

Improving Your Relationships

by Mary Lowman



Improving Your Relationships

A Bible Study

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A Ministry for Christians in the Workplace

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“My command is this:

Love each other as I have loved you.

Greater love has no one than this:

to lay down one’s life for one’s friends.”

John 15:12-13

Note from Mary Lowman

Getting along with all kinds of people under various circumstances is perhaps the greatest challenge we face.

The Bible is full of practical advice and principles to help us improve our relationships.

I pray this study will help you apply these biblical principles to your relationships and you will note great improvement!

Joyfully,

Mary Lowman

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Study Objective and Format

Before you jump into the study, I think it will be helpful to give a brief explanation of why I've designed this workbook the way it is. The course is very interactive—it is intended to get you involved as much as possible. If you had wanted to read a book, you would have bought a book instead of this study. So, I assume that you want something that helps you discover things for yourself and come to some conclusions on your own. Therefore, this study will ask you to look up scripture and paraphrase it, define terms, analyze attitudes, etc.

All quotations and passages are quoted from NIV (Holy Bible, New International Version®, NIV® Copyright ©1973, 1978, 1984, 2011). While it's possible to use other translations, you'll find it easier to follow if you use the NIV.

Another characteristic of this study is that it asks questions about you and gives you opportunities to make decisions.

The format gives you space to answer questions and write in your thoughts. I encourage you to do this, even though it may not seem necessary. I have learned that putting things in writing really crystallizes those ideas in my mind, especially when God is dealing with me. It will also help you to concentrate better.

However, what you do is between you and God, so if you skip some of the questions, that's no problem, at least not with me! If you think some part doesn't apply to you, then of course you're free to skip it and go to the next.

Lesson 1 – Biblical Principles for Relationships

Introduction

Someone has said, “Relationships are the sandpaper of our lives.” Well, it's true that they are not always easy, but it's also true that if we practice biblical principles in regard to our relationships, we'll discover immense improvement.

Obviously, we don't have total control over our relationships, since there are other people involved. And you've probably discovered that you cannot change another person. You and I can only change ourselves. That means that some relationships will never be what we want them to be because the other person is not willing to improve or change. That's when we have to learn to let go and accept the relationship as it is.

However, most relationships can be improved if we work on ourselves and do everything we can to make it better. That takes a servant attitude and a willing heart. It requires a dedication to God's principles and a willingness to be humbled. We have to care more about improving the relationship than we do about proving that we are right or getting our revenge or taking care of “number one.” But if we will choose God's way instead of our own, we discover unimaginable freedom and joy, and the improvement in our relationships is often quite amazing when we decide that we're willing to change.

In this first lesson, we are going to consider some biblical passages which give specific advice and help on what we can do to improve any relationship in our lives. This will build a foundation for the rest of our study, where we will address specific people and difficult relationships.

I hope you are willing to pay the price of improving your relationships, because, if so, you're in for some great payoffs!

Biblical Principle #1—Put Others First

Read Philippians 2:3-4 and fill in the blanks:

Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather in _____ value others _____ . Not looking to your own interests, but to the interests of others.

Which of these two statements do you think is an accurate paraphrase of what the Apostle Paul meant when he said “value others above yourselves”?

Check one:

- ☐ We should never think well of ourselves, but should always put ourselves down and try to be very humble and talk about how we're not as good as other people.
- ☐ We should consider other people as having great importance, recognizing that their needs and struggles are just as critical as ours. They are worthy of our consideration, regardless of who they are, even before we think of ourselves.

I believe in the light of all of scripture, and particularly what Paul had to say in verse 4, that the second paraphrase is a more accurate one. In verse 4 he says we should look not only to our own interests. This indicates that looking to our own interests is not forbidden, but is to be kept in balance with our concern for others.

Now the question becomes, how in the world do we put this into practice in our everyday lives? What can you do to practice this principle of considering others first and looking to their interests?

Choose two close relationships in your life and identify one thing you could do this week or next to put their interests ahead of your own:

Name of Relationship	Action

In the next verse of this chapter Paul says, *Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus*. Then he goes on to describe Jesus' attitude.

Read Philippians 2:6-8 and in your own words describe this "Jesus attitude" that Paul refers to in this passage:

The King James Version of verse 5 says, *Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus*. I like that very much because it reminds us that everything begins with our thought lives. Your attitude toward other people is governed by your thoughts, and your attitude will determine whether or not you will ever be able to consider the interests of others ahead of your own.

Ask yourself this question: Who seem to be the most fulfilled, happy, and contented people you know?

People who have achieved great financial and/or career success and are able to accumulate much in the way of material things.

People who are very involved in the lives of other people and seem to have great availability for others.

People who are self-consumed, talk about themselves all the time, worry about their rights being violated, fight for their piece of the American pie, and generally spend their lives getting and doing for themselves.

People who sacrifice their time and money to help others, who are dependable and reliable when it comes to commitments, and who have more friends than they do money!

If you think of people you know personally, I believe you will honestly admit that the most "together" people are generally those who have learned the joy of focusing their lives on others more than themselves. And if you think of some of your really miserable friends and family members, they will assuredly be those who spend their lives self-absorbed.

Putting others first, as difficult as it may seem, improves our relationships and makes us happier people! Isn't God smart!

Acquiring this “Jesus attitude” toward others comes from Jesus through you. It begins with a desire on your part to want to obey Jesus and to want to care about others. Then it has to become a regular prayer issue with you. If you will start to pray for this attitude, believe me, God will gladly impart it to you.

I encourage you to add this to your prayer list everyday: “Lord, help me to think of others as more important than me today, to put their interests ahead of my own.”

Biblical Principle #2—Rejoice and Weep with Others

Romans 12:15 tells us to: *Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn.*

What does it mean to rejoice with those who rejoice?

To mourn with those who mourn?

Which do you find easier to do?

- ☐ Rejoice with someone who has had something good happen to him/her
- ☐ Mourn and sorrow with someone who has had a great loss

Do you think most people find it easier to mourn with people than to rejoice with them?

What might keep us from rejoicing with someone who has a reason to rejoice?

Check off the things you have done to rejoice with someone:

- ☐ Given a party to celebrate a friend's promotion/raise
- ☐ Sent a congratulatory note to someone who had a significant accomplishment
- ☐ Contacted a friend to tell her/him how happy you are that she/he is engaged
- ☐ Attended a baby shower—gladly—with gift in hand to celebrate a new mom
- ☐ Taken someone to dinner to celebrate good news from the doctor
- ☐ Given your child a special treat for good grades or some other special deed
- ☐ Planned a celebration for a significant milestone in someone's life

Hopefully you can add many other specifics to this list as you think about things you have done to rejoice with someone. If you found it difficult to think of anything you've done, then perhaps that is an area that needs improvement.

Check off things you have done to mourn with someone who is mourning:

- ☐ Sent a sympathy card to someone when a loved one has died
- ☐ Took food to someone who has become temporarily or permanently disabled
- ☐ Cried with a friend over a broken relationship
- ☐ Invited someone to be with you when you knew they were hurting over some rejection or they were feeling particularly alone
- ☐ Gone up to someone who is hurting with a hug and words of sympathy
- ☐ Sat up all night with a friend who is waiting for possible bad news—or has already received it
- ☐ Listened—a long time—to a friend pour out her/his heart to you about a painful experience in her/his life

You've probably done more of these things than you ever realized, because unfortunately, there seems to always be someone around us with a serious problem who needs a listening ear or a shoulder to cry on.

However, it's good to search your heart and ask yourself if you've been avoiding these kinds of people or situations. Again, this biblical principle is one that requires some sacrifice and commitment on our part, but it yields a beautiful harvest for us as we see how it improves our relationships with those with whom we rejoice and weep.

Biblical Principle #3—Love Unconditionally

Proverbs 17:17 is a classic verse to help us improve our relationships. It says quite simply:

A friend loves _____, _____, _____, and a brother is born for a time of adversity.

At all times would include all of these and more:

- the middle of the night
- times reserved for yourself
- when you feel very needy yourself

- when the other person is grumpy
- when the other person takes advantage of you
- when the other person doesn't love you the way he/she should
- when you're tired
- weekends

Many relationships are conditional: the people involved give to the relationship for the purpose of receiving, and when they're not receiving what they think they should be, they stop giving.

Can you identify some relationships in your life that would fit this description? These would be relationships where both of you are continuing the relationship only because it meets a certain purpose in your lives. Take this a step further and ask yourself whether you have some one-sided relationships in your life. One-sided relationships are those where one person is giving and contributing to the relationship while the other is simply taking. Remember, these can go both ways; you could be the "giver" or the "taker." It might be helpful to try to identify some of those relationships in your life.

My one-sided relationships include:

I am the "giver" in these relationships	I am the "taker" In these relationships

Neither conditional nor one-sided “taker” relationships are relationships that love at all times.

Read what Jesus had to say about these kinds of relationships in Luke 6:32-34:

If you _____ those who _____ you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners love those who love them. And if you _____ to those who are good to you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners do that. And if you _____ to those from whom you _____, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, expecting to be repaid in full.

You will discover great improvement in your relationships when you decide to be the kind of person who “loves at all times,” whether or not that love is reciprocated.

Biblical Principle #4—Be a Good Listener

How often have you said, “You know the problem with her is she just doesn't listen.” Now, ask yourself this question: How do you feel when a person doesn't listen to what you have to say? How does it affect your relationship with that person?

James 1:19a:

My dear brothers and sisters take note of this: Everyone should be _____
_____, _____, _____, _____...

Proverbs 18:13:

To _____ before _____ —that is folly and shame.

Which of these would describe your bad listening habits?

- ☐ I am often thinking of what I am going to say instead of listening.
- ☐ My mind wanders easily and I think about other things instead of listening.
- ☐ I tend to interrupt too often instead of listening.
- ☐ I often complete their sentence for them instead of listening.
- ☐ I do other things and become distracted instead of listening.

James says we should be quick to listen. What do you think it means to be quick to listen?

Becoming quick to listen and slow to speak is absolutely guaranteed to improve your relationships. Give it a try.

Biblical Principle #5—Be Dependable

Ecclesiastes 5:5 has this to say about being dependable:

It is _____ not to make a _____ than to make one and not _____ it.

Solomon, the wisest man who ever lived, tells us it's much better not to promise anything at all than to make a promise and not keep it. We should be very careful in this area. Christians should be dependable people, always diligent in following through.

What kind of reputation do you have for dependability?

- ☐ I am known to be very dependable by my friends, family, and co-workers.
- ☐ I am dependable most of the time.
- ☐ I make promises too easily, but then end up often breaking those promises or commitments.

If you recognize that dependability is not one of your strong suits, I encourage you to dig deeper and ask yourself why you have developed this bad habit of being undependable. It could be lack of good role models in your life, laziness, self-centeredness, a lack of organization, and a tendency to forget.

Whatever has caused you to be this way, it's time to take responsibility for your behavior and start doing what you need to do in order to become a very dependable person. You and I can change if we want to.

Biblical Principle #6—Be Loyal

Consider these scenarios:

#1 You have a friend that you've been fairly close to for over ten years. You have shared many personal matters in confidence, and you have come to trust her. Then you discover that she has been relating your personal confidences to other people.

#2 You were talking to an aunt who started bad-mouthing your sister about some rather insignificant matter. You knew your aunt was wrong in talking about your sister, but you didn't say anything to her.

#3 You are extremely disappointed in your grown son because his lifestyle is not what it should be and not the way he was raised. So, you've told him that until he gets his life together, you don't want to have anything to do with him.

#4 Your co-worker pretends to be your friend when he's with you, but behind your back he makes fun of you, tells things that are not true about you, and tries to create strife between you and others on the job.

#5 You and your husband are having dinner with his parents. His mother begins to say some unkind things about you, as she has done in the past. Your husband doesn't say a word.

In each situation, what damage will be done to those relationships by the lack of loyalty that is demonstrated?

There's no question that in order to build good relationships, we need this ingredient of loyalty. Consider Proverbs 17:9: *Whoever would foster love covers over an offense, but whoever repeats the matter separates close friends.*

What do you think wise Solomon meant by *covering over an offense*?

Remember, loyalty will cover over an offense but that doesn't mean you whitewash sin. You do everything you can to keep down the rumors and to keep from exposing your friend or family member to criticism or embarrassment. Try to deal with it in a quiet way, keeping it out of the public eye, if possible.

