

9 Strategies for Drama-Free Living

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*It is never too late to start your serenity
journey*

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Letter from the author

Some conflict and confrontations are part of healthy emotional relationships. You'll never be able to remove them completely. But you can take steps to minimize the unnecessary and unhealthy conflict we call drama.

For a long time I believed I was a drama-magnet. No matter how hard I tried to be happy, fate would throw a wrench in my plans. Nothing worked out the way it was supposed to. I was angry at the world and ashamed of my failures. I blamed myself for not doing more (and not being more) for everyone else.

Every day I questioned my abilities, my opinions, and my worth. I wasted hours obsessing over what I should have done better. I envied peaceful, happy people like it was my job. All I could think was "Why is my life so hard?"

Eventually, I realized my life was no harder than any others'. It was better than most, in fact. What kept me in a perpetual state of drama was my refusal to accept the things I could not change, failure to change the things I could, and utter confusion about the difference.

Today, I see the world with a new set of eyes; living confident in my value, free from drama, and grateful for every blessing. There are still challenges and questions, but unnecessary conflict is stripped away when the serenity prayer is applied to life.

God, grant me the serenity
to accept the things I cannot change,
courage to change the things I can,
and wisdom to know the difference. Amen.

You do not have to accept overwhelming pain and confusion as normal. With the right tools and dedication to awareness, drama can be kicked to the curb.

These 9 strategies make up the foundational principals of serenity. Applying these diligently and thoroughly to your life will significantly reduce both your internal and external conflict.

#1

Ditch Your Expectations

Life rarely unfolds according to plan. It's messy and unpredictable. And how you handle that unpredictability will determine your level of peace moving forward. The faster you accept changing circumstances, the faster you'll ultimately experience more peace and less drama.

In my late twenties, I spent an obscene amount of time choosing to be depressed and angry because I expected to be married by 26. I made two fatal mistakes: 1) I built this expectation real high (complete with a fiancé) and 2) I couldn't let it go. As difficult as accepting set backs and losses can be, it's nearly impossible when you cling to your original expectations. I blamed myself, God, specific men, and just men in general. Jealousy fueled my anger and loneliness. I spiraled slowly into a hot mess until I finally released my expectation. Once that was done, I was free to embrace my single life and enjoy it wholeheartedly.

Loosely held expectations help us to make sense of this chaotic world. But tightly held expectations are an attempt to control what will happen next. And since virtually nothing in this world is within our control, wishing those expectations were real for any substantial length of time is pointless.

Essentially, it is a waste of time and energy.

On a spiritual level, an expectation is faith put in an earthly desire, not God. God's perfect will is ignored and instead we cling to our own broken cravings.

Trusting God's plan cuts out the drama and leads you directly down the right paths. Trust in expectations (i.e. your own understanding) will cause more conflict.

“Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not rely on your own understanding; think about Him in all your ways, and He will guide you on the right paths.”

– Proverbs 3:5-6



#2

Make Gratitude a Daily Habit

Every moment spent in gratitude is another moment spent in joy. You have a choice to recognize your blessings or ignore them. The more frequently you give thanks, the easier it becomes to quickly recall those positive emotions.

Choose gratitude. Choose joy.

Take a look around. You are surrounded by blessings. When was the last time you acknowledged them?

It's healthy to focus on desires and goals. But when focus becomes fixation, the blessings in hand fade into the background. Give enough attention to what you don't have and it becomes habit. And habits are hard to break. So much so, that when you finally reach your goal, it will most likely be unsatisfying. Not because it does not mean anything to you, but because you are out of the habit of celebrating what you have.

Start small and be thankful for your socks. Then, build up your gratitude habit until you start feeling grateful for your enemies. Now there is a great habit.

The impact of daily gratitude is profound. Gratitude creates significance; it creates meaning. Events that would be pointless to one person, are cherished memories to one who is grateful for the moment.

Gratitude is a gift. Focus on it to produce feelings of abundance, pleasure, safety, and connection. Express it to produces positive ripple effects in the world.

