



BROKEN LINKS

GOD'S GRACE FOR
RESTORING RELATIONSHIPS

SMALL GROUP RESOURCES
HIGHROCK 2022

INTRODUCTION

Sermon Schedule*

*Sermon schedule is subject to change at the discretion of the pastors.

Week 1. Jacob & Esau (Genesis 25:19-34)

Week 2. Paul, Mark, & Barnabas (Acts 15:36-41)

Week 3. David & Nathan (2 Samuel 2:1-13a)

Week 4. Paul & Ananias (Acts 9:10-19)

Week 5. Mary & Martha (Luke 10:38-42)

Resource Overview

This is a small group companion to Highrock's *Broken Links* sermon series. It's designed to be used with a small group, but it can also be used individually. Within the companion, you will find space each week for notes on the sermon and Scripture text, reflection questions, and prompts to discuss your reflection with others. Please note, there are several readings which may only be accessed by emailing smallgroups@highrock.org. These resources have been marked with an * (asterisk).

Assignments (with time estimates):

Prepare (Complete before 1st session)

READ: "Prepare" section on page 3 of this guide (3 minutes)

LISTEN: Gravity Leadership Podcast, [How Attachment Theory Helps Us Live Our Faith](#) (65 min)

READ: "Invitations from God" Chapter 1: Invitation to participate in my own healing* (30 min)

Weekly

LISTEN: Link to the sermon (20 min)

REFLECT: Scripture, [Emotion Inventory](#) and any additional reading/podcast (10-40 min)

RELATE: Discuss questions with your small group in person or online (60 min)

PRAY: Use the provided prayer prompt to close your group meeting (open-ended)

When considering the reflection questions, the goal is not to answer everything or have all the "right" answers—instead, let these questions serve as a starting point for curiosity in your conversation with God and others. See the Appendix of this guide for more resources and opportunities to engage with this study.

Appendix Preview (see page 14)

Additional Reading

"Icebreaker" Questions

Tips for Guiding Conversations

General Resources for Individual Support

Conversation Covenant

About

We hope that all small group discussions are lively and enriching, but sometimes tough topics will be discussed. The Conversation Covenant* is an agreement to hold respect and grace toward all participants within a small group, no matter the conversation. Please adhere to the Conversation Covenant or think about how to create one that fits your context.

*Adapted from <https://conversational-leadership.net/conversation-covenant/>

I pledge:

To act in good faith, with curiosity. *I will assume the best about my conversation partners when entering into our groups. I will give the benefit of the doubt, recognizing that they may know something I don't.*

To show respect. *I will show respect. I will be polite and give due regard to the feelings and traditions of others. I understand that I do not have to agree with someone to show them respect.*

To speak the truth. *I won't use rhetorical tricks to try to win an argument. I will speak what I genuinely believe is the nuanced truth.*

To aim to discover the truth. *I will not enter into a conversation with the purpose of changing the mind of anyone to my way of thinking.*

To focus on what we can change. *I will focus on what we can do differently in the future since we cannot change what we did in the past.*

To take responsibility for the conversation. *I will take responsibility for the quality of the conversation and the abidance of the rules both in principle and in spirit.*

To follow the covenant even when others fail to do so. *I will abide by the rules regardless of whether another person breaks them.*

To respect the confidentiality of the group. *I will not share stories of group members verbally or in written form (including on social media and online outlets).*

To lighten up and approach the conversation in good humor. *I recognize that humor is a hallmark of a constructive, generative conversation and take the conversation in good humor.*

PREPARE

Emotional Intelligence

READ

We've all experienced conflict and brokenness in our relationships. Sometimes it's as simple as someone cutting you off in traffic. Other times, it's wondering if your friendship will ever recover from a betrayal of trust. We look to Jesus as the ultimate example of reconciliation, and yet, it can be tricky to figure out how his example applies to our specific real-life experience when we are hurt or hurt others in our relationships. Our relationships won't get the chance for reconciliation if we leave those hurts unaddressed. We can stay stuck in immature versions of these relationships or cut them off altogether. There are tons of ways to become healthier in our lives, but relational health and emotional intelligence can be harder to pin down or know if we are on the right track.

