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# Dealing with the Emotionally Wounded

Here's how to help  
them find healing



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# Dealing with the Emotionally Wounded

Here's how to help them find healing



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Introduction

# Shared Sufferings

by Janine Petry



**N**ow, I know she's only five, but it seems that my daughter overreacts every time she gets the smallest cut or scrape. Panic-stricken, she howls and holds the hurting limb, asking whether or not she needs stitches. While the drama can get tiresome, I realize that she's not just putting on a show for entertainment. She honestly doesn't understand what's going on or what's going to happen next, and she's *scared*.



## Dealing with the Emotionally Wounded

### Shared Sufferings

I find it fascinating that her favorite way of dealing with her pain (besides crying), is to ask me about my experiences with getting injured. If she's got a splinter, she wants to hear my splinter stories. If she bumps her head, she wants to know my head-bumping stories. No matter the crisis, she faithfully asks, "has this ever happened to you?" And then she wants to know *every* detail. And so I share them, because I can see the immediate comfort it brings.

Regardless of the fact that there are years between us, there's really little difference from the way we process our pain. While I've learned not to overreact to my physical ailments (for the most part), there are pains I encounter that I don't understand how to recover from, and they just plain *scare me*. I'm talking about emotional wounds. And like a child, when my heart or mind feels injured, I am comforted by those who can relate to my pain, help me understand it, and offer the hope of restored health.

My ultimate friend when it comes to comfort, understanding, and restoration is, of course, Jesus. Isaiah's familiar words say it best: "Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows...he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed" (53:4-6).

There's no pain I can encounter that he isn't familiar with—and that he hasn't provided complete healing for. And whether that healing comes directly from him and his





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### Shared Sufferings

Word, or through the comfort he's offered to another before me (2 Corinthians 1:4), it's effective and available to all of us—without exception.

As leaders, we're surrounded by our own needs, as well as the needs of others. As you seek the way to emotional wellness, this resource can help guide you. Here, you'll find comfort and wisdom from those who understand emotional pain, and can offer the insights you need. You'll also find plenty of other resources packed inside to help you and those you serve become emotionally strong, healthy, and truly free.

Blessings,

*Janine Petry*

Contributing Editor, KYRIA downloads  
Christianity Today International



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The Heart of the Issue

# A Woman's Hidden Pain

Women desperately need the comfort  
only other women can give.

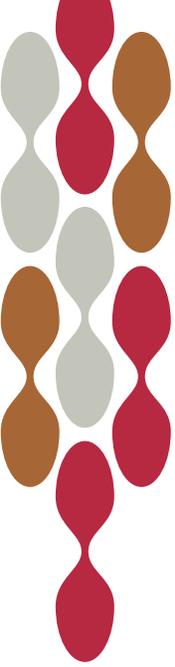
*by Beverly Hislop*



“**T**he most humiliating day of my life was the day I walked into my doctor's office. I looked around, alone and ashamed. My face grew hot, and I whispered, 'I came for an AIDS test.'”

Pam was sharing a painful season in her life, but more than that, she was confronting the pain of being wounded and the subsequent loneliness of feeling isolated from her church.





## Dealing with the Emotionally Wounded

### A Woman's Hidden Pain

"After my husband walked out on our twenty-year marriage for another woman, I was devastated," she told me. "I wish someone from the church expressed care, understanding, or support. But instead people avoided me. No one called or came to pray with me. After meeting with Pastor, I realized even he had no clue how much pain I was in. I rarely go to church any more. It hurts too much."

I wished Pam lived closer, so she could find a church like ours that was finding new ways to comfort broken people.

### Misery Needs Company

At Western Seminary I teach a class called "Women in Pain." Each school term I hear students tell stories of wounds—divorce, widowhood, abortion, infertility, death, sexual abuse. Women often tell me my seminary classroom is the first place they could admit their source of hurt and feel accepted and understood.

Women process pain differently than men. Women need to talk about it, to get it out in an affirming environment before receiving direction. Empathetic listening skills are critical. Understanding is essential. In some ways, women desperately need the comfort only other women can give.

I have discovered that once my students hear the story of a woman who has experienced the pain of abortion, divorce, or domestic violence, they begin to grow in compassion. They open their hearts for a deeper understanding of the pain, and an eagerness for helping those who feel it.

At the same time, a woman who has had the opportunity to share her own story of pain in a safe environment





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### A Woman's Hidden Pain

also grows in healing and compassion. A woman who has overcome intense hurt often feels an intense desire to help those with similar wounds.

I began to see my students as Titus 2 at work. In that passage, Paul exhorts Titus to train the older men, the younger men, and the older women. But Paul directs the older women of the church to take charge of training the younger. My students were demonstrating that a woman inexperienced with a certain emotional wound could find great comfort and guidance from another woman who had experienced it. Paul's instructions addressed exactly what our church was missing—an empathetic friend and mentor our hurting women could turn to.

I began to wish we had a group of women who had experienced divorce (for example), received grace and healing, and were available to help other women through this kind of pain; women who had felt the tremendous pain and could say, "I've been there, I want to help."

This was the very element my friend Pam was missing. We needed to bring this concept from my classroom to my church.

### Unveiling the Pain

Our first step was to uncover the often hidden hurts that our church's women were dealing with. We conducted an unusual survey. Beside a long list of emotionally painful issues, respondents could check either "need help" or "can give help."





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### A Woman's Hidden Pain

The responses surprised many. We had no idea how many women were presently experiencing, or had in the past experienced, emotional trauma.

Once the results were tallied, we informed our church of the top five needs and our desire to address those needs in the coming year. Then we issued a general invitation, while also hand-selecting women to take part in a training seminar. We personally invited women we saw as potential shepherds—women who had experienced intense emotional pain, who had been restored to emotional health, and who were willing to help others with similar pain—who had answered "can give help."

The focus of the first seminar was training women to help others. We laid the biblical foundation from Titus 2 for women mentoring women. We also included training in shepherding skills and opportunities for the participants to practice them.

The first seminar lasted three hours. Since then, we have expanded the course to seven hours.

Our next step was to schedule open-invitation seminars, one Saturday morning each month for a year, to address the different expressed wounds. Any woman who had experienced the subject covered was invited to attend such seminars as "Understanding the Pain of Stress" or "The Pain of Divorce."

Most of our instructors were women who have been through both pain and healing. Ordinary women, they have allowed God to use their pain to help others.





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### A Woman's Hidden Pain

At the end of each seminar, we provided opportunity for the women to respond and to sign up for follow-up support. The atmosphere freed our church's women to begin sharing their own hurts. It provided a safe place to talk about it with others who understood.

Kati was just beginning to move from shock to anger after her husband died. Carole, a shepherd who identified widowhood as her area of experience, spontaneously connected with Kati. She was able to bring understanding, help, and comfort during Kati's tough months.

Trish was overwhelmed with mothering three preschoolers. Cindy, a trained shepherd who identified young motherhood as her area of experience and health, agreed to spend time with Trish. Eventually they invited other young mothers to their meetings and established a small group ministry for young moms.

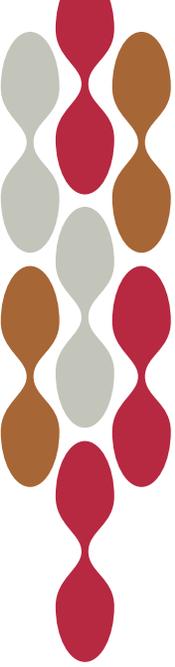
### Ongoing Care

Next we shifted our focus from events to ongoing pastoral care for women.

Teams of women began to form around each pain area. Some were dealing with divorce, others with death or mentoring. We borrowed four categories from Ezekiel 34:4—nourishing the healthy, strengthening the young, caring for the lost, and bringing healing to the injured.

We call these "branches." New ministries are developed as each branch, led by a "branch shepherd," focuses on the best way to minister to its people group—the healthy, young, lost, or injured.





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### A Woman's Hidden Pain

As the needs arise, so do the ministries, and the shepherds. Melinda, for example, was tormented by the isolation she felt from her stepdaughter. A call to one of our shepherds in the area of blended family put Melinda in touch with help and hope.

Carrie, a college student, wanted to learn from an older woman how to grow in her relationship with the Lord. Betty, gifted in mentoring, agreed to meet with Carrie, and they together defined areas where Carrie could grow.

