Introduction: Why This Series? Because it is central to the Bible – As Sally Lloyd-Jones says, the Bible is not a book of rules but a love story. In RUF we want to keep the main thing the main thing – and relationships are not at the periphery of the Bible, they are at the center. And, because it is foundational for understanding ourselves and the world we live in. We live in a world where the rules have been discarded and we are cut off from the wisdom of the past. Even basic things (like whether a guy should open a door for a girl) are minefields. The Bible offers wisdom that has been tested across time and cultures for thousands of years. It offers wisdom from the One who made us. So what does the Bible say? In a nutshell it says that relationships are essential but impossible – but don’t despair because God is not finished yet.

I. Relationships Are What You Were Made For! - We see this in what God says and in what Adam says.

1. God says it is not good for man to be alone. (Genesis 2:18) The story is told to draw your attention to this. God says that “it was good” over and over, but then “not good”! And this is before sin! And this is when Adam has God all to himself. What does this teach us? Even if you have God in your life, you still need people! I meet so many Christian students that seem to think you need to become totally content with God alone before you can ever enter into a dating relationship or marriage. But God said it wasn’t enough for you to have God alone!

2. We also see we were made for relationships in looking at Adam’s words. (Genesis 2:18-23) God knew it was not good for man to be alone, but Adam didn’t get it until he experienced the naming of the animals and seeing how there was none that both fit him and complimented him. And then God made woman and Adam breaks out into poetry! The only pre-fall human speech recorded in the Bible is poetry! Adam cries “At last!” Is this your idea of Christianity? Do you think of Christianity embracing passion or being uncomfortable with this kind of emotion?

But relationships with others are not enough! As Francis Schaeffer put it, human relationships are insufficient, they crush and break when we try to hang to much on them – like looking for our “soulmate” who can perfectly fulfill us. “Never before in history has there been a society filled with people so idealistic in what they are seeking in a spouse.” (Tim Keller “The Meaning Of Marriage” pg. 33) We need both relationships with others and a relationship with God not just because of sin but because it's what we were made for. To be without relationship with God and others is not miss all that it means to be human.
II. Sin Made A Mess Of All Our Relationships – With God And With Others.

1. The vertical and the horizontal are always linked. The way you related to God will always manifest itself in your relationships with others and your relationships with others are a good indication of the kind of relationship you have with God. If you look at Gen 3 carefully it shows us that our relationship with God drives every other relationship. When Adam and Eve disobey God it brings blameworthy and fear not just toward God, but each other!

2. God tells the woman that, “your desire will be for your husband, and it [or he, the Hebrew can be translated either way] will rule over you.” Where there had been mutual support and love, now there is either over-dependence on the man, or a desire to rule over the man (and most likely both dynamics at work!)

3. We are trapped! We long for community because it is what we are made for, but we refuse to give up our freedom and independence – and this makes real community impossible. It is no mere coincidence that in our culture which idolizes freedom, loneliness is epidemic. As Berkeley University sociologist Peter Berger explains, “To the extent that we are free from others, we are also alienated from them.” This is what happened to our relationship with God and with other people!

4. It doesn’t take long for Adam and Eve to feel how broken everything is. (Genesis 4:1) Even though Adam believes the promise (seen in him naming Eve “the mother all living” after the fall in Genesis 3:20.) And Eve shows she has faith in God’s promise in that when they have their first baby Eve cries, “The Lord has given me the man! (The definite article is in the Hebrew.) But she names her second son Able, which in Hebrew is “hevel” (which means “frustration” as the reality of the fall has sunk in more fully.)

III. The Good News Is That God Comes To The Rescue! Even though we are tempted to want to give up on relationships, God has not given up!

1. We see this in His pursuit of Adam and Eve in their hiding. Understand that God never asks question to get information he doesn’t have – after all, He knows all things. God asks questions to invite reflection. God’s knows where they are, but do they? The first part of God’s pursuit is to call us to see what a mess sin has made of things and to turn back to His welcoming embrace!

2. We see this in the provision God makes to cover their shame in 3:21. He makes clothes for them – but notice, something had to die for them to be clothed!

3. But we see this even more clearly in Jesus! Ultimately our hope for relationships is that God has not given up on pursuing a relationship with us, no matter what the cost. This is what Genesis 3:15 is about! God refuses to let Adam and Eve stay in their rebellion against Him. They have allied themselves with Satan against God, but God in His sovereign grace rearranges the teams! He says I will put enmity (warfare) where you have tried to make peace and I will bring peace where you have made warfare and the way I will do this is by sending the Seed of the woman to crush the Serpent!

4. This is what the life and death of Jesus is all about! Jesus allowed His perfect relationship with the Father and the Spirit to be ruptured so that you and I could be restored to God and to others! To get back to the tree of life, someone must go under the sword – and that is what Jesus does! This is why Jesus acts so weird at the wedding in John 2. He tells his mom “Woman, why are you bothering me, my hour is not yet!” It’s because he is sitting there thinking about how He will have to endure the cross to feast with us at His own wedding! “The shattered relationship between Father, Son, and Holy Spirit at the cross provides the basis for our reconciliation. No other relationship ever suffered more than what the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit endured when Jesus hung on the cross and cried, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Matt 27:46.) Jesus was willing to be the rejected Son so that our families would know reconciliation. Jesus was willing to become the forsaken friend so that we could have loving friendships…” (Lane and Tripp “Relationships: A Mess Worth Making” pg. 13)