

# RECONCILING RELATIONSHIPS

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## OBSTACLES TO RECONCILIATION

Reconciling relationships with our brothers and sisters in the body of Christ.

How many of us feel that we are hurt more than we hurt others? It must be because of our fallen human nature that we notice the pain we feel much more easily than the pain we inflict on others.

What do we do with the pain we feel from the hurts in our relationships? And how do we offer our repentance and reconciliation to those we have hurt?

### A. **FEAR**

*1 John 4:18 There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love.*

*Isa 51:12 "I, even I, am he who comforts you. Who are you that you fear mortal men, the sons of men, who are but grass?"*

*Prov 29:25 Fear of man will prove to be a snare, but whoever trusts in the LORD is kept safe.*

*Isa 41:13 "For I am the LORD, your God, who takes hold of your right hand and says to you, Do not fear; I will help you."*

Fear often keeps us from reconciling our relationships. We can be afraid of breaking our relationships if we bring up something unpleasant. Ultimately we fear rejection - someone not loving us. This fear clouds our ability to reason.

Jesus wants us to face our fears and give us the grace to know that He will always help us.

### B. **JEALOUSY/ENVY**

*1 Cor 3:3 You are still worldly. For since there is jealousy and quarreling among you, are you not worldly?*

*Rom 13:13 Let us behave decently, as in the daytime, ...not in dissension and jealousy.*

*Gal 5:15 If you keep on biting and devouring each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other.*

When we are jealous we have lost sight of what God has done for us.

Jealousy and envy can often be so subtle that we don't even realize that we are having such thoughts. Sometimes it can just be vague negative feelings or thoughts about another person. Let's ask the Holy Spirit to show us when we are responding out of jealousy or envy.

Thanksgiving is a great cure for jealousy. Thanksgiving helps us remember all that God has done for us.

**Dictionary definition: Jealous** - Resentfully envious; resentfully suspicious of a rival or a rival's influence.

### C. **JUDGING**

*Luke 6:37 "Do not judge, and you will not be judged. Do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven."*

*Rom 2:1 You, therefore, have no excuse, you who pass judgment on someone else, for at whatever point you judge the other, you are condemning yourself, because you who pass judgment do the same things.*

*Rom 14:10 You, then, why do you judge your brother? Or why do you look down on your brother? For we will all stand before God's judgment seat.*

*Mat 7:1 Do not judge, or you too will be judged.*

*Mat 7:2 For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.*

*James 4:12 There is only one Lawgiver and Judge, the one who is able to save and destroy. But you—who are you to judge your neighbor?*

Judgments are very similar to jealousy and envy because they come from our lack of experiential knowledge of God's deep love for us. Judgments can seem so righteous but we know in our hearts that it doesn't bring life to the other person. Sometimes when we can find fault with another person it's our way of feeling better about ourselves.

### D. **GOSSIP**

*Prov 26:20 Without wood a fire goes out; without gossip a quarrel dies down.*

*Prov 16:28 A perverse man stirs up dissension, and a gossip separates close friends.*

*Prov 20:19 A gossip betrays a confidence; so avoid a man who talks too much.*

*James 5:9 Don't grumble against each other, brothers, or you will be judged.*

**Dictionary definition: Grumble** - to mutter or mumble in discontent; complain in a bad-tempered, hostile, rude way.

Gossip can be a sign of jealousy. When we talk negatively about another it's a way that we try to build ourselves up. It can also be a sign that we have a lack of forgiveness in our hearts towards the person. Jesus tells us that we must first go to our brother to work out the situation.

## E. **UNHEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS**

1. Addictions/psychological problems. We are always called to forgive but this does not mean we put ourselves in the same situation if we are relating to someone with addictions or serious psychological problems.
2. Patterns of relating that do not respect our dignity. We can love others but we must use judgment about how we open our lives to another. This requires wisdom and time. We can reconcile relationships without choosing to have deeply intimate relationships.

Mat 7:5 You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye. (Reconciliation in a Christian relationship)

Mat 7:6 "Do not give dogs what is sacred; do not throw your pearls to pigs. If you do, they may trample them under their feet, and then turn and tear you to pieces. (Prudence in what you share with others).

It is interesting that reconciliation and prudence are placed together in above verses.

