

Daily Devotional Guide

Monday – Today read Luke 6:27 and Luke 23:33-34. These two texts contain the most powerful thing we can do when we are dealing with a difficult person – pray! Now, we are not praying for God to give the person “what for”; instead, we pray for God to give us the wisdom to deal with the person in a loving manner and for God to give us the eyes to see the person with His eyes. It is almost impossible to stay angry at a person we are praying for. So, next time you are faced with a difficult person at work, home, or in your social circle take a time out and pray for the person. You will be amazed at the results.

Tuesday – Read Romans 12:18-21 and 1st Peter 3:8-9. These texts contain a powerfully effective approach to difficult people – overcome evil with good. Not only is this a Christ-like approach, but it works! I can attest to its effectiveness. Often times, folks are difficult because they desire attention. They are screaming out for someone who cares. If we are praying for them, God will help us discern what they need. It could be that they simply want someone to listen to them. Perhaps they just want to be recognized or appreciated. Quite often, once they get what they need, their dysfunctional behavior dissipates. Overcoming evil with good is also an assertive act which expresses that we will not be controlled by dysfunctional behavior. What’s more, it is a witness of the overcoming power of God’s love.

Wednesday – Read Luke 5:15-16, Mark 6:30-32, and Mark 3:31-35. These texts demonstrate Jesus setting healthy boundaries. I have yet to find one passage of scripture that tells us that we are to be doormats and allow others to demean or abuse us. We are God’s children and God does not want us to be disrespected. There is a big difference between forgiving someone and enabling controlling or abusive behavior. Sometimes we have to deal with folks who are chronically difficult and firm boundaries must be established. Depending upon the person we are dealing with, having a third party present to establish these boundaries can be effective.

Thursday – Read Matthew 7:1-5 and verse 12. Sometimes the best thing we can do when faced with a difficult person is to look ourselves in the mirror and recognize that we can be difficult too. We always judge others more harshly than we judge ourselves. When we recognize what causes us to be difficult, we will have more empathy and patience with difficult people. Sometimes people are just having a bad day and we happen to be the most convenient target. Taking them aside and asking, “Is something bothering you?” can be helpful. We hope people make such allowances for us when we can be difficult. Let’s reciprocate.

Friday – Read 1st Corinthians 1:10. It is often the most obvious solution that gets missed. Sometimes in our frustration with difficult people we forget the direct approach – communicate with them. Sitting down with them and expressing, in love, how their behavior makes us feel cures most problems with difficult people. Let’s build bridges with difficult people. After all, God built a bridge to us in Jesus Christ.



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~ When Trouble Finds You ~ Dealing with Difficult People

Sunday, April 3, 2011

Sermon by: Dr. Charley Reeb, Senior Pastor

Scripture Lesson: Proverbs 15: 1-2

In 1994, a Korean jetliner made a crash landing in South Korea. The crash was not caused by a malfunction in the plane or bad weather. The crash occurred because two people could not get along. Who were these two people? The pilot and co-pilot.

They argued about whether the runway was long enough, then fought each other for control of the plane as it landed. The plane skidded off the runway and rammed a safety brigade. All 152 passengers and crew members survived by jumping down an escape chute just moments before the plane exploded into flames. As the plane went up in flames, the two pilots continued the argument, blaming each other for the crash.

You want to know the single most important ability in life? Getting along with people. It doesn’t matter if you are a pilot, a teacher, a homemaker, or a plumber; the ability to get along with people is the key to success and fulfillment. Let’s face it. Life and faith are all about relationships with people. If you can get along with people, you will be successful in anything you do. You can pretty much write your own ticket. If you can’t get along with people, your life will be like that Korean jetliner – one crash after another.

A study was done by the University of Chicago some time ago on what subjects adults wanted to learn the most about. The study determined that the two subjects adults wanted to learn the most about were health and getting along with people. I know this to be true in my own experience as a pastor. You want to know the number one reason why people come to see me in my office? They can’t get along with another person.

