

Pray More Lenten Retreat - Transcript

Bringing Our Wounds to Christ

by Ashley Stevens

Hi, my name is Ashley Stevens of Mountains Unmoved and I'm not the girl that I used to be. You see, shortly after a serious accident I had a stroke that impaired the use of my dominant right hand. And since then my handwriting has been about on par with my kindergartner's. Since then my typing speed is not what it used to be. And many days I'm adjusted to my new normal, after the accident with some of the wounds, but some days it really bothers me. One of my girls is in dance and each week she goes and part of her dance class is they all change shoes. They change from ballet shoes to tap shoes. And each week my daughter is the last one to get back on the floor after all the moms tie the tap shoes. And many weeks, it makes me sad. Many weeks, it makes me miss, makes me long for, the girl I used to be who tied shoes easily.

And I don't know about you, but the way I handle those wounds some days is I try to fix it. I try to fix it instead of taking it to God in prayer. So, for me, that would look like going home and writing more in my notebook. It would look like going and typing a blog on the computer to try to up my typing speed, to increase my hand dexterity. Many days I try to do that and hustle to fix my wounds rather than giving them over to God. I don't know what wounds you're facing today, I don't know what led you to this, but for me, over the past 10 years since the accident I've come to know and believe that my worth doesn't rise and fall based off of what I look like. It doesn't rise and fall based off of what I do, how fast I tie my shoes. It doesn't rise and fall based off of my past, any mistakes I made, or friendships that I lost. I'm very secure, now, to know and to realize and to stand firm that my identity is only found in being a child of God.

I don't know what wounds you're facing today. I don't know what led you to listen to this talk, but I do know that all of us use our own lens to interpret the world. We use our own lens to interpret how we see our social media feeds, how we see the news, conversations with friends, even how we read scripture. I just finished a book called "Present Over Perfect" by Shauna Niequist, and in it she talks about her lens, her story that she grew up telling herself, and that story, for her, was a story of shame, it was a story of interpreting what friends said, what scripture said, what the news said as being not good enough. One week she was at a retreat and at the retreat they talked about the story in scripture of Peter walking on water, and growing up she had always read that story and knew it well, and interpreted it as a

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story of her stepping out, sinking, and then being scolded by Christ. But that weekend at the retreat, a priest led her in lectio divina, and during that they read and they reread and reread the passage and they pictured themselves in it. And if you're not familiar with the story, in it, the disciples see Christ in the distance walking on water, and Peter calls to our Lord, he says, "***If you are the Lord, call me to you.***" And Christ calls Peter to him and he begins to walk on water but the wind picks up and Peter gets scared. He begins to doubt and he starts to sink. And Christ reaches out and grabs him and pulls him in and he says, "***You of little faith, why did you doubt?***"

But that weekend, the author of the book saw that story, saw that scripture passage in a different light. That weekend she realized that before Christ scolded Peter he rescued him, the rescue came first. Christ reached out his hand and grabbed Peter and brought him in before he even said a word. And I have three daughters, and I can imagine if I were in the same situation that I saw any of them begin to sink in water, have trouble keeping up, I would grab them immediately. And I would hug them and I would get them out of the water. I would dry them off long before I talk to them about water safety rules. In that book she has a quote I'll read to you now, says, "What if all my life I've been trying to walk with the Jesus who reprimands me while I'm drowning and grabs me at the last second, rolling his eyes? No wonder I didn't tell him when I'm scared or fragile."

And for me, that quote really gets me. That really moves me because it resonates that point all those times when I tried to fix my wounds rather than letting my guard down and being vulnerable with Christ. So I don't know what story you're telling yourself today. I don't know if it's a story of shame like she told herself. I don't know if it's a story of being not holy enough, not put together enough, not pretty enough, not having your act together enough. I don't know what story it is, but I do know the stories we tell are how we interpret our lives. If we're looking for a story to affirm us, we'll find it. We'll find it in the news and scripture, and in our social media feeds. If we're looking for a story to tell us we're not good enough, we'll find it. If we're looking for a story to tell us the world is evil, we'll find it. Whatever story you're telling yourself today, however you're interpreting God and his love for you, if you need to, it's never too late to change the story you're telling.

Shauna, the author of that book, said since that retreat now she begins by praying with the rescue in mind. And brothers and sisters, just as I would go to my girls who are having trouble swimming over and over and over, there would be no end to where I went and scooped them up and dried them off and hugged them and kept them safe, our God has no limits to the distance he will go for you over and over and over. If you're struggling in shame of a sin because it keeps repeating, if

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you feel afraid to keep bringing it to him, if there's a wound that's too sensitive to confess to or bring to the Lord, Christ wants to heal you. He wants to make you whole and he wants you to bring it to him. I don't know where you're at today, but if you are overwhelmed by your weaknesses, I want to encourage you with a paraphrased song of one of my favorite artists, Lauren Daigle. She says, "You are not hidden. There has never been a moment you are forgotten. You are not hopeless, God will send out an army to rescue you wherever you are, over and over and over."

Our Lord wants us to bring our wounds to him. He wants us to bring our weaknesses to him, and there is no limit to how much he'll come to you and grieve with you and cry with you and heal you over and over. Your failures, your weaknesses, your limitations, they don't surprise God, they don't bother him. And I want to leave you with this verse that applies to men just as much as women from Solomon, it says, "***You are altogether beautiful, my darling, in you there is no flaw.***" Our God is enthralled by you. He is enthralled by who you are, by how he made you. And whatever lies or whatever stories you're telling yourself, whatever weaknesses or whatever wounds you're facing, he wants to rescue you over, and over, and over.

Let's close in prayer. *In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen. God I thank you, I thank you for how you've rescued all of us. I thank you for how you continue to rescue us in our daily weaknesses and our daily failures. I thank you, Lord, that you're our father, that just as I want my kids to come to me with their hard days, with their weaknesses, I thank you that you want us to come to you, as well. That you want to sit with us and you want to cry with us, and you want to heal our hearts and you want to make us whole. I pray for everyone listening today that is in need of rescue, that they would know and understand and believe how faithful your love is, Lord. I ask this in your name. Amen. In the name of the Father, Son, Holy Spirit. Amen.*