

# You are Here

“Eliminate negative people from your life.”

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Grab a bible and go Romans 15. It's gonna take a minute to set up where we're going. You Are Here is not about Columbia. The idea is if our culture was a shopping mall, here's a map to orient yourself to our assumed ideologies. Here's how to orient yourself to the cultural and spiritual beliefs of the culture we find ourselves in.

Today we're looking at: “Eliminate negative people from your life.”

- “Don't let anyone tell you how to live your life.”
- “Surround yourself with positive people.”
- “You can't worry about what anyone else thinks, you have to do what's best for you.”

Tends to be what Taylor Swift is singing about when she's not singing about a breakup.

- *Mean*: “My life is gonna go awesome... And all you'll ever be is mean.”
- *Shake it Off*: “...the haters, gonna hate, hate, hate, hate, I'm just gonna shake, shake, shake, shake, shake... Shake it off.”
- *Bad Blood*: It's not just that they have problems. It's that Taylor's not sure they can solve them. Used to be mad love. But now they got bad blood. Band-aids don't fix bullet holes...

All of these ideas have to do with how we think about relationships and community. How do we choose what kinds of people to fill our lives with?

There is some reality and needed advice wrapped up in some of these ideas:

There are plenty of negative people in the world. The Bible is not surprised by this fact at all. The whole book is full of sinners who find all kinds of ways to hurt themselves and others.

## **John 2:24 (NASB)**

But Jesus, on His part, was not entrusting Himself to them, for He knew all men.

Bunch of people start trusting in Jesus and following Him, but Jesus wouldn't entrust Himself (not fully) to anyone because He knew the heart of all men. Remember, Jesus is the most incredibly loving, selfless person who ever lived... and He still didn't entrust Himself to broken people. Jesus wouldn't argue that negative people exist... He would just argue that it's actually all of us, not just the really annoying folks.

There are specifically “negative” groups of people. Biblically, all of us are sinners sin and prone to damaging ourselves and other people; but there are also specific groups of folks who can be particularly annoying, difficult to love and/or damaging.

- *The foolish*: Proverbs talks about fools all the time. People who ignore how the world works, never learn, no humility, cause a lot of damage to themselves and others. Always making a mess for others to clean up.
- *The immature*: They don't have a lot of perspective. Well intentioned, but not grown yet.
- *The weak*: Folks who don't have a lot of strength. Don't bring a lot to the table. Could be a season of illness, mental/emotional strain. Could be immaturity.
- *The emotionally/ relationally burdensome*: Some people just take a lot out of you. They're draining or needy/clingy.

- *Abusers:* Some people are dangerous. They abuse their power and always take more than they give. Uncontrolled anger; cause incredible pain and damage. Controlling. Vicious. Mean.

For those who have been in hard abusive relationships there's almost always some needed separation, strict boundaries, and likely counseling needed to learn to walk in the freedom and peace Jesus offers. The Bible has tons to say on this, but in this sermon, not really what we're talking about. We're talking about the general pattern and posture of dumping people who take energy.

We all need healthy people in our lives. Once again, the Bible is on board here. Proverbs has all kinds of guidance about choosing wise friends; about the soul-benefits of people who speak kind and encouraging truth into our lives. We all need healthy community that isn't always draining and needing us.

And with all of that said... our culture is still off with the whole "eliminate negative people" idea. See, we think this is the pathway to strength; the way to be a healthy, stable, mature person is to avoid the weak. And the Bible confronts this idea overtly.

#### **Romans 15:1**

We who are strong have an obligation to bear with the failings of the weak...

