



10 Principles to Transform Difficult Relationships

I. Difficult Relationships Described

A. Types

1. Addictions (alcohol, drugs, sex, gambling)
2. Abuse (verbal, emotional, physical, sexual, and spiritual)
3. Anger
4. Mental Illness
5. Physical Illness
6. Workaholism and Other Excesses
7. Spiritually Mismatched
8. Irresponsibility
9. Different Personalities/Genders/Values/Goals/Ethnicities
10. General Dysfunction

B. Dynamics

1. Perpetual Problems
2. One person wants change/One with “The Problem” doesn’t
3. Poor Communication
4. Strong Emotions
5. Denial
6. Distrust
7. Disrespect

8. Blame
9. Resentment
10. Codependency/Caretaking/Enabling
11. Rigidity
12. Enmeshment
13. Triangulation
14. Secrets
15. Manipulation/Control
16. Contempt/Criticism/Judgment
17. Shame
18. Poor Boundaries

II. Principle 1: Understand Scriptural Truths

- A. Submission (Ephesians 5:22-24; Acts 5:29)
- B. Biblical Love (1 Corinthians 13:4-8; Romans 13:10; Philippians 2:4)
- C. Suffering for Good (1 Peter 3:17)
- D. Compassionate Toughness (Romans 2:4)
- E. Respect (Leviticus 19:3, 32; Ephesians 5:33; Ephesians 6:5; 1 Peter 3:7; 1 Thessalonians 5:12)
- F. Rights (Acts 16:37; 22:25)
- G. Dying to Self (Colossians 3:3)
- H. Turn the Other Cheek (Matthew 5:38-39; 1 Peter 3:9)
- I. Gentle and Quiet Spirit (1 Peter 3:1-4; Matthew 11:29; Romans 12:18)
- J. Law of Reaping and Sowing (Galatians 6:7-9)
- K. Evaluate the Fruit (Galatians 5:19-23; Ephesians 5:8-11)

L. Confusion Over Divorce, Separation, and Remarriage

III. Principle 2: Reach Out

- A. Isolation is common.
- B. Referrals to Twelve Step and Other Support Groups
- C. Professional vs. Lay Counseling
- D. What to Tell and Who to Tell
- E. When a Spouse Says No

IV. Principle 3: Change Yourself, Not Them

- A. Obsession
- B. Forcing Change: “Do something”
- C. Accept Powerlessness
- D. Admit Your Part
- E. Adjust Expectations

V. Principle 4: Detach With Love

- A. Detachment Defined
- B. Stop Enabling
- C. Stop Getting Hooked
- D. Act as If
- E. Live and Let Live
- F. Offer Love and Compassion

VI. Principle 5: Nurture Yourself

A. It's not selfish; it's essential.

B. Take care of own needs

1. Emotional
2. Physical
3. Spiritual
4. Mental
5. Relational

C. Let Go of Regrets

D. Respect Yourself

VII. Principle 6: Face Your Fears

A. Fear Keeps People Stuck

B. Solution:

1. Identify the Fear
2. Feel the Fear
3. Talk About It With God and People
4. Analyze It
5. Do What Is Right Anyway
6. Trust God

VIII. Principle 7: Speak the Truth in Love

A. Know the Truth

1. Let Go of Denial
2. Let Go of Self-Doubt

B. Speak the Truth

IX. Principle 8: Make Your Children a Priority

A. What to Do

1. Listen to Them
2. Validate Them
3. Talk to Them
4. Discipline Them
5. Protect Them
6. Model How to Cope
7. Provide Stability
8. Take Care of Their Needs

X. Principle 9: Set Boundaries

- A. Origin of Weak Boundaries
- B. Boundaries Defined
- C. Determining Boundaries
- D. Response to Boundaries
- E. Forgive vs. Reconcile

XI. Principle 10: Enter God's Rest

- A. Risk Change
- B. Live for Today by Turning Over the Future to God
- C. Accept the Unchangeable Things
- D. Let Others Take Care of Themselves
- E. Recognize Healing is a Process
- F. Watch God's Redemption

XII. Your Role as a Minister/Lay Counselor

- A. Listen, Empathize, Validate, and Support
- B. Offer Principles, Not Specific Advice
- C. Understand "Stuckness" and the Cycles of Difficult Relationships

D. Understand Your Own Reaction and Biases

E. Turn the Person and Problems Over to God

F. Let the Process Work

Application Questions

1. What is your experience with difficult relationships? How will those experiences help or hinder you when counseling with someone in a difficult relationship?
2. How would you explain and support a scriptural “compassionate toughness” or “tough love” approach to a difficult relationship?
3. Transforming principle #3 is “Change yourself, not them.” Why is this an important and powerful principle? Does it mean someone can’t identify the other person’s problems or do anything about them? Why or why not?
4. What would you say to someone who blames herself or himself for the loved one’s problems?

1. How would you explain “detachment” and why is it so important and powerful?

2. How would you counsel this woman using the 10 Transforming Principles?

Gina has been married for 10 years. Both she and her husband Jim are Christians and attend church. They have two children, ages 4 and 8. Jim has used drugs (pot and cocaine) off and on during their marriage. Both of them work outside the home. He manages the money but is typically late paying bills and doesn't allow her much spending money, even though he spends money for whatever he chooses. Jim is often gone in the evening, and she doesn't know where he is. She can never be sure he isn't using drugs, because he has always lied about it in the past and it took her a long time to find out. Communication is very difficult. Whenever she complains about anything or brings up a problem, he tells her she is being critical and attacking him and then he gives her even less money or doesn't pay the bills to punish her. He tells her that everything would be fine, if she would just submit and be a godly wife. Gina does try to be submissive, but it doesn't seem to work. At times, she believes it is her fault and that she makes her husband the way he is; at other times, she is angry with him and sees that he is not fulfilling his role as her husband. Part of her knows she cannot continue living this way, as she is depressed, obsessed, confused, distraught, and worried. She finds it difficult to function at home and work, because she is exhausted from trying to figure everything out. She is frequently impatient with her kids, as she is so upset over the problems. Divorce doesn't feel like an option, because she knows God hates divorce, and she doesn't want her children to go through the pain of divorce. Yet, she has tried everything to get her husband to change and nothing is working. She feels tremendous guilt about the negative emotions she has toward her husband, as she sometimes even wishes he would die because that is the only seemingly simple solution.

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