

THE MUD PUDDLE

A Parable To Gain Understanding.

(Christian Edition)

by Timothy Cross

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CHAPTER 1

Once upon a time there was a mud puddle. Unlike many mud puddles, this one was most unusual. It almost beckoned people to enter. Beside the mud puddle was a large sign which read: “THOU SHALT NOT WALK THROUGH MUD PUDDLES!”, and it was signed, “God.”

And this is where our story begins. There was a man whose nickname was “Rebel.” (I shall not give you his real name for perhaps you might know him, and it would only serve to embarrass you both.)

Rebel had a friend who was nicknamed “Follower.” (You likely know the sort of fellow. In fact, you might know him as well.)

One day Rebel and Follower were out for a walk. Rebel was having one of those a rotten, no good, horrible, *bad-hair* day, and even though he knew it was clearly wrong, he decided to splash through the mud puddle. He was mad, and besides, he thought it would make him feel better.

Rebel hit the mud puddle full blast and intended to come out the other side.—Instead, Rebel made it about half way through the mud puddle, sloshing mud everywhere, when he became mired. The mud was like a giant octopus latching onto his legs. Rebel was stuck. The feeling was similar, I’m sure, to what a fly must experience when it accidentally lands in a can of paint. For Rebel there was panic. The more he struggled, the deeper he sank. If you’ve ever waded near a creek and gotten your shoe stuck in the mud, you know the feeling. The hard you struggle the deeper in you sink.

Rebel discovered an important truth about the mud puddle that day, albeit too late, that the mud puddle was a lot like slow quicksand. He knew that unless he could get out he would surely die.—“*If only I’d obeyed the warning sign,*” he thought.

He also began to have new insights into God as well. Could it be that God had put the sign there, not to keep him from having fun, but rather to protect and provide for his well-being?

What happened to Follower, you say? Well, he followed Rebel right into the mud puddle. In fact he ended up even muddier than Rebel. Not only did he get mud on himself, but he got a lot of Rebel’s mud on himself as well.

Rebel and Follower found themselves in a horrible predicament. They had both become law-breakers (in need of being forgiven or pardoned by God), and they were also covered from head to toe in mud (and in desperate need of a cleansing).

Their condition was worsening by the minute as they were slowly, ever so slowly, sinking deeper and deeper into the mud. Already the mud was up past their knees.

It so happened that this same day there was a lovely young girl who had gone out for a morning stroll. Her nickname was Lily (as in lily-white). She was a beautiful child with a sparkle in her eye and joy in her heart. She radiated innocence and a zest for life.

On this particular morning Lily had decided to go for a walk wearing a new white dress her mother had made especially for her.

Lily was enjoying the day: the flowers, the butterflies, the birds singing in the trees. All seemed so peaceful and happy.

And then, before she knew what was happening, ugly mud seemed to be flying everywhere and her beautiful dress was suddenly covered with mud (from Rebel and Follower). To the casual observer it would have almost appeared as though she had gone through the mud puddle herself. In fact that is what some of the town's people said later.

In that moment her life changed forever.

Lily was overcome with a myriad of emotions. She felt betrayed by Rebel and Follower, whom she had known much of her life. Her trust in them was shattered. And she felt shame. Not only did she feel dirty on the outside, but for some unexplainable reason she also felt dirty and violated on the inside. Even though she told herself that it was not her fault, she felt guilty. *"If only I had . . ."*—And what was she going to tell her mother who had worked so long and poured so much love into making the dress? Would her mom blame her? *"You stupid girl. Why didn't you watch where you were going? It's all your fault!"*

Lily became angry at Rebel and Follower. Bitterness and rage seized her like ugly dragons. She wanted to hurt Rebel and Follower for what they had done to her. As she gave into the anger, bitterness and rage it was almost as though she could feel a dark force pouring gas on the flames of her anger. She felt that unless she could regain control it would consume her.

