

Chapter 4

LOVING OTHERS

“For you have been called to live in freedom – not freedom to satisfy your sinful nature [flesh], but freedom to serve one another in love. For the whole law can be summed up in this one command: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’” **Galatians 5:13–14** (NLT)

In the previous chapters, you have learned how to be set free from the Rejection and Judgment Cycles, as well as how to forgive people who have offended you.

This chapter will examine the commandment to love others and confront the hindrances to obeying it.

Competing with God

Jesus said the greatest commandment is to love God. It makes sense that you should love God since He made you and has the power to control the universe. He has the right to tell you what to do and He deserves your praise.

“Jesus replied, ‘You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. A second is equally important: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’”

Matthew 22:37–39 (NLT)

Do you love God or do you compete with Him? There are three ways that you may compete with God, by seeking praise from people, trying to control people, and judging others.

“...I alone am God. There is no other God; there never has been and never will be.” **Isaiah 43:10** (NLT)

Selfishness

When you are trying to take God's place, you are not loving Him *and* you are not able to love others. Love puts others first. Seeking praise, trying to control, and judging others puts self first. Selfishness destroys relationships.

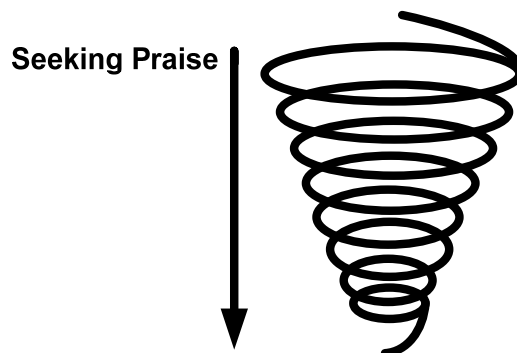
*“For wherever there is jealousy and **selfish ambition**, there you will find disorder and every kind of evil.”*
James 3:16 (NLT)

Everyone knows that selfishness destroys relationships. But did you know that when you seek praise, try to control or judge others, you are behaving selfishly?

The Downward Spiral

The following diagram illustrates that selfishness causes your relationships to spiral downward. *Seeking praise* in your relationships is one example of selfishness.

My Relationship with Others



Seeking Praise

Seeking praise might look like wanting to be told that you do things well, that you look good or that you are appreciated.

- Q1.** Do you feel hurt when you are not thanked for the things you do for others? Give an example.

Q2. How do you feel when people don't pay attention to you?

Q3. Do you try to win friends through flattery or giving gifts?

Seeking praise is selfish because it is an attempt to *take* something rather than *give* something to the relationship.

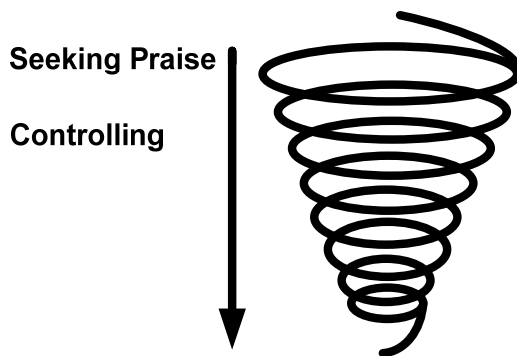
"Never once did we try to win you with flattery, as you very well know. And God is our witness that we were not just pretending to be your friends so you would give us money! As for praise, we have never asked for it from you or anyone else." **1 Thessalonians 2:5–6** (NLT)

Another way you might exercise selfishness in a relationship is by being *controlling*.

Controlling

Controlling others might look like manipulating people so they will do what you want, the way you want, when you want. You may also try to control others so they will do the "right" thing. You do not have the power to make everyone around you do what you want. As a result, you may experience negative feelings like anxiety, stress, worry, and frustration. There will probably be strife in the relationships that you try to control also.

My Relationship with Others



- Q4.** Have you ever been in a relationship where someone tried to manipulate you? How did you feel?
- Q5.** Have you tried to get people to do what you thought was “right”? How did they react?

