



MAKE US ONE PEOPLE - 401



Hope Christian Fellowship

*Making disciples who
live & love like Jesus*

13320 St Rt 7
Lisbon, OH 44432
330-385-HOPE

43152 St Rt 39
Wellsville, OH 43968
330-362-0224

© 2017 **Hope Christian Fellowship**
13320 State Route 7
Lisbon, Ohio 44432
330-385-HOPE

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PEOPLE ARE OUR BUSINESS

(All scriptures are taken from the New Living Translation, 2nd Edition, unless otherwise indicated.)

When we ponder the question, “What are we here for?” from a biblical perspective, we would probably say, “To glorify the Lord in all that we do.” and we would be correct.

However, we must consider something that is very close to the Lord’s heart—people.

Look at some Scriptures that help with that:

JOHN 3:16-17

“For God loved the world so much that he gave his one and only Son, so that _____ who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life. ¹⁷ God sent his Son into the world _____ to judge the world, but to _____ the world through him.

MATTHEW 22:36-40

“Teacher, which is the most important commandment in the law of Moses?” ³⁷ Jesus replied, “‘You must love the LORD your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind.’ ³⁸ This is the first and greatest commandment. ³⁹ A second is equally important: ‘Love your _____ as yourself.’ ⁴⁰ The entire law and all the demands of the prophets are based on these two commandments.”

MATTHEW 28:18-20

Jesus came and told his disciples, “I have been given all authority in heaven and on earth. ¹⁹ Therefore, go and _____ of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. ²⁰ Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you. And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”

Then to finish this idea:

JOHN 13:34-35

So now I am giving you a new commandment: Love each other. Just as I have loved you, you should love _____. ³⁵ Your love for one another will prove to the world that you are my disciples.”

We can see that people are at the center of the Lord’s heart. Even though the rest of creation is important to Him, people are, without a doubt, at the center of focus as Deuteronomy tells us.

DEUTERONOMY 32:10 NKJV

He found him in a desert land And in the wasteland, a howling wilderness; He encircled him, He instructed him, He _____ him as the _____ of His _____.

In light of these truths, we may have to rethink our life's priorities and our motivation for the things we do.

Let's consider this statement: **"If you love God you must love what He loves."**

Do you love God? Do you love what He loves? If so, do your efforts reflect those statements?

The Bible clearly tells us that God says, "If you love me you will obey me."

Does the Lord ask us to take actions anchored in selfishness or actions that consider others?

PHILIPPIANS 2:1-5

Is there any encouragement from belonging to Christ? Any comfort from his love? Any fellowship together in the Spirit? Are your hearts tender and compassionate? ² Then make me truly happy by agreeing wholeheartedly with each other, loving one another, and working _____ with one mind and purpose. ³ Don't be selfish; don't try to impress others. Be humble, thinking of others as better than yourselves. ⁴ Don't look out only for your own interests, but take an interest in _____, too. ⁵ You must have the same attitude that Christ Jesus had.

So, we must consider what we are doing with our time, talent, and money in light of the heart and desires of God who is Master of it all!

How Do We Love People Like the Lord Loved?

- **Love them** —always, under every circumstance, no exceptions.
- **Accept them** —totally, without reservation
- **Forgive them** — no matter how miserably they fail or how blatantly they sin, we want to forgive just as Jesus did for us. (John 13:34-35)

We all have had reason to hate people or to have enemies.

- We have been abandoned and betrayed
- We have been used and abused
- We have been manipulated through lies and deception
- We have been ill-considered, disrespected, hurt.

Although it is natural to feel bitterness and anger toward people, if we hold on to those negative emotions, they will hinder us from loving people, even those who are close to us. However, if we allow the Holy Spirit to help us to love, accept, and forgive those people, we grow in our ability to love.

The Lord tends to challenge us when it comes to our level of love toward others. If we want to *live* like Jesus, we must learn to *love* like Jesus.

1 CORINTHIANS 16:14

And do _____ with _____.

We encourage **everyone**, especially at Hope Christian Fellowship, to practice love, acceptance, and forgiveness.

Loving, accepting, and forgiving people does not mean we license what they do, agree with their thinking, or compromise our values. It means we simply receive them as they are, without expecting them to be like us, or think like us. We receive them and extend kindness toward them. If we do not practice these things, we won't be much of a light to attract them to Christ. If they never meet Christ, they will not have the opportunity to come to wholeness and maturity.

Luke 19:10

For the Son of Man came to _____ and _____ those who are lost.

The word "save" or "salvation" in its broadest sense means to bring to wholeness. It is interchangeable with the word "healing."

If the church (the living presence of Christ in His people) is to be the force for God in the world that it should be, it must learn to love, accept, and forgive people.

People need to know Christ so he can bring them into wholeness in every area of their lives. If people are handled poorly by us, they will never allow us the marvelous privilege of introducing them to the One who can make them whole. They will not want to engage in the fellowship of the church.

Love is your highest calling and the greatest contribution you can make to others. But it is possible to neglect it or misunderstand its characteristics.

What Does Love Look Like?

In our society, love is a commonly used word, even an over-used word. Often those who use the word most understand it least. Many who think they have found love have really settled for something far less than God intended for them.

For many, love means a romantic or sexual relationship.

While Scripture has much to say about intimacy within marriage, the word love takes on a differ-

ent meaning in the New Testament. Even Ephesians 5:25 (“Husbands, love your wives”) does not refer to romantic love.

Other common errors include equating love with emotionalism or sentimentality, or a friendly spirit of tolerance and affection toward others. People rarely give any consideration toward what the Bible says about love.

Biblical love is none of those. The “more excellent way” Paul refers to in 1 Corinthians 12:31 is love that comes from God Himself and conforms to His holy attributes.

We have no capacity to generate this on our own.

The Greek word for that kind of love is agapé, and it is characterized by humility, obedience to God, and self-sacrifice.

John 13:1 says of Christ’s love for His disciples, “He loved them to the end.” That literally means He loved them to perfection—to the limits of love.

In verses 4–5 He demonstrates His love by washing their feet. Love is humble. It focuses on meeting needs.

That goes along with one of the sayings we have used over the years to describe why we are equipping people, **“The Church is people, equipped to serve, meeting needs everywhere in Jesus name.”**

In addition, love is obedient and willing to make sacrifices for others.

JOHN 14:15

“If you love me, _____ my commandments.”

God made the supreme sacrifice for us in that He “so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son” (John 3:16). His example to us was to humble himself, leaving his heavenly throne to come to the earth as a human baby. To live as we live, to experience what we experience, including temptation and pain. Humiliating himself still further, He gave Himself as a sacrifice to pay for our sin. That is how much He loves us.

Whether the people we love and serve are lost or saved does not change the fact that they are important and precious to our Savior and King. Our heart and actions should reflect His, no matter where we are or who we are with!

Ask yourself if your expressions of love are all that God wants them to be. If not, take note of what changes you need to make in light of what you’re learning.

QUESTIONS FOR SMALL GROUPS

Do you consider yourself a “people-oriented person,” or a “task-oriented person?”

If you are a people-oriented person, how can you make sure your motivation toward being with people is unselfish and encouraging?

If you are a task-oriented person, what are some ways that you can make people a higher priority in your life?

Does this lesson challenge you in any way? How can we prioritize loving people as the Lord has loved us?

MAKE US ONE – PEOPLE 401-02

BUILD OTHERS UP!

(All scriptures are taken from the New Living Translation, 2nd Edition, unless otherwise indicated.)

All of us experience difficult seasons in our lives. We know what it is like for someone to encourage us. We may also know what it is like to find ourselves growing toward greater sadness and difficulty.

Since these things are all common to man, the Bible exhorts every believer to be a source of encouragement for those God has placed around them.

PROVERBS 11:25B

Those who refresh _____ will themselves be refreshed.

It is not difficult to build others up especially since we have the Spirit through Jesus Christ and the fruit that comes with Him.

A thankful heart and the presence of God are really all we need to encourage and build each other up.

Let's use the following acronym, "B-U-I-L-D-U-P," to be a source of encouragement to others:

B Be cheerful and inviting from the heart.

PROVERBS 17:22

A _____ heart is good medicine, but a broken spirit saps a person's strength.

When we take time to build up ourselves in the Lord through the Bible and prayer, we give place for God's Spirit to affect our attitude and actions.

We have an opportunity to be cheerful and inviting, no matter where we are or who we are with.

We need to become more aware of how our presence affects people. Are we inviting or repellant? Are we encouraging or negative? Do we build others up or tear them down?

U Utilize your giftings, or talents.

1 CORINTHIANS 2:10-11

But it was to us that God _____ these things by his Spirit. For his Spirit searches out everything and shows us God's deep secrets. ¹¹ No one can _____ a person's thoughts except that person's own spirit, and no one can

know God's thoughts except God's own Spirit.

