

HOW TO HANDLE

DIFFICULT PEOPLE



David L. Johnston

How to Handle Difficult People

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Introduction

Wouldn't it be nice if you and I lived in a world where everyone got along – everyone was nice – everyone understood our intentions and gave us the benefit of the doubt? Sadly, that just isn't reality. We are all imperfect people and imperfect communicators. So, like it or not, throughout your life you will have to deal with difficult people. I wrote this short e-book to give you some practical, helpful and biblically-based insights on how you can work with people who are, well, challenging.

If you can find ways to work with people who are not like you, people who have different worldviews and personalities, you are likely to enjoy your life more and have more fruitful impact in all your relationships.

I hope this free e-book is a blessing to you. Feel free to share it with others. Be sure to check out all the latest teaching audio and videos that are available at no charge on our website: www.NothingButTheTruth.org

Sincerely,
David L. Johnston

How to Handle Difficult People

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We've all encountered difficult people. I know I personally have encountered many of them, and based on my experience with others, I know I am not alone. Difficult people seem to be plentiful, which makes learning how to handle them using biblical techniques an important and needed subject today. In the next pages, expect to encounter various types of difficult people, who are broken people, and to learn how to respond to them the way the Bible teaches us to respond.

Let's start with a question: Do you remember being a difficult person at some time in your lifetime? I was. Let's dive into this subject with an attitude that first seeks to understand why difficult people are, well, difficult. There are, after all, *so many* of them...

1. Difficult people are plentiful

Be sure you got that: Difficult people are plentiful.

"Many are the afflictions of the righteous: but the LORD delivereth him out of them all."

(Psalm 34:19)

You cannot have afflictions without inflictors. This Scripture verse, Psalm 34:19, confirms the old adage, "No good deed goes unpunished." And so it goes; people who do the right thing experience adversity, or affliction. We also read here, and have

likely personally experienced, the Lord's deliverance from harm of one kind or another.

Consider for a moment your own afflictions caused by others. Do you see that you cannot have an affliction without an afflictor? Without someone who is making bad stuff happen in your life. The righteous have both many afflictions and many afflictors. But here's the good news: the Lord promised us deliverance from all of them.

2. Difficult people are usually broken people

Here are a few illustrations of types of difficult people.

"The wise man's eyes are in his head; but the fool walketh in darkness: and I myself perceived also that one event happeneth to them all."

(Ecclesiastes 2:14)

First there's the fool...he's a broken person. Jesus told us never to call a person a fool, even though he might be. There's condemnation for that: "...whosoever shall say, *Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire*" (Matthew 5:22). However, having the ability to recognize a fool is important for all of us. When encountering with this type of brokenness in someone, we need to look past their foolishness to see the hurt that causes the stupidities in their life. One Scripture says, for example, "*comfort the feeble minded*" (1 Thessalonians 5:14). If you know somebody who isn't as smart as you, in your opinion, someone feeble minded, don't accuse them. Don't point your finger at them. Don't mock them. Scripture says to comfort them because they are broken.

"A wise man feareth, and departeth from evil: but the fool rageth, and is confident." (Proverbs 14:16)

The fool rages. I mean, he's out of control. But, worse than that, maybe, is the fact that he is confident; he's a believer in his stupidity.

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Then there are the simpletons. And they receive folly because of this simple mindedness. And how did they get in this place?

“The simple inherit folly: but the prudent are crowned with knowledge.” (Proverbs 14:18)

“The simple believeth every word: but the prudent man looketh well to his going.” (Proverbs 14:15)

The simple person believes everything he’s told, and never vetting, never verifying, never adjudicating the facts of life, he becomes simple. He’s broken too. All difficult people are usually broken people in some way.

Next, there are angry people. Anger controls people.

“Be not hasty in thy spirit to be angry: for anger resteth in the bosom of fools.” (Ecclesiastes 7:9)

It is not smart to be angry, but they don’t know any better.

