



## 7 Laws of Relationship Part 2

### What Are Your Priorities in Relationships?

I know this will shock you, but my wife and I have gotten in arguments. And yes I have let the sun go down on my anger. In fact the sun has gone down several times in a row on my anger and no I wasn't in a coma or something. What makes relationships so tough to maintain, especially those that are the most intimate, the most important to us? A friend recently admitted in his newsletter that his wife refused to go to church with him one Sunday because of the argument they had. And he is a pastor! Each of us has a tale to tell of some broken relationship we have experienced. There are those that devastate us, others that just create misery. Because relationships are in some ways as important or more than eating and sleeping, it would be great to consider how we can build healthy friendships and loving relationships.

Last week I talked about the first three laws of relationship. Today we will continue our conversation on this with the fourth law of relationship. All seven are built upon the total picture you see in the Bible and gives you expert direction on how to live with others. First, notice again what James the brother of Jesus noted about relationships. **My brothers, as believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ, don't show favoritism. Suppose a man comes into your meeting wearing a gold ring and fine clothes, and a poor man in shabby clothes also comes in. If you show special attention to the man wearing fine clothes and say, "Here's a good seat for you," but say to the poor man, "You stand there" or "Sit on the floor by my feet," have you not discriminated among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts? Listen, my dear brothers: Has not God chosen those who are poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith and to inherit the kingdom he promised those who love him? But you have insulted the poor. Is it not the rich who are exploiting you? Are they not the ones who are dragging you into court? Are they not the ones who are slandering the noble name of him to whom you belong?** (James 2:1-7 NIV) This is an extraordinarily profound statement on how each of us are to interact with one another and what living together is to entail if we are committed to living for Christ.

The fourth law is quite simple. Every person you come across is created in the image of God. **So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.** (Genesis 1:27 NIV) The Hebrew term translated "image" is "zelem" and describes a likeness or resemblance. It tells us that something about each person is like God. There is a family resemblance there. What that entails is open to much speculation. Many would argue that it is tied to us each having a spirit and God being spirit. That seems as logical as any possibility, but regardless, the point is that each person in your life is made in the image of God and that is crucial to all of your relationships. That resemblance between us and God clearly is paramount to our Creator, and it decides how we are to treat one another. When God reestablished the world order after the flood, he made it clear to Noah and all who followed him that human life was precious. The reason this was so is because all people are created in God's image. **"Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed; for in the image of God has God made man.** (Genesis 9:6 NIV) It is a grave mistake to mistreat others because God made every person in His image. It was such a serious concern for Him that the eye for an eye rule of law was established by God. **"If anyone takes the life of a human being, he must be put to death. Anyone who takes the life of someone's animal must make restitution — life for life. If anyone injures his neighbor, whatever he has done must be done to**

**him: fracture for fracture, eye for eye, tooth for tooth. As he has injured the other, so he is to be injured. Whoever kills an animal must make restitution, but whoever kills a man must be put to death.** (Leviticus 24: 17-21 NIV)

The ancient maxim, “blood is thicker than water” is seen here. God is supremely protective of us because we are in His image. We are His family; we are His children. We see this in every part of the world. Why have the Ukrainians pushed back the better equipped superior numbers of Russian attackers? It is because they are fighting for their families, for their neighbors, for the future of their children. Nehemiah, the governor of Israel who oversaw the rebuilding of Jerusalem after it had been destroyed by the Babylonians, issued this stirring call to the Israelites when the surrounding nations threatened to come and attack Jerusalem. **After I looked things over, I stood up and said to the nobles, the officials and the rest of the people, "Don't be afraid of them. Remember the Lord, who is great and awesome, and fight for your brothers, your sons and your daughters, your wives and your homes."** (Nehemiah 4: 14 NIV) God has this same view of us. The law was established by Him to break the curse of violence and destruction against His own children.

Keep in mind why the law of the eye for an eye was established by God. It was because all people are made in God's image and to be protected against violence, mistreatment and evil. Listen now to what Jesus had to say about the law of an eye for an eye. **"You have heard that it was said, 'Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.' But I tell you, Do not resist an evil person. If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if someone wants to sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. If someone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles. Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you. "You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous."** (Matthew 5: 38-45 NIV) This is of course extraordinary in its scope and in many minds impossible to keep but is the next step in what created in God's image means.

Not only is every relationship built on justice...treating people fairly and not harming them, it is now we see rooted in mercy because we are made in God's image. James says this about God. **The Lord is full of compassion and mercy.** (James 5: 11c NIV) If that is how God is, full of compassion and mercy, then that also must be the psychological configuration of those created in God's image. You are made with mercy as a central component of your heart, of who you are. When you are not compassionate and merciful, you are at war with yourself. Psychological turmoil is the result. Pay careful attention to Jesus' harsh assessment of the condition of the Pharisees who focused on keeping the details of religious law but ignored their lives as those created in the image of God. **"Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You give a tenth of your spices — mint, dill and cummin. But you have neglected the more important matters of the law — justice, mercy and faithfulness. You should have practiced the latter, without neglecting the former."** (Matthew 23: 23 NIV) We think of the “woe to you” comment as only a warning of divine judgement but I think there is something more here in this. It is also a declaration to you and me of what happens when we are not living according to how we are made in God's image. To not be merciful brings woe to us now, within our heart and does untold damage to us psychologically.

I love Jesus' story of the Father and his prodigal son for one particular reason I have never mentioned. When the father welcomed his repentant and broken son home, the father's other son became angry. He was furious that his dad lavished so much money and affection on his younger brother. He wanted no part in the celebration his father threw welcoming the wayward son back home. The older, judgmental, critical son could not enjoy the party at all, pouted and became confrontational. So there you have the psychology of mercy and judgment. Angry, bitter, unhappy as judgment ruled one heart. Happy, relieved, refreshed and renewed as mercy ruled the other heart. If you could choose to have one life or the other. Which would you want to have? I would choose mercy every time. The question is, “Why don't I?”