

relationships

Leader's Guide

BIG IDEA

Relationships are a gift from God. But, we have sought after ultimate fulfillment in them. The Gospel confronts the way we try to pile the deepest longings of our heart onto one person instead of God himself.

RELATIONSHIPS POP QUIZ

SAY "To begin this study we are going to take a quick Relationships Pop Quiz. Let's read through all the questions first and then flip the sheet upside-down to see the answers."

STATUS UPDATE: IN A RELATIONSHIP

READ THIS SECTION TOGETHER

How has a family, friend or dating relationship been a real gift to you?

THE PROBLEM

LEADER READS THE SMALL SECTION UNDER "THE PROBLEM"

SAY "Now we are going to read a story from Scripture that deals with the topic of relationships. Can I have one volunteer who would be willing to read this story? Please read loudly and slowly so that we can catch what is going on."

READ John 4:1-26

How does Jesus use the well in the story as a spiritual analogy with the Samaritan woman? The well in the story represents her spiritual thirst. Jesus showed her that she had been going after men to quench her spiritual thirst.

What is the passage urging you to do? Jesus is urging the woman at the well to see that he is the living water that can truly satisfy. Likewise, we are urged to come to Jesus to quench our spiritual thirst instead of going to relationships or anything else in life that we think will ultimately fulfill us.

What is the reward for doing it? We won't have to keep going to other worldly sources to be satisfied. We can have eternal satisfaction right now through Jesus.

SAY "Hopefully, after reading about this interaction between Jesus and the woman at the well, it has helped you to see that God also desires a relationship with you and me. He has put a deep desire in us to find fulfillment in a relationship with him. But the problem is that we often go to other sources to quench our spiritual thirst instead of God. Let's move on to the next section to find out why."

relationships leader's guide cont.

THE ROOT

READ THIS SECTION TOGETHER

How have you or your friends bought into the cultural myth that we can have meaning, be healed, made complete, or ultimately fulfilled with “the one?”

SOLUTION

READ THIS SECTION TOGETHER

What is your initial reaction to the Gospel message above? Potential follow-up questions:

- *How will deeply knowing The Gospel change the heart of someone who is piling the deepest longings of their heart onto one person right now?*
- *How should knowing that eternal life is primarily a relationship rather than a destination affect the way you live your life?*
- *What else stood out to you from this section?*

REDEEMING RELATIONSHIPS

READ THIS SECTION TOGETHER

Which of these do you need to be empowered by the Holy Spirit to live out more fully? Potential follow-up question: Which of these areas have you struggled with in the past?

SAY *“Thanks for sharing. Let's spend the last few minutes in prayer.”*

PRAY

Pop Quiz

- 1) The #1 relationship argument is over _____.
 - A. jealousy
 - B. money
 - C. what to watch on TV

- 2) Couples with children are more likely to get a divorce than couples without children.
 - A. True
 - B. False

- 3) One out of five women who meet men online have sex on the first encounter.
 - A. True
 - B. False

- 4) ____ say that they been told it's all over via text message or email.
 - A. One in three
 - B. One in seven
 - C. One in ten

ANSWERS:
 1) B (money)
 2) False
 3) False (1 out of 5)
 4) B (1 in 7)

Quiz sources:

- #1 www.dating-online-today.com
- #2 www.divorcestatistics.org/
- #3 www.zimvi.com
- #4 <http://www.reuters.com/article/technologyNews/idUSL1323642420071214>



STATUS UPDATE: IN A RELATIONSHIP

In the movie *Cast Away* Tom Hanks gets so lonely that he paints a face on a volleyball and names it Wilson. Having an imaginary relationship for him was better than no relationship at all. Isn't that why we all get a little jealous when our friend's status update changes to "in a relationship?"

One of the worst punishments that a man can be given in jail, apart from being put to death, is solitary confinement. Being put in "the hole" alone and isolated for an extended period of time is pure torture.

