



# Dealing with the Difficult People in Our Lives

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**ruminate**, v. — *to chew over again; to meditate; to ponder; to think on over and over again.*

**speculate**, v. — *to meditate; to contemplate or reflect; to consider a subject by turning it in the mind and viewing different aspects and relations; to consider attentively; to review, often inconclusively; to take to be true on the basis of insufficient evidence; to be curious or doubtful about; to wonder.*

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Rumination can be a good thing. We might recall a joyful event in our lives, think about someone that brings us delight, or look forward to something tasty we've had before and get our mouth watering. We can ruminate on the Word of God which is incredibly beneficial, pondering or meditating on a truth our heart needs to be reminded of so its roots sink down deep. Or we might play the lyrics of a worship song that ministers to us personally over and over in our mind, like a record on repeat.

Speculation can also be used for good. We might gauge someone's character by good qualities we've consistently seen in the past, and predict how they might respond or react in the future. We can apply that same concept to the Father, anticipating His good provision for, or redemption of, a situation in the future based on His faithfulness in the past.

Rumination and speculation have negative sides as well. Their negative applications make us prone to worry, make ill-fitting assumptions, and convict others based on past history rather than exhibit Christlike compassion and hope for change. The two go hand-in-hand. In many cases, we use one to inform the other.

When we dwell in our minds on how things went down poorly in the past, we make assumptions that they will go down in a similar way, or even worse, the next time. And they may! Regardless, we fail to give the other party the benefit of the doubt when we presuppose what someone's response will be — *particularly with the difficult or disgruntled people in our lives* — based on past encounters, unfairly convicting them in our hearts and minds before the next interaction.

Plain and simple, that kind of mind-play is draining and unfruitful. Maybe it will be the same, and maybe it won't. Maybe our own interactions and contributions play apart. If we have already convicted the other party in our heart and mind, we will probably brace ourselves in anticipation of the negative, having an unpleasant tone in our voice or a look on our face, rather than be pleasant in the moment, kind and gracious, willing to lean in with a listening ear and a gentle answer.

***"A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger."***

— Proverbs 15:1 (NIV)

Often times disgruntled people simply want to be heard and their concerns to be acknowledged. That doesn't mean we have to agree. And it definitely doesn't mean we should chime in with our own words of negativity. What it does mean, is listening to complaints like Christ, responding with validation such as, *"That sounds awful/trying/frustrating/etc. I can see why you're upset/hurt/etc."* Using that example, we can comfort like Christ with compassion — *pausing to let the acknowledgement sink in* — then offer a kind, Spirit-led word of encouragement, and potentially defuse the situation. Hurt accuses. Pain complains. Sin criticizes. People are much more willing to listen if they have felt heard.

This approach helps to remove speculation and negative body language that might add fuel to the other persons fire, and keeps us in right standing with God. This strategy is meant as a means to navigate difficult people and negative, critical, or draining conversations. If we can approach those encounters with God-given and Spirit-led grace, it has the power and potential to disarm the situation and soften the heart of the one who desperately wants to feel seen and heard. And when the encounter is over, we can let it go. The other persons frustration is not ours to carry.

Who might you need to show that kind of grace and Christ-like compassion to in your life?