



Do You Love Me?

Exploring Our Relationships with God and Others

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Activities by Monica Romig Green

Do You Love Me?
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Dear friends,

Welcome to *Do You Love Me?* I am excited for what you will experience in the next few weeks. This short book is designed to engage you in relationship with God and others. You will notice that the text contains a variety of invitations—to meditate, to read, to pray, to act, to dialogue with others—which you can accept as you feel led and able.

There are no requirements for engagement, just opportunities to be refreshed. Allow this journey to enliven your vision for what is possible when relating with God and others. Feel free to pause on ideas that intrigue you and to participate in activities that recharge you. You will find explanations for each activity as you go along which will guide you through the process.

So let's get started. I know that God is traveling with you. May you feel His blessing as you begin.

Debbie

Debbie Swindoll

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

This workbook is written for group or individual use over a suggested four week period. Each week has additional activities alongside the text of *Do You Love Me?* to bring the experience into your daily prayers and conversations.

Rest and Receive

Each week opens with several short activities for you to relax with and take in, like a deep breath.

The **Opening Prayer** focuses your heart and reminds you that God is present as you think and read.

The five recorded **Scripture Meditations**, one for each day of the week, invite you to ruminate on God's Word. Each recording is about 5 minutes long. We created these meditations to let you listen to Scripture spoken aloud and receive rest.

Read Access Online Content on page 9 for instruction on how to download and listen to these meditations.

Read and Reflect

Do You Love Me? presents concepts from Scripture through engaging stories and clear explanations. The book is divided into

ten short chapter selections, followed by questions for personal reflection.

Use the questions in **Pause to Consider** to prayerfully reflect on how what you are learning touches your life. We've provided you with open space to write out your answers to help solidify your thoughts and conclusions.

Live Into It

Following the reading, we've included three 20-minute activities that encourage you to try out the ideas of the book. We recommend these activities as an accessible starting place for experiencing *Do You Love Me?* in the context of your daily life.

Discuss Together

Each week ends with questions for group discussion, carefully chosen to help spark lively dialogue with others who are reading *Do You Love Me?*

We pray that as you engage with this workbook, your life will be impacted as you grow in love for our Lord Jesus Christ and His church.



Week 1



*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God,
and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God.
All things were made through him, and without him was not
any thing made that was made.*

*In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light
shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.*

John 1:1-5

REST AND RECEIVE

Opening Prayer

Find a quiet place to relax where you will not be disturbed by others. Set aside any items which might vie for your attention. Consider God's presence with the following prayer:

LORD God,

*I pause to acknowledge that You are with me right now
Even though I may not feel or recognize Your presence.*

*Help me to grasp Your desire for relationship
And to listen for whatever you want to reveal to me.*

I entrust myself to You.

In the name of Jesus, Amen.

Scripture Meditations

We have recorded five meditations on the following biblical passages to draw your attention to God throughout the week. Access these recordings at www.graftedlife.org/podcasts (see page 9).

MONDAY	John 1:1-5
TUESDAY	Matthew 11:28-30
WEDNESDAY	Genesis 1:26-27
THURSDAY	John 3:19-20
FRIDAY	Romans 8:19-22

READ AND REFLECT

Preface to Do You Love Me?

Several years ago my spiritual life derailed. After decades of trying to live according to the Bible, I “woke up” exhausted one day confronted with the words of Christ in Matthew 11:28-30—“Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light” (ESV). As I let those verses contrast with the true state of my internal life, I concluded that if Christ’s invitation was true, then I was doing something fundamentally wrong in my walk with Him.

The cry of my heart became, “LORD, teach me how these words of Yours can be true in my life.” This prayer was a turning point in my spiritual journey. It was as if I got off a derailed train and onto another, only I had no idea where the new train was going or how it worked. I could only hope that the journey would feel less burdensome and that the destination would indeed be a place of rest for my tired soul.

