



## **The Struggle for Inner Peace**

*By Henry Brandt, Ph.D.*

### **LESSON 3: AFTER DISCOVERY...WHAT?**

What is your reaction when a friend confides, "I'm going to be very frank. There's something about you that I wish were not true"?

Do you grasp his hand and pull him to a chair so he can sit down and tell you your shortcoming? Do you fairly shout for joy that here is another glimpse of your true nature, that you are about to take the first step toward peace: self-discovery?

If he has a compliment, you are only too glad to have him say it; you don't even draw him apart from the crowd to hear it. But how hard it is to have your faults pointed out.

Much study has been given to the best ways of dealing with a person's faults. An often-used approach is to first give the person realistic praise in order to soften the criticism that follows. Dale Carnegie taught that if you want to win friends and influence people you should not criticize at all. He had a point. The average person resists facing up to his faults. Quite likely he will reject the person who points out his error.

Jesus Christ gave the precise explanation for this when He said: "For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed" (John 3:20). Man possesses a natural dislike for rebuke. He has a built-in resistance to seeing his shortcomings.

We react to reproof as we react to pain. The tendency is to shrink away, to protect ourselves from what we wish were not so. James bluntly described our sinful nature in his epistle:

But what about the feuds and struggles that exist among you—where do you suppose they come from? Can't you see that they arise from conflicting passions within yourselves? You crave for something and don't get it; you are murderously jealous of what others have got and which you can't possess yourselves; you struggle and fight with one another. You don't get what you want because you don't ask God for it. And when you do ask He doesn't give it to you, for you ask in quite the wrong spirit—you only want to satisfy your own desires (James 4:1-3, PH).

## THE NECESSITY OF REPROOF

Reproof, however, is good—like the surgeon's scalpel or the dentist's drill. The process is painful, but the result is health.

A man in our town suffered ill health for a year. He was one who didn't like to go to doctors; he was afraid they might tell him something he did not want to hear. When the man could no longer stand the pain, he visited a physician who informed him he suffered from a malignancy that would kill him within a few months.

"There might have been good hope for your recovery if you had come sooner," the doctor said.

This man had hated to face the truth. He believed that by denying he suffered or by ignoring the pain he somehow would get by. But he died—right on schedule.

In human relations it appears more sensible—at least easier—to ignore one's own fault or that of another. But the results are strained relations, strife, discord, and personal misery. A simple, effective alternative is, "If we walk in the light as He [God] is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin" (1 John 1:7).

A variety of sources will shed light on your pathway, primarily the Bible. King David said: "Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path" (Ps. 119:105). The Apostle Paul wrote that "by the law is the knowledge of sin" (Rom. 3:20). Humanly speaking, when you step from darkness into light, your first impulse is to close your eyes or turn away. I have found that when we approach the Bible and it reproves us, the response is similar. One wants to turn away because the feeling is unpleasant. It was Jesus who commented about His own words:

Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away (Matt. 24:35).

Blessed are those who hear the word of God and keep it (Luke 11:28).

It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing. The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life (John 6:63).

Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth (John 17:17).

Studying the Bible is a sure way to get at the truth about yourself, but it takes some effort and no one can force you to study it.

The daily requirements of marriage, or the give-and-take situations that arise between college roommates, or the necessity for members of a committee or an athletic team to

work in harmony, can likewise be immensely helpful to the individual who would get at the bottom of his problem.

## **FACING THE UNPLEASANT TRUTH**

As the truth about you emerges from some probing stimulus, you will either face it directly or turn from it. You will mellow or harden, depending on what you choose to do about your discovery.

A young couple stepped into the counseling room. "How is it that at times we can be so cooperative, so tender toward each other, and 15 minutes later so opposed, so hostile, so cold?" asked Marvin, the husband. "How is it possible that we can pray together and feel united in our faith but when Sunday is past, or our time of morning devotions over, we don't even think of God and we battle each other?"

Marvin then opened the door on their lives to afford a glimpse inside. He remembered the day he and Gloria, his wife, had driven to the city hospital and parked. As they glanced up to the eighth floor, Marvin breathed a prayer for their three-year-old son who hovered there between life and death. "Dear God, we love our boy and we want him, but may Thy will be done. Help Gloria and me to be worthy parents and give Jimmy a happy home."