I have dreamed of the church becoming a place where people understand the depths of pain, where they are vulnerable enough to comfort others with the comfort they received. While there may be more kinds of pain than we can ever have shepherds for, those who lend support from an empathetic heart are changing the lives of the women in our church.

We are still looking for someone who can relate to Mary. Her daughter's death left her with a grandchild to raise. Trained shepherds who have experienced loss have come alongside her for now.

Someday I envision Mary offering the understanding she receives today to another grandmother suddenly faced with grandchildren to raise—a grandmother who will find a God-sent answer when she asks, "Does anyone really know what I am going through?"

*Beverly Hislop is the team leader of pastoral care to women at Grace Community Church in Gresham, Oregon. This article first appeared in the Winter 2002 issue of LEADERSHIP JOURNAL.*



## Reflect

- *The author writes, "Women process pain differently than men. Women need to talk about it, to get it out in an affirming environment before receiving direction. Empathetic listening skills are critical. Understanding is essential. In some ways, women desperately need the comfort only other women can give." Do you agree or disagree? Why or why not?*
- *As a leader, how can you be instrumental in helping the women you serve both "unveil" their pain and receive the ongoing care they need?*

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Practically Speaking

# When A Friend Is Hurting

Five ways to share God's comfort in a crisis

*by Lucia Alexis Gainer*



**M**egan's eyes filled with tears as she talked about her painful past. I poured each of us a second cup of coffee and listened as the afternoon sun cast golden shadows on my dining room wall. I knew I was witnessing a young woman's struggle to find faith.





## Dealing with the Emotionally Wounded

### When A Friend Is Hurting

Megan was a beautiful, intelligent young woman who taught English literature at a nearby university. However, she'd been emotionally devastated as a youth by parental alcoholism, sexual abuse, and her own addiction to alcohol. Four years ago, she'd achieved sobriety, but Megan was still in emotional pain. She asked me to help with her recovery process, and I was delighted to say yes. Although she wasn't a Christian yet, I sensed she was close.

I knew in part what Megan was going through. I, too, came from a troubled family background and became addicted to alcohol at an early age. At age twenty-nine, God relieved my compulsion and led me to accept Christ as my Lord and Savior. In the succeeding fourteen years, he healed many of my emotional wounds and gave me the chance to work with other addicted people through my church's recovery ministry.

My heart ached for Megan. I knew she, like many wounded people, found it hard to trust others and was taking an emotional risk merely by being honest with me. But I also knew I had some valuable things to share with her—insights I'd received from believers who'd taken the time to talk with me when I was hurting and at the beginning of my faith journey.

*Oh Lord, I prayed silently, help me say the right things.*

We've all been there. Perhaps we find ourselves with a friend, family member, or even a stranger who is hurting. We sense the opportunity to share our faith but struggle to find the right approach.





## Dealing with the Emotionally Wounded

### When A Friend Is Hurting

Each opportunity we have to talk about Christ with someone who is hurting is a unique one. Since no two situations are alike, there aren't any hard and fast rules to follow—I ask the Lord to guide me each time. However, my involvement in a recovery ministry has taught me some principles to follow in dealing with those who are hurting. Perhaps they'll help you in similar situations.

***Reach out with unconditional love.*** A hurting person may display intense emotions—tears, anger, bitterness, frustration, or sarcasm. We may feel tempted to withdraw from such emotional displays, but we need to draw near to the person who is in pain, just as God helps us when we're in need.

Jan, a legal secretary in her thirties, was a Christian who asked me to help her deal with a difficult family issue—both her parents were addicted to drugs. Our conversations were frequently punctuated by Jan's vocal frustration and anger over her parents' behavior, and her powerlessness to do anything to stop it.

It was important for me to love and encourage her even when she was angry, especially because unconditional love was something Jan had never received in her family. She also needed reassurance of God's faithfulness to see her through this difficult period. During our times together, Jan learned to handle her feelings without outbursts, and over time became a patient witness for Christ to her parents.

***Try to understand rather than fix the hurting person's feelings.*** We may mean well when we try to persuade a





## Dealing with the Emotionally Wounded When A Friend Is Hurting

hurting person to "cheer up," but suffering is often an integral ingredient of the spiritual experience. We must acknowledge a person's pain, not try to put an emotional bandage over it.

Chris, a nurse who often attended one of our groups, arrived in tears one night and sobbed that her mother had died the previous week. Several well-meaning friends urged her to stop crying. But Lucille, a group member who'd experienced the loss of several immediate family members, simply held her close as Chris expressed her grief. "Thank you," she whispered after her tears had subsided. "I find I need to cry a lot right now."

***Find specific ways to be supportive.*** People in pain are often reticent to ask for help. Someone who is ill or bereaved may need you to bring food or offer to baby-sit. A friend facing a frightening medical test or hospital stay probably would appreciate your offer to go with her. Even little expressions of love—a hug, a note in the mail, an invitation to come over—can mean a great deal to a hurting person. There's an old expression: "If we don't demonstrate our love, it doesn't do anyone any good." Hurting people need expressions of love they can see and feel.

***Share your own times of struggle.*** I've found hurting people benefit tremendously when they can talk with someone who's transparent about her own struggles. Such honesty breaks down the barriers of isolation that suffering often erects. God is glorified when I'm willing to tell others how far he's brought me, as well as my continuing need for his power to guide and deliver me in times of temptation or difficulty.





## Dealing with the Emotionally Wounded When A Friend Is Hurting

I shared in our group one night about some of my challenges as a wife and mother, especially my desire to erase the "critical voice" of my early upbringing and become a more encouraging, positive person. After the meeting, Jeannie, the mother of three young girls, told me how relieved she was to know someone else struggled with that same issue. After that, she called me frequently, and soon we were exchanging insights from the Lord on ways we could be more positive and encouraging.

***Pray for those with whom you're sharing.*** We may tend to focus primarily on what we can say or do to help a hurting person, but don't forget the power of prayer. It's still our greatest tool for helping others. Pray for God's will in the life of the person who is hurting, and ask the Holy Spirit to guide your intercession for that person.

As Christ's love in us increases, so will our desire to pray for and share our faith with those who are struggling. It's comforting to know the Lord doesn't ask me to be a perfect witness to the person who's hurting. He just asks me to be a willing one. He can be counted on to do the work if we are simply willing to open up our hearts.

When Megan finished telling me about her troubles, she looked up and said, "Well, I guess you think I'm pretty crazy."

"Yeah, a little," I said, smiling, "but you know what? I identify with a lot of what you've said."

I went on to share the struggles I'd experienced after first reaching out to the Lord, especially those I sensed Megan





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might identify with. I mentioned the many positive things I saw in her life, like her willingness to seek God and her desire to grow. She'd expressed a lot of frustration and sadness, and I told her how normal those feelings were, considering her past. I told her, too, how Jesus had transformed my life, and how she could count on him to take her through a similar process.

Megan began to relax as she realized I wasn't interested in criticizing her or trying to change the way she felt. We talked many times over the ensuing weeks, and I saw God begin to transform Megan's life. She started attending church regularly, and some months later told me of her commitment to Christ.

*Lucia Alexis Gainer is a freelance writer living in California. This article first appeared in the July/August 1997 issue of TODAY'S CHRISTIAN WOMAN.*

## Reflect

- *When you encounter a hurting person, how do you usually respond? Be specific.*
- *The author suggests several strategies for dealing with those who are wounded: showing unconditional love; offering understanding, rather than just "fixing" problems; finding ways to be supportive; sharing your own struggles; and praying. Which of these do you find to be the most helpful to you when you struggle with pain and why? How could you practice this as you reach out to others?*





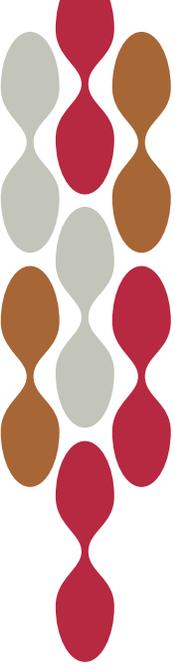
How To

# An Atmosphere of Change

Create an atmosphere  
conducive to personal change.