Fear also began to grip her as she wondered if she would ever again be safe. Innocence was gone and she felt as though her soul had been ripped apart. Her safe world no longer seemed safe.

Even though Lily had always thought of herself as a person of faith, she felt betrayed by God. *"God, why didn't you stop them? Why did you let them splash all over me? Why didn't you put a barbed wire fence around the mud puddle rather than just that stupid sign?"*

As Lily tried desperately to get the mud off of herself she began flinging mud from her dress in every direction. To her dismay she heard screams of panic from other children playing near her. She was splattering her mud all over them.

Before long everyone in the village had smatterings of mud on them. No one was exempt. As people would bump into one another the mud would get transferred, first to one and then to another. Some would sit in a muddied chair. Others would track the mud into their homes. And so it went. Rebel's and Follower's mud spread far and wide, and all the while they remained stuck and dying.

To minimize and deny the gravity of their situation, they decided to play mud games. They would throw mud balls at one another and tell themselves, *"It's not all that bad! It's actually sort of fun feeling the mud squeeze through your toes."* Yet, deep down, they knew their situation was worsening moment by moment. Because misery loves company, sometimes they would even beckon other unsuspecting souls to join the "party."—Some even did. Deep within Rebel and Follower felt guilty whenever they lured others to break God's law and unite with them.

When Rebel and Follower were almost up to their necks in mud they finally began to cry out for help. They could no longer deny their problem. Unless they got help they would soon die.

Lily was the first one to hear their cries above her own crying. *"What should I do?"* she thought. The last people in the world she wanted to help were Rebel and Follower. On the other hand, she thought, *"If I don't help them, and they die, I will feel like a murderer."*

Whether it was right or wrong, Lily turned and walked away and prayed that someone else would come to their rescue.

As for Rebel and Follower, they did get out. Someone finally tossed them a life rope. Rumor has it that they each made several more trips back into the mud puddle. One of them, I hear, eventually drowned in the

mud puddle after the town's people got tired of rescuing him. The other one got help and became an anti-mud-puddle advocate. He steered many a person away from the mud puddle. When he showed people the mud stains on his clothes they would believe him.

I understand that he went on to lead a normal, happy life. It is even rumored that he and Lily were reconciled. His children would sometimes ask him about the stains on his clothes, and with tears in his eyes, he would tell them how foolish he had been when he was young.

Chapter 2

As you have probably figured out, this parable about the mud puddle is a lot like real life. There are people who *sin* with their eyes wide open (e.g., Rebel). Some hurt themselves because they are followers ("Everyone else is doing it!" "He started it." "I was just along for the ride.") Still others become victims, like Lily. And lastly, there are the secondhand victims, who are victimized by other victims (like the children were by Lily).

If you struggle with an addictive personality and you can't stay away from drugs, alcohol, or gambling; or you battle sexual obsessions, over-eating, tobacco and the like; then you can probably relate well to Rebel or Follower.

If you have been abused sexually, physically, emotionally, verbally or spiritually then you may well relate to the feelings of Lily.

If you are the child of a parent who has a history of abuse, you may relate to the second-hand victims. Hurt people *hurt* people.

The following questions may be answered by yourself, or even better, in a group setting. They are meant to produce insight which can aid you in recovery and healing. "*You cannot change or heal what you do not acknowledge.*"¹

I urge you to use a notebook and pen to answer these questions. Having led many discussion groups on "Mud Puddles" I know that strong feelings and thoughts can be triggered by the following questions. Recording your thoughts in a notebook will reinforce the learning process, as well as allow you to go back at some later time to review what you learned. Hopefully you will gain yet further insights into your life as you review and rethink what you recorded.

QUESTIONS

I. CONCERNING THE MUD PUDDLE

- How do you see this mud puddle being like real life?
- What are some of the mud puddles in your life? . . . in your family?

