

Getting On Well

A small group bible study series
about the extraordinary diversity of human relationships



Introduction

Hello and a very warm welcome to this set of small group bible study sessions under the title of 'Getting On Well', in which we'll look at the God of creation and of relationship, and what we can learn from his Word, the Bible, about the extraordinary diversity of relationships that we see around us. It's great to be looking at this topic together, in the company of lots of others across NW Bristol and wider afield.

Flexibility is what this course is designed for. You might be using this material in a small group that continues to meet over Zoom. You might be meeting with others in person. You might be discussing this with another friend as you walk and talk and have coffee together, or perhaps over the phone. You might even have been given this booklet by a friend but you're reading it in a quiet moment on your own. Whenever you're reading this, wherever you are, and whoever you are, you're very welcome to this study resource. We hope it will kick-start some helpful and thought-provoking, even life-changing, conversations.

The sessions are designed to contain enough discussion material to keep you thoughtfully occupied for an hour meeting. However, you might meet for a shorter time or want to spend longer in some questions and leave others out. That's fine – each group is different and you should feel free to adapt the material here to your circumstances. We do recommend, however, that you do something from each of the 4 Ws below each time that you access the course - a balanced diet is a healthy one.

Each session is based around 4 Ws:



Welcome - becoming aware of others, of God, and of his world;



Word - looking at what God says to us in the Bible - his word;



Witness - thinking about how we might respond to God's word to us in our 'everyday'.



Worship – responding to God and his word in praise, reflection and prayer.

SESSION ONE

Created To Relate

Colossians 1:15-23



Welcome

- As we begin this 'Getting On Well' series together, think of someone with whom you get on well and who you would say is a good listener. What qualities do you most appreciate in them and in how they listen?
- Over the next weeks, we're going to talking about relationships of all kinds. What 'ground-rules' might your group like to discuss and corporately decide on now to help these conversations to be helpful, constructive, honest, safe, and gracious?



Word

- You might like to ask someone in the group to pray that God would help us to see and know him, others, and ourselves better, and help us to respect these ground-rules as we look at his Word together. Invite someone to read Colossians 1:15-23.
- How many different types of relationship does the Son, Jesus, have here? Can you count them all?
- From verses 15-18, how would you describe the *character* of the relationship between God and creation?
- Remind yourself of verses 20-21. Why do you think that this relationship needs mending/reconciling?
- What words stand out for you in verse 21 and why?
- Why is verse 22 such good news?



Witness

- Think about your relationships. Is there an opportunity for you to reflect something of Jesus' reconciliation and forgiveness in them? What might this look like?
- You're chatting to someone sat at an adjacent table in a local café. They pick up that you go to church and ask, 'what do Christians believe?' Focusing on the words 'God', 'Jesus', 'us', and 'relationship(s)' how might you respond to them?



Worship

- You might like to listen to the song 'You Were The Word in the Beginning' on You Tube. Spend some time praying together or in your own heart for chances to follow Jesus' example in your relationships with people you already know/those you may meet.

SESSION TWO

Being Church

Romans 16



Welcome

- If you're a member of a church, what can you share with your group about the people you normally sit near/see on a Sunday or during the week? Do you know their names? (Don't be embarrassed if the answer is 'no' – it's not always easy in church to remember everyone's names!) Do you know how they're involved in the church/community during the week?



Word

- Romans is a letter and Romans 16, at the end, could be described as a (slightly long!) way of saying 'Lots of Love' or 'Hugs and Kisses'. Read it now with that sort of 'lightness'.
- Another way of looking at Romans 16 is as a 'church family photo'. The church in Rome (and further afield) is strikingly diverse. What clues does the passage give us about just how diverse it is? What do we find out about the people here?
- How would you describe their relationships with each other and why? What keywords give you that impression?
- Verse 17 talks about the danger and reality of divisions and obstacles which are contrary to the apostles' teaching. Can you give some examples of what similar things might be for us today in our UK church context, or our Bristol context? What does it look like in practical terms for us to 'keep away from them'?