*by Marshall Shelley*

**T**here's an old story about a boy who found a turtle that had withdrawn into its shell. He tried to pry the turtle's head out with a stick. His uncle saw what was happening and said, "Not that way." He took the turtle inside and set him on the hearth. In a few minutes, as it began to get warm, the turtle stuck out its head and feet and calmly crawled toward the boy.



## Dealing with the Emotionally Wounded

### An Atmosphere of Change

People, like turtles, can't be forced to open up. But in the right environment, they often choose to do so. Warmed by kindness and concern, they sometimes relax, and often wind up coming your way. These are some of the ways leaders create an atmosphere conducive to personal change:

#### **Dignify Pain and Suffering**

Many people request help but resist it when it is offered. To be more precise, they want the pastor or leader to take away their pain, but they don't want to deal with the underlying problems producing the pain. They don't want help if it means making changes in the way they're living.

"People seldom know the solution. But they know they are unhappy, and they can describe eloquently, with exquisite detail, how their lives are out of sync," observes Roger Thompson of Trinity Baptist Church in Wheat Ridge, Colorado.

In some cases, the problem hinges on a superficial view of pain, particularly emotional pain. They believe the absence of pain is an inalienable right. Even some leaders fall into this trap. Sometimes, however, the pain is not something to be avoided, cured, fixed. It may be entirely appropriate. In these situations, the absence of pain would be pathological.

One young man, Karl, came to his pastor frustrated because he wasn't "happy." He had just broken up with his girl friend, the company he worked for was struggling financially, his job was in jeopardy, and he was wondering what direction his life should take.





## Dealing with the Emotionally Wounded

### An Atmosphere of Change

"He seemed to have the idea that life should always be blissful," said the pastor. "Karl's feelings of disquiet, which were quite normal, were intensified because he didn't think anyone should ever feel that way. But there would have been something wrong with him if he weren't feeling pain from a broken relationship and an uncertain job situation."

The pastor pointed Karl to the book of Lamentations, which faces suffering and uncertainty, takes the situation seriously, but doesn't *do* anything about it. No quick answers; no easy remedies. The pastor simply reminded Karl of God's faithfulness.

"I needed the message of Lamentations at that point, too," said the pastor. "It kept me from rushing in with 'therapy' for Karl. It kept me from the temptation to manipulate or alleviate, which is always condescending and belittles the person's pain. When the pain is legitimate and normal, I feel it's up to God to heal. My job is to give companionship, meaning, and dignity to the person in the midst of it."

Eugene Peterson suggests that pastors and leaders help people "lean into the pain"—to enlarge their capacity for suffering.

"The pastor who substitutes cheery bromides for this companionship 'through the valley of deep shadows' can fairly be accused of cowardice. Writing cheerful graffiti on the rocks in the valley of deep shadows is no substitute for companionship with the person who must walk in the darkness."

### Help People Expect Trials

Despite most Christians agreeing, in principle, that life with Christ will not remain problem free, ample confusion remains over what kind of protection God's people will enjoy. Are they





## Dealing with the Emotionally Wounded

### An Atmosphere of Change

supposed to experience *peace*? How about *fulfillment* or *joy* or *assurance*? And what do these concepts mean when hormonal or emotional upheaval strikes?

"We often tend to neglect one of the key themes of Scripture," said one former pastor. "And that is: Walking with God does not mean you won't face problems, even emotional problems. If you'd tell a ten-year-old boy, 'Son, if you'll become a Christian, you'll never have to be a teenager,' we'd all see that as ridiculous. But I have heard people tell forty-year-olds, 'If you're really walking with God, you don't need to worry about menopause or midlife transition.'" The "Any problem can be solved if you just get right with God" mentality simply doesn't square with most people's experience.

Being right with God, as far as confessing sins and walking in obedience, does not mean that you're going to have enough money to live on, or that your husband won't walk out on you. In fact, when you look at Scripture – Isaiah 43, Psalm 23, James 1 – you get the impression that the opposite is true: Those who walk with God will endure fiery trials.

Leaders who communicate that trials are part of the Christian life, and that they are not a sign of God's displeasure, find the atmosphere is more conducive to people owning up to the pressures they face and being willing to accept help.

### **Encourage Healthy Self-Disclosure**

One reason people often don't want help is because the vulnerability demanded in such an admission scares the tar out of them.





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### An Atmosphere of Change

To overcome this, one nondenominational pastor shares "stories that show me in a negative light, and there are lots of them! People need to see my weaknesses, but more importantly, how I'm working on them. Men who are insensitive to their wives, for instance, need to see that I'm insensitive to my wife at times but, just as important, that *I'm trying not to be*. In one sermon I told about listening to my wife as she was telling a lengthy story. I finally said, 'Can you get to the bottom line?' It was rude. Tears trickled down her cheeks, and she said, 'I listen to you when you talk about sermon ideas and your plans for the upcoming week. I share my story, and all you do is ask me to get to the bottom line.'"

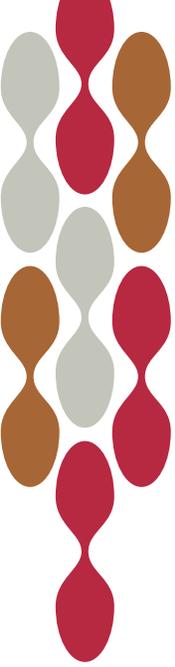
Revealing weaknesses and failures isn't easy, but people identify with and benefit most from lessons learned through mistakes. Even Jesus offered his scars to doubtful Thomas, with powerful effect. Thomas believed and was reconciled after seeing for himself the effects of Christ's suffering. As Fulton Sheen once said, "Scarred men come for healing only to scarred hands. Only a Risen Jesus with scars can understand our hearts."

On the other hand, sharing personal victories in daily life can also be helpful. Sharing that careful blend of humanness without false humility, victories sans pride, presents an authentic picture of God's work in a life. Such illustrations demonstrate a leader's willingness to own up to failures and work to improve them. They also set a tone that allows people to admit they need help, too.

### Allow Others to Help You

Healthy relationships are two-way streets. One of the most affirming things we can do for people is to allow them to





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help us in some significant way – even to change us. When people see we have been affected by others, they're more likely to admit they need us as well.

One pastor found his preaching criticized with some regularity. A number of people told him he wasn't connecting. He set up a weekly Tuesday morning group of five men and women who would critique his sermon and – lest they become mere grippers – would help think through the passage for the next Sunday.

"I am open with the congregation about this group being there to help me preach better," says the pastor. "I had been criticized for fuzzy thinking. This group helps sharpen my ideas and gives me help with applications. Since I've submitted myself to them for help, I've noticed other people are more open to my taking the initiative to help them with problem areas in their lives."

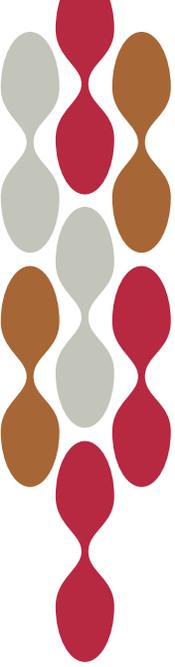
#### Practice Preventive Counseling

"We counsel by the way we live," says veteran pastor Malcolm Cronk. "My lifestyle, my own marriage, my family, is part of my counseling. It says something. It isn't always articulated in formal statements, but it's there. People sense it."

One pastor described his whole ministry as "preventive counseling."

"I've had people tell me I'd saved their marriage. I didn't even know their marriage was in trouble. But what they meant was that by teaching the biblical view of marriage and by illustrating it with Christ's relationship to the church, they picked up principles to apply to their own marriage, and they worked it out."





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### An Atmosphere of Change

Leaders and ministers plant seeds in soil plowed by life's circumstances. Many of the seeds take root. Some we're aware of; others we aren't. But by teaching biblical standards with biblical illustrations or illustrations from life, people beginning to go through those kinds of experiences often appropriate those principles. They experience the remedial effect of preventive counseling.

