

Relationships¹



SABBATH—JANUARY 15

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: 1 Samuel 25; Ephesians 4:1–3; 1 Peter 3:9–12; Luke 17:3, 4; Luke 23:34; James 5:16.

MEMORY VERSE: “ ‘In everything, do to others what you would want them to do to you. This is what is written in the Law and in the Prophets’ ” (Matthew 7:12, NIV).

A CITY EVANGELIST² OFTEN HELD STRESS-MANAGEMENT SEMINARS before his evangelistic meetings³ in cities. He had developed a simple survey (questionnaire). He asked the audience to list the four or five things that caused them the most stress. Workers grouped the answers in general groups (health, money, work, relationships). Before the count was completed, one worker saw that the speaker already had prepared a set of transparencies⁴ to discuss “relationships” as the number one problem. When questioned, the pastor explained that the results were always the same. Bad relationships always came up as the chief cause of stress.

Relationship problems might be with a spouse (husband or wife), our children, a boss, coworker, neighbor, friend, or enemy. Other people are often the main cause of our stress. But when relationships are positive, they can lead to great happiness. This seems to be true everywhere. People make us very happy, or people make us very unhappy.

That is why this week we will spend some time on the important topic of relationships and what the Bible teaches us about them.

1. relationships—how people live, work, or socialize with others.

2. evangelist—a preacher who travels, preaching the gospel (good news about Jesus).

3. evangelistic meetings—meetings that teach the gospel to many people at one time.

4. transparencies—pieces of thin, clear plastic with pictures or words printed on them that can be viewed on a large screen by shining light through them.

SUNDAY—JANUARY 16**COMPLETELY HUMBLE AND GENTLE (Ephesians 4:1–3)**

Read Ephesians 4:1–3. Why do you think Paul connects a humble spirit, gentleness, and patience with good relationships and unity?⁵ Think of examples from your own life when good attitudes had a positive influence⁶ on relationships.

Read 1 Samuel 25. What can we learn from the actions of Abigail and David about doing the right thing in difficult and tense situations?

The story of David, Nabal, and Abigail is an excellent example of how you should and should not treat others. David sent his soldiers to ask Nabal a favor. “We have protected your men and your property. Give us whatever you can find” (1 Samuel 25:7, 8, in the author’s own words). But Nabal did not know about kindness. He had no skill in dealing with others without causing bad feelings. We are told that Nabal was a harsh and evil man. Other translations use words such as *bitter, mean, rough, dishonest, and rude*. And Nabal surely showed these traits⁷ to David’s soldiers.

But notice David’s attitude. David held the military power, but his message was full of care. David wished Nabal and his household long life and

good health. David introduced himself as “‘your son David’ ” (verse 8, NIV).

As for Abigail, the Bible tells us that she was smart and beautiful. Consider her behavior. She gathered plenty of good food. She ran to apologize to David, bowed down before him, spoke of herself as “your servant” and of David as “my master.” She asked for forgiveness. She also reminded David that, as a man of God, he needed to avoid needless bloodshed.

Abigail’s wise and humble actions changed David’s plans. David praised the Lord for sending her and praised her for her good judgment. The actions of Abigail saved the lives of many innocent men. As for Nabal, he died—probably of heart failure caused by his own fear.

It is easy (usually) to be kind to those we like. But what about those we do not like? Think of those you find very disagreeable. How would they act if you showed a humble and gentle attitude (feeling) toward them? Through God’s grace, give it a try. (Remember, too, that you might not always be the most popular and lovable soul either.)

MONDAY—JANUARY 17**REPAYING EVIL WITH BLESSINGS (1 Peter 3:8–12)**

What is the true purpose or mean-

5. unity—being in full agreement.

6. influence—the power to change or affect someone or something; the power to cause changes without directly forcing them to happen.

7. traits—qualities that make one person or thing different from another.

ing of 1 Peter 3:8–12? What are some of the immediate ways you can use these principles (rules) in your own life?

Instead of an “eye for an eye,” Jesus taught us to turn the other cheek (Matthew 5:38, 39). This idea was strange then and still is today in many cultures.⁸ Sadly, even Christians do not always show goodness to others in return for the evil or hurt done against them. But Jesus keeps saying, “ ‘Learn from me. I am gentle and free of pride’ ” (Matthew 11:29, NIV).

A couple with small children was having serious problems with their neighbors. Several times, these neighbors told the young parents how unhappy they were about the swing set the parents had set up in the yard. It bothered them to hear the children playing on it. And the neighbors also complained about the “mess” in the young family’s yard. The young parents were hurt by these unkind words. After all, they were not doing anything against the neighborhood rules.

One day, the family was harvesting apples from the backyard apple trees. The mother decided to give the neighbors two freshly baked apple pies. The neighbors accepted the pies gladly. That simple act made a big difference in their relationship. This is probably because the neighbors never would have expected anything like that from people they complained about.



Instead of an eye for an eye, Jesus taught us to turn the other cheek.

