

RELATIONSHIPS - PART 1

INTRO

- Life is relationships...they are woven into the very fabric of our lives
- Imagining life without relationships is nearly impossible because they bring great joy and meaning to our lives
- Most of our most precious and treasured memories are connected in some way to relationships with others
- “It seems nearly impossible to overstate the importance of relationships. Isn’t this the point of the classic *It’s a Wonderful Life*? In the final scene, in a house full of neighbors, with everyone pitching in to help George, his brother Harry arrives to the surprise of the crowd. Everyone gets hushed and Harry lifts his glass to say, ‘A toast to my big brother George, the richest man in town!’ Cheers erupt, and George picks up a copy of *Tom Sawyer*, left by Clarence, the angel. The shot zooms in for us to read the inscription Clarence wrote to George: Remember no man is a failure who has friends! Yes, the movie’s angelology is off, but its message about friendship is spot-on and moving. Life is relationships.”¹
- Life is relationships...and this is even more true in the church where believers are united by the Spirit and put into relationship with one another
- It should come as no surprise that relationships are also foundational to the church
- The church is the place where those God-designed relationships are meant to operate
- The church was not something God invented because all his other plans failed...rather, the church was the culmination of all of God’s plans for his children
- It is where he intends the blessing of relationships to flourish...real people...in real relationships with each other
- The church is a place of fellowship...a place where real body life takes place
- Yet, relationships are hard...some of our greatest pain and sorrow in this life come as a result of relational discord and conflict
- Some of the worst pain in life occurs in the context of broken relationships, when we hurt others and are hurt by them
- They are complex, challenging, messy, and often characterized by struggle and failure
- But our hope as believers is that, in Christ, relationships can be maintained and repaired with the resources God supplies
- They can become deeper and even more meaningful than they were before sin broke them
- “Relationships are messy; they are also what God uses to rescue us from ourselves. Through them, God shows us our inability to love others without first finding our strength in our relationship with the God who created and redeemed us.”²
- Even in the face of less-than-perfect relationships, God is able to help build relationships that become what he intended them to be

¹ <https://thementoringproject.com/field-guides/relationships/>

² Timothy Lane and Paul David Tripp, *Relationships: A Mess Worth Making*, 1.

THREE CATEGORIES OF RELATIONSHIPS

- When we think of relationships, we normally think of the horizontal ones with other people
- But these horizontal relationships are greatly affected by two other relationships which are really the true starting point when it comes to good relationships
- Often the conflict that erupts in horizontal relationships springs from problems in how we relate to God and ourselves

Our Relationship with God (Upward)

- This is the foundational relationship that we are in as those created in God's image...we are made by him and for him
- Thus, that relationship must be made right and be cultivated daily in order for earthly relationships to flourish
- This happens first by sinners coming to faith in Christ which restores the vertical relationship

Romans 5:6-11 ~ For while we were still helpless, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. 7 For one will hardly die for a righteous man; though perhaps for the good man someone would dare even to die. 8 But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. 9 Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him. 10 For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life. 11 And not only this, but we also exult in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation.

- This happens daily as we abide in Christ and walk closely with him

John 15:4-5 ~ Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you unless you abide in Me. 5 I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing.

- Our relationship with God (vertical) greatly impacts how we relate to others (horizontal)
- Jesus made this clear when he was asked about the greatest commandment

Matthew 22:37-39 ~ And He said to him, "YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND." 38 This is the great and foremost commandment. 39 The second is like it, "YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF."

Our Relationship to Ourselves (Inward)

- Knowing ourselves and what is going on in our souls is critical to healthy relationships
- Taking a long hard look into our hearts to see what motives are at work in our relationships must be a regular practice
- Conflict and relational discord usually spring from unmet expectations and idolatrous desires
- Even good things can become selfish desires and can morph into something sinful:³
 - Comfort – I want, must have, and deserve comfort and you'd better not get in the way of me getting it! I fear hard work.
 - Pleasure – I want, must have, and deserve pleasure and you'd better give it to me! I fear pain.
 - Recognition – I want, must have and deserve recognition or I will be devastated. I fear being overlooked.

³ List adapted from Lane and Tripp, *Relationships*, 76.

- 3. Isolation – when both persons move toward isolation in search of safety and self-protection; limited conversations, stay away from revealing too much about their heart; results in empty relationships
- “The interesting point about each profile is that each is an unbalanced relationship because each person tends to make too much or too little of the relationship. Isolationists conclude that relationships are too difficult; they are not necessary and the effort is not worth it. (“I don’t need relationships to be me.”) On the other hand, immersionists are convinced that relationships are everything. (“Without relationships, I am nobody.”) These conclusions are rooted in people’s hearts and expectations. When things go wrong in relationships, the problem often starts there.”⁷
- This is where we need to understand how God relates to the other members of the Trinity and how he relates to us

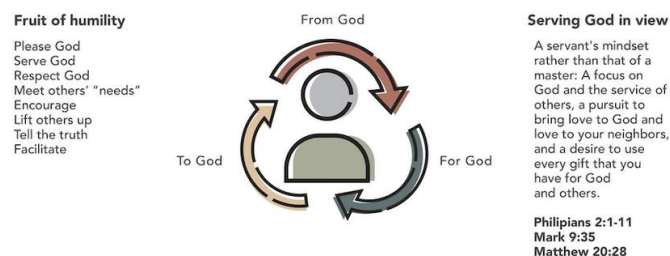
John 17:20-26 ~ I do not ask on behalf of these alone, but for those also who believe in Me through their word; 21 that they may all be one; even as You, Father, are in Me and I in You, that they also may be in Us, so that the world may believe that You sent Me. 22 The glory which You have given Me I have given to them, that they may be one, just as We are one; **23 I in them and You in Me, that they may be perfected in unity, so that the world may know that You sent Me, and loved them, even as You have loved Me.** 24 Father, I desire that they also, whom You have given Me, be with Me where I am, so that they may see My glory which You have given Me, for You loved Me before the foundation of the world. 25 O righteous Father, although the world has not known You, yet I have known You; and these have known that You sent Me; 26 **and I have made Your name known to them, and will make it known, so that the love with which You loved Me may be in them, and I in them.**

- This is where we also need to live for the kingdom of God rather than the kingdom of self...and practice genuine humility toward one another...our relationships must be shaped by what God wants, not us

KINGDOM DIAGRAM



HUMILITY



⁷ Ibid., 21.

