

Appendix 1: How to Reconcile Broken Relationships

Reconciliation = skilfully restoring broken or strained relationships

Relationships can break and become strained. Sometimes it happens when another person wrongs you. Sometimes it happens when you wrong another. Sometimes no intentional wrong was done – perhaps there was a misunderstanding, or perhaps a lack of communication and effort has caused the connection to decline.

What are we to do when this happens? Listen to two things Jesus said... *Matthew 5:9 (Jesus said,) "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God."*

Jesus calls us to be peacemakers. It means that we actively pursue authentic, not superficial, harmony with people. The reason I say 'authentic not superficial' harmony is because we often settle for a kind of pseudo-peace where underlying tensions and conflicts go unaddressed. Sometimes being a peacemaker will entail being a peacebreaker. We may have to expose some painful issues to bring about real peace. We need to seek reconciliation between us and others, and between conflicting parties.

Elsewhere the Bible says it like this: *'If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.'* (Rom 12:18). This echoes the words of Jesus. Peace and harmony is something that we need to take responsibility for. We need to live at peace with everyone – as far as it depends on us.

Wonderfully Jesus promises that as we give ourselves to being peacemakers, people will discern that we really are agents of the God of peace. We will be perceived as God's children as we reflect his peacemaking character and intention in a conflict-filled world.

Matthew 5: 23 (Jesus said,) "Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother or sister has something against you, 24 leave your gift there in front of the altar. First, go and be reconciled to that person; then come and offer your gift."

See how Jesus tells you to deal with someone close to you whom you have hurt or offended. Jesus refers to ancient Jewish life where bringing an offering to the temple was of extreme importance. But he tells them that even more important than ritual faithfulness is looking after one's relationships. There is nothing more important and urgent than doing all you can to reconcile with people who feel hurt or offended by you.

Here are seven brief keys to skilfully reconciling broken or strained relationships

1. Talk to God before talking to the person.

Discuss the problem with God first. When you do this he can change your heart. And perhaps he can change the other person as you pray for them. As David did in the Psalms, ventilate vertically. Take your hurt and anger to him. Tell him what you feel. Cry if need be. Also, be sure to pray, 'God – help me not to look to this person to satisfy my deepest needs. That's your job.' When we look to people to make us happy, we end up setting ourselves up for far greater agony and disappointment when they let us down. Also, ask God to help you forgive the person.

2. Talk to the person, not to others.

What do most of us do when we're hurt? We talk to others about it. That only makes it worse, doesn't it? Jesus, in Matthew 18:15, tells us to talk to the person before talking to others: 'If a fellow believer hurts you go and tell him – work it out between the two of you. If he listens, you've saved the friendship. But if he doesn't, take one or two others along so the presence of witnesses will keep things honest.' By the way, when a person speaks to you about how another person hurt them, ask them if they've talked to the person yet. If not, it may be best to say, 'Please stop – talk to them first. That's what Jesus tells you to do in *Matthew 18:15.*' Proverbs says '*Fire goes out for lack of fuel, so tensions dissipate when gossip stops.*'

3. Always take the initiative to see the person.

Even if the other person is more in the wrong, Jesus tells you to take the initiative – and make time to talk with the person about the problem or conflict. The longer you wait, the more complicated the situation often becomes. In the warmest way possible say, 'Any chance I can come round. There's some stuff that I'd love for us to talk about.' Face to face is best. My experience is that trying to talk over the phone or by email only worsens the situation. Choose a good place, and make sure that you're both at your best when you talk. A rushed 30-minute lunch break won't do.

4. Listen more than you talk.

Use your ears more than your mouth. You may be hurt, but as you listen to the other person's feelings, you will realize they've been hurt too. Listen non-defensively. Don't react. Just listen. Sympathize with their feelings.

5. Confess your part in the conflict.

The Bible reminds us that if we claim we're without sin, we deceive ourselves. Instead of focusing on the wrong the other person did, focus on the wrong you did. Humbly apologize. Don't make excuses. As you do, it makes it easier for the other person to apologize. Ask for forgiveness.

6. Attack the problem, not the person.

At some point, you may need to speak about what the other person did that offended or hurt you. Think carefully about how you do this because if you come across in an attacking way, you'll do even more harm. The Bible says, 'Don't let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouth, but only that which is helpful for building the other person up.' As a general rule never say, 'You always...'. This will get their backs up. Rather say, 'When you did this (and be specific about what they did), this is how it affected me. This is how it made me feel.'

7. Aim at reconciliation, not total resolution.

Reconciliation focuses on the relationship. Resolution focuses on the issue. Even after speaking, you might not agree on the issue, but make sure you're reconciled to the person. It's unrealistic to think that all issues can be resolved. Perhaps say these words, 'I can live with us not seeing eye to eye on the issue. Perhaps after some time, we will. But I want you to know that my relationship matters to me a lot. Let's stay arm-in-arm even when we don't see everything eye-to-eye.' So that's the third building block: reconciliation. But there is one critical part of reconciliation I have left out because it deserves its own focus – it's the fourth building block...