

PRACTICAL STEPS IN
HEALING YOUR RELATIONSHIPS
RECONCILIATION AND RENEWAL IN CHRIST

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Introduction

Think of important people in your life. What regrets fill your mind? Is there remorse? Do you have current problems with them? Think of your father, your mother, your siblings, your child, your long-time friend, your pastor, your business partner? Or your *former* business partner, *former* pastor, *former* church friends or *former* co-workers? Has it led to distance? Do you feel powerless to “fix” them? Do you have open hatreds? Who do you hate? Do you wish anyone dead? As a Christian, praying the Lord’s Prayer (among other biblical teachings) you must ask yourself, do I have broken relationships with any persons? Who must I forgive, even as I am forgiven? (“Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.”)

This book is an exercise in counseling through writing. It attempts to “get real” with one of the hardest challenges in life: dealing with broken relationships. Almost all of us have “problem people” in our lives and heartbreaking breaches of trust. Good friends fail us, or worse, turn against us. Our spouses, parents, children, and other family members resent us. Bitterness characterizes many of our long-term relationships. We have stewed in the juices of hatred and vengeance. We have schemed the downfall of our friends. We have replayed and replayed the wrongs done to us on an infinite loop. Injustices done are always ready in our “on the go” playlist. A film reel is always cued for those decisive clips of actions against us.

Emotional memories often indicate relational traumas. Can you remember the last time you were slighted or “dissed” in a conversation? Can you recall being rejected by a person more than ten years ago? Where were you sitting when you received one of the harshest critiques? What room were you in when you got the worst job review ever? The fact is, we recall these kinds of things because relational problems create a kind of post-traumatic stress in all of us. And just as those who struggle with PTSD, we can be “triggered.”

Life in this fallen world provides occasions for all kinds of hardship, wounds, and long-term trauma; but as Christians we confess true healing now and forevermore. Do you believe that healing is possible? You must first accept this as a real possibility. We need Jesus to rule over our past, our present, and our future.

This book will not “fix” your relational problems, but it does offer a process and wisdom for healing broken relationships. Reading this book will not

effect healing, but doing the practical exercises will begin the genesis of new tissue over old wounds. Only when you use the process will renewal be possible.¹

Renewal of mind is not a concept meant to be critically assessed or bantered about in philosophical halls; it is action called for by a man who was transformed. The man who wrote the phrase, “renew your mind,” had practiced what he preached. He was transformed by grace—from a murderous lunatic to a martyr of peace. This man had gone as far as killing and imprisoning many of the first Christians. He was transformed into a man who demonstrated peace through incredible suffering in his life and words, even penning the anthem of Christian love (1 Cor. 13). I am referring to “the least of the apostles,” and “chief of sinners,” as he calls himself, St. Paul. He certainly deserves the title “saint.”

Paul *models* personal change for those who desire personal change. He underwent an amazing transformation. We have a written account of this, as well as his advice to others in a variety of situations in the Pauline Epistles. The repeated pattern of his writings is that because of Christ’s redemption, we are to live out the reality of being in the Body of Christ, the new humanity (Eph. 2:15). This requires peace with others—working through conflicts by applying the gospel to our hearts and relationships (e.g., read Romans, Galatians, or Ephesians in reverse to see where Paul ends). They end with unity in relationships and begin with the “indicatives” of what Christ has done for us.

We are called to pursue peace because peace is the final state of affairs in eternity. Grace, mercy, justification, these are just a means to peace. The kingdom is itself peace, “the kingdom of God . . . righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit” (Rom. 14:17). Peace means “wholeness” (Hebrew, *Shalom*), not a mere cessation of war or trouble. The Bible speaks of several kinds of peace.

Cosmic peace at the end of all things is obtained through Christ “to reconcile all things to Himself” (Col. 1:20). Salvific peace is peace with God, “having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (Rom. 5:1). Circumstantial peace is the peace of orderly

¹ Research suggests that people who use a process and time do get such healing. I say this on the authority of Scripture and the world’s most knowledgeable researcher on forgiveness, Dr. Everett L. Worthington: <http://www.evworthington-forgiveness.com>

circumstances, “for God is not a God of confusion but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints” (1 Cor. 14:33). Peace of mind is the result of trusting in God. “The steadfast of mind Thou wilt keep in perfect peace” (Is. 26:3; also Phil. 4:7).

Often, the Bible speaks of a peace resulting in unity. I call this *relational peace*. It has deep roots in the Hebrew Scriptures: It is “strife” between brothers that threw the world into turmoil (Cain and Abel). “So Abram said to Lot, ‘Please let there be no strife between you and me, nor between my herdsmen and your herdsmen, for we are brothers’” (Gen. 13:8). Relational peace is a precious attainment (Ps. 133).

Relational peace is living in a state reconciliation, as far as it is possible with you, with every person in your life. It requires properly disposing of all offenses that may arise: this is to grant forgiveness to all who have trespassed against you and to be at peace with them, as far as it concerns your own heart and mind. Jesus called us to this kind of peace when he said, “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God” (Mt. 5:9).

Two Things to Learn by Heart

This short study is designed to give two memorable handles on the processes of healing relationships: reconciliation and renewal. In the first section of this booklet, I will explain the reality of broken relationships in the Church, as well as providing a simple, memorable process to follow in pursuing reconciliation. This process of healing relationships can be summarized in an acrostic: “PEOPLE” and the process of renewal of relationships is “REPEAT.” So “PEOPLE” is for addressing reconciliation and “REPEAT” is to address ongoing relational difficulties.

“PEOPLE” stands for the following principles of reconciliation:

- 1) Pursue Peace
- 2) Examine Yourself
- 3) Offense Defined
- 4) Process of Confrontation (or Not)
- 5) Listen in Confrontation
- 6) Exercise Renewal

“REPEAT” stands for the following process drawn from Philippians 4.

- 1) Rejoice Always
- 2) Endure with Others
- 3) Petition God (rather than worry)

- 4) Existential Peace
- 5) Affirm the True, Good, and Beautiful
- 6) Teachers and Models

I also need to place a disclaimer at this point. Many of us have experienced relational breakdowns. I believe the principles in this study will help, if one does them (rather than simply know about them). However, if you or someone you are seeking to help has gone through significant trauma, such as sexual abuse, the murder or abduction of a loved one, or other atrocities, this study is in no way a substitute for appropriate counseling. While I do think the teachings here can help even in extreme cases, it must be applied with a great deal of patience, love, and expertise counseling.

Personal Conflicts in the Church

As a young minister I believed that there would surely be no unresolved personal issues in a “biblical church.” It only took a couple of months for that to give way. Personal conflicts are an unfortunate *reality* in the Church. The Bible promises forgiveness for our sins through Jesus, no more tears in heaven, a resurrection body, life in a new creation, the indwelling of the Spirit now, but it does not promise a life without relational conflicts. It is a sad reality that it is often church members, close friends, relatives, in-laws and even spouses in such conflicts. This is prefigured in the Psalms. “Even my close friend in whom I trusted, who ate my bread, has lifted up his heel against me” (Ps. 41:9).

The claim to be in a “biblical church” or a “New Testament church” will not change this reality. In fact, the (sometimes) prideful attitude that accompanies “we are biblical church” is often a rationalization for being “right” in a conflict! Not only are conflicts evident in every kind of church today, many conflicts are evident in almost every church in the New Testament.

In Acts we find conflict as the gospel crossed cultural and religious boundaries (e.g., Acts 6, “the Hellenistic vs Hebrew widows”), not to mention the personal division between Paul and Barnabas over Mark (Acts 15:39). Romans has weaker/stronger brother conflicts, as well as similar issues stemming from the Jew/Gentile diversity (Rom. 14). There are conflicts over many personality and doctrinal issues in the Corinthian church (1 Cor. 3, 11, 15). Paul begins the book by rebuking them due to divisions over personalities: “I am of Paul,’ and ‘I of Apollos ...” (1 Cor. 1:12-13). In

Galatia there are (as in other books) Judaizing conflicts, even leading to a fracas between the apostolic leaders Paul, Peter, James and Barnabas! Paul exhorts the believers not to “bite and devour one another” (Gal. 5:15). In Ephesus there is a charge to walk “with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love, being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Eph. 4:2-3). The same could be said for Colossians, Thessalonians, Peter’s epistles, and John’s epistles.

