

GOD'S ANTIDOTE TO DAMAGED EMOTIONS

Psalm 23 Stressbusters - Part 3

January 25, 2009

Psalm 23:3 *“He restores my soul”* What good news, for we all need to have our souls restored from the aches and pains life throws at us. Life is tough. We deal with discouragement, depression, and despair. We fight fatigue, failure, frustrations, and fears. We all have open wounds and hidden hurts. We carry the battle scars and a pile of emotional garbage. God wants to get rid of all that. He wants to restore our soul. And He can, when we allow Him to make some changes in our life. We can live in emotional stability by doing three things:

1. LET GOD REMOVE MY GUILT

Nothing destroys a soul faster than guilt. Psalm 38:4,6 *“My guilt has overwhelmed me like a burden too heavy to bear... I am bowed down and brought low; all day long I go about mourning.”* There are two problems with guilt. 1. We have reasons to feel guilty. We are imperfect. We've all made mistakes. By nature we carry the guilt with us. 2. We can't get away from it. It's in our mind. Even if we go to a new location we bring a guilty conscience with us. Proverbs 20:27 *“The Lord gave us a mind and a conscience. We cannot hide from ourselves.”* How do we get rid of guilt? How do we deal with the guilt in our life? There are options. We can deny it and pretend that it doesn't exist. We can bury the past, but that doesn't work because it keeps resurrecting itself. Just about the time we think it's gone, the feelings comes flying back to us at the most inappropriate time. Denying guilt does not relieve it.

We can minimize it. *“It was no big deal, not that big of a sin.”* Then why do we still remember it? Why can't we forget it? Minimizing doesn't work. We can compromise it by lowering our standards. We tell ourselves that we really didn't do anything wrong, but we know we are lying to ourselves. Compromising doesn't work. We can rationalize our guilt. *“Everybody does it.”* In the first place, everybody doesn't do it. Even if they did, rationalizing based on the behavior of others does not let us off the hook. Remember that *“Rationalize” means “Rational lies”*. We know better, and so the guilt stays with us. Sometimes we take the popular course of blaming others. It started in the Garden of Eden when the man said, *“It's her fault.”* And the woman said, *“It's the serpent's fault.”* And we've all followed suit ever since. And our guilt remains.

Sometimes we use guilt as a club to beat ourselves up. We punish ourselves because deep down inside we know that somebody has to pay for all the wrongs in our life. So subconsciously we set ourselves up to pay for our sin. Can guilt make you sick? Oh yeah! Can guilt cause depression? Absolutely. Can guilt cause you to set yourself up for failure? Without a doubt. Because often there's this guilt that's constantly saying, *“You don't deserve to succeed.”*

None of these things work. There is only one solution to our guilt. We've got to give it to God. He's the only one who can remove it. Romans 3:23-24 *“All of us have sinned... yet God declares us >not guilty' IF we trust in Jesus Christ, who in mercy freely takes away our sins.”* The most basic truth of Christianity is that Jesus has already paid for all our sins. Everything we've ever done wrong. Every sin we've committed, and every sin we're about to commit has already been paid for. We just need to ask God to forgive us and accept what Jesus has already done for us. Just accept it. That's how our guilt will be removed. No other way. No psychologist can remove our guilt. They don't have the power to forgive us. We didn't hurt them. But the Creator does have that power. It doesn't matter what you've done because forgiveness is not based on how bad we've been, but how good God is. It's not about you, but what Jesus has already done for you. All we have to do is trust. We don't beg, bribe, or bargain with God. Just believe. Just trust. Accept Jesus Christ's free gift. That's why it's such good news. It's a free gift. I can wipe my slate clean. I can start over with a clear conscience.

But you say, *“I've asked God to forgive me many times and I still feel guilty. No matter how many times I ask, I still feel guilty.”* Do you understand how God forgives? It is immediate, free, complete, and unconditional. It wipes out the guilt the first time we ask. If we keep asking God to forgive something He's

already forgiven, we're saying we don't trust Him, we don't believe Him. And that's sin. If we still feel guilty about a sin we've already confessed to God, that guilt is not from God. That's from Satan. He wants us to feel bad, to feel guilty. Before we commit a sin, Satan minimizes and rationalizes it. "It's no big deal. And everybody's doing it." After we commit the sin he says, "This sin is so big, God could never forgive you!"

Remember Colossians 2:13-14 "*He has forgiven ALL your sins. He has utterly wiped out the evidence of broken commandments which always hung over our hearts, and completely annulled it by nailing it to the cross!*" ALL our sins. The evidence has been WIPED AWAY. It is COMPLETELY annulled. When God forgives, He forgives completely. He takes our sins, throws them in the deepest part of the ocean, puts up a "No fishing" sign and says "Forget it!"

