

Relationships

Introduction

The following material is suitable for discussion groups as well as for individual study. It was specially developed for musicians and artists at the "Crescendo Summer Institute of the Arts 2006" in Hungary.

Concerning our subject:

As fish need water and birds the air, so the human being needs relationships. We are in every way relationship-based creatures: we do not arrive in this world all alone, but have, when we first see the light of day, already lived for nine months in an unseen relationship. And thus we go through life - not like Robinson Crusoe, on a lonely island, but together with others. We are thus involved with the subject of "relationships" our whole life long.

Now there are no other religions in the world which are so relationship-orientated as the Jewish and the Christian. They speak of a personal God and even of a covenant between man and God. In the Bible, the wonderful dynamic of a good relationship between man and God and the totally dramatic consequences of a bad relationship are shown - as well as between fellow human beings. It can therefore be only of benefit if we cast the occasional glance at biblical texts.

The discussion material is suitable for local artists' discussion groups. We would very much like to encourage you to start such a group. Please keep us informed (under info@crescendo.org) if and how this happens, and how we in Crescendo can offer you support.

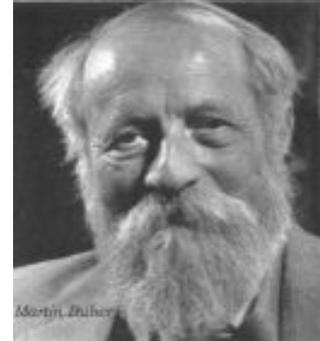
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We hope that this course, despite its brevity, which leaves out countless aspects of the subject, will lead to good discussions - and of course also to good relationships!

1.

Building relationships: from "I" to "Thou"

In his book "Ich und Du" ("I and Thou") (1957), the Jewish philosopher Martin Buber writes: "All real life is encounter" and: "Encountering a 'Thou' makes a person into an 'I'. That means: only through relationships do we become mature personalities. Through relationships not with objects or deeds ("It") but with other persons ("Thou"). How does an "I" encounter a "Thou"?"



Buber says:

- Not through just working, organising and being concerned with many things in the world "outside" ("I - It").
- Not by just living "internally" in one's subjective world of feeling ("I - I").
- Not when people "only" have feelings for one another ("I + another I"), although feelings are important!
- A real relationship is mutual ("I – Thou")
- In a real relationship, there is a special factor: love. "Love is responsibility of an "I" for a "Thou". Something special grows up in the "middle" between two persons ("I - love - Thou")

How important are relationships for me?

What ideas about relationships did I take on in early years?
Do these have anything to do with what Martin Buber says?

Buber names two fundamental relationships: "I - Thou" and "I - It". He warns us that interpersonal relationships can become "It" relationships. That means that the other person is then for me an object...

We can go on from Buber's thoughts. If the "I - It" relationship replaces the "I - Thou" relationship, the following happens:

- the other person is only interesting in as far as he or she is important for my (artistic) goals.
- the other person is an "object". He has to fulfil my needs. He has to applaud me. He has to contribute to my success.
- or in reverse: I am an object for other persons and their wish for success.
- the other person has to match my preconceptions, otherwise I cannot accept him.
- real "I - Thou" relationships are impossible.
- the "I" is thus destroyed.

Are other people for me a "Thou" or sometimes also an "It"?

Do I notice when I am an "It" object for others?

If so, when? What is the reason for this?

What can I do about this?

Let us take some time now to get to know each other better in a discussion group! Let us tell each other something about our lives. Where do I come from? What is important for me? What interests me, etc.? Perhaps one can make a start today, tomorrow someone else continues , etc.

2.

Learning to relate: accepting oneself - being accepted

In the Bible we read: "Love your neighbour as yourself!" This sentence appears already in the Old Testament and is then used by Jesus in the so-called "double commandment of love": "Love God with your whole heart... and your neighbour as yourself." (Matthew 22,37-39). Expressed negatively, this means: ***I cannot love others if I do not love myself.***

Is this true? Have we experienced this ourselves?

