

Difficult Relationships

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[0 : 0 0] I guess the kids don't want to hear about difficult relationships. I just want to add to what BK said and say thank you to all of the people that have fed us so well and cared for us this weekend.

Yeah. And the guys leading music, and it's been a remarkable weekend. Thank you so much for the privilege it has been for me to be here.

I have enjoyed getting to know those of you who I've gotten to spend time with. And once again, I just have to say I love the church and I love the Christ of the church.

Don't you? This is a sweet time. It is a sweet opportunity. So tonight we are going to talk about difficult relationships. And I was thinking about, gee, I wonder why I put this one last.

This might be a downer. And then I wanted to reassure you that tonight we're not going to wallow in the difficulty of relationships. We're going to acknowledge the difficulty of relationships.

[1 : 0 5] And as usual, the Word of God has so much to say that is so helpful. And I love the Word of God, and I know you do too. You've demonstrated that throughout this weekend.

And the Word of God is helpful. It's powerful. It cuts to the bone. And it gives us the answers to life. Life is full of difficult relationships, unfortunately.

It is a fact of life. They're in front of us every day. Sometimes those relationships are our own. And sometimes we're watching the difficulty that others are experiencing. And I wonder if when you hear news or read the news or Twitter feed or wherever you get your news, do you ever think about the rest of the story?

The impact of that story that you're reading, that story of crime or some kind of a tragedy, what kind of impact does that story have on the extended personal relationships?

The lingering and long trail of difficult relationships because of a tragedy that's being reported. And I started thinking about this about two or three years ago, the first time I was asked to talk about this.

[2 : 1 8] And there was a couple of stories in the news or from my personal life that just struck me. Maybe some of you heard about this story in 2019. Salvatore Anello was holding his 18-month-old granddaughter, his daughter's child.

On the 11th floor of a cruise ship, and he leaned up against a window on the cruise ship, only the window was opened and the baby fell out of that window and fell to her death.

This happened on a family vacation with the entire extended family in attendance. You read that story and you think, what a tragedy. And then you think about that story and you wonder, can you imagine the relationships now and into the future?

How Salvatore interacts with his family, how that daughter interacts with her father. The sorrow, the blame, the anger, and the forgiveness, hopefully.

Also in 2020, a story that I had some personal connection to because of people that were involved in the aftermath. But in 2020, Robert Bryans abducted his twin two-year-old daughters in San Diego, California, making threats to kill them.

[3 : 33] He put them in their car seats. He drove at a high speed off of a cliff, 30-foot cliff into the Pacific Ocean. And it was all caught on a surveillance video.

A San Diego police officer was driving by at that moment. He had the gear in his car. He rappelled down the cliff, swam into the water, and he rescued all three.

All three survived. And eventually will recover. What do you think the future of that family is? Mom, grandparents, extended family.

I know a man, a police officer, and his wife. He was just about to retire as a police officer, a godly man, who gave their daughter in marriage to a young man in their small church, bringing two well-known, friendly, long-time, decades-long relationship, Christian families together within a small church, in the joyous and blessed time of a wedding.

Within two months, those parents received a phone call from the police department informing them that their new son-in-law had murdered their daughter. By the way, the response and the perseverance of that couple, the parents of that daughter, were remarkable.

[4 : 52] As they attended the murder trial and the aftermath. And there's a long story to that. But it's remarkable how they operated in the context of those events and the difficult relationships that came out of those events.

You read these stories in the news, and you think about if you just read the stories and move on, that's fine. But occasionally, stop and think, what is the impact that these events, and these are just dramatic illustrations of the concept that every event in life has consequences.

And those consequences involve relationships. And your difficult relationships might pale in comparison to what I just described to you. And maybe they don't. Life is hard.

And I wonder how many of you think about the events described in the Bible through that same lens. All throughout the Bible, there are relationships that are damaged, strained, and broken.

