

If you were enrolled in my Interpersonal Communication College course, I would ask you to describe how you would respond to three different situations... including your emotional reaction. ... Let me present these scenarios to you... and just imagine what your reaction would be. Are you ready...? Here we go...

1. You are in a hurry to get home... but you decide to stop on the way at Wickiup Junction Market to get some milk. There are cars parked in every stall in front of the doors... and as it so happens... two of those stalls are occupied by just one car. The driver carelessly left his car at an angle taking up two parking spots (one of which you could have used for your quick in-and-out stop.) Each parking stall is clearly marked. It is quite obvious to you that there is no reason the carelessly parked vehicle could not have been parked so that another driver could use the valuable parking space.

Was the driver being considerate of others...? ... What are your feelings when you come upon something like this...? ... What is your attitude toward the driver...?

2. You are having a terribly busy day. You are in downtown Bend on Wall Street and need to pop into a stationary/office supply store for a project you will be working on. You find the items that you need and proceed to the register. Behind the counter at the register is a young girl reading a book. She apparently ignore you. You stand there for several minutes before you finally speak out. "*Ahh... hello...*" But she does not answer you and remains pre-occupied with her book.

What are your reactions and your feelings...? What is your attitude toward this girl...?

3. It is Friday night and you are walking down Bond Street in Bend. You walk past an ally and there you see a man with messed up clothing and an empty wine bottle beside him. He is mumbling to himself.

What are your feelings...? What is your attitude toward him...?

OK... Now I would like to go a step further... and tell you how each of these stories ended. Your task now... is to consider if your feelings would change at all.

1. You finally park your car. You are about to walk into the store... when the driver of the carelessly parked car runs out... jumps into his car... and drives away. Inside the store... the clerk tells you that there has just been a bad accident 1 mile south down 97. The driver who took two parking stalls had driven to Wickiup Junction to telephone an ambulance and Oregon Highway Patrol. He was not aware that he had occupied two parking places... as he dashed into the store to get help.

Any change in feeling now...? How about your attitude toward the driver...?

2. As you prepare to walk out of the office supply store... Mr. Clarke... the store owner approaches the girl who had ignored you. After speaking a few words in French to her... he introduces you to his family's foreign exchange student who will be staying with them for the next school year. The student was just waiting for Mrs. Clarke to come and give her a ride to their home.

Any change in feeling now...? What is your attitude toward the girl now...?

3. A ambulance pulls up. You discover that the man is the branch manager of Bank of the Cascades which is two doors down. He had been hit over the head with a wine bottle and robbed.

Describe your feelings now...

When we act on our initial impression... we can be so wrong... can't we...? Because of the trust we place in our own emotion-fed perception... we can over-react with a harshness that creates greater problems than it solves.

How often have you approached a situation with a harsh firmness... when the situation really called for a gentler response from you...? ... My

Southern Baptist preacher friend... Ed Bedrosian... would tell me... *“Jim... you can catch a lot more flies with honey... than you can with vinegar...”*

In an article for Leadership journal, Gordon MacDonald shares the story of a friend who was caught in the middle of a nasty church conflict that had spun out of control. When MacDonald asked his friend how the situation had been resolved, his friend told him that he had been confronted with a piercing piece of advice: "Someone has to show a little dignity in this thing. It really should start with you." MacDonald's friend took the wisdom to heart, and it worked wonders in the situation. MacDonald took the wisdom to heart himself and had the opportunity to apply it when caught in the middle of an airport fiasco.

MacDonald was scheduled to fly from Boston's Logan Airport to Chicago, but the boarding-pass attendant realized that he was scheduled to fly not out of Boston, but Manchester, New Hampshire. MacDonald asked whether she could solve the problem for him. She could—but for an extra \$360.

MacDonald was shocked. "I'm a 100k customer on your airline. I give you guys a lot of my business. Can't you just get me on the flight for free as a courtesy?" But the boarding-pass attendant said her hands were tied. MacDonald would have to pay the \$360.

The testy situation had reached its decisive moment. Though the problem was a result of MacDonald's incorrect booking, he felt "depreciated, blown off, victimized by a big company that seemed to put a monetary value on every transaction." As he points out in his article, "the ungodly part of me wanted to say something sarcastic (about friendly skies, for example) that

would hurt the other person as I felt hurt. Hurting her would help me to feel that I'd hurt the rest of the company—all the way up to the CEO. Perhaps she'd call and tell him how I felt so that his day would be ruined like mine was about to be ruined."

But then he remembered the advice his friend had been given: "Someone has to show a little dignity in this thing. It really should start with you."

