

SUMMARY OF

RELATIONSHIPS

BY TIMOTHY LANE & PAUL DAVID TRIPP

- Key Insights
- Best Quotes
- Study Questions

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Relationships



MAIN IDEA

Relationships are simultaneously wonderful yet terrifying. They bring great joy, but are often quite messy. Still, the amazing reality is that as human beings made in God's image, we were made for relationships. They are a reflection of the fact that our God is a communal God, so our relationships are an essential part of what it means to be human.

Sin has distorted our relationships so that we often view them as opportunities to advance our own selfish desires and agendas rather than glorify God. We have a sinful tendency to find our identity in our relationships rather than worshiping our Creator and finding our identity in Christ.

Through the gospel and the wisdom found in God's Word, we can have the relationships that God intends for us to have for His glory. God has given us the tools we need to have the relationships He intended, and there is hope for every relationship because of Christ.



Created for Relationships

We were created in the image of a relational God, so relationships are an essential part of what it means to be human.

The foundation of a biblical perspective on relationships is understanding who God is, who we are, and how we are created. God is triune, meaning that He is one being eternally existing in three persons. God is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit ([Mat. 28:19](#)). God Himself, therefore, is both unity (one God) and community (three persons).

Relationships are essential to the very nature of God. God created humanity in His image ([Gen. 1:26-28](#)). In this passage, “we are given a glimpse into the divine community as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit commit to make the human community in the image of the Triune God” (p. 22). When [Genesis 2](#) says that “it is not good that man should be alone,” God wasn’t so much calling him lonely as He was commenting on man’s essential nature. God created Adam as a communal being, so he is incomplete without relationships. The implications of this are staggering: *relationships are essential to what it means to be human.*

This means that relationships are *not optional*. We need relationships. “Just as human beings were created with a vertical need for God’s companionship, they are also created for the horizontal companionship of other people.” (p. 10) Thus, when we pull away from relationships or mistreat others, we are living contrary to the way we were designed. On the other hand, when we move toward others with compassion and love, we affirm our humanity. This also means that our relationships need to be *God-centered*. We were made in God’s image for His glory, and our relationships are most satisfying when we are in them to please God. We were made for relationships, and when we do them as God intended, they bring Him glory.

KEY QUOTES

- “God created us to be relational beings because he is a social God.” (p. 9)
- “The biblical teaching of the Trinity is very practical for relationships since God himself is a model of loving, cooperative, unified community.” (p. 22)
- “God is a community and we as his creation reflect this quality... We can never escape our essential nature—who and what God designed us to be. This relational characteristic is central to who we are.” (p. 25)
- “Human relationships are most satisfying when we enter them not just to please ourselves or even the other person, but to please God.” (p. 27)

APPLICATION QUESTIONS

- How does the doctrine of the Trinity help explain our need for relationships?
- What should be the ultimate goal in all of our relationships?



Sin and Our Relationships

Our relationships are impacted by the reality of sin, and the solution is finding our identity in Christ.

Although we were made for relationships, the sin in our hearts and the broken world that we live in distort the relationships that God intended us to have. This has detrimental effects on all of our relationships. As a result, “the Bible assumes that relationships this side of eternity will be messy and require a lot of work” (p. 32).

This messiness takes various forms. Sometimes:

- This looks like idolatry when we seek to receive from other people what we can only get from God.
- We hurt others when we have desires for good things that go unfulfilled.
- We embrace our own selfish agenda for our relationships instead of submitting to God’s agenda.
- Our selfishness causes us to desire to be served by others rather than sacrificially serving them.

- We respond to the sins of others against us in a sinful manner, forgetting that God holds us accountable for the way we respond.
- We isolate ourselves from relationships to protect ourselves from potential harm or immerse ourselves into relationships in an unhealthy way to fill the void that only God can fill.

Often, the sinful tendencies of our heart lead us to take the relationships that God intended for good and distort them. In order to have the relationships that God intends for us, we must find our identity in Christ and stop seeking to find our identity in our relationships. “Much of the disappointment and heartache we experience is the result of our attempts to get something from relationships that we already have in Christ.” (p. 59) When we love and worship God as supreme, we will be enabled to truly love others the way He intends. There is hope for every relationship through the gospel.

KEY QUOTES

- “Since relationships are about being other-centered, the self-centeredness of sin will inevitably subvert God’s design.” (p. 33)
- “When love for God is replaced by love for self, we see people either as obstacles that hinder our goals or vehicles that promote them.” (p. 35)
- “When we fail to worship God as Creator in our relationships, we try to ascend to his throne and do all we can to recreate others in our own image.” (p. 60)
- “When I fail to worship God as Savior, I am too casual about my sin and too focused on yours.” (p. 64)

APPLICATION QUESTIONS

- Where has sin impacted your closest relationships?
- Does your sinful tendency tend to be to run away from relationships or pursue unhealthy ones?
- How does the gospel address our relationship issues?



