

Truth for Today

The Bible Explained

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From Discouragement to Growth Damaged Relationships

*[Please note: sections in blue type are not broadcast on every radio station.
The New King James Version of the Scriptures used unless otherwise stated.]*

Introduction

Often when I am given a subject to take, I initially think, what can I say about it? However, for today's topic, my mind immediately started to think about damaged relationships that I have encountered in my life. I suppose most of us would be the same. It is often easier to speak about your own experiences and how you felt during the difficulty, how it was resolved, that's if it was ever resolved, or to ask yourself what I learnt from the experience. Good relationships with others are a very happy thing but a damaged relationship can be brutal and nasty.

Christians are not immune from damaged relationships. However, as a Christian you can and should turn to the Lord in prayer for help and guidance through reading His Word, the Bible. The Bible is full of real-life experiences that we can study so we can learn how to react in a damaged relationship. The Bible can also help us as to how we can avoid damaged relationships in the first place. The Lord Himself is the perfect example of how to deal with difficult people and difficult circumstances, as is recorded in the Gospels.

In the family and in the church, there can be wonderful loving and caring relationships. People of the same mind who are related through natural birth or related because they have become children of God. They love each other, care for each other, protect each other and are willing to accept each other's opinions and faults. However, when a relationship breaks down it can often turn very nasty and sad. I have seen family members who have not spoken to each other for years. I have seen disagreements between Christians that have caused division. Often in these circumstances it takes years to repair the damage and sometimes sadly there is no reconciliation.

God's attitude to our damaged relationship with Him

The most wonderful example of a damaged relationship is between God and us. In the first book in the Bible called Genesis we read of how pleased God was when He made man and woman living beings. God created us so we could have a relationship with Him. The LORD God gave Adam and Eve a beautiful garden to tend. However, He made one rule. They must not eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, or they would die. God loved to come down into the garden in the cool of the day to speak to man. But when Adam and Eve disobeyed God, that relationship was damaged, it was broken, there was distance. The interesting thing here is that mankind could do nothing to repair their relationship with God. God banished Adam and Eve from the garden, and they felt the burden of sin in their hearts. Adam and Eve felt their nakedness before God and God provided for them, He made clothes of animal skin to cover their sin, an animal had to be killed. Later their sons Cain and Abel were encouraged to bring a sin offering to God. The blood of an animal was the only offering God would accept for their sins. Sadly, Cain killed his brother Abel because he was jealous that Abel's sacrifice was accepted by God. **05:10**

The Bible tells us:

'Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned'
(Romans 5 v.12).

Because of God's holiness and our sins there is a damaged relationship between God and mankind. The wonderful thing regarding this damaged relationship is that God still loves us, He loved us so much that He gave His only Son, Jesus Christ, so that He could come into this world and lay down His life, by shedding His blood on the cross of Calvary for our sins. God at His great cost has made a way so that our relationship with him can be repaired.

'For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life'
(John 3 v.16).

How amazing, God's love and gift, along with our repentance and faith, gives us peace with God! Relationship repaired for ever!

Examples of damaged relationships in the Bible

Abraham and Lot's herdsmen, Genesis 13

Abraham was a godly man; he did not want strife, he wanted to avoid damaged relationships between his herdsmen and Lot's. So, he suggested to Lot that they should separate, and he graciously offered him the choice of the land in which to rear his livestock. Lot chose the plain of Jordan to the east as it had lots of water for his herds and Abraham stayed in the land of Canaan. There was no trouble or ill-feeling between Abraham and his nephew, Lot. Lot's choice was a bad one and he pitched his tent toward the vile cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. Abraham continued to depend on and trust in God, whereas Lot continued to backslide. Soon Lot found himself in trouble and Abraham intervened to save him, his family, and his belongings. Lot soon found himself residing in the vile and wicked city of Sodom and Abraham pleaded with God to save Lot and his family from the destruction that was to fall on that city. Abraham always looked out for and cared for his nephew Lot, even when Lot did not walk with God. He loved him throughout and would not allow others to damage the relationship between them. There is a good lesson for us here!