*Marshall Shelley is editor for LEADERSHIP JOURNAL. This article was first published in *Helping Those Who Don't Want Help*, a LEADERSHIP BOOKS, 1986.*

## Reflect

- *The author writes, "People, like turtles, can't be forced to open up. But in the right environment, they often choose to do so. Warmed by kindness and concern, they sometimes relax, and often wind up coming your way." What is the environment like in your ministry or organization and how is this affecting the people you serve and work with? What would need to change in your environment in order to create an atmosphere of openness?*
- *How is it true that "leaders who communicate that trials are part of the Christian life, and that they are not a sign of God's displeasure, find the atmosphere is more conducive to people owning up to the pressures they face and being willing to accept help"?*



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A Corporate Perspective

# The Church's Walking Wounded

How should we respond in  
a psychological age?

*by Tim Stafford*

I received a letter from an old friend, a pastor's wife. She used shaded and painstaking words, language intended to convey deep personal struggle without giving too much in the way of detail. To this day I don't know exactly what happened to her and who ultimately was at fault—if anyone. Nevertheless, the tone of her letter made miserably clear that she was wounded.





## Dealing with the Emotionally Wounded

### The Church's Walking Wounded

Not, apparently, wounded by any single person or event but—as she saw it—wounded by the church. After a lifetime of engagement, she has dropped out of active involvement. She indicated she needed to learn how to experience Jesus' love instead of guilt and duty.

This friend had sought help. Philip Yancey's writings have meant a great deal to her. A therapist has provided support and insight, helping her learn to care for herself. As if to allay any misunderstandings, she wrote that her husband had been supportive and understanding. But when she would be back in circulation, she could not say.

I read the letter with a sinking feeling, not just from pity for my friend, but also because she reminded me of an epidemic I have been uneasily witnessing. Every time I turn around, I meet another person like her, who feels wounded by the church.

Wounded people are real, and their injuries are real. We may never authoritatively establish the real source of the problem—whether a failure of the church, or a failure of the wounded individual. How much does it matter? "The eye cannot say to the hand, 'I don't need you!' ... Those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable" (1 Cor. 12:21-22).

If you're not sure whom I'm talking about, ask a pastor. Most pastors seem very familiar with the wounded, who don't necessarily leave the church—many stay and walk around in it, like unhappy ghosts. Or ask a therapist. My wife, counselor-in-residence at our church, sees many people whose troubles include severe issues with church.





## Dealing with the Emotionally Wounded

### The Church's Walking Wounded

The wounds vary. Some of her clients were sexually abused as children by a pastor. Others were embittered by the church's lack of grace, as they define it.

By disposition I am a "get-over-it" kind of guy. I mention this because I know I'm not the only one. A good portion of the church would counsel the hurting to get over it—or they would if they weren't afraid to seem insensitive.

You feel haunted by the legalistic church of your childhood? Get over it! You last attended that church 15 years ago. A pastor failed you? Move on! There's a hurting world that needs your help.

I confess, though, that when I want to urge people to "get over it," I don't have persecuted Christians in mind. I'm thinking, rather, of my own peace of mind. As a leader in my church, I want to get things done. I'm busy. I don't want to pause for the painstaking and repeated interaction that psychological wounds require.

Psychologist Diane Langberg might have me in mind when she says, "God uses people who are weaker to expose our hearts to us. I can tell myself that I am really patient as long as I am with people who are running at the same pace as I am. But when I begin to attend to people who are deeply wounded, I may find that I am not so patient after all."

On the issue, Wheaton College historian Mark Noll commented: "My guess is historically quite regularly people were wounded by the church." He mentioned women systematically denied opportunities to use their gifts, and people of color who have suffered discrimination and





## Dealing with the Emotionally Wounded

### The Church's Walking Wounded

deprivation, often at the hands of other Christians. "Yet in diaries, you do not get the sense of personal disorder, disorientation, and wounding that is common today."

He added, "The amount of introspection, with the exception of Wesley, is negligible." (He later added another exception, David Brainerd.) And even in introspecting, he said, "They are consumed by their relationship to God. Am I living up to God's standard? They are not interested too much in the self."

Noll noted the significance of the psychological revolution, and wondered whether those wounded by the church "may be a small ripple in a large tide of people wounded by X, Y, and Z." He pointed out that our times produce people sensitized to psychological wounds, and yet modern business practices treat people increasingly as commodities.

People may be wounded by the world, but when they come to church, they hope for better treatment. If they perceive that the church has not treated them as they hoped it would, the pain may be intense. If we live in an age in which people become easily hurt, not all hurts are the same. Therapists and pastors I spoke with helped me distinguish between different kinds of wounds.

***Abused people.*** The Catholic Church's scandals offer many examples, but Catholic priests aren't alone. Protestant leaders, too, make improper sexual advances, misuse funds, or abuse their authority. Some people can shrug this off and "get over it." Others cannot. A single egregious incident, or more likely a pattern, may lead them to mistrust all church institutions and authorities.





## Dealing with the Emotionally Wounded

### The Church's Walking Wounded

***Neglected people.*** We live in a bureaucratic, impersonal world, and people are desperate to be noticed and cared for. Churches are one place people look to, sometimes unrealistically, for personal, psychological care.

Churches today can hurt people, says Langberg, "through a lack of knowledge or understanding of what they are going through." For example, one in four women and one in six men say they were sexually abused as children. Many of them desperately need to be understood and helped, but the church often doesn't feel comfortable addressing their problems. For some, this neglect proves as wounding as the original offense.

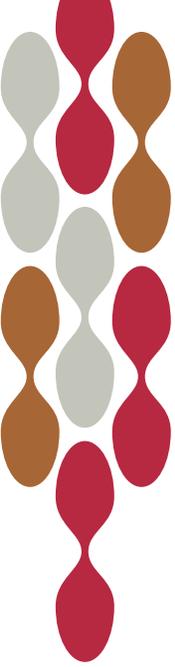
***Lonely people.*** Modern society is full of people looking for love. Some come from broken or dysfunctional families, and they hope the church will offer warmth they never found at home. Churches often seem to promise exactly what they hope for.

Psychologist Larry Crabb receives letters every week that say, "You're talking about a kind of community where I can be nurtured. Is this a pipe dream? Is there any place where this is really happening?"

"People are aware as never before of their longing for community, for encounters with a supernatural God, for reality beneath the mess," he said. "They go to church thinking this is going to happen, but the deepest need of their soul is missed."

Crabb says that the church's big-event orientation misses people. They need the sense that somebody listens to them, and attends to their soul.





## Dealing with the Emotionally Wounded

### The Church's Walking Wounded

***Guilt-laden people.*** Though we live in a "guiltless society," stripped of all the old moralisms, many people today are still weighed down by guilt, some of it deserved, some of it not. Some churches really are good at dealing out even more guilt. They preach a compelling holiness that their members always fall short of. On the other hand, some people are prone to receive guilt. If, for example, the church emphasizes the value of daily prayer, some people will hear that as an overbearing and condemning set of commandments.

I originally thought people wounded by guilt came mainly from fundamentalist or authoritarian churches. I came to see that Presbyterians and Lutherans and charismatics can be equally vulnerable. Any institution with high ethical ideals will at times place unfair burdens on people—or will be perceived as doing so. Not even churches emphasizing grace will be immune.

***Overinvolved people.*** Churches attract idealists. Almost inevitably, some idealists become overinvolved, overidentifying themselves with their ministries. Burnout can become a psychic and spiritual wound that lasts long after the original fatigue.

When I think of my friend, the pastor's wife, I wonder whether her struggles are essentially burnout. But then, I suspect that as a highly conscientious person she may suffer from a false sense of guilt for not living up to her own expectations.

This may be magnified by the tendencies of the church to plug her into its programs without attending to her soul.





## Dealing with the Emotionally Wounded

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And perhaps, too, she has a lonely side that the church has never truly met, despite its promises of community and family. Perhaps my friend, like most people, doesn't fit neatly into diagnostic categories, but spreads over all of them.

Indeed, the wounded are a minority but a significant one. Perhaps like the canary in the mine, they serve as an indicator. By attending to their healing, we may help the whole church toward greater health and minister more effectively in this unique age.

Gordon MacDonald thinks so. He believes a fundamental reframing of the church is in the making. He speaks of reframing the gospel, reframing church structures, and reframing our calling. He has wounded people in mind at every point. He believes we need different language to describe Jesus' call. Whereas evangelicalism has followed Paul's model of total surrender, MacDonald thinks Abraham's commitment to a journey may speak better of the ambiguities of life—as well as the lifelong nature of discipleship, requiring long-term commitment and surrender.

