

# The Issue 1 Barnabas Letter

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a nonprofit counseling, discipling,  
and teaching ministry in Charlotte, NC

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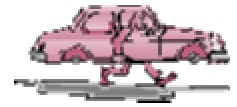
Lisa Godman

A man with dark hair, seen from behind, sits at a desk. A chair in front of him is overflowing with papers that are flying out and floating in the air. The scene is brightly lit, creating a sense of motion and activity.

Why am I so...



# The Truth Shall Make You Flee



## The Many Faces of Defensiveness

By Roger Edwards

On my commute home one day, a lady in traffic got really angry at me. She was trying to change lanes to avoid a stalled car and I didn't let her in. When I looked in the mirror, she 'gestured' to me. I couldn't hear the words, but I saw her shouting.

We soon separated, but for the next 45 minutes, I held internal court on our encounter. "Your honor," I said (to myself), "I plead innocent. This (irrational) lady has falsely accused me of.... of... Well, I don't of what exactly. But she is mad about something, and whatever it is, I am without blame."

I continued making my case, "I have to get home too. I didn't see her. Everybody makes mistakes. I usually let people in. Her face was not nice at all." And for good measure, I added, "Women drivers, oh yeah, and you too."

I was upset. Her accusing fist kept appearing in my mind. I imagined pulling into a gas station and her following in behind me. She jumps out cursing and throwing drink cups at me. Yet I stand there innocent and noble. My hands are up; pleading, urging her to sanity, dialogue, and reconciliation. The other people at the pumps stand open-mouthed at her assault. Occasionally they look at me in admiration of my restraint. Finally, she peels off in a rage, having failed at undoing me. The others shake their heads sadly. I am vindicated.

I spent my whole commute laboring to defend myself from a woman I would never see again. Why all this energy? Well, I'll tell you why. It takes a lot of energy and cunning to defend your whole life against any accusation coming from any direction and from anyone. This accomplishment doesn't come easy, it takes a lot of practice. You never know when something might slip in under the radar and find fault with you, undoing your mastery of life.

**"It takes a lot of energy and cunning to defend your whole life against any accusation coming from any direction and from anyone."**

Moreover, it takes years to develop a workable style of defensiveness. You have to find a way to fend off threats that is consistent with your personality and gifts. Do you choose pitiful excuse-making to elicit empathy? Or do you employ cool rationality that makes others feel stupid for saying anything? Do you defend yourself with a vial of poison or a glass of sweet tea?

Most people, despite the difficulties, manage to create a style that suits them well. And even though these styles look very different, they are much alike in purpose. Simply put, the purpose of defensiveness (all types) is to maintain a comfortable sense of 'I'm really

OK' despite any humbling evidence to the contrary. The hard edges of reality can hurt; and so we want to fend it off.

For example, all my legal maneuvering in the car was designed to deny that I had, in fact, cut the lady off in traffic (She was sorta in my blind spot). But why was this such a big issue? Why work so hard to deny a little thing like that?

In my case, it would have meant admitting that sometimes I am not such a nice guy (it had been a really stressful day, you know). And if I admitted that sometimes I am wrong... well that would be self-incrimination. It might insinuate that I have all sorts of character flaws (although I'm not as bad as some people). If you aren't careful, integrity will have you involving your whole life in the Lordship of Christ. And, I ask you, where will that end?

But just so you might be able to identify your own defensiveness, I will describe a couple of the styles. And since the easiest kinds of defensiveness to spot are the loud and irrational kinds, let's look at some defensive styles that seem more quiet or rational.

Take the strategy of 'selective hearing' for example. This one requires no words at all. Yet, I witness this defensive style almost daily. My three young boys can be quite deaf when we call for help with the chores; but somehow they can hear a bag of chips being opened from a quarter mile away.

