

You Cannot Help Someone Who Won't be Honest

Jer. 7:16, 23-28; 9:3, 5-8; 11:14; 14:11-12

When someone will not be honest with you or won't tell you the whole truth about their situation, they are usually hiding something. As long as that things remains hidden, you'll not be able to help them. [READ TEXT]

Generally, there are two reasons why someone does something they shouldn't do: **(1)** The reason they tell you, and **(2)** the real reason they don't tell you.

For example, consider some reasons people give for leaving a church (NOTE: There are legitimate reasons for leaving—Heresy; immorality in leadership; relocating):

- “We are leaving because the Lord is leading us to a different church.”
- “We are leaving because there are no programs for our children.”
- “We are leaving because we are not being “feed.”

When someone leaves our church, I'd like to know why. One family who left our church several years ago told me they were leaving because they felt their “ministry” was over here and decided to move on. (God was obviously blessing their ministry.) However, someone who knew this family told me the real reason they left was because I said something against one of their heroes (Bill Gothard).

Another family who left our church several years ago told me they were leaving because they felt they were not getting what they needed at BBC. (They would never tell me what they needed that they were not getting.) I found out later they left because I preached on tithing and stewardship. Neither of these families were being honest with me, therefore I could not help them.

➡ Some reasons people often will not tell you the real reason is...

- They know in their heart they are wrong, but are too proud to admit it.
- They know their real reason isn't justified or they are hiding something.
- They are offended.

God gives people the opportunity to “come clean” about their behavior. However, when they persist in being dishonest, they prove they cannot be helped.

Consider these two cases involving dishonesty:

1. Gehazi (2 Kings 5:20-27).
2. Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1-10).

➡ Consider the following story from Marshall Shelley's book, *“Helping Those Who Don't Want Help”* (pages 16-25). “Brad” is a pastor who is trying to help a young couple in his church named Gil and Penny Farney:

➡ As you listen to this story, consider these questions:

1. What is the root issue in this case?
2. Can these people involved be helped?
3. Would it help to call in someone else for assistance? Who?
4. How long do you keep trying?
5. Did “Brad” actually help this couple?

At first, Brad Edwards had no reason to doubt Gil Farney. Gil and his wife, Penny, had come to the Bartlesburg Bible Church shortly after Brad had arrived as pastor three years ago. The Farney’s sang in the choir and quickly were accepted into the congregational mainstream.

Thanks to his ready humor, Gil, a sales representative for a computer firm, made friends quickly. He had lost his left arm in an accident as a child, but he used his artificial arm as a conversation piece. He’d introduce himself by saying, “My name’s Gil, but you can call me Stump.”

Occasionally he would come to church with his artificial elbow bent backwards — just to see the reactions of people who didn’t know about his arm. Those who knew Gil laughed with him.

When Gil’s company made some cut-backs and Gil lost his job, the whole church began praying for him. When the unemployment stretched into six months, then seven months, Brad could see Gil becoming more and more uncomfortable when people asked how the job search was going.

“Nothing yet,” he’d say, “but my cousin knows some people with an independent TV station in Charlotte. There’s a possibility of doing some weekend sports reporting.”

A month later, Gil told Brad the job fell through because he’d had surgery to

remove a cancerous growth in his stomach, and the TV station “didn’t want to take a risk with someone like that.”

It sounded strange, but Brad had no reason to doubt the story.

Brad asked how the Farney’s were doing financially, and when he found out their car needed some repairs they couldn’t afford. Brad dipped into his Discretionary Fund to pay the mechanic. Gil and Penny seemed grateful. “We’ll pay the church back once we get on our feet,” he said.

“Don’t worry about it,” said Brad. “We’re glad we can help.”

After another month with still no job, Gil would come to some informal social activities at church with alcohol on his breath. Brad wondered if he ought to say something, but he knew unemployment could be depressing. *It’s probably better just to be the supporting family he needs right now*, he thought. *And help find him a job!* Brad began making some phone calls.

Before anything concrete developed, however, Gil stopped into Brad’s office.

“I need to talk to somebody, Pastor,” he began. “And I think I can trust you to keep this confidential.”

“Sure. What’s on your mind?” Brad asked.

Gil launched into an unusual story. “A guy I used to sell computers to found out I

was unemployed. And through a middle man, he contacted me and asked me to think about setting fire to an old warehouse. I told him he was crazy, but he said, ‘Just think about it. I’ll make it worth your while.’ Pastor, I know arson’s a crime, so I went to the State’s attorney. The State’s attorney took me over to the FBI, and they encouraged me to go ahead and meet the guy to find out what was going on.” Gil was dead serious.