The wonderfully rich book of Hebrews is hardly concerned with personal conflicts as a major theme, yet in the section of practical exhortations, notice the deep surgical cuts made to apply the new covenant reality: “Pursue peace with all men, and the sanctification without which no one will see the Lord. See to it that no one comes short of the grace of God; that no root of bitterness springing up causes trouble, and by it many be defiled; that there be no immoral or godless person like Esau...” (Heb. 12:14-15).

As the above survey shows, all kinds of personal conflicts happened within New Testament congregations. There were divisions between leaders and members, from Jerusalem to Rome and everywhere between. We would be naive to think this will not happen today. The real choice is not whether we will have relational conflict, but how to properly prepare for and respond to such conflicts.

PART I: STEPS OF PERSONAL RECONCILIATION

The Effects of Broken Relationships

Our relationship with God is in jeopardy when we do not forgive and walk in reconciliation. These matters affect our lives holistically. Resentment, anger, anxiety, bitterness, hatred, and unforgiveness can cause ulcers, high blood pressure, and are correlated with dozens of diseases. On the other hand, relational peace in community has been documented as providing the basis for health. Consider the fascinating case of Roseto, Pennsylvania, chronicled in Malcolm Gladwell's, *Outliers: The Story of Success*. He tells of immigrant Italians who set up a replacement village in the new world. "These people were dying of old age. That's it."² The researchers concluded that their happy community life affected their health, despite eating and drinking like the Italian Mafia.

Certainly bad health can result from the stress of broken relationships. (This is not to suggest that health problems prove relational sins.) Relational breaches often blossom into the fruit of bitterness. In his book on the subject of bitterness, Jim Wilson, said, "Guilt is what we feel when we sin, and bitterness is what we feel when others sin against us."³

Common bitterness is not caused by great atrocities done to humanity. No one is really bitter at Hitler or Stalin because of their evil. That feeling is simple hatred. Rather, we are bitter over toothpaste tubes, toilet seats, coming home late, dinner not being ready, repeatedly forgetting preferences, birthdays, anniversaries, etc. Bitterness is caused not by great sins, but by annoyances of close proximity. Wilson observes that bitterness is against those closest to us: fathers, mothers, brothers, sisters, husbands, wives, children, roommates, bosses, co-workers. Consider a recent comment I heard from an adult daughter speaking about her mother: "The year that I did not speak to my mother was the best year of my life." She only lived a few doors away.

We can all sympathize. But this is not the way of Christ. He calls us to walk in forgiveness since we are forgiven. We are called in many stories and several direct exhortations to put away bitterness (Mt. 18; Heb. 12). Upon a full analysis, our bitterness often goes global. It really reaches, as in *Moby*

² Introduction ("The Roseto Mystery") in *Outliers: The Story of Success* (New York: Little Brown, 2008).

³ *How to Be Free from Bitterness* (Moscow, ID: Canon Press, 1995, 2007).

Dick, “through the mask” of the white whale to God. Finally, bitterness, explicitly or implicitly, is pointed against God. As Jonathan Edwards illuminated, God would not be safe for one moment if it was within humanity’s grasp to kill Him. The most beneficent, loving, and wise Being conceivable would be . . . well as it turned out, crucified by us.

Defining Forgiveness: Decisional vs Emotional Forgiveness

What is Forgiveness? The Greek verb we translate “forgive” (*aphiemi*) literally means to “not send or set in motion” and means in many passages to “send away, free, abandon, let go, leave.” Consider the uses of the term that do not refer to the arena of personal reconciliation: it is used for *leaving* one’s first love (Rev. 2:4); in also *giving* your coat too (Mt. 5:40); in when men *abandon* the natural function of sexuality (Rom. 1:27); when Jesus rebuked a fever it *left* her (Lk. 4:39). The uses of the word in the sense of personal reconciliation, it is to “cancel, remit” (Newman); to “release, on the part of the creditor or offended party, of any expectation that a debt will be repaid” (Lexington); to “let go, or give up a debt” (Thayer).⁴

“Decisional forgiveness occurs when a person decides to act without malice or to act in such a way to treat the offender as a valued person and forswear vengeance. Emotional forgiveness is hypothesized to be the emotional replacement of negative unforgiving emotions with positive other-oriented emotions (i.e., empathy, sympathy, compassion, or even love toward the offender).”⁵ Hence, (decisional) forgiving is an act of the will to “release” the debt or “abandon” the debt. The emotional effects of this may, or may not, result in a level of emotional peace which is consistent with the biblical conception of reconciliation.

The decisional and emotional aspects of healing your relationships, as a Christian, begin with applying the forgiven status you possess in Christ (from your own sins) to every other person in your life and thus addressing from Gospel-grace all personal conflicts: “And be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you” (Eph. 4:32; cf Parable of the Unforgiving Servant in Mt. 18:21-35).

The Principles of Reconciliation

⁴ Newman, Lexington, and Thayer are well-known lexicons defining NT Greek terms; these citations are from the versions in Accordance: Oaktree Bible Software (ver. 12.1).

⁵ From Everett Worthington, <http://www.psychology.vcu.edu/people/worthington.shtml>

Over the years I have repeatedly seen the need to address biblical conceptions of reconciliation. I would teach, preach, and talk through ideas of forgiveness, confrontation, reconciliation, and renewing relationships while encouraging individuals to apply them. I finally began to reduce them to a set of principles, finalizing them into six steps: 1) commit to be reconciled to others; 2) examine yourself prior to making accusations of others; 3) clarify how others have sinned against you and you against them; 4) determine whether a confrontation is necessary for your reconciliation or whether you can simply grant forgiveness without requiring anything of another; 5) use proper evidence in a confrontation or accusation and listen; and 6) as you move away from a conflict renew your mind toward the other person(s).

Someone rather harshly criticized this work (in a preliminary form) for suggesting that “steps” can help people. So let me say a few words in defense of “steps.” On the one hand, I recall a parishioner with a severe problem who did not know how to “go to the Lord” or “seek God’s healing,” etc. After struggling for a few years, this person abandoned the faith because secular behavioral counseling helped this person address real problems. On the other hand, a person said to me (critically), you “give steps instead of pointing people to God . . .” So on the one hand a person denies the faith because there are (allegedly) no actions steps; on the other hand, the Spirit of God (allegedly) cannot work through the reasoned application and sequence of the teachings of the Word of God. This is clearly a false dilemma.

The Word encourages “teaching, instruction, and training” (2 Tim. 3:16) which implies sequence and ordering, among other aspects of explication. The work of the Spirit requires that each part of a biblical sequence or “step” include conscious dependence on the Spirit of God, fully reflective of Christ’s redemptive work. These are not contradictory. To deny the value of a biblical sequence of ideas, i.e., “steps” is simply to deny the value of biblical teaching, if the steps are indeed biblical. So here are six steps that will guide you in pursuing relational peace.

Principles of Relational Healing: PEOPLE

- 1) Pursue Peace
- 2) Examine Yourself
- 3) Offense Defined
- 4) Process of Confrontation (or Not)
- 5) Listen in Confrontation
- 6) Exercise Renewal

Pursue Peace: PEOPLE

The first letter is a matter of obedience to Jesus at a foundational level. Pursue peace. You should have the conviction that you will not live with any broken relationships, so far as it is within your power to have relational peace. Jesus lived and died and rose so that we can have peace with God and be united in peace in the Body of Christ. To permit broken relationships persist in the Body is radically inconsistent with our professed faith in Christ and the “communion of saints.”

