Dealing with Difficult People

6 Powerful Strategies guaranteed to improve your most difficult relationships

by Berni Dymet
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We all have difficult relationships in our lives. The more effectively we deal with them, the more we’re going to enjoy life.

When we first aired the radio series called *Dealing with Difficult People*, the phone rang off the hook!

One woman who called in wanted to know:

_How quickly can you send me the CDs of those messages? I need them right NOW!_

After almost a decade of producing radio programs – literally thousands of different episodes, heard by millions of people each week in over 160 countries around the world – it still remains one of the most popular series we’ve ever broadcast!

To tell you the truth, when I sat down to start researching and writing those programs, I had absolutely no idea – _none_ – of the impact they would have in people’s lives.

But really, I shouldn’t have been at all surprised, because we all have difficult people who seem to rob us of the joy in our lives … don’t we?

So the whole purpose of this book is to give you _six powerful strategies guaranteed to improve even your most difficult relationships_.

Now … I’ve written this book from a Christian perspective, because that’s who I am. But – _and this is really important_ – I’m not here to ram anything down your throat, or anyone else’s.

Whatever you happen to believe – these strategies work! May you be blessed as you put them to work in your most difficult relationships.
1. Wisdom that Works

I’m not a psychologist, but I am a keen observer of people who’s spent many years helping clients resolve conflict. And I’m someone who’s prepared to put God’s wisdom to work in my life. So as each of these 6 strategies unfolds, I’m going to share practical wisdom with you … wisdom that works.

And as you read each one, what you’ll discover is that it’s simple, profound and it just rings true.

2. Case Study

There’s nothing like a real life situation to bring a bit of wisdom to life, is there?

That’s because real stories have a funny way of helping us take hold of the truth in such a way that it becomes part of us – because we relate to it.

And when it becomes part of us … then we can start living it.

So each case study is your chance to relate the strategy to your own, difficult relationships.

3. Your Tasks

Hopefully you’re not planning to read this book simply to be entertained or even to be informed.

I’m hoping that what you’re really after is a better life, by dealing with the difficult people in your world.

If that’s so, then you realise that this isn’t just a theory lesson. It’s about learning and doing – so I’ll be giving you tasks to complete, to make the rubber hit the road for each strategy.
But before you get started ... there’s something you need to know. The journey of dealing with your difficult people isn’t going to be an easy one. That’s not some glib statement. I’m speaking from experience and I’m speaking from the heart.

Why? Because the fact that a relationship is a difficult one, means that it is, in effect, bankrupt. Your relationship trading account with one another is overdrawn – on both sides of the ledger. And so as we journey down this road, all sorts of emotions are going to come flooding back – in you, and in the other person (the difficult one!)

Inadequacy, pain, fear, resentment, anger. A sense of hopelessness perhaps. No, its not going to be easy. I just wanted you to know what to expect. But there’s something else you should know.

As you step into unknown territory in an earnest attempt to bring about a cessation in hostilities, with a heart to see healing and reconciliation take place, you can’t predict the outcome. But as someone who’s been down this road with mixed results, I can promise you this:

Whilst there’s no guarantee that a relationship will be restored, you’ll be a better you for having tried. It’s something you’ll never, ever regret.
1 strategy

the transition from ...

from me ... to we
WISDOM THAT WORKS

The biggest problem we have in our relationships, is the perspective from which we see not only our circumstances, but other people. So let’s tackle the biggest problem first.

Our Natural Response

The very first thing we want to do when a relationship goes awry, is blame someone else. Specifically the person who’s causing us the pain. It’s just what we do.

Like Pavlov’s dogs, when we experience a stimulus, we give the response that we’ve learned over and over and over again. In fact, it’s a response that was handed down from our parents, and their parents’ parents.

You caused me pain … so I’ll blame you. It’s a pretty simple formula. You know it well, right?

In fact, can I ask you to think back over just the last 48 hours, to the person who’s caused you the most grief in that short time. Picture their face, remember the circumstances, now … how did you respond?

No – not your well-thought-out, well-measured response after you’d had a chance to calm down and think it through. I’m talking about your gut reaction – your first up, instinctive response.

Chances are, you did what most of us do. You blamed them for hurting you.

Throughout the course of this book, we’ll see that the blame game is a real problem. But right now, let’s see it for what it is. The blame game is first and foremost a symptom.

Our natural response is a symptom of our natural state.

Our Natural State

So what’s our natural state? Well, that’s pretty straightforward too. It’s this:

I am at the centre of the universe.

In other words, everything revolves around me. My wants, my needs, my comforts, my hopes, my dreams, my aspirations, my welfare, my emotions, my social status, my reputation, my possessions, my wealth, my …

And, if the blindingly, glimpsingly obvious fact that this me–me–me thing has been
I was born guilty ... in fact, I was already a ‘sinner’ when my mother conceived me!

*King David (Psalm 51:5)*

imprinted in our very DNA should require any proof at all, consider the two young children playing. Two boys, let’s say. They’re only just old enough to be sitting up on the floor together withouttoppling over (most of the time). Can’t talk. Can’t walk.

The first has a toy that he’s been playing with – a shiny red fire truck. The second doesn’t, but he sees his little companion’s fire truck and in a flash comes to the well-considered, well-thought-through conclusion that he wants it. So he reaches over, snatches it out of the first boy’s hands and starts playing with it ... pretty much oblivious to the fact that his little mate is now screaming loudly and bawling his eyes out.

Not yet old enough to avoid dirtying his nappy on a regular basis, but plenty old enough to exhibit his innate programming which tells him – *I am at the centre of the universe.*

We’re born with it. It’s that simple.

**So What’s Wrong with That?**

Nothing really, as long as we’re prepared to live in a world that thrives on the maxim that it’s a dog–eat–dog world, and there’s plenty of dog to go around!

Until Copernicus in the mid 14th century, the “fact” that the earth was at the centre of the known universe, was axiomatic – everything else was premised on that inviolable and, at the time, totally unprovable “fact”.

Copernicus was reviled as a fool and a heretic by the very same people who insisted that the earth was flat!

It was a matter, dare I say it, of perspective. The scientists, philosophers and theologians of the time had a narrow field of vision, with none of the benefits of scientific observation that we have at our fingertips today. We can’t imagine that they could have held such a view. But mark this – it was the prevailing wisdom of the day that the earth was quite obviously at the centre of the universe.

Ultimately though, that perspective proved inadequate to explain reality.

Today you and I live in a world of around seven billion people. That’s rather a lot.

Imagine now that we all carry around with us the me–me–me maxim that *I am the centre of the universe*. How well is that going to work?
In fact, how well is it working?

There are wars and rumours of wars. Each day 25,000 children die through the effects of poverty (that’s 1 dead child every 3 seconds). There are officially 20 million slaves in the world. Unofficially, the experts agree that it’s much closer to the 100 million mark.

Many of those are young children enslaved into prostitution.

And this, in a world where there’s more than enough room for everyone to live, more than enough food for everyone to eat, more than enough wealth for everyone to be able to have a decent roof over their head.

Something’s not right. Something’s not working. It’s the me–me–me thing. And it just isn’t working!

Copernicus wasn’t the only man labeled a heretic for upsetting the status quo with an inconvenient truth.

There was a guy called Jesus years earlier. Some lawyer asked him .... So out of all our laws, what’s the most important one do you think? And this Jesus answered something along these lines:

Love the Lord your God with all your heart and mind and strength and soul. That’s the first and most important one. And the second one is like ... well, it’s like the flip side of that coin. Love your neighbour as yourself. In fact you could say that those two pretty much sum up all the other laws in a nutshell.

Now – I said at the outset that the last thing I wanted to do was to ram anything down anyone’s throat. This is not about religion (happily Jesus was pretty anti-religion too). This is about what works.

Would it surprise you to know that the religious leaders of the day were so threatened by this heresy, it so undermined their me–me–me religion, that they had Jesus nailed to a cross?

Just think: so powerful a revolution was this shift in perspective – from me to we – that they assassinated him. Because it’s all about power.

**Perspective & Power**

So what do I mean by that ... that it’s all about power? People build systems to preserve their power. For the religious leaders of Jesus’ day, they taught a brand of religion that bred a tribe of unquestioning adherents, conditioned to obey an ever-growing list of religious rules, to give power to their leaders and to part with their hard earned cash for the privilege.

Jesus comes along in stark contrast and hangs out with prostitutes, tax collectors, lepers and other hapless sorts that made up the flotsam and jetsam of society. Jesus comes along and tells people – not just by what he said but through what he did – that each one of them is just as valuable, just as lovable as the next. Jesus comes along and loves the unlovable!

And it upset the religious leaders’ apple cart. They could see their power base crumbling before their very eyes.

Because this revolutionary change of perspective – from me to we – undermined the very foundations of their me-me-me religion.

Just as Copernicus years later, would undermine the scientific and theological power base of the great thinkers and leaders of his time by coming up with a perspective that gave a true picture of reality.

Okay. No doubt, all of this makes sense, but ...
What Does it Have to Do With You?

That’s not an unreasonable question at this point. This book is, after all, about helping you deal with the difficult people in your life.

So what does all this have to do with you?

