



BAND OF BROTHERS

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Wounds and Scars

"Here on earth you will have many trials and sorrows. But take heart, because I have overcome the world." (John 16:33)

"Does it mean He no longer loves us if we have trouble or calamity, or are persecuted, or are hungry or cold or in danger or threatened with death? ... No, despite all these things, overwhelming victory is ours through Christ, who loved us." (Rom. 8: 35, 37)

"We will find grace to help us when we need it." (Heb. 4:16)

"For you have been healed by His wounds." (1 Pet. 2:24)

"He comforts us in all our troubles so that we can comfort others. When others are troubled, we will be able to give them the same comfort God has given us." (2 Cor. 1:4)

"He was wounded and crushed for our sins; He was beaten that we might have peace; He was whipped, and we were healed!" (Isaiah 53:5)

"On the last day, Jesus will look us over not for medals, diplomas, or honors, but for scars." (Brennan Manning, Ruthless Trust, p. 48)

"Then will he strip his sleeve and show his scars..." Henry V

"For I bear on my body the scars that show I belong to Jesus." (Gal. 6:17)

"For the Lord does not abandon anyone forever. Though he brings grief, he also shows compassion according to the greatness of his unfailing love. For he does not enjoy hurting people or causing them sorrow." (Lam. 3:31)

"We also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope." (Rom. 5:3-4 NIV)

Feeling Abandoned by God - Taking Control

It's easier to understand suffering if it is a consequence of intentional sin. If you rob a bank, going to jail may be a natural consequence. If you commit adultery, divorce could be an outcome. But it is harder to understand suffering that we are asked to endure by God that is not seemingly a consequence of intentional sin.

If God is good, "Why was I physically or sexually abused?" "Why did my father abandon me?" "Why do I physically or emotionally hurt this way?" "Assuming God has the power to do so, why won't God heal me from this illness?" "Why does my loved one have to suffer with this disease?" "Why did God allow the betrayal and broken relationship to enter my life?" "Where was my rescuer when I was crying out for help?" "Why is life so hard today and my suffering so seemingly harsh now that I am a Christian?" "Where is this so-called abundant life?" "God, how can I believe you are good in the midst of these circumstances?"

These and other questions haunt us. As our wounds are being inflicted, seemingly no one - including God - comes to our rescue. "Does God not care?" we wonder! As we look at our scars, often times we lose faith that God has our best interests at heart and in our desperation we choose to take control of our lives. This is true of all of our stories. And fully letting go of control and surrendering to God seems impossible - and sometimes even foolish! Yet that is just what God is asking us to do. Is absolute surrender to a God - who often feels harsh, absent, and unfair even possible? Bitterness towards God and others often wells up in our spirit.

For many of us, the wounds we carry were inflicted by our fathers because they were weak substitutes for God the Father. Some of our fathers were silent and absent, never helping us chart a course for our lives and causing us to feel lost and confused. Some were physically abusive and demeaning, causing us to feel small and weak. Some were abusive to our mothers, causing us to feel angry and powerless to protect. Some of our wounds came from sexually abusive neighbors, coaches, or family members. Some came from playground torment or jokes, name calling and taunting. These wounds left some core questions and core messages in our hearts as young boys and, as a result, we often do not feel like we have what it takes to be a man. And "the father of lies" bombards us with statements similar to the following:

"I am supposed to handle this but I don't know how – I am so weak and stupid."

"There is no way I can teach my son how to become a man."

"There is something terribly wrong with me."

"I feel so fearful - so there is no way I could become a warrior for God"

At some point, all of us have stories that made us feel abandoned by our parents, our friends, and by God. And this can lead us to believe we have only one option – *to take control of our lives and try to make it on our own*. We begin living a life where the only love we understand is conditional love based on our performance. We can become bitter and resentful. Our unforgiving spirit toward those who hurt us can dominate our lives and draw us away from God. Once we take control, it is a battle and takes great courage and perseverance to relinquish control back to God.