⁸ Both diagrams from <https://www.biblicalcounselingresources.org/work/crystals-cczet-w6d5y>

- “Human relationships are most satisfying when we enter them not just to please ourselves or even the other person, but to please God. The circle of human community is only healthy when it exists within the larger circle of community with God.”⁹

BIBLICAL FOUNDATIONS FOR RELATIONSHIPS¹⁰

God Has Created Us for Relationships

- As people who are created in the image of God, we realize that God has made us for relationships
- Even though the term “relationship” doesn’t appear in the Bible, the concept is found all throughout it
- God has not designed us to live alone, in isolation from others...we were created to be social beings
- Being in relationships with others is a foundational part of God’s design for humans
- Humans were created to be in relationships with God and with each other since they were made in God’s image
- Since God lives in relationship within the Trinity, he has designed us to share in similar relationships as those made in his likeness
- We can see this from the very beginning...seven times in Genesis 1, God looked at what he had created and saw that it was good
- But something very interesting happened in Genesis 2...in a perfect and sinless world, where man enjoyed perfect relationship with his Creator, God said, “It is not good for the man to be alone,” a statement that says more about God’s design for humanity than it does about Adam’s need
- The only thing in all of creation that was not good was man’s solitude
- Though perfect, sinless and in perfect harmony with God, humans still needed to be in relationship with other humans
- So, God created woman to be a companion to man and to allow him true relationship
- God created Eve to be a helper to and in relationship with Adam because he is a social, relational God
- In that sense, nothing has changed to this day...the need for relationships remains
- “Just as human beings were created with a vertical need for God’s companionship, they are also created for the horizontal companionship of other people. Genesis 2 points to the fact that relationships are a core component of who God has designed you to be.”¹¹

In a Sense, All Relationships Are Hard

- Sin endangers all fellowship and infects all relationships
- This is evident in the breakdown in relationships in the home, in the church, in society
- Sin and selfishness operate as principles beneath the surface of all relationships
- We only need to look at the very first family to see the reality of this
 - As a result of the fall, the relationship between Adam and Eve became characterized by accusation and slander
 - In Genesis 4, Cain killed Abel out of envy, jealousy, and greed
- And since then, all human relationships have been plagued by the effects of the fall

⁹ Lane and Tripp, *Relationships*, 28.

¹⁰ Adapted from Timothy Lane and Paul David Tripp, *Relationships: A Mess Worth Making*, 11-16.

¹¹ Ibid., 12.

- “What we want, for ourselves and from others, becomes more important to us than God himself. We have made ourselves ultimate and God secondary. This Bible calls this sin, as we reject God’s rightful rule over us and decide to become our own ruler. When we do this, our selfish desires go on to rule our relationships, leading to problems, conflict, and disappointment with others.”¹²
- It is tempting to assume that problems in relationships are due to factors outside us (circumstances, others); however, while true that others’ sins do affect us, Scripture is very clear that the problem also lies within us

Romans 7:21-25 ~ I find then the principle that evil is present in me, the one who wants to do good. 22 For I joyfully concur with the law of God in the inner man, 23 but I see a different law in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin which is in my members. 24 Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death? 25 Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, on the one hand I myself with my mind am serving the law of God, but on the other, with my flesh the law of sin.

James 4:1 ~ What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you? Is not the source your pleasures that wage war in your members?

- Sin impacts our relationships in six basic ways:¹³
 1. Self-centeredness – makes us think what’s best for us rather than what God’s doing in us
 2. Self-rule – makes us think others should bow to our control
 3. Self-sufficiency – makes us independent of God rather than dependent on him
 4. Self-righteousness – makes us think we are more righteous than the other person
 5. Self-satisfaction – makes us look to others for happiness rather than God
 6. Self-taught – makes us our own source of truth

There is No Such Thing as a Problem-Free Relationship

- Although we may try a variety of techniques to foster healthy relationships in hopes of avoiding their pitfalls and pain, no relationship is free from problems
- All relationships require hard work, humility, and the power of the Gospel
- “Skills and techniques appeal to us because they promise that relational problems can be fixed by tweaking our behavior without altering the bent of our hearts. But the Bible says something very different. It says Christ is the only real hope for relationships because only he can dig deep enough to address the core motivations and desires of our hearts.”¹⁴

God Keeps Us in Messy Relationships for His Purposes

- Often it’s easy to wonder why God doesn’t just fix our relationships...why he allows conflict to remain
- But God uses the difficult relationships to grow and sanctify us...it’s one of his purposes in relationships
- “What happens in the messiness of relationships is that our hearts are revealed, our weaknesses are exposed, and we start coming to the end of ourselves. Only when this happens do we reach out for the help God alone can provide. Weak and needy people finding their hope in Christ’s grace are what mark a mature relationship. The most dangerous aspect of your relationships is not your weakness, but your delusions of strength. Self-reliance is almost always a component of a bad relationship. While we would like to avoid the mess and enjoy deep and intimate community, God says that it is in the very process of working through the mess that intimacy is found.”¹⁵

¹² Ibid., 31.