Psychologist Langberg said, "We live in time and we heal in time, and you can't just apply a verse and get over it. People expect themselves to heal in that fashion, so they carry a tremendous amount of guilt when they do not." MacDonald wants to create church structures so that they are more personal—particularly small groups. "I don't think you will find this problem ... in a church that has a strong small groups ministry," he says. "If people are properly supported and prayed for, they climb out of their





## Dealing with the Emotionally Wounded

### The Church's Walking Wounded

crisis and are stronger." Those with perpetually bleeding wounds drain others in the congregation, he says.

"If you closed one wound, they would open another. I see a lot of those. They have a lot of complaining to do. Put them in a small group where week after week they get to talk, and it helps them. They get listened to, and they get lovingly confronted."

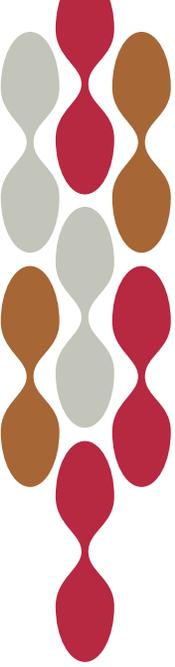
Psychologist Archibald Hart notes that church is not for the healthy: "We invite in everybody, and as a consequence we have a higher percentage of personality disorders than society generally. You should see pastors' eyes light up when I describe the different types of personality disorders. They recognize some of their members. People with personality disorders don't change, but they can be helped through an environment of tough love, one that sets limits."

That calls to mind pastor Roberta Hestenes's distinction between people who are wounded and those who are merely looking for a stick to hit someone with. Woe to churches that can't tell the difference.

Finally, several leaders speak of the need to reconsider the fast-paced, corporate model of church. "It does not allow for weakness," Langberg says. "It sees weakness as a hindrance or an annoyance that we need to get them over quick. That is very different than Scripture, which says that weaker members are important to the body."

Still, I can't help remembering that Jesus showed impatience only toward those who defined themselves as healthy—never toward those in pain. He identified his





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mission with the lost sheep, and with those in need of healing. When such people accosted him in the street, he stopped for them. He never lost sight of his larger agenda, but he always stopped for them.

I find this extremely difficult to do. The busy American church finds it excruciating. Jesus seemed to do it instinctually and effortlessly. Those of us who want to "get on with it" must consider the possibility that we do precisely that when we halt the parade to attend to the weak.

*Tim Stafford is a senior writer for CHRISTIANITY TODAY. This article first appeared in the March 2003 issue of CHRISTIANITY TODAY.*

## Reflect

- *As a leader, what is your experience with the "walking wounded"? In what ways have wounded individuals impacted you or your ministry roles?*
- *How do you believe the church's wounded should be treated? What do you believe is an effective way of helping them to "move on" and regain their health?*



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Biblically Speaking

# The Woman Who Touched Jesus

Healing fueled by faith.

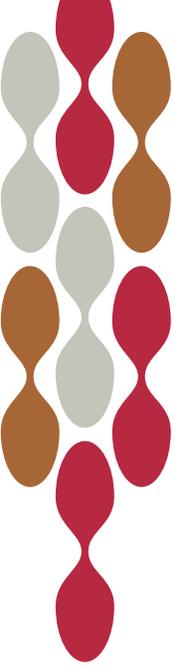
*by Liz Curtis Higgs*



**I** *if I just touch his clothes, I will be healed* (Mark 5:28). That's what she told herself, this nameless, bleeding woman who'd traveled 30 miles, fueled by nothing but faith.

It was a daring plan. According to Mosaic Law, women who were ceremonially unclean weren't allowed to touch anyone, let alone the Son of God. But desperate women do desperate things. For 12 long years blood had flowed from her body, making her physically sick and socially unacceptable.





## Dealing with the Emotionally Wounded

### The Woman Who Touched Jesus

#### Desperation and Determination

The physicians of her time were unable to relieve her suffering. She "spent all she had, yet instead of getting better she grew worse" (Mark 5:26). Some of us have been there, dealing with a prolonged illness or stubborn medical condition. Or perhaps we suffer with pains that aren't just physical. It's frustrating, even embarrassing, to keep going for help, only to return with little hope.

The true miracle in this story is what remained healthy: her faith. Her willingness to believe she could be well again, despite all evidence to the contrary. When she heard about a man who'd "healed many who had various diseases" (Mark 1:34), she made a beeline for Capernaum.

After a 30-mile journey, I would have thrown myself in his path, begging him to help me. Instead our bleeding sister quietly "came up behind him in the crowd and touched his cloak" (Mark 5:27).

By law, her touch would have made him unclean. By grace, just the opposite happened. "Immediately her bleeding stopped" (Mark 5:29). Without a word, a look, or a touch from Jesus, she was made whole simply by *believing* he could heal her—and daring to act on that belief.

#### A Stolen Miracle

When her faith was rewarded, she wasn't the only one who noticed. "He turned around in the crowd and asked, 'Who touched my clothes?'" (Mark 5:30). How her heart must have pounded. She'd just stolen a miracle!

When the disciples pointed out that many in the crowded street were touching him, "Jesus kept looking around to see who had done it" (Mark 5:32). He wasn't looking to accuse but to affirm.





## Dealing with the Emotionally Wounded

### The Woman Who Touched Jesus

The same faith that empowered her to stretch out her hand now gave her the strength to step forward. She "fell at his feet and, trembling with fear, told him the whole truth" (Mark 5:33).

She risked everything—public humiliation, if not punishment—to make her confession of faith, explaining to the crowd "why she had touched him and how she had been instantly healed" (Luke 8:47).

#### Restored

With a single word from Jesus, 12 years of pain and isolation were swept away: "Daughter ..." (Mark 5:34). In no other gospel account does Jesus use this term of endearment and respect. *Daughter*. She was a member of the family now, restored to her community, setting an example for others who "begged him to let them touch even the edge of his cloak, and all who touched him were healed" (Mark 6:56).

This woman literally put feet to her faith: traveling to Capernaum, reaching out to touch Jesus' garment, and walking forward at his invitation. By faith, we too can go first in our families, in our workplaces, and in our circles of influence, stepping forward to proclaim, "There is a balm in Gilead to make the wounded whole."

*Liz Curtis Higgs is the author of Embrace Grace (WaterBrook Press). Visit her website: [www.LizCurtisHiggs.com](http://www.LizCurtisHiggs.com). This article first appeared in the January/February 2007 issue of TODAY'S CHRISTIAN WOMAN.*



## Reflect

- *According to Romans 5:1-2, Ephesians 2:8-9, and Philippians 3:8-9, how does faith in Jesus come through Jesus? If our faith is flagging, where does Hebrews 12:2-3 urge us to turn for refreshment?*
- *If instead of healing her, Jesus had given her sufficient strength to bear the pain another dozen years, would that also be a form of grace? What does 1 Peter 2:19 suggest? According to 2 Corinthians 12:7-10, when the apostle Paul pleaded with God to take away the "thorn in his flesh," how did God respond? And what was Paul's victorious conclusion?*

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Getting Deeper

# What Forgiveness Isn't

6 myths that may be keeping you from letting go.

by Denise George



I listened quietly as my friend Jamie told me the frank details of the sexual abuse she'd suffered as a child.

"I hate my father!" she blurted out. "He abused me for more than a decade!" Jamie cried. "But my pastor said if I want to heal from my childhood pain, I have to forgive."

"What did you tell your pastor?" I asked.

"I told him I could *never* forgive my father, that I didn't want to forgive him, that no one—not even God—would *expect* me to forgive him!"





## Dealing with the Emotionally Wounded

### What Forgiveness Isn't

Jamie told me all the reasons that kept her from forgiving her abusive father. I'd heard many of them before. In fact, I'd used some of them two years earlier, when a friend I'd trusted to keep a confidence told several women in my Sunday school class about a painful circumstance I was going through. I felt betrayed by my friend—as I should have. But *forgive* her? That was the last thing I wanted to do! I dropped out of the Sunday school class and avoided her at church.

