

Regaining Our Identity

By Alison Vorlicky*

Most, if not all of us, have heard the saying, “I got stuff, you got stuff, we all got stuff.” I do not know about you, but when I hear that saying, there is a part of me that chuckles because I know that to be true, but there is another part of me that inside says, “If anyone really knew how bad my stuff was, I would be alone journeying through life by myself.” There are people around us, in our congregations, seminary, even in this room, that are broken and wounded and at the depths of their souls they are crying out for help, for attention and for someone to notice that they are in so much pain. People search and search for a place, person or thing to trust, yet they fear letting anyone into that dark place of their soul because of the rejection, condemnation and judgment they might face. No matter how discouraged a hurting person is, there is a small sense of hope inside and they pray for a day or even a moment in which they can breathe and be freed from the pain. They pray for a day where they know they will be dwelling in safety.

Today’s message is called “Regaining our Identity,” and before I read you the passage from Psalm 4, I would like to take a moment to pray. Lord I ask that your Holy Spirit would dwell upon us today and that as I deliver the message you have laid upon my heart that my fellow brothers and sisters in Christ would be able to discern and hear your voice, your truths and the hope that you bring. I pray that you open our hearts and our minds to a message that is challenging not only spiritually but emotionally for some people. I pray Lord that you would open our spiritual senses so that we might be able to see life and your love through a new perspective and through a new lens. Lord camp your angels around us, protect us and bind the enemy from this place. We praise and thank you Lord. Amen!

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The Psalms are a collection of songs, prayers and poetry that express the heart and soul of humanity. The Psalmists pour out their true feelings, confess their sins and express their fears and doubts to God. They ask God for help in times of trouble and they show an expression of praise and worship to Him. As you read the Psalms, you will hear the laments of believers. You will hear them crying out to God from the depths of their despair and you will hear them singing to Him in the heights of celebration. The Psalmists do not hold anything back when speaking with God. You will always hear their honest feelings and you will see how God comforts them in their struggles and times of distress. You will see how God has brought them to new heights of joy and praise as they discover His unfailing and everlasting love and forgiveness. The Psalms bring hope, comfort and bring us into a deeper and closer relationship with God.

Please open your Bible to Psalm 4...

Answer me when I call to you, O my righteous God. Give me relief from my distress; be merciful to me and hear my prayers. How long, O men, will you turn my glory into shame? How long will you love delusions and seek false gods? Know that the Lord has set apart the godly for himself; the Lord will hear when I call to him. In your anger do not sin; when you are in your beds, search your hearts and be silent. Offer right sacrifices and trust in the Lord. Many are asking, "Who can show us any good?" Let the light of your face shine upon us, O Lord. You have filled my heart with greater joy than when their grain and new wine abound. I will lie down and sleep in peace, for you alone, O Lord, make me dwell in safety.

Psalm 4 is a Psalm of despair, emotions, and a hurting soul crying out to God for relief. But as you continue to read the dialogue between God and David you begin to hear hope and joy, a joy that is not temporary but a joy that is lasting. Psalm 4:1 begins with David's cry for help to God to relieve him of his distress. Following in verses 2-7, you begin to hear a different voice, a different dialogue between God and David, or God and victim/ abuser. There is the idolatry of false gods, David questioning the length of his suffering, and God reminding us not to sin in our anger. David was obedient and trusted in the Lord. His heart was filled with great joy and in verse 8, David rejoices in God's

protection and peace, for God has heard his prayers and has been faithful in bringing him safety.

David cried out to God and although God might have seemed far away during his suffering, God shined His light and His face upon David. He allowed David to see that in Him, there was hope and freedom that would come. As God stood by David, God also stands by us. His heart's desire is for us to be freed prisoners and when we are held captive, it breaks His heart. In the end, David knew that no matter what attack he faced, no matter what abuse he encountered, he knew that he could dwell in the safety of the Lord. This is a message that needs to be conveyed to the hurting, to the abused and to the ones under attack. God is with us every step of the way. He weeps when we weep and He rejoices when we rejoice. If we, like David, could know that He is with us every step of the way, and if we allow Him to lead and to shine His light into our lives, we too could dwell in His safety. As David found hope in the midst of his suffering, God offers and promises the same hope for us.

Yet, there are many people, especially children, who are in the midst of abuse that are crying out to God and are not able to find Him anywhere. They feel abandoned, rejected, alone and they search high and low for the one thing to ease the pain of their souls. They ask, as David did, "how long, how long O God, must I endure this suffering."

