

Healing Relationships God's Way: The Power of Forgiveness

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[0:00] The theme I'm wanting to present today is really a theme that might strike a chord with some. Not for any reason, the pastor hasn't been telling me anything about you.

But really, every church has got need for this theme of reconciliation. Unity is under threat every which way, isn't it? And we think of reconciliation, it's really the heart of God's grace, isn't it? The heart of God's grace. And how do we define it? Reconciliation. It's really the restoration of harmony in relationships that have been damaged by sin, by conflict, misunderstandings. That happens everywhere, even in secular settings, there's this divide at times. And when reconciliation is lacking, it really, it takes away the blessing that God wants, isn't it? We know in Psalm 133, it talks about the blessing of unity. And the devil loves to create disunity. So reconciliation is the opposite, isn't it?

[0:58] What God wants, and there's blessing there in reconciliation and unity. So we see, the Bible tells about reconciliation, you could say, in really two dimensions. There's the vertical reconciliation with God, and then there's the horizontal reconciliation with others.

And when we think about it, as we go to 2 Corinthians 5, verse 18, God reconciles us through Christ, and he calls us to do the same with one another, doesn't he? So we go to 2 Corinthians 5, verse 18.

We've just got verse 18 here, but I'll touch on verse 19 and 20 as well, just briefly as well. So perhaps we could stand for the reading of verse 18 together.

You might want to read it as you see it there, as you read it in your Bible. And it says, 2 Corinthians 5, verse 18. Let's read it together. Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us.

We pray in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God. Amen. Please be seated. Be ye reconciled to God. Think of God's grace that makes it possible.

[2:30] Reconciliation. It's the very heart of our Lord, isn't it? Of the gospel. Of his great love towards us. He took the initiative to mend that broken relationship, didn't he? Between God and men.

Through Christ. And we have received the grace of God. Grace. It should impact us, shouldn't it? In how we reach out and touch others, others' lives. And we're called to live and be as ambassadors of that grace of God.

Of reconciliation. Extending forgiveness. Of love. Of peace. And he committed to us the word of reconciliation. So it's really important.

The Bible talks about this theme over and over. So let's have a look at some of the references, the theme of reconciliation together this morning. Some biblical principles we could perhaps take some knowledge of today.

First up, reconciliation begins with God. He starts it. God leads the way with his love. Romans 5.8 it says, But God commendeth his love toward us in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.

[3:38] And then verse 10, When we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his son. So God's reconciliation is not a reaction to human repentance.

God's reconciliation is an act of grace before we turn to him. While we were enemies. Think of that. Reconciliation. It's God's initiative. He took the initiative.

And think of it. God made the first move, didn't he? To bring about reconciliation. Despite God himself, our Lord God himself being the offended party.

He took the initiative. Notice that. And while humanity was estranged enemies, God reached out first, didn't he? Showing that true reconciliation.

It begins with love and sacrifice. Thank God we are reconciled to God. God, as we've been hearing, that blessing of that assurance that we have of the blood. He's reconciled.

[4:33] He's made us close and inseparable by his love. This is God's model, isn't it? For us. Think of it. As human relationships get challenged. When there's divides between some now and again.

And relationships. Oughtn't we to mirror the kind of love that God shows to us when it's undeserved and even when it isn't reciprocated.

It's showing us, isn't it? That we ought to take the initiative to repair relationships. Even when we feel we are the ones who have been wronged. In other words, take that first step towards reconciliation.

Even if the other person is unresponsive. Even if it's their fault. And what does that look like? It's a reaching out to someone who has wronged you. That goes against the...

It's counter-cultural, isn't it? Like human nature. Like the world would say, get even. But no, the Bible says love. It's a reaching out. The one who has wronged you, reach out to them.

[5:33] And just like God reaches out to us, doesn't he? Think about the father and the prodigal son, Luke 15. You see the father's readiness to restore fellowship with the repentant.

Consider the whole theme of redemption. It's all about sacrificial love, isn't it? Reconciliation costs something. For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son.

Reconciliation. Think of the sacrifice that God's showed to us through Christ. Just the love, the cost of the cross. What our Lord took.

Are we willing to sacrifice our pride, our comfort, to restore relationships, to love even though it's hard to love? God's heart for reconciliation should inspire us to forgive.

Forgiveness is a really critical thing, isn't it? To embrace those who've wronged us. To love them still. God himself, he sets that example, doesn't he? In Ephesians 5 from verse 1 through 2, Be ye therefore followers of God as dear children and walk in love as Christ also have loved us.

[6:40] Think of it. God's love to us. His patience, his mercy is so extensive, isn't it? And oughtn't that inspire you and me to show the same to others? Another principle is forgiveness.

Forgiveness. It's really the pathway to reconciliation. Relationships can get damaged, can't they? Yet by the grace of God, even broken relationships can be restored.

They can be. We oughtn't to give up that hope. Forgiveness. This is what reconciliation is all about. Really at the heart of reconciliation is this truth of forgiveness, isn't it?

