How to Restore a Wounded Relationship, Part 1 (Mt. 18:15)

1. Recognizing when the spirit of a relationship is wounded
   1. 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). We must do our part, and then God will do His part in blessing and healing our relationships.

*This morning I want to talk about the second commandment. I want to talk about healing wounded relationships and restoring relationships. Now concerning the things that I am sharing this morning, I am really focusing on husbands and fathers. That is what is really in my mind, but it is far bigger than that. It is a subject between friends, leadership teams, or any kind of relationship that needs to be restored.*

*I do not want to miss the point of the father and the husband taking the leadership in the home to see restored relationships within the context of the family. More than that we want to see it throughout the whole Body of Christ in terms of our spiritual family and all the different relationships that we are a part of.*

*A relationship is like a garden. This is obvious—it has to be cultivated. We water it by adding the important nutrients that nurture the plant, and we weed it by removing and addressing the things that hinder its growth. I am going to talk mostly about addressing and removing the things that hinder the growth of a relationship, i.e. restoring a wounded relationship.*

*We have to do our part, and God will do His. That also is obvious, but the reason I say it is that a lot of folks pray and ask the Lord to break in sovereignly and heal that relationship, and then they stand back passively. The Lord is saying, “No, I have given you instruction in my Word about what you are supposed to do. I will heal the relationship as you do your part.”*

*Many times we just say, “Lord, do it. Heal it. I want to see Your supernatural work.”*

*He says, “Only in context of you doing your part in the relationship.”*

* 1. 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 or dysfunctional.

*Husbands and fathers, I just want to mention this. You know this, that a relationship can be wounded at various levels. There could be a slight injury of the relationship with a child or a spouse or a wife, or it could be deeply broken in a very serious situation. My point is, when we recognize the slight injury of a relationship, we want to move in proactively and restore that relationship right away.*

*I know some men of God are oblivious to the injured relationships in their home and around them because it is not very broken or it is not a severe problem. They think, “Hey, things are fine.”*

*I say, “Well, you know when you put your arm around your teenage daughter, she draws back.”*

*“She is just in a funny mood, and she will grow through it.”*

*“No, that means something is injured. It is the beginning of an injury there. Pay attention to that, and move in proactively and restore it before anything else takes place.” That is something I want to emphasize today, that the spirit of a relationship can be injured long before it is broken.*

*Now two godly people who have a wholesome walk with God can have an injured relationship without themselves being wounded or dysfunctional. Some people think that if the relationship is injured, then everyone is dysfunctional. No, I know many situations where the brother over here is godly and wholesome, with a good life with God and the other brother does too, but the relationship between them—the spirit of that relationship is wounded. The same is true within the context of family relationships.*

* 1. 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 these signs.

*What are the signs of a wounded relationship, or at least what are a few of them? Number one is when you see a closed spirit. In other words, the spouse or the children are not as responsive as they use to be in the relationship. Pay attention to that. If it is one day or one week, that is not a problem. But if it is something that is going on for months, it is time to say, “Lord, I want help to restore this.”*

*They are guarded, and they are not sharing as freely as they use to share, and that may be between two friends, not just in a family context. There is strained communication, there is defensiveness, argumentativeness, and challenging that is happening regularly. “Well, my children are just rebellious.” There may be some truth to that, but there is probably an injured relationship that needs repaired as well. It is may be long before it is broken, but it might be broken if you do not take proactive steps.*

*Then there is the resisting of touch. I am thinking of family relationships particularly, that if you put your arm around your spouse or your children, and they draw back or they tighten up, note to self: “Father, Husband, alert, alert! Something needs to be ministered to in a proactive way to strengthen that relationship there!” Be alerted.*

* 1. A relationship is wounded long before it is broken, and a broken relationship requires much more skill and attention to heal. If we address the relational weakness, or “infection,” at the early stages, 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*.

*If we can address the weaknesses in the early stages, we can avoid gangrene setting into the relationship and it being destroyed completely. If we are alert to these things, then we can be proactive. When we are proactive, we save a disaster. Where there is the disaster, the relationship is not just wounded; it is completely broken. Note, these principles also apply to restoring that broken relationship.*

*Now most of these things are so obvious, most of you in the room know them. But when you are in the heat of the pain or just the busyness of life, you can lose sight of some of these very obvious biblical principles in relationship building.*

1. the power of our speech in our relationshipS
   1. The most common way to wound the spirit of a relationship is through perverse, or corrupt, speech; this includes speech that is crooked (perverse), instead of being straight.

4A wholesome tongue is a tree of life, but perverseness in it breaks the spirit. (Prov. 15:4)

*Now I do not think anything is more powerful than speech in terms of wounding a relationship. There are other things as well. I mean obviously there are some disastrous things out there, but I am talking about in the everydayness of life in which we can wound the spirit of a relationship, as Proverbs 15 calls it, through perverse speech.*

*Let’s read it in Proverbs 15:4. King Solomon wrote the book of Proverbs. So King Solomon, the wisest man to ever live on the earth besides the Lord Himself, said, “A wholesome tongue is a tree of life, but perverseness in speech breaks a person’s spirit.” Now this is talking about when there is perverse speech in a close, meaningful relationship. Perverse does not mean immoral or vulgar. That is not the idea of perverse. Perverse in this context means it is that which is crooked. It is not straight; it is not wholesome.*

*I believe that in the course of decades of relating in a family context or even long-term friendships, speech is at the very top of the list of what hurts a relationship. Obviously there can be some traumatic things that are worse than speech, but I want to highlight the importance of having our speech right.*

* 1. Corrupt speech injures relationships, rather than imparting grace to the one being corrected. Such words grieve the Spirit, as well as grieving both the speaker and the recipient of the words.

