

Relationships (Part 3)

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[0 : 00] Matthew chapter 5 in the Sermon on the Mount expresses something about relationships this way. And by the way, we are going to reiterate tonight some of the things we've already been talking about on relationships.

And if relationships really are the most important thing in the whole universe, most important thing in life here and now, they will also be the most important thing in heaven when we get there.

They are the most important things in heaven for those who are there now. Relationships because nothing counts as much. Nothing is as important as relationships, if that's true.

And if Jesus Christ left heaven's glory, came down to this earth to do what he did, all for the sole purpose of reestablishing and reconnecting a broken relationship, then we ought to know all that we can about the dynamics of relationships, how they are maintained, how they are injured, how they are ended, how they can be restored.

And I do not know of any other way other than through this formula that I am offering. And it is my formula. All I've done is just put these words and things together that I've gleaned throughout the scripture.

[1 : 30] So there's nothing really original about this. And I am convinced that these things and the order in which we are giving them are absolutely critical to maintaining healthy relationships.

Whether you're talking about a marriage, a relationship to your parents, to your siblings, to your employer or employees, to your neighbors, to schoolmates, to anybody, it doesn't make any difference.

It's just that the marriage relationship, of course, it's a closer relationship than all of those others. So what we are talking about works across the board for all kinds of relationships, whether near or far.

And you realize, of course, do you not, that what is wrong with the world is that it is in conflict. Nations are in conflict with other nations.

And people are in conflict with people. And that always creates offenses and pain and distancing.

[2 : 48] This is where it all begins. This is the source of all relationships being threatened.

Offenses. Offenses, nothing more than. Negative things that we say to each other that hurt and alienate and distance.

And negative things that we do to each other. We don't have any other way of getting to one another other than by what we say and what we do.

And that's adequate, isn't it? We don't need anything else. And by the way, the flip side of that is as wonderfully true that the positive things that we say and the positive things that we do have the opposite effect on relationships.

Rather than injuring them and severing them, it stabilizes them, strengthens them, and deepens them. So we can feed on one or the other.

- [4 : 03] And yet, conflict never comes from saying the right things to people and doing the right things to people. It doesn't produce conflict. What produces conflict is what we're talking about.
- This is what's wrong with the world. It's what's wrong with us. So, begins with an offense. And from the offense, does anybody remember the order in which these were given?
- I've got my little list here, but I don't want this to just be a lecture time. So you feel free to jump in with anything you've got. What happens after an offense is committed?
- An offense produces injury. And this is an internal injury.
- This is a hurt of the heart. This is a wound to the human spirit. We likened it to, it may be a small offense, not that big a deal.
- [5 : 06] We would say it's kind of like a dart size. You know, the kind of darts you throw on the board. And you throw this dart. And it lands in the spirit of the one we're offending.
- And then there's a bigger offense, like an arrow. And then there's a big offense, like a spear to the heart. And these things leave varying degrees of damage in the one who is offended.
- And as a result of the injury, and always, of course, pain, and it may be anger. And all of these spell out resentment.
- Resentment has to do with hard feelings toward another person, toward the offender. And I don't know if you've ever thought about this word, resentment, or not.
- But it has the idea of, well, think of it this way.
- [6 : 21] When somebody says something that we do not find offensive, but we may find it pleasant, we are accepting of that. We absorb it.
- We accept it. And we take it in. And when it isn't, we resent it. And you know what? Resent means. It means to just send it back where it came from.
- That's what the re is. You resent it. And that means that you do not accept it. You reject it. And you resent it.
- And with that is the anger, or the pain, or the hurt that is there. This takes place in the common concourse of humanity.
- Just living. We just do these things. One reason we do is because some of us, well, all of us have to varying degrees what I call the jerk factor.
- [7 : 23] And everybody has a capability of drawing upon their own personal jerk factor and saying something that's stupid, hurtful.
- And sometimes we intend it to be. That's why we say it. We expect it to hurt. We mean it to hurt.
- And sometimes we say something that we do not intend to hurt. That was not our purpose. And yet it does hurt. They find it offensive. And we didn't mean to offend them.
- So there are different degrees of this. But injury and pain and anger produces resentment. This is the way you feel toward that person.
- And out of your feelings toward that person flows your attitude toward them.
- [8 : 20] The way you treat them in return. Sometimes it's tit for tat. They said something or did something that offended you. So you say something or do something that offends them.
- And it's a get even game. Tit for tat. And while you're doing this, you're wounding them. So what we've got, we've got darts and arrows and spears in the air flying back and forth from these two parties.