It's a fundamental key. Ephesians 4 tells us verse 32, Be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, forgiving one another, even as God, for Christ's sake, have forgiven you.

As Christ, as God, for Christ's sake, have forgiven you. Forgiveness. It's a command, isn't it? So it's really, it ought to be our daily prayer as we read Matthew 6, 12, And forgive us our debts as we forgive our debts.

[7:50] Now when you think about it, look at those words there. Forgive us, Lord, as we forgive others. Think about it here. Do you really want God to forgive you like you are forgiving others?

It ought to make us think, wouldn't it? Am I forgiving others like I want God to forgive me?

Sometimes we don't, do we? Honestly. I know I can be tested in that.

So think about forgiveness. It's essential, isn't it? And it's a real stumbling block to our walk with the Lord, this real hindrance to spiritual growth, when we don't let go of the grudges and the offences.

Unforgiveness. Unforgiveness. It's such a huge obstacle, isn't it? To our growth as Christians. And we ought to make that choice, that determination, to lay it aside, that bitterness, that resentment, the grudges, the desire for revenge.

It's human nature to be like that, isn't it? The story's told, for example, Corrie ten Boom. She forgave a former Nazi guard who had been her guard in the concentration camp.

[8:53] He sought forgiveness, and she showed that true forgiveness that's empowered by God's grace. It's beyond human limits, isn't it?

To love, to sow love. And we can pray for those who've hurt us, asking the Lord for strength to love, to keep on loving, to forgive. And our Lord set the ultimate example of forgiveness, didn't he?

As we think, as he's outstretched there on the cross, there at the cross, even the Lord Jesus forgave, didn't he? Even from the cross as he cried out, praying for his persecutors.

Luke 23, 34, Father, forgive them. Consider the depth of that forgiveness. And this is not just a superficial, sorry.

You know, I don't know if you parents here, your child does something wrong between the two children, and you say, go and say sorry to your brother, to your sister, and they say, sorry.

[9:50] They don't really mean it. You know, there's some that have that kind of, they say sorry, they make a show, or they talk that they're sorry that they're forgiving, but really it's not here, is it?

But our Lord said, Father, forgive. Forgive them. The ones who are crucifying him. And that's the way we should forgive, isn't it? So we think of unforgiveness, it's a real stumbling block to our walk with the Lord, isn't it?

It's a real hindrance to our spiritual growth. Not letting go of that unforgiveness. And so we, can I encourage you today to make forgiveness a daily practice.

Make it something I will forgive. Even in minor offences, some just don't seem to even let go. Something trivial just makes it, there's a barrier there.

No. Let it go. What about us? Are there people in our lives who we need to forgive them or seek forgiveness from? But we don't.

[10:55] It's that pride, isn't it? We need to forgive. Let it go. Any grudges or hurts. Really, forgiveness, it's not just for their sake, it's for us too.

Brings peace, doesn't it? To your spirit. Another good example in the Bible is Joseph forgiving his brothers. In Genesis 45, verse 4, he says to them, I am Joseph, your brother.

And then later in Genesis 50, verse 21, he speaks to them, I will nourish you and your little ones. And he comforted them and he spoke kindly unto them.

These were the brothers who'd thrown him in the pit and then ended up selling him off like a piece of merchandise to the slave traders and they'd wronged him so badly but yet Joseph forgave, didn't he?

Despite his betrayal, he sought restoration. He didn't seek revenge, he sought restoration. That should be our heart, amen? Shouldn't it? With people like that in our lives, commit to forgiving others.

[12:02] It's obeying God, really. It's not based on our feelings, even whether we want to. There's some practical steps we can take to do our part to bring about forgiveness. Think of it.

It's fundamental. Really, it's the first principle that we need to reset things when they're out of accord. Resolve what's an obstacle, what's blocking things.

We see Matthew 5, verse 23, verse 23 through 24. It talks about, leave there thy gift. First, be reconciled to thy brother.

And when you want to do something for God, hey, just hold on a minute. First, be reconciled to thy brother. All right? It's a fundamental, it's a first thing, it's the foundation of building relationships. Make an effort to resolve the stumbling block. Remove the wedge. Let go of the grudge. When you think about it, forgiveness, it frees both parties too.

[13:00] Notice Hebrews 12, verse 15. It talks about, looking diligently, lest any man fail of the grace of God, lest any roots of bitterness springing up trouble you. You know, sometimes things are deep-rooted, aren't they?

Those things that are deep down, those, I know just lately I had a bit of problem in my garden where a veggie bed, the roots of the nearby tree had found their way into that soil and had kind of taken over the whole veggie bed and long roots that were really deeply infesting and I had to rip those roots out and it's like that with unforgiveness.

It's like this deep-rooted thing, you've got to tear it out. It's going to do damage, all right? Bitterness, it traps the offender and the offended. Forgiveness, it's a key to freedom, isn't it?

There's many examples you could see through life of someone who's been wronged, maybe a prisoner, but then they forgive their captors and they find peace, they find release from the bitterness they've been held captive by.

