

Alpha and Omega

LOVE ONE ANOTHER

6 lessons



Rejep and Layla Aydin

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Preface

In preparing this course we are indebted to Kenneth Williams for *Sharpening Your Interpersonal Skills* (Relationship Resources, Inc, 2016) and David Gibson for *The LORD of Psalm 23* (Crossway, 2023). The course is born out of more than three decades of working with Central Asian believers. It is designed so that believers can study this material in small groups even if the leader has had no prior training in this area.

Introduction to the course

By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another (John 13:35).

We know that we should love one another but we often find it so hard. Broken relationships not only spoil the life of the church, but hinder others from coming to know Jesus.

These six lessons will help you to love each other in your family and in your church better. You will need to study them again and again as you put these ideas into practice. If you do this, everyone will know that you are truly disciples of Jesus!

Most lessons have some questions for you to answer. The number in brackets after each question indicates the number of the answer at the bottom of the lesson. Try to answer the question before looking at the answer.

If there are references to verses from the Bible, it is important to find them and read them during the lesson if they are in **bold**. If they are not in bold, you can look them up if you have time or when reviewing the lesson on your own.

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Lesson 1:

Psalm 23: following the Good Shepherd



We need to be following the Good Shepherd in order to love those around us well. Then there will be no room for bitterness, unforgiveness or contempt. Together we can help each other to be a community where everyone is loved and valued!

What do we need to be doing in order to love those around us? [1]

Read **Psalm 23**.

Who wrote this psalm? [2]

God had cared for David when he was a shepherd, and then when he was a fugitive, and also when he was king. Countless people have been greatly encouraged by this psalm over the past 3,000 years. Let us join them!

The LORD (v.1) is *Yahweh* in the original language, meaning “I am” (Exo 3:14). This is the eternal God who created the world and who calls all people to submit to his loving rule. His law can be summarized in two commands: to love God and to love our neighbour (Mark 12:30–31).

What sort of person is the LORD compared with (Ps 23:1)? [3]

What does a shepherd do? [4]

This all-powerful God is also his people's caring protector and guide! As the prophet Isaiah said about God, *He tends his flock like a shepherd: he gathers the lambs in his arms and carries them close to his heart; he gently leads those that have young* (Isaiah 40:11).

How does this compare with your view of God? Do you think of him as distant and harsh—ready to punish you for every time you do wrong? Or do you see him as your caring protector and guide?

Jesus

Read **John 10:10–16**.

When Jesus said *I am the Good Shepherd* what was he saying about himself? [5]

These verses tell us three more things about Jesus, our Good Shepherd:

1. **He is our rescuer** (vv.10–11). Just as a shepherd must rescue sheep that have been stolen, so Jesus laid down his life in order to rescue us from Satan.
2. **He wants a living relationship with each of us** (v.14). Just as a good shepherd knows his sheep well and they know him, Jesus knows each one of us and wants us to know him too.
3. **He wants to unite us** (v.16). Just as it is important for the sheep to follow their shepherd together, so Jesus wants us to be a community who follow him together. He does not want his sheep to think that they can follow him while staying away from the other sheep.

What was Jesus telling us about himself when he spoke about being the *Good Shepherd*? [6]

With the Lord as our shepherd, what do we lack (Ps 23:1)? [7]

The Good News of the New Testament is that Jesus has given us every spiritual blessing (forgiveness, restored relationship with God, eternal life, his Holy Spirit, love, joy, peace, etc) (Eph 1:3).

Sometimes we confuse our desires with our needs. We want a big house, a nice car, a husband/wife, children, etc. We want to look as good as our neighbours, if not better than them—but we definitely do not want to appear worse off than them!

However, God knows our needs—which may or may not include all these material things. Prosperity leads us away from the Good Shepherd, not closer to him (**1 Tim 6:9–10**).

Jesus tells us that we should not worry about our material needs. He knows what we need and tells us, *Seek first [your heavenly Father's] kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well* (Matt 6:33). With Jesus we lack nothing that we need!

What does *I lack nothing* mean (Ps 23:1)? [8]

Where does he *make me lie down* (v.2)? [9]

What does this represent? [10]

Time spent with God in his word, on our own and with others, is our spiritual green pasture.

Where does he *lead me* (v.3)? [11]

Deep, fast-moving waters are dangerous places for sheep to drink. They can easily be washed away. In the same way, it is dangerous for us to “drink” lies about God, ourselves and other people. These lies drag our hearts and minds into bad ways of thinking and relating to others.

In contrast to this, Jesus leads us to *quiet waters*. He alone can give us life-giving water for our thirsty souls (**Ps 42:1; John 7:37–38**). He alone can give us the truth about God, ourselves and other people.

What is the result of this for *my soul* (Ps 23:3)? [12]

As Jesus *refreshes [our souls]*, we are much better able to refresh other people’s souls (Philemon v.7).

Once the Good Shepherd has refreshed my soul, what does he do (Ps 23:3)? [13]

As I spend time with Jesus each day, reading God’s word and praying, he gives wise guidance so that I never go off in the wrong direction. Our destination is the New Jerusalem, where we will be with Jesus forever. He will lead us there each step of the way!

How can we hear God’s guidance? [14]

Why does he guide us along right paths (v.3)? [15]

As our Good Shepherd guides us in paths of love and good deeds, people will glorify God (**Matt 5:16**)!

What three things does Psalm 23 verse 4 tell us about times of going *through the darkest valley*? [16]

What kind of things might be *the darkest valley* for us?

Jesus told us that we will face troubles in this life (John 16:33). He himself suffered in every way, so he is able to empathize with our weaknesses (Heb 4:15). So whenever we face difficulties, we must remember that Jesus understands what we are going through, he is with us each step of the way and he is using everything to make us more like him (**Rom 8:28–29**)!

What must we remember when we are going *through the darkest valley*? [17]

The most important phrase

In Hebrew poetry, the most important line of a poem is the middle one. The middle line of Psalm 23 is: *for you are with me*. The God who created the whole universe is with me! However much you may feel the loss of family and friends because you decided to follow Jesus, the Good Shepherd is telling you, *Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you* (Heb 13:5). There is not one day that the Lord will not be with us!

The shepherd's *rod* is the head-cracking heavy stick that he used to fight off human and animal attackers. His *staff* is his crook that lifts sheep out of danger (see the picture at the start of the lesson). Together the rod and the staff were all a shepherd needed to rescue and defend his sheep. In the same way, Jesus is able to keep his sheep completely safe until we get to our destination: the New Jerusalem.

What do the Good Shepherd's *rod* and *staff* tell us about Jesus? [18]

Where does God *prepare a table* for me (Ps 23:5)? [19]

The enemies of a shepherd are wild animals and thieves. Our true enemy is the devil. He often uses people and things to make life difficult for us, but we should remember that *our struggle is not against flesh and blood* (Eph 6:12).

Our Good Shepherd not only provides us with protection and nourishment—he wants to have a celebration meal with us! He wants us to enjoy his presence, not only after we finally get out of the dark valley, but in the middle of it!

Jesus invites us “to dine” with him every day whatever our circumstances (Rev 3:20). He wants us to rejoice in him even when we are facing huge problems. As the apostle Paul wrote from prison, *Rejoice in the LORD always. I will say it again: rejoice!* (Phil 4:4).

What do we learn from the idea that the Good Shepherd prepares a table before me? [20]

What two more things does the Good Shepherd do for me to honour me (Ps 23:5)? [21]

An honoured guest at a banquet had their head anointed with oil (Luke 7:46). Jesus honours us in front of those who have shamed and attacked us (**Matt 5:10–12; 10:32**).

As in many cultures, an overflowing cup was a sign that the host of the meal wanted you to stay as long as possible. If they kept refilling your cup, they wanted you to stay. An empty cup was a sign they wanted you to leave. Jesus keeps refilling our cups—he wants us to enjoy his presence continuously!

We should remember that however people treat us for our faith in Jesus, he treats us as his honoured guests! He does this even though we don't deserve it!

When unbelievers shame you, what should you remember? [22]

What will *follow me all the days of my life* (Ps 23:6)? [23]

Only the Good Shepherd is completely good and trustworthy.

In the original language the word “love” is *Hesed*. This is an important word in the Old Testament. It describes God's faithful loving kindness for his people who he made a covenant with (Exod 15:13; 20:6). We can trust him to do everything that he has said he will do for us. He will bring us safely to the New Jerusalem where we will be with Jesus forever.

