

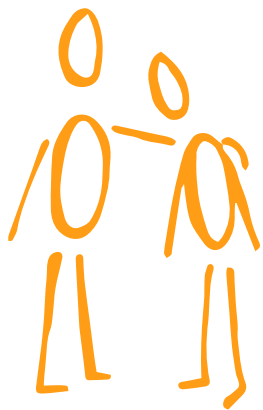


SESSION SIX

RELATIONSHIPS

Lord of all pots and pans and things, since I've no time to be a great saint by doing lovely things, or watching late with thee, or dreaming in the dawnlight, or storming heaven's gates, make me a saint by getting meals, and washing up the plates. Warm all the kitchen with thy Love, and light it with thy peace; forgive me all my worrying, and make my grumbling cease. Thou who didst love to give men food, in room, or by the sea, accept the service that I do, I do it unto thee. Amen.

• ——— Brother Lawrence ——— •



6. RELATIONSHIPS

My father died of cancer when I was thirty. It was very painful, but I have many great memories of him. He was a wise and patient man who always had practical insights into the situations of my life. I often find myself thinking about some of the unforgettable conversations we had. One of those conversations was about friendship.

One Saturday we were watching one of my brothers play soccer, and the stands were quite empty. Dad asked me how things were going at school and I was telling him about some problems I was having with a friend.

I remember as if it happened yesterday: He turned to me, held up his hand, stretched out his fingers, and said, “Matthew, true friendship is rare. Much rarer than most people think. If you find five true friends in this life you will be a very blessed man.”

At the time I thought to myself, “Five! I’ve got tons of friends.” But as time has passed, life has revealed the wisdom in my father’s words. True friendship is incredibly rare.

We all need a few great friends to do life with. We need friends who will challenge us when we need to be challenged, encourage us when we need to be encouraged, and be genuinely happy for us when we succeed. We all need a handful of friends who can help us to become the-best-version-of-ourselves.

Finding that handful of friends is not just going to happen. It requires patience, self-control, trust, and some great decisions. God wants to help you to develop fabulous relationships.

The truth is, a great deal of your happiness and a great deal of your misery in this life will probably come from relationships—so it is important to get this right!

6.1 WHAT IS THE PURPOSE?

Developing great relationships is like constructing a great building. The first stage is design, and design is driven by purpose. The best warehouse in the world would not serve very well as a family home, and the best family home in the world would not serve very well as a warehouse.

Everything has a purpose. If you want to succeed at something, the first thing you need to get really clear about is purpose. The purpose of golf is to shoot your lowest possible score, the purpose of football

is to score more points than the other team, the purpose of business is to be profitable by adding value to your customers’ lives so that they will continue to purchase your products and services, and the ultimate purpose of life is to get to Heaven.

But what is the purpose of relationships?

The sad thing is, too many people never really explore this question. As a result, when we look around society today we don’t see too many dynamic and healthy relationships.

Lots of people think the purpose of relationships is just to have fun. Relationships should be fun, but they are not going to be fun all the time, and fun is not the main purpose. If you think it is, you will fail in relationships.

So, what is the purpose of relationships?

To answer this question, we must first revisit the purpose of life.

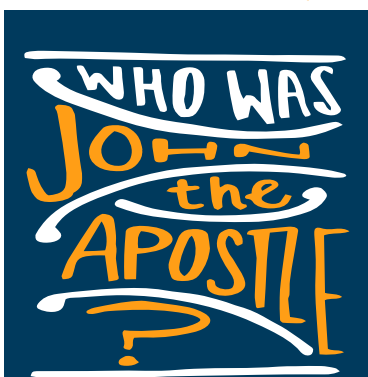
We have already spoken about God’s dream for us to become the-best-version-of-ourselves. Everything makes sense in relation to God’s dream for us—including relationships. In our discussion of the Bible we talked about being pilgrims. This world is not our final destination; we are just passing through here. We have talked time and time again about God’s overwhelming desire for a relationship with us. God wants us to walk with him in this life and be with him for eternity in Heaven.

God gives us relationships to help us become the-best-version-of-ourselves. He gives us relationships so that we can help each other get to Heaven.

My number one job in my marriage is to help my wife Meggie get to Heaven. My number one job as a parent is to help my kids to know and love God and get to Heaven. My number one job as a friend is to help my friends get to Heaven. My number one job here, right now, is to help you get to Heaven. So each day I encourage my wife, my children, and my friends to become a-better-version-of-themselves. Why? Because it is impossible to grow in virtue and character and not draw nearer to God. It is impossible to become a-better-version-of-yourself and not be one step closer to Heaven.

The purpose of every relationship is two people helping each other become the-best-version-of-themselves. It doesn’t matter if a relationship is between husband and wife, boyfriend and girlfriend, brother and sister, parents and children, manager and employee, coach and player, teacher and student. The purpose of every relationship is to help each other become the-best-version-of-ourselves. I am here to help you become the-best-version-of-yourself, and you are here to help me become the-best-version-of-myself.