There's many practical steps we can take towards forgiveness. Make it intentional. For example, pray. Our Lord tells us that, Matthew 5, 44, he says, pray for them which despitefully use you and persecute you.

[14:16] Pray. Do we do that? Pray for the ones that got a grievance against? Release the offence. Don't dwell on it. Maybe seek some help from a trusted mentor and counsellor.

How about us? Have we relationships that need mending? Surely we all have. Can we do our part? Sometimes they may not reciprocate, but we can do our bit, can't we?

Galatians 5, 15 talks about a church where they're biting and devouring one another. A lot of infighting. That's not healthy, is it? And that can happen in any kind of church at times where there's difference.

It's all going to take some swallowing of pride because pride is that hindrance, isn't it? So let's approach others with humility. Next scripture is Philippians 2, verses 3 through 4.

Paul exhorts to Philippians, he says, in lowliness of mind, let each esteem other better than themselves. It's about putting others above ourself, isn't it? Not big noting ourself, not thinking, oh, we've got it all together.

[15:15] Actually, we want to think about others and their needs. And when these fractures can happen in a church, in relationships, in families, let's be the mature ones, the godly ones to apologise sincerely for our role in the conflict and help the healing start, that journey of growth.

What does this look like? Can we just pause? Before we go into the frustration, just pause, just stop and think. Let's remind ourselves of God's patience, God's patience towards us.

Amen? Here's another principle, number three, another principle to make reconciliation. Forbearing one another. Forbearing one another in love.

Colossians 3.13 tells us, forbearing one another and forgiving one another if any man have a quarrel against any. Even as Christ forgave you, so also do you.

Forbearance. It's going beyond the human kind of limit. It's going beyond, isn't it? Strengthening relationships. It's about love in action, isn't it?

[16:23] Forbearings. Bearing with others. Bearing with others' weaknesses and imperfections. How do we do that? Forbear. It's about having patience. We're all imperfect.

I've got to say sometimes I'm imperfect. Probably more than others might think. Because we know ourselves, don't we? Look in the mirror and we see all our own faults if we're really honest about it. If we're really humble about it. Rather than picking on others' faults. It's easy to do, isn't it? We're all imperfect. Forbearing means giving others the space to grow, to learn and without judgment.

And another Bible truth is don't sweat the small stuff. And other words, those minor offences are just a difference of opinion, of a view, of some way to do things or not do things.

And that just becomes a big, big stumbling block that just overtakes, doesn't it? Just overlook the minor offences as well as the other things.

[17:25] And as the Lord tells us in Proverbs 19, 11, as the Word tells us about the discretion of a man, it says it is his glory, the discreetful man, the man who shows discretion, it is his glory to pass over a transgression.

In other words, let it go. Okay, someone's done the wrong thing, they've differed with you, just pass over it. Don't have the mindset to dwell on the petty grievances.

Rather, have this mindset, forbearing. In other words, let's decide to be patient with one another. Amen? Long-suffering, when difficult things happen in relationships.

And it's going to take humility. Ephesians 4, verse 2. Ephesians 4, verse 2, with all loneliness and meekness, with long-suffering, forbearing one another in love.

Notice it says, forbear in love. It takes an intention to love and keep on loving. Orden that be our hallmark as the people of God, as God's children, forbearing one another, putting up with one another.

[18:32] Notice it says, forbear in love. Okay, we have to recognise that patience and tolerance are spiritual disciplines and we need to cultivate that. Are we impatient, intolerant, easily offended?

Commit to praying for someone who irritates and frustrates you. That helps build the body, doesn't it? Don't we want that as a church body, as any church?

Fellowship, we want to have that closeness to commit to praying, not responding with frustration, let go of resentment, of bitterness, of unforgiveness because it's going to eat you up, isn't it?

Let it go. So when we face that difficult person in our life, whether it's a co-worker, whether it's a tricky neighbour, we're going to persist and just be patient, just keep calm.

There's blessing in that unity, especially in the church fellowship, when we have that kind of unity and it comes out of love, doesn't it? Brotherly love. It grows when we overlook offences.

[19:33] Let's find ways to actually not make a practice of fault finding but of encouraging, of edifying and that unifying of God. Brotherly love is that overlooking of offences and choosing to rather extend grace.

Let's be gracious. We ought to be the examples of it, the model of it, of what it ought to look like. As an example of this, consider how the Lord patiently bore with Peter, didn't he? Kept on persevering with Peter despite his flaws, continued to love and to teach him and all the other disciples, really.

Another aspect of reconciliation, number four, is this call to be a peacemaker, a peacemaker.

Matthew 5, verse 9, our Lord says, blessed are the peacemakers for they should be called the children of God.

That's our role, to be a peacemaker. Think of it. When there's conflict, when there's situations of difference, rather let's be the ones who, like our Lord, extends peace and grace.

We look at, for example, his dealings with the woman caught in the very act of adultery, John 8. We see that grace there. The enemy delights in sowing discord and creating division and disunity.

