

# Love Reconciles

by Elizabeth Alliman

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*Elizabeth Alliman's sermon emphasizes the transformative power of love and forgiveness in reconciling relationships within the body of Christ.*

**Duration:** 33:27

**Scripture:** Proverbs 10:19, Matthew 5:23-24, Matthew 18:15, Romans 12:18, 1 Corinthians 12:25, Ephesians 4:32, Colossians 3:13

**Topics:** "Love"

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## Description

In this sermon, the speaker reflects on the importance of reconciliation and unity within the body of Christ. They emphasize the need for believers to walk and work together, spreading the news that God is present among them. The speaker acknowledges that while the Bible calls for loving relationships and compassionate behavior, this is not always seen in the church. They share personal experiences of pain and tension within the church, highlighting the significance of forgiveness and the promise of a peaceful and encouraging community when forgiveness is practiced.

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## Transcript

I thought our song this morning was very interesting when we talk about reconciliation. And as I was singing, I was listening to the words. We will walk with each other.

We will walk hand in hand. We will walk with each other and together we'll spread the news that God is in our land. Oh, that we always walk together.

We will work with each other. We will work side by side. We will work with each other and we'll guard each one's dignity and save each one's pride.

Those are beautiful words. But I don't know about you, but I don't see that all the time in the body of Christ. Last time I came and spoke in last semester, it was on pressing on to maturity.

I usually, uh, Kirke usually asks all her speakers to decide what topic sounds like something they're comfortable with. Well, that one tore me apart because I saw my own stuff. And again, this morning we're talking about love reconciles.

If we have any understanding of the Bible, we know that the Bible speaks to our life's experiences, our joys, our doubts, our moods, and our hurts. We know the Bible does more than confirm our experiences. It

gives us insight into them and it imparts to our everyday struggles redemptive significance.

The Bible calls us to loving relationships and to certain behaviors in our relationships in the body of Christ. We are to be merciful to each other for God is merciful to us. We are called to have loving relationships.

Do we always have those? We're to reflect compassion as we have experienced the forgiveness of God. Kirke spoke last week on forgiveness and forgiveness, as you well know, is not a suggestion. It's a command.

In the end, if we walk out forgiveness to one another, it promises us a community that is peaceful and joyful and encouraging. As some of you may remember from last semester when I gave a mini testimony, I came to Christ in my mid-30s and that was 33 years ago. The reality I have found is that it's not always peaceful and joyful and encouraging in the body of Christ.

In fact, some of the most pain I've ever been through has been with members of the church. When Kirke asked, what would you like to teach this time, Elizabeth? As a Christ-centered counselor, I looked over the index in the book and I thought, oh, that's a good one. Love reconciles.

That's basically what I do every hour of the day. I work with people that need reconciliation, whether it's a marriage problem or whether it's a parent needing reconciliation with an adolescent or it's a parent needing reconciliation with an adult child in the family that in some cases haven't spoken to each other for years. Now, I know in a group this size, there are some real heart pains about the fact that some have not reconciled to people in the body of Christ.

I haven't always found the body of Christ to be an encouraging community. I've been in many churches and I've seen a lot. Possibly you can say the same.

We don't constantly and consistently encourage one another or show grateful appreciation for one another. And often, we're called to extend grace to people that are not easy to get along with. Let's call them the difficult people.

It's a tough assignment to walk out Christ's love with difficult people. Many times, we've been hurt or misunderstood, even accused of things that we've done by one or more difficult people who are competitive or envious or for one reason or another have misunderstood us, particularly if you have been in leadership in a church. My first insight to this was as a new Christian in Orlando, my first Bible teacher that I traveled with giving my baby talks, as she called them, was a highly gifted, beautiful, tall, slim brunette who God had raised up to teach his word to a group of 300 women every Tuesday morning in a Salvation Army chapel.

One of the other Orlando Bible teachers was so envious that the war began. As a new Christian, I was amazed to see the verbiage and the hurt and the accusations of one Bible teacher worried that the other one was going to steal her flock. If that wasn't bad enough, the people in her downtown church, the teachers in her downtown church did the same thing.

And my first Bible teacher left her church, couldn't take it anymore, and went downtown every Sunday morning because of her pain, taught in a rescue mission for seven years, mostly populated by prostitutes. She said those were the best years of teaching she ever had in her life because people there needed Christ desperately, and the games that had been played in that church and in that community were over. As women, you and I, who are emotionally based and sensitive, many of us have had deep pain,

heartache, and bruising with those that we've been instructed to love.

And a wall of separation has come between you and another person, even perhaps with close friends, people that we've served with, that we've been on boards with, that we've even prayed with. You and I are fragile. We can come to a church or a Bible study any day of the week, and we present who we are somewhat.

Every one of us are unique individuals, and every one of us have been hurt desperately and deeply in our lives. Brennan Manning, who wrote one of the best books I've ever read called *Abba's Child*, talks in Chapter 4 about the imposter. And the imposter is one that we bring along to tell other people how wonderful we're doing.