Remember, the Lord is not surprised about any situation. The Lord knows everything within and around every person walking on the earth at every single moment.

Since we are connected to the Holy Spirit, we can pray for discernment and strategic opportunities to encourage other people. Pray, even in the midst of a conversation, that God will quicken our minds with the right words in that special moment.

I Inspire through the Word of God.

PROVERBS 19:8

To acquire wisdom is to love oneself; people who cherish _____ will prosper.

God's word has answers for every situation in life. As believers, we receive insight to the scriptures that can help strengthen and encourage other people. A wise and encouraging person will use the scriptures to inspire and build others up. Scripture can be used for gentle guidance, leading those in discouragement and despair towards a way of hope.

L Listen to the Hearts and Minds of others.

JAMES 1:19

Understand this, my dear brothers and sisters: You must all be _____ to _____, _____ to _____, and slow to get angry.

Sometimes our strongest encouragement comes without us saying a word and just listening to what is on another person's heart and mind. We should strive towards patience and self-control while trusting in God to reveal His will in time. To that end, James 1:19 is a great scripture to memorize and to remind ourselves to speak less and listen more.

D Demonstrate encouragement with your attitude and actions.

EPHESIANS 5:8-9

For once you were full of darkness, but now you have light from the Lord. So live as people of light! ⁹ For this _____ you produces only what is good and right and true.

Even when others are negative or harsh in their attitude and actions, we can still show Christ by the way we respond to them. How we relate to those who are harsh, judgmental, or unfair reveals how close we are to God.

The Spirit of God will equip us to deal with adversity in such a way that people around us

are encouraged either in their faith or towards living a life of faith.

U Understand their difficulty, comfort them as Christ comforted you.

PSALM 69:20

Their insults have broken my heart, and I am in despair. If only one person would show some pity; if only one would turn and _____ me.

We listen so we can understand and have compassion, so we can offer comfort where it is needed.

There are even times when it is necessary to enter into a tough conversation in order to give another person hope. Avoiding those times can actually make a situation worse.

As believers, we can ask God for wisdom to give a word of encouragement even in the worst of days. Our response should be sympathetic and grounded in the love of Christ. We “speak the truth in love.” (Ephesians 4:15)

P Provide hope and prayer.

ECCLESIASTES 9:4

There is hope only for the _____. As they say, “It’s better to be a live dog than a dead lion!”

Hope is for **everyone alive** – even when situations are incredibly overwhelming.

There is hope in Christ for every hardship on earth. God has the power to turn every evil act into an opportunity to reveal His grace, mercy, and strength to those who call on Him.

We are Ambassadors of hope for Christ in every opportunity.

We are to pray at every opportunity! Use the “Thirty-Second Prayer.” Pray with people in the moment of their need. It is better to pray right in the moment than to tell a person, “Sure, I’ll pray for you.” taking a risk that you’ll remember it later.

PHILIPPIANS 4:6

Don’t worry about anything; instead, _____ about _____.
Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done.

Let’s Go Build Others Up!

1 THESSALONIANS 5:11

So encourage each other and _____ each other _____, just as you are already doing.

We are around people every day at work, at church, at school, and in our homes. Many of these same people need encouragement every day by the words and actions of other people.

Most people are still hearing hurtful words from their past.

It is the grace of God that gives us what we need to overcome our own difficulty and become a source of encouragement to the hurting. Spend time praying and asking God to show you a person who you can build up today!

Ways to Build People

1. Start with Yourself – King Solomon (1 Kings 3:5–14)
2. Practice the 30-Second Rule (encourage them during the first 30 seconds) – Jesus and Simon Peter (John 1:42)
3. Let People Know You Need Them – Paul (Galatians 4:13–15; 2 Timothy 4:11)
4. Create a Memory and Visit It Often – Joshua (Joshua 4:1–7)
5. Compliment People in Front of People – John the Baptist (John 1:29–31)
6. Give Others a Reputation to Uphold – Jesus and Nathaniel (John 1:45–48)
7. Say the Right Words at Right Time – Mordecai to Esther (Esther 4:13, 14)
8. Encourage the Dream of Others – Naomi and Ruth (Ruth 3:1–6)
9. Pass the Credit On to Others – David and his men (1 Samuel 30:21–31)
10. Offer Your Very Best – Epaphroditus (Philippians 2:25–30)
11. Share a Secret with Someone – Mary and Elizabeth (Luke 1:39–45)
12. Mine the Gold of Good Intentions – Abigail and David (1 Samuel 25:23–35)
13. Keep Your Eyes Off the Mirror – Joseph and his Brothers (Genesis 50:18–20)
14. Do for Others What They Can't Do for Themselves – Joseph (Genesis 41)
15. Listen with Your Heart – Barnabas and John Mark (Acts 15:36–41)
16. Find the Keys to Their Heart – Nehemiah and builders (Nehemiah 2:17, 18)
17. Be the First to Help – Barnabas and Saul (Acts 9:26, 27)
18. Add Value to People – Rebekah and Abraham (Genesis 24:10–27)

19. Remember a Person's Story – David, Jonathan, and Mephibosheth (1 Samuel 9:1–13)
20. Tell a Good Story – Paul (Acts 26:1–29)
21. Give With No Strings Attached – Jonathan (1 Samuel 18:1–4)
22. Learn Their Name – Paul (Romans 16:3–15)
23. Point Out People's Strengths – Peter and Paul (2 Peter 3:14–16)
24. Write Notes of Encouragement – Paul and his epistles (Philippians, 2 Timothy)

QUESTIONS FOR SMALL GROUPS

Discuss this statement: Encouragement is one of the most effective ministry tools we can use, toward both believers and unbelievers.

Have you been challenged by this lesson?: Do you have any attitudes toward people that might need to be adjusted?

Do any of our list of "Ways to Build People" stand out to you? Do you intend to put some of them into practice?

Have you made a personal decision to become an encourager?

ATTITUDES THAT ATTACK

(All scriptures are taken from the New Living Translation, 2nd Edition, unless otherwise indicated.)

Becoming Free

The first thing we probably have to learn is to accept what we cannot change.

Many aspects of life cannot be changed:

- Weather
- Time
- Our Past
- Death of Loved Ones

To accept what we cannot change requires humility on our part. Humility brings us into the power and presence of God.

1 PETER 5:6

So humble yourselves under the mighty power of God, and at the _____ he will lift you up in honor.

PSALM 37:5

Commit everything you do to the LORD. _____ him, and he will _____ you.

It is one thing to know what these verses say. It is quite another thing to put them into practice. This requires a decision, and a willingness to act on that decision. Then, putting these verses into practice helps us to know what to change and what to accept.

Accepting what Cannot be Changed:

- Acceptance means you stop fighting the inevitable.
- Acceptance stops a lot of hurt.
- Acceptance empowers you to let go and allows the Lord to get involved.

If we want to grow to become all God created me to become, we have to accept what cannot be altered.

Often this requires prayer and counsel from others. We work through our attitudes and thinking patterns. We accept the responsibility to grow in character. We choose not to remain the person we were before. We ask the Lord to transform our brokenness into wholeness.

Impatience and humility do not go together. Impatience leads to reaction against events instead

of waiting for God's direction. Impatience causes us to sacrifice insight for effort. It causes us to trust our natural instincts rather than the Word of God in our life

Three Harmful Responses

As we go through life's crises, we need to guard against three harmful responses:

- Blaming God
- Blaming others
- Blaming yourself

When Jesus died on the Cross, He took my failures, my sins, and my brokenness in His redemptive suffering.

If you are in that struggle of, "Where did I go wrong?" consider this Scripture:

ROMANS 8:1

So now there is _____ for those who belong to Christ Jesus.

Jesus is telling us, "Go and blame yourself no more."

Stop Playing the Blame Game

JOHN 9:1-3

As Jesus was walking along, he saw a man who had been blind from birth. ²

"Rabbi," his disciples asked him, "why was this man born blind? Was it _____ of his _____ or his parents' sins?" ³

"It was not because of his sins or his parents' sins," Jesus answered. "This happened so the power of God could be seen in him.

The Apostles were not looking at God's heart for the situation. They were looking to place blame.

We often do the same thing. Instead of looking to God and operating in His compassion, we are more concerned about the blame, and we miss the solution.

Playing the blame game only creates more opportunities for hurt, and it blinds us from seeing God's purpose fulfilled.

Blaming others:

- never heals. It always hurts
- never reconnects people. It only breaks relationships.

- never unites. It only divides.
- never builds. It only tears apart.
- never solves a problem. It only compounds the problem.

Jesus came to stop this cycle. In essence, He said, “Forget these blaming games,” instead, ask, “How can I build this man or woman.” “How can I make this situation better?”

Make the Wonderful Discovery of Who You Are

The third step in our emotional healing occurs when we learn that in God’s sight, a person is neither a complete failure nor a hopeless sinner. When we stop blaming ourselves, we are able to discover God’s amazing love. Because every human being is of divine origin.