Pursue Peace
Examine Yourself
Offense Defined
Process of Confrontation (or Not)
Listen in Confrontation
Exercise Renewal

The Bible makes this point in several important passages. Hebrews 12:14 commands: “Pursue peace with all men, and the sanctification without which no one will see the Lord.” Like Romans 12:18-19, it moves from peace to revenge - “If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men. Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, ‘VENGEANCE IS MINE.’” Through Christ we have peace with God (Rom. 5:1) and the spiritual power to live at peace with others.

The command “pursue” means “eagerly strive,” or “track down” (Ps. 34:14). It is the term often translated, “persecute.” Literally rendered it is, “Persecute peace with all men.” It is to be “tracked down.” Two parallel objects: peace and sanctification. The attached consequence of failing is profound: “without which no one will see the Lord.” A lack of relational peace and spiritual fruit is called, “coming short of the grace of God” and a “root of bitterness” (Dt. 29:18). If this happens, “by it many be defiled” (v. 15). The consequences of our lack of peace with others are thus not only severe for us (even eternally), but also they affect many downstream. Are you willing to pursue peace at all costs?

Jesus clearly calls us to this, “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” (Mt. 6:14-15). The end of the parable of the “Unforgiving Servant,” e.g, “seventy times seven” is: “And his lord, moved with anger, handed him over to the torturers until he should repay all that was owed him. My heavenly Father will also do the same to you, if each of you does not forgive his brother from your heart” (Mt. 18:34). Could this be stronger?

Examine Yourself: PEOPLE

This is the discipline of keeping a “blameless conscience.” It leads us to acknowledge our own sins, to see our own bitterness or malice and in so doing, to provide a closer meeting point for healing (even if the other party has wronged you). Jesus calls us to self-examination, especially prior to confronting others. He vividly made this point in the Sermon on the Mount: “Do not judge so that you will not be judged. For in the way you judge, you will be judged; and by your standard of measure, it will be measured to you. Why do you look at the speck that is in your brother’s eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, ‘Let me take the speck out of your eye,’ and behold, the log is in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother’s eye” (Mt. 7:1-5).

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Practically, our willingness to admit our faults provides space for more honesty with others. Proverbs 15:1 says, “A soft answer turns away wrath, But a harsh word stirs up anger.” If you do need to confront someone, be sure that you are completely willing to start by confessing your sins against them. You get no stars in your crown for being stoic about your own sins when you are seeking reconciliation. Be vulnerable and space will open for healing and wholeness. Otherwise, the whole process is doomed.

Offense Defined: PEOPLE

Many people “take offense” and bury it, never assessing it or addressing the problem. We believe our own critical thoughts about others and we believe

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gossip. Instead of “believing all [good] things” and “hoping all [good] things,” we believe the worst about others (1 Cor. 13:7). Then we discover how grievously others have sinned against us. We find that their smallest fault becomes the cause of our “offense.”

What is a proper basis for “taking offense”? Could it be a difference of opinion, irritations, annoyances, failures of others? Before accusing or judging others, define their offense(s) objectively, according to the Bible. An offense is a cause or occasion of sin, a “stumbling block” (*scandalon*, Mt. 5:29ff, 16:23, 18:6). A true offense requires the following:

a) That another person violates the Law of God making you the victim of such sin. For example, let us think through the moral law (in the Ten Commandments).

- A person could disrespect or disobey you, if you are in an authority relationship over them (V. Honor your father and mother).
- A person could hate or act murderously toward you (VI. You shall not kill).
- A person could violate you or your spouse sexually (VII. You shall not commit adultery).
- A person could steal from you (VIII. You shall not steal).
- A person could lie to you or about you (IX. You shall not bear false witness).
- A person could express covetousness toward you, possibly in the form of envy, jealousy, or bitterness, etc. (X. You shall not covet).

b) The second component of defining an offense is proper evidence. Jesus applies this rule in Matthew 18:16. It is required that “two or three witnesses” confirm every fact (Dt. 19:15; Mt. 18:16). We should not form judgments toward others until the facts are confirmed. This is where many go astray. We may be tempted to believe one side of the story; we take the barest evidence as “proof.” But, in many interpersonal cases the “facts” are not demonstrated until a confrontation takes place and one hears the other person’s perspective. Leaping to condemnation prior to this is sinful and foolish. Remember the “Golden Rule,” “do unto others as you would have them do unto you” (Mt. 7:12).

Given these qualifications for properly *taking offense*, differences of opinion, irritations, annoyances, failures of others, personality quirks, being “rubbed the wrong way,” etc. are not true offenses. However, reacting wrongly to these kinds of things may lead a person to sin against another. You may accuse another (improperly) of an offense which is itself a serious sin. For example, Deuteronomy 19:18–19 speaks of “a false witness” making a false accusation; the result is “then you shall do to him just as he had intended to

do to his brother.” In principle here, a false accusation of murder would lead to death for the false witness. If you have ever been accused of something that you did not do, you know this deeply wounds a person and can do long-term relational damage. It leads to ongoing relational strains, creating discord, dissension, and schism.

**Process of Confrontation (or Not):
PEOPLE**

There are only two right responses to actual biblical offenses, e.g., when someone violates the Law against you and that is clear from proper evidence: a) we may forgive without process or b) we may forgive with process.

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a) We may forgive some offenses without requiring further action or “process” (the process here is outlined in Mt. 18:15-19). The biblical basis for this is in several passages which speak of being “tender-hearted” and letting “love cover a multitude of sins” (Eph. 4:32, 1 Pet. 4:8). Even in the Lord’s prayer, we posture ourselves as those who continually, “forgive our debtors.” Colossians says we are always to be “forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you” (3:13). This exhortation is parallel to, “bearing with one another,” suggesting the continual and ongoing nature of forgiveness (Col. 3:13).

Surely this is a matter of spiritual maturity. When a child gets mad and says, “I hate you,” for some petty reason, what is the mature response to this? Certainly a parent should correct it, but what if you are the “victim,” and not in authority? Should you take this child to the church court and require a written letter of apology for harming your dignity? Of course not. A mature person would extend good will, love, and forgiveness without requiring a process of confrontation and confession. The same is true (perhaps even more so) in dealing with less mature believers. You may judge your maturity in the Lord by this. In dealing with others in Christ, are you like the loving adult who continues to love and even win the sullen child’s heart, or do you descend to the level of a brat demanding justice for any petty and thoughtless offense?

Forgiveness without process (a) is not accepted as biblical by all. Many have taught and believe that unless a person acknowledges their sin, they don’t

deserve forgiveness and it is even wrong to forgive a person who lacks penitence. This view can easily be a justification for bitterness. There are many instances where it is impossible for the perpetrator to confess and receive forgiveness, for example a past abusive situation when the offender has died. Does God still call us to forgive our debtors? Yes. The above passages, as well as ordinary experience in the Church and years of counseling people, have persuaded me that we are to grant forgiveness without process in many instances. This does not mean the person has *received* such forgiveness or the peace that such forgiveness should bring. Reconciliation requires willingness from both parties. But simple forgiveness is an action of the victim toward the perpetrator regardless of the perpetrator's disposition. Choosing to forgive frees the victim from resentment, anguish, and bitterness and applies the Gospel of liberty.

b) On the other hand, in many cases, there is a need to follow the process in Matthew 18:15-19. We may pursue reconciliation with an offender by "process" with the means of sequential, humble confrontation (Mt. 18:15ff) to give opportunity for clarification, establishing facts, repentance, and a peaceful resolution. It should be noted that Matthew 18 applies more broadly than the specific case when someone sins against you, personally. In fact, Christ leaves the "victim" of the sin out. He simply say, "If your brother sins." However, in the parable which follows (vv. 21-35) the issue is personal reconciliation. "Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him?" (Mt. 18:21).

