Are you the kind of person who’s going to move through life being able to have relationships that are meaningful and fulfilling and significant? Are you able to relate?

Louie Giglio
Relat(able) Study Guide

Orientation

If you have ever been near schoolchildren on a playground, one of the things you are bound to overhear is the accusation, “That’s not fair!” Indeed, fairness and a sense of equality is something children carry with them from a very early age. This has much to do, of course, with the deep need for justice God has placed in all of us. It also has something to do with what we learned, early on, to expect from life: that at its best, everything should come out “even” in the end.

But here’s the problem. As Christians, we know from the crucifixion of Jesus that life, justice, and even God are not fair. Life is not fair because of the sin that corrupts and destroys the people of God. Justice is not fair because God’s justice is accomplished by an act of supreme unfairness, Jesus’ death on the cross. And God himself is not fair because in spite of what people may deserve, God keeps offering grace to everyone. This is who God is. God can’t help it. God is a mercy giver, and in a world that thirsts for fairness, sometimes this can be hard to accept.

This week in Relat(able), Louie kicks off the series by drawing connections between our love of God, our neighbors, and ourselves. He argues that if one of these loving relationships gets out of order, it will skew the other two as well. They are all connected in a kind of dynamic interdependence, and what fuels them is God’s radical mercy and love for his people.

Louie also suggests that our relational health might have as much to do with our ability to receive mercy as it does with our ability to give it, which brings us back to fairness. The kind of mercy God offers is not fair. It just is not. We did not earn it. We cannot justify it, and yet it is there, available to us,
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every day. This week’s session is about opening up to this kind of radical, unfair love. The kind of love that is at the heart of what God is doing in Christ. The kind of love that is changing the world. The kind of love that can also change lives.

When we open up to this kind of love, everything changes. The question for this week is, “Are you open to that?”

Welcome and Checking In

Go around the group and invite the members to introduce themselves, and then answer the following questions:

Which scenario recharges your batteries: spending time with people, or spending time alone?

If you could describe your hopes for this study in one word, that word would be: __________. Why did you answer the way you did?

Hearing the Word

Read Matthew 20:1 – 16 aloud in the group. Invite everyone to listen for a fresh insight during the reading.

1 For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire workers for his vineyard. 2 He agreed to pay them a denarius for the day and sent them into his vineyard.
About nine in the morning he went out and saw others standing in the marketplace doing nothing. He told them, “You also go and work in my vineyard, and I will pay you whatever is right.” So they went.

He went out again about noon and about three in the afternoon and did the same thing. About five in the afternoon he went out and found still others standing around. He asked them, “Why have you been standing here all day long doing nothing?”

Because no one has hired us,” they answered.

He said to them, “You also go and work in my vineyard.”

When evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his foreman, “Call the workers and pay them their wages, beginning with the last ones hired and going on to the first.”

The workers who were hired about five in the afternoon came and each received a denarius. So when those came who were hired first, they expected to receive more. But each one of them also received a denarius. When they received it, they began to grumble against the landowner. “These who were hired last worked only one hour,” they said, “and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the work and the heat of the day.”

But he answered one of them, “I am not being unfair to you, friend. Didn’t you agree to work for a denarius? Take your pay and go. I want to give the one who was hired last the same as I gave you. Don’t I have the right to do what I want with my own money? Or are you envious because I am generous?”

So the last will be first, and the first will be last.
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In groups of two or three, share your answers to the following questions:

What was one thing that stood out to you from the reading? Was this a new insight?

What situation do you imagine Jesus might have been addressing when he told this parable?

What does this parable have to say about “fairness”? Does God have a different definition than we do?
Watch the Video

Play the video segment for Session 1. As you watch, use the following outline to record any thoughts or concepts that stand out to you.

Notes
The degree to which we receive what God has given to us determines the degree to which we are able to have meaningful relationships with ourselves and with other people.

Two reasons why we don’t accept what God wants to give us: (1) we don’t think we’re worthy, and (2) we don’t believe that what he has to offer is better than what we currently have.

Apart from our relationship with God, our relationship with ourselves is the most important relationship we will have in this life.
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The number one flaw we experience in relationships is that we expect more of other people than they can realistically give and be in our lives.

Jesus can relate to us because (1) he took on the constraints of entering into time and space, and (2) he took on flesh and blood and became human just like us.

Jesus relates to us by (1) not giving us what we deserve, and (2) coming all the way to find us and show us mercy. This affects how we relate, because in the same measure we receive this love, we are able to extend that love to others.
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Group Discussion

Take a few minutes with your group members to discuss what you just watched and explore these concepts in Scripture.

