

## **Out of the Darkness and Into the Light**

Part One: Betrayal  
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3.30.19

### **Outline:**

Jesus is our example for overcoming darkness.  
Betrayal happens when a perceived loss or gain is greater than the value of a relationship.  
Jesus was betrayed by religious leaders, friends, family, politicians, and the masses.  
The nature of betrayal is that it often involves friends, not strangers.  
We overcome our betrayals by allowing God to determine our worth, not others.

**Going Deeper:** Use the following questions for personal reflection and/or to discuss with family, friends and small group.

What are some of the Bible stories that center around betrayal?  
Why do you think these stories are so prevalent?  
Remember a time when you were betrayed, what were some of the feelings and emotions that you experienced? What is it about betrayal that hurts so much?  
What was the impact that the betrayal had on your life?  
How did you overcome it (if you did)? Did you turn to God for help in recovery?  
Read the following verses. What do they have to do with recovering from betrayal?  
    Psalm 41:12: "...you set me in your presence forever."  
    Matthew 26:38-39  
    John 13:1-3  
What is one truth that you can meditate on to help you recover from the pain of betrayal?

### **Message**

This morning I'm starting a new series called: Out of the Darkness and Into the Light. And that's because this is the season in the church calendar known as Lent. Lent starts with Ash Wednesday and continues for 40 days, ending on Easter.

Lent is traditionally a time of inward reflection... often on the sufferings of Jesus, but also on how God meets us in our own suffering. And that's what I'd like to look at over the next few weeks: how Jesus can guide us out of our darkness and into his light. Jesus will be our example.

I've been struck recently by how people seem to be losing their coping skills. I don't think life has gotten any harder. Life has always been hard. Tragedy has been with us from the beginning of time. But I've read numerous articles about people... high profile people... successful people... who have given up on life. They ended their story.

I initially thought that it was just my perception..., but the statistics backup my observations. More people are giving up on life. Nationwide, the suicide rate has increased by 33% in the last 20 years. In January, five people took their own lives locally, way above the average. It seems like taking your life has become a viable option for dealing with the pain of life. And that has me very concerned.

You might be thinking, Remy, why are you talking about this? This is so dark. Yes it is. And that's exactly where I want to start this series...in the dark. You see, for every person that ends their life, there are probably thousands who consider it. And for everyone who considers it, there are probably thousands more who are struggling with intense depression and despair.

There's something about our culture that has caused us to lose our moorings, our anchor that grounds us. We are losing the ability to endure hardship and overcome it and even see how God can use pain in our life. So, yes, I'm starting us out in a very dark place, but it's only to illustrate that we have a problem in this country.

You may have never thought about it, but the Easter drama includes a story about suicide. Judas solved his problems by taking his life and that is set in contrast to Jesus. Jesus solved his problems by clinging to God and trusting in him.

Jesus' story of darkness started with betrayal. I want to look at that today. Betrayal isn't something we often talk about. It's very personal. It's embarrassing to reveal how someone rejected you. It's painful. But as I reflected on the Bible, betrayal is a common theme.

Adam and Eve betrayed God on page two of the Bible.

Cain betrayed Abel on page three. Jacob betrayed his brother Esau.

David was betrayed first, by King Saul, and then by his son Absalom.

With so much betrayal in the Bible, God must want us to consider it.

As I looked back on my life, I realized that I've experienced many betrayals. Friends in high school, church leaders, people that I've worked for, business partners. I've even felt betrayed by national figures like politicians and spiritual leaders.

I'm sure your life has its own set of betrayals in the form of rejections, abandonment, or abuse. The sting of a past betrayal might still be with you. Or you might be in the throes of a betrayal right now. So let's take a look at Jesus' story to see what we can learn about overcoming the darkness of betrayal.

Matthew quotes Jesus telling his disciples:

"As you know, the Passover is two days away—and the Son of Man will be handed over to be crucified." Matthew 26:1,2

This must have hit the disciples like a ton of bricks. “Wait...what?” Crucified? *“No Jesus. You must be mistaken. I think you are a little paranoid. The people love you. You are the messiah they’ve been waiting for. They’re going to make you king. You need to lighten up.”*

Well, it wasn’t the people Jesus was worried about. It was the religious leaders. Matthew continues the story:

Then the chief priests and the elders of the people assembled in the palace of the high priest, whose name was Caiaphas, and they schemed to arrest Jesus secretly and kill him. “But not during the festival,” they said, “or there may be a riot among the people.” Matthew 26:3-5

Why would religious leaders want to kill Jesus?

How could religious leaders wish anyone harm, let alone death?

Well, the gospel of John connects the dots for us. It tells us that Jesus had been in Galilee performing miracles. That was about a weeks journey north of Jerusalem. Whatever happened in Galilee, pretty much stayed in Galilee because news didn’t travel that fast. I’m sure people heard some rumors about a new prophet up north, but it didn’t have any bearing on Jerusalem...until Jesus traveled south.

Which he did. Jesus went to Jerusalem for a religious holiday. Jesus was no longer a rumor. People got to see for themselves what the rumors were about. At first, Jesus just challenged the religious system, ruffling the feathers of the priests and the religious power brokers. But what really put them on edge was when he raised a man back to life.

You can read the full story in John 11. But John tells us something that clues us into why this event was the tipping point that led to Jesus’ betrayal and death.

Jesus... came to the tomb. It was a cave with a stone laid across the entrance. “Take away the stone,” he said. “But, Lord,” said Martha, the sister of the dead man, “by this time there is a bad odor, for he has been there four days.” ...Jesus called in a loud voice, “Lazarus, come out!” The dead man came out, his hands and feet wrapped with strips of linen, and a cloth around his face. Jesus said to them, “Take off the grave clothes and let him go.” John 11:38,39,44

What’s significant to the story here is that Lazarus was in the tomb for four days. His body had started to decompose. John was careful to point this out because this wasn’t a questionable story about someone momentarily fainting, or even being revived after his heart stopped for a minute. Lazarus was stone cold dead and rotting, and everyone knew it. That’s why it says...