“So I met the guy, and we made arrangements to burn the place down. I secretly kept in touch with the FBI, and they were keeping me under surveillance. The night I was to torch the place, my friend told me to forget it — he was just testing me to see if I were willing. Then he told me he really wanted me to deliver some drugs.” Gil was looking the pastor right in the eye, but his voice began to quaver. He looked frightened.

“Again, I contacted the FBI, and they told me to do what the guy said and to keep them informed. They wanted to see how many people were involved. That’s where it stands now.

“Pastor, I want to do what’s right. I’ve agreed to help the FBI, but I need your prayers. I’m scared, and I needed to talk to someone. I told the FBI about you, and they checked you out and gave me clearance to talk with you. So far, you and Penny are the only ones who know, and it’s got to stay that way.”

Not knowing what else to do, Brad agreed to pray for Gil and Penny.

Over the next few weeks, Gil stopped in periodically to give Brad updates. He told of staying out all hours of the night, making contacts for the FBI. His wife was

being followed whenever she drove. His third-grade son was being tailed by the FBI to make sure he was safe. Their house was under surveillance from the vacant home across the street. Gil wove quite a web of intrigue. But, yes, he still needed a job.

When Brad talked with Penny, she confirmed the story. “Yes, I usually see a red car following me. It’s scary, but Gil tells me those are the good guys. We’ve also had to have the phone taken out of the house because Gil was afraid it might be tapped.”

“Is the FBI paying you anything?”

“Oh, no,” she said. “I understand that would be illegal.”

Brad continued to pray for the Farney’s. It was all he could do.

Brad’s phone calls did eventually find employment for Gil — a telephone sales job with a company that sold coupon booklets. It was a comedown for Gil, but at this point, he was happy for even a temporary job. At least it was income.

Gil soon began telling Brad that other people at church were also involved with the FBI — some of them came to the services armed, he said. Brad began to be skeptical, but he couldn’t confirm his suspicions. He couldn’t prove Gil was a liar because everything was undercover. Brad doubted the FBI operated that way, but he was sure if he called they wouldn’t tell him anything one way or the other. Brad found himself looking twice at every visitor who attended Sunday services.

Gil and Penny moved out of their rented house and into an apartment with Penny’s sister and brother-in-law. It wasn’t

the best situation — two families with three kids in a three-bedroom apartment. But Gil told Brad, “We didn’t have a choice. The owner of the house decided to sell, and the other apartments we’ve been looking at haven’t been cleared by the FBI.”

“Well, let us know when you find a place,” said Brad. “We’ll be glad to help you move the furniture.”

The cramped living situation continued for three months. Seven people in one apartment made for some tension. Once when Brad was talking privately with Penny, she almost broke down. “I don’t deserve to be treated like this. We’re trying to help the FBI, and they’re being unreasonable. Gil says every place he suggests, they veto. I don’t know why God let us get tangled up in this.”

Gil was also increasingly disturbed. Once he stopped in Brad’s office visibly shaken. “Pastor, I’m afraid for my life. I had to go downtown late last night to contact some of the drug dealers. The FBI put a bug in my car so they could tail me, but when I got there, I realized the bug was gone. Someone had taken it! I couldn’t see anyone tailing me, so I just drove away and came home.”

Gil was pale. “They may kill me!”

Brad wished he had more facts, but Gil would never tell him whom to talk to with the FBI.

“Gil, you’ve got to get out of this situation. Get a lawyer.”

“I tried, but they won’t let me, Pastor. I just need you to keep praying.”

Despite the inner turmoil, Penny and Gil appeared serene in public services at

the church. No one but the pastor knew their story. He was glad when they did manage to find another house to rent. At least that was one problem solved.

About that time, Brad got a phone call from Molly Otter, the woman who had hired Gil, at Brad’s request, for the telephone sales job.

“I’m afraid for Gil Farney,” she began.

“Oh, why’s that?” Brad asked.

“Something is bothering him. He’s been drinking a lot on the job. One afternoon he was gone three hours and came back violently drunk, yelling at the others in the office, swearing at me, saying he was a loser and that I had hired a loser. He was out of control, and I was afraid he might hurt himself or someone else. I had another worker drive him home. I suspect the problem is his family situation.”

