

SESSION 2:
LIFE IN A RELATIONAL WORLD

LOOK UP: LARGE GROUP TEACHING GUIDE

BIG IDEA

In this session, students will identify the pressures they feel as members of families, cultures, and peer groups. Relationships can be frustrating at times—but God designed us to be part of groups and families, and to build a circle of care we can ask to be with us when we experience both good times and bad.

FOR THIS SESSION, YOU'LL NEED:

- Session 2 slides and means to project them
- **Session 2 Video: Life in a relational world** and a means to play it, if you are using the videos included with this curriculum during your **Look up** teaching time
- To think ahead and identify a story from your own life about a relationship with a family member or friendship that wasn't always as healthy as it is now. What did the person do or say that was challenging or annoying? Why did you stick with that person and relationship? What steps did you both take to help? How is that relationship a blessing to you now?
- If you're doing small groups during this gathering, be sure to check the “You'll need” list at the top of the Small Group Discussion Guide

WHO'S ON YOUR TEAM?



SLIDE: WHO'S ON YOUR TEAM?

*If you are using the videos included with this curriculum in your **Look up** teaching time, show **Session 2 Video: Life in a relational world** here to open your teaching session.*

Begin by reminding your students that this month you're talking about life in our anxious world. Culture, technology, academic achievement, competition, self-comparison—all of these add to the pressure that builds around us and inside of us. We all feel anxious, but anxiety exists to tell us something important. It might be telling us something is wrong or that we're in danger. Or it might be telling us something about our bodies, our relationships, or about basic needs like food and sleep. The key is that we learn to listen by asking ourselves two questions: *Where is God at work in the midst of my anxiety?* and *What might God—or anxiety—be trying to tell me?*

Say: **Today we're going to talk about families, and the impact they can have on how we feel.**

Ask students to discuss in pairs: **What's the last thing you argued or disagreed about with someone at home?** Give students a brief time limit (about 30 seconds) to help them keep their answers light for this opening activity. They'll have the opportunity to discuss more deeply later in their small groups.

Say: **Just between us, let's admit something ... Families can be annoying sometimes.**

Actually, since I'm telling it like it is ... People can be annoying sometimes.

At this point, ask a question or two to nurture interaction with your students. This could be asking for a show of hands about things others do that annoy them, or typical things parents say that frustrate teenagers (keep this general rather than encouraging any student to publicly rant about their parents). Or, consider sharing your own lighthearted story about a parent, sibling, or family cultural norm that you found it hard to be patient with as a young person.

LEADER TIP



Later in this session you'll be asked to tell about a person in your life who you once found challenging to get along with, but whose relationship (or perseverance) you are now deeply thankful for. You could tell the “back then” part of your story here, to set up for your main point later.

Say: **The people we love most can really get under our skin sometimes. Sometimes those relationships can even feel like a little more than we can handle. But we still need them.**

ADVICE FROM AN UNUSUAL EXPERT

Say: In Luke 5, we read a story about Jesus first meeting some of his disciples. Let's listen to it.

Read, or invite a student to read, Luke 5:1–11.



SLIDE: LUKE 5: 1-11 (2 SLIDES)

One day Jesus was standing beside Lake Gennesaret when the crowd pressed in around him to hear God's word. Jesus saw two boats sitting by the lake. The fishermen had gone ashore and were washing their nets. Jesus boarded one of the boats, the one that belonged to Simon, then asked him to row out a little distance from the shore. Jesus sat down and taught the crowds from the boat. When he finished speaking to the crowds, he said to Simon, "Row out farther, into the deep water, and drop your nets for a catch."

Simon replied, "Master, we've worked hard all night and caught nothing. But because you say so, I'll drop the nets."

So they dropped the nets and their catch was so huge that their nets were splitting. They signaled for their partners in the other boat to come and help them. They filled both boats so full that they were about to sink. When Simon Peter saw the catch, he fell at Jesus' knees and said, "Leave me, Lord, for I'm a sinner!" Peter and those with him were overcome with amazement because of the number of fish they caught. James and John, Zebedee's sons, were Simon's partners and they were amazed too.

Jesus said to Simon, "Don't be afraid. From now on, you will be fishing for people." As soon as they brought the boats to the shore, they left everything and followed Jesus.

Luke 5:1–11

Briefly remind students that stories you explored together in Session 1 also featured the disciples in an unsteady boat. Remind students that Jesus didn't leave the disciples alone in their anxiety. He joined them and journeyed with them in the anxious situation.

In the beginning of the story, we see Jesus doing just fine on his own. He's traveling and teaching, and gathering large crowds.

But the story gets interesting in verse 3, when Jesus jumps into Simon's boat and steps behind the wheel—or sail, or oars, or whatever.

In this story, Simon seems surprisingly okay with that. To keep students engaged, you could pause here to ask if others have a friend like Simon—the type who always seem easygoing and happy to come along for the ride.

Then, in verse 4, Jesus starts handing out advice. Now perhaps Simon's not so sure. Simon's been a fisherman all his life. He probably learned his trade from his parents, who learned it from their parents, and so on.

Jesus, on the other hand, isn't a fisherman. He's a rabbi. A religious teacher. Try to picture our pastor coming up to you all of a sudden and trying to tell you how to use Snapchat. Or do Common Core math. It would be funny, right? It might even annoy you a little bit.

But some really important things happen when Simon decides to take Jesus' advice.

REASSURANCE AND RECONNECTION

Point out to students that the first important thing that happens in this story is the miraculous catch of fish. There's a very good chance they will have heard this story before if they attended church as children. Perhaps your church's children's ministry even sings a song about it, or displays the story in a mural or piece of artwork somewhere. If this is the case, point out that you want to help unearth a new aspect of the story that maybe hasn't been considered previously.

