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THE PAST

HEALING THE WOUNDS

Gordon Dalbey

He will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children,
and the hearts of the children to their fathers;
or else I will come and strike the land with a curse.

MALACHI 4:6

While leafing through the June 1995 issue of *Men's Health* at the barbershop, I was startled to find, behind cover articles on pumping iron and improved sex, an editorial on page 86 titled "Our Fathers." Young, presumably healthy and on top of his game editing such a popular men's journal, the editor, Joe Kita, was nevertheless grieving the loss of his father, who had died two years earlier. "I'm still waiting for my father to talk to me about sex and success, money and marriage, religion and raising kids," he confessed. "I don't know a man my age who doesn't feel like he's navigating his life without a map."

Having ministered to men around the world, I've found that the average man is not lacking in health, intelligence, talent, energy, desire to succeed and often education as well. But without a father's input, he lives as if sailing a well-designed ship upon a vast sea with no map. And so

the man either doesn't know where he's going, or if he does, he doesn't know how to get there.

Just as life requires input, manhood requires fathering. The father shapes a boy's sense of himself more deeply than any other person in his life. Even the father's absence, whether emotional or physical, has destructive effects. There are two ways, after all, to kill a plant: You can cut it down or just not water it.

In a graphic example, Catholic priest Richard Rohr tells the story about a nun ministering in a men's prison. One day early in May, an inmate asked the nun if she could get him a Mother's Day card. Happy to oblige, the nun went into town and bought it for him.

The inmate told others, and the word spread like wildfire around the prison. Soon, dozens of prisoners were knocking on the chaplain's office door asking for their own Mother's Day card. Overwhelmed, the nun wisely thought to call Hallmark's national office for help. The company graciously donated a thousand cards to the prison, and a week before Mother's Day, the prison warden invited inmates to go to the chaplain's office for their cards. By the end of the day, all the cards had been distributed.

The nun was delighted. Soon after this great success, she was looking ahead on her calendar and noted Father's Day just ahead. Planning ahead this time, she again contacted Hallmark, who sent her a thousand Father's Day cards. The warden repeated his announcement the Sunday before Father's Day. "Father's Day came, and Father's Day went," the nun reported in dismay. "Not one inmate asked me for a Father's Day card." She returned all of the cards, unused.¹

From well-off editor to prison inmate, the father wound that developed in a man's boyhood festers within and among men today. In order for both the individual man and society itself to become as God intends, a man's past must be transformed, beginning with the healing of his father wound.

This brokenness between fathers and sons doesn't only cripple indi-

vidual men. As the prophet Malachi warned thousands of years ago, it brings a curse on the larger society as well, as godly, masculine deeds of strength, compassion and innovation are supplanted by passivity, anger, and destruction. Short of a time machine, no natural human power can overcome this curse. Therefore, as Malachi prophesied, God sent his Son to heal this wound between fathers and sons, and thereby, to restore relationship between a man and Father God.

Every little boy naturally sees his seemingly all-powerful dad as God. All dads, however, are human beings, and as such, sinful creatures. Inevitably we hurt our sons. If the son doesn't face this wound and take it to Jesus—who reveals the true Father of all men—his disillusion with Dad festers and manifests later in adulthood as either a desperation to please his father or a vengeance to punish him. The wounded son either denies his wound and runs toward Dad or spotlights it and runs rebelliously away. Either way, the kingdom of God suffers.

Focusing exclusively on the earthly father, both responses ignore the young man's own unique destiny and detour him from the call of Father God. Instead, he's trapped in a life of either shameful failure—since no boy can ever imagine measuring up to Dad—or destructive anger. Both the corporate “yes man” and the violent gang member actually stem from this same father wound, each lacking in the creative accomplishment that the Creator and Father of all men ordains.

Because all dads are imperfect, every man has a father wound. Clearly, not all of us act it out destructively enough to go to prison—or at least, to get caught. For most of us it's a nagging shame that we don't have the stuff of manhood. This shame stirs great fear; as every man knows, if other men find out you're weak, you're thrown off the team and cast into outer darkness. And so we're desperate to find that manly “stuff,” and will pay whatever the cost to whoever promises to give it to us.

