

## Biblical Strategies for Healthy Relationships

*Presented by Julie Busteed*

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### Day One

Have you ever said or thought this? “I’d love this job if it just wasn’t for the people!” I know this is a sarcastic saying—it’s more tongue in cheek—but it’s how we feel sometimes isn’t it? Yet as Christ-followers, the greatest command Jesus gave us is to love God and love others.

This week, we’ll look at some strategies to help us as we relate to others around us—our family, friends, coworkers, and neighbors.

*Jesus replied: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself’” (Matthew 22:37-39).*

The first priority in dealing with our relationships is to love God with all our heart, soul, and mind! Our relationship with God is essential. It affects everything, including our relationships with others. Take a minute to ask yourself these questions: Are you spending daily time with God? Reading his Word? Praying? This is the first place to start. It’s vital for you and me to make our relationship with God the foundation of our lives.

Sometimes it can be easy to think, “I have a relationship with God, and that’s enough. I don’t need others. I don’t need to go to church.” But that’s not true either. God is a triune God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. There is community between them, and as image-bearers, we need community not only with God but also with each other. God made you for community and connection.

Since you and I are made to be in community, how do we do this well?

Jesus goes on to say we are to love our neighbor as ourselves. What does it mean to love your neighbor? Love is an action—not just a feeling—a romantic feeling. It’s not the same as like. Love is giving of yourself and putting others first. It could look like delivering a meal to someone in need. Or helping a coworker with a project. Or praying with or for someone. It can take many forms; the main thing is that you see others—notice when they are in need—and reach out to help and care for them.

### Day Two

Are there people in your life you find difficult to get along with or really understand? I am examining biblical strategies to help grow and build healthy relationships, and communication is a key tool.

A verse you might be familiar with is *everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry* (James 1:19b). Honestly if we all practiced that, I think there would be much less miscommunication.

Let’s break this down. What does it mean to be quick to listen? Studies show good communication is essential for organizations. Marjorie North—a communications expert—says we only hear half of what is being said in any given conversation. It’s true, isn’t it? I can be distracted by something outside the

conversation, or I can begin to form a response to something the person said. No matter what distracts me, I struggle to listen.

You and I need to practice active listening. And I mean practice; it will take a lot of practice. Put the distractions away—and by this, I mean your phone! Give the person your full attention. I know someone who is so good at this. I can tell when I am speaking to him I have his full attention. It's a great thing to be heard—really heard.

Some other ways to be slow to listen is to repeat back what you believe you heard the person saying. And if you don't understand something, ask clarifying questions. Try not to interrupt them.

What does it mean to be slow to speak? I think we need to be careful and thoughtful. Examine your words before you say them. Depending on what the conversation is, you might even need some time to think before responding.

*Do you see someone who speaks in haste? There is more hope for a fool than for them (Proverbs 29:20).*

*Those who guard their lips preserve their lives, but those who speak rashly will come to ruin (Proverbs 13:3).*

James also goes on to talk about our tongues—what we say and how our words can bless or curse others. He compares our tongue to the bit that steers a horse or the rudder that guides a ship. What comes out of your mouth can not only corrupt your whole body but others as well. The Psalmist prays *to set a guard over my mouth, Lord; keep watch over the door of my lips* (Psalm 141:3). And the Apostle Paul encourages the Ephesians *to 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* (Ephesians 4:29).

Good communication in relationships is necessary. It's a skill you and I can practice and improve, but we need to be mindful and intentional.

### Day Three

I'm looking at some strategies to help grow and build relationships—principles that apply at work, home, church—with everyone. The first two strategies I looked at were loving others and communication skills. I think integrity is also an important component in healthy relationships.

Integrity really covers several qualities. It's being honest, having strong moral principles, and being trustworthy and reliable.

A great example of integrity in the Old Testament is Daniel. He was taken into captivity from Israel to Babylon, and he became an adviser to the Babylonian kings because of his integrity and trust in God.

For many, it's a familiar story but to recap: Daniel refuses to bow down and worship a man-made idol. He worships and prays to God. As a result, he is thrown into a literal lion's den. The next morning, he testifies that *my God sent his angel, and he shut the mouths of the lions. They have not hurt me, because I was found innocent in his sight* (Daniel 6:22a). Not only did God protect and preserve Daniel, but King Darius also decrees everyone in his kingdom must fear and revere the God of Daniel.

Daniel's integrity and courage not only effected his own life, but the entire kingdom was now to fear God. He trusted and honored God in his actions, and his integrity was evident to his employer, resulting in a testimony to the entire kingdom.

Integrity can also be something significant done privately, not for public recognition. A friend of mine recently showed a great example of integrity. She just published a book through a traditional publisher. Normally, when you work with a publisher, you receive an advance against future royalties—meaning you don't earn additional royalties until the book's sales cover that advance. And if the book doesn't sell enough to cover it, the author doesn't have to pay it back.

