

SHOWING GRACE TO OTHERS

book twenty-seven in the series:

THE OWNER'S MANUAL TO THE NEW YOU

DOUG BRITTON, MFT

Five-day Bible study for individuals, small groups, and churches

Day One: Replace Irritation with Grace

Day Two: Respond with Grace to Others' Faults

Day Three: Respond with Grace to Others' Opinions

Day Four: Respond with Grace to Others' Personal Styles

Day Five: Review and Test

Showing Grace to Others: Book twenty-seven in “The Owner’s Manual to the New You”

Copyright © 2020 by Doug Britton

All rights reserved. Except as specified below, no portion of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means (including, but not limited to, electronic, mechanical, photocopy, audio recording, and scanning) except for brief quotations in critical reviews or articles, without prior written permission from the publisher.

However, permission is granted to copy this book for personal use provided it is made available at no charge and it is copied in its entirety, with no changes. This permission may be revoked at any time.

If this book is copied in quantities of five or more, please send a brief email describing how it is being used to owners-manual@dougbrittonbooks.com.

Bible translation: Except when otherwise noted, Scriptures are taken from the Holy Bible, New International Version 1984. Copyright 1973, 1978, 1984 International Bible Society. Used by permission of Zondervan Bible Publishers.

ISBN: 978-1-930153-76-9

Version: TOM2720191106A

Published by LifeTree Books, Sacramento, CA • Visit www.dougbrittonbooks.com



The Owner's Manual to the New You

Forty-eight short books

(Each book includes a five-day Bible study and homework)

By Doug Britton, MFT

Twelve books on “Knowing God”

Twelve books on “Developing a Godly Character”

Twelve books on “Enjoying Healthy Relationships”

Twelve books on “Overcoming Personal Problems”

For

Individuals

Small Groups

Churches

Available free for personal use at:
www.dougbrittonbooks.com/owners-manual

The Owner's Manual to the New You

"The Owner's Manual to the New You," published by LifeTree Books, is a series of forty-eight cross-cultural discipleship books by Bible-based Marriage and Family Therapist Doug Britton. LifeTree Books is making these books available free of charge for individual use.

Each book is ideal for a five-day study by small groups, classes, or individuals. Although this is a forty-eight-book series, each book can be studied as a complete book by itself.

Knowing God

- Book 1: Who is God?
- Book 2: Becoming a Believer
- Book 3: Your Identity in Christ
- Book 4: Quick Overview of the Bible
- Book 5: How to Study the Bible
- Book 6: How to Pray
- Book 7: Key Christian Practices
- Book 8: Successful Christian Living
- Book 9: Living a Joyful Life
- Book 10: Knowing God's Will
- Book 11: Obeying God
- Book 12: Living in God's Power

Developing a Godly Character

- Book 13: Growing in Christ
- Book 14: Changing Your Self-Image
- Book 15: Changing Your Attitudes
- Book 16: Living with Humility
- Book 17: Living with Purpose
- Book 18: Living with Self-Control
- Book 19: Living with Integrity
- Book 20: Growing through Problems
- Book 21: Trusting God
- Book 22: Breaking Free from Our Culture
- Book 23: Handling Money Responsibly
- Book 24: Staying Faithful to God

Enjoying Healthy Relationships

- Book 25: Keys to Healthy Relationships
- Book 26: Making Friends
- Book 27: Showing Grace to Others
- Book 28: Forgiving Others
- Book 29: Serving Others
- Book 30: Resolving Conflicts
- Book 31: Overcoming Peer Pressure
- Book 32: Helping Others with Wisdom
- Book 33: Dating, Marriage, and Sex
- Book 34: Embracing the Body of Christ
- Book 35: Respecting Authority
- Book 36: Sharing Your Faith

Overcoming Personal Problems

- Book 37: Overcoming Your Anger (Part 1)
- Book 38: Overcoming Your Anger (Part 2)
- Book 39: Overcoming Rejection
- Book 40: Overcoming Temptation (Part 1)
- Book 41: Overcoming Temptation (Part 2)
- Book 42: Overcoming Anxiety and Fear
- Book 43: Overcoming Jealousy and Insecurity
- Book 44: Overcoming Self-Sufficiency
- Book 45: Overcoming Guilt and Shame
- Book 46: Overcoming Discouragement
- Book 47: Overcoming Failure
- Book 48: Overcoming the Fear of Death

Contents

Foreword	7
Small Group Leader's Guidelines	8
Day One: Replace Irritation with Grace	9
Homework – Day One	13
Day Two: Respond with Grace to Others' Faults	15
Homework – Day Two	19
Day Three: Respond with Grace to Others' Opinions	21
Homework – Day Three	25
Day Four: Respond with Grace to Others' Personal Styles	27
Homework – Day Four	31
Day Five: Review and Test (may be removed by leader)	33
About the Author	37
More Books by Doug Britton	38



Foreword

When I was first asked to write a series of downloadable books for intensive discipleship training, I was excited. Jesus has revolutionized my life, and I am glad to share his truths with you.