**YOU WILL
LEARN MORE
FROM YOUR
FRIENDS
THAN YOU
EVER WILL
FROM BOOKS.
CHOOSE YOUR
FRIENDS
WISELY.**



Saint John the Apostle (AD 6–100) was one of the Twelve Apostles of Jesus. He was also the brother of James. The Church Fathers generally identify him as the author of five books of the Bible: the Gospel of John, three epistles of John, and the book of Revelation. He was the only male follower of Jesus at the foot of the cross with Mary. How many of your friends would stay with you as John stayed with Jesus? John is the patron saint of friendship and his feast day is January 20.



Matthew 7:24-27

KNOW IT: There is a difference between the wise and the foolish.

THINK ABOUT IT: Are you building your life on a solid foundation like the wise man?

LIVE IT: What one thing can you do each day to strengthen the foundation you are building your life upon?

The world says that the secret to having great relationships is common interests. Common interests are good, but they are not the key to great relationships. Your interests ten years from now will most likely be very different from your interests today. Throughout our lives our interests are constantly changing and evolving. And if you build a relationship on common interests, if you make common interests the most important thing, and your interests change—the relationship will change. And it will very often fall apart.

Purpose matters. The foundation you choose to build your relationships upon matters. Think about the story from Matthew's Gospel. Jesus said:

"Everyone who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house upon the rock; and the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat upon that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on rock. And every one who hears these words of mine and does not do them will be like a foolish man who built his house upon the sand; and the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell; and great was the fall of it." (Matthew 7:24-27)

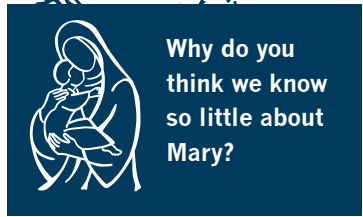
Fun is great, but it is not enough. Common interests are fabulous, but they are not enough. Building relationships upon fun or common interests is like building a house on sand. Great relationships need common *purpose*. Building relationships upon the common purpose of helping each other become the-best-version-of-ourselves is like building a house on rock.

If you want to build your relationships on sand, choose your friends based on whether or not they are good-looking, fun, athletic, rich, and popular. If you want to build your relationships on rock, choose friends of good character, who are striving for virtue, who help you become the-best-version-of-yourself, and lead you closer to God.

The more closely we align ourselves with the purpose of anything, the more success we will have. Relationships have a purpose. God gives us relationships to help us become the-best-version-of-ourselves.

The beautiful thing about the purpose of relationships is that it is unchanging. Like the rock that the wise man built his house on, common purpose is a solid foundation to build your relationships upon. Many things may change in your life over the next month, year, or decade, but the purpose of relationships will not.

Are you ready to start building your relationships on a solid foundation?



1. WHO ARE THE MOST IMPORTANT PEOPLE IN YOUR LIFE? WHY?

2. WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF RELATIONSHIPS?

3. WHAT ARE YOU PRETENDING NOT TO KNOW ABOUT YOUR APPROACH TO RELATIONSHIPS?



NOTHING IS MORE PRACTICAL
THAN FINDING GOD,
than falling in Love
IN A QUITE ABSOLUTE, FINAL WAY.

What you are *in love* with,
WHAT SEIZES YOUR IMAGINATION,
will affect **EVERYTHING.**

It will decide what will get you
OUT OF BED *in the morning,*

WHAT YOU DO WITH YOUR EVENINGS,
how you spend your weekends,

WHAT YOU READ, **WHOM YOU KNOW,**

what *breaks your heart,*

and what amazes you with

JOY and **GRATITUDE.**

Fall in love, **STAY IN LOVE,**

AND IT WILL DECIDE EVERYTHING.



“There is nothing I would not do for those who are really my friends. I have no notion of loving people by halves, it is not my nature.”

—Jane Austen

“THERE IS NOTHING ON THIS EARTH MORE TO BE PRIZED THAN TRUE FRIENDSHIP.”
—SAINT THOMAS AQUINAS

6.2 Choose your friends wisely

Many of the most important decisions you will make in your life will be around relationships. Here are five examples:

1. FRIENDS. The friends you choose to surround yourself with now and throughout your life will have an enormous impact. Sooner or later, we all rise or fall to the level of our friendships. If your friends take their studies seriously, chances are you will too. If your friends get into drugs and alcohol, chances are you will also. If your friends waste endless hours sitting around playing video games, chances are you will too. Friends are a powerful habit, for better or for worse. Are your friends helping you become the-best-version-of-yourself? Are you helping them to become the-best-version-of-themselves?

You are going to make a lot of friendship decisions throughout your life. Get into the habit now of asking the Holy Spirit to guide your friendship decisions.

