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Introduction

Religion in Relationships¹

Life is lived in relationships. Some relationships are deep. Other relationships are “polite.” Some relationships last a short time. Other relationships last a lifetime. Some relationships are functional.² Other relationships are close and personal.

We relate³ to all kinds of people: to a spouse,⁴ to children, to relatives, to friends and neighbors, to the gas-station worker, to the people we work with, and to the police officer who stops us for speeding. We relate to our pastor, to the principal of the school where we have enrolled our children, and to the tax collector.

Both Christians and non-Christians must relate to other people. The difference between us and our non-Christian friends is that our faith should affect all of our relationships.

As Seventh-day Adventists, we believe in a set of doctrines.⁵ Some of our doctrines are the same as other churches. But some of our doctrines are special to us and help make us a “special” people with a special message and mission (work). Doctrines show how we understand who God is. Doctrines help us get a clearer understanding of who and what God is. They also show what God has done, is doing, and will finally do for us personally and as a people. We need doctrines to understand how our belief in God and His plan of salvation can influence our daily life.

But Adventist Christianity is more than a list of doctrines. The Christian God is not a far-off God who does not care about our daily life. Instead, He is a personal God of love who has personally met us in Jesus. Paul shows this very clearly in Philippians, when he writes: “You should think in the same way Christ Jesus does. In his very nature he was God. But he did not think that being equal with God was something he should hold on to. Instead, he made himself nothing. He took on the very nature of a servant. He was made in human form. He appeared as a man. He came down to the lowest level. He obeyed God completely, even though it led to his death. In fact, he died on a cross” (Philippians 2:5-8, NIV).

God is a covenant⁶ God. He goes out of His way to make a special effort to establish a close relationship with us. He is Love in person. He looks for an answer to that love through worship, obedience, and love. Once we let God establish a relationship with us, He will influence every other relationship we may have.

We need to gain a better understanding of who and what God is. We need to

¹relationships—the connections we have with other people in everything we do.

²functional—useful; serving a specific purpose.

³relate—how we connect with other people in everything we do.

⁴spouse—a husband or a wife; the person you are married to.

⁵doctrines—church beliefs based on the Bible.

⁶covenant—a promise or an agreement made between God and His people.

accept Jesus as our Savior and welcome the Holy Spirit as our Guide through life. Then we will be able to look at the world in a new way. Then it will not be so important to us to live and work with people who are the same as we are. What will be important will be for the people we live and work with to learn about salvation.

Religion does not depend on our good works. Religion depends on what God has done for us through Jesus. But a religion that is not an important part of our daily lives is a dead and meaningless religion (James 2:17). If our relationship with God does not influence our relationships with other people, we cannot be sure if our relationship with God is real.

This quarter, we will study many verses in the Bible to learn more about how our faith influences our relationships. We will discuss how we can strengthen those relationships. We will learn how to restore⁷ broken relationships. We will discover that there is more *religion in relationships* than we may think.

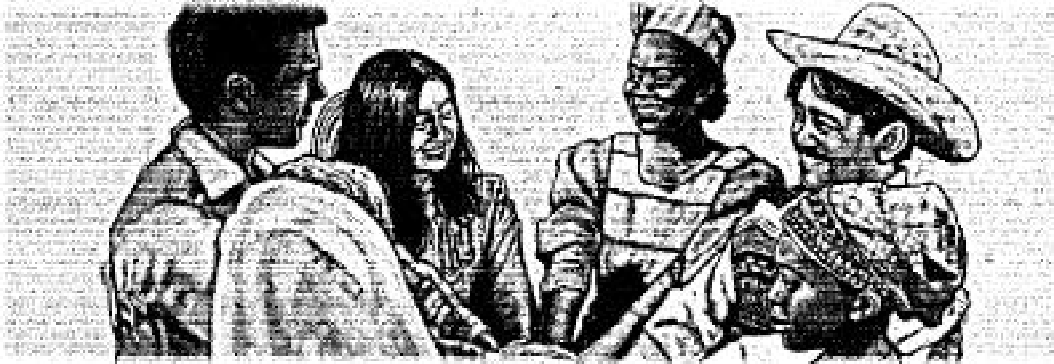
This quarter's *Adult Bible Study Guide* was written by Reinder Bruinsma. He is from the Netherlands. He is a longtime-church worker, including six years as executive secretary of the Trans-European Division (1995–2001). He is also the author of 15 books in both English and Dutch. In 2001, he returned to the Netherlands, where he is ADRA⁸ director. ADRA is an organization directly involved in meeting the most basic needs of people. His concern as a pastor is that we treat people in a Christian manner. We can see his concern in every lesson this quarter.

