

# What a SOUL NEEDS

**W**e know a lot about how to care for our bodies. Our diet and exercise habits are well-informed. But what about our souls? Most problems are soul problems. Your soul is your deepest you—and God loves your deepest you. How do we take care of our souls? We need to nourish our inner lives and become people whose hearts, minds, wills and bodies are integrated and whole. This summer, we look to the middle chapters of Matthew to discover what the soul needs to find health and peace—resting in the hands of a God who loves us.



## HEALING MERCY • Matthew 12:9-21 • Tim McConnell • July 23, 2017

Pain is an awful, but awfully effective teacher. I bumped into a friend the other day and saw she had a little limp. "I think I broke my toe," she said. "How'd you do that?" "I turned and banged into a ladder in my garage. Stupid thing to do," she said. "No matter how hard you try, a toe and a ladder can't share the same space at the same time." I tried to encourage her, stubbed toes are the cost of moving forward. You don't stub your toe unless you're trying to go somewhere. Just don't try to go where the ladder already is. If you want to raise kids, Band-Aids are part of the deal. When I was single, or when Abigail and I were married before kids, we actually had Band-Aids get old in the cabinet! Not anymore. Every time I see a box now on sale I snap it up. I'm sure we'll use it. If you are going to move forward you are going to get bruised from time to time. Suffering is unavoidable. Pain is a guarantee. The same goes for your soul. And when your soul gets bruised, you need to know where to go for healing mercy.

I'd love it if my soul was totally protected from harm. I think we try to set up life that way, to protect our soul. But the soul gets bruised. If you are in motion, living life, your soul will get hurt too. It could be something I did to myself – a mistake I made that looked good at the time but hurt me deep inside. It could be something that someone else did to me – some harm done to me from the outside that was so intense it went right through my skin and into my interior life – and bruised my soul. It could be something that happened like a natural disaster, just a product of a world that doesn't quite fit the form God gave it anymore because it has been twisted and contorted away from God's original plan. I wish I could protect my soul from all these things. I could make my soul like an avatar in a video game or something like that. That way the pain isn't real. It will be like losing a life in a video game and just popping right back up. But if there is anything we are guaranteed in the teaching of Jesus it's that we are going to face and endure suffering. John Ortberg writes, "If you ask people who don't believe in God why they don't, the number one reason will be suffering. If you ask people who believe in God when they grew the most spiritually, the number one answer will be suffering." (*Soul Keeping*, p. 179) Pain is a nasty teacher, but it's effective and we all get to go through her class. Face it, we learn more by tears than we do by laughter. One time touching the hot stove beats ten times your mother tells you not to. One time banging your head against something beats half a dozen signs telling you to duck. Your soul is going to bang up against stuff. When it does, how

will you respond? Turn to Jesus. The place you meet Jesus is a healing place. Healing overrules hurting when Jesus gets involved. Jesus is a healer. Jesus is a healer for your soul.

In Matthew 12, we get into one of these nasty little fights. Can you heal on the Sabbath? Last week we talked about meeting Jesus on a Sabbath day, one day in seven to stop, pray, and fill and let your soul rest in Jesus. Now here's a bunch that have taken it to the extreme, to the point that they get mad at others if they don't sit still for a defined 24-hour period at the end of the week. So, as we wade into this, remember what the Sabbath is. If I could summarize it, "Sabbath" is where we meet with Jesus – time and place mapped out and protected, like a container, a spot, a protected opportunity where we meet with Jesus and rest our souls in His care. Sabbath is where we meet Jesus. So, here we go. It's Sabbath. Work stoppage day in some people's mind, and here is a man with a withered hand. Some said you could work to help someone on the Sabbath (that would be an exception to the rule) but only if it was a life-threatening deal. This is not a life-threatening deal. So they ask Jesus, "Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?" We know from the text it's not an honest question. They're out to get Jesus. They're out to pick a fight, and they think they've got one they can win. Observing the Sabbath is a religious thing; Jesus is supposed to be a religious guy. If we get Him working on the Sabbath, we've got Him dead to rights. But Jesus had something greater to demonstrate: that healing overrules hurting when Jesus gets involved.

