



Zoom Bible Study ~ Improving Your Relationships

Session 7 ~ February 23, 2021

Last week we focused on the broken or hurting relationships in your life. I hope you were able to take some beginning steps toward mending those relationships.

What did you/do you find to be the most difficult part of trying to be reconciled?

What surprised you most about the other person's response to your initial approach?

Did you find yourself praying more about these broken or hurting relationships than you did before? That alone can make a big difference in moving toward reconciliation.

Obviously, restoring relationships is not a one-week effort, nor is it an easy thing to do. But do not lose heart and do not give up. Remember what the Apostle Paul tells us in [Galatians 6:9](#): *Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.*

Introduction

All of us have a variety of relationships in our lives, with differing demands on our time and commitments. If we are confused about where our loyalties lie, we can make disastrous decisions about our relationships.

In this lesson we are going to address the high priority relationships of our lives - covenant relationships.

What Is a Covenant Relationship?

Rarely, if ever, do we have formal documents defining the responsibilities of our relationships. However, based on what we know about God's priorities in relationships, there are certain people in our lives with whom we have a covenant understanding. We have an understood covenant of promises and commitments to that relationship.

Which of these descriptions best describes a covenant relationship?

- A covenant relationship is one where there is a legal contract of some sort.
- A covenant relationship is one where there is a blood relationship.
- A covenant relationship is a lifelong relationship.

Obviously, a covenant relationship could be any or all the above, but it is not necessarily limited to these descriptions. I think the best definition of a covenant relationship, one that encompasses the full range of relationships, is:

A covenant relationship is one where no one else can adequately or properly fulfill your role in that relationship. Your contribution is unique and vital.

Which relationships in your life would fit the description of “covenant relationships”?

This may be more difficult to do but make an attempt to rank these covenant relationships as to the priority that each has in your life. Some will undoubtedly share “top billing,” but consider this ranking not as who you love the most, but to whom you have the greatest responsibility and commitment because of the unique covenant between you and that person.

- | | |
|----------|----------|
| 1. _____ | 5. _____ |
| 2. _____ | 6. _____ |
| 3. _____ | 7. _____ |
| 4. _____ | 8. _____ |

Consider that you have been asked to put in writing exactly what your covenant agreement is. How would you describe the covenant relationship you have with the number one person on the above list?

I have a covenant relationship with _____ and have promised that I will:

This exercise is probably one of the best things you can do to help you understand your responsibilities to your covenant relationships, and therefore to help us determine the priorities of our lives.

Dealing with Dysfunctional Covenant Relationships

How do we deal with a covenant relationship which is significantly dysfunctional? Obviously, there are no pat answers to this question, and each situation has its unique struggles. But the Bible gives us principles to apply in these situations.

In your own dysfunctional relationships or your observance of others, which of these reactions and effects have you witnessed?

- Those involved became bitter and angry, and the relationship deteriorated more and more.
- Those involved lived in a continual "pity party."
- One person became obsessed with trying to change the other person.
- The relationship was abandoned, and the covenant was broken.
- One person emotionally disconnected with the relationship.
- Substitute relationships or activities were used to replace the dysfunctional relationship.
- The dysfunctional relationship became an excuse for all other areas of failure.

- One person becomes an enabler to the other, allowing that person to continue in a dysfunctional manner.

For the most part, none of these reactions or ways of dealing with a dysfunctional relationship solves anything, but instead it makes matters worse. Therefore, we need to know the proper, biblical way to handle a dysfunctional covenant relationship.

Our objective should be to sustain and maintain our covenant relationships, if possible, even at our own personal sacrifice.

Under which of these circumstances would it be proper to break a marriage covenant and get out of that relationship?

- When one mate is abusing another in some obviously evil and wrong way
- When one mate is unfaithful to the other and has broken the marriage vow of fidelity
- When one mate just does not love the other one any longer
- When one mate is a believer and the other is not
- When two people simply no longer have anything in common and are no longer compatible
- When one mate is spiritually mature and the other is not

- When communication breaks down between the two partners
- When one mate finds someone else more suitable

Since marriage is definitely a covenant relationship, only the most serious and irreparable circumstances are reason enough for divorce or separation.

Ecclesiastes 5:5-6a:

It is better not to make a vow than to make one and not fulfill it. 'Do not let your mouth lead you into sin. And do not protest to the temple messenger, "My vow was a mistake."

Of course there are boundaries to the commitment we have to our covenant relationships. Too many women stay in abusive relationships when they should get out at once. Too many people become enablers of bad behavior by staying in a covenant relationship or refusing to confront the dysfunction of a covenant relationship.

Refuse to Be Bitter

Undoubtedly some of you feel rather stuck in a dysfunctional covenant relationship right now. You know you should not get out of it, but you feel you are suffering unjustly, and you find yourself full of anger and bitterness at your lot in life.

Hebrews 12:15:

See to it that no one falls short of the grace of God and that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many.

“See to it,” we are told; do not let that bitterness grow. Stop it quickly and completely. Pull it out by the roots.

Think of someone who is a very bitter person. Which of these are characteristic of that person?

- He/she exaggerates the wrong done and the problem is blown way out of proportion.
- This person's physical appearance changed; he/she looked older and less attractive.
- This person's health deteriorated.
- Relationships with other innocent people were damaged because of his/her bitterness.
- He/she tends to take their anger out on others.

Bitterness is self-inflicted suffering. It is the result of keeping a record of wrongs done against us. It comes from refusing to forgive. It happens when we continually re-live how our feelings were hurt, how our pride was damaged, how our toes were stepped on.

Have you forgiven that covenant person in your life who has caused you great pain and harm? If so, you have discovered the freedom that comes through forgiveness - freedom for you. You have probably also discovered that you have to forgive more than once - many times.

Forgiveness does not imply that the wrong done is no longer wrong. Nor does it mean that relationships can be restored to their original state or restored at all. Forgiveness means that you choose to no longer harbor it and hold it in your heart against that person.

As you think about your dysfunctional covenant relationships, if you have any, ask God to teach you the truth that those covenant relationships are not in your life by accident.

Don't you think Joseph must have wondered why God would have given him such cruel brothers? They rejected him, even planned to kill him. Because of his brothers, he was sold into slavery and spent years in a cruel prison. Certainly Joseph could have legitimately claimed he was from a dysfunctional family, and he had endured great pain and evil at their hands.

But because of their actions, Joseph found himself in Egypt where eventually his talents and expertise were recognized, he became second in command in the whole country, and was used by God to keep that nation and his own family alive through a very severe famine.

In the end Joseph was able to say that his cruel brothers had intended evil for him, but God had turned it into good. His dysfunctional family became the instrument through which God worked a great good.

God can do that for you, too. Have you asked him to take that difficult covenant relationship and use it for his glory? It will take some faith on your part to accept that they are not in your life by accident, but faith pleases God. So, when he sees that you are willing to accept those covenant relationships as part of his plan for your life, then you have released his power to turn that painful relationship into a powerful tool for God.



205 N Washington St . Wheaton IL 60187-5314
Office Hours: Mon-Thurs 9:00 am – 4:00 pm #630.462.0552
Website: christianworkingwoman.org
Email: tcww@christianworkingwoman.org