

9. 1 Peter 3:9-11 suggests two general ways that we fail to exhibit these characteristics. What are they?
10. List a couple of examples (recent ones are the most helpful to you) where you might have returned evil for evil or insult for insult. What did God want you to do in each case? (Remember to protect the *other* person when you cite examples. Don't give names.)
11. What results do these verses suggest will be ours if we live in this manner?

Read 1 Peter 3:14-16.

12. Verse 14 tells us to be fearless during unjust suffering. Verse 15 gives the "how to." Explain how setting apart Christ as Lord in your hearts will enable you to be fearless. (Is hope a central ingredient in this process? Why or why not?)
13. Let's look closely at verses 15-16.
- What is "the hope that is in you"?
 - To whom are you to explain it?
 - Why would they ask?
 - In what manner should the explanation be made? Is this true for men as well as for women?
 - Who is responsible for the results of such an encounter?

14. According to these verses, how does a person keep a good conscience,?
15. There is another way. Read 2 Corinthians 7:9-10 and 1 John 1:9. What *is* the other way?

Read 1 Peter 3:17-22.

16. Verse 17 suggests that sometimes it is the will of God that when I am just (and who is ever completely just?) I suffer unjustly. How does verse 18 support this?
17. Christ's unjust suffering was so that He might bring us to God. Please explain this concept.

Christ proclaimed God's victory to the disobedient angels. He did this by the display of His resurrection life.

18. What was it that saved Noah (v. 20)?

Being placed into Jesus saves me from death and gives me new birth, new life, and living hope. His death paid the penalty for my sin and His resurrection demonstrated that there was power to do so.

19. What do you see to be the impact of verse 22? Maybe one or two words can describe it. How can this help you today?

20. **PERSONAL:** Are you “away” from God your Father? Because of God’s great love for you He is longing for you to come closer, to come Home. Jesus Christ’s death and resurrection paved the way and provided the power to bring you to God. Tell Him you are accepting and depending on *His* provision and that you *do* want Him to be the Lord of your life today. *Thank you, Father, Amen.*

21. Read the attached article, thinking about it in relationship to 1 Peter 3:2. What did you find helpful about the article?

RICK

By Ruth Senter

Male/female friendships should be easy and natural – right? But the realities of our humanness intrude. The author tells of a personal experience.

Pen. Paper. Text. Class schedule. Train pass. Lunch. I took mental inventory of my needs for the day, kissed Mark goodbye, and streamlined myself out the door, through the early-morning traffic, and into the station just in time to make the 7:37 train to the city – too close for a comfortable start of the day.

I was going to miss Mark's companionship in this early-morning routine. Commuting together had been our tradition since he had started graduate work at the university and I'd decided to pick up a few courses as well. But this quarter his classes didn't begin until noon, and since I had to be in the speech lab by one o'clock, the best I could hope for was a glimpse of him across campus.

First class of the day: "Psychological Foundations of Communication Theory. Graduate Level."

Thirty minutes into the lecture I knew I had made the right choice. I liked the professor; I liked the group. Twelve of us sat in a circle broken only by Dr. Stacey and her blackboard. The class would be half lecture, half lab; our grade would be based on a group research project to be developed on our own time. I foresaw hours of extra work, but I also saw possibilities for new ideas and new friendships. There was something intriguing about the group around me – a sort of sophisticated mystique that made me want to know more about them.

In five minutes I had my opportunity. "Senter, Stein, Swansen, and White. Group number four." Dr. Stacey handed us each a list. "Ten topic proposals. Choose one. Completed project due November 28. That's it for today."

"Anyone here belong with Stein?" A voice boomed out from over near the door. I looked to see who owned the voice. "Your name's not Frank N., is it?" I surprised myself with my lack of inhibition as I moved toward him.

Stein was obviously used to having his name played with, but he laughed anyway. I noticed that when he smiled his eyes narrowed. I felt immediately at ease. "No, as a matter of fact it's not Frank, it's Rick."

He reached out, shook hands with the other male member of the group and completed the introductions. "Now, when shall we meet? Friday comes in four days. Guess we'd best start tracking." Leadership seemed natural for him.