[20:50] He wants to tear us apart, to divide us, to create misunderstandings and infights. And some will foster it too by their unwise words. Let's watch our words, people.

Amen. Brother, sister, before we open our mouth, are we using unwise words like gossip, murmuring, backbiting, gainsaying?

These things are toxic. I like this next slide here. Think before you speak. Let's think. Got this word here. I don't know if you've seen this kind of acrostic before.

It's a good way to think before you speak because sometimes we can engage mouth before brain.

Amen. Think before we speak. In other words, and it's got this acrostic here, T for think.

Is it true? Ask, is it true? Is it H, is it helpful? I, is it inspiring? N, is it necessary? K, is it kind?

[21:48] In other words, something might be maybe just hearsay but we utter it as if it's true. Actually think before you utter it, it may not be a true statement. You might hear something, oh, whisper, whisper.

Oh, actually that's not true. So I'm not going to speak it. I'm not going to relay it. I'm not going to repeat it. Okay. Is it helpful? Is it something, yeah, well maybe we could say something but actually saying it to that person is actually not a helpful thing to do.

Could be discouraging. If it's not helpful, don't say it. Okay. Is it inspiring or is it actually going to put them down, make them feel discouraged or would we rather lift them up and be inspiring, be edifying?

Is it necessary? We can say something but it's actually not necessary that they hear that. That gossip, that murmuring, that opinion, that viewpoint, that repeating of something malicious.

Is it necessary to say it? If it's not necessary to say it, then don't say it. And is it kind? That's an ultimate one, isn't it? Are we being such that the words that we say, is it kindness or is it actually being nasty?

[22:52] Is it kind? If it's not, don't say it. Right. This is good helpful stuff there really, isn't it? Because really, let all things be done unto edifying. No, that's the building up of others. All things, that ought to be our focus.

Think before you speak. It's a good maxim, isn't it? The Bible urges us not to murmur. Really, murmuring is a very serious sin. You see, Philippians 2.14, do all things without murmurings and disputings.

All things. So, we might all be inclined to be a bit whingy or a bit maybe weary or a bit downcast from time to time, a bit negative.

Don't murmur or dispute. Actually, have rather the positive reference point. We can decide to be a peacemaker. All right? That peace is what we build.

We're about this work of active peace building. And look for those opportunities when there's conflicts or there's differences, whether in your family, your workplace, your church, your whole life. [23:54] Find ways to bring peace, to speak words that bring peace. Right? We ought to stand out as the ones who are peacemakers in our world. And reconciliation, when you think about it, is really that actively working to restore harmony, to counter conflict.

And James 3, 17 talks about God's kind of wisdom. God's wisdom, it produces peace. It talks about the wisdom that is from above. It's peaceable. It's peaceable. And we need to have that kind of spirit that's a peace building, peacemaking kind of spirit, a sweet spirit.

Amen? That's what peacemaking calls for, a sweet spirit. See, some that just don't have a sweet spirit. We need to ask the Lord, help, help, keep me sweet, Lord.

Keep me sweet, keep my words sweet, keep my dispositions sweet, keep my attitudes sweet.

Peacemaking calls for a sweet spirit. And next scripture, Galatians 5, verses 22, 23, talks about the fruit of the spirit.

Of course, we could elaborate much more, but you see love, joy, peace, it goes on. It's that kind of spirit, isn't it, that God wants for us as a church body. And a practical tip, keep calm in your manner, listen actively, find ways to spread the kindness, to be understanding, to edify the church, to approach every situation of life with gentleness, with humility, and with an intention to heal.

[25:23] That's your desire, rather than to hurt. And Bible example of this is what happened with Abigail. We won't go there, but just in brief, 1 Samuel 25, talks about how Abigail intervened to prevent bloodshed between David and Nabal.

And Abigail showed this true heart of a peacemaker. And so the situation was, just in brief, that Nabal, he got an offense.

He was offended. Sorry, the other way around, getting that story around the wrong way, but David was offended about Nabal's actions because Nabal had been hostile to David's men.

And so David reacted. He reacted with resentment. He wanted to get even. He wanted to strike back. But Abigail helped turn things around. That vengeance was not the way to go.

David's anger and vengeance at this offense, Abigail turned David's attitude around. And such that, that hostility, that Nabal had started really, but David didn't react that way.

[26:38] And so Abigail intervened with grace and gifts and it turned David's heart around to not have that resentment and that revenge attitude. So we could be like Abigail, in other words, diffuse it, counteract it with rather, with grace, with reason and sense and calm approach.

And we're told, next scripture, Romans 12, verse 18, if it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men. The desire of God, the plea from our Lord through Paul to the Romans here is live peaceably with everybody.

And here's really where the rubber hits the road, isn't it? In human relationships, when we've got a family dispute, for example, can we just think, well, how can I sort this?

Mediation. How can I make peace? What steps can I take with this conflict, whether it's a church or whatever situation? What steps can I take to make reconciliation happen?

And a clear Bible truth is we ought to admit fault. Some people find it hard to do that. Actually, when I think about it, it's my fault.