In the years since that spiritual wake-up call, I have studied and experienced many things that have influenced my understanding of the gospel. God has helped me discover new ways to engage in the journey of sanctification. My knowledge of how the new train operates and how I can know, love, and learn from the gentle and humble-hearted Engineer has grown. I now understand that lasting change doesn’t result when I exhaust myself through trying harder to be good, but rather when I bring my brokenness into a relationship with Christ.

That relationship has transformed my life. What I have learned over the last fifteen years has convinced me that our spiritual

growth rests on the quality of our relationship with God. My goal in these pages is to share my experience and to highlight biblical ideas about the sanctification journey that have helped me grasp the reality of Christ's invitation to live in His yoke.

If God uses these words to encourage you about the possibilities of abiding in a close relationship with Him, then that result will be to His glory, empowered by His Spirit, who is always calling us closer to the Father's heart.

Chapter 1. Why Relationship?

I grew up in the evangelical church. I believed in Jesus as my savior at an early age. As a young Christian, I heard Christianity commonly described as “having a personal relationship with Christ,” and I often used this description, myself. Looking back, I think I understood that phrase primarily from a conversion perspective. I equated the “personal relationship” to my initial decision to accept Jesus as the Savior for my sins. I knew that everyone had to make this individual choice in order to come into the faith. But the majority of my experience after my conversion moment didn't feel like an abiding relationship with a Person. I operated independently, doing what I could to obey and conform to the Christian image that I read about in the Bible. My concern was to be good, to avoid guilt and the feeling that my behavior might disappoint God. I had little awareness of God's presence with me and little knowledge of what an interactive relationship with God might look like.

I believe there was a part of me that wanted a different spiritual experience—a deep and quiet longing to know God intimately, or as the Apostle Paul writes, to be known by God (Gal. 4:9). But if I am honest, there were other parts of me that appreciated the distance, that feared being close to God. I felt comfort in controlling the journey and dreaded what God might ask me to do or give up if I got too close. I avoided these feelings. They didn't make logical

sense in light of what I knew in my head about God—His love and the length that He was willing to go to save me. I had no idea how to explore the disparity between what I knew about God and the fear that often emerged from my heart.

But God planned so much more for me. After my spiritual life derailed, God began to awaken me to the truth that my definition of “personal relationship” was only the embryo of what He had in mind when it came to relating with me. My understanding limited my spiritual growth and exhausted me. In contrast, the gospel actually offered me the opportunity to grow in intimacy, trust and love for God, to enjoy the privileges of being in His family, to become His friend. His relationship with me was meant to invade every aspect and activity of my life.

Sometimes in life we have these insightful moments—when something that we think we know takes on new meaning or is nuanced in a life-changing way. The potential to have an ongoing relationship with God was like that for me. Once the idea was planted it continued to expand and eventually gave me a framework that made everything else in my Christian life fit together. It has taken time for God to reorient my mind and heart and help me understand His desires for me. One thing I needed to grasp was how important relationship is to God.

God desires relationship simply because He relates. One of the most mysterious realities about the personhood of God is the truth that He is Triune. Relationship abides within His Being. Scripture gives evidence to this important doctrine of the Church. For example, the Bible describes God as the “Us” that made man in His image and then had to expel those first image-bearers, Adam and Eve, from the Garden of Eden after their sin (Gen. 1:26, 3:22). The New Testament explains how God’s plan of redemption and sanctification is carried out through God’s cooperative work in the Trinity as Father, Son, and Spirit share the same will for us and constantly communicate within their Being to bring that will to fruition (John 14, Rom. 8:12-39).

Without dividing His essence, there is communication, association, unity, understanding, and community between the persons of the Father, the Son, and the Spirit. There is perfect, divine, eternal relationship. The doctrine of the Trinity informs us that relationship is fundamental to the nature of God. The Triune Personhood of God defines, initiates, establishes and sustains the concept of relationship. It is the starting point.

God extends relationship because He loves. God is a lover. The Apostle John describes Him as love (1 John 4:8). This relational truth about God is also a part of His Personhood. God loves first within the Godhead. As the Trinity demonstrates, relationship is more perfectly expressed in the giving and receiving of love. Jesus explained that His unity with and adherence to the Father's will was proof of His love for the Father (John 14:31).

