

You and yours

Share in small groups: Who are the people you have been closest to in your own life? Does this list include: your father, your mother, your brothers and sisters, spouse, friends and children?

Why do you think so many people find these relationships so difficult?

Relationships: learning to love and to be loved

The relationships in our lives bring us the deepest joy.

They can also bring us the deepest pain we will ever know.

These joys and pains come through being a friend, a wife, a husband, a child or a parent.

As Christ begins to change our lives, and as we learn his way, so our relationships should begin to change as well.

Bible study

The world means many different things by love.

The Christian model for love in all our relationships is Jesus.

Paul sums up the new understanding of love he has come to in Jesus in his famous chapter on love, 1 Corinthians 13.

Study this passage quietly on your own first.

- Read it through once as it is written
- Read it through a second time substituting the name 'Jesus' for 'love' in verses 4-7. What do you learn about Jesus?
- Read it through a third time, substituting your own name for 'love' in verses 4-7. What do you learn about yourself?

Now discuss the passage in small groups. Share what you have learned about Jesus and about yourself (if you can).

What do you learn about love in marriage and in family life?

What does the passage teach you about growing up?

What verse in the passage speaks to you most clearly?

Building good relationships

Some things build good relationships between people, whether in friendship, marriage or parent-child relationships. These include:

- quality time spent together;
- listening to each other;
- sharing yourself;
- allowing other people to be themselves;
- appreciating each other (and using words to do it)

What others can you add to the list?

Barriers in relationships

Barriers form between people for many different reasons. These are some of the most common.

Think about them in small groups. Try to give some practical examples for each one – and write down some ideas on how to overcome them.

- Pride
- Unforgiveness
- Fear
- Jealousy.

What happens when things go wrong

Many people come to Christ bearing wounds from relationships that have gone badly wrong with parents, children, spouse or friends.

Sometimes, even after you become a Christian, you will sustain serious hurt through relationships.

Christ is able to heal these inner hurts from the past and to set them right. Often, as part of our Christian growth and development, God will allow hurts from the past to come to the surface again so that they can be healed. This process is sometimes known as inner healing.

At the core of this healing is receiving forgiveness yourself for the wrong you have done and forgiving others who have wronged or hurt you very deeply.

When you forgive someone you are releasing all the pain and bitterness and anger you have carried for years against that person.

You are not saying, ‘What so and so did does not matter’, and you are not saying, ‘What so and so did was right’. You are saying, ‘What so and so did to me was wrong and hurt me very deeply. But in Jesus’ name I forgive him or her anyway.’

To forgive is like cleansing a wound – all the infection goes and, over the weeks and months, the wound is then able to heal instead of remaining open and festering.

The healed failure, the forgiven sin, become the place where Christ’s power rests upon us like a tent pitched over our weakness (2 Corinthians 12.9). The thickened scar tissue is stronger than the original, undamaged flesh.

Though healed, the soul’s wounds are still seen by God, not as wounds but as honourable scars... Our courteous Lord does not want his servants to despair even if they fall frequently and grievously. Our falling does not stop his loving. Peace and love are always at work in us, but we are not always in peace and love. But he wants us

this way to realise that he is the foundation of the whole of our life in love and furthermore he is our eternal protector and mighty defender.

Julian of Norwich, *Revelations of Divine Love*, chapter 39

Growing closer to God

Growing as a Christian is about coming to love God more and coming to realize more and more deeply how much God loves you.

Share together in small groups:

- Are there any people you realize you need to forgive?
- How will you go about that?
- How easy do you find it to believe that God loves you?

For reflection

Thank the Lord each day for those close to you and build up a habit of praying for them by name. Invite the Lord to show you any areas of your life where you need to forgive or that need healing.