

# God Heals Our Broken Friendships



## SABBATH—DECEMBER 1

**READ FOR THIS WEEK’S LESSON:** Colossians 4:10, 11; Philemon 1:1–25; 1 Corinthians 3:5–11; Romans 5:8–11.

**MEMORY VERSE:** “Surely, now that we are God’s friends, God will save us through [because of] his Son’s life” (Romans 5:10, ICB).

**EVEN AFTER GOD Poured HIS SPIRIT ON HIS CHURCH** in New Testament times, friendships between believers were not always easy and peaceful. The Bible gives us examples of the way that church leaders and believers solved these problems. The rules they followed are very important for our church to understand today. When we follow these rules, then our friendships and connections with people will be a success. These rules also will help us have peace with each other in the church.

In this week’s lesson, we will look at how God heals our broken friendships and connections with other believers. We also will look at how these connections have the power to join us as one in Jesus. Part of the Holy Spirit’s work is to bring people closer to God and to each other. The Holy Spirit also breaks the “walls” in our connections that separate us from God and other believers. When our connections with each other are strong, then we are strong as a church. The best example of the truth that we as a church can show to other people is not what we say but the way we live. So, we must show God’s love (John 13:35). If we do not show God’s love in our lives, then nothing we say about the truth will convince anyone.



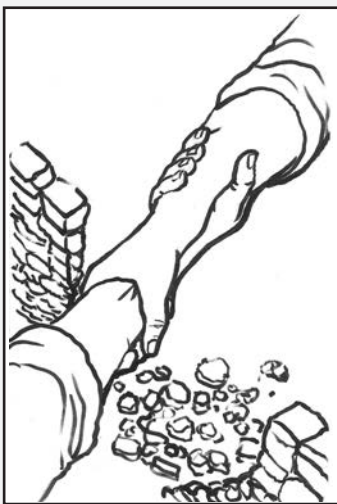
**If we do not show God’s love in our lives, then nothing we say about the truth will convince anyone.**

**A FRIENDSHIP MADE NEW (Colossians 4:10, 11)**

Paul and Barnabas worked together. They witnessed for Jesus. Then they argued about John Mark. John Mark was Barnabas' cousin. Paul and Barnabas argued because Paul did not think he could trust John Mark to stay with them in the future. John Mark got scared by the dangers all around them when they preached the Good News about Jesus. So, John Mark ran away from Paul and Barnabas and went home (Acts 13:13).

“When John Mark ran away, Paul judged John Mark. Paul was very disappointed with John Mark for a while. But Barnabas felt that John Mark behaved the way he did because he was young and did not have much experience. Barnabas was worried about John Mark. Barnabas did not want John Mark to stop doing God's work. Barnabas saw many good things in John Mark that would make him a useful worker for Jesus.”—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles [leaders and teachers]*, page 170, adapted.

God used all three men to do His work. But they were far from perfect. They needed to solve their problems. Paul preached the Good News about God's mercy and forgiveness. Now Paul needed to show that same mercy and forgiveness to John Mark. John Mark grew strong under Barnabas' care and teaching (Acts 15:39). After a while, Paul's heart was touched by all the changes he saw in John Mark.



**God broke the “wall” that separated Paul and John Mark. Then they worked together to share the Good News about Jesus.**

**Paul writes about John Mark in Colossians 4:10, 11 and 2 Timothy 4:11. How do Paul's letters show us that Paul now trusted in John Mark?**

The Bible does not tell us exactly how God healed Paul's broken friendship with John Mark. But we know that John Mark became one of Paul's most trusted friends. Paul told the church at Colosse that John Mark was his coworker in sharing the Good News about Jesus. At the end of Paul's life, Paul strongly encouraged Timothy to bring John Mark to Rome because John Mark was very helpful to Paul in doing God's work (2 Timothy 4:11). Paul forgave John Mark. God broke the “wall” that separated these two men. Then they worked together to share the Good News about Jesus.

**How can we learn to forgive people who have hurt or disappointed us?**

## FROM SLAVE TO SON (Philemon 1:1–25)

While Paul is a prisoner in Rome, he meets a runaway slave named Onesimus. Onesimus runs away from Colosse to Rome. Paul knows who Onesimus' owner is. That man's name is Philemon. So, Paul writes his friend Philemon a letter. In his letter to Philemon, Paul works hard to heal a broken connection between his friend and the runaway slave.

Personal connections and friendships are important to Paul. Paul knows that broken connections and friendships hurt spiritual growth and agreement between believers in the church. Philemon is a church leader in Colosse. So, Philemon needs to let go of any bad feelings for Onesimus in his heart. Paul knows that bad feelings can destroy a person's work for God.

