

Restoring Damaged Relationships 2

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Preacher: Matt Smith

- [0:00] I bet I'm recording right now. Look at that. But I want to stop. Good morning. Well, I am starting late today, but I'm going to try and start anyway.
- And let me remind myself where we were last week.
- We started on a series of lessons about restoring damaged relationships.
- And if you don't have a handout, let me offer you one. In fact, let me just give those to you and hand them out as you see fit. And you can put them back over there.
- There are some more handouts in the back, too. And last week, we covered some introductory material. I started looking at the story of Joseph and his brothers.
- [1:03] And I spoke of four steps in restoring damaged relationships. And suggested that, though you could talk about that subject of restoring damaged relationships in various ways from a biblical perspective, that this was one way to try and put all the material together.
- And... Hey! Hi, Ben! Hello! Uh... You got the recorder. That's good. I got the recorder from Matt. Excuse me just a moment.
- And... Shortly, we may have some video. Video. Uh... Just a visual. Cool. And...
- So we started talking about what I call a first step in restoring damaged relationships. And that is dealing with the anger that people almost always feel when they're in a meaningful relationship and some other person in a relationship hurts them.
- Uh... It is natural, and I think not necessarily sinful, to get angry as a result. Um... But, I suggested that, uh...
- [2:32] We should not stay angry. The Bible tells us to, uh... Renounce anger against, uh... Others. And that that's a first step that we can take ourselves.
- Whatever the other people are. We can take that step. Now, I didn't provide any opportunity for, uh... Questions last week.
- Uh... But, two people did ask me questions during the week. Um... And, in fact, The two people both asked the same question. So I thought it would be good to start off with that question and, uh...
- Give those of you who want to a chance to ask questions at the beginning. And, uh... We'll go on from there. So... The, uh...
- One person emailed me a question, and I'll read it to you. Um... I did wonder about renouncing anger. What about the case of repeated offenses?
- [3:37] Is there a distinction between godly indignation and unrighteous anger? Should godly indignation be, uh...
- Dispersed with after a few days in all cases? And that statement may be up on the screen sometime soon. Um...
- Whereas I had said something like this. If you are angry with someone for more than a few days and are not in the process of renouncing anger, then you are probably sinning.

Ah, I think we're getting really close. Um... So... Uh... I'll repeat those more or less if you want.

If you need it. But what do you think? Uh... Is the statement that I just made again... Uh... Do you think that's biblical?

[4:40] Or do you think it's missing something? Uh... Once again, the person said, I wonder about your treatment of renouncing anger.

Um... Is... I'm going to put a cable on your map. Thank you. Thank you. I'll try not to trick over it. Okay. Uh... I'm going to need that closer, I think.

Well, um... If you have any thoughts, you can share those. You know what I'm saying. Uh... Or, uh... If you have a different question, you could ask that too.

And I'll give you a moment to think. And you know what? Let's pray. Heavenly Father, as we get started this morning, and as we deal with technology, above all, Lord, we want to meet with you.

We want to know you better and experience your love and grow up more as your sons and daughters.

[5:56] Help us to follow your example of loving others and being involved in it. reconciling with us.

Help us now, Lord, we ask. In Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Boy, things went so smoothly with this last week.

But, uh... That's no guarantee, is it? You know, I would say from one of those questions, you said, biblically, we know that that's what we should do, is reconciliation. But personally, for me, what we should biblically do isn't always what's easiest to do or what my very sinful nature wants to do.

So it's one of the hardest things I struggle with because I want to stay indignant that I've been wronged in a relationship. And that person should make the first move, right?

The first move to come to me and say, gee, I'm sorry I wronged you. And so it's a really hard thing for me to truly say, I give it up to the Lord and let it go.

[7:10] So, I know I should do it, so it isn't. I know reconciliation is a biblical command, so to speak, but my nature just doesn't want to go there.

And I'm just, I think, Kirsten was using the term reconciliation in a certain way.

Well, maybe including a whole process which I call forgiveness and repentance and sin. For restoring the relationship. If, once again, if you have a handout, you can look and see this here, or if you don't have one, we can certainly get you one.

I suggest thinking of the restoration of the relationship process in terms of four steps, and I call the third one reconciliation.

