



FOUR ASPECTS OF HEALTHY CHRISTIAN RELATIONSHIPS

Introduction

Welcome to our D-Group study on *Four Aspects of Healthy Christian Relationships*! We know that relationships are a vital part of the Christian walk because (1) God is a relational God who created us to be in relationship with him, (2) God himself said it is not good for man to be alone, and (3) God saves us into relationship with himself and others whom he has saved as well (Eph. 2:19). It's no wonder that there are at least 54 commands in the New Testament that deal with how Christians are to conduct themselves in relationship to one another!

Despite all of this, relationships are not easy by any means. Our sin, personal preferences, selfish desires (to name a few) all contribute to difficulty in human relationships, including Christian relationships. Therefore we need to be constantly seeking God's help through the gospel, his Word, and His Spirit to help us experience Christian relationships the way he intended us to.

The purpose of this curriculum is to discover four aspects of healthy Christian relationships that can help us in our journey to experience one another the way God intended. While this curriculum is by no means all inclusive, it does provide a good starting point for anyone seeking to develop and maintain healthy relationships with other Christians. Our prayer is that each D-Group participant will be both encouraged and challenged to grow in each of the four aspects of healthy Christian relationships that we will cover over the course of this curriculum.

LESSON 1: TRANSFORMATIVE VS. TRANSACTIONAL RELATIONSHIPS

Transformative relationships happen when two or more people interact with each other in such a way that impacts each other's thoughts, words and/or actions. For Christians, this kind of relationship usually leads to feelings like love, care/concern for others and in our case, Christian brotherhood/sisterhood. This is also the kind of relationship that God invites us into through the gospel of Jesus Christ.

On the other hand, transactional relationships happen when two or more individuals in a given relationship seek only to have their own needs or wants met through the relationship, regardless of whether or not it will have a positive impact on the other person(s) in the relationship. While transactional relationships are common and necessary in our day-to-day lives, this kind of relationship may lead to feelings like loneliness, feeling manipulated, and isolation when constantly experienced in Christian relationships.

The goal of this lesson is to cultivate a desire for more transformative relationships with other believers.

Answer the following questions:

Based on the definition above, what are some examples of common transformative relationships? What are some examples of transactional relationships?

Do you tend to have more transactional relationships or transformative relationships with other Christians? Explain your answer.

Read Proverbs 27:17, Matthew 28:18-20, and 2 Timothy 3:10-15, then discuss the following:

What do the verses we just read contribute to your understanding of transformative relationships?

What are some obstacles or objections you have to developing transformative relationships?

Discuss solutions to help each other overcome your obstacles and objections to developing transformative relationships.

Read Matthew 4:18-22, John 1:14-16 and Titus 2:11-14, then discuss the following:

Based on the verses we just read, how did Jesus demonstrate transformative relationships in his earthly ministry? Do any other examples come to mind? If so, share with the group.

What can we take away from Jesus' example as we seek to develop transformative relationships with others?

Before you go:

Based on our discussion, what is one step you can take right now to begin developing more transformative relationships with others in your D-Group?



LESSON 2: AUTHENTICITY IN RELATIONSHIPS

Authenticity is the quality of being genuine or real. Practically speaking, authenticity looks like being yourself instead of pretending to be someone or something that you're not. It also means being truthful about our thoughts, feelings, desires, ambitions, etc., as opposed to hiding or covering these up in an attempt to alter the perception others may have of us. When we are authentic, we can truly know and be known by others. When we are not authentic, we can never truly be known by others.

One of the amazing things about the gospel of Jesus Christ is that it frees us to be authentic in our relationships with each other. Instead of hiding behind the fear, shame and guilt of our sin, we can live authentically in the new life that Jesus Christ offers to those who believe in him.

The goal of this lesson is to help us move towards authenticity in our relationships.

Answer the following question:

Describe a time when you felt a person was being authentic with you. How did their authenticity impact your relationship?

Read James 5:16, 1 Corinthians 15:9, 2 Corinthians 6:11–13, Ephesians 4:25 then discuss the following:

Why is authenticity necessary, especially in Christian relationships?

What are some obstacles or reservations that you may have to being authentic with others?

Discuss some solutions to help each other address the obstacles and reservations to being authentic.

Read 1 Samuel 16:7, then discuss the following:

How can a verse like 1 Samuel 16:7 encourage us towards authenticity?

Read Matthew 26:36-39 and John 11:32-34, then discuss the following:

Based on the verses we just read, what are some ways Jesus demonstrated authenticity in his earthly ministry? Can you think of any other examples outside of those two verses? If so, share with the group.

What can we take away from Jesus' example of authenticity as we seek to be authentic with others?

Before you go:

Based on this discussion, what is one step you can take right now to begin being more authentic in your relationships with others?



LESSON 3: ACCOUNTABILITY IN RELATIONSHIPS

Accountability in Christian relationships encompasses two major aspects: holding others accountable and being accountable to others. For the sake of this lesson, holding others accountable is the process of helping those in our sphere of influence to live their lives in obedience to Jesus Christ. By the same token, being accountable is the process of submitting ourselves for the purpose of allowing others to help us live our life in obedience to Jesus. The process of Christian accountability can be summarized like this: iron-sharpening-iron for the sake of producing Christlikeness in one another.

