

## WHEN YOU CAN'T FORGET

### Haunted by ugly memories, or terrorized by flashbacks

Continually picture yourself in Jesus' loving arms, because spiritually and emotionally that is exactly where you are. As a 10 year old you were probably only conscious of the presence of your doll, but in reality, Jesus was there, weeping for you, wanting you to run to him. As an adult who has discovered Jesus, you can now bring him into that memory. Never again need you go anywhere without an awareness that he is there, loving you, feeling your pain, healing you. He knows exactly what it is like to be abused and humiliated and afflicted with agonizing pain. He, like you, was innocent but treated like dirt and made to feel responsible for every conceivable sin.

For anyone trusting Jesus, guilt feelings are nothing but a satanic deception. There is no way that the loss of your virginity casts the faintest of shadows over God's pride in you, his child. You had once so suppressed your painful memories that you were unaware of the abuse you had suffered. That's how God sees you. He has, as it were, wiped from his memory any conceivable reason for you to feel ashamed. Of course, your Lord fully understands your trauma. Your present distress pains him. As far as the *shame* of your past is concerned, however, in God's mind it is utterly as if it never happened. To him you are precious, pure and perfect, just like Jesus, because you and he swapped places.

Nevertheless, there are advantages to you in becoming aware of your past. The benefits all revolve around love and forgiveness and honor. One benefit is that you gain a unique opportunity to become Godlike by loving and forgiving your abusers and those who betrayed your trust, just like Jesus forgave his abusers and betrayers. The harder it is to forgive, the greater your eternal honor when you forgive.

Another benefit is that the more depraved you imagine you have been, the more your eyes are opened to the extent of Christ's love for you in suffering to make you spotlessly pure so that you can be on intimate terms with the Holy God. Of course, you were no more sinful than other people, but it is usually only the most saintly people have any conception of just how sinful they are, relative the holy perfection of God. For example, the prophet Isaiah's dramatic encounter with God left him overwhelmed by an awareness of his own personal sin (Isaiah 6:5). The same can be said of Peter (Luke 5:8). The deeper the apostle Paul grew in his understanding and love for God, the greater his consciousness of his personal moral failures until he finally considered himself the greatest of sinners (1 Timothy 1:15). Remember Jesus defending the street woman who loved Jesus more than the Pharisee loved him. The one who is forgiven much, said Jesus, loves much (Luke 7:47). Since we were all so ruined by sin as to be, as Scripture says, 'dead,' 'without hope' and doomed to hell, *every* Christian has been forgiven much. Where Christians differ is not in how much they needed forgiveness but in their *consciousness* of their indebtedness to Christ for forgiving their sin. You have been blessed with a deeper understanding. This insight has the great potential to increase your love for your Savior. This is of immense spiritual value since love for God is the greatest of all commandments (Matthew 22:36-38).

The benefits flowing from your painful memories are very deep things. They hurt, but they go to the very heart and nature of God because God himself hurts. You have been hurt by someone else's sins. God is hurt by *everyone's* sins. Through your experiences God is sharing his secrets with you. It is something deeply spiritual and intimate and precious. Through it you are granted unique insight into the heart of God. You will move from mere head knowledge to deep heart knowledge of God and his love and his ways. The most precious experiences cost, but they are more than worth all the pain.

The Bible often refers to trials as being like childbirth. During childbirth the pain can be so intense that the mother-to-be wishes she had never conceived and is determined never to have another child. Not long afterwards, however, she sees things in a very different light. While you are in the midst of your pain, you are unable to see things from the perspective that you will when you are in heaven. When you get there, as impossible as it may now seem, you'll actually look back and be thankful for all the good things produced during your present pain. For instance, I have suffered quite a bit of emotional pain and even now I can praise God for it because it has equipped me to minister to hurting people and it has softened my heart and given me a deeper understanding of Christ's suffering. If I had known little pain, how could I know what Christ voluntarily endured for me?