2. PARENTS. Your relationship with your parents is a central relationship in your life. It is now, and it always will be. My dad has been dead for ten years, and there are still days when I think to myself, “I should call Dad and tell him that . . .” and then I catch myself and remember he is not with us anymore. A week does not pass when I don’t think about my dad and how he would advise me in a situation. Whether they are alive or not, whether you live with them or not, your bond with your parents is powerful.

This relationship is so important that it is the first human relationship to be mentioned in the Ten Commandments. The fourth commandment is: Honor your father and your mother. I heard a great story a couple of weeks ago that made me realize how powerfully and practically God uses his commandments to lead us to happiness and the fullness of life he desires for us.

Caitlin was fifteen years old when her parents thought it would be a good idea for her to go on a mission trip to serve the hungry and the homeless. She didn’t want to go and didn’t want to hear why her parents thought she should. Finally, her parents came to her one night and said, “We have prayed about it and we have a strong sense that you should go on this mission trip.” That Saturday as they put her on the bus she was sobbing in anger because they were making her go. A week later, when she got back, she was happier than her parents had ever seen her. Her eyes had been opened to how difficult life is for so many, but she had also met Scott. Caitlin and Scott dated all through high school, all through college, and just three weeks ago, they got married. Her parents had a strong sense that Caitlin should be on that trip because God was inspiring them to send her.

Caitlin was resistant to her parents’ guidance. Little did she know that God was working through them.

God works in powerful ways through his commandments. So next time your parents ask you to do something, or encourage you to consider something, you may want to politely and humbly say yes.

3. MARRIAGE. Some of you will become priests or enter religious life, but most of you will get married. Whom you decide to marry will have an enormous impact on your life and happiness. What criteria will you use to make that decision? Looks? Personality? Character? Looks matter to a certain extent. It is important that you be attracted to the person you marry. Personality matters more. But character matters most. Is this person committed to growing in godly character? Are you committed to growing in godly character? If not, then the truth is, sooner or later your marriage will most likely find itself in a very difficult place.

Marriage is a beautiful thing. It really is, and I didn’t fully understand that until I was married. But marrying the right person for the right reasons is critical. Marriage may seem like something in the very distant future for you, but what I want you to know *now* is that the decisions you are making around relationships today will affect your marriage, no matter how far it is in the future.

4. COMMUNITY. We all need people to do life with—friends, family, and community to encourage us and challenge us. When we are young we find ourselves involved in various communities—school, parish, sports, and neighborhood. But as we get older we have to actively seek out community. Part of the genius of Catholicism is the parish community. Parish life provides a natural and powerful opportunity for us to encourage, challenge, and support each other.

I’m not going to lie to you. Some parish communities are better than others. But I want to encourage you to get involved in your parish more each year. Join the youth group, become a reader or a Eucharistic Minister, or get involved in any of the many groups and ministries that make up your parish community. You might say, “The youth group is lame at our parish!” Maybe it is. So do something about it. Get involved and make it better. It is easy to criticize from the sidelines.

Don’t ask what your parish can do for you; ask what you can do for your parish. It is through service and sacrifice that we are very often led to the beautiful plan God has for our lives.

5. GOD. I put your relationship with God last on the list, but it is the most important. Unless you make your relationship with God a priority, your chances of getting the other relationship decisions right are next to zero.



Goodness

[goo d-nis]

The quality of being good, having virtue, character, and moral excellence.

Are you striving for goodness?

How do you feel when you behave in ways that are good, virtuous, and morally excellent?

Who is one person in your life that models goodness for you?





The Trinity – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit - is the most dynamic relationship, and your relationship with God will have an enormous influence on every other relationship in your life.

Every yearning you have for good things is in some way a yearning for God. Your longing for relationship is a yearning for God. God is relationship. So, no wonder you yearn for relationships so much.



Throughout your life you are going to make lots of relationship decisions. You are already making dozens every day. Are you making good relationship decisions? What can you do to make better relationship decisions? Do you understand how some of the decisions you make today will impact your life in the future?

There is a great Scripture I want to invite you to reflect upon today. When we really think about what it takes to have great relationships, it can be overwhelming. In John's Gospel, Jesus says, "the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything. . ." (John 14:26) The Holy Spirit will teach you everything . . . including how to have great relationships.

Open yourself up to the Holy Spirit's guidance. Try it. Don't take my word for it. At least once a day for the next week, pray to the Holy Spirit and ask him to guide you in a specific situation. Follow your conscience and the guidance of the Holy Spirit and you will notice that you are less anxious and more joyful.

This Catholic stuff really works. It's real. It's true. It's just that most people have never really given it a chance in their life. Give the genius of Catholicism a chance in your life. You will be glad you did.

John 14:26

KNOW IT: God, the ultimate Father, wants to teach you everything you need to know to live a rich and full life.