Sometimes we confess a sin to God and then keep bringing it back to Him. When we confess our sins and repent, when we turn back to God again, God not only forgives, He forgets. That's amazing. The Creator of the universe chooses to forget our sins. He wipes it out, never to be brought up again. Why? Because He's already dealt with it. In Jesus, it has been paid for. When you pay a bill, do you try to pay it again? So why do we want Jesus to keep paying for what has already been handled. On the cross Jesus said, "It is finished. I've paid for your sins". So if God forgives and forgets our sins, shouldn't we? Why keep beating ourselves up over something that God has forgotten? Then when we don't really feel forgiven, every time something goes wrong in our life we start to think that God is getting even with us. He's not. If we put our faith in Christ, God's not going to get even with us because all of our punishment was taken by Him. Why punish us when Jesus has already, voluntarily taken our punishment? He paid the price so we wouldn't have to. Don't nail yourself to the cross. Just let God remove your guilt.

2. LET GOD RELIEVE MY GRIEF

Not all of the damage in our souls has been self inflicted. Sometimes we grieve because of things that are done to us. Or maybe we see the pain in the lives of those we love. At times in life, we will be hurt. We experience loneliness and pain. This isn't heaven. It's earth, and it's imperfect. Some days we will be lonely. Some days our hearts will be broken. We will feel despair. We'll experience sorrow, loss, and grief.

The letter said, "*Dear Pastor, Last year my marriage fell apart after twenty years. I really fought hard to save it, but it was of no use. Now I'm divorced and unwanted. I'm writing to you because I don't know anybody else to share my feelings with. I feel so bad, so much of the time and I feel hopeless about the future. Rejection is a pain nobody should have to feel. My grief is overwhelming and my heart aches with loneliness. I often go home from work to an empty house and just sit and cry. But there is no one to hold me when I cry. Everybody else is too busy with their own lives to care. Life goes on for everybody else but for me it drags on minute by torturous minute. I feel so emotionally crippled and helpless to change. I can't bring back the past or redo it as much as I'd like to. My situation seems to be beyond my control. Pastor, please, please help me mend my broken heart.*"

If you identify with those emotions, know that I'm sorry you hurt. And way beyond that, know that God knows what you're going through. God hurts with you and He cares about your hurt. The people in this church want to be your family in this crisis. Only Jesus can fill the emptiness in your heart. What do you do when your heart is breaking? What do you do when the grief overwhelms? Throw a giant pity party? Play the "if only" game? Withdraw into a shell, hide in a cave, isolate yourself from humanity and say "I'll never let anybody hurt me again!" Do you pull back and resign from life? There are other options. Let Jesus restore your soul.

King David was very acquainted with grief. He understood how much it damages our soul when we hurt. Psalm 31:9 "*Lord, have mercy, because I am in misery. My eyes are weak from so much crying, and my whole being is tired from grief.*" That says that he knows how grief can damage the soul. Sometimes we grieve because of our own stupid actions. We bring pain into our lives. And sometimes we grieve when we

see that people we love are hurting. We grieve because of a loss, or because we're innocent and somebody has victimized us.

In 2 Samuel 12, David shows us how to handle grief. He had a baby that was born after he seduced a married woman, and then had her husband killed. He deserved to hurt, to pay the price. But the penalty was not what he expected. The child was born very sick, and David began to grieve. He fasted and got on his knees to pray. He said, "God, this baby hasn't done anything wrong. I'm the one who blew it. I'm the one who made the mistake. I'm the one who deserves punishment. Save the child. He's done nothing wrong." But the baby died. What did David do with his grief? Three things. And these are things that we can do to restore our soul.

1. Accept what cannot be changed. *"Then David got up from the ground... He said, 'While the child was still alive, I fasted and wept... But now that he is dead, why should I fast? Can I bring him back to life?'"* (2 Samuel 12:22-23) No matter the source of your hurt, all the grieving in the world is not going to change the past. The first step to emotional healing and restoring your soul is acceptance. Accept what cannot be changed. I cannot change my background. I cannot change the hurts I've experienced and neither can you. Acceptance is the first step to healing the mind, the will, and the emotions. This is the first key to peace of mind: Accept what cannot be changed.

2. Play it down and Pray it up Don't exaggerate it, dedicate it. Give it to God. In life, pain is inevitable, but misery is optional. The Bible says, *"Blessed are those that mourn,"* (Matthew 5:4) but too often we hold onto our mourning and turn it into moaning. Play it down and pray it up. Give it to God. Psalm 37, *"Commit your way unto the Lord."* (Psalm 37:5) Instead of saying, "This is devastating! I can't handle it." say, "God, help me make it through this situation!" *"After he had washed, put on lotions, and changed his clothes, he went into the house of the Lord and worshiped."* David went to church. He worshiped God, which gave him a new perspective and the strength to carry on.

3. Focus on What's Left not What's Lost. (2 Samuel 12:24) *"Then David comforted his wife Bathsheba, and he went to her and lay with her. She gave birth to a son, and they named him Solomon."* You may be going through grief right now. Remember that God is not yet finished with your life. This is not the end. It hurts. But it does not have to be devastating. Open your life to Christ and let Him heal your emotions. Ask God to remove your guilt and relieve your grief. If you're alive, God is not through with you. And the rest of your life can be the best of your life. Isaiah 61:3 *"To all who mourn... he will give: beauty for ashes; joy instead of mourning; praise instead of heaviness."* We don't have to remain a prisoner of our pain. It's a choice.

