

# **MBC WOMEN'S STUDY**

## **RELATIONSHIPS: A MESS WORTH MAKING**

**WINTER/SPRING 2025/26**

**Class 2: Chapter 3**

### **INTRODUCTION TO THE SEMESTER**

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- This year is going to be about relationships and how God desires His people to come along side one another for more than just surface level conversations and relationships.
- Specifically, we are going to be talking about biblical relationships and friendships that Christians have with one another.

### **CONTINUATION FROM LAST MONTH'S CLASS**

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- Last month we stopped at *A Biblical Lens on Relationship...we'll continue from there and then look at chapter 3.*

#### **A Biblical Lens on Relationships (11-16)**

- This final section of the book, I believe, is the best part of these two chapters. He talks about “eight biblical facts that summarize the way God wants us to think about our relationships. These facts will shape the way we approach everything in this book.”

#### **You Were Made For Relationships (11-12)**

- We talked about this in the introduction, but you and I were made by God to be in relationships with other people. This is vital in our personal life and also in our life in the church.
- We are made in God's image and part of that is we are to have community and relationships.
- He talks about the word *helper*. This is used to describe someone who is a companion, not just someone who labors alongside you in the daily grind of the job.
- He says, “The reason we know this is true is because the word *helper* is often used to describe God's relationship with his people.” (12)
- As God's unique creation, humans, we need the ultimate companionship with God our Creator. But, we also need to have companionship with other humans. That is how God designed it.

### **In some way, all relationships are difficult (12)**

- All relationships are less than perfect and each one is going to take work...not just to survive but to thrive and be all that the Lord has designed them to be.
- I like how he said, “Quickly on the euphoric heels of Genesis 2 comes Genesis 3, where the entrance of sin brings frustration and confusion into relationships. In Genesis 3, man and woman engage in accusations and slander. Genesis 4 gets even worse, with a man murdering his own brother.” (12)
- Our relationships are marred by sin...both ours *and* the other persons.
- If you want any relationship to work; you must admit you are a sinner. You must be ready to repent, forgive, and work through issues that come up.<sup>1</sup>

### **Each of us is tempted to make relationships the end rather than the means. (13)**

- Our personal relationship with God is always going to be the bedrock or foundation for our relationships with other people.
- As Tripp says, “All of creation was to function as an arrow pointing to God. But in our sin we tend to treat people and creation as more important. The very things God created to reveal his glory become instead the glory we desire.”
  - Can I say...**ouch!**
- Our desires (as Lewis has said) are for lesser things...or they are too weak.
- We are settling for satisfaction in our human relationships and not looking to God.
- **Example:**
  - In a marriage, if the husband seeks to please his wife (or vice versa) not only are the standards ever changing, but the pleasure is also only temporary. It only lasts for the duration of the event.
  - But, when both spouses seek to please God...seek to put Him first and their relationship with Him is the priority, both are joyful beyond measure and fully satisfied with one another.
- Your marriage (or any relationship) is not the goal but the conduit to something that much greater.

### **There are no secrets that guarantee problem-free relationships (13)**

- If all we do is try to change our behavior so that someone will like us, we have done nothing for our own hearts or for the other person.
- We have fallen prey to a fear of man and seeking to please that idol by people pleasing.

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<sup>1</sup> There are times when one party seeks to do this, and the other does not. One party may want to blame shift, make excuses, or other things that simply are not helpful. While reconciliation should always be the goal, sometimes it is not possible. That will be addressed later in our study. For now, working on your own heart before God and others is the overall focus of the section.

