



From Coping to Cure

By Henry Brandt, Ph.D.

LESSON 10:

BOOM! THE WING OF THE PLANE SMACKED ME IN THE HEAD

THOUGHT STARTER:

Do you find yourself hurt or disappointed by people's behavior or events?

[Jesus said,] "Take heed to yourselves. If your brother sins against you, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him. And if he sins against you seven times in a day, and seven times in a day returns to you saying, 'I repent,' you shall forgive him." And the apostles said to the Lord, "Increase our faith."

Luke 17:3-5, NKJV

Webster defines *forgive* as "to grant free pardon, cease to feel resentment against."

What are you to do when you must work together with someone who repeats undesirable behavior over and over again, often deliberately and sadistically? This was my question one summer when I was working with the North American Indian Mission along the spectacular coast of British Columbia. Each year the mission sponsored a summer program, placing college students on many of the beautiful islands scattered along the coastline. The mission would assign a team of four to eight college students to an island for a month. Their job was to make friends with the native Indian islanders, to develop a recreation program for the children and an arts and crafts program for the adults, and to encourage them to attend mission meetings and Bible studies.

The mission had a large ship, which cruised up the coast from Vancouver to the southern tip of Alaska. Several seaplanes would regularly meet the ship and fly the teams of students to their assigned islands. My job was to help supervise the teams of students. With a pilot and seaplane I flew from island to island to see how the work was progressing.

I had no experience with seaplanes, but I found it a thrilling experience to take off and to land on the water. After my first landing at one of the islands, the pilot asked me to jump out on the dock and hold the rope, which was tied to the pontoon of the plane. Glad to be of help, I stood rope in hand under the wing. When the pilot jumped out of the plane and onto the pontoon, the wing came down and struck me in the head. Boom! I saw stars!

The pilot was apologetic, "I'm sorry." I replied, "That's okay."

I walked up to the primitive little village where a team of college students was eager to share with me all the unexpected challenges that had arisen. The little kids were hard to manage. They swore. They had lice in their hair. After advising, encouraging, and praying with the team, I returned to the plane.

I made note that these students would need frequent visits to encourage them and to remind them to depend on the Lord daily for grace, love, patience, and wisdom.

The pilot once again asked me to hold the rope while he got into the plane. I was glad to oblige. He jumped on the pontoon. The wing came down and smacked me in the head, "Whack!" Again I saw stars!

He said, "I'm so sorry." I said, "That's okay."

My head was somewhat sore, but I ignored it. There was far too much excitement in taking off over the water and rugged landscape. What was a little bump on the head compared to working with such devoted students and these needy Indian children.

As we flew to the next island, I was mildly annoyed at the pilot. My head throbbed, but the beautiful scenery and the three-foot waves which met us at our next landing absorbed my attention.

The pilot asked me to hop out on the dock and hold the rope while he secured the plane. Again I was happy to oblige. Again I felt useful. I was caught off guard when the wing came down on my head: "Bang!"

The pilot said, "So sorry." I said, "That's okay."

A VICTIM OF MY OWN BEHAVIOR

I know what you are thinking. Why didn't I just get out from under that wing? The excitement of the landings and launchings, the lovely views and my observations of the Indian culture all added up to forgetting to look out for my head.

On the way up to see the students, I began to wonder how sorry the pilot really was. This was no longer okay! I thought that if this happens again, I will throw him into the ocean!

When we arrived at the village the students told me that they could not get along with one other. One of the fellows was very messy. He had promised his friends that he would change, but he didn't. I told them to be more forgiving of one another.

The pilot and I walked down to the dock. He asked me to hold the rope while he got

into the plane. I was glad to comply. The pilot jumped on the pontoon, the wing came down, and I was nowhere near it. I gloated to myself, "Ah, ha! You missed me!

