

Restoring Damaged Relationships 1

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- [0:00] I know that I'm visually challenged. So if you're trying to wave at me and get my attention, and I don't seem to be paying any attention, you might want to try harder or give up.
- Whatever you think best. Ah, thank you, Eli. Yes, I think we're good. And, yeah, I guess we can leave that right there.
- Good. Good. Good. Well, I'm going to start off this morning with a little story about a family.
- The main characters are a brother and a sister. And I'm, true story, but I'm going to give fictitious names, John and Rachel.
- And here is John's account. I called home to see how my father was doing as he recovered from his heart attack. But what I found out is that my mother was now in the hospital.
- [1:06] At first, they wouldn't tell me what was wrong. But finally, my sister Rachel let it out that Mom was in the psychiatric unit after taking an overdose of drugs.
- Rachel said to me, we don't call you anymore. We don't tell you because you don't care about the family. You're too good for us now.
- John says, I have never been cut so deeply in my life. My sister doesn't know that I've been sending home a quarter of my paycheck each month to help with my dad's hospitalization costs.
- She doesn't know how often I call home. So what she said was unfair and untrue. But I decided I'd rather that I wouldn't say anything about this to her.
- After all, she's been carrying quite a load at home. I'll just forgive her. Just forgive and forget, it has often been said.
- [2:23] And I think that at times that is what we should do. But in a case like that of John and Rachel, where their relationship has been badly damaged by misunderstanding and now is characterized by lack of trust and deep hurt, in a situation like that, just forgiving and forgetting, I think usually does not do anything to help repair the damage to the relationship.
- Today and the next three Sunday mornings, we're going to be looking at damaged relationships and how to restore them.
- On the handout that I hope you have, you'll see at the top a little introduction section with what I call five truths that the Bible tells us about relationships.
- And I'm going to go through those briefly now. First, relationships get damaged. How many people believe that? Probably I don't have to prove that to you.
- But I will mention that in the book of Genesis, which has the primary theme of beginnings, there is this strong secondary theme of damaged relationships.
- [4:03] I think it's true, or at least almost true to say, that every single relationship in Genesis that we read about in any detail got badly damaged.

And up on the screen, you'll see a partial list of these relationships, which I think, to me anyway, make very clear that God knows this is true, and he cares deeply about it.

The damaged relationship that we'll be focusing on comes at the end of Genesis, and it's about Joseph and his brothers.

Now, the second truth about relationships from the Bible is that it's hard work to repair a damaged relationship. But they can be restored with God's help.

And here I reference, and on your sheet, you know, you'll see a lot of text, and next to most of them is a Bible reference, and I'm going to put those up on the screen when I'm referring to them.

[5 : 17] So, it's hard work to maintain and restore relationships. In Ephesians 4.2, we read, Be completely humble and gentle.

Be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

Make every effort. The message is, it's hard work. But we're to do that. By the way, I just remembered something that I had forgotten.

And that is that I was hoping to use the youth group Bibles that are sitting in a box in the back room there. Eli would know where they are and if they're still available.

But later today, when we look at Genesis, I wanted to encourage all of you to, if you don't have your own Bible, to look on there.

[6 : 21] Thank you, Ben. All right. So, the third truth about relationships from the Bible. Not that these are the only truths, but these are some.

Number three. Restoring damaged relationships is critically important to God's work in the world. We read in John 13, 35, that Jesus said, By this, all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.

Now, the implication is that, on the other hand, if Christians are fighting with one another, are not getting along with one another, if their love isn't showing, people will doubt that we are disciples of Jesus.

And I think in the United States today, we see that in a big way. People outside the church, people who wouldn't call themselves Christians, typically, so the polls show, look at Christians and think, they're unloving, and they're not really following Jesus.

Which has a terrible negative effect on what God wants to do through us. So, good relationships between Christians and people in general are important to God's work.

[7 : 59] Fourth truth. God's goal for us in our relationship when they get damaged is not just that the anger and hostility ends.

God's goal is that we have good relationships with one another. Colossians 3, 12 and following. Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience.

Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.

And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity. Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body, you were called to peace.

A lot of words there. But if you can form a picture of what the church and our relationships would be like if we obeyed that, it is a beautiful thing.

[9 : 14] Something to be greatly treasured and worth working hard for. The fifth point.

Restoring damaged relationships is usually a process. Now, there may be those times when, let's say, you get hurt by somebody else that you've had a good relationship with and you get angry and there may be times when, you know, very quickly, all of a sudden, problem solved, it's over with, good relationship again.

