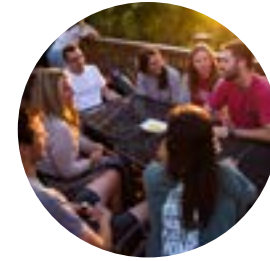


NOTES



Chapter II

Relationships



CHAPTER 2

RELATIONSHIPS

Goal: Awakening an Awareness to Rightly Ordered Relationships

Leader's Guide:

Last week, we discussed the truth of our identity as sons and daughters of God and how we were created to be fully alive in this image and identity. But we know that we were created not just for relationship with God but also for relationships with others, our fellow brothers and sisters in Christ. These could be a number of relationships: family, friends, significant others, classmates, coworkers or neighbors. Regardless of the kind of relationship, Scripture tells us, "It is not good that the man should be alone" (Gen. 2:18).

This chapter will help us navigate the real desires we have for authentic and life-giving relationships and the struggles we face to get there. Our relationships can point us to God and his goodness in so many ways; but when they are out of order with God's designs, they can also be a source of confusion, pain, anger, and temptation to sin. It's our hope that your participants will see that it is ultimately an intimate relationship with the person of Jesus Christ who will fulfill our desire to be known, loved and cared for, and that relationships are a good insofar as they point us and others back to him.

Introduction: Identity and Relationships

(Please read aloud.)

Last week, we discussed the truth of our identity as sons and daughters of God and how we were created to be fully alive in this image and identity. Today we are going to explore the truth that we were created not just for relationship with God but also for relationships with others, our fellow brothers and sisters in Christ. These could be a number of relationships: family, friends, significant others, classmates, coworkers, or neighbors. Regardless of the kind of relationship, Scripture tells us, "It is not good that the man should be alone" (Gen. 2:18). To kick us off, let's consider the following question:

1. Which relationships in your life are the most significant or impactful? What about them makes them so significant? How have they affected or changed you?

Response: Let the group discuss.

(Note to leader: Please read aloud.)

Looking back on last week's discussion and our study of Genesis, we learned we are made in God's image and likeness. Today, we're going to look at another characteristic of God and what that means for how we were created.

(Read 1 John 4:8.)

2. We hear all the time that God loves us; but love isn't just what God does; it's who he is. What does that mean?

Response: Ultimately, love isn't only an action that God does, but it truly is at the heart of who he is. See section below on the Trinity.

When we say that God is love, we know that God has revealed himself as a relationship of persons. God is a Triune God, meaning he is three distinct Persons in one - the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Many of us know this, but the truth of it is profound and worth pondering: God the Father is constantly loving God the Son, and the love between them is so real that it is a third Person, the Holy Spirit. All three are constantly and eternally existing in a relationship of perfect love.

3. Using what you know from the Gospels, how is the Trinity described or explained? How is God revealed as Father? How is Jesus described in relation to the Father? What about the Holy Spirit?

Response: Jesus is revealed as the Son at the Annunciation (Luke 1:35) and throughout the Gospels when he prays to God as Father (Matt. 6:9; John 17:1, 21). At the Last Supper, Jesus tells his disciples that he will send his Spirit to be with them (John 15: 26). Based on the knowledge of your group, feel free to direct your group to read any of these cited Scripture passages to help their understanding.

4. If, as we learned last week, we were created in the image and likeness of God, and if God himself is a union of three Persons, what does that tell us about what we are made for in terms of relationships?

Response: We are created to be in relationship - with God and with others, as God is within himself. Our very nature is to love and to be loved, to be in relationship. God is love, and we are created to become like him in this.

Relationships and "Original Justice"

(Note to leader: Please read aloud.)

It's clear that we are made for relationship. However, we are not made for just any relationships, and we are not made for all relationships at the same time or in the same way. There is a divine order to healthy relationships, and we're going to explore that today. Without order in our relationships, we may end up missing the good fruits of them that God intends, and we may even experience negative consequences that keep us from thriving. We can say it this way: insofar as our understanding of relationships is skewed, our ability to be "fully alive" is seriously jeopardized.

