

Dealing With the Pain of Broken Trust

In a mental “conversation” with someone who had knowingly let me flounder and fail in front of several hundred people, I exclaimed, “You’re a class-A jerk!” Being embarrassed and even humiliated can create some challenges with trusting people. Needless to say, I experienced some fallout trust challenges with this person—when trust in any relationship is platinum currency.

Once trust is betrayed, we do all kinds of things to shield ourselves from getting hurt or having to relive a painful experience. I was living this rerun yet again when the Holy Spirit reminded me how Jesus interacted with the Samaritan woman at the well in John 4:4-42.

Our Deepest Pain

It’s no surprise that the Samaritan woman was hyperprotective and even evasive when Jesus asked her for a drink of water. Jesus’ conversation with the Samaritan woman shows how He can redeem the deep scars and wounds from our own relationships and turn them into building blocks to make our relationships healthy and constructive.

From the outset, many of us live in a quiet and shared sisterhood with the Samaritan woman. At the beginning of the story, John tells us that Jesus had to pass through Samaria. But an upstanding Jew at this time in history would do everything to avoid going through Samaria. In fact, he would dodge the region entirely to protect his religious scruples. But defying convention and custom, Jesus goes through Samaria and sits down by a well around noontime, tired from His journey.

Interestingly enough, a woman comes at this time to draw

water, and Jesus engages her in seemingly innocent dialogue. In my thinking, since Jesus is God's Son and knows everything, He already has this conversation scooped in His mind, start to finish, and knows with whom He is talking. Before the conversation begins, Jesus knows the Samaritan woman with all of her warts and failures. Truth be told, most of us probably would have avoided chatting with such a person, knowing what Jesus knew about her—which brings us to an interesting observation.

This woman has come by herself to draw water when there's the least chance that anyone will be around. This is significant because it's out of character with our normal chick behavior. Consider that we are highly relational, even going to the restroom in pairs! This woman, on the other hand—although most of the women came with their water jars in the morning and evening—has come to the well at the least social time of the day. Perhaps this is why Jesus started the conversation with her asking for a drink of water, fully intending to dive into a robust and redeeming conversation with her.

The religious and social culture of this day was extremely strict on the interaction between men and women. In fact, most Jews believed that Samaritans were nothing less than second-class citizens for whom disdain, if not outright rejection, was the appropriate attitude. So when Jesus asked the Samaritan woman for a drink of water, He was defying both religious and social norms.

I'm grateful Jesus doesn't stay in our little airtight conventions or expectations of divine behavior. The truth is, you and I both need Jesus to defy and even obliterate the pious and divisive chasms we've developed as a result of hurt and trust betrayal—even if these maintain the appearance of religion and propriety. When our behavior isolates us from healthy interactions, it's high time for divine intervention, and this is exactly what Jesus means to do from the outset of His engagement with the Samaritan woman.

So our Samaritan woman asks in John 4:9, “How is it that You, being a Jew, ask a drink from me, a woman of Samaria?”

Based on her question, Jesus draws her deeper into an increasingly engaging dialogue. “If you knew the gift of God, and who it is who is saying to you, ‘Give Me a drink,’ you would have asked Him, and He would have given you living water” (John 4:10). The woman replies that He doesn’t have anything to use for drawing water from the well. Jesus then makes the conversation increasingly intimate, perpetuating their discussion with statements that evoke curiosity in her and more dialogue with Him—until there’s an abrupt halt.

When Jesus instructs the woman to go and call her husband, she suddenly clams up. “I have no husband,” she says. Before these four words, this woman has been relatively chatty, but clearly He has struck a raw nerve.

Jesus knew full well what He was doing when He brings up the husband topic. Whenever He starts to rummage around in our closet of skeletons, we often have the same reaction as the Samaritan woman. Everything is flowers and sunshine until He introduces shady subjects, painful experiences and hurtful memories. These remind us why we’ve isolated ourselves in the first place and chosen dysfunctional behaviors to deal with our struggles.

I am seriously grateful that Jesus steps right into the middle of the most painful places in our hearts and brings His light, healing and love to our broken and dysfunctional garbage. Here is where Jesus’ conversation with the Samaritan woman gets super interesting. He agrees that she doesn’t have a husband, that she has had five husbands and that the man she is with currently isn’t her husband. Talk about skeletons in the closet! Jesus is exposing her deepest and most painful secret, which is also likely why she is collecting water by herself, in dysfunctional isolation.

The woman quickly tries to change the subject and talk about religion, which could be a good deflection for the average Jewish man—except that Jesus isn't average by any stretch of the imagination. Nevertheless, He goes down the rabbit trail with her.

Jesus' Deepest Secret

At this point in the conversation, Jesus does something altogether spectacular, which we often overlook. In congruent revelation with the woman's dysfunction and brokenness, Jesus shares His own deepest secret with this damaged woman, possibly before He tells anyone else. She says, "'I know that Messiah is coming' (who is called Christ). 'When He comes, He will tell us all things'" (verse 25). He replies, "I who speak with you am He." Not only does Jesus expose the woman's deepest pain and failure, but He exposes His deepest identity with her, declaring to this Samaritan woman that He is the long-expected Messiah and prophesied Savior of the world.

This idea leaves me undone—that Jesus would organize His itinerary to "accidentally" bump into a broken and dysfunctional woman not only to convey He is not put off or repelled by any of her dysfunction, pain, neediness or brokenness, but also to divulge His true identity. Most of us would avoid someone like this, justifying our behavior since we can't let someone suck the life out of us or bleed us dry with endless needs. Not Jesus. In fact, He takes engagement to the next level by revealing His true identity.

So how does she respond to such vulnerability and transparency? She leaves her water jug at the well, rushes into town, finds the men (a few of whom she may have been married to) and exclaims, "Come and see a man who told me everything I ever did." There's no more isolation in her behavior. In fact, she piques everyone's curiosity to meet the nonconformist man about whom she speaks.

So the town turns out to see who this guy is. Long story short, everyone in the town becomes a follower of Jesus—all out of one simple conversation about a drink of water.

So consider a few takeaways to apply:

1. Let Jesus talk with you about those memories and experiences in your heart that carry so much pain, causing you to make dysfunctional and unwise decisions.
2. Let the reality of who Jesus is sink into and infuse your soul—redeeming, repairing and renovating your mindset, conversations and relationships.

In the experience I described at the beginning of this article, I was tempted to isolate myself from this person who had lost my trust. But as the Holy Spirit reminded me of the Samaritan woman, I brought my pain and betrayal to Jesus, giving Him permission to talk me through the experience for outcomes of redemption and not dysfunction.

Do you want to increase your intimacy with Jesus? Be sure to allow the Holy Spirit access to your treasury of trust!

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