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## WHAT DO YOU DO WITH A BROKEN RELATIONSHIP?

Let's face it. To all relationships there comes the inevitable crisis. Someone is offended, and a painful process of alienation begins. Attitudes quickly change. Inappropriate words and actions soon follow. The relationship is strained and at times even ended.

Is this your experience? If so, it is our prayer that this booklet, written by James Pittman, will help you with its practical answers to this crucial question.

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## RECOGNIZING THE SYMPTOMS

Unless you live by yourself on a remote island, you know all too well the pain of broken relationships. Even the best of friendships can go sour. Marriages have their bad days. Co-workers can turn the office into a battlefield. Churches split over personality conflicts. Families explode because of unkind words. Neighbors argue about barking dogs. The problem is of epidemic proportions. It is a greater threat to our well-being than influenza, cancer, or heart disease.

As with physical disorders, there are telltale signs that point to the problem. Like flashing red lights, these symptoms warn that something is seriously wrong. You can probably recognize the following symptoms from your own experience.

**Avoidance.** Longtime friends suddenly avoid each other after a conflict. Although they used to enjoy one another's company, now when they see each other they keep their distance.

**Irritability.** "What did you say?" "Leave me alone!" "She makes me sick!" "Mind your own business!" "So what?" "I said no and I mean no!" "I've had it!" "Get off my back, will you!" Do you recognize any of these fiery phrases? I'm sure you do. We've all heard them. And most of us will have to admit that we've said some of them.

**Silence.** A common response to a wounded relationship is "the silent treatment." We simply refuse to talk with the other person. It's a nonverbal signal that says, "I don't want to have anything to do with you, so leave me alone." For some, it is a way to insulate themselves from any further pain. For others, it is a way to get even. By refusing to talk, they hope to make the other person suffer.

**Enlisting allies.** It's unfortunate, but some people respond to broken relationships like nations that have just declared war. They immediately recruit allies by giving only their view of the issue. And this one-sided account is the ammunition used in the battle. Such behavior reveals insecurity and weakness. It uncovers a person's lack of confidence to handle the problem adequately on his own.

**Terrorism.** Like its counterpart in our world of bombings and hijackings, this form of personal aggression is subtle and comes without warning. With methods that are indirect and underhanded, it often destroys the innocent along with the supposed enemy. There are angry looks and words, and even physical abuse. At times it may involve slanderous attacks, causing the destruction of someone's influence or character.

If you see any of these symptoms, your relationship may be deteriorating. Now's the time to resolve the problem.

## MAKING IT WORSE

Poison ivy can make life miserable. The rash itself is hard to take, but the urge to itch is torture. To give in to the overwhelming temptation to scratch, though, only makes the problem worse. The poison spreads, and the agony is compounded. The right solution to the predicament is to apply some healing cream and to keep from doing what itchy skin cries out for you to do.

Broken relationships can make life miserable too. But, like dealing with poison ivy, our natural response may only make matters worse. Many times our attempted solutions just don't work. To avoid making those kinds of mistakes, let's look at some tactics that are ineffective or self-defeating.

**Ignore it.** The largest bird in the world, the ostrich, has the undeserved reputation of responding to imminent danger by sticking its head in the sand. That seems foolish. Yet many people respond in a similar way to broken relationships. Ignoring a problem allows it to spread like a cancer, eating away at the relationship.

**Attack the person.** We may make the mistake of attacking the person instead of the issue. Often the original cause of the conflict is forgotten. Name-calling or faultfinding takes over and builds a wall that hides the real issue.

**Manipulate.** Sometimes we are more interested in getting things to work out for our own personal interests. We may feel that we have all the answers and work to get others to see things our way. This in reality is a subtle form of pride and selfishness.

**Involve the wrong people.** We may mistakenly involve those individuals who are more interested in spreading gossip than in restoring relationships (Prov. 16:28).

**Talk too much.** Are we good listeners? Do we lend an ear and try to understand? It's not enough just to be on the talking end of an issue.

**Neglect timing and tact.** We may do and say the right things but not get the results we expected. If our efforts lack proper timing and loving tact, we will only compound the problem.

