

## Rising From Our Pain

On Sunday we celebrated Easter by discussing two Gospel passages that show us how we, like Christ, can rise from our pain.

1. Warm-up Question: What is the worst scar on your body? How did you get it?
2. Recap: Two weeks ago, we talked about the irony that Jesus' perfect resurrection body bears scars on his hands, feet, and side that will serve as an eternal reminder of his deepest earthly wounds. We typically view scars as ugly reminders of experiences we'd like to forget. Jesus' scars challenge us to rethink that. Because a scar is a wound that has healed. A scar is a proclamation that I have triumphed over a great wound – that whatever happened to me, instead of burying me, it made me better, stronger, wiser, more compassionate, and more grateful for the gift of life. Like Jesus we are called to be the kind of people who, instead of getting stuck in our woundedness, rise from it, heal from it, and end up being more beautiful because of it. Think about someone you've known who has recovered from, and risen above, deep wounds in life. How did life wound them? How did they get beyond it? How did their wounds make them more beautiful?
3. This past Sunday we picked up where we left off two weeks ago by exploring two key steps – taught by both the Bible and psychology – for how we can heal from life's deep wounds. To illustrate the first step, we watched comedian Anthony Griffith's first public sharing of the story of his deepest pain – the death of his infant daughter – thirteen years after her death.
  - a. What most struck you about Anthony's story? How do you think he felt as he told the story? How do you think he felt after telling the story?
  - b. Since Anthony's story was videotaped, it has been viewed millions of times. Why do you think that is?
  - c. Most of us find it very difficult to talk about our life's deepest pain. Why is that?
4. Anthony's experience illustrates a key lesson found in Jesus' famous parable about stewardship. Being a good steward means being faithful to, and making the most of, the opportunities God gives us. Theologian Frederick Buechner (Beek-ner) challenges us to apply the lessons of Jesus' stewardship parable to our pain. With that in mind, let's read Matthew 25:14-30. Note: The word "talent" in this parable refers to an ancient unit of money roughly equal to \$500,000 in today's currency.
  - a. Let's focus on the third servant, i.e., the one who received one talent of money, since he illustrates what it means to be a bad steward. According to what Jesus says in this parable, what was the third servant's biggest mistake? And what motivated that mistake?

- b. We often make the same mistake when God entrusts us with painful experiences. Out of fear, we try to bury those experiences and the pain they induce. Based on your own experience and what you know about psychology, why is it such a mistake to try to bury our pain? What happens when we do so? Can you think of a time you tried to bury your pain? What happened?
  - c. In the context we've been discussing, i.e., burying our pain, what is the meaning of Matthew 25:30? What does the "outer darkness" and the "weeping and gnashing of teeth" represent?
5. From all the foregoing, we drew the first step to rising from our pain. ***The first rule for rising from the dead is not to stay buried. Whatever you do, don't let your pain stay buried. DIG IT UP and process it.*** But that still left us with the question: How should we process our pain? What's the difference between wallowing in our pain versus healing from it? For guidance we looked to our second Gospel passage, which tells us how Simon Peter healed from his most painful moment when, at Jesus' trial, Peter denied ever knowing Jesus. Afterward, Peter gave up, returned to his home, and resumed the life of a fisherman, until Jesus found him there. Read John 21:1-17.
- a. Look again at Jesus' question to Peter in verse 15. With his question, Jesus went right to Peter's point of deepest pain and ripped off the scab. How do you think Peter felt in that moment? Why do you think Jesus did it? What was the point?
  - b. After Peter responds, Jesus says, "Feed my sheep." What did that mean? Why do you think Jesus's said this? What was the point?
  - c. Why did Jesus repeat this dialogue verbatim three times? What lesson can we learn from that?
6. Jesus' example with Peter leads us to: ***The second rule for rising from our pain – shower it with compassion. Picture the person you were back then, the person you have become because of what happened, the event itself, and the person who perpetrated the event and wrap them all in arms of everlasting love.*** At first blush, this may sound a bit new-agey, but actually it's a very biblical concept. Bitterness isn't going to heal our wounds; grace can and will. With that in mind, Jeff suggested we practice a "Lovingkindness Meditation." Take a moment to look through that meditation on the next few pages, then discuss the following questions.
- a. As you look through this meditation, what are your impressions? Do you think you might benefit from practicing this? Why or why not?
  - b. As you look through this mediation, what painful event in your life comes to mind that might need further processing?
  - c. Look again at Sending Lovingkindness Step 1 (the person who hurt you) and Step 2 (your feelings about God). How do you feel about these two steps?
  - d. Why is holistic compassion the key to healing?

