

Healing Your Crushing Soul Wounds

There are times in life when our hearts are overwhelmed with sorrow, grief and that unspeakable pain that permeates one's being. It's times like these that we must find the way to heal.

Allow yourself to become vulnerable to family and friends who truly want to help in your time of need. They love you and care about you. You will find you do not have to explain much; they already know and understand the situation. They desire to be a support beam for you to lean upon when you feel weak.

And then there are those unexpected people to whom God will speak concerning you to also find a way to reach out and help to carry you through. Don't be closed-minded; you may find a rich jewel in a new friendship that will bless you in your time of sorrow.

Then there are times when the people around you are not able to reach inside and heal the deep wound of sorrow. These are the times when you need to choose to grab hold of the Spirit of the living God for help, inner healing, peace and strength that does not come from this world.

I share a testimony in my new book, *The Healing Creed*, about a woman who lost all five of her children in one tragic day. It tells how she finally found her way with Jesus to inner healing, peace and the strength to live another day with the assurance that it was OK to smile again. She overcame the fear-based control that prevented others to come near her. Her ashes, sorrow and hopelessness were healed by Jesus alone and transformed into His beauty. The spirit of heaviness fell off, and she found joy once again.

There are different levels of healing, and God uses people to

help us through difficult trials in this life. And then there is a deep inner healing that God alone can bring, but we have to choose to wipe off the ashes of sorrow and allow Him to wash us with His atoning blood and make us whole again.

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This Is How Holy Spirit Feels When You Criticize the President

This is a question on a lot of people's minds right now.

Are we, as Christians, allowed to criticize the president? And if we are, is there a line that can be crossed?

Is God displeased when we criticize the president, and if I choose not to criticize him, is that my silent approval?

Social media is extremely toxic right now.

Many who support President Trump are calling out those who don't. And many who are against President Trump equate him to Hitler and the Taliban.

It was no different with President Obama.

Christians criticized his looks and called him Hitler ... they called him an idiot, stupid and all sorts of degrading names (something I often spoke against), just as many are doing with President Trump now.

The question is, does this cross the line?

The Bible actually has much to say about this, and later this year, we'll delve even deeper into this issue of criticizing and mocking, but today let's look at what the Bible says about criticizing our president.

In 1 Samuel 26, David finds himself in a situation that may would consider favorable.

He finds the place where Saul is camped out in his hunt to kill David. Saul and his men are in a deep sleep, and here is David standing right over Saul.

Saul's spear is right next to him ... the setup is perfect!

David—by all accounts—has a right to kill Saul. It would be considered self-defense. Saul has spent all of his time and energy hunting David down to kill him like a dog; David has done nothing but run for his life for months now.

With just one blow, David's life could change. He'd be a hero, he'd be free!

But, instead, he chooses to do something probably no one understood, and surely no one agreed with: He chose to save Saul's life.

But lest you think that David was on Saul's side, this act was less about Saul and more about David taking a stand for God.

David understood a biblical principle many of us have forgotten today.

"Blessed be the name of God forever and ever, for wisdom and might are His. it is He who changes the times and the seasons; He removes kings and sets up kings" (Dan. 2:20-21a).

David knew that God had chosen Saul to be king, and to lift a

hand against him would be lift his hand against God's anointed, an act that comes with serious consequences.

But how does this relate to today? No Christian would ever think of assassinating the president! Right?

Jesus makes a curious statement in Matthew 5 that I think bears looking at:

You have heard that it was said by the ancients, "You shall not murder," and "whoever murders shall be in danger of the judgment." But I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment. And whoever says to his brother, "Raca," shall be in danger of the Sanhedrin. But whoever says, "You fool," shall be in danger of hell fire (emphasis mine).

What Jesus is saying here is that though the Old Testament law condemned a murderer to death, New Testament covenant takes this commandment about 10 steps further.

New Testament covenant goes past a person's actions and straight to the heart. And "... out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks" (Luke 6:45).