It's everywhere in the Bible. If you put on that lens of evaluating relationships as you read the Bible, you will see repeatedly that there is a strain all over the place.

[6 : 09] The Bible doesn't really talk about it in many cases. It just states the facts. But if you think about what are the ramifications, it's really startling.

And I don't have time here tonight to even begin to scratch the surface, but I want to try. Think about Genesis 2, since we've been in Genesis 2. Perfection.

No sin. Everything is brand new. Adam and Eve are on their honeymoon. Can you imagine the honeymoon in the Garden of Eden?

It's perfection. It's peace. It's joy. No sin. They know a perfect world in a way that you and I will never know on this earth. Beautiful. Sin-free.

Perfect communion with God. And you turn the page to Genesis 3, and it's a fallen world. There's sin. There's the husband and wife marital difficulties that in Genesis 3, God pronounces the curse on the man and the woman, guaranteeing that from that point until we are raptured and go to heaven or go to heaven, marriage is going to be difficult.

[7 : 22] There are going to be difficulties in that relationship. Genesis 3 says that the wife's desire will be to usurp the man's leadership.

The man's leadership will be weak and failing. That will create difficulty. That is by design. It is baked in the cake. That is why I say with great confidence that everybody experiences difficult relationships.

And it didn't take long for those relationships to unravel. In Genesis 3, verse 12, as Adam is confronted, do you recall what he basically said?

He said what Saul said. I didn't do it. That woman you gave me, he says, is the one who did it. Can you imagine Eve's eagerness to love and follow that leadership?

And then you turn the page to Genesis 4. Adam and Eve's oldest son, Cain, killed his brother Abel. Murder enters the world.

[8 : 27] Have you thought about the shock and awe of that event? Adam and Eve, they have experienced the Garden of Eden. They have been ejected from the Garden of Eden, and their son kills their son.

Difficult relationships. How about the two Sauls in the Bible? We already talked about Old Testament King Saul, Saul and David. Right around that 1 Samuel 15 part of the Bible, you see that we already talked about that Saul has been rejected as king by God, and David is selected as the next king in the very next chapter.

But there's a problem. David is serving in Saul's court. Saul knows he's done. We call it a lame duck. His replacement is right in front of him every day.

In 1 Samuel 18.10, here's how Saul responded. It came about in the next day that an evil spirit from God came mightily upon Saul, and he raved in the midst of the house while David was playing the harp with his hand as usual, and a spear was in Saul's hand.

Saul hurled the spear, for he thought, I will pin David to the wall. But David escaped his presence twice. It's a difficult relationship? Yeah, a little bit.

[9 : 48] Next chapter, 1 Samuel 19.1, it says, Now Saul told Jonathan, his son, and all his servants to put David to death. Ten verses later, it says, Saul sent messengers to David's house to watch him in order to put him to death in the morning.

Difficult relationship. There were many more attempts on David's life by Saul. Saul is obsessed with killing David. He even takes 3,000 men with him to kill David at one point.

In verse 28 of 1 Samuel 18, it says, Saul knew that the Lord was with David. And then it says that Saul was afraid of David. And it says he was David's enemy continually.

The rest of Saul's life is devoted to killing David. He was not successful, as you might imagine. When God says David is the next king, who do you think is going to be the next king?

But, of course, Saul has already demonstrated, as we saw last night, he doesn't really care about what God says. So he pursues David the rest of his life. And, in fact, David at one point spares Saul's life a couple of times.

[11 : 07] I wonder if you've ever had, if you've ever experienced somebody threatening or attempting to kill you or ruin you. You talk about a difficult relationship.

In 1 Samuel 31, Saul and his three sons are killed in a battle. Saul is badly injured, and then he commits suicide. David's problems are over.

But guess what? In spite of all of that, David is asked to do the eulogy of the man who spent the end of his life absolutely committed to murdering him.

Could you do that memorial service? And if you might want to read it, in 2 Samuel 1, it's remarkable. David does it.