As we flew along, I rubbed my head and nursed my mean, nasty thoughts; I half grumbled and half prayed for help. Then it hit me like the wing of a seaplane. I had visited with teams of students that had to live with circumstances beyond their control. I advised the students to look to God for love, grace, and peace in their difficulties. They had to be more loving and more forgiving of one another.

In the midst of my anger, I remembered the following scripture:

“Take heed to yourselves. If your brother sins against you, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him. And if he sins against you seven times in a day, and seven times in a day returns to you saying, 'I repent,' you shall forgive him.” And the apostles said to the Lord, “Increase our faith.” (Luke 17:3-5, NKJV)

I thought to myself, I'm with the apostles. If I am to forgive this character and like it, then something special must happen to me now.

There I was sitting beside a pilot who was sacrificially serving the Lord. Yes, I was angry and resentful toward him. And I had said nothing. I argued with myself: what about this pilot? I don't think he's the least bit sorry! So what? If he isn't going to change, why not get out from under the wing? Not a bad idea! But is it fair for him to do this three times?

Enough of this kind of thinking, I said to myself. I had struck out on two counts. Why not admit it? First, my heart needed to be cleansed and renewed; my attitude was indefensible! Second, I failed to confront the pilot. Such behavior was clearly a violation of what Jesus taught.

I admitted to God that my attitude was lousy and that I had failed to communicate with the pilot. I asked Him to forgive me, to cleanse me, and to renew my spirit. The Lord heard my prayer and my heart was changed right there in that plane. I was the victim of my own behavior.

We approached another island where we would spend the night. The landing was smooth. The pilot asked me to jump on the dock and hold the rope. I was only too glad to comply. I was a wise, knowledgeable veteran. The pilot crawled out of the plane and, as always, jumped on the pontoon. The wing came down and disturbed only air; Brandt's head was not under the wing!

That night under the stars as we sat around a campfire, I told the pilot about my struggle. Jesus says to rebuke someone who sins against you. I assumed I should be gracious about it. "You kept saying you were sorry," I reminded him.

“What I meant was, 'I'm sorry if you're too dumb to get out from under the wing,’” he replied, holding his sides with laughter.

This incident started me thinking. Was he serious? Did he mean that he deliberately jumped on the pontoon, knowing that I stood under the wing and would receive a whack on the head? Was this a typical bush pilot joke that they all played on newcomers? Perhaps he had adopted a popular view that says you learn best by taking the consequences for misbehaving. But shouldn't he at least have instructed me to get out from under the wing when he jumps on the pontoon? Our verse says:

"If your brother sins against you, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him." (Luke 17:3, NKJV)

Did that mean that I should chew him out? Vent my wrath on him? What if he said he had repented but continued his unacceptable behavior? Another verse will shed some light on these questions:

Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself, lest you also be tempted. (Galatians 6:1, NKJV)

This verse tells me that if anyone mistreats me, I need to first examine my own heart. I need to be "spiritual" before I approach the other person. What is "spiritual"?

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

If I am not spiritual, I need to straighten myself out before I approach the other person.

If I qualify, I need to rebuke him; that is, I need to point out the offensive or unacceptable behavior to my brother. His response shouldn't affect my spirit because my spirit is between God and me.

What about the other person's behavior? If he repents, forgive him, that is, grant free pardon and cease to feel resentment against him.

In this instance he did repent. He agreed to warn me when he was about to jump on the pontoon. Obviously, I needed to keep on being "spiritual." His present or future conduct didn't dictate the condition of my heart.

In the future, I could be more alert. I could accept his way of doing things. When he was around the plane, I could be sure not to be under the wing. Occasionally I could remind him to let me know when he was about to jump on the pontoon. Otherwise, I would allow myself to become the victim of my own behavior or lack of behavior.

REBUKE AND FORGIVE

Suppose someone is repentant and still repeats undesirable behavior over and over. Our verse says to rebuke and forgive.

I found myself in this situation with my wife, Jo. Shortly after saying our marriage vows, we learned that some adjustments were necessary.

