

Guardrails for Managing Relationships

Welcome back to *EQ God's Way*. Earlier in the series we explored the emotional intelligence of Jesus and how it shapes our own lives. We looked at how Jesus embodied EQ—his deep empathy, his emotional self-awareness, and His relational wisdom. Today, we shift the focus from observation to instruction. Jesus didn't just model EQ—he taught it. In fact, his teachings are like relational *guardrails*—twelve practical, powerful principles that protect and direct us in our relationships. These aren't soft suggestions. They're Kingdom mandates for emotional maturity. They teach us how to love well, confront wisely, forgive radically, and choose our relational investments strategically. **Jesus didn't just model EQ—He mandated it.**

This is EQ from the inside out—Christlike, Spirit-led, and radically countercultural.

1. We are called to practise the Golden rule of empathy and mutuality.

Luke 6:31 "Do to others as you would have them do to you."

This verse is significant as it demonstrates Jesus' emphasis on challenging believers to move beyond mere justice to active kindness and generosity, even to enemies. This rule is simple, practical, and universal, yet spiritually demanding because it requires self-denial and a transformed heart. This verse does not advocate for reciprocity, but rather for proactive goodness. It is not just about responding to others' actions, but initiating moral action based on how we hope to be treated. Imagine starting off your day like that; asking yourself how you would like to be treated by others and then using your response as a to do list guiding you on what you will do for others. This is radical because it is a call for benevolence even when it is not returned. It has been described as the ethical climax of Jesus' teaching on love. It's the ideal interpersonal ethic that is a guide not just for believers, but all of humanity. NT Wright describes it as an invitation to participate in the redemptive logic of God's love. For Wright, the verse points to a reversal of power and self-interest that characterizes the kingdom of God. Jesus' version of the Golden Rule is positive and proactive, in contrast to similar teachings in other traditions that are stated negatively:

Rabbi Hillel (Judaism): "What is hateful to you, do not do to your neighbour."

Confucius (China): "Do not impose on others what you do not wish for yourself."

Buddhism: "Hurt not others in ways that you yourself would find hurtful."

It's important to note that Jesus' command goes further, encouraging initiative in kindness, not just the avoidance of harm.

Matthew 22:39 "Love your neighbour as yourself."

Verses like this confront our natural instinct to prioritize ourselves and asks us to invert that.

This is the foundation for all relational ethics. **What would your relationships look like if you applied this rule consistently?**

2. We are called to be emotionally aware and have inner congruency

Luke 6:45 "For the mouth speaks what the heart is full of."

My inner heart condition will determine the quality of my relationships. Relational integrity is not just about what others see, it's to do with my inner thoughts that only God knows.

Authentic discipleship flows from within, otherwise it's just behaviour modification which is unsustainable.

You can't fake what your heart is full of—eventually, your mouth will reveal it.

Hypocrisy cannot last, because eventually the true state of the heart will emerge — especially in speech.

Harsh words, sarcasm, or manipulation don't come out of nowhere — they are clues to deeper emotional or spiritual issues. Healing relationships often means addressing what the heart is full of — not just policing the mouth.

3. We are called to balance wisdom and purity in dealing with people

Matthew 10:16 "Be shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves."

The serpent represents practical wisdom, not deceit. The dove symbolizes sincerity, not gullibility.

The context of this verse is *Matthew 10:16a* — *"I am sending you out like sheep among wolves. Therefore...."*

NT Wright describes this as living out the kingdom of God in hostile territory. He speaks of how shrewdness doesn't mean manipulation — it means being strategically aware and missionally agile. Innocence doesn't mean weakness — it means being untainted by corruption or retaliation. Being shrewd means knowing your audience, understanding power structures — cultural and political awareness and navigating threats wisely.

4. We are called to practise direct, private confrontation rather than gossip or passive aggression.

Matthew 18:15 "If your brother or sister sins, go and point out their fault, just between the two of you."

Gossiping is emotional cowardice—Jesus calls us to courageous confrontation.

5. We are called to value reconciliation and bridge-building.

Matthew 5:9 "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God."

We are called to be peacemakers not peacekeepers at all costs. Would you rather be right or reconciled?

6. We are called to engage in difficult conversations that resolve conflict proactively and swiftly.

Matthew 5:25 "Settle matters quickly with your adversary."

Here is the full verse: *"Settle matters quickly with your adversary who is taking you to court. Do it while you are still together on the way, or your adversary may hand you over to the judge, and the judge may hand you over to the officer, and you may be thrown into prison."*

Jesus is expanding on the commandment, "You shall not murder," showing that anger, contempt, and unresolved conflict are equally destructive. Matthew Henry explains that this is suggesting it is better to suffer loss through reconciliation than to cling to pride and face greater ruin — both legally and spiritually.

