



## **I Want Happiness Now!**

*By Dr. Henry Brandt with Phil Landrum*

### **LESSON 4: LIVING WITH YOURSELF (Behavior–Part 1)**

#### **YOUR DAILY TASKS BUILD RESPECT—OR TEAR IT DOWN**

One part of your life that either builds self-respect or tears it down is behavior—the choices you make.

Everyone is involved in a multitude of choices every day. Your self-respect depends on the quality of your performance.

You do your best.  
You do poorly.

You do it right.  
You mess it up.

You do what is required.  
You cheat.

You follow instructions.  
You disobey.

You give it all you've got.  
You do it half-heartedly.

You keep your agreements.  
You go back on your word.

These and more are choices you make day after day, according to the principles that guide you. The Bible gives you a central reference point:

*He who has My commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves Me ... (John 14:21).*

## **BENEFITS OF KEEPING COMMANDMENTS**

There is more to Jesus' words than meets the eye. We previously mentioned some of the benefits of keeping the commandments. This is such a critical choice that I want to elaborate. Consider some statements from wise King David:

### **KNOWLEDGE OF SIN**

*Thy word have I treasured in my heart, that I may not sin against Thee (Psalm 119:11).*

### **INSIGHT AND UNDERSTANDING**

*I have more insight than all my teachers, for Thy testimonies are my meditation. I understand more than the aged, because I have observed thy precepts. I have restrained my feet from every evil way, that I may keep Thy word (Psalm 119:99-100).*

### **PEACE AND STABILITY**

*Those who love Thy law have great peace, and nothing causes them to stumble (Psalm 119:165).*

The prophet Isaiah and the Book of Joshua add more insights:

### **WELL-BEING AND RIGHTEOUSNESS**

*If only you had paid attention to My commandments! Then your well-being would have been like a river, and your righteousness like the waves of the sea (Isaiah 48:18).*

### **PROSPEROUS AND SUCCESSFUL**

*This book of the law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it; for then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have success (Joshua 1:8).*

Searching out all those commandments will lead you into a lifetime study of the Bible. Also, it will guide you into conduct pleasing to God and will contribute to your own self-respect.

That's worth a lifetime of study, for why not commit yourself to a lifetime of doing what is right? Just as people who are physically fit spend a lifetime seeking out fitness principles and following them, so contented people learn the principles that will enable them to build self-respect...to love themselves.

## **BROAD BIBLICAL GUIDELINES**

The Bible furnishes us with some broad guidelines to help us make choices, but what it says puts the responsibility for our daily actions squarely on our own shoulders:

*All things are lawful for me, but not all things are profitable...I will not be mastered by anything (1 Corinthians 6:12).*

*All things are lawful, but not all things edify (1 Corinthians 10:23).*

*...to one who knows the right thing...and does not do it...it is sin (James 4:17).*

*The work of righteousness will be peace, and the service of righteousness, quietness and confidence forever (Isaiah 32:17).*

Every day of your life you make choices about what you will or will not do. In part, the joy of participating in athletics is the challenge of making quick, spontaneous decisions within the rules and boundaries of the game.

Likewise, the pleasure and fascination of life is in making decision upon decision within the commands God gives us.

Continuous, ongoing study of God's commandments with the intent to obey them is a most satisfying lifestyle.

Consider this example of how one man saw his self-respect grow by the choices he made.

## **WHICH WAY TO TURN?**

Fred came to me with a unique question. He was an expert skier, a member of an Olympic team. He was a very popular athlete—one of the favorites of the sportswriters.

As a result, his picture and favorable write-ups appeared constantly in newspapers across the country. Because of his popularity, a ski manufacturer was urging him to turn professional and to endorse their skis. This meant an income of at least \$50,000 annually.

The Olympic committee was urging him to remain an amateur. He was the spark plug of the ski team. Fred was torn between his loyalty to the amateur team and the lure of the professional contract.

Finally, Fred agreed to remain an amateur until after the national meet, which would be held in the Rocky Mountains the first week of February.

But the ski manufacturer kept after him, and got him to promise to turn pro after the amateur meet and in time to race in the professional championships the third week of February.