Some people may try harder to please you but usually they want to get out of the relationship or rebel against your control.

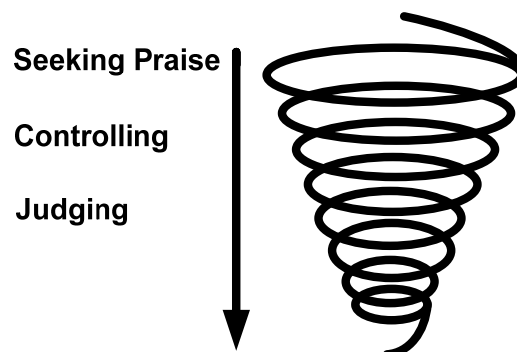
“If you help, just help, don’t take over; if you teach, stick to your teaching; if you give encouraging guidance, be careful that you don’t get bossy; if you’re put in charge, don’t manipulate...” **Romans 12:7–8** (MSG)

Another way of behaving selfishly in your relationships is when you *judge* others.

Judging

When you see the people around you acting in a way that you do not approve of or that seems “wrong,” you may begin to judge them. Judging others creates in you the negative emotions of irritation, impatience, and disgust. Others see you as fault-finding, critical, nagging, and constantly correcting.

My Relationship with Others



- Q6.** Are there people you are always criticizing or correcting? Do they enjoy being around you?

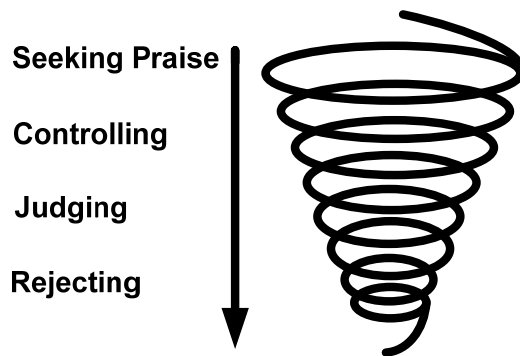
“Don’t grumble about each other, my brothers and sisters, or God will judge you. For look! The great Judge is coming...” James 5:9 (NLT)

Seeking praise, controlling, and judging others leads to *rejecting* people.

Rejecting

Your relationships will collapse when you reject or withhold love from others. People that feel rejected often do hurtful things in retaliation. These offenses can leave you with feelings of bitterness and unforgiveness. Rejecting others may look like making sarcastic comments to them, trying to hurt them, ignoring them or stopping all contact with them.

My Relationship with Others



Selfishness causes conflict and quarrels in relationships.

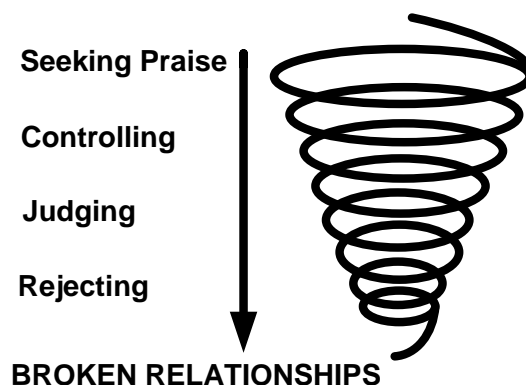
“Where do you think all these appalling wars and quarrels come from? Do you think they just happen? Think again. They come about because you want your own way, and fight for it deep inside yourselves.” James 4:1 (MSG)

Broken Relationships

Selfishness is a downward spiral that inevitably ends in *broken relationships*.

“It’s harder to make amends with an offended friend than to capture a fortified city. Arguments separate friends like a gate locked with iron bars.” Proverbs 18:19 (NLT)

My Relationship with Others



Q7. Do you have any broken relationships in your life? Explain.

Love Is

When you are seeking love from others, you will relate to others with a selfish motive. Giving love is the opposite of selfishness. God isn't selfish in His relationship with you. He loves you.

