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"But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called 'today'" Hebrews 3:13

July 7, 2020

From Frustration to Anger

I think we would all agree that, at the very least, these last few months have been frustrating. Frustration is a kind of annoyance; it arises when we are prevented from doing something we want to do or accomplish. It seems Jesus seems frustrated with his disciples at times (e.g., Mt. 16:23; Luke 24:25; John 14:8-9) and we know he was frustrated with the scribes and Pharisees.

Frustration is not sinful, although it can become sinful if it morphs into anger.

As usual, an incident in my life illustrates this. In our early 30s, Christie and I were invited to go skiing and we immediately fell in love with the sport. My first trip down the "bunny trail," convinced me that it was something special.

A friend and I made plans to go skiing one Tuesday, but he had to back out at the last minute, so I decided I would go anyway. This was only my second attempt at skiing so I stayed on the green (easy) runs the whole day. When it got close to closing time, I decided to take one more run down the next-to-easiest slope. About midway down, I fell, heard something pop and felt a sharp pain in my left knee. I got up and sort of skied to the bottom of the hill. My knee hurt, but wasn't something I couldn't bear.

I drove the hour-plus trip home in my '79 VW Scirocco. The car had a manual transmission so I was pumping the clutch all the way down the hill; my injured left knee was getting a work out. When I got home I limped around, took a couple of aspirin and went to bed.

When I woke up, I started to get out of bed, but my left leg was completely stiff — I couldn't bend it at all. Christie called the doctor, somehow helped me into the car, and drove me to the office. The doctor determined that I had a torn ligament and put my entire left leg in a plaster cast. I remember the kids in school who broke their arms and having a cast was almost a mark of valor. They would get their friends to write their names on it. It was kind of a big thing.

At first, I wore my full-leg cast as a badge of honor, too. To the question, "what happened?" I would answer proudly, "I tore a ligament while skiing..." leaving out the minor detail that I was on one of the two easiest ski runs when it happened.

The "honor" wore off quickly, anyway, and turned to frustration. The doctor had told me I would have to wear the thing for three weeks and after the first few days, I was done with it. It was heavy, hard to sleep with and my leg inside was starting to itch like mad (I used a wire clothes hanger to reach the bottom of my leg). To add insult to injury, one fine early spring morning, Christie and her friend decided to go skiing. She offered to stay home, but I urged her to go and I can still see her smiling face waving goodbye as I lay on the couch suffering.

My frustration grew worse by the day. Finally, I had a date to get the cast removed on a Wednesday, exactly three weeks after it was

put on. I was ready. More than ready. Really, really ready. My leg was itching and felt like it was all wrinkly and shrinking (it was).

Oddly, I had this weird dream the night before that when I got to the office, the doctor wasn't there. But that was just a bad dream. I got up on Wednesday morning and Christie drove me to the doctors office. When the receptionist finally called me up to the window she spoke words that live in infamy. She said, "unfortunately, the doctor isn't here; he had an emergency so we'll need to reschedule." I'm saying to myself, "ahhhhhh..." then, collecting myself, I said "OK, I can handle one more day." She then told me the doctor will not be in again until Friday. Two days was exponentially worse than one day. I was fit to be tied, but didn't express my frustration in the office. However, when I got outside, I threw something my grandparents would call a "conniption fit." As I stood at the door of my



Our daughter Angie skiing for the first time

Scirocco, I was so angry, I slammed my fist down on the top of the car and actually dented

the roof. I was lucky I didn't break my hand.

Being frustrated is not fun. Is it sinful? Yes, when it turns to anger. In fact, "frustration" can be a euphemism for "anger" and my anger — taken out on the roof of my car — was sinful. James said,

Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger; for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God. James 1:19

I was quick to anger and I hope no one saw me throw that fit. It was petty, not pretty. Anger at a thing or situation hardly, if ever, helps and is not a good look, especially on a Christian.

A couple of years later, I was in an accident in the Scirocco that was not my fault. My car was damaged so I took it to a body shop. When I got the car back, the dent in the roof was gone. *My sin had been covered.* Apparently, the body repair guys thought the dent was a result of the accident so they removed it. Gone, forever. Sort of like what happens to sin once we confess it (see Hebrews 8:12).

In the big scheme of things, this whole episode in my life is unimportant. But, I learned a lot from it: don't go skiing alone; don't push yourself too far beyond your ability; don't take pride in something that is really a product of your failure; a torn ligament is not that big a deal considering what many are facing; and, exercise self-control in all circumstances.

Considering that patience and self-control are included in the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23), I have to conclude that I flunked that test. But, we live and learn.