ECCLESIASTES 3:11

Yet God has made everything _____ for its own time. He has planted eternity in the human heart, but even so, people cannot see the whole scope of God’s work from beginning to end.

PSALM 8:5-8

Yet you made them only a little lower than God and _____ them with glory and honor. ⁶ You gave them _____ of everything you made, putting all things under their authority— ⁷ the flocks and the herds and all the wild animals, ⁸ the birds in the sky, the fish in the sea, and everything that swims the ocean currents.

We should encourage people to know that it is not necessarily prideful to think well of yourself. Here at HCF, one of our values is to “Love ourselves *correctly*.” We do not get our value from the viewpoint of the world, our even from our own opinion of ourselves, we get our value from God Himself. Generally, people tend to get out of balance one way or another – leaning toward either self-exaltation or self-hatred. We find the truth, the good balance in the Word of God. It teaches that we are made in the image of God and are therefore of great value. We have all sinned and brought damage upon ourselves, but God valued us so highly that He sent His only Son to pay the price for our sin so that we can make the choice to accept receive this precious gift. The acceptance of Christ’s sacrifice puts us into agreement with God, restoring our relationship with Him.

When Christ lives in us, we are wonderful people. I am a child of God. God loves me.

PHILIPPIANS 4:13

For I can do everything _____, who gives me strength.

God is faithful to finish the work He has started in us. The best is yet to come!

God wants to turn your brokenness into a ministry of hope, using it to heal many other broken people and give them hope as well!

Slam the Door on Self-Pity

Self-pity is an ever-present temptation to those who have endured an emotionally shattering experience. It is many people's number one private enemy.

Self-pity is one luxury that no one can afford. To engage in it is to hurt yourself far more than anything that has hurt you previously. Close the door on self-pity and you shut out the major cause of depression.

To get rid of self-pity, learn to do these six things:

- Spot it quickly and see it for what it is.
- Exercise your power to make self-pity an unwelcome guest.
- Make use of physical exercise (needed to fight depression).
- Expect some heartache along the way.
- Focus on what you have, not what you have lost.
- Give yourself in service to others.

Apply Healing Medicine to your Emotional Wounds

Jesus was hurt that we might be healed.

ISAIAH 53:1-6

Who has believed our message? To whom has the LORD revealed his powerful arm? ² My servant grew up in the LORD's presence like a tender green shoot, like a root in dry ground. There was nothing beautiful or majestic about his appearance, nothing to attract us to him. ³ He was despised and rejected— a man of sorrows, acquainted with deepest grief. We turned our backs on him and looked the other way. He was despised, and we did not care. ⁴ Yet it was our weaknesses he carried; it was our sorrows that weighed him down. And we thought his troubles were a punishment from God, a punishment for his own sins! ⁵ But he was pierced for our rebellion, crushed for our sins. _____ was _____ so we could be _____. He was whipped so we could be healed. ⁶ All of us, like sheep, have strayed away. We have left God's paths to follow our own. Yet the LORD laid on him the sins of us all.

Emotional pain is normal. However, if we continue giving in to it long after our injury, we have no

one to blame but ourselves.

ROMANS 12:9-21

Don't just pretend to love others. Really love them. Hate what is wrong. Hold tightly to what is good. ¹⁰ Love each other with genuine affection, and take delight in honoring each other. ¹¹ Never be lazy, but work hard and serve the Lord enthusiastically. ¹² Rejoice in our confident hope. Be _____ in trouble, and keep on praying. ¹³ When God's people are in need, be ready to help them. Always be eager to practice hospitality.

¹⁴ Bless those who persecute you. Don't curse them; pray that God will bless them. ¹⁵ Be happy with those who are happy, and weep with those who weep. ¹⁶ Live in harmony with each other. Don't be too proud to enjoy the company of ordinary people. And don't think you know it all!

¹⁷ Never _____ evil with more evil. Do things in such a way that everyone can see you are honorable. ¹⁸ Do all that you can to live in peace with everyone.

¹⁹ Dear friends, never take revenge. Leave that to the righteous anger of God. For the Scriptures say, "I will take revenge; I will pay them back," says the LORD.

²⁰ Instead, "If your enemies are hungry, feed them. If they are thirsty, give them something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals of shame on their heads."

²¹ Don't let evil conquer you, but conquer evil by doing good.

To heal the bitterness and pain of a wounded spirit, learn to take these seven steps:

- Tell yourself that no one can hurt you any more than you allow.
- Open yourself to God for cleaning out the wound.
- Practice forgiveness
- Pray for anyone who deceitfully uses you
- Give others the benefit of the doubt, even those who hurt you
- Let God heal your broken spirit
- Overcome evil by doing good. (Romans 12:21)

QUESTIONS FOR SMALL GROUPS

How as this lesson challenged you? Do you ever struggle with attitudes?

Do you ever feel “attacked” by an attitude and have to battle with it? Have you ever “attacked” another person because an attitude of your own?

Discuss: The “Blame game,” and how destructive it is.

Have you ever considered the phrase, “Love yourself *correctly?*” How can you put that concept into practice?

HANDLING CRITICISM

(All scriptures are taken from the New Living Translation, 2nd Edition, unless otherwise indicated.)

The ability to deal with criticism makes or breaks us. No one is unaffected by it.

Everyone faces criticism, no matter who you are, no matter what you do.

Some of the most painful and difficult moments of our lives have revolved around criticism.

Criticism doesn't have to demean or defeat us, it can actually help us grow! If we learn to handle it well we turn it into something useful for us and for the Kingdom of God.

How to Handle Criticism in a Positive Way

We have more than one option when receiving criticism. It is always important to handle criticism in a positive way. I am not responsible for anyone else's actions or attitudes, only my own.

If my attitude and actions are right before God, then I can be at peace with Him. If we do not handle criticism correctly, we become victims rather than victors. We serve a God who helps us turn bad into good, just as He did with the patriarch Joseph.

GENESIS 50:20

You intended to _____ me, but God intended it all for _____. He brought me to this position so I could save the lives of many people.

Joseph had a good attitude and perspective when he evaluated the difficult times of his life.

ROMANS 12:2

Don't _____ the behavior and customs of this _____, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God's will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect.

The first step in learning how to handle criticism is to understand the difference between *constructive* and *destructive* criticism.

- Make sure you know what is being said. Is it positive, seeking to help you to improve somehow? Or is it negative, with no substance, a personal attack?
- Be open to the idea that there may be some truth in what is being said, always willing to evaluate yourself.
- Take positive action instead of being negative and defensive. A negative attitude toward criticism can become more destructive to you than the criticism itself.

- Avoid defensiveness, it will only close you off to the other person and put you in a combative or argumentative attitude.
- Determine not to waste energy fighting destructive criticism. Choose to react with kindness, no matter what the demeanor of the other person.
- Try to understand the source of the criticism.
- Place yourself in the other person's shoes. Ask yourself, "Is this person speaking from wisdom or from lack of understanding?"
- See if there is a crowd with the critic. If only one person raises an issue, listen to what he or she has to say, but also consider that this person may simply have had a bad day. If more than one person raises an issue, it carries more weight.
- Open yourself to see if you can benefit from the criticism.
- Seek first to please God more than man. Then God can work in the situation without any interference from you.

PROVERBS 16:7 KJV

When a man's ways please the LORD, He makes even his enemies to be at peace with him.

How you handle criticism is much more important than the criticism itself.

How to Cultivate the Mind of Christ while Handling Criticism

"When you are being run out of town, get to the head of the line and look as though you are leading a parade."

Herman Hickman

Let's learn how we can equip ourselves for handling criticism by being:

- Appreciative: "Every time I think of you, I give thanks to my God." (Philippians 1:3)
- Considerate: "So if what I eat causes another believer to sin, I will never eat meat again as long as I live—for I don't want to cause another believer to stumble." (1 Corinthians 8:13)
- Humble: "Though I am the least deserving of all God's people." (Ephesians 3:8)
- Servant-like: "This letter is from Paul, a slave of Christ Jesus, chosen by God to be an apostle and sent out to preach his Good News." (Romans 1:1)
- Confident: "For I can do everything through Christ, who gives me strength." (Philippians 4:13)

- Courageous: “Do not be afraid, for I have ransomed you. I have called you by name; you are mine.” (Isaiah 43:1)
- Excited: “And I am convinced that nothing can ever separate us from God’s love. Neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither our fears for today nor our worries about tomorrow—not even the powers of hell can separate us from God’s love. ³⁹ No power in the sky above or in the earth below—indeed, nothing in all creation will ever be able to separate us from the love of God that is revealed in Christ Jesus our Lord.” (Romans 8:38-39)
- A Goal Setter: “I am planning to go to Spain, and when I do, I will stop off in Rome.” (Romans 15:24)
- Persistent: “For the next two years, Paul lived in Rome at his own expense. He welcomed all who visited him, boldly proclaiming the Kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ. And no one tried to stop him.” (Acts 28:30-31)
- Victorious: “Yes, and the Lord will deliver me from every evil attack and will bring me safely into his heavenly Kingdom.” (2 Timothy 4:18)

QUESTIONS FOR SMALL GROUPS

We all face criticism. How have you handled criticism when it has come your way?

