
TOGETHER: HOW SHALL WE LIVE LIFE WITH OTHERS?

A Small Group Study for Students on
Living Out Gospel-Reconciliation in their Relationships

College of Christian Studies
Charleston Southern University

INTRODUCTION AND HOW TO USE THIS RESOURCE FOR SMALL GROUPS

We here at the College of Christian Studies are so excited that you have chosen to use this study for a DNow, Retreat, or small group series. In the pages of this small group study guide, you will find a catalyst for helping students live out gospel-reconciliation in their relationships. The faculty of the College of Christian Studies at Charleston Southern University has come together to help students answer the question: ***How should we live life with others?***

These small groups summarize the talks at Charleston Southern University's 2019 ENDURE youth apologetics conference and are placed in a format that you could teach in a small group. Together, we offer them to you as a resource to help you to inoculate your students against the loneliness epidemic. This spiritual pharmacy is stocked with material on:

- **Session 1 – Who Am I?** – by Dr. Ross Parker and Dr. Jonathan Watson; Dr. Parker addresses the way in which our dominant cultural worldview contributes to broken relationships, and lacks the resources to heal them. Dr. Watson describes the biblical teaching that people are made in the image of God for the purpose of relationships.
- **Session 2 – Friends, Lovers, and Family** – by Dr. Ed Gravley; presses a “reset” button on the hook-up culture by summarizing what the Apostle Paul says about sex and marriage (and waiting for both).
- **Session 3 – Marriage and the Gospel** – by Dr. Peter Beck; makes the connection between the gospel and the foundation of the family—marriage.
- **Session 4a – Friendship for the Guys: How Do I Man Up?** – by Dr. Jonathan Denton; enters “Guyland” to call boys to the kind of friendships with other guys that will help them become godly men.
- **Session 4b – Friendship for the Girls: Finding Your People** – by Dr. Amanda Denton; guides girls toward virtuous female friendships that will help them become godly women.

How To Use this Guide for Small Groups

- This guide has been adapted from an apologetics conference. We start with big ideas, study Scripture, and move towards application.
- Think of this guide as a journey. We begin with showing students how the world has given them a faulty understanding of humanity. Students are then shown that God has created us in the image of God for the purpose of relationships. This then leads us to reevaluate how we think of dating relationships, marriage, and friendships.
- Each small group lesson contains three sections:
 - Connect: This portion helps students connect the lesson. You will find an activity or illustration that will lead to a debriefable moment that will allow you to introduce the topic.

- Explore: In this portion of the lesson, you will help students explore the topic through Biblical content. For each lesson, our professors provide you with Scripture and commentary for you to teach to your students. The professors provide you with important Scriptures to teach, but also help you to think about these topics in the grand narrative of God's story. You will also find small group questions that you can ask as you teach to help gauge learning and help students further explore the topic in their immediate context.
- Transform: This portion of the lesson helps you summarize the topic and lead students towards application.
- Feel free to adapt the lesson towards your individual students and their immediate contexts
- For the last session, we have provided a session on friendship to be taught to guy small groups and a session on friendship to be taught to girl small groups.

God bless you as you grow in your relationship with God and others, and as you help those around you to grow in those relationships as well!

If there is any way we can help you towards those goals, please reach out to us at:

christianstudies@csuniv.edu or call us (843) 863-7972.

Introduction to the topic and why it is important to address with students today:

**THE LONELINESS EPIDEMIC:
CHRISTIANS KNOW THE CURE!**

DR. BEN PHILLIPS, DEAN,
COLLEGE OF CHRISTIAN STUDIES
CHARLESTON SOUTHERN UNIVERSITY

Loneliness has become an epidemic problem in our culture. Not simply social isolation, where one never interacts with others, but the absence of and inability to form deep, life-giving relationships. A person can be lonely in a crowded room.

Failure to build relationships has led to elderly people dying in heat waves because no one cared to check on them. In some places, insurers offer “lonely death” insurance to protect landlords from the cost of cleaning up apartments where the death of the tenant was only discovered when their corpse began to decompose. This is not material poverty; it is social poverty.

Loneliness is not just a problem for the elderly. In fact, studies show that Generation-Z (18-22 year-olds) is the loneliest generation of all. In a 2018 poll by Cigna Insurance, 47% of Gen-Z reported feeling left out, and 43% felt like their relationships are not meaningful. Only 18% of young adults think they have someone they can “talk to.”

The stress created by this sense of loneliness not only has social implications, it also has a physical effect... equivalent to smoking 15 cigarettes per day! Medical studies indicate that it raises the level of stress hormones and inflammation, which in turn raises the risk of heart disease, arthritis, diabetes, and suicide. What can be done?

In Britain, the government has started a “befriending program,” which pays social workers to visit lonely people for an hour, a few times a month. Sociologists at the University of West Virginia have started a program which brings small groups of lonely people together to share their feelings of loneliness and desire for relationships. Such programs are well-intentioned, but cannot possibly solve the problem. Paying people to befriend someone is not genuine friendship—it is mercenary—it will not endure when the paycheck ends. Healthy and deep relationships are unlikely to form when no-one in the room knows how to form them. Christians, however, know the cure.

Applying a cure always begins with diagnosing the disease, and in this case, it is sin. Sin isolates us from God and from each other. It’s ultimate payoff is death. But God sent His own Son to die as the sacrifice for the sins of the world, to rise again from the grave, and to reconcile us to God. The gospel overcomes our inability to have a live-giving relationship with God. But the gospel also impacts our relationships in this life, enabling us to develop life-affirming relationships with others. It takes those who are “curved in” on themselves and redirects them

towards others. It not only enables us to love the Lord our God with all our heart, mind, and soul; it teaches us to love our neighbors as ourselves.