An example:

If I cannot accept my own music and art - how can I then appreciate other artists and praise them? Precisely in regard to our (artistic, creative) activity it is noticeable: we often have difficulties in accepting ourselves (and our work)!

We often have a deficit in love, in recognition, in praise... for this reason, we often cannot pass these on to others. We are then like an empty jug.



What are the consequences?

- Must we therefore begin by being egocentric and thus first of all receive fullness?
- Or should we on the contrary become totally "altruistic"? An altruist is someone sacrifices himself for others. But there are people who sacrifice themselves for others and in the process become bitter.
- Or is there another path? Perhaps the path of Mother Theresa? She said "We should love until it hurts!" But Mother Theresa was not bitter, but instead very joyful in her self-sacrificing service. She showed that life can become like a "Roman fountain"- the water overflows from the rim because the basin is full.
- Or is there another path? Perhaps the path of Mother Theresa? She said "We should love until it hurts!" But Mother Theresa was not bitter, but instead very joyful in her self-sacrificing service. She showed that life can become like a "Roman fountain"- the water overflows from the rim because the basin is full.



How can something like that work?



Here are some more quotations from Mother Theresa. Let's read them and reflect on them.

- *"We can work until we drop exhausted; but if our work is not woven through with love, it is useless."*
- *"If you know how very much God loves you, then you can only be alive when this love shines out from you."*
- *"Many attempt to fill the emptiness they feel with eating, radio, television and constant external activities. But this emptiness can only be filled by God."*
- *"Let the love of God take complete and total hold of your heart. Allow his love to become, so to speak, your second nature."*

What do the words of Mother Theresa say regarding our topic?

For further reflection:

If we can only accept ourselves with difficulty, and if it is therefore not easy for us to "love" others, then the following passages from the Bible help us:

John's Gospel 5, 9 and 13: Jesus says:

"As the Father has loved me, love one another; remain in my love!"

"No-one has greater love than this, that he lay down his life for his friends".

Letter to the Romans 5,5:

"The love of God is poured out in our hearts through the Holy Spirit, whom He has given to us"

3.

Learning to relate: living in a relationship with God

Martin Buber writes in "I and Thou" a third section on the relationship with God. And Mother Theresa says: *"Let the love of God take complete and total hold of your heart. Allow his love to become, so to speak, your second nature."* We can only do this if we have the right picture of God.

What picture of God do we have?

Often we make wrong pictures of God for ourselves. He then looks like us - or the "church" - or like some Christians or like...

A man on his death-bed said: God is so harsh. I cannot believe in a loving God. The pastor asked: "What does this God really look like?" The man replied: "I can't describe him. He is simply harsh." But the pastor didn't drop the matter. "Describe God." The man then thought about it for a long time and finally this was what came out: "God actually looks like me!"

It is not so easy to believe in a God of love if we carry wrong pictures of him around with us. For example, if I pray "Our Father in Heaven" and this perhaps touches somewhere memories of my own father, who was not always so good to me...

Experiment: let's close our eyes for a moment and imagine that God now meets us. What do we think he would say to us?

I suspect that various different voices have made themselves heard here and there... Perhaps we have heard:



- "There you are at last. It's high time that you came to me again. It's really been a long time. I'm not satisfied with you..."
- Or fears have come up: God wants to take something away from me because I'm so sinful. God wants to punish me.
- Or: God wants to chain me as a slave worker - he is demanding something from me and I have to produce results for him.
- Or: "You don't have to search for me at all. I'm there in everything that surrounds you. In the stones and the trees, in your lovable fellow human beings and in beauty. That should be enough for you. Anyway, you can't know more about me than that."
- Or: emptiness – there is no God! Or only as a fantasy invented by man.