But, I believe both experience and the Bible indicate that that's not the way things usually work. Usually, restoring a badly damaged relationship is a process.

We'll see, I believe, good evidence for that in the Bible as we go along. But I think also, in Genesis 37 through 50, the story of Joseph and his brothers, we see how that gets played out as a long-term process of restoration.

Now, the Bible says a lot about relationships, how they get damaged, how they can be fixed. I think one way to summarize what the Bible teaches is that restoring relationships is a process that can be described in four steps.

[10:55] Not the only way to, you know, summarize the Bible's teaching, but I think this is a good way. On your sheet, and the front side that we're looking at is the one that starts with restoring damaged relationships, not the one that says step three on the back.

But right here, you have what I call four steps to restoring damaged relationships. And you can read those, but what I want to do now is try and explain briefly what I mean by them, making reference back to the story I told at the beginning about John and Rachel.

John was deeply hurt and then angered by what Rachel told him. But it seems that fairly quickly he got over his anger.

And that's what I mean by renouncing anger. You know, letting go of it so that you're not angry with the person who hurt you anymore.

And then it seems that instead of focusing on the hurt and anger that he was feeling, he started thinking about Rachel and all that she was going through.

[12:11] And I would describe that as responding in love. He really starts to care about the person who hurt him. Now, I don't think that was the total approach he took was wise, but at least I believe he was responding in love.

What's wrong with that approach is that if he isn't going to do anything else but just forgive and forget, he's not going to get to what I call reconciliation.

By which I mean things are discussed. There's good communication. People come to an agreement on the truth. And where there's a need for somebody to ask forgiveness and for forgiveness to be granted, there's an opportunity for that to be done.

Now, if that doesn't get done, the hurt of the past is probably going to continue into the future in a form of lack of trust.

This person hurt me before. You know, why should I believe the future should be any different? The person's probably going to hurt me again. So, in the case of John, Rachel, you know, if John just forgives and forgets, Rachel's probably going to continue to think John doesn't care about the family anymore.

[13:37] He thinks, you know, he's too good for us now. And so she certainly isn't going to trust him to act in the best way towards her and the rest of the family.

So, these are four steps that often are worked through in the order that you have them there.

During this study, today in the next three weeks, this is my hope and goal, that as we look at what the Bible says, we'll come to understand more about relationships, how they get damaged, how God wants to work with us and through us to restore them.

But I also want us to work together to help each other apply the truths that we read.

Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we are broken people who have broken relationships.

[14:59] We ask that you will give us a picture of what you want those relationships to be in the future.

May we see the love and the joy that you desire us and others to have. We ask that you'll bring conviction where you want us to change, that you'll give us hope, that you will enable us to change.

help us obey you so that we may experience your peace, love, and joy. That the name of Jesus may be praised.

Amen. that. Now, at this point, I'll just invite you to do two things if you can.

One, get a handout if you haven't gotten one yet, and we're going to be looking in a moment at this section about Jacob and his family.

[16:18] And also, if you don't have a Bible, then how do we do our Bibles? We have many, and hopefully they're the ones I'm imagining, but if not, probably close enough. I'd like you to turn to Genesis 37, and we're going to begin by reading verses 3 through 11.

If you're using the Bible, I think you have, you'll find this on page 31. Somebody, if you find that's true, let me know. If it's not true, you can also let me know.

But, Genesis chapter 37, and we'll start with verse 1. But, as you turn there, let me just give you a little bit of background.

Jacob, one of the main people in this story, it's mentioned over here, Jacob also has the name Israel, and he's called by both names in this text, but they both refer to the same people.

Now, Jacob was the grandson of Abraham and the son of Isaac, part of the family that God picked to reveal himself to the world.

[17:35] So, they have a special part in God's plan. But, as we'll see, that didn't guarantee that they were necessarily very godly people.

people. This chart describes Jacob's family. He had what we might call two first class wives, Leah and Rachel.

children. But then he had what we might call two second class wives, Bilhah, Rachel's servant originally, and Zilpah, Leah's servant.

And between the four of them, he had twelve sons, and they're listed there underneath their mother, and the number there is their birth order, as it turns out.

Now, this is a great recipe for a dysfunctional family. And that is what we see happen for the marriage setup and for other reasons, too.

[18:40] But even in a family such as this, there were certain expectations. And one is that the oldest son would become the leader of the family when dad died.

And the oldest son would also inherit a greater share of whatever inheritance the father passed on to his sons. However, in this family situation, which the other brothers wouldn't have liked, but they would have gone along with it because, you know, that's tradition, that's what we have to live with.

