

## WEEK 9: BUILDING AUTHENTIC RELATIONSHIPS

### Detailed Facilitator Guide with Notes and Questions

#### From Performance to Presence

---

#### OVERVIEW FOR FACILITATORS

**Week 9 Goal:** Help participants move from transactional, performance-based relationships to authentic, mutual connections grounded in vulnerability and presence.

**The Integration Week:** This week synthesizes everything learned so far:

- Weeks 1-2: Awareness of patterns and harm
- Week 3: Death of false self
- Weeks 4-6: Emptying, releasing control, listening
- Week 7: Humility as foundation
- Week 8: Empathy as practice
- **Week 9:** Applying all of this to actual relationships

**Why This Week Is Critical:** All the internal work means nothing if it doesn't translate into healthier relationships. Participants have learned skills—now they must practice them in real connection. This is where theory meets reality.

**The Core Challenge:** Narcissistic relationships are:

- **Transactional:** "What can you do for me?"
- **Hierarchical:** "I'm above or below you"
- **Performative:** "I must maintain my image with you"
- **One-directional:** "This is about meeting my needs"
- **Unstable:** Idealization → Devaluation → Discard

### **Authentic relationships are:**

- **Mutual:** "We're here for each other"
  - **Equal:** "We're both fully human"
  - **Present:** "I can be real with you"
  - **Bidirectional:** "We both give and receive"
  - **Stable:** Consistent care through ups and downs
- 

## **UNDERSTANDING NARCISSISTIC RELATIONSHIP PATTERNS**

### **The Narcissist's Relational Style**

#### **Stage 1: Idealization** ("You're perfect!")

- Love-bombing, excessive attention
- Puts person on pedestal
- Sees them as supply source
- **Not genuine love—strategic attraction**

#### **Stage 2: Devaluation** ("You're disappointing")

- When person fails to meet unrealistic expectations
- Criticism, withdrawal, contempt
- Person becomes "bad" in narcissist's eyes
- **Not about person's failure—about narcissist's needs**

#### **Stage 3: Discard** ("You're worthless to me")

- Person is no longer useful
- Cold abandonment or ghosting
- Move to next supply source

- **Not about person's worth—about narcissist's need for novelty**

## **Why Narcissists Struggle With Authentic Relationships**

### **Can't Be Vulnerable:**

- Vulnerability = weakness = exposure
- Must maintain image at all costs
- Can't risk being truly known

### **Can't Be Mutual:**

- Relationships are hierarchical (above or below)
- Giving without getting feels like loss
- Scorekeeping is constant

### **Can't Handle Autonomy in Others:**

- Others' independence threatens narcissist's control
- Healthy boundaries feel like rejection
- Partners must be extensions, not separate people

### **Can't Maintain Consistency:**

- Love is conditional on meeting narcissist's needs
- Hot/cold, present/absent, loving/cruel
- Others walk on eggshells

### **Can't Repair Ruptures:**

- Apologies feel like humiliation
- Defensive when confronted
- Blame-shifting instead of accountability

# WHAT AUTHENTIC RELATIONSHIPS REQUIRE

## The Foundations

### 1. **Vulnerability** (letting yourself be known)

- Sharing fears, needs, weaknesses
- Asking for help
- Admitting mistakes
- Being imperfect in front of others

### 2. **Mutuality** (both giving and receiving)

- Both people matter equally
- Give without scorekeeping
- Receive without shame
- Interdependence, not dependence or independence

### 3. **Boundaries** (healthy separateness)

- You end where I begin
- I can say no and still be loved
- We're connected but not enmeshed
- Autonomy enhances intimacy

### 4. **Presence** (being real, not performing)

- Dropping the mask
- Showing up as you actually are
- Consistency over time
- Authenticity over image

### 5. **Repair** (handling conflict and hurt)

- Owning mistakes without defensiveness
  - Apologizing genuinely
  - Making amends when possible
  - Rebuilding trust
- 

## **WHAT MAKES THIS WEEK DANGEROUS**

### **Resistance Patterns to Expect**

#### **Intellectualizing Relationships:**

- Understanding principles without applying them
- "I get it" without actual vulnerability
- Talking about authenticity without being authentic

#### **Performing Authenticity:**

- Strategic vulnerability (sharing to manipulate)
- Calculated "realness"
- Using authenticity as new image to manage

#### **Selective Authenticity:**

- Vulnerable with strangers, performative with those who matter
- Real in group, fake in actual relationships
- Authentic when it's safe, performing when it counts