But, you know, it's just however you define it. You talk about the whole thing is reconciliation or forgiveness. things. But, what Kirsten is saying accurately is that many times when we've been hurt and we're angry, yeah, righteous, we think it's righteous indignation, we think we have a right to be angry.

[8:40] We are, we're hurt, and yes, let the other person take the first step. And, what I'm suggesting is, and I haven't said this point clearly yet, is that the first two steps, renouncing anger and responding in love, are things that we can do whatever the attitude or will of the other person is.

the step that I call reconciliation involves interaction, discussion, honesty, asking for forgiveness, being forgiven, those kinds of things, which you need two willing parties to do well.

But, I'm suggesting right in line with what Kirsten said that, yes, a first step that God calls us to take when a relationship's been damaged and we're angry, is to say, Lord, help me, I'm going to, help me get over this and I tried to make clear last week that that isn't necessarily going to be an instantaneous thing.

Lord, take this anger away. Ah, and you'll never be angry about what happened again. Rather, I'm suggesting that's the start of a process.

That's right. All right. Now, let me say one more thing. Because, the only question I got following last week's lesson was about this.

[10:15] I decided to talk to somebody, they weren't in the class, but to talk to somebody about it. And they had a lot to tell me. And part of what they were telling me is this.

what about the steps a person needs to take if they've been hurt for their own protection?

And maybe as I talked about it with them, I was coming across as saying, well, let's just say this. You're in an abusive relationship at work, at home, hopefully not a church, but wherever it's been.

And, I think they were saying to me, well, Matt, the first step is, you know, get safe yourself. Get out of the abuse.

Can I regroup your forgiveness? I'm sorry, I'm laughing, because I had this lousy experience yesterday.

[11:21] I was working on preparing my lesson for today, and all of a sudden Windows says, we are doing an update. We are reconfiguring your computer. And so, for an hour or two, I couldn't work on my computer while it reconfigured things.

And last night, it was done, and I got back to work, and everything seemed fine. But maybe not everything is quite fine. Worked last week, but with this new configuration of Windows 10, who knows what's happening.

But it's all right. You can keep working, I'll try and ignore you. So, hi. Hi, Sam.

Hi. What's your name? My name's Matt. Hi, Matt. If you'd like, you can have a handout. help. And so, the approach I was taking kind of assumed that you weren't being abused, you know, and the hurt wasn't actively on a regular basis.

If you're assuming that, yes, then get safe, and then you can look to God and ask for help in doing what he wants you to do to restore the relationship, which may never happen if the other person isn't living.

[12:54] But, yeah. Any other follow-up comments on that? Yeah. Any other questions at this point?

So, I'll try one. Yeah. Thank you for doing this class. And again, I thought you did a good job last week. The part that left me uncomfortable last week is that, you know, we called Jacob's relationship broken, we called even Joseph's relationship broken, and I understand why.

But it just didn't sit well with me because through Jacob and the twelve tribes of Israel, through Joseph, a whole nation was saved. So, even while we consider it broken, God was doing something good.

So, I constantly go back to Peter's dream, don't call it broken what God has used for good. So, I just, I don't know, it didn't sit well with me.

Okay, yeah, yeah. So, God had a purpose, that he used the sin of Joseph's brothers, and I think the sin of Joseph, and the sin of Jacob.

[14:18] You know, God used that, just like he used the sin of the religious and Roman authorities in the day of Jesus, you know, so that Jesus ended up being crucified and dying for our sins.

So, God at least uses good for his purposes, and he's not surprised by it.

In fact, he knows the future. Some would say he ordains all the sin to be happened, or that's a big question I have a hard time dealing with. But, yes, God used it.

But, I think we'll see that Joseph, by some years later, both knew that God was using him for his purposes, and yet, he, I believe, worked really hard to restore the relationship with his brothers.

He wanted a good relationship with them again. people. And so, God, you know, can use bad things in our lives, including broken, damaged relationships, for good.

[15:31] Oh, my, he's used them in my life over and over again to get my attention about something.

good. I've worked in the New Haven school system for 11 years. I taught science, a career in my school.

school. And, uh, uh, yeah. And, um, but I retired a year ago.

