

You Can Still Be Blessed While Going Through Hardship

Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that is taking place among you to test you, as though some strange thing happened to you. But rejoice insofar as you share in Christ's sufferings, so that you may rejoice and be glad also in the revelation of His glory. If you are reproached because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. On their part He is blasphemed, but on your part He is glorified (1 Pet. 4:12-14).

In my family, one of our favorite people is a little girl with bows in her hair, braces on her legs and a walker that holds her up. Her little body struggles to be healthy, but her soul is perhaps the healthiest I have ever seen. She has a huge smile, lovely personality and kind word for everyone she meets. Every time I read Jesus' words that those with pure hearts will be blessed, this little girl comes to mind.

This lovely little lady has spent much of her dozen years of life in the hospital undergoing various surgeries. On one occasion, I was honored to be at her bedside as she came out of surgery and began to awaken. Her lovely blonde hair was shaved, and in its place were numerous large stitches from yet another surgery.

With parched lips and droopy eyes due to the medication, she looked at me and smiled. Holding back tears, I asked her how she was doing. She said, "I'm fine, but Mr. Mark, how are you? I'm more worried about you."

This little girl has been through more suffering than any child I know, yet she is perhaps the godliest, maturest, and most Christlike child I have ever met. In various

conversations we have had, she has explained to me how her suffering has helped her more fully appreciate Jesus' suffering and increased her love and compassion for others who are suffering. At times the profound insights she shares make it obvious that God's Spirit is present and powerful in her suffering, giving her wisdom that defies the number of candles on her birthday cake.

Jesus suffered, and yet He was blessed because the Holy Spirit rested upon Him in glory during His suffering. You can suffer and be blessed because the Holy Spirit will come to rest on you in a unique and glorious way when you suffer. {eoa}

Mark Driscoll is a Jesus-following, mission-leading, church-serving, people-loving, Bible-preaching pastor and the author of many books, including Spirit-Filled Jesus, which you can order here. He currently pastors The Trinity Church in Scottsdale, Arizona, with his family. For all of pastor Mark Driscoll's Bible teaching, please visit or download the app. You can download a free devotional e-book from pastor Mark here.

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The Six Types of Spiritual Relationships

Every prudent man deals with knowledge, but a fool lays open his folly. A wicked messenger falls into mischief, but a faithful envoy is health. Poverty and shame will be to him who refuses instruction, but he who regards reproof will be honored. The desire accomplished is sweet to the soul, but it

is abomination to fools to depart from evil. He who walks with wise men will be wise, but a companion of fools will be destroyed. Evil pursues sinners, but to the righteous good will be repaid (Prov. 13:16-21).

The first key to healthy relationships is to accept that not everyone is Spirit-filled, wise, responsible, teachable or a good investment of time and energy. We must determine which category we are in and invite wise people who love us enough to tell us the truth to help us see ourselves more clearly.

Every one of us has at least some areas of our lives that are foolish, if not even evil. We are all works in progress.

Wise + Foolish = Parental Relationship

Irresponsible people seek out overly responsible people and dump their responsibilities on them. You know you have picked up a relationship like this when you are doing for someone things they should be doing for themselves.

Wise + Evil = Distant Relationship

When an evil person seeks to build a close relationship with a wise person, the wise person maintains the distance. Aided by the discernment of the Holy Spirit, Jesus kept His distance from evil people, and we should do the same.

Foolish + Foolish = Codependent Relationship

When two foolish people come together in a close relationship, they multiply their folly. Jesus was friends with foolish people and even attended their parties but only to help make them wise. He never acted foolishly or sinfully.

Foolish + Evil = Abusive Relationship

Foolish people are often gullible and vulnerable. Because they do not deal with reality or have much of a plan for their

lives, they are easy prey for evil people. Sadly, foolish people allow this kind of abusive relationship to continue for far too long and pay a steep price.

Evil + Evil = Dangerous Relationship

When two evil people come together, they are like two barrels on a gun. If you get in front of them, you are likely to get shot. United by their common goal, when two evil people come together, they make it their life's mission to do the same thing as the devil—steal, kill and destroy.

Wise + Wise = Healthy Relationship

When two wise people walk humbly together, they make the good times twice as good and the bad times half as bad, as the old saying goes. Proverbs 13:20a speaks of this kind of relationship, saying, "He who walks with wise men will be wise."

