

Relating to Friends, Part 2

By Patricia Ennis

Pre-Session Assignments

One week before the session, participants will take the following assignments.

Assignment One

Some of the bombs dropped on England by the Germans during World War II are still killing people. What is true of bombs is also true of people who have unresolved anger. Buried anger explodes when we least expect it. And when anger explodes, it can ruin a friendship garden. Prepare to share your answer to the following question: What does Scripture say about anger? Proverbs 25:28 and 29:11 provide a foundation for your study.

Assignment Two

Relational weeds in the friendship garden have the potential of stunting or completely stopping growth. The book of John teaches us how to make our garden weed free. Study John 13:34–35; 15:12, 14 and 17. Prepare to share what John teaches about friendships.

Assignment Three

The legendary *Spanish water torture* strapped victims down so they could not move. Cold water was dripped slowly on to a small area of the body until they were gradually driven frantic. Prepare to share your answer to the following question: How is the choice to withhold forgiveness in a friendship like the Spanish water torture? Use Scripture to describe how to follow our Lord's example and develop a *forgiving spirit*. 1 Peter 2:21-23 will get you started.

Scripture to Memorize

"Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends." John 15:13

Session Goal

Consistent with God's Word and in the power of the Holy Spirit—by the end of this session, disciples will develop strategies to restore damaged relationships.

Pat Ennis is distinguished professor and director of Homemaking Programs at Southwestern Seminary. Prior to that she served as consultant to that program. She taught home economics for the San Diego Unified School District while developing the Home Economics Department at Christian Heritage College (now San Diego Christian College). In 1987 she established the Home Economics-Family and Consumer Science Department at The Master's College.

She is the author and coauthor of several books, including *Becoming a Young Woman Who Pleases God*. Pat's life's mission is to:

- Love her Lord with ALL of her heart (Matthew 22:37).
- Walk worthy of her calling (Ephesians 4:1-3).
- Train the younger women to fulfill the Titus 2 mandate so that God's Word will not be discredited (Titus 2:3-5).

It's in the Book

30 minutes

Real-Life Scenario

The people in your church are lots of fun to be with and you enjoy hanging out with them. Lately you notice that they seem to be avoiding you. What behaviors might cause those who used to include you in their activities suddenly to exclude you?

Read Genesis 4:1-8; Ephesians 4:26; Isaiah 6:1-8; James 1:19-20; 3:1-12; 4:1; and Matthew 5:21-26 out loud.

A study of friendship teaches us that friendship eliminates many of the negative aspects of life, keeps us healthy and may even add years to our lives. Since this is true, it is important not only to plant and care for a friendship garden but to weed it consistently. Whether or not you are a gardener, you know a weed is a plant that is growing somewhere you don't want it—a simple definition, a potentially large problem. Relational weeds in the friendship garden have the potential of stunting or completely stopping its growth. This study focuses on how to identify the weeds and get rid of them. We begin by examining their source.

Studying the Passage, James 4:1

Verse 1. What . . . among you? James introduces this section of teaching with a question, “What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you?” **Fights** literally means “state of war” and **quarrels** are “personal disagreements or battles.” James answers his own question: the source is from your personal desires. **Passions.** This word in Greek always has a negative meaning in the New Testament. It means “the passionate desires for worldly pleasures that describe unbelievers.” These are the source of conflict in any relationship – including the church.

James 1:19. quick to hear, slow to speak. Christians are to respond positively to God's Word and eagerly pursue every opportunity to know God's Word and will better. Psalm 119:9-11 is a reminder that internalizing God's Word is the best method to remove weeds from our friendship garden. **slow to anger.** When a disagreement occurs, the one who is listening rather than fighting back with words is the one slow to anger. **Anger,** by definition, is anywhere from a strong feeling of annoyance to a condition of hostility. Left unchecked, it can lead to **wrath.** *Wrath* is from the Greek word describing a “deep, internal resentment and rejection.” Clearly this is a weed that must be removed from the friendship garden as soon as it appears.

Assignment One Feedback

The person who completed **Assignment One** during the week can now report on what Scripture teaches about how exploding anger can ruin a friendship garden.

On Your Own

In the space below write some specific and practical ways you can show Christian love in your relationships. Use John 13:34-35; 15:12-14, and 17 as a foundation for your answer. When everyone is finished, the group can share their responses.

Discussion Question

Review Genesis 4:1-8. What do Cain and Able teach us about the unbiblical response to anger?

Carelessness in word or deed can damage the best relationships. Though the tongue is small, it has the power to control everything associated with a person's life. It is a weed that needs to be pulled as soon as it takes root.

Studying the Passage

Isaiah 6:1-8 related the account of how God called Isaiah to become a prophet. He did so first by giving Isaiah a vision of His awesome holiness and then by sanctifying the prophet's tongue.

Verse 5. unclean lips. If the lips are unclean, so is the heart. This vision of God's holiness vividly reminded the prophet of his own unworthiness which deserved judgment.

James 3:2. stumble. Nothing ruins a friendship faster than an uncontrolled tongue. James teaches that believers who are never at fault (**stumbles**) in what they say (**in word**) are **perfect**. **Perfect** is defined as "a mature, complete person."

On Your Own

In the space below report James's additional descriptions of the tongue found in James 3:4-12. Evaluate your tongue in light of Isaiah 6:1-8 and James 3:1-12. List any changes that need to be made to ensure that it is a flower rather than a weed. When everyone is finished, the group can share their responses.

