How to Restore a Wounded Relationship (Pt. 2)

1. Review: Recognizing when the spirit of a relationship is wounded

The Lord is establishing the second commandment in the church as He empowers His people to have healthy relationships. A relationship is like a garden that must be cultivated by *watering it* (adding components that nurture it) and *weeding it* (addressing the factors that hinder it). A relationship can be wounded at various levels, from being slightly injured to deeply broken.

*This is part two of a message I gave a few weeks ago on restoring wounded relationships. I have a few more in this series that I will get to in the weeks ahead. As a point of review, the Lord is establishing not only the first commandment in first place in the Body of Christ around the world, but He is also establishing the second commandment in its place. He is empowering, inspiring, and stirring His people to walk in healthy relationships, honoring relationships, inclusive relationships.*

*One of the reasons He is doing this is because that is how God relates to God, within the relationships of the Godhead in the Trinity. The Father relates to the Son with great joy, with overflowing gladness. The Son relates to the Spirit and to the Father, etc. Salvation is actually an invitation to participate in the family dynamics of the Godhead.*

*Actually, in the family dynamics and the way They relate with one another, salvation is saying, “Be part of our family and enjoy the joy that We have in walking and sharing love together.” That is why the Lord cares so much about the first and second commandment being in the highest place of priority in the Body of Christ. Healing wounded relationships is of the highest priority in the kingdom of God because of the way that the Lord values and enjoys love.*

*Now a relationship can be wounded at various levels. It can be slightly injured, or it can be deeply broken, or a hundred steps in between. We do not want to wait until a relationship is deeply broken before we begin to have alert attentiveness to it. If there even is a slight injury, we want to move in biblical principles and restore that injury so that love would abound and excel in our midst and in our 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 any of these signs.
	2. A relationship is wounded before it is broken; a broken relationship requires much more skill and attention to heal. If we address the early wounds, then we can avoid broken relationships.
	3. One of the primary ways that the spirit of a relationship is wounded is by corrupt speech.
	Corrupt speech includes ***unfair criticism*** (accusatory), ***sarcasm*** (insulting), “***sitcom humor”*** (jokes about faults), ***anger*** (harsh), ***condescending*** (looking down), ***demeaning*** (dishonoring), ***shaming*** (belittling), ***manipulating*** (motivating by guilt), ***authoritative*** (overpowering), ***silencing*** (interrupting or shutting down), ***derogatory*** (labeling), ***threatening*** (intimidating), etc.

29Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers. (Eph. 4:29)

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

*Ephesians 4:29 is one of the most important verses in my opinion in building relationships as well as in restoring relationships. In Ephesians 4:29, Paul said, “Let no corrupt word, no corrupt speech proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification that it might impart grace to the hearers.”*

*The point I am making here is that the spirit of a relationship is wounded in a significant way by corrupt speech. I have listed twelve examples of corrupt speech, but obviously the list could be much longer than this: unfair criticism, sarcasm, demeaning speech, shaming, belittling, etc. You can look at that list yourself.*

*So make it a goal of your life, as Paul said, that there would be no corrupt speech proceeding from your mouth but only words that impart grace. To impart grace means it gives confidence and courage to people to press into God, to obey God, to stay the course in the will of God when it is difficult. When we speak words that impart grace, they give inspiration and give insight into how the things of the kingdom work and how we are to apply them in our everyday life in our family, the marketplace, the neighborhood, and every dimension of life.*

*Now I want to challenge you to make Ephesians 4:29 a personal life goal. Make this is one of your standards in excelling in love and walking in the second commandment. Having no corrupt speech leave our lips is excelling in love; this is a practical description of excelling in love or at least an aspect of it. Make this a goal for your family, for your marriage. This is a goal my wife Diane and I have set: we will not let this happen in our marriage. Now of course it does happen that we violate it, but the good news is that when you do come short— and I come short of this often—you can restore your relationship by simply owning it, by admitting it and apologizing for it. It only takes a minute.*

*You can pull the arrow out. You can undo the damage most times. Sometimes it takes a little bit more than that, but as a leadership team of this spiritual family we have it as a goal that we do not want our speech to be corrupt in any of these many different ways, from sarcastic to condescending to demeaning to shaming, any of those kinds of ways. Of course we do violate our goal, but when we violate it, we are committed in our hearts by the grace of God to admit it, to apologize, to own it, and to undo the damage of it.*

*If you would do that in your own life, in your own marriage or family, as many of you have already done, the ability to abound in love increases.*

* 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 far more difficult to “win” a brother once he is offended (Prov. 18:19). The “offended brother” often includes those with whom we are in a familiar relationship, such as a spouse, child, sibling, extended family member, friend, or a co-worker, etc.