- God wants your heart and knows that behavior will follow the inward change.
- Tripp says, “Skills and techniques appeal to us because they promise that relational problems can be fixed by tweaking our behavior without altering the bent of our hearts.” (13)
  - We like the *do this to fix that and then be happy* approach. We all know that this approach really does nothing but prolong the outcome of utter disaster.
- We need Christ because He “can dig deep enough to address the core motivations and desires of our hearts.” (13)
- **Example:**
  - You are struggling to communicate with someone. You have kids that are not talking “nicely” to each other. You need to have a hard conversation with someone.
  - These verses offer someone the correct way to speak to someone. If we just tell someone, here are 4 aspects to having a successful conversation:
    - Be honest with one another...don’t use *always* or *never* (v. 25)
    - Make sure to keep current...not bringing up the past (vv. 26-27)
    - Don’t take shots at each other...stick to attacking the problem (v. 29)
    - Act from a place of thoughtfulness...don’t just react to what was said (vv. 31-32)
  - **Ephesians 4:25-32** “Therefore, laying aside falsehood, SPEAK TRUTH EACH ONE of you WITH HIS NEIGHBOR, for we are members of one another. BE ANGRY, AND yet DO NOT SIN; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and do not give the devil an opportunity. He who steals must steal no longer; but rather he must labor, performing with his own hands what is good, so that he will have something to share with one who has need. Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for edification according to the need of the moment, so that it will give grace to those who hear. Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.”
- This would work for anyone who *just wants to get through the hard or unpleasant interaction*.
- We can train someone to do this, to act this way so that our life is easier. But then we would be serving an idol of comfort, fear of man, or any other thing that is not Christ.
- This is why we don’t start in **verse 25**, but looking back to **verse 20** “**But you did not learn Christ in this way.**” And then **verse 22** “**...you lay aside the old self...**” then **verse 23** “**and that you be renewed in the spirit of your mind.**” Then **verse 24** “**and put on the new self...**”
- That is why **verse 25** starts with *Therefore*.

- In other words, since you know Christ, since you are striving to put off the old man, since you are being renewed in your mind and putting on the new man...now you can act in a way that is in accordance with Christ...the One whom you call Savior.

### **At some point you will wonder whether relationships are worth is (13-14)**

- No matter who you are or who you have relationships with, you are going to become discouraged with the other person.
  - Remember, that other person is also going to become discouraged with you at some point.
- One point that Tripp makes throughout this book, and many of his other books is that we are sinners who are living with other sinners.
- We must, at our core, identify “the sin patterns that tend to trouble” our relationships (14)
- He says, “Because human conflict is the result of the spiritual battles in our hearts, wise relationships always seek to be aware of that deeper struggle.” (14)
- In other words, you are not battling the other person...it is a spiritual battle for what is going to have control over your own heart.
- It is not a matter of if, but when, when this comes upon you, are you ready to battle? Not with the person but the spiritual attack upon you.

### **God keeps us in messy relationships for his redemptive purpose (14-15)**

- We always like to avoid relationships that are messy or that really don’t benefit us.
- Tripp says, “In reality, a difficult relationship is a mark of his love and care. We would prefer that God would just change the relationship, but he won’t be content until the relationship changes us too.” (14)
- God will keep us in the fire until we learn what we need to learn.<sup>2</sup>
- He also says, “What happens in the messiness of relationship is that our hearts are revealed, our weaknesses are exposed, and we start coming to the end of ourselves.” (14)
- This is where relationships really start to form...when someone else sees our *ugly* side and we see that we are truly weak and really need someone else.
- This does not mean that we look for someone to be our “rock” but rather, as Tripp says, this is when we can find our “hope in Christ’s grace” and this is actually a mark of a “mature relationship.”
- He then profoundly says, “The most dangerous aspect of your relationships is not your weakness, but your delusions of strength. Self-reliance is almost always a component of a bad relationship.” (14)

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<sup>2</sup> Once again, this is predicated upon both parties wanting to really work through what is happening. In the case of abuse, manipulation, lying, or any other sinful pretense, it may be best to simply forgo the relationship to honor God.

- We need Jesus and we need one another. If at any time we start to sense that we are going at it alone, living a life that is dependent upon only ourselves, it is a warning sign for us to run back to Christ.

