



Zoom Bible Study ~ Improving Your Relationships

Session 1 ~ January 12, 2021

Introduction

Someone has said, "Relationships are the sandpaper of our lives. Proverbs 27:17 reminds us that "As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another."

Some relationships will never be what we want them to be, but most relationships can be improved if we are willing and learn how to apply God's principles.

Biblical Principle #1 - Put Others First

Philippians 2:3-4: Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.

Which of these two statements do you think is an accurate paraphrase of what the Apostle Paul meant when he said "consider others better than yourselves"?

- We should never think well of ourselves, but should always put ourselves down and try to be very humble and talk about how we're not as good as other people.
- We should consider other people as having great importance, recognizing that their needs and struggles are just as critical as ours. They are worthy of our consideration, regardless of who they are, even before we think of ourselves.

Now the question becomes, how in the world do we put this into practice in our everyday lives? It will require of you a willingness to humble yourself.

James 4:10: Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up.

When you are motivated to put others first because you love Jesus and want to please him, it will not be mission impossible.

Choose two close relationships in your life and identify one thing you could do this week or next to put their interests ahead of your own:

Name of Relationship	Action

Paul goes on to describe Jesus' attitude.

Philippians 2:5-8: In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross!

How would you describe this “Jesus attitude” in your own words?

Ask yourself this question: Who seem to be the most fulfilled, happy, and contented people you know?

- People who have achieved great financial and/or career success and are able to accumulate much in the way of material things.
- People who are very involved in the lives of other people and seem to have great availability for others.
- People who are self-consumed, talk about themselves all the time, worry about their rights being violated, fight for their piece of the American pie, and generally spend their lives getting and doing for themselves.
- People who sacrifice their time and money to help others, who are dependable and reliable when it comes to commitments, and who have more friends than money!

Putting others first, as difficult as it may seem, improves our relationships and makes us happier people! It is one of the paradoxical truths of Scripture. Our mind tells us it can't be true, but experience proves that it is!

I encourage you to add this to your prayer list every day: "Lord, help me to think of others as more important than me today; to put their interests ahead of my own."

Biblical Principle #2 - Rejoice and Weep with Others

Romans 12:15: Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn.

What does it mean to rejoice with those who rejoice? What does that look like in your life?

What does it look like to mourn with those who mourn?

Which do you find easier to do?

- Rejoice with someone who has had something good happen to him/her
- Mourn and sorrow with someone who has had a great loss

A good way to improve your relationships is to just learn to rejoice at other's good news with them. Enhance their happiness by sharing their excitement. And when they're in the depths of despair, just cry with them, give them sympathy and love, without any advice. That's good biblical counsel.

Biblical Principle #3 – Go the Extra-Mile

We are called to have an extra-mile attitude in our relationships with others.

Matthew 5:38 - 42: "You have heard that it was said, 'Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.' But I tell you, do not resist an evil person. If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to them the other cheek also. ⁴⁰ And if anyone wants to sue you and take your shirt, hand over your coat as well. ⁴¹ If anyone forces you to go one mile, go with them two miles. ⁴² Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you."

What does it mean to have an extra-mile attitude, to turn the other cheek, to give your coat as well as your shirt? What is Jesus trying to teach us? Check the ones which you think are implied by his teaching here in Matthew 5:

- To endure unfair treatment at times, without griping or complaining
- To refrain from saying some of the things I would like to say to the difficult person
- To do some work I don't have to do or want to do
- To put in extra time and effort to help a difficult person
- To endure any kind of treatment
- To put up with unacceptable behavior or habits forever
- To never say anything negative to anyone

I believe that Jesus gave us boundaries with these "extra-mile" principles, and he definitely is not teaching us to become doormats or whipping posts. Pray for proper balance, but please, don't let the culture around you rob you of practicing this Christ-like attitude of going the extra mile.

Give some examples of things you are doing or have done to “go the extra mile,” and what has been the result. Give some examples of things you are doing or have done to “go the extra mile,” and what has been the result.

Biblical Principle #4 - Love Unconditionally

Proverbs 17:17: A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for a time of adversity.

At all times includes:

- the middle of the night
- times reserved for yourself
- when you feel very needy yourself
- when the other person takes advantage of you
- when the other person doesn't love you the way he/she should
- weekends
- when you're tired
- when the other person is grumpy

Many relationships are conditional: the people involved give to the relationship for the purpose of receiving, and when they're not receiving what they think they should be, they stop giving.

Can you identify some relationships in your life that would fit this description?

My one-sided relationships include:

I am the giver in these relationships	I am the taker in these relationships

Neither conditional nor one-sided taker relationships are relationships that love at all times.

Luke 6:32-34: "If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners love those who love them."³³ And if you do good to those who are good to you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners do that.³⁴ And if you lend to those from whom you expect repayment, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, expecting to be repaid in full.

As you look at the reciprocal and one-sided relationships of your life, remember that all relationships go through cycles, so don't give up on a one-sided relationship, where you may be doing all the giving for a while.

However, as you consider those one-sided relationships, you also need to ask yourself if you have become an enabler.

Remember, you don't have to like someone in order to love them, and love is not necessarily a warm, nice feeling. First Corinthians 13 defines what God's kind of love is – and it is not necessarily associated with our feelings. This love is described as being long-suffering, kind, is not envious or proud, does not seek its own way, doesn't hold grudges, doesn't keep a record of wrongs done to her, looks for the good in others, endures even through hard times. These are choices we make – intentionally – with or without those warm feelings.

You will discover great improvement in your relationships when you decide to be the kind of person who "loves at all times," whether or not that love is reciprocated.

Matthew 5:43-45: "You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.

How would you define a relationship enemy?

Jesus said, “Love your enemies...” What a revolutionary teaching this was. It demands an attitude that is foreign to our natures. But if God leads you to the “love your enemies” principle in dealing with difficult relationships, he will empower you to do it.

Proverbs 25:21-22: If your enemy is hungry, give him food to eat; if he is thirsty, give him water to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head, and the LORD will reward you.

By loving your enemies, Solomon says you will heap burning coals on his head. That doesn't sound too loving, does it? What does that mean?

In these two passages we see these principles about dealing with “enemies”:

1. Love your enemies.
2. Pray for your enemies.
3. Give your enemies what they need.

The Lord will reward you for this kind of attitude toward “enemies.” We aren't promised that the “enemies” will change or that they will appreciate our kind reaction to their unkind actions. We aren't guaranteed that they will be repentant and ask for our forgiveness. But when we respond in loving ways toward difficult people, we keep ourselves from sinning and we demonstrate the love of Jesus in very real ways.

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