

Guarding Our Wounds

✖ I love O'Reilly, my Jack Russell Terror—I mean Terrier. Her boundless energy and spunk keep me on my toes, and her mischievous antics make me laugh—even when I'm trying to discipline her. She is full of personality, possessing the spirit of a preschool toddler. I love that about her. That is until recently when something happened to temporarily change my appreciation of her *joie de vivre*!

I was released from the hospital after undergoing major surgery, and it felt good to be home. I slowly hobbled into the house; every muscle in my body was hurting. I grabbed my down comforter, wrapped it tightly around me like a burrito and began to melt beneath its warmth. Just as I had started to drift off into a nice sleep, I was abruptly awakened. The front door opened and a shot of lightning flashed by me. It was O'Reilly. She soared into the living room where I was nursing my wounds and skyrocketed right for me like a heat-seeking missile.

In an instant I assumed the fetal position to protect my fresh wounds. I felt vulnerable and her presence was a threat to the pain I was already experiencing. I didn't find her funny, amusing or cute in that moment. Instead she was dangerous and a potential inflictor of more damage! She was way too close to my pain—too near to the wound to be trusted, and I instinctively made a wall of protection around myself.

That's when the revelation came. *How similar is this to what we do emotionally and spiritually?* This experience in the natural gave me insight into what can happen to us in the emotional realm when hurt and pain has left us wounded and vulnerable. Instead of enjoying the life and zeal of those around us, we often tend to become avoidant, steering clear of human interaction.

I thought about Heather. She seems to be a nice and confident girl. She is able to communicate through writing and texting, but in person she completely withdraws. The message she broadcasts with her body language screams loudly, "Stay away from me!" She intentionally rejects any display of warmth in person, yet through writing she opens up.

I also thought of Brenda. She is shy yet friendly until the spotlight is on her. She coils up and walls off like Fort Knox. No way are you getting inside of her defense system!

What's wrong? Could it be these women are actually in secret duress? I have come to learn that emotional and spiritual pain is often misunderstood and hard to detect. We may think someone is being rude or anti-social, but in reality we may be getting too close to her wounds. Maybe a probing question, an invite for friendship or even a casual hello feels like a fearful and threatening intrusion to the one who is isolating herself, trying to recover from an emotional wound.

Instead of seeing caring individuals as a comfort, injured souls are afraid and threatened with the presence of someone who may come close enough to see through their defense system into their pain. Although the body of Christ is exactly what we need to heal, the truth is, when we are hurting we often curl up into an impenetrable ball of steel and isolate ourselves safely out of "harm's way."

In my case with O'Reilly, my protective mode was instinctive and needed to protect me from a deeper wound. But in many other cases this protective posture probably serves to only increase the pain since God has given us relationships as a way of becoming whole. Guarding the wound and withdrawing from others is seldom the way to find healing.

James 5:16 says: "Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective" (NIV, emphasis

added).

When we are willing to let our guard down and selectively and wisely allow someone into our pain and hurt, we are on our way to healing and wholeness. The prayers, counsel and encouragement we find as a result of sharing are powerful keys to freedom. God has made us to need one another—an indisputable fact no matter how uncomfortable it may feel to open up and become transparent! When we share the burden of our souls with another, we will find release and rest from the anxiety that secrecy and fear create. But we also fulfill the heart of Christ, who desires us to walk with one another in this life (see Gal. 6:2).

Now that my surgery wounds are healed, I am back to loving the life and energy I find in O'Reilly and I eagerly join in the relentless game of Frisbee. In that moment my soul smiles because healing has come and I am free to fully engage in life's adventures. This is what God has in mind for all of us—when we receive our emotional and spiritual healing, we will possess a soul smile, for once again we will fully and completely absorb life, enjoying the perfect love of God—which is also *relentless*!