

The DNA of RELATIONSHIPS

Downloadable Small Group Study Guide

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With Ted Cunningham

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LEADER'S NOTES

The study guide serves as a supplement to the book by Dr. Gary Smalley, *The DNA of Relationships*. Here are a few suggestions for implementing this guide in your small group:

1. On the first night of small group...
 - ? Share with the small group the story of Jim and Mary from chapter 1.
 - ? Ask the group participants to share stories from their lives that can relate to Jim and Mary.
 - ? Wait and pass out *The DNA of Relationships* book until the end of the small group.
 - ? Have them read Chapters 1 and 2 for homework.
2. As an introduction, begin each night of small group with a story from the assigned chapter.
3. Open with prayer.
4. Remind group members of the need for confidentiality. Vulnerability in members will shut down if confidentiality is threatened.
5. Work through the discussion questions, allowing each member the opportunity to respond.
6. End by asking for goals and take-away value. Ask for ways that you, the leader, can hold them accountable.
7. Close with a prayer of commitment.
8. Be sure to remind them of the next week's chapter.

Chapter 1 & 2 – The DNA of Relationships

*“To love **the Lord God** with all your heart, soul, mind and strength and the second one was like the first, **love your neighbor** in the same way that you **love yourself**.” Matthew 22:37*

Identify the 3 relationships in this passage.

1. You are made for relationships. Relationships are part of the creation design. You are created to need relationships.

What type of relationship do you have with God, others, and yourself? Be honest with yourself and really evaluate. What kind of relationship with God do you desire? What kind of relationship do you want with others?

You are made for three kinds of relationships: With others, with yourself, with God.

You are made with the capacity to choose. You can't always choose your relationships, but you can choose how you will act in those relationships.

Describe in a few sentences your typical reactions when faced with difficult relationships.

You are made to take responsibility for yourself. You are responsible for your choices and actions. You cannot change the other person, but you can take responsibility for your own behavior.

Have you ever identified a pattern in your relationships where the problem is always the

other person's fault? Have you ever felt helpless when the other person refuses to change?

When you find yourself stuck in a relationship, what steps do you take in an attempt to change the other person?

All three relationships must be in balance.

2. You have a relationship with others, with yourself, and with God. Each of those relationships is not only important, but each is intricately related to the others.

Does having a relationship with yourself strike you as odd? If so, why?

3. It's never just about the other person. The problem you have with another person is often a problem you have with yourself.

List 2-3 of your "pet peeves" when it comes to relationships.

It's never just about the other person.

4. Put yourself in the picture. When you see yourself in the same "frame" as the other person, you begin to see yourself as part of the problem as well as part of the solution.

Why is it easier to point the finger at someone else rather than looking closely at yourself?

5. Get God's lens for a healthy view of your relationships. Only when you see your relationships through an accurate lens--God's lens—can you see others as he sees them and see yourself as he sees you. That lens is the basis for healthy relationships.

How does your picture of God affect the way you view yourself? Do you have a hard time viewing God as your Father?

How does your picture of God affect the way you view others?

6. All three relationships must be in balance. Each of the three relationships is so tied to the others that if one is out of balance, the other two will be out of balance too.

Which of the three relationships is out of balance in your life? Describe the symptoms that point to the imbalance.

When you have a clear picture of how God views you, you better understand and relate to others.

7. Choice equals change. All relationships involve choice. When you choose to work toward healthy relationships, you often find things that need to change. You must choose to change, even when the change is scary.

What type of choices do you make with others? Are you willing to repair any of your relationships? Make a list of the relationships that are in need of repair.

8. Not choosing is itself a choice. If you postpone making a choice, making a change, then you are choosing. By not doing anything, you force change to be done to you.

Would you say it is time to start making some changes? List a few of the changes you would like to make.

Chapter 3: The Dance that Destroys Relationships

“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. ⁹But the LORD God called to the man, ‘Where are you?’

¹⁰ He answered, ‘I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid.’” Genesis 3:8-10

In the above passage, can you identify man’s common response to God? What’s the problem? The core problem.

1. The external problem is rarely the problem. What we think is the problem--finances, the other person--is not the core problem.

List the issues, people or problems that you tend to blame for your stuck relationships.

2. The core problem is our fear. The problem in nearly every conflict is that something touched each person's core fear. We wrestle with a core fear.

To better understand your core fear, ask yourself the “So what” question. When you ask yourself that question, can you identify a common thread that touches each conflict you experience?

3. Each of us is involved in a Fear Dance. Triggered by a core fear, we get stuck in a destructive Fear Dance that involves our hurts, wants, fears, and reactions.

