

Melva's Corner

The Simplified Soul & Difficult People

February 28, 2005

Bible Text: Ephesians 4:15, Matthew 5:44, 45

Central Truth: God's love and grace extends to us all.

This series of messages would be incomplete if I didn't include suggestions on how to deal with difficult people. Don't you wish you could join Will Rogers when he said, "I've never met a person I didn't like." But the truth is, I have. I've run into people who seem to have been put on this earth to irritate and stress me. You've met them, too. You've encountered rude drivers and surly grocery store clerks. You've had demanding bosses who assign impossible or irrelevant tasks. You might struggle with relatives who are hurtful or deceitful or friends who are more frustrating than fun. But the fact is, I have learned over the years that the stress I encounter with difficult people is more about me and less about them.

Difficult people are not necessarily bad; they just rub you the wrong way and they can wear you out. They may push your buttons, belittle you, or set you on edge. We all have difficult people in our lives with whom we must deal on a regular basis. The ones I hear the most complaints about are the following:

Controllers insist on having everything their way. They are demanding and stubborn and rarely give in.

Clams are quiet and withdrawn. It is hard to know what they want or like because they don't give you enough information.

Know-it-alls are arrogant and condescending; they have this knack for making you feel stupid. They believe the world should and does revolve around them.

Complainers always have something to grumble or gripe about. They seem to enjoy whining, but they rarely do anything to change the situation.

Bullies are angry and sometimes abusive. They might be sarcastic, loud, pushy, threatening, or even physically abusive-anything to get their way.

Manipulators are deceptive and indirect in making things happen. They take advantage of people to fulfill their own personal desires.

Addicts are caught up in certain unhealthy patterns and are driven to do almost anything to meet their needs. They're willing to do just about anything to get their next "fix."

Blockers stand in the way of you and your goals. For reasons of jealousy, fear, or even misguided affection, they don't want you to move forward. They can be very nice on the surface, but their words and actions are calculated to discourage you and slow your progress.

Now admit it. You know people like this. They live in your neighborhood, go to your church, and work at your job. You might even be related or married to one. **Sometimes they are actually trying to be difficult; often they don't have a clue they are such a problem.** Either way, if you can develop some strategies for coping with difficult people and reduce your stress levels dramatically.

Difficult people are usually difficult for a reason. Taking the time to understand why they act the way they do might not motivate you to be closer to them, but it might help you be less angry or annoyed.

Everyone has a history, and this history helps explain why a person acts a certain way. A controller might feel out of control of her emotions, so she tries to over control her environment. A clam might fear getting in trouble if he says anything, so he shuts up. A know-it-all might believe she is worthless if she doesn't have all the answers.

The world is full of broken people whose brokenness drives their behavior. The way they treat you often has very little to do with you; you just happen to be a convenient target. In fact, most difficult people have little or no insight into their own motives and behavior. Reminding yourself that there's a real, hurting person behind the challenging actions can sometimes turn your frustra-

tion into compassion.

You need to consider one more thing as you try to understand the difficult people in your life. There is always a chance that your weariness or past history is causing you to be a difficult person in someone else's life. The problem might be theirs, but it might be yours as well. In any case, extending your understanding and compassion to yourself as well as others might significantly cut down on your people issues.

As you cope with the difficult people in your life, it's important to keep praying. Pray for their welfare and growth, and also pray about your attitude and actions toward them. Pray that you will show kindness and integrity regardless of what they do.

When you are already worn out, this may seem impossible. If you are feeling annoyed or irritated with another person, you might not even want to pray for him or her. But the Bible is clear that the Holy Spirit intercedes when we run up against our limits in prayer. All you really need to do is take the first step. Say the words, even if you don't feel them at the moment. Or tell God that you want to pray for the other person even if you are really mad at him or her. And then trust God to make your insufficient prayers-sufficient.

How you respond to challenging people will make a big difference in how stressed out you feel. The secret is to be polite and kind, but firm-showing respect but also asking respect from others. Sometimes, in the case of rude strangers, highway encounters, or annoying phone calls, the wisest course of action is to ignore it, walk away, and seek out more congenial company.

We can always hope that difficult people will change and become easier to be with. More likely, you will need to grow and learn how to cope with social challenges. **Ephesians 4:15 makes the challenge clear, "Rather, let our lives lovingly express truth [in all things, speaking truly, dealing truly, living truly]. Enfolded in love, let us grow up in every way and in all things into Him Who is the Head, [even] Christ (the Messiah, the Anointed One)." Amplified.**

It helps to remember that God's love and grace extends to us all, and one of the requirements of following Him is that we extend that grace to others.

Memory Text:

"Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right, persevering, and steadfast spirit within me. Cast me not away from Your presence and take not Your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of Your salvation and uphold me with a willing spirit." (Psalm 51:10-12) Amplified