Where will I dwell forever (Ps 23:6)? [24]

Our *house of the LORD* is no longer a physical building, but Jesus himself (John 2:19–22)! Jesus calls us to *dwell* in him. In the same way, the apostle Paul calls believers *those who are in Christ Jesus* (Rom 8:1).

However, we cannot *dwell in Christ Jesus* if our hearts are full of hurt, bitterness, unforgiveness or contempt. So the first step towards learning to have good relationships with those around you is to allow the Good Shepherd to lead you *along the right paths* and to use his staff to pull you away from the wrong paths! May this course help you on this journey.

How has God challenged you through studying this Psalm?

Answers

- 1 – We need to be following the Good Shepherd.
- 2 – David.
- 3 – A shepherd.
- 4 – A shepherd looks after his sheep to make sure that they are well fed and healthy.
- 5 – He was saying that he himself is God, and he is our caring protector and guide.
- 6 – He was telling us that he is our rescuer, he wants a living relationship with each of us and he wants to unite us with his other followers.
- 7 – Nothing!
- 8 – With Jesus we lack nothing that we need.
- 9 – In green pastures.
- 10 – Green pastures are a safe place where we relax and feed ourselves.
- 11 – *Beside quiet waters.*
- 12 – *My soul is refreshed.*
- 13 – *He guides me along the right paths.*
- 14 – Jesus guides us as we spend time with him each day, reading God's word and praying.
- 15 – *For his name's sake.*
- 16 – *I will fear no evil; for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.*
- 17 – Through all the difficulties and problems of life, Jesus understands what we are going through, he is with us each step of the way, and he is using everything to make us more like him.
- 18 – Jesus is able to keep his sheep completely safe until we get to our destination—the New Jerusalem.
- 19 – *... in the presence of my enemies.*
- 20 – He wants us to enjoy his presence and dine with him every day.
- 21 – *You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.*
- 22 – We should remember that however people treat us for our faith in Jesus, he treats us as his honoured guests!
- 23 – *... goodness and love.*
- 24 – *... in the house of the LORD.*

Lesson 2:

Listening



This lesson is about how we spoil or destroy our relationships by our lack of love and respect for each other. This can be best seen in the way we listen to each other.

Drama (if possible, prepare this before the lesson)

Two people are talking. The first person tells the second person about a little problem they had last week. The second person listens badly, by reading a message on their phone and writing a reply, criticising the first person and then starting to talk about themselves.

Discuss: How did the first person feel?

Love

The apostle John said, *Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love* (1 John 4:7–8).

What do these verses tell us about where love comes from?

What do these verses tell us about the person who does not love?

Discuss: Is it possible to truly love someone if we don't want to listen to them?

Fact: I show how much I love a person by how carefully I listen to them.

Respect

An important way of showing love is showing respect for each other. We do not listen to those we do not respect.

Listening test 1

Be devoted to one another in love. Honour one another above yourselves (Rom 12:10).

How well do you listen to:

- your parents?
- your parents-in-law?
- your husband/wife?
- your children?
- your daughter-in-law?
- other people who live in your home?
- your church leaders?
- all those who come to your church (even the difficult ones!)?

Is God pleased with your attitude to all these people?

Confession time



If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness! (1 John 1:8–9).

Ask God to forgive you for those times you have been disrespectful. Ask him to give you a new appreciation for the people he has put in your life. Ask him to help you to be a better listener to them.

Listening

To understand how important this theme of listening is, think back to a time when you were very sad or hurt and you wanted someone to listen to you. You tried to share with them but they listened so poorly that it hurt more than before. Don't speak about it now, but think about how you felt then. How do you feel about it now? The pain you experience shows us why we all need to learn to listen to each other. When we listen to other people's pain, their pain becomes lessened and more bearable.

The apostle John told us: *let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth (1 John 3:18).*

Remember: I show how much I love a person by how carefully I listen to him.

Praise God that even if we did not receive much love from our parents or from our husband/wife, the Holy Spirit can fill our hearts with God's love! We can all learn to love others as Jesus loved others!

How do we show how much we love a person?

Love test

Let us think about these two verses from the Bible:

Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience (Col 3:12).

But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere (Jas 3:17).

Let's think about the meaning of each of these words. As we do this, put a mark beside each characteristic that you want to learn to do better. Later you can ask Jesus to help you.

- Compassion** means feeling sad about someone else's problem. Jesus constantly showed compassion to the people who came to him (e.g. Matt 9:36; 15:32).
- Kindness** means goodness and generosity, even when people are not kind in return (Luke 6:35).
- Humility** means not thinking that you are better than others and that others should do what you want. Instead, we should see others as precious children of the living God and be willing to serve and bless them (Phil 2:3).
- Gentleness** means being considerate of the feelings of others and not allowing our own irritable feelings to control us. Jesus, our great example, was *gentle and humble in heart* (Matt 11:29).
- Patience** is the opposite of anger—that we are not quick to get angry or annoyed when someone or something irritates us (Jas 1:19).
- Pure** means holy, not giving into sin (1 John 3:3).
- Peace-loving** means never starting quarrels and arguments. Instead, we should do all we can to promote harmony (Matt 5:9).
- Considerate** means respectful of the feelings of others (Rom 12:10). Will these words or actions make someone else feel sad or unloved?
- Submissive** means to do what Jesus wants us to do and therefore willingness to obey those in authority without arguing. We obey as long as it does not contradict God's commands (Eph 5:21–22; 6:1,5).
- Mercy** is readiness to forgive, just as God has shown mercy to us (Eph. 2:4–5).
- Good fruit** is the evidence that the Holy Spirit is at work in our lives (Gal 5:22–23).
- Impartiality** means treating everyone as a precious brother or sister in Christ (Jas 2:1–5).
- Sincere** means that we shouldn't pretend. Our thoughts and deeds should match our words (1 Pet 1:22).

Look at the ones you marked. **Is God pleased with how you relate to other people?**



Confession time

Ask God to forgive you for the times when you do not relate well to other people.
Ask him to give you a desire to be a blessing to all those he has put in your life.
Ask him to help you to be a better listener to them.

Listening test 2

I show how much I love a person by how carefully I listen to them.

Now make a mark next to the things you often do when someone is talking to you about something that is important to them:

Possible actions

- you show that you are too tired to listen
- you answer the phone and start a new conversation
- you read what is on your phone when someone is talking
- you turn away from the person who is talking to you
- you often look at the time
- you look bored, impatient or roll your eyes
- you show an inappropriate expression on your face
- you continue doing housework or other jobs while talking on the phone.

Possible words

- you ask too many questions
- you say something that makes a person feel stupid or bad (“How could you do that?” “It’s your fault!”)
- you tell them that their problem is not important
- you finish their sentences
- you give advice that seems too simple
- you interrupt often
- you tell them what they are thinking (e.g. “You think that you are better than him.”)
- you tell them what will happen (e.g. “If you tell them about it, you will lose your job.”)
- you change the topic
- you talk about yourself
- you ask if they (or anyone else) would like some more food or drink while they are sharing.

Other things you may do

- you talk too much (Prov 10:19)
- you gossip (Prov 11:13)
- you are quick to start a fight (Prov 26:21)
- you speak too soon and become angry (Jas 1:19–20)
- you always give your own opinion (Prov 18:2)
- you respond before the person finishes telling you what the problem is (Prov 18:13)
- you are not careful with your words (Jas 1:26; 3:5)
- you show anger when someone is offended or upset with you
- you do not respect them because they are younger than you or they are new to church or new to your family

What other examples can you give?

Look at the ones you marked. **Is God pleased with how you relate to other people?**



Confession time

We all fall short in many ways. But let's ask God to make us better listeners, so we can be better at showing love to one another.

Exercise in pairs

- One of you will talk about their own difficulty right now. The other should listen carefully and pray for the person who is speaking.
- The other person can then share something, and the first person can listen carefully and pray for them.

Lesson 3:

Understanding emotions



In the last lesson we talked about some of the things that we do that stop us from listening well. In this lesson we will learn about how we can listen to people so that we are a blessing and encouragement to them.

The healer of our hearts

To start with, let us think about the healing that Jesus brings to our wounded hearts.

