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Relationship Press

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Welcome to *Top Ten Relational Needs*

Top Ten Relational Needs is a course of study designed to help you explore the nature of the key relational needs that all humans share. It is our hope that this resource will help you to gain greater insight into the ways that God meets your relational needs, as well as equipping you to better recognize and meet the needs of others.

The fact that God has created each of us with relational needs points to an important biblical principle: We were never intended to live our lives alone. Like the early church, we are to be devoted to real fellowship, or *koinonia*—open, honest, authentic relationships with other people. Thus, this course is not intended to be a study that you undertake on your own. Rather, it is designed to be experienced in community with other believers.

As a means of facilitating meaningful interaction among those who use this resource, each of the book's eight chapters contain the following features:

- **Gratitude for His Love**—An experiential exercise in which you will be challenged to reflect on the ways in which God has met your needs, and to respond in gratitude. It is only when we recognize how God has lovingly met our needs that we are empowered to do the same for one another.
- **Living It Out**—An experiential exercise in which you will have an opportunity to share with others the insights that God is revealing to you concerning your relational needs and the needs of those closest to you. This time of sharing is intended to spur mutual prayer and encouragement.
- **Small Group Notes**—Additional Bible readings, discussion questions, and prayer emphases related to the chapter content that may be used in a small group setting.

May you be blessed and transformed by this course as you pursue a deeper understanding of our human neediness and God's abundant provision.

CHAPTER 1



Needs: An Important Aspect of How God Made Us

**“And my God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus”
(Philippians 4:19).**

In this passage from his letter to the believers at Philippi, the apostle Paul expresses great confidence in the power and provision of his God, the God who is willing and able to meet all the needs of His children. While Paul’s words undoubtedly serve as a compelling testimony to the loving care of our Creator, they also tell us something important about ourselves: We all have needs. Neediness is an intrinsic characteristic of our God-given identities, an inescapable part of being human. This reality is apparent in several different areas of our lives.

First, we all share certain *physical* needs, such as our needs for the following:

- food
- water
- sleep
- oxygen

But humans are more than merely physical bodies. We also have *spiritual* needs, such as our needs for the following:

- the experience of God’s love

- the experience of God's forgiveness
- the experience of God's peace
- transformative encounters with God's Word

Finally, in addition to physical and spiritual needs, we all have *relational* needs. Ten of the most significant relational needs that we share are our needs for the following things:

- | | |
|----------------|-----------------|
| • acceptance | • comfort |
| • affection | • encouragement |
| • appreciation | • respect |
| • approval | • security |
| • attention | • support |

In this resource, we will explore the nature of each of these ten relational needs, discuss why it is so important that we understand relational needs, and learn how our need-meeting God intends to express His love through us in order to meet the relational needs of others. But first, let us explore five general characteristics of all needs, whether physical, spiritual, or relational.

FIVE CHARACTERISTICS OF NEEDS

1. Needs Are Cross-Cultural.

Neediness transcends all cultural differences. People of every race, ethnicity, language, religion, and socio-economic group share the same physical, spiritual, and relational needs. The truth of this claim becomes especially clear when we

consider that our earliest biblical ancestors experienced these needs long before any such cultural distinctions arose.

2. Needs Exist in All Generations.

Adam, Paul, Augustine, Muhammad, Michelangelo, Mozart, Lincoln, Churchill, you, and I all have something important in common—we were all created with the same physical, spiritual, and relational needs. Needs are not a 21st-century phenomenon; every person who has ever lived has had needs.

3. Needs Are Lifelong and Continuous.

We all know that our basic physical needs remain constant throughout our lives—human beings never reach a developmental stage where food, water, sleep, or oxygen become optional luxuries. Likewise, most mature Christians are aware that our core spiritual needs do not diminish with age. But it is important that we recognize that the same also holds true for our relational needs. The increased knowledge and confidence that come with life experience can never negate our need for intimate relationships with other people.

Relational needs are generally easy to spot in children. Even if they are comfortable, dry, fed, and well-rested, infants may cry just because they want some *attention*. Similarly, toddlers who fall down may cry even when they are not badly hurt because of their need for *comfort*. Some children latch onto their mother or father in order to signal their desire for *affection*, while others try to get their parents to notice their budding academic, artistic, or athletic abilities because of their need for *approval*.

The relational needs of adults, by contrast, are often less readily visible. This does not mean, however, that we gradually “grow out of” our relational needs as we get older, or that our relational needs can somehow be met once and for all during childhood. Rather, it is merely indicative of the fact that adults often labor to conceal or deny the relational needs that they expressed so freely as children. The

truth is that, just like our needs for food and air, our relational needs must be consistently met throughout our lives. A 90-year old living in a retirement home has the same need for attention and comfort as a 3-year old playing in a nursery.