In this five-week study, we'll take a look at relationships in the Bible that model conflicts we might be experiencing, and engage with sermons, podcasts, additional readings, and spiritual practices as we try to help heal those conflicts.

Jesus' work on the cross was an act of reconciliation with all of humanity, so as we seek to walk with Jesus, we believe we are called to be agents of reconciliation in the world, too. Jesus' prayer that the church be unified (John 17) as a witness to the world means that we have to take our relationships seriously! But we are all humans with limits and areas of brokenness- so taking our relationships seriously means learning how to take care of them within our limits. A large part of caring for our relationships is growing in our emotional intelligence. Emotional intelligence is basically being able to:

Know what you're feeling

Assess your emotions

Express your emotions without letting them control you

Many Christians have relied on connecting to God through their heads, and cognitively understanding God, or their hands, and concretely serving God. Emotional intelligence asks that we connect to God through our hearts, and see how God might be inviting us to a new reality through our emotions.

Emotions are tricky because our minds are complex, and we can't always understand the ways they are responding to situations we find ourselves in. Yet, our emotions greatly impact our relationships with God and one another. It's a work of discipleship to see these emotions more clearly, and allow them to be gifts that help us love God and our neighbors with our whole heart, soul, and mind.

Psychologists have identified four major responses our brains turn to when they run into conflict. They are:

Fight: facing any perceived threat aggressively

Flight: running away from the danger

Freeze: being unable to move or act against a threat

Fawn: immediately acting to try to please to avoid any conflict

During our study, you will be asked to listen to a sermon examining a conflict represented in the Bible, and then spend time reflecting on your response to different kinds of conflict and your emotions. Then, you'll read or listen to an additional piece of information to better understand the drivers of these conflicts. Then with your group see if God is offering you any next steps. We pray that you would recognize God's loving embrace of you, and God's promise to never leave you or forsake you as you do this work towards growing in your relationships with God and others.

Set a foundational understanding for this series by completing the following:

LISTEN: Gravity Leadership Podcast, [How Attachment Theory Helps Us Live Our Faith](#) (65 min)

READ: "Invitations from God" Chapter 1: Invitation to participate in my own healing* (30 min)

WEEK 1

Jacob & Esau

LISTEN | Sermons available at Highrock Online's [YouTube channel](#).

REFLECT | In this text, we encounter Esau and Jacob, twins born to Isaac and Rebecca. The two represent more than an answer to prayer from a barren couple. They are called “two nations” and continue the Genesis theme of the eldest (Esau) serving the youngest (Jacob). This turn subverts the expected hierarchy of preferential parental treatment of the eldest child. The two brothers compete and jockey for position, favor, and love. Their relationship is one marked by fracture rather than fidelity.

Reflect personally: Prior to your small group gathering:

- Read Scripture passage (see Scripture & Additional Resources below)
- Complete the [Emotion Inventory](#)
- Read *True You*, Chapter 4: “Competitors or Comrades”*
- Review small group questions for discussion

RELATE | Use these questions as a launching point for your small group conversation.

Open with a check-in/getting-to-know-you question. Group opener options are available in the Appendix.

1. Growing up, was competition encouraged? How so? What were the benefits of winning or the potential consequences of losing?
2. Is there a relationship with someone you know that is marked by competition? When did the competition begin? What might be at the root of what you are competing for and why?
3. What would the relationship between you look like if you stopped competing? What might it take for you personally to let go of it? Is there an area of security that you might be able to develop in your relationship with God or others?
4. Was there anything that God was getting your attention about in the sermon or in the additional resources? Anything that is making you ask new questions?
5. Is there an action step you would like the group to hold you accountable for taking?