Lot and his family, Genesis 19

It is interesting to look at what we can perceive of the relationship Lot had with his family. Look at their reaction to him in Sodom just before the judgement of God fell. Lot lived with his wife and two daughters in Sodom. He also had sons-in-law, so he had at least a further two daughters who lived in the city. When Lot went to warn them about the imminent judgement, they thought he was joking! It seems that Lot's relationship with his sons-in-law was strained to say the least. They had no respect for what their father-in-law was saying, it seems that Lot had no testimony with his family. It is feasible to conclude that his actions whilst living in Sodom caused his sons-in-law to laugh and reject his warnings. There was a problem somewhere in this relationship. It certainly was godless which was probably the reason for the breakdown. Because of this Lot's daughters and sons-in-law were killed in the judgement of God. Lot may have had this on his conscience for the rest of his life. We also sadly read of the way that his other two daughters treated him, making him drunk, then having children by their father. The chaos and broken relationship caused so much trouble. May God preserve our testimony to our families!

Jacob and Esau, Genesis 27-33

Jacob was a cheat, he was a chancer, a deceiver. Esau and Jacob were twins, but Esau was born first. In those days, the status of the firstborn son brought more privileges and an inheritance. Jacob, along with his mother Rebekah, tricked old Isaac into thinking Jacob was Esau so the

inheritance was given to Jacob rather than Esau. As you would expect Esau was mad, he hated Jacob and vowed to kill his brother. Jacob himself was tricked by his soon to be father-in-law, Laban, before he got the love of his life, Rachel. God blessed Jacob with twelve sons and one daughter. Jacob and Esau lead separate lives. However Jacob reached out to Esau in later years to find favour, and forgiveness from him. Esau was strong, he had an army of four hundred men. So, when reaching out to Esau Jacob was distressed and afraid. Jacob prayed to God for deliverance from his brother. Jacob prepared a gift for his brother, two hundred female goats, twenty male goats, two hundred ewes, twenty rams, thirty milk camels with their colts, forty cows, ten bulls, twenty female donkeys and ten foals. Jacob's servants took the gift to Esau. Jacob then humbled himself and called himself a servant of Esau's to his own servants. Jacob spent the night struggling with God. The next day he saw Esau coming with his army. He bowed to the ground seven times, but Esau ran toward Jacob and embraced and kissed him, and they both wept. Jacob's whole family bowed down to Esau. Esau told Jacob that he had enough goods and told him kindly to keep his gift. Jacob urged him to take it and he did. This is a nice story of a damaged relationship being repaired. How would you and I have reacted if we were Esau? Would we have accepted Jacob's repentance? Or would we have held that bitterness to the grave? It is very challenging indeed!

Joseph and his brothers, Genesis 37-50

Joseph the second youngest of Jacob's sons was hated and rejected by his brothers. Jacob loved Joseph more than all his children, which did not go down very well with the rest of the family. Joseph was also chosen of God and had dreams in which his brothers would bow down to him in the future. You could imagine that when he told his brothers this it made them even madder. The brothers planned together as to how they could get rid of their brother without killing him as this would cause great distress to their father. They stripped him and threw him down a pit, they tore his coat of many colours and covered it in blood to make out to their father he was dead. Then they sold Joseph to Midianite traders who were on their way to Egypt. Joseph suffered many things in Egypt including ending up in prison because of a false accusation. However, God was with Joseph all the way through every hardship he had to bear. God is sovereign and He had a plan for Joseph and Jacob and his family. Joseph soon rose to be second in command to the Pharaoh in Egypt, who trusted Joseph. God told Pharaoh through Joseph that there would be a severe famine in the area, so Joseph organised the receiving and storing of great volumes of food to sustain people through the famine years. Jacob and his family struggled through this famine, and they came to Egypt to buy food. This is where the damaged relationship between Joseph and his brothers get interesting. The brothers did not recognise Joseph, but he recognised them. The brothers had no idea if Joseph was even alive, it had been so long since they seen the back of him. Did his brothers have guilt over these years? We are not told. However, it seems like Jacob had Joseph on his mind every day. I suppose you could say that Jacob's sons deceived him, and that he got a touch of his own medicine from when he tricked Esau!

Genesis 47 is probably one of my favourite scenes in the whole Bible as Joseph reveals who he is to his brothers. Joseph was by then the most powerful man in Egypt who could easily have had his brothers killed for what they did to him. But Joseph had never held anything against his brothers. From his side there was no damaged relationship. What a lovely attitude! Joseph breaks his hearts and weeps loudly as he asks them to come near to him. He kissed all his brothers and told them to bring his father down to Egypt where he would give them everything they needed and much more to survive the famine by taking up residence in the land of Goshen. If I was treated like this by my family, could I without any grudges say,

'And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose' (Romans 8 v.28).

