

REDEEMING RELATIONSHIPS

Study Notes



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Introduction: How to Use this Study Guide

Purpose of this Small Group Study

1. To become connected with other Christians in a more than casual way,
2. To gain support from others,
3. To be held accountable,
4. To learn authenticity in the Christian life, and
5. To begin the process of becoming mature in a measureable way

The Process

Learning often occurs when we combine investigation, introspection, meditation, and “truthing in love” in a group setting. Each lesson contains all of these components. We encourage each member of the group to read the chapter being considered, work through the questions, and complete the reading before the group meets. It would also be profitable if you would purchase a notebook in which you can write your observations.

This study is designed to be completed in 12 weeks, but you can break any of the sessions up smaller chunks if it works better for you. The questions should be answered ahead of time by each group member, and then discussed as a group during your regular meeting time.

Week 1: Introduction to the Material and Getting to Know Each Other

Week 2: Chapter 1: **Introduction: In the Shallow End**

Week 3: Chapter 2: **The wrong response**

Week 4: Chapter 3: **Personality differences**

Week 5: Chapter 4: **Crushed character as a result of a fallen nature**

Week 6: Chapter 5: **Editing our Expectations**

Week 7: Chapter 6: **Dealing with Immaturity**

Week 8: Chapter 7: **Belief or Opinion**

Week 9: Chapter 8: **Mending Marriage**

Week 10: Chapter 9: **Winning the War of the Worlds**

Week 11: Chapter 10: **Dealing with Damaged Trust**

Week 12: Chapter 11: **Using Head and Heart in Resolving Conflict**

After you complete this study, we encourage you to discuss the possibility of staying in touch as a group. Answer the question: Can we become the people who can promote growth in each other.

Week one

Introduction: In the Shallow End

The pervasive nature of conflict

How has conflict affected you in the last:

✓ Year?

✓ Month?

✓ Week?

Overview: Looking at some basic Causes

- Confusing needs and wants
- The wrong response
- Personality differences
- Crushed character as a result of a fallen nature
- Expectations
- Immaturity
- Belief or Opinion
- Being married
- The world
- Forgiveness and trust

Confusing needs and wants

Read Chapter 1

Exploding the Myths of Relational Conflict – looking at the common myths

Discuss each of the following myths and how they contribute to conflict.

Myth #1: My relationships will succeed without confrontation

Myth #2: Disagreement is sin.

Myth #3: I can still grow without resolving conflict.

Myth #4: Real love doesn't confront, it forgives.

Myth #5: Agreement is the glue of unity.

Myth #6: It is easier to put up with a conflict than to resolve it.

Myth #7: Treating the symptoms can solve the conflict.

Myth #8: I can ignore what's important to me.

Points to consider:

- Which of these myths have affected your relationships?
- Why do you think we hold to these myths?
- In what ways do we confuse wants and needs?
- How does the Bible help us determine needs over wants?

The wrong response

Read Chapter 2

Triaging the Situation

Discuss the following:

- Knowing when to shrug. What does it mean to shrug? Why is it important?
 - Problem solvers – List the problems that problem solvers have in shrugging.
 - Rescuers – Why is so difficult for rescuers to shrug?
- Hugging- can you describe a situation in which you shrugged when you should have hugged?
- Cautions:
 - Majoring on the minor – what makes us want to major on the minor?
 - Minor on the major – what makes us ignore big issues?

Time for self Examination

- In what issues do you have a hard time “shrugging”?
- In what circumstance do you tend to make “a mountain out of a mole hill”?
- Do you know the difference?

Personality differences

It is not our purpose to become each other; it is to recognize the other, to learn to see the other and honor him for what he is. (Hermann Hesse)

Read Chapter 3

When we work to cherish differences, we reduce the potential for conflict.

Two Key Questions

- First, will spending time and energy on getting the other person to change really be all that profitable? (If that worked, you probably wouldn't be reading this chapter, right?)
- Second, is it possible that the difference I'm wrestling with may actually add some positive quality to my life?

How does answering these two questions help us?

Marty and Rich write: "The most difficult difference to deal with is the one that requires us to cherish someone who cannot (or will not) cherish us." Do you agree or disagree?

Some of the greatest conflicts we face are over issues of personality. In their book, *Opposites Attract: Turning Your Differences into Opportunities*, Jack and Carole Mayhall list some of the personality differences that create conflict.

Discuss the types of conflicts that occur between the opposites listed below.

