

- ***READ Philippians 2:1-4*** Last Sunday we took some time to look here in Philippians at Paul's encouragements to these brethren as to how they could be working towards completing the good work of faith within their lives as disciples. We learned that in order to complete the good work of faith we must be a people who are courageous, humble, focused, and always rejoicing. When we discussed being humble, we did so in the context of our relationships with one another and how Jesus sets the perfect example for us in regards to how we ought to love those around us. With those considerations and this reminder this morning, we're all set to have perfect relationships with everyone we come in contact with on a daily basis, right?
- Well...as much as we wish that was the case...we know that just isn't how things are. But why is that? Why is it that we read what the Bible says about our relationships with others and then we turn around and experience bad relationships with others? Many a book from the minds of men have been written to address the issue of interpersonal relationships, but I have never read one that painted a picture quite like that of "*Leadership & Self-Deception*" by the Arbinger Institute.
- This purely secularly-corporate setting book takes the reader through a meeting that takes place between a man named Tom and his new boss named Bud. All new managers within Tom's company are required to have a day-long meeting with Bud, and the purpose of this meeting is for Bud to inform these new managers of a problem that they and all people possess. It is a problem that, if unchecked, will lead to the ruin of not only their company but every single relationship that we experience in this life.
- Now, that might seem like a pretty extreme statement to make, but the problem and the solution are both quite simple. The problem is that each of us almost naturally find ourselves living inside our own boxes, and these boxes are problematic because they deceive us and negatively affect the relationships that we have with others. But again...the solution is quite simple. We simply have to work at and achieve the action of getting out of the box.
- Over the next few minutes, we are going to look at three real-life situations that do a good job at illustrating the problems that we have while in the box, and then we will look at some conclusions that are mentioned in the book that, though very wise and helpful, did not originate with the Arbinger Institute because they are first found within the pages of Scripture. These principles have been truly life-changing to me, and while I am by no means perfect in my relationships with others I do feel as if I have grown in what influence I have on the health of my relationships because I have focused greatly on these principles.

I. The Problems (In The Box):

Situation #1: Bud finds himself on an open-seated (first come, first serve) flight. He was lucky enough to find a window seat with the seat next to it vacant. He sits down and puts his briefcase in the empty seat beside him in order to hopefully deter anyone else from taking that seat. He even opens up a newspaper so the space in his row would look smaller and less inviting. While "reading" the paper, his eyes are peeled for people who might look interested in the neighboring seat. If he saw someone looking at it then he would stretch out the paper as wide as he could in order to hopefully scare them off. In doing all of this, what does it seem like he thinks about these other people?

A. We see ourselves as more important or more entitled than others.

1. I believe this story well illustrates one of the main issues with being inside of the box. While Bud's actions might not be overtly malicious, the reality is that he was clearly seeing these other people as threats to his comfort and desire to have this row all to himself. His mindset and subsequent actions were showing that he believed that he was someone important and that he was entitled to the row by himself. He deserve the spacious seat, and other people can fend for themselves.

2. Have any of you ever found yourself behaving in a similar way? I can easily remember doing something similar to this on the bus while in school. I would find a seat that was empty and I would stretch out all the way across it in order to hopefully keep people from wanting to sit down beside me. I was the one who got up the earliest to catch the early bus, so I deserved to have a seat all to myself. I couldn't care less about the needs of others because I was too busy making sure that I had exactly what I wanted because I was most important in my eyes. Instead of seeing myself as just another person among persons, I saw myself as *the* person among all of the other persons on the bus. I was someone special!

Situation #2: A few weeks before his meeting with Bud, Tom had a nasty run in with one of the employees he was managing. There was a conference room right around the corner that Tom used as a second office because it had a massive whiteboard that he often wrote on. He had told everyone on his team that they were not to use the conference room without letting him first know. However, one of the ladies on his team used it without his knowledge and even erased everything he had written on the board. This made Tom very angry, and he immediately called this woman in, refused her handshake, did not invite her to sit, but simply berated her by threatening her to never do that again unless she wanted to be looking for another job. The worst part about this situation...Tom couldn't even recall the lady's name because he had never taken the time to learn it.

