

How to find deliverance from rejection

Luke 5:12-15

March 12, 2017

There was an elderly man in a community where I used to live. His name was Wade. He was a shut in and did not belong to any church in town so I took it upon myself to visit him several times a month. During one visit he told me the story of how at the age of five his mother died. His father was gone and Wade sat alone in that house for several days until a neighbor woman came by to check on them and found the boy and his mother's body and the father was contacted. About a week after the funeral, the father pinned a note to Wade's coat and told him to walk across town to his uncle's house. When Wade arrived at his uncle's house, he read the

card; "You can have the boy and keep him if you want."

After Wade told me this story, he pulled out from under his bed an old box full of letters. He pulled a yellowed postcard out and handed it to me to read. It was the note. At the top were two little pinholes where his father had pinned it to Wade's coat eighty years ago.

Wade looked at me with moist eyes. "Why do you suppose my father sent me away? Why would he do that to a little boy?"

That experience of being abandoned by his parents left Wade with a spirit of rejection. He believed that he was unlovable and worthless.

How many people are there living quiet, lonely lives, infected by a fear of rejection?

The leper

Turn in your Bibles to Luke 5.

Jesus is up north around the Sea of Galilee in the early part of his ministry.

In one of the towns, a man came along who was covered with leprosy. When he saw Jesus, he fell with his face to the ground and begged him, “Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean.”

¹³ Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man. “I am willing,” he said. “Be clean!” And immediately the leprosy left him.

¹⁴ Then Jesus ordered him, “Don’t tell anyone, but go, show yourself to the priest and offer the sacrifices that Moses commanded for your cleansing, as a testimony to them.”

¹⁵ Yet the news about him spread all the more, so that crowds of people came to hear him and to be healed of their sicknesses.

We wonder about this man because leprosy was the most dreaded of diseases

in New Testament times. The condition rendered the body a mass of ulcers and decay. Fingers would curl and gnarl. Blotches of skin would discolor and stink. There were even certain types of leprosy that would numb the nerve endings, leading to losses of fingers and toes—even a whole hand or foot. Leprosy as one man said, was death by inches.

The social consequences were severe. Since they were considered contagious, lepers were quarantined or banished, usually to a leper colony. Throughout Scripture, the leper is representative and symbolic of the ultimate outcast. He stands for any person who has ever been rejected, turned away, or unloved. He is avoided by people he does not know and condemned to a future he cannot bear.

Imagine having no one to touch you—not a family member, a spouse, or a friend. Imagine no handshake, no warm embrace, a tap on the shoulder, a kiss on

the lips. Such moments taken away from you. No one to touch you. No one to even accidentally bump into you for everyone kept their distance. You could not go into a synagogue, your home, or a store. You were untouchable.

The disease would begin imperceptibly with a simple weakening of your grip. Perhaps one day you were working your field with a hoe and you noticed one of the tips of your finger was numb. Then your other fingers. By the end of the planting season you could feel nothing at all. The hand grasping the handle might as well as belonged to someone else. The feeling was gone. How hard you would try to keep it hidden from your family.

Until one day you plunged your hand into a basin of water intending to wash and see the water turn red. Your finger was bleeding from a cut you had not even felt.

Now you must go to the priest. One look at your hand and he covered his mouth

and extended his palm forward. “You are unclean” And with that pronouncement you lost your family, your farm, your friends, your future.

Rejection

Seems harsh doesn't it? The banishing of a leper seems unnecessary. Of course the ancient east isn't the only culture to isolate their wounded. We may not build colonies or cover our mouths in their presence, but we certainly build walls.

Maybe you have felt rejected and unloved. Perhaps you experienced abandonment from your parents, sibling rivalry, or divorce. Perhaps you experienced constant criticism and you gave it a place in in your heart so you started to believe that you are unlovable and worthless.

Maybe your college of choice turned you down. Maybe your date stood you up. I remember in high school calling a girl for a date and her response was to burst out

in laughter. It's kind of tough on a guy's ego. Maybe you were always chosen last in gym class. Maybe you were overlooked for a promotion. It's a feeling we do not care to remember.

Melinda's mother, widowed for the second time, commented on how her married friends dropped her when she became single again. Probably all of us have at times felt unwelcomed or rejected.

I read a newspaper article about a man named Rob Smitty of Tennessee. He donated one of his kidneys to a stranger he met while browsing the internet. He said he did it because he wanted to do something that would make his children proud.

But his ten year old daughter Amber wasn't impressed by his sacrifice. "He never comes to see me and he never calls even on my birthday. I don't think he is much of a hero," she said. Records show that he had not made child support

payments to Amber's mother in nine months.