Everything so far in this Chapter, serves to illustrate this important point:

Our current perspective is the problem and a fresh perspective is the solution.

When you and I see other people from the perspective that says: I am the centre of the universe, we’re living out our lives through a distorted view of the reality. Isn’t it patently obvious that if each of the seven billion people walking planet Earth have that perspective, then Houston, we have a problem?

When we see other people that way, then we’re no better than:

• The boy who stole the toy,
• The people who insisted that the earth was at the centre of the universe, and
• The religious leaders who killed Jesus.

Wouldn’t you agree?

A Right to Exist

The reason, sadly, that the Palestinians and the Israeli’s can’t stop killing one another is this: neither is prepared to give the other a right to exist.

That’s the macro view, but we’re not talking about some great geopolitical conflict here. We’re talking about the difficult people in your life. So let’s bring it back down to our level.

The reason that relationships are fractured, the reason that some people in our lives are difficult is this: that each of us, in our quest to be the one ‘me’ at the centre of the universe, doesn’t give the next guy that same right. In effect – me and that other difficult person – are both wrong. Get it?

Now just for the moment, let’s assume that the bankruptcy of your relationship with that difficult person prevents you from influencing them to shift their point of view. That means that 50% of the equation is completely out of play.

But – and this is the truly important bit – 50% of the equation is still in play. We still have the power to change our half of the equation. And that’s the first, most powerful strategy for dealing with difficult people. Shifting our perspective.

A Profound Shift Perspective

Some years ago, I received an email from Safari Murinzi, a Colonel in the Pareco – a rebel group in the DR Congo. He’d heard one of my radio programs in his hotel room, while at a peace conference. The program was about this very thing – it was about who was at the centre of the universe, and who had the power. This is what he said to me:

I’ve been on battle field for 13 years now, I don’t know how many people have died because of my gun, but what I know is that after listening to what you said, I decided to lay down my arms and stop fighting.

It’s a question of whether the other person, that difficult person, has a right to exist, a right to be them, a right to live, to be imperfect, to make mistakes, to be different, to say their bit, to …

This first strategy is not the whole solution. But it is a critical pre–cursor to finding a solution. Without it, there can be no solution.

Me–me–me doesn’t work. It just doesn’t.

So let me ask you this – are you prepared to lay down your arms? Are you prepared to shift your perspective from ‘me’ … to ‘we’?
CASE STUDY

Meet Doug & Maree. They’ve been married for 15 years. It all started out okay but now, their marriage has descended into the steely silence of détente. It’s not a marriage at all.

Why has this happened, and what (if anything) can they do about it?

They’re So Different

Like most couples, Doug and Maree are totally different. They say that opposites attract and at first they did. Doug’s a man’s man. He played football when he was young – in fact he captained the team – and when Maree first met him, the thing that attracted her to him was his strength. His looks helped, but it was his strength that did it for her.

And Maree, she is so soft and gentle. When Doug first laid eyes on her he just knew. And as he heard her speak and saw how she cared about people, well, that was it.

But after 15 years of marriage, 3 kids and a mortgage, those very things that first attracted them to one another, are now tearing them apart. “Doug is so uncaring – why can’t he be a bit gentler?” she says about him. “Maree is so emotional about things, why can’t she just get focused and be a bit more logical?” he says about her.

What’s the Solution for Them?

Well, we’re a bit of a way off a solution at this point. But I can tell you the first step. If Doug and Maree could only remember the things that attracted them to one another in the first place. At what point did Doug’s strength make him “uncaring”? At what point did Maree’s gentleness make her “emotional”?

Doug, do you remember the person you married? She was always gentle and caring (“emotional”). And Maree – can you remember the Doug you fell in love with? He was always strong (“uncaring”).

The problem is that you’ve each decided to remodel the other in your image – to make them more like you. And in doing that, you’ve taken away their right to be different to you.

Your perspective is now me–me–me. But what if you each restored to the other the right to be who they always were?

Doug what if you just decided today that it’s okay for Maree to be the Maree she was when you first met her?

And Maree, what if you gave Doug the right to be the Doug he’s always been, too?

Then both of you could resign from the position of managing the project to change the other. Woohoo … one less thing to do!

The critical first step, is shifting your perspective from ‘me’ … back to ‘we’.
YOUR TASKS

This is where the rubber hits the road. So far you’ve been informed, maybe even amused for a short time. But unless you do something about it, nothing’s ever going to change.

Take some time out today – in fact maybe even over the next few days – to really think this through – to identify, to understand and to shift from ‘me’ to ‘we’.

Your most difficult relationships are the ones that cause you the most pain. Investing in a solution will reduce, and in some cases even eliminate the pain. And that’s worth it!

1. Identify Your Top 3 Difficult People:
   You may have several in your life – at work, at home, socially. These are people with whom you interact, that cause you pain or discomfort. Write their names on a piece of paper.

2. Give the Pain a Name:
   For your top 3, think about the pain that they cause you. Is it their anger that causes you fear? Maybe they’re sarcastic and they belittle you in front of others. Or perhaps they’re always in your space, telling you what to do. Give a name to the pain, and write it down so that you know what it is.

3. Understand the Cause:
   Invariably, the pain arises because each of these 3 people are profoundly different to you. Identify the differences and write them down (remember Doug and Maree?)

4. Make the Shift:
   Now, think very carefully about this – because this is the biggie. Now that you’ve seen their faces, put your finger on the pain and tried your best to understand what’s causing it, are you prepared to let this person be who they are? I don’t mean necessarily keep on doing what they’re doing (we’ll talk about that later) but will you give them a right to exist and to be different (remember Israel & Palestine)?

5. Live the Shift:
   What’s one thing that you can start doing right now, to show each one of your top 3 difficult people that something’s changed in your attitude towards them? Start doing it.
strategy

dealing with ...
the most difficult
person you’ll ever meet
WISDOM THAT WORKS

Just close your eyes for a minute, and picture the face of the person who is hurting you the most in your life right now. Chances are that stirs up all sorts of emotions; chances are you can see their face; chances are you feel the hurt and the pain.

Looking in the Mirror

Now open your eyes and if I was with you right now I’d like to hold up a mirror and say:

Have a look in this mirror. Have a really good look because there is the most difficult person you’ll ever meet. Let me introduce you to you, because you are the most difficult person you’ll ever meet, and I am the most difficult person that I will ever meet.

Why? Because you can’t ever get away from you, and I can’t ever get away from me. We are with ourselves 24/7 for the rest of our lives.

And when we look at difficult people in our lives, actually it’s not so much that the people are difficult, it’s the fact that the relationships are difficult. Takes two to tango doesn’t it? In any relationship it takes two to tango, and as much as we might want to pass all the blame onto the other person, the fact is when it comes to difficult relationships, we are often the biggest contributors through our own weaknesses and mistakes, and through the stupid things that we do.

Isn’t it funny how we will cut ourselves a whole bunch more slack than we cut the other person? True isn’t it – be honest? We forgive our own failures and faults, and make allowances for our own weakness and laziness and stupidity and pride. We make allowances and forgive ourselves much more quickly than we will do for other people, right?

Jesus Comes Along, and …

And then Jesus comes along and says, “Look you know what the problem is? It’s not them! The problem is the way you see things. The problem is that your perspective is distorted.”

In fact, let’s take a look at exactly what He says. It comes from Matthew’s Gospel, first book in the New Testament, chapter 7, verses 1 to 5. And as you read it – notice, He’s not mincing His words:
You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye and then you’ll see clearly enough to take the speck out of your neighbour’s eye! – Jesus

Don’t judge other people and you won’t be judged, because with the judgment that you judge, you will be judged, and the measure that you give, you will be measured by. Why is it that you see the speck in your neighbour’s eye but you don’t notice the log in your own eye? Or how can you say to your neighbour, ‘come over here, let me take the speck out of your eye’ whilst there’s a log in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye and then, then you’ll see clearly enough to take the speck out of your neighbour’s eye. – Jesus

Isn’t it funny how we just want to get all judgmental. We’re not self aware. We don’t see our own glaring failures.

“I don’t have any failures, do you have failures? No, I haven’t got failures either.” Come on!

And we think we’re seeing clearly but we’re not really. We’re seeing through the lens of our own weakness and failures and insecurities and hurts and ... come on, the list goes on. We see the world through those things and Jesus is saying here:

You may not have noticed this my friend, but you have a dirty great log in your eye. Your perspective’s distorted. Your insecurity is making you think this person over here is somehow a bad person. Well, maybe, but that’s not the place to start. The main thing isn’t them. The main thing here ... is you! Your insecurity. Your pride. Your ambition. Your sin! That’s what’s getting in the road of you really seeing this other person for who they are. Come on; first take the log out of your own eye.

Nobody Likes a Hypocrite

Do you like hypocrites? No, me neither!

Well let me tell you something. If we’re carrying a log around in our own eye, as much as we might deny it, as much as we might say it’s not my fault, it’s not my fault, it’s not my fault ... we’re being hypocrites!