The pages you are about to study come straight from God's word. They contain truth that puts our feet on the path to the fullest life possible—truth that sets us free.

As Jesus said, "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free" (John 8:31-32).

May God speak to your heart as you read, and may he bring his truth alive in your life.

Your brother in Christ,

Doug Britton

P.S. LifeTree Books is offering this downloadable book and all the other books in "The Owner's Manual to the New You" series free of charge. If you find these books helpful, please feel free to spread the news to churches, ministries, and individuals who might benefit from them.

Small Group Leader's Guidelines

Introduction. These studies are for new believers as well as mature Christians. They are for small groups, discipleship classes, mentors, and individuals. They are ideal for studies lasting from sixty to ninety minutes.

Choose the key points, verses, and discussion questions you will talk about. Don't think you need to cover every verse and question. With new believers, go over the main points, key verses, and selected questions. Go into more depth with mature Christians.

Begin and end each study with prayer. Start by asking God to help each person grow from the study. At the end, ask everyone to pray for help to put God's truth into practice.

Review homework. Before starting the current lesson, ask group members to discuss their answers to some of the previous day's homework questions.

Personalize the lesson. Although it's okay to read each lesson word-for-word, the material will "come alive" if you discuss some of the key points in your own words. Share your own experiences and struggles, and how God has helped you.

As you read, identify important points and key parts of verses. Ask group members to circle them, and then explain why you want to emphasize these points.

Get everyone involved. The more people are actively involved, the more they are impacted by what you are studying. Don't ask questions that can be answered by "yes" or "no." For example, don't ask, "Do you have any thoughts about this?" Instead, ask, "How does this insight speak to you?"

Consider breaking up into smaller groups to discuss the questions if you are leading a large group or class.

Use day five for a review and test. Use the questions in day five as a review and/or test. Remove these pages if you do not want group members to see the questions ahead of time.

Want to Learn More?

Free online resources: For more suggestions for small group leaders as well as many online Bible studies on Christianity and daily living (anger, marriage, self-image, finances, and more), visit www.dougbrittonbooks.com/resources/small-groups

Small group leader's book: For detailed information on how to lead small groups and overcome typical problems, visit www.dougbrittonbooks.com/bookstore/small-groups.

Day One: Replace Irritation with Grace

How do you go through a typical day? Do you sometimes find yourself feeling critical or upset with others because of their attitudes, actions, or words? Or do you give people “breathing room,” knowing that everyone has different ideas and different ways of doing things—and that everyone sometimes makes mistakes or does things wrong?

Most of us are bothered by others’ actions, attitudes, or opinions from time to time. In this week’s lesson you will learn how to respond with grace instead of becoming irritated.



Evaluate yourself

What irritates or upsets you?

The following list illustrates just a few of the countless things people do that can be irritating. How would you respond to each of these situations?

- Someone doesn’t invite you to a wedding or birthday party.
- Someone doesn’t seem to appreciate you.
- Someone has piercings or tattoos you don’t like.
- Someone forgets your birthday.
- Someone seems stuck up or ignores you in church.
- Someone expresses a political opinion you think is terrible.
- Someone says unkind words about you.
- Someone is late to a meeting.
- Someone does not return your phone calls, text messages, or emails.
- Someone acts like a hypocrite.
- Someone misquotes the Bible.
- Someone has bad manners.
- Someone loads the dishwasher the “wrong” way.
- Someone cuts you off in traffic.
- Someone criticizes you.
- Someone seems lazy or irresponsible.

- Someone bores you.
- Someone smokes in the church parking lot.

Discussion questions

1. Which of the previous situations would irritate you? Describe one or two times you got upset about something on the list.
2. Describe additional things people do that irritate you.

How do you respond when you are irritated or upset?

When people say or do things that irritate or upset you, how do you respond? Here are a few common responses.