**"... the purpose of all types of defensiveness is to maintain a comfortable sense of 'I'm really OK' despite any humbling evidence to the contrary."**

'Selective hearing', a favorite of men who practiced not hearing their mother all their young life, is related to the phenomenon of 'selective memory'. All relationship is built on history and shared experience but some people are able to wipe out entire events or conversations with the two words: "I forgot." Funny how they can recall the batting average of the '90 Mets without hesitation, but don't remember the promise they made that morning.

As 'selective hearing' moves to 'selective memory', it can further devolve into 'selective presence'. This is the ability to leave physically or mentally out of the present moment. What is the defensive advantage to not being present? Well, if you aren't around, then you can't be hurt or be held responsible, now can you? You can appear to be standing right there, when you are really miles away. Pretty neat huh?

There is, however, an opposite style of defensiveness that is also quite effective. It is a particular favorite of the ladies. Rather than the



absence of presence, this one involves a super abundance of presence. There is hyper-sensitive hearing, a memory that doesn't forget anything, and rather than the person's insides being nowhere, it seems they are everywhere! The theory here is that the best defense is a good offense. If you can inundate the dialogue with a multitude of past examples, feelings, and explanations, then the other person will soon be overwhelmed and give up or give in.

These two styles look very different, but they are the same in purpose. One avoids words, and the other is extravagant with them, but neither really want to hear anything. One person is there, and the other isn't, but neither want the companionship of conviction.

We all have styles of defensiveness, but what happens when those styles encounter one another? For example, what happens if these two aforementioned styles marry one another?

It might start like this. The husband asks a simple question, "Where did you put the electric bill?" Then the wife (not wanting to be seen as incompetent) launches into a detail-rich story that begins two days earlier, chronicles her daily routine that includes, but is not limited to, the task of going to the mailbox. In a closely woven monologue she exhibits her responsibilities and activities that are multi-tasked on a daily basis, and oh by the way, you don't help much.

His face gets increasingly red and he keeps saying, "but... but...", trying to derail this unwanted change of direction. She reads this response as gross insensitivity to her stress and a complete invalidation of her hard work. Thinking that if he would just listen, he would 'get it', she steps even closer, begins to talk even more rapidly, and with hand motions. She firmly believes that if she can illustrate her point well enough, then he will finally see his error and apologize for the past 10 years of sloth.

**"Defensiveness can look as rational as an explanation or be as quiet as tiptoeing away. But make no mistake, it is as destructive as a nest of termites."**

A thin but discernable glaze forms over his eyes and he starts edging his way into the den, where there is a comfortable chair and a remote control. But control becomes even more remote as she follows him saying, "and there's another thing..."

By this time the electric bill is old history, and both of them feel misunderstood and defeated. But most importantly, both husband and wife feel very justified in their handling of the situation. "Well you see how they are," they might say.

And so, over the years, their pattern of chase and retreat become a way of life. She might reach out, but with little hope; and he might endure, but without faith. Pretty soon there won't be any such thing as a simple question.

Defensiveness can look as rational as an explanation or be as quiet as the pitter patter of little retreating feet; but make no mistake, it is as destructive as a nest of termites. When you are defensive you will slowly but surely, eat away any sense of shared reality, whether

the relationship is with another person, yourself, or God. And when you refuse to acknowledge the common bond of truth; trust collapses and relationship with it.

No matter which style, defensiveness is in essence an unwillingness to admit what is true. It might plead with innocence, "Of course I was listening to you." It could attack, "I can't believe you can't find a little bill!" Or it might blame, "If you would just help, I wouldn't lose things." But no matter how it does it, defensiveness tries to manipulate reality in order to save face, and in so doing, eats the floor from under itself.

**"...take the chance that God might find us, and seeing the truth about us, he might teach us grace and free us indeed."**

The really frightening thing is that if you desire to replace real truth with your truth, you might actually succeed, at least in your mind. With enough hurt to justify and fuel your practiced strategy, you might come to a place where you are hardly bothered at all by your lack of integrity.

