

Community Courses: *Personal Relationships Series*

Christian Personal Relationships

Materials for Participants

2011

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Talk 1. Learning to Love One Another

1. Introduction

- a. Christian personal relationships are an important but neglected area among most Christians. As a result Christians pick up their ways of relating from the world (secular society).
- b. This course is designed to lay a foundation for the way of relating that we call Christian community.
 - Christian community is not primarily a structure, but a set of relationships in Christ (John 4:20-21).

2. Modern society creates challenges for good personal relationships

- a. We are living in the middle of dramatic change.
 - 1) Technological change (beginning with industrialization, now in what is called the information age) produces rapid social change (see chart at the end of the materials for this talk.
 - 2) It has been accompanied by ideological currents that have changed values (individualism, relativism, hedonism).
 - 3) Add to this that the change is happening in a society that is secular, increasingly so, and as a result marked by fallenness and sinfulness.
- b. Some of the consequences of this change
 - 1) Breakdown of relational stability (even in the family)
 - 2) Pluralism (uncertainty) of values and morality in the private sphere
 - 3) Insecurity about relationships, fear of commitment accompanied by a desire for secure relationships
 - 4) Isolated individuals on their own in serial relationships, forced to find their own way
 - subjected to “experts” and media
 - 5) A high rate of mental and emotional distress, even breakdown

3. Relationships in the world (modern society) and the kingdom of God

- a. The root contrast: love of self (personal fulfillment and personal satisfaction) versus love of God and relationships in the kingdom of God (under his lordship, primarily with those also under his lordship).

- b. Some common contrasts:
 - 1) Independent agents versus members of a body
 - 2) My values versus the Lord's way of life
 - 3) Preferential versus inclusive relating
 - 4) Ruled by feelings and desires versus ruled by a new nature
 - 5) Social superficiality with a few relationships of special intensity versus warmth of relationship
 - 6) Self-protective and self-serving versus generous and serving

4. Entering into new relationships

- a. The Lord provides us an alternative, regardless of what is prevailing in society: Deut. 4:6-8.

- b. We want be a body of people who together agree to live in the Lord and so has the power to have new relationships (Acts 4:32-35; 9:31).
 - This means that these relationships need to be primary for us.

- c. We need to make it a purpose in life to build up those who belong to the same body of Christians (1 Thess. 5:11; Rom 12:10).
 - After submitting our lives to the Lord, the commitment to serving our brothers and sisters is first (John 15:12-13; Phil. 2:1-8).

- d. The goal is a society that lives differently from the one around us, a body of people who love one another in the Lord (Eph. 4:15-16).

Scripture Passages for Talk 1

1 John 4:20-21

If anyone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen. And this commandment we have from him, that he who loves God should love his brother also.

Deuteronomy 4:6-8

Keep them [the Lord's statutes and ordinances] and do them; for that will be your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the peoples, who, when they hear all these statutes, will say, "Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people." For what great nation is there that has a god so near to it as the LORD our God is to us, whenever we call upon him? And what great nation is there, that has statutes and ordinances so righteous as all this law which I set before you this day?

John 15:12-13

This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.

Philippians 2:1-8

So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any incentive of love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. Do nothing from selfishness or conceit, but in humility count others better than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.

Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross.

Acts 4:32-35

Now the company of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one said that any of the things which he possessed was his own, but they had everything in common. And with great power the apostles gave their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all. There was not a needy person among them, for as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the proceeds of what was sold and laid it at the apostles' feet; and distribution was made to each as any had need.

Acts 9:31

So the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria had peace and was built up; and walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit it was multiplied.

1 Thessalonians 5:11

Therefore encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing.

