

# **When I Hurt Someone Else**

Message #8 in the series "Beyond Hurt"

St. Paul's United Methodist Church of Elizabethtown  
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For seven weeks we have engaged in a series of messages called, "Beyond Hurt." Indeed, so much of what God wants for His children is for them to be united in mission, purpose, love, and grace - for the sake of their witness to Jesus Christ. But in our humanness, we end up hurting each other on the journey to oneness. Sometimes we hurt ourselves. Sometimes we hurt the ones that we love the most. Our present culture is a perfect illustration. God's Word gives us not only direction on how to navigate through our hurts, but how to move beyond them and into greater healing, forgiveness, and hope. And hope, my friends, is lacking in many corners of our culture today, amen? What would it look like if we, instead of lashing out and yelling past one another, sought to bring hope and love to those around us? Doesn't that sound like a good idea?

In our Beyond Hurt series we've examined many different aspects and perspectives on pain, suffering, persecution, and rejection. We've seen, time and again in God's word, that forgiveness, restoration, and reunification come not through anything that we can do on our own but through the timeless grace of Jesus Christ. It is through his example that he set, dying on a cross for our sins, that we begin to understand how big *his* grace is and how much we need his grace in our lives--daily. While it may be difficult to extend grace to others, particularly when they really, really, really, *REALLY*, tick us off and inflict immeasurable pain on us and those close to us, let it also be said that sometimes, just sometimes, it just as difficult to accept grace when we are in the wrong, when we've hurt others.

For some in the room today or watching online, you know exactly what I am talking about. For some of us today, we've come to the immediate realization that we've hurt someone so deeply we don't quite know how to forgive ourselves even if the offended person has extended forgiveness to us. And yet, maybe some who are hearing this message today have been in a situation, perhaps even recently, where you know you've struck an obviously painful blow to someone else. Even as the words shot out of your mouth, anger boiling over and clouding your judgement, you might even feel good about how bad you've made someone else feel.

What is happening to us when we hurt others? What does our lashing out at another person say about our witness to Christ?

I can remember once when I was in my early twenties, I was driving down Central Ave. in Wichita—a very busy four-lane most days. When I think back to who I was back then, I remember that I was always in a hurry. Whether I was going to work, coming home from work, going to the grocery store, heading out to band practice, or dropping mail off at the post office, I was always in a hurry. Because I was always in a hurry, I can also remember reacting almost immediately whenever anyone in another car cut me off or somehow impeded my progress.

So, there I was probably running an errand and on Central Ave. cruising down the left lane nine-miles-an-hour over the speed limit when a big red sedan pulled out of a filling station and swept right into my lane, taking the entire side of the road with it. Adrenaline shot through my body as I slammed on the breaks—I was probably driving a little too fast—and I instinctively yelled "Come on, Grandma!"—because only grandmas drive large red sedans.

After turning in front of me, and no doubt hearing my blaring horn, the offending driver slowly and deliberately signaled a lane change and made the maneuver after a few blinks of a turn signal. I sped up to get a look at this obviously irresponsible driver. As our cars were even with one another I looked over to see... My Grandma Jessie. She smiled and waved. And I smiled and waved. I looked in my rearview mirror that day and said to myself, "I never want to be that explosive, reactionary person again."

I've told this story for nearly twenty years, and what I love about this story is, first and foremost, my Grandma Jessie, who went home to be with Jesus just a few years ago, continues to live on in my life and I get to introduce her to hundreds of people today. But this story is also an illustration of two perspectives—one of petulant adolescent anger and the other of love.

When we hurt other people, we are default is reactionary, unbridled anger, we are not operating from a place of love, we are operating from a place of... well... anything but love. A principle that we've heard over the years from our Senior Pastor, David Woolverton is **"Hurt people hurt people."** When we are passively or actively hurting others, it is largely due to the pain and brokenness we are either avoiding all together or struggling to deal with.

Last week during her beautiful and powerful message, Becky Rupp referenced our stained-glass windows. Have you ever looked at these windows to see their amazing detail? From a very early age my son Wyatt and my daughter Mabel have noticed the stories they've heard in bible classes illustrated in these windows. Our favorite for a season was the picture in the back of David and Goliath's severed head. I'll let you guess which child of mine picked up on that one first.

