

How To Restore A Wounded Relationship

I. RECOGNIZING WHEN THE SPIRIT OF A RELATIONSHIP IS WOUNDED

- A. A relationship is like a garden that must be cultivated by *watering it* (adding components that nurture it) and *weeding it* (addressing the components that hinder it). We must do our part, and then God will do His part in blessing and healing our relationships.
- B. A relationship can be wounded at various levels, from being slightly injured to deeply broken. The *spirit of a relationship* can be injured without the people themselves being deeply wounded. In other words, the trust and open communication can be injured between two good people who are not emotionally devastated and dysfunctional.
- C. The signs of a wounded relationship include a *closed spirit* (no longer receptive to receive affirmation), *being guarded* (they are unwilling to share freely), *strained communication* (defensive, argumentative, sarcastic) and *resisting touch* (a spouse or child with a wounded spirit often resists being touched or hugged). We should be alerted if we see these signs.
- D. A relationship is wounded long before it is broken. A broken relationship requires much more skill and attention to heal. If we address the relational weakness or infection at the early stages, then we can avoid allowing “gangrene” to set into the relationship. It is better to be proactive in the maintenance of our relationships because an *ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure*.

II. THE POWER OF OUR SPEECH IN OUR RELATIONSHIP

- A. The most common way to wound the spirit of a relationship is through perverse speech, which includes more than speech about immorality (perversion). It is speech that is crooked (perverse) instead of being straight. It is speech that has an accusatory, critical, or sarcastic tone.
⁴A wholesome tongue is a tree of life, but perverseness in it breaks the spirit. (Prov. 15:4)
- B. Corrupt speech injures relationships instead of imparting grace to the one being corrected. Wholesome speech refreshes the heart of those who hear, instead of bruising their spirit.
²⁹Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers. ³⁰And do not grieve the Holy Spirit... (Eph. 4:29-30)
- C. Perverse or corrupt speech includes *unfair criticism* (exaggerated), *sarcasm* (insulting), “*sitcom humor*” (jokes about faults), *anger* (with rejection), *being condescending* (self-exalting), etc.
²¹Death and life are in the power of the tongue... (Prov. 18:21)
- D. We are to be careful with our words, knowing that it is more difficult to win a brother once he is offended (Prov. 18:19). The offended brother often includes those with whom we are in a familiar relationship, such as a spouse, child, sibling, extended family member, a co-worker, etc.
It requires wisdom, effort, and patience to get inside a fortified city and “win” our brother.
¹⁹A brother offended is harder to win than a strong city... (Prov. 18:19)
- E. **Complaining:** We are warned not to allow our complaints to dominate a relationship. Continual complaining makes people want to discontinue or draw back from the relationship, and even tempts children to leave home prematurely (Prov. 14:1; 17:1; 19:13; 21:9, 19; 25:24). This principle applies to all people in many different types of relationships, not just women in their homes.

⁹*Better to dwell in a corner...than in a house shared with a contentious woman [spouse, parent, etc.]...¹⁹*Better to dwell in the wilderness, than with a contentious and angry woman. (Prov. 21:9, 19)**

¹*Better is a dry morsel with quietness, than a house full of feasting with strife. (Prov. 17:1)*

¹³*The contentions of a wife [spouse, parent, friend] are a continual dripping. (Prov. 19:13)*

III. BIBLICAL PRINCIPLES IN RESTORING AN INJURED RELATIONSHIP

A. What do we do when our relationship with someone is wounded? Restoring a relationship usually involves a process. The wound occurred over a process of time. Thus the healing of the relationship often requires time so that trust and communication lines can be restored.

B. We must not be naïve in thinking that a wounded relationship will heal by itself over time. We are to seek to restore relationships to the measure that it depends on us (Rom. 12:18).

¹⁸*If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men. (Rom 12:18)*

C. **Make a godly appeal:** Jesus taught us to go to our brother to make an appeal, both when they have *something against us* (Mt. 5:24) and when we have *something against them* (Mt. 18:15-16).

1. **He has something against you:** We are not to present our gifts to God in worship without attempting to heal broken relationships (Mt. 5:23-24). Our union with Jesus in worship is deeply connected to our honor of others.

²³*If you bring your gift to the altar, and remember that your brother has something against you...²⁴**First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.** (Mt. 5:23-24)*

2. **You have something against him:** When someone mistreats or sins against us, Jesus commanded us to go to them privately to share honestly our concern with them.

¹⁵*If your brother sins against you, **go and tell him his fault between you and him alone.** If he hears you, you have gained your brother. (Mt. 18:15)*

a. **Go and tell him:** When we meet face to face with a brother, the Lord intervenes in surprising ways, and we often experience the earlier stirrings of the bonds of love. We often feel more affection and mercy than when we talk *about* him to another. We are often changed by the process, gaining new insight about them and ourselves.

b. **Alone:** Do not share your wound or concern about your brother with other people.

D. We are to make our appeal in the right *tone, timing, spirit, and ratio* of affirmation to correction.

²⁸*The heart of the righteous studies how to answer... (Prov. 15:28)*

E. **Tone:** The tone of our communication is a most important issue in restoring a relationship. We are to make our appeals with a spirit of gentleness as we consider our own weakness.

