

Binding Up the Brokenhearted

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We sat facing on her bed. I could see pictures of a little blond boy on her dresser. She was crying and I held in my pat answers. How could I relate to her pain? I knew Jesus could - but I couldn't. I was barely a mother, my firstborn still kicking under my heart. Her three year old son was dead. It was a drowning accident, and she was devastated.

Little did I know, four years later, the child I was pregnant with that day - my three year old son - would be dead as well. And, along with him, his two year old sister... and my husband. It was a flying accident, and this time I was the one who was devastated. Only then did I get a glimpse of my friend's pain. And only then, did I fully understand God's wisdom in keeping me from offering her a handful of easy answers. I found that sometimes there just aren't any.

There are many ways a heart can break - death, divorce, rejection, illness, abuse, sin, injustice, failure - the list goes on and on. Everyone will experience a broken heart at some time. Some will never fully recover. I'm sure the Lord has already used you to minister to those who are hurting, but I believe He wants to use you in even greater ways. Perhaps I should say, He wants to make you more "comfort-able" or better able to give comfort as lavishly as He does.

HOW "COMFORT-ABLE" ARE YOU?

Binding up the brokenhearted. It's part of being a Christian, yet so often we are uncomfortable when faced with someone's tragedy. Many times we feel awkward being around those who are grieving, or broken, or wounded. We want to comfort them, but don't really know how. Often we're at a loss for words or with perfectly good intentions, blurt out something we (or they) wish we'd never said. We wonder if we should talk about the difficulties - or avoid them. And all too often, we end up doing nothing because we feel inadequate - thinking we need to have all the answers or just the right scriptures before God can use us.

I've walked through some very difficult and painful situations in the past few years, and I'm so grateful for the grace of God - and the people of God. I'll share briefly in case you're not familiar with my testimony.



In 1973, I married Keith Green, and in 1975, we became Christians. In 1977, we founded Last Days Ministries and I lost my first child through an early miscarriage. Then in 1982, Keith and two of our children, Josiah (3), and Bethany (2), died in a small plane crash. I was left behind with my one year old daughter, Rebekah Joy, and new ministry responsibilities. I was also six weeks pregnant with Rachel Hope. The next five years were filled with activity, adjustments, and difficulties - a lawsuit regarding the plane crash, investigations and false accusations about my pro-life work, intense attacks of the enemy, a broken engagement - and most recently, a Texas tornado that caused major damage and setback to all of Last Days Ministries.

I'm grateful that God has been so abundantly faithful in every situation I've faced - but walking through the fire is not fun for anyone! Sometimes, when I didn't think I could make it, the Lord used men and women with wisdom and maturity to pour His resurrection life back into my heart. As many have reached out to me in different ways, I've seen what has borne good fruit, and what hasn't. It's some of those insights, along with biblical principles, I want to share with you.

OUR BODY

"So we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another." (Rom. 12:5) God made the human body in a unique way. Whenever there's a wound, all systems go on alert. The blood rushes to the scene and the whole body is called to attention. Healing begins immediately. I believe that's exactly how God wants the body of Christ to respond to its wounded.

Isaiah 61:1 paints a powerful portrait of God's heart, *"The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me to bring good news to the afflicted; He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted..."* When I think of "binding up," I think of something done very gently and carefully - to wrap, or encircle, or bandage. It takes time if done properly. Today, our Band-Aids come in little tin boxes - my children like the ones with pictures. I'm amazed at how just placing one over a scraped knee stops tears almost miraculously. However, putting a Band-Aid over a severed artery would be deadly. Since we live in a quick-fix society, we're sometimes reluctant to take the time and tears proper treatment requires. However, we must evaluate the injury before deciding on a treatment.



RADICAL MERCY

When we think of being radical, we usually think of having radical faith, boldness, commitment, or zeal - but let's not leave out radical mercy, compassion, and grace. In our reaction toward what's been called "easy grace," we can't forget what Jesus did at the cross. Every Christian has experienced God's amazing grace. And the thing that makes it so amazing is that it's so radical! No one has earned or deserved the mercy they've received.

