

MODULE 2: COMMUNICATION

SESSION 2: SELF-DISCLOSURE

Key Ideas for This Session:

- Self-disclosure is important in building healthy relationships.
- What we share about ourselves plays a key role in building trust and intimacy.
- Inappropriate self-disclosure can create mistrust and distance in a relationship.
- Key verse: Romans 12:10:
Be devoted to one another in love. Honour one another above yourselves.

How Do People Build Trust in Relationships?

Self-disclosure is sharing information about yourself that other people wouldn't otherwise know. The amount and kind of personal information we disclose affects the quality and depth of our relationships. In healthy relationships, self-disclosure is reciprocal (meaning both people do it; it's not just one person who shares). Sharing personal or private information about ourselves with another person opens the way in developing a closer relationship. For example, the personal information you share with a pastor or priest is different than what you would tell a prospective boss during a job interview.

For a prisoner or former prisoner, self-disclosure must be done intentionally and with caution. Do you agree? What is the danger of sharing too much? What is the danger of not sharing enough?

Knowing when, how much, what, and with whom to share personal information can be tricky. Indeed, too much information shared too soon can scare people away and cause you to feel rejected by them. However, not sharing enough

personal information with a friend can result in the relationship becoming stagnant or even failing completely.

The more we trust someone, the more we tend to self-disclose; the more we self-disclose, the more we tend to trust someone. Appropriate amounts of self-disclosure can be the difference between forming satisfying life-long relationships and not having close friendships.

Have you ever been in a conversation where you or the other person disclosed too much information?

What are some of the things that you look for in someone before you decide to open yourself up to them by sharing personal information?

ROLE PLAY

Role play the following situation involving self-disclosure to try to understand some of the personal issues involved. Role play MARK'S voice with growing curiosity and ELI'S voice with growing despair.

MARK: Hey, Eli, how are things going?
ELI: I... well... I don't know. Not too good, I guess.
MARK: Why? What's going on? C'mon, you can tell me.
ELI: It's a little embarrassing. It's my wife Alyssa again. I just—
ELI: What? Tell me. I really want to know.
ELI: Ah, actually, never mind. It's nothing. Forget it.

Appropriate self-disclosure is based on trust in a relationship. What did you sense about the level of trust in the relationship between Mark and Eli?

Often fear of being judged by the other person prevents self-disclosure. What other things might prevent self-disclosure?

What could Mark have said or done in order to help Eli feel safe in sharing or opening up about his problems?

Should you make a habit of disclosing personal information to people?

One of the greatest friendships described in the Bible is between David and Jonathan in 1 Samuel 18. Their friendship was seemingly unlikely given that Jonathan was the son of the current King (Saul) and David would later take over Saul's throne.

Read 1 Samuel 18:1-3.

After David had finished talking with Saul, Jonathan became one in spirit with David, and he loved him as himself. ² From that day Saul kept David with him and did not let him return home to his family. ³ And Jonathan made a covenant with David because he loved him as himself.

What characteristics of David and Jonathan's friendship made it possible for them to self-disclose to each other?

Proverbs 18:24 says:

One who has unreliable friends soon comes to ruin, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother.

How do friendship and self-disclosure go hand in hand?

Proverbs 12:22 says:

The Lord detests lying lips, but He delights in people who are trustworthy.

Is there a situation where choosing not to disclose something personal to someone might be considered lying?

Read John 4:5-26.

This story is about Jesus and a Samaritan woman, meeting for the first time and talking to each other at a water well. Jesus tells the woman to go call her husband and return to Him. "I have no husband," she replies. Jesus responds by saying, "You are right when you say you have no husband. The fact is, you have had five husbands, and the man you are now living with is not your husband." The woman admits this is true and believes Jesus to be a prophet. Jesus then tells her that He is the Messiah she has been waiting for. The woman runs into town and tells everyone she can find that they must come out to the well and meet this man.

In the above exchange, what is being disclosed and who is doing it?

What effect does Jesus' self-disclosure have on the woman?

Why do you think Jesus decided to disclose so much? Why didn't He just get His water and leave?

Read Romans 12:10.

Be devoted to one another in love. Honour one another above yourselves.

How can love encourage and protect friends who share personal information with each other?

Break into small groups and discuss the following if there is time, or think about these topics this week:

- *When it comes to talking about your past (including your jail/prison experience), how much and when do you think it might be appropriate to share with another person?*
- *What are some practical ways you can increase the level of trust and feelings of safety in your relationship with another person?*
- *Why might you share or not share? How do you choose with whom to share? Why is sharing important?*
- *Read James 5:13-16. What can you do to practice helpful self-disclosure?*