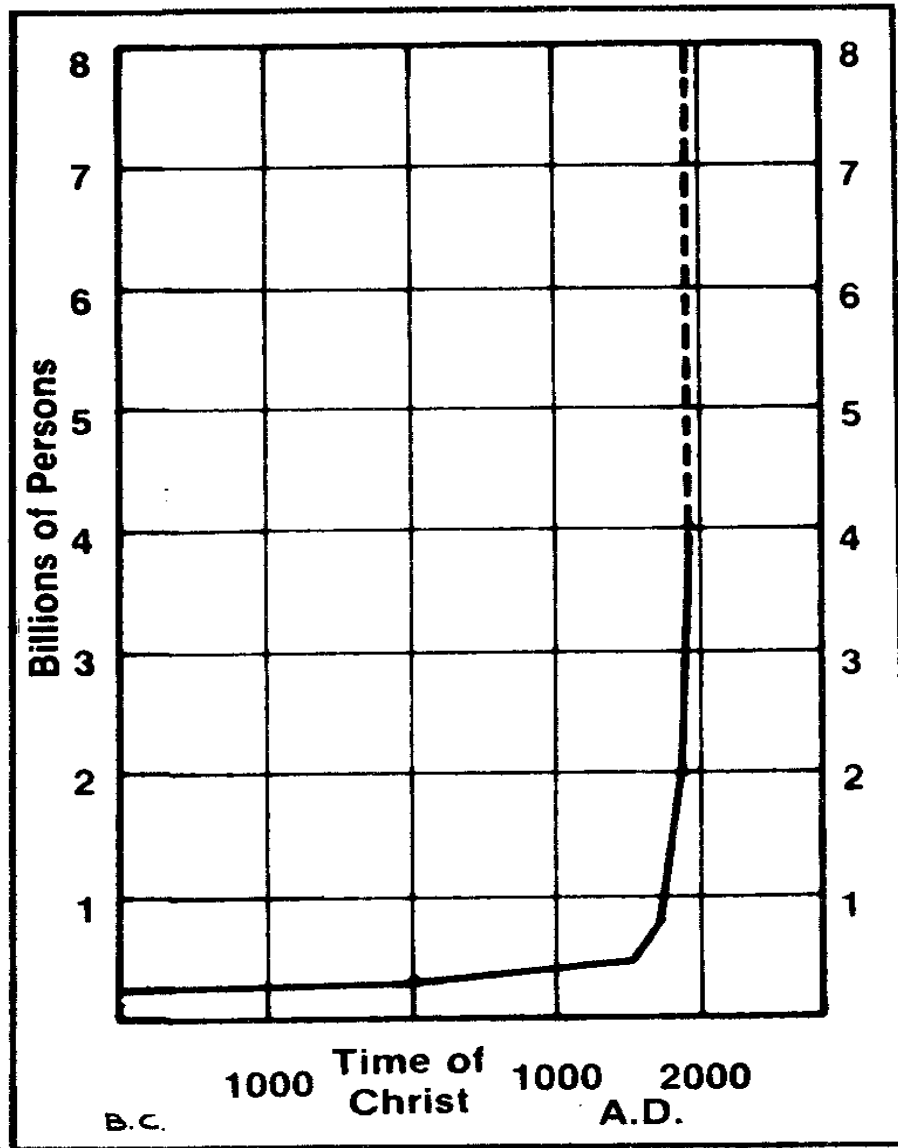
Romans 12:10

Love one another with brotherly affection; outdo one another in showing honor.

Ephesians 4:15

Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every joint with which it is supplied, when each part is working properly, makes bodily growth and upbuilds itself in love.

Chart: World Population Growth



Population growth is only one aspect of the change in society. It does, however, give a good picture of the rate of change and correlates closely with other changes in society.

Talk 2. “Outdo One Another in Showing Honor”

1. Showing love to our brothers and sisters in daily life
 - a. Expressing love strengthens love: we need to express our love and commitment by the way we relate to one another.
 - This is something missing in modern society, but often present in traditional societies.
 - b. The main way to show love is to serve one another.
 - c. Another important way to show love is to speak in a way that builds up (see. Talk 3).
 - d. Still another very important way is to show affection: *love one another with brotherly affection* (Rom. 12:10)
 - e. Still another way is to show honor: *outdo one another in showing honor* (Rom. 12:10).
2. The Lord wants us to show honor and respect to one another
 - Rom. 13:7; Prov. 3:9; Rom. 12:10; 1 Pet. 2:17
 - a. In modern secular society, people have lost the ability to show honor and respect in the scriptural way.
 - 1) Modern people honor others for achievement, but rarely for character and almost never just because they are in relationship together.
 - 2) They rarely show respect to those who are “over” them (in position or age), probably because of an exaggerated egalitarianism (“I’m as good as you are”).
 - b. “Showing honor”: expressing the value we place on others
 - 1) It is possible to love people without honoring them and also to be affectionate with them without honoring them.
 - 2) We honor our brothers and sisters because they are made in the image and likeness of God and because they belong to us and we value that.

- c. “Showing respect”: expressing our respect for positions of authority
 - 1) “Respect” (literally: fear) is a form of honor.
 - 2) Respect is the special honor given to those “over us (Eph. 6:2-3 [Exod. 19:12, Deut. 5:16]; 1 Thess. 5:12-13; Rom. 13:1-2).
 - We show respect in different ways depending on the relationship.

3. How to show honor to one another

- a. We show honor on special occasions (Gen. 18:1-8, 16).

