Written by Wendy Wood

### **Chapter 1**

1. Why can these authors affirm that what you will read is true?

2. How does this give you hope?

### **Chapter 2**

1. Take a moment and reflect on the relationships in your life. Think about the relationships in your family while you were growing up.

What were the unspoken rules your family followed?

How did you handle conflict?

Were there regular patterns of forgiveness?

What were the ways you communicated?

Did you grow up in a quiet family or a loud family?

What was conversation like around the dinner table?

Were there certain taboo subjects or was everything fair game?

How much was invested in keeping relationships healthy?

Were you motivated with positive ways or with guilt and fear?

Did you relax at home or feel like you were walking on eggshells?

Did you serve one another? Was serving modeled for you?

What kind of relationship did your family have with the surrounding community?

2. Why is it important to think through the past way relationships worked in your life?

3. What hope does grace offer you whether you loved the way you grew up or you grew up in a struggling family?

4. What painful things are you experiencing right now in relationships? What is God's purpose in these painful things?

5. Why did God create us to be relational beings?

6. How does the creation of Eve reveal more of God's plan for relationships?

7. What is the purpose of all creation? Including human relationships?

8. Why is Christ the only hope for relationships?

9. "God keeps us in messy relationships for his redemptive purpose... What happens in the messiness of relationships is that our hearts are revealed, our weaknesses are exposed, and we start coming to the end of ourselves." (page 12)

Write out a prayer. Thank God for His purpose and plan for your relationships. Ask God to give you a teachable heart as you study His purpose and design for relationships. Ask God to teach you how He wants to change and grow you. Name the specific relationships that are messy and commit them to God and His plan.

10. Think about your relationships right now. How are you measuring the relationship through the size of the problems?

11. What would it look like to measure the relationship by the magnitude of God's presence?

12. How does Jesus' suffering in Matthew 27:46 give you hope in your relationships?

1. The authors describe the "frustrated relationship", the "enmeshed relationship", and the "isolated relationship". Looking at the close relationships in your life, which ones do you identify with? Briefly outline 2 relationships and describe why you see it in the category you do.

Relationship 1

Relationship 2

2. Take an honest look at your expectations. From the above 2 relationships, what expectations do/did you have for those relationships?

3. Define theology (page 20)

4. How are relationships "doing" theology every day?

5. Looking at those two relationships above, what kind of a theologian are you? (Do your responses to relationships reveal that you have a sovereign God? Do your responses to relationships reveal that you have a wise God? Do your responses to your relationships reveal that you have a good, loving, forgiving, omni-present, infinite, holy God?)

6. What is God's two-fold purpose in our relationships?

7. Respond to the statement: "Our relationships must be shaped not by what we want, but by what God intends."

8. For the relationships you mentioned above, where do you see your own selfishness in them?

9. How did Jesus' death on the cross create an entirely new community?

10. What role will the Holy Spirit play in helping you with relationships?

11. Name specific ways you have been "denying your humanity" in your relationships.

12. How is this sinning against God?

13. For the 2 relationships you have worked with in this chapter, write out one way for each relationship that you can move toward that person in compassion. Be specific.

Memorize 2 Corinthians 5:9 "Whether at home or away we make it our aim to please God."

1.James 4:1-2 says "What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you. You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain so you fight and quarrel."

Look up the word 'passion' on dictionary.com. Define it.

Look up the word 'desire' on dictionary.com. Define it.

Look up the word 'covet' on dictionary.com. Define it.

Where do fights and quarrels come from, within you or from an outside person?

2. Examine your closest relationship. Describe how the 4 components of Romans 7:21-25 are at work in your relationship.

Law -

War -

Prisoner -

Rescue -

3. The self-centeredness of sin will inevitably subvert God's design. Read the descriptions of the 6 basic ways selfishness impacts our relationships and study the chart on page 36.

How are these impacting your closest relationships right now? Rate each one on a scale of 1 (not very impacting) to 10 (very impacting). Briefly give examples for what you do that demonstrates each one.

Self-centeredness

Self-rule

Self-sufficiency

Self-righteousness

Self-satisfaction

Self-taught

4. "When love for God is replaced by love for self, we see people either as obstacles that hinder our goals or vehicles that promote them. Sinful self-interest turns the two great commands upside down: rather than loving God and using his gifts to serve

others, we love the gifts and use people to get them." (page 35 and examples on page 37)

What passions and desires have you been trying to get from people? The authors give examples of reputation, intimacy, success, comfort, control, and material things.