The Apostle Paul makes this even clearer in 1 Corinthians 13:6-7:

Love does not delight in evil but _____ with the _____. It always _____, always _____, always _____, always _____.

A loyal person is not eager to pass along something offensive about a friend or family member. Just the opposite, they seek to protect that relationship, and they hang in there with that person as long as they can without compromising their own beliefs or testimony.

What is another word for "repeats the matter"?

Gossip is always harmful and the Bible has a great deal to say about the sin of gossip. And remember, it is a sin even if it is true. If we gossip about others, passing on derogatory information that is neither lovely nor necessary, we damage the relationship we have with that person and we also damage the relationships they have with others.

Gossip is one of the major factors in broken relationships. Solomon says it separates close friends.

Conclusion

Jesus summed it up so beautifully when he said, *In everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets* (Matthew 7:12). We call it the Golden Rule, and it works as good today as it ever has. The more you put yourself in the other person's shoes, the better your relationships will be.

These six principles that we have looked at in this lesson are principles that we must incorporate into our lives, regardless of whether or not other people do the same thing or appreciate what we've done or change their behavior as a result. These are our responsibilities to the relationships of our lives, if we want to be fully obedient to our Lord Jesus Christ.

I understand that there are two sides to any story, and the other people in your relationships need to cooperate in order to have the best possible relationship. But don't use their behavior as an excuse for failing to practice what you know is God's will for you. God will honor you for doing what you are supposed to do, regardless of the other person or persons involved.

Suggested Assignment

Here are the six principles we've discussed in this lesson:

1. Put Others First
2. Rejoice and Weep with Others
3. Love Unconditionally
4. Be a Good Listener
5. Be Dependable
6. Be Loyal

Out of these six principles, choose the one that you feel is most lacking in your life, or the one where you need the most help. Note which one that is:

I need to improve in implementing biblical principle number _____.

Then, identify some specific actions you will immediately take to put this into place.

Today or tomorrow I will:

Lesson 2 – Dealing with Broken or Wounded Relationships

Review

In our first lesson we looked at six biblical principles that we need to incorporate on a daily basis as we deal with the relationships of our lives. They were:

1. Put others first.
2. Rejoice and weep with others.
3. Love unconditionally.
4. Be a good listener.
5. Be dependable.
6. Be loyal.

This is a partial list of the principles in Scripture which tell us how we can improve our relationships. We are given these principles to help us do what we need to do in our relationships, regardless of whether we want to or not, whether we feel like it or not, whether it is appreciated or reciprocated or not. We are called to have servant attitudes toward other people, and all of these principles require that kind of selfless approach to the relationships of our lives.

Which of these principles did you work on these past few days?

Did you notice any changes in yourself or in others as you tried to improve your relationships?

I want to encourage you to continue to review these principles, and work on implementing them into your life through prayer and commitment. We won't improve our relationships by accident. It must be intentional on our part, so I urge you to keep working on them. The benefits are enormous.

Introduction

Broken relationships create all kinds of problems, whether they are work relationships, family relationships, or even casual relationships.

A woman told me that she couldn't take part in her family's Christmas celebration because her brother would be there and she was not speaking to him any longer. She began to explain the reason for their broken relationship. From her side of the story she had a reason to be hurt with her brother, but the damage of that broken family relationship was very painful to her and caused problems for her sons as well. They were not able to take part in an important family occasion.

A friend of mine is in the midst of a broken marriage relationship now, a marriage of over thirty years. It's not her fault that the relationship is broken, and she is doing all she can to repair it. But her pain has been palpable.

Another friend was "downsized" from an organization and she felt the decision was extremely unfair. It came from people she had trusted as more than just her employer and manager—she had seen them as friends. But now that work relationship is severed and it has caused an on-going rift between her and the management she once respected.

Think of the broken relationships in your own world, whether they are yours personally or those you are aware of. Consider the ripple effect that broken and hurting relationships have, not only on the people directly involved, but on many others as well.

Are we doomed to have to live with these broken relationships? What is our duty and responsibility in trying to mend broken relationships? That is what we will consider in this study.

Jesus' Remedy for Broken Relationships

You will discover that we refer to Matthew 5 a great deal in this study. It contains part of what we call The Sermon on the Mount," Jesus' mountainside discourse to his disciples and followers by the Sea of Galilee. Most of that sermon deals with relationships of one type or another and gives us very clear guidelines on how to improve our relationships. Any time you are experiencing some interpersonal conflicts, a good practice would be to go immediately to Matthew chapters 5 - 7 and read this sermon again. More often than not you'll find an answer for your situation in that sermon.

Consider what Jesus taught us to do when a relationship has been broken or wounded: (Matthew 5:23-24)

Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother or sister has something against you, _____ your _____ there in front of the altar. First go and _____ to them; then come and offer your gift.

Let's look at each part of this passage, because contained in these few words is a lot of wisdom and help in dealing with broken or wounded relationships.

Who is Jesus talking to?

- ☐ Anybody
- ☐ A religious person
- ☐ A disciple of Jesus Christ

Jesus uses the occasion of *offering your gift at the altar* to teach us some important principles. Obviously, anyone offering a gift would be a religious person, one who took his or her commitment seriously.

I think Jesus is trying to teach us several important principles through this phrase: *if you are offering your gift at the altar*.

Even committed people who are trying to do the right thing will have relationship struggles. Mending broken relationships takes priority over religious activities.

You can't substitute spiritual activity for trying to mend a broken relationship.

Consider what Jesus meant when he said, *and there remember that your brother or sister has something against you*. Does this limit our obligation in mending broken relationships to family members only?

Who do you think is included in the term *brother or sister*?

Since Jesus says, *and there remember that your brother or sister has something against you*, does that mean it is possible to forget that you have a broken relationship?

What are some methods you have used, or you have observed others using, to "forget" about

those unpleasant, hurting relationships?

- ☐ Stayed very busy, even if you had to create unnecessary activity
- ☐ Convinced yourself that there was nothing that could be done about it
- ☐ Convinced yourself that since you didn't cause the problem, you shouldn't be the one to initiate the reconciliation
- ☐ Found other relationships to fill the gap in your life

As I talked with the person who no longer speaks to her brother, it seemed to me that it would not be difficult to mend that broken relationship. Yet she was unwilling to even consider the possibility. Why are we prone to avoid reconciliation efforts for hurting relationships?

If you have been guilty of procrastination when you needed to try to heal a broken relationship, which of these reasons applied to you?

- ☐ I didn't know what to say or how to say it.
- ☐ I was fearful of being rejected.
- ☐ I was afraid I'd make matters worse.
- ☐ I found it difficult to say "I'm sorry."
- ☐ I thought it was more the other person's fault than mine, and therefore the first move was up to him or her.
- ☐ I just couldn't find the right time to do it
- ☐ I was too proud and/or stubborn to do anything about it.
- ☐ I always have difficulty facing issues head on and tend to run away from problems.

Here are some people who would have *something against you*:

- A person whose feelings are hurt because of you.
- A person who misunderstood you and misjudged you.
- A person who thinks you have treated her unfairly.
- A person who thinks you have neglected her.
- A person who feels insulted by you.
- A person to whom you spoke words that were not well chosen.

Perhaps you can think of some others.

Do you think Jesus meant that this applies when another person has something against you which is your fault? Would it also extend to her perceptions, even if her perceptions are incorrect?

Would this principle also apply when you have something against another person? Should you follow the same prescribed way of dealing with a broken relationship if you are the injured party and you feel you have a legitimate reason to be very hurt with another person?

- ☐ It should apply even if you have something against someone else, whether they are aware of it or not.
- ☐ It should only apply when someone else has something against you.
- ☐ It would depend upon the situation. Sometimes it would be good to initiate a healing action for a broken relationship when you have something against someone else. At other times it might be necessary to bear with that hurt.

In discussing this question, consider Colossians 3:13:

_____ and forgive one another if any of you has a _____ against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.

There will be times, when you are the harmed person in a relationship, that you should *bear with* that other person, even though you may have legitimate grievances against him or her. The original word there means “lengthen your anger;” stretch it out. Bearing with other people is a part of building good relationships. So, if you have *something against* someone else, before you make any moves to air your grievances, pray about it and see if the Lord would direct you to *bear with* that situation a little longer—or maybe a lot longer. If he asks you to do so, he will supply the patience and ability to do it.

Why would it be necessary to *leave your gift there in front of the altar* in order to be reconciled in a broken relationship?

Jesus is illustrating the urgency and importance of addressing these hurtful situations. He says, in effect, as soon as you are aware that someone has something against you, reconciliation should become your highest priority.

Think of the culture in which this was written. If someone were at the altar performing this sacred duty of offering a gift and sacrifice to the Lord, by prescribed Jewish law as given in the Old Testament, what would it mean to leave that gift in front of the altar without completing the ritual?

This action could have been viewed by others as any combination of:

- weird
- unorthodox
- incorrect
- puzzling

It could cause:

- embarrassment
- criticism
- questions
- loss of a costly sacrifice
- loss of prestige or status

Jesus knew that his hearers would fully understand the importance he placed on reconciliation by using this illustration of leaving your gift at the altar to go and find the person who has something against you.

Therefore, what is the main principle Jesus is teaching when he says *leave your gift there in front of the altar*?

Jesus clearly establishes the priority of personal reconciliation when he says; *First go and be reconciled to them; then come and offer your gift* (Matthew 5:24b).

In your own experience, what problems have been created by a reluctance to be reconciled?

Think of your work situation, your church home, your family environment. Which of these results have you witnessed because of failures to be reconciled?

- ☐ The break in the relationship grew deeper and wider.
- ☐ The reason for the break was exaggerated and amplified way beyond reality.
- ☐ Innocent people were hurt because the relationship was not reconciled.
- ☐ Gossip and backbiting increased.
- ☐ The longer it was neglected, the more difficult it was to do.
- ☐ It opened the door for illegitimate or harmful relationships to begin.
- ☐ It caused a church split.
- ☐ It caused a family split.
- ☐ It caused other relationships to deteriorate.
- ☐ It caused great financial stress.
- ☐ It adversely affected someone's testimony for Jesus Christ.
- ☐ It caused non-believers to have negative impressions of true believers.
- ☐ It caused those involved to walk away from their commitment to Jesus Christ or seriously affected them spiritually in a detrimental way.

That's a long list, and it's not exhaustive. My guess is you have checked off quite a few of those consequences of broken relationships. And the longer it is delayed, the more these and other consequences will be realized.

Jesus said *First go...* That's a directive, right? Not a suggestion, but a direct command. And who is to go? We are. Jesus teaches that we should make the first move even if we're not the one at fault. The Master said you make that first effort to be reconciled and do so quickly.

What kind of advice do you think you would receive from most "earthly advisors" if you told them that someone has something against you, but it's not your fault?

- ☐ It's their problem, not yours. Let him/her make the first move.
- ☐ Don't let that person manipulate you with hurt feelings.
- ☐ Some relationships are doomed; let it go.
- ☐ That person needs to grow up and learn a few lessons.

Notice that Jesus put no qualifiers in his directive. He said regardless of the circumstances, if there is a rift in your relationship with another person, go quickly and try to repair it.

How does it make you feel to go to someone who “has something against you” and initiate a reconciliation?

- ☐ It is humbling
- ☐ It is humiliating
- ☐ It makes me feel resentful and angry
- ☐ It makes me very uncomfortable
- ☐ _____

When you have to go to someone to try to mend a broken relationship, are these kinds of feelings:

- ☐ fairly normal?
- ☐ totally out of line for a Christian?
- ☐ to be expected?
- ☐ an indication of an immature person or Christian?

There is a difference in humbling yourself and feeling humiliated. How would you describe that feeling of humiliation?

One of the lessons we all have to continually learn is that our feelings are sometimes out of control and will bombard us with reactions that disgust even ourselves. But they are feelings, and when we recognize them for what they are, but refuse to be controlled by them when they are wrong, we are learning a great lesson about spiritual maturity.

Don't be surprised at your feelings. Just determine to follow the directions of our Lord whether you “feel it” or not.

Jesus said to go and be reconciled. The dictionary definition of reconciliation is to cause to cease hostility or opposition; to restore and make good again; to repair. So, if you are going to someone who has something against you for the purpose of reconciliation, you would likely not do which of the following:

- ☐ Recite all the mistakes she has made and where she is wrong.
- ☐ Defend yourself and explain why you are not at fault.
- ☐ Tell how you have been hurt or harmed.
- ☐ Lecture the other person about his need to change.