PRAY

Father Lord, teach us the power of a generosity that interrupts the logic of scarcity with the extravagant self-giving of divine love. Amen. May the peace of the Lord Christ go with you: wherever he may send you; may God guide you through the wilderness: protect you through the storm; may God bring you home rejoicing: at the wonders God has shown you; may God bring you home rejoicing: once again into our doors.¹

¹ Claiborne, Shane; Wilson-Hartgrove, Jonathan; Okoro, Enuma. Common Prayer

Jacob & Esau

SCRIPTURE & ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

OPTIONAL READING:

- *Deeply Formed Life* by Rich Villodas, Chapter 6*

SCRIPTURE: Genesis 25:19-34 19 This is the account of the family line of Abraham's son Isaac. Abraham became the father of Isaac, 20 and Isaac was forty years old when he married Rebekah daughter of Bethuel the Aramean from Paddan Aram and sister of Laban the Aramean. 21 Isaac prayed to the Lord on behalf of his wife, because she was childless. The Lord answered his prayer, and his wife Rebekah became pregnant. 22 The babies jostled each other within her, and she said, "Why is this happening to me?" So she went to inquire of the Lord.

23 The Lord said to her,

"Two nations are in your womb,
and two peoples from within you will be separated;
one people will be stronger than the other,
and the older will serve the younger."

24 When the time came for her to give birth, there were twin boys in her womb. 25 The first to come out was red, and his whole body was like a hairy garment; so they named him Esau. 26 After this, his brother came out, with his hand grasping Esau's heel; so he was named Jacob. Isaac was sixty years old when Rebekah gave birth to them.

27 The boys grew up, and Esau became a skillful hunter, a man of the open country, while Jacob was content to stay at home among the tents. 28 Isaac, who had a taste for wild game, loved Esau, but Rebekah loved Jacob.

29 Once when Jacob was cooking some stew, Esau came in from the open country, famished. 30 He said to Jacob, "Quick, let me have some of that red stew! I'm famished!" (That is why he was also called Edom.)

31 Jacob replied, "First sell me your birthright." 32 "Look, I am about to die," Esau said. "What good is the birthright to me?" 33 But Jacob said, "Swear to me first." So he swore an oath to him, selling his birthright to Jacob. 34 Then Jacob gave Esau some bread and some lentil stew. He ate and drank, and then got up and left. So Esau despised his birthright.

WEEK 2

Paul, Mark, & Barnabas

LISTEN | Sermons available at Highrock Online's [YouTube channel](#).

REFLECT | In this text, we see that Paul, Mark, and Barnabas all had previous relationships with each other, and also a set way of operating within their different relationships. These expectations from previous interactions led to conflict when there was a disagreement about how the three of them would operate together.

Reflect personally: Prior to your small group gathering complete the self-assessment, the reading/podcast, and review small group questions for your discussion.

- Read Scripture Passage (See Scripture & Additional Resources below)
- Complete the [Emotion Inventory](#)
- Listen to this podcast from The Non-Anxious Leader, [Self-Differentiation](#)
- Review small group questions for discussion

RELATE | Use these questions as a launching point for your small group conversation.

Open with a check-in/getting-to-know-you question. Group opener options are available in the Appendix.

1. What is difficult about being in a relationship with someone who is different from you?
2. Share about a relationship in your life where you have disagreed with another person, or had a difference that has created confusion or anxiety about how you are supposed to relate to them.
3. Was there anything that God was getting your attention about in the sermon, or in the additional resources? Anything that is making you ask new questions?
4. Is there an action step you would like the group to hold you accountable for taking?

PRAY

Lord, strengthen our will to heed your commandments. We pray to be found faithful in the smallest things, that you might deem us worthy of more opportunities to serve you. Amen
may God guide you through the wilderness: protect you through the storm;
may God bring you home rejoicing: at the wonders God has shown you;
may God bring you home rejoicing: once again into our doors.²

² Claiborne, Shane; Wilson-Hartgrove, Jonathan; Okoro, Enuma. Common Prayer

Paul, Mark, & Barnabas**SCRIPTURE & ADDITIONAL RESOURCES****OPTIONAL READING:**

- [Article on Differentiation](#)

SCRIPTURE: Acts 15:36-41 36 Some time later Paul said to Barnabas, “Let us go back and visit the believers in all the towns where we preached the word of the Lord and see how they are doing.” 37 Barnabas wanted to take John, also called Mark, with them, 38 but Paul did not think it wise to take him, because he had deserted them in Pamphylia and had not continued with them in the work. 39 They had such a sharp disagreement that they parted company. Barnabas took Mark and sailed for Cyprus, 40 but Paul chose Silas and left, commended by the believers to the grace of the Lord. 41 He went through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches.

