

Still Standing//“Repairing Relationships”// Proverbs 19:11; Proverbs 15:28; Proverbs 17:9; Proverbs 15:1; Proverbs 25:21–22

Announcement:

- Good morning Summit Church... I want to start today by asking you to join up with one of the greatest, most meaningful movements around here. The Summit Church volunteer squad. Every week 100's of people help pull off what goes on here... People talk about how friendly our church is. (“No one spoke to me”... Sometimes we miss it, and I'm sorry) How easily they get around. It's one of the greatest groups of people. Raise your hand if you are grateful for volunteers...

Introduction:

- **We're in the middle of a series called “Still Standing”... Going through Proverbs looking at a life that is built on the principles of wisdom. We've spent a handful of weeks going over some basics...** how to anchor your life in the rock of wisdom, how to know the will of God. This week, I want to talk about something relevant to all of you... repairing broken relationships.
- **All of us have broken relationships in our lives**
 - It's always amazing to me how many people have a friend they used to be close but who aren't anymore.
 - Some of you were in a nasty job situation...; got fired, or had to walk out on a business partner. Maybe you haven't left, you just have certain people you avoid at work.
 - Some of you left churches and came to this one because of conflict with people at your old one.
 - Some of you have family conflicts...
 - A big place for this is within your marriages...
 - This week was my anniversary; on Tuesday Veronica and I celebrated 8 great years of marriage, and 1 other 1 for a total of 9. We've had conflict. When Veronica got married to me she thought she had married the perfect man. If you idolize or are infatuated with someone, don't marry them.
 - I remember us giggling to each other before we got married, “we never fight.” One of our first fights was over who would answer the phone... both of us **hate answering the phone**... for some reason that never came up in premarital counseling. That's the whole reason I got married... phone would ring, stop. We'd have a 10 minute argument about who should have answered the phone—tape measure out measuring who was closer. One of our next fights was over whether or not I should put a bag in the trash can after I'd emptied it. The way I saw it, it was my job to empty the trash can, but putting the bag in was a whole new chore... she should at least be grateful enough that I emptied the trash to come behind and put a new bag in. That's fair.
- The point is, we've all had conflicts. I've been kind of light about it, but for some of you, it's serious. Some of you are considering leaving your spouse... or maybe you can't bring yourself to leave them because of your kids, but you are just emotionally shutting them off. Chances are, everybody in here has some painful memory that has to do with a broken relationship.
- Solomon has some incredible wisdom to share with us on why relationships dissolve, and how to repair them before they do... and, Solomon had 700 wives, so he probably has a lot to say.
- 5 principles: React slowly, Resist superiority; Release liability; Respond graciously; Remember mercy.

I. React slowly (Prov 15:28)

- I want to start with this one, because observing this one is actually the only way you'll ever be able to do all the others...
- **Proverbs 15:28** *The heart of the righteous ponders how to answer, but the mouth of the wicked pours out evil things.*¹
- We gush emotions. Like a reflex. Ever hear someone say "They really press my buttons." Computers don't ponder.
- But if you take a minute and choose not to react in the moment... and ponder... there are a couple of things this allows you to do:
- First, you are able to get some emotional distance. Some things just look different from a distance!
 - **Illus.** Woman and the cookies.
 - I have lived by a rule I call the 24 hr rule that I picked up from a bio I read of Abe Lincoln
 - Email...
 - When I'm getting angry, taking 24 hrs to think it through. It almost always looks different then. Conversations can actually take a real long time this way—one phrase every 24 hrs. Veronica and I have conversations that have lasted for years.
 - Seriously, there are things are said in the midst of emotional turmoil which are exaggerated.
 - **Nighttime problems...** Before doctor gave me medicine I'd wake up in these horrible moods... really worried about something or really angry at someone... but then I'd think about that same issue the next day and it wouldn't seem so bad. So, when I'd wake up I'd say, "I'm just not going to think about this now. I know tomorrow it will look different." I told our staff... "If I ever call you up at 4 a.m... Just ignore me. Come right on in."
- Second, it gives you some ponder to see the issue from other person's perspective.
 - When Veronica tells me she is hurt about something, my reaction is usually to explain to her why her being hurt is silly and irrational. But, with time, and loving thought, I can say, "What is really behind what she is saying?" And at least try to see it from her perspective. You see, Prov 18:13 says this: **18:13** *If one gives an answer before he hears, it is his folly and shame.*
 - I want to make sure I have a chance to really hear (and not just to hear it, but to listen to it, to ponder)...
 - So, that's our first one. React slowly. This will enable you to do the others.

