

Helping Hurting People

Paradoxes in Helping the Hurting.

Pat answers given to comfort may only bring more pain.

Then Job answered and said, I have heard many such things: miserable comforters are ye all. Shall vain words have an end? or what emboldeneth thee that thou answerest? I also could speak as ye do: if your soul were in my soul's stead, I could heap up words against you, and shake mine head at you. (Job 16:1-4)

People who have suffered and found comfort are the best comforters.

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. (2 Cor 1:3-6)

Sometimes the best way to truly help someone is to hurt them more.

For though I made you sorry with a letter, I do not repent, though I did repent: for I perceive that the same epistle hath made you sorry, though it were but for a season. Now I rejoice, not that ye were made sorry, but that ye sorrowed to repentance: for ye were made sorry after a godly manner, that ye might receive damage by us in nothing. (2 Cor 7:8-9)

Where do we go for understanding about hurts?

We hear many voices on the subject of hurts and abuses today. Politicians and pundits try to make it sound like they have the true understanding on hurts. There are doctorate degrees given and entire careers built around people learning how to solve the problem of human hurts.

As Christians, we turn to the Bible. God's Word gives us the background story of how human experience has gotten as mixed up as it is. The Bible uses words like "sorrow", "travail", "suffering" and "affliction"

many times in human experience. In fact the New Testament Greek words for “comfort” and its forms occur 42 times, for “suffer” is also 42 times, and for “affliction” is 45 times. The Bible also gives us God’s answer for human hurts. We will raise some very common questions about “hurts” and “hurting people” and seek Bible solutions so we know we see the problem and the solution from God’s perspective.

The main theme of the Bible is that those who choose God’s way (and forego the pleasures of this world for pain) will find eternal reward. Those who avoid God’s answers and choose quick “fixes” or live in the pleasures of sins will reap eternal punishment.

Why do we as people have hurts?

There are a number of reasons why people hurt. The first we will consider is that *mankind is created in the image of God*. We share similar emotions. The Bible speaks about God’s love, but it also references His anger and His jealousy. He laughs at the foolishness of the wicked (Psalm 2) and sings for joy over the righteous (Zeph 3:17). It even says, “And it repented the Lord that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him at his heart.” (Genesis 6:6.) Our God suffers, He understands us when we suffer.

We also suffer because our parents chose to sin. In Genesis 3, in the same context where sin came into the world, God identifies sorrow and the suffering as being the new normal because mankind listened to Satan. We know the “whole creation groaneth” (Rom 8:22) because of this “fall”. Our own choices of sin only add to our involvement in what is already misery.

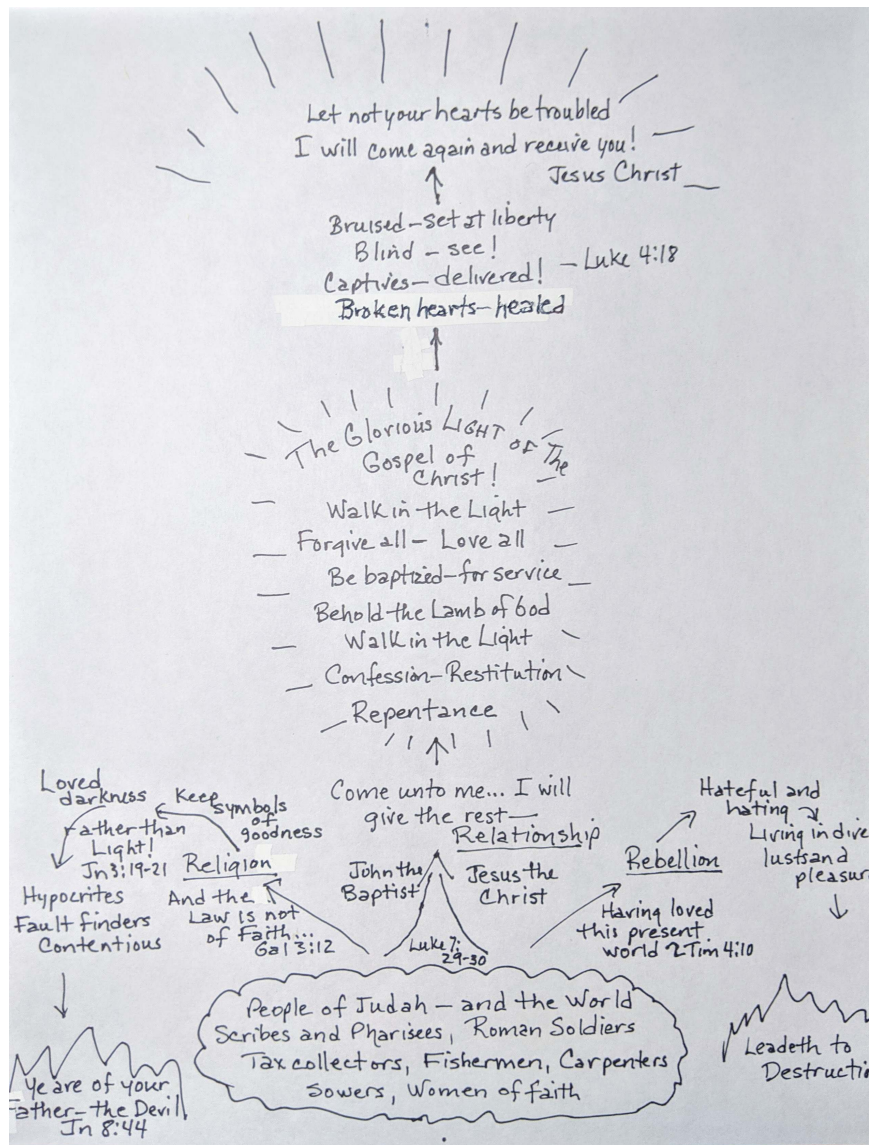
But God offers comfort to our misery. Jesus said, “*The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised,*” (Luke 4:18). We believe this will be fulfilled in its greatest dimension at “the times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began.” Acts 3:21