WEEK 3

David & Nathan

LISTEN | Sermons available at Highrock Online's [YouTube channel](#).

REFLECT | In this text, King David has a long and storied history as ruler. Nathan comes to him, sent by God, with a parable dressed up as a legal case. David listens and is outraged by the injustice he has heard, demanding the wrongdoer be killed. Nathan speaks directly and plainly with the message from God that David is the one who has been found guilty of having plenty yet stealing from his neighbor.

Reflect personally: Prior to your small group gathering complete the self-assessment, the reading/podcast, and review small group questions for your discussion.

- Read Scripture Passage
- Complete the [Emotion Inventory](#)
- Read [Scientific American](#) article on deception
- Review small group questions for discussion

RELATE | Use these questions as a launching point for your small group conversation.

Open with a check-in/getting-to-know-you question. Group opener options are available in the Appendix.

1. Pointing fingers outward can be easier than examining our own shortcomings. Have you ever heard a sermon and only thought about how much someone else needed to hear it?
2. Can you think of a time when a bruised ego caused you to lash out or deny your own role in a conflict?
3. Who has been like a Nathan to you now or in your past: Someone who can speak honestly to you and whom you trust?
4. Was there anything that God was getting your attention about in the sermon, or in the additional resources? Anything that is that are making you ask new questions?
5. Is there an action step you would like the group to hold you accountable for taking?

PRAY

Lord, your church is such that when one member of the body fails, the whole body suffers. Help us encourage one another in faith so that working together we might become a unified body that goes forth into the world to proclaim good news. Amen.

may God guide you through the wilderness: protect you through the storm;

may God bring you home rejoicing: at the wonders God has shown you;

may God bring you home rejoicing: once again into our doors.³

³ Claiborne, Shane; Wilson-Hartgrove, Jonathan; Okoro, Enuma. Common Prayer

David & Nathan

SCRIPTURE & ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

OPTIONAL READING:

- [BBC article](#) on self-deception
- Sacred Companions, Chapter 4 “The ideals of spiritual friendships”*

SCRIPTURE: 2 Samuel 12: 1-13 12 The Lord sent Nathan to David. When he came to him, he said, “There were two men in a certain town, one rich and the other poor. 2 The rich man had a very large number of sheep and cattle, 3 but the poor man had nothing except one little ewe lamb he had bought. He raised it, and it grew up with him and his children. It shared his food, drank from his cup and even slept in his arms. It was like a daughter to him.

4 “Now a traveler came to the rich man, but the rich man refrained from taking one of his own sheep or cattle to prepare a meal for the traveler who had come to him. Instead, he took the ewe lamb that belonged to the poor man and prepared it for the one who had come to him.”

5 David burned with anger against the man and said to Nathan, “As surely as the Lord lives, the man who did this must die! 6 He must pay for that lamb four times over, because he did such a thing and had no pity.”

7 Then Nathan said to David, “You are the man! This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: ‘I anointed you king over Israel, and I delivered you from the hand of Saul. 8 I gave your master’s house to you, and your master’s wives into your arms. I gave you all Israel and Judah. And if all this had been too little, I would have given you even more. 9 Why did you despise the word of the Lord by doing what is evil in his eyes? You struck down Uriah the Hittite with the sword and took his wife to be your own. You killed him with the sword of the Ammonites. 10 Now, therefore, the sword will never depart from your house, because you despised me and took the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your own.’

11 “This is what the Lord says: ‘Out of your own household I am going to bring calamity on you. Before your very eyes I will take your wives and give them to one who is close to you, and he will sleep with your wives in broad daylight. 12 You did it in secret, but I will do this thing in broad daylight before all Israel.’”

13 Then David said to Nathan, “I have sinned against the Lord.”

Nathan replied, “The Lord has taken away your sin. You are not going to die.

WEEK 4

Paul & Ananias

LISTEN | Sermons available at Highrock Online's [YouTube channel](#).

REFLECT | In this text, we see that God invites Ananias to seek out a relationship with Saul, who had been murdering followers of Jesus. Ananias has to wrestle with whether or not he will be safe with Saul, and if Saul is worth saving.