Can I show the same attitude as Joseph did?

Now we are going to fast forward to the New Testament and see two instances of damaged relationships. One was a sharp disagreement between two Christian leaders; and one between fellow Christian workers.

Paul and Peter, Galatians 2 vv. 11-14

Paul recalls the fact that he had been given charge by the Lord to preach the gospel to the Gentiles, whereas Peter was charged to preach the Gospel to the Jews. Paul also recalls that, when he was in Jerusalem, he and Barnabas had been given the right hand of fellowship by James, Peter, and John. Paul then goes on to review how he had a tense face-to-face confrontation with Peter at Antioch. Both Paul and Peter were fervent in the preaching of the Gospel, but Paul was angry that Peter had shown hypocrisy and contradiction in his actions. Peter would happily eat with Gentiles, which was discouraged by some of the believing Jews. But, when he saw the Jews coming along, he withdrew from the Gentiles and separated himself from them. You could say he was being two-faced. He was afraid of what the Jews would say. Paul and Peter and the counsel in Jerusalem had earlier agreed that the Gospel of the grace of God was both to Jews and Gentiles, and there was no difference. Both Jews and Gentiles are sinners in God's sight, and both need to be saved by grace alone. Once saved they belong to Christ, they are Christians and there should be happy fellowship with each other with no laws separating them. Paul blamed Peter for leading both the Jews and the Gentiles astray as well as even Barnabas. 2 Peter 3:15 would suggest that there was no lasting grudge held by Peter and secular history would indicate that they preached together in Rome before they were both martyred. Sometimes it is right to confront a fellow Christian over the practical implications of theology, but it should be done in love and grace with reconciliation in mind.

Paul and Barnabas, Acts 15 vv.36-41

Paul and Barnabas had worked very closely together over many years whilst serving the Lord, until they decided to return to the places where they had preached the Gospel (Acts 15:36). They had an argument over the role that Mark should play in this mission. Barnabas wanted to take Mark on the journey, but Paul was convinced this was not a good idea because Mark had abandoned them during their first missionary journey. Barnabas was determined to take Mark, but Paul insisted that they should not take him. V.39 says,

'The contention became so sharp that they parted from on another.'

This was an argument over a matter of judgement. It is also interesting to note that Mark was related to Barnabas, did he put their natural relationship before his better judgement? This is something we all need to be careful about! It seems that Paul and Barnabas never crossed paths again. It is also interesting to note that the Lord used both Barnabas and Mark, and Paul and Silas, to further the Gospel and encourage the saints. God's purpose will always be fulfilled even although His people disagree and can't work together.

Final summary

As we have seen from the instances we have covered in the Bible, there are lots of occasions where relationships have been damaged. In some of these instances one party was willing to forgive, show kindness, grace, and hold no grudge. We see this clearly from our loving God and Joseph (who was a picture of Christ). In some of the instances we see the one who did wrong, say they were sorry, and in grace they were forgiven. It is a happy occasion when reconciliation takes place. However, sadly we see some who may never have made peace with each other. It could be both parties were at fault, or maybe it is just one side who was unwilling to accept the repentance of another! There is a danger when we feel we have been wronged that we do not except the other person's apology! When we look at God's mercy and grace, we must bow our heads in shame if we are not prepared to show the same grace to the one who has wronged us. We have seen damaged relationships in families, in church leaders, and in church workers. Sadly, we see

some damaged relationships unresolved and go on to the grave. Be careful you don't ever let this happen to you!

I will finish with a few verses from the New Testament to challenge and hopefully encourage you.

2 Corinthians 5 v.18:

'Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation.'

1 Peter 3 vv.8-9:

'Finally, all of you be of one mind, having compassion for one another; love as brothers, be tenderhearted, be courteous; not returning evil for evil or reviling, but on the contrary blessing, knowing that you were called to this, that you may inherit a blessing.'

1 John 1 v.9:

'If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.'

May the Lord bless you today.

Thank you for listening to the Truth for Today talk on From Discouragement to Growth 'Damaged Relationships.' Talk number T1350.

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