

# Lord of Our Relationships



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## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *Exod. 20:14, 17; Psalms 127; 128; Luke 6:27, 28; Acts 2:41-47; Eph. 4:32; 5:25; 6:1-4.*

**Memory Text:** “Bear ye one another’s burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ” (*Galatians 6:2*).

**Key Thought:** God created human beings to enjoy intimate relationships with Him and with one another. When Jesus Christ is the Lord of our relationships, we will experience the meaningful intimacy that was part of God’s original plan.

Created for relationships. After God had created Adam, He said, “It is not good that man should be alone” (*Gen. 2:18, NKJV*). Adam was not simply a work of art to be admired by his Creator. He was a relational being, created with the innate desire to experience intimacy with God and with other created beings. When the Lord brought Eve to her companion’s side, Adam gave the following testimony of the intimacy he was already experiencing: “This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man” (*vs. 23*). Moses provides a brief description of the intimate relationship that our first parents enjoyed: “They were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed” (*vs. 25*).

So much has changed since that first relational encounter. Relationships have become damaged and fractured by sin. God desires that we experience the meaningful intimate relationships that were part of His original plan.

*\*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, August 13.*

## The God of Relationships

As human beings, we live in relationship with other human beings. There's no escaping it. Nature itself shows we are meant to exist in relationships.

For starters, each one of us is here only because of a *relationship* that resulted in our birth. And even after birth, infants cannot live but a few hours on their own. They need a relationship to survive; that is, they need at least one other person to take care of their physical needs. And almost as important as the physical are the mental needs, as well. Infants crave love, attention, and affection. From their youngest days infants are aware of, and respond to, human love—to touching, to words, to moods, to attitudes. Babies are made to bond, not with toys or with the bed, but with other people. The children who have loving, close parents to bond with are so much better adjusted than those who never had them. And that's because we were made to be in *relationship* with other people.

And yet, no matter how basic to our existence and identity as humans, something has gone wrong with our relationships. All around us we can see examples of relationships gone sour. Most of the pain and heartache we suffer as humans, we suffer because of bad relationships.

But because God loves us, He obviously cares about our relationships, which form such an important part of our existence. Thus, He wants us to have good, healthy, affirming relationships. That's why the Bible has so much to say about this crucial topic.

**Look** up the following texts: Exodus 20:14, 17; Luke 6:27, 28; Romans 12:2-21; Ephesians 4:32; 5:25; Galatians 6:2; Philippians 2:2, 3. What do they tell us about relationships? What can we learn from them about how we are to relate to others? As far as time allows, find as many verses as you can in the Bible that talk about relationships (be prepared to share what you find with your class).

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Here, as we interact with others, the true measure of our walk with Christ will be revealed. Thus, as Christians, no aspect of our lives should be under the lordship of Jesus Christ more than our relationships.

**How well do your relationships reflect the principles expressed in the above texts? In what areas, perhaps, do you need to make some radical, even painful, changes?**

**Key Text:** *John 15:12*

### Teachers Aims:

1. To show that God created us as social beings.
2. To understand that sin causes breakdowns in human relationships.
3. To show that with Christ as the Lord of our relationships we can have true love for one another.

### Lesson Outline:

#### I. Created for Intimacy (*Gen. 2:18*).

- A. Why did God create a partner for Adam?
- B. What is it about God that teaches us He created us to be social beings? (*Gen. 1:26*).
- C. What else about the creation of humanity signifies God's desire for us to be social beings? (*Gen. 1:28*).

#### II. Building Healthy Relationships (*1 Cor. 10:24*).

- A. Discuss practical ways of fulfilling the command in 1 Corinthians 10:24.
- B. What other guidelines does the Bible give about how we should relate to others?
- C. Explain how having a personal relationship with God enables us to have healthy human relationships.

#### III. Christ—the Center of All Relationships (*Phil. 1:27*).

- A. If we conduct ourselves in ways that are “worthy of the gospel of Christ” (*NIV*), how will we treat one another? How will we not treat one another? Be specific.
- B. What things constitute careful listening? How can careful listening help us build better relationships?

