

Lord of Our Relationships



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Exod. 20:14, 17; Psalms 127; 128; Luke 6:27, 28; Acts 2:41-47; Eph. 4:32; 5:25; 6:1-4.*

Memory Text: “Bear ye one another’s burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ” (*Galatians 6:2*).

Key Thought: God created human beings to enjoy intimate relationships with Him and with one another. When Jesus Christ is the Lord of our relationships, we will experience the meaningful intimacy that was part of God’s original plan.

Created for relationships. After God had created Adam, He said, “ ‘It is not good that man should be alone’ ” (*Gen. 2:18, NKJV*). Adam was not simply a work of art to be admired by his Creator. He was a relational being, created with the innate desire to experience intimacy with God and with other created beings. When the Lord brought Eve to her companion’s side, Adam gave the following testimony of the intimacy he was already experiencing: “ ‘This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man’ ” (*vs. 23*). Moses provides a brief description of the intimate relationship that our first parents enjoyed: “They were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed” (*vs. 25*).

So much has changed since that first relational encounter. Relationships have become damaged and fractured by sin. God desires that we experience the meaningful intimate relationships that were part of His original plan.

**Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, August 13.*

The God of Relationships

As human beings, we live in relationship with other human beings. There's no escaping it. Nature itself shows we are meant to exist in relationships.

For starters, each one of us is here only because of a *relationship* that resulted in our birth. And even after birth, infants cannot live but a few hours on their own. They need a relationship to survive; that is, they need at least one other person to take care of their physical needs. And almost as important as the physical are the mental needs, as well. Infants crave love, attention, and affection. From their youngest days infants are aware of, and respond to, human love—to touching, to words, to moods, to attitudes. Babies are made to bond, not with toys or with the bed, but with other people. The children who have loving, close parents to bond with are so much better adjusted than those who never had them. And that's because we were made to be in *relation-ship* with other people.

And yet, no matter how basic to our existence and identity as humans, something has gone wrong with our relationships. All around us we can see examples of relationships gone sour. Most of the pain and heartache we suffer as humans, we suffer because of bad relationships.

But because God loves us, He obviously cares about our relationships, which form such an important part of our existence. Thus, He wants us to have good, healthy, affirming relationships. That's why the Bible has so much to say about this crucial topic.

Look up the following texts: Exodus 20:14, 17; Luke 6:27, 28; Romans 12:2-21; Ephesians 4:32; 5:25; Galatians 6:2; Philippians 2:2, 3. What do they tell us about relationships? What can we learn from them about how we are to relate to others? As far as time allows, find as many verses as you can in the Bible that talk about relationships (be prepared to share what you find with your class).

Here, as we interact with others, the true measure of our walk with Christ will be revealed. Thus, as Christians, no aspect of our lives should be under the lordship of Jesus Christ more than our relationships.

How well do your relationships reflect the principles expressed in the above texts? In what areas, perhaps, do you need to make some radical, even painful, changes?

Relationship With God

Though we all want good, healthy relationships with each other, that's not always so easy to achieve. We are all sinners with defects that don't always make us so easy to get along with.

Crucial, however, to our relationship with others is our relationship with God. He created us, He alone can change us. Only through a close connection with the Lord can we have the kind of relationships with others that we should, ideally, have.

Read Matthew 22:36-39. How does what Jesus says here affirm what the lesson states above? Why is our relationship with God so important in helping us form the right relationships with others? What does God do to us that helps us have the right kind of relationships with others?

Look up the following texts. How do they help answer the above questions? *Ps. 51:10, 2 Cor. 5:17-19, Gal. 4:19, 2 Pet. 1:4.*

When Job declared “For I *know* that my Redeemer lives, and He shall stand at last on the earth” (*Job 19:25, NKJV, emphasis supplied*), he was referring to more than simple awareness of a fact. This same Hebrew verb *yada* is used in Genesis 4:1 where Adam “knew” his wife, and she conceived and bore a son. Job was testifying concerning an intimate personal relationship. In an article entitled “Growth in Grace,” Ellen White shared the following insight: “To be living Christians, we must have a vital connection with Christ. The true believer can say, ‘I know that my Redeemer liveth.’ This intimate communion with our Saviour will take away the desire for earthly and sensual gratifications. All our powers of body, soul, and spirit should be devoted to God.”—*Review and Herald*, May 30, 1882.

