

youthESource Bible Study

Case Study: Messy Relationships

by Leah Abel

Test your Bible Knowledge

- **Name a few examples of Bible characters who give examples of good, healthy relationships.**
Allow students to struggle through this. First reaction may be very “rose-colored glasses” about relationships, or those with more Bible knowledge may realize that there are far more bad examples than good of Biblical relationships. Below are a few notes to help you as they consider potential answers. They may offer one or two suggestions, and then you or other students can talk them through it and show them places where things may have taken a turn for the worse. A few examples they may mention and that you can consider are as follows:
 - Ruth and Naomi (a loving mother-in-law and daughter relationship)
 - David and Jonathan (a strong friendship)
 - Job and his friends (some were good and stayed with him while he mourned; others suggested to him all the ways he earned the tragedy that befell him)
 - The Disciples (but what about Matthew 20:20-28?)
 - Joseph and his brothers (when he forgives them)
 - Abraham and Isaac (Isaac trusts and obey his father who faithfully follows God)
 - Mary and Martha (comforting each other at the loss of their brother Lazarus)
 - David and Nathan the priest
 - Mary and Elizabeth (Elizabeth mentors Mary)
 - Father of the boy possessed by demons
 - Friends of the paralyzed man on the mat
 - Mary and Joseph (push them...how do we know? We know God chose them, which tell us much about their character and we see them interacting with the angel of the Lord, but little with one another in the actual text of Scripture.)
- **Can you think of some bad examples of relationships from the Bible?**
Potential answers below:
 - Adam and Eve
 - Sarah and Abraham
 - David and Bathsheba
 - Cain and Abel
 - Samson and Delilah
 - Joseph and his brothers (when they betray him)
 - David and Absalom
 - Isaac and Rebekah (playing favorites with their kids)
 - Mary and Martha (arguing about Mary not working hard enough)
 - Israelites complaining in the desert and Moses.
- **Why do you think that it is easier to find examples of “bad” relationships in the Bible than good ones? Try looking up Romans 3:23 for some insight.**
The Bible is written about our perfect, holy, loving God and His sinful people. Relationships are just one of the things that were impacted when sin entered the world.

Consider the 10 Commandments (Go to Exodus 20 or dust off your Catechism if necessary.)

- **What relationship(s) do the first three commandments address?**
Our relationship with God.
- **What relationship(s) do the last seven commandments address?**
Our relationship with other people.
- **What does this tell us about the importance of how we treat our relationships with others?**
It's important! It gets seven whole commandments.

Messy Relationships

Relationships are complicated, plain and simple. When Adam and Eve rebelled against God they forever altered the harmonious state of our relationships and brought into our relationships pride, miscommunication, selfishness, resentment and deception. It is shocking to see as we read the Bible that God's people were not immune from these painful effects of the Fall in their relationships.

Messy Relationship CASE STUDY #1: Samson and Delilah

God uses some unlikely and often unworthy characters in His story. Read Judges 16:4-21.

- 1. What were some of the ungodly characteristics that Samson and Delilah displayed?**
- 2. How did Delilah misuse her ability to influence her mate?**
A key teaching for young ladies is their God-given ability to influence guys and their temptation to sometimes use that to manipulate them instead.
- 3. What important asset did Samson cease to use in his relationship with Delilah?**
Check out Proverbs 3:13 for a hint: wisdom.
- 4. If Samson and Delilah were friends of yours in a dating relationship, what advice might you give them?**
Get away from each other! You are bad news for each other.
- 5. What was God's original design for the marriage relationship?**
- 6. What can we learn from what went wrong here?**

Messy Relationship CASE STUDY #2: Hosea and Gomer

God did a strange thing in the life of the prophet Hosea. He asked Hosea to live out God's relationship with Israel by marrying an unfaithful woman named Gomer. Read these two excerpts from their story: Hosea 1:2-3, 3:1-5.

- 1. What was Gomer's occupation?**
Prostitute
- 2. What messy struggles do you imagine might have existed in Hosea and Gomer's marriage?**
- 3. What God-like characteristics did Hosea live out here?**
REDEMPTION! He literally bought her back from slavery and gave her love and a home, forgiveness—a clean slate. (Note to leader: This is a bizarre story. Help them wrestle with the reality of what God asked Hosea to do. Be careful here not to encourage this kind of "rescue others" relationships in the students themselves, i.e. "Dating is not a wise evangelism tool.")

Messy Relationships 101

The purpose of the Bible is to tell us about the story of God restoring His relationships with us. The main relationship we learn about in the Bible is the relationship between God and His people. While we see the painful effects of sin in Scripture, we can also hear God's voice calling us to healthier relationships—relationships in which we reflect the love of God to one another. We can see God's action as He lives out with us one-half of a perfect relationship.

- 1. What are some words that you would use to describe God in His relationship with us?**
forgiving, merciful, patient, kind, just, faithfulness, etc.
- 2. What are some words that you would use to describe us in our relationship with God?**
selfish, rebellious, self-centered, abusive, etc.
- 3. Scripture calls Christ the bridegroom and compares us, the Church, to the bride. How has God designed the marriage relationship to mirror His relationship with us?**

Check out the verses below.

What does God invite us to do in relationships in each of these passages that is a God-like characteristic?

- **John 13:34** (loving)
- **Zechariah 7:9** (merciful)
- **1 Peter 3:8-9** (humble, sympathetic, compassionate)
- **Ephesians 4:32** (forgiving, kind, compassionate)

Which of these descriptors is hardest for you to live out? Why?

Closing Thoughts

As humans, we are often motivated in our relationships by what we hope to get out of them. What should our motivation be for living out godly principles in our relationships? Because God LOVES you! He ADORES you! He FORGIVES you when you mess up. Jesus would stop at NOTHING to show you the extent of His love! Why strive for demonstrating godly characteristics in our relationships? We simply reflect Him to those with whom we have relationships. What a privilege!

“We love, because He first loved us.” 1 John 4:19

Live It

Review your answer to the question “Which of these descriptors is hardest for you to live out?” and ask God to continue to strengthen you to live in your relationships and prepare for relationships in your future.

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