



# THE BARNABAS LETTER

A Newsletter from The Barnabas Center; A Nonprofit Counseling, Training & Teaching Ministry

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## working through past pain

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*By Carrie Luke*

*Carrie is married to Jim and they have Maggie and Emma. Carrie has a ministry of hope women hurt by childhood trauma and writes regularly in her blog:*

# Named In Darkness

**"I will give you a good name, a name of distinction, as I restore your fortunes before their very eyes. I, the Lord, have spoken." Zephaniah 3:20**

**F**or my 37th birthday this year, my friends gave me an incredible gift. They named me. More specifically, they compiled a list of words that they uniquely thought best described who I am in their eyes. They then placed the expressions in a colorful design and had it framed so I would always have it as an anchor. They know that often times, I run adrift.

In the center of the picture rests my given name, Carrie, which tells a large part of my story. Ever since I was a little girl, I have alone "carried" secrets, memories, and experiences that were much too heavy for tiny shoulders to bear. The wonder of receiving this gift is that it shows trauma and pain are no longer all that I "carry." My given name and life are surrounded by a sunburst of other words like tender, wife, brave, mother, writer, strength, lover of beauty, photographer, friend, laughter, redeemed, and beloved. Where once there was a heavy burden in my monogram, there is now the sweet relief of new life and hope.

The timing was ironic. This celebration came on the eve of speaking at a large women's conference. My talk was titled "How to Love Wounded Women in the Church," specifically, those who have a past history of childhood victimization in the areas of physical, emotional, and sexual abuse. The reason I was chosen for such a topic was not because I am a clinical expert. It was because for almost a decade, I was the wounded

woman. I have seen and experienced God's love and presence in community illuminate my dark places, and they have changed me.

In May 2002, I began seeing a counselor at the Barnabas Center for depression. As a young wife and mother of two, I was overwhelmed with life and an inner hopelessness that would not alleviate itself. By the third session, the counselor looked at me suspiciously and wondered aloud, "Carrie, is there sexual abuse in your past?" Taken aback and unsure of its relevance, I nodded. I have always had my memories.

She became very quiet, almost reverent, and suggested I talk to someone about those experiences. I was 28-years-old and no one other than my husband tried to understand what transpired all those years ago. After all, why would I? They were the very things I had spent a lifetime trying to forget because they were too painful and shame ridden. Besides, it was done. I could not change any of it, so why dig up what had been buried and abandoned? I was unaware that such things do not dissipate over time. I never did "grow out" of those wounds when I entered into adulthood. In fact they kept me quite small, and what I thought was laid to rest long ago had begun to rot and decay.

The next week found me sitting before her recalling my very first memory in life. I was four years old the day I stopped growing emotionally. Unable to look up while sharing, I finally

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raised my eyes and braced myself for her response. I expected disbelief - or worse, contempt and disgust. Instead I saw only tears, gently raining down her face. I was confused and angered by her display. Mostly, I was disturbed by the stark contrast between her response and my own. My eyes were dry as they had always been.

Almost a decade later, I now interpret those tears as an invitation from the Lord. It was a hallowed moment where He pulled back a curtain to reveal a glimpse of His own heart towards me. The Holy Heart that ached for all that had been taken from a child's soul, and all that had been poisoned in a child's mind.

I did not know it at the time, but accepting the tears of another on my behalf would rattle the very foundation of my life. It provoked a question: could a loving, compassionate God *and* a child unprotected from the evil that lurked to kill, steal, and destroy coexist in one mind? I could tolerate one or the other, but did not have the capacity at the time to assimilate both realities at once. My relationship with God had always been predicated on the denial of my past.

At this crossroads of faith, I would have to choose. I could fiercely hold on to the notion that my story was 'not that bad' and had no effect on the woman I had become. All I needed was to pay the counselor, leave the office, and never look back. I could continue through life with a very small view of God fashioned by my own two hands, where He was easily understood, explained, and had served me well.

Or I could accept this invitation to take the Gospel and the Man of Sorrows into my past. The implications of doing so were horrifying to consider. I did not want to come face to face with the fact that the events I loathed and tried to erase from the past were the very things that controlled and shaped my life and relationships in the present. But sometimes, we must sacrifice our today in order to heal from yesterday, so that we can live more fully alive in our tomorrows.

My deepest fear in doing so was that God's reach would not be long enough to catch me if I jumped into

the unknown. Worse yet, I feared that He would not even try to rescue me, which would confirm my secret suspicions of unworthiness born out of the years of neither being seen nor heard as a child.