#### **Fear of Losing Relationships:**

- "If I'm real, they'll leave"
- "If I stop performing, they won't love me"
- "My image is all that keeps people around"

## **Boundary Confusion:**

- Thinking vulnerability means no boundaries
  - Confusing mutuality with enmeshment
  - Can't distinguish healthy from unhealthy relationships
- 

## **OPENING SESSION (Day 1)**

### **Transition from Week 8 (15 minutes)**

#### **Facilitator Script:**

"Last week, you learned empathy—to feel with others, to enter their worlds, to be moved by their experiences. You practiced empathy pauses, perspective-taking, deep listening.

This week, we're putting it all together: building authentic relationships.

#### **For eight weeks, you've been deconstructing narcissistic patterns:**

- You've seen your harm
- You've let the false self die
- You've sat with emptiness
- You've released control
- You've learned to listen
- You've practiced humility
- You've developed empathy

#### **Now: What do healthy relationships actually look like?**

#### **The narcissist's relationships have been:**

- Transactional: "What can you do for me?"
- Performative: "I must maintain my image"

- Unstable: Idealization → Devaluation → Discard
- One-directional: "This is about my needs"

**Authentic relationships are different:**

- Mutual: We're here for each other
- Present: We can be real together
- Stable: Consistent care through ups and downs
- Bidirectional: We both give and receive

**This requires everything you've learned:**

- Humility: "I'm not the center; we're both fully human"
- Empathy: "I feel with you, not just for myself"
- Vulnerability: "I let you see the real me"
- Boundaries: "We're connected but separate"
- Repair: "When I hurt you, I own it"

Ecclesiastes 4:9-10 says: 'Two are better than one... For if either of them falls, the one will lift up his companion.'

**Authentic relationship is mutual burden-bearing.** Not using others. Not performing for others. But genuinely being with and for each other.

This week: You're practicing presence instead of performance."

---

**Opening Check-In (Go Around Circle)**

**Question:** *"Think about your closest relationships. On a scale of 1-10, how authentic are you? How much do you perform vs. how much are you genuinely present?"*

**Facilitator Note:** Most will overestimate their authenticity. That's okay—this week will reveal the gap between perceived and actual authenticity.

---

## **SCRIPTURE FOUNDATION EXPLORATION (40 minutes)**

### **Ecclesiastes 4:9-12 - "Two Are Better Than One"**

**Read aloud:** Ecclesiastes 4:7-12

**Focus on verses 9-12:** "Two are better than one because they have a good return for their labor. For if either of them falls, the one will lift up his companion. But woe to the one who falls when there is not another to lift him up. Furthermore, if two lie down together they keep warm, but how can one be warm alone? And if one can overpower him who is alone, two can resist him. A cord of three strands is not quickly torn apart."

**Facilitator Teaching** (12 minutes):

"Solomon describes the value of genuine relationship—not transactional connection, but mutual support.

**'Two are better than one':**

- Not 'two are necessary for my success'
- But: We're better together than separate
- Relationship multiplies effectiveness, joy, resilience

**'They have a good return for their labor':**

- Partnership increases productivity
- But more importantly: shared labor is meaningful labor
- We're created for collaboration, not isolation

**'For if either of them falls, the one will lift up his companion'** (v.10):

This is the essence of mutual relationship:

- EITHER can fall (both vulnerable)
- The OTHER lifts them up (mutual care)



- Reciprocal support, not one-directional

**'But woe to the one who falls when there is not another to lift him up':**

**The narcissist isolates through:**

- Not allowing themselves to fall (can't be vulnerable)
- Not allowing others to help (can't receive)
- Using people until they leave
- Result: When they fall, they're alone

**'If two lie down together they keep warm' (v.11):**

Intimacy provides comfort, safety, warmth. But only if both are genuinely present, not performing.

**'If one can overpower him who is alone, two can resist him' (v.12):**

Authentic relationship provides:

- Protection from external threats
- Strength to resist temptation
- Accountability against self-destruction

**'A cord of three strands is not quickly torn apart':**

Relationship with God + relationship with others = strength.

**For recovery:** You've been trying to be the single strand—self-sufficient, needing no one, performing strength. Solomon says: That's weak. Mutual relationship is strong."

---

**Discussion Questions:**

1. "Solomon says 'two are better than one.' Do you believe that? Or do you operate like 'one is safer than two'?"