But last week, as Debbie and I were driving through New Haven, I drove by my old high school, and anger came up with anything. and, as best as I can discern, it had to do with a long-standing resentment that I had against the New Haven public school system.

Rightly or wrongly, I think a lot of their policies and decisions actually hurt students instead of helping them. And I, you know, saw things that I thought were bad to be done over and over again in my 11 years.

[16:45] You know, half the faculty means I went to, you know, I go away, oh, no, you know, ah! But I never realized until last week that the anger I was feeling about those bad policies, the developed into a resentment against some individuals and the system as a whole.

And then I could remember, you know, my wife saying, ah, Matt, you know, in social sense, whenever education comes up, you know, you go on your rampage, you know, about what should be done and what's being done wrong.

And, you know, obviously she was implying I did it in an unhelpful, inappropriate way. And, you know, I was just passionate about doing what was right for students, right?

Well, that was a piece of it. But a piece of it was that I had not dealt with my righteous anger, assuming some of it was righteous.

And instead of dealing with it, you know, I got angry this time, angry that time, angry this time, to the point where this resentment built up that not only affected me at work, but affected me outside of work, affected my social relationships with other people, provided a foothold for safety.

[18:35] So, I pray, Lord, help me, let go of that anger and resentment that had been percolating in me all these years.

so this class has been good for at least one person. Now, this wasn't, this isn't as clear as the story of Joseph and his brothers, but my anger, staying angry, not dealing with it, leading to resentment, was wrong.

But God eventually used it to get my attention after I'd learned some more things and did another step of his work in my heart making me a little bit more like Jesus.

So, yeah? Is there a particular passage in the Bible that you could use when we can't feel like that? Wow, what a great segue.

Yes, do you have the handout there, Chuck? Okay, so, last week in renouncing anger, I think there were scriptures over the five how-tos under there, right?

[19:56] Okay, so the first one, you know, I believe suggests, hey, when you stay angry with someone or a group of people, a system, whatever it is, one, realize, ah, God doesn't want me to stay angry with these people.

world, and maybe I'll focus on that, on people. God, I believe, does not want us to stay angry with individuals or groups.

So, first acknowledge that and say, God, help me let go of this. So, that's the first step. Second step is, you know, don't keep going over it in your mind.

And I give, you know, references to the love chapter, 1 Corinthians 13, that suggests that love doesn't do that. And love doesn't, love hopes that things can be better.

There's no guarantee that things will be better in our broken relationships, but we can at least hope that. So we don't have to say, oh, they did that to me before, and they're going to do it again.

[21 : 02] Rather, oh, Lord, change me, change that. Step four is, remember that I've sinned too. In a damaged relationship, in any relationship, you know, there's, being sinners, you know, it's almost guaranteed that there's fault on both sides.

And God calls us to forgive others as he forgives us. And forgiveness can mean a lot of different things, but, here, in that context, I think it at least means, you know, not staying angry with them.

And Matthew, the, Chuck, there's a reference to Matthew there with step, or how to for, also. Yeah, so that's the parable of the unforgiving servant.

And if you, you're a person, you know, who kind of delights in getting angry, you know, feeling that righteous sanctification, you might want to read that over, because it's kind of like a real negative warning about don't do that.

God doesn't like it. It's not good. And then, how to's, four and five, are positive things. last week I would have projected this on the screen for you.

[22 : 24] Today I can't. And so, Is the projector broken? They're not communicating well. Oh, wow. The computer, yes, these things happen sometimes.

But, step four is, oh yes, forgive as God has forgiven you. How to is pray for those who have treated you badly.

And for me, this has been the most practical, positive step. When I've been in the process of letting go of my anger against somebody, when I start replaying, you know, what they did to me, being committed not to do that, and when I'm aware of it, saying, ah, yes, God wants me instead to pray for these people.

Well, one, that brings God into the picture. Not just what they did against me, it's, yeah, my relationship with them, me, them, and God.

And that changes things. So, praying for them in a positive way is, I think, one of the most helpful things. Long answer.

[23 : 42] Did that? Yeah. Okay. So, by God's grace, even when we've been badly hurt by someone, we can get to the point where, you know, we're not getting angry with them every time we think of them.

but that's only, I would say, a first step in restoring the relationship. I want to tell you a story.

