

99b. Ethnic Harmony in Action

By Barbara Steen

Good morning!

I am really, really glad to be here after my brief absence and my frequent absences of late. And, I got to tell you, after Melodye and after Esther, I don't even know if I should be up here.

But, um, I was talking to Pastor and I told him a little story of what went on with me, and this morning I was praying and spending some time with the Lord, and, preparing to tell the story and the Lord gave me a totally different thing to tell. Because, going through life with this skin, you experience some really interesting, amazing things. And, uh, I say that because I really have to say I love my ethnicity. I love my deep, lovely tan. I love my kinky hair, and, uh, I know that not everybody does but I've gone through life and lived here in America around people who, uh, receive me differently at different times. Sometimes you'll notice I don't have kinky hair because I know that in some places that I go in my professional business and sometimes even church business, some people would really be uncomfortable with that. And that's really, really sad because God made us – thank you – God made us different. I believe that God likes diversity. I mean, when you look at nature and you see birds of all colors, shapes, sizes and what have you, He made them that way. But their still birds, you know. And I'm just really, really grateful He made me in a way that I can go through this life and experience some things that would give me some perspective that would help me be kinder to people. And, that's really, really what it's done for me.

Well, I'm going to tell you a little story of a co-worker of mine – several stories of co-workers of mine – but this first one's named Mike, and Mike is an old-school former military guy. He's a tough guy. He's a loudmouth and he's also a bigot. And, uh, I really wouldn't be surprised at all if Mike had one of those white robes with the distinctive pointy hat in his closet. I wouldn't be surprised at all. And, uh, I worked with him for ten years and by the grace of God I wore him down. By the time he retired, I was the person who threw his retirement party.

Now, when we first interacted with each other, he wouldn't look at me. When he talked to me he'd bark at me. Anything he said was condescending, nasty and mean. I acted like I didn't notice it. I just kept on. I just kept working with him. And, I prayed for him, and us, God is gracious. He is really, really gracious when you're in that situation and you have to deal with something. God has got things in His Word to deal with everything. And, if I'm gonna be a Christian and say I'm a Christian, I need to handle things the way God said to handle them and know and trust that He's gonna work it out. And that's what I did with Mike.

So, a couple of weeks ago – Mike's on Facebook – we're Facebook friends now, and uh, (laughter) he posted 'I am proud to be white. I bet many won't repost this for fear of being labeled as racist.'

And I noticed there were no likes, no comments there. So, you know I had to say something (laughter). So, I said, 'There's nothing wrong with being proud of your ethnicity cause I'm certainly proud of mine. There'd be a problem if I saw you disrespecting another culture.' But I said, 'I don't see any of that going on here.' And Mike came back with a resounding, 'Absolutely.' And I thought, 'That is so cool' because he went from being really mean and really hateful. I mean so much so that the company actually sent him to charm school. (Laughter). I mean he was that bad. You know, they had the Dale Carnegie classes, what was it, *How To Win Friends and Influence People?* And he was so awful to a few people in the office, and, they went to HR and complained that they made him go to that class twice (laughter). Mike was no joke but he's my friend now.

So, anyway, being, um, of this ethnicity and a child of the sixties, I have experienced some unusual things. But, the facts of my life, being a black woman, being having kinky hair, doing all these things, that doesn't define me. What defines me is my relationship with God through Christ. And, according to Acts 17:28: *In Him I live and move and have my being.* I'm His offspring. So, I can say not every experience has been a good one but the end result is that I've learned to trust Him. I've learned to trust Him in every situation. You remember, um, like I said, child of the sixties – the Beverly Hillbillies? Granny? Granny usually had two jugs, at least two jugs at any particular time and one of them held – I know you guys know – moonshine! And, the other one held what she called her medicine. She said, "It's good for what ails ya." So, I'm here to tell you today this thing, this Bible of mine, it's good for whatever ails me. And, uh, like I said He's got something for every situation so I'm going to give you a couple scriptures I stand on, and, um, actually I'm not going to read them from here. I've them in my notes and I had to take notes because like I said I completely changed what I was going to talk about this morning.