From the moment of birth we experience new and different things. These things shape and mold us as we discover who we are and begin to develop our self-concept and worth. Not all of these experiences are good and because of the nature of this world, some are quite painful and damaging. Negative family relationships, abuse, loneliness, fear, the death of a loved one leave their mark upon us because we are so vulnerable in childhood. We are not equipped emotionally to deal with such trauma. It is devastating to the adult to feel unloved, let alone the insecure teenager.

These emotional hurts are pushed down into our subconscious where we are not aware of them but they continue to affect us. It is during times of stress, when we overreact to circumstances, that our problems surface. Boredom, exhaustion,

tension, bitter memories, anger, resentment, and jealousy.

I knew a man in my home town named Ben. He had been an ambulance driver in WWII. His job was to go into a battlefield and retrieve the dead and wounded.

Years later Ben came to faith in Christ and became a part of our church. But still the grisly memories of the war haunted him. I think he had PTSD before it was recognized. Untreated it built up inside of Ben until one day he exploded. He got a gun and a hostage and barricaded himself in his house. Fortunately he chose to surrender and was hospitalized for several months. Through good doctors and the prayers of our pastor, Ben was able to find healing for those memories.

Jesus heals the leper

Jesus does the same for the leper. After five years of leprosy his hands would be

gnarled. Tips of his fingers were missing as were portions of an ear and nose. At the sight of him mothers grabbed their children and covered their eyes. Others pointed and stared. The rags on his body couldn't hide his sores. Unclean, unclean he had to shout whenever he was near other people. How tired and exhausted life was.

Until one day. He had heard that a traveling rabbi was coming to his village. Word on the street was that he had performed some pretty incredible miracles in Capernaum. Some were calling him the Messiah. What did he have to lose?

He saw the huge crowd coming down the road. It would have been impossible to have gotten close the rabbi. But not for him. Just the sight of him sent people running in the opposite direction as a flood of fear swept across the crowd. But this time he ignored their screams. Every

one ran away but Jesus. Rather than see fear on his face, the leper saw only compassion.

He fell to the ground and begged, “Lord, you can heal me if you will.” If you are willing.

“I am willing”, Jesus said, “be clean”.

Now Luke records these words, “*Jesus reached out and touched the man.*” I think Luke mentions this for a purpose. Remember Luke was a physician. He notes this small but significant action of Jesus in the healing process.

Think about that for a minute. Think how long it had been since he had experienced the touch of another human being.

Think how many touches you get a day. A handshake, a hug, a pat on the back, holding someone’s hand. The leper had not been able to do that that for years.

Think how much affirmation that would have sent flowing through his spirit.

“He touched me.”

Warmth where there had been numbness. Strength where there had been atrophy. His back straightened and his head lifted. Life where there had been decay.

When St. Francis of Assisi decided to leave his life of wealth and privilege, in dramatic fashion he stripped off all his clothing and walked out of his town. As he walked he saw a leper standing on the side of the road. Francis went to the leper and embraced the leper and continued his journey. Looking back, he saw the leper was gone. For the rest of his life St. Francis was convinced that the leper was Jesus. For whatever you have done for the least of these, my brothers, you have done it for me.”

Healing begins with Forgiveness

I believe Jesus can heal our damaged emotions. Paul reminds us in 2 Corinthians that *“if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: the old has gone, the new is here.”*

Jesus can heal our feelings of rejection. We can have our old, hurtful memories replaced by positive ones. Not that we forget them but we allow Jesus to transform them through a process of prayer, counseling and forgiveness.

When I was the youth pastor here in the 80's we used to take the youth on a bus trip to Ocean City New Jersey for a week long retreat. It was a long trip so I made friends with the bus driver whose name was Ray. He had never been inside a church or opened a Bible. He shared with me about his rough childhood. He resented his father for all that had happened. By his own admission he was restless, angry and frequently got into fights. He always carried a knife and a

club with him. He had not seen nor visited his father in 17 years.

During the trip we had the opportunity to pray with Ray and he came to faith in Christ. That night he called up his father and forgave him and asked for forgiveness. First time they had spoken in 17 years! Father and son spoke to each other and cried together as God healed this broken relationship. The next day Ray threw away his weapons into the hotel dumpster. But he also threw away his anger and rejection. Satan's hold on this man was broken. Forgiveness brought deliverance.

Forgiveness is God's way of healing the human spirit. Jesus taught us this truth when he said, “If you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others their sins, your father will not forgive your sins.

I believe that forgiveness is key to our health and wholeness. I have seen many people who suffer from guilt, resentment, bitterness, anger which could be alleviated through a forgiving spirit.

Truth is, we make mistakes, we fail, and we hurt each other. We live with people who require compassion, tolerance, understanding, and an endless supply of forgiveness. If we don't forgive each other on a regular basis, we begin to store up these old hurts of the past, the unresolved arguments, and old issues we just can't seem to talk about until we have a mountain of clutter in our relationships. Resentment builds until we begin to avoid family members, friends, fellow church members and stay on our side of the clutter that separates us until the relationship begins to wither.

