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Pain, Suffering, and Healing

BY DEACON PHIL HENGEN

Several years ago, I wrote a book called **If Jesus Were a Therapist: Modern Parables for Emotional and Spiritual Health**. I wrote this book based upon my experience of telling stories in Family Therapy and Marriage Counseling. Like Jesus, who taught very effectively through the use of stories and common objects and experiences known to people in his time, it was my hope that I could help people in my therapy practice learn to improve their psychological and spiritual health by paying attention to persons, places and things in their everyday life. Each of the 52 chapters begins with my imaginary Jesus talking to his disciples in modern times, using some ordinary things to make a point. (Think “Consider the Lilies of the Field in Mathew 6:28). I follow this with a short discourse of my own, and then suggest several questions for the reader to consider throughout the coming week. Following is one of those chapters...

6352 FORSYTH BOULEVARD

ST. LOUIS, MISSOURI 63105-2269



314-935-9191 FAX 314-727-6053
WEB SITE www.washucsc.org

CONSIDER THE BOO-BOO

Jesus hadn't had a cut, scrape or bruise ever since his resurrection.

That was another good thing about having a glorified body; you never got any *boo-boos*. His friends who weren't so lucky envied him. He assured them that the time was coming when they too would be immune to any physical pain or injury...but they just had to wait awhile. In the meantime, there were valuable lessons to be learned from something like an accidental cut or a sprained ankle. One of the guys who hung around Jesus was a hypochondriac and a real whiner. He got on everybody's nerves but Jesus', especially if the guy got sick or sustained a minor injury. He came up to Jesus once, and tearfully held out his finger, that had a little blister on it. (He was hoping Jesus would make it go away, which he sometimes did.) But Jesus thought that this would be a good opportunity to teach his friends something about life. Jesus said, **"Consider the *boo-boo*..."**



Everybody gets *boo-boos* now and then. *Boo-boo*...Now that's a great word. It captures the essence of being hurt much better than words like abrasion, laceration or fracture. Little kids know how to tell it like it is. We all know what a *boo-boo* is and we all have had them. My wife, Mary, had a *boo-boo* once, and it was my fault. I gave her a black eye on our wedding anniversary. (Now, before you put this book down in disgust, please read on. I have many faults, but I am not guilty of spouse abuse. In fact, I think the last time I hit anyone in anger was when I was 14 and I punched my brother in the nose...and I still believe he had it coming.) Anyway...it was the evening of our wedding anniversary, and we were getting ready to go out to dinner. We live in this charming 150-year-old converted farmhouse in a near-suburb of St. Louis, Missouri. The small, downstairs bathroom was added on 50 years ago, and the linen closet where we keep our toiletries is across a narrow hallway. I'm a fast mover, and sometimes I don't look where I'm going. I finished drying my hair in the bathroom with a hand-held hair dryer, and, without looking, reached to put it in the linen closet across the hallway. I had done this a thousand times without incident. I could hang it on the hook in the closet with my eyes closed. But there was a glitch on this occasion. As I lunged for the closet, Mary happened to be passing in the hallway. I smacked her right in the face with this hard plastic hair dryer. Boy, did that hurt! She had the biggest black eye I had ever seen.



There's a lesson to be learned from *boo-boos*.

I didn't mean to smack Mary in the face with that hair dryer. It was an accident, and she realized this. I felt terrible (although probably not as terrible as she felt at the moment). I said I was sorry and she forgave me. I did what I could to help her, getting an ice pack for the swelling and some Tylenol for the pain. So...since it was accidental, I was sorry, and she forgave me, everything should be okay. Not quite...one little thing remained...Mary still had a black eye...and it took time to heal.

Boo-boos come in a variety of forms. They can be physical, emotional, relational and spiritual. Physical hurts are readily observable...the others aren't. *Boo-boos* of every kind can be accidental or they can be intentionally caused. Whatever the kind or the cause of a *boo-boo*, they all have one thing in common. They need to heal and healing takes time. The amount of time required for healing depends on the nature and extent of the

trauma. A broken leg heals more slowly than a bruised shin. The convalescence after quadruple bypass heart surgery is longer than it is for a tooth extraction. The infidelity of an affair in a marriage hurts more than an unkind word said in the heat of an argument. Repeated assaults on a person's spirit cause more damage than isolated acts of unkindness (e.g. put-downs and criticisms). Physical wounds generally heal more quickly than do emotional or spiritual ones.



WEEKLY REFLECTIONS: "BOO-BOOS"

As I go about the business of daily living this week, I will notice *boo-boos*, my own and those of others. When I look at others, it is their physical *boo-boos* that I will notice, while their emotional and spiritual hurts remain hidden. I might have a *boo-boo*. Maybe I have a cold or a sore back. Maybe my friend said something that hurt my feelings. Maybe my spouse, parent or child disappointed me in some way. As I reflect on all of this, I will ask myself the following questions:

Can I remember a *boo-boo* I had in the past that is now healed? Was it physical, emotional, relational or spiritual? What were my thoughts and feelings while I was in pain? How long did it take to heal?

Is there some physical, emotional, relational or spiritual hurt in my life at the moment? How am I dealing with it? Do I have faith that it too shall pass?

Suffering is a part of living. So is healing. I trust that God will give me sufficient grace to patiently endure the incidental and necessary pain of life, confident that healing will come, sooner or later. Meanwhile, I will show my *boo-boos* to those who love me, and accept the comfort they offer.