- *Differences based on how we think:* Factual vs. Intuitive, Logical vs. Relational.
- *Differences based on the way we relate:* Introvert vs. Extrovert, Affectionate vs. Reserved.
- *Differences based on the way we talk:* Revealer vs. Concealer.
- *Differences based on the way we act:* Perfectionist vs. Non-Perfectionist, Aggressive vs. Timid.

- *Differences based on the way we look at life:* Pessimistic vs. Optimistic

Which of these personality traits do you think you have? Your spouse (if you have one)?

Which of these personality traits has caused conflict in your relationships?

We need each other – gaining a different perspective.

Now the body is not made up of one part but of many. . . If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be? But in fact God has arranged the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be. . . . so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. (1 Corinthians 12:14-25)

We all have the tendency to measure others by our perspectives – why do you think we do this?

The following steps can help us change that tendency and communicate effectively when we try to redeem relationships divided by personality differences.

Briefly describe how each step below serves to reduce conflict.

Step 1 - Think Team

God has made us unique *not* for the purpose of driving each other nuts, but so that we can be stronger.

Step 2 - Do an Assessment

Even if you don't take a personality test or see a counselor, do an assessment of your personality type and how it affects your perspective in life.

Step 3 - Take Control

Third, we need to take control . . . of ourselves. After all, we are the only person that we *can* control. Normally we concentrate on the people around us.

Step 4 - Give Permission

Without permission, all but the boldest will avoid confronting us. One of the first conversations you have with people I work with goes like this: "I know that my personality can

be difficult – I’m giving you permission to have any conversation with me you believe will help us be a better team.”

Step 5 – Communicate your concern, not just your critique

Communicating Confrontation

1. Outline – Write out what you are going to say and how you are going to act.
2. Do it privately – Never remove someone’s dignity.
3. Come alongside – Don’t get in their face. Literally approach them from the side avoiding a frontal attack. It is disarming and softens the climate of the confrontation.
4. Don’t drop clues – Make clear statements about what you expect. Avoid “attack” words like “you,” and “parent-child” words like “should.”
5. Control your emotions – anger adds distance, gentleness creates respect.

Step 6 – Set the Right Climate

Question- What is the climate you most often create around you?

Step 7 – Pray about it.

Praying about Confrontation

1. Pray for courage - One of the reasons we don't confront personality problems is because we lack courage. It will still be difficult. But with courage, you can do it.
2. Pray for an open heart - When we confront with the idea that we are right, very little resolution occurs. Pray that God will prepare your personality for the other person’s.
3. Pray for wisdom - In the book of James in the Bible, we are encouraged to pray for wisdom. It is often the missing ingredient in our attempts to resolve conflict.
4. Pray for the above *with* those involved. In some settings and with some individuals, this may not always be possible, but when possible - pray. It sets the tone.

Crushed character as a result of a fallen nature

“Characters live to be noticed. People with character notice how they live” (Nancy Moser).

Read Chapter 4

Read and briefly discuss the following passage:

^{GAL 5:13} You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather, serve one another in love. ¹⁴ The entire law is summed up in a single command: "Love your neighbor as yourself." ¹⁵ If you keep on biting and devouring each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other.

^{GAL 5:16} So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature. ¹⁷ For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want. ¹⁸ But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under law.

^{GAL 5:19} The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; ²⁰ idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions ²¹ and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.

^{GAL 5:22} But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. ²⁴ Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires. ²⁵ Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit. ²⁶ Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other.

Describe the characteristics listed in Galatians 5:19-21

Looking at three special ones:

Sexual Sin

Idolatry

Pride

How do I know I am struggling with pride?

- Do you embellish stories about your accomplishments?
- When you are wrong about a matter, are you able to admit it?
- Does pride keep you from sharing your needs with those who can help?
- Do you like to talk about what you own?
- Do you like to talk about how independent you are?
- Do you talk more than you listen in a typical social setting?
- Are you overly concerned about what others think of you?
- Are you seen by others as a “loner”?
- Do you publicly give yourself the credit for your blessings?
- Do you pray about your needs?
- Do you see yourself as the product of hard work rather than God’s blessings?
- Are you reluctant to give mature people permission to confront you?
- Are you reluctant to let others have the credit for your success?
- Do you have to have the last word?

Which of the above questions do you struggle with most often?

What to do if you struggle in this area – applying Galatians 5:22-26

1. Make Sure it’s a Pattern not an Incident

How do you know the difference between a pattern and an incident?

