

LEADERSHIP AND SELF-DECEPTION: getting out of the box
Part I—Self-Deception and the “Box”
Summary by Mark R. Elliott*

1. On page 17, Bud continues his conversation with Tom with a question:

“Remember how I mentioned that you needed to know something about a problem in the human sciences?”

‘Yes.’

“This is it. Self-deception—being in the box—is the problem I was talking about. Of all the problems in organizations [churches], self-deception is the most common, and the most damaging.”

Bud elaborates further on “the problem” as he describes how he began to view people as objects while he sat waiting as others looked for seats on a plane with open seating. “Notice how my view of both myself and others was distorted from what we agreed was the reality,’ Bud said. ‘Although the truth was that all of us were people with more or less the same need to sit, I wasn’t seeing the situation that way. So my view of the world was a systematically incorrect way of seeing others and myself. I saw others as less than they were—as objects with needs and desires somehow secondary to and less legitimate than mine. But I couldn’t see the problem with what I was doing. I was self-deceived—or, in the box. The lady who offered us her seat, on the other hand, saw others and the situation clearly, without bias. She saw others as they were, as people like herself, with similar needs and desires. She saw straightforwardly. She was out of the box.” (Page 35-36)

Question: How does Bud’s “problem in human sciences” relate to the Biblical concept of original sin and its impact on humanity?

Q: When was the last time you caught yourself thinking of another person as an object? How did your perception impact your relationship with that person?

Q: Jeremiah 17:9 says, “The heart is more deceitful than all else and is desperately sick; Who can understand it?” If this is true, what hope is there for us to avoid the issues of self-deception (being in the box)? Is it even possible for us to get 100% out of the box? If you were brutally honest with yourself and were completely open to God’s Holy Spirit, what percentage in the box do you function on a day-to-day basis? On a good day: ____% On a bad day: ____%

2. As Bud related an “uncomfortable” encounter with Lou when he first came to work at Zagrum, he stated, “If 100 people had tried to do what Lou did to me in that meeting and afterward, only 1 in 100 could have invited my cooperation, as Lou did, rather than my resentment. By the book, it shouldn’t have worked. But it worked anyway. And with Lou, it usually did. The question, Tom is *why*—*why* did it work?”

That was a good question. ‘I don’t know,’ I finally said, shrugging my shoulders. Then, almost as an afterthought, I said, ‘Maybe you just knew that Lou cared about you, so you didn’t feel as threatened as you might have otherwise.’

Bud smiled and sat down again in the seat across from me. ‘So you think I could *tell* that—how Lou was feeling about me.’

‘Yeah, I think you probably could.’

‘And so you’re saying, then, Tom, that I was primarily responding to how Lou was regarding me—at least to how I thought he was regarding me—and that his regard, to me, was more important than merely his words or his actions. Is that what you’re suggesting?’ (Page 25)

Q: Proverbs 27:6 says, “Faithful are the wounds of a friend; but the kisses of an enemy are deceitful.” If we have been blessed, we have had friends like Lou who could say and do things that others couldn’t. As you think about a friend who was willing to “wound you”, what qualities did they have that helped you to receive their words?

Q: When you have attempted to be a friend and give “words of exhortation,” how were your words received? As you honestly reflect back on those experiences, how much do you think **YOUR** attitude towards that individual impacted their response?

3. On Page 49 Bud continues his conversation with Tom. “Now remember what we’ve covered so far: There’s something deeper than behavior that determines our influence on others—it’s whether we’re in or out of the box. You don’t know much about the box yet, but when we’re in the box, our view of reality is distorted—we see neither ourselves nor others clearly. We are self-deceived. And that creates all kinds of trouble for the people around us.”

‘With that in mind,’ he continued, ‘I’d like you to do something for me before we get back together after lunch. I’d like you to think about the people here at Zagrum—both in and out of your department—and ask yourself whether you’re in or out of the box toward them. And don’t lump the people you’re thinking about into an impersonal mass. Think of the individuals. You may be in the box toward one person and out of the box toward another at the same time. Think of the people.’”