Indeed, the one who can deliver us from the shame of unmanliness properly becomes our Savior and Deliverer. If we don't recognize the Father revealed in Jesus as the true source of manhood, if we don't turn to

him for his saving acceptance and healing, our desperation for deliverance clouds our vision and impels us toward counterfeits. Sexual encounters, alcohol, endless TV ballgames, overworking, legalistic religion—the list of compulsive efforts to save ourselves from shame is as long as a man's natural energy allows.

MARBLES FROM DAD

How does a man recognize the father wound of his past, and where does he go for healing?

My own father was a career Naval officer and was assigned to the Pentagon when I was in the fifth grade. On the playground during recess at my new school, I found several boys in my class shooting marbles. Wanting to join them, I walked up to one group as they knelt around the circle of string. "Can I play?" I asked.

"Sure," one boy replied amiably. "Where's your marbles?"

"My marbles?" I echoed, confused.

"Yeah," the boy declared, as the group paused to look up at me. "Go ahead and put in your marbles, and you can play!"

"Uh, well . . ." I stammered, "I don't have any marbles."

Shrugging their shoulders, the group matter-of-factly turned away from me and back to their game.

Later that night, I told my father I needed some marbles in order to play with the other boys, and he took me out to buy some. The next day, I put my marbles in the circle and was accepted into the game, certified as one of the boys.

In a larger sense every boy goes to his father for the "marbles" that will gain him both self-acceptance as a man and acceptance among men. Out of that security the father provides his son with a map to manhood. For example, he encourages the boy's talents and passions, as in patting his son on the shoulder and saying "I'm proud of you!" He warns the boy about dangers and harmful influences such as drugs, premarital sex, and legalistic religion. At an appropriate time he talks helpfully to the boy

about God's gift of sex, providing a centeredness amid the mysterious, overwhelming attraction that seizes a boy's body even when he sleeps.

Most important, the father connects his son to the Father "from whom all fatherhood in heaven and on earth derives its name" (Ephesians 3:15, with footnote)—by praying with his boy, taking him to church, reading the Bible with him, and taking him to Jesus for praise amid life's joys and centeredness amid its pain and disappointment.

These are some of the major marbles a boy needs to play the game of life successfully.

SON OF THE BEATLES

A father's job is to watch for what God is doing in his child and bless it—to give encouraging voice to what God is calling the boy to become. An unfathered man therefore often has trouble finding his calling in life and developing his special talents and abilities to fulfill it. He may move from job to job, even woman to woman, never knowing what really satisfies because he doesn't know what's "really me." When a man abdicates his calling as a father, the world suffers the effects.²

Julian Lennon, son of the late Beatles pop idol John Lennon, is a classic example. In his early twenties, Julian made his musical debut with a best-selling album. Then, to everyone's shock, he suddenly stopped recording altogether. Seven years later, when he finally released a second album, he talked with a reporter about struggling to find his calling.

Julian's mother and father had divorced when he was five, and after that he saw his father, John, perhaps a dozen times. "He walked out the bloody door and was never around," Julian snapped. "I'd admire him on TV—listen to his words and opinions. But for someone who was praised for peace and love and wasn't able to keep that at home, that's hypocrisy."

As the reporter notes, "Julian became a self-taught musician. His father never gave him a music lesson." In the son's words, "We sat down once and maybe he played five chords—that was that. . . . The only thing

he ever taught me was how not to be a father.”

His hate for his father blinded Julian Lennon to his own calling, and the world suffered the loss of his talent for seven years. As the reporter concluded:

Blood. Talent. Julian has slowly learned to view these as gifts. And by coming to terms with his father's failures, he's felt a freedom to explore the legacies that live within him.

“He spent many years trying to sound like anyone but John Lennon,” [rock music author] Gary Graff noted; “now he's at peace sounding like his father, and it's a much more genuine musical statement.”³

The father not only defines a boy's past, therefore, but also stands at the gateway to his destiny. Coming to terms with your father's failures is an essential task of manhood, required in order to recognize and fulfill your purpose in life. A man must face what his earthly father did *not* give him and grieve that awful loss in order to cry out for it at last from his true, heavenly Father.

The prophetic promise that overcomes the curse found in Malachi is that Jesus has come to heal this father wound by leading a man to know his true Father, apart from his earthly dad. This confidence overcomes a man's natural shame of inadequacy and enables him to become the man he was created to be.

