

Relationships and the Game of LIFE

WEEKLY BIBLE STUDY

3rd in a six-part series

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Genesis 1:27 (NRSV)

So God created humankind in his image,
in the image of God he created them;
male and female he created them.

1 John 1:9 (NRSV)

⁹If we confess our sins, he who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

1 John 4:7–12 (NRSV)

⁷Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. ⁸Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love. ⁹God's love was revealed among us in this way: God sent his only Son into the world so that we might live through him. ¹⁰In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins. ¹¹Beloved, since God loved us so much, we also ought to love one another. ¹²No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God lives in us, and his love is perfected in us.

*We've all got lots of diverse relationships; some intense and some very casual.
In the Game of Life, what might God want us to understand about them all?*

I often skip the movies shown on airline flights. Either I've already seen the film or I know I don't want to. But sometimes, out of sheer boredom, I break down and watch something from the latter category. This past summer I watched a bit of a forgettable romance movie on a flight. I couldn't tell you the movie's name or even who starred in it. But I do remember one line. A young woman is trying to decide whether to head off to NYC to pursue her career dreams or stay closer to home to be with the man she loves. A friend tells her, "Half of life is what you do; the other half, the more important half, is who you do it with." It may not have been much of a movie, but that line is right on the money. In the game of LIFE, the "who" matters more than anything else.

The who

Relationships. We've all got 'em. They come in many shapes and sizes. We all have parents, many of us have brothers and sisters. Most of us marry, and most of us have children. We all have friends and hopefully at least a few very close ones. We have extended families and large, vast networks of acquaintances.

We use the catch-all word "relationships" to describe them all. A few of our relationships are deep, rich, and life-long; indeed, sociologists tell us that we are incapable of sustaining more than a handful of truly deep relationships. Others are thin and barely recognizable as relationships at all; I have 200+ "friends" on Facebook, whatever that means.

The question for us is this: What do all the relationships in our lives have in common? We could talk about marriage or friendship or parenting, but think about all the relationships in your life. What could we say about all of them?

We ought not to be surprised that our lives are a complex web of relationships. After all, as we talked about last week, we are made in the image of God, all of us, believer and non-believer alike. And this God, the creator of the cosmos, is inherently relational, three persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, comprising a loving community for all eternity.

It is our claim that God is Trinitarian (three persons/one God) that makes concrete John's claim that "God is love" (1 John 4:8). Love requires an object – you love someone, someone

loves you. Jesus reveals to us that God is love in God's very being, God's essence. God simply *is* a loving community of three; God simply *is* love.

Marriage as an aspect of our discipleship

In the biblical view, marriage is a covenant between husband and wife and it is a covenant before God. The UMC affirms "the sanctity of the marriage covenant that is expressed in love, mutual support, personal commitment, and shared fidelity between a man and a woman." As disciples of Jesus Christ we are called to a way of life in which marriage is a covenantal commitment and a witness to others. The writer of Hebrews urged disciples to honor their marriage, *mirroring God's faithfulness in their faithfulness to each other*. The apostle Paul urged married disciples in Corinth to stay with unbelieving spouses so that the unbeliever might come to know Christ (1 Corinthians 7:12-16). Paul urged husbands to love their wives just as Christ loved the church and to love their wives just as they love themselves (Ephesians 5:25-33).

In a sermon for the wedding of two friends, Richard Hays, an ordained pastor and preeminent NT scholar, wrote:

"Thus, in making the covenant of marriage, you make a covenant to love one another as God has loved you – that means to love one another unconditionally, freely, sacrificially. In making the covenant of marriage, you promise to become servants of one another in love. In making the covenant of marriage, you form a union that reflects the love of God and stands as a *sign* of God's love in the world. Marriage is a sacrament in the true sense: it is both sign and vehicle of grace."¹

¹From Hays' chapter, "Divorce and Remarriage," in his 1996 book, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament*.

So, we are to love. Love God and love neighbor, Jesus said, are the two most important of all God's teachings. But how is this love manifested – across all our relationships?

