

Sermon for Sunday, June 12, 1977, by Andrew A. Jumper, D.D., Senior Pastor  
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"YOU AND YOUR CLOSEST 'BROTHER'--YOUR MATE!"

St. Matthew 18:15-22

Text: "If your brother sins against you, go and tell him of his fault, between you  
and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother."

St. Matthew 18:15

Next Sunday Dr. Megahan and I will both be attending the General Assembly of our  
denomination in Nashville, Tennessee. Dr. Megahan is an alternate commissioner and  
will go as an observer. Next year he will be one of the official commissioners from  
our Presbytery. I will be leading the team of evangelicals who will be at the Assem-  
bly trying to see to it that the liberals and social activists don't run off with our  
church! Incidentally, one of our own Elders is a commissioner from our Presbytery  
this year and Pete Baptiste will also be attending. The Sunday we will be gone will  
be Father's Day. That's a good opportunity to talk about the Christian family again  
and that's what I want to do this morning since I won't be here next Sunday.

Several years ago I preached a sermon on how to get along with people. I was reminded  
of that sermon recently when a lady with whom I was counseling made a comment to this  
effect: "you wouldn't believe how nice my husband is in public," she said. "Every-  
body thinks he is the nicest guy because he treats everybody with such courtesy.  
"But," she continued, "when we are alone you wouldn't believe how he treats me either.  
When she said that, it struck me how typical this is of so many of us. We do a good  
job of treating our fellow man--our brother--as the Bible says we should. Yet, we  
turn around and treat our mate--the brother closest to us--in dreadful ways. Unfor-  
tunately, many of us are interested in treating our brothers in ways that will make  
people think well of us, yet at the same time we treat our spouses in ways that we  
wouldn't dare treat an outsider. Isn't it too bad that we would treat the person  
closest to us in the worst possible way? For that reason I thought it might be help-  
ful to all of us if we looked at what the Bible has to say about how to treat a  
brother (that is, a fellow human being) and apply those same principles to our mates--  
the brother closest to us.

There are a lot of divorces today and the rate is rapidly increasing. One of the  
reasons is the poor way we treat each other in marriage. Maybe it will help our homes  
if we take some of the principles of Christian brotherhood and apply them to our homes  
Surely we should be willing to treat our husband or our wife as well as the Bible  
tells us to treat our brother.

I suppose Adam and Eve had about as ideal a situation as you could have for marriage.  
He didn't have to listen to her tell about all the men she could have married--and  
she didn't have to listen to him talk about mother's cooking! In our Scripture for  
this morning Jesus lays down five basic principles for getting along with our brother  
--especially the one closest to us.

The first principle is the principle of confrontation. Jesus says, "If your brother  
sins against you, go and tell him his fault..." In effect, Jesus says that if there  
is trouble between you and your closest brother, the first thing to do is go talk to  
him about it. There are two good reasons for doing this. The first reason is what  
happens to me if I don't confront the other person. This thing begins to build up  
inside of me. Soon it is all I can think about and I'm making up imaginary conver-  
sations to let my mate know just how I feel and really cut her down in the process.

Do you do that? Most of us do. What started out as a small thing begins to build up all out of proportion. Your stomach gets tied in knots, your blood pressure goes up, and you begin to have really serious physical and emotional by-products. I have known people to become actually ill because of such internal pressure.

Have you noticed how your perspective on life begins to change? Soon we are walking around with a chip on our shoulder, looking for our mate to do something to knock it off. Have you noticed, when you do that, you can always find your mate doing or saying something that can be interpreted to knock that chip off your shoulder? Do you know, when we become so sensitive to ourselves and the way we are being treated, we actually become insensitive to our mate and his or her feelings? The next time you have something boiling inside of you about your mate, you try that and see if it isn't true. Ask yourself, "Wait a minute! How is my closest brother feeling? What kind of things is she or he experiencing?"

So in the principle of confrontation, the first thing is what happens to me if I don't. The second reason for confronting my closest brother is because of what it does for the other person. When you confront your closest brother about his or her offense you may discover one of several things. You may discover, for example, that your mate did not mean what he or she said or did in the way you took it, or in the spirit that you understood it. Again, you may discover that he or she may have meant it at the time, but is already sorry for saying it. Not many of us set out deliberately to hurt another person's feelings. Most of us say or do things on impulse and then we could bite our tongues! So, you may discover that the other person is already looking for a way to make amends or apologize to you. When you go to your mate about it, it opens the door for that person to ask forgiveness. Or, again, you may discover there is a real difference between you. But to talk it over makes you both feel better toward one another and helps dilute the feeling of alienation.

