

HANDLING



HURTS

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How many of you have been hurt at one time or another by some other person? The truth is, we all have. Our parents hurt us, our children, our marriage partners, the people at work. The dog down the street. Hurts come easy.

Look at the biblical record: Noah was hurt, Abraham, Jacob, Joseph, David, Jesus, Peter, Paul... I could go right on down the line. Just to be honest, none of us are so holy, so good, so perfect so as to avoid hurt. I can truthfully say that the majority of people that I see in my office are having to deal with some kind of hurt.

Hurts come from a variety of sources and due to a variety of reasons:

- The loss of a loved one, through death, divorce, or breakup.
- An emotional or physical attack from some other person.
- Long-term emotional or physical abuse that may or may not be currently happening.
- An unanswered prayer.
- An unmet expectation.
- A slight or offense from a coworker, a church member, classmate....
- Your boss fails to notice a job well done.
- A friend says something thoughtless and cruel.

Any of these factors can set off feelings of hurt or emotional pain. Such pain, if left unchecked can turn into more serious forms of depression, anxiety, paranoia, personality disorders, or any other number of mental or physical illnesses. I know of a man who quit church and forsook his faith because his pastor failed to shake his hand one day after church. He said that he was hurt.

No doubt most of you are aware of the so-called Pain Scale. You can find it posted in most doctor's offices or hospital rooms. Well I have drawn up my own pain scale for emotional pain. As you can see, it measures pain on a gradient of one to ten. Where are you on the scale this morning?

<u>Pain Level</u>	<u>Description</u>	<u>Comments</u>
10	TOTALLY DISABLING Must take care of pain.	Numb Disoriented Depressed Rage Guilt Thinking ability limited.
8	SEVERE Can't concentrate and can't do all but simple things.	Thoughts always go back to the "event"; the person. Thoughts of revenge. Misses sleep. Bitter.
6	DISTRESSFUL Now able to continue some physical activity.	Talks and thinks oftentimes about the hurt. Angry. Unclear.
4	TOLERABLE, Can be ignored	Moving on. Positive thoughts begin to creep back into your life.
2	MILD Only aware of pain when focused on.	You begin to look for new things to invest yourself in. You can now stay focused. Hopeful.
0	PAIN FREE	Self confident. New attachments are made. Whole. Happy again.

Today I want to talk to you about the hurts that come to us by way of someone else. I call these the "he/she said, he/she did" pains. These again range from some of the most terrible things imaginable to the slight offenses of some passing moment.

So, what do we do when we are stung by such hurts? Let me give you three simple guidelines.

1. DON'T CURSE IT.

Joseph Richardson, a New York millionaire, lived and died in a house only five feet wide – believe it or not. It was called the "Spit House." It was called that because you could stand against one wall and spit all the way across to the other wall. Let me tell you the story. Mr. Richardson owned a very narrow lot of land. Since it was of no use to him, he decided to sell it to one of the neighborhood owners. The neighbor, however, did not want to pay Joseph what he felt the property was worth. Therefore, to spite the neighbor, Richardson put up this so-called "Spit House" which disfigured the whole block. Then he condemned himself to a life of discomfort by spending the rest of his life in it.

Moving on, a Philadelphia woman left instructions in her will for the executor to take one dollar from her estate, invest it, and pay the interest to her husband, "as evidence of my estimate of his worth."

Another woman -- also from Philadelphia (the city of brotherly love) -- bequeathed her divorced husband one dollar to buy a rope with which he would hopefully hang himself.

Banks have long printed checks in a wide spectrum of colors. Some, as you know, have offered checks with floral or scenic backgrounds. The modest-sized Bank of Marin in Marin County, California, has gone one step further. Its customers can simply bring in their own photograph or drawing and have it printed onto a standard check form.

Undeterred by the higher cost, more than 500 customers signed up for the illustrated checks. But perhaps the most imaginative (and vindictive) customer is the one who ordered special checks to be used solely for making his alimony payments. They show him kissing his beautiful new wife.

How about one more: Consider this Swedish man. When his wife filed for divorce, he cashed in all their investments -- worth \$81,300 -- and burned the cash. There was nothing left for either of them but a pile of ashes.

In each instance, really, who hurt worse -- the hater or the hated? It is pretty obvious, isn't it?

Along this line, let me ask:

- How many acts of disrespect does it take, how many years of dishonor must be lived out, before one has fully repaid a mother or father for being an alcoholic, an abuser, an absentee parent?
 - How many put downs will it take until the other person is sufficiently put down?
 - How many check showing the brother kissing his new wife will it take before the debt is paid in full?
- You see, sometimes repayment is impossible!