The gospel is the cure for the loneliness epidemic. It reconciles us to God. It brings to us the Holy Spirit, who enables us to grow in sanctification, overcoming the sin that breaks our relationships with repentance, forgiveness, and reconciliation. Now, God's Son has tasked Christians with the ministry of reconciliation.

SESSION 1 – WHO AM I?

Connect

Connect Moment:

- **Go around the group and ask each student to tell these four things about themselves:**
 - *What is your name?*
 - *What school do you attend?*
 - *What have been your highs and lows this week?*
 - *What is the best thing you have ever made?*

Debrief: *We all love to create and make things. When we finish a project, we are proud of the work we have done. The project did not create itself. We are the ones who designed and made the project. What if the thing we made told your teacher or judge that it made itself? That would be ridiculous. When we think about relationships, we want to go all the way back to creation. When we realize that God created us, it has huge implications for how we view and relate to others. However, today's culture has us all starting in a different place.*

PART 1: THE FLAWED WORLDVIEW OF NATURALISM

DR. ROSS PARKER, ASSISTANT PROFESSOR
COLLEGE OF CHRISTIAN STUDIES
CHARLESTON SOUTHERN UNIVERSITY

Today in the realm of relationships, chaos and confusion reign. The traditional institution of marriage has been unstable for a long time now – way before same-sex marriage became legal in the U.S. and other countries. The hook-up culture tells us to have sexual encounters without getting emotionally involved, though the negative psychological effects of noncommittal sex are significant.¹ More and more people – especially men – don't have strong friendships in their lives.

Many people will be quick to diagnose the causes of the relationship difficulties of our day. I submit that a fundamental contributor to the relationship chaos of our day is an erroneous worldview. Does that surprise you?

¹ Justin R. Garcia et al., "Sexual Hookup Culture: A Review," *Review of General Psychology* 16, no. 2 (2012): 161–76.

Question to ask: *Do you know what a worldview is?*

Many people don't even know what a worldview is, yet they have one, and it shapes how they live life with others. Your worldview is "the conceptual lens through which [you] see, understand, and interpret the world and [your] place within it."²

A fundamental worldview question is, "Who am I?"

- Not just who am I as an individual (I'm a father, and professor, etc.) but who am I *as a human being*. Your answer to this question will affect your relationships.
- Broadly speaking, there are two major options when it comes to who we are as humans.
 - o You can think that humans are created by God
 - o Or you can think that humans are the product of random natural processes.
- The first option reflects a theistic worldview; the second comes from the worldview of naturalism.

Question to Ask: *Does anyone know the word: Naturalism?*

You probably have not heard the word, Naturalism, unless you have learned it in an English or Philosophy course, but it is a view that you are all familiar with.

- Definition: Naturalism is the view that all of reality can be explained in terms of the material world. So, the naturalist worldview holds that human beings are the product of an evolutionary process that began with matter, and through time and chance resulted in the creatures we are today.
- The fundamental implication of naturalism for the question of human relationships is that there is no design or purpose for human nature. If there was no intentionality in how humans came to be, then there is no truth about what a human *ought* to be.

When we think through the lens of the naturalist, it can lead us to two major ways that we live our life. Once again, you may not know the terms, but you have seen people live their lives in these ways:

1. Ethical Relativism

- a. How I ought to live, and what things are right and wrong, are determined by my personal commitments.
- b. On this view, how I ought to live, and what things are right and wrong, are determined by my personal commitments. So, if *you* believe you should be kind to others, then that's true for you. But if *I* believe that I should seek to amass the most stuff for myself that I can get, then that's true for me.
- c. Now if moral relativism is true, the relationship chaos and confusion of our day isn't surprising. Assuming relativism, if someone thinks that he should stay in a marriage only so long as it makes him feel happy, and now he's no longer happy, then it's right for him to leave.

² Tawa Anderson, W. Michael Clark, and David K. Naugle, *An Introduction to Christian Worldview: Pursuing God's Perspective in a Pluralist World* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2017), 8.

- d. Ultimately, though, we know deep down that moral relativism isn't the true account of how we ought to live. We know that there are some things that a person should *not* do, even if they sincerely believe that it's OK to do them. To take just one example, even if someone sincerely believes that it's permissible to abuse another person because it brings the abuser pleasure, we know that's wrong. In fact, there are very few consistent relativists. Most people, in their reflective moments, acknowledge that there are some actions that are right for everyone, and some actions that are wrong for everyone.

2. Utilitarianism

- a. Utilitarians begin by claiming that it's a natural fact that pleasure is good (with the corollary that pain is bad). We also recognize that it's not just our own pleasure that's good; other people's pleasure is good as well. So, what each person should do in any situation is the act that brings the most pleasure for everyone involved.
- b. Major Problem #1: A naturalist has no basis for saying that pleasure *ought* to be pursued.
- c. Major Problem #2: If held consistently, it implies that injustice is right
 - i. Illustration:
 - 1. A group of 25 people living in a small community is tired of doing all their day-to-day chores. So, they decide to choose 1 person and force that person to do all the chores in the community. They choose this person through a random drawing. The person who "wins" the drawing – Bob – is forced to do everyone's chores. Bob is obviously experiencing pain through having to do everyone's work, but everyone else is happy to have the leisure afforded to them through not having chores to do.³
 - 2. For the sake of calculation, let us say that each day Bob experiences 20 units of pain. But each of the other members of the community experience 1 unit of pleasure. So, there is a surplus of pleasure over pain as a result of this decision, which means that, according to utilitarianism, this action was the right thing to do. But what we've just described is a situation where a community has enslaved a person! We recognize that regardless of the results, slavery is unjust and wrong. In light of these criticisms, we can see that utilitarianism is an inadequate approach to what is right and wrong in relationships.

