

Practical Tips for Successful Relationships

Dealing with Conflict

Healthy relationships need constant attention. We often think that only bad relationships need attention but actually, the best relationships are those that are constantly worked on and “fine tuned.” All types of relationships—husband/wife, friendships, employer/employee, parent/child—will benefit from the following principles that teach us how to keep relationships healthy and current.

“Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry”

Ephesians 4:26

The first principle: deal immediately with misunderstandings, hurts, and anything else that would cause you to be angry. This scripture suggests that anger should not be internalized. Unresolved hurt may lead to negative emotions such as bitterness, fear, guilt, condemnation, and despair; and may eventually affect us in physiological ways such as insomnia, high blood-pressure, anxiety, and headaches. Since there are no “perfect relationships,” all relationships will inevitably produce hurts, and our reluctance to deal with them promptly causes us to internalize negative emotions that God never intended for us to bear.

“Speak the truth in love”

Ephesians 4:15

The second principle: deal with conflicts by sharing truth and always share the truth motivated by love.

First, this verse tells us what to speak—the truth. Whenever there’s a conflict in interpersonal relationships, seek the truth. Many times we’re upset over something we’re misinformed about. Often, just talking out a situation—getting the facts—will dissolve many conflicts. Proverbs 18:17 says, “The first to present his case seems right, till another comes forward and questions him” which simply means there’s always two sides to every story.

But, this verse also speaks about how the truth should be spoken, how it should be delivered. Armed with the truth, you can’t act like a “007 agent” with a license to kill, using the truth to maim and hurt; you must minister the truth in love. The Bible won’t let you go up to someone in a crowd and blurt out, “You’re overweight,” even though it may be the truth, because you’d be in violation of the “in love” clause.

If we ignore either admonition in this verse we’ll become either a *hider* or a *hurler*. *Hiders* don’t share the truth; *Hurlers* share the truth—but not in love. Both approaches produce disastrous results. *Healers* share the truth in love.

“A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger”

Proverbs 15:1

The third principle: learn to diffuse volatile conversations by speaking gentle words. What happens if you’re verbally attacked by someone? How do you respond to a *hurler*?

The answer is not to hurl back, for then you fall into the trap of “returning insult for insult,” a battle in which there is no winner.

What will neutralize anger? A gentle answer. What does a gentle answer sound like? Here are some examples: “I’m sorry this situation has disappointed you. Let’s talk about it.” “I want to do everything I can to restore peace to this relationship. Let’s talk.” “If I’ve done something to offend you, I want to know about it so I can make it right.”

Speaking a gentle answer doesn’t mean you have to eat crow; it’s not an open invitation for verbal abuse. Nor does it mean that someone can come “spill on you,” then walk off, leaving you frustrated and confused. This verse is best applied to the first 90 seconds of a volatile conversation; it will diffuse an explosive situation before it gets out of hand. Once the conversation is manageable, then reconciliation is possible.

This week, see how often you can apply these three verses as you seek to maintain healthy relationships.