"Going to be an interesting quarter with this group," I thought as we headed toward the south end of the campus. Beth wore an oversized Mickey Mouse wristwatch, seldom smiled, and kept referring to the group as "you" rather than "we"; and blond, ruddy-faced Peter from

Sweden spoke English in slow, fractured monosyllables, rounded off his w's into v's, and sounded thoroughly academic. Then there was Rick – some mother's all-American dream son. I could picture him hoisting the sails amid sparkling blue waters on a commercial for aftershave.

Actually I wasn't too far off on Rick's professional expertise. "Into TV production over at channel _____." He mentioned one of the larger stations in our city. "I'm here at the station's expense. Hammering away a little at a time on my master's degree in broadcasting."

We discussed project strategy between bites of pizza. I noticed that Rick had outlined the meeting in neat block printing on a yellow note pad; on an opposite column he had written his day's schedule. I couldn't miss it. It was right next to my elbow. Besides, organizational ability is one thing I never overlook in people. "Noon – meet group. 2:30 – to studio – tape forum. 7:30 – Bible study at Lynn's."

I almost forgot my manners and charged right into the conversation. One didn't happen upon another Christian every day on this impersonal commuter campus. Restraint came hard, but I managed to stick to the business at hand until we adjourned the meeting with plans to meet next time at Rick's apartment, which was only three blocks from campus. There we would at least be able to hear each other.

"Hey! Hey! What do you know?" Rick pounded delightedly on the table when I told him I studied the Bible too and in fact was personally related to the One who inspired it.

"Now, this is what I call a pleasant surprise." His enthusiasm was obvious. "Wait till I tell Lynn. Lynn's my fiancée. She'll be my wife as of June 27. She's the one who introduced me to Jesus. I've been a Christian almost a year now and what a difference!"

"What's changed for you?" I opened the door wide . . .

Forty-five minutes later when I looked at my watch, I realized I was late for speech lab. "I'll walk you down there. I have to catch the 'L' on South Halsted anyhow," Rick volunteered as I let him help me with my jacket. It seemed the perfectly natural thing to do.

"Christian friends just aren't that easy for me to come by, especially ones like you who've had a lot more time to grow." He invited Mark and me to his Bible study and promised that sometime he would show me some of the poetry he'd written since becoming a Christian. "See you tomorrow." I felt his smile penetrate right through me and watched as he jogged toward the "L" platform. Easy, muscular form. I felt his magnetism.

"Pleasant surprise," he'd said. I could see why he'd probably be good at writing poetry. It was a pleasant surprise to find someone who knew and understood and shared the value of your faith. Almost like finding a long-lost cousin. "That's what Christian friendship is all about," I thought to myself as I bounded up the stairs and unlocked the door to apartment 2B.

"Guess what." I dropped my books on the dining room table, swung into Mark's arms and told him about Rick. "He's a Christian. You must meet him. You two would hit it off."

Mark grinned and kissed me on the nose. He knew the value of friendship, especially friendships that stretched us beyond our usual boundaries. Once in a while friends came along with whom there was a special blend. Mark and I both knew that regardless of which of us was a part of the initial blend, the other would reap the benefits too. I sensed Rick would be no exception.

I wasn't so sure about Lynn. She appeared on the scene the following day at Rick's apartment. Our group huddled around his coffee table putting the last-minute alterations on our project proposal when she pushed open the apartment door. I would not have guessed she was Lynn except by deduction. What other female would be pushing open Rick's door in the middle of the afternoon? She didn't fit my expectations for the woman Rick would choose.

A shy smile played around her mouth and tried to come out. Rick jumped to her rescue and made the introductions. She wore white and had just come from instructing nurses down at the medical center. I was sure that with her street clothes on she'd look much more colorful and interesting. "Probably just what Rick needs," I thought. "Calm, quiet stability."

"Do I have a question for you!" Rick made the statement one day several weeks later as he squeezed his tall frame into the desk next to mine. "By the way, you and that color green go great. You look as luscious as lime sherbet on a hot summer day. Now here's the issue: As a Christian, when you make a decision, is it you that makes the choice or is it God who runs the controls, regulates your mind to make the choices that are consistent with His will?"

Let's talk about it later, I scribbled on my notebook paper. I was glad for the two hours of lecture to think about a response. This wouldn't be a conversation we'd tie up in five minutes after class.