II. Resist superiority (Prov 19:11)

- **Proverbs 19:11** *Good sense makes one slow to anger, and it is his glory (or his wisdom) to overlook an offense.*
 - **Let's ask a question of this verse:** Why does being slow to anger or your ability to overlook an offense mean that you have good sense, or wisdom, or glory?
 - Here's why: One of the core signs in the book of Proverbs that you have understanding or wisdom is that you recognize your own natural inclination to evil. The first peg of wisdom is that you recognize you are naturally foolish. (**Remember I said the first week: "If you think you are naturally wise, you are fool; if you know you are naturally foolish, you are wise."**)
 - Well then, if you have good sense, then you know that when someone does something that hurts you, you recognize that really, in your heart, you are made out of the same stuff they are.

¹ **Proverbs 14:29** Whoever is slow to anger has great understanding, but he who has a hasty temper exalts folly. **18:13** If one gives an answer before he hears, it is his folly and shame. **29:11** A fool gives full vent to his spirit, but a wise man quietly holds it back.

So, you see yourself as the same as them, and so you don't automatically despise them. You tend to be a little more sympathetic, because, you do the same kind of things.

- Here's another verse coming at it from another angle: **Proverbs 11:12** *Whoever belittles his neighbor lacks sense, but a man of understanding remains silent.* "Belittles" or "derision" or "despises" ...
 - Ever see those **political cartoons**? When someone lies, that's what they are. A dirty liar. If you ever lie... you're like, "Well, but I'm still a good person. There's another side to me. I'm complicated." You were impatient, but there were reasons... you had a really bad day; you were selfish; you really deserved that.
 - Most of our anger is fueled by a sense of pride, a sense of superiority.
 - Let me go a tad psychological on you... Human beings are almost constantly striving to show they are better than everyone else, and that's because we are fundamentally insecure. You see, the human condition is that all of us want to call the shots in our lives. We want to play God. At a very deep level we know this is wrong, so we are insecure and constantly looking for self-justification. We have to prove we're alright. Well, when we're offended, that drive for self-justification kicks into hyper-drive. We think, "I'd never do that. I'm better than that person." And when you realize you do do what they did, "well, there are complex reasons for it." So we despise people because we feel superior. Our sense of superiority fuels our anger.
 - But if you see yourself ultimately as the same as them, you wouldn't be so quick to anger.
 - Principle I learned: **"1st sinner; 2nd sinned against!"** Every time Veronica didn't think of my needs, every time she selfishly put her interests above mine... I thought of how many times I had done that to God. If I feel like she's taken something that belonged to me... maybe I deserved respect she wasn't giving me, I thought about how many times I had not given God His due.
 - It's not the whole package of forgiveness, but it's an important component. If you don't see your own sinfulness, that you are guilty of the very things you are angry at in others, you have no sense. You are a fool!

III. Release liability (Prov 17:9)

- **17:9** *Whoever covers an offense seeks love, but he who repeats a matter separates close friends.*²
- "Covers" is not talking about "glossing over" an issue where you pretend it didn't happen, and they keep trampling all over you while you never say a word. Here's how I know that. Proverbs is all about confronting foolishness and evil in others. "Better are the wounds of a friend than the kisses of an enemy." "If you confront a wise man you're doing him a favor."
- What the word "cover" really means here is like what you mean when you go out with a group of friends to dinner... 'I'll cover it.' You don't mean, "Leave without paying. Pretend you didn't eat. We'll just gloss over it." No, it's saying, 'I'll absorb the financial damage for what you ate.' The word cover means "to absorb." It literally means "to overwhelm." You absorb, you pay for yourself, the offense they committed.
- The 2nd line shows you the opposite of that. "He who repeats a matter breaks up the closest of relationships."
- Here's how this works: when you are offended, a little tuning fork goes off inside of you. You feel wronged. Repayment needs to be given. You repay by "repeating."
 - **You could literally repeat the action back to them.** They hurt you; you hurt them. Eye for an eye. You do right back to them what they did to you. Or, if you can't do that, you figure out a way to hurt them back like they hurt you. That might take the form of yelling at them; or, if

² **Proverbs 10:12** ¹² Hatred stirs up strife, but love covers all offenses. **12:18** Some people make cutting remarks, but the words of the wise bring healing.

you're more of the passive type, you give them the silent treatment, if you're married refuse to have sex with them; crying (a lot of women have learned the way they can get back at their husband is to cry...). Whatever, you are repeating the offense back to them. **My sister:** I remember discovering when my little sister was 12 years old that she thought the verse, "Do one to others as they have done one to you." "How long has she thought that?" For 5 years she's been paying me back and feeling like, "Well, that's what the Bible says." One way of repeating is to repeat the offense...