I used to live in Stanford, Connecticut, and on one occasion, I, I want to hold off on that for a moment.

instead, let's pick up with the story of Joseph and his brothers. Last week, we looked at Genesis 37, and you'll find this on, you're using one of the Pew Bibles, not one of the Pew Bibles, one of the downstairs Bibles, which are different than the Pew Bibles, but they're probably not out here today.

So, if you have a Bible, I'd encourage you to turn to Genesis 37, um, hi Sam, can I, I'm looking for a Bible.

[25:18] Yeah. Over there? On the bottom shelf. That shelf over there? By the way, maybe some of you haven't been able to hear me, but now that we have this help, and I'll try and stand here, if you still can't hear me, let me know.

Any comments on sound? Sound? Yeah, yeah, and looking at, somebody who knows about this thing, I just hit it, maybe I turned it off, I was trying to locate it in a place where it would pick me up from now on.

So in Genesis 37, we read how many things contributed to Joseph's brothers, his ten older brothers, getting angry with him, and coming to hate him.

And then saw how that erupted in violence, they were, they grabbed him, tore his special clothing off, it was a special robe that was a sign that his father loved him more than any of his other brothers.

And she proudly wore around and rubbed it in their faces, I believe, and threw him into a pit, either to kill him or to let him die, but as we read at the end of chapter 37, what they ended up doing was selling Joseph as a slave, a caravan came by bringing various goods, it was on its way to Egypt, and Judah, one of the brothers said, hey, let's get some money out of this, and let's sell him as a slave, which they did.

[27:19] And off Joseph has taken Egypt. And the brothers are thinking, yes, this thing that has made our lives miserable, this person who's made our lives miserable, is out of the picture forever.

But, they had to convince their father that Joseph was out of the picture forever and not just missing. So, I would like it if somebody would read Genesis, oh, I can read it, I have it here, Genesis 37, starting with verse 31.

Then they took Joseph's robe and slaughtered a goat and dipped the robe in the blood. And they sent the robe of many colors and brought it to their father and said, this we have found, please identify whether it is your son's robe or not.

And he identified it and said, it is my son's robe. A fierce animal has devoured him. Joseph is without doubt torn to pieces.

Then Jacob tore his garments and put sackcloth on his loins and mourned for his son many days. Well, it seemed that Joseph was out of the picture, even so he was casting a long shadow in the family.

[28:54] But, well, he was out of the picture. Now, I believe that the story of Joseph and his brothers is a wonderful biblical story and illustration of restoring a damaged relationship.

But it does not give us information about every step in the process. And one of the things we don't see directly is the brothers getting over their anger towards Joseph.

And Joseph, I bet, was angry with his brothers after they beat him up and sold him as a slave. It doesn't tell us directly about him getting over that.

but the Bible does give us a lot of, I think, indirect and clear evidence that Joseph did that. That he eventually followed step one, renouncing anger, and secondly, came to the point where he really loved his brothers again and wanted a good relationship with them.

So, on your handout, you'll see right down around here a number of passages from Genesis that I present as evidence that Joseph trusted and obeyed God and that God blessed him.

[30:31] And we're going to read just the first one, which is in Genesis 39. Again, with the downstairs Bible, I think it's page 33.

Genesis chapter 39, and I'll read verses 1 through 10. Now, Joseph had been brought down to Egypt, and Potiphar, the officer of Pharaoh, the captain of the guard, an Egyptian, had bought him from the Ishmaelites, who had brought him down there.

The Lord was with Joseph, and he became a successful man, and he was in the house of his Egyptian master. His master saw that the Lord was with him, and that the Lord caused all that he did to succeed in his hands.

So, Joseph found favor in his sight, and attended him, and he made him, Potiphar made Joseph, overseer of his house, and put him in charge of all that he had.

From the time that he made him overseer in his house, and over all he had, the Lord blessed the Egyptian's house for Joseph's sake. The blessing of the Lord was on all that he had, in the house, and in the field.

