



## Zoom Bible Study ~ Improving Your Relationships

### Session 2 ~ January 19, 2021

#### Introduction

Last week we look at three biblical principles that should govern all of our relationships:

1. Put Others First
2. Rejoice and Weep with Others
3. Go the Extra-Mile

Here are four more biblical principles that will definitely improve our relationships.

#### 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. <sup>33</sup> And if you do good to those who are good to you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners do that. <sup>34</sup> 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 warm, nice feelings. [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.

## Biblical Principle #5 - Speak Kind Words

*Proverbs 18:21: The tongue has the power of life and death, and those who love it will eat its fruit.*

*Proverbs 15:1: A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.*

There's no doubt that we have power in our tongues, and when we choose kind words, when we soften the blow, when we think before we speak, it's guaranteed to help.

*Ephesians 4:29: “Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.*

*Proverbs 12:25: Anxiety weighs down the heart, but a kind word cheers it up.*

*Proverbs 25:11 (ESV): A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in a setting of silver.*

How would you define “fitly spoken words”?

**Ephesians 4:1-16** deals with unity in the body of Christ and exhorts us to build each other up in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God so that we can become mature Christians. Here are some excerpts from that passage:

### Verses 1 ~ 5

As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. <sup>2</sup>Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. <sup>3</sup>Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. <sup>4</sup>There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called; <sup>5</sup>one Lord, one faith, one baptism; <sup>6</sup>one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

## Verses 14-16

Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of people in their deceitful scheming. Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.

Did you ever realize that the people in your life are part of God's maturation plan for you?

The operative word here is "love." Have you ever spoken the truth in:

- |                                  |                                  |  |
|----------------------------------|----------------------------------|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> haste?  | <input type="checkbox"/> anger?  | <input type="checkbox"/> vindictiveness? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> hatred? | <input type="checkbox"/> malice? | <input type="checkbox"/> defensiveness?  |

The truth can often be very painful. When we speak it in anything but love, we can open a door that never should be opened and cause a rift in a relationship that may never be healed.

Which would describe you best?

- I have difficulty speaking the truth in love even when I know I should.  
If you checked this description, why do you find it difficult to speak the truth to a person for his or her own good?
- Because I hate confrontations.
- Because I fear rejection or repercussions.
- Because I feel guilty; after all, I'm not perfect either.
- I speak the truth too freely and often without compassion or forethought.

Words are very powerful and need to be bathed in prayer. However, remember that speaking the truth in love is a biblical principle, and when God puts you in a position to do just that, to fail to do so is to rob that person of an opportunity to become more mature.

## Biblical Principle #6 - Be a Good Listener

*James 1:19: My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry,*

*Proverbs 18:13: To answer before listening—that is folly and shame.*

Which of these would describe your bad listening habits?

- I am often thinking of what I am going to say instead of listening.
- My mind wanders easily and I think about other things instead of listening.
- I tend to interrupt too often instead of listening.
- I often complete other's sentences for them instead of listening.
- I do other things and become distracted instead of listening.

*Proverbs 10:19 (ESV): When words are many, transgression is not lacking, but whoever restrains his lips is prudent.*

A good friend gave me some good advice that God had shown her in her relationships:

*Be gracious and brief.*

## Biblical Principle #7 - Be Dependable

What kind of reputation do you have for dependability?

- I am known to be very dependable by my friends, family, and co-workers.
- I am dependable most of the time.
- I make promises too easily, but then end up often breaking those promises or commitments.

Dependability definitely enhances our relationships. This is a strong biblical principle, and I urge you to become very serious about being a dependable person.

A great motto to remember is: *Under promise; over deliver.*

If you tend to over promise, why do you do that?

*Proverbs 13:12: Hope deferred makes the heart sick, but a desire fulfilled is a tree of life.*

Any time you make a promise or a commitment to someone, you build hope in that person. If you fail to keep that promise without a good reason or explanation, then it does something to that person's heart - to their feelings toward you.

*Ecclesiastes 5:5: It is better that you should not vow than that you should vow and not pay.*

## Conclusion

We've covered seven biblical principles that definitely will improve your relationships:

1. Put Others First
2. Rejoice and Weep with Others
3. Go the Extra-Mile
4. Love Unconditionally
5. Speak Kind Words
6. Be a Good Listener
7. Be Dependable

There are two more principles we need to consider next week and then we'll look at some specifically difficult types of people we often encounter.

Remember, the secret to improving your relationships is to pray these principles into your life.



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