Have you ever considered that you have more than one option when it comes to handling criticism? Has this lesson challenged you?

Discuss the differences between constructive criticism and destructive criticism.

Do you have a plan to handle criticism differently the next time you are faced with it?

DEALING WITH SHAME

(All scriptures are taken from the New Living Translation, 2nd Edition, unless otherwise indicated.)

For the world to discover the truth of who they are, Christians must discover it and walk in it themselves. One of the greatest needs for the world today is for Christians to walk in the identity and power of who they are in Christ.

Perhaps the greatest lie that the enemy has used to deceive the Lord's people with is that they are powerless against sin and that they will have to struggle with it for the rest of their lives.

If Christians do not know who they are, they will not live and love like Jesus. Once a person gets a revelation of who they are as a new creation in Christ, the right identity and lifestyle are secure within them.

As we know, the Holy Spirit is guiding us in to all truth.

JOHN 8:31-32

Jesus said to the people who believed in him, "You are truly my disciples if you remain faithful to my teachings. ³² And you will know the truth, and the _____ will set you _____."

JOHN 16:13

When the Spirit of truth comes, he will _____ you into all _____. He will not speak on his own but will tell you what he has heard. He will tell you about the future.

ROMANS 8:14

For all who are _____ the _____ of God are children of God.

Our hope is that you will be refreshed, through teaching the truth of God's Word so that you can recognize the leading of the Holy Spirit and follow His lead in your life.

Already Forgiven

One of the most difficult areas of the Christian life to overcome is shame. Even though they know they have been forgiven, many Christians continue to struggle, year after year, under the shame of their past sins and mistakes.

Many never move from the initial experience of being a "sinner saved by grace" into the more mature life of being a "Saint of the Most High."

"The heaviest garment a person can ever wear is the garment of shame."

Jonathan Welton

The Difference Between Guilt and Shame

Guilt The negative discomfort we feel for doing something against our values which can help us grow and learn from the experience. *“I did something bad.”*

Shame An intense and false belief that we are flawed and unworthy of loving connection, which destroys growth and freedom. *“I am bad.”*

What is Shame?

- When we persistently feel that we are not acceptable.
- The belief that we are less than a good person.
- A vague, undefined heaviness that presses our spirit.
- An invisible violence that attacks the belief that life can be better.
- A primal feeling that discolors all others.
- The dark repeating voice that tells you , “You don’t measure up . . . Do more!”
- The force that slackens the free flow of joy and gratitude.
- A corrosive, spiritual acid covered by a think layer of perfectionism, performance, rage, and legalistic religion.

The people of God need a clear view of how God sees us and how we should be viewing ourselves.

Let’s look at the story of Sarah for some great insight into how God views us, both before and after repentance.

GENESIS 18:9-15

“Where is Sarah, your wife?” the visitors asked. “She’s inside the tent,” Abraham replied.

¹⁰ Then one of them said, “I will return to you about this time next year, and your wife, Sarah, will have a son!” Sarah was listening to this conversation from the tent.

¹¹ Abraham and Sarah were both very old by this time, and Sarah was long past the age of having children. ¹² So she laughed silently to herself and said, “How could a worn-out woman like me enjoy such pleasure, especially when my master—my husband—is also so old?”

¹³ Then the LORD said to Abraham, “Why did Sarah laugh? Why did she say, ‘Can an old woman like me have a baby?’ ¹⁴ Is anything too hard for the LORD? I

will return about this time next year, and Sarah will have a son.”

¹⁵ Sarah was afraid, so she denied it, saying, “I didn’t laugh.” But the LORD said, “No, you did laugh.”

According to the Hebrew root words describing her laughter, Sarah’s laugh was a mocking type of laugh. She was not saying something like “That’s a good one Lord. You really know how to make a person laugh.” The root word indicates that she was angry, frustrated, and actually scoffing at His announcement.

She was not enthusiastic and full of faith, it was just the opposite. Yet in spite of this, let’s look at how the New Testament recalls this story.

HEBREWS 11:11-12

It was _____ that even Sarah was able to have a child, though she was barren and was too old. She _____ that God would keep his promise. ¹² And so a whole nation came from this one man who was as good as dead—a nation with so many people that, like the stars in the sky and the sand on the seashore, there is no way to count them.

Those first four words, “It was by faith,” are surprising. The King James version says, “She judged Him faithful who had promised.” The story we read in Genesis 18 did not show a person full of faith, but in Hebrews 11 it describes a person of faith!

So what happened? Somewhere along the line, Sarah repented, and The Lord rewrote the story. Imagine how the Lord might have said to the Hebrew writer, “Ok, this is how I want you to write it down.”

In the eyes of God, repentance literally rewrites the account of our lives. When we repent, God changes our story and sets us back on the path of our destiny.

If He did not do this, the moment we made our first mistake we would be doomed, never able to reach our destiny. Our sin would have permanently derailed us.

However, here is the good news - God interacts with us from our destiny, not our history!

The Past Separates Us

If we do not realize that God changes our history when we repent, we will continue to see ourselves through a reality that, according to God, no longer exists.

1 JOHN 1:9

But if we confess our sins to him, he is faithful and just to

_____ us our sins and to _____ us from all wickedness.

If he has truly forgiven our sin and cleansed us from wickedness, then to live in guilt means we are submitting ourselves to a false reality. God goes so far as to tell us that the past does not belong to us.

1 CORINTHIANS 3:21-23

So don't boast about following a particular human leader. For everything belongs to you—²² whether Paul or Apollos or Peter, or the world, or life and death, or the present and the future. Everything belongs to you,²³ and you belong to Christ, and Christ belongs to God.

All things are ours, including the present and the future, but the past is not ours, and that is why it is not included in this verse. If we have repented and received forgiveness, our past does not belong to us, it belongs to God.

ROMANS 8:38-39

And I am convinced that nothing can ever separate us from God's love. Neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither our fears for today nor our worries about tomorrow—not even the powers of hell can separate us from God's love.³⁹ No power in the sky above or in the earth below—indeed, nothing in all creation will ever be able to separate us from the love of God that is revealed in Christ Jesus our Lord.

“The past” is also missing from this list. Could that mean that dwelling on the past can actually separate us from the love of God? If that were so, it would not be because God desires it. But we, ourselves, choose to dwell on the past, and so separate ourselves. In a sense, we are calling God a liar when HE says we are forgiven, but we choose to continue to live in guilt and shame. We unwittingly live as though God is not enough.

There is another point that needs clarification: God deliberately “forgets” our repented-of past. He chooses not to “remember.” Once we have repented and received His forgiveness, he never brings it up to us again. Only our enemy does that. That is why Satan is called, “the accuser.” (Revelation 12:10)

Let's look at some scriptures to see how our Lord deals with us when we repent.

PSALM 25:6-7

Remember, O LORD, your compassion and unfailing love, which you have shown from long ages past.⁷ Do not remember the rebellious sins of my youth. Remember me _____ of your unfailing love, for you are merciful, O LORD.

PSALM 103:8-12

The LORD is compassionate and merciful, slow to get angry and filled with unfailing love.⁹ He will not constantly _____ us, nor remain angry forever.¹⁰ He does not punish us for all our sins; he does not deal harshly with us, as

we deserve. ¹¹ For his unfailing love toward those who fear him is as great as the height of the heavens above the earth. ¹² He has _____ our sins as far from us as the east is from the west.

ISAIAH 43:25

“I—yes, I alone—will _____ your sins for my own sake and will never think of them again.

ISAIAH 64:9

Don't be so angry with us, LORD. Please don't _____ our sins forever. Look at us, we pray, and see that we are all your people.

JEREMIAH 31:34

And they will not need to teach their neighbors, nor will they need to teach their relatives, saying, ‘You should know the LORD.’ For everyone, from the least to the greatest, will know me already,” says the LORD. “And I will _____ their wickedness, and I will never again remember their _____.”

HEBREWS 8:12

And I will forgive their wickedness, and I will never again _____ their sins.”

HEBREWS 10:17

Then he says, “I will _____ remember their sins and lawless deeds.”

1 Corinthians 13:4-5

Love is patient and kind. Love is not jealous or boastful or proud ⁵ or rude. It does not demand its own way. It is not irritable, and it keeps _____ of being wronged.

Wow – what a wonderful God we serve! However, many Christians have suffered great emotional, mental, and even physical disorders throughout life because they could never accept the fact that God has totally forgiven them.