So, some of you know my favorite scripture is Zephaniah 3:17. That scripture was written to Israel but it applies to me because I'm grafted into the family because remember I'm His offspring. So, in my Bible, which is a Personal Promise Bible, the text is personalized for me, for Barbara. So, here's what it says: *The Lord, Barbara's God, is in the midst of her. A mighty One who will save Barbara; He will rejoice over Barbara with joy. He will calm her for His love; He will rejoice over Barbara with singing.* And that verse always reminds me God's with me. He's strong enough to take care of me in whatever situation I find myself. He loves me enough that He actually rejoices over me. He gets excited over me. I mean, just like when I saw him yesterday. I got so excited and I thought about that this morning when I was in prayer. God gets excited over me more than I got excited when I saw Pastor Arland yesterday at the airport when he picked me up. God is such a good God and He's just, He joyfully sings over me. That's love. And that's my scripture that I meditate on when things are bothering me, when, uh, when things are going badly or I'm having issues with somebody or some thing. That's the scripture that I start with. I go to God and I pray that scripture and I sit and meditate on that scripture. I chew on that scripture. And then I can get back to the meat of whatever thing that's in this Word that He wants me to use for whatever situation I'm in.

And He reminded me of the same scripture that Melodye used: *The weapons of our warfare are not carnal.* It's not people. It is a spiritual battle and if you're in Him and you're living your life according to your relationship with Him, it's not even your fight. You're to pray. You're to stand and you're to treat them with the respect that God wants you to. I mean, God loves them too. He died for them just like He died for you. And, we have to remember that as we deal with people. So, people can sometimes be unkind but we have to remember it's always a spiritual battle. Because we have an enemy whose out there and he wants to steal our joy, kill our peace and destroy our relationships with people. And, we've got the weapon here that we can use to prevent that from happening. So, I always, I have decided in advance that's how I'm going to handle things. I'm going to handle them the way the Lord said.

And when it comes to people who are difficult what He said in Matthew 5:44: *But I say unto you, Love your enemies. Bless those who curse you and do good to those who hate you; and, pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you.* Now, I had a hard time applying that verse to myself at first because I didn't want to think of anybody as an enemy. But, the definition of enemy is somebody who would seek your injury or your harm or who wants bad things for you. It sounds kind of harsh, but, I learned I can apply it to anybody who has an ugly attitude towards me. So, just for the record, don't mess with me because I will pray all over you (laughter). It's what I do. I pray.

I rest in Him and I know that since I've handled it His way, He's gonna work it out. I just turn it over to Him.

Now, two quick stories both from the workplace in the late 80's, no late 70's and early 80's. I worked at a small manufacturing shop in Long Beach. And I was production control, I was the person who was tasked with taking orders – not taking the order – but when the order came in from the customer, I had to make sure everything was done and shipped out to the customer in time.

Well, I had to remove whatever hindrance to that shipment and I found real quickly my biggest hindrance was the production manager, the person who was over the guys in the manufacturing plant who actually made the parts. And, one day I couldn't get things moved and I went out there and I talked to the guys and they said, "Your stuffs over there on the shelf, back there up under everything else." And I said, "Why?" They said, "The production manager told us not to touch it." He prioritized everything and, "If we do touch it, we'll get in trouble. Sorry, can't help you."

So, I had to go talk to him. I went and talked to that man and he gave me the hard stare and told me, "I'm not doing anything for you. Don't come talking to me and don't come talking to my guys anymore." And I said, "That's gonna be a problem because I've got a job to do and if my job requires me coming to talk to you, gonna come talk to ya." He got in my face, I mean this close, in front of people, yelled, screamed at me. He called me names. Spat on me at the workplace. Now, I just thank God for Jesus, cause, and he should have too. But, um, I took it. I didn't say anything. Well then, he decided to push it and he kept going. And he kept going and he got louder and closer and closer.

Finally, I snapped. I mean it was bound to happen. I snapped and I started in on him and I started yelling and I proceeded to tell him that if he disrespected me he'd better expect to get the same in kind, and, on and on and I started going forward and I ended up backing him in the corner and the whole office is standing there watching. I got finished with what I had to say and I sashayed off. You could hear a pin drop. It was really quiet in the room.

And uh, later on I came back through and he was gone and my coworkers were cheering. They were so excited because no one had ever stood up to this guy. He was such a tyrant. That made me feel so bad. You would think that after I spoke my piece, I would feel better but I didn't. I felt horrible because I'd been disobedient. That wasn't the way I was supposed to handle it.