5. What in scripture shows us that God knows we will be sinned against? How does this change your view of relationships?

6. What relationship comes to mind when you think about being sinned against? How have you responded? According to James 4:1-2, where has your response come from?

7. How is this difficult relationship a "grace" from God?

8. What would it look like to measure this relationship according to the size of God's provision in Christ and His promise of His eternal presence?

9. The fact that our relationship issues are due to sin should give us hope! There is a "cure" for our "disease" of sin. Christ died for sin. Christ came to save the 'sick' (sinful) people. Write out a prayer of confession and repentance. How have the desires and

passions of your heart been sinful and rebellious against God? How have the desires and passions of your heart led to sin against others. Confess it as sin. Agree with God that you are responsible for your sin - it came from within you! Ask for forgiveness (1 John 1:9) and ask God to help you change as you continue to study His plan and purpose for relationships.

1. What two things does scripture say about relationships?

2. Read Romans 7:21-25. How does this passage illustrate that self-interest is still present in every believer? What is Paul's, the writer of Romans, answer for dealing with the sin that remains in us? (Hint, verse 25)

3. Read Romans 8:28-29. How does this scripture illustrate God's bigger agenda for our relationships?

4. For each instruction based on Ephesians 4:1-6, summarize what it means. Then, evaluate you view of relationships. Do you share God's view of relationships?

### Maintain the unity of the Spirit

Make every effort

Be humble, gentle, patient and forbearing in love

There is one Spirit, one Lord, and one Father

5. "God chooses to surround us with people who are different from us because He knows it will promote His purpose." How have you viewed diversity as a hindrance to relationships?

6. "Our purpose is to get what we want, but God's purpose is to give us what we need. God ultimately wants us to mature, to be built up, and to stop acting like infants. He wants the things that ruled Christ's heart to rule ours as well."

Think of one relationship that is a bit of a struggle for you. How has a difference between you and that person been used by God to grow and change you? (If you have resisted God's work in the past, how might you grow and change now that you see God has a higher purpose than you?)

7. Look at the list of tendencies and descriptions on page 50. Which of these are the biggest struggle for you? Circle the ones that apply to you and your relationships. Give an example of how each tendency has resulted in your sin within a relationship.

The tendency toward self-indulgence

The tendency toward deceit

The tendency toward anger

The tendency toward selfishness

The tendency toward unhelpful communication

The tendency toward division

The tendency toward an unforgiving spirit

8. "Struggles are not obstacles, but instruments in God's hands. Every struggle is an opportunity to experience God's grace yourself and give it to the other person." (page 51)

Which of the following is a challenge for you to trust God in?

How much wiser God's plan is for us than our plan for ourselves.

The life-changing power of truthfulness

The healing benefit of gentleness, patience, and love

The joy of serving the needs of someone else

The value of loving and wholesome communication

The beauty of functional unity in relationships

The freedom of practicing forgiveness

9. What do you want out of your relationships?

10. What do you want God to accomplish in your relationships?

11. Will you settle for ease, comfort, approval, and happiness, or are you willing to take up the biblical vision for relationships?

12. Write out a prayer asking God to forgive you for the sinful, selfish way you have used relationships. Ask God to forgive you for doubting the way He has designed relationships to be. Ask God to help you grow and change to adopt His purpose and view of relationships. Ask God to begin the work in you and to help you persevere as you continue to study how to have biblical relationships.

1. Look through the questions on page 55 in the top paragraph. Briefly write out the answer to a couple of those questions to show struggles you are currently facing in relationships.

2. What words do you use to describe yourself? Do you think of yourself in terms of the roles you have? For example son or daughter, employee, mom or dad, wife or husband, etc? Do you identify yourself by your personality? For example, shy, outgoing, thinker, easy going, competitive, etc? Do you identify yourself by your looks or ethnicity? Do you think about health or diagnosis? Do you think about strengths or weaknesses? Write a list of 10 things that describe you in the order that you place significance on them.

