

The Biblical Way God Wants You to Process Pain

“Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted” (Matt. 5:4).

For many years I wondered what this verse meant. I used to think that God wants us to feel bad for all the sin in the world and walk around depressed or sad all day. But now I believe this verse has to do with the need for us to fully face and deal with those things that hurt us. Only those who fully enter into this process of grieving over wrongs done to them, or for sin, will ever be able to process their pain to the point where they can be comforted by God.

“To mourn” means to grieve or lament something—the process through which you allow yourself to feel a heavy emotional burden or pain while you deal with a loss or emotional wound. This is different from a pity party or clinical depression; this is actually the opposite of feeling sorry for yourself, since in mourning you are open to reality and God’s inner dealings of the heart. But when you feel sorry for yourself, you actually mitigate against the workings of God in your soul, hindering growth in the process of pain and grief.

The Jews of the Old Testament understood what it meant to fully comprehend and process pain. They used to walk around dressed in sackcloth and would throw ashes on their heads. After Jacob died, they mourned his passing with heavy lamentation for seven days (Gen. 49:10). When Moses died, the nation of Israel mourned 30 full days (Deut. 34:8). This was not just done after someone passed away, but when they were grieved by something or someone, or when they repented for sin (Matt. 11:20-21; Jonah 3:4-10). Nowadays, we continue to sin as if it were nothing—since we refuse to feel the pain of God’s heart and suffer with Him for our actions. When we do

not fully face what we are doing wrong, we continue to perpetuate evil deeds!

At least 25 percent of the Psalms are made up of lamentations. For example, Psalm 22 is a prophetic song about how Jesus would be treated and how He would feel emotionally for what people did to Him. Psalm 51 is a whole song about godly sorrow; David was a man after God's heart because he knew how to process and face the guilt he felt, and he knew how to feel pain for hurting God and His people. There is even a whole book written by Jeremiah called Lamentations. Second Corinthians 7 teaches us that godly sorrow leads us to repentance. David wrote a song that he commanded Israel to sing regarding the loss he felt due to the death in battle of King Saul and his son Jonathan (2 Sam. 1).

Jesus: Our Example for Mourning and Facing His Pain

Jesus was in touch with His emotions. He was angry and grieved at the hardness of the hearts of the religious leaders (Mark 3:5). He greatly rejoiced in the Spirit (Luke 10:21). He groaned within Himself and was troubled (John 11:33-35). He was moved with compassion when He healed people (Mark 1:40-44). Jesus was openly sorrowful, even to the point of death when He was in the Garden of Gethsemane: Matthew 26:36-39 says, "Then Jesus came with them to a place called Gethsemane and said to the disciples, 'Sit here while I go and pray close by.' He took with Him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee and began to be sorrowful and troubled. Then He said to them, 'My soul is very sorrowful, even to death. Wait here, and keep watch with Me.' He went a little farther, and falling on His face, He prayed, 'O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me. Nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will.'"

Jesus and Lazarus: John 11:33-36 says, "When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her weeping, He groaned in the spirit and was troubled. He said, 'Where have you laid

him?' They said to Him, 'Lord, come and see.' Jesus wept. Then the Jews said, 'See how He loved him'."

Sometimes I feel awkward when a person, especially a female, starts weeping! Jesus didn't. He fully knew how to enter into someone else's pain!

Jesus wept over Jerusalem: Matthew 23:37-39 says, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those who are sent to you, how often I would have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you would not! Look, your house is left to you desolate. For I tell you, you shall not see Me again until you say, 'Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord.'"

Unlike spiritual leaders and Christians, Jesus did not just move on when people didn't progress in their faith with God.

Jesus was called a man of sorrows and was acquainted with grief. This doesn't mean He was depressed or filled with self-pity but rather that He was filled with grief because He entered into the suffering of others.

How We in America Process Pain

In America, we are taught to just suck it up and keep going without dealing with things. Everything in this generation is instant and superficial. Most relationships are an inch deep and a mile wide, even marriages! Most spouses don't even know their mate the way they should, and most Christians have friendships that are only based on connecting in the context of a lot of people and activity.

Even after a loved one passes away, we are taught to mourn only three days! Jesus said it was a blessed thing to mourn. It is a healthy thing to not only contemplate and mourn the loss of a loved one, but it is also healthy to fully process what happens when someone hurts you, sins against you or when a friendship is broken.

Mourning Is Necessary for Spiritual and Emotional Health and Maturity

You have to fully face and evaluate when someone hurts you, and fully face how it made you feel in order for you to fully release and forgive that person and progress forward to spiritual maturity. Moving forward in relationships without fully facing your own pain and the hurt others have inflicted upon you will enable their ghosts to continue to haunt you. This then causes invisible people (those from your past who still influence you negatively and constitute your emotional baggage) to trigger leakage in your later years that will come out negatively in all other meaningful relationships. Truly, hurt people hurt people.

When we move on too quickly, we don't even know ourselves. We don't even understand all the hidden, negative thoughts, unresolved emotions and pain that are still motivating us today! Often, there are songs, neighborhoods, smells, colors and even images, authority figures and events that can trigger great pain, depression and vast mood swings in each of us—and we don't consciously understand why. It is because of how those memories are connected to a person or symbol that you have unresolved issues with.

Case in point, I remember one day after I saw a baseball movie with my wife for my birthday (*The Natural*, with Robert Redford) that I became depressed and in a bad mood. At first, I didn't understand why, but then I realized that the movie reminded me of my dream as a kid to become the center fielder for the New York Yankees and finally, at the age of 25 in the early 1980s, I was finally facing the fact that this particular dream would never be fulfilled! I should have resolved this when I was 13 and a doctor told me that I could never make sports my living because I had a bad case of bursitis or "sand on the knee," which would cause me to limp in great pain after a few months of playing organized baseball.

Also, a few years ago, I went on a very long fast for one of my children. It was only recently that I realized this juice fast was really triggered because I was fully facing and mourning the backslidden state of one of my older children.

How to Comfort in Mourning Is to Release and Forgive the Invisible People in Our Lives

In John 20:23, Jesus says, "If you forgive the sins of anyone, they are forgiven them. If you retain the sins of anyone, they are retained." Sometimes I will almost be paralyzed for hours because I have learned that I cannot go on with my life until I fully evaluate what others have done to hurt me, my response to that hurt, including honestly assessing how their action made me feel, and then, either speaking to them in person to resolve it or just dealing with it before God and forgiving them without meeting with them. I have been doing this for years. This process is perhaps the greatest reason why I have survived in Christian leadership for almost 40 years.

It is time for you to begin the process of emotional health in your life and in the key relationships around you. Begin now to forgive and release those who have sinned against you. Sometimes the greatest ghost in the room is you; you have to also learn to forgive and release yourself! Sometimes depression is caused by anger at yourself. Self-hatred is also very common. We need to release ourselves from failure if we are going to have a chance and go on with God!

The Wounded Healer Is Here to Heal Your Wounds

Finally, all the provision for both bodily and emotional healing has been provided for in the death, burial and resurrection of Christ. Isaiah 53:3-5 prophesied this about Jesus: "He was despised and rejected of men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. And we hid, as it were, our faces from him; he was despised, and we did not esteem him. Surely he has borne our grief and carried our sorrows; Yet we

esteemed him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was upon him, and by his stripes we are healed.”

May we all learn how to process pain honestly with the strength and grace of the One who was wounded so we can experience healing on the inside and outside.