

Are You Velcro or Teflon?

Kelly can be one of the best friends in the world. She's thoughtful, caring, and always eager to encourage and serve others. The people in her Bible study and small group always look forward to seeing her, and her coworkers think she is one of the most pleasant people they'd ever known.

But there is a small circle of people who do not experience her this way. These are the people who have gotten onto her "black list." Most of them got there by failing to meet her expectations or by saying something critical about her.

This typically leads to her feeling unappreciated or attacked. If the offensive behavior is repeated, she eventually begins to see herself as the innocent victim of other people's sinful behavior. Once that happens, Kelly turns into human Velcro.

She automatically assumes the worst about everything the black-listed person does. Like Velcro, she grabs hold of every piece of evidence that supports her critical view of that person, and like Teflon, she lets evidence that favors them slide by unnoticed and unremembered.

Before long, these people are in a no-win situation. Even when their positive actions far outnumber their failures, she remembers only their flaws and never their virtues. Thus, getting off her black list and out of her jail of judgment can seem nearly impossible.

Are you a Kelly? I am.

Not all of the time, but more often than I like to admit. Although I generally tend to be charitable toward others, if I'm offended frequently or deeply enough, especially by those I expect a lot from, I'm fully capable of becoming human Velcro.

Perhaps you are too.

If so, how can we break free from this miserable habit? Here's three steps that usually help me.

First, I confess to God that this critical attitude is inexcusable, sinful, and a terrible offense to him. He sent his Son to die for our sins, to wash them away, to give us a fresh start every day (Col. 1:21-22). How wrong it is of me to hold people's sins against them when Jesus has already paid for them in full!

Second, I meditate on and pray through Bible passages that remind me of God's lavish forgiveness through the gospel and his unequivocal commands to imitate his kindness and acceptance.

The LORD is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. He will not always chide, nor will he keep his anger forever. He does not deal with us according to our sins, nor repay us according to our iniquities. For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him; as far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us (Ps. 103:8-12, ESV).

Love keeps no record of wrongs.... It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres (1 Cor. 13:5-7, NIV).

And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Let all bitterness ... be put away from you, along with all malice. Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you (Eph. 4:30-32, NIV).

Third, I ask God to give me grace to reverse my critical Velcro/Teflon tendency and turn it into a positive habit. How? By making a conscious effort to become like Teflon when people irritate me, letting their offenses slide quickly out of my memory (Prov. 19:11), and to become like Velcro with regard to their virtues, seeing, celebrating, and remembering every evidence of God's grace in them.

As the Apostle Paul taught two embittered women in the Philippian church nearly two thousand years ago:

Whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me—practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you (Phil. 4:8-9).

These three steps do not address every aspect of dealing with personal offenses. In fact, as I'll discuss in an upcoming blog, there are times when overlooking offenses is the wrong thing to do. But for the vast majority of us, reversing the Velcro/Teflon tendency is a step in the right direction.

- Ken Sande

Reflection Questions:

- Do you have a "black list"? Who has been on it? How did they get there?
- How do you think of people on your black list? How do you treat them?
- How do you think they feel about the way you view and treat them?
- How do you feel when you've got an active black list? What does it do to you?
- Do you want to break this habit? You can start by practicing the three steps given above.

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