

“Houston, We Have a Problem” Interview with Astronaut Charlie Duke – Part 1 of 2

VOICE: The Apollo 13 crew was in deep, deep trouble!

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VOICE: “Houston, we have a problem!”

THEME: MUSIC IN AND UNDER ANNCR

ANNCR: Charlie Duke was one of the astronauts who sped to Mission Control to deal with the emergency. Duke talked with producer David Fisher about the “problem” and how they solved it. Here’s part one of our exclusive interview – in today’s edition of **Truth in the Test Tube!**

THEME: OUT

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General Duke, where were you when millions of people were shocked of those famous words, “Houston, we have a problem”?

DUKE: Well, I was at home. That was 10 o'clock or so at night, and my wife and I were getting ready for bed. The phone rang, and it was John Young saying, “They have a problem. They've had an explosion. Let's go to Mission control.” We went off to Mission control, John and Ken Mattingly and I, who were now the backup crew for the Apollo 13. We were there for 35 hours. We had to get the procedures developed so that they could get back on what is called a free return, activate the Lunar Module and use it as a lifeboat. So we were very busy for 35 hours.

VOICE: Astronaut Jack Lousma said there was never a thought of **whether** we succeed or not. “It's going to happen!”

DUKE: Well, Jack was probably a little bit more optimistic than I was. I was looking at the consumption of what we call “consumables” in the lunar module – oxygen, cooling water, drinking water, electrical power and those kinds of things. Their lunar module was made for two guys for **maximum** three days. And now they've got three guys for four days. So you look at all the consumption at the power level we had, things were running out before we got back. And so I was very pessimistic at first; we don't have enough “stuff.”

But once we started back around from the moon, and we started powering down and learning how to manage what was necessary and what wasn't necessary and what can we turn off – all those kinds of decisions – then that usage of oxygen and electrical power level leveled off so we went running out until after reentry. If we don't make a mistake in Mission Control and they don't make a mistake among the crew, we have enough stuff to get back. And sure enough, we did.

VOICE: Didn't they use the gravitation of the moon, too?

DUKE: That's right, they did. When you get to the moon you're going too fast to go into orbit. So you whip around the moon, and the moon's gravity propels you back toward the Earth. Before we got to the moon, though, we had to get them on what is called “free return trajectory.” That meant, if they **didn't do anything** as they whipped around the moon, it would take them back to Earth. And so we did that maneuver before they got to the moon, and they whipped around and started home. We made one or two little corrections, if I remember, on the way home. But now they were at least headed back to Earth.

We used the lunar gravity to whip us back toward Earth. And every Apollo [mission] would do that, if you didn't burn your engine to slow down and go into orbit.

VOICE: So was your turn when Apollo 16 came along.

DUKE: Right.

VOICE: What was that experience like – walking on the lunar surface?

DUKE: It was very exciting! My emotional high was like a little kid at Christmas, I guess. Bounding down the stairs and opening the door, and there are presents and all the other stuff.

[It was] incredibly beautiful, though the moon doesn't have much color other than shades of gray. But I just kept thinking, “nobody's ever been here before. And we're seeing this for the first time, up close, and we can reach out and touch it.”

There was a sharp contrast between the lunar surface and the blackness of space. Very vivid, and the moon was very, very bright from the reflected sunlight.

Surprisingly, I felt right at home, and it was just a sense of belonging, even though it was a very hostile environment.

VOICE: Somebody called it “magnificent desolation.”

DUKE: Buzz Aldrin did. He's got a book out by that name. He actually did say that as he was coming down the ladder, “magnificent desolation.” It's a vivid description; that's exactly what it looked like, magnificent in beauty and yet desolate.

VOICE: Yet surprisingly, a man who walked on the moon stumbled badly when he got back to earth. What tripped you up?

DUKE: Well, I think it was the fact that I had looked to my own wisdom and abilities and success to meet all my needs. I got back, and I was 36 years old. So in January of 1973 Apollo is over, and the thought occurred to me, what are you going to do now?” Because that drive that took me to the moon was still there.

VOICE: No more worlds to conquer.

DUKE: Yeah, no more worlds to conquer – at least not in the space program, that I could visualize. So I was successful in my career – as an astronaut, as a test pilot, and military officer. But I wasn't doing too well as a husband and a father. That stress that was in our marriage, from my focus of being so career-oriented, and my wife's problem of me being her god. You know, she put me number one in her life, and I'm not God. She wanted to live the Cinderella story, you know, “happily ever after.”

Marriage is tough. I was traveling and I had all these career pressures with Apollo. Things got really, really bad at home.

I was also a military drill instructor dad. When I went to the moon, my boys were – one had just turned 7 and the other one was coming up on 5. And I demanded instant obedience. You know, if you've got 5-year-olds, that they don't always give you instant obedience. I had an explosive temper back then, and it would go off.