That's pretty direct. If you believe yourself to be strong, faithful, mature. The way forward isn't to get rid of the negative folks. It's to embrace them. You have an obligation to do so. And at least part of that obligation is that you actually owe it to yourself. A couple reasons:

- *Your growth:* Learning to love the weak will actually make you stronger. You'll learn things about yourself you never would have learned otherwise. Patience, graciousness, gentleness, increased capacity. These are marks of maturity that can't be learned outside of dealing with people who need patience, gentleness, and graciousness.
- *Their growth:* In order to grow, the weak need someone stronger than them to love them and walk with them. By dismissing someone weak now, you could be cutting off the possibility of a vibrant, strong friendship 5 years from now. The true pathway to strength and maturity isn't to avoid the weak but to build relationships precisely with people who are hard to build relationship with.
- *Recipe for loneliness:* At some point, if the only people worthy of sharing life with you are strong and wonderful and mature and sinless as you, you'll eventually find no one meets your criteria. You'll end up lonely.

#### **Romans 15:1-2**

We who are strong have an obligation to bear with the failings of the weak, and not to please ourselves. Let each of us please his neighbor for his good, to build him up.

At the end of the day there are two binary categories for how you approach relationships in your life. Either you believe that the people around you exist to please you or you exist to please the people around you. And if you believe they exist to please you, that's called using people. And if you believe you exist to please others and build them up; that's called love.

There's only two options: You're using people or you're loving them.

Your perspective and choice here changes everything.

If you believe your spouse exists to serve you and increase your pleasure at all times, then you will be selfish, harsh, critical. Their best efforts will never be enough for you. You will be constantly tempted to look at other people and compare their highlight reel to your spouse's blooper reel and conclude, "I bet my life would be so much better if they were my spouse."

If you believe your children exist to serve you and increase your pleasure, there's gonna be a lot of yelling in your house. A lot of anxiety. Everything changes when you wake up remembering and resetting in the reality that God's called you to lead and serve your kids.

When your neighbor has the music too loud or has people over who park on your lawn...When your roommate leaves the dishes in the sink again, the question is how much anger riles up inside of you? Because it's an indicator: do you believe people exist to please you, or the other way around?

"Eliminate negative people from your life" is rooted in the belief that the people God has put around you exist to please you. And if they don't, get rid of them. It's the exact opposite of what Paul's saying here. And here's part of the problem: at some point, if the only people worthy of sharing life with you are strong and sinless and as mature as you, you will eventually find that no one meets your criteria. And we'll end up with a fifth of American adults very lonely.

But to adopt this love-based perspective takes some initial energy. This self-giving, community-building, others-focused, grace posture... it doesn't just come naturally to our selfish hearts. What motivates someone to say, "Yeah the weak people. Those are my people. Bring on the broken; the annoying; the messy. Bring it all!"

**Romans 15:3**

For Christ did not please himself, but as it is written, "The reproaches of those who reproached you fell on me."

This is the gospel in terms of inverse relational capital. Jesus didn't live His life with a "what can you do for me?" mentality. He didn't live His life or die His death to please Himself. He didn't live homeless and suffer as a criminal because it was enjoyable.

In Jesus' life and death, He's walking in the reality of bearing with the failings of the weak. Like I don't know if you've ever thought about this, but Jesus' disciples are some really negative people a lot of the time... All the time questioning Jesus, screwing up. Asking Him to rain down heaven fire on people. Telling Him there's no way to feed all these people. Fighting about who's the best disciple. Completely missing the point. Ironically, a lot of the time the disciples are telling Jesus that he needs to eliminate the negative people from His life. "Ughhh get these whiny children away from Jesus." "Ughhh Jesus we're trying to rest; tell these hurting people to go away."

And he never quits them.

Even though they ultimately quit on Him.

And it's not just that Jesus is patient and gracious with His disciples back then. That's how He walks with all His disciples, even me and you. Every time we see Jesus dealing patiently with the disciples and their idiotic questions, it's supposed to be a picture of how often Jesus has dealt patiently with us and our less than brilliant questions. Every time we see Jesus being abandoned, betrayed, back-stabbed, let down...every time it's supposed to remind us of how often we've quit on, abandoned, betrayed, back-stabbed, and let down Jesus.