19A brother offended is harder to win than a strong [fortified] city… (Prov. 18:19)

*Proverbs 18:19 says that a brother offended is harder to win than a fortified city. Now this “brother” is a generic term. It could be a sibling. It could be a family member. It could be a spouse. The idea is that when the slight injury of a relationship escalates to an offense, now the relationship is broken. It is very difficult to win a city that is fortified and has put up their guard against the intruder, and that is what Solomon is telling us here. He says not to let the injury escalate to an offense and a broken relationship. Move in quickly and correct the wrongs that were done or even the perceived wrongs, make them right.*

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.

*One of the primary biblical principles for healing or restoring wounded relationships is that we make a godly appeal. We go to the brother or sister, and we make an appeal. A godly appeal means an appeal based on biblical principles. Some people go to the other person when there is a conflict, but the way they go, the tone in which they go, the spirit, the process, the whole manner of the way they go is not very helpful.*

*So going to the brother or going to the sister is not enough. It is doing it in a godly way as prescribed by the Word of God. The point of this principle is that we are not to draw back from the relationship. What happens often is people get into a conflict and then one of the parties lives in retreat from the relationship. They avoid the other person. They retreat into silence. They duck and look away every time they see the other person.*

*Jesus, the Word of God, would say, “No, do not retreat. Go forward. Communicate with them. Talk to them according to biblical principles.” Do not be naïve thinking the relationship will just heal itself. Relationships do not just heal themselves. If there is an offense, even a minor offense that is taking root, and it is not healed, if it is not restored, it will escalate and become a greater offense. It just does not go away on its own. That is one of the foundational biblical principles.*

* 1. We are to do all that we can to restore relationships, so far as it depends on us (Rom. 12:18).
	The Lord wants to establish a culture of honor in the body of Christ that seeks reconciliation and healing of all relationships as His people walk out the second commandment together.

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

*In Romans 12:18, Paul says, “If it is possible, as much as it depends on you, live peaceably,” or in this context, pursue the restoring of relationships, pursue the healing process. Now the idea is that not all relationships will be healed—even in the Body Christ not all relationships will be healed—in this age. “As much as it depends on you,” you are going to do your part, that is what Paul said here, to live peaceably or again in this context to see relationships healthy and restored.*

*The Lord wants a culture of honor established in the Body of Christ. He is speaking this and inspiring ministries all over the earth, hundreds of thousands of ministries, regarding this subject of a culture of honor. They may use different terms, but where relationships are broken, there is a pursuit to see them healed. I have heard of many ministries talk about how the Lord is highlighting this.*

*As a spiritual family—and this is a real goal—we want everybody that is a part of this spiritual family to be committed to doing their own part to see 100 % of their relationships in the body of Christ restored as much as is possible. Not all relationships will be restored completely, but we want to make a commitment before the Lord that we are going to continue to exhort and to move forward with the resolve to see this process happen.*

*I do not mean only current relationships that are being injured or being troubled right now, but even ones from five and ten years ago, even from back in the city you were at or at another ministry. We want to walk in that excellent spirit of love and that clean spiritual environment where, as a people, we so value the second commandment that we are endeavoring to do our part. This is a sober, serious goal that we have as a leadership team to pursue this as a spiritual family in a long-term way.*

* 1. ***Go to your brother:*** Jesus taught us to go to our “brother” to make an appeal, both when we have *something against them* (Mt. 18:15) and when they have *something against us* (Mt. 5:24). Every believer is to take initiative in reconciliation instead of waiting on others to do their part. Some feel justified in waiting until the other person humbles themselves and starts the dialogue.
		1. When someone mistreats us, we are to go to them *privately* to share our concern, without first sharing it with others.

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

* + 1. When someone has something against us, we are to go to him (Mt. 5:23-24). By doing this, *we go beyond Matthew 18*—we go the second mile for love (Mt. 5:41). This is one way in which we can abound in love (Phil. 1:9) and walk out the second commandment.