[27:59] At least in part. At least, I could have, I could have cut it short by actually having a thought, well, actually, I'm not always right. And actually, maybe, yeah, maybe it is, I'm partly to blame.

Even if it's only partly, I am to blame. It's my fault. I could have fixed this sooner. And some people find it incredibly hard to say, actually, pastor or brother, sister, sorry, I was wrong.

For my part, I was wrong. But some people, it's almost like they can't bring themselves to that point of admit fault. And so, they live a life full of unresolved grudges and hurts.

Honestly, brother, sister, we've just got to learn that truth. It's where reconciliation starts, isn't it? We realise our own part in it. And look at the example of David's repentance in Psalm 51.

He says, I acknowledge my transgressions. He acknowledged my, he says, I acknowledge my transgressions. He asked for forgiveness. This is between David and God, but we could think of it humanly too.

[29:09] I have sinned. Wash me. Create in me a clean heart. So, we see David's repentance in Psalm 51. It's a great model, again, of that humility, that honesty and reconciliation.

What does that translate into in our own lives? As one practical tip, maybe write a letter or make a face-to-face meeting to restore lingering conflicts.

Try to sort it out. Do your part. Of course, there's definite steps to heal divides. Matthew 18 talks about verse 15 through 17, the very steps we can take for reconciliation within the church, within the assembly.

Moving on, another aspect, number five, is brotherly love. You could say that this is the fruit of reconciliation. Hebrews 13 verse 1. I love this scripture. Four words.

It's a really easy one to remember, all right? You don't have to try really hard to put this one in your memory bank here, all right? Let brotherly love continue. Wouldn't that be a good thing if we could not just memorise it but make it happen?

[30:16] Amen? Let brotherly love continue. Here's what builds relationships, isn't it? It's what heals relationships when they're being tested. Brotherly love. That should be our goal.

And our Lord wants this for us, the blessed unity of believers. John 13 verse 35. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples. If ye have love, one to another.

Love is really the key. And reconciliation, it's not just about resolving conflicts, it's about fostering love. When love's lacking, that's when the grumbling, grieving, grievances, the fault finding just destroys love, doesn't it?

And that we ought to care for one another, nurture relationships. Now in the church, we're all in this together. Amen? Aren't we? We're all in this together.

And every church that gets tested in these things, nurture the relationships, don't give up on them. There's many scriptures we can quote that back up this truth of love, of kindness, of compassion, of humility.

[31:24] Colossians 3 verse 12. It talks about putting on love, it talks about building unity, Proverbs 17, 9. It talks about how love prospers when faults are forgiven. How can we build bridges and prevent conflict even escalating, even starting?

Make brotherly love your aim. Now I know brothers and sisters in families don't always get on, but hopefully we learn to at least learn to cope with each other and make a family work.

It's the same in a church, isn't it? God helping us, brotherly love, that's God's will for the church. And let's make it our aim to strengthen those bonds with fellow believers.

There's the truth that love covers it all in that sense of reconciliation, that unconditional love. We'll go to 1 Peter 4 verse 8. There's the truth that we're family. Let's hang together.

Brothers and sisters, we're always going to be brothers and sisters, physically so, but spiritually so too, isn't it? Whether you get offended and leave and go to some other church or you're still my brother, my sister, let's try to avoid any divide.

[32:35] Let's hang together like brothers and sisters ought to do in a good family, not in a dysfunctional one. And so the Bible talks about this love covers all charity, shall cover the multitude, of sins.

Let's make it happen. Amen? Love that will cover the multitude of sins such that actually those faults and those differences, it's not a big deal. It's actually just the small stuff, isn't it?

When we have a difference, a different view, it's not necessary that we have a divide. A difference doesn't have to be a divide. And this can happen, for example, when we're supporting someone through a repentance process.

And I've heard of situations of late in another church where someone sinned and it was their wish to stand up before the church and say, I've sinned. And they described the sin without maybe the detail of it, but the object was that they would be restored to the body.

That actually the body would come around that person and embrace them back. They'd sorted it. They'd made it right. They'd repented. They'd made it open. They'd confessed it.

[33:44] They'd forsaken it. And so that restoration could happen. That's the aim of any church discipline, isn't it? I know we get situations where a brother or sister might do something wrong. It says that we go to them in that spirit of gentleness with restoration, lest we fall likewise.

The object of discipline is restoration. And really, whatever the situation with brotherly love, there's no room for division. Galatians 3.28, it says, ye are all one in Christ Jesus.

whether there's, whatever our background is, there's no place for division, for barrier. Whether it be race, class, status, or background, all of those differences are broken down.

We're brothers and sisters. We're as intimately connected as a brother or sister in a family that's functioning. That should be what the church is like. And so let's commit then to loving one another. And that intensity, that commitment, that overlooks fault, like God has shown to us. And number six, another truth that relates to reconciliation.

[34:53] Another truth about reconciliation, number six, is that it reflects the gospel, doesn't it? Paul says, I've committed to you the word of reconciliation. He says, you're ambassadors of this reconciliation.

