

Renew Your Life

COVID-19 Version

Session 6: The Energy of Relationships

Reading: Chapter 6

Welcome & Opening Questions (10 minutes)

Introduce yourself and share your responses to one or more of these questions:

- Who is someone who has encouraged you? What did they do to offer encouragement?
- Who did you stay connected with during the “stay at home” portion of COVID-19 (family, friends, coworkers, neighbors...)? How have you stayed in relationship with one another?

Group Prayer Practice (5 minutes)

Spend a few minutes in silence as a group. Sit in a comfortable position and imagine yourself being held by God. Close your eyes and focus on your breath. Gently set aside or release any distracting thoughts during this time. The leader will guide you with these prompts.

- As you think about the past day or week, what did you experience that was life-giving?
- As you think about the past day or week, what was energy depleting for you?
- Silently, release the past day or week over to God in prayer.
- Imagine yourself held in the expansive energies of God’s love. Take a minute to breathe deeply of God’s presence and peace.

Amen.

Scripture Text (5 minutes)

Colossians 3:12-17

As God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other; just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; teach and admonish one another in all wisdom; and with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

Reading Recap (5 minutes)

All people are created through the gracious design of God and reflect the image of their Creator. Imagine what that idea might do for us as we consider what it means to live in a world filled with fear, division, pain, conflict, inequality, and brokenness. Can God’s grace release us from the misdirected desire to create life in our own image and open us to the

possibility that God's image is present in us and in all others? Will we allow ourselves to enter deeply into relationship with others, acknowledging our limitations and brokenness, and be open to having our horizons expanded by their presence? Where do we need forgiveness? Where do we need humility? Where do we need to deepen our understanding? How can we listen more deeply?

Questions on Chapter 6 (35 minutes)

Start with these questions, adding in other questions to supplement. Questions are also available in the Renew Your Life book, starting on page 141.

- What concepts in the readings and sermon were life-giving for you?
- What concepts or stories were difficult or challenging for you to think about or integrate into your life?

The Energy of Relationships

1. When you think of yourself as created in the image of God, what thoughts or feelings come up?
2. Describe a relationship you have now that you "do deep." What makes that relationship energizing? What has helped to bring about or sustain the depth?
3. What are the impediments to deeper relationships? How have you gotten around those impediments?
4. Who have you gotten to know from another culture, economic class, race, or religion? How did you get to know one another? What have you learned or discovered? What are the barriers to getting to know people from other communities?
5. How can we as a faith community expand our ability to meet and interact with those from another culture, class, race, or religion who may have a different life story? What steps would you like to take? What would help you take these steps?

Update during COVID-19

We Need Each Other

Many of us have been taught to pull ourselves up, to rely on ourselves, to never let them see us sweat. What if we were created to be in community not to be "rugged individuals?" What if our strength, our hope, our resilience is communal not purely what we can muster up on our own? What lessons about our need for each other have we learned by being apart during COVID-19, that we would not have otherwise known? What have we learned about relationships and community in the loss of George Floyd and all that has happened in recent weeks? Once again, how do we begin to listen more deeply?

Loneliness

Loneliness is not bound by age or economics or race or circumstance. We can be surrounded by people and be desperately lonely. We can also find ourselves alone in the world, depending on the circumstances of life or life stage or race or economic status, and feel the pangs of isolation. What can loneliness and isolation teach about our need for one

another? How can we experience God's presence in times of isolation? How can we reach out and befriend someone who may be alone or lonely, especially in this time?

Questions during COVID-19

1. What words or phrases from the Colossians text speak to you today? What message do they carry for you?
2. What has surprised you about your relationships with others during COVID-19? Which of your relationships are stronger, thriving and maybe even deepening? Which of your relationships are strained or suffering? What might cause some relationships to become stronger while other relationships struggle?
3. Did you stretch to be in relationship with people outside of your friends and family, during this time? With whom have you formed new relationships?
4. In what ways has the COVID-19 pandemic created a sense of isolation or loneliness for you? How have you reacted to isolation during the pandemic? How is isolation different from loneliness for you?
5. How have others reached out to support you in this time? What are some ways you have tried to address your own sense of isolation or the isolation of others?
6. What did you discover about yourself during this time of staying at home or in isolation? What did you learn from how you reacted? What did you learn about relationships?
7. What did you discover about yourself in recent weeks as you've watched circumstances and events related to racial justice? What might be some next steps for you?

Closing Question & Faith Practice (5 minutes)

Explore how the chapter theme can make a difference in your life by considering the questions & trying the faith practices:

- Who is someone you'd like to reach out to? How will you do that?
- How does affirming that all people are created in the image of God affect how I see and treat them?
- Use this breath prayer in the coming week to remind you of God's grace and creative, renewing energy. (see "breath prayer" instructions).

*Inhale: Blessed by God
Exhale: To be Blessings*

Closing Prayer (3 minutes)

God, this is a time of challenges beyond what we could have imagined. We each face our own, unique circumstances, and together we share in a time of unforeseen changes, loss, uncertainty, pain, brokenness, fear and disruption.

Yet, God, we know that your steadfast love never ends and your presence never leaves us. We continue to see you in ordinary and extraordinary moments. We thank you for creation's renewal and beauty, for actions of kindness and love, for the blessings of daily life and for

your renewing gift of hope. We are especially grateful for those who are doing self-sacrificing work on behalf of others, the community and the world. Most of all, we thank you for your peace, love and grace.

Guide us to know how to be your blessing in the world today. Open our hearts and imaginations to see how we can create healthy and abundant life for others. Sustain us, comfort us, guide us and enliven us to be your presence in the world. Amen.