Now, if every person was easy to get along with, life would be a whole lot easier and most

ministers and counselors would be out of business. The truth is, all of us face difficult people. And our joy and success in life and in faith is determined by whether or not we can get along with difficult people.

So, how exactly do we get along with difficult people? Perhaps you are asking that question today. Maybe the difficult person in your life is manipulative, controlling or overbearing. Maybe this difficult person has a habit that gets on your one nerve. Perhaps this difficult person smothers you and won’t leave you alone. Maybe this person gossips about you or has betrayed you. Whoever they are and whatever they are doing you want to know how to deal with them without losing your mind.

This morning I want to give you one word that is the key to getting along with difficult people. Ready? P.A.U.S.E. When you are faced with a difficult person and you feel yourself getting angry or frustrated, remember P.A.U.S.E. Don’t fly off the handle. Don’t lose your cool. PAUSE

A friend of mine named Henry remembered to pause when he ran his business. He enforced a 24 hour rule with all of his employees. Whenever they faced a difficult client or a difficult staff person they were required to wait 24 hours before they responded to the difficulty. This rule prevented many foolish decisions and much heartache.

But there is more to P.A.U.S.E. than just waiting to cool off. Each letter of the word represents an effective biblical response to difficult people.

PRAY

The P of PAUSE represents prayer. Now, this prayer is not “Lord, may a bolt of lightning hit this difficult person as soon as possible!” That is not the

kind of prayer I am talking about. I am talking about praying for the person with the best intentions.

Jesus said, “But to you who are willing to listen, I say, love your enemies! Do good to those who hate you. Bless those who curse you. *Pray for those who hurt you*” (Luke 6:27-28).

Pray. It works! It is impossible to stay mad at someone you are praying for every day. For when you pray for a difficult person the Holy Spirit seeps into your heart and changes the way you feel about the person. The spirit gives you a new heart for the person and the ability to see the person with new eyes.

Praying for a difficult person gives you Christian bifocals. Bifocals, of course, help you see up close and far away. Prayer gives you spiritual bifocals to see difficult people up close and further down the road as they were created by God to be. You are able to see their potential and you begin treating them as they were created to be. Amazing things begin to happen when you begin to pray for difficult people.

So, I challenge you to do an experiment. If there is a difficult person in your life, pray for them every day for the next two weeks and watch what happens.

APPRECIATE

The A of PAUSE represents appreciate. I know this may sound crazy, but show appreciation for the difficult people in your life. Find something you appreciate about them and tell them. It works wonders.

I remember a man at another church I served who caused much turmoil for me. It seemed he was against me from the start. If I voted yes, he voted no. If I voted no, he voted yes. He made things very difficult for me. I prayed, “Lord, help me deal with this man. What should I do?”

Shortly after I began praying for this man there was a fall festival at the church. I walked around to the different booths, admiring the arts and crafts created by those in the congregation. The man I was praying for had a booth full of paintings he had done. They were portraits. I had no idea he was a painter and a good one at that! I asked him to show me his paintings and tell me about them, and he did with great enthusiasm.

The next day I sent him a note, thanking him for showing me his paintings. I also told him how much I appreciated his gift for painting. I couldn’t believe what happened next. He told everyone about the note and never gave me anymore trouble. In fact, he became my biggest supporter!

Let me tell you the truth about human nature. Many people are difficult to get along with for one

reason: they are screaming to be appreciated! William James said, “The deepest principle in human nature is the craving to be appreciated.” Notice he said “the CRAVING” to be appreciated - the craving for someone to listen to them, pay attention to them, and appreciate them. And many have discovered that the only way they can get attention is by being difficult.

So, bosses, you want to improve morale in the office? Show appreciation to your employees. Kids appreciate your parents. Parents appreciate your kids. Husbands and wives, show appreciation for each other. If you show sincere appreciation to people, you will avoid a lot of conflict and heartache.

“Finally, all of you, have unity of spirit, sympathy, love for one another, a tender heart, and a humble mind. Do not repay evil for evil or abuse for abuse; but, on the contrary, repay with a blessing. It is for this that you were called – that you might inherit a blessing” (1st Peter 3:8-9).