When you believe God's love for you is inexhaustible, you won't need to go to others to *get* love; you can go to others to *give* love.

As an illustration: If you needed money, you might go to your friends to get some. However if your father gave you a million dollars, instead of going to your friends to get money, you could go to your friends to give them money.

The following verses describe the kind of love that God gives you.

“Love is patient and kind. Love is not jealous or boastful or proud or rude. Love does not demand its own way. Love is not irritable, and it keeps no record of when it has been wronged. It is never glad about injustice but rejoices whenever the truth wins out. Love never gives up, never loses faith, is always hopeful, and endures through every circumstance. Love will last forever...”

1 Corinthians 13:4–8 (NLT)

- Q8.** What stands out to you in this passage? Why?
- Q9.** What would others experience if you related to them with love instead of selfishness?

When You Love Others

Instead of being proud and boastful (seeking praise), you are humble and satisfied with God's acceptance.

Instead of demanding your own way (controlling), you are hopeful and trusting God.

Instead of keeping a record of wrongs (judging), you are patient and kind.

Instead of giving up on a relationship (rejecting), you endure through every circumstance.

Instead of a broken relationship with them, you have a relationship that lasts.

Christ's Example

Jesus Christ modeled this kind of love in His relationships. He was not competing with God; He was God. Jesus had every right to receive man's praise, control man's behavior, and judge man. However He gave up those rights, humbled Himself, became a man, showed us how to live and love others.

“Your attitude should be the same that Christ Jesus had. Though he was God, he did not demand and cling to his rights as God. He made himself nothing; he took the humble position of a slave and appeared in human form.”

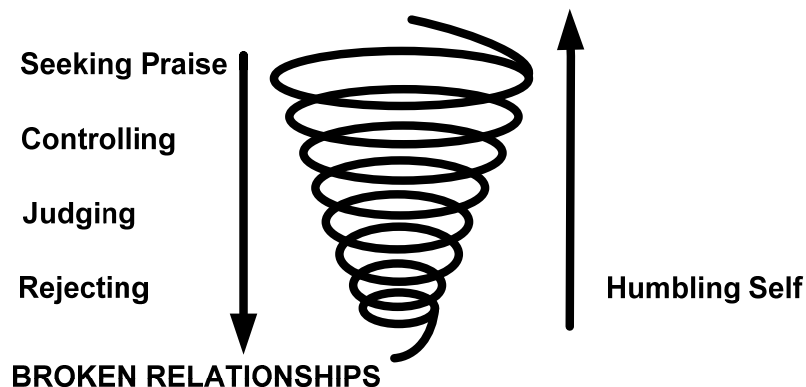
Philippians 2:5–7 (NLT)

Humbling Self

The first step on the upward spiral of My Relationship with Others is having an attitude of *humility*. Rather than seeking praise from others, you consider others as more important than yourself.

*“Don’t be selfish; don’t live to make a good impression on others. Be **humble**, thinking of others as better than yourself.”* **Philippians 2:3** (NLT)

My Relationship with Others



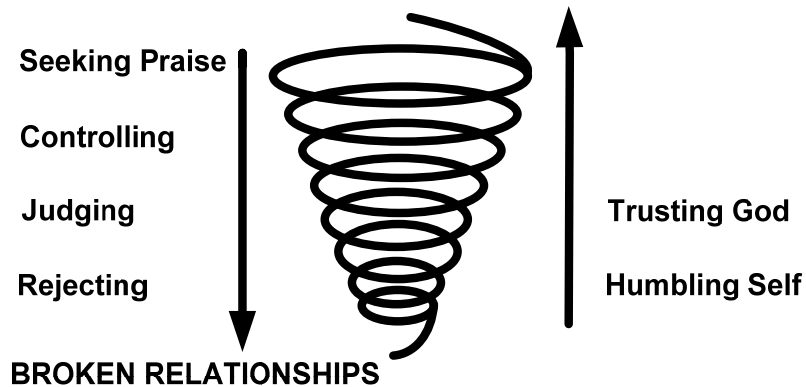
When you are aware of how important you are to God, you won't need others to treat you like you are important. Instead you can treat them like they are important no matter how they treat you.