- b. We show honor in daily life (Rom. 12:10). Examples:
 - 1) Introducing people who do not know each other
 - 2) Paying attention to others when they are speaking, and refraining from interrupting or dominating a conversation
 - 3) Being ready and attentive to serve others
 - 4) Accepting the order of situations as we enter and participate
 - 5) Avoiding humor that is indirectly dishonoring (“negative humor”)
 - 6) Showing special courtesy to the opposite sex (1 Pet. 3:7; Prov. 31:28-29; Eph. 5:33)

- c. We show honor for accomplishments (Prov. 26:1).
 - Especially those of character (Ps. 15:4)

4. We should show respect to one another

- a. To those “over us”
 - 1) God (Prov. 3:9)
 - 2) Christian leaders in community and church (1 Thess. 5:12-13)
 - 3) Those in secular authority (Rom. 13:7)
 - 4) Those in authority over us: parents, teachers, employers (Mal. 1:6; Rom. 13:7; Eph. 5:33)
 - 5) Older people, other “elders” (Deut. 28:50; Lam. 5:12; Lev 9:32; Job 32:4; 1 Tim. 5:3).

- b. We show respect in the way we relate to those over us.
 - 1) Obeying in a respectful way to the degree that obedience is due
 - 2) Giving precedence (letting them go first, going to meet them)

- 3) Acknowledging their authority to direct, teach, correct, etc. (e.g. not giving them directions, but making requests)
 - 4) Serving them when with them (as appropriate)
 - 5) Speaking and acting in a way that increases others' respect for them
- c. Those in authority should honor those for whom they care.
- 1) Speaking about them in an honorable way
 - 2) Commending them whenever it is deserved
 - 3) Seeing that they are receiving honor
 - 4) Speaking to them with courtesy (e.g., parents to children)
- d. We give the respect of free people, those who are not slaves, but show respect out of desire to act appropriately (1 Pet. 2:16).

Conclusion

We are engaged in recapturing something that society has lost. It is in many ways culturally impoverished. We are seeking to produce relationships in which people experience their worth and the commitment of others.

Scripture Passages for Talk 2

Romans 13:7

Pay all of them their dues, taxes to whom taxes are due, revenue to whom revenue is due, respect to whom respect is due, honor to whom honor is due.

Proverbs 3:9

Honor the LORD with your substance
and with the first fruits of all your produce.

Romans 12:10

Love one another with brotherly affection; outdo one another in showing honor.

1 Peter 2:17

Honor all men. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the emperor.

Ephesians 6:2-3 (Exodus 19:12, Deuteronomy 5:16)

Honor your father and mother that your days may be long in the land which the Lord your God gives you.

1 Thessalonians 5:12-13

But we beseech you, brethren, to respect those who labor among you and are over you in the Lord and admonish you, and to esteem them very highly in love because of their work. Be at peace among yourselves.

Romans 13:1-2

Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God.

Genesis 18:1-16

And the LORD appeared to him by the oaks of Mamre, as he sat at the door of his tent in the heat of the day. He lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, three men stood in front of him. When he saw them, he

ran from the tent door to meet them, and bowed himself to the earth, and said,

“My lord, if I have found favor in your sight, do not pass by your servant. Let a little water be brought, and wash your feet, and rest yourselves under the tree, while I fetch a morsel of bread, that you may refresh yourselves, and after that you may pass on – since you have come to your servant.”

So they said,

“Do as you have said.”

And Abraham hastened into the tent to Sarah, and said,

“Make ready quickly three measures of fine meal, knead it, and make cakes.”

And Abraham ran to the herd, and took a calf, tender and good, and gave it to the servant, who hastened to prepare it. Then he took curds, and milk, and the calf which he had prepared, and set it before them; and he stood by them under the tree while they ate....

Then the men set out from there, and they looked toward Sodom; and Abraham went with them to set them on their way.

1 Peter 3:7

Likewise you husbands, live considerately with your wives, bestowing honor on the woman as the weaker sex, since you are joint heirs of the grace of life, in order that your prayers may not be hindered.

Proverbs 31:28-29

Her children rise up and call her blessed;
her husband also, and he praises her:
“Many women have done excellently,
but you surpass them all.”

Ephesians 5:33

However, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband.

Proverbs 26:1

Like snow in summer or rain in harvest,
so honor is not fitting for a fool.

Psalms 15:4

...In whose eyes a reprobate is despised,
but who honors those who fear the LORD;
who swears to his own hurt and does not change.

Malachi 1:6-7

A son honors his father, and a servant his master.
If then I am a father, where is my honor?
And if I am a master, where is my fear?

Deuteronomy 28:50

A nation of stern countenance, who shall not regard the person of the old or show favor to the young.

Lamentations 5:12

Princes are hung up by their hands;
no respect is shown to the elders.

Leviticus 19:32

You shall rise up before the hoary head, and honor the face of an old man, and you shall fear your God: I am the LORD.

Job 32:4

Now Elihu had waited to speak to Job because they were older than he.

1 Timothy 5:3

Honor widows who are real widows.

1 Peter 2:16

Live as free men, yet without using your freedom as a pretext for evil; but live as servants of God. Honor all men.

