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# Healing Themes From The Psalms

by Elaine Denman

Several years ago, there was a media extravaganza in Chicago at the opening of the Al Capone vault. Cameramen were in place hours beforehand, and the anticipation of what would be found inside was only heightened by the wait. TV commentators explained the excitement of having the mysteries of this famous person finally revealed by the contents of the vault. The time came for the opening—and to the disappointment of all, there was only emptiness.

Inside each of us is a vault. It is the private inner world of ourselves where we carefully guard our deepest feelings. Our outer selves rarely reflect the true contents of these inner vaults. Many of us go to great lengths to protect them from others, as we fear that this treasure of our true selves may not be received with understanding and love. The pain of secrets and shame from the past lies quiescent as we diligently attempt to keep such feelings locked safely away. Rarely will we open our inner worlds even to God, for fear of his divine disapproval and rejection. To maintain this facade is unhealthy and can only deepen our wounds.

Have you ever gone to a movie where you identified with the story so much that it took days to get it off your mind? You intellectually knew that it was a movie, but your feelings related so intensely to the plot that it was as if it were your own life. Your inner world was opened, and your hidden feelings

were resurrected through someone else's experiences.

Through the Psalms, our inner worlds can likewise be opened and our facades removed. We can identify with the psalmists in their questioning, their anger and their depression; in their victory, their joy and their praise. By doing so, we can learn to enjoy the freedom of expressing our own emotions to a loving God, to others—and to ourselves. As with the movie, we can relate to the psalmists in the intensity of their expressed feelings and identify with their pain and praise. Our inner worlds can be honestly opened, and only then can we receive the necessary healing that will give us the freedom to be whole.

God has created us with a wonderful capacity to think and to feel. We have each been given a left brain which dominates in cognitive, rational, problem-solving processes, and a right brain which is more sensual, analogical and creative. Both are absolutely necessary in experiencing God. In the Restoration Movement, the greater part of our experience of God has historically been from a left-brain, rational mode. Experiencing God from the right brain is what can be done through the Psalms. The writers allow us to enter their inner vaults of emotion and experience the very personal depths of their beings. The pictures are painted with images and metaphors which demand the involvement of all of our senses. Bring to mind the Twenty-third Psalm, and allow the images of the words to paint the scene in your mind.



Visualize yourself as a secure lamb in the quietness of the valley, fearlessly trusting your shepherd's care. Do you hear the brook, feel the breeze and smell the grass? Experience the tranquillity in your mind and enjoy the relaxing peace. Then translate those feelings into the message that you have a God who cares for you, watches over you and will protect you. You have just completed a simple exercise in balancing both the rational and the emotional to understand a truth about God. Carry the exercise one step further and bring to mind a situation that you are now experiencing which has caused you insecurity, fear or distrust. Take it with you back to the scene of the valley and lay it at the feet of the Shepherd. Rehearse the psalm and conclude by saying, "Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever" (Ps 23:6). Now you have applied the truth to your personal life and have experienced God's promise to you.

So what about healing? And who needs it? It has been said, "To be human is to be wounded, and to be wounded is to be in need of healing." The psalmists often expressed a need of healing even in dire situations beyond their control. We are in need of healing when we allow anything to distance us from God. Satan would love for us to believe that we cannot do much about our woundedness. The pain of our woundedness is usually deep in our inner beings, but the imagery and metaphor of the Psalms can reach into that depth and bring healing.

One of the wounds we all share is that of anger. It is one of those feelings that we tend to lock up in our inner vaults and disregard for as long as possible. The source of our anger may be difficult to define, and therefore we resist dealing with it. Or we may know very well why we are angry, and that in itself is too painful to handle. For whatever reason, we ultimately avoid dealing with anger because we are fearful of the outcome.

Unfortunately for us, somewhere along the way many of us have gotten the impression that we cannot be angry. We certainly cannot share that anger with God. Therefore, we continue to mask the feeling of anger until it eventually explodes. The psalmists were angry often; moreover, they voiced their anger to God. Our response might be, "How dare they!" We are so used to keeping that inner vault of feelings locked up that we lose sight of the healing that can be ours when we are open and honest.