The apostle Paul proclaimed:

I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better. I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is like the working of his mighty strength, which he exerted

in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms. (Ephesians 1:17-20)

One of the simplest yet greatest “marble” blessings a father can offer to facilitate his son’s destiny is simply to enjoy him. When the boy enters the room, for example, Dad’s face lights up. He turns away from his ball game, computer, workbench, client or newspaper and rushes to hug his son. A boy who is not enjoyed by his father learns “I’m not much to get excited about.” He doubts his place in life, discounts his gifting and calling, and in adulthood shies away from significant accomplishments.

Jesus’ Father enjoyed him and freely told the world so. After being baptized by John the Baptist, Jesus emerged from the water and a dove came down from heaven to the Father’s joyful outburst, “This is my Son, chosen and marked by my love, delight of my life” (Matthew 3:17 *The Message*).

Significantly, *all of Jesus’ accomplishments came after this blessing, not before*. Too often, fathers withhold affirmation from their sons for not performing well when their affirmation is precisely what would lead the boy to do his best.

The father wound, in fact, is most often a wound of absence, of longing for something you didn’t get. As such, it’s harder to spot than any bruise on your skin. “How can you say I have a father wound?” one man asked me. “I hardly even had a father. He was rarely around, and when he was, he never did much with me.”

Without the “marbles of manhood” from Dad, a boy grows up doubting not only his place in the world but his own manhood as well. He’s left with a gnawing, empty fear that he doesn’t belong among men or measure up in their presence—indeed, that his natural, heartfelt need for affirmation and acceptance is not only insignificant but in fact disqualifies him for manhood. He learns to fear the very man he looks up to and thereby to associate respect with fear rather than with trust. Often, he balks at growing into manhood himself, not only because he feels

inadequate but also because he doesn't want to intimidate and hurt others as his father did him.

This resulted in the hippie generation of the 1960s, in which I sought manhood. My father's generation had suffered through a national economic depression in the 1930s, only to face the demands of World War II as young men. Jobs and even food were scarce, as were compassion and assistance. Amid such life-threatening circumstances, feeling pain or fear was deemed counterproductive and scorned as unmanly and therefore shameful. Like my dad when he was a boy, and his father before him, I learned to stuff my feelings and stand quietly alone if I wanted to be seen as strong among older men.

Along with most young men my age, I felt inadequate as a man and was ashamed to tell anyone about it. This charade crippled me in friendships and dating; how can you respect and listen to someone else's heart if no one has taught you to respect and listen to your own?

Once, in my late twenties, a woman I had thoughtlessly wounded asked me in dismay, "When did you cry last?" I stood silent, but not strong—in fact, ashamed and confused—because I couldn't remember when I had last risked such an honest human emotion.

In order to counter the soldiering and emotional disengagement of the older men who had wounded us, my generation of flower children marched under the banner of "peace and love." But this self-righteous veneer merely covered the fact that we had no idea what true peace is or how to love another person. In my rebellious anger I trashed all that my father held dear. He was a Naval officer; I marched for peace. He lived in a suburb, ate Wheaties, drove a Chevy and saluted the flag; I crashed in communes, ate granola, drove a beat-up VW Bug and scorned everything American.

Eventually, the hippie confusion and desperation gave way to the more vengeful slogan "Bring the war home; kill your parents." In that, we had become the very hardened men we protested, and no closer than they to genuine manhood. Killing your father doesn't make you a man;

it only makes you an orphan—the chief prey for the father of lies.

In fact, most of our political and cultural clashing of the 1960s—its in-your-face lifestyles and radical philosophies that fester even today, from pot-smoking to Gay Pride parades—were a fraud, a desperate smokescreen to hide the shame and anger of an abandoned little boy longing for his father.

FLOWER CHILDREN WITHOUT JESUS

A man who hates his father will eventually hate his own manhood. Unable to affirm himself as a man, he can become confused in his gender identity, unable to see clearly what he's been created to do and unwilling to exercise God-given authority to do it. Wounded by older men in authority, he may equate authority with coercion and repression rather than protection and guidance. So he will distrust all authority, even his own—and perhaps especially, that of any god called “Father.” Such a man abandons not only himself but also others who need his strength.