- I find myself thinking about and being bothered by other people's words or actions.
- I feel judgmental about others' opinions or faults.
- I feel hurt or take things personally.
- I criticize others or point out their mistakes.
- I tell others what they should do.
- I gossip, telling other people about things that hurt or upset me.

Discussion questions

3. How do you respond when people say or do things that irritate you?
4. Do you often correct people or tell them what they should (or should not) do? If so, give some examples.
5. How do you think people feel when you correct them or tell them what to do?
6. Do you know someone who often corrects or instructs you? If so, how does that make you feel?

Showing grace — a godly response to life's irritations

It's normal to feel irritated or upset with other people, but God wants us to learn a different way to respond. As you read the following two passages, circle "bearing with" and "bear with."

As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. (Ephesians 4:1-3)

Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. (Colossians 3:13)

Responding to others with grace means "bearing with" (or graciously putting up with) people. It means acknowledging that everyone has areas of weakness and that we all are works in progress. It means loving people in spite of their personalities, habits, and faults. It means showing "unmerited favor."

Finally, all of you, live in harmony with one another; be sympathetic, love as brothers, be compassionate and humble. (1 Peter 3:8)

Jesus helped us understand this when he told his followers to love their enemies and to pray for those who persecuted them.

But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? And if you greet only your brothers, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? (Matthew 5:44-47)

Discussion questions

7. What does it mean to show grace to others?
8. Why is it important to show grace to others?

Does responding with grace mean we never should talk about others' words or actions?

Showing grace is a key attitude we should cultivate. However, as you will see in coming pages, there are times we should talk about others' words or actions, and there are times when it is appropriate to take a strong stand.

Pray when you are bothered by someone's words or actions

Responding with grace does not come easily to most of us. It is especially difficult for "perfectionists," people who continually see faults in themselves and in others.

Pray for love and concern for others.

God has called us to be genuinely concerned about others' needs, to consider others as "better" than ourselves. When we look at people with love and concern, we are less likely to take offense. If they do or say something wrong, we pray for them instead of reacting with anger.

Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. (Philippians 2:3)

Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen. (Ephesians 4:29)

Discussion question

9. How can praying for love and concern for others help you respond with grace?

Pray for people who bother you.

It is God who changes people. Sometimes we can help by talking with them, but we need to be sensitive. When we get too involved, we can get in God's way.

Discussion question

10. How could continually correcting or criticizing others get in God's way?

Pray to live in harmony and to be a peacemaker.

It is inevitable that you will be upset with others from time to time, but you don't need to give in to your emotions. Pray for wisdom. Pray to be a peacemaker.

If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. (Romans 12:18)

Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. (Colossians 3:12)

Discussion question

11. What is one situation in your life in which God wants you to respond with grace instead of reacting with bitterness or anger? What steps do you think you should take?

Pray to overcome your anger.

When you become angry, irritated, or grumpy, put yourself on "time out." Instead of saying or doing things you might regret, ask God to help you respond with love and concern, not anger.

Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. (1 Corinthians 13:4-5)

A hot-tempered man stirs up dissension, but a patient man calms a quarrel. (Proverbs 15:18)

Discussion questions

12. When do you become angry, irritated, or grumpy?
13. How will you remind yourself to pray during these times?

Do you know Jesus?

This book was written to help believers in Jesus grow in their faith and personal life. You will get the most out of these pages if you know Christ, since it is through his love and power that you can truly change. If you have not yet entered into a relationship with Jesus, let me invite you to accept him as your Savior and Lord. Make this your personal prayer:

Jesus, I believe you are the Son of God, and I need your help. I confess I have sinned and failed you in many ways. I invite you to be my Savior and Lord, and I ask you to help me follow you the rest of my life. Thank you for loving me, forgiving me, and accepting me as your child.

If you prayed this prayer, welcome to the family of God. God has plans for you—to transform you. You have an exciting life ahead of you!

Memory verse

Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. (Colossians 3:13)

Want to learn more?**Free online Bible study**

How to Be Born Again

www.dougbrittonbooks.com/resources/salvation

5. How do you think God would want you to respond to the situations you described in question 3?

6. Write a prayer asking God to help you overcome the irritation you described in question 3:

7. Does responding with grace mean never talking about problems? Why or why not?

Day Two: Respond with Grace to Others' Faults

Do you frequently criticize, correct, or confront others when they do something wrong or make a mistake? If so, you probably have discovered that the results aren't what you hoped for and that people resent your comments.

That makes sense, doesn't it? No one likes to be constantly criticized or corrected.