As they are hurling these verbal or actionable offenses one to another. And all the while that's going on, guess what else is taking place?

They're moving further and further away. The relationship is experiencing a distancing.

In marital terms, you call that estrangement. They aren't together any longer. They're separated. And what caused the separation?

[9 : 26] It's always the same thing. I mean, it is always the same thing. No exceptions to this. No exceptions. It is always the offense.

This is what starts it. But it isn't the offense that does it in. Offenses do not in and of themselves end relationships.

They injure relationships, but they don't end it. And what ends the relationship is offenses that are unresolved.

Matthew 5 and verse 23. Jesus said, Therefore, if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there remember that thy brother hath ought against thee, leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way, and first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.

Now, it needs to be said that the context in which our Lord is speaking here has to do with bringing gifts, monetary gifts, to God at the altar.

[11 : 03] This is in Jerusalem, at the temple. And he is setting forth here a principle that operates this way.

Don't concern yourself about being on good terms with God if you're not concerned about being on good terms with your fellow man.

Now, that's a principle. And the reason it is stated here, and the reason the Lord used it, is just another indication of the kind of value that God places on relationships.

God and Christ is here speaking for his Father, as it were, in heaven. And the Father in heaven is saying, You come to the temple to bring me a gift, to worship me.

Don't bother. I don't want your gift. I don't want you coming to me with your gift. While you are on the outs with your brother. Don't think that you can ignore a human relationship, and that everything is hunky-dory between you and me, because it doesn't work that way.

[12 : 21] God is so committed to relationships, he wants us to focus on being rightly related to one another, and then being rightly related to him.

That's a concept that probably isn't much appreciated or understood, but I'm satisfied that that's what the principle here is saying, and it just indicates the value that God places on people getting along with each other.

So, this distancing is a result of unresolved relationships, and sometimes the relationship comes to an end, because what takes place with unresolved offenses is there's an accumulation, a build-up.

You know, and speaking again of marriage, because it is the most pronounced illustration of this, couples can live together for years, carrying tons and tons of unresolved offenses.

Things that they have said and done to each other over the years, that hurt, hurt a lot, and are vividly remembered, and stored away in their spirit, and they just, they're just warehoused there, and they don't go away.

[13 : 55] And what we do is, with each new offense, with each new wound, we just keep adding to it, and adding to it, and adding to it, and pretty soon, the next thing you know, it's your lawyer or mine.

The straw that broke the camel's back. I've had it up to here. I want out. And this is epidemic. It's going on all over the country. And it's always the result of this same thing.

Unresolved offenses. I remember, I think it was Howard Hendricks talking about this fellow.

He was Professor Christian Ed at Dallas Theological Seminary forever. And a young man who had been married for a couple of years, came in for some marriage counseling, and he plopped himself down the desk, and he said, Well, Prof, he said, I got a real problem here with my marriage.

And he went on. He was describing his wife, and he talked about her thusly and thusly, and just went on and on and on. And Hendricks is just sitting there nodding, and he's just reading out this wonderful creature that he married, and all of her faults, and all of her problems, and all of her inconsistencies, and all of her hang-ups, and all the things about her that he couldn't stand.

[15 : 18] And finally, Hendricks, he said, I'm amazed. He said, What really amazes me is, Why did you marry a woman like that?

And he said, Well, she wasn't like that when I married her. He said, Oh, you made her that way. Oh. And you know what?

That's humorous, but it is also sad, because this is what's going on. And the offenses pile up, and they pile up, and they pile up, and pretty soon, a relationship just becomes so top-heavy with offenses, that it starts teetering, you know.

And they're never resolved, never removed, things are never patched up, never fixed, and what both people in this relationship are usually counting on, is the old maxim, Well, time heals all wounds.

