

Healing Spiritual and Emotional Wounds
Presentation for Women's Meeting
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25 September 2006

My purpose in coming before you tonight is to offer you information that has benefited me and I believe will benefit you in your relationship with God and with others.

My oldest son told me Friday that "life is a tragedy for the emotional and a comedy for the thinker." You see, in his experience, emotional people or "emos" are wounded people for whom this world has handed painful tragedy one after the other and the only way to find the humor is to use your brain but not your heart. How many of you have learned that same lesson? This keeps us from connecting with each other and with God in a real, deep, meaningful way.

The following are *some* of the events that wound us and manifest themselves in our physical, spiritual, and emotional lives:

- Death of a child
- Sexual abuse
- Abortion
- Unfaithful spouse
- Unfaithful friend
- Abusive spouse
- Parents' divorce
- Incest
- Physical abuse
- Childhood neglect
- Rape
- Name-calling (you know... sticks and stones may break my bones but words can permanently harm me.)

In addition, there are lies we believe that keep us in chains:

- I must hide the depth of my pain.
- To forgive means I must cover my pain or pretend it isn't there.
- God really is as our distorted vision of Him.
- I am too bad to be forgiven or healed.

On top of that, there are things we have heard from ministers or well-meaning friends such as:

- Count your blessings, you still have fill in the blank (your health, other children)
- It's time to cheer up and get on with life
- If you don't keep the secret you could hurt fill in the blank (parents, church)
- You don't need therapy
- Get your life right with God and you won't have these problems
- Christians shouldn't get depressed

All of this can leave the wounded feeling like there is no hope, no peace, and God must be awfully far away from someone like me.

However, there is hope!

Most of what I have to say to you tonight is inspired by the book, *Door of Hope* by Jan Frank. This book is specifically for the healing of victims of childhood sexual abuse but I believe the process is relative to all woundedness. The needs she addresses and the steps to healing are her work. The examples are mine unless specified otherwise.

A quote from Jan Frank with which I identify is:

“For it has been, through the PAIN that I’ve known His PEACE,
through the HEARTACHE I’ve embraced His HEALING,
and through the VALLEY I’ve discovered His VICTORY.”

Jan goes on to say, “I believe emotional recovery occurs over a period of time. It’s not that the Lord doesn’t have the ability to heal us instantly. He does. I have found, however, that He often uses a process of time for our instruction and renewing. It is similar to our coming to know Christ. Although we are instantly new creatures in Him, we are in the process of being ‘conformed to the image of his Son’ (Rom 8:29) throughout our lives.”

Having my life transformed from physical, spiritual, and emotional torment into a life of healing and true joy was not so much about addressing the sexual abuse in my past as it was a journey to discover a meaningful relationship with God. His desire to make me whole is constantly reshaping my life and so the journey is not done.

Let’s take a look at what are the needs of those who are hurting, and the specific goals to use when trying to help them.

Isaiah 58:12 says, “And they that shall be of thee shall build the old waste places: thou shalt *raise up* the foundations of many generations; and thou shalt be called, The *repairer* of the breach, The *restorer* of paths to dwell in”

So we see the three needs of the hurting and the three goals of those who would help are to:

Raise the wounded up
Repair their broken and shattered lives
Restore them to a healthy path

Let’s examine what that means in practicality.

To *Raise up*:

The Hebrew translation is “to help to lift up, establish, strengthen, confirm, or authenticate.” Think about those words and ask yourself, “When I see someone is showing signs of woundedness, can I help to lift them up in prayer and even literally pick them up? Can I help to establish them in a firm foundation? Can I help strengthen them, like the Holy Spirit does? Can I confirm their value to me and to God? Can I authenticate them, validating their worth?”

To *Repair*:

The Hebrew translation is “to walk in or around, to close up, hedge or enclose.” That makes me think of a hedge around a yard or garden, meant to protect and offer a sense of shelter. I also thought of how a bandage over a wound offers protection and allows the wound to safely heal. Ask yourself, “Can I offer that kind of an environment to someone who is hurting?”