³ This example, as well as the analysis, is based on a similar discussion in Steven B. Cowan and James S. Spiegel, *The Love of Wisdom: A Christian Introduction to Philosophy* (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2009), 345.

Questions to ask:

- *Why is the belief that we are just random creatures a bad place to start when we think about how to relate to one another?*
- *What are some of the things that students hope to get out of relationships?*
- *Why do students today not want to tell their beliefs to others?*

Transition: Many of the voices from culture that speak into our lives come from this false worldview of naturalism. The problem is that naturalism is unable to account for moral truths that we all know, such as the fact that abuse and slavery are wrong. The Christian worldview, on the other hand, can make sense of truths we know deep down about how we should interact with one another, and it provides the only sure foundation for living well in the midst of the confusion and chaos of our day. Let's look in God's Word about who He says we are.

Big Idea: *We are not random creatures. We are made in the image of God for the purpose of glorifying God through our relationship to God and others.*

Explore

PART 2: THE IMAGE OF GOD AND HUMAN RELATIONSHIPS

DR. JONATHAN WATSON, ASSISTANT PROFESSOR
COLLEGE OF CHRISTIAN STUDIES
CHARLESTON SOUTHERN UNIVERSITY

We will be looking in Genesis 1-2 to answer these two questions:

- (1) What is a human being?
- (2) What is the purpose of a human being?

WHAT IS A HUMAN BEING?

Genesis 1–2 tell us that the last of God's creative acts was the creation of humans. They were the pinnacle of God's creative work, and everything that God created was for their enjoyment and their sustenance. Further, among the creatures of the earth, Adam and Eve were unique in an essential way: they were made in God's image.

Read Genesis 1:26-27

A key phrase in this passage is “the image of God”

- The image of God is “[all the ways] that man is like God and represents God.”⁴
- Think of the image of God as both what we are and what we do: we have the image of God (what we are) so that we might image God (what we do).
- Important notes of the image of God
 - o Both men and women are created in God’s image
 - o The image was scarred but not destroyed by the Fall.
 - o The image of God, while damaged, is still possessed by all human beings
 - o The image gives each human being inherent dignity and worth
 - o Jesus Christ is the perfect image of God (Col 1:15; cf. Heb 1:3; 2 Cor 4:4)
 - o It is only through a relationship with Christ by faith that the image will be restored in us (Rom 8:29)
 - o This image-renewal will not be complete until Christ’s return (1 John 3:2)
 - o In light of this hope, believers pursue conformity to his image now (1 John 3:3)

Questions to ask:

- *How does the world describe teenagers today?*
- *How is God’s definition of you different than what the world says?*
- *What is the devastating problem that we all have? (We are not inherently good or blank slates. We have a sinful nature)*
- *How have you seen Christ transform you?*
- *If all mankind is made in the image of God, how does this change how we relate to others?*

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF A HUMAN BEING?

Human beings have been made in the image of God so that they might rightly relate to God and image him to the rest of the created order. All of our God-imaging capacities are designed to glorify God.

Read Matthew 5:16

“God’s glory is the sum total of who He is and what He does.”⁵ The term translated “give glory” means “to glorify, extol, or venerate.” Jesus is teaching his followers to live in such a way that others will see our good works and praise the God whom we serve. Though we are the ones doing the works, our performance has the purpose of pointing them toward our Heavenly Father who is empowering us. Our works are helping others see God for who he is and what he has done. Furthermore, the apostle Paul tells us, “So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God” (1 Cor 10:31). There is no phase of life that has been exempted from this God-glorifying purpose.

⁴ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994, 2000), 442. The initial phrase is an addition but seems in keeping with Grudem’s presentation. Grudem goes on to list a complex array of ways in which the image of God is found in human nature (e.g., moral, spiritual, mental, and relational aspects). He even highlights how our bodies reflect aspects of God even though God doesn’t have a body.

⁵ Brandon D. Smith, *Echoes of the Reformation: Five Truths that Shape the Christian Life* (Nashville: LifeWay Press, 2017), 124.

Questions to ask:

- *What does a right relationship with God look like?*
- *Why are human relationships important?*
- *What are some ways that we glorify God?*

Transform

As image bearers, we have been made to glorify God by imaging or reflecting the beauty and perfections of his character to the world, and chief among the attributes of God's character is love (1 John 4:8). Michael Reeves writes, "Made in the image of [the triune] God, we are created to delight in harmonious relationship, to love God, to love each other."⁶ So, human beings have been created to glorify the perfection and beauty of our God who not only loves but who is love. This has massive implications for our relationships.

IMPLICATIONS FOR RELATIONSHIPS

1. Created in the image of God, "we belong to God" (cf. Mark 12:13–17)⁷ and we are to love him with all that we are (Matt 22:37).
2. We are in a unique relationship with fellow image bearers.
 - a. Not only are we not to curse (Jas 3:9) or murder them (Gen 9:6), we are to love them as we love ourselves (Matt 22:39).
3. The image of God means that human community is part of our purpose (Gen 2:18).
 - a. The Father, Son, and Spirit have eternally existed as one God in loving community. Similarly, humans as image bearers are relational, created for loving community.
 - b. Sin has profoundly disrupted human relationships. But God is drawing persons through the gospel into loving community with himself and with others. Isolation and antisocial behavior are antithetical to our purpose and design.
 - c. Thus, we must pursue God-intended, loving community with others.

As we go through this weekend (or series), let's covenant to:

- 1. Worship God well**
- 2. Love and Honor One Another at all times**
- 3. Grow closer together as a group**

Conclude the session by praying for the group that you will do these three things well during the weekend or your upcoming series.

⁶ Michael Reeves, *Delighting in the Trinity* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2012), 64.

⁷ Millard Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013).

