

## PROLOGUE: THE PARABLE OF PUDGY

Pudgy was a little fish that lived on the western end of Nassau in the Bahamas. His parents warned him that he shouldn't swim too close to the shore because the large waves, especially around the month of October, would wash him up onto the beach and he would die.

But Pudgy knew best. As far as he was concerned he could swim better than his parents or siblings; after all he had gone to a better swimming school than all of them. So, against the advice of his elders, one October morning Pudgy went swimming close to the beaches on the western end of Nassau. A large wave tossed him up on the beach and, as he watched the water ebb away, he realized that he was beached. He flipped his tail. He twisted his body. He tried to jump off the sand, but try as he might; he was unable to get back into the beautiful aquamarine sea. Afraid and trapped, he now remembered all his parents had told him; after all, hindsight is twenty-twenty.

As the Bahamian sun grew hotter, water evaporated from Pudgy and he became weaker. As the morning wore on, Pudgy went into early shock. He tried and tried to get back into the water, but the waves lapped just short of him, leaving him stranded. His heart beat faster and his fear now turned to terror.

Along the beach came a very sophisticated lady. Fascinated by the spectacle of the little fish on the beach, she stooped down to tell him how excited she was to meet him. But even before she could open her mouth, Pudgy blurted out his plea for help, crying, "Please help me, I'm beached. Put me back into the water—a fish out of water will die."

"Oh," said the lady, "I understand, but you see I belong to the Bahamas Independent Society and we believe that if people are just given the chance to help themselves, they can handle their problems much more effectively. In fact, I am on my way to the Independent Society meeting at our church down the street. So, little fish, you just keep on trying and I'm sure you will be able to do it all by yourself."

"Please help me," cried Pudgy growing ever weaker.  
"Please put me back into the sea, you can even kick me back into the sea. A fish...out.....of water.....will.....DIE."

"Don't be preposterous," replied the lady. "I would never kick one of God's little creatures, in fact I volunteer at the animal society weekly; God knows I would never harm one of his vulnerable little animals, so don't think like that, just keep on trying. You know the saying, 'Try and try again, boys, and you will succeed at last.' Anyway, I must be off to my meeting now—but I'll stop by on my way back and we can discuss your position further. Cheerio, and have a good day."

Pudgy tried again and again but became progressively weaker until he could hardly move. He was almost dead. Then a little girl came walking along the beach. Seeing Pudgy she stopped and quickly scooped him back into the water. "Now that's better!" she said smiling as Pudgy slowly regained his strength and started his journey home.

A little later our lady returned to the beach to check on Pudgy. When she arrived at the spot where Pudgy had been, she exclaimed in a loud, joyous voice, "I knew he could do it, I will never forget that little fish. He is now swimming with all the other fishes in the Bahamian sea. He had a problem, and, just like we said in our meeting this morning, he faced it. Now he is swimming happily ever after with all the other little fishes in the sea." The little girl, who was playing in the sand nearby, spoke up.

"No, that's not what happened. He was dying so I rescued him; I put him back into the sea. If I hadn't, he would have died."

What was lacking between the woman and the fish? They spent time together; she stopped long enough to hear him explain his inner longing, his need for survival. She talked with him, she encouraged him, she advised him, she even sought to nurture and motivate him, and she tried to build up his strength and self-esteem. She then took the time to come back and check up on him; in our modern scientific lingo, she did a follow-up study. But she didn't meet Pudgy's need. This lady was not malevolent. In fact she rejoiced at the thought of the fish conquering his problems and swimming happily in the sea again. But she didn't meet Pudgy's need. Her formidable intellect and education did not help her to connect. Does this parable remind us of the lack of intimacy that exists in the modern world?

Overwhelmed by the powerful information revolution and our exciting new technologies, we grope toward a global village—but deep in our hearts we feel a paralyzing distance from each other. We can be involved with each other, spend time with each other, but still

so easily miss each other. Pudgy is that friend who calls out to us for help. Pudgy is our husband who is trying to tell us that things are not well and are falling apart. Pudgy is our wife who screams in silence, warning us that her heart is breaking. Most sadly, Pudgy is our child. Seeing our children daily, we continue to ignore the cry of their hearts and the pain of their existences. And one day the cry stops. No, the pain did not go away, it was buried and over time that part of the heart died. Pudgy is also our own heart, which calls us by day and night, asking us to stop, to slow down, to take some time to smell the roses, to give up destructive habits, or just to become authentic. But one day the heart is silent. No, its needs did not go away, but that part of the heart died. A person dies many times before they die. The tragedy of life is not death itself, but that we allow so much of ourselves to die before we die, some of us living 40 to 60 percent below our potential. The challenge is to keep our childhood simplicity without being childish.

In this story the woman's idea about independent self-determination is very good and reasonable, but it is not applicable to helping the fish in its desperate situation. In spite of the perceived closeness, there was an empathic block between the heart of the woman and the heart of the fish, making it difficult for the woman to hear the fish's cry for help. She was caught up in the prison of the familiar, addicted to her internal idea of independence, which she projected onto the fish instead of listening to its cry. Seeing only her internal representation, the ideas in her head, she was able to ignore the external reality around her. Sadly this is not uncommon in the way we live. Made in the image of God, we are born into intimacy with God but have to discover or come to an awareness of that reality. We cannot be without the presence of God, but it is possible to live without the awareness of his presence. Through contemplation we can discover intimacy with God—he calls us to a total transformation of consciousness so that our lives are based on his love. This is manifest by a new ability to see the world as God sees it, to care for each other, and by an empathic concern for the environment.