2. **"Have you experienced someone lifting you up when you fell? What was that like?"**
  3. **"The narcissist falls alone because they won't let anyone close enough to help. Where do you do this?"**
  4. **"What makes it hard to be the 'two' instead of the isolated 'one'?"**
  5. **"How does relationship with God (third strand) strengthen human relationships?"**
- 

### **Proverbs 27:17 - "Iron Sharpens Iron"**

**Read aloud:** Proverbs 27:5-6, 9-10, 17

**Focus on verse 17:** "Iron sharpens iron, So one man sharpens another."

**Facilitator Teaching** (12 minutes):

"This proverb describes healthy, growth-oriented relationship.

**'Iron sharpens iron':**

The metaphor matters:

- Iron sharpening is **mutual**: Both blades are sharpened
- It's **friction**: There's contact, even conflict
- It's **intentional**: Both are improved through process
- It requires **similar strength**: Iron can sharpen iron (not stone, not wood)

**'So one man sharpens another':**

Authentic friendship:

- Makes you better
- Challenges you
- Refines rough edges

- Requires both to be engaged

**Context** (surrounding verses):

**Verse 5:** 'Better is open rebuke than love that is concealed.'

Real love includes correction. The narcissist gives neither love nor correction—just performance.

**Verse 6:** 'Faithful are the wounds of a friend, But deceitful are the kisses of an enemy.'

**A true friend will wound you** (give hard feedback) because they love you. **An enemy will flatter you** (what the narcissist does) while harming you.

**For the narcissist:**

- Can't handle 'iron sharpening iron' (feedback feels like attack)
- Surrounds self with people who won't challenge
- Gives flattery instead of honest feedback
- Avoids friction at all costs

**For recovery:** Can you handle being sharpened? Can you offer sharpening? Can you be in relationships with friction that makes both better?"

---

**Discussion Questions:**

1. "Who in your life sharpens you? Who challenges you to grow?"
2. "Are you in relationships with 'iron' (people of substance who can sharpen you)? Or do you avoid anyone strong enough to challenge you?"
3. "The proverb says 'faithful are the wounds of a friend.' Can you receive wounding feedback from a friend?"
4. "Do you give flattery (narcissist's tool) or honest feedback (friend's tool)?"

## 5. "What makes friction in relationships feel threatening to you?"

---

### **Ephesians 4:25 - "Speak Truth Each One of You with His Neighbor"**

**Read aloud:** Ephesians 4:25-32

**Focus on verse 25:** "Therefore, laying aside falsehood, speak truth each one of you with his neighbor, for we are members of one another."

**Facilitator Teaching** (12 minutes):

"Paul is teaching the Ephesians how to live in authentic community.

**'Laying aside falsehood'** (*apotithemi to pseudos*):

- Put off, strip away, get rid of lying
- Not just blatant lies, but: image management, spin, partial truths, omissions

**'Speak truth each one of you with his neighbor':**

- Truth-telling is foundational to relationship
- 'Each one'—mutual responsibility
- 'With his neighbor'—to each other, not just about each other

**'For we are members of one another':**

This is the WHY. We're interconnected. One body.

When you lie to me, you harm yourself (we're connected). When I lie to you, I harm myself.

**Verse 26:** 'Be angry, and yet do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger.'

Authentic relationship allows anger (emotions are real) but requires resolution (don't let it fester).

**Verse 29:** 'Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for edification.'

Truth-telling isn't weaponized honesty ('I'm just being honest'). It's truth FOR THE SAKE OF BUILDING UP.

**Verse 32:** 'Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.'

Authentic relationship holds: Truth + Kindness + Forgiveness.

**The narcissist fails all three:**

- Lies to maintain image (no truth)
- Uses people without tenderness (no kindness)
- Can't forgive because they can't admit wrong (no forgiveness)

**For recovery:** Can you speak truth kindly? Can you receive truth without defensiveness? Can you forgive and be forgiven?"