I shouldn't have said what I did the other day. I know it really made her sore, but I'll just give her enough time, she'll cool down. No, she won't. She won't cool down.

[16 : 34] She's got a vivid memory. She's got that baby stored away. And she can mentally bring it up anytime she needs it, or anytime you do something else to trigger it.

Up it pops, you know. And she replays that thing over again. And each time we replay it, we become wounded and offended all over again.

This is not the way people are supposed to treat each other. And we're all guilty of this to one degree or another.

We are, many times we are the offended, and when we're not the offended, we are the offender. And it just goes back and forth and back and forth.

So, injury, pain, anger, these are all emotional feelings. These are feelings of, of resentment, and anger, and disgust, and before any of this can ever change, or get turned around, what's the next thing we need?

[17 : 42] Anybody remember? before there can be any reversal of this, before we can even start to resolve the offense, something has to happen.

Okay? You're right. But there's one thing first before repentance. Why should anybody repent? What's the cause of repentance?

Repentance. Repentance. Repentance. Information.

Information. One of my favorite words. I've become fascinated with this term, and what it really means, because it is just, it is just incredible. It's just incredible.

What do we mean by information? And there are two kinds we said, remember? Internal information, external information. Before anybody can make a move to resolve an offense, to remove the arrow, and remember, this is really important.

[18 : 57] The only, when the offender fires a dart, or an arrow, or a spear, into the spirit of the other person, the offender who fired it is the only one who can remove it.

There is no self-help removal. You can't just say, well, I'm just not going to let it hurt me. You are too. You don't have the power to not let it hurt you.

You can act like it doesn't hurt you. But you can't really fool yourself. It hurts. You can't remove the hurt.

Only the one who put it there can remove it. And the only way they can do that is by way of apology. And internal information, how does this work? What's the dynamic of internal information?

If I remember? Your conscience. Your conscience. Your memory. You may be reading something.

[20 : 01] You may be reading an article from your daily devotional. And it will remind you of something that you said or did to offend another person a couple of days ago.

And you say, oh yeah, well, you feel guilty about it. You feel maybe ashamed that you said it or did it.

And you begin replaying it in your mind. That is internal information. You are mulling it over and thinking about it. What you said.

And you may reason this way. You know, when I saw so-and-so this morning, he acted like it took him a lot of effort to even speak to me.

I mean, he was really, didn't stop the chat or anything. It was just, you know, what's eating him? And then you may think, oh yeah, well, I guess he, maybe he's still kind of sore about what I said the other day.

[21 : 07] You know, well, he probably is. And you start playing that over. You replay that in your mind what the offense was. That is internal information.

You are informing yourself. And what is an example of external information? Somebody tells you that you have offended them.

Yeah. Yeah. They just, and maybe, maybe they're a little distant too. And you say, hey, is something bugging you? You know, have I, well, yeah, matter of fact, there is.

And then they unload. And when you said thus and so, I thought it was unkind, and it was unfair, and it was only half true, and you shouldn't have said it. And it really hurt. I want you to know that. It really hurt.

You are getting information, data, that you can act on. And this person is the source of it.

[22 : 07] And in fact, they may even come to you. The text says, if your brother has ought against you, you are to go to him.

And there's a big debate over who's supposed to initiate this. But you know what usually happens, don't you? Well, let them come to me. And most of us have an ego problem in going to someone else.

And you know why? Because it makes us look like we're crawling to them. And that's not very good for our image. So we want to be the big honcho, and we want them to come to us and make an appeal to us.

It is self-lowering to go to them and make an appeal. But if you are more concerned about the restoration of a relationship than you are protecting your precious ego, you will do whatever needs to be done.

And you will bite the bullet and go to them. And it's not an easy thing to do. And I'll tell you how I know that this is not an easy thing to do.

[23 : 22] It doesn't happen very much. People don't do this very much. And I'll tell you the reason why we don't. We aren't big enough.

We're too little. We're too small-minded. We're too overly protective of our ego.

We're not going to eat humble pie. We're not going to go to them. If they want things patched up, let them come to me. That's just an attitude of arrogance.

We're all capable of it. And do you know what it does? It just intensifies the offense and it increases the injury, the pain and the anger and the resentment.

