

MBC WOMEN'S STUDY

RELATIONSHIPS: A MESS WORTH MAKING

WINTER/SPRING 2025/26

Class 3: Chapters 4-5

INTRODUCTION TO THE SEMESTER

- 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

- Last month we stopped at *Our Communal God...*
- We will continue from that point and then into chapters 4 & 5.

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.¹
- How can Christians respond to this statement?

¹ <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/basics/relationships>

- 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.”²
- 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 points 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.”³ (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 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.

² <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/basics/friends>

³ 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...

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)

- “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)

- “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)

- “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.

- “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?

Sin's self-centeredness cuts us off from God and others

- **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?

True human community only arises out of communion with God

- “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?

- “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)

- “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)

- 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)

- “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)

- “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.

CHAPTER 4: SIN

- This chapter is all about sin...but not sin in general...it is the sin that you and I have in us that keeps us from having the fruitful relationships that God desires for us.

A Foundational Principle (Inside, Outside, Upside Down)

- “The Bible assumes that relationships this side of eternity will be messy and require a lot of work.” (31)
- The hardest work that will go into a relationship will be the work that goes into our own hearts.
 - It is easy to point out the flaws, sin, annoying habits that other actions that we don’t like in others. But happens when we look into our own hearts and minds?
- “It is tempting to look at the trouble in our relationships and locate the problem outside ourselves. And it’s true: the other person is inherently weak and sinful! **Unfortunately, so are we.**” (31)
- Where there are problems in any of our relationships, how often do we start by looking at the other person and what they are doing or not doing...instead of starting by looking at ourselves.
- “We have all made a decision to turn things upside down. What we want, for ourselves and from others, becomes more important to us than God himself. We have made ourselves ultimate and God secondary. The Bible calls this sin, as we reject God’s rightful rule over us and decide to become our own ruler. When we do this, our selfish desires go on to rule our relationships, leading to problems, conflict, and disappointment with others.” (31)
- Tripp moves to **Romans 7:21-25**
 - “I find then the principle that evil is present in me, the one who wants to do good. For I joyfully concur with the **law** of God in the inner man, but I see a different **law** in the members of my body, **waging war** against the **law** of my mind and *making me a prisoner* of the **law** of sin which is in my members. Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, on the one hand I myself with my mind am serving the **law** of God, but on the other, with my flesh the **law** of sin.”
- Paul uses four helpful terms to describe his experience: (32)
 - 1. The term **law** explains an inescapable principle at work in his life. That principle is like gravity: you can’t choose to be free from its influence. Until you are finally delivered from the power and presence of sin, you will never escape your own sin in relationships.
 - 2. The term **war** illustrates the ever-present struggle going on within Paul. This inner conflict, between a desire to do what is right and the power of sin, is still at work.

- 3. The term ***prisoner*** describes the experience of the redeemed sinner. Have you ever wanted to do the right thing, but instead were pulled into sin? You said to yourself, I can't believe I did that again! This is what it feels like to be a prisoner. A prisoner has lost his freedom.
- 4. The word ***rescue*** is a dramatic word that is often overlooked in these verses, though in light of the three previous words, it should shine even more brightly. When you need rescue, it means you are hopeless without outside help.
- “These four words mean that our biggest problem is inside us and we can't fix it on our own. Paul's evaluation of the struggle with sin is sobering, as it calls our attention to its impact on our relationships.”
(32)

Sin affects us in six basic ways (32-34)

Self-Centeredness

- “When you reject God, you create a void that cannot remain empty.”
- Self-centeredness in any relationship is only going to lead to destruction. There is no way around the fact that if all you can do is think about you; the other person will eventually not desire to be around you.
- When our focus is on ourselves, it is no longer on God. We move from desiring to please God to wanting others to please us.

Self-Rule

- Each believer is to be submitted to God and desire to please Him but reading and following what He has said in His Word.
- When our desire is to have control so that others can serve us, there will be heavy criticism and unattainable demands put on the other person and on the relationship.

Self-Sufficiency

- The belief that you are no longer dependent but able to do things on your own leads to destruction.
- When we no longer depend or lean on others for help and encouragement, we have moved away from them and from God.
- Many times in relationships, when moving away from one another, there is movement away from the very means that God has given someone for their own encouragement.