3. What is the foundation of relationships. See page 56, the 3rd full paragraph.

4. What would a solid foundation be built on?

5. Define identity.

6. Define worship.

7. Write what this statement means in your own words. *"We all live theologically; that is, the things we believe about God and ourselves are the foundation for all the decisions we make, all the actions we take, and all the words we speak. The theology you live out is much more important to your daily life than the theology you claim to believe."* 

8. Look up the following verses and write out **identity** is given to believers. Put a star next to the ones that mean the most to you.

**John 10:11, 14, 15, 27** – I am a little lamb that Jesus, the Shepherd cares for and loves. I know Him and He knows me. He sacrificed His life for me.

Genesis 1:27

Colossians 1:16, Romans 11:36

**Revelation 4:11** 

Romans 5:12

Romans 3:10-12, 23, Isaiah 64:6

John 3:16

1 Corinthians 15:22

Romans 5:8

John 15:9

John 15:15

John 15:25

John 17:20 – 21

John 14:2-3

Matthew 5:13

Matthew 5:14-16

I John 3:1-3

Isaiah 61:10

Psalm 45:10-11

Psalm 145:15-16

Acts 17:25

1 Corinthians 4:7

James 4:13-15

Revelation 19:7-8

I Peter 1:18-19

Philippians 1:6

I Corinthians 6:19

I Corinthians 6:20

Psalm 139:1-18

Titus 3:4-7

9. How have you looked to other people to give you identity? How have you made someone else the source of your joy and contentment?

10. What is the danger of trying to get your identity from someone else? How has this been true in your relationships?

"When I remember that Christ has given me everything I need to be the person he has designed me to be, I am free to serve and love you. When I know who I am, I am free to be humble, gentle, patient, forbearing, and loving as we navigate the inevitable messiness of relationship."

11. Is there evidence that you have looking to your relationships to give you things you have already been given in Christ?

12. What is the connection between worship, identity and activity?

#### God is the Creator.

13. Think about the relationship that is the biggest struggle right now. As you read Psalm 139;13-16, how does this help you change the way you view the other person?

14. How have you tried to recreate that person in your own likeness?

15. How has God made this person different from you. How can you celebrate God as the Creator as you look at this person?

### God is Sovereign

16. As you think about the other person in this struggling relationship, how have you failed to honor God's sovereignty in the experiences and influences that have shaped this person?

17. How can you show honor to God's sovereignty by how you respond. List 2 or 3 things that you need to change in your response to this person that would show you value God's sovereignty over the other person's life.

God as Savior

18. What sin do you need to own in this struggling relationship? How has your sin impacted the relationship?

19. How have you tried to be the "Holy Spirit" in the other person's life? Meaning, how have you attempted to convict them of their sin, change them, or accomplish your purpose in them?

20. How can remembering your identity as a sinner change your relationships?

1.Look up the following verses and write in your own words (don't copy the verses) what it says.

Proverbs 18:20-21

Proverbs 25:11

Job 19:11

James 3:8-10

1 Peter 3:10

Ephesians 4:25, 29

Colossians 4:6

Psalm 141:3

Proverbs 12: 18-19

2. Read Luke 6:45. Where do your words come from?

3. Eugene Peterson translates Proverbs 18:21 as "Words kill, words give life; they're either poison or fruit - you choose." How have your words been words of killing and poison?

- 4. What has been the harvest of your words?
- 5. What does it mean that "our words belong to the Lord"?
- 6. How do your words expose your deep need for God's forgiving grace?

7. "If the thought, attitude, desire, emotion, or purpose hadn't been in your heart, it wouldn't have come out of your mouth." What do your words reveal about your heart?

8. What does it mean to be Christ's ambassador?

9. Look up 2 Corinthians 5:15. What would it look like to no longer live for yourself, but for God in your words and communication? How would your words change?

10. Think over your conversations this week with the people you live with, work with, and do life with. Were your words about your kingdom or God's kingdom? Were you about your agenda or God's agenda? Give some specific examples.

11. What are the 3 components of speaking like an ambassador?

12. How can keeping these components in mind help you respond biblically to someone who is sinning against you?

13. What might a rebuke sound like if you speak like an ambassador? (For example, if someone is gossiping to you about someone else, what might you say?)