Jesus could have said, "Hey buddy. Tough deal with the hand. Meet me after sundown and I'll see what I can do." But He didn't. Jesus doesn't have time to watch people hurt to satisfy false religious rules. Nope. Wouldn't you yank your sheep out of a hole? Yes, you would. And rightly. So, says Jesus, "It is lawful to do good on the Sabbath." I'm the Lord of the Sabbath, says Jesus. Don't forget, God made this day for you. How much more valuable is a man, a person, a human soul than a sheep? "Then he said to the man, 'Stretch out your hand.' So he stretched it out and it was completely restored, just as sound as the other. But the Pharisees went out and plotted how they might kill Jesus." (Matthew 12:13-14) Aware of this, Jesus withdrew, and a large crowd followed, and just to make the point perfectly clear, Jesus went ahead and healed every sick person that showed up that day! When Jesus gets involved, healing overrules hurting every time.

Then Matthew says this episode fulfills Isaiah 42. Verse 17, "This was to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet Isaiah: 'Here is my servant whom I have chosen, the one I love, in whom I delight; I will put my Spirit on him, and he will proclaim justice to the nations. He will not quarrel or cry out; no one will hear his voice in the streets. A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out, till he has brought justice through to victory. In his name the nations will put their hope.'" (Matthew 12:17-21) Now, I don't know about you but that made me wonder. How does what Jesus did have anything to do with this passage from Isaiah? It's actually not obvious, but it is profound. Look again at how Isaiah describes the coming Messiah. The Messiah comes with the power of the Spirit and the delight of the Father. The Messiah comes with justice (life the way God wants it) for all people. The Messiah comes without quarrelling and bickering. The Messiah comes with mercy and care for the weak and the hurting. The Messiah is hope for all people, any kind from anywhere.

Jesus fulfills all of this. The Spirit of God is on Jesus – He has the power to heal. His presence is like walking into the love and delight of God. Just His presence makes you believe in the delight of the Lord, believe that life the way God wants it might be possible. But look at this: even when these nasty opponents try to get Jesus to fight, He won't do it. You don't hear the voice of Jesus yelling in the streets, shouting across protest lines at opponents. He quietly builds the Kingdom one healing at a time – very present, immediately present to the pain with help and healing. Imagine being the guy with the bad hand, and the authorities around you just see you as an opportunity to start a fight, to bicker about policy or regulations or rights, all the while you just sit there in your pain. Maybe you've been there. I've been pretty close. I'm sick, my kid is sick, and for you it's all about insurance regulations and filing for this and referrals for that... "Hey! Help!" Jesus has no interest in quarreling or crying out or being a voice in the streets. And there are no papers to fill out, no processing to satisfy. No. Jesus shows up to say, "The place you meet me is a healing place. When I'm involved, healing overrules hurting." And that message gets proclaimed straight across the face of the earth until every nation, every people knows that Jesus is our hope. He's like no other.

This is the Jesus you need to know when your soul gets bruised. Who is this Jesus? Can we trust Him? "A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out." Lord, my soul is like a bruised reed. Like a plant or flower stalk, kind of battered and

tender, it would be so easy right now to break it. Even without meaning to, just be rough with it and it will snap. Not Jesus. My soul is like a smoldering wick of a candle about to go out. The slightest puff, and it's over for me. I'm so weak Lord. Not in the hands of Jesus. We can trust Jesus with our delicate souls. We can trust His hands, His healing hands, with our souls when they are at their most vulnerable, most exposed, most wounded. Life hurts sometimes. Pain is unavoidable. In the very best of cases, we face hard stuff and the soul gets bruised. In the hands of Jesus, there is healing. This is the Jesus we need, the Jesus we need to know and trust for healing mercy. The place we meet with Jesus is a healing place. Jesus brings healing.

What if you broke your leg and never went to the ER? Wouldn't that be ridiculous? What if you bruised your soul? Shouldn't you turn to the Healer of Souls? One way or another we are going to act out of our wounded-ness. Our brokenness inside works out to the outside. We can suck in on ourselves trying to defend our souls and focusing on how wrong and awful it all was that we had to suffer so, and we fall into a sucking, bottomless vortex of self-pity. Ever been there? There's no bottom to that pit. There's no end to that darkness. Our internal wounds become external problems. Or, or we turn out in faith, we entrust our bruised souls to Jesus, and He does something miraculous. He turns our broken into beautiful, our wounded-ness into healing, and instead of diving deeper and deeper into the dark realm of self-pity we find ourselves blown open in the light of Christ and able to empathize with those in pain, able to hope, able to pray, able even to find joy again.