God also demonstrated His love beyond the Trinity and established the framework in which He intended all other relationships to function. For example, He expressed His love and extended relationship to His creation through the goodness of His original design. He exhibited His love in relationship with Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden (Gen. 1-3). After the Fall, He continued to display His love to the ancient nations by instituting an unconditional covenant with Abraham and his descendants, guaranteeing His ultimate faithfulness to them (regardless of their fickleness toward Him) with the promise to bring blessing to the whole world (Gen. 12,15). He demonstrated His great love for us in that while we were still sinners and enemies He sent His Son to die so that He might restore us to a loving relationship with Him (Rom. 5:6-11). In sending Jesus, He also lovingly kept His promise to bring blessing to the world. (In the next section, we will further explore the relational dynamics recorded in Scripture.)

God is *always* relating and loving. Stop and think about that. That truth is not just a sound theological idea, but a reality that has the potential to transform our days—to invite us to participate in an ongoing relationship with Him. We can enter into that relationship because of Christ. For those who believe in Him, His

life, death, and resurrection restore our relationship with God. It is now possible for us to accept the love of God and to love Him in return—to consistently engage in acts of healthy relationship and to be an abiding part of the on-going love exchange of the Trinity (John 15:1-11).

This is something that God has always wanted for us and from us. In fact it is not just an optional add-on for the super spiritual, but a direct command from our Creator. Scripture gives preeminence to the idea of relating to God by requiring that we love God with our heart, soul, mind, and strength and by positioning love as the foundation of the whole law (Deut. 6:5, Matt. 22:37-38). The scope of such a command goes far beyond the realm of trying to be good by following rules and avoiding feelings of guilt or disappointment. This scriptural imperative requires that we honestly explore our thoughts, emotions, desires, attitudes, and actions before God in order to relate with Him from the depths of our hearts (Jer. 31:31-34, Eph. 3:14-19).

Does abiding with God in such an intimate way sound like the kind of “personal relationship” you desire? If you are like me, it may not be what you originally understood when you became a Christian. Through the rest of this book, we will explore God’s invitation to engage deeply with Him in a relationship that will transform our lives.

- » Take a moment to talk with God about your relationship with Him. What would you like to express to Him? How would you desire Him to respond? Take a moment to journal your thoughts.



Chapter 2. Going Back to the Beginning

I was greatly encouraged to understand that God desires and invites me into relationship with Him, but knowing how to respond in love to God was, at times, a frustrating exercise. It takes two to be in a relationship. I didn't come preprogrammed to understand how to accept God's invitation. I struggled to know how to engage with a Spirit. As I mentioned earlier, there were parts of me that were reluctant to be close with God. It seemed as if I had fundamental heart problems that were getting in the way of intimacy with God. Not only did I need to have my understanding of God's views on relationship expanded, but I also needed to grow in awareness of my heart's true condition, particularly about the hindrances inside me that kept me from desiring a deeper relationship with Him.

Desire was not my only problem, though. I also had relational habits that hampered healthy interactions with others. I come from a family that functioned in its unique brokenness. All of our families do to some degree. I continue to grow, with the help of God and others, to understand how that brokenness and my own sinfulness

affect me, creating wounded places in me that impact the ways that I relate with others. But back in the day, I had a certain naivety about how deeply my relational deficiencies impacted my life and was ignorant about how they disrupted my relationship with God.

Thankfully, God's grace comes in many different packages. Often when He invites us to a deeper relationship, He allows us to feel the insufficiencies of our current one. Along with persistent feelings of exhaustion during my spiritual derailment, God invited me to experience how poorly I was operating in all my relationships. My kids, who were teenagers at the time, were particularly useful tools in the hand of God. They often told me or showed me the shallowness of my relational capacities.