To *Restore*:

Now there is a word we in the *Restoration* should be quite familiar with. The Hebrew translation is “to rescue, recover, retrieve, to bring back home again or cause to make to return.” Wow! I like that! So, ask yourself, “Can I bring someone who is hurting to the One who is able to restore them and heal them from the inside and out?”

Come to think of it, aren't these exactly what the wounded bride of Christ needs? To be raised up, repaired, and restored?

So, now that we have examined the need of the wounded and the goal of those who would help, let's look at how this can be done.

According to Jan Frank, the ten steps to healing are:

- Step 1 Face the Problem
- Step 2 Recount the Incident
- Step 3 Experience the Feelings
- Step 4 Establish Responsibility
- Step 5 Trace Behavioral Difficulties and Symptoms
- Step 6 Observe Others and Educate Yourself
- Step 7 Confront the Aggressor
- Step 8 Acknowledge Forgiveness
- Step 9 Rebuild Self-Image and Relationships
- Step 10 Express Concern and Empathize with Others

In the first step, facing the problem, we cannot heal from that which we do not acknowledge. This is similar to the first step in Alcoholics Anonymous, which is to admit you have a problem. Weight problems, eating disorders, depression, chronic fatigue, headaches, addictions, and even frequent illness can be physical manifestations of a spiritual wound that needs your attention. If you are going through a combination of any of these, it is likely time you pray and ask God to reveal to you if you have wounds that need His healing. When He reveals these to you, be willing to face the problem.

The second step, recounting the incident, is giving voice to the cause of the injury. If you go to the doctor for a physical problem, you will be asked to tell as many details of the situation as you can remember so that a proper course of action can bring you the most benefit. It is no different with our spirit. After facing the problem, we then need to recount the incident either verbally or by writing it down. This dispels the secret our enemy uses to torment us and begins to allow the Lord to set us free.

After these two steps comes step three, experiencing the feelings. This is difficult. If you were not given the opportunity to express emotion at the time you were wounded you may have developed a pattern of shutting off your feelings. When you begin to really grieve for the baby lost or for the little girl who had no one to stick up for her, the tears may seem to never stop. You may feel like your eyes have turned into faucets. You may become angry. It is important to realize that feelings are not sinful. Feelings are without moral “right or wrong.” Now, how you act on your feelings can lead to sin, but let me make this clear, *feelings are not sinful*. It is not wrong to feel. Our Lord Jesus, when He walked this earth in flesh like us, felt pleasure, pain, sorrow, gladness, grief, love, and anger. If He did all this and did not sin, then we must give our heart permission to feel. We must experience the feelings in order for the Lord to bring us His healing.

Step four is to establish responsibility. Dr. Dobson in *Love Must Be Tough* states, “If there is anything that an adulterer does not need, it is a guilt-ridden mate who understands his indiscretions and assumes the blame for it. Such a person needs to be called to accountability, not excused by rationalization.” When we take responsibility for that which belongs to another we do two things: one, we keep them from facing their problem and going through the steps of repentance so that God can work in their life, and two, we keep ourselves in the bondage of their sin. The only One worthy to take upon themselves another’s sin is the Spotless Lamb. We get in God’s way of bringing redemption to us AND to the one who wounded us by carrying another’s guilt. It is important to recognize that abuse is always the *abusers* choice and NOT THE VICTIM’S FAULT. We must establish responsibility where it truly belongs for the Lord to bring healing to us and to them.

