



Contemporary Comments

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"Unity and Broken Relationships"

December 8, 2018

Texts: 2 Timothy 4:11; Philemon 1-25; 2 Corinthians 10:12-15, Romans 5:8-11, Ephesians 4:26; Matthew 18:15-17

Two rival Lebanese Christian leaders reconciled last month, ending four decades of animosity triggered by a massacre during Lebanon's civil war. Samir Geagea, leader of the Lebanese Forces group, and Sleiman Frangieh of the Marada Party, shook hands and kissed each other on the cheeks at the Maronite Christian church north of Beirut. Cardinal Bechara al-Rai, head of the Maronite church, sponsored the reconciliation. "It is so nice for brothers to sit together," al-Rai said. "I welcome you through prayers as happiness fills my heart and the heart of all Lebanese."

The two leaders are Maronite Christians and are both presidential candidates. Their reconciliation comes while both their relations are tense with foreign minister, Gibran Bassil, another presidential hopeful who heads the Free Patriotic Movement. According to Lebanon's power-sharing system, Lebanon's president must be a Christian Maronite. Frangieh is a close friend of Syrian President Bashar Assad and is allied with the militant Hezbollah group. Geagea is with the Western and Saudi-backed coalition and is a harsh critic of both Assad and Hezbollah leader Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah.

In 1978, members of the main Christian militia killed Frangieh's father, Tony, as well as his mother and sister and 30 Marada fighters and supporters. Geagea led the raid in the mountain resort of Ehden but was seriously wounded and withdrew from the operation. Frangieh met with the families of those who died four decades ago and asked for their permission to go ahead with the reconciliation. They willingly offered forgiveness. At the end of the meeting, Geagea told reporters, "Today is a beautiful day, a historic day." Frangieh said, "This is a new page that we open today."¹

Wherever relationships exist, there's always the potential that conflicts will destroy those bonds. This week's lesson explores biblical principles for restoring unity to broken relationships. Interestingly, the life and



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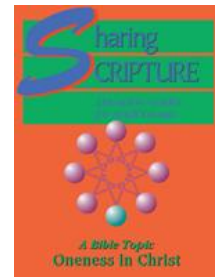
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ministry of the apostle Paul illustrates many of these principles. His passion and laser focus on his mission to spread the gospel often created prickly situations that damaged personal relationships. Paul, the minister of grace, sometimes had to learn to extend grace to those who fell short of his high personal standard, such as John Mark.

Paul's personal experience with mending his own broken relationships helped him to become an effective peace-making counselor to others. His letter to Philemon is a classic example of a pastoral appeal toward healing a fatally damaged relationship. Something broke the bond between Philemon and Onesimus. We know that Onesimus ran away, but we're not sure if Philemon did something to drive Onesimus away. Paul gave Philemon the benefit of the doubt and spoke kindly to him, reminding him of his own debt of forgiveness to Paul and Christ. Paul had learned from his experience with John Mark that forgiveness and unity of mission are common traits found in nearly every restored relationship.

~ cb

1. apnews.com

~ For Reflection

Connecting: As people arrive, give them a few pipe cleaners and ask them to create a symbol for unity. Share the ideas through show-and-tell.

Sharing: Read Matthew 18:15-17. What can we learn from this passage about correcting the behavior of others?

1. If a person sins against us, we should tell as many people as possible about how we were treated.
2. Once someone sins against us, we should never have anything to do with that person again.
3. If a person has wronged us, we should first talk privately with him or her. If that is not effective, we should take one or two people with us and try again.
4. When someone has wronged us, the goal is to make the sin public, not to restore the person.
5. If someone makes a mistake, the church should treat him or her as a pagan or a corrupt tax collector.
6. Other...

Applying: Read John 13:35 and then write the verse on a large sheet of paper or on the whiteboard. Make a list of how you, your group, your family, and your church visibly show love for one another.

Valuing: Prayerfully read Ephesians 4:26. Without dwelling on negative experiences, ask God for guidance on how you can follow this verse. Write out a brief plan and look at it every day as you listen to the promptings of God's Spirit.

About Us

Since 1988, the Center for Creative Ministry has been serving local church leaders and individuals around the world. Formerly known as the publishers of ABBA Newsletter and the Baby Boomer Ministries Resource Center, we have now broadened our generational/ministry focus to include our children. The Center for Creative Ministry took on its new name on June 1, 1996.

The Center for Creative Ministry, formerly Baby Boomer Ministries, is a privately funded and managed para-church ministry fully recognized by the Seventh-day Adventist Church in North America. We are dedicated to supporting the local church in outreach and nurture ministries by providing resources, information, training, and consulting.