---

**Discussion Questions:**

1. "Where do you 'lay aside falsehood' vs. manage truth to protect your image?"
  2. "Paul says we're 'members of one another.' How does that change how you think about relationships?"
  3. "Can you speak truth in love—honest without being cruel?"
  4. "Can you receive truth in love—hearing hard things without defensiveness?"
  5. "Paul says 'be angry and yet do not sin.' How do you handle conflict in relationships?"
- 

**DAILY PRACTICES INSTRUCTION**

## **Morning Practice: Vulnerability Prayer (Days 1-7)**

### **Detailed Instructions for Participants:**

"Each morning, pray this prayer—slowly, letting it sink in:

**'God, today I will be real. Not perfect. Not impressive. Just present.'**

**Unpack each phrase** (5 minutes):

#### **'I will be real':**

- Not performing
- Not managing my image
- Showing up as I actually am
- Dropping the mask

#### **'Not perfect':**

- I will make mistakes today
- I won't hide them
- I'll own them when I see them
- Imperfection is human, not shameful

#### **'Not impressive':**

- I don't need to wow anyone
- I don't need to be the smartest/funniest/most interesting
- Ordinary presence is enough
- I'm not competing

#### **'Just present':**

- Here, now, with whoever I'm with
- Attentive, not distracted

- Engaged, not performing
- Available, not strategizing

**Throughout the day:** Return to this prayer when you catch yourself performing.

**The goal:** Choosing presence over performance, reality over image."

---

### **Daily Practice: One Vulnerable Truth (Days 1-7)**

#### **Instructions:**

"Each day, share ONE vulnerable truth with someone safe—something real, not impressive.

#### **What is vulnerable truth?**

NOT:

- Humble-bragging: "I'm so bad at [thing I'm actually good at]"
- Strategic sharing: Revealing to manipulate
- Impressive vulnerability: "I struggle with being too generous"

BUT:

- Actual weakness: "I don't know how to do this"
- Real need: "I need help with this"
- Honest struggle: "I'm afraid of this"
- Genuine mistake: "I was wrong about that"

#### **Examples of vulnerable truths:**

- "I made a mistake at work and I'm scared to admit it"
- "I don't understand this and I need someone to explain it"
- "I'm jealous of your success and I hate that I feel that way"

- "I hurt someone and I don't know how to make it right"
- "I'm lonely and I don't know how to connect with people"
- "I need help but asking makes me feel weak"

#### **How to practice:**

1. **Choose a safe person:** Someone who's earned your trust, not someone who'll weaponize vulnerability
2. **Share simply:** Don't explain away or minimize—just state the truth
3. **Resist the urge to:** Immediately fix it, explain why it's not that bad, turn it into a joke
4. **Notice:** What happens? Do they reject you? Or do they draw closer?

#### **Journal each evening:**

- What vulnerable truth did I share today?
- With whom?
- What was it like?
- How did they respond?
- What did I feel?

**The goal:** Building the muscle of vulnerability—letting yourself be known."

---

#### **Evening Practice: Relationship Inventory (Days 1-7)**

##### **Instructions:**

"Each evening, review your relationships through these questions:

##### **1. Where did I perform today?**

- With whom?
- What image was I maintaining?



- What was I afraid would happen if I was real?

## **2. Where was I genuinely present today?**

- With whom?
- What made that possible?
- What was the difference?

## **3. Did I give AND receive today?**

- Or was I only giving (to look good/be needed)?
- Or was I only taking (using someone)?
- Where was there genuine mutuality?

## **4. Did I maintain boundaries?**

- Could I say no when I needed to?
- Did I honor others' no's?
- Where did I over-function or under-function?

## **5. If there was conflict, how did I handle it?**

- Did I defend or did I listen?
- Could I admit fault?
- Did I repair or did I withdraw?

## **Write briefly (10 minutes):**

- One relationship highlight from today
- One relationship area I need to work on
- One person I need to be more authentic with

**The goal:** Daily awareness of relationship patterns—building authenticity one day at a time."

---

## THE RELATIONSHIP AUDIT (Days 2-4)

### Instructions for Participants

#### Facilitator Introduction (Day 2):

"This week's major work: A comprehensive Relationship Audit. You're going to map your current relationships and assess their health—or lack thereof."

---

### Part 1: Mapping Your Relationships (Day 2)

#### Instructions:

"Create a visual map of your relationships in concentric circles:

#### Circle 1 (Innermost): Intimate relationships

- Spouse/partner, closest friends, family you're close to
- People who know you deeply (or should)

#### Circle 2 (Middle): Close relationships

- Good friends, family you see regularly
- Colleagues you're close to
- People who know you fairly well

#### Circle 3 (Outer): Casual relationships

- Acquaintances, distant family
- Colleagues, neighbors, community connections
- People who know you superficially

#### Circle 4 (Outermost): Very distant relationships

- People you barely know

- Service providers, etc.

