

Episode 339—Should We Avoid Negative People?

[Teach 4 the Heart Podcast Transcript Episode](#)

Linda Kardamis (00:01)

Avoiding negative people can seem like an obvious thing we should do, right? But wait, it might not actually be quite that simple. Let's dive into Scripture and consider this from both angles. Welcome back to the Teach 4 the Heart podcast where we tackle teaching challenges from a biblical perspective. Why are we here? Because we don't believe that our spiritual walk and teaching profession should exist in two separate domains. Rather, the hope we have in Christ should change how we approach everything, not just at home, but at school as well.

So join us as we explore both the spiritual and practical sides of key teaching challenges, integrating them together so we can succeed at teaching, glorify God, and make a lasting difference in our students' hearts and lives. This episode is brought to you in partnership with the Herzog Foundation. I'm really excited to be talking about this topic, and I'm here today with our podcast manager, Karly Hello, Karly.

Karly (00:51)

Hello, happy to be here.

Linda Kardamis (00:53)

So this topic actually came up because we've been working really hard on a program called Hope Renewed, which if you've been following the podcast, you're aware of it's a program to help teachers stop feeling defeated and face each day with hope. It's a five week combination of Bible study, teaching and practical application. If you're interested, you can find out more at teach4theheart.com/hoperenewed. But as we're doing that, one of the things that we were talking about was just **dealing with negativity and how do you handle that?** And I had gone through the material and one of the points that I had put on there was avoid negative people because that's just kind of like typical advice, right?

I was like, yeah, that's good advice. Karly always reviews my notes for me and kind of gives back and she goes, well, wait a second. I don't know if this is quite right because yes, I see what you're saying, but God calls us to help each other. And if we just avoid all negativity, then we're not reaching out to people. I said, my goodness, you're so right. **This is complicated.** We should talk about it. So Karly, what first popped in your mind when you saw that note for me.

Karly (01:51)

I actually think I thought back to when I was teaching and just the challenge of being in the culture of a school. There's things that are really great about being in the culture of a school, and it depends on your school, but there's also things that are really challenging, especially I was in a public school, you know, teachers of all different backgrounds, all different, you know, theologies and moral codes kind of thing. And I just remember there were times when it was so easy to get sucked into negative spiral and and I did and like I and it it felt good sometimes you know.

And that that's and that's **one of those dangers of being too negative is that you just get sucked into it and it the bitter flavor starts to taste good to you**, but I also thought about how there were moments when maybe a more negative person on the staff that I really loved but also could kind of spiral having conversations with that person and being able to sort of bring them to a better place and make them feel heard.

So I felt, I always felt uncomfortable just leaving or, you know, I didn't want to be rude. And in some ways, sometimes I probably should have left certain conversations, but **there were also conversations where someone needed comforted**, you know, or like the, the negativity was, was the surface level expression. And there was just a lot more going on underneath that needed tenderness and compassion.

So I always had such a, it was always a tension, right, to figure out when to be around and when to, address things that are bad and grieve those things and lament those things, but then also not to get sucked into the negative spiral. So that was kind of what popped into my mind when we started talking about this topic.

Linda Kardamis (03:43)

Yes. And so today what we wanted to do is kind of dive into this in more detail. And you might already be picking on the fact that we're probably not going to button up this topic really nice and neat with a little bow and tell you exactly what to do because it's complex and it depends on each situation and the leading of the Holy Spirit. But what we want to do is we're going to talk about, first of all, how, you know, why we might need to avoid negativity at times. And we're going to talk about kind of the opposite side. Why should we not completely avoid it?

And then we'll kind of try to put it together and give some advice on how do you navigate that tension between the two. So let's start out with why is being around a lot of negativity a bad thing? And, you know, I think this one's kind of obvious, but I like what you said, Karly, about how, it is easy to get sucked into it. And even sometimes that can even feel good to just kind of go there and just be.

That can feel really good to complain sometimes. And obviously, too, I think there's certain people where you just know it's going to spiral. So sometimes it can feel good. Sometimes it can feel really

oppressive, too, right? Sometimes it can just be like, my goodness, I don't want to feel like this. I feel like I'm being dragged down into this pit of negativity. What comes to your mind in this one, Karly?

Karly (05:07)

Yeah, and I think, **when someone is consistently taking a negative perspective on a situation or a place of work, you know, a workplace, it's going to affect the way you see it.** Either that you will react against it and be—sometimes we react against it and are like overly positive, trying to make up for the the negativity. Again, I think sometimes, that colors the way that we see where we are and we get obsessive about the negative things that aren't fixed or that are still a problem.

