

RRR6 – Broken Relationships

*When it's not working out: Matthew 18
Spence Shelton – October 23, 2016*

Jonah & The Great City – Starting a series next weekend that I believe is incredibly timely for our church. We are going to walk through the book of Jonah for 5 weeks. Groups are going to study it together. Great one because it's a story. Easy one to invite people to. "Come learn what Jonah is all about." But the story of Jonah is incredible. It is a raw look at who we really are and at the same time a grand majestic look at how God works in the world. The story about the prophet and the great fish is going to open up into a story of our purpose in God's world. That starts next week. Jonah & the great city.

On January 28th 1986 millions of people tuned into what was to be the turning point in Space exploration. NASA had put a public school teacher on board the Space Shuttle Challenger and children & people everywhere were tuning in all across the country. Tragically, the shuttle's flight only lasted 73 seconds before the entire shuttle exploded, killing all seven crewmembers on board. Anyone in here who was old enough to watch it remembers that scene pretty vividly

I'm sure. Over the next several months the Rogers Commission investigated the cause of the explosion. What they determined is that there was a simple part called an O-ring that had malfunctioned. The O-ring, it turned out, had actually malfunctioned before on previous flights. But the malfunction had been considered acceptable because even though it shifted under high heat, the shift seemed to help seal the hot gasses from the fuel tank into place. Well, on January 28th the conditions were freezing and the O-Ring didn't shift...which resulted in hot gases escaping from one fuel tank, catching fire, and then sending that fire into the primary fuel tank. Of course from there, it was milliseconds before the entire thing exploded in front of the watching world.

Another sad part of the story is that there were warnings upon warnings. Engineers who warned them all morning...DON'T LAUNCH ITS TOO COLD! The O-rings won't work! There were prior reports about the O-Ring from previous missions. There were so many warnings. Small conversations, arguments in some spaces, but at the end of the day the system of checks that had been put in place to address problems before they became huge...were all ignored. All systems were still go, even when they weren't. And the result was disastrous.

Today we are in our last week on what the bible has to say about the major relationships in our lives. Today we are talking about broken relationships. Which means we are going to talk about conflict, repentance, forgiveness, and

healing. And in many cases, though not all, relationships that reach a point of total brokenness do so because two people refuse to deal with the seemingly small or

Warning signs along the way. They don't take the small, seemingly insignificant moments serious enough or maybe one person keeps their mouths shut when they need to raise a flag and then one unsuspecting day too much pressure is put on the relationship and some little tipping point happens and the whole thing reaches a breaking point.

Today we are going to be confronted with a really helpful truth that God expects you to have conflict with other people. Today we are going to talk about how to handle it so that your relationships don't wind up in the middle of a disaster.

I'm going to give you everything I have to try and show you that God is not surprised by your conflict and that he has built into the bible the means by which to handle it. But to understand & deal with today's word...it's going to require you to dig deep. To go down underneath the surface. You guys know me I love to keep things light hearted where I can, but today probably won't be too lighthearted. Because conflict causes you to lose trust, to put up walls, and to entrench you against someone. As you sit there you pray I do God's word justice because today's topic is something I am deeply passionate about. I've witnessed too many friendships, too many marriages, parent-child

relationships, too many churches self-destruct because they never understood the incredible power of what we are going to walk through today.

And you gotta know I know that people in this room are all over the spectrum in conflict. Some of you are ignoring the O-ring warnings right now. Some of you are feeling the heat and your relationship is headed towards destruction. And some of you are in the aftermath. Maybe it's been years since you've talked to your ex. Or to your child or parent. I believe God has great, great hope for you today and I recognize the mountain I'm talking about climbing over for you to really feel that.

Here we go. Theology of Conflict and Resolution that includes some very practical ways to get started. Again if you are new with us we normally just teach through a book, like Jonah. But in this series we've surveyed what the whole bible has to say about these relationships we walk through all the time.

Ok with that introduction, here's what we are going to cover today:

What's wrong with you?

The bible's conflict management protocol

The hope the gospel gives us in conflict

(Best if this list can build one line at a time so by the time I say the 3rd one all three are then showing. But all 3 aren't showing when I start.)

Ok first, **What's wrong with you?**

Have any of you ever made it into a disagreement or argument where either you, or the person you were arguing with launched this missile: "What's wrong with you?" You reach that point where you are so confident you are RIGHT that the only logical conclusion you can draw is that this person must have suffered a concussion recently and their brain is not firing on all cylinders. Otherwise they'd be in complete agreement right? Why else would you choose to take the route that puts you on Independence at 5pm with a car full of children!?