Therefore many of the Jews who had come to visit Mary, and had seen what Jesus did, believed in him. John 11:45

This was a miracle beyond any doubt. It was undeniable.

The resurrection of Lazarus was why people hailed Jesus as their Messiah on Palm Sunday. It was as if Jesus poured gas on a fire. His popularity went viral. But that popularity threatened the religious elite.

Some of the people went to the Pharisees and told them what Jesus had done. Then the chief priests and the Pharisees called a meeting of the Sanhedrin. "What are we accomplishing?" they asked. "Here is this man performing many signs. If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him, and then the Romans will come and take away both our temple and our nation... So from that day on they plotted to take his life." John 11:46-48,53

And there it is...the reason why religious leaders can do bad things: fear. Fear of losing their position and power. You see, the Romans ruled Jerusalem, but they made a deal with the religious leaders, that they would allow them to have their wealth and power over the people, as long as they didn't rock the boat. No protests. No rebellions. No problems. Jesus threatened that agreement. He could spoil everything.

Betrayal surfaces when one of two things happen: someone fears losing something they value, or someone believes they can gain something of value. When either gain or loss show up on the radar screen, a persons' character is put to the test and the temptation can prove to be too much for them.

Betrayal is a common theme in this narrative. The betrayal of the religious leaders was like the first domino to fall because once they betrayed Jesus, a whole list of people betrayed him.

I mentioned before that I was betrayed by religious leaders in my past. I don't want to recount that here but I wrote about it in my book *Broken Trust*. That book is all about the pain of being betrayed by religious leaders.

I like the title: Broken Trust, because that's exactly what happens in betrayal. You go to church for guidance. For a connection to God. You entrust yourself to the leadership of another. You trust that they got into that position because of their character, their knowledge, and their connection to God. And so you let your guard down and invite them into your life.

And then you find out... usually much too late... that they aren't the person you thought they were. They were using you to build their own kingdom. Or they lied to you about how they spent the money, or they were having an affair, or taking advantage of someone in the congregation. Maybe you've experienced one of these betrayals.

You might know the leader personally, or you might just know the person from afar. I've been following a leader for years, reading his books, attending his conferences... only to find out that he wasn't all that he said he was. I didn't know him personally, but it still hurt to learn how he hid his dark side for decades. I felt betrayed.

If you have been betrayed by religious leaders, it's important to know that Jesus was betrayed by them too. He understands how you feel. He's been there. You're not alone.

But Jesus wasn't just betrayed by religious leaders. He was rejected by his disciples...most notably Judas. At the Last Supper Jesus said:

"Very truly I tell you, one of you is going to betray me." His disciples stared at one another, at a loss to know which of them he meant. One of them, the disciple whom Jesus loved, was reclining next to him. Simon Peter motioned to this disciple and said, "Ask him which one he means."

Leaning back against Jesus, he asked him, "Lord, who is it?" Jesus answered, "It is the one to whom I will give this piece of bread when I have dipped it in the dish." Then, dipping the piece of bread, he gave it to Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot. John 13:21-26

Betrayal is interesting. At what point do the scales tip in favor of betrayal? For Judas, it had to do with money.

Then one of the Twelve—the one called Judas Iscariot—went to the chief priests and asked, "What are you willing to give me if I deliver him over to you?" So they counted out for him thirty pieces of silver. From then on Judas watched for an opportunity to hand him over. Matthew 26:14-16

30 was the magic number.

30 was the tipping point where it was worth selling out Jesus.

It reminds me of the movie, "Indecent Proposal" where Robert Redford offered Demi Moore, a married woman, a million dollars to spend the night with him. Her tipping point was a million dollars. She had a price where she was willing to risk her marriage and reputation making the point that if you have a price where you will sell yourself, even if it's a million dollars, then you are no better than the person who sells themselves for \$50.

The movie and the story of Judas beg the question: is there a price where you'd sell out a friend, or a family member, or even Jesus? If your fear of loss is high enough, or your greed for gain is great enough, do you have a tipping point where you will choose to betray someone? It's easy to point the finger at others. But it's only fair to ask if we are just as guilty.

Well, it must have been a big relief to Peter and the others when they learned that they weren't the ones who would betray Jesus. You see, I think there was something inside of each one of them that had considered skipping out on Jesus. And deep down, they knew it.

They were probably fine with Jesus until he said he would be crucified. That was a game changer. Following Jesus was no longer a fast track to glory. Now, following Jesus made them marked men and they hadn't signed up for that. Peter was quick to profess his dedication.

Even though all will fall away because of you, I will never fall away. Matthew 26:34

Peter was probably overcompensating for his inner fear, like many do. And Jesus knew it, telling him:

Will you really lay down your life for me? Very truly I tell you, before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times! Matthew 26:34

And sure enough, Peter did betray Jesus, along with all the others.

When we talk about betrayal, we are talking about a betrayal of trust, meaning that the person who betrayed you was most likely close to you: a friend or family member. Not a stranger. That means you depended on them. You committed a part of your life to them, so when they walked away, they left you hanging.

Even if you didn't know them personally, you relied on them for something. You had a place in your heart for them. That's why it hurts so much when they abandon you. It can leave you feeling empty and disillusioned...you might want to give up. Not only did they leave you hanging, but it caused you to doubt yourself...to question your value. Why would someone leave you if you were truly valuable?

