Participant Study Guide
For Small Groups
Based on the Book
Relationship Principles of Jesus
By Tom Holladay

This study guide and the Church-wide small group adventure was developed by the following people: Dane Bernau, Rick Gregory, John Gruszinske, David Mundt, and Tracy Schneider.

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Community Church, N6717 Streblow Dr, Fond du Lac, Wisconsin
**Week 1 - Place the Highest Value on Relationships**

Point to remember: **God does not demand of me that I accomplish great things. He does demand of me that I strive for excellence in my relationships.**

**Grow: Prayer and Study**

1. Open in **prayer**, asking God to teach you to see the high value God places on relationships.

2. **Activation activity:**
   Think about the following people and name what they would consider the person's most important endeavor. In other words, what are they famous for?
   - Q: Steve Jobs
   - Q: Serena Williams
   - Q: Abraham Lincoln
   - Q: Mother Teresa
   - Q: Jesus

3. **Read Mark 12:28-34** in their Bible. Then read it from the book, pages 25-26 (found in Day 1 - The notes regarding the Day are for those who have the Kindle version of the book, which does not have page numbers.)
   b. Essential to having a relationship with Christ is being made right with God. As we recognize our sinful state and the fact that Jesus took our place of punishment on the cross, we can then personally accept the salvation God offers us in Jesus Christ.
c. How do we give relationships with people greater priority over lesser values, like money and tasks? How do we prioritize our relationship with God?

d. Have someone read the text on pages 42 and 43 (Day 3) that think about the passage. Love God with our heart (emotions), soul (decisions), mind (thoughts), and strength (physical interactions).

e. What are the aspects of a relationship with God that Jesus is advocating?
   - Heart - emotions
   - Soul - decisions
   - Mind - thoughts
   - Strength - physical interactions

f. What relationship does the second commandment have with the first? What do we mean when we talk about valuing relationships with others? Here is my thought: Think of the people on the Survivor TV show. They would say they value relationships, too, but for an entirely different reason; for competitive and selfish motives and ends. So, when Christians say we value relationships, what do we really mean?

Serve:
- **Challenge:** What is one step you will take this next week to make the love of God and love of neighbor number one in your life? Pray about these steps.
**Week 2 - Love as Jesus Loves You**

Point to remember: **The greatest sacrifices love makes ... may well be the daily sacrifices.**

**Connect:**

❖ Debrief

Last week you answered the question: **What is one step you will take this next week to make the love of God and love of neighbor number one in your life?** What happened when you took that step?

**Grow: Prayer and Study**

1. **Activation Question:** Have you ever come across some “not so loving” Christians? Very briefly tell behaviors of Christians that you have experienced that have caused you trouble. What is the most loving thing someone has done for you?

2. Open in **prayer**, asking God to teach all to love as Jesus loves us individually.

3. Have someone read the **paraphrase of John 13 on pages 81 and 82** (Day 8) and then have another person **read John 13: 1-35** from their Bible.
   - a. What is the standard Jesus gives us in showing love to one another?
   - b. What are specific ways that Jesus showed love to His disciples and all believers?
   - c. Why is it important for Christians to act lovingly towards all people?
   - d. Holladay says, “You cannot command an emotion, but you can command an action.” (page 89 -Day 9) What is the difference and why is it important?
e. “Feelings by themselves can sometimes lead you down a good road. But more often than not, they’ll lead you right into a train wreck.” (Holladay, page 105-Day 11). What place do feelings have in a relationship? What warnings should we give ourselves regarding feelings?

f. Can you think of a time that you acted in love, even though you didn't feel loving at the time? What helped you to follow through on the desire to act in love?

g. Is there a relationship in your life that is falling apart? Read Matthew 5:24 and brainstorm a list of potential first steps you can take to re-engineering and revitalize that relationship. What prayers need to be prayed in advance?

h. Discuss the importance of acting immediately and radically. What risks to our relationship arise when we do not act immediately or radically?

i. Why is it difficult to forgive? What misconceptions make forgiveness harder? How did this section help you to understand the relationships between fellowship, trust, and forgiveness?

j. As an introduction to 1 Corinthians 13 Holladay says this, "True love (shows itself with) daily sacrifices. You give up your way and seek another person's good." (Page 127) Have someone read the headings on pages 128 - 131 (Day 14). Which one of these is God calling you to exercise this week? With whom?