We fight! The question what's wrong with you is of course the wrong question. Have you noticed that every conflict you have with every person has one thing in common? You. The question we must actually start with is...**what is wrong with me?** Conflict is one of those things that shouldn't exist, but does. And you have to understand WHY. Because before you can solve the problem of conflict you have to understand why we ever have conflict with anyone. I promise this little theology excursion is so important to engaging conflict well. I want to read you a verse from the apostle Paul where he explains why things aren't the way they should be.

[12] Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned— Romans 5.12

He's referring back to Genesis 3. When Adam & Eve sinned. And what he's saying here and what the bible says consistently throughout is that when Adam & Eve sinned that was sin's grand entrance into the world. And then it spread like a plague to every human. And sin did not just mean we would experience physical death and decay...it also disrupted our relationships. And so we think things and do things that we would have never done before the fall. Adam...when God called him out for his sin he blame shifted to his wife. "The woman you gave me made me eat." You know some conflict happened in the Adam household after that. And that blame shifting spread to his sons. Adam's son Cain would murder his own brother Abel out of jealousy. And then when God confronts him and asks where is your brother "Cain says am I my brother's keeper?" He sins & avoids responsibility for it. Sin corrupts us. What's wrong with you? Well, your ancestors were corrupt sinners and they passed it down to you.

Here's why this is such a big deal – You cannot truly resolve a conflict until you deal with the sin in your own life. You are by nature & action a sinner. I'm sorry if that is offensive to you. But you will not agree with anything else the bible says if you don't agree with this. Like the Challenger, you are defective. And get this...so is everybody else. Even your

pastors. Eugene Peterson (“The Message” Guy) the other day tweeted

“Every congregation is a congregation of sinners. As if that weren’t bad enough, they all have sinners for pastors.”

And I was like yep. Sure enough. Sin isn’t a part of the created way things are to be, it is a distortion of God’s design. And that means we can have hope. In fact God’s great rescue plan for the human race is the wiping away of sin from us so that we can be restored to who we were created to be. And then...no more conflict. But until then, we as the church are to be a beacon of hope for relationships. God gives us a unique power to navigate conflict that becomes a beautiful expression of the gospel as we go through it.

I’m about to walk you through the bible’s steps to deal with conflict. But you will never be able to do it unless you walk into any conflict (Friendship, marriage, dating, parenting...doesn’t matter) starting with this statement: “I am a sinner.” Not “I am right.” But “I am a sinner.” In fact, here is a short statement my pastor taught me years ago that has paid huge dividends in my life. When someone sins against me my first thought should be: ***First sinner, second sinned against.***

The bible’s conflict management protocol

And this is going to feel a little like step-work ok. It’s definitely not always this neat and clean so don’t think you always have to think “ok I am now at step one.” But these

are things God calls you to go through if you want to resolve conflict. And while they are everywhere in the bible, all of them rest right in Matthew 18.

Matthew 18.15-18: [15] “If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. [16] But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses. [17] If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector.”

Confrontation

Just that word almost made some of you throw up. How many of you would be willing to admit you really don’t like confrontation? THAT’S GOOD! You shouldn’t like it. Confronting sin isn’t joyful. It is worth it and I’ll explain why in a second, but it isn’t something we should enjoy. If your hand isn’t raised because hey you enjoy telling people their problems...you have a problem.

Look again at verse 15. I never understood this fully until recently. Notice how the burden of confrontation is on the person sinned against. I was always taught to apologize when I do something wrong to someone else. So it seems it should say, “If you sin against your brother, go apologize.” I mean that’s what I was taught. But this says the reverse. It’s your job if your brother sins against you to deal with it. Why?

The other person may not know! – It shocks me how often this is the case. You are carrying around a grudge against a friend or a spouse for 4 months because of something they did and you are waiting on them to finally apologize. But you aren't going to let it go until they do. And guess what...that girl or that guy has no clue they hurt you. And here you are carrying that hurt and they are interacting with you like nothing is wrong. Can you believe them? Yes. I can! You've turned them into an evil monster when they are most likely oblivious to your pain. God very clearly here tells you that if you feel sinned against it is up to YOU, not just the offender, to confront the problem. And if you do it will be good for you!