MacDonald swallowed his pride and applied the advice to the situation at hand. He writes about what happened next:

I said to the boarding-pass lady, "Before I pay you the \$360, let me say one more thing. Six weeks ago I came here to take a flight to the West Coast and discovered that the airline had cancelled the flight and hadn't told me. They said they were sorry, and I forgave them.

"Then two weeks later, on a flight to Europe, the airline lost my luggage (for two days). They said they were really, really sorry. And, again, I forgave them.

"Last week, on a third flight, they got me to my destination two hours late. Your people fell all over themselves saying how sorry they were about the delays. And you know what? I forgave them again. Now here I am—fourth time in six weeks—wanting to fly with you again. See how forgiving I am?

"But this morning the problem's mine. I forgot that I scheduled myself out of the other airport. And I am really, really sorry that I made this terrible mistake.

"You guys have said 'sorry' to me three times in the last six weeks, and, each time I have forgiven you. Now I would like to say 'sorry' to you and

ask you to forgive me and put me on that flight without charging me the \$360. You have three 'sorries,' and now I'm asking for one. Does that make any sense to you?"

The boarding-pass lady took her own time-out and considered my idea and then said, "It really does make sense to me. Let me see what I can do."

She typed and typed and typed into her computer—as if she was writing a novella—and then looked up with a smile. "We can do this," she said. Two minutes later I was off to the gate with my boarding pass.

That morning dignity won. The airline forgave me. The skies were indeed friendly. I didn't have to pay an extra \$360.

MacDonald offers these closing thoughts: "*...Our human dignity is eroded by these constant clashes, (and) even our innocent mistakes point to the possibility for hateful exchanges and vengeful acts. You have to keep alert lest you get sucked into saying and doing things that you'll regret an hour later.*"

Our study today... in the Book of Judges... is a narrative about a very harsh reaction... for which the action-takers felt a lot of regret. ... I think that our narrative today... pre-figures what the Apostle Paul would later write to the Galatian believers... about a problem they needed to confront among themselves...

**Galatians 6:1 (ESV)**

*Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted.*

Judges chapter 20... is a cautionary tale that warns us against rushing to judgment. ... As we read about the Israelites... who press their case against Benjamin... one of their brother tribes... we're reading about ourselves... or at least about our tendency to throw truth to the wind... and rush to judgment.

We hear a report about "Sister Gottrocks." She is known to get a little more than tipsy every evening with her wine before dinner. *"People like her should not be watching our kids in the nursery... you know. Let's let the pastor and the elders know... so she can be removed. And maybe she should lay off the stuff before comes and sits in the pew with us on Sunday mornings..."*

"Brother Wankle" confessed at Bible Study a few weeks ago that he used to smoke pot in college. ... Why in the world is he still allowed to be the head usher of our church...? When he walks to the back to count the money... he is probably taking some of it to support such an awful habit... If he quit smoking it... then why hasn't he removed his tattoo from his arm...?

Before we read our passage this morning... let's get a little of the back story. ... Judges 20 is a continuation of the narrative that began in the previous chapter. ... In Judges 19... last week... we read about a Levite... from the priestly tribe in Israel... who traveled from the region of Ephraim in the north... to the city of Bethlehem... to win back his concubine... who had returned to her father's house after becoming angry with her partner. ... On the return trip... the Levite came to the town of Gibeah. These were Israelites from the tribe of Benjamin... and he thought he would be safe.

However... some men from Gibeah demanded that the old man who took him into his home... hand over the Levite... so that they could gang-rape him. ... The old man refused... and the Levite appeased them... by pushing his concubine out the door... so they could rape her... and beat her all night long.

The next morning... when the Levite was preparing to leave... he all but tripped over his concubine... who was lying at the doorway of the old man's house. ... Let's pick up the narrative with verse 28 of Judges chapter 19...

### **Judges 19:28-30**

How Israel responds to the gruesome call to arms is the subject of the opening verses of Judges 20.

### **Judges 20:1**

The Levite does what no leader in the period of the judges was able to do... he unites Israel. ... Representatives from all the tribes of Israel... from Dan in the north to Beersheba in the south... travel to Mizpah... to consider what to do in response to the atrocity of Gibeah. ... Israelites even came from the other side of the Jordan... representatives from the land of Gilead... who had a tenuous relationship with the other 10 ½ tribes in the land of Canaan. ... The Israelites literally gather as “one man” to take counsel.