In the Old Testament, the prophet Isaiah spoke about what the Messiah would do when he comes. Jesus said that this prophecy was about him (Luke 4:16–19). This is what Jesus does in us and through us today!

Read **Isaiah 61:1–3**.

What was the Messiah going to do? See how many things you can find in these verses.

Let us think about what each phrase means:

- ***proclaim good news to the poor*** (v.1)
We may be physically poor, spiritually poor or both. When we go to Jesus with all our sins, failures and problems, he has good news for us!
- ***bind up the broken hearted*** (v.1)
A good surgeon sews up wounds so they are hardly visible afterwards. If we do not attend to our bad wounds, it can lead to terrible deformities. Our hearts can be scarred by problems and somehow we keep on going with our lives, but the damage leads to emotional deformities. Jesus wants us to give our wounds and scars to him, so he can make us whole again. Most people need daily rebinding!
- ***freedom for the captives and ... prisoners*** (v.1)
Many people are imprisoned by their sin, anger and bitterness. Jesus came to set us free (**John 8:36**)!

- *the day of vengeance of our God* (v.2)
We need to give up being the judge of those who hurt us. There will be a day of justice when Jesus returns. But if we hold on to bitterness and a desire for revenge, Jesus cannot bring us healing (**Rom 12:19**).
- *to comfort all who mourn, and provide for those who grieve* (vv.2–3)
There are many things that can make us sad. We must never forget that Jesus, like his Father, is full of compassion and comfort, even when we have failed him (**Matt 11:29; 2 Cor 1:3**).
- *to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes* (v.3)
Putting ashes on your head was a sign of mourning. But Jesus wants to take away the shame of our “ashes” and turn them into a beautiful “crown” of honour (**Heb 12:11; 1 Pet 1:6–7**).
- *the oil of joy instead of mourning* (v.3)
Jesus turns our mourning into joy (**Ps 18:28; John 15:11**)!
- *and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair* (v.3)
God wants to turn our despair into praise (**Heb 13:15; Ps 139:12**)!
- *They will be called oaks of righteousness, a planting of the LORD for the display of his splendour* (v.3)
Here we see the reason why God wants to do all this. He wants us to be his witnesses, so that other people can see how wonderful he is! Oaks are strong trees that don’t fall down in the wind. You can see them from a long way away because they are so big. The more we delight in reading God’s word and allow him to transform our hearts, the more we can stand firm and be an example to other people when difficulties come into our lives. Then God gets the glory and more people want to know him!

Who does Jesus want to use as instruments of these blessings that he longs to give to his people? [1]

Yes, Jesus wants to use us to do all this too! We are his body (Col 1:24). He chooses to work through us (**2 Cor 1:3–4**).

In this lesson, we will think about how we can allow Jesus to use us to encourage those around us when they face problems.

Peace

In Isaiah 9:6 the Messiah is called *the prince of peace*. Peace is an important word in the Bible (it’s written over 400 times).

In the Bible, peace means the total well-being of our heart, mind and soul. This peace only comes when we are living in harmony with God and with one another. Read **John 14:27, Eph 4:3 and Phil 4:6–7**.

Many of us are anxious about our family, money, future, etc. What we need most of all is the peace that only God can give us. However, God wants to use us to grow each other’s peace.

Positive emotions add to our peace. Negative emotions take away from our peace.

We all experience many emotions during the course of each day.



1) Which positive emotions have you felt in the last week?



2) Which negative emotions have you felt in the last week?

Look at answer 2 and see which emotions you have **not** named. [2]



When we let someone share happy emotions with us, it increases their happiness and their peace. And when we let someone share unhappy emotions with us, it makes those feelings a little easier to bear—their peace is a little restored.

Are you someone who helps others to grow their peace?

Are you someone who others can trust to share their feelings with—do they know that you will not gossip about them?



What do you do if you have unhappy emotions? Do you cover them up? When we don't admit our negative feelings, to ourselves or others, it is easy to speak in an angry way with other people. This takes away their peace and spoils our relationship with them—for example, we shout at them when they have done nothing wrong!

Let us think about how we can help others to grow in their peace. One big way we can do this is by listening well. When someone is hurting, the best way to help them is to **listen well** and, after you have listened well, **take them to Jesus**.

Then, when we have unhappy emotions, we will have a trusted friend who we can share them with, without hurting them. Even if we do not have such a friend, we do have Jesus, who is always patient and ready to listen to us (**Matt 11:28**).

How does listening well help people manage their emotions? [3]

How can we listen well to other people? You can look back to Lesson 2 for ideas.

Drama (if possible, practise this before the lesson)

Two people: the first person tells the second person about a little problem they had last week. The second person listens well by doing the things listed in answer 4. [4]

Discuss:

How did the first person feel?

What things did the second person do to help the first person?

What other things can we do to listen well?

List as many ideas as you can. Compare your answers to the list in answer 4.

Follow Jesus' example

Read **John 4:1–29**.

Jesus gave us an example of good listening when He met the Samaritan woman at the well.

What did Jesus do that helped the Samaritan woman?



When you have thought of as many things as possible, compare your answers with answer 5 to see what else he did. [5]

As a result of how he related to this woman, she was able to tell many others about how Jesus had changed her life!

If we want to bring people to Jesus, we need to do several things. Put a mark next to the points you want to do better:

- make sure the other person is comfortable talking.** Do you need to find a place to talk with them on their own?
- overcome any negative feelings you might have about the other person.** Make sure you can speak respectfully towards them—if not, then ask someone else to help them, and confess your feelings to the Lord.
- understand the facts** of the situation. What happened? Do not assume things that you have not been told.
- listen out for and acknowledge their feelings.** How did this make them feel?
- ask them if there is any sin that they can **confess** (Jas 5:16) but **do not judge them** (Matt 7:1–2)
- do not be too quick to offer advice**
 - for example, you can ask, “Is there anything else that you did to make this situation worse?” or, “What do you think you can do to try to avoid this happening again?”
 - if you have any advice, ask them if they are happy for you to make a suggestion before you give it. If they say yes, only then give your advice.
 - point out any sin to them, **humbly**, only if they have not confessed it (we are talking about sins from the New Testament). But do not be quick to tell them their sins—remember **Matt 7:3–7!**
- take them to Jesus!** Talk about the good news that Jesus forgives us, heals our hearts and gives us peace. Talk about the wonderful future we have with Jesus in heaven.
- pray** with them.

Prayer

Sometimes there are things we can do to help the situation and sometimes there are not. But we should always **pray** for the person who shares something difficult with us. Our job is not to solve everyone else’s problems, but to lead them to the one who can solve all their problems—remind them who Jesus is!

Exercise in pairs

- The first person will talk about something they find difficult now. The second person should listen carefully, acknowledge the emotions the first person is feeling and then pray for the first person.
- Then repeat the above step with the roles reversed.
- When you have finished, discuss how this has changed how you feel about your difficult situation.

Challenge

Phone someone who has not come to the meeting this week, to ask them how they are. Listen well, including noting their emotions, then take them to Jesus.

Answers

- 1 – Us!
- 2 – 1) happiness, excitement, joy, encouragement
2) worry, confusion, disappointment, anger, irritation, sadness, despair, fear, shock, rage.
- 3 – It increases their peace.
- 4 – Be concerned and empathetic when someone is telling you how they are feeling.
When someone wants to talk to you about something important, do your best to make sure you won't get interrupted by your phone or anyone coming to see you; for example, go to a park to talk. Let them continue talking for as long as they need to, without changing the subject. Show your interest in the person by your non-verbal behaviour, as we talked about in lesson 2—look at them, sit quietly, put aside all your jobs and listen carefully, etc. Listen for the feelings that they might be experiencing and acknowledge them (e.g. Say what you think you just heard the person describing and ask them to confirm that you have understood correctly how they feel.).
Make sure that you don't tell anyone else what the person has told you, unless they have given you permission to tell someone else.
Offer to pray for the other person.
- 5 – He talked to her on her own, not in front of other people.
He did not despise her for being a Samaritan and a woman; instead He showed respect by asking her to help Him.
He was not offended by her rejection of His request, instead He pointed her to Himself, the source of life. He invited her to tell him more about her situation and confess her sin.
He did not condemn her, He just stated the facts.
He led her to the One who could bring her forgiveness, new life and peace with God.