Jesus is saying, if you show contempt for a person (*Raca*, which is Greek for "blockhead" or some other similar degrading word) and with your words seek to destroy their character ("You fool!"), you have literally murdered that person in your heart.

Your anger and contempt for them are equal to murder in your heart.

Criticizing the president's policies and attacking a president's person and character are not the same. David didn't agree with the things Saul did. He wasn't on Saul's side politically.

But David understood that he had to separate Saul's actions from his position. Although he was in complete opposition to Saul's actions, he had to honor Saul's position.

By honoring Saul's position, he was honoring God. So to lift his hand against Saul would be dishonoring God.

And, my dear friends, nothing has changed today. While we may have criticized Obamacare or the many executive orders he wrote, while we may be extremely opposed to President Trump's order to close our borders to certain countries, we must take great caution that our opposition to his policies doesn't turn into opposition to him. As Christians, we must learn to separate the president's actions from his position.

We may be opposed to his actions, but we must never lift our words against his character or his position.

To do so is very displeasing to God.

I am not for President Trump. I disagreed with some of his positions when he was campaigning, and I'm sure I will find myself in disagreement with him many times over the next four years.

Neither am I against President Trump. I am for God.

And because I am for God, I will do all I can to please God.

I will stand for truth every time, even when it brings me opposition:

- I will stand for biblical values.
- I will stand for family values.
- I will stand for moral values.

I stand for God, not for man.

And because I stand for God, I cannot raise my words against any man, his person or his character.

No, a Christian should not criticize the president. He may criticize a president's actions, but a Christian should always hold honor and value of a president's position and character in his heart.

For it is God who made him rise to that position. And God will honor those who honor their authority. {eoa}

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Strengthen Your Marriage With This End-Times Principle

It may mean nothing to you, but my students having been eyeing this date on my dry erase board every day for the last two weeks, along with the ominous words "*examen acumulativo*." Feb. 22 is the day they have to walk into class and be able to translate, into Spanish, 80 sentences out of the 125 they've been studying.

The first two weeks of study were pretty chill, but when I announced on Tuesday, "Two weeks until the cumulative exam," I could see panic flicker across a few faces.

So it caught my attention yesterday when I read Tim Elmore's blog post, "Five Reasons Why Deadlines Are Lifelines for Students." He called deadlines a gift. My favorite two points he made were that deadlines create a very healthy sense of urgency and also help us to prioritize.

Which brings me to my crawl space.

Ah, you didn't even know I had a crawl space. It is mine alone, because both of my men are over six feet tall and beg me to retrieve things for them.

And do you know what I always think when I go down there after something? *What if I die and people come in here? What will they think of me?* Perhaps an extreme thought, but there you have it. So I have determined to clean out my crawlspace this winter. Really clean it out.

Yesterday I made my first trip to the thrift store, and I handed off quart jars that had been in the crawl space for years. There was a dead spider in one of them, which integrity says I should have cleaned out, but I did not. I hope someone at the thrift store is very, very brave.

Yesterday a friend sent me a link to a website called Organize 365, which only poured gasoline on the fire of my decluttering flame. Over my after-school snack, I listened to the host talk about how to manage adult trinkets. She said this as I looked at my substantial snowman collection.

Yesterday (I know I keep saying this, but all of these activities in the same day began to layer in my thinking, like phyllo dough and butter in a good baklava) –yesterday I was working on writing a Bible study in 1 Peter, and one phrase lodged itself in my brain:

...you are to conduct yourselves in reverence during this time of temporary residence." (1 Peter 1:17, HCSB)

This life is my temporary residence.

Peter gives a deadline:

The end of all things is near..." (1 Peter 4:7, MEV).

Mom and I were talking on the phone yesterday. (See? Yesterday was a big day in my soul.) Dad went to be with the Lord on Feb. 14, the same day my father-in-law went to be with the Lord 20-some years ago. So Mom and I we were sharing some quiet sorrow together. I was telling her how Dad's death was a transforming event in my marriage. Matt and I have a sweeter friendship and tighter love now, and I believe it's because we can feel the ever-present reality that we may not have tomorrow together. I'll come back to this thought in a second.