And it's hard to like, step back and kind of see a whole picture of imperfect places. Like it's easier for us to think about places as either good or bad. But most places aren't just one. So I think that the negativity is a place where we can live that feels easier to understand or an easier way to navigate a space.

So that's one of the things I was thinking about too.

Linda Kardamis (06:04)

Yeah, that's a good point, right? can just, sometimes it's just bad, you know, and not recognizing the complexity of it or even maybe not the place is bad, but this parent or this relationship is just toxic or just kind of write it off, right? I also think about how, at Hope Renewed, **we talk a lot about how we need to keep our eyes on Christ and remember that he's put me here and he's allowed this situation and this interaction or this relationship.**

And I think a lot of times, especially if, well, honestly, I was going to say, especially if it's from unbelievers, but no, it can come from either place, right? A lot of times those negative conversations, God is just absent from them, right? Like we are just looking at the circumstances and what's happening. And I think that's where it can be particularly unhelpful where we're not wrestling with the questions of pain and why it's got to lie.

We're not wrestling with that. **We're just kind of forgetting in that conversation that God has anything to do with this.** And that's obviously not going to lead our heart to a good place.

Karly (07:05)

Yeah, and I actually I like what you said about like circumstance, we get honed in on circumstance. And we're not seeing where the Lord is. And we're not necessarily even inviting the Lord into these conversations or into these questions that we're wrestling through. Like we're just sort of wrestling with them in our own way. And that can be a way of us trying to take control of something that is

difficult, because the reality is teaching is difficult and school environments can be really difficult. And so

It can be overwhelming and **we need the Lord in order to walk through those spaces with grace and compassion and the ability to hold complexity.**

Linda Kardamis (07:43)

Yes, my goodness, yes. So those are just some thoughts around why we might be like, yes, we need to avoid negativity or at least why, yes, there is danger here. Like there is danger in negativity, negative conversations, particular people that might be super negative. But then let's look at the other side, right? So there can be that temptation to just completely avoid it. okay, we see the issues, let's just avoid it completely.

I isolate myself from these people, I'm gonna walk away, I'm not gonna eat in the lunchroom and all of that, which we're not saying don't do that, but there's that temptation to just go no. But, Karly let me ask you first, what do you think are some of the issues with just cutting out negative people completely? Let's go a little deeper into that.

Karly (08:27)

Well, came to mind immediately when I was thinking about this. In [Matthew 22](#), Jesus is talking to the Pharisees and they ask him, what is the greatest commandment? And he says, you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And the second is like it. **You shall love your neighbor as yourself.** On these two commandments depend all the law and the prophets.

Jesus is saying that the love of God and the love of neighbor are paramount to what it means to follow him, right? That these are all the other laws and all the other things that he asks of us hinge on these. And in my head, I went, well, **Jesus didn't say love your positive neighbor or love your easy-to-love neighbor. He said love your neighbor** and you know, our neighbor is everyone that we meet.

And that's really challenging because not everyone we meet is easy to love. Again, so what does it look like to move toward people instead of away from people who need the compassion of the Lord? I don't think there's a simple answer because sometimes you do have to walk away from these conversations. But it just got me thinking about like, what does it look like? And actually, there's a guy, Jonathan Holmes has talked about many times, he teaches a course at our church and like he talks about moving toward people is the goal, right?

That sense of direction and what does it look like to really move towards someone instead of trying to move away from them. And that's where again, I think it gets complicated and there's a lot of ways that can look in different circumstances.

Linda Kardamis (10:15)

Yeah, so let's dive into that. I hope you guys are catching the vision of basically if we were to just say, I'm going to isolate myself from all negative people, that maybe that would help us personally, but we're kind of losing sight of the mission of like, well, **maybe that person is someone God has called you to have a positive interaction with or to help or to listen or mourn with them** or whatever it is. Like we are ignoring that calling that might be there in that conversation.

So we can't, we shouldn't just put up this hard line. I'm avoiding all negativity, which side note too, I think that our world is all about, I don't know, the world's worldviews conflict with each other sometimes, but there's definitely this element of positivity and like making sure you are happy, right? Like that's paramount, you be happy. And so if someone else is causing you to not be happy, boundaries, leave, because you being happy is most important.

And, you know, what God says is different, right? It says, **your happiness is not your primary concern.** Love God, love others is number one. And that's just very different. So let's start talking then about some of that nuance then. How do we, and once again, we're not, this is not gonna be tied up in a neat bow, but what are some thoughts that can help guide us as we think through, how do I know then?

How do I know when to stay in a conversation? How do I know when to leave? How do I know when to avoid the lunchroom? Do I need to avoid the lunchroom? I think we both have some thoughts on this. Karly, do you want to share a couple thoughts first?

