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Good morning I am Josh Burnham and I'm the lead pastor here at Bethel. For all of our guests, those watching online, and our covenant members, welcome! There is no greater place to be in the world than in the presence of Jesus Christ.

We are excited to continue our series: **Because you asked**. Today we look at the Word to seek wisdom on how to deal with difficult people, and **you know who you are!** Why preach on difficult people? First, you asked for it! Second, you asked because we all interact with exasperating individuals daily.

How do we cope with uncooperative persons? One option is to find a career with as little personal interaction as possible. **Did you know you can find career lists for "people who don't like people?"**

1. Accountant
2. Actuary
3. Archivist
4. Head Chef
5. Electrician

No matter how hard you try, not even these professions are exempt from people, let alone, difficult people. Here is hope, you are not alone, The Son of God, Jesus the Messiah, constantly battled troublesome persons. Not only is **He our Maker, not only is He our Messiah, He is our model.**

### **How do you deal with difficult people? Mark 10:1-12**

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In the passages of Sacred Text, we read today, we find different characters and participants. These are people who Jesus encountered in His life. I believe that one day or another, these are people who we encounter.

**Common Charlie (10:1)** When Jesus set out from there and went across the Jordan, the crowds **converged** on him. As in Mark 8, after feeding the 4,000, the crowds appear unexpectedly. We don't know when, but we know **why** they arrived. They wanted to see the arrival of the prophet who could heal, bless, and spoke with authority. Notice, this **crowd doesn't have a name**. Let's give them a name, common Charlie.

Think with me for a moment. Where do you find the crowd and the common Charlie? **Everywhere**. He is behind you at the grocery store, he is your co-worker, your classmate, and in the bleacher in front of you at the ballfield. What makes common **Charlie so difficult**? Because he is always around. **How does Jesus respond?**

When the crowds converged... he taught (10:2). For the Messiah, every conversation had spiritual significance. **Every interaction is either a stumbling block or a stepping stone**. You never have time to prepare for the crowds. This is why:: 2 Tim. 4:2 *Preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; rebuke, correct, and encourage with great patience and teaching*. **Are you prepared and ready?** **Jesus did not leave the gospel at the synagogue and throw up his hands in disgust when the crowds converged**. We must be ready! *Common Charlie doesn't need a pastor, he needs you and he needs your Jesus*. What common Charlie is in your life today because they need the truth? Who is your one? Jesus was ready because He abided in the Spirit. **How do you deal** with common Charlie? Prepare your heart; spend time on your knees today. Lord give me an open door to share the gospel and the boldness to step through it.

**Critical Christine (10:2)** Embedded within the crowd we find a peculiarly grumpy people called the Pharisee. For our purposes, today we call her Critical Christine. This person is sharp, intuitive, and they ask a lot of questions. However, their inquisitions are not from curiosity but from a critical spirit.

**Pay close attention, the surface question is not necessarily hostile, but it's a test.** **Know anyone who is always testing you?** The question is asked to trap Jesus. As in our day, marriage and divorce were matters of great interest and controversy. It's possible Jesus is in *Perea, which was under Herod Antipas's jurisdiction, and would have been a trap on the legitimacy of Herod's marriage to Herodias, over which John the B lost his head*.

**Jesus doesn't take the bait.** How do we respond to Critical Christine's in our lives? Jesus didn't *flee and he didn't fight*. This is what the Pharisees wanted and this will be your temptation. Their traps are built to detain or detour. Recognize that critical people have critical hearts. So, Jesus addressed the heart (10:5). **When dealing with critical Christine, speak to their heart.**

The Mosaic provision was meant to **limit a problem**, not **license a practice** that goes against God's original intentions for marriage, Because of the hardness of your heart. **A critical heart is self-defeating**. **You don't learn to fly an airplane by following the instructions for a crash landing.** **How do you deal with critical people?** Engage their heart, and don't let their critical spirit work on you. And if needed, redefine the relationship. If this is you, let the Holy Spirit reshape your heart.

