

Dealing with Difficult People

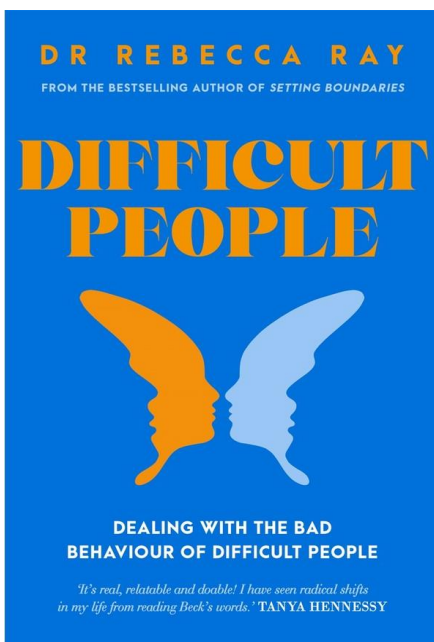
A servant of the Lord must not quarrel but must be kind to everyone, be able to teach, and be patient with difficult people.

2 Tim 2:24 (NLT)

- Not quarrelsome
- Kind to everyone
- Able to teach others
- Patient with difficult people

We are not called to fix them – that’s God’s job. We are called to be Jesus to the people around us.

But HOW do we do this? I read a book by Dr Ray – a clinical psychologist – looking for tips on how to deal with difficult people. I quickly realized that according to her, **I was the difficult person** and I got quite despondent. What she pointed out was that



1. It’s the behaviour that is difficult for you to cope with, not the person that is difficult.
2. We all have difficult behaviours.
3. We all have different coping strategies/instinctive protective behaviours learned in our childhoods.
4. **You don’t know another’s person’s background or trauma.**

We know that “People judge by outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.” (1 Sam 16:7) and that God and Jesus do “not judge by what he sees with his eyes or decide by what he hears with his ears” (Is 11:3), and we are called to do the same. We don’t know why someone behaves the way they do, or the background ‘traumas’ they have experienced. We have no idea what constitutes ‘trauma’ to them and why they display behaviour that we perceive as difficult. It also works the other

way around: they may perceive **you** as being difficult. We need to learn to cut each other some slack and be kind, gentle and respectful in our speech and responses, even if we think they are wrong or behaving badly.

Right + Rude = Wrong

There is a very well-known poem by M.T. Lathrap which captures the need to be careful of our judgement of others when we don’t know the situation. (The full poem is at the end of the article – but you’ll get the idea from the first two verses).

“Judge Softly”

Pray, don’t find fault with the man that limps,
Or stumbles along the road.

Unless you have worn the moccasins he wears,
Or stumbled beneath the same load.

Just walk a mile in his moccasins
Before you abuse, criticize and accuse.
If just for one hour, you could find a way
To see through his eyes, instead of your own muse.

Some suggestions for dealing with difficult people – a loving response to a difficult person requires you to be pleasant and tactful, gentle and not judgmental. “With all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love,” Eph 4:2

- **Expect people** to show difficult behaviour, so you are prepared.
- **Don't lose your cool:** “A wise, mature person is known for his understanding. The more pleasant his words, the more persuasive he is.” Prov 16:21 and “gentle words are a tree of life” Prov 15:4
- **Don't fuel the fire** or make the situation worse
- **Swallow your pride** (Esteem him better than yourself/ don't think more highly of yourself than you ought) “Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves.” Phil 2:3
- **Remember their brokenness** (and your own. “Take the speck out of your own eye”)
- **Shower them with kindness** “Be devoted to one another in love. Honor one another above yourselves.” Rom 12:10
- **Pray for them.** “The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective.” James 5:16
- **Pray for yourself** that you show the Fruits of the Spirit to them.
- **Matthew 18** – Graciously confronting a difficult person in private. - “If another believer sins against **you**, go **privately** and point out the offense.
- **“Stop being bitter and angry and mad with others.** Don't yell at one another or curse each other or ever be rude. Instead, be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving one another, just as God also forgave you in Christ.” (Eph. 4:31-32)
- **“Make every effort** to live in peace with everyone” Heb 12:14
- **“Do to others** as you would have them do to you.” Luke 6:31

Cathy Strachan

“Judge Softly”

“Pray, don’t find fault with the man that limps,
Or stumbles along the road.

Unless you have worn the moccasins he wears,
Or stumbled beneath the same load.

There may be tears in his soles that hurt
Though hidden away from view.

The burden he bears placed on your back
May cause you to stumble and fall, too.

Don’t sneer at the man who is down today
Unless you have felt the same blow
That caused his fall or felt the shame
That only the fallen know.

You may be strong, but still the blows
That were his, unknown to you in the same way,
May cause you to stagger and fall, too.

Don’t be too harsh with the man that sins.
Or pelt him with words, or stone, or disdain.
Unless you are sure you have no sins of your own,
And it’s only wisdom and love that your heart contains.

For you know if the tempter’s voice
Should whisper as soft to you,
As it did to him when he went astray,
It might cause you to falter, too.

Just walk a mile in his moccasins
Before you abuse, criticize and accuse.
If just for one hour, you could find a way
To see through his eyes, instead of your own muse.

I believe you’d be surprised to see
That you’ve been blind and narrow-minded, even unkind.
There are people on reservations and in the ghettos
Who have so little hope, and too much worry on their minds.

Brother, there but for the grace of God go you and I.
Just for a moment, slip into his mind and traditions
And see the world through his spirit and eyes
Before you cast a stone or falsely judge his conditions.

Remember to walk a mile in his moccasins
And remember the lessons of humanity taught to you by your elders.
We will be known forever by the tracks we leave
In other people’s lives, our kindnesses and generosity.

Take the time to walk a mile in his moccasins.”

by [Mary T. Lathrap, 1895](#)
