

197. Relationships #1: Letting Go Of Your Past By Arland Steen

It does not matter how wealthy or famous you are, if your relationships are bad, life is miserable. Your happiness is largely determined by your ability to get along with others. The Bible is the greatest book on relationships. It talks about building a relationship with God and with others. In order to build a foundation for this series, I want to look at one of the greatest causes of why people have bad relationships. It is found in ...

Philippians 3:13-14 NIV *I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, 14 I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.*

Paul is pointing out something that we need to learn in building relationships: you cannot relate to the present if you are still reacting to the past. If you bring too many unresolved problems into current relationships, it will stifle them. We all carry some emotional garbage of three types:

1. We rehearse our resentments. Mentally we go over and over again the episodes with people who have hurt us.
2. We remember our regrets. These are things we feel guilty about. Then, when we rehearse our resentments and remember our regrets,
3. We reinforce our remorse. And we feel down.

When you do those three things and carry the emotional garbage that goes along with it, it tends to cause us to react to relationships rather than enjoy them.

So, according to Paul, you have to forget the former and focus on the future. That is easy to say but harder to do. Here are three things that may help.

□ YOU MUST GIVE UP ALL GRUDGES

Ephesians 4:31-32 NIV *31 Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. 32 Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.*

Circle "get rid." Otherwise, your relationships will be ruined.

Another reason is because resentment does not work. It does not upset the other person. It upsets you. They may be out having a great time and you are home stewing.

On top of that it is worthless. Being resentful toward people who have hurt you in the past will never change the past. It never resolves the problem. It only makes matters worse.

Resentment is also controlling. If you say to someone, "You make me so mad..." you are admitting your weakness. "You make me..." means "they" control your emotions. The truth is no one can make you mad without your permission. You are allowing them to make you mad.

All of us have been hurt in the past, but you cannot afford to allow people in your past to hurt you in the present. Some of them may have passed on and you do not even know it. My Dad use to pray for people who had died because he did not know it. So, Paul says to get rid of bitterness!

Job 5:2 GNB *To worry yourself to death with resentment would be a foolish, senseless thing to do.*

Who are you holding a grudge against? A former girlfriend or boyfriend? A former spouse? A former employer? A parent? Many adults still are unconsciously fighting their parents. They say, "I was unloved ... ignored ... abused verbally ... manipulated." When you moved away from home you took the hurt in your luggage with you. Again, for some of you, the person who hurt you in the past has already died. Now what are you going to do?

Job 18:4 GNB *You are only hurting yourself with your anger.*

When you hang on to hurt and allow it to pile up, you tend to take it out on your spouse or children. That is not fair! If you want to get on with your life, there is only one alternative: forgive everybody just as God has forgiven you. You have been forgiven, so forgive. You owe it to yourself.

□ YOU MUST GIVE UP GRIEF

Sorrow is a natural part of life. Everyone eventually experiences loss. Some of you may have had loss this past year and it hurts. Grieving is a natural part of life. There is nothing wrong with grieving over the loss but there is a huge difference between that and moaning and self-pity. When you moan you resign from life. It is when you declare that you quit or you have lost it all or you will never be happy again. These type of people then build a wall of isolation around themselves and won't allow anyone to get close to them because they might get hurt again.

Pain is a part of life but do not allow pain to make you a prisoner. You must let go of your grief as well as your grudges. The story of David and Bathsheba contains within it the steps you must take to let go of grief. Their illegitimate son became very sick and David fasted and prayed and wept for the child. He didn't sleep for six nights. But on the seventh day the child died. When the child died, David did three things. It is the same three things you need to do to let go of grief:

- **accept what cannot be changed**

2 Samuel 12:22-23 *NASB-1995* ²² *He said, "While the child was still alive, I fasted and wept; for I said, 'Who knows, the LORD may be gracious to me, that the child may live.'* ²³ *But now he has died; why should I fast? Can I bring him back again?*

David realized he had to get on with life. He accepted what could not be changed. If you are still in pain from something that happened years ago, you need to come to grips with reality and move on.

- **play it down and pray it up**

Many times people exaggerate their grief. "The world has ended!" No it hasn't. You are heartbroken but the world is still turning. Then you worship the Lord. Notice what David did.

2 Samuel 12:20 *TLB* *Then David got up off the ground, washed himself, brushed his hair, changed his clothes, and went into the Tabernacle and worshiped the Lord.*

What did David do with his grief? He went to church and worshipped the Lord. If your heart is breaking you need to focus on God. Unfortunately, what many people do is blame God or his representative. I'm not lessening the significance of your loss but I am saying for your own sake, you must accept what cannot be changed and play the grief down and pray it up. That person in your life may not be coming back.

