

Healing for Broken and Guilty Hearts

Written by Bob Stone

Ways to Help and Be Helped

Not everyone wants to help the person who is hurting, so when we see this desire in others it should be affirmed, especially in children.

I read an excerpt from James Dobson's newest book about a mother who was sick in bed with the flu. Her young daughter wanted so much to be a good nurse. She fluffed the pillows and brought a magazine for her mother to read. And then she even showed up with a surprise cup of tea.

"Why, you're such a sweetheart," the mother said as she drank the tea. "I didn't know you even knew how to make tea."

"Oh, yes," the little girl replied. "I learned by watching you. I put the tea leaves in the pan and then I put in the water, and I boiled it, and then I strained it into a cup. But I couldn't find a strainer, so I used the flyswatter instead."

"You what?" the mother screamed.

And the little girl said, "Oh, don't worry, Mom, I didn't use the new flyswatter, I used the old one"—Family News, Dr James Dobson, Focus On the Family.

It's hard to know what to do when something like that happens, but whatever you do, make sure you look beyond the act and affirm the caring and giving heart. Then you can give the child some insight on what he/she might do next time!

If you are caring for someone, even if you don't feel competent or have no way to

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measure how you're doing, I want you to hear my encouragement and applause today. ("Way to go! Yay!") In fact, I think I represent the Lord in saying, "Thank you." In the context of applause and thanksgiving, however, I think the Lord has some insight for us as to how we can grow in our care for others.

I want us to look at a passage of Scripture this week and next, and basically highlight a few of the phrases we find there to spotlight on our caring action.

Isaiah 61:1-3 The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me, because the LORD has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners, to proclaim the year of the LORD'S favor and the day of vengeance of our God, to comfort all who mourn, and provide for those who grieve in Zion—to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair. They will be called oaks of righteousness, a planting of the LORD for the display of his splendor.

We know this passage well because it is repeated in Luke 4:18-19.. These are the words Jesus read from Isaiah to describe Himself and His church. I have spoken on this whole passage many times, but in the time we have, I want to focus on one phrase in verse 1—*"...He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted..."*

There is some disagreement about whether this phrase was in the original documents of Luke, but in Isaiah 61, we see an expanded description of our Lord's ministry and ours as well. In the Luke and Isaiah passages we see:

The Prerequisite to Ministry

"The Spirit of the Lord is on me..." The description of ministry is introduced by this one phrase. It is an important prerequisite to all ministry. This precondition is where we all must start and continue, if we are going to be ultimately effective in any Christian service. We

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need the Spirit!

The Pattern of Ministry

With the Lord's example of dependency in mind, notice how Jesus gives to us a description of His ministry and ours. At least five areas are mentioned here:

1. evangelizing
2. healing counsel
3. rehabilitation
4. prayer and spiritual warfare
5. explaining the times

The first area of ministry is evangelizing.

"The spirit of the Lord is upon me; therefore he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor..."—Luke 4:18a; Isaiah 61:1a.

The second area of ministry is healing, counseling and tending.

"...he has sent me to heal the brokenhearted..."—Luke 4:18b; Isaiah 61:b. Before we get to Heart Healing 101, we need to know what the heart represents. The heart, in Scripture, provides the **center for our thought process**—understanding, reflecting, and considering. King Solomon prayed for a wise heart—2 Chron. 1:10.

The heart is also the **seat of the emotions**—courage and despair, joy and pain, fear and faith. David expressed his desire to build God's Temple as something that was in his heart. Both Old and New Testaments view the heart as the **essence of the individual's mental, emotional, and spiritual life**.

The heart is the reflection of the person ("*...out of the abundance of the heart a man speaks...as a man thinks in his heart, so is he...*")

and

is seen, then, as the point of decision making. It is the moral and spiritual center of choice. Solomon's sinful religious and moral choices are described as the turning of his

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heart
from God—1 Kings 11:4.

What can happen to the heart? According to Paul, the human heart may be darkened, blinded, or hardened—Rom. 2:1,5; Eph. 4:18. The human heart has a great capacity for self-deception. (*"The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?"* —Jer. 17:9?)

