

## CASE STUDY

Tom and Joe were recently hired by XYZ, Inc. It soon became apparent that both were managers with tremendous potential. Sensing the competition, Joe began to undercut Tom's relationship with their immediate superior. Tom becomes furious when made aware of Joe's tactics and vows to retaliate in kind.

Mr. Hill's case study, on pages 56-57 of his book, provide Tom with the Christian solution to Joe's back stabbing actions. Mr. Hill espouses God's merciful love as the solution to Tom's and Joe's broken relationship. Merciful love takes the initiative in forgiving, redeeming and healing.

God sets the standard in this regard by repeatedly seeking reconciliation with us. Jeremiah noted, 'The favors of the lord are not exhausted; they are renewed each morning. . . (Lamentations 3:22-23).

David, who had much personal experience with moral failure, lauded divine forgiveness: "As far as the east is from the west, so far have our sins been removed from us" (Psalm 103:12).

The basic Christian story - that Jesus died on a cross so that we might be forgiven - speaks reams about the merciful character of God and the lengths to which he will go to restore broken relationships,

So what does Christian mercy require of Tom? As difficult as this may seem, Tom is instructed not to retaliate but to be merciful toward Joe. "You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.' But I say to you, offer no resistance to one who is evil. When someone strikes you on your right cheek, turn the other one to him as well. If anyone wants to go to law with you over your tunic, hand him your cloak as well. . . . You have heard that *it was said*, "You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy." But I say to you, love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you . . . ." (Matthew 5:38-44).

The concept of "enemy love" distinguishes Christianity from other ethical systems. Aristotle and Confucius, for example, refused to go so far, teaching that the duty to love is conditioned on the other person's response. Donald Bloesch, "Freedom for Obedience: Evangelical Ethics in Contemporary Times" (San Francisco; Harper & Row, 1987), p.97. The Christian position demands much more, requiring Tom to "live not according to the golden rule but beyond it." Donald Bloesch, "Freedom," p.93.

This is not to say, however, that Tom must be naive in his dealings with Joe. Jesus warned against being overly vulnerable to those who abuse. "Do not give what is holy to dogs, or throw your pearls before swine, lest they trample them underfoot, and turn and tear you to pieces" (Matthew 1:6). Neither is Tom to be passive in his response. Rather, he is to actively seek reconciliation. This will no doubt involve face-to-face meetings with Joe, prayer for him, and unsolicited acts of kindness. It may also include setting the record straight with their superior.

At no time, however, should Tom sink to Joe's ethical level. He must neither demean nor hate him. Of all Jesus' moral teachings, his enemy-love command may be one of the most difficult to obey.