

# Damaged Emotions

One Sunday evening in 1966, I preached a sermon called “The Holy Spirit and the Healing of Our Damaged Emotions.” It was my first venture into this area, and I was convinced that God had given me that message, or I would never have had the courage to preach it. What I said that evening about the healing of the memories and damaged emotions is now old hat. You will find it in a lot of books. But it wasn’t old then.

When I got up to preach I looked down at the congregation and saw dear old Dr. Smith. Now Dr. Smith had been a very real part of my boyhood. When my wife, Helen, and I first heard that we were appointed to our present pastorate, a few elderly faces appeared in our minds to trouble us. Dr. Smith was one of them, for I wondered how I could ever minister to him. He had nearly scared the life out of me with his preaching when I was young, and I was still uneasy in his presence.

When I saw him in the congregation that evening, my heart sank. But I went ahead and preached the message that I felt God had given me. After the service, which was followed

by a very wonderful time for many at the prayer altar, Dr. Smith remained seated in the congregation. I was busy praying with people at the altar; somewhere back in my mind, I was also praying that he would leave. He didn't. Finally, he came up to the altar; and in his own inimitably gruff way, he said, "David, may I see you in your office."

All those images from the past arose and the frightened little boy inside of me followed the old man. As I sat down in my office, I felt somewhat like Moses must have before the fire and smoke of Sinai. But I was so wrong about him—I hadn't allowed for change. I had frozen him at one stage and hadn't let him grow.

Very kindly, Dr. Smith said to me, "David, I've never heard a sermon quite like that before, but I want to tell you something." His eyes got moist. He had been an outstanding evangelist and preacher for many years, and had won thousands to Christ. He was a truly great man; but as he looked back over his own ministry he said, "You know, there was always a group of people I could never help. They were sincere people. I believe many of them were Spirit-filled Christians. But they had problems. They brought these things to me and I tried to help. But no amount of advice, no amount of Scripture or prayer on their part ever seemed to bring them lasting deliverance."

Then he said, "I always felt guilt in my ministry, David. But I think you're onto something. Work on it, develop it. Please keep preaching it, for I believe what you have found is the answer."

When he rose to leave, *my* eyes were wet as I said, "Thank you, Doctor." But most of all, I was inwardly saying, "Thank You, God, for Your affirmation through this dear man."

## THE PROBLEM

Through fifteen years, as tapes have gone out all over the world, letters and testimonies have confirmed my belief that there is another realm of problems which requires a special kind of prayer and a deeper level of healing by the Spirit. Somewhere between our sins, on the one hand, and our sickness, on the other, lies an area the

Scripture calls, “infirmities.”

We can explain this by an illustration from nature. If you visit the far West, you will see those beautiful giant Sequoia and redwood trees. In most of the parks the naturalists can show you a cross section of a great tree they have cut, and point out that the rings of the tree reveal the developmental history, year by year. Here’s a ring that represents a year when there was a terrible drought. Here are a couple of rings from years when there was too much rain. Here’s where the tree was struck by lightning. Here are some normal years of growth. This ring shows a forest fire that almost destroyed the tree. Here’s another of savage blight and disease. All of this lies embedded in the heart of the tree, representing the autobiography of its growth.

And that’s the way it is with us. Just a few minutes beneath the protective bark, the concealing, protective mask, are the recorded rings of our lives.

There are scars of ancient, painful hurts. . . as when a little boy rushed downstairs one Christmas dawn and discovered in his Christmas stocking a dirty old rock, put there to punish him for some trivial boyhood naughtiness. This scar has eaten away in him, causing all kinds of interpersonal difficulties.

Here is the discoloration of a tragic stain that muddied all of life. . . as years ago behind the barn, or in the haystack, or out in the woods, a big brother took a little sister and introduced her into the mysteries—no, the miseries of sex.