**Now, for each person in Circles 1-2, answer:**

1. Is this relationship mutual? (Do we both give and receive?)
2. Am I authentic in this relationship? (Do they know the real me?)
3. Is this relationship stable? (Consistent, not hot/cold?)
4. Do I respect their boundaries? Do they respect mine?
5. Can we repair when there's conflict?

**Use a color code:**

- Green: Healthy, mutual, authentic
- Yellow: Mixed, some healthy aspects, some not
- Red: Unhealthy, transactional, performance-based

**What you'll discover:** Most narcissists have very few green relationships."

---

## **Part 2: The Relationship Assessment (Days 2-3)**

**For each person in Circle 1 (intimate relationships), answer honestly:**

**Authenticity Questions:**

- Do they know my fears, failures, weaknesses?
- Do I show them my real self or a performed self?
- Can I be imperfect around them?
- Have I told them real, non-impressive truths?

**Mutuality Questions:**

- Do I give to them without scorekeeping?
- Can I receive from them without shame?

- Is the relationship balanced, or is one person carrying it?
- Do both of our needs matter?

### **Stability Questions:**

- Am I consistent with them over time?
- Do I idealize, then devalue, then discard?
- Can they count on me?
- Am I hot/cold, present/absent?

### **Boundaries Questions:**

- Can I say no to them without guilt?
- Can I hear their no without taking it personally?
- Do we have separate identities or am I enmeshed?
- Do I respect their autonomy?

### **Repair Questions:**

- When I hurt them, do I own it?
- Can I apologize without defending?
- Do we work through conflict or avoid it?
- Have I made amends when needed?

**Write for each person:** 'My relationship with [name] is [green/yellow/red] because \_\_\_\_\_. Specific examples: \_\_\_\_\_. To move toward health, I need to: \_\_\_\_\_.'

---

## **Part 3: The Vulnerability Assessment (Day 3-4)**

### **Questions to answer:**

#### **1. Who knows the real me?**

- List people who've seen you at your worst
- Who knows your fears, failures, shame?
- Who have you allowed past the performance?

**If the list is short or empty:** This is the problem. You're isolated in your image.

## **2. Who am I performing for?**

- List people you maintain an image with
- What image are you protecting?
- What are you afraid they'll see?

## **3. Who am I using?**

- List people you relate to transactionally
- What do you get from them?
- Would you stay if they couldn't give you that?

## **4. Who have I hurt that I haven't repaired with?**

- List people you've harmed
- What do you need to own?
- What's stopping you from making amends?

## **5. Who do I need but won't admit I need?**

- List people you depend on but won't acknowledge
- Why is dependence shameful to you?

**Write a summary:** 'Looking at my relationships honestly, I see: \_\_\_\_\_. My biggest relational pattern is: \_\_\_\_\_. What needs to change most is: \_\_\_\_\_.'

---

## **Group Processing (Day 5-6)**

## Discussion Questions:

1. "What did you discover in your Relationship Audit? Any surprises?"
  2. "How many green (healthy) relationships do you have? Why so few/many?"
  3. "Who knows the real you? If the answer is 'no one' or 'very few,' what does that tell you?"
  4. "Where are you performing vs. being present?"
  5. "What relational pattern keeps showing up—triangulation, using people, hot/cold, scorekeeping?"
  6. "Choose one relationship. What would it look like to be more authentic there?"
- 

## STUDYING BIBLICAL FRIENDSHIPS

### David and Jonathan (1 Samuel 18-20)

**Assignment** (Day 2-3): Read 1 Samuel 18:1-4, 19:1-7, 20:1-42

**Group Discussion** (Day 3 or 4):

**Facilitator Teaching** (10 minutes):

"David and Jonathan's friendship is one of the Bible's most beautiful relationship portraits.

**1 Samuel 18:1:** 'The soul of Jonathan was knit to the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as himself.'

**'Knit together':** Deep, lasting bond—not superficial

**'Loved him as himself':** Not narcissistic love (using), but self-giving love (genuine care)

**What makes this friendship remarkable:**

**Mutual, not hierarchical:**

- Jonathan is prince, David is shepherd
- Jonathan gives David his robe, sword, belt (symbols of status)
- He's willing to decrease so David can increase

**Vulnerable:**

- Both share fears, needs, struggles
- 1 Samuel 20—they weep together, make covenant
- Emotional intimacy without shame

**Loyal through threat:**

- Jonathan's father Saul wants David dead
- Jonathan protects David at great personal cost
- Loyalty even when it's costly

**Honest:**

- They speak truth to each other
- Jonathan warns David of danger
- No image management, no performance

**Non-competitive:**

- Jonathan knows David will be king instead of him
- He celebrates David instead of competing
- Rare for someone with everything to lose

**For us:** Can you have friends where both souls are 'knit together'? Where you're vulnerable, loyal, honest, non-competitive?"

