



## **From Coping to Cure**

*By Henry Brandt, Ph.D.*

### **LESSON 1: THE MYTH OF COMPLEXITY**

#### **THOUGHT STARTER:**

What do you say? God is, or God isn't?

*I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtlety, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ.*

2 Corinthians 11:3, KJV

When I enrolled in graduate school, for the first time in my life I was taught by highly trained, thoughtful, dedicated professors who not only used textbooks that ruled out God, but who themselves sincerely believed there is no God. For them, God *isn't*.

In my studies in clinical psychology, we grappled with the challenge of helping disturbed people. We thoughtfully pondered how to help hostile, hateful, resentful, rebellious, frustrated, confused, angry, cruel, selfish, dishonest, destructive people.

We all agreed that these words accurately describe the dark side of human behavior. We were taught that a person is a biological organism whose total personality is the product of functioning in a social and cultural context. A disturbed person is one whose needs are not met when he comes into the world, who is neglected, who lives in an environment that is cold and indifferent toward him. To understand what is behind this disturbed person's behavior is to seek complex origins in a murky past. The process can take months or years. Then the question becomes: What in the world can be changed or given to release this person from a prison of destructive emotions and behavior?

"No deity can save us. We must save ourselves."

This is the position taken in secular colleges, secular textbooks, in most graduate training, and in a formidable mass of "scientific research."

This is the operating philosophy of government, heavily financed mental health agencies, professionally trained counselors, and the bulk of medically trained personnel.

Human problems are not ignored. In fact, we spend billions of dollars annually searching for solutions. Educators, politicians, psychiatrists, psychologists, sociologists, social workers, social agencies, and law enforcement agencies confront these problems every day.

A massive group of people—intelligent, educated, influential, politically powerful people, who have the best interests of humanity at heart—firmly and fiercely reject the concept of sin, a creator, and a God. You might compare that host of people to a huge giant called Goliath. They firmly believe: *God isn't*.

There is another tiny group standing up to Goliath. This group (and I am one of them) believes that *God is*. We agree with the Goliath crowd that these words accurately describe the dark side of human behavior (hostile, hateful, resentful, rebellious, frustrated, confused, angry, cruel, selfish, dishonest, destructive).

But at this point in the road, we come to a fork. We disagree that these words describing human behavior are socially and culturally caused. Our guidebook is the Bible. This book puts all those descriptive words under one heading. The heading is *Sin*. We are born with sinful hearts. Society only brings out of our hearts what is already there. When our leader announced to the Goliath crowd that He came to save them from their sins, they replied with one thunderous voice: *Crucify Him*. They did.

In standing up to Goliath, our little group might be compared to a little boy called David. We dare to use the word *sin* and affirm there is no human remedy for sin. You need a Savior who will cleanse you from sin and empower you to walk in the Spirit (in love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control).

If it is sin, that's good news. Sin is the simplest thing in the world to deal with. Jesus died to cleanse us from sin.

"Too simple," says the Goliath crowd.

It is recorded that the third day after Jesus was crucified, the disciples were assembled in a room with the doors shut for fear of the religious leaders. Jesus appeared in the room and said to them, "Peace be with you." Then He breathed on them and said,

**“Receive the Holy Spirit.” (John 20:21-22, NASB)**

Are we to believe that Jesus can change a fearful person into a peaceful person as quickly as it takes to exhale a breath of air?

Make no mistake. The people who approach life from humanistic assumptions make up a huge majority of the people you deal with every day. How long has it been since you had a conversation about sin and its cure?

As I have labored in the past to take an accurate case history from a counselee, I came across some statements made about Jesus:

**[Jesus] knowing their thoughts . . . (Luke 11:17, KJV)**

**[Jesus] knowing their hypocrisy . . . (Mark 12:15, NASB)**

**God, who knows the heart . . . (Acts 15:8, NASB)**

Jesus didn't need a case history. Another time I came upon a hopeful statement:

**For the LORD gives wisdom; From His mouth come knowledge and understanding. (Proverbs 2:6, NASB)**

I began to pray for wisdom and understanding. Over a period of months I experienced some amazing encounters and results with people seeking help. I can't claim credit because my input was often very minor.

Examine some of these experiences of people who have come to me with their burdens. You be the judge if these stories are too simple.

## **TRAGIC DEATHS**

He must have been in his early forties. She looked a bit younger. She held a little baby, perhaps two months old. They had anticipated this week-long family conference situated in a wooded area beside a clear, large lake.