How about you? Which of the six kinds of relationships do you most commonly find yourself in? {eoa}

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Why You Shouldn't Waste Your Time Ministering to Evil People

When wisdom enters your heart, and knowledge is pleasant to your soul, discretion will preserve you; understanding will keep you, to deliver you from the way of the evil man, from the man who speaks perverse things, from those who leave the paths of uprightness to walk in the ways of darkness; who rejoice to do evil, and delight in the perversity of the wicked; whose ways are crooked, and who are devious in their paths (Prov. 2:10-15).

Some people have a hard time thinking a professing Christian can be evil, but the Bible is painfully pointed. For example, in Acts 5:3b, Peter says of one church member, "Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to deceive the Holy Spirit?"

Evil people do not cause harm unintentionally as fools do. Instead, evil people intentionally plot harm, scheme to bring pain and destruction and feel vindicated in doing so because of their hurt, self-righteousness or corrupt nature.

The way to respond to an evil person is with nothing—the exact opposite of our response to a wise person. Draw near to a wise person and run from an evil person. Give more information to a wise person, and no information to an evil person. Deal directly with a wise person, and let the cops and lawyers deal with the evil person.

A wise person can be influenced toward godliness, and a fool can perhaps be brought toward wisdom after they have sat in their mess for a while. But the evil person has to be considered hopeless apart from a dramatic intervention from God—one that does not involve you, because there is little to

nothing you can do. An evil person might not be beyond God's ability to help, but they are probably beyond your ability.

At this point you separate, protect yourself and establish a definite ending to the relationship with no contact or information going forward.

Evil people live by the power of demonic forces to harass and harm. Because of their demonic empowerment, they are far more powerful when seeking to cause harm than they otherwise are in normal life. Evil people who move into ministry leadership become wolves who strike the shepherd in an effort to scatter the sheep. Evil people require a professional relationship with someone trained to deal wisely with their issues. {eoa}

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How to Recognize and Avoid a Foolish Person

The proverbs of Solomon, the son of David, king of Israel: To know wisdom and instruction, to perceive the words of understanding, to receive the instruction of wisdom, justice, judgment, and equity; to give subtlety to the simple, to the young man knowledge and discretion—a wise man will hear and will increase learning, and a man of understanding will attain wise counsel, to understand a proverb and the interpretation, the words of the wise and their riddles. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and instruction (Prov. 1:1-7).

Foolish people are not necessarily less intelligent or less educated. However, they are unteachable, defensive, unyielding, arrogant, irresponsible and prone to make excuses for themselves and wrongly blame others when things go poorly. Sadly, if we are honest, everyone is foolish in certain areas and seasons of life. None of us is immune to folly.

But people who are primarily foolish have an ongoing pattern of folly that infects and affects most if not all of their lives. Rather than changing, they want everyone and everything to change to accommodate them. Efforts to correct and instruct foolish people result in a fight or flight response where they fight back or run away. They have low empathy and tend to see themselves as both morally superior to others and a constant victim.

When dealing with a foolish person, you tend to have the same conversation over and over, and to them it sounds like nagging. The more you address the areas in which a foolish person keeps making the same error, the more conflict and disagreement ensues, and the relationship deteriorates.

The way to respond to a foolish person is with less—less time arguing, less frequently having the same conversation, less being on the defensive trying to get them to come around and take responsibility for their own life. This response sharpens through consequences and boundaries. Proverbs 1:7b provides a reason when it says “fools despise wisdom and discipline.” Because a foolish person will not change but instead plows ahead in the same direction of destruction, the best thing to do is to impose consequences and limit the ability they have to harm themselves and others.

A foolish person pushes their responsibilities and the consequences of their folly onto responsible people, and the best thing to do is push the responsibilities and consequences back onto them.

A foolish person lives by the power of the sinful flesh (our sinful human nature). A foolish person will waste what you give them because they do not embrace it. They are like a bucket in which the bottom has rusted out; anything you pour into it just spills onto the ground. Peter started out as Jesus’ most foolish disciple. Jesus helped Peter move from foolish to wise by rebuking him and inviting him to change. Jesus knew Peter was foolish and asked Peter to walk with Him toward wisdom. {eoa}

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How to Handle Foolish and Evil People

The people answered and said, "You have a demon. Who is seeking to kill You?" Jesus answered them, "I did one work, and you all marvel. Yet, because Moses gave you circumcision, you circumcise a man on the Sabbath day (although it did not come from Moses, but from the Patriarchs). If a man receives circumcision on the Sabbath day, so that the Law of Moses should not be broken, are you angry at Me because I completely healed a man on the Sabbath day? Do not judge according to appearance, but practice righteous judgment" (John 7:20-24).