In Psalm 35 we find a wonderful example of the healing process of dealing with anger. When reading this psalm, "listen" with your right brain so that the strong imagery and metaphor can have the

effect that the writer intended. The scene is set as the psalmist asks the Lord to be his defender. He then expresses his most malicious wishes for his enemies, with the confident expectation that the Lord will take care of them. His vengeance is vented, but to whom? Not to his enemies, but to the Lord. Once that is accomplished, the psalmist can feel relieved, knowing that his responsibility has been placed in the right hands (vss 9-10).

The next step is to define his anger. Simply acknowledging anger does not necessarily complete the healing process. The psalmist explains the pain of betrayal, loss and rejection. In his pain he cries, "O Lord, how long will you look on" (vs. 17)? But he is able to turn it over to God and even give thanks and praise in anticipation of God's help. His anger is still in the realm of God's control.

Finally, the psalmist places the control of and responsibility for his enemies with the Lord. He obviously is still in pain, but he has developed the spiritual maturity to rise above the situation so that it is God who can be praised for his behavior. His concern is that even those who are the object of his anger will be able to see God in the picture and praise him.

As you read this psalm, bring into the picture your own anger and allow yourself to identify with the writer in all of the imagery. Walk through the process of healing the anger as does the psalmist, and then redefine that experience with the rational concept of being angry without sinning. Healing takes place when we are able to release the anger, define it, allow God to take it and then focus on our responsibility to be a witness for the God of grace, even to our "enemies." The situation does not have to change—we do!

Many other healing themes such as depression, anxiety, forgiveness, rejection and grief could be demonstrated from the Psalms. Have you ever asked yourself why the Psalms were passed on to us? Were they given only so that we could have inspirational songs or good devotional material? Those are obviously appropriate uses of the writings, but perhaps there is more. Within the lines of the 150 psalms, we find the tools that can open our inner vaults. We can partner with the writers as they share the realities of life and all of the intense emotions that life brings. The greatest beauty of all is that in the human predicament described in the Psalms, there is the ever-present, incomprehensible, steadfast love of a God who never gives up on man, and who offers a hope reaching far beyond the human need. Therein lies our "Rock," our "Strength," our "Fortress," our "Defender," and our "Song" for all the predicaments in which we may find ourselves. The

world tells us to find a specialist when we are wounded; the psalmist shows us how to find God.

Our movement has been built on turning to the Bible for answers and authority. We believe that it is inspired by God and applicable to life today. We believe that we can find the truth therein. We have upheld this conviction on matters such as doctrine, authority and salvation. But there is room for improvement in the area of our day-to-day human emotion. Do we go to God's Word in the midst of grief or rejection? Do we find solace in the outpourings of the writers in their anger or depression? Do we dare allow ourselves to cry out to God, "Where are you?" without feeling as though we are losing our faith?

The key is to spend time in the Psalms with the intention of searching for answers. Using our cognitive and emotional abilities as we approach the Psalms will enable us to experience the rich blessing found in them. Read one psalm at a sitting, spending the time and energy to fully absorb the imagery, metaphor and feelings of the author. Once the general emotion of the author is established (joyful, depressive, angry), search your heart for that emotion lying within your inner self. Reread the psalm, identifying with the author. Visualize, feel, smell the described circumstances. Now reframe those emotions into a cognitive truth for yourself. A rewarding

exercise might be to rewrite the psalm describing your own personal situation but using the framework of the psalmist. This can be shared with someone significant to you who is willing to walk with you on the journey to spiritual wholeness.

Such exercises can be advantageous to individuals privately, as well as in small group settings. They can be a wonderful way to train our young people to direct their strong emotional tendencies to God's Word. Our youth would probably be surprised by the kinds of emotions found in the Psalms! Some may have been written by a young person experiencing life with the same fears and uncertainties that we face.

Perhaps it is time that we all open our inner vaults to discover the secrets of the person within. It is time that we dissipate the fear associated with wounded emotions. It is time that we use both our cognitive and emotional senses as we come to the Word of God. The 150 psalms are passed on to us today so that we may do all of these things. Whatever healing needs to be done in our lives can be accomplished through the Psalms as they open us up to ourselves and to God.

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