This is when life can get dark. Betrayal can throw you into a tailspin. But this is where we need to look to Jesus to right our course. For example, think about this: Jesus was the most valuable person who ever walked the earth, but he was betrayed and rejected. His betrayal had nothing to do with his value. So if you've been rejected, don't assume that YOU are the problem. Betrayal reveals a weakness in the betrayer, not the betrayed, right?

I want us to understand the mindset that Jesus had that got him out of the dark. Jesus knew who he was. Listen to what John said about Jesus:

Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God; John 13:3

That's all anyone really needs to know, right? You came from God and are returning to God. It was this confidence that sustained Jesus through his darkness. And it will sustain you too. No one can take that away from you.

God created you, so God is the one who determines your value. If I fail you, or a family member fails you, or your boss fails you, those rejections will all hurt. No doubt. But no one person determines your value. Only God can do that. So don't collapse in despair assuming that you were betrayed because of your worthlessness. Don't go there.

In your moments of betrayal and rejection it's important to turn to God... to remember what he says about you. I like what David said in Psalm 41 after he had been betrayed by his friends. He said to God:

...you uphold me and set me in your presence forever. Psalm 41:12

David was convinced that his betrayer didn't have the power to defeat him. It's easy to go there...to think that you are ruined. That your betrayer had some kind of special power in

your life and now that they are gone you are undone. You can't make it without them. That's not true. Don't believe that.

The devil wants you to believe that. The devil wants you to think that you are less of a person without your betrayer. But David said, No, GOD upholds me...not any person. The word "uphold" means that God has you in his grasp and won't let you go. He is the one sustaining you. He won't fail you.

God upholds you and David said God does that by setting you in his presence. That means you immerse yourself in thoughts of who GOD is and who God says you are and not dwelling on your betrayer and what they say about you. We so often get that backward. And that's what leads us to despair. God wants us thinking about his greatness and what he can do in you, not about what your betrayer has done to you.

When we look to other people for our sense of identity, we are looking for trouble. We set ourselves up... only to be let down. But when you look to God for your identity, you see yourself through his eyes. You're his child, his creation. You're one of the people that Jesus died for. You can't be more valuable than that.

When you believe that deep in your soul, it doesn't matter who sells you out. Nothing will rock your boat. Nothing will keep you down. Not your ex, or your abuser, or your boss, or your parents, or your kids... Do you believe that?

It's so important that we don't let other people define us. Our identity has to be tied into something unchangeable. When we allow ourselves to depend on others to determine our worth, we are at their mercy. We rise and fall with their moods or their bad decisions.

But sitting in God's presence means you refuse to dwell on the dark side...you refuse to be defeated or retaliate. Jesus said:

Bless those who persecute you. Bless and do not curse."

When you know who you are, you are able to bless those who persecute you. When you don't know who you are, you live in anger and fear feeling the need to defend yourself and seek revenge.

David closes his psalm by saying that God is worthy of praise.

Praise be to the LORD, the God of Israel, from everlasting to everlasting. Amen and Amen. Psalm 41:12, 13

You see, God is God whether people betray you or not. God deserves your praise because he is the ONE Person who you can count on never betraying you. The Bible says, "if we are faithless, he remains faithful." 2 Timothy 2:13

Whatever darkness you might find yourself in today, I want you to know that Jesus can guide you out of it and into the light. Don't give up. The same strength that Jesus had is available to you.

Prayer: Jesus, this room is full of stories of hurt and betrayal. I pray that people will invite you into their darkness today to lead them into the light. Please show us the way so we can live the life that you created us to live. Amen.

## **Out of the Darkness and Into the Light**

Part Two: Connecting

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4.7.19

### **Outline:**

You overcome your darkness when you:

Reach out to connect with others.

*Jesus invited his disciples to pray with him.*

Help others.

*Jesus washed his disciples feet hours before his arrest.*

Have "bigger than self" goals.

*For the joy set before him, Jesus endured the cross.*

Receive help from others.

*Jesus welcomed Mary's love and gratitude.*

**Going Deeper:** use the following questions for personal reflection and/or to discuss with family, friends and/or your small group.

What is your typical behavior when you go through a season of darkness? Do you tend to isolate or reach out and invite others into your life? Why is that?

What has happened as a result of your behavior?

What were the four actions that Jesus took during his darkness? Which of the following scripture relate to the action?

Matthew 26:36-40

John 13:4,5

Hebrews 12:1-3

John 12:1-8

How might these four actions help you to overcome your darkness?

Remy shared research to validate Jesus' action. Did anything surprise you about the research? How so?

People often take a break from serving others and being generous when they go through a hard season. Why might this be the wrong thing to do?

The research shows that moving toward a person in pain triggers hope and courage. Who is in your life today that you could contact to either receive hope and courage from them, or offer it to them?

What is a “bigger than self” goal for your life that will help you see your life in a bigger context than just your personal success or failure? What kind of positive impact do you want to have on the people around you? What mission in life or at work most inspires you? What do you want to contribute to the world? What change do you want to create?

## **Message**

Last week I started by saying that I’m concerned about our culture. I’m concerned because I think we are losing our ability to overcome hardship and setbacks. I say that just by looking at the rise in suicides. Death by suicide has increased by 33% in the last 20 years. Suddenly quitting on life has become a viable option.

It’s like the bottom has dropped out for people emotionally. Some of us have lost the ability to find hope and bounce back from hardship. I can understand how that might be true if you don’t believe in God and his power to transform your pain.

But if we say that we are followers of Jesus then I want to make sure that we understand why knowing Jesus and the power of his resurrection can bring us out of the darkness and into the light.

I am taking these weeks leading up to Easter to follow Jesus through his time of darkness when he was betrayed by religious leaders, his followers, his government, and the people at large. Everyone abandoned him, yet he didn’t give up.