I desired for them to be good, to obey, and to be involved in church. I wanted them to do all the things that I thought God wanted me to do. But just like me, they had deeper issues in their hearts and because I didn't know how to explore my deeper issues, I was incapable of being with them or helping them to know how to explore theirs. I didn't often talk with them about their feelings. I defaulted to lecturing them and giving them advice. I was quick to deal with their problems, rather than to be with them. Their unresolved troubles made me uncomfortable, and I didn't want to feel my inadequacy. Over time God allowed me to see that my relational shallowness was not just affecting my interactions with my kids, but that it stemmed from a lack of depth in my relationship with Him.

I needed a relational overhaul and an honest understanding of what was happening inside of me. I believe God made me aware of these failures so that I would be willing to enter into a new journey with Him. In the midst of my dysfunction, God brought me into a community of believers who walked with me, helping me to discover Him and myself in deeper ways. He also showed me over and over through the pages of Scripture how deeply He desires a relationship with me. The stories of the Bible became alive with relevant illustrations about the struggles of my heart.

The Bible has a lot to say about relationships. A main purpose of Scripture seems to be to reveal the nature of God's relationship with the human race which He created in His image. Scripture also provides understanding about people's relationships with each other and our responsibilities in connection with the rest of creation. From its opening chapters which contrast the picture of relational harmony in the Garden of Eden with the devastating relational dysfunction which resulted from the Fall, the Scriptures illustrate both the benefits of living with God and the consequences of living independently (in human pride) from God's design.

Over the next few chapters, we will explore some of what the Bible reveals about relationships. As we do, there will be places to stop, reflect, and talk with God about how these scriptural ideas help us understand our lives.

CREATION'S STANDARD

When I hear the name "Garden of Eden," it evokes ethereal images in my imagination. Natural beauty, an environment of abundance, and a sense of ease in life are all concepts that play through my mind. Who of us hasn't longed for a glimpse of Eden or the opportunity to go back in time and experience, even for a day, the reflected glory of such a place?

Although we cannot experience it personally, reflecting on the garden narrative affords us the opportunity to ponder the relational dynamic recorded between God and Adam. We can see a picture of God's desire to relate to us and how we were created to relate to Him.

The creation story unveils the deep affection and care that God demonstrated in providing the heavens and earth for the sustenance and enjoyment of man, who He positioned as the culmination of His creative activity. God brought Adam to life with His own breath (Gen. 2:7). God honored the first couple with the responsibility of dominion over the rest of creation (Gen. 1:26-31). God expresses

His personal connection with man by fashioning both men and women after His image. Part of the image of God that is instilled in humanity is the ability to relate—to participate in relationships where love is exchanged.

Within just a few verses, Scripture portrays an open and ongoing relationship between God and Adam. Adam received instruction from God about his vocational responsibilities and about a prohibition God placed on his activities. God invited Adam to participate in naming the animals and blessed him with the gift of a perfectly compatible human partner (Gen. 2:15-25). By creating Eve for Adam and by commenting that it was not good for man to be alone, God again affirms how much He values relationship.

God's visitations with Adam and Eve in the cool of the day characterized their relationship with Him. Scripture implies that Adam and Eve recognize the sound of God walking in the garden, which leads us to conclude they were familiar with this experience with God (Gen. 3:8). The relational context appears loving, open, innocent, and ongoing.

SIN AND THE RELATIONAL FALLOUT

Many times I have wished for more information about Adam and Eve's experience in the Garden of Eden prior to the fateful day recorded in Genesis 3. Scripture introduces their fall from glory so suddenly that as readers, we barely get our bearings before the narrative turns our perspective upside down. As Scripture explores Adam and Eve's actions that day, we begin to see what caused the break in humankind's relationship with God. Reflecting on their encounter with God is valuable not only to understand the nature of sin but to recognize the relational damage that resulted from it and which continues to plague us today.