There's this Bible truth that reconciliation, it's a witness to our world. You know, when a church is working well, God helping us to be such a people, the world will see, yeah, they love one another. It's what the Romans said when there was persecution times. Even the enemies of the gospel, the enemies of the church were saying, these people love each other. And our Lord says, all men shall know when they see your love.

Notice reconciliation, it's a witness. People notice, people will notice that love that we have as the body of Christ, brothers and sisters in Christ. It's the whole theme of the gospel too, isn't it?

It's a part of our testimony to the world. As we read the verse again, 2 Corinthians 5, verse 19, in part, God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself.

[35:58] And we think about it of our lives, brother, sister, your life is a witness of that reconciliation you've received, that reconciled life. It's a witness to the transforming of God's power, of God's grace and advances the kingdom.

Again, John 17, 21, that they all may be one, that the world may believe that thou hast sent me. It's a witness to the world when we get the reconciliation right.

The unity among believers, it's a powerful testimony. And so let's foster that as God's people, as the church of God in this place, in every place where God's people meet as an assembly of God's children, of God's family.

Let's foster that cohesion. It's a witness to our world. Let's work on that unity that we're not going to be divided over some petty little difference.

Let's grow up and be the church. Let's be the church that hangs together like a functional family hangs together. Reconciliation, it matters. And we're told that it's a ministry of itself.

[37:01] Think of that. You know, you might be asking, Pastor, I want this ministry or that ministry. God's given all of us the ministry of reconciliation, that we want to have that heart, that heart.

Hey, that's a ministry I want, to be a minister of reconciliation. And this is the recurring message of the next scripture, 2 Corinthians 5, 18 through 20. Of course, you could read the whole context there, but just in part, be ye reconciled to God.

That's our message, isn't it? When you're out on the streets at the railway, witnessing as we maybe knock on doors, when you talk to a person, when you share the gospel message, hey, that's the key message, isn't it?

Be ye reconciled to God. That's our heart. That's his heart for this world and that we will be a messenger of that word of reconciliation.

When we share the gospel cloud news of the saving grace of God, that he would so love even us while we were his enemies, he wants reconciliation, he offers it, he extends it, we testify of it by what's happening in our own lives and relationships too.

[38:09] So here's the transformative power of the gospel. It's reconciliation, isn't it? This truth of reconciliation, it's right through the word from Genesis to Revelation, from cover to cover, reconciliation.

It's right through the book and this truth of reconciliation, it's getting on with others. This is our calling to be an ambassador. Here's another Bible example of the witness of that reconciliation to our world.

Another Bible example is the fractured relationship of Philemon and his servant Onesimus. Paul appealed to Philemon for reconciliation, to reconcile with Onesimus, that servant that had gone to Australia and left him in the lurch and it reflects the heart of reconciliation, doesn't it?

And we truly see the truth that others are brothers and sisters in Christ. Think of that. When you see a brother or sister, someone in the church, hey, oh, I don't always see eye to eye with this one or that one or, oh, they've done this and done that, they said this or done that.

Hey, they're your brother, they're your sister, why don't we have a bit of grace? I'm sure amongst us there's testimonies we could share about how God's helped us to find that grace, to transform our life, our relationships and he keeps on doing it, gives us more grace, more grace, Lord, more grace today, Lord, please.

[39:41] May we work at having this heart to restore broken relationships. Think about it. Maybe there's fractured relationships in our own lives, our own circle. How can I restore that which is broken?

What's got in the way? And when you actually break it down and look back, it's probably something you might have even forgot what it was, what the difference was.

Can you think of examples like that for yourself? Well, I've not spoken to so-and-so in weeks, months, years. Where did that all begin? Might have been something really trivial.

Think, get over it. Come on. Think about it. I'm saying that for myself, right? The trivial things that become bigger than, you know, what do they say?

That a mountain out of a molehill, that's what it is, isn't it? Off times. And that's the, the devil just loves that. The devil loves disunity and division.

[40:47] Because where does the blessing come? When brothers and sisters dwell together in unity. That's where the blessing comes. The devil doesn't want you to get a blessing.

He wants you over here in the disunity. But God wants you here where brothers and sisters dwell together in unity. Psalm 133. So may we work at having this heart to restore broken relationships as a witness of God's reconciling grace.

So just to kind of wrap it up a little, I'm getting closer to wrapping it up. Some practical steps for reconciliation. So you could think some practical steps we can take.

You could think, firstly, identify the issue. So Matthew 7. We see Matthew 7 and, you know, the context there is of course, oh, look at the fault of this one over here.

He's got a speck in his eye. And you've got a big, big fat plank, big fat plank in your eye, right? A beam. And so Matthew 7, the Lord says, well, if you want to sort that out, first, first, cast out the beam out of thine own eye.

[42:08] Evaluate your role in the conflict. Maybe you've got some fault. It happened in maybe not intervening earlier, I've had situations like that. I look back and think, maybe I could have nipped that in the bud by being a bit more proactive.

