

DROPPING YOUR GUARD: THE VALUE OF OPEN RELATIONSHIPS

DIGGING DEEPER, RISKING CHANGE (PART ONE)

EXODUS 13-14; NUMBERS 11



The Heart of the Matter

For well over four hundred years, the Israelites lived as slaves in Egypt under conditions that grew more and more unbearable. In His grace, God heard their cries and ultimately called Moses to lead them out of Egypt in the most miraculous manner—through the parted Red Sea. Under Moses's leadership, they left the painful but familiar setting of Egypt. With the yoke of slavery broken from their necks, God's people followed Him into an uncharted, unpredictable, unexpected wilderness. Their destination? Canaan. They had struck out on a journey none of them had ever dreamed possible . . . and right away they faced trials that tested their faith.



Discovering the Way

1. As God Begins to Lead Us, He Often Tests Us (Exodus 14)

After the Israelites left Egypt, God tested their faith by placing them between the Egyptian army and the Red Sea. The fearful Israelites had to decide whether or not they would trust God.

2. Resist the Urge to Complain (Numbers 11:1-6)

Instead of thanking God for His miraculous deliverance, the Israelites complained about their lack of security and shortage of food. Their grumbling showed that they didn't trust God.



Starting Your Journey

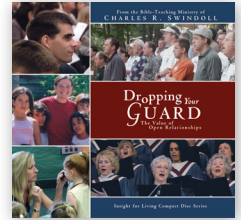
In order to follow God on the journey He has for us, we must stop trying to recapture the tranquility and simplicity of yesterday. We must trust God's sovereign leading and choose to follow Him. And we must pull together with our church family and follow God in unity.



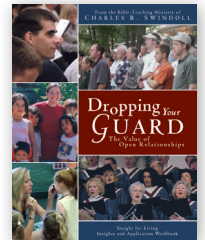
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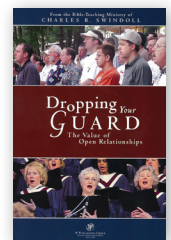
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DROPPING YOUR GUARD: THE VALUE OF OPEN RELATIONSHIPS

DIGGING DEEPER, RISKING CHANGE (PART TWO)

NUMBERS 12–14



The Heart of the Matter

It's good for churches to regularly evaluate their ministry. One way they can do this is by examining the experience of the ancient Hebrews as portrayed in Moses's words in Exodus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. The analogies can be remarkable! After the Hebrews' exodus from Egyptian slavery, they crossed the Red Sea and began the journey to Canaan. But in Numbers 11:1–6, the people longed for Egypt or at least a change in diet! As we pick up the story, we find the Hebrews growing increasingly discontent and determined to go back to the familiarity, security, and safety of Egypt—even if it meant personal slavery and direct disobedience to God.



Discovering the Way

1. Tests That Tempt Us to Go Back (Numbers 13:1–2, 25–27; 14:1–4)

Adversity, surprises, fear, unfair accusations, and unexpected resistance tempted Israel to return to Egypt. But these circumstances were also perfect opportunities for God to teach His people to walk by faith.

2. Barriers That Keep Us from Returning (Numbers 12:3, 9–10; 14:20–23, 30)

In order to keep His people from returning to Egypt, God gave the Israelites clear direction, incredible deliverance, timely relief from discouragement, internal fortification from attack, and extreme discipline.



Starting Your Journey

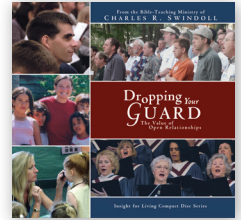
It's the desire of our God that we display a message different from the world around us. *So, Lord, intensify your distinctives in us.* It's the uncertainty of our future that strengthens our faith. *So, Lord, increase the risk.* It's the mystery of it all that makes us unique, that gives us power. *So, Lord, enlarge the difference.*



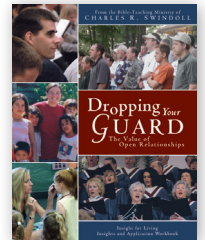
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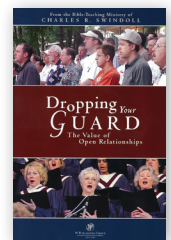
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GETTING CLOSER, GROWING STRONGER

DEUTERONOMY 6:1-13; ECCLESIASTES 4:9-12



The Heart of the Matter

We can draw some relevant analogies between the ancient Hebrews and our modern-day churches. In the process, we will discover that even though centuries separate us, some of the same struggles, solutions, attitudes, and principles fit our situations perfectly. The people who entered the land of Canaan—the “new generation” of wilderness wanderers—were forced by the sheer determination of survival to pull together, to lock arms and link hearts, as they took on the challenge of invading the land under Joshua’s leadership. Sufficiently prepared by Moses before his death, the people committed themselves to the tough task of conquering Canaan, which they accomplished with the sovereign assistance of Jehovah. Divided, they could never have done it. Unified, they were strong. The same is true for churches today.