Activity: I would encourage you to take a few minutes and think of the people you connect with on a regular basis. List their names below and prayerfully listen to the Holy Spirit as you check next to their name whether you are *in the box* or *out of the box* as it relates to that particular person. (Ignore the “prompting” column.)

Name	In the Box	Out of the Box	Prompting or Self-betrayal
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(Continue on the next page if necessary)

Name	In the Box	Out of the Box	Prompting or Self-betrayal
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PART II—How we get in the box

4. On page 66, Bud tells Tom about an incident that happened years ago...“One night a number of years ago, when David was just an infant, I was awakened by his wailing cries. He was probably four months old or so at the time. I remember glancing at the clock. It was around one in the morning. In the flash of that moment, I had an impression or a sense or a feeling—a thought of something I should do. It was this: “Get up and tend to David so that Nancy can sleep.””

Continuing the story on page 77 Bud said, “‘Before I betrayed myself, I simply saw something I could do to help Nancy. She was a person with a need that I felt I should fill. I saw the situation straightforwardly. But after I betrayed myself, my view both of her and of myself became distorted. I saw the world in a way that justified my failure. My perception became distorted systematically in my favor. When I betrayed myself, I became self-deceived.’

‘Oh, I see it,’ I said, enthusiastically. ‘So when you betrayed yourself, you entered the box.’”

Q: I Thessalonians 5:19 exhorts us, “Do not quench the Spirit.” What happens when we “quench the Spirit” and fail to respond to His leadership?

Q: As you look at the list of people on the previous page where you checked “in the box”, and think about how you got there, were there “promptings” from the Holy Spirit that you ignored? If so make a check mark under the prompting column on the previous page.

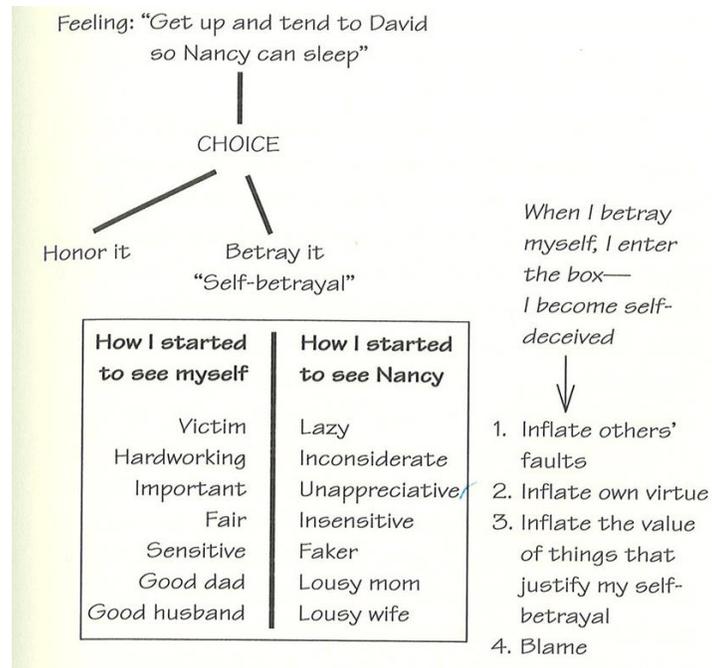
Q: Reflect again on the people toward whom you are currently “in the box.” Can you describe the moment when you betrayed yourself and entered the box? If so put

an "X" under the prompting/self-betrayal column on the previous page. (Note: you might have both a check mark and an "X" next to some names.)

5. On page 81, this sketch is used to depict what happened in Bud's mind after he failed to respond when David woke him at 1:00 a.m.

A: Select one of the individuals you listed on the previous page where you acknowledged you were "in the box" and where you know that you ignored "promptings from God" and/or committed "self-betrayal". Like Bud did, take a few minutes to list the emotions and attitudes that began to develop toward yourself and the other person:

How did you start to see yourself?



How did you start to see _____?

6. On the top of page 105, we can find the following summary of the book's definition of "Self-Betrayal"

- An act contrary to what I feel I should do for another is called an act of "self-betrayal."
- When I betray myself, I begin to see the world in a way that justifies my self-betrayal.
- When I see the world in a self-justifying way, my view of reality becomes distorted.
- So—when I betray myself, I enter the box.
- Over time certain boxes become characteristic of me, and I carry them with me.
- By being in the box, I provoke others to be in the box.
- In the box, we invite mutual mistreatment and obtain mutual justification. We collude in giving each other reason to stay in the box.

