

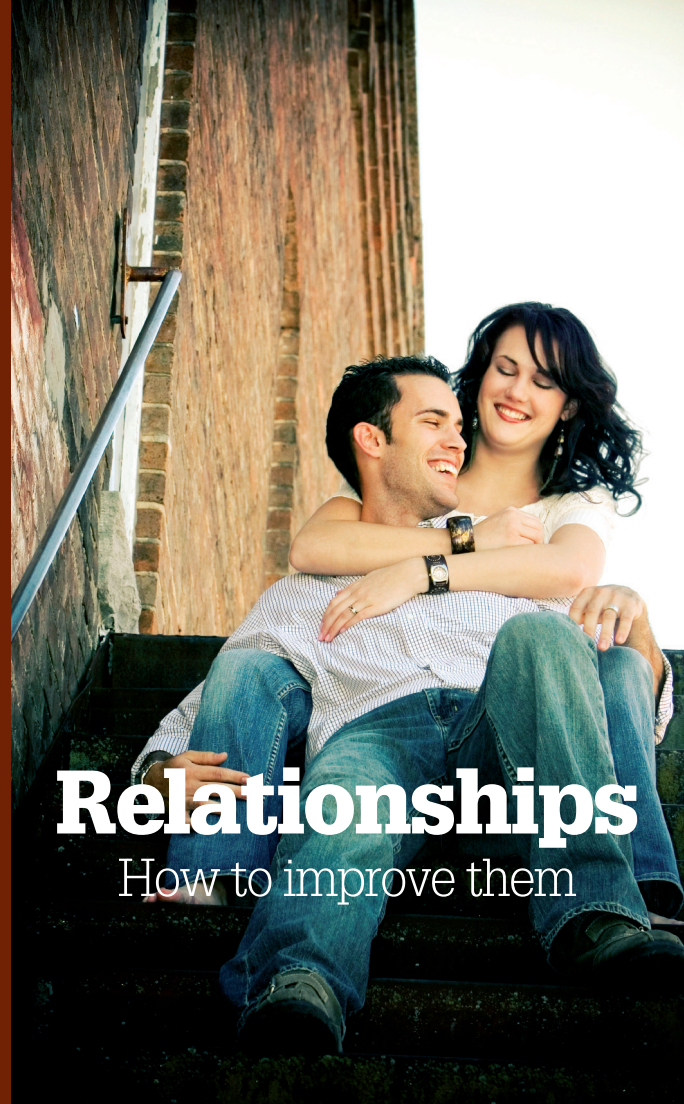
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- Guidance
- Loneliness
- When God Doesn't Explain Why.
- Worry

Scripture is taken from the Holy Bible
New International Version
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Relationships

How to improve them

Egerton Long is an ordained Baptist Minister and has served in churches in both USA & Australia. He and His wife Betty also served among the Indigenous people in Australia for over 25 years. Other booklets are available in this series as well as Daily Devotional material.

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that God has done what you have asked him to do.

4. Believe also that the Holy Spirit has now been given to you to live within you and help you live a Christian life (Read Romans 8:9 & 16)

If you have made this decision today then sign your name here and tell someone else what you have done. Join a church where you can hear God's Word preached and have fellowship with other believers.

I acknowledge myself to be a sinner in God's sight.

I accept Jesus Christ now as my Saviour.

I thank him for saving me.

Sign your name here

Date ____ / ____ / ____

Relationships

How to improve them



Egerton C. Long

HOW CAN WE IMPROVE OUR RELATIONSHIPS?

IS IT EASIER TO TALK ABOUT THE NEED TO IMPROVE THEM THAN TO DO IT?

WHAT HAS BEEN YOUR EXPERIENCE?

Mark & Bill are neighbours and good friends. They often play a round of golf together or watch the football on Mark's TV. Bill has a small construction business and occasionally loans Mark tools or helps him complete a project around his house or yard. Mark is an accountant and takes care of Bill's books and tax returns. The two families sometimes go places together. Bill has an ongoing church connection while Mark does not. But the two men really appreciate being together. You could say they have a growing, worthwhile relationship.

WHAT DO WE MEAN BY THE TERM 'RELATIONSHIP'?

Strictly speaking, the term relationship covers **any** continuing connection or association between two or more people. Each person in a relationship must contribute or participate in some way. Depending on the type of relationship, emotion will very often be involved. In other circumstances, it could simply be an ongoing interaction with another person, such as between an employer-employee. The word 'ongoing' is more important than we realise. A

Fill me with your fullness till I overflow.