14. What might comfort sound like if you speak like an ambassador? (If someone is complaining about an unfair boss, what might you say?)

1.Respond to these statements. How is this challenging to your thinking and believing? "Conflict with others is one of God's mysterious, counterintuitive ways of rescuing us from ourselves. God uses it to get us where he wants to take us before we die... God can use conflict to defeat sin in us and make us more like Christ, with a love for him and others that reflects his nature."

2. How do you typically respond to conflict? Do you tend to avoid conflict or do you rush into conflict?

3. Who do you have conflict with? What is the cause of that conflict based on James 4:1-3?

4. What tends to produce conflict in your life? What are the passions or desires at war within your own heart? Comfort? Pleasure? Recognition? Power? Control? Acceptance?

For each one, write out an example of when that has led to conflict within a relationship.

5. Desiring pleasure and acceptance and comfort and those other things are not always wrong. When does a good desire become a sinful desire?

6. In your last conflict, what was more important to you than God's glory?

What temporal blessing did you want that you did not get?

What did you fear would happen if you didn't get what you wanted?

7. What does God's jealousy have to do with conflict?

8. Who is God using in your life right now that He is using to grow in repentance and faith?

9. What should you do when you are, by God's grace, aware of your sin in your relationships?

10. How does the change process work? Outline the steps of James 4.

11. Think through a common conflict you have. Walk through those steps with what it would look like to handle the situation differently next time.

12. Why should we not expect the Christian life to always be fun and easy?

1.Read Matthew 6:12. What is the connection between God forgiving us and we forgiving others who sin against us?

2. What principle do you learn from Matthew 18:21-35 about your sin, God, and other people's sin against you?

3.. How is granting forgiveness like canceling a debt? What are the promises that you make when you forgive someone who has sinned against you?

4. How is not forgiving even more costly?

5. What does it mean that forgiveness is a process, not an event. What sin have you forgiven that you still need to continue to forgive as the incident comes to mind or when bitterness threatens to creep in?

6. What is the vertical aspect of forgiveness? What does this "look and sound" like?

7. What is the horizontal aspect of forgiveness? What does this "look and sound" like?

8. How should you respond if someone sins against you (and it's either habitual or too big to let love cover it) and does seek your forgiveness?

9. What is the difference between asking for forgiveness and saying "I'm sorry"?

10. Re-read Matthew 18:21-35. What sins of yours do you stand amazed that God has not only cancelled your payment/debt for by removing the penalty of death and hell, but also given you the amazing grace of relationship with Him both now and eternally?

11. What are some of the 'wealthy' aspects of being a child of God?

12. How does thinking about what you have been forgiven and all that Christ has done for you, help you in forgiving others?

1. What is the *already* and the *not yet* time that we are living in?

- 2. Write a brief description of what each description means.
  - 1. Our relationships will never work according to our plan.
  - 2. Our relationships will never live up to our expectations.
  - 3. Our relationships will always grapple with some kind of difficulty.
  - 4. Our relationships will always need to improve.
- 3. What is God's purpose for our relationships? (bottom of page 110)

4. What are some of the character qualities that God is wanting to grow in you through relationships? Put a star next to the ones that you think you need to grow the most in.

5. "When you give up on yourself, you begin to rely on Him. When you are willing to abandon your own little dreams, you begin to get excited about His plan. When your way has blown up in your face again, you are ready to see the wisdom of God's way." (page 111-112) Have you come to the end of your dreams and your goals for your relationships? What do you think God might be trying to do in YOU in the relationship that is difficult right now?

6. The diagram below was created by Stuart Scott. Which lens of life have you been viewing life through? How have you allowed your circumstances to create doubt about God in your mind?

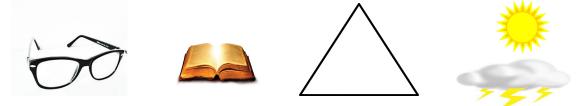
The first diagram has a lens of life that sees the circumstances. You look at how bad things are in relationships and others areas of life and believe lies about God. Your view of God is distorted because it is not based on Scripture and the Truth of who God is. You are allowing your circumstances to create doubt about the character of God. Maybe you start to doubt His goodness or His love for you. Maybe you doubt His faithfulness because your circumstances are hard.