¹If a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted. (Gal. 6:1)

1. A *soft response* diffuses anger in the one to whom we speak; a harsh tone will stir it up.
***¹A soft answer turns away wrath [anger], but a harsh word [tone] stirs up anger.
²The tongue of the wise uses knowledge rightly, but the mouth of fools pours forth foolishness [anger]... (Prov. 15:1-2)***
 2. A *negative tone* includes anger, defensiveness, impatience (rushing people to answer), or a tone of lecturing (instructing them without listening), etc.
 3. *Expressing our appeal with anger*—sarcasm, sighs, huffing, slamming doors, etc.—hinders the ability of others to hear our concern. The tone of the communication involves our body language and facial expressions, including making eye contact, etc.
- F. ***A right spirit***: When solving a relational tension, it is important to wait until both parties are in a place of peace or a have happy spirit instead of being angry, agitated, annoyed, or pressured.
- G. ***Ratio***: A healthy family relationship requires about ten positive statements to one negative one. We cannot drive a “ten-ton truck” of correction over a relational bridge that can only bear five tons. We must not speak more about one’s failure than their virtues. Speak to their desire for greatness, not only to their failure or shame. We seek to see what they are *reaching to be* and *be grateful for the good in them*, not just critical of their faults.
- H. ***Ask the Lord***: We are to ask the Lord for insight on how we lacked sensitivity in the relationship and how our deficiencies in love contributed to wounding relationship, instead of only asking Him to change the other person.
- I. ***Ask the person***: Ask them for information about what they were thinking, feeling, doing, or wanting in the situation, instead of starting with statements of complaint or correction. For example, ask them, “*What were you thinking or feeling when you told me...?*” Try to hear their pain. Ask them for help, “*Help me understand what you felt when I said...*”
- J. ***Tell them what you feel***: Start by saying how you *feel* about what they did or said, instead of making statements about their faults. For example, “*I felt rejected when you said...*”
- K. ***Active listening***: Listen carefully to their unspoken words, pains, fears, and desires. Then speak back to them what *you heard* them say. For example, “*It sounds like you are saying...*” This gives them the opportunity to clarify what you heard. We honor people by patiently listening to their point of view in the conflict, even if their view is not 100% accurate.
- L. ***Be non-defensive***: A defensive attitude hinders communication and the restoration process. When people correct us, they are like a “free research team” giving us insight into our blind spots.
- M. ***Confessing our faults***: Our confession is our “love offering.” Do not say, “I am sorry *if* I offended you.” Rather say, “I repent, *because* I sinned against you” (by coming up short in love).

¹⁶Confess your trespasses to one another [your spouse]...that you may be healed. (Jas. 5:16)

- N. We are to respond by being approachable with a gentle spirit that is eager to receive correction.
- ¹³*Who is wise and understanding among you?...* ¹⁷*The wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy...and without hypocrisy. (Jas. 3:13, 17)*
1. **Willing to yield:** We are to be willing to yield to their appeal to do things “their way,” even if it is not the absolute best way.
 2. **Full of mercy:** Be merciful with their failure, even when their perspective is wrong. To be full of mercy includes not requiring that their view of the conflict is 100% accurate.
- O. **The whole truth:** Some people say, “I just want the truth to come out.” They must remember that the “whole truth” about someone includes their *virtues* and not just their *failures*. Remember that God doesn’t tell any of us the whole truth about all our shortcomings, as it would overwhelm us.

IV. PRACTICAL ADVICE

- A. **Winning:** We must remember that the one *who loves most* is the one who *wins* in God’s court.
- B. **Set boundaries:** Come to new agreements about the “trade-offs” in the relationship, i.e. what you agree to give each other in terms of time, service, communication, etc.
- C. **Get an arbitrator:** An arbitrator can be very helpful in solving long-term conflicts. This is a person who makes both sides listen to each other (instead of interrupting). They ask questions of both parties, highlighting things which the people in the conflict easily lose sight of.
- D. **Pick your battles wisely:** It will be necessary to give up some things. Don’t spend all your “relational equity” on small, insignificant things. Be willing to lose a battle to win the war. In order to gain the most important things, we need to give up some smaller things.
- E. **Proverbs:** Read Proverbs every day together in your marriage and/or with your children. This is the part of Scripture that highlights communication skills. There are 31 Proverbs. Thus you can read the proverb that corresponds with the date on the calendar (Prov. 15:28).

²⁸*The heart of the righteous studies how to answer... (Prov. 15:28)*

V. QUESTIONS FOR SMALL-GROUP DISCUSSION

1. Identify one point that inspired or challenged you. Why? What will you do differently to apply it?
2. Identify one point that you want to impart to a younger believer. Why? How will you approach this?
3. Identify one point that you would like to gain more understanding of. How will you seek to gain it?

How to Restore a Wounded Relationship (Pt. 2)

VI. REVIEW: RECOGNIZING WHEN THE SPIRIT OF A RELATIONSHIP IS WOUNDED

- A. The Lord is establishing the second commandment in the church as He empowers His people to have healthy relationships. A relationship is like a garden that must be cultivated by *watering it* (adding components that nurture it) and *weeding it* (addressing the factors that hinder it). A relationship can be wounded at various levels, from being slightly injured to deeply broken.
- B. Be alert for the signs of a wounded relationship—they include having a *closed spirit* (no longer receptive), *being guarded* (unwilling to share freely), *strained communication* (defensive, argumentative, sarcastic), and *resisting touch* (a spouse or child with a wounded spirit often resists being touched or hugged). We should be alerted if we see any of these signs.
- C. A relationship is wounded before it is broken, and a broken relationship requires much more skill and attention to heal. If we address the early wounds, then we can avoid broken relationships.
- D. One of the primary ways that the spirit of a relationship is wounded is by corrupt speech. Corrupt speech includes *unfair criticism* (accusatory), *sarcasm* (insulting), *“sitcom humor”* (jokes about faults), *anger* (harsh), *condescending* (looking down), *demeaning* (dishonoring), *shaming* (belittling), *manipulating* (motivating by guilt), *authoritative* (overpowering), *silencing* (interrupting or shutting down), *derogatory* (labeling), *threatening* (intimidating), etc.
- ²⁹*Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers. (Eph. 4:29)*
- ⁴*A wholesome tongue is a tree of life, but perverseness in it breaks the spirit. (Prov. 15:4)*
- E. We are to be careful with our words and diligent to repair any damage that we cause with our words, knowing that it is far more difficult to “win” a brother once he is offended (Prov. 18:19). The “offended brother” often includes those with whom we are in a familiar relationship, such as a spouse, child, sibling, extended family member, friend, or a co-worker, etc.
- ¹⁹*A brother offended is harder to win than a strong [fortified] city... (Prov. 18:19)*