Briefly discuss the following steps.

Changing the Frequency: Conflicts Caused by Crushed Character

1. Get to a quiet place and ask God to help you identify the cause of the character flaw from Colossians 3:5, Ephesians 5:3 or Galatians 5:19. Work on one behavior at a time.
2. Memorize a passage of Scripture that deals with that behavior. (Use the

concordance at the back of a Bible.)

3. Write the negative behavior on your calendar – the day it happens. Write every positive behavior from this individual in the same way.
4. At the end of the week, count the number of times positive behaviors *and the negative one* showed up.
5. If it only showed up the one time, follow the same procedure for a month.
6. If it showed up more than once, you may need to confront the person. First show them their positive behaviors. (If you can't find any, get help from a friend who knows the two of you.) Second, show them the verse you have been memorizing to help you overlook the offense. Finally, show the individual your calendar.
7. Then have the individual read this chapter. Discuss options in the chapter (or other parts of the book) that would help the person change their character.

First, use these principles to learn to manage the incidents. If you can't or if the incidents have become patterns, move on to the next principles.

2. Join the Divine Cooperative

When we read a passage from the Bible, we should ask, "How does God want to apply this passage to *my* life?" When we honestly ask the question, the Holy Spirit focuses our attention on those areas that need adjustment and helps us demonstrate his spiritual "fruit": "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control" (Galatians 5:22).

Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed—not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence—continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose. (Philippians 2:12-13)

In a large house there are articles not only of gold and silver, but also of wood and clay; some are for noble purposes and some for ignoble. If a man cleanses himself from the

latter, he will be an instrument for noble purposes, made holy, useful to the Master and prepared to do any good work. (2 Timothy 2:20-21)

3. Change the Model

4. Take the Medicine

- Ingredient 1: Spend quality time in the Bible
- Ingredient 2: Spend consistent and quality time in prayer
- Ingredient 3: Spend quality time with other Christians
- Ingredient 4: Spend quality time making a difference.

5. Go Public

6. Mend Bridges

Crushed by Character?

So far, we've been talking about what happens when the flesh crushes our character, but what if you're on the receiving end? The following advice can help.

1. Guard yourself

How do you do this and why is it important?

2. Predict and Plan

3. Ask for wisdom

4. Set boundaries

5. Check the timing

Why is this area so difficult to deal with in our relationships?

How would you advise a person who is in a relationship with someone who has crushed character?

Editing our Expectations

“Every relationship is in some way governed by expectations”

Read Chapter 5

Meeting the Expectation - Everyone has a list on another person

What are some of the expectations that you have that others probably don't know?

Briefly discuss the following characteristics.

Characteristics of Expectations

- A passing remark or clue can create an expectation on the list.
- The passage of time creates a movement on the list.
- When something begins moving up, it creates an attitude of impatience and unthankfulness.
- As an item moves closer to the #1 position our anger level rises.
- Items in the top ten are often trivial.
- When an item reaches the top and remains unaccomplished – we react emotionally
- Even when someone finally meets the expectation – we are not thankful.

What it takes to be normal

- The person must guess with is on the list
- The person must get the items in the right order
- The person must do each of the items in order before any of the items move upward
- Only then will they achieve normal status
- Normal status = doing what is expected

To be super – above normal – a “WOW” in the relationship

- You have to do all it takes to be normal + The person must do the next thing that would have been added before it is added.

The Problem with Expectations – ***Briefly discuss the factors below.***

- Explodes minor issues
- Puts us in a parental role
- Reduces the relationship to a performance
- Creates high-maintenance relationships
- Makes it impossible to please

Explain how this process would work with someone with whom you have expectation issues?

What is the solution?

- Hand over the list
- Prioritize the list
- Compare the list to Scripture
- Guard the list
- Pray through the lists
- Construct a new list
- Draw the line
- Review the list

Time for Self Examination

- What are the areas and relationships in your life that are affected by expectations?

- Which of your expectations need to be examined?

- Which of your expectations need to be verbalized?

- Who do you know who may have an expectations issue with you?

Dealing with Immaturity

Samuel Ullman defines maturity: "Maturity is the ability to think, speak and act your feelings within the bounds of dignity. The measure of your maturity is how spiritual you become during the midst of your frustrations."

