



# Restoring Relationships

How to Resolve Conflict and Grow in Community

C.S. Lewis famously wrote, “to love is to be vulnerable.” This is why our relationships can be so messy and hard. When we are hurt by those closest to us, we feel exposed and helpless, ready to give up. Thankfully, we are not left to figure this out on our own. The Bible gives us hope for these relationships, rooted firmly in the cross of Jesus Christ, which is God’s own act of restoring us to himself.

## 1. UNITY IS THE GOAL

### Read

*“Behold, how good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell in unity!” – Psalm 133:1 (ESV)*

### Reflect/Discuss

- Was there a time when you and a friend reconciled with each other? How did you feel after everything was resolved?
- Why do you think we choose to feud with others instead of live in unity?

### Consider

When our relationships are broken, the only thing we can see is our differences. The bridge that once united us disappears, leaving a chasm in between. Unity often starts out as the goal but quickly fades when adversity strikes. Neither one is willing to make the jump to the other side.

When David sat down to pen this Psalm, he exclaimed that unity is both good and pleasant. If it was good but unpleasant, we might approach unity in the same way we approach healthy eating, like a necessary evil. However, if unity was pleasant but bad then we might see it as a piece of dessert we know we can't finish. Sure, we enjoy it for the moment but ultimately come to regret it later. Psalm 133 is adamant that dwelling in unity is both good and pleasant. Brothers and sisters who put their differences aside to achieve unity experience the health of the church and the deep delightfulness of friendship.

Many things divide us each day. But in the same way that a bridge unites two unlikely sides, Christ brings the church together. Christians come from different backgrounds, speak different languages, and have many different hobbies. But there is one thing we all have in common: Jesus Christ died for our sins and that is enough to unite even the worst of enemies. Putting aside our differences for the purpose of gospel unity will make us healthier and happier, just like David wrote!

### Act

- Resolve conflict with one person in the church by putting aside your differences
- Act as a neutral party in helping others dwell in unity together

### Go Deeper:

- [Blessed Are the Peacemakers](#)

## 2. ASKING FOR FORGIVENESS

### Read

*“I will arise and go to my father, and I will say to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you.’” – Luke 15:19 (ESV)*

### Reflect/Discuss

- How did a friend or family member act when you asked for forgiveness?
- Why is it hard for us to ask for forgiveness?

### Consider

In Luke 15, The Prodigal Son rejected his father and wasted his inheritance on foolish and selfish living. When he finally came to his senses, he was living as a servant, feeding pigs and eating their leftovers. It’s somewhere in this sloppy, dirty pig pen that the son realized just how much he had betrayed and hurt those closest to him. More often than not, reconciled relationships begin with the humility to recognize our own mistakes. This posture of humility gives us the boldness and empowers us to seek forgiveness.

It must have been hard for the Prodigal Son to ask for forgiveness. He was the child of a wealthy man who had once enjoyed all the privileges and benefits of his father. But in the blink of an eye he finds himself homeless, smelly, hungry, and ashamed. Not only has he embarrassed himself in reckless living but he also destroyed a relationship. The Prodigal Son understood that he needed to be reconciled to his father and seek forgiveness.

Humbling ourselves is hard, uncomfortable work. Our first instinct is to shift the blame instead of admit our wrongs. When we feel entitled and proud, we will never see our own faults, and the conflict could last a lifetime. But when our hearts are exposed in the light of the cross of Jesus Christ, we recognize that we are rarely blameless in conflict. God’s grace helps expose the selfishness and evil inside us. So we take the first step and reach out a hand. And we say, “I have sinned against heaven and before you. Please forgive me.”

### Act

- Pray that God would help give you a posture of humility in restoring broken relationships in your life.
- Gently ask for forgiveness from someone you may have hurt.

### Go Deeper

- [What Does It Mean to Repent?](#)

### 3. FORGIVING OTHERS

#### Read

*“Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.” – Ephesians 4:32 (ESV)*

#### Reflect/Discuss

- Why is it hard to forgive people even after they apologize?
- Do you find it harder to ask for forgiveness or to forgive someone? Why?

#### Consider

In the winter of 1993, a sixteen-year-old boy was shot and killed. What would normally be just a news clip or statistic became reality for Mary Johnson that day. She lost her only son, too soon. Immediately she began to feel anger, bitterness, and hatred toward the young murderer. However, twelve years later, she sat in front of this same convicted felon at the state prison offering the words “I forgive you.” His response was a combination of gratitude and confusion. “Ma’am, how could you do that?”

Christians are to be kind, compassionate and forgiving of others. But what sounds great on a in words can be extremely difficult to apply in real life scenarios that include real hurt and pain. Paul, the author of Ephesians, explains to his readers how to live in harmonious, peaceful relationships. The main ingredient is to forgive others. This recipe doesn’t call for a small portion of forgiveness. Restoring and reconciling relationships needs to be soaked in forgiveness. True forgiveness is an ongoing, daily decision to forgive those who have hurt us.