SESSION 2 – FRIENDS, LOVERS, AND FAMILY

WHAT THE NEW TESTAMENT SAYS ABOUT MARRIAGE AND SEX (AND WAITING FOR BOTH)

DR. ED GRAVELY, ASSISTANT PROFESSOR
COLLEGE OF CHRISTIAN STUDIES
CHARLESTON SOUTHERN UNIVERSITY

Connect

Illustration: Show a picture of a reset button. In video games or electronics, what is the purpose of the reset button? I remember as a kid that if I ever messed up or got in a part of the game that I didn't want to be, I would just hit the reset button. What do we do if our computer or phone freezes? We hit the reset button. Our culture has a lot of different views on sex and marriage. And it can be easy to get warped in our thinking or at least confused. Perhaps we need to hit the reset button for a moment and see what God's word says about sex and marriage.

There are many texts in the New Testament that discuss the Christian view of sexual ethics, but there are three key texts in the writings of Paul that, when taken together, best summarize what the New Testament teaches about marriage, sex, and sexual ethics. These texts are 1 Corinthians 7:1-9, 32-35; 1 Thessalonians 4:1-8; and Ephesians 4:1-32. Here is a brief summary.

Big Idea: As made in the image of God, we are to press the reset button on culture's view of sex and live holy lives. Part of living a holy life is honoring God and others with our bodies.

Explore

PRESSING THE RESET BUTTON ON SEX

Read 1 Corinthians 7:1-9, 32-35

The churches in Corinth were struggling (and failing) to obey the Lord in a whole host of areas. This is why Paul writes 1 and 2 Corinthians to them, to deal with serious issues in the church. One of those issues was the issue of sexual immorality in the church (1 Corinthians 5) and issues related to singleness, marriage, divorce, and remarriage (1 Corinthians 7). Paul begins 1 Corinthians 7 by pressing the reset button on all those issues, arguing that singleness and

celibacy (i.e. not sexually active) are good (7:1, 8). There is nothing wrong with being single and celibate. Paul, however, is quite frank that it is also perfectly okay to want to have sex one day, and to get married in order to be able to have sex. Not only is it okay; it is clearly one part of God's plan for humans (7:2-5, 9). Both singleness and marriage, are gifts from God, and not everyone has the same gift (7:6, 35). Paul concludes by explaining why he likes singleness so much. Singleness frees up Christians from worldly concerns to, single-mindedly serve Christ in God's mission (7:32-34).

Paul's teaching is shocking to modern ears. Culture wants everyone to believe that whether or not a person is having sex and whom that person is having sex are the most important things about him or her. Too much of pop culture, a person's sexual identity and sexual availability is their only value. And yet Jesus was the perfect human. He was entirely righteousness. He was entirely obedient. He is our example. He is perfect and complete in every way. There is no one in the universe more valuable than him, and he never had sex!

God calls most to marriage and sex (in that order). God calls some to singleness, but humans are so much more than who they do or do not have sex with. This must be understood first, to press the reset button on our culture, if the rest of what the Bible says about sex and marriage is to be understood.

Questions to ask:

1. *What are some of the ways that we can serve God while we are young and single?*
2. *Are there some things that we can do now for God that would be harder for someone older and married to do?*
3. *What are some of the lies that the world tells us about sex?*

LIVING THE HOLINESS OF GOD IN RELATION TO SEX

Read 1 Thessalonians 4:1-8

In the midst of two letters that he wrote to the Thessalonians, Paul encourages the Thessalonian to continue to be morally pure in relation to sex.

Paul is clear that

- 1) God wants us to walk in a way that pleases him (4:1-2).
- 2) God's will for us is that we become more and more holy (4:3).
- 3) God cares about what we do with our bodies (4:4-5).
- 4) God cares what we do with other people's bodies (4:6-7).
- 5) Disobeying the Lord with your own body or with someone else's body, brings judgment (4:6, 8).

This also sounds strange to modern ears, especially young ears. Culture wants everyone to believe that as long as both parties consent, they can do whatever they want with their own bodies and each other's bodies. To suggest otherwise is oppressive. But the Christian must

never forget that God loves him or her very much. And God loves the other person very much. In fact, Paul argues, that God loves both of them far too much to allow them to injure their own holiness and come out unscathed. Paul warns that the no one should “transgress and wrong his brother or sister in this matter, because the Lord is an avenger in all these things . . . and solemnly warned you.” This is a dire warning. God loves his people too much to allow them to do whatever they want with their bodies.

Questions to ask:

- 1) *What are ways that we can honor people of the opposite gender?*
- 2) *What does “holiness” look like in a dating relationship?*
- 3) *What are some ways that we can honor God with our bodies?*

Transform

Illustration: You just finished a hard work out for the sport you play or at your local gym. You are sweaty and nasty. You jump in the shower and clean off. Once you get out of the shower, you then put on the sweaty clothes you just took off. How nasty would that be? When we are dirty, we don't care about dirty clothes. But once we are clean, we want to put on clean clothes. In the same way, God redeems and cleanses us. Why, then, do we act like the old self when God has made us new? Instead, we should be seeking ways to look and act like our new identity as a child of God.

PRACTICAL TIPS FOR PRACTICAL HOLINESS

Read Ephesians 4:1-32

While he is sitting in a prison cell, Paul writes to the Ephesians to encourage them to walk in a manner that is worthy of what God has done for them in Christ (4:1). Believers, Paul explains, are God's gift to the church. That means we have both purpose and mission (4:2-16). The people of God must discard futile thinking and live as they were taught (17-24). Paul unpacks this for his readers as things we must “put off”—all impurity—and things we must “put on”—the new life of Christ.