Genesis 3 begins by introducing another of God's creatures, a serpent that was superior in wit to the other beasts of the field. Scripture records a conversation between the serpent and Eve in

which he tempts her to eat from the only tree that God had banned. The serpent's arguments for disregarding what God had said strike at the heart of Eve's relationship with God. Through crafty questioning and half-truths, the serpent leads Eve to consider the possibility that God's word is not true and that God's plan for Eve will not enable her to reach her highest potential (Gen. 3:1-5). If these charges proved true, God would not be a trustworthy Being to relate with intimately and dependently.

At the center of this temptation lay a relational decision: to love God by trusting His plan, following His instructions, and enjoying the bounty of His provision, or to compete with God by seeking the wisdom gained from eating the forbidden fruit as a way to operate in equality with God. Eating the fruit offered a chance to become autonomous—independent from God—but would also be an unfaithful rejection of the couple's current loving relationship with Him. We all know what Eve and Adam ultimately decided.

In a real sense, their relational choice is at the heart of all sin. We don't often like to think that our behaviors have relational significance or meaning. The essence of sin, however, is choosing self-rule over surrender to the rule of our Creator. This is a relational rejection. It is not just the rejection of an idea, but a lack of trust in God's honesty, goodness, and love. Every sinful act through the ages has had the same rebellious heart posture at its core.

When Adam and Eve chose to reject God and strike out on their own, their choice had devastating relational consequences. When their "eyes were opened" (Gen. 3:7) as the serpent predicted, instead of seeing their own glory revealed on a level equal with God, they were awakened to feelings of exposure and shame from their nakedness. Scripture reveals that they quickly worked to cover themselves with fig-leaf garments. This covering act was the first sign of relational alienation.

Circumstances deteriorated from there. Like a snowball rolling downhill, the relational disintegration between the first couple and God quickly gained momentum. When they heard God coming to meet with them, they physically hid themselves from His presence.

When questioned about their actions, they seemed incapable of honest conversation. They defaulted to half-truths and excuses, deflecting responsibility by blaming each other and even God. The open, innocent, transparent, trusting, and loving environment that characterized their previous relationships in the garden was now gone. The choice against faith—to move away from God and His ways—brought shame and guilt, resulting in the relational dysfunction of covering, hiding, lying, and blaming. This brought relational consequences on every level.

At the most crucial level, Adam and Eve's decision that day brought about the consequence of spiritual death—the dissolution of the natural and normal state of their relationship with God. It separated them from Him. Spiritual death was not an arbitrary punishment for disobedience but the inevitable outcome that God had warned them would follow if they chose to eat that fruit. To think of this act as *simply* disobedient (which it certainly was) is to miss the heart disposition that motivated it and broke the relational bond. Eating the fruit involved distrusting God's will and therefore choosing to live life apart from Him, guided instead by their own wisdom and desires. God's willingness to honor that choice for their lives and the lives of their descendants resulted in the state of humankind's spiritual death.

As children of Adam's race, we experience the consequences of spiritual death. It is no longer natural or normal for us to be in relationship with God. We are born estranged from a dependent connection with Him who created us, left to secure our happiness in our own strength and in the best way that we see fit. The shame and guilt resulting from our sinful choices cause us to cover up our true nature and to hide from God in darkness (John 3:19-20).

In addition it seems we are all plagued with a deep mistrust of God's love and goodness—the same mistrust at the heart of the original temptation. We are easily deceived by the notion that we can attain wisdom or knowledge to figure out life on our own. Deep within our souls we experience the loneliness of life without God,

but our ability to distract ourselves often keeps us from feeling the extent of that reality.

Being alienated from God and His love on this fundamental level also spills over into our other relationships. We see the beginning of human family dysfunction in the lives of the first couple. When Adam and Eve ate the forbidden fruit, it fractured more than their relationship with God. It also damaged their ability to function in loving relationship to one another.

Before the Fall, Scripture characterizes Adam and Eve's relationship with each other as one in which they were naked and unashamed. This reality was an expression of relational transparency—the ultimate “what you see is what you get” opportunity without rejection or recrimination. They enjoyed the freedom to function in love and cooperation with each other, accomplishing more as a team than they could as individuals (Gen. 2:18-25).