And then we have the hide to go to someone else and point out that they’ve got a speck in their eye whilst all the time we have a log in our own. Come on! That’s hypocrisy. That’s the very thing that we decry in the next person. And that, my friend, is exactly what Jesus is talking about here.
Time to Pluck Up Some Courage

First have the courage to say, “You know something, I read a book today about dealing with difficult people and today, I’m going to admit to myself that I have a log in my eye – You know something, it’s true; this particular thing in my life is distorting my view of other people.”

And then have the determination and the courage and the humility to go to God and say, “You know something Lord, I’ve just heard You talking to me about that log in my eye, but I don’t know how to get rid of it.”

It’s when we get real with ourselves that we’ll stop blaming other people for everything that’s going on. And then, when we realise that we don’t have what it takes to get the log out of our eye, the only thing we can do is admit it and in humility lay it down and go to God and say “Jesus, set me free.” And when we do that, you know what happens? Eighty to ninety percent of what other people do, doesn’t hurt us anymore. Isn’t that amazing? Jesus wants to set us free. Jesus wants to give us a life. He’s real!

Courage is one thing, but …

Now, courage is one thing. But most of us don’t even know where to begin, in dealing with the log in our own eye.

And there’s a reason for that. It’s because we can’t really see it for ourselves. It is, if you will, a blind spot. And the reason blinds spots are called “blind spots” is because we just can’t see them for ourselves.

Anybody who has ever driven a car will know that if the internal and external rear vision mirrors aren’t properly adjusted, then there are going to be some blind spots – big enough for someone on a push bike or a motor bike to hide in. So, we quickly check the mirrors, but we don’t see them.

Why? Because they’re in our blind spot.

Now I’d been driving a car for about 30 years, when I attended a defensive driving course. And one of the amazing things that I discovered on that course is that car makers actually design the mirrors to work together and if they’re adjusted properly there’s no need to have any blind spots.

That just blew me away. The designers had already figured out how to eliminate the blind spots. So why do we imagine that God is any less of a Designer when it comes to our vision?

When our vision is properly adjusted, then there is no need for any blind spots.

And that’s precisely what Jesus said. Let’s take a look (Matthew 6:22,23):

The eye is the lamp of the body. So, if your eye is healthy, your whole body will be full of light; but if your eye is unhealthy, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light in you is darkness, how great is the darkness!

So, Jesus wants to get our vision right so that, instead of being filled with the darkness of self-delusion, we’re filled with the Light of the World! Is that good news or what?

And there is only one way that I know to discover that light. There is only one way that I know of to get things into a right perspective: get that log out of my eye, and have the Light flooding in. Just One Way.
We need something powerful to do this. We need something that cuts right through all the self delusion and gets right to the blind spot.

We need something gentle enough to help us open our eyes and see, yet powerful enough to bring about a major change, real change, humility of the heart.

Fortunately, God already knew that, and He’s already provided that:

Indeed, the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing until it divides soul from spirit, joints from marrow; it is able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart. And before him no creature is hidden, but all are naked and laid bare to the eyes of the one to whom we must render an account. (Hebrews 4:12,13)

If you will spend time in the Word of God – the Bible – just quietly, alone each day, I guarantee you that God will speak to you so clearly about your blind spots – your logs – in a voice that is both tender and gentle, yet firm and strong.

The revelation about your blind spots that He will bring will utterly astound you.

But it doesn’t stop there, because revelation and awareness aren’t enough. You and I need the power to change. The power to do something about the log in our eye. The power to take it out so that we can see clearly.

Fortunately the Word of God is full of that very power that we need:

All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, so that everyone who belongs to God may be proficient, equipped for every good work. (2 Timothy 3:16)

The Plan is An Abundant Life

I am the most difficult person that I will ever meet. And you are the most difficult person you will ever meet. We have to live with ourselves 24/7. Our foibles, weaknesses, blind spots, logs … call them what you will … sin … will rob us of the abundant life that Jesus came to give us, like a thief who comes only to steal, kill and destroy.

Sin’s like that.

But Jesus came that you and I could have life in all it’s abundance (John 10:10). The word that John uses there, if it were translated literally, means super-abundance. That’s Jesus’ plan for you!

And it seems to me that the sooner we’re honest with ourselves and admit our blind spot to Him, the only One who can help, then the sooner you and I are going to be living the life that He came to bring us.

Remember – difficult people are out there. They’re everywhere. We will never be able to change them all. They are never all going to dance to our tune, for our good pleasure.

But the one person we can do something about is ourselves. And the power of God is ready, willing and able to make that happen for you.
CASE STUDY

Meet Jessie. She’s 27 years old and four years into her second job as a hairdresser. As things turn out, she’s a brilliant hairdresser. She learned her trade really well.

But lately, work’s been getting her down. Really down. The boss is always on her back – pick, pick, pick. It happened at her last job too, which is why she left. Maybe, she thinks to herself, it’s time to move on again …

It’s A Generational Thing

It turns out that Jessie is Generation Y (or Gen-Y as we like to call them). And the thing about Gen-Y’s is that they like to know why they’re being told to do something.

Her boss, the owner of the salon – Maree – is 46 years old. She’s been around for a while and she treats her staff really well. But if there’s one thing she can’t stand, it’s laziness.

It’s … a generational thing.

Jessie has a habit of getting to work a few minutes late most days, and wanting to race out the door before the salon’s cleaned and the till is closed off.

And that, after four years, is starting to drive Maree crazy. It’s just rubbing her the wrong way. Now Maree, as things turn out, isn’t the best manager. She hates having to confront people about things. So she adopts the passive-aggressive approach.

The anger builds up inside, and so it’s … pick, pick, pick. You get the picture, right?

So What’s the Solution for Jessie?

Well, the obvious one is to move on. Find another job. Find another boss. “After all”, she reasons, “I deserve better than this. I’m a really good hairdresser.” And she is.

But deep down, she has a sneaking suspicion that things mightn’t be any different next time around. There’s a pattern emerging here.

She really enjoyed her last job, but she left because her boss was always on her back. And for the first few years, she’s enjoyed this one too … and now, the very same thing.

With a bit of maturity and a bit of courage, the other alternative is to sit down and chat with Maree during a bit of a quiet time and have this conversation – Maree, I really like working here and I don’t want to leave, but lately I just feel that you’re picking on me. Is there something that I’m doing that’s annoying you? If so tell me, because I want you to be happy.

Now at this point, Jessie can’t yet see the log in her own eye. All she can see, is the speck in Maree’s.

But she’s just taken the first step to resolving the situation. If she has the courage to listen and learn, rather than to defend her position, she’s going to be rid of the log.

What would you do in this situation?
YOUR TASKS

Okay, this one isn’t easy. Because it involves admitting that in your most difficult relationship, there could well be something that you’re doing which is contributing to the situation. And who wants to do that?

But you know what they say, no pain, no gain. You either keep letting things go the way they are, or – like Jessie – take a step towards finding a solution.

And the best place to start is … with you!

So, here goes.

1. **Just start with your most difficult relationship:**

   I know you might have a few. But one is plenty for the moment. Ask yourself – “Am I contributing in any way to this?” And if you don’t know, ask around. Ask either the person themselves, or perhaps a trusted advisor who’s not directly involved. You might be surprised at what you discover.

   And please, go there with an open heart, and don’t defend yourself.

2. **Take Responsibility:**

   Finding out something “not so nice” about yourself often hurts. So, as I said, have the courage not to react or to defend, but process it. Stand back. Do they have a point? Are you contributing to the situation? Perhaps you need a friend to help. Certainly pray about it. And if there’s some truth in what people are saying – take responsibility. Admit it. Own it … and now you’re ready for the next step.

3. **Do Something About it:**

   This is a big subject that we can’t possibly discuss in a single paragraph. But bad habits happen one step at a time. They’re undone the same way. It might take a while, but it will be worth it. And when the other person sees you making the effort, they will almost always respond positively.

4. **Open Your Bible:**

   Above all, establish a daily routine of reading God’s Word and praying. You’ll be amazed at how clearly God gives you the insight, wisdom and power to make the changes you need to make!
3 strategy

dealing with ...
people who dominate you
One of the hardest things that we have to deal with in life is when other people try to dominate us. You know, when they try to be the enforcers; have their way all the time. We weren’t made to be oppressed. We were made to be free.

Authority versus Domination

When that oppression happens to a whole country, we call it a dictatorship. Deep down, we know it’s not right. Not at a national level. Not at an organisational level. And not at an individual level.

Now we all live under some sort of authority. The authority of law for starters. The authority of our parents when we’re growing up. There’s authority at work too. In fact, wherever you turn, there’s some form of authority.

That’s okay. That’s the way it’s meant to be.

But what happens when people overstep those normal boundaries of authority and try to dominate our lives?

Sometimes it can result in emotional, even physical abuse. Other times it’s just a sick feeling in our stomach because we know that when we go to work today we’re going to have to deal with THAT person again. The popular term for it these days is “bullying”. It happens in the schoolyard, in the office and at home. Even on Facebook!

So, how do we deal with the difficult people who try to dominate us?

Freedom is a funny thing …

… it’s not just about doing what we like, because if we could each do just what we wanted to, there’d be lawlessness; there’d be fear. We know that.

In fact, if we were all free in that sense, none of us would be free at all! It’s a kind of strange paradox isn’t it?

