

July 22 2018am - "Relationship Repair -Mending the Messes We Make."

Undivided Series

Some material adapted from a sermon by Brian Atwood on May 21, 2009.

<https://www.sermoncentral.com/Sermons/Print?sermonId=135423>

1st let's look at what God has to say about relationships.

John 13:34,35...³⁴ *"I give you a new command: Love one another. Just as I have loved you, you are also to love one another."*³⁵ *By this everyone will know that you are My disciples, if you love one another."*

Ephesians 4:31-32... *Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.*

Romans 12:9-16...⁹ *Let love be without hypocrisy. Detest evil; cling to what is good.*¹⁰ *Love one another deeply as brothers and sisters. Outdo one another in showing honor.*¹¹ *Do not lack diligence in zeal; be fervent in the Spirit; serve the Lord.*¹² *Rejoice in hope; be patient in affliction; be persistent in prayer.*¹³ *Share with the saints in their needs; pursue hospitality.*¹⁴ *Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse.*¹⁵ *Rejoice with those who rejoice; weep with those who weep.*¹⁶ *Live in harmony with one another.*

A common solution we attempt in our relationships with other people is the idea that if we can just become the best versions of ourselves then it will all work out. What we really need is to become the best reflection of Jesus Christ!

Philippians 2:1-5... *If then there is any encouragement in Christ, if any consolation of love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any affection and mercy,*² *make my joy complete by thinking the same way, having the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose.*³ *Do nothing out of selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility consider others as more important than yourselves.*⁴ *Everyone should look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others.*⁵ *Adopt the same attitude as that of Christ Jesus.*

Now that we have a pretty good idea of what God has said about relationships, let's take an honest, and sometimes painful look at what's going on today

We all make mistakes in relationships. We all mess up. We mess up in our friendships, we mess up before marriage, during marriage, in parenting, in church relationships, with our neighbors, on the job. But do you realize that it is NOT messing up that always destroys our relationships? It is also the failing to handle our missteps so that our relationships can grow stronger and deeper that destroys them!

Good, solid relationships are not ones where we've never sinned against one another. That's impossible! Good relationships come from how we handle our failures. How do we deal with one another when we sin? Strong marriages, good parent-child relationships, happy church families, productive work environments, or our society at large - are all built on people properly handling one another's mess-ups!

We're human, so we're all going to fail. We're going to fail in our relationships. But what are we going to do with those failures? Even in the church? What do we do when we fail one another or when someone in the

body of Christ has a relationship failure? Sadly, quite often the church shoots their wounded. What do we do when a marriage in the church family is on the skids? What do we do when a teen or young adult messes up? What do we do when someone has an affair? How do we mend our messes even as a church family? The lost and unbelieving world around us will find it impossible to get things right with one another if we, as the people of God, don't practice and model God's plan. We need to know what to do, so that's why we're going to talk today about **"Relationship Repair, Mending the Messes We Make."**

We're not giving attention to this so that we can excuse our sin, but so that we can grow from the mistakes we've made. Repairing relationship mess-ups isn't about getting away with stuff. It's about doing the right thing once we've messed up. Not sweeping our mess-ups under the rug or ignoring them and hoping that the results of our mess-ups will somehow magically disappear. They won't go away on their own. We've got to be proactive when we fail one another in our relationships. So, even though we do mess up in our relationships, we're not saying that messing up is something we take lightly. It's very serious. But the point is - we don't have to give up on relationships simply because we've messed up. This is one of many good news threads in the Bible! God allows for and encourages restoration and repair in our relationships! He doesn't want us to be miserable. He wants us to have joy and peace in life - amazingly, He wants this for us even after we've messed up! This is part of God's amazing grace and what we're considering today! **Our need and goal is to know HOW to repair our relationships so that they are better relationships.** We're going to use a seldom-mentioned story in the book of Genesis to discover some Precepts of Relationship Repair. This is a story about a King named Abimelech and the famous man of faith, Abraham.