Unresolved conflict can harden your heart and lead to spiritual peril. The point is not just to avoid lawsuits, but to break cycles of hostility. **Delaying reconciliation only strengthens division.** It's a call to take initiative, not wait for the other person to move first. This verse is not just about avoiding legal trouble — it's about avoiding spiritual hardening. It is similar to other scriptures:

Matthew 5:23–24: "First go and be reconciled to them; then come and offer your gift."

Romans 12:18: "If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone."

James 5:9: "Don't grumble against one another... The Judge is standing at the door!"

Ephesians 4:26–27: "Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry..."

7. We are called to embrace love as the distinguishing trait of Christian relationships.

John 13:35 "By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."

He sees this as a powerful public witness. Jesus places love as the identifying mark of true discipleship — not gifts, knowledge, or zeal alone.

Verse 34 says, *"A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another."* Jesus says this after washing the disciples' feet. He is also showing that it is a love full of humility and service. The world is watching how we love each other. It is interesting that Jesus highlighted love as the distinguishing and primary mark of believers, not our theology or titles — but how we love fellow believers. This love isn't optional or secondary; it's proof of belonging to Jesus.

8. We are called to servant leadership in all contexts.

Matthew 23:11 "The greatest among you will be your servant."

- They are willing to do menial tasks. Nothing is beneath them.
- They are teachable.
- They are always looking for opportunities to serve.
- Their focus is on adding value to others.
- They are not easily offended by how they are treated.
- Jesus washed their feet.

9. We are called to self-reflection and curiosity before judgement.

Mt 7:3-5 "Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? 4 How can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when all the time there is a plank in your own eye? 5 You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye."

Relational maturity starts with owning your 'plank' before pointing out someone's 'speck'.

Always ask "What else could be true?" e.g. story of train ride.

Mt 7:1-2 "Do not judge, or you too will be judged. 2 For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you."

10. We are called to radical forgiveness in the face of injustice.

Luke 23:34 "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing."

Jesus' high levels of empathy enabled Him to forgive. If you had grown up in the same conditions as some people you might have turned out worse than them. It reminds me of the judgements I made when I saw people fighting to be first in line for the food at a Christian Conference. I also remember when I was

growing up wondering why our helper ate so fast, hardly chewing her food, until she told me of her experiences during the war years. Jesus calls us to proactively love those who hate us and hurt us.

Mt 5:44 (NKJV) But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you...

Matthew 5:39 "If someone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to them the other cheek also."
This is non-retaliation and emotional control under provocation. A slap on the right cheek (assuming a right-handed striker) is likely a backhanded slap — a gesture of insult, not violence. "Turning the other cheek" demonstrates self-control, dignity, and moral strength. This is about refusing to return evil for evil. It's about taking the higher ground when insulted. This doesn't mean ignoring injustice — but **choosing a path that breaks the cycle of violence and vengeance.**

11. We are called to build trust through clear, honest communication

Matthew 5:37 "Let your 'Yes' be 'Yes,' and your 'No,' 'No'; anything beyond this comes from the evil one."

This is setting verbal boundaries. Don't over promise and under deliver.

Build trust with the people around you. At the time, religious leaders used elaborate oath systems to manipulate truth — swearing "by heaven" or "by the temple" with varying levels of obligation. Jesus calls for a higher standard: integrity so complete that no oath is needed.

12. We are called to be discerning with regards to where and how to invest emotional energy.

Matthew 7:6 "Do not throw your pearls to pigs."

In different seasons of His ministry Jesus focused on different people. Initially it was the Jews and at a certain point He felt released to reach the Samaritans. The full verse reads (Matthew 7:6) — *"Do not give dogs what is sacred; do not throw your pearls to pigs. If you do, they may trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you to pieces."*

This is a type of boundary. **You are not called to everyone.** Matthew Henry interprets "dogs" and "pigs" as people who are hostile or contemptuous toward sacred truths.

To whom are you called to primarily minister to? Don't try to mentor everyone. Do they value your knowledge? It's about strategic stewardship of the truth. We are not obligated to force sacred truths upon those who despise or mock them. In evangelism be discerning with regards to depth and timing. Know when to wait for a better opportunity. Sometimes we are called to go where the life is, instead of trying to force it on those who despise it.

Setting boundaries isn't selfish—it's spiritual stewardship.

Conclusion

Relational EQ isn't optional in the Kingdom—it's foundational. These twelve guardrails from Jesus aren't just good advice; they're divine direction. They realign our hearts, reshape our reactions, and reveal Christ through our relationships.

Imagine the impact if we actually lived this—if we spoke from a full heart, forgave with real empathy, set boundaries without bitterness, and loved with purity and purpose. Jesus not only *showed* us how—He *told*

us how. Now the question is: will we follow? Let's choose the narrow way of emotional maturity. Let's honour the voice of Jesus over the volume of our emotions. Let's live EQ—God's way.