



The Practice – Lesson 1

Love Like Jesus

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Introduction

God created us in His image (Genesis 1:27). He is a God of relationships and He lives in relationship within Himself: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit – three and yet one (John 17:11). Since He is a God of relationships and we are made in His image, we too are relational beings. His desire for us as Christians is to have loving relationships with one another. He gave us several reasons for that:

- So the world would believe that God sent Him (John 17:21).
- So that others would know we are His disciples (John 13:34, 35).
- So we would experience full joy (John 15:11).

It is clearly important to God that we not only have a strong relationship with Him, but that we also have good relationships with one another. He wants us to live in harmony and peace with one another, not just because others are watching, but for our own emotional health.

1. Some Biblical commands about relationships

- Love your neighbor as yourself (Matthew 22:39).
- Be kind one to another (Ephesians 4:32).
- Forgive one another (Matthew 6:12).
- Love your enemies (Matthew 5:44).
- Pay your debts (Romans 13:8).
- Be generous and ready to share (1 Timothy 6:18).
- Don't try to get even when someone hurts you (Romans 12:19).
- Be hospitable (welcome people into your home) (1 Peter 4:9).
- Others?

2. Causes of broken relationships

- Sin (evil people, injustice, envy, greed, unkind words, etc.).
- Differences in values, religion.
- Personality clashes.

- Failure to forgive (bitterness).
- My wounds rub against your wounds (failure, fear, rejection).
- Some seek to control; others tend to resist.
- Listening to lies of the enemy.

3. Relationship issues in the New Testament

- Relationship problems existed even in the early church.
- Women (Philippians 4:2)
- Leaders (Acts 15:6-9)
- Apostles (Acts 15:37-41)
- How leaders handle these situations is important. It can make the difference between the survival and the death of a church.

4. Handling disagreements

- Method 1: Ignore it and hope it goes away.
 - In some cases this is the right response (Proverbs 19:11).
 - If it hangs on and starts to affect your relationships and other people, it is time to address the issue.
 - Women tend to be good at relationships. Many of us like to keep the peace and encourage others to keep the peace as well, but if the problem is not brought out into the open, it will usually only get worse until someone explodes.
 - Biblical examples:
 - Cain & Abel (Genesis 4)
 - Jacob & Esau (Genesis 25:27)
 - Jacob & Laban (Genesis 31)
 - David & Absalom (Tamar) (2 Sam. 13)
- Method 2: Try to understand the root of the problem. Ask God.
 - Is it a personality clash?
 - Jacob/Esau (Genesis 25:27, 28)
 - Mary/Martha (Luke 10:40)
 - Is it a difference in values? Abraham and Lot (Genesis 13)
 - Is sin involved (James 4:1)?
 - Envy: Moses v Aaron/Miriam (Numbers 12)
 - Jealousy: Saul/David (1 Sam. 18:9)
 - Failure to forgive: Absalom
 - Greed: Judas
 - Pride: James/John vs. other disciples
 - Is this spiritual warfare? (Eph. 6:12; Daniel 10:12-14)
 - Sometimes we fight on the wrong battlefield. We think our problem is other people, but it is really the enemy. If we unite in prayer, he will

be defeated. The enemy loves it when we fight one another instead of him.

5. Biblical Steps to Resolving Conflict (Sande, 2014)¹

- Step 1: Believe God can use this conflict for good and God's glory (Romans 8:28).
 - Paul/Barnabas disagreement led to two missionary teams.
 - Early church disagreement led to clarification of what was essential for Gentiles to become part of the church.
 - Confession and reconciliation can be healing. Both people grow. (Jacob/Esau both prospered)
 - Others are watching how we handle disagreements. Show them how to forgive, how to love, how to extend mercy and grace to those who hurt us.
- Step 2: Get the log out of your own eye (Matthew 7:5).
 - What did I do to contribute to the problem?
 - Ask God to reveal sinful actions, words, and thoughts.
 - Daily confession can prevent disagreements from growing.
 - Open your heart; ask the Holy Spirit to shine His Holy light.
 - How did I grieve your heart (Eph. 4:30)?
 - When He shows you something, repent and confess (1 John 1:9).
 - Ask Him what He wants you to do about it.
 - Accept His forgiveness and move on.
 - Attitudes or actions to take.
 - Habits we need to change.
 - Confession to the person you hurt.
 - Anything He wants you to do to "make it right" (Luke 19:1-10).
 - Be obedient. It is better than grieving the Spirit of God and disobeying Him.
 - When we get the log out of our own eye, we open our hearts to be able to forgive.
- Step 3: Seek reconciliation with the other person.
 - Is there is someone you find yourself avoiding because you sense there has been a break in your relationship?
 - Has someone done something hurtful that you cannot seem to get past even though you have tried to forgive them?
 - Ask God what you can do to bring healing to the relationship.
 - Refuse to complain to others. It is always tempting when someone has said or done something that hurt us to find a close friend and tell them what happened. We look for someone who will be sympathetic