Faithfulness

I believe that "faithfulness" pretty well sums it up. The Bible is one long story of God's love manifested in his faithfulness. God makes promises and keep those promises – that is the essence of faithfulness.

As I've written about often, the word "faith" in Greek is *pistis*, and the best synonym for it is "trust." Thus, faithfulness is grounded in the trust of the other person. It is to trust that the other person will keep their promises, will live up to their end of the bargain, will be true to a covenant made.

God is all these things. God is "faithful and just" (1 John 1:9). God made promises to Abraham and to his descendants, and kept those promises in God's son, Jesus.

All promises are not the same. I entered into a marriage covenant with my wife, Patti. We are to be faithful to those promises and to one another. But I can also be faithful to someone in a business context. The question is the same: do I keep the promises I make? What a great thing it is to learn to never make promises you can't keep. Why? Because breaking promises destroys trust and faithfulness.

The Bible is filled with the stories of people who have to choose to be faithful. One of my favorites is the story of David and Jonathan, the least likely of friends, yet an enduring portrait of faithfulness. Here's a bit of their story.

A story of faithfulness

Jonathan, son of Saul, Israel's first king, met David soon after the young shepherd's victory over Goliath and the Philistines. Like

so many others during David's long life, Jonathan must have been drawn to the charismatic young man. We are told that Jonathan's soul was bound to David's. Jonathan loved David as he loved himself. Jonathan made a covenant with David, even handing over his royal robe and sword. It is important for us to see that Jonathan offered all this to David without even a hint of reciprocity or reward. Jonathan's covenantal friendship was a gift freely given. Indeed, this pretty much characterized their relationship. Twice more, Jonathan would make a covenant with David and only

on the third occasion are we explicitly told that the covenant was made mutually. In Jonathan's gift of friendship there is no *quid pro quo*; there is no transaction. He would be faithful to his friend, keeping the promises he made with no need for return. Jonathan's was a faithfulness grounded in grace.

Reflecting a friendship based upon the bonding of souls, Jonathan always walked a tightrope between his loyalty to his father Saul and his loyalty to David. He was in a terrible box, finding it impossible to fully reconcile his faithfulness to his father with his faithfulness to David.

A bit of the history of the Game of LIFE¹

The game was originally created in 1860 by Milton Bradley as *The Checkered Game of Life*. This was the first game created by Bradley, a successful lithographer, whose major product until that time was a portrait of Abraham Lincoln with a clean-shaven face, which did not do well once the subject grew his famous beard. The game sold 45,000 copies by the end of its first year. Like many games from the 19th century, such as *The Mansion of Happiness* by S.B. Ives in 1843, it had a strong moral message.

Bradley's game did not include a die, instead using a teetotum, a six-sided top (dice were considered too similar to gambling).

The game board was essentially a modified checkerboard. The object was to land on the "good" spaces and collect 100 points. A player could gain 50 points by reaching "Happy Old Age" in the upper-right corner, opposite "Infancy" where one began.

In 1960, the 100th anniversary of *The Checkered Game of Life*, the first modern version of *The Game of LIFE*, was introduced, designed by Reuben Klamer.

There have been many re-publishings and modernizations of the game over the years, but it remains a game whose outcome is very dependent on luck, with Life cards, which are essentially random, being the prime determinant of the winner. The choices, such as college and career, have a much smaller overall effect on the game's result.

1. Adapted from the Wikipedia entry.

At a key juncture, Jonathan persuades his father to spare David's life and restore him to the royal court. Later, Jonathan and David would conspire in an attempt to discern Saul's true intentions toward. Even then, all that Jonathan asks of David is that, no matter what happens, David would always be *faithful* to Jonathan's own family (1 Sam. 20:15). At their last meeting, Jonathan eagerly abdicates to David his own right to be Saul's successor. And not long after, Jonathan is killed in battle. It would be many years before David would act upon his promise to be faithful to Jonathan's descendants.