When do you forgive without the process of confrontation and when do you forgive in the process of confrontation? There is no rule about this. But here are some considerations:

- As I suggested above, as we grow spiritually, we should be more and more willing to forgive without the need for confrontation. This too applies to many relational difficulties which border on personality issues.
- When you cannot specify the sin clearly, but feel hurt, try to forgive and move on. If you continue to rehearse this (alleged) sin against you and you find that it continues to affect your attitude toward the person, then you need to follow-through in meeting with the person.
- It may be useful to use the process of confrontation, so that the other person becomes aware of what you take to be an offense. This could be an opportunity for growth in all.

- If you tend to minimize offense against you and sweep things under the rug, then you should fall on the side of confrontation. You may be struggling with a fear of confrontation and your spiritual growth depends upon stepping up to the plate.
- If you tend to be so sensitive that you often take offense even from a person's non-verbal communication, then you should practice forgiving and moving on without confrontation. Grow thicker skin and remember your identity in Christ. You have Him, what else do you require?

So if you have a biblical offense against you (above), and the process of confrontation is necessary, what do you do? The language below is crafted for what I take to be ordinary relational breaches, when all the facts are not clear. You need to get clarity and you desire reconciliation. This kind of language would be inappropriate in a case where, say, you found your husband in bed with another woman or a case where the facts are evident or established. But if you think someone slandered you, or lied about you, etc. and now you need to get to the bottom of it. Consider this potential language.

- What to say in confrontation: *“Something has been bothering me and I want to keep a clear conscience, you did [specify sin] at [specify time and location]. That seemed to me to be a sin against me and a [violation of _____ commandment]. I wanted to give you a chance to address this in case I have misunderstood this.”*

Now stand ready to hear evidence to the contrary or to receive an acknowledgement of sin and grant forgiveness to this person. If the person does not “hear” (receive and acknowledge) you, the biblical process requires you to proceed to take another person as a witness, etc.

- What to say if you are confronted: After listening, say a) if you are guilty, *“You are right, I sinned in doing _____ . I was wrong, please forgive me.*

The follow-through to acknowledging your sin is what I will call the restitution question. *Is there anything that I can do to make the situation right or to make up for my sin against you?* In many cases, just asking this brings some healing. It conveys that you understand you have hurt and caused a loss to the person. (See the appendix on Restitution)

Listen in Confrontation: PEOPLE

The book of James commands sobering actions: “This you know, my beloved brethren. But everyone must be quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger; for the anger of man does not achieve the righteousness of God” (James 1:19–20).

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Being quick to hear is another way to say, “listen.” The Proverbs give a wonderful litany of the virtues of “hearing” or “listening.”

- A wise man will hear and increase in learning. (1:5)
- The way of a fool is right in his own eyes, But a wise man is he who listens to counsel. (12:15)
- But a scoffer does not listen to rebuke. (13:1)
- He whose ear listens to the life-giving reproof will dwell among the wise. (15:31)
- He who neglects discipline despises himself, But he who listens to reproof acquires understanding. (15:32)
- He who gives an answer before he hears, It is folly and shame to him. (18:13)
- Like an earring of gold and an ornament of fine gold is a wise reprov-er to a listening ear. (25:12)

The principles in these proverbs are applicable to many circumstances, but especially the context of confrontation for the purpose of reconciliation. We must “hear” the other party. But “hearing” is not simply the reception of sound waves on the eardrum. It is listening with understanding and empathy. And, in order to do this well, prior self-examination is necessary.

One of the reasons we must listen, in such a meeting, is because we may need to establish the “facts.” We may objectively know the sins of a brother or sister in some circumstances. However, most inter-personal conflicts begin with some level of confusion on the “facts.” In our confrontation with others, we should be open to reconsider what we believe to be the “facts.” If we are called upon to help people address conflicts, we must try to distinguish the “facts” from biases, allegations, and assumptions. We must not presume we know the motives of others.

For example, Jane intended to serve a spaghetti dinner to their Bible study group. Wanda let Jane know that she couldn’t come because she was trying

gluten-free diet. Jane responded that they could make arrangements for that diet. Wanda explained (in a text) that they didn't want to trouble anyone. After Wanda (and family) didn't attend the dinner (despite Jane's offer), Jane stopped inviting Wanda to fellowship events in their home. After a couple of weeks of muddled communication, Jane told Mary that Wanda was mad at her and didn't know why. Wanda told Karen that Jane was mad at her because she was trying a gluten-free diet. Then Mary and Karen told Sue their "concerns." Sue came to the pastor and explained that Jane and Wanda were at odds with each other and it had disrupted their Bible study. The pastor then told the elders that "we have a real issue with people making idols of their diet in the church." The pastor blogged about "Diets that Rival Christ." Wanda left the church. And so it goes.

Most of these kinds of conflicts get stirred up long after the "facts" have been lost. Getting back to the objective definition of the sin and how we verify it, etc. becomes hopelessly mixed into the judgment of motives, misunderstandings, and assumptions of guilt. Our posture toward others in Christ should be making no assumptions about guilt, but verifying an objectively defined sin. I think this is what Paul meant in saying "Love ... believes all things" (1 Cor. 13:7). Loving others means we get objective confirmation before making an accusation.

Exercise Renewal: PEOPLE

Following the principles of reconciliation above, let us suppose you have mended a relationship. You have already determined to pursue peace, you have examined yourself and acknowledged your own failures in a situation, you biblically defined another person's sin against you, you determined the need to confront the other person, and you truly listened to them in confrontation. As a result sins were clarified, confessed, and forgiveness was transacted. Now both parties rejoice in Christ. Now what?

- Pursue Peace
- Examine Yourself
- Offense Defined
- Process of Confrontation (or Not)
- Listen in Confrontation
- Exercise Renewal

In my experience, maintaining peace requires effort. The temptation will be to rehearse the details and perhaps with suspicion. To find similar faults again. To believe the other person will likely commit the same sin again. Healing relationships demands that after reconciliation happens, we must continue to live in a *renewed way in order to restore trust*.

PART II: STEPS OF PERSONAL RELATIONAL RENEWAL

Peace and the Congregation

A few years ago I was asked to speak at an event about “Congregational Peace.” I supposed I was qualified because our congregation had just gone through a white squall of conflict and the ship did not sink. In preparing for that talk, I discovered the larger context of the well-known verse, Philippians 4:7, “And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.” By looking more deeply into the context I discovered that Paul was not throwing out random commands to be framed on our walls along with pictures of butterflies. This entire passage expositis a means of renewal in relationships.

Philippians is a marvelous Epistle and many saints love it for the many memorable and quotable verses. Part of the reason for this is Paul’s effusive love for this congregation. He calls them his “joy,” his “crown,” his “beloved” or “well-loved” ones. Despite this, they still had squabbles. They needed relational healing.

Conflicts in Philippi

The example of the church in Philippi provides a relational boot camp for us. But this is not because Philippi was unusually troubled. Not at all. Acts 16 reveals the foundation of the church in Philippi. Paul and Silas followed the urgings of the Spirit to evangelize there. They were sensitive to the Spirit, though they still had to actively “conclude” God’s will (Acts 16:10). By their faith and faithfulness in adversity, God opened the gospel door to all of Europe.

In this context Luke joined the apostolic band (Acts 16:11, “we” includes the writer, Dr. Luke). The first converts were diverse: a businesswoman (Lydia and her household servants), a slave girl with the spirit of divination (lit., spirit of the python) now delivered, and the pagan jailer and his household.

Lydia whose name means “from the Greek region of Lydia,” was likely a wealthy Greek (unmarried or widowed, conducting her own business). She had a household including at least some servants (Acts 16:15). The jailer was likely Roman, having been given this post and land as a result of service in the Roman army. It is likely that he had large household of servants which would have been from a variety of ethnic groups. Important households in

the first century world utilized slaves. For example centurions, magistrates, and jailers used servants which may have been slaves bought to function as personnel to run the household micro-economy.⁶ The slave girl with the spirit of divination (*pneuma python*) was likely from a marginal group within the empire. Though she was not identified as part of the congregation or converted, it is likely that her deliverance included her conversion and that such a conversion meant participation in the ecclesia of believers.