VII. BIBLICAL PRINCIPLES IN RESTORING AN INJURED RELATIONSHIP

- A. *Make a godly appeal*: What do we do when a relationship is wounded? We make a godly appeal. Since the wound occurred over a period of time, the healing of the relationship will often take time too, involving a process of godly appeals and more. We must not be naïve in thinking that a wounded relationship will heal by itself over time. If we do not take action to heal the relationship, it will grow worse over time as we get more familiar with each other.
- B. We are to do all that we can to restore relationships, so far as it depends on us (Rom. 12:18). The Lord wants to establish a culture of honor in the body of Christ that seeks reconciliation and healing of all relationships as His people walk out the second commandment together.
- ¹⁸*If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men. (Rom. 12:18)*

- C. **Go to your brother:** Jesus taught us to go to our “brother” to make an appeal, both when we have *something against them* (Mt. 18:15) and when they have *something against us* (Mt. 5:24). Every believer is to take initiative in reconciliation instead of waiting on others to do their part. Some feel justified in waiting until the other person humbles themselves and starts the dialogue.
1. When someone mistreats us, we are to go to them *privately* to share our concern, without first sharing it with others.
¹⁵If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained [won] your brother. (Mt. 18:15)
 2. When someone has something against us, we are to go to them (Mt. 5:23-24). By doing this, *we go beyond Matthew 18*—we go the second mile for love (Mt. 5:41). This is one way in which we can abound in love (Phil. 1:9) and walk out the second commandment.
²³...that your brother has something against you, ²⁴leave your gift there before the altar, and go...first be reconciled to your brother... (Mt. 5:23-24)
⁴¹And whoever compels you to go one mile, go with him two. (Mt 5:41)
⁹...that your love may abound still more and more... (Phil. 1:9)
- D. This principle relates to reaching out to someone with whom you are in *relationship* and have *personal interaction*. The Lord is not mandating that we take initiative to seek to make everyone on Facebook happy with our statements, decisions, convictions, lifestyle, etc.
- E. Jesus called His people to be peacemakers who greatly value seeing relationships reconciled. He promised a special blessing to all who commit to do this consistently. This involves seeking reconciliation in our personal relationships, as well as helping others reconcile their relationships.
⁹Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God. (Mt. 5:9)
- F. It is so rare to see people do this consistently with humility, tenderness, and wisdom that others will recognize such people as *being sons of God* who act like their heavenly Father.
⁴⁴...bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you...⁴⁵that you may be sons of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good... (Mt. 5:44-45)

VIII. GOING TO THE ONE WHO HAS SOMETHING AGAINST US (MT. 5:23-24)

- A. When someone has something against us, we are to *go to them* to seek to remove the offense.
²³...if you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, ²⁴leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift. (Mt. 5:23-24)
- B. **Leave your gift:** Our gifts to Jesus are an expression of our love for Him. We present our heart and love to God as a gift in worship. He does not receive them if we ignore the offense we have caused a brother by our words or actions.

1. We are not to present our gifts to God in worship without attempting to heal broken relationships. Our union with Jesus in worship is connected to the way that we honor others in His body. We must seek to treat our brother in the same way Jesus treats us.
2. Jesus requires immediate action without delay. On the way to offer our gift, He wants us to leave it until we make things right with others. We are not to present our heart to God as a gift in worship while we speak to His children in wrong ways—especially a spouse.
⁷Husbands...giving honor to the wife...that your prayers may not be hindered. (1 Pet. 3:7)
3. The effect of Jesus' death for us is that He has made all of us *to be one with Him*. Therefore, it is impossible to be one of God's children without also being a brother or sister to His other children. His incarnation, death, and resurrection mean that He has become inseparable from all of those whom He redeemed and brought into His family.
4. The fellowship of the Trinity has an expression on earth in the relationships in the body of Christ. Fellowship makes visible on earth the life of the Trinity that comes to us through Jesus. The glorious community in the Church is rooted in Jesus and His mercy.

C. **Reconciled:** Confessing our faults and humbling ourselves is an essential part of seeing our relationships healed and of expressing our love for Jesus. To be reconciled to others, we must genuinely confess and repent of our sin or insensitivity. We cannot do this by saying, "If you are hurt, I am sorry," but "Since I sinned against you or was insensitive toward you, forgive me."

¹⁶Confess your trespasses to one another...that you may be healed. (Jas. 5:16)

D. **First:** We are to seek to resolve bitterness and offense quickly without allowing it to escalate. Until we deal with them, the consequences of bitterness and offense do not just go away. Anger gives place or opportunity for the devil to establish a stronghold in our lives and relationships.

²⁶...do not let the sun go down on your wrath [anger], ²⁷nor give place to the devil. (Eph. 4:26-27)

E. **Tone:** The tone of our communication is a most important issue in restoring a relationship. We are to make our appeals in a spirit of gentleness, aware of our own failure and deficiency.

¹If a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted. (Gal. 6:1)

1. A *soft response* diffuses anger in the one to whom we speak; a harsh tone will stir it up.

¹A soft answer turns away wrath [anger], but a harsh word [tone] stirs up anger. (Prov. 15:1)

2. A *negative tone* includes anger, defensiveness, lack of patience (rushing people to answer), or a tone of lecturing (instructing them without listening), etc.

F. **Be non-defensive:** A defensive manner hinders communication and the restoration process. See people who criticize us as a "free research team," giving us insight into our blind spots.

- G. **Active listening:** Be careful not to interrupt or cut them off, but listen to discern their *unspoken* words, pains, or disappointments. Speak back to them *what you heard* them say. For example, “*It sounds like you are saying...*” This gives them the opportunity to clarify what you heard. We honor people by patiently listening to their view of the conflict, even if it is not 100% accurate.

¹⁹But everyone must be quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger. (Jas. 1:19, NAS)

- H. **Ask the person:** Ask them for information about what they were thinking, feeling, doing, or wanting in the situation, instead of starting with statements of complaint or correction. For example, ask them, “*What were you thinking or feeling when you told me...?*” Try to hear their pain that is unspoken. Ask them for help, “*Help me understand what you felt when I said...*”
- I. **Get an arbitrator:** An arbitrator can be very helpful in solving relational conflicts. An arbitrator helps both people *listen* to each other, instead of interrupting. They *ask questions* of both parties, highlighting things that the people in the conflict might easily overlook.

