

Peacemaking for Families

Forgiveness & Reconciliation – Part 2

by Steve Cornell

TEN GUIDELINES FOR THOSE HESITANT TO RECONCILE

Those who have been seriously (and repeatedly) hurt rightfully feel hesitant about reconciling with their offenders. When your offender is genuinely repentant, however, it's important to be open to the possibility of restoration (unless there is a clear issue of safety involved). Jesus spoke about reconciliation with a sense of urgency (Matthew 5:23-24). If you are hesitant to reconcile, work through these ten guidelines:

1. **Be honest about your _____ motives.** Make sure 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 one who hurt you.** 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 (Hebrews 4:16).
4. **Be willing to _____ admit ways you might have _____ contributed to the problem.** As Ken Sande writes in *The Peacemaker: A Biblical Guide to Resolving Personal Conflict*:

“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.”

Such a step, however, is not suggested to promote the idea of equal blame for all situations (Matthew 7:1-6).

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 and include such factors as maintaining financial accountability, holding down a job, or seeking treatment for substance abuse.
8. **Be alert to Satan's schemes**. In Ephesians 4:27, Paul 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, he 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.
9. **Be mindful of God's control**. As the apostle Paul wrote, "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). And to the Romans, he wrote, "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). To quote once again from Ken Sande:

"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)."
10. **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 of 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 they stumble, 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 the process of reconciliation. Be open to the goal of a fully restored relationship.