### **The fact that our relationships work as well as they do is a sure sign of grace (15)**

- Two sinners, two people whose natural default setting is to think of themselves come together and find companionship with one another.
- As Tripp says, “Considering our sin, it is amazing that people get along at all!” (15)
- It really is a testament to God’s grace that people can have any relationship with one another at all.
- Instead of looking at all the ways we are different, look to Christ and seek to please Him.

### **Scripture offers a clear hope for our relationships (15-16)**

- Jesus is the ultimate picture of the hope that awaits all who put their trust in Him.
- I believe this is why without Christ, a real relationship with one another is just not possible.
- A relationship built upon, or around common interests and desires is not really a relationship.
- But one that is built upon the finished work of Christ has depth, has forgiveness, has a real desire to see the other person grow in grace...even if it means you feel pain.
- As Tripp says, “In his life, death, and resurrection, Jesus brought reconciliation in fundamental ways. Jesus reconciled us to God, which then becomes the foundation for the way he reconciles us to one another.” (16)
- It is only through the finished work of Christ that we can experience a true and fulfilling relationship, firstly with God and secondly with one another.

## **CHAPTER 3: NO OPTIONS**

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- God has created us for relationships, as we read last time...it is from His image that we have a natural desire and find fulfillment in relationships.
- Even though *all* our relationships will have some sort of issues, as Tripp says, “Yet something keeps dragging us back to other people. We know we are less than human when we are all alone.” (18)
- Since we have the God-given desire for relationships and the remaining sinfulness in our hearts, we tend to move between wanting to be with someone and wanting to be alone.
- Tripp talks about two extremes that people can fall into when they are either seeking to have or to keep a relationship with someone.
- We must be honest with ourselves and also very intentional to make sure that we are not falling into one of the three categories that he mentions that are common to all people.
- Our hope should be to find our hope / satisfaction in Christ so that we can love others well.

## Two Extremes (19-20)

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I want to be safe (**Isolation**)  I need you in order to live (**Immersion**)

- Isolation and Immersion are the two extremes that we must be careful in our lives.
  - “While most of us don’t tend to live at either of these extremes, we do move in the direction of isolation or immersion in all our relationships.” (19)
  - What are some of the warning signs that you have noticed in your own life that you may be moving in the direction of either isolation or immersion?
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## Three Relational Profiles that fit most of the problems that we have

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### **The Frustrated Relationship**

- “Here the person moves toward isolation while the other moves toward immersion. One dreams of being safe; the other dreams of being close and intimate.” (19)
- This is when two people may desire to have a friendship, but are not sure how the other person thinks because they are only thinking about themselves.
- As Tripp says, “Since both of them regularly have their expectations frustrated, the relationship is perpetually disappointing. Each person thinks his perspective and expectations are fair and reasonable, so the shared disappointment eventually leads to anger.” (19)
- When we only have our own desires in mind, the relationship is not going to be fruitful at all.
- In fact, this is the type of relationship which may start out good. One person may want to try and please the other, but when needs are not met, the relationship falls apart.
- This can happen when we don’t take the time to get to know the other person and only see them as someone who can help me to meet my expectations.
- We may think one way and expect the other person to think the same way.

### **The Enmeshed Relationship**

- “Here both people move towards immersion.” (19)
- Each person is very dependent on one another and fully expects the other person to meet their needs.
- There is a lot of emotions between these people.

- As Tripp says, “Much of the energy in the relationship is spent dealing with minor offences, real or perceived. Each feels hurt because his or her expectations of the other person are never completely fulfilled.” (19)
- Not only are your own expectations never met or satisfied, you can never meet the other person's expectations.
- This leaves both parties frustrated and not knowing how the relationship is able to move forward.