## **STEPS TO RECONCILIATION**

### A. **COMMUNICATION**

The following communication skills are adapted from the Archdiocese of Washington's pre-marital training manual, "To Love and To Cherish." These skills are an aid to resolving Conflicts:

- a. Becoming an empathic listener- this involves listening to others without considering your own feelings about what they are saying. The goals are to really understand their feelings in the situation and to communicate to them that we have understood them (further details on last page).
- b. This is such an important step to reconciliation because so often in conflicts we don't feel understood. Empathic listening is the first step toward reconciliation.
- c. Resolving the conflicts - when both people have been practicing the empathic listening skills it becomes clear how each person has been hurt in the situation. Once this has been established, true repentance and forgiveness can occur. The next important step is for each person involved to talk about ways future situations would be handled in a more desirable manner to both people.

### B. **HUMILITY**

*Rom 12:10 Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honor one another above yourselves.*

*Col 3:12 Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience.*

*Rom 12:16 Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited.*

*1 Pet 5:5 All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because, "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble."*

**Dictionary definition: Humble** - having or showing a consciousness of one's defects or shortcomings; not proud; modest; unpretentious.

**Proud** - arrogant; having a haughty opinion of oneself.

**Modest** - having or showing a moderate opinion of one's own value, abilities, achievements, etc; not vain or boastful.

**Unpretentious** - not making claims to some distinction, importance.

What is our posture as we come together to discuss conflicts? We can often confuse humility with being a doormat that everyone walks over. Jesus must be our model for understanding true humility. Was he ever a doormat?

Jesus was completely humble and he had every reason to be proud because he was/is perfect. We can't make that same claim. If we can listen empathically we will begin to see how we hurt others and seek reconciliation.

### C. **PATIENCE/FORGIVENESS/PRUDENCE**

*1 Thes 5:14 And we urge you, brothers, warn those who are idle, encourage the timid, help the weak, be patient with everyone.*

*1 Thes 5:15 Make sure that nobody pays back wrong for wrong, but always try to be kind to each other and to everyone else.*

*Col 3:13 Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.*

*Eph 4:2 Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love.*

*1 Pet 3:9 Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult, but with blessing, because to this you were called so that you may inherit a blessing.*

*Mat 5:23 "Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift.*

*Mat 16:19 I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven."*

*2 Cor 5:19 that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation.*

*Rom 12:14 Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse.*

*2 Tim 2:24 And the Lord's servant must not quarrel; instead, he must be kind to everyone, able to teach, not resentful.*

**Dictionary definition: Patience** - the will or ability to wait or endure without complaint. Syn - implies the bearing of suffering, provocation, and delay with calmness and self-control. **Patient** - refusing to be provoked or angered, as by insult; forbearing, tolerant. Calmly tolerating delay, confusion,

inefficiency, etc. Bearing or enduring pain, trouble, without complaining or losing self control.

God commands us to forgive. Using the communication skills will often make it easier for us to forgive. But even when the other person is unwilling to acknowledge their wrongdoing we are called to forgive. In these situations we must use prudence in what kind of relationship we will have with this person. When we are reconciled to something it implies coming to a peace in the situation.

Sometimes we don't have the opportunity or it may not be appropriate to use the communication skills mentioned earlier. If we feel deeply wronged it's very important to go through the painful experience with someone who has the skills to lead you through the healing process.

It's not enough to simply tell ourselves that we forgive but then we can't stand to look at the person. That is like saying that everything is fine but we have a gaping wound. God wants to take those deep hurts and heal us but we must choose to cooperate.

## WHAT JESUS WANTS FOR US

### 1. **LOVE AS BROTHERS/SISTERS**

*Gal 5:13 ... serve one another in love.*

*Gal 6:10 Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.*

*1 Th 5:11 Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing.*

*Rom 15:7 Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God.*

Jesus wants us to experience His love for us through each other. As we love each other more and more we will be able to serve the mission of the Church.

### 2. **HARMONY**

*1 Pet 3:8 Finally, all of you, live in harmony with one another; be sympathetic, love as brothers, be compassionate and humble.*

*Rom 12:16 Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited.*

**Dictionary definition: Harmony** - a combination of parts into a pleasing or orderly whole; congruity. Agreement in feeling, action, ideas, interests, etc.

