

## CHAPTER SIX

### THE WOUNDED SOUL

#### ***A new creation***

When I became a believer I was taught that I was now a “new creation; old things had passed away; behold all things had become new.” (2 Cor.5:17). This verse was used to challenge me concerning the little things of the old nature that still were present in my life. Naturally, I was made to feel guilty. I eased my guilt by reasoning that my old habits weren’t as bad as some of those I saw in others. We were very quick to condemn those who were not so able as we were to overcome their old habits, particularly those obvious “sins” such as smoking and drinking, not to mention dancing and keeping company with those who do such things! I’m glad I have come to understand this verse better, and to understand something more of the grace of God.

Thank God that *in Christ* we are fully accepted. We are reconciled to the Father, justified (just as if we’d never sinned!), forgiven and made new creatures. However, my teeth did not shed their fillings and return to the undecayed brightness of my youth, when I was converted. Indeed, my body has not been made a new creation; it continues to die, day by day.

The *new creation* refers to that part of me which once was dead - my spirit. I am aware that there is much confusion about the difference between the soul and the spirit but, for the purpose of this book, I shall call the spirit that part of me which, now being alive to God, differentiates me from the unconverted man, whose spirit is dead, however noble or religious a man he may be. He, like me, has a body with its varying degrees of health, but which will surely die one day, unless the Lord comes before.

We also have souls - our minds, our wills, our emotions. Even the non Christian man has a living soul. At conversion, these are not made *a new creation*. They carry many wounds from the past and provide a fertile battle field for Satan. He knows the wounds - after all, his hosts were very active in causing them! For too long we have made many new (and some older) believers feel incompetent in the battle by charging them to be more mature than their wounded souls have allowed them to be. We have urged them to run when their soul is crippled! - to fight when their muscles have atrophied! Instead, we should have been ministering to their hurts and wounds, bringing healing through Biblical teaching. The Lord has committed unto us *the ministry of reconciliation*.<sup>1</sup>

### ***Bruises of the soul***

Many people have been subject for most of their lives to continuous criticism and verbal abuse. This might come from a parent or older siblings. Their retiring personality invites others to continue this abuse at school or at work and they come into adulthood with great *bruises* on their soul. They are often accused of being too sensitive and indeed they are, as a result of the abuse. They function well enough until criticized again when they find themselves unable to handle the pain. New bruises are formed and each new criticism, real or imagined, is like a punch on the bruise.

Peter had been raised in a somber, though Christian home. He was the only child and had few friends. He was not allowed to bring friends home from school as they were “worldly” and there were no others his age in the small church his family attended. He never quite met his father’s expectations or demands of him and was unable to hold a job for very long. He was never made to feel good enough to be accepted. In his mid-thirties he left home and went to work for a Christian mission, where he was befriended by three other men. He began to enjoy his work and friends and became a well accepted part of that ministry - until, one month, three years later, each of his three friends announced that he would

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<sup>1</sup> 2 Corinthians 5:18,19

soon be leaving to work elsewhere. Instead of the usual sorrow one would expect, Peter began to act in a strange way. He deliberately set out to make himself disliked by his departing friends. For example, he borrowed something from one of them, deliberately broke it and said it was an accident. Each of the friends left the mission offended by Peter.

Why did he act like this? He told me that it had started just after he had returned from holidays - at home. That had not been a good time and he had been glad to return to the mission. When I suggested that his experience of more criticism at home had produced renewed bruising on his soul, and that the departure of his friends had been like punches on the bruising, Peter broke down and cried. "That's exactly how I feel," he declared, "their leaving just added to my feelings of being unworthy of love and acceptance." Today, Peter is walking in a new freedom, knowing his worthiness in Christ.

### ***Stab wounds***

For others, the wound may have been created by a single act - a wound just like a stabbing. The classic example, of course, is the child who is sexually abused by a trusted, loved one. The child does not understand that he or she is the victim and not the guilty one. They are afraid to speak about the incident, choosing rather, to bury it in their memory. Some time afterwards, the wound is covered over and not easily brought to the surface to be faced, even in adulthood. The *bandage* with which the wound was covered has become a *bondage* affecting other areas of the adult's personality. Such a soul needs healing!

