

## Healing a 'moral injury'.#1 of 4; Defining moral injury

Hi all,

Today I begin a series on 'moral injury' and how to heal it. A moral injury produces deep wounds to the soul of a person. A moral injury is like a deep bruise in our emotions, and like a physical bruise located where no one can see it, produces a deep pain that is always in the background of all we do, hindering our ability to function.

### **A moral injury is...**

A moral injury is an injury to a person's established moral standards. Moral standards help define us, providing a framework of understanding through which we function with others in life and society, and how we understand God. For a Christian, our view of God is interwoven within the fabric of our moral standards so that life makes sense. When we receive a moral injury we feel God let us down, God is somehow to blame and yet is also somehow the answer.

So an injury to our moral framework shakes us to our core of who and what we are. We don't know the rules any longer and emotionally wander in a dry desert feeling like we don't belong anywhere and that we are different from everyone else and God becomes distant and suspect. The very fabric of who we are has been shattered by the assault on our moral framework.

Its first use was in the military, where young men and women are required to do horrible things to other people, and those actions assault their moral standards, causing deep injury to their soul. Their world-view has been shattered. They did things or saw things that weren't video games or a movie - they saw and participated in real horror - or had a horror inflicted upon them. PTSD (Post Traumatic Stress Disorder) or in my words, "a severe stress to the soul appearing after, and as a result of a traumatic event one witnesses or participates", is not just for soldiers.

### **A moral injury is a betrayal of what is morally right by someone or some thing who holds authority over that person or that situation.**

If a child is sexually molested, that shatters their moral world - that relative, that friend, that neighbor, that stranger - violated every moral structure the child held, in what they thought previously to be a safe and secure world. They have suffered a moral injury, a deep wound in their soul. It shatters who they are, leaving them confused, hurt, ashamed, even wrongly believing they caused or deserved it. They are left with no framework in their soul that defines love or how to function in life. So they find things to take them out of the world they no longer recognize.

Addictions to sex, substance abuse, and other things often occur as they attempt to rebuild some form of moral structure, with depression and hopelessness often the unfortunate result as they discover none of those things can heal and rebuild who they are and why they are on planet earth. As a whole, the church offers little help.

Our churches are filled with people carrying 'moral injuries'. This is in part because we are told to forgive the person who hurt us, ignore our God-given sense of right and wrong, the need for accountability, the need for an apology from the perpetrator, and are made to feel like we're supposed to be happy about it all.

But our moral framework was violated, and we are angry, hurt, confused by what the church says, and wanting justice! So the average Christian is conflicted, feeling on the one hand they are to love God the Father, but on the other hand not trusting Him because if He is the way most churches present Him, then He is perverted and sadistic. (Fortunately, He is not that way at all)

### **The situations that cause moral injury can change, but the results are basically the same. For instance:**

A boss yells at and demeans a subordinate, attacking not just their work, but them as a person and their worth and value as a human being. Making it personal when it is uncalled for is a moral injury - a deep and abiding bruise, more widespread in the soul than the cut of a single sharp rebuke. It is not quickly healed because that employee's sense of right and wrong within the company and work relationships has been shattered by the boss. That is a moral injury.

Or perhaps it is a health care or emergency responder who knows what is the right thing to do, but rules and regulations or the will of the hospital or doctor they work for demand they violate their morals, resulting in a patient's death or receiving less quality care that they should have received. But they obey their bosses, resulting in a moral injury to their soul. Their sense of moral framework of what it means to be in health care and why they went into health care is shattered by budgets or illogical rules or cruel bosses...they have suffered a moral injury.

### **A moral injury produces in the person...**

Any moral injury may cause these things in a person: Long term emotional pain, anger, shame, guilt, and even being disgusted and/or hating themselves, depression and thoughts of suicide, all of leaves a person with no answers; not knowing how to be healed of the pain in their soul caused first by that deep moral injury.

There is healing, for one of the foundational prophecies of Jesus, found in Isaiah 42:3, says Messiah 'will not break an already bruised reed, nor extinguish a barely burning wick', referring to His tender care for those injured in their emotions, morals, and souls. Jesus invited those heavily burdened and weary of the load to come to Him and He will give them rest - but where is that actually seen in churches? How is the relief from the burdens walked out?