Karly (11:52)

Yeah, you know, I've actually been thinking a lot about even just that commandment, right, begins with love the Lord your God first, right? that one hinges the second one to love your neighbor.

But also there is a sense in which we can't decide this or create these rules for our life or these boundaries or whatever you want to call them on our own and I actually I found an article because I was like I would love to hear a counseling perspective on this so found [a counseling CCEF article by Tim Lane and he talks about he's talking to pastors helping difficult people in the church.](#)

But I thought that the language he uses is helpful and he says this, **“The language of boundaries typically gives the impression that as the helper, you must set boundaries in order to protect yourself from being taken advantage of. If we think in terms of God setting the agenda, the end**

result will be you loving the person well, rather than just protecting yourself.” And that's where there's a sense to me in which that sort of looks at two things, right?

Like there are ways in which we do need to protect ourselves from negative people. But actually, we need to trust the Lord to protect us. And so if we're praying that the Lord will set the agenda for a relationship, even as we walk toward the lunchroom, and we're like, Lord, what's your agenda for today? Am I supposed to go into the lunchroom? And like trying to hear his voice. And maybe we go in, and maybe it becomes very clear very quickly that like, we need to leave. You're not going to get it right every time we never do.

But learning to hear the Lord's voice in those moments of discerning what does it look like for him to set the agenda? I love that metaphor and that way of thinking of it because it gives honor to the Lord's will for every moment and it also allows us to entrust ourselves to him and be like if I am gonna be exposed to a lot of negative commentary **will you protect me from spiraling into that and will you help me to navigate what does it look like to have compassion on a person who might just really need someone to understand something underneath all of that negativity?**

And how do we start to ask questions of those people? So this is your complaint, but like, what's underneath that? Like, what's behind that? And we don't always have time for these things, but as we think about what relationships the Lord wants us to pursue, those might be some of the things.

Linda Kardamis (14:17)

Yeah, that's really good, right? Recognizing that it's not just about protecting myself, but like, what does God have for me? What is he calling me to? And **sometimes it might be, to step aside and get our own minds renewed in him** because we're not, you know, but other times it might be to engage and to be involved.

And I was thinking about one relationship in my life right now where we're having a lot of conversations and they're going through some tough things. Part of it is sometimes when we have conversations, most of the time I don't feel sucked into negativity. I feel very much like I'm able to encourage and try to give advice and listen and just be that sounding board. But then there was a time where, and I don't know if it was them or me, but I was like, this week, this conversation is really affecting me.

And like, I can't this week. Like I have nothing. I have no advice. I was like, you know what? This is a good week to just step back. I'm not like leave. It was no rudeness or anything, but it's basically just like I'm not going to like purposely engage on this topic this week because I am just sensing it's not. And I think it's what you're saying, like listening to the Holy Spirit, but also paying attention to like,

how is this affecting me? I being able to be helpful or is this being harmful to me? And I'm not helping right now.

I think this is another aspect to pay attention to, in that, it wasn't like, well, I'm cutting off this relationship. I just need to take a step back. I can step back and do it again. And the next conversation we had was phenomenal and very edifying actually to both, I think both of us. It was a wonderful conversation. So I think about that a little bit too.

Karly (16:00)

I like what you said about just, even that you take a break for a week. There's no, God doesn't have formulas for how we interact with people. Not going to the lunchroom, not talking to that person this week or this day isn't like you're a bad friend or you're a bad coworker or you're a bad neighbor. Space can be good and the Lord's agenda is what we want to be trying to tune into.

So I really like that you said that.

Linda Kardamis (16:32)

Yeah. Another thing that came to mind too is evaluating what is the relationship? So in other words, **if there's somebody in your, staff that you kind of have no relationship with, they're not your friend, they're not coming to you for comfort, they just spout off every time you see them and it's sucking you in, then that might be one where you're just like, God, I don't sense you're calling me to this.**

I sense this is an avoid situation, right? There's no edifying happening. There's no relationship. So that's another thing to think about. Like, what is the relationship with these people? **If it's a dear friend who's struggling, well, we should be there for them. my goodness.** Like, we wouldn't just avoid that. We should weep with those that weep and be there and go into that dark place with them. But then, yeah, like I said, and then there's everything in between, right? There might be people where, well, no, we don't have a strong relationship, but this is a divine appointment where we should speak.

But yeah, there's just such a variety of situations as I think about it.

Karly (17:27)

I think a lot about the whole calling, right, is transformation, that we're supposed to be transformed into the image of Christ, and that we believe that God can change people. And I think we have to, I think our culture very much goes against the fact that people can change. Like they talk about growth, but there's, I'm this this is who I am. "So if you don't like it, get out," and even some of what you were talking about, but just like very hard boundaries, very protective.