---

## **Discussion Questions:**

1. **"What makes David and Jonathan's friendship so special?"**
  2. **"Jonathan gives up his claim to the throne for David. Can you celebrate someone's success even when it means your decrease?"**
  3. **"They weep together openly. Can you be emotionally vulnerable with friends?"**
  4. **"This friendship was mutual—both gave, both received. Do you have friendships like that?"**
  5. **"What would it take to build a 'Jonathan and David' friendship in your life?"**
- 

## **Ruth and Naomi (Ruth 1-4)**

**Assignment** (Day 3-4): Read Ruth 1:1-18, 4:13-17

**Group Discussion** (Day 4 or 5):

**Facilitator Teaching** (10 minutes):

"Ruth and Naomi show us female friendship, intergenerational relationship, and covenant loyalty.

**Context:** Naomi is Ruth's mother-in-law. Naomi's husband and sons (including Ruth's husband) die. Naomi tells her daughters-in-law to leave—go back to their families.

**Ruth 1:16-17:** Ruth's response:

'Do not urge me to leave you or turn back from following you; for where you go, I will go, and where you lodge, I will lodge. Your people shall be my people, and your God, my God. Where you die, I will die, and there I will be buried. Thus may the LORD do to me, and worse, if anything but death parts you and me.'

**This is covenant friendship:**



- Not transactional (what do I get?)
- But loyal (I'm with you regardless)
- Not conditional (only if it benefits me)
- But committed (til death)

**What makes this relationship remarkable:**

**Sacrificial:**

- Ruth gives up her homeland, people, prospects
- She stays with Naomi even though it costs her everything
- Not getting anything obvious in return

**Committed through hardship:**

- Naomi is bitter, grieving, poor
- Ruth stays anyway—not because Naomi is fun or helpful
- Faithful when it's hard

**Mutual care:**

- Ruth works to provide for Naomi
- Naomi guides Ruth, helps her remarry
- Both serve each other

**For us:** Can you have friendships that are covenant, not contract? Loyal through hardship? Mutually caring?"

---

**Discussion Questions:**

1. "Ruth gives up everything to stay with Naomi. What makes someone worth that kind of loyalty?"

2. **"Naomi is bitter and grieving—not pleasant. Ruth stays anyway. Can you be faithful to people in their worst seasons?"**
  3. **"This friendship isn't based on 'what do I get?' How are your friendships different?"**
  4. **"Ruth makes a covenant—'til death.' Do you have covenant friendships or only contractual ones?"**
- 

## **PRACTICING VULNERABILITY**

### **The Vulnerability Exercise (Days 4-6)**

#### **Facilitator Introduction:**

"Vulnerability is scary—especially for those of us who've hidden behind performance our whole lives.

This week, you're going to practice vulnerability in escalating levels."

---

### **Level 1: Low-Stakes Vulnerability (Day 4)**

#### **Instructions:**

"Share something mildly vulnerable with someone you trust somewhat.

#### **Examples:**

- 'I don't know how to use this software—can you help me?'
- 'I made a mistake on this project'
- 'I'm feeling overwhelmed today'
- 'I need advice on something'

**The practice:** Admit you don't know/can't do/need help

#### **Notice:**

- How hard is it?
- What do you fear?
- How do they respond?
- Do you survive?

**Journal afterward."**

---

### **Level 2: Medium-Stakes Vulnerability (Day 5)**

#### **Instructions:**

"Share something more vulnerable with someone you trust more.

#### **Examples:**

- 'I'm struggling in my marriage'
- 'I'm scared I'm failing as a parent'
- 'I'm jealous of your success and I hate that'
- 'I hurt someone and I don't know how to fix it'
- 'I'm lonely even though I'm surrounded by people'

**The practice:** Admit deeper struggle without explanation or minimization

**Notice:** Same as Level 1

**Journal afterward."**

---

### **Level 3: High-Stakes Vulnerability (Day 6)**

#### **Instructions:**

"Share something deeply vulnerable with someone who's earned the right to hear it.

