

# The Priority of Relationships

## Small Group Guide

**Warm-up Question:** (Choose one, make up your own, or skip this part all together, depending upon the nature of your group.)

1. With what person (outside of your family) have you maintained a relationship for the longest period of time?
2. What are three words your friends might use to describe you?

**Read the following passage:** Matthew 5:21-26.

In this passage, Jesus illustrates in striking fashion that our relationships are of paramount importance. We should do all that we can to repair them when they begin to break down. One of the salient features of Jesus's teaching was the extent to which he connected our human relationships to our relationship with God. In effect, Jesus was saying that if we think we're doing well with God when we're not doing well with people, we're deceiving ourselves. No one, including Jesus, had or will have perfect human relationships. But we can engage our relationships in ways that promote healing, restoration, and life.

**Questions for Discussion** (Choose several that are relevant for your group):

1. Generally speaking, do you take a passive or active approach to your relationships? In other words, do you intentionally initiate communication, connection, and important conversations, or do you wait to see if these things will happen without your deliberate effort? Explain.
2. How should reflection on God's triune nature impact how we think of ourselves and the importance of relationships?
3. Psychologist Henry Cloud writes that our "relational connections produce qualitative and quantitative effects" in areas like the following:
  - How long you live
  - Whether you reach or don't reach your goals
  - Whether or not you close the sale
  - How much money you make
  - How well your kids do in school
  - How much you trust people
  - How you cope with stress and failure
  - What kind of mood you're in
  - How much physical pain you experience
  - How and what you think

Why do you think our relationships have such a big impact in these (and other) areas? How do you think our relationships can help us in these areas? Are you experiencing the benefits of strong relationships in your life? Explain. Do you think others are experiencing benefits from friendship with you? Explain.

4. Explain how criticism and defensiveness can sabotage our relationships. What are some ways criticism and defensiveness manifest in your relationships?
5. Read Matthew 7:3-5. How can Jesus's teaching in this passage help us have healthier relationships?
6. Read John 2:23-25. Why is it important to make a distinction between forgiveness and trust? How can trust be rebuilt in a relationship?
7. Read Matthew 18:15-17. What happens when we don't try to resolve conflict in the way Jesus outlines here? What should we counsel individuals to do if their conflicts with others have produced real trauma their lives?
8. What is one practical way you can take a step toward stronger and healthier relationships?

**Pray**