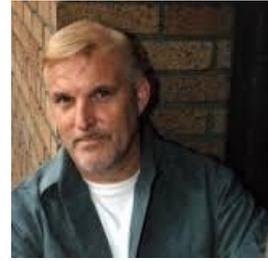


We've all got wounds, past injuries of the soul that still show themselves either in current pain or current behavior.

They can show themselves in current pain through memories that just won't die. Sometimes a mental picture of a traumatic event, like a childhood humiliation or tragedy, keeps intruding into your thoughts. Maybe you let yourself relive it, and all the pain of the event comes flooding back, reopening the sore and making it worse.



A wound can also show itself in your behavior, when it affects the way you relate. It can be the root of adult isolation, fear of intimacy, a craving for power or extreme passivity and dependency. In those cases, the wound affects your ability to love and trust, which pretty much insures you'll have no real intimacy in life.

All of which, I think, is pretty common among people involved in addictive behaviors. Often the behavior can indicate a problem relating, at the root of which there's often a wound that a person's been medicating with a private vice (porn, alcohol, drugs, etc.).

The private vice is a problem, for sure, which needs to be repented. But sometimes it's also been a drug — a way of numbing the pain of an unattended wound. So when the person repents and stops using the painkiller, the wound may start hurting more than ever. No wonder so many people relapse! Their painkiller gets removed before they've developed new ways to deal with the pain.

When you're wounded you'll be tempted to medicate with the tried and true sin you used in the past. That's when emotional pain becomes an internal trigger yelling for its "meds." And while it's great to repent of overt sins, you really can't repent of your wounds. They're still there, and need to be dealt with.

So what's a wounded person to do? Four things come to mind: Identify, Address, Release, Relate.

Identify

Does the very thought of a certain person — or the mention of that person's name — flood you with fear, rage or sadness? Is there someone you avoid whenever possible because the idea of interacting with her or him puts you into a panic? Do you indirectly punish someone — a family member, perhaps, or former friend — with silence, or sarcasm or gossip?

Then you may have a wound associated with that person. Usually the wound is made up of a series of events that happened between you and him or her, a few of which especially stand out. And usually the person involved is someone you were close to — a family member or friend — so he or she could hurt you at the deepest levels.

This is exactly why Jesus said to address a problem directly and immediately:

If your brother sins against you, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him. (Luke 17:3)

When you've been wronged, although you're commanded to forgive, you're also commanded to be honest about the wrongdoing. If you aren't you'll feel unresolved about it, and that lack of resolution easily gives way to resentment.

Address

If this comes close to describing your history with a person you've experienced a deep wound with, then you need to address it. To do so, ask yourself four questions:

First, is this person accessible? (Meaning he or she is alive and can be located.)

Second, is a conversation about this feasible? You may still see this person at times, and the wound is still a painful wall between the two of you. If so, move ahead with plans to address it.

Third, is your perception of this person, and what happened between the two of you, accurate?

Fourth, what do you want to say to this person? What questions do you still have? What do you want him to know about you and the way you feel? What, if anything, do you want to see changed in your current relationship with this person? In addressing these questions, you're finally getting some resolution and clarity, which is a way of cleaning the old wound out.

Release the Wounder and the Wound

If you're able to talk out an old problem with someone who's hurt you, you should. But even if you can't, you're still mandated to forgive. Jesus offered no wiggle room on the matter:

*If you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.
(Matthew 6:15)*

The Greek word Jesus used for "forgive" is *aphiemi*, meaning (according to Thayer's Greek Lexicon) "to let go of a debt by not demanding it." When you release someone who's wounded you, you give up the right to punish. You relinquish any tactics you've used in the past to "hurt him back" — the silent treatment, coldness, sarcasm, or hurtful remarks — and you release the emotional battery acid that's been welling up whenever you think of this person.

If the wounder is unrepentant, unwilling to admit his wrong, there's a punishment waiting for him that's worse than anything you could dish out. Meanwhile, you've got a life to live, so does it make sense for you to allow someone's sin to keep distracting you from what really matters?

When you release the wounder, you relieve yourself of the negative, crippling feelings that weaken you. That, too, is the logic of forgiveness.

Now Relate!

The key to dealing with emotional pain is to admit it, address the source if possible, forgive, then develop relationships that strengthen and heal you. Wounds are generally not healed unless we attain, and maintain, healthy intimacy.

My first clinical supervisor told me to remember that when someone came to me for counseling, they were there because something went wrong in their relationships. And, he stressed, the real solution would come not through analysis, but through intimacy. When people learned to develop strong ties with healthy, loving friends and family, they would heal.

I'd say he got it right. So if you're wounded, I hope you'll take your wound to God. Offer it up; ask Him to help you deal with it. Confess any bitterness you've allowed yourself to hold onto, and ask for the grace and wisdom to address the Wound.

Then go to the source, if possible. Talk it out; clear the air.

Then release the source, whether or not you've been able to talk it out together. And if the old pain resurfaces, make a habit of releasing it as soon as you're aware of it. Here's a trick I learned years ago, which is no trick at all. Jesus advised it when He said:

Bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you. (Matthew 5:44)

Whenever I remember someone's sin against me, whether in the distant past or the here and now, I try to remember them in prayer. Specifically, I pray God's blessings on their lives, and His correction in their lives of any sin that needs correcting. In doing so, I'm released from the burden of hating them, thinking ill of them, obsessing over them. Because who, in the long run, is punished by my bitterness? No one but me, and I've quite selfishly decided I'd rather not punish myself any longer.

I sure hope you won't, either.