23…that your brother has something against you, 24leave your gift there before the altar, and go…first be reconciled to your brother… (Mt. 5:23-24)

41And whoever compels you to go one mile, go with him two. (Mt 5:41)

9….that your love may abound still more and more… (Phil. 1:9)

*Jesus talked about the way to make this godly appeal. He said to go to your brother. He is talking about going to your brother to make an appeal. The word, brother, is generic; that brother may be in your house, in your home, in your family. It may be your spouse. That brother may be a dear friend. Brother or sister—that is not the point. The point is go to them.*

*Now it is very important to observe that Jesus applied this principle of the godly appeal, going to your brother, in two very distinct ways. We often emphasize the first, but neglect the second. We talked about the first one in our first session. In our second session on this series, we want to talk about the second application.*

*Jesus presented two situations. If we have something against our brother, if the brother is troubling us, we should go to him. Then Jesus turns it around. He says that if you are troubling the brother, go to him. So on both accounts, whether they are troubling you or you are troubling them, He says to the godly believer who wants to obey Him, “Go to your brother.” Take responsibility in both situations. Take the initiative to make the first step to see healing and restoration in the relationship.*

*You say, “Now which is it? If I did not do anything, but they are bothered at me and I did not do anything—I think they are trumped up charges anyway—What do I do?”*

*Jesus says, “You excel in love and go to them.”*

*“I didn’t do anything. I am at peace. I am waiting for them to come to me. That is not a biblical answer. The biblical answer is you go to them. If they bother you, you go to them. If you bother them, you go to them. Bother is not quite strong enough—you trouble them with a sense of injustice is the idea.*

*Now the Lord commands us to take initiative in both cases. Every believer is commanded to go on both accounts. The idea is that if only one of the believers obeys, the process of restoration and healing begins. As sincere believers before Him, we want to be committed to obey in both different situations. Lord, by the grace of God, we want to do what You say is love in the Word of God, and we want to obey You in this.*

*Our last session covered the idea that when someone troubles you, go to them. Our emphasis today is that when we trouble them, we go to them, even if we are at peace. We are all familiar with Matthew 18, that if they bother us, then we take the initiative. Matthew 18 makes sense to our natural mind. Matthew 5 reverses it and says to do the other as well.*

*Now the Matthew 5 exhortation—we go to them when they are troubled by us. That is one way to excel in love. This is going the second mile. This is abounding in love as Paul prayed. This is the goal that the Lord has for the Body of Christ. If only everybody in the Body of Christ would buy into the Matthew 5 exhortation that not only do you go when you are troubled, but you go even if they are and you are not. This is the will of God for the Body of Christ, and this is what He is emphasizing in our own midst right now.*

* 1. This principle relates to reaching out to someone with whom you are in *relationship* and have *personal interaction*. The Lord is not mandating that we take initiative to seek to make everyone on Facebook happy with our statements, decisions, convictions, lifestyle, etc.

*Having said that, I am going to put a qualifier on it, because this is not talking about going to* ***everybody*** *who* ***disagrees*** *with you. This is not talking about initiating a conversation with everybody who does not like you. This is not talking about people on Facebook who do not like what you said or the clothes you were wearing or your lifestyle or your convictions. They said, “Bah-humbug,” and now you need to go spend time with them to make them happy with you and to get them to like you and agree with you—that is not what He is talking about here. That is too broad.*

*The reason it is important to narrow this down is because, if it is too broad, you will conclude this is too big. It will become impossible, and if you try to do it in every situation when someone does not like you or agree with you, you will end up not doing it at all. You will relegate this exhortation to the impossible status.*

*There are only a few relationships that the Holy Spirit would, in most people’s lives, be referring to in this. It is real, actual relationships where there has been meaningful personal exchange and personal interaction. It is not about whether or not somebody likes you or agrees with you. It is much more narrow than that. You have a real relationship, and you have had a real interaction that is troubling them. They have the sense of mistreatment in that interaction. So that would narrow it down to a much smaller group of people that is doable, and that is why we cannot exaggerate this command. So if it becomes daunting and overwhelming, you will not do it all. If you exaggerate it, you end up getting manipulated by it, and you run around in a frenzy trying to make everybody like you in the name of this verse. The Lord is saying, “No, that is not what I am talking about, living manipulated and under guilt in a frenzied way trying to make everybody happy with you.” That is not what it is talking about. It is talking about actual personal exchanges where there is a clear sense of injustice in the exchange in a real relationship.*

* 1. Jesus called His people to be peacemakers who greatly value seeing relationships reconciled.
	He promised a special blessing to all who commit to do this consistently. This involves seeking reconciliation in our personal relationships, as well as helping others reconcile their relationships.