Bringing your wounds to your Heavenly Father

We will have days, or even seasons, when the pain from our wounds is so intense that we will turn our anger on God and wrestle with his goodness. In the midst of our pain God seems anything but good. Perhaps we can relate to Lieutenant Dan in the movie *Forest Gump*, who felt that forces beyond his control had caused him to miss his fate. The men in his family line had died noble deaths on the battlefield. Lieutenant Dan had his legs blown off in a vicious battle where he could have died a noble death, but instead was rescued by Forest Gump and was forced to live - and to try to cope with life while disabled in a wheelchair. For a while Lieutenant Dan lost hope in his fate, his destiny, and tried to take control of his life by pursuing some relief through prostitutes and alcohol. The self-medication did not help. He did not experience peace until after he had allowed himself to contend with God at the top of the mast of the shrimp boat, screaming, "Bring it on, God!"

What are you aware of holding back from God – fury, sadness, confusion, disillusionment? God does not want us to "get over" our frustrations toward Him. Instead, he invites us to bring our honest frustrations to him. "Come now, let us argue this out," says the Lord (Is 1:18). We are not fooling him by trying to hide our disappointments and frustration with life, or with him. He created us, and He designed us to have real relationship with Him. Not bringing our disappointment to Him would not be real. After all, He could have stopped the abuse, abandonment, silence, rejection, sickness, or physical and emotional pain we have experienced. And if Satan was the perpetrator of the evil towards us, then God could have intervened and protected us. God does not make excuses for His sovereignty or His choices that sometimes feel harsh: "I am the one who sends good times and bad times. I, the Lord, am the one who does these things." (Isa. 45:7) And as stated by Solomon, "Enjoy prosperity while you can. But when hard times strike, realize that both come from God." (Eccl. 7:14) And consider the following: "So it will be when the Lord begins to heal his people and cure the wounds *He gave them*." (Isa. 30:26)

In the case of Job, God in His sovereignty allowed Satan to inflict the pain. After God permitted Satan to destroy Job's family and property, God said to Satan, "[Job] has maintained his integrity, even though you persuaded *me to harm him without cause*." (Job 2:3) God did not place the blame for Job's "unfair" suffering onto Satan. In fact, God admitted that *He* harmed Job, because He could have forbidden Satan from harming Job. Wow! What do we do with the fact that God takes responsibility for all that is bad - all the hardships - but does not always heal the wounds in the manner that we desire?

Yet one is amazed by Job's response immediately after this "unjust" assault occurred. What did he do? *He worshiped God! That's right - he fell to his knees and worshiped God:* "The Lord gave me everything I had, and the Lord has taken it away. *Praise the name of the Lord!*" (Job 1:21) This is very hard to understand, don't you agree?

But consider this question: *Do you think that today Job would trade his story, his glory, and his legacy with anyone else?* No way! Job's faithfulness, his struggles, and his legacy will echo throughout eternity! And the Bible teaches that God blessed Job immensely - gave him twice as much as before - even while still on earth.

And speaking of our definition of "unfair," what about the price Jesus paid on the cross when He lived a life without sin? And after Jesus asked God to alleviate His suffering at Gethsemane - to "let this cup of suffering be taken away from me," Jesus trusted in God's ultimate goodness and cried out, *"Yet I want your will, not mine."* And even though Christ had to bear the sins of the world, do you think Jesus would make a different choice today? No way! God does not ask us to suffer just for the sake of watching us suffer - "For he does not enjoy hurting people or causing them sorrow." (Lam. 3:31) And he does not ask for our sacrifice unless He plans to reward it with something better. Finally, God promises that He will give us grace to endure any burdens He asks us to bear.

Being Gloriously Broken by God. God allowed Paul to be "tormented by a messenger from Satan." Paul's response was not to fight Satan's messenger with "spiritual warfare," but he went straight to the source that controls all good and evil: He "begged" God 3 times to take away the "thorn in the flesh." Each time, God answered his plea, *"My gracious favor is all you need. My power works best in your weakness."* (2 Cor. 12:9) God allowed Paul's suffering, not in response to Paul's intentional sin, but to prevent Paul from becoming proud and thus thwarting what God wanted to do through him. God used suffering in Paul's life for God's own agenda and glory. If Paul had not suffered, the story of God through Paul may not have echoed throughout eternity. Most likely, God would have delivered the gospel message through some other willing servant. This eternal perspective is why Paul ultimately decided surrender control and rejoice in his sufferings: *"So now I am glad to boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may work through me. Since I know it is all for Christ's good, I am quite content with my weaknesses and with insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong."* (2 Cor. 12:9-10) As we are broken, there is less of our flesh and more of God working through us. Our self-obsession is lessened; and our others-centeredness is increased. Paul understood what was accomplished through him "for such a time as this," and was thankful to be honored in such a way. He didn't want to miss out!