3. LET GOD REPLACE MY GRUDGES

Grudges come from what other people do to me. I feel guilty for what I've done to others, but I feel grudges about what others have done to me. Now we know that life isn't fair. People will hurt us. Sometimes intentionally, sometimes unintentionally. Either way, it hurts. How we handle the resentments in life will determine whether we are a bitter person or a better person. The difference between bitter and better is the letter A. I make the choice. I choose whether the circumstances will devastate me or direct me to a new path. Will I be bitter or better? But what do I do with all the hurts that have piled up, all the emotional garbage toward those I still resent?

Job 5:2 *"To worry yourself to death with resentment would be a foolish, senseless thing to do."* Why? Resentment never hurts the other person. It only hurts you. The other person might be totally oblivious that you're even thinking about them. They've gone on with their life. Some of us continue to allow people from our past to keep hurting us *now!* That's foolish. Our past is past. They cannot hurt us anymore unless we keep rehearsing it in our mind. Every time we rehearse that resentment, the pain is fresh and we allow them to hurt us again. They may even be dead and still they hurt us because we won't let it go. That's

dumb! Holding a grudge, holding on to a hurt, only hurts us. Job tells us that: *"You're only hurting yourself with your anger."* Job 18:4

So what do we do with our grudges and resentments? Romans 12:19 *"Dear friends, never avenge yourselves. Leave that to God, for He has said He will repay those who deserve it."* Because of sin, life is unfair. Sometimes innocent people suffer. Sometimes guilty people, evil people prosper. Justice is not always served in this world. But God has said that one day He is going to settle the score. One day He's going to call it into account, right the wrongs, settle the issues that were left unsettled; all the crimes, the injustice, the prejudice, the racism, the sexism, the rapes, the murders, the hurts, the abuse. One day God will bring justice. In the meantime, the Bible says, don't avenge yourself. It will eat you up. What do we do instead?

"Get rid of all bitterness ... forgiving each other just as in Christ God forgave you." (Ephesians 4:31-32) There is a real heaven and a real hell. One day God is going to settle the score. In the meantime He says, get rid of all that bitterness. Forgive each other as God has forgiven you. If you've been forgiven, God expects you to be forgiving. You will never have to forgive another person more than God has already forgiven you.

Martin Luther King said, "Bitterness is blindness." If I allow you and your hurt to make me bitter it blinds me. It blinds me to the truth. It blinds me to all that's good in the world and all I can see is the bad, the evil, the prejudice, and sin. It blinds me to what God wants to do in my life. God wants to take all that negative, harmful, hurtful stuff, and turn it around so it can be used for something good; so He can make me a better person. I can't see that when I'm bitter.

We will never be healed from our hurt until we accept God's forgiveness through Jesus Christ and then offer that same forgiveness to other people. All the minimizing and rationalizing, all the compromising and blaming, all the times that we have beaten ourselves up will not lead to healing. None of it works. Only Jesus Christ can remove that guilt and pain. Nobody else. He specializes in new beginnings. It's called being born again. He wipes the slate clean. He restores the soul so we can get back to the joy of living. He is the Savior, the Shepherd who can restore our soul.

In Psalm 42 David prays, *"Why are you cast down, O my soul. Hope in God."* (Psalm 42:11) Have you ever wondered what a cast down soul is? Some time back I learned that sheep are built in such a way that when they are on their back, legs sticking straight up in the air, as if they have been thrown down or cast down, they are helpless. They can't get out of that position by themselves. They are open to attack by anything and everything. On hot days a cast down sheep can die in a matter of hours because all their internal systems start to shut down. For the sheep to survive, the Shepherd must restore them.

When a shepherd restores a cast down sheep, it doesn't just happen. It takes time. First the shepherd massages the legs to get some circulation going again. Then he begins to talk in a reassuring tone to the sheep, "You're going to make it." Then he gently turns the sheep over, puts his hand under the sheep's belly and lifts it up because it cannot stand on its own. He lifts the sheep and holds it until it gets some equilibrium. With stability restored, the shepherd will lovingly and gently let the sheep go.

That is a picture of what God wants to do for you! When you're on your back and flailing around, when the guilt, grief, or grudges are overwhelming, when you think you're on the verge of death, the Lord is your Shepherd. He comes with reassuring words and tender hands. He picks up His little lamb, lifts it to its feet, and carries it until it is stable once again. Jesus wants to restore your soul. If you've been cast down for any reason, He's the only one who can help you get back on your feet again. When He restores your soul, He restores your confidence, your joy, your peace and your strength. We can restore a lot of things - cars, paintings, buildings - but only God can restore a soul. And Jesus wants to heal your soul. How does He do it? *"Put your heart right, reach out to God... then face the world again, firm and courageous. Then all your*

troubles will fade from your memory, like floods that are past and remembered no more." (Job 11:13-16)
Jesus will restore your soul. He is your Savior. Let Him be your Shepherd. And in your life, may it be so.
Amen.