And he honors Saul. Saul. He says what he can say about Saul that's positive. 2 Samuel 1 is the dirge of David honoring Saul.

[12 : 10] He tells the truth where he can without talking about what a bad guy Saul was. I guess everybody knew that. David demonstrates the ultimate in honor, grace, gentleness, and wisdom.

Here's what he says about Saul. Saul and Jonathan, beloved and pleasant in their life, and in their death they were not parted. They were swifter than eagles.

They were stronger than lions. Oh, daughters of Israel, weep over Saul, who clothed you luxuriously in scarlet and put ornaments of gold on your apparel.

How have the mighty fallen in the midst of battle? That's so sweet. That's so sweet. So kind. At the end of Saul's life, to eulogize him that way, knowing that had Saul had his way, Saul would have been attending David's funeral.

And then there's the apostle Paul. I don't know how much of his story you know, but he was a bad guy. He was a very bad guy.

[13 : 16] In Acts chapter 7, talking about when they were stoning Stephen, the Pharisees, the religious leaders of the day, it says in verse 58 of Acts 7, when they had driven Stephen out of the city, they began stoning him, and the witnesses laid aside their robes at the feet of a young man named Saul.

In Acts 8, verse 1, Saul was in hearty agreement with putting Stephen to death. Some devout men buried Stephen and made loud lamentation over him, but Saul, listen to this, this is the man who becomes Paul.

I'm just going to call him Paul. Paul began ravaging the church, entering house after house, and dragging off men and women. He would put them in prison. In Acts chapter 9, it says that Saul, or Paul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest and asked for letters from him to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found anyone belonging to the way, meaning Christians, both men and women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem.

That's Paul. In fact, Paul, in his testimony later, says in 1 Timothy 1.13, I was a blasphemer, a persecutor, and a violent aggressor.

And the victim of all of that was the church, Christians. Well, in Acts 9, Paul is converted. Amazing story.

[14 : 49] You can read that at your leisure. In verse 20 of Acts 9, it says that Paul immediately began to proclaim Jesus in the synagogue, saying, He is the Son of God.

All those hearing him continued to be amazed and were saying, Is this not he who in Jerusalem destroyed those who called on his name and who had come here for the purpose of bringing them bound before the chief priests?

Is this the same guy? How receptive do you think the church was to the man who probably had murdered and tortured fathers, sons, uncles, grandparents?

How receptive would they have been for Paul to come in to worship with them? I think there would have been a little bit of fear, a little bit of rejection, difficult relationships.

Verse 26 of Acts 9 says, When Paul came to Jerusalem, he was trying to associate with the disciples, but they were all afraid of him, not believing that he was a disciple.

[15 : 55] But Barnabas, and I want you to remember that name, but Barnabas took hold of him and brought him to the apostles. Now let's think about the relationship issues here.

He's going to the apostles. The relationship issues here is they're all afraid of him. Wouldn't you think? He was going to kill me.

And perhaps he killed family and friends. And perhaps this is a ruse. He's just coming here to find out who we are so he can kill us. There's anger and bitterness.

There's righteous indignation. Hey, this is the guy that killed my pastor, my friend, my father, my son. There's jealousy. Think about this.

Why should we submit to an apostle named Paul when a few weeks ago he was killing us? I have a better testimony than that.

[16 : 53] I've been faithful for so long, and here comes this murderer, and we're supposed to submit to him? Human beings would never react that way, would they? Authority.

There'd be questioning of his authority. He was trying to kill me a few weeks ago, and now he has apostolic authority over me. I reject that authority. Difficult relationships. And then there's grace.

Of course, there would be people that were gracious, and that's the overriding story of Paul. Grace and forgiveness. Can you imagine being in a church and welcoming in somebody who was murdering and torturing Christians and forgiving them?

But that's what happened. Grace and forgiveness is hard, especially in a fallen world. Forgiveness is a companion to every other manifestation of fallenness.