When God offers us His forgiveness, it is never a partial forgiveness, but always a total forgiveness. The slate is forever clean. In God's family, there are only forgiven children.

God forgives us. We are to accept with gratitude His cleansing provision and, by His help, blot out from our memories all hurting reminders of the past.

We should also become a more forgiving person with others, free of the resentments and prejudices that will shackle our spiritual lives.

Someone has made this humorous but wise observation: “Christians should keep a cemetery in

which to bury the faults and failures of their fellow believers.”

Let's make this very clear: God does not want us to access our past apart from His rewriting of it. When we continue to live in the past, we open the opportunity to repeat it and give place to the devil in our lives. It is easy to fall into a cycle of repetition because the past (which our repentance changed) does not lead us to our destiny.

Hebrews 11:13-16

All these people died still believing what God had promised them. They did not receive what was promised, but they saw it all from a distance and welcomed it. They agreed that they were foreigners and nomads here on earth. ¹⁴ Obviously, people who say such things are looking forward to a country they can call their own. ¹⁵ If they had longed for the country they came from, they could have gone back. ¹⁶ But they were looking for a _____ place, a heavenly homeland. That is why God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a _____ for them.

If these men and women had focused on the past, they would have found themselves repeating it. The problem is not the content of the past, but rather, **our focus**. We all tend to head where we focus, and as the old saying goes: If you do not change your direction, you will end up where you are headed.

Forgiven by Faith

Consider this amazing reality: God does not choose to forgive us when we repent! He chose to forgive us over 2,000 years ago! Before we were born, we were completely forgiven.

This is why we can only be saved by faith (not by works) because we have to *believe*. We live by faith for what was done on the cross *then*, not for what we can do *now*.

The purpose of repentance is not to plead with God or to convince Him to forgive a particular sin; He has *already* provided forgiveness for us.

God does not show us our sins to demand an apology. Rather, He lets us see those sins for what they are and the harm they cause so that when we see it, we will repent and turn away from it.

When we repent, we turn our heart back to Him, so we can receive His forgiveness. Once we have received the forgiveness He has already purchased for us, there is no more need for repentance.

Only One Way to Righteousness

Many have said that the Old Testament was works-based salvation and that the New Testament is grace-based salvation. However, the truth is that faith has *always* been the only way to righteousness in both the Old and New Testaments.

EPHESIANS 2:8

God saved you by his grace _____ you _____.
And you can't take credit for this; it is a gift from God.

The Old Testament animal sacrifices were performed not as works, but in faith as a proclamation looking forward to the day of Jesus' sacrifice.

The Old Testament saints believed *toward* a coming Messiah, whereas the New Testament saints believe *back* toward the completed work of the Messiah.

In both cases, it is a matter of faith, because people in both eras receive by faith the same event in history: Jesus' death on the cross.

CONCLUSION:

Before we were born, before we sinned, before we repented, Jesus had already provided forgiveness for us on the cross 2000 years ago.

1 JOHN 2:2

He himself is the sacrifice that _____ for our sins—and not only our sins but the sins of all the world.

Jesus died not only for our sins but also for every sin ever committed. God has chosen to forgive all sin for all time!

So now, we must make the choice to receive His forgiveness by faith. Like a steel cable of forgiveness suspended throughout all of eternity, Jesus' blood runs through the whole timeline infinitely in both directions.

He established forgiveness for all sin before any humans were ever created and made it accessible by faith.

REVELATION 13:8

And all the people who belong to this world worshiped the beast. They are the ones whose names were not written in the Book of Life _____ the world was made—the Book that belongs to the Lamb who was slaughtered.

All that one must do to receive forgiveness is to reach out and grasp it by faith!

QUESTIONS FOR SMALL GROUPS

What do you think about the Jonathan Welton quote, “The heaviest garment a person can ever wear is the garment of shame.”

How can dwelling on the past affect our relationship with the Lord in a negative way?

Has this lesson challenged you? Have you accepted and received the forgiveness purchased for you by the death of Christ on the cross?

Have you, in turn, developed a forgiving heart toward others? If not, how can that affect your relationship with God?

DEALING WITH SHAME, PART 2

(All scriptures are taken from the New Living Translation, 2nd Edition, unless otherwise indicated.)

In our last lesson, we learned:

- We tend to struggle with things already forgiven.
- We need a clear view of how God sees us and how we should see ourselves.
- God changes our story when we repent.
- We receive forgiveness by faith in what Christ has already done.

Forgiveness Before Confrontation

“I will forgive them after they apologize.” How many times have we heard that? Perhaps we have even said that ourselves. In so many relationships, the only time that we hear about our sin is when someone has been hurt and is demanding an apology.

The Lord’s approach is very different. He forgives us *then* confronts us for the purpose of repentance. He is not looking for us to cover ourselves with dust and ashes, to fast for 40 days, or to cry all night, He desires a **change of direction**. He came to show us the destruction of our ways and how we can walk in newness of life.

True change does not come from condemnation and guilt, but from a loving and forgiving Father.

JOHN 3:16

“For God _____ the world _____ that he gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life.

ROMANS 2:4 NASB

Or do you think lightly of the riches of His kindness and tolerance and patience, not knowing that **the kindness of God leads you to repentance?**

We do not have to convince God to forgive us because He already has! We need to **accept** the fact of His complete forgiveness before we sinned, during our sins, and after we sinned.

If we sin, we do not need to convince God that we are worthy of a second chance. We have been forgiven for anything we could ever do. Jesus’ death provided a perfect sacrifice so all our sins could be covered once and for all time.

1 PETER 3:18

Christ suffered for our sins _____ for _____. He never sinned, but he died for sinners to bring you safely home to God. He suffered

physical death, but he was raised to life in the Spirit.

ROMANS 6:10

When he died, he died once to _____ the power of sin. But now that he lives, he lives for the glory of God.

As we repent, we must continue to receive our forgiveness by faith.

ROMANS 1:17

This Good News tells us how God makes us right in his sight. This is accomplished from start to finish by faith. As the Scriptures say, "It is through _____ that a righteous person has life."

GALATIANS 3:11

So it is clear that no one can be made right with God by trying to keep the law. For the Scriptures say, "It is through _____ that a righteous person has life."

Conviction vs. Condemnation

Many of us have been taught that we should remember our failures so that we can learn from them, but is that really Kingdom of God thinking?

Remember the Lord desires that we leave the past behind, not to focus on it so we do not try to repeat it.

One of the great deceptions that has crept into the church is to equate holiness with awareness of sin. This lie from Satan has not lead to freedom, but rather it leads us to live a life lived under the shadow of condemnation.

The Lord does not want us to live in the shadow of lies but under the brightness and warmth of the truth of God's Word. If we do not close the door to the past, condemnation will destroy our confidence in Christ's forgiveness.

What is condemnation? The Merriam-Webster dictionary tells us that to condemn is "to declare to be reprehensible, wrong or evil, usually after weighing evidence without reservation. To pronounce guilty. To be judged unfit for use." Some of the synonyms are, "to criticize, to sentence, or to doom."

Now, what does the Bible tell us about condemnation?

ROMANS 8:1

So now there is _____ condemnation for those who belong to Christ Jesus.

Hallelujah! We belong to Jesus Christ, so there is no condemnation for us. We can be sure that our Great God is not sitting on his throne in the Heavens declaring us reprehensible, wrong or

evil, unfit for use, criticizing us, passing sentence or placing doom on us.

Condemnation is Satan's tool to use against believers, and he is quite good at it. However, if you have repented, and you continue to hear words in your heart declaring your guilt, you are hearing Satan's voice of condemnation. You, at that point, have the power and authority to resist the devil, command the liar to be silent, just as our Lord did.

JAMES 4:7

So humble yourselves before God. _____ the devil, and he will flee from you.

1 PETER 5:9

Stand firm _____ him, and be strong in your faith. Remember that your Christian brothers and sisters all over the world are going through the same kind of suffering you are.

How does the Lord correct His children? He uses the voice of kindness and conviction.

Webster's dictionary defines *conviction* as "The act of convincing" or "the state of being convinced."

It is the responsibility of the Holy Spirit to convict (convinces) us when we have sinned. It is not His task to beat us or make us feel miserable.

The Holy Spirit actually convicts in three different ways.

JOHN 16:8

And when he comes, he will _____ the world of its sin, and of God's righteousness, and of the coming judgment.

- **Conviction of Sin**

The Holy Spirit convinces our hearts that we have committed a sin or sins. We then should repent to the Lord and, if possible, to the person or persons whom we hurt or offend so relationships can be restored.

We can discern the difference between conviction and condemnation because the Holy Spirit always speaks the truth to us in love. God is love and in Him, there is no demeaning or belittling voice. He is not one who makes you feel dirty and worthless, or ashamed.