R.E. Whitbourn.

The six steps to becoming a better listener form a LADDER.

- L** Look at the person speaking to you.
- A** Ask questions
- D** Don't interrupt
- D** Don't change the subject.
- E** Empathize
- R** Respond verbally and nonverbally.

HOW TO TAKE CHRIST AS YOUR SAVIOUR

If God has been speaking to you as you have read this booklet and if you are willing now to take Jesus Christ as your Saviour, here is what you should do:

1. Confess – tell God in your own simple words that you are a sinner needing a Saviour (Read Romans 3:23). Tell God you are sorry for your sin – the Bible Word is repent.
2. Accept – tell God that you see Jesus Christ as your only Saviour and that you accept him now (Read Romans 6:23)
3. Believe – that Jesus Christ has saved you because you asked him to do so (Read Romans 10:13). His Word is the assurance

possible.

UNDER THE SPIRIT'S CONTROL.

'When the Holy Spirit controls our lives, He will produce this kind of fruit in us – love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control'. Galatians 5: 22-23 NLVB. Look at each of those words. If we allow the Holy Spirit to do that in our lives, the result will certainly be an improvement in our relationships with everyone.

How does the Holy Spirit help us? As we yield ourselves to Him, He will automatically produce a Christlike character in us. The secret to all this is a morning prayer: 'Lord Jesus, I give myself to you for today, so that your Holy Spirit may have His way in my life today.' Then if something comes up which may interfere with the Spirit's work within us, confess it, and put it away.

Try praying that prayer each morning and maintaining that attitude each hour of the day and watch your relationships improve! And let us pray for each other that Christ may be seen in our actions and reactions always and in all ways, to the glory of His Name, May God bless you and keep you is our prayer for you.

Blessed Holy Spirit, Live through me today.
I want to be like Jesus, pure in every way.
Guide me, teach me always, what I need to know.

'relationship' with someone does not usually include a passing acquaintance, but it is a continuing, definite connection, normally with no time limit attached. Some relationships are exclusive, such as in marriage. Others are wider and more inclusive, such as membership in a church or a club.

MADE FOR FELLOWSHIP.

As human beings we were created for fellowship, (call it a 'relationship') first with God and then with other human personalities. Many years ago, a godly man said it well: 'Our hearts are restless until we find rest in Thee, O God.' God is looking and waiting for our fellowship. He could be called 'The Waiting Father', longing for us to spend time with Him and to share our entire lives with Him.

Similarly, many people are desperately reaching out and longing for an enduring, meaningful relationship with another person or persons. We all have that desire and long for its fulfillment. We are neither a machine or just a computer. We are human beings who deeply desire personal, inner satisfaction. When we allow Jesus Christ to meet our deepest need, we are then free to help meet the needs of others.

We may call human relationships 'friendships', but when emotion becomes involved the relationship usually deepens. One writer has said: 'Love is friendship which has caught fire'.

IN HOW MANY RELATIONSHIPS ARE WE INVOLVED?

If we were to write down a list of all the situations in which we find ourselves, recognizing that a relationship exists within that situation, we might be very surprised at the total. There are family relationships, marriage relationships, employer and employee relationships. Every day we are involved with other people. Neighbours, friends, relatives, doctors, shopkeepers could all be included. Some persons might list his or her dog or some other pet.

HOW CAN WE IMPROVE THESE VARIOUS RELATIONSHIPS?

We don't need any help to destroy a relationship. We can do it very easily by something we say or by a single, unresolved argument or by the way we act or react. It can happen through the comments of others, repeated or passed on to us. Or we can be too sensitive or too defensive. Some people think that everyone else needs to change the way they act or speak, but never think that they themselves might need to do so. As a result most of us need to work harder at improving many of the relationships in which we are now involved.

All relationships involve a degree of trust. Let's go back to Bill & Mark. Supposing Bill received a letter from the Income Tax Dept. asking why he has not submitted returns for the past

to forgive.

WHAT DO WE NEED TO IMPROVE OUR RELATIONSHIPS?

We need:

1. A loving grateful attitude expressed in words and actions.
2. A forgiving attitude which shows in our actions and relationships.

HOW CAN WE DO ALL THIS?