Jesus was anointed to bind up the brokenhearted - but we often find it hard to love each other when we see weakness or sin. Sometimes it's easier to believe God will cleanse, heal, and restore the most degenerate sinner, than it is to believe Him to do the same thing for a repentant brother or sister. But we can be so inconsistent. When *we* sin, we beg for (and expect) God's mercy. But when someone else sins, our thoughts often race towards swift judgment. James 2:13 warns, *"For judgment will be merciless to one who has shown no mercy; mercy triumphs over judgment."*

WHEN THERE'S SIN

God always has redemptive purposes - even when sin is involved. Moses was a murderer. David committed adultery, then had someone killed to cover it up. Most of us would have written these guys off immediately. But look at the redemptive heart of God in these tragic and sinful situations. As these men saw their sin and repented, God worked with them and loved them right on to fruitful lives as His chosen leaders. It didn't happen overnight, but it did happen as they were tested and their character and maturity proven. It's hard to imagine the Bible without the inspiration and example of Moses and David.

The enemy is the *"accuser of the brethren"* and when someone falls, he's right there to assure them that God is finished with them. That's why *we* need to speak encouragement and hope into their lives - telling them they *can* make it, that we believe in them, and that God is *not* finished with them. We also need to help them walk through any necessary steps, whether it's repentance, restitution, confession, or church discipline - with the goal of healing and restoration in God's way and God's time. A lot will depend on their willingness to see their sin - and their response to God. When Jonah ran from God, he ended up in the belly of a big fish. But when Jonah repented, God delivered him and spoke the same message to him a second time. We serve a God of second chances.

God is a redeemer and a healer. There's a wonderful promise in Isaiah 42:3, *"A bruised reed He will not break, and a dimly burning wick He will not extinguish."* Let's be tender with the bruised and dimly burning of the world - no matter how they got that way. The enemy wants to extinguish them. God wants to heal them.



SYMPATHIZE

When wrong choices contribute to someone's pain, we're often afraid to sympathize, thinking we might look like we're condoning their sin. Jesus didn't have this fear. *"For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin."* If Jesus, being sinless, can sympathize with us, then how much more should we sympathize with each other?

Bumps and bruises are a part of growing up, and my girls have had their share. My attempts at "consoling" them used to include trying to talk them out of their feelings if I thought they were overreacting, making a joke to divert their attention, or saying things like, "Oh, it doesn't really hurt *that* bad." I found these tactics usually made them cry even harder because they wanted to prove they were hurting.

Later, I started to acknowledge their pain - no matter how slight it seemed. I'd simply say, "That looks like it hurts," or "I'm sorry that's hurting you, honey," and they'd calm down. It seemed that beyond their pain, they wanted to know I cared and that I believed they were hurt. Aren't we all like that? Romans 12:15 says, *"Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep."* So, when someone is hurting, don't make jokes or try to talk them out of it. Even worse, don't tell them they shouldn't be hurting. This only adds condemnation to the pain. We need to recognize the reality of their pain - whether we think it's totally warranted or not. It's not our place to judge their feelings - but to pour healing oil over everything that hurts.

IDENTIFY

When we're comforting someone, we should think about how we'd feel in the same situation, and how we'd want to be treated. And if there's sin, let's remember we're also capable of falling. The Bible says no temptation can overtake us *"but what is common to man."* We can find the root sin in any situation and identify it in our own life. For example, the root sin of adultery might be lust - the root of abortion might be selfishness. Is there anyone who hasn't been tempted by lust or selfishness? Hopefully, with God's grace we won't fall - but if we'll identify the root sin in our own heart, we can build a bridge of understanding. However, if we sit back smugly thinking, "I could *never* do that!", we've built a wall. And since pride comes before a fall, we've also become candidates for a fall of our own. *"Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall."* (1 Cor 10:12) There's no room to be proud of all the sins we "haven't committed." Every Christian is a sinner saved by God's amazing (radical!) grace.

When someone has sinned, we can identify with them by sharing our own struggles in similar areas - showing compassion and understanding. We might say something like, "I understand how you were tempted in that situation... I might have been (or have been) tempted too." This is not condoning sin, but extending an open hand, instead of a pointed finger. From that platform of love, we can even minister correction if it's needed.