In Ann Voskamp's new book, *The Broken Way*, she shares a lot about her own struggles. Ann has suffered a lot in her life, and has felt pretty vulnerable, pretty broken at times. She has seen her brokenness manifest itself in destructive ways, but she has also seen how Jesus can take our brokenness if we look to him for healing mercy. The soul needs healing mercy. They live on a farm, and one evening when Ann was feeling particularly fragile her husband said, "You know—everything all across this farm says the same thing, you know that, right? The seed breaks to give us the wheat. The soil breaks to give us the crop, the sky breaks to give us the rain, the wheat breaks to give us the bread. And the bread breaks to give us the feast. There was once even an alabaster jar that broke to give Him all the glory...Never be afraid of being a broken thing." (p. 25) Never be afraid of being a broken thing. Brokenness in the hands of

Jesus brings beauty. When Jesus is involved healing overrules hurting, and somehow the pain brings greater things.

I heard a podcast recently saying churches are losing their ability to lament. People are worried that we're, well, we're just not sad enough, I guess! No, they worry churches are so success-oriented that it feels wrong to be honest about pain. We need to be open about hard things. We need room to express our brokenness, where our souls are bruised. But sometimes we forget, I think, that lament and celebration are not equal counterparts. Not in the Bible. There's a tendency to address joy and sadness as equals, and to act like we are not serious unless we dwell in lament and plumb the depths of despair. But that's not the Bible speaking. In the Bible sadness gives way to joy. In the Bible darkness gives way to light. They are not equals. Darkness in fact is nothing but the absence of light, like cold is the absence of heat. Lament gives way to joy. Pain is a precursor to wholeness. Sickness is just something that happens on the way to health. Death, even death—and death is real—death is only prologue. Even death can't hold on to the one who belongs to Jesus. Its grip slips, and death itself is only prologue to eternal life in the pleasures of God's presence.

Brokenness is real and a wounded soul is enough to dwell on for an age, but it will drag you down. Give it to Jesus—your soul needs healing mercy—and watch the hands of Jesus turn broken into beautiful for His glory. He is the champion of this after all. When Jesus moves in healing overrules hurting. He's the champion of all this. It's Jesus who left the pleasures of heaven to dwell with us. It's Jesus who took the pain of our suffering on Himself. It's Jesus who agonized and suffered, feeling all the weight of all the consequences of all our wrongs and rebellions against God and His holy ways. It's Jesus who was up on that cross, and down in that grave, and it's Jesus who took all the pain of the whole world, all the brokenness of all time, and turned it into a glorious victory, a beautiful morning whose sun never sets! It's Jesus. He knows. Put your brokenness in His hands. He makes beauty out of broken things.

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## STUDY GUIDE

### "What a Soul Needs: Healing Mercy"

Matthew 12:9-21

#### Start It

- You can't get far in life without getting a few bumps and bruises along the way. Maybe that's taking it too lightly. Life includes suffering. Christian life includes suffering. Where we go with our pain is the most important question. If you look at the most important lessons you have learned in your life, I suspect many of them were learned in moments of crisis, disappointment and pain. Ann Voskamp writes, "There is no growth without change, no change without surrender, no surrender without wound—no abundance without breaking. Wounds are what break open the soul to plant the seeds of deeper growth." (The Broken Way, p. 26)

#### Study It

- Read Matthew 12:9-10. Why would there be any question about healing on the Sabbath? What could Jesus have said to avoid having charges piled up against Him by the Pharisees?
- Read Matthew 12:11-12. Which does Jesus assume is more valuable, a person or a sheep? Why do you think people might respond to the needs of a sheep but disregard those of a person? How does Jesus want us to look at mercy on the Sabbath day?
- Read Matthew 12:13-14. Why did Jesus ask the man to stretch out his own hand instead of stretching it out for him (think of at least two possibilities)? Did the Pharisees see what they wanted to see?
- Read Matthew 12:15-21. Matthew says this all happened to fulfill Isaiah 42. In what way do you see this episode fulfilling this prophecy? What is it about Jesus' actions in this event that reveals His identity as the Messiah? What qualities of mercy do we find in Jesus?

#### Pray It

*Lord, as You look down on Your children in mercy, You can see how easily we are bruised and how delicate and vulnerable the flame of our soul can be when we face difficulties and hardship. Life can be very painful. Help us to turn to You, O Lord, to find healing mercies and tenderness for our souls. In Jesus' name, Amen.*

#### Live It

List the three most difficult things you faced in the last six months and evaluate your performance. Resolve to take your pain to Jesus in every hard turn.