Genesis 21:22-31...²² *Then Abimelech came with Phicol, the commander of his army, and said to Abraham, "God is with you in everything you do."*²³ *So make a promise to me here before God that you will be fair with me and my children and my descendants. Be kind to me and to this land where you have lived as a stranger; as kind as I have been to you."*²⁴ *And Abraham said, "I promise."*²⁵ *Then Abraham complained to Abimelech about Abimelech's servants who had seized a well of water.*²⁶ *But Abimelech said, "I don't know who did this. You never told me about this before today."*²⁷ *Then Abraham gave Abimelech some sheep and cattle, and they made an agreement.*²⁸ *Abraham also put seven female lambs in front of Abimelech.*²⁹ *Abimelech asked Abraham, "Why did you put these seven female lambs by themselves?"*³⁰ *Abraham answered, "Accept these lambs from me to prove that you believe I dug this well."*³¹ *So that place was called Beersheba because they made a promise to each other there.*

Genesis 21:22-32 Abraham's Covenant with Abimelech

²² *At that time Abimelech, accompanied by Phicol the commander of his army, said to Abraham, "God is with you in everything you do."*²³ *Swear to me by God here and now, that you will not break an agreement with me or with my children and descendants. As I have been loyal to you, so you will be loyal to me and to the country where you are a resident alien."*

²⁴ *And Abraham said, "I swear it."*²⁵ *But Abraham complained to Abimelech because of the well that Abimelech's servants had seized.*

²⁶ *Abimelech replied, "I don't know who did this thing. You didn't report anything to me, so I hadn't heard about it until today."*

²⁷ *Abraham took flocks and herds and gave them to Abimelech, and the two of them made a covenant.*

²⁸ *Abraham separated seven ewe lambs from the flock.*²⁹ *And Abimelech said to Abraham, "Why have you separated these seven ewe lambs?"*

³⁰ *He replied, "You are to accept the seven ewe lambs from me so that this act^[g] will serve as my witness that I dug this well."*³¹ *Therefore that place was called Beer-sheba^[h] because it was there that the two of them swore an oath.*³² *After they had made a covenant at Beer-sheba, Abimelech and Phicol, the commander of his army, left and returned to the land of the Philistines.*

Abimelech was a Philistine king who lived in the city of Gerar. You might remember him because, before the conversation we just read, when Abraham first arrived in Abimelech's area, Abe told a bodacious lie! He spread it around that Sarah was his sister instead of his wife. He was afraid that if they knew Sarah was his wife they would kill him in order to take her away because she was a beautiful woman and he was outnumbered. When King Abimelech heard that Sarah was not married he decided to take her to be his wife. Very poor relationship move on Abe's part! Lying, and thereby allowing another man to think his own wife was available! God had mercy on Abraham's sin and revealed to Abimelech in a dream that he had made an innocent, yet tragic, mistake by planning on marrying Sarah. So the king returned Sarah to Abraham untouched and made restitution for any embarrassment that had been caused. Abimelech had learned through this incident, and also by the way that Abraham's family and flocks were being blessed, that God was "with" Abraham. In fact he said to Abe, ***"God is with you in everything you do."*** (V.22)

Abimelech is apparently a God-fearing man. God strategically placed him in Abraham's path as a friend in order to teach both of these men - and consequently - to teach us - about relationships.

The interaction between Abraham and Abimelech exemplifies relationship repair in these ways.

1. WE MUST DESIRE TO MEND THE RELATIONSHIP.

Sometimes we grow comfortable with dysfunction. Something is not what it should be, but we just settle in and get used to it. This is one thing if we have done all we can. We can't force others to do what they will not. The children of broken homes can't force parents to behave themselves and love one another. It is a different thing when we are talking about relationships in Christ. If you see that I am not what I ought to be and you do not act to correct my sin, I could be lost—but you could as well. God told Ezekiel that failing to warn his brethren to turn from sin could jeopardize his own soul (Ezek. 3:16-21). When a Christian becomes entangled in sin, other Christians are commanded in Galatians 6:1... ***"restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness"*** (Gal. 6:1). We must firmly desire to mend what is broken whether it be within our souls or our relationships.