Depending on the translation, somewhere between 40% to 70% of Psalms deal with anger, injustice, injury to the soul, and mourning, describing intensely personal processes required to work through moral injury.

Jesus doesn't extinguish the fire of a person's barely burning wick, nor cut off a bruised plant stem of a soul, but how does He lead each person into a personal healing of the soul? How does one restore a moral structure that was destroyed?

Next week - the gateway into the process of healing the moral injury. Until then, blessings,

John Fenn

[www.cwowi.org](http://www.cwowi.org) and email me at [cwowi@aol.com](mailto:cwowi@aol.com)

### **Healing a moral injury #2 of 4, Mourning my injury**

Hi all,

It is a rare thing for me to share in my Weekly Thoughts on the same subject as the monthly teaching series, but moral injury is so prevalent in the church and unaddressed, that I thought it would be helpful. The audio teaching allows more in depth points than here, but these Weekly Thoughts on the subject will cover some good elements.

Again, a moral injury is an injury to the framework of right and wrong we hold internally. That framework is how we think of ourselves, interact with the world and people, and forms our world view. When that moral fabric of our being is violated by someone or some thing we trust or believe in, our world crumbles in confusion and a sense of not belonging or knowing who we are.

When we become Christians we tie what we think is God's moral framework into our own, so that when we receive a moral injury, we feel God has let us down or has in some way, a part to play. It means that millions of people love Jesus, don't know the Father, and more than that, don't trust Him.

A popular Pastor of a mega church died while still a rather young man, and at his memorial service a famous TV teacher spoke. To the disgust of the thousands assembled, including the pastor's widow and children, the Bible teacher chastised them for feeling sorrow over the loss of their pastor, husband, and father. He said they should all be rejoicing over his home-going and that it is not scriptural to feel sad about a Christian's death.

Besides angering the thousands, what he said mirrors much of church culture's approach to genuine anguish of the soul - let's all look to heaven for if we can't lay on hands to heal it, if we can't cast it out,

if we can't give money to fix it, let's wait until heaven when everything will be made right. Let's not deal with real issues.

What does a person do to rebuild their moral fabric when a trusted person or authority perpetrated a great act of betrayal against all they knew as right?

### **Step 1 to healing: Mourning, grieving, counting the damage done, taking time to feel:**

The Bible teaches the practice of acknowledging one's loss or injury to the soul or moral fabric of our being. It teaches us to embrace the feeling the loss, taking time to grieve, mourn, and take account of a loss or injury to the soul.

Romans 12:15 tells us to rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep.

Genesis 23:2 tells us Abraham mourned and wept over Sarah's death.

Genesis 50: 2-4 says when Jacob (Israel) died his family mourned 40 days, and the Egyptians mourned 70 days.

But it is Ezekiel 2:10 that gives us a framework for the purpose of mourning: "And he spread it before me (the scroll); and it was written front and back, filled with words of lamentation, and mourning, and woe..."

The moral injury that was written down for Ezekiel was the destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonians, and the carrying away of thousands of Jewish people who were resettled in Babylon. Nebuchadnezzar's army had come in three waves of attack over several months, each attack carrying away people and goods, even the furnishings and contents of the temple and its storehouses.

The moral structure of the good and righteous Jewish citizens had been destroyed. All they thought of God - that He would protect and provide for them - was shattered. Yes, it had been prophesied this would happen if the nation as a whole didn't repent, but for the righteous who still held out hope, their lives were shattered.

God presented Ezekiel a scroll written on the front and back of all that was to be mourned. There is value in accepting and counting the injury to our souls. Not for the purpose of dwelling on it, but rather to acknowledge our hurt, our violation, our loss. There is value in taking ownership that 'this' happened to me.

A moral injury is like part of them died inside. An innocent part. A good part. A part that believed the best and hoped in God's protection. But He let us down we now feel. Own that. Acknowledge that. Faith is allowed to challenge God, to reason with Him, to question why this or that happened. Faith and transparency go together. Be real. It's not just the loss of innocence or the feeling of being dirty inside, nor even the brutal violation of all that was right and wrong. It is a death of part of your soul. God wrote it down for Ezekiel so he could see it and feel it. He told Ezekiel to eat the scroll and it was bitter. God the Father knows the bitterness of soul a moral injury causes, but He doesn't want us to sweep it under the rug, hidden out of view like it never happened.