As this occurs, all the life-giving interactions begin to disintegrate. There will be no confession (honey, the truth is that I don't know what I did with that bill.) There will be no forgiveness (That's forgivable. Would you help me look for it?) And when there is no shared admission to what really happened, there will be no shared joy when the lost envelope is finally recovered. (Hey! We found it!)

When defensiveness rules the day, there can only be bickering, or at best, an uneasy truce. All there will be is two people safe and smug behind their respective walls, perpetually maintained with cool silence or snide comments (The bill was in your car. Funny how it got there!) Defensiveness promises relief from the burden of truth, but ends up with a weary never-ending game of 'got-you-last'.

And so we defend ourselves from the truth with well crafted and oft practiced styles of defensiveness. To a degree they work. But how chilling that thought! Do we really want to live apart from truth?

Is there a different way to live? What would you think about taking the chance that God's truth might be as gracious as it is revealing. What if, when God finds us and sees the truth about us, he might teach us grace and free us indeed. Perhaps because of the cross, He can find a way to treat us with acceptance rather than contempt.

And if our hearts could rely on His mercy more than our maneuvering, then we could find some real rest from all our running and hiding. Who knows, perhaps with faith and time, I could become increasingly freer of my hobbling self preoccupation. Maybe I would be able to think about someone else on my ride home. Oh! And think! Maybe we could mimic Him and offer grace to each other.



*Roger Edwards is a counselor teacher with the Barnabas Center, and is married to Jean. Together they have seven children who could tell you that he usually is a very considerate driver. Really.*



About the author:

Palmer Trice is the director of The Barnabas Center, is married to Lynne, and they have 3 children.

# The Log in Your Own Eye

By Palmer Trice

## do you see it? 〇〇

I walked in the other night from a meeting at my office. It was 9PM. My son and wife were watching our favorite TV show, *Seventh Heaven*. As I walked in, before I could catch my breath, Lynne spoke up alarmingly.

“We need you!”

“Alright, I just need to make a quick call.”

“No, I need you right now. Palmer (my son) has to write this paragraph by tomorrow and we need you to help him. Right now!”

“Well, can I...?” I said, but I already knew the answer. My son and I headed to the computer to do some online research. I was doing what she asked, but internally I was thinking something else.

“Why in the heck were they watching TV when this paragraph had to be written? I mean, now he is tired. It’s too late to be doing homework and I won’t get to make my phone call and... why didn’t they do the stupid paragraph before I got home anyway!” Note my exclamation point there. It really wasn’t a question.

Palmer and I did the online research but ended up rising early the next morning to write the assignment. When I

*1 Judge not, that you be not judged. 2 For with the judgment you pronounce you will be judged, and the measure you give will be the measure you get. With what judgment ye judge ye shall be judged. Not by men, but by God 3 Why do you see the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? 4 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? 5 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. Matt. 7.1-5*

headed up to bed, I was irritated. Lynne had gotten to spend the fun time with our son and left me with the grunt work. I was irritated, and she knew it.

I could see clearly. I saw what was happening. She was being very inconsiderate. I was tired. The assignment was thrust upon me. And Lynne wasn’t being a very loving wife. Right?

I wish that had been the truth. I later found out that Lynne and my son had, in

fact, tried to do the research. Lynne knows little of computers and my son Palmer not much more (at least not much at that hour and for that purpose). He tried. He failed. How much was fatigue, I don’t know. It also turns out that they had worked for several hours on other assignments. He had led her to believe that this last assignment would only take 15 minutes and would be a snap.

It turns out that I didn’t see as clearly as I had thought. And my judgment of her was anything but correct. I didn’t see so clearly after all. All I could see was my side of the story.

We all see only part of the story. Jesus knew that. That is why he warned about judging others.

I remember a couple coming in and the husband said to me, “I will tell you my side of the story and she can tell you hers and then you can tell us what really happened.” We laughed. I wasn’t even there when the real thing happened. But he knew that he didn’t see the whole story. We all only see our own side.

But it is worse than that. We only see part of the story. We only see our own side of the story. And even that part we only see through our own glasses.