THINK ABOUT IT: Are you really opening yourself up to the Holy Spirit's guidance?

LIVE IT: Each time you need to make a decision, ask the Holy Spirit to guide you.

Love
REARRANGES
OUR PRIORITIES

D·I·S·C·U·S·S·I·O·N QUESTIONS

1. WHAT'S THE BEST FRIENDSHIP DECISION YOU HAVE MADE IN THE PAST TWELVE MONTHS?

2. HOW DO YOU FEEL GOD IS CALLING YOU TO IMPROVE YOUR RELATIONSHIPS WITH YOUR PARENTS?

3. ARE YOUR FRIENDS HELPING YOU TO BECOME THE-BEST-VERSION-OF-YOURSELF? ARE YOU HELPING THEM TO BECOME THE-BEST-VERSION-OF-THEMSELVES?



PSALM 25

To thee, O Lord, I lift up my soul.

² O my God, in thee I trust, let me not be put to shame; let not my enemies exult over me.

³ Yea, let none that wait for thee be put to shame; let them be ashamed who are wantonly treacherous.

⁴ Make me to know thy ways, O Lord; teach me thy paths.

⁵ Lead me in thy truth, and teach me, for thou art the God of my salvation; for thee I wait all the day long.

⁶ Be mindful of thy mercy, O Lord, and of thy steadfast love, for they have been from of old.

⁷ Remember not the sins of my youth, or my transgressions; according to thy steadfast love remember me, for thy goodness' sake, O Lord!

⁸ Good and upright is the Lord; therefore he instructs sinners in the way.

⁹ He leads the humble in what is right, and teaches the humble his way.

¹⁰ All the paths of the Lord are steadfast love and faithfulness, for those who keep his covenant and his testimonies.

¹¹ For thy name's sake, O Lord, pardon my guilt, for it is great.

¹² Who is the man that fears the Lord? Him will he instruct in the way that he should choose.

¹³ He himself shall abide in prosperity, and his children shall possess the land.

¹⁴ The friendship of the Lord is for those who fear him, and he makes known to them his covenant.

¹⁵ My eyes are ever toward the Lord, for he will pluck my feet out of the net.

¹⁶ Turn thou to me, and be gracious to me; for I am lonely and afflicted.

¹⁷ Relieve the troubles of my heart, and bring me out of my distresses.

¹⁸ Consider my affliction and my trouble, and forgive all my sins.

¹⁹ Consider how many are my foes, and with what violent hatred they hate me.

²⁰ Oh guard my life, and deliver me; let me not be put to shame, for I take refuge in thee.

²¹ May integrity and uprightness preserve me, for I wait for thee.

²² Redeem Israel, O God, out of all his troubles.





How did Mary love?

JOHN 4:7-21

KNOW IT: To know God is to love God.

THINK ABOUT IT: How well do you know God?

LIVE IT: Do something today that puts God's priorities at the center of your life.

JOHN 3:16

KNOW IT: God loves you more than you could ever imagine.

THINK ABOUT IT: Think about all the love you have for everyone in your life, and multiply it by infinity. God loves you more than that.

LIVE IT: How can you share the love of God with others?

6.3 WHAT IS Love?

What is love? This is one of life's biggest questions. We all yearn for opportunities to love and be loved. Love matters. You matter. Whom and what you decide to love matters.

"What you are in love with, what seizes your imagination, will affect everything. It will decide what will get you out of bed in the morning, what you do with your evenings, how you spend your weekends, what you read, whom you know, what breaks your heart, and what amazes you with joy and gratitude. Fall in love, stay in love, and it will decide everything." These are the words of Father Pedro Arrupe (1907–1991). Whom and what you decide to love is going to have an enormous impact on your life. So let's take a look at what love is and is not.

One of the most beautiful passages in the Bible is in the First Letter of John, Chapter 4:7–21. From this passage we get one of the most quoted phrases of all time: "God is love." These three words are usually quoted on their own. But the whole verse reads, "Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love." If you read this carefully you discover that God gives us a fabulous clue right here.

John tells us that people who don't love don't know God. He implies that if they knew God they would love. Which tells us that getting to know God is the best way to learn how to love. So, what does God teach us about love?

The most quoted verse in the Bible is John 3:16. At baseball games and football games, you will often see someone holding up a sign that says JOHN 3:16. That verse reads, "For God so loved the world that he gave his only son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life." This is the love of God the Father.

Then, there is the love of the Son. What does Jesus teach us about love? The first thing he teaches us is the position love has in the whole scheme of things. When he was asked, "Which is the greatest of the commandments?" he replied, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and all your soul, and all your mind." This is the greatest and the first commandment. And the second is like it: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." (Matthew 22:36–39) Love is the most important thing.

Jesus also teaches that the essence of love is self-donation: "No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends." (John 15:13) He teaches us further that love is not words, but action, by laying down his life for us on the cross. He backs up his words with action. Jesus doesn't just talk about love; he models it for us. Love is selfless.

