

The Other Guy's Story Isn't Yours

Respect the unseen context.

Track: Community Lessons

Estimated time: 11 min

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Generated: 2026-04-10 16:59 UTC

Source URL: <https://common-sense-church.com/lessons/other-guys-story>

Principle: You rarely know what someone has survived.

People carry grief, illness, debt, shame, trauma, exhaustion, and private battles. You usually see the behavior. You rarely see the cost. The Key Move: Separate "What Happened" From "Why" You can describe what happened without inventing motives. - What happened: "They were short with me." - Story you invented: "They're disrespectful and don't care." The Failure Mode: Assumptions Turn People Into Caricatures When you fill in missing context with your own assumptions: - empathy dies quietly, - anger feels righteous, - and your response gets harsher than the moment requires. Three Alternate Explanations (On Purpose) Before you judge, name three possible explanations besides "they're awful." Examples: - They're overwhelmed or sleep-deprived. - They misunderstood you. - They're reacting to something unrelated. - They're embarrassed and covering it with attitude. - They're guarding themselves because they've been burned.

This practice doesn't excuse bad behavior. It prevents premature cruelty. In The Wild (Examples) Someone doesn't text back: - Story: "They're ignoring me." - Alternates: "Busy, phone dead, family issue, forgot, anxious."

A neighbor is standoffish: - Story: "They hate me." - Alternates: "Introverted, grieving, stressed, shy, cautious."

A coworker pushes back: - Story: "They're sabotaging me." - Alternates: "Different priorities, unclear brief, protecting their workload." Scripts (Curiosity Before Certainty) - "Hey, did I read that right?" - "What's going on for you today?" - "I might be missing context. Can you fill me in?" - "If I got this wrong, I want to fix it." The Practice (This Week) - When you feel irritation, take one breath and ask one clarifying question. - If you must act (boundary, consequence), act without contempt. Reflection (Optional) Where do you confuse "different" with "wrong"? Related Hymn Hymn III - The Other Guy's Story Ain't Yours