II. CONCERNING REBEL

- Why did it take him so long to cry out for help?
- What was it that made him want to recruit others to join him in the mud puddle? Have you ever done that?
- For Rebel to begin to undo all the harm he caused, what are some steps he would need to take?
- Because he broke God's moral laws what does he have to do to get right with God? (See John 1:12; Revelation 3:20; I John 1:9.)
- Besides needing forgiveness, he also got dirty. What steps will he have to go through in order to get cleaned up? (See I Timothy 2:21)
- How is getting cleaned up different than being forgiven or pardoned? (Note: The Bible teaches that *justification* occurs at a point in time. It is *just* as if we never walked through the mud puddle. Sanctification, on the other hand, is the cleaning up procedure of the Holy Spirit in our lives and it is a life-long process.)
- What steps must he take in order to get out of the mud puddle?
- What preventive measures will he have to take to ensure that he never goes back into the mud puddle?

- Because he abused and victimized Lily, how could he begin to make things right with her?
- Is merely asking her forgiveness enough?
- When is restitution necessary (paying back or restoring, as much as possible, what he damaged)?
- What major feelings do you think Rebel felt after getting stuck (e.g., guilt, shame, etc.)?
- How could these negative feelings actually be good for him? How could they motivate him to change? (See II Corinthians 7:9.)
- Do you think Rebel had any idea about the far reaching effects of what he did? (Reflect on the one sin of Adam, Genesis 3.)
- In what ways are you like Rebel? Does Rebel remind you of anyone in your family?

III. CONCERNING FOLLOWER

- Was Follower just as guilty as Rebel?
- In a court of law would he be considered as guilty as Rebel?
- Is ignorance, or being weak-willed, ever a good excuse for getting in trouble? Why not?
- Was Follower as muddy as Rebel?
- What sort of feelings do think Follower felt after getting stuck in the mud?—How would he feel about himself? . . . toward Rebel?
- How would Follower’s feelings differ from Rebel’s feelings?
- What steps would he have to take in order to be forgiven, cleaned up and set free?

IV. CONCERNING LILY

- How is Lily the victim?
- In what ways have you been victimized? (Note: If you are in a group setting, confidentiality is of utmost importance. Be sensitive to the one sharing.)
- Was Lily responsible for getting mud splashed on her?
- What was your response when Lily's mom said, “*It’s all your fault!*”
- Why is it that people often get mad at the victim rather than the lawbreaker? Why is that so crushing to the victim? Can it be almost as painful as the original abuse?
- How is Lily, nonetheless, accountable for how she handles the situation?
- What does the saying, “*Suffering colors all of life, but we choose the color,*” mean to you?
- What would you have thought of Lily had she used the excuse, “*I’m already muddy, so I might as well join Rebel and Follower?*”
- Do you ever use similar excuses?
- How could Lily become a better, stronger person for having been victimized?
- How could she use her choice to overcome victimization to help others?
- Should she help Rebel and Follower out of the mud puddle if they ask her? If so, under what conditions?
- Should Lily forgive Rebel and Follower if they ask for forgiveness? If so, under what conditions?
- What if they don’t ask? Should she forgive them anyway? What do you think Jesus meant in Matthew 6:12-15 and 18:21-35?
- Someone once said, “*To forgive is costly. Not to forgive is even more costly.*” What does that saying mean to you?
- If she forgives them what will it cost her?
- If she doesn’t forgive, how much more will it cost her? What else will she have to carry around, besides a muddy dress, if she doesn’t forgive them? (hint: bitterness, anger, rage, etc.)
- What do you think the dark force was that came over Lily when she yielded to unabated anger and rage? (See Ephesians 4:26, 27. For further reading on ways Satan/demons get a spiritual hold in our lives when we hang on to sin, please read *The Bondage Breaker* by Dr. Neil Anderson.)

