



Church-hurt

Jesus asked, ***“What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he loses one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness, and go after the one?”*** (Lk. 15:4-5).

Is there any hurt that runs as deep as church-hurt? We are vulnerable in the Church of the living God, but God isn't there to maim us. Just think about how many have backslidden, been sidelined, and become spiritual shipwrecks due to the self-seeking, meanness and short-sightedness of God's people. It crushes His heart. He would quickly take them up in His arms. He searches out the straying like a Shepherd.

***A church of God has wounded me, now I need a safe place to be
This has made me question all I know, now I need a safe place to go.***

We must never minimize the suffering of another. --Billy Graham

In 1991, a major denomination in the United States disclosed that during the previous year, they obtained an incredible 294,784 decisions for Christ. But they could only find 14,337 still in fellowship (*American Horizons*, March/ April 1993 Vol. 2, Number 2). *That means there were 280,447 decisions that couldn't be accounted for.* After extensive inquiries, authorities failed to reveal any clues as to why this happened. The National Director of Home Missions could only say, "Something is wrong!" Churches and leaders are letting these Christians down. These statistics are not confined to that denomination says author Ray Comfort. Churches today average an 80 to 90% fall away rate and many are completely oblivious to what is really happening. Ray goes on to say that most pastors will tell you that something is drastically wrong in American churches. The average church today can only boast of a small percentage of its congregation reaching out or even having a zeal for the Lord reminiscent to that of the Church in the Book of Acts.

“Brethren, if anyone among you wanders from the truth, and someone turns him back, let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save a soul from death and cover a multitude of sins.” –James 5:19-20

Now, I know there are a lot of books out today addressing the results of spiritual abuse, religious manipulation and other abuses and there really are too many with a victim-mentality wallowing in their pity party. We have too many chronics out there as well stewing in the stew.. enjoying it... viewing themselves as the poorest little abusees as they point the finger of blame at their parents. They are not willing to be healed or to get up and brush it off. They need to get over it and grow up. But there are others who attempt to brush it off but it won't brush. They need the Lord alone and yet the Lord wants to use us to help them.

The question for today is: Am I my brother's keeper? The answer is: Yes, I am his keeper! You and I are Christ's solution for reaching the lost and for combating the spiritual attrition rate in His body. You remember how Christ was His brother's keeper when he restored Pete. And ***“He who says he abides in***

[Jesus] *ought himself also to walk just as He walked*” (1 Jn. 2:6). The Word says, *“This commandment we have from Him: that he who loves God must love his brother also”* (1 Jn. 4:21).

Bill Bright is in agreement: *“Christ's Parable of the Sower teaches that not all seed is on good soil. In reality, some soils are hazardous but hard to tell and people fall away. While it can be very disappointing, I have learned that I need to keep on trusting God and not be discouraged in my efforts to warn of danger, encourage the fainthearted and build-up men and women for Christ. Just as successful witnessing is simply taking the initiative to share Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit, and leaving the results up to God, so are successful restoration efforts and follow-up ministry. It is simply following the Great Shepherd who longs to restore the wanderer. He wants to use you in going after, in healing and in building-up His disciples to prepare them to reach out to others in the power of the Holy Spirit. And again we're leaving the results up to God. We are to take restoration ministry and follow-up seriously. They go hand-in-glove with successful witnessing.”*

God hates misrepresentation. He is against all bullying of authority (see Ezek. 34:3-6): *“You do not take care of the flock. You have not strengthened the weak or healed the sick or bound up the injured. You have not brought back the strays or searched for the lost. You have ruled them harshly and brutally. So they were scattered because there was no shepherd, and when they were scattered they became food for all the wild animals. My sheep wandered over all the mountains and on every high hill. They were scattered over the whole earth, and no one searched or looked for them.”*

*People all around are hurting, wounded by discouragement;
God has called us to befriend them, bringing His encouragement.* —Sper

On March 21, 1969, a United States Marine patrol in Vietnam came down a steep bank to fill their canteens in a dirty stream. As they tromped through two feet of water, the area suddenly exploded with gunfire and grenades. Several men were hit. According to an official report, one soldier, with complete disregard for his own safety, assisted several Marines who were scratching dirt to escape. Despite the heavy fire and shrapnel, he made several trips, until he himself was wounded and unable to continue.

Twenty-one years later, one of the guys who had been pulled out of those treacherous waters learned that his rescuer was still alive. He felt so grateful that he set out to find him – to make sure that his friend was properly recognized for such heroism. The Marine eventually found, Jim Lahr, who was paralyzed from the waist down. And with a heart full of appreciation, he finally saw the day when Jim received a much-deserved Bronze Star.