Freedom actually involves constraints. It involves right and wrong. For us to be individuals in a society, there have to be some boundaries and without those boundaries actually, we can’t be free.

Without boundaries, we can’t be free.
Otherwise one person’s freedom becomes the next person’s fear. My liberty becomes your liability and that’s not freedom.
When we get that out of balance, then one person ends up dominating another. Even good things out of balance, freedom things out of balance, end up in that kind of win/lose situation. You end up with a power struggle. You end up with the domination of one individual by another.

**The Rule of Fear**

For almost two decades, I worked as a consultant in the information technology industry and I probably went into a couple of hundred different organisations.

There were some that were ruled by fear. These were places where management was so intrusive, that there was this unbalanced culture and no one was happy. No one enjoyed work, because somehow, the right boundaries of authority had been over-stepped and had become more like a dictatorship.

And that can even happen, let me say, when people take God’s love and turn it into a religion. Jesus discovered that. He was talking to some religious leaders, Pharisees. Now these guys were a sect who followed religious law to the absolute letter, to the n'th degree.

This is what He said to them:

“You Pharisees, you’re in trouble. You give God a tenth of your spices from your gardens and mint and all that sort of stuff but you cheat people and you don’t love God. You should be fair and kind to others and still give a tenth to God. You Pharisee’s are in for some big trouble because you love the front seats in the Synagogues and you like to be treated with honour in the market place but boy are you in for trouble. You are like unmarked graves that people walk on without even knowing it.”

A teacher of the Law of Moses spoke up and said, “Teacher, you said some cruel things about us.” And Jesus said, “You teachers are in for trouble, you load people down with heavy burdens but you won’t lift a finger to help them carry the loads.” 


I love that because the stereotype that a lot of us have about God is that God equals religion and religion equals rules and therefore, God is a rule book.
And here’s Jesus saying to these people, “NO! NO! It’s not about that, It’s not about rules and burdens. God does not want to dominate you.”

**God’s Plan is to Set You Free**

Now if anyone should have the right to dominate others … then surely that person would have to be God, wouldn’t it? But that’s not how He sets things up. He sets us up to be made in His image; He sets us up to be free and that freedom only means something within some constraints of goodness.

We know deep down what’s good and right, come on, we do. We might want to marginalise it; we may want to say that good is bad and bad is good; we might want to say it’s all grey and nothing’s really right or wrong, black or white.

But deep down inside we know what’s right and we know what’s wrong. And as long as we live our lives within those “good” boundaries we know what freedom is.

People, governments, religions, systems, companies – when they dominate and marginalise and belittle individuals: get this, Jesus screams out, “NO! You are not meant to be dominated in that way. God’s love is not meant to be turned into a bunch of rules by people who load you down with them and yet don’t give you goodness and mercy and love which is what God is all about.”

In fact it was that clash between God’s Son, Jesus and the oppression of religion that ultimately got Jesus crucified. He threatened these religious leaders so much that they conspired against Him and had Him nailed to a cross.

That’s how big the conflict is between freedom and domination. That’s what God thinks about that conflict. He thinks enough about it, to let His Son Jesus be nailed to a cross in the middle of it all, to set you and me free.

It’s pretty sobering stuff! God does not mean for us to be dominated in that way.

**Well, what can we do?**

For me, the only thing that I can do is get closer to this Jesus. That may sound simplistic, but hear me out.

Back in the first book of the Bible, Genesis 1:26, it tells us that we are made in the image of God.

And Psalm 139, verse 14 says that we are fearfully and wonderfully made.

It was God who knitted us together in our mother’s womb. When we look at who we are through God’s eyes – wow! When God looks at us, He’s captivated. God is delighted. God is just overflowing with joy and love when He looks at you and when He looks at me.

When we get close to that, when we sidle up to that, and when that becomes the foundation of our lives, then His perfect love casts out all that fear because domination is about power and fear, right?

If someone wants to dominate you, whether at home or at work or however they want to do it, they rule by fear and it’s that fear that enslaves us. As we get closer to Jesus, as we really get to know Him, it’s where God speaks His love and His grace into our hearts. That perfect love of His casts that fear out; it breaks the power of someone’s domination over our lives.
The Truth Will Set You Free

It may not change the other person’s behaviour, it may not change the way that the other person thinks or talks or acts, but what it puts in our hearts is a quiet confidence; a sense of value coming from an intimacy with God that replaces the fear. And when that happens, they cease to dominate us on the inside. They cease to control our hearts and our minds.

When that happens we get this quiet assurance and peace about who we are and from that position we can then learn to assert ourselves, we can then learn to say, “no.” We can then learn to be our own person.

Nine times out of ten, the person who is trying to dominate us will discover they can’t do it anymore, that the fear is no longer ruling in our hearts so they move on.

Isn’t that great? It’s about winning the battle on the inside, by knowing who you are in Christ. Not by slogging it out with your adversary.

You and I can’t always change the behaviour of other people. If you’re married to someone who dominates you, you can’t always change their behaviour. But God can change you. God can put His perfect love into your heart.

All you have to do is ask Him.

What about you? What are you going to do with the people who try to dominate you? You can fight them; you can argue with them; you can try and change them, but nine times out of ten that won’t work.

Or you can get close to Jesus and let Him change you inside.

So, Should You be a Doormat?

No, that’s not at all what I’m saying. The proverbial doormat is a person who lives out their lives as a victim, and God does not want you to be a victim.

You’ve no doubt heard this saying (it’s sometimes called the Serenity Prayer):

**Lord give me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can and the wisdom to know the difference.**

The reality is that sometimes we can’t change the situation. If you live in North Korea, you can’t all of a sudden create freedom. But you can, with God’s help, develop the inner strength to live out His freedom.

Other times, you can change your circumstances but to do that, you need courage. And that’s what I’m talking about here. That courage is the starting point of both acceptance and change.

God does not mean for you or me to be a victim, but sometimes He does allow us to suffer. And that suffering can include domination by others.

The perfect example of this Jesus Himself. This is what He said:

*For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life in order to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it up again. I have received this command from my Father.*

(John 10:17,18)

Jesus suffered and died a brutal death. It was horrible. And He did it for you and for me.

But He was no one’s victim. He had the courage to know the terrible task He was called to. And though He suffered a shocking humiliation, punishment and death, He was never, ever a victim.

That’s what I’m talking about.
CASE STUDY

Doug’s been on the footy team for about nine months. He loves it. So do the other guys.

But the assistant coach is just a control freak. There’s no other way to put it. And he’s not just ruining Doug’s enjoyment of the game, the whole team is starting to come apart.

Stepping Over the Line

Well, the whole team expects to look up to the coach and the assistant coach. They don’t have a problem with that at all. Oh, and they expect it to be tough.

They expect the coaches to get stuck in to them when they’re not playing at their best.

But somehow this guy – and remember, he’s only the assistant coach – is stepping over the line. He’s like a football Nazi. He bowls people out in front of their mates for the most ridiculous things.

Your boots aren’t clean! … or ... You’re two minutes late! … or ... How can you play footy when your hair’s that long!

He’s more like a Regimental Sergeant Major!

And so the guys are starting to lose interest. They train in the cold and the wet. They get muddy and dirty. They come away with knocks and bruises. At least this should be fun, right?

Well, it used to be!

Doug Decides to Act

Fortunately, Doug’s been around the block once or twice himself. At work, he leads a team of analysts and his boss, well ... she’s been a great mentor over the last five years.

That’s the key – she’s taught him how to handle control freaks, because there are plenty of those in the different departments of the large company in which he works.

And the key, he’s discovered along the way, is to find out what’s eating them. When there’s someone who’s that dominating, there’s invariably something wrong.

Sometimes, it’s a deep insecurity – afraid of losing their job, or status, or position. Other times, it’s because they themselves were bullied and now it’s their turn to be top dog.

So over a couple of beers one night, Doug talks to his mates about it and suggests they help this guy with whatever it is that’s eating him. You can imagine, right?! At first his mates are incredulous. Help him? I want to kill him! shouts one of the team members. But then someone pipes up, with some news about the assistant coach’s past at boarding school (yep, bullying) that starts to point to the root cause of the problem.

So the lads decide to help him. After all, how does he treat his kids? It’s not going to be easy and it’s going to take time. But as a team, they decide ... it’s the right thing to do.
YOUR TASKS

The problem with this whole domination thing is two–fold. Firstly, no doubt, it’s been going on for a while. That’s often the pattern. And secondly, it hurts and frustrates you so much, that, like the football team, you don’t want to help the person, you want to kill them.

But there’s great wisdom in taking the servant approach, the Jesus approach, in this situation.

Because if there’s a solution to be found, this is pretty much the only way to make it happen.

1. **Start With Some Forgiveness:**
   While you’re angry and unforgiving, you simply won’t be in a position to help the person and find a solution.

   So begin with lots of prayer for them, and the decision to forgive them, even though they’re still hurting you. It’s amazing how God can change our hearts, when we pray for our enemies.

   And prepare yourself – if there is a solution out there somewhere, it’s going to be a long haul exercise.

