

relationships



Seeing Jesus in My Relationships Changes Everything

Light a candle

Opening prayer

Lord Jesus, you loved everyone, including those who sinned, who were ill, poor, and even those who sought to do you harm. Teach me how to love my brother and sister, to care for them and to see you in every person I encounter in my day. Guide my words and actions so I may always speak and act with compassion, forgiveness, respect, and fairness. Amen.

I have just three things to teach:
simplicity, patience, compassion.
These three are your greatest treasures.
Simple in actions and in thoughts,
you return to the source of being.
Patient with both friends and enemies,
you accord with the way things are.
Compassionate towards yourself,
you reconcile all beings in the world.

— Lao-Tzu, *Tao Te Ching*

My relationships

The people in our lives are God's special gift to us. As you reflect on the relationships in your life, consider your parents, children, spouse, friends, business partners, coworkers, parishioners, neighbors, people you don't know in your community, political leaders, people you don't like, people who are mean to you, people you hear about in the news, people who live by values that oppose yours...all the different relationships God brings into your life no matter how briefly they stay or how dramatically or quietly they enter and leave your life.

My close relationships

The most important relationships in my life right now are:

Why are these relationships special and important to me?

In what ways do I nurture these relationships?

How do I resolve conflicts that arise with these relationships?

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A current difficult relationship

The most difficult or strained relationship in my life right now:

What circumstances make this relationship challenging?

How have I have tried to improve this relationship?

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. *Reacting or responding:*
. *Under what*
. *circumstances would I*
. *yell at Jesus? Not share*
. *with him? Ignore him?*
. *Hold a grudge against*
. *him? Lie to him? Talk*
. *about him in a negative*
. *way? Lose patience with*
. *him? How is the way I*
. *respond to my*
. *relationship with Jesus*
. *different from the way I*
. *react to situations or*
. *respond to people in my*
. *other relationships?*
.

Past difficult relationships

A difficult relationship from my past:

Did this resolve? What is this relationship like today? If I could change the relationship or the way we left it, what would I change?

What have I learned from my past difficult relationships that can help me in my relationships today?

Relationships with acquaintances and strangers

A time I felt God brought someone into my life for a short time:

What did I learn from this person? How did I respond to this relationship?

Jesus teaches us how to love

Jesus teaches us through his example how to have loving relationships. As we see Jesus in our relationships we come to an awareness of the relationship he wants to have with us and the relationships he wants us to have with others. Among the many ways Jesus teaches us to nurture our relationships and resolve conflicts, he teaches us to have compassion, to listen, to forgive, to be kind, and to love others as he loves us.

Compassion

“Seeing the people, He felt compassion for them, because they were distressed and dispirited like sheep without a shepherd.” Matthew 9:36 NASB

“Moved with compassion, Jesus touched their eyes; and immediately they regained their sight and followed Him.”
Matthew 20:34 NASB

“And the king will say to them in reply, ‘Amen, I say to you, whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me.’” Matthew 25:40 NAB

Compassion is the awareness of another person’s distress along with a desire to alleviate it. We might not be able to heal all around us who suffer, but we can each help at least one other person. We can offer a compassionate and listening heart, cook a meal, share a portion of our wealth, give our time and talent to help someone get through a tough time.

What suffering do I see in the people around me that I could help alleviate?

If I could set down my load for a day and carry someone else’s, whose burden would I choose to carry?

“Then Jesus said, ‘He who has ears to hear, let him hear.’”
Mark 4:9 NIV

Jesus taught us to listen with our ears and also with our hearts. He taught us to listen to his word and then put it into action. Listening is the first step. As we go about our busy stressful days, do we take time to listen to others? Or do we wait for our turn to talk?

When I need a good listener, what qualities am I looking for?

Am I a good listener? Can I listen without speaking my own mind?
Without trying to fix a situation? What has listening taught me?

How does listening to others help me do God's work?

Forgiveness

“Then Peter approaching asked him, ‘Lord, if my brother sins against me, how often must I forgive him? As many as seven times?’ Jesus answered, ‘I say to you, not seven times but seventy-seven times.’” Matthew 18:21-22 NAB

“When you stand to pray, forgive anyone against whom you have a grievance, so that your heavenly Father may in turn forgive you your transgressions.” Mark 11:25-26 NAB

“For this is my blood of the covenant, which will be shed on behalf of many for the forgiveness of sins.” Matthew 26:28 NAB

Forgiveness is a matter of the heart. Forgiving someone requires that we no longer feel any resentment toward them. There is no debt to

repay. No further apologies to accept. All injuries are forgotten. Both the person giving and receiving forgiveness receive grace. We may find it difficult to forgive someone who has hurt us, especially if that person has never apologized. But forgiving them is our act and requires our change of heart, not theirs. If they repeat their offense, still we can forgive. We cannot control someone else's hurtful acts, but we can control our response to them. We can forgive them seventy-seven times.

A time when I found it difficult to forgive someone:

A time I might have hurt someone and not apologized:

Ways I have reconciled differences with others in the past:

If I were able to immediately forgive and forget, how might it change my relationships?

.
. *It can be paralyzing to*
. *brood over past events*
. *or relationships even*
. *though we know we*
. *cannot undo what has*
. *been done. When do we*
. *need to reconcile the*
. *past? When is it okay to*
. *simply move forward?*
.