- **focus on what is left instead of what is lost**

2 Samuel 12:24 *NASB-1995* *Then David comforted his wife Bathsheba, and went in to her and lay with her; and she gave birth to a son, and he named him Solomon.*

David still had family and loved ones and he focused on what was left not on what was lost.

You say, "I don't have much left!" You do, too! You have your life. You have a church full of people who will pray for you and care for you and love you if you make your needs known. Begin looking at what you do have.

Self-pity is much more damaging to your life than any tragedy you will ever face because it perpetuates the pain long after the pain should be manageable.

□ YOU MUST GIVE UP GUILT

Some people refuse to accept God's forgiveness. They hand on to their guilt as if they are paying for their own sins. They feel they can no longer have God's best for their life because of some dumb mistake they made. If you feel that way, you are wrong. If I believed that I would not be here. The message of the Good News is that there is hope. Always! But you must give up your guilt. Refusing to do that is the Humpty Dumpty syndrome of life. "All of the king's horses, and all the king's men, nobody's going to put me back together again." If that is your song, then you need to meet JC in a new way. He is the healer of scars.

Some people are torturing themselves with guilt and torturing their mate with guilt for things that happened long before they were married. And they are taking it out on their marriage today. That is not right. You've got to let go of your grudges – people who have hurt you. You've got to let go of your grief – things that are out of your control. You have to let go of your guilt – when things you have done have hurt others.

How do you let go of guilt? There are two approaches. One is right and one is wrong. They are both seen in two of the disciples of Jesus – Peter and Judas. Both denied Jesus on the night before He was taken into custody. They both sinned. But they responded very, very differently to their guilt.

Judas responded in condemnation. Self-condemnation. Matthew 27:3,5 *NIV* ³ *When Judas, who had betrayed him, saw that Jesus was condemned, he was seized with remorse and went away and hanged himself.* Suicide is the ultimate expression of self-condemnation. He said, 'I've blown it! I've made the biggest mistake of my life! Therefore, I am worthless!' There are many ways to live in condemnation without committing suicide and many people are doing it today.

Peter responded with confession. *Matthew 26:75 NIV Then Peter remembered the word Jesus had spoken: "Before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times." And he went outside and wept bitterly.* He had the same remorse Judas did but he confessed his sin. And a few days later God used him in a big way. Think about it. The man who denied Jesus Christ at the crucifixion was the same man that God chose to use 50 days later to speak to 3000 people and watch them all get saved. That is the God of the second chance. When you confess your guilt to God, He gives you a new start.

Confessing it to God does not mean you beg God. You don't beg God. He wants to forgive you more than you want to be forgiven. He's waiting to forgive you. He wants to wipe the slate clean.

You do not bargain with God either. If you try to bargain with God in an area of personal weakness you'll be back there in a few days. Confession of guilt takes care of the past but it does not make you strong. The confession of who you are in Christ makes you strong but that is a different type of confession. You don't bargain with God.

You do not blame other people. "My mama dropped me on my head when I was two and since then I've had repressed emotions. That is why I stabbed that guy in the back. I am a product of my environment – sociologically culturized to sin." No, you don't blame, you don't bargain and you don't beg.

You just believe. Believe and receive. *1 John 1:9 NRSV says, If we confess our sins, he who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.* That's what God says to you.

Which of these three bags of emotional garbage bags are you still carrying around in your relationships? GRUDGES? Against whom? The Word says to give it up. It's not smart to allow people in your past to continue and hurt you in the present. The Bible says, *Love keeps no record of wrongs.* Love does not keep score. GRIEF? Have you built a wall around you? Have you become afraid of opening up to people? Have you become hard? Or, have you accepted what cannot be changed? Are you looking at what's left instead of what's lost? Are you playing it down and praying it up? GUILT? Are you carrying emotional baggage from 20 years ago into present relationships? Give it up.

SALVATION

Jesus Christ was nailed to a cross so you can quit nailing yourself to a cross. *2 Corinthians 5:17 NIV says, Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!* The moment you commit your life to Jesus Christ, your old life is washed away and you become a new person inside. It is a brand-new shot at life. You do not have to live the rest of your life in a penalty box!

Consider how this sermon applies to you today. In a few moments we are going to pray. As they sing, I want you to allow God to speak to you and minister to your heart. Please, no one moving around at this time