Last week I looked at one thing that Jesus did to overcome his darkness. Today, I want to look at four more actions that he took that we can use as our example. They are very subtle. You might not even notice them because they seem so normal. But I think Jesus was modeling for us what we need to do in times of darkness.

Now, there’s a problem in using Jesus as an example. Too many people look at Jesus and say, “Well, sure. Jesus could do that because he was God. But he’s out of my league. I can’t do what he did. That’s not helpful.”

But that’s where people get it wrong because although Jesus was God, he came in the form of a human being. He experienced life just like you and I experience it. So we really can do what he did.

To prove my point, I’m going to share with you some research from a book called *The Upside of Stress* by Kelly McGonigal. The book relates a number of studies showing what people can do to overcome their stress.

Four of the recommendations in the book were exactly what Jesus did. And the book showed why they are so helpful. So, whenever I see research backing up what I read in the Bible, I find that to be very compelling, and I hope you do too.

The first thing that Jesus did to overcome his darkness was to reach out to connect with others. When Jesus' week of suffering drew near, he started to tell his disciples what was about to go down. There are many of examples of this in the gospels. Jesus didn't keep his pain to himself. He invited his close friends to share his pain.

Unfortunately, his disciples didn't offer him any comfort. In fact, one time after Jesus shared his fate of crucifixion, James and John had the nerve and audacity to have their mother ask Jesus if they could sit at his right and left hand, thinking that he was going to become the King of Israel. They were totally clueless and missed their chance to comfort Jesus. This is a good example of where we tend to minimize Jesus' need for comfort. We say, well, he was God. He didn't need the comfort. I don't believe that. His humanity needed comfort just like we do.

The same thing happened in the Garden of Gethsemene. Jesus invited Peter, James and John to join him in prayer. But do you remember what happened? They fell asleep.

Jesus went with his disciples to a place called Gethsemane, and he said to them, "Sit here while I go over there and pray." He took Peter and the two sons of Zebedee along with him, and he began to be sorrowful and troubled. Then he said to them, "My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me."

Going a little farther, he fell with his face to the ground and prayed, "My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will." Then he returned to his disciples and found them sleeping. "Couldn't you men keep watch with me for one hour?" he asked Peter. Matthew 26:36-40

Jesus' disciples failed him, but at least Jesus did the right thing. In his darkness, he didn't withdraw and isolate. He didn't sit and feel sorry for himself. He reached out and invited people into his life. He tried to connect.

In *The Upside of Stress*, the author, Kelly McGonigal says:

"...the way to find hope is to connect, not escape." page 161

In fact, she goes into detail about how God designed our bodies to move us to connect with people.

She said that when you are under stress, the brain releases two chemicals. One, a chemical called oxytocin, is released in your body to make you want to connect with other people. Another chemical, dopamine, is also released to motivate you to make that connection.

Now, unfortunately, many people let fear override the impact of these chemicals. They are afraid to be vulnerable and reveal their pain to others. Brene Brown put it like this:

When we feel isolated, disconnected, and lonely, we try to protect ourselves. In that mode, we want to connect, but our brain is attempting to override connection with self-protection. That means less empathy, more defensiveness, more numbing, and less sleeping.” —Brené Brown, *Braving the Wilderness*

But when you do these things; self-protect by being defensive, numbing, etc., you are actually working against God’s design. God created you to connect with people during dark times so that you’ve be filled with hope and courage.

When you isolate and obsess about your pain, you miss out on what God had planned for you. God created you to be in relationship. When you neglect that part of your humanity, you suffer for it.

So step one in moving out of your darkness is to reach out and connect with a friend or family member. If you are short on friends, you’ve got some pastors here and small group leaders, and LEAD team members, that would love to meet with you and hear what you are going through. That’s why gave us the church. Not just to attend a meeting on Sunday’s but to be a place where you find comfort and comfort others.

The second thing Jesus did during his time of darkness was to help others. Instead of shutting down and dwelling on his betrayal Jesus continued to think about serving others.

For example, before he joined his disciples for the Last Supper, John tells us that Jesus...

...got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist. After that, he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples’ feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around him. John 13:4,5

Jesus used every minute of his life as a chance to help others.

Now this is where the research really impressed me, so I have a few quotes for you. This might be one to put on your mirror:

If you struggle with avoidance, self-doubt or feeling overwhelmed, helping others is one of the most powerful motivation boosters you can find. Page 164

The author said that when you reach out to help someone else, you trigger a release of chemicals in your body that is like flipping a switch in your brain from despair to hope.

Now, I realize that when you are in a season of darkness, the last thing you want to do is help someone else. You often think that you don’t have time to help others. You need to deal with your own stuff first.

But when researchers instructed hurting, time crunched people to help others in need, they said:

Surprisingly, helping someone else decreased people’s feeling of time scarcity more than actually giving them extra time did.

What this means is, the researchers had two groups of stressed out people, people who didn't think they had any extra time for anyone else. They asked one group to spend time helping others, and they freed up the time of the people in the second group.

At the end of the study they said that the people that helped others felt like they had more free time than the people who were actually given more time in their lives.

That led the researchers to conclude:

When individuals feel time constrained, they should become more generous with their time— despite their inclination to be less so.

And so the author made this recommendation:

When you are feeling overwhelmed, look for a way to do something for someone else that goes beyond your daily responsibilities. Your brain might tell you that you don't have the time or energy, but that is exactly why you should do it.

She goes on to say that you don't have to make grand gestures to help others. You don't have to go on a mission trip or give away thousands of dollars. She tells people to just look for the little ways you can help people as you go about your day. Just that simple mindset turns your focus off of your problems and it changes your brain chemistry.

