

Chapter Seven

FAILURE & FORGIVENESS

IN WHICH...

- Elwood betrays Brewster and finds himself forgiven and loved
- The apologetics of love encounter
- Words and life-actions are inextricably linked

*F*ast forward now to mid-summer 2026.

Elwood's side job with Washington Wild was progressing on schedule. His work at The Spheres was steady. His relationship with Nattie had become serious. He was drawn to her kind smile, her calm under pressure, her congruent way of being the same stable center in changing environments and fluctuating stresses. The coffee bar hummed along under her leadership with a rare kind of ease, even on the busiest days. Elwood's head was filled with questions, musings, wonderings, and a constant tickle of subterranean itches from the many big-picture issues that had surfaced for him over the last year. It had all began when that one inauspicious child had innocently asked him if the plants in The Spheres were happy, of all things!

On a Tuesday morning in early August Brewster sent Elwood a friendly note and asked if he would be willing to write a job recommendation for him. Seattle Japanese Garden has an opening for a full-time horticulturist and Brewster was thinking it would be a perfect place to land having completed his Masters earlier in the summer. The only hitch, Brewster added, was that his complete application had to be submitted by the end of the week and Elwood would need to send the one-page recommendation directly to SJG HR office.

Elwood immediately replied, "Happy to! Sounds like a great fit." He sent off the email and immediately his phone rang. It was sister Maggie. Their mom and dad had been in a semi-serious car accident up in Lynwood. Maggie was in Houston Texas at a work conference and asked if Elwood could meet her parents at the Emergency Room at Evergreen Medical Center.

"On my way!" Elwood nearly shouted and headed out the door. Traffic was light in the late morning and Elwood made it to the hospital soon after his parents had been admitted. He was allowed to see them in their ER cubicles. His dad's face was bruised around his broken nose. A broken collar bone and a wrenched back were giving him a lot of pain. His mom had apparently broken both wrists in the collision, and her right knee was badly swollen. Both were conscious, alert, and calm. By early evening both were discharged from the hospital with follow-up appointments scheduled. Elwood drove them home, thankful that things had not taken a turn for the worse. He made it home to his own bed by midnight, plopped down and promptly fell asleep. The day had been an adrenaline-charged blur. When Elwood awoke the next morning, Brewster's recommendation request had been completely forgotten.

The following Monday Elwood received a call from Brewster, who sounded down. "Well," he began, "I didn't get the job at the Seattle Japanese Garden. The notice did not go into details but said my application was not completed in time. Not sure what happened, but thanks for helping me out on that."

Elwood's face went white. "Oh no!" he thought to himself, "I completely forgot to do the recommendation." Elwood was silent. "What should I say?" he desperately wondered. Finally, he mumbled, "You're welcome, bro. Sorry that it didn't work out. Must have been a technical glitch."

"Yeah, no doubt," replied Brewster. "Well, I guess it wasn't supposed to be. I'll keep my eyes open for the right thing. Keep your eyes open for me too, OK?"

"Will do," Elwood said, barely audible.

He hung up the phone and felt sick. Not only had he let down his friend, he had lied to cover up his guilt. And now the sense of shame was palpable. Elwood went for a walk, watched TV, played a couple of video games, but nothing would dull the heavy pit in his stomach. That night he tossed and turned in his bed. "I've got to come clean," he thought to himself miserably. "I can't live with myself like this."

The next morning Elwood picked up the phone and called Brewster. "Hey Brewster."

"What's up?" Brewster replied cheerfully.

"Oh man," Elwood blurted out dejectedly, "I've got to be straight with you. Brewster, I am the one who torpedoed your application at the Japanese Garden. Dude, I never wrote it and sent it in. I know this is no excuse, but right after you called my folks were in a car accident and I spent the day at the hospital with them, and your whole request just evaporated from my mind. I am SO sorry, and I am even sorrier I wasn't straight up with you yesterday. I was caught in the moment and too ashamed to fess up."

"Hey, are your parents OK, Elwood?"

Elwood was stunned that the first thing out of Brewster's mouth was concern for his parents. Caught of guard, he stuttered, "S..s..sure. Both beaten up but a full recovery awaits both of them."

"Glad to hear it. And listen, I get it. I asked you awfully close to the deadline, and you were sweet to be willing, at least. Elwood, I have let other people down before, so I know the awful feeling you are feeling. So now worries, OK? I totally forgive you and we'll never need speak of it again. I am trusting everything will come together for me at the right time and the right way."

Elwood was stunned again. Brewster had every right to be furious and indignant and bitter, and

yet he showed none of that. Rather here was understanding, humility, kindness, forgiveness, good will all gift-wrapped and handed to him with no obligation, no strings attached. Brewster had claimed to be a Christian. Is this how Christians act?

“I don’t know what to say,” whispered Elwood.

“Nothing to say, my brother, “ Brewster warmly replied. “We’ll be in touch.”



THE APOLOGETICS OF ACTION

What we ____ matters: James 2:14-17

Actions preceding words, words explaining actions:
both are needed, like _____

The damage of _____: Romans 2:17-24
Looking for genuineness, authenticity: the sons of
Sceva in Acts 19:11-20

What people long for: _____:
John 8:1-8; Acts 16:16-34

The power of _____: the example of Jesus on
the cross: “Father forgive them” and “Surely this was
the son of God”: Luke 23:34 and 47.

HOLDING UP THE MIRROR

- Words and Actions: Integrity and Authenticity
- Communicating love and understanding to others
- Forgiving those that have done you wrong