It doesn't resolve anything. And nobody's happy. Everybody's miserable in this because the relationship is in disarray. Now, once we've got the information, external or internal, whichever kind it is, I just want you to know this is the crisis.

[24 : 32] This is the sticking point. This is why if relationships are not restored by offenses being resolved, it is usually because of this.

This one thing. This crisis that is reached here. Once the information has been processed and you realize you are the offender, now the ball is in your court.

What are you going to do? Our preference is nothing. Our preference is let time do for us what we don't want to do for ourselves.

Just give it time. Well, it won't work. It won't work. Granted, time can go by and there can be a thawing.

There can be a thawing of the ice between you so that you are at least maybe restored to speaking terms.

[25 : 36] Is that what you are willing to settle for? Or do you want the thing fixed? Do you want it resolved? You see, so many of these injuries, so many of these offenses that are just tried to be restored through time doesn't remove it.

You can't take the offense. Time can't take the offense away. Can it lessen it? Yes, it can. It can lessen the pain. It can lessen the hurt. But it doesn't remove the offense.

And I'm talking about a first-class relationship where the offense is resolved, not where time allows it to just chip away at the edges a little bit and it gets to the place of where you are at least speaking again and treating each other civilly.

That's not good enough. And really, all that does is give both people the impression that things are pretty good now. But they're not. They're not.

They're not unless you can convince yourself, well, boy, I'm really glad that's over. I'm glad we got that. I'm glad we had it out.

[26 : 53] I'm glad we had an airing. I'm glad we got it resolved. And we can hug or kiss and make up or shake hands or whatever you're doing and make up and honestly feel good about it.

That's what you want. That's what the goal is. It's not just to get back on speaking terms again. That's not adequately resolving it. So, here is the crisis.

Once you get the information, what are you going to do with it? And this is where the rubber really meets the road. Do you have a comment?

Okay. That is a huge, huge step. Big step. Tough step. Rare step. It is something, it is, it is something that we should be equally as good at as we are as good at offending.

This is what fine tunes relationships. Nothing has the power of an apology. And we talked a little bit about that last week. That's a spiritual crisis.

[28 : 04] And information, let's put, let's put apology down here. It's coming. But, after, after information and before apology comes something that's already been mentioned.

Somebody mentioned it earlier. Repentance. Okay. That is a change of mind. And, this is what information is designed to lead us to.

Information. You mull it over, you rethink it, you process it, you play it over and over again, and, you come to this conclusion. Oh, you know what?

I really blew it. I was, I was really out of line. I was, I should not have said that. What am I doing?

I am changing my mind. The reason I said what I did in the first place that offended and hurt was because that's what I thought and that's the way I felt at the time.

[29 : 21] I did it. Repentance says, I don't feel that way anymore. I don't think that way anymore. I've changed my mind.

I've reversed myself. Repentance means, even though you cannot go back and replay the offense in actuality, you cannot have an opportunity to do it over again, but if you could, you would do it differently.

That's what it means to repent. Now, usually we call this a change of mind and actually that's what it is because it involves the intellect and it involves the will. It is a change of mind but that doesn't communicate nearly as well as does a change of heart.

a change of heart because we know that a change of heart involves feelings and emotions and behavior.

the intellect provides the rational basis for it but it is the heart it is the change of heart it is the feeling and emotion that puts movement behind what the intellect has done or the conclusion that the intellect has reached and this is very, very important this change of mind change of heart it means I want to reverse myself and then comes the apology and we've talked about that apologia means with words it means you verbalize it means you express and you spell out what you did and what you said that was offensive this is no time for general pronouncements such as if I offended you or hurt you in any way I'm sorry okay that does not cut it there's nothing genuine about that or legitimate about that it needs to be

[31 : 30] I am sorry that I said thus and so and thus and so and thus and so or I'm sorry that I did thus and so you need to spell it out because only when you articulate it and you define it and you are specific does the one who is the offended know and understand that you really hurt them and how you hurt them you have to reiterate it you have to put it into words and then you give them an opportunity to agree to it and elaborate on it if they wish this is painful stuff and this is why it most often is not done because it's hard this is hard work this is the hard work of relationships not just marriage but relationships on any level it is being willing to bite the bullet and stuff your ego and go to the other person and just read yourself out before them