Faith plays a part here. You see, if I truly believe that God fights my battles for me, then I can leave the matter up to Him. If I do not believe that, then I must take matters into my own hands.

- Hebrews 10:30 states, **"For we know Him who said, 'It is mine to avenge; I will repay,' and again, the Lord will judge His people...."**
- Deuteronomy 32:35 adds, **"It is mine to avenge; I will repay. In due time, their foot will slip; their day of disaster is near and their doom rushes upon them."**
- Romans 12:17-19 notes, **"Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody. If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with**

everyone. Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: 'It is mine to avenge; I will repay,' says the Lord.'

Revenge belongs to who? God! The fact is, when you retaliate against another person, then God stops acting on your behalf.

Romans 12:14 offers a better way to handle hurts. Paul says **"Bless those who persecute you. Bless and do not curse."** The opposite of blessing is cursing. To bless means to speak positively to/about those who are speaking negatively about you. Build up those who are tearing you down. Encourage those who discourage you.

Look at the example of Jesus. Isaiah 53:3-7 notes:

"He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering. Like one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not.

Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted.

But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed.

We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth."

Jesus did not curse them. He could have, but He didn't. He blessed instead of cursed. He died praying for His enemies. He died praying for their forgiveness. His example is our standard.

Some time ago, William James wrote, "The greatest discovery of my generation is that a human being can alter his life by altering his attitude." Today mental health professionals hammer away at the point: it's not what happens to us that determines the quality of our lives; it's how we respond to what happens to us that counts. Life doesn't come to us directly; it's mediated through our point-of-view, our mind-set, our assumptions.

I like this story. In the late 1990s, Pete Peterson was appointed U.S. ambassador to Vietnam. Peterson had served six years as a prisoner of war in the dreaded "Hanoi Hilton" prison camp. When asked how he could return to the land where he'd endured years of starvation, brutality and torture, he replied, "I'm not angry. I left that at the gates of the prison when I walked out in 1972. I just left it behind me and decided to move forward with my life." When we bless, we can move forward, but not until then.

Bless. Don't curse.

2. DON'T REHEARSE IT.

Job 5:2 (*Good News*), **"to worry yourself to death with resentment would be a foolish thing to do."**

Resentment is one of the great killers of our modern age. When you've got resentment, you're focusing on the past, not on the present or the future.

Ephesians 4:31 says **"Get rid of all bitterness, anger, slander along with every form of malice."**

1 Corinthians 13:4-5 (*God's Word* translation) says, **"Love is patient. Love is kind. Love isn't jealous. It doesn't sing its own praises. It isn't arrogant. It isn't rude. It doesn't think about itself. It isn't irritable. It doesn't keep track of wrongs."**

The Message puts it this way:

"Love never gives up.

Love cares more for others than for self.
Love doesn't want what it doesn't have.
Love doesn't strut,
Doesn't have a swelled head,
⁵**Doesn't force itself on others,**
Isn't always "me first,"
Doesn't fly off the handle,
Doesn't keep score of the sins of others...."

Every time you review a hurt, it gets bigger. For instance, let's say that someone criticizes you. Criticism hurts. I know. But if you keep thinking about the criticism, in time you begin to think that the whole world's against you. The event gets blown all out of proportion. It gets magnified every time you rehearse it.

I use to have an associate pastor that had mastered this point. Even though, I thought he was doing a great job, he nonetheless was criticized from time to time by people from within the congregation. People who had never been an associate pastor were having a heyday telling this fellow how he should do his job. Sometimes the jabs hit pretty close to home.

The brother, though, had the uncanny ability to just shrug it all off. Nothing ever seemed to stick to his spirit. He simply would listen, see if the critic had anything of value to say, and then he went on about his business. He refused to let his mind dwell on the negatives any longer than necessary. Today, he is pastoring his own church.

Quite honestly, I have known some very angry, bitter people. It is almost as if they have all of their past and current hurts stand in review each and every morning. They inspect them, rehearse them, and make their vows before them.

- "I will get even with him even if it is the last thing I do...!"
- "An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth...!"
- "He got me once, I will get him back twice!"
- "She will live to regret the time that she hurt me. I do not get mad, I just get even!"

Every day it is the same evil thing – rehearsal time.

I want to tell you about a pastoral call my wife and I made some thirty years ago. A lady had visited one of our services. That week Marilyn and I stopped by her house to introduce ourselves and to invite her back.

