



WEEK SIX: VULNERABILITY THE PATH TO INTIMACY

Last week we learned that if we want to build deep and authentic relationships, we need to learn to listen well. This week, we will focus on the flip side of this equation—that if we want to build deep and authentic relationships, we have to grow in our vulnerability and learn how to share **our story, our journey, and our heart** with others. This week we will explore several passages of Scripture that illustrate both our need for community and also our fear of it. We will also read several selections from *Everybody's Normal Till You Get to Know Them* and *The Emotionally Healthy Church*.

DAY ONE

DAILY FOCUS

Today we will . . .

- ◆ **EXPLORE:** Genesis 3:1-13
- ◆ **READ:** *Everybody's Normal Till You Get to Know Them*, pgs. 13-21
- ◆ **REFLECT:** On our deep need for connection and community

◆ EXPLORE

Each of us is designed for community and yet—in our brokenness, we often fear it. The Bible traces this tension back to the “Fall”—our original rebellion against God as a race. This rebellion led to a breakdown not only in our relationship with God, but also in our core character and our relationships with one another.

Read **Genesis 3:1-13** in the Good News Translation (GNT) and answer the following questions. (You can find this on YouVersion.)

- 1) How did Adam and Eve’s rebellion impact their relationship with God?
- 2) How did this rebellion impact their sense of self?
- 3) How did it impact their relationship with one another?

◆ READ

Read pages 13-21 in *Everybody's Normal Till You Get to Know Them*. Stop at the heading *How to Get Close Without Getting Hurt* (Audible ch. 1 - 00:18-19:03).

◆ REFLECT

1) What was your favorite insight or illustration from today’s reading, and why?

2) Here are four quotes from the reading today:

• *We all want to look normal, to think of ourselves as normal, but the writers of Scripture insist that no one is “totally normal” —at least not as God defines normal. “All we like sheep have gone astray,” they tell us. “All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”*

• *Because we know in our hearts that this is not the way we’re supposed to be, we try to hide our weirdness. Every one of us pretends to be healthier and kinder than we really are; we all engage in what might be called “depravity management.”*

• The yearning to attach and connect, to love and to be loved, is the fiercest longing of the soul. Our need for community with people and the God who made us is to the human spirit what food and air and water are to the human body.

• We are created to draw life and nourishment from one another the way roots of an oak tree draw life from the soil. Community—living in vital connection with others—is essential to human life.

-Everybody's Normal Till You Get to Know Them, pgs. 15,17,18, and 21 (in order)

Which of these four quotes speaks to you the most, and why?

3) We all experience this tension between our need for connection and this deep fear of self-disclosure. We long to connect, but we are afraid to share our true selves. How have you managed this tension in your own life? Do you feel like you need to grow in this area? If so, explain.

4) Think back over Genesis 3, your reading, and your responses in today's study. What is the most important insight you want to take with you? Jot it down in your journal and spend some time praying about it.

DAY TWO

DAILY FOCUS

Today we will . . .

- ◆ **EXPLORE:** Mark 2:1-12
- ◆ **READ:** *Everybody's Normal Till You Get to Know Them*, pgs. 44-49
- ◆ **REFLECT:** On the “Fellowship of the Mat”

◆ EXPLORE

Read **Mark 2:1-12** in the Message (MSG). (You can find this on YouVersion.) Then answer the following questions.

- 1) The paralytic’s friends were willing to take some bold steps to get to Jesus. Why do you think they took this risk? What do you think was going through their minds as they lowered their friend through the roof?
- 2) How do you think the paralytic felt as he was being lowered through the roof to Jesus?

◆ READ

Read pages 44-49 in *Everybody's Normal Till You Get to Know Them*. Stop at the heading *A Community of Roof-Crashers* (Audible ch. 2 – 00:00-10:29).

◆ REFLECT

- 1) What was your favorite insight, observation, or illustration from today’s reading—and why?
- 2) In Chapter 3, John writes,

People rarely drift into community. Psychologist Alan McGinnis notes that rule number one for entering deep friendships sounds deceptively simple: Assign top priority to your relationships. Ironically, we tend to devote massive amounts of time to making money, running errands, and succeeding at our jobs, but we neglect giving our most valuable possession—time—to the experience for which we were created: community. ... Maybe the biggest single barrier to deep connectedness for most of us is simply the pace of our lives. ... The requirement for true intimacy is chunks of unhurried time. If you think you can fit deep community into the cracks of an overloaded schedule—think again. Wise people do not try to microwave friendship, parenting, or marriage. You can’t do community in a hurry.

