

# *Healing and Maintaining Relationships*



<https://morethanordinarylives.com/>

# Relationships

Relationships should be the most important thing in our lives. Nobody on his or her deathbed ever says, “I wish that I had accumulated more things.” Nearly everybody regrets some relationships that are not all that we desire. And relationships are of prime importance to God. The two great commandments are, “*Love the Lord ...*”, “*Love your neighbor ...*” Matt 22:36-40

## .1. Understanding what damages or destroys relationships

The first step in restoring and maintaining relationships is to understand what damages or destroys them. James 4:1 says, “*What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don’t they come from your desires that battle within you?*” NIV So what are some of the desires within us that cause problems in relationships?

**Selfishness** - Some people are more selfish than others. But, every person is selfish to some degree.

Philippians 2:3-4 says, “*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.*” NIV

Many relationships are hindered because people are afraid that others will take advantage of them. Jesus laid down quite a challenge in Matthew 5:39-44. “*But I tell you, do not resist an evil person. If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to them the other cheek also. And if anyone wants to sue you and take your shirt, hand over your coat as well. If anyone forces you to go one mile, go with*

Discuss some human relationships that are and should be of high value to us. Please give examples.

What are some consequences of allowing relationships to be damaged, destroyed, or just fail to mature ?

Why do you think relationships are so important to God ?

What are some specific things that come from within us that make relationships difficult?

How can selfishness damage a relationship?

Does it seem unnatural to “value others above yourself?” Why?

How could “valuing others above yourself” affect a relationship?

*them two miles. Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you. You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you."* Jesus is talking about dealing with "evil" people not those with whom we expect the closest relationships. We will see that the most

successful relationships require cooperation by all parties. However, Jesus' admonition should take away the stigma of letting others take advantage of us.

**Pride** - Some have called pride the original sin from which all other sins evolve. Many scriptures relate to the dangers of pride. The best known is probably, "*Pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall.*"

Proverbs 16:18 NIV However, concerning relationships the first part of Proverbs 13:10 is especially meaningful, "*Pride only breeds quarrels ...*"

An old saying goes, "He (or she) is often wrong, but never in doubt." One manifestation of pride is thinking that you know better than anyone else. Proverbs 13:10 continues, "*... but wisdom is found in those who take advice.*"

Some people derive a sense of infallibility based on confidence in their own logic or even a sense of superior spirituality. However, thinking is affected by an individual's personal values. True wisdom understands that our own opinions are affected by our personal values and that those with different values can give us valuable input. Other people allow personal feelings to determine their opinions. Feelings are also affected by personal values plus many other factors. Wisdom understands that feelings that reject the input of others can be misdirected.

Why are we so fearful of letting others take advantage of us?

How can we overcome this fear? Read Proverbs 19:11. What consolation should we have when we "overlook an offense"?

How can pride on the part of one or both of the parties affect a relationship?

Have you ever known an individual who always thought they knew best? They wouldn't take or even consider any advice? Were there challenges in maintaining a relationship with that person ?

Can you give examples of personal values affecting logic? Feelings?

How can decisions based on either logic, false spirituality, or feelings without considering the other party, hurt a relationship?

Are there any spiritual situations that can lead to a false sense of infallibility?

**Neglect** - Relationships take effort. Nobody has enough time or energy to have the best possible relationship with everybody. However, the relationships which we deem most important often suffer from neglect.

Occasionally, neglect is unavoidable due to circumstances. Illness, for example, could force a person to neglect those they genuinely love.

Neglect can occur for avoidable reasons ...

- a. Not understanding the other person's needs
- b. Low priority on the relationship
- c. Different expectations of the relationship

... and take many different forms.

- b. No time for the relationship
- c. Failure to provide for needs
- d. Poor or little communication

Jesus gave us what is called the Golden Rule.

*"In everything, do for others what you would have them do for you."* (Matt 7:12) A little boy heard this verse at church. So, he gave his mother a box of his favorite candy for Christmas (knowing he would get most of it). A paraphrase of Jesus' words, could add "if you were in their position."

Apostle Paul instructed, *"We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves. Each of us should please our neighbors for their good, to build them up. For even Christ did not please himself ..."* (Romans 15:1-3)

After God, what relationships do you think should have highest priority for our time and energy?

Why do we sometimes neglect those we deem most important?

How might a person (for example a close family member) respond, if they feel neglected in a relationship that should be a priority ?

Can think of other avoidable reasons for neglect? Can you give examples to illustrate avoidable reasons for neglect?