This unity could be promising if it were for the sake of worship... or even if it were for conference to seek revival that would lift all Israel out of its immorality. But... as we see in the next verse... these were mainly armed

soldiers... ready to do business. They came prepared for a harsh response... trusting fully in their first impression. ... What could possibly be the Benjamites' reaction... but to put the Benjamites on the defensive... and make military action all but inevitable...?

### **Judges 20:2-7**

The Israelites want to know "*how this awful thing happened.*" ... The question does not appear to address anyone in particular... but the Levite seems all too happy to answer it. ... The assembly... also... seems eager to listen to him. ... But what is very important for our notice is this... ... The Levite's testimony features half-truths... distortions... and a concern for himself... instead of his concubine. ... As an answer to the question... the Levite bears false witness... for starters... violating one of the Ten Commandments.

During the night... the men of Gibeah came after him... and surrounded the house... intending to kill him? ... No... they intended to rape him. ... (That is bad enough... but it is not the same. ... He adds to the story.) ... Next... They raped his concubine and she died? ... Yes... they raped her... but the Levite withholds a very significant detail. ... It was only because he pushed her out to them... knowing what they would do. ... In order to protect himself... he willingly gave her to them. He played a very significant role in this disgusting act. ... Third... Yes... she died... but when? ... After they raped her or after he took a knife to her? ... I read more than one commentary where the scholar presents their belief (which is based on the Hebrew word for cutting up)... that she was not dead when he cut her up. Cutting her into pieces is what finished her off. Whether or not that was the



case... the Levite sure does minimize his own role in all of this... Yes... some men of Gibeah... (the whole town...? – No!) ... Some of its men committed a lewd and outrageous act in Israel... but what about the Levite?

He sacrificed his concubine... all but tripped over her in the morning... after he layed down... presumably going to sleep through it all... But then he commanded her to get up and go— with further chilling callousness...  
Outrageous!

The Levite exhorts “*all you Israelites*” to “*speak up.*” ... But (do you know what...?) ... I really don’t think that he wanted every Israelite to speak up. What if they found and interviewed his host that evening...? “*Really...? It wasn’t all the men of Gibeah...? Therefore we should only take action against the perpetrators...?*” ... “*Really...? He consented and gave up his own wife to them...?*” “*Really...? Murder was not their intent...?*” With a little more investigation... the outcome may have been different. Instead... the Levite paves the way and encourages everyone to rush to judgment. He wants the assembly to immediately decide tell him what they’ll do... decided to do... without consulting any other witnesses. ... (NOW HERE IS SOMETHING VERY IMPORTANT TO KNOW)... What the Levite was asking them to do... was a violation of the Law. The Law of Moses is clear. At least two witnesses are required... before the type of action he was pushing them to... could be taken. (Deuteronomy 17:6, 19:15).

First, the Levite was willing to sacrifice his concubine to protect himself... now he’s willing to ignore God’s Law... and to sacrifice thousands of his countrymen in battle... for the sake of his own personal revenge.

It's easy for us... having read Judges 19... and the first seven verses of Judges 20... to sit in judgment of the Levite. ... (In some ways... perhaps I can be accused of doing something similar as what the Levite was doing – encouraging you to rush into judgment... about the character of this Levite.) ... But not completely. (You see...) without question... the Levite deserves rebuke. ... But here is the balance. ... As we consider his wrong... we should think about the times when we have urged a certain reaction. Have you ever been inclined to stretch the truth to influence the outcome?

Have you ever hidden... or minimized... certain facts... that could cause a different result than what you wanted...? You just didn't bother to mention certain things because it might hinder your desired outcome... if they were known. ... Have you ever embellished your account about an event... while at the same time demonizing your opponent? ... Have you ever tried to rush a decision... before others (who might have a different perspective) could come forward...? Have you ever discouraged your listeners from soliciting testimony from those who would tell a different story? ... The Levite was willing to sacrifice the lives of his countrymen for the sake of personal vengeance. ... And honestly... we have been willing (sometimes) to sacrifice the reputations of others... who we have been able to convince to act with us... on only the information that we pushed out to them... ... What might we be inclined to sacrifice... and for what cause?

### **Judges 20:8-11**

Without taking any more testimony... and without inquiring of the Lord... the Israelites believe the embellishing... and truth withholding Levite... and literally mobilize as “one man” against Gibeah. ... The Spirit of the Lord has

come upon many leaders in the book of Judges... but none of them was able to generate the level of response that the Levite generated with his false testimony. ... (Deborah... Jephthah... Gideon... Samson... None of the Judges could unify Israel to battle the Canaanite opponents.) But here... they all come out... as one... to take up arms against their own countrymen. The Israelites manage to unite only to fight their own... not their enemies.