2. **Do Your Research:**
   As we’ve seen, there is almost always a reason for a person’s domineering behaviour. So do your research. Ask around. Once you understand their pain, much of your anger will subside and you’ll be in a much better position to help.

3. **Get to Work:**
   The best way to handle someone who is domineering, is to set boundaries on the one hand, and love and serve them on the other. Start with one or two simple, clear boundaries that you won’t allow them to step over. Be firm, but at the same time, find a way to “compensate” them in another area of your relationship.

4. **Be Prepared to Pull Back or Walk Away:**
   Some people can’t be helped. Some men will continue to cheat on or abuse their wives. Some people at work will always be bullies. There comes a point when you need to be prepared, initially, to pull back and then ultimately, to walk away. It’s a tough call, so be prepared.
strategy 4

dealing with...

people who ignore you

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One of the most painful experiences we’ve all had in life is when other people ignore us. Do you remember being the last one to be picked on a team for a game at school? Have you ever had your friends all go out for dinner, but somehow you weren’t invited? You feel like the ugly duckling. You feel so alone.

The Emotional Rollercoaster

We’ve all been there, and we go through anger and resentment and then this sense of failure and worthlessness. They’re all out there having fun while I’m stuck at home.

How dare they?! I mean it’s just not fair. Maybe they don’t like me. Maybe I’m not good enough for them.

You know what I’m talking about.

Being ignored hurts. In fact it can hurt so deeply, it can ruin a relationship. But like it or not, sometimes being ignored is a fact of life. Sometimes, we just have to deal with it. So exactly how do we do that?

Being ignored is hard because it means being left out; being left alone.

Being ignored is a double-sided coin. The other side is about those other people who are out there enjoying each other’s company and enjoying whatever they’re doing. And it’s their side of the coin – the ones who are leaving us out – that makes our side of the coin feel even worse.

Nobody enjoys being left alone and forgotten (at least that’s how it feels). But it’s made doubly worse, by the fact that they’re out there enjoying themselves.

Been there, done that, got the t-shirt, right?

So why does it happen?

Why is it that sometimes people ignore us?

Well, sometimes it’s just circumstances. Sometimes maybe you’re single and you’re home alone and your friends are married and they’re at home with their family. It’s just the way it is. Married people go home to their families. Single people often go home to an empty house. I’ve been there and I know exactly what it’s like.

So sometimes we feel as though we’re being ignored; we feel as though we’re being left out, but it’s just the circumstances we’re in.
But God proves his love for us in that while we were still sinners Christ died for us.

Paul (Romans 5:8)

It’s nobody’s fault. It’s just where we are.

The second reason is oversight. Sometimes the people at work go out for lunch and you happen to be at a meeting and you get back late. You don’t know where they’ve gone and no-one thought to leave you a note. It just happened.

No one meant it to happen, it’s just the way things panned out that day. You just missed out somehow. Now we can get angry about it, but you know, it just happened.

But sometimes it’s deliberate. Sometimes people deliberately avoid us. You know when you go into a group of people and a person in that group who you see time and time again never eyeballs you, never looks at you, never talks to you, never engages in conversation with you and it’s almost like there’s an emotional ostrisisation going on?

That is a really hurtful thing!! And it happens every time. Ouch!

 Whatever the cause, they’re over there having fun and I’m over here alone and it hurts; being left out hurts. Can I encourage you, when that happens, to try to work through the reason?

Circumstances

Because if it’s just circumstances, as we were just talking about, or if it’s purely a simple oversight, it’s so easy for us to get hurt and injured and become resentful for no good reason at all. We can end up reading more into the situation than is there.

Married people go home to there families, it’s what they do, remember?! And it doesn’t even cross their mind to invite you out, because they aren’t walking in your shoes.

Sometimes people accidentally miss out on things. It’s what happens. We get all miffed and uppity and offended and angry and hurt. We question ourselves because we were left out, when it’s just the way it was. No one meant anything by it; it just happened that way.

Sometimes we think that we’re being different or being the odd one out or being left behind. It’s like we’re lepers, and yet … that’s not how others see it.

I remember when I was single and on Sundays after Church all the married couples used to go home and maybe one couple
had another couple over for lunch, but somehow they didn’t quite engage with single people and I’d go home on Sunday to an empty house thinking, “Well, you know, gee, it would have been lovely to catch up with someone for lunch.”

Well, married people want to go home with their families and have lunch on Sunday, they don’t always want someone else over there and emotionally, we interpret that as though, we’re a leper.

It’s okay to be alone, and it’s okay to spend time by ourselves. It’s okay not always to be with other people. It doesn’t make us a leper; it doesn’t make us any less valuable. It’s okay and half the time when we’re over here (alone!) we overrate the other side’s experience. We’re sitting home alone thinking, “Oh boy, I wish I had a family around me” or “I wish I could spend time with them”, and the person, over there, in the family which is in a mess and falling apart is thinking “Boy, I’d love to have some space. I’d love to be single for a while.”

It’s a crazy thing. We sit where we are, we look at the other person’s lot and think that their lot is much better than my lot.

**A Question of Value**

The question is, when it comes to being left out, to being ignored, where do we get out value from?

Do we get our value from what other people think of us or do we get our value from who we are? Because if we get our value, our sense of identity and worth, from other people; whether they invited us to lunch or not; whether they included us in this or that (or not!!) … we end up with a distorted sense of who we are.

People do get cliquish; people do ignore other people. People will disappoint us, they will hurt us. And if I derive my sense of value from those other people, it’s like going into one of those amusement parks with those distorted mirrors in side–show alley, you know the ones. They make you look really tall and skinny, or really short and fat, or all wobbly. That’s the self–image we get of ourselves when we rely on other people.

If I look to other people to derive my self–image and self–worth, then guaranteed, I’ll get a distorted sense of who I am. Because those other people are, themselves, far from perfect.

**In any case, God doesn’t call us to have a self-image, He calls us to a faith-image!**

God calls us to look at the Cross of Jesus Christ and say:

*This is how much God loves me. This is what God thinks of me. This is my value. This is who I am. I know that by the Price that He was prepared to pay on the Cross.*

One of the most beautiful times of my life was when I was alone. I mean … desperately alone. And I often felt like I was being left out and ignored and yet it was in that space that I discovered who I was at the foot of the Cross of Jesus Christ. Some days the married people, as I said, would go home after Church and I was single and I’d go home to a cold, empty house and I felt left behind.

But God was in that place. Jesus was in that space and it was in that space that I learnt to open this book – yes, the Bible – and read it and hear God speak to me.

It was in that space I learnt to experience the Presence of God. It was in that space that God grew this quiet confidence in me and it was in that space I learned to enjoy God’s
company and my own company. Can I tell you truthfully? I wouldn’t be here with you now if it wasn’t for the time that I spent in that space alone with Jesus discovering who I was in Him!

That’s what value is all about. Not what other people think; not what other people say; not whether other people invite us to lunch or they don’t invite us to lunch; not whether they talk to us or don’t talk to us. Who knows why they’re not talking to us? Maybe they’ve got some stupid thing going on in their lives that’s ruining their life and they’re seeing the world all distorted and they think we’re part of the problem. Who knows?

That’s not where we get our value from.

Value is about looking at the Cross with Jesus hanging on it and saying, “That’s what God thinks of me. That’s how much He’s prepared to pay for me.”

When it comes to dealing with people who ignore me, it’s really about having a different perspective.

Knowing that God will never ignore me. God will never forsake me. God will never ever treat me as though I’m worthless. Because in His eyes, I’m worth the life of Jesus. And so are you!

**Two Simple Steps**

Now I know what you’re thinking. That’s all well and good (you’re right, it is!), but … what if people just keep on ignoring me? What if there’s something wrong with me?

That’s an entirely reasonable concern, so I want to give you the two greatest secrets of making friends. These don’t come from me by the way. They come from a man called Dale Carnegie.

Back in 1936, he published a book called: *How to Win Friends and Influence People*. I’m sure you’ve heard of it. And if you haven’t read it yet, you should!

So, here are my two greatest secrets for making sure that you’re not constantly overlooked and ignored, if that’s what happens to you:

1. **Become Genuinely Interested in Other People:**
   Sometimes, we’re too self-centred and self-focussed. It’s easy to talk about ourselves all the time and frankly, people get bored with us when we do. Because they want to talk about themselves, and make you realise how brilliant they are. So, give them what they want. Ask them questions about … them. The reality is that everyone wants to feel important.

2. **Serve Them:**
   Jesus said: “The greatest among you will be the servant of all.” He was absolutely right. Think of the people who are nearest and dearest to you. Invariably they’re the ones who’ve served you the most – especially when you didn’t deserve it. Even when we do the smallest thing for other people, they notice. They appreciate it. And they naturally want to include us in things, because – without necessarily realising why – they want to be around us. You can completely change the opinion that other people have about you, simply by doing little things for them, without any expectation of a reward. Try it – you’ll be amazed at what happens!
CASE STUDY

Janelle and her husband Mario have been attending the same church for, oh ... about three and a half years now.

At the beginning, people were pleased to invite them out, but just of late, they feel like they’re getting the cold shoulder. And that hurts. They really need some friends.