Even Christians can develop self-deceiving capacities like rationalizing, in order to deal with sinful motives or emotions. (Adapted from *Why Christians Crack Up*—Minirth-Meier Clinic, p. 17.) But the heart can also be transformed by the glory of Christ—2 Cor. 4:6.

There is one more thing I want you to notice about the heart. Isaiah 61 says that the heart can be broken, too. Brokenhearted means a rubbed together and shattered heart.

What is the ministry of Jesus to this kind of person? To "heal" (bind up, Is. 61:1) is to serve as an attendant, to do service, to take care of. It can mean to dress, wash, to take care of the sick at heart—to tend, to treat them in whatever way is needed. One of my favorite examples of the Lord's ministry to the brokenhearted is found in John 11:1-45.

Let's read an excerpt from that incident—John 11:32-46. (Explain story.)

When Mary reached the place where Jesus was and saw him, she fell at his feet and said, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died." When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come along with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in spirit and troubled. "Where have you laid him?" he asked. "Come and see, Lord," they replied. Jesus wept." (Note: That's the shortest verse in the Bible, but it is profound in the picture it gives to us of Jesus.)

Then the Jews said, "See how he loved him!" But some of them said, "Could he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?" Jesus, once

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more deeply moved, came to the tomb. It was a cave with a stone laid across the entrance "Take away the stone," he said. "But, Lord," said Martha, the sister of the dead man, "by this time there is a bad odor, for he has been there four days." Then Jesus said, "Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?" So they took away the stone. Then Jesus looked up and said, "Father, I thank you that you have heard me. I knew that you always hear me, but I said this for the benefit of the people standing here, that they may believe that you sent me."

When he had said this, Jesus called in a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!" The dead man came out, his hands and feet wrapped with strips of linen, and a cloth around his face. Jesus said to them, "Take off the grave clothes and let him go." Therefore many of the Jews who had come to visit Mary, and had seen what Jesus did, put their faith in him. But some of them went to the Pharisees and told them what Jesus had done.

I love this picture of Jesus. If you want to be like Him, mimic Him here. Here is the Son of God, who already knew what He was going to do, but still identified with the pain and mourning of those He loved. I want you to know Jesus does the same thing today. Even though He is in eternity and has a plan for our lives, He is still moved by our condition.

- 33] "...he was deeply moved in spirit and troubled..."
 - 35] "Jesus wept."
 - 36] "See how he loved him!"
 - 38] Jesus, once more deeply moved, came to the tomb.
 - 41] Then Jesus looked up and said, "Father, I thank you that you have heard me.
- 42] I knew that you always hear me, but I said this for the benefit of the people standing here, that they may believe that you sent me."

Remember, the brokenhearted can't bear their condition alone. They need caring people—those who will tend them. They need people to help them get their heart healed, for it's broken and shattered—Prov. 14:13; 15:13.

Prov. 14:13—"Even in laughter the heart may ache, and joy may end in grief."

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Prov. 15:13—*"A happy heart makes the face cheerful, but heartache crushes the spirit."*

Why is the heart broken? There are a number of reasons, which will help to guide our approach, our extension of Christ's ministry.

- Sometimes it's because their dreams have been dashed. Things don't work out as planned. The media has lied to them, e.g., "it doesn't get any better than this."

- Sometimes it's because of life's circumstances, the sins and/or actions of others—Prov. 12:18a; 15:4b. Through pressures their strength is depleted, or they are dealt a cruel blow by sinful actions (abused/sinned against, abandoned, betrayed).

In the little booklet entitled, "Why Christians Crack Up," there is a story about Andrew. Andrew was never loved or accepted. No matter what he did, how good his grades were, how clean his room was, his parents constantly found fault. His father, a military officer, disciplined him harshly, asserting that it was biblical not to spare the rod and spoil the child. In Andrew's family, no one showed affection. In fact, one of his father's favorite sayings was, "Big boys don't cry." Andrew's father drilled this denial of any emotion into the young man from the time he was a toddler. The result was that Andrew came to deny his emotions and developed intense underlying anger that he did not recognize. Andrew eventually got married, but stress/dysfunction followed. No matter what his wife did, it was not good enough. He had inordinately high expectations of his children. Andrew represents many Christians who are deeply wounded and need to be healed. Someone sinned against them, and now as the wounded, they are brokenhearted and/or sinning against others.