“He that is soon angry dealeth foolishly: and a man of wicked devices is hated.” (Proverbs 14:17)

The above Scripture tells us the person who grows angry quickly deals foolishly. This type of person doesn’t make right decisions because anger is driving him or her. If this Scripture represents one of the difficult people in your life, what are you to do?

First, it is crucial to understand their anger stems from some type of brokenness. This brokenness is one reason Jesus Christ is so important for believers. We call Him Savior, after all. We call Him Redeemer. Why do we give him these titles? Because Jesus specializes in fixing what’s broken. He specializes in getting rid of what we’ve done wrong, so we can get on the right track again. Again, difficult people are usually broken people.

Now let’s look at deceivers. These are those who go around deceiving others.

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*“Deceit is in the heart of them that imagine evil:
but to the counselors of peace is joy.”*

(Proverbs 12:20)

There are people all around us who imagine evil.

*“The thoughts of the righteous are right: but the
counsels of the wicked are deceit.”* (Proverbs 12:5)

And the counsel of deceitful people cannot be valued or considered helpful advice. They are full of treachery. Another type of difficult person is a deceitful person.

But for deceivers to work, there must also be **those who are deceived.**

*“Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil;
that put darkness for light, and light for darkness;
that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter!”*

(Isaiah 5:20)

Then there are the broken people who don't know the difference between right and wrong. Reflect on the meaning of the above Scripture for a minute: *Woe unto them that call evil good.* They don't know right from wrong. That's a severe brokenness. *They put darkness for light, and light for darkness.* These broken difficult people can't tell the difference between right and wrong, between what's smart and what's not smart. In fact, they *put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter.*

This is a predicament. This is a brokenness. This is a shattering. This is an internal condition. No wonder they're difficult when we have to deal with them, because behind a difficult person is usually some brokenness.

Lastly, there are those who are full of themselves. **They are the narcissist.**

*“Woe unto them that are wise in their own eyes,
and prudent in their own sight!”* (Isaiah 5:21)

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It goes on to say *woe unto them that are wise in their own eyes*. They're narcissists. This person thinks he knows it all. And those who are prudent in their own sight—they can't see very far, because of the egocentricity driving them. They become competitive in your life. It's a contest not of what's right, but of *who's* right. And so, it's an ego conflict. Why is this? Because, within that difficult person is a brokenness.

“All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all.”

(Isaiah 53:6)

Now, we all need to be careful, because *all we like sheep have gone astray, and we have turned everyone to his own way*. We all have a measure of brokenness in us.

3. We were once broken and difficult

We were once broken and difficult as well. Can you remember, for example, being difficult to your dad, to your mom, to your siblings, to your brother and sisters, to your friends? Were you ever difficult to your college professor? The truth is that once upon a time all of us were broken and acted out of our brokenness. But here is the good news now. We *used* to be broken. Hopefully you've recovered. And if not, I'm certainly glad you're reading this, because we've got lots of stuff to help you get rid of your brokenness. That's what Jesus is all about. That's what the Bible is about.

“He sent his word, and healed them, and delivered them from their destructions.” (Psalms 107:20)

An idea from God can enter into your mind that can fix anything in a flash...can settle an issue.

One of the brokennesses most people have is a lack of genuine self-acceptance. And when someone doesn't like themselves, they

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will spend the rest of their lives trying to prove to themselves and others that they really are a somebody.

A father and a mother got together... there was a baby coming. But God is the one who put the person inside that baby's body. People cannot make people. *It is He that hath made us, and not we ourselves* says the Scripture (Psalm 100:3). That's why Jesus taught us to pray, *our Father which art in heaven* (Matthew 6:9).

We are here because God wants us here, and He has placed in us what we call "embedded natural abilities." But those who don't know this could wander through the rest of their lives compensating, trying to convince themselves that they are okay, when in fact, they really are not. That brokenness has to be fixed, and it's fixed by understanding that we are here by divine purpose. We don't have to prove we're important, because we really are.

