

Ransom Notes

Irritation or Blessing?

I heard a story about a student named Donald MacDonald from the Isle of Skye, who was admitted into the prestigious Oxford University, and was living in the hall of residence in his first year there. His clan was so excited that one of their own had made it into the upper class of education, but they were concerned how he would do in 'that strange land.' After the first month, his mother came to visit.

"And how do you find the English students, Donald?" she asked.

"Mother," he replied in his thick brogue. "They're such terrible, noisy people. The one on that side keeps banging his head against the wall, and won't stop. The one on the other side screams and screams, away into the night."

"Oh Donald! How do you manage to put up with these awful noisy English neighbors?"

"Mother, I do nothing. I just ignore them. I just stay here quietly . . . playing my bagpipe"

If this scenario were to happen next to my bedroom, I'd probably be irritated and grumpy. I'd be tempted to locate the offending musical instrument and find a creative way to make it disappear. Self-analysis tells me I become irritated rather easily. For example: When I'm . . .

- Eager to reach a scheduled event and road construction interferes
- Needing a quick lunch in order to make tee off time, but find an empty peanut butter container and/or jelly jar In a restaurant, anticipating quiet conversation with friend needing support, but loud talkers in adjoining table
- Enjoying a hike, but grains of sand find their way into my shoe
- Excited about seeing family but delayed because of cancelled flights
- Focused, working on a writing project, and the computer causes challenges, delaying task completion
- Running late, but observe urgent need of friend or stranger, provides a challenge – 'go' or 'stop and assist'

Undoubtedly many of you have scenarios which drive you to the boiling point, resulting in an explosion of unkind words, or screaming inside your head, causing you to want to bang the walls of the adjacent room. For some, the blood pressure accelerates or anger flits through your thoughts. I'm envious of humans who appear to never have a ruffled hair, disturbing event, or an irritating human driving them to consider leaping off a tall building or screaming.

Each time irritation takes over my mind and actions I try to remember Proverbs 15:1 and 4. "A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger." "The soothing tongue is a tree of life, but a perverse tongue crushes the spirit." The wise author of Proverbs steps on my toes again, with his thoughts in 12:16. "Fools show their annoyance at once, but the prudent overlook an insult." How can they manage to stay calm?

Those three verses provide super advice. The problem is, it is easy to read and agree with good advice, but implementing is a another thing. Challenges creep up quickly and automatic, negative responses leap from your mouth. The Bible shares several examples of men becoming angry, each with tragic consequences. In Genesis 4 Cain became so angry with his brother Abel, that he killed him.

Numbers 20 reminds us of the time when Moses lost his temper attempting to get water for his followers. He struck the rock twice even though god had told him to simply speak to the rock. Because of that thoughtless response, Moses was denied the opportunity of leading the Children of Israel into the promise land. Apparently he had just reached his breaking point and flew off the handle. Just think of what adventures he missed because of his impatience.

I get upset with thoughtless drivers or people who stand in the way of completing my ultimate task or goal. Numbers 22 shares how Balaam got ticked off at his own donkey. Balaam had a goal, but God was angry with his destination and sent an angel to stand in the road to stop him. Balaam was riding the beast when the donkey saw the angel standing in the road with a sword in his hand and turned off the road. You guessed it. Balaam, in anger, beat the poor creature in an effort to get his 'ride' back on track. Check out the incident and find out what unexpected action the donkey took that day.

Psalm 37:5-9 reminds us of the flip side of 'temper challenges.' Bottom line, our Psalm tells us to commit our way to the Lord, trust him, and then He will make your righteous ways shine like dawn. Then the tough part. "Be still before the Lord and wait patiently for him; DO NOT FRET . . . Refrain from anger and turn from wrath; . . . it leads only to evil." Goodness gracious, but this is so hard for some of us. But I love the final promise. "Those who hope in the Lord will inherit the land."

Challenges can bring a blessing if we remain calm and practice Christian love toward others. We become a witness for God, demonstrating kindness and patience. My prayer is that each of us will reduce our periods of irritation and, "If it is possible, as far as it depend on you, live at peace with everyone" (Romans 12:18).