- ☐ Lovingly accept blame for whatever you have done that has contributed to the bad feelings.
- ☐ Talk about what you are willing to do to mend the relationship.
- ☐ Explain how important the relationship is to you.
- ☐ Establish some guidelines to hopefully help avoid similar misunderstandings and hurts in the future
- ☐ Explain how important the relationship is to you.

Keep in mind that reconciliation is not for the purpose of airing your grievances; it is rather to cease hostility. Anything that might cause hostility to increase or continue should not be a part of your efforts to reconcile. Again this will take humility and grace on your part, but God has plenty of that to give you and you will be amazed at what you are able to do through his power.

Is It Always Possible To Be Reconciled?

Read Romans 12:18:

If it is possible, as far as it _____ on _____, live at _____ with everyone.

Do you believe it is possible to be reconciled with everyone who has something against you?

Under what types of circumstances would reconciliation be difficult if not impossible?

We must not ignore the imperative of this verse from Romans 12, *as far as it depends on you*. If you have a broken relationship, make certain that you have done and are doing everything you can to mend that relationship. Don't let yourself off the hook easily. Go the extra mile, humble yourself, initiate the reconciliation, be willing to swallow your pride...whatever it takes for true reconciliation.

However, please keep in mind that being reconciled does not include:

- being someone's "doormat"
- enduring abusive treatment of any kind
- compromising your Christian principles or integrity
- lowering your standards of behavior
- enabling someone else to continue in wrong or evil behavior

So, it is not "reconciliation at any price" that we are seeking. True reconciliation is where the past can be put behind us, forgiveness can be given and received, and we can establish a new, better foundation for that relationship to go forward.

Also, it may be possible to be reconciled to someone without fully restoring the relationship to the status that it was before. Choices and actions produce consequences, and there are times where a relationship has been damaged so much that full restoration is not possible.

Describe some relationships (yours or someone else's) where there has been reconciliation but the relationship cannot be fully restored:

Dealing with the Aftermath of a Broken Relationship

Whether we are able to mend a broken relationship, or our attempts to do so have failed, there is an aftermath that we must deal with. Words were spoken that cannot be unspoken. Feelings were aroused that cannot be quickly forgotten. We've "glued" the broken relationship back together, but there remains that telltale sign that the relationship has been harmed, and we can't pretend it doesn't exist.

I want to encourage you to consider how Jesus dealt with his closest friends and associates who failed him miserably. Which of his twelve closest disciples experienced some kind of broken relationship with Jesus?

- ☐ Simon Peter
- ☐ Andrew
- ☐ James (Zebedee)
- ☐ John
- ☐ Matthew
- ☐ Bartholomew
- ☐ Judas son of James
- ☐ Philip James (Alphaeus)
- ☐ Simon the Zealot
- ☐ Thomas
- ☐ Judas Iscariot

We don't know all the details of his relationships with these men, but some are quite obvious:

- Judas betrayed him.
- Peter denied him.
- Thomas doubted him.
- They all fled and left him when the soldiers came to arrest him.
- They all exhibited lack of faith and trust in him throughout his ministry.

Read John 21:15-17.

This is a wonderful example of how Jesus restored a broken relationship with Peter and they were beautifully reconciled. Think of what has just taken place. Remember the scene at the Garden of Gethsemane where all the disciples fled and left Jesus alone and remember the trial where Peter denied even knowing Jesus. Jesus was put on trial and crucified on a cross. As far as we know, Peter was not even present at the crucifixion. There's no question that at this point their relationship was damaged and greatly wounded. I can imagine that Peter felt very penitent and regretful and wondered if Jesus would allow him to be a close friend and disciple again.

Jesus could have legitimately said any of these to Peter at that moment in time:

- Peter, I was so disappointed in you, because you were the one who promised you would never leave me even if you had to die with me.
- Peter, why did you run away at the Garden of Gethsemane when I needed you with me?
- Peter, I can't begin to tell you how painful it was to hear you deny me three times in the midst of that mockery of a trial.
- Peter, I thought you loved me more than anyone else, but I guess you didn't because look how you left me and denied me.
- Peter, you were supposed to be my rock, the one on whom I could always depend. Yet you were the first to deny me.
- Peter, if you want to be my disciple, you're going to really have to change because I just can't depend on you anymore. Look how you deserted me.
- Peter, if you want to be my disciple, you're going to have to prove yourself to me. It will take time, Peter. After the way you treated me, you can't expect to just waltz back in and take over, can you?

Jesus had a right to say any of these things to Peter. But his purpose was reconciliation. He wanted to help Peter get past his terrible mistakes and move on to be the man Jesus knew he could be. So, he didn't say any of these things to Peter. After all, Peter knew them anyway.

Notice also that Jesus made the first move to restore Peter, although Peter was the one who had broken the relationship by his denial of Jesus.

Jesus' one concern was to make sure Peter was prepared for the awesome challenge that was ahead of him, as he started that first church of believers and converted so many people to faith in Jesus Christ. Jesus did not allow his damaged feelings, his bruised ego, his need for revenge to control his feelings or actions. Instead he kept his eye on the big picture, knew how important it was that his relationship with Peter be fully restored, and made sure that the reconciliation took place.

He leaves us a wonderful example of how we must approach our wounded and broken relationships.

Conclusion

I want to make sure that I've presented a balanced view in this lesson, and that no one thinks that every relationship must be reconciled at any cost. That is not possible nor is it right.

Some of you have endured terrible abuse in relationships, and those relationships need to be severed, at least until there is absolute and long-term change in the other person. Others have relationships that have been so terribly damaged that, although some reconciliation has taken place, it is not possible to be fully restored. I understand all of those kinds of situations.

But we must still be willing to go the extra mile when it comes to reconciling any relationship that has been broken if we possibly can. As much as it depends on us, let's follow the teaching and example of our Lord and seek to be reconciled.

Suggested Assignment

Identify one relationship where you think someone has *something against you*, whether justifiable or not, and the relationship is not what it should be:

Identify one relationship where you have *something against someone else*, and that relationship has been strained or broken as a result:

Have you followed the teaching of Jesus and gone to either of those people and sought reconciliation in the proper way?

If your answer is no, are you willing to try to do that right away, and if so, what is one step you could take toward reconciliation?

Lesson 3 – Dealing with Difficult Relationships

Review

As you focused on the broken or hurting relationships in your life since our last lesson, I hope you were able to take some beginning steps toward mending those relationships.

What did you find to be the most difficult part of trying to be reconciled?

What surprised you most about the other person's response to your initial approach?

Did you find yourself praying more about these broken or hurting relationships than you did before? That alone can make a big difference in moving toward reconciliation.

Obviously, restoring relationships is not a one-week effort, nor is it an easy thing to do. But don't lose heart and don't give up. Remember what the Apostle Paul tells us in Galatians 6:9: *Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.*

Introduction

In this lesson we will address some specific types of relationships that we encounter often, on our jobs. Whether your job is in your home or an office or factory or store or school, we all have jobs and those jobs bring relationship challenges. Mothers of young children who do their work at home have daily relationships with many people, including their children, other children and mothers, clerks in the stores, and on and on. Wherever you work, you have faced or will face some of the relationship challenges we address in this lesson.

When we go to a job outside our homes, we typically spend eight hours a day there with coworkers and peers whom we might never voluntarily choose to spend one-third of our waking hours each week. But there we are—together! And even though we're Christians, we're not immune to the irritations, aggravations, and outright conflicts that can exist in these relationships.

As I traveled across the country giving business seminars for many years, I got the same response from all types of people when I asked my classes what caused the greatest stress on their jobs. At the top of

most everyone's list was something like “the people I work with” or “a co-worker who's driving me crazy” or “my impossible boss!”

Learning how to cope with these difficult working relationships is a key issue for Christians in the workplace because there's much more at stake than stress or productivity. These conflicts give us opportunities to demonstrate the power of Christ, to show that his presence makes a real difference in our everyday lives. As we find solutions to these conflicts through application of Scripture, we establish a track record and testimony that cannot be discounted, because most people never find any answers for these interpersonal difficulties.

In considering how we should respond to these difficult relationships at work and elsewhere, let's look at some other biblical principles which would apply in many of these situations. Then we will see how they apply to specific types of relationships.

The “Extra-Mile” Principle

We are called to have an extra-mile attitude in our relationships with others. Matthew 5 is pretty clear about this. Fill in the following blanks, beginning in verse 38:

“You have heard that it was said, ‘Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.’ But I tell you, do not resist an evil person. If anyone _____, _____, _____, _____, _____, turn to them the other cheek also. And if anyone wants to _____ you and take your _____, hand over _____ as well. If someone forces you to _____, go with them _____.”

What does it mean to have an extra-mile attitude, to turn the other cheek, to give your cloak as well as your shirt?

What is Jesus trying to teach us? Check the ones which you think are implied by his teaching here in Matthew 5:

- ☐ To endure unfair treatment at times, without griping or complaining
- ☐ To refrain from saying some of the things I would like to say to the difficult person
- ☐ To do some work I don't have to do or want to do
- ☐ To put in extra time and effort to help a difficult person
- ☐ To endure any kind of treatment
- ☐ To put up with unacceptable behavior or habits forever
- ☐ To never say anything negative to anyone

I believe that Jesus gave us boundaries with these “extra-mile” principles, and he definitely is not teaching us to become doormats or whipping posts.

However, do you think most Christians:

- ☐ go too many extra miles.
- ☐ don't go the extra mile as much as they should?

We certainly should find the right balance in our effort to go the extra mile, but don't become infected with the prevalent worldly attitude of “watching out for number one” and not doing anything you don't have to do.

The “Speak-the-Truth-in-Love” Principle

Ephesians 4:1-16 deals with unity in the body of Christ and exhorts us to build each other up in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God so that we can become mature Christians.

Please read Ephesians 4:1-16.

Did you ever realize that the people in your life are part of God's maturation plan for you? Without relationships—that sandpaper of our lives—none of us would become the mature people God wants us to be.

Notice particularly verses 14 and 15:

Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of people in their deceitful scheming. Instead, _____, _____, _____, _____, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ.

The Apostle Paul is telling us that speaking the truth to people is sometimes the part we are called on to play in their lives in order to help them grow. Of course, the operative word here is “love.”

Have you ever spoken the truth in:

- haste?
- anger?
- vindictiveness?
- hatred?
- malice?
- defensiveness?

You see, the truth can often be very painful. When we speak it in anything but love, we can open a door that never should be opened and cause a rift in a relationship that may never be healed.

Which would describe you best?

I have difficulty speaking the truth in love even when I know I should.

If you checked this description, why do you find it difficult to speak the truth to a person for his or her own good?

- ☐ Because I hate confrontations.
- ☐ Because I fear rejection or repercussions.
- ☐ Because I feel guilty; after all, I'm not perfect either.

I speak the truth too freely and often without compassion or forethought.

In practicing this biblical principle of speaking the truth in love, we must exercise extreme caution. Words are very powerful and need to be bathed in prayer. Our motivations must be carefully scrutinized to make certain that we are speaking the truth in love for the right reason at the right time. (Lesson 5 on confrontation goes into this in more detail.)

However, remember that speaking the truth in love is a biblical principle, and when God puts you in a position where you should do just that, to fail to do so is to rob that person of an opportunity to become more mature.

The “Love Your Enemy” Principle

Here is another principle from Matthew 5 that is helpful with difficult relationships—Matthew 5:43-45:

You have heard that it was said, “Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.” But I tell you: _____ and pray for those who _____, that you may be children of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.

How would you define a relationship “enemy”?

Enemies are people who make your life uncomfortable, difficult, cause unnecessary hurt or work or discord, and are generally at odds against you in many ways. They may not have overt intentions to do you harm, but if their manner or actions do indeed cause you harm, they are relationship enemies.

Jesus said, *Love your enemies*.... What a revolutionary teaching this was. Never before had anyone taught such convoluted doctrine. It goes against all of our instincts to love our enemies. It demands an attitude that is foreign to our natures. It requires a denial of self which seems imminently unfair and all but impossible.

That's the way it often is with biblical principles. They go against our grain, and we feel as though it's mission impossible. But if God leads you to the *love your enemies* principle in dealing with difficult relationships, he will empower you to do it.

Can you remember a time when you were empowered by God's Spirit to love an enemy? Describe that situation:

Were you not more amazed than anyone else to discover that you had the power to love someone who was truly out to do you harm? Wasn't that an awesome feeling to realize that you just did what you thought you never could do?