Now, if you were broken at some point, and most of us were, please realize this: Jesus came to fix your brokenness. We all have had self-destructive behaviors going on; we all have experienced brokenness. And that, my friend, is why Jesus came—to get rid of our brokenness and change us forever.

*“And such were some of you: but ye are washed,
but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the
name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our
God.”* (1 Corinthians 6:11)

We were once broken, but we're not anymore. Once upon a time a whole list of brokenness made us difficult people, really bad stuff. We used to be like that, but three things happened. First, we are now washed, and, secondly, we are sanctified. Thirdly, we are justified. Washed means the impurities were removed. Nothing, no chemical, can get rid of the stains on the heart. Only Jesus can wash the heart. He came to wash away all impurities.

There's more. We're not only washed, we are also sanctified. What does sanctified mean? It means we are now set apart and endowed with a saintly character. We're different now; we're changed people now so we know how to handle difficult people. We're washed and sanctified. And it was done in the name of Jesus

and by the Spirit of God.

The third person of the Trinity is here, and he's both functional and active. Jesus called Him the Comforter, which is somebody who's called alongside to help us. You see, help is not far away from us. Change is possible because with God all things are possible. So, most difficult people have some brokenness, and we too were once broken, and thus difficult.

4. Now we are capable of handling difficult people

Now that we're changed, we are capable of handling difficult people. How so?

“And hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us.” (Romans 5:5)

Something changed. The old passed away, the new has begun. We used to live for our own ego satisfaction; this is called selfishness. We once made every decision based on our own highest good, the cost didn't matter to us. We lived from a “me first” mentality. In contrast, as justified and sanctified children of God, we are changed to love others. Now our focus is the opposite of selfishness. Our focus is love.

Interestingly, the opposite of love is not hate; it's selfishness. Love is now choosing what is good for other people, including the difficult people in our lives. Now we approach the difficult people problem from a new condition. And that condition is called love.

5. We follow Bible instructions and Jesus' example

Now we love them. We may not know exactly how to love them, but we now follow the Bible's instructions to love difficult people.

“And hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments.” (1 John 2:3)

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We do not only follow the Bible's instructions, we also follow Jesus' example. Jesus dealt with difficult people. *Hereby do we know that we know Him—if we keep His commandments.* Keeping the instructions on how to deal with other people is the key, after the love motive, to handling difficult people.

“He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him.” (1 John 2:4)

The proof of a genuine follower of the Lord is whether or not we do what He says.

“But whoso keepeth his word, in him verily is the love of God perfected: hereby know we that we are in him.” (1 John 2:5)

Because we are in Him, we love difficult people. We follow the instructions on how to do that—the love instructions, or commandments. We like the commandments because they are of God; they are not grievous to us. Unfortunately, the commandments have been misrepresented, yet they are, in fact, the stepping stones to achieve the success we ask for. They are a guidance system to show us the right way.

“He that saith he abideth in him ought himself also so to walk, even as he walked.” (1 John 2:6)

So, we have the right motive; we have the instructions, and we have Jesus' example to show us how we are to handle difficult people.

6. We function without respect of persons

Here's another issue we face when dealing with difficult people: We like some difficult people more than we like other difficult people. We tolerate some more than others. But God

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shows us that love isn't like that. God doesn't place one nationality above another nationality, one gender above another gender, etc. He is not a respecter of persons. With God, there is no elevating one person over another. We treat every person the right way, all the time.

“But love ye your enemies, and do good, and lend, hoping for nothing again; and your reward shall be great, and ye shall be the children of the Highest: for he is kind unto the unthankful and to the evil.”

(Luke 6:35)

Love the guy (or gal) who gives you the most difficulty, and do good to him. Lend him a helping hand without expecting or asking him to give you a helping hand in return. If you do this, your reward shall be great, as Jesus tells us. This amazing promise is for you. So is this one: *You shall be called the children of the Highest.* God is kind to the unthankful and even to the evil.