So the point here is that: if you are in a dark place, helping others will move you out of that dark place. And if that doesn't motivate you, then maybe a health risk might. Studies showed that...

Among people who did not serve their communities in some way, every stressful life event, like a divorce or job loss, increased the risk of developing a new health problem. But there was no such risk for people who regularly spent time giving back. For them, there was zero association between stressful life events and health.

But wait...helping others can actually save your life:

Among those who did not routinely help others, every significant stressful life event increased the risk of dying by 30 percent. But participants who went out of their way to help others showed absolutely no stress-related increased risk of death.

I love this research because it backs up what I've been preaching here for the last sixteen years. I regularly talk about the importance of connecting with each other and helping others. I mean, it's built right into our logo: connect, grow, serve, Right?

I like how Kelly McGonigal put it. She said:

The best way to help these individuals who are often labeled "at-risk" might be to turn them from victims into heroes, and to help them help others.

That's my job, and that's our job with each other: to help turn people from victims to heroes by helping each other help others.

Okay. The first two points alone are worth being here today, but I've got two more for you. Next...

If you want to move out of your darkness, you need to have "bigger than self" goals. A bigger than self goal means that you aren't living your life just for yourself. You know, it's much easier to give up on life when your only goal is your personal success, because if you fail... or if someone fails you, then you tell yourself: why bother? Why go on? It's not worth it.

But a bigger than self goals says, no, I'm not just here for myself. I'm here on earth to work with a team of people to make an impact on others. If I quit, I won't make the impact that God put me on this earth to achieve.

There's a verse in the Bible that shows how Jesus had a bigger than self goal that kept him motivated in the face of his suffering. The writer of the book of Hebrews wrote to a group of discouraged Christians. They were suffering persecution and were tempted to give up on God and maybe their lives. So the writer encouraged them with these words:

...let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart. Hebrews 12:1-3

For the joy set before him, Jesus endured the cross. This is the attitude that we are losing in our world today. We are unwilling to endure the pain of life but I think it's because we don't see the joy set before us. We can't see how God can use our pain for good, so we give up.

But Jesus said (my paraphrase), Look, no one likes torture and crucifixion, but when it's over, I will have reconciled all of humanity to God. It's worth it. That's what keeps me going. God will make good out of my pain.

That's what Easter is all about, right? God making good out of our pain. We've lost sight of this.

In the same way, as you face your pain, your troubles and hardship, if you have a bigger purpose than mere survival, if you are committed to helping your family, or friends, or church, or some ministry... you fill in the blank. If you are working to make a contribution to something or someone beside yourself, you can endure anything with God's help.

Again, quoting the book:

When people are connected to bigger than self goals, they are more hopeful, curious, caring, grateful, inspired, excited. In contrast, people who are self-focused are more confused, anxious, angry, envious, lonely.

Which of these descriptions fits you? If you want to be more hopeful, curious, grateful, inspired, and excited then you need to find a bigger than self goal.

The author said that one of the easiest ways to find a bigger than self goal is to view yourself as the source of whatever support you want to experience.

For example, she told about two twenty something female roommates. As they got to know each other, they found out that they had something in common: They both lost a parent but never had anyone to process their grief.

So they decided to do something about it. They hosted a supper once a month and invited other young woman who had lost a parent to join them. The idea caught on, and now it's a national organization and these dinner parties are offered across the United States, all because two young women decided to be the source of support that they wanted themselves.

The author concludes:

If there is something that you want to experience, or a community you wished were available to you, how can you be the starting point of creating it for others? People who allow themselves to have a courageous vulnerability— to look first for how to support others, and to use their own suffering as the point of connection— end up receiving more social support themselves.

What she's suggesting is that, rather than looking for support from others, maybe you need to create the support that you would like, and then offer that to others. That way, not only do you get the help you need, but you help others in the process.

There is one more thing that Jesus did to help him out of his darkness that you can do and that is to receive the help that others offer you.

I can't imagine the anguish that Jesus lived with as he approached the Passover knowing that he would be rejected, beaten, and finally crucified. The religious leaders were out to kill him. His own disciples were clueless to his pain. He was the loneliest man on earth.

One day Jesus was invited to a dinner to celebrate the resurrection of Lazarus. In the book of John, chapter 12, John tells us:

Six days before the Passover, Jesus came to Bethany, where Lazarus lived, whom Jesus had raised from the dead. Here a dinner was given in Jesus' honor. Martha served, while Lazarus was among those reclining at the table with him. Then Mary took about a pint of pure nard, an expensive perfume; she poured it on Jesus' feet and wiped his feet with her hair. And the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume.

The next few verses describe how Judas complained that she was wasting money. But Jesus responded by saying...

Leave her alone...It was intended that she should save this perfume for the day of my burial. You will always have the poor among you, but you will not always have me.”  
John 12

Mary was the only person in the world that day who thought to encourage Jesus. She had no idea that this meal would be her last chance to show Jesus her gratitude and love. Thankfully, she seized the moment... really at great risk.

We don't see the scandal in this story but a woman in that culture would never enter the presence of a room full of men like this. It's still true in the Middle East today. Plus, of course, she was berated by Judas for wasting the perfume.

But Jesus didn't send her away. He didn't use cultural reasons to justify sending her away. And he didn't use false humility either, like saying, "Oh Mary, you shouldn't have done that. Thanks but no thanks. I'm fine. It's all good. Don't worry about me."

We often do that, don't we? People take the risk of coming into our space to encourage us and we send them away, minimizing our pain. Why do we do that? These people are emissaries from God, sent to offer you hope and courage in a time of darkness. Receiving them will trigger all kinds of positive feelings in your brain. But we are too insecure, or too proud, to let them into our lives. That's a shame.