Lesson 4:

Rebuking



Who here has never sinned? Who here has not sinned in the past week? Who here has not sinned today?

Our problem is that we find it really hard to see our own sin. The prophet Jeremiah said, *The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?* (Jer 17:9)

The Holy Spirit has a special task: to make each one of us more like Jesus. As we read God's Word each day, the Holy Spirit shows us **what** we need to change; he also helps us to change—but sometimes we're deaf! Sometimes we're blind! Sometimes we think that when the Bible is talking about people's sin, it does not apply to us. So Jesus uses others to show us our sin.

Why we should rebuke others

Who can tell us the parable of the lost sheep (Luke 15:1–7)?

What is this parable teaching us? [1]

The apostle James wrote: *My brothers and sisters, if one of you should wander from the truth and someone should bring that person back, remember this: whoever turns a sinner from the error of their way will save them from death and cover over a multitude of sins* (Jas 5:19–20).

What happens when someone *turns a sinner from the error of their way*? [2]

We can all help each other from going astray. What ideas do you have about how we can do this?

When you have thought of as many ideas as possible, look at answer 3 for some more ideas. [3]

It is important to relate to the opposite sex in an appropriate way. Do not let anyone think that there is immorality in your church.

What questions can you ask to hear how someone's relationship with Jesus is going? [4]

What should you do if you realise that someone is sinning or is in danger of sinning? [5]

How we should rebuke others

Jesus said, "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? 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? 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" (Matt 7:3–5).

What should we do before telling someone else what they are doing wrong? [6]

Remember that we are **all** sinners, so we should only tell others about their sin if we can do so **humbly!** Humble people are aware of their own weaknesses and sin. Proud people ignore their own weaknesses and sin, and only see the weaknesses and sin of other people.

The apostle Paul said, *Brothers and sisters, if someone is caught in a sin, you who live by the Spirit should restore that person gently. But watch yourselves, or you also may be tempted (Gal 6:1).*

What two things should we remember as we help someone else turn from sin? [7]

Conversation—for ladies (if possible, practise this before the lesson)

Listen to this conversation. How does Gulia help Aina?

Gulia: How are you?

Aina: *Okay, I guess.*

Gulia: Is everything okay?

Aina: *Not really.*

Gulia: What has Jesus been teaching you this week?

Aina: *Nothing.*

Gulia: Are you reading your Bible each day?

Aina: *No—I'm far too busy.*

Gulia: So would you say that you have a close relationship with Jesus at the moment?

Aina: *Not really.*

Gulia: Is there something you are doing that Jesus doesn't like?

Aina: *Maybe.*

Gulia: Are you willing to tell me what this is?

Aina: *No—I can't tell anyone.*

Gulia: While you won't tell anyone, you will be a slave to that sin. Do you know that once you tell someone about your sin, the power of that sin becomes much less? As long as what you are doing is not criminal, I can promise you that I won't tell anyone else what you tell me. But I would like to help you to overcome this sin. Are you willing to tell me?

Aina: *No—I can't tell anyone. You would be shocked.*

Gulia: Well you know that I'm not perfect; I have done many things wrong. And it is only because of God's mercy that I am who I am today. I love you and I would like to help you because I can see that the devil is leading you away from Jesus. And I promise that if you tell me what you're doing wrong, I won't tell anyone.

Aina: *Well—maybe I can tell you My boss wants me to be his lover.*

Gulia: Thank you for telling me. That was courageous.

Aina: *Do you promise not to tell anyone?*

Gulia: Yes I promised you. What do you think you should do about this?

Aina: *I need to repent of spending time with him on my own.*

Gulia: Yes! What else should you do?

Aina: *I should stop spending time with him and find a different job.*

Gulia: That's great! If you are willing, I can check with you next week to see how you are getting on with that.

Aina: *Yes please!*

Gulia: Are you ready to ask Jesus to forgive you? Would you like to pray now?

Aina: *OK. Dear Father God, please forgive me and help me to get away from my boss and find a new job quickly. Amen.*

Gulia: Amen. That's wonderful—Jesus has forgiven you! May he help you to find a new job. And now you can enjoy a renewed relationship with Jesus again! Can I pray for you?

Aina: *Sure.*

Questions for the women:

Why did Aina have courage to tell Gulia what she had done? [8]

What did Gulia promise her? [9]

What was the result of the conversation? [10]

What might have been the result if Aina had not had this conversation? [11]

How did Gulia obey Gal 6:1? [12]

Conversation—for men (if possible, practise this before the lesson)

Listen to this conversation. How does Rahim help Serdar?

Rahim: How are you?

Serdar: *Okay.*

Rahim: Is everything okay?

Serdar: *Well ...*

Rahim: What has Jesus been teaching you this week?

Serdar: *Nothing.*

Rahim: Are you reading your Bible each day?

Serdar: *No—I'm far too busy.*

Rahim: So would you say that you have a close relationship with Jesus at the moment?

Serdar: *Not really.*

Rahim: Is there something you are doing that is taking you away from Jesus?

Serdar: *Maybe.*

Rahim: Are you willing to tell me what this is?

Serdar: *No—I can't tell anyone.*

Rahim: While you won't tell anyone, you will be a slave to that sin. Do you know that once you tell someone about your sin, the power of that sin becomes much less? As long as what you are doing is not criminal, I can promise you that I won't tell anyone else what you tell me. But I would like to help you to overcome this sin. Are you willing to tell me?

Serdar: *No—I can't tell anyone. I am too ashamed.*

Rahim: Well, you know that I'm not perfect; I have done many things wrong. And it is only because of God's mercy that I am who I am today. I want to help you, because I can see that the devil is leading you away from Jesus. And I promise that if you tell me what you're doing wrong, I won't tell anyone.

Serdar: *Well—I've been looking at pornography on my phone.*

Rahim: Thank you for telling me. That was courageous.

Serdar: *Do you promise not to tell anyone?*

Rahim: Yes, I promised you. What do you think you should do about this?

Serdar: *I need to repent.*

Rahim: What else should you do?

Serdar: *I should delete all those pictures from my phone.*

Rahim: That's right! When you are tempted to search for any more pictures, start reading the Bible. If you are willing, I can check with you next week how you are getting on with that.

Serdar: *Yes please!*

Rahim: Are you ready to ask Jesus to forgive you? Would you like to pray now?

Serdar: *OK. Dear Father God, please forgive me and help me to stop looking at pornography, but instead to read the Bible. Amen.*

Rahim: Amen! That's wonderful—Jesus has forgiven you! May he help you to stay close to Him. Now you can enjoy a renewed relationship with Jesus again! Can I pray for you?

Serdar: *Sure.*

Questions for the men:

Why did Serdar have the courage to tell Rahim what he had done? [13]

What did Rahim promise him? [14]

What was the result of the conversation? [15]

What might have been the result if Serdar had not had this conversation? [16]

How did Rahim obey Gal 6:1? [17]

The slippery slope

Most people do not suddenly commit a big sin. First, they take one small step in the wrong direction, then another, then another. This is like going down a slippery slope. The further you go down it, the harder it is to go back up.

When we see something that is leading someone away from Jesus, we should talk to that person before they can go any further down the slope. We need to help each other turn back before we go too far.



God has put us in a community of brothers and sisters. Our job is to love and encourage each other. We need each other to stand firm and to grow in our faith. Then God can use us together to be a light to those around us. We are not to tear each other down. Instead, we are to help each other to stand firm (Eph 6:14).

If there is a sin that someone is clearly committing, then we need to help that person. If we know them well, we may be able to talk directly with them on their own.

If this is not someone who you have a close relationship with or who is much older than you, then you need to find an indirect way of talking about the problem. How can you do this?

When you have thought of as many ways as possible, look at answer 18 for some more ideas. [18]

The apostle Paul says that sin is like yeast. You only need a little yeast to affect the whole batch of dough. You only need a little sin to affect the whole church community (1 Cor 5:6). For example, if a member of the church starts a romantic relationship with an unbeliever and nobody challenges them, then others in the church will think that it is not a problem.

The goal is not to make yourself look better by saying how shocked you are, or that nobody in your family would ever do such a thing. Rather, your goal is to help your fellow believer to turn away from a path that leads to death. We also want to protect other church members from copying their sin.