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)

*In Ephesians 4, Paul says the same thing, but uses a different word. He says, “Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but only a word that is good for edification”—it is necessary to build up people’s heart, to inspire, encourage, and give them insight—“that it may impart grace to the hearers, and do not grieve the Holy Spirit.” Solomon in Proverbs 15 said it breaks the spirit. Paul goes the opposite direction and says that corrupt words do the opposite of edifying.*

*Now words really can break somebody’s spirit. You have heard the phrase, “sticks and stones may break…”—I forget how you say it now—“but words will never hurt me.” Okay. Words do hurt you. I should have practiced that before I did that, okay; it has been a while. Words can hurt us, and words do hurt our children. They hurt our spouse, they hurt our friends, and they hurt relationships in the workplace.*

*Paul says, “Do not let a corrupt word leave your mouth.” Now obviously corrupt words do leave our mouth. What do we do? The corrupt words do not have near so much power* ***if we own that the word was wrong*** *and we look the person in the eye, and we correct it, we take the word back.*

*Many times raising our sons—they are in their mid-thirties now—I would look at them, little Luke and Paul, five-six-seven years old, and I would say some word with a wrong tone in it. When that happened, I would look them in the eye—because this is a principle I taught many times and so I was reminded of it constantly—I would say, “What I, Dad, did was wrong to you. It was a sin.”*

*They would kind of roll their eyes, “A sin? Well, it is not really a sin.”*

*I would say, “Yeah, what I did was wrong, and I ask you to forgive me.”*

*They would say, “Sure, Dad, not a big deal.”*

*The fact that you would say that is critical, and if you do it regularly and keep short accounts, it does not become a big deal. If you say corrupt words to your children and to your spouse, and you think, “Ah, they are rough. They are tough. They have got big shoulders,” and you just let it take its toll, sooner or later the relationship gets injured.*

*So I have spoken many a corrupt word in my day, but by the grace of God a number of times, hopefully more than not, I would look at my wife or my sons or a friend and say, “That was wrong what I said. I take that back, I apologize for that.” If you keep short accounts, and you own it and retract it, the damage is really minimal or none at all.*

*So Paul said to speak words that impart grace. Now to impart grace means it gives people courage, and it gives them inspiration. It gives them insight on how to obey God or to grow in the Lord or to do the will of God in their life.*

* 1. Perverse, or corrupt, speech includes ***unfair criticism*** (accusatory), ***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)

*Just a little snapshot of what perverse or corrupt speech looks like—this is not a comprehensive list. It is unfair criticism, where the criticism is accusatory or even exaggerated. Exaggerated criticism is very common. “Well you always do this…” “Well, no one always does anything…” I mean “always” is almost always the wrong word.*

*Corrupt speech is sarcastic humor or sitcom humor. Sitcom humor is a term that most of you, I think, understand what I mean by that. There is so much of it in the media today that it is part of our culture, where we poke fun at people’s weaknesses or we just poke fun at them. They laugh, we laugh, we all laugh, and that has so inundated our Western culture that it seems okay. It seems harmless. It seems fun. I want to say this: according to Paul the apostle this culture has no place in the kingdom of God. The kingdom culture is opposite of jokes that put people down, even if they are laughing. We do not want to go in that direction. We want to go in the opposite direction.*

*Paul said in verse 30, “Do not grieve the Spirit.” Now in verse 30 he is talking about verse 29. When he says, “Do not grieve the Spirit,” the context is* ***by the way we speak****. Because when we speak corrupt words, or as Solomon said, perverse words, the Spirit is grieved. It is not only that the person we talk to is grieved, and not only that the person doing the talking is grieved. The Spirit is grieved, the listener is grieved, and the speaker is grieved. Now the speaker might not even be aware of it, because they are so used to living with a dull spirit. It is normal to have a dull spirit, and when the spirit is dull, they do not even know it because they are accustomed to it. When you are walking with the Lord in a fresh way, you feel when you say something wrong. You just feel that tweaking of the Lord on the inside, that displeasure, that slight displeasure. That is the grieving. Pay attention to that.*

*So corrupt words grieve God’s Spirit, the hearer’s spirit, and the speaker’s spirit. We want to stay far away from those. Now again I have spoken those kind of words many times, and not just in the distant past, but I want to own it and correct it each time that I do it or at least each time that I know and aware of it. I just want to encourage you to do the same, and I know that many of you are committed to that.*

* 1. We are to be careful with our words and diligent to repair any damage that we cause 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, good friend, or 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 [fortified] city… (Prov. 18:19)

