

Revival & REFORMATION

The Official “United in Prayer” Weekly Blog and Prayer Requests
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Praying for Difficult People

By Frank M. Hasel

We long to experience a happy and smooth life. We desire to be exempt from problems and difficulties. But real life often is different. Perhaps you have experienced it yourself: There are some things in life that are rather challenging and even outright awkward, and often you have to deal with people who really give you a hard time. Indeed, there are some fellow human beings who are not easy to get along with. Perhaps a schoolmate, teacher, colleague, or supervisor has it in for you. Maybe your child or your spouse is giving you a hard time. Maybe there are even brothers and sisters in the church who are a real pain in the neck. People who can make your life sour are to be found everywhere. What do you do in a situation like this?

You pray. And—of course—you make a decisive effort to solve the problem. You are kind to such people. You are patient with them, very patient indeed. You sincerely hope that they will change and you encourage and give support to make a change for the better. You try everything that is in your power to help them. You give your best. And you have tried it countless times. And, of course, you pray. But nothing changes.

Finally somebody advises you to talk with the difficult person, eye to eye, to address the issue. So you gather all your courage and approach the person. You are open, honest, candid, and as kind as you can be. Most individuals are reasonable beings, you think. All you have to do is to explain the problem clearly, so that the person understands—and changes. So you think. But it is all to no avail. After quite some time, it seems as if it is virtually hopeless to try to change this person. He or she continues to drive you nuts. No matter what you do and no matter how sincere and loving you try to be, your best attempts are without success.

And all of a sudden you realize that even if you had everything you ever wanted to have, even if you were healthy and well off, your happiness still would depend to a large degree upon the person with whom you need to get along. And even if your circumstances would all change and you would become a millionaire, your spouse would still be that old and notorious grouchy tyrant, and you still would have to get along with your picky mother-in-law, your annoying colleague at work, and/or your wearisome church elder.

Finally, you realize that it is exactly this notorious person that you are helpless to change. When all your plans to change a difficult person have failed, you can perhaps better understand how God must feel when He deals with us human beings. But God does not only see the difficult people with whom you have to deal on a daily basis and who give you a hard time. God sees an additional person who is of the very same kind. And this additional person is you.

Perhaps this perspective can open up the first step to solve your problem: You need to recognize that you are the very same kind of person that you bemoan in others. You, too, need God’s forgiveness. You, too, have rather problematic character qualities that make it difficult for other people to change you or to get along with you. You might not perceive yourself as such a difficult person. But we all tend to see our own deficits and mistakes as less severe than others do. The handling of your mistakes is one of the greatest challenges—even for God.

Despite all the power He possesses, it is impossible for God to change you if you are not willing to change. This is true for every person. God woos and pursues us in His great and tender love, but even His strongest love will never force us. And God not only sees all the imperfections and difficult character traits in other people, He has your own deficiencies and mistakes in sharp focus. The amazing thing, however, is that God loves us—all of us—despite our stubbornness. And God never gives up on us. He never stops loving us.

What is even more amazing than that is the fact that God has joined and committed Himself more closely and more intimately with us human beings than we could ever be willing to do with another person: He desires to live in us and with us. This means that God is uniquely and very closely confronted with every evil thought we have, with every impulse of hatred, envy, pride, covetousness, greed, vanity, indifference, stubbornness, and irreconcilability in all of us. For our pure and holy God, this is more painful for His Holy Spirit to endure than all the mistakes of other people could ever bother me.

This perspective can open up new perspectives to change difficult people. First of all, my life will change gradually. If I am willing, I can allow God to change things in my life. And He will do it. His love will impact me in such a way that I will become kinder and more courteous toward others. In His strength I will be able to meet with genuine love and growing patience even the most difficult people in my life. Perhaps I am indeed the only difficult person that God can change when I invite Him to do so. Why don't you give it a try? You'll be surprised by what God can do in you and through you, even for others.

Still, it is biblically correct and good to pray for other people (Eph. 6:18; 1 Tim. 2:1-3; Jer. 29:7), even for difficult people. Of course such a prayer will first of all change me, but I believe it also gives God an opportunity to move and act in a special way. Since the Fall, we all live in enemy territory. In this sinful world, Satan claims all of us as his followers. For this reason, God needs to be given permission to get active in a special way. While the Holy Spirit tirelessly works on every human being, God wants us to become His "fellow workers" (1 Cor. 3:9, NIV) in His plan of salvation.

When we pray for others, we give God an opportunity to become active on our behalf. And perhaps we simply need to pray for other people because there are those who have never learned how to pray and have never had examples of praying believers who brought them into God's presence. And then there are those who have never experienced the living God personally. They need your prayers and your prayer support. For prayer unites—even across very long distances. What a blessing it is to be prayer partners with God.

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World Church Prayer Requests

November 17 - 24, 2019

- **PRAYER REQUEST:** Please pray for the coming Ten Days of Prayer, January 8-18, 2020. Please pray earnestly that many people all over the world will choose to be part of this powerful Ten Days of Prayer focusing on cultivating a deeper experience with the Lord. To learn more, visit: www.tendaysofprayer.org
- **PRAYER REQUEST:** Let's pray that God would first and foremost start His revival work in us, so that we can more effectively reach those around us! Then pray for the backslidden members of your churches and congregations. Pray for the difficult individuals in your life that test your patience, or cause you frustration.
- **PRAYER REQUEST:** Please pray for countries throughout Asia and the Middle East that are experiencing great religious persecution right now. Pray that believers will be faithful and stand true to God's Word. Pray that God will send more laborers into these fields.
- **PRAYER REQUEST:** Please pray for the Total Member Involvement event scheduled for Papua New Guinea in May 2020. Please pray for all of the logistical details that are being arranged.
- **PRAYER REQUEST:** Please pray for the Generation of Youth for Christ Conference scheduled for January 1-4 in Louisville, Kentucky. Thousands of young people from all over the world will be gathering together. The theme is "By Many or by Few." Pray for special Holy Spirit blessings on the meetings, the speakers, and the outreach that is planned for the city of Louisville.