Let's go back to Genesis and to the creation story that we talked about last week. In the story of creation, and before sin and distrust entered the world, God created man in a state of harmony in multiple areas: "The first man was not only created good, but was also established in friendship with his Creator and in harmony with himself and with the creation around him" (CCC 374).

The Catechism describes this original state -- our state before we sinned against God and where our lives were in perfect harmony -- as "original justice" (CCC 376). The idea of "justice" can, at times, have a negative connotation in our culture today; however, here it is referring to a right order, with everything in its rightful spot in the order. In the Garden, "original justice" looked like this:

- 1) Harmony with God first, as our Creator and Father
- 2) Harmony within oneself, which includes a full understanding and embracing of our identity as sons and daughters of God

- 3) Harmony with others, to live in relationship as we were created in the image and likeness of the Trinity
- 4) Harmony with creation, to cultivate and care for creation as it was entrusted to us by God

Though sin has since entered the picture and ruptured the original harmony and original justice of the Garden in Genesis, we can still see the rightful order in how we were created.

5. Why is it a “just” order for these four harmonies to fall into this order? Why would a different order be less ideal or less in line with God’s purpose in creating humanity?

Response: Let the group discuss. For the second question, draw your group’s attention to the fact that each of the harmonies build upon one another – we cannot have one without the others before it. Union with God ultimately must be first, for everything else flows from it.

6. In our own brokenness, we can be tempted to strive for these harmonies out of order. How are you tempted to order them in your own life? Which do you see as the most important?

Response: Let the group discuss.

7. Now, think back to last week and the four areas where we could seek our image from things other than God: **approval and appreciation, emotional and physical comfort, security and control, and influence and power.** How could these temptations cause relationships with others to become out of order in our own lives?

Response: Let the group discuss. Possible answers include:

Approval and Appreciation: *We can be tempted to place relationships with others over our relationship with God and the worth of our lives that he gives. We can then seek to gain their approval over right relationship with God.*

Emotional and Physical Comfort: *When we seek our own emotional or physical comfort above God, we can reject his call for our lives; when we seek comfort from others, we are bound to be disappointed and unfulfilled.*

Security and Control: *Chasing security and control can lead us to putting created goods (money, possessions) or temporal situations (career, friendships) ahead of God in our lives. We can be tempted to put our trust in things that fade away, rather than in God’s eternal providence.*

Influence and Power: *Seeking influence and power over others is another way we can put our relationships with others over our relationship with God: we can get our sense of identity and worth from the titles we have or the success we experience and not from God our Father.*

God’s Vision for Relationships

Though we were created in a state of original justice, we know that sin has led us out of the Garden of Eden and into generations of a broken world. We are constantly being tempted to put relationships before God, to let ourselves live disintegrated lives and to seek ways to be filled that only leave us empty.

However, we can turn to Scripture and see the ways that Jesus helps people re-order their priorities and offers them the fulfillment they are seeking.

(Note to leader: Women, read the Woman at the Well below. Men, skip ahead to the Prodigal Son.)

Women: John 4, the Woman at the Well

We are going to look at the story of the Samaritan woman at the well in John, chapter 4.

(Read John 4:4 – 14.)

7. The woman in the passage thinks Jesus is talking about actual water from the well, but Jesus seems to be talking about a different kind of water. What do you think Jesus is actually referring to when he talks about “living water”?

Response: Possible answers include: companionship, fulfillment, happiness, the love of God, eternal life, etc.

(Read John 4:15 – 19.)

8. Jesus reveals to the woman that he knows about the struggles of her life. How does it seem that the woman has sought to find happiness and fulfillment? Has she found what she is looking for?

Response: Through her marriages and relationships with men. No, the fact that she has been married so many times seems to indicate that she has not found what she is looking for. Also, the fact that she is at the well by herself at the hottest part of the day reveals that she is very isolated and alone and wanted to avoid the other women of the village, who likely would have drawn water in the morning.