B. We view others as being tools to accomplish our own desires.

1. Tom's big mistake and our similar mistake is that he saw his team members as only tools in his tool box that were supposed to help him get work done. His only concern was with accomplishing his goals, and anyone who hindered his accomplishing of his goals was seen as an obstacle that needed to be removed...a tool to be discarded.
2. Have we ever found ourselves with a similar mindset towards other people? Have any of us ever been on a team in school, on the job, or in some other capacity where those who don't contribute are simply discarded without a second thought? How did such treatment of others affect your relationship with those people? It is that treatment of others as tools that leads to us not taking the time to extend even the most simple of kind gestures in learning their names.

Situation #3: Some years ago, Bud and his wife Nancy had a four month old named David. It was around 1 o'clock in the morning when Bud heard David begin to cry. In that moment, Bud felt the desire to go take care of David in order for Nancy to sleep, but instead of getting up...he stayed in bed in an effort to wait either for Nancy to get up or for David to fall back asleep on his own. So there lay not only Bud, but also Nancy continued to lay in bed not getting up. It is in that moment that Bud begins to develop negative feelings towards Nancy. He began to think of her as lazy, inconsiderate, and even unappreciative for everything he did for the family since she wasn't jumping up to take care of David so that he could sleep before work tomorrow. By the end of the episode, Bud had real hard feelings against Nancy.

C. We fail to consider that our issues with others might be of our own doing.

- Let's start at the end and work our way to the beginning. Firstly, was Nancy actually being lazy, inconsiderate, or unappreciative? While it could be that she was doing what Bud was doing, the reality is that she very well could've still been legitimately asleep because she herself was tired from a long day. And yet, it was Bud's betraying of his good ideas that put him in the box and distorted his view of his wife to the point that he was actually embittered towards her...and he only had himself to blame for the feelings that he was now experiencing towards her.

D. We fail too do to others as we know that we ought to do.

1. Remember, this situation started with Bud's son crying and him knowing that it would be the right thing for him to get up and take care of his son so that his wife could sleep and get some much needed and deserved rest. But instead of doing as he knew he ought to do, he decided to

betray those good intentions by putting all of the responsibility on his wife. This is what led him to his poor feelings against her. If we trace the root of the issue back to its earliest origins, we come to find out that this all was a result of Bud's own doing for not doing what he should have.

2. Surely I'm not the only one here who can think of past situations where my feelings or my relationship with someone was poor and it all came down to the fact that I wasn't willing to recognize that I was the reason that it was bad. We are so quick to blame everyone else for our problems, and we want to ignore the fact that we ourselves could be the problem starters. Sometimes the problems we cause are a result of us simply doing to or for others what we know that we ought to do. When we do these things, we find ourselves in the box and there is little hope for us to have stable and enjoyable relationships when we continue to make the mistakes.

II. The Solutions (Out Of The Box):

A. View others as more important than ourselves. (Philippians 2:1-5)

1. Within the book, Bud actually shares a wonder story that shows the other way that the plane seat situation could be handled. Bud and his wife had a ticketing mishap on a plane trip they were on together, and the crew was having a difficult time finding two seats together for them. Out of nowhere, this woman comes up and offers for Bud and his wife to take her seat because the one beside her was vacant. The way that this woman responded to the needs of other people was the polar opposite of what we saw in Bud himself from the earlier situation. Instead of this woman doing everything she could to hold onto the vacant seat, she saw a couple in need and sought to do something to help them out...even if it meant her now having less room for herself. This is a very clearly seen example of someone putting the interests of others ahead of their own interests, and this is exactly what Jesus expects of us because that is exactly what He did for us when He came to earth.
2. Paul's admonitions for us to "*consider others as more important than yourselves*" and to "*look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interest of others*" speak directly to the solution to our relationship problems when they are a result of our thinking that we are superior and entitled to whatever we want in this life. If we will shift our focus from being so self-centered, then we will have our eyes opened to the needs of others and hopefully come to understand that it is a good thing when we seek to help others when they have a need that we can serve. When we give effort in this direction then there is hardly any doubt in my mind that our relationships will be benefitted and strengthened. However...that isn't going to happen unless we open our eyes to the needs of others because we actually see them for what they really are.

