

Relationships

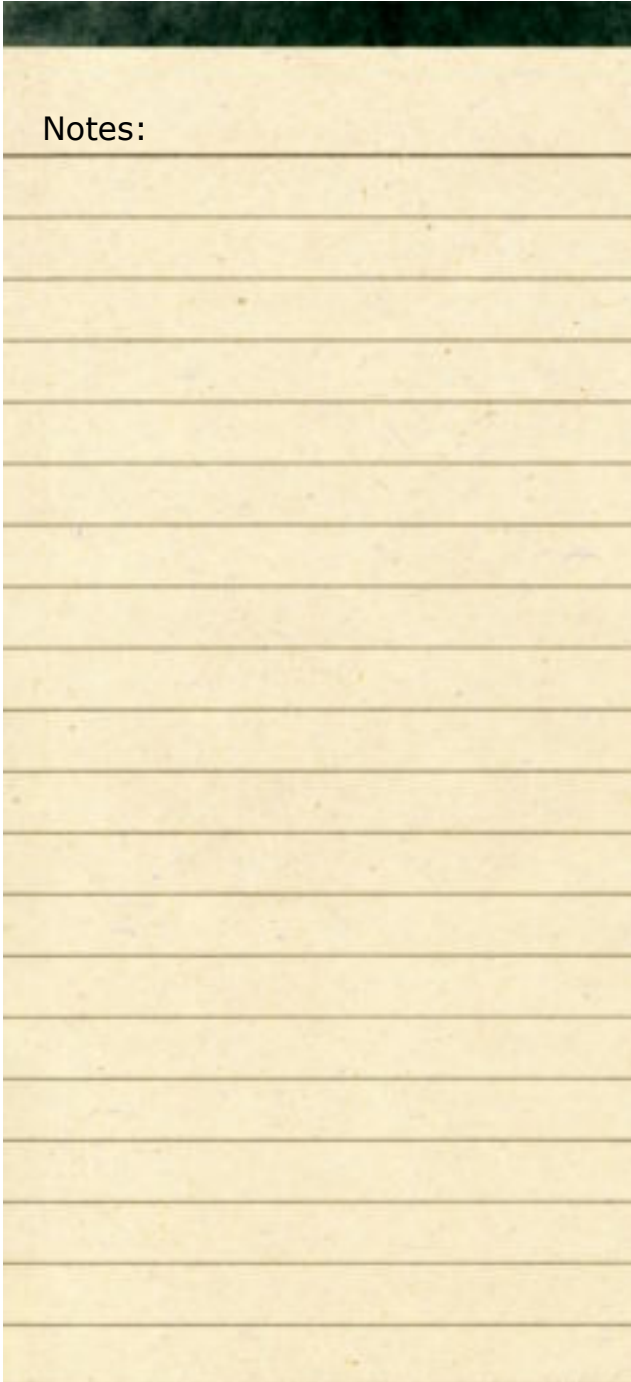
You can't listen to a talk show, visit a bookstore, go to a movie, or browse the Internet and not be bombarded by all the talk about relationships: Why we need them. Why we struggle. Why they don't work very well. So what's so important about relationships?

Why do we need relationships? It's simple. Relationship is the ultimate reality in the universe. It's not truth or matter, but relationship. While some may initially dispute that statement, the ultimate relationship is the Triune Godhead—that perfect relationship between the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. And since all humankind is “made in His image” (Gen. 1:26-27), we all were made by God to relate to Him and others. As God-reflectors, it's in the context of relationships where we have the opportunity to most fully reflect Him. That's why relationships are so important.

But relationships are also the major source of all mankind's struggles. Whether it's within the family, the church, the community, or between nations and races, how we relate to one another has the potential to produce not only the greatest joys, but also the greatest pains.

Why is every relationship a struggle? Again, it's simple when we go back and unpack it from the beginning. Every relationship is marred by sin. Since the fall of the first man and

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woman in the Garden of Eden (Gen. 3:1-19), which resulted in separation from the life-giving relationship with God, every other relationship since then has been dominated by selfish interests that collide. We crave security and significance because we're made in God's image, but since that relationship with God was severed, we foolishly hunt for another source of life. The source we most often turn to is those around us who also reflect something about God. That's why we either exploit others to get what we need from them to make us feel good about being us, or they exploit us.

The relational landscape is dominated by the law of the jungle: exploit or be exploited. Instead of giving to one another out of the fullness of life that God pours into us, we demand from others what only God can provide. We've become greedy instead of giving.

All struggles in relationships can be traced back to these core roots: We are bent, but not broken. We are people who are bent on getting what we need by exploiting our relationships with others. I know, that sounds awful. It is. And our bent is reinforced because we are not broken over our willingness to exploit others because we refuse to be humbled before God. Brokenness before God and returning to Him as the only One who has the words of life (John 6:68) is the only solution to the relational cannibalism we participate in and experience all around us.

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While that may seem dismal, there is hope. Jesus' own words about why He came are our hope for restoration of relationship with God and with others: "I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full" (John 10:10). "By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another" (John 13:35). Relational health is restored through brokenness and humble dependence upon God as the only true source of life that breaks our bent towards exploitation and empowers us to enjoy relationships with others in a way that gives them a sip of the water of life that God has given to us (John 7:38).

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