The only way I would know for sure if He is indeed mighty to save was to allow Him access into my lost places. Over the next difficult eight years, I would slowly open myself up to Him and to others. Time and again, He would come find me, drape me across His shoulders, and "carry" me home. This continual act of love gave me the courage to move into the lives of others. There too, I received a homecoming embrace as I discovered there was a holy connection between my pain and sinful strategies of managing that hurt and the love and grace I received in the midst of them. My hope was to bury my past, but God longed to resurrect and redeem it. That is His way, and this work began in me one night in the dark.

Two years into my counseling, I left my therapist's office more discouraged and embittered than ever by all that I had lost and still had to overcome. I was tormented by nightmares and spent my days in hostile anger and paralyzing fear. Because I see things in metaphor, I had a new defiant resolve to accept and wear my story in the form of a burlap sack. It would be biting and uncomfortable, but after letting go of the illusions that my story was harmless, it was now the only covering I owned.

I went to sleep that night, and a man approached me in a dream. Though I did not see His face, I knew Him to be Jesus. He took off my self-made, tattered garment and gently tended to the many wounds and scars it left behind. He placed a salve over my back and shoulders. His touch was more agonizing than the original hurts because it was not condemning or polluting, but compassionate and kind. I wept as I realized He was not going to pry my story out of my hands or punish me for such a small, self-saving faith. He just wanted to meet and give to me in the midst of the truth of where I was.

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By Roger Edwards

a counselor and teacher at The Barnabas Center. He is married to Jean and they have seven children. And two granddaughters.

Roger's blog:

<http://actuallyalive.wordpress.com/>

# Dealing With Today's Pain Today

*When is the best time to plant a tree?*

*- 20 years ago.*

*The second best time? - Today.*

*Chinese Proverb*

**W**hen is the best time to deal with pain? Today - of course.

But I don't. I hesitate and procrastinate. My wounds become infected with bitterness and regret. My broken bones set wrong and I limp relationally - under-trusting and over-compensating. I know it's better to deal with pain today - but I don't. Why?

I've come to a disturbing conclusion - a conclusion that could undo me or remake me - or both.

I once believed that I avoided today's pain in order to escape additional pain. You know what I mean. I don't pick up the phone and call my wife, "Hey, listen. When you didn't notice \_\_\_\_, I was hurt." I dread the awkwardness. If we talk, I might feel the rejection again. She might confront me with my part in it - and I'll feel guilty and defensive. Even if she's understanding - I'll feel small and vulnerable. Dealing with pain today brings more pain.

But I've concluded that this isn't the main reason I run. Something deeper is at play. I am avoiding pain, alright, but more fundamen-

tally, I am avoiding today. That may seem strange, I know that it is true.

You see, I don't just run from pain. I also flee today's pleasure. For example, if someone gives me a compliment, one that is both desired and real. My first reaction? Well, it isn't to soak in the pleasure - but rather to hide. I duck, wiggle and cringe. I want the compliment, the admiration of the other, but when it comes, I can't handle it.

Sometimes, I go to great lengths to avoid pleasure - to the point of looking silly. I effusively compliment the person back ("*Oh no, no - you're much better than me*"). I find reasons why the compliment can't be real (*they don't really know me*). I've been known to flee the room. Once alone, I might question the person's sincerity or motives (*they must want something*). I actively refuse pleasure. Incredible. Why do I avoid feeling good?

And it isn't just compliments, I consistently repress all kinds of pleasure. I might, for example, be really looking forward to lunch (i.e. after a tough morning). But once I get to my food, I gulp it down without thought or enjoyment. If I were driven by pleasure, wouldn't I want to savor such a moment? Linger?

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**“You’d think receiving a compliment would be a simple thing, natural even. But for me, receiving a compliment is complicated. In fact, receiving anything is complicated.”**

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Why do I consistently hold back from intimate conversation? Why don't I stay 'in the moment' of peace? Why am I afraid to really laugh? Or rest when I have the chance? Am I too busy? Too tied into the worries of the day? Sure, but if I were truly driven by aversion to pain, wouldn't I repress the worry instead of the pleasure?

Something strange is going on. I understand why I avoid pain. But oddly, I discover that I flee good feelings too. Regardless of what today might bring - I draw back. For some reason, I won't let 'today' in - at least not fully.