**A brief word about how the church has gotten to this place in their relationships with one another.**

- Now under the terminology of *Moralistic Therapeutic Deism* (MTD), it has taken the Christian church by storm and does not show signs of slowing.
- Now a groundbreaking new study from the Cultural Research Center at Arizona Christian University shows that as adults, the under-50 generation still embraces the Moralistic Therapeutic Deism of their formative years. But what was once a rogue belief system that characterized Christian teen culture now permeates both American culture and the Christian church, making Moralistic Therapeutic Deism the most popular worldview in the United States today.<sup>3</sup> (this was done in 2021)
- Munsil explained, “People see themselves as Christians, but these findings show they are actually living out a watered-down, counterfeit worldview that looks more like the culture around them than the biblical Christianity they profess.” According to Munsil, “This report is another powerful reminder of the importance of biblical worldview training—at every stage of life. Wrong views about what it means to be a Christian learned in the teen years can still define worldview for adults.”<sup>4</sup>
- What is MTD and why is it spreading through churches like wildfire?<sup>5</sup>
  - The term *Moralistic Therapeutic Deism* was first coined by sociologists Christian Smith and Melina Lundquist Denton in their 2005 book *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers* (Oxford University Press). Based on extensive research, they identified the predominant beliefs of American teenagers, even those that claim to be Christians. They named the core beliefs Moralistic Therapeutic Deism or MTD. The five core beliefs of MTD are as follows:<sup>6</sup>
    1. A god exists who created and ordered the world and watches over human life on earth.
    2. God wants people to be good, nice, and fair to each other (morally good)
    3. The central goal of life is to be happy and to feel good about oneself.

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.arizonachristian.edu/2021/04/27/counterfeit-christianity-moralistic-therapeutic-deism-most-popular-worldview-in-u-s-culture/>

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.gotquestions.org/Moralistic-Therapeutic-Deism.html>

<sup>6</sup> This list is a combination from the above source and the Arizona Christian study from 2021.

4. God places very limited demands on people

5. Good people go to heaven when they die.

- This is moralistic because one is to be good...
- This is therapeutic because people are to feel good about themselves and that is God's job towards us...
- This is a deistic belief because God does exist but is relatively uninvolved in his creation...
- This idea, which is all over Christianity, has brought many Christian to see the church (and consequently church members) as a place where their needs are to be met so that they feel better.
- As Barna explained, "Consequently, this approach to spirituality asks little of its followers while providing the comfort, convenience, and community they long for."<sup>7</sup>
- The reason I bring this up is because what is being taught in the majority of churches today is all about how God is there to meet your wants.
  - He is there to make sure you're happy and free from anything that may cause you stress.
  - In fact, MTD teaches that it is god's will for our lives that we live good lives and that we are happy.
- With this in mind, if a relationship gets difficult, if God only wants you to be happy, then you are going to leave that relationship for another.
- If we are only thinking of ourselves and what we can get out of any relationship, we are not going to properly care for or love others in a Godly manner.
- This can be a result of not having a deep relationship with the Lord. When we emotionally move into a relationship with someone, looking to be fulfilled, it may be a good indicator of what we're missing that can only come from the Lord.

### **The Isolated Relationship**

- "Here both people move toward isolation. Each person is very aware of the dangers of relationships and constantly opts for safety." (20)
- This, I believe, can be a tricky one.
- As Tripp says, "Conversations are limited, safe, and impersonal. They tend to stay away from self-disclosure." (20)
- Why is this tricky? Two people could be friends, thinking they know something about one another, but really all that has been revealed over the course of several years is impersonal and common knowledge.
- The person who desires to be isolated may not want to be *physically* isolated; they may want to have people around them to give the picture of deep relationships.