**Cover it up.** "Oh, just forget it." "Let's put it behind us, and start all over again." These and other similar statements are good if they express genuine reconciliation. But they are inadequate if they are nothing more than band-aids on a broken arm. Wounds inflicted in the heart need more than superficial words.

**Discard it.** Sometimes relationships are treated like disposable goods. If something goes wrong, it seems more trouble than it's worth to patch things up. Some may even suggest that the best solution is to end the association completely.

Yes, broken relationships can be made worse instead of better if we handle them the wrong way. The necessary repair work can be accomplished when we are willing to follow the pattern given by God.

## THE RIGHT PATTERN

Imagine for a moment that you are a lone soldier under orders to capture an enemy city. You slowly make your approach, and finally the city comes into view. It's an awesome spectacle. The walls that surround it are massive and lined with troops. The large metal gates appear impenetrable. You stand there in amazement, wondering what to do.

Sounds a little ridiculous, doesn't it? Yet the Bible says that trying to win back the friendship of an offended person is like trying to capture a fortified city. It says that anger is as difficult to overcome as barred gates.

A brother offended is harder to win than a strong city, and contentions are like the bars of a castle (Prov. 18:19).

Repairing a broken relationship is extremely hard, but it's not impossible. Like the lone soldier facing a fortified city, you need to know what to do. In the Bible, we find a plan of action modeled by God Himself.

In the person of Jesus Christ, we see the steps that God took to repair the broken relationship between Him and mankind. The activity of Christ was in reality the activity of God restoring an alienated world to Himself. Paul wrote: God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself (2 Cor. 5:19).

In His example, we see the steps we must take in order to make peace with others.

What did God do? What were the steps He took to reunite us with Himself? The Bible gives us the answer: He loved, He humbled Himself, He suffered, He invited, and He forgave.

**HE LOVED:** *"In this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him. In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us" (1 Jn. 4:9-10).* God took the initiative for peace. He didn't wait for us. Even though we were at fault and showed no desire to make things right with Him, by sending His Son He took the first step. While we were still sinners, He proved His love for us (Rom. 5:8).

**HE HUMBLLED HIMSELF:** *"And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross" (Phil. 2:8).* What a profound truth! God humbled Himself. God the Son became a man--in the person of Jesus Christ. Setting aside His rights, Christ placed our concerns above His own. This amazing step of humility was absolutely necessary to repair our broken relationship with Him.

**HE SUFFERED:** *"Christ also suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive by the Spirit" (1 Pet. 3:18).* Sin had ruined our relationship with God, and only a painful sacrifice could make things right again. In giving His Son to die, God was willing to make that sacrifice for us.

What a step this was! It was a choice made by God to suffer. It was a choice made by Him to allow His Son to suffer--even to die--that we might live.

**HE INVITED:** *"He came and preached peace to you who were afar off and to those who were near. For through Him we both have access by one Spirit to the Father" (Eph. 2:17-18).* Through Christ, God has taken another step. He has sent a message to Jew and Gentile alike. It is an offer of peace based on the sacrifice of His Son. It is an opportunity to come to Him and to face the reality of our separation from Him. It is an invitation to confront the issues and accept His offer of restoration. The door of access to God is open.

**HE FORGAVE:** *"In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace" (Eph. 1:7).* Although we have been rebellious, God has been gracious. We deserve to be punished, but His desire is to show mercy. Rather than hold our sins against us, God wants to forgive us through His Son. This undeserved kindness can be hard to

comprehend by people who live by the slogan, "I don't get mad; I get even!" God doesn't want to get even; He wants to restore us to a right relationship with Himself. Such undeserved forgiveness is certainly a reason to praise Him. Because of what Christ did for us on the cross, we can be assured of God's complete acceptance. If and when we are willing to be restored, He is willing to forgive us freely.

Yes, God has modeled the steps necessary to repair bruised and broken relationships. His example should be the basis for our method of breaking down the barriers between people.

## THE RIGHT PRACTICE

As a child imitates his parents, so every Christian ought to follow the example of his heavenly Father. When confronted with the task of repairing a broken relationship, this becomes an absolute necessity. Our Father gives us the perfect pattern of how reconciliation is to be achieved. Like our Father, then, we should take the same steps of love, humility, suffering, invitation, and forgiveness.

