

Words Hurt—But God Can Heal Your Damaged Soul

When I first met my friend “Guillermo,” he couldn’t make eye contact. I knew he had suffered a lot of abuse because he always held his head down. When I asked him about it, he told me his angry father often called him names and scolded him continually.

I once prayed for a woman named “Paula” who felt unwanted because her parents told her she was a “mistake.” Another young man I know, “Sean,” was constantly teased by classmates because he struggled with his weight. Even though he found salvation in Christ as a young adult, he considered suicide more than once because he felt so bad about himself.

I meet people constantly who are bleeding inside because of verbal abuse. Some struggle with a physical or learning disability; others are insecure about their appearance; others were bullied, and the cruel words they heard on a playground were seared into their brains with a hot iron. In each case they were teased, taunted or branded failures.

I’ve heard some preachers say, “Oh, just get over it. Everybody deals with negative words.” It’s true that name-calling and verbal abuse is common. But it’s not easy for people to overcome the trauma it causes. It’s the reason many people are addicted to alcohol, drugs or prescription medicines. Soul pain is real.

What about you? Do you find it difficult to describe your positive qualities? Did your parents, siblings, teachers, classmates or even a spouse pin hurtful labels on you—such as “stupid,” “fatso,” “loser,” “lazy,” “queer,” “sissy” or worse? Words, like knives, can leave permanent scars. Verbal abuse can trigger shame, inferiority and depression. If this is

hindering your relationship with God and others, consider taking this journey toward healing:

1. **Realize you are not alone.** The Bible is full of stories of insecure people who ended up doing heroic things. Sarah was barren, yet God called her a mother of nations. Moses was a stutterer, yet God called him to confront Pharaoh. Gideon thought he was the weakest in his family (see Judges 6:15), but he became a warrior. David was an embarrassment to his father—probably because he was born outside of marriage. If you feel inferior, you are in good company!
2. **Bury the lies you've believed.** False beliefs will not collapse without a fight. You must identify the lies you believe about yourself, and then renounce them. This is not something you can do alone; you must be willing to talk about your inferiority with a counselor, a pastor or trusted friends.

When I was in my 20s, I asked two friends to pray with me because I felt inferior. This deep insecurity made me shy and fearful, but I wanted to be confident so that I could grow spiritually and discover my calling. That prayer session put me on a path toward full-time ministry. I would have stayed in my prison of insecurity if those men had not helped me see that God had something important for me to do with my life.

3. **Confess your new identity.** Gideon felt like a failure when the angel of the Lord said: "The Lord is with you, O valiant warrior" (Judg. 6:12, NASB1995). At that point, Gideon was looking around and wondering, *Who is this guy talking to?* He did not believe he was a warrior! Yet God redefined Gideon's identity and eventually changed his name to Jerubbaal, which means (my paraphrase) "The devil is in trouble."

But it is not enough to simply believe in your heart. You must boldly proclaim who you are now. Joel 3:10 declares: "Let the

weak say, 'I am a mighty man.'" You must say it! If you were told you are a failure, say: "I am more than a conqueror." If you were told that you are fat and ugly, say: "I am my beloved's, and His desire is for me" (Song 7:10). This might be a difficult exercise, but make a list of your good qualities. God has blessed you in ways you don't realize.

- 4. Stop comparing yourself with others.** At the core of sinful human nature is the desire to have what isn't ours. That's why one of the commandments God gave Moses was "Do not covet" (see Ex. 20:17). We live in a culture that celebrates perfect beauty, athleticism, youth, celebrity and wealth—and our media constantly reminds us of what we don't have by bombarding us with images of "perfect" people.

Don't let those photoshopped idols control you! Social media doesn't set the standard for us—God does. Instead of focusing on what you aren't, celebrate who God made you to be. If I had spent my life lamenting the fact that I wasn't a talented athlete or a savvy businessman, I would have never discovered the unique talents God gave me.

- 5. Be filled with the Holy Spirit.** You can never overcome worthlessness and inferiority in your own strength. It is the Holy Spirit who changes us. Just as He convicts us of sin and purifies our motives, He also strips away the lies we have believed about ourselves and heals us from the abusive words that crippled us. Ask Him to fill you so full that those lies can't hang around any longer.

If your soul has been abused by hateful words, say this prayer now:

"Lord, You are more powerful than any label that has ever been put on me. I renounce the lies I've believed about myself. I'm not weak; I'm strong in You. I'm not stupid; I have Your

wisdom. I'm not worthless; You died on the cross to redeem me. Thank You that because I'm in Christ, I'm a new creation. I'm not bound by my old identity—I have a new identity in Jesus. Help me to see myself the way You see me—as Your beloved child and as a powerful, anointed, gifted disciple. Amen.” {eoa}

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