



The Scars of Loneliness

Did you hear about the Marine who was deployed in Iraq? He received a “Dear John” letter from his girlfriend back home in which she informed him that she had been unfaithful to him on two occasions, didn’t love him anymore and wanted him to send back the picture of herself she had given him before he left.

The Marine went around to all of his buddies and asked for all their unwanted photographs of women. He got 25 pictures and sent them to his former girlfriend with this note:

“I’m so sorry, I can’t remember which one you are. Please take the one that belongs to you and send the rest back.”

Have you ever been laughing at a truly funny story—and that one is—and have reality slap you in the face? Have you ever found your laughter stilled when you recognized the pathos behind the humor? This story did that for me. I was laughing until I realized what was going on. A young man who had been deeply wounded by someone he trusted was trying to get back and to hide his wounds.

As some of you know, my proclivity is to be a loner. (I’ve often said that I could be a Trappist monk if they would let me bring my wife.) In the last few years, I’ve come to see that proclivity as a way to keep me from pain. If I just don’t let anybody close, they can’t reject me, and I can’t get hurt.

One of the most profound things we can know about Jesus is his refusal to be a loner. He is God and one of the attributes of God is his self-sufficiency.

Jesus chose not to be a loner. Not only that, he chose the pain that is the inevitable implication of being in a relationship with people. If you are going to be committed to people, you

must know that it is a commitment to pain, chaos, misunderstanding, anger, betrayal and pathos.

Just ask Jesus. He knows.

Some of the most moving passages of the Gospels are those where Jesus expresses his hurt and loneliness.

For instance, do you remember when Jesus started teaching some of the deeper truths about who he was? Almost everybody was pleased when the blind threw away their white canes. People liked the sound of beggars’ cups hitting the side of the road. It was fun to see cripples planting their crutches in the sand and doing a jig. Everybody likes a magician. But when the magician starts talking about things like losing one’s life, taking up a cross and dying to self, the crowd has a tendency to quietly dissipate.

In the 6th chapter of John (vs. 66-67 ESV), John says, “After this many of his disciples turned away and no longer walked with him. So Jesus said to the twelve, ‘Do you want to go away as well?’”

Jesus was feeling the pain of rejection and loneliness.

When Jesus was in the garden of Gethsemane facing the most horrible and devastating human loneliness—the loneliness of one whose God would turn away—he sought the friendship of his disciples. Jesus said, “My soul is very sorrowful, even to death; remain here, and watch with me” (Matthew 26:38 ESV).

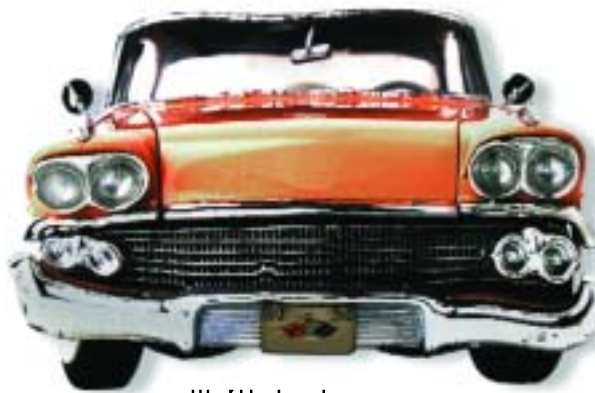
Listen to the pain in Jesus’ words when he finds them sleeping: “Could you not watch with me one hour?” (vs. 40 NKJV).

That is a lonely man whose pain was magnified by the lack of concern of those he had chosen to love.

Ravi Zacharias tells of seeing a painting in a church in Puerto Rico. It is a

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- ▼ Abuse
- ▼ Debilitating illness
- ▼ Addiction
- ▼ Loss of loved one
- ▼ Divorce
- ▼ Loss of career

At some point in our lives, we are all called to journey from Egypt to the Promised Land!

he asked me

painting of a little girl holding the hand of Jesus. She asks him, "Que paso con tus manos?" ("What happened to your hands?")

There was no answer in the painting because there isn't a need for one. The answer is that Jesus' hands had the nail-scarred wounds inflicted by those he loved.

That Marine had scars too. He chose to hide them. I can understand that and, frankly, I like the way he did it! He didn't get mad; he got back! Good for you, son! I can affirm the psychological catharsis that can be. Anger and action maybe can't fix it, but they can ameliorate the pain—for a while.

I can identify with that. Been there, done that...have the T-shirt.

But I can also identify with the Marine that night when he was by himself with no one but Jesus to see. I can identify with the tears that come from being human, insecure and hurt. I can see him in my mind's eye, in his sleeping bag, trying to stifle the sobs so his buddies wouldn't hear. I've experienced the broken heart, the wrenching emptiness and the horror of rejection...

...and, I suspect, you've been there, too.

Maybe you're there right now. Perhaps you've been rejected by someone you loved deeply. Maybe it was your husband or wife who walked away. Could be your teenager said that he hated you. Could be that your Christian brothers and sisters failed to look at your heart and didn't understand you were doing the best you could. Perhaps you couldn't please your parents no matter how hard you tried.

"Lord, I'm angry," I prayed. "I don't know if I can deal with this. I simply can't forgive this time. It's too much to ask."

I know. But I did. It's a process and it's hard. But you can do it because I'll help. Look at the scars you have and then look at mine. They aren't altogether different.

He asked me to remind you. □

—Steve Brown

THE PLAIN TRUTH