

**Text:** [Matthew 18:15-20](#)  
**Date:** September 10, 2023  
**Title:** “Repairing Relationships: Reconciliation”  
**Theme:** Jesus’ steps for reconciliation are as relevant today as they were in the first century.

## 1

A few weeks ago, the washing machine at the parsonage stopped working  
One of those small frustrations of life  
I was hopeful that we’d call someone to repair it and move on  
I mean, this particular washer has always been reliable  
It was a good model from a quality brand

Well, I made my first call to a local appliance repair service and they said,  
“How old is it?”  
I didn’t know, honestly.  
I mentioned the model name and the person on the other end of the line  
had never heard of it – bad sign  
“We don’t work on anything over 12 years old,” she said  
That was the first moment I realized that a repair probably wasn’t in the  
cards

So, I dug into the documentation we had on the washer  
Turns out it was from the mid-90s  
Twenty-five, twenty-six years old, probably  
And even as we decided repairing it was the right way to go, I just felt in my  
spirit this certainty:  
There ain’t no way this new washer will last 25 years  
And that was confirmed when the installers left and machine stopped with  
an error code 30 minutes later

## 2

It’s working now, but the experience drove home a point  
We don’t expect things to last like we once did  
Have you bought a stapler lately?  
I can’t with the staplers

I remember the old Swingline 747 staplers – I think we still have a couple here at church – some of them I'm sure are as old as me  
Those things will survive until Jesus returns, I'm certain of it  
It's hard to find things like that today

Stuff breaks, we throw it out  
Even if you wanted to repair say, a TV, it's just not a thing that can be easily or cheaply done  
And so we don't

But I wonder sometimes whether this attitude – of replacing rather than repairing – isn't finding its way into other dimensions of our lives too  
Most particularly into our approach to relationships

I planned the next two Sundays as a mini-series about "Repairing Relationships"  
Today, focusing on reconciliation  
And next week, on forgiveness

There is a difference between these two ideas  
Reconciliation is the work of restoring a relationship that's been broken  
Forgiveness is usually the internal work of letting go of hurt...it can *lead* to reconciliation, but that's not always the case  
Both are important parts of the Christian experience  
Both are things Jesus taught extensively about  
And in the teaching the Church, both are dimensions of what Christ achieved through the cross for God's relationship with humanity

### 3

So let's think about today's scripture  
One of Jesus' most practical, step-by-step instructions for relationships

I want to give it some context: if you read a little bit before, Jesus is telling the story of the lost sheep  
About how the good shepherd will leave the 99 sheep to bring back the 1 who has gone astray – remember that story?

It's basically a story about how God doesn't see any one of us as  
throwaway  
And how Jesus says we shouldn't either  
How the shepherd puts in the work to bring the sheep back to the fold

So this tells me a couple things:  
First, the work of reconciliation and restoring relationships takes effort  
It requires something of us; there's no way around it  
It takes courage, it takes humility, and it takes maturity

But second, this teaching was originally meant to be applied within the  
church –  
in other words, "here's how you deal with broken relationships in the  
community of faith"  
Now, there's a lot here that might be instructive about reconciliation within a  
friend group or family too  
And you don't need to be a Christian to see the wisdom of the idea of trying  
to tackle issues privately, one-on-one first  
That just makes sense

So the steps are:

- 1) Try to address the situation privately and directly
- 2) If the person won't listen, then you may need to enlist others to help –  
to advocate, perhaps even to testify to what they've seen or  
experienced – why someone's behavior has been problematic
- 3) And if the person still won't listen, then you bring it to the church

The hope is that most situations, with most people, will get resolved in the  
initial stage, with just a conversation  
I want to spend most of our time there

Steps 2 and 3 begin to take on a greater formality and a greater  
seriousness  
Honestly, one way of talking about step 2 is to say it's like an intervention  
It's harder to ignore or shut down multiple people than it is to shut down  
one