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

*We are still in Matthew 5, which is the passage of this exhortation. We will back up a few verses to verse 9, where Jesus promises a blessing. He says, “Blessed are the peacemakers.” He is saying, in effect, “There will be a special release of My presence. I will help you. I will honor you. I will be with you in the process of making peace.” This peacemaker dimension is helping two parties reconcile. Peacemaking is about helping two parties who are in conflict reconcile, but peacemaking is not limited to you being the arbitrator between two parties. You might* ***be*** *one of the parties in conflict, but you are taking initiative. If you take initiative, you are still a peacemaker. You are still pursuing peace, even if it is peace in relationship with you.*

*Whether they troubled you or you troubled them, you are taking the initiative. You are going forward, and you are in this peacemaking beatitude here in Matthew 5:9. Jesus said that not only will there be a blessing on you, a release of the presence of God, but God will actually help you to succeed in these.*

* 1. It is so rare to see people do this consistently with humility, tenderness, and wisdom that others will recognize such people as *being sons of God* who act like their heavenly Father.

44…bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you…45that you may be sons of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good… (Mt. 5:44-45)

*Jesus said that people will call you sons of God when you are a peacemaker; they will conclude different things about your life. Why? Because it is so rare for people, with humility, with tenderness, with wisdom, consistently try to be a peacemaker. Again, whether making peace in their own conflicts, or being an arbitrator for somebody else for two other parties, it is so contrary to human nature to do this consistently. So when people see you do it consistently—not occasionally but consistently—Jesus said they will conclude you are like your heavenly Father. They see that you are being motivated by the God of heaven. Nobody puts time and energy and value into walking in love because it takes a lot of time and energy to do this. When we do this, Jesus said, other will conclude you are like your heavenly Father.*

1. Going to the one who has something against us (Mt. 5:23-24)
	1. When someone has something against us, we are to *go to them* to seek to remove the offense.

23…if you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, 24leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift. (Mt. 5:23-24)

*Let’s narrow it down and look at this exhortation today, this “you going to the person who is troubled by you.” You are at peace. You feel innocent. But they are troubled, and it seems to you it is a trumped-up charge. It does not seem even realistic. They should not be troubled, as far as you are concerned. Like, why would they be troubled by what I did? I did not do anything.*

*Jesus says, “Yeah, get a bigger picture than that. The fact that they are troubled should concern you because you love them and you want to help pull that thorn, that arrow out of their heart. So you are going to do what you can to do that, just as an act of love.”*

*Sometimes in the process you will find your own error and deficiency in the conflict, but even if you do not think there is deficiency on your part, you go forward. You patiently listen, and you engage in the process. The Lord says that you are excelling in love if you do that.*

*Let’s look at the passage here in Matthew 5. He says, “If you bring your gift to the altar…” So picture a worship service. You are in the public meeting, you bring your gift up front to the altar, and they have not given it to the priest yet, but they have brought it up to present it to the priest in that Old Testament context.*

*Or think of a worship service of today, and while you are about to give your money, you remember, “Ah, there is a brother who is troubled by me.” Again it is not an issue that he dislikes you and disagrees with you. No, there is a perception of an injustice and a mistreatment that you caused with your words or with your deeds towards them. So then you remember, “Oh, that guy thinks I have ripped him off in some way or that I have mistreated them in some way.”*

*Jesus said to put your gift down, put your money down, by the altar, and run out, go make a phone call, initiate the process of getting together to get this thing cleared up, and then run back into the meeting to offer your money, to give it to the priest.*

*Now I do not know that anybody ever stopped in mid-act—whoops!—put their money on the altar, ran out door, made a phone call, and ran back in, I do not know if that actually happened. The point of it is the urgency to do this. Do not even go forward in any other act of worship. Put your act of worship on hold and go do this. That is point one.*

*There is another point Jesus is making. Giving your money is an act of worship, singing your songs is an act of worship, your service of the kingdom whether it is in the church or in the marketplace or in the neighborhood or leading the kids’ soccer team, whatever you are doing in service for the kingdom, there are many ways to serve the kingdom. So whether it is giving your money in the service or your worship songs or your act of service, what Jesus is saying is that the time it takes to seek reconciliation with a brother* ***is as much of an act of service as*** *giving your money, your time, and your singing to the Lord. He is declaring that when you take time to do that, you are actually worshipping Jesus like you are when you are giving money or you are singing songs or you are serving the kingdom in various facets of whatever God’s assignment is for your life.*

* 1. ***Leave your gift:*** Our gifts to Jesus are an expression of our love for Him. We present our heart and love to God as a gift in worship. He does not receive them if we ignore the offense we have caused a brother by our words or actions.