Anyone who has been around church for very long has heard this before. They understand it and, to a degree, believe it. But younger Christians struggle here, because they have become hopeless that they will ever be able to live sexually moral lives in the face of our modern sexually promiscuous and pornographic culture. And our culture wants them to feel defeated. Culture is pushing them to believe they can't help but be sexually immoral, that it is totally natural, *human* even.

Only the gospel gives us hope for how to live in the midst of this sexual revolution. The Scriptures promise that when a believer spends time “putting on” the new self, the “new person” that was created by God's Spirit after the likeness of God, the self that is righteous and

holy, it gets easier and easier to “put off” impurity. Most young Christians are convinced that their desires will never change and that the Christian life is suffering through life with those desires and occasionally giving in and acting on them. But the hope of the gospel is that God can change us from the inside out, even our desires, no matter who we are or where we’ve come from.

Questions to Ask:

1. *What are some of the things God has done in your life?*
2. *What are some of the things God is calling teenagers to do to serve Him?*
3. *What are some of the characteristics of Christ that we are to reflect to the world in the “new self”?*
4. *How does focusing on Christ and reflecting his character help us in our fight for purity?*

SESSION 3 – MARRIAGE AND THE GOSPEL

A CHRISTIAN VIEW OF MARRIAGE

DR. PETER BECK, PROFESSOR
COLLEGE OF CHRISTIAN STUDIES
CHARLESTON SOUTHERN UNIVERSITY

Connect

Questions to ask:

1. *What do you think of when you hear the word “Marriage”?*
2. *What do you believe is the purpose of marriage?*
3. *How is marriage portrayed on shows or movies that you watch?*

The world’s oldest institution is under assault. No, we’re not talking about a nation. Not even the church. We’re talking about marriage. As culture embraces attitudes and behaviors once thought sinful, it must of necessity oppose those things that oppose its newfound idols. Marriage, long understood to be the cornerstone of any healthy society, has become the latest target of opportunity.

Secular assaults on this ancient institution are nothing new. Adultery crept in not long after Adam and Eve ate a piece of forbidden fruit. Ever since, people have been tempted to enjoy the forbidden fruit of someone else’s family or home. In the last century “no fault” divorces ate away at the foundations of biblical marriage even more. In the last few decades the assault has grown more intense as the opposition has grown bolder. Today we must think about “gay marriage,” polyamory, and even child sex trafficking as the world around us tells us these behaviors must be embraced as acceptable alternatives to the age-old paradigm of husband and wife.

For years the church fought to protect the boundaries of marriage against such attacks. Alas, many in the church grew tired. In many cases the church grew silent. In others, many now tolerate or even embrace behaviors forbidden in Scripture. The Bible, however, is not silent on these matters and the church must once more be intentional about teaching our people what was once commonly assumed. If we cannot reach the adults who’ve come to contrary conclusions or struggle to formulate a biblical position on such things, we must reach the next generation for Christ, not only with the Gospel but with a full-orbed Christian worldview on matters of importance like marriage.

Big Idea: Our definition of marriage needs to be understood through the lens of the gospel.

Explore

WE HAVE BEEN CREATED IN THE IMAGE OF GOD.

Read Genesis 1:26-27

Theologians often speak of God's creation of humans in His image (Gen 1:26-27) as the *imago Dei*. Drawn from early Latin translations of Genesis, this important doctrine highlights the centrality of humanity in God's creation, gives all humans great value, and sets the stage for the rest of God's interactions with humans throughout Scripture. This isn't an unimportant doctrinal distinction. This doctrine explains why God cared enough about humans to send His own Son to redeem them.

WE HAVE BEEN CREATED FOR RELATIONSHIP.

Read Genesis 1:28

Created in God's image, man must fulfill the role(s) that accompany such a grand gift. While theologians debate the implications of the *imago Dei*, Moses sets the stage quite clearly. The very first command from God to man was to "be fruitful and multiply" (Gen 1:28). Setting aside the obvious need to populate the earth, we must not ignore the unspoken assumption of this "Creation Ordinance." To be fruitful one must relate to another. In fact, the lack of relationship is not good (Gen 2:18). The bulk of Genesis 2 is given over to the specifics of God creating the perfect helpmeet – complement – for Adam. From Adam God created Eve for Adam. Together, things were very good, just as God intended (Gen 2:24).

SIN RUINS EVERYTHING.

Read Genesis 3:8-24

As we read the Genesis account, we move quickly from the joy that is found in the union of Adam and Eve to the disaster of sin found in their disobedience to God. The story of the Fall is well-known and doesn't need repeating here. However, we would do well to not overlook the common thread that runs through the aftermath of that fateful decision. Relationships were destroyed. Their choice destroyed their relationship with God, so much so that they felt the need to hide from him (Gen 3:8). Their relationship with the creation itself was undermined (Gen 3:17-18). Moreover, their relationship with each other would never be the same (Gen 3:16). Marriage and marriages have been suffering ever since.

Questions to Ask:

1. How do you feel when someone does something mean to you?
2. Why does sin always lead to brokenness in relationships?
3. How did sin hurt Adam and Eve's relationship to one another?
4. What are some of the hurts in families today?

BIBLICAL MARRIAGE RESTORES GOD'S PLAN FOR THE FAMILY.

Read Ephesians 5:22-33

Reading the admonition to Ephesians to live in harmony with one another, we find Paul using marriage as the illustration to communicate great truths about salvation. In this analogy, we also find the beauty of marriage as God intended restored. Paul calls the church and spouses to follow God in love (Eph 5:1-2). Doing so, the wife will submit as commanded by God in a display of her faith (Eph 5:22-24). The husband will sacrificially love his wife as he nurtures her soul (Eph 5:25-29). We do all this, Paul said, because the two shall become one, just as Moses said (Eph 5:31).