Harmony in songs involves different musical notes played or song at the same time that sound pleasing together. This is such a beautiful analogy of the body of Christ and so different than conformity. God never said he wanted all of us to be the same.

He wants all of the unique gifts of each person to come forth. Living in harmony means that we are in accord (peace) with one another.

### 3. **UNITY**

*Eph 4:3 Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.*

*Col 3:14 And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.*

*1 Cor 1:10 I appeal to you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another so that there may be no divisions among you and that you may be perfectly united in mind and thought.*

*Rom 15:5 May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you a spirit of unity among yourselves as you follow Christ Jesus,*

This unity is having a common understanding and experience of God's plan of salvation in Jesus Christ. He wants us to have a common vision in following him.

### 4. **PEACE**

*2 Cor 13:11 Finally, brothers, good-bye. Aim for perfection, listen to my appeal, be of one mind, live in peace. And the God of love and peace will be with you.*

*Mark 9:50 " ...be at peace with each other."*

*1 Thes 5:13 ... Live in peace with each other.*

*Rom 14:19 Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification.*

*Col 3:15 Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful.*

*Rom 12:18 If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.*

*Heb 12:14 Make every effort to live in peace with all men and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord.*

The world is so devoid of peace. Peace is a witness to the world of God's love for us. Peace is a fruit of communion with God. God wants us to know His peace in all circumstances because he is trustworthy and we can rely on him.

*Col 3:12-14 Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.*

## **PRACTICAL TIPS FOR RECONCILING RELATIONSHIPS**

(modified from the arch-diocesan pre-marriage training)

How can we really listen empathically?

1. Give full attention - face the person, give eye contact, put away any distractions.
2. Allow the person with the strongest feelings to go first.
3. As the other person speaks, try to understand the thoughts and feelings underlying the words. Put yourself in that person's shoes.
4. Voice back important feelings and thoughts the other person is saying using "you" statements. Example: You felt angry that I didn't come to help you when you were cleaning up all alone. You felt I didn't care about your needs.
5. Do not repeat back what the person said word for word (this would sound like you weren't really thinking about what the person was really saying).
6. Reflect back feelings and thoughts that may not be mentioned by the person but that you believe the person is experiencing. This gives the other person the opportunity to further clarify their thoughts and feelings and gives them the assurance that you are really listening.
7. Avoid questions. This brings the focus to what your thoughts are and not necessarily what they are feeling or thinking.

Each person should have the opportunity to listen empathically and be listened to empathically.

How does empathic listening benefit relationships?

1. We feel understood, respected and loved. This is a gift that we can give one another.
2. Deepens our friendships
3. Improves problem solving.
4. Helps the other person to clarify his or her own thoughts and feelings.
5. Builds trust.
6. Breaks down division and builds up the body of Christ!!
7. **RECONCILING RELATIONSHIPS**
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9. Once we have had the opportunity to really understand the other person's perspective and vice versa, we can seek repentance and forgiveness with the other person. If you feel you have sinned against the person try to be specific.
10. Example: Instead of simply saying, "I'm sorry" try saying, "I'm sorry for speaking to you harshly. I will try to tell you sooner when I'm feeling frustrated" or "I'm sorry for not paying attention to you. You felt like I didn't care about you. I do care and I will try to be more attentive to you during our conversations".
11. It is important to talk about ways to handle future situations that are mutually agreeable.

## **QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION**

1. Our own insecurities and weaknesses often lead us to be jealous of others. Jesus wants us to know the great dignity that we have in being sons and daughters of God our Father. Ask the Holy Spirit to show you where you have been harboring jealousy

against others. Acknowledge your sin to the Lord and ask Him to replace this with a revelation of how precious you are to him.

2. Fear, jealousy, gossip and unhealthy relating were listed as some of the obstacles to reconciling with others. What do you think are your major obstacles to reconciliation?
3. Think about a time when you had a disagreement with someone and after you talked you became closer to this person. If you would like to, share this with your fellowship group.
4. Discuss the difference between harmony and conformity. Why is this such an important distinction?
5. Which of the scripture verses listed in the outline above has the Lord been using to speak to you about reconciling relationships? What has he taught you through them?
6. Practice empathic listening. Did you find it helped you understand the other person's perspective better? Did you find the problem discussion and solution tools helpful?