IX. APPLYING THE PRINCIPLES OF INITIATING RECONCILIATION (MT. 5:24)

- A. These principles are applied differently in our different relationships and personal interactions.
1. **Family:** to your spouse, children, parents, siblings, or extended family, etc.
 2. **Authority:** to those under your authority in the marketplace, church, ministry team, etc.
 3. **Peers:** to friends, siblings, students, or fellow workers in the marketplace.
 4. **Romance:** to someone you are pursuing, considering pursuing, or dating
- B. **Beware:** Do not seek to apply these principles wrongly by being manipulated by pressure and guilt to *feel responsible* to fulfill unrealistic expectations that some people have for you.
1. **Different expectations:** Some of the most painful relational conflicts are related to having different expectations for the relationship. If someone sees you as their *best friend*, while you see them as a *casual friend*, then offenses can occur that may not be solved.
 2. **Envy:** Some are offended because they want to have your role, honor, ability, friends, etc.
 3. **Being overlooked:** Some are offended because they deeply desire to be included in a certain group or promoted to a position of leadership that others do not feel is right.

X. QUESTIONS FOR SMALL-GROUP DISCUSSION

1. Identify one point that inspired or challenged you. Why? What will you do differently to apply it?
2. Identify one point that you want to impart to a younger believer. Why? How will you approach this?
3. Identify one point that you would like to gain more understanding of. How will you seek to gain it?

How to Restore a Wounded Relationship (Pt. 3)—James 3:13-18

XI. REVIEW: RECOGNIZING WHEN THE SPIRIT OF A RELATIONSHIP IS WOUNDED

- A. A relationship can be wounded at various levels, from being slightly injured to deeply broken. When a relationship is wounded, we are to make godly appeals to one another. Jesus taught us to go to our brother to make an appeal, both when they have *something against us* (Mt. 5:24) and when we have *something against them* (Mt. 18:15-16).
- B. We are to do all that we can to restore relationships, so far as it depends on us (Rom. 12:18).
¹⁸If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men. (Rom. 12:18)
- C. We are to appeal in the right *tone, timing, process, spirit, and ratio* of affirmation to correction. The tone of our communication is a very important issue in restoring a relationship. A defensive tone hinders the process. We make appeals in a spirit of gentleness, aware of our deficiencies.
¹...you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself... (Gal. 6:1)
- D. Confessing our faults and humbling ourselves is an essential part of seeing our relationships healed and expressing our love for Jesus. To be reconciled to others, we must genuinely confess and repent of our sin or insensitivity. We cannot do this by saying, “*If you are hurt, I am sorry,*” but “*Since I sinned against you or was insensitive toward you, forgive me.*”
¹⁶Confess your trespasses to one another...that you may be healed [reconciled]. (Jas. 5:16)
- E. We all are both *victims* and *agents* of our offense and wounding. We are victims when we are mistreated, and we are agents when we respond wrongly and allow an injustice against us to become a festering wound in us. The injustice done against us does not produce bitterness, but rather it is our wrong response to the injustice that produces bitterness. If we respond wrongly, the conflict escalates to consume our time, energy, emotions, and money.
¹⁵If you bite and devour one another, beware lest you be consumed by one another! (Gal. 5:15)

XII. TWO PRIMARY OBSTACLES TO HEALING A WOUNDED RELATIONSHIP (JAS. 3:13-16)

- A. James addressed the two primary issues behind offenses in relationships that are not healed. This is a very practical passage in how to avoid or heal relational wounds. He pointed out two types of wisdom (perspectives)—heavenly and earthly (v. 15)—and their different results (v. 16, 18). He identified jealousy and selfish ambition (v. 14) as two primary causes of relational conflict.
¹³Who among you is wise and understanding? Let him show, by his good behavior, his deeds in the gentleness of wisdom. ¹⁴But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your heart, do not be arrogant and so lie against the truth. ¹⁵This wisdom is not that which comes down from above, but is earthly, natural, demonic. ¹⁶For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there is disorder and every evil thing. (Jas. 3:13-16, NAS)

- B. **Wise and understanding:** The issue is which wisdom or perspective guides our life, the heavenly or earthly (v. 15). The person of heavenly wisdom is the one who agrees with God’s ways.
- C. **Let him show by his good behavior:** our words and actions reveal which wisdom or perspective we embrace.
- D. **Gentleness of wisdom:** this speaks of deeds being done in gentleness or meekness that comes from having wisdom or a godly perspective.
- E. **Bitter jealousy:** many offenses are rooted in jealousy or the desire to have what another has (their role, honor, money, possessions, abilities, friends, life situation, etc.).
- F. **Selfish ambition:** Many offenses are rooted in selfish ambition or the expectation to gain a better position, increased honor and recognition, more money, be invited to “join the team,” or even to have a special relationship with someone who does not respond in the same way.
1. Some see themselves as being mistreated and used, or they see the unresponsive person as non-relational, instead of owning their part in the offense—in having expectations and strong desires for things that they did not get.
 2. Some of the most painful relational conflicts are related to having different expectations for the relationship. If someone sees you as their *best friend*, while you see them as a *casual friend*, then offenses can occur that may not be solved.
 3. Some are offended because they deeply desire to be included in a certain group or promoted to a position of leadership that others do not feel is right.
- G. **Do not be arrogant and lie against the truth:** this is one of the most important principles in healing relational conflicts, having a good marriage, or being of person with excellent character.
1. It is a very natural response for all of us to “*lie against the truth*” by refusing to take responsibility for the truth about our unperceived jealousy and selfish ambition that has contributed to being offended and hindering the healing of the relationship.
 2. Some people live in bondage to “always having to be right.” When was the last time that you verbalized to someone that you had a measure of selfish ambition that contributed to the offense? The inability to see our ambition will hinder the healing process.
- H. He defined offenses rooted in our jealousy and ambition as earthly, natural, and demonic (v. 15).
1. **Earthly:** this perspective demands that we be treated in a way that fulfills most of our expectations. This “wisdom” is rooted in the temporal values in our humanistic culture.
 2. **Natural:** our sense of entitlement to honor, comfort, inclusion, and promotion are natural.