I'm not going to do that no of course not most of us won't and we don't and relationships suffer well the apology with words is a statement that expresses what we have repented about what we have changed our mind about and they need to understand that they need to know that you have thought about and considered what you said or did and you agree with them and you disagree with yourself it means you are taking their side against you now let me tell you something this is highly abnormal isn't it it is virtually non-existent in the non-Christian community but the thing that is really tragic is it's almost non-existent among

Christians and it ought to be our calling card it ought to be something that we are eager to do these are spiritual benefits that have been made available to us as divine operating assets and God has given us a supernatural ability that enables us to do this kind of thing and most of us still won't do it and there's only one reason because the flesh gets in the way and says no I'm not going to belittle myself I'm not going to eat humble pie they were just as wrong as I was and nobody's willing to break that ice this is this should not be so in the Christian community but it is we all know it apology is incredibly powerful and then along with the apology is the request for forgiveness and it is a request we spell out in no uncertain terms what we have done we acknowledge what we have done we acknowledge the wrongness of it and this is no time this is no time to remind them of what they did to contribute to the situation because you're pouring you're pouring gasoline on the fire what you're doing is counterproductive you are taking the blame you are being the heavy you are taking the responsibility do they have any responsibility most often they do maybe not as much as you do or they may be an equal contributor but you do not have the right when you're making an apology you do not have the right to call into play what they did wrong and you know what that is so tempting because when we do that it keeps us from having to shoulder the whole blame for this thing because we don't deserve to take all of it they were a contributor they were party of that so let's remind them of it no you don't do that you are responsible only for yourself but what you are doing when you take responsibility and when you own up to what you did or what you said and you offer an apology and they see that your repentance is genuine and that you are reversing yourself what you are doing and this is not manipulation this is not what you're trying to do you're just trying to be honest and make things will likely read from your doing that is they will see the sincerity of your effort and it will immediately in almost every case it will immediately bring to their mind the fact that they are not exactly lily white in this thing either and you have just made it easy for them to own up to their responsibility in this by your taking the lead you're giving them that opening and very often do you know what they'll do why you're apologizing you know what they're doing they are processing information internally and here they are hearing you apologize and you saying how sorry you are for what you did or said and they are absorbing that and they are thinking why you're saying that well boy

I never thought I never thought he'd see the day when he'd never apologize about anything I'm really shocked that he did and you know what I had a part in this too I shouldn't have done thus and so and so and what you're doing is creating a maximum climate for kiss and make up that's a wonderful thing stepping on your own ego to get to kiss and make up is a small price to pay keep that in mind request forgiveness we do not demand forgiveness we do not have the right to demand forgiveness when we request forgiveness we are putting them the offended one in the driver's seat they are calling the shots it is up to them they hold all the cards in this thing you have just made yourself the heavy and rightly so you were the heavy you were the offended the offender and now they are in the position they're in the catbird seat and you are dependent on them for their forgiveness forgiveness what will make it easier for them to forgive than anything else what makes it easy for someone who has been offended to forgive when they sense the earnestness and the genuineness of your repentance and your apology it is very very difficult for an offended person to say no

I won't forgive you when they see that you have poured your heart out and you have expressed your own grief about your situation what you have done or what you have said it is very very difficult for them to withhold forgiveness you are putting yourself in a position of vulnerability and you are putting them in a position of command and it is true there may be some people who are unfeeling and hard hearted who will actually go so far as to say hell no I won't forgive you forget that won't forgive you you don't deserve to be forgiven you know what they need information and do you know what will give it to them more quickly than anything else and more effectively than anything else is you're just maintaining your attitude of a contrite spirit and a sincerity in your apology and they have to deal with that they have to process that they have to work that through and when they do time and again first of all there's the initial shock of trying to get over you apologizing and you know and once they get over that then they just start replaying that

