

RESTORING RELATIONSHIPS

We live in a world where our relationships are not perfect. Many times, they are damaged, broken and seem beyond repair. We desire greatly to have relationships that are healthy and wholesome. We desire to see relationships that have been damaged or destroyed restored to be all they should be. At the very least, we hope to not have the same destructive patterns become part of new relationships. To this end, we seek restoration in relationships.

Still, some of our relationships remain broken. We find old patterns repeating themselves in new situations. We try to resolve old issues with people we have hurt or who have hurt us, only to find our efforts blocked or misunderstood. Even when old issues are resolved, we often discover that other issues are uncovered or remain unresolved. As we focus more on relationships, we become aware of problems even in relationships we thought were good.

We find it impossible to believe that a relationship can be completely restored. Our innocence is lost. *We are aware that human relationships suffer from imperfection.*

In view of this, it is easy to lose hope and resign ourselves to a fate of putting up with the brokenness, damage and destruction that relationships often seem to bring into our lives. It is easy to hold ourselves aloof from other people. After all, we reason that since we seem unable to completely resolve the problems, it is worthless to even try to bring about change. Why bother to work towards better relationships at all when there will still be more problems and more pain?

When we begin to think in this way, we have developed a flaw in our reasoning. We have forgotten that healthy relationships, like most other things in life, do not develop overnight. *Relationship building and relationship restoration is a process -- a process of growth, development and healing that takes time and effort.*

A builder who is restoring an old house may need to tear off some wallpaper, redo some wiring, tear up some floors, and maybe even pull down some walls. At this point in the process, the house will appear damaged. However, the builder will not stop, look around and declare, "Look at this mess! It's hopeless. Nothing could ever improve this house again. I quit!"

Instead, he will clean up the rubble and start rebuilding. He will put up new walls, put down new floors, fix the wiring and repaint the house. He will not look on the house as a lost cause if he has not yet finished the job. Rather, he will count each step made towards the completed project as an accomplishment.

Likewise, a doctor who has set the broken leg of one of his patients will not despair when he later sees this same patient with the cast still on. He will not ask, "Why are you still wearing that cast? I set your leg last week. You should be walking by now."

Instead, the doctor will patiently wait until the leg has healed before he removes the cast. Nor will the doctor be upset when the same patient returns two days later, needing antibiotics for an infection. The doctor will not say, "Why did I even bother to set your leg? Here you are, back with another problem."

Rather the doctor will treat this new problem in the appropriate manner, hoping that the patient will soon recover.

In areas such as these two examples, we have no difficulty accepting the fact that restoration and recovery takes time and effort. However, when we think of recovery in relationships, we tend to focus only on the hoped for "finished product" or "complete restoration". When the process seems to take too long, or when the results of our efforts do not bring the perfect relationships we desire, we despair.

We need to remember that each step towards better relationships is valuable. Each small amount of healing that occurs is worthwhile. Every improvement that is made in a relationship can be counted as a success, even if some brokenness still remains.

Most of all, we need to understand that God works in the restoration of relationships. God is a God of reconciliation. He knows intimately the meaning of relational rift, for human beings have been separated from Him since the Fall. God know what it takes to fully restore such a deep rift, and He made the ultimate sacrifice to make such a restoration possible. In the person of Jesus Christ, God came to us Himself. He gave Himself when He died on the cross, so that we could be restored to relationship with Him.

It is the power of redemption that is at work in the restoring of relationships. It is God alone who has such power. He will walk with us through each step of relationship building, if we will let Him. He will understand when things become difficult and will help us respond to brokenness in our relationships in an appropriate manner. Even when a relationship remains broken, He will grieve with us, because He has been there Himself. And God will do the work of healing in our lives and in our relationships that we are unable to do ourselves. May God be glorified in our relationships, through the brokenness, through the healing, through the wholeness.

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