

UNITY
CHURCH OF BAKERSFIELD
"A POSITIVE PLACE TO GROW!"

Today's Lesson
A Matter of Perception
PowerPoint notes available at:
www.unityofbakersfield.org

A Matter of Perception

They say that life is a matter of perception- how we see and interpret our environment and the people we share it with. "People! If I didn't have to deal with ___ my life would be so much easier."

We try to avoid them, but we all know that difficult people can be found everywhere in the world: our workplaces, stores, malls, or social gatherings. Sooner or later we all get a chance to have a relationship with a difficult person.

A Matter of Perception

Last week I shared one of my favorite mantras for dealing with difficult people from author, Terry Cole-Whittaker:
What you think of me is none of my business.

A Matter of Perception

The writers of the synoptic gospels have Jesus talking and teaching about the need for us to forgive those who would hurt us, cause us pain and suffering, hate and demean us.

When Peter asked how many times he needed to forgive someone, Jesus responded: "Not seven times but 70 times 7!"

I love this quote by G. K. Chesterton: *The Bible tells us to love our neighbors, and also to love our enemies; probably because they are generally the same people.*

A Matter of Perception

We talk a lot about forgiveness being one of the aspects to creating a spiritual life full of peace, order, harmony, and abundance. Forgiveness is not something you do once and then forget about it.

Forgiveness is often a multifaceted process that involves understanding those who we are looking to forgive. Sometimes we get understanding and sometimes we don't.

A Matter of Perception

In his book, Thank You For Being Such a Pain, Dr. Mark I. Rosen, Ph.D. writes:
Thank You for Being Such a Pain is about the difficulties we experience in everyday relationships and the deeper spiritual meanings the underline them and four premises that contribute to our perceptions about these difficulties.

A Matter of Perception



THANK
YOU

FOR BEING SUCH A PAIN

Spiritual Guidance
for Dealing with
Difficult People

MARK J. ROSEN, PH.D.

1) *What seems like life's seemingly random encounters are not so random after all;*
2) *that the pain, frustration, and suffering we experience with certain people are just as important for our personal and spiritual growth as love and joy—adversity is our teacher, pushing past our resistance and teaching us what we would fail to otherwise learn;*

A Matter of Perception



THANK
YOU

FOR BEING SUCH A PAIN

Spiritual Guidance
for Dealing with
Difficult People

MARK J. ROSEN, PH.D.

3) *that difficult relationships can and should be healed; and*
4) *that healing requires being attentive to the spiritual lessons that life presents us – when we do the inner work we are here to do, our outer relationships and circumstances become transformed.*

A Matter of Perception



THANK
YOU

FOR BEING SUCH A PAIN

Spiritual Guidance
for Dealing with
Difficult People

MARK J. ROSEN, PH.D.

People the world over are all looking for a solution to getting the other person to stop annoying them. They believe the best responses include fighting back, retaliation, enduring the difficulties, walking away, or just giving up. The true resolution comes only when you finally learn what the other person is teaching you.

A Matter of Perception

To understand the process of changing our perception about difficult people let's look at seven things that may give us some insight and guidance, as revealed by Dr. Rosen:

1. Difficult People: There's No Escaping Them.

Difficult people bedevil us. They sap our energy and distract us, causing us minor annoyance and major distress. We protest, complain, and struggle to cope—sometimes successfully, often uselessly.

A Matter of Perception

People have been making other people miserable for thousands of years. The Bible is filled with stories of people who do terrible things to each other. Every time we deal with a difficult person, we face one of the dilemmas of being human.

The key to remember here is that when you are struggling with a difficult person, know that you are not alone. Know also that you will continue to face difficult people wherever you go...there's no escaping them.

A Matter of Perception

2. What Makes Someone Difficult?

A newspaper story told of a contest for the worst boss. The winner was a man who sent his secretary to the bar up the street at the close of work each day to scout for women he could hit on.