At that moment, Marvin and Gloria felt closer to each other than at any time in their lives. Carefully he helped her out of the car; arm in arm they walked to the door and made their way up to the boy's room. Jimmy was asleep. A solution of some sort was being fed from a bottle into his arm. The parents looked at their son and their hearts beat as one for him. Marvin felt that he could never speak harshly to the boy again, that he could know no selfishness toward his son. Jimmy recovered. What joy for Marvin and Gloria to bring him home! But after a week, the feelings Marvin experienced at the hospital had changed. In fact, antagonism toward both his wife and son crept into Marvin's heart.

The boy had been waited on night and day in the hospital. After he arrived home, Gloria kept up the pampering. This provoked Marvin.

"When are you going to let him grow up?" he asked his wife.

One evening Jimmy was playing on the floor near the sofa where his parents were reading. Insistently, he said his mother should go into the next room and fetch his favorite truck. She put down her magazine and started for the toy.

"Let him go for it himself, Gloria," Marvin said.

"I don't mind getting it for him," she replied.

Marvin nearly exploded. "You're spoiling him rotten! All he needs to do is point a finger and you jump."

Dad insisted that the boy get his own toy. The child begged and pleaded and began to whine. Gloria became increasingly uncomfortable. Finally she defied her husband and got the truck. Jimmy was happy, but his father was enraged.

After Jimmy went to bed, a silence developed between the parents. Marvin felt quite justified for having taken his stand. Gloria felt Marvin was being too strict. Whereas in the car outside the hospital and by their son's bedside they had shared the tenderest of feelings and identical goals, now they were distinctly opponents.

The associations of most people parallel at some time the fluctuating course in which Marvin and Gloria found themselves. The details vary, but the theme is the same. What father has not pledged himself to being a great dad and a wonderful husband and then has not found himself so angry at both his wife and children that he is capable of lashing out and hurting the very ones he loves?

The Bible describes this dilemma: "For what I am doing, I do not understand. For what I will to do, that I do not practice; but what I hate, that I do. Now if I do what I will not to do, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me" (Rom. 7:15, 20).

What is it that keeps Marvin and Gloria from making good on their commitments to live consistently? They must be saved from themselves, just as the Apostle Paul wrote that the solution to his dilemma was outside of himself: "O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, with the mind I myself serve the law of God, but with the flesh the law of sin" (Rom. 7:24-25).

Any person who would hit the target of consistency must be saved from the drive within him that causes him to miss the mark. He must first discover and then face the truth about himself. He must realize that God alone is the One who can help him. John wrote in his first epistle:

If we refuse to admit that we are sinners, then we live in a world of illusion and truth becomes a stranger to us. But if we freely admit that we have sinned, we find God utterly reliable and straightforward—He forgives our sins and makes us thoroughly clean from all that is evil. For if we take up the attitude, "we have not sinned," we flatly deny God's diagnosis of our condition and cut ourselves off from what He has to say to us (1 John 1:8-10, PH).

When this was brought to their attention, both Marvin and Gloria responded negatively. "Are you calling us sinners?" They found it hard to face the truth, even though they were fully aware that their behavior was inconsistent. They knew they both missed the mark that they had agreed to aim at.

How thoughtful and compassionate and generous we intend to be toward others in our relationships! Husbands and wives, or partners in a business, chart a course that each fully expects to follow. But somewhere along the way the trail is lost, one deviates from the path, and the target is missed. God says this waywardness is iniquity, or sin. "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned, every one, to his own way" (Isa. 53:6).

Yet who wants to agree that such failure is sin? Rather than face the truth, a person makes excuses: "I'm snappish today because I'm tired." "I spanked the child because his stubbornness makes me so mad I can hardly see straight."

## **SIN STANDS IN THE WAY**

Marvin and Gloria left the counseling session, assuring each other of their devotion. They renewed their vows never to fall short again. But they were soon back. They couldn't inspire each other to be consistent.

"But we are Christians," they pleaded. "What can we do?" John wrote, "I write these things [which give you a true picture of yourself] . . . to help you to avoid sin. But if a man should sin, remember that our advocate before the Father is Jesus Christ the righteous, the One who made personal atonement for our sins" (1 John 2:1-2, PH).

You must be careful with the word "sin"; you must be sure of its meaning. Sin is the inability to do the good you want to do; it is the drive within you that causes you to do what you don't want to do (Rom. 7:14b-15, 19).