One couple was sitting in my office having a mildly heated conversation. He interrupted and raised his voice, a bit. She cowered and turned to me and said, “See, he yells at me that way. He is so loud and intimidating!”

I found him to be strongly opinionated and mildly loud – but a far cry from the bully that she was experiencing. As you might guess, she grew up in a very abusive home, with a loud and intimidating father. And any significant increase in volume felt like verbal abuse to her. That is an extreme example. But all of us have our own unique pair of glasses through which we view the world.

We all have our own historically determined perspective on what is and isn’t normal. And what is hardest to grasp is that our personal perspective is not always the one that is universally accepted.



Last Monday night, when I put Palmer to bed, I went in to set the record straight about how thoughtless Lynne had been, watching TV with him and leaving me to deal with a tired, frustrated son. When the full story came out, I felt a little foolish. Part of me wanted to continue to make this about Lynne’s selfishness and poor judgment. After all, I was still put out and it had to be someone’s fault. But Jesus encourages us to examine our own eyes before we go to work on our spouse’s vision. And we just don’t see clearly.

Oswald Chambers in his devotional My Utmost for His Highest says this – “The only way we can be of use to God is to let Him take us through the crooks and crannies of our own characters. It is astounding how ignorant we are about ourselves!

**The willingness to acknowledge the log that blocks my vision creates at least two problems : uncertainty and culpability.**

We do not know envy when we see it, or laziness or pride. Jesus reveals to us all that this body has been harboring before His grace began to work. How many of us have learned to look in with courage? We have to get rid of this idea that we understand ourselves.” (MUFHH, Jan.12)

The willingness to acknowledge the log that blocks my vision creates at least two problems – uncertainty and culpability. If I am willing to check my vision, life becomes less certain – and hence I will become less judgmental. But if life becomes less certain, then I am never quite sure what cards I am playing with. And something in me really likes to have things figured out. When I come home and face the research project, I have to check out carefully what is going on. I can’t just get mad.

Secondly, there is a cost to taking a more honest look. Once I look honestly at the situation, I may find that I am at fault. I may be wrong, culpable. My willingness to look honestly at the aforementioned homework situation led eventually to a much less resentful evening. After I found that I could not blame Lynne or Palmer, I was left having to look at my own (not very loving) response.

**And what is hardest to grasp is that our personal perspective is not always the one that is universally accepted.**

The willingness to look again, to see if I really am seeing things clearly, has opened the door to a clearer look at my own heart. I have found myself for the first time facing the fact that I get angry and resentful. I have discovered that I want more – from friends, from my kids, from my wife, even from God. I have seen how often I feel fear – that someone will think less of me, that I will teach and find that folks are bored, that I will give my best to love Lynne and she still won’t be happy. And I don’t handle that longing or fear in very good ways. Sadly, I have found that protecting me takes precedence over everything else. I have found that I not only was a sinner who needed God’s grace, but still am.

How about you? Do you want to see yourself more clearly? Are you willing to open the door to the fact that you have a log in your eye that prevents clear vision?

If you are, then you open the door to a new look and a new dependence on Christ. You open the door to changing yourself. You open the door to loving in new and different ways. Yes, this does open the door to probable chaos; but it also opens the door to more with God.



*October 18-20  
2002*

# Heart to Heart

for your marriage

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Heart to Heart is a unique marriage weekend designed to meet each couple at their point of growth. It is a weekend designed not just to teach Biblical principles and truths but to insert them in very practical ways into your relationship. It is a weekend designed not just to teach but to change – patterns, marriages, and hearts.

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Childcare Available Friday and Saturday



About the author:

Lisa Godman recently joined our staff full time as a counselor at The Barnabas Center, and is also involved with counseling missionaries.