Assuming all of these were the charter membership of this church, note the diversity. This “church plant” was composed of three different characters and their relations, with very different backgrounds. Very likely, they were from three different social classes, and three different ethnicities. God’s foundational choices in the church show His love and acceptance of all kinds of people.

This core group of Philippian believers (and households) had grown to include multiple elders, deacons (1:1), and several ministers associated with them, including, Timothy, Epaphroditus, if not Tychicus and Trophimus (Acts 20:4). Philippi was a healthy church, but not a perfect church. We learn that there were at least some issues of disunity and disharmony (chs. 2-4).

Christ-Centered Relationships

One of the most profound passages about the nature of Christ’s incarnation is found in chapter 2, the *Carmen Christi*.

Although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. For this reason also, God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

This amazing passage expresses the depth of Christ’s character in His humility and exaltation. This was likely a hymn which captured the essence

⁶ For more on biblical-times households, see “The First Century Family” at <http://www.wordmp3.com/reformationresources>.

of the Apostolic witness to Christ. It is as poetic as it is profoundly theological. This is no bare theological discourse on the nature of *kenosis* (a theological topic on how He “emptied” Himself). It comes with a very simple exhortation: “Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others. Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, *who although He existed in the form of God . . .*” (Phil. 2:3-5).

God was at work in this congregation from the first (1:5). Paul encourages them with a future hope: “He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus” (1:6). Paul was thankful for their “participation” (*koinonia*) in the gospel. They were “partakers of grace” (1:7). They had prayed for and provided for Paul (1:19). Their participation included being partakers of grace, being prayer warriors, and providing practically for the expanse of the gospel to other congregations. Their maturity required active participation in gospel-partaking, prayer, and giving. Yet, they needed the direct command, “Do all things without grumbling or disputing” (2:14). Real church growth requires patience and perseverance in love through resolving personal conflicts.

Euodia and Syntyche

Paul’s loving personal appeal and deep Christological appeal (2:5-11) conclude in chapter 4. In the context, Paul gives a pastoral exhortation for two co-laborers to stand firm. Euodia and Syntyche have ongoing relational problems in the church, despite that they have “shared my struggle in the cause of the gospel” (4:3). The name “Euodia” probably means, “prosperous journey” and “Syntyche” means, “fortunate.” It is ironic that both ladies’ names mean more or less the same thing. Indeed, as believers, they have the same destiny. They have the same church home. They have the same Lord, the same baptism, the same Table. But, they are still at odds with one another. Such is the human condition.

Paul provides rich counsel here which has been mostly ignored as wisdom in healing relationships. Let me make a case that Paul is actually providing relevant, helpful, and healing counsel. I will argue that the verses which follow his address of the women provide a helpful sequence of injunctions in directly calling for a relational renewal process (with Euodia and Syntyche and those affected).

Philippians 4:1-9 - Thus, my loved ones, my brethren, whom I long to see, you are my joy and my crown; in this way, stand firm in the Lord, my loved ones: I urge Euodia and I urge Syntyche to think together in the Lord. 3 Yes, and I ask you also, my yoke-fellow [pastor], take hold of these women, for they have struggled beside me in the work of the gospel, together with Clement and the rest of my co-workers, whose names are in the book of life. 4 [You all] continually be glad [that you are] in the Lord; again I will repeat, be glad. 5 [You all] Let your gentle, reasonable side be seen by everyone. The Lord is near. 6 Stop worrying about things and pray about everything specifically with thankfulness so that what you ask for [instead of worry about] is made known to God. 7 And [then] the peace of God, which exceeds all your thinking, will protect your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. 8 Last of these [exhortations on how to stand firm], beloved, [in such problems] affirm whatever is true, whatever is honest, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable, [see in this] what is excellent and glorious. 9 Keep on putting into practice the things that you have been disciplined in and received and heard and seen in me, and the God of peace will be with you. (my translation)

At the end of ch. 3, Paul says, “thus” (*hoste*), which recalls that there are enemies against the gospel, yet we are part of a united heavenly “citizenship” (*politeuma*) (3:18-19). So he calls the whole church to “stand firm” (4:1). He provides a qualification on standing firm, “in this way” (*houtos*). The transition between chs. 3 and 4 is like climbing to the top of hill, then looking back and forward. The very enemies that are outside the church (3:2) and the unity we profess as the true circumcision (3:3) and true citizens (3:19) mirrors the call to peace and unity within the congregation.

Then he addresses a specific group, two women, called out by name for a lack of peace. Paul appeals to another here, a “loyal yoke fellow” or “true companion” or “partner” or “comrade” to help these women live in peace.⁷ This person is likely the pastor, minister, overseer of the Philippian church at the time. He is to “help” (literally, “seize,” *sullambano*) the women in order to bring about a greater unity.

⁷ We don't know the identity of this person. It could be Luke, Timothy, Epaphroditus, or another. A minority of interpreters transliterate the term as a formal name, “Syzygus.”

There are several reasons why the next set of commands form a process for “standing firm” together in the midst of relational problems.

- There is a parallel structure which runs from verses 2-9 which outline peace. This section begins with a lack of peace, ends with peace, and in center there is peace.

A. Think together [**peace**] in the Lord.

B. Keep on taking hold of the peace disruptors (these women).

C. Keep on rejoicing in the Lord.

> **The peace of God will guard you.**

C'. Keep on envisioning the true, good, beautiful.

B'. Keep on putting into practice what you saw in me.

A. The Lord of **peace** will be with you.

- While verse 4 seems generic, the command to “rejoice” is plural and may imply: “You rejoice, Euodia and Syntyche.”
- Even so, the next command seems especially relevant to the women, “let your gentleness” or “forbearance” be seen by all. This most likely should be taken as, “You ladies show your gentleness and patience to all the congregation.” If this is so, it seems likely that “rejoice” is also directed to them, just as the others.
- As it turns out, on consideration, these exhortations form a spiritually useful process to address the stress of relational conflicts.

Wash, Rinse, Repeat

Just like the simple instructions on many shampoo bottles, broken relationships need cleansing, resetting, and repeating the process. The instructions in Phil. 4 are especially helpful as a renewal process. From the Phil. 4 injunctions, I have reduced the actions to the following acrostic: “REPEAT.”

Rejoice Always (4:4)

Endure with Others (4:5)

Petition God vs Anxiety (4:6)

Experience Peace (4:7)

Affirm the True, Good, and Beautiful (4:8)

Teachers and Models (4:9)

Rejoice Always (4:4) - REPEAT

The first of this sequence is to, “rejoice” (*chairō*). To “*chairō*” is “to enjoy a state of happiness and well-being.”⁸ The qualification Paul gives is, “in the Lord.” In my translation, I try to capture the subjective aspect of this: “[You all] continually be glad [that you are] in the Lord; again I will repeat, be glad.” The command is to give praise to the Lord that you are joined or connected or in union with Him, “in Him.” Like our acrostic, he “repeats” - “Again, rejoice.”

Rejoice Always
Endure with Others
Petition God vs Anxiety
Experience Peace
Affirm the True, Good, and Beautiful
Teachers and Models

Paul calls these women to be in a state of happiness because of their salvation. Why begin the sequence here? We must put all of our problems into perspective. The largest perspective is simply this: are you in Christ or not? If you are in Christ, nothing can separate you from Him (Rom. 8:35ff). Whatever problems you have must be seen in this noon day light. In the stark, but realistic words of Job: “the LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD.” Paul would apply this same “in Christ” logic to his own life earlier in the book. “For to me, living is Christ and dying is gain” (Phil. 1:21). To “rejoice” or “praise the Lord that you are united to Christ” decentralizes every worry, every problem, every difficulty. Remember who you are, Paul urges, and take joy in that; and repeat!

Endure with Others (4:5) - REPEAT

The usual rendering of verse 5 is “gentleness,” “forbearance,” “endurance,” even “reasonableness” or “meeting half-way.” So my translation is, “[You all] Let your *gentle, reasonable side* be seen.” This is just to say, “endure with others.”