That's completely normal. But my friend told me she wants to make sure her book's sales do reach that advance amount. She's putting in extra effort to promote and market her book because she doesn't want to be a burden to the publisher. She isn't required to do this—it's not part of her contract—but she feels it's the right thing to do. Quiet integrity.

In both of these examples, integrity was a vital characteristic in dealing with others. Integrity directed how they should act in certain situations—be it life or death—or something that's not really seen by others. With faith in God and belief he is faithful, they lived out their lives in honor to him.

*Whoever walks in integrity walks securely, but whoever takes crooked paths will be found out* (Proverbs 10:9).

When we live our lives with integrity, we can walk securely—quietly resting upon God's favor and gracious providence.

## Day Four

Humility may not be the first trait that comes to your mind as an essential element in healthy relationships. That's what I will look at today as we continue to seek to grow healthy relationships.

The first thing that comes to mind when I hear the word humility is I need to have a low opinion of myself. But that's not correct. It's about being interested in others. Serving others. Yes, modesty is part of humility, but it's not being down on yourself. It's putting others first.

Paul exhorts the Philippians and us to *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* (Philippians 2:3-4).

Becky Harling, author of *Cultivating Deeper Connections in a Lonely World*, writes humble people come in curious to the conversation, and this curiosity is the superpower of connections! They listen and ask questions. They don't come in like the expert. I love that! We can have this superpower if we are simply interested and curious. And that's what I think the Apostle Paul is talking about—to look not to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.

Humility also is shown by just being kind, lending a hand, helping a coworker.

My friend Heather recently showed a beautiful example of humility. She had her day carefully planned with a full to-do list, but when a friend reached out to spend time together, she chose to set her plans aside. It wasn't what she had intended for the day, and honestly, it wasn't what she felt like doing at the moment—but she recognized her friend needed someone to listen.

What makes this even more meaningful is this friendship isn't always easy or comfortable. Yet that very morning, Heather “happened” to read Proverbs 3:27–28.

*Do not withhold good from those to whom it is due, when it is in your power to act. Do not say to your neighbor, ‘Come back tomorrow and I'll give it to you’—when you already have it with you* (Proverbs 3:27–28).

Those verses were a timely reminder that God sometimes calls us to act in the moment—to give of ourselves, our time, or our attention—when it's within our power to do so. Heather reflected the heart of Christ that day by choosing relationship over routine, allowing herself to be “interrupted” in order to show love and kindness right when it was needed most.

I pray you and I will *be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love* (Ephesians 4:2).

## Day Five

I've been looking at what it takes to build healthy relationships. And I've saved the best for last: forgiveness. This verse in Matthew always catches me short.

*For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins* (Matthew 6:14-15).

I need to take to heart this command!

Relationships are living, growing things because they involve people who are growing and changing. And because you are human, there will be times when words are spoken or actions are taken that hurt someone in the relationship. You and I need to forgive others and also ask for forgiveness—things that are not easy to do, except through the power of the Holy Spirit.

But wait—there's more! Jesus said we should love our enemies.

I look at Jesus' example of laying down his life for you and me. When he was on the cross, suffering, he forgave those who crucified him.

*Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do* (Luke 23:34).

That's the ultimate in forgiving your enemies. It really seems quite impossible, doesn't it? Jesus was fully God and fully man. But I don't think that excuses you or me to forgive even our enemies.

Corrie Ten Boom and her family helped many Jewish people escape the Nazi's in WW2. As a result, she was arrested and sent to Ravensbrück concentration camp. She survived and wrote books and spoke about her experience. Corrie recounts the following as she was speaking about forgiveness at a church in Munich in 1947:

*Afterward, I saw him—a man moving toward me through the crowd. I recognized him instantly: a former guard from Ravensbrück, the concentration camp where my sister Betsie and I had been imprisoned for hiding Jews.*

*He approached me, now dressed in civilian clothes, and said, “A fine message, Fräulein. How good it is to know that all our sins are at the bottom of the sea.” Then he extended his hand. “I was a guard at Ravensbrück. I've become a Christian, and I know God has forgiven me, but I would like to hear it from you. Will you forgive me?”*

*I stood frozen, remembering Betsie's suffering and death. Forgive him? I could not. Yet I knew Jesus' words: “If you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive yours.”*

***Forgiveness is not a feeling—it's an act of the will.***

*So, I prayed silently, “Jesus, help me. I can lift my hand; You supply the feeling.” Mechanically, I reached out—and as I did, a current seemed to pass from my shoulder to our joined hands. A warmth filled my heart.*

*“I forgive you, brother,” I said, “with all my heart.”*

*In that moment, I felt God’s love more deeply than ever before.<sup>1</sup>*

May you and I be obedient and lift our hands and trust God to fill us with his love.

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<sup>1</sup> Corrie Ten Boom, Sherrill, E., & Sherrill, J. L. (2008). The hiding place. Chosen Books.