It is therefore important:

- that we see through these mechanisms.
- that we allow our picture of God to be corrected.
- that we listen to those people who have had experience of God. People in the Bible and around us...

The Bible talks about a God who seeks a relationship with us because He loves us.

Do we know passages in the Bible which speak of God's love?

Do we know works of art and pieces of music which speak of God's love?

Have we experienced God's love ourselves?

For further reflection:

- God created us human beings so that he could have a deep relationship with us.
- God is in himself "relationship": Father - Son - Holy Spirit.
- God still loves us, his creatures, even when we don't want to know anything more about him and become guilty regarding him.
- Jesus Christ names God "Abba" (= a pet-name for father), which was certainly very unusual at that time. This shows that he lived in a very deep relationship with the heavenly Father.
- Jesus himself showed in his life - and in his death for us - how much God loves us: in the 1st Letter of John 4,16 we read about Jesus: "*And so we know and rely on the love that God has for us. God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in him.*"
- If God is a person who loves us, then we can speak to him and ask him: "Show me your love!"

"If you are seeking God and don't know where to begin, learn to pray and take the trouble to pray every day." (Mother Theresa).

4.

Learning to relate: learning to love a "Thou"

"Love your neighbour" (the other person)... This is sometimes very difficult. It is sometimes easier to love an "It" than a "Thou". But our destiny is to love. Jesus even says: "Love your enemies". That's even more difficult! How do we learn to be capable of love and of relationships at all?

Upto now, we have established the following:

- We should build an "I - Thou" relationship instead of an "I - It" relationship.
- Only when we have learned to love ourselves and to accept God's love can we give love to others. The pre-condition is that we have the right knowledge of God and can lay aside wrong pictures of God.

Which thoughts on this topic have become important to us since the last discussion round?

An additional point on "learning to relate"

A rabbi looks out with his pupil through the window onto the street, where people rush to and fro and don't have any time for relationships any more. "Why is this so?", asks the pupil. The Rabbi replies: "This window allows us to see through to other people. Now imagine that there is silver behind this glass. What do we have then? A mirror in which I can only see myself. Sometimes in life it only takes a little silver, and suddenly a man sees only himself".

What does this mean for us, for musicians, for artists, for those in the business of culture?
What do we "see"?

What do we say about this view: "It's a matter of creating art as well as possible. Art in its turn is a means of communication. So we as artists have less time and energy for relationships!"

Excursus:

We can derive an aesthetic principle from the Bible: "Beauty" (artistic quality) is not a value in isolation: "beauty" in the Bible is only then good when it is within a "context of blessing": when others are enriched by it or God is praised..

- the word "good / beautiful" in the account of Creation ("See, it was very good") implies a relationship: "good / beautiful for..."
- God created the most wonderful work of art (heaven and earth) out of love, for a "Thou"!
- God's glory is not beauty in isolation but is shown to man, to whom it constantly brings gifts!
- Where man does not place his art in this context of blessing, his work and he himself are in danger. The aesthetic quality remains, but the moral (and religious quality) is missing.
- Beauty can even lead to becoming guilty: Jerusalem falls away from God and must now hear from God (Ezekiel 16,15): "You relied on your beauty." In the prophetic book of Amos we

read how the poor are oppressed - and how despite this beautiful worship services are held. But God speaks through the prophet (Amos 5,23): "Away with the noise of your songs! I will not listen to the music of your harps!" In the Third Reich, when there was a "fashion" for Gregorian chant, the theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer said: "Whoever does not cry out on behalf of the Jews is not entitled to sing Gregorian chant!"

In what kind of service can our art find a place? Is it pursued for its own sake? Is it only serving the business of culture? Is it only serving to bring personal success? Or does it come back constantly to a "Thou"? What happens then with us and our art? (Experiences?)

Are we aware that we can glorify God through art - like Handel or Bach, who wrote "Soli Die Gloria" under all his compositions? What happens then with us and our art? (Experiences?)