Wise people are not the most intelligent or educated, but they are humble, godly, teachable, open and responsible. These people meet reality and life's demands by changing their actions and attitudes as needed to align with what is true and good. They welcome correction, invite others to teach them, and you can build a growing relationship with them by being honest.

Wise people also have empathy for others and consider more than just their own desires and feelings in a situation. Because of these character traits, there is always hope for a wise person to grow. The time you spend with them, instruction you give to them and investment you make in them is worthwhile because they personally mature and your relationship grows and flourishes. Proverbs 9:8b-9 (NLT) puts it this way: "Correct the wise, and they will love you. Instruct the wise, and they will be even wiser. Teach the righteous, and they will learn even more."

The way to respond to a wise person is with more—more time, more discussion and more information—because they are a good investment of time and energy. A wise person lives by the power of the Holy Spirit. You can trust a wise person and enjoy a personal relationship with them.

We all have had the painful experience of someone wrongly judging us or not understanding us, and as a result, our relationship with them suffers or is severed. Additionally, we have all had the painful experience of thinking we knew someone and trusting them, only to find—much to our misery—that they were not the person we thought they were.

Jesus came to earth in large part for the sake of relationship, but even devout religious leaders were foolish or evil in dealing with Him. In John 7, they sought to kill Jesus rather than have a relationship with Him because they wrongly judged Him. Jesus then rebuked their poor relational wisdom, saying, “Look beneath the surface so you can judge correctly” (v. 24, NLT).

To properly deal with people and have any healthy relationships, you must have the discerning wisdom of the Holy Spirit.

The Spirit of God knows people better than anyone, and He will help you have healthy relationships. God wants you to be wise and seek wisdom so that you can know how to handle foolish and evil people. {eoa}

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Maybe You Shouldn't Treat Everyone the Same

“Forsake foolishness and live, and go in the way of understanding.” He who reproves a scorner gets shame for himself, and he who rebukes a wicked man gets hurt. Do not reprove a scorner, lest he hate you; rebuke a wise man, and he will love you. Give instruction to a wise man, and he will be yet wiser; teach a just man, and he will increase in learning (Prov. 9:6-9).

Thomas, Susan and Harold all grew up in the same home. Their father was an angry man who had allowed bitterness to infect his inner life as well as his outer life. On the worst days, this dad would have too much to drink. Like a grenade with the pin pulled, he exploded over the slightest issue with anyone in the family. His wife and kids would run from the room, because sometimes he would hit his children. As the three children grew up, they each responded very differently.

Thomas became just like his dad. When he married and had kids of his own, he sadly carried the sins of his father into his family. People feared him, but no one respected him.

Growing up, Harold decided he would be the funny one and try and make jokes and lighten the mood when his dad would start to rage. He never learned to deal with problems, but instead turned everything into a joke and made light of serious things. As an adult, Harold avoided doing hard things and instead just acted foolishly. Always the life of the party, he

could not hold a job or have a serious conversation and became the stereotypical happy drunk who ignored reality. Harold became foolish. Lots of people liked him, but no one respected him.

Susan met a girl at school whose family were Christians. As a teenager, Susan started hanging out at her friend's house a lot, and before long, they were picking her up on Sundays to attend church with them. Then Susan met other kids her age and their families. As Susan observed other families, the unhealthiness of her own grew obvious.

Over time, she learned to forgive her father as God had forgiven her, and she decided to attend college and get a counseling degree. Today she is both a mother with a healthy family and a licensed Christian counselor who helps abused children.

From this family, we learn that your experiences in life do not determine who you become. Instead, *how you choose to respond* to your experiences determines who you become.

As our kids grow up, we tell them to treat everyone the same. Perhaps that's not a good thing. The truth is, we need to treat different people differently. People decide how we treat them by how they behave.