How did David pay Saul back for the attacks on his life? Read 1 Samuel 24:4–6. What does this tell us about David’s character?⁹ How might we use the same attitude¹⁰ in our own experience, especially with other Christians?

The first book of Samuel tells of four times when David had the opportunity (chance) to kill King Saul. But instead, David forgave the king each time. David chose a humble and godly manner in his dealings with someone who was not kind to him.

Should we not all do the same?

TUESDAY—JANUARY 18

FORGIVENESS (Ephesians 4:32)

It is possible to live a rich and meaningful religious life and still have problems with other people. We often

8. cultures—the beliefs, customs, arts, and so on, of different societies or groups of people.

9. character—the way someone thinks, feels, and acts; someone’s personality.

10. attitude—the way someone thinks or feels about someone or something.

upset others and cause one another pain, even in the church. That is why it is important for us to learn how to forgive.

Read Ephesians 4:32. How well have you been using this Bible truth in your life? Whom do you need to forgive? Why is it important, for your own good, to forgive them?

In recent years, people who work as counselors have started to understand just how important spiritual principles are for the health of our minds. For years, many psychologists¹¹ and counselors believed that religion was the cause of guilt and fear. But that is not so true anymore. Today, many make use of Christian principles. “Therapies”¹² such as prayer, spiritual journaling, memorizing Bible verses, and forgiveness are now accepted ways of helping people overcome different emotional¹³ problems. Forgiveness causes people to feel comfort and relief. It frees us from the pain and guilt of the past. It heals us. This is because the ability to truly forgive and be forgiven comes only from God and through a heart that God has changed (Ezekiel 36:26).

Read Matthew 5:23–25; Luke 17:3, 4; and Luke 23:34. What do they teach us about forgiveness?



Forgiveness comes from a heart that God has changed.

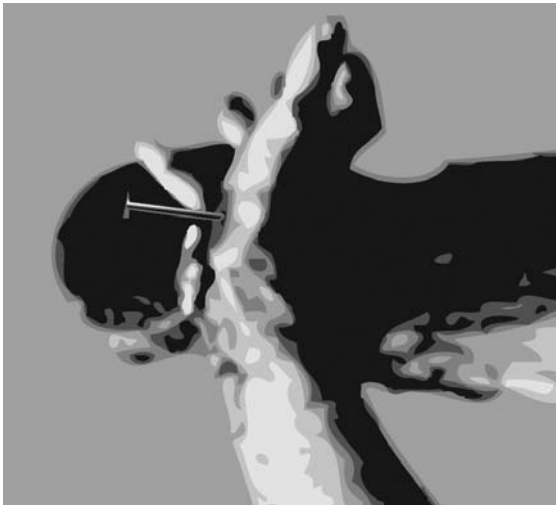
We may sometimes think that forgiveness is impossible to give. But no person will ever reach the level of pain and suffering that Jesus suffered on the cross. The King and Creator of the universe was tortured and crucified (put to death on a cross) by the people He created. But even as He hung dying on the cross, Jesus loved them enough to beg the Father for their forgiveness.

At times, people wrong others without a full understanding of the pain they are causing. At other times, people offend because they feel unsafe or have personal problems. So, they try to get relief from their pain and guilt by hurting others. How can knowing the problems of others help you offer forgiveness? How can you learn to forgive those who are trying to hurt you?

11. psychologists—scientists who specialize in the study and treatment of the mind and behavior.

12. therapies—treatments for physical or mental illnesses.

13. emotional—of or relating to emotions (strong feelings such as love, anger, joy, hate, or fear).



Even as Jesus hung dying on the cross, He forgave those who put Him there.

WEDNESDAY—JANUARY 19

CONFESS YOUR SINS TO ONE ANOTHER (James 5:16)

What do you think James 5:16 means by confessing sins to one another? Think about this verse and ask yourself how you need to use its teaching in your own situation.

When I sin against my neighbor, I must confess it to him or her and ask for forgiveness. This will restore (bring back; heal) the relationship. It shows that I am willing to be responsible for what I have done. It also shows that I trust and hope for acceptance and forgiveness. By God's grace,¹⁴ a noble soul will give forgiveness, no matter how deeply hurt he or she is.

There is an additional meaning in this verse that can help people heal more quickly. Confessing sins,

errors, and wrongs to someone you trust brings about emotional healing. Talking about or sharing our own weaknesses to a godly Christian friend will help reduce the burden of sin. Confession also deepens personal relationships. Trusting and being trusted helps people unite (join together as one) to make a friendship true and lasting. In fact, the entire counseling practice is based upon the principle that talking is good for the soul. There are mental disorders that require professional treatment. But many feelings of pain or suffering can be relieved at the church and community levels. This is especially true for problems caused by misunderstandings, lies, and jealousy. By following the advice of James, we can reduce psychological burdens. We can also help bring renewed strength to relationships and change destructive behaviors.

We need to be careful, though. Confession of committed sins to a close friend may bring much relief. But it also exposes our weaknesses to others. For example, there is always the risk that our friend will share the secret of our weakness with other people, which is destructive to all those involved.