The external problem is rarely the real problem.

How do you respond when others “push your fear buttons?”

4. Don't expect the other person to be the solution. When we hurt, we want the other person to change so that we won't feel the hurt. But the solution is not to change the other person.

How affective have you been in the past at changing others?

5. The Fear Dance is functionally dysfunctional. Because the Fear Dance is the only dance many people know how to do, they "function" in the midst of dysfunction. They adopt coping mechanisms, which often only deepen the problem.

The external problem is rarely the real problem.

In your own words, but from the other person's perspective, how would they say you react or cope when faced with dysfunction?

6. We can break the rhythm of the Fear Dance. By identifying our core fears and by understanding that the other person isn't the problem, we can begin to learn new dance steps to healthier relationships.

What reactions do you want to work on throughout this study? What should you do immediately after your buttons are pushed?

Chapter 4 - The Power of One: Taking Personal Responsibility

"You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'Do not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.'²² But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment.

Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you,²⁴ leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift. Settle matters quickly with your adversary who is taking you to court. Do it while you are still with him on the way, or he may hand you over to the judge, and the judge may hand you over to the officer, and you may be thrown into prison." Matthew 5:21-25 (NIV)

Who do you need to forgive? Who do you need to ask for forgiveness?

1. Take control of your thoughts, feelings, and actions. You are part of the picture in every relationship, in every Fear Dance. You can choose to do something. Remember that your thoughts determine your feelings and actions.

Circle the thoughts or words that best describe your frustrations in relationships:

Your thoughts control your feelings and reactions.

"You don't see it do you? You're too negative and it's driving me away!"

"You say you're sorry, but you keep doing the same mean things over and over. You'll never change!"

"It's your fault that he talks to me like that, you're a great example!"

You are in charge of how you react.

"Forget it then. Go out with your friends, see if I care! Stay out all night, you like them better than me anyway."

"I'm not talking about that any more, it's too hurtful."

"I'll just leave the house if you continue talking about this. End of discussion; its over."

"That subject is not open for discussion."

2. Take responsibility for your buttons. You have a choice about how you react when someone pushes your fear button. No one controls how you react. You alone do that. You are in charge of your buttons.

In 2-3 sentences, share a scenario where your buttons were pushed.

3. Don't give others the power to control your feelings. Focus on the right person. Personal responsibility means refusing to focus on what the other person has done. The only person you can change is yourself. You can stop the Fear Dance. You control whether you get stuck in the Fear Dance. It takes only one person to stop the destructive dance.

You can stop the fear dance.

When conflict raises its ugly head, where do you place blame? Your spouse? Kids? Boss? Job? Church? Money? What steps could you take to accept personal responsibility in your life?

4. Don't look to others to make you happy. Don't fall into the "If you scratch my back, I'll scratch yours" myth. Come to relationships with realistic expectations.

List some unrealistic expectations that you have of your spouse, children, parents, co-workers, boss, etc.

Forgiveness heals relationships.

5. Become the CEO of your life. You can't force people to meet your needs, but when you express legitimate needs to others, they can choose to step in to assist you.

How would you ask someone pushing your buttons to help you during your maturity journey?

6. Forgiveness heals relationships. Taking personal responsibility means you confess your wrongdoing and ask for forgiveness. You also forgive others.

Who do you need to forgive? Who do you need to ask for forgiveness?

Chapter 5 – Safety: Create a Safe Environment

Read the following passage and list 2 reasons why we make bad judges.

"Do not judge, or you too will be judged. ²For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.

³"Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? ⁴How can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when all the time there is a plank in your own eye? ⁵You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye."

Matthew 7:1-5 (NIV)

1. When you create a safe environment, relationships flourish.

What relationships do you not feel safe in right now? Have you created any unsafe environments?

2. Respect the wall. When people are threatened, they build a wall. Instead of trying to knock down the wall with a sledgehammer, respect the wall. Create a safe environment in which the other person can gradually take down the wall.

Would you say that you are perceptive in identifying walls others have built in protecting themselves from you? If so, outline the steps you take in attempting to tear down the wall.

See others as God sees them.

3. Honor others. When we honor others, we see them as valuable. We see others as God sees them. Honor creates a safe environment in which people can come together.

What are some ways you can express honor to your friends and family? What words can you use?

4. Suspend judgment. When we express genuine interest in people rather than judge them, relationships have a better chance of growing.

Would others describe you as negative, pessimistic, or judgmental? Or would they describe you as positive, optimistic and unconditionally loving?