- Q10.** Is there someone in your life who would feel loved if you treated him or her as more important than yourself? Who is it?

Trusting God

Instead of trying to control the people around you, you can *trust God* with them. God has a plan for them and will work it out in His timing.

My Relationship with Others



Trusting God in relationships looks like thanking God for those people and praying for them. You can be confident that God will do what He wants with them.

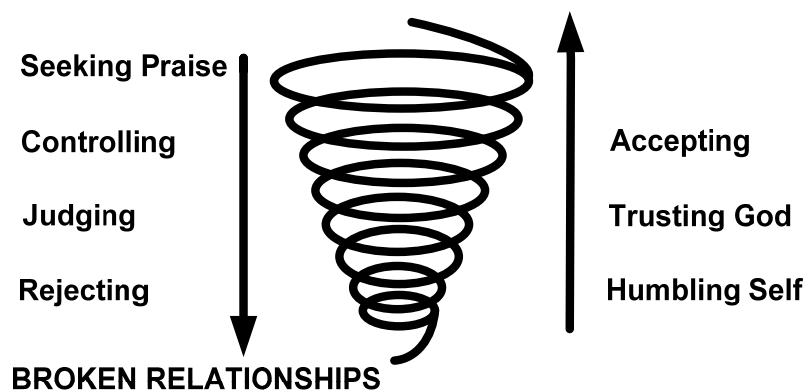
*"Every time I think of you, I give thanks to my God. I always pray for you, and I make my requests with a heart full of joy...I am sure that God, who began the good work within you, will continue his work until it is finally finished on that day when Christ Jesus comes back again." **Philippians 1:3–6** (NLT)*

Q11. Can you trust God with the people you have been trying to change? Why or why not?

Accepting Others

Instead of judging others and faultfinding, you can respond by *accepting* them.

My Relationship with Others



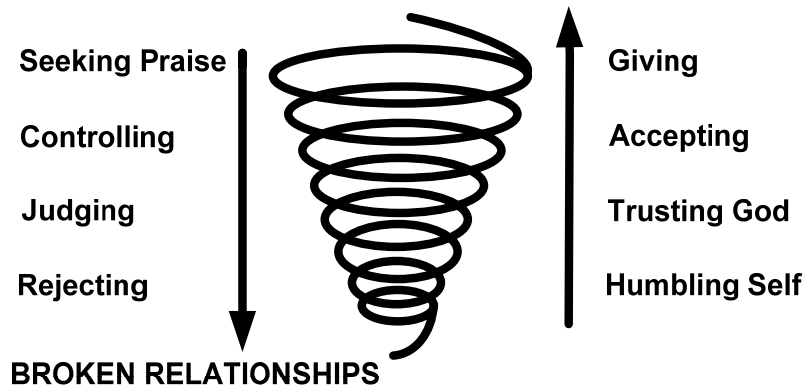
“Be humble and gentle. Be patient with each other, making allowance for each other’s faults because of your love.” Ephesians 4:2 (NLT)

- Q12.** Who in your life would feel more loved if you were patient and made allowances for his or her faults? Describe.

Giving

Instead of rejecting or withholding love from others, you can love them by *giving* to them.

My Relationship with Others



Jesus explains that when you are giving to others, you are loving God.

*"Then the King will say to those on His right hand, 'Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: for I was hungry and you gave Me food; I was thirsty and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in; I was naked and you clothed Me; I was sick and you visited Me; I was in prison and you came to Me.' Then the righteous will answer Him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry and feed You, or thirsty and give You drink? When did we see You a stranger and take You in, or naked and clothe You? Or when did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You?' And the King will answer and say to them, 'Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, **you did it to Me.**'"*
Matthew 25:34–40 (NKJ)

Q13. After reading these verses, do you believe there is something God is showing you to do?