Under the Surface

As with most marriages, there is more going on here than meets the eye. Janelle and Mario have a difficult teenage son, and it’s putting a real strain on their marriage. They’re doing it tough. And so having some friends around them would be just such a great help at the moment.

And besides, we all want to belong. And this is a church, after all. Aren’t they supposed to look after you?

With all that going on, it’s a downward spiral for them. And one day, Janelle decides she just can’t take it any more. She confronts one of the pastors and asks him, "What in the blazes is going on here? We need some help ... and yet nobody seems to want to help us! Is there something the matter with us? Are we lepers, or are the people in this church just lazy and rude?"

A Difficult Conversation

The pastor had kind of figured that this was coming, but he wasn’t prepared for the anger and the frustration that confronted him. Janelle was normally such a friendly, kind individual.

So, he plucks up the courage to have the difficult conversation that he was going to have to have with Janelle.

It turns out that Mario is one of those people who talks and talks and talks ... about himself, all the time. People can cope with that for only so long, and then, they kind of stop inviting you, because he’s boring their pants off.

The problem is Mario! Well, Janelle’s been married to him for quite a while now, and of course deep down she knows that. She’s had to put up with his jabbering on for almost twenty years herself. So she slumps back in the chair, overwhelmed with a sense of despair.

But the pastor hasn’t been caught flat-footed on this one. He’s already recruited a mature couple from the church to pull alongside Mario and Janelle. The husband in particular is a patient man, just the sort of guy who can help Mario see what’s going on; why it is that he doesn’t have any friends.

Now, I know. It’s not easy. These things rarely are. But at the same time, the pastor takes some time for prayer and counseling so that Mario and Janelle can understand, forgive and most importantly get God involved in their lives. In fact, when you think about it, it’s a God-given opportunity ...
YOUR TASKS

Janelle’s pain and frustration is exactly the way we tend to feel when we’re being ignored and ostracised. And often that pain prevents us from taking the positive first steps to becoming part of the community again. So the first step is all about overcoming the pain.

If you’re in that position at the moment, then it’s going to require some courage, some humility and quite some resolve. Are you ready?

1. **Begin with Prayer:**
   
   Does that surprise you? Start praying now? It shouldn’t! All too often we treat prayer as a last resort, when God should be the One to whom we instinctively turn in times of trouble.

   So, I’m suggesting a few weeks of solid prayer and Bible reading here. It’s time to draw close to God and hear His great and mighty heart beating for you, in your loneliness and isolation.

   That’s going to give you a sense of forgiveness, some wisdom and the courage that you need right now.

2. **Why Am I the Leper?**
   
   You need to find out why it is that people are treating you like a leper. Now, this comes with a warning! Because when the answer comes, it’s going to hurt. A lot! But you can either hurt that way, or hurt by continuing to be the leper. Which would you rather?

3. **Get Some Help:**
   
   Mario and Janelle were fortunate. They had a wise, sensitive pastor who enlisted the help of just the right couple. That won’t always be the case. But if you can get some help, someone who’s prepared to speak the truth in love to you, then do it. Those people are worth their weight in gold, and then some.

4. **Get Interested in Other People:**
   
   The most common reason that people are ignored is because they talk too much about themselves. It’s time to get interested in other people. Genuinely interested. Ask them questions. Remember their answers. Step in, gently and quietly, and help them in a practical way. This is about building bridges, and with a bit of help from a friend, it doesn’t take all that long.
strategy 5
dealing with ... people who undermine you

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WISDOM THAT WORKS

So, when was the last time you were “stabbed in the back”? It’s probably not that long ago. Because people constantly want to undermine us – our authority, our credibility and our reputation. Somehow they think by pulling us down, it lifts them up. Really?!

Stabbed in the Back

Without a shadow of a doubt one of the finest pieces of television in the history of humanity would have to be the British comedy series “Yes Minister” and “Yes Prime Minister”.

And one of the finest lines from a Machiavellian head of the British Civil Service on that show, Sir Humphrey Appleby when he was talking to a more junior Civil Servant was this. He said:

Remember Bernard, you have to get behind someone before you can stab them in the back.

That’s brilliant and it’s funny and perhaps the reason we laugh at it so much, is that – like much of that brilliantly written series – it cuts so close to the bone. We’ve all been stabbed in the back haven’t we?

And mostly it’s by people who smile and appear to be our friend to our face, but then they go behind our backs and undermine us with rumours and whispers and freely sharing our failures. That hurts doesn’t it?

So when that happens, how do we deal with it? I mean, how do we deal with the difficult people that undermine us?

They’re Everywhere

In this eBook, we’re looking at the subject of dealing with difficult people because they’re everywhere, have you noticed?

There are difficult people at work, at home, amongst our friends. Wherever you turn, it seems that you’ll find someone to oppose you, dominate you, lie about you, ignore you, disappoint you, or hurt you in some other way.

So we’re looking at the subject of how we deal with the difficult people in your life, because just one bad relationship can really ruin your life. That’s why it’s just so important to understand how to deal with these difficult people.
Those very ones whom you know, who’l’ll smile to our faces and talk to us nicely and sweetly as though they’re our best friends, and then in the next breath go behind our backs with whispers and rumours and innuendo and half-truths, making jokes and poking fun at us. They’re like having your own personal publicity machine to advertise your weaknesses and failures.

And you know what advertisers do – they exaggerate things to the point of the ridiculous. This is exactly what these people who seek to undermine us will do to us.

Now the reason they do it, is that so often, they themselves feel inadequate. They have their own insecurities, and so to get ahead, they pull us down in the eyes of other people. You have that going on long enough, and people will start to question your competence and integrity; they question the very faith that they used to put in you.

That’s why this is one of the most difficult of all things to deal with in relationships. It’s dishonest, it’s two-faced, it’s hypocritical and it’s dangerous. It can do us a lot of harm.

It’s kind of like stealing and lying. I mean dishonesty is awful but what they’re stealing is our reputation; what they’re lying about is you and me and that can be really emotionally damaging. This one can really get to us.

**So How do you Handle This?**

Sometimes we go into the fetal position and let out a primeval scream. You know, we get so angry and hurt and disillusioned about what they’re doing to my reputation and how dare they … that we just want to go and kill them. And the reason for that is that we’ve been so deeply hurt … so we want to lash out.

But it’s not going to help is it? It’s not going to be constructive or positive as much as we might want to kill them. Nor is keeping it all bottled up inside, because stowing it and letting it stew and brew and ferment on the inside, is like having our emotions eaten away by a cancer.

No, that doesn’t work either.

I think that today God wants us to really sharpen our perspective on this!

What do we do when someone goes behind our back and undermines us?
Can I say to you, no matter how much it plays on our insecurities, no matter how much it hurts, no matter how disillusioned we feel, no matter how emotional we become, the forensic facts of the matter are these: by undermining us, that person has done the wrong thing. It’s as simple as that!!

Either they’ve lied about us or they’ve made fun of us or maybe openly shared our faults and failures rather than just covering for us when we couldn’t cover for ourselves.

People love to do this, they love to say:

Do you know what Berni did? Oh you would never imagine. He gets on the radio and talks about all these good things and then he goes home, do you know what he did? I heard on the grapevine that he did this …"

**Should We Cover Up Sin?**

Now, I’m not saying that we should be covering up people’s sin. I’m not saying we should be hiding stuff and not dealing with it – because that never works. Sin has to be dealt with. But there’s a right way and a wrong way of doing it. Holding people accountable. That’s one thing.

But gossiping behind their backs – come on! I can’t imagine what it must be like for people in the public eye, when they have an argument between husband and wife and it’s on the front page of some tabloid somewhere. No marriage can function effectively under that sort of illegitimate scrutiny.

Good accountability addresses the issue in private, and gives people the opportunity to learn and grow and develop and correct their ways, with encouragement and support thrown in along the way. That’s how it should work. That’s exactly what Jesus taught:

If another member of the church sins against you, go and point out the fault when the two of you are alone. If the member listens to you, you have regained that one. But if you are not listened to, take one or two others along with you, so that every word may be confirmed by the evidence of two or three witnesses. If the member refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if the offender refuses to listen even to the church, let such a one be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector.

(Matthew 18:15–17)

Now, we could write three chapters on that. Suffice to say, there’s a godly model for accountability and correction.

**But when people gossip and undermine others, what they’re doing is distorting the facts, by at best magnifying our weaknesses and failures, and at worst, downright lying about us.**

Let’s face it, each one of us comes as a package deal: we’re made up of both strengths and weaknesses.

I am and you are and if I go around and talk to other people only about your weaknesses and not about your strengths, I’m lying. I’m giving an dishonest and unbalanced view of who you are and what you’ve done. So whether they lie outright or whether they have simply played on our weaknesses with half-truths and joked about our failures, they’re both wrong.

We might feel exposed and inadequate but let me say it again, the bottom line here is that they’ve done wrong.

**Mutual Accountability**

Let me ask you, what stops us from murdering,
dealing with difficult people

It wouldn’t take long in a society without the rule of law, for things to degrade into anarchy and robbery and fear. The law keeps us accountable; there’s a sense of justice in our community. We have freedom within right constraints and without those right constraints we wouldn’t have freedom at all (we saw that in Chapter 3).