So what should you do when you encounter difficult people who are not grateful for who you are or what you have said or done for them? The danger is that we would say, “If that’s all the thanks I get, see if I ever do that again!” This response would be wrong; it is not how Jesus tells us to respond.

God is kind, even to the unthankful—even to the evil. This is an important ingredient in learning how to handle difficult people. Look beyond their fault to see their need. Remember that their difficulty is a brokenness. Love them, choose the highest good for them. Treat them this way even if they’re unthankful. Even if they’re evil.

You also want to be merciful to them, just like your Father who is merciful. That’s how you want to deal with difficult people.

“Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful.”

(Luke 6:36)

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“Then Peter opened his mouth, and said, Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons:”

(Acts 10:34)

There’s no discrimination with God, and this characteristic of His spills over into how He deals with difficult people, and, as we know, we are to follow His example. We can’t choose to be nice to some people but not nice to others. We must use the same standards with everyone all the time, just like God does. We must be kind, even to the unthankful. Kind, even if they’re evil. And kind and merciful, no matter how difficult they’ve been. I know this is revolutionary. It’s out of step with current culture, with our natural inclination to retaliate.

This idea is certainly not in line with how many people act when they encounter a difficult person. The Bible, however, tells us there are three kinds of people and is clear on which type of person we should strive to be.

First there are those who return good for good, and evil for evil. If somebody’s good to them, they’ll be good back, and if they’re evil, they’ll be evil back. Then there are people who will return evil for good. Even though you do them good, they’ll do evil. Finally, there’s a third group, the you and I group. We return good for evil. This is the category we want to be in.

7. In the stillness we contemplate in advance

Before we do anything with a difficult person, we need to slow down and think it through. We need to contemplate in advance.

“And that ye study to be quiet, and to do your own business, and to work with your own hands, as we commanded you;” (1 Thessalonians 4:11)

Contemplate the meaning of this Scripture. It’s saying: Get quiet. Don’t react. Slow down. Isolate yourself if you have to. Insulate yourself. Regulate yourself. Get yourself calmed down.

When you reach a place of calmness, study to give the person

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the right response. Don't offer a knee-jerk reaction. In fact, don't react at all. Rather, be calm, cool, collected, and composed.

Pause to think the situation through based on love for them, the commandments given to us, and the example of Jesus. Ask yourself the following questions: What does love look like to this person? Do you remember some of the things about love? Love is slow to lose patience. Love looks for ways to be constructive, to build not to tear down.

“The heart of the righteous studieth to answer: but the mouth of the wicked poureth out evil things.”

(Proverbs 15:28)

So, the heart of those who want to do right study, the slow down and consider their response, before they answer. In contrast to this, the mouth of the wicked just dumps stuff out. He doesn't know any better because he's driven by wickedness. Instead, we go to the stillness. We study...contemplate in advance of responding.

“Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath:”

(James 1:19)

Listen first, listen, *listen*, ask questions, draw them out, listen. Be swift to hear. Most of us are too ready to talk instead of listen. Listen, and then be slow to speak and slow to wrath. What is this wrath? Wrath is being provoked into a negative reaction. Be swift to hear, slow to speak, and slow to be provoked to a negative reaction. The ability to accomplish this comes from going to the stillness.

“For the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God.”

(James 1:20)

Here's an important truth: *the wrath of man does not do what is right according to God*. So what is wrath? Wrath is to react. It's to exert a response equal to the one received. So, somebody's nasty

to you, wrath is being nasty back. Don't do that. Do you really want other people to be able to push your buttons and reduce you to what they are? Mean, obstinate, obnoxious even?

You are in control. Nobody can push your buttons without your consent. Nobody can provoke you to react the same way they do unless you allow it to happen. Not too long ago, a young man was complaining to me about his father. The truth is, that in reacting, the son had become just like his father. Just as mean, just as ugly. His father should not have been that way either. We must never allow other people to reduce us to their brokenness. To avoid this from happening, we contemplate in advance...in the stillness.