**Examples:**

- 'I don't know if I believe in God anymore'
- 'I'm afraid I'm unlovable'
- 'I've been lying about \_\_\_\_\_'
- 'I need help—I can't do this alone'
- 'I've hurt you and I'm ashamed'

**The practice:** Reveal what you've hidden most

**Notice:** Same—and also: Do you feel MORE connected or LESS after vulnerability?

**Usually:** Genuine vulnerability increases intimacy (if the person is safe).

**Journal afterward."**

---

**Group Processing (Day 6-7)**

1. "What levels of vulnerability did you practice? What happened?"
  2. "What was scariest about being vulnerable?"
  3. "How did people respond? Rejection? Drawing closer?"
  4. "Did vulnerability increase or decrease intimacy?"
  5. "What did you learn about the connection between vulnerability and authentic relationship?"
- 

**THEOLOGICAL AND CLINICAL DEEPENING****Larry Crabb Quote Discussion**

**"We are created for connection. Narcissism is the illusion that we can be autonomous, that we can be our own source. Recovery is remembering we are made for each other." — Larry Crabb, *The Safest Place on Earth***

**Facilitator Teaching** (15 minutes):

"Crabb, a Christian psychologist, identifies the core lie of narcissism: autonomy.

**The narcissist believes:** 'I don't need anyone. I'm self-sufficient. Needing others is weakness.'

**Crabb says:** That's an illusion. You're CREATED for connection.

**Genesis 2:18:** 'It is not good for the man to be alone.'

This is BEFORE the fall. In perfect Eden, God says: You need others. Aloneness isn't good.

**The narcissist tries to be their own source:**

- Own validation
- Own comfort
- Own meaning
- Own everything

**It doesn't work.** You can't be your own source because you weren't designed to be.

**Crabb says recovery is 'remembering we are made for each other':**

Not: Learning new techniques But: Returning to design—we're relational beings

**John 17:21:** Jesus prays 'that they may all be one; even as You, Father, are in Me and I in You.'

**God Himself is relational** (Trinity). You're made in His image. Therefore, you're relational.

**For recovery:** Stop trying to be autonomous. Embrace dependence.  
Remember: You're made for connection."

---

### **Discussion Questions:**

1. **"Crabb says narcissism is the illusion of autonomy. Do you believe you can be self-sufficient?"**
  2. **"God says 'it is not good for man to be alone.' Why is aloneness not good?"**
  3. **"Where do you try to be your own source—validation, comfort, meaning?"**
  4. **"What makes dependence on others feel threatening?"**
  5. **"Crabb says recovery is 'remembering we're made for each other.' What would change if you truly believed that?"**
- 

### **Tim Keller Quote Discussion**

**"The goal of authentic relationship is not to be known as impressive, but to be known as you are and loved anyway." — Tim Keller**

### **Facilitator Teaching (15 minutes):**

"Keller captures the narcissist's relational dilemma perfectly.

**The narcissist's goal in relationships:** Be known as impressive

- Manage image
- Highlight strengths, hide weaknesses
- Perform competence, success, specialness
- Be admired

**The result:** You're never actually KNOWN. Only your image is known.

**And if you're not known, you can't be loved.** Because what's loved is the image, not you.

**Keller says the goal should be:** 'To be known as you are and loved anyway'

**'As you are':**

- Not as you wish you were
- Not as you're performing to be
- But as you ACTUALLY are—flawed, limited, needy

**'And loved anyway':**

- Not loved BECAUSE you're impressive
- Not loved FOR what you do
- But loved DESPITE your ordinariness

**This is gospel:**

Romans 5:8: 'God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.'

**God loved you BEFORE you cleaned up, WHILE you were a mess, AS YOU ACTUALLY WERE.**

**That's the model:** Be known fully and loved fully.

**For narcissists:** This is terrifying. 'If you know the real me, you won't love me.'

**Keller says:** That's the risk. But it's the only path to real love."

---

**Discussion Questions:**

1. "What's your goal in relationships—to be known as impressive or to be known as you are?"
2. "Who knows you 'as you are'—flawed, limited, needy?"

3. **"What are you afraid will happen if people see the real you?"**
  4. **"Keller says 'loved anyway'—despite your flaws. Can you believe you're lovable as you are?"**
  5. **"God loved you while you were still a sinner. How does that change how you think about being known?"**
- 

## **CREATING A RELATIONSHIP PLAN**

### **Ongoing Practices (Days 6-7)**

#### **Instructions:**

"Based on your Relationship Audit and this week's learning, create a plan for building authentic relationships."