**As an aside**, for those who have been divorced, the intent of Jesus' teaching was not to shackle those who fail in marriage with debilitating guilt. The question in our day of transient commitment and casual divorce is whether God's people will hear the unique call of Christ. **No one who ever asked for forgiveness from Jesus in the Gospels was ever denied.**

**Needy Ned (10:13)** Following the crowd, and the criticizer, we find in rapid succession another group in the audience. In the narrative, this needy group doesn't have a name and their **anonymity** helps to

make the point about **status**, they are children and not anybody special. You see, **the typical ancient attitude was that young children were less important than adults and thus important teachers** shouldn't be bothered. Let's just call this group **Needy Ned**. This person need not be only a child. We all have people in our lives that are overly or constantly needy. **I had a friend who has now passed away, and everything this friend called she would be in a panic. Everything was an emergency. Everything was urgent. And everything in her life called for my immediate attention at that moment!** And to be honest, it was draining. How would Jesus respond to my friend?

Jesus could have easily dismissed the children, but he didn't. Jesus took them in his arms, laid hands upon them, and blessed them. How do we deal with Needy Neds? Dismissal? Avoidance? No, we **help without enabling**. Jesus gave them what they **needed not what they wanted**. Parents wanted a touch, Jesus did so much more.

With my friend who was always in an uproar, I learned to **listen** to her words, and then help her in her **needs**. For those who are needy, listen to their actions, set clear boundaries, and ask the Spirit how you can meet their real needs not just wants. **Needy persons need our love and discernment.**

**Elitist Eric (10:13)** May we not forget the other piece of the puzzle. While the children were pressing upon the Messiah, the disciples were not silent. Their response? They rebuked the parents and possibly the children. The response of the disciples to the children betrayed in that moment their **exclusiveness and elitism**. This is a difficult person. Let's call him **Elitist Eric**.

**Ever met something who thinks they are better than you, simply doesn't have the time, or doesn't want the inconvenience?** Even worse, they were "protecting Jesus." As if they were saying, **"God doesn't have time for you or people like you at this moment."** Maybe you have heard somebody say, **"people like you (me) don't belong in this church..."** Elitist Eric comes in all shapes and sizes. He doesn't care if he gets ahead or you get behind. **Either way, the separation and barriers exist.**

**How does Jesus respond?** He was indignant. **This word means to vent oneself in expressed displeasure rather than brooding about it. Jesus simultaneously expresses his irritation at their failure to learn and their self-serving attitude. How do we deal with elitists? We must speak up and speak out (church discipline).** James the brother of Jesus urged, **"do not show favoritism as you hold on to the faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ."** When we are **silent** towards injustice, favoritism, classism, racism, and elitism, you might as well **sanction it**. This has no place in the kingdom of God. Rather, every person—regardless of status-- must come to Jesus like these children, with empty hands ready to be filled.

**Good Ole Boy Gary (10:17)** Here we find another man. Influential, young, successful, and good. He was a salt of the earth type of man. This was the ideal disciple and church member and as one commentator stated, "a most attractive recruit for the kingdom of God." This man in all genuineness and sincerity had a clear conscience concerning the laws of Yahweh. He looked **good from the outside and felt good from the inside**. Let's call him Good Ole Boy Gary. He had one major struggle, he treasured his stuff more than the Savior. The RYR was a southerner and found on every street corner. This man made the tragic mistake of committing to a set of religious rules but would not commit to Jesus.

**How do we deal with Good Ole Boy Gary?** Looking at him, Jesus loved him and said... **This is the only time in Mark that Jesus is specifically said to love someone.** The final demand was not a means of putting him off, Jesus wanted him on board. But Jesus was not content to let the man live with a naïve conscience. What does Good Ole Boy Gary need more than anything else? To treasure Jesus above all! He needs the Gospel. Jesus first had to show him that that his goodness was subjective. What did Jesus expose his moral house of cards? Because he loved him. **Gary is difficult because he can live his whole life thinking he is good.** We cannot ignore the Good Ole Boy mentality. We cannot be content to let Good Ole Boys walk a “good” path to destruction an eternal hell apart from the one who loves them! To this man, Jesus loved him enough to say, deny yourself and follow me. **Are you following?**

**Sinful Self.** Lurking in the background of each of these narrative episodes is a passive participant.

There are times that I am the common Charlie, I am critical, I am needy, Elitist, and Good Ole Boy.

Coping with difficult people is always a problem, especially if the difficult person happens to be yourself. -  
Anonymous

**The most difficult persons in the world are not those we encounter. It’s the one who lives inside of you.**

Let’s call this person **Sinful Self**. How do deal with **your heart?** Jesus tells us that those who have been forgiven much love much. I often think this law is in effect, **I don’t deal with others well, because I forget how much I have been forgiven.** How did Yahweh deal with us when we were enemies of the Kingdom?

