**Relationship Goals - Week 1 - Connection Goals**

**Message Big Idea:** The only on-ramp to connection in relationships is vulnerability.

**Scripture:** Genesis 2:25, Genesis 3:1-13, Genesis 3:21, Galatians 3:26-27

**Prop:** Selfie Stick

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**Introduction: Selfie Stick**

*(Series graphic)* How many of you have one of these? *(Hold selfie stick)* Of course, this is a selfie stick that helps you get the just right angle when taking a picture of yourself. In fact, if you are ok with it, I’d like to go ahead and get a selfie with all of you. Would that be okay? Well, I’m going to do it anyway… *(Take selfie with audience)*

A selfie stick helps you get a better picture of, well, yourself. *(Hold phone low as if you were taking a picture from that angle)* You know, you want to avoid the angles that make you look like you have 100 chins. But did you know that since the creation of the photograph, a sure-fire method has always existed to capture the best picture of yourself? Do you know what it is? Asking someone else to take it for you!

And yet, noooo…. *(Over exaggerate pretending to take a selfie)* Instead of asking an actual human being to take our picture, we’d rather walk around like a crazy person.

Think about it… We used to have people who would take our pictures for us. There was actual interaction with a real human being involved in the picture taking process. But now it’s all “selfies.” It sometimes makes me wonder if “taking a selfie” could also be called “taking a lonely.” After all, what is the point of taking 722 pictures of ourselves in the bathroom mirror?

**Series Intro**

Today we are beginning a brand new series called **“Relationship Goals.”** Maybe you know what your relationship goals are or maybe you’ve never given them much thought. During this series, I want you to think about the people you are close to or the people you wish you were close to because the single most important thing in our lives are *relationships*.

Jesus talked about it like this:

**“’Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’” - Matthew 22:37-39**

Nothing is more important in life than a relationship with God and our relationships with other people. And yet, so many of us still feel disconnected, unknown, and utterly alone.

A recent survey of 20,000 Americans conducted by Cigna Healthcare revealed some pretty startling statistics: *(add one at a time)*

* **46% of Americans report sometimes or always feeling alone.** This number has doubled in the last 50 years.
* **43% say they sometimes or always feel like their relationships are not meaningful.**
* **20% say they rarely or never feel close to people.**
* **47% say they rarely or never have meaningful in-person interactions with others.**
* **13% say zero people know them well.**

Maybe those statistics surprise you, maybe they don’t. Perhaps as you sit here today, you feel the reality of those stats yourself – the loneliness, the disconnection. I’ve been there myself. Many times.

What I’m hoping we’ll see today is that this kind of isolation has never been God’s plan for our lives. God designed us to *know* and *be known* in close, meaningful relationships.

So maybe it’s time to set some connection goals. Have you ever really thought about them? We all long for strong, stable, solid relationships. But they don’t just happen on their own. They take hard, intentional work. So how do we build them?

**Word: Genesis 2-3**

Well, to answer that question it makes sense for us to start at the beginning. After the world was created, God created animals and then the first human, Adam. Listen to how Genesis records it:

**“The Lord God said, ‘It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him.’ Now the Lord God had formed out of the ground all the wild animals and all the birds in the sky. He brought them to the man to see what he would name them; and whatever the man called each living creature, that was its name. So the man gave names to all the livestock, the birds in the sky and all the wild animals. But for Adamno suitable helper was found.” –Genesis 2:18-20**

So right from the get-go we see that human beings were not designed to be alone. In a newly created world, each day God steps back and says, “Oh, that’s good.” But when he sees Adam by himself, it’s the first time God says, “That’s not good.” He says that because we were never built to live in isolation. Thankfully, God is going to remedy this. The story continues:

**“So the Lord God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep…” –Genesis 2:21**

Which, as a quick aside, ladies – men have been falling into a deep sleep since the beginning of time, so… go easy on us, okay? The passage continues:

**“…and while he was sleeping, he took one of the man’s ribs and then closed up the place with flesh. Then the Lord God made a woman from the ribhe had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man.**

**The man said,**

**“This is now bone of my bones
    and flesh of my flesh;
she shall be called ‘woman,’
    for she was taken out of man.” – Genesis 2:21-23**

Now, in the Hebrew, what Adam says here actually rhymes. How beautiful is that? The very first recorded human words are a poem, a song rejoicing that humankind is no longer alone.