Now, who wouldn't be moved by this Marine's longing to honor the one who saved his life? We need to be like him! Could you imagine if it was friendly fire?

It makes me wonder about another One wounded in battle – actually killed while rescuing the wounded. Christ paid it all, all to Him I owe! The One who paid a far greater price to save my soul – to save your soul. *“And one shall say unto him, what are these wounds in thine hands? Then he shall answer, Those with which I was wounded in the house of my friends”* (Zech. 13:6). Talk about church-hurt ... the Bible says, *“He was wounded for our transgressions”* (Isa. 53:5). No one deserves more honor than Christ! No one has sacrificed so much to heal so many – even those with church-bruising! No wonder all heaven will praise Him forever. *“Worthy is the Lamb who was slain to receive power . . . and honor and glory and blessing!”* (Rev. 5:12).

The Psalmist David also smarted from and recorded spiritual-betrayal in Psalm 55:12-14. Was Ahithophel the person he meant?--“a man, my equal” said David. Nothing could have pained David so

much to hear that this friend, who he had confided in and shared secrets with, had conspired together with Absalom (2 Sa. 15:31) against him. Ahithophel was David's counselor, (1 Chr. 27:33). Their subversive plot had brought David, not to his faith's end, but to his wits' end, as bemoaned the whole nightmare, ***"If an enemy were insulting me, I could endure it; if a foe were raising himself against me, I could hide from him. But it is you, a man like myself, my companion, my close friend, with whom I once enjoyed sweet fellowship as we walked with the throng at the house of God."*** (niv).

Many Christians have become weary in their daily conflict against evil and they are tempted to give up in their spiritual struggle. They are finding themselves coming under attack – yet, it's (so called) Christians coming against them. Shouldn't we join forces against the real enemy? They need an encouraging word.

***Lord, let me feel the pain of a wounded soul and seek to heal that wounded one I pray;
Yes, I would take the reconciling role, and bring an end to pain and strife today.***—Hess

What do you think of when you hear about church hurt? History has shown us countless religious people and so called righteous people hurting others in their own attempts to advance the cause of God.

- Do you think about Diotrephes “the church boss,” in 3 John 9-11? What a small person. John described how he, ***“loves to have the preeminence”*** at church and how he was prating against church leaders ***“with malicious words.”*** He kept rejecting and putting decent brethren, ***“out of the church.”*** In the very next verse John warned us, ***“Beloved, do not imitate what is evil, but what is good. He who does good is of God, but he who does evil has not seen God”*** (3 Jn. 1:9-11).
- Do you think about how Paul felt when John Mark abandoned him while on that important missionary journey or about how Demas really disappointed him? Paul said, ***“Demas has forsaken me, having loved this present world, and has departed for Thessalonica”*** (2 Tim. 4:10).
- Do you think about that calloused priest in Luke 10:21 who couldn't find a few minutes for the one who was beat up – you know that man who was traveling ***“down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves, who stripped him of his clothing, wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead.”*** How cold-blooded could a priest be to just ignore a wounded soul on the roadside of life! Priests should be the first to respond but this fellow, through sins of omission, just avoided the injured just to keep his important church schedule of sorts.
- Do you think about that religious leader in the Old Testament who liked to prophesy – yes, Saul who was trying his best for a long time to kill David who merely wanted to do things God's way?
- Do you think of the crusades where thousands were killed in the Name of Jesus Christ? Or what about Him who invented the church? All his disciples let him down. You and I have also hurt Him...
- Do you think about Jesus who was pained by the money-grubbing-sins in His temple – He ***“overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who sold doves”*** (Mrk. 11:5). Hey, the house of God was meant to be safe and holy! But He still gets hurt in church, being forced out of many of them to this day.

Maybe you've been hurt by the so called righteous? Perhaps you feel bewildered, downhearted, cynical, disillusioned or hopeless? It seems like what mattered to you most is now just fading into a sour memory. Come back to Christ. Romans 8:28 is still effectual. He understands how you feel and He can cause it all to work for the good. Remember what the Apostle Paul said to Timothy, ***“Get Mark and bring him with you, for he is useful to me for ministry”*** (1 Tim. 4:11).

Not that it was good or like He caused it to happen to you. But He felt it too and cares for you. He wants to encourage you, *“The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, a broken and a contrite heart”* (Ps. 51:17). I like what Paul Tournier said, *“The suffering of man is also the suffering of God.”*

“The Sovereign LORD says to them: See, I myself will judge between the fat sheep and the lean sheep. Because you shove with flank and shoulder, butting all the weak sheep with your horns until you have driven them away, I will save my flock” (Ezek. 34:21-22). Whose flock? Many pastors think it’s their’s.