Loving others will always cost you something.

“But if anyone has enough money to live well and sees a brother or sister in need and refuses to help – how can God’s love be in that person? Dear children, let us stop just saying we love each other; let us really show it by our actions.” 1 John 3:17–18 (NLT)

Q14. What did loving you cost Jesus?

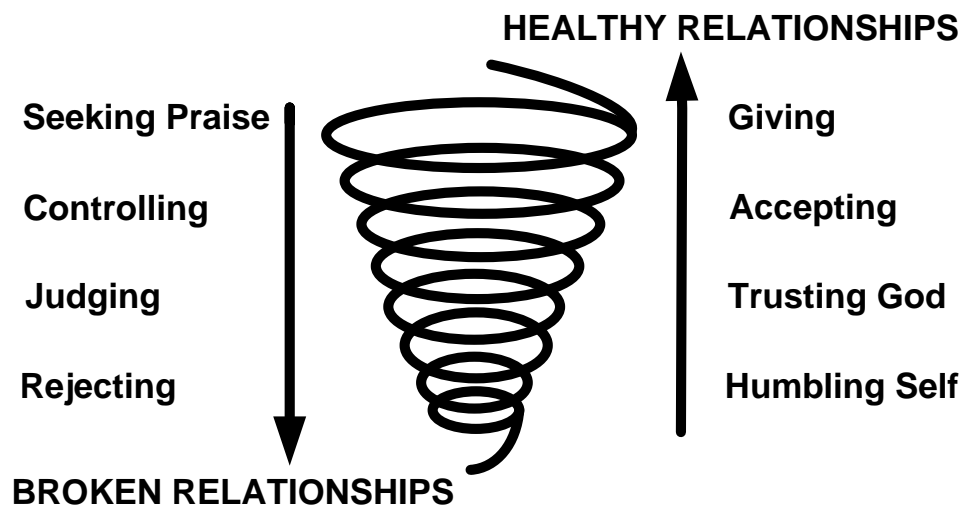
*“We know what real love is because Christ gave up **his life** for us. And so we also ought to give up our lives for our Christian brothers and sisters.” 1 John 3:16 (NLT)*

Healthy Relationships

The result of loving others is *healthy relationships*.

“How wonderful, how beautiful, when brothers and sisters get along!” Psalm 133:1 (MSG)

My Relationship with Others



Instead of broken relationships which come from selfishness, you can have healthy ones because of love.

Your relationships are not based on others filling a void in your life. If you let God fill you, you won't be giving to others out of a need to feel good about yourself. You will be giving to others out of your abundance in order to bless them.

Healthy relationships start when you are secure in God's love for you. You don't need anyone else's love for your security.

"May you experience the love of Christ, though it is so great you will never fully understand it. Then you will be filled with the fullness of life and power that comes from God." **Ephesians 3:19** (NLT)

You can love others even if *they* are insecure. However God doesn't want you to be their source of security. He wants His love to be their source of security. God wants you to love others but He does not want you to be their God.

Choosing to Love

Loving others does not require feelings. It is best described as a decision to *act* lovingly towards others. You can offer a loving act even if you don't feel like doing it. The greatest act of love was Jesus going to the cross. Do you think He felt excited about giving His life?

"Saying, 'Father, if it is Your will, take this cup away from Me; nevertheless not My will, but Yours, be done.'"
Luke 22:42 (NKJ)

The person you act lovingly towards will *feel* loved as soon as you act. Later you may find that your feelings have caught up with your actions.

"Dear children, let us stop just saying we love each other; let us really show it by our actions." **1 John 3:18** (NLT)

Q15. Is there someone that you need to show love to even though you don't *feel* like it?

Q16. Ask God to show you what *action* He wants you to take to love that person. Write down what He shows you. Then do it!

My Relationship with Others

Diagram

Notes