And don’t miss the verse right before Adam’s song of gratitude. Did you notice? The text says that God *(highlight)* **“brought her to the man.”** It’s here that we see something that is true throughout the entire Bible – that God is a provider and loves to give good gifts to his kids. And I don’t think this passage is just talking about a marriage relationship. It’s describing the kind of connection we all long for with other people. This companionship, this solution to the loneliness dilemma, is something God himself provides because he knows that we were never intended to do life alone. We were designed to know and be known. In fact, connection is essentially to flourishing, which is God’s dream for all of us. This is the image we’re given in Genesis 2 – complete and total connection. Just two verses later, we read:

**“Adam and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame.” – Genesis 2:25**

Perfect, unblemished connection. Vulnerability with no shame. This is our original design. This is what, deep down, we’re all wired for. And not only connection with each other, either. This type of connection, this “knowing and being known” was intended to be our relationship with God as well. But very quickly, that was severed.

*(Genesis 3:1)* This severing didn’t begin with an argument, but a suggestion. The serpent in the garden subtly asks, “Did God really say that?” He plants a seed of doubt about God’s goodness.

Typically the temptation has been depicted as the temptation to eat an apple, but let’s be honest… who has ever been tempted by an apple? I mean, throw some caramel on that and get back to me. If you have some chocolate cake – let me know. But the temptation wasn’t about an apple; the temptation was to disbelieve God’s goodness. In fact, listen to Eve’s response to the serpent:

**“The woman said to the serpent, ‘We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, but God did say, “You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die.”’” – Genesis 3:2-3**

But that’s not quite what God said. Here’s what God actually said: *(add)*

**“But you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat from it you will certainly die." – Genesis 2:17**

Eve exaggerates God’s command. God never said she couldn’t touch the fruit. These slight alterations to God’s remarks suggest that Eve has already moved slightly away from God toward the serpent’s attitude. The Creator is being painted as a little harsh and repressive, forbidding the tree even to be touched.

The centerpiece of this story is the question of the knowledge of the 'good.' The snake implies by his questions that God was holding out on Adam and Eve, keeping this knowledge of the good away from them.

So they disobey and eat the forbidden fruit. Immediately after they eat…

**“Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves.**

**Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the Lord God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the Lord God among the trees of the garden. But the Lord God called to the man, ‘Where are you?’**

**He answered, ‘I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid.’” -Genesis 3:7-10**

Humans, created for intimate connection with God and each other, now recognize their vulnerability. They are filled with shame and what do they do? They hide. These first humans go from “walking with” to “hiding from.”

And we’ve been hiding ever since.

**Ways We Hide**

There are lots of ways we hide. *(“Ways We Hide” heading with the following added one at a time)*

**Achievement.**

How many of us have felt the temptation to hide behind our accomplishments and successes? Or, maybe we hide behind:

**Humor.**

Here’s one I particularly struggle with myself. I often hide behind humor to keep others from seeing the real me. I’m not proud of this, but it is a real temptation to divert attention with a joke here or there. Maybe for you, it’s:

**Distance.**

This could be both physical or emotional. Sometimes we’re inclined to retreat from others to avoid being truly seen. Or maybe you hide through:

**Religion**

Now, that one feels different, doesn’t it? But the truth is religion is one of the safest places to hide. Without thinking about it, we can find ourselves behaving a certain way that certainly looks good to the rest of our “church friends” and yet still feel completely disconnected inside.

So, how can we come out of hiding and connect at a deep level with others, the way we were designed to live?

**Vulnerability**

The only way to truly connect is to stop hiding, to stop covering up, to allow ourselves to be seen. Simply put, the only on-ramp to connection is vulnerability. If we long for connection, the only way we’ll find it is by coming out of hiding. Now, we resist vulnerability for a number of reasons, and part of the reason is because we just don’t really understand it. So let’s learn a little bit about vulnerability from one of the world’s leading vulnerability experts, Brene Brown.

**Video: Brene Brown** [**https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZkDaKKkFi6Y**](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZkDaKKkFi6Y)

How good is that? I love the idea that vulnerability is not weakness, but our greatest measure of courage. I think poet and songwriter Criss Jami put it well:

**“To share your weakness is to make yourself vulnerable; to make yourself vulnerable is to show your strength.” – Criss Jami**

We tend to think of vulnerability as a dark emotion...so we armor up. We put up our defenses. Vulnerability is the center of all difficult emotion, but it is also the birthplace of every positive emotion – emotions like love, joy, and belonging.

**What Now: Vulnerability Challenge**

So what does it look like for each of us to choose to be vulnerable? Today, I want to issue a *(Heading, build 4 challenges underneath)* **Vulnerability Challenge**. I want you to think about the people you are close to or long to be close to, and I want to challenge each of us to take a risk this week, maybe even for the first time in a long time. I’m going to give you four possible challenges and I want you to pick one that you’ll begin working on this week. *(TP: Talk about which of these four challenges is difficult for you.)*

The first challenge is to: **Answer people honestly when they ask, “How are you?”**

Again, we’re talking about taking on these challenges with the people who would genuinely want to know how you are, your close friends and family. It’s really important to note that the level of vulnerability should always match the level of your relationship. I’m not asking you to go and spill your guts to a former high school classmate who happens to pass you in the cereal aisle at Target. That will have the exact opposite result of “connection.”