*Let’s look at Proverbs 18:19. Solomon said, “A brother offended is harder to win than a strong city” or as one translation says, a fortified city. The truth of this verse is so important. We need to be very careful with our words because we know that if we speak corrupt or perverse words to our children, our spouse, our friends, the people we work with—the sarcastic humor that is not edifying, all those kinds of things—we run the risk of the brother being offended. Now when you see the word, brother, here do not think of just a friend in the kingdom. Think of family members as well—male or female—it is generic, it is the close relationship. If in that close relationship the person gets offended, then it is far more difficult to win them. So what Solomon is saying is to be careful with your words because once you step over that line and the person has that negative reaction and it settles in, then it is far more difficult to get that relationship healthy again. Solomon is warning them in essence to be very careful with their words.*

*Fathers, do not take liberty to vent to your children. “Well, they are my children, and it is my home. I can do what I want to do. We can be sarcastic, we can be condescending, we can have an angry tone because it is just our kids and we are just trying to help them. I mean we love them.”*

*The Holy Spirit says, “No, do not take that liberty. Those little ones are so precious, and you will actually injure their spirits if you do that time and time again as the culture of your home and of your leadership style.”*

*Now a fortified city, or a strong city is what this verse is talking about in Proverbs 18:19. The idea is that there is this advancing army coming to capture a city, so the city fortifies itself. It puts up all of its guards to keep that invading army out. What Solomon is saying is, if that family member or that friend gets offended, they are like that city. Their heart is like a city with all the fortifications and guards. If you are going to enter that city, if you are going to gain their heart again, you are going to have to be like the king in that military situation. They have to have strategy, and it takes a lot of effort, and it takes a lot of patience to take a fortified city.*

*So what Solomon is saying is that it is going to take you time to undo that offense. It is going to take wisdom, it is going to take patience, and it is going to take fortitude to capture that city again, to capture the heart of that friendship or that family member that has been offended. It is not easy. It takes time. It takes patience.*

* 1. ***Complaining***:We are warned not to allow our complaining to injure a relationship. Continual complaining makes others want to discontinue or 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 many different types of relationships, not just women in their homes.

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

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

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

*Complaining is so common. I want to talk about the danger of complaining, the dangerous nature of complaining. Complaining is so intrinsic to being human. I mean we all do it. We all see it is just so human. I do not know if anything is more human than this. Obviously I could put a few things on that list.*

*The Lord called Solomon the wisest man in the Old Testament. He called him that, and Solomon repeatedly throughout the book of Proverbs discusses the danger of complaining. It says it over and over and over. This is not a casual thing. Someone may say, “Well, you know, I just had a tough day. I will do a little complaining, you know.”*

*He says, “Do not do it. It is destructive, it is very serious, and it will injure a relationship. If you continue with complaining, it will ruin the relationship.” Again, this is something we are all susceptible to because it is just the nature of the human heart that if things are not right, just to complain.*

*Now what happens when somebody complains often, we want to draw back from the relationship. It is obvious because we all feel it, that there is the temptation to draw back. Some want to discontinue the relationship if the complaining goes on and on. Children want to leave their home prematurely if the parents complain in a chronic way. They think, “I just cannot get any peace here. It does not feel right at all. I am always a failure. I am always under the power of feeling their displeasure. I cannot do anything right. There is always tension in the air. Ugh!”*

*The human heart would rather retreat from the relationship, the home, and the marriage than have continual complaining as a way of life. This does not make it right [to leave] but Proverbs is saying, Solomon is saying, “Take this seriously. This is not a casual thing.”*

*Proverbs 21:19 says that it is better to live in a wilderness than to live with a contentious and angry wife. Contentious means constantly provoking argument, often through complaining. Now he is not saying the guy in the wilderness is off the hook or that he is doing everything right. He is not ascribing blame to one or the other, or saying who is better, who is worse. He is just pointing out the danger of complaining as a strategy to get that guy’s attention.*

*Now lest you think complaining is only about women complaining to a husband, because that is mostly how Solomon applies it, complaining is also men to their wives, parents to children, adult children to parents. It is bosses to their employers. It is team members on the team. It is among friends. This principle applies to every relationship that you can think of. So do not limit this to the husband-wife relationship, though that is what Solomon talks about in Proverbs. He really hits men hard on immorality, and he hits women hard on complaining in Proverbs. It is like there was an issue that he was really after.*

*The truth is immorality is a problem for both men and women, and complaining is a problem for both men and women. So if you are a man, do not think you are just the guy wanting to retreat in the wilderness; you might be the guy that has her wanting to go to the wilderness!*

*So what Solomon is saying is that the guy would rather live in a wilderness with no conveniences of life, out there in the wild, rather than be at home with all the conveniences of home, just so that he does not have the pain, the pressure, that ugly feeling of a complaining culture in the home. I have seen many marriages and many families, from parents to children, broken over this issue, even godly people who do not take this warning seriously. This is not a casual thing. This is deadly to a marriage and deadly to a parent-child relationship.*