Marvin and Gloria have moments when both agree that they are violently opposed to each other. Yet when they try to face the truth, they deny it and attempt to reassure each other that all is well. But it isn't. They want peace, but they fight the process that leads to peace. They fail to take advantage of one of the important benefits of marriage—the means that marriage provides to self-discovery. Because the tendency is to fight against such discovery, many find marriage distasteful. They do not like to be reproved, even if the criticism is true.

The same holds true regarding work, social, and church relationships. The story of George Lund illustrates the point. George wanted to clear up the gnawing sense of anxiety and growing unhappiness that plagued him, hopefully before anyone found out his condition; so he sought professional counseling. He would rather have died than have his associates learn that he was bored with church and its activities, dissatisfied with his wife, and annoyed with his fellow employees at work.

But the counseling experience was a shattering one. The counselor, who George felt was a non-Christian, pressed him to share his antagonisms, and George did not like it. He insisted he had no antagonisms. He stoutly maintained that since he was a Christian he loved everyone and was nice to all. Still the counselor probed. Finally George blew his top.

Afterward he was ashamed. He had been a poor example of what a Christian ought to be. The counselor pointed out that George was filled with anger and hatred toward people, rather than with love.

Then George came to see me. He was confused. Was he a Christian or wasn't he? He had asked God to give him love toward all persons. Hadn't he meant it? "Since this counselor forced me to blow up," he said, "I've been pretty nasty to a lot of people." What evil thing, he wanted to know, had the counselor done to him?

What *had* the counselor done? He had led George to face the truth about himself. What truth? That he was an angry man with hatred burning in his heart toward the people with whom he worshiped at church, toward the people he worked alongside of at the office, toward his own wife and family—and now, toward the counselor, who, he maintained, had caused him to blow his top.

Because George pretended to be a happy man, he wanted to believe that he was one. That was why, since becoming a Christian, he had always acted politely to everyone. His annoyance was his own secret. He controlled himself for the sake of his testimony. The psalmist described such a man: "The words of his mouth were smoother than butter, but war was in his heart; his words were softer than oil, yet they were drawn swords" (Ps. 55:21).

Pretending to be happy didn't make him so. Yet he believed that essentially he was a happy man. He was only being true to human form. "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it?" (Jer. 17:9)

George Lund's emotions—his heart—told him he was a nice, loving, happy man. But he refused to recognize the deceit of his heart. What the counselor had done was to expose George to himself, to lay open the falseness of his heart. He made George see that his smooth, soft words covered a bitter war raging inside, that they sheathed the sword of hate and malice.

George might have discovered this truth for himself. Like the fever that warns that all is not well in the body, the gnawing sense of uneasiness in his relationships with others ought to have made him aware that all was not well between him and the people in his life. But George did the natural thing—he disregarded the symptoms, denying the truth.

Because he was a Christian, George could not admit to himself that there was anything in his heart but love. And this is where Christians often encounter difficulty. Unlike non-Christians, who can despise others and unashamedly justify their position, Christians know they have a high and noble standard to measure up to. Non-Christians may settle for a less exacting standard. They know that if they fail, everyone else fails as much as they. So why not relax instead of trying to change the world? But for Christians, God's standard allows no bitterness and strife. Therefore, if they are not always what they know they should be, they at least act like Christians.

George was proud of his acting ability. "Usually I control my anger," he said. "Don't I get any credit for that?" His ability to act lovingly toward others presented an impressive testimony; but it did not satisfy him. As he became aware that he was only acting, the truth shook him up; he began to lose the control that he had so tightly held.

"I'm confused. Why doesn't God give me peace?" he asked.

Though the truth told him that he was only acting, he found it hard to admit it. How hard it is to help a self-righteous man! He sees no need to turn to God for help. But the Bible states that sin does lurk in the heart: "Your iniquities have separated you from your God; and your sins have hidden His face from you, so that He will not hear" (Isa. 59:2).

Repentance is rare. One tends to defend himself. Time after time George insisted he was an innocent man. He said the fault lay with the conduct of people around him, including the goading counselor. Nevertheless, the facts of his contradicted him. His iniquities separated him from God and denied him God's peace.

When he finally did focus on the true picture of himself, he became not repentant but defensive, dismissing his own responsibility.