**Summary:** God planned for humans to be social beings. Because of sin, however, human relationships have fallen from God's original plan; but through an intimate relationship with Him, our relationships can be redeemed.

## COMMENTARY

### Lord of Our Relationships.

Several generations ago a man with five young children and a wife mortgaged his house and fled with the money. Thirty years later he was planning to travel through the area where his now married daughter lived. He told another family member that his daughter would have to accept him into her home because she was a Christian. He experienced no guilt about his past behavior, only an awareness of how guilt could motivate her to take him in.

## Relationship With God

Though we all want good, healthy relationships with each other, that's not always so easy to achieve. We are all sinners with defects that don't always make us so easy to get along with.

Crucial, however, to our relationship with others is our relationship with God. He created us, He alone can change us. Only through a close connection with the Lord can we have the kind of relationships with others that we should, ideally, have.

**Read** Matthew 22:36-39. How does what Jesus says here affirm what the lesson states above? Why is our relationship with God so important in helping us form the right relationships with others? What does God do to us that helps us have the right kind of relationships with others?

**Look** up the following texts. How do they help answer the above questions? *Ps. 51:10, 2 Cor. 5:17-19, Gal. 4:19, 2 Pet. 1:4.*

When Job declared “For I *know* that my Redeemer lives, and He shall stand at last on the earth” (*Job 19:25, NKJV, emphasis supplied*), he was referring to more than simple awareness of a fact. This same Hebrew verb *yada* is used in Genesis 4:1 where Adam “knew” his wife, and she conceived and bore a son. Job was testifying concerning an intimate personal relationship. In an article entitled “Growth in Grace,” Ellen White shared the following insight: “To be living Christians, we must have a vital connection with Christ. The true believer can say, ‘I know that my Redeemer liveth.’ This intimate communion with our Saviour will take away the desire for earthly and sensual gratifications. All our powers of body, soul, and spirit should be devoted to God.”—*Review and Herald*, May 30, 1882.

**How has your own relationship with God impacted your relationships? Write down the practical, tangible ways in which knowing God has impacted how you relate to people. In what areas do you need to grow?**

Was he right? Should Christians, under the lordship of Jesus Christ, not set boundaries with those people who have harmed them? Does making Christ Lord of our relationships mean we must allow others to abuse us?

In the last few decades there has been quite a bit of discussion about “codependency” in the spiritual life. Much of this is borrowed language from organizations that treat persons with addictive disorders. Codependency, basically, is enabling someone who exploits another person to continue to do so. Addicts usually have at least one person who enables them to continue in their addictive behaviors. For example, a parent keeps giving a child cash, even though the child uses it to buy drugs; or a wife lies for her husband to cover up for his alcoholism. Another example of codependency is when a student keeps silent even though she or he knows a friend is using dangerous doses of an addictive substance. In each of these examples, the enabler experiences some sort of secondary gain.

Persons addicted to any substance, behavior, or idea will change only when they reach “rock bottom” and are forced to come to terms with their own responsibility for their situation. Codependency prevents this from happening and protects addicted persons from encountering reality in all its harshness. Yet, only when addicts do encounter reality will they be forced to make a decision for life or death. Only then is there a chance of turning from destructive behavior in order to enjoy freedom.

In contrast to codependence is interdependence. In each of the codependent relationships described above, one person is dependent on the other in order to continue an addictive behavior. The codependent person can help the addict heal by refusing to be codependent. As a result, the addicted person will be forced into a crisis situation that will offer the opportunity for healing to occur. This is the first step toward interdependence.

Interdependence acknowledges we are a part of humanity and that we need to live that part. Interdependence embraces healthy dependency and gracefully admits that need. Interdependence says, “I need you and you need me, but we are separate.” In interdependence, self-pretentious independence is replaced with a humble acknowledgment that we need to be part of the body of Christ.

