

3 Spiritual Steps to Take When People Disappoint You

Did you know that happiness research is a “thing?” For the past few decades researchers have looked at what determines how happy people are. It’s not primarily money, where you live, or even health. More critical than any of those is the quality of your closest personal relationships such as those with family and friends. But what do you do when people disappoint you?

Your spouse should be more attentive. Your boss should recognize your hard work more. Your coworkers should be easier to get along with. Your neighbors shouldn’t be so noisy or nosy. Your children should help out more. Your pastor should visit more often. Your church leaders should ask for your input more often. Your friends should be more available and pay more attention to you.

Yes, people disappoint. It’s what they do.

Personal relationships are hard. Marriage especially makes you vulnerable to your spouse’s quirks and dysfunctions. You discover you cannot trust people in the way you hoped. You feel misunderstood, alone, and needy.

Your head knows that only God can meet all your needs and be with you all the time. And developing a deeper relationship with God is the foundation for all good growth. That’s a topic for another very important article.

But what do you do about your very human need for someone to talk to, someone to understand? (Even Jesus felt this way. See Matt. 26:38-40.) Your needs are real. Don’t sit back and expect others to magically fill you up; be proactive.

These things will help:

1. Learn to feed yourself.

God makes the grain grow, but He does not hand you a sandwich. You and I are responsible for knowing when we're hungry, finding and choosing appropriate food, preparing it and taking it into our being. It's the same with the emotional, mental and spiritual nourishment we can't live without.

Relating to others from a position of emotional starvation is counterproductive. Thank God for the people who unselfishly give, regardless! Most of the time, however, your relationships will be dramatically healthier if you see yourself as responsible for the nourishment you need. It will make you more attractive and better able to receive what others do have to give.

Find what nourishes you, and do more of that. Those things should include time with positive people: Find them, and be around them. But it must also include time alone with God, time taking in uplifting media on your own, time in nature and whatever nourishes your soul.

2. Be grateful.

The same Harvard research study (among others) showing that happiness is most determined by personal relationships showed that gratitude is a foundational principle of relationships that foster happiness.

Think of someone you know who is always miserable; nothing is ever good enough for them, and they can ruin a perfectly good day just by showing up. Nobody—you included—enjoys being around them.

Then think of someone you know who is usually happy. They may have serious problems, but you hear so much more gratitude coming out of their mouth than complaining. And you look forward to being in their presence.

Want healthier, happier, deeper relationships? Choose to be grateful for what you *do* have, including the positive things you *do* experience from other people. Expressing gratitude for life and for the other person will make them want to be around you more as well.

3. Be generous.

Back to that Harvard research study again. A final critical ingredient in making the quality of personal relationships meaningful and helpful is that of generosity.

Mutual giving is the key. In an unhealthy codependent relationship only one person is giving. But that doesn't mean you should wait until someone else gives to you. And keeping score of who gives the most is completely disastrous.

Come to your relationships—your marriage, your friends, your work, your church—with a generous attitude. See how you can add value to other people. Look for someone who needs something you have, and see how you can help them.

It's both a biblical and a scientific truth that people who are generous—who are more concerned with what they can give than what they can get—are healthier, happier and better connected.

'Go and Do Likewise'

None of this will improve your happiness or the quality of your personal relationships unless you put these things into practice.

Here's the short version:

- When you're empty, take responsibility for finding the soul nourishment you need.
- Focus more on what you *do* have and express gratitude for that.
- Look for someone who needs something you have and find a

way to pass it on.

And watch your relationships grow.

Your Turn: *If you have been disappointed in people, which of these steps do you most need to implement more of? Leave a comment below. {eo}*

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