**In Philemon 1:1–25, Paul talks about how important it is to heal broken friendships and connections. What important rules does Paul give us to follow as we try to heal our own broken connections?**

It may be surprising to us that Paul does not talk more strongly against slavery. But Paul does something else. He talks about the Good News. The Good News breaks all the different walls that separate us from each other (Galatians 3:28; Colossians 3:10, 11). Paul sends Onesimus back to Philemon. Paul does not send Onesimus back as Philemon's slave. Paul sends Onesimus back as Philemon's son in Jesus and as Philemon's beloved brother in the Lord (Philemon 1:16).

Paul knows that runaway slaves do not have much hope for a happy future. Their lives will be hard. But now, Onesimus is Philemon's brother in Jesus and a willing coworker. Onesimus can have a better future now. Philemon can offer him food, a safe place to sleep, and protect him while he works for the Lord. This healed connection will make a wonderful difference in Onesimus' life. Onesimus became a loyal and beloved brother to Paul. He worked with Paul in sharing the Good News (Colossians 4:9). Paul very much wanted the broken connection between Onesimus and Philemon to be healed. Paul was even willing to pay Philemon for any money he lost when Onesimus ran away.

**What important rules does this story give us about how to heal our broken friendships and connections with other people?**



**In his letter to Philemon, Paul works hard to heal a broken connection between his friend and the runaway slave, Onesimus.**

## SPIRITUAL GIFTS AND CHURCH AGREEMENT (1 Corinthians 3:5–11)

**We already learned that the church at Corinth had deep problems. What important rules does Paul give us in 1 Corinthians 3:5–11; 1 Corinthians 12:1–11; and 2 Corinthians 10:12–15 to help heal broken friendships and damaged personal connections in the church?**

In these verses, Paul gives important rules for church unity. You will remember that unity is agreement. Jesus helps us to be in agreement with each other in heart, mind, and the truth. Paul says that Jesus uses different workers to do different jobs in the church. Together, all believers work to build up God's kingdom (1 Corinthians 3:9).

God asks us to work **with** each other and **for** each other, not against each other. God gives each believer gifts to do His work in the church and to serve the community (1 Corinthians 12:11). There are no gifts that are better than other gifts. All gifts are needed in God's church (1 Corinthians 12:18–23). Our God-given gifts are not for our selfish use. The Holy Spirit gives us these gifts to help us share the Good News about Jesus.

So, we should never say how we are better or worse than other people. These comparisons will make us feel too proud or feel bad about ourselves. If we think other people are better than we are, then we will feel awful about ourselves. It will be easy to lose hope about doing the work God gave us to do. Also, if we think our work for God is better than what other people do for Him, then we will feel too proud. That is wrong. No Christian should feel proud in his or her heart.

When we feel either too proud of ourselves or not good enough, we hurt the work we can do for Jesus. At the same time, we also hurt our connections with other people. So, here is what we should do. We should do the work that Jesus gives us to do. Then we will feel joy and peace. We will be good witnesses for Jesus because of our joy and peace. Our work for Jesus will not hurt the work that other members do for Him. Then Jesus' church will do many wonderful works to build up His kingdom.

**Why must we not feel jealous of other believers or be too proud of our work for God? Why is it not good to compare ourselves with other believers?**



**We should do the work that Jesus gives us to do. Then we will feel joy and peace. We will be good witnesses for Jesus because of our joy and peace.**

**FORGIVENESS (Romans 5:8–11)**

What is forgiveness? When we forgive people who wronged us, does that mean we say their behavior is OK? Does my forgiveness of the person who hurt me depend on his or her saying sorry first? What if the person that I am upset with does not want my forgiveness?

**In Romans 5:8–11; Luke 23:31–34; 2 Corinthians 5:20, 21; and Ephesians 4:26, the New Testament writers talk about forgiveness. What do these verses say that helps us understand what forgiveness means?**

Jesus leads humans to join with God again. “God is kind to you so that you will change your hearts and lives” (Romans 2:4, ICB). While we were sinners, Jesus joined us with God again. Our sorrow for sin and confessing our sins do not join us as one with God. No. Only our faith in Jesus’ death on the cross does that. Our part is to accept Jesus’ death for us. It is true that we cannot feel happy about being forgiven until we confess to God our sins first. But that does not mean that our saying sorry for our sins somehow fills God’s heart with forgiveness for us. No. Forgiveness for us was in God’s heart all the time. But when we confess our sins, then God can give the forgiveness in His heart to us (1 John 1:9). So, we need to confess our sins. Confessing our sins is very important. It does not change God’s feelings about us. But it does change our feelings about God. When we let the Holy Spirit’s power into our hearts, then we are changed. He gives us the power to turn away from sin and to confess our sins.