Discovering the Way

1. Crucial Issues in a Ministry Like Ours (Ecclesiastes 4:9–12)

If modern-day church ministries are to survive, they must learn about the unhealthy consequences of isolationism, the essential benefits of relationships, and the absolute necessity of assimilation.

2. Some Dangers That Inevitably Occur (Deuteronomy 6:1–13)

Watch out for these dangers in ministry: falling more in love with the leader than the Lord; fixing our eyes on our immediate convenience rather than our ultimate objective; assuming that because we are large, we are strong; and living in the glow of yesterday instead of the challenge of tomorrow.



Starting Your Journey

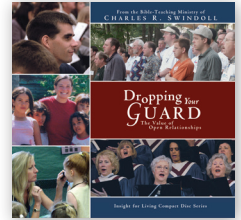
To go on we must get closer to others. To get closer means we pull together. And to pull together we must grow deeper in relationships.



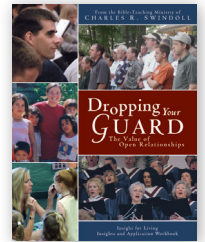
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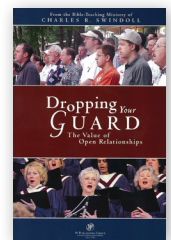
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OPERATION ASSIMILATION

JOSHUA 1:1-18



The Heart of the Matter

A vast difference exists between watching something happen and being involved in what happens. For many, church becomes a “spectator sport”—a few exhausted, burned-out believers knock themselves out to run the ministries and activities, while the majority sit back and observe from a distance. This is a far cry from the way the body of Christ was designed to function! In this message, we’ll focus on the problems of “spectatorism” and how we as members of the church body can overcome congregational apathy. The ancient Hebrews were *forced* to work together and get involved in taking the land of Canaan. In their example, we find some practical direction for our own lives.



Discovering the Way

1. Crucial Issues We Must Face

Members of the church today must become active participants in the function of the body of Christ. We must work with and care for other members of the body in love.

2. How the Hebrews Handled It (Joshua 1:1–18)

God’s people determined the direction of their future. They accepted the challenge of occupying their land without fear of failure. They forgot their differences and closed ranks in unity. They abandoned themselves to the plan and fixed their eyes on the Lord.



Starting Your Journey

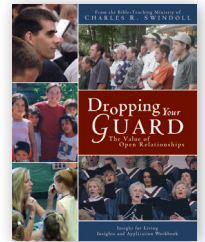
For us to go on, we must pull together and go deeper. For me to be involved, I must reach out and risk relationships. This means that we must all be willing to adapt and adjust our lives accordingly.



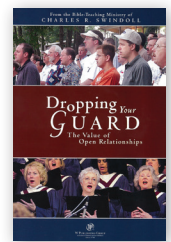
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UNITED AND INVINCIBLE
JOSHUA 1; 6; 8; 10; JOHN 17:20–23



The Heart of the Matter

The psalmist wrote a chorus of worship that emphasizes the benefits believers experience when they are united in their fellowship. The opening lines read:

*How good and pleasant it is
when brothers live together in unity!
It is like precious oil poured on the head.
(Psalm 133:1–2 NIV)*

We are discovering the truth of that in this series on congregational relationships. Being together in unity is indeed good, “like precious oil,” as David put it in his psalm. Not just being together, but being together *in unity*. As we shall learn from the ancient account in Joshua, when God is in the midst of His unified people, they are invincible.



Discovering the Way

1. Some Things to Remember (John 17:20–23; 1 John 3:14)

To be assimilated as a believer is to be absorbed in the life of the unified body. Unity requires closing ranks and minimizing our differences so there can be deeper involvement. Involvement means adjusting our lives so we can be participants, not spectators.

2. New Territory to Conquer (Joshua 1:16–18; 6:2–20; 8:3–8; 10:9–13; 1 John 3:16)

God’s people rallied fearlessly around their leader and their Lord. They accepted a new and unusual strategy without resistance. They worked as a team to accomplish an objective without jealousy. They trusted God to assist them and didn’t doubt.



