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Wisdom Worksheet: Leading Difficult People through Listening (James 1:19)

4 Types of Difficult People:

At least four difficult types of people exist. Two are task oriented; therefore, they are direct in their difficult behavior. They include the (1) aggressive and (2) complainer. Two are people oriented; consequently, they are indirect in their difficult behavior. They are the (3) people pleaser and (4) passive resistive.

Each pursues the satisfaction of at least one primary, God-given desire: (1) control, (2) security, (3) significance, and (4) contentment (Gen. 1:27-30). Each leads primarily with one chamber of the heart: (1) will, (2) mind, (3) emotions and (4) spirit. Although each desire flows from all four heart chambers, a person who attempts to satisfy ultimately one desire seems to lead with a respective chamber of the heart. For example, one who attempts to satisfy his desire for control leads with the will. A person who attempts to satisfy his desire for security, leads with the mind. One who attempts to satisfy his desire for significance leads with the emotions. A person who attempts to satisfy his desire for contentment leads with the spirit. In his sinful nature, the difficult person attempts to satisfy his God-given desires apart from Christ, the only one who can truly satisfy them (Ps. 145:16; John 7:37-38).

Task Oriented (Direct):

(1) Aggressive

The main desire of the aggressive is control. He leads with the will.

(2) Complainer



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The main desire of the complainer is security. He leads with the mind.

People Oriented (Indirect):

(3) People Pleaser

The main desire of the people pleaser is significance. He leads with the emotions.

(4) Passive Resistive

The main desire of the passive resistive is contentment. He leads with the spirit.

Our Problem:

Beware, the difficult person you read about might be you! Each of us has a bent toward one of these behaviors; although, left to ourselves outside surrender to Christ, we borrow the difficult behavior from each of the four types. A difficult person is: (1) *disconnected* from the hearts of others, (2) *un-deflected* through his difficult behavior, (3) *non-reflected* in his heart condition by those whom he encounters, and (4) *misdirected* toward foolishness over wisdom.

When dealing with a difficult person, our first inclination often stems from our sinful nature which will be foolish, rather than wise. We will be slow to listen, quick to speak, and quick to become angry. When we are surrendered to being led by the Spirit of Christ, we will be wise. We will be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to become angry (James 1:19; Prov. 18:13).

How to Lead Difficult People through Listening



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In order to listen and lead the difficult person, we must make at least four wise movements: (1) *connect* with his heart like a *Lego* (Prov. 20:5); (2) *deflect* his difficult behavior like a *shield* (Prov. 17:9); (3) *reflect* his heart like *mirror* (Prov. 27:19); and (4) *direct* him toward wisdom like a *highway sign* (Prov. 24:11-12). Each practice is performed uniquely with each respective difficult type (1 Thess. 5:14).

(1) Connect with his heart like a *Lego* (Prov. 20:5)

A difficult person is disconnected from the hearts of those around him. His co-workers, family members, and friends often become stuck on his external behavior and never make a connection with his heart. In order to do so, we must ask questions about his choices, thoughts, feelings, and even his prayers. Then we must listen. Solomon said, “*The purposes of a man’s heart are deep waters, but a man of understanding draws them out*” (Prov. 20:5).

Pause and Let Wisdom Work

When you encounter any person, recognize that he has the capacity to be difficult in at least one of the four ways previously described. Before any difficult behavior begins, connect with that person’s heart. Ask questions and learn about his choices, thoughts, feelings, and prayers. This will establish a heart connection through listening and serve as preventive maintenance for the relationship. When that person becomes difficult, ask yourself, “Why?” Now that you have a heart connection, you can examine his desires and continue to do so through asking and listening.

(2) Deflect his difficult behavior like a *Shield* (Prov. 17:9)



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Difficult behavior includes coarse words, a rude tone of voice, demeaning facial gestures, evil eye contact, improper use of the hands and body, and even ignoring a person altogether. Most people never get past these flaming arrows because they cannot control their own prideful responses to the negative behavior. We need to deflect the difficult behavior to Christ who gives us the power to do so because He has conquered sin at the cross, fully paying its penalty once and for all. Deflecting moves past the unpleasant behavior without disengaging from the relationship. Proverbs records, “*He who covers over an offense promotes love, but whoever repeats the matter separates close friends*” (Prov. 17:9). Deflecting covers over an offense.

Pause and Let Wisdom Work

When you encounter difficult behavior, remain engaged with the person’s heart and deflect his sin like a shield. Humble your heart to Christ and the person who is being difficult. This will allow you to be wise in deflecting his flaming arrows. Consequently, it will not be you, but Christ in you who will do the deflecting.

(3) Reflect his heart like a *Mirror* (Prov. 27:19)

Because so few people connect with a difficult person’s heart and even fewer deflect the difficult behavior, rarely does anyone reflect the difficult person’s heart with an accurate and compelling picture. Reflecting is paramount to the difficult person’s behavior being revealed to him in a non-threatening way through questions and images. Solomon taught, “*As water reflects a face, so a man’s heart reflects the man*” (Prov. 27:19).



Pause and Let Wisdom Work

When you are engaging with difficult behavior, connect with the person's heart, deflect his flaming arrows, and reflect your journey to understanding his desires that you gained from listening. Do this in the form of a question so that you are not presuming that you know his desires completely and accurately. Possibly use relevant images that will engage the person's heart in an unthreatening fashion. Continue to learn through listening.

(4) *Direct him toward wisdom like a Highway Sign (Prov. 24:11-12)*

After the connecting, deflecting, and reflecting, comes the directing. When the difficult person understands that we are engaged with his heart, he becomes more open to our suggestions. This is when we want to direct him toward wisdom. Often, this is most effective when we offer multiple wise choices. In one of the 30 sayings of the wise, Solomon wrote, "*Rescue those being led away to death; hold back those staggering toward slaughter. If you say, "But we knew nothing about this," does not he who weighs the heart perceive it? Does not he who guards your life know it? Will he not repay each person according to what he has done?"* (Prov. 24:11-12).

Pause and Let Wisdom Work

Next time you encounter a difficult person, connect with his heart, deflect his difficult behavior, reflect your understanding of his heart to him, and direct him toward wisdom by offering wise alternatives for him to consider.

Summary



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When we encounter a difficult person, we want to lead him wisely through listening—moving past his challenging words and nonverbal cues to his desires. *Connect* with his heart like a *Lego*. *Deflect* his difficult behavior like a *shield*. *Reflect* his heart like a *mirror*. *Direct* him toward wisdom like a *highway sign*. This will provide a path for us to wisely navigate through conflict to community.