At the end of the age, we will be judged by how we used our tongues. Matthew 12:36 teaches "people will give account for every careless word they speak," The tongue reveals more about us than almost anything else. Although for a time the tongue may conceal its true character, eventually it will be revealed. Just as the mouth of a babbling spring reveals the nature of the water source, so people's tongues reveal their heart (Matthew 12:35). Weed your friendship garden often to make certain your words reflect spiritual maturity.

Assignment Two Feedback

The person who completed **Assignment Two** during the week can now report on what John teaches about friendships

Studying the Passage

A common weed in the friendship garden is the choice to hold a grudge. A **grudge** is a consistent feeling of resentment that comes from a past insult or injury. How would you respond to the question: "When others have wronged me, what should be my attitude?"

Psalms 86:5. forgiving, abounding in steadfast love. This passage teaches that believers follow God by being ready to forgive and overflowing with committed love.

Matthew 6:12–15 states you are to forgive others in light of the forgiveness of God. **Verse 15** clearly explains that God will withhold His forgiveness from us if we refuse to forgive others.

Matthew 18:21. how often . . . forgive. Peter asked how many times a believer was required to forgive a wrong. *Forgive* means “to cease to feel resentment against someone.” Peter actually was being generous when he offered to forgive seven times. The rabbinic teaching was that an offended person needed to forgive a brother only three times. Jesus’ reply was that forgiveness needs to be many more times—not just **seven times but seventy seven times**. That’s 490 times! Jesus meant that no limits should be set.

Assignment Three Feedback

The person who completed **Assignment Three** during the week can now report on how to follow the Lord’s example and develop a forgiving spirit.

Discussion Question

As a friend you will at times wrong others. **James 5:16** says, “Confess your sins to one another.” Discuss the question: “Am I humble enough to confess to my friends that I was wrong so the relationship can be restored?”

Studying and Applying the Passage

The biblical account of Joseph is a clear example of forgiveness. Genesis 37:18-28 records his brothers’ plot to kill him. Genesis 37:29–45:4 described Joseph’s experiences that led him to offer the forgiveness to his brothers recorded in Genesis 45:1-15. Are you carrying a grudge against anyone? Are you willing to follow Joseph’s example and offer forgiveness, even if the person is not repentant? What forgiveness strategies will you develop so that Joseph’s example will be yours in situations where forgiveness is needed?

Heart and Hands

8 minutes

Read again the **Real-Life Scenario** near the beginning of the lesson. Consider whether your answers have changed during the session.

Be silent for two or three minutes. Thank Jesus for His sacrifice and for the gospel. Adore Him for His glorious reign on the throne of heaven. Then ask the Holy Spirit to reveal to you:

1. A way the Scriptures you studied today will change your heart for the glory of Christ.
2. Or a way those Scriptures will lead you to stop doing something for the glory of Christ.
3. Or a way those Scriptures will lead you to do something for the glory of Christ.

Write what the Spirit reveals to you below and then be ready to share what you have written with the group.

Since Last Week

5 minutes

Grace-Filled Accountability

5 minutes

Planning for Evangelism, Missions, and Service

5 minutes

Prayer

7 minutes

Every disciple will pray aloud, offering praise to Jesus, thanking Him specifically for His gracious acts, making heartfelt confession, committing to actions flowing from the Bible study, praying toward evangelism locally and globally, and interceding for others as prompted by the Holy Spirit.

At Home: Nail It Down

Hard work is necessary to ensure you are doing your part to maintain friendships. When you neglect to invest time and effort in a relationship, you are essentially saying, "I don't care very much." Maintaining relationships suggests that you are a forgiving person (Colossians 3:13-14), willing to bear with weaknesses and idiosyncrasies of others (1 Corinthians 13:7) and quick to clear up misunderstandings as soon as they arise (Mark 10:25-26; Galatians 6:1).

Maintaining relationships also means dealing with your pride and asking for forgiveness when you have offended your friend (Matthew 5:23-24; 6:14-15) and surrendering your desire to punish someone who has hurt or upset you (2 Timothy 2:23-26). True friendship freely grants forgiveness (Ephesians 4:31-32) and forgets the transgression (Psalm 103:12; Jeremiah 31:34).

As we conclude our study of the importance of weeding our friendship garden, may I pose a question for you to ponder? Since healthy friendships counter so many of the negative aspects of life, keep you healthy, and may even add years to your life, why is it so difficult to prevent weeds from growing in your friendship garden?

As you think about your response, consider Jesus who set the standard for unchanging, steadfast love and commitment in friendship (Hebrews 13:6). If you seek to follow His example, you undoubtedly will find your capacity to "love your neighbor as yourself" increasing (Leviticus 19:18; Deuteronomy 6:5; Matthew 22:37-40). Are you willing, through His strength, to build friendships that reflect you are a friend with God, the Almighty Creator of all?

Follow up Question

What biblical strategies can a believer use to restore damaged relationships?

The Making Disciples curriculum is a gift from Southwestern Seminary to those who, for the glory of the Father and in the power of the Spirit, will spend a lifetime embracing the full supremacy of the Son, responding to His kingly reign in all of life, inviting Christ to live His life through them, and joining Him in making disciples among all peoples.