



I Want Happiness Now!

By Dr. Henry Brandt with Phil Landrum

LESSON 5: LIVING WITH OTHERS (Behavior–Part 2)

WHAT ABOUT THE REST OF THE WORLD?

You have to live with yourself. But what about the rest of the world? Your behavior toward others is just as important to building self-respect.

Interacting with people often reveals unexpected, self-centered behavior.

AROUND THE WORLD

One time a mission executive, for whom I had worked many years as his consultant, invited me to take a tour with him. We were good friends.

Finally, after a year of planning, we met in Switzerland to begin a journey that would take us around the world. Our flight was called. The exit from the terminal to the plane was a door just wide enough for one person at a time to pass through.

Since I was the executive's consultant and wanted to be "cooperative and agreeable," it seemed reasonable to suggest:

"You go first."

"No, you go first," he replied.

"No, you go first, I insisted.

Finally, I reluctantly gave in and went through the door first. To get into the airplane we had to climb a narrow stairway. On the way to the stairway, I told myself:

So help me, he is going up first.

I said to him, "You go first."

He came back with, "No, you go first."

We were stymied at the foot of that ladder.

Finally, *he gave in* and went up the ladder first. I felt better. We got inside the plane, and there were two seats. Now the question was, *who gets to sit by the window?*

I wanted that seat and figured that if I offered it to him first, he would refuse and I could get it. Sure enough that's what happened.

"Why don't you take the window seat?" I said to him.

"No, you take the window seat," he answered. Pretending reluctance I "gave in" and took it.

This gentleman and I were friends. There was respect, admiration, and good will between us. We liked each other. He had a Th.D. degree, and I had a Ph.D. degree.

That's a lot going for a relationship, isn't it? How much education and friendship does it take for two men to get along smoothly? We had three problems *before we even sat down on the plane*. Isn't that something?

We looked at each other sheepishly and agreed that we would surely have a hard time getting around the world.

THE INEVITABLE DEADLOCK

What was the basic problem?

First, both he and I had to face a simple truth. He wanted to run things his own way. I wanted to run things my way. In a word: selfishness. We fit the picture of human nature as described in Isaiah 53:6:

All of us like sheep have gone astray, Each of us has turned to his own way; but the LORD has caused the iniquity of us all to fall on Him.

Second, he and I, individually, needed to repent of this self-centeredness, to be forgiven, and cleansed—which we did.

Third, if we were to manage the multitude of daily decisions that come up on a tour, we needed a leader to give direction.

WHO WOULD YOU VOTE FOR?

So, we called ourselves together to have an election. But we faced the thorny problem of choosing a leader with only two people voting.

Which one of us would you pick to be the leader? In order to help you decide, let me give you some facts. He was the director of the mission. His people were expecting him. Most of them had never heard of me. Now, readers, let me tell you what happens whenever I ask my audiences to choose one of us for a leader on the basis of the above facts. The dialogue between me and the audience goes something like this:

Brandt: Let me ask you folks out there. . . how many of you would vote for me to be the leader?

(Not a single hand goes up.)

Brandt: Let me run through that question again!

(There is hilarious laughter, but no one changes a vote.)

Everyone votes for the mission director. I wouldn't vote for me either. He was the obvious leader.

I still had my Ph.D. My experience didn't disappear. My reputation didn't change. It wasn't a matter of my losing face because he was now the leader. We had simply decided, among friends, which one of us would have the last word. This way we could get to our common goal without a debate every time a little decision was needed.

We had no more problems on our trip, even though my opinion still differed with his at times. He made the final decisions, many times following my judgment. Our respect for each other grew. But we could have been bitter enemies by the time the trip was over.

THE BASICS WORKED

There are a few basic principles that governed our choices.

First, we were both committed to following the commandments as our guide for living.

Second, we consciously acted on our commitment. Here are two verses that gave us some guidance:

Be subject to one another in the fear of Christ (Ephesians 5:21).

The fear of the LORD is to hate evil; pride and arrogance and the evil way (Proverbs 8:13).

If you put these verses together, they simply mean that two men who "fear Christ" are not two cringing, fearful people, but rather two men who would want to clear away any evil, pride, or arrogance that is revealed between them and figure out a mutually agreeable way to get along.

It's fun to cooperate.

LINDA'S FAMILY

Linda's family lives in an affluent neighborhood with plush evergreens, hedges, and an enclosed swimming pool.

In some ways, this lushness excites Linda and her mother. In other ways, it galls them, because all is not well in the midst of this luxury.

Linda's dad is an insurance representative in four states and is away from home much of the time. He gives his wife a specified allowance each month, tells her exactly how to spend it, and checks up on her spending regularly.

Linda hears her mother and father argue on a regular basis. The issues are usually the same—his long absences from home, not paying any attention to Linda, and his tight-fisted control over the money.

THE ARGUMENTS ARE ALWAYS THE SAME

Recently, Linda and her mom were discussing Linda's latest problem.