# The Freedom of Brokenness

## Humility as the Antidote for Defensiveness

By Lisa Godman

*He was oppressed and treated harshly, yet he never said a word. He was led as a lamb to the slaughter. And as a sheep is silent before the shearers, he did not open his mouth. From prison and trial they led him away to his death. But who among the people realized that he was dying for their sins—that he was suffering their punishment? He had done nothing wrong, and he never deceived anyone. Isaiah 53:7-9*

**Why is it so hard for us to respond with the softness of humility and faith? Because responding with faith and humility feels like death.**

A friend comes over and compliments some changes you have made in your home and then she makes a suggestion. Does your heart receive her suggestion with the love she had intended, or do you end the conversation because your sense of failure consumes you because she thought of something you didn't? A colleague reviews your report and makes a few corrections. Are you angry with him for thinking something you didn't or thankful for his insight? Your wife accuses you of always being late. Do you quickly think of something you were on time for or do you open your heart to your wives disappointment resisting the temptation to prove her wrong? A friend tells you she doesn't trust you. Do you set out to build a case to prove her wrong or love her even if she doesn't trust you?

If you are like me and with the smallest hint of failure, inadequacy or injustice you forget the depth of Gods love and the tenderness of His hand.

A few months ago I had someone say to me in so many words "I am concerned because I don't know if I can trust you and I don't know if you are really for me." I would love to tell you that my heart melted and I asked questions to understand his concerns and doubts. I actually felt caught.

Our previous conversation had been one of

interrogation on my part. You see we were discussing some ministry ideas and I was not so sure I trusted his heart. So instead of approaching him with honesty and concern, my posture was one of putting him on trial to see if he was worthy of my time. His approach to me was one of honest concern over the doubts he was having and some uncertainty as to why he felt this way.

In response to feeling caught and exposed, I suggested that he talk to some mutual friends who I was sure would set him straight on what a wonderful person I am. When I arrived home I immediately went to my computer to pound out a plea to these friends to help set this confused man straight.

You see, I was out to prove him wrong. I crawled into bed feeling confident that I had built a good case to defend myself and he would soon know how wrong he was about me. Never once did I consider whether his concerns were legitimate? Was there something here for me to learn about how I handled this man? In my heart I said, how dare you question my trustworthiness?

Later that night, somewhere in that state between awake and asleep I felt like I had been run over by a freight train. The door had been opened by someone sharing his concerns from a place of humility and all I could focus on was ME! Making sure that I looked



good and was not misunderstood. I began to ponder, “I wonder why he thinks trusting me is difficult?” I became aware that my goal had been defending myself and not understanding his concerns. My defensiveness had ended the conversation.

By God’s grace a few days later I reentered the conversation with questions and a desire to understand. I confessed my awareness that my heart was not focused on the needs of the ministry. In this situation, faith meant facing the blackness of my heart and allowing someone else to see it as well. A shift occurred when I acted out of faith. The gulf that had risen between us began to be bridged.

Why is it so hard for us to respond with the softness of humility and faith? Because responding with faith and humility feels like death. For me it meant admitting that I had judged him, that my own arrogance led me to question if he was worthy of my time. It meant owning my own brokenness rather than focusing on his. I was required to set aside my commitment to look good, competent and successful at all costs.

Scripture is clear that Jesus came for the defenseless, the poor, and the needy. He didn’t come for those that feel they have it all together and don’t need much. He came for the sick that need a doctor, not the healthy. I don’t know about you, but I want to need Jesus. The problem is I do not want to be poor in the physical or spiritual sense. There lies my problem. I don’t want to be poor, which means I do not want to need Jesus. Jesus had every reason to defend himself when he was arrested and crucified. The voice of the one who had every reason to defend himself was silent.

“Forgive them, Father, for they know not what they do.” Jesus is the ultimate picture of humility and faith as he stretched out his arms and died. To leave ourselves open to criticism or attack feels like death. It leaves us feeling exposed and vulnerable. We feel

caught and exposed for who we really are, broken people desperately in need of a savior. We build a case to prove to ourselves, our spouses, and to God that we really are good and we really do have worth. And when the cracks are exposed, we panic.