5. Value differences. When we value our differences rather than make them the focus of our conflict, we create safety.

Make a list of the differences between you and someone you struggle with relationally.

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6. Be trustworthy. When we are trustworthy with others, we dedicate ourselves to treating them as the valuable and vulnerable people that they are. When we are trustworthy with ourselves, we act in ways consistent with our own value and vulnerability.

Next to each point you listed above, express the value of that difference and how it can be used to strengthen the relationship.

Chapter 6 - Self-Care: Keep Your Battery Charged

Read Luke 2:52 and identify the 4 ways in which Jesus grew.

Why does loving and taking care of ourselves sound selfish?

What words would you use to describe your physical health right now? (i.e. tired, exhausted, chipper)

1. Self-care is essential to all relationships. If you don't take care of yourself, you will have nothing to give to a relationship.

The only way you have something to offer a relationship is to make sure you are caring for yourself.

On a scale of 1-10, how charged are your batteries:

Spiritually _____

Emotionally _____

Physically _____

Relationally _____

For any battery lower than a 10, what can you do to “recharge?”

2. We must love God above all and love others as we love ourselves. This great commandment indicates that we can love others only as we love ourselves. When we take care of our whole selves--spiritually, emotionally, intellectually, and physically--we set ourselves up for healthy relationships.

Why does loving ourselves sound selfish?

3. Your emotions are your information system. Your emotions inform you about what you are feeling.

What are your emotions telling you about your pace of life at this moment?

4. Listen to your emotions. Identify your emotions, and evaluate whether or not they are true.

Identify some negative emotions you may have as a direct result of negative thinking. What type of actions are your thoughts producing at home, at work, with family and friends?

5. Self-care is not selfish. Taking good care of yourself is one of the best things you can do for your family, friends, and coworkers.

Is your relationship with yourself healthy? Do you value yourself as God does? Write down three ways in which you can choose to honor God by honoring yourself.

6. Good self-care involves receiving, attending, and giving. You need to receive from others, attend to your legitimate needs, and give to others out of your fullness.

Do you take enough time out for yourself? If not, list 2 or 3 activities you can cut out to free up some time. What roadblocks might you encounter in freeing up this time? How will you handle them?

7. You can release your stress and find peace by:

- ? Reducing expectations.
- ? Receiving everything that happens as filtered by God.
- ? Using every stressful experience as an opportunity to worship God.
- ? Resting in God, listening quietly, and asking him what he's telling you to do.

Are your thoughts true as recorded in Scripture about trials, gossip, the view of yourself, God's love, all circumstances and other things that happen to you?

Chapter 7 – Emotional Communication: Listen with the Heart

“My dear brothers, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, **slow** to **speak** and **slow** to become angry...” *James 1:19*

According to this passage, what 2 steps should we take to slow down our quick response or anger?

1. Listen beyond the words to the feelings. People generally feel more understood, cared for, and connected when the communication focuses on their emotions and feelings rather than merely on their words or thoughts.

The real message is often hidden in the words.

When listening, do you find yourself asking questions to gain deeper insight? Or is your focus on you, thinking about the next point you can make?

2. The real message is often the emotion behind the words. When you listen with your heart and listen for the heart of the other person, you show that you care.

When we find ourselves disagreeing with someone, what steps can we take to become better listeners? Try saying statements like, “Let me see if I’m hearing you right” or “So what I hear you saying is...”

3. Allow others' emotions to touch you. People feel loved when they know you truly understand their feelings.

When someone is sharing with you, how do you respond to let them know you're getting what they're saying?

4. Effective communication is a dynamic process of discovery that maintains energy in the relationship. When you see communication as a dynamic process of discovery rather than one of solving problems, you often solve the problems by default.

Do "deep" conversations tend to wear you out? In a couple of sentences, explain your feelings during times of intense conversation?

Effective communication takes work.

5. Effective Communication starts with safety. When you listen rather than judge or correct, you create a safe environment for understanding to blossom.

What relationships could benefit from your quest for understanding rather than problem-solving?

Good communication is not about proving yourself to be right.

6. Communication is understanding, not determining who's right. Your relationships will thrive if your priority is understanding the other person.

When you find yourself in an argument, what is your goal? Is your goal to win, or be right? Or is your goal unity and harmony?

Chapter 8 - Teamwork: Adopt a No-Losers Policy

“Don't push your way to the front; don't sweet-talk your way to the top. Put yourself aside, and help others get ahead. ⁴Don't be obsessed with getting your own advantage. Forget yourselves long enough to lend a helping hand.” Philippians 2:3-4 (MSG)

What have you done this week to assure your spouse that you are on the same team? How about your co-workers? Children? Parents?

