



HEALING

Healing from Toxic Religion – Part 3

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If you carry scars from a toxic church or leader, those wounds won't heal merely by the passage of time. It takes intentionality to heal. Issues like the betrayal of trust, manipulation of our thoughts and emotions through the toxic tools of guilt and shame, and degradation of our God image must all be exposed to the light of God's truth. Jesus once said, "You will know the truth and the truth will set you free" (John 8.32). In this next installment in our series, we'll examine what it takes to heal from some of the worst damage caused by toxic churches and those who lead them.

Hurtful experiences from Christians are a part of the stories of nearly half of all atheists and agnostics.

Those between the age of 18 and 32 are two and a half times more likely than older generations to say they've had bad experiences among Christians that have degraded their view of Jesus.

1. HEALING FROM ABUSE

“Although studies and information on clergy sexual abuse are limited, available statistics state that its global prevalence rate is around 18 percent for girls and 7.6 percent for boys. In recent years, commissioned studies have found alarming rates of clergy sexual abuse within various religious communities.” – Manly, Stewart & Finaldi (January 16, 2024)

“You are more likely to be abused by someone in the church, than your congregation being involved in a shooting.” – Dr. Diane Langberg

Pain and Pretending

- Vulnerability - Who can meet my needs?
- Discovery - What is happening to me?
- Eligibility - Why is this happening to me?

“It’s like they’re carrying a ticket to disaster in their pocket.”
– Rich Buhler

- Abandonment - Who will help me?
- Pretending - What can I do with my pain?

We learn to grieve the things we cannot change

“Grief is how we get our hearts and minds wrapped around reality.” – Carolyn Adkins, LPC



Blessed are those who mourn for they will be comforted. Matthew 5.4

❑ We break the chains that bind us to our abuser through forgiveness

You are only hurting yourself with your anger. Job 18.4

"[Forgiveness means becoming] a hero instead of a victim in the story you tell." – Dr. Fred Luskin, Stanford University Forgiveness Project

"Forgiveness is not a one-off decision; it is a journey and a process that takes time, determination, and persistence. Forgiveness is not forgetting; it is simply denying your pain the right to control your life." - Corallie Buchanan

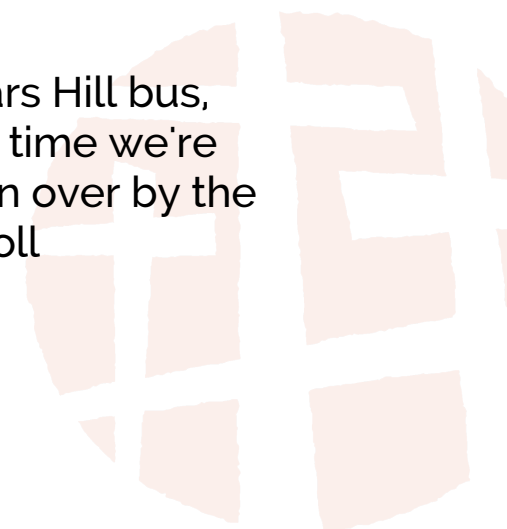
2. HEALING OUR TRUST WOUNDS

"[Traumatized people] lose their trust in themselves, in other people and in God." - Judith Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*

"Trust is the glue of life... It's the foundational principle that holds all relationships." - Stephen Covey

"There is a pile of dead bodies behind the Mars Hill bus, and by God's grace, it'll be a mountain by the time we're done. You either get on the bus or you get run over by the bus. Those are the two options." - Mark Driscoll

❑ The scars of broken trust



Yet you brought me safely from my mother's womb and led me to trust you when I was a nursing infant. Psalm 22.9 (New Living Translation)

Can trust be restored once it's violated?

There are at least 20 well-known Bible stories that involve broken trust, and only three of them (that I know of) end with trust being rebuilt.

Trust cannot be commanded. It has to be earned.

What are the essentials of trust?

- 1.) Predictability
- 2.) Dependability
- 3.) Faith

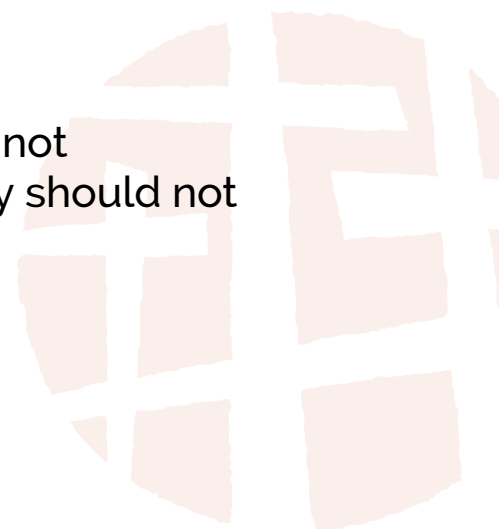
Jesus still carries His scars

"Isn't it curious that God could raise Jesus from the dead but didn't heal the nail wounds in his hands? Was this an oversight? Surely not. The power of death is conquered, but the [scars] remain." - Richard Hays, "Fingering the Evidence"

