

Why You Should Never Bury Your Pain

Recently the Lord gave me a specific word of knowledge as I was finishing a sermon in a church. The Holy Spirit showed me, through a strong impression, that there was a woman in the crowd who struggled with serious, ongoing depression.

I knew this woman felt as if she were trapped in a dark box of emotional pain. I also sensed that the heaviness was causing sleep problems. So I shared all of this from the podium.

I don't expect people to raise their hands and admit their struggles publicly in situations like this. Sometimes God just wants the person to know He is there, and He understands. But in this case, a woman who fit this exact description came to me after the service ended. She was shy and tearful.

She told me that she immediately froze when I shared the word of knowledge. Shame and fear paralyzed her. Yet she knew God was calling her out of that box.

I made her feel safe and gently asked her to share her experience. Her life was marked by painful abuse—including physical violence from a former husband. And, sadly, she had never asked a trusted Christian friend to pray for her. Intimidation and guilt kept her in a prison of pain.

I was not only able to pray for her, but I connected her with a woman from the church who is trained in biblical counseling and healing prayer. They exchanged numbers and scheduled a time to meet. I'm thrilled that a victim of abuse found freedom that day. But I'm also sad because I know that so many people in this woman's situation have still never told one human soul about their inner turmoil.

I can't count how many times people have opened their hearts

and told me horrible things they endured in life—sexual abuse, abandonment by a parent, bullying or physical violence—and then they admit, “I’ve never told anyone about this until today.”

If you have endured some form of trauma or abuse, or if you are holding on to a painful secret that you’ve never shared, please take this as the strongest hint possible that you need to open your heart and ask for help.

Ever since Adam and Eve hid their nakedness from God, human beings have been looking for creative and deceptive ways to hide their sin and shame. The Bible describes our hearts as both “hard” (Zech. 7:12) and “deceitful” (Jer. 17:9). We would rather pretend that we have it all together than to admit we have a weakness. And if we experienced something shameful or traumatic, our tendency is to bury the memory—either because we think it was our fault, or because we fear people will reject us if they know what happened.

But closing your heart is never healthy. Even secular counselors will tell you that living in denial of a painful experience will create further emotional problems. Toxic emotions, if locked inside you, will build up like a pressure cooker. The dark goo of anxiety, fear, anger or unforgiveness will become like a fermented poison in your soul—and it can cause mental anguish, headaches, chronic pain, stress, lack of energy, nightmares and even disease.

James 5:16a (NASB) says: “Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another so that you may be healed.” The “sins” here can be either sins we committed or sins that were committed against us. (Of course abuse is not the victim’s fault, but in either case, transparency is crucial.) God didn’t create us for isolation, and our hearts shouldn’t require a padlock to open. To be emotionally healthy you must learn to process your pain with someone who cares.

I experienced sexual abuse when I was just a boy of seven, and I never told anyone about it until I was 19. For all those years I stuffed my feelings and pretended to act normally, even though I was limping and bleeding inside. Thankfully a load of shame was lifted off of me when I shared my painful burden with a trusted friend and counselor. Waves of healing followed. The devil could no longer use that embarrassing incident to taunt me. I was free.

If you are haunted by any form of painful trauma, be assured that God wants to heal you. Don't limp through life, pretending that your pain isn't real. Be honest. Unlock your heart. Let your guard down. Let the tears flow. Be willing to trust a mature Christian to pray with you. Vulnerability is the key to your deliverance. {eoa}

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