If we won't identify with those who fall, God can't use us to minister deeply to them. Why? Because we think we're better than they are. The Bible word is "self-righteous." Remember the tax-gatherer and the Pharisee? *"The Pharisee stood and was praying thus to himself 'God, I thank Thee that I am not like other people: swindlers, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax-gatherer. I fast twice a week; I pay tithes of all that I get.'"* While, the tax-gatherer *"...was beating his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me, the sinner!'"* (Luke 18:10-14) Which one went home justified?

INJUSTICE

We will frequently find situations where someone's been treated unjustly and they are deeply hurt. I've heard stories that have made me want to go out and kick walls - but we can't take up an offense and speak unlovingly or unredemptively about anyone, no matter what they've done. If we do, we become part of the problem.

As we sit, and listen, and pray, we want to help that person come to a point of wholeness. It's important to acknowledge what's been wrong, or hurtful - and assure them their pain is understandable under the circumstances. This releases any false guilt they may have for feeling hurt. We also want to protect them, and others, from further injury - so we need to watch our words and attitudes. We don't want to feed any bitterness or resentment they may be struggling with or encourage any angry things they may want to say or do. We do, however, want to encourage them to take responsibility in any area they need to, since it's rare when one side is totally to blame. In these situations we can simply say, "What happened was wrong - anyone would be hurt. The others involved may never see it, and they may never ask you for forgiveness. But you need to forgive them anyway. Take care of your part, and trust the Lord with the rest." No one suffered more injustice than Jesus and yet He forgave. For total healing, they must eventually come to a point of forgiveness and let the offense go. Our job is to help them get there.

PROCESS AND TIMING

A friend recently said, "Some people have the ministry of filling people's cups, others have the ministry of drilling holes in them." I sank in my chair, knowing that on occasion, I've been a driller rather than a filler. Can you identify with me on this? In fact, a lot of what I'm sharing has been learned the hard way - through being hurt, and unfortunately, by sometimes hurting others. Part of the problem comes from not understanding process and timing. We're all at different stages in the process of becoming like Jesus. And in that process, there are priorities. When an ambulance hits the scene of an accident, the doctors aren't interested in *who* ran the red light. They just want to stop the bleeding, bind up the wounds, and get the injured out of the street. At that moment of crisis, it doesn't matter who did what. A drunk driver laying in a pool of blood knows he's blown it and doesn't need anyone standing over him with a flashlight to tell him so. It can and will be dealt with later - if he survives. It may take months in the hospital before he's even strong enough to appear in court. The courtroom and the ambulance both have their place - but timing is crucial. Parents understand this. They'll phone an ambulance for their injured son before lecturing him about playing in the street.

But sometimes we hit the scene of a tragedy with a flashlight and a gavel, instead of a first-aid kit. When there's sin, repentance is essential - but we can't let someone bleed to death waiting for them to agree with us on where *we* think they went wrong. What if the "drunk" driver swerving down the road was really a man having a heart attack? Sometimes we draw hasty or superficial conclusions - and sometimes we're wrong. Job had some interesting friends. In the midst of his tragedy, they came weeping and tearing their clothes. They sat silently with Job for seven days - sharing his sorrow. They got off to a great start, until their quiet support turned into a time of wounding accusation.

In *The Healing Choice*, Ron Lee Davis says, "...there are two ways to stand by people in a time of loss: one, a ministry of quiet presence with the sufferer; the other, a reckless and judgmental intrusion into the sufferer's misery. When someone is going through a trial, he probably doesn't need to hear more words, not even words from the Bible. He just needs a friend who will offer simple presence and practical encouragement. In God's own time, he may gain a divine perspective on his trial, but that perspective can never be imposed on him from without, especially during the very worst depths of his suffering."

DON'T BE SHY!

After Keith and the children died, many reached out to me. But I often had a false idea that I was really a bother to them. I felt awkward being on the receiving end of so much sympathy and attention. But if my friends hadn't pursued me, I would have ended up lonely and isolated, depressed over thinking nobody cared - while they sat home wishing there was something they could do! When someone's going through trials, they may be so upset they're not thinking straight. They don't know what they need. Because we don't want to "invade their privacy," we think that if they wanted to talk, or pray, or have company - they'd ask. They usually don't. Be sensitive, but don't be shy!