We are not afraid to die. In fact, as we become "brothers of Christ," we are asked to allow our flesh to die with Him. And suffering always accompanies the death of our sinful natures: "Or have you forgotten that when we became Christians and were baptized to become one with Christ Jesus, *we died with Him?*" (Rom. 6:3) So, like Paul, *"I myself no longer live, but Christ lives in me. So I live my life in this earthly body by trusting in the Son of God."* (Gal. 2:20) We can never fully live for Christ and live out the purpose for which we were

created without death to our demanding spirits - our sinful natures - and this process of sanctification is painful. So suffering for all disciples of Christ is inevitable. For death is a necessary ingredient to a fruitful life: "The truth is, a kernel of wheat must be planted in the soil. *Unless it dies it will be alone* - a single seed. But its death will produce many new kernels - a plentiful harvest of new lives." (John 12:24)

Oswald Chambers states that the "Christian life is gloriously difficult." If you examine the lives of the great heroes of the Bible - Moses, David, the disciples, Paul, etc. - all of them had to be broken for the sake of God's glory (read the laments of David in the Psalms! Laments comprise two-thirds of the Psalms.). Their self-obsessions and independence from God had to be gloriously destroyed. All followers of Christ will experience and enter the "*dark night of the soul*," a season when very little makes sense and we have to face our deepest fears and our core questions about why God doesn't always seem to have our best interests at heart. The only word that seems applicable as we enter this dark cave is "mercy!" In these dark caverns of our soul, the rescuer will reveal himself - but we must be patient.

So don't be surprised or shocked when trials and calamities come your way. "These trials are only to test your faith, to show that it is strong and pure. It is being tested as fire test and purifies gold - and your faith is far more precious to God than mere gold. So if your faith remains strong after being tried by fiery trials, it will bring you much praise and glory and honor on the day when Jesus Christ is revealed to the whole world." (1 Peter 1:7) An "abundant life" for a Christian disciple is not a life without trials and suffering. Suffering is one of the marks, or badges, of true discipleship. What else would Jesus mean when He says to take up our "cross daily" in order to follow Him? What does it mean to embrace the cross? How else would we "become like Christ?"

So why, rather than bringing our questions to God about the intensity of our suffering, do we blame others, or ourselves, instead of going to God with our questions about His goodness? Jacob's life is helpful at this point:

Jacob was the man who deceived his father Isaac into giving him his brother Esau's birthright. The name Jacob actually means *ambitious deceiver*. Yet it was this slimy guy who eventually was named *Israel*, the namesake of an entire chosen people. Doesn't sound exactly like the story line we generally associate with "victorious Christian living," does it? Jacob wrestled with the angel of God (most scholars' say this was Jesus himself) all night long. Jacob was wounded in the process as Jesus "knocked [his hip] out of joint at the socket" (Gen 32:25). It was in this broken condition that Jacob clung to God and would not let him go until he received a blessing. Jacob was persistent in his struggle, and he would not let God go. He knew that the perpetrator of his wound also was his only hope - that there was no "Plan B." God knew Jacob's glorious purpose and knew that a wound was necessary for Jacob to live out his true identity. But from that day forward Jacob walked with a limp as a reminder of his neediness.

No "Plan B"

At this point many of his disciples turned away and deserted him. Then Jesus turned to the Twelve and asked, "*Are you going to leave too?*"

Simon Peter replied, "*Lord, to whom would we go?*"

You alone have the words that give eternal life.

(John 6:66-69)

And even Christ did not want to remove his suffering at the cost of missing out on His glorious mission. Jesus said:

"Now my soul is deeply troubled. Should I pray, '*Father, save me from what lies ahead?*' But that is the very reason I came. Father, bring glory to you name." (John 12:27-28)

But after the struggle, God gave Jacob his new name as a symbol of how his life had been changed. Israel means *one who struggles with God and overcomes*. God not only *allows*, but sometimes *delivers* wounds and suffering to change our lives. For the stakes are much greater than what we can see with our eyes today. He desires to give us a new identity that reflects the real reason for our lives – to be men who overcome and then love and fight for others well! The thing we resist is that often we are asked to be overcoming men who live with a limp – a limp that reminds us every day that we are totally dependent on the blessing of God and on the new identity and noble purpose *bestowed* by God. We can never demand or take for ourselves our new identity - it must be bestowed. Every great servant of God from the Bible has struggled with Him, and each person's demanding spirit had to be wonderfully destroyed. Men who honestly contend with their God about their wounding and who passionately search for a blessing in the midst of the wrestling will become powerful in this War and for our King. And we know from all the great sufferers whose stories were told in the Bible that, in the end, God's plan is good!