“What situation? The apartment?” Brad asked.

“No, the divorce! I assumed you knew. He said he talked to you regularly.”

“Tell me what he’s told you,” Brad said.

“For the last month or so, about every other day he becomes very distraught. Almost teary-eyed, he says virtually the same thing each time: Penny is divorcing him and going to take the kids, and he can’t stand to see the family break up. Yesterday one of the other employees wanted to take up a collection to help him get an attorney. That’s why I’m calling — to see if you can help us understand the situation.”

“This is news to me,” said Brad. “I know he’s under pressure.” He thought of one conversation with Penny when she

had said, "I'm thinking of moving out of state until this thing with the FBI is over. I can't take much more." But that didn't sound like divorce.

"I didn't know Penny was leaving," he told Molly.

"Oh, yes. Two weeks ago they went out for lunch on his birthday. When Gil came back, he just sat there, staring at his desk. I asked what was wrong, and he told us all that Penny had just told him she was starting divorce proceedings."

"Molly, I appreciate your call. Let me check this out."

"Brad," Molly said urgently. "You can't let him know I've talked to you. This has got to be confidential. If he knew I told you, it would destroy our working relationship. He's a good salesman, and they're hard to find. Promise me."

"All right, and again, thanks for calling." Brad hung up and immediately drove over to the house.

Penny opened the door. Brad smiled and said he'd just stopped by for a "pastoral call." She was alone and invited him in, and after a few minutes of small talk, he said, "Penny, you all lived with your sister for three months, and it was pretty cramped for you. That's a tough situation for any marriage. How are things going between you and Gil?"

"Much better now that we've got our own place," she said. "I think things are going to work out."

"I'm glad to hear that," said Brad, but inwardly he groaned. Gil's story about the divorce was a lie. He wondered how much more was fabricated as well.

Gil walked in a moment later, stumbling slightly as he walked through the door. Brad could smell alcohol. He realized he had a problem, a severe problem, on his hands. But how could he confront Gil about the divorce story without breaking his promise to Molly? He didn't feel, at that point, he could break the confidence.

"You've been drinking," he said to Gil.

"Yes," Gil admitted, sitting down dejectedly. "I don't want to, but after too much time with those FBI guys, I just have to drink to unwind."

By now, Brad was doubting the whole story. "Gil, you've got to quit. This thing is destroying you. Your spiritual life is threatened; your emotional life is a wreck. You've got to tell them you're through."

Penny was crying. And Gil looked at

Molly was flabbergasted when Brad told her Gil's story about Penny divorcing him was a lie.

"I can't believe it!" she said. "He would literally be crying after having lunch with her. Everyone in our office hated Penny for putting him through that."

Molly was the first to confront Gil, and right away he said, "You've been talking to Brad Edwards." He didn't admit he had told a lie; he simply refused to talk about it. Molly didn't fire him, but she said she didn't want to hear any more about the divorce, and if he ever showed up at work drunk, he'd be fired.

Brad also talked to him. Gil never confessed any falsehood—he tried to downplay it. Afterward Molly and Brad discussed the situation. "I think things are going to be OK," Molly said. "He's settled down at work. Let's not rock the boat."

Brad wondered what he should tell Penny—if anything. She didn't know about the divorce story. She still believed the FBI story. What should he do? He knew Gil had lied about the divorce, but he had no evidence to refute the FBI tale. Penny was somewhat emotionally unstable anyway, given to periods of tears. *If she found out what her husband had been doing to her, she might have a breakdown*, Brad reasoned. In the end, he decided it was better not to risk the trauma, at least not now.

And things did seem to get better — for a while. Gil continued to come to church every Sunday. He stopped telling Brad any stories about the FBI. He started helping with a Thursday night church program for boys, and faithfully attended, although Brad did notice he reeked of after-

shave lotion. He wondered if it was to mask the smell of alcohol.

But after two months, suddenly Brad got a phone call from Penny's sister. "Would you please go see Penny? I think she needs you right now," she said mysteriously. Since the Farney's still had no phone, Brad drove over to their house.

Penny told him Gil had split. "Yesterday morning he woke up and told me he was going out to New Mexico, where he has some relatives, to look for a job. In two hours, he was gone. I haven't heard from him since, and I'm getting scared."

Brad tried to assure her things would be OK. He went back to the church and called Molly.

"Is Gil at work today?"