## THE RIGHT PRACTICE

### STEP 1: LOVE

*"Therefore be followers of God as dear children. And walk in love, as Christ also has loved us" (Eph. 5:1-2).* Loving others with whom we have conflicts is not easy. But if a work of restoration is to be achieved, we must take the initiative in love. Since this step is so important, it is necessary to be sure we understand what it means. First we will look at what love is not.

**Love is not merely feelings.** In a broken relationship, positive emotions are often replaced by negative ones. In fact, as far as feelings are concerned, it may be quite some time before we have that sense of warmhearted acceptance between us and the other party.

**Love is not phony.** Forced smiles or any other false expressions of kindness are both superficial and artificial. They lack the genuine and lasting quality necessary to correct the problems in a broken relationship. Pretending to love others will not do. It has to be real. The apostle Paul wrote, "Let love be without hypocrisy" (Rom. 12:9).

**Love is not man-made.** It isn't of human origin or something we manufacture ourselves. God's kind of love is out of our league. Since we can't produce it, someone else has to. That person is the Holy Spirit, who lives in all Christians (1 Cor. 6:19). Under His guidance, we can truly love those whose acceptance we seek to regain (Gal. 5:22).

**Love is not retaliatory.** When mistreated by others, we must decide to do what is right. Jesus said, "Do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, and pray for those who spitefully use you" (Lk. 6:27-28). He was saying that we are to let kindness be our response to

hate. We should speak well of those who speak ill of us. Prayerful concern should be shown for those who treat us in degrading ways. In short, we choose to do what's right toward others, regardless of their response.

Now that we have looked at what love is not, let's take a positive approach.

**Love overrules personal feelings.** This concept is not easy to put into practice. It means taking a stand against ourselves. While committed to right actions toward others, we must refrain from expressing our negative emotions. In reality, our bad feelings are suppressed for the good of others. Yet it is a part of that self-denial to which Christ calls us (Mt. 16:24). Responding the right way to others in spite of our feelings is an all-important step in repairing relationships.

**Love looks in the mirror.** Perhaps the most difficult aspect of loving others is to examine our own attitudes. But that should be our primary task. Before we try to straighten out the other person, we had better make sure our heart is right. Jesus said, "Hypocrite! First remove the plank from your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck out of your brother's eye" (Mt. 7:5). It's hard and often painful, but it can be done.

Once again, we are dependent on the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives. His ministry is to give us renewed hearts and minds (Rom. 12:2). With His assistance we can replace anger, bitterness, and malice with kindness, tenderheartedness, and forgiveness (Eph. 4:31-32).

**Love makes the first move.** Our natural inclination is to avoid those with whom we have relational strife. However, if we are going to remedy the situation, we must be willing to initiate the process. Loving them first means just that. It is the willingness to take the first step, to go to them and begin to work things out (Mt. 5:23-24; 18:15). Yes, broken relationships can be repaired when we initiate the process in love.

**Thinking It Over.** Has anyone hurt you recently? Have you decided to put aside your feelings and do what is right? Have you asked God to help you to love that person rather than ignore or retaliate? If you make the first move after seeking God's help, does that guarantee that the other person will accept your love? How long should love continue to reach out for reconciliation?

## THE RIGHT PRACTICE

### STEP 2: HUMBLE YOURSELF

*"I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to have a walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (Eph. 4:1-3).*

One of the biggest hindrances to settling our disputes with others is pride. The problems could be remedied, but our egos get in the way. Any peacemaking action is somehow viewed as weakness. Since we don't want others to think we are weak, we protect our dignity by not approaching them or by being unapproachable.

But this kind of hardness for the sake of personal esteem is wrong, especially for Christians. If God in Christ could lower Himself to be at peace with sinners, we can lower ourselves to be at peace with each other. In fact, we are commanded to walk "with all lowliness." Therefore, whenever we have problems with others, we should approach them in humility. With this in mind, it's important to understand what humility really is.