Tragedy had marred the last year. Their four-year-old daughter died after a lingering illness. Soon after the next pregnancy, both his family and her family gathered at the hospital for the results of an ultrasound test to determine the sex of their unborn second child. Expecting an exciting announcement, the whole family was shocked when a somber doctor stated that the baby she was carrying was dead.

It was a heavy Christmas that year. Very few of their friends stood with them. They faced their sorrow alone. Even the progress of a third pregnancy and new son's birth had not eased their pain.

We were two days into the family conference. They were not enjoying themselves as they had hoped. The double deaths a year ago haunted them here with all the other families together in the dining room. He was also burdened with the recent failure of a business relationship, which left him with a large financial obligation.

Could I help them? He sat there with clenched teeth behind tight lips. She held on to her little baby with a look of desperation.

How could anyone bear such trouble? No glib answer would magically remove their burdens. But there was an answer which seemed clear to me. However, my guess was that they weren't ready to talk about answers; they were too preoccupied with their problems. I encouraged and prayed with them for an open mind as they attended the meetings.

As one of the conference speakers, my emphasis was on forgiving people their trespasses whether they asked for it or not, or even if you never saw them again. Nursing a grudge within your own mind hurts no one else but you. You are a slave to the person you hate. Jesus said,

**"If you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses." (Matthew 6:14-15, NKJV)**

The other speaker expounded Galatians. The works of the flesh block the fruit of the Spirit. The barrier was made out of hatred, contentions, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambition, dissensions, and envy.

**The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. (Galatians 5:22-23, NKJV)**

"Why would anyone turn their back on an inner life like that?" he asked.

Two days later the couple visited me. Clenched teeth and tight lips had become radiant smiles. They just dropped in to let me know that they listened and got their answers. They had dealt with their own sins. They didn't need to talk to me anymore. Besides, they had to get to the lakeside to enjoy the afternoon.

Three months later, I received a phone call from them. All is well; he and his partner have resolved their differences.

It was a very complex problem, and I apparently had very little to do with the solution. This was God's doing, not mine. Was this too simple? We must be careful not to underestimate the help available to hungry, open-minded Christians from a prayer-filled conference.

## **ARRESTED FOR DRUNK DRIVING**

Joe and Martha enjoyed the growing up years of their son, Mike—his fun personality and bright mind. However, in high school he began withdrawing from the family. They passed it off as a phase in his life and probably due to peer pressure at school, but this only increased in his college years.

At the age of twenty, after two years in college and while home for the summer, the

problem came to a head.

About 1:00 a.m. they received a phone call. Mike said, "You'd better come down here." He had been speeding while drunk with three buddies in the car. He missed a right angle turn, drove off the end of the street into a driveway, rear-ended a parked car, shoved it through the corner of the garage, and wrecked his own car beyond repair.

Mike was arrested, charged with drunk driving, and was being held at the police station. They would not release him, so his father returned home about 2:30 a.m.

Martha and Joe slept no more that night, facing the reality that their son had emotionally departed some time ago. Band-aids would not work; major changes were needed now. They finally concluded that they loved Mike so much and were willing to do whatever was necessary to help, including fight for him.

Neither Mike nor his buddies were good for each other and their relationships should end. They realized that this might not be acceptable to him, and he may leave as a result.

They decided if he tried to leave, to stop him; and if he did leave, to go after him. In order to lose their son, he would have to reject their love. It would not be because they didn't love him enough to fight for him.

His father had to face another tough truth. He knew what he should do, but he had no confidence; his track record was not good, and his judgment was too subjective.

Considering how important it was to make the right choices, they called me, an old friend who lived three thousand miles away in Florida. We sat around the kitchen table while I asked questions and took notes. After about an hour and a half, I knew enough to say what they each needed to hear.

"Joe, you have been foolish and need to repent. You said you knew Mike was not going in the right direction, but compared to yourself at his age, he wasn't doing too bad. Since when were you, at that age, God's standard for anybody? You also said you didn't want to drive Mike away. Mike, did you know your dad didn't want to drive you away?"

Mike nodded.

"Martha, you have been foolish and need to repent. You have been trying to make your son happy. Stop playing God. Mike, did you know your mother wanted to make you happy?"

Mike nodded again.

