

Getting Healed



Gary Wilkerson July 15, 2019

Being in Community, Staying in the Fight

My friend the evangelist Nicky Cruz calls the church a Holy Ghost hospital. I couldn't agree more. The church is and should be a place of healing. In my decades as a pastor, I've counseled a lot of people who needed restoration after lifelong heartbreak.

By far the most damage came from broken homes. Some Christians were wounded by their parents' divorce. Some were abandoned by a mother or father. Some were abused by a family member. They carried their wounds into adulthood, and sometimes a pattern repeated. Their spouse divorced them, and they endured painful rejection all over again; or their significant other abused them, and they thought they deserved it.

How does anyone deal with wounds this deep? Most people I've counseled try to repress their hurt. They never allow their emotions to surface because they're too painful to face. Instead, they press on, burying their pain in worship or Bible study. Others struggle with addictions, but their inner pain never leaves them.

Jesus doesn't promise anyone a pain-free life, but he does promise that we can be restored to abundant life. What does that look like in a wounded, suffering Christian?

The first hurdle for a lot of hurting people is the difficult question, "Why did God let this happen?"

Have you ever wondered how nice it would be to live a shame-free life? To no longer be plagued by circular thinking that reminds you of all your wounds and failures? Wouldn't it be liberating not to constantly wonder, "What did I do, that God let me be abused as a child? What did I do to cause my divorce? Why did he allow my son, my daughter to become a prodigal? Why do I have to go through such pain?"

The book of Judges offers insight into the question of our pain. When Joshua led the Israelites to victory in Canaan, God allowed some of their enemies to remain in the land. Why would he do that?

God explained why: "I will no longer drive out the nations that Joshua left unconquered when he died. I did this to test Israel—to see whether or not they would follow the ways of the Lord as their ancestors did.' That is why the Lord left those nations in place" (*Judges 2:21-23, NLT*). The next chapter repeats this: "These people were left to test the Israelites—to see whether they would obey the commands the Lord had given to their ancestors through Moses" (3:4).

God left Israel's enemies around so the Israelites would be tested. Some might read this and think, "Wow, God didn't put much faith in Israel. That's almost like setting them up for failure." As I read these passages, I don't interpret them that way. God was clearly up to something different here.

We all know people who like a challenge. Where I live in Colorado, a lot of people take up rock climbing or

triathlons or iron-man competitions for one reason: They want to test their own mettle. They want to know whether they have something inside that will make them rise to the challenge.

I believe our Father holds out the same kind of test for each of his children. It's not because he wants us to fail. His purpose is just the opposite: He wants us to see and grasp the power we have in Jesus Christ, a strength we wouldn't know we have unless there were enemies in the land.

Most of us don't know how strong we are in Christ and the power he places within us to be released for his glory. John tells us, "The Spirit who lives in you is greater than the spirit who lives in the world" (1 John 4:4). We have been given incredible authority by the Spirit who lives within us. We're to call on that authority as we face our enemies.

I see four primary enemies thwarting wounded Christians today.

Enemy number one is anxious fear. If you've had a difficult family history, anxiety may be a daily reality for you. This may be a free-floating anxiety, unattached to any present reality. You don't know why you're anxious, but you find yourself worrying over things you think might happen. Suddenly, you're blowing things out of proportion that have yet to exist.

For example, you find out your child has smoked pot. You start thinking, "What if he gets caught up in a circle of addicts? It might lead to harder drugs and more risks. What if he does something that lands him in jail?" People from difficult backgrounds are especially vulnerable to thoughts like these. Their deep wounds can cause them to project their past onto their future. It's an unconscious coping mechanism that says, "If I *think* it will happen, then I won't be surprised by it the way I was surprised by my parents' divorce."

For any wounded brother or sister reading this, the Bible speaks one command more than any other: "Fear not." Why would God say this more than "Don't sin" or "Love one another"? It has to be because God knows we'll have fearful events in our lives, and those realities can make us want to shrink back.

We already know we have been given supernatural authority to stay in the fight. Jesus also assures us with this: "Here on earth you will have many trials and sorrows. But take heart, because *I have overcome the world*" (John 16:33, *my emphasis*).

Enemy number two for many Christians is a sense of rejection. There is no worse blow to human desire than the experience of rejection. It tells us not to hope again. We may desire many good things—relationships, friendships, a spouse, a calling—but rather than face possible rejection again, we shut down desire. In reality, you can't shut down one part of your heart and not expect other parts to be affected. If you choose to shut down pain, you also shut down the possibility of receiving love to heal that pain. Friend, our hope lies not in our past experience but in the future Jesus has prepared for us. "Let all that I am wait quietly before God, for my hope is in him" (*Psalms 62:5*).

Enemy number three is lonely isolation. Our deep wounds can tempt us to withdraw from community, yet that's where most healing happens.

Think of the mighty pairings that were God's design: Adam and Eve, Abraham and Sarah, Moses and the elders, David and Jonathan. In so many instances of great need, there were communities—even just two people—who came together to strengthen each other's faith. I can't imagine life without my encouraging wife, Kelly, who tells me in every trial, "Don't run, Gary. Stay in this fight! You're being tested, but you're meant to have victory."

When you face your trial, will you do it alone? Or will you open yourself to the love God has provided for you in community?

Our final "enemy in the land" is common to many Christians I've counseled.

Enemy number four is self-loathing or self-hatred. Often when I've counseled people, we began with the wound, the rejection, the shame. Almost always, the core issue was that the person blamed themselves for their wound. A man would tell me, "My mother used to slap me around. I must have provoked her to do that." A woman would tell me, "My husband left me. I must have been a bad wife."

This is different than a shame that says, “I’m wrong.” This shame says, “I’m bad.” It tells someone their core being is rotten. So, they try to reinvent themselves, constructing a different personality that others will find acceptable.

We have been given a source of authority over all false shame. It is the Lord’s unconditional love. “Love is patient and kind. Love...keeps no record of being wronged.... Love never gives up, never loses faith, is always hopeful, and endures through every circumstance” (*1 Corinthians 13:4-7*). I suggest that every wounded person apply this unconditional love toward themselves. After all, it describes God’s love for you. No one who loves themselves the way God loves them needs external validation because they already have it from the one who lives within them. They don’t need to construct a false self because their true self is celebrated by their creator and Savior.

Stop allowing yourself to say, “I’m a failure, a loser!” Unconditional love reveals the truth: “You’re growing. You’re being stretched. This challenge is calling you to new heights because the merciful, gracious, healing foundation Jesus has put underneath you is solid.”

Stay in the fight, stay in community and find his abundant life filling you day after day. There may be enemies in the land to test you, but your Father has put power in you to conquer them all. He calls on you to summon forth that power for your healing and his glory. Amen.

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