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## HOW DO YOU HELP SOMEONE WHO WON'T HELP THEMSELVES? By Tanya Curren

We all have someone in our life or know of someone who should change, but won't. They are either in denial about needing help, or they stubbornly hold onto their habits, behaviors and attitudes without the desire to make positive changes. It can be so frustrating to care for someone that you want to help, yet they won't even help themselves! This frustration can lead to feelings of guilt because you can't figure out how to help them in an effective way.

Do you have someone like this in your life? Think of the husband who won't stop drinking, the wife who won't stop spending, the son who won't stop using, the daughter who won't end an unhealthy relationship, the brother who causes so much family drama, the sister who won't stop lying, or the friend who won't stop complaining. These are just some of the scenarios that we see happening in many people's lives today. How do you deal with someone who is locked in a behavior or pattern that you view as destructive? How do you cope with someone in your life who brings drama and pain, yet you love them and don't want to cut them off? How can you handle phone calls, emails and texts with a person who refuses to change?

Let me give you some practical ways that you can answer all of those questions. This isn't easy, and there isn't one pat answer that fixes everything in an instant, but if you incorporate the following things into your life, you will have more peace and be equipped to handle a difficult person or situation with calmer control.

### **PRAY FOR THEM**

As a Christian, this seems like the obvious first answer. Yet, sometimes we get so irritated with someone else that it's the last thing we want to do! Let's just be honest, it is SO hard to pray for someone who makes your blood pressure skyrocket! We can read in Matthew 5:44 where Jesus commands us to pray for our enemies and those who persecute us, but it sometimes seems impossible. This is where we must allow the supernatural power of the Holy Spirit to come in. There is no way we can pray on our own and trust our human nature to love an enemy. It is only through the power and might of God that we are able to put our human feelings aside and pray for someone who has hurt us.

You might be thinking, "Well, the person in my life isn't really my "enemy," but they sure are difficult to pray for!" I understand. We think of an enemy in a dramatic movie scene way, where

there are fights with spears and swords and blood and guts. That's not the enemy we're looking at here. Even if someone isn't your actual enemy, it can be hard to pray for them because you see their hurtful and destructive behavior causing pain to you and those you love. Again, my first answer is to pray for them. Pray that God will change their heart. Pray that they will submit their will to the power of the Holy Spirit, who can change ANYONE. Pray that God opens their eyes to see the pain they are causing others. Pray for God's wisdom and for Him to give you words to speak to them. Pray, pray, and oh yeah: pray some more. Never think that you don't know how to pray, either. If you know how to talk, you know how to pray. It's that simple!

The more you talk to God about it, the less you'll need to talk to others about it. I have found that the more I pray for someone, the less I need to go and get other's opinions about it. I have also found that it helps me release the burden as I give it to God. This brings me to the second extremely important thing I want you to remember.

### **CARE WITHOUT CARRYING**

There is a huge difference between caring for someone and carrying their burden. HUGE difference! It is so important that you learn how to care for someone, yet not carry their problem or pain. It is interesting that some of the most Godly, compassionate and caring people have the most difficult time with this. They have the love of Jesus in their hearts for others, so their motives are pure. They love to pray and want to see others live in the fullness of Christ. But the flip side of this type of person is that they get so emotionally involved in someone else's crisis or life that they end up being overwhelmed and burdened because they have transferred that person's situation onto themselves.

I understand this type of person because I used to be this person. I care for others deeply. When I love someone or something, I'm all in, baby. I love 100%. I'm not a halfway type of person with anything. So if I care for you, then I care for you a lot. And if you hurt someone I love, then I get angry and take it personally. But what I have had to learn is that I can't fight someone else's fight. I can't continually cry, lose sleep and damage my health in the name of loving someone else. It has been a really hard thing to learn, believe me. I used to get so upset to the point of becoming consumed with someone else's situation. I would do all of the good things – pray, call them, encourage them, etc. – but then I would pick up their burden like a huge backpack filled with rocks and carry it around mentally and emotionally. I would think about ways I could help them – almost to the point of obsessing about it. Their issue would become my issue, so now I not only had to deal with my issues in life, but I was adding on piles and piles more!

Has this happened to you? You may not even be aware of it, because I wasn't until my husband intervened and told me how much this was bothering me. He pointed out that I wasn't just walking beside others I loved as I supported them; I was trying to walk in their shoes with them! He told me in a very loving way that I had to get a grip on my emotions and stop transferring their life onto mine. I had to acknowledge this and realize that this was not how God wanted me to live. I had to realize that God wanted me to love others, but not to the point of destroying myself. I had to recognize that when we pray, we are to give that huge backpack of burdens to God and then leave it there. Is this hard to do? Yes. Is it impossible to do? Absolutely not. Does it take practice? Yes. Can you learn how to do it? Of course you can!

