

Warm-up Activity or Question

Choose one and pursue it as a group.

1. **Activity.** Hand out note cards or sheets of paper to each person present. Make sure each participant has a pen or pencil.
 - *Secretly* write down the first and last name of one person in response to the following question. *If you could go to dinner next weekend with any living person (other than your family members) from anywhere on the planet, who would it be?*
 - Collect all the answers and read them out one at a time, asking the group to guess which member of the group wrote down that answer.
 - Once the group identifies a participant's selection. Encourage that person to tell us a little bit about the selection, e.g., why did you choose that person?
2. **Question.** We all come here with burdens. If there were one burden you could unload or resolve in your life this week, what would it be? Tell us a little bit more about that.

Can You Relate?

In this week's Scripture Paul models for us transparent intimacy in our relationships and calls us to avoid binding relationships with those who do not share our faith.

1. **Unrequited Love.** Like a stiff-spined teenager, limp-armed who refuses to warm to a parent's loving embrace, the Corinthians at this point have not matched Paul's outpouring of love for them. Someone read aloud:

*"¹¹ We have spoken **freely** to you, Corinthians, and **opened** wide our hearts to you. ¹² We are not withholding our affection from you, but you are withholding yours from us. ¹³ As a fair exchange—I speak as to my **children**—open wide your hearts also."* (NLT 6:11-13).

Paul has written transparently to his audience, **freely** defending the integrity of his ministry. And with vulnerability he has **openly** demonstrated his genuine love for them. Their spiritual father in the faith yearns for relationship with them. As relational beings created in the image of a triune God, we recognize instinctively that one-sided love is no relationship at all.

With whom do you identify in this story at this moment? Paul? Or the Corinthians? Let's take a full minute of silence and bring to mind an experience of one-sided love in your life from within your own family or extended family.

- Tell us about that. What was at the root of the problem? Some catalysts for thought:
Alienation? Betrayal? Unforgiveness? Vanity? Pride? Greed? Childishness? Control?
 - Based on your experience, what advice would you give to a Christian friend encountering similar circumstances?
2. **Don't Be Unequally Yoked.** Having urged the necessity of genuine love in a believer's relationships, Paul turns to warn them to avoid being "unequally yoked" in those relationships. The imagery is from Deut. 22:10 ("*Don't plow with a donkey and an oxen yoked together.*" MSG). Working at different paces and with different perspectives, the two animals could not plow a straight row. In modern imagery, it would be "Don't mount different sized wheels on your axle." The car will be hobbled, and you won't be able to keep it on course.

- a. **Scope.** This doesn't mean your yardman and physician must be Christian but surely applies to entering into marriage or long-term business partnerships. It's helpful to think of the yoke as a binding relationship that is difficult to exit.
 - b. **Exits.** This verse is not a call to depart from marriages with unbelievers. See 1 Cor. 7:13. The believer is to remain as a living witness to the unbelieving spouse.
 - With those guardrails in place, let's take a full minute of silence to think of an example where misalignment between you and a non-believer created tension in your life over matters of faith, integrity, or morality.
 - Tell us a bit about that.
 - Based on your experience, what advice would you give to a Christian friend encountering similar circumstances?
- 3. Call to Holiness.** Having called us away from unholy relationships, Paul calls us to holiness, a call to be different – set apart. Read 6:16b-18. Paul particularizes his call, urging us to work toward holiness in our lives because of awe and reverent respect for God. Read 7:1.
- This ongoing process of cleansing our lives from unholy things is how we participate with God in “bringing holiness to completion.”
 - God set you apart as His - to be different from the world, to be distinctive.
 - Set aside for this purpose religious bumper stickers, wrist bands, hats, and t-shirts. And set aside just for now going to church and any on-campus volunteer work.
 - Now, take a moment to think of how your faith has been apparent to the world so far this year? How did that happen? Tell us about it!
 - How would you like your faith walk to change for the rest of this year?
 - Paul then identifies for us the fuel that drives that process: our awe of God (reverent respect; the fear of the Lord) (7:1).
 - Take two minutes to call to mind a moment in which you felt the awe of God.
 - How did that happen? Tell us about it!

Live It Out

Let's take a moment and go around the group to identify what we want to take away from this discussion. Any quiet-time reflection required?

- SOAP quiet-time journaling is a great starting point for drawing closer to God. Consider pledging with someone in the group to do quiet time this week - and texting one another for support as you go through it.
- Try resolving to start each day pouring your heart out to God in transparent prayer.
 - **How?** This week, **before you get out of bed** (making God your first priority), pick up your phone or tablet and play *Here's My Heart* by Casting Crowns. **Try closing your eyes as you listen.** Absorb the lyrics. Play them back in your head through the day. Report next time on how that went. That song is on YouTube: <https://youtu.be/qkSBmRAVXNc>

Encourage members of the group to commit time to praying for one another, encouraging and meeting one another's needs, fellowshiping together, and interceding for the other members. Contact absent group members and encourage them to continue to meet and to return together at the next scheduled gathering.