Talk 3. Speech That Builds Up

1. Introduction: the power of the tongue
 - a. The tongue is very powerful (Prov. 18:21; James 3:2-5; Prov. 10:11a).
 - b. Teaching on speech is another area that is neglected by many Christians today, but it is crucial for developing good personal relationships.

2. The Christian ideal
 - a. Those who wish to be in good relationship with the Lord have to speak in an acceptable way (Ps. 15:1-3; James 1:26).
 - Some speech is wrongdoing and a violation of the commandment “You shall not bear false witness” (Exod. 19:16).
 - b. The Christian ideal for speech in daily life with our brothers and sisters is a high one: building one another up (Eph. 4:29; 1 Thess. 5:11; Prov. 10:31; 12:18).

3. Some problem areas
 - a. “Speaking against” (“slander,” “detraction”)
 - 1) Speaking against others is seriously wrong (2 Cor. 12:20; 1 Pet. 2:10; Rom. 1:30; James 4:11; Matt. 7:1; Ps. 101:5).
 - “Speaking against” in scripture and Christian teaching means saying that others have done something seriously wrong (making accusations or charges of wrongdoing) and, in some circumstances, saying that they are incompetent.
 - “Speaking against” does not have to be false to be wrong. *False* speaking against is “calumny” or “libel.”
 - Sometimes we may speak about someone’s wrongdoing if we are:
 - presenting a problem to a pastoral leader
 - warning someone of possible harm (usually the responsibility of a coordinator but sometimes ours)
 - going to a qualified person for counsel (usually a coordinator)

- 2) “Tale bearing,” reporting to one person something unfavorable said of that person by another person, is also wrong (Prov. 6:19; 16:28; 18:8; 26:20).
- 3) Listening to someone speaking against someone else is also wrong (Prov. 17:4; cf. Sir.¹ 19:13-14; 28:16).

b. Gossip

- 1) “Gossip” means talking about others in a way that negatively affects their good name in the eyes of others or passing on things that should remain private (Prov. 11:12; Ps. 15:3; 2 Cor. 12:12).
- 2) When we do talk about others:
 - It is fine to talk about others’ good qualities or successes or good fortune.
 - It is fine to talk about problems that do not reflect upon the person’s character or competence.
 - We should not talk about those things that might reflect badly upon a person’s character or competence (criticize them, evaluate them negatively) unless there is a good reason to do so.
- 3) We should keep private matters confidential. This means that we should not share about our brothers’ or sisters’ temptations and problems, talk about courtship matters, or talk about others’ finances unless we know that it is OK to do so (Prov. 11:13; 17:4; Sir. 27:16).
- 4) We should not listen to gossip, much less pass it on (Sir. 19:5-6). We should not be “busybodies,” looking into others’ private affairs (1 Pet. 4:15; Prov. 26:17).

c. Disloyalty (Proverbs 11:11)

- 1) We should not speak about our brothers and sisters or any group we belong to in a way that leads others to disrespect or distrust them (Prov. 11:12).
 - This includes the community itself to outsiders.
- 2) Sometimes we need to talk about concerns we have about the community to priests or ministers in order to get advice about how our church approaches something, but we should speak loyally.

4. Speech that strengthens (Proverbs 12:18b)

- a. As Christians, our conversation should be distinctive, mainly because the negative things that characterize much worldly culture should be absent.

1. Some of the passages cited in this talk are from the book of Sirach (entitled Ecclesiasticus in some Bibles). Many Christians regard the book as part of scripture. Others do not, but it is normally considered helpful background to New Testament teaching because it was read by New Testament writers. Sirach is especially useful because it provides much teaching on speech.

- b. Speaking in faith and hope, without negative, despairing, or hopeless speech
 - 1) We do not have to be constantly pious, but we should be able to talk together and to others about spiritual things in a natural way.
 - passing on new truths or insights that we have gained
 - sharing our experiences of Christian living in a way that increases faith or determination
 - 2) We can and should be honest about difficulties and shortcomings.
 - 3) We should seek to encourage one another (1 Thess. 5:11).

- c. We should seek to promote the honor of our brothers and sisters by the way we speak about them (Rom: 10:12b). We should avoid dishonoring humor.

- d. We should express affection to our brothers and sisters in speech (Rom. 10:12a).

- e. We desire to be sources of grace to our brothers and sisters (Eph. 5:29).

Scripture Passages for Talk 3

General

Proverbs 18:21a

Death and life are in the power of the tongue.

James 3:2-5

For we all make many mistakes, and if any one makes no mistakes in what he says he is a perfect man, able to bridle the whole body also. If we put bits into the mouths of horses that they may obey us, we guide their whole bodies. Look at the ships also; though they are so great and are driven by strong winds, they are guided by a very small rudder wherever the will of the pilot directs. So the tongue is a little member and boasts of great things. How great a forest is set ablaze by a small fire!

Proverbs 10:11a

The mouth of the righteous is a fountain of life.