**Humility Defined.** The *American Heritage Dictionary* defines humility as being the opposite of pride. But what kind of pride? What the dictionary editors had in mind was certainly not the acceptable kind--such as the pride we have in our work, our family, and our country. Rather, the opposite of humility is conceit, self-centeredness, and arrogance.

If humility is the opposite of this kind of pride, it means that we should not think of ourselves more highly than we ought (Rom. 12:3). It means that we should be interested in the needs and concerns of others (Phil. 2:4). And when we think this way, our desire will be to become the servants of one another (Eph. 5:21).

**Humility In Practice.** How does humility work in repairing relationships? First, if we're not big-headed, no deed will be considered too small and no sacrifice too big to make things right between us and others. Second, if we are sincerely interested in what concerns other people, then their feelings and opinions will be as important to us as our own. Even though it may be difficult, we will try to be understanding.

Finally, if we are humble, we will continue to respect people, even though we may disagree. We will try to serve them in helpful ways, even if they do not appreciate our efforts.

Relationships can be mended if we have the mind of Christ and humble ourselves as He did (Phil. 2:5). Then we will also be prepared to accept personal suffering, which is the next important step.

**Thinking It Over.** What rights did Jesus set aside in order to win us back to Himself? If He did all that for us, why do we have so much trouble setting aside our rights? When was the last time you were in a situation where you were "in the right" but you humbled yourself by seeking out the other person? If you realize that you are the one who is wrong, how can you express your humility?

## THE RIGHT PRACTICE

### STEP 3: BE WILLING TO SUFFER

*"Therefore, since Christ suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same mind" (1 Pet. 4:1).* Jesus Christ was the God-man dying for the sins of the whole world. In that sense, the suffering of Christians could never be like His. But there are many ways in which we can follow Christ's example. Suffering in a Christlike manner includes the following characteristics: commitment, courage, confidence, empathy, and endurance.

**Commitment.** Christ was determined to do the Father's will, regardless of the suffering (Mt. 26:39). It is our heavenly Father's will that we live peaceably with all people (Rom. 12:18). When conflicts arise--and they will--we should be committed to work toward reconciliation, knowing that suffering is a part of the process.

**Courage.** Christ knew that His suffering would be great, but He faced it bravely (Lk. 9:51). When things go wrong between us and others, we often lack the heart to confront the problems because of the pain. Even though suffering may be involved, we must courageously resolve the issues.

**Confidence.** Jesus placed Himself into the hands of the Father, in spite of the things He suffered (1 Pet. 2:23). Oh, how difficult this is for us to do! Yet this is the key to getting the best out of the worst kind of situation. When we put our confidence in God, He not only strengthens us, but He also works everything out for our good (Rom. 8:28).

**Empathy.** Jesus identified with us completely in our human sorrow (Isa. 53:3-4). His expressions of understanding and compassion attracted people who needed to be reconciled to God. We too can greatly influence the people we are alienated from when we share their problems and pain. It may help them to accept us if they notice that we hurt when they hurt. The apostle Paul said: Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep (Rom. 12:14-15).

**Endurance.** Christ faced His suffering with patient endurance, and so must we (Heb. 12:1-3). Suffering because of others is very hard to accept, especially in broken relationships. Criticism, misunderstanding, and rejection cause pain that we naturally seek to avoid. But if personal conflicts are to be resolved, the hurt involved in the process must be endured. Nobody likes to suffer. But it's worth it if that's what it takes to regain a lost friendship or repair a broken marriage. Yes, repairing broken relationships is a painful process. But it is possible if we are prepared to accept the suffering.

**Thinking It Over.** Where and why did all this suffering begin? (see Gen. 3). How can a genuine expression of empathy break down barriers of bitterness and hate? Can you recall specific ways you have willingly suffered in order to restore shattered relationships?

## THE RIGHT PRACTICE

### STEP 4: INVITE RECONCILIATION

*"Moreover, if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother" (Mt. 18:15).* When we are disputing with others, one of the hardest things to do is to sit down and calmly talk it over. It is so easy to avoid them or to allow angry emotions to spill out during what we intended to be a quiet discussion of our differences. A confrontation is often avoided because of embarrassment, fear, or even anger. But it is absolutely necessary if relationships are to be repaired. Whenever conflict exists, we must invite the other party to talk about the issues with us so that the differences can be resolved.