"No, and he wasn't here yesterday either. He called in to say Penny was pushing him for divorce again, and he had to see his lawyer yesterday and be in court today. He said to expect him tomorrow."

"Well, don't," said Brad. "It's a lie. He may be in New Mexico, but I don't even know that for sure."

At that point Brad went back to see Penny and told her everything — about the divorce story, his suspicions about the FBI yarn, everything. "Gil needs professional help," he said. "He's having trouble with alcohol. He's not facing reality. He doesn't even know what the truth is anymore."

Penny almost collapsed. She was sitting on the couch, but all the muscles in her body seemed to go limp. Then she began to cry hysterically, "I hate you. I hate you. I hate you." Brad let her shout until she calmed down.

He arranged for another woman in the church to stay with Penny and the kids. He also ordered a phone for their home so Penny could contact him or her sister. The only hitch was clearing up a past-due bill from a year before. Penny was shocked it was so easy; she still assumed the FBI didn't want them to have a phone. She worried that drug dealers might make threatening calls. Brad tried to assure her that no drug dealers or agents would be calling.

The day after the phone was in, Penny called in tears. "Pastor, you've got to come over!"

"What's wrong?"

"I just tried looking up your number in the book. I haven't used a phone in so long, I can't handle it."

Brad saw the tension and emotional strain Penny had suffered was greater than he realized. He looked in on her every day after that as she rode an emotional roller coaster — one minute thanking him for supporting her and the next minute accusing him of driving her husband away. Brad carefully explained that *when* (not if) Gil returned, she *had* to help him get professional counseling. "He's a sick man. The church will help with the costs," Brad assured her.

When Molly heard the emotional abuse Penny had suffered and the financial straits she was in, she brought her a check for \$1,000—the company contribution to the group insurance that she had refused to give Gil.

Two days later, on Friday when Brad stopped by the house, Gil was there. He'd rolled in the previous night. Penny didn't

even greet the pastor; she just gave him a hard look and said, "It's his word against yours. How do I know you're not lying? And even if you're telling the truth, how do you know the people you talked to aren't lying?"

Brad didn't bother to defend himself. He turned to Gil.

"You need help, Gil. You have some problems I'm not capable of dealing with, but I can get you in touch with those who can."

"I'll be OK," he said. "I just need to get to New Mexico. I've got a job lined up that'll be great. We'll be near my folks."

"Gil, you have problems that New Mexico won't solve, "You have trouble facing reality. You told people Penny was divorcing you. That's not true. You're telling lies. You're drinking ..."

"I know, I know," said Gil. "Ever since I lost my job, I've felt confused."

"We'll get you help," said Brad.

"But I don't know what to do," said Gil. "We're getting evicted next Monday." That was the first Brad had heard about that. Another lie??? He closed the conversation encouraged that at least Gil was open to counseling.

When he checked out the eviction story, his lawyer friend confirmed it. The eviction notice had arrived the day before Gil had taken off for New Mexico. Brad speculated the two events were not unrelated.

Two days later, on Sunday, the Farney's were in church, greeting friends in the foyer as if nothing were wrong. Brad made a point to say quietly to Gil, "Let's

get together tomorrow. We'll work things out."

"Sure," said Gil.

But the next day, when Brad went to the house, it was vacant. Even the furniture was gone. A call to Penny's sister confirmed that Gil and Penny had moved out Sunday night, heading for New Mexico.

Brad Edwards has not seen them since.

"Gil was one of the most jovial, easy-going men I've known," he says, shaking his head. "I still don't know what all was involved. It's probably a combination of the unemployment... midlife... depression... economic problems... the drinking problem... possibly problems between him and Penny... a self-image problem with his arm — who knows? All I know is that he desperately needed help, and I couldn't get him to accept any help."

NOTE: I'm glad I've never had to face a problem that this at BBC!

When people aren't completely honest, it's hard to get the facts, as Brad Edwards discovered. Sometimes people lie intentionally. Sometimes they have "hidden agendas." Other times people are sincere, but their observations are inaccurate. How do you know who's telling the truth?

As this real-life episode shows, trying to help someone who is untruthful is nigh to impossible.

Consider these questions regarding the story of Gil and Penny Farney:

1. What is the root issue? (Pride; self-deception; alcoholism)
2. Can these people involved be helped?
3. Would it help to call in someone else for assistance? Who? (The FBI?)
4. How long would you keep trying to help?
5. Did "Brad" actually help this couple?