

Pathways

Session 7

Fulfilled in relationship



RESOURCES FOR THE PRESENTER

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Purposes of Session 7

For the participants to:

- explore the importance of relationships
- consider ways of keeping the dimensions of life in balance

Reflection stimulus

Christianity means community through Jesus Christ and in Jesus Christ. No Christian community is more or less than this. Whether it be a brief, single encounter or the daily fellowship of years, Christian community is only this. We belong to one another only through and in Jesus Christ. What does this mean? It means, first, that a Christian needs others because of Jesus Christ. It means, second, that a Christian comes to others only through Jesus Christ. It means, third, that in Jesus Christ we have been chosen from eternity, accepted in time, and united for eternity.

[D Bonhoeffer, Life Together, p11]

Focus questions

- What relationships are important to me?
- What is God's plan for relationships?

Biblical focus

I give you a new command. Love one another. You must love one another, just as I have loved you. If you love one another, everyone will know you are my disciples.

John 13:34,35 (NIRV)

Suppose I speak in the languages of human beings and of angels. If I don't have love, I am only a loud gong or a noisy cymbal. Suppose I have the gift of prophecy. Suppose I can understand all the secret things of God and know everything about him. And suppose I have enough faith to move mountains. If I don't have love, I am nothing at all. Suppose I give everything I have to poor people. And suppose I give my body to be burned. If I don't have love, I get nothing at all. Love is patient. Love is kind. It does not want what belongs to others. It does not brag. It is not proud. It is not rude. It does not look out for its own interests. It does not easily become angry. It does not keep track of other people's wrongs. Love is not happy with evil. But it is full of joy when the truth is spoken. It always protects. It always trusts. It always hopes. It never gives up.

1 Corinthians 13:1-8 (NIRV)

Each of us has one body with many parts. And the parts do not all have the same purpose. So also we are many persons. But in Christ we are one body. And each part of the body belongs to all the other parts. We all have gifts. They differ in keeping with the grace that God has given each of us. Do you have the gift of prophecy? Then use it in keeping with the faith you have. Is it your gift to serve? Then serve. Is it teaching? Then teach. Is it telling others how they should live? Then tell them. Is it giving to those who are in need? Then give freely. Is it being a leader? Then work hard at it. Is it showing mercy? Then do it cheerfully. Love must be honest and true. Hate what is evil. Hold on to what is good. Love each other deeply. Honour others more than yourselves.

Romans 12:4-10 (NIRV)

Theological focus

The story of creation (Gen 2:14b-25) shows how highly God values relationships. God created everything to be in a state of perfect harmony. Human beings, created in the image of God, shared in harmonious and mutually beneficial relationships with each other which reflected the relationships within the trinity. Human relationships flowed out of, and were blessed by, a perfect relationship with the creator. Human beings were also in perfect harmony with the animals and all of the rest of creation. Before the advent of sin to distort and destroy those relationships, nothing disturbed them.

Although human beings are different from all the other creatures God created, the close relationship between human beings and the rest of creation is emphasised in the creation stories. God formed a human being from the dust of the ground and breathed his breath into that 'person' who became a living being (Gen 2:7). These two aspects need to be kept closely together – that human beings are one with the earth (which they share with all creation, and to which they will return) but contain the breath (spirit) of God. This means human beings have a 'vertical' relationship with God, and a 'horizontal' relationship with the rest of creation.

Human beings relate to each other at various levels. Each person is related to every other member of the human family, but God has placed us in a closer relationship with some people than with others. Relationships also change: for example parent/child relationships, friendships, work relationships, etc. The closer the relationship, the greater the mutual benefits, but also the responsibilities.

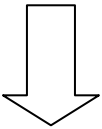
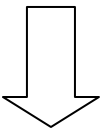
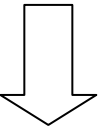
Sin has fragmented the relationships which God had established. The account of the fall (Gen 3) clearly shows how all relationships were immediately shattered by the advent of sin: between Adam and Eve (vs 7; 12); between God and human beings (vs 8; 10); between human beings and the rest of creation (vs 15; 17; 18). The natural self-centredness of sinful human beings leads to disharmony, conflict, and the breakdown of relationships at all levels. Individuals see themselves as the self-sufficient centre of the universe and see the rest of creation as provided for their benefit and exploitation. The Bible itself gives many examples of the tragedy of broken relationships (cf Gal 5:19-21).

Jesus Christ came to restore broken relationships. By restoring the relationship between God and human beings (the 'new creation'), Jesus also provides healing for all broken relationships: between the individual and him/herself; between the individual and other people; between people and the animals, the environment and all of creation. For Christ's sake God offers forgiveness and restoration and makes it possible for us to try to live in harmonious and loving relationships with one another. It also allows us to offer support and care to those who are experiencing difficulties in relationships (eg marriage breakdown, family strife, unacceptable work situations, congregational tensions, abuse and harassment, bullying, etc).

Concepts in focus

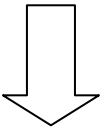
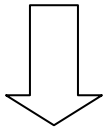
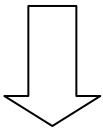
- I am created for relationships with others and with God
- I am fulfilled in relationship (family, church, society)
- Relationships also help me experience brokenness and wholeness (sin and forgiveness)
- I experience the struggle of being a 'saint and sinner' at the same time

WORKSHOP Option 1

<p>Stimulus</p> 	<p>Participants are given a piece of paper and asked to draw a series of concentric circles to show the many different relationships in which they are involved. Ask them to start with their closest relationships in the inner circles and extend this through to the less close relationships. They reflect on the following questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do relationships enrich my experience of life? • What challenges do I experience through relationships?
<p>Reflection</p> 	<p>Provide the participants with the Resource Handout, <i>Reflection stimulus and theological focus</i>. They reflect on</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How does Christianity provide a framework for considering and developing relationships within the world? • How does this impact on the relationships listed in and around the circles?
<p>Sharing</p> 	<p>Ask the participants to share and discuss:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are key beliefs about God and people that underpin the Christian approach to relationships? • What do you find most challenging as you reflect on how this applies to your relationships in the school context?
<p>Prayer</p>	<p>Close with a time of quiet prayer as participants reflect on their relationships in the light of John 13:34,35 or 1 Corinthians 13:1-8</p>

[Note: From the two workshop options provided, please choose the option that best suits your staff needs]

**WORKSHOP
Option 2**

<p>Stimulus</p> 	<p>Ask the participants to individually reflect on the Bible passages contained in the Resource Handout, <i>Living in relationship</i>.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What guidance does the Bible provide for living in relationship? • How are these guidelines challenging and/or inspiring?
<p>Reflection</p> 	<p>Provide the participants with the Resource Handout, <i>The Calling of Humans</i>. Make available a range of art materials such as clay, paint, paper, card, junk items and ask the participants to individually reflect through their artwork on the different relationships described and how these interrelate.</p>
<p>Sharing</p> 	<p>Ask the participants to share their artwork and to discuss in pairs or groups:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What have you found to be challenging or insightful in what you have read or thought about during the session? • What ideas do you think are particularly relevant for relationships in the school context? (staff with God, staff with staff, staff with students, staff with parents, relationship to creation)
<p>Prayer</p>	<p>Conduct the meditation on 1 John 4:7-21 (NIV) in the final Resource Handout, <i>Prayer</i>.</p>