The crawl space isn't the only thing I've been tackling. Yesterday I had some filing to do and realized not one more paper would fit into the file drawer, so I spent the day cleaning out old files. I came across a few papers with my dad's handwriting on them.

"Did you keep them?" Matt asked.

"No," I said.

That brings me to my conclusion. We have a deadline. I haven't set out to be morbid, but I mean an actual deadline—a time coming when this life will end. And this deadline is a gift.

It creates a sense of urgency.

It helps me prioritize.

Jars filled with spiders, marriage, and papers with Dad's handwriting on them—how do I know what's important and how to live and what to keep and what to take to the thrift store?

The end of all things is near.

This one statement tells me to love my husband well today. It helps me make decisions in my crawl space. It loosens my grip on trinkets and tightens my grasp on what is valuable to God.

I pray for you now. May the Lord give you the gift of branding this deadline in your mind. May the reality of your temporary residence on this earth inform every decision you make in your home and every action you take in your relationships. May it create urgency in your heart and a sense of what is truly important in life.

Flee These 2 Hideous Joy-Killers

How long has it been since you felt joy?

I mean, real joy: not just a happy feeling, but a deep sense of satisfaction knowing that you are in the center of heavenly Father's will.

An unmistakable sense of His pleasure.

We don't lose our joy.

Joy can't be lost, the way we lose our keys or that \$5 bill that fell out of our pocket while we walked down the street.

Joy is not lost. You don't go to church on Sunday, get filled up with joy and then lose it somewhere between Sunday afternoon and Monday morning.

That's not the way it works. Joy is stolen, not lost. And joy is stolen when we leave an entryway in our life unprotected.

Joy cannot be taken away without our permission.

Just as no one can take away our possessions without our permission, there are things we often do that give the enemy an invitation to come and steal our joy.

When you leave your home or park your car, you lock your doors. Right?

You don't leave your home unlocked while you're gone.

You don't leave your car keys in the ignition.

This would be an invitation for someone to come and rob you. And it's the same way with the enemy of our souls. There are things we do to invite him to come and steal our joy.

If you're in a battle for your joy right now, you need to:

Lock your doors
Pull down the shutters
Pull up the moat
Put on your armor

When we feel joy has gone out of our lives, our first response should be to take a spiritual inventory, just as we would if we had discovered that we had been robbed.

We need to look at each area of our life to determine how the enemy gained entrance into our lives, and then we need to reinforce that weak area so he can't come back.

Two Things That Steal Joy in Our Lives

1. Disobedience

Disobedience is one of the most common ways the enemy steals our joy.

In this permissive society where authority figures are afraid to take a stand and demand adherence to rules, law and order,

we now have an entire generation to whom the word “obedience” sounds harsh, judgmental and legalistic.

This culture of rebellion has also seeped into the church.

Suddenly, God’s law is no longer the standard for most Christians; but rather, it is an evolving document subject to cultural norms and practices.

Over the past several generations, we’ve seen a slow drift away from the importance of obedience and the rewards it brings to our lives as believers. In its place, we have so minimized the importance of sin that we no longer see it as a serious matter that destroys our relationship with God and infects every area of our life until we no longer have a sensitivity to the Holy Spirit.

The enemy’s strategy is to steal, kill and destroy you. And one of the first ways he does this is by deceiving you into believing that disobedience isn’t a big deal.

Another word for disobedience is rebellion, and this is what God has to say about rebellion: “For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry” (1 Sam. 15:23).

If we want to live in the joy of the Lord, we must purpose in our hearts to live in obedience every day.

Does this mean we will never mess up?

No. Willful disobedience and unintentional sin are two different things, and in the Old Testament we see that there was a sacrifice for unintentional sin, while the punishment for willful disobedience was death.

