

Healing for Damaged Emotions 1

Welcome to the first Sunday of Lent, 2010. Lent is a season of the Christian year that runs from Ash Wednesday through Easter Sunday. It is more or less about 40 days in length, if you don't count the Sunday's. Its length is supposedly modeled after the 40 days of Jesus being in the wilderness. The traditional purpose of Lent is the preparation of the believer to commemorate and celebrate the Death and Resurrection of Jesus Christ.

So following the example of Jesus while in the wilderness; Lent is distinguished by; more intentional prayer, more honest repentance, more sincere giving, and individual self-denial. In modern times it has been reduced to "giving up something" for Lent. People give up all kinds of things: chocolate, meat on Fridays, brussel sprouts, TV, even not using ones clothes dryer as a means to not only sacrifice, but save the environment. You can tell, I'm a bit skeptical about many of Lent's modern perversions.

I'm not pretending to be able to reclaim all the seriousness of Lent in one 7-week sermon series, but I want to take us on a different...deeper journey this Lenten Season. I want us to spend part of our intentional prayer, and honest repentance, and sincere giving, and individual self-denial dealing with some deep seated emotional damages... that most of us have...few of us admit...fewer still learn to live above.

It is my contention that most human beings have been hurt at some level, and most of us have not done all we can to be free from the damages of being emotionally hurt. I know that this same 7-week sermon series can't be completely clinically therapeutic or psychologically all-inclusive; but I want to apply part of the best that Lent has to offer, to the deepest hurts that many of us suffer. Here's why. From this famous "Lent or Easter" passage:

But the fact is, it was our pains he carried— our disfigurements, all the things wrong with us. We thought he brought it on himself, that God was punishing him for his own failures. But it was our sins that did that to him, that ripped and tore and crushed him—our sins! He took the punishment, and that made us whole. Through his bruises we get healed. Isaiah 53:4-5

We get healed...not just of our sins...we get healed from our pains, our disfigurements, ALL the things wrong with us!

I will be drawing inspiration from a book that some of you are currently studying, written by a professor of mine in seminary called: Healing for Damaged Emotions, by Dr. David Seamands. It was written a number of years ago, updated a just a couple years ago, and has now been translated into 15 different languages. In this book Dr. Seamonds opens for all the world to see, that many...most Christian believers live (some more successfully and faithfully than others) with deep-seated, and damaging emotional scars. It is his and my intention to teach some important principles to help us discover the healing that Isaiah talked about and Jesus delivered.

Most of us who have navigated our way through Jr. Hi. Science, have probably spent some time studying a tree's growth rings. Every tree's growth rings function like a circular journal of that particular tree's life. Trees that have lived through a forest fire will show blackened, scarred rings. Trees that have been through a draught or a flood will reveal that evidence in its rings. Trees infested with diseases or insects will often bear testimony to that trauma in its rings. Trees that have suffered the loss of significant limbs show the loss in their rings.

Well, our lives are no different. We may not have the recognizable rings, but we have the scars none the less. We might not want to admit them, but being abused as a child (or adult), being ridiculed by our peers, or shunned by our friends, or rejected by a lover, or abandoned by a parent, or a spouse, or a hundred other experiences can often leave us emotionally damaged.

And with many of these infirmities...accepting Jesus or being baptized by the Holy Spirit is not enough to undo the damage. I know that we say salvation is supposed to be all inclusive, and our baptism in the spirit renders us to some level of "perfection", but if that is so, why are there still so many damaged, discouraged, distressed and depressed Christians still walking around? The answer is because many of us have certain areas of our lives that need special attention. We have wounds and addictions, and memories, and inclinations, and hurts that will require a special dispensation of God's instruction, God's grace, and time. Time to unlearn some past wrong programming, and time to relearn and reprogram some new TRUE truths. Time to have the transformation by the renewal of our minds...connect all the way to the center of our growth rings!

For too long Christians have wrongly attacked the very real problem. We've either applied the "Devil behind every bush", "blame it on someone else", (or better yet the devil made me do it); "I'm a victim and therefore not responsible", approach. Or we hyper-spiritualize all our problems and life, and offer meaningless platitudes like "just pray about", or "read your Bible more" or "God will take care of it", if you just trust and obey. Neither of these approaches are very helpful at getting to the depth required to find real healing, real deliverance, real freedom and real joy.

I'm not sure this sermon series can deliver what I hope to promise either...it's really up to you. If you wish to finally deal with some of the junk of your past, I hope this Lenten Season might be one where you explore more deeply with Jesus, the path to wholeness and holiness. I promise not to trivialize anyone's pain or story or problem, and I promise to offer not only the truth from God's word, tested and tempered through my own life experience and growing wisdom; but also, my personal commitment to walk through this 'dark valley' with you if you so desire.

Today I want to offer you the road map we'll be following for the next 6 weeks. Here are four critical steps each of us must take if we really want to move past the junk of our past. Let me remind you of these four Biblical Principles which must be followed to find healing for damaged emotions. Remember no really deep or significant problem can be "solved" in 4 easy steps, but this is where the journey begins to discover healing for damaged emotions.