<http://focusmagazine.org/mending-broken-relationships.php>

2. RELATIONSHIPS ARE REPAIRED THROUGH KINDNESS.

Abimelech asks Abraham to promise to be fair with him. He says in verse 23... ***"Be kind to me and to this land where you have lived as a stranger; as kind as I have been to you."***

If you experience a rift in your marriage, or in a friendship, in the church, on the job, or with a neighbor, kindness is one of the greatest tools available for restoring your relationship to its prior place - even for making it a better and stronger relationship!

This is such a simple yet often overlooked ingredient for rock-solid relationships, especially relationships in need of repair. The natural inclination in times of relationship stress is to be UN-kind. We want to bask in bitterness and let our anger boil when our relationships get messy. We want to yell and curse and be rude. But those are precisely the kinds of attitudes and actions that hinder relationship repair. The Bible says:

Ephesians 4:31-32 (CEV)...³¹Stop being bitter and angry and mad at others. Don't yell at one another or curse each other or ever be rude. ³²Instead, be kind and merciful, and forgive others, just as God forgave you because of Christ. The next time they mess up in your relationship, instead of following your natural inclination to be rude and rowdy - be kind!

Being kind doesn't mean you have to agree with the other person. You can disagree kindly. Being kind can be difficult sometimes, but it repairs relationships because it's what God wants from you.

Micah 6:8 ... *"He has shown you, O Man, what is good and what the Lord requires of you: to act justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with your God.*

What a revolution in our relationships would occur if we would "love being kind to others!"

Listen to this story about kindness and relationship repair."A young man cowered in the corner of a dirty, roach infested death row cell in a South Carolina prison. His body curled in a fetal position, he seemed oblivious to the filth and stench around him. His name was Rusty, He was sentenced to die for the murder of a Myrtle Beach woman in a crime spree that left four people dead. Police arrested twenty-three old Rusty Wellborn from Point Pleasant, West Virginia in 1979, following one of the most brutal slayings in South Carolina history. Rusty was tried for murder and received the death penalty for his crime. Bob McAlister, a deputy chief of staff to South Carolina's governor, became acquainted with Rusty on death row.

Bob had become a Christian a year or so earlier and felt a strong call from God to minister to the state's inmates, especially those spending their last days on death row. Bob's first look at Rusty revealed a pitiful sight. Rusty was lying on the floor when he arrived, a pathetic picture of a man who believed he mattered to no one. The only signs of life in the cell were the roaches, which scurried over everything, including Rusty himself. He stared blankly at Bob as he began to talk, but did not respond.

During visit after visit, Bob tried to reach Rusty, telling him of the Love that Jesus had for him and of his opportunity, even on death row, to start a new life in Christ. He talked and prayed continuously, and finally Rusty began to respond to the stranger who kept invading his cell. Little by little, he opened up, until one day he began to weep as Bob was sharing with him. On that day, Rusty Wellborn, a pitiful man with murder and darkness behind him and his own death closing in ahead of him, gave his heart to Jesus Christ.

When Bob returned to Rusty's cell a few days later, he found a new man. The cell was clean and so was Rusty. He had renewed energy and a positive outlook on life. McAlister continued to visit him regularly, studying the Bible and praying with him. The two men became close friends over the next five years, in fact McAlister said that Rusty grew into the son he never had, and as for Rusty, he had taken to calling McAlister "Pap."

Bob learned that Rusty's childhood in West Virginia had been anything but "almost heaven." His family was destitute, and Rusty was neglected and abused as a youngster. School was an ordeal both for him and for his teachers. Throughout his junior high years he wore the same two pair of pants and two ragged shirts. Out of shame, frustration, and a lack of adult guidance, Rusty quit school in his ninth grade year, a decision that was to be just the beginning of his troubles.