Substances are one type of addiction. Beliefs can be another. Religious addiction involves the use of religious escape to deny reality. It views life, not from a position of faith but as a series of opportunities to manipulate others or one’s self to accomplish a personal agenda. Religious addicts escape from internal pain and anxiety by controlling others with their beliefs or by allowing themselves to be controlled by strong religious figures such as cult leaders.

In contrast, when we make Jesus Lord of our relationships, we receive His grace, which strengthens us to withstand pressure, face reality, and grow. We do not avoid pain. Instead, we embrace pain,

## The Gift of Marriage *(Eph. 5:22-33)*.

Marriage, like the Sabbath, is something we have taken from Eden. Sadly, though, many marriages today have hardly been made in paradise. Probably few things better represent the extent of the damage sin has caused to human relationships than what it has done to marriage, something that was originally designed to bring fulfillment, happiness, and joy.

**Read** Genesis 2:24, a command that is repeated in Matthew 19:5 and Ephesians 5:31. Is this talking only about physical union, or is there more implied? If so, what?

When Jesus Christ is Lord of our lives and Lord of our relationships, our perspective on marriage will be uniquely Christian. “Men and women can reach God’s ideal for them if they will take Christ as their helper. What human wisdom cannot do, His grace will accomplish for those who give themselves to Him in loving trust. His providence can unite hearts in bonds that are of heavenly origin. Love will not be a mere exchange of soft and flattering words. The loom of heaven weaves with warp and woof finer, yet more firm, than can be woven by the looms of earth. The result is not a tissue fabric, but a texture that will bear wear and test and trial.”—Ellen G. White, *The Adventist Home*, pp. 112, 113.

**Following** what Paul says about marriage in Ephesians 5:22-33, how would you answer the following questions:

**1** How are wives to relate to their husbands?

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**2** How should husbands treat their wives?

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**3** How does what Christ did for the church represent what a husband should do for the wife?

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**4** What mutual principles of love and respect are seen in these texts? How would following these principles greatly enhance any marriage?

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learn from it, and rise above it. Christians have an arsenal of strategies with which they face the onslaught of the enemy. We view suffering, not as something to run from but as something that helps us grow. Paul says suffering produces endurance, and, ultimately, endurance produces character and hope (*Rom. 5:3, 4, RSV*).

So, we must each ask ourselves, Is Jesus Lord of all our relationships? We must measure the value of longsuffering against the value of calling sin by its right name and rejecting it. As he fled, Joseph left his coat with Potiphar's wife. Yet, Jesus accepted another wanton woman, refusing to condemn her. From these two examples we see that responding to Jesus as Lord of our relationships looks

## Inductive Bible Study

**Texts for Discovery:** *Psalms 127, 128, 133, Luke 10:25-37, Acts 2:41-47, Ephesians 5:22-33, 6:1-4.*

**1** When God observed that “ ‘it is not good for the man to be alone’ ” (*Gen. 2:18, NIV*), He was talking about more than marriage. He was pointing out that we need social interaction in order to develop physically, emotionally, and spiritually. List eight to ten types of relationships most of us have on a regular basis (family, church, community, etc.). How will these relationships be affected by claiming Jesus as Lord?

**2** There is a direct relationship between our relationship with God and our relationships with other people. Read 1 John 4:19-21. Make two lists: one of people to whom it is easy to reflect God's love, the other of people to whom it is difficult to show love. How can we show love to those who are decidedly unlovely? What biblical counsel do you find useful?

**3** Some people use Ephesians 5:22-33 as a familial flowchart to illustrate the line of succession from Christ to the husband to the wife to the kids to the pets, etc. If Jesus became a servant to win our allegiance (*Phil. 2:5-8*), what is the best way to establish “authority” in the family? Mention at least six practical ways we can show servant leadership in this social unit.