How can we find healing for our hurts?

Why then doesn’t all mankind experience this healing of having a broken heartedness?

The New Testament actually gives two reasons why men rejected John the Baptist and Jesus’ Gospel. On the one hand John 3:19-21 gives the

explanation of why the religious people rejected Christ. "And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved. But he that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God." There is no Gospel healing



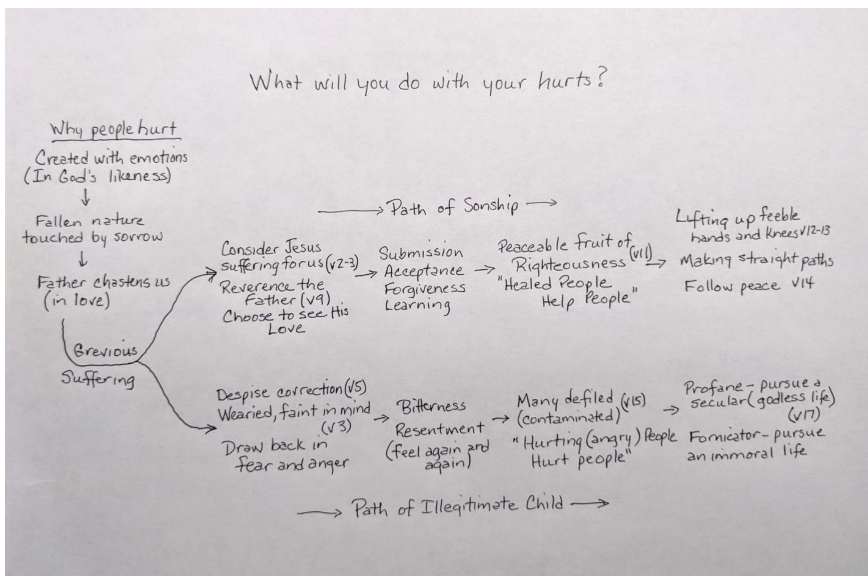
in one's heart or in relationships if man is not willing to face his sin, yes, naming specific sins he has been involved in. (See **Illustration 1** for the comparison of the paths chosen in Jesus' day.)

The person who embraces the gospel message embraces humility and transparency. A person who comes to Christ shares his struggle and walks in the light, eschewing all former addictions and fleshly choices. He also embraces forgiveness. In forgiving others, releasing them from consequences or revenge from their wrongs, he frees himself to receive Jesus' comfort. His hurts are managed by the hope he experiences in a relationship with Jesus who is with him today and promises to come again.

A church member who pretends to be a part of a fellowship but refuses (like the Pharisees) to disclose his heart struggles will never know the joy of healing in Christ's body, the church. His pride will prevent his healing.

The other reason why people don't find healing in Christ is because they love their sins and do not want to be delivered from them. All around us we see the misery of those who are choosing to live in the pleasure of sin for a season.

The Bible gives another reason why Christians hurt. (See **Illustration 2** below) That is because God in His love and mercy chooses to chasten us.



He chastises us either because of our sins, or because we need to be humbled to keep us from sin. The Bible explains that even as a loving

father chastises his son, our Father in heaven lovingly chastens us. If we respond by pulling away from God in resentment or if we become alienated from Him, our hurt will turn into bitterness. When we become bitter, it takes very little to hurt us again. In fact, people will hurt us even when they don't intend to, or don't mean to.

The answer here is to embrace the hurt and to ask our Father to help us learn the lessons He intends for us in the chastisement.

Do “Hurting people hurt people?”