First, cast out the beam that's in thine own eye. Evaluate your role in the conflict. Often reconciliation, it starts with self-examination. Maybe write down your thoughts.

What's the root of the issue? First, identify the issue. Next, you could go Romans 14, 19, to seek peace proactively.

Let us therefore follow after, follow after, in other words, run after, chase after, pursue the things which make for peace. In other words, make peace your aim. A Bible example, another one of this is, for example, Abraham's approach to law.

They had this difference, this conflict. Their men had this conflict over the land. And Abraham said, let there be no strife.

[43:12] He used wisdom to find a solution. He said, okay, we can't fit in this space together. You decide where you want to go and I'll take the other.

So Abraham used wisdom and his mindset was, let there be no strife. Let there be no strife between us. In other words, make for peace. All right?

Here's a practical tip too. To reach out with that person that you've got a difference with, with humility. Do your part to mend the relationship. Humility, isn't that the key?

To be willing, to be humble, to be teachable, to say, actually, pastor, you're right. I'm wrong. Some people find it hard to say that, don't they, pastor?

Pastor, you're right. I'm wrong. No, they want to argue. They want to justify. They want to justify themselves. It's a key, humility.

[44:17] Be teachable. Actually, well, I still think maybe I've been wrong, but I could have done better. I could have sorted it sooner. I could have fixed it, but I've just let it fester and now it's eating me up and it's all toxic and I'm hurting inside.

I'm getting ulcers and I'm getting, getting discomfort here because I know I'm in the wrong. But have I got to swallow my pride? Sometimes hard to do, isn't it?

Swallowing the pride. I know that. I'm like that sometimes. I've got to work on my pride and crucify it. Nail it down every so often.

The old man, the pride that is in me. When there's a divide going on, it's important also to use godly wisdom. James 1. Use godly wisdom. James 1, verse 5.

It tells us, if any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God. Ask for it. Ask for wisdom. Before engaging in reconciliation, pray. When you've got some interaction that's difficult, actually, Lord, help me before I open my big mouth.

[45:22] Lord, help me to have wisdom. To say what's right. The right words at the right time with the right attitude.

And if it's not any of that, not to do it. All right? The wisdom not to say what we want to say is sometimes a good thing too, isn't it?

And just like with Abigail's tactful intervention with David and Nabal, let me close with this.

Reconciliation, it's not an option. It's actually not optional that we not reconcile.

To let it sit there and fester. I've had situations where there's some churches where so-and-so hasn't spoke to so-and-so in so, so long. They're sitting in the same church and they don't even shake hands with each other.

I've heard of pastors like that that don't shake hands with their own church members because of some grievance, something that's caused this animosity, this hostility, this conflict.

[46:22] Is that of God? Absolutely not. Absolutely not. Come on, people. I'm not saying that of this church. I'm just talking generally of my own church, of any church.

We've got to work on this, don't we? Reconciliation, it's not an option. It's not optional. It's a divine mandate and it's modelled by God. Do ye reconcile to God?

See what God has done to reconcile you to himself by Christ? Are we messengers? Are we ambassadors of that reconciliation? We ought to be.

And so, it's modelled by God and it's made possible by the Lord and as God's dear children, we're called to mirror this to show his love, his forgiveness, this peacemaking spirit in our relationships where they're broken, where they're challenged.

Let's think about how can I heal that? How can I mend that? And we can have it in our own families, in our own physical families, can't we? Oh, I haven't talked to such and such or this and that and we're not really connected.

[47:22] We could maybe do better. I know I can. It takes work. So, let's think, let's decide to have a bias to reconciliation. I like this thought that we should make reconciliation our default.

Our default. So, rather than disagreement, make grace your default. I'm going to find a way to sort this out. I'm going to find a way, God helping me, to humble myself and to fix this, to actually have a default to grace and to commit to practicing forgiveness.

Not sweating the small stuff, not getting upset, not being a fault finder that's all caught up in criticism, a critical spirit, but rather to be practicing forgiveness and forbearance day by day by day and keep sweet.

Hey, we can all think and I've been, I've been wronged. I've been wronged. I've been hurt. Do you hold on to it or do you give it to God?

Do you let him deal with it? I've been hurt. Join the club. Let's keep that sweet spirit, brother, sister. Keep that humble spirit. It won't be long till glory.

[48:34] Who knows whether we'll get the call saying you've got three months to live. Puts things in perspective, doesn't it? Doesn't it? How much time have we got to get things right with people in our lives that are not right?

Let's determine this way to live out this humility, this truth, to be true ambassadors of reconciliation. It's the calling of every believer. It's the heart of Christ. As God has reconciled us to himself through Christ, we must strive to reconcile with others.

Let's commit to live this hour, this gospel, this gospel truth of forgiveness, of forbearance, of love, of peace. Think of it, if you bear with me, just recap real quick here.

Just to capture all the six points, try to make it only a three point or less sermon, but it's a six points are here. But reconciliation, just a quick recap. Number one, it begins with God.