In spite of all of this, Barnabas, whose name means, by the way, the son of encouragement, he steps into the smooth way for Saul. So your life might be full of difficult relationships.

[18 : 04] It's a fact of life on this planet. Tonight we're talking about friends, current and former friends, perhaps people who used to be very close friends, who have damaged the relationship.

We're talking about family, parents, children, siblings. We're talking about work, employer, and employees.

And today we are together going to obey the command in Hebrews 6.1, which says, let us press on to maturity. You see, the key to dealing with difficult relationships is to grow in maturity.

I'm not saying that it's going to restore those relationships, but it can resolve a lot of those issues. Colossians 1.28 says this, We proclaim Christ, admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom so that we may present every man complete in Christ.

And there is the outline for what we're going to do the rest of our time. We're going to proclaim Christ. We're going to find the wisdom in Scripture on how to deal with difficult relationships so that we may be presented as mature, complete in Christ.

[19 : 25] Colossians 3 says this, So as those who have been chosen by God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience, bearing with one another and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone, just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you.

And beyond all of these things, put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity. Now, there's a lot there. And I know you've heard those verses before.

But we're going to dive into that in a very practical way and understand what does all that mean. If you have your Bibles, I want you to look at two passages with me. And just to give you a map of where we're going, I want to read these two passages.

The first is Romans 12, verses 17 through 19. And then we'll turn to Titus 3, verses 2 to 3. And then I want to pull nine principles out of those two passages.

The Bible is so practical. It is so helpful. We're going to pull these principles out in the context of difficult relationships. Romans chapter 12, starting in verse 17.

[20 : 42] Never pay back evil for evil to anyone. Respect what is right in the sight of all men. If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men.

Never take your own revenge. But leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, Vengeance is mine. I will repay, says the Lord.

And then Titus chapter 3, verses 2 and 3. That we are to malign no one. We're to be peaceable, gentle, showing every consideration for all men, for we also once were foolish ourselves.

Disobedient, deceived, enslaved to various lusts and pleasures, spending our life in malice and envy, hateful, hating one another.

There's a lot of passages we could go to. I'm going to use these two passages to drive the rest of what we talk about tonight. Here's a brief commentary of these two passages.

[21 : 51] Nine commands. If you're taking notes, I'm going to give you nine commands. When you consider a difficult relationship or difficult relationships, plural, this is what the Bible says you do.

We are to do in that context. And they describe the difference between maturity in a difficult relationship and immaturity. And of course, we've already seen Hebrews 6.1, we are to strive for maturity.

Number one, do not repay evil for evil. It's right out of Romans chapter 12. Never, it says. Never.

A couple years ago, my family was forced to move out of the house we lived in. A crazy man moved in next door.

And we tried to survive it for three years. And that man eventually was threatening murder, attempting murder, stalking, following, doing everything he could to destroy our life.

[22 : 57] I'll tell you what, I really wanted to pay back evil. It was very difficult. But the Bible says never.

The assumption here is that you are the target of evil. Nothing new. Nothing unusual. If you are the target of evil, you're just like everybody else.

You never repay evil with evil. And if you aren't now, you will be. Plan on it. Also plan to turn the cheek.

Always. The opposite of never is always. Turn the cheek. Maturity. Maturity bears evil. Maturity trusts in the Lord.

And we'll talk about that. The second thing that Romans 12 says is respect what is right in the sight of all men. What does this have to do with difficult relationships? What this is talking about is integrity, honor, and truth, honesty.

[24 : 03] Do not lie to yourself or others about that difficult relationship. It's easy to do. You can talk to people about a difficult relationship.

And you can prompt whatever counsel you want to get by telling them only the facts that they need to know to tell you what you want to hear. Romans 12 says don't do that.

You respect what is right. What is true, you tell the whole story. 1 Peter 2. Matthew 12 says keep your behavior excellent so that the thing in which they slander you is an evildoer.

