

## **Getting Along with Coworkers**

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### **Day One**

We typically spend eight hours a day on our jobs—with coworkers and peers whom we might never voluntarily choose to spend one-third of our waking hours each week. But there we are—together! And even though we're Christians, we're not immune to the irritations, aggravations, and outright conflicts that can exist between coworkers.

Let's face it: coworkers can get to you! However, these relationships give us opportunities as Christians to demonstrate the power of Christ, to show that his presence makes a real difference in our everyday lives. Some close friends were at my home and several of them were sharing the struggles they are facing on their jobs with coworkers. But in each case, as they shared how God had helped them get along with those coworkers, they told of dying to their own rights and then watching God work miracles in those situations. And in each instance, their ability to deal in a Christ-like way with a difficult coworker has opened a door of witness on their jobs.

In many of those situations, the coworker has not yet changed, and their behavior is extremely difficult. But even when they don't change, God can change us, so we are equipped to handle it properly. Often God just gives us grace to cope, grace to endure, grace to accept, even though the other person never changes. But isn't that just as great a miracle as changing the other person? I think so.

Let's look at one type of difficulty we encounter with coworkers.

### **Dealing with the lazy coworker**

Sometimes we have to work with a person who is lazy, and if we have to pick up his or her slack, we may find ourselves becoming bitter and resentful. And of course, that would show in sarcastic words, angry looks, body language, etc.

In these situations, we need to know whether to confront the situation; to let the work go undone; to go to management; or to do the work for a while.

One principle to consider is we are called to have an extra-mile attitude in our relationships with others. Read Matthew 5 beginning at verse 38 to refresh your memory on how Jesus taught us to go the extra-mile. Of course, this is not the world's solution, and it goes against all our natural reactions. But God may have good reasons for us to go the extra mile and be willing to do what we don't have to do.

### **Day Two**

I wonder how many of you are in a work environment where there is conflict among coworkers, perhaps even a personal conflict you are facing. It happens quite frequently, and as Christians, we need to be aware of biblical principles in dealing with these difficult coworkers.

Yesterday we were talking about the lazy coworker, who doesn't do his or her share of the work. We pointed out one principle to consider is the extra-mile principle given in Matthew 5.

I can hear some of you saying, "What? Are Christians supposed to be doormats? I don't buy that." What I find myself and other Christians doing so often is rationalizing and watering down God's principles based on our own reasoning processes and the influence of this world's thinking on us.

We think Jesus taught us to go the extra mile and love our enemies and all that, but he wasn't referring to this type of situation. And we begin to pick and choose our beliefs from Scripture. You know, I've decided if I'm going to make an error in applying God's Word, I'd like to err in favor of going too far rather than not doing enough, for a change.

Now, let me assure you I don't think it's right for people to be lazy. But how other people act and react shouldn't change our commitment to God's principles. Matthew 5 gives principles for dealing with people who are doing the wrong thing; people who are against us, people who cause us problems and difficulties.

I'm not saying we should do the lazy person's work forever, and never say anything. There are times when an open confrontation with the lazy coworker and/or with management is appropriate. Jesus confronted people frequently, but never to vent his own frustrations. He always confronted for their good and benefit, and I think that has to be our guiding principle in determining who and when to confront.

What we must guard against is this build-up of bitterness, which can quickly happen when we're dealing with lazy coworkers. We can't blame bitterness on others. It's our responsibility to keep a root of bitterness from growing within us.

### Day Three

Have you ever had a problem getting along with someone you work with? Most of us have, and it surely can cause a lot of grief, can't it? I can tell you Christians certainly are not immune to these interpersonal conflicts. We need some biblical principles to guide us. Let's consider the problems that arise when we deal with a negative coworker.

#### **Dealing with a negative coworker**

Our worlds are full of negative thinking and talking people. It seems they have nothing good or encouraging to say about anything or anyone. If you've ever had to work closely with a very negative individual (and who hasn't!), you know just how tough it is to be around that person.

This is one of those times when you need lots of compassion, because compassion lengthens your tolerance and helps you think about where the other person is coming from and what's causing them to be so negative. I think without Christ, I'd be negative in this world most of the time.

There are a couple of proverbs which apply here.

*A cheerful look brings joy to the heart* (Proverbs 15:30). One way to fight the irritation is to keep your own spirits up, and a smile on your face will help do that. Have you learned the secret of smiling?