The house was a old farmhouse out in the country. The driveway was long and unpaved. We were invited in. During the course of the conversation the lady's husband, who had not been to the church, chimed in. He was an angry, bitter man. It didn't take long for us to find out why. The story came easy for him. Years earlier a man had murdered his sister. It must have been awful.

Anyway, I will never forget that visit. It was chilling. The fellow pointed to a door that was near to the chair where I was seated. He proceeded to tell me, "Preacher, do you see that door?" I said "yes." He then continued, "Just on the other side of the door is a rifle. It's loaded. If the man who shot my sister were to walk up that driveway right now, I wouldn't even give it a thought. I would just go in there, get my gun, and shoot that man before he could ever make his way up to my porch." He didn't even bat an eye as he spewed out his ugly hatred.

I have no idea how many times that old fellow (who is no doubt dead by now) had rehearsed his evil plan. He obviously lived for the day that he could take another man's life.

If you are consumed with hatred this morning, I have a word for you. I do not want anyone to misunderstand what I am about to say. I am going to state my point in very simple terms. It is now time to get over it. Put it behind you – now. Let the offense go. Quit rehearsing your hurt.

3. DON'T NURSE IT.

I want to share with you a short illustration from the movie "*Antwone Fisher*." Based on a true story, the film tells of a young man who grew up in an abusive foster home. Over the years, Antwone grew bitter towards his natural family for giving him up. By the time he enlisted in the Navy, his anger got him into so many fist fights that he was sent to Navy psychologist Jerome Davenport, who becomes a father figure to Antwone.

After they have built trust with each other, Antwone shares a powerful poem with Davenport. At this critical juncture, his counselor raises the key issue that Antwone must deal with to find healing.

The conversation takes place just after the Thanksgiving meal at his counselor's house. Antwone gives Davenport a folded piece of paper, and Davenport reads it aloud thoughtfully.

"Who will cry for the little boy
 Lost and all alone?
 Who will cry for the little boy
 Abandoned without his own?
 Who will cry for the little boy?
 He cried himself to sleep.
 Who will cry for the little boy
 Who never had for keeps?
 Who will cry for the little boy
 Who walked the burning sand?
 Who will cry for the little boy
 The boy inside the man?
 Who will cry for the little boy
 Who knew well hurt and pain?
 Who will cry for the little boy
 Who died and died again?
 Who will cry for the little boy?
 A good boy he tried to be.
 Who will cry for the little boy
 Who cries inside of me?"

Davenport says, "This is excellent, Antwone. You're good because you're honest. You are more honest than most people. Even in your anger—the only thing your not honest with yourself about is your need to find your own family. Your natural family. You're upset with them because you feel they didn't come to your rescue. Maybe they didn't know.

Antwone replies bitterly, "How could they not have known?"

Davenport says, "That's the question you need to ask. 'Regard without ill-will, despite an offense.' That's Webster's definition of forgiveness."

Antwone says, "Why do I have to forgive?"

Davenport answers, "To free yourself, so you can get on with your life."

Source: preachingtoday.com

I like those last two lines. Listen as I read them to you once again: "Why do I have to forgive?"
 Davenport answers, "To free yourself, so you can get on with your life."

Let me put it bluntly:

- Hatred is nothing more than a slow form of suicide. It can and will kill.
- Someone once put it this way, "It is not what we eat as much as what eats us that kills a person."
- As I noted in an earlier sermon, "Seeking revenge is like taking poison and hoping the other person is going to die."
- Or as the Chinese say: "If you're not willing to forgive, you better get ready to dig two graves."

During World War II, the U.S. submarine *Tang* surfaced under cover of darkness to fire on a large Japanese convoy off the coast of China. Since previous raids had left the American vessel with only eight torpedoes, the accuracy of each shot was essential. The first seven silent missiles were on target.

But when the eighth was launched, it suddenly veered off course. Instead of hitting its intended target, it boomeranged back unseen to strike the crew that had launched it. Too late, the emergency alarm to submerge rang out. Within a matter of seconds, the U.S. sub received a direct hit and sank almost instantly.

In the same way, we're also capable, while intent on attacking others, of doing irreparable damage to ourselves. The missiles of anger and hate we launch can return to hurt us. Again, anger can be a poison that kills.

Whenever we nurse a hurt, we give life to it. In short, we encourage it to grow and grow. How do we do this?

- By showing it off to others.
- By parading it around for others to see.
- By enlisting people to share in the offense.
- By emphasizing it, by exaggerating it.
- By feeding it.

And how do we feed a hurt, you ask?

- We feed it self-pity.
- We feed it anger.
- We feed it bitterness.
- We feed it hate!