They may because of your good deeds as they observe them glorify God. Maturity is living according to truth rather than feelings and preferences and manipulations.

That's maturity. That's maturity. The third evidence of maturity in the midst of a difficult relationship is be at peace.

[24 : 59] I know that's hard in a difficult relationship. If possible, it says so far as it depends on you. Do you see that in Romans 12? If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men.

Will all men be at peace with you? You have no control over that. Maturity says regardless of their demeanor towards me, I am going to be at peace towards them.

The implication here is it takes two to make peace, doesn't it? Have you ever been in a difficult relationship where you just want to make peace and the other person just doesn't want to make peace?

The mature person is still at peace. Number four. Number four. Never take your own revenge, it says.

In Romans 12. Never. You will have the opportunity to expose and destroy. Don't do it.

[26 : 02] Never. Never. We live in a cancel culture. We respond to offense by writing people off and making sure as many people as possible that know them will also write them off. Live as if they don't exist.

And there's lots of implications of that. The most basic is that it is yet another sign of a godless, sinful generation that human beings treat each other that way. You see, maturity never takes revenge.

This is hard sometimes when the difficult relationship breaks out into the public. And the other party is saying what they say. Don't take revenge.

You see, punishment is always the domain of God. Revenge is the opposite of forgiveness. And maturity forgives.

Never take revenge. Number five. Trust the providence and the purposes of God. It says, never take your own revenge, beloved.

[27 : 06] But leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, vengeance is mine. I will repay. And maybe you want to pray about that. Lord, do your work.

I confess with a crazy neighbor who eventually forced us to go underground so that he could not follow us. I will confess.

I prayed at times, Lord, do your work. But that's his domain. It's not my domain. He trusts in the providence and the purposes of God.

God, I understand I'm not supposed to live where we live anymore. We move. That's the providence of God. You leave room for the wrath of God.

You see, if you step in and you start expressing in any way the wrath of God, you replace God. And that's not what we're to do. That wrath may be for them. And by the way, it may be for you.

[28 : 05] You don't know why that difficult relationship is going on. God knows all about the difficulty, the injustice, the unfairness. He knows all of that.

In fact, he ordained all of that in whatever relationship you're thinking about right now. He may be using it for your good. He may be using it for their good.

He may be using that difficult relationship situation for purposes that you have absolutely no idea. You trust the Lord. Trust in his providence.

He is at work for his glory always. Revenge and wrath is the exclusive domain of God. And in light of God's providence, we need to stand down.

Faith and maturity go together. Maturity trusts in the purposes and the providence of God. Maturity understands the wisdom of Colossians 4.

[29 : 13] Let your speech always be with grace as though seasoned with salt so that you will know how you should respond to each person. The commands to control our tongue is all over scripture.

And nowhere is it demonstrative of maturity more than in a difficult relationship. Sometimes the best speech, by the way, is no speech.

Be quiet. No need to respond. Stop talking. Everyone doesn't need to know the details. Maturity is self-control, particularly with the tongue.

Number seven, be gentle. This is the quality that should be evident if there's ever a need to talk about a difficult relationship. It is the opposite of harshness.

Remember the example of David eulogizing the man who pursued him bent on seeing him dead. What an example.

[30 : 16] That's gentleness. It's grace. And gentleness will cause you to temper your comments and maybe even help you to stand down and be quiet.

Maturity is gentle. Number eight, be humble. And I've probably said be humble in six different contexts this weekend. I hope we're getting that message.

Christians are humble. Mature Christians are humble. In Titus chapter three, it says, show every consideration for all men.

In verse three, for we also were foolish ourselves. We should never forget our own desperate state of sin. And that we were forgiven. And that we were forgiven.

And are forgiven every day over and over and over. And whatever offense that person has committed against you or is committing against you, it likely pales in comparison to the offense of your sin to a loving God every day.

[31 : 19] Be humble. Be humble. And the ninth is to grow up. That sounds harsh.