"Mother, I just have to get some new dresses. Let's face it, kids at this school dress like dreams. I'll never be accepted if I can't keep in step. Just two weeks from tonight, we're having a party, and I haven't a thing...."

"Linda, you know your father insists that I buy you too many clothes as it is."

"LINDA, DON'T CRY!"

"Isn't there something we can do, mother? I'll just die if the kids won't accept me. I just know I won't be invited to another party unless...."

Linda began sobbing.

Linda's mother usually yielded to her husband's instructions, even if she inwardly resented them.

This time she rebelled and made a decision she knew her husband would object to.

"Linda, don't cry. I'll try to cut down on something else so you can have more new clothes. I hope your father won't notice. So be careful. If he finds out, there will be trouble."

"Oh, I will, mother. Don't worry."

Their plan worked. Before the party, Linda had some new clothes. As she dressed, Linda thought of her father.

Would he notice and question her?

She needn't have worried about that, though. Linda's father was much too preoccupied to notice her clothes.

DAD MAKES AN OBSERVATION

One night, however, when Linda came home wearing a new dress, her father did remark:

"You look very nice in that dress."

"Thank you, dad," she replied, as she felt herself beginning to blush. Nothing more was said.

SECOND THOUGHTS

In her room, Linda had some serious misgivings about their scheme. Then, as she remembered the way the kids had been impressed with her new attire, she said to herself:

Oh, well. I guess all's fair in love and war—as long as you don't get caught. It's all dad's fault anyway. If he'd give mom more money she wouldn't have to cheat.

THE PRINCIPAL CALLS

A month of seeming serenity passed. Then, Linda's mother's world caved in. On a Friday, the school principal phoned, asking about Linda's health.

"I'm so sorry she's had the flu. I've received your note." When the principal stopped talking and hung up, Linda's mom was numb with disbelief.

Tears filled her eyes. She sat down. She hadn't written any note. Linda hadn't been sick.

Linda had been skipping school. But why? Why would she do such a thing to me? We are so close!

Linda's mother decided to do something about it. She brought Linda to me.

THE CONSULTATION

Several consultations followed with all the members of the family. There was ill-will, selfishness, and deception in the hearts of all of them.

Linda's father was unreasonable. There was plenty of money available. As it turned out, his wife did have plenty of money to spend. The issue turned out to be how to spend it, not how much.

Linda did have many dresses. It was not a question of enough dresses—only more of the same.

What then is the point of the illustration? It is this. Linda's mother was chipping away at her own self-respect by purchasing more dresses and entering into a conspiracy with her daughter to deceive her husband. She had the ground cut out from under her when she learned that her daughter was also deceiving her by skipping school. How could she deal with her daughter's deception when she, herself, was deceiving her husband?

THREE PEOPLE: EACH HURTING HIMSELF

Linda's mother justified her own choices by telling herself she was being a considerate mother—exactly the opposite of her inconsiderate husband.

He was, indeed, an inconsiderate husband and a disinterested father. His world revolved around himself and his own interests. He did not really need to be away as often as he was. He justified his choices by telling himself that his business demanded the life style he chose for himself.

Linda was becoming a skilled manipulator, doing as she pleased, and she justified her choices by convincing herself that she was only doing what was necessary to be accepted by her friends because she was a neglected child.

I once read a description that applies to all three:

Bobby is bounded on the north by Bobby, on the south by Bobby, and on the east and west by Bobby.

This family would benefit greatly if they would be guided by some biblical principles like this one:

Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind let each of you regard one another as more important than himself; Do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others (Philippians 2:3-4).

I have listened to many similar stories and I have found out that we are capable of an endless variety of ways of deceiving ourselves. The Bible puts it clearly:

The heart is more deceitful than all else and is desperately sick; who can understand it? I, the LORD, search the heart. I test the mind, even to give each man according to his ways, according to the results of his deeds (Jeremiah 17:9-10).

Knowing that our hearts are deceitful, and knowing that God will search our hearts and test our minds, it is only logical to continuously submit our choices to the test.

But how? The psalmist gives a clue:

Search me, o God, and know my heart; try me and know my anxious thoughts; and see if there be any hurtful way in me, and lead me in the everlasting way (Psalm 139:23-24).

James says it also:

But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves. For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks at his face in a mirror; for once he has looked at himself and gone away, he has immediately forgotten what kind of person he was (James 1:22-24).

You can know your heart, if you allow the Lord to show you yourself reflected in His Word. On the basis of what you see, you can act on His instructions:

Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; and let him return to the LORD, and He will have compassion on him, and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon (Isaiah 55:7).

The apostle John points the way to a carefree life:

Little children, let us not love with word or with tongue, but in deed and in truth. We shall know by this that we are of the truth, and shall assure our heart before Him, in whatever our heart condemns us: for God is greater than our heart, and knows all things. Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence before God; and whatever we ask we receive from Him, because we

keep His commandments and do the things that are pleasing in His sight (1 John 3:18-22).

SOME GUIDELINES TO HELP

The Bible gives some guidelines for making choices:

1. *Treat others as you would like to be treated.* Jesus said:

And just as you want men to treat you, treat them in the same way (Luke 6:31).