Rejoice Always
Endure with Others
Petition God vs Anxiety
Experience Peace
Affirm the True, Good, and Beautiful
Teachers and Models

Why would this be the second action, after “taking joy”? We all know those that get to that place: “I’m done with him/her.” There are people that we

⁸ *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament Based on Semantic Domains, 2nd Ed.*, Johannes P. Louw and Eugene A. Nida, Editors (New York: United Bible Societies, 1988); Electronic text hypertexted and prepared by OakTree Software, Inc.

are “done with,” namely those that reject Jesus. But please remember, we are by no means “done with” those with whom we will spend eternity. Are we?

So, I think this is the most direct and practical action a person can take in a squabble. It is a call to act on your self-examination. Can you be a little more gentle, a little more patient? Can you bear with another person a little longer? Can you endure a little longer? Paul calls them to reflect upon ways to be gentle or patient. But then there’s the note of accountability, “Let this be seen by all.” Paul highlighted a very practical action for these women. Show a little more patience, a little more gentleness, a little more perseverance with each other, and show that to everyone.

What does Paul’s addition mean: “The Lord is near.” Some interpret this as further accountability: the Lord is near in judgment. This is true, since we are only a moment away from standing before him. However, Paul’s use here is more likely an allusion to Psalm 145:18. “The LORD is near to all who call upon Him, To all who call upon Him in truth.” This works well as a transition to a word on prayer, calling for specific petitions. Endure in your struggles and remember the Lord is near, so call on Him. Do not be anxious . . .

Petition God vs Anxiety (4:7) - REPEAT

The third action is prayer, since He is near to those who call upon Him. Instead of being worried (about this problem), turn anxieties into specific petitions with thanksgiving. “Stop worrying about things and pray about everything specifically with thankfulness so that what you ask for [instead of worry about] is made known to God.” I might add, let this be made known to God, rather than venting in your own mind and in gossiping to others.

- Rejoice Always
- Endure with Others
- Petition God vs Anxiety
- Experience Peace
- Affirm the True, Good, and Beautiful
- Teachers and Models

Worry is imagination used poorly. Instead of seeking God on a matter, we relive or *pre-live* fruitless emotions and things outside of our actual control. Jesus taught, “Do not be worried about your life”. . . “who of you by being worried can add a single hour to his life”? (Mt. 6:25-28). Great question, Jesus. Worry can’t do anything, change anything, add anything, affect anything —except for destroying the health and happiness of the worrier.

Worry and prayer are similar mental activities. Worry uses the same faculties that prayer uses. In both, our thoughts and words are present, as well our emotions and imaginations. Worry is imagination used in futility. Effective prayer reverses this and asks God for vivid, specific, and tangible requests with gratitude.

The process of exchanging futile anxieties for fruitful prayer entails several steps: name a specific concern; turn it into a specific petition to the Lord; adding notes of thanksgiving to the Lord. Regardless of the problem we can be thankful. We can add gratitude to our prayers since a) we are to be glad (rejoice) in our own salvation (4:4), b) we are to be grateful in God’s own character and power to do exceedingly beyond what we ask or think (Eph. 3:20). And c) we can discipline ourselves to see elements of goodness in our own situation (4:8).

Experience Peace (4:7) - REPEAT

The entire section is about peace. But here the center-piece of the passage is peace. This is not a command, as are the previous three injunctions. The verb is future tense. The “peace” “will guard” or “will protect” (*phrereo*) your hearts and minds. It is to install a garrison of soldiers. Once we have rejoiced, shown endurance, petitioned (Him who is near) with thankfulness, we can expect peace to set up guards, patrolling the perimeters of our heart and mind.

Rejoice Always
Endure with Others
Petition God vs Anxiety
<u>Experience Peace</u>
Affirm the True, Good, and Beautiful
Teachers and Models

We must once again remember the context, “And [then] the peace of God, which exceeds all your thinking [about the problem], will protect your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.” As much as we would like for this promise to be, “then you’ll have overflowing peace,” it might just be more oriented toward the patrolling guard metaphor. Once you have committed this to the Lord, the disruption of peace will sound an alarm. The patrol will alert you and you will need to keep or maintain that peace-guard by the process already discussed: rejoicing, patience, and petitions with thanksgiving in order to experience or continue to experience peace.

Whatever *guarding* means, it seems plain that we are to *have* or *experience* peace. Later Paul indicates, “the God of peace will be with you” (v. 9). Peace is to be realized, but it depends upon the previous actions: praise, patience,

petitions, then peace will guard you in Christ. The peace is a result of giving the problem over to God and accepting that He is with you (near) and will answer your prayers. It is like the definition of evangelism, “Sharing the gospel and leaving the results to God” (Bill Bright of Campus Crusade). Getting this peace requires rejoicing, being patient, taking it to the Lord in specific prayer and leaving the results with God.

Affirm the True, Good, and Beautiful (4:8) - REPEAT

The idea of positive thinking sounds like psychobabble to many. “Positive thinking” pop psychology may or may not help people. Usually in self-help stuff there’s just enough good and true to keep it afloat. Cultivating an optimistic attitude surely can be beneficial. The context of what one “affirms” here, makes all the difference.

Rejoice Always
Endure with Others
Petition God vs Anxiety
Experience Peace
Affirm the True, Good, and Beautiful
Teachers and Models

Just as Paul calls for exchanging worry for specific prayers (v. 6), he provides another exercisor mental renovation which might be summarized as, “be hopeful.” Paul wants us to affirm all that is good in the situation. But the thinking here is not unconnected or blindly “positive.” It is thinking about the relational problem, remembering Christ and rejoicing, “in the Lord” (2:5-11, 4:4).

In conflicts, our minds are tempted toward spiraling into the darkness, thinking the worst of everything and everyone. Rather, we are to use our mental faculty to see and reflect upon present and future aspects of the situation and persons and affirm that which is good. In doing this, we avoid mental slander and malice toward others.

Paul calls us to “*logizomai*” (take into account, impute, reckon) good things in this situation. This term is translated variously, “think,” “dwell,” “cherish the thought,” “minds be filled,” “meditate,” etc. One use of this term is found in 1 Corinthians 13: “When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I *reasoned (logizomai)* like a child.” This means something like “saw the world as a child.” This passage, along with others like Romans 6:11, “consider (*logizomai*) yourselves dead to sin,” provide a wide range of meanings. Clearly it is not, “reckon” evil as good. He is urging us to “see” the good, “acknowledge,” or “affirm” the true, good, and beautiful.

My translation is, “Last of these [exhortations of how to stand firm], beloved, [in such problems] affirm whatever is true, whatever is honest, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable, [see in this] what is excellent and glorious.” To affirm these good things is to positively look for, see, and gladly acknowledge these realities. We are to see good/true/beauty in the situation, expecting that it is really there. Another way Paul says this is, “Love believes all things and hopes all things” (1Cor. 13:7).

You may have a difficult time remembering this list of terms, “true, honorable, right,” etc. This memory trouble is not aided by the many variations of the list in translations. No two modern translations are identical on this.

ESV: true, honorable, just, pure, lovely, commendable

NASB: true, honorable, right, pure, lovely, good repute

NIV: true, noble, right, pure, lovely, admirable

NKJV: true, noble, just, pure, good report, virtue, praiseworthy

NRSV: true, honorable, just, pure, pleasing, commendable

However, there is an easy way to get and handle on this. The list of terms is a set of six attributes which are “excellent and glorious.” These qualitative terms range in meaning. The first term is agreed on by all, “true,” as well as the fourth term, “pure.” The other terms convey, despite varied translations, a sense of the main ideas.

These six attributes can be categorized as three sets of two related qualities. Then they culminate in two related superlatives. The first two relate to truth (true-honest), the next two relate to good (right-pure), and the final two relate to beauty (lovely-admirable). So then these six reduce to the familiar classical virtues of *the true*, *the good*, and *the beautiful*, which are all glorious-excellencies, or high virtues.