¹³ Ibid., 33.

¹⁴ Ibid., 13.

¹⁵ Ibid., 14-15.

God's Word Offers Clear Hope for Our Relationships

- The Gospel provides real and lasting answers for the struggles we face in our interactions with others
- The NT offers hope that unity, love, humility, grace, and forgiveness can characterize our relationships
- “This hope challenges whatever complacency and discouragement we might have about our relationships because there is always more growth, peace, and blessing that God’s grace can bring, even here on earth.”¹⁶

GOD’S DESIGN FOR RELATIONSHIPS IN THE BODY OF CHRIST

Matthew 5:21-25 ~ You have heard that the ancients were told, ‘YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT MURDER’ and ‘Whoever commits murder shall be liable to the court.’ 22 But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother shall be guilty before the court; and whoever says to his brother, ‘You good-for-nothing,’ shall be guilty before the supreme court; and whoever says, ‘You fool,’ shall be guilty enough to go into the fiery hell. 23 Therefore if you are presenting your offering at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, 24 leave your offering there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and present your offering. 25 Make friends quickly with your opponent at law while you are with him on the way, so that your opponent may not hand you over to the judge, and the judge to the officer, and you be thrown into prison.

Matthew 18

Acts 1:14-15; 2:44-46; 4:23-24, 32-37; 5:12; 15:22-25

Romans 12:9-21 ~ Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil; cling to what is good. 10 Be devoted to one another in brotherly love; give preference to one another in honor; 11 not lagging behind in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord; 12 rejoicing in hope, persevering in tribulation, devoted to prayer, 13 contributing to the needs of the saints, practicing hospitality. 14 Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. 15 Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep. 16 Be of the same mind toward one another; do not be haughty in mind, but associate with the lowly. Do not be wise in your own estimation. 17 Never pay back evil for evil to anyone. Respect what is right in the sight of all men. 18 If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men. 19 Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, “VENGEANCE IS MINE, I WILL REPAY,” says the Lord. 20 “BUT IF YOUR ENEMY IS HUNGRY, FEED HIM, AND IF HE IS THIRSTY, GIVE HIM A DRINK; FOR IN SO DOING YOU WILL HEAP BURNING COALS ON HIS HEAD.” 21 Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

1 Corinthians 1:10 ~ Now I exhort you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all agree and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be made complete in the same mind and in the same judgment.

Galatians 5:16-26 ~ But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh. 17 For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please. 18 But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the Law. 19 Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality, 20 idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, 21 envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these, of which I forewarn you, just as I have forewarned you, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. 22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. 24 Now those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. 25 If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit. 26 Let us not become boastful, challenging one another, envying one another.

Ephesians 4

- A Preservation of Unity (vv. 1-6)
- An Appreciation of Diversity (vv. 7-10)
- A Culture of Maturity (vv. 11-16)
- A Rejection of Sinful Tendencies (vv. 17-32)

¹⁶ Ibid., 16.

- Self-Indulgence (vv. 19-24)
- Deceit (v. 25)
- Anger (vv. 26-27)
- Selfishness (v. 28)
- Unkind speech (vv. 29-30)
- Bitterness (v. 31)
- Unforgiveness (v. 32)

Philippians 2:1-5 ~ Therefore if there is any encouragement in Christ, if there is any consolation of love, if there is any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and compassion, 2 make my joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose. 3 Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; 4 do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others. 5 Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus,

Colossians 3:1-14 ~ Therefore if you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. 2 Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth. 3 For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God. 4 When Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory. 5 Therefore consider the members of your earthly body as dead to immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed, which amounts to idolatry. 6 For it is because of these things that the wrath of God will come upon the sons of disobedience, 7 and in them you also once walked, when you were living in them. 8 But now you also, put them all aside: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and abusive speech from your mouth. 9 Do not lie to one another, since you laid aside the old self with its evil practices, 10 and have put on the new self who is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him— 11 a renewal in which there is no distinction between Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and freeman, but Christ is all, and in all. 12 So, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; 13 bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you. 14 Beyond all these things put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity.

POSITIVE ONE ANOTHERS

- Love one another (John 13:34 AND 16 other places)
- Be devoted to one another (Rom 12:10)
- Honor one another above yourselves (Rom 12:10)
- Live in harmony with one another (Rom 12:16)
- Build up one another (Rom 14:19; 1 Thess 5:11)
- Be likeminded towards one another (Rom 15:5)
- Accept one another (Rom 15:7)
- Admonish one another (Rom 15:14; Col 3:16) Greet one another (Rom 16:16)
- Care for one another (1 Cor 12:25)
- Serve one another (Gal 5:13)
- Bear one another's burdens (Gal 6:2)
- Forgive one another (Eph 4:2, 32; Col 3:13)
- Be patient with one another (Eph 4:2; Col 3:13)
- Speak the truth in love (Eph 4:15, 25)
- Be kind and compassionate to one another (Eph 4:32)
- Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs (Eph 5:19)
- Submit to one another (Eph 5:21, 1 Pet 5:5)
- Consider others better than yourselves (Phil 2:3)
- Look to the interests of one another (Phil 2:4)
- Bear with one another (Col 3:13)