Step five is to trace behavioral difficulties and symptoms. To do this we must look at our current patterns of behavior, especially where it relates to our interpersonal relationships, and identify undesirable characteristics. Then we trace them back to where those behaviors originated. After establishing the origin, we replace the undesirable, unhealthy, or even destructive behavior with desirable, healthy, and *constructive* behavior. For instance...when my husband and I were first married, I was hyper-critical of everything he did to try to help me. I even *unkindly* told him the “right” way to stack dishes in the drainer. It was definitely interfering with the “harmonious bliss” of being newlyweds. So, where was all this hostility coming from? I traced the behavior to my father’s insisting when I was growing up that there was a “right” way to do everything, which was usually HIS way. As a child, I had resolved to always do things the “right” way so as to stay in his good graces. I transported that into adulthood and assumed my new husband would also want to do things the “right” way and treated him with the tender love of a drill sergeant. If I wanted some form of happiness at home and some help with the house work, I was going to have to accept that there could be more than one way to do something. After some practice and self-discipline, I did learn to trace the behavioral difficulties and symptoms and continue to get help with the dishes!

The next step, step six, is to observe others and educate yourself. For you to reach the point of healing you will need assistance. Contrary to Simon and Garfunkle, I am not a rock, I am not an island, and I do cry. What this means is that in order to reach where I am now, I have needed the help of others. I have watched how other fathers in our congregation love their daughters and their daughters' reaction to that fatherly love. I have watched how freely the other families touch and hold each other and how that seems to make them feel and bind them together. I have watched the sweetness in some couples' interaction with each other and felt the peace that lives in their home. Every person I have come in contact with has been as source of contemplation and study for me (the relationally challenged.) I have a great curiosity in observing the relationships of other people. In addition, I have sought the wisdom of others. I have attended workshops, classes, studies, and retreats, and most of all, I READ, A LOT. This process of observing others and educating yourself encourages you to reach out outside of a painful past and form healthy relationships and behaviors.

Step seven is to confront the aggressor. Why is this necessary? Shouldn't we just forgive and forget? Isn't that the "Christian" thing to do? Actually, confrontation is completely scriptural and necessary. Think of Nathan confronting David regarding Bathsheba, the Lord confronting Cain regarding Abel, or Jesus confronting the money changers in the temple. Also, forgiving and forgetting does not work because you only camouflage feelings of anger with a whitewash of "niceness." You become dishonest in your interaction with others. Confrontation motivates to action, benefits the offender, breaks the cycle of bad behavior. To confront means to bring face to face. Notice that steps one through six are about us individually. Here in step seven, the aggressor may be involved in a face to face way. However, if safety is an issue, or if the aggressor is deceased or unable to be located, it is possible to process through this step by role-playing in a counseling setting. It is important to remember that the purpose of this step is to actually place the responsibility on the rightful owner. It is also important to not rush TO this step or THROUGH this step. Remember your healing is not dependent on the aggressor's response. Confronting the aggressor does not mean to absolve the individual of consequences nor does it invalidate your feelings.

Step eight is to acknowledge forgiveness. For a reason I can not comprehend, we who profess to be the body of Christ, fail to allow the acknowledgement of pain as essential to forgiveness. Let me try that last part again. *Acknowledging pain is essential to forgiving*. The following is an example from *Door of Hope*:

"Suppose you find out from a friend that Gertrude Gossip, a woman from your Bible study, has been flagrantly revealing personal information you shared with her in confidence, distorting the information and placing you in an unfavorable light. You find out that she has done this all during your friendship with her the past three months. You are angry and hurt. You can't believe she would repeat these intimate conversations much less lie about the details. Yet when you see Gertrude you avoid her, smiling sweetly on the outside while you're seething on the inside. One Tuesday morning Gertrude approaches you. She tells you what she has done and genuinely asks for your forgiveness. You reply rather quickly, 'Oh, it's all right---it's no big deal. Let's be friends.' In your mind you are telling yourself you have done what 'good Christians do' --forgiving seventy times seven.

Several destructive elements are at work in this situation. First, there has been a total denial of the intense hurt and anger you experienced. By not acknowledging this hurt openly with Gertrude, you leave yourself wide open for the root of bitterness to spring up on your heart. By not telling her how her actions made you feel, you will have a tendency to distrust her every time you see her whispering to another woman. You will probably unconsciously maintain a distance between you for safety's sake. As Chuck Swindoll put it in a recent sermon, 'You will keep Gertrude on *probationary* status. She will never be fully forgiven, but you will subject her to a period of testing and trial to ascertain her fitness.'

