

Personal Transformation #4: Restoring Relational Damage

General Purpose:

The emphasis of this session will be on repairing the damage that occurs based on the sins we commit.

SIN AND RELATIONAL DAMAGE

1. Sin spoils God's good intentions for a loving relationship between Himself and His creation. Sin also spoils any relationships between ourselves and the other people He intends for us to love.

Isaiah 59:2

But your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, and your sins have hidden His face from you, so that He does not hear.

2. Sin causes a breakdown in communication. It breeds distrust, anger, resentment and rejection. It wreaks havoc with the love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness and faithfulness that we are intended to enjoy in our relationship with God and others.
3. The finished work of Jesus Christ, on the Cross, overcame the power of sin to permanently separate us, and it provided for a justified restoration of our relationship with God. However, until we are perfected in Eternity, sin still happens on this earth, and sinners are still being divided by its consequences.

THE PURSUIT OF RELATIONAL RESTORATION

1. God has taken extraordinary measures to bring reconciliation.

Romans 5:8, 11

But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us... And not only this, but we also exult in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation.

2. God's plan for us includes our participation in restoring people with broken relationships, and reconciling them back to their Creator.

2 Corinthians 5:18-20

Now all these things are from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ, and gave us the ministry of reconciliation, namely, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and He has committed to us the word of reconciliation. Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were entreating through us; we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.

This ministry of reconciliation is not only about reconciling people to God. It also includes being reconciled with one another.

3. Regardless who is at fault, it is **OUR** responsibility to seek restoration. God has given us NO EXCUSE for not pursuing the ministry of reconciliation.
 - If I have offended someone else, it's my responsibility to pursue reconciliation.

Matthew 5:23-24

If therefore you are presenting your offering at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your offering there before the altar, and go your way; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and present your offering.

- If someone else has sinned or caused the offense, I am responsible to pursue restoration.

Matthew 18:15-16

And if your brother sins, go and reprove him in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother. But if he does not listen to you, take one or two more with you, so that by the mouth of two or three witnesses every fact may be confirmed.

For the purposes of this class, dedicated to repenting and changing the sin patterns in our own lives, we'll focus on repairing some of the damage caused by those very sins.

BEST PRACTICES FOR REPAIRING AN OFFENSE

1. Listen & Draw Out

We must take time and ask questions to give the offended party a chance to express the true impact of the offense.

Hebrews 12:11

All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness.

Our constant aim at peacemaking is to make it easier for the offended to become free. Forgiveness is difficult work, even when someone wants to do it, it can be very hard to accomplish. When we are the offender, it's our job to do everything in our power to make it easier. We need to humble ourselves and own up to our responsibility. We may need to let the offended party express their anger against us and rehearse our faults.

We may feel "bad" about it before we gain the ability to feel "good" about it. For a biblical Christian, this is a high priority for God, and we should do whatever it takes to honor Him.

Perhaps the pain of pursuing the humble road of repentance and reconciliation will make us think twice before speaking or acting offensively in the future. This makes it part of the Process of Our Change.

2. Restate & Demonstrate Understanding

We restate what has been shared with us to demonstrate our level of understanding. We show that we have paid sincere attention and that we "get it". ALL of it.

After we have made our restatement, we need to inquire regarding its completeness. Do we have it all? Is our picture complete? We need to be ready to reopen the "Listening" phase again if there are gaps still remaining in our empathetic understanding. Repeat until successfully completed.

3. Express Genuine Sorrow (“I’m Sorry”)

- Using the data gathered from our empathetic listening, we can intelligently explain what we are actually sorry for. Be clear. Be specific.
- Express sorrow not just for what we have done but also for how it impacted and hurt another.

4. Ask Forgiveness

Asking forgiveness is different than apologizing. Apologizing is about us. It is our expression of genuine sorrow. Forgiveness is about them. It is the offended party’s decision to release their residual anger, resentment and bitterness and to dismantle the wall of separation that has built up between them and us.

At this stage, we are making an appeal to the offended party to take action. We are pleading with them to do the right thing. It’s in their best interest to forgive us, and it is something that is precious to God. We care about them and want them to be restored.

James 4:6

Therefore it says, “GOD IS OPPOSED TO THE PROUD, BUT GIVES GRACE TO THE HUMBLE.”

If we cut the process short and prematurely go straight to the “asking forgiveness” part, we may find that the forgiveness is incomplete. That’s because we haven’t helped the offended party enough. They can’t let it all go because they don’t believe that we even understand what we’ve really done. They have a hard time genuinely forgiving us, and a big part of their difficulty is our fault! We should take the time to do this right.

Side Note:

Forgiveness is for the purpose of tearing down a wall of separation between two parties. Many of the routine offenses that occur from day to day require a simple apology. But if my offense has not risen to the threshold of damaging the relationship, then petitioning for forgiveness is probably not necessary.

5. Declare Future Intentions

At this point, it would be appropriate to make a declaration of our intention to NOT repeat these particular offenses in the future. If this involves habitual behaviors on our part, this may be a difficult and even conditional promise. We may be limited to expressing our determination to “do our best” to behave differently and better.

6. Make Restitution (when appropriate)

Paying someone back, for an offense that we have caused, isn't always appropriate. But when it is, we must see this as part of the reconciliation process.

If our offenses have caused material damage to someone else, it is our duty to make them whole again, to the extent that we are able. In fact, the scriptures mandate that we repay more than we have damaged or stolen.

Even if there are no material damages involved, “overpaying” for the wrongs that we have done can be a very effective means of demonstrating our sincerity and for wooing the favor of the offended party.

Proverbs 18:16

A man's gift makes room for him

SPECIAL CASE:

When we have wronged someone publicly, or harmed their reputation in some way, we must make amends. If we have slandered them in our gossip or involved others in the offense in any way, we must make restitution as much as we are able.

The rule of thumb is that one should express repentance and pursue forgiveness to the extent of the circle of those involved and affected.

In other words:

- If I think unfair and unkind thoughts towards someone, but don't communicate them, then my repentance can be before God alone.
- If my offense is personal, and only the offended party is impacted, the circle of influence is just between me and him/her. (Offended parties should always be careful not to draw others into their

offenses and tempt their friends to take up an unwarranted offense on their behalf.)

- If my offense dragged others into the mess, then they become part of the circle of those I need to go back to when expressing my repentance and trying to make things right.
- If I sin publicly, then my repentance and petition for forgiveness needs to be public as well.
- Finally, we must never forget that ALL sin is first and foremost against God. He is ALWAYS involved in the circle of influence.

PUTTING ASIDE THE PAST

Sometimes our sins are so significant that our problem grows beyond obtaining the forgiveness of others and involves the need to forgive ourselves. In order to be able to forgive ourselves and avoid the pit of self-condemnation we need to:

1. Understand that condemnation is not from God.

The Holy Spirit **convicts** us of specific sins to lead us to repentance. This conviction is the way in which we can be reconciled to God and enjoy the benefits of His fellowship. Condemnation separates us from God.

2. Know that we can't "purge" our sins by condemning ourselves.

1 John 3:19-21

We shall know by this that we are of the truth, and shall assure our heart before Him, in whatever our heart condemns us; for God is greater than our heart, and knows all things. Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence before God...

HOMEWORK:

Practice the art & the spiritual discipline of Reconciliation.