We can encourage each other and pray for one another that our art should be freed from wrong "It" relationships and time and again makes the breakthrough to "Thou".



5. Gaining relationships: friendship - partnership

Of course, not all relationships are good!

It is very important to ask these questions: Which people are in the most central area of my life? Which people do I allow to influence me? From which do I want to learn? What are friends? And of course: With whom do I want to travel through life?

That does not mean that I should not build up any other "I - Thou" relationships. But there are different concentric circles of relationships in my life.

Let's make a list:

What circles of relationships do I have? (It's best to use names)

Questions for reflection: (in the next few hours):

- The circles of relationships look like an archery target. Where do I aim most of my arrows? At the edge or at the centre? Do I set the right priorities? That means: do I spend enough time with the people who are important to me? With which people would I like / should I spend more time because I can learn from them or because we need each other or because...

- Are there people who have been on the edge until now, but should really be at the centre?

In choosing people for important relationships, we always let ourselves be guided by certain values. What are these values? Or, putting the question another way, what are important characteristics for me in a friendship / in an important person to relate to?

Values that we can allow ourselves to be guided by in relationships:

Values	Priorities for working together artistically¹	Priorities for friendship	Priorities for (marriage) partnership
<i>Family responsibilities</i>			
<i>Because the other person is influential</i>			
<i>Because the other person admires and praises me</i>			
<i>Shared interests - what are they?</i>			
<i>Shared faith</i>			
<i>The other balances out my failings</i>			
<i>Shared areas of ministry</i>			
<i>Shared feelings, attraction, love</i>			
<i>Openness, honesty</i>			
<i>I can be "myself" with the other, don't have to play a role.</i>			
<i>The other is a good artist</i>			
<i>Same goals in life</i>			
<i>We can talk to each easily</i>			
<i>Same cultural background</i>			
<i>I can learn from the other, because he can also correct me</i>			

Put these words in their order of importance (1 = most important...) for at least one column and then share about the results.

For further thought:

We know that Jesus firmly underlined the commandment "Honour your father and mother". But there is an interesting situation described in Matthew 12, 46-50.

"While he was still speaking to the crowd, his mother and brothers stood outside, wanting to speak to him. Someone said to him, "Your mother and brothers are standing outside, wanting to speak to you. He replied to him, "Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?" Pointing to his disciples, he said, "Here are my mother and my brothers. For whoever does the will of my father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother".

How do we understand the story? What can it mean for us?

¹ Imagine that you will start an artistic / musical group with others. What will be important?

6. Gaining relationships: making concrete decisions

Entering casual relationships is not difficult. Maintaining them, having a "binding" relationship with someone, is certainly something else. Perhaps you have difficulties in choosing a partner. Or maintaining a friendship over a long period. One reason for this could be perfectionist expectations. This is a characteristic that artistic people in particular are very familiar with. In this case, one says: "No-one is good enough to be my friend, let alone my partner!"

People with deep perfectionist tendencies - and often particularly artists! - have high expectations. In the same way that they are not completely happy with any of their works, they are also not satisfied with themselves and with another person.

They have a more or less clear vision of a friendship - or let's call it an ideal picture. But no real person can ever live up to this ideal.

Do we know "artistic perfectionism"? If yes, what effect does this have on relationships?

Hans Christian Andersen tells us the fairy tale of a butterfly that wanted to marry a flower. It flew around everywhere, but never found the right one - and at the end was captured by man. Did Andersen perhaps use this to illustrate a personal problem?



How things were for Eva in Paradise! Adam asked her: "Do you love me?" Eva answered: "Who else?"