The more that we feed it, the more it grows until the hurt can literally become all consuming.

By the way, someone has written that "blowing out the other fellow's candle won't make yours shine any brighter!"

Ephesians 4:26-27 **"Don't let the sun go down while you're still angry and do not give the devil a foothold."** It's ok to be angry. Anger is a legitimate response to hurt. However, it is important to remember that anger must have a time limit. It can't go on and on and on. last forever. You see, when we hold on to anger for an extended period of time, it can turn into bitterness, resentment, or even hatred. All of those things are sin. Job 18:4 therefore warns, **"You're only hurting yourself with your anger."**

Anger doesn't change the situation. It can't reverse the past. It just makes us upset.

Can you imagine Jesus Christ returning to heaven ahead of schedule and the angels ask "Jesus, You're back home ahead of schedule." And Jesus saying, "I'm sorry. But just to be honest, I'm ticked! Those people down there didn't appreciate Me. They didn't give me the strokes I needed. They were

nothing but a bunch of ingrates! I just decided to pack up my bags and come home.” Again, thank God, Jesus didn’t do that.

You cannot please everybody. In fact, in trying to please everybody you’re guaranteeing you’re going to be hurt. Just about the time you get Person A pleased, Person B gets upset. Just about the time Person B gets satisfied, Person A gets upset. You have seen it happen.

Even God can’t please everybody. One person is praying for rain today. Someone else is saying they want it to be sunny. You get two people on opposite sides of the ballgame both praying for their team to win.

This is an election year. Millions of people are going to pray for the Democratic candidate to win in November while millions more are going to pray for the Republican candidate to win.

Whose prayer does God answer? Which group does He please and which group does He disappoint? Again, even God can’t please everybody. Only a fool would try to accomplish what even God can’t do.

As I close, I want to share with you a cute story drawn from one of my all-time favorite books -- John Ortberg’s *“If You Want to Walk On Water, You’ve Got To Get Out Of The Boat.”*

Some years ago my wife arranged for us to ride in a hot-air balloon as a birthday gift. We went to the field where the balloons ascended and got into a little basket with one other couple. We introduced ourselves and swapped vocational information. Then our pilot began the ascent. The day had just dawned-clear, crisp, cloudless. We could see the entire valley, from craggy canyons to the Pacific Ocean. It was scenic, inspiring, and majestic.

But I also experienced one emotion I had not anticipated. Want to guess? Fear. I had always thought those baskets went about chest high, but this one only came up to our knees. One good lurch would be enough to throw someone over the side. So I held on with grim determination and white knuckles.

I looked over at my wife, who does not care for heights at all, and relaxed a bit, knowing there was someone in the basket more tense than I was. I could tell, because she would not move-at all. During part of our flight there was a horse ranch on the ground directly behind her. I pointed it out because she loves horses, and, without turning around or even pivoting her head, she simply rolled her eyes back as far as she could and said, "Yes, it's beautiful."

About this time I decided I'd like to get to know the kid who was flying this balloon. I realized that I could try to psyche myself up into believing everything would be fine, but the truth was we had placed our lives and destinies in the hands of the pilot. Everything depended on his character and competence.

I asked him what he did for a living and how he got started flying hot-air balloons. I was hoping for his former job to be one full of responsibilities a neurosurgeon, perhaps, an astronaut who missed going up into space.

I knew we were in trouble when his response to me began, "Dude, it's like this..." He did not even have a job! He mostly surfed.

He said the reason he got started flying hot-air balloons was that he had been driving around in his pickup when he'd had too much to drink, crashed the truck, and badly injured his brother. His brother still couldn't get around too well, so watching hot-air balloons gave him something to do.

"By the way," he added, "if things get a little choppy on the way down, don't be surprised. I've never flown this particular balloon before, and I'm not sure how it's going to handle the descent."

My wife looked over at me and said, "You mean to tell me we are a thousand feet up in the air with an unemployed surfer who started flying hot-air balloons because he got drunk, crashed a pickup, injured his brother, and has never been in this one before and doesn't know how to bring it down?"

Then the wife of the other couple looked at me and spoke-the only words either of them were to utter throughout the entire flight. You're a pastor. Do something religious.

I love that line, do something religious. That is what I am calling you to today. Do something right. Do something Christian. Do something that will bless you and God alike.

What is that? Give up your hurts – now – to God. Vengeance belongs to Him anyway.

No longer curse your hurt, rehearse your hurt, or nurse your hurt. Instead, just hand them over to God today -- once and for all. In other words, forgive. After all, that is just about the most religious thing you can do.