

Cultivating Connection

A biblical approach to relationship challenges

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Dealing with Broken or Wounded Relationships

Introduction

From the sin of Adam and Eve, the Bible records a litany of broken and damaged relationships. Can you name some of the broken relationships in the Bible?

The good relationships that began in Eden were twisted and corrupted by sin—and that curse of sin has trickled down to us today. Restoring damaged relationships is not easy.

What would you say is the most important attitude necessary on your part or the part of anyone who wants to repair a broken relationship?

As followers of Jesus Christ, in trying to heal broken relationships, we have a great advantage over those who aren't followers because we have certain resources to help us. Name some of them.

We are called to be reconcilers.

2 Corinthians 5:18 – 20

All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God.

We are to *implore* others, as God leads us, to be reconciled to God and to others.

Jesus' "Fix" for Broken Relationships

Jesus gave clear and detailed instructions on what we should do when a relationship has been broken or wounded:

Matthew 5:23-24: "Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to them; then come and offer your gift."

Who is Jesus talking to?

Jesus was teaching his disciples that in his Kingdom, things are very different. He said, "if you are offering your gift at the altar." Obviously, he's talking to a worshipper who is about to offer a gift or offering at the altar. Jesus made it clear that this should have the highest priority—he said *first go!*

What did Jesus mean when he said, "and there remember that your brother has something against you"? Who do you think is included in the term "brother"?

Since Jesus says, "and there *remember* that your brother has something against you," does that mean it is possible to *forget* that you have a broken relationship?

What are some methods you have used, or you have observed others using, to put off trying to reconcile those unpleasant, hurtful relationships? Do any of these sound familiar?

- Stayed very busy, even if you had to create unnecessary activity.
- Convinced yourself that there was nothing that could be done about it.
- Convinced yourself that since you didn't cause the problem, you shouldn't be the one to initiate the reconciliation.
- Found other relationships to fill the gap.
- Don't know what to say or how to say it.
- Fearful of being rejected.
- Afraid of making matters worse.
- Difficult to say, "I'm sorry."
- Difficulty facing issues head on and tend to run away from problems.

Perception equals reality, and incorrect perceptions often are the cause of broken relationships.

When You Have Something Against Another Person

Colossians 3:13: Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.

The original word here—*bear with*—means “lengthen your anger;” stretch it out. Bearing with other people is often a big part of restoring and maintaining good relationships.

Jesus clearly establishes the priority of personal reconciliation when he says, “First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift.”

Which of these results have you witnessed because of failures to be reconciled?

- The break in the relationship grew deeper and wider.
- The reason for the break was exaggerated and amplified way beyond reality.
- Innocent people were hurt because the relationship was not reconciled.
- Gossip and backbiting increased.
- The longer it was neglected, the more difficult it was to do.
- It opened the door for illegitimate or harmful relationships to begin.
- It caused a church split.
- It caused a family split.
- It caused other relationships to deteriorate.
- It caused financial stress.
- It adversely affected someone's testimony for Jesus Christ.
- It caused non-believers to have negative impressions of true believers.
- It caused those involved to walk away from their commitment to Jesus Christ or seriously affected them spiritually in a detrimental way.

The longer you put off reconciliation, the more these and other consequences will be realized.

There is a difference in humbling yourself and feeling humiliated. How would you describe the difference?

God wants us to be humble, but he does not intend for us to be humiliated by others.

If you are going to someone who has something against you for the purpose of reconciliation, which of the following would you NOT want to do?

- Recite all the mistakes she has made and where she is wrong.
- Defend yourself and explain why you are not at fault.
- Tell how you have been hurt or harmed.
- Lecture the other person about his need to change.

Instead, here is the attitude we should have:

- Lovingly accept blame for whatever you have done that has contributed to the bad feelings.
- Talk about what you are willing to do to mend the relationship.
- Explain how important the relationship is to you.
- Establish some guidelines to hopefully help avoid similar misunderstandings and hurts in the future.

Keep in mind that reconciliation is not for the purpose of airing your grievances; it is rather to cease hostility. Your choice of words will play a critical role in the success of your efforts to be reconciled.