**Eph 2:12** At that time you were without Christ, excluded from the citizenship of Israel, and foreigners to the covenants of promise, without hope and without God in the world. **13** But now in Christ Jesus, you who were far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ. **14** For he is our peace, who made both groups one and tore down the dividing wall of hostility. In his flesh,

**Are you far away?** Jesus died to bring you near by His blood and reconcile you to the Father.

**Do you struggle with others?** Who do you need to offer grace or forgiveness? Who like Jesus, do you need to love?

Who is in your life because they need to see and know the love of Jesus through you? What if that person is difficult because they are far from Jesus, and so desperately need to be brought near?

# Notes

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**Mark 10:1** He set out from there and went to the region of Judea and across the Jordan. Then crowds converged on him again, and as was his custom he taught them again.

As in 8:34, a crowd or rather crowds, appears unexpectedly: the arrival of the prophet whose reputation they have heard before would naturally draw a crowd (NIGTC, 390).

Oh God makes us hungry to learn what your love makes you so ardent to teach! (Augustine, sermon 80).

**Mark 10:2** Some Pharisees came to test him, asking, “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?”

Marriage and divorce were in Jesus’ day, as they are in ours, matters of great interest and controversy (Pillar297).

The intention of the question itself is not necessarily hostile, but Mark’s use of test in similar contexts (8:11, 12:15) suggests that it is not necessarily innocent (NIGTC, 390).

The phrasing of the question in Mark focuses not on the allowable grounds of divorce on which as far as we know mainstream Jewish teachers of the time were agreed. Probably they already had some indication that Jesus’ views on the subject were extreme, not likely to endear him to people in general, and leaving him open to the charge of contradicting the Mosaic law (NIGTC, 390).

The questioning is done to trap Jesus in what he will say (Witherington, 274)

Jesus was not vexed when he was challenged by deceptive questioners who hoped more for a gaffe than an answer (Origen)

If Jesus is in Perea, which was under Antipas’s jurisdiction, the question may have been put to trap him on the issue of Antipas’s marriage to Herodias, over which the Baptist had lost his head (Pillar, 300).

**Mark 10:3** He replied to them, “What did Moses command you?” **Mark 10:4** They said, “Moses permitted us to write divorce papers and send her away.”

Jesus asks about commands, but they reply in terms of permission (NIGTC, 390). Deut 24:1-4 does not specifically command or even permit but regulates the situation in which divorce that results after a divorce.

It thus safeguarded the rights of the woman as much as possible in a patriarchal culture (Pillar, 301).

**Mark 10:5** But Jesus told them, “He wrote this command for you because of the hardness of your hearts. 6 But from the beginning of creation God made them male and female. 7 For this reason a man will leave his

father and mother 8 and the two will become one flesh. So they are no longer two, but one flesh. 9 Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate.”

### **Hardness**

Refers here not to men’s cruelty towards their wives, but to their rebellion against God’s will for them (NIGTC, 391).

The Mosaic provision was meant to limit a problem, not license a practice that in essence goes against God’s original intentions for marriage (Witherington, 276).

You do not learn to fly an airplane by following the instructions for making a crash landing; you will not be successful in war if you train by the rules for beating a retreat (Pillar, 301).

The Pharisees reflect the view that marriage is a disposable contractual arrangement (Pillar, 301).

### **What God has joined**

The antithesis between God and man highlights the basis of Jesus’ rejection of divorce. It is a human decision attempting to undo the union which God has created. God’s act is expressed as a fait accompli (NIGTC, 392).

No third party is allowed this relationship (Witherington, 277).

**Mark 10:10** When they were in the house again, the disciples questioned him about this matter. **11** He said to them, “Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery against her. **12** Also, if she divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery.”

Jewish divorce was specifically with a view of remarriage: the certificate given to the divorced wife read, “You are free to marry any man” (NIGTC, 393). Jesus pronouncements here therefore assume that remarriage will follow divorce, and it is the combined divorce-remarriage which he brands as adultery.

It needs to be said that separation of a married couple without divorce was not a legal possibility in early Judaism (Witherington, 275).

Also, divorce in Jesus’ setting was almost without exception a male privilege (Withington, 275).