Q: Turn to the person next to you and using your own words, describe what each of these steps means. Then listen as he does the same thing.

7. On page 108-109, Bud is summarizing the conversation he, Kate, and Tom have had. "There are actually two main reasons why the box undercuts results. The first is what Kate has just taught us. When we're in the box, what motivates us most is the need for justification, and what will bring us justification is very often at odds with what is best for the organization. Does that make sense?"

I nodded, thinking as I did so that this was true whether the organization was a company or a family [or a church].

'Here at Zagrum, we use the term "**what-focus**" to describe whatever a person is focused on achieving. Out of the box, my what-focus at work is results. In the box, by contrast, my what-focus is justification. That's the first reason why the box always undercuts results.'

That made sense. 'What's the second reason?' I asked.

'It has to do with my 'who-focus' when I'm in the box.' Bud answered.

'You're focused on yourself when you're in the box, aren't you?' I blurted out.

'Exactly, Tom, and as long as I am focused on myself, I can't fully focus either on results or on the people to whom I am to be delivering those results.'"

Q: In Matthew 28:19-20 believers and the church are given the task of making disciples. If the results of our daily walk are to see people come to Christ and to grow in Christ-likeness, how will that be impacted if we find ourselves constantly "in the box?" How important does keeping out of the box or getting out of the box become when we acknowledge how negatively it impacts our faithfulness and fruitfulness?

Part III—How we get out of the box

8. Lou Herbert steps onto the scene in Chapter 17 and tells Tom how he first understood about “being in the box”. On pages 129-130 we hear the closing portions of Lou’s pilgrimage and some important application points:

“But what I learned in Arizona was that **I** was a mess. Because I was in the box, I was provoking the very problems I was complaining about. I had chased away the very best people I knew—feeling justified all the time, because in my box, I was convinced they weren’t that good.’

He paused. ‘Even Kate,’ he added, shaking his head. ‘No one on this planet is any more talented than Kate, but I couldn’t see that because of my box.’

“So as I sat there in Arizona, I had a huge problem. I was sitting next to a wife whom I’d been taking for granted for 25 years. I was by then 100 miles of impassable terrain away from a son whose only recent memories of his father were probably bitter ones. And my company had come unglued—the best and brightest scattering around the globe, embarking on new careers. I was a lonely man. My box was destroying everything I cared about.’

‘One question seemed more important to me in that moment than anything else in the world: **How can I possibly get out of the box?**’

Lou paused, and I waited for him to continue.

‘So how **do** you?’ I finally interjected. ‘How do you get out of the box?’

‘You already know.’

‘I do?’ I searched my memory about the sessions the day before. I was sure we hadn’t talked about it.

‘Yes. And so did I when I was wondering how to get out,’ Lou said.

‘Huh?’ at that moment I was really lost.

‘Think about it,’ Lou replied. ‘As I sat there regretting how I’d acted toward my wife, my son, and my coworkers, what were they to me? In that moment, was I seeing them as people or as objects?’

‘In that moment, they were people to you,’ I said, my voice trailing off in thought.

‘Yes. My blame, resentment, and indifference were gone. I was seeing them as they were, and I was regretting having treated them as **less** than that. So in that moment where was I?’

‘You were out of the box,’ I said softly, almost as if in a trance, trying to locate what made the change possible. I was feeling a bit like a spectator at a magic show who sees the rabbit surely enough but has no idea where it came from.

‘Exactly,’ Lou agreed. ‘In the moment I felt the keen desire to be out of the box for them, I was **already** out of the box toward them. To feel that desire for them was to be out of the box toward them.’”

Q: In Philippians 2:3-7 Paul writes, “Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind let each of you regard one another as more important than himself; do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but

also for the interests of others. Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, who although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men.” How does the book’s concept of how to get out of the box, compare and/or contrast with Paul’s exhortations and the example of Christ? Using the book’s terminology, was God in the box or out of the box when He sent Jesus to die on the cross? Why?