The Bible tells us that we are first and foremost accountable to God (see Hebrews 4:13 and 2 Corinthians 5:10). However, the Bible also reminds us that we are accountable to each other in Christian community. This lesson will help us to see the need for accountability in our Christian relationships while also challenging us to implement it in our Christian relationships.

Answer the following question:

What feelings and/or thoughts do you experience when you hear the word “accountability?” Explain your answer to the group.

Read Matthew 18:15-17, Luke 17:3, Galatians 6:1-2, Hebrews 3:12-13 and Hebrews 10:24-25, then discuss the following:

Based on the verses we just read, why do we need accountability in Christian relationships?

What does it look like to provide accountability for each other in Christian relationships? (Refer to the verses you just read if necessary)

What challenges have you experienced when being accountable to other Christians?

What challenges have you experienced when attempting to hold other Christians accountable?

Discuss some solutions to help each other address the challenges of being accountable and/or holding others accountable in Christian relationships.

Work together to develop at least three practical ways for holding each other accountable in your D-Group.

Before you go:

Have someone in the D-Group close your time together with this prayer: Dear Lord, help us to live accountable lives to you and to those in our Christian community. Help us to understand the importance of self-examination, of nurturing our relationships with others, and of acknowledging Your divine judgment. Teach us to act with love, truth, and grace in all circumstances. Amen



LESSON 4:

EXPECTATIONS IN RELATIONSHIPS

One of the most common reasons for relational brokenness is unmet expectations. However, the responsibility doesn't always lay with the person(s) who failed to meet the expectation(s). Sometimes people place unrealistic expectations on others who are simply unable to meet the expectation(s). Having realistic and healthy expectations of each other will go a long way in helping to maintain and preserve healthy relationships with one another.

Equally important is understanding that Christians do not carry the responsibility of meeting the unhealthy and unrealistic expectations of others. While our response to such expectations should be full of love, truth and grace, we should only seek to meet those expectations which are in line with God's expectations of us, being led by his Spirit and his Word.

Determine whether the following expectations are realistic or unrealistic: (Remember to explain your answer)

- *The church community should fix all of my personal problems.*
- *The church community should hold me accountable for my conduct.*
- *The church community should always be there for me when I need them, no matter what.*
- *The church community should encourage me and pray for me when I need it.*

Read Luke 10:38-42, then answer the following:

What expectation(s) did Martha have of Mary? What expectation(s) did Martha have of Jesus?

Based on Jesus's response, do you think Martha's expectations were healthy and realistic? Explain your answer.

In what way(s) is this situation similar to the expectations that are placed on Christian relationships in the church community?

What can we take away from Jesus's response as it relates to meeting the expectations of others.

Read Romans 12:10 and Philippians 2:3-4, then answer the following:

What unhealthy and unrealistic expectation(s) have you placed on your Christian relationships? What was reason for your expectation(s)?

How can Paul's instructions to the Roman and Philippian churches help us maintain realistic expectations of others?

Discuss one step you can take right now to maintaining healthy, realistic expectations of your Christian relationships going forward?

Before you go:

Of the four relational areas we have discussed in this curriculum, which one has impacted you the most? Pray for one another after everyone has answered.



LESSON 5: FORGIVENESS IN RELATIONSHIPS

Forgiveness

The Bible is clear...Christians are expected to forgive others. Jesus commanded his disciples to forgive others and the apostles repeated this command in their letters to the various churches. However, that doesn't mean that forgiving others is easy. It can also be difficult to ask others for forgiveness for ourselves. At the same time, experiencing the forgiveness of God through the gospel of Jesus Christ helps us to be able to forgive others and to ask others for forgiveness, even in some of the most difficult circumstances.

While it is virtually impossible to cover all the nuances or necessities of forgiveness in one lesson, the verses and questions below offer a great foundation for anyone seeking to grow in forgiveness. The goal of this lesson is to encourage one another to begin taking the necessary steps towards forgiving others and asking forgiveness for ourselves.

Read Matthew 6:14-15, Matthew 18:21-35 and Colossians 3:12-13, then discuss the following:

Based on the verses we just read, why should Christians forgive one another?

What do you find the most difficult about forgiving others?

What do you find the most difficult about asking for forgiveness?

How can the verses we just read motivate us to ask for forgiveness when we have wronged others?

How can the verses we just read motivate us to forgive others when we have been wronged?

Read John 8:1-11 and Luke 23:33-34, then discuss the following:

Based on the verses we just read, what are some ways Jesus demonstrated forgiveness in his earthly ministry?

What can we take away from Jesus's example to help us grow in the area of forgiveness?

Before you go:

Think about one person that you are currently struggling to forgive or ask forgiveness from. (You do not need to reveal who it is). Spend time praying that God will help you to forgive and/or ask for forgiveness.