Witness

- How would you like to be mentioned if you were a person in one of Paul's letters? Co-worker or friend or faithful or mother or father or sister or brother or host or risk-taker or something else? How might you go about living out this description day-by-day – what does it look like?



Worship

- At the start, we thought about some of the people in our congregation, what they do, and how we might describe them positively, as Paul does here? Why not spend some time in pray now being thankful to God for people by name, thanking him for what you see of Jesus in them.

SESSION THREE

Being Family

Genesis 37



Welcome

- Your family might live at home with you or live in a different place. Without feeling any pressure to share anything you'd prefer not to, share with the group how things have been for your family in the last week or month.



Word

- Does anyone in the group know anything about the bible character Jacob? Or about his family – his father/his mother/his brother/his sons? (You might like to skim your eyes very quickly over Genesis 25 and the following chapters to pick up a flavour/remind yourself)
- Listen to Genesis 37 if possible (as you might listen to an audio-book on Kindle or the radio). If you've got access to a computer, you might like to visit www.biblegateway.com; type in Genesis 37 and hit the speaker symbol.
- How would you describe the family relationships here (and from what you've seen from previous chapters)? Who would you say is at fault?
- Can you spot any similarities between the events of chapter 37 and the life of Jesus? (See verses 12/13; 18; 23; 25; 31)



Witness

- Jesus died on the cross to bring hope and reconciliation to us and God, and to all our broken relationships. He realises that no-one is perfect or fault-free. Think about how Jesus lived among us. Think about some of the stories from the accounts of his life that you might remember. How might the character and example of Jesus guide us in how we might live in the complexities of our own family relationships? Can you think of some specific examples/circumstances from your experience and practical ways in which the example of Jesus might help?



Worship

- You might like to pray for some of those relationships now. You might prefer not to share specific details but simply to write the name of a family member on a piece of paper and to ask one person in the group to pray for the names and the situations they represent; praying that God's Spirit would help us to imitate Jesus in those relationships.

SESSION FOUR

Being Single

Matthew 12:46-50 and John 19:25-27



Welcome

- Who have you met or spoken to so far this week? Were they friends/family/people you know a bit/strangers? Share some of the encounters of your week so far with the group.



Word

- Jesus was single but he was not alone. From what you know of Jesus' life, can you name the different types of relationships he had with others – what did his network of relationships look like?
- Now read Matthew 12:46-50 and John 19:25-27.
- At first sight, Jesus' question in Matthew 12:48 might sound disrespectful/harsh. Does the passage from John suggest that this is the case? How might Jesus' enlarged definition of 'family' be helpful, both for him and also for others?
- The words of a dying person were considered to have legal force, like a will, under Jewish law. The word 'woman' doesn't imply disrespect, even it is sounds striking to our ears. The gospel writer John is the 'disciple whom he loved' [John 19:26]. What do Jesus' words in the passage from John tell us about him, and what do they tell us about his care for those who are single?
- How do Jesus' words in John honour Mary, not just practically but emotionally and spiritually as well?



Witness

- Who is in your network of friends/family/colleagues and how do you connect with them?
- How has what we have seen in the bible today encouraged you in how you might live practically, thinking about 1) others and 2) yourself in the week ahead?



Worship

- You might like to listen to the song 'O God you search me and you know me' on You Tube – a musical version of Ps139 which reassures us that we are never alone. Then tell the group about your week ahead and pray for each other.

SESSION FIVE

Being Friends

1 Samuel 18:1; 1 Samuel 19:1-7; 1 Samuel 20:1-9



Welcome

- How would you describe what it means to be a best friend/soul-mate – what does that look like and feel like in practice?
- Is there someone who you can think of who is a best friend/soul-mate for you? Could you describe this person to the group?



Word

- Read the bible passages above which are selected extracts from the friendship between David and Jonathan in the Old Testament.
- What do you think the expression 'one in spirit' might mean/look like in 18:1? Does sharing the same spirit mean that David and Jonathan had less individuality?
- Read 19:1-7. Sometimes we can speak most negatively about those closest to us. How does Jonathan speak about David?
- Read 20:1-9. Why is Jonathan and Davids' friendship surprising? Have you witnessed or heard about surprising friendships? What can we learn from them?