But sometimes, people still don't want to hear  
And that's why you have step 3  
Step 3 is the most serious, it makes us think of excommunication  
The decision to stop having interactions with someone & to cut off the  
relationship  
But you'll note that even in Jesus' words about step 3, there's still some  
room, the door is still open  
When he says, "treat them as you would a Gentile and a tax collector,"  
we can't forget that Jesus' opponents called him "a friend of tax collectors  
and sinners" (Matthew 11:19)

#### 4

Now, let's come back to talk about the first step, the one-on-one  
conversation, in detail  
This passage is written from the standpoint of the one who feels they have  
been wronged  
Jesus says, "if your brother or sister sins against you..."  
Which also is instructive – we learn that our willingness and ability to  
lovingly confront and challenge someone is important

We don't typically value that a whole lot in the church  
We value swallowing insults and hurts and saying nothing  
That seems more Christian to us somehow  
But the reality is that our ability to address things that bother us is essential  
to relationships  
It's true, Jesus went to the cross  
Before he did that, though, he called Judas on the fact that he sold Jesus  
out: "Oh, so you betray the Son of Man with a kiss?" (Luke 22:48)

The only thing worse than constant conflict in a relationship is zero conflict  
in a relationship  
Because when there's zero conflict, I guarantee someone's not talking  
about something important  
And what's likely to happen is one of two things: that person will eventually  
either blow up, OR they'll just check out

That's why the ability to have these difficult conversations –  
BOTH to lovingly confront people we care about  
AND to humbly receive that critique when it comes OUR way –  
BOTH are so vitally important  
AND neither is easy to do

Jesus sets out with the assumption that reconciliation is the goal  
We're doing this because the relationship is NOT throwaway  
That it matters to us – it's close enough that we want to work for it

We're subjecting each other to a temporary discomfort – the discomfort of  
speaking up about our pain  
and the discomfort of listening to the ways we've hurt someone –  
in order to repair something that's broken

You'll note there's another underlying assumption: that everyone is  
operating out of pure and kind motives  
Remember, Jesus gives the instruction to those who are members of the  
church – to the “brothers and sisters” – to our siblings in Christ  
These are fellow believers – again, closeness is implied  
And a seriousness about the community that's created through shared faith  
That are we are all here to make each other better

That said, we all know that some people *don't* approach conflict in good  
faith – they just don't  
And unfortunately, those folks are hard to reconcile with

Some people will talk behind your back all day long  
They'll jump to step 2 and get all kinds of other people involved  
But they will never say any of it to your face

Other people will call you out for the slightest infraction  
Be ready to tell you all the ways you've disappointed them

But you share one thing that's hurt you?  
They won't listen  
They'll deflect, they'll get defensive, they'll blame it all on you

Sometimes, reconciliation doesn't work  
The relationship doesn't get restored  
And that's why Jesus gave us steps 2 and 3

Because both people have to WANT reconciliation  
There's no way around it  
And when one person doesn't want it  
Then the question becomes one of pure forgiveness  
Which is where we're headed next week

## 5

But I want to leave us with this idea for today:  
The rules for how we interact in healthy relationships  
They aren't any different today than they were 2000 years ago  
Because people haven't changed since Jesus' time

Relationships still require work  
There is no such thing as a self-healing relationship  
When we hurt each other, we've got to make the effort

That means:  
We've got to get comfortable with speaking up when we've been hurt  
And we've got to get even more comfortable listening calmly, patiently and  
non-defensively when someone needs to tell us how we've hurt them  
We've got to come to that process with courage, maturity, and humility  
Trusting that the person across from us is doing the same

We've got to trust that this person values the relationship like we do  
Right up until the point when they make it clear that they don't

There are times when reconciliation is not possible, or even desirable  
But that's a decision we can never take lightly  
Only after a lot of prayer and discernment  
Because our relationships are NOT meant to be throwaways  
That's why Jesus offered us the repair manual!

Amen.

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