- Teach one another (Col 3:16)
- Comfort one another (1 Thess 4:18)
- Encourage one another (1 Thess 5:11)
- Exhort one another (Heb 3:13)
- Stir up [provoke, stimulate] one another to love and good works (Heb 10:24)
- Show hospitality to one another (1 Pet 4:9)
- Employ the gifts that God has given us for the benefit of one another (1 Pet 4:10)
- Clothe yourselves with humility towards one another (1 Pet 5:5)
- Pray for one another (James 5:16)
- Confess your faults to one another (James 5:16)

NEGATIVE ONE ANOTHERS

- Do not lie to one another (Col 3:9)
- Stop passing judgment on one another (Rom 14:13)
- If You keep on biting and devouring each other...you'll be destroyed by each other (Gal 5:15)
- Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other (Gal 5:26)
- Do not slander one another (James 4:11)
- Don't grumble against each other (James 5:9)

RELATIONSHIPS - PART 2

THE SOURCE OF RELATIONAL DISCORD

- Whenever two people enter into a close relationship, disagreement is inevitable at some point
- Puritan John Trapp says that it is as unlikely that you could strike two pieces of flint together and not have sparks as it is that you could put two sinners together and not have conflicts
- This is part of living in a fallen world...it should be expected...the closer you are to someone, the more potential there is for conflict
- As believers who have been reconciled to God by Christ, we are called to respond to conflict in a way that is vastly different from the way the world deals with it
- This begins by understanding what conflict is and how to resolve it to the glory of Christ
- Conflict results from a difference in opinion that frustrates someone's goals or desires
- It is caused by many different factors:
 1. Standing up for what is honoring to God despite opposition from others and the world
Daniel 3, 6
 2. Misunderstandings
Acts 15:22-29
 3. Differences in values, goals, priorities, expectations, interests, etc.
1 Corinthians 12:12-31
 4. Competition over limited resources
Genesis 13:1-12
 5. Sinful attitudes and desires that lead to sinful words and actions
James 4:1-3 ~ What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you? Is not the source your pleasures that wage war in your members? 2 You lust and do not have; so you commit murder. You are envious and cannot obtain; so you fight and quarrel. You do not have because you do not ask. 3 You ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend it on your pleasures.
- James identifies the source of our conflicts as pleasures/lusts/desires which reside in our heart
- Selfish, fleshly desires which are deeply rooted in our hearts provide the seedbed for conflict
- "Our typical response to conflict is to point the finger at our opponent. We feel justified because the person often has done something annoying, frustrating, or even downright sinful! But James doesn't let us off the

hook that easily. He makes it clear that even if someone has sinned against us, the reason we fight is because there is something wrong going on inside us!”¹

- Most of our conflicts erupt because we want our way and make choices to get it
- While we often think our selfish desires are right, they usually fool us
- It is our root desires lead to sinful choices
- A tree with good roots with produce good fruit...a tree with bad roots with produce bad fruit

Luke 6:43-45 ~ For there is no good tree which produces bad fruit, nor, on the other hand, a bad tree which produces good fruit. 44 For each tree is known by its own fruit. For men do not gather figs from thorns, nor do they pick grapes from a briar bush. 45 The good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth what is good; and the evil man out of the evil treasure brings forth what is evil; for his mouth speaks from that which fills his heart.

- Just like trees, we have a root system in our hearts that produce different kinds of fruit
- This root system is made up of desires that reside in our hearts
- “If our hearts are filled with selfish desires, the fruit will usually be sinful words and actions that result in conflict and broken relationships. On the other hand, if our hearts are filled with love for God and a desire to please him, then the fruit will be words and actions that promote peace and strengthen relationships. Some of the desires in our hearts are clearly wrong, like greed or selfishness, and will produce bad fruit. Other desires may seem to be good, like wanting to get good grades, but even a good desire can produce bad fruit if you desire something too much. The desire can become a sinful demand. When you demand your own way, you are likely to offend others. This is how conflict often begins.”²

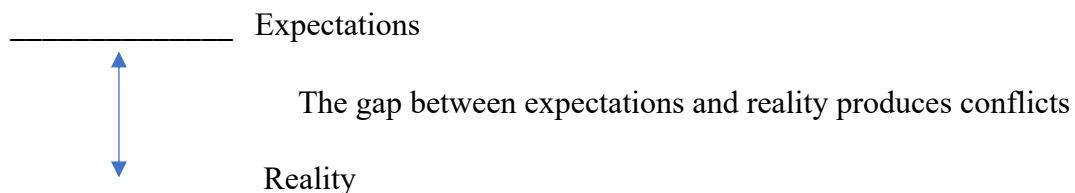
Jeremiah 17:9 ~ The heart is more deceitful than all else And is desperately sick; Who can understand it?

Matthew 12:34 ~ You brood of vipers, how can you, being evil, speak what is good? For the mouth speaks out of that which fills the heart.

Mark 7:20 ~ And He was saying, “That which proceeds out of the man, that is what defiles the man. 21 For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed the evil thoughts, fornications, thefts, murders, adulteries, 22 deeds of coveting and wickedness, as well as deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride and foolishness.”