- Who is Lily hurting the most by not being forgiving: Rebel, Follower, or herself?
- If she forgives Rebel and Follower, does that excuse what they did?
- To whom are Rebel and Follower still accountable, even if Lily forgives them?
- If she forgives Rebel and Follower, does that mean she has to let them splash mud on her again?
- What if she sees them heading for the mud puddle the next day when she's out taking a walk? What should she do?
- Do you think she should leave them in the mud puddle to teach them a lesson?
- Even though she was a victim, she still victimized and hurt others (e.g., the other children near her). What does the saying, *Hurt people hurt other people*, mean to you?
- What steps must she take in order to make things right for those whom she hurt.
- How do you think she feels having hurt others (e.g., kids, spouse, family, friends, etc.)?
- Instead of having mud splashed on a dress, what if we were actually talking about rape?—What if Rebel had sexually abused her? Maybe Rebel was her father, or uncle, or grandfather, or neighbor. Would you still give Lily the same advice about forgiveness and about handling her problems? Why or why not?

V. CONCERNING SECOND-HAND VICTIMS

- How do you think they feel toward Lily?
- What are the chances that these second-hand victims will victimize others?
- How can victimization become a generational cycle?
- Does victimization and abuse run in your family? How many generations back?
- How have you been hurt because of the abuse your parent(s) suffered?
- How can the cycle be broken?

VI. CONCERNING GOD

- Why do you suppose God put the sign up?
- Why didn't God stop Rebel and Follower from entering the mud puddle?
- What is free will? How would God stopping them have violated their free will?
- What is the difference between robots and people?
- If God gave us free will, so we wouldn't be robots, does that mean we can choose good or evil?
- Does that also mean innocent people, like Lily, may get hurt? Do you think that is God's will?
- If Lily is going to get mad, who should she be mad at? Rebel? Follower? God? Herself?
- Just because God forgives Rebel or Follower, does that mean they will never suffer the consequences of their actions? (e.g., If God were to forgive Rebel and Follower for robbing a bank, does that mean they may not have to spend time in jail?)
- When we sin we need forgiveness. When we have been sinned against we need healing. What provisions has God made for both healing and forgiveness? (See: John 3:15-18; Galatians 6:2; James 5:13-16; Romans 12:15-21; Hebrews 4:13-16.)

VII. CONCERNING YOU

- Between Rebel, Follower, Lily and the secondhand victims, with whom do you most identify or relate?—Are you like Rebel, running into trouble with your eyes wide open? Or, are you a follower who often yields to peer pressure? Or, are you someone whose problems are the result of being victimized by either first or second-hand abuse?
- If you see yourself as a victim, how has that affected your view of God?
- Do you struggle with anger toward God?
- How would you feel if you could forgive your abuser(s) and lay aside your anger?
- How is harboring anger and bitterness working for you? What help would you need in order

to lay all your anger, bitter-ness, rage, and unforgiveness at the foot of the cross.—Will you seek the help?

- Even though you have every right to be angry, by hanging onto your anger, who do you hurt the most?—you or your abuser(s)?
- What would it feel like if you could hand both your anger and your abuser(s) over to God, believing that God will take care of them?
- If you could apply just one thing you learned from the mud puddle parable, what would it be? How could it affect your life?

A NOTE FOR GROUP LEADERS

If you are the group facilitator, it also works well to have members of the group role play the parable. Cut out cards with each character's name (e.g., Rebel, Follower, etc.). Attach strings so the names can be worn around the neck. Begin by having everyone pretend there is a mud puddle in the middle of the floor. For the person who plays Lily (victim), take some encyclopedias (or heavy books) and label each book with one emotion (fear, anger, rage, bitterness, and unforgiveness). Then let "victim" hold the books. Label a stuffed animal "Satan" and sit it on top of the books. Before the person drops the books, have others offer to take some of the books (see Galatians 6:2). Then have each of them lay the books at the feet of Jesus. (You may want to have one person play Jesus holding the sign, "Thou shalt not walk through mud puddles.") By getting rid of the books, and giving the victimization to Jesus, the person robs Satan of those particular footholds in his/her life.