

Relationships: Communication, Expectations, and Healing Wounds

I. 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. Be alert for the signs of a wounded relationship—including having a ***closed spirit*** (no longer receptive), ***being guarded*** (unwilling to share freely), ***strained communication*** (argumentative, sarcastic) and ***resisting touch*** (a spouse or child with a wounded spirit often resists being hugged).
- B. A relationship is wounded long before it is broken, and a broken relationship with offense requires much more effort, wisdom, and patience (entering a fortified city) to repair. The “offended brother” can be those with whom we are familiar—as a spouse, child, sibling, good friend, or co-worker, etc.
¹⁹A brother offended is harder to win than a strong [fortified] city... (Prov. 18:19)
- C. Husbands are called by God to honor their wives and also train their children to honor her.
⁷Husbands...giving honor to the wife...that your prayers may not be hindered. (1 Pet. 3:7)

II. THE POWER OF OUR SPEECH IN OUR RELATIONSHIPS

- A. The most common way to wound the spirit of a relationship is through corrupt speech, which includes ***complaining*** (too negative), ***unfair criticism*** (accusatory), ***sarcasm*** (insulting), “***sitcom humor***” (jokes about faults), ***anger*** (with rejection), ***being condescending*** (self-exalting).
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)
- B. ***Complaining***: This injures relationships and causes people to draw back from the relationship (Prov. 14:1; 17:1; 19:13; 21:9, 19; 25:24). This principle applies to men and women in all their relationships.
¹⁹Better to dwell in the wilderness, than with a contentious and angry woman. (Prov. 21:19)
¹³The contentions of a wife [or spouse, parent, friend] are a continual dripping. (Prov. 19:13)
- C. ***Anger***: An angry response 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)
- D. ***Seeing virtue and expressing gratitude***: We are to seek to see people from God’s perspective, to see their virtue and excellence, and to express gratitude for the good that they have done and seek to do. Saying “thank you” for small things makes a big difference over time in a relationship.
³As for the saints...“They are the excellent ones, in whom is all my delight.” (Ps. 16:3)

- E. ***Pick your battles wisely***: Don't use up your "relational equity" by correcting too many small things related to your spouse, children, or close friendships. Resist commenting too often on how the smaller things need to be better in their lives or actions so that you can focus on speaking into the most important things. Make sure you affirm them far more than pointing out their deficiencies.

III. BIBLICAL PRINCIPLES IN RESTORING AND BUILDING STRONG RELATIONSHIPS

- A. ***Clearly defined expectations***: Many offenses, tensions, and lack of trust result from having unfulfilled expectations or broken commitments. Therefore, take time to define expectations as to how each spouse agrees to serve the other and what they can expect in terms of time, service, communication, etc. Seek to establish practical, coordinated rhythms in your personal and family schedules that can reduce tension. It is essential to acknowledge when you do not keep your commitments, even in the small things related to time and money.
- B. ***Make a godly appeal***: When a relationship is wounded, make an appeal to the wounded person. We are to appeal in the right *tone*, *timing*, and *ratio* of affirmation to correction.
1. ***Tone***: The tone of our communication is a most important issue in restoring a relationship. A *negative tone* includes speaking with anger, defensiveness, and impatience (rushing people to answer or interrupting them while they are answering) and may include sarcasm, sighs, huffing, slamming doors, etc. This hinders the ability of others to hear our concerns. Our tone involves our body language and facial expressions, including making eye contact.
¹A soft answer turns away wrath [anger], but a harsh word [tone] stirs up anger. (Prov. 15:1)
 2. ***Timing***: When resolving a relational tension, it is *important to wait* until both parties are in a place of peace, or have a happy spirit, instead of communicating while angry or agitated.
 3. ***Ratio***: A healthy family relationship requires about ten positive statements to one negative one. We must not speak more about someone's failure than their virtues and desire to do right.
- C. ***Ask the person***: Ask them to tell you what they were thinking, feeling, doing, or wanting in the situation, instead of starting with statements of complaint or correction for them—"What were you thinking or feeling when you told me...?" "Help me understand what you felt when I said..."
- D. ***Tell them what you feel***: It can be helpful to share how you *felt* about what they did or said, instead of just making statements about their faults—start by saying things like, "I felt rejected or pained, or disappointed when you said or did that..." Opening our heart to share our feelings can help.
- E. ***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.

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

- 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. ***Confess your faults***: Do not say, “I’m sorry *if* I offended you.” Rather say, “I repent, *because* I sinned against you or failed you” (by coming up short in love, in keeping my commitments, etc.).
- H. ***Get an arbitrator***: An arbitrator can be very helpful in solving deep-seated relational conflicts.