### **Today**

*'Today' threatens me because of the freedom it offers. Today is the one place where I have real choices. I am bound to yesterday; I am barred from tomorrow, but today? Today, right now, I am free.*

*Historically, I have viewed 'today' as but a slice of time too narrow to make a move. But the opposite is true. Today is the widest and wildest moment in my life. Today is the pivot point to anywhere.*

*Today, I can tell my spouse the truth of what I feel. I can forgive an enemy or ask forgiveness from one. I can decide to get healthy. I can name a loss and begin a grief. I can pray or ask for help. I can admit a sin or problem. Today is full to the brim with freedom.*

*I pretend that today is too small; I act as though it is no big deal. But this is all a farce. Intuitively, I know that today is too large. I don't throw it away because it is a small, worthless thing. I avoid it because it is an immense and priceless thing. Today, with its vastness, its possibility, overwhelms me.*

*I am afraid to let it in. It threatens to burst me with freedom or crush me with responsibility. If I enter today I lose the pretention of control. (I lose the sense the escape from freedom I lose my out from responsibility.*

*(we lie in a lie. We live thinking that we can avoid choices. Avoid responsibility avoid dependency.*

*Today threatens me because it offers me real choice in my life.*

*Think about where you sit right now. What is this moment to you? What choices are available to you? What will you do with this moment? Perhaps you will read think pray act? What keeps you from entering in right now to the right now?*

It isn't pain or pleasure, per se, that I'm avoiding, it is today. And yet today is all I have.

By today, I mean the 'here and now' present moment. Today

*Here's what I mean. I when I say that avoid today I mean that I avoid the 'here and now' that God has given me. I won't enter it. I won't embrace it. You are doing it right now. You are partially 'out' you aren't inside the reality around you.*

How tragic to throw away life. It is as if I'm adverse to 'what is'. It is as if I'm in rebellion against reality. But as self-destructive as that sounds, it rings true to the Genesis account of the human problem. For that is exactly what Adam and Eve did - they rebelled against the given order. They tried to transcend Eden - not because they were in pain - but because they weren't in control.

It all started when the serpent questioning reality - 'Did God really say?' Our first parents followed suit and reached out to twist and pluck the world from God. They wanted to be 'like God'. Thus began the human story, which Paul sums up, saying, 'they exchanged the truth of God for a lie...' Fallen man exchanges the truth for a lie.

### **Undone**

If I take this conclusion seriously, then I must assume that my entire

psychology is built as a defense against the truth. Does this disturb you? Entire psychology. I am in denial even as I write this article? That is scary. But that's what I'm saying. I am so adverse to reality that I would avoid entering the reality of right now - I avoid today.

So our problem lies far deeper than aversion to pain, our core problem is a denial of reality. Our entire psychology is committed to the delusion that we can replace God with ourselves. The denial is so severe that I would actually refuse to enter the 'here and now' moment. And if I am not 'here and now' - well, where am I? Do I, in a meaningful way, exist at all? Do I really live?

Today, this present moment, is avoided precisely because it requires an admission of truth. If this moment is painful, then to enter it, I must choose to suffer. If this moment pleasurable, then to enter it I must choose to enjoy. Either way, I would admitting the truth. Both suffering and enjoyment require a capitulation of control. Both place (replace?) us into the hands of God. Today, if I enter it, is choice to repent.

Take the example of my hurt feelings. If I ignore the feelings, then I will not pick up the phone. I will remain in the lie, in a passive-aggressive stance against reality. No one will know. Nothing will happen. I will be a ghost, shadowy and unreachable. I know where this will end. I will feel the intense shame of pretending to be a person but not being one. I will be afraid of everything real. I will have to have to hide. No place for trust. I won't need God; I will be 'in control'. Tragically, day by day, I will lose my life trying to save it.

If I choose to deal with today's pain today. I will pick up the phone and reenter the earth. A voice answers, a process is created. I will actually be standing somewhere - in the light; naked, breathing and real. Something will happen. It might end

*By Roger Edwards*

*a counselor and teacher at The Barnabas Center. He is married to Jean and they have seven children. And two granddaughters.*

*Roger's blog:*

*<http://actuallyalive.wordpress.com/>*

# Dealing With Today's Pain Today

I know that it is better to deal with my pain today. Today, before the wounds become infected with regret or bitterness. Today, before the broken bones set wrong and I begin to limp relationally - untrusting on one leg, overcompensating on the other. It is better to deal with pain today. But I don't.