Questions to Ask:

1. *Who does the Husband represent in the marriage relationship? How is the Man to be like Jesus?*
2. *Who does the Wife represent in the marriage relationship? How is the woman to be like the church?*
3. *As students, what are some of the ways that we can prepare for those future roles if God was to lead us towards marriage?*
 - a. Note: you do not need to be in a relationship to work on these things. It's probably better if you aren't!
 - b. For example: For guys, how can we grow in love towards others? What are some areas in our life that we can begin to lead others by serving?

BIBLICAL MARRIAGE ILLUSTRATES THE GOSPEL.

Marriage as conceived by God and explained in Scripture provides a beautiful picture of salvation and the believer's relationship with Christ. The church is the bride; Christ is the groom. The covenant of marriage finds its echo in the covenant of salvation (Mal 2:14). Just as the bride and the groom become one in marriage (Gen 2:24), the Bride and the Groom become one in salvation (1 Cor 1:30). God's desire for permanence in marriage (Matt 19:6) is fulfilled in the permanence of salvation (John 6:37).

Transform

Questions to Ask:

- *From our discussion of God's word, write out a definition of marriage in your own words.*
- *What does God say about marriage?*
- *What is its purpose?*
- *How is a Christian marriage to be different than what the world says marriage is?*

Thus, at the end of the day, the biblical model of marriage is too important to jettison to the winds of change blowing in our culture. Too much is at stake – not only marriages and families but the meaning and communication of the Gospel itself. May we always remember that we are to do all things for the glory of God (1 Cor 10:31). For that reason, it's not too late to build a wall of protection around the institution of marriage and to make sure that our children and our children's children appreciate the permanency of God's word and the beauty of His plan for our lives.

SESSION 4A: FRIENDSHIP FOR THE GUYS

HOW DO I MAN UP?

THE IMPORTANCE OF BIBLICAL MALE FRIENDSHIPS IN OUR SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENT TOWARDS MANHOOD

DR. JONATHAN DENTON, ASSISTANT PROFESSOR
COLLEGE OF CHRISTIAN STUDIES
CHARLESTON SOUTHERN UNIVERSITY

Connect

Connect Moment: Would You Rather Questions (feel free to make up your own as well)

- Play Nintendo Switch all weekend but only eat healthy food *or* not play and eat all the snacks you want
- Watch college football all weekend *or* youtube
- Learn to surf *or* learn to snow ski

Debrief: *There really are two options with the friends we put in our lives. They will either help us grow or they will pull us down. A common statement we say about friendship is: "Show me your friends and I will show you your future." We tend to become like those are in our life.*

Big Idea: In Our Quest for Manhood, Our Friendship Circles Foster Spiritual Growth or Spiritual Ruin.

Illustration: Draw Three Circles in different places on a sheet of paper. We all have three spheres of friendships in our lives.

- First, each guy is surrounded by a **community** who shares in similar activities like school, sports, or church.
- Second, each guy has a smaller **crowd** of teammates, peers, or youth group.
- And finally, each guy needs a **cluster** of around five best friends. In that cluster lies the power for friendship that is based on love and desire for good for each other.

Questions to Ask:

1. *Who is your community?*
2. *Who is your crowd?*
3. *Who is your cluster?*
4. *Write out the names of some of your best friends. Look at the list. How would you describe your cluster?*

Explore

AS GUYS MARRIED BY SIN, WE TEND TOWARDS ISOLATION.

Though friendship is a powerful influence in the life of a guy, forming deep relationships can sometimes be difficult for us. A pastor at Brooklyn Tabernacle who does men's ministry stated: "Men have a Ph.D. in isolating themselves. You don't have to train them."

Read Genesis 2:16 – 18

And the LORD God commanded the man, "You are free to eat from any tree of the garden, but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for on the day you eat from it, you will certainly die." Then the LORD God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone: I will make a helper corresponding to him."

- In our journey with God, we need other people
- As we have seen in this passage in other sessions, God has created a need for companionship. God meets that need in marriage and also in friendship as mankind populates the world.

One of our main tasks in the teenage years is to "individuate" but we tend to "isolate"

- Modern day manhood teaches us that we don't need anyone

Questions to Ask:

1. Why do guys tend to try do things on their own?
2. Why do we need other people in our life?

Illustration: Draw the three circles again spread out and us outside of the circle. We like to go back and forth into these groups whenever we choose and whenever we need something. But we still stay outside of the circles isolated for the majority of the time.

AS GUYS LIVING IN A SINFUL WORLD, WE NEED A NEW BIBLICAL UNDERSTANDING OF FRIENDSHIP.

Whereas friendship was historically an important part of the moral life of an individual, the concept of friendship moved from the moral life to the devotional life in the Middle Ages and Reformation.⁸ The question we have to ask today is, "Do we let the Gospel interpret how we think about friendship?"

When we don't think biblically about our friendships, we experience disastrous effects. Kimmel studied teenage and college-age guys and called their place of residence: "Guyland." Guyland is a "... topsy-turvy, Peter-Pan mindset, [where] young men shirk the responsibilities of adulthood

⁸ s.v. "Friendship", in *New Dictionary of Christian Ethics & Pastoral Theology*, ed. Stephen Atkinson, et al. (Grand Rapids: IVP Academic, 1995), 398-399.

and remain fixated on the trappings of boyhood, while the boys they still are struggle heroically to prove that they are real men despite all the evidence to the contrary.”⁹

In “Guyland,” guys prove their manhood by partying hard or dating girls with little commitment to a relationship. They don’t do these things because they are trying to impress girls or because “boys will be boys,” but because they all know that they are being evaluated by other men with a scorecard of manhood. Many of the problems we experience today are not because we are trying to impress girls or because “boys will be boys,” but because we are looking for status and identity from other guys.