Galatians 5:19-21 ~ Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality, 20 idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, 21 envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these, of which I forewarn you, just as I have forewarned you, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

- “Discord and division are inevitable when people focus on their agendas to the exclusion of others in the church...disregard of fellow believers, no matter how unintentional, is a mark of loveless, sinful indifference that produces jealousy, contention, strife, and the other enemies of spiritual unity.”³



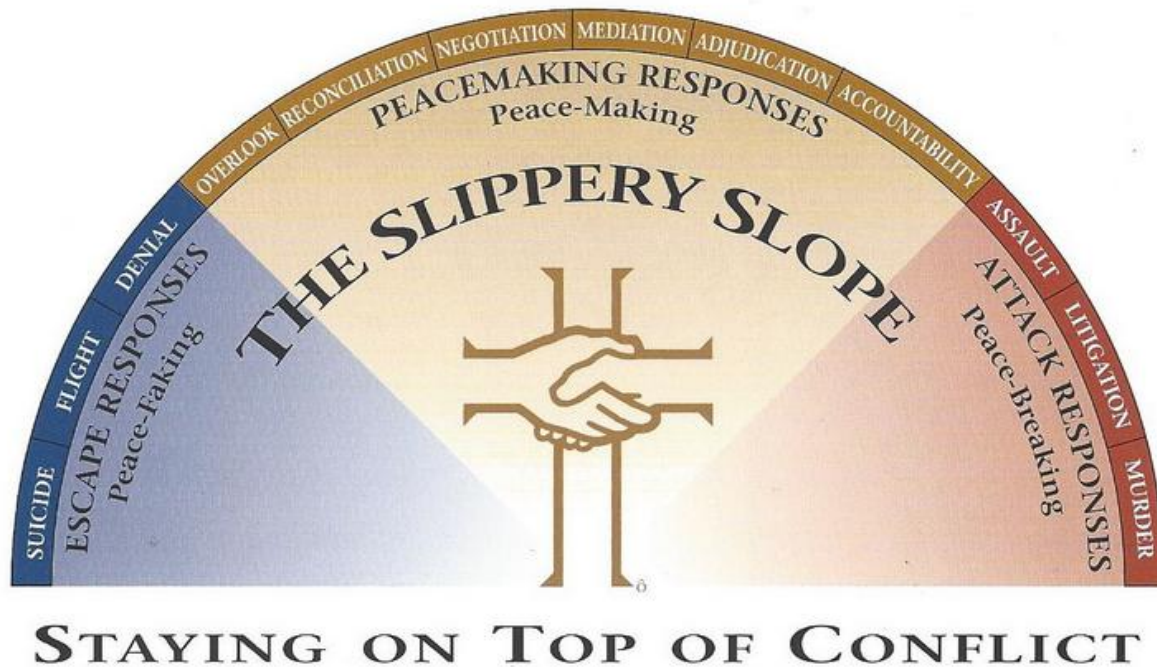
- When we don't get our way we tend to have problems in our relationships with others
- Thus, conflict typically starts in the heart

¹ Timothy Lane and Paul Tripp, *Relationships: A Mess Worth Making*, 75.

² Corlette Sande, *The Young Peacemaker: Teaching Students to Respond to Conflict God's Way*, 26.

³ John MacArthur, Matthew commentary

- This leads to a variety of responses:



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- There is a spectrum of response to conflict with escape responses on the left, attack responses on the right, and peacemaking responses in the center:⁵

Escape responses – responses used to get away from conflict instead of trying to resolve it...typically expressed in people who have a strong desire for loving comfort and pleasure...they often prolong conflict and can result in bitterness and unforgiveness:

- Denial – pretend that a conflict doesn't exist or refuse to do what should be done to resolve it
- Flight – run away from the person with whom you are having a conflict
- Suicide – taking your own life rather than dealing with the situation

Attack Responses – responses used to put pressure on others to get our own way...typically expressed in people who have a strong desire for control...usually damage relationships and often result in anger and hatred:

- Assault – using harsh or cruel words when conflict arises or resorting to physical force or intimidation to compel a person to give in to your demands
- Litigation – take the matter before civil authorities rather than exhausting attempts at working it out
- Murder – killing the person who opposes you

Conciliation Responses – a variety of responses aimed at finding a just and agreeable solution to conflict

Personal peacemaking responses – only involve the two parties

- Overlook – one person deliberately and unilaterally chooses to forgive a wrong and walk away from a conflict (Prov 19:11; 1 Peter 4:8). This is not the same as “denial” but forgiveness is the key here. This causes the person who overlooks another's sins to continue having a growing, healthy relationship with them.

⁴ <https://goshen.church/message/conflict-under-the-rug>

⁵ Adapted from *Biblical Peacemaking: Responding to Conflicts Biblically*, IFCA International.

- Reconciliation – personal offenses are resolved through confession or confrontation, leading to forgiveness and reconciliation (Matt 5:23-24; 18:15). “A conflict is resolved by going directly to the other person to talk it out together. This can include confessing your own wrongs and confronting the other person’s wrongs in a kind and respectful way. This response should be used if you cannot overlook what the other person did, and the problem is hurting your relationship.”⁶
- Negotiation – issues are resolved through a bargaining process in which the parties seek to reach a mutually agreeable settlement of their differences through an exchange of promises (Phil 2:3-4)

Assisted peacemaking responses – involves others in the process of conflict resolution

- Meditation – one or two other people meet with the parties to improve communication and facilitate a resolution (Matt 18:16). Mediators suggest solutions for reconciliation but both parties need to decide what to do.
- Adjudication – when the parties cannot come to a solution, they explain the matter to one or more arbitrators who are empowered to render a binding decision on the matter. The arbitrator decides on a solution.
- Accountability – when a believer refuses to do what is right and just, the church formally intervenes in a process of church discipline to promote repentance and reconciliation (Matt 18:17-20)

THE SANCTIFICATION OF RELATIONAL DISCORD⁷

- Conflict provides opportunities for God to work and accomplish his purposes, making conflict a means of sanctification rather than a burden
- “Conflict with others is one of God’s mysterious, counterintuitive ways of rescuing us from ourselves. God uses it to get where he wants to take us before we die. Because we don’t usually think that trials can be used in such a positive way, this truth catches us by surprise. But it shouldn’t all kinds of suffering, including conflict with others, can be redemptive because of the grace of God. By redemptive, we mean that God can use conflict (as well as everything else in our lives) to defeat sin in us and make us more like Christ, with a love for him and others that reflects his nature.”⁸
- When conflict arises, we often let our emotions take over and drive our behavior; instead, we should recognize that conflict can be an opportunity for growth

Glorify God

- Conflict provides another situation in which we can bring glory to God which is our ultimate aim as believers

1 Corinthians 10:31-11:1 ~ Whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. 32 Give no offense either to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God; 33 just as I also please all men in all things, not seeking my own profit but the profit of the many, so that they may be saved. 11:1 Be imitators of me, just as I also am of Christ.