And here we see the pressure of a painful, repressed memory . . . of running after an alcoholic father who was about to kill the mother, and then of rushing for the butcher knife. Such scars have been buried in pain for so long that they are causing hurt and rage that are inexplicable. And these scars are not touched by conversion and sanctifying grace, or by the ordinary benefits of prayer.

In the rings of our thoughts and emotions, the record is there; the memories are recorded, and all are alive. And they directly and deeply affect our concepts, our feelings, and our relationships. They affect the way we look at life

and God, at others and ourselves.

We preachers have often given people the mistaken idea that the new birth and being “filled with the Spirit” are going to automatically take care of these emotional hang-ups. But this just isn’t true. A great crisis experience of Jesus Christ, as important and eternally valuable as this is, is not a shortcut to emotional health. It is not a quickie cure for personality problems.

It is necessary that we understand this, first of all, so that we can compassionately live with ourselves and allow the Holy Spirit to work with special healing in our own hurts and confusion. We also need to understand this in order to not judge other people too harshly, but to have patience with their confusing and contradictory behavior. In so doing, we will be kept from unfairly criticizing and judging fellow Christians. They’re not fakes, phonies, or hypocrites. They are people, like you and me, with hurts and scars and wrong programming that interferes with their present behavior.

Understanding that salvation does not give instant emotional health offers us an important insight into the doctrine of sanctification. It is impossible to know how Christian a person is, merely on the basis of his outward behavior.

Isn’t it true that by their fruits ye shall know them? (Matt. 7:16) Yes, but it is also true that by their roots you shall understand, and not judge them. Over here is John who may appear to be more spiritual and responsible as a Christian than Bill. But actually, considering John’s roots and the good kind of soil he had to grow in and out of, Bill may be a saint by comparison. He may have made much more progress than John in really being conformed to the image of Jesus Christ. How wrong, how unchristian to superficially judge people!

Some may object: “What are you doing? Lowering standards? Are you denying the power of the Holy Spirit to heal our hang-ups? Are you trying to give us a copout for responsibility, so that we can blame life, or heredity, or parents, or teachers, or sweethearts or mates for our defeats and failures? In the words of Paul: ‘Shall we continue in

sin, that grace may abound?" " (Rom. 6:1)

And I would answer as Paul answered that question, "God forbid!" What I am saying is that certain areas of our lives need special healing by the Holy Spirit. Because they are not subject to ordinary prayer, discipline, and willpower, they need a special kind of understanding, an unlearning of past wrong programming, and a relearning and reprogramming transformation by the renewal of our minds. And this is not done overnight by a crisis experience.

## TWO EXTREMES

Understanding these things will protect us from two extremes. Some Christians see anything that wiggles as the devil. Let me say a kind but firm word to young or immature Christians. Throughout the centuries the church has been very careful about declaring a person demon-possessed. There *is* such a thing as demon possession. On rare occasions, during my many years of ministry, I have felt led to take the authority of the name of Jesus to cast out what I believed was an evil spirit, and I have seen only deliverance and healing.

But only careful, prayerful, mature, Spirit-filled Christians should ever attempt anything in the nature of exorcism. I spend a lot of time in the counseling room, picking up the pieces of people who have been utterly disillusioned and devastated, because immature Christians tied to cast imaginary demons out of them.

The other extreme is an overly simplistic pat-answer syndrome, which says, "Read your Bible. Pray. Have more faith. If you were spiritually OK, you wouldn't have this hang-up. You would never get depressed. You would never have any sexual compulsions or problems."

However, people who say such things are being very cruel. They are only piling more weights on a person who is in pain and unsuccessfully struggling with an emotionally rooted problem. He already feels guilty about it; when people make him feel worse for even having the problem, they double the weight of his guilt and despair.