So, the Lord really, really messed with me about it and I knew I had to go apologize. So, um, before I got to him not only did the Lord tell me I had to apologize but I was going to stay in that job until I learned to deal with that man the way He wanted me to. I was like, "Okay."

So, I go to his office. He's alone. I walk in. He sees me and I see his face get like. And I proceed to close the door. And he begins yelling, "Get out of my office! Don't say a word to me! I don't ever want to see your face again! I'm gonna make sure you're fired!" I let him finish yelling and I told him, "I'm here to apologize." I said, "I'm so sorry for disrespecting you and for disrespecting you in front of the team. It was inappropriate. I had no business. I know that I need my parts. I know I need to come speak to you but that was not the way to do it. I'm so sorry." He didn't know what to do. He absolutely did not know what to do with that. And he just said, "I accept your apology. That shows character. Most people would not have done that." And I said, "Thank you," and I said, "I'm gonna leave now but please know if I need you, I'm gonna come back and see you." Haaa. So, I leave.

The next day, the next weeks, what have you, my parts are still not moving. I finally had to go talk to my manager, because I needed to explain why my work wasn't getting done. My manager went and had a talk with this guy. The guy finishes talking with my manager. He's furious and he comes back at me again. And I told him I said, "I've got a job to do. They pay me, you know, to do this and I have no choice but to come talk to you and one way or the other, my parts are gonna get done." He says, "We'll see." He walks away. Haaa. I'm praying for this man because the Lord put it on my heart. He says, "You need to pray for him. You need to treat him like I said treat him. Pray for your enemies. On and on and on. And it was the prayer first, honestly, I prayed wrong. It was, "Lord, give me a new job so I don't have to deal with this (laughter). But then as the Lord worked on my heart I realized I needed to pray the Lord to bless him. I needed to pray that the Lord would give me wisdom to deal with him in the way the Lord wanted me to deal with him. I needed to pray that he would see Jesus in me.

Little by little things started to change. Now this happened over a number of years, so I was praying for this man for a long time before there was any change. And finally, I go to see him one day and I said with a little smile, "John, John, I need my parts. Can you help me?" This time I saw him put his head down but I saw a little smile. And I knew I was going to get my parts. He just said, "Yeah, okay, I'll see what I can do." And he walked away. I had to keep doing that but little by little my parts started moving in the shop. I had to still go see him but less and less.

After awhile, he'd see me from a distance and say, yell, "What do you want? What do you need for me to do for you now?" And whatever I asked for he did. And um, after working for him for about two years, our relationship was such that he became my closest friend there.

And uh and, one thing that I skipped was the fact that he had such an issue with color. And I knew it was specifically color because my *best* friend actually worked there as a receptionist. She took the applications when people came in for jobs and he had gone to her and told her, "When black people come in don't even give me the applications. Make sure you throw it away. Cause if you give it to me, I'm gonna have a problem with you.

So, he went from that to basically being my cheerleader there. And when things did change and I finally took a position someplace else, I went to him and told him I was leaving. He cried. He cried! And you know that was the Lord because that kind of thing doesn't just happen. If I had handled him the way I wanted to handle him, oh. If I had continued to handle him the way I wanted to handle him, that would never have ever worked.

I uh, I'm getting the hook, so (laughter), so I'm gonna have to go but let me just see if there is anything I have to say here. Well, (unintelligible), so be kind. Be kind. (unintelligible). So, I'm just gonna say. What I learned in that situation and in several others I have had like that, is like I said God can be trusted. You know, He has stuff in His Word here and it's not just to make us feel better. It's real. It's serious. I mean these words they are spirit and they are life and if we live our lives according to this, He's gonna make a difference. Like you said, "We're His very own and He cares how we're treated. He cares what we go through. And sometimes, like with John, He let me go through so that I could learn to deal with things. I mean, I tell you, I got a little more backbone dealing with that guy - being yelled at and spit on. But in the end, he didn't come to the Lord but he had so much more respect and when people told him they were a Christian after that, he paid attention. Prior to that he made fun of it. But after awhile, John got alright. So, let me just encourage you to trust God. Take Him at His Word, knowing that He loves us. He wants the best for us and if we do it the way He says to do it, it's going to be good.