*This is remarkable that you express as much love for Jesus by pursuing that brother. Again you are at peace, you think the charges are trumped up and exaggerated, you do not think he should be even mad. If he had been paying attention, he would not have even been offended. How could he be? Because you did not do anything wrong. If you put that on pause, and you pursue that relationship for the sake of love, and you are going to go in humility and gentleness, that is as much loving Jesus as giving your money, giving your service, or singing in the worship service. Jesus calls that worship. That is a remarkable reality.*

* + 1. We are not to present our gifts to God in worship without attempting to heal broken relationships. Our union with Jesus in worship is connected to the way that we honor others in His body. We must seek to treat our brother in the same way Jesus treats us.

*Our union with Jesus in worship is deeply connected to the way we honor His family. Our connection with Him in worship is deeply connected to the rest of His family. One of the reasons is because Jesus is as committed to that offended brother as He is committed to you. I mean He is committed to you and you enjoy that. He enjoys the relationship with you and He values you. He says, “I enjoy the relationship with that brother, even if his charges against you are trumped up. I enjoy that brother as much as I enjoy you. I am as committed to him. I love him. And in this process you might find that you have deficiencies as well, and then you will grow in love as well. You will grow in godliness in the whole process.”*

*So because of our identification with Jesus and our union with Him we are to treat the brother in the way we treat the Lord. Because in reality there are several passages where Jesus says the way you treat them is the way you treat Me, in Matthew 25 and Acts 9.*

*“Well, I would not ignore You, Jesus, if You were troubled.”*

*“Good, then do not ignore My brother. He is your brother too, but he is My brother, and he is troubled. If you ignore him, you ignore Me.”*

*You may feel like, “O Lord, come on! I mean You are so easy to relate to, and he is so difficult to relate to.” Our union with Jesus actually is reflected in the way we treat our brother; that is a profound spiritual reality. It is a real substantial one is what I mean by profound. It is a key tenet in the kingdom of God that this is a reality.*

* + 1. Jesus requires immediate action without delay. On the way to offer our gift, He wants us to leave it until we make things right with others. We are not to present our heart to God as a gift in worship while we speak to His children in wrong ways—especially a spouse.

7Husbands…giving honor to the wife…that your prayers may not be hindered.
(1 Pet. 3:7)

* + 1. The effect of Jesus’ death for us is that He has made all of us *to be one with Him*. Therefore, it is impossible to be one of God’s children without also being a brother or sister to His other children. His incarnation, death, and resurrection mean that He has become inseparable from all of those whom He redeemed and brought into His family.
		2. The fellowship of the Trinity has an expression on earth in the relationships in the body of Christ. Fellowship makes visible on earth the life of the Trinity that comes to us through Jesus. The glorious community in the Church is rooted in Jesus and His mercy.

*In the fellowship of the Trinity, the Father, the Son, and enjoy each other. The fellowship of the Trinity has expression in the relationships on the earth of the family of God. The way the family of God relates on the earth is an expression of the life of the Trinity, the way they relate together in heaven. By the blood of Jesus we have actually been called into the participation of that fellowship, and we actually give an expression of that fellowship when we fellowship with one another. I do not mean just your favorite folks to hang out with, although that gives expression of it as well that is real and valid and powerful.*

*Going that extra mile to give the expression of the reality of the life of the Trinity by brothers and sisters reconciling is something that pleases our heavenly Father who loves His family so much.*

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

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

*So Jesus said to leave your gift on the altar and go be reconciled. Go be reconciled. Now the very heart of the gospel is reconciliation. I want to add a verse here that it is not on the notes—2 Corinthians 5:19. Paul said that the whole point of the gospel is God reconciling the world to Himself and then giving us the message of reconciliation and we reconcile people to Him. In the context of that, we reconcile with one another under His leadership and in His family. The whole heart of the gospel is reconciliation. Reconcile them to God, and then the family under the Father is reconciled under the Father’s delight, under His pleasure, and under His leadership.*

*So Jesus says to go to your brother. Now James was the Lord’s half-brother in the natural. James said to confess your transgressions or your sins to one another that you may be healed. This passage has several applications, and there is quite a bit involved in this passage. I will just mention a few things here.*

*Number one, he says the promise that you will be healed. The promise in context of James 5 is physical healing. He promises that the process of physical healing will be started. He is saying that the confession of sin is linked to the process of physical healing. You do not want to derive your entire theology of healing from this one verse, but he says confession and reconciliation are included in that.*