Read Proverbs 25:21-22:

If your enemy is hungry, _____; if he is thirsty, _____. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head, and the Lord will reward you.

What do you think wise Solomon meant by *you will heap burning coals on his head*?

In these two passages we see these principles about dealing with enemies:

1. Love your enemies.
2. Pray for your enemies.
3. Give your enemies what they need.

The result of this type of attitude toward a difficult person is that the Lord will reward you. We aren't promised that the person will change or that they will appreciate our kind reaction to their unkind actions. We aren't guaranteed that they will be repentant and ask for our forgiveness. But when we respond in loving ways toward difficult people, we keep ourselves from sinning and we demonstrate the love of Jesus in very real ways.

The “Humble Yourself” Principle

As we've been noting throughout this study, one of the many purposes of relationships is to teach us needed and important lessons. And humility is certainly an important lesson we can learn through difficult relationships.

Read Luke 14:11. Notice that Jesus exhorts us to humble ourselves.

For all those who _____ themselves will be _____, and those _____ will be _____.

Read 1 Peter 5:6:

_____, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time.

Remember the promises given to us in the two passages above when we truly are willing to humble ourselves. We will be lifted up and we will be exalted. Don't miss Peter's words that we will be lifted *up in due time*. That's probably not as soon as you would like it to be, but it will be in the right time after you have learned the valuable lesson of humbling yourself.

The “Put on Compassion” Principle

Read Colossians 3:12:

Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with _____, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience.

Notice some important directions here: We, as God's people, are to clothe ourselves with these characteristics. It is our choice, our decision whether or not we will wear compassion. We must be very intentional about putting on compassion.

What does it mean to be compassionate toward someone?

Remember that your reaction to that difficult person begins in your thought life. When you choose to put on compassion and react in a compassionate manner, you will be directing your thoughts in the right direction. Putting on compassion will empower you to react in the righteous way. (Your thought life is addressed in detail in a book I've written, *Think About What You Think About*.)

The “Speak Kind Words” Principle

Proverbs 12:25 says:

_____ weighs down the _____, but a _____
_____ cheers it up.

Proverbs 25:11:

A _____ is like
apples of gold in a setting of silver.

Fitly spoken words are those which are strategically selected and gently delivered. They are “fit,” they fit the situation perfectly. When you can find those “fit” words, you can change an ugly environment or situation into something beautiful—like *apples of gold in settings of silver*.

Don’t underestimate the power of your own words, and carefully select kind, positive words as a response. For example, with a negative person, your positive words not only may have a good effect on him or her, but they will also insulate your mind against the negativity so that you do not succumb and become negative yourself.

Now, let’s consider five specific kinds of relationships which we are likely to encounter and how these biblical principles apply in each of these relationships.

Dealing with the Lazy Person

One of the more common types of difficulties we encounter is the person who is lazy and doesn’t pull his or her share of the workload. Have you ever worked with someone who fits this description? What kind of reactions did that relationship generate in you—at least at times?

- ☐ Resentment
- ☐ Anger
- ☐ A desire to get even
- ☐ Less motivation to do your own work
- ☐ A tendency to talk about that person in derogatory ways
- ☐ A decision to do nothing more than what was required of you—no more “Mr. Nice Guy!”
- ☐ Sarcastic remarks to the “lazy” coworker

It’s not difficult to understand how any of these reactions can happen when you face this type of co-worker relationship day in and day out. It’s very easy to become bitter and resentful. Resentfulness can start to show in sarcastic words, disgusted remarks, exasperated facial expressions, and body language. The wall between you and that co-worker builds quickly under these circumstances.

You've probably noticed that the Bible doesn't have a chapter on "dealing with difficult people," but the principles we've already studied can be directly applied to the lazy person.

Please realize that God's principles in these relationships may be far more than you would ever do on your own, and even more than your employer requires of you. God's principles are higher, and we are held to a more righteous standard. The good news is that he empowers us to do what he requires us to do, because of the Holy Spirit within us.

Check the situations below which would indicate it is time to apply the "speak-the-truth-in-love" principle with a lazy person:

- ☐ You are sick and tired of doing this lazy person's work and you realize you are going to explode if you don't say something soon.
- ☐ A lazy coworker is taking advantage of you and even taking credit for the work that you're doing, and that isn't fair to you.
- ☐ Management has a totally wrong impression of this lazy coworker, and it's time they knew the real story.
- ☐ You realize that until this coworker truly changes, he or she will continue to inflict harm on you and others, and that coworker will never become the good employee/worker that he or she could be.
- ☐ You realize that you are now enabling this person to continue to do wrong and keeping him or her from learning to do what is right.
- ☐ God has given you a "green light" in your spirit. After much prayer, you know it is time to take some action.

Before you can speak the truth in love, your motive has to be right. Some of these motives would not be right for us as believers in Christ. Therefore, until our motives are changed, we should hold our tongue.

Alternative Approaches for the Lazy Coworker

Here are some possible approaches you could take in dealing with a lazy coworker. Note the potential pros and cons of each approach.

1. Allow the problem to surface by simply doing your own work well but not doing the other person's work. Eventually the poor work habits will come to the attention of those in power and hopefully will be confronted from an upper level position.

Pros	Cons

2. If letting the work go undone would be harmful to some innocent people like customers, have a direct discussion or confrontation with the coworker to try to remedy the matter. If a confrontation doesn't work, eventually bring the matter to the attention of upper management.

Pros	Cons

3. Hang in there a while longer and go a few more extra miles, without griping, complaining, or gossiping.

Pros	Cons

4. Keep a record of the times when you have done the coworker's work, so that you have some proof of the problem when you decide the time is right to confront the situation.

Pros	Cons

5. Approach the coworker privately and try to solve the problem between the two of you. If that fails, go to one of the four approaches above.

Pros	Cons

Dealing with a Condescending, Arrogant Coworker

Let's make sure we are certain of our definitions, as we discuss this type of coworker.

What does condescending mean?

What does arrogant mean?

If you have ever worked with a condescending and/or arrogant coworker, which of these terms would apply to that person or persons?

- ☐ Talks down to people
- ☐ Unteachable
- ☐ Knows it all
- ☐ "Been there and done that" attitude
- ☐ Name dropper
- ☐ Treats others as though they are dumb or stupid
- ☐ Frequent body language and facial expressions that indicate aloofness, disgust, disapproval, etc.

When someone has a continual attitude of arrogance and condescension, it is a telltale sign that underneath that intimidating outward appearance lies a great deal of insecurity and pain, and it reveals a lack of confidence, a need for recognition, and a fear of rejection.

There are times when the "extra-mile" principle is the one God would have us practice, just bearing with that arrogant person, not being intimidated by their behavior, but trying to ignore it as much as possible. Then we may need to speak the truth in love to that condescending person, when God gives us the green light to do so. Certainly God could use this person in our lives to teach us to humble ourselves as well.

Dealing with a Domineering Coworker / Person

Have you ever worked with or known people who had delusions of greatness? They just seemed to assume that they had a right to manage other people, even though they had not earned the position of manager.

The "humble yourself" principle seems to come into play when a domineering person is around. Why is it particularly humbling to work or live with someone who is domineering and bossy?

Which of these responses to a domineering person would be a way for you to humble yourself?

- ☐ Refrain from any verbal response
- ☐ Be willing to do what they ask/demand, even though you are not required to do so
- ☐ Respond in a quiet, controlled manner
- ☐ Explain that you are not required to follow his/her instructions, but you are going to do so anyway

- ☐ Remind her/him of the chain of command in the organization and who you report to
- ☐ Smile when he/she barks orders at you, and then ignore
- ☐ Refuse to join in any “character assassination” of this person

There may be times when you will use the “speak-the-truth-in-love” principle with this type of coworker as well as the “love your enemy” principle. But before you take any other action, ask God if there is some way you can learn to humble yourself through your relationship with this domineering coworker.

Dealing with a Vindictive, Hostile Coworker / Person

We sometimes work with vindictive, malicious, even vicious types who are openly trying to cause us problems and do us harm.

Jesus came to bring true light to the world, and when we become believers, he says that we are the *light of the world* (Matthew 5:14). We become the bearers of his light into a very dark world. That is a great privilege, but it comes with its “downside.”

Read John 3:19-20:

This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but _____ loved _____ instead of _____ because their deeds were evil. Everyone who does evil _____ the _____, and will not come into the light for fear that their deeds will be _____.

Read John 15:18-19:

If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first. If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the _____

Jesus gives us a clear warning of relationship problems we will incur because we are believers in him and carry his light into our dark worlds. Why should it be different for us than it was for him?

Therefore, we should not be shocked to discover that on occasion our Christian “light” will generate a hostile response from a coworker. Remember what Jesus told us in the above passage from John 3—the reason for this unpleasant reaction is the fear of exposure. That person is aware of your glaring light, exposing his or her evil ways, so that person strikes out against you to try to “kill the light.”

What are some things this type of person might do in response to your “light”?

Have you really stopped to think about the impact of 1 Peter 2:19-21?

For it is commendable if someone bears up under the pain of _____
_____ because they are conscious of God. But how is it to your credit if you
receive a beating for doing wrong and endure it? But if you suffer _____
_____ and you endure it, this is commendable before God. To this
you were _____, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example,
that you should _____ in _____.

A few years ago I was memorizing this passage and the reality of this scripture began to dawn on me. Called to suffer unjustly? You've got to be kidding! I remember thinking, Lord, I just don't think I'll ever be really willing to do that. The only way we can learn to accept unjust suffering and treatment is to constantly remind ourselves that by doing so we have an opportunity to share in Jesus' suffering, which gives us the great privilege of learning to follow in his steps.

Think about it—when you are going through tough waters, you feel very close to someone who's been there before you, because that person really knows what you're feeling. When we have an opportunity to taste the kind of suffering Jesus drank fully for us, then we know him better. And that in turn brings his resurrection power into our lives.

Dealing with the Negative Person

Our worlds are full of negative thinking and talking people. It seems that they have nothing good or encouraging to say about anything or anyone. If you've ever had to work closely or have frequent contact with a very negative individual (and who hasn't!), you know just how tough it is to be around that person and not feel and express irritation.

What are some biblical responses to a very negative person?

When you are dealing with a very negative person, you will not find the “put on compassion” principle easy to do, because that person's behavior will not generate a naturally compassionate response on your part. In fact, it will likely generate hostility or disgust or anger. So, if you want to respond to a negative person in a biblical way, you will have to pray for the desire and the power to put on compassion toward that person.

Some kind words spoken to that negative person might be the key to getting him or her to get past that negativity and become more positive. However, consider another verse about words as given to us by the same wise Solomon in Proverbs 23:9:

Do not speak to _____ for they will _____ your _____.

There are people who are committed to being negative, and nothing is going to move them from that position. To try to change them is futile and indeed that person will treat you with scorn. So, there are times that you cannot have a positive effect on a negative person, regardless of how kind your words may be or how good your motives are.

Conclusion

As we examine our relationships with these difficult types of people, we must constantly be aware of the fact that the problem may not always be the other person's. Unfortunately Christians are not always the ones in the white hats who never cause these interpersonal conflicts. There are times that we Christians fall into some of these categories in our behavior toward others: lazy, arrogant, domineering, vindictive, negative. And sometimes we excuse ourselves by calling it persecution!

It would do us all good to take a close look at each of these and ask the Holy Spirit to reveal to us if we're guilty of any of these difficult characteristics in our relationships with our co-workers.

Notice 1 Peter 2:12:

Live such _____ among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us.

I think we frequently let ourselves off the hook by blaming our circumstances, our background, our tendency to be human! But the whole message of the Christian life is that we have been given power to be what we never could be otherwise. There should be a difference in how we live our lives, and we can never excuse ourselves for allowing any of these wrong attitudes to remain in our behavior toward our coworkers.

Suggested Assignment

Choose one person you know who fits one of these descriptions:

- Lazy
- Condescending, arrogant
- Domineering
- Vindictive, hostile
- Negative

The name of the person is _____ and he/she is a _____ coworker/friend.

My plan of action to deal with this person this week is:

Write out what you want to attempt to do. In applying God's principles and praying about this relationship and your plan of action each day, you will see some positive results.

Even if it means humbling yourself, swallowing your pride, going the extra mile, speaking the truth in love, or accepting unfair treatment, obeying God's principles will improve these relationships. I'm not promising you that the difficult person will change, but I will promise you that you will change and God will give you coping power you've never had before. Go for it!