3. **Demonic:** this wisdom gives the devil opportunity and results in bitterness that is energized and stirred by demonic influences. James was not saying that such people are demon-possessed. He was pointing out how human interests can serve demonic interests. Jesus rebuked Peter for promoting a demonic agenda in his human-centered counsel that Jesus refuse to die on the cross (Mt. 16:21-23).

²¹Jesus began to show to His disciples that He must...be killed...²²Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him, saying, “Far be it from You, this shall not happen to You!”²³But He turned and said to Peter, “Get behind Me, Satan! You are an offense to Me, for you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men.” (Mt 16:16–23)

4. Anger gives opportunity for the devil to establish a stronghold in our relationships.
- ²⁶...do not let the sun go down on your wrath [anger], ²⁷nor give place to the devil. (Eph. 4:26-27)*

- I. **Disorder and every evil thing:** Wherever we express jealousy and selfish ambition in a specific relationship, we will contribute to the disorder in that relationship.

XIII. SEVEN VIRTUES THAT CONTRIBUTE TO HEALING RELATIONSHIPS (JAS. 3:17-18)

- A. He described the responses that are inevitable in any who have a heavenly perspective (wisdom).
- ¹⁷But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and good fruits, unwavering, without hypocrisy. ¹⁸And the seed whose fruit is righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace. (Jas. 3:17-18, NAS)*
- B. **Pure:** this includes having pure motives that are honest about resisting our selfish ambition.
- C. **Peaceable:** to be “peace-loving” is the opposite of the disorder caused by selfish ambition.
- D. **Gentle:** this speaks of the quality of being accommodating, considerate, patient, agreeable, etc.
- E. **Reasonable:** This is translated as “willing to yield” by the NKJV. We are to be willing to yield to the appeal of others and to do things “their way,” even if it is not absolutely the best way.
- F. **Full of mercy:** We are to be merciful with the failures and deficiencies of others that are related to the relational conflict. To be “full” of mercy includes not requiring that their perspective of the conflict be 100% accurate. This includes having mercy that overlooks the bad responses of others and does not hold it against them. Mercy is acting generously towards others
- ⁸Above all things have fervent love...for “love will cover a multitude of sins.” (1 Pet. 4:8)*
- ¹³Mercy triumphs over judgment. (Jas. 2:13)*
- G. **Unwavering:** This is translated as “without partiality” in NKJV. This includes not having a double standard in our evaluation of the actions of others.
- H. **Without hypocrisy:** it is sincere and not simply acting kindly for show or to gain an advantage.
- I. James promised that the seven virtues in verse 17 are “seed” whose fruit results in righteousness.

¹⁸*And the seed whose fruit is righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace. (Jas. 3:17-18, NAS)*

J. ***The seed whose fruit is righteousness:*** as we sow the seeds that are identified in verse 17, we will see the growth of righteousness in our life and relationships.

1. We will see a cascading effect on others who will also be inspired to act and speak in righteousness as our response helps them to overcome their bitterness related to a wounded relationship.
2. When we counsel our loved ones to identify even a small residue of jealousy or selfish ambition in their heart, we will be helping them to grow in righteousness and will help them to heal wounded relationships.
3. It is common to listen to a friend described how they were mistreated by someone. If we truly love them, then we will not simply justify their complaints of being mistreated, but we will be peacemakers who help them locate jealousy or selfish ambition in their heart.

K. ***Sown in peace by those who make peace:*** Those who make peace speak things that facilitate unity between people. Their words, actions, and attitude are unity-protecting.

1. Peacemaking is at the heart of Jesus' teachings, and it is His standard for discipleship.
2. Jesus promised a special blessing to all who consistently seek to reconcile relationships. This involves seeking reconciliation in our personal relationships, as well as helping others reconcile their relationships.

⁹*Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God. (Mt. 5:9)*

L. Frustration and anger that leads to offense and bitterness is often caused by any who violate our personal rights or block our goals for honor, comfort, money, etc.

¹*What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you? Is not the source your pleasures that wage war in your members? ²...You are envious and cannot obtain; so you fight and quarrel. (Jas. 4:1-2, NAS)*

M. Our anger or offense does not result in accomplishing God's righteous purpose in our lives.

²⁰*...for the anger of man does not achieve the righteousness of God. (Jas 1:20, NAS)*

XIV. QUESTIONS FOR SMALL-GROUP DISCUSSION

1. Identify one point that inspired or challenged you. Why? What will you do differently to apply it?
2. Identify one point that you want to impart to a younger believer. Why? How will you approach this?
3. Identify one point that you would like to gain more understanding of. How will you seek to gain it?