Discussion questions

1. Have you ever had a parent, boss, friend, or relative who constantly criticized you? If so, how did that feel?
2. How can remembering what that felt like help you be less critical towards others?



Is it always wrong to confront, correct, or criticize others?

How should you respond when people do something wrong, commit a sin, or make a mistake? That's not an easy question, since the answer varies depending on circumstances, relationships, and God's leading. Depending on the situation, your response could be to:

- Strongly confront someone or establish boundaries.
- Gently say something.
- Not say anything. Pray.

Although confrontation sometimes is appropriate, in most of our day-to-day interactions, it is not. As you will read in today's lesson, it's not a good idea to continually criticize or correct others.

Expect others to make mistakes or sin from time to time

Everyone has faults, and everyone sins from time to time. That includes your pastor, your best friend, your parents, your co-workers, and your neighbors. And, of course, that includes you.

The Bible tells us that everyone sins.

We all stumble in many ways. If anyone is never at fault in what he says, he is a perfect man, able to keep his whole body in check. (James 3:2)

If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word has no place in our lives. (1 John 1:10)

When you accept the fact that others will say or do something wrong from time to time, you are better prepared to respond with love and patience, not annoyance.

A man's wisdom gives him patience; it is to his glory to overlook an offense. (Proverbs 19:11)

We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves. (Romans 15:1)

You might say, “I can understand a non-Christian disappointing me, but I expect better from Christians.” If so, reread James 3:2 and 1 John 1:10. Notice that both verses were written to Christians.

Discussion question

3. How can expecting others to sometimes sin or make mistakes help you respond more wisely?

Watch your attitude

Pray to not have a judgmental attitude.

When you see someone sin, be careful not to develop a judgmental attitude. That doesn't mean not identifying sin as sin. Rather, it means not “judging” that the person is not a Christian, or that he or she is going to hell. And it means not taking a superior attitude, thinking you are better than that person.

Do not judge, or you too will be judged. For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you. Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? How can you say to your brother, “Let me take the speck out of your eye,” when all the time there is a plank in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye. (Matthew 7:1-5)

Do not judge, and you will not be judged. Do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven. (Luke 6:37)

There is only one Lawgiver and Judge, the one who is able to save and destroy. But you—who are you to judge your neighbor? (James 4:12)

Remember that you too are imperfect.

One way to overcome a judgmental attitude is to confront your own sins. You may not have the same faults as someone else, but you have different ones of your own. Realizing this can help you live with others' shortcomings.

Be especially careful if you have overcome a sin in your life, and you see someone else engaging in that sin. Many people are intolerant or condemning of people who struggle with sins they themselves have conquered.

Discussion question

4. How can knowing that you are imperfect help you be patient with others' failures?

Replace a judgmental attitude with loving concern.

When you see people sin, ask God to help you respond with concern and compassion instead of irritation or anger.

Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. (1 Corinthians 13:4-5)

Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins. (1 Peter 4:8)

Speak and act as those who are going to be judged by the law that gives freedom, because judgment without mercy will be shown to anyone who has not been merciful. Mercy triumphs over judgment! (James 2:12-13)

Discussion questions

5. What is the difference between a judgmental attitude and loving concern?
6. Do you usually respond with a judgmental attitude or loving concern? Describe one or two situations that illustrate the way you respond.

Realize that the Holy Spirit convicts of sin

You may think you need to point out others' faults for their own good. Although gentle confrontation sometimes is appropriate, don't make a habit of it. The Holy Spirit speaks to each of us, convicting us of sin.

As you read in Day 1, if you frequently criticize someone, you may get in God's way. When you argue, the other person is less likely to hear the Holy Spirit. You usually are more effective if you criticize less and pray more.

Hatred stirs up dissension, but love covers over all wrongs. (Proverbs 10:12)

Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. (Ephesians 4:2)

Look for the positive

If you look for the negative, you will find it. Likewise, if you look for the positive, you will find it. A key part of forbearance is focusing on those things that are good, lovely, and noble.

Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things. (Philippians 4:8)

Be an encourager.

If you look for and comment on good things people do, you will have a much greater impact than if you frequently criticize or complain.

Limit yourself to one or two negative comments a day.

If you often criticize or correct others, make a commitment before God to limit yourself to one or two negative comments a day at the most. You will discover that most of the things you once thought you needed to say are not so important after all.

Discussion question

7. What do you think about encouraging more and criticizing less? How can you remind yourself to encourage more and criticize less?