- **Conviction of Righteousness**

Once the Holy Spirit has convinced us of sin and we have repented. He then begins to convince us of our righteousness. He begins to restore us in light of who we *are* not in light of what we have *done*.

He begins to tell us things like:

“You are better than this, this is not who you are.”

“I have seen the end of your story you are a mighty person in Christ.”

“Now, stand up tall; walk with confidence; walk in love; walk in strength; I have called you to holiness.”

This what the Holy Spirit does, convincing of our righteousness in Christ.

- **Conviction of Judgment**

The Holy Spirit convinces us to bring judgment upon the kingdom of darkness around us. This is not about judgment toward our sin. Our judgment was removed when we repented of our sin.

JOHN 16:11

Judgment will come because the ruler of this world has _____
been judged.

So we see that the Holy Spirit convicts people of their sin, then after they repent, convicts them of their righteous standing, then He convicts us to exact retribution on the tempting spirits that mislead us from the path of righteousness, He sends us to destroy the works of the enemy.

This is how God brings judgment upon Satan.

Once we are free from the very things that kept us bound, perhaps even for years, whether lust, bitterness, shame, alcohol, drugs, whatever- we are sent out to expose and crush these same works of darkness.

The very chains with which we were once bound have been given back to us as a witness against the lies and deception of our former jailer.

2 CORINTHIANS 2:14

But thank God! He has made us his captives and continues to lead us along in Christ's triumphal procession. Now he uses us to _____ the knowledge of Christ everywhere, like a sweet perfume.

Thanks be to God, who leads us in His triumph! Then, we get to help others to overcome those very same things. What a wonderful victory.

ACTS 1:8

But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you. And you will be my _____, telling people about me everywhere . . .

MATTHEW 5:13-16

“You are the _____ of the earth. But what good is salt if it has lost its flavor? Can you make it salty again? It will be thrown out and trampled underfoot as worthless. ¹⁴ “You are the _____ of the world—like a city on a hilltop that cannot be hidden. ¹⁵ No one lights a lamp and then puts it under a basket. Instead, a lamp is placed on a stand, where it gives light to everyone in the house. ¹⁶ In the same way, let your good deeds shine out for all to see, so that everyone will praise your heavenly Father.

You, because of the victory given to us by God Himself, are the salt and the light of the world. Season the world you live in with your saltiness! Let your light shine!

Conclusions

Condemnation is demonic. Conviction is heavenly.

Conviction brings an awareness of sin. Once we realize and repent, conviction tells us how Christ chooses to see us and sends us out to bring judgment upon the devil.

Johnny and His Sister

Johnny is fighting with his sister and he has her pinned down. His mother comes and corrects him for it. She explains that he has a different responsibility in life than to pin down his sister.

“Johnny you are a powerful man of God. You are a man full of respect and honor. You are not the type of boy who pushes little girls. You are the kind of boy that protects them Do you understand?”

He says yes and his mom commissions him from that point on to be his little sister’s protector, “Make sure she is always treated with respect, honor, and kindness. Can you do that?”

He replies, “I sure can!”

Once we understand this amazing truth, we begin to see that conviction is awesome, wonderful, cleansing and sometimes even fun.

Do we understand that we are called to be the Ambassador of the living God? Can you do that?

QUESTIONS FOR SMALL GROUPS

What are the differences between conviction and condemnation?

Who is it that brings condemnation to us?

Consider the story about Johnny and his sister. Johnny's mother treated Johnny in an honoring way, even though he had wronged his sister. Yet she didn't let him get away with what he had done. How can we put that example into practice toward others?

DIFFICULT PEOPLE

(All scriptures are taken from the New Living Translation, 2nd Edition, unless otherwise indicated.)

How Do We Deal With Difficult People?

In this world, we have to deal with many kinds of people. This includes people who have unique personalities and habits.

Sometime people like that are also known as “extra care required” people. These people have a tendency to act sneaky, hostile, negative, or unresponsive to others’ needs.

These men and women cause all kinds of relationship problems. Normal communications fail to get through.

In Romans 12:18, the Bible give us a very challenging thought to live by.

ROMANS 12:18

Do all that you can to _____ in _____ with everyone.

This applies to everyone we come in contact with, a huge undertaking.

HEBREWS 12:14

_____ living in peace with everyone, and work at living a holy life, for those who are not holy will not see the Lord.

We should always direct our attitudes and our behavior toward living peacefully with everyone, even with difficult people. Our attitude is our own responsibility. The other person’s responses are not our responsibility. There are times when can live at peace with them, and we can forgive them, but we may not be able to embrace them in close friendship. There are actually types of people that the Bible instructs us not to allow ourselves to befriend (1 Corinthians 5:11, Proverbs 22:24-25), warning us that we could be corrupted by them.

Jesus came from heaven to earth to offer us salvation by His death, burial, and resurrection. He has paid the price for us. What He will not do is take responsibility for our choice to accept or reject His great offer.

JOHN 3:16-21

“For God loved the world so much that he gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life. ¹⁷ God sent his Son into the world not to judge the world, but to save the world through him.

¹⁸ “There is no judgment against anyone who believes in him. But anyone who does not believe in him has already been judged for not believing in God’s one and only Son. ¹⁹ And the judgment is based on this fact: God’s light came into the

world, but people _____ the darkness _____ than the light, for their actions were evil. ²⁰ All who do evil hate the light and refuse to go near it for fear their sins will be exposed. ²¹ But those who do what is right come to the light so others can see that they are doing what God wants.”

Following our Lord's example, we are to do everything we can to live at peace, but beyond that, we cannot force it to happen.

Eight Strategies for Working with Difficult People

- Be confident in who you are.
- When relating to a difficult person, remember that your self-worth does not depend on that person's opinion of you.

ROMANS 8:1

So now there is _____ condemnation for those who belong to Christ Jesus.

ROMANS 15:7

Therefore, _____ each other just as Christ has accepted you so that God will be given glory.

- Don't allow yourself to overreact.
- All people, even the most difficult, usually have some good attributes and behaviors, try to focus on these as they are sharing their problems with you.
- Don't assume that they are attacking you as much as trying to share with you. They may be overreacting to their own problem. Don't get caught up in it with them.
- Refuse to play the difficult person's games.
- Learn to say no when difficult people try to manipulate or gain control over you, or they will consume an enormous amount of your time and energy.
- When you need to confront a difficult person do it quickly.

EPHESIANS 4:26

And “Don't sin by letting anger control you.” Don't let the _____ _____
_____ while you are still angry,

- The sooner you stand up to a difficult person, the better off you will be. Each day you wait allows more control and damage by the person's destructive misbehavior.
- Have realistic expectations.

- People who are hurt can't give much love. There is a commonly known cliché that applies here, "Hurt people hurt people."
- Save yourself a lot of pain and rejection by not expecting a difficult person to give what you need. Do not expect another person to respond the way you think they should. You may be holding them to an unrealistic standard.
- Stop trying to change the difficult person in your life.
- Do not try to change anyone who does not want to change. Sometimes you must stop taking responsibility for someone's bad habits.
- Only by the Spirit of God can a person truly be changed to be like God.

2 CORINTHIANS 3:17-18

For the Lord is the Spirit, and wherever the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. ¹⁸
 So all of us who have had that veil removed can see and reflect the glory of the Lord. And the Lord—who is the _____—_____ us
 more and more like him as we are changed into his glorious image.

- Don't become a slave to difficult people. Realize that you are not the "fixer" of their problems or the circumstances created by them.
- With those who are verbally abusive or manipulative, remember that you always have a choice to say no.
- Just like Peter with Jesus, sometimes people (even Christians) aren't always thinking about what is best for us or for the Kingdom of God. Remember that other people don't necessarily think the same way you do!

MATTHEW 16:22-23

But Peter took him aside and began to reprimand him for saying such things. "Heaven forbid, Lord," he said. "This will never happen to you!" ²³ Jesus turned to Peter and said, "Get away from me, Satan! You are a dangerous trap to me. You are seeing things merely from a _____ point of _____, not from God's."

- Let God lead you through your struggle with that difficult person.
- Do not be robbed of your inner peace. Every time we turn our eyes on Jesus and ask for His help, His peace comes into our hearts.

PHILIPPIANS 4:7

Then you will experience God's peace, which exceeds anything we can understand. His _____ will _____ your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus.

We want to truly love, even the difficult people, as Christ loves them. Reacting out of our human nature is often more destructive than helpful.

Let God's love and wisdom be yours as you develop strategies for dealing with the difficult people in your life. Then don't just develop them or think about them, put them into practice. You will have plenty of opportunity!

QUESTIONS FOR SMALL GROUPS

Has this lesson given you any insight about yourself and your responses toward difficult people?

Why do you think the Bible instructs us to not let the sun go down while we are still angry?

Have any of the suggestions in this lesson given you ideas or strategies to practice?

What does this statement mean to you?—"Not everybody thinks the way you do."