You may have heard the saying that “Hurting people hurt people.” This statement is true in some situations, but it does not tell the entire story. Study 2 Cor 1:3-7 (in the center verses in the box on the first page of this handout). Paul explains that it was when he was hurt very badly God opened his heart to receive Holy Spirit comfort. This clearly implies that had he not had that hurt then he would not know comfort to the degree he did. And if he did not know God's comfort, then he would not be able to relate to hurting people. In fact he insists that it was pain that brought him to experience Christ's comfort and it was Christ's comfort that enabled him to relate to others in any kind of trouble.

I asked an acquaintance if it is true that “hurting people hurt people”? His answer was “No, it's angry people who hurt people.” When people brood over their hurts and become angry, then their anger will spill out and offend persons.

In fact, a person who is hurting often understands other hurting people more completely. He can not only sympathize with the hurting (give them pity), he can empathize with them, (show them by their actions that they feel their hurt with them.) If you have had a similar pain in your life and have found your way, you likely won't have to say a lot. Your presence will bring comfort.

What are some wrong ways to relate to hurting people?

One of the little sayings my wife recently shared with me is this little figure.

We all would like to be thought of as being nice. There are times when we are tempted to skirt the truth and color it just a bit when we believe we understand a situation. That is when we are tempted to give a “white lie”. Telling the person what he wants to hear

Truth is like a surgery. It hurts but it heals.

A Lie is like a painkiller. It gives instant relief but has side effects forever.

may help him feel better temporarily but it will not help him in the long run.

There is another lesson to ponder about relating to hurting people. Recently a brother told me about a wayward friend who is looking for help. His dreams about living the life of sin simply are not working out well. Money has run out and it is becoming more and more difficult to “sponge” off of other people. The wisdom of the prodigal son’s father became clear. The father went running for the son when the son was done with the pig pen, but he didn’t rescue him before he got to that point.

If we help someone in their sinful lifestyle, we may actually hinder them coming to repentance and God’s answer. As one counselor has advised, “Don’t short-circuit the misery factor. The misery factor has to outweigh the pleasure factor.”

How do we help hurting people find salvation?

One of the key things to remember in practicing personal evangelism is that every person has something they are struggling with in their life. It may be physical or material, social or emotional, but the struggle is real.

Sometimes you will see that in the anger and abusiveness of the person you are relating to. If a person quickly turns to anger or abuse in your relationship, it is a sign of a hurting, unforgiving person. In a case like this, beseech God for wisdom, and then ask him a question. You may say something like, “It appears to me that you may have a lot of pain in your life. Is this something we can talk about?”

For others who are good at masking their hurts, you will not see anything obvious. But just because their pain is not obvious to you at first glance doesn’t mean it isn’t there. Here’s where you may need to draw them out.

People can soon sense if you are a sensitive, sensible listener. That is what it takes. Only if you have tasted of the pain of life can you really care about others. And your caring heart will come through in many ways. If you really care about the people God sends into your heart you will have been praying that God would lead you to some seeking soul, even before you go on that trip or open your doors for business. And then when your paths cross, you will go beyond the surface in relationships, you’ll want to know the person’s heart. By careful responses you will build trust and many people will open up. Sometimes strangers are easier to be real with than people they think they will meet again. Many people like to open up and dump out their troubles, but they want a careful listener.

But letting people “*see our good works*” is only part of Christ’s

command. The other part is for us to “*let our light so shine before men*”. That means when we have been careful and considerate of the hurts when our acquaintance is angry or when they have patched everything over carefully our duty is to explain how Christ is the One who has met the needs of our hearts. If we are “very good people” but never give credit to Christ, they will “glorify man” as in “You are really good people”, but they will not glorify Christ.

Part of that might be that you will offer to pray for them, right there and then. Sometimes this is done better off to the side, or it might be right there in a busy airport concourse. There is no wrong place to cry out to your Heavenly Father for endeavoring to help someone. Offer to pray, and then pray for your friend in his need. Also give him a promise from the Bible. Maybe you will need to write the Bible verse on a piece of paper, but put his name on the paper so he has something to take along with him. God will use the seed you have planted. He wants to be in holy partnership with you in your caring for souls.

How do we help hurting people in the body?

“Brethren... Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ. For if a man think himself to be something, when he is nothing, he deceiveth himself. But let every man prove his own work, and then shall he have rejoicing in himself alone, and not in another. For every man shall bear his own burden.” (Galatians 6:2-5)

The latter part of this verse brings out our responsibility to walk the path our Father has chosen for us. But the first part brings out the fact that we should enter into the suffering, into the burden our brother is bearing. Life is not just about us. Its about Christ’s body, and in whatever way we help our brother carry his load, we do this for Christ. We will be given our reward.

This will even affect our giving. When we truly care about our brother and see him in light of eternity, we will understand how much more his soul is worth than our own financial standing or pleasurable pursuits.

Hurts? We will never get beyond them in this life. In fact, we are not supposed to. Hurts are part of God’s plan to help prepare us for the world beyond.

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