

Opening Question

Q: What is one thing you've learned from this study that has helped you in your messy relationships?

Book Discussion

Page 155 "As Kara's friend listened, she was moved by her suffering. She could remember being in a similar situation several years before. It wasn't hard to empathize and she wisely did not minimize the problems in Kara's life. Yet as she looked into Kara's world, she saw things that Kara could not see. Everywhere she looked, she saw the evidence of God's redeeming grace at work.

Q1: Why do you think it's easy to see our problems, but difficult to see God's provision? (see p158)

Q2: How would Brian and Kara relate to each other differently if they could "see"? What might it sound like, look like?

Page 161. "The stakes are high: the reality our imagination embraces is the reality we will live by. If we are not captured by the truth of living in a deeply personal relationship with God, we will shrink our expectations and dreams down to the size of our own selfish wants, desires, and strategies." Page 164. "God's work is driven by an agenda so much grander than simply making our lives better. He wants to remake us into his likeness. And that likeness can be seen in Jesus."

Q3: Why does believing this reality change the way you view your problems?

Page 166. "The reality your imagination sees is the reality that will shape your words, actions, attitudes, and relationships. The question is not, "Has God made adequate provision?" The question is, "Do we see him?"

Q4: In regards to your relational struggles, who is God to you?

Page 171. “In a conversation with the Pharisees, Jesus confronted their fundamental misunderstanding of the kingdom of God. They imagined a system of political rule in which they would be the ruling class. Jesus informs them that his kingdom is not a system, but the tangible display of the presence of the King.”

Q5: Explain what is meant by the “kingdom is not a system, but the tangible display of the presence of the King”? What are some ways we make it into a system?

Q6: What difficulties do we face if we get this wrong?

Page 175. “Keep in mind that one of the most compelling things people see is your own need for grace. This is not a ministry that benefits from an “I’ve arrived but you need grace” posture. It’s in the context of your own sins, struggles, and weaknesses that the love and power of the King are most clearly seen.”

Q7: What does it look like to be “salt” and “light”?

Q8: What opportunities do you have to invite others into the light so that they can see the kingdom?

Bible Discussion (Provision, Ministry)

Ezekiel 36:26 ESV

²⁶ And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh.

Q1: What is the significance of getting a “heart of flesh” in regards to our identity and our relationships?

2 Peter 1:3–4 ESV

³ His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence, ⁴ by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire.

Q2: How does our “knowledge of Him” benefit us and our messy relationships?

Read Psalm 121.

Q3: How does knowing God is present/near affect how we view the mess in our relationships?

Read Rom 8:28-39.

Page 163. "When we are in trouble, our tendency is to think that God is nowhere to be found and we must fix things ourselves. When our vision of reality is this small, our attempts to fix things often make the trouble more troubling."

Q4: How does this passage protect us from the implications of a "small reality" that we tend to fixate on in the midst of our troubles?

Psalm 57:1–2 ESV

¹ Be merciful to me, O God, be merciful to me, for in you my soul takes refuge; in the shadow of your wings I will take refuge, till the storms of destruction pass by. ² I cry out to God Most High, to God who fulfills his purpose for me.

Q5: What can you learn from these verses regarding the perspective the psalmist has in the midst of the "storms"?

Matthew 5:13–16 ESV

¹³ "You are the salt of the earth, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled under people's feet. ¹⁴ "You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. ¹⁵ Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. ¹⁶ In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.

Q6: In regards to the messy relationships all around us, what does it look like to be "salt" and "light"? How does Phil 2:14-16 answer this question? Can you identify other passages?

Prayer Focus

Page 172. "What does the kingdom of God have to do with Ben and Erin's story, or you and your relationships? Everything! If you are experiencing humility, forgiveness, patience, or godly

conflict, you are experiencing the work of the King as he builds his kingdom. This means that your relationships are a place where the kingdom has come, and they are intended to attract others to the King. In addition, whenever you speak of change in your life and relationships, you are not drawing attention to your wisdom, relational savvy, or personal giftedness; you are calling attention to Jesus, your King. As the couple and community that reached out to Ben and Erin understood, the kingdom of God is not just for private enjoyment, but also for public display. People who come into our midst will see the work of the kingdom but they won't necessarily see the King. It is our responsibility and privilege to point them to him."