Serve: Think of a person in your life with whom you no longer get along as well as you used to. How might you, with a renewed attitude, pray for and act lovingly towards that person this week?
Week 3 - Communicate from the Heart

Point to remember: **You cannot have high-level communication without high-level trust.**

**Connect:**
- **Debrief**

Last week you answered the question: Think of a person in your life with whom you no longer get along as well as you used to. Now, how might you, with a renewed attitude, pray for and act lovingly towards that person this week? Write down what happened when you took that step.

**Grow: Prayer and Study**

1. **Activation Question:** Think of a time when you were helped by someone who was honest and loving in telling you what you **needed** to hear. Without sharing details, why were both the honesty and love necessary?

2. Open the time in **prayer**, asking for God to use His words in the Bible to align our hearts with His.

3. **Read aloud Mark 5:22-43** and the paraphrase on pages 140-141 (Day 15). What is the point that Holladay is making?

4. Holladay also points out four specific ways that our words can erode trust in others. Have someone identify those four items, pages 147 - 149 (Day 16). What are the characteristics we are to develop and how do we foster them?
5. The author speaks of a vicious circle of words, where my heart affects the words that come out of my words, and the words that come out of my mouth affect my heart. (Pages 154-155 - Day 17) The author provides his own question on the subject: “Can you see places in which you are caught in a vicious cycle of words? At work, at home, with friends? The question is, ‘How do you break the pattern?’”

6. Holladay says, “There is no area of life that is immune from the dangers of this vicious circle of words. I sometimes hear people excuse their ugly words in areas such as theology or politics.” (Page 155 - Day 17) Why is it so important for Christians to carefully weigh our words, for example, in the political arena?

7. Read the strategies aloud (page 156 - Day 17) for helping “break the cycle before the words start pouring out of your mouth.” Which strategy has worked for you? How often do you see yourself using it?

Serve: Read the way Jesus dealt with communication roadblocks and breakdowns. (The headings from pages 183-190 - Day 21) Which one is the easiest for you to incorporate? Which one is the hardest to exhibit? Which one do you need to take on this week? Invite participants to write their thoughts on an index card. Pray for each other for that specific area.

Repeat: Outside of Christian friends, whom do you have regular conversation with? (It could be family, work, neighborhood, Kiwanis, bowling team, ...) Pick one thing you have been learning to share with that person this week.
Week 4 - As You Judge, You Will Be Judged

Point to remember: **God wants us to be merciful because He is merciful.**

**Connect:**
- Debrief

Last week the challenge was: **Looking at the ways Jesus dealt with communication roadblocks and breakdowns, pages 183-190 - Day 21, select one to take on this week.** Write down what happened when you took that step.

**Grow: Prayer and Study**

1. **Activation Question:** Without sharing details of the situation, have you either offered forgiveness or been offered forgiveness and what did it mean to you?

2. Open your time in **prayer**, asking for God to use His words in the Bible to open our eyes to any judgemental attitudes or hypocrisy there might be in our hearts.

3. Have someone **read aloud Matthew 7:1-5.**
   - a. What are the specific commands that Jesus gives us?
   - b. What does Jesus teach about judging?
   - c. How is judging different from discernment or saying that it is right to do one thing and wrong to do another? (A great additional resource for this discussion is Erwin Lutzer’s book called “Who Are You to Judge?” This book is in the Church Resource Center.)
d. What is Jesus’ definition of hypocrisy?

4. Why and how can we grow comfortable putting on a mask? And what can you do to make groups you are part of safe places for yourself and others to take off masks?

5. Holladay tells us that the alternative of judgement is not tolerance, but mercy. (Page 213 - Day 25) Reread that section. In what ways does Paul spell out mercy?

Serve: To whom is God calling you to show mercy during this next week? How can others pray for you?