1. ADMIT YOUR PROBLEMS HONESTLY.

Many of us have lived with our "issues" so long; we don't look at them very honestly anymore. We've sort of made peace with the fact that this is just how life is going to be, and we're resigned to living unfulfilled, or less than expected, or making the best of a bad situation. I would hope that this next 40 days or so, might be the beginning of a new way to live, as we begin to admit and address our real problems...honestly.

Sometimes this admission must involve another person. James 5:16 reminds us that we are to *confess our faults to one another*. We balk at that prospect after having our "faults" suddenly show up on the next prayer chain at best, or gossip circle at worst. Occasionally that person might be a loving caring spouse (but remember they probably have their own problems too); or more often it might involve a caring third party. I'm not advocating that every person who wants to deal with their junk needs to make an immediate appointment with me, a counselor or a psychiatrist...but as this journey progresses...don't be surprised if even your "best friend" is unable to lead you further on down the road to your recovery. I am not a counselor, but I am a good "referrer"! I tell the folks who come to see me, that each of us must be honest when it comes time to refer.

The road to emotional wholeness and holiness begins with an honest admission of our problem. Name it, write it, curse it if you must...but get it out in the open.

All of us acutely aware of the insidiousness of addictions know that no help is helpful until the addict admits his/her problem. This is the same. I know the journey to our past can be painful, but healing lies in honestly admitting the problem. Good luck.

2. ASK YOURSELF IF YOU REALLY WANT TO BE HEALED

In John's gospel the 5th chapter the 6th verse we find Jesus asking one of the most absurd questions attributed to our Savior. To a man who had been paralyzed for 38 years...38 years, Jesus says: "Do you want to be healed?" Maybe Jesus saw something deeper, maybe he wanted the man to hear himself ask for his healing...or maybe the guy has grown comfortable with his infirmity, his place of prominence and sympathy near the temple pool, his lucrative income garnered from the faithful temple goer's generosity. There may be a hundred different reasons Jesus asked the man...but we must ask ourselves!

Do we really want to be healed, especially if we've come to some relative terms of peace with our wounded condition? Maybe the fear of what we'll have to do to work through the problem, renders us more comfortable staying in our safe situation. I don't know for you, but I do know that before anyone embarks on this journey to wholeness, they must ask and answer...do you really want to be healed. It will likely take a wholehearted commitment to do whatever it takes to get well. Is that what you want?

3. ACCEPT YOUR RESPONSIBILITY PERSONALLY

A few years ago I heard a mother say to a son who had been arrested and was being held in jail; while he recited all the tragic things that had been done to him in his past; "yes, "Johnny" this might not totally be your fault...but it is now your responsibility." I so admired this woman's tough love stance, and revelation for all of us.

Many of our 'problems' and 'infirmities' have resulted from some other person or event or circumstance that we neither chose nor caused.

Many of us are true victims of some malicious or even illegal act; but the road back from such tragedy is marked with signposts that lead us to accept our personal responsibility. We might not be responsible for the cause of our problem, but we might be responsible for how we've handled or didn't deal with that problem. Either way, as the adults, we are forced to deal with our stuff, personally, and I hope responsibly.

4. APPLY FORGIVENESS FOR OTHERS AND YOURSELF

I know there is a fine line here. Some of us have been hurt so badly by someone that forgiveness seems the furthest thing from our minds. And I'm not advocating some pious, trite, meaningless offer of forgiveness because we think we know that's what's expected of us as good little "Christians". I'm saying that in every situation where a wrong has been done, there is a need for forgiveness so the victim can move on.

We don't always offer forgiveness for the perpetrator or so the offender can be set free; but so we can be set free. I know that some folks have to hang on to the anger or hate, so they can appropriately process all that has happened...but I believe...I believe...that there will come a point in almost every situation where forgiveness is granted. It doesn't have to be granted verbally or personally or face to face. It doesn't give the offender the right to reoffend. It doesn't give the victim cause to be revictimized...it just answers the call of Jesus to forgive if we wish to be forgiven.

And one final word; most folks find forgiving themselves tougher than forgiving others. I'm not sure why that is often the case. We are hardest on ourselves. Especially when we've born this personal unforgiveness wrongly. So many victims feel guilty for what's happened, and it's not their fault. It makes it doubly hard to forgive ourselves if it's not really our fault, and doubly necessary we do so in order to be made whole. I don't understand all this, but I know that forgiveness is a process, not an act. Forgiveness is a necessity, but not always immediately.

Forgiveness is not natural, but is possible. If we love God, and have been forgiven by God...who do we think we are to withhold forgiveness from ourselves?

My friends, this has been some tough sledding today, and it might get worse as we go along. We're going to start next week delving into some of the damaged emotions like issues of self-worth, and guilt and debt-collecting. I hope you'll begin your Lenten journey with some honest introspection that might inspire you to take the dark road to healing for damaged emotions. Just remember, Jesus has already been there, and he's promised to travel with you...and meet you on the other side! AMEN

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