After they rejected their relationship with God, however, the purity of their relationship with each other changed. Their shame limited their ability to be transparent, and they hid their nakedness from one another. When God questioned them about their actions, Adam, unable to be honest and take responsibility, blamed Eve for his actions. Eve blamed the serpent, and they both insinuated that God was ultimately at fault.

By engaging in blaming, the first couple inflicted each other with relational wounds, breaking the trust between them. No longer freely able to cooperate with each other, they began to compete for happiness. Self-preservation became an instinctive value of their hearts. Rather than thriving in the abundance of God's provision, they were forced through the consequences of their actions (Gen. 3:16-24) to feel the scarcity of what they could provide for themselves. Genesis 4 records the ultimate consequence of human competition and relational wounding: Cain choosing to kill his brother Abel.

In a more subtle sense, the story of the Fall also infers a loss of humans' ability to be in honest relationship with oneself. It appears that Adam and Eve's ability to hide from realities and evade truths

not only hurt their relationship with others but also interfered with their own self knowledge (Gen. 3:10-13). Their separation from God marred their self perception, rendering their hearts capable of great self deceit (Jer. 17:9-10).

In addition, Adam and Eve lost touch with their vocational identity. When they followed the advice of the serpent, they failed to rule over creation. Consequently, it became more difficult for them to subdue the earth and cause it to flourish (Gen. 3:17-19). This loss subjected the creation to futility, and it longs for God to reveal the redeemed as His sons so that our glory will free creation from corruption (Rom. 8:19-22).

This last consequence completes the picture of the relational devastation that ensued from the Fall—estrangement from God; the capability to deceive, blame, and hurt each other; and a diminished ability to understand their own hearts and their human vocation. The human chaos recorded in Genesis 4-11 illustrates how these tendencies multiplied in the lives of Adam and Eve's descendants.

PAUSE TO CONSIDER

- » How do you see the relational consequences of the Fall playing out in your own life? Have you made a choice for self-rule over God's rule lately? What have been the effects of that choice?

- » Do you see the effects of Adam and Eve’s inter-relational wounds in your life? Have you recently deceived, blamed, or hurt someone in your life? Has someone deceived, blamed, or hurt you? How have these actions affected your relationship with each other?

- » Have you experienced yourself hiding from the truth lately or worrying how others perceive you? Have you recently discovered anything about yourself that was surprising or unexpected?

- » What about your vocational role in the world? Do you experience any confusion regarding your identity, purpose, or role? Take a few minutes to journal your thoughts.

LIVE INTO IT

Practice Relating to God

Spend 20 minutes intentionally staying aware of God's presence while doing a common everyday task, such as driving, cleaning, watching TV, cooking, etc. If your attention wanders away from God, just gently bring it back without passing judgment on yourself. Notice how easy or difficult this is for you. Notice what seems different for you as you keep God's presence in the forefront of your mind throughout your activity.

Practice Your Vocation over God's Creation

Spend 20 minutes physically caring for some aspect of creation. This could involve tending to a garden (watering, weeding, pruning, planting, etc.), tending to a pet, picking up trash in a park, biking or walking somewhere instead of driving, etc. As you engage in this activity, consider your relationship with God's creation and your role within it. Notice how this compares to your everyday attitude towards God's creation.

Practice Interpersonal Responsibility

Spend 20 minutes thinking about a relationship in your life where there is conflict. Journal about the circumstances that led to and proceeded from the conflict. Consider your part in the conflict, and note where you have contributed to the relational breakdown. Talk with God to determine if there is anything you need to confess to Him and/or to the other person.

NOTES

DISCUSS TOGETHER

What do you think?

How have the readings, questions and Scripture meditations challenged or altered your understanding of relationship with God?

How do you feel?

How do you feel about the current state of your relationships: with God, others, yourself and/or creation?

What about God?

Where do you recognize God's activity in your life? Give everyone a moment to pray silently, so they can talk to God about this question. Then invite everyone to share, if they want to.

Where to go from here?

What might you want to remember from this discussion for the coming week?

NOTES