"He egged me on," George said repeatedly, reminding me that the flare-up was not his fault. One day he admitted that maybe he did lack love for certain people. But if he did, he asked petulantly, why didn't God give it to him? Now he blamed God for his anger.

When you get a glimpse of your true nature, it is to be expected that you will want to dodge the truth. But be aware that when you deny what you find in the recesses of your life, the results will be anxiousness and vague unhappiness that slowly envelop you in their tentacles.

Fifteen-year-old Gene described himself as easy to get along with. But he came for counseling because of his hair-trigger temper. He had been thrown off the football team for fighting. Once at home, his mother demanded that he study instead of going outside to play baseball. Gene became so incensed that he threw his ball through the picture window.

When I asked him about this display of temper, he dismissed any responsibility for it with a shrug. "Oh, I only get mad with my mother," he said. "Anybody would around her."

"What about the fights you get into at school?" I asked.

"Well, if you'd been in my place, you'd have punched them out too. Anyone with guts would have. You'd defend yourself, wouldn't you?"

Gene was a self-willed boy. He had no friends because they refused to put up with his lack of consideration and his quick fists. In spite of all the facts, Gene still insisted that he was an easygoing fellow. He really believed it; he was unhappy that others did not.

Fred Crompton came to my clinic because he was suffering from exhaustion. He was busy as a deacon in the church, made weekly calls on Sunday School absentees, served on the counseling team of the citywide youth rally, and headed the planning committee of the local Christian businessmen's organization. Fred hardly ever missed a meeting at church. He also played tennis once a week and faithfully followed his son's high school sports career.

Why wouldn't so active a man wear out? Yet his doctor could find no physical cause for his complaints.

In talking with him I learned that a year before, a trusted partner had cheated Fred out of his half of a business. I also learned that the demanding schedule Fred followed had started about the time of his loss. Fred had no explanation.

"I've got the time to do the things I've always wanted to do," he said. "I'm glad I can do them."

"You mean you are thankful that you lost the business?" I asked.

"I had committed the business to God," he replied. "The Lord gives and the Lord takes away."

"Were you as busy in the partnership as you are now?" I asked.

"Oh, busier. I was a workhorse."

"Did you get exhausted then?"

"Not at all."

"Now you aren't as busy as you were before, but you're on the verge of a mental and physical breakdown. How do you explain that?"

He couldn't. I asked if he still had contact with the man who had cheated him. He replied that their paths crossed occasionally.

"We see each other. I hold no hard feelings at all toward him."

"What was your reaction toward him when you first learned that he had cheated you?" I inquired.



"Must we go into *that*?" he said, quite annoyed. "The incident is past. I have forgiven him. Let's forget it!" It seemed to me that Fred Crompton was getting hot under the collar. At least the flush of his skin indicated that he was certainly disturbed.

In later interviews, it became clear that Fred was carrying a grudge against his former partner. He hated to admit it, but he was a deeply bitter man. Rather than face his reactions to an injustice, Fred had tried to bury them in a flurry of activity. Though he maintained a good front outwardly, the inward decay had pushed him to a point of near-collapse.

## **STOP STRUGGLING—COME TO TERMS**

The first step toward peace is to discover yourself. The second is to square up with the truth you find.

You will get fleeting glimpses of your true self (and sometimes a very clear picture) as you interact with other people, as you read the Bible, as the ministry of others touches your life. The natural reaction is to shrink away from your findings. Thus you struggle against yourself in your quest for peace.

But you need not run from yourself and thereby add trouble on trouble. The resources of heaven are yours to apply against the character defects you discover. Jesus died to forgive your sins: "In whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins" (Col. 1:14).

Furthermore, God will give you daily strength if you let Him: "Present yourselves to God as being alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God. For sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under law but under grace" (Rom. 6:13-14). "But now having been set free from sin, and having become slaves of God, you have your fruit to holiness, and the end, everlasting life" (Rom. 6:22). "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control" (Gal. 5:22-23).

Questions for review:

1. Take a moment to reflect on the last time someone gave you negative feedback or even constructive criticism. How did you react? Did you take their input to heart and see the need for change, or did you become angry or resentful toward the person or situation?
2. What does the Bible call those areas in which a person falls short of God's standard?

3. What will typically happen if you deny what you find in the process of self-discovery?
4. The first step toward peace is to \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_. And the second is to \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_.
5. What are some of the resources of heaven that you can apply against the character defects you uncover in your self-discovery?

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