Relationship Tools

God has given us what we need in His Word to have healthy relationships.

We need the practical wisdom of God's Word to practice healthy relationships. We need to understand that:

1. We were made for relationships.
2. Sin has distorted all of our relationships.
3. The gospel empowers us to have relationships as God intended.

Thankfully, God has given us the tools that we need in His Word to have healthy relationships. Understanding how to use these tools is vital to any friendship, marriage, partnership, or any other relationship that we are in.

1. **Every relationship requires a commitment to confession and forgiveness.** Every relationship in this fallen world takes place between two sinners, so it is inevitable that sin will affect the relationship at some point. In these moments, we must be willing to forgive as we have been forgiven by Christ. We must show mercy as we've been shown mercy.

2. **Healthy relationships require an understanding of how to steward our time and money.** “If you want to discover what you treasure, look at your schedule and checkbook.” (p. 142)
As Christians, we ought to be generous with our money to be a blessing to others. We ought to be generous with our time, seizing little moments as redemptive opportunities.
3. **Good relationships require good communication.** The words that we use have the power of life or death in our relationships, so we must choose to speak to one another in a way that builds up rather than tears down.
4. **Relationships require the humility to serve one another.**
Jesus modeled this service by washing the feet of His disciples. This shows us that we can serve in our relationships regardless of our position, circumstances, or the other person’s worthiness to be served.

While there are many other relationship tools that could be mentioned, our communication, forgiveness, resources, and actions are absolutely foundational to the relationships that God intends us to have.

KEY QUOTES

- “Because our words have power and direction, they always produce some kind of harvest.” (p. 71)
- “Forgiveness is both a past event and an ongoing process into the future. It is a past promise you keep in the future.” (p. 98)
- “Serving others is the way we put feet to our faith. What we believe is not just what we say; it is inextricably bound to what we do.” (p. 130)
- “Our money is an intensely personal part of our lives, and only an intensely personal relationship with the Redeemer can loosen our grip on other things.” (p. 149)
- “God wants us to see the daily struggles of life as critical moments of redemptive opportunity, rather than hindrances.” (p. 150)

APPLICATION QUESTIONS

- What does our use of time and money say about our relationship with God? With others?
- Who are the people in your life that you resist serving?
- Are there any relationships in your life that need forgiveness and reconciliation?

CHAPTERS

1**2**

The Shortest and Most Important Chapter of This Book

Why Bother?

Relationships are difficult and always will be as long as people are sinners. Even a book written on relationships is written by sinners! Because of this, it is essential to remember that we were created by God as relational beings. Yet because of our sin, all relationships are difficult, and we are tempted to make them into idols.

It is well known that relationships cause trouble, and at some point, we will wonder whether relationships with other sinners are even worth it. However, God uses even messy relationships for His purposes, and God offers us hope through His Word that our relationships can glorify Him. There is hope through the gospel for every broken relationship.

KEY QUOTES

- “Our aim is that this book will help you look through the shattered glass of our sin to see the glory of the Redeemer who is ever-present, always at work to rescue and change us.” (p. 2)
- “Some of the deepest joys and most painful hurts have been in relationships. There are times we wish we could live alone and other times we are glad we don’t. What is certain is that we all have been shaped significantly by relationships that are full of both sorrow and joy.” (p. 6)

CHAPTER

3

No Options

In the midst of relational difficulty, we have a sinful tendency either to *isolate* ourselves from others in self-protection or *immerse* ourselves into relationships in our desire for intimacy. These lead to relationships that are:

1. *Frustrated* when one person tends toward isolation and the other toward immersion
2. *Enmeshed* when both tend toward immersion
3. *Isolated* when both pull away to protect themselves.

The solution to both extremes begins with understanding that we are made in the image of a communal God. We do not have the option of abandoning relationships. When we pull away from relationships out of selfishness, we are denying our humanity, but when we move toward one another in forgiveness and love, we affirm the relationship.

KEY QUOTES

- “Community with one another is not just a duty; it is an aspect of our humanity.” (p. 23)
- “People made in God’s likeness will reflect that likeness and glory only when they live in committed community.” (p. 24)

CHAPTER

4

Sin

Though we were made for relationships, they will always be messy in a fallen world because of the reality of sin. Our sin makes us selfish, and we tend toward:

- Self-centeredness
- Self-rule
- Self-sufficiency
- Self-righteousness
- Self-satisfaction
- Being self-taught.

