



STEWARDING OUR RELATIONSHIPS

Jesus was once asked, *What is the greatest commandment?* (Matthew 22:36) His answer to this practical and sincere question is particularly revealing because it involves what is clearly one of the most important aspects of our human existence—our relationships. Jesus' top two greatest commands concern (1) our relationship with God and (2) our relationship with our fellow human beings. Let's focus our attention on the second greatest commandment.

When we understand that Jesus' greatest commands are about healthy and successful relationships, we can begin to appreciate the sheer preponderance of Scripture that is devoted to relationships and how to make them work successfully. It would not be an exaggeration to say that one of the major themes of the New Testament concerns healthy human relationships. An example of this teaching can be found in over 30 different *one another* commands (many often repeated) instructing us in how we ought to be stewarding our relationships with family, friends, fellow believers, co-workers, and even strangers who cross our path. To deepen the gravity of these statements, note that they are not written as good suggestions, but as *non-optional* commands.

These *one another* phrases are used 59 times in the New Testament, giving us a broad range of ways we are to be stewarding our relationships. Let me give you my top 10 *positive one another* commands. If you can successfully practice these 10 with your many relationships, the depth and the quality of your life and the lives of those in your world will increase exponentially:

1. *Love one another* (John 13:14)
2. *Forgive one another* (Ephesians 4:32)
3. *Live at peace with one another* (Romans 12:16)
4. *Bear one another's burdens* (Galatians 6:2)
5. *Be patient with one another* (Ephesians 4:2)
6. *Honor one another above yourself* (Romans 12:10)
7. *Accept one another* (Romans 15:7)
8. *Encourage one another* (1 Thessalonians 4:18)
9. *Teach one another* (Romans 15:14)
10. *Serve one another* (Galatians 5:13)

If we are honest with ourselves, consistently practicing just number one and two would radically transform our relationships. I say this because if you get those down, the rest will happen almost automatically.

The key to successful human relationships is rooted in love and forgiveness. In fact, the key to our successful, divine relationship is also rooted in love and forgiveness—except it is *His* love and *His* forgiveness that drives our relationship with Him, not our own. And He tells us to go and do the same in our relationships. I have heard someone (maybe even myself) say, “I can’t love that person” or “I can’t forgive that person!” Oh, really? You cannot pass on to others what you received from Christ? Is it that you *can’t* or you *won’t*?

About 25 years ago, when I was working in stewardship planning, I was asked to speak at a Christian medical conference. Most of the sessions were over my head, but I chose to attend one that was led by a well-known and respected Christian psychiatrist because it seemed like it would be something I could understand. During his presentation, the psychiatrist said something so profound that I was literally stunned, and I have never been able to shake it! (Obviously, even after 25 years I am telling you about it.) The comment was said casually, almost in passing, and then he moved on with the rest of his presentation.

He said, “**Ninety percent or more of all counseling could be eliminated entirely if people would learn to forgive.**” Take a minute and read the statement again.

The psychiatrist then proceeded to share with the audience one example after another of how failure to forgive was doing serious emotional and physical damage to those who refused to extend forgiveness. In other words, people are destroying themselves with pent up “un-forgiveness.” It is interesting that the first victim of “failing to forgive” is the one who is withholding forgiveness.

Additionally, we often don’t realize that our failure to forgive people when they sin against us also damages our relationship with God. Have you noticed what Jesus teaches us to pray in Matthew 6:12? We are to pray, *forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.* Notice we are not just asking God to forgive us our sins/debts. In the same proportion we forgive others when they sin against us, we are asking God to forgive us for how we sin against Him. In other words, “use the same standard of forgiveness on me that I use on others.”

If that is not enough, after He finishes His model prayer, He gives additional commentary on forgiveness. To show the severity of our unwillingness to forgive one another, Jesus states in no uncertain terms in Matthew 6:14-15, *For if you forgive others for their transgressions, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions.*

Uh Oh! You mean failing to forgive those who hurt and offend me actually damages my relationship with God? And it damages my relationship with myself and those who have sinned against me? Yep, it is a lose-lose-lose proposition for everyone; it’s a totally bad deal.

The Scriptures give us no “wobble room” on this topic of forgiving one another. If we want a healthy relationship with God, ourselves, and those who have sinned against us, forgiveness is the great balm of healing. My counsel to you concerning those who have sinned against you (no matter how far back the transgression goes) is to “let it go”! Just “let it go”! Release the perpetrator from their sin, and “let it go”! There is no hurt that we have incurred in life that exceeds the hurt we have inflicted on Jesus. Yet, in spite of what we have done to Him, He still loves and forgives us, every day! He is asking us—no, *commanding* us—to do the same thing with our relationships, to love and forgive one another just as Christ loves and forgives us!

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