Let us open our hearts and minds to see what we can learn about one of the most important parts of being a Christian. As representatives of Jesus, how should we relate to fellow human beings? Everyone is made in the image of God—the God who died on a cross to save us.

⁷restore—to make something new as it was in the beginning.

⁸ADRA—Adventist Development and Relief Agency.

Created for Community¹



SABBATH—JUNE 26

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY: Exodus 20:2-17; Isaiah 1:10-17; 1 Corinthians 13.

MEMORY VERSE: “Dear friends, let us love one another, because love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born again because of what God has done. That person knows God” (1 John 4:7, NIV).

IN TODAY'S WORLD, MANY PEOPLE ARE VERY LONESOME. They live without meaningful relationships.² They are without a sense of being needed or loved. They live without a feeling of true belonging. Some people are married. Some people have children. But in their deepest self, they feel alone. Other people have a wonderful social life, but they would admit to being very lonely. Many people share their apartment houses with dozens of other people and every day see thousands of people in the city or on the bus or train. But they do not have the ability to reach out to these people.

Lonely people are everywhere. But the Bible teaches that we live in community with other people. How does God want us to live in community? This week, we begin our look at the answers to this question.

A LOOK AT THIS WEEK'S LESSON: What does the Creation story teach us about community? What principles³ should guide us in our relationships with

¹community—a group of people living or working together in the same place. Each one of us live in many different communities. Our family, friends, and the people we work with are examples of some communities.

²relationships—the connections we have with other people in everything we do.

³principles—basic rules that are the basis for more specific rules.

other people? What does the Bible teach about love? What did Jesus mean when He talked about us hating our mother and father? What part does the Cross have in our relationships with other people?

*Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, July 3.

SUNDAY—JUNE 27

“ ‘IT IS NOT GOOD FOR THE MAN TO BE ALONE’ ” (Genesis 2:18, NIV).

Genesis 1 and 2 give us a picture of what happened when God created our world. Creation is a mystery. But Creation tells us what we need for a better understanding of the world. Creation includes the truth that God created us to be with other people in a community.

How does the Creation story show that God wants us to live in a community? Genesis 1:28; Genesis 2:18-25; Genesis 4:1, 2.

God's original purpose (plan) was that we would live in relationship with other people. The ideas of a partnership between a man and a woman, and of a bond between parents and children, were important parts of Creation. Belonging together in a marriage relationship, and in family, was not just one choice among many different choices, but shows God's original plan for human happiness. This does not mean a single person cannot live a happy and

fulfilling life. But it shows that the Bible sees the family as the important foundation of a healthy society.

“A family is not a result of our romantic desires. A family is not a result of society's rules that parents must give their children food and a place to stay. A family is not a little group of people receiving emotional support from living together. . . . Family is an important part of the Creator's plan for raising children who teach faith to *their* children. To rebel against family is to wreck the core (basic) community that makes all other community possible.”
—Adapted from Lewis B. Smedes, *Mere⁴ Morality⁵ What God Expects From Ordinary People* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W. B. Eerdmans Publication Company, 1983), p. 81.

The British poet John Donne wrote, “No man is an island. Every man is a part of all humanity,⁶ a part of the larger group” (adapted). Donne meant that we are all involved with each other. What does this show us about the kind of influence we should have on other people?

⁴mere—only; simple.

⁵morality—doing right; a set of rules that teaches us what is right.

⁶humanity—all the people of the world.