Dr. Stacey had barely finished her lecture when Rick leaned over and asked, "How about solving this theological dilemma over a Big Mac? I really need your thoughts on this one, but I have to eat and get to the studio by 1:30. Come on. My treat."

The day was warm for September. I threw my blazer over my shoulders and followed Rick into the brilliance of noon. Lucky for me that today was my afternoon off at the speech lab. I'd planned study time in the library, then a three o'clock rendezvous with Mark after his class.

"Too nice a day for inside. Let's get our food and then come back and eat on the triangle." Rick referred to one of the few spaces of green on the campus, over by the west entrance: a little park, complete with white birch, Austrian pine, and a three-tiered fountain. It happened to be one of my favorite spots – an oasis in the concrete desert of the university. How did Rick know? "Could be he likes the place too," I thought. Being with Rick seemed a natural, profitable way to spend a lunch hour, especially when we were discussing the will of God. I had no second thoughts.

The hour flew. With Rick I never had to wonder how to start a conversation or what to say next or even if he'd heard what I just said. Rick gave me 100 percent attention.

Then the 1:05 buzzer reminded us of time. "You've got to go. I don't want to make you late for the studio."

Rick seemed in no special hurry. "This has really been helpful, Ruth. Thanks for your time. I wish I knew my Bible the way you do. In fact, you're really into a lot of things. You enjoy life, don't you? You're an amazing person." He reached out and gave my arm a little squeeze.

"By the way, when are you going to bring Mark out of hiding and let me meet him? Could I talk the two of you into a Saturday brunch sometime? That's when Lynn and I do a lot of our entertaining."

He swung his brown leather jacket over his left shoulder, picked up his attache case, flashed his wide smile, and was gone. He even remembered to take the empty McDonald's bag with him to deposit along the way.

I sat for a long time, mesmerized by the cascading liquid sculpture of the fountain and by thoughts of Rick. What was it about him? Did he absorb everyone into his life and thoughts the way he'd done with me?

The will of God came up again a few weeks later, this time over a ham and cheese omelet cooked to perfection. Rick had kept his promise: brunch for four at his apartment. He poured freshly squeezed orange juice into tall glasses, set the basket of croissants on the table, and with the ease of someone who serves brunch every morning of his life, took his place in the empty chair between Lynn and me.

The dynamics of the morning flowed together with pleasant precision: the sound of coffee bubbling in the percolator, Handel's Water Music in the background, the warmth of splattered sunlight over natural woods, earthtones, and hanging gardens of green. I watched Mark reach for another roll and throw his head back in uproarious response to Rick's joke about a rabbi, a priest, and a Southern Baptist preacher. Humor from the same mold. No wonder they enjoyed each other. Rick and Mark were an interesting study in contrasts and similarities. I found myself making mental notes on each.

As for Lynn, she drifted in and out of the conversation – mostly in on topics of spiritual significance. I could tell her commitment to God was deep. She was the one who opened the discussion on God's will, and I wondered what else was inside her besides theological questions. There seemed to be a lot of Lynn under lock and key. Rick, on the other hand, seemed more like an open door.

Our verbal exchanges weaved in and out among topics of Jewishness, theology, television producing, golfing, graduate projects for communications theory, Dr. Stacey, the will of God, marriage. The rolls and coffee had long since disappeared, the morning turned into noon, and I felt we'd just begun. We said goodbye in the front hallway, next to Rick's photo gallery.

“See you Monday, Ruth,” Rick called as we started down the stairs. Suddenly Monday morning became significant; an anticipated event. I had never felt that way before about the beginning of the workweek. Down deep I knew it had something to do with Rick.

“Going to Houston,” Rick boomed out one morning when he met me in the hall outside class. “Don’t look so shocked. It’s only a five-day convention. Be back a week from Friday, just in time for the grand finale to this outstanding production by group number four. I think we can tie it all up when I get back, don’t you?”

Sure, we could tie it all up ... but suddenly I felt at loose ends, as if someone had just cut next week out of my calendar. Why should it matter so much that Rick went to Houston next week? The project was in its final stages. My head struggled to convince my heart. I rode home on the train that afternoon feeling that life had boomeranged back into the ordinary, at least for next week.

