

Restoring Broken Relationships

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- 1. We were created for relationships:** Genesis 1 & 2
- 2. The place where broken relationships began:** Genesis 3:1-7; Isaiah 53:6
- 3. The restoration of broken relationships:** Ephesians 2:11-18 (Jews & Gentiles)
- 4. A higher standard for relating among followers of Jesus:**

John 13:34-35- “A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. ³⁵By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.”

Ephesians 5:1-2,25- “Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children ²and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us.” ²⁵- “Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her.”

Live a life of love: “⁴Love is kind and patient, never jealous, boastful, proud, or ⁵rude. Love isn't selfish or quick tempered. It doesn't keep a record of wrongs that others do. ⁶Love rejoices in the truth, but not in evil. ⁷Love is always supportive, loyal, hopeful, and trusting. ⁸Love never fails!” (1 Corinthians 13:4-8a, CEV)

Colossians 3:13- “Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.”

Philippians 2:3-5- “Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. ⁴Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. ⁵Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus:..”

- 5. Reconciliation is a top priority for followers of Jesus:**

Matthew 5:23-24;18:15-17

- 6. Maintaining good relationships requires effort: Ephesians 4:3**

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

- 7. Some relationships should be avoided:**

Proverbs 22:24: “Do not make friends with a hot-tempered man, do not associate with one easily angered,” (cf. Proverbs 1-9)

8. Some relationships should be carefully defined and limited:

Matthew 5:12-16; 28:19-20; II Corinthians 6:14-18

9. Levels of grievances in relationships:

A minor grievance should be *covered in love* (I Peter 4:8), allowing for an unbroken relationship.

A serious offense which has driven a wedge between two people, requires *confrontation in love* (Matthew 18:15-17; Ephesians 4:15a).

10. Reconciliation is a process

Differing from forgiveness on the personal level, reconciliation is a process that *is* conditioned on the attitude and actions of the offender. Its aim is restoration of a broken relationship—which is *often* a process.

Those who commit *significant* offenses against others must be willing to recognize that reconciliation is a process. In such cases, even if the offender confessed his wrong to the one he hurt, and appealed for forgiveness, the offended person could justifiably say, “I forgive you, but it might take some time for me to regain trust and restore our relationship.” **Note:** This response should never be used to justify a vindictive or vengeful disposition (see: Romans 12:17-21).

Remember: Being forgiven, restored, and trusted again is a great experience for one who has failed. Yet it is important for those who hurt others to understand that their attitude and actions will affect the process of rebuilding trust.

When someone has been *significantly* hurt, and feels hesitant about restoration with her offender, it is right and wise to look for changes in the offender *before* allowing reconciliation to begin. This is especially true when the offense has been repeated.

Reconciliation requires us to offer a repentant person an opportunity to demonstrate repentance and to regain trust. However, when a person has consistently behaved in a harmful and irresponsible manner, he must accept the fact that reconciliation will be a slow and difficult process.

Three main considerations affect the timing of the process of restoration:

1. The attitude of the offender
2. The depth of the betrayal or violation
3. The pattern of the offense (e.g. often repeated offenses)

Restoring broken relationships- Steps to take:

- 1. Check your own heart: Matthew 7:3-5—self-examination comes first. (See attached)**
- 2. Understand your conflict management style (See attached)**
- 3. Understand what kind of relationship is possible: Different types of relationships**
- 4. Clearly define the wedge driven between you and the other party**
- 5. Understand the contributing factors to the wedge between you**
History, perspective, circumstances, motivations, fears...
- 6. Confront in love:**

A serious offense which has driven a wedge between two people, requires *confrontation in love*. Such confrontation is the beginning of the process of reconciliation. **Note:** In cases involving violent crimes, it might be best (and the only safe option) that no contact occur between the victim and the perpetrator.

Q. How should we respond if the offender doesn't think she has done anything wrong?

When an offender does not see that she has done anything wrong, the offended party may need to put distance between herself and her offender. The act of setting relationship boundaries for the person who hurt us is designed to both protect us from future hurt and promote conviction in the offender's life. In such cases, the process of regaining trust and restoring a broken relationship will be more difficult. The offended person must commit the situation to the Lord and accept the change of relationship.

- 7. Confirming genuine confession and repentance**

When an offended party works toward reconciliation, the first and most important step is the confirmation of genuine repentance on the part of the offender (Luke 17:3).

Seven signs of genuine confession and repentance:

The offender:

1. Accepts full responsibility for his or her actions. (Instead of: "Since you think I've done something wrong..." or "If I have done anything to offend you...").
2. Accepts accountability from others.
3. Does not continue in the hurtful behavior or anything associated with it.
4. Does not have a defensive attitude about his or her being in the wrong.
5. Does not have a light attitude toward his or her hurtful behavior.
6. Does not resent doubts about his or her sincerity- nor the need to demonstrate sincerity. (Especially in cases involving repeated offenses)
7. Makes restitution wherever necessary.

Note on restitution: Restitution gives the offender an opportunity to demonstrate by actions that he or she wishes to be restored to the injured person and to society in general. The harder you work to make restitution and repair any damage you have caused, the easier it will be for others to believe your confession and be reconciled to you.

Forgiveness does not necessarily release an offender from responsibility to repair the damages caused by his or her actions. An injured party may exercise mercy and choose to waive the right to restitution, but in many cases making restitution is beneficial even for the offender. Doing so demonstrates remorse, sincerity, and a new attitude, which can strengthen reconciliation. At the same time, it serves to establish lessons that will help the offender avoid similar wrongdoing in the future.