Then I said, "Joe and Martha, you have a reasonably intelligent twenty-year-old son

who has figured that his dad doesn't want to drive him away and his mother wants to make him happy. He's been playing that for all it's worth.

"Your home has been a training center, but your son has been the trainer—training his parents in the way he wants them to go. Allow what he wants, and he rewards you with a good attitude. Inhibit what he wants, and he penalizes you with a bad attitude. Your son has been controlling this home by his attitude."

I then turned to Mike. "Mike, you are an angry, deceitful young man. That's not my opinion but what you have revealed about yourself and I recorded in my notes. I don't need to meet your friends to know what they're like. They're just like you—that's why they are your friends."

"Mike, if you don't repent, I predict this is your future: You will find some attractive young woman who is just like you. You'll seem to have a lot in common, think you're in love, marry, and then turn your anger and deceitfulness on each other and ruin each other's lives."

Looking at all three of them, I continued, "You each need to repent, but then you each need to change. You will each need help to change, and you will each resist the help you need. However, if you don't receive the help to change, you will revert into the habit patterns that made this mess in the first place."

After that I could only say, "Well, I can't repent for you, so you might as well take me to the airport."

Martha and Joe repented, but Mike seemed cold and unresponsive until a couple of days later. He seemed so matter-of-fact, saying that he had repented and never really meant to hurt his parents. Although they had difficulty believing him, they perceived the counsel they had received had the ring of truth.

They realized that in the fall, Mike should enroll in a school that would provide the helpful environment he needed in order to change.

Of course, Mike did not want that kind of school environment; he wanted to continue living off campus, accountable to no one. Yet at the same time, Mike didn't want to continue as he had been.

He resisted; we persisted. Mike enrolled in a school with rules, and lived on campus in a dorm with "nosey dorm leaders."

Their family struggled through a number of tear-filled times, but they didn't give up.

Imagine their surprise, when after getting his bachelor's in English, Mike decided to stay in the same school (with rules) and to pursue another degree in counseling. He chose another school (with rules) for his master's in counseling and then gained his doctorate

at one of the leading universities in the nation. He is now married to a lovely Christian, and they are about to have their first child. The core problem was with the parents even more so than with their son. He was more willing to receive correction and direction than they had been able or willing to provide it.

Does such a brief encounter as I had with this family have lasting results? Well, this occurred ten years ago, and to date, all is well with Mike.

Do not underestimate the cleansing power available when anyone approaches God as a repentant sinner who has seen the sin and wants to be restored and renewed. It doesn't take God long to transform a humble person.

### **"MY SON IS A DRUGGIE"**

Duke is the pastor of a church today. It was not always so. Duke was a very strong-willed child from the day he was born. At age seventeen he was in complete rebellion. He used drugs, stole, was rude and obnoxious. His parents sought help from counselors, doctors, and the police, but none could help. He ran away from home for eleven weeks. Then he returned on his own. He continued his uncooperative, obnoxious ways. His father's job required travel, so his mother attempted to deal with her son. They restricted him to the house, but he refused to comply, threatening to leave again.

I was speaking on family relations when an elegantly dressed lady, looking as if she didn't have a care in the world, approached me after one session and asked if I could help her. She told me this story. She had run out of ideas, not knowing what else to do.

Knowing how to respond to such a problem with so little information is very difficult. At a time like this I need to turn Godward, admit my helplessness, and appeal to Him for wisdom. Theoretically, I need information—what is she like, what is her husband like, some history about Duke. Without proper information, how could I help?

My heart was filled with sympathy and compassion for this obviously desperate, anxious lady. It seemed logical to comfort her by reassuring her that it was quite normal to be anxious. However, that's not what I heard myself say. Instead, I told her that she had at least two problems, perhaps three.

First, she needed to relax. Two Bible verses came to mind:

**Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; In all your ways acknowledge Him, And He shall direct your paths. (Proverbs 3:5-6, NKJV)**

**Let the peace of God rule in your hearts, and be thankful. (Colossians 3:15, NKJV)**

Her response was total disbelief. How is it possible to calm down under these conditions and be thankful? I reminded her that to say the least, she could be thankful that she got a chance to be reminded that God would direct her path. She seemed more disturbed than ever.

Second, whatever she did about her son, she needed to be sure that she and her husband were like-minded about any action.

Third, I could not advise her specifically what to do, but something, probably quite drastic, should be done quickly. I reminded her that she and her husband needed to trust the Lord and not be afraid of losing their son. They probably already had; this was the opportunity to win him back.