Psalms 15:1-3

Lord, who shall sojourn in your tent?
Who shall dwell on your holy hill?
He who walks blamelessly, and does what is right,
and speaks truth from his heart;
who does not slander with his tongue,
and does no evil to his friend,
nor takes up a reproach against his neighbor.

James 1:26

If any one thinks he is religious, and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his heart, this man's religion is vain.

Ephesians 4:29

Let no evil talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for edifying, as fits the occasion, that it may impart grace to those who hear.

1 Thessalonians 5:11

Therefore encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing.

Proverbs 10:31-32

The mouth of the righteous brings forth wisdom,
but the perverse tongue will be cut off.
The lips of the righteous know what is acceptable,
but the mouth of the wicked, what is perverse.

Proverbs 12:18

There is one whose rash words are like sword thrusts,
but the tongue of the wise brings healing.

Speaking Against

2 Corinthians 12:20

For I fear that perhaps I may come and find you not what I wish, and that you may find me not what you wish; that perhaps there may be quarreling, jealousy, anger, selfishness, slander, gossip, conceit, and disorder.

1 Peter 2:10

So put away all malice and all guile and insincerity and envy and all slander.

Romans 1:29-30

They were filled with all manner of wickedness, evil, covetousness, malice. Full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, malignity, they are gossips, slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents.

James 4:11

Do not speak evil against one another, brethren. He that speaks evil against a brother or judges his brother, speaks evil against the law and judges the law. But if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but a judge.

Matthew 7:1

Judge not, that you be not judged.

Psalm 101:5

Him who slanders his neighbor secretly, I will destroy.

Proverbs 6:19

[There are six things which the Lord hates...] a false witness who breathes out lies, and a man who sows discord among brothers.

Proverbs 16:28

A perverse man spreads strife, and a whisperer separates close friends.

Proverbs 18:8

The words of a whisperer are like delicious morsels; they go down into the inner parts of the body.

Proverbs 26:20

For lack of wood the fire goes out; and where there is no whisperer, quarreling ceases.

Proverbs 17:4

An evildoer listens to wicked lips; and a liar gives heed to a mischievous tongue.

Sirach² 19:13-14

Admonish your neighbor – he may not have said it;
and if he did, that he may not say it again.
Admonish your friend – often it may be slander;
every story you must not believe.

Sirach 28:16

Whoever pays heed to slander will not find rest, nor can he dwell in peace.

2. Some of the passages cited in this talk are from the book of Sirach (entitled Ecclesiasticus in some Bibles). Many Christians regard the book as part of scripture. Others do not, but it is normally considered helpful background to New Testament teaching because it was read by New Testament writers. Sirach is especially useful because it provides much teaching on speech.

Gossip

2 Corinthians 12:20

For I fear that perhaps I may come and find you not what I wish, and that you may find me not what you wish; that perhaps there may be quarreling, jealousy, anger, selfishness, slander, gossip, conceit, and disorder.

Proverbs 11:12

He who belittles his neighbor lacks sense, but a man of understanding remains silent.

Psalm 15:3

...Who does not slander with his tongue,
and does no evil to his friend,
nor takes up a reproach against his neighbor.

Proverbs 11:13

He who goes about as a talebearer reveals secrets,
but he who is trustworthy in spirit keeps a thing hidden.

Proverbs 20:19

He who goes about gossiping reveals secrets;
therefore do not associate with one who speaks foolishly.

Sirach 27:16

He who betrays a secret cannot be trusted,
he will never find an intimate friend.

Sirach 19:5-6

He who gloats over evil will meet with evil,
and he who repeats an evil report has no sense.
Never repeat gossip,
and you will not be reviled.

1 Peter 4:15

But let none of you suffer as a murderer, or a thief, or a wrongdoer,
or a busybody [RSV: mischief-maker].

Proverbs 26:17

He who meddles in a quarrel not his own is like one who takes a
passing dog by the ears.

Disloyalty in Speech

Proverbs 11:11-13

By the blessing of the upright a city is exalted,
 but it is overthrown by the mouth of the wicked.
He who belittles his neighbor lacks sense,
 but a man of understanding remains silent.
He who goes about as a talebearer reveals secrets,
 but he who is trustworthy in spirit keeps a thing hidden.