A powerful story from the Old Testament is illustrated in the front of the church is the story of Joseph. "From slave to the ruler of Egypt," it says. I'd like to visit that story for a few moments today to see what this ancient story can reveal to us about how we hurt others and what we do when we are lost in our pain and brokenness.

In Genesis 37: 2-4 it says,

***Joseph, a young man of seventeen, was tending the flocks with his brothers, the sons of Bilhah and the sons of Zilpah, his father's wives, and he brought their father a bad report about them.***

***Now Israel loved Joseph more than any of his other sons, because he had been born to him in his old age; and he made an ornate robe for him. When his brothers saw that their father loved him more than any of them, they hated him and could not speak a kind word to him.***

So, imagine this if you can. Here we have the introduction of a large family. Jacob has several sons, but it is his youngest that earns his favor. It is illustrated lavishly through this coat of many colors that Joseph wears everywhere he goes. You could see Joseph coming from a great distance because this coat was so bright and so unique. It was probably very expensive and represented a tremendous gift from a proud father. While it reflected the pride of the father, it also sewed seeds of resentment by Joseph's older brothers.

Joseph had many gifts it appears. Later in the text we read of these detailed dreams he has that show sometime in the future he will lord over his brothers and father. They will come before him and bow down to him. Joseph shares these visions with his brothers, and they are naturally incensed by the idea that their younger brother, this young kid in an expensive coat, would ever be in charge of them.

While all of this, the dreams and the new coat, burned his brothers, Joseph had something else they perceived they would never have—their father's favor. In their minds at this time, no matter how hard they worked, no matter what they tried, they knew, inherently, they would never have favor like young Joseph had and that made them really, really angry.

So, when we read the text provided here in verse 4, where it says they "hated him and could not speak a kind word to him" we might pause and ask how this could be possible. I mean he was just a kid. But think about it for just a second.

**They didn't like what he wore.**

**They didn't like what he said.**

**They didn't like what he represented.**

Does that sound familiar at all? Can we think of a modern corollary that can put us in a similar state of mind as Joseph's brothers? Yes, we can.

I don't know to quantify how much ink and bandwidth, or personal energy has been spent and likely wasted in the last year dedicated to what people wear or don't wear—particularly on their faces. I've seen people turn all sorts of different shades of red based solely on something another person has said or typed in their social media feed. And I know it's probably not a good idea to get political, but if you think carefully, you can probably reference at least one instance where friend groups and families have been torn apart in both directions when a one family member's views represent something different compared to the rest of the family.

They didn't like what he wore.

They didn't like what he said.

They didn't like what represented.

So, they plotted to kill him, but hesitated, and they sold him into slavery instead. If you are familiar with the Biblical story, you know that when Joseph approached him, they overtook him—stripping him of his coat. They threw him into a pit and sold him for twenty pieces of silver to a band of Ishmaelites traveling to Egypt. To cover up what they had done, they slaughtered a pig and covered Joseph's coat in blood so they could present it to Jacob, their father, and sell him a story of how Joseph was killed by a wild animal.

Now, I'll leave it up to you to decide what motivated Joseph's brothers go to such lengths. Perhaps they were mad with rage or fueled by unbridled jealousy.

Remember, **hurt people hurt people**. Whatever their driving emotion or internal condition was we know this for sure, they were not operating from love.

What is love?

The text that was read earlier written by the Apostle Paul to the Corinthian church outlines the character of love. Being a new church, the Corinthians were learning how-to live-in community with one another. Even in the early church there were deep-seeded disagreements. However, by deliberately describing what love is, Paul also describes the deep value love has in the pursuit of Christian discipleship. If you roll back the tape just a couple of verses in 1 Corinthians 13, you get a more complete picture of what Paul is talking about.

***If I speak in the tongues of men or of angels, but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy***

***and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. If I give all I possess to the poor and give over my body to hardship that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing.***

So, let's clarify this for a moment. Paul is preaching a message of unity and love to the Corinthian church—a church like all others that has its difference. Perhaps they were practicing all these spiritual disciplines listed above but doing so with ulterior motives. And he is saying, in short, "What we do as followers of Christ we do in love for one another."

So, his letter then begs the question. What is love?

***Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.  
Love never fails.***

As I read over these verses slowly shortly after reading Genesis 37, each line punched a little harder than the one before it.