That night during my conversation with God, I played an edited tape of my feelings. I could not bring myself to verbalize the growing tension inside me. Surely God understood about friendship. That’s why he created companionship for himself in the garden. But when it came to this friendship – the one that drew Rick and me together – I felt God was strangely silent. I’d always assumed the male-female “thou shalt nots” in the Bible were for the extremes. But Rick and I were walking down the middle of the road, and the guideposts did not seem so obvious.

The call from Houston came on Wednesday afternoon just after I’d gotten home from school. “Just can’t get along without me now, can you? Tell the truth.” He didn’t give me time to tell him, and I wouldn’t have anyhow. “Do me a big favor. Peter didn’t have his cross-tabs done on the Edgebrook sample. Check with him tomorrow. Dr. Stacey needs to see a copy of the stats too. Would you get them to her before Friday? Thanks. You’re a nice lady. So what’s been happening in your life since I’ve been gone?”

I wasn’t sure I understood his question, so I told him that the temperature had dropped to 14 degrees last night – first time in 20 years it had been this cold this early; that we had finished Festinger and the Cognitive Dissonance Theory in class; and that Mark and I had eaten at the Greentown restaurant Rick recommended to me one day during a conversation about ethnic foods.

Rick seemed to forget that he was calling from Houston. He described his hotel, the giant American flag that flew above the hotel portico, the view from his fifteenth-story window, the Mexican dinner he’d eaten the night before in Houston’s Old Town, and the speech on the future of coaxial television that he’d just heard at the convention.

When it was all over, I sat for a long time and stared at the phone. A lot of conversation just to tell me about Peter’s cross-tabs. Where is this thing going?

It was a question I didn’t want to answer. But I didn’t have to, at least not right then. Instead, I felt like singing. And I did. All the way through the rest of the evening. “It’s getting near the end of the quarter. You’re singing again. You feel out from under the pile, don’t you?”

Mark made his observation that night at dinner. I couldn't bring myself to tell him any differently. I never mentioned Houston or the call.

Strange that I felt the need to hide a phone call I'd received from a friend. I knew Mark would understand. Our marriage was rooted in the strength of our trust and commitment to each other. Why then the sudden need for secrecy?

I drifted in and out of a troubled sleep. Images and thoughts of Rick pounded at my mind. Mark seemed far away, even though I could feel his strong, secure body next to mine. Male-female friendships. They'd never troubled me before. This time was different. This time involved my heart.

The next four days passed in slow motion. My mind was in Houston. Meanwhile, I carried out the functions of the here and now and waited for Monday. For the first time in our marriage I wondered if Mark ever read my diary. I'd never thought about my need for privacy before. Suddenly, it seemed very real. I'd never consciously measured Mark against another man before. Now the contrasts seemed glaring -- and not at all in Mark's favor.

Where is this friendship taking me? I couldn't bring myself to consider an answer. I wasn't sure I wanted any messages written in neon lights from God. When something seems so special -- so easy and natural, so comfortable and affirming -- why spoil it by asking tough questions? Chances are it's not going anywhere other than where it is. Why become paranoid about dangers on the other side of the river when you haven't even crossed the bridge?

The minute I saw Rick walk into class on Monday morning I knew this friendship wasn't standing still. He'd never looked so good. His Houston suntan was set off by the soft blue in his sweater and in his eyes. It was that mix of tough and tender that I so admired -- a blend I didn't find very often in people.

"I had to work in a little golf, you know." He swung an imaginary golf club in front of my desk. "Those conventions are hard work. You have to balance it off with some play. Speaking of work, the fearsome foursome has some to do yet."

We agreed that two seven to nine evenings at Rick's place should bring us through in time for our deadline. We had built our investigation carefully and critically; the project would be a major accomplishment for us all.

The November night was cool as the wind blew in off the lake. Rick and I walked toward his car -- into the wind. I shivered, and he offered me his coat. The project was finished, ready to be delivered to Dr. Stacey's office. The final stroke had come at 10:20, just 17 minutes after the last train west until midnight. "I'll run you home," Rick volunteered. "Now that this masterpiece is done, I have all the time in the world."