Talk 4. Keeping the Peace

1. Christian personal relationships involve peace (Ephesians 4:3)
 - a. “Peace” means good relationships, not just absence of fighting.
 - 1) Our concern in this talk is handling conflicts in our relationships with one another.
 - 2) Dealing with conflict outside the community works somewhat differently.
 - b. In the context of a good relationship, most difficulties can be handled.
 - a. We have to put away those things that do not work towards good relationships but create conflict (Eph. 4:31).
 - b. We should try to handle conflicts as quickly as possible (Eph. 4:26).
 - c. We should go to the person with whom we have the difficulty and not tell someone else, unless we need to go to someone for help in how to handle the situation.
2. The means for working on conflict
 - The main approach should be direct Christian discussion rather than complaining about others, criticizing them to others, nagging them, putting pressure on them, making them feel guilty, manipulating them, indirect communication (hints, remarks, jokes).
 - The means of working conflicts through vary depending on whether the matter concerns right and wrong, good and bad or a matter of preferences. We need Christian teaching and wisdom to know the difference.
 - Our men’s or women’s groups should help us find the wisdom we need in conflicts.
 - a. If the matter of conflict is a matter of right and wrong (the rarest case):
 - 1) We should take the initiative to go first (Matt. 5:23-24; 18:15).
 - 2) We should begin by asking forgiveness for any contribution we made to causing the difficulty.
 - 3) We should be ready to receive correction and ask forgiveness for our part (Prov. 12:1).

- 4) We should reprove our brother or sister for what they did if they do not ask forgiveness (Luke 17:3).
 - 5) If we cannot resolve it with our brother or sister, we should get a judgment from a pastoral leader or another mature brother or sister (Matt. 18:17).
- b. If it is a matter of good and bad (somewhat common):
- Many of our conflicts are caused by differing expectations.
 - 1) If the matter involves something (clearly or possibly) good and bad, handle it on that basis by direct discussion.
 - If you cannot agree and one of the parties is in authority, that person should make the final decision after discussion.
 - 2) If the matter cannot be settled, come to an agreement about how to handle it.
 - Agree clearly (check to see if we understand it the same way).
 - Call one another to keep the agreement.
 - 3) If you cannot agree and the matter is important, get help in sorting it out.
- c. If it is a matter of preference (most common):
- 1) If it is a matter of preference, seek to defer.
 - 2) If you have a hard time accepting something, say so and ask if the other person would be willing to go along with your way.
 - 3) In general, our attitude should be to put up with what is not wrong or clearly better and to defer to the other person's opinion or even desires (Col. 3:13).
 - a sense of humor is valuable
 - not resentfully or with self pity, but willingly
3. The personality conflict
- a. This is a common challenge, one that is perhaps God-given for fallen people to help them to change (Prov. 27:17).
 - b. When we get into one, we are often reacting to something about ourselves.
 - c. Pray for the other person. Discuss how to handle it with your formation group leader.

4. We should be thankful for relationship difficulties (Rom. 8:28).
 - a. How we handle conflicts is almost always more important than what the resolution is.

 - b. God is seeking to make us people of character (treated in *Fruit of the Spirit*).

Scripture Passages for Talk 4

Ephesians 4:1-3

I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all lowliness and meekness, with patience, forbearing one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

Ephesians 4:31

Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, with all malice,

Ephesians 4:26

Be angry but do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and give no opportunity to the devil.

Matthew 5:23-24

So if you are offering your gift at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go...

Matthew 18:15-17

If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every word may be confirmed by the evidence of two or three witnesses. If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector.

Proverbs 12:1

Whoever loves discipline loves knowledge, but he who hates reproof is stupid.

Luke 17:3

Take heed to yourselves; if your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him.

Colossians 3:13

...Forbearing one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive.

Proverbs 27:17

Iron sharpens iron, and one man sharpens another.

Romans 8:28

We know that in everything God works for good with those who love him, who are called according to his purpose.

Talk 5. Encouragement and Correction

1. Mutual responsibility

- a. As brothers and sisters in the Lord, we are part of a Christian body (Eph. 4:15-16, 22-23).
- b. We therefore cannot just take the view of contemporary society that our private lives are our affair, to be lived as we see fit but we need to take responsibility for one another.

2. Encouragement (1 Thessalonians 5:11)

- a. The English word means “to put heart into.” that is, to strengthen by motivating and helping someone. The Greek word is sometimes also translated “exhort,” that is, “call on.” We can do this by
 - 1) teaching and admonishing one another, passing on what we have learned, or helping others apply the word of Christ to their situation (Col. 3:16)
 - 2) sharing our experiences of Christian living in a way that increases faith or determination
 - 3) simple exhortation.
- b. We should encourage one another at community gatherings and men’s and women’s group.
 - We can also do it in ordinary life, although we should avoid being overly pious.
- c. We want to create an environment that helps us to live the life we are committed to.

3. Correction (help to do better)

- a. Correction should be part of the life of the Christian community, because we all want to live lives of holiness and righteousness (Eph. 4:23-24) and we need the help of others to do that.

- b. As with areas of personal conflict, the main approach should be direct Christian discussion rather than complaining about others, criticizing them to others, nagging them, putting pressure on them, making them feel guilty, manipulating them, using indirect communication (hints, remarks, jokes).