¹ Sande, K. (2014). The Four G's. *Christian Conciliation, Foundational Principles*. Retrieved from www.peacemaker.net

and take our side in the issue, tell us we were right and they were wrong. Why do we do that? We think it will make us feel better. Does it? No. It just creates a bigger problem. We start to build a circle of people "on our side" and before we know it, there are two "armed camps".

- What is the biblical way to handle the situation?
 - Jesus gave the answer. Matthew 18:15-17, MSG: *"If a fellow believer hurts you, go and tell him—work it out between the two of you. If he listens, you've made a friend."*
- Do's and don'ts for the conversation
 - Do pray ahead of time:
 - Wisdom: what to say (2 Samuel 12 - Nathan).
 - Discernment – what is really going on – demonic attack, sin, personality issue.
 - Timing: Give time for God to work (Esther 5:7).
 - Do not try to get them to admit they were wrong and you were right, or persuade them to apologize. Only godly sorrow will bring them to repentance (2 Corinthians 7:10).
 - Do not make a false confession, hoping they will do the same.
 - Speak the truth in love (Eph. 4:15).
 - Be gracious and humble in what you say and how you say it.
 - Listen to what they say.
- Step 4: What happens if they do not listen?
 - Give them time to reflect and pray.
 - Follow Jesus' advice (Matthew 18:16).
- Step 5: Forgive again.
 - Forgiveness is not optional for Christians.
 - Matthew 6:14,15, MSG: *"In prayer there is a connection between what God does and what you do. You can't get forgiveness from God, for instance, without also forgiving others. If you refuse to do your part, you cut yourself off from God's part."*
 - None of us want to be cut off from God's forgiveness. If we choose to hold on to the painful memories of people hurting us, God cannot forgive us.
 - It has been said, "If we choose not to forgive, it is like drinking poison and hoping the other person dies."
 - We are the ones who are hurt when we choose not to forgive.
 - We carry the weight of that bitterness around like a heavy burden on our back. It drags us down and the weight of it on our spirit becomes unbearable.

- Hebrews 12:15, ESV: *See to it that no one fails to obtain the grace of God; that no "root of bitterness" springs up and causes trouble, and by it many become defiled.* "A bitter root is contagious.
 - Absalom's story (2 Samuel 13 – 15)
- There are incredible stories of Christians offering forgiveness to those who have inflicted deep pain.
 - Corrie ten Boom
 - Parents who have forgiven those who killed their children.
- Sometimes we think, "But it's not fair! They hurt me intentionally. They need to pay for what they did!" When we say that, we do not really understand what it means to forgive.
 - Forgiveness does not mean it was OK for them to hurt you.
 - It does not mean that the pain was not real.
 - It does not mean that it's OK for them to do it again.
 - It does not mean that you will forget that the incident happened.
- Forgiveness is for you. It sets you free.
 - It frees you from the need to make them pay for what they did.
 - It frees you from feeling that hurt every time you see them.
 - It frees you from the emotional connection to that person.
 - And it allows God to work in their heart.
- Forgiveness is choosing not to allow that situation to influence your life and your decisions.

Conclusion:

In the end, forgive as God has forgiven you. Colossians 3:12–14, ESV: Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful.

"Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." Mark 11:24, KJV

Love like Jesus!

Reflect: Is there someone you are having a hard time forgiving? What steps can you take to begin the forgiveness process?