



Genesis 21:22-31 At that time Abimelech and Phicol the commander of his forces said to Abraham, "God is with you in everything you do. :23 Now swear to me here before God that you will not deal falsely with me or my children or my descendants. Show to me and the country where you are living as an alien the same kindness I have shown to you.":24 Abraham said, "I swear it.":25 Then Abraham complained to Abimelech about a well of water that Abimelech's servants had seized.:26 But Abimelech said, "I don't know who has done this. You did not tell me, and I heard about it only today.":27 So Abraham brought sheep and cattle and gave them to Abimelech, and the two men made a treaty.:28 Abraham set apart seven ewe lambs from the flock.:29 and Abimelech asked Abraham, "What is the meaning of these seven ewe lambs you have set apart by themselves?":30 He replied, "Accept these seven lambs from my hand as a witness that I dug this well.":31 So that place was called Beersheba, because the two men swore an oath there.

As Christians we will have times of conflict; sometimes with a neighbor who seems unbearable, sometimes with an employer, customer, or government official who seems overly demanding or unfair, sometimes with a relative, fellow Christian or even another church. The answer to handling these type of problems is not revenge, hostility or avoidance of the problem, which is not a real possibility anyways. What does the Bible (our perfect instruction book) tell us about relationships?

The Bible tells us in Romans 12:18 that we are to "Do everything possible on our part to live in peace with everybody". So our need & goal should be how to build better relationships.

Four Principles of Building Better Relationships:

1: Be Proactive In Avoiding Future Conflicts

As you may recall from Genesis chapter 20, Abraham and Abimelech had a prior relationship that was anything but positive and so they each went their separate ways. Nevertheless it became obvious to Abimelech that something more needed to be done because as he said to Abraham, "God is with you in everything you do." God's promised favor was upon Abraham and therefore his entourage was growing. Abraham was acquiring more livestock and more people,

therefore he would soon need even more area to support them and the only available pasture was in what was considered Abimelech's territory. Abimelech rightly perceived this as a potential conflict so he takes the initiative in resolving this problem before it starts. In essence, he comes to Abraham and says, "Let's come to an agreement and understanding." In this act he reveals the first principle of building better relationships.

Most people are reactive that is they wait for conflict to manifest itself and intensify before they do anything to try and resolve it. This is better than ignoring the problem or resorting to worldly solutions (hostility, revenge, etc.) but in many cases we can avoid conflict altogether by being proactive. We need to use godly wisdom to see potential conflicts and respond accordingly.

2: Deal Honestly With Others

It is amazing how many conflicts are caused or magnified by simple dishonesty. This is a common theme in Genesis, especially in the story of how Jacob's dishonesty led to conflict Esau and how Laban's dishonesty led to conflict with Jacob. In Ephesians 4:25 we are told to "put off falsehood and speak truthfully to your neighbor..." The context of this Scripture passage deals with unity so it again is showing us how dishonesty spoils positive relationships. Abimelech could never have a positive relationship with Abraham until he was sure he could trust him. This could only happen if Abraham was honest from this point forward.

In practice this means being honest but kind about our feelings, situations, likes and dislikes, etc. In addition to his request for honesty from Abraham, Abimelech reminds Abraham of the kindness that he had shown to him even though he was "living as an alien" in the land. In essence he is saying, "When I had the upper hand I did not take advantage of your situation so you should do the same for me." Your acts of kindness in the past can be very rewarding in the future.

3: Be Open About Problems

There were few things of more importance than water in the Middle East; so many serious disputes arose over the rights to water both then and even today. Abraham could have just kept quiet and kept the peace but the reality is that such an approach would only worsened future conflicts. It is good to overlook offenses as the Bible tells us in Proverbs 19:11 but if the problem is serious or ongoing then we are instructed to go to our brother and point out the offense as it says in Matthew 18:15.

Sometimes problems and conflicts are made much worse by not being open about the problems with the person who has offended us. We may talk to everyone else but not to them. Often in our efforts to keep the peace we make things worse by not speaking up. This is true at

work where we may not be up front about issues that are bugging us. This may be the case with a neighbor when we're not open about a serious divisive issue or it maybe in the church when we are not sharing our real concerns in an appropriate manner.

4: Do Not Make Assumptions About Another's Knowledge Of A Problem

Apparently the complaint of Abraham's about the well was worded in such a way that he assumed Abimelech knew of the problem because Abimelech is quick to defend himself and say, "I don't know who has done this. You did not tell me, and I heard about it only today." Sometimes we never get problems or conflicts solved or come to a mutual understanding because the offended person assumes that the offender knows of the problem. We act as if people have a sixth sense about these things or we assume that our subtle remarks and innuendos are clear, when they are not!

Many people do not even know that they have offended you or if they do sense a hostility they are bewildered as to what the problem is. It may be obvious to you but not to the offender.



- 1.) *What Is Your Most Challenging Relationship Right Now, Why?*
- 2.) *How Do You Maintain That Good Relationship?*
- 3.) *Share How You Think The Lesson May Help In Your Present Relationships?*