Read Chapter 6

Paul's definition: When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put childish ways behind me. (1 Corinthians 13:11)

Discuss these five areas and explain what happens when we stay immature.

Making the Shift from Immaturity to maturity – growth areas

- From dependence to independence to interdependence

- From egocentricity to other-centricity

- From passivity to proactivity

- From pleasure-centeredness to purpose-centeredness

- From acquisition to the application of knowledge

Which of the above areas do you think are the most difficult to change?

Which of the above areas have you struggled with?

How do you help someone who is still struggling with immaturity?

Why is immaturity such a difficult area to address?

In what ways are the following used to grow us up?

- People
- Circumstances
- The Church
- The Bible
- God's Intervention

Resolution Plan – ***Which of these steps are the hardest for you?***

1. Own your own behavior
2. Wait for the right time
3. Get others involved
4. Attack the root
5. Record and reward
6. Raise the stakes
7. Remember how God answers

Time for Self Examination

- What are the areas of immaturity in your life?

- What does your plan to grow-up look like?

Belief or Opinion

Jesus said, "Go and make disciples," not converts to your opinions.

(Oswald Chambers)

Read Chapter 7

Discuss the differences between the black, white, and grey.

Black	Gray	White
1. Measurable success	1. Difficult to measure	1. Difficult to measure
2. Focused on abstinence	2. Focused on wisdom and deference	2. Focused on obedience
3. Grades sin	3. Validates actions	3. Grades virtue
4. Absolutes based	4. Principles based	4. Motives based
5. Associated with a critical spirit	5. Associated with extreme attitudes	5. Associated with accommodation
6. Makes no provision for the "gray"	6. Weighs the "black" and the "white"	6. Fulfills the law

RO 13:8 Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for he who loves his fellowman has fulfilled the law. ⁹ The commandments, "Do not commit adultery," "Do not murder," "Do not steal," "Do not covet," and whatever other commandment there may be, are summed up in this one rule: "Love your neighbor as yourself." ¹⁰ Love does no harm to its neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.

How does this passage help us in the matter of living by the law (absolutes)?

Read Romans 14 and answer the following questions:\

1. What is the attitude of the person who abstains towards those who do not?
2. What is the attitude of the person who eats towards those who abstain?
3. According to this passage who does each actually have to be accountable to?
4. What guidelines are given us in this matter of the black, white, and gray?

RO 15:7 Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God.

Can you think of times when your opinions caused conflict?

Why are we drawn to thinking Black and White in matters?

Why is it so difficult to allow others to have different opinions on gray issues?

MT 7:1 "Do not judge, or you too will be judged. ² For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.

According to Matthew 7:1 what happens to the person who is judgmental?

MT 7:3 "Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? ⁴ How can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when all the time there is a plank in your own eye? ⁵ You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye.

According to Matthew 7:3-5 – what is often the problem in making judgments?

What is the cure?

Discuss each of the steps below and how they relate to our relationships.

Repairing Relationships

We have used the following outline to help people repair relationships damaged by beliefs and opinions. Think about it the way you think about maintaining your car. It's like a six-point inspection (but we'll warn you—it costs a lot more than money).

Check your lines.

Check your attitude

Check your motive

Check your service record

Check your convictions

Check your conscience

Caution: Don't reduce your life to the weakest conscience.

How has the area of the black, white, and gray affected your relationships?

Mending Marriage

“Statistics reveal that many marriages either dissolve or are robbed of intimacy and satisfaction because of the couple’s inability to effectively resolve conflict.”
(Dr. Todd E. Linaman)

Read Chapter 8

Conflict Enters Our Marriage

To the woman he said, “I will greatly increase your pains in childbearing; with pain you will give birth to children. Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you.” (Genesis 3:16)

What does God mean?

Traditional

The Hebrew

Eve, rather than maintaining a loving relationship with Adam, you will now try to take control . . . Adam, in response, will stop being the loving caring mate and will try to subject you to a loveless tyranny. (Rollins paraphrase)

The curse is broken through Christ.

- Husbands love your wives the way Christ loved the church. ***(What does this look like?)***

How did Christ love the church?

What was the object of his loving the church?

How is this applied to marriage?

- Wives respect your husbands. ***(What does this look like?)***

- Love and respect are universal, unconditional commitments.

How do you show respect to someone you don't respect?

Mending Marriage – the steps of resolution

Discuss the following steps and how they are important.

Step 1 – Understand the commitments of marriage.

List some of the commitments of marriage.