When I asked Alec why he couldn't read or write, he told me a sad story. For four years his mother had doted on him, her only child, after his father had walked out on them. Then another father came on the scene - one who did not like, or want Alec around him. He soon knew the deep pain of rejection. At the age of five, Alec started primary school, where he would sit in the back of the room, day dreaming. He well remembers the occasion when an unthinking teacher shouted at him. "Alec, you're nothing but a

dumbo!” The hurting, little soul said to himself, “If that’s what you think I am, that’s what I’ll be!” He resolved, as a young child, never to study to please that teacher . . . and so grew into a teenage illiterate! Was Alec bright enough to have learned? Just one month after we talked, Alec was reading all the sports news in the daily newspaper! He had an interest in a young lady and was motivated to walk out a healing. I used his knowledge of sports personalities and their photographs in the newspapers, to encourage him in reading the words explaining the pictures. Soon, he needed no pictures and I watched his self esteem grow as he began to read with understanding. So many teachers - and parents - and others, will never know the negative significance of the stabbing wounds their unthinking words have had on so many young souls. And many adults today are still carrying the scabs and scars from those wounds on their souls!

### **Grazes**

Then there’s the grazing kinds of wounds. They usually leave no scar or permanent bondage, but can bleed profusely at the time of injury. If not treated correctly, however, they can fester and then produce far worse injury. I see such wounds of the soul occurring when one experiences a *put-down* or some great disappointment. It is accompanied by feelings of inadequacy and loneliness. Spiritual defenses are down. This is the time when we need to come around in tender support for the hurting one. It is the time for empathy, and understanding.

Mary had become ill with Epstein Barr or Yuppie Flu, called the disease of the nineties. It was hard not knowing how long she was likely to be ill, for the doctors had no ready cure. The members of her church were praying for her but she wished someone would come to visit her. No one came, giving their reason that they were unsure if such a disease was contagious. That was hard to accept but Mary did so, with grace. Then one day, a telephone call caused much *bleeding* of the soul. Her closest friend called to tell

her that the church had stopped praying for Mary as it was obvious she was not exercising faith. If she had been so doing, she would have now been well!

### ***Fractures***

Let us continue with our metaphors. Are there such wounds as fractures in the soul? Yes, there are many believers who are limping through life because of some traumatic experience. It may be the death of a loved one, a broken engagement, some accident of life. They were crippled by the experience and have never learned to walk again.

Melinda had an argument with her mother, during which she had pushed her away with some force. Some months later, mother was diagnosed as having developed breast cancer and within a year, she had died. No amount of argument could convince Melinda that her push had not created the cancer in her mother. She would not forgive herself, and could not accept the Lord's forgiveness. She was a broken woman when I met her, and remains crippled.

### ***"He restores my soul"***

I am convinced that very many believers today, have wounded souls. I am also convinced that the Lord wants to heal those wounds - to restore the soul. The psalmist David was guilty of adultery and murder. He carried terrible soul wounds but he could say, "The Lord is my shepherd . . . He restores my soul." (Psalm 23: 3).

There are also wounds created by our own doings. It seems to me that when we deliberately act contrary to the explicit Word of God, we create our own wounds. Sex outside of marriage, and divorce, will always create wounded souls that need healing through the grace of God. Be very sure, that it is His

desire to bring such healing. Indeed, I see this as the true work of sanctification - the second part of salvation.

**Justification** - set free from the penalty of sin - salvation (wholeness) for the spirit.

The past work of the Spirit.

**Sanctification** - set free from the power of sin - salvation (wholeness) for the soul.

The present work of the Spirit.

**Glorification** - set free from the presence of sin - salvation (wholeness) for the body.

The future work of the Spirit.

That's why we call Him **Saviour!**

### ***The angler***

We have likened Satan to a roaring lion and an archer. It seems to me, however, that his most effective warring device is like an angler's hook and rod! He knows exactly where our soul wounds are. After all, he was instrumental in creating them - albeit through other people and often through believers. When we get ready to enter the battle in the heavenlies, he then casts his line, hooks into the wound and manipulates the soul into ineffectiveness.