Now let me lay some **ground rules for confrontation** here. These are very practical and they are important because in conflict words matter. They really carry weight and what you say will stick with someone.

The Purpose of Confrontation is reconciliation. I'm not talking about giving someone a tongue lashing so you can "get that off your chest." Some of you start thinking about Confrontation like...yeah I'm going to get him. No that's revenge. And if you are not a Christian, I don't fault you. But if you are a Christian, God says vengeance is no longer yours to get. Paul mentions this in Romans 12.19-21 **19] Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord."** [20] To the contrary, "if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to

drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals on his head." [21] **Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.**

My old pastor, J.D. Greear taught me so much about this verse and the whole idea behind seeking reconciliation. In this verse, 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.*¹

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. Let me point out something obvious: 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." No, Undeserved grace is a more effective change agent than my wrath.

When you confront someone, 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 shouldn't arise out of a sense of personal

¹ This "gospel secret" was taught by Tim Keller in a sermon on Romans 12, then re-phrased and expounded on by J.D. Greear in a sermon titled "Repairing Relationships" from the *Still Standing* series in proverbs.

woundedness, but out of a love for them. The goal is not punish, but to restore relationship and to heal.

What someone *did* is not the same as who they *are*. That make sense? There is a difference like we just said between the evil and the evildoer. The person you are now in conflict with...that is a person loved by God. And a person God has called you to love. And that is massively important. It's hard in the moment, which is why you have to decide before you ever get in a conflict how you are going to respond to it. Listen, Love lowers the temperature of most conflicts by refusing to engage in retaliation.² Love overcomes evil with good. So when you confront, it means some practical things. It means you don't use language like always and never. "YOU ARE ALWAYS LATE" or "You NEVER LISTEN." Always and never are character words. Saying who he or she *is*. Separate the evil from the evildoer. That way you can show you love them. So Courtney and I are trying in our own marriage and with our kids to be specific in our confrontation. Here's an example sentence:

- When you did _____, it hurt me.

Two more **rules of confrontation** real quick
Do not delay – It doesn't say "when a person sins against you Harbor it for 6 months then tell them." No it says go. This is what keeps you from building up bitterness and hardening yourself to that person.

² Strauch, 27.

Go directly to the person – The order of this passage is important. If your brother sins against you...go to him. It doesn't say go tell 10 people and get their take on the matter and then maybe get around to talking to the person you are talking about to others. I saw this happen in a church I was in growing up and it split the church in half. In fact my job as a shepherd of this church is to make sure you follow this protocol because it acts like a safeguard for the unity of the church! Go to the person...gain your brother. If they are unrepentant, then go get 2 people and the three of you go back. And if that doesn't work, get some elders involved and take it to the church. Because the purpose isn't punishment it's restoration to God and then to fellow man. And if they remain in unrepentant sin that grieves you because they are hardening themselves to God.

Now I feel like since we are already talking about the person sinned against I gotta go ahead and talk about forgiveness. And, that's where our passage goes anyway. This is the second component in the conflict protocol.

Forgiveness

From here Matthew writes about an interaction between Peter and Jesus. Where Peter is either curious or he has a rough relationship with one of the disciples.

Matthew 18.21-35: [21] Then Peter came up and said to him, "Lord, how often will my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? As many as seven times?" [22] Jesus said to

him, "I do not say to you seven times, but seventy-seven times. [23] "Therefore the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his servants. [24] When he began to settle, one was brought to him who owed him ten thousand talents. [25] And since he could not pay, his master ordered him to be sold, with his wife and children and all that he had, and payment to be made. [26] So the servant fell on his knees, imploring him, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you everything.' [27] And out of pity for him, the master of that servant released him and forgave him the debt. [28] But when that same servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii, and seizing him, he began to choke him, saying, 'Pay what you owe.' [29] So his fellow servant fell down and pleaded with him, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you.' [30] He refused and went and put him in prison until he should pay the debt [34] And in anger his master delivered him to the jailers, until he should pay all his debt.

Remember, whenever Jesus teaches a parable he is trying to teach one main idea. In this case it is forgiveness. And he makes a really exaggerated story up to get his point across. A guy owes more than his whole life is worth...gets forgiven...and that same guy has a friend who borrowed \$5 from him for a pumpkin spiced latte. Friend comes walking by and the guy that's just been freed from death starts to demand payment on the spot? He refuses to forgive the small debt when he's just been forgiven his whole life??? The parable is crazy! This wouldn't really happen! Even his

imaginary friends in the imaginary story cant believe it. So they tell the master and the master says

[32] Then his master summoned him and said to him, 'You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. [33] And should not you have had mercy on your fellow servant, as I had mercy on you?'