The friends you surround yourself with will have an effect on your behavior

Illustration: Search for the video Social Conformity by Brain Games. The video is of a woman in a waiting room. The rest of the people in the waiting room stand up every time there is a beep. After three beeps, she starts standing up to. Even when everyone else has left, she continues to stand up. Show the video and talk about how easily everyone was affected by the herd mentality.

When guys allow their friends to set the scorecard of manhood, it effects their behavior.

Read Psalm 1:1-2 *“How happy is the one who does not walk in the advice of the wicked, or stand in the pathway with sinners, or sit in the company of mockers! Instead, his delight is in the LORD’s instruction, and he meditates on it day and night.”*

The word for “sit” is not like sitting as a student in a class, but like a professor occupying a “chair.” The individual in the company of mockers is earning a Ph.D. in the group’s behaviors. There are no causal observers in today’s friend groups.

Not only does culture dictate the scorecard for manhood, it has also hijacked the concept of love from friendship.

When we look at friendship in the Bible, we see phrases like “Jonathan was bound to David in close friendship, and loved him as much as he loved himself” (1 Sam. 18:1) and “Remembering your tears, I long to see you so that I may be filled with joy” (Paul to Timothy in 2 Tim. 1:4). To the modern guy, saying “I love you” to a guy friend or “remember when we cried when we left each other” are foreign concepts. Kimmel states the currency in Guyland is friendship, but it is a counterfeit currency. Instead of love and care, the friendship is based on toughness and an allegiance to the “Guy code.”¹⁰

A best friend like Jonathan to David is an important part of growing up. As the circle of friendship draws closer, there is a healthy growth of intimacy in relationships.

⁹ Michael Kimmel, *Guyland* (San Francisco: Harper, 2009), 4.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 278.

Culture has taught us that intimacy is only for sexual activity. But the reality is that we all need intimacy in our friendships as well. Gerali states, “Guys need to learn that it’s good to declare their love to their friends. It’s a manly thing to die for a friend, but tell him you love him – that’s a bit girly. But the truth is if we can’t say it, then we won’t die for it.”¹¹

Questions to Ask:

1. *What are some of the ways that our friends affect our decisions and behaviors?*
2. *Are your friends positive influences in your life or negative?*
3. *Why is it so hard to tell our friends that we love them?*

AS GUYS ON MISSION WITH GOD, WE NEED BIBLICAL FRIENDSHIPS WITH OTHER GUYS ON MISSION WITH GOD.

We need relationships and we find relationships in the church.

Read Titus 2:6 *In the same way, encourage the young men to be self-controlled in everything. Make yourself an example of good works with integrity and dignity in your teaching.* – Titus 2:6

While friendships can have a devastating effect on behavior, godly friendships can propel us to serve on mission with God. Two stabilizing forces that all guys need on their journeys with God are godly Fathers and/or mentors and then godly friends. Kimmel in his secular research notes, “Parents and real friends are the counterweights to Guyland.”¹² In a research study on healthy churches that are reaching young people, the researchers note that guys with five close friends from church tend to score higher on important aspects of the faith such as regular attendance, regular study of the Bible, openness to talk about faith questions or struggles, and regular service both locally and globally. They conclude, “This benchmark of five close friends isn’t magic, but it sure seems to help.”¹³

Questions to Ask:

1. *Who are some of the men who have made a difference in your life?*
2. *What are some of the things they do or taught you that made a difference?*
3. *Why is it so important to have close Christian friends? How do they help you grow?*

Transform

As leaders and parents of teenagers, we would be wise to help foster student ministry communities where guys can build clusters of five friends to help them as they are on mission with God. We would also be wise to help them to think biblically about their clusters. The book of Proverbs gives us some great teaching in this area:

¹¹ Gerali, 224.

¹² Kimmel, 280.

¹³ Powell, Mulder and Griffin, *Growing Young*, 176.

What Proverbs teaches us about Friendship:

- *The one who walks with the wise will become wise,
but a companion of fools will suffer harm.*
 - Proverbs 13:20
- *A friend loves at all times,
and a brother is born for a difficult time.*
 - Prov 17:17
- *One with many friends may be harmed,
but there is a friend who stays closer than a brother.*
 - Prov 18:24
- *The wounds of a friend are trustworthy,
but the kisses of an enemy are excessive.*
 - Prov 27:6
- *One who rebukes a person will later find more favor
than one who flatters with his tongue.*
 - Prov 28:23
- *Singing songs to a troubled heart
is like taking off clothing on a cold day
or like pouring vinegar on soda.*
 - Prov 25:20
- *Oil and incense bring joy to the heart,
and the sweetness of a friend is better than self-counsel.*
 - Prov 27:9

Illustration: Draw the three circles in their proper place with yourself surrounded by your cluster, surrounded by your crowd, and surrounded by your community.

Questions to Ask:

1. *Who are the five friends who you need to have closest to you?*
2. *What can you do to spend more time with those groups of friends?*

I grieve for you, Jonathan, my brother.

You were such a friend to me.

Your love for me was more wondrous

Than the love of women.

- 2 Samuel 1:26

Let's pray that we will be a cluster of guys that prays for one another, supports one another, loves one another, calls out sin in one another, and calls each other Godward!

SESSION 4B: FRIENDSHIP FOR THE GIRLS

FINDING YOUR PEOPLE

BUILDING FEMALE FRIENDSHIPS GOD'S WAY

DR. AMANDA DENTON, ADJUNCT PROFESSOR
COLLEGE OF CHRISTIAN STUDIES
CHARLESTON SOUTHERN UNIVERSITY

Connect

Illustration: Share a few stories of your friendship with others. Share a story of someone that you are close to and your friendship is great. Also, share a story of a friendship that has been hard and difficult.