*This promise of the process of healing taking place is not only physical; it is emotional healing as well as relational healing. When He says to confess your trespasses that you may be healed, the “you” is individual. The man confessing is singular, but the “you” also has a corporate dimension. It is the relational dynamic as well.*

*There is this simple act of confessing, which means admitting. You go to the brother, and you are admitting and apologizing for even the minor injustice that happened in the relationship. It is not just a confession to God. James is saying more than to confess to God that you committed a private sin. It includes a confession to a brother of an injustice, even a minor injustice that happened in the relationship. So that word* ***confess*** *is confess to God, but there is also a horizontal dimension as well of confessing to the brother with whom you actually are in the conflict, because broken relationships are connected to broken bodies.*

*Again, the whole theology of healing is not in one verse, but there is a connection between broken relationships and broken bodies. So do not take it in a wrong way, assuming that if you are sick it means you must be sinning. That is not what I am saying, yet there is a connection of this whole kind of larger reality of how healing takes place.*

*James is talking about the simple act of verbalizing your sin to your brother and apologizing. That means committing not to go in that direction any longer, not to continue in that pattern of speech or behavior or in that attitude or mindset. It actually has a tremendous impact on the healing of the relationship.*

*Now it is interesting, Jesus said in essence and the Word of God says to* ***go*** *to your brother and* ***confess****. But we retreat in prayer and we say, “Lord, come and heal our brother. Come and visit our brother.” We pray that the Lord would visit and heal.*

*He says, “No, let’s do it this way. You go and confess, and as you go and confess, I will visit and heal.*

*“No, Lord, I am going to stay in the prayer closet. I am going to ask You to visit and heal the relationship.”*

*The Lord says, “I want you to rise up, go, and confess. And as you go and confess, I will visit and heal. We will do it together. So go!”*

*“Well, no, Lord, You go.”*

*The Lord says, “No, you go.”*

*“No, Lord, You go.”*

*The Lord says, “I will go if you go. How is that?”*

*There really is this kind of dynamics. It is real; it is more than just a nice little play on words. So we go and we make our confession. Now our confession to our brother has to be genuine. It cannot be confession to win the argument. It cannot be confession for show. It cannot be confession just to diffuse the brother. You might think that if we confess, even though we do not mean it, we will diffuse the anger of the brother. No, the confession needs to be real. It needs to be a genuine ownership of your fault.*

*You might say, “Well, I have not sinned in the process.” I would challenge you in the way the Lord challenges me that it does not have to be a scandalous sin. Is there any deficiency in love on your part in the relationship? Is there any insensitivity or deficiency in love at all?*

*“Well, yeah.” So bring that to the conversation then. Find that deficiency, that insensitivity. If it is a scandalous sin, bring that, but if it is something smaller than that, search it out and come with your offering of love to the relationship and bring that humble confession in it.*

*When you make a confession to somebody of a fault—now I have said this so many times over the years, but I love repeating this over and over—do not go to the person and say, “****If*** *you are hurt, I am sorry.” That is not a confession—****if*** *you are hurt, I am sorry. Here is what a confession is, “Since I sinned, forgive me.” That is a real confession. Or it might be, “Since I am deficient in this area… or, since I am insensitive in this area, forgive me.”*

*Do not say, “If you are hurt, I am sorry,” because what you are really saying with that is, “Because you are so fragile and you are so insecure, you cannot hear my sound, clear words of love, and so now you are upset. Because you get upset so easily, I am now sorry. You are upset so easily because you are so fragile and insecure.”*

*I want to tell you in my house that does not fly at all. If I went to my wife and said, “If you are hurt, I am sorry,” she would say, “Hey pal, try it again. That is not working.” I would not even try it. That would be so absurd, that I just would not even try that one. You know I have tried other things, but not something that blatant.*

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

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

*Jesus gives this sense of urgency. He says, “First, before you give the money, even before the service begins, begin the process of reconciliation. Do your part.” Again it might be a phone call, it might be an email, or it might be a letter. Begin it. First begin the process. Often it is a process. Sometimes it is a simple conversation or a simple acknowledgement, and sometimes it is a series of meetings, but begin the process.*

*The reason for this urgency is because the Lord knows that bitterness, if it is not resolved, escalates. Bitterness does not stay the same. It escalates if it is not resolved. That does not mean the person is going to be venting in a greater intensity. A lot of times the person acclimates to their bitterness, and they do not vent. But they settle in to this posture of distrust and this posture of suspicion and accusation against you in the relationship. So if the offense is not resolved, it does escalate.*

