



BY MELANIE VOIGT

# Loving DIFFICULT PEOPLE

## ON PURPOSE

**T**hey're everywhere. They're in your workplace, in your family...even in your church. You can't avoid them; some of you even work for them. Who am I referring to? Difficult people.

Difficult people are the people we struggle to get along with. Some difficult people are aggressive and seem to almost always be looking for a reason to fight with you. Others are people who diminish everything you do - no matter how hard you try, they always find something about you to criticise. Then there are the negative people who complain all the time - for them the proverbial glass is not half empty, it's just empty. Some people are just so different from us that we don't understand their lifestyle and find it difficult to relate to them. There are just some people who we struggle to get along with.

Over the last few months I've had conversation after conversation with people who are struggling to get along with someone in their family or workplace. In the past, I've had to work closely with people who I really struggled to get along with. I've even lived next door to difficult people.

It can be really frustrating and exhausting to deal with difficult people all the time.

The truth is that we really can't avoid spending time with difficult people. It's challenging, but the way we deal with them can be a powerful testimony of God's love and grace.

Jesus was the master of dealing with difficult people. He spent time with people who the rest of society would not want to associate with - tax collectors, prostitutes, and lepers. He was able to do it because He knew how to love these people. He saw them through the eyes of God's grace. When asked what the greatest commandment in the law was, Jesus replied: "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 neighbour as yourself." (Matthew 22:37-39) We need to love our neighbours - the people around us - as we love ourselves.

*“When it comes to dealing with the difficult people in our lives, we need to make two choices: we need to choose to love, and choose to forgive.”*

It's also good to pray for God to help you see the person's good qualities. Perhaps the angry boss who is always putting you down actually happens to be really efficient and is the reason your company is able to employ so many people. Perhaps the colleague who is always negative is actually really creative. Noticing their positive qualities could change how you see them completely.

### CHOOSING TO FORGIVE

Part of the reason we might be finding it so difficult to get along with the difficult people around us could be because we haven't forgiven them for past hurt. Choose to forgive the person when they offend you. It might mean that you have to do it daily, but choose to forgive quickly. Pray "Lord, I choose to forgive my boss for shouting at me in front of my colleagues today which made me feel angry and humiliated. Please bless him."

You might often not feel like forgiving the person, but make the choice to do it anyway. God has forgiven us for all our sins – sins we have committed in the past and in the future. If He can forgive us for our mistakes, we can forgive others for their mistakes.

### CONFRONTATION

There are situations where you may need to confront the difficult person in your life. If you feel that God is urging you to do so, pray carefully for the right words to use. Make sure that you are calm before speaking to them and that you don't respond with anger.

Years ago, I went to a leaders' conference where they told us to use a 'truth sandwich' when confronting people. Start off with the first slice of bread which is affirming the person – "You are a really amazing boss who has really improved the company." Then, you add the meat – "When you confront me in front of my colleagues, it really upsets me." Lastly you add the second slice of affirming bread – "But, I really do enjoy working for someone like you who is so good at what you do." This 'truth sandwich' helps you to attack the behaviour, and not the person.

There is also something else we need to consider. If you are finding that you have lots of difficult people in your life – take a step back and ask yourself whether it's not you who is being the difficult person. Perhaps you are being overly critical of the people around you. Take this in prayer to God, asking Him to help you be less critical and more loving towards the people around you.

I wish you all the best in loving the difficult people in your life on purpose. What is truly amazing is that God is the one who equips you with all the love you need to do it. Remember that He has given us everything we need to live a godly life (2 Peter 1:3) so rely on His provision. ■

When it comes to dealing with the difficult people in our lives, we need to make two choices: we need to choose to love, and choose to forgive.

### CHOOSING TO LOVE

When we think of love we are tempted to think of warm fuzzy feelings, but love is a choice. We can choose to love the difficult people in our lives. We can love them on purpose. How do we do that? First of all, we need to pray and ask God to help us to love the difficult person. Ask Him to fill you with His love – when He does that, you will be filled to overflowing and won't be able to stop spilling that love onto others.

Pray for the difficult person in your life every day. Perhaps part of the reason why they are being so difficult is because they are struggling with something. You'll find that once you start praying for the person, you'll become more invested in their lives and actually feel more love towards them.