She left, looking more despondent than ever. A quickie conversation immediately after a meeting is hard to handle. This one surely looked like a dud. My intentions were good, but it seemed that the more I tried to help, the more agitated she became. One thing, however, I have learned—to depend upon a person's second reaction to a conversation rather than the first.

Several years later a clean-cut young man came to the platform after a meeting and introduced himself.

"My name is Duke," he said. "I'm in college preparing for the ministry. I came to thank you for encouraging my parents not to give up on me."

Twenty years later, at another meeting, this same lady named Catherine and her husband Bob came up to me. I didn't recognize her. They gave me a report on Duke. He finished college and seminary, married a fellow student, and today they are pioneering in the opening of a new church. Then we set up time for them to tell me what happened after she left the meeting twenty years ago.

She did have a second reaction. She had to admit that she had not considered it even remotely possible to relax. She was at her wit's end over what to do; professionals were no help. But she had not thought of turning the problem over to God and to consciously team up with her husband.

She and her husband renewed their commitment to do anything to save their son from sure destruction and to depend on God to direct their paths.

Now Duke was up against two people renewed in their dedication to seek God's best for their son.

They agreed to expect Duke to do what was right and to do whatever was necessary to enforce righteousness—whatever that means.

A few days later, Duke and his father were in the kitchen, just the two of them. On the



counter was a bottle of vitamins that his mother used. Duke wanted some of the vitamins. Bob was not sure if these were prescription drugs so he told Duke to ask his mother for permission.

Duke cursed his mother, and Bob rebuked his son sharply. Duke swung at his dad; Bob knocked him to the floor. A vigorous fight followed.

The tussle moved into the dining room and then into the yard.

Duke managed to get away and took off on his bicycle. Bob took after him in his car, but couldn't find him.

Bob returned home and went to Duke's room where he found a sizeable quantity of marijuana. He went to the police station and swore out a warrant for his son's arrest.

Wow! Does this sound like the Lord directing Bob's path? This all took place on Mother's Day.

They accepted this crisis as God's leading. They were doing the best they knew how, on behalf of their beloved son.

When Duke came home to pack up and leave, Catherine called the police. They arrived quickly, with not one but three cars with lights flashing, attracting the attention of the whole neighborhood. Two policemen arrested Duke on assault and battery, handcuffed him, and led him to a police car. Duke's sister and the neighbors were appalled.

The hearing was scheduled; bail was set high enough so that Duke's friends could not get him out for two weeks. Duke had bragged that the police would never catch him, but now he was in jail on a warrant sworn out by his own parents.

At the hearing Duke was sentenced to ten days in jail and one year of probation.

While he was in jail, Duke refused to talk to his father. He would talk to his mother. She visited him and brought him reading material. While he served the ten days a doctor discovered that Duke had a serious case of hypoglycemia.

When Duke began his probation, a police sergeant instructed him to fill out a daily report of his activities, accounting for each hour, and submit it weekly. He warned Duke that if he failed to submit the report, he would personally see to it that Duke would get a five-year sentence. He showed Duke the pictures of several young men who called his bluff and who were all in prison. Duke was paroled in the custody of his parents.

Catherine nursed Duke back to health. He continued to ignore his father, but complied with the terms of his probation.

When Duke regained his health he got a job with a contractor. It was a pick-and-shovel

job, mostly with a partner. This fellow was annoyingly cheerful and considerate toward Duke. Day in and day out, week in and week out, this fellow lived a consistent, cheerful life.

Every chance he got he tried to tell Duke about Jesus, who had saved him from a life of anger and misery.

One day Duke said, "Mom, guess what happened to me?" Her heart sank. What trouble is he in now? she thought. "I gave my heart to Jesus," he said. "From now on I'm living for God."

Duke then made a dramatic U-turn. He went to places where he had stolen things and made restitution. He changed his friends and graduated from college and seminary.

Today he is pastor of a church and I had the pleasant surprise of sharing lunch with Duke recently. I asked him to tell me his memories of that period. Here are a few of his reflections:

"One day these two giant policemen walked into my room at home and arrested me. Man, they were prepared. They surrounded the house. They had a dog in case I tried to run away. Guns and everything. I sat in jail for two weeks before getting out. But I didn't stop drugs . . . I just got smarter and more careful.