*Look at Proverbs 17:1. Solomon says the same thing a little different way. He says that better is a dry morsel with quietness than a house of feasting with strife or the complaining. What he is saying is the guy would rather have dry toast out in the wilderness than being in a house full of feasting. I mean here is the party with the best food, the best music, celebration, all the conveniences of life, but the primary relationship that he has, that person is complaining. He says, the guy would rather have dry toast in the wilderness than the best food, the best music, and all the conveniences, but have to work through that. Complaining does something to the human heart. Solomon saw that really clearly, so he addresses this very, very forcefully in the book of Proverbs.*

*He says in Proverbs 19:13, the contentions—again that is complaining of a wife, and again do not limit it to wives—are a continual dripping. Now some folks read this verse in what I believe is the wrong way, and I have heard it over the years, it is like a dripping faucet. No, it is not talking about a dripping faucet. They did not have running water in their houses. You did not turn the water on, back 3,000 years ago. There were no dripping faucets in that day.*

*He is not talking about annoyance. A continual dripping is water coming through the roof. It is water damage destroying the home. This is a serious problem, not a small annoyance. It is not a dripping faucet. It is water damage destroying the home. He is giving a severe warning here. He is not giving a suggestion, you know, that things would be a little bit better if you just tone down the complaining a little bit.*

*Now many people, I mean millions and millions and millions, grow up in a home where the culture of relating, the style of relating, is to make your point by sarcasm and complaint. It is really hard to break that cycle, but I want to encourage you, the Holy Spirit wants your generation to break that cycle. If that cycle is not broken, the chances of the home being broken are very real. It does not take a rocket scientist to figure out that homes are being broken in this generation far more easily than homes were broken a hundred years ago.*

*In the culture of today, homes are broken very easily. What I am saying is from the book of Proverbs: run away from complaining like it is cancer destroying your home. It is a leaking roof, and a leaking roof will destroy your home. That water damage stays there. You cannot live there. There are many problems that happen if that water continues to come into the home. So face this with great zeal, not casually.*

*Again so many of you in this room may say, “Well, I grew up in a culture like that. I mean millions in the Body of Christ grew up in that culture.” This is the generation to break that cycle! Do not let this break your life, and it will. In the old days they just stayed together and lived with a peace treaty, though they did not like each other. Today homes are broken far more easily. So I feel alerted by this in the culture of today, that in the kingdom community we take this very seriously.*

1. biblical principles in restoring an injured relationship
   1. ***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.

*We will just look at a few principles. We will not cover all of them because I like to give you something to take home to read on your own. These principles are just so self-evident; they are so obvious. If you have been in the kingdom for a year, this is Kingdom of God 101. This is relationship building or relationship repairing, because you can use it in both ways, it is Relationship Building 101.*

*Now it takes time to heal a broken relationship because it took time to break it. It was not broken in one event. Usually it was over time through the process of relating in a certain style. So it takes time to heal that relationship through a process of change, so do not give up quickly if the relationship is broken. Do not just say, as some folks do, “Well, I will just pray, and hopefully the Lord will do a miracle.” We do that for sure—we believe in prayer around here, right? We do pray; it is something we do here. But you do not want to put all of your confidence that prayer alone will do it because the Lord is saying, “No, I want you to do the part that I have mandated you to do, in being active to see the relationship restored as well.”*

* 1. 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)

*Do not be naïve, thinking it will take care of itself. You know I have seen people in marriages who think, “Well, we are a little strained right now, but we are not going to deal with it. It will go away.” It will* ***not*** *go away! It really will not. If it stays like it is, the problems get worse. The more familiar you become with each other over the years, the easier it is to speak badly to each other, the easier it is to fight each other off. If these things are happening now, and you are on year one or ten or twenty, it will be worse ten years from now. It will not be better.*

*It is not like, “Well, maybe the Lord will fix it, and it will be okay.” It will not. I want to tell you after forty years of pastoring: it will not get better on its own. It must be addressed. It takes time. Red alert! Go after it, put energy into it. Paul says here in Romans 12:18, as much as it depends upon you, do your part. You cannot make them do their part, but you do your part. Now again this is not just husband and wife. This is friendship, this is parents, this is workplace; it is all of these types of relationships.*

* 1. 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).

*One of the primary principles is the principle of making a godly appeal. A godly appeal means a biblical appeal. In other words, do not ignore the wound hoping it goes away. Make an appeal; take action. Jesus is the One who told us in two different situations that you are to take action.*

* + 1. ***Someone 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 the way that we honor others in the Body of Christ.

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

*He said that if the guy has something against you, you take action to fix it.*

*“Wait a second! He has something* ***against me****! I don’t really care about it.”*

*Jesus says, “You take action and initiate the conversation.”*

*“Well, I am not troubled. He is, so he should take action. He is bothered? He knows where I am.”*

*Jesus said, “No, you take action.*

*Then He goes to the exactly opposite extreme. He says, “If somebody has mistreated you, you take action.”*

*“Well, Lord, I have to take action if he did it, and I have to take action if I did it?*

*The Lord says, “You are understanding right! You take action in both situations.”*

*So in a marriage of two godly people who love Jesus, God tells the husband to take action if she is troubled and to take action if he is troubled himself. He tells the wife the same thing: you take action. He puts the onus on the both of them. In other words as an individual believer I am to take initiative in both areas. Whether I made them mad or if they made me mad, I knock on their door. Jesus said that that is what a kingdom person does—they take the initiative in the relationship.*

*He says, “If somebody has something against you…” We are not talking about somebody on Facebook who does not like your music or does not like a sermon or does not like where you took your kids. You posted it, and they criticize you. This is not that.*

*No, this is talking about meaningful relationships, not casual ones. There are a lot of folks who do not like something you are doing; that is not what He is talking about. He is talking about the context of a meaningful relationship, if they are bothered by you, you knock on their door.*

* + 1. ***You have something against another***:When someone mistreats or sins against us, Jesus commanded us to go to them privately to share our concern honestly with them.