4. It Is OK to Have Needs; Neediness Is Not a Defect.

We have asserted that all people—regardless of their cultural background, historical setting, or age—share certain basic physical, spiritual, and relational needs as part of their God-given identity. Having thus established that God created each of us with needs, it stands to reason that it is all right for us to admit that we have them! Unfortunately, however, many of us seem to have bought into the idea that if we are “mature” or “tough” enough, we will not have certain needs (or at least we will not have to *admit* to having them). This is particularly true when it comes to relational needs. Thus, for example, some people have come to believe one or more of the following:

- Those who need appreciation are merely insecure.
- Those who need attention are self-centered.
- Those who need comfort are too emotional.
- Those who need security lack true faith.
- Those who need support are simply weak.

An admission of neediness, however, is not a sign of some character defect. Rather, it is an honest and humble confession of our humanity. King David (who was hardly a weakling or a man of little faith) freely acknowledged, “I am poor and needy” (Psalm 109:22), and his vulnerability stands as an example and challenge for us. We all have needs; that is simply the way that God made us. Denying this truth is not only pointless, but potentially very harmful.

5. We Cannot Meet Our Own Needs; Needs Can Only Be Met in the Context of Meaningful Relationships with God and Others.

Finally, we must recognize that we do not have the ability or resources to meet our own needs. For example, we cannot meet our own relational need for comfort. Imagine coming home after a hard day at work, wrapping your arms around your own neck, gently patting yourself on the back, and saying to yourself, “I’m so sorry you had a hard day. Tell me all about it.” Not only would you look and feel ridiculous, you would probably not feel comforted in the least.

Similarly, imagine trying to meet your own spiritual need for God’s peace by looking at your face in the mirror and attempting to calmly reassure yourself that there is no need to be concerned about all of the difficulties that you are facing because everything will work out in the end. Such methods might be advocated by self-help gurus, but they inevitably leave us feeling isolated and overcome by our problems. While most of us do not behave in such extreme ways in our attempts to address our neediness, we are often guilty of trying to meet our own needs by other means, such as through our accomplishments and material possessions. But inanimate things can never truly satisfy our spiritual or relational needs:

- A house cannot meet our need for *affection*.
- A car is not a substitute for *acceptance*.
- Degrees and diplomas will not satisfy our need for *respect*.
- A position of authority is no alternative for *approval*.
- Successful projects will not meet our need for *appreciation*.
- A bottle of alcohol or bowl of ice cream does not bring genuine *comfort*.

By definition, our *relational* needs can only be met in the context of deep, meaningful *relationships* with God and others. The same is true of our spiritual needs. These needs are only effectively addressed when God ministers His love to us, either directly or through other people.

You may be thinking to yourself, “Ah, but what about my physical needs? I can certainly meet those for myself.” But can you? Yes, you may be able to earn money with which to buy food, and you may be able to prepare and cook meals, but where did the food actually come from? Who made the seed? Who created the soil in which the seed grew, and provided the oxygen that gave it life? Who caused the sun to shine and the rain to fall? Farmers may be able to plant, cultivate, and harvest crops, and we may be able to purchase and prepare food, but the source of all these good things is God: “Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father...” (James 1:17).

WHY DID GOD CREATE US WITH NEEDS?

It should now be obvious that we all have needs, but the question remains, “why?” Why did God create us with a need for sleep? Why do we require oxygen to sustain us? Why do we long for comfort, attention, and security? After all, God is sovereign. He could have created us without any needs whatsoever. Should we then conclude that our needs represent flaws in God’s design? Did the Creator make a mistake when He formed us in His image? The answer must be a resounding, “No!” God’s Word suggests several reasons why He chose to create us with needs.

1. Our Neediness Encourages Us to Depend Upon God and Look to Him to Meet Our Needs.

So far, we have seen that (1) everyone has needs, and (2) we cannot meet our own needs. Therefore, we can only conclude that, in order to have our needs met, we must look beyond ourselves to our loving heavenly Father. God may meet our needs directly, or He may choose to meet our needs through other people, but

either way, He is the ultimate source of provision for our needs. Indeed, Scripture tells us that even Jesus asked the Father to meet His needs: “During the days of Jesus’ life on earth, he offered up prayers and petitions with loud cries and tears to the one who could save him from death” (Hebrews 5:7).

2. Our Neediness Encourages Interdependence.

Just as our neediness and our inability to meet our own needs compel us to look to God for His loving care, so they should also motivate us to support and encourage one another. We cannot live our lives as if we were computerized robots on an assembly line, doing our own thing with no regard for the needs of others.

Fortunately, God has created a number of institutions that serve to promote interdependence and mutual need-meeting. Most basically, many of us have been granted the blessings of healthy marriages and other close family relationships, which serve as environments within which we both give and receive loving care in order to meet one another’s needs.