Another definition of react is "to respond in kind to that which you received." They're nasty? Be nasty back. If you have engaged in this type of behavior, you know it doesn't work. It does not produce a good result. The wrath of man does not work the rightness God wants in any given situation.

8. We avoid the opponent structure

Another biblical way of dealing with difficult people is to avoid an opponent structure. The opponent structure is like a courtroom. In a courtroom there's a prosecutor and a defender. One guy is against you; one guy is for you. The prosecutor tells the judge, jury, and others present how bad you are while the defender justifies what you did. The opponent structure is a contest of sorts that works well only in a courtroom setting. First, a judge is present who sets the rules of what you can and can not do, say, admit, etc. There's a regulator, a judge. Secondly, there's a jury of your peers. Unbiased persons are there to listen to opposing viewpoints and to decide fairly based on facts what the outcome should be. In personal relationships, the opponent structure does not work like this. How do we know?

*"Of these things put them in remembrance,
charging them before the Lord that they strive not
about words to no profit, but to the subverting of
the hearers."* (2 Timothy 2:14)

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Strife in an opponent structure between people outside a courtroom setting subverts the hearers. It is not a good idea. He says, she says. She says, he says and back and forth. And what do we get? Escalation. We get escalation and a poor outcome. The outcome is never good. We must always avoid the opponent structure because, remember, we love them. So, what does that mean? It means, we're on their side even if they're not on their own side.

*“But foolish and unlearned questions avoid,
knowing that they do gender strifes.”*

(2 Timothy 2:23)

Foolish, unlearned questions...avoid them. Just don't go there. Why? Because stupid ideas and unlearned questions gender strife. They create strife.

*“And the servant of the Lord must not strive; but be
gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient...”*

(2 Timothy 2:24)

The opposite to striving is to be gentle with all of these broken, difficult people in our lives. We must not get into striving with them, but instead be gentle. I often quote Brit Hume who said, “Everybody you know is fighting battles you don't know about, so be nice.”

Let's go back to the striving issue. The Bible tells us, the Lord's servants, not to strive, but be gentle, able to explain. We don't get to explain unless we're asked for an explanation, which means you need to be able to explain. And we need to be patient.

*“In meekness instructing those that oppose
themselves; if God peradventure will give them
repentance to the acknowledging of the truth;”*

(2 Timothy 2:25)

Look at this now, and in meekness—meaning in lack of anger

and lack of agenda—instructing those... What an interesting phrase follows now, *instructing those that oppose themselves*. People are fighting an internal war with themselves. They have not yet settled all their issues. So we must avoid the opponent structure. We must avoid striving and instead be gentle, able to teach, patient, and, if we're given a chance, and with a right attitude, instruct those that oppose themselves. Why would we do this? What will be the result?

“And that they may recover themselves out of the snare of the devil, who are taken captive by him at his will.”
(2 Timothy 2:26)

“Preacher, do you believe in the devil?” a guys once asked, then he said, “I believe in the big devil because I see so many little devils.”

There is a devil. In fact two opposing forces exist in the entire world—God for good, and the devil for bad. The devil is accompanied by a host of spirits that want to destroy you, to mess with you, to pull you down. And if the devil can keep you addicted to some form of brokenness, a place where you self-destruct, he can move on to somebody new. You've already lost. That's why you, my friend, and I must learn how to handle difficult people. We must avoid the opponent structure.

Remember, a wrathful reaction to them does not achieve what is right. No ego contest, no one-upmanship, no domination... Don't act superior to the difficult person. Avoid the opponent structure.

9. We are proactively gentle, kind, compassionate

We are proactively gentle with these difficult people, these broken people. We are to be kind, and compassionate.

“And of some have compassion, making a difference...”
(Jude 1:22)

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It is this compassion, the Scripture says, that can make a big difference in somebody else's life. What does compassion mean? It means that we're moved by the distress of another person with a desire and intent to relieve it. This is how Jesus responded when on Earth. Do you remember?

“O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!”