But if we believe what Jesus says and what God says about the world, then we have to believe that he can change people. And that means that he can change us and that he can change people who struggle with negativity and can't seem to, cope very well and all kinds of things. And so I even think about too what does it look like to get out of the negativity, right?

What are the things that when we think about when we're in a negative spiral, what gets it helps get us out of those things? And of course prayer, but I think sometimes there's like physical ways that the Lord can help us. I'm a big fan of being outside, but like walking in the woods, there's a whole lot of interesting research. If you ever want to go on a deep dive research, the effect of walking in the woods on stress, because just six minutes, six to 12 minutes could change your whole day based on the research of how it affects us and what it can do.

And so maybe someone who's really struggling with, you know, a tough school environment, **maybe you invite someone to go on a walk with you. Maybe you invite them to have a nice cup of tea, like things that engage your senses in a way that embodies comfort and warmth or adventure, fresh air, you know, these things that can help us to see God in different ways and experience God's goodness in ways through our body** when our mind is like negative, like the negative wall is up in the mind, but can the Lord speak to our senses in different ways that are helpful and invite us into some different ways of thinking.

Linda Kardamis (19:22)

Mm.

That's such an interesting thought. I would have never thought of that to make a change in the scenery or the activity that can really just help reframe our mind, but that's so, so true. Sometimes my mind went more to, **can you steer the conversation?** Which sometimes you can, and sometimes you can't. And it depends but sometimes there's a way to just steer it in another direction.

Sometimes we're not even necessarily refuting what they said. Maybe the negativity is just this is the reality, but maybe we can bring up something from the personal life or something good that's been happening to help that conversation not to stay stuck there too. So, well, thank you, Karly, for talking about this with us.

As I said, there's no simple answer here, but just recognizing, yes, there are times when we do need to avoid negativity. especially if you notice this is really oppressing my soul, then maybe I need to make some change in my habits. There are times when it's wise to say, I'm not going to the lunchroom today. I'm taking a break from this. But then being careful to not isolate ourselves and just worry about that and recognizing God has called us to engage. Do you any final thoughts you'd like to share, Karly, before we wrap up?

Karly (20:43)

Yeah, and you know, we said it before, but I think it's worth saying again, like the, I think the biggest practical thing you can do is to pray and rely on the Lord. He's the one that gives us strength and direction and just be open to what he has and being humble and learning, always learning. We're always changing, growing and being transformed. But just that if you walk away with one thing today, you need the Lord's help in these relationships.

And how can you, maybe the question for you to ask yourself is, **how can I invite the Lord into this situation more?**

Linda Kardamis (21:15)

That is fantastic, right? And something as simple as just, God help me with this relationship. I don't know what to do. That simple invite just opens the door for God to show up. And sometimes it's obvious and sometimes it's not obvious, but you look back and you're like, my goodness. Wow, it has changed or it has morphed or I didn't know what to do in that moment or it went rough, but I made it through. Right? Like he's there and you can see that. But I do think that just that **going to him and asking, inviting him into the situation makes such a difference.**

Karly (21:48)

He's ready. He wants to come. He's ready to help. He's like, are you gonna ask? Because I'm here. and he can do amazing things. You know, we have to believe that. **He can do things beyond what we could have imagined.**

Linda Kardamis (22:02)

Yes. Well, thank you, Karly, so much for just talking with us about it. And I hope this has been helpful to you guys that are listening. If you're listening on the podcast and aren't part of **Hope Renewed, we would love to have you join us in that program. You can get more details about it at <http://teach4theheart.com/hoperenewed>**

And if you'd like to check out the notes in this episode or we will link to that article that Karly was talking about, you can find that at <http://teach4theheart.com/339>

If you've enjoyed this episode, liking it, sharing it, leaving a review, all that really helps it to grow. Or just simply **sharing this one episode with a friend or colleague that you think it would be helpful to.** And that's one final piece of advice I just thought about is talking with people you trust about it, right? Like if there's a specific relationship or a specific situation, you're like, I don't know what to do with this. Pray about it 100%. **But one of the means of grace God uses is also other people. So asking advice from other people.** Yeah. Glad we've got that in.

Well guys, thank you so much for being here. This episode has been brought to you in partnership with the Herzog Foundation, although all our views and opinions are our own, don't necessarily reflect those of the Herzog Foundation. We look forward to being with you again soon. In the meantime, teach to remember God is at work in you and through you, and he's using you to make a difference. Keep your eyes on him and teach for the heart.