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<sup>7</sup> <https://www.arizonachristian.edu/2021/04/27/counterfeit-christianity-moralistic-therapeutic-deism-most-popular-worldview-in-u-s-culture/>



- There may be a desire in this person to show others that they do have relationships but they really don't want to put the work into them.
  - Some of these people may or may not even know they are not really sharing anything of value with someone else.
  - This may be a result of being hurt in the past or never really knowing how to open up with someone.
  - Tripp summarizes these, "In each scenario there is a relational impasse. In the frustrated relationship, the movement is away from the other. In the enmeshed relationship, the move toward the other is so extreme that it is impossible to satisfy expectations. In the isolated relationship, the movement towards safety precludes real relationship." (20)
  - Do you recognize yourself in any of these profiles?
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- In what ways have you seen this in other people's relationships that you know?
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- Tripp says, "So while relationships are not inherently dangerous, the expectations we bring to them can be. This is why it is important to ask questions about what God intended for this area of our lives. We need to ask, 'What purpose does God intend relationships to serve in my life? As a person created in his image, what should my relationships look like?'"
  - Thinking about your current relationships (wife, mom, daughter, co-worker, friend, fellow believer, etc.), what are some expectations that you have brought (or are currently bringing) into these areas of your life?
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## **Our Communal God (21)**

- Speaking of relationships, the questions about them are the same from the world or the church.
- From Psychology Today:
  - While need for human connection appears to be innate, the ability to form healthy, loving relationships is learned. Some evidence suggests that the ability to form a stable

relationship starts to form in infancy, in a child's earliest experiences with a caregiver who reliably meets the infant's needs for food, care, warmth, protection, stimulation, and social contact. Such relationships are not destiny, but they are theorized to establish deeply ingrained patterns of relating to others.<sup>8</sup>

- How can Christians respond to this statement?
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- Psychology Today also talks about the benefits of friendship, “Strong friendships are a critical aspect of most people's emotional well-being. Research indicates that close friendships are associated with greater happiness, self-esteem, and sense of purpose. These bonds are even associated with physical outcomes, such as lower blood pressure and a longer lifespan.”<sup>9</sup>
- While this list is not an all-exclusive list (there are also emotional and physical benefits of friendship), they all have the same focal point in common...*you*.
- The world is telling people that a good friendship is one that benefits you, has you at the center, and should keep you in focus.
- If that ideology is being shared between two people, it is no wonder that friendships are so hard to come by; even and/or especially in the church.
- Tripp also brings this point out, “All books on relationships raise the same questions we have asked so far. Unfortunately, however, most go on to answer these questions only from a horizontal perspective.”<sup>10</sup> (21)
- If we want to have real, true, and authentic relationships with one another, they must have a focus on Christ and what He has done for us.
- A great quote from Miroslav Volf on page 21,
  - “Because the Christian God is not a lonely God, but rather a communion of the three persons, faith leads human beings into the divine *communio*. One cannot, however, have a self-enclosed communion with the Triune God—a “four-some,” as it were—for the Christian God is not a private deity. Communion with this God is at once also communion with those others who have

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<sup>8</sup> <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/basics/relationships>

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/basics/friends>

<sup>10</sup> I looked at the bestselling books on christianbook.com and others and I could not find one that had Jesus or the Bible or God or anything that focused on one's relationship with Christ. I am not saying they were none there, but a cursory look at titles and a couple of sample pages revealed that most popular books on relationships / friendships have a “me” focus. No wonder the world's so tired...

entrusted themselves in faith to the same God. Hence once and the same act of faith places a person into a new relationship both with God and with all others who stand in communion with God.”

- Do you see the connection between our salvation and our communion with one another?
- When we realize that our study of Theology is not the end, but the means by which we know God and know how He is a relational God our relationships with one another will grow and blossom.
- All that we know to be true about God should cause us to then put that into practice with one another as we seek to live out what we know.

The next section is based on **John 17:2-26**. “Of all the things Christ could pray for at this moment, he prays for the unity of his people. Let’s consider the assumptions that are the basis for Christ’s prayer and the framework for relationships.” (23)

### **God is the only properly functioning community in the universe (23)**

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- “He longs for his people to experience the same things in our community with God and one another.”

### **The Trinity is the only adequate model for human community (23-24)**

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- “If God is making us into his likeness, we can be encouraged that he will give us the grace to live like this in community with one another.” (24)
- **1 John 3:1-3** “See how great a love the Father has bestowed on us, that we would be called children of God; and such we are. For this reason the world does not know us, because it did not know Him. Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we will be. We know that when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is. And everyone who has this hope fixed on Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.”
- God desires our spiritual growth and He does this through community by giving grace when we need it.