Jesus didn't send Mary away. Jesus knew the significance of her action. She thought she was just expressing her gratitude. But Jesus knew that God had sent her as a priest to anoint him for his suffering and death that was to follow. He understood that she was on a holy mission from God to encourage him and so he received her.

So when God sends someone your way who wants to help you and encourage you, don't send them away. Talk to them. Let them know what you are going through. They might not say all the right things. That's okay. At least they are there for you. Go and tell them what they say wrong, but don't send them away.

Now, I know that some of you are in darkness today. I heard back from a few of you this past week in response to the first message in this series. So, I hope and pray that you will follow the example that Jesus set for us.

If you reach out to others, help others, have a bigger than self goal, and receive help from others these steps will lead you out of your darkness and into the light.

But... you have to take the steps and that's often very hard when you are in a dark place. I understand that, but that's why this information is so important. You need to understand that God created you to be resilient. He created you to be a Victor, not a Victim. His Spirit wants to move you out of your darkness and into his light.

So let me pray for you to that end...

Father, I thank you that, like the psalmist said, we are fearfully and wonderfully made. You designed us to handle the trials of life. You sent Jesus to be an example for us. You've even given us research to validate our resilience. Now I ask that everyone here would invite you to fill them with the life they need to follow Jesus' example. Help us, even today, to reach out to connect with others, to find ways to help others every day, to discover a bigger than self goal, and to receive the help that others offer us. Turn us from Victims to Victors over our darkness. Amen

## **Out of the Darkness and Into the Light**

Part Three: *Letting Go*

By Remy Diederich

4.14.19

### **Outline:**

1. Jesus owned his pain, not blaming, justifying, or complaining.
2. Jesus surrendered his will so that he might honor God's will.
3. Unforgiveness is thinking, "You owe me!"
4. Forgiveness shifts the focus from lamenting what your offender took from you to anticipating how God can restore you.

Download Remy's book: STUCK...how to overcome anger and reclaim your life.

- Go to Google Play, or the Apple Appstore, and download the Kindle Reader (free).
- Open the app and click on "Kindle Store."
- Search for STUCK by Remy Diederich
- It should be listed as free until April 18th. Click purchase.

**Going Deeper:** use the following questions for personal reflection and/or to discuss with family, friends and small group.

1. On a scale of 1 to 10, how big of a complainer are you? (10 is the worst). Why is that?
2. On a scale of 1 to 10, how easily do you forgive big offenses? Why is that?
3. Read through Matthew 26 taking note of every time Jesus is offended. What strikes you about what Jesus said and didn't say? Contrast this with how you would typically respond in that situation.
4. What was it about Jesus that enabled him to respond with such a clear head and not retaliate? How might you do the same?
5. How did Remy define forgiveness?
6. Think about some of the big offenses in your life. Do you still have a feeling of "YOU OWE ME"? Why is that?
7. How does unforgiveness keep you stuck in the past?
8. What did Remy say might help you to let go and forgive?
9. Consider downloading Remy's book STUCK and reading it with others.

### **Message**

We are spending these weeks leading up to Easter following Jesus to see what we can learn from him about handling pain and hardship. Some of you are probably in that place and I want to help you. I want to help you move out of the dark and into the light.

I started two weeks ago looking at the pain of Jesus' betrayal. I know it resonated with some of us. Betrayal is just a part of life. We trust people with our money, and our future, and our

hearts and sometimes they let us down. Worse than that, they might even turn against us. That's painful.

Or maybe your betrayer isn't another person. Maybe it's your health, or your finances, or your career. Maybe one of these let you down.

Or maybe YOU are the betrayer. Maybe you are the person who let others down. You've hurt people and that awareness now hurts you. You wonder if you can ever find forgiveness and restoration. And you wonder if you can forgive yourself.

No matter how you've been betrayed, you might be in a dark place today. So how do you handle the pain of betrayal? Or the pain of hardship? Well, over the last two weeks, we've looked at some solutions, involving turning to God and turning to other people. Today we are going to look at turning to face your betrayer, whoever that might be.

First I want to look at how Jesus talked about, or talked to, his betrayers. We are going to focus in on the encounters Jesus had in Matthew 26.

...Jesus... said to his disciples, "As you know, the Passover is two days away—and the Son of Man will be handed over to be crucified." Matthew 26:1,2

That's all he said. He didn't add anything about how wrong it was. He didn't whine or complain. There was no rant against his persecutors or any attempt to elicit pity from his followers. Jesus owned his pain and chose to walk the path set before him.

Maybe that's why his disciples didn't take him seriously. I mentioned last week how James and John ignored what Jesus said about crucifixion and made their move to get Jesus to promote them in leadership. Jesus was so matter of fact, and understated maybe they didn't realize what he was saying.

Let's drop down a few more verses. Now Jesus was sharing the Last Supper with his disciples.

When evening came, Jesus was reclining at the table with the Twelve. And while they were eating, he said, "Truly I tell you, one of you will betray me." They were very sad and began to say to him one after the other, "Surely you don't mean me, Lord?" Jesus replied, "The one who has dipped his hand into the bowl with me will betray me. Matthew 26:20-23

Again, Jesus simply stated the truth without making any derogatory comments. No accusations or incriminations or condemnations. He didn't call out Judas in front of everyone and shame him or humiliate him. That would have been so tempting. Jesus just said to Judas, go do what ya gotta do.

I'm sure the disciples all breathed a sigh of relief knowing that they weren't the ones who would betray Jesus. But before they got too comfortable with that thought Jesus told them they would all abandon him...