- Sometimes a heart is broken because of a person's own sins. Proverbs 14:30 says, *"a heart of peace gives life to the body, but envy rots the bones."* Psalm 32:3 adds, *"When I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was sapped as in the heat of summer. Selah."*

Obviously this person has contributed to his own condition, but now feels the weight of his action and it crushes him!

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- A final reason a heart can be broken is the death of a loved one, or walking with a friend/relative through a terminal illness. Even after a year or more, there is still great pain after such a loss.

What will help? Many things can, but whatever assistance we offer, it must be healing. "...He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted..." We need to find ways to bind up, to serve as an attendant, to do service, to dress, to wash, to take care of the sick at heart.

Let me give you an overview of all the kinds of healing that may be needed.

Healing presence/God's presence. Ps. 23—"Yea though I walk..."

When I talk to people who are going through a difficult time, the first thing I do is to pray and thank the Lord for His presence—Ps. 77:19; 73:23-24; Matt. 28:20b. One of our people was in the hospital in a coma a few years ago, and when I got to the part of the prayer, "*Yea though I walk through the shadow of death I will fear no evil for you are with me,*" she began to stir and the monitors began going off. She came out of her coma.

Healing friendships

The vast majority of people won't get help from a professional counselor or a pastor. They don't want to reveal their private life to another. Still others refuse to go to a pastor or counselor because they believe seeking help is an announcement that they are really in trouble.

Filling the gap between the need and counsel can be a friend, especially one who is wise and prepared to help. The challenge to all of us is to find such a friend. Men, most of you

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don't know that you need a very close friend. The friendless American male is more often the norm. Women, you also need a network of friends, intimate friends, kindred spirits to whom you can confide your soul.

Friendship can also be hurtful. We decide what effect our presence will have on people—Job 2:11-13. Job's friends did the right thing to begin with, but they should have kept their mouths shut a lot longer. The problem with their words is that they didn't have a heavenly perspective. While they said some true things, a lot of error and hurt was in their speech as well. How much better to have just been present and listened.

I read an article about actress Nell Carter in which she shared how her Christian friends abandoned her in her time of need; it was her Hollywood friends who kept in touch (visited, called, wrote cards). What did that say to her? Christians weren't as loving and caring as non-Christians. That may not be fair, but that was her conclusion based on the people who were there in her time of need.

Healing families

Children and parents need a place of safety, a place where healing, rest and restoration can take place. The tragedy today is that many families are too busy to be a place of healing. Instead of a place of calm, the home is filled with winds of activity and family pressures which blow loudly and fiercely. It takes time, prayer and the grace and compassion of God to make our homes into a place where healing takes place; it's in the calm that we prepare for the storm.

Likewise, it's in the everyday activities of the home where we prepare for those storm-like tragedies, calamities, moments when the whole family is hurting. I believe one of the greatest needs in the Christian home today is the development of a healing atmosphere. Here's a story Dobson tells that illustrates the impact of healing.

"I'm told that when I was a very small child, maybe two years of age, my family lived in a one-bedroom apartment, and my little bed was located beside the bed of my parents. My father said that it was common during that time for him to awaken at night to a little voice that was whispering, 'Daddy? Daddy? Daddy?'

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"My father would answer quietly, 'What, Jimmy?'

"And I would say, 'Hold my hand!'

"My dad would reach across the darkness and grope for my little hand, finally engulfing it in his. He said later that the instant he had my hand firmly in his grip, my arm would become limp and my breathing deep and regular. I would immediately fall back to sleep.

"You see, I only wanted to know that he was there! Until the day he died, I continued to reach for him—for his assurance, for his guidance—but mostly just to know that he was there.

"Then, so very quickly I found myself in my dad's place. And I wanted to be there for my children—not just a name on their birth certificate, but a strong, warm and loving presence in their lives.

