



HOW TO HEAL TOXIC RELATIONSHIPS

Big Idea

In the final installment of the It's Complicated series, Pastor Larry Stockstill talked about how to heal toxic relationships. Dishonor, distrust, and disloyalty affect the emotional health of a relationship like poison affects physical health. They make relationships toxic. Usually, when something becomes toxic, it has to be abandoned or disposed of, but God can renew toxic relationships. Like the tree used in Exodus 15:23-25 to sweeten the bitter water of Marah, the tree of the Cross and the Lord our Healer (v. 26) can turn the bitterness of toxic relationships to blessing.

In order to heal a toxic relationship, we first have to honor the other person. We can do this by looking past the person to the image of God within them. When we see them as God does, we will be able to honor them—even when the relationship isn't yet in a healthy place. Next, we need to work on building trust in that relationship. When we see a flaw or a failure, or think there might have been a breach of trust, we have a decision to make: We can suspect the worst and place that suspicion on the relationship, or we can choose to trust and try to understand before placing blame. People who want to be trusted have to make themselves trustworthy, and this gives the other person the opportunity to be honest and transparent, even if they've failed. Finally, we need to choose to be loyal by showing compassion, patience, faithfulness, and forgiveness. This gives us the ability to put the other person before ourselves and to stick with them through difficult times.

Discussion Questions

- Of the three steps to heal a toxic relationship, which do you think is the hardest to implement and why?
- When considering a toxic relationship you may have, how do you think you can take a step towards showing that person honor?
- God wants a relationship with you that is based on honor, trust, and loyalty. How can you demonstrate your commitment to Him in these ways?

Prayer Focus

Father, thank You for being a God of loyal love and for demonstrating how I can love others well. Please help me identify and heal any toxic relationships in my life. I pray to see the fruit of honor, trust, and loyalty in my relationships.

Next Steps

If you have a toxic relationship, commit to taking the steps necessary to heal it. To start, think of one way you can show honor to that person, and do it the next time you have the opportunity.

Leader Tip

Toxic relationships have the potential to cover a wide range of circumstances that may be difficult for some to discuss. Be sure to emphasize that your group is a safe space where people can be open and honest, and ask your group members to honor the group's confidentiality.