We sin against others in our relationships and are sinned against, yet God still calls us to respond in a godly way. Even though relationships are messy, God has given us grace for this struggle. He has given us:

- His Word to guide us
- His Spirit to convict us
- A community of believers to correct and encourage us
- The sacraments of baptism and communion to empower us with His grace.

KEY QUOTES

- “When love for God is replaced by love for self, we see people either as obstacles that hinder our goals or vehicles that promote them.” (p. 35)
- “Even when we are sinned against, we are responsible for how we react.” (p. 38)

CHAPTER

5

Agendas

Everyone enters into a relationship with an agenda, what they're hoping to get out of it. Though our agendas are often selfish, God has a bigger agenda than we do. In [Ephesians 4](#), Paul begins to teach what relationships are to look like in the body of Christ. We are to:

1. Work to maintain the unity that we already have in union with Christ.
2. Be humble, gentle, and patient with one another.

Even in this unity, however, God calls us to appreciate the diversity with which He has made us. We each have different gifts to use to build up the body. Each day, we must choose whether we will follow our own selfish agendas for our relationships or pursue God's agenda of the body being built up in love and being unified in the midst of diversity.

KEY QUOTES

- “You can’t take the gospel seriously and not take your relationships seriously.” (p. 45)

CHAPTER

6

Worship

Relationships are built on the foundation of identity and worship. Our identity is who we perceive ourselves to be, and the identity that I assign to myself impacts the way that I respond to others. Many relationship difficulties come from us trying to find our identity in another person rather than in Christ. Our worship is remembering who God is. Worshipping God as:

- **Creator** enables us to accept others as God has made them
- **Sovereign** allows us to trust His plan for our lives and others
- **Savior** helps us to remember that we are sinners in relationships with other sinners, both standing in need of God's grace.

KEY QUOTES

- “When I live out of a biblical sense of *who I am* (identity) and rest in *who God is* (worship), I will be able to build a healthy relationship with you.” (p. 57, emphases in original)
- “Only when I remember who I am and worship God for who he is can I respond to you with patient, gentle, hopeful, and courageous love.” (p. 65)

CHAPTER

7

Talk

Our communication shapes our relationships in a profound way. Our words are powerful, producing either life or death. Our words belong to God, because He created language for His glory. However, our words can lead us into serious trouble, and they reflect problems in our hearts.

God calls us to use our words as ambassadors for Christ, to build His kingdom instead of our own self-focused mini-kingdoms. We do this by practicing others-centered communication, words that are focused on building up the other person. Our words should be helpful, according to the other person's needs, and we should seek to speak in a godly way. In this way, we won't grieve the Spirit of God ([Eph. 4:30](#)) but will glorify God and be used by Him.

KEY QUOTES

- “Have you ever said, ‘Oops, I didn’t mean to say that!’ Often it would be more accurate to say, ‘I’m sorry I said what I meant!’ If the thought, attitude, desire, emotion, or purpose hadn’t been in your heart, it wouldn’t have come out of your mouth.” (p. 72)
- “Speaking as an ambassador is not about using biblical words; it’s about speaking with a biblical agenda.” (p. 74)

CHAPTER

8

Obstacles

Conflict is inevitable in relationships made of sinners. [James 4](#) teaches us both the causes and cure for conflict. Conflict is often caused by having competing agendas and our own selfish desires that become higher priorities than our relationship with God. It is cured by understanding that it is a way that God works in our lives as we imitate His conflict against evil through the gospel.

We are to:

1. Identify what drives ungodly conflicts.
2. Recognize our default strategy.
3. Engage in spiritual warfare.
4. Consider the needs of the other person
5. Make a plan to approach the other person in a godly way.

These steps are not easy, but God uses relationship difficulties to sanctify us.

KEY QUOTES

- “It’s inevitable. If you live with other sinners, you will have conflict.” (p. 79)

CHAPTER

9

Forgiveness

In relationships between sinners, forgiveness is essential. The Bible teaches that forgiveness involves canceling a debt, making a choice to absorb the cost of the offense rather than demanding payment for the offense.

Forgiveness:

1. Is costly for us, but unforgiveness is even more costly because it costs us eternally ([Mat. 18:35](#))
2. Is both an event and a daily process to continue to walk in
3. Has both a vertical dimension as a heart attitude toward God and a horizontal dimension in offering and receiving forgiveness from others. We should always practice the vertical aspect of forgiveness with God, and horizontal forgiveness requires repentance and a heart change toward the other person.
4. Is an imitation of God's amazing grace.

KEY QUOTES

- “Forgiveness is both a past event and an ongoing process into the future. It is a past promise you keep in the future.” (p. 98)
- “The vertical aspect of forgiveness is unconditional, but the horizontal aspect depends upon the offender admitting guilt and asking for forgiveness.” (p. 99)

CHAPTER

10

Hope

As Christians, we live in the ‘middle’ between being saved and being glorified. Because of this, “our life with others is always life in the middle” (p. 108). We need to realize that our relationships:

1. Won’t go according to our plans
2. Won’t live up to our expectations
3. Will grapple with difficulties
4. Will need improvement.