Psalms 34:18 says, *"The Lord is near to the brokenhearted, and saves those who are crushed in spirit."* We need to be near too. Just phoning to tell someone you were thinking of them, or asking if you can visit, means a lot. Or, you can just drop by for a few minutes. If they're not in the mood for company, you can always go back later. My friend just found out she has breast cancer. Several of us went to encourage her and her husband. We prayed, cried, and shared communion. It was simple, yet so comforting - for all of us. Depending on the situation, there are many little things you can do - usually the more practical, the better. Things like cooking, cleaning, or shopping are great ways to express concern. Flowers or cards are always appreciated. And maybe just doing something fun together for a few hours would bring some needed relief from the intensity of the situation. Just see what the needs are and meet them. If you aren't sure, ask.

Just your presence makes a statement of caring. Broken people usually need some solitude - but a steady diet of loneliness is unhealthy for anyone. Just be natural and express yourself simply. God may give you an encouraging word or scripture, but just saying you're sorry they're sick, or you're sorry about the death in the family, is sufficient when it's sincere. Big speeches aren't necessary. Many people want to talk about what has happened, or about the past, or pray. Talking is therapeutic. Let *them* set the tone and the limits of the conversation, and be careful not to pry. Be a thoughtful and

sympathetic listener. Maybe they just need a shoulder to cry on.

Be careful not to push someone past a point they're emotionally ready to go. Let them be on God's time schedule - not yours. If someone gets "stuck" we may need to gently encourage them to press forward - but usually it's more important that they're headed in the right direction, than how fast they're going. My friend's daughter died, and after a few months the people in her church wanted her to stop grieving, put away her pictures, and rejoice that her child was in heaven. To avoid the pressure and guilt, she finally quit going to church. She was responsible for her decision - but the insensitivity of her church influenced her choice in a negative way. God wants us to help, not hinder, those who are wounded and struggling.

Depending on the situation, it may take months or even years for full healing to come - so don't quit after one visit! You may wonder how some of the little things I mentioned could really help. But little things aren't "little" to someone who's struggling. We're told to "*bear one another's burdens*" and, often, we're carrying more than we realize. (Gal. 6:2)

CARRYING CROSSES



On the way to Calvary, Jesus needed help carrying His cross. In John 19:17, it says He, "*...went out, bearing His own cross...*" Then in Matthew 27:32, we're told, "*And as they were coming out, they found a man of Cyrene named Simon, whom they pressed into service to bear His cross.*" This is how I imagine the scene: Jesus is led out of the Praetorium, the cross bar tied to His arms. But He'd been so badly beaten, and tortured, and lost so much blood, He was stumbling and falling. Because of the cross, He couldn't break His fall with His hands, so sometimes He fell flat on His face under its' crushing weight. It soon became obvious that He wasn't going to make it without help, and Simon was "*pressed into service.*" Now Jesus could use His hands to break His fall. God could have lifted the weight, but He gave us an example by choosing a man to help bear the burden. When Simon took the cross, he helped break Jesus' fall. It enabled Jesus to make it where He was going. It was help Jesus didn't ask for because He was willing to bear His own burden, but it was help the Father wanted to give.

We are a community of believers that fall and rise - following the biblical pattern of death and resurrection. Simon was a passerby with no plans to carry anyone's cross that day - yet he allowed God to use him for a difficult and unpleasant task when his path crossed with Jesus'. It's even possible that his help prevented Jesus' premature death. Simon's obedience allowed him to play a part in the most awesome drama of human history - the death and resurrection of the Son of God. Simon couldn't know whose burden he was carrying that day, or how his act of mercy would be recorded for all eternity to remember,

Let's allow God to press us into service, and like Simon, break the falls and bear the burdens of those He puts (even unexpectedly) along our path. Jesus was anointed to bind up the brokenhearted. We need that same anointing in our lives. If we allow God to use us in this way, the world will never be the same - and we too, will be transformed.

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