Sliding into the passenger's side of Rick's yellow Datsun 280-Z I felt ambiguities similar to those I experienced every time I rode a 747 at 35,000 feet -- the excitement of the skies juxtaposed against safe ground beneath me. Why my hesitation? Friends give each other rides home all the time. Why should this be so different?

Rick and I both knew it was. He spoke first.

“Know what, little lady? I missed you while I was in Houston. I found myself thinking about you a lot.” He took a deep breath. I felt my heart racing. “And I’m going to miss you tomorrow when there’s no class. I like you. I like you a lot. You are all the things I admire in a woman – all wrapped up in one person. I’ve never found that before. You understand me better than some who’ve known me all my life.” I saw a look of tenderness on his face that I hadn’t seen before. “Ruth, I think I love you.”

I felt as if the whole inside of me was vibrating. The night was rushing past the headlights, through the windshield, and into my brain. Night. Fog. Clouds. Confusion. A complex jumble of emotions, images, sensations, expectations, rules, and commitments – a bombardment of feelings I didn’t even recognize.

Rick broke the silence. “A penny for your thoughts.”

My thoughts were coming too fast to unscramble. “It’s just ... I ... well, I – I hadn’t planned on this friendship becoming so – so complicated. I thought it would just be a friendship ...”

You can’t program your heart, you know.” Rick said it so softly it almost sounded like poetry.

“I know. Now I know Rick, you’re a very special person to me.” I looked away from him and tried to pull the fragments of my thoughts together. “I love you as a friend – a friend in Christ – I think. I thought I knew the difference between kinds of love – now I’m not so sure. Where is the line? How do you know when you’ve crossed it?”

“We never ask easy questions, do we?” His strong hands gripped the steering wheel. There seemed to be something in our dilemma that was drawing us even closer. “Maybe we come right back to the will of God. What is it for you and me? Can’t it include our caring for one another, even though we are male and female with other commitments we honor? If not, what do I do about you? Amputate my emotions? Pretend I never met you? Act as though you are dead?”

I heard frustration in his words, saw tension in the lines across his forehead. I wanted to put my arms around him and tell him not to worry, that everything would be okay. But I couldn’t tell him it would be okay. I didn’t think it would be.

“There are other classes, you know,” he continued. I felt him straining for resolve. “I’ll be on campus another two years. Tomorrow doesn’t have to end it all. Couldn’t I see you now and then? Have lunch here and there, just to keep in touch? Besides, who would understand my wild questions about faith and Christianity? At least who else would give me permission to ask them?” He smiled at me with his warm, contagious, gentle smile and raised his eyebrows as though waiting for my answer. I never gave him one. At least not then.

“Please smile for me,” Rick said as we pulled up in front of my apartment building. “If I never see you again, I don’t want to remember you with tears in your eyes.”

I felt like my throat was closing off. The possibility of never seeing him again sounded like a deathblow. I wasn't sure I was prepared for it, at least not yet.

"Give you a call sometime," he said. I didn't know whether he meant it as a question or as a statement, so I said only, "Good night, Rick. Thanks for the ride," and slipped out of his car. I hardly had strength to climb the stairs to our apartment – where I knew Mark would be waiting.

"Lord, hang on to me," were the only words I could pray. I knew God would, but I needed to say the words to Him anyhow. They were urgent words that I said more than once in the days that followed, when I felt like I was teetering on the rim of a giant precipice.

"Unto Him who is able to keep you from falling ..." I remembered the words of the benediction from the Book of Jude. I felt arms reaching around me. Hugging me. Drawing me close. God's arms. Mark's arms. Supporting me; loving me.

I knew what I had to do. The courage to do it didn't come overnight. But one day I sat down at my typewriter and typed the letter on blue monogrammed notepaper. I addressed it to his home.

"Friendship is always going somewhere unless it's dead." I'd said it to him before, but I said it again. "You and I both know where ours is going. When a relationship threatens the stability of commitments we've made to the people we value the most, it can no longer be." I folded the letter and watched it disappear down the mailbox chute. There was no way I could get it back now.

I felt that final ripping apart with every part of my body. My hands shook as I typed the letter. My eyes stung. My insides felt like lead. But I also felt the load shift – from my shoulders to God's. I'd obeyed that inner voice. I'd done what I knew I had to do. I would trust God to heal the wounds. ☪

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