#3

Take Your Thoughts Captive

Do not underestimate the power of thoughts. The mind has more influence over your life than any outside being. It is a super computer that is constantly translating information from your body, your heart, and surrounding environment. The mind collects, categorizes and assigns importance to each piece of information, creating the filter through which you see the world.

Using this filter, the mind produces a series of decisions resulting in the trajectory of your life. For example, Carla had never thought of herself as “good enough.” She decided to put down her dream of organizing a non-profit for single mothers and took a job as a nanny instead of attending college. One weighty thought (“I’m not good enough”) lead Carla down a specific path.

But just one new thought can alter the filter enough to produce new emotions and new decisions leading to a completely different journey. In this case, Carla discovered a new thought. She learned God made her perfect – more than “good enough.” This new thought brought more confident emotions, which resulted in a successful non-profit for single mothers.

*“and every high-minded thing
that is raised up against the
knowledge of God, taking every
thought captive to obey Christ.”
– 2 Corinthians 10:5*



This is why we are called to take every thought captive and align our thoughts with God’s thoughts. They can build us up toward the truth, or tear us down and stifle God’s love. Nurture God’s truth in your thoughts and you will harvest love and joy along your journey.

#4

Worship God



God is love; worship simply causes you to connect with that love.

Acts of worship can look very different across nations, denominations, and individuals. This is because God has a personal relationship with us all. There is no one right way to worship. It could be a quiet and still moment for one person and a loud, physically active moment for another. The most important component to worship is acknowledging His sovereignty in your life.

I know, the idea of worship can come with some negative baggage, but hear me out. Worship is not about lifting God up and keeping us down. It is about coming closer to God. It is about lifting our spirits by recognizing the magnitude of His love for us. It is about increasing our faith in His personal guidance in our every moment.

God does not need you to worship Him. Rather, He wants you to understand His never changing affection for you specifically. He wants to calm your spirit, center your soul, and bring relief to your mind. Worship is His means.

#5

Take Responsibility For Your Thoughts & Actions

D6 This sounds like obvious common sense to most people. But most people *also* try to avoid responsibility for at least some of their actions. Pointing fingers and deflecting blame is a great way to feel better about yourself and make enemies all at once. It definitely falls under the category of drama-maker.

Admitting poor decisions can be difficult. The fear of living with guilt and shame can be overwhelming, even when the physical consequences of owning responsibility may be small. At the root of all, it's the possibility of being exposed as unlovable that motivates lies and blame shifting.

In reality, it is the lies and blame shifting that creates wedges in relationships. Owning the truth shows an obvious respect for others. It may raise an uncomfortable situation, but it provides an opportunity for healing and restoration that lies and blame will never produce.

Plus, dodging responsibility will have you carrying the burden of a lie. Taking responsibility is taking on the truth. And the truth is what sets you free. As Christians, we do not have to carry the burden of guilt once we take responsibility.

“We are forgiven and free by the endless grace of God. We have nothing to fear from responsibility.” 

Our guilt was taken on by Jesus when He died on the cross. God has forgiven us. We are forgiven and free by the endless grace of God. We have nothing to fear from responsibility.



#6

Keep The Pain in Perspective

“Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.” - James 1:2-4

We humans have short memories. We focus most clearly on what affects us acutely in the immediate moment – especially when it comes to pain.

Pain focuses our attention like nothing else. This is a great survival skill for, say, a broken leg. But this is a poor survival skill for a student being bullied at school, or a single parent on the verge of bankruptcy.

The most recent struggle or loss appears overwhelming when we examine it closely. The more detail we discover, the more painful it becomes. It appears overwhelming. But the truth is, this pain is only one season in a life filled with ever changing seasons.

Take a step back from the pain. Gear up your “helicopter thinking” and see it from a new perspective. In other words, try to see it in the context of the whole journey (side-by-side by positive memories). Alone it seems overly important, but as part of a life-time its impact appears smaller.

This painful season is not the end. God uses pain to prepare us for a role in His love story. These are literally growing pains. Growing closer to Him and growing into our new role or purpose. His motivations may seem unclear, but trust that He knows He is leading you in exactly the right direction.