### **Write it down**

We have a book in the Bible called 'Lamentations' that Jeremiah wrote about the exact same thing as Ezekiel, for he felt the exact injury to his moral structure. These are works of mourning, of counting the cost, of detailing the confusion, hurt, loss felt in their hearts.

Writing it down is healthy if done the right way. God says deal with it, own it, take inventory of your loss and injury. But don't live there. Forty days were allotted for Israel to mourn Moses, then they got back to life. There is a time to weep, a time to refrain from weeping.

Today we call what God did for Ezekiel 'journaling' and in days past personal diaries were popular, where every hurt and anguish, victory and defeat could be expressed in confidence. The word 'lamentation' is used to describe a wailing song, often with the beating of the chest, in deep pain and loss.

Lamentations 1:1 start the process of mourning, of realizing Jeremiah's loss : "Look at the city, now sitting empty and alone, that used to be filled with people!" That sets the tone for the whole book of

Lamentations, but the journaling of Lamentation later starts to weave God's faithfulness and hope in with expressions of lamentations. He turns a corner.

The key is not to stay in mourning, not to focus on that list of wrongs, those hurts that you wrote down. In Psalm 56:8 David remembered all the hurt, all the injury to his moral framework he both did to himself and that which was inflicted upon him, stating and asking: "All my tears are kept in your bottle; are they not (also) written down in your book?"

The Lord has recorded all that you have suffered, and all the resulting tears you have shed. Write it down, but know that He too has written it down, and that knowledge helps us turn from the dangers of dwelling on the destruction of our moral framework. There IS justice in the end. I'll pick it up there next week, until then, blessings,

John Fenn

[www.cwowi.org](http://www.cwowi.org) and email me at [cwowi@aol.com](mailto:cwowi@aol.com)

### **Healing a moral injury #3 of 4, altered view of life**

Hi all,

I ended last week sharing how the Lord wrote down on a scroll for Ezekiel 'lamentations, mourning, and woe', and then told him to eat the scroll, which was bitter to see it written down, distasteful. But if you read chapter 3, the actual taste in his mouth was as honey. Why is that?

The Lord had showed Ezekiel the value in writing down the 'lamentations' (loud wailing song or cry of sorrow), 'mourning' (a quiet inward taking account of the personal loss felt), and 'woes' (the realization of the consequences of the new reality and sorrow accompanying that realization).

The eating of the scroll detailing those bitter events was sweet in taste because he had allowed himself the process. It was Ezekiel's own 'turning a corner' towards healing. It was a willingness to accept the moral injury, and the start of rebuilding his new internal moral structure. He still didn't understand, but he was willing to move on.

Upon looking back, it was bittersweet. They in hindsight could see the Lord's goodness in the midst of it all. They wouldn't want to go through it again, but the Lord had turned that which was intended to destroy, into something no longer bitter, but sweet in the value of godly character gained. Paul said the value of knowing Christ in the midst was exceedingly greater than any difficulty he had gone through. (II Corinthians 4:17, 12: 9, etc) How did they turn that corner?

Again, a moral injury is an injury to the moral framework of our right/wrong, good/evil through which we understand and interact with the world. That moral framework helps define what and who is safe and secure, or unsafe and dangerous. Our morals are our standard of behavior by which we judge right and wrong.

That framework becomes part of us from earliest age. A violation of our moral framework causes a moral injury, and is always perpetrated by a person or agent in authority. For a child that person may be a parent or other older person, for a soldier that authority may be a commander or the overall purpose for being at war.

### **Boys and girls...**

...grow up to become men and women, and if they suffered a moral injury when they were children like abuse, neglect, divorce, or the death of a loved one, they carry that unhealed moral injury forward into life. They think they are more or less whole, except in that one area, very private, and it is there they don't trust God or man.

### **Moral injury alters how self, others, and circumstances are understood**

I go into more detail in part 2 of the current series offered above, 'Shattered Lives', but there are several Bible examples of people who had suffered a moral injury, which resulted in an altered version of life. They looked at themselves differently, they understood others differently than what was intended and accurate, and understood circumstances in an altered way.