Perhaps you have heard about the man who was traveling on a dinner flight. When he opened his prepackaged

meal, right on top of the salad he saw an enormous roach. When he got home he wrote an indignant letter to the president of that airline. A few days later, a special delivery letter came from the president. He was all apologies. "This was very unusual, but don't worry. I want to assure you that that particular airplane has been completely fumigated. In fact, all the seats and the upholstery have been stripped out. We have taken disciplinary action against the stewardess who served you that meal, and she may even be fired. It is highly probable that this particular aircraft will be taken out of service. I can assure you that it will never happen again. And I trust you will continue to fly with us."

Well, the man was terrifically impressed by such a letter, until he noticed something. Quite by accident the letter he had written had stuck to the back of the president's letter. When he looked at his own letter, he saw a note at the bottom that said, "Reply with the regular roach letter."

So often we reply with the regular roach letter to people suffering with emotional problems. We give pat, oversimplified answers, which drive them to deeper despair and disillusionment.

### THE EVIDENCE

What are some of these damaged emotions? One of the most common is a deep *sense of unworthiness*, a continuous feeling of anxiety, inadequacy, and inferiority, an inner nagging that says, "I'm no good. I'll never amount to anything. No one could ever possibly love me. Everything I do is wrong."

What happens to this kind of person, when he becomes a Christian? Part of his mind believes in God's love, accepts God's forgiveness, and feels at peace for a while. Then, all of a sudden, everything within him rises up to cry out, "It's a lie! Don't believe it! Don't pray! There's no one up there to hear you. No one really cares. There's no one to relieve your anxiety. How could God possibly love you and forgive someone like you? You're too bad!"

What has happened? The good news of the Gospel has not penetrated down into his damaged inner self, which also needs to be evangelized. His deep inner scars must be touched and healed by the Balm of Gilead.

Then there's another kind, that for want of a better term, I call the *perfectionist complex*. This is the inner feeling that says, "I can never quite achieve. I never do anything well enough. I can't please myself, others, or God." This kind of a person is always groping, striving, usually feeling guilty, driven by inner oughts and shoulds. "I ought to be able to do this. I should be able to do that. I must be a little bit better." He's ever climbing, but never reaching.

What happens to this person, when he becomes a Christian? Tragically enough, he usually transfers his perfectionism onto his relationship with God, who is seen now as a figure on top of a tall ladder. He says to himself, "I'm going to climb up to God now. I'm His child, and I want to please Him, more than I want anything else."

So he starts climbing, rung by rung, working so hard, until his knuckles are bleeding and his shins are bruised. Finally, he reaches the top, only to find that his God has moved up three rungs; so he puts on his Avis button and determines to try a little harder. He climbs and struggles, but when he gets up there, his God has gone up another three rungs.

Some years ago I received a telephone call from the wife of a minister friend of mine, asking me to counsel her husband who had just suffered a complete nervous breakdown. As we were driving the hospital, she began to talk about him. "I just don't understand Bill. It's almost as if he has a built-in slave driver that won't let him go. He can't relax, can't let down. He's always overworking. His people just love him; and they would do anything for him, but he can't let them. He's gone on and on like this for so many years that finally he has broken completely."

I began to visit with Bill, and after he was well enough to talk, he shared with me about his home and his childhood. As Bill grew up he wanted very much to please his parents. He tried to win his mother's approval by occa-

sionally helping her set the table. But she'd say, "Bill, you've got the knives in the wrong place." So he would put the knives in the right place. "Now you've got the forks wrong." After that it would be the salad plates. He could never please her. Try as hard as he might, he could never please his father either. He brought home his report card with B's and C's. His dad looked at the card and said, "Bill, I think if you try, you could surely get all B's, couldn't you?" So he studied harder and harder, until one day he brought home all B's. Dad said, "But surely, you know, if you just put a little more effort into it, you could get all A's." So he worked and struggled through a semester or two, until finally he got all A's. He was so excited—now Mother and Dad would surely be pleased with him. He ran home for he could hardly wait. Dad looked at the report card and said, "Well, I know those teachers. They always give A's."