- c. The way we do this depends both on the matter and on our relationship to the brother or sister. Look at the chart “Handling Relationship Problems” which follows.
 - 1) It depends on the matter, whether it concerns right and wrong, good and bad, or preference.
 - 2) It depends on our relationship to the brother or sister.
 - Parents and community leaders, because of their position of authority, have a responsibility for others: Eph. 6:4, Prov. 13:24, 1Thess. 5:14.
 - If we are older than someone we handle it one way, if we are peers another, if we are younger, still another way: 1 Tim. 5:1-2.
 - It also depends on our wisdom and experience.

- d. Those who have positions of authority and are therefore responsible for others should be more active in correction.

- e. With our peers in the community
 - 1) For the most part, we should not correct other brothers and sisters. We should *forbear one another* (Col. 3:13; cf. 1 Cor. 13:7).
 - 2) Ongoing correction should normally be reserved to community leaders (or parents).
 - 3) If we are confident we can help, we can offer correction to any brother or sister in matters of right and wrong. If we think we can help someone in matters of improvement, we can offer suggestions.
 - 4) We are only responsible for correcting someone for serious wrongdoing if there is no one in a position of authority who can do so or if we are the only one who has witnessed it.

- f. Receiving correction
 - 1) We should desire correction (Prov. 12:1, Heb. 12:11).
 - 2) If we are wise, we will try to make it easy for those who give it to us (Prov. 9:8).
 - 3) We need to repent if we have done something wrong, and we need to ask forgiveness from any people we have done wrong to.

- 4) If the concern is not a matter of right and wrong, we do not have to ask forgiveness, and should not.
 - 5) The issue is not our intention, but our actions. We need to take responsibility for what we did wrong or did badly.
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4. We should seek to be our brother's or sister's paraclete (encourager).
Satan is the accuser of the brethren (Rev. 12:10), the Holy Spirit is the encourager (paraclete) (John 14:16).

Chart: Handling Relationship Problems

Right and wrong	Good and bad	Preferences	Personality conflict areas
Correction by those in authority Fraternal correction sometimes	Correction by those in authority Suggestion otherwise	Not correction Conflict resolution	Not correction Conflict resolution
Requires repentance	Not repentance, perhaps regret	Not repentance	Not repentance
Willingness to repent	Willingness to change	Readiness to yield	Openness to change

Talk 6. Relationships Outside

1. Introduction

We are going to consider how the teaching in this course applies to our relationships with people who do not belong to our community or outreach.

- The focus is on our main ongoing, significant relationships, not casual encounters.

2. We have to relate somewhat differently to people outside.

a. Scripture teaches that we have to relate somewhat differently to those who are not Christians than to those who are.

- 1) We have a special obligation to our brothers and sisters in the Lord, as we do to our natural family members (Gal. 6:10).
- 2) We should seek to dispose others to Christianity (Col. 4:5-6; see also 1 Pet. 3:1-2).
- 3) We should have a special concern to avoid conflict with non-Christians, (Rom. 12:18; also 1 Thess. 4:11-12).

b. We also have to relate somewhat differently to other Christians who are not part of us.

3. What we have learned in this course is applicable to how we relate to those who are not part of us, but it often needs to be modified.

a. Talk 2: Modernized people often dislike expressed forms of honor and respect because of their orientation to casualness and informality, although everyone likes to be treated with honor and respect.

b. Talk 3: Others often want us to engage in forms of speech that are sinful (e.g., slander and gossip, sexually immoral humor) or not helpful (e.g., dishonoring humor), although most people like the way we speak to them if we are gracious.

c. Talk 4: Most people do not like to be spoken directly to about their wrongdoing and some find it offensive. Many do not see as wrong what we see as wrong.

Most will not ask for forgiveness and are uncomfortable when we ask them for forgiveness.

- d. Talk 5: Most people do not want to be corrected and most do not want helpful advice on how to relate better, unless they are in trouble and know they need the help.
- e. In general, affection can easily be misunderstood, although with some it can be very helpful.

There is no objection to love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, faithfulness, etc. (Gal. 5:22-23): the more we show basic good Christian character, the better our relationships will go.

4. Dealing with relationship difficulties

Some common types of relationship difficulties outside:

- bad relating directed at us, such as domineering, manipulative, unfair behavior
 - attempts to draw us into unethical business practices, political factions, cliques, sexual relationships
 - hostility to our Christianity and to our “negative” moral views (abortion, sexual promiscuity, etc.).
- a. Be a man or woman of peace, seeking good relationships, avoiding quarreling (Rom. 12:18; 1 Thess. 4:11-12; Titus 3:1-2).
 - 1) Here if all is working right, all conflicts can be worked out. Outside that is not the case.
 - 2) We need to be more cautious, less direct with others.
 - We should do our best to avoid personal conflict (not necessarily avoid disagreement).
 - We should have a non-judgmental spirit, including in areas where others are immoral. We cannot necessarily expect pagans or nominal Christians to do better (cf. Titus 3:3-5).
 - We should be cooperative (do what they want, if we can), respectful, and gracious.
 - b. Know what limits you will go to (what is right and wrong) in difficult situations. For the rest, practice forbearance and give way.