(Read John 4: 25 – 30).

9. We see Jesus reveal his true identity to the woman and the effects it has on her: she came to the well alone at noon, steering clear of everyone else drawing water before the heat of the day, but leaves after encountering Jesus ready to enter the town and tell everyone about him. What do you think changed her?

Response: Let the group discuss. Help your group see that searching for fulfillment in others had led the woman to shame and isolation, but finding fulfillment in Jesus led her to joy and conversion.

10. What do think God is trying to tell us with this encounter? How does that apply to your life?

Response: Let the group discuss.

Men: The Prodigal Son

We can turn to Scripture and see one way that a good father helps a man re-order his priorities and offer him the fulfillment he is seeking. We are going to look at the story of the Prodigal Son in Luke, chapter 15.

(Read Luke 15:11-32)

8. The son takes his “inheritance” and goes and squanders it. When he has nothing left, what does he realize? How does he think his father will respond?

Response: He realizes he needs to return to his Father – not as a son, but as a slave instead. He thinks he isn't worthy to be a son anymore, so he plans to be treated like a hired worker.

9. Why do you think that the son thought he wasn't worthy to be a son to his father anymore? How do you think he feels about wasting away all that his Father had given him?

Response: The son thinks he has ruined his relationship with his father, that he has become unworthy of his love and care. He thinks he has to work to earn his love. He was given "all" that his Father had for him and now that is gone. He believes he must earn any attention or material goods that he received from his Father moving forward.

10. We see that the Father runs to the son, embraces him and kisses him. This comes as a shock to the son and he doesn't know why his Father would treat him this way after all that he has done wrong. The Father disregards his son's statement and reassures him of his love through his decision to slaughter the fattened calf and throw him a welcome home party. What is the Father telling his son through his actions?

Response: let the group discuss. He is telling his son that he loves him unconditionally and that he forgives him and is not holding his sin against him, and that the son needs to do nothing to earn the father's love. He is expressing mercy and love to his son when he needs it most.

11. What do think God is trying to tell us with this encounter? How does that apply to your life?

Response: Let the group discuss.

Finding Order in Relationships: Greek Life Testimonies

(Note to leader: Feel free to read aloud or print these testimonies for your group to read and reflect upon, either during your study or outside of your study time.)

Male Testimony:

My junior year of college I experienced what true friendship was. I'd been living the "college life" for two years and had everything the world told me would make me happy - a bunch of friends (thank you Greek life), multiple parties to go to every weekend, decent grades, and a beautiful girlfriend. I was so confused because despite all of this I felt totally empty. So I walked into the Newman Center one day and accidentally met John. John invited me into his life, and he challenged me to become the best-version-of-myself. In doing so, He taught me how to pray, showed me that following Jesus is worth the pain of rooting out the sin in my life, and helped me take steps to prepare to be a great husband and father one day.

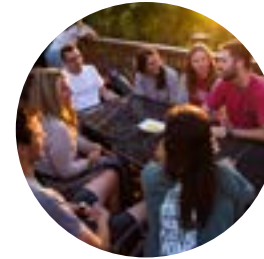
Female Testimony:

In high school, I was very picky about keeping my friend groups from different organizations separate. These friendships from dance team and other extra-curricular activities ended up being friendships of utility and pleasure, and most of them didn't last once I went to college. In college, I treated Greek life in a very similar way. I wanted my sorority sisters to be my friends in Greek life, but I was nervous to combine worlds and introduce any of them to my Catholic friends. One day, I put my concerns aside and decided to start a Catholic Bible study in my sorority house. Little did I know that so many of my sorority sisters were

Catholic and were hungry to know the Lord. The women from that Bible study are some of my closest friends to this day, and that may have never happened if I didn't introduce my faith into those friendships.

12. What does putting God first in your life look like? How could you do this this week?

Response: Let the group discuss.



Chapter III

Sex