When Bill became a minister, all he did was exchange one mother and one father for several hundred of them: his congregation became his unappeasable parents. He could never satisfy them, no matter what he did. Finally, he just collapsed under sheer weight of struggling for approval and trying to prove him.

A famous God-is-dead theologian was being interviewed. The reporter asked, "What do you mean by *God*?"

"God? God, to me, is that little inner voice that always says, 'That's not quite good enough.' "

He didn't tell us much about God, but he did say a lot about his own personality. And I presume that such sick people produce sick theologies. Oh, how the perfectionist complex defeats people in the Christian life! And how it evens keeps people out of the kingdom!

Then there is another kind of damaged emotion that we can call *super sensitivity*. The supersensitive person has usually been hurt deeply. He reached out for love and approval and affection, but instead he got the opposite, and he has scars deep inside of him. Sometimes he sees things other people don't see, and tends to feel things other people don't feel.

One day I was walking down the street and saw super-

sensitive Charlie coming toward me. I usually give him a lot of attention, but that morning I was very busy so I just said, "Hi, Charlie. How are you?" and passed on by. When I got back to the office, a church member called me on the phone and asked, "Are you mad at Charlie?"

"Charlie who?"

"Well, you know, Charlie Olson."

"Why, no. I saw him down the street." Then I suddenly realized that I hadn't given Charlie the appreciation and the affirmation I usually do, knowing he is super-sensitive.

Supersensitive people need a lot of approval. You can never quite give them enough. And sometimes they seem very insensitive. They have been hurt so badly that instead of becoming sensitive, they cover it by being hard, tough. They want to get even and hurt others. So quite unbeknown to them, they spend their lives pushing people around, hurting and dominating them. They use money or authority or position or sex or even sermons to hurt people. Does all this affect their Christian experience? Yes, very deeply.

Then there are the people who are filled with *fears*. Perhaps the greatest of them all is the fear of failure. These damaged persons are so afraid of losing the game of life that they have a simple way out—never get into the game; just sit on the sidelines. They say, "I don't like the rules," or, "I don't care for the referee." "The ball isn't quite round." "The goals are not right."

I remember some years ago talking with a salesman in a used car lot. As we looked out the showroom window, we saw a man who was going around kicking tires on the cars. He was also raising the hoods and banging the fenders. The salesman said disgustedly, "Look at that guy out there, He's a wheel-kicker. They are the bane of our existence. They come in here all the time, but never buy cars because they can't make up their minds. Now watch him out there. He's kicking the tires. He'll say the wheels are out of line. He'll listen to the motor and say, 'Hear that knock?' Nobody else can hear the knock, but he can hear it. Something is always wrong. He is afraid to choose; he

can never make up his mind, so he always finds an excuse."

Life is filled with wheel-kickers, people who fear failure, and fear making the wrong decision. What happens to such people as they approach the Christian life? Believing is a great risk; it's very hard. Decisions tear them up. Faith comes hard. Witnessing is difficult. Launching out in the Holy Spirit and really surrendering to God is almost a trauma. Discipline is difficult. The fearful people live on *if onlys*: "If only this or if only than, then I would be OK." But since the *if only* never comes to pass, they usually never accomplish what they would like to. The fearful are the defeated and the indecisive.

The whole area of *sex* is intricately mixed in with all these others, but needs a special word said about it.

When the Apostle Paul wrote his first epistle to the Corinthians, he dealt with every imaginable kind of human problem, and some which are almost unimaginable. He talked about quarrels, party splits, court cases, property disputes, and various kinds of sexual difficulty, from incest to prostitution. He talked about premarital relations and marital relations and post-marital relations. He wrote about widowhood, divorce, vegetarianism, getting drunk at the Communion table, speaking in tongues, death and funerals, taking up offerings, and conducting an every-member canvass in the church!

But he began his letter by saying he was not going to know anything among them except "Jesus Christ, and him crucified" (1 Cor. 2:2). This means our Gospel is most practical, and get right down to where we live. Much of Paul's letter had to do with sexual problems.

