

Let the Pain Go

Every woman has endured one kind of heartbreak or another. We've all had the unfortunate experience of betrayal, and we've grieved over the difficulty of getting past it. As Christian women, how do we process the hurts we go through? And where is our God in the midst of them?

In the book of 2 Samuel, King David's daughter Tamar suffered an unspeakable violation at the hands of her brother Amnon, who afterward, rejected her and cast her away. The Scripture says: "Tamar put ashes on her head and tore the ornamented robe she was wearing. She put her hand on her head and went away, weeping aloud as she went" (2 Sam. 13:19, NIV).

Imagine how this tragic scene might have played out. Tamar's weeping came from the depths of her soul and ran through the canyons of her entire being. Clutching her torn garments to her breast as if to reserve the last shreds of her dignity, she made her way across the courtyard.

The ashes with which she had covered herself were a silent witness to the stain of violation no tears could wash away. Nothing could. If she took a thousand baths, she would still feel unclean (see 2 Sam. 13:19).

Tamar was empty, spent, a prisoner of her own despair. She could still feel her half-brother Amnon's eyes glaring at her with intense hatred. Still hear his words ringing in her ears, "'Get this woman out of here and bolt the door behind her'" (2 Sam. 13:17). "This woman! This woman!" She had been deceived and raped, but being reduced to just another woman in her half-brother's eyes was more than she could bear.

The sounds of her suffering carried on the wind, drawing the attention of her brother Absalom. He came bounding from his house to see what had so devastated her. Absalom said to her: "'Has that Amnon, your brother, been with you? Be quiet now, my sister; he is your brother. Don't take this thing to heart.' And Tamar lived in her brother Absalom's house, a desolate woman" (2 Sam. 13:20).

She felt so ashamed as she shared her plight with him. Would he blame her for this? Would he say that she had done something to entice Amnon? The thought of his name caused her to shiver in repulsion.

She thought Amnon liked her. She had caught his gaze many times when he did not avert his eyes quickly enough to conceal his longing. It was inconceivable that he had such evil intentions

toward her. Though they did not share the same mother, the blood of their father, David, joined them together in a familial bond that could not be ignored.

Now it was too late. Amnon's "love" had changed to hatred. As a matter of fact, he hated Tamar more now than he had ever loved her. Now he cast her aside carelessly, as if he had never known her at all.

Now where could she turn? Who would come to her defense? No one had been present to hear her cries, to witness this travesty. Absalom could only clumsily comfort her by suggesting that she should not take this matter to heart.

Though Absalom did not accuse her, his attempts to calm her did not repair her shredded soul. How could she not take it to heart? The inner core of her being had been brutally invaded. Her very soul had been ravaged and left for dead.

Yes, a part of Tamar had died that day. It did not come back to life when, after several years, Absalom avenged her by killing Amnon. His death could not console her devastated heart. And as she wandered the halls of Absalom's house, day in and day out she resigned herself to believing that only the night and her dreams would give her relief from the desolation that had taken up residence within her.

HURTING PEOPLE, HURT OTHERS

Men are mandated by God to treat the women in their lives with respect and honor. They are called to protect and cover us. However, the heart of fallen man does not always heed the call of the Spirit. When flesh rules, men and women alike fall prey to selfishness, impulsiveness, impatience, lust, covetousness, manipulation, strife and every evil work.

The cycle of violation that follows sinks the soul into deeper and deeper depravity, wreaking more and more destruction on others not aware of the pain of the offender. Whether it is an abusive mother that builds fury in the heart of a young man, a father with a perverted sense of affection toward his young daughter, or some other past relationship or painful incident, no one knows the motivation of one who violates and damages another person's heart, body or spirit.

There is no such thing as a small or insignificant violation or offense. One cannot compare violations to rationalize which will cause less or greater damage. The bottom line is the pain is a large reality to the person who has been victimized. To try to explain away the pain or attempt to put it in any type of context is to demean the one who is already struggling to make sense of the occurrence.

Though the pain is the same, the circumstances can be different. One can be raped emotionally as well as physically. A person's heart can be violated by the misinterpreted motives or deceptive actions of another. The wound can sometimes be deeper than if a physical act had been involved.

Ruptured trust can give birth to fears that can grow and overwhelm its victim. In their mind, a thousand "whys" remain unanswered. There may never be a visible rhyme or reason behind actions of abuse, rape, betrayal, emotional battery or adultery. Emotional devastation can go deeper than physical abuse, simply because it can be more difficult to locate the source of suffering in order to deal with it.