Discuss problems courteously

Although you should not constantly point out others' faults, from time to time it is loving and appropriate to confront sin, voice a complaint, make a request, express concern for someone's well-being, or discuss problems in a relationship. The following verse in one of Paul's letters tells us the way we should talk to others when they sin:

Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted. (Galatians 6:1)

This passage lets us know that we need to:

- Stay close to Jesus.
- Restore (not just get angry).
- Be gentle.
- Guard against being tempted.

In Day 3, "Respond with Grace to Others' Opinions," you will read several ideas to help you talk courteously—even when you *really* disagree with someone.

Memory verse

Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins. (1 Peter 4:8)

Want to Learn More?

Free online Bible studies

Encourage One Another. Say Encouraging Words Daily
www.dougbrittonbooks.com/resources/encourage-others

Studies on overcoming anger
www.dougbrittonbooks.com/resources/anger

Books by Doug Britton

Victory Over Grumpiness, Irritation, and Anger
www.dougbrittonbooks.com/bookstore/anger

Encouraging Your Spouse (marriage book)
www.dougbrittonbooks.com/bookstore/encourage

Homework – Day Two

1. The Bible says, “A man’s wisdom gives him patience; it is to his glory to overlook an offense” (Proverbs 19:11). What does that mean?
2. Do you usually feel condemning of others when they do something wrong, or do you usually feel concern for them? Explain your answer:
3. Does knowing that you sometimes sin in your thoughts, words, or actions help you avoid be judgmental? Explain your answer.
4. Does not judging others mean pretending they never do anything wrong? Explain your answer:

5. Describe a situation or time when you might talk to someone about something he or she did wrong:

Describe how you would talk about this:

6. How can remembering your own shortcomings help you respond to others with grace?

7. Do you need to confront people's sins more often or less often?

Write a prayer asking God to help you make any needed changes in your approach:

Day Three: Respond with Grace to Others' Opinions

Do you have strong opinions about religion, politics, sports, or other topics? If so, how do you treat people who disagree with you? Do you talk with them in a respectful manner, or do you get into angry arguments, “writing them off” as stupid, wrong, unchristian, or crazy?

Evaluate yourself

Here are some examples of topics that can drive a wedge between people. As you read them, ask yourself how you would respond to someone who disagreed with you about any of these issues.



- What is the best political party?
- Are people poor because they are lazy?
- Is a specific radio talk show host anointed or crazy?
- Should women be the primary homemakers in a family?
- Are taxes too high, too low, or just right?
- Should Christians be vegetarians (or vegans)?
- Is it okay to watch R-rated TV shows and movies?
- Who should the church hire as a pastor?
- Is abortion okay?
- Are Mormons Christians?
- Is there a world-wide conspiracy to control the world?
- Is a certain TV evangelist a genuine Christian or a phony?
- Is one particular denomination the main place God is moving?
- Is it okay for Christians to dance?
- Did God create the world in six days as measured by our calendar?
- What type of worship songs should we sing in church?
- Can a Christian “lose” his or her salvation?
- Does God exist?
- Is it okay for Christians to drink alcohol?

- Is it okay to spank children?
- Is hell real?
- Is there life on other planets?

You probably have strong opinions about some of these questions. That makes sense, for many of them are important issues, and you need to be able to talk about them.

Discussion questions

1. Which of the previous questions are “hot button” topics for you? Why are they important to you?
2. What are other topics you feel strongly about? Why are these important to you?

Build bridges by talking respectfully

How should you respond when people say something you disagree with? The answer depends on circumstances, relationships, and God's leading. Depending on the situation, you could gently disagree and state your opinion, or you could not say anything.

In today's lesson, you will read guidelines on how to talk respectfully and have a meaningful discussion instead of giving in to anger and pushing people away.

Even if you are sure you are right about something, the way you talk is usually just as important (or more important) than if you are right or wrong. Being right, or having wisdom, does not mean it's okay to attack others verbally.

- If you are talking with unbelievers, instead of laying the foundation to share about Jesus, you build a wall.
- If you are talking with believers, instead of influencing them, you push them away from your point of view—and from you personally.
- Instead of possibly learning from different perspectives, you lose an opportunity to grow. After all, it's unlikely that you are right about everything.