How to Restore a Wounded Relationship (Pt. 4)—James 3:17-18

XV. REVIEW: RECOGNIZING WHEN THE SPIRIT OF A RELATIONSHIP IS WOUNDED

- A. The Lord is establishing the second commandment in the church as He empowers His people to have healthy relationships. A relationship can be wounded at various levels, from being slightly injured to deeply broken. One main way that the spirit of a relationship is wounded is by speech.
²⁹Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers. (Eph. 4:29)
- B. We are to do all that we can to restore relationships. When a relationship is wounded, we are to make an appeal in the right *tone, timing, process, spirit, and ratio* of affirmation to correction.
¹⁸If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men. (Rom. 12:18)
- C. **Go to your brother:** Jesus taught us to go to our “brother” to make an appeal, both when we have *something against them* (Mt. 18:15) and when they have *something against us* (Mt. 5:24). Every believer is to take initiative in reconciliation instead of waiting on others to do their part.
¹⁵If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained [won] your brother. (Mt. 18:15)
²³...that your brother has something against you, ²⁴leave your gift there before the altar... first be reconciled to your brother... (Mt. 5:23-24)
- D. James addressed the two primary issues behind unhealed offenses in relationships (Jas 3:13-16). He pointed out two types of wisdom (perspectives)—heavenly and earthly (v. 15)—and two main hindrances to relationships in our heart—bitter jealousy and selfish ambition (v. 14). This passage has been called the *Great Hymn of Wisdom*. It starts with our inner attitudes (v. 14-16) and then describes outward responses in words and actions (v. 17) that express God’s wisdom.
¹³Who among you is wise and understanding? Let him show, by his good behavior, his deeds in the gentleness of wisdom. ¹⁴But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your heart, do not be arrogant and so lie against the truth. ¹⁵This wisdom is not that which comes down from above, but is earthly, natural, demonic. ¹⁶For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there is disorder and every evil thing. (Jas. 3:13-16, NASB)
- E. **Bitter jealousy:** Many offenses are rooted in jealousy—the desire to have what another has (their role, honor, money, possessions, abilities, friends, life situation, etc.).
- F. **Selfish ambition:** Many other offenses are rooted in selfish ambition—the expectation of gaining a better position, increased honor and recognition, and more money, of being invited to “join the team,” or having a special relationship with someone who does not respond in the same way.
- G. **Do not be arrogant and lie against the truth:** This is one of the most important principles in healing relational conflicts, having a good marriage, and being a person of excellent character.
- H. He defined offenses rooted in our jealousy and ambition as earthly, natural, and demonic (v. 15).

1. **Earthly:** This perspective demands that we be treated in a way that fulfills most of our expectations. This “wisdom” is rooted in the temporal values of our humanistic culture.
 2. **Natural:** Our sense of entitlement to honor, comfort, inclusion, and promotion is natural.
 3. **Demonic:** This kind of “wisdom” gives opportunity to the devil and results in bitterness energized by demonic influence. James was not saying that they were demon-possessed.
- I. **Entrusting ourselves to God:** The Lord vindicates His people in *His* time and way. We entrust the situation to God’s leadership, knowing that He will answer in His way and His timing.
- ²³*...when He [Jesus] was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously. (1 Pet. 2:23)*

XVI. EIGHT RESPONSES THAT CONTRIBUTE TO HEALING RELATIONSHIPS (JAS. 3:17-18)

- A. James identified eight responses that express heavenly wisdom (biblical perspective) in relational conflicts. These show us the way to heal relationships and to live in freedom with a vibrant heart.
- ¹⁷But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and good fruits, unwavering, without hypocrisy. ¹⁸And the seed whose fruit is righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace. (Jas. 3:17-18, NASB)*
- B. **Pure:** Of first priority, we are to be honest about admitting and resisting bitterness and ambition. We break our agreement with seeking to establish our own desires and agenda that is outside of God’s will. Pure includes free of mixture, able to lead people to do what is right (in a culture that militates against biblical values). We are to refuse the distorted values promoted by our culture.
- C. **Peaceable:** This speaks of being peace-loving and committed to walking in unity in the relationship. We are not to insist on a “peace” that seeks payback and vindication.
1. We are to approach healing the conflict with a calm and peaceful spirit.
 2. We are not committed to *peace at any price* that compromises biblical principles.
- D. **Gentle:** This speaks of the quality of being accommodating, considerate, patient, agreeable, etc. This person seeks to be non-combative, instead of stubborn, defensive, and resistant.
- E. **Reasonable:** The NKJV translates reasonable as “*willing to yield*.” We are to be willing to yield to the appeal of others and to do things their way, even if it may not be absolutely the best way. The KJV translates this as “*easy to be entreated*”—be willing to yield to their appeal to do things their way and being eager to take responsibility for our faults. We express heavenly wisdom when we are eager to yield and to take responsibility for our deficiencies, insensitivities, and any contribution that we have made to the conflict.
- ²³*The poor man uses entreaties, but the rich answers roughly. (Prov. 18:23)*

- F. **Full of mercy:** Showing mercy means acting generously towards others. We are to be merciful with the failures and deficiencies of others in relational conflicts. Being *full* of mercy includes not requiring their perspective of the conflict to be 100% accurate. We seek to hear what they say even if only 10 % is accurate, while 90% is wrong. We focus on *hearing* the 10% that is true.
1. A response of mercy overlooks the wrong responses of others.
⁸Above all things have fervent love...for “love will cover a multitude of sins.” (1 Pet. 4:8)
 2. In what way does mercy triumph over judgment in our lives? Our hearts are liberated, and the healing process begins.
¹³Mercy triumphs over judgment. (Jas. 2:13)
 3. When we look at the deficiencies of the other in the conflict, we are to give them mercy. We are not to have a spirit of revenge seeking a punitive outcome.
- G. **Good fruits:** Heavenly wisdom involves more than good intentions; it includes follow-through in actions. Wisdom, like faith, must be demonstrated by good works (Jas. 2:14-17).
¹⁷Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead. (Jas. 2:17)
- H. **Unwavering:** The NKJV translates unwavering as *without partiality*. This response includes not having a double standard in our evaluation of the actions of others.
1. Paul emphasized this in Romans 2:1 by warning people not to judge someone for an action while violating the same biblical principle themselves, though with a different application.
¹Therefore you are inexcusable, O man, whoever you are who judge, for in whatever you judge another you condemn yourself; for you who judge practice the same things. (Rom. 2:1)
 2. We are to seek to avoid inconsistency in our judgments, but we seek to be unwaveringly or single-minded in evaluating ourselves and others.
- I. **Without hypocrisy:** It implies sincerity, not putting on a show of kindness to gain an advantage. This speaks of being genuine and true to appearances without a show of pretense. We are not to put on one face while we have another agenda operating in another way.
- J. James asserted that the seven virtues in verse 17 are “seed,” whose fruit results in righteousness.
¹⁸And the seed whose fruit is righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace. (Jas. 3:17-18, NAS)
- K. **The seed:** As we sow the seeds identified in verse 17, we will see the growth of righteousness in our life and relationships. It often takes a while to see the harvest of righteousness in the relationship and in others after we begin responding in the biblical way.
- L. We inspire our Christian adversaries to respond in a godly way.

