

How to Love Difficult People

Receiving and Sharing
God's Mercy

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There are people in my world who are hard to love. Some of them are determined to protect themselves; prickly and constantly on the defensive, it only takes something little to set them off. They lash out verbally, and then withdraw emotionally and sometimes physically, cutting off all chance of communication. Others are just plain nasty for no apparent reason. They seem to take perverse pleasure in sabotaging every interaction, so most exchanges end unhappily with hard feelings on both sides. And then there are the Eeyore types who mope through life always looking at the dark side. They notice and (endlessly!) discuss every gloomy detail of their lives. They throw a wet blanket on every conversation. Frankly, I get tired of them all.

How do I deal with difficult people? Sometimes I avoid them by ignoring their emails, losing their telephone messages, or not allowing them to catch

my eye at work. Other times I try to manage our interactions by keeping them as short as possible. Occasionally I cope by talking about them with someone else. And when I've just had it, I give them a piece of my mind. Sarcastic, critical, and loud are my preferred options when I'm fed up and can't take it anymore.

Hmm, that's an interesting set of reactions... avoidance, manipulation, gossip, quarreling. You know, when you think about it, I can be pretty difficult to love too.

We Are All Hard to Love

Learning to love difficult people starts with understanding that you (like me) are hard to love too. You might not be difficult to love in the same way as those around you are, and you may not cause the same amount of relational damage; but on the inside, in your own way, you are just as difficult to love as everyone else.

Just like those difficult people, you and I sin

and go astray (Isaiah 53:6; Romans 3:22–23). It took Jesus' sacrifice on the cross for God to welcome you and me into his family. God doesn't love you because you make such a wonderful addition to his family; he loves you in spite of what you are like. And through his love for you, he changes you to be like himself. He makes you lovely, even though you didn't start out lovely (2 Corinthians 5:17, 21). You need exactly the same things from God—grace, mercy, kindness, and welcome—that others need from you.

If deep down you know you are unlovable *and* God's acceptance of you is completely undeserved, then you will have a welcoming attitude toward other unlovely people. But if you believe you're basically a decent person who anyone would be privileged to know, then you won't welcome others until they get their act together and become decent...just like you!

Learning the difficult skill of loving difficult people starts by asking God to show you how hard