To do what needs to be done to improve relationships, we need help – a lot of help. When we try to love and forgive from within our own limited resources, we will inevitably fail. Friends can help us. Our family can help us. But the only Person who can really give us the assistance we need is the Holy Spirit. He is given to everyone who believes in Jesus Christ as their Saviour. We can count on His consistent, all sufficient help day by day as we yield ourselves to Him. 'Your body (as a believer) is the temple of the Holy Spirit, who lives in you and was given to you by God'. 1 Corinthians 6:19 NLVB. He lives within us to make real to us all that Christ has made possible for us. Christ has made forgiveness possible. He has taught us how to love one another. Christ's presence in our lives can become real for us.

The Holy Spirit is within us to make possible a Christlike life day by day. A Christlike life is one where wonderful relationships become

are just as inconsistent.

What does 'forgive' mean? It is actually two words – to 'give for'. In other words – 'No matter what you have done to me, I give you my friendship and goodwill'. The story is told of a certain tribal language that had no word for 'forgiveness'. So the missionary translator made up a combination of words which meant 'not being able to think about it many more'. What is the New Testament standard of forgiveness? 'As the Lord has forgiven you' – completely. How? 'I will forgive and remember their sins no more'. Hebrews 8:12

Some people hold on to a hurt for years. God says 'When you forgive, forget it'. We may not be able to erase the incident from our memory entirely but let us not give in to the luxury of playing it over and over again and again in our minds. Ask God to help us to keep our heart and mind fixed on Him rather than on the hurt. And we can pray for that person, seeking God's blessing for them. When we do that we will find our attitude toward them to be changing. It could be that in praying for them, our heart will be softened and we may find there are major changes which need to be made in ourselves. We all need the forgiveness of God repeatedly and also a right relationship with those we have inadvertently hurt by word or action. Let's be honest with God and with one another.

Lesson #5 in improving relationships – **Learn**

three years. He immediately went next door to see Mark. Angry words followed. 'Why didn't you send in my return? I left it to you – what happened? Mark made excuses but the relationship was never the same again. There needs to be complete trust and each party needs to continually live up to that trust.

There can also be hidden reasons for a breakdown in a relationship. Some situations need the direct, helpful, intervention of friends or professional counselors. For example, continued depression can seriously affect a person's relationships and that depression needs to be recognised and treated. It is dangerous to allow it to go on indefinitely. Medical or other help must be obtained. Others may have difficulty in establishing a lasting relationship, possibly because of childhood experiences, past rejection or even shyness. The basis of a relationship must include openness and trust. It may even include making ourselves vulnerable and giving of ourselves in many ways to the other person involved. That, too, may be difficult for many people.

WHAT CAN WE DO TO HELP?

It is very easy to over-simplify remedies and offer solutions which might help in some situations but would be insufficient or even disastrous in others. A cough drop will not be much help when dealing with pneumonia. However, one way to start on the improvement road might be

to go to a trusted friend and ask for their help and advice. Talk it out with that friend and listen to their suggestions. Do not overlook professional counseling if that is needed. But where there has simply been a breakdown in communication, the Bible has much to say to us. It is a textbook which can help in many more practical ways that we usually recognize.

A REMEDY FROM THE BIBLE.

If we really want to improve our various relationships, here is an important, helpful secret from the Bible: 'Be gentle with one another, sensitive, forgiving one another as quickly and as thoroughly as God in Christ forgave you'. (Ephesians 4:32). Another helpful verse is in the same chapter: 'Be completely humble and gentle: be patient, bearing with one another in love.' (Ephesians 4:2). We have no right to be impatient with one another when we think of how patient Christ is with us.

WAS THIS INSTRUCTION NEEDED?

Why did Paul write those commands? The church in Ephesus was an outstanding church. But Paul must have sensed a serious need to improve personal relationships between the church members. He urged them to be more sensitive and more gentle – in other words, more loving and patient with one another. It is the same today. A successful church must be more than a group of people meeting together

them? Affirmation and appreciation should be the constant expression of a desire to continue and build a relationship. One whole book in the New Testament, Paul's letter to the Philippians, is a 'thank you' note expressing his heartfelt thanks for their contribution towards his personal needs. He wanted to maintain his good relationship with that church and wrote warmly of his love for them all. This takes effort but it encourages the development of any relationship.

1 Thessalonians 4:12 expresses it well: 'May the Lord make your love grow and overflow to each other and to everyone else'. Lesson #4 in improving relationships – **Learn to express love and gratitude.**

ADDING TO THE PRECEDING – WE NEED A FORGIVING ATTITUDE.