Jesus is of course setting them up. Because every one of the disciples and anyone else listening on as Jesus is responding to Peter are all like "YEP." Definitely what's wrong with that guy? Jesus this is a pretty obvious lesson. And Jesus says EXACTLY...

[35] So also my heavenly Father will do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother from your heart."

If you cannot forgive someone who has sinned against you...it means at the core you have a gospel problem. You don't need to try harder to "find it in your heart to forgive them." No you need to dive deeper into the forgiveness that's been given to you. Because Jesus is saying LISTEN...Your sin incurred a DEBT YOU COULD NEVER PAY! YOU were bound for slavery into sin and then eternity apart from God. And God looked down at you and said...I'm going to forgive your debt. You don't have to pay it. You can be FREE! You were on death row and set free!

And ya'll I'm not saying this lightly. Some of you have been deeply, deeply hurt by someone else. And I'm not at all trying to trivialize that and I'm not saying forgiveness is

EASY. Some of you had a spouse cheat and walk out. Forgive them? Some of you were abused as a child. Forgive? Some of you were abandoned by a parent and maybe that parent is no longer alive. Forgive? How! I get it. It's not easy.

I'm saying the only way you will ever find freedom from that pain is by seeing how much bigger the God of the gospel is than your pain is. His love can heal you and bring you to a place where you don't have to carry that with you anymore. And that the path to healing goes through forgiveness. **And you will only be able to forgive if you see that you've been forgiven a far greater injustice than the one committed against you.** The gospel is your only hope to free you from that pain.

Let me come back up from that depth a little and talk about your close relationships. The only way they are going to last, is if you commit to forgiveness. Here's the way James MacDonald & Garret Higbee said it in their book Christ Centered Counseling:

Relationships don't develop strength and longevity because two people always agree or get along well. Rather, they survive because forgiveness is the glue that overcomes the unavoidable offenses that occur in a fallen world.³

You want to keep friends for a long time? You want to date that person more than 6 minutes? You want a healthy marriage? You want a good relationship with your kids? – You are going to have to practice forgiveness.

We are trying to teach this to our kids. When a certain sister hurls a doll at a certain brother's unsuspecting head, an injustice has occurred. First, we have to stop brother from pounding said sister's head. Then we have to say to sister...go apologize to your brother. Now here's the thing: when sister apologizes what brother says is really important. He doesn't say, "It's ok" because sin is never OK. He says, if he means it, "I forgive you." And that means he doesn't get to retaliate. And ya'll brother doesn't like that so it really is a challenge to say it and mean it. Why does that matter? Because I want them to have a language to understand the gospel as they grow. Adults need that language too. Forgiveness should not be a foreign concept to believers.

And lets be clear – Forgiveness is where you take the debt. The offender is not in your debt. Married couples this doesn't mean you say you forgive and then 8 years later you use it against your spouse "This is just like that time you said you were going to pay the mortgage but didn't and the bank showed up at our door." NOPE. You are modeling the gospel here. Which means you hold no record of wrong against your spouse. Q: are you really ready to go there?

³ Macdonald & Higbee, 365

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.

Ok let me take the last couple minutes here and talk to the offender. I spent the bulk of today on the sinned against party because forgiveness is the only real solution to conflict. But here is the other side of the conflict protocol.

Confession and Repentance

How many of you love admitting you are wrong? Some are like...well sure if I was ever wrong, I'd gladly admit it. Ever been accused of 'never being wrong?' Listen, I want you to hear again what the bible said a few minutes ago...you are a sinner. That's what the gospel says. And in order to receive Christ's forgiveness you have to ADMIT you sinned!

1 John 1:8-9 –[8] If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. [9] If we confess our sins he is faithful and just to forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness

Do you realize that your relationship with God begins in the acknowledgement that you have sinned against him? You cannot receive forgiveness until you know you need it. And when I say confession & repentance, confession is the verbal declaration of sin, but before that comes repentance, which is the internal change of heart.