15If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone…16If he will not hear, take with you one or two more…20For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them." (Mt. 18:15-20)

*And, number two, it goes the opposite direction. You are bothered by them; go knock on their door. He says here in Matthew 18:15, “If your brother sins against you, go tell him. Go tell him your fault between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained”—or many translations say, you won—“your brother;” you will win your brother.*

*There are so many principles in this simple, little passage here. We know this, but I just want to say it anyway, we cannot improve upon Jesus’ model of healing relationships. There are so many implications in this short, little passage. Number one, if your brother sins against you, if he mistreats you in anyway, and you perceive that you have been mistreated and it pains you—the idea is it pains you, it bothers you, it unsettles you that they have done this to you. Whether it is pain or you are bothered, you are agitated, unsettled, you have got an emotion that is negative. He says that if you have that negative emotion, go tell him.*

*“Well, I really do not want to tell him.”*

*Jesus says, “Go tell him.”*

*Then we pray, “Jesus, O Lord God of love, would* ***You*** *tell him?”*

*He answers, “No, I want you to tell him.”*

*“No, Lord, in the name of Jesus, You tell him. Father, tell the Holy Spirit to tell him.”*

*“No,” Jesus says, “I told you to go tell him.”*

*“I do not want to tell him, I am not good at telling him.”*

*“Well, you and I will work together,” says the Lord, “and I will help you through the process of this.”*

*If it bothers you, and you do not mention it to them—yes, you pray about it, but you do not tell them—until this thing is resolved, that is the Lord’s answer. Most believers do not do that. They tell somebody else or they let it fester, and it goes from a slight injury to where they are really bothered months or years later, really bothered because they did not do what Jesus said. They thought, “Well, I don’t really want to tell them. It will cause problems.”*

*Jesus said, “No,* ***this will fix*** *the problem. More negative will happen in you and in other relationships if you do* ***not*** *do what I told you.*

*Now do not go tell others about him. Tell him alone. If he hears you, then you win your brother, you gain him. Listen carefully now: when you meet with the brother or it could be a parent, it could be a spouse, it could be any number of relationships,* ***your goal is to win the brother, not win the argument****. See, sometimes I will go talk to somebody, and I want to win the argument. The Lord says, “No, no, it is about winning the relationship back to health. It is not about winning the argument. It is not about proving he was wrong or she was wrong. That’s not the way it works.” That is not what Jesus is talking about.*

* + - 1. ***Go and tell him***:When we meet face-to-face with a brother, the Lord intervenes in surprising ways, and we often experience the early stirrings of the bonds of love.   
         We are often changed by the process, gaining new insight about them and ourselves.
      2. ***Alone***:Do not share your concern about your brother with others. We often feel more affection and mercy for him when we talk *to* him (rather than *about* him to another).

*Jesus says, “Go tell him.”*

*Someone says, “I really cannot. I do not know how to do that.” Well, it is a process. “Go tell him” is not a one-time event. Maybe it starts with an email. Maybe it starts with a letter. Maybe then it leads to a phone call, and it takes a few steps before you have the face-to-face. The point is, begin the process. Many dynamics take place in this endeavor to go tell them. Your own emotions…and their emotions…so many emotions happen when you determine to tell them. You get mad, then you get afraid, then you get bold, then you get clear, then you get confused, then you get bold again, then you get mad again…all these emotions are going in you.*

*Then the guy gets the email and the phone call. He gets mad, he gets defensive, he starts praying, he gets tender, he gets clear, and then he gets confused. There is this discombobulation on both sides, and in that context all kinds of new things happen.*

*The Lord says, “Just tell him.” Many things will happen that you cannot predict. There are many surprises when the Holy Spirit shows up because—and I do not have it on the notes here, but just five verses later here in Matthew 18:20—He says, “Where two or three of you gather, My Spirit will be manifest in your midst.” There is Holy Spirit activity in it. You have had this range of emotions preparing to tell him, and he has had a range of emotions hearing the request for a meeting, from good and bad emotions and everything in-between. Then the Spirit gets you together, and it is a new context, and there are new ideas and new moments of tenderness and new discoveries of him and yourself, and the Holy Spirit does things.*

*When we skip this model, whether in marriage or with our children or friendship, things break unnecessarily. Jesus is saying, “Do what I tell you to do and these relationships will be repaired.” This is all about the second commandment, loving one another in the way the Lord loves us.*