- **You repeat the action to others:** A way of damaging them. every single time you do you pay their debt down a little. Ever notice that when you slander someone you feel a little better?
- **You repeat the action to yourself.** You just continue bring it up to yourself; you dwell on it, making you resent and hate the other person.
- The idea of repayment separates even the closest of friends.
 - It will destroy your marriage: **Illus.** *James Dobson tells the true story of a guy who was asked by his wife to zip up her blouse: zip, zip, zip and breaks zipper. She sees him under the car and does it to his zipper. Feeling sense of smug satisfaction goes inside and sees her husband. 'who's under car?' neighbor. He's out cold. Did what any guy does when someone touches his zipper, sat straight up! Knocked out cold! **If you operate on the "eye for an eye" principle... pretty soon, you both will be blind!***
- So, you have to (as the verse says) release liability. Don't make them repay. Now, this is hard... that tuning fork has gone off, you feel wronged, and when you're getting even, you feel nigh unto deity. How can you release the impulse to get even?
- **Proverbs 20:22** *Do not say, "I will repay evil"; wait for the LORD, and he will deliver you."* Paul quotes this verse in Romans 12 and adds the statement: "Vengeance is mine, says the Lord."
 - The way you lay down liability is you realize that, if the person is a Christian, Jesus has died for them. So, when they sin against you, thank God that He died for the sin they just committed. He absorbed the vengeance for what they just did. 'Vengeance is mine.'
 - If they are NOT a Christian, well, then God promises one day he will settle all scores. He will repay vengeance. It is His. So, every night before you go to bed, you are either putting your anger on the cross over here, or putting it into hell over there. Either Jesus either died for this, or God will repay it fully in eternity. Either way, I don't have to carry around the bitterness of vengeance in my soul.
 - Either way, you're saying, "I'm not going to bear this."

IV. Respond graciously (Prov 25:21–22)

- **Proverbs 25:21–22** *If your enemy is hungry, give him bread to eat, and if he is thirsty, give him water to drink, 22 for you will heap burning coals on his head..."*
 - Coals of fire... always thought that was an odd image. Heaping burning coals... that's what I want to do? Why not just skip all the kindness and do the burning coals myself?
 - Your goal in heaping burning coals is not pay them back, but to wake them up! *When you are nice to someone who is a jerk to you, quite often they are confronted with the guilt of what they are doing; heaping coals of fire is like awakening their sense of conscience.*
 - **Gospel secret...** we think the way to change somebody is to make them pay, or berate them, or be sarcastic to them... GRACE is how you change them. Very few people in the midst of an argument suddenly feel like, "Oh, you just totally put me in my place. Now that you have yelled and berated me I see the error of my ways. Your sparkling logic has removed my stupidity from me. Let me change right now." I had to learn that in my marriage... **Proverbs 15:1** *A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.* Undeserved grace is a more effective change agent than my wrath.

- **Clearest this was ever described... Jesus when He gave us the concept of “turning the other cheek...”** People ask, “What does that mean, someone is physically attacking you and so you stand there and just keep taking it?” The person hitting your cheek is not trying to kill you. No school of martial arts I know of tells you to go for the cheek... the face in Jewish thought is relationship. The common greeting was to kiss the cheek. So, for a Jew, having your cheek slapped is the ultimate insult. It’s saying, I don’t want a relationship. So, when someone slaps your cheek, insults you, damages relationship, you can...
 - Strike back, go for their cheek. (repeating)
 - Turn the other cheek: turn to them the other side of your face, in an attempt to re-establish the relationship. You are not just standing there continuing to take it on the same cheek, that’s why he said, ‘Turn the other cheek.’
 - Sometimes you have to confront them... Letting someone continue to live in sin is the most unloving thing you can do for them! To let them go on in their behavior is being unkind to all the rest of the people who will be hurt by them.
 - But when you confront them, it’s not to try and get even or make them pay you back, you are doing it out of love for them. Your anger doesn’t arise out of a sense of personal woundedness, but out of a love for them. The goal is not punish, but to restore relationship and to heal.
- Before I leave this, let me make something clear. God takes our refusal to forgive very seriously. **Proverbs 24:17-18** *Do not rejoice when your enemy falls, and let not your heart be glad when he stumbles,* ¹⁸ *lest the LORD see it and be displeased, and turn away his anger from him.*
 - The point is not how to keep God hating your enemy
 - The point is that if you don’t forgive, God turns His anger onto you... because our hatred and unforgiveness of the one who has hurt us is as offensive to God as the initial act. Because it demonstrates a COMPLETE lack of who God is and how He’s cared for you.