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Why Peter Was Restored but Judas Was Not

Then a servant girl saw him as he sat near the fire, and gazed at him, and said, "This man was with Him." But he denied Him, saying, "Woman, I do not know Him." A little later someone else saw him and said, "You also are one of them." Peter said, "Man, I am not!" About an hour later another man firmly declared, "Certainly, this man also was with Him, for he is a Galilean." Peter said, "Man, I do not know what you are saying." Immediately, while he was yet speaking, the rooster crowed. The Lord turned and looked at Peter. Then Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how He had told him, "Before the rooster crows, you will deny Me three times." And Peter went outside and wept bitterly (Luke 22:56-62).

One of the most challenging things in life is learning to read people. We've all had people who completely surprised us. In Jesus' life, there were people constantly seeking to get closer to Him and enjoy a more intimate relationship with Him. Jesus was not paranoid, trusting no one. Neither was He naive, trusting everyone.

Instead, Jesus was wise and discerning. His wise discernment was possible by the Holy Spirit who knew everything about everyone. For this reason, even though Judas and Peter failed, Jesus restored Peter to friendship and ministry but sent Judas away. Thanks to the Holy Spirit, Jesus knew what was in each man's heart and knew whom to walk with and whom to walk away from.

The difference between Judas and Peter is the difference

between covert and overt. Judas was covert. His sinful scheming and plotting were secretive, hidden and deceptive. For the entirety of his three years with Jesus, he stole money and plotted against Jesus.

Outwardly one would never know this. He hid who he really was from everyone except Jesus, who alone knew his heart. Lots of people are like Judas—they can steal money from their bosses, cheat on their spouses, use church membership solely as a means to appear pious in public, and have no heart for the Lord. Covert people are incredibly difficult to have a relationship with because you never know them, and they only use you.

Peter, however, was overt. He could not keep his mouth shut, and as a result, you always knew what he was thinking, feeling and doing. He would boss Jesus around, grab a sword and cut someone's ear off and seemed utterly incapable of hiding his inner life.

Some people are like Peter. They want to get it all out, put all their cards on the table and just tell you up front who they are, what they think and what they are doing. Overt people can be blindsided by covert people. They simply cannot understand how someone could lie, hide, cheat, steal and conceal their true identity throughout life. Covert people often take advantage of overt people, since overt people assume they agree unless they say otherwise and have no idea there is a problem unless something is said. {eoa}

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8 Laws of Relationships That Jesus Used

When Jesus had said this, He was troubled in spirit, and testified, "Truly, truly I say to you that one of you will betray Me." The disciples looked at one another, uncertain of whom He spoke. Now there was leaning against Jesus' bosom one of His disciples whom Jesus loved. Therefore Simon Peter motioned to him to ask who it was of whom He spoke. Leaning back against Jesus' bosom, he said to Him, "Lord, who is it?" Jesus answered, "It is he to whom I shall give a piece of bread when I have dipped it." When He had dipped the bread, He gave it to Judas Iscariot, the son of Simon. After receiving the piece of bread, Satan entered him. Then Jesus said to him, "What you are going to do, do quickly" (John 13:21-27).

The following are eight laws of relationships observed in the life of Jesus.

The Law of Hospitality

Many people experience hospitality with you, but not all are your friends. Jesus was friendly to all people, but He was friends with only a few people.

The Law of Capacity

In the Bible, we read of all the people Jesus met with, prayed for, taught and healed. But there is an even longer list of

all the people that Jesus did *not* meet with, pray over, teach or heal. Jesus had capacity limits due to His humanity. You too are finite and cannot give to everyone who would like to receive something from you.

The Law of Priority

For Jesus, His inner circle of three disciples plus a few friends and perhaps His family got the majority of His personal time and energy. He would lovingly help and serve people but then move on.

The Law of Seasonality

Very few relationships, if any, endure through every season of life. We should accept it and thank God for the deposits people make along life's journey.

The Law of Clarity

You know someone is driving in the wrong relationship lane when things cause you to avoid or dread him. At times like these, you need to have transition talks and closure conversations. A transition talk is an opportunity to lovingly but clearly define (or redefine) the lane where the relationship will be. A closure conversation is the talk we have to be clear that we are not talking anymore.

The Law of Idolize-Demonize

These are the people who love you one minute and hate you the next. This very thing happened to Jesus. The enthusiastic crowd shouting, "Hosanna, hosanna," soon became the hateful mob crying, "Crucify, crucify."