But Titus three, verse three says, for we also once were foolish ourselves. Disobedient, deceived, enslaved to various lusts and pleasures, spending our life in malice and envy, hateful and hating one another.

And the point here is we also once were. Put all of that behind you. Be mature. There's the maturity of leaving that behind in the rear view mirror.

A life full, by the way, I mean just riddled with difficult relationships, says more about you than it does about the people with whom you have difficult relationships. At some point, the mirror has to come up and there has to be an examination of what is the cause of all these difficult relationships.

Maturity is demonstrated by growing wisdom and effectiveness in dealing with difficult relationships. So in mature relationships, you can only change you.

[32 : 32] None of the above, none of what I've talked about, talks about changing other people. Did you notice that? Run through that list again. Don't repay evil for evil. Respect what is right.

Be at peace. You can't compel peace in the other person. Never take revenge. Revenge, by the way, escalates the difficult relationship probably, right?

Don't do it. Trust the providence and purposes of God. Malign nobody. Be gentle. Be humble. Be mature. And all of that is in the face of somebody who, in response to all of that, might repay evil, won't respect what is right.

They will lie. They will not be peaceful. They will take revenge. They don't care about the providence and the purposes of God. Or maybe they'll believe they're implementing the providence and purposes of God by being difficult.

They might malign you. They won't be gentle. They'll be proud. They'll be immature. None of that matters. The Bible makes clear you can only change you.

[33 : 38] You're responsible for you. And you and I are never promised easy relationships. You are called to mature responses to those difficult relationships.

So I started with stories. I want to end with an extended story from the Word of God illustrating all of this. It involves Paul and Barnabas and a man named Mark.

They were ministry partners, long-term friends, been in the trenches together, and actually they were family. They were related.

Barnabas was Paul's right-hand man. Remember when I said remember the name? He's the guy that stepped into the gap with the murderous Saul and took him to the Christians and said he's saved now.

That's Barnabas. He happened to be Mark's cousin. Who's Mark? Well, it's Mark of the Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John fame, the book of Mark. He's the same guy from Acts.

[34 : 45] I'm sorry. When Peter was released from prison in Acts 12, if you remember that story, Paul had been imprisoned. When Paul was released from prison in Acts 12, it says he went to the home of Mark's mother, where many were gathered praying.

And why did he go to Mark's mother's home? Because that was, he happened to be a childhood friend of Peter. Acts 13 tells us that the Holy Spirit set apart Barnabas and Paul for a missionary journey.

We're now past the events of Mark 12. We're now past the events of Mark 12. We're now past the events of Mark 12. Barnabas and Paul. It's interesting. The Holy Spirit set Barnabas and Paul aside for a missionary journey.

And that Mark went with them as a helper. And then in verse 13, it says, but Mark left them and returned to Jerusalem.

There's no explanation as to why, what the circumstances were. But later in Acts 15, we find out a little bit more. Let me make sure you understand.

[35 : 56] Mark went with Paul and Barnabas. Paul is the ministry leader. Barnabas is Paul's right-hand man. And Mark is Barnabas' cousin. They're on a trip.

All of a sudden, Mark leaves. And in Acts 15, we find out why. Paul and Barnabas are planning another trip in verse 37. And it says that Barnabas wanted to take Mark.

Paul said no. In fact, he didn't just say no. He insisted, it says, that they not take him. In verse 39, And there occurred such a sharp disagreement that they separated from one another.

And Barnabas took Mark with him and sailed away to Cyprus. But Paul chose Silas and left. There's a split. Something happened.

It says a sharp disagreement. Beyond that, we have no idea. We don't know what the disagreement was about. We don't know how sharp the disagreement is.

[37 : 01] But it must have been sharp because Paul grabbed Silas and left Mark and Barnabas where they were. It caused Barnabas to split with Paul for the first time.

It's difficult. It was public. It's recorded in Scripture for all time and eternity. We're talking about it. It's a very public split. You can be sure all kinds of people were involved in choosing sides.