One of the best ways you can learn how to do this is by starting now and starting small. Think of the ways you carry someone else's burden. Do you cry? Do you obsess? Do you worry? Does it make you physically ill? Does your heart race at night? Do you lose sleep? Know yourself. Know how you respond to situations like these. See what triggers anxiety in your heart and mind. Then, (and this goes back to the most important thing), talk to God about it. Tell Him everything. Tell Him how you are so concerned to the point of being a basket-case with frazzled nerves. Tell Him how you want to help, but don't know how. Ask Him to show you ways to deal with your feelings. Ask Him to calm your heart, ease your mind and bring strength to your soul. As you discipline yourself to pray and ask Him these things, He will reveal Himself and answers to you.

This is one of the many awesome ways that God operates! When we come before Him and seek to know His ways, He loves to reveal Himself and give us peace! It is a beautiful process, but again – it is something that comes with a price. The price is the sacrifice of our time and discipline. Hebrews 13:15 says that we are to, "...continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise..." One way you give God your "sacrifice of praise" is by stopping long enough to praise Him and hear from Him. This means that you can't be on Facebook until the second you fall asleep. I think it's a ridiculous concept to be on your Smartphone in bed telling the world good night as you read your home page until you pass out. How in the world are you supposed to pray and hear from God when you have everyone else's voice shouting from the screen? I also believe it is so unnecessary to have your Bluetooth stuck in your ear while you're in the middle of church! How can you be fully tuned into to what your pastor is teaching when you have half of your ability to hear completely covered?! Plus, your attention can't be on the Word 100% because a potential phone call might come through, so you are present physically, but not fully present mentally.

What saddens me is that I see how technology has changed our world to the point that people stay busy just to stay busy. It is as if there is a desire to drown out every moment of quiet time so that it can be filled with talking, texting, announcing and displaying. Just know that if you choose to fill your every waking moment with a piece of technology in your hand, ear and face, you probably won't be able to hear the still, small guiding voice of God. I have said this for years, "You can be deep in the Word or scattered to the world, but you can't be both." Of course you can be on Facebook sometimes, call those you love and text your friends. But remember, this all comes with a balance. This brings me to my next important point:

### **SET HEALTHY BOUNDARIES**

I can't say it enough. God wants you to have healthy boundaries set around your heart, mind, time, finances...every area of your life! When you put everything in your life into perspective and set those healthy boundaries around yourself, things fall into place. This is a huge part of helping someone who won't help themselves. If you don't take the time to ask God what you should allow in versus what you shouldn't, usually the other person will infringe upon your time and heart. Think of the child who continually wants more money. This is a person who is infringing upon your finances. Think of a co-worker who manipulates situations at work that make you look bad. This is a person who infringes upon your job. Think of a spouse who needs to lose weight to live a long and healthy life, but refuses. This is a person who infringes upon your ability to have a long marriage together.

Can you “fix” any of these people? No, but you can decide how you will react to them. Remember, you will be miserable if you go around trying to fix everyone and everything. It is an impossible mission, and even Tom Cruise and his tough team can’t help with this. The best thing to do after praying and releasing the person or situation to God is to look at areas that need good boundaries. Say no to the child who continually comes asking for money. You don’t need to provide financial life-support just because you love your child. In fact, studies have shown that this actually cripples a child’s ability to be self reliant long term. Of course, situations arise that warrant help, but you should not be guilted into providing money when a child is capable of taking care of themselves. If you are dealing with a situation like this, I highly recommend the book, *The Millionaire Next Door*. In it co-authors, Thomas Stanley and William Danko, call this EOC: Economic Outpatient Care. It is a term used to express the false sense of financial security an adult child receives when an affluent parent provides money. In their bestselling book, they give great ideas for producing children who become self reliant adults.

If you work with someone who is manipulative and does things that make you look bad, be aware of this and look for ways to prevent it. Maybe you need to set boundaries around your working relationship and watch what information you share. Or, perhaps you need to address it directly so it doesn’t continue to get worse. If you are proactive and pray for God to guide you in your words and actions, you will have more peace as you know that God is protecting you and your job and He is the one in control. We can’t control what someone else is going to say, but we can trust that our God is a God of justice and He is the one who protects our job.

