

## Becoming a Wounded Healer



### Christopher News Notes

*“[God] heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds.”—Psalm 147:3*

**ALL OF US, AT TIMES, CAN COUNT OURSELVES AMONG THE BROKEN-HEARTED** and wounded because no life is immune from suffering. We call upon God for strength and healing, but it doesn't always arrive in the quick and miraculous manner we want. Instead, God often uses “wounded healers” as instruments of His love and grace. They can then guide us toward a better tomorrow in which we become wounded healers ourselves.

## Jesus is God's Wounded Healer

Few people want to expose their suffering to the world because they feel it makes them look weak. But the late Catholic priest and author Henri Nouwen offered a differing perspective on opening up about our pain.

Nouwen wrote, "Nobody escapes being wounded. We all are wounded people, whether physically, emotionally, mentally, or spiritually. The main question is not 'How can we hide our wounds?' so we don't have to be embarrassed, but 'How can we put our woundedness in the service of others?' When our wounds cease to be a source of shame, and become a source of healing, we have become wounded healers. Jesus is God's wounded healer: through His wounds we are healed. Jesus' suffering and death brought joy and life. His humiliation brought glory; His rejection brought a community of love. As followers of Jesus, we can also allow our wounds to bring healing to others."

## Wounded Warrior and Role Model

For U.S. Army Staff Sergeant Travis Mills, there was no hiding his wounds. Following an I.E.D. explosion during his third tour in Afghanistan, he lost parts of both of his arms and both of his legs. In addition to excruciating pain, he feared that he would now be a burden to his wife and baby daughter. And as a Christian who had always lived a good and selfless life, Travis was furious at God for allowing this to happen.

Thankfully, a revolutionary treatment eased Travis's pain, prosthetics allowed him to function well in daily life, and his wife and daughter loved him more than ever. Travis also came to a new understanding of faith. During an interview on *Christopher Closeup* about his Christopher Award-winning book *Tough as They Come*, he said, "I realized it's not okay to just be a believer when things are going your way...As much as I was upset about the situation, God had a plan for me to keep going forward."

Part of that forward movement involves running

the Travis Mills Foundation, which supports fellow wounded warriors and their families by showing them that they can still live a life of accomplishment, purpose, and love.

When asked why he chose to become a wounded healer, Travis cited a friend who didn't make it home from the war: "He doesn't take his daughter for ice cream; I do. He doesn't take his wife out for dates; I still do. I think it would be a selfish slap in the face if I were to give up on myself—a slap not just to the men who died, but to their families... [and to] the doctors [involved] in my recovery. They worked 14 hours to stabilize me, numerous surgeries to wash out everything and keep my infections down and keep me going. I just can't see myself giving up on them, on my family, or my brothers-in-arms that have passed away that didn't get the opportunity to still live after injury."

## Vulnerability is a Superpower

Actress Nikki DeLoach will never forget the hardships that the year 2017 brought. First, her unborn son was diagnosed with a heart defect that threatened his survival. And shortly thereafter, her father was diagnosed with an aggressive form of dementia that changed his loving personality. In the years that followed, her son underwent numerous surgeries that saved his life, while her father passed away in 2021.

Though some people in pain may choose to isolate themselves, Nikki relied on God and opted for a different approach. She has repeatedly done work to help Children's Hospital of Los Angeles, where caring doctors and nurses saved her son's life. She also volunteers to support the Alzheimer's Association in honor of her father's struggle.

During an interview with The Christophers, Nikki noted that the traumas we experience in life—be they at age eight, 18, or 48—can create disease in our bodies and minds if they're not addressed. "But if you can turn within," Nikki explained, "and bring compassion and love to your wound—and ask it, 'What can I learn from you? How can I grow from you?'—that's how you begin to heal yourself.