But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere. Peacemakers who sow in peace raise a harvest of righteousness. (James 3:17-18)

Words from a wise man's mouth are gracious, but a fool is consumed by his own lips. (Ecclesiastes 10:12)

Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. (Ephesians 4:3)

And the Lord's servant must not quarrel; instead, he must be kind to everyone, able to teach, not resentful. Those who oppose him he must gently instruct, in the hope that God will grant them repentance leading them to a knowledge of the truth. (2 Timothy 2:24-25)

Discussion questions

3. Do you agree that the way you talk is usually just as important (or more important) than if you are right or wrong? Why or why not?
4. How can people “burn bridges” by the way they talk? What does that mean?

5. Do you sometimes burn bridges? Would you like to change? If so, in what way?

Guidelines for respectful conversations

Set the stage for a good talk.

If someone says something you disagree with, don't blurt out the first words that come to your mind.

- Pray before you talk. Decide if, when, and how to speak.
- Start the conversation graciously.

Do you see a man who speaks in haste? There is more hope for a fool than for him. (Proverbs 29:20)

Seek to understand the other person.

Listen intently and try to deeply understand the other person. Ask God to give you wisdom and understanding.

He who answers before listening—that is his folly and shame. (Proverbs 18:13)

Watch your attitude as you talk.

- Focus on loving and speaking respectfully more than on winning.
- After making your point, do not keep pushing it.

End the conversation well.

Be willing to agree to disagree. Be prepared for ongoing talks if necessary. Pray together if there was tension and the other person is willing.

Discussion question

6. Which of the above guidelines will help you have more respectful conversations? Explain your answer.

Don't "major in the minors"

Many of us get agitated about issues that aren't that important to God. Christians in the New Testament did the same thing. For example, in Paul's day believers disagreed about whether it was okay to eat meat and whether one day was more sacred than another day.

Instead of making a big deal about these issues, Paul wrote that people should not look down on each other because of their opinions about these topics. He added that people should make up their own minds about such issues.

Accept him whose faith is weak, without passing judgment on disputable matters. One man's faith allows him to eat everything, but another man, whose faith is weak, eats only vegetables. The man who eats everything must not look down on him who does not, and the man who does not eat everything must not condemn the man who does, for God has accepted him. Who are you to judge someone else's servant? To his own master he stands or falls. And he will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand. One man considers one day more sacred

than another; another man considers every day alike. Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind. (Romans 14:1-5)

So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God. (1 Corinthians 10:31)

Discussion question

7. Do you sometimes “major in the minors”? If so, give one or two examples.

Don't argue with troublemakers

There are times when it's wise to avoid talking about controversial topics with certain people—especially those who are only interested in stirring up trouble. Their main goal is to get you upset or to prompt you to say something foolish.

I urge you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and put obstacles in your way that are contrary to the teaching you have learned. Keep away from them. (Romans 16:17)

Discussion question

8. Do you know someone who argues just to upset you, not to have a good discussion? If so, how do you respond to him or her? How would you like to respond?

Memory verse

Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. (Ephesians 4:3)

Want to learn more?

Free online Bible study

Respect Others Even When You Don't Think They Deserve It
www.dougbrittonbooks.com/resources/respect-others

Book by Doug Britton

Talking with Respect and Love (marriage book)
www.dougbrittonbooks.com/bookstore/talk-with-respect

Homework – Day Three

1. Do you bring up differences of opinion too often, not often enough, or about the right amount?

Explain your answer:

2. What are some topics that are really important to you?

3. How do you talk about these topics—respectfully or disrespectfully?

Explain your answer:

4. What does it mean to “burn bridges” by the way you talk?

Day Four: Respond with Grace to Others' Personal Styles

In today's lesson, you will not read about responding with grace to people's faults and opinions. Instead, you will read about something that can be even more difficult—responding with grace to people whose personalities, habits, appearance, and ways of doing things are different from yours.

This can be hard if you have strong ideas about how things should be done—even such minor things as how someone dresses, loads the dishwasher, rolls up a toothpaste tube, or folds the laundry.

If it seems obvious to you that there is a proper or logical way to do something, it can be annoying when someone else does it differently. It can be especially annoying if you explain why your ideas make sense and the other person doesn't agree. After all, you may think, you obviously are right and the other person is being unreasonable.



Evaluate yourself

How do you respond to people whose personalities, habits, appearance, and ways of doing things are different from yours? As you read the following, ask yourself if any of them describe you.

I get annoyed at the ways people do things.

I wish people would do things the way I do—which is obviously the right way. For example, I wish they would:

- Load the dishwasher more efficiently.
- Find a parking space close to the store instead of far away.
- Leave the server a larger tip.
- Cook right (the way I do).
- Fill the car with gas when it gets down to one-quarter full.
- Install toilet paper so it rolls out (or rolls in).
- Eat with their mouth closed.
- Turn off the lights when they leave a room.