First Impressions
1. Before everyone shares in the large group, turn to one or two people next to you and finish this sentence: “After watching the video, one question I now have is…”

Community Reflection
2. Do you consider yourself a people person? Why did you answer the way you did?

3. What is one thing you learned about relationships from the family you grew up in?
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4. In the video, Louie notes that a primary flaw we experience in relationships is that we expect more of other people than they can realistically provide. Do you think this is true? Why or why not?

5. We are beloved; it is our identity in Christ. Which is harder for you to do: to be honestly critical of yourself or to receive praise? Why did you answer the way you did?

6. Louie remarks that what we expect from others is certainly not what we want all the time from God. We want him to give us way more grace than we give to other people. Do you relate to this statement? If so, how? If not, why not?
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7. In the Matthew 20 parable, Jesus challenges his audience to consider the ways they resent God’s lavish grace being shown to people they think are undeserving. Have you ever felt as if there was someone who did not deserve God’s grace? Has that person ever been you? Did you learn anything from Louie in this session that helped?

Becoming Relat(able)

For this activity, each participant will need a blank piece of paper, a pen, and an envelope.

In this session, you have explored what it means to be able to relate. It involves health in three relationships: your relationship with God, your relationship with yourself, and your relationship with others.

Take a few minutes to pray, and then answer the following question on one side of the piece of paper you have been given:

If God could grow me in one of these relationships, which one would it be, and how would I want to grow? Be as honest as you can be. No one will ever see it but you.

Once you have written your answer, write any specifics you want to include about the relationship and then seal it in your envelope. Finally, as a sign of being open to God’s movement in this area of your life and accepting God’s view of you, write the word beloved on the outside of the envelope.
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Put the envelope in the pages of this study guide. Each week when you return to your guide, let it be a reminder to you of your prayer and how God sees you. You are beloved.

Closing Prayer

Close the session by reading Psalm 103 aloud as a prayer:

1 Praise the Lord, my soul;
   all my inmost being, praise his holy name.
2 Praise the Lord, my soul,
   and forget not all his benefits —
3 who forgives all your sins
   and heals all your diseases,
4 who redeems your life from the pit
   and crowns you with love and compassion,
5 who satisfies your desires with good things
   so that your youth is renewed like the eagle’s.
6 The Lord works righteousness
   and justice for all the oppressed.
7 He made known his ways to Moses,
   his deeds to the people of Israel:
8 The Lord is compassionate and gracious,
   slow to anger, abounding in love.
9 He will not always accuse,
   nor will he harbor his anger forever;
10 he does not treat us as our sins deserve
   or repay us according to our iniquities.
11 For as high as the heavens are above the earth,
   so great is his love for those who fear him;
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12 as far as the east is from the west,  
    so far has he removed our transgressions from us.
13 As a father has compassion on his children,  
    so the LORD has compassion on those who fear him;
14 for he knows how we are formed,  
    he remembers that we are dust.
15 The life of mortals is like grass,  
    they flourish like a flower of the field;
16 the wind blows over it and it is gone,  
    and its place remembers it no more.
17 But from everlasting to everlasting  
    the LORD’s love is with those who fear him,  
    and his righteousness with their children’s children —
18 with those who keep his covenant  
    and remember to obey his precepts.
19 The LORD has established his throne in heaven,  
    and his kingdom rules over all.
20 Praise the LORD, you his angels,  
    you mighty ones who do his bidding,  
    who obey his word.
21 Praise the LORD, all his heavenly hosts,  
    you his servants who do his will.
22 Praise the LORD, all his works  
    everywhere in his dominion.  
Praise the LORD, my soul. Amen.

(Note: You can also read this psalm responsively by whole verse. The leader would read verse 1, and the group would read verse 2 in response, and so on.)
BETWEEN-SESSIONS
PERSONAL STUDY

You are invited to further explore the good news of \textit{Relat(able)} by engaging in any or all of the following between-sessions activities. Remember, this part of the \textit{Relat(able)} experience is not about following rules or doing your homework. Rather these activities—arranged according to their purpose of growing your relationship with \textit{God}, \textit{self}, and \textit{neighbor}—are designed to give you an opportunity to be open to God and his work in your relationships. \textit{Be sure to read the reflection questions after each activity and make a few notes in your guide about the experience.} There will be a time to share these reflections at the beginning of the next session.

\textbf{Love God: Get a Mercy Shovel}

The name of this session is “The Shovel and the Spoon,” based on Louie’s metaphor that when it comes to mercy, God heaps it on with a huge shovel, not a spoon. In the last part of this week’s video, Louie says, “When you wake up tomorrow, just imagine that there is an angel standing by your bed, and he’s
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just shoveling mercy and pouring it on you before you even hit the snooze button.” In this activity, you are invited to do more than just imagine—you are invited to make this a reality each day this week.