Starting Your Journey

The pursuit of unity is hard work, but it’s worth it. The place of humility is of highest importance, but it’s rarely seen.



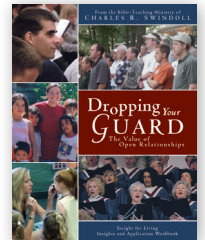
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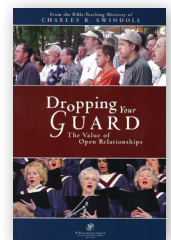
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WHEN THE FELLOWSHIP BREAKS DOWN

JOSHUA 7



The Heart of the Matter

Friction frays fellowship. Like a tire rubbing against the fender of a car, friction prohibits advancement. It isn't long before the heat creates greater complications. In God's family, whenever there is a breakdown in the fellowship, regardless of the reason, it impacts others. We see this vividly portrayed in Joshua 7, one of the least victorious chapters in the book. Even though these times were painful for the Hebrews, they are useful to Christians today. They teach us that we must not be idealistic in the matter of growing closer together. There *will* be times when the fellowship breaks down, but the growth can continue, and the body of Christ can ultimately become stronger and more mature.



Discovering the Way

1. Possible Reasons Fellowship Breaks Down (Acts 15:39)

Fellowship breaks down for several reasons: extreme suffering and sickness, burnout and fatigue, trouble in one's home or private life, friction between two or more Christians, and open disobedience against God.

2. A Biblical Event: Ai and the Hebrews (Joshua 7; Proverbs 18:19;

1 Corinthians 6:5; Galatians 6:1)

When Ai defeated the Hebrews, even though God had said He would give them victory over their enemies, it was a sign something was wrong among His people. Joshua followed a four-step process to identify and correct the problem.



Starting Your Journey

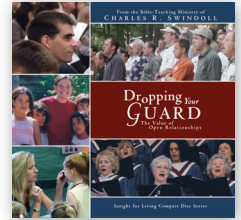
Most fellowship breakdowns will not heal themselves. Get involved! The longer the breakdown, the greater the impact. Start today! Solutions will be initially painful but ultimately rewarding. Don't quit!



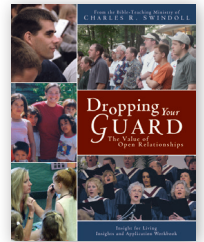
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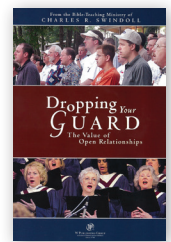
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AUTHENTIC LOVE
1 CORINTHIANS 13



The Heart of the Matter

What is love? If we were to ask ten people that question, we would probably get *at least* ten different answers. And there are many different kinds of love. We feel affection toward those we admire and who warm our hearts. We love our friends with whom we feel a deep connection. And we feel romantic love toward a spouse. But the highest form of love is charity—the type of devotion that seeks the highest good of another. This love serves unconditionally, regardless the cost. The Bible talks about this kind of sacrificial love in 1 Corinthians 13. This is the kind of love that we need most of all, and it finds its fullest expression in God's relationship to us.



Discovering the Way

1. Love Is Essential, Not Optional (1 Corinthians 13:1–3)

Love is the essential ingredient in friendships, congregations, marriages, and all relationships.

2. Love Is a Demonstration, Not an Inclination (1 Corinthians 13:4)

Love is an action and requires that we freely give of ourselves to others.

3. Love Is a Magnet That Draws Us Together (1 Corinthians 13:5–6)

Love draws individuals to one another and keeps people together.



Starting Your Journey

Love is a long-term investment, not a quick return (1 Corinthians 13:7–13).



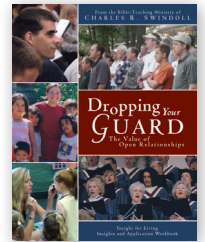
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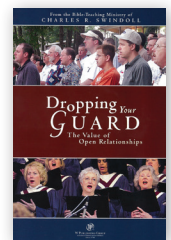
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DROPPING YOUR GUARD: THE VALUE OF OPEN RELATIONSHIPS

NEEDED: SHELTER FOR STORM VICTIMS

NUMBERS 35; JOSHUA 20; PSALM 31



The Heart of the Matter

Although many Christians seem to have perfect lives, we know better! Believers are not only a long way from perfection; we struggle with the battles that plague all humans. Like everyone, we find ourselves in need of shelters—places of refuge where we can heal and be renewed. People without Christ often seek refuge in corner bars where they can meet with friends and forget life's troubles. But where can Christians turn when we've been pushed around, misunderstood, and bruised with adversity? The answer for us today is not unlike the answer for the ancient Hebrews. Following God's Law, they set up "cities of refuge"—pockets of security and protection, where healing could happen. Places of spiritual refuge are just as needed today.