What other forms might neglect take ? Can you identify other forms not listed?

Can you think of examples where, like the little boy, you did something for another to benefit yourself?

How might applying the Golden Rule affect a relationship suffering from selfishness, pride or neglect?

Give some appropriate examples of *"bear with the failings of the weak."*

## .2. Communication

Nearly everyone knows that communication is important in any relationship. However, simply knowing this does not necessarily make you a good communicator.

*“When words are many, sin is not absent, but he who holds his tongue is wise.”* (Prov 10:19)

*“If anyone considers himself religious and yet does not keep a tight rein on his tongue, he deceives himself and his religion is worthless.”* (James 1:26)

### Listening

*“Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to anger.”* (James 1:19) True listening leads to understanding, not necessarily agreement. *“By wisdom a house is built, and through **understanding** it is established.”* (Prov 24:3)

Many people are more concerned with making their point or winning the argument than they are in truly understanding the other person. You have not fully understood until you can explain (not necessarily agree with) the other person’s point of view to their satisfaction.

### Speaking

Ephesians 4:15 says, *“Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ.”* The manner in which we speak truth and the attitude with which it is delivered determine the way it is received.

Why is communication sometimes so difficult?

Can you over communicate? Give some examples of bad communication.

What are some aspects of good communication?

How does it make you feel when someone really listens and understands you?

How do you feel when someone fails to understand you, but just wants to make their own argument?

What are some good listening and understanding techniques?

Have you ever traded sides in an argument and explained the other person’s point of view?

Are there ways to speak the truth, but not in love? Give some examples?

How can a person tell, if they are truly *“speaking the truth in love”*?

## Power in Positive Words

Many people are difficult to deal with, because they have a negative view of themselves. However, positive words can have a tremendous effect on any relationship. The Bible tells us *“Whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable-- if anything is excellent or praiseworthy – think about such things.”* Philippians 4:8-9 When we help a person to think positively, we are doing God’s work in their lives.

What are some symptoms of having a negative view of yourself?

How can positive words affect a relationship with such a person?

Is there a difference between flattery and helping a person to focus on the positive? Please give examples.

## Dealing with a difficult issue

There are issues in every relationship. However, many people withdraw rather than face a difficult issue. Frequently, fear is the primary cause of withdrawal. The Bible promises, *“There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear.”* I John 4:18

One legitimate fear is that an argument will escalate into a fight. A fight is when we say or do things to hurt the other person. This only makes the situation worse. Things you say or do become an issue rather than resolving an issue. To deal with a difficult issue we must learn how to have a safe argument. Just like in sports there must be rules to make the game possible, likewise there must be some rules to make a safe argument possible.

How might a person withdraw rather than face a difficult situation?

What are some fears which might make a person withdraw rather than face a difficult situation?

Do you know of any ways that “perfect love” can “Drive out fear”?

1. Stick to one specific object of discussion.
2. Avoid “you” statements:  
“You always ...”, “You never ...”
3. Especially avoid personal attacks:  
“If you weren’t so lazy ...”, “You’re stupid.”
4. Don’t bring up the past.
5. Don’t let anger make the situation worse

How is the other person likely to respond to failures to communicate well such as personal attacks?

Can you think of other guidelines on having a “safe argument”?

## Dealing with Anger

You will not resolve a difficult issue in anger. Temporary withdrawal is appropriate if your anger is likely to make you say or do things that you will regret later. *“Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth ...”* Eph 4:49 However, Eph 4:26 *“... do not let the sun go down on your anger.”* makes clear that withdrawal in anger should only be temporary.

The first step in dealing with anger is to recognize that it is not good for us. Not only can anger damage relationships, but chronic anger has been statistically linked to poorer health. Anger can even lead to murder. Read Genesis 4:6-7.

Experts tell us that anger is usually the manifestation of deeper emotions such as fear, disappointment, or hurt. Unfortunately, we sometimes try to mask these emotions by responding in anger. Some feel more comfortable with anger, because it can be directed toward other people rather than acknowledging other emotions. Control of anger can be helped by honestly assessing what is truly causing our anger.

God has also give us the Holy Spirit to help deal with anger as well as other negative emotions. Gal 5:22-23 says, *“The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.”* Paul was saying that, if your life is characterized by these qualities, doing the right things ie “law” will be no problem for you.

How does anger make meaningful communication difficult?

How can unwholesome words or actions caused by anger damage a relationship?

Give some examples of how temporary withdrawal can prevent making the situation worse.