Reflect personally: Prior to your small group gathering complete the self-assessment, the reading/podcast, and review small group questions for your discussion.

- Read Scripture Passage
- Complete the [Emotion Inventory](#)
- Listen to podcast from Kate Bowler and Malcom Gladwell, [Can People Change?](#)
- Review small group questions for discussion

RELATE | Use these questions as a launching point for your small group conversation.

Open with a check-in/getting-to-know-you question. Group opener options are available in the Appendix.

1. Can you recount a time in your life where you have changed your mind or behavior about something that was deeply important to you previously?
2. What is hard about offering forgiveness, or giving people a second (or third, or fourth) chance to change?
3. Why do you think it is easier to focus on changing someone else instead of changing ourselves?
4. What boundaries did Ananias have to consider before saying yes to God? Are there boundaries you need to set in order to extend a relationship to someone who has hurt you?
5. Was there anything that God was getting your attention about in the sermon, or in the additional resources? Anything that is making you ask new questions?
6. Is there an action step you would like the group to hold you accountable for taking?

PRAY

Lord, help us not to shy away from our own transgressions, neither to hold the sins of others against them, but to name sin with confidence that your forgiveness has the power to effect a just reconciliation in our world. Amen.

may God guide you through the wilderness: protect you through the storm;

may God bring you home rejoicing: at the wonders God has shown you;

may God bring you home rejoicing: once again into our doors.⁴

⁴ Claiborne, Shane; Wilson-Hartgrove, Jonathan; Okoro, Enuma. Common Prayer

Paul & Ananias

SCRIPTURE & ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

OPTIONAL READING:

- [Transformation is More Than a Mind Change](#), Fr. Richard Rohr
- [Breathing Underwater](#), Fr. Richard Rohr
- [Lessons on Interpersonal Accountability](#), The Wildfire Project
- [The End of Memory: Remembering Rightly in a Violent World](#), Miroslav Volf

SCRIPTURE: Acts 9:10-19 10 In Damascus there was a disciple named Ananias. The Lord called to him in a vision, “Ananias!”

“Yes, Lord,” he answered.

11 The Lord told him, “Go to the house of Judas on Straight Street and ask for a man from Tarsus named Saul, for he is praying. 12 In a vision he has seen a man named Ananias come and place his hands on him to restore his sight.”

13 “Lord,” Ananias answered, “I have heard many reports about this man and all the harm he has done to your holy people in Jerusalem. 14 And he has come here with authority from the chief priests to arrest all who call on your name.”

15 But the Lord said to Ananias, “Go! This man is my chosen instrument to proclaim my name to the Gentiles and their kings and to the people of Israel. 16 I will show him how much he must suffer for my name.”

17 Then Ananias went to the house and entered it. Placing his hands on Saul, he said, “Brother Saul, the Lord—Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you were coming here—has sent me so that you may see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit.” 18 Immediately, something like scales fell from Saul’s eyes, and he could see again. He got up and was baptized, 19 and after taking some food, he regained his strength.

WEEK 5

Mary & Martha

LISTEN | Sermons available at Highrock Online's [YouTube channel](#).

REFLECT | In this text, Jesus is a guest at the home of Mary and Martha. The sisters have two different responses to Jesus' presence. Martha is so certain that her own choice is best that she asks Jesus to correct Mary for choosing to sit with the disciples when she should be making preparations. However, instead Martha is corrected for her attitude and assumptions. Jesus reframes how we see the choices others have made.

Reflect personally: Prior to your small group gathering complete the self-assessment, the reading/podcast, and review small group questions for your discussion.

- Read Scripture Passage
- Complete the [Emotion Inventory](#)
- Listen to Podcast: Hidden Brain, [Decoding Emotions](#)
- Review small group questions for discussion

RELATE | Use these questions as a launching point for your small group conversation.

Open with a check-in/getting-to-know-you question. Group opener options are available in the Appendix.