Love is patient, love is kind. Were Joseph's brothers patient or kind when a young, inexperienced boy was having dreams he couldn't possibly understand and tried to share them with the people he knew best? Perhaps they were patient at first, but ultimately no, not they weren't. Instead, Joseph's older brothers were envious and prideful. They were short-tempered and easily angered. Try as they might, they couldn't help but keep a growing list of everything they despised about their brother. Instead of unifying on the familial love they shared and protecting one another, they went another way and fed into everything they felt that wasn't love.

We are living in a time among so many who are quick to anger and slow to love. Our reactionary culture is tearing communities and families apart. Far too often we are falling into what love is not and avoiding what love is. If we are to be a unified, if we are seeking the unity that God has ordained for us, then we must choose love. It really is a choice. Love always protects, always trusts, always hopes, and always perseveres.

As followers of Christ, we must choose love; we must lead with love. Even in times of chaos and uncertainty, love must be our default. For if we do not lead with love, if we lead with pride, boasting, anger and self-centeredness, what does that say about our witness for Christ? Jesus wasn't any of those things. He was the antithesis of self-centeredness when he willingly died on a cross so that you and I could live free from the wages of sin and brokenness. Jesus's example is clear. There are no records of the wrongs you and I have committed because his blood covers them all. **Love never fails.**

As a young man Mr. Li worked in a factory near his home in China. One day he was approached by an older man who gave him a sword and instructed Mr. Li and his cohorts at the factory to kill any outsiders and Christians in their village. Mr. Li did as he was instructed to do, and by his count Mr. Li killed seven Christians in what would be later called the Boxer Rebellion of 1900. At that time there were several missionaries in China, and the number of Chinese Christians was growing at an



alarming rate. There were some in the Chinese culture that didn't like what these missionaries looked like, they didn't like what they said, and they didn't like what they represented, so they resorted to tremendous violence.

Twenty years later, missionaries from Elizabethtown, Pennsylvania returned to China to share the gospel message with the Chinese people. The Boxer Rebellion still very present in their memories, missionaries returned to region out of a deep sense of calling. A missionary by the name of Henry Oberholtzer met Mr. Li and heard his story. It turns out Mr. Li still had the sword he'd been given two decades earlier and was haunted by it. Mr. Li came to know the redeeming grace of Jesus Christ and gave his sword to Oberholtzer who returned to Pennsylvania and donated it to Elizabethtown College, which was affiliated with his church at the time.



The sword is housed in the Hess Archives in High Library. I've seen it with my own eyes, and it is chilling to know what it was used to do over 120 years ago during the Boxer rebellion. As an implement of war, this is not the best representation. It is old, rusty, and not nearly as effective as it would have been in 1900. But to many who hear this story and see these pictures, this relic is a reminder that the love of God can invade even the darkest places and transform hate at the sound of Jesus's name. Love never fails.

Several years after Joseph is sold to those Ishmaelites for 20 pieces of silver, famine breaks out in the land where Jacob and his sons live. Desperate, they decide to travel to Egypt and plead with the king to see if he will be merciful to them and share some of his resources with them. They had long forgotten Joseph, but one can only imagine the feelings Joseph felt when he immediately recognized them as they came before him, effectively the king of Egypt, ruling on behalf of Pharaoh himself, hearing their pleas for help.

If you know this story, Joseph goes through a serious period of reflection. He is immediately taken back in time to when he was 17, scared and abandoned in pit, sold into slavery, to rise and fall over and over again—all at the hands of his brothers. He had every right and all the power to crush his brothers, to repeat the cycle and react from the pain he had endured. But, instead, he chose love.

Ultimately, this family, broken by rage, envy and anger, was reunited. Love never fails.

In each of these cases, love entered a place where it was desperately needed. Joseph, Mr. Li, and even a twenty-something who was always in a hurry, made a purposeful choice. They didn't want to be the hurt, vengeful and reactive people they once were. Moving beyond hurt starts with a choice to lead with love. And it can start today.

The same love that united this family, that transformed Mr. Li, that keeps no records of wrongs nor discriminates based on your politics, postal code, or social position... This love, the love that protects and fosters life and brings feuding factions to a halt... This is the same love that can flood this very space from top to bottom and reunite what has been divided, mend what has been torn apart, join what has been chopped, this is the love that against all odds took up on the sin of the entire world and died so that we may live. Don't tell me what isn't possible when this love is readily available. Love never fails. And it will never fail you.