

## Improving Your Relationships

Air Dates: July 18-22, 2022

### Day One

How are you doing in your relationships? Are they in good shape? The Bible gives us much good advice and guidance to help us with our relationships.

Romans 12:15 offers some very sound counsel for us. It says: *Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn.* Think about your relationships with your family, your friends, your coworkers, even your more casual acquaintances. Do you really rejoice with them when they rejoice and cry with them when they cry?

Have you ever been excited about telling a friend some good news, only to discover that they didn't seem to find it exciting at all? I remember once my company advised me that I was to go to a special conference. I was thrilled at this good news, and immediately shared it with my friend, expecting her to be happy with me. Instead, my good news put her into a terrible bad mood; she didn't speak to me for a quite awhile. You see, she wanted to go to the conference, too, so instead of rejoicing with me, she was angry at me.

I remember when a close friend was sharing a disappointment with a couple of us. We both just moaned and offered sympathy. "I'm so sorry; that's really rotten. You've sure had nothing but bad news lately it seems." Do you know how she responded? She said, "Yes, but I know the Lord has a purpose in all this and we'll be okay."

When a fellow believer has a grief or disappointment of some kind, don't give them cliches or advice. Don't even quote Romans 8:28 to them. Just mourn with them. That's what they need right then. And when you mourn with them, *they* can then quote Romans 8:28; *they* will be the one to tell you that they know God is still in control. However, if you say things like: "Now, don't let this get you down. You know that God still loves you and will take care of you," it somehow makes them want to say, "But it hurts. Don't you understand? It hurts."

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.

### Day Two

The Bible has wonderful advice for us about relationships which, if applied, will make dramatic differences in our relationships with our friends, family members, coworkers—everyone.

Proverbs 17:17 is one of the classic verses to help us improve our relationships. It says quite simply: "A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for a time of adversity."

*At all times*—we can apply that very literally. A true friend is available in the middle of the night, weekends, lunch hours, times reserved for yourself, times when you're tired, times when you feel very

needy yourself. Friendship requires a time commitment of us that may be costly and sacrificial on occasion.

Many friendships are simply reciprocal: 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. But that's not the kind of relationship that loves at all times. Jesus said anybody can love the person who loves them in return; but true love is to care for someone when they are not showing you the same care and concern. Sometimes even our closest relationships go through periods where it seems the other person is not giving to us the way he or she should. But by God's grace we can be the kind of friend who just keeps loving.

Certainly during times of adversity, we should be there for our friends and family. Is someone you know going through some deep waters right now? How much have you been there for that person? You don't have to have answers; you don't need great words of wisdom. Just be there. Let her know you care in every way possible.

If you truly want to improve your relationships, ask God to help you be the kind of friend who loves at all times. That's the way Jesus is with us, and through him, we can be the same way with others.

### Day Three

Not long ago someone said to me, "You know the problem with him is he just doesn't listen." That's a common problem lots of us have, isn't it? One of the best things we can do to improve our relationships is simply to truly listen better.

James 1:19 tell us that we should be quick to listen and slow to speak. What great advice that is. Let me ask you, are you a good listener? You know, listening takes effort. You have to work at it.

One of my bad habits is that my mind wanders while people are talking to me. I find myself thinking about all kinds of other things instead of listening. Do you have that problem, too? Well, one way to help you concentrate is to take notes while you're listening. You should also pray and ask God to help you remember to listen and not let your mind wander.

Also, there's a big difference in listening and waiting for your turn to talk. Sometimes out of politeness we don't interrupt people while they're talking to us, but we're not really listening because we're thinking of what we're going to say as soon as we get our chance.

You know, if you'll listen better, you won't jump to wrong conclusions so often, you won't say something you regret, you'll learn a lot more about those friends and truly get to know them if you'll just make yourself listen to them when they're talking to you. And while you're listening, put yourselves in their shoes and try to understand them better.

James says we should be *quick* to listen. If a friend or family member indicates a need to talk to you, are you *quick* to listen? Do you readily put aside whatever else you're doing, *quickly*, so you can listen to them? The Bible really gets down where we live, doesn't it?

And then, we're told to be slow to speak. Go easy with the words. If you talk a lot you're bound to say something you shouldn't. It's a fact that women say many more words in a given day than men do. And let's face it, we often say too much. We have a great need to communicate, but that has to be tempered with the Holy Spirit's control of our words.

Becoming quick to listen and slow to speak is absolutely guaranteed to improve your relationships. Give it a try.

## Day Four

How do you feel about someone who makes a promise to you and doesn't keep it? It doesn't generate lots of good feelings toward that person on your part, does it?

Proverbs 13:12 says that "Hope deferred makes the heart sick, but a longing fulfilled is a tree of life." And in Ecclesiastes 5:5 we read "It is better not to vow than to make a vow and not fulfill it."

Many relationships suffer greatly because of broken promises and commitments. If you've made someone a promise, that builds hope in that person. He or she is hopeful that you will do what you've said you'd do. Now, 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. They're disappointed, of course, but more than that, they feel betrayed because you didn't remember or care enough to keep your promise. It's a form of rejection when you think about it. Obviously, that doesn't have to happen very often in a relationship before it takes a terrible toll.

Solomon, the wisest man who ever lived, tells us it's much better not to promise anything at all than to make a promise and not keep it. Christians should be dependable people, always diligent in following through. And remember that Jesus said if we're not faithful in the small things, we won't be faithful in the large things either. So, we need to make sure that we are faithful and dependable from the smallest to the largest things in our lives. Can your friends and family members depend on you? Do you keep your promises?

If you find that you have a tendency to make commitments—even small ones—and not fulfill them, this could be one major reason for some of your relationship problems. Ask God to help you to be more careful in making those promises, and then to take them very seriously when you do. Believe me, it will make a noticeable difference in your relationships.

## Day Five

Loyalty is one of the most valuable of all characteristics. And it is a cornerstone in building good relationships.

Did you ever have a friend or relative who was disloyal to you? If you find out that someone who you counted as a friend has said or done something disloyal, it really hurts your relationship, doesn't it? There's no question that in order to build good relationships, we need this ingredient of loyalty.

Do you stand up for your friends no matter what? Proverbs 18:24 says there is "a friend who sticks closer than a brother." Again, in Proverbs 17:9 we see that "He who covers over an offense promotes love, but whoever repeats the matter separates close friends."

Make certain that you don't damage your relationships by lack of loyalty. Your friends and family members should know beyond a shadow of a doubt that you will be loyal to them; you will stick closer than a brother. If you hear someone talking disparagingly about a friend, don't be afraid to show your loyalty. Stick up for them. Good friends should do that.

Remember, love will cover over an offense. That doesn't mean you whitewash sin, but you do everything you can to keep down the rumors, to keep from exposing your friend to others' criticism. Gossip is one of the chief causes of broken relationships. If we gossip about others, we damage the relationship we have with that person and we also damage the relationships they have with others.

Someone has said, "Relationships are the sandpaper of our lives." Well, it's true that they are not always easy, but it's also true that if we practice biblical principles in our relationships, we'll discover immense improvement. I guarantee you that as you, by God's grace, set out to be the best friend you can be, you'll discover that what you sow, you reap; and that effort will produce great joy and peace in your relationships.