So what am I to think about?

1. Remember it’s better to suffer ill, than do ill. *“For it is better, if the will of God be so, that ye suffer for well doing, than for evil doing”* (1 Pet. 3:17).

2. Remember to praise the Lord, to be healed, to appropriate new joy, to be grateful. We’ve heard a lot about this stuff -- healing and recovery. Sometimes it comes at a pace that’s for the most part, not near as fast as we (or others) would like to see it happen. We work through all that. *“In every thing give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you”* (1 Thess. 5:18).

3. Remember forgiveness and that you’re surround by those who need it. We’ve all sinned. There’s no time for revenge or getting even, or proving I was the one who was right. No time for the victim mentality or a pity party. Are you under a curse? No, God has blessed you. Sure you might still hurt, might still need reviving. Bathe it in prayer. Talk about it with God and with the right people.

4. Remember the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of truth, not the Spirit of what might have been, what could have been, what should have been, what ought to have been. He moves in what is ...and when we leave behind what ought to be left behind, and seek the Spirit earnestly about what is and how we are to relate to it in rightly representing Jesus, the Spirit will move mightily.

5. Remember the Lord and to abide in Him -- don’t strive in the flesh. Don’t nurse a grudge. Let it go. Go forward! Advance. You’re either having a going-forward-day spiritually or a going-backward-day spiritually depending on your choice. No in-between. You’re either growing or digressing. Don’t go backwards, not even an inch spiritually. Don’t let church-hurt paralyze you from all productive service. Sure God will also give you time to heal and regroup with Him. We can plan and reminisce some, but too many Christians live in the past and too many live in the future. It’s time to live no-compromise, 100% for Jesus Christ in the compartment called today. Go forward even if you must start all over, over with less, or over much weaker. He’ll give you a second chance.

The words of Paul are for you and I. *“One thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus”* (Phil. 3:13). He didn’t say I glide or cruise toward the mark. Paul was determined to press on towards it. He wouldn’t be disqualified by bitterness. Life is 10 percent what happens to us and 90 percent how we respond to it.

I can think of three friends of mine who were all leaders in their churches and very productive. Now they are not. Today they won’t go near a church. The first one was in his twenties and was hurt by another Christian. The second two got hurt by the same senior pastor who was trying to serve God his own way. It breaks your heart.

God is a specialist when the anguish is deep. His ability to heal the soul is profound. . . but only those who rely on his wounded Son will experience relief. —Chuck Swindoll

6. Remember that spiritual wholeness often begins with a broken heart.

*The Maker of the universe knows every need and wound of man,
And made provision for all that stuff according to His plan. —Anonymous*

"He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds," wrote the psalmist. "The Lord lifts up the humble; He casts the wicked down to the ground" (Ps. 147:3,6).

**The Lord is drawn to broken hearts and saves each sin-sick, contrite soul.
With healing touch His grace applies, and makes the wounded spirit whole. —Bosch**

"Pearls are the product of pain . . . a precious, tiny jewel conceived through irritation, born of adversity, nursed by adjustments. Some oysters are never wounded . . . and those who seek for gems toss them aside, fit only for stew." —Chuck Swindoll

*Come, ye disconsolate, where'er ye languish—come to the mercy seat, fervently kneel;
Here bring your wounded hearts, here tell your anguish:
Earth has no sorrow that heav'n cannot heal. —Moore*

*If you defend yourself, God will let you but you'll have a weak defense. Trust God and defend others.
—Chuck Smith*

7. Remember there is a time to warn your friends when someone is out to maim. But don't vilify others. It's not ours to say if they are lost. God knows. Vengeance is the Lord's – don't you go for that. If the devil can get you to respond in to the taunting of combative fleshly thinkers, he will throw a PARTY and then eat your lunch! Walk in the Spirit and pray for your enemies. Show love wisely to those who take advantage of you.

8. Remember not to make the close-minded (non-teachable fools) **your close friends.** If they're teachable, they're reachable. All churches are flawed, but proceed on with growing Christians in a healthy flawed church. Let go of the past. Remember that your groom promises suffering: *"I tell you . . . you will be weeping and wailing . . . and you will be sorrowful."* He calls these pains birth pains. But this "bundle of myrrh" in its bitterness, represents the suffering the Bride endures to be close to her Beloved.

*Jesus is totally worthy all our days, of all our love and highest praise;
He was wounded to death to take our sin and shame—oh, bless the Savior's holy holy name!*

I had a favorite nursery rhyme when I was little. How about you?