- Glorifying God in conflict starts by believing that God can and does work in all kinds of situations for our good and his glory
- He wastes nothing in his sovereign purposes to conform us to his image and to accomplish his good pleasure

⁶ Sande, *The Young Peacemaker*, 26.

⁷ Adapted from *Biblical Peacemaking*, IFCA International.

⁸ Lane and Tripp, *Relationships*, 72.

- It is often in the trials that God does his greatest work

James 1:2-4 ~ Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, 3 knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. 4 And let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

- We can glorify the Lord in the midst of relational discord by:

- Trusting him – believing that he is not to blame for the conflict, but is a faithful God who keeps his promises

Psalm 37:5-6 ~ Commit your way to the LORD, Trust also in Him, and He will do it. 6 He will bring forth your righteousness as the light And your judgment as the noonday.

- Obeying him – not playing the blame game or becoming angry and bitter but embracing God's instructions about how to relate to others

John 14:15 ~ If you love Me, you will keep My commandments.

- Imitating him – following God's example in how he relates to us

Psalm 103:8-10 ~ The LORD is compassionate and gracious, Slow to anger and abounding in lovingkindness. 9 He will not always strive with us, Nor will He keep His anger forever. 10 He has not dealt with us according to our sins, Nor rewarded us according to our iniquities.

Ephesians 5:1-2 ~ Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children; 2 and walk in love, just as Christ also loved you and gave Himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God as a fragrant aroma.

- In the midst of the conflict, we must be asking:
 - How can I please and honor the Lord in this situation?
 - How can I be a witness to what Christ has done for me?

Serve Others

- Conflict with others provides an opportunity to serve them, even though this is contrary to the way our flesh naturally responds
- “Conflict doesn't usually bring out the best in you, does it? When you are having a dispute with someone, it is easy to give in to your sinful heart and become angry, bitter, and mean. Thoughts of retaliation, instead of plans for reconciliation, often fill your mind. Your friends who do not know Jesus will tell you to ‘look out for yourself.’ But Jesus says something different...When you are in conflict, you can serve not only the person who is opposing you but also the people who are watching what you do. As you choose to act in a loving and self-controlled way, you can be a Christ-like example to them and show them how they can stay on top of the slippery slope.”⁹

Luke 6:27-28 ~ But I say to you who hear, love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, 28 bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you.

- We can serve others whom we are in conflict with by:
 - Loving and doing good toward them

⁹ Sande, The Young Peacemaker, 93.

Romans 12:14, 17-21 ~ Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse...17 Never pay back evil for evil to anyone. Respect what is right in the sight of all men. 18 If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men. 19 Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, “VENGEANCE IS MINE, I WILL REPAY,” says the Lord. 20 “BUT IF YOUR ENEMY IS HUNGRY, FEED HIM, AND IF HE IS THIRSTY, GIVE HIM A DRINK; FOR IN SO DOING YOU WILL HEAP BURNING COALS ON HIS HEAD.” 21 Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

- Helping them change through constructive confrontation

Galatians 6:1 ~ Brethren, even if anyone is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; each one looking to yourself, so that you too will not be tempted.

Ephesians 5:11-13 ~ Do not participate in the unfruitful deeds of darkness, but instead even expose them; 12 for it is disgraceful even to speak of the things which are done by them in secret. 13 But all things become visible when they are exposed by the light, for everything that becomes visible is light.

James 5:19-20 ~ My brethren, if any among you strays from the truth and one turns him back, 20 let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins.

- Praying for them

Matthew 5:44-47 ~ But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, 45 so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. 46 For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? 47 “If you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same?”

Grow to be More Like Christ

- God’s overall goal for us is to become like his Son in the way we think, speak, and act

Romans 5:3-4 ~ And not only this, but we also exult in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance; 4 and perseverance, proven character; and proven character, hope;

Romans 8:28-29 ~ And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose. 29 For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren;

2 Corinthians 3:18 ~ But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit.

- Conflict helps us to remember our need for God

2 Corinthians 12:7-10 ~ Because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, for this reason, to keep me from exalting myself, there was given me a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to torment me—to keep me from exalting myself! 8 Concerning this I implored the Lord three times that it might leave me. 9 And He has said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness.” Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me. 10 Therefore I am well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ’s sake; for when I am weak, then I am strong.

- Conflict helps to uncover sinful attitudes and habits

Psalms 119:67, 71 ~ Before I was afflicted I went astray, But now I keep Your word...71 It is good for me that I was afflicted, That I may learn Your statutes.

- Conflict provides opportunities to put off the old self and put on the new self

Ephesians 4:22-24 ~ that, in reference to your former manner of life, you lay aside the old self, which is being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit, 23 and that you be renewed in the spirit of your mind, 24 and put on the new self, which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth.