**The Command.** An invitation to reconciliation is an expression of obedience to the Lord's command. Jesus taught that the right way to settle a dispute was for the individuals themselves to get together and work it out. Whether we have knowingly offended others or they have offended us, our responsibility is to go to them and resolve the problem. Getting them to cooperate may be difficult, but the Lord has instructed us to do it. We have no reasonable option but to obey.

**The Need For Honesty.** A face-to-face encounter has no value unless we intend to be open and sincere. If someone has wronged us, we are to tell them. If we are hurt or angry, we must say it. However, this should not be done for the sake of argument or to get even. Rather, we should let the other person know that we are being candid because we want things to be right between us.

**The Importance Of Privacy.** The conflict is often made worse when the problem is not confined to the parties involved. We must be discreet. Whatever we have to say should be said privately to the one who is at fault. This approach keeps us from backbiting, slander, and gossip. It also guards the reputations of all involved. By not making the matter public, we show our respect. Also, by that action, we may influence the person to respond favorably to us as well.

**The Time For Mediators.** A face-to-face encounter with the other person may not resolve the problem. According to Matthew 18:16, if the private confrontation fails, we should enlist the help of others. The wisdom and influence outsiders may bring can be helpful. And even if the problem remains, they can still be witnesses to guard against any misrepresentation of the things discussed. Then, if we're unsuccessful--even with the help of mediators--the next step is to take them before the church.

When we have strife with others, therefore, we must invite them to confront the issues and work with us to resolve them.

**Thinking It Over.** When was the last time you sat down with an adversary and talked through the issues that separated you from him? Why is it so hard to be straightforward when confronting others? Why is it easier to enlist allies than to seek a godly mediator? If you are aware of a rift between two people, what can you do to help mediate the conflict?

## THE RIGHT PRACTICE

### STEP 5: FORGIVE

"... *forgiving one another, just as God in Christ also forgave you*" (Eph. 4:32). A Sunday school teacher was explaining forgiveness to her class of first-graders. She said that if a classmate mistreated one of them, they had to be kind in return. And if the offender said he was sorry, it was not to be held against him. The class members looked at one another with troubled faces until finally one of the little girls blurted out, "But teacher, that's hard!"

She was right. It's hard for all of us. Yet broken relationships cannot be repaired unless we are ready to do what is difficult. We must be willing to acknowledge our offenses and forgive one another as God has forgiven us. But how is our response to others to reflect God's forgiveness?

**Judicial Forgiveness.** This means that our forgiveness, like God's, is not a matter of overlooking or excusing the offenses of others. It is concerned with upholding justice. It recognizes the wrongness of what people do to each other, and the rightness of proper punishment. But it also recognizes that since Jesus has already taken the punishment, we are free to forgive without violating the just law of retribution. Yes, what people do to each other may hurt, but it has been paid for by Jesus Christ Himself. This makes forgiving each other the right thing to do.

**Conditional Forgiveness.** As God has forgiven us, we must be willing to forgive one another at all times. But that forgiveness is not complete unless those who have offended us are willing to repent. Jesus taught:

If your brother sins against you, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him. And if he sins against you seven times in a day, and seven times in a day returns to you, saying, "I repent," you shall forgive him (Lk. 17:4).

There has to be a genuine acknowledgment of the wrong done and a serious effort to clear it with the one offended. Without it, relationships can't be repaired.

**Decisional Forgiveness.** This means that we must choose to forgive in spite of our feelings. The Bible says that even though God is grieved and angered by our sin (Ps. 7:11), He chooses to forgive (Eph. 4:32). And we must do the same with each other. Regardless of our feelings, we must choose to forgive whatever may have been said or done to offend us.

**Emotional Forgiveness.** Although we must forgive even when we don't feel like it, we should strive to include the proper emotional element. This means that forgiving each other not only involves the use of our will, but it also includes the attitude of our hearts. Paul pointed this out in his letter to the Colossian Christians. He said that we should have heartfelt compassion toward others, along with kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience. We should bear with each other, forgiving whatever complaints we may have against one another (Col. 3:12-13).

