

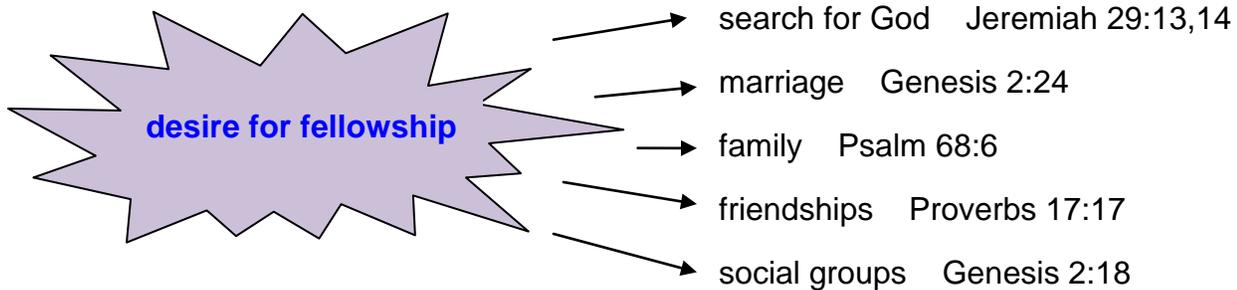
Developing in your relationships

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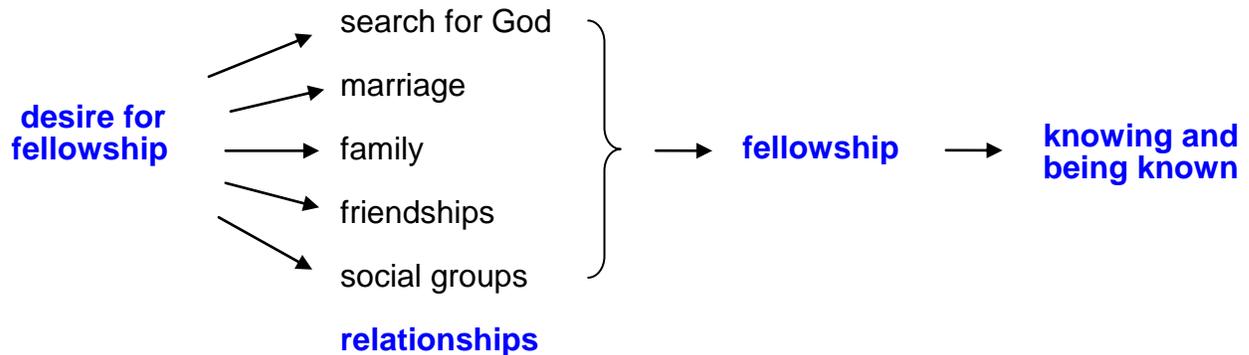
Human beings are created in the image of God Genesis 1;27.
As a result we all have in us a deep desire for fellowship, just as God does.
(God created people because He wanted fellowship. Revelation 4:11).

This desire for fellowship shows in different ways:



"It is not good for man to be alone" Genesis 2:18

Fellowship always takes place within the context of **relationships**. We develop a relationship, then in the relationship we get to know each other in fellowship. This fellowship enables one of our deepest human needs to be met: to *know* others and to *be known* by them.



The Greek word used in the New Testament for 'fellowship' is *koinonia*. It is a word with many shades of meaning including communication, sharing, participation, communion, association, fellowship, intimacy, companionship. Just what most people are searching for!

Do you have a desire for closer fellowship

- with God?
- within your marriage?
- within your family?
- in your friendships?
- within the Church?

You will only find deep fellowship as you develop in your relationships. Unfortunately, many people find it hard to develop relationships (and as a result many people are very lonely!)

Here are some practical guidelines for developing meaningful relationships: the kind of relationships in which both parties can have their deepest needs met. (And the kind of relationships that everyone wished they had!).