As I reflected on the many times I cried out to God for help, to relieve me from my distress and to show some sort of mercy upon my soul, I also reflected on the many children that are in the midst of, or have endured the suffering of sexual abuse and have cried out to God for help, asking how long they must endure their suffering. Through my own abuse and through my own suffering, God revealed to me that no matter how hard life gets, how much adversity we face, or how much our soul aches, that in Him we will find peace and joy.

Sexual abuse is a topic that is often avoided and that is not being addressed or talked about within the church. Do you realize that one out of every three to four females and one out of every five to six males are sexually abused? Do you know that over sixty five percent of children placed in foster care homes and in adoptive families experience sexual abuse for the first time after placement? And these are only statistics based on the number of cases that are reported. Not only have these children been removed from their parents, homes and everything they have ever known, they are going into a new environment where everything is unknown. They are scared, feel abandoned

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and rejected and then their soul, purity and innocence gets stripped away. To them God is so far away and is non-existent. They do not know the love of Jesus and they do not know that He will be there strength, refuge and their light in such a dark and lonely time.

Take a look around this room. Take a good look because there are people here in this room that live with the pain, with the anger, and with a shattered soul because someone took away their purity and innocence. They live with a fear all day, every day, and cannot fall asleep at night with their hearts silent because it is trembling with fear. They cry out to someone, to God, to stop the abuse from happening. They are not able to sleep at night without anger and fear because they do not know when the next time their perpetrator will come into their rooms and strip them of everything they have. When God seems so far away, it is hard for them to image the peace that comes when dwelling in the Lord's safety (4:8). Fellow brothers and sisters, this isn't a post-modern issue that is taking place. Dating back to Genesis, God reveals to us that sexual abuse and incest is real. In Genesis 19:1-36, Lot offers his daughters for sexual favors to protect two strangers. In 2 Samuel 13:14-15, Amnon rapes his half sister Tamar, and in 2 Samuel 11:1-5 we see how David's authority and power coerced Bathsheba into having an adulterous affair.

Now ask yourselves why? Why does God disclose to us in His Word these horrific acts of sexual misconduct? Is it because it is accepted in God's eyes or is it because God knows how sin destroyed the one thing He created us for, love. There are lives that have been shattered, souls that have been broken and a purity that cannot be restored.

So ask yourselves this question? Why are we leaving so many children in fear, danger and in darkness? Think about it. If we embrace one hurting soul at a time and show them the strength and power of Christ, and if we could love them in a way that is not threatening, but embracing, loving and without bounds, we will show these victims that they can persevere and have victory in Christ. What needs to be understood is that a child's image of God is created by the relational intimacy their parents show them. When children are abused by their parents or their parents fail to protect them from the abuse, they begin to realize something in their soul was stolen and they will try anything to still their internal storm. You see, the things that shape us are not our beliefs but our experiences. When our experiences are filled with anxiety, fear and pain, it is hard to see God in the midst of the circumstances.

As a church, we need to take action and bring people the truth of Christ. We need to tackle this “Huge” yet often avoided issue and we need to show the lost and broken that God is always with us and He promises never to leave us or forsake us (Joshua 1:5). He promises to protect us and He promises to walk by our sides through the valleys and through the shadows of darkness.

As a body of believers, it is our responsibility to step in and start making a difference in so many children’s lives. Isaiah 61:1 says, “The Spirit of the Lord is upon us and He has anointed us to preach the good news to the poor, bind up the brokenhearted, proclaim freedom for the captives, release the prisoners from darkness and comfort all who mourn.” God knew that His voice, His unfailing love and His forgiveness was a message that needed to be conveyed, received and a message that we all need to stand firm on.

Church! Brothers and sisters! When was the last time you prayed for those children in foster care, the children that have experienced sexual abuse or the children that have never known the silence of their hearts? When was the last time you prayed for those who have never known what it feels like to feel safe? Are you willing to sacrifice a part of you for a part of them? I am not asking you to all of the sudden be a foster parent, but I am challenging you to not overlook this subject. It is prevalent, alive and is seen throughout the Bible and amongst us today. I believe that we are called and obligated to address this and to take the appropriate action instead of leaving it in the governments and states hands. We need to show these children, adolescents and surviving adults that with the healing presence of the Lord, there is comfort, safety and freedom, but most of all, there is HOPE.

There is hope and if we could position these hurting souls before the presence of Lord and if they could encounter Jesus just one time, if they could feel alive for just one moment, imagine the transformation that could occur. No matter what they face, no matter how long they face it, they will know that God loves them and is walking with them through each attack. Through His unfailing love, they will be able to receive healing and restoration to in a life they were so hopeless about. Their souls, lost innocence and identity will be able to find rest in Jesus. To me that is exciting. I would have given anything to know the hope, peace and safety of the Lord when I was abused. But I have found it now and I know that He was with me every step of the way. So should these children...