Our relationships will take us beyond what we can do in our own strength so that we’ll need to trust in Christ. As we do this, we can be encouraged because:

1. Jesus is with us.
2. We have precious promises in the gospel.
3. We have unlimited potential because Christ lives in us ([Gal. 2:20](#)).

Therefore, we need to be encouraged and to encourage one another with the hope we have in Jesus.

KEY QUOTES

- “Your relationships have not been designed by God as vehicles for human happiness, but as instruments of redemption.” (p. 110)
- “The reason we get overwhelmed and discouraged in relationships is not because we don’t understand what is going on. We are discouraged because we don’t see Christ.” (p. 113)

CHAPTER

11

Burdens

Another essential ingredient in relationships is a willingness to be a servant. Jesus teaches us in [John 13](#) that our circumstances don't determine whether we serve, because He was about to go to the cross. Someone's worthiness as a person does not determine whether we serve them, because we see Jesus washing the feet of the disciples who would betray and abandon Him.

Our position doesn't determine whether we serve others, because God Himself washed feet. This seems overwhelming to us, but Jesus has promised us the power and grace we need to change. With this in mind, we can fulfill the commands of Jesus to serve, honor, accept, bear with, and love one another.

KEY QUOTES

- “Jesus not only serves in the midst of his greatest crisis, he serves the very ones who don’t deserve to be served.”
(p. 122)

CHAPTER

12

Mercy

Godly relationships require us to be merciful toward one another. We have a tendency to desire mercy for ourselves and withhold mercy from others, but mercy humbles us by leveling the playing field. Mercy “looks at the trouble of others and cares, acts, forgives, and perseveres” (p. 136). A commitment to mercy sets a new agenda for our relationships:

1. We will expect suffering and be willing to endure it.
2. We are willing to love those who are poor.
3. We commit to persevere in hardship.
4. We reject an agenda exclusively about personal happiness.
5. We are forgiving and willing to overlook minor offenses, yet without overlooking what God says in His Word about morality.

Ultimately, giving mercy reveals what the heart treasures.

KEY QUOTES

- “A relationship without mercy is a relationship lived outside biblical borders.” (p. 134)
- “In the mirror of mercy, all of us tend to look the same.” (p. 135)

CHAPTER

13

Time and Money

The two things that reveal what our heart treasures more than anything else are:

1. How we spend our time.
2. How we spend our money.

God calls us to generosity with our money, modeled after the Macedonians in [2 Corinthians 8:1-15](#). We are to give:

- Spontaneously
- Sacrificially
- Submissively
- In ways that brings unity
- Following the example of Jesus, who became poor so that we might become rich in Him.

We are also to ‘redeem the time’ we’ve been given by God to take advantage of every moment for God’s glory. The way that we use our money and time reveals much about our relationships with God and others, and once our hearts have been softened by God’s grace, we are enabled to be generous with our time and money with others.

KEY QUOTES

- “If you want to discover what you treasure, look at your schedule and checkbook.” (p. 142)
- “God wants us to see the daily struggles of life as critical moments of redemptive opportunity rather than hindrances.” (p. 151)

CHAPTERS

14

Provision

15

Moving Out

Our relationships require imagination to see:

- What is real but often unseen
- Our identity in Christ
- The resources that are ours in Christ, namely, God's provision of His presence every moment.

As we live out relationships the way God intended, we will move outward toward other people, being the salt that Jesus calls us to be ([Mat. 5:13-16](#)). We will be a part of God's kingdom coming on earth. Our relationships will be a place where the kingdom has come and will draw others toward the King. Our relationships will be beacons of light in a dark world. Loving and welcoming others in relationships is an act of worship to the One who has welcomed us.

KEY QUOTES

- “The question is not, ‘Has God made adequate provision?’ The question is, ‘Do we see him?’” (p. 166)
- “The call of the kingdom is a call into the world, never away from it.” (p. 173)



CONCLUSION

We were made for relationships because we were made in the image of a relational God. Though sin has distorted our relationships by causing us to seek from them what we can only receive from the Creator, through the gospel, we can have the relationships that God intended. When we worship God as supreme and live according to His Word, we can glorify God and love others the way we were made to.

3 KEY INSIGHTS

1

Created for Relationships

We were created in the image of a relational God, so relationships are an essential part of what it means to be human.

2

Sin and Our Relationships

Our relationships are impacted by the reality of sin, and the solution is finding our identity in Christ.

3

Relationship Tools

God has given us what we need in His Word to have healthy relationships.

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