Keeping secrets

A gossip betrays a confidence; a trustworthy person keeps a secret (Prov 11:13).

How good are you at keeping secrets? Could you keep a promise not to tell anyone about a sin that someone confesses to you?

If someone tells you something serious or dangerous, you still should not tell others but, rather, tell a pastor or someone who can help (for example, you may need to take them to the hospital).

Jesus said, *If your brother or sister sins, go and point out their fault, just between the two of you. If they listen to you, you have won them over. But if they will not listen, take one or two others along, so that “every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.” If they still refuse to listen, tell it to the church; and if they refuse to listen even to the church, treat them as you would a pagan or a tax collector (Matt 18:15–17).*

What three steps should we take if we think that someone is sinning, including sin against you? [19]

Is it right to talk to other people about someone else’s sins, without asking the sinner first? [20]

The rule is: **If you would not say it in front of the person, do not say it behind their back!**

Public shaming of someone in front of the church is the last thing we do: do this only if a church member is persistently sinning and refusing to repent.

What to do when someone corrects or criticises you

Whoever heeds life-giving correction will be at home among the wise (Prov 15:31).

Who *will be at home among the wise?* [21]

God often uses the members of our family to tell us what we are doing wrong. But often they criticise us for things that are not sin—many women feel constantly criticised!

What is the difference between criticism and correction? [22]

Can you give examples of when you criticise things you don’t like, but which are not sin? [23]

How do you react when people criticise you?

When people criticise us, we should do our best not to be defensive or angry. We can humbly say, “Thank you for telling me about this,” and then we can ask the Lord to show us if what they say is true. We all have a lot to learn!

There are two ways to respond to criticism:

The Jesus way:

- pray about the accusation—ask Jesus to show you if it's true, even if it's only partly true.
- if it is true, or only partly true, repent and ask Jesus to forgive you and help you not to do this anymore.
- let the person know that you are asking Jesus to help you not to do this anymore.

If you do this, you will enjoy your relationships so much more!

Our own way:

- get angry and be offended,
- justify yourself (e.g. "I do that because you do it to me"),
- criticize the other person.

If you do this, your relationships will get worse and worse!

How can you prepare yourself for the time when someone tells you about the sin in your life?

Challenge

What would you like to change in your own behaviour, as a result of this lesson?

Prayer

*Search me, God, and know my heart;
Test me and know my anxious thoughts.
See if there is any offensive way in me,
And lead me in the way everlasting.*
(Ps 139:23–24)

Answers

- 1 – It teaches us that every person is valuable, and that God wants to save every sinner from their sin.
- 2 – They *save them from death and cover over a multitude of sins*.
- 3 – Ideas include:
 - make sure you show love to **everyone** who comes to a meeting so that everyone feels welcomed and wants to keep coming back,
 - ask them good questions to show you care about how they are,
 - phone or visit those who didn't come to the meeting to let them know that you missed them,
 - regularly pray for everyone who comes to your meeting.
- 4 – Ideas include:
 - What have you been reading in the Bible this week?
 - What has Jesus been teaching you?
 - How is it going with your husband/wife/parents/children/work colleagues?
- 5 – You should try to talk to them about it.
- 6 – We should examine ourselves to see if we are doing something wrong. If we are, we should repent of it.
- 7 – We should do it gently and we must watch ourselves, so we won't be tempted to sin.
- 8 – Aina understood that she could trust Gulia, that Gulia loved her, wanted the best for her and wouldn't judge her.
- 9 – Gulia promised she wouldn't tell anyone Aina's secret.
- 10 – Aina turned back to Jesus and put herself out of temptation by leaving her job.
- 11 – Aina might have carried on sinning and stopped following Jesus—and so would have been on the road to hell.
- 12 – Gulia was gentle and not harsh. She didn't ask for any details, which might have led her into temptation.
- 13 – Serdar understood that he could trust Rahim, that Rahim wanted the best for him and wouldn't judge him.
- 14 – Rahim promised he wouldn't tell anyone Serdar's secret.
- 15 – Serdar turned back to Jesus and put himself out of temptation by deleting the pictures.
- 16 – Serdar might have carried on sinning and stopped following Jesus—and so would have been on the road to hell.
- 17 – Rahim was gentle and not harsh. He didn't ask for any details, which might have led him into temptation.
- 18 – Ideas include:
 - talk to them about this sin that some people commit, without saying that you know they are committing it,
 - talk about the problem of this particular sin in a group, without naming anyone who may be committing it,
 - share a proverb or story that shows the folly of this sin,
 - find an appropriate person to talk to the person about their sin (directly or indirectly).
- 19 – Go and tell them privately; if they don't listen, take someone else with you to talk with them; if they still don't listen, tell the whole church.
- 20 – No—unless you are telling one trusted person who can talk to this person instead of you.
- 21 – Whoever heeds life-giving correction.
- 22 – Correction is when there is an obvious sin. Criticism is when the other person is doing something you don't like.
- 23 – We don't like their cooking, their cleaning, their clothes, their style of parenting, etc.

Lesson 5:

Conflict



In this lesson we will think about:

- how to try to avoid conflict,
- how to try to resolve conflict,
- and how we can try to help other people resolve their conflict with each other.

How good and pleasant it is when God's people live together in unity! (Ps 133:1).

Discuss the things people argue about—give one example for each category:

- between a husband and wife,
- between parents and adult children,
- between parents and younger children,
- between work colleagues,
- between employers and employees.

Whenever we have a close relationship with someone, there will be conflict!

Spiritual Conflict

It is important to remember that we live in a war zone! We live in a war that is raging between God and Satan. Satan has already lost this war, but for now he continues to fight (Gen 3:15; Matt 2:13,16; Rev 12:7–10).

So, whenever we are involved in conflict we should stop and think: whose side am I on? **Am I serving Jesus or Satan in this conflict?** Beware: Satan loves to deceive us that we are right. But often we are just protecting our hurt, selfish, proud hearts!

It is more important to love God and love our neighbour, than it is to win an argument! So, whenever a conflict is starting, stop and pray:

*Search me, God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts.
See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting (Ps 139:23–24).*

How to avoid conflict

Discuss: resolving conflict takes up a lot of time and causes a lot of pain. So let us think about how we can avoid it in the first place! What things can we do to avoid it? When you have thought of as many ideas as you can, continue reading this lesson.

Here are some more ideas on how to avoid conflict:

1. Spend time with Jesus every day in prayer and Bible study

Oh how I love your law! I meditate on it all day long. Your commands are always with me and make me wiser than my enemies (Ps 119:97–98).

If you think you don't have time to spend time with Jesus each day, think of it as giving you the daily wisdom you need to avoid conflict. Think about how much time resolving a conflict swallows up and how much damage it causes. We all need lots of wisdom to live each day well and in peace with one another.

2. Love and respect the other person

Be devoted to one another in love. Honour one another above yourselves (Rom 12:10).

Love each other deeply, because love covers a multitude of sins (1 Pet 4:8).

You should ask yourself if you really love God, and if you really love this person as you love yourself (Matt 22:37–39).

3. Humility, gentleness and patience

In humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests, but each of you to the interests of the others (Phil 2:3–4).

You should ask yourself if you think of yourself as more important than the other person.

Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love (Eph 4:2).

You should ask yourself if you are harsh and impatient with others.

4. Remember: when you are tired or stressed, you are more likely to get angry

Let others know when you are finding life hard! Ask them to pray for you.

5. Be quick to forgive

- We are much more sinful than we think we are! Yet we are quick to see the *speck of sawdust in our brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in our own eye (Matt 7:3)*!
- The parable of the unmerciful servant reminds us that God has forgiven us so much that we have no right not to forgive others (Matt 18:23–35).
- Jesus told Peter that he should forgive his brother seventy-seven times—that is a way of saying EVERY time (Matt 18:22)!
- Beware—if we don't forgive others, Jesus told us that God cannot forgive us (Matt 6:14–15).

Consider: Which of these do you need to work on in order to avoid conflict with other people?

How to try to resolve our own conflict

Drama 1 (if possible, practise this before the lesson)

Perhat (*angrily*): Why is this house such a mess?! If you didn't spend so much time on the phone maybe you could do a bit more tidying up around here!

Masha (*angrily*): Why are you always shouting at me? Don't you know how much I have to do?