Did you know that antidepressants are the leading prescription drug in the US? A few of the leading causes of depression are abuse (a harmful relationship), conflict (a heated relationship) and loss (an ended relationship). Not having healthy relationships make us go just as crazy as Tom Hanks on an deserted island. Why is this?

God created us to be in relationship. After creating Adam he said, "It is not

good for man to be alone" (Gen. 2:18). Therefore, God gave Adam a gift - Eve. Upon seeing her, Adam sang a song (Gen 2:23) that probably would have earned him a role on *Glee*.

Contrary to gods in other religions, we see that the Christian God not only wants humans to have a relationship with each other, but a relationship with him as well. We learn that God walked and talked with Adam and Eve in the garden (Gen. 3:8). We read that Abraham was called a friend of God (James 2:23). We see that "the Lord spoke to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend" (Ex. 33:11). Sure, these examples only include prominent leaders. But, as we read later on in the New Testament, Jesus was known as "a friend of sinners" (Matt. 11:19). He didn't discriminate or form cliques, but truly was an equal-opportunity friend.

From eternity past, God the Father has had a relationship with God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. The very nature of the Trinity proves that God is relational and has created us as relational beings since we are made in his image. When we interact with and serve those in relationship with us, we reflect the very nature of God.



How has a family, friend or dating relationship been a real gift to you?

relationships are a gift



the problem

Relationships are a **gift** from God but we have sought after **ultimate fulfillment** in them rather than God.

Read
John 4:1-26

Answer the questions below after reading the passage of Scripture...

How does Jesus use the well in the story as a spiritual analogy with the Samaritan woman?

What is the passage urging you to do?

What is the reward for doing it?

THE ROOT ISSUE

Not much has changed since the story of the woman at the well. Like her, we also go from relationship to relationship to fulfill our "spiritual thirst." Here are some of the underlying "thirsts" that we are trying to quench through relationships:

Approval and appreciation. "My life feels more meaningful when I get the praise and compliments of others" or "I like being in a relationship because it makes me feel wanted."

Influence and Power. "I feel more powerful when I am dating someone important or when I'm accepted into an elite group on campus."

Emotional and physical comfort. "Being in a relationship with someone makes me feel less lonely or bored" or "I like the intimacy we have when we talk on the phone every night or when we engage in sexual activity."

Security and control. "I feel more secure about myself and my future when I'm in a committed relationship" or "I like to date people I can control because I like being the one in charge."

While it is true that we seek to fulfill our spiritual thirst through multiple avenues, the culture (especially music and film) continues to tell us to pile the deepest longings of our heart onto one person. Ernest Becker says that this constant pursuit of fulfillment in one specific person is called "*apocalyptic romance*" which is "*looking to sex and romance to give us the transcendence and sense of meaning we used to get from faith in God.*"

*"We maintain the fantasy that if we find our **one true soul mate**, everything wrong with us will be healed."*

- Pastor Tim Keller

What we see on TV and what we listen to on the radio continues to feed this mythical fantasy - even though many of the celebrities giving us this message are single or divorced.

Stanly Hauerwas says, "*The assumption is that there is someone right for us to marry and that if we look closely enough we will find the right person. This moral assumption overlooks [a] crucial [aspect] to marriage... It fails to*

appreciate the fact that we always marry the wrong person. We never know whom we marry; we just think we do. Or even if we first marry the right person, just give it a while and he or she will change." Mr. Hauerwas is saying that soon after finding Mr. or Mrs. Right, we will realize that they are not perfect and wonder if we made the wrong choice. The problem though is not them but our expectations for them. We tell ourselves that the this guy or girl will give us all that we need and more.

But, in general, statistics show that this pursuit for ultimate fulfillment has been unsuccessful. The number of divorce cases has been increasing since the 1970's. Today, 40-50% of all marriages end in divorce. In addition, a *Journal of Couple & Relationship Therapy* study revealed that 45-55% of married women and 50-60% of married men engage in extramarital sex at some time or another during their relationship.

Whether "the one" in your life ends up being a good choice or bad choice, the fact remains: No one is qualified to quench our deep spiritual thirst apart from God.