Are four hundred thousand soldiers... in addition to ten percent of the male population for supply lines... really necessary to punish the rapists of Gibeah? ... Is it really necessary to unite against an entire city... when only a few of its residents are guilty? ... What about giving diplomacy a try before marching on a city? ... Who can stop the march toward war once men hear the drums and start smelling blood?

The human tendency... once the blood starts boiling... and the drums start beating... is to jump to conclusions and shut our ears to further information. (You know...) once our opponents are identified... anyone who is connected with them... often become guilty by association... We see this happening in our narrative... All the people of Gibeah... not just the rapists... became guilty in the eyes of the Israelites.

We... on the other hand... must be willing to listen longer... to hear more than one side... and to suspend judgment. ... Watch out for when your blood starts boiling and the drums start beating... ... because the truth often gets drowned out on such occasions. ... We must guard against believing lies... and half-truths... like the Israelites... and mobilizing for the wrong causes.

Why is it... by the way... that so often in the church... we act just like these Israelites...? We can't seem to listen to each other. ... Obviously... it is because we have a spiritual enemy... who wants us to see each other... as the enemy. ... Certainly... there is a place for discussing theological differences to listen... to sharpen... and to persuade... but too often such differences become intensely personal.

In many cases... the theological disagreements... are really just camouflage... for an underlying animosity. ... For many involved in such disputes... the real issue isn't theology... the real issue is personal. ... But if we blame the dispute on theological differences... we can convince ourselves that our purpose is to stand up for the truth.

A pastor friend of mine once asked me... *“Have you ever noticed that when a group of people split away from a church to start their own... how often they put the word ‘Bible’ in their name...?”* ... *“We understand the Bible correctly in our new church... We are Biblical here...! Unlike those we left...”*

Beware of the evil one... Satan... who wants to turn us against each other in order to hinder our witness and our mission. ... If we're fighting each other... we're probably not fighting who we should be fighting – Satan!

**Ephesians 6:12 (ESV)**

*For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.*

**Judges 20:12-13**

Apparently the tribe of Benjamin was not invited to the conference where all the other tribes reached their verdict. ... And rather than going to the city where the offense had happened... they go all over the territory of Benjamin... to all of it's cities. .

If they ONLY wanted Gibeah to give up the worthless fellows who committed the indecent act... why didn't they **just** go to the city where they were...? ... Why did they need to go show their strength of force throughout the whole tribe...? ... We want the whole tribe... who we did not invite... to know what we are about to do...

The result...? Benjamin (no doubt) felt isolated and backed into a corner. So Benjamin decided to show its own brand of unity. They unified themselves and declared war on the rest of the tribes of Israel.

### **Judges 20:14-16**

It is unlikely that bullheaded Benjamin will be a pushover. ...They may be far outnumbered (almost 15 to one) but their crack Seven Hundred Unit... will have to be reckoned with. ... This number formed an elite corps of left-handed super-slingers... renowned for their deadly accuracy. ... They may have been the reason (for what we will see next week)... that Benjamin had initial success against all the other tribes. ... Most of Israel's soldiers were probably right-handed... and carried their shields on their left arms. ... That would provide normal defense against right-handed slingers... but these 700 lefty slingers would be hurling at a different angle toward the unguarded side... and... if these left-handers could hit a hair... they could surely smash a right temple lobe on the head.

## Judges 20:17

Next week we will continue this narrative. ... The resulting war is tragic... and Israel will regret their actions. ... That is often the case whenever you and I rush to judgment.

If we accuse and demand before listening... like the Israelites... we back the other party into a corner. ... We leave the other person or group with little choice but to defend themselves. ... Perhaps... though... there's something we're missing. ... The Israelites saw evil in Gibeah and wanted to punish Gibeah... but they couldn't see the evil in the one who persuaded them to punish Gibeah. ... And... of course... they couldn't see the issues with their own response — jumping to conclusions... refusing to listen... overreacting... and deeming others guilty by association. ... What are we missing?

Jesus Christ... the human and divine king anticipated by the book of Judges... famously said,

### **Matthew 7:4-5 (ESV)**

*Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when there is the log in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye.*

We often don't notice the obvious... the plank in our eye. ... Second... with a plank in our eye... we can't see what we're doing. ... With a plank in their eyes... the Israelites... who pressed their case against Gibeah... couldn't see what they were doing.

Jesus, of course... is not denying a place for removing specks from brothers' eyes. ... Wherever this is known sin in a brother or sister's life... that they are not repenting from... we are to go to them... but to look in the mirror before we begin.

**Galatians 6:1 (ESV)**

*Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted.*