In addition, God has established the church, which, as Paul reminds us, is a single body made up of interdependent parts: “The eye cannot say to the hand, ‘I don’t need you!’ And the head cannot say to the feet, ‘I don’t need you!’...Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it” (1 Corinthians 12:21, 27). As we accept our role within this larger body, we are challenged to look for ways in which we can minister to the needs of the other “parts”—our brothers and sisters in Christ.

Again, Jesus serves as our model as we pursue this vision of interdependence. The Lord often expressed His own needs to His disciples, and He did so most dramatically at the time of His greatest trial: “My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me” (Matthew 26:38).

3. Accepting the Reality of Our Needs Helps Us to Develop a Heart Filled with Compassion for Others.

The word that is most commonly used in Scripture to describe Jesus' reactions to needy people is *compassion*. In his letter to the church at Ephesus, Paul exhorts believers to follow Christ's example by being "kind and compassionate to one another" (Ephesians 4:32). Our ability to respond effectively to this mandate, however, is closely tied to our willingness to admit that we have needs.

The sad truth is that those who tend to deny their own needs often lack compassion for others who are in need. Having chosen to adopt an attitude of self-reliance, they are likely to respond to neediness in others by thinking, "Why should I care about their needs? If they have problems, they should take care of them themselves!" However, as we come to accept the reality of our own needs, and to receive Christ's compassion for us, we are in turn empowered to respond to the needs of others with genuine feelings of compassion and concrete acts of kindness.

4. Admitting Our Needs Frees Us to Both Receive and Give Care.

"Freely you have received, freely give" (Matthew 10:8).

It is difficult to give others what we have not received. A woman who was never comforted as a child will find it incredibly challenging to offer words of comfort to her own children. A man whose parents failed to consistently display affection for him may struggle to adequately express his affection for his wife. An employer who has rarely received encouragement from others may find it hard to effectively encourage her employees.

By contrast, those who *have* had their own needs met are much better equipped to meet the needs of others. But in order to have our needs met, we must first admit that they exist. When we willingly confess our neediness, we allow ourselves to receive care from both God and other people. Having thus received, we are able to give more freely in turn.

5. Meeting the Needs of Others Expresses Care and Produces Unity in the Body of Christ.

If we desire to decrease the number of divisions within the body of Christ, we must begin by increasing care: “But God has combined the members of the body...so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other” (1 Corinthians 12:24, 25). How do we demonstrate that we truly care for one another? By meeting each other’s needs. As loving care is increasingly demonstrated through mutual need-meeting, divisions are mended and unity is strengthened.

NEEDS ARE AN ESSENTIAL ASPECT OF HEALTHY, CLOSE RELATIONSHIPS.

There is a big difference between superficial relationships and intimate relationships. It is possible to be around people all day long and still be lonely. In fact, a recent survey indicated that 70% of Americans suffer from loneliness. Surely this does not indicate that seven out of ten Americans have completely isolated themselves from society, but rather that their relationships with others—which are often numerous—lack genuine intimacy.

Even within the context of marriage, superficial relationships are troublingly prevalent. The second highest rate of divorce is among couples that have been married for 22 to 25 years, and the most common reason given for these divorces is “incompatibility.” Can you imagine the pain and disillusionment that must result when a marriage relationship dissolves after a quarter-century because both partners essentially decide that, “we don’t know each other, and we don’t really want to”?

Tragically, it is possible to drift through life without ever experiencing the joy of intimacy with another human being. Indeed, far too many people find themselves trapped in a world of shallow, unfulfilling relationships. But we must recognize that this is not God’s plan. He desires for us to become deeply connected to one another. Instead of settling for relationships that are distant, formal, or superficial, we can experience relationships that are personal, deep, warm, and intimate.

How can we develop, deepen, and maintain this sort of intimacy? By drawing upon the unlimited resources that God makes available to us and lovingly reaching out to meet the needs of others. Neediness is the catalyst for intimacy, and intimacy is the natural result of mutual need-meeting.

In the next chapter, we will take a closer look at the ten most significant relational needs that we all share. But for now, complete the following assessment in order to clarify your attitudes about neediness.

Personal Assessment

| Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Not Sure | Agree | Strongly Agree |
|-------------------|----------|----------|-------|----------------|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

1. I believe that God created me with physical, spiritual, and relational needs.

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
|---|---|---|---|---|

2. I believe that other people have these same needs.

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
|---|---|---|---|---|

3. I believe that I should be active in seeking to meet the needs of others.

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
|---|---|---|---|---|

4. I sometimes feel impatient toward other people when they express their needs.

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
|---|---|---|---|---|

5. I tend to deny my own needs.

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
|---|---|---|---|---|

6. I tend to view my own needs as more important than the needs of others.

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
|---|---|---|---|---|

7. I tend to feel guilty or bad that I have needs.

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
|---|---|---|---|---|

Gratitude for His Love

It is important to recognize that we are needy, but it is equally important that we realize that God knows and cares about our needs. When we humbly express our needs and exercise faith, God demonstrates His love for us and reassures us of His intent to provide for us.