These ideals are not easy to put into practice when someone has hurt us deeply and is throwing insults our way. But the proper response can be ours if we allow God to control our hearts. The apostle Paul's inspired list of the fruit of the Spirit points to the right attitudes.

The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law. And those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit. Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another (Gal. 5:22-26).

If we truly want to honor God with our lives, we must let His Spirit work in us so that ours will be a forgiveness that comes from the heart.

**Thinking It Over.** When someone asks you for forgiveness, do you find it hard for you to forgive? Why? Are we right to hold back our forgiveness from those who haven't acknowledged their wrong? How can lack of forgiveness on our part hinder our own relationship with God?

## WHAT IF IT DOESN'T WORK?

God does not hold us responsible for results, but He does hold us responsible for what we do and how we do it. As far as broken relationships are concerned, it is our Christian duty to imitate our heavenly Father and follow the steps modeled by Him. If we have made a sincere effort to do so and the issues are still unresolved, then the following suggestions should be considered:

**Don't Blame Yourself.** The psalmist wrote, "My soul has dwelt too long with one who hates peace. I am for peace; but when I speak, they are for war" (Ps. 120:6-7). Can you identify with his frustration? Sometimes it may seem that you have tried everything to make peace but the other person keeps attacking and tossing bombs at you. When that happens, you need to do what you can and then leave the rest up to God.

When relationships break down, both sides must be willing to work toward repairing them. Unfortunately that doesn't always happen. So often when one side tries to work things out, the other doesn't cooperate. Like the psalmist, we may be for peace but "they are for war." Therefore, the blame is not ours but theirs. It is their attitude that hinders the restorative process. It may be bitterness, fear, anger, shame, resentment, or even pride. Whatever it may be, the fault is theirs and not ours. If we have done all we can, and the relationship remains strained, then they must answer to God for it.

**Trust God To Change The Other Person.** The apostle Paul wrote to Timothy the following words of advice: "A servant of the Lord must not quarrel but be gentle to all, able to teach, patient, in humility correcting those who are in opposition, if God perhaps will grant them repentance, so that they may know the truth" (2 Tim. 2:24-25). We would do well to heed these words. When we have others opposing us, we should not be quarrelsome. But we should be gentle and patient. We should talk to them meekly and courteously. And even though our efforts may not make a difference, God is able to change their attitudes and their behavior.

Therefore, we should be encouraged. We may have failed at first, but that may not be the case in the long run. We must be patient and pray for them. We must trust God to change them.

**Get The Help Of A Third Party.** Sometimes it takes a mediator to bring people back together. While in prison, the apostle Paul mediated a dispute between a servant named Onesimus and his master Philemon. Evidently, the servant had wronged his master and deserted him. Some time later, Onesimus met the apostle and became a Christian. Paul wrote a letter to Philemon to let him know what had happened. In a wonderful expression of Christian love, Paul appealed to Philemon to restore Onesimus, not merely as a servant but as a Christian brother. Paul also made himself accountable for any loss that Philemon may have suffered at the hands of Onesimus (Phile. 16-18). Like Philemon and Onesimus, we may need a negotiator too. Our mediators should be godly, wise, and loving. They should be people who understand us and the situation. They should be impartial and objective in their judgments. And above all, they must be sensitive to God's leading.

Whether it be a pastor, a counselor, or a trusted friend, a mediator can be effective where we have failed.

**Love Them Unconditionally.** Even though we may not have been successful in removing the reason for conflict between us and others, we must love them anyway. Our desire should be to treat them right no matter how they feel or act toward us.

In 1 Corinthians 13:4-7, Paul described the qualities of unconditional love for others:

We should **be patient**. This requires a conscious and often difficult effort to refrain from reflex retaliation. We should cultivate the ability to respond in a Christlike way when we are wronged.

We should **be kind**. Choosing to do deeds of kindness gives us the ability to respond to mistreatment with goodness. Our opponent will be thrown off guard by such an unexpected response!