Finally, he instructs us on how we should love: "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you." (John 15:12) Notice Jesus didn't say, "This is my suggestion to you . . ." It wasn't a suggestion; it was a command. He commands us to love one another in the same way he loves us—that is, by laying down our lives for each other. But it is important to point out that he didn't lay down his life so that we could have more of our selfish desires and worldly pleasure; Jesus laid down his life so that we could have eternal life. In the same way, he wants us to lay down our lives for others in ways that lead them to eternal life. You will come across many people in your life who want you to make sacrifices so that they can have more of their selfish desires and worldly pleasure. That's not love. That's manipulation.

God's vision of love is beautiful, selfless, and radical. By contrast, the world's vision of love places a disproportionate focus on physical pleasure and having fun. God's vision of love is others-focused selflessness; the world's vision of love is me-focused selfishness.

More than anything, the world tells us that love is a feeling. God tells us that love is a choice. In my marriage there are times when I feel overwhelmingly in love with my wife, but there are also times when I don't feel that way. It's when I don't have those fabulous feelings that I really prove my love for Meggie. It is in those moments when I don't have those fabulous feelings that I choose to love her. Love is a choice, not a feeling – and it's a choice that proves itself with action. Feelings are fleeting, while love lives on.

Love rearranges our priorities. It shows us what really matters, and in the process, banishes selfishness.

The world pretends that love is a mutual giving and taking. But that is not love. In love there is no taking, just giving and receiving. There is a beautiful reflection by Bruce Barton that illustrates this point. It is called "Two Seas."

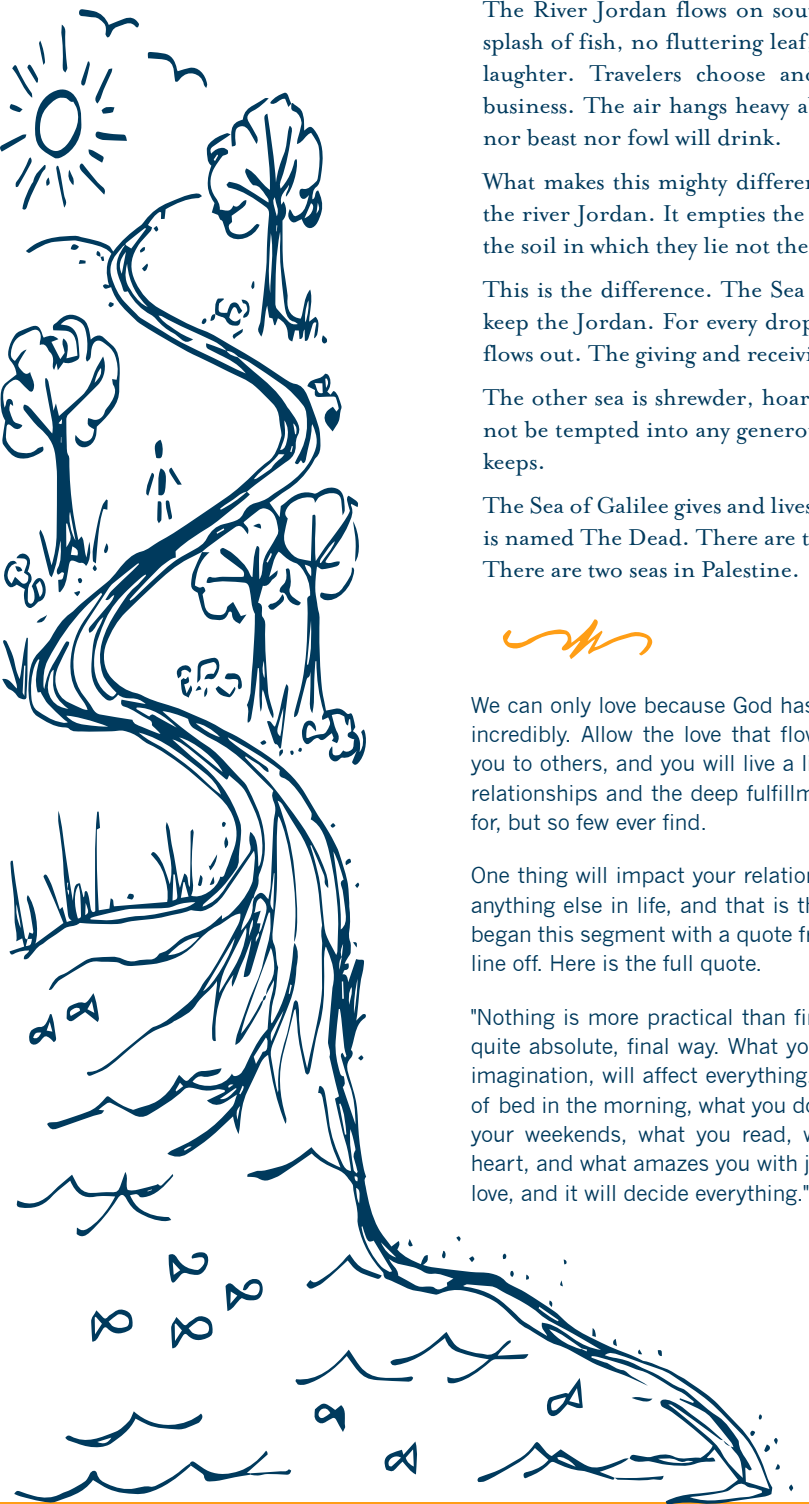
There are two seas in Palestine. One is fresh, and fish are in it. Splashes of green adorn its banks. Trees spread their branches over it and stretch out their thirsty roots to sip of its healing waters. Along its shores the children play, as children played when He was there. He loved it. He could look across its silver surface when He spoke His parables. And on a rolling plain not far away He fed five thousand people.

