

THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST

SPREADING THE SOUL-SAVING MESSAGE OF JESUS

MOTIVATIONAL LESSONS **“How to Build Strong Relationships”**

Introduction by narrator accompanied by a cappella singing:

THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST. Spreading the soul-saving message of Jesus. And now, Kevin Pendergrass.

Welcome to the Gospel of Christ. Today we will be continuing our motivational lessons, and will be looking at how to build strong relationships. When we look at the idea of relationships, we see that everyone has them. Some of those relationships may be strong; some may be weak; some may be mediocre. But everyone has relationships in this life. You have a relationship with your family—whether it is your husband, your wife, your parents, your children, your brothers, or your sisters. You have relationships with friends, those with whom you work, those with whom you go to school, or those with whom you come in contact during your daily chores. How can we strengthen those relationships and make them better? You might be thinking, “My relationships are already just fine, so I don’t have any need to listen to this lesson.” But that is not true. Even if you think that your relationships are good, it will only make them better if we go to the Bible, “speak as the oracles of God” (1 Pet. 4:11), and see what the Bible says about relationships. So let’s look at how to make relationships strong.

If we are going to make any of our relationships stronger, we must be willing to listen. Listening is so important in any relationship. In James 1:19 the Bible says, “So then, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath.” We are to be “swift to hear.” We need to have our ears ready to listen to what someone is saying. Some people observed that the Lord gave us only one mouth, but two ears. Thus, we need to listen twice as much as we talk. Even though the Bible does not come out and say that, the principle is seen in James 1:19. When it comes to listening, we always need to be ready. When it comes to speaking, we need to be slow. There are some good principles in the Book of Revelation, too. In Revelation 2 and 3 the Lord was writing letters to the churches of Christ in Asia Minor. At the end of each letter (whether He was rebuking them, correcting them, or encouraging them), He said, “He who has ears, let him hear what the Spirit says.” The Spirit was speaking through the Word of God (through those letters). The people needed to be “quick” regarding how they listened. There were to be sure that they did not say, “Well, I read the letter, but I won’t read it again or pay any more attention to it.” Instead, they needed to be quick to listen to what was being said. In Proverbs 1:5 the Bible says that “a wise man will hear and increase learning.” If we want to learn, what is the best way to do so? We first must hear in order to learn. Romans 10:17 says, “Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.” We must listen to what God’s Word has to say. If we want to be better Christians and strengthen our relationship with God, that begins with us going to the Bible as the Word of God and listening to what it has to say.

In Proverbs 19:20 the Bible says, “Listen to counsel and receive instruction, that you may be wise in your latter days.” We have to listen to counsel if we want to be wise. If we want to increase our learning, we must listen. If we are ever going to have a good relationship with God, we must listen to what He has to say.

However, we not only must listen to what is being said, but we also must listen in the correct manner. You may be asking yourself, “What does that mean?” If we listen with preconceived ideas in our minds, it will not help us grow. Even if what is being said is not correct, we still must listen in the right way. In Luke 8 Jesus taught a parable about soil, and how that soil represented the heart, while the seed was the Word of God. Different soils received that seed differently. In verses 16-18, notice what Jesus had to say about the way we listen:

“No one, when he has lit a lamp, covers it with a vessel or puts it under a bed, but sets it on a lampstand, that those who enter may see the light. For nothing is secret that will not be revealed, nor anything hidden that will not be known and come to light. Therefore **take heed how you hear**. For whoever has, to him more will be given; and whoever does not have, even what he seems to have will be taken from him.”

Jesus said that there is a certain manner in which we are to listen. We need to take heed “how” we hear. If we have preconceived ideas as we are trying to listen to someone, that is a wrong way to listen. I find it ironic how so many people want to put the emphasis on the speaker or on how he said something. The Bible teaches us that it is our responsibility to listen correctly to what is being said. Thus, if we are going to strengthen our relationships, we must be willing to listen.