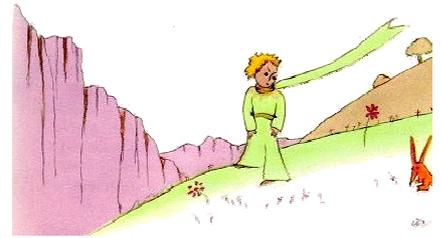
Our present time makes it additionally difficult to make a long-term decision. We speak of the "post-modern multi-option society": we have so many decisions to make because there is such a big choice. This already starts in the supermarket. And this demands so much from us that we then prefer to say: "Alright, I'll choose this today. But only for today! Tomorrow I'll possibly choose something else!"

How can we counteract this? Are there "counter-strategies"?

Antoine de St-Exupéry's "Little Prince" meets a fox. The fox wants them to become friends. How is this going to happen? There are a thousand foxes and a thousand youngsters like the Little Prince. The fox says: let's get familiar with each other. "You will be the only one for me in the whole world and I will be the only one for you..."

One youngster amongst many - and one fox amongst many foxes thus form a friendship!

There is no relationship without the decision: I mean ONE PARTICULAR person. I accept this person with all his weaknesses - as he has to accept me with all my weaknesses.



What do we gain through this decision?



A glance in the mirror shows you the truth: we can't choose anyone else! We must / we are permitted to accept ourselves as we are. But despite this, many people are not reconciled to themselves! They shy away from themselves and try to "change" their identity.

For further reflection:

A glance at the Bible shows you that God made a very concrete choice for a particular people: Israel.

Deuteronomy 7,6:

"For thou art a holy people unto Jehovah thy God: Jehovah thy God hath chosen thee to be a people for his own possession, above all peoples that are upon the face of the earth. Jehovah did not set his love upon you, nor choose you, because ye were more in number than any people; for ye were the fewest of all peoples: but because Jehovah loveth you, and because he would keep the oath which he sware unto your fathers, hath Jehovah brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you out of the house of bondage, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt."

The Old Testament speaks on almost every page about God's faithfulness towards Israel. He holds firm in this, even when Israel is unfaithful. And the new Testament speaks on almost every page about God's love and faithfulness towards us. God means us personally and remains faithful to us.

7. Staying fit for relationships: overcoming jealousy

Jealousy is poison for relationships. Overcoming jealousy is a particularly big challenge for artists.

How does jealousy start?

What experience do we have of this (active and passive), and how did we deal with this?

There are various ways of showing jealousy - open or concealed.

A singer was engaged for a concert again after the birth of her child, a comeback. This was a great success. The singer was given an overwhelming reception. A colleague, who also had children and was hoping for a comeback, was there. Her reaction was to go up to the singer and ask: "How did you organise someone to look after the baby?" And then she mentioned how quickly children are disadvantaged because of a career. She didn't mention the concert at all. All she did was to create a bad conscience regarding children.

The singer who had made the comeback was phoned the next day by another colleague. She was eager to hear what he, a specialist, thought of the concert. But he didn't mention the concert at all, but only asked about some sheet music and about other concerts. Not a word about the concert, and the singer didn't have the courage to ask. After the phone call, she was beginning to have doubts. Perhaps the concert didn't really go that well? Was it bad, and nobody dared to say anything? It was only later that she got encouraging reactions from colleagues.

Have we experienced other forms of jealousy?

- One can completely ignore the achievements of others
- One can try to give the other person a bad conscience
- One can make little remarks to damage the confidence of the other person.
- One can also be quite openly jealous and then perhaps try to make the failings of the other person seem bigger than they are! Etc.
- One can project the jealousy onto others and think: "The others are jealous of me!"
- Salieri in the film AMADEUS murdered Mozart out of jealousy. One can also attempt to "murder" others in a non-physical sense...

What effect does jealousy have on the person who is jealous?
Personally? Artistically?

In the Bible there are two jealous brothers – Jacob and Esau. Jacob had deceived Esau. But later Esau said to Jacob: "I have plenty, brother, keep what you have." (Genesis 33,9). A famous psychology book by Thomas A.Harris has the title "I'm OK, you're OK". Harris writes: "Christ's central message was the term grace. He doesn't say: 'You could be OK, if...' or: 'You will be accepted, if...', but he does say: 'You are accepted - without any preconditions.'"