How has your own relationship with God impacted your relationships? Write down the practical, tangible ways in which knowing God has impacted how you relate to people. In what areas do you need to grow?

The Gift of Marriage (*Eph. 5:22-33*).

Marriage, like the Sabbath, is something we have taken from Eden. Sadly, though, many marriages today have hardly been made in paradise. Probably few things better represent the extent of the damage sin has caused to human relationships than what it has done to marriage, something that was originally designed to bring fulfillment, happiness, and joy.

Read Genesis 2:24, a command that is repeated in Matthew 19:5 and Ephesians 5:31. Is this talking only about physical union, or is there more implied? If so, what?

When Jesus Christ is Lord of our lives and Lord of our relationships, our perspective on marriage will be uniquely Christian. “Men and women can reach God’s ideal for them if they will take Christ as their helper. What human wisdom cannot do, His grace will accomplish for those who give themselves to Him in loving trust. His providence can unite hearts in bonds that are of heavenly origin. Love will not be a mere exchange of soft and flattering words. The loom of heaven weaves with warp and woof finer, yet more firm, than can be woven by the looms of earth. The result is not a tissue fabric, but a texture that will bear wear and test and trial.”—Ellen G. White, *The Adventist Home*, pp. 112, 113.

Following what Paul says about marriage in Ephesians 5:22-33, how would you answer the following questions:

① How are wives to relate to their husbands?

② How should husbands treat their wives?

③ How does what Christ did for the church represent what a husband should do for the wife?

④ What mutual principles of love and respect are seen in these texts? How would following these principles greatly enhance any marriage?

The Gift of Family

What insights can we gain from Psalms 127 and 128 about the gift of family?

God has blessed each one of us with the gift of family. Whether we are single or married, with or without children, we are all part of a family circle. That family circle is extended exponentially when we become a part of God's family! In all our family relationships, we who have been redeemed by the precious blood of Jesus and now live under His lordship should manifest a Christlike spirit and a loving conduct that are different from that of unbelievers.

In the home, perhaps more than anywhere else, parents have a sacred obligation to live out the principles of their faith. Love, forgiveness, kindness, compassion, care, discipline—these principles are especially crucial. So many of the child's early impressions about God are formed early on as a direct result of how the parents interacted with the child and with each other. Nothing done in the home occurs in a vacuum: The repercussions of our words, our body language, our tone, and our deeds are felt throughout the house, whether we realize it or not. And long after the deeds and words or even attitudes are past, the influences live on, often in the hearts and minds of the children, who are so malleable, so tender and sensitive. How crucial that parents, or anyone interacting with children, deal gently with them.

What counsel does the apostle Paul give to Christian families regarding the interaction between parents and children? *Eph. 6:1-4*.

When caring for children within our circle of influence, the Lord Jesus Christ wants us to avoid two extremes: a harsh, tyrannical disposition and a careless, indifferent attitude. Parents need to find the delicate balance between these two extremes, giving discipline and guidance when needed, while, at the same time, showing children the mercy and love and grace God has shown to them. It's a sacred, and solemn, responsibility. Here, as in all relationships, parents need to learn from God at the foot of the Cross.

The Gift of Community (*Acts 2:41-47*).

Those who live under the lordship of Christ experience a unique sense of community. The Greek noun used in the New Testament to describe this community is *koinonia*, often translated as “fellowship.” Some scholars suggest that the “[*koinonia*] of the Holy Spirit,” spoken of by the apostle Paul in 2 Corinthians 13:14 (*NIV*), may also be translated the “*koinonia* brought about by the Holy Spirit.” In other words, to the degree that we allow the Holy Spirit to work in our lives, to that degree we will have fellowship with one another.