- M. We will often see a cascading effect on others, who will be inspired to respond in righteousness, as they see our merciful and righteous response to them in a conflict.
- N. As we counsel our loved ones to identify even a small residue of jealousy or selfish ambition in their hearts, we are helping them to grow in righteousness and heal their wounded relationships.
1. Friends often tell each other how they have been mistreated. However, if we truly love our friends, we will not simply justify their complaints of mistreatment, but will respond as peacemakers, helping them to identify any jealousy or selfish ambition in their heart.
 2. Some friends will encourage them to “stand up for your rights” in a non-biblical way.
- O. ***Sown in peace by those who make peace***: Those who make peace speak words that facilitate unity between people. Their words, actions, and attitudes protect the bond of unity.
1. Peacemaking is at the heart of Jesus’ teachings, and it is one of the standards that He requires of His disciples.
 2. Jesus promised a special blessing to all who consistently seek to reconcile relationships. This involves seeking reconciliation in our own personal relationships, as well as helping others reconcile their relationships.
- ⁹Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God. (Mt. 5:9)***
- P. When someone violates our personal rights or blocks our goals of honor, comfort, money, etc., it often causes a wrong response of frustration and anger in us, leading to offense and bitterness.
- ¹What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you? Is not the source your pleasures that wage war in your members? ²...You are envious and cannot obtain; so you fight and quarrel.***
(Jas. 4:1-2, NASB)
- Q. Our wrong response of being angry or taking offense does not result in accomplishing God’s righteous purpose in our lives.
- ²⁰...for the anger of man does not achieve the righteousness of God. (Jas 1:20, NASB)***

XVII. QUESTIONS FOR SMALL-GROUP DISCUSSION

1. Identify one point that inspired or challenged you. Why? What will you do differently to apply it?
2. Identify one point that you want to impart to a younger believer. Why? How will you approach this?
3. Identify one point that you would like to gain more understanding of. How will you seek to gain it?

How to Restore a Wounded Relationship, Pt. 5 (Jas. 3:17)

XVIII. REVIEW: RECOGNIZING WHEN THE SPIRIT OF A RELATIONSHIP IS WOUNDED

- A. We are to do all that we can to restore relationships. Living peaceably involves having a spirit of goodwill with all people—in one’s marriage, family, workplace, friendships, neighborhood, etc.
- ¹⁸If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men. (Rom. 12:18)*
- B. **Go to your brother:** Jesus taught us to go to our “brother” to make an appeal, both when we have *something against them* (Mt. 18:15) and when they have *something against us* (Mt. 5:24).
- C. The Bible teaches that the foundational response to being mistreated is to entrust the results of the conflict to God’s leadership, knowing that He will answer in His way and His timing.
- ²³...when He [Jesus] was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously. (1 Pet. 2:23)*
- D. When someone mistreats us, verbally or by their actions, we are to commit the situation to the Lord as we make our appeal to that person (Mt. 5:23-24; 18:15). We can have peace, knowing that God is watching and will intervene in His way and in His time, as we live before His eyes.

XIX. EIGHT RESPONSES THAT CONTRIBUTE TO HEALING RELATIONSHIPS (JAS. 3:17)

- A. James identified eight responses that express heavenly wisdom (biblical perspective) in relational conflicts. These show us how to cultivate healthy relationships, heal wounded relationships, and live in freedom with a vibrant heart even in the midst of a conflict.
- ¹⁷But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy. (Jas. 3:17)*
- B. **Pure:** We are to respond with *pure motives* in seeking the good of others and *purity of insight* (without distortion) into how even a small residue of our self-seeking in us contributed to the conflict. A spirit of purity works in those who confess their self-seeking without rationalizing it. Having a pure heart doesn’t mean that all of our negative desires are gone, but that we are honest about them as we take responsibility for how our deficiencies contributed some to the conflict.
1. Purity of insight includes acknowledging our negative desires with humility and seeing God’s perspective of the person with whom we are in conflict. We are to seek to see people from God’s point of view—to see their dignity, excellence, and their value to the Lord; we want to see the good that they do and seek to do, not just their faults.
- ³As for the saints who are on the earth, “They are the excellent ones, in whom is all My delight.” (Ps. 16:3)*
2. **Ratio:** A healthy relationship requires about ten positive statements to one negative one. We cannot drive a “ten-ton truck” of correction over a relational bridge that can only bear five tons. We must not speak more about someone’s deficiencies than their virtues and desire to do right. We must be grateful for the good that they have done and seek to do.

C. **Peaceable:** We are to respond in a peaceable way rather than with accusations, complaints, anger, venting, or sarcasm. Our temptation may be to answer accusation with accusation and to answer sarcasm with more sarcasm. When resolving tension, especially in a marriage, it is best to wait until both are peaceful and have a happy spirit, instead of being angry, agitated, or annoyed.

1. We can be calm and have a peaceable spirit, knowing that the eyes of Lord are on us.
2. Continual complaining makes others want to draw back from the relationship and can cause children to leave home prematurely (Prov. 14:1; 17:1; 19:13; 21:9, 19; 25:24). This principle applies to all people in all types of relationships, not just women in their homes.

¹⁹***Better to dwell in the wilderness, than with a contentious and angry woman. (Prov. 21:19)***

¹³***The contentions of a wife [or spouse, parent, friend] are a continual dripping. (Prov. 19:13)***

3. We must not make our appeals to others with a spirit of anger—sarcasm, sighs, huffing, slamming doors, etc.—which hinders the ability of others to hear our concern.

D. **Gentle:** This speaks of the quality of being humble, fair, and generous in our communication. When appealing to someone to see a deficiency in their behavior or point of view, we must speak with a spirit of gentleness, being aware of our own failures and deficiencies (Gal. 6:1).