First, get an actual shovel. This can be a big shovel, a small shovel, a new shovel, or one lying around your garage.

Second, write the word mercy on the blade of the shovel. You can use a sticky note, a paint pen, or a felt-tipped marker. Whatever you choose, just make sure the word mercy is unmissable in the way it is attached to the shovel.

Third, take your “mercy shovel” into your bedroom and prop it up beside your bed or someplace else obvious. You can even arrange it so that it will get in your way. Wherever you put it, make sure you will see it every day this week.

Once you have set up your mercy shovel, use it as a devotional tool. Each time you see it, let it act as a reminder of the mercy, grace, and love that God has for you. God’s mercy is new every morning, so let this be a daily reminder to you of that fact. Respond with a prayer of thanksgiving, or just take a deep breath as a way of receiving God’s unconditional grace and love.

It’s for you.
No strings attached.
No matter what.
By the shovel-full.

(Note: You can also do this activity by carrying a small garden spade with you this week. Take this small shovel with you to the office, or to school, or in the car. This would be another way to practice constant awareness of God’s radical, overwhelming, ever-new mercy.)
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Take note of how God uses this activity to speak to you. Make a few notes about it below to share with the group next week.

Pray. God is near.

The love of God trumps whatever else we have experienced in life. The fundamental idea is not what our dad was like and not what our mom was like, because we can’t change that. The fundamental idea is how willing we are and what is our capacity to receive what God is wanting to give us today. That is going to be the number one shaper of our ability to have a meaningful and successful relationship with ourselves and with the people around us.

Louie Giglio, Relat(able) video

Love Yourself: Have Fun!

In the video this week, Louie says that our ability to have healthy interpersonal relationships is directly connected with our ability to love God and love ourselves. Louie’s connections are built on the words of Jesus, who said that the second greatest commandment in all of the Law is to love your neighbor as yourself (see Matthew 22:36 – 40). So, it stands to
reason that if the way you love yourself gets off track, it might skew your other relationships as well.

For most of us, loving ourselves in a healthy way is an underdeveloped skill and spiritual practice. We train in loving God through worship and prayer, and we train in loving our neighbors through service and fellowship. However, when it comes to loving ourselves, we do not have many practices on which to draw. That is, until now . . .

This week you are invited to practice loving yourself in a holy, righteous, and Christ-centered way—by doing something fun, just for you! This could be seeing a movie, taking time to read, going on a bike ride, or visiting a museum. Whatever it is, make sure it’s something that gives you life and restores you.

Remember to pay attention to anything God shows you during this time, and make a few notes about your experience to share with the group next week.

Now, get out there and do something fun for you.

This week.

In the name of Jesus.
The Shovel and the Spoon

God’s mercies are new every single day. So when you wake up tomorrow, just imagine there is an angel standing by the bed, and he’s just shoveling mercy. He’s pouring it on you before you even hit the snooze button. This is not yesterday’s mercy. This is new mercy today. We’ve got lots of angels, and lots of shovels, and it’s like “mercy on your life today . . . mercy on your life . . . big shovel of mercy on your life.”

Louie Giglio, Relat(able)

Love Your Neighbor: Alone Together

In 2012, Sherry Turkle (professor in the Program in Science, Technology, and Society at MIT and the founder and director of the MIT Initiative on Technology and Self) gave a TED talk where she observed that technology is not just changing what we do but also changing who we are. One of the primary ways we are being changed is in our ability to relate to one another.

For this exercise, watch Turkle’s TED talk at the TED website (http://www.ted.com/talks/sherry_turkle_alone_together), and reflect on the following questions:

• Do you think our communication technology is a good thing or a bad thing? Why did you answer the way you did?
• Turkle makes an important distinction between connection and conversation. Do you agree with her observation?
• At the end of her talk, Turkle advocates for cultivating the practice of solitude. She argues that learning how
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to be alone is what will help us know how to relate to others in the rest of our life. Do you think she’s right? Is being alone hard or easy for you? Why?
• Three of the Gospels tell us the first thing Jesus did after his baptism was go into the wilderness where he fasted for forty days. Read one of the accounts of this event in Matthew 4:1 – 11, Mark 1:12 – 13, or Luke 4:1 – 13. Was it easy for Jesus when he was alone? What is the connection between faithful solitude and trusting God with the hardest things we are called to do?
• How does Sherry Turkle’s talk relate to Louie’s message from Relat(able) this week?

Use the space below to write any key points or questions you want to bring to the next group meeting.