Repeat: 

Challenge: Sometime during this next week, find some uninterrupted time and go through the self-evaluation questions on pages 244-246 - Day 28. The author suggest several hours, but even if you don't have that amount of time, slowly read through the questions and allow God’s Spirit to speak to you.

Who can you now share at least one of your personal reflections with? If you don't have a regular accountability partner, think about and then ask one person to coffee or lunch who you could share one “not-too-deep-and-personal” item. Perhaps the relationship will grow and deepen over time.
**Week 5 - The Greatest Are the Servants**

Point to remember: **Don't try to feel humble; act humble.**

**Connect:**
- Debrief

Last week we challenged each other: **To whom is God calling you to show mercy during this next week?** Write down what happened when you exhibited mercy to that particular person.

**Grow: Prayer and Study**

1. **Activation Question:** What do most people think of when they hear the word “humility”?

2. Open your time in **prayer**, asking for God to use His words to teach us what true humility is and what it looks like.

3. Before we talk about humility, let’s talk about it’s opposite: self-centeredness and the pursuit of greatness. What is it about the pursuit of greatness that violates the relationship principles of Jesus? Why is it so difficult to build a relationship with someone who is self-centered and more concerned with their own advancement?

4. By contrast, why is it so much easier to build a relationship with someone who is humble and seeks the good of others?

5. How do you think your family would describe you? Your co-workers?
   a. What does Paul tell us are the results of being united with Christ?

   b. How does this foundation then equip us to be unified, like-minded, one in spirit and purpose?

   c. What is then seen among believers as a result of this unity with Christ?

7. Holladay says, “Humility has more to do with how you think about others and how you think about God.” (Page 289 - Day 35)
   a. What did Jesus do to show His thinking about God the Father?

   b. In what ways did Christ think of us humans as more important than himself?

8. How does the humility Jesus modeled for us help us to restrain selfish ambition and the desire to compare ourselves to others that lurks inside of us?

9. How do we abide in Christ?

10. How is selfishness the enemy of strong relationships? How does service strengthen relationships?

Serve: What small need can you meet for someone else soon? Who is the person and what is the need you will work to meet? As you attempt to meet this need, how could others support or help you?

Repeat: Next week is the last session for the Relationship Principles study. If you have been in any way challenged in your walk with Christ through the study of the Bible and interacting with other Christians, consider starting or joining another study group. Soon there will be more information at church on new groups starting soon and other next steps.
Week 6 - Treat Others as You Want Them to Treat You

Point to remember: Love is not reciprocal; love is sacrificial.

Connect:
❖ Debrief
Last week we asked this question: What small need can I meet for someone else soon? Who is the person and what is the need you will work to meet? Write down what happened when you worked to meet the needs of that particular person.

Grow: Prayer and Study
1. Activation Question: Why do you think that the Golden Rule has been talked about all through history?

2. Open your time in prayer, asking for God to use His words to teach us how to live our lives in ways that copy His Son, Jesus.

3. Have someone read aloud the book's version of Luke 23:26-43 (pages 303-304, Day 37) and then the passage itself from the Bible.
   a. In what ways is God’s love not reciprocal?

   b. In what ways is God’s love not a ricochet?

   c. In what ways does God not have a hidden motive?

4. Holladay says instead that God’s love is sacrificial. Describe how and why we can describe God’s love this way.
5. New Testament scholar, William Barclay, described God’s love this way: “Let a man be a saint or let a man be a sinner, God’s only desire is for that man’s highest good. Now, that is what agape love is. Agape is the spirit which says, ‘No matter what any man does to me, I will never seek to do harm to him; I will never set out for revenge; I will always seek nothing but his highest good.” That is to say, Christian love, agape, is unconquerable benevolence, invincible good will. It is not simply a wave of emotion; it is a deliberate conviction of the mind issuing in a deliberate policy of the life; it is a deliberate achievement and conquest and victory of the will. It takes all of a man to achieve Christian love; it takes not only his heart; it takes his mind and his will, as well.” (quoted in Steve Schaefer’s, Living in the Overlap, ©2010, Redemption Press) How does this description help you understand the love of God more clearly? How does this description challenge you to love the people around (family, friends, and enemies) differently?