If we are going to have strong relationships, we also must understand what that person is trying to convey to us. In Proverbs 4:7 the Bible says, “Wisdom is the principal thing; therefore get wisdom. And in all your getting, get understanding.” Think for a moment about the times when problems occurred because there was a misunderstanding about what was being said. Instead of listening to understand, people may have been listening—believing that they already knew what was being said. They therefore missed the point. Maybe you have gone to worship services, and as you entered you said, “Today I think that the preacher is going to offend me because he has an agenda against me. So whatever he says today will be directed at me just to make me mad.” If a person already has such a mindset, he can listen to what the preacher has to say, but he is listening with an incorrect motivation. He is not listening to understand what the speaker has to say. We must be willing to understand what another person is trying to convey to us. I want to look at a couple of passages in the Scriptures where the Jews totally misunderstood Jesus. It was not Jesus’ fault. Rather, it was because the Jews were unwilling to understand what was being said. They thought that they already had it figured out; therefore, they did not even try to listen.

In John 8:37 the Bible says (Jesus speaking at first),

“I know that you are Abraham’s descendants, but you seek to kill Me, because My word has no place in you. I speak what I have seen with My Father, and you do what you have seen with your father.’ They answered and said to Him, ‘Abraham is our father.’ Jesus said to them, ‘If you were Abraham’s children, you would do the works of Abraham. But now you seek to kill Me, a Man who has told you the truth which I heard from God. Abraham did not do this. You do the deeds of your father.’ Then they said to Him, ‘We were not born of fornication; we have one Father—God.’ Jesus said to them, ‘If God were your Father, you would love Me, for I proceeded forth and came from God; nor have I come of Myself, but He sent Me.’”

Here we see a misunderstanding that is taking place. The Jews said, “We have Abraham as our father. We came from Abraham.” Jesus was trying to teach that such was all part of God’s plan. Jesus was not a false prophet. He was not a false teacher. Rather, Jesus was the One to Whom they should have been listening. This was the seed promise that had been made to Abraham. But they thought they already had everything figured out, so they did not understand what Jesus said. They were not listening to try to understand. In verse

43 Jesus said, “Why do you not understand My speech? Because you are not able to listen to My word.” It was not that the Jews were not capable of understanding. It was that they were unwilling to understand. Verses 44-47 record,

“You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own resources, for he is a liar and the father of it. But because I tell the truth, you do not believe Me. Which of you convicts Me of sin? And if I tell the truth, why do you not believe Me? He who is of God hears God’s words; therefore you do not hear because you are not of God.”

Jesus was not saying that the Jews needed some sort of “mystical powers” to be able to understand what He was saying. Instead, He said that they were not trying to listen; thus, they were not “of God.” The reason they could not understand was because they did not want to understand. If we go into a situation with our minds already made up, then that conversation will not accomplish anything. We must understand what the other person is saying—whether it is right or wrong. If it is right, we need to listen to it. If it is wrong, we need to at least understand where they are coming from so we can teach them the truth.

Another example is found in John 6 as Jesus was teaching His own disciples. In verse 41 we read, “The Jews then complained about Him, because He said, ‘I am the bread which came down from heaven.’” Jesus was talking about He was the bread of life. This was confusing to the Jews and Jesus’ own disciples. In verses 53-58 Jesus said,

“Most assuredly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. For My flesh is food indeed, and My blood is drink indeed. He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him. As the living Father sent Me, and I live because of the Father, so he who feeds on Me will live because of Me. This is the bread which came down from heaven—not as your fathers ate the manna, and are dead. He who eats this bread will live forever.”

Jesus was saying that they had to “consume His flesh and drink His blood.” But then He went on to explain what He was saying. In verse 60, however, we read, “Therefore many of His disciples, when they heard this, said, ‘This is a hard saying; who can understand it?’” The answer is that anyone could have understood it. In verse 61 we read, “When Jesus knew in Himself that His disciples complained about this, He said to them, ‘Does this offend you?’” He then went on to explain that He was consuming, not Him **physically**, but His Word **spiritually**. In verse 63 He said, “It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing. The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life.” He thus explained what He meant. It was His words that would give people life. But some of the people did not understand—because of their own choosing. In verse 66 the Bible says, “From that time many of His disciples went back and walked with Him no more.” In verse 67 Jesus said to the twelve apostles, “Do you also want to go away?” In verse 68 we read, “But Simon Peter answered Him, ‘Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.’” Peter finally got it. Christ had the words of eternal life. He was not talking about physical flesh and blood. He was talking about His words, which would give people life. Many of His own disciples, however, “ended up walking with Him no more.” That happens today a lot of times. People are not willing to sit down and study various issues. They may hear a Bible verse and then say, “I don’t want any part of that.” They therefore do not understand. If they had been willing to try to understand what was being said, there would have been no problem. We need to make sure that we are not making assumptions (for example, “thinking that we do understand”) when we are talking to one another. Different words may mean different things to people because of the way they were reared. Let me give you an example of this. Suppose I was preaching on Ephesians 5 about the relation-

ship between a husband and a wife, and Christ and the church. Ephesians 5:24 speaks about how a woman is to be submissive to her husband. If I preached that and read that verse, and the idea of being submissive meant to hear that she had to do everything her husband said, without question, she might go out of the assembly and say, "I heard the preacher say that women have to do everything their husbands tell them to, without question." Is that what I said? Of course not. And likely everyone else knew that. So why did she think that? It was because she misunderstood the word "submission." If we do not define our words properly, we can cause misunderstandings to occur. We need to be careful when we are talking to each other that we are not on different levels of reasoning, but that we are using proper definitions.

Now let's look at some keys to understanding. How can we understand in a relationship? We have been emphasizing how people misunderstand each other, which leads to more confusion. So how what can we do to correctly understand someone in a relationship?

We must not react hastily. When you are in a conversation, and someone says something, don't "go off the cuff." James 1:19 says that we are to be "slow to wrath and slow to speak." In Proverbs 14:29 the Bible says, "He who is slow to wrath has great understanding, but he who is impulsive exalts folly." If we are slow to wrath, we will have a clear mind and more understanding. When we react hastily, or based on an impulse, our emotions begin to get the best of us. We no longer are in control of our emotions, and what we are saying is based on what we feel rather than on the truth. That is dangerous because we will not encourage proper understanding when we do that. In Proverbs 29:20 the Bible says, "Do you see a man hasty in his words? There is more hope for a fool than for him." If you are "hasty with your words," a fool has more hope than you do. That is how bad it is when we react hastily. When, in a relationship, people start saying something to you, do not just start talking. Stop and listen.

It also can help if we ask questions. If you come out of a conversation saying, "I just wonder what he meant by that?," then go ask. Don't assume. Matthew 7:7 says, "Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you." Even though the specific context is salvation and seeking the Lord, the same principle is true with any relationship. We need to be willing to seek and ask questions. If someone says something, and you are unsure about what is being said, ask, "Is this what you meant by that?" or "What did you mean by that?" That way you can be sure that you have a proper understanding of what the person was saying, rather than what you might think that he was saying.

Another key to understanding is to be willing to define words. At times, even the Bible teaches us to that. Paul did that in 2 Corinthians 8:13 as well as 1 Corinthians 5:9-10. In 1 Corinthians 5:9-10 we read about withdrawing from a fellow Christian. There was sin in the church, so Paul wrote that the church was to "deliver such a one to Satan." The church was not to have fellowship with that person. Paul wrote,

"I wrote to you in my epistle not to keep company with sexually immoral people. Yet I certainly did not mean with the sexually immoral people of this world, or with the covetous, or extortioners, or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world."

Paul defined what he meant. He said that he was speaking about people who were Christians who had obeyed the Gospel, but who had fallen away. This is why it is so important to follow 1 Peter 4:11—"If anyone speaks, let him speak as the oracles of God." We must properly understand the Word of God rather than trying to put our own twist or definition on it. We must do the same in conversations with people. I have participated in a couple of public debates. And in doing that, the first thing that a debater does when he is affirming

his proposition is to define the words. This helps the opponent understand the proposition, but also helps the audience what the speaker is trying to say.

Jesus was very specific in identifying problems. In Revelation 2:1-4,12-15,18-20 and Revelation 3:1-3,14-16 Jesus was dealing with specific problems in various congregations. Oftentimes He stated what the problem was not, and then He stated what the problem was. That took away the confusion when He said, "Here is what you are doing right; keep on doing it; don't stop. But here is what you need to change. Here is what you need to cease doing or start doing." When there are problems in a relationship, we need to be open and honest, and we need to be specific in identifying the problem. There is a difference between symptoms and disease. Think about the person who never attends church services on Sunday or Wednesday nights. Why is that person not there? He more than likely knows that he needs to be there and that he should be there. So why is the person not there? Lack of attendance is a symptom of the disease: **sin**. The real problem is that the person does not love God the way he should. He is not putting God first. The desire to do that is not in the person's heart. If it was there, then the person would attend. We must look at the symptom and then ask, "What is the real problem?" We need to be specific when we are talking to people so we can define the problem and then deal with it. We cannot fix problems until we know what the problems are. For example, Romans 3:23 identifies the problem as sin. What is the solution? It is God. It is Jesus Christ. What if someone is having a problem in his marriage? Perhaps the solution is patience or more understanding. In any problem, there is always a solution. We have to be willing to put those solutions into practice.

We also have to apply the solution. In Proverbs 2:2 the Bible says, "Incline your ear to wisdom, and apply your heart to understanding." This is where "the rubber meets the road," so to speak. In any relationship, a person might be willing to listen, understand, and get specific regarding the problem. But if that person is not going to apply the solution the relationship will never be strong. In Proverbs 22:17 we are told, "Incline your ear and hear the words of the wise, and apply your heart to my knowledge." In Proverbs 23:12 we read, "Apply your heart to instruction, and your ears to words of knowledge." In Acts 1:1 Luke is talking about Jesus, and speaks of "all that Jesus began both to do and teach." Jesus was not just a teacher of God's Word, but also was One Who applied that Word. We must do the same. The concept that "faith without works is dead" is seen throughout the Scriptures. We have to be willing to apply the solution because "faith without works is dead." That applies to any facet of life.

In James 2:14-17 we see the importance of applying our faith.

"What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save him? If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food, and one of you says to them, 'Depart in peace, be warmed and filled,' but you do not give them the things which are needed for the body, what does it profit? Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead."

This is what I am saying in regard to the importance of applying the solution. James was saying that if a person was hungry or thirsty, and you understand that, but then you don't do anything about it, what good has it done the person? It did not help him at all. "Faith without works is dead" every time. That is how a relationship will be if you do not have faith plus works.

Relationships are important; we all have them. So how do we build strong relationships? We must be willing to listen. We must be willing to understand what another person is saying. We have to identify the problem. And we have to apply the solution.

Have you obeyed the Gospel? Do you have a true relationship with the Lord—not just a relationship that “makes you feel good”? The Bible teaches us that we must go to God’s Word in order to have a correct relationship with God (Heb. 11:6; Rom. 10:17). We must believe that Jesus is the Son of God (Jn. 3:16; 8:24). We must repent of our sins (Acts 3:18-19). We must confess that Jesus is Lord (Rom. 10:10). And we must be baptized for the forgiveness of our sins (Acts 2:38). If you have yet to obey the truth, we pray today that you will obey the Gospel of Christ.

Narrator accompanied by a cappella singing:

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STUDY QUESTIONS FOR “HOW TO BUILD STRONG RELATIONSHIPS”

1. What does James 1:19 have to say, and how does it apply to building stronger relationships?
2. What good piece of advice is found in Revelation 2:29 for people who want to build stronger relationships?
3. What good piece of advice is found in Proverbs 1:5 for people who want to build stronger relationships?
4. What good piece of advice is found in Proverbs 19:20 for people who want to build stronger relationships?
5. What admonishment did Jesus Christ offer in Luke 8:18?
6. Proverbs 4:7 says, “Wisdom is the principal thing; therefore get wisdom.” Based on the material found in the verses above in questions 1-5, what is one good way to “get wisdom”?
7. What question did Jesus ask in John 8:43 that applies in regard to people today who want to build stronger relationships?
8. In John 6:53-58 Jesus spoke some “difficult words” to His disciples. What (as discussed in this lesson) would have helped those disciples be able to better understand Jesus’ points?
9. How can entering into a relationship with preconceived notions or unproved assumptions affect the people in a relationship?
10. How can the admonition found in Proverbs 14:29 help people build stronger relationships?
11. How can the admonition given by Jesus in Matthew 7:7 help people build stronger relationships?
12. As discussed in this lesson, what did the apostle Paul do in 1 Corinthians 5:9-10 that could help people build stronger relationships?
13. If there is a problem in a relationship, how can “treating the disease instead of the symptoms” help repair the relationship?
14. What good piece of advice is found in Proverbs 2:2 for people who want to build stronger relationships?
15. What good piece of advice is found in Proverbs 22:17 for people who want to build stronger relationships?
16. How can the principle founds in James 2:17 help build a stronger relationship?