Lesson 4 – Covenant and Contractual Relationships

Review

Did you see some improvement in a difficult relationship as a result of the principles we covered in Lesson 3?

Remember that there are rarely overnight turnarounds, but improving our relationships is usually one baby step at a time.

Which of these biblical principles, which were discussed in Lesson 3, did you actually try to implement?

- The “extra-mile” principle
- The “speak-the-truth-in-love” principle
- The “love your enemy” principle
- The “humble yourself” principle
- The “put on compassion” principle
- The “speak kind words” principle

I hope you can identify at least one of these which you intentionally put into place in dealing with a difficult relationship. I know that if you did, you saw some positive results. The more you practice these principles, the easier and more natural it is to do, and the more improvement you will see in your relationships on the job.

Introduction

All of us have a variety of relationships in our lives, with differing demands on our time and commitment. How do we properly determine “who’s on first and who’s on second”? If we are confused about where our loyalties lie, we can make disastrous decisions about our relationships. If we don’t understand what God requires of us when it comes to relationship commitments, we can easily be fooled by what our culture tells us and base our relationship decisions on lies rather than God’s truth.

In this lesson we are going to address the “high priority” relationships of our lives—covenant relationships. This is a coined term not a biblical term, but I like the terminology covenant relationships because it helps us to recognize our high priority relationships and understand our obligation to them.

What Is a Covenant Relationship?

A covenant is an understood agreement between two or more people to do or not to do something specified in the covenant. Covenants are serious matters with God, and therefore should be taken very seriously by us.

Rarely, if ever, do we have formal documents defining the responsibilities of our relationships. Pre-nuptial agreements have become common these days, but they are for the protection of the individuals and their property, not to establish relationship responsibilities and commitments. So, that kind of legal document would not qualify as a covenant.

However, based on what we know about God's priorities in relationships, there are certain people in our lives with whom we have a covenant understanding. These relationships are usually the closest and most important people in our lives. We have an understood covenant of promises and commitments to that relationship.

Which of these descriptions best describes a covenant relationship?

- ☐ A covenant relationship is one where there is a legal contract of some sort.
- ☐ A covenant relationship is one where there is a blood relationship.
- ☐ A covenant relationship is a lifelong relationship.

Obviously, a covenant relationship could be any or all of the above, but it is not necessarily limited to these descriptions. I think the best definition of a covenant relationship, one that encompasses the full range of relationships, is:

A covenant relationship is one where no one else can adequately or properly fulfill your role in that relationship. Your contribution is unique and vital.

For example, no one can be your children's mother (or father) except you. I only have two parents; no one can fully take their place in my life. I can't say to my two brothers, "I'm tired of being a sister; find someone else to take my place." No one else can be my brothers' sister. That's my unique covenant relationship. No one can take my place as the mother of my daughter. That is a one-of-a-kind covenant relationship.

I realize that there are many situations where surrogates step in to take the place of a missing covenant relationship, such as foster parents, adoptive parents, etc. God often provides friends to help us when a covenant relationship is broken or missing. You've heard people say, "She's been like a mother to me," or "He's like a son to me." In our broken world, it's wonderful that we can find "fill-ins" as substitutes. And those roles can take on the characteristics of a covenant relationship.

Which relationships in your life would fit the description of covenant relationships?
(Remember, the criteria is that no one could take your place in that relationship.)

This may be more difficult to do, but make an attempt to rank these covenant relationships as to the priority that each has in your life. Some will undoubtedly share top billing, but consider this ranking not as who you love the most, but to whom you have the greatest responsibility and commitment because of the unique covenant between you and that person.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____
8. _____

For the relationship(s) that you have determined to be the highest ranking of your covenant relationships, the one(s) to whom you have the strongest commitment and the most responsibility, write out in words your covenant with that person or persons. Consider that you've been asked to put in writing exactly what your covenant agreement is. How would you describe the covenant relationship you have with the number one person on the above list?

I have a covenant relationship with _____ and have promised that I will:

This exercise is probably one of the best things you can do to help you understand your responsibilities to your covenant relationships, and therefore to help determine the priorities of your life.

Covenant Versus Contractual Relationships

You've listed your covenant relationships above. Think about the relationships that are not on that list. We have many other relationships in our lives, many of which fall under the category of "contractual relationships." While it rarely involves a written contract, a contractual relationship has an understanding or agreement of performance. We may owe a lot to our

contractual relationships, but they should never have as high a priority in our lives as our covenant relationships do. If you get the priorities reversed, it can cause a great deal of harm and stress.

The definition of a contractual relationship is the opposite of a covenant relationship.

The contractual relationships of your life are those which, though sometimes important, can indeed be filled by someone else.

Name some of the contractual relationships in your life:

Your job is an important part of your life, but guess what: if you walk out tomorrow, somehow they'll survive without you. Your church is a vital part of your life, but when it's time for you to move on to another church or another job in the church, someone else will come along to fill that role.

What Is Caesar's and What Is God's?

The Pharisees were always trying to trap Jesus. One of the most interesting stories is when they tried to catch Jesus off guard and get him to indict himself concerning his relationship priorities.

Read Matthew 22:15-22.

The Pharisees figured if they could get Jesus to say that Caesar was of no importance and they owed him no allegiance, then they'd have him in trouble with the law and could get him arrested.

But Jesus was too smart for their scheming, and in answering them he gives all of us a very important biblical principle about contractual relationships and our responsibility to them. Our allegiance to Jesus

Christ and to our covenant relationships does not relieve us of our duties to others, even to people who may not be godly.

Our Responsibility to Our Employer

Our relationships with our employer and co-workers is a contractual relationship. Therefore it does not carry the same weight and priority as our covenant relationships. Nonetheless, we are to *render to Caesar* what belongs to him.

If we think of our employers as the Caesars in our lives, then we can apply this principle and it can give us some very good guidance on our behavior and responsibilities as employees.

Let's think about the things a Christian employee owes to their employer, the things that are rightfully his or hers, whether that employer is a Christian or not.

1. We Owe Hard Work

A Christian employee should always give his or her employer an honest day's work for the money received. If you have agreed to do a certain job for a certain paycheck, then you owe that work to your employer.

Read Ecclesiastes 9:10:

Whatever your _____ finds to do, do it with _____
_____, for in the realm of the dead, where are you going,
there is neither working nor planning nor knowledge nor wisdom.

Read Ecclesiastes 10:18:

Through _____, the rafters sag; because of _____
_____, the house leaks.

Read Matthew 25:26:

His master replied, "You _____, _____ servant! So you
knew that I harvest where I have not sown and gather where I have not scattered seed?"

Read 2 Thessalonians 3:10:

For even when we were with you, we gave you this rule: "The one who is
_____ shall not eat."

In our contractual relationships with our employers, Christians should always give a full day's work and never take advantage of their employer by cheating them out of time and work that is due to them. Our work habits should be noticeably different from those who try to take advantage of the employer, and our attitude should be one of being desirous to give the employer what is their rightful due—hard work for our pay.

2. We Owe Protection of Employer's Assets

What belongs to that employer is yours to use for business purposes, not for your own personal benefit.

What are some of the employer assets that are commonly taken or used by employees without permission?

When a person takes something that is not rightfully his or hers without permission, using it for personal purposes, what do we call that action?

Read Exodus 20:15:

You shall not _____.

Yes, it's one of the ten commandments, not suggestions, and stealing is stealing, regardless of how acceptable it has become in certain arenas and situations.

Ask yourself if you have "stolen" anything from your employer in the past few months.

3. We Owe Loyalty

A third thing that we owe our employer is loyalty. As long as we're willing to take our paycheck from our employer, we owe them respect and loyalty. If you are loyal to someone, here are some things you would NOT do:

- Talk about that person in a negative way behind his/her back.
- Listen to others talk about that person in a negative way.
- Laugh at jokes made at his/her expense.
- Complain and gripe about that person.
- Treat that person with any disrespect.

Now, ask yourself if you've ever been guilty of any of these things in your relationship with your employer, past or present. I have to confess that I certainly have. It's a very common practice to have gripe sessions about the boss or the company. It's almost expected of you by your coworkers in some situations.

But a Christian should not be found stabbing the employer in the back or running them down to others. This should be a point of distinction for a Christian employee. It should be quite noticeable that you do not enter into the office gossip and character assassination of anyone, especially your boss and employer. If you find you cannot give this respect and loyalty to your employer, then you should move on. It's wrong to work for someone and at the same time disparage, constantly gripe, and complain about them.

Now, let's think about what we do not owe to our employer, for the other half of this principle is to give to God what is God's. Sometimes we can give to Caesar what belongs to God, and we need to be well aware of this.

In what ways could a Christian employee give his or her employer what really belongs to God?

Here's what we do not owe the Caesars of our lives:

1. We Do Not Owe Dishonesty

Has there been a time in your career when your employer asked something dishonest of you? If yes, how did you respond to that request or demand?

When obeying an employer causes us to disobey a Christian principle, then our course of action is clear. We obey God rather than man. That may cost us a job; it may cost us promotions or favor with the bosses. There is a price for true discipleship. But there should be no question as to what is right for us to do.

2. We Do Not Owe Dishonorable Activity

Socializing after work or with customers is the American way, but frequently it is not the godly way. What type of jobs are more likely to create environments that could encourage "dishonorable activity"?

Does that mean that a Christian should never take a job which has a reputation for dishonorable socialization? Why or why not?

Have you known someone—perhaps yourself—who was in this type of a job but was able to maintain a consistent Christian testimony and not take part in the dishonorable activities? If so, how did he/she do it?

No employer has a right to require you to be a part of compromising situations in order to keep your job. That is not their rightful due.

3. We Do Not Owe All of Our Energy and Time

If we must constantly give our employer twelve hours a day plus weekends, we're probably giving to Caesar what belongs to God. While it's true we owe them an honest day's work, if we give far more than that in order to get ahead, so that there's no time left for our families, our friends, our church or ourselves, then we're getting into dangerous spiritual territory.

If you've ever had a job where these kind of long hours were more or less “expected,” and other co-workers consistently put in many long hours and weekends, how did it make you feel if you worked your regular hours and left?

This one is tough to deal with because we feel guilty that we're not at the job night and day, or we worry about what others will think about us for not being there on weekends to work. Well, again, it may be a costly decision, for it's true that some employers expect every drop of your time and energy in order to keep your job or get promotions. But don't be fooled by this world's false standards of excellence. We owe God time and a balanced lifestyle. And if you put him first, he'll honor that commitment.

Dysfunctional Covenant Relationships

A new word in our vocabulary is dysfunctional. It is usually applied to various relationships where things are just not quite right. I'm sure that term has some legitimate use, but frankly I think we've about over-done it to the point that it has become a cliché. In fact it seems that some people feel its the in-thing to talk about their dysfunctional relationships and to use them as excuses of one sort or another.

What does the word dysfunctional mean?

Something that doesn't function the way it is supposed to function would be dysfunctional, right? It functions, but not exactly right.

The whole story of the Bible is about dysfunctional people and relationships. Name four people in the Bible who had dysfunctional relationships:

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

If you know much at all about the Bible, you could have named many more than four. From Adam and Eve, with murder in their family, to Abraham to Joseph to David to Jesus himself, whose siblings thought he was crazy, we are told of covenant relationships that functioned poorly or not at all! Why would the Holy Spirit inspire the writers of scripture to record these dysfunctional relationships in all their ugliness? Don't we usually try to cover these up and keep them hidden?

Why do you think the Bible so candidly relates these many dysfunctional relationships?

Consider these passages:

Psalms 51:5:

Surely I was _____ at birth, _____ from the time my mother conceived me.

Romans 3:23:

For _____ have _____ and fall _____ of the glory of God.

Psalms 14:3:

All have _____, all have together become _____; there is no one who _____, not even one.

How would you define sin?

Paul wrote to the Romans that all have sinned and we all fall short of the glory of God. Falling short of the glory of God is a succinct definition of sin. When we sin, we are "dysfunctional,"

for we are falling short of what God intended for us and not functioning in the way he desires. We don't live up to our potential; we don't behave the way we should; we don't relate to others appropriately. That's the story of mankind since sin entered the world in the Garden of Eden. Sin has warped and polluted all of us so that we are dysfunctional in many ways.

How many people have sinned?

Therefore, how many of us are dysfunctional?

I'm convinced if you looked long enough, you could describe any relationship as dysfunctional. For example, take one of your covenant relationships listed previously. Identify some way in which it does not function the way you think it should, the way you think God intended.

