

Good & Beautiful & Kind

Chapter 3 ~ Hindering Wounds, Holy Wounds

(*Note to Table Group Leaders: This week could be triggering. Please proceed with sensitivity.)

“Our woundedness or trauma has a way of hindering us from freely receiving and giving love.” (page 49) Since our calling and commitment in following Jesus is to love, it is important to notice and examine/explore anything that might hinder us from fulfilling this calling/commitment. While often unrecognized, our traumas/woundedness can be one of the biggest obstacles to overcome in our efforts to love well.

- *If you are willing, share some of your own trauma and woundedness.*
- *How aware are you of the pain you are carrying?*

“It’s in the compassionate confrontation of our wounds and trauma that we stumble toward wholeness, which, in turn, allows us to become agents of healing.” (page 52)

“Our exploration in this chapter is to produce compassion toward ourselves and empathy toward others, which are indispensable practices of love.” (page 52) *“The more we know about another’s story, the harder it is to hate or harm that person—including ourselves.”* (page 54)

- *Who knows you and your story...particularly the painful parts of your story? Rich shares the story (see page 53) of how his heart was changed for a congregant when he learned more of his story. How has your heart changed toward someone when you learned more about them?*

Rich states that trauma is *“...a wound, the state of woundedness, and the story that arises from living in that state. The world, rooted in incurvatus in se and possessed powers, is a state of constant wounding and re-wounding.”* (page 54) He goes on to speak of transgenerational trauma, racial trauma, sexual trauma, and developmental trauma. (This is not an exhaustive list.) The point is, we all have some woundedness that affects us to various degrees, as does every person we interact with. Also, not all trauma/woundedness is easily seen on the surface, perhaps very little is seen on the surface. To function in a loving way means to be sensitive to this reality. It is safer and more loving to assume everyone we encounter is carrying a wound, bearing some pain.

- *Consider the hurt that you keep pretty well hidden. How would it change how you interact with people if you assumed that they carry similar pain? Or, perhaps more to the point, what will it take for you to function from that assumption?*

In discussing trauma Rich mentions that it often comes from something happening to us that should not have happened (like abuse) or something not happening that should have (like neglect, absence of care and support). He goes on to say, *“Psychoanalyst and philosopher Robert Stolorow explained that developmental trauma occurs when ‘emotional pain cannot*

find a relational home in which it can be held.’ In other words, the pain we experience through everyday life has a way of metastasizing, damaging the rest of our emotional worlds.” (page 57)

To paraphrase Rich, none of us have been loved perfectly. That being the case, we all have some gaps in our psychological, emotional, and relational development. It is important that we recognize and tend to these gaps. (see page 58)

- *Can you think of something that happened to you that shouldn’t have, or something that didn’t happen to you that should have? Would you like to share about that? No pressure. (***)Table Group Leaders, please be particularly sensitive with this, and certainly don’t force it if no one wants to share. If someone shares, honor that as sacred. (***)*
- *How aware are you of your developmental gaps? If somewhat aware, how are you tending to those gaps? If not aware, how might you go about identifying them?*

FYI...Rich’s predecessor at New Life Fellowship was Peter Scazzero who authored *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality*, which stressed that we cannot be spiritually mature while remaining emotionally immature. Generally speaking, the best way to gauge our emotional health is by looking at the quality of our relationships. It’s in relationships that our lack of maturity is often seen.

The beauty of the gospel is that neither sin, nor our trauma, has the last word. *“The way to loving well in a traumatized world requires a level of compassionate self-confrontation deep enough to face ourselves, which in turn enables us to relate differently toward others. In short, the person we must learn to love is ourselves, primarily. It’s very easy to focus on the traumas of others (and there’s a place for that), but first we are called to open ourselves to the healing available in God’s love.” (page 59)*

In the second half of this chapter Rich lays out the habits required in order to learn to love well. They are...

Naming our shame

As Rich points out, most of the trauma and wounds we experience are not our fault but we often internalize it as if it was our fault. This brings undue shame, which closes us off to others and thus to the love needed in order to heal. Also, while we all have trauma and wounds, we also have feelings that accompany those hurts. It is important and healthy to identify/name those feelings. Healing begins when we can name the pain and the feelings associated with it. Is this easy? No. Is it enjoyable? Nope. Is it necessary? Yes...if we want to get to a healthy place. Will God help us? Yes, God is in the healing business. What we also need to recognize is that one of the key resources God offers us in the healing process is His Body, the family of the Church.