¹***If a man is overtaken in any trespass [even mistreating you]...restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted. (Gal. 6:1)***

1. A soft response diffuses anger in the one to whom we speak; a harsh tone will stir it up. It is important to have a gentle and generous tone in our communication when seeking to cultivate a healthy relationship or to restore a wounded one.

¹***A soft answer turns away wrath [anger], but a harsh word [tone] stirs up anger. (Prov. 15:1)***

2. A harsh tone includes anger, accusation, defensiveness, lack of patience (rushing people to answer), being exacting or a tone of lecturing (instructing them without listening), etc.

E. **Willing to yield:** The kingdom response is to be eager to *listen carefully* and *yield* to the view of others who point out a need for us to change our behavior, ideas, or plans on how to do things (in our family, workplace, ministry, etc.). We are to seek to be accommodating and agreeable.

1. This includes being openhearted to *receive insight* about our failure, insensitivity, or deficiencies in our behavior or ideas (plans) and being quick to *take responsibility* for the deficiencies or blind spots in our behavior or ideas when someone points them out to us.
2. This involves being teachable or easily persuaded when someone points out our faults.
3. This is the opposite of being close-minded, stubborn, resistant, combative, entrenched, and defensive to what others think or want. We are to be open to the counsel of others.

4. The need to *yield* implies that we are being challenged with an idea that we would not naturally accept. In being willing to yield, we are not to compromise biblical convictions or accept decisions or plans that will cause trouble or setbacks for many others.
 5. We seek to be supportive of the ideas that our family, friends, and fellow employees give us. We seek to “get on their team” to make it work for them. In agreeing to do things in the way that others want, we understand that “their way” may not be the absolute best way. There are often several right ways to do something. Each one has a downside.
 6. The person who loves the most is the one who ultimately wins in God’s eyes.
- F. ***Full of mercy***: Showing mercy includes acting generously towards those who mistreat us, even if they did it intentionally. We are to forgive their failures and deficiencies in the relationship.
1. Being *full* of mercy includes not requiring their perspective of the conflict to be 100% accurate. We seek to hear what they say, even if only 10 % is accurate and 90% wrong.
 2. A response of mercy covers and overlooks the wrong responses of others (Prov. 19:11). We are to give mercy without seeking revenge and payback so that people suffer for their wrong doings. Treating someone with mercy is not the same as quickly trusting them.
⁸...for “love will cover a multitude of sins.” (1 Pet. 4:8)
 3. ***The whole truth***: Some say, “I want the truth to come out.” We must remember that the “whole truth” about someone includes their *virtues*, not just their *failures*. God doesn’t tell us the whole truth about all of our deficiencies, knowing that it would overwhelm us.
 4. Mercy triumphs over judgment as our hearts are liberated and the healing process begins. The people who acted wrongly may be restored to obedience and confidence in God.
¹³Mercy triumphs over judgment. (Jas. 2:13)
- G. You are not to enable someone to abuse you by coming back to them with “mercy,” thus giving them opportunity to harm you. The context here is how to heal strife in relationship (Jas. 4:1).
- H. Wisdom, like faith, must be expressed by good deeds in our life (Jas. 2:14-17).
- I. ***Full of good fruits***: A kingdom response involves more than good intentions to be merciful to our adversaries; it includes follow-through in actions.
1. Wisdom, like faith, must be expressed by good works (words and deeds) in our life.
¹⁷Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead. (Jas. 2:17)
 2. For example, after a reconciliation meeting, we must follow through with our words and actions by honoring the things that we committed to do in the reconciliation meeting.

- J. ***Without partiality***: This includes not showing partiality to ourselves or to others who bless us. We must not hold our adversaries to a higher standard than we hold ourselves. There is to be no double standard in the kingdom. It is common for people to justify what they do wrong, but then be offended when another violates the same biblical principle yet with a different application.
1. Paul emphasized this in Romans 2:1, warning us not to judge someone for an action while violating the same biblical principle ourselves, though perhaps in a different way. Maybe they do not tell the whole truth or they fail to follow through on what they say. Do you always tell the whole truth or ever fail to follow through on what you say?
¹...you are inexcusable, O man, whoever you are who judge, for in whatever you judge another you condemn yourself; for you who judge practice the same things. (Rom. 2:1)
 2. Some get quickly offended when seeing injustice with money. Yet, they omit information on their taxes, or they sell their car or house without making all the information known about it to the buyer. Some are not faithful to God in giving to the kingdom. The Lord charged His people with stealing from Him when they withheld their tithes (Mal. 3:8).
 3. James warned against showing partiality by evaluating the actions of our adversaries by a higher standard than we evaluate the people who give us favors (Jas. 2:1-9).
²For if there should come into your assembly a man with gold rings...³and you...say to him, “You sit here in a good place,” and say to the poor man, “You stand there” ...⁴have you not shown partiality... and become judges with evil thoughts? (Jas. 2:2-4)
- K. ***Without hypocrisy***: This speaks of being genuine, sincere, and true to appearances, with no show of pretense to “appear to be kind” in order to gain an advantage. We are not to present ourselves as forgiving and kind to a person, and then later act and speak negatively against that person.
- L. James asserted that the eight responses in verse 17 are like a “seed” whose fruit, or harvest, will result in righteousness. As we sow this “seed,” we will see the growth of righteousness in our life and relationships. It takes a while to see the harvest, once we begin responding in the right way.
¹⁸Now the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace. (Jas 3:18)
1. ***Fruit***: One way you will see a harvest of righteousness is by inspiring others to respond in humility and righteousness as they see your merciful response to them in a conflict.
 2. If we truly love our friends, we will not simply justify their complaints of mistreatment. We should help them to identify even a small residue of envy or self-seeking in their heart; this helps them in a practical way to grow in righteousness and heal relationships.
 3. We are to respond with a peaceful spirit to those with whom we are in conflict.

XX. QUESTIONS FOR SMALL-GROUP DISCUSSION

1. Identify one point that inspired or challenged you. Why? What will you do differently to apply it?
2. Identify one point that you want to impart to a younger believer. Why? How will you approach this?
3. Identify one point that you would like to gain more understanding of. How will you seek to gain it?