His teenage years were full of turmoil as he was kicked out of his home many times and ran away countless others. He spent the better part of his youth living under bridges and in public rest rooms.

Bob taught Rusty the Bible, but Rusty was the teacher when it came to Love and Forgiveness. This young man who had never known real love was amazed and thrilled about the Love of God. He never ceased to be surprised that other people could actually love someone like him through Jesus Christ.

Rusty's childhood enthusiasm was a breath of fresh air to Bob, who came to realize how much he had taken for granted, especially with regard to the Love of his family and friends. Rusty became extremely bothered by the devastating pain he had caused the family and friends of his victim. Knowing that God had forgiven him, he desperately wanted the forgiveness of those he had wronged.

Then a most significant thing happened: the brother of the woman Rusty had murdered became a Christian. God had dealt with him for two years about his need to forgive his sister's killer. Finally, he wrote Rusty a letter that offered not only forgiveness but also Love in Christ. Not long before his scheduled execution, this brother and his wife came to visit Rusty. Bob was present when the two men met and tearfully embraced like long-lost brothers finally reunited.

Rusty's senseless crime ten years earlier had constructed an enormous barrier between himself and the brother. The Love of Christ obliterated that barrier and enabled both men to realize that, because of Him, they truly were brothers reunited on that day. It was a lesson Bob would not forget. Not only did Rusty teach Bob McAlister how to Love and Forgive; he also taught him a powerful lesson about how to die. As the appointed day approached, Rusty exhibited a calm and assurance like Bob had never seen.

On his final day, with only hours remaining before his 1:00 A.M. execution, Rusty asked McAlister to read to him from the Bible. After an hour or so of listening, Rusty sat up on the side of his cot and said, "You know the only thing I ever wanted was a home, Pap. Now I'm going to get one." Bob continued his reading, and after a few minutes Rusty grew still, very still. Thinking he had fallen asleep, Bob placed a blanket over him and closed the Bible. As he turned to leave he felt a strong compulsion to lean and kiss Rusty on the forehead. A short time later, Rusty Welborn was executed for murder.

A woman assisting Rusty in his last moments shared this postscript to his story: As he was being prepared for his death, Rusty looked at her and said. "What a shame that a man's gotta wait till his last night alive to be kissed and tucked in for the very first time." (From "Bad Beginnings to Happy Endings," by Ed Young)

Don't wait to be kind to those you love. They're going to mess up. You're going to mess up. Kindness is healing medicine!

3. RELATIONSHIPS ARE REPAIRED THROUGH HONEST AND OPEN COMMUNICATION

After the promise of mutual kindness is made between Abraham and Abimelech, Abe brings up a "situation."

Abraham complained to Abimelech about Abimelech's servants who had seized a well of water. (V. 25)

Ever have "situation" in your relationships? Of course you have! That's what causes relationships to need repairing. Something happens. A "situation" arises. Someone hurts you in some way. They cross the boundary of acceptable behavior into the territory of bad behavior.

In Abraham's case, the "situation" was that someone in Abimelech's employ had forcibly taken a well that belonged to Abraham.

In those days it was a "well" established rule (no pun intended) that if you went to the extensive time and trouble to dig a well, you had dibs on the water. Abraham's water rights had been violated.

But here's the important key to this story. This was the first that Abimelech heard about it! The king said to Abraham, "I don't know who did this. You never told me about this before today." (V. 26)

Ever have someone mad at you and you had no idea why? They skulk around and act all reserved and quiet, like they want you to know that they are aggravated with you but they won't tell you why? This happens in marriages and friendships all the time. It happens on the job and in the church. A "situation" needs attention but the person who can do something about the "situation" doesn't even know that a "situation" exists because the other person hasn't been open and honest enough in their communication to mention it.

Granted, there are "situations" that don't need to be discussed; especially a lot of petty things that we need to just forget about. But this wasn't a small thing and Abraham should have brought it up before.