My covenant relationship is dysfunctional because:

Some of you have probably identified some serious dysfunctional characteristics of your covenant relationships; other dysfunctional characteristics may be more trivial. But my guess is, you could probably come up with something that doesn't function quite right, because, as we all say, nobody is perfect!

Consider how these situations could make a covenant relationship “dysfunctional” in some way:

- Marriage partner is not a believer
- Children are not obedient to parents
- Adult children do not take proper care of aging parents
- Wife is not respectful of her husband, or vice versa
- Siblings rarely communicate or fellowship
- Parents do not teach their children morals or integrity
- Mate or children refuse to do their share of the family workload
- Husband does not take spiritual leadership in the family

I simply want to remind you that because of sin, we are all dysfunctional. The good news of the gospel is that Jesus has come to help set us right. When we accept the salvation he offers us, confessing our sins and acknowledging that he alone is a qualified Savior, we then become new creations in Christ.

2 Corinthians 5:17:

Therefore, if anyone is _____, the _____
_____ has come; the old has gone, the new is here!

Now, because of Jesus, we have the power to become functional where we were dysfunctional before. We have the privilege to be transformed into the likeness of Jesus Christ, and that's the journey we are on. It is a process.

2 Corinthians 3:18:

And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord's glory, are _____
_____ into his (Jesus') image with _____ — _____ glory,
which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.

It is important to note that we “are being transformed;” that's what the Christian life is all about—a day- by-day transformation from our dysfunctional state of sin to be more and more like Jesus. This transformation can only take place once we have become born again, because then we receive the Spirit of God indwelling our bodies. And it is God's Spirit that empowers us to be able to get beyond our dysfunctional, sinful habits and become more like Jesus.

I want to encourage you not to be fixated on the dysfunctional part of your covenant relationships, but to remember that all relationships have their dysfunctional elements. Maybe you're thinking of someone else's marriage that seems ideal to you. Believe me, if you knew that couple better, you'd discover something that doesn't function exactly right.

Or perhaps you think someone else's children do everything right and are the epitome of what children should be. Get to know them better and you'll find the blemishes, the areas of dysfunction. That's because we're all sinners.

I asked you to list the dysfunctional characteristics of one of your covenant relationships. Now, with that same relationship, list the wonderful, good, functional characteristics of it.

My covenant relationship is functional in the following ways:

Philippians 4:8 reminds us to focus our minds on the good things, to think about the good reports not the bad reports. I want to encourage you not to forget the "functional" aspects of your covenant relationships and not exaggerate the "dysfunctional" parts.

Dealing with Dysfunctional Covenant Relationships

I recognize that there are many people struggling on a daily basis with covenant relationships which are truly out of whack. There may be serious defects in some of your relationships, and I'm not suggesting that you ignore these things or live in denial.

How do we deal with a covenant relationship which is significantly dysfunctional? It's more than "My husband won't take out the trash," or "My daughter won't clean her room." Obviously, there are no pat answers to this question, and each situation has its unique struggles. But the Bible gives us principles to apply in these situations.

In your own dysfunctional relationships or your observance of others, which of these reactions and effects have you witnessed?

- ☐ Those involved became bitter and angry, and the relationship deteriorated more and more.
- ☐ Those involved lived in a continual "pity party."
- ☐ One person became obsessed with trying to change the other person.
- ☐ The relationship was abandoned and the covenant was broken.
- ☐ One person emotionally disconnected with the relationship.
- ☐ Substitute relationships or activities were used to replace the dysfunctional relationship.
- ☐ The dysfunctional relationship became an excuse for all other areas of failure.
- ☐ One person becomes an "enabler" to the other, allowing that person to continue in a dysfunctional manner.
- ☐ _____

For the most part, none of these reactions or ways of dealing with a dysfunctional relationship solves anything, but instead it makes matters worse. All too often, in dealing with these painful broken relationships, we inflict greater suffering and pain on ourselves by the way we respond. Therefore, we need to know what is the proper, biblical way to handle a dysfunctional covenant relationship.

Since covenants are not intended to be broken, that should be our last and final course of action with a covenant relationship. Our objective should be to sustain and maintain our covenant relationships, if at all possible, even at our own personal sacrifice.

Under which of these circumstances would it be proper to break a marriage covenant and get out of that relationship?

- ☐ When one mate is abusing another in some obviously evil and wrong way
- ☐ When one mate is unfaithful to the other and has broken the marriage vow of fidelity
- ☐ When one mate just doesn't love the other one any longer
- ☐ When one mate is a believer and the other is not
- ☐ When two people simply no longer have anything in common and are no longer compatible
- ☐ When one mate is spiritually mature and the other is not
- ☐ When communication breaks down between the two partners
- ☐ When one mate finds someone else more suitable
- ☐ _____

If you polled the average person on the street today, most would indicate that any of these circumstances would be grounds for splitting up and going your own way. The marriage covenant is not taken very seriously by most. In fact, it's not uncommon for people to enter into marriage with the idea that if it doesn't work out, they can always get a divorce.

However, since marriage is definitely a covenant relationship, only the most serious and irreparable circumstances are reason enough for divorce or separation. Certainly abuse and unfaithfulness would fall into that category, but the others do not. Your commitment to your marriage covenant should supersede your feelings, whether you love your mate any longer or not, whether you like your mate any longer or not, whether your mate is pleasant or not.

This is why it is so important for us to teach our young people the seriousness of selecting a marriage partner. Our homes and churches need to do a much better job in setting strong guidelines for young people to govern their dating habits and their relationships with the opposite sex. Once we've entered into a covenant marriage relationship, God views those vows as sacred, even if we chose poorly.

Read Ecclesiastes 5:5-6a:

It is better not to _____ than to make
_____ and _____. Do not let
your _____ lead you into sin. And do not protest to the temple messenger,
“My _____ was a _____.”

Vows are made with our mouths. Solomon warns us not to let our mouths lead us into sin. When we make a vow, we are entering into a covenant, especially marriage vows. Believe me, it is far better not to make that marriage vow, to remain single all your life, than to make a vow that you cannot or do not keep.

To paraphrase what Solomon is teaching: Don't tell me that your vow was a mistake, therefore you are no longer bound by that vow. No, that's not the way vows work. Once a vow is made, it is considered a covenant. Therefore be sure before you make the vow, that it's the right vow with the right person. Then, even if you make a mistake in that vow, don't use that as an excuse for getting out of your commitment to that covenant relationship.

Refuse To Be Bitter

Undoubtedly some of you feel rather “stuck” in a dysfunctional covenant relationship right now. You can't or know you shouldn't get out of it, but you feel you are suffering unjustly, and you find yourself full of anger and bitterness at your lot in life.

Read Hebrews 12:15:

See to it that no one falls short of the _____ of God and that _____
_____ grows up to cause trouble and defile many.

See *to it*, we are told; don't let that bitterness grow. Stop it quickly and completely. Pull it out by the roots.

If you've ever done any gardening, you know it's much easier to pull up a weed by its roots if you get it young and early, before those roots dig down too deep. The same is true with bitterness in your heart. Look down deep and ask yourself if there's any root of bitterness there because of your dysfunctional covenant relationship (or anything else, for that matter). Maybe it's a tiny one; maybe it's a new one. If you'll decide right now to pull it out by the roots, you will avoid all the suffering that is inevitable when you become bitter.

Think of someone who is a very bitter person. Which of these are characteristic of that person?

- ☐ He/she exaggerates the wrong done and the problem is blown way out of proportion.
- ☐ This person's physical appearance changed; he/she looked older and less attractive.
- ☐ This person's health deteriorated.

- ☐ Relationships with other innocent people were damaged because of his/her bitterness.
- ☐ He/she tends to take the anger out on others.
- ☐ This person is poorly motivated, accomplishes little, and is exhausted all the time.
- ☐ _____

Now, just think about all the harm that a person can and will suffer if they insist on harboring bitterness. But the amazing thing to realize is that bitterness is self-inflicted suffering. That means that anytime you decide to, you can stop suffering from bitterness. Today, right this minute, if you want to, you can pull up the roots of bitterness in your heart and get rid of them forever.

Nobody can force you to be bitter if you don't want to be. I don't care how justified you may be in feeling bitter, all it does is destroy you.

Why do we hang on to bitterness? Could it be because we don't want to let the other person off the hook that easily? We don't want to forgive? That's what's hard about forgiveness, isn't it? It seems like we let the other person off and they don't deserve it! Well, remember this passage from Romans 12:17-19:

Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody. If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord.

While that person in your dysfunctional covenant relationship may be off of your hook, he or she is not off of God's hook.

Maintaining a Strong Covenant Relationship

Thankfully, we have many covenant relationships which are good ones. The danger here is that we start to neglect them and take them for granted, not really appreciating those people like we should. That's easy to do.

Think of the precious covenant relationships in your life right now. It could be your mate, child, parent, sibling, or some other extended family or friend that has been very close to you. What could you do today to let one of those covenant people know how you feel about them? Here are some suggestions:

- Tell them how glad you are God put them in your life. For example, out of the clear blue tell your child how glad you are God gave him or her to you. Especially when they're smaller, they love to hear about the day they were born and how excited you were to have them in the family.

- Reaffirm your commitment to them. It might be a shock to your mate, but wouldn't it be very nice for them to hear from you that the vows you took are just as important to you today as the first day you spoke them. Reaffirm your commitment to your marriage. That's a good thing for an anniversary celebration.
- Write a note expressing your appreciation for that covenant relationship. Whether they live close by or not, putting it in writing really means a lot to people. Have you ever thanked your parents in writing for all they've done for you? I guarantee you, they will treasure that letter.
- Do something special for a covenant relationship—unexpected for no reason at all, and just tell them again, “It's just because I love you.”

Covenant relationships should have the highest priority in our lives. Ask God to help you appreciate more the covenant people in your life.

Conclusion

As you go out to face your relationships in the upcoming days, keep these “covenant” and “contractual” categories in mind. When you have decisions to make, ask yourself how it will affect your covenant relationships. Learn to screen your decisions through the priority of covenant above contractual relationships. I think you will find this a helpful tool in keeping an eternal perspective and not allowing the pressures of the moment to cause you to make poor decisions that will affect your covenant relationships negatively.

Also, be aware of the “Caesars” in your life and remember Jesus’ principle concerning these contractual relationships. I have found it to be a wonderful guideline in helping me make decisions and get rid of false guilt because I couldn’t be all things to all people!

Suggested Assignment

I would encourage you to get a little notebook or journal of some description and write in it your covenants with the people in your life who have the highest priority, the people that have a special place in your life, where no one can take their place. I believe putting in writing what our commitments and responsibilities are to our covenant relationships will greatly strengthen those relationships and keep us focused on what is truly important.

You can use the same simple format we gave in the first part of this lesson:

I have covenanted with _____ that I will:

It may take a while to write them all out, but it will be a very worthwhile exercise. You might even want to share those covenants with the other person. What a great encouragement it may be to them to realize what a place of importance they have in your life and heart.

Lesson 5 – Constructive Confrontation

Review

As you focused on your covenant relationships, I trust you were able to reinforce those very important people in your life. Preventive medicine is always the best, so becoming pro-active in maintaining strong covenant relationships should be a very high priority for all of us.

What maintenance activity did you practice this past week in one of your covenant relationships?

Did you have an opportunity to assess your “Caesar” relationships? Was there any area in your life where you felt you were rendering to Caesar what truly belonged to God, or vice versa?

I hope that these covenant and contractual relationship definitions have given you an easy handle to help evaluate your relationship priorities on a regular basis.

Introduction

I think if we took a survey of the things we don't like to do, confrontation would come out somewhere near the top. Whether on the job or in our personal lives, most of us struggle with how and when to confront someone. It is not a pleasant experience, and therefore we often avoid it or postpone it. Yet, confrontation can be one of the most constructive things we can do to improve our relationships when it is done at the right time, for the right reason, in the right way.

In this study we are going to demonstrate the consequences of failure to confront when you need to, the potential benefits of constructive confrontation, and most importantly, the guidelines you need to follow when it is right for you to confront. This is one of the most important lessons to learn in developing your ability to improve your relationships.

The Consequences of Avoiding Confrontation

Consider this scenario:

You and I work together as peers, but I have been on the job longer than you. Your work habits have become a constant source of frustration to me because you don't do your work carefully and your many errors end up on my desk and cause me considerable extra work.