## **NO SNOW IN THE ROCKIES**

The first week of February there was not enough snow in the Rockies, so the meet was moved to New Hampshire, but because of other meets already scheduled in that area, the date was changed to the third week of February.

What was he to do?

The amateur committee insisted that the change in dates did not release him from his promise. But the ski manufacturer had a promise from him, also. He got conflicting advice from attorneys and friends.

"What does a person do?" he asked. "My reputation means more to me than the money. It has never before failed to snow in the Rockies. What do you do when the weather crosses you up? I want to keep my word to the amateurs and I want to turn professional."

There were no simple answers. We prayed together for wisdom. But, after prayer, the problem remained.

Finally, Fred realized he must take a step of faith. He would stay with the amateur team. His decision involved a great financial loss, but he was at peace with himself because as best he knew, he did what was right.

Thinking about Fred, a Scripture verse comes to mind:

*Let us not lose heart in doing good, for in due time we shall reap if we do not grow weary (Galatians 6:9).*

Making "good" choices is not always easy. For Fred, there was no obvious way to go. His choices had to be determined by the broad "commandments" he was committed to follow.

## **DEBATABLE CHOICE?**

Sid was traveling with his father-in-law. During the trip they had a long conversation about what was right and wrong. They stopped for lunch and, before resuming their journey, his father-in-law stopped at a pay phone to make a call. When he hung up, six dimes were returned in the money return slot.

His father-in-law put them back into the phone box.

"What are you doing?" Sid asked. "That's your good fortune if the phone doesn't work right."

"Not for me." Sid and his father-in-law had a "twenty-five mile discussion" about the six dimes. Sid remained unconvinced that it was wrong to keep the money. Even his father-in-law admitted that his decision was debatable.

The punch line to this story came a few months later. Sid was using a pay phone, and when he hung up the phone released two dimes. He happily put them into his pocket and drove off. But his decision bothered him.

He told himself that he was fortunate, but he kept thinking he was wrong. Finally, he pulled up to another pay phone and inserted the two dimes.

Was he right or wrong? He wasn't sure, but he was relieved. Deciding is often difficult.

For Sid, this was one of those times. But there is a clear principle involved. The intent to do right, the effort to practice righteousness, leads to peace. Your choices are within your own control.

## **A CLEAR-CUT CHOICE**

On the other hand, many choices are clearly right or wrong. When I was a boy, we lived in the suburbs. A neighbor had a fine raspberry patch. My instructions were to stay out of that patch—unless permission was given by my parents and the people who owned the patch.

One day I wandered past the patch. The berries were ripe, and there was no one around. I slipped into the patch and started eating—cool, juicy raspberries. What a pleasure!

Suddenly, there was a noise behind me. I turned around and was face to face with the owner. Instantly, I was a bundle of tensions. My heart pounded wildly, and I began to sweat.

Desperately, I pleaded with the lady not to tell my mother. But she wouldn't promise. Those delicious berries suddenly felt like a rock in my stomach as I headed away from the scene of the crime. I was even fearful of seeing *them* again. For the rest of the day, a nagging question plagued my mind: had she told my mother? I had a miserable afternoon.

## **SURELY, SHE KNOWS!**

This was a conscious, deliberate choice to do wrong. Now, I was suffering agony because of it. Soon, I heard my mother call:

"Hennnnnnrrrrreeee!"

Did she know? Had the neighbor lady called mom? What would happen to me? Filled with fear and tension, I went into the house, expecting the worst. My mother looked up.

"Henry..." "Yes, mom." *Scared to death. Here it comes.*

"Henry, I want you to go to the store."

What a relief! Maybe she didn't know. But how could I tell?

At dinner, I was fidgety and nervous. Finally, my father said:

"What's wrong with you?"

"Nothing wrong with me, dad. Nothing at all. Nothing." I realized I had protested too much. *I'm going to give myself away if I don't calm down.*

"Then, why don't you eat?"

"I'm eating."

I was eating but the food gave me a sick feeling. I glanced nervously back and forth between my father and mother. Finally, she said:

"Henry, there *is too* something wrong with you."

"Nothing wrong, mom." I resisted the temptation to say it again, then got out of there as quickly as possible.