We all have that. There are days and there are days in everyone's life. And the beauty of Christ-centered counseling is that we go under the waterline to find what the truth is and how the person is truly hurting, not just how they're presenting to other people.

Cynthia's book, *Becoming a Woman Who Loves*, is challenging. Again, when I had said to Kirky, oh, listen, love reconciles, that's a natural for me. At that time, when I just thumbed through this, I said, oh, that's a natural.

Love reconciles. That's what I do all day. That'll be easy.

I didn't think at the time that I would get as reflective as I have been in looking over my life. I had a monumental birthday yesterday. I was 69.

And when you're just about to 70, trust me, you young ones, you do look back over your life and can't believe you lived this long, first of all. But after studying and reflecting and digging through books that I know by authors that have addressed the issues, I have to write letters to two therapists, two male therapists, one to ask his forgiveness, the other to confront. For injuries done to me almost 15 years ago.

Back then, I'm being honest, I was too wounded to deal with either one of these. And I went through the process of attempting to forgive without really knowing how to start. So I prayed and prayed.

I even went to therapy so that I could learn how to handle something as deep and as painful as it was to me at that time. I chose to let it go with both. Am I sorry? No.

I couldn't have at that time. I was not ready for what maturity would bring along. Because of disgust with one and deep pain with the other, I have broken fellowship with two very well-taught Christian therapists.

It was not worth it to me at the time to continue to delve into situations that absolutely terrified me. So I've broken fellowship and I've let them both go. The driving motive behind forgiveness is the hope of reconciliation.

You see, there is no joy like the joy of reconciliation. There's no joy of the hope that just perhaps the other one would feel the way I feel or you feel about restoring a relationship that has been broken. Most of us have experienced moments of tension with a friend.

In this fast-paced culture we're in, when most of our connections with friends has resorted to email, and if we don't hear back for a few days, we wonder why not and so forth. The old days of talking to a girlfriend on the telephone are over. I was a stay-at-home mom with four children for years and years and years,

and my whole life, other than my husband and kids, were my girlfriends.

I bet you can say the same. Do you remember those old days that we'd go to somebody's house for coffee and stay almost all day, talking and watching our children connect and play together, and we'd stay for lunch and she'd put on the tuna fish and so forth? And those were good days of building relationships and friendships that, for most of my friends, we are either extended in living other places in the country or we're all so busy that we don't stay as connected as we did in the old days, and quite honestly I miss that, but I am a part of it myself. Most of us, when we have experienced tension with a friend, don't quite know what it's all about.

Nothing is said, but the air is heavy and the unknown, unstated offense is just lying there somewhere. The tension is there, but is it real? Could it just be a byproduct of being oversensitive? I know I am. I know a lot of you in here.

I know Kirky's sensitive. I know Elizabeth Jessup is sensitive. I know Carol Rosene is sensitive.

I know a lot of you that are sensitive. No matter what the mask, down deep in our little girl heart, we're very sensitive to a word not spoken in season, but a word that would wound. If you sense a gulf is widening between you and a friend, you ask yourself, is this my imagination or have I done something to cause this? What do you do? I know there are situations in this room right now that you've been asking yourselves, what do I do? I know there's a problem, but I can't put my finger on it.

Do you ask? Do you ignore it and become pleasant? Do you confront? Do you wait? Do you hope that someone, the other person, will bring it up? The tension can become unbearable, especially with close friends. It's the pain of a soul crying out for relief. And the longer it lasts, the more intolerable the anguish of wanting restoration.

When the air is finally cleared, and the block, whatever it is, is removed, and the hearts have been reconnected, there is enormous rest and joy. There is no joy like the joy of reconciliation. Reconciliation is restored peace.

Wholeness and health has returned to something that was broken or even diseased. When girlfriends talk about each other and words come back about what my friend had said about me, that is painful. We see this often in our churches, even the best of them.

What happens if the other person is unwilling to reconcile? Dan Allender, who wrote the book *Bold Love*, has written another courageous book. He, pardon me, Dan Allender wrote the book *Wounded Heart*. And in this book, *Bold Love*, he has taken quite a courageous stand on reconciliation.

You might pick up a copy if you're interested in really delving into what reconciliation between the saints is really like. He says, Reconciliation is not to be withheld when repentance, that is deep, heart-changing acknowledgement of sin, and a radical redirection of life takes place in the one being rebuked. I will repeat that.

Reconciliation is not to be withheld when repentance basically takes place in the one being rebuked. Nor is reconciliation the offer of restoration and peace to be extended to someone who has not repented. This is cutting-edge stuff.

Remember, we are all so fragile. We are maturing in the things of the Lord, and perhaps many times we do our work immediately, not when something has become so tense that that's when the pressure builds. Personally, I keep very short accounts with my family and friends.

I have learned that if I let something go, it builds, and the enemy comes in like a flood to divide and destroy our relationships with one another. Because of my own tendency to withdraw from situations I fear, I have withheld rebuke on one hand and so detested getting into it with the other that I refuse the offer with him to discuss it. I wonder how many times in the last 15 years I have sinned against both brothers, one saying to many other people in my field, oh, he might be a good author, but he's not a safe person.