While today there is no death penalty for willful disobedience, I do believe that when God’s people choose to willfully engage in sin, they invite death into their lives. They leave a door open to the enemy to come and work his

destruction of death in their hearts.

When Christians unintentionally sin or realize they have left the door open to the enemy through willful disobedience, they should humbly repent before the Lord and restore their relationship with Him.

2. Unforgiveness

I remember sitting on the couch in my mom's living room with tears running down my face. I was sharing with her my deep disappointment and disillusionment in ministry.

Ministry is hard.

Anytime you work with people it's hard, but there seems to be a greater expectation from people when you are in ministry. Some of that is well-founded, but sometimes the expectations are far too high, and the pressure to live up to those unrealistic expectations can leave a minister in a trap of failure and disillusionment.

But the real source of my depression wasn't that, it was unforgiveness.

The truth was that I had expectations of those around me that they hadn't fulfilled, and I was disappointed in them. Rather than admitting my own failure, I allowed that disappointment to turn into bitterness.

Unresolved hurt, disappointment or conflict doesn't just sit there. It gets infected; and when we fail to address that infection, it will fester and grow. Eventually it becomes a cancer that eats away at the very life of our spirit.

Jesus addressed this seriously when He said, "But if you do not forgive men for their sins, neither will your Father forgive your sins" (Matt. 6:15).

The book of Hebrews takes it a step further. "Pursue peace

with all men, and the holiness without which no one will see the Lord, watching diligently so that no one falls short of the grace of God, lest any root of bitterness spring up to cause trouble, and many become defiled by it" (Heb. 12:14-15).

We see here how bitterness "causes trouble" and defilement in our lives. It literally gives the enemy an open door to come in and poison our lives.

That's why Paul said, "Be angry but do not sin. Do not let the sun go down on your anger. Do not give place to the devil" (Eph. 4:26-27).

If we want to walk in abundant joy, we must purpose every day to forgive all who offend us. Big offenses. Small offenses. Every. Single. Time.

Live forgiving. This locks the door to the enemy and brings abundant joy of the Holy Spirit in our lives!

So let me ask you again: How long has it been since you felt joy?

Have you taken time to do an inventory of your spiritual life? Do you know how the enemy got in and robbed you of the joy that rightfully belongs to you as a child of God?

He has no authority to steal from you, unless you allow him to.

It's time to find the place of entry and lock it up! {eoa}

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them to be. You can also find her at Missional Call where she shares her passion for local and global missions. You can follow her on Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest and Google +.

A Holy Spirit-Focused Way to Make Decisions

Decision-making is no fun. Especially when the decisions we're struggling with could have life-changing or drastic repercussions, or at a minimum have lots of pros and cons to consider. That's why in my Proverbs 31 devotion running today, I shared about being frustrated with having so many important decisions to make, and how I found myself wishing God would just give me a big ol' neon sign from above so I'd know which direction to take. Or if not that, maybe a big fluffy cloud to follow like the Israelites had in Exodus showing them which way to go. If they could get a cloud, it seems only fair you and I could have one too, right?

I shared a few weeks ago on my blog about my personal situation, which has not only been a drain emotionally, but mentally, because I've had to make more hard decisions than ever before in my lifetime. It has not been fun. After all, who wants to finally make a decision (after a lot of stressing I might add), only to realize later it was a bad one, or at least not the best one that could have been made? I know I don't, and I dare say neither do you.

I believe that's why God brought the verse to my mind that says, "The Lord went before them by day in a pillar of cloud to lead them along the way: (Ex. 13:21a). As I stated in the devotion, instead of a cloud, I had a cloudy mind. I was so

worried about making a wrong decision that I couldn't make any decisions at all. I felt lost in a wilderness, much like the Israelites. But through that passage, God helped calm my heart and my mind by reminding me that even if I make a wrong decision, He'll still be by my side to teach and guide me through the journey.