The rule of thumb about being open and honest about a situation is this: If you're angry, sad, hurt, bothered, etc. about a "situation," then it needs to be openly and honestly discussed. When communication breaks down relationships stagnate. Relationships won't be repaired through silence. We have to find a way to overcome our insecurities, our fears, and talk to one another about our problems. We can afford to operate on the premise, "Others should know what's bothering me." That is a very self-centered proposal.

When relationship messes occur we need to talk through what happened so that we know both sides to the story. Abraham and Abimelech couldn't have a healthy relationship until open and honest communication existed. We need to be open and honest about our feelings, talking to others in love, humility and with resolution in mind. Jesus taught us the right way to go about it.

"If your brother wrongs you, go and show him his fault, between you and him privately. If he listens to you, you have won back your brother." Matthew 18:15 (Amplified Bible)

If you feel you've been wronged Jesus said that the responsibility to talk about it rests with you. It's entirely possible to start a discussion without starting an argument but you'll have to work at it. It takes practice and patience. But you have to commit yourself to the journey of open and honest communication in order to repair your relationships.

4. RELATIONSHIPS ARE REPAIRED BY ESTABLISHING BOUNDARIES.

Abraham liked how things were going in this conversation with Abimelech. The Bible says, Gen 21:37-31

²⁷ Then Abraham gave Abimelech some sheep and cattle, and they made an agreement. ²⁸ Abraham also put seven female lambs in front of Abimelech. ²⁹ Abimelech asked Abraham, "Why did you put these seven female lambs by themselves?" ³⁰ Abraham answered, "Accept these lambs from me to prove that you believe I dug this well." ³¹ So that place was called Beersheba because they made a promise to each other there.

This is a great picture of two influential men making a promise to each other about what belonged to whom and where the boundaries were in their relationship. Once you've decided to repair a relationship with kindness, and after you've established open and honest communication, establish the boundaries in your relationships.

Relationships have to have boundaries because we have to show respect to one another. But pay close attention to how it's effectively accomplished.

Two attitudes that Abraham displayed that we need to display while seeking boundaries in our relationships:

First, be willing to give as well as take.

Selfishness is one of the biggest relationship problems we face. Everyone can't have their own way all the time if we're going to enjoy healthy and happy relationships. Abraham "***gave Abimelech some sheep and cattle.***" He negotiated. Establishing boundaries is essential in relationships. We must respect one another. But they are established successfully when we are generous and willing to do our part. Parents, for instance, are owed respect from the children by virtue of God's intended order - "***Honor your father and mother,***" God commands us. But a wise parent will love their child in such a way that their child desires to honor them.

Secondly, be willing to do right when you've been done wrong.

After Abraham gave the king an unspecified number of sheep and cattle, then he added another seven lambs as a gesture of his willingness to forgive Abimelech's servants for stealing his well. Yes, this established a boundary. It was a way of going on record that this well belonged to Abraham - but he didn't try to make Abimelech respect his boundaries - by his good will he encouraged Abimelech to respect his boundaries voluntarily.

Mutual respect. It's part of the bedrock of good relationships. But you can't force it. You have to be diplomatic.

And I think this is part of the reason God blessed Abraham in spite of his weaknesses, like the lie about his wife being his sister. Abraham was like his Heavenly Father. God doesn't just write people off when they hurt Him; when they sin against Him. He shows His love. He gives and He gives and He gives. All the while He is extending His hand of mercy and grace to us so that we can voluntarily enjoy a relationship with Him.

Greatest Guideline is:

John 15:9-13...⁹ ***"As the Father has loved me, I have also loved you. Remain in my love.***¹⁰ ***If you keep my commands you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commands and remain in his love.***¹¹ ***"I have told you these things so that my joy may be in you and your joy may be complete.***¹² ***"This is my command: Love one another as I have loved you.***¹³ ***No one has greater love than this...***