The thrust of Jesus’ teaching is not simply to proscribe remarriage after divorce but to deny the Pharisees’ presumption for divorce in general (Pillar, 303).

Human failure does not alter the purpose of God’s intention for marriage (Pillar, 305).

The intent of Jesus’ teaching is not to shackle those who fail in marriage with debilitating guilt (Pillar, 305). The question in our day of impermanent commitments and casual divorce is whether we as Christians will hear the unique call of Christ to discipleship in marriage.

**Mark 10:13** People were bringing little children to him in order that he might touch them, but the disciples rebuked them. **14** When Jesus saw it, he was indignant and said to them, “Let the little children come to me. Don’t stop them, because the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. **15** Truly I tell you,

whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it.” **16** After taking them in his arms, he laid his hands on them and blessed them.

### People

The unspecified subject may reasonably be assumed to be the parents of the children (NIGTC, 395).

### Children

Their anonymity helps to make the point about status: they are their children are not anybody special (NIGTC, 395).

The later evidence for a custom of bringing children to rabbis for blessing and prayer on the Day of Atonement is an example of this natural tendency to bring a child to the rabbi (NIGTC, 396).

This may reflect a typical ancient attitude that young children were less important than adults, and that important teachers shouldn't be bothered by them (Witherington, 279).

In this story children are not blessed for their virtues but for what they lack: they come only as they are—small powerless, without sophistication, as the overlooked and disposed of society (Pillar, 307).

### Indignant

The word means to vent oneself in expressed displeasure rather than simply brooding about it (Pillar, 306).

Covers both irritation at their failure to learn and repugnance at their attitude in itself (NIGTC, 396).

Underlying the disciples attitude and the resultant teaching is the same concept of the child as the least important member of society (NIGTC, 393).

The response of the disciples to the children replays their exclusiveness and elitism (Pillar, 306).

Little children are paradigmatic disciples, for only empty hands can be filled (Pillar, 307).

**Mark 10:17** As he was setting out on a journey, a man ran up, knelt down before him, and asked him, “Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?”

The question seems sincere and indicates a serious spiritual quest (NIGTC, 401).

It is sometimes suggests that do is meant to betray a Pelagian concept of salvation by works but the narrative does not support this, as Jesus' reply is also in terms of things to do (NIGTC, 401).

**Mark 10:18** “Why do you call me good?” Jesus asked him. “No one is good except God alone. **19** You know the commandments: **Do not murder; do not commit adultery; do not steal; do not bear false witness; do not defraud; honor your father and mother.**”

Jesus assumes that this total stranger is familiar with the Decalogue (NIGTC, 402).

Perhaps we are meant to think that this man believed he and Jesus were good men because of their deeds (Witherington, 282).

**Mark 10:20** He said to him, “Teacher, I have kept all these from my youth.”

The man is claiming a clear conscience with regard to these commandments, and there is no indication that the claim was insecure (NIGTC, 403).

He is proving to be altogether a most attractive recruit for the kingdom of God (NIGTC, 403).

**Mark 10:21** Looking at him, Jesus loved him and said to him, “You lack one thing: Go, sell all you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.” **22** But he was dismayed by this demand, and he went away grieving, because he had many possessions.

V.21 gives us a tender touch, saying that Jesus looks straight at the man and loves him, the only time in this Gospel that he is specifically said to love someone (Witherington, 282).

The man is to have treasure in heaven and to come and follow Jesus (Witherington, 282).

The final demand is not meant to be a means of putting him off: Jesus wants him on board (NIGTC, 403).

Dismayed- His face clouded

The children in the former story who possess nothing are not told that they lack anything, but rather that the kingdom of God is theirs; yet this man who possesses everything still lacks something (Pillar, 312).

## Illustrations

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# Application

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**Praise often reveals what people value the most –Craig Groeshel**

## **Wrong responses**

Fight  
Flight

## **Right Responses**

Listen  
Answer  
Dismiss

## **How to love and serve the needy**

1. offer what they need not what they want
  - a. pay attention to actions not words
2. Set healthy boundaries
  - a. Time and resources
3. Allow them to face their consequences

## **Manipulators (Groeshel)**

1. Greatest weapons
  - a. Threats, guilt
2. Recognize when someone is trying to control you
3. Don't let it work on you
4. Redefine the relationship

Don't say, "That person bothers me." Think: *That person sanctifies me.* —Josemaria Escriva, founder of Opus Dei