



August

Reflection Vs Deflection

BY Whitney Lute

I absolutely love to play the flute! I've played for the last 17 years, and up until the last two years, I played nearly every day. From fifth grade through twelfth, I practiced daily. I played in honor bands and the marching band in high school. When I wasn't playing my flute at school, I was attending rehearsals for a community wind symphony. I took lessons, practiced at home, and played in church. I continued flute lessons in college, played for the college choir, participated in an instrumental ensemble, and played every Sunday at church. The flute has been an

integral part of my life and remarkably influential. As I said, I absolutely love playing the flute!

As with many hobbies, though, despite our love for them, sometimes they must be moved aside for various reasons. This happened to me, and the frequency of time I now spend playing personally and professionally has decreased dramatically.

However, I do pull out my flute for a few "gigs" during the Christmas season and Easter. This requires time commitment when I travel, personal practice, ensemble rehearsals, and the performance itself.

In March 2023, I agreed to play flute for a church Easter service. The music arrived about three weeks before the performance. Flipping through it, I thought, “Wow, that looks tough. I’ll definitely need to practice before rehearsal.” As the days ticked by—days filled with graduate school and a busy schedule at work—so did my opportunities for practicing. I kept thinking about that music, knowing if I didn’t practice, rehearsal would not go well, but I kept delaying any practicing until the day before our only performance rehearsal. By this time, it was too late. I knew my flautist skills could only carry me so far before it would be glaringly apparent that I was unprepared.

At the Thursday rehearsal, to my surprise, I was the only instrumentalist besides the organist. To say I panicked would be a gross understatement! Fortunately for me, the vocal ensemble I was accompanying needed more practice than the director expected, so I was told I could leave. The director assumed I knew my music well enough without a group rehearsal. I left

thinking, “Good! Now I have more time to practice before the service on Saturday evening.” I should have remembered that ‘pressing’ matters always crowd out practicing my flute.

On Saturday, I nervously spent the entire day reviewing the music with my husband, who was singing in the ensemble. He knew as well as I did, I was unprepared for the evening’s performance. We practiced diligently and fervently hoped my musician instincts would kick in and save me.

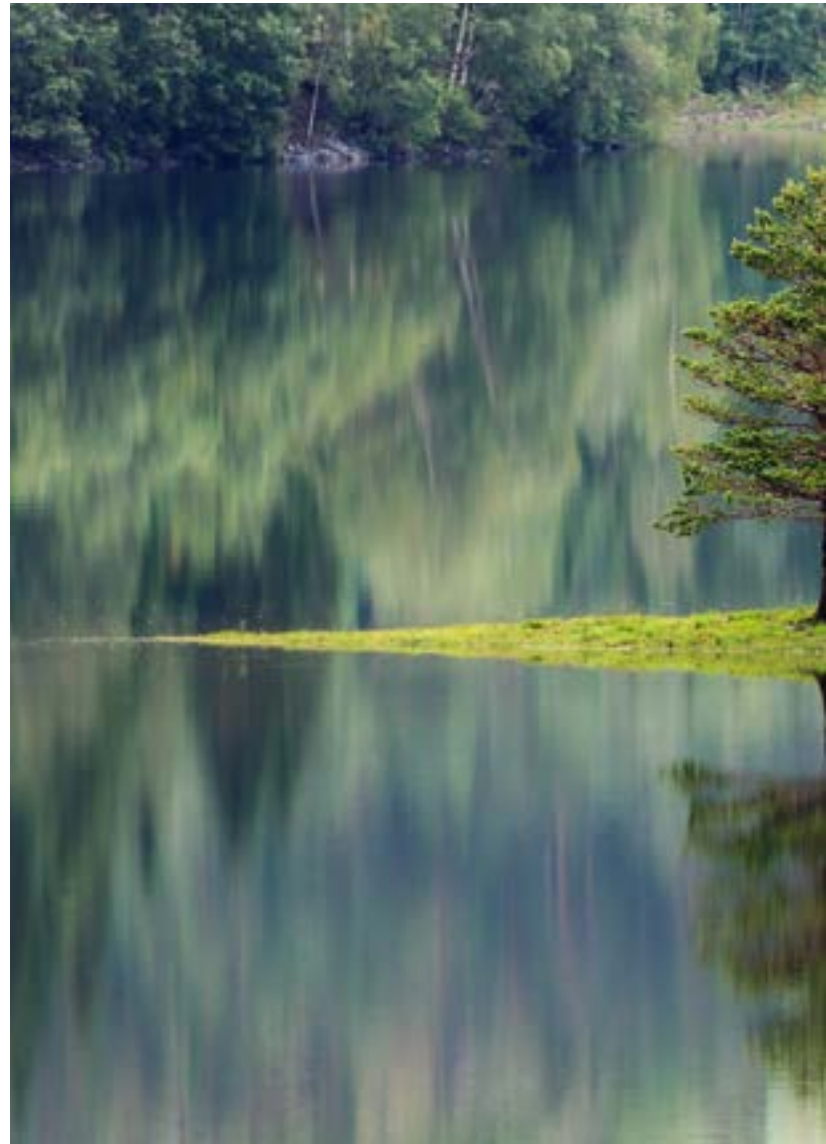
I look back on that evening and believe it was the worst performance I’ve ever given in my professional flute-playing career. I missed key changes and misread time signatures, both musical elements I had known since I was ten years old. I played the wrong rhythms and didn’t even consider dynamics. I was beyond embarrassed—I was very angry with myself.