To what extent can such statements offer a solution for the problem of jealousy?

What gives us strength to make such statements ourselves?

For further reflection:

In his book "Zum Teufel mit der Eifersucht" ("To the devil with jealousy"), Reinhold Ruthe names **Fundamental Misconceptions in Life**. It is worth asking these questions:

Do I know these misconceptions? How do I get rid of them and reach the truth? What would this liberation mean for my art?

1. As an adult, I must be loved by everyone and appreciated, particularly by important personalities around me.
2. I must be competent, able and successful in several areas if I want to be recognised as a valuable member of human society.
3. I feel it is a catastrophe if things do not go as I thought they would. .
4. My happiness is essentially dependent on other people, on my parents, my partner. But circumstances and society are also responsible for my happiness.
5. It is better for me to go out of the way of difficulties rather than to confront them on my own responsibility.
6. I find it good to be dependent on others, particularly if they are stronger, more intelligent and more reliable.
7. I depend on my past. It has formed my life
8. I cannot be satisfied with imperfections. It is a catastrophe if a perfect solution cannot be found.

8./9.

Staying fit for relationships: from negative to positive

At the end of chapter 7 we named some fundamental misconceptions.

Have we come up with some more thoughts about that?

Inter-personal relationships develop dynamically, because different individuals encounter each other. We all know not only joy but also a portion of suffering and problems in inter-personal relationships. There are moments in which it is better for both sides if the relationship is broken off. But we can often do a lot to improve or rescue a relationship - above all, if we know our own weaknesses and begin with ourselves...

1. From the saw-dust to the plank

Mark is a very lovable young man. He has a special skill: he is very sharp and precise in naming the weaknesses of others - and making jokes about them. The truth, he despises many people. There is also hardly a single relationship that he been able to keep up.

Often, artists have a gift of perceiving sharply and naming things. The question is whether they do this with love or with contempt and mockery.

Do we know this tendency in ourselves?

Do we know artists who have this ability?

What positive results can this ability have? What negative results?

How do we get from the negative to the positive?

Luke 6,41: "Why do you look at the speck of sawdust that is in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye?"

Romans 5,8: "But God demonstrates his love towards us in this: while we were still sinners, Christ died for us."

2. From prejudice to truth

In his book, "Anleitung zum Unglücklichsein" ("How to be unhappy"), the psychiatrist Paul Watzlawick wrote about a man who wants to go to a neighbour to borrow a hammer. But, before going, he thinks: "This neighbour hardly said hallo to me yesterday. Perhaps he doesn't like me. But I haven't done anything to him. If he wanted a hammer from me, I would lend it to him immediately. How can anyone be so unfriendly? People like that make life sour for all of us! And then he will imagine that I'm dependent on him. Just because he has a hammer. I've really had enough of this!" - And then he storms across, the neighbour opens the door and says "Good morning!". But the man screamed at him: "You can keep your hammer!"

How can we interpret this story? Does it have anything to do with our experiences?

Relationships begin in our head. And there we often allow ourselves to be led by patterns, by sympathy and antipathy... often we think that the other person means... and then relationships get complicated.

What is the solution? How can one get from negative to positive?

Can art be of service in this area? What forms can this take?

Gospel of John 8,32

"...then you will know the truth and the truth will make you free"

3. From alienation to thankfulness

Isn't it a fact - the trouble with others is that they are so "other"!?

This is obviously a principle of creation: there is great variety. Not even with snowflakes is one identical to another... In the story of creation we hear repeatedly: how God made each creature "according to its kind".

On top of differences of character, there further differences of cultural, social and family background.

How do we react when someone is "completely different"? With insecurity, anger, humour, thankfulness, tense expectation...?



What task does art have in this area?