Years ago a woman in our church was having constant marriage troubles. She confided that when she was growing up her mother had men in and out of their lives, and each one of them hit her mom. As a young girl, when her morals were just being formed, part of that understanding was that love is communicated between a man and a woman by the man hitting the woman.

So when she came to the Lord she carried that understanding into her new life in Christ, and into her marriage. She was always trying to provoke her husband into hitting her, and she even hit him on many occasions trying to provoke him - but he was a good man and didn't hit back. She eventually realized what had happened, and changed her moral structure into God's way of thinking about relationships between men and women. The result was her healing.

Very often little is done when children suffer injuries to their soul and moral framework - no time is taken to talk through, to think through what they experienced. A little girl tells her mom that her father molested her, and the mom ignores her or puts the blame on her - and so the bruise is set within the girl's self-image, her view of men, marriage, her mother and father...and she grows up. She grows up. Internally confused, feeling no one can love her.

The employee ripped to shreds emotionally from an abusive boss either cries or feels like crying, pauses, and returns to work the next day, but with a deep bruise in their soul. They start looking at coworkers, their boss, the company very differently than they did before. Their moral structure of how they saw that company, its people, and their place in it, was destroyed. If they can't rebuild or repair that moral structure, they will soon look for another job...and so it goes.

### **Turning the corner to healing**

The process of healing is a difficult process. It is highly personal, extremely private, and takes time. .I can't think of a single example in scripture of healing that came to someone's moral structure by a single touch from the Lord, by a single prophetic word, by attending a single teaching at the feet of Jesus. It is a process.

Consider Joseph. Genesis 37 details the story of the arrogant 17 year old boy, secure in his favored status above his older brothers - some of them no doubt in their 30's. He was their boss and he let them know it. He had a quilted coat which was his pride and joy, a personal gift from his father. (Genesis 37:3)

His moral structure was secure: His dad loved him, provided for him, his brothers hated him but they were his brothers and subordinates. Life was good. Then one day the brothers conspired to kill him and lie to their father. Only when the oldest intervened was his life spared, and Joseph was sold into slavery.

### **His moral structure was now destroyed. All that he had held safe, secured, loved, was gone.**

Over the next 13 years that arrogant teenager was transformed - not in a moment of time - but by a process that involved moving in his spiritual gifts (interpreting dreams) and natural gifts (administrator/organizer). It also involved false accusations and prison time.

Joseph had to rebuild his moral structure. The old one was destroyed. He had to rebuild himself from the inside out in what turned out to be a 13 year project. He did it by looking for who he was; who was Joseph? He knew himself, he gleaned the good memories from his past, from his successes. He allowed himself those truths about himself. We must do that. Acknowledge and embrace what is good about us, what God built into us.

He knew he had run a multi-faceted business overseeing more than a dozen employees. He took the time and allowed himself the grace to give himself credit for who and what he was. He came to value the good he had in him, and worked through his arrogance and pride by the force humility he suffered.

Allow yourself to take with you in life, the good things of who you are and what you have to offer. Allow yourself to embrace those good things. In the midst of moral injury, look for and find and embrace the real you, the one beneath the injury suffered, and love that part of you. That is where love of self begins, by seeing what God created. That cannot be destroyed for the 'real you' is of God.

That Joseph did that very thing is self-evident. The same gifts for dream interpretation and administration were evident in Potiphar's house and jail, and later at age 30, as 'Prime Minister' over Egypt. He took with him through the trial that which he knew was good and valuable of himself. That is how his own personal 'bitter scroll' turned sweet to the taste. We must do that same thing...and I'll pick it up there next week. Until then, blessings,

John Fenn  
cwowi.org and email me at [cwowi@aol.com](mailto:cwowi@aol.com)

### **Healing a moral injury #4 of 4, weaving the tapestry**

Hi all,

I closed last week talking about Joseph and how he retained deep within himself who he knew himself to be.

### **Today, consider David**

David was the youngest of his siblings, and so lightly considered as part of the family that when the prophet Samuel came to anoint the new king, no one thought to get David for consideration. I Samuel 16:11

But out there in the wilderness as a no-account member of the family, God was tutoring David. David was singing psalms of worship. David was learning how to be skilled with the sling, defending the sheep. A sling can hurl a rock at 1300 feet per second (400m), which is about the velocity of a 44 caliber bullet fired from a modern hand gun.