But a complicating factor was that Jacob had a favorite son who he loved more than all the others. That was Joseph.

And between that and some shenanigans that Reuben was involved in, it wasn't clear that Reuben was going to be the head of the family in the future.

You know, maybe Joseph was. And that just made things more complicated and less happy in general. all right, that being said, I'm going to start reading Genesis 37 with verse 1.

[20:00] Jacob lived in the land of his fathers, that is, Abraham and Isaac, his father's sojournings in the land of Canaan, what we would call Israel today.

And the next phrase, these are the generations of Jacob, may not communicate a lot to us. another translation puts it, I think, helpfully this way.

This is an account of Jacob's family line. And now the second part of verse 2.

Joseph, being 17 years old, was pasturing the flock with his brothers. He was a boy with the sons of Bilhah and Zilpah, his father's wives.

And Joseph brought a bad report of them to his father. Now, we don't know whether that bad report was warranted or not.

[21:02] And we don't know in what way Joseph brought the report to his father. But, however that be, it certainly was not something that the other brothers appreciated.

verse 3. Now, Israel, once again, same person as Jacob. Israel loved Joseph more than any other of his sons, because he was the son of his old age.

And he made him a robe of many colors. But, when his brothers saw that their father loved him more than all his brothers, they hated him and could not speak peacefully to him.

So, Jacob showed favoritism. That wasn't Joseph's fault. But, it was certainly easy for the brothers to focus their unhappiness about it on Joseph in anger.

Now, it would have been wonderful at this point if Joseph's brothers, feeling this anger, said, you know, we should not hold a grudge against Joseph.

[22:29] We should love him. You know, we should renounce our anger. They did not have the benefit of the whole Bible.

They did not have the benefit of understanding the joy of forgiveness through faith in Jesus, nor the fullness of the Holy Spirit, nor a greater church around them to help them.

So, and plus, there's no indication they were particularly godly people, even though they were in this special family that God was working with. We do have those other benefits today, and even so, it's hard for us to react as God wants us to in a similar situation.

But, with God's help, we can. And, so, in a situation like that, first thing, renounce anger. But, they didn't.

Alright, let's read on. Not only did they not renounce anger, but at this point, we read that Joseph added fuel to their simmering, angry fire.

[23:53] Now, Joseph had a dream, and when he told it to them, he said to them, hear this dream that I had.

Yeah, suddenly my glasses don't seem to be working well. But, I, here we go. Hear this dream that I dreamed. behold, we were binding sheaves in the field, and behold, my sheave arose and stood upright, and behold, your sheaves gathered around it and bowed down to my sheave.

His brother said to him, are you indeed to reign over us, or are you indeed to rule over us? imagine negative tone of voice.

So, they hated him even more for his dreams and for his words. Then he dreamed another dream and told it to his brothers and said, behold, I have dreamed another dream.

Behold, the sun, the moon, and eleven stars were bowing down to me. But when he told it to his father and to his brothers, his father rebuked him and said to him, what is this dream that you have dreamed?

[25:15] Shall I and your mother and your brothers indeed come and bow ourselves down to the ground before you? And the brothers were jealous of him, but his father kept this saying in mind.

Now, when Joseph told this dream, he was at least seventeen years old and he was a smart young man.

I think those things are clear. I also think that he was a spoiled teenager and was acting like a jerk. So, we could say, yeah, his brothers had good reason to be angry with him.

and they stayed angry and eventually their anger turned violent.

As I've said before, we, by God's grace, have a lot more resources than they had to deal properly with damaged relationships.

[26 : 28] relationships. So, let's look first at what the Bible says we should do in a situation like this. And, so, at this point, we're looking at step one in restoring damaged relationships, renouncing anger.

And, what I call step one here is acknowledging that God doesn't want me to stay angry even if somebody really has hurt me. He does not want me to stay angry with this person.

And, let's see here, the reference I give is Ephesians 4, 26-27, which is up on the screen.

It reads, be angry and do not sin. Do not let the sun go down on your anger and give no opportunity to the devil.

that phrase, don't let the sun go down on your anger, it was a, I think, putting it in our context today, it would be something like this.

[27 : 41] Don't stay angry with somebody for more than a few days. When you're hurt, it's normal and not necessarily sinful to respond in anger.

Jesus was angry at times. But staying angry with somebody is a sin.

And the implication here is that if you stay angry with somebody, you're inviting Satan to come into your life and stay there and continue to make your relationships bad.