- The ABC of Christian growth: Adversity Builds Character

THE SOLUTION FOR RELATIONAL DISCORD

- As believers we ought to be those who seek peace and promote relational unity
- This is true in our relationships with unbelievers

Matthew 5:9 ~ Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.

Romans 12:18 ~ If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men.

Hebrews 12:14 ~ Pursue peace with all men, and the sanctification without which no one will see the Lord.

- This is also true in our relationships with fellow believers

Romans 14:19 ~ So then we pursue the things which make for peace and the building up of one another.

2 Corinthians 13:11 ~ Finally, brethren, rejoice, be made complete, be comforted, be like-minded, live in peace; and the God of love and peace will be with you.

Ephesians 4:3 ~ being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

1 Thessalonians 5:13 ~ and that you esteem them very highly in love because of their work. Live in peace with one another.

2 Timothy 2:22 ~ Now flee from youthful lusts and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart.

James 3:13-18 ~ Who among you is wise and understanding? Let him show by his good behavior his deeds in the gentleness of wisdom. 14 But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your heart, do not be arrogant and so lie against the truth. 15 This wisdom is not that which comes down from above, but is earthly, natural, demonic. 16 For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there is disorder and every evil thing. 17 But the wisdom from above is first pure, then *peaceable*, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and good fruits, unwavering, without hypocrisy. 18 And the seed whose fruit is righteousness is sown in *peace* by those who make *peace*.

- The true peacemaker doesn't fake relational harmony, appeasing others simply by trying to arrive at "peace-at-any-price"
- Contrary to what most people think, the true peacemaker is not afraid of making waves
- Real peacemakers don't gloss over or hide truth...they don't rationalize or excuse sin
- They are willing to confront issues and address problems
- They are willing to drag sin into the light and expose the source of the conflict
- They want to expose issues of the heart in order to apply Biblical truth to them
- And then, after the problems are solved, they build a bridge between those who were separated by the problems
- A peacemaker is always willing to enter into the situation – which could temporarily result in greater conflict – in order to secure genuine peace

- “The peacemaker is a fighter...he makes trouble to make peace...he wages peace.”¹⁰
- They are not spoiling for a fight...they don’t revel in conflict...but they are honest about the state of relationships around them...they are willing to risk more conflict temporarily in order to make things right in the long term
- In other words, peacemakers fight for peace...they are not just peaceKEEPERS...but peaceMAKERS
- They actively work toward reconciliation and strive to end relational hostilities
- Thus, peacemaking is not an optional activity for those who follow Christ

Overlook the Offense if Possible

- Before rushing off to confront someone, we should remember that there are times when it is appropriate to overlook minor offenses
- We should ask whether it’s really worth fighting over because God does command us to overlook minor offenses

Proverbs 19:11 ~ A man’s discretion makes him slow to anger, And it is his glory to overlook a transgression.

1 Peter 4:8 ~ Above all, keep fervent in your love for one another, because love covers a multitude of sins.

- We should overlook offenses when:
 - The offense is not seriously dishonoring to God
 - Our relationship has not been permanently damaged
 - Others are not being hurt
- If these are not true of the offense, then it is too serious to overlook and needs to be addressed

Get the Log Out of Your Own Eye

- Rather than attacking others or dwelling on their sins, we must first take responsibility for our own contributions to the conflict...confessing our sins and asking God to help us change any attitudes and habits that lead to conflict...and seeking to repair any harm we have caused
- We must own whatever personal sin we have brought to the situation
- “Only do this if you have sin to own. Sometimes you will and sometimes you won’t. Most of the time we do bring sin into the situation, so don’t be afraid to admit where you have not loved well. Your confidence in Christ’s righteousness (not your own) is the only thing that will enable you to do this.”¹¹

Matthew 7:5 ~ You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother’s eye.

- Although it is easy to see the faults in others, we must first recognize our own faults
- Don’t blindly defend yourself...instead, examine your attitude, words, actions, and motives...the goal should be reconciliation, not winning

Psalms 139:23-24 ~ Search me, O God, and know my heart; Try me and know my anxious thoughts; 24 And see if there be any hurtful way in me, And lead me in the everlasting way.

¹⁰ R. Kent Hughes

¹¹ Lane and Tripp, *Relationships*, 82.

- If the Lord reveals sin on your part, confess that to the Lord and to the person you offended

Proverbs 28:13 ~ He who conceals his transgressions will not prosper, But he who confesses and forsakes them will find compassion.

- Repentance over sin is more than a feeling...it is an action, a choice of the will
- There is a worldly sorrow that does not produce genuine repentance...so we must ensure our repentance is sincere
- Godly sorrow comes when we see sin for what it is: a personal offense against a holy God

Psalms 51:3-4 ~ For I know my transgressions, And my sin is ever before me. 4 Against You, You only, I have sinned And done what is evil in Your sight, So that You are justified when You speak And blameless when You judge.

- Genuine repentance will produce a change of heart, a different way of thinking, and changed behavior

2 Corinthians 7:9-11 ~ I now rejoice, not that you were made sorrowful, but that you were made sorrowful to the point of repentance; for you were made sorrowful according to the will of God, so that you might not suffer loss in anything through us. 10 For the sorrow that is according to the will of God produces a repentance without regret, leading to salvation, but the sorrow of the world produces death. 11 For behold what earnestness this very thing, this godly sorrow, has produced in you: what vindication of yourselves, what indignation, what fear, what longing, what zeal, what avenging of wrong! In everything you demonstrated yourselves to be innocent in the matter.