Self-Righteousness

- “When the holiness of God is not your personal standard of what is good, true, and right, you will always set *yourself* up as the standard.”
- This view not only elevates what we think of ourselves, but it also lowers our view of God.

- When we think that our standards are *the* standards, we have effectively said that God's are not good enough and everyone must follow what we have set forth as right and good.

Self-Satisfaction

- When you try and find satisfaction in a relationship apart from God, you will be moving in a direction that can never fulfill you.
- “If you find satisfaction in people, you will use relationships for your own happiness.”

Self-Taught

- “When you are your own source of truth and wisdom, you forsake the humble, teachable spirit that is vital to a good relationship.”
- You are no longer looking for wisdom from others, but you rather put yourself as the standard that others should be aiming for in their own lives.
- Sin will *always* turn our eyes inward. Sin will always put self on the throne, replacing God with the desires of self.
- Anytime we find ourselves moving away from God towards anything else, we must stop and start to take an inventory of what is really going on in our life.
- When relationships are not going as we think they should, while it is never 100% one person's fault, we should stop and try to find out where our focus is in our own hearts.
- Tripp then references **James 4:1** “What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you? Is not the source your pleasures that wage war in your members?”
 - When *self* is elevated to the place where God is supposed to dwell, there is going to be a war and conflict within us.
 - Jay Adams writes about this verse, “The warfare, then, begins *within*. The battle that the counselor fights is with the soldiers within. ***He must bring them into line and help them to serve the cause of God rather than the selfish desires of the counselee.*** A counselee who exhibits a way of life that is a pursuit of pleasure is one in whom, sooner or later, you will find the troops amassing to fight against his better wishes so as to mobilize him also to attack other believers. This is what Paul was talking about in Romans 7:23. ***The tendency for pleasure-seeking may become so habituated into our lives that, without even realizing what is happening, one calculates his every decision and move in the light of his objective.*** To make him aware of it and to replace it after repentance is your task. This may be your first task. Throughout the section

are various insights that James gives in order to help make him aware. Many counselees have heard so much justification of sin that they don't even realize that self-seeking is sin."⁴

- As Tripp further writes, "This is what sin does. It blinds us to our dependence upon God, turns us inward, and causes us to either exploit others." (36)
- We will never reach out to God when we are constantly seeking our own pleasures.
- As we discussed in the past couple of classes, we are made for community. We are made to have other people in our lives and when this is not a reality, we feel a void.
- Tripp writes, "Sin, however, places human community within the context of an allegiance to other gods (comfort, control, material things, power, success, approval). This radically alters the agenda we have for other people." (36)
- When we have an "agenda," there is only one person we are trying to please and that's ourselves.

WHAT ABOUT THE BAD THINGS PEOPLE DO TO ME? (36-38)

- As I said before, we all bring something to a relationship that causes issues within the relationship.
- There are never problems that are 100% one person's fault.
- While it may be 90/10 in the relationship, there are always issues on both sides.
- There are times where the victim can sin by their unbiblical response when sinned against.
- "Therefore, even when we are sinned against, we are responsible for how we react." (37)
- "We tend to add trouble to our trouble! Some of the typical ways we do this are as follows: (37)
 - I confess your sins to myself with bitterness. **"I can't believe she did that to me!"**
 - I confess your sins to another person in gossip. **"Let me tell you what she did to me!"**
 - I confess your sins to God, seeking vengeance. **"God, when are you going to do something to the person who hurt me?"**
 - I confess your sins to you in anger. **"How dare you do such a thing to me?"**
 - When it comes to the sins others commit against us, we tend to communicate about them in destructive ways. This is wrong, and it encourages us to think that our biggest problem is outside ourselves."
- We can inadvertently sin, and continue to sin, even when we were the "victim" of someone else's sin against us.

⁴ Jay E. Adams, *Hebrews, James, I & II Peter, and Jude*, The Christian Counselor's Commentary (Cordova, TN: The Institute for Nouthetic Studies, 2020), 200. (emphasis mine)

Helping others who have suffered from other's sins against them.