I had to change my thoughts about my decisions and stop thinking and acting that things were in my control. Here's what I chose to do instead, and maybe these tips will help you transform your thinking as well, especially if you're facing some hard decisions today, too:

- I chose to pray, and ask God to help me stop stressing over not knowing the future. The future is in His hands, regardless of the decisions I make.
- I chose to stop stressing over whether my decisions were right or wrong and believe He would be with me either way.
- I chose to stop obsessing over worst-case or what-if scenarios and focus my energies and thoughts on the potential positives instead.
- I chose to remind myself not to think negatively every time one of those nagging, worrisome thoughts bubbled back up to the surface. Reject them; move on.
- I chose to trust God. Because that's really the only choice I have. He is in control, and I am not.

You see, I had to intentionally choose to change my thinking, otherwise my thinking would have changed me. We may not have control over our circumstances, or even the outcome of our decisions, but we always have control over how we think about them. Hard lessons learned during the writing of my next book, which I am praying will help you decide to choose to intentionally think positive too. {eoa}

Tracie Miles is a national speaker and author with the internationally known *Proverbs 31 Ministries* and has spent the

last 12 years inspiring women to live intentionally for Christ. She is the author of two best selling books, Your Life Still Counts: How God Uses Your Past To Create A Beautiful Future and Stressed Less Living: Finding God's Peace In Your Chaotic World. Her newest book is Unsinkable Faith: God-Filled Strategies for Transforming the Way You Think, Feel and Live (April 2017). She is a contributing author to the popular Zondervan NIV Women's Devotional Bible, and the Proverbs 31 Encouragement for Today Daily Devotional Book, in addition to being a monthly contributing writer for the Proverbs 31 Ministries Encouragement for Today daily devotions, which reach nearly one million people per day around the world with encouragement from God's Word. Tracie also holds the role as COMPEL Manager at Proverbs 31, has 3 children and lives in Charlotte, North Carolina. You can connect with Tracie on her blog at [and](#) all social media outlets.

Valentine's Day: The Secret Restoring Christian Marriages

While Valentine's Day has long become a commercial holiday about affection, flowers and chocolate, the story of Saint Valentine shows a more authentic love than the version Hallmark sells us today.

It is believed that Saint Valentine was executed by Emperor Claudius II in around A.D. 269 for refusing to denounce his faith in Christ.

This martyrdom is a real demonstration of what Paul is talking about in Ephesians when he says "Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for it"

(Eph. 5:25). As men, we are called to die to ourselves as we love our wives deeply.

Why do so many of us fail to live up to Christ's example?

The sad truth is that 68 percent of church-going men view pornography on a regular basis. Many Christian men will try to romance their partners this Valentine's Day, yet they will go and view pornography during the following month.

Pornography has been proven to have a devastating effect on relationships. Numerous studies show that men who view porn are more likely to enforce violent sex acts on their partner. To add to that, 56 percent of divorce cases show that porn played a role in the break up.

Many of these men are desperate for a way out. They've tried to stop but have failed at every attempt.

Men struggling with porn are dealing with high levels of shame and a sense of worthlessness. Chris Ogden, adults ministry pastor at Orlando's First Baptist Church, explains, "For a lot of guys who have struggled in the area of sexuality, the lie becomes This is just who I am. This cannot change. This will never go away. I might enjoy a week or a month [of sobriety] here or there but ultimately this is embedded in my soul, I can't get free of it."

Dr. Ted Roberts, host of the Conquer Series who has counseled thousands of men to freedom from pornography, discusses why so many people in the church can't stop viewing porn. Churches often treat this issue as a moral one, but fail to recognize it's mainly a brain problem.

"We tell men to try harder, pray harder, love Jesus more." Dr. Roberts adds. "But what starts off as a moral problem quickly becomes a brain problem. Telling a man to try harder is only tightening the 'noose' of bondage."

The good news is that there is a movement of men all around the world who are retraining their brains through the Conquer Series, learning to defeat porn and walk in freedom. Find out more.