## **DAYS OF AGONIZED MISERY**

It was a terrible evening. The frightening climax came when dad called. Usually, when he called me, something was up. Again there was the same reaction within me—tension, sweating, and a pounding heart.

"It's bedtime!" That's all he said.

Whew. What a relief to disappear into the bedroom. But, it proved to be a most uncomfortable night.

The next day I was playing outside and, to my dismay, here came the lady who owned the raspberry patch. I ducked behind a corner of the house, and spied on her as she approached.

She came closer. Closer. Closer.

Then, she went past the house. And on down the street.

Whew. Safe again.

So it went for days of agonized misery. And I never did find out if she told my parents.

## **NERVOUS, ANXIOUS, WORRIED PEOPLE**

I've listened to countless stories in the consulting room of people who create similar tensions for themselves because of their own actions. No one knows their secret. *But they know.*

And that's enough.

Two lines of a poem—I don't know who wrote them—sum up my point:

*There is a secret in his breast  
That will never let him rest.*

Your secret may not be that you robbed a bank or murdered someone. It can be as simple as sneaking into a raspberry patch.

## **TELEGRAM IN THE NIGHT**

Many years ago I was dean of men in a small college. One night, I had to deliver a telegram to one of the students in the men's dormitory. Another student was standing in the hall, so I greeted him and went on to deliver the message.

On my way out, the same student approached me and said:

"I need to talk to you. Do you have a few minutes?"

As we strolled down the sidewalk, he blurted out:

"I have a confession to make. Every time I see you coming toward me I think you have found out what I have done. I'm tired of the suspense of hiding, and want to confess."

He had repeatedly broken a rule that required students who had cars to have liability insurance if they transported other students. He had no such insurance. Often, he would load his car with fellow students and take off. They often joked about how easy it was to put one over on the dean.

They were right. I had no idea this was going on.

Can you picture this student? I'd often stop him on the sidewalk and make small talk. Simple pleasantries (I thought).

"How are you?"

"How is your car working?"

"Goodbye."

Occasionally, I'd see him sitting on a bench with his girl friend (who often went riding with him), so I'd wander over to visit a few minutes with both of them.

"It's bad enough when you'd stop me on the sidewalk. But when you'd come over toward where we were sitting on a bench, I'd get all tensed up and nervous. We always figured you had found us out, but then you'd just ask a few questions and walk away."

### **THEN...FRAMED IN THE DOORWAY...HERE CAME THE DEAN**

This is what the student had lived with. Then, suddenly this evening, the door opened. There, framed in the doorway and coming right at him, was the dean of men. He figured I was after him, but I walked right past without much more than a word.

"It shook me up when you came in," he said. "I just can't stand it any more."

He was the author of his own misery because of his own behavior—chipping away at his own self-respect.



This student is not unusual. Most of the people I talk to have done what they wanted to do if they wanted to do it bad enough—rules or no rules, promises or no promises, standards or no standards.

When we do so, we must live with whatever tension goes with it—sometimes much and sometimes little. You don't break God's laws (disobey authority) without paying a personal price of inner tension.

## **WHAT TO DO WITH A BURNING CIGAR?**

Some years ago, I taught a college-age Sunday school class. There was one young man in the class who often said:

"I am very devoted to the Lord. Because my body is the Lord's, I want to take care of it. I don't stay up late, I'm careful what I eat, I exercise regularly, don't drink, smoke—or chase women."

We all listened and nodded. It's good to know that your students take your teaching seriously.

"Good for you," we would say.

Then, one day at an airport many miles from home, as I was approaching the terminal, I thought I saw this model student standing in front of the building.

Guess what?

He had a cigar in his mouth, puffing away as happy as could be. He didn't notice me. Since he was in my Sunday school class, I walked up to chat with him. Then he saw me—and did a very strange thing.

He stuck that cigar—still smoking—in his pocket.

Isn't a pocket a strange place to put a lighted cigar? He wasn't very happy to see me. One would think he would be glad to see his Sunday school teacher, especially this far from home.

Exactly the opposite.

He was in a hurry to be off.

It was a pitiful, yet amusing, sight. As we talked, the smoke began curling up from his pocket. My pupil was one miserable young man.