Because we Americans have been weaned on indiscipline, indecency, and sensuality, we are living in modern Corinth. In our society, it is very difficult for anyone to grow to young adulthood without suffering some damage in the sex department of his personality.

I'm thinking of scores of people who have come to me for help. I remember a lady who had heard me speak in her church and then drove 1,200 miles to talk with me. I remember a man who finally came into the office and said

that he had driven eleven times around the church, getting up enough nerve to come and see me. Both of these people were genuine Christians, and both were struggling with problems of homosexuality.

I am thinking of a young lady in a distant university where I held a preaching mission. To this day I don't know what she looks like, for she kept her back turned to me and her coat pulled up around her face, as she sat in a corner, sobbing. Finally, she said, "I've got to share this with someone before I explode." Then, still facing the corner, she told me the sad story which we hear more and more often these days, about a father who had treated her not as a daughter, but as a wife.

I am thinking of scores of young men and women who were fed a lot of false and harmful ideas by well-meaning but ignorant parents and preachers. Now they are unfit for marriage, unable to be husbands and wives who can live without fear, guilt, and shame. Damaged? Yes, badly damaged.

Does the Gospel have a message for these various kinds of emotionally damaged persons? For if it doesn't offer healing for all of them, then we had better put a padlock on our church doors, quit playing Christianity, and shut up about our "good news."

### DIVINE REPAIRS

Does God have some repairs for us? Yes, He does! Paul wrote to the Roman Christians about the Holy Spirit who *helps our infirmities* (Rom. 8:26). Many of the modern translations use *weaknesses* or *cripplings* in place of the word *infirmities*. One meaning of the word *help* has a medical connotation, suggesting the way a nurse helps in the healing process. So it is not simply "to take hold of on the other side," which is the literal meaning of the verb, but that the Holy Spirit becomes our partner and helper, who works along with us in a mutual participating, for our healing.

What is our part in the healing of our damaged emotions? The Holy Spirit is, indeed, the divine counselor, the divine psychiatrist, who gets ahold of our problem on

the other end. But we're on this end of it. Just what are you and I supposed to do in this healing process?

That is the very purpose of this book and you will find many suggestions as you read further. However, at this point let me suggest the general, biblical principles which must be followed throughout in order for you to find healing for damaged emotions.

1. *Face your problem squarely.* With ruthless moral honesty, and with God's grace, confront that awful, hidden childhood memory, however deep the feelings within you. Acknowledge to yourself, and acknowledge it to another human being. Some problems can never be solved until you confess them to others. "Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed" (James 5:16). Some people miss deep inner healing because they lack the courage to share deeply with another person.

2. *Accept your responsibility in the matter.* "But," you say, "I was sinned against. I was a victim. You don't know what happened to me."

True enough. But what about your response? What about the fact that you learned to hate or resent, or to escape into an unreal world?

You may say, "My folks never told me anything about sex, and I grew up and I went into this evil world, innocent and ignorant, and got into trouble." That's the way it happened the first time. But what about the second time or the third time—whose fault was it then? Life is like a complicated tapestry, woven with a loom and shuttle. Heredity, environment, all the things experienced in childhood, from parents, teachers, playmates, all of life's handicaps—all of these things are on one side of the loom, and they pass the shuttle to you. But remember, you pass the shuttle back through the loom. And this action together with your responses, weaves the design in the tapestry of your life. You are responsible for your actions. You will never receive healing for your damaged emotions until you stop blaming everyone else and accept your responsibility.

3. *Ask yourself if you want to be healed.* This is what Jesus asked the sick man who had laid ill for thirty-eight

years (John 5:6). Do you really want to be healed, or do you just want to talk about your problem? Do you want to use your problem to get sympathy from others? Do you just want it for a crutch, so that you can walk with a limp?

The lame man said to Jesus, "But, Lord, nobody puts me into the pool. I try, but they all get there ahead of me." He would not look deep within his heart to find out whether he really wanted to be healed.