(Masha starts crying and leaves)

Perhat (*praying*): Oh God, why do we always argue? Show me what I'm doing wrong and help me to be nice to my wife. Help me to talk to her about why we argue.

(Masha returns and puts some tea and a plate of food on the table without saying anything)

Perhat: Can we talk? I realize that I am not very patient with you. And I can see that when the house is a mess, I'm afraid that someone might visit and I will be ashamed. But my relationship with you is more important than what others think about me. So please will you forgive me?

Masha: Thank you for telling me this. I do forgive you. I didn't realize that you were afraid of people coming here and seeing the house as a mess. I can see that that would be shameful for you. But I am so tired—the baby wakes me up many times in the night and our son never stops running around and doing things he shouldn't be doing. It's hard enough to find time to cook, let alone clean the house. But now I know how important it is for you to have a tidier house, I will try to do more housework. Maybe I can get our son to help me pick up the toys each evening.

Perhat: I didn't realize you were so tired and busy. From now on when I come home, I can help clear up the toys too and even vacuum the sitting room. I think we should make sure that we make time to talk each day, so we find out how each other is feeling. I think we should pray for each other too. A good marriage is more important than a tidy house!

Masha: Thanks, I would love that! And I need to say that I'm sorry that I spend so much time on the phone. I will try to make sure that I've done all my jobs before I chat with my friends.

(Perhat and Masha hug each other)

What things did Perhat do to try to solve the conflict in his marriage?

Let's review what we can all do when we need to resolve a conflict with someone who is close to us:

1. **Pray**—ask the Lord to show you what you did to make this into a conflict and confess this to the Lord.
2. **Talk** to the person as soon as possible before the conflict grows. Refusing to talk to the person who upset you does not solve the conflict—it makes it worse! However, it is important to remember not to talk about it while you are both angry. Only talk when you are both calm. Hand over all your anger and frustration to God, **before** talking to the other person.
3. Talk about **one specific issue**. Do not talk about all their faults or everything that has happened over the years.
4. Agree to talk **calmly and respectfully**. Do not shout or be rude to each other—you are talking to a precious child of God! If anyone starts raising their voice, you should take a break until you have both calmed down.
5. Tell the other person **how you feel** about what happened. Use “I” rather than “you”, for example, “I am sad that we disagree about this and can't seem to find a solution” is better than “Why do you always disagree with me about everything?”
6. **Listen** well to the other person and **acknowledge their feelings** (e.g. pain, anger, grief, frustration).
7. Be ready to **ask forgiveness** for whatever you have done wrong.
8. **Ask** what ideas the other person has to solve this problem; listen carefully to them and **propose** your ideas for a solution. For the sake of unity of family or church, be willing to **compromise**. Be willing to change how you do things in order to make the other person happy!
9. If you can't agree, **plan another time to talk**. If necessary, agree on who you can invite to help you to work through this conflict. Do not allow the conflict to get any worse; do everything you can to resolve it before it causes disunity in your family or church.
10. **Agree not to criticize your partner to anyone else**. Do not let the conflict involve others.

Discussion

Which of these instructions are new to you?

Which of these instructions would you find hardest to do?

If the conflict is with someone you don't know well, then it may be better not to talk to the person directly. You may need to go to someone who knows that person well and ask them to help you resolve the conflict. Many people find it helpful to have the help of a third person, even when they do know each other well.

What is the difference between gossip and asking someone for help to resolve a conflict?

What sort of person would be a good person to help you resolve a conflict?

How we can try to help others resolve their conflicts with each other

Blessed are the peacemakers for they will be called children of God (Matt 5:9).

In this drama, you will see a mediator demonstrating how to mediate between two people who are in conflict with each other.

If they know each other well, they should speak to each other, not to the mediator. If they do not know each other well, then let them talk to the mediator and allow the mediator to speak for them to the other person. The mediator can then explain the problem in an understanding way to the other person.

Drama 2a—for men (if possible, practise this before the lesson)

Arslan: Hello, welcome! Come in, come in. How are you? How is your family? How are the children? Please sit down. I am so glad that you came to chat.

Davlat (*Sits down facing away from Murad*): Hello, how are you? Fine, thanks.

Murad (*Sits down facing away from Davlat*): Hello, how are you? Fine, thanks.

Arslan: I'd like to pray before we start.

(*praying*) Dear Father God, please help us to restore this broken relationship. We ask in the name of your precious Son Jesus. Amen!

I want to remind each of us that we are sinners and we all need God's mercy and forgiveness each day!

Now we need to agree on some rules for our discussion:

- you will take turns to speak,
- you won't interrupt each other,
- you won't raise your voice,
- you won't be rude.

Do you both agree?

Davlat and Murad (*reluctantly and not looking at each other*): Yes.

Arslan: Good! Let's start. Davlat, you go first. I'd like you to tell me what happened

Davlat: I was really upset last time I came to the meeting. My boss had been angry with me and I was tired. So when Murad told me to help get the tables and chairs ready, I shouted at him. I know I shouldn't have done that, but I don't like being told what to do, especially when I've just arrived.

Arslan (*to Murad*): Davlat says that when he arrived at the meeting, he had come from a bad day at work and he was feeling rather tired. It appears that as soon as he arrived, you told him what he needed to do to help. He responded by shouting at you. Murad, can you tell me what Davlat said about what happened?

Murad: Davlat said that he doesn't like me telling him what to do. That's why he shouted at me.

Arslan: Davlat, what did Murad not hear?

Davlat: I was really upset last time I came to the meeting. My boss had been angry with me and I was tired. I shouted at him because I don't like being told what to do, especially when I've just arrived.

Arslan: Okay. Murad, tell me some more about what Davlat said.

Murad: He was really upset last time he came to the meeting. His boss had been angry with him and he was tired. So, when I told him to help, he shouted at me. He doesn't like being told what to do, especially when he's just arrived.

Arslan: Murad, tell me how you think Davlat might have been feeling that evening.

Murad: I think he might have been shocked by what his boss said to him and maybe he was worried that he might lose his job. He was looking forward to being somewhere he could relax, and was disappointed that he was abruptly told to do something.

Arslan: Is this right, Davlat?

Davlat: Yes, that's about it.

Arslan: Super! Now Murad needs to say what he thinks happened that evening.

Murad: I was late getting everything ready for the meeting. No one else had come to help me and I was relieved that at last someone had arrived who was strong enough to help. Before I knew it, he was shouting at me. So I shouted back at him!

Arslan: So, Davlat, can you tell me what Murad has just said?

Davlat: He was late getting everything ready for the meeting, I arrived and before we knew it we were shouting at each other.

Arslan: Is that all he said? Can you say how he was feeling?

Davlat: Well, no one else had come to help him, so I guess he was frustrated and disappointed, and also worried that he would not be able to get everything ready in time. He must have already been quite stressed when I started shouting at him. That's why he shouted back at me.

Arslan: Murad, do you feel that Davlat has understood you?

Murad: Yes, I guess so.

Arslan: Good, we're making progress. Now we need to think about how to avoid this happening again. What ideas do you have, Davlat?

Davlat: I guess that however I feel, I must not shout at my friends. Murad—I'm sorry I shouted at you. Please forgive me!

Murad: I forgive you, Davlat!

Arslan: That's great! Now what other ideas do you have, Murad, so this doesn't happen again?

Murad: I need to realise that people may turn up at the meeting unhappy and tired. So I need to be careful not to demand that they help me. Davlat—I'm sorry that I told you to help me immediately you arrived at the meeting. Please forgive me.

Davlat: I forgive you!

Arslan: You've done so well! One last thing we need to do is to pray for each other. Will you do that?

Davlat and Murad: Sure! Let's pray ...

(Davlat and Murad hug each other)

Drama 2b—for women (if possible, practise this before the lesson)

Göwher: Hello, welcome! Come in, come in. How are you? How is your family? How are the children? Please sit down. I am so glad that you came to chat.

Altin *(Sits down facing away from Kumish):* Hello, how are you? Fine thanks.

Kumish *(Sits down facing away from Altin):* Hello, how are you? Fine thanks.

Göwher: I'd like to pray before we start.

(praying) Dear Father God, please help us to restore this broken relationship. We ask in the name of your precious Son Jesus. Amen!

I want to remind each of us that we are sinners and we all need God's mercy and forgiveness each day!

