**Shallow: Relationships
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**Week 1 –**

Hello and welcome to Southside! Today we’re starting a new series – Shallow.

The first topic in our series is going to look at our relationships.

Covid has revealed how much we need each other and how quickly we can begin to feel isolated. This has been a trying but revealing time for us, one in which I believe God is showing us areas in our lives and in our culture that need to be healed and matured.

And so there’s a question I want you to keep in the back of your mind as we chat – “*Where do I need to recommit to my relationships*?”

Just put that here and we’ll come back to it as we begin the conversation about places where we might be a little Shallow.

Whenever I hear the word “shallow”, I think of the neighborhood swimming pool.

Remember there’s always the main pool where the cool kids were and then off to the side there’s a tiny, super shallow kiddie pool.

**SLIDE 1 (kiddie pool)**

It was only like 6 inches of water and it was always… warm. And everyone knew why it was warm. It’s not because the sun was heating it up.

It’s because those little swim diapers don’t really do much of anything. There’s a reason they were always dumping extra chlorine into that kiddie pool.

The big pool was much better. It was deeper and it’s where all the fun stuff happened. You could cannon ball into the deep pool.

**SLIDE 2 (diving into pool)**

The diving board was over there – you could show off your belly flop skills. You could throw things and then dive way down to the bottom for them.

Gravity is not your boss when you’re underwater. You can flip and twist and do all kinds of crazy things. The deeper water in the pool is definitely the fun place to be.

And let’s face it, there is a right of passage that kids go through at the pool. You have to pass the swim test so you can go into the deep end.

I remember summer camps, when the first thing you had to do was make sure you passed that deep-end-of-the-pool test.

You had to prove you could swim in the deep end. Then you got that little colored bracelet. It was like a badge of honor. That bracelet was the must-have status symbol for a camper.

Everyone knew the shallow pool was not the fun pool. And if you’ll allow me a super corny transition here: shallow end of the pool – not fun. Shallow relationships – not fulfilling.

The relationship I have with the people at the Cava drive through, as much as I adore them and am grateful to them, is not as emotionally satisfying as the relationships I have with two ladies who have for years now joined me in countless IHOP meals as we celebrate our mutual love of bacon.

 **SLIDE 3 (friends gathering)**

When I’ve needed to talk to other moms about the rollercoaster that is parenting teens and adult children, I needed to lean on relationships where I could be raw and real. I’ve cried over many plates of bacon.

As I was preparing this message and I thought about having deep, meaningful relationships, God just began to flood my mind with gratefulness for the different people in my life who have allowed me the privilege of letting me know them, really know them, and for letting me be known.

There is something about deep relationships that is so satisfying that it’s hard to put words to. It can be difficult, no doubt. It can be heartbreaking.

Remember, at the deep end of the pool there’s belly flops and sometimes you get water up your nose, but there’s so much more enjoyment to be had than if things stay shallow.

I truly believe that deep, meaningful relationships are satisfying because we were literally created for that purpose. Being in relationship is at the core of what it means to be human.

In the first couple of chapters of Genesis this core need unfolds as the writer describes how God created mankind. We’ll begin with Genesis1:26-27. I’ll be using the New English Translation.

Verse 26 picks up at the pinnacle of creation – God has established created order and populated the earth with plants and animals of all sorts and then we come to verses 26 and 27:

**SLIDE 4-6 Genesis 1:26-27***26Then God said, “Let us makehumankindin our image, after our likeness, so they may ruleover the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over all the creatures that moveon the earth.”27God created humankindin his own image,in the image of God he created them*, *male and female he created them.*

Ok, so lets start by looking at verse 26. Prior to verse 26, God is described as simply speaking things into existence, but then the wording changes signaling that this particular creation will be set apart from the other things.

What God speaks of in verse 26 is created specifically to be like Him – in his likeness. “*Let* ***us*** *make* ***humankind*** *in* ***our image****, after* ***our likeness***.” Dissect this sentence with me.

* US - He actually makes reference to Himself with a plural pronoun “*us*”. I’m of the opinion that we see allusion to the Trinity here, but I recognize that’s debatable. What is clear is that God is very obviously referring to Himself directly as describes the fact that His creation will be made to resemble Him.
* HUMANKIND – The word used here is *'adam*, which is a Hebrew word that can sometimes mean a male person or sometimes mean the collective human species, male and female. English does the same thing.

We can use the word ‘man’ to refer to one male person, like “*My husband Martin is a sexy man*.” Or we can use it as a collective identity, like when we say, “*Look at what man has achieved in the field of science*”.

In this particular sentence, the grammar and sentence structure support the meaning of humanity as a collective whole. God, we are told, created the human species.
* OUR IMAGE/OUR LIKENESS – Now we come to something very unique in the creation narrative. This *'adam, this humanity,* is created in God’s likeness and image.

These two terms likeness and image describe humans who are in some way to reflect the form of their Creator. More likely this is stressing the spiritual rather than the physical likeness, meaning the God-given mental and spiritual capacities that enable us to relate to Him and serve him by co-reigning over His creation.