As a result, this has boiled up inside of me until I feel very "put upon," and I share my frustration with another coworker who is a good friend of mine. In other words, I go into gossip mode and tell this other coworker what I don't like about you, etc. Since this other person is a friend of mine, she is influenced by what I've told her about you.

Shortly thereafter, my good friend is having a conversation with another coworker in another part of the company, your name surfaces innocently, and my friend passes on to this other person the negative report about you which she heard from me. Before long this gossip has spread through the company, and your reputation is somewhat damaged.

You notice a change in the way some co-workers interact with you and you sense something has happened, but you have no idea what it is. You just know that it's not much fun to work here any longer because of the poor working relationships that have developed.

Who is responsible for your relationship problems with your coworkers?

Consider other consequences of this scenario:

- Company morale suffers.
- You develop ulcers!
- Your attitude takes a turn downward.
- Productivity is down; wasted time is up.
- Inaccurate work continues, affecting customers adversely.
- The boss is not happy.
- I continue to be frustrated over your poor work habits, and that affects my attitude even more.

Now, here's the next important consideration. Which of these actions on my part could have averted all of these negative consequences?

- ☐ If I had gone to the boss and complained about you, that would have solved the problem.
- ☐ If I had kept my mouth closed and said and done nothing, that would have solved the problem.
- ☐ If I had chosen to confront you in a constructive way, without talking to anyone else, there is a possibility we could have resolved this matter between us. It would never have caused these other negative consequences.

Complaining to the boss without first trying to resolve this issue with you would have made me look like a snitch and once you found out, our relationship would have had little hope of ever improving.

Keeping my mouth closed and doing nothing is sure to lead to bitterness and anger on my part that will eventually come out in an uncontrolled and destructive way.

So, the only logical and right thing to do is to confront you and attempt to find a way to resolve this issue privately between us.

When you and I avoid confrontation where it is needed, we do not spare nor help our relationships, but usually we damage them further. So, failure to confront when needed is a very destructive and harmful course of action.

Our Reluctance to Confront

How would you describe yourself when it comes to confrontation?

- ☐ I rarely confront anyone about anything because it is very uncomfortable and I try to avoid anything unpleasant.
- ☐ I fear the reaction from the person I need to confront and I don't want to hurt his or her feelings, so I'm very reluctant to confront.
- ☐ I feel so guilty about myself for so many reasons that I feel as though I don't have a right to confront anybody about anything.

- ☐ I only confront when I'm really angry, and then it comes out all wrong and causes greater problems.
- ☐ I confront all the time, but I don't stop to think about how I do it, so it often backfires on me.

You will recognize that any of these descriptions would not qualify as constructive confrontation, so if you find yourself in one or more of these categories, it means that you need to improve your ability to confront.

Is there a person in your life at present that you know you need to confront about some situation or issue, but you have not yet done so? If yes, what is keeping you from confronting her/him?

- ☐ I'm afraid of her/his reaction.
- ☐ I don't know how to do it.
- ☐ I confronted her/him once before and it made things worse.
- ☐ I've confronted her/him many times and it doesn't do any good.
- ☐ I don't want to hurt her/his feelings.
- ☐ I don't know if it is my place to confront this person or not.
- ☐ I've never been good at confrontation and I'm fearful that I will make a fool out of myself.
- ☐ I'm waiting for the right time to do it (like maybe in 100 years!).

Analyze your answer and ask yourself if the root cause of your failure to confront is not indeed some kind of fear: fear of rejection, fear of disapproval, fear of failure, fear of unpleasantness, etc.

If fear is keeping you from confronting in a situation where you need to confront, then you are allowing that relationship to deteriorate instead of taking constructive steps to improve it. Even though the other person may be at fault in their behavior or attitude or whatever, your refusal to confront is also a strong contributing factor in this troubled relationship.

That means that you need to take responsibility for that relationship, gird up your courage with prayer and planning, and confront so that there will be hope for that relationship to improve.

Constructive or Destructive?

Please note that this lesson is entitled “Constructive Confrontation,” which obviously infers that not all confrontation is constructive. And it is true that much confrontation ends up making matters worse because it was not done for the right motivation and in the right way.

Think of what is behind much confrontation that you observe. Here are some common motivators for many confrontations:

- Anger
- Frustration
- Selfishness
- Watching out for “number one”
- Lack of patience

Which of the following confrontations would qualify as destructive or constructive and why?

1. Your boss calls the department together for a meeting, and after some initial announcements and discussion, he/she announces that the quality of work has been extremely poor in a certain area, and he/she proceeds to ventilate a great deal of anger toward certain people, with warnings and threats of what will happen if the quality of their work does not improve.

Constructive? or Destructive?

Why?

2. Your mother calls you in tears, very upset because she has just learned that you're not going to be home for Thanksgiving. She accuses you of not caring about her and always going to your husband's home instead of hers.

Constructive? or Destructive?

Why?

3. Your grown daughter is still living at home, but she doesn't do any work around the house. Since she pays a minimal amount of rent, she feels she is not obligated to do anything else. As a result her room, as well as the bathroom, is always a disaster area. You have decided to put in writing what will be required of her as a "tenant" in your home. You have a quiet conversation with her as you give her those written requirements, while you let her know that if she chooses to live somewhere else, you will understand and that will be okay with you. You set a time limit for her to make a decision about whether she will abide by the house rules or find another place to live.

Constructive? or Destructive?

Why?

4. Your husband has a bad habit of saying negative things about you in front of other people, in a joking way, but it often hurts your feelings. He did it again last night when you were out with friends, and you didn't speak to him after you got home. This morning, however, he keeps asking you what's wrong, and finally you blurt out that you're tired of him running you down in front of other people, and you end up in tears.

Constructive? or Destructive?

Why?

5. Your friend at church calls at the last minute to tell you something's come up and she can't help you with the church dinner tonight. You tell her how thoughtless that is of her, how much work this puts on you, and how her action is going to adversely affect the whole church dinner tonight.

Constructive? or Destructive?

Why?

6. Your parents are aging and need a great deal of assistance in taking care of their home and their affairs. You have two siblings, but they seem to be happy to leave all the responsibility for your parents in your hands. You have dropped some hints at times to try to solicit their involvement, but they haven't seemed to notice. So, you arrange for both of them to come to your home, and after dinner you broach the topic. Ahead of time you prepare a list of the things that have to be done for your parents, with any necessary details. You inform your siblings that these responsibilities will have to be shared between the three of you, and you ask them to choose the ones they will volunteer to do.

Constructive? or Destructive?

Why?

What qualifies a confrontation as constructive? Here are some benchmarks:

If the confrontation were successfully completed, would the person you are confronting benefit from it?

If so, then it would be a constructive confrontation. That doesn't mean that the confrontation would not be sensitive or cause some temporary pain. It doesn't mean that the person confronted would necessarily have a good first reaction to it. But, thinking beyond the immediate reaction, if that person was able to understand the need for the confrontation and that would cause some positive change, then it would be a benefit to him or her.

Does this situation/person really require confrontation, or do you need an attitude change or more patience?

Sometimes we think the other person needs to be confronted in cases where we just need to be more patient and understanding. So, if you're confusing a need for confrontation with a need for patience, then it's likely that a confrontation is not called for. You know, people need time to grow and change, and some things just can't be rushed—they take time.

Is your desire to confront imbedded in a desire to get even, or is it wrapped up in anger and vengeance?

Here is where our motives have to be carefully analyzed. Consider James 4:

What causes _____ and _____ among you? Don't they come from _____ that battle within you? You desire but do not have, so you kill. You covet but you cannot get what you want, so you quarrel and fight.

Any time our confrontation is tainted with wrong motives, it cannot be considered constructive, even if it is a needed confrontation. That coworker may indeed need to be confronted, but if you do it simply because you're sick and tired of what that person is doing to you, then your motivation is totally selfish and suspect.

We can't embark on a course toward confrontation until our motives are right. Jesus never confronted anyone for selfish reasons but always for the greater benefit. If we confront for the wrong reasons, even if a confrontation would be helpful, our motives will spoil the whole thing and it won't produce a good result.

Read Ephesians 4:11-16.

The Apostle Paul is teaching the Christians at Ephesus how their relationships as believers in a local church setting need to be built up so that there will be unity and maturity among the believers.

Notice verse 15:

Instead, _____ the _____, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ.

Some very important principles regarding relationships can be gleaned from this passage:

1. Relationships need to be nurtured and built up.
2. Relationships and maturity are closely connected.
3. Being open in our relationships is very important.
4. Confronting in love is a necessary part of maturing as a Christian.

This really gets to the heart of our motivation in confrontation. It has to be rooted in love for the other person. That love doesn't mean gushy feelings or even good feelings toward the person, but a God-type love which cares about the good of the other person. It is the Christ-love that is poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, the kind of love for others that you really can't know without the power of God's Spirit operating in your heart.

Tips for Confronting

Once you've come to the conclusion that you truly need to confront a person about some situation, then you need to consider several important elements of a confrontation. Remember that confronting is by nature sensitive and delicate, and therefore needs to be thoughtfully approached. A reckless, speedy, unplanned confrontation can lead to disaster.

Read Proverbs 14:15:

The simple believe anything, but the _____ give _____ to their steps.

Proverbs 14:29:

Whoever is patient has great understanding, but one who is _____ displays folly.

How would you describe a *prudent* person?

A prudent person would be the opposite of a quick-tempered person. The admonition of these passages is that we should approach any type of a confrontation with careful thought—prudent not rash, careful, not in the heat of emotion.

So, patience and prudence are very important as we think about confronting someone.

Choose the Right Time

The timing of your confrontation is a critical point to consider.

Check the following times that would be good times for a confrontation:

- ☐ You are upset and at the point of tears.
- ☐ You spent a sleepless night worrying about it.
- ☐ The “confrontee” is extremely busy this week.
- ☐ The “confrontee” just lost his/her job.
- ☐ You are angry.
- ☐ The “confrontee” has had a recent health problem.

Hopefully, it is obvious that none of these would be good times for confrontation. Since confrontation is a delicate issue at best, as much as possible, choose a time that will help and not hinder the possibility of success.

However, it should also be noted that some confrontations can't wait. For example, the following situations would probably require an immediate confrontation:

- A situation where there would be no further opportunity for confrontation; it is now or never.
- A situation of such volatility and potential harm that to wait could endanger the reputation or welfare of others.
- A situation where the name of Jesus Christ would be dishonored by waiting.
- A situation where your ethics or morality could be misunderstood or defamed by waiting.

Choose the Right Place

Not only is the right time important, but the right place is as well. Which of these locations would seem conducive to a constructive confrontation?

- ☐ The cafeteria at work
- ☐ Your cubicle in the office
- ☐ A conference room
- ☐ A restaurant
- ☐ In a meeting
- ☐ A private office

- ☐ Over the phone
- ☐ The lobby at work or church
- ☐ In a home setting

Here are the basic things to consider in choosing the right place:

Choose a private place where you can have a one-on-one discussion without being overheard by others. In a work situation, you may want to consider the implication of calling someone into your office and shutting your door for a confrontation. That could be a signal to others that a confrontation is occurring, so even though it is in a private place, it may still need to be more discreet.

On the job, consider an off-site location. That is a good idea, especially in what you would consider high profile situations.

Consider confronting over a meal. It seems to break down some barriers when we share a meal with someone.

Choose the Right Media

Today our major ways of communicating are electronic—email, texting, video calls, etc. If possible, confrontations need to be in person. It is by far better and will be more successful than any other way. However, there may be situations where distance or other situations—like a pandemic—can prevent a person-to-person conversation.

Then your second choice should be an electronic two-way conversation where you can see each other and both can easily take part in the conversation. That would include video and audio calls—and there may be others. But confronting electronically should be the exception to the rule.

Avoid Finger-Pointing

Which of the following phrases would be considered “finger-pointing” phrases?

- ☐ “You never are on time...”
- ☐ “You’ve made the same mistake three times...”
- ☐ “You don’t know how to do this...”
- ☐ “You have difficulty getting along with your sister...”
- ☐ “Your attitude is causing problems...”
- ☐ “You never listen to me...”
- ☐ “You have had your way for too long...”

Those are all finger-pointing phrases, and notice that they all begin with “you.” Now think how you react to finger-pointing when it comes your way. Typical reactions are:

- Defensiveness
- Hurt feelings
- Retreat
- Argument
- Anger

Often finger-pointing generates a combination of those reactions. Therefore, it's a fairly safe assumption that finger-pointing phrases do not improve relationships, but generally do quite the opposite.