The second diagram shows the lens of life that uses Scripture and Truth to view life. The circumstances are still the same, but because you are thinking accurately about God and who He reveals Himself to be, you trust that the difficult circumstances will be used by God to grow your faith, make you humble and dependent on Him and transform you more into the image of Christ.



7. How is it encouraging to think Truth about God?

8. Memorize Psalm 46:1-2 about God's presence. How does thinking about God always being with you give you hope in your difficult relationship?

9. Which promises from God do you need to focus on as you interact in a difficult relationship. Some suggestions might be that promises that God is using all things for your good. Another promises is that we are not yet home; heaven is our real home where we will be in the presence of God. God promises that nothing can separate us from His love. God promises to finish the work He started in us when He first placed His Spirit within us.

Which promises (there are MANY in the Bible) do you need to focus on? Write out the scripture that makes that promise. Choose at least 3 promises with verses.

10. Memorize Galatians 2:20. How can trusting that you are a new creation in Christ help you in this relationship?

11. How can you share these truths with others who are struggling in relationships also?

1. When you think about your relationships, how many of them ultimately revolve around making sure your concerns are heard and your self-defined "needs" are met? Think about how quickly you become irritated or annoyed with others...

2. What does it look like to be a servant in your relationships?

From the John 13:1-17 passage:
What do you learn about what it means to be a leader from this passage?

What do you learn about ourselves as we look at the lives of the disciples?

What will motivate you to love this way?

4. What excuses do you use for not serving others?

5. Who tempts you to give up serving them? Who has maxed out their compassion quota?

- 6. Why are your excuses and refusal to serve others not justified?
- 7. Write out Mark 10:45
- 8. Write out Matthew 20:27-28
- 9. Based on these scriptures, how are you doing in terms of your greatness?
- 10. Where do you have the privilege to serve people who are "under" you?
- 11. What picture was Jesus portraying by washing the disciples feet?

12. Why do you need to repent every day?

13. How can repenting daily give you motivation to serve others?

14. How is serving others acting out our identity?

15. Think about the "one another" passages below with three different relationships. Choose someone you love, someone who is difficult to be around, and an enemy. Read the description of each phrase and for each person, write out what it would look like to reflect Christ's grace and service to them.

A. Romans 12:10 "Be devoted to one another in brotherly love".

B. Romans 12:10 "Honor one another above yourselves."

C. Romans 15:7 "Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you in order to bring praise to God."

D. Galatians 6:2 "Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ."

E. Ephesians 4:2 "Be completely humble and gentle; be patient bearing with one another in love."

16. Actively, but quietly, serve 3 people this week. Write down what you do.

1. Where have you needed mercy extended to you over the last week?

2. Why is it helpful to remember that you need mercy too?

3. Define mercy.

"What makes mercy merciful is a heartfelt compassion that results in some kind of action toward the other person. Mercy is not just something you feel; mercy is something you do. It is a lifestyle, a stance toward others that shapes everything we say and do. Mercy has eyes. It pays attention to your distress and notices your weakness and failures. But mercy looks at these with eyes of compassion. It doesn't criticize you for the tough situation you are in or condemn you for your sin. Mercy wants to relieve your suffering and forgive your debt. It looks for ways to help you out of your struggle and remove your guilt and shame. Real mercy is restless. It is nt content with the status quo. It doesn't rest until things are better for you. It works hard, costs a lot, and is ready to hang on until the job is done."

4. Respond to this quote. What is the most difficult aspect of mercy for you? What surprises you as you read this definition? Where do you need to grow in living out mercy to those around you.

5. Write out a definition (in your own words) of the following words.

Compassion

Forgiveness

Forbearance

6. "A commitment to mercy will change your relationships, just as it will change you." For each of the following statements about mercy, write out where you need to change in your current relationships. What would it look like for you to extend mercy in this way. Be specific for one or two relationships for each one.

Mercy means you expect suffering in your relationships and are willing to endure it.

Mercy means you are willing to live with the poor.

Mercy means you are committed to persevere in hardship.

Mercy rejects a "personal happiness" agenda.

Mercy means you live with a commitment to forgive.

Mercy means you overlook minor offenses.

Mercy does not compromise what is morally right and true.

A commitment to mercy will reveal the treasures of your heart.

Giving mercy always demands mercy.