We live in an age that some call the "goof-off" era, where each person wants to blame someone else instead of facing his own responsibilities. I have been working with college students for many years, and sometimes I wonder what the B.A. degree really means: Bachelor of Arts or Builder of Alibis. Ask yourself: "Do I really want to be healed? Am I willing to face my responsibility in the matter?"

4. *Forgive everyone who is involved in your problem.* Facing responsibility and forgiving people are really two sides of the same coin. The reason some people have never been able to forgive is that if they forgave, the last rug would be pulled out from under them and they would have no one to blame. Facing responsibility and forgiving are almost the same action; in some instances you need to do them simultaneously. Jesus made it very plain that no healing occurs until there is deep forgiveness.

5 *Forgive yourself.* So many Christians say, "Yes, I know that God has forgiven me, but I can never forgive myself." This statement is a contradiction in terms. How can you really believe that God has forgiven you, and then not forgive yourself? When God forgives, He buries your sins in the sea of His forgiveness and His forgetfulness. As Corrie Ten Boom says, "He then puts a sign on the bank which says: 'No fishing allowed.'" You have no right to dredge up anything that God has forgiven and forgotten. He has put it behind His back. Through an inscrutable mystery, divine omniscience has somehow forgotten your sins. You *can* forgive yourself.

6. *Ask the Holy Spirit to show you what your real problem is, and how you need to pray.* Paul said that often we do not know how to pray as we ought (Rom. 8:26). But the Holy

Spirit prays in and through us, and makes intercession for us. Sometimes the Holy Spirit uses a temporary assistant in the form of a human counselor, who can help us to perceive what the real problem is. Sometimes the Spirit is able to do this through God's word or through some incident in life that suddenly makes us aware of our real problem. For it is important that we realize the true problem and know how we should pray. James reminded us that we sometimes do not receive because we pray for the wrong things (James 4:3). It may be essential for you to get help from a counselor or a pastor or a friend; then together with this person, you can ask the Holy Spirit to show you where your real need is.

Do you remember the story of Henry Ford and Charlie Steinmetz? Steinmetz was a dwarf, ugly and deformed, but he had one of the greatest minds in the field of electricity that the world has ever known. Steinmetz built the great generators for Henry Ford in his first plant in Dearborn, Michigan. One day those generators broke down and the plant came to a halt. They brought in ordinary mechanics and helpers who couldn't get the generators going again. They were losing money. Then Ford called Steinmetz. The genius came, seemed to just putter around for a few hours, and then threw the switch that put the great Ford plant back into operation.

A few days later Henry Ford received a bill from Steinmetz for \$10,000. Although Ford was a very rich man, he returned the bill with a note, "Charlie, isn't this bill just a little high for a few hours of tinkering around on those motors?"

Steinmetz returned the bill to Ford. This time it read: "For tinkering around on the motors: \$10. For knowing where to tinker: \$9,990. Total: \$10,000." Henry Ford paid the bill.

The Holy Spirit knows where to tinker. We do not know what we ought to be praying for. We often do not receive, because we ask for the wrong things. As you read these chapters, ask the Holy Spirit to show you what you need to know about yourself, and then to guide you in your prayers.

*Therefore is the kingdom of heaven likened unto a certain king, which would take account of his servants. . . . One was brought unto him, which owed him ten thousand talents. But forasmuch as he had not to pay, his lord commanded him to be sold . . . he fell down, and worshiped him saying, "Lord, have patience with me, and I will pay thee all." Then the lord of that servant was moved with compassion and loosed him, and forgave him the debt.*

*But the same servant went out, and found one of his fellowservants, which owed him an hundred pence and he . . . took him by the throat, saying, "Pay me that thou owest" . . . and cast him into prison, till he should pay the debt.*

*And his lord was wroth, and delivered him to the tormentors, till he should pay all that was due unto him. So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses.*

Matthew 18:23-35

*Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.*

Matthew 6:12