I get annoyed at people's habits.

I wish people would not be so annoying. For example, I wish they would:

- Be on time.

- Keep a cleaner house (or be less picky about keeping a perfect house).
- Use toothpicks privately, not in public.
- Keep a cleaner car (or don't spend so much time on their car).
- Be more consistent at taking care of daily-living responsibilities.

I get annoyed at people's appearance.

I wish people would pay more attention to their appearance. For example, I wish they would:

- Wear more up-to-date clothes (or stop trying to look up-to-date).
- Wear better clothes to church (or wear more casual clothes to church).
- Lose weight (or gain weight).
- Wash their clothes more often.
- Get a better haircut.
- Wear less makeup (or wear more makeup).
- Get rid of their tattoos.

I get annoyed at people's personalities.

I wish people would:

- Be more cheerful when they wake up (or be less cheerful when they wake up).
- Talk more (or talk less).
- Talk faster (or talk slower).
- Be more energetic (or be less energetic).
- Laugh more (or laugh less).

Discussion questions

1. Are you sometimes annoyed for any of the above reasons? If so, which ones? Why are they important to you?
2. What are other things that annoy you? Why are they important to you?

Recognize you may be right—or you may be wrong

It's possible that some of your opinions on the above topics are correct. On the other hand, it's unlikely you are right about everything. Sometimes you are probably wrong. In fact, often there are many ways something can be accomplished, and it doesn't matter very much how it's done.

In any case, the way you respond to the way others do things is more important than whether you are right or wrong.

Finally, all of you, live in harmony with one another; be sympathetic, love as brothers, be compassionate and humble. (1 Peter 3:8)

Discussion questions

3. Describe one time you thought you were right about something, but later realized you were wrong.
4. Assume you tell someone the best way to do something, but that person does it differently. How can 1 Peter 3:8 help you respond to the other person?

Remember not to major in the minors

Remember what you read in Day 3 about the early Christians who disagreed about whether it was okay to eat meat and whether one day was more sacred than another day. Paul's advice in Romans 14:1-5 was simple—let each person make up his or her own mind. Let's read this passage again:

Accept him whose faith is weak, without passing judgment on disputable matters. One man's faith allows him to eat everything, but another man, whose faith is weak, eats only vegetables. The man who eats everything must not look down on him who does not, and the man who does not eat everything must not condemn the man who does, for God has accepted him. Who are you to judge someone else's servant? To his own master he stands or falls. And he will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand. One man considers one day more sacred than another; another man considers every day alike. Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind. (Romans 14:1-5)

Paul's words illustrate the theme of today's lesson: Much that upsets us doesn't really matter. We should give each other "breathing room" when it comes to many personal decisions and habits.

Focus on changes you should make

Instead of focusing on changes you think other people should make, ask God to help you see changes you need to make.

You hypocrite, first take the beam out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye. (Matthew 7:5)

Discussion question

5. How can Matthew 7:5 help you respond with grace to other people?

Recognize that everyone is different—by God's design

God created all of us with different talents, personalities, physical abilities, and spiritual gifts. Don't expect everyone to be just like you. For example, if you only need six hours of sleep a night, don't judge someone who needs eight hours. If you are able to concentrate on many things at the same time, don't criticize someone who has trouble concentrating on more than one or two things at a time.

Along the same lines, realize that people have different energy levels. Although proper nutrition, exercise, and rest make a difference, some people have more energy than others. Some people can go nonstop for fourteen hours, while others collapse after eight hours.

The following passage was primarily written to say that all believers collectively make up the body of Christ, but it also illustrates the fact that everyone is different.

Now the body is not made up of one part but of many. If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," it would not for that reason cease to be part of the body. And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body," it would not for that reason cease to be part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be? But in fact God has arranged the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be. If they were all one part, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts, but one body. (1 Corinthians 12:14-20)

Enjoy others' differences.

Instead of getting upset by other people's differences, learn to enjoy them. If someone parks farther from the shopping mall than you would prefer, see the long walk as healthy exercise. If someone dresses in an entirely different style than you, appreciate the variety. If someone has a nasal twang or uses bad grammar, enjoy the way he or she talks.

Discussion question

6. What is something others do that bothers you? How could you look at this as refreshing, enjoyable, or stimulating?

On occasion, share your ideas with others

Today's lesson does not mean you should never talk about differences or offer suggestions about how to do things. Just don't bring things up too often. When you do bring them up, do so gently and respectfully.