-*Everybody's Normal Till You Get to Know Them*, p. 46, excerpts

What's your first response to these quotes—and why?

How would you rate your level of investment in deep friendships and community at this point in your life?

Do you feel like you need to make any changes in the way you are approaching your relationships right now?

3) In the reading today, John writes about the “Fellowship of the Mat.” He says,

There is this gift between these friends: trusting vulnerability and dependable faithfulness. This mat, which according to society should have created a great gulf between him and them, instead became an opportunity for servanthood and acceptance. This group becomes the Fellowship of the Mat. Wherever human beings love and accept and serve each other in the face of weakness and need, there is a Fellowship of the Mat.

-*Everybody's Normal Till You Get to Know Them*, p. 47

Which is harder for you: to be vulnerable, share your weakness, and allow others to carry you? Or to accept the vulnerability and weakness of others and to carry them? Why do you think this is?

4) Later, John quotes Jean Vanier, who says,

There is no ideal community. Community is made up of people with all their richness, but also with their weakness and poverty, of people who accept and forgive each other, who are vulnerable with each other. Humility and trust are more at the foundation than perfection.

-*Everybody's Normal Till You Get to Know Them*, p. 48

If this is true, what are some practical implications of what we should expect in true community?

5) What are two or three of your most important takeaways from today's study? Jot them down in your journal and talk with Jesus about them.

DAY THREE

DAILY FOCUS

Today we will . . .

- ◆ **EXPLORE:** Mark 14:32-42
- ◆ **READ:** *Everybody's Normal Till You Get to Know Them*, pgs. 81-86
- ◆ **REFLECT:** On the importance of deep disclosure with trusted friends

◆ EXPLORE

On His last night with His followers before He was arrested, Jesus modeled a deep level of vulnerability. Read **Mark 14:32-42** in the Message (MSG), and then answer the following questions.

- 1) How would you describe Jesus' emotional state at this time?
- 2) Why do you think He took three of His followers with Him and left the others behind when He went to pray?
- 3) How does Jesus illustrate authentic relationship and true vulnerability in His interactions with Peter, James, and John?
- 4) What are some practical implications for our lives?

◆ READ

Read pages 81-86 in *Everybody's Normal Till You Get to Know Them*. Start with the heading *Deep Disclosure With a Few Close Friends* and stop at the heading *Learning To Dance* (Audible ch. 3 08:16-20:50).

◆ REFLECT

1) What was the most helpful principle, insight, or illustration in today's reading, and why?

2) In Chapter 4, John writes,

Every human being carries hurts or scars or wounds. Our tendency since the Fall is to hide as if our life depended on it.

This is exactly wrong.

*Our life depends on getting found. **There is no healing in hiding.***

-Everybody's Normal Till You Get to Know Them, p. 82

What do you think John means by this last sentence? Have you discovered this principle to be true in your own life? If so, explain.

3) Later, John writes,

*Even when someone tells you they love you, inside you say to yourself: **Yes, but you don't know the whole truth about me. You might not say these things if you really knew.***

This is why knowing and being known go to the core of life: You cannot be fully loved if you are not fully known. You can only be loved to the extent that you are known. You can only be completely loved if you are completely known.

-Everybody's Normal Till You Get to Know Them, p. 82

Do you agree with this? Have you experienced this principle at work in your own life? If so, explain.

4) Later, John writes,

Sin causes us to seek hiddenness and separation, which in turn destroy community. In confession, we enter back into community.

-Everybody's Normal Till You Get to Know Them, p. 83

Then he goes on to compare and contrast two important words: *disclosure* and *confession*. How does John describe the difference between these two words? Why is it important to practice both in our lives?

5) Finally, John writes,

*One of the greatest steps you can take toward living in community is this: **Move toward having someone in your life who knows all about you.***

-Everybody's Normal Till You Get to Know Them, p. 84

This is such a great insight and yet—it's crucial that, when we share at this deep level, we pick the right people—people who are safe and trustworthy. On pages 84-85, John describes three “warning signs” to help us identify people who are not safe to share with (Audible ch. 3 – 16:29-18:13). What are the three warning signs?

6) Take a few minutes and reflect on what you learned today. Is the Holy Spirit revealing any new truths or calling you to take any new steps in your relationships? If so, write them down in your journal and pray about what God is showing you.

