

Relationships: A Mess Worth Making Chp 4-5

Small Group Discussion Guide--Some questions are taken from "Change and Your Relationships: A Mess Worth Making"

Opening Question

How important are relationships to God?

From where does true human community grow?

Book Discussion (Chapters 4-5)

Page 32 "It is tempting to look at the trouble in our relationships and locate the problem outside ourselves. And it is true—the other person is inherently weak and sinful! Unfortunately, so are we. James 4:1 reminds us that our real problem is inside us." AND Page 39 "When it comes to the sins others commit against us, we tend to communicate about them in destructive ways. This is wrong, and it encourages us to think that our biggest problem is outside ourselves. The Bible reminds us that even when we are sinned against, ultimately, before God, our biggest problem is still our own hearts' propensity to sin....Being sinned against tempts us to sin."

Q1: Do you agree with this statement? What are the implications for our relationships if this is true?

Page 33-37 6 Basic ways sin affects us and our relationships

Q2: Which of the six basic ways sin affects us do you identify with most?

Page 35 "When love for God is replaced by love for self, we see people either as obstacles that hinder our goals or vehicles that promote them. Sinful self-interest turns the two great commandments upside down: rather than loving God and using His gifts to serve others, we love the gifts and use people to get them."

Q3: How have you seen this manifest itself in your own relationships? How does it feel to be on the receiving end of this kind of relationship?

Page 40 “Our mistake is to think of grace as deliverance from problems; in reality, it is the ability to persevere in the midst of those problems. We desire the “grace” of relief while God gives us the true grace of empowerment.”

Q4: How does this change the way you view messy relationships and God’s connection to them?

Q5: What is your dream for relationships?

Page 43 “The default question we ought to bring to every area of life should be, “What is God’s purpose and design? What was His reason for creating this? When you apply these questions to relationships, you begin to see how different His agenda is from your own. We would easily settle for our own definition of personal happiness when God’s purpose is nothing short of conforming us to the image of Christ!”

Q6: How does God’s purpose for relationships match your dream?

Page 48 “God uses our diversity to accomplish His purpose—our growth in grace. Diversity is not an obstacle, but a very significant means to this end.”

Q7: What do you think the author means by this?

Bible Discussion

Q1: What is the relationship between Eph 1-3 and Eph 4-6?

(Never read anything in Chapters 4-6 without having Eph 1-3 in the forefront of your mind.) If needed, spend a few minutes reviewing Eph 1-3 and the good news of God’s grace toward us.

Read Eph 4

Q2: In 4:2, Paul lists several character qualities before he tell us what to do. Talk about each of these qualities and how they impact the way we approach relationships?

Q3: In 4:11-16, What is God’s purpose in relationships? How does that differ from our own agendas?

Q4: In 4:17-32, Paul lists several tendencies of the sinful heart that effect relationships. How many can you identify? Which of the tendencies do you find yourself leaning toward most often?

Q5: In these same verses, what does a gospel-filled life look like in the midst of messy relationships?

Q6: Where in these verses to you see evidence of God's grace?

Prayer Focus

"We enter relationships for personal pleasure, self-actualization, and fun. We want low personal cost and high self-defined returns. But God wants high personal cost and high God-defined returns. And although we frequently disagree with God, His plan is better. Beneath all our conflict with others lies a deeper conflict between these two agendas: ours and God's."