As flower children, my generation tried to escape adult responsibility and recapture the innocence of childhood—which our fathers' history had never allowed us and now our own destructive lifestyle threatened to disallow us as well. Without Jesus, we couldn't access the true Father (see John 14:1-14) and discover at last that we are his children. Without Jesus to bear our shame, we could only fabricate a false flowers-and-bare-feet innocence to cover it. Thus we degenerated into the very hardness we protested in the older men—numbing ourselves with drugs and casual sex, and cursing those who differed from us.

In the 1960s God was calling a generation of men to deal with the manly needs that decades of depression and world wars had eclipsed. In a world tired of war, God was calling for a generation of spiritual warriors to overcome such demonic strongholds as militarism, materialism, racism, sexism, and shame-based religion. But instead of confessing honestly “I need you, Daddy” and grieving our loss, my generation masked our pain and anger behind righteous political principles.

We lost our war because we lost the boy—and with him we lost our hearts and the ability to be real. And so we abdicated our occasion to be real men.

Today, the awful legacy of that cowardice is the man-hating spirit that fuels the politically correct value system. In this worldview, ideology has replaced relationship, and masculine values like truth-telling and victory are replaced by tolerance—even tolerance for a wide range of harmful behaviors explicitly proscribed in the Bible. It's grace without truth.

RELIGIOUSLY CORRECT

On the conservative end of the spectrum, men may become Christians and join churches. But too often we manifest the same fear of relationships and become instead religiously correct, striving to measure up to biblical principles, Christian standards of manhood or marks of a spiritual champion.

In our hearts we know that, as the apostle Paul said, "I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out" (Romans 7:18). But instead of trusting the Father as sons and getting real with him and each other about our brokenness, we're often too busy trying to cover our shame by preaching moral law and the evils of liberalism. It's truth without grace.

Jesus, meanwhile, reveals the true Father. In that process, he's not about being correct but being real. "For the law was given through Moses," John declared; "grace and truth came through Jesus Christ" (John 1:17). That is, the Father sent Moses to tell us what to do, but he sent Jesus to show us Who does it.

As the Son of God, Jesus came to restore us as sons of the Father. Without Jesus, however, we don't know who we are because we can't know Whose we are. Trying to hide our shame, we define ourselves by what we accomplish and even by who we are not rather than by Whose we are and what he has done.

Transformation of your past begins as you are born again: from a son of the flesh—that is, of your earthly father—to a son of the Spirit. "A

man is born physically of human parents,” Jesus said, “but he is born spiritually of the Spirit” (John 3:6 TEV). This spirit of sonship transforms your past—precisely as it frees you not to “do it right” but rather to be real enough to recognize God as your true Father and cry out for him to do it in you (see Romans 12:2; Ephesians 3:20; Philippians 2:12-13).

BREAKING THE CYCLE

Liberal or conservative, like the generations of men before us, we’ve all abandoned the little boy in our hearts. His desperate cry in the wilderness terrifies men who don’t trust any father to respond. God, however, has provided for just this need: “Though my father and mother forsake me,” the psalmist proclaims, “the LORD will receive me” (Psalm 27:10).

Before doctors can treat a disease, they need to note its effects and diagnose it. However, men don’t go to the doctor until they know they’re sick, and sometimes it’s too late. A society that regards imperfection and brokenness as shameful wants to hide its wounds. The first step toward healing wounds of the past—by admitting their presence and their effects—can be the most difficult.

As the great Physician, Jesus was sent into the world not “to condemn the world, but to save the world” (John 3:17). In order to let God heal us as men, we need first to recognize our wound and spot its effects among us.

Certainly, our sin nature is at the root of all ungodly behaviors. You can’t blame Dad or anyone else for that, no matter how badly they’ve hurt you. But like maggots, your sin nature feeds off your past wounds and can’t be checked apart from our Father’s healing.

HONORING THE FATHER WHO WOUNDS YOU

The father wound is the hook that our Father uses to draw us to himself. The man who can see clearly what his earthly dad did not give him will be more apt to ask God for it. “In their suffering,” the Father hopes, “they will try to find me” (Hosea 5:15 TEV).

Yet we often deny our wound because we're taught to be strong, and a wound feels weak and shameful. "I don't understand all this talk about father wounds," one corporate sales executive complained to me. "I had a good dad and I know he loved me." Later, as our conversation turned to other topics, the man mentioned that during his boyhood, his father had been in prison for several years.