In a sense there is a framework of mutual, societal accountability to one another through the law. Any group of people have to have some form of accountability to keep us honest and to keep us decent and that’s the key word here. The person who has been out there talking behind our backs and sneering and muddying our names, has to be held to account.

Remember, as we saw earlier, Jesus said, “If someone has wronged you, go and talk to them about it and if they don’t listen to you, take two other people and go and talk to them about it.” Jesus wasn’t into sweeping things under the carpet, he said, “Go and talk to them, go and deal with the issue.”

The Apostle Paul taught us to speak the truth in love. (Ephesians 4:15)

In other words, when that stuff happens (as inevitably it does) I really believe we need to confront it, we need to make the person accountable, in love, and not with a pickaxe in one hand and a blow torch in the other; not with a chainsaw. That’s not going to do it. It might make us feel better in the short term, but it’s not going to work long term. It’s going to escalate the conflict rather than resolving it.

**Firm Foundations**

We need to actually deal with that person and speak out of a place of security.

You and I are wonderful to God. Do you realise that?

God delights in you when He looks at you, because you’re made in His image. He loves you and He sent His Son for you, so you have the most incredible value to Him!

And that’s the place from which you can go and talk to someone when they’re stabbing you in the back. And if they have a problem with you, shouldn’t they do exactly the same for you?!

Whether they disagree with you or they disagree with me, shouldn’t they come into our office or our home and sit down quietly, privately and speak to us alone in love? With respect? With decency? Isn’t that the right thing to do?

Of course it is, that’s what we’d like, isn’t it?

So even when they’re out there talking behind our backs, we shouldn’t try and fight them by going out and undermining them behind their backs because when we stoop that low, we become no better than them; we become thieves; we become dishonest … just like them.

I know that’s what we may want to do. I mean, when someone’s out there undermining us, we want to do exactly the same back to them; we want to fight fire with fire.

Jesus dealt with things in love and if we just go and sit down with that person at work or at church or at home, and kindly yet firmly hold them accountable, then nine times out of ten that is going to hold that dishonest person accountable. Nine times out of ten by confronting an issue like that with them, in love, it might be painful at the time, there might be sparks and fireworks at the time, but it’s going to make a difference.

We can only do that from a position of quiet confidence in who we are in Christ, and the value that we have in God’s eyes.

stealing and raping? The answer is, the law does.

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CASE STUDY

Richard’s the new kid on the block. He’s a car salesman. Yep, you guessed it, he sells … used cars. But you know something? He’s really good at it. It’s his career. He enjoys selling. And just about everywhere he’s ever been, he’s consistently won the top salesman awards, month after month, year after year.

So Then What’s the Problem?

Well, the problem is that in this new car yard where he’s just started, there’s an existing “king pin”. Mal’s been top of the heap in the selling stakes here for, well … for years!

And he likes it that way. He likes working here. He likes selling and he likes being top dog. That’s basically it. So the minute Richard walks in the front door, he smells trouble.

Here’s competition. Here’s some guy who, by all accounts is a bit of a hotshot. There’s every chance he could knock Mal off his perch. WHAT A DISASTER THAT WOULD BE!!!

But then, this is nothing new. Mal’s been down this path once or twice before.

So he does what any self respecting salesman would do. He welcomes Richard with a warm smile and handshake, shows him around and watches him like a hawk.

And then with the stealth of a lion stalking its pray, he sets about undermining the new guy at every opportunity. Nothing overt you realise. Subtly, like an army of white ants boring through the frame of a house.

Won’t be long and he’ll be gone.

Who’s Watching Whom?

Now the easiest thing for Richard to do, is to be threatened. But fortunately, he too has been in this place once or twice before. He knows what’s going on, and … as much as Mal’s behaviour is unsettling and annoying … he knows how to handle himself.

The first thing he does, is that he banks on the fact that the boss is no fool and that he knows exactly what Mal’s like. Doesn’t take long to discover that he was right.

While Mal’s watching Richard like a hawk, the boss is sitting in the corner office watching them both with an eagle eye. Hey, he wants his new hotshot salesman to succeed, right?

The second thing Richard does, is look at the sales award system. Yep, just what he expected. There can only be one top dog each month. So he goes to the boss and suggests a change to the incentive and reward system so that instead of having one top dog at a time, anybody who reaches a certain standard gets an award.

What’s he just done? Created a win/win – and you know what? It worked!
YOUR TASKS

Somebody who sneaks around behind your back is very, very unsettling. It’s a terrible feeling to have a sense that there’s whispering going on behind your back. And it’s an even worse feeling to know that someone is deliberately undermining you.

But in this situation, offense is better than defense. And to play the game, you need both a carrot and a stick.

1. Read the Signs:
   It’s important not to over react to situations based on our own sense of insecurity. The important thing here is to read the signs. And if someone is telling half truths, or advertising your failures behind your back, the evidence quickly mounts up. It’s hard to hide. Eventually you can trace these half truths and lies back to the source.

   And when you do, it’s time to plan your campaign. This isn’t a campaign to give the other person some of the same. It’s a campaign to hold them accountable, and encourage them along the way.

2. An Offensive of Blessing:
   The first and most important step is not to stoop down to the same level. In fact, quite the opposite. When the person who’s undermining you isn’t there to defend themselves, then you defend them instead. Word will soon get back to them. And chances are that other people will start to hold them to account for their poor behaviour.

3. Be Prepared to Confront Them:
   This takes some real courage. But when you have clear, irrefutable evidence of their underhanded tactics, get them off to one side, sit them down and lay it on the table. I’ve become aware that you’ve been saying a, b and c. Is that true? People who undermine you are often cowards. They hate being held to account.

4. Bless them Again and Again:
   In private (through prayer) and in public (in front of the other people involved). They say that cream quickly rises to the top. It’s true. By taking this approach, your reputation will grow, more often than not, you’ll have dealt decisively with this bad behaviour.
strategy 6

dealing with …

people who disappoint you
WISDOM THAT WORKS

We all have high expectations of other people. We expect our mothers to be perfect mums. We expect our fathers to be perfect dads; our teachers to be perfect teachers; our friends to be perfect friends; our wives or husbands to be perfect wives or husbands; our kids to be … you get the picture right? So what happens when they fall short of our expectations?

If Only They Were Perfect

I mean, when our friends aren’t as friendly as they should be or our kids aren’t as well behaved and balanced and obedient as they should be. What then?

The basic facts of life are that other people disappoint us. In fact, I guarantee you that today won’t pass by without someone else in your life falling short of your expectations of them.

People can be difficult can’t they? So what do we do when those people disappoint us?

As I mentioned earlier, I spent almost two decades as a consultant in the IT industry. Now consultants aren’t cheap.

They have an hourly rate. Mine wasn’t really expensive and it wasn’t really cheap but I charged people quite a bit of money for doing what I did. And at the beginning, because of that, I tried to be an expert at everything. After all I was charging them quite a bit of money. But the result was, well … come on, no one’s an expert at everything, right? We can’t all be good at everything and so the clients were happy with the things I could do well and they were a bit touchy with the things that I couldn’t do quite so well.

Why was that? Because they had wrong expectations (stupidly fuelled by yours truly).

Great Expectations

So one of the things I learned fairly quickly as a consultant, was that it was really important for me to set limits; to set realistic expectations with clients, as to what I could do and what I couldn’t do.

Berni’s good at these things … but you know that thing over there, well, I need a specialist to deal with that because it’s not within my area of expertise. And once I had learnt to set those expectations correctly, consulting
as a business was much easier because people accepted, kind of, that I couldn’t be good at everything.

Initially though, I wrongly thought that I had to be good at everything because of the money I was charging them. That story, for me, serves to illustrate why we become disappointed with people sometimes: it’s because we expect them to be perfect.

Now, let’s get a revelation here today. Nobody that walks this planet is going to be perfect – nobody. There’s only been one person in all history who has been perfect and that’s Jesus, the Son of God.

Some people are really good at detail; they like doing crosswords or they like doing stitching and sewing and in fact, they’re great at all the detail in the workplace. Other people are ‘big picture’ people and the detail drives them nuts. We need both detail people and big picture people, right?

Some people are really relationship focussed, other people are more ‘outcome’ focussed. Some people are very good communicators, other people are very good doers.

Some people are very good navigators, some people – come on husbands – are not good navigators. You know that we’re all different don’t you?

And praise God that we are, because it would be a boring world if they all looked like you and me out there. So why is it then that we have these unrealistic expectations in our hearts of other people?

So, we set this standard of perfection, but what exactly is perfection? Well, here’s how we usually define it:

Perfection is when they’re exactly like me. Perfection is when they see the world the way I do, when they’re good at the stuff that I’m good at, when they conform with what I want them to do … that’s perfection – when they’re just like me.

And then we wonder why they fall short of our expectations and then we get all disappointed with them and it ruins our relationship.

**Wake Up!**

We do some silly things sometimes, don’t we?
We have these expectations of people that they’re never going to measure up to. My wife, Jacqui, is a wonderful woman. She is the most wonderful wife a man could ever ask for, but she is never going to be able to help me navigate with a street directory (or without one). It’s just not her cup of tea. And yet she does things here in our ministry at Christianityworks that I could never do. She handles so much detail and when you call our toll free number, chances are Jacqui will handle that call and you’ll talk to her.