Right? That's what people do when there's a split in a high-profile relationship. That's what Christians do. Family was involved. Barnabas and Mark are cousins, and it makes you wonder if blood runs thicker than water.

So you fast forward. The book of Colossians. This is six years later. After that very public split.

It was public for the people in the church. It's public because it's recorded in the Bible. Six years later, Paul's writing to the church at Colossae from prison. And he says in chapter 4, verse 10, Aristarchus, my fellow prisoner, sends you his greetings.

[38 : 14] And also Barnabas' cousin, Mark, about whom you received instructions. If he comes to you, welcome him. Something happened.

It was resolved. And if you read the book of Philemon, written at the same time as Colossae, written from the same jail, Paul is in prison.

It says in verse 23 that Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, greets you as do Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, Luke, my fellow workers.

Something has happened. And then in 2 Timothy 4, I think it's considered to be the last letter written by Paul before his death. He knows he's about to die.

Listen to this. He says, make every effort to come to me soon. For Demas, having loved this present world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica. Crescens has gone to Galatia, Titus to Dalmatia.

[39 : 16] Only Luke is with me. Pick up Mark, Mark, and bring him with you, for he is useful to me for service. In Acts 13, there's a split.

By the end of Paul's life, they come back together. In fact, of everybody, that's who Paul wanted next to him. It's an interesting note.

Mark, perhaps because of this split, came under the intense leadership and discipleship of a man named Peter. And because of the split with Paul, he went to Jerusalem.

Based on Peter's preaching and influence, he wrote the Gospel of Mark. Mark, by the way, neither heard nor accompanied the ministry of Christ.

I don't know if you knew that. He was not an eyewitness to what he wrote about in the book of Mark. He was not a disciple. He was in the early church. And in the early church, the Gospel of Mark was referred to as the memoirs of Peter.

[40 : 25] Because Mark parted with Paul, he was sent away from Paul. He connected with Peter, and Peter disciplined him. And Peter dictated him the stories of Christ.

And in AD 150, Mark was referred to as the disciple and interpreter of Peter. Peter, this relationship grew and blossomed, probably as a result of the split with Paul.

You never know the purposes and plans of God. I'm not saying I do, of course. But isn't it interesting that if Mark had stayed with Paul, the Gospel of Mark may not have ever been written.

You trust the purposes and the plans and providence of God, even in difficult relationships. Then you have Philemon and Onesimus.

Philemon was a wealthy believer, a godly man living in Colossae. The church there in Colossae met in his house. And Philemon had been saved under Paul's ministry in Ephesus.

[41 : 29] And Onesimus, that's a common name for a slave at the time, meaning useful. It's a good slave, I suppose. Onesimus apparently stole money from Philemon and ran away to Rome to merge into the large slave population and kind of disappear.

Somehow he runs into Paul, who's in prison. And through the ministry and the testimony of Paul, Onesimus is saved. And now he's coming back to Colossae.

This is Philemon is the letter from Paul to give Philemon some context and to appeal to him for the restoration of the relationship with Onesimus.

He appeals to him to forgive him, to restore him willingly, without grudges, and to consider his new status as a fellow heir in Christ.

And at the end of the letter, Paul says, I already read it to you, Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ, greet you, as do Mark. Aristarchus, Demas, Luke, my fellow workers.

[42 : 34] Verse 24, where he mentions Mark, is a not-so-subtle reference to Paul's own once-severed but now-restored relationship with Mark.

Paul's instructions to Philemon carried more weight since Paul had followed his own counsel and forgiven Mark. And everyone would have known that.

What did we just see in those stories? The merging of those stories in the New Testament. First, forgiveness. Paul obviously forgave Mark.

He got over it. And so did Mark. Forgiveness demonstrates humility and maturity. A lack of forgiveness is immature and ungodly.

We saw example. I just noted that Paul's example of forgiveness gave him the basis to appeal to Philemon on behalf of Onesimus.