I can't say that I was ever depressed from the fact that the drive that took me to the moon was still there. I was always optimistic that something else will come along, and I'll channel this energy and drive that I have. And it did. I was just hoping that my marriage and family tensions would be alleviated, and they were several years later – due to the transition of my wife becoming a born-again Christian.

VOICE: Do you think that the stresses of your career are what caused the problems? Does space flight make a person vulnerable?

DUKE: Not so much more than any other career. I've learned now that in my life and the life of my wife, our focus was wrong. I was looking to my career to meet all these needs. If I just reach this level, if I just do this, everything's going to be great. Whereas my wife put me first in her life, all of that was the problem. It wasn't whether I was in the space program or whether I was in private business or whatever. Because later on I was in private business, making money – and that didn't work, either.

VOICE: So many celebrities are harmed by fame and glamor. Why do you think that is?

DUKE: Like some of us, they look at “If I could just get famous, if I could just be good-looking and charming and all, then the whole world will flock to me and I'll be happy.” But it never works. Fame and fortune or glamour are not God. We focus on the created things and the tangible things, rather than the spiritual part of life. That's where I was off balance. My mind and body were in good shape, but the spiritual leg – the soul side, if you will – was bankrupt. While I believed in God, and I was in regular attendance at church and had been baptized and had confessed Jesus and the creeds and all that stuff, those were just empty words. I ended up going to church, but after I would walk out of church, God would never enter my mind hardly until the next Sunday.

So I was in charge of my life, trying to satisfy this drive that I had. I was very successful at accomplishing things, but it was always something missing in my life. I discovered in 1978 that it was Jesus that I was really missing.

VOICE: You said that your wife got straightened out with the Lord before you did?

DUKE: That's correct. We were active in our church in La Porte, Texas. One of the ministries they have an Episcopal church is called faith alive. It's an evangelical ministry. The team comes to church on a weekend – Friday, Saturday and Sunday. They just share their stories: “Let me tell you what God did for me.” So everybody gets a chance to share their stories.

I was there that weekend, and I had to admit they had a love and joy and peace that I know I didn't have. Dottie saw it vividly. She had tried everything for happiness and purpose: career, a little bit of marijuana, social work, church. She was on the verge of suicide, primarily because her marriage was not what she thought it should be.

Anyway, after that weekend was over, she said, “Lord, I have tried everything but you. Jesus, if you're real, I give you my life. If you're not, I want to die!”

Well, there really is a God. His name is Jesus. And he came into her life. She didn't even tell me about this for a couple of months. But I began to notice a change in her. And I watched her change from sadness to joy over the next six months or so. In fact, now she's written a little booklet, *From Sadness to Joy: The Story of an Astronaut Wife*. It was amazing!

DUKE (CONT.): About that time, I was leaving the space program to make my millions, thinking millions would give me satisfaction and peace. And I was very a successful businessman, but I didn't find any real peace in business. I had 42 people working for me. I had to make payrolls and manage and all that stuff, so it took a lot of hours. But my wife Dottie never complained; she just loved me. It was an amazing change in her attitude as she became a deeper believer in a deeper walk with Jesus.

VOICE: So at the meetings, it wasn't so much what anybody said, as the sense of peace and joy that you discovered.

DUKE: And they were saying it was all on account of Jesus – that Jesus had given them purpose, Jesus had filled them with love and peace in their lives. In spite of all the problems they faced, Jesus was there and was their help. It wasn't preaching. It was just testimonies. She realized, "I've tried everything but Jesus. Lord, come into my life." He began to show himself, through answered prayers and the reality of his presence, and that she could experience peace and purpose.

What is purpose in life? If life is so mean and disappointing and hurtful and sorrowful and there's no future, why live any longer? Get it over with. She had thoughts of suicide. She never attempted it, but she had thoughts.

She had gone from despair to depression. She didn't go to a psychiatrist, but if he had, she probably would have been diagnosed as clinically depressed. Jesus delivered her from all that. She says Jesus became her psychiatrist. And she really changed!

THEME: MUSIC IN AND UNDER ANNCR.

ANNCR: We'll hear the conclusion of our interview with lunar astronaut Charlie Duke, next time. Meanwhile, remember you can hear dozens of programs on various aspects of science and how they relate to God and the Bible, by simply googling "Truth in the Test Tube" or checking us out on the TWR360 website, www.twr360.org. I repeat, go to www.twr360.org, and search for "Truth in the Test Tube."

We always welcome your comments and suggestions. You may contact us at Truthtest@truthinTHEtesttube.org. Again, Truthtest@truthinTHEtesttube.org.

I'm Denny Milgate, inviting you to share more of astronaut Duke's "out of this world" experiences, on the next **Truth in the Test Tube!** We will hear the conclusion of our interview with lunar astronaut Charlie Duke next time.

THEME: OUT

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