This connection between human need, trusting faith, and divine provision is evident in many of the stories in the Gospels. When Jesus met Zacchaeus, He looked beyond the little man's sinful behavior and saw his needs. He then responded to Zacchaeus' neediness by summoning him to come down from the tree and announcing His intention to spend time in the tax collector's home. As Zacchaeus responded in faith to Jesus' invitation, his life was radically transformed (Luke 19:1–10). When Jesus saw a man who had been an invalid for thirty-eight years, He had compassion on him and commanded him to pick up his mat and walk. The man obeyed in faith and became the recipient of divine provision (John 5:1–9). When ten lepers encountered Jesus on the road, they begged Him for mercy, and the combination of their neediness and their faith prompted Him to respond (Luke 17:13–14).

How do you feel in your heart as you consider the truth that we have a God who notices, understands, and is acutely aware of our needs? In Matthew 6, Jesus explains that even though the lilies of the field do not labor or sew garments, they are beautifully dressed. Since we are more valuable than lilies, we can be assured that our Heavenly Father knows all of our needs and will be faithful to meet them.

Pause now and allow the Holy Spirit to impress you with the truth that God knows and cares about your neediness. Ask the Lord to reassure you and overwhelm you with the reality of His attentiveness. Then take some time to recall specific occasions when you sensed God's special care on your behalf. Remember a time when He provided for you, came through for you, or intervened powerfully in a difficult situation, whether directly or through another person. Then complete the following statement and offer it as a prayer of gratitude to God, praising Him for meeting your needs and worshipping Him as Jehovah Jireh, your provider:

God, I am reassured and reminded of your care as I remember _____

For example:

“God, I am reassured and reminded of your care as I remember a time when I was without work for an extended period of time and you brought caring friends into my life to encourage and support me. I deeply desire to be overwhelmed by an assurance that you know my needs and want to provide for me. Please help me to experience this reality for myself in a fresh, new way. Father, my heart is touched as I recall how you have known me, provided for me, and cared for me. Strengthen my faith, that I may trust You to meet all my needs.”

Living It Out

“And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds” (Hebrews 10:24).

In groups of two or three, examine your responses to the Personal Assessment on p. 15, particularly statements #4 through #7. Take turns discussing these four statements with your partner(s), sharing with each other which of the four you agreed with most strongly. Meet one another’s need for **attention** by demonstrating care and striving to enter into each other’s world. After each of you has shared, pray for one another, asking God to bring truth, freedom, and empowerment.

For example:

“Father, fill my friend with the patience of your Spirit so that he/she might be more sensitive to the relational needs of others,” or “God, please show my friend the truth about his/her needs—that it is OK to have them,” or “Jesus, help my friend to sense both the importance of his/her own needs and the importance of others’ needs.”

Small Group Notes

God, in His infinite wisdom, created us with physical, spiritual, and relational needs. In this chapter, we have discussed five characteristics of those needs and five positive results of our neediness. As we learn to admit our own needs, we will increasingly be able to express gratitude to our Creator for the beneficial aspects of our neediness. In addition, we will be filled with compassion for others and begin to look for ways in which we can give to meet their needs, just as God has given to us.

Starter Question

If you found yourself alone on a desert island without any human contact, what would you miss most?

Key Bible Passage

1 Corinthians 12:12–26—The body is a unit made of many parts.

Discussion Questions

1. God could have made us any way He wanted. For example, He could have created us to be totally sufficient in ourselves. But instead, He created us with needs. How does that impact our relationship with Him?
2. Why does Paul place such a strong emphasis on members of the church being interdependent (vv. 15–20)?
3. When are you tempted to deny that you need God or other people (v. 21)?
4. When are you most challenged by the needs of others?
5. What kinds of selfish behaviors might lead to divisions in the body (v. 25)? Give examples of such harmful behaviors in your own relationships.

6. What might sharing in the suffering or in the honoring of others (v. 26) look like, both from the perspective of the “recipient” of such sharing, as well as from the perspective of the “giver”?

Prayer Pointers

- Acknowledge God’s deep love and caring provision for you.
- Ask God to show you afresh how much you need Him, and ask Him to help you receive care from Him, both directly and through others.
- Invite God to birth in you a heart that is filled with compassion.
- Thank Him for the opportunities that He has given you to care for others.
- Pray for the various needs of those in the group.