9. Review Chapter 20’s list of six things that DON’T work when you are trying to get out of the box:

- Trying to change others
- Doing my best to “cope” with others
- Leaving
- Communicating
- Implementing new skills or techniques
- Changing my behavior

Q: Which of these has become your favorite option for getting out of the box? How well has it worked for you? What other “options” do you think might work?

10. Lou summarizes and brings a concluding point to Tom’s attention on pages 145-146: “In the box, everything we think and feel is part of the lie of the box. The truth is, we change in the moment we cease resisting what is **outside** our box—others. Does that make sense?”

‘Yeah, I think so.’

‘In the moment we cease resisting others; we’re out of the box—liberated from self-justifying thoughts and feelings. This is why the way out of the box is always right before our eyes—**because the people we’re resisting are right before our eyes**. We can stop betraying ourselves toward them—we can stop **resisting** the call of their humanity upon us.’

‘But what can help me do **that**?’ I asked

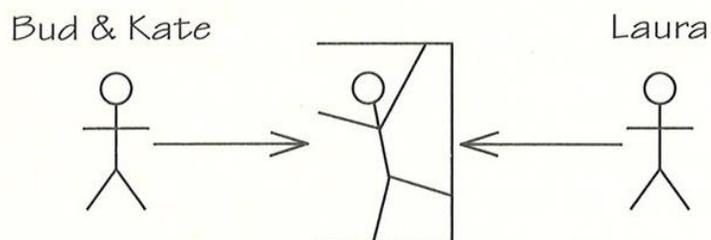
Lou looked at me thoughtfully. ‘There’s something else you should understand about self-betrayal—something that may give you the leverage you’re looking for. Think about your experience yesterday with Bud and Kate. How would you characterize it? Would you say that you were basically **in** or **out** of the box toward them?’

‘Oh, **out**, for sure.’ I said. ‘At least most of the time,’ I added, giving Bud a sheepish grin. He smiled in return.

‘But you’ve also indicated that you were **in** the box toward Laura yesterday. So there is a sense in which you were both **in and out** of the box at the same time—in the box toward Laura but out of the box toward Bud and Kate.’

‘Yeah, I guess that’s right.’

‘This is an important point, Tom. Toward any one person or group of people, I’m either in or out of the box at any



given moment. But since there are many people in my life—some that I may be more in the box toward than others—in an important sense, I can be both in **and** out of the box at the same time.”

Q: As you review your list on page two, you will note that you are in the box with some people and out of the box with others. How can you leverage your positive experiences with some people to help you move out of the box with others? Lou suggests that we can be in the box “with a group of people”. Do you agree and if so, towards what groups do you tend to be “in the box”?

11. Chapter 22 emphasizes the importance of leaders (pastors) being out of the box. On page 160, Lou points out to Tom: “You can see how damaging an in-the-box leader can be. He or she makes it all too easy for others to revert to their boxes as well. The lesson then, is that you need to be a different kind of leader. That’s your obligation as a leader. When you’re in the box, people follow you, if at all, only through force or threat of force. But that’s not leadership. That’s coercion. The leaders that people **choose** to follow are the leaders who are out of the box. Just look back on your life and you’ll see that that’s so.”

Q: Do you agree with Lou that as the pastor and leader of your church it is important for you to stay out of the box? Why?

Q: Lou asked Tom to look back on his life and see the positive impact that leaders who stayed out of the box had on him. Let me ask you to do the same thing. Think about some of the best leaders you have experienced in terms of being in or out of the box. Now think of some of the leaders you have had difficulty following in terms of whether they were in or out of the box. To what extent have your experiences affirmed Lou’s conclusions?

12. In Chapter 23—Birth of a Leader, Lou relates to Tom the following humbling experience: “One of the last things I did to Kate before she left,’ he recalled, ‘was to demand that a ladder be removed from her sales area. Her department had decided to use the ladder as a visual aid in promoting some sales goals. I thought it was a stupid idea and told her so when she asked me about it. But they went ahead and did it anyway. Later that night, I told the custodial staff to remove the ladder from the premises. Three days later, she and the other four members of the March Meltdown group gave me their two-month’s notice. I had them removed by our security staff within an hour—didn’t even allow them to go back into their offices alone. **Anyone who turned on me like that can’t be trusted,** I told myself. That was the last time I had seen or spoken with Kate.’