The Law of Economy

Relationships are like vehicles. Some get good gas mileage. They don't drain our energy and they keep moving forward without difficulty. Other relationships, however, get lousy

gas mileage. These take a lot of time, energy and money, and don't seem to make much progress.

The same is true for each of us. Some people are amazingly good investments of time and energy. Others, however, are exhausting and never gain much if any relational momentum. {eoa}

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How Jesus Picked Out His 12 Disciples

In these days He went out to the mountain to pray and continued all night in prayer to God. When it was day, He called for His disciples, and of them He chose twelve, whom He named apostles: Simon, whom He named Peter, and Andrew his brother, and James and John, and Philip and Bartholomew, and Matthew and Thomas, and James the son of Alphaeus, and Simon called the Zealot, and Judas the son of James, and Judas Iscariot, who became a traitor (Luke 6:12-16).

How did Jesus determine what kinds of people He would and would not have relationships with? How did Jesus pick the Twelve disciples to be in close relationship with Him for three years? Luke 6:12–13 says of Jesus, “He went out to the mountain to pray, and all night he continued in prayer to God. And when day came, he called his disciples.”

Have you ever pulled an all-nighter? Perhaps for school or work? You know that something is incredibly important when you stay up all night to work on it. For Jesus, picking who would be in relationship with Him as disciples required that He spend the whole night in prayer.

You might ask why it took so long. Could they not have simply made a list and let Jesus go to bed? No, the Father, Son and Spirit are relational and take relationships very seriously. It would not be surprising that they had some long conversations about Peter the denier, Thomas the doubter and Judas the betrayer. Jesus spent all night talking to the Father and the Spirit about the list. You and I need to do the same. Do you invite the Lord to help you pick your closest relationships?

When looking at the disciples, we can rush to the assumption that Judas was a mistake and should not have been chosen, but he was part of God’s plan. In John 17:12 Jesus again prays to the Father, saying, “While I was with them in the world, I kept them in Your name. I have kept those whom You have given Me. And none of them is lost except the son of perdition, that the Scripture might be fulfilled.”

Jesus was a perfect friend to Judas, and Judas betrayed Him. It just goes to show that relationships can be painful even if we did not do anything sinful.

Surveying the life of Jesus, it is insightful to see how He managed so many diverse, complex and shifting relationships with the help of prayerful time with the Father and Spirit.

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Why Not All Relationships Are Created Equal

The whole city was gathered at the door, and He healed many who were sick with various diseases and cast out many demons. And He did not let the demons speak, because they knew Him. In the morning, rising up a great while before sunrise, He went out and departed to a solitary place. And there He prayed. Simon and those who were with Him followed Him, and when they found Him, they said to Him, "Everyone is searching for You" (Mark 1:33-37).

In life, relationships are like drivers on a highway. Unless everyone understands what lane they're in, there are bound to be collisions that lead to disappointment when unspoken expectations go unmet.

Jesus was constantly overwhelmed with people who wanted to get

and stay close to Him. Mark 1:21–37 records the relational chaos Jesus had to deal with on what was supposed to be a day off. It was the Sabbath, and He taught in the synagogue, cast a demon out of a dude, “And immediately his fame spread everywhere throughout the region surrounding Galilee” (v. 28).

Not even taking a siesta break for chips and salsa, he “went directly” (v. 29) to Simon’s house to heal his dying mother-in-law. Then “In the evening, when the sun had set, they brought to Him all who were sick and those who were possessed with demons. The whole city was gathered at the door” (vv. 32-33a).

He had to be exhausted and worn out. Nonetheless, “he healed many who were sick with various diseases and cast out many demons” (v. 34).

How did Jesus possibly manage these kinds of complex, needy, urgent relational demands? Building on the concept of relational lanes, here’s how I see a dozen distinctions between various personal, professional and spiritual connections after surveying the relationships of Jesus: enemies, former acquaintances, distant relatives, professionals, neighbors, acquaintances, coworkers, friends, mentors, close friends, close family, the Lord.

Jesus’ life was like your life—filled with people who drive in whatever lane they choose and seek to merge into the next lane of importance and closeness in your life. This happened to Jesus, and it happens to you and me.

Wisdom teaches us to treat different people differently. Our problem comes from our tendency to develop a relationship pattern that works for us and then apply it to everyone, only to find it working some of the time and failing some of the time. {eoa}

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