The Scriptures are full of progression of glory, from the story of Adam vs Jesus to the several character sequences in the NT (Rom. 5:3-4; 2 Pet. 1:3-7; cf 2 Cor. 4:7). Along with the idea that these point to the true, good, and beautiful, the overall pattern is more important than the exact translation of each term. We are urged on a mental path to think about what is first *true* and finally “*praiseworthy*” (*epeinos*, common to all translations). There is a

progression: it starts with truth, but ends with what is praiseworthy or glorious. Thus, it begins with *accepting reality* (truth) and concludes with worship (giving praise).

In the development of our renewal we are to move from thinking merely of truth to that which is worthy of praise and glory. We are to move in thinking about our problems and relational conflicts, from accepting the “truth” of the situation, to the place in which we “see” what is praiseworthy through the situation. Can you accept the possibility that God could work in the situation so that the result could be glorious and praiseworthy? Can you lift your eyes to see the Lord at work? Can you look past the faults and sins of others to see the glory of Christ?

How do we do this? Think of a problem and begin using these tools and forms. “I am having trouble with [situation or person] because of [problem]. I am praying about this with gratitude for my/our salvation, knowing God’s exceeding power to bring change and seeing many mercies in the situation. As I think through this problem. I am disciplining my mind to envision and take into account what is true, good, and beautiful in this.”

Teachers and Models (4:8) - REPEAT

- Rejoice Always
- Endure with Others
- Petition God vs Anxiety
- Experience Peace
- Affirm the True, Good, and Beautiful
- Teachers and Models

In the previous verse (v. 8), Paul begins with the term “finally” (*loipos*), which literally means “toward the rest,” deemed to mean “finally” or “last.” However, this is a problematic translation. Paul uses this word in ch.

3:1: “Finally (*loipos*), my brothers and sisters, rejoice in the Lord!” He then goes on with two more chapters. The term literally means, “to proceed, then.” Verse 8 is not actually the last injunction; just as in 3:1. Steve Jobs, at the end of his presentations of Apple’s new tech famously would say, “Just one more thing.” This one more thing was the main thing. It is not uncommon in thought, life, and literature for something which seems “last” or “final” to be followed by an actual last (biblical examples might include John 22, Rev. 22 which are appendices).

Paul gives another command: “Keep on putting into practice the things that you have been disciplined in and received and heard and seen in me, and the God of peace will be with you.” He concludes this passage with a final call

to remember *how he acted*. This “one more thing” turned out to be a main thing.

Paul provides several of these astounding and sometimes apparently “immodest” calls to be like him:

- 1 Cor. 4:16 - Therefore I exhort you, be imitators of me.
- 1 Cor. 11:1 - Be imitators of me, just as I also am of Christ.
- Phil. 3:17 - Brethren, join in following my example, and observe those who walk according to the pattern you have in us.
- 1 Thess. 1:6 - You also became imitators of us and of the Lord...
- 2 Thess. 3:7 - For you yourselves know how you ought to follow our example...
- 2 Thess. 3:9 - ... to offer ourselves as a model for you, so that you would follow our example.
- 2 Tim. 3:10 - Now you followed my teaching, conduct, purpose, faith, patience, love, perseverance . . .

The commission to “make disciples” was something that the conservative party of the Jews (Pharisees) understood (Mt. 23:15). Paul was of this party and understood the task. Now, in Christ, he makes disciples for a radically different purpose. Still the task involves *modeling* a disciple of Jesus. Perhaps the most succinct way of saying it is: “Be imitators of me, just as I also am of Christ” (1 Cor. 11:1).

Every disciple-maker, every disciple that desires to influence others for Christ, every believer who wishes to bear spiritual fruit, must implicitly or explicitly desire for others to follow them as they follow Christ. Spiritually mature people still acknowledge their sinfulness, just as Paul did (Eph. 3:8, Rom. 7:24, 1 Cor. 15:10). However, they can say to their disciples in Christ, “watch me and follow my lead,” “do you remember how I dealt with that?” “Follow my example.”

We are to be examples to others. And in any case, we, in fact, *are examples*. People always take spiritual leaders as examples. There is no escape from this part of the “stricter judgement” (James 3:1). Here, I take comfort in the powerfully Pauline words of John Newton, “I am not what I ought to be, I am not what I want to be, I am not what I hope to be in another world; but still I am not what I once used to be, and by the grace of God I am what I am.”

Paul had “discipled” (*manthano*) them (v. 9) in these things. The term is usually translated “learn.” But it means, “to learn by use and practice.” It is used to refer to the rabbinic process of training (John 7:15). “Discipled” is a fair way to convey this. They had received and heard Paul apply the gospel in his life. They had “seen” these actions *embodied* in Paul.

Remember, this “church plant” started when Paul and Silas were unjustly beaten to the point of open wounds and thrown in jail. They received the painful injustice of physical torture (Acts 16:22), and the bitter experience of literal chains and “stocks” (*xulon* - “an instrument for imprisonment, but also as a means of punishment”).⁹ What did they “model” in this situation? They prayed and sang psalms to the glory of God! If they knew how to glorify God in such dire conditions, we can trust well that they knew how to act in the midst of petty grievances, strife, resentments, malice, and the occasions for bitterness.

For our purpose, we cannot look to the life-example of Paul in our own midst, but we can observe his teaching. We can also take this principle as a simple one: look for good examples who embody reconciliation in practice. Do you see a person who easily grants forgiveness? Be like them. Do you see a person who does not easily take offense? Be like them. Do you see a person who has the courage to gently and peaceably confront those in sin? Be like them. Do you see a person willing to do what is right despite the cost? Be like them. Do you see a person who has been wronged by others, but refuses to gossip about it? Be like them. Do you see a person that yields their “rights” for the good of the Body? Be like them.

Finally, this call to follow Paul as a model is conjoined with the promise, “and the God of peace will be with you.” Therefore, I think the full sequence beginning in verse four includes his call to remember his own model in their midst.

Let us then remember the renewing actions set forth in Philippians 4:4-9: “REPEAT.”

- R**ejoice Always
- E**ndure with Others
- P**etition God vs Anxiety
- E**xperience Peace
- A**ffirm the True, Good, and Beautiful
- T**eachers and Models

⁹ Louw-Nida lexicon.

APPENDIX: PRACTICAL WORKSHEETS

Use a notebook or prayer journal to answer any questions in the following worksheets.

Decisional Forgiveness Worksheet

“Decisional forgiveness occurs when a person decides to act without malice or to act in such a way to treat the offender as a valued person and forswear vengeance.”¹⁰

- I. Remember the Requirement to Forgive
 - A. And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors (Mt. 6:12).
 - B. 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 (Mt. 6:14–15).
 - C. Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you (Eph. 4:32).
 - D. Then Peter came and said to Him, “Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him? Up to seven times?” Jesus said to him, “I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven (Mt. 18:21–22).
- II. Reflect on the Breach of Relationship
 - A. What event caused an offense or the latest relational problem? Note: if there is a long standing relational problem, just start with one event, the most recent.
 - B. Who sinned?
 - C. What is the sin? Define the sin and identify it as breaking one/more of the Ten Commandments.
 - D. Reflect on the Causes of this Sin.
 - E. Have you sinned in similar ways, especially against this person (Mt. 7:1-5)?
 - F. Why did this person sin in this way? Can you understand it? Does this help you show compassion in forgiving?
- III. Determine to Forgive
 - A. Remember that God, through the cross of Jesus Christ has forgiven you all of your sins and it is a requirement of Jesus that you forgive others (Mt. 6:12). Do this out of obedience to Jesus. Write down that you have forgiven this person for this specific sin, defined above.
 - B. Has this processed affected your feelings about this event and this person? If so, how? If not, revisit this after a few weeks.
 - C. Are you now willing to remember that you have chosen to forgive, when you remember this sin?