Note about confirming genuine repentance:

A disingenuous and unrepentant offender will resent your desire to confirm the genuineness of his confession and repentance. He may resort to lines of manipulation. "I guess you can't find it in yourself to be forgiving." "You just want to rub it in my face." "I guess I should expect that you want your revenge." "Some Christian you are, I thought Christians believed in love and compassion." These lines reveal an unrepentant attitude.

Don't be manipulated into avoiding the step of confirming the authenticity of your offender's confession and repentance. Use these signs carefully and with much prayer. It is also advisable (in difficult cases) to seek the help of a wise counselor. You must be as certain as you can of your offender's repentance—especially in cases involving repeated offenses. It is hard to genuinely restore a

broken relationship when the offender is unclear about his confession and repentance.

Remember, even God will not grant forgiveness to one who is insincere about his confession and repentance. The person who is unwilling to forsake his sin will not find forgiveness with God (Proverbs 28:13).

Of course, only God can read hearts-- we must evaluate actions. Jesus said, "By their fruit you will recognize them" (Matthew 7:16a). We must not allow superficial appearances of repentance to control our response. Displays of tears or appearing to be sorry must not become substitutes for clear changes in attitude and behavior.

Finally: When we are hesitant to reconcile:

It is common for those who have been seriously hurt to feel hesitant about reconciling with their offenders. When your offender is genuinely repentant, however, it is important to open yourself to the possibility of restoration.

Remember, Jesus spoke about reconciliation with a sense of urgency (see Matthew 5:23-24). If you are hesitant to reconcile, work through the ten guidelines on the next pages.

Ten guidelines for those who are hesitant to reconcile

1. **Be honest about your motives** -Make sure that your desire is to do what pleases God and not to get revenge. Settle the matter of forgiveness (as Joseph did) in the context of your relationship with God. Guidelines for reconciliation should not be retaliatory.
2. **Be humble in your attitude** -Do not let pride ruin everything. Renounce all vengeful attitudes toward your offender. We are not, for example, to demand that a person earn our forgiveness. The issue is not earning forgiveness, but working toward true reconciliation. This demands humility. Those who focus on retaliation and revenge have allowed self-serving pride to control them.
3. **Be prayerful about the situation** -Jesus taught his disciples to pray for those who mistreat them (Luke 6:28). It is amazing how our attitude toward another person can change when we pray for him. Pray also for strength to follow through with reconciliation (see: Hebrews 4:16).
4. **Be willing to admit ways you might have contributed to the problem** -"Even if you did not start the dispute, your lack of understanding, careless words, impatience, or failure to respond in a loving manner may have aggravated the situation. When this happens, it is easy to behave as though the other person's sins more than cancel yours, which leaves you with a self-righteous attitude that can

retard forgiveness (*i.e. relational forgiveness*). The best way to overcome this tendency is to prayerfully examine your role in the conflict and then write down everything you have done or failed to do that may have been a factor.” (Ken Sande, p. 168). Such a step, however, is not suggested to promote the idea of equal blame for all situations. (See: Matthew 7:1-6) (*Italicized words added*).

5. **Be honest with the offender** -If you need time to absorb the reality of what was said or done, express this honestly to the one who hurt you. Yet we must not use time as a means of manipulation and punishment.
6. **Be objective about your hesitancy** –Perhaps you have good reasons for being hesitant to reconcile, but they must be objectively stated. Sometimes, for example, repeated confessions and offenses of the same nature make it understandably hard for trust to be rebuilt. This is an objective concern. Clearly define your reasons for doubting your offender's sincerity.
7. **Be clear about the guidelines for restoration** -Establish clear guidelines for restoration. Requirements like restitution can be clearly understood. Others include financial accountability, holding down a job, and putting away substances.
8. **Be realistic about the process** -Change often requires time and hard work. Periodic failure by an offender does not always indicate an unrepentant heart. Behavior patterns often run in deep channels. They can place a powerful grip on a person's life. A key indicator for change is the attitude of the offender. While you may proceed with some caution, be careful about demanding guarantees from a person who has truly expressed repentance. If the person stumbles, the process of loving confrontation, confession, and forgiveness may need to be repeated . Setbacks and disappointments are often part of the process of change. Don't give up too easily on process of reconciliation. Keep the goal of a fully restored relationship open.
9. **Be mindful of God's control** –“No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, *that you may be able to endure it*” (1 Corinthians 10:13). “We know that God works all things together for good for those who love him and are called according to His purpose” (Romans 8:28). “When you are having a hard time forgiving someone (*i.e. being restored*), take time to note how God may be using that offense for good. Is this an unusual opportunity to glorify God? How can you serve others and help them grow in their faith? What sins and weaknesses of yours are being exposed? What character qualities are you being challenged to exercise? When you perceive that the person who has wronged you is being used

as an instrument in God's hand to help you mature, serve others, and glorify him, it may be easier for you to move ahead with forgiveness (*i.e. restoration*)" (Ken Sande, p.165;cf. Hebrews 12:7;I Pet.2:23b; 4:19). (Italicized words added).

10. **Be alert to Satan's *schemes*** -In Ephesians 4:27, the apostle warns about the possibility of giving Satan an opportunity in our lives. Significantly, this warning is given in the context of unchecked anger. A few verses later, the Apostle wrote, " Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. And be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you. Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children; and walk in love, just as Christ also loved you, and gave Himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God" (Ephesians 4:29-5:2). Meditate on these words and put them into practice! (See also: II Corinthians 2:14; Hebrews 12:15).