Too often Christian men who recognize their childhood wound are afraid to talk about it for fear of disobeying the commandment "Honor your father and your mother, so that you may live long in the land the LORD your God is giving you" (Exodus 20:12). But as Malachi prophesied, this is precisely the wound that Jesus came to heal. Jesus is the means; the Father is the goal: "No one comes to the Father except through me," Jesus declared (John 14:6).

A man who hides his father wound, whether from shame or fear of being disobedient, will not find good news in this work of Jesus. "My dad was basically OK, so I don't need a heavenly Father," he imagines. What he's really saying is, "I don't trust that there's any other father out there who either loves me enough or is powerful enough to make up for what my natural father did or did not do."

I know I can't give my son all he needs from me as a father. That's why I work at connecting him to our Father God—praying with him, talking about the Scriptures and showing him how I approach God myself when I blow it or otherwise need him. I want my son to honor me for who I am, not for some fantasy that I'm not.

You don't have to curse your parents to acknowledge how they hurt you; you just have to tell the truth and want to get on with your life—that is, to "live long in the land the LORD your God is giving you" (Exodus 20:12).

A hidden wound festers, infects and kills. It doesn't honor me if my son whitewashes my sin or otherwise pretends I'm perfect; it only hurts him. I'm honored and encouraged when he trusts me enough to come and tell me when I hurt or disappoint him. Until he faces my imperfec-

tions, he'll never let go of me to seek and know his true and perfect Father—the one, in fact, “from whom all fatherhood in heaven and on earth derives its name” (Ephesians 3:15).

FORGIVENESS THE KEY

Forgiveness is the key to releasing the pain of your past and freeing yourself from its shame and fear. Denial short-circuits this process. A man who fancies *My parents never hurt me* cannot forgive them, simply because he imagines he has nothing to forgive them for.

In learning to forgive, you can ask Jesus to “show me my father the way you see him.” Have some tissues on hand when you do. When he asked this of Jesus, one thirty-five-year-old assistant pastor whose dad had been absent during his childhood declared, “I see a little boy on crutches!” Thanking Jesus for this revelation, he asked for more understanding and then burst into tears. “Oh, I see Grampa hurting Dad as a boy too!” At once, he began sobbing tears for his father’s boyhood pain. This was a major step toward releasing his masculine energies formerly bottled up in resentment. Feeling your wounder’s pain is tantamount to forgiving him; it’s hard to hate someone when you’re crying for him.

When a man abandons his son, whether physically or emotionally, the son thinks it’s because he’s a bad boy. Most often, however, it’s because the father thinks he himself is a bad man. A good indication of how much your father needs healing is how badly he has wounded you. Instead of cursing your dad, pray for him. A boy, that is, cries *from* his father’s wounds. A man cries *for* his father’s wounds as an intercessor.

Much of your father wound has simply been passed down through past generations and ultimately came through your dad’s own brokenness. Parents are not saints—but neither are they demons. Often, they’re just fellow victims of their own childhood wounding. Most parents do the best they can, no matter how little that might be. It’s not that they deliberately withheld love; they never received any to give away.

Still, our sinful human nature has its own designs in every generation,

and sometimes people, even parents, flat-out choose to hurt you. This is harder to forgive. But that's why Jesus came—to give us God's power to do what we can't.

Holding on to your anger not only perpetuates the wound, but it also destroys the generation after you. As one eighty-plus-year-old declared at one of my men's conferences, "Whatever you don't forgive your father for, you'll do to your son."

Cry out to Jesus for his grace to forgive your father. Then, in your prayer closet or with a trusted friend, say out loud, "Dad, I forgive you for (name the sin against you) and lay down all right to pay you back." Then pray for your father, asking our Father God to heal and bless him. Surrender to Father God your right to confront Dad personally; the real proof of your forgiveness is (1) your willingness to honor him, (2) the peace in your heart, and (3) a growing sense of purpose in your own life.

DAD'S GOOD QUALITIES

One way to honor your father, and thereby invest in your future, is to thank God for Dad's good qualities—and claim these as part of your legitimate heritage. At my conferences, after the first teaching session, I put the men into small groups and say, "Tell the other men your father's finest character trait and something he did to demonstrate that."