Most of us probably have a default response when a friend or family member asks, “How are you?” For me, mine is, “I’m good, thanks!” It’s quick, concise, to the point and I can usually say it while slowly backing away from the person asking the question. Honestly, I know that I am not always good when I give that answer. So why do I give an answer that’s not always completely honest?

Sometimes I think I avoid honestly answering to protect my “social media persona” of “life is always good”.

* My hair is always perfect.
* My meals are always healthy.
* My marriage and home is always tidy.
* My vacations are always exotic.
* The sun is always shining on me.

Does anyone know what I’m talking about?

Sure, *sometimes* those things happen…I mean…except for my hair. That’s always perfect. But the majority of the time I spend a lot of effort and energy portraying the perfect life when I too experience hurt, disappointment, discouragement and really hard days just like everyone else. I know that I need to work on being more intentional about *honestly* answering this question.

To answer this question honestly and vulnerably, you don’t have to say much, just something simple like, “I’m good, but I have been stressed about \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ this week.” Answer honestly if something is stressing you out. Is it work? Family? Your health? Whatever it is, share it and be honest.

So the first challenge is to answer honestly when a close friend or family member asks, “How are you?”

The second vulnerability challenge is to: **Admit a weakness.**

This is a tough one. Because, honestly, who wants to admit a weakness?

Let’s face it, when we do admit a weakness, it’s often a humble brag. Something like, “My problem is I just work too hard,” or “My downfall is I care too much.”

In this vulnerability challenge, I’m talking about being vulnerable with something you really struggle with. You can turn this into an exercise where you admit one weakness a week to someone close to you and ask for his or her support or advice. This doesn't have to be something huge that you are committing to at the beginning. It can just be a small step in the direction of vulnerability.

That’s not something we generally seek out, even if it is with a close friend. But the benefit of doing this is that we create accountability with a trusted friend about a growth area that we have identified in ourselves. That person then knows to be on the lookout for signs of that weakness appearing and then can help coach us in the right direction.

Vulnerability challenge number three is to: **Give a Compliment.**

This one feels a little different from the first two. We don't often associate being vulnerable with giving a compliment, but it can be more challenging than you think.

Have you ever noticed that it can be easier to compliment acquaintances or even complete strangers than it is to compliment someone close to you? Sometimes being honest with someone in your family about how you feel about them is one of the most vulnerable things you can do.

So what could this actually look like?

Maybe it’s about:

* Telling your sibling something you appreciate about their personality. Or…
* Texting a good friend you haven’t talked to in a while just to remind them about how you feel about them. Or…
* Rather than just signing your name, writing actual sentences in a Mother’s Day card telling your mom specific things you appreciate about her. There’s a timely one that would mean the world to your mom. Am I right, moms?

Don't withhold words that could be life-giving to someone else because they can feel vulnerable.

The final vulnerability challenge is to **Speak Up About a Hurt.**

When someone accidently or even intentionally says a thing that hurts or offends you, say so. Challenge it. Being hurt is going to happen. We are going to feel hurt or feel offended by people, and rather than holding it in and letting it fester, speak up. Express your hurt to that person. Now, it’s important to say that this has to be done with love and grace. We shouldn’t go into the conversation ready to attack with our words. I know for me, it’s so hard to be vulnerable about my own hurt, but this has been invaluable and really important to my growth and connection with other people.

So there you have it. Four possible vulnerability challenges. Vulnerability is the only on-ramp to connection so if you long to connect with the most important people in your life, I want to encourage you to take a step to come out hiding this week by taking on one of these challenges.

**Conclusion**

As we conclude, I want you to think back to our story again. God came to the garden to clothe Adam and Eve. Even in their disobedience, he was there with what they needed. And the same is true for us… Even in the ways we’ve screwed up and hid, God draws near to us. We have been clothed with Christ.

In his letter to the Galatians, the Apostle Paul writes:

**“So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.” - Galatians 3:26, 27**

When we were vulnerable, Jesus came and clothed us. Knowing that we are loved, accepted, secure with God can give us the courage to be vulnerable with each other.

So let’s come out of hiding. Let’s know and be known the way God designed us to be. Let’s take a step in the direction of our relationship goals.

**Communion Idea**

In talking about connection and vulnerability, we see Jesus emphasize these over and over again. It was for connection that Jesus invites us to the communion table. But it was with great vulnerability that made this meal even possible.

Connection, because Jesus invites everyone to a seat at the communion table. You don't have to have it all together to celebrate communion. We celebrate communion because we don't have it all together and because Jesus wants to have a relationship with you. And what could be more vulnerable than Jesus going to the cross dying for the very people and sins that put him there? As we receive communion today, lets pray that we can have the connection and vulnerability with others that Jesus offers to us.