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

*I am just going to mention a couple of the principles here and leave most of it for you to read on your own. When we make this appeal—and making the appeal is critical. Do not skip the appeal. Make it. Ask the guy for the meeting. Sit down with your spouse, and make the appeal—when we make this appeal, it is not to present your argument. Do not present your complaint. Make an appeal. The word* ***appeal*** *is a critical word, and it is important that we make it in* ***the right tone****. Why? Because it is a biblical appeal; it is a godly appeal. It is not just getting it off your chest. It is doing it the biblical way. A biblical way is not venting and just making your complaint known. That is not what Jesus is talking about. He is talking about something far more involved than just getting it off your chest.*

*“Well, I told him…I told her…and she did not listen. I knew it! I am moving on.”*

*The Lord would say, “You did not tell her in the way that My Word says to tell her…or to tell him…or to tell your children…or that friend…or that person in your working relationship.” It needs to be in* ***the right tone****. It needs to be in* ***the right timing****. It needs to be in* ***the right spirit****. It needs to be in* ***the right process****.*

*Go to them* ***first****. Do not go to your friend and process it in the name of prayer. That is just dignified gossip. “Brother, I am about to talk to him, would you pray for me?”*

*“What are we praying about?”*

*“Well, I got to go do Matthew 18. I am going to tell him, you know, but I just do not trust him, da-da-da…”*

*Jesus said that it will complicate everything if you say it over there because that guy will accidentally tell somebody, and somebody else will get in it, and the guy gets mad, and then he feels betrayed, and then you are mad that he thinks you betrayed him. “How dare you feel betrayed?”*

*“You betrayed me and bah-bah-bah-bah-bah-bah-bah…”*

*Jesus said to be quiet and just talk to him alone. “Just do what I say. I am really good at restoring relationships,” says the Lord.*

*So we do it His way, and we do it in the right ratio of affirmation to correction. In other words we give affirmation far more than we give correction. If that ratio is not right, it is not going to work. It is just not going to work.*

* 1. ***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)

*We will start with what I believe is the most important part of the appeal—the tone—that we make an appeal in a spirit of gentleness.*

*Galatians 6:1 points out two things. Whether we want to restore a brother or restore a relationship with a brother, the same principle applies. When we are in the place postured for restoration Paul said—notice, at the end of verse 1, two things—he says, one, have a spirit of gentleness, and number two, consider yourself. In other words, look for your own deficiencies.*

*The idea is that you are going to bring the awareness of your deficiencies into the conversation; you are going to admit your deficiencies and talk about them. Now it does not mean just any random deficiency, but particularly a deficiency related to the tension in the relationship. So he says to look for the deficiency in your own life and go in a spirit of gentleness. Now it is most normal to go in a spirit of debate, to go in a spirit of complaining, go in a spirit of payback, accusation. Paul says not to do it, but to go in a spirit of gentleness. That tone is critical.*

* + 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)

*Proverbs 15:1 tells us that a soft answer—or many translations use the word gentle—a gentle answer turns away anger. A harsh answer or a harsh tone stirs anger up.*

*So the relationship is a little bruised. It is injured, not broken. You are going to make your appeal, but you kick into that harsh tone, and your finger starts pointing, and you start using the word* ***always****. “You always…” “You never… and blah-blah-blah.” All of a sudden her temperature starts rising, and then your temperature starts rising. The tone is off. You went from an injured relationship to a more injured relationship all in the name of making an appeal. We have to make the appeal in the right tone, a biblical tone. I have more about that in number two.*

* + 1. A *negative tone* includes anger, defensiveness, lack of patience (rushing people to answer), or a tone of lecturing (instructing them without listening), etc.
    2. *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.

*Then number three is so common. It is just all over the earth; I am thinking it is so much on TV and in the sitcom humor-type things in the shows. When you are making your appeal, do not use sarcasm, do not sigh, and huh, and huff and puff, and stomp, and slam doors, and throw pots and pans, and all that kind of stuff. Do not go there.*

*“Well, if I do that, I will get his attention.”*

*No, it is opposite. You do that, and you will lose his attention.*

*“If we do that, our kids will finally know that we are serious and that we mean business as parents. Stomping, huffing, puffing, slamming doors, well, that is how mom and dad always did it. That is just how I learned to do it.”*

*The Word of God says that is not the way to get their attention. That is the way to drive them away from the relationship. You may think it seems normal because you grew up with that. That is not the culture of the kingdom. Millions and millions of believers have grown up in that context, and it is time to break that cycle.*

* 1. ***A right spirit***:When solving a relational tension, it is important to wait until both parties are in a place of peace, or have a happy spirit, instead of being angry, agitated, annoyed, or pressured.