We should **not be jealous**. When our enemies succeed, we should not covet their good fortune. Although they may not deserve what they are receiving, we must entrust ourselves to God.

We should **not brag**. Any speech that wrongly promotes us to make us look better than those who reject us is inappropriate.

We should **not be big-headed**. Pride sets up barriers to resolving conflicts. It keeps us from making the personal sacrifices that are often needed to patch up tattered friendships.

We should **not be rude**. You certainly don't put out a fire by pouring gasoline on it, and you certainly do not subdue anger by more harsh words. No matter how badly we have been hurt, disrespectful or inconsiderate comments are out of place.

We should **not be selfish**. We are not to be concerned only with our own wants and needs. We must train ourselves to be equally interested in the concerns of those with whom we are at odds.

We should **not be quick-tempered**. When people irritate us, do we lash out without thinking? This doesn't please God. A person with a "hair-trigger" temper needs to learn to put his mind in gear before his mouth.

We should **not hold grudges**. If we don't keep mental records of wrongs done against us, we will not desire revenge against those who have hurt us.

We should **not delight in evil**. When our adversary suffers a downfall or an injustice of any kind, we are not to gloat over his misery.

We should always **rejoice with the truth**. When God's Word is obeyed and people respond properly to problems, we should praise God and rejoice.

We should **be protective**. Honest concern for those with whom we have strife will keep us from hanging out their "dirty laundry" for all to see.

We should **be trusting**. Instead of anticipating the worst from people or looking suspiciously at those who reject us, love gives the benefit of the doubt.

We should **be hopeful**. Love is optimistic about the possibility for reconciliation, always expecting positive change.

We should always **be loyal**. Love endures even when the going gets rough. It means remaining consistent in our attitude and actions toward those with whom we have personal conflict. When others refuse to be at peace with us, our commitment should still be to love them.

Although we may have tried to repair a broken relationship and failed, these suggestions can still be helpful. We should not give up. God is patient with sinners, wishing all to be restored to a right relationship with Him. Following His example, we must leave the door open for reconciliation and do all we can to see that it happens.

## RELATIONSHIP MAINTENANCE

Let's be honest. No one wants to experience the pain and embarrassment of a broken relationship. We would much rather have things go well between us and others. But good associations are not easy to maintain. In fact, it requires a diligent effort from all the people involved. As we take the necessary steps, it will help to promote the health and stability of the relationships that we have.

**Talk Openly.** It's very important that we freely and regularly share our thoughts and feelings with one another. When we do, it helps us to be more understanding. It gives us the ability to know each other better and to respond in the ways that we should.

**Communicate Honestly.** The Bible instructs us to get rid of all deceit and hypocrisy (1 Pet. 2:1). It also says that we should not lie to one another (Col. 3:9). Therefore, we should be honest in everything we do and say. This makes it possible for us to trust one another, and it binds us closer together.

**Respect Each Other.** Having the esteem of others is fundamental to our personal well-being. We don't feel good about ourselves unless others think that we are important. That's why friends and loved ones who care about us are so vital. They affirm our worth. When personal regard is mutually expressed, it causes us to respond to one another with a warmhearted acceptance. And this acceptance is maintained as we continue to honor one another (Rom. 12:10).

**Resolve Your Anger.** The Bible says, "Do not let the sun go down on your wrath" (Eph. 4:26). Our anger should be dealt with as quickly as possible. Before the day is over, we should go to the one who has offended us and clear it up. Not only will we sleep better, but problems will be handled before they have time to grow.

**Be Patient.** We need to overlook one another's imperfections. According to the Bible, we have to be patient, making allowances for one another's faults (Col. 3:13). None of us are excluded; all of us have flaws in our character. Instead of judging others and being critical, we should be humble and tolerant. If we are, it will help maintain our ties with others.

**Share One Another's Problems.** Let's face it. We need each other--especially when we have problems. It's true that each of us has the responsibility to handle his own troubles, but there comes a time when we all need the help of a friend. In fact, the Bible tells us that we should share each other's burdens and in this way we obey the Lord's command (Gal. 6:2). When we share each other's problems, we show that we care--making our relationships much more secure.