So how could Mary Johnson forgive her son’s killer? She was empowered by the same forgiveness that God had given her. This forgiveness also involved the murder of a son. Jesus Christ was unjustly killed on a cross at the hands of lawless men. This is the means by which God, in Christ, forgives us. It was because this forgiveness changed Mary’s life that she was able to forgive even the worst of offenders. Forgiving others and restoring relationships becomes a little easier when we look to the way in which we have been forgiven.

#### Act

- Search your heart to see if you have built up any bitterness towards anyone.
- Begin the process of forgiveness with someone, even if they haven’t asked for it yet.

#### Further Reading:

- [I Forgive You With All My Heart](#)

## 4. RESOLVING CONFLICT

### Read

*“If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.” – Romans 12:19 (ESV)*

### Reflect/Discuss

- What’s the hardest part about resolving conflict with others?
- When have you ever sought revenge instead of resolution? How did you feel afterward?

### Consider

Why do some marriages end so bitterly? Why is it hard to make and sustain meaningful friendships? Often, it is because people do not resolve conflict. Months and years of resentment will turn a beautiful and fruitful relationship into bitterness and thorns. The best relationships are not conflict free. Rather, they are marked by continual reconciliation. Resolving conflict is like cutting cancer out of the body. We must stop it in its tracks before it spreads and kills.

The Scriptures encourage us to live peaceably with one another. But this short verse is much harder said than done, especially when disagreements arise. Christians should be discontent with leaving relationships cracked and broken. Christians should be seekers of peace. This means that we do not take revenge. Instead, we humbly admit our wrongs. This means we forgive others. We pray for those we are in conflict with. We might even pray with them. Or, as it is put more simply in Ephesians 4:26, “do not let the sun go down on your anger.”

Bitterness ages like milk, not wine. We can’t let it spoil our hearts with unresolved conflict. Thankfully, we can find hope for our broken relationships in Jesus Christ. He has resolved our deepest relational strife. Our sin left us hopeless and cut off from our God and Father. But being rich in mercy, he sent his son Jesus Christ to die in our place and purchase our salvation. The greatest conflict in the Bible is resolved on the cross! Now, we can view every relationship through this new gospel lens, and “so far as it depends on [us], live peaceably with all.”

### Act

- Identify a relationship in your life that is currently marked by ongoing conflict.
- Initiate a conversation to resolve the conflict

### Go Deeper

- [How to Avoid the #1 Relationships Killer](#)

## 5. GROWING RESTORED RELATIONSHIPS

### Read

*“Luke alone is with me. Get Mark and bring him with you, for he is very useful to me in ministry.” – 2 Timothy 4:11 (ESV)*

### Reflect/Discuss

- Is there someone whom you are close to now that you once were in conflict with? What helped you two get past the conflict?
- What is the hardest part about moving on after conflict?

### Consider

Paul and Barnabas are partners in ministry, traveling together and preaching the gospel all across Asia. But then a conflict arises between them. Barnabas wants to take John Mark with them and Paul does not. John Mark had abandoned them earlier in the midst of persecution and Paul was not willing to give him a second chance. The story ends with the two missionaries going their separate ways: Paul with Silas, and Barnabas with John Mark.

The Bible records nothing of Paul and John Mark’s relationship again until 2 Timothy 4:11 when Paul writes his final letter before death. With his last words he requests (John) Mark to come see him! Apparently in the decades that followed the abrupt separation, reconciliation had been made between them. We do not know if Paul apologized to John Mark for being too strict or if John Mark repented for abandoning his friends when they needed him most. It’s possible it was a mixture of both. All we know is that before Paul’s death, he wanted to see John Mark one more time. This relationship is newly marked by forgiveness and love instead of previous conflicts. They were able to grow a previous disagreement into a flourishing friendship.

This is what we want for our relationships. Forgiveness is offered and received, a resolution is made, and a new stronger relationship is born. New memories are made together in the context of patience, grace and love. Similarly, our relationship with the Father is no longer marked by conflict. Jesus has reconciled and redeemed us from our sin!

### Act

- Identify one relationship that might be slipping back into conflict.
- Pray for your relationships to be defined by forgiveness instead of conflict.

## Go Deeper

- [Remedy for a Broken Relationship](#)

You can't instantly restore a relationship. Each act of restoration takes time. Sometimes years or decades pass before friends and family are reconciled again. But we do not have to lose hope! Jesus Christ has restored us to the Father, and the Holy Spirit now empowers us to pursue unity, ask for forgiveness, forgive others, resolve conflict, and grow restored relationships.

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