Examine the description of the early Christian community in Acts 2:41-47. Luke records that they continued steadfastly in *koinonia*. After reading the texts, answer the following questions:

- 1. What kind of practical and theological unity did they manifest?**
- 2. What kind of fellowship did they have?**
- 3. In what practical ways did they relate to one another?**
- 4. What kind of witness did they, in their *koinonia*, present to the world?**

What a beautiful picture of the early church; what a powerful depiction of the very principles regarding relationships Jesus Himself taught and, of course, manifested in His life. Try to imagine what a force for good your local church could be were it to manifest such *koinonia*. What a powerful witness it would be (*see John 13:35*).

What changes need to be made in your church in order for it to reflect better what we’ve learned today? Why, though, must those changes begin in the heart of each believer? What is the only way these changes can come?

Further Study: When building relationships, the art of listening is crucial. We listen to God primarily through His Word and through His creative works. We listen to others as they communicate both verbally and nonverbally.

Examine the following situations in the life of Jesus where He demonstrated the importance of listening when building relationships: John 3:1-21, 4:4-42.

“The first service that one owes to others in the fellowship consists of listening to them. Just as love to God begins with listening to His Word, so the beginning of love for the brethren is learning to listen to them. It is God’s love for us that He not only gives us His Word but also lends us His ear. So it is His work that we do for our brother when we listen to him. . . . But Christians have forgotten that the ministry of listening has been committed to them by Him who is Himself the great listener and whose work they should share. We should listen with the ears of God that we may speak the Word of God.”—Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1954), pp. 97–99.

Discussion Questions:

- 1** In every aspect of our relationships with others, one crucial theme comes to the forefront, and it’s best expressed in the words of Matthew 16:24. Read those words aloud as a class. What’s the key principle there? Why is this principle so important in order to have the right relationship with others?
- 2** List the three most important relationships currently in your life. What are you doing to nurture those relationships?
- 3** What are some creative ways you can reach out to people who lack meaningful relationships in their lives?
- 4** As a class, read together the Bonhoeffer quote listed above. What practical things can you do in order to become a better listener?

One Tiny Church

Juan Chauquian

Along the rugged coast of Chile lie some isolated clusters of homes called *caletas*. These settlements are too small to be called villages and are extremely isolated. Some are little more than an extended family who make a living by fishing or raising a few head of cattle. One of these settlements is Caleta Milagros, a cluster of four families. Unless one has a boat, it takes 14 hours to walk from the nearest settlement.

Juan Chauquian and a friend had a burden for the people along the coast of Chile who had never heard the three angels' messages. They walked the rugged coastline looking for people who were willing to listen to Bible truth. When he arrived at Caleta Milagros, he found the people wary of strangers and hesitant to let them in.

Juan and his friend knocked on each door, but were turned away. Then they found someone who would invite them in. The two young men gave the couple a copy of the "Faith of Jesus" Bible course and promised to visit them again.

In the next house they visited they found a lonely woman. But she told them that her husband would be angry if she let them in. Juan talked gently to the woman and put her at ease. Eventually she invited the two men in.

The three talked and studied the Bible together for a half hour before the woman's husband returned home. He was angry to find two strange men in his house and threatened to toss them out. But Juan talked gently to the man, and he calmed down enough to listen. The four people talked about God and the Bible for six hours that day. Before Juan and his friend left, the husband apologized for his anger, saying he had misjudged Adventists. He explained that because Adventists did not dance in the Spirit or speak in tongues, he had assumed they did not accept the Holy Spirit.

Before Juan and his friend left at 2:00 A.M., the entire family had accepted the Bible truths and had asked for baptism. And the man who had been so angry to find Adventists in his home began to tell his neighbors what he had learned. In time the other two families in the settlement joined the first family for Bible studies. Today if you were to visit Caleta Milagros, you would find that everyone living there is an Adventist. The families worship together in their homes. Because they have no pastor, the family members take turns leading their little congregation. They would not have heard about the Sabbath had it not been for two faithful lay workers who were willing to go the extra miles for people they had never met.

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