1. Meaningful relationships develop naturally

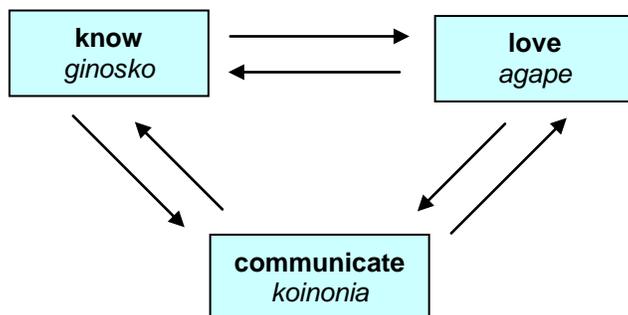
People get scared off when others force a relationship or when it feels too intense. As soon as one partner feels threatened the relationship itself is threatened.

It's best if relationships develop **slowly** and **naturally**. As you communicate with someone in a natural way you gradually get to know them. You build a solid foundation for an ongoing relationship and gradually learn to love each other.

We tend to invest most of our time in building relationships with the Lord and with our soul mate. After this comes those who we would call our 'best friends', then others who are just 'friends' or 'acquaintances'.

He who would have friends must show himself friendly. Proverbs 18:24.

Building of relationships with people and with the Lord always takes time, but it is an investment that brings forth great riches. The more time we spend with someone and the more deeply we communicate, the closer the relationship and the deeper the fellowship. Spending time communicating, loving and getting to know others is time well spent!



The triangle of relationship

- The more we communicate the more we know each other.
- The more we know each other the more we will communicate.
- The more we know each other the greater is our love for each other.
- The more we love the more we know each other.
- The more we love each other the more we will want to communicate.
- The more we communicate the more we will love each other.

As the relationship develops you both begin to experience a sense of unity and togetherness. You enjoy being together and are comfortable in each others' presence. As time goes by this develops into a deep richness in your relationship that is unforced, and mutually enriching and fulfilling. You are able to share of yourselves and have a strong feeling of knowing and being known. You may be alone at times but you know you will never be lonely!

Surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age. Matthew 28:20.

There is a friend who sticks closer than a brother. Proverbs 18:24

Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you. Hebrews 13:5.



Some questions to think about.

What is different about your relationships with the Lord; your soul mate; your best friends; your friends and your acquaintances? What is similar?

Think about your ongoing relationships. How did they begin? How did they develop?

How do you react when people put pressure on you in a relationship?

How many relationships do you have where you feel that you “know and are known”? What is about these relationships that make them so special to you?

2. Relationships tend to develop with people who are similar to you.

It is possible to have relationships across the common human barriers (class, age, gender, sexual orientation, race, educational level, status, spiritual maturity etc). It is difficult, though, to have deep relationships across these barriers because you have to work hard to understand where others are coming from. The greater the differences the more effort is required. Proverbs 18:15, 20:5.

It is good for us to have relationships with people who are different to us, as it helps to break down our prejudices, and enables us to learn about life from new perspectives. Galatians 3:26-29.

When you relate to someone who is similar to you, you are likely to have similar values, worldviews, and expectations. You have a strong basis of shared understanding upon which your relationship can build. With people who are different to you, this is not so, and it is easy to make assumptions about them and their way of life that may not be true. Jesus said we are to *love one another as I have loved you*. John 13:34. This means we are to love all people, not just the ones who are like us, or who are ‘nice’, or who relate well to us. God has made all people and loves them equally, without discrimination. John 3:16.

People out there who are very different to you are desperately seeking to find the kind of fellowship you are craving! This applies especially to the unloved and unlovely in our society.

Perhaps there is someone out there that you may never considered relating to, but with whom you could build a relationship? It could change both of your lives!

Some questions to think about.

Make a list of the people that you relate most closely to. Now examine whether you share similar values, worldview, and expectations to these people.