Let's say, for example, that my wife hurts my feelings. Perhaps I do something for her, something thoughtful and she doesn't seem to notice. What do I do?

Do I pick up the phone? "Hey listen, when you didn't notice, well, it hurt my feelings."

No, I don't do that. I hesitate. I dread the awkward conversation. I know I might feel the hurt again. She might confront me with my part in it. Then I will feel guilty - then get defensive - then I'll turn angry because the issue is now my defensiveness. Even if she is understanding and concerned - I will probably feel small and vulnerable. Dealing with pain today brings on more pain. So I avoid it.

But avoiding pain isn't the whole story. I've discovered that I'm avoiding something deeper. But this is surprising. What do I fear more than pain?

I sit staring at the phone. Will I call her? It will be uncomfortable at first. But I also know, from experience, that

I'll be better off afterwards.

If she's understanding, we'll work it out with forgiveness. We might even be stronger than before. If she is defensive? I'll still be better off for I will have interrupted a bad cycle. Yes, it is better to deal with it now. So I pick up the phone.

Then I put it back down, remembering that I need to empty the trash in my office. And I have move some papers from one side of the desk to the other.

I think about other times she's hurt me. And then I think of other people who haven't noticed me too. Yes, I'm angry now. Maybe I should just let her think about it a while. But that feeling is still stuck in my throat.

I should call her I guess, but ...My phone rings. It is her. "She probably wants something," I think.

"Hello," she says. "Hi," I chime in, nonchalant, "what's up?"

"I think I hurt your feelings this morning," she says.

"Oh really," I say, "when?" She could stop right there and call me a liar, but she continues to apologize.

Her goodness is making me squeamish, so I try to interrupt, "Well you were tired." "It was no big deal." "I'm completely over it." But she won't stop. She seems determined. And I am equally passionate about defending myself from it.

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**"Then I see. Even when I am offered vindication and restitution, I still run. Although I am afraid of pain, I'm avoidant of something deeper. Because even when I'm offered relief, I won't take it. I hold on. But to what?"**

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Then I see. Even when I am offered vindication and restitution, I still run. Although I am afraid of pain, I'm avoidant of something deeper. Because even when I'm offered relief, I won't take it. I hold on. But to what?

We talk several few minutes. She insists and I manage to let her finish her apology. I'm even able to get out that I forgive her. I feel better but in an off-balance kind of way.

She has asked me to do something that disrupts me. She asked me to trust. And trust means I have to give up control. Or more accurately, trust means I have to give up the illusion of control. That is the deeper thing that I am avoiding - that awful sense of not having control.

You see, I have this idea that I shouldn't have to trust. Well, honestly it's more like an obsession.

This obsession seems to be the strongest part of me sometimes. Even though I know in my head, that I'd be better off to call my wife, admit my hurt and ask for her help - I won't do it. The obsession has more sway than even my experience. It is like an alter ego at war with my best interests.

*(Continued from page 3)*

When He finished doctoring, He dressed me in a white, plush robe. I knew it was mine because it fit and was clean. All my life, I have felt soiled and dirty. I thought to myself, "Yes, thank you Jesus. This is the truth of the gospel. I remember, and I understand." I ran my hands over my new gift, enjoying the relief and deep comfort it brought me. When I looked up to thank Him, I was stunned to silence. As He walked away, He was wearing my burlap sack. He disappeared, and I heard Him whisper a word over and over into my darkness. With that secret word, He changed my name.

All of life has the potential to name us - both our victories as well as our hurts. However, I have learned on my journey that only God has the power to **rename**. Revelations 2:17 states that "to the one who overcomes, I will

Even after the phone call, after a rather sweet, reconciling conversation - this alter ego will often spend the afternoon trying to undo it. "Well this won't be the last time this happens." Or maybe I turn on myself, "Why are you so sensitive anyway - when will you learn to stop wanting attention?" This part of me will do almost anything to avoid the trusting place.

And when I get home? Well, I might not mention our conversation to test her. Will she says anything? "Hah," I think, "so she didn't mean it after all." It is like I am determined to make it go wrong.

Do you hear how self-destructive that is? I would put myself back in pain. I would make things wrong—even if they are right - just to get back that illusion of control.

Dealing with pain today means that you have to trust. There is no way around it. You have to let go of the control techniques of procrastination, excuses, blaming, numbing and so on.