### **People made in God’s likeness were made for community (24)**

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- “Human community was not only Christ’s plan for his disciples; it was also God’s plan for all people from the very beginning.” (24)
  - “Community with one another is not just a duty; it is an aspect of our humanity.” (24)
  - How do you see this outside the church and how has the world brought their idea into the church?
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## God has a two-fold purpose for human community: personal growth and witness to the world.

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- “Christ’s prayer is that his people would grow and reflect his glory to a watching world. The ultimate flaw in the three kinds of relationships described earlier is that each is driven by personal desire rather than God’s purposes.” (24)
  - “Our relationships must be shaped not by what we want, but by what God intends.” (24)
  - How have your own desires gotten in the way of what God desires in a relationship with someone?
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## Sin’s self-centeredness cuts us off from God and others

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- **2 Corinthians 5:14-15** “For the love of Christ controls us, having concluded this, that one died for all, therefore all died; and He died for all, so that they who live might no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died and rose again on their behalf.”
  - “Sin turns us inward, away from God’s grace and others...” (25)
  - What are some sinful motivations that cause someone to *turn inward* in a relationship?
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## True human community only arises out of communion with God

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- “My problem was that I didn’t love God as I should. That weakened my love for my family. My panic was about more than being overwhelmed in my responsibilities; it revealed a lack of trust in God.” (25)
  - In your relationships, have you allowed them to take priority over your own relationships with God?
  - What are some indicators that you have put someone’s love for you above God’s love for you?
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- “We can’t move toward community with one another until we have been drawn into community with God.” (25)

## **Christ's resolve confirms the commitment made by the Father, Son, and Spirit before the creation of the world (26)**

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- “People made in God’s likeness will reflect that likeness and glory only when they live in committed community.” (26)
- We must seek to have the same commitment that Christ does for our community. Our commitment to community will be a reflection of how we view Christ’s commitment to us.

## **God will dwell in community with his people so that they can know community with one another (26)**

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- Jesus “knows that the guilt of sin separates us from God and others. That is why he goes to the cross. But he is also aware that the ongoing presence of sin will make living in community impossible if we are not empowered in an ongoing way.” (26)
- **John 17:22-23** “The glory which You have given Me I have given to them, that they may be one, just as We are one; I in them and You in Me, that they may be perfected in unity, so that the world may know that You sent Me, and loved them, even as You have loved Me.”
- “Jesus would give me all I needed to live with my family. Jesus faced the unthinkable so I would have the power to live in relationships of love.” (26)
- In other words, it is all about grace...the grace given to us to have relationships with one another based upon what Christ has done for us.

## **The Image of God Is a Community (27)**

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- “Our fondest memories and deepest hurts involve relationships...Despite the fact that we are selfish people in a fallen world, our lives still reveal God’s likeness. God is a community and we as his creation reflect this quality...Only when human beings live in community do, we fully reflect the likeness of God.” (27)
- **John 13:35** “By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.”

## **Are You Denying Your Humanity? (27)**

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- “If my identity as a human being is tied to community, then to deny, avoid, escape, misuse, exploit, or destroy it is to deny my own humanity. You deny your humanity every time you avoid someone, when you get angry with your children, when you opt for isolation over facing your hurt, when you exploit another human being, or when you give way to bigotry.” (27-28)

- “Human relationships are most satisfying when we enter them not just to please ourselves or even the other person, but to please God. The circle of human community is only healthy when it exists with the larger circle of community with God.” (28)
- We must be able to look to God when hurts and pains exist in relationships. We know that our own hearts are fickle, they are dynamic, “one moment you are comforting your child and the next you are gossiping on the phone!”
- We must start with our own hearts before God and seek to live holy before Him so that we are then able to have strong relationships with others in His community.