Say: **What happens after that might just be an even bigger miracle.**

Recall with students that Simon calls to his partners in the other boat, who respond and help out in verse 7.

Say: **Once again, Simon's boat starts to become wobbly. And Simon starts to get anxious. In fact, he's so anxious that he gets inside his own head. And suddenly, he's not thinking about the boat and everyone's safety anymore. He's thinking about his own failures—he feels exposed. And he starts to push Jesus away.**

Read verse 8 again out loud. Ask for a show of hands:

Does anyone else find that when they're feeling worried they just want to be alone? Or maybe, like Simon, when you're standing in front of someone you admire all you can think about are your own failures and mistakes? Like somehow all their perfection just magnifies your imperfections?

But Jesus says two game-changing things to Simon in verse 10:

1. **Don't be afraid.**
2. **From now on, you will “fish for” people.**

Explain that Jesus doesn't leave Simon alone in his fear and anxiety. First, he reassures Simon. Then he reconnects Simon with himself and others.



SLIDE: JESUS REASSURES SIMON. JESUS RECONNECTS SIMON.

There's something new happening in this moment. Jesus is forming a circle of people for his work. But he's also connecting a circle of people for *each other*.

When the story began, Peter and his friends were fishing—a trade that had been taught to them by their families and villages. And they were probably using tricks and habits that had been passed down for generations. It was a cultural thing.

But the problem was, no one was catching anything. “The way we’ve always done it” wasn’t working. When Jesus calls out, it isn’t just to give them fishing advice (as in “this is the way we’ve always done it in *my* community on the other side of the lake”).

Jesus is giving Peter a new vision for how Jesus, and what will one day become the church, are going to work together. Jesus is forming a circle of people for Peter to take on a journey of new identity, a new way of interacting, and a new perspective on old traditions. You can see throughout the Gospels and the Book of Acts that this circle grows and grows, becoming a like a family for all of us as Jesus’ followers.

WHO'S IN YOUR CIRCLE?



SLIDE: WHO'S IN YOUR CIRCLE?

Yes, the people we love most can really get under our skin sometimes. And sometimes we might get frustrated when they want us to do things the way they've always been done—or relate to them the way we did when we were younger.

But when the boat starts to wobble and everything tells us to push others away, that's when Jesus offers us another way. Instead of pushing or pulling away, we can reach out and connect.

Share a story from your life about a time when a relationship with a family member or friend went through a rough patch. What did the person do or say that was challenging or annoying? Why did you stick with that person and relationship? What steps did you both take to help? How is that relationship a blessing to you now?

Point out that occasionally in life, we come across people—even in our family—whose words and actions can be harmful instead of helpful. It’s important to know that if we ever find ourselves in a relationship that is dangerous or frightening, God wants us to reach out for help. What’s more, God wants us to know the hope we can experience when we are cared for and supported by our community. Encourage students to speak to you or a pastor if they have a relationship that seems harmful or unhealthy.

LEADER TIP

When a student confides about a family relationship that is toxic or dangerous, it's important to help them understand that God wants them to get help and experience hope. Young people should never be counseled to stay in an abusive situation. As you journey through this four-part curriculum, talk with your pastor or church leadership about how you should respond when a student confides about abuse or neglect, and know your state's mandatory reporting laws. It's a good idea to keep a list of hotlines students can call and local services they can access if they do not feel safe at home.

Say: More often than not, God calls us to stick with our people, because we are designed to be connected.



SLIDE: WE ARE DESIGNED TO BE CONNECTED.

Explain that sometimes even normal levels of anxiety or depressed feelings can make us feel self-conscious and want to push people away—like Simon did when his fishing boat felt like it was sinking. But we can't fight those feelings on our own. Even though relationships are hard work sometimes—and sometimes we do need to walk away from a toxic relationship—we were designed to be our most whole when we are connecting with God and journeying with others.

To stay connected when we feel like pulling away from people, we need to:



SLIDE: LOOK UP. LOOK INSIDE. LOOK AROUND.

LOOK UP. We pause in the midst of our anxious thoughts to look up, and seek God's friendship through the Bible and by talking with others who are walking in faith.

LOOK INSIDE. We reflect on where God is at work inside us.

LOOK AROUND. We take a good look at our own anxious world so that we deepen the relationships that help us navigate it.

Relationships can be frustrating at times—but God built us to be part of groups and families, with a culture and heritage that help us to know who we are. And God wants us to draw on all of those resources to build a circle of care we can ask to be with us when we experience good times and bad.



SLIDE: WHO HAS GOD ALREADY PUT IN YOUR CIRCLE?

This week I want to challenge you to sit down and have a conversation with someone in your family or an adult who's like family. Look around you when you go home, and ask yourself: Who in my family seems to handle pressure well, or does a good job of communicating and connecting

with others? What could I learn from that person? Try to get some time with them and ask them a few questions about how they've learned to navigate stress, or build such strong relationships.

Emphasize to students that, like many things in life, relationships take practice. There is likely someone in their family or circle of trusted adults who has experienced some of the anxieties that they do, and might love the opportunity to hear them share from their heart and offer some practical advice. The take-home sheet will give students suggestions on what they could talk about, but it's up to them to take the first step and connect with someone. Remind them that if they want to see change in their life, they have to be willing to put in the work.

Close in prayer, referring to the image of Jesus calming Simon in his fear and connecting the disciples with one another.

*Divide into small groups at this point, or use the **Session 2 Look inside** material whenever your ministry meets in small groups this week.*