1. Adopt a no-losers policy. When one person in a relationship loses, everyone loses. A no-losers policy works toward mutual understanding and a win-win.

Make a list of the most common disagreements you experience in your most cherished relationships. Write down both points of view. Then write a one sentence explanation as to why one opinion is better than the other.

Winning is about both people feeling like winners, not just one.

2. Winning is finding a solution both people feel good about. Winning is not compromise but a true sense of win-win.

Would you say that you work hard to see the issue from both sides?

3. In healthy relationships, everyone wins. If we see relationships as teamwork, we can commit ourselves to working on cooperative strategies.

With the list you've just finished, explore options and allow for room on both sides.

4. Seven steps to win-win solutions:

Step 1: Establish a no-losers policy.

Step 2: Listen to how the other feels.

Step 3: Ask God for his opinion.

Step 4: Brainstorm about a win-win solution.

Step 5: Select a win-win solution.

Step 6: Implement your solution.

Step 7: Evaluate and rework your solution if necessary.

We at the Smalley Relationship Center and Smalley Marriage Institute are committed to serving you and equipping you as relationship champions. Look for these relationships resources:

Find resources, articles and much more information at our website: www.thednaofrelationships.com

The DNA of Relationships Live Seminar – By Dr. Gary and Michael Smalley – Find our schedule at: www.thednaofrelationships.com

The DNA of Relationships Live Seminar on DVD or CD audio (available on November 15th) at www.thednaofrelationships.com

Relationship Resources for Marriage

If you are committed to helping people in their marriage look for *The Marriage You Always Dreamed Of* by Dr. Greg Smalley.

Dr. Greg Smalley and Robert (Bob) Paul run the Smalley Marriage Institute, which offers marriage intensives for couples who need the care of a relational emergency room. Couples come to the marriage intensives with broken and failed marriages. They are often ready to divorce the next week. Greg and Bob help these couples get to the heart of their differences and heal their wounds. These marriage intensives forge lasting behavior change—and *The Marriage You Always Dreamed Of* and another upcoming book will offer you what they have learned over years of counseling distressed couples.

Consider starting a marriage relationship revolution by inviting other couples into your home and leading a couple's small group that studies *The Marriage You Always Dreamed Of*. To learn more, visit www.smalleymarriage.com.

Relationship Resources for Young Singles

If you find yourself naturally hanging out with singles, God may be calling you to invest in their lives. Be proactive. Don't let MTV, FOX, or *American JOE* teach them how to relate to their peers and the opposite sex. Don't let them establish

destructive relationship patterns. Check out Michael and Amy Smalley's *Don't Date Naked* (put on the armor of God) for straight talk about relationships between guys and girls. To learn more, visit www.dontdatenaked.com.

Available Now!

Relationship Resources on Your Relationship with God

The beginning of any relationship revolution is a person's heart. Too often, this is the part of the relationship revolution we neglect. We have time to feed ourselves, but we don't carve out time to feed our souls. What does your relationship with God look like? Gary learned this in the hospital after his kidney-transplant surgery, as he mentioned in chapter 5. If you are interested in helping people order their interior lives, look for Gary's book *Your Relationship with God* in fall of 2005. The book will tell you what he's learned about the utmost importance of our relationship with God. The book will include a small-group study guide. Plan on leading a group in 2005 to deepen their trust in God. Any relationship revival must start with a change of heart.

Dr. Gary Smalley, the co-founder and chairman of the board of the Smalley Relationship Center, is America's relationship doctor. He is the author and coauthor of more than forty books, including the best-selling, award-winning books *Marriage for a Lifetime*, *Secrets to Lasting Love*, *The Blessing*, *The Two Sides of Love*, and *The Language of Love*. Recent releases include *Men's Relational Toolbox*, *Food and Love*, *Food and Love Cookbook*, *One Flame*, *Bound by Honor*, and the Redemption fiction series (with Karen Kingsbury). In addition to earning a master's degree from Bethel Theological Seminary, Gary has received two honorary doctorates, one from Biola University and one from Southwest Baptist University, for his work with couples. He is the host of the nationally syndicated radio show *Smalley LIVE!* In his thirty years of ministry, Gary has appeared on national television programs such as *The Oprah Winfrey Show*, *Larry King Live*, the *Today* show, *Sally Jessie Raphael*, as well as numerous national radio programs. Gary has been featured on hundreds of regional and local television and radio programs and has also produced films and videos that have sold millions of copies. Gary and his wife, Norma, have been married for nearly forty years and live in Branson, Missouri. They have three adult children and eight grandchildren.