And at some point, this reality has to penetrate your heart to where you realize, Jesus got nothing from me in this arrangement. He just poured out love. Over and over and over and over and all the way to pouring out His precious blood in the cross.

He wasn't ever using me. He couldn't have been using me. What did I have to offer Him? What could He use me for that He doesn't already have? I mean really think about it. What did you bring to Jesus' table? You had nothing to offer to Him to improve His quality of living. You had no amazing thoughts He'd never heard before. No perfect love for Him that He could trust in you. You had rejected Him. You were whiny, sinful, annoying, self-centered. And He came and served you. Lowered Himself and suffered for you. And despite our eternal lacking-ness, He persisted. He stayed the course to the cross to purchase you.

And that reality starts to soak into you and it changes you. you start to realize that every action of Jesus in loving the weak around Him is massive encouragement for you to do the same. This is exactly what it says in Hebrews.

**Hebrews 12:3**

Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted.

Consider Him. Set your mind on Him so that you won't grow weary. So that your heart won't grow faint as you seek to love your neighbor.

This is how it always works. God's people are called to take any annoyance, any wounds, any hardship of loving our neighbors well; pouring ourselves out consistently without growing weary as we follow in Jesus' footsteps. Because that is exactly what Jesus has done for us.

**Romans 15:4**

For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.

Paul says the entire Old Testament was written for our instruction, for our endurance and encouragement so that we might have hope. The whole book of sinful people hurting each other and God patiently sticking with them and not quitting on them. All intended to encourage us.

**Romans 15:5-6**

May the God of endurance and encouragement grant you to live in such harmony with one another, in accord with Christ Jesus, that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Think about Charlottesville. Every time people in our culture lament the brokenness we see in communities raging against each other, we are actually longing for heaven. Paul prays here for this church to be a little picture of heaven. Heaven is not a homogenous group of people who look like you, talk like you, think like you. So, neither should your community here. That's what I want for us. And he ends this passage by telling us how:

**Romans 15:7**

Therefore welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God."

Hospitality is the posture that sums all of this up. Instead of eliminating negative people from your life, Christ calls us to welcome them. To have a posture of inviting broken, sinful people into our life, the same way He has done for you.

"For the glory of God". More than your comfort is at stake here. God's glory is at stake and His vision for the church is at stake.

God's call for His people is to create a crazy grace-based counter culture. A city on a hill. A light in the darkness.

The goal for God's people is that when our neighbors and roommates and family members bounce into our culture they'd go, "what's wrong with these people? They're not using each other. They're not using me. They're going out of their way to serve each other. They're not quitting when it gets hard. They're sticking it out. They're in it for the long haul. They're going out of their way to welcome in the weakest people in the bunch.

- Erica and I got sick after the first week our kids went to school. Out of nowhere some friends bring over 3 days worth of meals. We're not bringing anything positive into their life at that point. We're sick. They're risking contamination just by coming to our house. Barely had the energy to mumble thank you and go back to sleep. Didn't get anything out of it, just grace pouring out.
- Just a week later some good friends of ours got really bad news. And I immediately start thinking, "ok, how do we love on these guys. How do we take care of them?" And my wife says, "I'm gonna just go over and be with them right now."
- Church family has loved me in the midst of my depression.
- Everyone's going to have a weak moment, a weak season, a time when you're the one in need of grace. And the vision for God's community is that you would have built your life giving away grace, love and building up those around you; not pushing away people who aren't good enough for you... so that in the seasons when you're struggling, the same would be returned to you.

What to do:

- Start using the 2 minutes at the beginning of each gathering to intentionally meet someone and welcome someone.
- Who's the most annoying, energy draining person in your life? Just start praying for them once a week. Pray for God to soften your heart and change your perspective.
- Mark one night a week on your calendar as hospitality night. One night a week where you're intentionally looking for new folks, for hurting folks, for folks who need an invite, for folks who aren't always the easiest to love. Pray that God might give us the opportunity to invite them over for dinner. And for God to grow us in the process.
- Serve the City opportunities.