



## Lecture Notes for Audio Week 3

### Principle 3: Change Yourself, Not Them

Answer this question: How much time and energy do you spend trying to change your difficult loved one?

We try to change our difficult loved ones by praying, wishing, nagging, lecturing, explaining, begging, threatening, controlling, or manipulating. True, they probably do need to change, but the problem is that we are powerless to make them change.

*Powerless* means “without power.” Can you stand at the seashore and command the waves to stop? Can you ask the sun not to rise? Can you make your difficult loved one change? No! So if you can’t do it, why waste your life trying?

The only sure way to make your life better is to focus on changing yourself. And I don’t mean changing yourself to please the other person, hoping he or she will change as a result. I mean changing yourself to live in a healthier way whether or not the other person ever changes.

#### Scriptural Principles

- God’s Word tells us clearly that each of us is responsible for ourselves and we will each stand before the judgment seat of Christ to give an account of our lives—not our loved ones’ lives (2 Corinthians 5:10).
- We are to take the plank out of our own eyes before commenting on the splinter in the other person’s eye (Matthew 7:3-5). (This applies even if you think your difficult loved one has the plank and you have the splinter.)
- Galatians 6:4-5 says, “Each one should test his own actions. Then he can take pride in himself, without comparing himself to somebody else.” We have to do what is right, even when our loved ones aren’t.

So what are some of the things you can do to change yourself that will make your life better, even if your difficult loved one never changes?

#### 1. Take the responsibility to live your life.

Give up being a victim or a martyr. You can’t change your life, when you don’t even accept that you have the power or right to change it. Victims and martyrs go around acting like they have no

other option but to continue bearing whatever life is handing them. Not true. You always have choices. When you own your power to choose how you respond, even when you don't like your choices, you have a sense of power and ownership. And even when you can't change the circumstances, you can adjust your attitude and perspective.

Martha came to Jesus in Luke 10:38-42 and complained that she was the only one working to prepare things for him. She came to Jesus with the view that she had no choice but to do all the work and she was angry that her sister didn't do as much as she was doing. Jesus recognized there was another choice: She could choose to sit and relax and just be with him. She didn't have to sacrifice and do it all or anything for that matter!

### **1. Let go of the obsession over him, her or them.**

Whatever takes up your mental and emotional energy and robs you of the ability to live your life is your obsession. We get obsessed with relationship stuff, because it is important to us and because close relationships trigger all kinds of deep emotional issues in us. Having a conversation with a parent can make you feel like that helpless child again. A conversation with a sibling can bring up all the old stuff from childhood and leave you wondering how you can still have all those ugly emotions. Problems with your in-laws can make you absolutely crazy, especially when your spouse doesn't see the issues. Fears and concerns over your children's choices can be overwhelming and heartbreaking. Things your spouse does directly affect you and your children and have the ability to dominate your life and rob you of your happiness.

Philippians 4:8-9 tells us to choose what we think about and 2 Corinthians 10:5 tell us we can take our thoughts captive. Try the following things to control your thoughts:

- Don't do things that increase your obsession with what your loved ones are doing. Don't check up on them, listen to their conversations, follow them, call them over and over, argue with them, ask other people about them, or try to influence them through other people (unless you need to do this to find out what is going on in order to make decisions).
- Keep your head where your feet are. Concentrate on what you are doing in that moment and don't let your thoughts wander.
- Yell "stop" aloud or to yourself every time you find your mind wandering onto them again.
- Find a phrase that reminds you that you are powerless over them and say it over and over. I say the Serenity Prayer: "God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can and the wisdom to know the difference." An abbreviated version might be "Can't change them." "Mind your own business" was another phrase I said to myself.
- Turn on the radio or listen to music.
- Get busy with your own life.

## **2. Understand your past.**

You need insight into yourself: your childhood, your family you grew up in, your past relationships, and your personality. This helps you get insight into how you are reacting to people today and what you can change in yourself.

## **3. Admit your part in the problem.**

Even if it is small compared to the other person's, you need to apologize and own your mistakes, and you can't expect or demand an apology from the other person in return. That might make you mad at first, but it really is the key to getting your life back. You are responsible for your actions, inactions, responses, passivity, aggression, reactions, actions, attitudes, and choices. You got it. You can't blame your actions on anyone else. "Changing yourself" is about you doing what is right for you regardless of what the other person does. The only exception to this would be if admitting your faults would be used abusively against you or jeopardize your safety. In that case, doing what you need to do to protect yourself from abuse is more important.

## **4. Feel and own your feelings.**

Many of us have denied, repressed, and suppressed our feelings for so long that we don't even know what we are feeling. Feelings are a window into your soul. You have to feel them to deal with them. Otherwise, they go underground and make you sick emotionally, physically, or relationally. King David spoke about his feelings openly to God and God helped him choose how to respond to the powerful feelings that raged inside him.

When you feel your feelings, it is tempting to blame them on someone else. After all, what your loved one did made you mad, sad, embarrassed, disappointed, or hurt. But the reality is that you are the one that had the feeling and that means it is yours to deal with.

## **5. Check your motives.**

Jesus spent much of his time on this earth going beneath the exterior. He looked at people's actions and then asked, "Why are you doing that?"

Difficult relationships are complicated. There are many decisions that have to be made and many conflicts to deal with about what to do or say. There aren't any one-size-fits-all answers. The

only way you can figure out what to do is to check your motives. When making decisions, ask yourself why you want to do what you are going to do.

If your motive is pure, good, and healthy, then you can take the action; if your motive isn't pure, good, or healthy, then you shouldn't take the action.

## **6. Adjust your expectations.**

We all have expectations about how we think people should be and act. Difficult relationships are difficult because they are with people who don't do what we want them to do. Yet, we often find ourselves expecting and hoping people will act a certain way and then disappointed when they don't. The easiest way to protect your emotions, conserve your energy, and get off the roller coaster of hope and then disappointment is to accept who your difficult loved one is. You don't have to approve or like it. Just deal with the reality, so you won't keep hoping for things that won't happen. Proverbs 13:12 tells us that hope that's not fulfilled makes our hearts sick. Instead of fighting reality, accept it, and then you can decide what to do about it!

The Serenity Prayer reminds us that the key to us finding a serene life is that we accept the things we cannot change and change the things we can. Focusing on changing ourselves gives us the power over our own lives and peace that we have been seeking.

### **THE SERENITY PRAYER**

**God grant me the serenity  
to accept the things I cannot change;  
courage to change the things I can;  
and wisdom to know the difference.  
Living one day at a time;  
Enjoying one moment at a time;  
Accepting hardships as the pathway to peace;  
Taking, as Jesus did, this sinful world  
as it is, not as I would have it;  
Trusting that He will make all things right  
if I surrender to His Will;**

**That I may be reasonably happy in this life  
and supremely happy with Him  
forever in the next.  
Amen.**

*Reinhold Niebuhr*