# Lovingkindness Meditation

The language below is drawn from the website of *Greater Good In Action* at the following link: [https://ggia.berkeley.edu/practice/loving\\_kindness\\_meditation](https://ggia.berkeley.edu/practice/loving_kindness_meditation). The language that appears there is itself adapted from a meditation created by researcher Emma Seppala, Science Director of Stanford University's *Center for Compassion and Altruism Research and Education*. The language below has been adapted to focus on recovering from deep life wounds.

## Preparation

Close your eyes. Sit comfortably with your feet flat on the floor and your spine straight. Relax your whole body. Keep your eyes closed throughout the whole visualization and bring your awareness inward. Without straining or concentrating, just relax and gently follow the instructions.

Take a deep breath in. And breathe out.

Recall an instance of great pain in your life.

## Receiving Lovingkindness, Step 1

Keeping your eyes closed, think of the person you were at the time of the painful event. Though it may be difficult and painful, think of how you felt in the midst of the experience and how it affected you at the time. Feel it as fully as you can. Don't bury it; dig it up.

Then, as the person you are now, and allowing the Spirit of God to flow through you, envision yourself wrapping your old self (i.e., the person you were at the time of the painful event) in arms of everlasting love, beaming compassion at your old self, and speaking the following phrases to your old self:

*May you be at peace, may you be happy, may you be healed from your pain and become stronger and more beautiful because of it. (Repeat two more times as Jesus did in with Peter in John 21.)*

Let your old self bask in the warmth of these wishes and love coming from all sides. You are filled and overflowing with warmth and love.

## Receiving Lovingkindness, Step 2

Keeping your eyes closed, think of the person you are now. Think of how the painful event affects you as you are now. Feel it as fully as you can. Don't bury it; dig it up.

Then, allowing the Spirit of God to flow through you, envision yourself wrapping the person you are now in arms of everlasting love, beaming compassion at yourself, and speaking the following phrases to yourself:

*May you be at peace, may you be happy, may you be healed from your pain and become stronger and more beautiful because of it. (Repeat two more times.)*

### **Sending Lovingkindness, Step 1**

If there was a person who hurt you in your painful experience, bring your awareness to them. Imagine the brokenness and challenges that person experienced that shaped them and brought them to the role they played in your pain. Imagine their pain. Don't run from it; open yourself to it for a few moments.

Begin to send love back in time to that person as they were then, and to them as they are now. Send all your love and warm wishes to that person, and speak the following phrases:

*May you be at peace, may you be happy, may you not stay stuck, but rather learn and grow from what happened, and be healed from your pain. (Repeat two more times.)*

### **Sending Lovingkindness, Step 2**

Now bring your awareness to God and to how you felt about God at the time of your painful experience and how you feel about God now as a result of that painful experience. Imagine the pain that your pain brought God. Imagine how hard it is to be God.

Begin to send love back to God. Send all your love and warm feelings to God, and speak the following phrases:

*There is so much I don't understand, but I do know that you love me infinitely, that you have always been with me and always will be, and that you will give me the power not just to heal from my pain, but to become eternally more beautiful because of it. (Repeat two more times.)*

### **Sending Lovingkindness, Step 3**

Now think of all living creatures who have experienced pain, are experiencing pain, or will experience pain. Imagine their pain. Don't run from it; open yourself to it for a few moments. Then speak the following phrases:

*As a fellow traveler who has also experienced pain, I open my heart to you. May you be at peace, may you be happy, may you be healed from your pain and become stronger and more beautiful because of it. (Repeat two more times.)*

Repeat this Lovingkindness Meditation over the course of time until it weaves its way into the essence of your being, allowing yourself to become a channel of God's infinite love.

*"For this slight momentary affliction is preparing us for an eternal weight of glory beyond all measure." I Corinthians 4:17.*

## **The Healing Time**

By Peshya Joyce Gertler

Finally on my way to yes  
I bump into  
all the places  
where I said no  
to my life  
all the untended wounds  
the red and purple scars  
those hieroglyphs of pain  
carved into my skin, my bones,  
those coded messages  
that send me down  
the wrong street  
again and again  
where I find them  
the old wounds  
the old misdirections  
and I lift them  
one by one  
close to my heart  
and I say holy  
holy.