

HANDLING DIFFICULT PEOPLE

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RELATIONSHIPS

The word “stewardship” means “manager”. God owns everything. Christian stewardship is the management of all things according to His will, which includes the management of human relationships. God created us social creatures. We instinctively desire to associate with others in relationships (marriage, family, friends, school, recreation, church, etc.) Some relationships are pleasant. Others, upsetting. Personality clashes are often the cause. Differences in upbringing, experiences and education also make people different, sometimes to the point of disliking one another. Psychologists indicate that, among a host of friends, the average person has only five very close ones whom they totally trust and with whom they feel throughly comfortable.

MANAGING DIFFICULT RELATIONSHIPS

Marie G. McIntyre, a workplace coach, offered this advice to five women workers who seemed to hate each other: *“Since you don’t get to choose your co-workers, you probably won’t like all of them. But you must be able to work with everyone, regardless of how you feel about them. Specifically, you are expected to be consistently pleasant, helpful and cooperative.”* Jesus leads us a step further: *“Love your enemies; do good to those who hate you; bless those who curse you; pray for those who mistreat you.”* (Luke 6:27-28). We are encouraged to engage the power of Christian love to ease or overcome troubled relationships - even in the Church.

RELATIONSHIPS IN THE CHURCH

A pastor once remarked that he attended every church meeting because, if he didn’t, some troublesome members would clash disruptively. Psychologists indicate that, on average, one person out of every five families has a some kind of emotional instability, which, though not seriously mental, can disrupt human relationships. Consequently, a congregation with 100 families could end up with seven potential troublemakers. If such hold office or influence, trouble could potentially brew on any horizon, especially regarding issues proposing beneficial change. St. Paul wrote epistles encouraging harmony to congregations with troubled member relationships, for example, the Corinthian Church.

TIPS ON HOW TO HANDLE DIFFICULT PEOPLE

> ***Keep Your Cool*** - Avoid an escalation of the disruption. The less reactive you are, the better your chances of easing a bad confrontation. Think before you speak to avoid saying or doing something you may regret later. In heated conversation, remember Prov. 15:1, *“A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.”*

> ***Recognize the Difficulty of Changing Someone*** Realize that it may be a waste of time to try to change, correct or convince someone entrenched with negative attitudes. Sometimes silence is the best response. Jesus remained silent before Pontius Pilate. (John 19:8-10)

> ***Understand the “Why” behind Troublemakers*** Remind yourself that some disruptive people might be behaving the way they do because of inherent emotional problems or warped personalities. Perhaps they also might be undergoing difficult life issues regarding health, spouse, children, work, etc. An understanding of root causes will help make you more proactive than reactive.

> ***Address the Issue not the Person*** - Address the problem at hand without attacking the problematic troublemaker. Never insult the personhood of someone by angrily shouting: “You don’t know what you’re talking about! Stop being so stupid!” St. Paul once insulted the High Priest Ananias calling him a *“whitewashed wall”*, for which he later apologized. (Acts 23:1-5)

> ***Shift the Focus from Yourself*** - When verbally attacked, politely shift the focus from yourself to the issue by asking a question. Jesus did this frequently. Instead of answering deceitful “trapping” questions, he responded by asking his enemies a question. (Matt. 21:23-27)

> ***Stand Up to Bullies*** - Tom Huddleston writes: *“When people don’t like themselves very much they have to make up for it by being bullies.”* Don’t cave into bully behavior. Engage the support of others to ward off whatever verbal and possibly physical abuse might occur. Many bullies are cowards and, when opposed, will back down.

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