Then Jesus told them, “This very night you will all fall away on account of me, for it is written: “ ‘I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered.’ But after I have risen, I will go ahead of you into Galilee.” Peter replied, “Even if all fall away on account of you, I never will.” “Truly I tell you,” Jesus answered, “this very night, before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times.” Matthew 26:31-34

But notice, even with the revelation of their eminent abandonment, there were no sermonettes about how disappointed he was with them. No lectures on their unfaithfulness. No frustrated words saying, “HOW COULD YOU... after all that I’ve done for you?” Nope. Nothing like that.

You know, as I observe the world today I think we are living in the age of outrage. It seems that almost everyone is upset about something or someone and they feel compelled to let others know about it. People jump on facebook or twitter in hopes of taking down their foes with tirades of disgust. But Jesus never did that. He trusted that God would defend him.

Then Jesus took his disciples out to the Garden of Gethsemane to pray. Let’s listen to his prayer:

Going a little farther, he fell with his face to the ground and prayed, “My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will.” Matthew 26:39

Jesus showed his humanity here. He wasn’t above the pain that he knew was about to be his. But he didn’t complain to God about it. He didn’t get mad at God. He didn’t ask, “Why me?” or tell God how unfair it was.

As painful as his life was, Jesus showed that he was totally surrendered to God’s will. He was willing to do whatever it took to do the right thing to honor God.

In all of these encounters that we just read, the common theme is trust. Jesus could face the worst possible scenario and not freak out or meltdown because he trusted the love of his Father. He trusted that God would make good of his pain. And that’s the message of Easter. God can make good of your pain.

This is the place where we often break down spiritually. We look for the easy way out... some kind of shortcut... to spare us from any more pain. We cease to be concerned about doing the right thing or honoring God. We just want out. We want the nightmare to end. We might offer up a brief prayer to God... basically, God, get me out of this mess. And when nothing changes immediately, we hit the eject button.

Doing the right thing isn’t our priority because doing the right thing might mean confronting someone and having a hard conversation. Or doing the right thing might mean losing a lot of money, or selling something that you really want to keep. Doing the right thing might mean forgiving someone and passing on a chance to offer some payback.

And we just don't think we are up for it. We fear that "doing the right thing" will only lead to more loss and pain. But it all boils down to whether or not we trust God. Do we believe that God rewards those who do the right thing?

For Jesus, doing the right thing meant being nailed to a cross so all humanity could be restored to God. He was able to sacrifice his happiness in order to honor God and help people. And he trusted that God would reward him for it.

Judas was certainly someone who had trouble doing the right thing.

Going at once to Jesus, Judas said, "Greetings, Rabbi!" and kissed him. Jesus replied, "Do what you came for, friend." Then the men stepped forward, seized Jesus and arrested him. With that, one of Jesus' companions reached for his sword, drew it out and struck the servant of the high priest, cutting off his ear. Matthew 26:49-51

Jesus referred to Judas as his friend. He didn't resist arrest. And we start to see why Jesus was so cool when he said this:

"Put your sword back in its place," ..."for all who draw the sword will die by the sword. Do you think I cannot call on my Father, and he will at once put at my disposal more than twelve legions of angels? Matthew 26:52,53

Jesus was totally comfortable in the situation because he knew that God was in control. He knew that submitting to the arrest would put him on the cross, but he trusted that God would deliver him.

I wonder... if you are facing some kind of pain today... are you confident that God will deliver you? Jesus' story is here to encourage us that we can trust God with our pain. Delivering you doesn't mean that he's going to solve all your problems. But Jesus wants you to know that God can use your pain for good.

Let's read one more encounter here in Matthew 26:

The chief priests and the whole Sanhedrin were looking for false evidence against Jesus so that they could put him to death. But they did not find any, though many false witnesses came forward. Finally two came forward and declared, "This fellow said, 'I am able to destroy the temple of God and rebuild it in three days.'" Then the high priest stood up and said to Jesus, "Are you not going to answer? What is this testimony that these men are bringing against you?" But Jesus remained silent. Matthew 26:59-63

Silent. When I was a much younger believer this really bothered me. I wanted Jesus to protest. I wanted him to list all the reasons that what they were doing was unfair. It seemed like such a sellout to say nothing. Insert outrage here. But this is where we can really learn from Jesus.

You know, expressing your outrage might give you a degree of satisfaction but it's most often at the expense of someone else. And it shows a total lack of trust in God.

But I don't smell any hint of that in Jesus. His accusers were outraged with him, but Jesus refused to lower himself and engage in their petty drama. He operated out of a different play book. He didn't need to answer their questions.

And so my first lesson for us this morning to help us move out of the dark and into the light is to put your trust in God. Rather than complaining about what happened or blaming people who caused it, ask God what he wants to show you about YOURSELF. What comes to the surface because of your pain? What kind of attitudes? Resentment? Bitterness? Revenge?

And then, ask God what he wants to show you about HIMSELF. Ask God to use the pain in your life to make you more like Jesus... to create in you a heart of humility and submission to his will.

Now, if you have some valid concerns about your situation that you believe needs to be voiced, that's fair. But then take your concerns to someone who can do something about them. Go to the source. Your offender. If that's not safe then go to a counselor or a trusted friend to vent and get perspective and direction. You might even need to call the police or see a lawyer. But don't spew your outrage to anyone that will listen. That's not helpful.

The second lesson today that will move you out of darkness and into the light is to forgive those who have hurt you.

I think it's plain to see from the verses that I've already quoted that Jesus didn't hold anything against anybody. To hold unforgiveness in your heart means that you believe someone owes you something. You may not say those words, but that's what you feel... "you owe me!"

The problem with believing that someone owes you is that you can never be paid in full. Even if someone could pay you back, they can't undo what they did. They can't take away the hurt they caused you.

So, it's imperative that you find a way to get paid back without looking to your offender to do it.