**4** When Jesus becomes Lord of our lives, He influences our relationships with our families, churches, workmates, and wider community. Read Luke 10:25-37. What are the two great principles that capture the essence of the Ten Commandments? Can we truly keep the commandments if our lives are not motivated by these principles? Explain.

## The Gift of Family

**What** insights can we gain from Psalms 127 and 128 about the gift of family?

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God has blessed each one of us with the gift of family. Whether we are single or married, with or without children, we are all part of a family circle. That family circle is extended exponentially when we become a part of God's family! In all our family relationships, we who have been redeemed by the precious blood of Jesus and now live under His lordship should manifest a Christlike spirit and a loving conduct that are different from that of unbelievers.

In the home, perhaps more than anywhere else, parents have a sacred obligation to live out the principles of their faith. Love, forgiveness, kindness, compassion, care, discipline—these principles are especially crucial. So many of the child's early impressions about God are formed early on as a direct result of how the parents interacted with the child and with each other. Nothing done in the home occurs in a vacuum: The repercussions of our words, our body language, our tone, and our deeds are felt throughout the house, whether we realize it or not. And long after the deeds and words or even attitudes are past, the influences live on, often in the hearts and minds of the children, who are so malleable, so tender and sensitive. How crucial that parents, or anyone interacting with children, deal gently with them.

**What** counsel does the apostle Paul give to Christian families regarding the interaction between parents and children? *Eph. 6:1-4*.

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When caring for children within our circle of influence, the Lord Jesus Christ wants us to avoid two extremes: a harsh, tyrannical disposition and a careless, indifferent attitude. Parents need to find the delicate balance between these two extremes, giving discipline and guidance when needed, while, at the same time, showing children the mercy and love and grace God has shown to them. It's a sacred, and solemn, responsibility. Here, as in all relationships, parents need to learn from God at the foot of the Cross.

different in different situations. It requires discernment to decide when to accept and continue a relationship and when to break it off.

This developmental process is evident in the experience of Dietrich Bonhoeffer. In the early stages of World War II, Bonhoeffer had the opportunity to escape Germany by accepting a teaching appointment in the United States. Accepting this appointment would have saved his life. During the decision-making process, Bonhoeffer wrestled with the thought of what Jesus would do. He concluded he would stand in solidarity with other Christians who remained in Germany. He felt if he did not identify with his people's suffering, he would have no right to help with the postwar reconstruction of the church. In the end, his decision cost him his life. (See Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* [New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1959], pp. 16, 17.)

## Witnessing

In both His life and words, Jesus gave us the perfect example of how to reveal God to others, and that is to be in relationship with Heaven. We were created in the image of God, who is the ultimate relational Being—Father, Son, and Spirit in One.

Given the importance of relationships, it is no wonder they are under such heavy attack and have suffered much damage through sin. As a result of seeing through the lens of their sin-ravaged relationships, people too often have a distorted image of God.

Your father left before you knew who he was? Or did he stay too long—long enough to be abusive? Don't let your imperfect example impair your vision of the Perfect. No matter what your life experience, the Spirit can make you cry out, "Abba, Father" to the One who is able to make you whole again (*see Rom. 8:15, Gal. 4:6*).

There is nothing greater we can offer those to whom we are witnessing than the healthy relationships to which the Savior calls us. While on earth, Jesus spent little time preaching but much time showing love and concern for those with whom He came in contact, be they leprous, Greek, Samaritan, female, or tax collector. Likewise, we would do well to spend less time trying to convert others and more time truly getting to know them. There is no greater testimony to the love of God than experiencing that love through one of His children.

Indeed, this was Jesus' final recorded prayer. Knowing the persecution His disciples would face, He did not pray for their safety; neither did He pray for their success or happiness but that they should be one, as the Father and Son are One.