The River Jordan makes this sea with sparkling water from the hills. So it laughs in the sunshine. And men build their houses near to it, and birds their nests; and every kind of life is happier because it is there.

Promise
me you'll
ALWAYS
REMEMBER:
— YOU'RE —
BRAVER
THAN YOU BELIEVE,
— YOU'RE —
STRONGER
THAN YOU SEEM,
— AND —
SMARTER
THAN YOU THINK.

—Christopher Robin to Pooh





The River Jordan flows on south into another sea. Here is no splash of fish, no fluttering leaf, no song of birds, no children's laughter. Travelers choose another route, unless on urgent business. The air hangs heavy above its water, and neither man nor beast nor fowl will drink.

What makes this mighty difference in these neighbor seas? Not the river Jordan. It empties the same good water into both. Not the soil in which they lie not the country about.

This is the difference. The Sea of Galilee receives but does not keep the Jordan. For every drop that flows into it another drop flows out. The giving and receiving go on in equal measure.

The other sea is shrewder, hoarding its income jealously. It will not be tempted into any generous impulse. Every drop it gets, it keeps.

The Sea of Galilee gives and lives. This other sea gives nothing. It is named The Dead. There are two kinds of people in the world. There are two seas in Palestine.



We can only love because God has loved us first, and he has loved us incredibly. Allow the love that flows to you from God to flow out of you to others, and you will live a life uncommon – filled with dynamic relationships and the deep fulfillment that all men and women yearn for, but so few ever find.

One thing will impact your relationships with other people more than anything else in life, and that is the way you respond to God's love. I began this segment with a quote from Father Arrupe, but I left the first line off. Here is the full quote.

"Nothing is more practical than finding God, than falling in Love in a quite absolute, final way. What you are in love with, what seizes your imagination, will affect everything. It will decide what will get you out of bed in the morning, what you do with your evenings, how you spend your weekends, what you read, whom you know, what breaks your heart, and what amazes you with joy and gratitude. Fall in love, stay in love, and it will decide everything."



Discussion Questions

1. WHAT DID YOU LEARN ABOUT LOVE IN THIS SESSION?

2. WHO MODELS SELFLESS LOVE IN YOUR LIFE?

3. HOW DOES YOUR RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD INFLUENCE YOUR RELATIONSHIPS WITH OTHER PEOPLE?



6.4 YOUR *Quest* FOR LOVE

We are all on a quest for love. We have a deep yearning to love and be loved. So what should you be looking for when it comes to love? How will you know if someone really loves you? What is the evidence of love?

The first thing we need to be clear about is that there are different types of love. There is the love we have for all men and women of goodwill. There is the love of friendship. There is romantic love. And there is agape, unconditional love.

During adolescence and early adult life, we tend to focus on romantic love. So, let's explore what it really means to love someone.

First, at the most basic and natural level, love desires what is best for the other person. You cannot want someone to do something that prevents her from becoming the-best-version-of-herself and at the same time claim that you love her. Love desires what is good for the other person. Along with this desire for what is best for the other person also comes the desire to share every good thing we have with that person.

Next, on a very human and practical level, love is a willingness to inconvenience yourself for another person. This does not mean that we should constantly inconvenience ourselves for those we love, but from time to time this is called for. Is this person willing to inconvenience himself for you? This could be something as simple as going to a Chinese restaurant when he really wanted to eat Mexican food, or as significant as caring for you when you are sick and cannot take care of yourself.

Then there is the love that Paul describes in Corinthians: "Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things." (1 Corinthians 13:4-7) If you are looking for love, this is what you should be looking for. Ask yourself: Could I put this person into this passage?

Jose is patient; *Jose* is kind; *Jose* is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude.

—or—

Samantha does not insist on her own way; *Samantha* is not irritable or resentful; *Samantha* does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth.

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY ABOUT FRIENDSHIP?