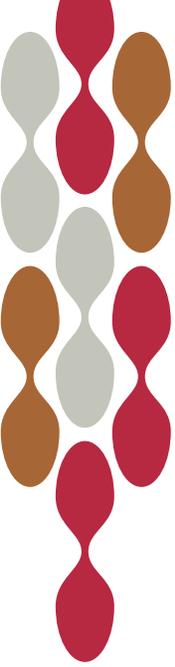
But a year later, when I reread what the apostle Paul said about forgiveness, his familiar words touched my heart in a special way: "Be kind and compassionate to one another, *forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you*" (Ephesians 4:32, my emphasis).

As I meditated on that verse, I knew I'd been forgiven much. I needed to forgive my friend, even if I didn't feel like it. I decided to do so. Later, when I met her and told her I'd forgiven her, she apologized, and we both cried. I wish I could say she and I became good friends again—but I can't. Her betrayal deeply hurt our friendship, and I was careful never to share another confidence with her. But God's Word and my decision to forgive set me free from bitterness.

### Facing the Challenge

Jamie and I are just two of a legion of Christian women who've struggled with forgiveness because it's difficult—almost impossible—to do. Yet in Luke 6:37, Jesus says, "Forgive, and you will be forgiven." He elaborates in Matthew 6:14-15: "For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins."





## Dealing with the Emotionally Wounded

### What Forgiveness Isn't

The apostle Paul repeats Jesus' command: "Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you" (Colossians 3:13). Surely Paul's "whatever grievances" covers any kind of hurt, betrayal, or injury another person could inflict!

In talking with hundreds of women about forgiveness, I've discovered six myths that keep us from the healing and freedom God desires for you and me.

***Myth 1: Forgiving means the offender didn't really hurt you.***

Jamie thought if she forgave her father, it lessened the severity of his abuse. Yet Jamie's forgiveness doesn't deny her father hurt her. In fact, it clearly recognizes the enormity of his evil—if Jamie's dad hadn't deliberately caused her pain, she'd have no reason to forgive him.

"Forgiveness is a redemptive response to having been wronged and wounded," wrote author Lewis B. Smedes. "Only those who have wronged and wounded us are candidates for forgiveness. If they injure us accidentally, we excuse them. We only forgive the ones we blame." Choosing to forgive her father acknowledges the pain Jamie endured at his hands. It also begins her healing.

***Myth 2: Forgiving means you excuse the offender's hurtful act.***

When I chose to forgive my friend, I didn't condone her cruel behavior. Forgiveness, I've discovered, is a response that seeks to redeem the hurt, not brush it off. An accidental "slip of the tongue" needs no forgiveness because it isn't deliberately caused. Intentional hurts—like my friend's betrayal—need forgiveness. When I forgave my friend, my forgiveness didn't lessen the impact of her painful action. But forgiveness unlocked my own "prison" of bitterness.





## Dealing with the Emotionally Wounded

### What Forgiveness Isn't

**Myth 3: Before forgiving, you must first understand why the offender hurt you.** On December 1, 1997, Missy Jenkins, a sophomore at Heath High School in Paducah, Kentucky, stood with her classmates and prayed before school started. Before they said their final "amen," 14-year-old Michael Carneal pulled out a pistol and fired 11 shots into the student prayer group. One bullet severely damaged Missy's spinal cord. Paralyzed from the waist down, Missy will spend her life in a wheelchair.

Missy doesn't know the reason her classmate deliberately hurt her. Michael may not understand his reasons. But that didn't keep Missy from choosing to forgive him.

"I believe hating him is wasted emotion," Missy says. "Hating Michael won't make me walk again. Besides, I know it isn't what Jesus would do."

Our human mind yearns to make all the confusing puzzle pieces fit together neatly before we forgive. However, the truth is we can forgive an offender even if we never discover the reasons for the inflicted pain. Author Philip Yancey writes in *What's So Amazing About Grace*, "Not to forgive imprisons me in the past and locks out all potential for change. I thus yield control to another, my enemy, and doom myself to suffer the consequences of the wrong."

**Myth 4: Before forgiving the offender, you must feel forgiving.** Forgiveness has nothing to do with how you feel. You can feel hurt, betrayed, and angry, and still completely forgive the one who wounded you. Biblical forgiveness is an act of the will. It's a choice you make.





## Dealing with the Emotionally Wounded

### What Forgiveness Isn't

Can you still feel angry after you forgive? Yes! Anger means you're in touch with reality—it's part of being human. But be careful to aim that anger at what your offender did, not at the offender herself. Then let your anger push you toward justice.

***Myth 5: Forgiving means the offender will face no consequences.*** When we choose to forgive someone, our forgiveness doesn't "let him off the hook." Forgiveness also doesn't mean justice shouldn't be served.

In December 1983, Pope John Paul II visited a prisoner, Mehmet Ali Agca, at the Rebibbia prison in Rome. In May 1981, Agca had aimed a pistol at the pope and shot him in the chest. After much pain and agony, John Paul recovered, and now he looked Agca in the eye, extended his hand, and said, "I forgive you." Even though the pope forgave him, Agca still faced the consequences of his crime. He served a lengthy prison sentence until he finally was released in January of 2006.

***Myth 6: When your offender is punished, you'll find closure.***

On June 13, 1990, Linda Purnhagen saw her two daughters, Gracie, 16, and Tiffany, 9, for the last time. Dennis Dowthitt, a dangerously sick psychopath, strangled Tiffany to death, then raped Gracie and slit her throat. When authorities discovered the girls' bodies, they arrested and convicted Dowthitt, and scheduled his execution.

A decade later, as executioners strapped him to his death gurney, Dowthitt apologized for the savage killings. But not even his confession, apology, and execution brought closure for Linda. She was disappointed after the execution, not relieved.





## Dealing with the Emotionally Wounded

### What Forgiveness Isn't

We think we can more easily forgive others if they confess the crime and apologize for the pain they caused. But don't look to justice, imprisonment, or execution to bring needed closure and healing. Only forgiveness will do that.

#### The Choice to Forgive

The decision to forgive an offender is probably the hardest choice we can ever make. Some crimes seem too horrible to forgive. Our instincts tell us to avenge the person who caused us pain, not to release him from the debt he owes us. But as Christians, we can't afford to have unforgiving hearts, for we have been greatly forgiven by God in Christ (Ephesians 4:32).

Only forgiveness can release us from a life of hatred and bitterness. "Forgiving is a journey, sometimes a long one," wrote Lewis B. Smedes in *Shame and Grace*. "We may need some time before we get to the station of complete healing, but the nice thing is that we are being healed en route. When we genuinely forgive, we set a prisoner free and then discover the prisoner we set free was us."

#### Forgiveness ABCs

**Acknowledge the hurt.** When someone deliberately hurts you, don't try to diminish the pain and its effect on you. Acknowledge your suffering—and express it aloud to God. Scripture promises: "The Lord is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit" (Psalm 34:18), and "He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds" (Psalm 147:3).

**Blame the offender.** If a person hurts you by mistake, she didn't mean to inflict pain, so she needs no forgiveness.





## Dealing with the Emotionally Wounded

### What Forgiveness Isn't

But if a person intentionally hurts you, then the pain she caused was deliberate. Say aloud: "I personally blame you, (name of offender), because you hurt me on *purpose*." Correctly placing the blame readies you to begin the forgiveness process.

***Cancel the debt.*** You've acknowledged the hurt and rightly blamed the offender. Now you're ready to make the willful decision to "cancel the debt" your offender owes you. Find a quiet place to be alone and ask the Lord's help in forgiving the person who hurt you. You might pray the "Lord's Prayer" (Matthew 6:9-13) and meditate on verse 12: "Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors." After you've prayed and while you're still alone, speak aloud your decision to forgive: "(Name of offender), I've chosen to forgive you for hurting me; I've decided to cancel the debt you owe me." You've now embarked on the process of forgiving the person who hurt you.

*Denise George, [www.authordenisegeorge.com](http://www.authordenisegeorge.com), is the author of 20 books, including Cultivating a Forgiving Heart—Forgiveness Frees You to Flourish (Zondervan). This article first appeared in the July/August 2006 issue of TODAY'S CHRISTIAN WOMAN.*



## Reflect

- *Why is it so important to forgive, as the Bible commands? How does a lack of forgiveness hold us in emotional and spiritual captivity?*
- *Which of the author's myths regarding forgiveness have you personally struggled with? How did you overcome this struggle? As a leader, how could you use these myths in order to help those who are emotionally wounded find healing and freedom?*



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Bringing It Home

# Getting Over It

How I learned to let go of my family's painful past.

