

How To Deal With The Thorns In Your Life

Is there someone in your life that consistently gets on your last nerve? Someone you find yourself inwardly cringing at the thought of even being around? Someone who's loud and obnoxious and seems to know everything about everything and isn't open to correction? Someone you can't trust and who has disappointed or betrayed you in the past? Someone who, in general, is a thorn in your side?

What if I told you that the best way to deal with them is to pray for them? But not pray in the way you'd first expect—"Fix that person God. Make them listen, be less abrasive, change the way they treat others, me especially." Pray instead that God give them every good thing you want for yourself: health, good relationships, satisfying work and inner peace. Pray that every day for two weeks. Pray it even when it's only words or when you have to pray for the grace to be willing to pray it. If you do something amazing will happen. Your heart will be softened and you will be free.

Carrying resentments and judgments about others imprisons those carrying them and keeps them captive. It weighs their spirits down. The key to release is in their pockets, but it's a real struggle letting go of the familiar feelings and behaviors that have been held on to for so long. I'm not suggesting that you put yourself back in the same relationship with someone who abused or seriously hurt you. What I am saying is that you can choose to not let them, as Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) says, continue to live rent free in your head.

The Big Book of AA offered this advice about how to pray for those you resent, taken from Jesus' admonition to love your enemies, be good to those who hurt you...when someone asks you to carry a burden a mile, carry it two miles.... At first glance, it doesn't seem to make sense, but in God's way of doing things it makes perfect sense.

When I was working years ago in a chemical dependency treatment center I gave a lecture about that kind of freeing prayer. "That's the stupidest thing I ever heard," the leader of the group of about 50 patients shouted out. He went on, "some man raped my daughter several years ago and if I ever find that ##### person I'd kill him with my bare hands." "Where is he now?" I asked. "I have no idea," he snapped back. "And where are you?" I said. "I'm in a treatment center, but what's that got to do with anything?" he muttered, "That's still the stupidest thing I ever heard!"



A few weeks later he came up to me in the hallway and whispered, "You were right." "Could you say that louder? I didn't hear you," I responded. "You were right."

Though I've never been in his situation, I have dealt with people who are thorns in my spirit, and when I pray this way, I find I become free and my heart is often softened to see the wound that is causing the behaviors that so get to me. I get a glimpse of those persons as Jesus sees and loves them and begin to understand.

I can't say that I always pray like this, that I don't get sucked in to my own prisons of judgment and resentment. But I do know that when I pray for God to bless them as I want God to bless me, I see more good, more possibility for change. I am transformed. And sometimes I even discover that some of my worst thorns are actually roses.

—Angela Anno, Pastoral Associate