And then you have to take up the healing methods that God has given us. They are all trust-based. Confession, grieving, forgiving - they are all about trusting God. And others.

give a white stone, with a new name written on the stone that no one knows except the one who receives it." Due to the intimacy implied in such a promise, I do not share the name I received; I only share the story from whence it came.

For nine long years, I wrestled with God face to face through the dark night of my past. In the early light of dawn I begged Him for a blessing, and He breathed new life into my story. Relationships lived that would have otherwise ended in death. I am now living with a heart more alive to all that was accomplished for me on the cross. Due to the severe nature of my trauma at such a young age, it is true that I will always limp through this life mentally and emotionally. But, I have learned while engaging God honestly that even the wounded can dance in the present and into the future with hope and joy.

**"Dealing with pain today means that you have to trust. You have to let go of the control techniques of procrastination, blaming, numbing..."**

**And then you have to take up the healing gifts that God has given: confession, grieving, forgiving..."**

**"For nine long years, I wrestled with God face to face through the dark night of my past. In the early light of dawn, I begged Him for a blessing, and He breathed new life into my story."**



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## • UPCOMING OPPORTUNITIES:



| <i>Date(s)</i>   | <i>Event</i>   | <i>Facilitator(s)</i>                  |
|--|--|--|
| 4th Wednesday of Every Month at 1:30pm at The Barnabas Center  | <b>Intentional Intercessors:</b> Come and pray with us for the ministry for one hour once a month.   | <i>Barnabas Staff and Friends</i>      |
| Now Enrolling Monthly  | <b>Honor's Program:</b> group for men who struggle with sexually addictive behavior. Visit our new Honors Program webpage for details on groups and related services: <a href="http://www.thebarnabascenter.org/">www.thebarnabascenter.org/</a>   | <i>John Pierce<br/>Kurt Zuiderveen</i> |
| Mondays from 9:30-11:00am<br>Group begins September 12   | <b>Training Ground:</b> 10 week group for pastors who want to grow in their ability to care for their congregants. Each week is led by a different member of the Barnabas staff on their area of expertise.  | <i>Barnabas Staff</i>                  |
| Thursdays from 6:00-8:00pm<br>Group begins September 12  | <b>Healing Hearts:</b> 14 week group for women who have experienced childhood harm. It provides a biblical, confidential context where women can wrestle with difficult realities related to their harm.   | <i>Lauren Petters</i>                  |
| Mondays from 6:30-8:30pm<br>Groups begin September 12  | <b>Barnabas Training Level Two:</b> 10 week group that focuses on the application of the model requiring a greater level of personal engagement. Prerequisite: Completion of Barnabas Training Level One.  | <i>Roger Edwards</i>                   |
| Mondays from 11:30-1:30pm or 6-8pm<br>Groups begin September 12  | <b>Barnabas Training Level Four:</b> 6 week session (every two weeks), supervision group where participants present real life care-giving scenarios. Prerequisite: Completion of Barnabas Training Level Two.  | <i>Pete Bondy</i>                      |
| Thursday, October 6<br>6:30-9:30pm<br>Center Stage @ NoDa  | <b>Barnabas Benefit:</b> Save the date for our first <i>Barnabas Benefit</i> fundraiser party (in lieu of annual golf tournament). The evening will consist of dinner, entertainment, silent auction and an opportunity to hear testimonies from clients who have been affected by The Barnabas Center's ministry.   | <i>Friends of Barnabas</i>             |
| October 28-29<br>New Charlotte Church  | <b>Barnabas Training Basic:</b> training for lay people, small group leaders, elders, deacons and pastoral care team to learn the basics of lay counselor training. Cost is \$80 if registered by October 1.   | <i>Palmer Trice<br/>Roger Edwards</i>  |
| <b>Barnabas Center—Richmond, VA</b><br>Groups will begin in September<br>Love Your Kids seminar November 5 | <b>Fall Groups at Barnabas Center-Richmond will include:</b> Barnabas Training Level One and Healing Hearts (descriptions for each above). All groups will begin September 2011.<br><b>Love Your Kids-Richmond:</b> parenting seminar for young families taught by Roger Edwards will take place Saturday, November 5 at West End Presbyterian Church.<br>Email Lisa Ould ( <a href="mailto:lould@thebarnabascenter.org">lould@thebarnabascenter.org</a> ) for more information. | <i>Lisa Ould<br/>Roger Edwards</i>     |