LOOK IT UP!

JOHN 15:12-15

PROVERBS 13:20

1 CORINTHIANS 15:33

LUKE 6:31

ROMANS 12:10

EPHESIANS 4:29-32

PROVERBS 22:24-25



And even more important, can you place yourself in this passage? Replace every reference to love with your name. Does it ring true or do you have some work to do?

Finally, in your quest for romantic love, reflect on this line from the Scriptures: "Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her." (Ephesians 5:25)

Gentlemen, in marriage we are called to love our wives as Christ loved the Church. We are called to lay down our lives in sacrifice for them. Every day there are times in my marriage when I have to choose between being selfish and laying down my life for my wife and children.

Ladies, when it comes time to find a man to spend your life with, this is the caliber of man you should be looking for—one who loves you so much that he is willing to lay down his life for you the way Jesus did, one who is capable of selflessness.

Today's culture takes the trivial things and makes them important, and then takes the important things and makes them trivial. Start focusing on the important things. You are not too young to really start thinking about life's big questions. The sooner you do, the better. Most people don't start thinking about these questions until after they have made all of life's big decisions. Start exploring these big questions now, and allow the answers you find to direct the big decisions you will make in your life.

Love is important. You are right to make a big deal of it. *It* is a big deal. But we tend to focus on the wrong things in our quest for love. Allow God to guide you in your relationships. Pause from time to time to ask yourself: Are these people helping me become the-best-version-of-myself? Am I helping them to become the-best-version-of-themselves? If the answer is no, do something about it.

Anyone or anything that doesn't help you become the-best-version-of-yourself is too small for you. And anything you do that doesn't help other people become the-best-version-of-themselves is too small for you too.

LOVE

→ BEARS all things

→ believes all things

→ ENDURES all things

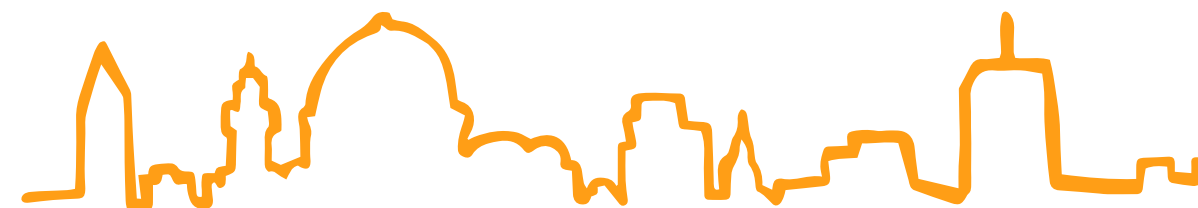
"WE'LL BE FRIENDS FOREVER, WON'T WE, POOH?" ASKED PIGLET.

'EVEN LONGER,' POOH ANSWERED."

A. A. Milne,
WINNIE-THE-POOH



What can we learn about love from Mary?

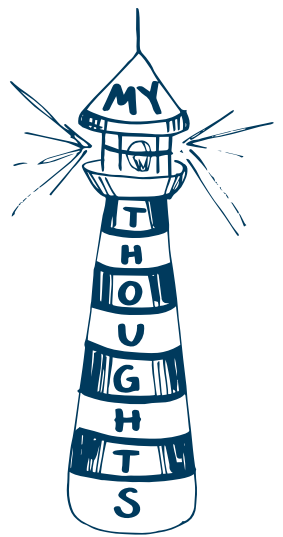


DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. IN WHAT WAYS HAVE YOU GONE LOOKING FOR LOVE IN THE WRONG PLACES?

2. WHO DO YOU KNOW WHO HAS A GREAT MARRIAGE? WHAT DO YOU ADMIRE ABOUT THEIR MARRIAGE?

3. WHAT VIRTUE DO YOU THINK IS MOST IMPORTANT TO HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS?



“THE BEGINNING OF LOVE IS THE WILL TO LET THOSE WE LOVE BE PERFECTLY THEMSELVES. THE RESOLUTION NOT TO TWIST THEM TO FIT OUR OWN IMAGE. IF IN LOVING THEM WE DO NOT LOVE WHAT THEY ARE, BUT ONLY THEIR POTENTIAL LIKENESS TO OURSELVES, THEN WE DO NOT LOVE THEM: WE ONLY LOVE THE REFLECTION OF OURSELVES WE FIND IN THEM.”

– THOMAS MERTON

6.5 DECISION point

When all is said and done, life is not about what street you live on or what school you went to or what type of car you drive; it's not about whether or not you made the football team or what position you played. Life is not about what grades you got in school or what job you had. It's not about how much money you have or how much money you make, or whether or not you vacation in all the right places and wear overpriced clothes with expensive labels on them. Life is about love. It's about whom you love and whom you hurt. It's about how you love yourself and hurt yourself. It's about how you love and hurt those people closest to you. It's about how you love or hurt the other pilgrims who cross your path as you make your journey through this life. Life is about love.