[43 : 34] Our maturity and difficult relationships is an example to those around us, including our children.

Our immaturity and difficult relationships is not a secret to those around us. People see it. Providence. I think you've seen this. Difficult relationships like everything else are within the control and the design of our good and gracious God.

Therefore, our good. Therefore, God's glory. The gospel of Mark would have been very different if the author had not been diverted to ministry alongside Peter.

Is that why that split happened with Paul? I don't know. I don't want to say that. But it's just interesting. Onesimus' school duggery and theft and his escape to Jerusalem brought him into the presence of Paul, who he otherwise would have never met, who shared the gospel with him and led him to Christ.

Paul's public difficulty with Mark and subsequent reconciliation gave him the authority then to send Onesimus back to Philemon and say, forgive him.

[44 : 52] That's providence. That's providence. Don't try to control people or relationships. That's God's domain. God is at work.

We cannot keep broken that which must be fixed, and we cannot fix that which cannot be fixed. God is provident.

Trust God. The other element I want to highlight from those stories is silence. I've already mentioned this, but I want to highlight this. There's a lot we don't know about these stories.

I probably haven't said everything that's known, but I've told you 95 to 99 percent of what's known about these stories, about these difficult relationships.

It's not a lot of details, and it's really frustrating at certain points. I really wanted to know more. I don't know about you. What in the world happened between Paul and Mark?

[45 : 52] We'll never know. What was Paul's conversation with Barnabas like? What was the disagreement? What did Onesimus do that caused him to run, put his life at risk, and try and hide himself in Jerusalem?

Why do we have to speculate about that? Why didn't God just tell us? I don't know. We'll never know. The inference by absence of data is that we don't need to know.

And it's apparently not necessary information. I think this illustrates sometimes the need that there is no need to talk a lot about a difficult relationship or a disagreement, particularly when the people you know or you're talking to know that person.

Maturity is quiet sometimes. Immaturity wants to plead our case. We want to make sure everybody knows. Before you talk to them, you've got to know what the truth is.

Maturity insists that love covers a multitude of sins and that love sometimes is best expressed in silence. You don't say everything you know.

[47 : 07] And the last observation of those stories is maturity. I can't think of anything in life on this planet that has driven the process of sanctification more in my life than dealing with difficult relationships.

I expect that's probably true for many of you. Paul, Mark, Barnabas, they're all just frail people. They're humans.

They're humans. They had difficult relationships. They're characters in the Bible, which doesn't make them perfect. It's the same process of sanctification in difficult relationships as you and I.

And nothing in life exposes maturity and immaturity more or quicker than a difficult relationship. And nothing will work on your sanctification like difficult relationships.

So, we don't repay evil for evil. We deal in truth. We respect what is right.

[48 : 11] We are at peace, at least as far as it depends on us. Never take revenge. Trust the providence and the purposes of God.

Malign nobody. Be gentle. Be humble. Be mature. It's a long list. It's a hard process.

But I think through the grace of God, that is what the Bible says we need to do in the face and in the context of difficult relationships. And I believe he will honor that.

To his praise and his glory. Let's pray. Thank you, Lord, for your word. Lord, some of this is hard truth. Some of this is difficult. But, Lord, you've laid it out in your word.

We thank you for the example throughout scripture of difficult relationships. Lord, we are not experiencing anything here that hasn't been experienced before. That your word is not sufficient to address.

[49 : 11] To give us the wisdom and the guidance. To walk through relationships that are hard. Lord, you pray if it's your will that you would resolve difficult relationships represented in this room that I don't even know.

You do. We trust that. We trust in your providence. We're grateful to you for the tests and the challenges. Not because they're fun.

But because they are what you will. And we want to be squarely in your will. Thank you for your love. Thank you for the church. For the comfort that's here among other believers.

For the accountability and the wisdom that's available within these churches. To help each of us to navigate all of this to your praise and glory. In Christ's name.

Amen.