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Healing for Damaged Emotions: Surviving Alone in Your Feelings

By Matt Hook

Luke 10:38-42

(David Seamands notes): Often there are two groups of people we fail to help in the church. Their problems are not solved by preaching the Word, commitments to Christ, being filled with the Spirit, or the Sacraments.

One group is driven to futility and they lose confidence in God's power. While they prayed, their prayers about personal problems didn't seem to be answered. They tried every Christian habit and discipline, but with no result. They played the same old record of their defeats, getting stuck in repetitive emotional patterns. On the outside they keep going, but on the inside they sink into deeper and deeper disillusionment and despair, and loneliness.

The other group moves toward phoniness. They repress their feelings, thinking that "Christians can't have those problems." So, instead of facing their damaged emotions, they covered them with a veneer of Scripture verses, theological terms, and unrealistic one-liners. The denied problems went underground, only later to reappear in all manner of loneliness, illnesses, on-the-edge living, terribly unhappy marriages, and sometimes even in the emotional destruction of their children.

We need special care and prayer for damaged emotions and unhealed loneliness.

Sometimes it comes out in under-achievement, but more often this emotional pain manifests itself in "over-extended" patterns of living: We OVERwork, OVEReat, OVERcommit, OVERspend, OVERspiritualize, OVERobsess about love and sex. We live on the edge. We must face the reality of our pain-filled past in order to proceed in a healthy way.

You have a choice. No matter how damaged you have been, you can choose to open yourself up to God's love and healing power through the Holy Spirit. You can ask the Holy Spirit to gently bring the truth about your past to light and "*the truth will set you free.*" (John 8:32).

Today we look at loneliness – surviving alone in your feelings that no one understands - perhaps the most prevalent condition affecting us as a people today. Why? Maybe because we are **consumers** in too many areas of our lives: including our relationships. We only buy into it if "it suits us." When it comes to relationships, we mix and match. We hunt for the bargain – what will cost us the least amount? We compare people. We ask "Does it fit me?" We're used to return policies. We're more interested in image than allegiance to anyone. We become like the coyote looking for the roadrunner - we keep on chasing, but always manage to come up empty-handed, or playing emotional ping pong.

So you're lonely – attempting to survive alone in your feelings. Why? Perhaps because we are trained to be nothing more than **spectators**. We think everything must be entertaining. Our technology and media has produced amazing things, but its number one product may be boredom. The average American watches 4 hours per day. So, we find our happiness second-hand through people who seem to have it all. We're engaged, but also totally disconnected. And that disconnect gets projected on to people. We listen to

someone with a remote in our brain, and when they go off on something that doesn't absolutely grab us, we click, on to the next channel, gunslingers of Satan's deadliest weapon – low self-esteem.

So you're lonely – attempting to survive alone in our feelings. Why? Perhaps because you are an **extreme individualist**. You've bought into the idea that we are essentially *good* and have within ourselves all that we need. We experience little meaningful contact with others. We think we can live in isolation and independence and live meaningfully. After all, I don't want others telling me what to do or how to do it. Though America looks like part of a continent, we're really a land of islands, disconnected and alone. Time available for family members to connect gets whittled down to a few minutes a day.

Today, as we begin our fourth look into the healing of these damaged emotions, I want to begin with a story from the life of Jesus, recorded in Luke's Gospel, 10:38-42. It is a story of two responses to Jesus. For those of us who grew up in the church world, it's probably pretty familiar. For those of us who didn't, it may be new. But it's a story of two women and their feelings and Jesus.

Listen to it now... *As Jesus and his disciples were on their way, he came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to him. She had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet listening to what he said. But Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made. She came to him and asked, "Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!" "Martha, Martha," the Lord answered, "you are worried and upset about many things, but only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her."*

When you're alone in your feelings, how do you cope in a healthy way? Do you get busy? Jesus said "*I have come that you may have life and have it abundantly*" John 10:10. If that's true, then shouldn't life be about more than just coping? Let's look more closely at the story of Mary and Martha. Mary was drawn, Martha was driven.

You can survive your aloneness by being driven. That was Martha, the ultimate hostess - the driven one. It's the difference between being an underachiever versus an over-expecter. In our church I don't see too many underachievers. But I wonder if we don't have a lot of over-expecters?

Are you surviving your damaged emotions, are you surviving alone in your feelings by being a driven person? What are you driven by?

Maybe you're like Martha. She was driven **by expectations of others**. (expectations of the culture). Her culture helped her manage her surviving alone. She had to meet so many people's basic needs, she had no time for loneliness. Are you a slave to the expectations of others? Martha was.

Martha was driven **by the familiar**. What do you do when it gets *bad*? You do what you've *always* done. You fall back into familiar patterns. Even if you know that those old habits are the ones that contributed to your present situation. Todd Snyder changed my life when I heard him pray "God, take me outside my comfort zone." Maybe this is your day to step out of your comfort zone. That's when the newness comes.

Martha was driven **by the unmet longing to be noticed**. Busyness is often a cover up for emptiness. And the kitchen is such a great place to be busy! The drawers open and shut a little too loud, you can walk by the clusters of people a little too fast, you can clink the glasses a little too noisily in the sink. Boy! Are you busy! We ALL need to be noticed in healthy ways, for healthy things.

Martha was driven **to talk to Jesus**. Listen to the words within her words:

1. "*Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!*" (But the issue's not really her sister Mary, is it?)

2. "*Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me?*"

(Do you hear Martha's real concern, yet? Listen once more...)

3. "Lord, don't you care?!" THAT'S it.

4. Lord, don't you care...that my spouse is clueless? ...That my savings are gone? ...That my dream is shattered? ...That my life is no where near where I wanted it to be? ...that I can't find happiness? ...that I keep falling down? ...that I'm lonely?

Where are *you* longing? Where are you lonely? Does Jesus have your attention?

41-42 "Martha, Martha," the Lord answered, "You are worried and upset about many things, but only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her."

Martha in surviving alone in her feelings was driven. But Mary was drawn.

Mary was drawn to sit. Our world tells us: busy is better. I want to congratulate you. Everything screams at us busy is better and you've come today and sat. Maybe you, like many others here, are drawn.

Mary was drawn to listen. Most of the time we listen only long enough to look polite and think of where we want to take the conversation next. But Mary really listened. When you really listen to a person, you give over control to who you're listening to. Will you allow yourself to really listen: to others, and to Jesus?

Jesus broke cultural norms. Girls didn't sit like the disciples. Girls worked. There's still a piece of that in our society today. (That's what makes the day we honor our mothers so strange). Church, let us break the cultural norms that lead people to loneliness. If there's one thing I've learned in 10 months about this church, it's that the people here really care. God is a God who really cares. Allow yourself to be drawn to him.

Hebrews 4:15-16 "For (in Jesus) we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our infirmities, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are-- yet was without sin. Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy... and find grace... to help us in our time of need."(Let me say that in the positive – “We have a High Priest who is touched with the feeling of our infirmities. We have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are – yet is without sin.”)

Jesus understands not just the fact of our infirmities. He understands the FEELING of our infirmities. Not just the crippings, not just the weakness, not just the emotional hang ups and the inner conflicts, but the pain that comes with them. He understands the frustration, the anxiety, the depression, the hurts, the feelings of abandonment and loneliness and isolation and rejection – the whole gamut. The fact that God not only knows and cares, but FULLY UNDERSTANDS is the most therapeutic factor in the healing of our damaged emotions.

Are you driven, or are you drawn? Jesus says it. "*Only one thing is needed.* Lay down what's driving you and give me control." Amen.