DEALING WITH DIFFICULT PEOPLE

By John Maxwell

We all have people in our lives that are difficult to understand, work with, or even to be around. We say things like, “I’m tired of her attitude!” or “She just doesn’t seem to care.”

As long as we live, we will experience conflicts. Some people are just more difficult to get along with than others. They seem irregular to us.

Getting along with people takes effort. It means loving them when we don’t feel like it and when they are not lovable.

Understanding the Types of Difficult People

There are several types of difficult people. Each has certain characteristics and requires different responses.

- **The Busybody**

Characteristics: Eager to ‘police’ people’s lives. Attempts to force others to conform to expectations – whether realistic or not. A judgmental person. An overbearing warden. A meddler in other people’s business, and worse – a gossip!

I Pet 4:15 But let none of you suffer as a murderer, or as a thief, or as an evildoer, or as a busybody in other men’s matters.

Response: Personally commit to giving and receiving only good reports. Refuse to give ear to gossip. Confront the person about the facts – and press him toward personal responsibility. Reprove, but with kindness.

Pr 26:20 Without wood a fire goes out; without gossip a quarrel dies down.

Pr 20:19 A gossip betrays a confidence; so avoid a man who talks too much.

- **The Antagonist**

Characteristics: He is controlling and needs to shape his world. He is domineering, aggressive, hostile, hot-tempered, and intimidating. He’s a bully who makes cutting remarks. This is very bad with a man – but even worse from a woman.

Response: Don’t argue with him or listen to his opinions. Express your opinions and don’t be intimidated. Demonstrate strength without argument, and give him room and time to respond.

- **Indecisive**

Characteristics: Noncommittal, postpones decisions, ignores issues, and wants all the facts.

Response: Let him voice his concerns. Use face-to-face settings, offer alternatives, press for agreement in stages, and press for decision and action.

- **Complainer**

Characteristics: Gripes but takes no action. His complaints may be real concerns, or he may feel powerless and refuse responsibility.

Response: Let him blow. Acknowledge his concerns, but don't agree or empathize. Ask problem-solving questions. Don't allow complaints to go unsettled.

- **Spoiler**

Characteristics: Negative. Always says, "It won't work." Critical, cynical, a wet blanket, a negative influence on others, an impossibility thinker. Finds problems and makes excuses for his own lack of responsibility, saying, "It's just the way I am."

Response: Don't give him a platform to complain or make excuses. Counter his negativism with realistic optimism. Don't try to convince him. Work to influence the larger group toward positive action. Don't allow him to sway the group. Kindly express your confidence in him, but point out that change is a choice.

- **Dead Beat**

Characteristics: Won't take risks and is fearful and lazy. Resists change. Appears apathetic, disinterested, or bored.

Response: Ask open-ended questions and demand more than a yes or no answer. Draw out his perspectives, and press for conclusions and responses. State presumed conclusions to solicit responses.

- **Know-it-all**

Characteristics: Strongly opinionated, competitive, imposing, pompous, and intimidating. Often tries to make others feel foolish or stupid.

Response: Know your facts. Be factual and concrete about the issues. Ask how his facts bear on things, and ask him to restate his views. Allow him to save face when he is inaccurate, and deal with him alone when possible.

- **Mr. Nice Guy**

Characteristics: Has a strong need for acceptance and approval. Portrays reasonable support in public. May be a totally different person in private. Accepts responsibility, but doesn't follow through.

Response: Give approval and help him express his true feelings. Work out task descriptions, and hold him accountable for tasks to help him follow through.

- **Volcano**

Characteristics: Unpredictable, explosive, insensitive, loud, and cutting. Tends to be unapproachable. Causes tension and others are fearful and uncertain around him.

Response: Stay calm and poised. Remove him from the crowd. Give him time to blow. Don't argue or interrupt. You may need to ask him to repeat the details later. Minimize his exaggerations. Remove hearsay. Deal only with facts, not emotion. Hold him accountable for his actions and those he has hurt.

- **Sherman Tank**

Characteristics: Has a tendency to intimidate others. "I'm right, you're wrong" attitude. Insensitive and difficult to reason with. Strongly influences others.

Response: Assess the degree of influence he has. Evaluate the importance of the issue in conflict. If issue has a direct or negative effect on others, it may be worth fighting for. Be direct, and be sure you have enough influence to fight for the issue.

- **Space Cadet**

Characteristics: Tends to pout. Full of self-pity. Uses moodiness to manipulate others. Uses the silent treatment to get his way. Sometimes negative, often infantile, usually irresponsible and hypersensitive.

Response: Tell him that moodiness is a choice. Teach him he is responsible for the atmosphere he creates. Don't patronize or enable his moodiness. Never reward or give undue attention to him. Expose him to people with real problems, and praise his positive ideas and actions. Ignore him when he pouts.

- **Garbage Collector**

Characteristics: This is the most negative type. Gives himself over to negative emotions and loves to replay and nurse his injuries and victimizations. He wants to hold on to his wounded spirit and collect negative garbage.

Response: Confront him about trying to speak on behalf of others. When he complains, make him give you the names of those he is supposedly speaking for. Challenge his generalizations and exaggerations. If he has created a serious situation that needs to be re-

solved, expose him to leaders who have the authority to make the necessary decisions.

- **User**

Characteristics: Manipulates others for personal gain. Avoids personal responsibility. Demands time & energy from others. Often uses guilt to get his way and may appear weak and needy to get others' help.

Response: Set predetermined limits. Don't allow him to use others. Require responsibility and accountability. Don't feel guilty or obligated when a firm "no" is the best answer.

THE TEN COMMANDMENTS OF CONFRONTATION

1. Do it privately, not publicly.
2. Do it as soon as possible.
3. Speak to one issue at a time.
4. Once you've made a point don't keep repeating it.
5. Deal only with behaviors the person can change.
6. Avoid sarcasm.
7. Avoid words like "always" and "never."
8. Present criticisms as suggestions or questions, if possible.
9. Don't apologize for the confrontation.
10. Don't forget the compliments.

Ten Principles for Getting Along With Difficult People

1. Maintain your confidence by being in right relationship with God. You can't be objective or discerning if you're not in good standing with God. A strong relationship with God gives you the grace and confidence to deal properly with difficult people.
2. Remember, over-reacting will only accentuate the conflict and confuse the issue.
3. Hold realistic expectations. Make sure the difficult person can reach your expectations. You may be expecting him to do or be something that is impossible.
4. Quit trying to change the difficult person. Give up your rights and expectations regarding this person. Accept the fact that you can't change him, but you can change your reactions to him.
5. Refuse to play his games. He may attempt to use you or make you feel guilty or obligated. Recognize the emotional games, and don't participate.
6. Don't allow yourself to become the difficult person's slave. Be honest with yourself and learn to say no.
7. Keep a proper spirit and attitude. Maintaining credibility is the greatest struggle. Don't let bitterness, anger, or resentment grow.
8. Allow God to lead you in dealing with the difficult person. There are no easy answers or set patterns to dealing with him. The Holy Spirit will give you guidance.
9. Confront immediately. Don't put off facing the conflict. It only makes matters worse.
10. Demonstrate godly compassion. The basis for getting along with people is found in Jesus' words. A religious leader asked Jesus what was the greatest commandment in the Law. Jesus responded, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it — Love your neighbor as yourself. All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments." (Matt 22:37-40 NIV)

It's easy to love those who love us and those who are easy to get along with. But how do you treat the stranger, the difficult person, that person you don't really understand, can't relate to, and don't really care about? That is the true test of our character and love.

LOVING YOUR ENEMIES

(All scriptures are taken from the New Living Translation, 2nd Edition, unless otherwise indicated.)

It's a Matter of Choice

We have the ability to love or hate, get angry or remain calm, to curse or to speak softly.

But whatever you do there will be a consequence.

So how does the Lord want us to be with those who are our enemies? To them who have done us wrong for no reason at all in some cases.

LUKE 6:27-37

“But to you who are willing to listen, I say, love your enemies! Do good to those who hate you. ²⁸ Bless those who curse you. Pray for those who hurt you. ²⁹ If someone slaps you on one cheek, offer the other cheek also. If someone demands your coat, offer your shirt also. ³⁰ Give to anyone who asks; and when things are taken away from you, don't try to get them back. ³¹ Do to others as you would like them to do to you. ³² “If you love only those who love you, why should you get credit for that? Even sinners love those who love them! ³³ And if you do good only to those who do good to you, why should you get credit? Even sinners do that much! ³⁴ And if you lend money only to those who can repay you, why should you get credit? Even sinners will lend to other sinners for a full return. ³⁵ “_____ your _____! Do _____ to them. Lend to them without expecting to be repaid. Then your reward from heaven will be very great, and you will truly be acting as children of the Most High, for he is kind to those who are unthankful and wicked. ³⁶ You must be compassionate, just as your Father is compassionate. ³⁷ “Do not judge others, and you will not be judged. Do not condemn others, or it will all come back against you. Forgive others, and you will be forgiven.