Remember, we are aiming at constructive confrontation, an outcome that will be beneficial to everyone, a win-win solution. So we need to choose words carefully, words that don't create a defensive reaction, if possible.

Think of some words/phrases that don't tend to have that “finger-pointing” flavor. An example is:

“Perhaps there has been a misunderstanding...”

What are some others?

Plan Your Words

Proverbs 21:23 reminds us that:

Those who guard their _____ and their _____
keep themselves from calamity.

Guarding your words carefully is always important, but never more so than when you are confronting someone. How you say what you have to say will make a big difference in whether the confrontation is a success or a failure.

Proverbs 16:21 is very helpful in this matter of confrontation:

The wise in heart are called discerning, and _____
promote instruction.

The purpose of a constructive confrontation is instructive—right? We want to positively instruct someone else so that they are motivated to change. Well, pleasant words promote instruction, or as another translation puts it, “Sweetness of speech increases persuasiveness.”

That doesn’t mean that we have to be gushy and certainly not phony as we approach this confrontation. It just means we are wise enough to choose words that can be swallowed as easily as possible.

Now, let’s look at some of the common situations that call for confrontations.

Confronting Careless Mistakes

Let’s say you need to confront someone on your job about mistakes she is making. These are careless mistakes, from lack of attention to details. They are affecting your ability to do your job, as well as the

quality of the work effort of your company or division. Although you are not this person’s manager, but rather a co-worker, this qualifies as a situation that needs some constructive confrontation. In most cases, it is best to try to confront this individual directly before taking it to a higher level.

So, you decide to gird up your courage and talk with this co-worker. You choose a day when the workload is manageable, and you invite this co-worker to have lunch with you. In a secluded setting, where your conversation can be kept private, you need to open this topic in such a way that it doesn’t sound like finger pointing, yet you have to get to the point and be specific in order to accomplish anything positive.

Think which of these two approaches would work best:

#1 “As you know, I’ve been working here for almost 12 years, and since you’re somewhat new on the job, I thought it would be good to give you a few pointers because you are making some mistakes that are causing a lot of problems. Let me point out to you what you are doing wrong....”

#2 “I remember when I first started working here, everything was so new and confusing. I’m sure I made tons of mistakes, but there was a woman who really helped me, and so I thought maybe I could do the same for you. There are some areas where a few changes on your part could make things easier for you and help us get the work processed better with fewer customer complaints. For example....”

Which one of these approaches has a “finger-pointing” feel to it? #1 or #2?

What is it about the non finger-pointing approach that sets a better tone? What specific words and phrases make for a better confrontation?

Confronting Poor Work Habits

Another common area where confrontation is called for is when a person has some poor work habits. List some poor work habits which you think need be confronted.

Who should confront poor work habits?

- ☐ Managers or supervisors only
- ☐ Employees with seniority
- ☐ Anyone who is negatively impacted by the poor work habits
- ☐ A close friend

Any good manager needs to be prepared to confront poor work habits. Many managers avoid confrontation to the detriment of the company and/or department. If you are not yet a manager, consider whether you want a job that requires confrontation on your part, because if you don't, management is not for you.

But there are others within a company who may, under certain circumstances, also be in a position to confront poor work habits. It depends on the company culture, the relationships, and many other factors.

If you are not managerial level, but you know of some poor work habits of co-workers that need to be confronted (and management either doesn't see it or refuses to confront), what course of action should you take?

- ☐ Talk to the manager and try to encourage him/her to confront
- ☐ Talk to the co-worker and try to settle it between the two of you
- ☐ Do nothing if it doesn't affect you directly
- ☐ Do nothing even if it does affect you directly

This to confront or not to confront decision is not a black and white one. Each situation calls for lots of careful consideration on your part, coupled with much prayer for guidance and wisdom. If you are not a person's direct manager, before you decide to confront, ask yourself these questions:

1. Is it highly likely that this person will see this as inappropriate on my part? Will it be seen as sticking my nose in someone else's business? Is my relationship with this person of such a nature that they are likely to be open to my suggestions/confrontation and perhaps even appreciative that I came to him/her directly?
2. Does this person's poor work habit have a direct negative impact on our company, profit, customers, productivity?
3. Does this person's poor work habit have a direct negative impact on my ability to do my job well?
4. Am I just irritated that this person is getting by with poor work habits when I work hard?

Let's say that you are a manager or supervisor and one of your employees is habitually late to work. This calls for a confrontation. Choosing a good time, you call this employee into your office to discuss some other issue that is business related, so as not to put that person on the defensive, and then at the conclusion of that discussion you broach this touchy subject of being on time. Which of these two approaches would work best?

#1 "Before you go, let me point out something that is bothering me. You've been late to work a lot and it just drives me crazy. I want every person here on time every day. You're paid to be here on time, so I'll be expecting you to be on time every day from now on. I hope that is clear."

#2 "I've noticed that you have some difficulty getting to work on time. Perhaps there is some good reason for that; if so, you need to tell me so we can work it out by cutting your lunch time or having you work later each day. Is there some reason that makes it difficult for you to be here on time each day?"

Who is the focus of approach #1?

Who is the focus of approach #2?

Why would approach #2 be most likely to generate a good result?

Confronting an Attitude Problem

Perhaps one of the most difficult confrontations is that of attitude. If someone has a negative, wrong attitude, that attitude is likely to make a confrontation less likely to succeed. Yet, a bad attitude does more harm than almost anything else you can name.

Let's say you work with a person who is always negative, griping, complaining and unhappy about everything. Consider these two confrontation approaches:

#1 "I've noticed that your attitude is always negative. You never seem to be happy about anything, and that makes it difficult to work with you. Your attitude really poisons the atmosphere, so I wanted to suggest that you work at being more positive."

#2 "I've noticed that you are often unhappy about the job and the people here. I'm not trying to pry, but I was just wondering if there is any way I can help you. I'd be glad to try, because I'm sure you realize that attitudes tend to be contagious. So when one person gets down, it tends to pull others down as well. Maybe there are some positive steps we could take to help you change your attitude."

Which approach is less accusing and more helpful in tone? #1 or #2?

What is wrong with the other approach?

When Confrontation Backfires

I've encouraged you not to avoid confrontation when it is the right thing to do. But we also have to be aware that even constructive confrontation doesn't always work. Wise Solomon warned us that people will not always listen or change when confronted.

Proverbs 12:1:

Whoever loves discipline loves knowledge, but whoever hates _____ is _____.

Proverbs 12:15:

The way of _____ seems right to them, but the _____ listen to advice.

Proverbs 10:17:

Whoever heeds discipline shows the way to life, but whoever _____
_____ leads others astray.

Why are there no guarantees that a constructive confrontation will produce a good and desired result?

Since we do not have total control over how the other person will react to a confrontation, we can never be certain how it is going to turn out. Which of these do you have control over in a confrontation?

- ☐ The words you choose to say
- ☐ The timing of the confrontation
- ☐ Your motivation and attitude toward the other person
- ☐ The frame of mind of the other person
- ☐ The other person's willingness to change
- ☐ The other person's insecurities
- ☐ The other person's life experiences

You get the idea. You and I can only control ourselves when it comes to confronting people. And it may be true that the right confrontation, at the right time, in the right way, may appear to have disastrous results because the other person reacts very poorly.

Here are some possible reactions to a confrontation. Which ones have you personally seen or experienced?

- Totally quiet; no response
- Angry and irrational
- Defensive
- Refuse to change
- Very hurt; emotional

You may be able to add to this list. Please understand that none of these reactions is proof in

itself that the confrontation should not have taken place, or that it was done in the wrong way. So, be prepared for any one of these reactions.

Also, keep in mind there may be a delayed response. Often at the moment of confrontation, a person reacts in an out-of-control manner, but after some thought and introspection, they are able to hear it and come back with the right response.

Conclusion

If you didn't think so before, I hope that this lesson has convinced you that constructive confrontation is truly an important element in most all of our relationships. And I trust that you're more comfortable with your approach to the necessary confrontations of your life.

Remember, it can be one of the best things you can do for a relationship—to speak the truth in love and confront a problem so that it can be solved.

Suggested Assignment

The next time you know there is a need to confront someone in your life, I encourage you to use this outline to help you prepare.

My Plan for Confrontation

I need to confront _____ in order to help her/him :

Before I confront I will:

1. Pray for wisdom and guidance
2. Seek needed advice, if appropriate
3. Examine my motives to make certain I am doing it for the right reason
4. Make certain I am not acting out of anger or vengeance

The best time for this confrontation is:

The best place for this confrontation is:

I will open the conversation by saying:

Regardless of the immediate results or reaction, I will trust God to work this out to his glory.

This simple plan for confrontation will make certain you've done your preliminary homework and give you the confidence you need to move ahead.

A Guide on Getting to Know God

Leader's Guide Notes

Thank you for being willing to lead this Bible Study. The good news is that you don't have to teach this study, just lead the discussion. If leading a Bible study is new to you, don't worry. You don't have to be an expert on the Bible or a trained teacher to lead this study.

The participant's guide is easy to follow, with questions that are designed to get everyone involved. Your job is to guide the discussion through the various questions, keep track of time and keep the discussion moving.

Leading the Sessions

Here are some key things to keep in mind as you lead the sessions:

- You will want to study the lesson in advance, so that you are thoroughly prepared to help with the discussion.
- Have the room set up in advance.
- **Always** begin and end on time. Regardless of how many people arrive on time, you need to establish that they can depend on this study starting and ending on time. However, some will still come late or have to leave early, and you want to make it clear from the beginning that they have that flexibility and are welcome whenever they can get there.
- Explain that this study is meant to be a discussion and encourage everyone to participate. However, do not put pressure on those who may be hesitant to speak, especially during the first few sessions. Don't be afraid of silence. People may need time to think about the question before formulating their answers. It's always good to solicit more than one answer to a question. Ask, "What do the rest of you think?" or "Anyone else?"
- Affirm the contributions of others whenever possible. Let people know you appreciate their insights. If you feel a response is wrong—not in accordance with God's Word—don't reject it. Rather ask something like, "How did you come to that conclusion?" Or ask others in the group what they think about the question.
- Be considerate of first timers. It's often best not to call on them for an answer, as they may not feel comfortable contributing the first time they participate. Keep that in mind if you choose to ask for participation by going around the table or the circle. Everyone may not want to contribute, especially first timers.
- Keep the discussion on track. It's easy for people to start down their own "bunny trails" and take the discussion in a different direction than the study intends. It will be your responsibility to bring the discussion back to the workbook and keep it moving, otherwise you will have difficulty completing the lesson.

- Remember that the purpose of the study is to understand what the Bible has to say, and

therefore personal opinions have to be considered in light of what scripture says. Whether or not a person agrees with what the Bible says, you want to keep bringing the discussion back to the biblical foundation.

- Avoid letting any one person monopolize the discussion. Obviously some people are more verbal than others, but if one person begins to answer every question and intimidate others from participating, it will have a negative impact on the group. It is your challenge to include that person but not allow them to take over!
- Avoid discussing various churches or denominations. Never allow anyone to malign or gossip about a church, an organization or a person, even if you must interrupt that person.
- Encourage the members of the group to look at the lessons in advance, if possible, but don't put any undue pressure on them.
- Most importantly, pray! Ask God to give you wisdom as the leader, to bring the people he wants into the study, and to use it for his glory. Bathe your efforts in prayer, asking other trusted friends to pray with you, so that at each step of the way, you are attuned to God's voice and covered in prayer. This is truly critical to your success.

About The Christian Working Woman:

In 1984 Mary Whelchel Lowman began this ministry as a once-a-week radio program on one station in Chicago. Her passion then, as now, was to challenge workplace Christians to see their jobs as more than just a place to earn a living. Every Christian is called to be an ambassador for Jesus Christ in all areas of their lives, including the workplace.

The ministry has grown from that small beginning to now being broadcast on over 400 stations nationally and internationally. Mary has written many books and Bible studies, and her resources are available on video and podcast at christianworkingwoman.org, YouTube, your favorite podcast platform, or by calling 630-462-0552.



Will You Help Change Lives?

Have you been encouraged and challenged in your faith through this Bible study? You can help other women around the world experience this same joy and growth in their faith when you donate to The Christian Working Woman. Your monthly or one-time gift ensures that women continue to receive these free resources as they seek to shine the light of Christ in their workplaces.

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