What was wrong? He was the architect of his own misery. His conduct didn't fit his words.

A Scripture verse pointedly summarizes the personal benefit of practicing righteousness:

*Thou hast loved righteousness, and hated wickedness; therefore God, Thy God, has anointed Thee with the oil of joy above Thy fellows (Psalm 45:7).*

## **THE FIRST ACT OF CONCEALMENT**

A statement by Phillips Brooks gives a positive basis for happy living:

*To keep clear of concealment, to keep clear of the need of concealment, to do nothing which he might not do out on the middle of Boston Common at noonday—I cannot say how more and more that seems to me to be the glory of a young man's life.*

*It is an awful hour when the first necessity of hiding something comes. The whole life is different thenceforth. When there are questions to be feared and eyes to be avoided and subjects which must not be touched, then the bloom of life is gone. Put off that day as long as possible. Put it off forever if you can. Can your actions stand publicity?*

## **SPEED TRAP AT 3:00 A.M?**

I recall traveling along a two-lane highway early one morning about 3 a.m.

The speed limit posted at the entrance of a little town was 20 miles per hour. I had been traveling 60 and was not about to slow down, not at three o'clock in the morning.

And...I didn't.

Kawhoom! I barreled through that little town, realizing that if the town marshal was awake, I'd get a ticket.

There didn't seem to be a soul around as I hurtled through that wide spot in the road.

I kept looking in my rear-view mirror, half expecting to see a car lurching from some side street and heading after me—red lights flashing.

But there was nothing. Finally, I hit the "Resume Safe Speed" sign. This was it. I had gotten away with breaking the law. I looked back in the mirror, greatly relieved.

It reminds me of the Bible verse already quoted:

*The work of righteousness will be peace, and the service of righteousness, quietness and confidence forever (Isaiah 32:17).*

## **WHY IS HE FOLLOWING ME?**

Have you ever been driving on a freeway and suddenly spotted a state trooper cruising behind you?

*Why is he following me?*

You glance at your speedometer.

*I'm only going 55.*

Isn't that a comfortable feeling? The relief of correct behavior.

Recently, I was riding in a friend's car. We were in a hurry to get to an office but couldn't find a parking place. So he decided to take a chance on putting the car in a "No Parking" area.

Rarely have I done business so quickly. My friend was pressing the entire time—and very relieved to get back out on the street!

The student, my friend, and I are all alike. *We do what we want to.*

When we violate our own commitments, we must live with the tension that accompanies it. We don't break God's laws without paying a personal price.

## **"THAT'S A DUMB SIGN!"**

Recently I was on an elevator. There was a "No Smoking" sign on the wall. A man got on with a lighted cigarette. He said:

"That's a dumb sign."

It may be, but he was violating it. And he knew it.

There are many signs that tell us what to do:

Wait to Be Seated

No Parking

Remit Before the 15th

Visitors Only

Quiet Please

One Way

Keep Off the Grass

Turn Left

There is no end. Many rules to be obeyed. Play within the rules, and you're comfortable. Do otherwise, and you're uncomfortable. Consider what the Bible has to say:

*... each one examine his own work...in regard to himself alone, and not in regard to another (Galatians 6:4)*

*... want to have no fear of authority? Do what is good, and you will have praise of the same...if you do what is evil, be afraid...for...an avenger...brings wrath upon the one who practices evil (Romans 13:3-4).*

## **A WORD ABOUT GUILT**

I have found guilt is only a problem with people who pretend to be sorry for something they have done, but intend to do it again.

Guilt is no problem to the repentant person, no matter what he has done, if there is a willingness not to repeat the mistake.

If you follow God's commandments, you will watch your self-respect grow, and you will be on the way to becoming indestructible.

## **Review Questions**

1. What is the pleasure and fascination of life in?
2. What does the author describe as a most satisfying lifestyle?
3. The intent to \_\_\_\_\_, the effort to \_\_\_\_\_, leads to peace. Your choices are within your \_\_\_\_\_.
4. You don't break God's laws (disobey authority) without paying a personal price of \_\_\_\_\_.
5. If you \_\_\_\_\_, you will watch your self-respect grow, and you will be on the way to becoming indestructible.

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