Difficult people come in all forms: Bullies use their power to intimidate; back-stabbers are pleasant in person but turn on you the minute you turn your back; Know-it-alls are always right; Hotheads explode at the drop of a hat.

A Matter of Perception

A difficult person can be a stranger, a neighbor, a teacher, someone at work, a relative, a spouse, and yes—a member of the clergy. But, no matter how different each circumstance may seem, all of them have one thing in common: Each time we have an encounter with a difficult person, we have a very uncomfortable emotional reaction. The key to the question of what makes someone difficult is that we really don't know.

A Matter of Perception

3. Why Do Some People Drive Us Crazy?

Who we find difficult and who doesn't bother us is different for each person. Sam and Sally – Sam hates people who talk during a movie whereas Sally loves it and doesn't enjoy a movie unless someone is making colorful remarks about the movie and the characters. People are not difficult because of what they do – they are difficult because they illicit the experience of unpleasant emotions in us as a result of their behavior.

A Matter of Perception

The key for us in this item is to know that an important starting point for dealing with difficult people is to pay attention to what is going on inside of us, not just what the difficult person is doing.

4. Ways of Seeing (Others).

We like to think that we see the world clearly. It's amazing how many people believe that their view of reality is the accurate one. In actuality, there are several truths.

A Matter of Perception

There is our truth, the truth of the person with whom we're having the difficulties, and the truth of any witness or bystander observing the situation. When we view our difficulties, our interpretations are based on how we feel at the moment. If we are tired, or angry, or suspicious, we will experience an interaction with a difficult person differently than when we are feeling good. We filter each encounter through our history, or life experiences, all our hurts and mistakes.

A Matter of Perception

The key to this aspect is to know that when dealing with a difficult person, it is important that you be open to new ways of viewing the situation. After all, if your current perceptions and assumptions about the difficulties were entirely accurate, you would probably have solved your problems by now.

5. Why Do Relationships Have Difficulties?

While there are many reasons that difficulties arise in our relationships, three fundamental reasons stand out in every encounter:

A Matter of Perception

insensitivity, inadequate communication, and lack of caring. No one wants to be treated with indifference. The key to this area of our relationships requires that we work on developing sensitivity, communication, and caring skills.

6. Everyone Is Difficult to Someone.

If you are honest with yourself, you have to admit that at some time or another you've done something to drive someone crazy. Yet no matter how annoying we are to others, we do not willingly accept being labeled as difficult.

A Matter of Perception

When we do something to annoy someone else, we're not being difficult; we see it as justified as we make statements: "I had a bad day; I didn't mean it; I didn't do anything; You deserved it; and the daddy of them all: "You made me do it."

Here ego is trying to preserve its self-image and it's a lot easier to focus on another person's behavior than it is to admit that we're being difficult. Ego does not like admitting that the effects of our own behavior on others would mean that we would have to identify with the very behaviors we are condemning.

A Matter of Perception

Ego would rather have us pretend that we are better than the person causing the pain. The key here is that in order to start the healing process we must come to understand that the difficult people aren't really that different from us; in fact, they are us.

7. A Spiritual Perspective.

Isaac Singer once wrote: *There is a plan to the universe. There is a high intelligence, even a purpose, but it's given to us on the installment plan. We are not here on this earth just to have fun.*

A Matter of Perception

Even Jesus pointed this out...*in this world you will have trials and tribulations.*

We are here to develop a spiritual life, to use our talents, our abilities to heal our souls, to contribute our unique and divine essence toward the greater good. No one else can do what we are here to do. The catch is that there are things to learn; it is likely that we can't learn at least some of them without a divine kick in the spiritual butt. The great spiritual traditions all teach that we live in a meaningful, purposeful, and loving universe.

A Matter of Perception

The key to this aspect is consider the possibility that difficult people are in our lives to help our spiritual growth. Our task is not to focus on the person causing the problem, but to look within ourselves and understand why we are having these problems and what we are supposed to be learning on our spiritual journey.

So remember: Difficult people help us to reveal what needs to be reveal so that we may heal what needs to be healed.