- 1) You need Christian teaching to know what is right and wrong in many situations, as well as the counsel of brothers and sisters.
 - 2) When it will help to do so, you should work for a change in the situation, a mutually acceptable way of approaching things. Sometimes you just need to put up with a bad situation.
 - 3) Sometimes a key to getting through difficulties in living (especially with family and roommates) or working together is making an agreement.
- c. If what you have to do in the situation goes beyond what is right, separate to the necessary degree.
- 1) You also should separate if staying together just increases conflict.
 - 2) Separation does not mean lack of love.
 - 3) With family, we should rarely make a complete break. We can separate temporarily or to a limited degree.
- d. If the issue is Christianity or Christian morality, take a firm but peaceful approach.
- 1) We should take hostility to our Christianity meekly, although we should be firm and correct false things that are said (Rom. 12:14).
 - 2) In normal personal relationships, we should not take unpopular moral stands on grounds of our Christianity if we can help it or be moral crusaders, although we can and often should make our disagreements clear on moral matters.
 - 3) Our main strategy to situations we are regularly in is to live as good Christians, overcoming evil with good (Rom. 12:21).
 - The Lord has not called us to live in peace (Luke 12:51-53), but to be men and women of peace (Rom. 12:18).

Talk 7. Relationships and Emotions

1. The challenge of our emotions
 - a. There are objective reasons why relationships can be problematic, but very often the reason is emotions – ours or others’.
 - b. By “emotions” I refer to desires, guilt feelings, fear, anger, etc.
 - Emotions are reactions inside of us to things that happen to us or that we experience.
 - c. We need to learn to recognize our emotions and take responsibility for how they influence our behavior.

2. Our emotions should be our servants, not our masters.
 - a. In contemporary society, we meet some approaches that are not helpful:
 - 1) The Stoic approach: we should repress them so they do not get in the way.
 - 2) The authenticity approach: my emotions are the expression of my true self, so I should get in touch with them and follow them.
 - Corollary: I should not act in a way that is not emotionally “authentic,” otherwise I am a hypocrite or insincere.
 - 3) The victim approach: because I am a victim, I have a right to express my anger, hostility, etc.
 - b. *Do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love be servants of one another. For the whole law is fulfilled in one word, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” (Gal. 5:13-14).*
 - 1) Christian love is more important than how we feel.
 - Christian love is expressed in how we treat one another; it is service love, not just emotional love.
 - 2) We may have an emotional reaction, but we do not have to obey it. We can respond in love.
 - This is emotional maturity.
 - 3) Emotions, however, are God-given: they have a good purpose.
 - God made us to desire things so we would be motivated to act.
 - God gave us fear to avoid danger.

- God gave us anger to overcome obstacles.
- God gave us guilt and shame to keep us from doing wrong.
- 4) But our emotions are often blind and “fallen.” We cannot simply follow them.
 - Sometimes we need to stir them up.
 - Sometimes we need to restrain them or ignore them.
- 5) We need to learn God’s wisdom:
 - so we can increasingly respond well in various situations
 - so we increasingly make our emotions our servants as we serve God and others
 - so we can become the kind of person we want to be, so we can grow in Christian character and emotional maturity.

3. Some common challenges from our emotions

- a. Not wanting to do the right thing or the helpful thing
- b. Feeling bad about ourselves, having a poor self-image – this can make us discouraged or inactive.
- c. Insecurity or other social fears – this can keep us from relating positively to others.
- d. Getting angry in uncontrolled ways or irrational ways – this can cause us to get into fights with others or relate hostilely to them.
- e. Not getting angry when we fail unnecessarily or when we see an injustice that should be changed
- f. Lust – this can cause us to desire sexually someone we should not or lose sexual or romantic control.
- g. Moodiness – this can make us hard to live with or work with.
- h. Personality reactions – this can lead us to bad relationships or conflicts with others we react to.

4. What we can do to grow in emotional maturity
 - a. Try to recognize how your emotions work. We are all somewhat different here.
 - b. Do not let emotions keep you from obeying the Lord and loving others.
 - c. Learn to be open about how your emotions work on you, discussing it in our men's or women's groups and with our pastoral leaders.
 - d. If you think you may have an emotional difficulty that is more than normal, discuss it with your pastoral leader. You can get help with it.
 - e. Keep the focus on others, not on yourself. Be active in loving God and your brothers and sisters.
 - f. Rely on the Lord to be at work to change you through the gift of the Holy Spirit he has put inside of you.
 - g. We will work on this area more in *Fruit of the Spirit* and *Emotions in the Christian Life*.