*You cannot guarantee it will be resolved, but you can go and do your part. Jesus says, “Before you give your money, go do it.” In other words, begin the process; there is urgency.*

*Paul says the same thing in Ephesians 4:26. He picks up this urgency. He says, “Before the sun goes down”—even before twenty-four hours passes, begin the process or you are going to give the devil opportunity to escalate the offense. The offense will grow. It will not go away on its own.*

* 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)

* + 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)

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

*I cannot emphasize this too often. I say it over and over when I talk on this subject. One of the most important points in a healing or restoring a relationship is the tone of the conversation.* ***What*** *you say is not enough. It is* ***how*** *you say it,* ***how*** *we say it. We can say the right thing in the wrong way, and that sets back the whole reconciliation process. You can go to the person and say the right thing, but if you can say it with a wrong tone with a wrong spirit, instead of healing, bitterness actually gets more established, and the person you went to says, “I am convinced now that you are insincere and you are off.” So tone really, really matters.*

*Galatians 6 gives us insight into how we restore relationships. Paul is talking in Galatians 6 about how to restore a brother who sins, but the very same principles apply to restoring a relationship. He emphasizes two things here, saying that when you want to see a brother restored in his personal life or you want to see a relationship restored two things are critical. In Galatians 6:1, he says to go in a spirit of gentleness, and number two, to consider yourself or look to yourself. That is, identify deficiencies in love that you have which contributed to the relationship problem. Identify insensitivities where you were negligent and insensitive. We can always find deficiencies and insensitivities. If there is not a big scandalous injustice or a horrible sin, there are certainly these other things. We can find them, and we bring them into the restoration of the relationship.*

*So what happens often is the guy goes to restore the relationship, but he does not go with gentleness and he does not go with looking to himself. He goes to explain to them* ***why*** *they should not be so offended. “Brother, if you knew me well, you would not be offended. It is your wrong perception and your fragile nature that makes you so easily troubled.”*

*Brother, sister, I tell you that will not restore anything, particularly in a marriage. She will not buy it if that is your line! That is not going to work. Your children will not buy it, your parents will not, your siblings will not, your friends will not, your co-workers will not. You will not buy it if they say it to you that way. That does not bring reconciliation. You will not accept it; they will not accept it. Do not even try that method! It is not workable.*

*Jesus’ method is so wholly other than. I mean here is the ultimate: the Innocent One, Jesus, took the role of the guilty one, us, our role. He took our sin so that the guilty ones, you and I, could have the benefits of the Innocent One. So the Innocent One takes the role of the guilty so that the guilty can be reconciled and have the benefits of the innocent—that is the ultimate.*

*Now none of us are innocent, so we can’t have a Messiah complex and think we are doing some amazing thing by going to them first. Here is the point. We are searching for any way where we can take the position of the one who has guilt in the relationship, even if it is just deficiency and insensitivity. That is the way Jesus modeled reconciliation in the kingdom.*

* 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.

*One of the things that sets reconciliation back when you go to this brother to ask him why he is troubled at you is to be defensive. Do not be defensive. The most natural thing is for us to be defensive; it is the most natural thing.*

*What do I mean by defensive? It is when we seek to defend ourselves, and we seek to show them how they would not be so troubled if they knew the whole truth. A defensive spirit will set back the whole process. A defensive spirit looks like this, and I know it because I have done it plenty of times, so I have had a lot of practice at this that I am not proud of.*

*You are in a conflict, okay, and as the brother is sharing the reason he is troubled, you are searching for the answer as to why you are not responsible. You are searching for an answer to defend yourself. The brother is talking, but you are searching for the answer to defend yourself, and you are not listening to hear what he is saying, particularly to hear the unspoken things that he is saying. He has fears, he has hurts, and he has disappointments that have not been articulated yet. He has not said them well. He has not even located them. In a right spirit we are searching to hear what they are saying, not searching for the answer to defend why we are not guilty or responsible. A defensive tone will set the whole thing back.*

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

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

*What a powerful passage James 1:19 is, talking about an expression of walking in love. Here it is. “Everyone* ***must****”—circle the word* ***must****—“must be quick to hear, slow to speak,” particularly if you are in leadership. Leadership anywhere in the kingdom, whether in the church ministries or in the marketplace, if you are in leadership you must, you must do this more than the people under you; you must be quick to hear.*

