

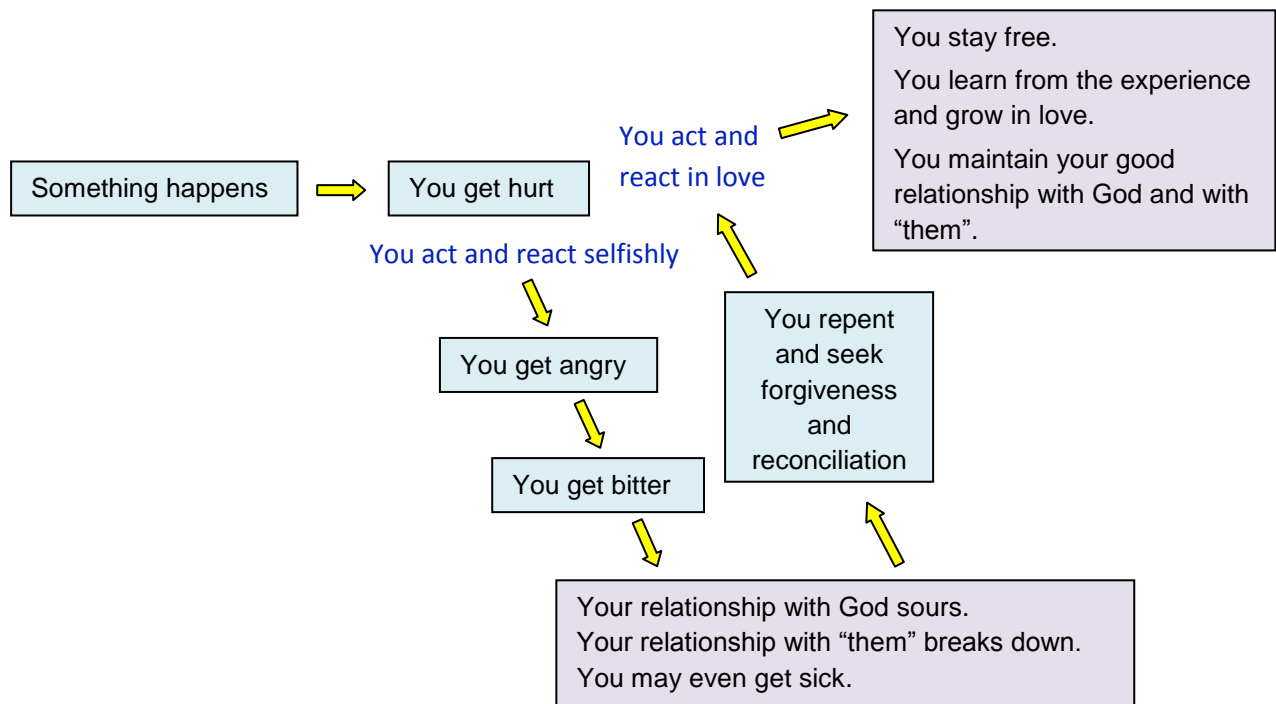
Acting and reacting in love

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When something happens to us that we don't like we are immediately faced with a choice as to how we will react:

- We can react in love, and we will come out of the situation positively. Or
- We can react out of self-interest. This will immediately start a downward spiral towards bitterness:



In Matthew's gospel Jesus teaches us much about our reaction when we get hurt. He shows that the best reaction is always to react in love:

Actions and reactions of love (based on Jesus' teachings in Matthew's gospel)		Actions and reactions of selfishness	
Be meek, merciful, pure in heart, humble, peace-making.	Deal with your own issues. (7:3-5).	Attack them/blame them.	Lose peace and joy.
Hunger and thirst for righteousness.	Do for them what you want them to do for you. (7:12).	Hate them.	Can't/won't forgive them.
Accept persecution for righteousness sake. (5:1-11).	Lay down your life and your rights. (10:37-39).	Explode at them or others.	Make judgements or expectations about them.
Seek reconciliation. (5:23-26).	Turn to Jesus and find your rest in Him.	Twist everything so it's their fault.	Lie/gossip about them.
Turn the other cheek.	Allow Him to carry your burdens. 11:28-30).	Gather evidence, lobby, build a case against them.	Fabricate stories about them.
Give to them. (5:38-42).	Watch your words. (12:33-37).	Portray yourself as innocent.	Demand things of them (e.g. an apology).
Love them.	Watch your heart. (15:10-20).	See a need in them for repentance and forgiveness, but not in you.	Try to manipulate them.
Pray for them. (5:43-48).	Go to them and try to sort it out. (18:15-20).	Refuse to acknowledge your part in the situation.	Withdraw from them and others.
Forgive them. (6:14,15; 18:21,22).		Justify why you are right and they are wrong.	Become self-absorbed.
Don't judge them. (7:1,2)		Can't stop thinking about them and what they have done to you.	Have a sense of loneliness and alienation from others and from God.
		Become miserable.	Reject them and everything to do with them

The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such there is no law. Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires. Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit. Galatians 5:22-25.

Free in Christ

The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God. Galatians 5:19-21.

In bondage

Bitterness and broken relationships are very common these days. They always start with a selfish reaction to something unpleasant, which then spirals downward. In God's grace, though, there is always a way back!

If we repent of our sin (our selfish reaction) and seek the other person's forgiveness (and they do the same) we can climb out of the negative spiral and restore our broken relationships.

Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord. Acts 3:19.

If we confess our sins He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. 1 John 1:9.

No temptation has overtaken you except what is common to mankind. And God is faithful; He will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, He will also provide a way out so that you can endure it. 1 Corinthians 10:13.

Through repentance, forgiveness and rebuilding of relationship we can once again *love one another* as Jesus loves us, and *the world will know that we are His disciples.* (John 13:34). We will move out of the powerful bondage of bitterness and broken relationships and come back into the *glorious freedom* of God's children. Romans 8:21.

If the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed. John 8:36.