1 Corinthians 12,14-20:

Now the body is not one made up of one part but of many. If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body;" it would not for that reason cease to be part of the body. And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body," it would not for that reason cease to be part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be? But in fact God has arranged the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be. And if they were all one part, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts but one body.

4. From criticism to encouragement

Criticism is important! It is not a sign of a good relationship if the other person is never criticised or corrected. Saying "no" is also part of a good relationship!

And: through correction and criticism we also make progress as artists.

In the family I had a famous theatre personality. At the height of her success, the whole country applauded her. Nobody dared to criticise her. One day, she was at our house and my mother (who was her cousin) said to her openly that her performances were losing quality. She could not accept this and was disappointed with my mother. - But a couple of years later she thanked my mother warmly for this hard criticism. In the meantime, she had improved her standards.

Apparently there is a good and a bad way to criticise. Which kind do we most often encounter?

How do we react?

In bringing up children, a principle applies: for each time you criticise, you should praise nine times.

Do we personally praise enough?

Philippians 2,3ff.

"Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests but also to the interests of others."

5. From "false witness" to truthfulness



A man had a tendency to say bad things about others and spread evil rumours. The pastor took him up a church tower, took a feather cushion and shook it out. The feathers flew in all directions with the wind, over the roofs and into the streets and lanes. "Right, now go and pick up all the feathers again", the pastor said to the man. "That's impossible", he replied. "Yes, and it's equally impossible to pick up the rumours again that you have spread about others", said the pastor.

Do we recognise this: someone says negative things about others - whether they're true or not?

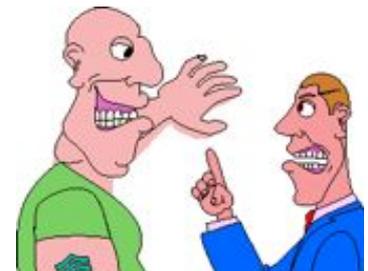
How can we deal with a situation where others say negative things about us?

In the Ten Commandments we read (Exodus 20,16):

"You shall not give false testimony against your neighbour." (Often translated: "You shall not lie." But here it means lies which damage others).

6. From resentment to forgiveness

A famous sentence in the play "Behind closed doors" by Jean-Paul Sartre runs, "Hell is other people." Many individuals are very disappointed and bitter about others. There is a saying that there are only two kinds of old person: the bitter and the thankful.



How do we deal with mistakes and guilt - of others and of ourselves?

How helpful for us are Bible passages in this (s. below)?

Matthew 6,12:

"And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors."

Psalms 103,1ff.

Praise the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits - who forgives all your sins, and heals all your diseases, who redeems your life from the pit and crowns you with love and compassion, who satisfies your desires with good things, so that your youth is renewed like an eagle's.

The Lord is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love. He will not always chide, nor will he harbour his anger for ever, he does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities.

1John 1,9

"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness."

10.

Staying fit for relationships: practise the "song in praise of love"

The following text from Paul speaks of love. It is known as the "Eulogy of love".

1 Corinthians 13,1-7

If I speak in the tongues of men and angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing. Love is patient, love is kind. It does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always perseveres.

Do we understand this text?

Have we already experienced love of this kind?

How can we learn to love like this?

1 John 4,7

"Beloved, let us love one another! For love is of God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God"

What is the meaning of "Whoever loves has been born of God and knows God."?

Have we experienced what changes in our lives when we "know" God?

For further reflection:

Knowing God means saying "Yes" to his love. God's greatest deed of love is his forgiving of guilt. Jesus Christ came as God's son in order to forgive our guilt. He sacrificed himself for us like a lamb. We know the text: :

„Agnus Dei, qui tollis peccata mundi, miserere nobis“.

We can make this the starting point for a prayer:

"Jesus Christ, Lamb of God, you carry the guilt of the world

- and you have also forgiven my guilt -

have mercy on me. Thank you, that I can belong to you.

Fill me with your Holy Spirit of love!

Amen