

HOW TO DEAL WITH DIFFICULT PEOPLE

You will undoubtedly encounter difficult people during your life. In fact, they can show up in every facet of your life. They can be in your family, your neighborhood, your school, your workplace, public places, and even your local church. They can frustrate and challenge you in many ways, making you want to respond in ways contrary to God's will. Therefore, people who desire to please God should learn how to deal with difficult people in ways that honor God.

MATTHEW 5:38-42

True righteousness in God's kingdom involves responding to people who are difficult toward you and even harm you in the right ways. In this, we see that difficult people are not a new challenge! Still, Jesus contrasts the common idea of retaliatory "justice" (eye for an eye, tooth for a tooth) with how He wants His people to respond with grace, mercy, meekness, kindness, and love (Colossians 3:12-15). This passage demonstrates that we must do good toward others who are difficult toward or harm us, not seek to exact revenge!

MATTHEW 5:43-48

The difficult people in your life can often become viewed as your enemy. Maybe this person has caused some kind of suffering in your life. Maybe this person has demonstrated himself/herself to be evil and opposed to what is good. Many have responded to such situations by loving those who are good toward them and hating those who harm them. Yet, Jesus commands selfless and sacrificial love even toward your enemy, so that you seek what is in the other person's best interest (John 3:16; Romans 5:6-11; Luke 10:25-37). Therefore, your love for an enemy must meet the description of how God defines love (1 Corinthians 13:4-7) rather than be defined by your own ideas and emotions.

MATTHEW 7:1-6

One major challenge with the way we deal with difficult people is trying to make the proper judgments. For, it can be tempting to be overly harsh or condemnatory in our judgments about difficult

people. First, notice that Jesus warns you to realize that you will be judged according to the same standard you use to judge others. So, if you show no mercy in your judgments of others, He will show no mercy toward you (James 2:12-13; Matthew 6:14-15)! Second, you must start all judgment of others by looking at yourself honestly. Sometimes the people who have the most challenges with others are themselves difficult people to get along with and interact with! Third, after correcting the error in your own life, you should make healthy and true judgments of others (v. 6). Sometimes there are people you may need to set boundaries with regarding your interactions (Proverbs 22:24-25; 1 Corinthians 15:33).

MATTHEW 7:12

This commandment from Jesus about how to treat other people is commonly called the "Golden Rule." In it, Jesus requires those in His kingdom to treat others how they desire others to treat them. This applies to how you talk to others, how you talk about others, how you judge others, how you treat others, etc. Sadly, many exchange this "Golden Rule" for other "rules" of inferior quality. For example, some use the "Iron Rule," which uses force, power, and/or authority to misuse others for their own benefit. Some use the "Brass Rule," which treats others according to the way they treat you. Others use the "Silver Rule," which does no harm to others but does not actively seek to do good to them. Living according to the "Golden Rule" is, however, the only way to truly live according to God's standard of righteousness!

ROMANS 12:17-21

Disciples of Christ must not retaliate and seek personal vengeance against those who do evil to them. Although we may think we can properly execute vengeance for what someone has done against us, we will never truly be able to do exactly what is deserved. Instead, we will almost always go further than what was truly deserved (e.g., due to our emotions). Therefore, we must leave vengeance to God, who is the only One able to perfectly deal out justice! While we wait for God's perfect justice, our responsibility is two-fold according to this text. First, you must do your best to live peaceably with others (even difficult people). You must use wisdom to know what will best make for peace with difficult people (as Jesus demonstrated, Matthew 22:15-21;

12:9-14; John 8:2-11). Sometimes this means confronting the error and seeking reconciliation (Matthew 18:15-17). Sometimes this means confessing your own error (Matthew 5:21-26). Sometimes this means accepting a wrong that was done instead of escalating the issue (1 Corinthians 6:7-8). Sometimes it involves remaining silent until you can say what is helpful (John 8:6-7). Sometimes it may involve physically removing yourself from a situation (Acts 9:22-25). Sometimes it may involve seeking the help of other godly people to bring about a resolution (Philippians 4:2-3). Sometimes it may involve something else. But, you must have the assurance of Scripture for however you choose to respond (Matthew 5:9)! Second, you must choose to conquer whatever evil is done against you with good. Sometimes it will not matter how much you try to be peaceable with others; they simply will not be peaceable toward you. Still, your responsibility is to do what is good and right toward them. In everything, you must show the fruit of the Spirit in your life (Galatians 5:22-23), even in how you treat them!

1 PETER 3:8-12

God's people are expected to work for the cause of what is good and right regardless of how others treat them (following the example of Jesus, 1 Peter 2:21-25). There is never a time when Jesus approves of people being unrighteous because of how someone else is conducting himself/herself! The characteristics of peaceable, sympathetic, loving, compassionate, and humility should shine regardless of the circumstances and difficulties. Even if others do evil or insult you, you must be committed to doing what is good, keeping your tongue from evil, and seeking peace! When this happens, your relationship with God will be unhindered, and His ears will remain open to your prayers.

CONCLUSION

Difficult people present challenging obstacles to navigate throughout your life in many different contexts and relationships. Yet, God provides all the guidance you need to navigate them in a way that brings Him honor! In the few passages we've considered, we have seen that your responsibility involves doing what is good and right regardless of how other people treat you and what others do against you. Ultimately, it involves loving everyone by sacrificially doing what is in the best interest of others!

DISCIPLESHIP QUESTIONS

What does Jesus teach about retaliatory justice?

What must you do for those who are difficult toward you?

Who must you love?

What does love toward your enemy require?

What does Jesus require concerning the judgments you make?

What does the "Golden Rule" require regarding your conduct toward others?

What can you do to live peaceably with difficult people?

What does it mean to conquer evil with good?

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