The second destructive element is that of minimizing her actions. This may inadvertently reinforce what she had done. You invalidate her repentance. Think of how difficult it must have been for Gertrude to muster up the courage to confess her faults before you and ask you for your forgiveness. What do you think it does to her when you say, 'Oh, it's okay. It was no big deal. It didn't matter much to me anyway'? You may unknowingly nullify the work of the Holy Spirit in her life.

What would be the proper response to Gertrude's apology? You might approach it this way, 'Thank you, Gertrude, for coming to me. I was hurt and angry when I heard the things you were telling others about me. You betrayed my trust. I'd like to forgive you, but it will probably take some time. However, I'm willing to work toward forgiveness and restoration.' Do you see the difference? This interchange was real instead of superficial."

Oh, how I wish this was how we sisters would treat each other. Oh, how desperately we need to acknowledge forgiveness and allow each other to feel pain on the way to forgiving.

Step nine is to rebuild self-image and relationships. Josh McDowell in *His Image...My Image* defines healthy self-image as "seeing yourself as God sees you --- no more and no less." He compares our self-image to a three-legged stool defining our basic emotional needs as 1) The need to feel loved, accepted; to have a sense of belonging. 2) The need to feel acceptable; to have a sense of worthiness. And 3) The need to feel adequate; to have a sense of competence. If we base our self-image in only one area, our stool topples down. In my life, I became a "control freak" thinking that if I could prove myself competent, I would feel a sense of self-worth. However, this proved an unsustainable self-image because, ultimately, I can't control anything but my own attitude and the façade of competence masked my deep pain at feeling out of place and unacceptable. I had to replace my false beliefs about myself and my distorted image of God as a critical parent. I did *and still do* this, and you can as well by reading scriptures and accepting His image of you and seeing Him as He truly is. Restoring right relationships with others also takes practice and discipline. Sometimes, it is a sheer act of willing obedience. My faulty self-image and distorted image of God devastated my ability to have relationships that were meaningful and intimate. I had to learn new patterns of communication and relating to others. This is an area I will probably work on for the rest of my life but I have seen significant changes for the better. I have found that what I focus on becomes my view. I can either chose what is true, honest, just, pure, and lovely or I can chose what is critical and harshly judgmental. My focus becomes my feeling. The scriptures are a great tool in correcting our focus and so they are essential in rebuilding self-image and relationships.

The tenth and final step is to express concern and empathize with others. This takes our inward focus and moves it outward. This is what Paul was talking about in 2 Corinthians chapter 1, “Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the *God of all comfort*; Who comforteth us in all our *tribulation*, that we may be able to *comfort them which are in any trouble*, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God. For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also aboundeth by Christ. And whether we *be afflicted*, it is for your consolation and salvation, which is effectual in the enduring of the same sufferings which we also suffer; or whether we *be comforted*, it is for your consolation and salvation.” This is what I am doing here. I am reaching out to you to offer you the comfort by which Christ comforted me in my tribulation to bring His healing into my life. If Christ has expressed His concern for us and empathized with our suffering, we should all also express concern and empathize with others to show His great love.

So, there you have it; the ten steps in the healing process. Don't be in a hurry to get to step ten and skip steps along the way or only focus on the steps that come more easily. Each are important and not to be taken lightly. Be patient with yourself. This can be a process of years, depending on the injury. Just like a year-long *plus* recovery from a major surgery, spiritual wounds do not heal over-night.

Truly, Restoration is His redeeming work. Whether that is the restoration of one individual to another or the bride to her bridegroom, it all begins with the restoration of one child to the Holy Father. But He doesn't end there. Jesus came to set right all the relationships that are broken; with my Lord, my husband, my children, my church family, and even my self. He is reshaping my life. He is making me new. He is restoring unto me the years the locusts have eaten. He can *and will* do that for you.

For that which the Lord said he will do...He will do.

He that began a good work in you IS able to complete it.