



## How do I deal with all the crazy relationships during the holidays?

This is a great question - one that I'm sure more than one person would like to have an answer for. The people we have to deal with at various gatherings is the thing that seems to cause the most stress during the Christmas season. Things such as divorce, sibling rivalries, controlling parents and meddling in-laws can make life difficult at any time of the year. But they really 'throw a wrench' into life during December, because of all the opportunities we have to face the people in those difficult relationships.

I'm sure I don't have all the answers - every situation is unique - but here are a few general 'rules of thumb' from God's word:

*For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. Ephesians 6:12*

**Principle #1: People are not the enemy. Satan is.** He's the one we are in a battle with. He simply works through the sinful natures of people (including us) in an effort to totally mess up our lives. You are in a battle, but it is with Satan and our sinful natures, not with other people. Remember, you aren't in competition with your siblings, your "ex" or anyone else. Even if they still act like that's the case, you don't have to play that game.

*If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him. James 1:5*

**Principle #2: Don't go into the battle armed with just your emotions.** Plan ahead. You have a good idea of who is going to stress you out at a certain function - and why. Ask God ahead of time for the wisdom to know what to say and how to deal with that person.

*You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; [23] to be made new in the attitude of your minds; [24] and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.*

*[25] Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to his neighbor, for we are all members of one body. [26] "In your anger do not sin": Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, [27] and do not give the devil a foothold. [28] He who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with his own hands, that he may have something to share with those in need.*

*[29] 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. [30] And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. [31] Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. [32] Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you. Ephesians 4:22-32*

There are a bunch of principles in that passage...

**Principle #3: You can't control how other people are going to act - or react. But you *always* have control over how you act and react.** Make sure your actions and reactions are ones that God would want. [v24]

**Principle #4. One thing you always have control of is your attitude.** [v23] Do an attitude check before you head out the door for one of those functions where you are going to see one of those people who cause you relationship stress or anxiety. Again, pray and ask God to give you the attitude you need.

**Principle #5. Learn to bite your tongue - not just the Christmas cookies.** Emotions run high when you have to see people who have given you trouble or hurt you in the past. One of the common emotions is anger. As the passage reminded us anger isn't a sin, it is a natural reaction to things that aren't right or don't fit our expectations. The problem is that anger most often leads us to sin. And the majority of those anger-sins are "unwholesome talk coming out of our mouths." Take the "high road." If someone wants to "start something," you don't have to allow them to drag you down to the "low road."

**Principle #6: Forgive. It is truly the most Christ-like thing you can do.** And, remember this: When you don't forgive, the person you are holding a grudge against is still controlling your life (by making you bitter). When you forgive, you have set yourself free from their influence and from your own bitterness. That may be the greatest gift you can give yourself this Christmas.

(Keep in mind that "I forgive you," is not the same as "It's ok." If someone hurt you it is NOT ok. Forgiveness is literally the cancellation of a debt or bill. When someone hurts you "they owe you one." And our human nature is to want to make things "even" again by getting back at them - making them pay. When we forgive we are saying, "What you did is not "ok", but I'm not going to get back at you. I'll leave that to God if He thinks it's necessary.")

**One final thing to keep in mind:** You will be setting an example for your kids. They will learn to deal with troubling relationships the same way you do. Make it your goal to follow God's principles and set them a positive example.

Thanks for asking,  
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Send your questions to <mailto:pastor@livingwordlutheran.net>