- *One of the healthiest practices we can employ in our lives is regularly sharing our feelings with a few trusted friends who have proven to be safe. Do you have such people in your life? Are you interested in developing such a practice? If you are practicing that, what does that look like for you and what have you experienced through that practice?*

Making sense of our stories

“It’s about being able to give expression to our story—especially the painful parts—in an unanxious, fully present, condemnation-free manner...[because] whatever we cannot name reveals the insidious bondage we still exist in. Yet, through the love of God, we were made to live openly, at ease, and courageously, especially as we rehearse our woundedness...[so that] our wounds and trauma are not what identifies us. We are so much more.” (page 63-64)

- *How well do you know your story...not just the people/relationships, facts, and events of your life, but the impact they have had on your soul? Who have you shared your story with? (Sharing it is part of the process of making sense of it.)*
- *Perhaps as practice, and if you feel up to it, share something about yourself people in this group don’t know about you. (It doesn’t need to be some deep secret...just a detail about you that allows people to know you a little bit better.)*

Attending to our bodies

Some of you may recall when we went through the book *The Good And Beautiful You* by James Bryan Smith. One of the points he makes in that book is, “*We must avoid dualism; human beings are a unity. The soul is in the body and the body is in the soul. Put simply, we do not have souls—we are souls; we do not have bodies—we are bodies.*” We tend to think of “faith” as something “spiritual”, but more accurately we only experience faith and life in and through our bodies. In fact, our bodies are the temple/dwelling place of the Holy Spirit (see I Corinthians 6:19). What we do with our bodies and what happens to our bodies is VERY important.

Learning to pay attention to the signals our bodies are sending is a key component in the healing, redeeming, transforming work God is doing in and through us. Additionally, our anticipated and hoped for future is that of a bodily resurrection. Can you think of anything you do without your body?

- *What has your body been communicating to you recently? Also, how are you caring for your body?*
- *As a possible exercise, sit up in an attentive but comfortable position. Close your eyes. Do some deep breathing. As you do so, pay attention to your body. Does anything feel tight or sore? Is there a part of your body that you seem to be noticing over others? Remember, your mind is also part of your body...does it feel clear, cluttered, etc.? Describe/share what you noticed.*

Beholding Jesus

Have you even considered what it must have been like for God to take on human form in Jesus, with all the limitations that come with it? Rich encourages us to consider the physical experience of Jesus...especially His torture and crucifixion...along with the mental, emotional, psychological impact of it. While the incarnation, crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus are core to the Christian faith, they are far more than doctrinal points. They reveal to us the One we worship, the One who is in the process of saving (healing, transforming) us. Jesus is our Wounded Healer.

- *What is the significance, and how does it make you feel, that the One we follow, the One who is our Lord and Savior, the One we pledge our allegiance to has experienced woundedness and trauma?*

We are called to be wounded healers too. But this requires us to have experienced some level of healing ourselves. As Rich points out, “...our wounds don’t have the last word...[in Jesus] our wounds are not to be the controlling narratives of our lives...something greater than pain lies at the center of our existence: the healing grace of God’s love.” (page 68)

- *How does it affect your perspective and expectations to know that even God in Jesus was wounded?*
- *What sort of encouragement, invitation, or challenge do you experience with this chapter?*

Allow me to end with this hopeful thought from Rich, “Your wounds can be redemptively reconfigured...in Him our wounds can become places of deep connection with and compassion for others. In Christ, our wounds no longer need to be marks of shame but can become signs of grace.” (pages 69-70)

Soul Training Exercise ~ Share Your Story...Let Somebody/Others Get To Know You

Last week’s exercise was to get to know somebody. This week it’s to allow somebody to get to know you. This can be done in different ways. It might mean simply opening up a little bit more about yourself in Table Group. It could be by having coffee with someone and sharing a little bit more about your story. Or, perhaps you’re sensing it’s time to allow a trusted friend to know more about some of the pain and wounds you carry.

While most of our trauma/wounds occurred in relationships, relationships are also what’s needed for healing. There’s just no escaping that we were made for relationships. The quality of our relationships is based on the depth of knowledge and acceptance we have of others and they have of us. This week’s exercise/invitation is to take the courageous step of being known. There’s no getting around the fact that love requires risk and vulnerability and might include some pain.