Often, men are surprised at the positive memories that emerge and the new confidence they feel. Just as cursing your father curses your own manhood, honoring your father builds you up. After all, every boy looks up to Daddy and wants experience to justify that; if Daddy is good, it follows that I, his son, am also good.

Ask God to recall any ways your father might have affirmed or otherwise blessed you. Often, fathers tell others how much they care about their son, but they don't tell the son himself. You may need to ask aunts and uncles what Dad said about you.

It doesn't have to be his words. I remember the thrill when my father first let me drive his car by myself; he never said much beyond

instructions, but his trust in me allowed me to trust myself and drive well. If your father wasn't present in your childhood, maybe your grandfather, uncle or stepfather blessed you. Maybe it was a coach, teacher or boss. Dig deeply into your past for any manly affirmation, and soak it in.

Finally, get on your knees and ask, "Father God, show me myself the way you see me." As Paul put it, the goal is to become one whose praise "is not from men, but from God" (Romans 2:29).

For readers who are dads, consider the power of your words to bless your children and free them from the world's shame. As the late President Kennedy recalled, "If I walked out on the stage and fell flat on my face, Father would say I fell better than anyone else."⁴

In fact, honoring your father like this prepares you for true worship—which is essentially bragging on your heavenly Daddy by proclaiming his goodness and greatness. A man who can sing out "My Daddy is the best!" is uplifted as a man. In that surrender and praise, a man opens his heart to his true Father at last, so the Father can heal through "open-heart" surgery.

A REAL MAN IS A MAN WHO'S REAL

The next step in letting Father God transform your past is critical. When you've humbly faced your ungodly behaviors and asked the Father to heal your wounds, it's time to move beyond the hospital into the barracks—that is, from your own pain into the company of men who are fellow warriors. For this step you need a platoon of brothers battling with you on the journey to manhood. You need men who have suffered the powers of sin and death and who in the midst of that battle have cried out to Jesus and tasted his victory—men who want so badly to overcome their own sin and to heal their wounds that they don't have any energy or desire to judge others.

A real man is a man who's real. He's not trying to cover up his mistakes or pretend he's either better or worse than he is. He wants to discover his

created purpose in life and get to the root of what's keeping him from it. Getting real with God by facing your wounds is the first step. But getting real with other men is the terrifying but promising leap that puts you where the Father can do his refining work.

Jesus told his followers, "I and the Father are one" (John 10:30). Furthermore, he promised that "where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them" (Matthew 18:20). The Father is the source of manhood. To meet the Father, you must encounter Jesus. A man can do this by meeting regularly and getting real with two or three other men who have surrendered their lives to Jesus.

It's simple, but it's not easy for most men today. A boy, after all, learns what it's like to be around other men by being with his father. A boy who has not had a father at home or whose father has been emotionally distant will feel anxious about getting real with other men; it's unfamiliar, even dangerous territory. He longs for their acceptance but is afraid they won't give it to him—as it was with Dad.

SEEK YOUR PLATOON

Decades ago, when my professional and family life was in turmoil, I became overwhelmed with fear. In desperation, I finally mustered the courage to call four other men and say to each, "I need you." For several years we met in my office every Friday morning at 7 a.m. We agreed to be real together, and not to share anything said in the group with anyone outside the group. Before long, what had started as a fearful leap of faith became a rock-solid base for growing into manhood.

Sex and marriage, money and job, faith and failures—we talked about it all and prayed it through. Knowing we were all struggling in these areas took the sting of shame away and allowed us to stay real and open to the Father. Sure, I still had to face many trials alone—but I was prepared to do so.

If you want to honor your father so you can occupy "the land the LORD your God is giving you," get your platoon together.

TIME WITH THE FATHER

In order to know someone, you need to spend time with him or her. In this painful season, I wanted to know my true, heavenly Father, so I blocked out time early each morning to be with him. Crying out for his truth and grace, I eagerly read his words in the Scriptures, sometimes just flipping the pages here and there, other times going through the *One Year Bible*, reading a few passages daily. I typed verses on index cards and memorized those that especially grabbed me.