MONDAY—JUNE 28

**RELIGION HAS A SOCIAL PART
(Exodus 20:2-17; Matthew 7:12).**

Our faith depends much on our relationship to God. But it cannot be separated from our relationship to other people. We live in this world with other people. And our religion very clearly shows how we are to relate to these other people.

The Ten Commandments are divided into two parts. The first four commandments point to our relationship to God. The last six commandments deal with our relationship to other people. Read the first four commandments in Exodus 20:2-11. How does our obedience or our disobedience to these commandments influence other people?



Often, Christians think too much about the social part of Christianity. Then they

forget the more important part of Christianity. That part is the relationship between us and God. When we forget about our relationship between us and God, our religion stops being Christian. It is also true that if our faith in God does not influence our relationships with people, our religion stops being Christian.

What do the following texts tell us about the social parts of Christianity?

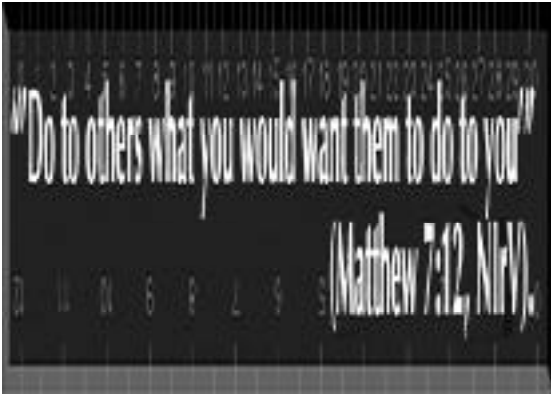
Leviticus 19:18 _____

Isaiah 1:10-17 _____

Hosea 6:6 _____

Matthew 7:12 _____

James 1:27 _____



Summarize the message of the verses you just read. What changes might you need to make so you are doing what these verses say?

TUESDAY—JUNE 29

BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS TAKES EFFORT (Matthew 5:9).

A good relationship with God does not happen by accident. To have a good relationship with God, we turn away from evil and focus on Him.

Peaceful relationships with people do not happen by accident. We must focus on building good relationships. As sinners, we live on a planet filled with other sinners. As a result, we are likely to be selfish, greedy, and jealous. These traits could destroy any fruitful, loving relationships we would try to have.

How do peaceful relationships happen? 1 Peter 3:11. What are we to try to do? Romans 12:18.

The peace we try to have with other people does not just mean avoiding quarrels or disagreements with them. The Bible teaches that peace is rooted in the Hebrew understanding of *shalom*. *Shalom* goes much deeper than just patience and interest in other people. *Shalom* shows positive support for people around us. Again, we must remember that this kind of peace does not come naturally to us. This is because our sinful nature is to be greedy, jealous, and power-seeking. No wonder we need God in our lives.

What basic rule should guide our relationships with other people? 1 Corinthians 10:24. Why is this rule so opposite of our selfish and greedy nature?

To look after other people purely for their own good is to show Jesus. His love for suffering humanity comes from unselfish purposes. He loves for love's sake. No selfish reason leads Him to do good. Jesus does good, because He loves other people and wants the best for them. What an example for us to follow!

Contrast⁷ how Jesus showed unselfish love toward other people with how you relate to other people. However, do not be discouraged. Remember that Jesus died to save people who have failed to follow His example.

⁷contrast—show how things are different.

WEDNESDAY—JUNE 30

AGAPE⁸ LOVE (1 Corinthians 13).

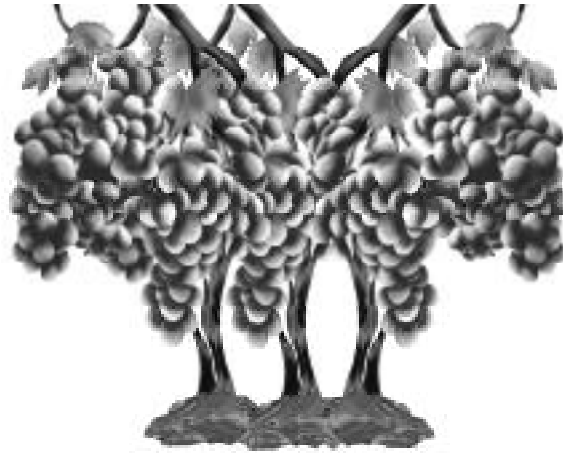
The New Testament uses several different words that can all be translated “love.” One word means love for friends. Another word means sexual love. There is nothing bad about these kinds of love. They are an important part of human life in their proper time and place. But there is one special word for “love.” That word is *agape*. *Agape* is the kind of love that God has for us. *Agape* love is the love we must also develop as the basis of all our relationships with other people. This is a disinterested (unselfish) love that puts the good of others ahead of ourselves. This is the kind of love shown perfectly in Jesus’ life.