I had this job working for a construction company with a pick and shovel with this long-haired hippie that kept talking about Jesus. One day we were in the bottom of an empty swimming pool shoveling out slimy scum. Man, it was the worst job I have ever had. Smells got all over you. Yuck! One day when we took a short rest break, this fellow, with whom I was working, told me about Jesus. Now a lot of things from that part of my life are a little confusing—having taken everything from LSD to you-name-it, but something clicked inside of me. What he said seemed to make sense.

I went inside to wash my hands and face at lunchtime. When I looked up at the mirror to dry my face, I felt clean—I knew something had happened. I went out and told my working buddy that I had become a Christian. Later, I told my drug friends about Jesus. They said, "Ahhh, you'll get over it. You're just going through a phase." Well, they may be right, but it's been over twenty years and I haven't gotten over it yet.

You know, Dr. Brandt, there's another thing. I never quit doing drugs; I just didn't want them any more."

Don't take too lightly the help that is available to a listener with an open heart. God had prepared a solution for that mother. Our brief encounter after a meeting had to be just a tiny part. My little advice motivated her to bring God in on the solution. It didn't seem very hopeful as she walked away from our little chat, but God's ways are not our ways.

## **“MY BROTHER AND I CAN'T STAND EACH OTHER!”**

Tim Daley is a biblical counselor; we have compared notes for years. Four hundred men were at a retreat that he invited me to attend. I was to learn that thirty-five of them were there because his life had touched their lives.

Bert was one of the men at this conference. He had set up certain procedures for the insurance agents who worked for him to follow. One agent who refused to comply was Bert's older brother. Over the next year the two of them had many strained conversations about the issue, which became more and more heated.

One day when they were angrily throwing verbal bricks at each other, his brother cleaned out his office and left. Bert called him on the phone a few days later. The verbal barrage continued until, finally, Bert hung up on his brother. He was livid with rage.

There was no contact for a month.

Earlier, when his brother first came to work with Bert, they had agreed that any problem would be worked out amiably and that work details would not interfere with family ties. Yet here they were sharply divided and a major holiday coming up.

Finally Bert consulted with Tim Daley, who listened intently to the story. Tim leaned forward and said, "You are a bitter, angry man. The way you talked to your brother is unacceptable as a Christian example. You need to repent and then apologize to your brother for your bad attitude. You will not find peace until you do." End of interview.

Bert wasn't prepared for that. He was expecting some reassurance that Bert was justified in his response because of the problem his brother created.

He pondered Tim's advice. He was afraid to call his brother, but the idea plagued him. Bert was reluctant to admit that he was bitter, angry, and self-righteous. Finally he admitted this to God with a repentant heart and asked to be cleansed and empowered to love his brother. To his surprise, his resistance to calling his brother turned into an urge to see him.

His brother didn't want to see him. Bert heard himself pleading for a twenty-minute meeting. It was agreed to reluctantly.

They met at the appointed place. His brother said nothing, but Bert felt compassion toward him. Gone was the bitterness. He proceeded to apologize for the attitude he had toward his brother. He asked for forgiveness; his brother had tears in his eyes, as did Bert.

Bert said that at that moment it was as though a two-hundred pound weight was lifted from his shoulders.

Two years have passed. The problem is behind them. Allowing God to change his heart was the first step in changing a complex problem into a simple one. Bert was a repentant prayer away from a change of heart all the time.

There are many more such stories happening every day. Jesus said:

**"Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." (Matthew 11:28, KJV)**

The Psalmist said:

**Cast your burden upon the Lord, and He will sustain you. . . . (Psalm 55:22, NASB)**

I often have people tell me, "Dr. Brandt, it's just not that simple!"

My reply is, "Have you tried it?"

Long pause.

End of discussion.

Many argue with me on this point . . . except my clients.

<b><i>Lesson: Give simplicity a chance.</i></b>
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## **DISCUSSION STARTERS**

- Review the thought starter at the beginning of the chapter. What thoughts were started?
  - Review the lead Bible verse. What does it say to you? Did you observe yourself in relation to the verse? Did you observe others in relation to the verse? Did you find any additional verses?
  - What is your response to the lesson at the end of the chapter?
1. Repentance was the common thread that made change possible in each case. For what did each person need to repent?
  2. In the stories, how were the minds of the individuals "corrupted from the simplicity which is in Christ Jesus?"

3. Do you know any Duke stories?
4. Can you relate an instance when you prayed for wisdom and understanding, and received them?

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