Afterwards in the car with my husband, I rattled off every possible reason to justify my poor performance. “I just didn’t have time to practice!” Or “you know how busy I’ve been at work! And

school eats up so much time.” Or “I didn’t get the music in time, and I didn’t even get to practice with the ensemble!” Deep down, I knew—excuses, excuses. I had only myself to blame.

In hindsight, I deflected the blame and did not accept any personal responsibility for my lack of preparedness, even when confronted with the ramifications of my choices. My story reminds me of Genesis three: the first story of deflection of blame. Remember when the Serpent tempted Eve to question or reconsider what God had told her and her husband, Adam. Regarding the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, she states, “God hath said, ‘Ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die (Genesis 3:3).’” After a quick exchange with the Serpent, Eve finds God’s command and Satan’s cunning coercion in stark contrast. A decision stands before her, and she chooses to eat the fruit of the tree and to give some to Adam, who also ate. What do we read next? “And the eyes of them both were opened, and they knew that they were naked...” (Genesis 3:7). Sin is

dangerous and damning because it blinds our ability to think and respond rationally. Suddenly, everything changed for Adam and



Eve and nothing would ever be the same again.

A few verses later, we read the first placement of blame recorded in Scripture. “And He [God] said, ‘who told you that you were

naked? Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you that you should not eat?' (Genesis 3:11)." When questioned,



Adam folded and blamed Eve for their joint decision. He says, "The woman whom thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I did eat (Genesis 3:12)." (What kind of look do you think Eve gave Adam at this response?)

Then, in verse 13, God asked Eve, "What is this that thou hast done?" As if she learned nothing from the sting of her husband's deflecting blame to her, Eve said, "The serpent beguiled me, and I did eat (Genesis 3:13)."

Imagine standing before God, faced with your sin, staring the consequences of your actions in the face, and pointing your finger at someone else, saying, "They made me do it!" While both Adam and Eve recognized they disobeyed, neither accepted responsibility for that decision to eat of the forbidden tree. It sounds like they said to God, "I know I did it, but it's not my fault! Someone tricked me!" Even before they made their choice, Adam and Eve knew the consequence of eating from this particular tree. The Lord had told them, "Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die" (Genesis 2:16-17). Could God have been any clearer with Adam and Eve? They were permitted to eat from every tree in the garden except one, and if they ate from that

one tree, they would die.

How often do we find a reason why we can't do something we know we ought to do? Or do something we know we shouldn't be doing? If we're honest, this should prick our conscience. I know it pricks mine. When faced with the decision, both Adam and Eve knew the correct choice: ignore the Serpent's crafty words and stay far away from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Unfortunately, their decision hurled them into a tragic trajectory with only one outcome—death. They both knew this was a conversation that could have ended differently. Unfortunately, it ended with a poorly thought-out choice and miscalculated and misplaced blame.