*by T. Suzanne Eller*



It was a typical family holiday scene: My daughter snuggled close beside my sister, sharing the exciting news of her wedding proposal. My niece leaned in to get the scoop and to see the ring. In the kitchen, my mom hummed an off-key version of a Christmas carol while she loaded dishes into the dishwasher. My dad lounged in his faded blue recliner, while my husband and brothers talked about the football game on TV. The younger children played cards at their feet.

**Wait a minute! When did we become a "typical family"?**



### Chaos at Home

My past will never resemble a Norman Rockwell painting. My mother was an emotionally fragile woman who lost a baby at age 15 and was physically and verbally abused by her first husband. She fled that marriage at 20 and started over.

On her own with her second child and pregnant with her third—me—Mom met a good man and remarried. They had three more children, but her emotional baggage took its toll on our family and was compounded by the mood swings caused by Mom's medication for acute asthma.

She often threatened suicide. One day she actually put a gun to her head in front of us. I was 13 at the time, weary of wondering if she was going to carry out her threats. I remember whispering under my breath, "Just do it."

Five siblings lived in our small house. We each reacted to the dysfunction in our own way. I played the part of protector, taking my younger brothers with me wherever I went. I watched out for them, often running into a room and stepping in the way of a belt when I thought things were out of control.

My younger sister learned never to ruffle feathers. My elder sister was the complete opposite. She fought back verbally and physically and left home at 16. My little brothers were too young to know how to respond. The youngest, a toddler, would hide in the closet. My other little brother climbed into bed with my sister and me at night, afraid of nightmares that wouldn't go away.



## Dealing with the Emotionally Wounded

### Getting Over It

#### **Time Keeps on Ticking**

Those events occurred 31 years ago. Today I'm 46. The youngest is 37. Our family no longer resembles the characters in our once-chaotic household. We grew. We changed. And God entered the picture.

When I was 15, I went to church with a friend. I didn't believe in a supreme being; I went because my friend wouldn't quit asking. I challenged God that day, asking if he was real. I didn't expect an answer, but God gently reached past the tough shell around my heart and let me know he not only existed, but that I mattered to him.

This new relationship changed my life. I found comfort and hope in Scripture. My world expanded as I hung out at friends' homes, seeing healthy families in action. Church became my sanctuary.

During my senior year, my mother began her journey of faith. Over the next ten years, the fractured mother of my teenage years picked up the pieces of her life and eventually became the beautiful woman of faith she is today.

#### **Clouded Vision**

My family has been healthy longer than dysfunctional, so why was I suddenly surprised to see them in that light? I had to admit I'd placed my family in a time capsule, viewing them through the jagged pieces of my childhood, as if I were part woman, part child.

It was time to completely move out of the past, to let go of my painful family memories and accept my family for what we'd become. But how?





## Dealing with the Emotionally Wounded

### Getting Over It

• **Refocus.** I took the spotlight off my childhood and onto the present. I'm no longer that 15-year-old hurting child but a grown, confident woman blessed with a loving 25-year marriage. I'm the mother to three young-adult children with whom I'm close. I know God, and his love amazes me. I've come a long way from that broken young girl. Viewing my family as a healthy, confident adult frees me to focus on *their* needs rather than mine. And this has taken my relationship with my mom and her healing to a whole new level. We've started fresh with a woman-to-woman friendship.

• **Be realistic.** Bad family memories tend to erase positive moments, so I've delved into the past to remember the good. I asked my mom to share good memories from the past. We laughed together as she reminded me of my five-layer birthday cake. Cooking didn't come easy for Mom, but she worked all day to make it from scratch. I carried it proudly to the kitchen, and on the way I stumbled. The cake exploded into a thousand chocolate pieces when it hit the kitchen floor. Mom ran to the cabinet and got out two big bowls. We scooped up the top pieces, lit candles in the gooey mess, and ate as we sat on the floor, laughing over my crumbled birthday cake.

Being realistic doesn't mean I don't wear rose-colored glasses. But it does mean I stop viewing my family exclusively through the bleak fog of harsh events. By weighing both good and bad, I'm able to add fond memories to my family album.

• **Relent.** When we were young adults—and the wounds were tender—my siblings and I held tête-à-têtes to dissect my mother's idle comments and perceived actions. Sometimes with Mom present, we jokingly told others childhood stories, complete with feigned laughter and *just enough* detail to heap guilt on her. The observers didn't catch on—but Mom did.





## Dealing with the Emotionally Wounded

### Getting Over It

This cycle of rehashing bad family stories became an excuse to stay "victims," to keep relationships at a distance and not forgive. But I realized I could either offer my children a legacy of bitterness and anger or extend grace and mercy in my family relationships. I chose grace and mercy.

• **Receive.** My mom always gives me a bag filled with goodies to take back home after I've visited. It might contain magazines or even a great vintage coat from a thrift shop, but I know these gifts have little to do with what they are. Every time my mother presses something good in my hands, it's her way of telling me she loves me.

Often with a dysfunctional past, a family member's overture of healing may be awkward. She may not use the words you think she should or act in the way for which you hope. But true grace is receiving those gestures with the same spirit in which they're offered.

Letting go of my painful past doesn't mean I've forgotten those memories, but it does mean I've transitioned from child to adult. I've broken the cycle of carrying emotional baggage from one generation to the next. I can reflect on what God can do despite a broken past. When I look at my family now, I don't just see normal, I clearly see a portrait of God's grace.

*T. Suzanne Eller is a conference speaker and the author of The Mom I Want to Be—Rising Above Your Past to Give Your Kids a Great Future. This article first appeared in the November/December 2006 issue of TODAY'S CHRISTIAN WOMAN.*



## Reflect

- *How can "refocusing," as the author presented it, help a wounded person to move beyond the pains of the past in a relationship?*
- *What's the difference between being realistic and wearing "rose-colored glasses"? Why is it important to embrace the positive parts of the past, and not just let the painful events cloud everything else?*



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Leadership Tools

# Treat or Refer?

Practical advice for ministering to the emotionally and spiritually wounded.

*by Rex L. Stancil*



I have spent the last 14 years serving as a chaplain or in some form of pastoral ministry in the local church. During that time, I have taught and trained literally hundreds of small-group leaders on the subject of Christian care and counseling. My advice is usually to love people until it hurts, perhaps love them some more—but also to make sure they are getting help somewhere in addition to the small group or ministry they're involved in. Here's some additional advice to help guide you in directing others to true and lasting healing.





## Dealing with the Emotionally Wounded

### Treat or Refer?

#### Advice for Pastors

If you are a pastor in a church, then you know your time can get eaten away doing nothing but counseling. And there may be necessary seasons of that. However, I do not advise entering into a long-term counseling situation with parishioners (keeping in mind that mentoring and discipling are different than counseling).

Instead, I tend to ***stick with a three-session rule***. If someone comes to me and we determine that some amount of counseling will be helpful—or if someone continues to schedule meetings with me and we end up discussing the same issue(s) over and over—I will only meet with that individual three times before I assist him or her into a more structured setting, such as a support and recovery group or meeting with a licensed counselor. Wherever I live, I keep the names of a few counselors and resources that I have pre-screened, and to which I feel comfortable referring.

#### Advice for Small-Group Leaders

Issues like death, divorce, addiction, sexual sin, depression, job loss, and so on can all be dealt with at some level within a small group. However, the weightier issues of life—those that will take longer periods to heal and those that are more deeply rooted in a person's past—will ultimately need a pastor, coach, and/or counselor to get involved.

If you are a small-group leader, I advise you to ***be careful about counseling your group members***. "Doing life together," "living in community," or whatever phraseology you use to describe small-group life is not always the same as receiving counseling. But that doesn't mean you need





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to cut a wounded person out of your life, or out of the life of the group. A listening ear is good medicine for every soul, and the greatest thing you can do for your wounded group members is to love them, be with them, and go with them—literally and figuratively—through the counseling and healing process.

Indeed, anyone struggling with issues, regardless of the problem, needs a loving community that will accept them as they are and love them through the process of healing. Validation, prayer, and accountability are essential for growth and healing. When everything in life is turned upside down, people need an anchor to keep them stable. A caring and compassionate group of friends can provide that anchor. I also advise small-group leaders not to attempt any kind of medical diagnoses with their group members. Never tell them they need medications or medical treatments. Remember: refer, refer, refer. A group leader's job is to provide a safe environment for all small-group members.