- This is a very delicate and sensitive topic. When talking with people who have been sinned against, one should not start with *well, how did you respond?*
- While they are fully responsible for their response, the sin against them might be so great that they are not ready to acknowledge how they responded.
- When bringing this up, it is important to fully understand that you should not seek add further condemnation upon them.
- It may take some time for the victim to fully understand that they are not able to respond the way they did in the situation.
- You may need to simply “sit” with someone as they lament what has happened to them.
- But, as those who believe in biblical counseling and the Word of God containing all that we need for this life...we don't allow people to “sit” in their pain and suffering.
 - We don't want to see people continue in their hurt and we must be able to offer them hope that is found in the person of Christ.
- Friends hurt friends...it can be very deep and vary lasting...we must be willing to walk with others and lead our own hearts through these trying times.

There is Grace for this struggle! (38-39)

- “Every good relationship we have is a gift of God's grace. Left to ourselves, nothing good would happen!”
- “Two often-overlooked provisions are the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper. Each embodies all of these blessings in a single act. They picture our dependence on grace, as well as our dependence on one another to grow in grace. Baptism is a sign declaring my relationship with God and my inclusion into the people of God. The Lord's Supper unites us all around one table. It is a picture of a family gathering and a shared meal. These things are more than just symbols; they are actually means of grace. God gives us his grace through them when we participate by faith. Our mistake is to think of grace as deliverance from problems; in reality, it is the ability to persevere in the midst of those problems. We desire the “grace” of relief while God gives us the true grace of empowerment.”
- Jesus said in **John 15:5** “I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing.”
- Jesus' words, *apart from me you can do nothing* certainly apply to our relationships with one another. I believe He is talking about both the power (grace) and the focus (Him not us) that we need to have relationships with one another in our sin laden world.

CHAPTER 5: AGENDAS

- What is an agenda...from a secular point of view:
 - An **agenda**, when used in the context of interpersonal relationships, usually implies an **ulterior or secret motive** that a person is trying to achieve, often at the expense of the other person. It suggests a transactional or manipulative dynamic rather than a healthy, mutual one. Examples of having an "agenda" include:
 - Pretending to be a friend to gain a person's trust and then borrow expensive items.
 - Dating someone with the sole intention of getting something specific (e.g., money, status, or physical intimacy) without a genuine interest in a committed relationship.
 - Entering a relationship with unstated expectations or goals that, if known, would cause conflict or disappointment.
- As Tripp says, "...but the point is that what looks good on the surface doesn't always look that way under closer inspection." (41)
 - An agenda, then, is saying or showing one thing but really there is something else which is taking place under the surface.
- This is something that is common with people and their relationship with the Lord:
 - **Isaiah 29:13** "Then the Lord said, 'Because this people draw near with their words And honor Me with their lip service, But they remove their hearts far from Me, And their reverence for Me consists of tradition learned by rote...'"
 - Even though these people of Jerusalem looked holy and righteous. They were saying and doing the right things in front of the onlooking people.
 - What was their agenda? They wanted to simply keep up the appearance of *tradition learned by rote* (routine, memorization, etc.).
 - There was an agenda in the hearts of the Israelites, they wanted the appearance of a relationship with God, but they really wanted to live according to their own appetites.
 - God says in **Isaiah 29:15** "Woe to those who deeply hide their plans from the LORD, And whose deeds are done in a dark place, And they say, 'Who sees us?' or 'Who knows us?'"
 - God knows what takes place both in the deepest caves of our hearts and the darkest corners of the earth.
 - We should seek to live according to what the Lord says, both in our hearts and in our actions.
- There are two themes that Tripp points out which predominate the Scriptures.
- He says they are *utterly unique* concerning our relationships with one another. (41)