So, first thing to do is, if you find yourself hurt and angry and you're staying angry, to realize, ah, this is not what God wants, and to pray and commit yourself to not staying angry with this person.

now, at this point, I think it would be good to do a little reality check. So, let me ask this, or ask you to raise your hand, if this is true of you.

[29 : 04] At some time in the past, have you been really hurt by somebody, gotten angry with them, and stayed angry with them for a few days or longer? if that's happened to you, as it's happened to me, I invite you to raise your hand.

Now, there may be some of us who haven't experienced that. If not, if you live very long, most likely it will happen, but, you know, some of us are more angry people than others, and some people stay more angry than others.

But, whether you've experienced it or not, here's another question. Let's say you find yourself in that situation. Maybe you're in it now, maybe in the future, you feel the conviction of God, I should renounce this anger, it should, you know, be wiped out of my life, and you pray about it, and you say, Lord, help me release this anger.

Do you think that that will, by itself, solve the problem? If you think that will likely for you solve the problem, raise your hand.

If you think, ah, that may not solve the problem just by itself, raise your hand, and here I raise my hand. You probably know that just because you decide you're going to do something, doesn't mean it's automatically going to happen.

[30 : 38] sin. A child may decide they're going to become a veterinarian, but that decision in itself will not bring that to pass. And many of us have experienced this.

We've been convicted of sin, we pray, confess it to God, ask him to help us have victory over that sin, and have found that we continue to do it.

Now, if you've experienced that, and gotten discouraged, be encouraged, because of two things.

These are not on your sheet, but one, God has given us everything we need to have victory over sin, and to get rid of the sin in our life.

By the way, this reference is now on your sheet, but it's up here after point number five, if you want to look at it in the future. So, 2 Peter 1, starting with verse 3, God's divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence, by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire.

[32 : 30] I find that an amazing and encouraging statement. God will give us what we need.

Secondly, God knows that in the way he's ordained things, if we've had habitual sin, getting victory over sin is usually a process by which God through his work over time pushes out the old habit and replaces it with the new habit that God wants us to have.

If you continue reading in that passage 5 through verses 11, this is very clear that it is a process by which God removes the sin in our lives and replaces it with his character, the character of Jesus.

And in addition to that general teaching, the Bible is full of information about the steps that we can take in the process to experience that.

And so right now we're going to continue looking at what I'm calling for the big picture step one, renouncing anger, but sub-steps in that.

[34 : 05] So the first one is to recognize ah, you know, this is not what God wants and ask for his help in renouncing anger. The second step that I mentioned there is don't replay the negative past.

So let's say somebody's hurt you and you know, you're going about your daily business and you remember the event.

Here are two choices that you have. One, you can go over it. You know, you can kind of put in that mental video you have of what that person did to you.

And as you replay it, you know, experience the hurt and anger all over again. And as you do that, you may experience a certain devious delight of righteous anger.

Oh, I have been wrong. That is terrible. And it's easy to do that again and again and again.

[35 : 26] But what God says to do is as we read in 1 Corinthians 13, I think it speaks to this point.

Love keeps no record of wrongs. It doesn't hold on to that mental video. You know, it doesn't keep it right there ready to play again and again.

Love does not delight in evil. You know, it doesn't make a practice of, oh yeah, that's what that person did to me. Get the adrenaline going again.

No. So instead of when that event, that hurt comes to mind, instead of replaying the negative paths, you could choose, with God's help, to practice step four or five.

But before we get to those and to step three, let's go back to our Bible text.

[36 : 50] And we read in Genesis 37, 12 through 17, that Joseph was at home. His brothers, it seems maybe all his brothers, except for his full brother and the youngest brother Benjamin, were out a ways from home taking care of the family sheep, the flocks.

And their father, Jacob, wanted to know how they were, so he sends Joseph out to find them and check on them. And then we come to verse 18.

The brothers saw him from afar and before he came near to them, they conspired against him to kill him. They said to one another, here comes this dreamer, come now, let us kill him and throw him into one of the pits.

Then we will say that a fierce animal has devoured him and we will see what becomes of his dreams.

But when Reuben heard this, he rescued him out of their hands saying, let us not take his life. And Reuben said to them, shed no blood, throw him into this pit here in the wilderness, but do not lay a hand on him.

[38 : 18] That he might rescue him out of their hand and restore him to his father. Now, it may be that some of Reuben's motivation was good.

Love for his father, love for Joseph. But it may also be that because Reuben had offended his father and you know, that maybe threw into question whether Reuben was going to become the head of the family.

