



Spiritual Advisory: Prior to reading this article you must take a look in the mirror and examine yourself. Ask yourself honestly and sincerely: “Am I the difficult person that I am labeling someone else as?” “How do I know that the difficult person is not me?” The difficult person often denies his own difficulties and denies his own need for taking responsibility.



Dealing with Difficult People

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“How can I give you up Ephraim? How can I hand you over, Israel? How can I make you like Admah? How can I set you like Zeboiim? My heart churns with Me; My sympathy is stirred.”

(Hosea 11:8)

If you experience the pain of dealing with some one difficult, the Holy Old Testament Book of Hosea records the turmoil in God’s heart when He also had to deal with a difficult set of people.

Often we wonder “why do I let them push my buttons like they do?” Or “why can’t I just get past all those negative remarks and let it go?” When we ask ourselves these questions we are implying to ourselves that something is wrong with us, that the negative reactions are ours rather than the initial comments, and that you should not let the friendship matter such that it does. Recognize that while no one is perfect this is not YOUR problem to internalize or rationalize.

There are three additional important points to remember when dealing with a difficult person. First, if someone has the capacity to push your buttons you must realize that when you experience the human trait of “caring” you are vulnerable. While this may not feel particularly good, it may say some very good things about who you are. If you feel frustrated and powerless it demonstrates a good characteristic descriptive of your human make-up. It shows

that you can care, feel, get frustrated, can react—this entire gamete of feelings can be viewed as somewhat positive and certainly means that you are alive. Those who cannot feel emotions are dead inside and not alive.

Second, when someone “gets to us” we need to learn to be less reactive. How? We are accountable to God to be in control of ourselves only. We can be in control of our responses only. When we ate the fruit from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil we became conscious and having become conscious we developed the recognition of being self-conscious. We became aware of ourselves as a separate entity. We lost that sense of oneness with nature, with the rest of the created world. This loss of the sense of oneness with the rest of creation led to our banishment from Paradise.

As individuals we have the choice to either desire to effectively help another in achieving change or seeking out another friend or circle of friends. The direction, meaning, and purpose of life as we envision it should outweigh regression to a level of unhealthy behavior and friendship as it relates to temptation and its effects as demonstrated



in the Garden of Eden.

Third, you must realize that if the difficult person didn't matter so much to you, he would not be able to "get to you" and affect you in such a manner. When you find yourself growing, happy, and moving forward you will find your life full. You need to become clear, honest, and direct about who you are, what you desire in a friendship, and what level of independence you require. A friendship should be compatible with your goals in

life and should encourage you to achieve those healthy and spiritually enriching objectives in your life.

If someone is making your life difficult take control and set boundaries. Recognize those dangerous friendships that make your life difficult and eradicate them. Dangers of friendships include those friendships whom you recognize that you would not want to model, those friendships where one does all the defining and the other all the reacting, or one that has one member that seems to be happiest when you are not doing well (arrogance). You also do not want a clingy or continually angry relationship with another reinforcing dependency or totally abiding in living in the defensive.



Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil

Practical ideas are to ward off the "one up role", model in your behavior what you are seeking from a friendship, and keep enough distance between all friendships to be who you truly are. You can depend on NO ONE'S growth but your own.

Through God's grace change and growth are human capabilities built in to our life processes and progress through maturation. Everything should work together and not conflict with each other. As we

become more mature and healthy our life will promote better and better things.

"I speak in human terms because of the weakness of your flesh. For just as you presented your members as slaves of uncleanness, and of lawlessness leading to more lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves of righteousness for holiness." (Romans 6:21)

References:

- Peck, M.S. (1993). *Further Down the Road Less Traveled*. Simon & Schuster, New York, NY.
- Townsend, J. (2004). *Who's Pushing Your Buttons Handling the Difficult People in Your Life*. Integrity Publishers, Nashville, TN.