After reading, I would kneel before a small cross on my desk and offer myself to the Father, asking him to show me my own sin so I could repent, to show me where others had sinned against me so I could seek healing, to show me what he was doing in my life so I could cooperate. I kept a journal, writing down Scriptures, impressions, words, dreams and experiences that stirred me.

Determined not to waste this painful ordeal, I sought out Christian counseling, went to conferences and workshops on biblically based healing, read related books, worshiped to praise tapes, and prayed and prayed some more. Bottom line: tell the Father what you're fed up with, give him full permission to do whatever's necessary to overcome it, and put yourself where he can.

HONOR YOUR BODY

During this season of upset and restoration, I decided for the first time to honor my male body. I cut out high-fat foods like whole milk, potato chips, French fries, cheeseburgers, hot dogs, ribs and the like, and began to eat more broiled and baked chicken, turkey and fish, whole-grain bread and cereals, and fresh vegetables, fruit and nuts. I've worked at cutting back on sugar, which has been harder. (When you've got the urge, nothing seems to satisfy like a chocolate chip cookie!)

Besides eating healthier, I began working out regularly—using a variety of exercises so I didn't overwork any body part. Jogging, weightlifting, cycling, tennis, basketball and fast-walking refresh me. A good

sweat and shower can release a lot of stress and help toward a good night's sleep. During particularly stressful days, I discovered that it was helpful to concentrate on hitting or shooting a ball rather than participating in a sport that let my mind wander, as in jogging.

The important thing is to find reasonably enjoyable workouts that fit your own needs. Overall, I try to be sensible about my diet and exercise. If I'm too hard on myself, it just stirs the old sabotaging rebel in me.

Exercising regularly isn't always easy. Busy schedules and family needs, not to mention just plain laziness, crowd in at times. But if you're too busy to exercise, you're too busy. Your body is not just a work machine or some lower form of creation; it's the temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 6:19), the vehicle of the Father's work in and through you in this world. Jesus had a body; honor yours accordingly.

AN ONGOING PROCESS

If you do all these things, will those old wounds of the past forever disappear from your mind? Probably not. But that's all part of God's plan too. Transformation of your past is an ongoing process of drawing closer to the Father.

Bringing your wounds to Jesus removes their sting so they no longer have power to cripple you in working out your calling. But totally removing them from your memory is not a realistic goal—not because God wants you to suffer but because his purposes are greater than simply removing your discomfort. Jesus didn't come to make religious robots through a holy lobotomy that erases all memory of pain. He came to call forth sons who learn through suffering to draw close to the Father (2 Timothy 2:3).

Biblically speaking, the past is neither “used up” time to be discarded nor a hobby for history buffs, but the theater where God reveals his character and purposes. On the cross, God demonstrated that his ultimate purpose is not to remove our pain and suffering but to use our wounds to prepare us for his future calling. The trusting relationship with him

that emerges from this process is what defines healing—not the removal of pain.

The promise in this Father-son relationship is a lifestyle of purpose and transforming power—not only for yourself but for others as well. Your past is transformed when, like Jesus on the cross, you can give its brokenness to the Father and let him use it for his larger purposes in this broken world.

The apostle Paul explains: “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” (2 Corinthians 1:3-4).

What then are the signs that a man’s past is being transformed?

He’s willing to risk being real with himself, with the Father and with other men. He wants the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth, no matter how painful, fearful or shameful. He’s realizing that he exists for a purpose, that only his true Father—revealed historically in Jesus and present today in the Holy Spirit—can fulfill that purpose in and through him. He wants to trust the Father and surrender daily to him. In fact, God has set the agenda for each man and “has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness” (2 Peter 1:3).

Growing in faith is not about what *you* do but about what *God* does in you. If godly manhood were just about behavior change, Moses and his law would have been enough. But the Father doesn’t want your sacrifices, that is, your efforts to prove how capable and good you are. Rather, he wants “a broken and contrite heart” (Psalm 51:17), which allows him to prove how capable and good he is in your life. He sent Jesus to do the sacrificing for us so we could concentrate on receiving his grace—and thereby be transformed from slaves to the law to grateful and loyal sons.

Transformation of a man’s past means growing from a childish fear of

not doing it right before men to a son's confidence in being real before his Father. "For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear," Paul admonished the Roman church, "but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, 'Abba, Father' " (Romans 8:15).

May we be so transformed as men.