From the book of Job, we gain another insight. The entire disaster was from Satan, but throughout the saga, God was boasting about Job and displaying absolute trust in him. By word and action God kept telling Satan that no matter what, Job would remain faithful and righteous. The Lord is doing the same with you. You could be babied – the Lord could continue to hide your past from you – but instead, God has great faith in you. He knows that although it will be tough, you will come through this, bringing glory to yourself and increasing your eternal reward. By permitting these memories to surface, he is trusting you not to misuse this information to become bitter towards God or others. Instead, he is looking to you to use this experience as an opportunity to grow in love and thus allow God to do what he longs to do – bring you through to full healing and make you worthy of the enormous eternal rewards he wants you to enjoy.

The torment you are experiencing is not from God. It's from God's enemy. It is true that Almighty could treat you as someone incapable of handling reality and forcibly suppress your memories. He could stop the devil from playing with your mind. And yet by not preventing these memories, your Lord is granting you unique opportunities to gain great honor in loving and forgiving as Christ himself does. And he is entrusting you with opportunities to feel and express the deep things of God. The Lord is sharing his own heart with you. I wonder if you can grasp what a privilege that is.

Not only should you enjoy eternity in heaven as compensation of your horrific suffering, you should have a place of high honor there. It is a struggle at present because Satan is never satisfied with physical and psychological abuse. He would love to destroy you spiritually. Nevertheless, Christ's victory has made you a winner.

One particular woman sometimes saw herself as a little girl she called Katie. She said:

**‘Katie wants to hurt herself, to destroy the evil inside.’**

Katie is right in recognizing that evil needs to be punished and destroyed. That is why Jesus came, was mocked, scorned, despised, labeled the prince of demons, publicly humiliated, stripped naked, tortured, his body cruelly violated, a spear plunged through his side, ripping into his internal organs. That Man on the cross traded places with you. It was Katie and every part of you, suffering and dying once and for all time so that in his destruction every trace of evil within you (and within me) would be totally destroyed.

For you to harm yourself would deeply hurt your Savior because he endured all that agony to spare you the pain. If you were to try to suffer for your own sin, or imagined sin, it would mean Jesus suffered for nothing. You need to realize this (perhaps you do already) and somehow Katie needs to realize it, too. Getting Katie to grasp it will be harder but it should gradually happen as you keep saturating your conscious thinking with the fact that you are pure and cleansed because every trace of evil has been destroyed by your Suffering Lord who gave his life to secure your purity.

**‘I want Katie to go away and leave me alone.’**

Better still, Katie’s tormented conscience can find peace by realizing that Jesus’ suffering has made her pure, and respectable, and given her great dignity. Just as Jesus is forever honored despite the indignity that he suffered, so he wants Katie to be forever honored, because he has poured out his blood and his love for her.

In fact, in our eyes, greater honor has come to Jesus *because* of the indignity he suffered. Likewise, what you suffered can become a source of eternal honor, when you triumph over it by drawing so much upon Christ’s love that you do not let your abuse fill you with bitterness. Whenever you try to forgive, you bring much glory to God, portray to others the depth of God’s love, and bring eternal glory upon yourself. Likewise, whenever in the midst of the pain you still feel because of your past, you praise God, you move the heart of God in an indescribably deep way and bring eternal honor to yourself.

**‘I know I have to accept this part of me but it is so hard.’**

Your distress stems primarily from the fact that no sane person can ‘accept’ events as you interpreted them as a child. No one can cope with believing he or she is evil and alone and unloved and should be destroyed. You never have to accept *that*. All you need do is realize that you misunderstood. You were not alone and unloved. Jesus was there. The evil you sensed within *has* been destroyed without it hurting you. It was destroyed by the suffering of the deeply compassionate Protector you didn’t realize you had. In the eyes of God – the only one whose opinion really counts – you are special. People can touch your body but they cannot touch your spirit. No matter what happens, as you keep trusting in Jesus, the eternal part of you remains pure and secure.

Crowds gawked as Christ suffered. Many jeered. No one rescued him. 'Father, forgive them for they know not what to do,' were almost his last words. He took all of our pain, our sin, our anger, our shame to the cross with him. He paid that price for us. We don't have to carry it ourselves any more. Our sorrows, our degradation, our defeats were all nailed to that cross on Calvary. Give him your pain, your anger, your hurts, dear friend. Right now, he is enthroned in heaven, interceding in prayer to God on your behalf. He weeps for you today as he sees you battling shame. He paid the price for that shame. Let him take it. He has made you royalty – a child of the King of kings. You will reign with him in eternal honor.

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