Discussion question

7. Imagine that you would like to share a suggestion with someone about his or her personality, habits, appearance, or way of doing things. What words would you use to start the conversation? How could you make sure you don't get into an argument?

Pray for grace and love

It's easy to look down on people whose personalities, habits, appearance, and ways of doing things are different from yours. Even when you are sure you know better than someone else, ask God to help you respond with grace and love.

We know that we all possess knowledge. Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up. (1 Corinthians 8:1)

Memory verse

Finally, all of you, live in harmony with one another; be sympathetic, love as brothers, be compassionate and humble. (1 Peter 3:8)

Day Five: Answer Key to Test (may be removed by leader)

Note to teachers and small group leaders

Remove this page if you do not want group members to see these answers ahead of time.

True or false

- T 1. Showing grace means graciously putting up with others.
- F 2. It is a good idea to point out everyone's faults. They will appreciate it.
- F 3. Showing grace means never talking about problems.
- T 4. Showing grace means showing concern for others' sins, not condemnation.
- T 5. The way you talk about problems is usually just as important (or more important) than if you are right or wrong.
- F 6. Paul wrote that it's good to argue about whether or not Christians should eat meat since that is such an important issue.
- T 7. It's important for believers to try to build bridges with other believers.
- T 8. You can burn bridges if you criticize a lot or speak disrespectfully.
- T 9. Sometimes it may be appropriate to confront someone or establish "boundaries."
- T 10. If you frequently criticize someone, you may get in God's way.

Memory verses

- 1. 1 Peter 4:8

Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins.

- 2. 1 Peter 3:8

Finally, all of you, live in harmony with one another; be sympathetic, love as brothers, be compassionate and humble.



About the Author

Doug Britton, Bible-based Marriage and Family Therapist, has helped hundreds of thousands of people as a therapist, clinical director of a treatment center, seminar speaker, radio co-host, and author of over twenty books that show people how to apply God's truths in their daily lives.

He has also trained pastors, counselors, mentors, and lay leaders in biblical counseling, mentoring, and small group leadership.

Doug and his wife Skeeter live in Northern California.



Books

Doug has written Bible-based books on many daily-living topics. Visit www.dougbrittonbooks.com/bookstore.

Free online Bible studies for daily living

Read and download Doug's free online studies on marriage, parenting, anger, self-concept, anxiety, depression, temptation, fear of death, biblical counseling, mentoring, small group leadership, and other topics. Visit www.dougbrittonbooks.com/resources.

Seminars and retreats

Doug is the founder and president of LifeTree Institute and LifeTree Books. If you would like him or another member of the LifeTree team to speak in your church on any of the above topics, please visit www.dougbrittonbooks.com and click on the "Seminars" link.

We would love to hear from you

Was this book helpful? Do you have suggestions to make it better?

Tell us your thoughts by emailing owners-manual@dougbrittonbooks.com
(Be sure to mention the name of this book and what country you live in.)

More Books by Doug Britton

In addition to “The Owner’s Manual to the New You,” Doug Britton has written many more cross-cultural, Bible-based books on leadership, discipleship, and key areas of daily living.

Growing in Christ

Getting Started, Getting Connected
First Things First
Living by Grace

Living Free

Breaking Free (from Drugs and Alcohol)
Conquering Depression
Defeating Temptation
Healing Life’s Hurts
Overcoming Jealousy and Insecurity
Six Keys to Personal Growth
Six Keys to Successful Relationships
Strengthening Your Marriage
Victory over Grumpiness, Irritation, & Anger
Who Do You Think You Are?

Marriage by the Book

Laying a Solid Foundation
Making Christ the Cornerstone
Encouraging Your Spouse
Extending Grace to Your Mate
Talking with Respect and Love
Improving Your Teamwork
Putting Money in its Place
Celebrating Intimacy and Romance

Successful Christian Parenting

Parenting Foundations
Preparing Your Child for Life

Christian Leadership

How to Lead a Christ-Centered Small Group

To see the current list of books, visit www.dougbrittonbooks.com/bookstore.

Spread the Word

Sign up for Doug Britton’s email newsletter to learn about his new books, online Bible studies, and upcoming seminars and retreats. Sign up at www.dougbrittonbooks.com/newsletter.

Do you have a website or social media page? Give visitors access to free practical, Bible-based resources by linking to www.dougbrittonbooks.com.