When you write to us, she’ll be the one who either responds or manages the response. Thousands of times each and every month!

She does some wonderful things in those areas that I’m just not skilled or equipped to do. I need her and she needs me. We’re a team; we’re good at different things and that’s great.

But if I expect her to be like me, if I expect her to have the same outlook and the same behaviour and the same priorities as me, well I’m expecting something that she would never be able to be or do. And if she expects that of me, she is expecting something of me that I can never be because, praise God, we’re two different people and that’s precisely God’s plan.

I really believe that the main reason we get disappointed with other people is that we set patently unrealistic expectations of who they should be and what they should do. It’s something we do all the time!

People are who they are. They see the world the way they see the world. They’re good at what they’re good at and they’re not good at what they’re not good at. That’s always been God’s plan.

And the reason we don’t get that is? ...

Mary & Martha

There were two sisters, Mary and Martha who bumped into Jesus along the way. It’s fascinating how they saw things differently and the different skills they brought to the table.

Jesus and His disciples were on their way from A to B and He came to a village where these women lived. Now Mary sat at Jesus’ feet listening to all that He had to say. But Martha, she was doing all the cooking and the preparations and cleaning ... and she came to Jesus and said:

“Lord, don’t you care that my sister has left me to do all the work by myself? Tell her to help me.” And Jesus said, “Martha, Martha, you are worried and upset over so many things but only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better and it will not be taken away from her.”

In other words, Martha was one of these people, like my wife Jacqui, who wants to love others by serving them; by cooking and by doing things. Some people are gifted that way. It’s their natural way of behaviour and those people can sometimes get really cranky and upset when everyone else isn’t like them. And that’s precisely what was going on here.

Mary was listening to Jesus. She knew there was something different about this guy. She thought, “Wow! This guy’s in my home and I just want to sit and listen to what he is saying because what he is saying is amazing.” She wanted to hear his voice; she wanted to hear the story. She was a big picture person.

Martha on the other hand was a detail person;
a gifted servant. That’s why she wanted to do what she was doing. That was her gifting and she became so cranky with her sister Mary, because Mary wasn’t like her. And Jesus said, “Whoa, hang on just a minute here, we’re all different. Your sister Mary is choosing the right thing here. I’m not always going to be sitting here with you in your house for you to listen to.”

Wrong Expectations

How silly is it for us to have wrong expectations of people; to have a standard of perfection that says you’ve got to be just like me and to then get disappointed with the differences?

You know what they say: you’ll catch more flies with honey than vinegar.

When we delight in people’s differences, when we celebrate their complementary nature, that person will rise up to a relationship with us and bless us more than we can ever know!

I have a cat called Doggy (great name for a cat don’t you think?) and she’s often squatting down on all fours. But when I go to pat her she will always sit up. She will always rise up into my pat; into my encouragement.

We people are like that too.

We rise up to encouragement and truly that acceptance and encouragement, that sense of value that we place on the different giftings and abilities that other people have, will deal with most of our “disappointments”. When we start to value them for who they are and get excited about what they’re good at (things that we’re almost always not good at) the disappointment goes away because most of it has to do with our wrong expectations of a standard of perfection that they can never live up to.

I’ll say it again, I say it many times, every person is a package with strengths and weaknesses.

When we celebrate and value and use those strengths, when we understand and compensate and de-emphasise their weaknesses, all of a sudden that relationship changes. All of a sudden we’re playing to peoples strengths. Isn’t that better, isn’t that smarter, than complaining about their weaknesses?

What do you think?

Let’s have a look around at all the people in our lives who are different to us and think, “What expectations am I setting of this person? What the unrealistic things am I expecting of them? Hmm?”

Is that maybe, just maybe, the reason I keep getting disappointed with them? Well?

Reasonable Expectations

What we’ve talked about in this chapter isn’t going to deal with every disappointment that we’ll ever experience, because sometimes, we have legitimate expectations that go unmet.

It’s not unreasonable for a wife to expect her husband to be faithful to her. It’s not unreasonable for an employer to expect his staff to rock up to work on time. And it’s not unreasonable for a child to expect her parents to love and honour and protect her.

Sure. Sometimes, people fall short of our right and legitimate expectations of them. And that hurts. Sometimes, it hurts deeply.

But most of the time, people fall short of our expectations of them, because we quite simply have the wrong expectations.

That, I guess is, the main point of this chapter. And as always, our example is Jesus. When we fell short of His expectations of us – legitimate ones at that – He chose not to reject us, but to die for us. Wow! When that sinks in, it changes everything.
CASE STUDY

Kirsty was 17 – in her second last year at high school. And she was failing just about every class. Her father – himself an academically gifted man – was so disappointed with her. How could his daughter (of all people!) be so lazy and so stupid?! And so their relationship, needless to say, was pretty much bankrupt.

Flogging a Dead Horse

It had been going on for years. Kirsty was your typical lazy teenager. Do you think her parents could get her to get herself up out of bed so that she’d make school on time?

Every morning, for the past few years, it had been a battle. Every ... morning! And parent teacher interviews were a nightmare too. “It’s not that Kirsty is a bad girl, reported her teachers, it’s just that she doesn’t seem to learn anything. Perhaps she should choose another subject ...”

Brilliant! Just Brilliant! What do you do with a teenager like that? It was, quite literally, like flogging a dead horse.

Both her mother and father were at wit’s end.

The Great Revelation

Until one day, her dad realised that this was exactly what he was doing. Flogging a dead horse! It was never going to change. He was living out Einstein’s definition of insanity – doing the same thing over and over again, and expecting a different result!

So one Sunday afternoon he and his wife were out for a quiet stroll down a local street filled with shops and they spotted a sign in the window of a beauty therapist – Apprentice Required.

Quick as a flash dad was in there enquiring. He’d come to the realisation – completely against his grain as an academic – that Kirsty was never going take to study, and forcing her to complete high school was dooming her to certain failure.

And what would that do to her already battered self-esteem?

To cut a long story short, Kirsty got the job and left school. The first year was hard, going from school to a commercial work environment.

It’s now six years on as I tell this story. Kirsty completed her apprenticeship, gained her qualifications and is now one of the top beauty therapists in a large firm, located in a five-star hotel.

She loves her work. She never has to be told to get out of bed – she’s always up early. And amazingly, she loves selling. To the delight of her employer, her calendar is regularly filled with requests, and she re-books most of her clients and sells them product as well.

Her dad shakes his head and wonders what would have happened, had he continued trying to jam a square peg into a round hole!
YOUR TASKS

Okay, so you’re disappointed with someone.
Get over it! I’m serious. Most of the time, the emotion of “disappointment” is a reactive, negative emotion that has little or nothing to do with finding a solution.

Solutions – remember those? If it’s a solution that you’re after, then try these steps on for size.

1. **Read the Bible:**
   I know it sounds trite and simplistic, but there’s a particular passage that I want to encourage you to read.

   It’s 1 Corinthians 12:1–31. The upshot is that by God’s sovereign choice (did you get that bit – God’s *sovereign choice*) each one of us has been wired differently. And rather than being annoyed by one another’s differences, the reality is that we need each other.

   Until we each have that truth firmly written on our hearts, we will continue to be disappointed with the square people who don’t fit into the round holes we’re trying to bash them into!

2. **Take a Good Hard Look:**
   Having digested that truth, it’s time to take a look at the natural gifting of the individual concerned and what we’re expecting them to do. There is doubtless a gap between the two which is leading to our disappointment (and their pain). Are we expecting a detailed person to think big picture? Are we expecting a leader to show compassion, or a “heart person” to be a leader? It’s time to get real about our expectations.

3. **Find an Alternative:**
   And once we’ve got that sorted, it’s time to modify our expectations, and expect different things of the person. If you have an employee, for instance, in the wrong job, put them in the right job so that they, like Kirsty, can actually succeed, rather than being doomed to failure.

4. **Enjoy the Blessing:**
   And then ... it’s time to sit back and enjoy the blessing – because with the right expectations, each individual can thrive and succeed. And remember, the fruit they bear, is for the rest of us to eat. But let’s be careful always to keep our expectations realistic, and in check.
A Final Word

In any conflict, at some point, someone has to stop punching. Someone has to hang up their gloves, no matter how much it hurts. The question is, will that someone be you?

If you’ve experienced the grace of God in Jesus Christ, it should be. Because when it came to ending the hostility between you and God, He hung up His Son on a Cross for you.


Resource Library

Here at Christianityworks, we’re passionate about seeing your life radically transformed as you grow in a dynamic relationship with Jesus.

It’s why we do what we do.

And our website has so many more resources to encourage you on your journey. So feel free to visit our audio library and check it out for yourself.

About the Author

After a career as an Army Officer, and then as a Director of an international IT Consultancy, Berni came to faith in October 1995.

Today, his radio programs are heard by tens of millions of people around the globe each week.

His heart is simply to share the Good News of Jesus, into the realities of life.
Thank you for remembering that we can only do what we do here at Christianityworks through the prayer and support of friends just like you.

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