### Practical Applications

At times, one person's needs may sidetrack an entire meeting. However, this should be rare, not regular. You as the leader must ***establish healthy boundaries for your entire group*** within which they can have their needs met. If you allow the pastoral care needs of one or two persons to sidetrack the meetings, then you have neglected the rest of the group.

When such monopolization happens, the easiest way to correct it is to set up something after the meeting—the next morning, the next day, or the next week. Meet with the person outside of the regularly scheduled time. If it sounds





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like something serious, give your pastor or small-group coach a call and give them a snapshot of the situation without breaking confidentiality. If your pastor or coach thinks more involvement is necessary, then go back to the group member and ask permission to talk about him or her to your coach or pastor. Be sure to let the small-group member make that choice.

#### Remember:

- »» When people are in crisis, they need assistance in many areas, but often times they will not ask for it. Your response (and that of the rest of the group) should be to actively and caringly try to help that person. If appropriate and needed, provide for their basic needs—meals, rides, chores around their house, and so on.
  
- »» Provide accountability to that person. Call them several times a day if necessary. Help them find a counselor if the situation warrants, and offer to attend the first meeting with them. Ask them if they are keeping their appointments. Ask them if they are following up on making the necessary changes in their lives. Invite them over for dinner. Be their best friend for a short time, if necessary.
  
- »» During crisis mode, people need more attention, more direction, and more reminders to do the things they need to accomplish. After a few days, maybe as long as a few weeks, things should normalize and the crisis may become manageable. At that point, you and your group can back off somewhat.





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There's no doubt about it: loving people is hard sometimes. Yet we are called to sacrifice for one another. Doing life together may mean giving up some of your free time to be with someone who is in need—to show them that you care beyond just your words. Your presence and willingness to listen are tangible ways you can love your neighbor as yourself.

However, as a final reminder, be sure not to try and "fix" any members of your small group. If they have issues with their past, and those issues are preventing them from being healthy in the present, then my advice is to pray, refer, and get them all the help they really need.

*Rex L. Stancil is the Associate Minister at Earlham Church of Christ, in Iowa. This article first appeared on [www.SmallGroups.com](http://www.SmallGroups.com), 2006.*



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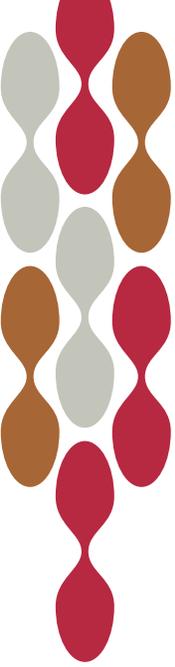


# Additional Resources

**Beauty for Ashes: Receiving Emotional Healing, Revised Edition**, by Joyce Meyer (Faithwords, 2003). A victim of childhood abuse, Meyer outlines the truths that brought recovery to her life and offers biblical advice to help you deal with emotional pain, grab hold of God's unconditional love, and wait for his timing in healing painful memories. You'll be encouraged by her journey from tragic youth to triumphant adult.

**Effective Mentoring**, a downloadable resource from **BuildingChurchLeaders.com**. Become an effective mentor for other women. This training tool from Gifted for Leadership authors, who understand your unique role as a mentor, helps encourage and direct you as you become an effective mentor to the women around you.





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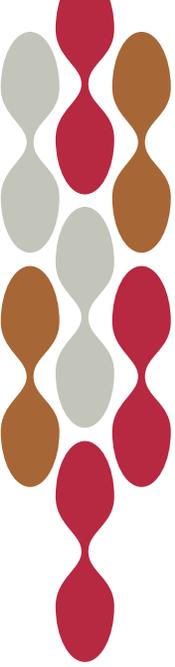
### Additional Resources

**Innovative Ministries**, a downloadable resource from **GiftedforLeadership.com**. Fulfill the calling of the Holy Spirit to get involved in your community and your church. If you feel God's sometimes not-so-gentle nudges toward filling certain needs in your community, your church, or anywhere on the globe, but feel overwhelmed by what you can do about it, this download will help. In these pages are inspiring stories of women and men who've seen a need and met it—often in creative, God-inspired ways. Along with inspiration and ideas, these stories offer some practical insight into the logistics of how the ministries were launched.

**Ministry for Today's Women**, a downloadable resource from **GiftedforLeadership.com**. Running women's ministries is a tough job, for so many reasons. Not the least of which is that churches today still fail to recognize that women are not all the same, do not all have the same needs, and can't be ministered to in a cookie-cutter approach. Because we believe in the importance of ministry to women and the good work of women's ministry leaders, Gifted for Leadership created this booklet. We've designed it to offer you some honest opinions on the way things look today, some ideas of what women would like to see, and some encouragement and wisdom to make it happen.

**No Longer a Victim**, by P. Burton Stokes (Destiny Image, 1988). Emotionally wounded, mentally tormented victims have no visible scars like those who were subject to physical violence. Yet the damage is no less real—and perhaps the need for healing is greater. This book will help guide you toward lasting healing.





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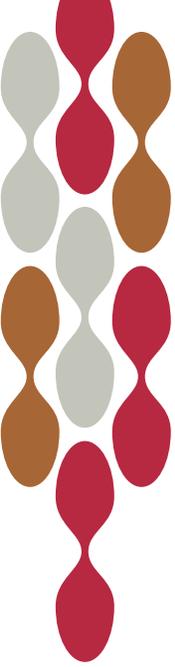
### Additional Resources

**So Free! An In-Depth Guide to Deliverance and Inner Healing**, by William Sudduth (Chosen, 2007). In a world where the enemy comes to kill and destroy, believers are called to do the work that Jesus did, including healing all who are oppressed by the devil. Sudduth offers training on how to identify specific strongholds, bring healing to the emotionally wounded, and much more! The enemy wants to keep people in bondage, but you can recognize and defeat those plans. Let Sudduth show you how anyone gripped by demonic oppression and emotional wounding can be marvelously and totally set free.

**The Trauma Zone: Trusting God for Emotional Healing**, by R. Dandridge Collins (Moody Publishers, 2007). Survivors of severe trauma are never the same. Often they become trapped, unable to return to normal life. This book reaches out to survivors with practical, biblical insights to help them get unstuck and move toward healing. *The Trauma Zone* is where trauma survivors get stuck: they find they can't move past the event, or they can't cope with overwhelming emotions, or experience flashbacks. Collins teaches readers how to turn off the "Trauma DJ" the voice in their heads that keeps them locked in the past, and move forward into freedom from emotional pain.

**Trusting God When You Don't Understand**, a downloadable resource from [Kyria.com](http://Kyria.com). If you have been sitting in what the Bible calls "the desert" for weeks, months or even years don't lose heart. Download this guide today and let these articles and stories encourage you. This resource provides practical ways for you to stay strong by keeping your focus on God and not on your circumstances.





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### Additional Resources

**Why Do Bad Things Happen?** a downloadable resource from **Kyria.com**. You may have asked this question many times. Most people do and the truth is, we may never know. If you are facing this haunting question, we hope that this Life Guide will help. Read how others have dealt with tragedy, loss, and suffering while placing their hope in God. When it comes to matters of the heart staying true to the Father, despite the struggle, is what matters most.

**Women Mentoring Women: Ways to Start, Maintain, & Expand a Biblical Women's Ministry**, by Vicki Kraft and Gwynne Johnson (Moody Publishers, 2003). Mature Christian women offer their younger counterparts empathy, experience, and seasoned spirituality. In turn, the younger generation reciprocates with energy, openness, and a connection to today's culture. This updated edition of the popular Titus 2:4 bestseller draws on Scripture to help you establish a vital ministry with everything from program ideas to organizing hints.

**Wounded by the Church**, a downloadable Bible study from **ChristianBibleStudies.com**. "Friendly fire" is—sadly—an easy concept for us to understand. Almost everyone knows someone who has been wounded by people or practices in a church. In "The Church's Walking Wounded," Tim Stafford examines this sorry phenomenon and reflects on how we might better respond. What does the Bible teach us about caring for wounded souls in our midst?



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