God has a higher standard for His children. In His wisdom, he knows the better way to live. He shows us that we must choose to love, even when we don't feel like it!

“Always, love is a choice. You come up against scores of opportunities every day to love or not to love. You encounter hundreds of small chances to please your friends, delight your Lord and encourage your family. That's why love and obedience are intimately linked — you can't have one without the other.”

Joni Eareckson Tada, from *Diamonds in the Dust*

Truths about Christians and Opposition

Effective Christians face opposition. The only time when we don't face opposition is when we are doing nothing.

A wrong response to our enemies negatively impacts our influence potential.

Wrong responses and their consequences include:

- Hiding from our enemies. — We lose momentum.
- Hindering our enemies. — We lose focus.
- Hurting our enemies. — We lose integrity.

If those kinds of emotions are left unchecked and allowed to brew, over time, they will overflow into every other area of our life. Those negative emotions will influence our decision-making, how we view relationships and how we impact other people.

Here's what the Lord had to say about the issue of responding to our enemies:

MATTHEW 5:43-47

“You have heard the law that says, ‘Love your neighbor’ and hate your enemy. ⁴⁴ But I say, love your enemies! Pray for those who persecute you! ⁴⁵ In that way, you will be acting as _____ of your Father in heaven. For he gives his sunlight to both the evil and the good, and he sends rain on the just and the unjust alike. ⁴⁶ If you love only those who love you, what reward is there for that? Even corrupt tax collectors do that much. ⁴⁷ If you are kind only to your friends, how are you different from anyone else? Even pagans do that.

Christ takes the cultural “code words” which were being taught and justified, even by religious leaders! – and he says that there is a better way – and that better way is to love our enemies.

Who are our enemies?

Enemy — “One actuated by hostile feeling, an armed foe, an opposing state, something harmful.” (Webster's Dictionary)

How did Jesus describe enemies?

- **People who curse us**

LUKE 6:28

_____ those who curse you. Pray for those who hurt you.

The word “curse” comes from a word that means “utterly detest” or “Loathe” or “doom.”

Do you know someone like that?

- **People who persecute us because we follow the teachings of Christ.**

MATTHEW 5:11

God _____ you when people mock you and persecute you and lie about you and say all sorts of evil things against you because you are my followers.

The word “persecute” is literally a word picture of someone who is in hot pursuit against another.

Therefore, an enemy is someone who is in hot pursuit against a person who pledges allegiance to and makes decisions by the person of Jesus Christ (otherwise, a true disciple).

- **People who exploit us selfishly.**

Jesus teaches us about blessing those who use us this way.

LUKE 6:28

Bless those who curse you. _____ for those who hurt you.

Do we love our enemies from afar, or up close?

It’s easy to love from afar, but it’s extremely difficult to love those close, especially those in your own house, church, etc. Jesus even loved Judas, even though he knew Judas would betray him. Since Jesus is our example, should we not strive to follow Him in this?

ROMANS 12:17-21

Never pay back evil with more evil. Do things in such a way that everyone can see you are honorable. ¹⁸ Do all that you can to live in peace with everyone. ¹⁹ Dear friends, never take revenge. Leave that to the righteous anger of God. For the Scriptures say, “I will take revenge; I will pay them back,” says the LORD. ²⁰ Instead, “If your enemies are hungry, feed them. If they are thirsty, give them something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals of shame on their heads.”

²¹ Don’t let evil conquer you, but _____ by doing _____.

Three ways to express love to your enemies:

- **Christians must choose to pray for their enemies.**

Jesus teaches that we are to pray for people who have made us their target. This is not a natural thing to do.

So we should initiate our attempts to love our enemies

“Love is the only force capable of transforming an enemy into a friend.”

Martin Luther King, Jr.

***“Through the medium of prayer,
we go to our enemy, stand by his
side and plead for him to God.”***

Dietrich Bonhoeffer

with a supernatural exercise – prayer.

We all know that prayer takes us to God. When we go to God, we not only see our enemies for what they are to us (persecutors, slanderers, exploiters, etc.) In prayer, we begin to see who they are to God (Hurting people in need of grace and for-

givenness).

We should pray that they would seek God’s help and that God would have mercy on them and their sins as he has had mercy on us and our sin. (Not like Jonah)

- **Christians must choose to bless their enemies.**

Remember, in Luke 28, Jesus said, “Bless those who curse you.” Jesus used the word translated as “bless” only twice in the Gospel. It means (pay close attention to this) “To speak well of.”

Jesus is not instructing us to live in denial or deceit, nor to be oblivious to facts and realities.

However, He IS instructing His followers to raise their own conduct and attitudes to a higher level.

- to express forgiveness,
- to be able to disagree without being disagreeable,
- and to say, even about our enemies, “May God bless them.”

- **Christians must choose to do good to their enemies.**

In Luke 6:27, Jesus says “Do good to those that hate you.”

The phrase, “do good,” is written in a grammatical tense which means a command to do something in the future which involves continuous and repeated action.

It means - “**keep on** doing good to those who keep on hurting you.”

How in the world can we do this without adding insult to injury?

When tempted to say something negative about an enemy, say something nice instead.

Staying quiet about the details of what you know about your enemy, promoting politeness and

***“Love is not communicated
in the big event but in the
small acts of kindness.”***

Richard Foster

proper action toward your enemy. Being honorable in your own conduct and loving justice. Giving your enemy time to allow God's grace and mercy to work in their lives.

"How people respond and react to me as a leader sometimes is beyond my control; but how I respond to them as a leader is always within my power of choice."

John C. Maxwell

QUESTIONS FOR SMALL GROUPS

What was your initial reaction the first time you heard the words, "Love your enemies?"

Ponder the statement, "Hurt people hurt people." and discuss how accepting that truth can help change our perspective toward our enemies.

What can you do to "bless" your enemies?

TEST

Name _____

Test Score _____

4 points each answer

THIS IS AN OPEN-BOOK TEST. You will need a score of 80% to receive a certificate of completion.

INSTRUCTIONS: Circle the correct answer in each of the following multiple choice questions.

1. Loving, accepting, and forgiving people does not mean that we:
 - a. License what they do.
 - b. Agree with their thinking.
 - c. Compromise our values.
 - d. All of the above.
2. The grace of God
 - a. Gives us what we need to overcome our own difficulties
 - b. Helps us to become a source of encouragement to the hurting.
 - c. a & b
 - d. None of the above.
3. We get our value from
 - a. What others think of us
 - b. What we think of ourselves.
 - c. What God says about us.
 - d. All of the above.
4. How you handle criticism
 - a. Is an indicator of the temperature of the room.
 - b. Is much more important than the criticism itself.
 - c. Will determine whether or not you enter into the Kingdom of Heaven.
 - d. Depends upon the demeanor of the other person.
5. Satan is called
 - a. The Vindicator
 - b. The Master
 - c. The Accuser
 - d. The Crippler
6. After we repent of sin, the Holy Spirit
 - a. Convicts (convinces) us of our right standing before God.
 - b. Convicts us to exact retribution on tempting spirits.
 - c. Sends us to destroy the works of the enemy.
 - d. All of the above
7. We sin when we
 - a. Have feelings of anger.
 - b. Let our anger control us.
 - c. Get our feelings hurt.
 - d. All of the above.

INSTRUCTIONS: Circle the correct answer (T for true, F for false) in the following true or false questions:

- | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|----|--|---|---|-----|--|
| T | F | 1. | People are at the center of the Lord's heart. | T | F | 10. | You are powerless against sin. |
| T | F | 2. | It is natural to feel bitterness and anger toward people. | T | F | 11. | God does not show us our sins to demand an apology. |
| T | F | 3. | Some of us are fortunate in that we do not have to face difficulties in our lives. | T | F | 12. | Condemnation is one of the tools God uses to punish us. |
| T | F | 4. | Hope is only for a few selected people. | T | F | 13. | Conviction brings us an awareness of sin. |
| T | F | 5. | We must continually fight against things that cannot be changed. | T | F | 14. | Our attitudes are our own responsibility. |
| T | F | 6. | Casting blame creates more opportunities for hurt. | T | F | 15. | Your self-worth depends upon what others think of you. |
| T | F | 7. | We should often indulge in self-pity | T | F | 16. | Some people are just more difficult to get along with |
| T | F | 8. | When we are criticized, we can respond in only one way. | T | F | 17. | It doesn't take any effort to get along with people |
| T | F | 9. | Criticism can help us to grow. | T | F | 18. | Sarcasm is something we must utilize at every opportunity. |

When you have completed your test, tear it out of the book and turn it in to the office or to your Home Group Leader.
If you score 80% or above you will receive a certificate of achievement.

MASTERPIECES

