

Living in Peace With Prickly People

Have you ever had that *one* person in your life? You know, that one person who seems to be able to push all your wrong buttons at all the wrong times? We've all been there. And in our world today—with all the anger, hatred and violence—it's easy to feel overwhelmed.

Fortunately, people who have flaws and faults are nothing new. All you need to do is read Genesis—the first book of the Bible, often referred to as “The Book of Beginnings”—to realize that. One of the earliest recorded stories in Genesis is about Cain, who killed his brother, Abel, because he was jealous of him (see Gen. 4:8). As we read on, we see a number of broken people who do terrible things (see Gen. 16:1–6; 19:30–38; 27:1–35; 37:18–36). And yet, the people involved in these situations are people God used for His plans and purpose—so I guess this means there's hope for us too.

The truth is if we're going to love anyone—no matter who they are—we have to accept that they'll have flaws, because no one is perfect, including you and I. And if we're going to live in peace, we must learn to walk in love. This means we need to learn to love people who are hard to love.

Love is so much more than a feeling; it's how we treat people, and it changes everything. Just imagine how different our world would be today if people truly loved one another. So I have decided that I am going to love people, which *includes* those who are hard to love. And I'm asking you to make the same decision, because I believe if enough of us do it, we will impact the world in a very positive way.

Prickly, Porcupine People

In the animal kingdom, probably the most difficult animal to

get close to is the porcupine. Porcupines are not usually considered loveable. Each one has about 30,000 sharp quills that can stick you and be very painful—even dangerous. These quills are their way of protecting themselves.

People also often develop ways of protecting themselves, especially if they have been hurt in the past. I say it like this, “Hurting people hurt people.” And sometimes, our methods of self-protection come across as very odd to the people who are dealing with us. For example, a person who has been hurt may be extremely defensive and think they are being rejected when that is not the case at all. Or, they may argue all the time, striving to be right in every situation because that is the only way they can feel good about themselves.

I happen to know a few people like this, and you probably know some too. I call them “porcupine people.” They are difficult to be around because you are likely to get hurt. If you get close to them, you will see their flaws and quirks, and likely experience them. It would be so nice if we could just place an order for the kind of people we would like to have in our life, but people come “as is” and we either take them as they are or end up alone.

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God takes us the way we are and helps us become all that we should be. The question is: Are we willing to do this for other people? My husband, Dave, did it for me, and had he not loved me unconditionally, I probably wouldn't be in ministry today. You see, when Dave prayed for a wife, he asked God to give him someone who needed help, and God certainly answered his prayer because I needed a lot of help.

Growing up, I experienced sexual abuse from my father. And because of that past abuse, I ended up becoming a porcupine

person too. Dave said he knew the first night he met me that I was the girl for him. As it's turned out, he was right, but he had to be willing to love someone who was very hard to love for a very long time before he had a wife who was loveable.

Now I pray regularly to be good to people and make them feel good when they are around me. It's not always easy, and sometimes I still stick out my quills. But God is working with me, and I always want to be willing to work with the porcupine people He puts in my life too. We may sustain little wounds from time to time as we walk through life with other people, but we are much better off having relationships than living in isolation.

We All Need to Be Loved

Despite their prickles, I don't believe there is a person on the planet who doesn't want to be loved. As a matter of fact, most people who are hard to love are the way they are because they have never experienced real love. They are dissatisfied and looking for something to fill the emptiness they feel, but often they don't know what they are looking for, so they search for it in all the wrong places. Each time they think they find what they have been longing for, they end up disappointed, and it only makes their behavior more challenging for those around them.

But we can make a difference. When we have God's love in our hearts—His peace, kindness, mercy, forgiveness, joy and many other blessings—we can let it flow through us to other people. Loving people who are hard to love will be difficult on most days, but God never asks us to do something without His help. And all things are possible with Him (Matt. 19:26). So don't listen to the lie that it is just too hard.

You can do it because God is with you and He will love others through you. Even the prickly ones.

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