Step 2 – Check the current.

Step 3 – Couple your prayer.

Why is it important for married couples to pray together?

Step 4 – End the stalemate.

Step 5 – Realize you can only change yourself.

Why is this important?

Step 6 – Do it in love.

Step 7 – Stop remembering.

What does this look like?

Step 8 – Work on being friends.

How do you do this?

Time for Self Examination

- List 2 areas in which you struggle with immaturity.

What will you do to begin growing in these areas?

- If you are married, what is the one attitude toward your spouse that needs to change?

In what specific way will you change?

Winning the War of the Worlds

"A whole new generation of Christians has come up believing that it is possible to 'accept' Christ without forsaking the world."

(A. W. Tozer)

"What good is it for a man to gain the whole world,
and yet lose or forfeit his very self?"

(Jesus)

Read Chapter 9

Too much in the World

Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. 16 For everything in the world--the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does--comes not from the Father but from the world. 17 The world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives forever. (1 John 2:15-17)

What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you? 2 You want something but don't get it. You kill and covet, but you cannot have what you want. You quarrel and fight. You do not have, because you do not ask God. 3 When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures.

You adulterous people, don't you know that friendship with the world is hatred toward God? (James 4:1-4)

For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs. (1 Timothy 6:10)

Can you share an actual story (without using names) of someone who lost everything because of their love of money?

Discuss each of these priorities and define why they are important. Which are the hardest?

Resolution

Priority 1: Get perspective

Priority 2: Get spiritual

Matthew 6:31 So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' 32 For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. 33 But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. 34 Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.

Answer the following:

1. Why do you own what you own?
2. How many of your expenses are "wants" and how many are "Needs"?
3. Is there any evidence in your checkbook that you serve God?
4. Do you pray about your spending?

Priority 3: Get Serious

Getting Serious involves important realities.

- We need a new paradigm
- We need the peace of God's provision
- We need to live within God's provision
- Wealth is often the American's test of spiritual maturity
- We need help

Time for Self Examination

- What specifically do you need to do to stop making money your master?
- What needs to change in your financial world?
- If your checkbook were an open book, what would it communicate about your priorities?

Dealing with Damaged Trust

“Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.” Colossians 3:13-14

Read Chapter 10

Discuss these 13 statements – for you, which are the hardest to apply?

Understanding the issue – 13 statements of truth

1. Trust and forgiveness are not the same.
2. Forgiveness is all about you.
3. Forgiveness is not earned, deserved, or fair.
4. Trust is all about seeing and believing.
 - You can forgive but not trust.
 - You can not trust without forgiving.
 - Trust is earned over time.
5. Forgiveness involves kindness and compassion.
6. We can't truly forgive until we've experienced God's forgiveness.
7. Forgiveness doesn't Journal.
8. Forgiveness is up to us.
9. Forgiveness is unnatural and seems unfair.
10. Forgiveness is not a pardon.
11. Forgiveness is not forgetting.
12. Forgiveness is an act of faith.
13. Forgiveness frees us.

Retooling your Trust

Briefly discuss each of these steps.

If you are the guilty party

- Confess
- Be honest
- Draft a blueprint of change
- Dig deeper
- Give permission
- Relinquish the schedule
- Miter the Martyr

If you are the victim

- Forgive
- Inspect with Kindness
- Measure the progress
- Hand over the tools
- Start over

Time for Self Examination

- Who do you need to forgive?
- Who do you need to apologize to?
- With whom do you need greater trust?
- How will you begin?

Using you Head and Heart Conflict Resolution

Read Chapter 11

Briefly discuss these 6 common strategies and explain why they do or do not work.

6 common strategies for resolving conflict

- Denial
- Giving in
- Stuffing it
- Working a deal
- The power play
- Resolving it – win/win

Briefly discuss the following 10 steps making application to your own experiences.

10 Steps to Remember

1. Own your own behavior
2. Make a deposit
3. Establish the right climate
4. Pray before doing anything
5. Find the right time
6. Find the right place
7. Communicate effectively
8. Define the problem without personalizing
9. Identify alternative solutions
10. Decide on a mutually acceptable solution

Time for Self Examination

- When conflict occurs – what is your response?

- Which of these steps are the hardest for you?

Conflict's great value (final thoughts)

- It is a reality.
- The frequency of conflict in our life can be reduced.
- Most conflict can be resolved.
- It matures us.
- It reveals our true character.
- It draws us to God.