*Humpty Dumpty sat on a wall, Humpty Dumpty had a great fall;
All the King's horses and all the King's men, Couldn't put Humpty together again.*

Yep, you remember Mister Dumpty, the big, egg-head shaped dude with the painted face and skinny arms and legs, perched happily over a wall. Well he fell off that wall and there was no mid-air stall. He broke into countless pieces. As a kid, could you feel the hopelessness of the situation whenever you read that they *"couldn't put Humpty Dumpty together again?"*

Have you fallen or been forced off the wall so to speak . . . by a Christian or by a leader? Since '77 I've come to know Christ as my Savior and Lord. I've experienced His powerful and tender hands restoring the

shattered pieces of my life and the lives of others. So here's an extra line for Christians that's true: ***"What all the king's horses and all the king's men couldn't do, the King could!"***

Have you been beaten down by the church? Are you or someone dear to you feeling shattered and broken today? I apologize for that. It wasn't God who did it.

9. Remember, no one is hopeless and beyond God's saving help. Jesus said, ***"With God all things are possible"*** (Matt. 19:26). When the hurt and broken pieces of life seem beyond hope of repair, don't give up. We have a King who can put people back together again.

10. Remember, when life knocks you to your knees, you're in a good position to pray. Do you ever think about how God can cause all things to work together for your good even after you've been hurt by a Christian?

11. "Remember ...those who are mistreated—since you yourselves are in the body also" (Heb. 13:3). ***"Remember the poor"*** (Gal. 2:10).

12. "Remember the works of the Lord" (Ps 77:11). They will comfort. ***"Remember the words of the Lord Jesus"*** (Acts 20:35). They will give you power to overcome. Remember to turn your eyes upon Jesus. ***"When my soul fainted within me I remembered the LORD"*** (Jonah 2:7).

"When you do good and suffer, if you take it patiently, this is commendable before God. For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps: 'Who committed no sin, nor was deceit found in His mouth' who, when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously" (1 Pet. 2:20-23).

The whole deal is about keeping priorities straight with Christ first – no idols (like an organization or a pastor). People will let you down, but Christ won't. It's about not being sidelined from others-oriented ministry and just going the distance in your life, close with Jesus. It's about releasing the hurt, not taking up an offense for another or even a wounded spirit from another. You might not have all the facts. It's about getting fully prepared as you obey the Lord and serve Him from an excellent base of operation (a Christ honoring, healthy local church led by the Spirit and a humble, spiritual under-shepherd. A lifetime is a precious thing to waste stuck in the wrong situation.

I'll conclude with this: Two men were offered a parachute while seated in a plane that just took off from DFW. The first man was told it would greatly improve his flight, make him look cool and help him become rich and more popular (as many are told). But the second man was informed that he would soon have to make a 25,000 foot jump ...because the plane would unavoidably be going down. When the flight struck severe turbulence and passengers started laughing at the first man across the aisle in coach, who was still trying to get comfy with his back pack behind him – you know, "the shoot." He felt hurt and got really frustrated so he took his parachute off and just slammed it to the floor, because as far as he was concerned it was uncomfortable for his back and it didn't improve his flight at all. To some of the other passengers it made him appear peculiar. But during the same violent turbulence, the second man clung tighter to his parachute. He was uncomfortable at times, but it didn't matter to him what the others thought or said. Now, each man's *motive* for putting the parachute on determined whether or not they would keep it on. In the same way, the *reason* you should ***"put on the Lord Jesus Christ"*** shouldn't be to find a cooler, happier or more comfortable life, to have all your maladies healed or all your church problems fixed, etc. (to have your flight improved). But it should be so you make it alive through the upcoming jump—because of the fact that you (like everyone on the same flight) will have to pass through

the door of death. So next time the flight gets bumpy, or people laugh, or the flight attendant in authority stumbles and dumps hot coffee in your lap ...in what clearly seems like was an intentional move... (The next time an interpersonal Christian relationship issue really hurts you bad) you won't want to chuck the shoot (or fall away from the faith).. because the flight is not about all that other stuff!

With acute church-hurt (or any type of pain) you have a choice. You can draw closer to Christ, or you can go farther away from Him. You will get closer to a healthy church, or stay away from one. You will get closer to a spiritual pastor, or become distrusting and go far away from one. Do you have Jesus?—a healthy church?—and a kindhearted spiritual pastor? You can. Today can be the start of a whole new way of living free.

Have Kurt's fishing devos blessed you? Click on the "Contact" button and let him know!

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