Discovering the Way

1. The Need for Places of Refuge (Psalm 31)

There are three primary times we need a place of refuge: when we are in distress and sorrow accompanies us, when we are sinful and guilt accuses us, and when adversity surrounds us and misunderstanding assaults us.

2. The Function of Cities of Refuge in Ancient Israel (Joshua 20; Numbers 35)

God commanded that cities of refuge be set up for people who had killed someone unintentionally and needed shelter from an avenger. He established the procedure for who could be admitted into these cities, and He commanded the Hebrews to be involved in the administration of these cities.



Starting Your Journey

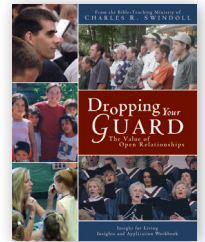
To provide refuge to others, we must have three things. First, we must have a willingness to go the distance for those in trouble (1 John 3:16). Second, we must have an attitude of loving compassion toward those in need (3:17). And, finally, we must have an availability to help in practical, tangible ways (3:18).



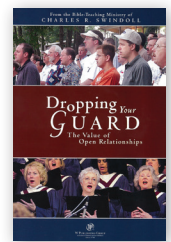
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SOME THINGS HAVE GOTTA GO!
JOSHUA 23; JUDGES 1; 1 CORINTHIANS 12:12–18



The Heart of the Matter

Meaningful, healthy relationships need the right kind of environment to flourish. Before we can expect to nurture genuine assimilation, *some things gotta go!* Just as tender plants require special care and the absence of things that assault growth, so do groups of believers who desire to cultivate relationships. Centuries ago, as God led the ancient Hebrews into the Promised Land, He specifically instructed them to clear the territory of the foreign tribes and to rid themselves of the influence of Canaanite civilization. From this example, we can draw an analogy for today. If we truly desire to grow deeper, pull together, and go further than skin-deep superficiality in our relationships, we must remove those things that hinder true community.



Discovering the Way

1. Existence: Essentials for Physical Survival (1 Corinthians 12:12–18)

If we want healthy lives, our physical bodies must stay healthy. When alien forces attack the body from without or cells of the body rebel from within, disease can take over. The same is true for the church, the body of Christ.

2. Obedience: Key to National Preservation (Joshua 23:1–16; Judges 1:19–28)

In order to inspire Israel's obedience, Joshua recounted God's faithfulness, God's commands, and God's warnings to His people.



Starting Your Journey

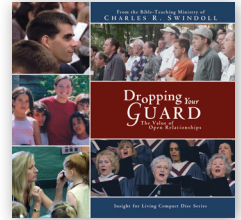
In order to build biblical fellowship in the church, Christians must get rid of any personal and corporate barriers to unity.



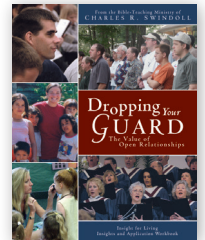
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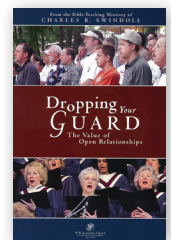
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DROPPING YOUR GUARD: THE VALUE OF OPEN RELATIONSHIPS

CHOOSE FOR YOURSELF

JOSHUA 24



The Heart of the Matter

There came a time when the ancient Hebrews had to make decisions on their own. No longer could they rely on their leader Joshua to stand before them and command that they go in this direction or that. He was soon to die, and they would be responsible for their own actions. So Joshua called the people together and confronted them with the facts. His final speech can be summarized in three words: “choose for yourselves” (Joshua 24:15). These three words apply so perfectly to us today as we consider how to build congregational relationships. In the final analysis, we either will or will not pull together, grow deeper, and become a caring body of believers. It’s really up to each of us to choose whether or not to bond with other believers.



Discovering the Way

1. Barriers That Hinder Relationships (Joshua 23:13; Revelation 3:15–18)

God commanded the Israelites to get rid of all of the Canaanites, so their pagan lifestyles would not become snares. Today, legalism, intolerance, suspicion, and pride are snares that obstruct meaningful relationships between believers and bring consequences for church unity.

2. Decisions That Encourage Relationships (Joshua 24:1–15)

As Joshua neared death, he gave the Israelites advice to follow as they lived in the lush Promised Land: *choose* to fear, serve, and obey the Lord.

