

Have an Enemy?

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I have a good friend who has an enemy; someone who is trying to discredit him and his ministry. Among other things, this foe created an anonymous website wherein he posts inflammatory blogs, lodges complaints and misconstrues incidents. Obviously, my friend is very bothered by this. He asked me how he should respond to the attacks. My emotions want to tell him to fight against the guy. But reason prevailed and I had to prayerfully consider my counsel.

What would you tell someone who has an enemy?

The Scripture is replete with stories of God's people having to deal with their enemies. The New Testament offers solid advice on what to do and what not to do. Here are some thoughts to consider when you are faced with the difficult challenge of having an enemy.

1. Don't go to war, go to prayer. When faced with injustice it is our natural tendency to react with anger, revenge and retaliation. However, their unchecked expression usually only makes things worse. Behind our negative and vengeful thoughts is a cry for emotional justice. It feels unfair, it hurts deeply, or it's just not right, our inner voice screams. These emotions and thoughts often come out as anger. But, 1 Peter 3:9 encourages us to "not return evil for evil, or insult for insult, but blessing instead." And, Matthew 5:44 challenges us to "...love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you."

2. Let it refine you, not define you. Use your enemy's criticisms as stepping stones to improve your practices, develop your character and deepen your faith. But don't succumb to believing exaggerations or negative narratives from your enemies. Rarely is everything true that they accuse you of. However, there usually are grains of truth that may help you do an even better job and become more like Jesus. Don't be hesitant to admit your mistakes. It's ok to make mistakes and it even better to admit to them.

3. Keep the "main thing the main thing!" Enemies tempt us to refocus too much of our energy on defending ourselves. Our focus needs to remain primarily on what God has called us to do. Having an enemy is upsetting, challenging and distracting. However, doing what God has called you to do and being who God has called you to be, is far more important. It's the main thing. Nehemiah had enemies who wanted him to stop building the wall and come down and talk to them. He didn't. (Nehemiah 6:3)

4. Defend only what is essential. There are times and situations where you need to respond to the criticism or challenge. However, make sure you only do so when it is absolutely required in order to preserve your ministry and life, not your reputation. God will defend it. Season your response with grace and truth. Do not exaggerate, manipulate or challenge. Petition with an attitude of humility.

5. Be humble. Pride in a leader's life is often the focal point for change even when the attack is unfair. It can keep leaders from learning and it robs them of God's favor. It's God's grace that enables us to be what He called us to be and to do what He called us to do. When dark clouds form and an enemy strikes, we need grace - lots and lots of it. Grace will do for us what we cannot do for ourselves. As James 4:6 says, "*God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble.*" Humility is the path to encountering more grace. It is God's grace that makes all the difference in whether we survive and thrive.

6. Fear not...have hope! Having to suffer unjustly is tormenting, and the enemy's attacks can provoke fear. What will happen? Will this ruin me? Ruin the ministry? When fear rises, remember 1 Peter 2:19-20. "*For this finds favor, if for the sake of conscience toward God a man bears up under sorrows when suffering unjustly.*" Our Father is the guardian of my friend's soul and life. He will determine his future, not someone's war against him.

"...and while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously." 1 Peter 2:23