

Tensions will always occur between people whether it be at work, at home, in public, or even at church.

What are the typical causes of tension or conflict between you and others?
Are there any consistent patterns or commonalities in the types of tensions you experience?

Discuss the following quote: *(keep this a humorous dialogue)*

"The only consistent feature in all of your dissatisfying relationships is you."

<http://www.despair.com/viewall.html>

When conflicts occur, how do you typically handle them?
Are you more inclined to want to confront the conflict right away or are you more inclined to withdraw? Why?

Can you think of any biblical examples where relationship conflict was handled badly?

Examples:

Cain and Abel	Genesis 4:8	Cain killed Abel
Lamech	Genesis 4:23-24	Killed anyone who wounded him
Jacob and Esau	Genesis 24:41	Esau was determined to kill Jacob until many years later
Judas Iscariot	Luke 24:12	Betrayed Jesus

Can you think of any biblical examples where relationship conflict was handled well?

Examples:

Joseph and his brothers	Genesis 45:5	Forgave his brothers
Jesus and Peter	John 21:15	Reaffirmed his relationship with Peter
Zacchaeus and others	Luke 19:8	Made restitution to those he wronged

Can you share an experience where a broken relationship was restored in your life?
How did that restoration happen?

What are some biblical principles we can apply to resolving relational conflict in our lives?

On the following pages are some scriptures that give us wisdom regarding restoring our broken relationships. Reflect on the significance of each passage.

Matthew 7:1-5 (NIV)

"Do not judge, or you too will be judged. ² For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you. ³ "Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? ⁴ How can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when all the time there is a plank in your own eye? ⁵ You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye.

In what ways do we tend to judge others? Think through the past week and try to recall some times when perhaps you “judged” someone.

Why is it so easy to spot shortcomings in other people, but ignore our own at the very same time?

What does Jesus say we should do at these times?

Jesus states that at the very moment we feel inclined to judge someone on their shortcomings, we had better first stop and reflect on our own lives. If we are going to choose to be critical about another's approach to life, we need to make sure we have no issues in our own lives. It is a contradiction to set a standard of righteous behaviour for someone else which we don't even meet ourselves.

Why is it so difficult to admit that we also have flaws, and instead of condemning, choose to support the other person?

Pride! Pride is our greatest enemy when it comes to relationships. Finding faults in other people is just a way to feel better about ourselves. We try to hide or ignore our own faults because we don't want to be confronted with our own inadequacy, but finding faults with others affirms we're better than they are.

When we humble ourselves and realize we all struggle, we are able to empathize with other people's faults instead of judging them. We can then try to be a loving support that encourages and helps people, instead of lowering their worth and significance.

If we truly understood that we will be judged by the very standard we judge others, how would that affect how we would judge others?

When we judge someone, we also tend to hand out a punishment to them in some way. These punishments may be blatant or very subtle. What are some examples of ways you have punished people you have judged in the past...or present?

- Gossip
- Silent treatment
- Avoidance
- Anger
- Accusations
- Belittling
- Violence
- Gestures
- Grumbling
- Withholding kindness
- Any expression in which we do not show love

Psalms 75:7 (NASB)

But God is the Judge; He puts down one and exalts another.

What does it mean to declare God is Judge?

To declare God is Judge is to affirm that he alone sits in the position to judge the actions of others. I can no more declare myself the judge of another person's actions than I can walk into a court room and sit in the judge's bench. I have not been granted that position or authority.

Romans 14:10-13 (NIV)

You, then, why do you judge your brother? Or why do you look down on your brother? For we will all stand before God's judgment seat.

¹¹ *It is written: "'As surely as I live,' says the Lord, 'every knee will bow before me; every tongue will confess to God.'"*

¹² *So then, each of us will give an account of himself to God.*

¹³ *Therefore let us stop passing judgment on one another. Instead, make up your mind not to put any stumbling block or obstacle in your brother's way.*

What are some reasons as to why God is the only one who can rightly judge?

- No one else can rightly judge because everyone is guilty themselves of wrong doing, except God.
- When we judge we do so based on what we see or know, which is always limited. God however, sees all and knows all; there is nothing hidden from his sight.
- When I judge, my own sinful perspectives come into play. I may show favouritism, I may not see some sins as being so wrong, my moral compass is misaligned.
- I am in no position of personal authority over anyone else. God alone is the one who is over all and therefore has authority to judge those under him.

Romans 12:19-20 (NIV)

Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord.

²⁰ *On the contrary: "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head."*

What does the above verse imply about our role in judging and condemning others?

If we are not to be judges, then we are also not the ones to hand out the guilty verdict and the accompanying consequences. In other words, I am not responsible for venting wrath towards the guilty party.

When we judge and condemn others, we are playing God and assuming a responsibility we were never meant, or equipped, to carry out. Judging and condemning others will not only hurt them, it will also hurt us.

Share some examples of times when you assumed responsibility to judge and condemn someone, but in the long run you found it only hurt yourself instead.

Judging others is an incredible responsibility that carries a heavy burden. God tells us he is freeing us from this responsibility so that we never have to worry about judging or condemning another person at all – he will take care of that for us.

If we truly believe that we are not responsible to judge or condemn any other person, in what ways might that free us?

If we are not responsible to judge or condemn anyone, we are simply free to LOVE that other person without any hindrance, regardless of what they may have done wrong.

When we judge others it often takes a negative toll on us emotionally and easily removes joy from our lives.

Consider the times when you have carried a grudge against someone – how did that affect you?**What does Romans 12:20 say our response should be, instead of condemnation?**

Paul writes that we are to go out of our way to show love to those we would normally condemn.

What might be some practical results of feeding our enemy?

- 1) We win him over to relationship through our acts of unselfish love
- 2) We strengthen him so that he is able to continue attacking us

Why would we show love to others if they only continue to seek to harm us?

Their behaviour does not control our love and actions – the will of God determines our actions.

We don't have to worry about judging them because we know God is already taking care of that.

Therefore, it is not our responsibility to hand out condemnation in any way.

If we are not to judge that person's actions or condemn them, then there is nothing to stop us from loving them, even if they continue to attack.

If they continue to harm us in the midst of our continued love, then it will go very badly for them on the day God does judge them. Justice will be served.

God is giving you permission this week to not judge or condemn anyone; you are freed from that heavy burden. If you are free from this responsibility how will it practically affect how you relate to people this coming week?

CHALLENGE: Try to go through this next week without judging or condemning anyone.

Consider:

Are there any people you need to treat differently?

Are there any people you need to ask for forgiveness for how you've judged them?

Are there any people from whom you have been withholding love? (avoiding, silent treatment, gossip, grumbling etc.)

Relationship is what we were created for; relationships therefore, need to be our highest priority. There are times when God will choose to judge "through us", but we will discuss that in a few weeks.

Matthew 5:9 (NIV)

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God.