[31 : 54] So, he left all that he had in Joseph's charge, and because of him, he had no concern about anything but the food he ate. Now, Joseph was handsome in form and appearance, and after a time, his master's wife cast her eyes on Joseph and said, Lie with me.

But, he refused, and said to his master's wife, Behold, because of me, my master has no concern about anything in the house, and he has put everything that he has in my charge.

He is not greater in this house than I am, nor has he kept back anything from me, except you, because you are his wife. How, then, can I do this great wickedness and sin against God?

And, as she spoke to Joseph day after day, he would not listen to her, to lie beside her, or to be with her. Joseph saw what God was doing in blessing him, so that probably made it easy for him to trust him on some level, trust God.

He obeyed God, and God blessed him. And, as you read those other passages listed there, you see this over and over again.

[33 : 22] now, here's my conclusion from that indirect evidence. I do not believe that God would have blessed Joseph in this way if Joseph had been, you know, seething with anger against his brothers all this year, all those years.

others. Now, I can't prove that, but let me ask you to turn to a psalm.

Psalms 37. And, I'd ask somebody to read verses 4 through 9, because...

I can read verses. You can. Okay. Are you there? I am. Great. Psalm 37, 4 through 9. Delight yourselves in the Lord, and he will give you the desires of your heart.

Commit your way to the Lord. Trust in him, and he will act. He will bring forth your righteousness as the light, and your justice as the noonday.

[34 : 38] be still before the Lord, and wait patiently for him. Threat not yourself over the one who prospers in his way, over the man who carries out evil devices.

Refrain from anger, and forsake wrath. Threat not yourself, it tends only to evil. For the evildoers shall be cut off, but those who wait for the Lord, shall inherit the land.

Thank you. No problem. Refrain from anger, or in the language I would use, renounce, what did I say?

No, refrain from anger is what it says, or renounce anger. And I think actually, not renouncing anger is incompatible with really trusting the Lord.

It's another command repeated several times in the Bible is don't seek revenge. Leave it to the Lord. He will take care of it.

[35 : 52] So, I conclude, you know, from what we've looked at, that Joseph came to the place where he trusted God, obeyed God, God blessed him, and that he did what this psalm tells us to do, which is don't fret about what the evil things people have done, refrain from anger, and trust me to take care of it.

There, I am done with step one, renouncing anger. Questions at this point, or comments? All right.

When I was living in Stanford, one time I had a cookout with some neighbors, and I will call the neighbors, one of the neighbors, Rich.

Now, as we talked, you know, it came out that another neighbor who lived right next to us too, George, wasn't there. And part of the reason is that Rich and George had not talked to each other for years.

And this is the back story. Rich had had a drainage problem in his yard, he had somebody come in and regrade the yard, and his water problem was over, but unfortunately now the water was causing problems for George.

[37 : 48] And whereas Rich and George had, you know, a good neighborly relationship in the past, sometime after that, they were both out in their yards, and Rich, you know, said hi to George, and George just turned around, walked away.

And Rich concluded, well, sorry for George, but if he doesn't want to talk to me, I can live with that. I'm not going to talk to him.

now I didn't detect any anger on Rich's part, but there was no love there either. Rich was content, you know, he hadn't been hurt badly, except snubbed a little bit, but he was okay with that.

He wasn't angry, but wasn't going to take any steps of love. To use Kirsten's example before, you know, somebody treats me badly, I'll let them take the first step.

You know, I'm not going to let the anger simmer inside me and tear me apart. No, I'm over that, but they want to deal with the problem, it's in balls in their court, I'll live without them.

[39 : 12] Now, that's not great in a neighborhood. But, when you have that kind of a situation in a family or in a church, it's deadly.

The relationship's been damaged, it's not growing. As this goes on, the relationship is dying. is good.

And, as we talked about last week, the goal that God has for us in our relationships with others is not just that they don't have hostility, but that the relationship be good and loving and growing and a place where God's grace is demonstrated to the people in the relationship and to the world as a whole.

So, the next step, I suggest, or a next step in restoring a damaged relationship is to respond in love.

passage. So, once again, I'm going to need people to read some passages.

[40 : 34] And, would somebody be willing to turn to Matthew 5, verse 43? And, I'll ask you a little bit later to read that.