Now we need to agree on some rules for our discussion:

- you will take turns to speak,
- you won't interrupt each other,
- you won't raise your voice,
- and you won't be rude.

Do you both agree?

Altin and Kumish *(reluctantly and not looking at each other):* Yes.

Göwher: Good! Let's start. Altin, you go first. I'd like you to tell me what happened.

Altin: I was really upset last time I came to the meeting. My boss had been angry with me and I was tired. So when Kumish told me to help get the food ready I shouted at her. I know I shouldn't have done that, but I don't like being told what to do, especially when I've just arrived.

Göwher *(to Kumish):* Altin says that when she arrived at the meeting, she had come from a bad day at work and she was feeling rather tired. It appears that as soon as she arrived, you told her what she should do to help. So she responded by shouting at you. Kumish, can you tell me what Altin said about what happened?

Kumish: Altin said that she doesn't like me telling her what to do. That's why she shouted at me.

Göwher: Altin, what did Kumish not hear?

Altin: I was really upset last time I came to the meeting. My boss had been angry with me and I was tired. I shouted at her because I don't like being told what to do, especially when I've just arrived and it seems that no-one cares how I feel.

Göwher: Okay. Kumish, tell me some more about what Altin said.

Kumish: She was really upset last time she came to the meeting because her boss had been angry with her and she was tired. She shouted at me as she felt I didn't care how she was feeling and she'd only just arrived.

Göwher: Kumish, tell me how you think Altin might have been feeling that evening.

Kumish: I think she might have been shocked by what her boss said to her and maybe she was worried that she might lose her job. She was looking forward to being in a place she could relax, and was disappointed that she was immediately told to do more work.

Göwher: Is this right, Altin?

Altin: Yes, that's about it.

Göwher: Super! Now Kumish needs to tell me what she thinks happened that evening.

Kumish: I was late getting all the food ready for the meeting. No one else had come to help me and I was glad that at last someone had arrived who could help me. I told Altin to help and before I knew it she was shouting at me, so I shouted back at her!

Göwher: So Altin, can you tell me what Kumish has just said?

Altin: She was late getting all the food ready for the meeting, I arrived and before we knew it we were shouting at each other.

Göwher: Is that all she said? Can you say how she was feeling?

Altin: Well no one else had come to help her, so I guess she was frustrated and disappointed, and also worried that the food would not be ready in time. She must have already been quite stressed when I started shouting at her. That's why she just shouted back.

Göwher: Do you feel that Altin has understood you, Kumish?

Kumish: Yes, I guess so.

Göwher: Good, we're making progress. Now we need to think about how to avoid this happening again. What ideas do you have, Altin?

Altin: I guess that however I feel, I must not shout at my friends. Kumish—I'm sorry I shouted at you. Please forgive me!

Kumish: I forgive you, Altin!

Göwher: That's great! Now what other ideas do you have, Kumish, so this doesn't happen again?

Kumish: I need to realise that people may turn up at the meeting unhappy and tired. So I need to be careful not to demand that they immediately help me. Altin—I'm sorry that I told you to help me when you arrived at the meeting without seeming to care about how you were feeling. Please forgive me.

Altin: I forgive you!

Göwher: You've done so well! One last thing we need to do is to pray for each other. Will you do that?

Altin and Kumish: Sure! Let's pray ...

(Altin and Kumish hug each other)

The goal is to restore the broken relationship. In order to do this, sometimes people need the opportunity to talk with the help of a trusted third person—a mediator. If you are a mediator, you need to stay neutral so that both sides trust you.

Let's review how a mediator can lead a reconciliation meeting:

1. Prepare for the meeting:

- Invite the two people who are in conflict to come and drink tea with you.
- Pray before you start the discussion. Remind everyone that we are all sinners who need God's mercy and forgiveness every day!
- Agree on the rules: one person speaks at a time, no interrupting, no raising your voice and no being rude.

2. Person 1 talks:

- Let the first person say what they think happened.
- Then let the second person retell what the first person has said, including acknowledging any feelings that have been expressed.
- The first person can add to or correct anything that the second person hasn't understood properly.

3. Person 2 talks:

- When the first person knows that the second person has heard them properly, then the second person can share.
- The first person should then retell what the second person has said, including acknowledging any feelings that have been expressed.
- The second person can add to or correct anything that the first person hasn't understood properly.

4. Person 1 makes suggestions:

- When the second person feels that the first person has understood them, ask the first person what suggestions they have to solve this problem.
- Ask the second person what they think about these suggestions.

5. Person 2 makes suggestions:

- Ask the second person what suggestions they have to solve this problem.
- Ask the first person what they think about these suggestions.

6. Next steps:

- See if there is a way forward that works for both people. What should they both do now?
- Aim to have both people ask for and give forgiveness

- Have both people pray for the other person.
- Agree when you need to meet again, if necessary.

Read through these steps again, before doing the exercise below.

Exercise—in groups of three

One person should be the mediator and the other two are people who have had a conflict. They have been complaining about each other to other people, and this is bringing division in the church. Practise going through the steps that we have been talking about to help these people reconcile.

When you have finished, pray (not as part of the exercise) for each other to be good at avoiding conflict, at dealing with conflict and at helping others to reconcile when they are in conflict.

Lesson 6:

Grief



Read **Psalm 88**.

What is the psalmist experiencing? [1]

What feelings is he expressing? [2]

How is he expressing his trust in God? [3]

Check your answers to these questions with the answers at the end of the chapter, to see if there is anything you did not notice.

When we lose something that is dear to us, we grieve; this is normal and not sinful.

In this lesson about loving one another, we are going to learn about how we grieve. This will help us to better understand our own feelings in times of loss. It will help us to better understand other people when they have suffered loss. We will also think about how we can help others in their grief. Galatians 6:2 tells us to “*carry one another’s burdens*”. Helping others when they are grieving is one way to do this.

When we lose something or someone, we grieve. Look at this list and see which words describe a loss you have experienced in the last year. Add any losses you have experienced that are not on the list:

- a relative
- a friend
- a friendship
- work
- our health
- our home
- anything that we value

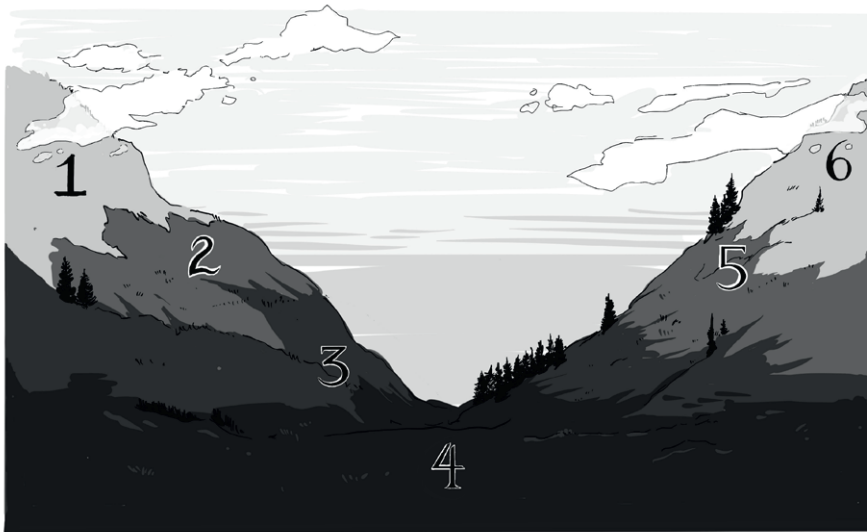
- our marriage
- our purity
- respect
- _____
- _____

There are some things we lose that we can quickly move on from. But some other things we grieve deeply and for a long time. Some of these deeper griefs become part of who we are—for example, people who lose a child may bear that pain for life. Anniversaries may renew our grief for a loved one who died.

Jesus grieved (John 11:35); Paul knew what grief was (Phil 2:27). **Grief is a natural part of life.** Our glorious hope is that one day we will live with Jesus in the New Jerusalem, where there will be *no more death or mourning or crying or pain* (Rev 21:4). But until that time, we will all suffer grief in different ways. So let us learn how to grieve well and how to help others to grieve well.

Everyone experiences grief differently. For most people it feels like going down into a valley and then going up on the other side of the valley. We call this a “grief valley”.