If you think about it, the world owed Jesus. They owed him its love and worship. They gave him neither. But he didn't demand their worship or hold their sin against them. Jesus never put anyone under a sense of obligation.

You could reject Jesus without any fear of retribution because he didn't depend on people for his self-worth. His sense of worth came from his Father. That's why Jesus was able to forgive so easily.

Jesus was most famously quoted on the cross for forgiving his accusers. After he was hanging on the cross he prayed,

“Father forgive them. They don’t know what they are doing.” Luke 23:34

I’ve had many people tell me, “I could never do that. After what’s been done to me, I’ll never forgive.” They say that because unforgiveness is a form of passive punishment. It’s their way of getting back. But it is also their self-protection. Their offender made them feel belittled...devalued...shamed. And so they vowed to never let that happen again. That’s too bad because when you shut down like that you lose a part of yourself. You might be able to protect yourself from more harm but you also prevent yourself from healing.

But Jesus would say, Look, no one can take any value from you unless you give it to them. Your worth comes from God and God only.

I mean, think about this. Unforgiveness makes no sense. Wasn’t it bad enough that someone hurt you? So, now you are going to “get back” at your offender by carrying the weight of unforgiveness throughout your life? It’s bad enough that you were hurt, but unforgiveness only continues to throw salt in the wound, over and over again and the irony is that now YOU are the one causing your own pain.

Lewis Smedes put it like this:

*Recall the pain of being wronged, the hurt of being stung, cheated, demeaned. Doesn’t the memory of it fuel the fire of fury again, make it hurt again? Suppose you never forgive, suppose you feel the hurt each time your memory lights on the people who did you wrong. And suppose you have a compulsion to think of them constantly. You have become a prisoner of your past pain; you are locked into a torture chamber of your own making.*

*Time should have left your pain behind; but you keep it alive to let it flay you over and over. Your own memory is a replay of your hurt; a videotape within your soul that plays unending reruns of your old rendezvous with pain. You cannot switch it off. You are hooked into it like a pain junkie; you become addicted to your remembrance of past pain. You are lashed again each time your memory spins the tape. Is this fair to yourself; this wretched justice of not forgiving? You could not be more unfair to yourself.*

You see, unforgiveness paints you into a corner. You want your offender to make it right. They OWE you. But what if they can’t pay you back? What if they can’t make it right? Or what if they don’t want to? Now what? You’re stuck. You need to find a way to free yourself from that trap. That way is called forgiveness

Some people say they can forgive the little things but not the big things. But it’s the big things that need forgiveness. The little things you forget about in time.

The big things you’ll never forget.

You'll never forget being abused.  
You'll never forget being rejected or abandoned.  
You'll never forget that ugly divorce.

So how do you get separation from what happened? You forgive.

To forgive means giving up the right to get even. That means you won't retaliate. You won't do what they did to you. You won't speak bad about your offender or even lay awake nights ruminating on what they did to you. But it doesn't mean you will necessarily trust the person again.

Unforgiveness keeps you stuck in the past. It's like walking into the future backwards, focused on some past hurt. Suddenly your entire life is defined by your past. That's not good. You can't live the life that God has for you by clinging to the past. You need to detach from the past and turn your sight forward. Learn from the past, yes, but then give today and tomorrow your full attention.

I don't know if I've shared this diagram with you before but this wedge represents your hurt. It represents the loss that you incurred. The unforgiving person looks at the loss and points to their offender saying, "You owe me. You have to fill this back up. I'm not going to rest until you fill this up."

Now, I think it's fair to ask someone to repay you if they can in some way. But if you insist on getting every last penny from them you are sentencing yourself to a life of pain and bitterness.

So let me suggest taking a different approach. Instead, bring the loss to God. Say to God, *God, I've a got a big hole in my life. This person caused it (or I caused it) but it's broken and they can never fix it. Please forgive me for insisting that they could. I will no longer look to them to fix me, heal me, or repay me. You are my healer. I know you, and you alone, can restore me. So please, God. Make me whole again. Fill up my loss. And while you are at it, help me release the person who did this to me and not hold it against them. Please work in their life too. Draw them to you. Help them to see what they did and want to be a better person.*

Now, the Bible tells us to forgive, but it doesn't tell us how. There's no instruction manual or users guide. What we really need is a coach to walk us step by step through a process. I'd love to be that coach for you, and so I want to give you a book that I wrote called **STUCK... how to overcome your anger and take back your life.**

I've made STUCK free this week on amazon.com on Kindle. This is how you can download it to your phone, tablet or computer:

1. Download the Kindle Reader app to your phone or tablet or computer.
2. Click on "Kindle Store." Put in "STUCK, Remy Diederich."
3. Download the book for free through this Thursday.
4. Read it
5. Answer the questions after each chapter.

Prayer: Father, please help us to find our identity in you and not in what we do or in what people think of us. Help us to believe that you can turn our ashes into joy. And help us to bring closure to our past hurts so we don't miss one opportunity that you have waiting for us. Amen.

Good Friday:  
I am dead to the pain. My source of life is drawn from something else.

Pleasure and pain are, in a word, the positive and negative poles between which flow the currents of human life. Detach one pole, and this life will cease. People who ask for a painless world don't truly know what they are asking for.

From *The Allure of Gentleness: Defending the Faith in the Manner of Jesus*.

When we accept moment-to-moment events and tribulations as the place where we receive God's provision, we patiently anticipate the action of His Spirit in our lives. In hope, we do our best to find and implement the ways in which our inner self can take on the character of the children of the Highest. This is the path of radical change—change sufficient to meet the needs of the world and prepare a people to be the habitation of God.

From *The Great Omission: Reclaiming Jesus's Essential Teachings on Discipleship*.