3. HEALING TOXIC GUILT AND SHAME

"The answer to such people is that if they cannot understand books written for grown-ups, they should not talk about them." - C.S. Lewis

Freedom from Guilt by Dr. Bill Counts
No Condemnation by Bruce Narramore



❑ The four types of guilt

- Civil guilt
- Theological guilt
- Psychological guilt
- Constructive sorrow

...yet now I am happy, not because you were made sorry, but because your sorrow led you to repentance. For you became sorrowful as God intended and so were not harmed in any way by us. Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death. 2 Corinthians 7.9-10

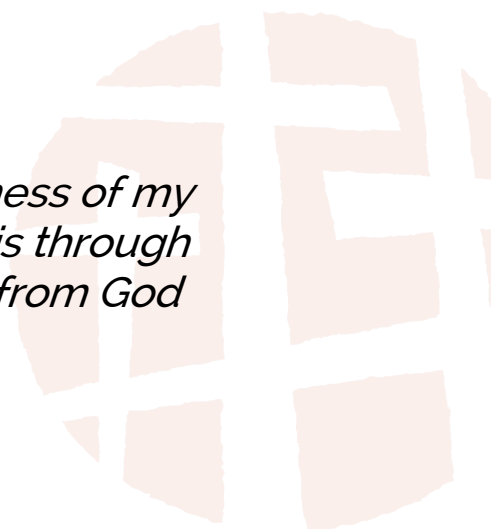
Results of constructive sorrow:

- 1.) No harmful effects
- 2.) Repentance and deliverance
- 3.) No lingering regrets

q So what happens when we sin?

- God does not reject us. He accepts us.

...and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ - the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith. Philippians 3.9



- God does not punish us. He disciplines us.

There is no fear of love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love. 1 John 4.19

☐ Embrace your new identity in Christ

My True Identity in Christ:

- You are not condemned (Romans 8.1)
- You are accepted (Romans 15.7)
- You are ransomed - "restored to favor" (1 Corinthians 1.30)
- You are a new creation (2 Corinthians 5.17)
- You are the righteousness of God (2 Corinthians 5.21)
- You are liberated (Galatians 2.4)
- You are chosen, holy and blameless before God (Ephesians 1.4)
- You are redeemed, forgiven (Ephesians 1.7)
- You are alive (formerly dead in spirit) (Ephesians 2.5)
- You have boldness and confident access to God (Ephesians 3.12)
- You have all your needs supplied (Philippians 4.19)
- Your life is hidden with God in Christ (Colossians 3.3)

How do you appropriate your new identity?

- 1.) You've got to know the truth.
- 2.) You've got to believe the truth.
- 3.) You've got to live the truth.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. We often only associate grief with the losses we face in death, but grief is God's way of healing us from any and all



of the losses of life. What sort of losses have you grieved? What feelings get expressed in grief? How has God met you in your grief?

2. Forgiveness is often misunderstood and therefore resisted. What separates real forgiveness from stereotypes and misunderstanding? Have you ever needed to forgive someone? What made it challenging? Take some time to discuss the following quotes:

"[Forgiveness means becoming] a hero instead of a victim in the story you tell." – Dr. Fred Luskin, Stanford University Forgiveness Project

"Forgiveness is not a one-off decision; it is a journey and a process that takes time, determination, and persistence. Forgiveness is not forgetting; it is simply denying your pain the right to control your life." - Corallie Buchanan

3. Trust is often violated in instances of toxic churches and toxic leaders. Trust is something that's never commanded in Scripture. Why is that? Are we appropriately cautious in new relationships to extended trust only when it is earned as opposed to leaving ourselves vulnerable? Have you ever had someone violate your trust? What effect did it have on you? How did you deal with it? How does it affect your present relationships? What did you learn about scars as it relates to trust wounds?

4. When people use the feeling of guilt to manipulate others, they are most definitely using guilt in ways that Scripture never does. The Biblical word for guilt only deals with the fact of guilt. When it comes to the feeling of guilt, Scripture uses another term "worldly sorrow" which only

produces death. How is godly sorrow different from worldly sorrow? When you feel guilty or are made to feel guilty, a child of God can reject that feeling as not from God. Have you ever been in an environment, church or otherwise, that made heavy use of the feeling of guilt? What effect did that have on you? What would you suggest to someone coming out of a toxic church that regularly practiced guilty their members?

5. As a group, take some time to read through the out true identity in Christ. Do you believe these truths? Do you struggle with any of them? How would your life be different if you lived like each and every one of these truths were also true of you? Print this list and find some place to post it where you can see it, read it and remind yourself of its truth daily.

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