If or when you need to be reconciled to someone, look beyond the difficulties of going to that person and imagine the great joy you'll have when it's behind you. Just obey Jesus. You'll be so glad you did.

Church Discipline

There is another passage where Jesus gave instruction concerning broken relationships:

Matthew 18:15 – 17

"If your brother or sister sins, go and point out their fault, just between the two of you. If they listen to you, you have won them over. ¹⁶ But if they will not listen, take one or two others along, so that 'every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.' ¹⁷ If they still refuse to listen, tell it to the church; and if they refuse to listen even to the church, treat them as you would a pagan or a tax collector.

Have you ever been led by the Lord to confront a brother or sister about their sin? When open and blatant sin is allowed to continue in a church body, it will quickly deteriorate your church fellowship and effectiveness.

1 Corinthians 5:11: But now I am writing to you that you must not associate with anyone who claims to be a brother or sister but is sexually immoral or greedy, an idolater or slanderer, a drunkard or swindler. Do not even eat with such people.

God just doesn't put up with continuing sin in a Christian's life; he hates it!

Is Reconciliation Always Possible?

Romans 12:18: If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.

If/when you have a broken relationship, make certain that you have done and are doing everything you can to mend that relationship.

However, please keep in mind that being reconciled does not include:

- being someone's "doormat"
- enduring abusive treatment of any kind
- compromising your Christian principles or integrity
- lowering your standards of behavior
- enabling someone else to continue in wrong or evil behavior

We are not seeking reconciliation at any price. Also, it may be possible to be reconciled to someone without fully restoring the relationship to the status that it was before.

Dealing with the Aftermath of a Broken Relationship

Consider how Jesus dealt with his closest friends and associates who failed him miserably.

- Judas betrayed him.
- Peter denied him.
- Thomas doubted him.
- They all fled and left him when the soldiers came to arrest him.
- They all exhibited lack of faith and trust in him throughout his ministry.

Here is a wonderful example of how Jesus restored a broken relationship with Peter.

John 21:15-17:

When they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?"

"Yes, Lord," he said, "you know that I love you."

Jesus said, "Feed my lambs."

¹⁶ Again Jesus said, "Simon son of John, do you love me?"

He answered, "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you."

Jesus said, "Take care of my sheep."

¹⁷ The third time he said to him, "Simon son of John, do you love me?"

Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him the third time, "Do you love me?" He said, "Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you."

Jesus said, "Feed my sheep."

Can you imagine how hurtful Peter's denial had been to Jesus? Jesus could have legitimately said any of these to Peter at that moment in time:

- Peter, I can't begin to tell you how painful it was to hear you deny me three times in the midst of that mockery of a trial, with that thorn of crowns on my head and the soldiers beating me.
- Peter, why did you run away at the Garden of Gethsemane when I needed you with me?
- Peter, I was so disappointed in you, because you were the one who promised you would never leave me even if you had to die with me.
- Peter, I thought you loved me more than anyone else, but I guess you didn't.
- Peter, you were supposed to be my rock, the one on whom I could always depend. Yet you were the first to deny me.
- Peter, if you want to be my disciple, you're going to really have to change because I just can't depend on you anymore. Look how you deserted me.
- Peter, if you want to be my disciple, you're going to have to prove yourself to me. It will take time, Peter. After the way you treated me, you can't expect to just waltz back in and take over, can you?

Jesus had a right to say any of these things to Peter, but his purpose was reconciliation. He leaves us a wonderful example of how we should approach our wounded and broken relationships.

In dealing with the aftermath of a broken relationship, whether it has been possible to be reconciled or not, you want to let go of the pain and the bitterness and move forward to what God has for you in the future.

Conclusion

You may have endured terrible abuse in a relationship, and those relationships need to be severed. Or maybe you have relationships that have been so terribly damaged that, although some reconciliation has taken place, it is not possible to be fully restored.

As believers, our responsibility is to go the extra mile when it comes to reconciling any relationship that has been broken if we possibly can. As much as it depends on us, let's follow the teaching and example of our Lord and seek to be reconciled.