**Give Constructive Criticism.** The Bible says that open rebuke is better than secret love (Prov. 27:5). We may be reluctant to confront someone about a particular fault, but it's more loving to say something to him than to keep quiet and allow him to continue on as he is. Truthful and loving criticism has as its goal the best interests of the other person.

Although this kind of criticism hurts, it is the pain of friendship. By helping one another this way, we show that we really care. Through constructive criticism we become better people. And as a result, our relationships are improved.

**Serve One Another.** Rather than asking what we can get, we should be asking what we can give. Instead of seeking to please ourselves, we should be seeking to please each other (Rom. 15:2). This attitude recognizes that selfishness only ruins a relationship, but self-sacrifice builds it up. When we serve one another our relationship is maintained and everyone involved benefits. Yes, these maintenance procedures are very important. If we faithfully follow them, they will help keep a relationship strong.

## CASE STUDIES: PEOPLE WHO TRIED

The principles stated in this book are not merely nice-sounding theories. These biblical truths work in real life. And they may be applied by anyone who is willing to try them.

Several people from different walks of life were asked if they ever had a broken relationship and what they did about it. Following are the answers they gave. *Based on the principles found in this booklet, what do you think of their responses?*

**A husband and wife.** "There were times we didn't think our marriage would last. In fact, on one occasion we experienced a complete breakdown in our relationship. It began with a lot of harsh words. Then there was no communication at all. For days we licked our wounds and ignored each other. We finally patched things up. Now we don't argue much anymore. It just isn't worth all the pain."

**A teenager.** "Relationships, who needs them! No matter how hard I try, I'm always blowing it with somebody. If it isn't with my parents, it's with my brother or sister. And school is just as bad. I don't even try to get along with everybody there. It's a struggle just to keep the few friends I

have. And we even fight sometimes. But after a while, we work it out. I guess it's because we really like each other."

**A secretary.** "I had a friend who was constantly criticizing me. When I talked to her about it, she was offended and our relationship ended. Later, we met again and renewed our friendship. She never did apologize, but she did stop the criticism. In spite of all that has happened, I really do care about her, and I've told her so."

**A factory worker.** "I guess relationships are important. But I have other things to worry about. I have a family to feed and bills to pay. Sure I'd like to get along with everybody, but sometimes that's too hard to do. Once I had a run-in with my boss. We argued, but later I apologized. Basically that's how I am with others. I try to be nice, but I usually mind my own business."

**A corporate executive.** "In all relationships it really boils down to integrity. You do the things that you know are right. If relationships are damaged, you do the right things to salvage them. But it doesn't always work--at least not for me. Once I made a management decision that alienated some people from me. I tried to resolve it, but I wasn't successful. So, there must be some things you have to live with."

**A senior citizen.** "When you get as old as I am, you treasure every moment you spend with others. Most of my friends and relatives are gone. So I do whatever I can to get along with people. I haven't always been this careful in the past. But I don't want to end up like some old folks I know. They've made such a mess of things that no one bothers with them anymore. Now they are lonely and bitter."

## TAKE THE FIRST STEP

Do you have a broken relationship? If so, what have you done with it? Have you ignored it, attacked the person, manipulated the situation, involved the wrong people, talked too much, forgotten timing and tact, covered up, or discarded it?

These are all the wrong things to do. The right thing to do is to repair it by following the steps modeled by God in Christ: love, humility, suffering, invitation, and forgiveness.

If you are a Christian, the Bible instructs you to follow the example of your heavenly Father (Eph. 5:1). You must take the proper steps to restore peace between you and others. No one has all the answers, but following the biblical procedures and principles can make a difference.

If you are not a Christian, your first consideration should be the broken relationship that exists between you and God. Because of one man's act of disobedience, all men and women are separated from God (Rom. 5:12). Because of His great love for the world, He did something to repair that broken relationship caused by sin. He sent His Son into the world to save sinners (1 Tim. 1:15). Jesus Christ, God's Son, died for our sins. He made it possible for us to be restored to

God. Now all those who receive Him are freely forgiven and brought into a personal relationship with God (Jn. 1:12).

Receive Him now and be right with God! Take that all-important first step.