But, could somebody be ready to do that for me? Raise your hand if you'll thank you. And, the second passage, 1 John 3.16. Not John 3.16, but 1 John 3.16.

Would somebody be willing to read that for us in a little bit? Thank you, Sam. Sam E. Sam E. Thank you. And, the third passage is Luke 6.32.

2. Would somebody be ready and thank you, John? Okay. So, as some of you are juggling your Bibles there, I want to draw your attention to this section of the handout.

Responding in love. And, I'd like you to look at those three aspects. I affirm that you are loved by God and worthy of my love, too.

[41 : 48] I choose to act lovingly towards you and I feel affection, concern, appreciation for you.

Now, normally, in relationships with other people, what order do you think those three aspects of love usually come in?

For example, imagine a one-year-old child. They're growing to love.

their mother. Do you think the first step in their growing to love them is, mom, I affirm that you are loved by God and I want what is best for you.

I think generally, in our experience, the reverse order is what happens. Somebody acts lovingly towards us.

[43 : 07] We feel affection for them and if that happens often enough, it grows into love for them. And then, hopefully, we not only feel love for them, but we start acting lovingly towards them as well.

And then, once we get theologically sophisticated, we may come to say, yes, love and just as God loves me, he loves them.

And I should love the people I already love and as I have opportunity, love others. But, when you've been in a relationship and it's been damaged, this, I think, is the typical order by which we start to respond in love once again.

Once we've at least started the process of renouncing anger, God may bring to mind, you know, I love you and I love them too.

And you should act lovingly towards them. I don't know if Kirsten's still here, but I'm so glad she said that, you know. at the beginning. And so, we might hear God saying, and I want you to take this step.

[44 : 37] But, that's the second thing, acting in love. First thing is, you know, God speaking to us and saying, I love them, I want the best for them. Will you join me in that?

Would somebody please read the Matthew passage? Matthew 5, 43, through 48. You have heard that it was said, you shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.

But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your father who is in heaven. For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.

For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others?

Do not even the Gentiles do the same? You therefore must be perfect as your heavenly father is perfect. Thank you. So, as children of God, God calls us to love others, even those who treat us badly, just as God so loved the world that he sent Jesus to die for the world while we were still his enemies.

[45 : 57] And, let's say you get to the point, okay, yes, Lord, I want what's best for them. I want to have a good relationship with them again, but I don't feel like doing it, doing anything.

I don't feel maybe he's, God's led you to do something, take another step. I don't feel like doing that. Thank you, those who are going to read the other passages.

I'll leave you if you generally want to read those later. But, I want to finish with this illustration.

Some of you have heard the name Corrie Ten Boom. She was a Christian woman who helped a number of Jews escape from the Nazis during World War II.

But, eventually, they discovered her and her family doing this and she, her father, and her sister were taken off to a concentration camp themselves. Her father and sister died there, but she survived.

[47 : 05] And, there's a book written about her experience by her, The Hiding Place, and there was a movie some years ago made about, based on the book. Really good movie. story. But, after she wrote the book, she became a speaker and she went around the churches and other places telling about her experience and preaching the gospel.

On one occasion, she came face to face with one of the cruelest guards in the concentration camp who had abused her and her sister terribly.

And, he came up to her and held out his hand and said, will you forgive me? And, this is what she wrote.

I stood there with coldness clutching at my heart, but I knew that the will can function regardless of the temperature of the heart.

I prayed, Jesus, help me. Woodenly, mechanically, I thrust my hand into the one stretched out to me and I experienced an incredible thing.

[48 : 25] The current started in my shoulder, ran down my arm, and sprang into our clutched hands. Then, this warm reconciliation seemed to flood my whole being, bringing tears to my eyes.

I forgive you, brother, I cried with my whole heart. For a long moment, we grasped each other's hands, the former guard, the former prisoner.

I have never known the love of God so intensely as I did at that moment. Point being, in a situation like a damaged relationship, it is usually that by God's grace we act lovingly first, and then the feelings follow.

So don't wait to feel loving in a situation like that. heavenly father, help us to apply your word, guided by your spirit, that we may live this week as your sons and daughters, in love and in peace.

Amen. Amen. We are dismissed.