#### **Answer these questions:**

##### **1. Relationships to Deepen:**

- Which 2-3 relationships will I invest in moving toward authenticity?
- What specifically will I do? (Vulnerability? More time? Honesty?)

##### **2. Relationships to Repair:**

- Who have I hurt that I need to make amends with?
- What do I need to own?
- When will I do this?

##### **3. Relationships to Recalibrate:**

- Where am I over-functioning (doing too much, being needed)?
- Where am I under-functioning (taking too much, not contributing)?
- What needs to change toward mutuality?

##### **4. Relationships to End or Limit:**



- Are there toxic relationships I need to exit?
- Are there draining relationships I need to set boundaries with?
- What's my plan?

### **5. New Relationships to Build:**

- What kind of people do I need in my life?
- Where will I find healthy, mutual relationships?
- What communities will I join?

### **6. Daily Practices:**

- What will I do daily to build authentic relationships?
- Vulnerability? Presence? Listening? Empathy?

**Write it out:** A concrete, specific plan. Not vague ('be better'), but actionable ('Have coffee with Sarah weekly, share one vulnerable thing').

---

## **FACILITATOR SELF-CARE**

**This week touches everyone's relational patterns—including yours.**

**Watch for:**

- Participants who understand intellectually but don't apply
- Performance of vulnerability in group
- Your own relational patterns being triggered
- Participants who rush to fix relationships before building skills

**Remember:**

- Model authentic relationship in the group
- Your transparency (appropriate) gives permission for theirs

- You can't force authentic relationships to happen
- Process your own stuff in supervision

**Self-care:**

- Notice your own performance vs. presence
  - Stay grounded in your own authentic relationships
  - Don't carry participants' relational failures
  - Remember: Change takes time
- 

**CLOSING THE WEEK (Day 7)****Final Reflection Questions**

1. **"Complete this sentence: This week, I learned that authentic relationships require..."**
  2. **"What was hardest about practicing vulnerability? About being present vs. performing?"**
  3. **"What did your Relationship Audit reveal about your relational patterns?"**
  4. **"Where did you experience authentic connection this week?"**
  5. **"What's your plan for building healthier relationships going forward?"**
- 

**Facilitator Closing Words**

"You've done profoundly important work this week—looking honestly at your relationships, practicing vulnerability, learning what authentic connection looks like.

**What you've practiced:**

- Daily vulnerability (sharing non-impressive truths)
- Relationship auditing (seeing patterns clearly)
- Presence over performance
- Studying biblical models of friendship
- Creating a plan for healthier relationships

**What you've learned:**

- Two are better than one (connection is strength)
- Iron sharpens iron (healthy relationships include friction)
- Authentic connection requires vulnerability
- You're made for relationship, not autonomy
- Being known and loved is better than being impressive and alone

**The challenge:** This isn't a one-week project. Building authentic relationships is lifelong work. But you now have:

- Awareness of your patterns
- Skills to practice
- Models to follow
- A plan to implement

**Next three weeks:** We enter Phase IV—Sustaining. We're learning how to maintain these changes long-term. Week 10 is Cultivating Gratitude (from entitlement to thankfulness).

You've come so far. Nine weeks ago, you couldn't even see your patterns. Now you're building authentic relationships.

Keep going.

Let's close:

'God, You created us for connection. You said "it is not good to be alone." We've been trying to be self-sufficient, impressive, autonomous. It hasn't worked. Teach us to be vulnerable. Teach us to be present. Teach us to build relationships that are mutual, honest, and life-giving. Help us risk being known—really known—and discover we can be loved anyway. Make us people of authentic connection. Amen."

---

## **END WEEK 9**

---

### **RESOURCES FOR DEEPER STUDY**

#### **On Authentic Relationships:**

- Larry Crabb, *The Safest Place on Earth*
- Henry Cloud & John Townsend, *Boundaries*
- Brené Brown, *Daring Greatly* (on vulnerability)

#### **On Biblical Friendship:**

- C.S. Lewis, *The Four Loves*
- Wesley Hill, *Spiritual Friendship*
- Jonathan Holmes, *The Company We Keep*

#### **Clinical:**

- Sue Johnson, *Hold Me Tight* (Emotionally Focused Therapy)
- John Gottman, *The Science of Trust*
- Harriet Lerner, *The Dance of Connection*