#7

Practice Forgiveness

Anger is bound to be a part of your story. It is a healthy emotion within the grief journey towards acceptance. Only when you hold on to your anger and nurture it does it become resentment.

There's no doubt about it; resentments are enticing. They promise the illusion of safety, control and rightness. But the security is false. Resentments cannot prevent you from further pain. They will only cause you more stress and conflict (both within yourself and with others).

Resentments keep you chained to anger. It seeps into your thoughts, your emotions, and your physical body. Holding on to resentments affects your physical health, spiritual health, and your relational health. In the end, the only person you are harming is yourself. Your anger cannot control anyone else's actions.

Forgiveness is for you, not your aggressor. It sets you free from the poisonous anger (even if you think it righteous). You deserve to be free from the wasted energy and distraction that resentments create. You deserve to spend more time enjoying the present moment instead of revisiting the pain of the past.

“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.”

– 1 John 1:9

Remember, God forgave your laundry list of sins. He asks that we love and forgive others in the same way. Allow Him to judge and provide the justice you crave. Leave your anger at His feet and walk away free.

#8

Serve Others

“Teacher, which command in the law is the greatest?’ He said to him, ‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.” – Matthew 22:36-40

When we serve others, we are not serving them alone. We become God’s physical instruments when we offer kindness, understanding, and a helping hand. In service, we become an example of God’s larger love, an arrow pointing broken people toward His care.

“Carry each other’s burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.” – Galatians 6:2

Serving provides threefold for the giver as well.

First, any time spent focusing on another is time spent disregarding personal struggles. This kind of big picture thinking inevitably reduces the importance of one’s own challenges and reframes our thinking.

Second, we are able to feel closer to God. If anything is sure in the kingdom of heaven, it’s that serving others out of love (not compulsion or guilt) is always in God’s plan. By using talents and giftings and time and two hands (or one!) as He prompts us, we can be sure it is in line with His plan. This knowledge ultimately brings us closer to God.

Third, service is healing, spiritually and physically. This is because love is actually felt more deeply within us when it’s received by others. Like exercise or eating healthy, serving is scientifically proven to be beneficial because of the emotions (and endorphins) we feel in the process. In this way, God has wired us to receive healing with every selfless act.

Basically, by loving others, we show our love for God and He, in return, shows His love for us.

#9

Set Healthy Boundaries

Even though we are asked to help carry each other's burdens, we are not expected to carry those burdens to our own detriment. This passage in Galatians reminds us to shoulder our own responsibilities as well.

What does this mean in terms of boundaries? Christian author Sheila Wray Gregoire asserts that "boundaries tell us what is our responsibility and what is someone else's responsibility."

A person with weak boundaries may find themselves overly burdened and carrying more than their share. Symptoms of weak boundaries can come in many forms:

- Trouble saying no / people pleasing
- Attempts to mind-read & appease to avoid conflict
- Confusion about how to feel
- Caretaking that impedes personal well being

Poor boundaries often stems from a feeling of deep unworthiness and fear of being abandoned. As a result, rather than express feelings that could cause conflict, those opinions and emotions are ignored in favor of peace.

*"Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not rely on your own understanding; think about Him in all your ways, and He will guide you on the right paths."
– Proverbs 3:5-6*

On the other hand, a person with strong boundaries will find it easy to reject others and isolate. This can stem from a history of deep pain. Oversensitivity to mistreatment can result in isolation in an attempt to prevent the possibility of pain.

Both of these scenarios are harmful. A healthy balance of responsibility for personal actions and loving interactions must be found to ditch the drama.



This is done by first finding our identity as God's child surrounded by His ever-present love. Then by accepting that other people are broken and their actions and opinions cannot diminish our importance. Lastly, we courageously step out of our comfort zone by trusting the Lord will help us through every trial and struggle.

Establishing healthy boundaries could mean letting people go that are not supportive and encouraging. It could also mean breaking down walls and letting new friends and supporters see our vulnerable places.

Finding the right balance can be uncomfortable at first. But, have faith. God never fails to provide direction and strength along the journey to balance and serenity.

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