V. Remember mercy

- **How do you do all this?** I can say, “Resist the need for superiority... Release liability...Respond graciously”
 - This is where it all falls apart for some people. I don’t know how. To err is human, to forgive is divine...
 - **Pippert at Harvard**
 - All the techniques... count to 10... can only help you temporarily deal with evil.
- ^{16:6} **By steadfast love and faithfulness iniquity is atoned for, and by the fear of the Lord one turns away from evil.**
 - To turn away from evil, you have to understand how your sin was atoned for. Atoned means “paid.” How? By steadfast love and faithfulness. Those two words are hard to put together, because they raise a dilemma. God loves us, steadfastly, yet the word “faithful” means just and righteous.
 - Here’s the dilemma: How can God love us steadfastly while at the same time remaining just in his treatment of our sin? **At the cross the just demands of the law are met when Jesus died in our place. Your sins were paid for, in totality, at the cross.**
- There, Jesus absorbed the penalty. There, Jesus, responded graciously. There, Jesus who was superior, turned His back on that His position and took the role of a slave and a criminal so that you could be saved.
 - When you see that God values you, you lose the need for self-justification.
 - When you see that God has absorbed the pain of your sin, you’ll be able to do it for others.
 - **S. Africa story:**

After 27 years in prison, Nelson Mandela was released and elected president of South Africa. He set up the Truth and Reconciliation Commission—the TRC—to stop the natural pattern of revenge that occurs when one oppressed group of people take control from another. The TRC rules were simple: “if a white policeman or army officer voluntarily faced his [black] accusers, confessed his crime, and fully acknowledged his guilt, he could not be tried and punished for that crime.”

One policeman got up and faced an elderly [black] woman. He told how he had shot and killed her 18-year-old son, and how he had roasted the body on a spit, “like a piece of barbecue,” to destroy the evidence. Then eight years later he returned to the same house, dragged the boy’s father out, bound him to the woodpile, poured gas on him, and ignited it—all while the boy’s mother (the wife) was forced to watch.”

The judge then gave the elderly woman a chance to respond. The judge asked her “What do you want from Mr. van de Broek?” The courtroom waited in hushed silence. Finally she said that she would like him to go to the spot where he burned her husband’s body, and gather up the dust so she could give him a decent burial. The policeman, head down, nodded. Then she added further that she forgave him and God forgave him, and to prove to him that the forgiveness was real, she wanted to embrace him, and she wanted him to come to her ghetto twice a month and spend the day with her, so that could be a mother to him and give him some of the love that she still had to give. The author says, “Justice was *not* done in South Africa that day.”³ Steadfast love and faithfulness wipe out sin.

Where do you learn that kind of love? The cross. Love like that flows out from experiencing great love first. You can overcome the resentment and bitterness that is dominating you, but it’s going to start with the cross.

Conclusion:

- Some of you are hurt, and that resentment is poisoning your soul, it is controlling you, and you need to make a decision this morning to get rid of it. It is killing you. I remember one time watching "The Three Stooges". Mo kept hitting Curly on the chest. Curly says, "I'm going to get even with that guy. I'm going to stop him!" So he takes a stick of dynamite and straps it to his chest and says, "Next time he slaps me, it's going to blow his hand off!!"
- This is killing you. Christ can give you the ability to let this go, to release it. He can take the bitter waters of your heart and make them sweet. But you have to start by letting Him love you—by surrendering to His plan and let Him have control. Listen, you don’t have to be controlled by this anymore. Through Him, the rest of your life can become the best of your life.

I know you’ve been hurt. But, in the power of Jesus Christ, you have ability to rise above it. To quit living as a bitter, resentful person and live as a healing, restoring person. Through Jesus the rest of your life can become the best of your life.

Prayer: “God, I admit that I’ve been hurt by other people. I also admit that my own habits and hang-ups have hurt others. Right now, I accept the forgiveness that has been offered through Jesus Christ. Through His power, I will forgive those (or that one) that has hurt me. Jesus, I reach out to you today. I want You to put my heart right.” **If you’ve never accepted Christ into your life, I want you to say,** “Jesus, as much as I know how, I let you have the controls in my life. I accept your offer to save me and make me new. Make yourself real to me and change my life. In Your name I pray, Amen.”

³ paraphrase - Philip Yancey, Rumors, Ch13 - “Practicing the Existence of God” p 224.