I was driving, and Jo was sitting next to me when she said, "Henry, would you please not drive so closely to the car in front of us?" I proceeded to defend my driving style and driving record, "Look, I haven't had an accident in years, and I am in better passing condition when I am close to the next car." She insisted that I was driving too close. We were clearly annoyed at each other.

Finally I saw the light. How selfish of me to ignore her request and not make driving with me more relaxing for her. I agreed to open the distance between our car and the one we were following. But I learned that driving habits are not easily changed. I would unthinkingly lapse into my old habits. Often I would remind myself; if I didn't, Jo surely would. There were some trips when I needed to repent seven times in a day. After weeks of catching myself and Jo rebuking me, I've developed the habit of staying the proper distance from the car in front of me. Occasionally, I need to correct and "walk in the Spirit." She needs to rebuke and forgive.

We had another adjustment to make. Jo had a habit of taking off her glasses and laying them on her lap, a table, a car seat, or any other handy place. They would then slide off her lap and disappear, or she would forget where she left them. She was constantly looking for them.

This was unacceptable to me. I felt something simple could be done to solve the problem. She reluctantly agreed to put them in her purse when she took them off when she was away from home. At home, there were two designated places for them. If I saw her put them down anywhere else, I would remind her on the spot. For a while it was a case of reminding her many times every day. Her response wasn't very friendly, and neither was my response to her response. We both had to repent of our bad attitudes. But the "rebuke-repent" process worked. It quickly became apparent that knowing where her glasses were was worth the effort on both of our parts.

These adjustments made it clear that we both needed to walk "in the Spirit" and we need to maintain a "rebuke-repent" process to deal with occasional lapses.

I met with a man who came to see me regarding his wife. He had married a door slammer. She would slam the car door as hard as she could. She'd slam the front door, the kitchen cupboard doors, the bedroom doors, the bathroom door, and any other door she needed to close. He would wince whenever she approached a door. He could hardly stand it anymore.

"Have you talked to her about it?" I asked.

"No, we have only been married a few months. If I criticize her it may hurt her self-image. I am trying to encourage her."

I called his attention to Galatians 6:1. No need to be critical. The Lord will help him to be gentle. There is no way for her to know what is in his mind if he doesn't tell her.

When he asked her to close the doors more gently, she was quite willing to comply. She had no idea that this behavior troubled him; he was greatly relieved. She then got up out of her chair and went to the bedroom and slammed the door. She was truly willing to change, but slamming doors was so much of a habit she did it without thinking. She actually needed to repent seven times a day, and he needed to forgive her just as often. But with two of them working together, she changed her behavior in a few weeks. It took two spiritual people who worked together to solve a problem.

What do you do about unacceptable behavior that may be repeated seven times in a day? First, you walk in the Spirit. It is a fallacy to blame someone else's behavior for your anger or resentment. This is a sin. Your spirit involves God and you. Second, there needs to be a change of behavior. You need to rebuke, that is, describe the unacceptable behavior. Third, you need to deal with the person's response. If there is repentance, you forgive. If there is improvement, you praise. But what if there is no change? What then?

What should your response be if someone says they are sorry, but repeats the same behavior day in and day out? You may need to conclude that "I am sorry" is meaningless. What you do about it depends on the relationship. Are you dealing with a child, a parent, your partner, a friend, an employee? Certainly, you need to walk in the Spirit. Depending on the relationship, you may need to reward, praise, punish, remind, train or even fire someone.

In my case, I simply needed to get out from under the wing. My assignment to hold a rope provided me with some insight into my own heart and the chance to learn a new lesson about communication and forgiveness (and how to avoid a bump on the head!).

<i>Lesson: Do not allow yourself to become the victim of your own behavior.</i>
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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. Can you think of a situation where you became the victim of your own behavior?
2. What determines what you choose?
3. By the time a person comes to God for help, have they experienced a change of heart?
4. How do you go about rebuking someone?
5. Define *forgiving*.

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