Though he was considered barely a member of the family, David held within himself who he knew himself to be. He carried that with him into battle against Goliath. That self-awareness enabled him to remain independent from the cowering army. You and I must look for, find, and embrace who God made us and how He gifted us.

(Do not ever slap your Creator in the face by saying you don't have gifts, for you are made in His image and likeness so you do have good things He created you with, for He used parts of Himself to create you. Stop lying to yourself and start finding those good things in you. That is true and humble Christianity, for embracing those things is the acknowledgment we are His creations, an act of humble acceptance. Drop the pride and start looking for and finding and acknowledging and embracing those good things in you.)

David was so secure in himself and the Lord that when confronted he was able to boil it down to the core: "Who is this uncircumcised Philistine who defies the army of the Living God." When he said Goliath was uncircumcised, he was stating that Goliath is not in covenant with the living God, therefore he had no defense before God. It was on that basis and his strong moral structure through which he viewed himself, others, and circumstances, that he entered into battle.

### **Here comes the destruction of all that noble moral structure**

What we see above is the 'real' David. But in II Samuel 11:1-2 we are told King David was at home in the time when kings should be in battle in the field. "But David stayed in Jerusalem."

It was there he spied one Bathsheba bathing on her roof top, daughter of Eliam, wife of Uriah. And he had to have her. He was king after all, couldn't he have any woman he wanted? Against that lust were the commands to not lust, not murder, not lie, not commit adultery. That was woven into his moral fabric as seen above.

But he violated everything that he believed in, violated the way he had lived his life. He destroyed his own moral framework in favor of the lust of a beautiful woman.

When Nathan the prophet confronted David he repented, horrified what he had done, who he had become. He wrote Psalm 51 as a result. Again from earlier in this series, David wrote it down. Like

Jeremiah would later do in Lamentations, like God did for Ezekiel, David wrote it out as part of the process of healing and rebuilding himself.

He poured out his heart in what was then a private Psalm. A psalm is a poem set to stringed instrument. As he played he worked through all he had done, and looked deep inside for anything of value worth retaining. Look at the process David went through to remember who he was, and rebuild in wholeness his moral framework:

"Have mercy on me, O God, because of your loyal love.  
Because of your great compassion, wipe away my rebellious acts. Wash away my wrongdoing.  
Cleanse me of my sin. For I am aware of my rebellious acts; I am forever conscious of my sin. Against you—you above all—I have sinned; I have done what is evil in your sight. So you are just when you confront me; you are right when you condemn me.

Look, I was guilty of sin from birth, a sinner the moment my mother conceived me. Look, you desire integrity in the inner man; you want me to possess wisdom. Cleanse me with hyssop and I will be pure; wash me and I will be whiter than snow. Grant me the ultimate joy of being forgiven. May the bones you crushed rejoice. Hide your face from my sins. Wipe away all my guilt.

Create for me a pure heart, O God. Renew a resolute spirit within me.

Do not reject me. Do not take your Holy Spirit away from me. Let me again experience the joy of your deliverance.

Sustain me by giving me the desire to obey. Then I will teach rebels your merciful ways, and sinners will turn to you.

Rescue me from the guilt of murder, O God, the God who delivers me. Then my tongue will shout for joy because of your righteousness. O Lord, give me the words. Then my mouth will praise you.

Certainly you do not want a sacrifice, or else I would offer it; you do not desire a burnt sacrifice. The sacrifice God desires is a humble spirit. O God, a humble and repentant heart you will not reject. Because you favor Zion, do what is good for her. Fortify the walls of Jerusalem. Then you will accept the proper sacrifices, burnt sacrifices and whole offerings; then bulls will be sacrificed on your altar." Psalm 51

May we work through what was destroyed in order to rebuild a new moral structure, discovering along the way who and what we are - the good things God put in us. It is part of the process. It is the way to healing.

New subject next week, until then, blessings,  
John Fenn  
[www.cwowi.org](http://www.cwowi.org) and email me at [cwowi@aol.com](mailto:cwowi@aol.com)