

BUILDING BETTER RELATIONSHIPS

1 – Take the Offensive

"Don't allow yourself to be overpowered by evil. Take the offensive—overpower evil with good!"
- Romans 12:21, PHILLIPS

"Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult, but with blessing, because to this you were called so that you may inherit a blessing."
- 1 Peter 3:9

Most of us believe that God can give us the *power* to nurture good relationships, and in some cases, to overcome bad ones. But few of us seem to know the *plan*. Romans 12 provides some great principles for building better relationships. They are radical and rarely practiced. But if you want to boldly go where your relationships have never been before, these principles are guaranteed to work!

Welcome

What was one of the worst things your brother or sister did to you as a child?

Word

1. The premise of Gary Thomas' book, *Sacred Marriage*, is that God is more interested in using relationships to make us *holy*, not *happy*. Has God been putting you through the paces in His "relationship gym" lately? If so, what "muscle group" has He been developing?
2. Comment on the following statement made by a counselor: "*If I could do anything, I would help them change their perspective, not their problems.*"

Read Romans 12:14-21

3. Notice the foundational principle expressed in verse 21, "*Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.*" When it comes to relationships—don't go on the defensive, but rather stay on the offensive. In other words, don't play to keep from losing, play to win! Why is this "win-win" perspective so critical in relationships, and yet so difficult to maintain?
4. Rightly understood, "*overcoming evil with good*" is an assertive, not a passive expression of discipleship. What's the difference between the two? Jesus provides similar teaching in **Matthew 5:38-48**. Is this something easy or difficult for you to do? Why?
5. Learning to *respond* rather than *react* is both an attitude and a skill. What have you found most helpful in maintaining this critical perspective, particularly in difficult relationships?

Works

If loving God and loving people are the two greatest commands (Matthew 22:37-40), then how to obey these commands when we find it hardest to do so is probably one of the most important skills you could ever develop. Is there a difficult person in your life at the moment? What attitude adjustment do you need to make this week?

Worship

Spend time thanking God that He stays on the offensive—and is determined to do that which is within your best interest (for example, Romans 5:6-8). Ask Him to help you reflect His character this week in terms of your own relationships. "Amazing Grace" (129), "Boundless Love" (325), "There is a Redeemer" (287), "I Stand Amazed" (147).