6. The author also says, “I’m not only to think about how I want to be treated; I’m to look at how God treats people.” If we had that as a perspective how would that specifically change our behavior in our relationships? And how would that change the way we respond to our enemies?

Serve: On pages 325-326 (Day 40) Holladay summarizes the key concepts from his book, this study. Have someone read them aloud.
   a. Pick one that meant the most to you. Write down how and why.

   b. Pick one that is still challenging for you and write down ways you continue to need prayer. Ask a friend to pray for you in these specific areas.

Repeat: What will be your next steps in continuing the pursuit of healthy, God-honoring relationships?
Next Steps...

Potential Studies to follow

The Relationship Principles of Jesus study

Resolving Everyday Conflict (The DVD for this study is available from David Mundt)
This is an 8-week study based on Ken Sande’s excellent book, Peace Makers. This study teaches a practical 4-step approach to working through conflicts; solving problems and not just sweeping them under the rug. DVD study with book and workbook.

The Art of Marriage (The DVD for this study is available from David Mundt)
This is a 6-week study from Dennis and Barb Rainey. Weaving together expert teaching, man-on-the-street interviews, engaging drama, and real-life stories, this study helps us to see the beauty of God’s design in marriage. DVD study with workbook.

Laugh Your Way to a Better Marriage (The DVD for this study is available from the Resource Center)
This 4-week study features pastor, author, and speaker, Mark Gungor. Using laugh-out-loud humor and personal stories, Mark opens the door to serious discussion about vital marriage issues. DVD study (with optional book).

Marriage: Back to Basics (The DVD for this study is available from David Mundt)
This 8-week study on marriage teaches the essential building blocks needed for a husband-and-wife relationship. Designed to reach pre-marital, newly-wed, and seasoned couples. DVD study with a workbook for each spouse.

God’s Blueprint for Families (The DVD for this study is available from David Mundt)
This 8-week study focuses on seven “one-another” statements from Scripture and applies them to parenting and family-life. Instead of just repeating what we experienced as kids, this study challenges us to reconsider God’s ideas for family relationships. DVD study with workbook.

40 Days of Purpose
This 6-week study is based on Rick Warren’s best-seller The Purpose-Driven Life, recently updated and republished as What On Earth Am I Here For? This study focuses on God’s purposes in the life of individual believers. DVD study with book and workbook.

40 Days of Community
This 6-week study is the sequel to Rick Warren’s 40 Days of Purpose. The 40 Days of Community study focuses on God’s purposes in the life of His Church, the gathered people of God. DVD study with book.
Recommended Reading List for *The Relationship Principles of Jesus*

Relationship Principle #1: **Place the Highest Value on Relationships**
- *Dropping Your Guard, the Value of Open Relationships*, by Charles Swindoll.

Relationship Principle #2: **Love As Jesus Loves You**
- *Grace Awakening*, by Charles Swindoll.
- *Grace; More Than We Deserve, Greater Than We Imagine*, by Max Lucado.

Relationship Principle #3: **Communicate From the Heart**
- *Dare to Be True; Living in the Freedom of Complete Honesty*, by Mark Roberts.
- *Peace Makers; Resolving Everyday Conflict*, by Ken Sande.
- *Choosing Forgiveness*, by Nancy Leigh DeMoss.

Relationship Principle #4: **As You Judge, You Will Be Judged**
- *Who Are You To Judge?,* by Erwin Lutzer.
- *Between the Words; The Art of Perceptive Listening*, by Norm Wakefield.

Relationship Principle #5: **The Greatest Are The Servants**
- *Serving One Another*, by Gene Getz.

Relationship Principle #6: **Treat Others As You Want Them to Treat You**
- *Everybody’s Normal Till You Get To Know Them*, by John Ortberg.
- *Risking Church; Creating a Place Where Your Heart Feels at Home*, by Jim Kallam Jr.
- *The Good and Beautiful Community; Following the Spirit, Extending Grace, Demonstrating Love*, by James Bryan Smith.