In 1 Corinthians 13, the word for “love” comes from *agape*. Read 1 Corinthians 13 three or four times. Then write out what you believe the Lord is telling you in these verses.

How does 1 Corinthians 13 describe love? How is this love different from the world’s idea of love?

Think about some of the traits of love as shown in 1 Corinthians 13. Which traits might you find the most

difficult to develop in your own life? How can you be changed to develop those traits? John 15:5.



We must stay connected to Jesus the way the branches stay connected to the vine.

THURSDAY—JULY 1

**GOD ALWAYS COMES FIRST
(Luke 14:25, 26).**

Living as a Christian means putting things in their proper order. Putting ourselves or our own interests first is not Christian. We will always need to remember this during the coming weeks as we study different human relationships.

What did Jesus say about putting our relationships in their proper order? Matthew 10:34-37; Luke 14:25, 26. What do you believe Jesus was telling us in these verses?

⁸agape—Christian love; love based on principle, not emotion.

What does it mean that we are to hate the people we love for the sake of loving Jesus? “The Bible makes it clear that this is not ‘hate’ as people understand hate. ‘To hate’ often should be understood as a Middle Eastern word meaning ‘to love less.’ . . . When we love our personal interests more than we love Jesus, we will not be able to do what Jesus asks us to do. The call of Jesus’ kingdom must always come first.”—Adapted from *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, pp. 811, 812.

In a lesson study on how we should relate to other people, we find that Jesus seems to downplay⁹ our relationships with other people. But Jesus’ point is to keep Him first in our lives. Why? When we love Jesus more than



anyone or anything, we can then love other people with *agape* love. Jesus has done so much for us. At the Cross, He restored¹⁰ the relationship between God and us.

A young woman had been abused by her father. So she now finds it impossible to develop long-lasting and meaningful relationships with anyone. How can she find healing at the Cross?

FRIDAY—JULY 2

ADDITIONAL STUDY: Read from Ellen G. White, *Welfare Ministry (Work)*, pp. 29–41.

“By showing an unselfish interest in people who need help, we can give a useful example of the truths of the gospel. ‘Suppose a brother or sister has no clothes or food. Suppose one of you says to them, “Go. I hope everything turns out fine for you. Keep warm. Eat well.” And you do nothing about what they really need. Then what good have you done? It is the same with faith. If it doesn’t [does not] cause us to do something, it’s [it is] dead’ (James 2:15-17, NIV). ‘The three most important things to have are faith, hope and love. But the greatest of them is love’ (1 Corinthians 13:13, NIV).”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Welfare Ministry*, p. 32.

⁹downplay—to make something less important than other things.

¹⁰restored—to have made something new as it was in the beginning.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. In today's world, geographical¹¹ differences can cause problems and hatred. Geographical differences can cause an unhealthy attitude¹² of "I am better than you." How have geographical differences influenced your thinking in a negative way? How can geographical differences be a positive thing, both in society and in the church?
2. Read through Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John to see how much Jesus taught about how we should relate to other people. What does that tell us about how important

this topic is for people who say they are Christians?

3. How does Ephesians 2:11-18 help us understand how close we can now be to the Lord? How will that closeness influence our relationships with other people?

SUMMARY: Religion has a social part. It is important to recognize that God created us to live in relationships with other people. We must remember that serving God includes having a relationship with Him and with other people. Remember to make God first in your life. Then you will have good relationships with other people.

¹¹geographical—having to do with countries.

¹²attitude—how you think or feel about something.