(Matthew 23:37)

He looked at the multitude and was moved by compassion. He saw them as sheep without a shepherd. Oh, listen to the pathos in His voice, *O, how oft I would have gathered thee under my arms like a hen doth gather her chicks, but you would not.* Compassion. So, we deal with difficult people in an absolutely not-normal-to-our-culture style. We return good for evil. We're proactively gentle, kind. Oh, be kind, be kind. Something needs to happen in all of us between the cradle and the grave that turns us into ladies and gentlemen.

“The desire of a man is his kindness: and a poor man is better than a liar.” (Proverbs 19:22)

What makes a man desirable? How big his muscles are? How tall he is? How smart he is? How educated he is? No. It's whether or not he's kind. You don't measure a man by putting a tape measure around his chest or his biceps, but around his heart.

“Charity suffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up.”
(1 Corinthians 13:4)

So, we love; and we suffer long; and we're kind back to the one who's the cause of the suffering.

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“Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice...” (Ephesians 4:31)

No bitterness, no wrath, no anger, no clamor, no evil speaking—put it all away from you with all malice.

“And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ’s sake hath forgiven you.” (Ephesians 4:32)

We are proactively gentle, kind, and compassionate.

10. If we speak, we speak peaceably

If we speak, we are to speak peacefully. No irritation. No hostility. No aggravation. No accusation. We speak peacefully.

“Depart from evil, and do good; seek peace, and pursue it.” (Psalms 34:14)

“But the meek shall inherit the earth; and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace.” (Psalms 37:11)

We must learn to speak peacefully. We have other material that covers this topic much more in-depth than I could here:

- “Ten Joys that Come from Speaking Peacefully.”
- “The Power of Genuine Peace.”
- “The Footsteps to Genuine Peace.”

You can go to www.NothingButTheTruth.org to find these teachings. They are also available on YouTube. Please let us know if we can be of more help to you as you learn to handle difficult people the Bible way.

Just before I leave you, I want to underscore the importance of

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handling difficult people, the Biblical way. The most effective way for me to do this is to let the Scriptures speak for themselves. Please, please, read the following passage carefully. Review all the elements revealed here. And if you will live this Biblical way, difficult people won't be so difficult. God bless you.

“Bless them which persecute you: bless, and curse not.

Rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep.

Be of the same mind one toward another. Mind not high things, but condescend to men of low estate. Be not wise in your own conceits.

Recompense to no man evil for evil. Provide things honest in the sight of all men.

If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men.

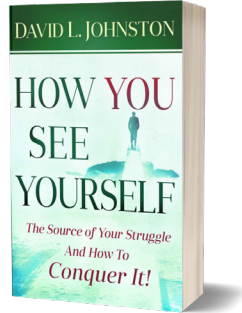
Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord.

Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head.

Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good.” (Romans 12:16-21)

MORE BY DAVID JOHNSTON

How You See Yourself — The Source of Your Struggle And How To Conquer It!



We are hindered from being the best version of ourselves, the version God intended. We are prevented by this insidious thing called iniquity. Iniquity is mentioned 334 times in the Bible, yet so many remain oblivious to its significant and negative impact on everyday living. Iniquity is the ancient term for narcissism. It's what turned a good angel, Lucifer, into the devil... "thou wast perfect in thy ways from the day thou wast created, till iniquity was found in thee" (Ezekiel 28:15).

It's one of the four reason Jesus went to the cross... "He was bruised for our iniquities" (Isaiah 53:5). It's why Jesus was sent... "to bless you, in turning away every one of you from his iniquities" (Acts 3:26). As you journey through the pages of this book you will not only identify the problems iniquity imposes upon us, but you will also discover the solutions. This book will help you discover:

- How iniquity contributes to mental illness
- How iniquity causes divorce and destroys households
- How conquering iniquity will cause your prayer life to flourish
- How you can finally live without fear and regret
- How to embrace the benefits that come from being free from iniquity and the way it robs you of your God-given potential!

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