One day we will stand before God, and perhaps the questions he will ask us are: How well did you love? Who or what did you lay down your life for?

Love is a choice, not a feeling. Every day you make hundreds of choices—and every choice is a choice for love or against love. So choose wisely . . . because whom and what you choose to love will determine just about everything.

Love
IS A
CHOICE
[NOT A FEELING]

Journal Questions

1. WHO OR WHAT ARE YOU WILLING TO LAY DOWN YOUR LIFE FOR?

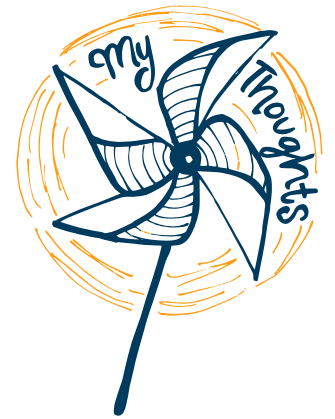
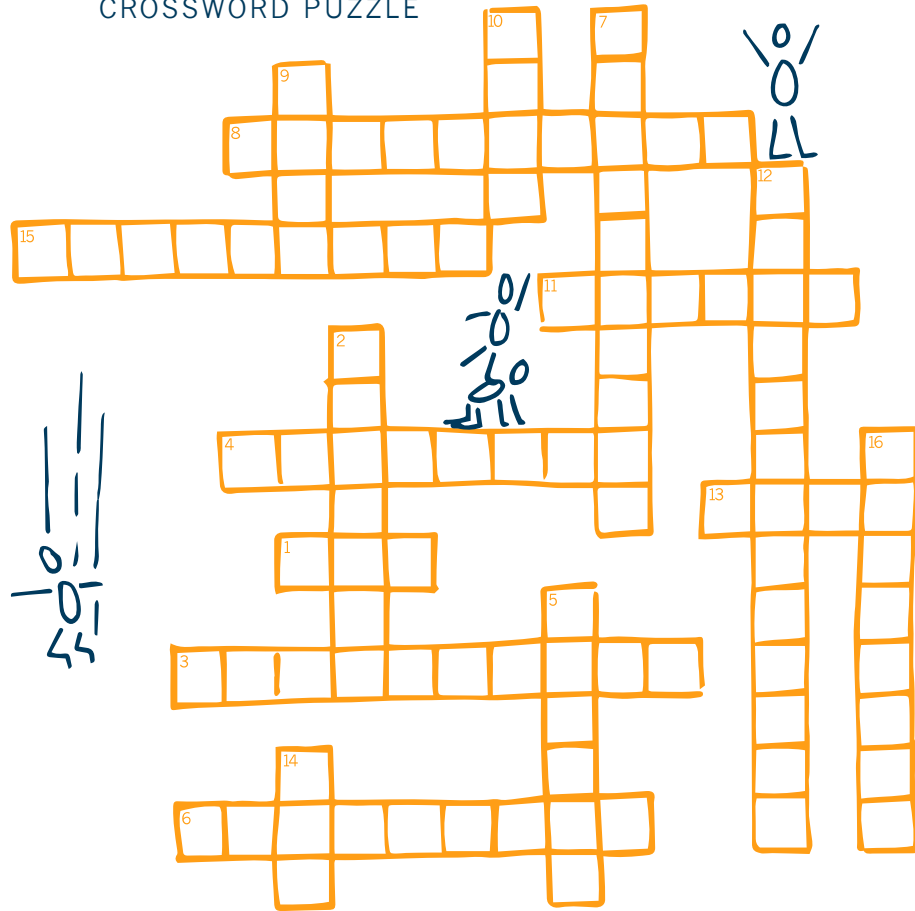
2. WHO LOVES YOU IN THE WAY GOD ENVISIONS LOVE?

3. HOW IS GOD CALLING YOU TO LOVE YOURSELF DIFFERENTLY SO THAT YOU CAN LOVE OTHERS MORE FULLY?



RELATIONSHIPS

CROSSWORD PUZZLE



ACROSS

1. The Creator of Heaven and earth
3. Mutual affection between two or more people
4. A commitment between a man and a woman by which they become husband and wife
6. The prosperity of plentiful and overflowing goodness
8. Like houses, relationships need to be built upon a solid _____.
11. Choose your friends _____.
13. God's vision of _____ is beautiful, selfless, and radical.
15. A group of people who share common attitudes, interests, and goals

DOWN

2. The reason for which something exists
5. Love is a _____, not a feeling.
7. Love rearranges our _____.
9. The only apostle recorded as being at the foot of the cross with Mary
10. There are two _____ in Palestine.
12. God gives us _____ so that we can help each other get to Heaven.
14. Relationships are not just about having _____.
16. Concerned more with the needs and wishes of others than with one's own