Forgiveness also is important for our spiritual health. We must forgive people who wrong us, even when they do nothing to earn that forgiveness. If we do not forgive the people who hurt us, we will hurt ourselves. Our failure to forgive other people can hurt us more than it hurts them. When you fail to forgive the person who hurt you, the pain will grow inside you. By not forgiving this person, you are letting him or her hurt you even more. These feelings hurt the peace and agreement in God’s church.

Forgiveness is the same as freeing people from the punishment that they earned for the wrong they did. That is exactly what Jesus did for us on the cross. We can forgive people because God forgives us. We can love people because God loves us. Forgiveness is a choice we make.



**Forgiveness is a choice that we make.**

**GOD JOINS US AS ONE AND GIVES US PEACE**  
(Matthew 18:15–17)

**In Matthew 18:15–17, Jesus tells us three things we can do to help end disagreements that happen when someone in the church wrongs us. What are these three things? How can we use them in our everyday lives?**

Jesus gave the advice in Matthew 18 because He wanted to protect the peace in the church. He also wanted to stop problems from getting any bigger. He wanted to keep problems between believers in as small a group as possible. That is why Jesus wanted the two people who had the problem to try to solve the problem on their own first (Matthew 18:15). When more people get involved in a problem between two believers, then the danger for even more problems to happen is real. That also can hurt the peace and the agreement in the church. But when Christians try to solve their problems in private with love and understanding, then broken friendships can be healed. The Holy Spirit can work with them to help them solve their differences.

Sometimes, two people alone cannot work out their differences. So, Jesus invites us to take one or two other people with us. Jesus wants to join people again, not push them away even more from each other. So, we can follow this advice only if we have tried to work out our problems with the person who wronged us first. The one or two persons who join you are not coming with you to argue for you or to blame the person who hurt you. They come in Christian love to give advice and to pray in this important work of joining two people again in peace and Christian agreement.

Now sometimes, nothing we do to solve the problem works. So, Jesus tells us to take the problem in front of the church. He does not mean we get up in the middle of Sabbath School class and tell everyone our problem. The right place to bring up our problem is in a church board meeting. Jesus' whole plan is meant to make peace.

“Do not let your bad feelings turn to hate. Do not allow the hurt that someone gave you to grow and become words of poison. These words will hurt the minds of the people you say them to. Do not allow hurt feelings and angry thoughts to continue to fill your mind and the mind of the person who hurt you. Go to him with a heart that has no pride in it. With a kind heart, talk to your brother in Jesus about the problem.”—Ellen G. White, *Gospel [about the Good News] Workers*, page 499, adapted.



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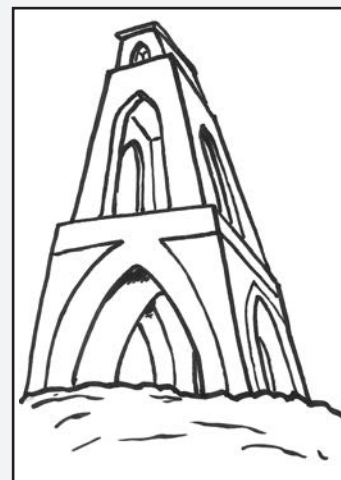
**ADDITIONAL THOUGHT:** Read the article “Forgiveness,” pages 825, 826, in *The Ellen G. White Encyclopedia*.

“God’s workers need Jesus to live inside them. The self-ish feelings in their hearts must die. God’s workers must turn away from wanting to be first. They must give up the wish to control other people in the church. They must be at peace with other believers in Jesus. They must allow God to make them holy. Then other people will see and feel their love. Then the Holy Spirit will pour on them the mercy and loving-favor that God promises to give the church. God’s promise to us will always come true.”—Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, book 1, page 175, adapted.

“What must we do if we want to stand in front of God on that day when God judges all people? We must make Jesus our safe place. Jesus also must become our high tower. We must let go of all jealousy and the desire to be number one. We must completely destroy anything that makes us jealous and full of pride. These things are not holy. We must not allow them to spring up into life again in us. We must join ourselves completely with Jesus.”—Ellen G. White, *Last Day Events [happenings]*, page 190, adapted.

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- ① In Colossians 3:12–17, Paul talks about the way the Christian church should behave. What behavior does Paul encourage the church to have? Why must this behavior be at the heart of everything we do to solve problems in the church?
- ② Read Colossians 3:12–17 again. Look at the teachings found in these verses. Why are these teachings so important to the church? How will they help church members to find agreement and peace?
- ③ What is the biggest problem in the Seventh-day Adventist church right now that stops us from having agreement? What can we do to have the agreement that we need to tell everyone on earth the Good News about Jesus? The Holy Spirit has the power to change our hearts so that the agreement we need can happen. Why must we ask the Holy Spirit for the power to change our lives?



“Jesus also must become our high tower.”—Ellen G. White, *Last Day Events [happenings]*, page 190, adapted.