

Series: Through It All
Title: Through the Valley of Difficult Relationships
Text: Matthew 5:25, 26; 43-44
Key Word: Instructions
Proposition: Everyone will walk through the valley of difficult relationships by following these biblical instructions.

Good morning everyone. My name is Chris Farmer. I serve as one of the pastors. We are thrilled that you have chosen to come and worship God with us. God is in this place. He offers His presence and power, so that we can love him and others; grow to be like Jesus, and serve the world. He is here to reveal his ways and purposes so that we can live the life that we were created to live. I invite to open up your mind and heart to what God would have to say this morning. (Read Scripture)

Tyler Perry's "Why Did I Get Married?" reveals those hilarious and heartbreaking moments in marriage. Eight married college friends reunite for their annual retreat in the snowcapped mountains of Colorado. They come expecting fun and relaxation, but doubt begins to enter into many of the marital relationships. During the weekend, each strained relationship is put to the test as secrets and deep-seeded emotions unfold. After Shelia's husband left her to be with another woman, Troy brings her to a place where she can let all her emotions out. They wonder if they will make it through the valley of difficult relationships. Let us ease drop on Troy and Shelia.

(Video) (110)

All have us have difficult relationships. We may not call the people in these relationships our enemies. They may not consider themselves as our enemies. But if we're alive, we have people with whom we argue, people who criticize us sharply,

people who seem to go out of their way to make us miserable. Sometimes relationships are hard because people withdraw from us when we try to connect with them.

We have many different reactions to these difficult relationships. Anger, hurt, sadness, defensiveness, and avoidance are all ways in which we respond. However, Jesus instructs us to love even the difficult people in our lives. I have found that sometimes, I can't love them, sometimes I find that I don't want to love them. In those moments, God offers us four key instructions to lead us through this valley.

First, face the person in the mirror with prayer. Evelyn had a few moments when she simply prayed, "Lord, change me." On her daughter's eighteenth birthday, she announced at the dinner table, "Mom, I never want to hear your Christian perspective of life. Do you know Mom, that you actually change the tone of your voice when you talk about that?"

After dinner, Evelyn went upstairs and cried out to the Lord. "Lord, how do I become the mother you want me to become?" The Lord answered, "Be quiet and don't say anything. Let her be won over without words by her pure and reverent behavior." Her daughter was not rebellious, but she needed to find out who she was. She went off to college and Evelyn backed off. She allowed the Lord to change her to be more like Christ. As Evelyn quietly submitted herself to the Lord, her daughter saw the choices she made and the way she spoke and acted. Her daughter did not hear her talk about her beliefs again. Years later, Evelyn's daughter wrote a card telling her that she had been a great influence in her life, that modeled things for her

and made it easier for her to trust in the Lord and that she had shown her that God is faithful. Change in any difficult relationship begins when we first cry out to God, “Lord, change me.”

Second, fight fair. Arguments, debate, verbal fights always exist in relationships. In fact, someone once said that if there are no disagreements then there is no need for the other. Conflict of interests and opinions, turf battles are bound to happen. The question then becomes how can we fight fair.

One day a boxer says to his manager, “Get me the champion.” The manager replies, “You’re not ready.” The boxer said, “Sure, I am. I going to fight him” But the manager wisely answered, “I know you want to fight him, but I have the responsibility of getting you ready, and you’re not ready. Every boxer only has so many fights in him. And it’s my job to pick the right ones.”

We human beings have so many fights in us. Therefore, we have to make sure we’re not constantly going into battle. Some things just aren’t worth fighting over—and we have to learn to reserve our strength for the big issues.

When the big issue comes up then they need to be confronted. Big issues mean that there is intelligent and heartfelt disagreement. Disagreement shows that there is void of dominance and each are actively thinking and engaged. Therefore, disagreement or conflict is not necessarily bad. The problem can be that disagreement can quickly sink into hostility that does lasting damage, producing resentment and bitterness. Every time I have allowed my emotions get the best of

me and permit disagreement to relapse into hostility, I have regretted it. Paul wrote in his letter to the Ephesians, *“Do not let the sun go down while your are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold.”*

Through the years, I have learned a few simple rules to avoid the trap of hostility. First, don't shout. Next, no name-calling. Next, no physical violence. Next, no verbal abuse including cutting sarcasm. Finally, pray always. It takes the power of the Holy Spirit to stay composed and poised to keep the rules in the heat of the moment. I try to write these rules on the hard drive of my mind. Prayer keeps the files accessible without which the relationship cannot be easily mended. Once harsh words are spoken, they are gone. You cannot take them back. It may even take a lifetime to heal the relationship.