Verse 27 then reiterates all of this with a structured poem.

The repetition and reversing of the lines is a way to stress the point being made here.

In verse 27, the writer uses the phrase “*male and female he created them*” as what constitutes “*the image of God*”. It is here that we see the first nod to the unified family of God – “male and female”, as humans together, represent the likeness of God.

So just from verses 26 and 27, we see that we were created for a purpose – to cultivate and rule over the world. We are to protect it, develop it, and fill it with other “likenesses” of God. And how was humanity designed to fulfill this assignment? We are created to be unified, in our diversity, to resemble the One who created us.

In chapter 2 of Genesis, we’re given what seems to be like a flashback or a behind-the-scenes picture of what happened during that particular moment of the creation process. We’re told God is looking around at what He made, gives everything the thumbs up, but points out the fact that the human is alone. And then in verse 18 he says what is really the linchpin sentence for us today.

**SLIDE 7** *“It is not good for the 'adam to be alone. I will make a companion for him who corresponds to him.”*

God does not intend for the *'adam, the “human”, to be alone.* This sentence signals a change coming. God then proceeds to take the human through this little object lesson where he parades the animals in front of him and lets him assign them names.

And at the end of the parade, the human is left scratching his head. He saw all of the animals have counterparts to one another. And the human is like, “*Well I don’t have a counterpart. None of those things is even remotely like me*”.

Ah ha! God let the human see his need! And it is here that God says I will create a companion for the human. A companion who corresponds to him. Who relates to him.

And through this fascinating process, God takes a side of the *'adam* and forms a perfect counterpart to the man. He forms the woman and presents her to the man who realizes this is the counterpart he was missing.

Now it’s important to realize something significant that most English translations have totally lost and basically screwed up over the years. In verse18 when God mentions a companion and in verse 20 when the man realizes he has no suitable companion, the word used for companion is *`ezer.*

Most of the other times when the word `ezer is used in Scripture, it is used to describe God as a deliverer, without whom a person or people group cannot help themselves. Obviously the woman is not being described as divine here, but she is described in terms of being a deliverer – one without whom the man literally cannot fulfill his function on earth.

The term “helper” – people let’s just throw that out. In English that has the connotation of being unequitable and subservient. Like Adam is the designated mechanic and Eve just hands him the wrench.

That’s just not what Scripture is saying. The text here is so much deeper than what our word “helper” conveys. The word “counterpart” is so much more representative of the real meaning.

The man cannot fulfill his role without the counterpart. Likewise the woman could not fulfill her role without the counterpart.

Think about how much sense this makes. What was part of humanity’s directive? Fill the earth. You cannot fill the earth without male and female.

It’s why the genetic sex that is given to you at conception is so very special and sacred. You were created to show the world part of the likeness of God.

I’m not talking about culturally assigned gender roles like who does housework or who get to play football – I’m talking about who you are as a man or a woman. Your very existence attests to the fact that God saw fit to create you with a certain genetic function and disposition to reflect Him to His creation.

The fact that men and women are distinct but necessary counterparts to one another certainly has implications for how people function in marriage. But it also points back to the fact that people were created specifically for relationship.

Right here is a good place for you to be mulling over that questions: “Where might I need to recommit or renew in this area?” If this is part of our design, then it’s something we need to nurture within ourselves.

I’ll quote Tim Mackie from the Bible Project when he talks about this subject: “any one human by themselves cannot become what God has called us all to become together.”

You hear that? God created distinct, humans, diverse in their reflection of the image of God and yet fundamentally needing one another in order to reflect God. If God were to have made a t-shirt for the Garden of Eden, it would have said

**SLIDE 8** “No one climbs alone”. Ya’ll need each other.

By design, humans were never meant to live outside of relationships. In other words: we cannot truly be human without other humans! Church, God’s desire is not that the earth be full of Christians, but that Christians exemplify what the redeemed and restored humanity looks like within the context of our relationships with one another.

Now you might ask, what about Adam and Eve’s relationship? Was it the deep kind or the shallow kind? Were they in the belly-flop-diving board end of the pool or were they in the kiddie pool? Well look at what the writer says after these two are introduced. Genesis 2:25 says “*They were naked and not ashamed*.”

The point here is not so much that they were without clothes - it’s that they are open to one another. They are not afraid to be vulnerable. Not afraid to be known. Deep end of the pool.

Everything seems to be going well here and then you turn the page. Literally. Chapter 2 ends with everyone being open and unafraid. Chapter three could be titled “*And then they screwed it up*”.

The humans assert their will over God’s and in doing so they invite brokenness and disorder into the Garden. Where there once was openness and vulnerability, there is now shame and suspicion.

The first travesty recorded as the result of sin is that the unity between Adam and Eve is broken. They then realize that their unity with God has been broken.

And now, all of the sudden, being in relationship and being known comes with risk. And it is this risk that keeps us from fulfilling our God-given roles as reflections of God. We find ourselves in a pretty vicious circle: We need other humans in order to truly be human. But we’re afraid of other humans because of our humanness. Did you get all that?

