

Relationships Under Fire

8 June 2021



I have been reflecting on how difficult it's been for so many throughout the COVID-19 pandemic and its resulting lockdowns since last year. I don't think I've ever seen the high levels of mental health and well-being challenges that we are currently experiencing, both within the church and the wider community.

In life, every person has a significant amount of resilience with which to stand strong against challenges. This is usually built over decades. However, it appears that the impact of successive lockdowns and the actual pandemic itself has eroded resilience to an all-time low, and most people are feeling more fragile. In increasing instances, they are unable to handle situations that, in better times, might have been like water off a duck's back.

Strained Mental Resilience

On the Isle of Man, [suicide](#) rates have exponentially increased, and we are seeing a significant increase in numbers from all age groups accessing [mental health](#) services. In some instances, the strain we are taking can be really obvious, as evidenced by a crisis event. However, for the majority of us, it has been a longer and slower process, one of which we're possibly still personally unaware. Yet those who know and love us may be seeing the tell-tale signs.

The impact of successive lockdowns and the stress of this pandemic is testing the resilience of all our relationships, friendships, [marriages](#) and even church leadership teams. How we think and interact with others, even those who love us the most, can so easily be skewed. Undoubtedly, the stress of this past year has affected how we view and respond to others, as our lens has been cracked.

My prayer...is that we will be known as people who are not only recipients of great grace, but as those who also lavishly give such grace to others.

Great Grace for Resilient Relationships

Reflect on this question: Am I feeling the need to make sudden life-changing decisions about marriage, family, spiritual family, calling, relationships, career or finances without, in the process, seeking a godly perspective from others with a consistent, fruitful and integrous walk with Jesus? If so, alarm bells should be ringing!

It was said of the early church (Acts 4:33) that 'great grace' was upon them. My prayer, perhaps above all in these days, is that we will be known as people who are not only recipients of great grace, but as those who also lavishly give such [grace](#) to others.

Three Ways to Keep Grace Flowing in Relationships

1. Give Grace Abundantly and Overlook Offences Quickly

"Sensible people control their temper; they earn respect by overlooking wrongs." – Proverbs 19:11 (NLT)

If you hadn't slept for the night and faced a stressful day ahead, most of us would be aware that the way in which we would need to deal with issues that day would have to be different. We would be very conscious of how just one disturbed night of sleep impacts us. But the question is, are we still self-aware now, 15-plus months into this pandemic? Are we as aware of the impact of the stress, [losses](#) and uncertainties on us and its influence on our responses to others around us? Inevitably relationships will start to show strain, and unless we're quick to forgive, deep-seated resentment will take root.

None of us naturally feel like forgiving. It is a choice as a disciple of Jesus.

[Corrie Ten Boom](#) survived the concentration camps, but many of her family didn't. After the war, she had a ministry of sharing with people about [the importance of forgiveness](#). One night she finished speaking in a German church and shook people's hands as they left. Suddenly, before her stood one of the evil guards from her concentration camp. He told her how he had become a Christian and experienced God's forgiveness but wanted to hear from Corrie's lips that she had forgiven him too. It was only then that she realised how much she was struggling. She fumbled about with her hands in her pockets. She knew that forgiveness wasn't a feeling, it was a choice. Eventually, she shook the man's hand and said, *"I forgive you."*

None of us naturally feel like forgiving. It is a choice as a disciple of Jesus. Corrie has said, *"Forgiveness is to set a prisoner free and to discover the prisoner was you!"* Grace is beautiful. Giving others grace is so attractive, and it blesses us too!

2. Always Believe the Best About Others and Their Motives

"Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things." – 1 Corinthians 13:7 (ESV, own emphasis added)

At the best of times, we second guess others' motivations, but when we're fighting to keep our

thought processes healthy, we often fall foul of 'stinking thinking'. The Psalmist says, *"He is not afraid of bad news"* (Psalm 112:7, ESV). My confession is that on some days, I allow my thinking to immediately go to the worst-case scenario, and I have to battle to reign it back in, taking every thought captive and making it obedient to Christ.

With the exit of Prince Harry and his wife Meghan from both the UK and royal duties, the media has been filled with stories about the British Royal family. This has been a family who has struggled to believe the best about one another for decades, with recent interviews and podcasts adding fuel to the flames and significantly increasing that mistrust.

The most recent revelations in mid-May 2021 regarding 'that interview' with Diana, Princess of Wales, by BBC reporter Martin Bashir in 1995, shows just how prone we are to believe the worst. It would appear that the reporter lied and falsified documents to secure the scoop of the 'tell-all' interview, which caused Diana to believe the worst of the Royal Family's actions and motives. Her son, Prince William, the Duke of Cambridge, in response to the revelations, said, *"This played on her fears and fuelled her paranoia..."* It is an extreme example, but when our resilience is weakened, our default isn't positive. We can find that our thinking and, in turn, our feelings take on a destructive life of their own.

I'm not seeing everything. I don't know all the facts. Jesus alone does.

I don't know the motivations of other people, and the ideal place to start in all my relationships is to believe the best. I'm not seeing everything. I don't know all the facts. Jesus alone does. If I can keep believing the best, then I'll be revealing the love of God rather than falling into the trap of a downward and negative spiral of mind games.

3. Don't Make Any Sudden or Life-Changing Decisions

*Understand this, my dear brothers and sisters: You must all be quick to **listen**, **slow** to speak, and **slow** to get angry. Human anger does not produce the righteousness God desires.* – James 1:19-20 (NLT, own emphasis added)

We've been called to a ministry of reconciliation. In every struggling relationship, reconciliation is still our goal. The enemy is currently having a field day causing division in marriages, families, among the closest of friends, and even in local churches and [leadership teams](#). It has been said, *"Speak when you're angry, and you'll make the best speech you'll ever regret."*

Too often, the knee-jerk reaction to potential conflict (both real but also increasingly based on the thoughts whizzing around our minds that have never been addressed person-to-person to gain understanding), is to opt for the nuclear option, which is to react either in a fit of rage or to quietly pull back from that relationship. Resist the temptation, which is often irrational, to make sudden and life-changing decisions. Pray, and chat things through with your elders and those who love you most.

John Maxwell's piece of wisdom regarding couples making decisions is a starting point. He says, *"I don't need everyone I know to agree with my decisions, but I do need my wife to be in full agreement."*

His yoke is easy, and His burden is light.

Jesus Was Never in a Rush

The account of Jesus on his way to heal Jairus' daughter and the faith-filled intervention of the woman with the issue of blood speaks to us on so many levels. Consider this: Jesus never ran anywhere. He was never in a rush. He walked slowly through the crowds, and because of that, a woman disturbed heaven and received her healing that very day. When we find life-accelerating decisions regularly being made on the hoof, there aren't enough hours in the day, a weekly rest day is shelved, pressure is coming from all sides, and the compulsion is to pull the plug on relationships and commitments, you can be sure that it is evidence of a life no longer yoked to Jesus. His yoke is easy, and His burden is light.

Remember how loving and life-giving these [resilient relationships](#) were before the storm of this pandemic started early in 2020? God longs to restore relationships, friendships, families and marriages. In this challenging season with so many relationships taking strain, let's be grace-givers. May much grace come upon you as you reflect upon this article, and may that same grace you have received from Jesus overflow from you into the lives of everyone you meet.