The words fight fair implies that there will be a winner and a loser. However, the objective in any fair fight is not a win – lose or right – wrong situation. It seeks the common ground on which the relationship can function. It strives for the win – win. This requires flexibility and compromise. Unless each person is willing to give a little, there's little likelihood of any lasting good coming out of the fight.

When the fight is over, healing needs to take place. In spite of the agreement that has been reached, somebody's ego will be bruised or even damaged. One night one dad in our Sunday night parent group said that after a heated moment with his kids, he makes sure that after things have cold down, he tells his kids how much he loves them. He heals the relationship, even if his children receive necessary

discipline. Prayer also unleashes God's healing and reconciling spirit. God heals the wound in time.

Third, focus on love when it hurts. Tim tells the story when he and his family were enjoying lunch at McDonald's. They were enjoying a pleasant conversation when a man, with his wife and children, plopped down at a nearby table. This man had hurt Tim deeply. They exchanged faked pleasantries and exchanged hellos, but Tim felt a growing hostility as he thought more and more about what this man did to him. This person had wounded him badly. He was surprised by how much hurt he still felt.

He and his family gobbled down their food and on the way out of the restaurant he overheard "the enemy" and his wife arguing because neither had any money to purchase the food they had ordered. Their three kids were screaming for their Happy Meals. The couple was embarrassed. Tim thought, *Praise God, there is justice in this world. He deserves every bit of embarrassment.*

Suddenly God broke through his "righteous anger and vindication, by reminding him of the Scripture he read that morning. *"Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody. If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written, 'It is mine to avenge; I will repay,' says the Lord. On the contrary, 'If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink'"* (Romans 12:17-20).

The Holy Spirit said, “Here's your chance, Tim, to be set free of your pain and overcome your hurt.” Tim had a choice to either obey or bask in his bitterness. Somewhat reluctantly, he reached into his wallet, pulled out \$20, and gave it to the man who had been his enemy. With tears in his eyes he said, "Have lunch on me." Focus on love even when it hurts.

Finally, God instructs us to forgive. When it comes to forgiveness, we probably agree that it's a beautiful idea—until we have to practice it. In the Lord's Prayer, Jesus links our own need for forgiveness with our willingness to forgive others. This doesn't mean that God's forgiveness is dependent on our having forgiven others first, but we should never expect to receive what we are unwilling to give. Forgiving those who have wounded us is not as easy as flipping a light switch—it's tough! Henri Nouwen describes the process at work. He wrote, “I have often said, "I forgive you," but even as I said the words, my heart remained angry and resentful. I still wanted to hear the story that tells me I was right after all; I still wanted to hear apologies and excuses; I still wanted the satisfaction of receiving some praise in return—if only the praise for being so forgiving! But God's forgiveness is unconditional; it comes from a heart that doesn't demand anything for itself, a heart that is completely empty of self-seeking.” Henri’s words speak to my wounded heart and call me to take the high road of forgiveness.

Recently I read a remarkable story by Corrie Ten Boom. Corrie watched in horror as the Nazi jailers brutalized her sister, Betsy, in the processing center at Ravensbruck.

Many years later, after the war had ended, one of these jailers approached her after she had finished delivering a message for a church service in Munich. She writes, “He was the first of our jailers that I had seen since that time. And suddenly it was all there—the roomful of mocking men, the heaps of clothing, Betsy’s pained, blanched face. His hand was thrust out to shake mine. And I, who had preached so often the need to forgive, kept my hand at my side. Even as the angry, vengeful thoughts boiled through me, I saw the sin of them. Jesus Christ had died for this man; and I was going to ask for more? *Lord Jesus, I prayed, forgive me and help me to forgive him.* I tried to smile. I struggled to raise my hand. I could not. I felt nothing, no spark of warmth or charity. And so again, I breathed a silent prayer. *Jesus, I cannot forgive him. Give me your forgiveness.* And as I took his hand, the most incredible thing happened. From my shoulder along my arm and through my hand a current seemed to pass from me to him, while into my heart sprang a love for this stranger that almost overwhelmed me. So I discovered that it is not on our forgiveness any more than on our goodness that the world’s healing hinges, but on His.”

If by the God’s grace, Corrie Ten Boom can manage such a difficult relationship so can we. The same grace that filled and empowered Corrie can and shall strengthen us to walk through the valley of difficult relationships. Why not try it and see what God will do? Give as much of yourself as you understand to as much of God as you understand and God will walk you through it all.