A common phrase that has often been said in relation to friendships is “you have to find your people.” These “people” are the ones who know who you really are and stick by you through both the good and difficult times. For girls, finding “your people” is especially important because God created females to desire community and fellowship within relationships. These kinds of godly friendships with “your people” are built on the foundation of a shared goal and passion to glorify the Lord and to spur one another on toward growing in Christ-likeness.

Questions to Ask:

- *Draw a Picture of someone who would be your “people.” What do they look like? What are some of their characteristics? What do they enjoy to do?*
- *What do you think Jesus would say about your people?*
- *How do we build female friendships God's way?*
- *What are some things that make friendships easy? What are some things that make friendships hard?*

Explore

Read Philippians 2:1-5

The apostle Paul addresses the topic of how Christians are to treat one another in a letter to the church of Philippi. This passage begins with an if/then statement that reads, *“If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from His love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in Spirit and purpose.”*

This statement from Paul to the church may seem confusing because why would he say “if” so much when writing to a body of believers and a group of Christ-followers? All the qualities he listed are qualities that Christians should surely possess. However, that is not what he intended here. The word “if” in Greek is actually translated “assuming” or “since there is.” So the verses above would read “Since there is encouragement from being united with Christ, since there is comfort from his love, since there is fellowship with the Spirit, since there is tenderness and compassion...” Paul is essentially saying, “Church of Philippi, you are all believers, you are all Christ followers, and because you are all Christians, then I know that certain things are present in your lives.” So, in this passage, he is outlining qualities that should be present among believers. From these qualities, it can be gathered what then should be present in godly friendships in general and also in female friendships.

GODLY FEMALE FRIENDSHIPS SHOULD POSSESS ENCOURAGEMENT, COMFORT, FELLOWSHIP, AND COMPASSION.

The words and actions used among friends should seek to encourage and build one another up, not tear each other down. It is common for girls to put another friend down to build herself up, but this practice isn’t honoring to God and certainly doesn’t reflect *“encouragement from being united with Christ.”* In addition, godly friendships should be inclusive because believers are *“united with Christ”* and should never exclude someone because they may be or look different.

Friendships focused on glorifying God should be a safe place where someone can come for comfort in the midst of sadness or struggle and where they can be honest about how they may be feeling without the worry of judgement. The apostle Paul said that *“fellowship with the Spirit”* was present in the church of Philippi, which means that because of their faith in Christ they shared in the fellowship of the Holy Spirit. When Christians enter into godly friendships, then both of the participants have the Holy Spirit living inside of them, influencing them, and leading them. This commonality is the foundation in which godly friendships rest.

Also, godly friendships should possess compassion where friends show each other the same kind of grace and mercy that was bestowed on them through Christ’s death and salvation. In verse 2 of this passage, Paul lays out the “then” statement, which reads *“then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose.”* Paul is making a shift here and essentially saying, “Church of Philippi, since you all are Christ followers then I know you are encouraging one another, comforting and loving each other, experiencing Christ-centered fellowship, and showing compassion. However, I need you to do even more...I need you to demonstrate God-glorifying unity.”

Questions to Ask:

1. *Why do you think girls tear each other down?*
2. *How can our group be a safe place for girls?*
3. *What are some ways that we can show compassion to one another?*

GODLY FEMALE FRIENDSHIPS SHOULD BE UNITED THROUGH CHRIST-CENTERED THOUGHTS, LOVE, AND PURPOSES.

Although friends may not have identical personalities or interests, female friendships amongst believers should be united by the common value of honoring and glorifying God. This is what should overwhelm and dominate their thoughts and actions among one another. Referring back to the concept of finding “your people,” the whole essence of this action revolves around finding those female friends who are heading in the same path and direction toward Christ-likeness and who are running this race toward Christ alongside of you.

Questions to Ask:

1. *Why is it so important to have friends who are heading in the same direction as you?*
2. *What happens if you are pursuing God but your friends are heading in a different direction?*

GODLY FEMALE FRIENDSHIPS SHOULD DISPLAY THE HUMILITY OF CHRIST.

Finally, verses 3 and 4 of Philippians 2 read, *“Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.”*

A friend who is acting with selfish ambition is only out for herself, and her only desire is to make herself look good or to get ahead no matter what the price and no matter who she may have to step on along the way. Vain conceit is defined as being excessively proud of or concerned about one’s own appearance, qualities, achievements resulting from vanity. Both of these qualities will suffocate a godly friendship because this kind of friend is focused on herself and not the Lord and certainly not her friend.

The solution Paul gave was to *“in humility consider others better than yourselves.”* These verses are not saying that believers should not have their own opinions or own interests, but these verses are calling them to a higher standard in relationships. Paul didn’t tell the Philippians to ignore or discard their own needs, just to put them second on the list.

Questions to Ask:

1. *Why is humility so important in friendships?*
2. *What are some ways that we can start noticing the needs of others?*
3. *What are some of the hard things we have to do in friendships?*
4. *What examples does Jesus set for us in how to be a good friend?*

Transform

Illustration: Tell a story about a time when someone had to help you do a really hard thing.

Questions to Ask:

- *Would anyone else like to share a story when a friend helped you during a hard time?*
- *Why is it important to have friends during hard times?*
- *How can we be good friends to each other during hard times?*

Godly friendships are not always easy. Sometimes hard things have to be said. Sometimes the other person is placed first. Sometimes it is not easy to be encouraging; but for believers seeking to find “your people” and seeking to glorify the Lord, look what Paul wrote in verse 5 of this passage, *“Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus.”* So when friendships get hard or when uncertainties arise about how to act in a particular situation, remember that believers are called to have an attitude that is the same as Christ Jesus *“who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross!”* (Philippians 2:6-8)