"There are times when God will not lift the darkness from you, but you should trust Him. At times God will appear like an unkind friend, but He is not; He will appear like an unnatural father, but He is not; He will appear like an unjust judge, but He is not. Keep the thought that the mind of God is behind all things strong and growing. Not even the smallest detail of life happens unless God's will is behind it. Therefore, you can rest in perfect confidence in Him." (Oswald, *My Utmost*, July 16)

Allowing our Brothers to suffer. Given that suffering and death to our flesh is a necessary part of the human condition for a follower of Christ, why is it that often times in our Christian community we refuse to allow our brothers to

suffer without trying to fix them? Is there an expectation that they necessarily should not be suffering? Of course we love them, but often our actions - although well intended - could be interfering with what God is trying to do. Our natural temptation as men is to step in and try to fix the chaos - like by quoting the "right" scripture from the Bible to relieve the pain. Sometimes truth - even from the Word of God - does not alleviate the pain. Yes, sometimes we are called to move in and be a rescuer on God's behalf and to bring hope from the Word of God. But often we are called to just sit in the muck and stench of the sewer with our brothers as they are suffering. Sit with them, cry with them, and love them as they suffer and God is doing His redeeming work.

Pain is difficult regardless of how fervently we pray! When Paul was being beaten with a whip and when Jesus was pleading with God in the Garden - the pain was immense and real: "He (Jesus) prayed more fervently, [yet] he was in such agony of spirit that his sweat fell to the ground like great drops of blood." (Luke 22:44) Intense agony obviously is an acceptable - and ironically can be a good and necessary - condition of the human heart. Sometimes life just flat-out sucks! (excuse the English) But that doesn't mean there is anything wrong with God or that there is anything wrong with the one suffering. Jesus' time on the cross was horrific and agonizing ... and without sinning He yelled out, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" - Even when Jesus understood God's ultimate redemptive plan! (Matt. 27:46) Jesus was hurting. there was not a joyful smile on the face of Jesus while being beaten and nailed to the cross ... there were tears, pain, blood, sweat, confusion, disappointment and heart-ache. God temporarily turned His back on his Son. It hurt!

"Jesus knew, too, the cost of divine restraint, the deeply personal cost of letting the world have its way with him. He understood that redemption comes from passing through the pain, not avoiding it: "for the joy set before him [he] endured the cross." ***Somehow redeemed suffering is better than no suffering at all***, Easter better than skipping Good Friday all together. Although Jesus knew the redemptive pattern in advance - he had revealed it to his disciples - how remote it must have seemed to him in the garden and on [the cross]. How remote it seems to all of us in the midst of our trials."
(Philip Yancey, "Prayer - Does It Make Any Difference," p. 88)

God desires to bless us through our suffering. It is very appropriate to cry out to God for rescue and mercy for our lives, to run into the arms of our Father God like a child, and to ask for protection against torment and evil. "You parents - if your children ask for a loaf of bread, do you give them a stone instead? Or if they ask for a fish, do you give them a snake? Of course not! If you sinful people know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly father give good gifts to those who ask Him?" (Matt. 7:9-11) Even in the midst of our suffering, it is important to remember that we are in the arms of our Father, our Papa, and our "Abba." He never abandons us in the midst of our trials. He holds us and is with us every step of the way - even

though we may feel abandoned. And our *Abba* is in the process of blessing us as His children and giving us good gifts and eternal blessings. We can trust that in his timing we will be delivered from the intensity of the suffering - it won't last!