Macdonald & Higbee say it this way: “repentance is the funnel through which all personal revival flows... It is the first step in the personal cleanup of the wreckage that sin brings.”⁴

So listen, if you struggle to ever repent to someone...you have a gospel problem. You have forgotten the humility the gospel brought to you. You need to sit back into the gospel. In fact your daily time with God should include the question 'lord where do I need to repent today?' See your repentance has two recipients because your sin is against two people. First you must repent to God because your sin is first a sin against God (Psalm 51.4). When King David slept with another guy's wife and then had that guy killed his repentance was “against you and you only God have I sinned.” Repentance starts with how we've sinned against God. Do you get that your sin, left unconfessed, begins to build up a wall in your heart between you and God? And listen some of ya'll are hiding some big stuff. I know. You come in here and smile and you have dark, hidden sin that you think nobody knows about.

⁴ Macdonald & Higbee, 357

Do you know how arrogant that is to think that way? To think you can keep your sin a secret first off makes a mockery of God. You cannot believe in an all-knowing God and still think your sin is a secret. Not only that, you are NOT as clever as you think you are. Eventually your sin is going to come crumbling down on you. If God is gracious to you, that will be soon. I've dealt plenty with someone who has their sin exposed and NOT ONCE did they say "Man I wish I could have just kept this a secret for longer." NO! They believed the lie that by keeping it a secret it was saving the people they love from pain when in actuality it was compounding the pain.

So if you feel convicted about your sin...RUN INTO THAT, NOT FROM IT. THAT IS GOD EXTENDING HIS ARMS TO YOU AND TRYING TO LIFT YOU OUT OF THAT DEATH. You think I'm being too strong? I'm trying to wake you up. Your eternity is on the line and I love you and our church too much to sit by while you destroy your walk with God and your relationships. The apostle Paul said the same thing to the Corinthian church. In his first letter to them he kind of ripped them a new one. They had some pretty sick stuff going on so he said you need to repent! And then he heard that his letter grieved them. They had this "ouch" reaction to his letter so strong that it was like they were grieving. So Paul sent a second letter. And in Chapter 7 he said

[9] As it is, I rejoice, not because you were grieved, but because you were grieved into repenting. For you felt a

godly grief, so that you suffered no loss through us. [10] For godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation without regret.

So yes I hope your sin grieves your soul. Because that means God is calling you out of it. REPENT TO GOD! Turn from it. And God says he will forgive you. See exposing & confessing sin seems like jumping off a cliff to certain death. It's too scary. And God says you are being deceived. You aren't on the edge of a cliff. You are already in free fall. Confession is grabbing ahold of a rescue rope that stops your fall and God can finally begin to lift you out of the abyss of your self-destruction.

And **then** we repent to our brother or sister who we've sinned against. Little practical advice here when you get up the courage in Christ to do this:

- An apology is a "no buts or ifs zone." An authentic confession has three parts: an admission of wrongdoing, a request for forgiveness, and room for a response.⁵

And be specific. The generic "I'm sorry" doesn't cut it. Very practically you might try:

- - "I was wrong when I _____; will you forgive me? [silence]"

⁵ Macdonald & Higbee, 374

That silence btw may last a few moments, maybe a few days, maybe more. It probably will match the weight of whatever you are repenting for.

Let me close with this truth:

The gospel gives us hope in conflict

I'll never forget the day a good friend of mine came to me and said Spence, I'm thinking about leaving my wife for another woman. This was a good friend. The other woman (who was married) was ready to run away with him. And that moment felt like a ton of bricks on me. And listen, the days that followed his confession and her confession... were awful. Just awful. But the next days...the days after the initial painful season...they were beautiful. He confessed to God, to his wife, to his friends. And ya'll as that sin got exposed it lost its power on him. And I watched him change. I watched him draw closer to the Lord. And his wife...ya'll this is no small thing. She chose in time to forgive him. And that means she took the pain. And the ONLY reason...cause he didn't deserve her forgiveness...the only reason was because She'd been forgiven by Christ. And it came down to: the forgiven forgive.

And now? Now their marriage, in fact BOTH marriages are flourishing. And both husband and wife are closer to the Lord. Dr. Les Parrott said, "conflict is the price we pay for a deeper level of intimacy."

I know conflict isn't easy. But the gospel gives you the hope to confess your sin & the power to forgive the sinner.

Today at the end of our service we will have a prayer team and our pastoral team down here. Some of you need to get sin out into light. God is calling you. He's banging on your heart. And it's going to hurt. And some of you need to forgive. And you need to get prayed over that the Spirit of God would give you the courage to forgive. That he would give you supernatural insight into the gospel that you would see the great sin you've been forgiven of in Christ.

Let's pray.