Writing at *FranciscanMedia.org*. Richard B. Patterson, PhD, shared four steps to becoming a wounded healer:

1. "In your journal, take an inventory of your wounds—healed or unhealed. Don't judge. Just notice."
2. "Assess what steps you need to take to face those wounds. What gets in the way? Pride? Shame? Fear?"
3. "Decide which healing path might work for you: support groups, 12-step programs, spiritual guides, or psychotherapists. Reach out."
4. "As you heal, be grateful and celebrate. Gratitude is a key attitude of the humble wounded healer. Celebration is sharing in God's joy."

"That's also how you begin to help others through deep compassion and empathy. Vulnerability is our superpower because it allows us to feel...When we see somebody else that's in pain, we can look at them, knowing what that feels like, and say, 'How can I help you?' Sometimes that means sitting with someone while they cry or...just listening with your heart. Sometimes it may involve a chain of people delivering food if the family's going through something. Whatever it is, when you listen from that space—and it's often from a space where you've also been wounded—you can really be a source of love and compassion for someone else."

## Heart to Heart Healing

It sounds like the kind of thing you'd see in a movie, but it really happened to Sister Ave Clark.

In 2004, a 120-ton runaway train slammed into her car while she was driving in Queens, New York. Hospitalized for close to a year, Sister Ave endured a lot of physical therapy before she was able to walk again.

Recalling her time in the hospital during a *Christopher Closeup* interview about her book *A Heart of Courage*, Sister Ave said she felt sorry for herself for a few days and asked, "Why, God?" Soon, she decided to ask a different question: "God, what am I going to do now?" God provided an answer.

Prior to her injuries, Sister Ave worked as a retreat leader and founder of Heart to Heart Ministry, in which she offers pastoral counseling to parents who have lost a child due to miscarriage, people with post-traumatic stress, victims of crime, survivors of suicide, survivors of abuse, post-abortive women, those dealing with depression or grief, and many others. While she was sitting in the hospital waiting for therapy, waiting for lunch, or waiting for dinner, different people would come into her room and have conversations with her. Instead of traveling to different churches to give retreats, she was listening and offering guidance to the people around her. In other words, she had found a way to bring healing to others because of her own wounds. Sister Ave realized, "I guess this is where God wants me. So there was a struggle, yes, but I think that's part of life, too. Struggles make us stronger, sometimes in broken places."

## Wounded Healers Offer Hope

After reading Henri Nouwen's book *The Wounded Healer* in 1983, psychologist Dr. Richard B. Patterson finally stopped living in denial and admitted that he was an addict. That admission

prompted him to seek the help he needed to be in recovery. Writing at *FranciscanMedia.org*, Dr. Patterson observed, "The healing potential within each of us comes from God! But we must find and activate it."

After some time, Dr. Patterson felt ready to help others struggling with addiction. In the process, he learned a lesson himself, noting, "What I've come to see is that wounded healers offer many things: knowledge, resources, and creative problem solving. But what they offer more than anything else is that most elusive, yet most important, spiritual and psychological experience: hope."

Still, some addicts can be resistant to change. Dr. Patterson recalled meeting an alcoholic early in the recovery process who didn't feel the need to come to AA meetings. "I'm not drinking," rationalized this man. "Why would I want to hang around with a bunch of drunks?"

Dr. Patterson pointed out "that these weren't a bunch of drunks hanging out in a bar. It was a bunch of drunks trying to help each other... Beyond that, I pointed out to him that he might have something to offer to others and that the helping of others might help him stay sober. He went back to his meetings. Becoming a wounded healer is always a process—never a finished project. There is always more to learn about being of help to others. Thus, I must always remember first to listen and remember that the wounded healer path may begin when I face my wounds, but it continues for a lifetime."

Consider the wounds that you have experienced in your lifetime. Can you use them to bring healing to others? If so, you will not only change someone else's life for the better, but also your own because you are reflecting God's love and healing.

  
**"It's better to light one candle  
than to curse the darkness."**

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*"When we become aware that we do not have to escape our pains, but that we can mobilize them into a common search for life, those very pains are transformed from expressions of despair into signs of hope." —Henri Nouwen*