

Dealing with Negativity—UUFVB Covenant Groups—March 2015

Chalice Lighting

May we know once again that we are not isolated beings,
but connected, in mystery and miracle,
to the universe, to this community and to each other.

Check-in: How is your spirit right now?

Opening Reading

Psychologists often say that one's personality refers to a specific pattern of beliefs and behaviors that are deep-seated and do not vary much over time, no matter how much pressure to change an individual might experience. When these behaviors and underlying beliefs seriously impede a person's ability to function, they are said to be personality disordered. People with a number of negative personality traits, such as those listed below, may seemingly be able to function in the world, but being in a relationship with them may seriously test our resilience. Negative personality traits include these behaviors:

1. Passive resistance to routine social or occupational obligations
2. Complains of being misunderstood or underappreciated
3. Complains of personal misfortune
4. Sullenness or belligerence (argumentative)
5. Highly critical of authority
6. Resents or is envious of those perceived as being more fortunate
7. Alternates between hostile defiance and contrition

(Source: McGraw-Hill Concise Dictionary of Modern Medicine. © 2002 by The McGraw-Hill Companies, Inc.)

Topic Exploration

It can be difficult to deal with negative people who bring your mood down with their pessimism, anxiety, and general sense of distrust. The obvious solution is to walk away...but we can't always walk away from a parent, sibling, spouse, colleague, or friend with a negative attitude. A more practical approach is to start by understanding the reasons for their negativity. Almost all negativity has its roots in one of three deep-seated fears: **the fear of being disrespected by others, the fear of not being loved by others, and the fear that "bad things" are going to happen.** The fears manifest themselves in a variety of ways, including judgmentalism, diffidence (a sense of helplessness about one's ability to deal with life's obligations or challenges), demanding nature, pessimism, risk aversion and the need to control others. There is a common feature across all of these manifestations of negativity: the tendency to blame external factors—other people, the environment, or "luck"—rather than oneself, for one's negative attitudes. (Raghnathan)

Dealing with Negative People

A straightforward but ultimately unproductive way of helping negative people is to give them the respect, love and control they crave. However, you may find yourself in the position of having to provide increasing levels of respect, love and control to keep the negative people happy, trapping yourself in an increasingly supportive role. You can grit your teeth and hope things will improve, but your passivity may be taken as a sign of acceptance of the negativity. You can seek the help of a counselor or an arbiter (e.g., a common friend), but going to a third party may lead to the negative person walking away feeling even more indignant and wronged.

The most tenable options for dealing with negative people involve three elements: compassion for the negative person, taking responsibility for your own happiness; and maturity in how you interact with the negative person. (Raghunathan)

Questions / Sharing

1. Discuss the pros and cons of using each of the following approaches for dealing with negativity.
 - A. **The compassionate element** involves rarely—if ever—advising the negative person about changing their behavior. Most of us are not good at taking critical feedback and negative people are particularly averse to such feedback. Remember that “getting it off your chest” is only going to escalate the problem and is not going to fix it.
 - B. The second element—of **taking personal responsibility for your own positivity**—involves doing what it takes to protect your own happiness. If you cannot maintain your positivity and composure, then all is lost. Adopt a positive attitude; take time away from the negative person on a regular basis to maintain your composure.
 - C. The final element—of **being mature**—involves understanding that the most reliable way to steer the negative person towards positivity is to manifest the positivity yourself. Do not let the other’s negativity curtail your spontaneous, positive, and trusting manner. When the negative person makes the skeptical or cynical comment, take time to explain why you chose to act as you did.
2. What strategies do you suggest for dealing with negativity in public or church meetings? In emails?
3. How do you identify and react to negative persons in your life and protect your own well-being?
4. How do you recognize and deal with your OWN negativity? Is your glass half empty or half full? Which is the negative attitude? How do you react when someone accuses you of being negative?

Closing Reading

Take stock of your own actions and words. If your own behaviors head in the direction of self-pity and pessimism, it’s time to re-track and start over by making a choice to adopt more optimistic beliefs and attitudes. Learn to recognize the toxic persons in your life and analyze how healthy these people are in terms of your overall well-being and composure. Seek to hold onto the positive and constructive aspects of any conversation. Don’t allow negative thoughts to fester and control your present and future self. The doubts, regrets and misgivings that others feel should be on no consequence to you and the paths you follow in life. Mingle with people who help you develop a healthy body and mind. The routine of seeing everything as a wonder and finding the good and positive in everyday interactions will eventually fall into place. (Wikihow.com)

Extinguish the Chalice

We extinguish this flame but not the light of truth,
the warmth of community, or the fire of commitment.
These we carry in our hearts until we are together again.

Housekeeping