When someone is difficult to you, don’t be difficult in return. Instead, be a blessing to the person. Be a witness of the overcoming power of God’s love.

UNDERSTAND

The U of PAUSE represents understanding. One of my favorite quotes comes from Plato. He said, “Be kind to everyone because everyone is fighting some kind of battle.”

We never know what people are going through. Have you ever thought about that? We never know what kind of day the lady behind the checkout counter has had. We never know the battle that slow person in front of us in traffic is fighting. Often times people are difficult to us because something is going in their personal lives and we just happen to be the easiest target for their pain.

My colleague Brad Dinsmore remembers learning the lesson of understanding in a powerful way. He had packed up the car and family and was ready to leave town for vacation. He had to stop by the gas station for some gas before he got on the highway. It was the weekend and each tank had a line of cars waiting. Brad picked one and waited. Finally, a tank opened. Before he could a drive up to the tank a car came speeding in and cut in front of him.

Well, Brad did not begin to sing, “It is well with my soul.” He got out of the car and stormed to the car in front of him ready to give his best sermon to the driver of that car. He knocked on the window, and the man who was driving rolled it down, and Brad saw a man with tears on his face with two toddlers in the back seat. The driver said to Brad, “I’m so sorry. Please forgive me, but my wife has been in an accident and I

need to get to the hospital!” We never know.

Sometimes the best thing we can do when faced with a difficult person is to look ourselves in the mirror and recognize that when we have had a bad day we can be difficult too. We always judge others more harshly than we judge ourselves, don’t we? This is what Jesus meant in Matthew 7 when he told us that before we begin talking about the speck of wood in our neighbor’s eye we need to get the 2 by 4 out of our own eye.

When we recognize what causes us to be difficult, we have more empathy and compassion with difficult people.

SET BOUNDARIES

The S of PAUSE represents setting boundaries. I’ve read through the whole Bible at least half a dozen times, and you know what I have yet to find in the Bible? I have yet to find one passage that supports us being doormats and the constant target of disrespect and abuse. We are children of God and God did not intend for us to be treated with disrespect. Yes, we are told to turn the other cheek, but this is an act of rising above evil behavior by not returning evil. But it is not God’s will that we continue to allow ourselves to be mistreated by people.

So, sometimes in life we come across chronically difficult people and we must set boundaries with them. We must speak the truth in love and tell them that the way they are treating us is not okay and it must stop. We must tell them that we are children of God and we were created to be mistreated.

ESTABLISH A BRIDGE

The E of PAUSE represents establishing a bridge. Paul tells us, “Now, I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you be in agreement and there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same purpose” (1st Corinthians 1:10). Paul was speaking to a church that was in conflict, and he was appealing to them to be unified in Christ.

Sometimes the difficult people in our lives are the ones we love the most. We need to take the first step and build a bridge to them and initiate healing. This is what Christ calls us to do.

There were once two brothers who lived on adjoining farms. They were very close for many years, but fell into conflict. A small misunderstanding blew up into a major argument and they stopped talking to each other.

One morning there was a knock on the older brother’s door. He found a man at his door with a carpenter’s tool box looking for a few days work. The

older brother said, “Have I got work for you! Across that creek is my younger brother. That used to be a meadow, but he took a bulldozer and made it into creek. I want to do him one better. See that lumber? I want you to build me an 8 foot high fence, so I won’t see his face anymore.” The carpenter said, “Show me the nails and tools and I will do a good job for you.”

Well, the older brother had to go to town, so he left for the day. At sunset, when he returned, his jaw dropped. There was no fence there at all. Instead, the carpenter had built a bridge that stretched from one side of the creek to the other. The younger brother came to older brother, hands outstretched and said, “After all I have done to you, you have done this? I can’t believe it!” The two brothers met in the middle of bridge and shook hands. The older brother saw the carpenter leaving and said, “No, wait. Please stay. I have other jobs for you.” The carpenter replied, “I would love to, but I have many more bridges to build.”

At the end of our days, God will ask us how we treated the people in our lives. God built a bridge to us in Jesus, so that we would build a bridge to each other. Amen.