

Voices: Great hope for holiday hurt

December 13, 2024

People hurt us. That is a simple fact of life.

A beloved child may reject his parents and their faith. Churches may not appreciate us and not want us around anymore. A boss might fire us. Siblings might drop out of the family and seek new loved ones for holidays. Friends choose different friends for fun activities.

We are left wondering where the ones we invested our lives in went.

I do not know what will help in all circumstances, but a few things have worked for me through many years of prayer and emotional and spiritual struggle as I dealt with complex interpersonal conflict. I offer these for your consideration.

Things that helped me

Accept your pain and live with it a while, if you are dealing with a long-term situation. Whenever we cannot solve a problem immediately, accepting it and not fighting it reduces stress.

Try not to obsess about the situation. This is a tough one, because thoughts cannot be controlled totally. Continue to lift the situation and loved ones to God—no matter how long this takes.

Visualize yourself letting go of what happens. “See” in your mind your hands letting go of the burden, and let yourself see the problem and person float toward the Lord. This is one skill that has released pain in my heart and given me freedom.

If you continue to see the person who hurt you, try to emphasize and build on any positive interactions. Show appreciation for any kindness or courtesies. Frequently, we make the negative a mountain and the positive a molehill, when the opposite should happen.

Consider the person's brain chemistry and past experiences. Everything we do arises from thinking, and all thoughts track back to brain health. Each person works with what he or she has physiologically and emotionally. We are not all equal in terms of the body and mind.

Look back into the family of the person who hurt you, if you can. Who modeled behavior for this person? Who raised this person, and did abuse or trauma occur in that family?

Often, mental illness and suicide are hidden in families—even in our own. The effects of unspeakable “secrets” still touch family members more deeply than we can imagine.

Many people behave rudely, never conveying to others how they came to be the way they are. They may not know the cause of their inherited tendencies toward undesirable behavior.

Life is not fair, but it can be better than fair.

Ways God helped me

As time passes, we are able to gain perspective we could not grasp in the heat of anger or rejection. After months and years, we gain new friends and jobs and a new confidence born of faith and experience with God.

Look for God's hand, for his work. Do you see the person who hurt you doing better? If so, rejoice. Your long nights of praying through a terrible situation has borne fruit.

Are you doing better? I honestly can say God has improved my life over time, in spite of anything any human tried to do to me. God's work absolutely trumps everything. No evil intention can stand against him.

When we realize our blessings come directly from God's hand, we can be more empathetic and tolerant of others. We can send them a Christmas card with a message of peace and hope.

Try to be around the one who hurt you—if this is possible. Talk less. Listen more. Avoid any topics that might lead to conflict. Aim to have a peaceful, tolerable experience with the hurtful person—hopefully with other people around.

Practice grace. Forgive many times. Keep praying. Stay aware of your true emotions, and stay current with confession of your sin. Sometimes, we are more responsible for problems in a relationship than we first realize.

God has a way of revealing the entire picture when we are open to accept it. There is no eternal shame in confessing we were immature and unwise in younger years and made mistakes. Everyone who has not died has grown and changed.

We all are in the same boat of sin. Stay humble. Be able and willing to apologize. Apology feels free and clean, opening a path for the future.

When you need time and space away from conflict—away from the one who hurt you—take it. Make time and space for your own healing and peace of mind.

If you need to go to a different church, go with a loving, forgiving heart.

God does not require us to be around difficult people constantly, but he does require us to reflect Christ in all our dealings with others. That could mean Christlike interaction or simply leaving the door open for God to work

in the future.

How Jesus helped me

Can we love someone we cannot be around all the time? My experience tells me *yes*. We can love their soul and the person they are, made in the image of God. We can love their potential for Christ and the good things they have done in the world, even if they were not good to us.

If this person is a Christian, we can love Christ in him or her.

Can Christ be a bridge between Christians? Surely, *yes*. We are commanded to be unified and love one another.

Some of the love we find in life is easy love that feels good and right. Other love is tough, and we have to pursue it, then sort it out. I have known both kinds.

Loving an enemy requires a generous love. For a time, that may be only a praying love.

Do not lose heart. Do not give up. Though we were apart from God, mired in deep sin, God poured out his agape love plan who is Jesus. Jesus breaks chains we think are immovable.

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