Forgiveness is love in action. Forgiveness clears the slate, forgiveness cleans the air, forgiveness can bring resolution.

Forgiveness allows the grace of God to heal memories. It can be painful. It can make us feel vulnerable. It means talking about feelings. Forgiveness is tough stuff.

Forgiveness doesn't mean:

- "It doesn't matter" or
- "I excuse you" or
- "Just forget it"

Forgiveness is confronting the issue—making no excuses, overlooking nothing, but sincerely repenting and confessing the wrong behavior before God and the offended person. And it means that we extend grace to the offending person and say those three words,

"I forgive you.

My mother never heard "I love you" from her father. Not as a child, not as a teenager, not as an adult. Imagine how that would make a child feel to never hearing those all-important affirming

words from the mouth of her father. The funny thing is my grandfather wasn't some cold-hearted, self-centered man. In fact, he was generous and warmhearted. But rather than feel rejected and unloved, mother decided that she was going to love him. Gramps was in his 80's and mother was in her 60's. It's pretty hard to change at that age.

But whenever she would see him, she would say, "I love you dad." And he would grunt something. For many people that would be enough to give up. But mother was determined to hear those words. Finally one day, as she was leaving, she put her hands on his shoulders, looked into his eyes and said, "I love you."

And she heard from the lips of her aged father, "I love you too."

Hurt people hurt people! When somebody's hurting you it's because they're hurting. It's easier to love them when you look beyond the hurtful things

they're doing to you and see where they are hurting. It enables you to be more sympathetic.

The fact is, those who deserve your love the least are those who need it the most. They need massive doses of love in order to heal their emotions and restore relationships.

Finding deliverance

So how do we find release from rejection? We begin by asking God what he wants to heal in us. The Holy Spirit knows us better than we know ourselves.

Then we share the painful memory with Christ in an attitude of prayer and tell him of your pain. Better yet, share it with someone that you trust and have them pray for you.

Then we give our hurt, anger, pain and other negative feelings to Jesus to heal. You cannot be passive bystander. You have to participate willingly in your

healing process. Especially if it requires forgiving someone.

Next, believe in faith that the healing process has begun and that you are beginning to grow closer to God. Then begin acting as though you are healed.

There is another story in Matthew 8 about not one but ten lepers being healed. When they asked for help from Jesus, he told them to go and show themselves to the priests. This was part of the requirement of the Jewish law once you are healed. The priest would make the final determination that you were free from the disease. Even though they were not yet healed, they went in obedience and in faith and were healed... as they went. Even though they couldn't see their healing, they acted in faith as though they were.

One final point to remember. Only one of the ten lepers returned to thank Jesus for his healing and Jesus commends that

one leper. So don't forget to thank God for his healing presence and to trust him for the results. Gratitude is such an important part in our healing.

My prayer is that Anderson Hills will be a church where massive doses of healing love will be given and received. It begins with us hearing Jesus say to us today, "I am willing. Be clean." Today you are invited as we sing our last song, to come forward for anointing with oil and a prayer of healing.

Prayer

Father, we thank you for Your Son, Jesus, who died on the cross not only for my sins, but for my fears. We thank You that Jesus is the same yesterday, today and forever, and that He wants us to be completely whole: spirit, soul and body.

Jesus, you knew all about me even before I was born. Thank you for being there as life began. Thank You, for being there

when I was born, and loving me. For some came into this world not being loved and not being wanted, and they felt such rejection.

Lord, walk back through every second of my life during those early years, go back and fill every void, give the love that was not received. Remove every hurt. Take away all fears - fear of darkness, fear of falling, fear of animals, fear of being lost. I thank You, Jesus, for setting me free and healing me.

Heal the hurtful memories of school. When we were treated harshly by a teacher, or a classmate. Thank you for healing those hurts and setting me free from those fears.

Bring forgiveness for any way I have hurt or failed my parents or they hurt or failed us.

I lift up my brothers and sisters to you. Where there were feelings of competition,

jealousy or resentment, I ask that your healing power and love mend every broken relationship. I forgive each brother and sister for hurting or failing me, and I ask their forgiveness for hurting or failing them.

Jesus, please take away every hurt between my mate and me. I thank you for mending every broken relationship, and wiping away every painful memory.

Take away any feeling I have of failure or guilt as a parent.

Heal every feeling of rejection, abuse, abandonment and replace it with your presence. Remove the fear, anger, and bitterness, I thank you for taking away my sorrow, my grief and my mourning. I thank you for giving me your joy and your peace.

I thank You, Jesus, for making me whole. Amen.