DAY FOUR

DAILY FOCUS

Today we will . . .

- ◆ **EXPLORE:** 2 Corinthians 12:7-10
- ◆ **READ:** *The Emotionally Healthy Church*, pgs. 116-122
- ◆ **REFLECT:** On the relationship between our weakness and God's power

◆ EXPLORE

Our passage today comes from 2 Corinthians—a letter written by the Apostle Paul to the Christ-followers in Corinth. This church often struggled to respect the Apostle Paul's leadership in their lives. He didn't always fit their image of a strong leader. They did not see him as a gifted speaker and he was often going through hard times and persecution. How could God be with him when his life was such a mess? However, as Paul shares with them, it's often in our weakness that God can use us the most.

In 2 Corinthians 12, Paul shares how he learned this life lesson through an amazing supernatural experience he had fourteen years before. Read **2 Corinthians 12:7-10** in the Common English Bible (CEB) and then answer the following questions. (You can find this on YouVersion.)

- 1) What did Paul ask God to do?
- 2) Why did God say no?
- 3) What lesson did Paul learn from this experience?

◆ READ

Read pages 116-122 in *The Emotionally Healthy Church*. Start at *Developing a Theology of Weakness* and stop at *Accepting Your Gift Of a Handicap* (Audible ch. 10 – 04:59-18:58).

◆ REFLECT

- 1) What was your favorite insight, principle, or illustration from today's reading?
- 2) Peter says our natural response to pain in relationships is to **flee, fight, or hide**. He describes each of these responses on pages 117-118 (Audible ch. 10 – 07:01-09:08). Which of the three responses comes most naturally to you—and why?

3) On pages 118-119, Peter gives us a chart that compares people and churches that are **Proud & Defensive** with those that are **Broken & Vulnerable**. Put a check mark in the box on the left or right side of each line to indicate which box best describes you (Audible ch. 10 – 10:16-14:01). (You can download a PDF of this chart by clicking “download resource” on Week 6 of this study.)

Are there any insights or lessons that stand out to you from this exercise? If so, explain.

4) Spend some time praying and/or journaling about what you learned today.

DAY FIVE

DAILY FOCUS

Today we will . . .

- ◆ **EXPLORE:** Luke 15:1-3, 11-32
- ◆ **READ:** *The Emotionally Healthy Church*, pgs. 128-135
- ◆ **REFLECT:** On the parable of the Prodigal Son

◆ EXPLORE

Read **Luke 15:1-3** and **Luke 15:11-32** in the Message (MSG). (You can find this on YouVersion.) Then answer the following questions.

- 1) This is one of Jesus' most famous short stories. What prompted Him to tell this story (Luke 15:1-3)?
- 2) Which of these two brothers do you identify with the most—and why?

◆ READ

Read pages 128-135 in *The Emotionally Healthy Church*. Start at *Following the Prodigal Son as the Model* and stop with *A Prayer* (Audible ch. 10 – 35:04-49:34).

◆ REFLECT

- 1) What was your favorite insight, principle, or illustration from today's reading?
- 2) On pages 132-134, Peter highlights three warning signs that suggest we may be acting like the “older brother.” To find these three signs, start at the heading: *How Do I Know If I Am the Lost Older Brother?* and stop at *Becoming the Father* (Audible ch. 10 – 43:22-47:04). How would you summarize each of these warning signs in your own words?
- 3) In the reading today, Peter writes,

People are desperate to be with others who will incarnate God's love in a practical way, who can do what the father does in this painting—embrace, love, empathize, be present, and forgive freely. It is a love without conditions, something the world knows little of. It is supernatural.

-*The Emotionally Healthy Church*, p. 134

Have you ever experienced this sort of love from someone in your life (other than God)?

Since coming to Christ, do you feel like you are becoming more like the father or more like the older brother?

4) Spend some time reflecting on what you've learned today. Jot down any important insights you want to remember in your journal. Spend some time processing them with the Lord in prayer.

WEEKEND MESSAGE REFLECTION

After you listen to the sixth message in this series (*Vulnerability...The Path To Intimacy*), answer the following questions.

- 1) What was the most helpful principle, insight, illustration or quote from this weekend's message, and why?
- 2) This weekend we learned that usually, it's best to share our story in stages. Have you ever shared your story too soon or with the wrong person—only to have it backfire on you?
- 3) Now that you have listened to the message and finished this study, are you planning on taking any new practical steps to create deeper community in your life? If so, explain.