

MONDAY MANNA

27 November 2017

WORKING WITH PEOPLE WHEN IT IS DIFFICULT

by Mike Reading

Most of us spend more time at work than we do any other place. There we must interact with people to get tasks done, support co-workers, satisfy customers, and make contributions toward reaching organisational goals. Not all people, however, are easy to work with.

Yet Jesus Christ tells us that to love God necessarily also means to love our neighbour -- even those we would consider more like enemies (Matthew 5:43-48). And the quality of love He calls us to extend to our neighbour is radical: "Love your neighbour *as yourself*" (Mark 12:31). To love someone the way we love ourselves essentially means our attempt to address the needs of others with the same sense of urgency and tenacity with which we seek to meet our own needs.

Jesus modelled this love for us throughout His ministry, and ultimately on the cross. He understood more than anybody the cost He was asking us to pay in order to love people to the degree with which we love ourselves: "*Now my soul is troubled, and what shall I say? 'Father, save me from this hour?' No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour*" (John 12:27).

So how can we practice loving people, especially when it is difficult? Consider these two practices the next time you find yourself in such a challenging position:

Look Inward First. It takes courage to look within ourselves first when faced with conflict. In high-pressure situations, many people look outward. They find reasons outside of themselves for their problems. They blame others or the situation, and look for excuses. However, the Lord asks us to look inward. We are to take personal responsibility for what is happening and what needs to be done, even when circumstances or other people clearly play a definitive role.

When faced with difficult situations and people, routinely ask yourself, "What is my part in creating the situation, and what do I, personally, need to do about it?" The apostle Paul modelled such behaviour when dealing with conflicts within the Church. Early in Paul's writings, he said he considered himself, "*the least of the apostles and [I] do not even deserve to be called an apostle ...*" (1 Corinthians 15:19). Later in his writings, Paul referred to himself as the chief of sinners (1 Timothy 1:15). The apostle had keen self-awareness. Knowing ourselves enables us to make conscious, intentional choices about how we respond to people and situations.

Work with Compassion. Compassion can be defined as "empathy in action." Being open to others enables us to face tough times with creativity and resilience. Empathy enables us to connect with people. It helps us get things done, and to deal with stress and the sacrifices inherent in leadership in powerful, effective ways. We are called to care enough to want to learn about other people, feel what they feel, see the world the way they do, and then do something with what we have learned.

The most challenging part about working with compassion is that we cannot assume or expect an equal exchange of compassion to be given to us. Compassion means giving selflessly. We find the capacity for compassion in Jesus, who said on the cross, while looking at the people who were crucifying Him, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing" (Luke 23:34). What an amazing request!

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Reflection/Discussion Questions

Who are those people in your workplace you find most difficult to love?

What would it look like if you strived to meet their needs this week with the same energy you use to meet your own?

Think back to a recent conflict. Look inward and ask yourself, "What was my part in creating the situation? What do I need to do about it now?"

If you were to empathise and seek to understand the other person's experience with that conflict, what would you have done differently to show compassion?

NOTE: If you have a Bible and would like to read more about principles it presents, consider the following passages:

Luke 10:25-37

Matthew 5:43-48, 25:31-46