Do you have many (or any) people in your list that cross over the the common human barriers (class, age, gender, sexual orientation, race, educational level, status, spiritual maturity etc). If so, have you had to work more strongly on building the relationship with these people than with those who are similar to you? How?

How does “love one another as I have loved” you work out in practice in your life?

What can you do to overcome the barriers that exist between people? (And do you really want to?)



3. Relationships take place at different levels.

You can't have deep relationships with everyone. There will be 'chemistry' with some people and not with others. We may strive for good relationships with everyone but most of us have

- many acquaintances (people we like and call our friends)
- a few close friends (people we love)
- one soul-mate (with whom we share everything)

We move from being acquaintances to being friends by **sharing experiences**, by **being open** to each other and by **good communication**.



- Growth comes about through sharing in the normal experiences of life. eg: similar interests, hobbies, sports, work, Church groups, community groups....
- Rapid growth can come about through shared experiences like birth, death, sickness, accident, marriage enrichment, training, travel....
- As we communicate we get to know each other better; our love grows, and our relationship deepens.
- If you have a caring nature and a loving, giving attitude you will find that good relationships come about easily and naturally. People like to be in relationship. People want to have friends! It's nice to love and be loved.

Some questions to think about.

Ephesians 5:2 says to "live a life of love". Does this mean we should (or can) love all people equally?

Do you have (or have had) a soulmate? If so, what was different about your relationship with this person compared to all other relationships? How did this relationship develop? How has it changed with time?

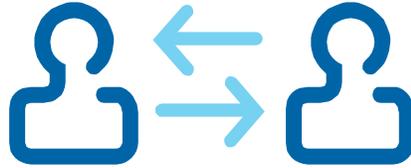
How many people would you say are your close friends? How does your relationship with these people differ from your relationship with others? How is your relationship with your close friends affected by times when you are apart?

How is your relationship with the Lord different from or similar to your relationship with your soulmate and close friends.

Do people describe you as friendly? If so, why? If not, why not?

4. Relationships are based on giving.

People's needs are met within relationships. In a healthy relationship one partner **gives** consistently so the other **receives**, and vice-versa. As a result both partner's needs are met.



Give, and it shall be given unto you. Luke 6:38

This doesn't mean we give so we can get. 'Giving to get' changes the relationship so it is based on expectations. This is almost guaranteed to cause problems in the relationship because no-one will ever be able to fully meet our expectations. Rather, the meeting of needs should come naturally as a by-product of the relationship. When both give of themselves without expectation, both receive. As time goes by each learns how to give better and this helps the relationship continue to grow.

There are many different ways that giving takes place within a relationship. All are based on a genuine desire to bring about what is best for the other person. Philippians 2:20. Our ability to give, though, is strongly affected by our self-centredness. The more selfless we are, the more we will be able to identify the needs of others and lay down our own agendas to meet these needs.

For many Christians, a pressing issue is to be able to receive from others at all! We are pretty good at giving to others and actually enjoy doing things for others especially when they are recognised and appreciated. We believe strongly that it is *better to give than to receive*. Acts 20:35. When it comes time for us to be on the receiving end it's another story. We find it hard to accept the love of others and if we do this it may make it hard for others to find ways of expressing their love for us. In healthy relationships both partners are great givers, and great receivers!

In his book "the Five love languages" Gary Chapman suggests that we have preferred ways of expressing our love:

- Words of affirmation
- Quality time
- Receiving gifts
- Acts of service
- Physical touch.

What are your preferred ways of giving and receiving love?

A relationship is likely to change significantly if its main purpose becomes 'meeting of needs', or if one partner **expects** or **demands** their 'rights'. eg:

- one may use the other as a 'crutch'
- the two may become dependant on each other
- a 'client-counsellor' relationship may emerge
- one may place the other on a pedestal
- there may be continual tension

(That's why it is difficult to be a leader. If you are a Pastor, Doctor, Teacher, Counsellor etc it is your *job* to meet other people's needs. People get used to receiving from you and find difficulty in relating to you as a person - outside of your role. As a result, being a leader can be a lonely business James 3:1-3.