‘I can’t explain it, but I just knew that I needed to take her a ladder. It was a symbol of so much. And so I did.’

Carol and I arrived back at JFK at about 6:00 on Sunday morning. I had the limo driver drop Carol off at home and then take me by the office, where I rummaged through a half-dozen or so supply closets before I found a ladder. We tied it to the

top of the car and headed up to Kate's place in Litchfield. It was about 9:30 or so when I rang her doorbell, the ladder laid across my back.'

'The door opened and I saw Kate, her eyes in wide surprise at the sight of me. "Now before you say anything, Kate, I have something I've got to say, even though I don't know how I can ever begin to say it. First of all, I'm sorry for just barging in on you on a Sunday morning, but it couldn't wait. I...ummm, I..."

'All of a sudden, Kate just busted up laughing. "Sorry Lou," she said, doubling over against the doorjamb, "I know you must have something serious to say or you wouldn't be here, but the sight of you hunched over with that ladder is just too much to take. Here, let me help you put it down.'" (Pages 166-167)

As Lou continues telling Tom about that critical conversation he had with Kate he comes to the point where he asked Kate to reconsider her resignation and to return to the company to help Lou implement the changes he had been discussing:

"I need your help, Kate' I said. 'Together we could figure out the best way to do it. No one I know would be able to do it as well as you could.'

'She sat there in thought. "I'm not sure," she said slowly. "I'm going to have to think about it. Can I call you?"

"Absolutely. I'll be waiting by the phone."

'As you can gather,' Lou said, 'she called. I was given a second chance. And the Zagrum you've been admiring over these many years has been the result of that second chance.'" (Pages 169-170)

Q: We are blessed to serve a God who gives us second chances on a regular basis. As you reflect on some of the challenging relationships you are facing today, are there people you need to give a second chance? Pick out one in particular, and let God's creative Spirit work with your spirit. Is there some symbolic "ladder" that you could use to break the ice in that relationship? What might your next conversation with that person look like if you approached it out of the box rather than in the box?

Q: In Romans 12:3-6a, Paul says, "For through the grace given to me I say to every man among you not to think more highly of himself than he ought to think; but to think so as to have sound judgment, as God has allotted to each a measure of faith. For just as we have many members in one body and all the members do not have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. And since we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let each exercise them accordingly:" In this passage he emphasizes our need for greater humility combined with a deeper appreciation for the giftedness of others. How do these teachings relate to the books concept of being in or out of the box towards another person? If we were to relate to one another as Paul suggests, would we be living in or out of the box? Why?

Q: Have you ever stopped to reflect on the context of Paul's exhortations to the church at Philippi to "rejoice in the Lord always, and again I said rejoice" and to "be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made know to God?" Or that in the same context Paul provides the promises that "the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, shall guard

your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus” and “the God of peace shall be with you?” The context of Philippians 4:2-9 is the struggle two members of the church, Euodia and Syntche, are having: they are in the box towards each other. In these verses Paul emphasizes our individual responsibility to approach others with an attitude of personal humility and to view others in a positive light. As you reflect on Biblical teaching and the insights and illustrations of the book *Leadership and Self-Deception*, what are some of the steps you need to take to help yourself get out of and to stay out of the box?

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*Mark R. Elliott served as a Director of Missions (Associational Mission Strategist) in western Iowa and eastern Nebraska for almost three decades. He is a strong advocate for obedience and Biblically based disciple making. As such, he knows that making healthy disciples requires Christian leaders to be constantly pursuing spiritual maturity—be lifelong learners. Because of the time constraints of ministry, most pastors focus their reading list on resources that assist them in teaching and preaching the Word of God. As such, books focusing on church health, leadership development, and church growth tend to find their way to the bottom of the stack. With that reality in mind, Mark has written discussion summaries on several books that have helped him to personally grow in Christ and that tend to find themselves on the bottom of most pastor’s stack. Many pastors have found them helpful as they are able to more quickly process great insights from other pastors and authors.