Our grief valley may be short and shallow or it may be long and deep. As we look at the different stages of the grief valley in this lesson, think about a loss in your life and what symptoms you experienced. See what actions might help you grieve better next time you experience a loss.



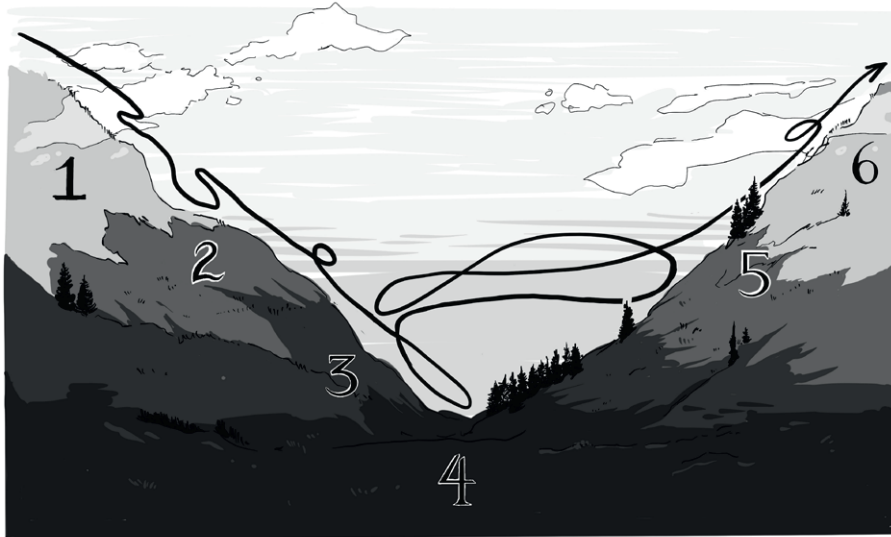
| Stage | Symptoms | How to help yourself and others go through this stage well |
|-------------------------|---|--|
| 1. Life before the loss | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • feeling that life is stable and going relatively well | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learn by heart Psalm 23. • Keep on studying God’s Word, especially the Psalms. • Underline your favourite verses so you can find them when you need them. • Then you will be better prepared to trust God in the bad times as well as the good times. |

| | | |
|--|---|--|
| <p>2. Initial impact</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • shock • numbness (you feel no emotions) • denial (“this can’t be true”) • hopelessness (“I will never be happy again”). | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Know that this is a natural stage and it will pass. • Allow others to help you. • Tell others how you are feeling. • Remind yourself of who God is, by reciting Psalm 23 every day. |
| <p>3. Wrestling with the pain</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • anger, fear, panic, sense of chaos, guilt, shame • crying, sleeplessness, accusing yourself, for example by saying: “I should have done it differently.” | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Know that this is also a natural stage and it will pass. • If possible, take time off work. • Spend time with other believers. • Remind yourself of who God is, by reciting Psalm 23 every day. |
| <p>4. Wrestling with the new reality</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • depression • isolation (people feel awkward being near someone who is grieving) • loneliness (“No one understands me”) • feeling God is distant (“Why would God allow this to happen to me?”) • attempting to move on to stage 5 but returning many times to stage 4 (some days you seem to be fine, then on other days you are angry and upset). | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Know that this is also a natural stage and it will pass. • Acknowledge your pain and seek to move forward. • Remind yourself of the Good News about Jesus. • Remind yourself of who God is, by reciting Psalm 23 every day. |
| <p>5. Renewing your trust in God</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • accepting your new situation • you might feel guilty that you are not so sad any more. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meet with believers. • Acknowledge your pain. • Be honest with yourself and with God. • Think about what you did wrong before and after your loss. Confess it, repent and accept God’s total forgiveness. • Remind yourself of who God is, by reciting Psalm 23 every day. |

| | | |
|--|--|--|
| <p>6. Moving towards healing and adjustment to your loss</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • peace and acceptance | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Listen to praise songs. • Choose to meet with believers and renew friendships. • Help others—this helps to occupy your mind positively. • As you read God’s Word, see how much suffering is part of everyone’s life; see how God uses it all to make us more like Jesus (Rom 5:3–4). He also uses it to make us better at comforting others when they suffer (2 Cor 1:3–4). • Regularly remind yourself of who God is, by reciting Psalm 23. |
|--|--|--|

It is very important to acknowledge our feelings. Feelings are given by God, even negative feelings. It is good for us to share what we are feeling with those who are close to us. People who ignore or suppress their feelings find it hard to have healthy relationships with others. They are more likely to become angry quickly and to be bitter when things don’t go right.

Be aware that people do not usually go through the stages of grief neatly in order. Rather, people often move forward and then go back to a previous stage, **many times!** The important thing is to allow yourself time to grieve, while trying to move slowly forward.



What are the six stages of grief?

Which symptoms have you experienced in your life?

What was helpful at that time?

What was not helpful?

Always remember: *The LORD is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit* (Ps 34:18).

The LORD is with you in your grief!

How to help others in their grief

When someone is depressed, they find it hard to do the normal things of life. They find it hard to listen to information. It is a normal part of grieving to get angry at those you love most. So we must be compassionate and patient with those who are grieving (**Col 3:12–14**). We must listen to them well, using the skills we learned in lessons 2 and 3.

Here are some more practical tips:

1. Allow them to take all the time they need to go through the grieving process. Don't say, "Now forty days are over, you must stop crying and feeling sad".
2. Give practical help, for example, cooking, cleaning, looking after children, shopping for groceries.
3. Pray for them.
4. Don't take offense when the grieving person gets angry at you.
5. Don't tell them not to cry—crying is good for us!
6. Don't judge them—never tell them that what happened is because they have sinned or they weren't a good mother or father, etc. If they have sinned, now is not the time to tell them that. God will show them their sin if He wants to!
7. Don't give easy solutions or advice: "Don't worry; everything's going to be fine—Just trust in God!"
8. Don't start telling them about who or what **you** lost. Don't tell them that their grief is not as bad as your grief.
9. Only share Bible verses gently and sensitively with them. Don't preach at them!
10. **Remember not to share someone's secrets with others!**

Which of these things do you need to remember to do, or avoid doing, next time someone you know is grieving?

Exercise—in pairs

Take turns to share with each other one thing that you have lost in the past few years. Where do you think you are in the grief valley? What can you do to move on? Let the listener share a verse that will be helpful for the person. Pray for each other.

Answers

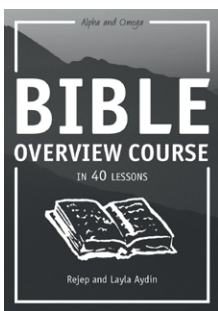
- 1 – Grief.
- 2 – Frustration about God not answering his prayers; feeling God is distant; hopelessness; depression; isolation and friendlessness; rejection by God; feeling he is a victim of injustice.
- 3 – He is telling God how he is feeling. He is also reminding himself who God is: he is *the God who saves* (v.1), who *loves* and who is *faithful* (v.11).

CONGRATULATIONS on finishing this course!

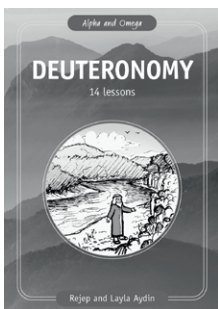
There is much in this course that we need to remind ourselves about again and again. One way to do this is to find some other people that you can study this course with. Or else, plan to study this course in your group again in a year's time. This will help you to grow in your ability to love others well.

May God bless you and make you a blessing to many others!

Other books by Alpha & Omega



Bible Overview Course in 40 Lessons



Deuteronomy Course: 14 Lessons

*“By this everyone will know that you are my
disciples, if you love one another.”*

John 13:35

We know that we should love one another but we often find it so hard. Broken relationships not only spoil the life of the church, but hinder others from coming to know Jesus.

These six lessons will help you to love each other in your family and in your church better. They cover the topics:

- following the Good Shepherd—which is foundational to your being able to love others well
- listening well—the biggest evidence of your love
- understanding and sharing your emotions—so that they don’t control us
- rebuking sin well—so that you help one another on the path to holiness
- resolving conflicts—so that you don’t allow conflicts to grow in your church or family
- understanding grief—so that you can grieve well and help others as they grieve.

These are lessons that you will want to study again and again as you put these ideas into practice. Then everyone will know that you are truly disciples of Jesus!