Why do we feel this strong need to defend ourselves? It is because we feel fragile, we don’t think that God is going to do it, and we value our glory more than God’s. It is as if we do not have a God that is working on our behalf. We tend to falsely believe that on earth it is all up to us. It is as if man’s opinion matters more than God’s. We struggle to believe that God’s opinion of us is enough. God defended me in Christ, but on this earth it is up to me.

Defensiveness makes us feel like we are doing something to protect ourselves. To respond with humility and faith feels like we are losing the battle. We keep bumping up against the questions: Are we taking care of ourselves or is God taking care of us? Are you living your life defending yourself? Or are you resting in the verdict that was won on the cross so your life reflects humility and faith?

I am continuing in a ministry that leads me into contact occasionally with the man I referred to earlier. My desire is to bless his ministry. Although, I am aware of my fears of what might be exposed in me along the way. I trust God to introduce me to the truths about myself so I might enjoy Jesus more and trust him in a deeper way.

Miraculously God redeems us day by day. As we face him with an honest heart and a desire to trust him more deeply, our relationships are strengthened. God really does use our disappointments, hurts and fears through the power of Christ to propel us to a deeper relationship with himself.

**We struggle to believe that God’s opinion of us is enough. God defended me in Christ, but on this earth it is up to me.**

**God really does use our disappointment, hurts and fears through the power of Christ to propel us to a deeper relationship with himself.**

### *The Barnabas Letter*

is published three times a year by the Barnabas Center, a non-profit counseling, discipling and teaching ministry.

Our goal is to help people face honestly the struggles of life and to search out how the truth of the gospel applies to all circumstances.

Secondly, we hope to keep our friends and supporters abreast of the programs, events, and health of our ministry. Subscriptions are free, although donations are welcome for the general operation of the ministry.

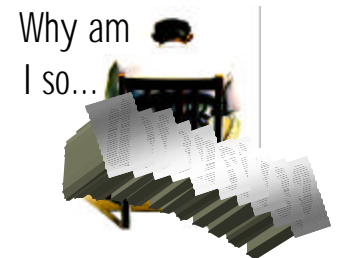
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# The Barnabas Center

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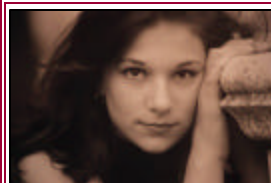


## Upcoming Events *opportunities and Current Events*

<i>Date</i>	<i>Event</i>	<i>Facilitator</i>
August 11 & 18	<b>Westminster Sunday School</b> – Loving Father or Prodigal Son	<i>Palmer Trice</i>
Sept. Tuesdays 5:30– 7:30	<b>Honor's Path– A Group for Men–</b> ministry to sexually addicted men who want a better path Please call (704-365-4545) or e-mail ( <a href="mailto:info@thebarnabascenter.org">info@thebarnabascenter.org</a> )	<i>John Pierce</i>
To Be Determined	<b>Honors Path Spouses Group–</b> See Box	<i>John Pierce</i>
To Be Determined	<b>Healing Hearts–</b> See Box Below	<i>Lisa Godman</i>
October 7, 2002	<b>2002 Golf Classic</b>	<i>Roger Edwards</i>
October 18-20	<b>Heart to Heart</b> Marriage Weekend in Charlotte	<i>Roger Edwards</i> <i>Palmer Trice</i>

### Honor's Path Spouse's Group

**If** you are in a relationship with a man who has struggled with sexual compulsivity or are in a relationship that is recovering from sexual betrayal this group could be a good place for you. Please call (704-365-4545) or e-mail ([info@thebarnabascenter.org](mailto:info@thebarnabascenter.org)) if you are interested in participating or getting more information. The start date and time for this group has not yet been established.



### Healing Hearts *a group for women*

a biblically based, professionally led, confidential, closed group context where women can find their heart again, receive support and wrestle with the difficult realities of being harmed by sexual abuse.