What relationships did Cain’s anger destroy?

How does anger affect the one expressing it?

Have you ever covered for another emotion by expressing anger? Please share, if you’re willing.

How can good relationships help us to deal with our anger, rather than letting anger destroy relationships?

What effect do you think the “fruit of the Spirit” could have on anger?

Do you think a mutual commitment to “the fruit of the Spirit” could help maintain or restore any relationship? Why?

How could a person go about manifesting “*the fruit of the Spirit*”?

### .3. Asking and Granting Forgiveness

US News and World Report completed a study on “Happiness”. They determined that the single most important factor in determining whether a person led a happy life was to ability to forgive others. Someone has said that, “Failing to forgive is like drinking poison and hoping the other person will die..”

**Asking forgiveness** is very biblical. The most effective reconciliation is when you admit where you were wrong and then say, “Will you forgive me?” Admitting wrong doing is very difficult for most people. However, the Bible says, “*Confess your sins to one another.*” James 5:16. Admitting wrong and pledging to do better is important for any relationship.

Sometimes we want to make peace. But, we still think that the other person was 90% wrong and we were only 10% wrong. Our responsibility is to seek forgiveness for our wrong regardless of what proportion it may have been. Unless they ask, let God convict the other person of their wrong. Including a condemnation along with our apology is a certain way to negate what we hope to accomplish. In asking for forgiveness, we also need to genuinely promise and try to not commit that wrong again.

**Granting forgiveness** does not mean that what they did was OK. Rather, granting forgiveness means to give up the right to punish that person. Read Eph 4:32, Col 3:13, and Matt 18:21-22. Unconditional forgiveness is a requirement of living a godly life. The ability to forgive and release ourselves from the burden of hurt and anger is a gift from God.

Rarely is someone all wrong in a conflict. When someone asks us for forgiveness, we should look within our selves to see if we have something for which to ask forgiveness as well. Mutual forgiveness is the key to restoration of the relationship.

Why do we want to hold onto our hurts and grievances?

What affect does this have on us?  
On our relationships?

Although there are no wrong ways to ask forgiveness, there are some poor ways. Can you think of any poor ways to ask forgiveness?

Why is it so hard to admit when we are wrong?

What are some ways we attempt to punish those who may have wronged us?

Is it easier to forgive someone who confesses that they have wronged us? (Hint read I John 1:9.)

#### .4. Rebuilding trust

Sometimes scriptures are misinterpreted.

Jeremiah 31:33-35 says, “No longer will they teach their neighbor, or say to one another,

‘Know the Lord,’ because they will all know me,

from the least of them to the greatest, declares the Lord. For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more.”

Some have said that this means that genuine forgiveness means that the memory of the offense immediately disappears.

First, the Jeremiah passage is speaking in the context of heaven, “they will all know me”.

However, in this life the hurt remains after a severe offense (such as adultery) even if the offended person has granted forgiveness or given up the right to punish the other. In these cases, the relationship must be restored by rebuilding trust.

Accountability can help to rebuild trust in a relationship after a severe offense. The object is to help the offended party heal from the hurt and very human fear that they will be hurt again. Many scriptures indicate that genuine caring will result in extraordinary measures to help the other person to recover.

“Bear one another’s burdens” Gal 6:2

“Be subject to one another” Eph 5:21

“Serve one another” I Peter 4:10

“Pursue things that make for peace” Rom 14:19

Some hurts between people are less severe, but become a serious irritation, if chronically repeated.

For example, one has repeatedly forgotten an important date to the other. Or maybe some who live together have different standards of neatness.

The most frequent argument of married couples is about spending money. Chronic repeat can deeply hurt the other person by failing to value them. Trust can be rebuilt in many cases by looking for a creative solution. This is not necessarily a compromise, but a new way of doing things that will prevent the reoccurring irritation.

Give some other examples of when a person might genuinely forgive, but still be mindful of an offense?

Following are some examples where hurt might linger even after forgiveness has been granted. Discuss steps of accountability that could help the offended person to heal and trust again.

- A. Adultery in marriage
- B. Hurtful words said
- C. Physical violence
- D. A disputed business deal
- E. Lying
- F. Other ?

Create some possible solutions to the following irritations.

- A. Forgetting dates
- B. Leaving the house a mess
- C. Overspending
- D. Feeding the pets
- E. Lateness
- F. Other ?

## .5. Difficult or Uncooperative Individuals

Playing tennis by yourself is difficult. Likewise restoring and maintaining relationships works best when there is cooperation by the other party. Sadly not everybody understands the benefit of good relationships or even knows what a good relationship might look like.