Reuben was looking for some way to get back into the good graces of his father. We don't know. But a good result of this, whatever the motivation was, is that Joseph was not killed at this time.

Verse 23. So when Joseph came to his brothers, they stripped him of his robe, the robe of many colors that he wore, and they took him and threw him into a pit.

The pit was empty and there was no water in it. Joseph was wearing the robe of many colors.

[39 : 35] The obvious evidence that he was the favorite, that he was loved more than all the others. was the man.

That's how it was that they recognized him from afar. So far away that they had time to get this conspiracy together and also to change it.

What a nice young man Joseph was, not flaunting. he was the thing. He wasn't that nice or so it appears to me.

So the anger that had been simmering comes out here. and what was in back of the conspiracy, they saw the robe of many colors and they replayed the negative past.

You know, the bad report he brought about them before, that dad loved him best, that Joseph obviously thought that he was going to be in charge.

[40 : 46] So not only was that a negative past, but imagining Joseph in charge of the family, that spoiled teenager jerk, that was not a desirable future for them.

And you notice in verse 18 that they say, ah, we're going to take care of this and then we'll see what becomes of his dreams. So, when we're badly hurt, it's easy to get angry and every time we remember it, to play the video of the negative past, and then project an image of a negative future.

Think of John and Rachel again. You know, when John thinks of his father and mother, both struggling with health issues now, you know, it would be easy for him to think, well, whatever happens now, I'm not going to hear about it.

You know, Rachel didn't tell me what was going on in the past, and that's how it's going to be in the future, so how am I going to deal with this now? I can't expect any help from Rachel. So, the Bible tells us not to replay the negative past, and not to project a negative future.

I believe one indication of that is in 1 Corinthians 13, 7, where we read that love believes all things, hopes all things.

[42 : 34] we can believe that just as God is at work in us, he's at work in other people. God can change that person for good.

God can change me for good. God can bring about a better relationship between us. And so we can have a positive hope for the future rather than an assurance that things are going to be just as bad as they have been or worse.

Now, there was a time in my life where one day I realized what I was doing.

I was thinking about a certain negative situation and I sat down and said, okay, this has happened, what's the worst that can happen next?

What about that? And then what's the worst that can happen after that happens? And then what's the worst that can happen after that happened? And in part, I was doing this as an exercise in placing blame on somebody else involved.

[43 : 58] So, when I sat down and started this process, I was feeling bad and by the time I was done, I felt horribly. And on this particular occasion, I believe God spoke to me and said, do you know what you're doing?

And then I realized it wasn't just then. This had been a habit, long-standing habit in my life. It did not help me to restore better relationships with the people involved.

And so, with God's help, that habit got done away with. And God helped me start practicing what I call here steps, four and five, in renouncing anger.

Oh, lost track of time for a moment. So, what we're going to do is we're going to come back to those steps next week.

We'll finish off renouncing anger and then start to look at responding in love. for better or for worse, I haven't noticed anybody trying to ask any questions today.

[45 : 21] And we're out of time now. I do, after a fashion. But here's what I want us to do.

If God's been speaking to you this morning, you know, and saying, this is an issue that I want you and I to deal with, don't push it aside and not act on it.

Maybe even right now, God would like you to say, you know, this afternoon, I want you to get alone and talk to me about this.

If you find this and some of the Bible references may be potentially helpful, use these. One of the things that I have found so helpful in my life lately is on a daily basis, trying to pick a phrase from either what I'm reading in the Bible right now, a verse, or maybe you'd want to pick something off of here, and read it over so that you can meditate on it during the day.

For example, if you're a habitually angry person, you might want to put in your mind, do not let the sun go down on your anger.

[46 : 52] And as you find yourself angry during the day, the Holy Spirit can bring that to mind and give you the grace to turn away from that.

But if he's been speaking to you, don't, don't, just ignore that. The Bible says it's not people who hear the word of God who experience God's blessing.

It's the people who remember it and put it into practice. One other thing, in small type, underneath the title, is my name and my phone number.

And feel free to call me if you have follow-up questions this week, or if you've already experienced God's blessing about restoring a relationship, or if even this week you have something, an experience that you think would be helpful for me to hear about, feel free to call.

let's close in prayer. Heavenly Father, we thank you and rejoice in your love for us and the great sacrifice you made to reconcile us to yourself through Jesus.

[48 : 21] Lord, may we have the experience as your children to be reconcilers here and now, that people may see your love in us and know that we are your disciples.

Amen. God is brought to him, okay?

He is convinced, how could try to get the push it."".

Please check the characterize the