“Therefore, laying aside falsehood, speak truth each one of you with his neighbor, for we are members of one another. Be angry, and yet do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and do not give the devil an opportunity.”
Ephesians 4:25-27 NASB

Do I go to bed angry? How do I resolve anger in a timely manner and yet wait long enough to get perspective?

“But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. If you love those who love you, what reward will you get?...And if you greet only your brothers, what are you doing more than others?” Matthew 5: 44-47 NIV

It is especially difficult to reconcile difficult relationships if we don't like the person or if we have no desire to continue the relationship. Relationships take time and work. Take a moment to consider a failed relationship. Could it be you misunderstood that person's perspective? If you now look at that person as Jesus, do you see them any differently? If you were forced to continue to interact with that person in your daily life now, how would you work it out?

Reflecting on a past difficult relationship with a compassionate and forgiving heart, how could I mend this relationship?

I expect God to forgive me when I hurt him. Have I ever felt hurt by God? How did we reconcile?

Love and kindness

“As I have loved you, so you must love one another.” John 13:34 NIV

Jesus loved us enough to die for us. How much love can we pass around in a day? Love is infinite. We will never run out. We can always make more. So what stops us from giving away as much love as we can each day? A smile. A hug. An open heart. A listening ear. A kind deed. A handwritten love letter. A call to an old friend. A game with a child. An image of hope for someone who is hurting. There are so many ways we can stop for a moment and share our love.

An act of love someone shared with me that has stuck with me:

A person I can think of right now who might need my love:

What kind word or deed did I share with my family or a friend today?

When do I find myself not being kind to the people who are closest to me—my parents, siblings, spouse, children, or good friends?

How does my own self-esteem and love for myself affect how I participate in a relationship? Do I see myself as Jesus sees me?

Three new ways I can share my love this week:

Relationship environments

In our daily lives, there are certain environments in which we regularly build relationships: at home, at work, at church, in our community. Consider the environments in which you regularly build relationships. Do you treat people in one environment with more or less respect or patience or humility than other people in your life? How do environmental factors such as decision-making authority, stress, positive and negative attitudes, routines, fresh air, lighting, cleanliness, welcoming opportunities, and perceived or real hierarchies affect your ability to nurture relationships in these environments? In what ways can you create a place within each environment to invite Jesus?

At home

How does my current home environment positively or negatively affect my relationships?

Does my family consider our home a sacred place? Do we think of God being there with us at our meals, in our intimate conversations? How does setting a place for Jesus at our table change our dinner conversation?

What are some ways I can bring Jesus into our home and our daily routines?

If Jesus and I had to work out our family roles—who would do the laundry, run the business, clean the bathroom, pick up the kids, and so on—how would I approach the situation differently than I do now with my family?

If it were Jesus I was helping to get ready for school or work in the morning or interacting with at other key times of our daily routine, how would I approach those transition times differently?

If Jesus were living in my home, what changes would I make to our environment to accommodate him?

At work

How does my current work environment positively or negatively affect my relationships?

Sometimes decisions at work or with a coworker affect our lives and jobs in significant ways (e.g., maternity leave, layoffs, salaries, responsibilities). When did an important decision at work affect my own or a coworker's livelihood? Was Jesus involved in that decision?

How does seeing Jesus in my coworkers change the way I approach situations at work?

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At church

What types of relationships do I have with people at my church?
What opportunities does my church provide for me to build and nurture relationships?

Does this environment of a group of people who all love Jesus make it easier for me to begin and nurture good relationships?

In my community and world

Ways my neighbors help me see Jesus in others:

Does thinking of a stranger as Jesus change my desire to know the person? Concerns or worries I have about building relationships in my community:

Times when it's difficult for me to see Jesus in my neighborhood and community:

When I think of those less fortunate, how does thinking of them as Jesus change my desire to help them?

Bringing it all together

After reflecting on my relationships; considering what Jesus teaches me about compassion, forgiveness, and love; and thinking about ways my home, work, and community environments support or strain my relationships, how can I use what I've learned to nurture my relationships with others as I would with Jesus?

Closing prayer

Lord, you give me the blessing of relationships—both challenging and rewarding—with my family, friends, coworkers, strangers, community, and greater world. Help me see your face in each and every person I meet. Be with me in my conversations, brief encounters, and lifelong friendships. Use me to bring your grace to those who need it. Grant me the strength and wisdom to use my listening heart, kindness, compassion, forgiveness, patience, and love in every situation. Gently remind me to treat each relationship you bring into my life with the same care in which I nurture my relationship with you, for you are in every person. Thank you for this gift. Amen.

Suggested topics and questions for group discussion

Use this space to prepare your own thoughts or to make notes during your group discussion.

When conflicts arise in your relationships, how do you resolve them? What makes it easy or difficult for you to forgive others?

In what ways do you show love and compassion to others? How do you respond differently to your close relationships than to strangers?

How does your environment at home, work, church, or in your community affect your relationships?

How does thinking about seeing Jesus in your relationships change the way you view your relationships?

Other aspects of relationships you would like to share with others or would like to hear more about from others...

Reflection: Seeing Jesus in my relationships

For your quiet reflection following group sharing.

What have I learned about myself after reflecting on my important relationships and thinking of Jesus in those relationships?

How have my thoughts about my relationships changed?

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How can my relationships be improved or nurtured differently if I treat those people as I would treat Jesus?

I was inspired by these stories or ideas shared by others:

What changes will I make in the way I resolve conflict or nurture relationships? Why?

What will I continue to do when resolving conflict or nurturing relationships? Why?

Resources

Resources I would like to share or that others have shared with me:
