

PRACTICAL SOLUTIONS TO COMMON PROBLEMS

Lesson – 5

"The Problem of Being Misunderstood"

INTRODUCTION:

- I. Few things are more difficult to live with than being misunderstood.
 - A. At those times, we're left with no defense – nothing we say or do can correct the misunderstanding, no matter how hard we try.
 1. We can all remember an experience or two in our lives where someone misunderstood our intentions.
 - a. More than likely, those are probably not very good memories.
 2. But the worst case of being misunderstood I've ever heard, is one Charles Swindoll writes about in his book, "Three Steps Forward, Two Steps Back."
 - a. He writes, "A close friend of mine has an acquaintance in Texas who is a young attorney. He is a member of a sizable law firm run by a rather traditional kind of boss who enjoys a special kind of ritual at Thanksgiving time.

Every year this young attorney participates in the ritual because it means so much to his employer. On the large walnut table in the board room of the office suite sits a row of turkeys, one for each member of the firm. It isn't just a matter of "if you want it, you can have it; if you don't, you can leave it." The members go through some rather involved protocol. Each man stands back from the table and looks at his turkey. When his turn comes, he steps forward and picks up the bird announcing

how grateful he is to work for the firm and how thankful he is for the turkey this Thanksgiving.

This young attorney is single, lives alone, and has absolutely no use for a huge turkey. He has no idea how to fix it, and even if it were properly prepared he has no way to use all its meat. But because it is expected of him, he takes a turkey every year.

One year his close friends in the law office replaced his turkey with one made of paper-mache'. They weighed it with lead to make it feel genuine, and attached a real turkey neck and tail to make it look just like a real turkey. But it was a bogus bird through and through.

On the Wednesday before Thanksgiving, everyone gathered in the board room. When it came his turn, this young man stepped up, picked up the large bird, and announced his gratitude for the job and for the turkey.

Later that afternoon, he got on the bus to go home. With the big turkey on his lap, he wondered what in the world he would do with it. A little further down the bus line, a rather run-down, discouraged-looking man got on. The only vacant seat on the bus was the one next to our young attorney friend. He sat down and they began to talk about the holiday.

The lawyer learned that the stranger had spent the entire day job-hunting with no luck, that he had a large family, and that he was wondering what he would do about Thanksgiving tomorrow. The attorney was struck with a brilliant idea: "This is my day for a good turn, I'll give him my turkey!" Then he had a second thought. "This man is not a freeloader. He's no bum. It would probably injure his pride for me to GIVE it to him. I'll SELL him the turkey!"

He asked the man, "How much money do you have?" "Oh, a couple of dollars and a few cents," the man answered. The attorney said, "I would like to sell you this turkey." And he placed it on the man's lap. "Sold!"

The stranger handed over the two dollars and whatever coins he had. He was moved to tears, thrilled to death that his family would have a turkey for Thanksgiving. He got off the bus and waved good-bye to the attorney. "God bless you. Have a wonderful Thanksgiving. I'll never forget you." The bus pulled away from the curb, as both men smiled...

The next Monday, the attorney went to work. His friends were dying to know about the turkey. You cannot imagine their chagrin when they heard the story of what happened.

I understand, through my friend, that they all got on the bus every day that week, looking in vain for a man who, as far as I know, to this day still entertains a misunderstanding about a guy who innocently sold him a fake turkey for his last couple of bucks and a few cents.

THAT'S MISUNDERSTANDING!"

- B. Unfortunately, this kind of thing happens all the time -- not someone getting a bogus bird -- but someone misunderstanding our intentions or motives.
 - 1. Being a Christian doesn't lessen our chances of being misunderstood either.
 - a. In fact, being a Christian often enhances our chances of being misunderstood by unbelievers who want little or nothing to do with Christianity.
 - 2. But, if there's any comfort, then understand that you're not alone in being misunderstood.
 - a. It's all part of the growing process we all go through.
 - b. We really don't grow fully and completely without being misunderstood somewhere along the line.

BODY:

- I. There is one particular Biblical character who had a major problem with being misunderstood – David.
 - A. He had made a reputation for himself by killing the giant Goliath.

1. And Samuel the prophet had already anointed David with oil and announced to David's family that he would be the next king.
 - a. But, learning how to be king, would involve learning how to endure being misunderstood.
 2. Saul, who the current king, was a very threatened and insecure man.
 - a. If you've ever worked for a Saul, then you know what David was facing – even the slightest irritation can create an enormous sense of insecurity.
- B. In 1st Samuel chapter 18, we have the story of David and Saul coming back home after a decisive battle against the Philistines – the enemies of Israel.
1. As David entered the city in a victorious parade, the women who had gathered around the returning victor sang a song.
 - a. *Now it had happened as they were coming home, when David was returning from the slaughter of the Philistine, that the women had come out of all the cities of Israel, singing and dancing, to meet King Saul, with tambourines, with joy, and with musical instruments. So the women sang as they danced, and said: "Saul has slain his thousands, And David his ten thousands." (1 Samuel 18:6-7)*

2. Saul became upset -- not because David had slain more than him in slaying the giant Goliath – he was upset because he was afraid David was "out to get Saul's job."
 - a. *Then Saul was very angry, and the saying displeased him; and he said, "They have ascribed to David ten thousands, and to me they have ascribed only thousands. Now what more can he have but the kingdom?" (v. 8)*
 - (1). Notice the exaggeration – David was not looking for a kingdom, he just woke up one morning and killed a giant.
 - b. But Saul didn't see it that way -- so he became suspicious of David's intentions from then on.
 - (1). *So Saul eyed David from that day forward. (v. 9)*
 - c. An innocent and courageous act was incorrectly interpreted so that deep down in Saul's heart, he was convinced that David was out to get the throne.
- C. Many Old Testament scholars believe that David's Psalm 140 was written as a result of the events we just discussed.
1. David is now on the run with a small group of loyal followers because of the threats Saul made against his life – he was a hunted man.

- a. Being misunderstood is always an unpleasant experience –
being misunderstood by Saul was a nightmare!

II. In Psalm 140, there is a pattern of things that will help us with the wisdom we need the next time we're misunderstood.

A. First, notice that there is a sense of vulnerability.

1. *Deliver me, O LORD, from evil men; Preserve me from violent men.
.. Keep me, O LORD, from the hands of the wicked; Preserve me
from violent men, Who have purposed to make my steps stumble.*

(vs. 1, 4)

- a. The words, "*Rescue me... preserve me... keep me...*" are the words of a vulnerable person.
- b. Someone who is defenseless and unprotected.
2. That's one of the first things you encounter with being misunderstood – there is a vulnerability of having stumbled into a situation by accident.
 - a. Now you're defenseless and unprotected.

B. Secondly, notice the sense of exaggeration.

1. *Who plan evil things in their hearts; They continually gather together for war. They sharpen their tongues like a serpent; The poison of asps is under their lips. (vs. 2-3)*
 - a. Remember the words of the song the women sang – *"Saul has killed his thousands, but David his TEN thousands?"*
 - (1). That was an exaggeration!
 - b. And that exaggeration led to another one in the mind of Saul – *"What more can he want but my kingdom?"*
2. David wasn't after Saul's kingdom – although he would be the next king, he wasn't trying to run Saul out of town.
 - a. But in Saul's mind, the misunderstanding led to an exaggerated thought.
3. Now David's enemies are devising evil things in their hearts – they are continually gathering together for war.
 - a. How true, when we're misunderstood.
 - b. Those who have not properly understood our motives jump to conclusions in their minds, and begin to devise evil things, and stir up feelings of resentment against us – **FOR SOMETHING WE DIDN'T DO!**

C. Thirdly, notice that people who misunderstand us, look for opportunities to trip us up – and the purpose of that is to make us look bad in the eyes of others.

1. *Keep me, O LORD, from the hands of the wicked; Preserve me from violent men, Who have purposed to make my steps stumble. The proud have hidden a snare for me, and cords; They have spread a net by the wayside; They have set traps for me. (vs. 4-5)*

a. David said those who misunderstood him were no longer content with keeping it in their hearts, they were intent on seeing him take a fall – a HARD fall!

b. Unfortunately, being misunderstood often sets us up for being the victim of vengeful acts that are designed to expose us and harm us in the eyes of others.

2. Sad isn't it?

a. But that's what happens to people who are misunderstood -- before long all kinds of evil plots are hatched, along with all kinds of lies and fabrications intended to persuade anyone who is gullible enough to listen to them.

b. REST ASSURED – There will ALWAYS be someone who will want to hear that kind of garbage.

III. How do we overcome misunderstanding? Notice what David did.

- A. The first thing David did was to call on God.
1. *I said to the LORD: "You are my God; Hear the voice of my supplications, O LORD. O GOD the Lord, the strength of my salvation, You have covered my head in the day of battle." (vs. 6-7)*
 - a. He didn't just THINK it, he SAID it – *"YOU ARE MY GOD; HEAR THE VOICE OF MY SUPPLICATIONS!"*
 2. There are times when we need to verbalize our allegiance to the Living God.
 - a. There are times when we need to say out loud, "Lord God, You are mine. I'm pleading with You right now to help me with this situation."
 - b. That's what David did.
- B. Second, David asked God to fight his battle for him.
1. *"Do not grant, O LORD, the desires of the wicked; Do not further his wicked scheme, Lest they be exalted. Selah.*
"As for the head of those who surround me, Let the evil of their lips cover them; Let burning coals fall upon them; Let them be cast into the fire, Into deep pits, that they rise not up again. Let not a

slanderer be established in the earth; Let evil hunt the violent man to overthrow him." (vs. 8-11)

2. Imagine what it's like having someone BIG on your side during some kind of unfriendly confrontation.
 - a. We have the LORD God Who created the heavens and the earth, Who parted the Red Sea.
 - b. In fact, just before the Red Sea was parted, Moses told the people, "*The Lord will fight for you while you keep silent!*"
(Exodus 14:14)
3. Being misunderstood means having enemies constantly nipping at your heels day after day.
 - a. Therefore, turn the situation over to the Lord and let Him handle the problem.
 - b. God knows how to deal with those kind of people better than you or I could ever imagine.

CONCLUSION:

- I. Have you been misunderstood by someone over something you did?
 - A. All the effort in the world may never get them to change their minds about you.

1. If so, learn from that terrible experience to count on God to protect and defend you during those times.
 - a. The temptation to avenge ourselves **MUST** be resisted.
 - b. Fighting back only brings us down to the level of our adversaries.
 2. So, call upon God to be your defender.
 - a. David knew the Lord would never let him down.
 - b. *"I know that the LORD will maintain the cause of the afflicted, and justice for the poor. Surely the righteous shall give thanks to Your name; the upright shall dwell in Your presence." (vs. 12-13)*
- II. It's comforting to know that Jesus is familiar with being misunderstood.
- A. Jesus was misunderstood by the religious and political leaders of His day.
 1. When Jesus came preaching that the Kingdom of heaven was at hand, the religious leaders thought He would bring about a civil war that would jeopardize their religious and political powers.
 - a. They viewed Him as a threat to their security, in much the same way as Saul viewed David as a threat to his security.

- B. Jesus' enemies put Him to death – all because of a misunderstanding about the nature of His Messiahship and His kingdom.
 - 1. It was never intended to be an earthly kingdom like Rome. Rather it was intended to be a kingdom where God and Christ would reign in the hearts of men and women everywhere.
 - 2. So, when it comes to knowing what it means to be misunderstood – Jesus knows.

- C. But, Jesus willingly suffered all the indignities of being misunderstood for you and me.
 - 1. He realized that someday (after His resurrection from the dead), the truth would be known.
 - a. Not everyone would believe His claim to be the Son of God and the Savior of the world.
 - b. But to those who would believe it, He would make it possible for them to become children of God.
 - 2. Do you believe Jesus' claim?
 - a. If you're not a Christian...
 - b. If you ARE a Christian...