The power of self-interest is still present in the believer

- “While the control of sin has been broken, the sin that remains in us still puts up a real fight. This means that while you live on earth, you will not fully escape the power of self-interest in your life.” (41)
- There is no doubt that believers underestimate both the amount of and power of their remaining sin after they have been born again.
- An excellent explanation from Sinclair Ferguson⁵:
 - *A much simpler way to think about it is this, that if you’re a Christian, the Lord Jesus Christ dwells in you. And if you’re a Christian, sin continues to dwell in you. And if that’s so, there is what the Westminster Confession calls “an irreconcilable war in your life,” and there will be times when the enemy seems to defeat you. There will be times when indwelling sin seems to rear its ugly head. But the great thing to remember is that the One who is in you, the Lord Jesus Christ, is far greater than any remnants of indwelling sin that remain. Because I think Satan has a very subtle way of saying to us: “Look, there’s sin there and there’s sin there. It isn’t possible that you’ve been set free from sin’s dominion,”—when the truth of the matter is the very fact that you are concerned about the presence of sin and that you fight against it, that’s only possible because you’ve been released from the dominion of sin and been brought into the reign of the Lord Jesus Christ.*

God has a bigger agenda for our relationships that we do

- My opinion is that this theme is either overlooked or unknown to the average Christian today.
- When we think of our relationships with others, the first question we ask ourselves usually pertains to ourselves, not to God. (think of theme number one...self-interest is still present).
- We want to know what we can get out of the relationship...we want to know how it is going to better us or make us more complete.
- In other words, “We would easily settle for our own definition of personal happiness when God’s purpose is nothing short of conforming us to the image of Christ!” (41)
 - **Romans 8:29** “For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren...”
- All that God has for us as His children is intended to conform us more and more into the image of His Son Jesus. This includes relationship; both the hard and good ones.

⁵ <https://tabletalkmagazine.com/posts/if-im-united-to-christ-why-do-i-still-sin/#:~:text=And%20if%20you're%20a%20Christian%2C%20sin%20continues,sin%20seems%20to%20rear%20its%20ugly%20head.>

- Our goal / hope should be to align our agenda in our relationships with what the Lord has already put in His Word for us.

A Road Map to a Bigger Agenda (42)

- Tripp takes us on a journey through Ephesians 4 and maps out God's agenda for us.
- He starts by asking some hard questions: (42)
 - Why do we get angry? Why are we impatient? Why do we fail to be kind and gentle? Why do we hold a grudge or act out of vengeance? Why do we refuse to cooperate? Why do we say things to one another that should never be uttered? Why do we walk away in disgust? Why would we lie to someone or seek to manipulate? Why are we competitive and envious? Why do we struggle to rejoice at another's blessing?
 - We do all of these things for one reason: We want our own way, in the way we have chosen, and at the time we have deemed best. We love us and we have a wonderful plan for our lives! We have a dream.
- Each of us can (and do) easily fall into these areas of sin.
- There are times when it is a habit to feel or think or even act in a certain way. Even if that is the case, we must recognize what the Bible says about this, realize that what we are doing does not align with the Scriptures, and then make the necessary changes. This is done for our good and God's glory!

A Call To Unity (43)

- In Ephesians 4:1-6, Tripp succinctly puts this into one sentence, "You are a recipient of grace and your life should reflect that!" (43)
- This is true, not just for your salvation, but for your entire life...to include your relationships.
- As Tripp goes on to write, "You can't take the gospel seriously and not take your relationships seriously."

MAINTAIN THE UNITY OF THE SPIRIT

- "Paul says that our relationships with other Christians are not something we should take for granted. He says that we are to maintain—not create—these relationships. If you are a Christian, you automatically are in relationship with other Christians." (43)
- We already have what we need in us to have relationships with anyone else who is a believer.
- This is also why Tripp goes on to point out, "Therefore, these relationships are gifts to be managed with great care. If I hinder my relationships with other believers in any way, I am devaluing these relationships."

- This is why we must do all that we can to maintain peace and unity in our relationships.
- This is not going to be easy at times. Sometimes, our relationships are going to fail; even when we have put all we can into them to succeed.
 - It always takes both parties to desire to reconcile...when one party decides that they are not going to move forward unity will be broken.⁶

MAKE EVERY EFFORT (44)

- “Paul is not naïve about the hard work relationships require.”
- If we remember that the hard work is both fueled and rewarded by God, we will desire to put in the work that is necessary to maintain the relationship.
- When making every effort, it is important to think about the physical and spiritual ramifications of continuing a relationship with someone who may be using or abusing you.
- It is not up to you to *stick it out* if you are in danger or a harmful environment.
- Too many people feel guilty for *giving up* on someone when that someone was abusive or never really had the desire or intentions to change for the Lord.