¹⁰ From Everett Worthington, <http://www.psychology.vcu.edu/people/worthington.shtml>

The Seven Minute Challenge of Renewal

In my own experience, taking the time to do this as a sequence when confronting a problem is a wonderful pattern for mental renewal. It is like spiritual alchemy, it transforms the lead of a problem into the gold of a mind-renewing outlook. The Seven Minute challenge is simply to do these in a sequence, with one minute per item. This is a tremendous spiritual exercise which can render your thorniest relational difficulty into the peace of a renewed outlook. While this practice offers no hope of “fixing” the other person, it offers great promise of clarity within yourself. That is the very thing for which God calls you to be responsible.

The renewal part is to change our own character, which leads to more more stability (Phil. 4:1), less offenses, more graciousness, more unity, and more peace. These steps for change can be the subject of a simple seven minute prayerful reflection.

- 1) Take one minute and focus your mind on the problem that is concerning you. This is a crucial step. What is the problem? Why do you feel this way? Perhaps you believe there are a thousand problems and how could you even narrow it down. But there is only way way forward, address one problem at a time. What is the one that rises to the surface. You can repeat this with many other problems. It is critical that you learn to focus your concerns on one matter at a time. Name the problem and write it down in one statement.
- 2) Rejoice Always (4:4) - Take one minute and Rejoice in the Lord, that you are His child, that you know that your sins are forgiven in Christ. Take joy in the fact that no matter what happens with the problem, you are eternally safe with Christ. Remember and recite this: that others in this conflict, despite the problem, if they indeed are Christians, know that Christ died to save them; take joy in their salvation, as well. Desire your (and their) eternal salvation to work backwards into this situation and create peace in the present as you give praise to the Sovereign Lord.
- 3) Endure with Others (4:5) - Take one minute to repent or turn from any lack of Endurance with another person(s), especially brothers or sisters in Christ. Consider how you could be more gentle, more patient, more persevering. Confess impatience of all sorts. Resolve to be more patient with others that are in opposition to you. Ask the Lord to give you that most precious fruit of the Spirit, patience. Determine how you will take action on this point at the next opportunity.
- 4) Petition God vs Anxiety (4:6) - Take one minute to focus the problem (_____) into a specific Petition. Transform the worry or anxious concern into a specific petition of prayer before God. Then add gratitude to that prayer. Remember the Lord’s complete power and perfect love to accomplish all His good will toward you. Thank Him that He is near you, with you, and the Holy Spirit is present in you. Thank Him for accomplishing His kingdom’s purposes through this problem, for He certain has promised to do that (Rom. 8:28-29).
- 5) Experience Peace (4:7) - Take one minute to actively Experience the peace of Christ. This may be done without words; however, at first, this probably requires directly stating and rehearsing the words of Phil. 4:7. You may simply thank the Lord for hearing your petition and confirm that you are trusting Him

with it. Thank Him for taking care of it. If your peace is weak, then ask Him to increase your peace, just as the father (whose son was possessed) called out, “I do believe; help my unbelief” (Mark 9:24). Let the kernel of your faith lead you to peace.

- 6) Affirm the True, Good, and Beautiful (4:8) - Take one minute to renew your view of the problem by positively Affirming the truth, goodness and beauty of your situation. Accept what is true in the situation. Could anything good come out of it? If the answer is no, then you are not using your imagination (or your Bible) very well (Rom. 8:28). Could there be a greater beauty of the gospel in life as a result? Could there be more glory to God as a result? Think of this. Account this. Imagine and envision this. Be hopeful that truth, goodness, and beauty will be realized in this situation. It could be as a desire, turned into prayer. It could be both. See the true. See the good. See the beauty.
- 7) Teachers and Models (4:9) - Take one minutes to reflect on and identify good Teachers and Models of peace-creating behavior (v. 9). Has anyone modeled peace in a similar situation? Has anyone shown grace to others, despite the harm done to them? Has anyone practiced forgiveness in a similar situation? Has anyone shown an example of reconciliation? Use this model by following their example.

Affirming the True, Good, and Beautiful: Philippians 4:8 Worksheet

Truths about this situation (list as many as you can in a few minutes):

Outcomes of truth this situation reveals:

Goodnesses about this situation:

Outcomes of goodness this situation reveals:

The Beauty in/about this situation:

Outcomes of beauty in this situation reveals:

What are some potential hopeful trajectories of this situation, from merely that which is true to greater revealing of God's glory?

Prayer Exercises

Morning Prayer (edited from Alexander Men, a Russian Martyr)

Dear Father, Son and Holy Spirit, help me, without distraction, in body and mind, to appear before You. Strengthen me in faith. Grant me burning love for You. Teach me to discern Your will in every event. Stop my mouth in evil and empty words, and restrain my hand from any evil deed. Should misfortune befall me today, give me strength to accept it in faith and offer it as a sacrifice to You. Make me a source of good for everyone I meet today. Accept my prayer for those, who do not know You and deliver them from unbelief. I thank You for my life, for those who are near, and those who are not, for the heavens and the earth, and for Your life-giving love. Grant that this day I may remember Your presence in gratitude because of Christ's sacrifice for me; in His name, Amen.

Prayer of Confession of Sin (from the Book of Common Prayer)

Most merciful God, we confess that we have sinned against you in thought, word, and deed, by what we have done, and by what we have left undone. We have not loved you with our whole heart; we have not loved our neighbors as ourselves. We are truly sorry and we humbly repent. For the sake of your Son Jesus Christ, have mercy on us and forgive us; that we may delight in your will, and walk in your ways, to the glory of your Name. Amen.

Receiving Forgiveness

Child of God, Christ compels you to accept forgiveness: By the mystery of His Incarnation, He compels you; by His Baptism, Fasting, and Temptation He compels you, Especially by His Agony and Bloody Sweat He compels you; by His Cross and Passion He compels you; by His precious Death and Burial He compels you; by His glorious Resurrection and Ascension He compels you, and by His Sending of the Holy Ghost: Our Lord Jesus compels you to believe and receive Forgiveness and Absolution. Your sins are forgiven in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.

[Response] *Thanks be to God, my sins are forgiven in Jesus' name!*

Prayers to Replace Anxiety

Weak Form of Prayer (but acceptable)

O Lord, I am worried about: [problem]

Please help me in and through this. Amen.

Strong Form of Prayer

Dear Father,

You Rule Earth and all that exists, I Rejoice in You always; I Rejoice in Your complete power and perfect love to accomplish all of Your holy will. I thank You that You are near me, that You are with me, through Jesus my Resurrected Lord and in the Holy Spirit in me. I am thanking You for accomplishing Your kingdom's purposes in: [problem].

You are completely sovereign over this matter and I entrust it to You. I am Your willing servant in this to seek to do Your will. In this I believe in the peace You have given me through Jesus Christ and the protection You promise to my heart and mind in this matter. In Jesus' Amen.

Devil-Busting Prayer for Recurring Problems

Dear Father,

You Rule Earth from Heaven, Your Son has conquered death and holds keys of death and hell. I rejoice that He has “fully paid for all my sins with his precious blood, and has set me free from the tyranny of the devil. He also watches over me in such a way that not a hair can fall from my head” apart from Your loving purpose and sovereign control. Therefore, I am thanking You for Your loving power over: [problem].

Lord Jesus, by Your Baptism, Fasting, and Temptation, especially by Your Agony and Bloody Sweat; by Your Cross and Passion; by Your precious Death and Burial; by Your glorious Resurrection and Ascension; by Your Sending of the Holy Ghost; by Your everliving intercession for me, because of all of this and that which is exceedingly and abundantly beyond what I can ask or imagine—I trust You in this matter and am your willing servant.

You have purchased me and equipped me as your holy child in Your kingdom. In the Name of Christ, who lives and reigns with the Father and the Holy Spirit, One God world without end. Amen.

TAKE SOME NOTES!

NOTES: