

John Bevere: How to Approach Someone Who Has Offended You

Here's what to do if your brother offends you.

"Moreover if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother." –Matthew 18:15

Many people apply this Scripture verse in a different attitude from the one Jesus was intending. If they have been hurt, they will go and confront the offender in a spirit of revenge and anger. They use this verse as justification to condemn the one who has hurt them.

But they are missing the whole reason Jesus instructed us to go to one another. It is not for condemnation but for reconciliation. He does not want us to tell our brother how rotten he has been to us. We are to go to remove the breach preventing the restoration of our relationship.

This parallels how God restores us to Himself. We have sinned against God, but He "demonstrates His own love toward [and for] us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom. 5:8). Are we willing to lay down our self-protection and die to pride in order to be restored to the one who has offended us? God reached out to us before we asked for forgiveness. Jesus decided to forgive us before we even acknowledged our offense.

Even though He reached out to us, we could not be reconciled to the Father until we received His word of reconciliation: "Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation, that is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation. Now then,

we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore you on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God" (2 Cor. 5:18–20).

The word of reconciliation begins on the common ground that we all have sinned against God. We do not desire reconciliation or salvation unless we know there is a separation.

In the New Testament, the disciples preached that the people had sinned against God. But why tell people they have sinned? To condemn them? God does not condemn: "For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved" (John 3:17). Is it rather to bring them to a place where they realize their condition, repent of their sins and ask forgiveness?

What leads men to repentance? The answer is found in Romans 2:4: "Or do you despise the riches of His goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering, not knowing that *the goodness of God leads you to repentance*?" (emphasis added).

God's goodness leads us to repent. His love does not leave us condemned to hell. He proved His love by sending Jesus, His only Son, to the cross to die for us. God reaches out first, even though we have sinned against Him. He reaches out not to condemn but to restore—to save.

Since we are to imitate God (Eph. 5:1), we are to extend reconciliation to a brother who sins against us. Jesus established this pattern: Go to him and show him his sin, not to condemn him but to remove anything that lies between the two of you and thus be reconciled and restored. The goodness of God within us will draw our brother to repentance and restoration of the relationship.

"I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one

another in love, endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (Eph. 4:1-3).

We keep this bond of peace by maintaining an attitude of humility, gentleness and long-suffering and by undergirding each other's weakness in love. The bonds of love are strengthened thereby. I have wronged people who have confronted me with condemnation. As a result, I lost all desire to be reconciled. In fact, I thought they didn't want reconciliation; they just wanted me to know they were mad.

Others I have wronged have come to me in meekness. Then I was quick to change my outlook and ask forgiveness—sometimes before they had finished speaking.

Has someone ever come to you and said, "I just want you to know that I forgive you for not being a better friend and for not doing this or that for me"? Then when they have blasted you, they give you a look that says, "You owe me an apology." You are baffled and stand there in confusion and hurt. They did not come to reconcile your relationship but to intimidate and control you.

We should not go to a brother who has offended us until we have decided to forgive him from our hearts—no matter how he responds to us. We need to get rid of any feelings of animosity toward him before approaching him. If we don't, we will probably react out of these negative feelings and hurt him, not heal him.

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