What does our verse say? 'Be gentle with one another, sensitive, forgiving one another as quickly as God in Christ forgives you'. What a challenge! In developing any relationship we need a forgiving attitude. That is God's attitude toward us. Do you remember Peter's question to Christ? 'Master, how many times do I forgive a brother (or sister) who hurts me? Seven?' Jesus replied: 'Seven! Hardly, try seventy times seven'. He then told an incredible parable about a man who had been forgiven an enormous debt but then refused to forgive another man who owed him a very small amount. Sometimes we

'Love one another deeply from the heart'. Don't expect them to respond immediately in the same way. God will give you your reward, possibly by someone making an unsolicited call to you when you yourself needed it most. An unexpected note or card expressing appreciation of the positive character traits in your friend may mean a big step forward in that relationship.

BE GRATEFUL.

Another way to show love is by being grateful – in words or actions. A housewife said: 'We've been married 20 years and never once has my husband thanked me for a meal or praised my cooking'. It is true that some people's cooking is a little hard to praise but you would think that once in a while they would get it right! We are left to wonder how often she had expressed appreciation of her husband for what he had done at one time or another. Let's look for the positives in people rather than focusing on the negatives which is so easy to do.

Sometimes it may take a special effort to set our mind on the positive side of a relationship. But if we make it our habit to be encouraging to others, it will be rewarding to see that relationship develop.

Giving thanks is a New Testament characteristic or principle, one that is also found in the Old Testament. How many times is thanksgiving mentioned in the Bible? Could you ever count

regularly, however large or small. There must also be definite caring, loving, relationships shown between its members. What did Christ say? 'By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another'(John 13:35). If we want to improve our relationships within our own church family, we need to listen to the same advice Paul gave to the church in Ephesus.

NEEDED – A MORE LOVING, GRATEFUL ATTITUDE

To improve our personal relationships with one another, we need to be more loving and show more gratitude than we have shown in the past. This is true in a church, within a family, or in any relationship in which we are involved. It starts with love but also includes displaying more gratitude than we usually show. We can be grateful that we have the particular relationship and should say so. We can be grateful for the strong points in our friend's character or for what they may do for us.

This is true regarding our love also. 1 John 4:11 says it well: 'Since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another'. The phrase 'one another' occurs in various forms 87 times in the New Testament. It is used more than 70 times in connection with our inter-personal relationships. Dr Larry Crabb said: 'Learning to love more like Christ is the key to healthy, growing relationships'. A Christian should be showing love in all our relationships. Our love

can be shown not only by the spoken word but in numerous ways. Love is seen in kindness shown, in generosity, in trust, in compassion, in our willingness to forgive. All these are part of an intimate, growing relationship.

L.O.V.E

A simple acrostic based on the word 'love' could help us see several areas in which we might improve. Take the first letter: 'L', Let it stand for **'listening'**. Love is seen when we learn to **listen to one another more**. Often a teenager has said: 'Dad won't ever listen to me' or 'Mum never listens to me'. If a counselor suggests to a wife that she should talk over her problem with her husband, she almost invariably replies: 'My husband never listens to me'.

Besides learning to be better listeners (and in the interests of improving relationships) we should probably delete that word 'never' from our vocabulary! We need to use words which are not so confrontational or inaccurate. A suggestion could be: 'When you don't listen to me while I'm trying to talk to you, I feel you are not interested in what I am saying'. Both husbands and wives often fail in this area. Lack of communication between husband and wife is one of the biggest tests a marriage can face. One partner being constantly negative in outlook is another hindrance to real communication.

understanding of the situation and of each other. This could lead to a better relationship and even draw each one closer to Christ.

THE EXAMPLE OF PAUL THE APOSTLE.

The apostle Paul has given us a wonderful example of recognizing others and their place in the team. If you look through his later epistles, you will discover that he usually began each letter with his own name and then linked with it the names of those who were with him at that time e.g. Paul and Timothy, Paul and Silas and so on. Over 100 friends are mentioned by Paul in his various letters. That is a fine example for us to follow. Recognise and value the other members of your 'team'. Lesson #3 in improving relationships – **Learn to value the other person's opinion.**

'E' – EXPRESS YOUR FEELINGS AND YOUR GRATITUDE.