But Jesus not only says, "if your brother sins against you, go and tell him of his fault..", he goes on to add, "between you and him alone." Here we are introduced to the principle of privacy. One of the most damaging faults in marriages is when one mate holds the other up to ridicule in public. Sometimes we try to change the behavior of our mates by telling others in public about their sins, their faults, their failures, or by telling jokes at their expense. Actually, we are trying to gain praise for ourselves in a reverse sort of way. What we are really saying to others is "Am I not patient, or kind, or tolerant to put up with my mate?" It is cruel and insensitive to do that to your closest brother and it does violate a command of Jesus who says that it should be between the two of you alone. Let me suggest that if you really want to improve your relationship to your closest brother try this: the next time you are with a group of friends, brag on your mate. Pick out his or her good qualities or something special that has been done and tell your friends about it. I have a friend who married a lady who hated to cook. When she did cook something that was half fit to eat, he bragged on her in front of all his friends. In two years time he had turned her into a gourmet cook! Try it with your closest brother and see how it works for you.

In verse 19 of our Scripture Jesus says, "Again I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything they ask, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven." Here we are introduced to the principle of agreement. Now, the word "agree" has some implications. It implies that you work things out, that you have some give and take. It implies an effort to reconcile difference and arrive at a common understanding.

You see, as long as I am trying to work out some agreement with my mate, I am admittin

that her position has worth, too. It means I am taking her seriously as a human being, as a person of worth, and that her ideas, her feelings, her thoughts deserve consideration, too. When it has to be my way only, I am putting her down. I am saying her thoughts or feelings are not worth consideration. In effect it says that she is not a person in her own right, but must be an extension of my own personality. Do you see that? To work at an agreement says to my mate, "you are a person of worth. What you think is important, too." And, do you know, Jesus blesses that. He says that Christian people who are working out their difference in some kind of agreement will have that blessed by God.

The fourth principle that Jesus introduces us to is found in verse 20. There we read, "For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in the midst of them." This introduces us to the principle of worship. An advertising slogan used by the Church is this: "The Family that Prays Together Stays Together." Now, that might sound like a cliché, but the fact is, independent scientific studies show that it is precisely true. Recently I heard some statistics. According to these figures, three out of five marriages are ending in divorce and the rate is climbing. But if a couple belongs to a church, the rate drops to one out of forty. However, if a couple belongs to the same church and actively participates in it, the divorce rate drops to one out of four hundred.

You try that in your marriage and see how it works with your closest brother. Go to church every Sunday, share your hymnbook, hold hands during the prayers, listen to the sermons and talk together about them. Suddenly you will discover that something is happening in your marriage. You see, the fact is, Jesus gives us an unequivocal promise. He says that when we are gathered in His name, He is in our midst. When Jesus gets in the middle of a marriage, it is going to make a tremendous difference.

The fifth principle that Jesus lays down in our Scripture this morning is found in verses 21 and 22. Peter asks Jesus how many times he should forgive his brother, as many as seven times? And Jesus replies, "I do not say to you seven times, but seventy times seven." Here we are introduced to the principle of forgiveness. You see, in getting along with our closest brother, the principle of confrontation may fail, the principle of privacy may not work, the principle of agreement may break down, the principle of worship may not turn the trick. But when all else has failed, Jesus has given us one final principle for dealing with the brother closest to us--He has given us the principle of forgiveness.

How often should you forgive your mate--your closest brother? Once? Twice? Seven times? No, Jesus says we should forgive and keep on forgiving. When everything else fails us, we can still exercise forgiveness.

I remember reading a story once about a farmer who had a creek going through his land. This creek was important because it provided water for his crops and was his only means of getting his produce to market. One year a barge was accidentally sunk in the creek and silt and mud began to build up around it. Soon a little island was formed. The water backed up and the creek got more shallow as the silt and mud filled in. Soon most of his land was covered with water and his only means of getting to market was gone. In desperation, he finally dynamited the old barge and opened up the channel of the creek. In a short time, the creek returned to its bed and things became normal again. So often the same thing happens to us in our relationship to the closest brother. Something gets sunk in the channel of communication, in the channel of relationship. Maybe it is a careless word, a hurt feeling, an unthinking deed. Our flow of communication is blocked and although it may not have amounted to

much in the beginning, the consequences begin to build up with all sorts of serious by-products. We need to dynamite that old wreck. We need to blow that old barge out of the channel of our relationship. The one sure way to do it is through forgiveness.

Maybe there is something between you and your closest brother this morning. Will you try the principle of forgiveness? When you forgive, also forget--put it out of your heart and mind.

Yes, Jesus gives us some principles for getting along with our brother. But those principles work especially well with our closest brother--our mate. He gives us the principle of confrontation, the principle of privacy, the principle of agreement, the principle of worship. And when all else fails, He gives us forgiveness. One bitter day--when all else had failed--our Saviour looked down from an agonizing cross. His eyes were dim with pain and surely His heart was broken because of His rejection. Yet, from the depths of His soul He lifted up His eyes to God and said, "Father, forgive them..."

Try that with your brother--especially the one closest to you--and see if it won't work for you.