Though soul mates, the relationship of Jonathan and David is pretty one-sided; Jonathan gives far more than he ever gets. Patricia Tull writes, "Friendship often begins with the unmotivated kindness of one person toward another, a generous, uncalculated action offered simply from the joy of companionship. Jonathan's spontaneous love initiated the friendship and over the course of several episodes he continues to nourish it. He asks nothing of David in the present; all he asks for the future is to be remembered for the sake of his descendants. . . Jonathan stands in good company with the God whose love for humankind precedes and exceeds all possible returns . . . [Jonathan] is the friend few of us deserve but most of us would dearly love to have."¹

Jonathan could have acted like his father, working always to protect his own interests. Instead, Jonathan chose the path of friendship, covenant, and trust. He pledged himself to work sacrificially for David's goodwill. *Such is faithfulness.*

¹from Patricia Tull's essay, "Jonathan's Gift of Friendship," in the April 2004 issue of *Interpretation*. She is professor of Old Testament at Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary.

Carrying God's Word with You . . . wherever you go!

Memorizing Scripture

God speaks to us through the words of the prophets and apostles whenever we sing them, pray them, and read them. Eugene Peterson urges us to "eat" the word of God, to chew on it, to let Scripture reshape us so that we have God-shaped hearts.

One way that God's people have taken Scripture within is by memorizing it. In 2011, my wife, Patti, and I are undertaking a program of Scripture memorization. We invite you to join us.

Each week, this study will include a text box with the memory verse for that week and a few words of background on the verse. As the months go on, we'll tackle a few longer passages from Scripture that all of us ought to carry within us.

Getting Started

Here are a few tips to get us started:

1. Read the paragraph or section from which the verse is taken – in the NRSV translation – so you get the context for the verse. Understanding the verse will help your memorization.
2. Learn the verse in chunks that make sense to you. Then piece them together into the whole.
3. Learn the verse exactly as written. Don't leave out any of the words.
4. Be sure to memorize the reference: 2 Corinthians 2:17 for this week.
5. Once you feel like you've got the verse memorized, spend some time meditating on it. Make the verse a part of your daily prayers.
6. As you begin to accumulate memorized verses, be sure to devote some time each week to reviewing the verse you've already learned.
7. Consider cutting out the verse and carrying it with you. I'll also post the verses online at www.scottengle.org.

Memory Verse of the Week 2 Corinthians 5:17 (NRSV)

So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation:
everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new.

This verse speaks to the Christian claim that everything changed with the coming of Christ. He inaugurated the arrival of God's kingdom and those who, by virtue of their faith in Christ, participate fully are new creations. We have been born anew (John 3) in Christ. Indeed, all the cosmos has been created anew and awaits only the consummation of God's rescue.

Questions for Discussion and Reflection

1. What could you say that all of your relationships have in common? What do you think God would most like you to understand about all your relationships?
2. We proclaim a triune God, (Father, Son and Holy Spirit), who is inherently relational. What does this say about the importance of relationships in our lives?
3. Consider the most important relationships in your life; the ones you really count on, perhaps a parent or a spouse or a close friend. What do all these relationships share in common?
4. God has always been faithful to us and always shall be. We have been made right with God by virtue of Jesus' faithfulness all the way to the cross. What does it mean for us to be faithful?
5. What could you do to strengthen the most important relationships in your life? What will you do tomorrow? Next week?
6. How could you become a more faithful person? What would it mean to be more faithful to St. Andrew?

Daily Bible Readings

Before reading each passage, take a few minutes to get a sense of the context. Your study bible should help. Jot down a few questions that come to mind from your reading of the passage.

<p>Monday, Ruth 1 Ruth chooses to stay with her mother-in-law, to be faithful.</p>	<p>Tuesday, Daniel 3:19-28 Three friends stay faithful to one another and to God</p>
<p>Wednesday, Psalm 40 God's steadfast love and faithfulness</p>	<p>Thursday, Romans 3:1-9 Can anyone's faithlessness nullify the faithfulness of God? NO!!</p>
<p>Friday, Galatians 5:16-26 Faithfulness characterizes those who have been born of the Spirit, i.e., all those who have faith in Jesus Christ.</p>	<p>Weekly Joys and Concerns</p>