"You see, a dad occupies a place in a child's heart that no one else can satisfy. So to all the men out there who are blessed to be called fathers: I urge you to be there for the little ones in your life who call you Dad." (Ibid, James Dobson)

Parents, we need a lot of hand holding, praying, hugging, truthful speech, laughter and love in order for our homes to be healing places. These qualities are developed only through a consistent walk with God in the everyday circumstances. Then when a tornado of hurt comes, there will be a storm cellar available.

Healing words

- Healing words are **not reckless** words. Prov. 12:18 says, "*Reckless words pierce like a sword, but the tongue of the wise brings healing.*" During my breakdown, I was attracted to Proverbs. It felt good.

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- Healing words are **not deceitful** words. Prov. 15:4—*"The tongue that brings healing is a tree of life, but a deceitful tongue crushes the spirit..."*
Truthful words bring healing.

- Healing words are **apt/appropriate** words. Prov. 25:11-13—*"A word aptly spoken is like apples of gold in settings of silver. Like an earring of gold or an ornament of fine gold is a wise man's rebuke to a listening ear. Like the coolness of snow at harvest time is a trustworthy messenger to those who send him; he refreshes the spirit of his masters."*

- Healing words **build up**. Eph. 4:29—*"Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen."*

- Healing words are **kind**. Prov. 12:25—*"An anxious heart weighs a man down, but a kind word cheers him up."*

- Healing words **affirm**. Everyone needs affirmation, even those who are most successful, most competent and most popular. Affirmation is not flattery, nor a series of manufactured compliments designed to make people feel good or to gain their favor. Affirmation is seen in the opening words of the letter to the Philippians.

Phil. 1:1—*Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, To all the saints in Christ Jesus at Philippi, together with the overseers and deacons:*

We skip over this standard greeting because it is so routine, but stop to think about it. Humanly speaking, there is no way *Paul* and *Timothy* should ever have been in the same sentence. Paul was a hand-picked apostle, highly educated and Jewish. Timothy, on the other hand, was a young, timid, country bumpkin. Paul was determined to build up this man, to instruct him so that years later the relationship could become a

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partnership. That's affirmation.

Jesus saw the potential in Peter before his spectacular denial. Seeing the potential in people—this future look—"is an ability given, we believe by the Holy Spirit. It is something to pray for. The Spirit of God lets us hold a crown of potential over someone's head and encourage him or her to grow up into it. We shouldn't be satisfied with sticking it on immediately. We should give people a sense that tomorrow they are going to be even better"—*Affirmation and Rebuke*, Gordon and Gail MacDonald, IVP, p. 12.

We must ask ourselves, "Are we capable of seeing the best possibilities, the potential in people today even when they appear to be failing us? And where would we be if Jesus had not done that for us at the cross?" (Ibid.)

Whenever Nancy and I talk with the Parenting Class at our church, we tell them our practice of affirming our children each night before they went to sleep. We tried to catch them doing something right during the day and then affirm them for it. We wanted the last thing they heard before going to sleep to be a sincere affirmation.

Healing comfort, empathy, mercy

Rom. 12:8—*"If it is showing mercy, let him do it cheerfully."*

2 Cor. 1:3-4—*"Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God."*

Mercy means to not give someone what he deserves, to crawl into another's skin and think with his thoughts; to put yourself in his place and think and feel like he does.

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Healing cheer

Prov. 17:22—*"A cheerful heart is a good medicine, but a crushed spirit dries up the bones."*

Rom. 12:8b—*"...if it is showing mercy, let him do it cheerfully..."*

If tastefully and wisely done, a sense of humor and a cheerful spirit can do amazing things to lift a hurting person out of their despair.

Healing counsel

1 Thess. 5:14—*"And we urge you, brothers, warn those who are idle, encourage the timid, help the weak, be patient with everyone."* This verse sets forth significant guidelines in relating to others in the church. Five verbs are used in this verse, which sets forth significant guidelines for relating to one another in the Body of Christ.

- *urge* or *parakaleo* in the Greek. It means "called alongside to help." This word reflects the work of the Holy Spirit and is a picture of what counseling is all about.