BE HUMBLE, GENTLE, PATIENT, AND FORBEARING IN LOVE

- These are all “character qualities before they are actions toward others.”
- “Humility enables us to see our own sin before we focus on the sin and weaknesses of another.”
- “A gentle person is not weak, but someone who uses his strength to empower others.”
- “A patient person is someone who places the needs of others higher than, or at the same level as, his own.”
- “A forbearing person is someone who does all this even when provoked.”
- This list may seem unreachable or even impossible for anyone.
- This is why we need to have grace in our relationships with others. Without grace, there is no way that we are ever going to be able to attain such a high calling.
- When we walk in the Spirit, we can do this. When we abide in the vine, Jesus will empower us to live in this way and not just have these character traits but exhibit them on a daily basis.

⁶ I think it’s important to point out that not wanting to move forward can look different in different relationships. For example, one party may choose simply walk away; not desiring to even have a conversation. Another example is one party will only meet if certain conditions are met or if they are in charge of the meeting. This would be an example of sinful control, not grace-filled forgiveness. It is important to remember that even if someone *says* they want to meet and reconcile, their hearts may still be filled with a sinful agenda. Sometimes all one can do is walk away in love and leave it up to the Lord.

- As was just quoted from Tripp...*even when provoked*. If you are walking in the Spirit, filled with the Word of God, *even when provoked*, you are not going to be shaken under the weight of a friend coming against you.

THERE IS ONE SPIRIT, ONE LORD, AND ONE FATHER (45)

- “Paul grounds our unity in the unity of the Trinity, not in our ability to get along. We get along because Father, Son, and Spirit have allowed us to do so. We can give grace because we have been given grace.”
- It is when we take our eyes from the Lord and put them on the idols of our life that we begin to feel the weight of our relationships.
- It is this grace that God has given us that we need to keep going and fighting the good fight.

7 Tendencies of the Sinful Heart (48-50)

- Tripp calls these 7 tendencies “that are damaging to relationships, disruptive of God’s purpose, and require persistent battling.”
- This is a self-evaluation for our own hearts:
 - The tendency toward self-indulgence (vv.19-24). My behavior in the relationship is driven by what I want, not God’s purpose.
 - The tendency toward deceit (v. 25). I will manipulate the truth to get what I want out of the relationship.
 - The tendency toward anger (vv. 26-27). I want to control the relationship by venting my anger or by holding it over you to control you.
 - The tendency toward selfishness (v. 28). I want to protect what I have, rather than offer it to serve you.
 - The tendency toward unhelpful communication (vv. 29-30). Rather than use my speech to make you feel better and put you in a better position, I speak to make myself feel better and ensure that I am in the top spot.
 - The tendency toward division (v. 31). I give in to the temptation to view you as an adversary, rather than a companion in the struggle of relationship.
 - The tendency toward an unforgiving spirit (v. 32). I want to make others pay for their wrongs against me.
- Everyone is tempted towards and falls into these at one time or another in their various relationships with one another.

- It is when we come to the conclusion that relationships are hard work, but God gives the energy and wisdom to excel in them.
- “We become willing to enter the struggle rather than avoid it, because we start to see that this is where God is present and active. We begin to run toward others rather than away from them, and we begin to experience the following: (49)
 - How much wiser God’s plan is for us than our plan for ourselves (vv. 19—24)
 - The life-changing power of truthfulness (v. 25)
 - The healing benefit of gentleness, patience, and love (vv. 26—27)
 - The joy of serving the needs of someone else (v. 28)
 - The value of loving and wholesome communication (vv. 29—30)
 - The beauty of functional unity in a relationship (v. 31)
 - The freedom of practicing forgiveness (v. 32)”
- Tripp goes on to write, “According to Ephesians 4, it is that the highest joys of relationship grow in the soil of the deepest struggles.”
- It is through these struggles that we have the opportunity to see God’s amazing grace and experience His joy in our life.
- It is not just for us to experience God’s grace, but for us to experience real gospel growth.
- Our character is formed through the crucible of life; especially how we handle the relationships that God has placed us in.
- If we understand that all the Lord brings our is for our good and His glory, then even the worst relationships we have will bring us joy because God knows it is good for us.