I know when I'm feeling down, frustrated, or irritated, if I can make myself smile, it starts to change the way I feel. I think God gave us the ability to smile to keep us going in the middle of tough situations. I encourage you to try smiling a lot more.

*An anxious heart weighs a man down, but a kind word cheers him up* (Proverbs 12:25). Some kind words spoken to that negative person might be the key to getting him or her to open up and share their real feelings with you, and in so doing, you may discover their negative attitude is a cover-up for fear or

anxiety. If they can share that with you, it gives you an opportunity to be of help to them. It doesn't always work that way, but it's worth a try. Give them some kind words, in spite of their negativism.

One warning here. Be careful you don't allow them to bring you down to their negative levels. Fight back by humming choruses to yourself. Quote Scripture to yourself. Change the conversation to something positive. Often, we allow negative people to set the tone and drag everybody else down with them. Guard your own mind against the onslaught of negativism.

## **Day Four**

Let me ask you, have you ever had to deal with a condescending and arrogant coworker? They talk down to you; they know everything; they're unteachable; they're always right. They're not very easy to endure!

I have a friend who worked in a bank, and she was having trouble getting along with an arrogant-type coworker. After prayer and consideration, she started "Project Love," her name for a planned program on her part to bridge the gap between her and her coworker. First, she invited her to have lunch with her. The coworker was a little surprised, but she accepted. Through this, they got to know each other, and my friend discovered underneath the arrogant attitude was a very insecure, fearful person with many personal problems. Now they've become friends, and this woman has frequently turned to my friend for counsel and help.

Thankfully my friend was willing to submerge her own normal resentment toward this arrogant, prejudicial coworker and extend herself to make a bridge. Jesus taught us to love our enemies, and this is an example of how we put that principle into practice. It's helpful to remember we don't have to like others to love them. Loving them means acting toward them in considerate and loving ways, even though you may not feel it.

### **Dealing with a domineering coworker**

Have you ever worked with someone who tried to manage everyone, including their manager? They're always telling you what to do, and everything in you wants to say, "Hey, you're not the boss around here!"

Jesus told us to humble ourselves, and that's an important lesson for us to learn. Did you ever think we could use these relationships with domineering people to help us learn humility? It is humbling to keep your mouth shut and not bark back. It is even more humbling to take their direction! There may be times when that's the right thing for us to do. God is interested in developing Christ-like characteristics in us, and sometimes he uses unfair and uncomfortable circumstances for that purpose.

Learning humility is how we become more and more transformed into the likeness of Jesus. If God has you in humility school right now, trust him to bring you through, and while you're there, learn your lessons well. Don't rebel and get bitter. Use it as a tool for righteousness. God is so good at doing that for us.

Remember, if a confrontation is called for, our motives have to be carefully examined to make certain we're confronting for the other person's good, not just to vent our frustration.

## **Day Five**

Let's discuss is the vindictive, malicious, even vicious coworkers who are openly trying to cause you problems and do you harm.

The first thing you need to understand is these people are in a world of hurt! They won't admit it, but you can be certain they are miserable. It could be their hostile behavior is caused by the light and salt that emanates from you. You know, Jesus told us men love darkness, and if our lights are shining as they should, we will discover some people not only run from it, they fight it.

Have you really stopped to think about what Peter is telling us when said: *To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps* (1 Peter 2:21).

The only way you can learn to accept unjust suffering is to constantly remind yourself that by doing so, you have an opportunity to share in Jesus' suffering, which gives you the great privilege of learning to follow in his steps. Think about it: When you are going through tough waters, you feel very close to someone who's been there before you. When you have an opportunity to taste the kind of suffering Jesus drank fully for us, then you know him better. And that in turn brings his resurrection power into our lives.

We've been talking about difficult coworkers, as though the problem is always with the other person and never with us Christians. How I wish that were true, but I know better because I know me! It would do us all good to take a close look and ask the Holy Spirit to reveal to us if we're guilty of any of these difficult characteristics in our relationships with our coworkers. Peter wrote our lives should be above reproach so when others try to find something bad to say about us, they have to manufacture it!

I am reminded of what Jesus said to his disciples when they were having difficulty getting along with each other: *If you want to be first in my kingdom, you have to be a servant* (Matthew 20:26). A servant heart is the sum total of what we've been saying here. As difficult as that is at times, it's much easier than doing it our way. And the benefits we reap are eternal ones. Let's go for it.