Perhaps Adam and Eve's fateful encounter prompts us to ask how often we deflect blame? Growing up, when my younger sister and I would get into arguments, inevitably, one of us would tattle on the other. We'd race to find Mom or Dad first. Graciously, my parents would listen to each side of the story. In many of these scenarios, my father quickly reminded us, "Remember, when you point a

finger at someone, there are always three fingers pointing back at you." Usually we would skulk away, knowing we were both to blame for the scuffle. While this is a silly example of sibling conflict, my father's words still carry profound wisdom and often ring true in my mind to this day. Just because you point your finger at someone and blame them, doesn't mean you are not without blame yourself. It behooves us to reflect on the situation before casting blame onto someone or something.

Regarding reflection, we must ask ourselves, "how often do I 'reflect' on a situation and yet blame God?" When confronted with his sin, Adam said to the Lord, "The woman whom thou gavest to be with me... (Genesis 3:12)." Adam reflected and then blamed God for his actions, the woman You gave to me gave me the fruit, and I ate. It's easy to think Adam had incredible audacity to blame the Lord for his sin, but do we do the same thing sometimes? We "reflect" then find a way not to accept responsibility for our actions, blaming God instead for our circumstances or choic-

es. When things go awry, and you make poor decisions, maybe you're quick to think, "I can't help it. This is just who I am. It's how God made me!" Is this a common refrain in your repertoire? It is in mine. Please remember: God is never to blame for our decisions or our shortcomings. He is blameless and gives us the free will to make decisions based on our desires, our volition, and our faith. When we reflect and blame the Lord, we are still deflecting and refusing to accept responsibility for the actions for which only we are responsible.

When our response is to reflect instead of deflecting, we should humbly ask ourselves, "What really happened here?" This grates against our natural disposition of self-centeredness, forcing us into uncomfortable conversations and realizations about ourselves. Self-reflection and introspection are good, healthy practices that enable us to properly understand ourselves. "Why did this happen?" Or "Why did I respond this way?" Or "If I'm being honest, what could I have done differently to make the situation's outcome more favorable?" These practices

equip us in the discipline of confession, and in recognizing our self-righteousness has resulted in arrogance before the Lord. Reflection helps maintain a right posture before God; freeing us to accept responsibility where needed; to confess our sins and failures to the only One Who eternally pardons; then, moving forward in confidence that we are forgiven. The beautiful reality of God's forgiveness is that our mess-ups can bring glory to Him, and point creation, others, and ourselves toward God's grace and mercy.

Often, though, our reflection can result in the need for further action. Maybe we need to apologize for our behavior. Perhaps we need to change our habits and help alter our mindset regarding blame and responsibility when we're in the wrong. Maybe we need to pray more, asking the Lord to humble us and aid us in our efforts toward reflection.

Since my lackluster flute performance, I've adequately practiced in preparation for any musical commitment, vowing to never allow such a musical mishap again. This doesn't change the outcome of my poor Easter performance,

but it will positively impact any future musical engagements. Accepting responsibility doesn't always alter the past and its consequences, but it certainly can influence the future and prevent something similar from happening.

So, I ask you, when is a time that you have deflected blame instead of reflecting on where the fault lies? Why is it easier to blame anything or anyone but yourself

when, in your heart, you know the truth? When have you "reflected" and still blamed God for the situation or for your response? What precipitating events lead to deflection and misplaced blame? How can you begin to accept responsibility for your actions, even when you're frustrated, sad, or embarrassed by your choices? How can the Lord redeem your failures for His glory and your betterment?

About the Writer: Whitney Lute works at Welch College, serving as the Women's Resident Director and an adjunct instructor in psychology. She is married to Jacob Lute and they are excited to welcome their first child, Lawrie, in early June. In her down time, Whitney enjoys traveling to new places, spending time outdoors, as well as reading a good book.