Most important, we know that we can always confess our sins fully to the Lord with the promise of forgiveness. Read 1 Peter 5:7. Harmful relationships may bring doubt and even fear and anxiety (nervousness). Other people may be able to help,

¹⁴ grace—God's gift of forgiveness and mercy (kindness that is not deserved) that He freely gives us to take away our sins.

but the surest help comes from God, who is willing to take all our cares at any time. He also leaves us with a true sense of relief for having left our burdens in His hands.

THURSDAY—JANUARY 20

BUILDING OTHERS UP (Ephesians 4:29)

Read Ephesians 4:29; 1 Thessalonians 5:11; and Romans 14:19. Ask yourself how you can use this teaching in your own life. Why is this so important, not only for yourself but for others, as well?

Paul warns the early church communities not to hurt or destroy personal relationships in the “body of Christ [the church].” Many problems come from people tearing each other down and hurting the entire community. People who gossip and criticize others seem to have problems themselves. They may believe they are less worthy or important than others. They may feel a need to be noticed or a desire for control or power. These people need help to let go of such hurtful ways of dealing with their own inner struggles and problems.

Feeling good about ourselves helps keep us from being involved in gossip and lying. Members of the body of Christ need to remember that they have been honored with the gift of salvation (Psalm 17:8; 1 Peter 2:9). By understanding this, we can remember

that the goal is to build others up and to learn from one another. Words of encouragement and approval, which are always positive and joyful, are ways of supporting people who have personal problems.

Another way to help is to serve as mediators.¹⁵ Jesus calls peacemakers “‘blessed’ ” and “‘children of God’ ” (Matthew 5:9, KJV). James says that peacemakers will reap “a harvest of righteousness” (James 3:18, NIV).

Read Matthew 7:12. Why is this so important to all relationships?

This principle is a priceless jewel. It is positive, and it is based on love. It is true at all times and in all places. And it stretches above and beyond human¹⁶ law. The “golden rule” also brings about positive benefits¹⁷ to everyone involved.

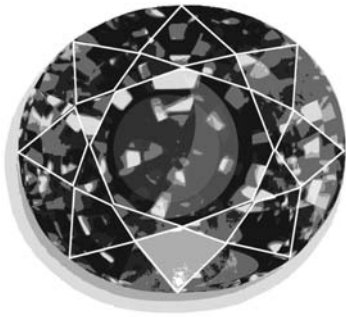
A farmer in China was caring for his rice paddy (field) up in the mountains overlooking the valley and the sea. One day he saw the beginning of a tidal wave. The sea had backed up, leaving a wide part of the bay exposed. The farmer knew that the water would return with force, destroying everything in the valley. He thought of his friends working in the valley and decided to set his rice field on fire. His friends quickly ran up the mountain to put the fire out, which saved them from being killed in the tidal wave. As a result of this spirit of helping one another, the farmer saved the lives of his friends.

The lesson is clear.

15. mediators—people working to bring peace and accord (agreement) between people who disagree.

16. human—of, relating to, or affecting people.

17. benefits—good or helpful results or effects.



The principle “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you” is a priceless jewel.

FRIDAY—JANUARY 21

ADDITIONAL STUDY: Read Ephesians 4:25–32, and underline the words that touch your heart. Think about all the things you can do with God’s help to improve your relationships with others.

These are parts of a letter that Ellen G. White wrote in 1908 to an evangelist: “I have this message for you from the Lord. Be kind in speech, gentle in action. Guard yourself carefully, because you can be too harsh and controlling, and say hard things. . . . Unkind words grieve the Lord and do harm. The Lord tells me to say to you, Be gentle in your speech; watch well your words; let no unkindness come into your speeches or into your actions. . . .

“When you look to Jesus and learn of Him daily, you will show a healthy and pleasant character. Soften your sermons and do not let words of criticism be spoken. Learn of the Great Teacher. Words of kindness and sympathy will do good as medicine. They will heal souls that are dis-

couraged. The knowledge of the Word of God brought into the practical life will have a healing, peaceful power. Unkind speech will never bring blessing to yourself or to any other soul.” —Adapted from *Gospel Workers*, pages 163, 164.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

❶ How much do you like to gossip? Even if you do not do it yourself, how eager and open are you to hear gossip from others? Why is hearing gossip from others as bad as spreading gossip yourself? How can you stop being part of something that can cause other people a great deal of pain?

❷ Forgiveness can be very difficult, especially when we have been badly hurt. How do you learn to forgive those who do not ask for forgiveness? They may be the ones who do not care about your forgiveness. They might even scorn it. What is your responsibility in such cases?

❸ Abuse (bad treatment) within families brings much pain to individuals and groups. What should be the Christian attitude to help prevent this problem? What should be done when forgiveness does not cause any change in abusive (hurtful) behavior?

❹ Think over your life right now. What steps can you take to improve your relationships? Why is being humble, trusting in God, and wanting to do right so important in improving relationships?