How have you or your friends bought into the cultural myth that we can have meaning, be healed, made complete, or ultimately fulfilled

solutio

The Gospel confronts the way we pile the deepest longings of our heart onto one person. Emily, a sorority girl, would write status updates on Facebook like “My boyfriend is the best,” “Love talking to my boyfriend into the wee hours of the morning” and “I love you.” Then about eight months into the relationship she told me, “We broke up a few days ago. I’m not dealing with it very well. I got hurt pretty bad. It’s going to take some time to recover.” What happened? Emily bet all of her chips on one guy and lost.

The bad news is, like Emily, we too have been guilty of trying to quench our spiritual thirst in friends, family, or romantic relationships. We have forsaken God, the “fountain of living water” (Jer. 2:13). We’ve abandoned Jesus who is our “living water” (John 4:1-26) and gone to sources that leave us empty. Therefore, it would have been perfectly just for God to keep us at a distance forever.

But, the good news is that God sent Jesus into the world to reconcile our relationship with him. Tragically, Jesus wasn’t well received when he got here. John 1:11 says, “He came to his own and his own people did not receive him.” And in his greatest time of need, his closest relationships failed him. His friends deserted him, doubted him, and even denied him. Even after all of this, Jesus still “laid down his life” (John 15:13) so that we as God’s “enemies” (Rom. 5:10) could be called his “friends” (John 15:15) and we as “sons of disobedience” could be called “sons of God” (Gal. 3:26). On the cross Jesus was forsaken by God because he received the penalty that we should have received for forsaking him (Matt. 27:46) so that he could bring us back into the arms of a loving Father:

If you truly believe that - you can have eternal life. But don’t make a common mistake. Don’t presume that eternal life simply means getting a ticket to heaven. Eternal life means getting God himself. John 17:3 says “Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.” The primary goal of the Christian life isn’t heaven, but a relationship with God through Jesus alone (1 Tim 2:5; John 14:6).

What Emily needs to know and what you and I need to know is that we can pile all of the deepest longings of our hearts onto one person - Jesus. We can stop searching desperately for intimacy because “The One” relationship that matters has come to earth and found us. And he promises to never leave or forsake us if we are united with him (Matt. 28).

redeeming relationships:

You can’t **redeem** relationships without being in a relationship with God. Since Jesus said that no one comes to the Father except through him (John 14:6), the first step is to trust in Jesus who died to reconcile you to God (Rom. 5:10). Those who are in a relationship with God are sealed with the Holy Spirit (Eph. 1:13) who empowers you with the motivation and ability to redeem *relationships* in the following ways:

return to God

In the book of Revelation, God encouraged one of the churches for the great things they were doing but also said, “Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken the love you had at first. Consider how far you have fallen!” (Rev. 2). Have you fallen or drifted from the love you once had for God? As you look at your life right now, would you say that God is the most important relationship to you? Are you sacrificing intimacy with God for the sake of spending all your time with one person?

run to God

God should be your highest pursuit. He is omnipresent (always there), omnipotent (all powerful), and omniscient (all knowing). Your loved ones are not! Therefore, don’t expect them to be there for you every second, deliver you from every trouble, and answer your every problem. They can’t handle those divine expectations. Run to God instead!

pursue community

C.S. Lewis said that you can’t have a relationship with God individualistically because you see God through others. If you don’t have a small group community of Christian friends that you are praying with, reading the Bible with, and doing life with, you will have a small view of God. You also need to be connected to a church community in the city because the Bible says you are one small member of a larger body (Rom. 12:4-5).

reconcile with others

Are you holding a grudge against someone right now? “Be forgiving each other just as in Christ God forgave you” (Eph. 4:32). Is there someone that you have a hard time accepting? “Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God” (Rom. 15:7). Let what Jesus has done for you soften your hard heart toward others.

What is your initial reaction to the Gospel message above?

Which of these do you need to be empowered by the Holy Spirit to live out more fully?