B. See others as what they are...people. (Philippians 2:1-5)

1. Remember, there is a temptation for us to only view those around us as being tools that we can use to accomplish our own desires and goals. And *NEWSFLASH* people don't enjoy it when they are seen as less than human. People don't appreciate it when they are simply used by others. Therefore, we must begin to see others just as we would want for others to see us. That means that we need to see others as people who, like ourselves, have desires, hopes, goals, and dreams. Instead of seeing ourselves as the only person around, we need to see ourselves as just another person among many other persons. We need to follow the Apostle's instructions to, "*Do nothing out of selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility consider others as more important than yourselves. Everyone should look out not only of this own interests, but also for the interest of others.*"
2. When we do this then I would dare say that we will see a dramatic change in the way that people respond to us. It isn't to say that we can't have working relationships where things need to get done, but it is to say that we want to work with people and not simply use objects. We want to treat people with dignity and respect. We want for people to know that we care about them as people. If we do such a thing then we might even notice that this relationship is able to grow

and thrive because this other person is more willing to buy into the work that you're doing together because that person now feels that you have his or her best interests at heart. If I find myself in a situation where there is tension in a relationship then I would do well to consider the way that I truly feel about these other people because it might be that I have been selfish and unwilling to see them as people and consider their own desires and needs.

C. Objectively examine ourselves. (**Galatians 6:1-5**)

1. In addition to considering how we feel about and view other people, we would do well to take time often to simply examine ourselves to make sure that we are being the best type of person that we can be. It is can be so easy for us to think that it is everyone else around us that has a problem, and we never take a moment to recognize that there is only one commonality amongst all of these problematic people...and that would be us!
2. This very quickly brings to my mind the situation between David, Nathan, Bathsheba, and Uriah that can be found in **II Samuel 12:1-7**. In this text, Nathan lays out a situation that closely paralleled to the exact situation that David had created, and yet there was no anger on David's part toward what he had done. This speaks to the fact that we can easily be blinded to our own faults and shortcomings. We can easily see the mistakes that others are making, but we fail to see that maybe we are the reason that they are making those mistakes.
3. This is why it is so important for us to make sure that we are not getting into the box and allowing for our perspective to be distorted. Instead of thinking that we are completely innocent in a conflict, we need to truly examine ourselves to see if we might have some culpability in the difficulties that are currently present. (**Galatians 6:3,4**) We must examines ourselves to determine whether or not we are the man or the woman that is at the root of the issues in our relationships. If we can determine that we are being too demanding, too stubborn, to obstinate, or whatever it might be...then we might just have a chance at fixing those issues and being able to have stronger and healthier relationships with those around us.

D. Do the right thing towards others. (**Matthew 22:36-40**)

1. One of the ways that we get ourselves in trouble is when we betray ourselves out of doing what we know is the right thing to do in the moment. Bud knew that it was the right thing to get up and take care of his son so that his wife could sleep, but he instead created a scenario where he ended up having negative feelings forwards her. All of it could have been avoided if he would've simply done the right thing to begin with. James would put it this way, "*So it is sin to know the good and yet not to do it.*" (**James 4:17**)
2. When it comes to our relationships, many of the issues that we might face could be avoided if we would take the responsibility of the things that we know that we ought to do simply because we know that it is the right thing to do. In fact, this is a principle that has been around for a very long time, even from the time of the Law and the Prophets. Jesus stated in **Matthew 22:38,39** that the two greatest commands were to first love God, but secondly to "*Love your neighbor as yourself.*" How many negative situations could have been avoided from the beginning if someone would've have simply asked themselves, "would I appreciate it if someone did this thing (that I am about to do to someone else) to me?" If the answer is "No!" then that right there should be a dead giveaway that this isn't the right thing to do. If we want better relationships then we simply need to do the right thing towards others.

Now, all of this about the box and being in and out of it might seem profound, but we need to give credit to the one to whom the credit is actually do...our God. What these men have discovered is simply what God has already decreed to us in His word. It is His word that shows us the need for humility, love, objectivity, and service. If we find ourselves struggling in our interpersonal relationships then maybe we need to simply get out of the box and begin to view and treat people the way that the Lord desires for His people.