We can be certain of this: If we surrender to our King, no matter the burdens our Father asks us to carry, *from eternity's perspective we would not trade our story and our legacy with anyone!* In the end, the blessings and good gifts our Father has in store for us we would not trade with anyone else - in spite of the pain! God knows what each of us was created for, and He knows how to individually bless us. For that reason, Paul reminds us to consider our suffering a privilege. (see Phil. 1:29; Rom. 5:3-4) For God's rewards will far outweigh any suffering we are asked to endure. "For our present troubles are quite small and won't last very long, but they produce for us an immeasurably great glory that will last forever." (2 Cor. 4:17)

"The Christian life is gloriously difficult, but its difficulty does not make us faint and cave in - it stirs us up to overcome."

Oswald Chambers, *My Utmost*, July 7

"A time to cry and a time to laugh..." (Eccl. 3:4) Another great lie of the Enemy is to convince us that the suffering and pain that we might experience today will be ongoing - forever. But the Bible teaches that such heartache comes in seasons. Just because today feels desperate, that does not mean tomorrow will be filled with suffering. So if today life feels too difficult to bear - *cry out to God for mercy* and HOLD ON! "Mercy!" "Mercy" "Mercy" "Mercy"... is all we need to pray. Or, better yet, you may want to pray the "Jesus Prayer," a prayer that has been used for centuries by the spiritual fathers: *"Lord Jesus Christ, Son of David, have mercy on me a sinner."* There is hope! For even in the midst of our suffering and lament, we are promised that "we will find grace to help us when we need it." (Heb. 4:16) *God is not going to ask us to endure more pain than he will give us the grace to endure.* He will give us the grace for the day! He *does* come - He *will* come! "And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm, and steadfast." (1 Pet. 5:10) Never give up hope!

Suffering Prepares us for the Battles ahead. The Bible also teaches us that suffering refines us and strengthens us for the battles ahead: "Dear brothers ... whenever trouble comes your way, let it be an opportunity for joy. For when your faith is tested, your endurance has a chance to grow. So let it grow, for when your endurance is fully developed, you will be strong in character and ready for anything." (James 1:2-4) As stated by Larry Crabb, *"Unbroken Christians operate mostly with only natural power and do not fully release power capable of transforming souls."*

And "remember that your Christian brothers all over the world are going through the same kind of suffering you are." (1 Pet. 5:9)

Scars not in Vain.

God does have compassion for our stories and our pain - so much that He was willing to sacrifice His own son - for "you have been healed by His wounds!" (1 Pet. 2:24) God desires that we have compassion for our own stories, and then take that compassion to love others well. "He comforts us in all our troubles so that we can comfort others. When others are troubled, we will be able to give them the same comfort God has given us." (2 Cor. 1:4) C.S. Lewis once wrote that every wound or disability "conceals a vocation." God wants our stories to be redeemed - What was intended for evil will be used for good! God can use our wounds and scars to love others well and to show compassion to the broken-hearted.

Our wounds will be healed as we are used by God to heal and show compassion to others. As stated by Henri Nouwen, "God is not only working to heal you, but to heal others through you." Our stories and our wounds shall be redeemed if we are willing to surrender to God. And our scars will not be in vain: "What we suffer now is nothing compared to the glory he will give us later. For all creation is waiting eagerly for that future day when God will reveal who his children really are.... And even we Christians, although we have the Holy Spirit within us as a foretaste of future glory, also groan to be released from pain and suffering. We, too, wait anxiously for that day when God will give us our full rights as his children." (Rom. 8:18-23) Because there will come a day when "there will be no more death or sorrow or crying or pain." (Rev. 21:4)

But until that day, in spite of our wounds and our scars, we do not want to miss out on the glorious story and receive the new name and purpose for which God has created us! And in the midst of our suffering, we pray that we will still bow down, worship God, and cry out, "*Abba Father, Thy will be done!*"

"As a saint of God, my attitude toward sorrow and difficulty should not be to ask that they be prevented, but to ask that God protect me so that I may remain what He created me to be, in spite of all my fires of sorrow."

Oswald Chambers, *My Utmost*, June 25

**"Sorrow is better than laughter, for sadness has a refining influence on us."
(Eccl. 7:3)**

**"Whenever trouble comes your way, let it be an opportunity for joy."
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"And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you

strong, firm and steadfast." (1 Pet. 5:10)

"The extreme greatness of Christianity lies in the fact that it does not seek a supernatural remedy for suffering, but a supernatural use for it."

Simone Weil