1. What role has jealousy played in your relationships? What might be some attitudes, emotions, or actions that indicate you are feeling jealous? Are there places, activities, or people which bring this out in you more than others?
2. What invitation does Jesus give to Martha? What might these words mean to you as you examine your own feelings of comparison or jealousy?
3. How can the gap between comparison and curiosity be bridged for relational repair?
4. Thinking about the Hidden Brain episode, consider how your cultural norms inform your emotional landscape. How might it impact your perception of other people's emotions? If you can relate to having parents/grandparents who immigrated, do you notice a difference in emotional expression or evolution?
5. Was there anything that God was getting your attention about in the sermon, or in the additional resources? Anything that is making you ask new questions?
6. Is there an action step you would like the group to hold you accountable for taking?

PRAY

Loving God, even in the midst of the world's pain and sorrow, we can encounter your joy. Show us that such joy comes when we are caught up in works of mercy and find ourselves unable to distinguish between our blessings and those of our brothers and sisters. Amen.

may God guide you through the wilderness: protect you through the storm;
may God bring you home rejoicing: at the wonders God has shown you;
may God bring you home rejoicing: once again into our doors.⁵

⁵ Claiborne, Shane; Wilson-Hartgrove, Jonathan; Okoro, Enuma. Common Prayer

Mary & Martha

SCRIPTURE & ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

OPTIONAL READING:

- [What Your Jealous Feelings are Telling You](#)
- [Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence](#)

SCRIPTURE: Luke 10: 38-42 38 As Jesus and his disciples were on their way, he came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to him. 39 She had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet listening to what he said. 40 But Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made. She came to him and asked, "Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!"

41 "Martha, Martha," the Lord answered, "you are worried and upset about many things, 42 but few things are needed—or indeed only one.[a] Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her."

Appendix

Below are a few resources to look into if you are interested in diving deeper into some of the topics covered in this series. If you need resources that more specifically address your own experience, demographic, or faith journey, please reach out to a Highrock pastor or to smallgroups@highrock.org and we will be happy to help!

Additional Reading

- [Set Boundaries, Find Peace](#) book & [workbook](#) by Nedra Glover Tawwab
- [Difficult Conversations](#) by Stone, Patton, and Neen

“Icebreaker” Questions

- What was a small win from your week?
- Share a High/Low from your day or week.
- On a scale of 1-10, how are you doing coming into this meeting?
- If you were to describe yourself as a weather forecast today, what would you be? Example: sunny, partly cloudy, rainy with a chance of snow, etc.
- What song would be the theme track for the day you had?

Tips for Guiding Conversations

- **Allow everyone space to share.** It's ok to ask what people are thinking even if they don't volunteer to share right away. But always give people the option to decline to share. Example: “Hey, Fred, you've been a little quiet and I'm curious to know what you think. Would you like to share anything?”
- **Remember there aren't necessarily “right” answers.** Encourage participants to simply be curious about what came up for them or others without the pressure of feeling like they “should” have thought or felt anything in particular. Example: Instead of asking “what is this story supposed to be communicating?” ask “what did you notice?”
- **Embrace the differences.** Affirm that different people can come to different conclusions regarding the same thing. Example: “It is really interesting that the text reminded Susie of ABC, while it reminded José of XYZ. Both can be present and true.”
- **Adapt to suit your group's needs.** Sometimes conversation is free-flowing and sometimes it's easier to move through discussion questions one at a time. Do what feels right for your group, but don't feel pressured to answer/discuss every single question.
- **Encourage curiosity by modeling curiosity!** Asking someone “Tell me more about XYZ” can be a really simple but effective tool to go deeper in conversation.
- **Don't be afraid of silence.** It's natural to want to fill silences or pauses in a conversation. But don't be afraid to sit in silence with your group members. Sometimes thoughts just need time to percolate, so don't feel like you have to rush to another question if no one shares immediately.

- **Refer back to the Conversation Covenant.** This is the posture that we as Highrock hold as we gather in groups. When the conversation gets tough, you can always refer back to the Conversation Covenant to remind the group that everyone has agreed to abide by this covenant in small group meetings

General Resources for Individual Support

- [Spiritual Practices](#)
- [Mental Health Resources](#)
- [Lament Liturgy](#)
- [Boston Area Community Aid](#)
- [Parenting & Kids—Understanding each other through Milestones](#)