So here we are: Scripture reveals that we were designed for deep end-of-the-pool relationships. But we constantly find ourselves running for the kiddie pool. Why? Why are afraid to be known?

Because like we saw earlier, being known is risky. Go back to the swimming pool analogy. When you go to the pool, you aren’t all covered up – swimming attire, by nature is revealing things that you could hide are now suddenly out in the open.

That SpongeBob tattoo you got a few years ago? You’ve been covering that up with your business clothes but now everyone can see it. We’re laid bare. And we do all kinds of things to prepare ourselves. There’s massive amounts of shaving and pre-tanning and we have to deal with our feet. All because we know people will see parts of us we can normally keep hidden.

We do the same thing with our relationships. We keep problems and issues and habits under the rug. We don’t want anyone to know about our stuff. Why? Because we’re afraid of being judged. Or hurt. Or rejected.

Whenever you enter a relationship…

* You face the possibility of being rejected.
* You face the possibility of being hurt.
* You face the possibility that something you want kept secret may come to light.

Letting your friends and family and loved ones know who you really are can be risky. Essentially, we’re still running around trying to cover our nakedness… because we’re scared.

There’s a TV show that was created several years ago – please don’t watch it – just the commercials coming on make me loose brain cells, but it’s called Naked and Afraid.

I’m not even sure how desperate you are for attention to agree to being dropped off in the buff in the middle of the woods with a camera crew.

But doesn’t that title just perfectly describe how we approach relationships? Emotionally we are naked and afraid and we’re hanging around in the kiddie pool where there’s not much going on but we feel safe. The deep end looks like fun but there’s risk.

It’s scary. You might go to deep and start to flounder. But the reality is when it comes to relationships, we were made for the deep end of the pool.

**SLIDE 9** We were meant to be known and loved by God. We were meant to be known and loved by others. When you jump back into the story of Genesis, we see that it is God who confronts and deals with all the lying and hiding brought on by the sin of the humans.

He doesn’t yell or shame or blame. He outlines the reality of sin’s consequences … and then He provides a cover.

The cover he provides is a reference to the salvation that will be provided through Christ. The atoning work of Christ is God’s answer to how to defeat this fear of being known.

Here are some hard and fast realities we need to deal with today.

* Everyone has issues they have to deal with. Everyone has hang-ups. Everyone. If you thought you were the only one, then just let that lie go right now.
* Relationships are risky – there’s no getting around that. We’re humans dealing with other humans. We’re going to hurt one another. You can get wounded. But without, deep meaningful relationships, you are missing out on how God intended for us to be human.
* And here’s the most important truth for you today. God not only made you for deep relationships, He made a way for us to work through the risk and enjoy what he meant for us to have.

Why did God make us for relationship? I think the answer to that is simple. It’s because He desired relationship with us. First and foremost, He created us to be able to relate to him in a way that was different than anything else on the planet.

And because of this, it is only though a relationship with Jesus that you can start your journey to real human relationships. He’s the foundation for all of it.

In Jesus you have someone who literally knows everything about you. Everything. And He loves you anyway. He’ll take you right where you’re at. Warts and all. There is no deeper, more meaningful relationship you can have than with the God who created you and died for you. In Jesus you are simultaneously known completely and loved completely.

And it is through the strength of the Holy Spirit residing in you that you can begin taking steps to have the kind of deep-end-of the pool relationships that define our humanity. Jesus gives you the courage to take those risks. Jesus helps us work through our past issues and fears.

Take it from me, sometimes it takes some good counseling to work your way through those issues. But it all starts with Him. Healing and wholeness begin by entering into the deepest, most fulfilling relationship of all – Jesus.

So, what does all this mean for you, right now, in your current reality? Remember that question:

**SLIDE 10** *“Where do I need to recommit to my relationships?”*

Covid, as we said earlier, has revealed places for growth. Quarantine and working from home and zoom meetings may have some people wondering, “*Where did all my friends go*?” I don’t feel connected.

And it may be, that there were some relationships that were much shallower than you had realized. I hope that today you’re not only realizing it, you are willing to take a step to do something about it.

Let’s recommit to having deep relationships in our lives. Remember the t-shirt in the Garden? “No one climbs alone”. If you’ve been feeling like you’ve been climbing all this craziness on your own, let’s do something about it.

What do you need to do to recommit to deep, meaningful relationships in your life? To heal a broken relationship? Or maybe be healed form a broken relationship?

* Where you have been hurt by a relationship, give it to Jesus. He can heal those wounds.
* Where you have been covering up, give it to Jesus. He wants you to be free.
* If you have hurt someone and you are dealing with guilt from that, give it to Jesus. He offers forgiveness.
* Where you’ve feared rejection, give that to Jesus. God created you and accepts you.
* As part of recommitting to relationships, I encourage you to check out

**SLIDE 11** Southside Groups.

What better way to find your circle here at Southside than with a group of people who are looking to learn more about Jesus in the context of community. More info on the website.

Pray