### ***A personal story***

Early in 1990 I became closely involved in a new work of God among the native peoples of western Canada. The spiritual battle was intense. I also stopped sleeping at the same time. My doctor tried many different medications to get me to sleep but it was several weeks before a way was found for me

not to lie awake all night. Many thought I was under an Indian curse and I would receive letters and telephone calls of encouragement from throughout the north-west of USA and Canada. I asked Charles and Claudia, another pastor and his wife, to pray for me, at which time she told me that she was aware of a “terrible spirit of abandonment” upon me. I had no understanding of what she meant.

Shortly afterwards, I was invited to spend a week at an Anglican Retreat for clergymen and wives. There I was told that there was an area of my emotions missing and it had much to do with my mother’s death. My mother had died when I was a teenager and, though I had not cried at the time in a normal mourning, I thought I had dealt with her death very well. Now I was being told that this had something to do with my sleeplessness. I still did not understand.

After four months I offered to resign my position at the church but the elders and members would not let me. Instead, much love was shown to me by them and the greater church body of our city.

After eight months, I entered Vancouver University hospital as a patient in the sleep clinic where it was diagnosed that there had been a physical breakdown in my body’s production of the sleep-inducing neuro-chemicals. The specialist put this down to stress. The next week, I did resign from the church, which had now decreased in numbers to about sixty percent of what it was at the beginning of the year.

The following Tuesday I was with a group of my closest friends, other pastors who met together weekly for prayer. As we finished our breakfast, one of them said to me, “Gareth, I sense an awful spirit of abandonment upon you!” These were the same words I had heard almost nine months earlier. When I got back home, I called Claudia to ask her to explain to me, just what she had meant by her comment. She told me to sit down that evening and to go back over my life, looking for the times when the little boy in me might have felt abandoned.

My wife Anne and I were amazed as we considered the different age-periods of my life. There were so many times when I might have felt the pain of abandonment, not least of which was my mother’s death when I was just fourteen. I had not cried then, but for some time afterwards, I had grieved. Later, that

same evening I relaxed to read a novel about the Crusades of the thirteenth century. Two knights were leading their men into battle on the fields of France. Suddenly, they were face to face. However, Sir Rufus had been wounded and was slumped over in his saddle, his sword hanging by his side. His enemy, Sir Nigel, quickly rode toward him, raising his mighty sword to slay his opponent. As he would strike the fatal blow, nine arrows from Sir Rufus' bowmen, flew through the air to find their target in Sir Nigel's armpit. They were ineffective against his armour, but very effective at his weak spot, where no armour could be worn. I sensed that the Spirit of the Lord was speaking to me.

“Gareth, you might well put on the armour of God, but when you go into battle against the enemy, be sure that he knows just where your weakest spots are - and your weak spots are where there are wounds of abandonment. They must be healed if you would be effective in the battle!”

I now began to understand why people had been drifting away from our church over the past two years. Three elders had left because of job relocation and had been replaced by three other good men. However, the new elders' board did not have the gifts necessary to maintain the programs initiated by the former men and soon there began a slow exodus from the church. I would meet people on the street who would rush up to me to tell me that they loved me, but had started to go to another church “because our children enjoy their youth work so much.” Many were the reasons but few had displayed the grace to come and tell me of their intentions. I would have gladly given them letters of introduction if I had known they wanted to transfer.

Then, as I grew more weary, I was not feeding and leading my flock as they were used to, so more began to leave. Instead of the fulfillment I was used to, I had the pain, almost every week, of seeing another vacant pew. As I was very committed to my people, each departure was like a mini-divorce. I'm sure that none of those people would have deliberately hurt me, but their actions were used by the enemy as hooks in my wounds of 'abandonment'. No wonder that the doctor called it stress - even though I would boast that I never took my church problems home with me!

**An epilogue:** If you are ever thinking of leaving your local church, do it the right and ethical way. Let your pastor know of your intentions. You might be very surprised if you knew how easily we would one another.