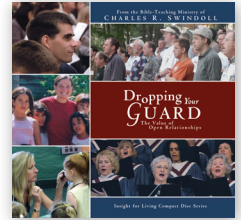


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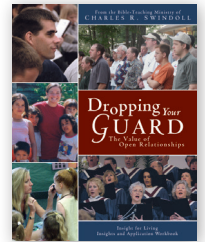
The bottom line: what do *you* choose? There are only three choices: risk reaching out, stay independent, or postpone your decision.



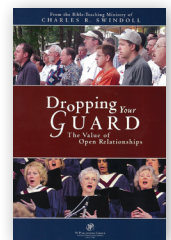
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Committed to Excellence in Communicating Biblical Truth and Its Application

DROPPING YOUR GUARD: THE VALUE OF OPEN RELATIONSHIPS

THE NECESSITY OF ACCOUNTABILITY

PROVERBS 13:10–20; ROMANS 12; 1 CORINTHIANS 5:1–3



The Heart of the Matter

Our society of isolated, distant individuals teaches a false philosophy: “Live and let live.” To those who have escaped from an oppressive, controlling government, that sounds like a haven . . . a long-lost dream realized. But when we flesh out that motto, it often leads to peril. *We need each other!* Even those who don’t think so. Even those who seem totally self-sufficient, strong, and stable. Christians are unwise when they remain out of touch and live in secrecy. Being responsible includes being accountable, not just to God but also to one another. If carried out in the power and under the control of the Holy Spirit, accountability can be one of the most secure and reassuring facets of our Christian experience.



Discovering the Way

1. Accountability: What It Is and Isn’t (Hebrews 13:16–17)

Accountability is the willingness to explain one’s actions. It requires vulnerability, availability, and honesty. Accountability turns into legalism when too severe, and when too loose, it turns into a license to sin.

2. Instruction and Examples from Scripture (Proverbs 13:10–20; Romans 12:4–12; 1 Corinthians 5:1–3; 3 John 1:9–10)

Christians are accountable to God and to each other. Paul held Peter accountable when Peter showed favoritism, and Samuel reproved Saul when he disobeyed God.



Starting Your Journey

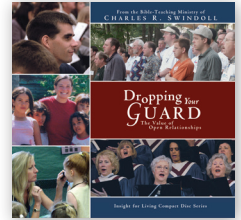
As you begin practicing accountability, follow these three suggestions. First, stop and consider the value of accountability. Second, choose at least one person with whom you can relate deeply. Third, develop a relationship that strengthens your grip on spiritual things.



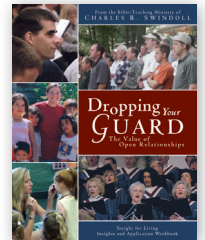
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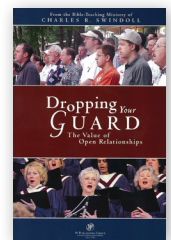
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DROPPING YOUR GUARD: THE VALUE OF OPEN RELATIONSHIPS

A HOPE TRANSPLANT: THE ESSENTIAL OPERATION

ACTS 5:14–42; 1 PETER 5:1–11



The Heart of the Matter

How would you define *hope*? In what way would your definition apply to a local church? What if hope were missing from a congregation? Would anybody notice? We'll think about these and other things as we allow Peter's words to guide us into the truth about hope. Of special interest are the essentials involved in keeping a church's hope strong and constant. These passages of Scripture suggest several ingredients that must be present if hope is to remain a vital part of a church's life.



Discovering the Way

1. Churches Come in Every Variety

Though churches and denominations vary widely, the essential characteristic of hope must be present in all of them.

2. A Brief Analysis of Hope (Proverbs 13:12; Acts 5:14–42; 1 Peter 5:1–10)

The word *hope* means to desire something with the expectation of its fulfillment. Hope imparts vitality and energy to the life of a church.



Starting Your Journey

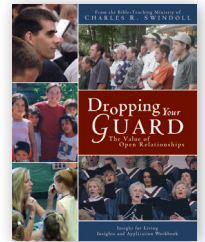
To keep hope strong in our lives and in the life of the church, we must have these essential ingredients: the right kind of leadership, true humility toward each other, a release of anxiety, an awareness of the adversary, and a proper response to adversity.



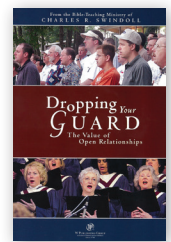
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