*Having a right spirit. This is one of the important points that I remember from back in my early days when Diane and I were first married thirty-seven years ago. I went to a marriage seminar as a young pastor. I was a pastor before we met at a little rural church in the St. Louis area in 1976 and 1977. As a twenty-one-year-old pastor I went to a marriage seminar because these old people were coming to me.*

*Think of it: I am twenty years old; they are old. They are like forty. They are twice as old as I. I had been driving four years, and they had been driving lots of years, you know, that kind of stuff. They are forty years old and fifty years old, and they are coming to me. I remember the first time one couple knocked on my door saying, “We need marriage counseling.”*

*I say, “What? I do Bible studies. I do not do marriage counseling.”*

*They answer, “Well, you are our pastor.”*

*I say, “What do you mean marriage counseling? I do not even have a girlfriend! I do not do marriage counseling.”*

*They repeat, “Well, you ARE our pastor.”*

*In the country rural setting, that is what the pastor does—everything! So I said, “Okay.” They sat down. I ask, “What is the deal?”*

*The guy is forty and he says the most horrible thing! He says the “S” word! He says, “We are having sexual problems.”*

*I paled, “Ah. You know what? This is not going to work. You’d better go to someone else.”*

*He said, “But you are our pastor.”*

*So I decided I had to go to marriage seminars and figure stuff out. What was I going to tell them when they were mad, when they were breaking up, when they were getting back together?*

*So I went to these seminars, kind of in a panic, and then I met Diane after that, and those seminars accidentally became my pre-marriage counseling. You know, I had the best teachers in the nation. I went to national-level seminars. The reason I am saying that is because I identified these five or six principles from these really smart guys. They held one of the top marriage seminars in the nation in St. Louis area. Again, I was getting my pre-marriage counseling though I did not even know it as I did not know Diane at the time.*

*I was trying to make up for lost time on how to counsel these people. So I identified these principles. Then some months later I meet Diane. She is a new believer, we are both twenty-one, and I lay out all of these principles. I say, “Here are the principles.”*

*She says, “Man, you are really smart.” She does not know I just got them straight from this marriage seminar.*

*I say, “Well, when you are twenty-one, you do tend to pick up wisdom by then.”*

*One of our foundational principles, absolute number one I learned from the seminar—I said it to her, she agreed, and we have operated in it since—is, “Do not have a conversation to solve the tension until you are both in a place of peace.” If one of you is agitated, just wait. If it is some hours, maybe the next day, wait until you are both at peace and relaxed. Do not try to solve tension when one of you feels tension.*

*The guy at the seminar said that if you obey that one rule, you will save yourself many, many tension-producing conversations. That is something we bought into because I learned it at that seminar. I taught it to some of these new/old forty-year-olds when I was twenty, and there you have it! I knew it. So I told her, and we decided to do that. Thirty-seven years later I want to tell you, this is one of the most important principles that I know about in restoring a relationship, not just marriage, but children, friends. If one of you is agitated, you have got to wait until you are both at peace before the appeal can happen successfully.*

* 1. ***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 someone’s failure than their virtues and desire to do right. We are to be grateful for the good they do and seek to do, not just critical of their faults.

*Another thing I learned it at the seminar was about the ratio. I believe to have a healthy family relationship it requires about a ten positive statements, ten affirmation statements to one negative comment. That is not a scientific number, ten-to-one. It is just kind of an arbitrary number, but the idea is that we cannot drive a ten-ton truck of correction over a relationship bridge that can only bear five tons. Meaning—let’s take the relationship of children with a dad—I could not give my two sons more corrections than I built the relational bridge by affirming them over and over.*

*I am just guessing the number; it is about ten to one. These affirmations, they are subtle ones, from a hug, to a thumbs up, to a “hey, I am proud of you,” to “wow, what you did was amazing!” Just little statements or actions. You need ten of them for every “you need to obey mom or there is going to be consequences,”—that is a correction. You can only do about one of those for ten of the other in a family context.*

*In a work environment, when you are asking the guy to do something a little different, for example in the accounting department, you cannot go there and say, “Boy, you are really amazing, you really love God, you are really beautiful, you know you work really hard, you are really diligent, and, oh, could you give me my money on time?” It does not work that way. I do not mean some forced kind of equation here. But particularly in a home environment it is important. We have got to speak more about their virtue and their desire to do right than their failure. We can address the failure, but if the ratio is off, the bridge is going to break.*

* 1. ***Ask the Lord***:We ask for insight about how our own lack of sensitivity and deficiency in love contributed to the wounded relationship, instead of only asking God to change the other person.

*Ask the Lord what deficiencies in love you have that contributed to the tension. Now maybe the other person is mostly responsible in a particular tension, but there is always a deficiency in love. We could have loved better or been a little more sensitive. Bring your deficiency into the conversation. That will really matter.*

* 1. ***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…”*

*In the tension of solving the problem and making your appeal, do not start off with a statement of complaint. For example, “You know what? I just do not like it because you seem like you lie…you seem like you manipulate…you do this…you do that…” Do not start off with a direct statement of correction or pointing out an area of failure or complaint. Rather, ask them how they were feeling. “What were you feeling when you said that statement? What were you thinking? I mean what was going on when that happened?” Start with questions, not with direct statements.*

* 1. ***Tell them what you feel***: It is good to share how you *feel* about what they did or said, instead of just making statements about their faults. For example, say something like, *“I felt rejected (or pained or disappointed) when you said….or did…”*

*Tell them what you are feeling. Again instead of saying, “I think you are just an insensitive, rude person, and that is how you treat me,” no, you go there and say, “You know when you said that thing the other day, it hurt my heart…or it made me feel like you are mad at me.” Tell them a little bit of how you feel before you make a direct statement about what they did wrong. These are simple little things in marriages, simple little things in childrearing, relationship repairing, and friends that assist the appeal process. It puts a whole different spirit in the appeal process.*

* 1. ***Active listening***: Listen to discern their *unspoken* words, pains, disappointments, and fears.   
     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.