He reaches out to us, unworthy, even though he is the offended party. Number two, forgiveness is key. Let go of any roots of bitterness or unforgiveness.

[49:42] Let it go so that healing can come. Number three, forbearing. Give space. Overlook offenses. Choose grace. Number four, be a peacemaker.

Think before you speak. Think of those, the T-H-I-N-K. Think. Don't murmur or gossip. Don't join in that. Don't spread it.

Let go of toxic talk. See, if Moses and the murmurers, you know, it was a big drama and God's, and to murmur against Moses was to murmur against God. So, so get behind your pastor.

He doesn't need murmuring. He needs you to be part of the uniting, of the cohesion of the body. It's hard work enough being a pastor without people murmuring.

That's just, it's just the devil behind that. So don't murmur. Don't gossip. Let go of toxic talk. Keep sweet. Number five, brotherly love. Make love your aim with brothers and sisters.

[50:42] Hey, we're going to be in glory together. Let's get on with each other this side of glory. The bond of love, restoration. We're family after all. And number six, reconciliation.

It's a witness. It's a testimony to our world that we're lovers of God and lovers of one another in that godly family sense of it. And this ministry of reconciliation where we're out on the streets, where we're out testifying, whether open air preaching or personal witnessing or passing out a leaflet and a personal word here and there, it's the whole ministry that we're all part of, reconciliation.

Be ye reconciled to God. That's what we want. Hey, we know you hate God at the moment. I was there once. I was an enemy once too. But God's saying he wants you be reconciled.

He wants that. And we're messengers of God's reconciling grace, aren't we? It's God's mandate. And again, the principle, I want to serve God.

I want to do that. I want to give my offering first. First, first go to God. First, get it sorted. And, oh, this one's got this fault.

[51:59] This one's got that fault. First, get the beam out of your own eye. Sort yourself out. All right? Make grace your default. The heart of Christ.

Grace ought to be our normal reaction to offences such that someone offends me, okay, I'm not going to fight back. I'm not going to be resentful. I'm not going to harbour the hurt, the bitterness. Actually, I'm going to let it go. I'm going to respond with grace. I'm going to be like Jesus. Turn the other cheek. Have a go at this one. Yeah? Rather have that.

Extend that grace that you have received to others. And so, what will we do with these truths? I'm going to wrap it here. Can we put them into action in our own lives?

This is not just theory. This is not just a theological concept of reconciliation. This is what we can make part of our own life. We can make this live in our own life, in our own attitudes and

relationships to seek reconciliation as to someone I've fallen out with, as to someone I'm at odds with.

[53:08] Embrace forgiveness even when it's your fault. All right? Even when it's hard. Even though, sorry, even when it's their fault. Yeah? Even when you're the offended party, they've done you wrong.

Love them. Commit to being a peacemaker in your life. Let us pray. Lord, we thank you, Heavenly Father, that you've shown such grace towards us that we can be reconciled to you through Christ. We pray, Lord, that the same spirit would be something we would have to others. Lord, to forgive, to love, to be a peacemaker in our world. Lord, we pray if there's anyone present that might see this speech sometime, Lord, that we'll get things right with you, ourself.

We'll make sure we are reconciled to God through Christ. We'll know the saving grace that took you to the cross and there where you cried out, forgive them. Lord, forgive us too.

If we'd have been in that crowd, we'd have been the ones nailing you to the cross and spitting upon you and hurting you and cursing you, mocking you. Lord, we need your forgiveness for ourselves.

[54:22] Lord, we thank you that through the cross, through your bloodshed, we can be receivers of that grace, of that forgiveness by faith. Lord, we pray for each one that's here present for our own lives, if there's hurts.

We'll let them go. We'll extend that grace that you've shown to us to others, Lord. Help us to have a heart of that ministry of reconciliation that will care enough to tell others, be you reconciled to God. We've only got so much time, Lord, we know, until our earthly time comes to a close, Lord. We know there's souls, never-dying souls all around us that need this gospel.

Lord, help us to be instruments of your peace, to reflect your grace in our relationships within the church, within the body of Christ, within our brotherly and sisterly relationships here as a church body.

Lord, submitting to the pastor here and his godly wisdom and direction. Lord, help us to be a people that will get behind the pastor, not murmur and complain or dispute.

[55:27] Lord, there won't be this conflict in any situation. We know, I don't know the situation in this particular church, Lord, but we know that in any church that must be the case, Lord, that brotherly love would continue, that we'd be instruments of your glory to this hurting world, this world that's in conflict still with you, Lord, but yet you are the peacemaker between this world and the Father, Lord Jesus.

You're that mediator between God and men. We thank you, Lord, for your love for us. We pray for this church, for Pastor Ethel and Sister Sharon, Lord, for your continued blessing and, Lord, for a great unction on this ministry here and for the people of God here to get stronger, to get more in that heart of grace, Lord, to one another and to be active in taking this word of reconciliation to our lost and dying world, we pray in Jesus' precious name.

Amen. Amen. Amen.