Jesus said, “... *be at peace with one another.*” Mark 9:50. And Apostle Paul wrote, says, “*If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men*”. Romans 12:18 Neither Jesus or Paul added, “except for some people.” Therefore, regardless of how difficult a person is, our responsibility is to, “... *pursue the things which make for peace ...*” Romans 14:19 (and many other places).

As followers and representatives of Christ, it is important to make sincere steps to make peace with every individual. (Show the Home Alone clip.)

Have you had relationships where the other person demonstrated little interest in being at peace ?

What was the result of that in your own life?

Did you take some steps attempting to restore the relationship? What steps?

How did making the effort for peace affect you? The relationship?

Has anyone ever reached out to make peace with you? How did that affect you?

Fortunately, the Bible makes gives us some very powerful ways to seek peace. We have already discussed; **Understanding what damages or destroys relationships, Communication, Asking and Granting Forgiveness, and Rebuilding Trust.** Following are some additional ways to pursue peace with someone who may be unwilling to cooperate.

## Make certain that we are right with God first

The Bible also makes a dramatic promise to us, *“When a man’s ways are pleasing to the Lord, He makes even his enemies to be at peace with him.”* Proverbs 16:7 Many godly qualities can earn a Christian the respect of everyone and can even soften the heart of an uncooperative person. Scripture even uses a commitment to *“do what is right”* in the context of peace. *“Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone. If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.”* Rom 12:17-18 NIV

God even puts reconciliation above the service of worshiping Him. *“Therefore if you are presenting your offering at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your offering there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and present your offering.”* Matt 5:23-24

## Seeing the Good - Believing the best

I Cor 13:4-7 says, *“Love is patient, love is kind and is not jealous; love does not brag and is not arrogant, does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong suffered, does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.”* And Jesus made it abundantly clear that we should love and do good for even our enemies. (Luke 6:27)

Difficult people are the way they are for a reason. They may be hurt, embittered by years of disappointment, fearful, or just don’t know any better. We can love them by trying to see

What are some godly qualities that will lead toward peace even with a difficult individual?

Conversely, sometimes Christians display qualities that do not lead to peace. Self righteousness could be an example. Can you think of other qualities that could be counter productive to peace?

Why do you think God puts reconciliation even above worship?

What are some factors that could make a person difficult?

Think of some difficult people in your life. Can you identify one good quality about that person? Two good qualities? Three?

How do you think focusing on the positive could affect your attitude toward that person?

In what ways, could identifying some good things make it easier to treat this person as Jesus would?

the good in them and trying to understand some factors that make them act the way they do. This is not to excuse poor behavior. But, seeing the good - believing the best can empower us with compassion to act in a godly manner toward them.

### **The blessing for insult response**

Our natural response when experiencing evil or insult is to respond in kind. However, to deal with uncooperative individuals and have the best relationships, God asks us to react differently. *“To sum up, let all be harmonious, sympathetic, brotherly, kindhearted, and humble in spirit. Not returning evil for evil, or insult for insult, but giving a blessing instead.”*

I Peter 3:8-9

Read about the example Jesus gave to us in I Peter 2:21-24. Even on the cross, Jesus asked forgiveness for those crucifying Him. Some people seek to express themselves or win the situation by aggression. However, *“A soft answer turns away wrath”* Proverbs 15:1

### **Forgiveness**

We have talked about forgiveness in the context of “Asking” and “Granting”. But, we can also forgive a difficult individual, even when they haven’t asked.

A person may have wronged us, but have no intention of reconciliation. In this case, it can be beneficial to make a list of the wrongs. Then go through the list deliberately forgiving the person for each item by our faith in God’s love for us. Then, as a visual sign of forgiveness that sets us free from hurt and bitterness, destroy the list. If we still have a tendency to rehearse the hurt in our minds, having a tangible reminder of our commitment may help us to emotionally heal.

Why is giving a blessing in return for an insult so difficult for us?

How can we manage to do such a difficult thing as giving a blessing in return for an insult?

How might the person to which the blessing is directed respond?

Can Jesus’ example give us the courage to bless those who may harm us? How?

Why do you think a “soft answer” can disarm a person’s aggression?

How can you forgive a person who isn’t seeking forgiveness?

How might our forgiveness affect an unrepentant person?

How might forgiving another regardless of their desire affect us?

What sorts of tangible reminder might help us to heal?