Witness

- Is there something from today's readings that might encourage you to be an even better friend to someone: What has stood out for you? What practical impact might it have on how you are a friend to others?
- 'You can tell a lot about people from the friends they choose'. On your own, take one or two moments to consider the question, 'What do my friendships say about me?' Are there ways in which you could encourage/develop/expand/deepen/challenge your friendships?



Worship

- You might like to listen to the song 'What a Friend we have in Jesus' on You Tube.
- Why don't you spend a few quiet moments within the group setting now, each person with a paper/card and pen, to write an encouraging note to a friend. You could then pray and thank God for them.

SESSION SIX

Being Married

Song of Songs 2



Welcome

- How many examples can you think of where two things combine so perfectly that, whilst they remain two things, they also create a new 'one' e.g. sweet and sour; salt and caramel; rock and roll; bucket and spade; serve and volley. Be creative and have some fun!



Word

- Listen to the passage from Song of Songs 2 on a bible website/app if possible. (See www.biblegateway.com; search for the passage; and hit the speaker symbol.)
- If you had two words to describe how this passage makes you feel, what would they be and why?
- Song of Songs is almost unique in ancient literature for containing as much material written from the female perspective/experience as from the male perspective. This is highlighted by sub-headings in many bible versions (e.g. He/She). How does 'she' think about 'he' and vice versa? What images/tones do they use? How do both 'she' and 'he' talk about the earth? Is there a 'marriage' between all these images?
- Is the world that this love poem describes without imperfection or challenge? Where do you spot challenges?
- Throughout history, some in the Church have felt that Song of Songs shouldn't be in the bible – it seems too 'earthy'. Do you agree? What does the fact it IS in the bible tell us?
- In the bible, Jesus is often described as 'bridegroom' and his people/the Church (both male and female) are described as the 'bride'. The kingdom of heaven is often described as a wedding feast or banquet. How might that help us to understand verses 4 and 16? How might it help us to understand our relationship with God?



Witness

- Marriage has an impact both on deep identity and everyday routine. What might the impact of being 'one with Jesus' have on 1) my understanding of who I am deep down and 2) the activities of my week ahead? What impact might it have for what I do/what I think about/how I do it/who I do it with? If your group is comfortable to do so, and if there are both married and unmarried people in your group, it might be valuable to hear how people from different life experiences react to this passage.



Worship

- You might like to listen to a recording of Psalm 23 on YouTube – it ends with a banquet scene 'You spread a table before me'. Have you told Jesus what he means to you recently?

SESSION SEVEN

Healing Divisions Based on Gender and Sexual Conduct

John 4:1-42



Welcome

- Today we're going to be encountering a person in the company of Jesus whose lived experience touches on issues of gender, sexual behaviour, identity, ethnicity, and religious expression/affiliation. How does that description make you feel? Given this topic, what ground-rules might you like to agree as a group before beginning your conversation?
- Invite someone in your group to turn these ground-rules into a prayer, asking for God's help to approach each other and the person in this passage following the example of Jesus.



Word

- You might like to read John 4 with one person speaking the words of the woman, one person as Jesus, and one person as the narrator. It's quite a long passage but do read it all – it has lots of twists and turns, and a great ending.
- Why was the woman at the well in the hottest part of the day on her own? What is shocking about the conversation? (If you're happy to, imagine yourself into the culture and politics of the time – the first century. You might like to consider each of the issues in the first bullet point of the 'welcome' section above.)
- What is helpful about where Jesus chooses to begin/not begin the conversation and how he continues the conversation.
- Do you find how the scene ends surprising? You might like to compare it to where the scene started.
- How would you describe the conversation?



Witness

- What is helpful in Jesus' interaction with the woman at the well that we might like to copy in our own conversations and lives?
- For private reflection: are we similar to the woman in some way? "You are fully known by God. Nothing is hidden. And he still loves you." How does this make you feel?



Worship

- Listen to the song 'All are welcome' – Catholic Music Vol 1, by typing it into the You Tube search box. Are there people who you talk with who might be similar to the woman in some way? You might like to pray for them and for yourself now in the stillness.