[41 : 12] I can't believe I came in and then I said I wouldn't forgive him and as they process that you know what this person is very likely going to do you know what maybe I maybe I just acted too angrily maybe I maybe I should forgive him maybe maybe he really did seem I've never seen him like that before I didn't think he had it in him but he did and and and then I squashed it and said no I won't forgive you and maybe I should and what you are doing is creating to want to forgive and to change their mind this is all dynamics of human relationships and nothing as fascinating and nothing as complicated as what we're talking about and all of this boils down to you know what getting along with each other and loving each other that's what this is all about and sometimes we just make it so hard to love one another and so hard to get along we request forgiveness and we ask will you please forgive me and like

I said that puts them in the position of power you have given them that power it is not your responsibility to see to it that they do not abuse that power it is just your responsibility to give it to them then it's up to them what they're going to do with it and don't be shocked if they initially say no no or if they say something like this well I forgive you but I'll never be able to forget it of course you can't forget it you don't have the ability to forget it but you can treat it like you forgotten it and in doing that that means that you don't use it again you don't bring it up because once you have forgiven it you know the word forgive the word aphimi in the Greek aphimi means to dismiss to send away to put out of sight it's what

God has done with our sin the scriptures say that God has forgiven our sin he has put our sin as far as the east is from the west he has put it away he has put our sins behind his back our sins are sought for and not found our sins are buried in the depths of the deepest sea God hasn't forgotten any of them but it is just as though God has forgotten them because he will not make them available to be used against you in the future that's what it means to be forgiven when you forgive someone you dismiss it you send it away you will not recall it you will not bring it up because you treat it as if it never happened and if it never happened how can you bring it up it never happened that's the way relationships need to be restored forgiveness be kind tender hearted one to another forgiving one another even as

God for Christ's sake has forgiven you and then once forgiveness has been requested and granted we have reconciliation restoration it's time to shake hands and be buddies again or kiss and make up and be lovers again or whatever the relationship is that was damaged and ruined and once that is done the beautiful thing about this whole situation is and this is the only way that it works like this the only thing in which it works that I know of is that is that through this process and through forgiveness the restoration that is realized can actually and should strengthen and deepen the relationship so that it was stronger and better than it was before the offense ever occurred and the reason for that is because both of you in the estrangement of the relationship both of you have gone through a time of emotional and mental and psychological pain and pain that is shared between two people has a way of deepening the bond and strengthening it even if it is a conflict between the two when once it is resolved and it is fixed the way it's supposed to be you can really get about the business of loving each other and it can be better and stronger than it was before the offense ever occurred and that's exactly what we have between

God creator man the creature had a wonderful relationship before there was a fall before Adam's fall but by virtue of what happened in the estrangement and the pain and the alienation and the separation and the price that was paid to affect that reconciliation the bond between God the creator and man the creature is far greater now and will be in the future than it was before Adam's offense ever occurred why because of everything that the two parties who were estranged have gone through in the meanwhile it solidifies bonds and strengthens and it's wonderful questions or comments anyone take the fun out of fighting

[47 : 29] I never heard it put that way before but that's okay greatest thing absolutely greatest thing in the entire universe universe is to love and be loved there's nothing that can compare with that and when the love is between God the creator and humankind as creatures that is just the absolute ultimate and God wants us to have something like that among ourselves between ourselves this is supposed to characterize the Christian community Jesus said you know everybody's going to know that you are my disciples because of your love one for another that ought to be our calling card that ought to be the thing that distinguishes us but as one brother has put it instead the world is looking in the window and saying behold how they club one another and brethren these things ought not to be so well anything else anyone okay sorry

I've kept you over five minutes extra but I apologize will you forgive me this is your chance to put it into practice seriously next week I've got some just super duper DVDs that I've been anxious to share with you for the last three or four months but I just wanted to get this stuff in and get it on the record because relationships across the board are in such a threatened state all the time you know because we're always so capable of saying and doing things that hurt one another and it just takes the edge off of the living that Christ died to provide for us and we don't want that so father we're so thankful for what you have exemplified in the healing and the restoring of relationships in that ultimate expression of your forgiveness and and what you've made available to us it's just it's just mind boggling that you could love in that way and give us an opportunity to be recipients of it we'll have all of eternity to thank you for it and we'll need that we bless you for it in

Christ's name amen peace peace peace peace peace peace peace peace peace peace