Remember: leaders are people, too! They have the same needs as everyone else, including the need for close relationships).

Some questions to think about.

What are the main ways that you like to give to others?

What do you especially appreciate when others give to you?

What qualities in you are required if you are to give to others in a relationship?

What qualities in you are required to receive from others in a relationship?

Relationships are always two way. What happens if one partner in a relationship

- *gives but won't receive?*
- *receives but won't give?*
- *makes demands?*
- *has expectations that are not met?*

How does your selfishness affect your ability to give and receive?

5. Relationships enable love to be shared.

The most meaningful and wonderful outcome of a relationship is that we love each other! It doesn't matter if the relationship is with the Lord, our soulmate, our friends or our acquaintances. We love and are loved, and we know it. The love is deep, genuine, two-way and unaffected by circumstances.

It is so great to love and be loved. That's when we feel most human; most contented; most in harmony with the Lord and most in harmony with the world He has placed us in.

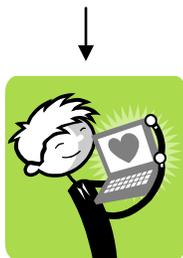
Love like this may be felt, but it must be shared for it to be worked out in practice. Love always results in action!

God places His love in our hearts and we share it willingly and fully using our words, actions and feelings. *Let us love one another, for love comes from God.* 1 John 4:7.

The Greek word for love used in the New Testament is *agape*. It is another Bible word with lots of deep meaning.

Agape love is unselfish, sacrificial, serving love. It's the kind of love that is shown when someone lays down their own desires and willingly and whole-heartedly acts for the best of others. It's the kind of love God showed us when He sent Jesus to the earth to become the way by which we can have eternal life. John 3:16

God's agape love



*sharing of
agape love*



*You really do
love me!*

How you show your love is vital. It must be selfless, genuine, and focused. In other words, agape love! The kind of love that God consistently shows towards each one of us, each and every day!

If our 'love' isn't genuine it can easily be misinterpreted and turned against us. People are very sensitive to demonstrations of 'love' that seem to have an agenda or in which there is any sense of self gain, power or control. In these kind of situations they feel threatened and quickly turn away from the relationship. The opposite is also true. When someone loves unselfishly it is quickly recognized and people respond very positively. The more unselfish our love the more open others will be to receive it. True love opens hearts!

Agape love is unselfish at its core, but in reality, it is very hard to be totally unselfish when we are seeking to love others. Our selfishness is very deep within our nature, and is always hard to put down so we can focus fully on what is best for those we love. Jesus is our best example of unselfish love. *For God so loved the world that He gave ...* John 3:16. He was able to love unselfishly and so can we!

Unselfish love involves:

- laying down your status, agenda and personal desires.
- noticing the situation in which others find themselves.
- identifying what's best for them in that situation.
- doing what's best for them.

*Jesus said:
I have set you an
example that you
should do as I
have done for you.
John 13:14*

Perhaps true, unselfish agape love is best spelled out in 1 Corinthians 13:

Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always perseveres. Love never fails. 1 Corinthians 13:4-8

When this kind of love is given and received in our relationships they are truly wonderful!

Some questions to think about.

What are the main ways that you like to show your love for others?

Are you able to give and receive love equally well?

What happens when you feel someone is 'loving' you with an agenda? What does this do to your relationship with them?

What is agape love? How well do you express this kind of love in your relationships?

How do you feel when you know you are loved? How do others feel when they know you love them?

In this study we have seen that real meaning in life comes about through relationships. In a deep relationship we are able to know and be known, and love and be loved. We know that there is always a risk in having deep relationships, and that the deeper the relationship the more both partners will be hurt if the relationship goes sour. Proverbs 18;19

It's worth taking this risk, though. God designed human life to be lived in relationship with Himself, within marriage, within families and within social relationships. The benefits of these relationships far outweigh the risks!