This is the so-called Golden Rule. It requires serious self-study, rather than concentration on figuring out someone else.

How would you like to be treated?

Would you like others to make an effort to find out what pleases you?

Would you like others (when they find out what pleases you) to defer to your wishes rather than theirs when there is a difference of opinion?

Do you mind being deceived or lied to?

Would you rather serve or be served?

Do you mind if people say one thing to you and another when you aren't there?

According to the Golden Rule, we are to treat others as we would like to be treated rather than try to second-guess the other person. Come to think of it, that's good news for the other person.

2. *Be a leader.* The apostle Paul says:

The things which you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, practice these things; and the God of peace shall be with you (Philippians 4:9).

A first reading of this verse gives us the impression that it is a hopelessly egotistical and impossible statement. On second thought, what a wonderful goal! Imagine, living your life in such a fashion that anyone who pays close attention to you finds the God of peace is with them because they follow what they learn, receive, hear, and see from you. They, like you, are making choices that are commendable, positive, and wholesome. Such a description of yourself is surely a firm foundation for building your self-respect, your self-love.

3. *Make choices as though the Lord were beside you—thankfully.* The apostle Paul says:

And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father (Colossians 3:17).

A moment's reflection, and you realize the presence of your boss, a policeman, or even a stranger in your home is enough reason to pay careful attention to your behavior. Imagine how careful you would be if the Lord were with you.

Such choices—within the limits of His commandments—would surely result in a thankful spirit. You would be thankful because your choices are building your own self-respect.

4. *Carry out your choices heartily, and desire to please God.*

Whatever you do, do your work heartily, as for the Lord rather than for men; knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance. It is the Lord Christ whom you serve (Colossians 3:23-24).

There is nothing more frustrating than doing things reluctantly, unwillingly. Boredom is one of our nation's greatest plagues.

Sooner or later, everyone is faced with tasks to do that you would rather not do. There are chores, housekeeping, errands, duties at work or at church—to name a few.

Has it ever occurred to you how many nostrils and throats a physician examines in a day? Or how many mouths a dentist peers into in a day? There is no need to pity these people. If they have a healthy response to their work, they accept the routine along with the glory.

All of us have no choice about many of the duties we must perform. Everyone can ask God for a hearty spirit toward the task if he wants to.

How wonderful to enjoy what you are doing—to do it heartily—to do it as an act of worship! This is true whether your work is at the desk, at the bench, in the shop, behind a podium, in the home. The poet has aptly put this thought into words:

*Let me but do my work from day to day,
In field or forest, at desk or loom,
In roaring market-place or tranquil room;
Let me but find it in my heart to say,
When vagrant wishes beckon me astray,
"This is my work; my blessing, not my doom;
Of all who live, I am the one by whom
This work can best be done in the right way."*

*Then shall I see it not too great, nor small,
To suit my spirit and to prove my powers;
Then shall I cheerful greet the laboring hours,
And cheerful turn, when the long shadows fall
At eventide, to play and love and rest,
Because I know for me my work is best.*
– Henry Van Dyke

A twentieth-century prophet, A. W. Tozer, has expressed the same principle:

We must offer all of our acts to God and believe that He accepts them, then hold firmly to that position, and keep insisting that every act of every hour of every day and night be included.... Let us practice the fine art of making every work a priestly ministrations. Let us believe that God is in all of our simple deeds and learn to find Him there.

Whatever ye do, do your work heartily, as for the Lord rather than for men; knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance. It is the Lord Christ whom you serve (Colossians 3:23-24).

Clearly then, to perform all our deeds to bring honor to His name, to please Him, and to do it in the spirit of thankfulness and heartiness is to build our self-respect, our self-love.

IF YOU DON'T. . .

One important reason for this is that behavior which falls short of biblical standards will cause you unrest, anxiety, worry, and tension. You pay a great price when you depart from truth, integrity, and honesty.

A goal for you might be the same one that Paul gave to Timothy:

Let no one look down on your youthfulness, but rather in speech, conduct, love, faith and purity, show yourself an example of those who believe (1 Timothy 4:12).

Be imitators of me, just as I also am of Christ (1 Corinthians 11:1).

CONCLUSION

Everyone, every day, faces a multitude of choices. Your sense of self-respect, of loving yourself, depends upon making those choices within the framework of commandments you choose to follow.

Consider seriously what Jesus told His disciples:

Teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and, lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age (Matthew 28:20).

Finally, consider these verses:

All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work (2 Timothy 3:16-17).

If you use God's commandments as the basis for your behavior, you are on the way to becoming indestructible.

Review Questions

1. Your behavior toward _____ is important to building self-respect.
2. Interacting with people often reveals what type of behavior?
3. The Bible says that our hearts are deceitful. How can we know our own hearts?
4. What are the four guidelines highlighted by the author that the Bible gives for making choices?
 - a. _____.
 - b. _____.
 - c. _____.
 - d. _____.
5. If you use _____ as the basis for your behavior, you are on the way to becoming indestructible.

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