

MODULE 3: RELATIONSHIPS

SESSION 4: REPAIRING BROKEN RELATIONSHIPS

Key Ideas for This Session:

- Conflict is an inevitable part of human relationships.
- The discipline of a principled versus an emotional response is key to healthy relationships. The Holy Spirit give us the “Fruits of the Spirit” to cope with the things that come up in the context of every relationship.

Key verse: Matthew 18:33

Shouldn't you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?

Why Do Relationships Fall Apart?

Conflict often arises when other people don't do what we want them to do. Sometimes we get angry with them, or we try to manipulate them into doing what we want and how we want it done. Sometimes we become sulky and passive aggressive. Because no one will always do what another wants them to do, conflict is inevitable in a relationship. Conversely, strong friendships can cope with difference of opinions and disagreements.

When we find ourselves becoming frustrated and irritable with someone else, it is helpful to stop and ask ourselves this question—“Right now am I feeling peaceful and relaxed or am I feeling upset and angry?” It's a simple question and we already know the answer, but it is helpful to firmly identify that we are responding out of emotion and not based on Spiritual principles.

Spiritual principles ultimately come from God and are given to us through the Holy Spirit. Scripture refers to these principles as the “Fruits of the Spirit,” and they are love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. (Galatians 5:22-23). When the response is principled, the issues within a relationship can be addressed safely and in a God-honouring way.

Emotional vs Principled Responses:

Put an “E” beside the responses you think are emotionally-driven and a “P” where you see a spiritual principle guiding the response. For each, also list which emotion or principle it may be.

		I cannot believe you are suggesting this—of all the selfish, narrow-minded things you could think of...
		Are you kidding me?!!!!
		I know that deep down you just want the best for me, so I’m going to look at it in that light.
		My life is so difficult already and now this... I feel so alone.... I give up....
		Let’s wait and go through this together to figure out what exactly we should do. Maybe we should think about it on our own first and maybe weigh the pros and cons.
		Forget it. Hell will freeze over before I agree with that.
		I agree with you about your first two points but can we talk through the third one?
		I want to work this out because I care about you.

Read Proverbs 14:12 in your Bible.
There is a way that appears to be right, but in the end it leads to death.

Write this verse in your own words.

Often when people think of themselves as “being in the right” they also justify or rationalize their actions as being reasonable and righteous. They are blind to their own fault or failure and blame others when things go wrong. This leads to all kinds of problems and bad relationships.

Read Proverbs 21:2 in your Bible.
All a person's ways seem right to him, but the Lord weighs hearts.

What does this mean?

Who determines if a person's actions are right or wrong?

It is helpful to clear our minds and think about what we are expecting from another person and whether that expectation is good and appropriate. We may realize that what we expect of another is sometimes solely based on our emotions in a given situation (and not on principles). This is particularly true if someone has disappointed us or hurt us in some way—and at this point, things can quickly unravel.

Let's consider a simple example involving the action of spitting. We all expect people not to spit on each other on purpose. This is a type of covenant called "implied consent." If someone actually does spit on another person, he has broken the principle of honour and violated a common expectation. Often, people think the correct response is to retaliate by spitting back or doing something worse in order to get even for the wrong done to them.

Have you ever experienced a situation in which you wronged someone, and instead of retaliating, they forgave you? If yes, describe the incident.

Could you hold back from retaliation?

Read Matthew 18:23-35.

Therefore, the kingdom of heaven is like a king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. ²⁴ As he began the settlement, a man who owed him ten thousand bags of gold was brought to him. ²⁵ Since he was not able to pay, the master ordered that he and his wife and his children and all that he had be sold to repay the debt. ²⁶ “At this the servant fell on his knees before him. ‘Be patient with me,’ he begged, ‘and I will pay back everything.’ ²⁷ The servant’s master took pity on him, canceled the debt and let him go. ²⁸ “But when that servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred silver coins. He grabbed him and began to choke him. ‘Pay back what you owe me!’ he demanded. ²⁹ “His fellow servant fell to his knees and begged him, ‘Be patient with me, and I will pay it back.’ ³⁰ “But he refused. Instead, he went off and had the man thrown into prison until he could pay the debt. ³¹ When the other servants saw what had happened, they were outraged and went and told their master everything that had happened. ³² “Then the master called the servant in. ‘You wicked servant,’ he said, ‘I canceled all that debt of yours because you begged me to. ³³ Shouldn’t you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?’ ³⁴ In anger his master handed him over to the jailers to be tortured, until he should pay back all he owed. ³⁵ “This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother or sister from your heart.

Do you think the unmerciful servant felt justified in his own eyes? Why do you think he felt he was right to have his own debtor punished?

The servant who owed a big debt realized that he could never repay that debt in his lifetime. He needed the person to whom he owed the money to forgive the debt—and that is exactly what happened. However, now that he no longer owed that big debt, he probably wanted to get back on his feet. When he came across a fellow who owed him a small amount, he demanded immediate payment. He had no mercy for the person—the man owed him the money fair and square and so he demanded the justice of the law with no mercy. He desired mercy for his own debts but demanded justice for the fellow who owed him and could not pay.

What does God require from us?

Should we hold ourselves to a higher standard than we hold others? Why or why not?

Read Romans 12:19-21.
Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord. ²⁰ On the contrary: "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head." ²¹ Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

Is it possible for a person to correct a wrong or put an end to wrong by seeking or taking revenge?

Why do you think that judgment belongs to God?

Our Expectations of Others Fall into Three Basic Categories:

Selfish Expectation: A desire for people to do something or behave in a way that is beneficial to me.

Unrealistic Expectation: A desire for people to behave in a manner that is unreasonable, unfair or beyond their ability.

Healthy Expectation: A desire for people to do what is reasonable, right, and appropriate and to give them the benefit of any doubt.

What does the word GRACE mean to you?

Jesus is our example of grace. When He was mistreated and hurt by others, He prayed for them and forgave them. Forgiveness is a spiritual principle that applies in situations when people have wronged us.

How would you describe forgiveness?

Like the unmerciful servant we just read about, many people who desire forgiveness for themselves when they need it, do not feel like forgiving people who have wronged or hurt them. Forgiveness is an act of grace. Grace, by definition, is something that is not deserved—it is a gift. It is God's gift of forgiveness and mercy toward us and it is a gift that we can give to others.

Break into small groups and discuss the following if there is time, or consider these topics this week:

- *Read Matthew 6:14. "For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you." How do you think this verse applies to you? How do you put this into practice?*
- *Think about a conflict you are having right now in a relationship. Observe which of your emotions are involved and how you have or are planning to respond. Now consider the fruits of the Spirit. Does this change your course of action? How might the outcome differ if you apply these principles?*