- *"be patient,"* a guideline for dealing with anyone

The remaining three verbs detail specific approaches suitable for specific problems.

- *"warn the idle"*
- *"encourage the timid"*
- *"help the weak"*

There are times then to be direct and times to be indirect. There are times to confront, and times to encourage. There are times to speak and times to listen.

Healing solutions

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Sometimes actions need to be taken before healing can be realized.

- Forgiveness from God. 1 John 1:9; James 5:16—*"Therefore, confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed."*

- Forgiving others. Matt. 6:12,14—*"If we don't forgive we aren't forgiven."* Help people to realize, for their sake, it is imperative to forgive. *"Bitterness is the fruit of unforgiveness"*
—Heb. 12:14-15; Matt. 18:21-35.

- Formulating an individualized care plan (for example, helping a person gently decide the best course of action can be very healing to them, e.g., get out of debt; seek reconciliation with parents; see a counselor; go back to school, etc.)

Healing sometimes comes during acts of obedience, or as a result of wise action—2 Kings 5:14. During my breakdown, the Elders handed me a plan. I couldn't make any decisions for myself, so they made the decisions for me.

In 1 Kings 19, we can see God's ministry to the dispirited prophet Elijah, and then the action plan that God presented to him as a means to getting him going in the right direction again.

Healing power/prayer

1 Cor. 12:9—*"...to another gifts of healing by that one Spirit..."*

James 5:16—*"Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective."*

It is obvious that no real healing takes place apart from the ministry of the Holy Spirit, and He has all kinds of gifts for all kinds of healing. It is also apparent that our prayers for others can be powerful and effective weapons of healing (see Healing Solutions—James 5:13ff).

Healing environment—love, acceptance, forgiveness, and belonging

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1. Love—2 Cor. 6:11-13; 7:2-4; 1 Cor. 13:4-8a; Eph. 5:1-2; John 13:34-35
2. Acceptance—Rom. 15:7; Acts 15:36-40; 2 Tim. 4:11
3. Forgiveness—Eph. 4:32; Luke 7:36-50
4. Belonging—1 Cor. 12:4-14; Eph. 4:16 (healing relationships). We belong to each other; we need each other; and we affect each other.

It's easy to see that it is God's intention to bring all kinds of healing through Spirit-empowered believers: "...he has sent me to heal the broken hearted." Therefore we need to find all kinds of healing agents in this hurting world.

Reflect and Share Questions

1. The manner in which healing for broken and shattered hearts takes place may be different for every person. Apart from mourning over the loss of someone, describe in short phrases the kinds of heart-focused healings you have experienced or observed in others. What is the most common kind of heart healing you have received? What healing instrument has God used most often? (Possibilities: a friend, a family member, a pastor, a professional counselor, other) What does that say to you?

2. If you have gone through a season of mourning, quickly reflect on how long the most intense portion of the mourning took. During that season, what was the most helpful and/or hurtful thing someone said or did for you? If you are currently in a season of mourning, what is the best thing people have done or can do for you?

3. From the example we see of the Lord's ministry in John 11:17-38, answer the following questions:

- What are the crowd's expressions of mourning in this incident?
- When Jesus wept, what was communicated to the crowd and family who may have seen it?
- Why do you think Jesus wept?
- What does this passage tell us about mourning?

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- When you were growing up in your household, would you have described your home as a place of healing and calm? Why? For those who desire to have a family, as you look to the future, what elements do you want to build into your family life that will assure it is a place of healing?

- What words, verses and/or action do you find most effective in bringing healing to someone who has a broken heart? Read the following verses and see if they remind you of appropriate words for the brokenhearted—Prov. 12:18,25; 15:4; 25:11; Eph. 4:29.

- Why is it so important to be affirming of children, other family members, co-workers, friends, etc.? Describe a time when a person's affirming words made all the difference in how you felt about your situation.

- Where do you feel you need some affirmation today? Describe the situation briefly.

Exercise: Read this story and notice how the Lord and the Jewish people comforted and mourned with the sisters of Lazarus. Answer the questions at the end.