- Marks of genuine repentance from v. 11:
 - Earnestness – a desire to clear ourselves of sin
 - Vindication – a desire to restore the trust and confidence of others in you
 - Indignation – anger over sin and the shame it brings
 - Fear – of offending God and falling into sin
 - Longing – to restore broken relationships
 - Zeal – for God and his holiness
 - Avenging of wrong – wants to see justice done and sin avenged no matter the cost
- The seven “A’s” of confession
 - Address everyone involved
 - Avoid “if,” “but,” and “maybe” statements
 - Admit specific sins (sinful attitudes, words, actions)
 - Apologize for the way your sin hurt the other person
 - Accept the consequences for your sin
 - Ask for forgiveness
 - Alter your behavior by putting off the sin and putting on the corresponding virtue

Be Willing to Confront Personally

- When you know that someone has something against you, you must go to them

Matthew 5:21-24 ~ You have heard that the ancients were told, ‘YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT MURDER’ and ‘Whoever commits murder shall be liable to the court.’ 22 But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother shall be guilty before the court; and whoever says to his brother, ‘You good-for-nothing,’ shall be guilty before the supreme court; and whoever says, ‘You fool,’ shall be guilty enough to go into the fiery hell. 23 Therefore if you are presenting your offering at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, 24 leave your offering there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and present your offering.

- In going to someone who has something against you, you may:

- Be able to clarify a misunderstanding
- Learn that you were actually wrong
- Help to deliver the other person from the danger of unforgiveness
- When someone's sins are too serious to overlook, you must go to them and confront them lovingly
- Scripture commands us to first talk directly and discretely to the person with whom we're in conflict

Matthew 18:15 ~ If your brother sins, go and show him his fault in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother.

Galatians 6:1 ~ Brethren, even if anyone is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; each one looking to yourself, so that you too will not be tempted.

- The purpose of confrontation is always to “win” them and see them “restored” to usefulness to God
- Elements of an effective confrontation
 - Pray for wisdom, grace, and guidance for all involved
 - Consider writing down what you plan to say to stay calm and on track
 - Choose carefully the right time and place and meet in-person if possible (Matt 18:15)
 - Think about how you would want to be confronted and speak only to build others up (Eph 4:29)
 - Listen carefully (James 1:19)
 - Assume the best of them until the facts prove otherwise (1 Cor 13:7)
 - Be objective (facts vs. personal opinions or conclusions)
 - Use the Bible carefully (don't preach)
 - Ask for feedback
 - Make a plan for next steps
- **It is important to remember that your job is to speak the truth in love as clearly and persuasively as possible...and it is God's job to change people**

Take Others with You

- If talking directly doesn't resolve the conflict, then the other steps in Matt 18 should be followed

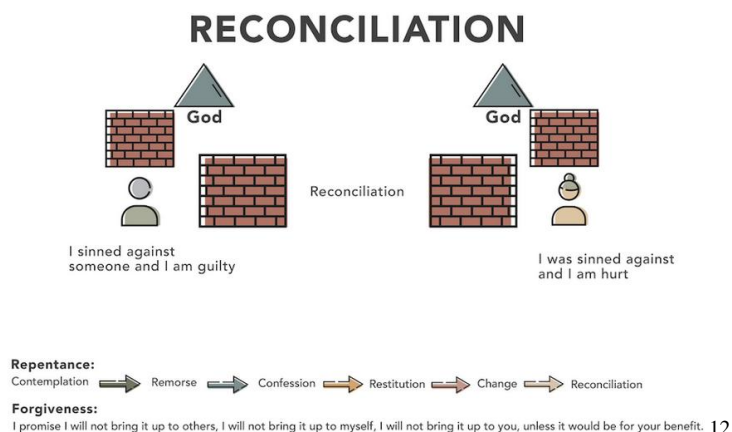
Matthew 18:15-20 ~ If your brother sins, go and show him his fault in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother. 16 But if he does not listen to you, take one or two more with you, so that BY THE MOUTH OF TWO OR THREE WITNESSES EVERY FACT MAY BE CONFIRMED. 17 If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector. 18 Truly I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven. 19 Again I say to you, that if two of you agree on earth about anything that they may ask, it shall be done for them by My Father who is in heaven. 20 For where two or three have gathered together in My name, I am there in their midst.

- Steps:
 - Step 1 – talk to them individually in private
 - Step 2 – take one or two others with you
 - Step 3 – tell it to the church
 - Step 4 – treat the unrepentant believer as a non-believer
- What if your opponent is not a Christian?

Galatians 6:10 ~ So then, while we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, and especially to those who are of the household of the faith.

Go and Be Reconciled

- Ask for and grant forgiveness...and work towards reconciliation



DEALING WITH UNREASONABLE PEOPLE

- What if the person who has offended you refuses to see it and work toward forgiveness and reconciliation?
- Remember that we have divine weapons

2 Corinthians 10:3-5 ~ For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh, 4 for the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses. 5 We are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and we are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ,

- Control your tongue

Romans 12:14 ~ Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse.

- Get wisdom from a multitude of counselors

Proverbs 11:14 ~ Where there is no guidance the people fall, But in abundance of counselors there is victory.

- Keep doing what is right

Romans 12:21 ~ Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

- Recognize your limits

Romans 12:18-19 ~ If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men. 19 Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, “VENGEANCE IS MINE, I WILL REPAY,” says the Lord.

- Never underestimate the power of deliberate, focused love to win your opponent over

Romans 12:20 ~ BUT IF YOUR ENEMY IS HUNGRY, FEED HIM, AND IF HE IS THIRSTY, GIVE HIM A DRINK; FOR IN SO DOING YOU WILL HEAP BURNING COALS ON HIS HEAD.”

¹² <https://www.biblicalcounselingresources.org/work/crystals-cczet-w6d5y>