## The Gift of Community *(Acts 2:41-47)*.

Those who live under the lordship of Christ experience a unique sense of community. The Greek noun used in the New Testament to describe this community is *koinonia*, often translated as “fellowship.” Some scholars suggest that the “[*koinonia*] of the Holy Spirit,” spoken of by the apostle Paul in 2 Corinthians 13:14 (*NIV*), may also be translated the “*koinonia* brought about by the Holy Spirit.” In other words, to the degree that we allow the Holy Spirit to work in our lives, to that degree we will have fellowship with one another.

**Examine** the description of the early Christian community in Acts 2:41-47. Luke records that they continued steadfastly in *koinonia*. After reading the texts, answer the following questions:

- 1 What kind of practical and theological unity did they manifest?
- 2 What kind of fellowship did they have?
- 3 In what practical ways did they relate to one another?
- 4 What kind of witness did they, in their *koinonia*, present to the world?

What a beautiful picture of the early church; what a powerful depiction of the very principles regarding relationships Jesus Himself taught and, of course, manifested in His life. Try to imagine what a force for good your local church could be were it to manifest such *koinonia*. What a powerful witness it would be (*see John 13:35*).

**What changes need to be made in your church in order for it to reflect better what we’ve learned today? Why, though, must those changes begin in the heart of each believer? What is the only way these changes can come?**

## Life-Application Approach

**Icebreaker:** Insomnia has spread as a global malady of epidemic proportions. What interrupts your sleep? Share with your spouse or a close friend. The psalmist proclaims God's promise, "He gives His beloved sleep" (*Ps. 127:2, NKJV*). What keeps us from claiming the gift God offers? What relational turmoil blocks your rest? Accept God's promise, and allow Him to change you through His Word and the presence of the Holy Spirit in your life.

### Thought Questions:

❶ Forgiveness is a really big concept. Take a moment to write a definition without using a dictionary. Ephesians 4:32 records the command to forgive. Why is it important that Paul includes the phrase "even as God in Christ forgave you" (*NKJV*)? Rewrite your definition to include the concept of God's forgiveness. Pray for an opportunity to practice true forgiveness.

❷ Acts 1 and 2 record the amazing story of Pentecost. We tend to read these chapters and long for what might have been. How is it possible and even critically necessary for our churches to reflect this type of authentic Christian community? Acts 2:44 (*NIV*) records that "all the believers were together and had everything in common." Reread Acts 2:41-47. Make a list of principles that brought about such harmony in the church. In your Sabbath School class, discuss practical ways to apply the principles you discover.

### Application Question:

Jesus admonished us to "love your enemies, do good to them which hate you" (*Luke 6:27*)! Our reaction may be, "This seems impossible! What about those who terrorize, maim, and kill?" Reflect on what it means and what it takes for us to love the unlovable. How does what Christ did for us at Calvary affect how we respond to those who have wronged us? What good thing can you do this week to bless an enemy?

**Further Study:** When building relationships, the art of listening is crucial. We listen to God primarily through His Word and through His creative works. We listen to others as they communicate both verbally and nonverbally.

Examine the following situations in the life of Jesus where He demonstrated the importance of listening when building relationships: John 3:1-21, 4:4-42.

“The first service that one owes to others in the fellowship consists of listening to them. Just as love to God begins with listening to His Word, so the beginning of love for the brethren is learning to listen to them. It is God’s love for us that He not only gives us His Word but also lends us His ear. So it is His work that we do for our brother when we listen to him. . . . But Christians have forgotten that the ministry of listening has been committed to them by Him who is Himself the great listener and whose work they should share. We should listen with the ears of God that we may speak the Word of God.”—Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1954), pp. 97–99.

### Discussion Questions:

- 1 In every aspect of our relationships with others, one crucial theme comes to the forefront, and it’s best expressed in the words of Matthew 16:24. Read those words aloud as a class. What’s the key principle there? Why is this principle so important in order to have the right relationship with others?
- 2 List the three most important relationships currently in your life. What are you doing to nurture those relationships?
- 3 What are some creative ways you can reach out to people who lack meaningful relationships in their lives?
- 4 As a class, read together the Bonhoeffer quote listed above. What practical things can you do in order to become a better listener?