'E' is the final letter of our acrostic. To improve relationships, **learn to express the feelings of your heart**. A little girl who had been playing with her dolls, complained to her mother: 'Mummy, I hug my dolls and I tell them I love them, but they never love me back'. There are many situations like that. It never hurts a relationship to express our love in one way or another to the person concerned. It can be shown or expressed in so many ways. A phone call saying: 'I was thinking of you..' can mean so much. 1 Peter 2:2 says:

conflict or seriously damage the relationship. Don't interrupt. Let your husband, your wife, your child, your neighbour, your friend, say what they think and let them feel that you will accept both them and their opinion without shooting them down. You might say: 'You have a point there. I don't see it that way but maybe we can talk this thing out together'.

If you are a parent with teenage children, remember to be especially sensitive to your child's opinion. Don't contribute to low self-esteem or even rebellion by giving the impression that you know everything and he or she knows nothing and that their opinion does not count. Try to look at a situation through their eyes, showing empathy.

If you are dealing with a strong-willed child, however, you may need to treat the situation differently. There are no rules which will fit every occasion and wisdom is needed to handle each one in the best way possible in the circumstances.

Remember a relationship is an ongoing interaction between two or more people. It cannot be one sided. Proverbs 15:22 reminds us: 'Plans go wrong for lack of advice'. We could paraphrase those words this way: 'Things go wrong from seeing or hearing only one side'. You might even learn something from listening to their opinion. And after communicating both views, each person will have a better

Sometimes a conversation which might help to improve a relationship is terminated by words such as 'You don't know what you're talking about'. It is important to allow the other person to finish what he or she wants to say even if we don't agree with it. They need the opportunity to fully express themselves and explain their reasoning. There cannot be any real relationship where one person does all the talking. (Remember this is also true in our relationship with God.)

We recognize that some people are like radio stations – never off the air. Others cut in and turn the focus of the conversation to their own situation or experience, jumping in with: 'Oh that happened to me.' Often ending the conversation right there.

LEARNING TO LISTEN.

James 1:19 reminds us to be 'Quick to listen, slow to speak'. We can learn to be better listeners if we really want to be. So much of our communication is non-verbal. It comes through our 'body language'. For example, the first lesson is to listen with our eyes as well as our ears. If it is obvious that our eyes are looking elsewhere and our body is ready to run, we are saying: 'I'm not really listening to you. I am thinking of something else'. **Learn to look at people directly while you are listening to them.** Lean slightly toward them in a relaxed attitude. Be patient.

Then let the speaker see that you are reacting in a warm way; that your heart is also listening as well as your ears. Be sympathetic if that is what is needed. Ask relevant questions to show you understand where the other person is coming from. Make sure your questions or statements are not intimidating, Say: 'I feel that perhaps you should.....' instead of: 'Why in the world did you do something like that?' Rephrase and repeat what is being said to you so that he or she will know you are really grasping the situation.

Do you like others to listen to you? Then here is Lesson #1 in improving relationships: **Learn to listen.**

'O' – OVERLOOK..

The second letter is 'O'. **Learn to overlook minor incidents.** Proverbs 19:11 'People with good sense restrain themselves. They earn esteem by overlooking wrongs'. A good sense of humour can also help here. You will probably laugh about it later, so why not now? Remember the words of our verse: (Eph.4:32) 'Be gentle with one another, sensitive' – as to the reason behind what the other person did or said. They may have had a bad day. Don't let their bad day spoil yours! You can choose to be gracious and act in a way that could either foster a better attitude or change their frame of mind. Treat them in the way you would like to be treated in a

similar situation. The paraphrase of the Golden Rule in 'The Message' gives us Matthew 7:12 in very plain words: 'Here is a simple rule-of-thumb guide for behaviour. Ask yourself what you want people to do for you then **grab the initiative and do it for them**'.

WHAT CAN I LEARN FROM THIS SITUATION?

Sometimes we can be over-sensitive, focusing too much on ourselves, especially if the other person's remarks seem to be critical. If it is criticism, evaluate whether or not there is any truth in what has been said. Ask yourself: 'What can I learn from this situation? Am I being too sensitive and reacting too much? Let's ask the Lord that we might be sensitive to Him and His leading and not be over-sensitive to other people? Look at it this way – by enlarging this situation, will you help or hurt the relationship involved? If it is a minor incident and not something major involving a principle, then here is Lesson #2 in improving relationships – **Learn to overlook minor incidents.**

'V' – VALUE THE OTHER PERSON'S OPINION.

'V' is next. To help improve relationships, **learn to value the opinions of others.** If you reply with words such as: 'You don't know what you are talking about', you will most likely start an argument which may increase the level of