His heart is not safe, I know. Will all of that go in my letter? Absolutely. I need repentance.

I need forgiveness. In further studies on love reconciles, I came up with the character traits of a reconciler, which I found furnished by a ministry who uses the acrostic HEAL to reconcile Christians with other Christians in the body of Christ who differ both in doctrine and in styles of worship. The H in HEAL stands for humility.

We know that pride keeps men from God, but pride separates men and women from each other, causing strife and conflict. To become a reconciler, we must be willing to rethink our positions and our perspectives and humble ourselves before the other. The E in HEAL stands for endurance.

Undoing years of denominational prejudice won't happen in a week or a month or a year, but they are advising us to not give up if an initial attempt at reconciliation is rejected. We must do the same in our personal relationships. We are not to give up.

The A is for affirmation. We are to affirm one another. In 1 Corinthians 12.25, we are instructed to have no schism in the body of Christ.

That's an old-fashioned King James word. The translation of schism is from schizma, which means to tear or to rent, like they rent their clothes. We are not to have schism in the body of Christ.

The L is for love. I have learned that when I obediently and humbly ask for forgiveness and for restoration, I sense a deeper intimacy with the Lord and usually a stronger bond with the one I offended. But there will be times when the offended does not want to be restored.

A verse that has helped me concerning difficult relationships is Romans 12.18. Do your part to live at peace with everyone as much as possible. Old King James that I memorized a long time ago was as much as lieth in you. Remember those words? Live at peace with all men.

She also said this. Through abiding in the word and spending time in prayer, I can look for God's faithful leading to indicate how I should respond in restoring a relationship and how to speak only what is necessary for the building up of the body. And again, in reconciling, we have to be careful using too many words.

When we are going to go to another saint, another Christian and ask for forgiveness, we need to keep it short. Because as we converse in the multiplicity of words is much sin, the Bible says, we can almost talk out the very thing that we had come to do. But again, we must bear in mind that love does reconcile with the beloved.

My part is to obey lovingly and do all I can to uphold what is good and pleasant in the body of Christ. As reconcilers, we must be willing to settle in for a long run. Shortly after Jesus left this earth, his disciples began to disagree.

Should the Gentiles be included? Should they be circumcised? Or was their faith in Christ enough for salvation? From that day until the present, Christians have disagreed, disputed, and separated with one another. Again, Dan Allender states, many people refuse to acknowledge their desire for reconciliation with someone who has hurt them because of the terror of hope. Strange words.

He goes on, hope is a radically dangerous passion. Hope is anticipation. Crushed hope is more than most people can bear.

The writer of Proverbs says that hope deferred makes the heart sick. But a longing fulfilled is the tree of life. Why would anyone hope for a restored relationship with someone who did terrible harm? The answer is simple.

To deaden the hope of restoration is to lose the joy and the possibility of reconciliation and would deny ourselves the maturity we could gain because of our fear of the person rejecting our attempt. I know that's what kept me from reconciling with my two old friends. What is the allure of reconciling that draws you and I on? To straighten out things that happen in family and friends.

It is the hope of reconciliation and the removal of all barriers of bitterness and hatred. Please remember one thing from this morning, if nothing else. There is no joy like the joy of reconciliation.

Cynthia states this. Restoration and unity are of supreme importance to God who went all the way to the cross to reconcile us to himself and thereby to one another. A forgiving heart desires to remove any hindrance that might exist in a relationship.

Do you ever ask your friends, how are we doing? Is there anything we need to talk about? I have told my close friends, I will pay you to show me my blind spots. They laugh, I laugh. But how else are we going to see what we can't see? Other than to ask a dear heart friend, what do you see in me that needs to change? Help me see.

Remember the imposter in chapter four? We all present one. Help me see past the imposter. Help me see me.

That would be done with all gentleness. When people come for Christ-centered counseling, that's what they're asking. Help me see me.

When we worship the Lord, he looks for a pure and loving heart behind our offering. Desire for unity with the brethren, a willingness to humble ourselves, and a merciful heart honors and pleases the Lord. I know this was somewhat heavy this morning.

I also know how God the Holy Spirit tenderizes our hearts to rethink some of the relationships that we have let go. As I looked over and introspected, to be honest, since I was given this particular chapter, as far as I can remember, these are the two letters that I need to write. Are there letters in your life or phone calls or luncheons that perhaps you might consider? Picking up a phone or writing a note and asking a friend, how are we doing? I always appreciate Kirke letting me come.

Every time I come, I learn something about me. And in closing, I want you to know that, again, in Christian counseling, every client that walks in the door, God shows me something about me. I know that happens with you in friendship because it happens to me.

Let's pray. Father, you are so gentle in the way you work with your beloved. How kind you are to let us make decisions whether or not we will go and be reconciled to our brothers.

I thank you for the exposure, again, in that gentle push that you use with me to clean up all relationships. How I pray that some women in the room today might consider doing the same. For you love unity, especially in the body of Christ.

Thank you, Holy Spirit, for your gentle work and your tender forgiveness. How we thank you, Lord Jesus, for providing this path for us. For it's in your name we pray.

Amen.

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