Before I had my son, I was a teacher. I was at an interview with a new principal and new school, and she was looking over my resume. As she was questioning me, she asked me if I thought I was going to get the job. I told her that I knew that if God wanted me here, He would put it on her heart to hire me. If not, then that meant He wanted me at another school. I told her that I knew she was the one that would be physically making the decision, but ultimately it was God’s decision. She smiled and I got the job. I hope this encourages you for your job and your life. God is in control – not another person. He will guide you to where you need to be and protect your position as long as He wants you there. Fearing about it, crying about it and worrying about it are unnecessary distractions for you, my friend.

If you are married to someone who won’t take care of themselves, I want to encourage you to do this next step:

### **ENCOURAGE THEM**

There is such power in speaking positive words! The Bible has so much to say about it, including Proverbs 12:18, Proverbs 18:21 and Ephesians 4:29. Sometimes we are so frustrated with someone and their negative behavior that we just want to tell them off or tell them how they should live their life. Let’s face it; it is hard to be positive around someone who is annoying! It is difficult to find something nice to say to someone who gets under our skin! But truly, it is necessary. How can you get your spouse to put down that doughnut, that drink or those cigarettes? You tell them how much you love them and that you don’t want them to be in bondage to ANYTHING. You don’t berate them, but instead you tell them how much you love them and want them healthy and happy and

FREE. You don't tell them they're fat, but instead you tell them you want to work out together. You start buying healthier foods and incorporating new recipes that you eat together. You don't isolate yourself from them, but instead you show them that you can do this TOGETHER.

If you have a spouse addicted to any substance, keep speaking encouraging words of life over them. Tell them that you see them free, whole and restored. Remind them how powerful God is and how with His strength, they can come off of anything. Use stories like my personal story to show them how God has restored others. That is one of the reasons we created my audio CD, Broken Places. It is so that others can hear how God restored my life from so much physical pain and addiction to prescription medications. It's a practical way that we encourage others to fight for a healthy, free life and trust in God's ability to restore their life completely. Find resources like ours that are positive and practical and listen to them together. This is such an excellent way to be a part of change in the life of someone you love.

Tell the person you love that you see them whole. This is powerful! Often, this person is beating themselves up and is listening to a lot of negative outside voices. You need to be the voice of truth. Be a steady and focused voice of strength in their life. Even if you have to set boundaries where you don't allow them to pull on you emotionally, you can still send empowering emails or texts to them with a Scripture that they will connect with. Do you know something great that will come out of this? It will make you stronger, too. The more you search for Scriptures to encourage someone else, the more they will become buried in your heart and mind. This is such an awesome way to grow as a Christian, because you are helping someone else and you are growing closer to the Lord at the same time!

Another great idea is to keep a journal or record of the Scriptures you use to encourage someone else. What you will find is that you will have a growing reference list that you can use for others. Life seems to run in cycles, so chances are high that you'll meet someone who could use those Scriptures at another time. You could even incorporate these into your personal Bible study or one with friends. In fact, it would be great if you shared this idea with your friends and got them to do it too. Then you could add your lists together and have an awesome cache of life-giving statements you can share with someone you love!

If this seems daunting to you, don't get overwhelmed. There are many resources available at bookstores and online that already have Scriptures broken down into categories. I have a book that I got from a church years ago called, The Bible Promise Book. It has different sections like prayer, guilt, death, comfort, etc. with corresponding Scriptures. Find something like this if you are just starting out and want great Scriptures to encourage your loved one.

Let me close by reminding you how important you are. You play a vital role in the lives of your family and those you love. Don't underestimate the power of your voice in their life. They might not be taking your advice, but they are hearing you. What you are doing is sowing seeds of life, positivity and God's love into the soil of their heart and mind. This is extremely powerful! You may have no idea when these seeds will come to fruition, but God does. Do not give up, and do not get discouraged. If it seems like you're in a season with them that will never end, remind yourself that it will end. All seasons end, even if they last longer than we would like them to.



God will continue to give you ways you can influence others in your life if you ask Him and discipline yourself to listen. Take the time to slow down so that you can be filled with His power and presence. The more you do this, the more peace and focus you will have. With this, you can change your world.

In Him,

*Tanya*



Tanya Curren is the co-founder of Boundless Limits International, a ministry of encouragement and empowerment. In 2004 Tanya Curren was in a life threatening coma for 8 days as a deadly infection ravaged her body. Given two hours to live, she survived only to face the ordeal of a painful three year recovery. She is the author of Broken Places, The Proverbs Devotion Guide, Embracing Change & Conflict, and several other CD's. In her conferences and seminars, Tanya shares with others the life-lessons she learned through her journey to restoration. Tanya travels and speaks at local, regional and international venues, and is passionate about guiding others to have a personal, real relationship with Jesus Christ.