Neither party walks away unscathed by these painful encounters. Regardless of what the eyes see, both people pay; both lose pieces of themselves. Those who inflict pain on others are usually weaker than those they violate and have no knowledge of how to extract themselves from the prison of anger and pain they find themselves bound in.

The antagonist who never suffers the consequences of their actions comes to believe that there are none. Which in the end only serves to increase their pain because their abusive behavior is a cry for help.

However this knowledge is usually lost on the victim who is trying to recover from her assault. Both the perpetrator and the victim become people with the potential to hurt others over and over again until the root of their anger is addressed and done away with. Such is the cycle of unresolved pain. Yet the power of God's healing is always available.

RECOVERY IS NEAR

In order to embrace the One who comes with healing arms to comfort us, we must first extricate ourselves from the offense. We will never forget the experience, but we must choose to understand (this does not mean justify) and forgive the one who has wronged us. If we allow ourselves to become prisoners of unforgiveness and bitterness, we are sentenced to live a life of seclusion, self-loathing and hopelessness.

How do you begin to forgive someone who has hurt you? Do you begin sifting through your pain to find the one grain of rationale that could excuse the other person's behavior? Sometimes there is none. What does one do then?

We have all heard that hurt people hurt other people, and this is a fact that is resoundingly true. It must also be noted that if someone truly loves you, they would never seek to hurt you on purpose. Yet, loved ones do offend, they do jolt us emotionally, shock us, dismay us and

sometimes even violate us through shattering the things that are nearest and dearest to our hearts.

Your body, your mind and even your self-esteem can be dealt a blow from which you feel you will never recover, but recovery is just a choice away.

The gift of free will that God gave to us is more powerful than we know. Many of us have not exercised the greatest reaches of its capacity to bounce back, overcome and even forgive. Forgive even when you are right and the other person is wrong.

The truth is that forgiveness has nothing to do with who is right or wrong. Forgiveness is a free agent. It is not attached to reason or agreement or even understanding. It is however attached to wholeness and to your healing and liberation.

Unforgiveness is a prison. It slams the door on new beginnings and entrenches you in your present pain. It chains the heart and stops it from beating. It suffocates joy and paralyzes your ability to move on. Unforgiveness is the cancer of the soul. It slowly eats away the marrow of your existence and impairs your judgment, your personality and your ability to love again.

The desire to want to hurt the person who hurt you can be overwhelming. We want them to feel the torture we think they deserve. "How can he act as though nothing ever happened?" We ask. "It's not fair! Where is God in all this? Is there no justice!"

Yes, there is justice. But justice comes only after we have released our offender into the hands of the One who is solely in the position to judge.

RELEASE THE OFFENDER

Only God knows both sides of the story. The fears, the past wounds, the generational conditioning, the weaknesses, the insufficiencies of character and integrity. He knows the things that we failed to notice—the things that should have warned us to guard our hearts.

Only God knows the hidden motives and unspoken regrets of the one who hurt you—their sickness, their brokenness. The assumptions we make usually do more damage than the truth:

"He doesn't even notice how much he hurt me!"

"How could he be so cold?"

"How could they just ignore my cries for help and walk away?"

“Doesn’t anyone see my pain?”

Our imaginations can be unmerciful. Trust me, it’s never what you think. Your guesses will always be more cruel than the reality of what really transpired, adding unnecessary injury to insult.

You must let it go. You need to forgive, not for the sake of the one who hurt or violated you—for your own. It’s time to redirect your focus and move on. And you won’t be able to do that if you continue to nurse and rehearse your anger, the many wrongs done against you, all the reasons why.

If you can’t forgive for your own sake, forgive for God’s sake. He needs your hands open in order to bless you. Cooperate. The one who wronged you does not deserve so much of your time, energy or attention. Your fixation is standing in the gap between that person and God, shielding him from conviction. Move out of the way. Free him to receive the proper correction from God. Free yourself to receive your healing.

Forgive because you need to be forgiven. How can you expect what you are unable to give yourself! Forgive my dear sister, because you are not alone. We have all been prisoners of our unspoken pain and suffering. So come and join us on the other side.

Choose to forgive because it is what God requires of you, and it is what is best. He will help you to forgive from your heart and not just from your head. Ask Him for strength to release your offender, for to release him (or her) is to release yourself.

Trust God to free you from your anger and your pain and from all the questions that continually assault your mind. Let Him speak words of comfort to you and assure you that He has taken heed to the things that have transpired. Although you may never forget what has happened, He will enable you to forgive even as He has forgiven you.

Michelle McKinney Hammond is the author of several books on relationships. Portions of this article were adapted from her book *Release the Pain, Embrace the Joy* (Regal).