*Be careful; do not interrupt them. Do not cut them off. Do not put them down. Do not interrupt them to tell them why you are right and they are wrong. Be quick to hear. Being quick to hear is not only not interrupting them. Being quick to hear means that when they are finished, do not change the subject the minute they are finished. So you say, “I did not interrupt them. They went a full ten minutes, and most of what they said was trumped-up charges. It was exaggerated, it was confused, and I listened patiently. I even smiled a few times. I mean I did it.” No, not quite. Almost ten minutes comes and goes, and you do not interrupt them, but at the end, now you thrust into your argument. No, that is not being quick to hear.*

*Being quick to hear—again this is easy to preach and a whole different thing to live. I do not do this nearly as well as I want to—but being quick to hear is saying, “Okay, let’s stay on the subject. Let’s stay on the subject of what you are saying. You are trying to speak your heart. Let me tell you what I heard you say. I am not changing the subject. I am going to give you a chance to clarify and elaborate.”*

*So the point is that we are locked into hearing the deeper thing on their heart. That is what quick to hear means. Do not interrupt, but give opportunity for them even to clarify and elaborate. Then in time you will be able to give your answer.*

*James said, “You must be quick to hear.” Again, whatever role of leadership you have in the Body of Christ, whether in the marketplace, in the neighborhood, in the soccer league—it does not matter what role in the kingdom you have—in a church ministry we must be quick to hear. We honor people by listening to them carefully.*

* 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 that is unspoken. Ask them for help, *“Help me understand what you felt when I said…”*
	2. ***Get an arbitrator***: An arbitrator can be very helpful in solving relational conflicts. An arbitrator helps both people *listen* to each other, instead of interrupting. They *ask questions* of both parties, highlighting things that the people in the conflict might easily overlook.
1. applying the principles of initiating reconciliation (Mt. 5:24)
	1. These principles are applied differently in our different relationships and personal interactions.
		1. ***Family:*** to your spouse, children, parents, siblings, or extended family, etc.
		2. ***Authority:*** to those under your authority in the marketplace, church, ministry team, etc.
		3. ***Peers:*** to friends, siblings, students, or fellow workers in the marketplace.
		4. ***Romance:*** to someone you are pursuing, considering pursing, or dating
	2. ***Beware:*** Do not seek to apply these principles wrongly by being manipulated by pressure and guilt to *feel responsible* to fulfill unrealistic expectations that some people have for you.
		1. ***Different expectations:*** Some of the most painful relational conflicts are related to having different expectations for the relationship. If someone sees you as their *best friend,* while you see them as a *casual friend,* then offenses can occur that may not be solved.
		2. ***Envy:*** Some are offended because they want to have your role, honor, ability, friends, etc.
		3. ***Being overlooked:*** Some are offended because they deeply desire to be included in a certain group or promoted to a position of leadership that others do not feel is right.

*I want to end with a beware because if you misinterpret this and you think it is about somebody who disagrees you or someone who does not like you, you will think that you have to now go meet with them for hours to get them to agree with you and like you. That is not what He is talking about.*

*If you do not interpret this correctly, it is daunting. It gets real big. Secondly, you can be manipulated by this. I have seen people manipulated by this, and that is not Jesus’ intent. They do not narrow the scope down to what He is talking about. They think, “Oh well, I am just going to live in this frenzied kind of pace, running around to everybody trying to make them like me and agree with me.”*

*Jesus is saying, “No, that is not what I am talking about. I am talking about a real sense of injustice in a real encounter and interaction with somebody.”*

*So beware not to apply this wrongly. Some folks may have higher expectations than you. They think you are their very best friend in a relational way. You do not think they are your very best friend, but they think you are, so they want you to give much more into the relationship. You are saying, “No.” We cannot solve this situation since there is no real sense of injustice. There is really just disappointment.*

*Jesus is not calling you to hang out with everybody, to make sure they like everything you are doing and you fulfill all their expectations. If you do that, you are just living in the manipulation of anybody who really wants to pour it on you, so do not do that.*

*Another thing is, I have seen people get liberated from manipulative, controlling relationships. Then they hear a message like this, and they walk right back into that relationship under the guise of repentance. “I am sorry; manipulate me.” No that is not what we are talking about.*

*So though I have given this charge I just wanted to give those qualifiers, and I give a couple of examples of it at the very end of this. So we want to excel in love, but we want to see the narrow focus of what He saying. We do not want to exaggerate it, but we want to do it faithfully and consistently. Amen and amen.*