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

*I recommend active listening. We have to be careful to listen to their unspoken words. There are many things that they are feeling that they do not know how to say. It does not mean they are just hiding it. Or sometimes they* ***are*** *hiding it because they do not trust you. Sometimes they do not know how to say it. Listen for what is not being said. Do not interrupt them. Do not cut them off. Do not speed them up. In the appeal process these things must be in place.*

*As I have said this over the years, this stuff is really easy to preach, but hard to live. I mess up on every one of these. I am looking to live this way. Still I mess up on all of these, but when I mess up on them, I try to own it. When I mess up, I try to tell the person I messed up. I don’t always, but I try to. So messing up is not the problem. It is not owning it when you mess up—that is the problem. That is the real problem. We have to own our mistakes.*

* 1. ***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.

*We have to work at being non-defensive. Our natural response when somebody gives a correction is to defend ourselves instead of listening. It’s like we really love the person, but we want to tell our son or daughter why we did it. We want to speed them up, or we interrupt and tell them why we did it. The problem is, defensiveness hinders restoration and communication.*

*If you could take a step back and—this is always kind of gets people laughing when I say this, but I actually mean it seriously—You get a person giving you a correction, even if they are exaggerating the correction and even if the correction is not right 100 percent,* ***look at it as a free research team****. Here you have blind spots in your life, and they are giving you insight for free. You have to pay good money to get a doctor to tell you that. This guy is telling you straight forward what you are doing wrong, even though he is probably exaggerating it and saying it a little bit wrong, but instead of saying, “How dare you?”, say “Hey, give the guy five dollars.” It would cost you a whole lot more if you go to a psychiatrist and get him to tell you. That would cost you thousands of dollars, and this guy is going to tell you some of the exact same things.*

*So do not be in the posture of, “how dare you say I am wrong?” Of course we are wrong! We take our fallenness seriously. Of course we have got errors. Big deal! It is not a big deal. Let’s work on these together, and let’s own them together.*

* 1. ***Confess our faults***: Our confession is our “love offering.” Do not say, “I’m sorry ***if*** I offended you.” Rather say, “I repent, ***because*** I sinned against you” (by coming up short in love, etc.).

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

*I will end with this one, confessing our faults. Now when we confess our faults—do not just think about confessing to a friend—think of family members, think of marriage, think of children, not just a guy at the workplace.*

*I have said this many times over the years, but I love to say it over again: when you are making confession, you are admitting your deficiency, your weakness, and you are bringing that into the dialogue. When you confess, do not look at them and say something like, “I am sorry* ***if*** *I offended you.” That is not a true confession. Rather say, “I repent because what I said was sin… or what I said was wrong.”*

*I learned this back in that marriage seminar back in the 1970s. Diane and I decided to do this, that we would never use the phrase, “I am sorry* ***if*** *I was wrong.” Or, “I am sorry* ***if*** *you were offended.” Here is why. If I go to my wife and I say, “I am sorry if you were offended,” what I am really saying to her is, “I am sorry that you are so insecure and fragile that my wholesome words could not be perceived by you and now you are offended.” That is what that means.*

*It really is an insult, “I am sorry if you are offended.” No, if I said that at home, she would say, “Start that one over again…” We agree to this. When I confess, I have to say, “I am sorry what I said was wrong.” Not, “I am sorry if you were offended.” I encourage you to keep short accounts, short accounts. We decided to keep short accounts a long time ago.*

*If I were to say something to her sarcastic-like, whatever, in our home that must be confessed as a failure. We cannot let statements like that go, and by the grace of God we do not let those go, and we have not over the years. Small little sarcasms have to be owned up or the relationship will be at the very beginning of the injury, and years later it becomes broken. Amen and amen.*

* 1. It is God’s wisdom to have an understanding heart with a peaceable and gentle spirit and to be eager to hear and to be helpful in restoring the relationship.

13Who is wise and understanding among you?...17The 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 in the relationship. To be “*full”* of mercy includes not requiring that their perspective of the conflict be 100% accurate.
  1. ***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*, 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.

1. Practical advice
   1. ***Winning***: We must remember that the one ***who loves most*** is the one who ***wins*** in God’s court.
   2. ***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.
   3. ***Get an arbitrator***: An arbitrator can be very helpful in solving long-term conflicts. An arbitrator helps both people 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.
   4. ***Pick your battles wisely***: Don’t spend all your “relational equity” on small things. Be willing to lose a battle to win the war, and to give up smaller things to gain the most important things.
   5. ***Proverbs***: Read Proverbs every day together with your spouse and/or with your children.   
      The book of Proverbs focuses on communication skills (Prov. 15:28). Proverbs has 31 chapters, so you can read the chapter that corresponds to the date on the calendar.

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