1. Look at your relationship with money. What can you conclude about your relationship with God?

Does He function as the One who provides all your needs?

Is He the One you trust for security?

What do your investments (how you spend money and your attitude about money) say about how you think about yourself and others?

What indication is there that you are investing your money in things God says are most important?

2. On a scale of 1 - 10, how sacrificial is your giving? Are you in danger of being a "cul-de-sac" of God's grace instead of a conduit?

What would it look like to be sacrificial in your giving? What change do you need to make this week?

3. On a scale of 1 - 10, how spontaneous are you in giving? Do you actively look for ways to give away your resources?

What would it look like to be spontaneous in giving away your resources? What do you need to change this week?

4. Is your giving from a heart of submission to God (or out of religious duty, to impress others, obligation, resentment)?

5. What does your giving reveal about your heart toward God?

6. What does your relationship with money reveal about what you think is most important in life?

7. To what degree is the kingdom of God driving your life?

8. Think about how you spend your time each day. Are you "redeeming the time" to show the grace of Christ to others? What might that look like in your life. Think through the ways you spend your time: work, running errands, family time, chores, driving,

going to appointments, etc. What does it look like to display the grace of Christ to others in these situations?

9.. Why is "I just need to get through this season of life" an ungodly understanding of your current responsibilities and opportunities?

10."God wants us to see the daily struggles of life as critical moments of redemptive opportunity rather than hindrances." Who do you interact with regularly that you can display Christ's grace to this week?

11. Where do you see your relationships changing as you go through this study? How are your relationships growing to reflect more of God's priorities over your own priorities? How have your relationships grown to share God's love with others rather than be consumed with getting what you want from a relationship?

1. How is admitting you need help a great sign that God is already working?

2. What two deeper realities does imagination give us a deeper sense of?

3. *"There has been a radical change in the core of our being." Ezekiel 36:26 says, "I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh."* What hope does this offer in your relationships right now? For you and the other person?

4. "Our reconciliation with God gives us a relationship with him that should alter the way we respond to everything. God is now my Father and I am his child. He looks on me with favor. I am the object of his attention and affection. I have access to his care. He blesses me with His resources. He offers ongoing forgiveness and cleansing as I struggle with sin. He promises never to leave or forsake me. He makes a commitment to finish the work of change he has begun in me." How does this change your view of your relationship struggles? What hope does this give you right now? How can you encourage the other person in your relationship with this truth?

5. "God provision simply can't be reduced to answers and strategies because His provision is tied to His presence. God knows that our need is much bigger and deeper than what we think will satisfy it. So He not only gives us practical advice, He gives us Himself. He is our wisdom. He is our strength. He is our forgiveness. He is our Father. As Moses said in Exodus 33:15 'If you Presence does not go with us, do not send us up from here.'" How do you need to change your believing and thinking about your relationships? What is going to change in your speaking and acting as you focus on God's presence and His active involvement in your relationships?

How can you offer encouragement to the other person in the relationship with this truth?

6. Re-read Psalm 121 and Romans 8:28-39. Pray and ask God to open your spiritual eyes to see His redemptive work in your relationships. Commit to pray for this regularly.

7. Over the next few weeks, spend time in these scriptures where God reveals His mighty, powerful, holy, sovereign, compassion, love and grace and more of who He is. Write out what amazes you about God from each passage. How will these new insights help you imagine all that God can do in your relationships?

Begin with prayer before reading:

Psalm 119:18 "Open my eyes, that I may behold wondrous things from your law."

Isaiah 40

Job 38-39

Ephesians 1, 2, 3

2 Peter 1

Psalm 139

1. Where are you experiencing God building his kingdom in your relationships? Where are you experiencing humility? Forgiveness? Patience? Godly conflict?

2. How are you giving God glory for your relationships and the work He is doing?

3. What would it look like to "apply salt to decaying relationships"? What would that look like and sound like?

4. What ministry opportunities exist for you with the people God has placed in your path? Read the list in the gray box on page 174 and think creatively about who you can be salt and light to.

5. Why does keeping the gospel at the forefront of your mind every single day allow you to display worship and theology to others?

6.How has God lovingly pursued you? How can this lead you to pursue others, even when they don't want to be pursued?

7. What has changed in your relationships the most as a result of this study?