

## Unburdened of Worldly Grief (2 Corinthians 7:9-13)

For the Travelling Light Series (Part Three)

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### Hole in the Heart

Navy SEAL training includes a week called 'Hell Week'. It's five-and-a-half days of exertion with only four hours of sleep. 75% of candidates fail.<sup>1</sup>

Some have commented that to succeed, you need some type of complex. You need a hole in your heart that will only be filled by being a SEAL.

We often use negative things, like shame, to motivate ourselves. But in the long run, these often end up being our undoing.

Paul would call this worldly sorrow.

2 Corinthians 7:9-11:

<sup>8</sup> Even if I caused you sorrow by my letter, I do not regret it. Though I did regret it—I see that my letter hurt you, but only for a little while— <sup>9</sup> yet now I am happy, not because you were made sorry, but because your sorrow led you to repentance. For you became sorrowful as God intended and so were not harmed in any way by us. <sup>10</sup> Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death. <sup>11</sup> See what this godly sorrow has produced in you: what earnestness, what eagerness to clear yourselves, what indignation, what alarm, what longing, what concern, what readiness to see justice done. At every point you have proved yourselves to be innocent in this matter.

This summer we are exploring Jesus' invitation to take his light yoke upon us, to lay down the things we burden ourselves with and accept the appropriate burdens He offers us. Today we are talking about unburdening ourselves from worldly sorrow.

What we'll learn, is that the difference between worldly sorrow and Godly sorrow is that one encourages to turn away from Jesus and the other encourages us to turn back towards Him.

### The Cycle of Worldly Sorrow

Paul tells us that the problem with worldly sorrow is that it leads to death. How does it do that?

Well, working off some previous insights from pastors, counsellors, and recovery workers, most of all one of my old professors Abraham Han and the work he did at first Baptist church, there is a cycle that worldly sorrow puts us in.<sup>2</sup>

Here's how the cycle of worldly sorrow works.

**Acting out:** we do something bad.

**Negative Feelings:** Because of this action, we feel something negative.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://navyseals.com/nsw/hell-week-0/>

<sup>2</sup> The most common name for this 'cycle' is the 'shame cycle'. <https://psychcentral.com/lib/breaking-the-cycle-of-shame-and-self-destructive-behavior#shame-cycle>

**The Voice of Shame:** In pop psychology, shame has come to mean feeling like we are flawed and unworthy of love.<sup>3</sup> Technically, in the Bible, shame refers to public disgrace, but for our purposes, we are using shame in the modern psychological sense.

Negative feelings after acting out often trigger a voice that tell us we are unworthy of love and belonging. It's worth knowing that 'Satan' means 'Accuser', and if this voice isn't demonic, I don't know what is.

**Turning Away from Jesus:** The choice this voice puts before us is whether we will turn to or away from Jesus. Like the first humans in Genesis 3, something in us wants to hide when we feel ashamed. This is how worldly sorrow leads us to death because we turn from the author of all life.

**Overwhelm:** In terms of burdens, shame tells us to pick up the burden of our existence and carry it alone. It tells us to shrug off the light yoke we share with Jesus and pick up all our sin and pain and identity and history and carry it ourselves.

Without a doubt, it overwhelms us every time. Crushes our spirit. So, to find relief we...

Act out.

### **The Cycle of Godly Sorrow**

How does Godly sorrow differ from this cycle?

Paul says it outright in v10: Godly sorrow brings repentance which leads to salvation and leaves no regret.

The key word there is *repentance*. Repentance should not be seen as a heavy or cruel word, it's an invitation to turn back towards home—like the prodigal son in Luke 15.

Thinking in terms of cycles, here's what the 'cycle of Godly Sorrow' looks like.

**Acting Out:** Same as before, you do a bad thing.

**Negative Feelings:** The negative feelings associated with bad action are a *good thing*. Paul describes Godly sorrow as beneficial. If you feel bad after acting bad, that's good.

**The Voice of Shame:** This is important. The Bible doesn't promise silence on Satan's part. Scripture tells us to get strong so we can 'withstand the fiery darts of the enemy.' The insinuation is, they don't stop flying but we get better at dodging and blocking. The crux is not silencing this voice, it's what you do when you hear it.

**Turning Back Towards Jesus:** Our key verse for the whole series is Matthew 11:28:

Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.

Right in the middle of your very darkest moment he stands making the invitation He made two thousand years ago: come to me. Right when you think the burden of your sins will crush you, He says: come to me.

Right now, whatever you're facing, He says: come to me.

The difference between Godly sorrow that leads to salvation and worldly sorrow that leads to death is whether you turn back towards that voice. Every. Time.

How do we do this? 3 brief practical thoughts.

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<sup>3</sup> See Brené Brown, *The Gifts of Imperfection*, pg. 38ff.

**Confession.** Let someone love you in your darkest and deepest secrets. Find someone who is mature and let them minister Christ's love to you in your sins.

**Community.** Shame makes us want to disconnect, that's the worst thing for us in that moment. Turn back towards Jesus' love in Jesus' community.

**Contemplation.** Quietly find a way to imagine, with images or words, Jesus' love for you.

Once you've done all that, the next thing that happens is.

We act out.

Perfection will not happen on this side of eternity. But growth can happen, and growth is what we are looking for.

"...the perfection of human nature consists perhaps in its very growth in goodness."<sup>4</sup>

### **Excursus: Against Worm Theology**

Some tradition gets uncomfortable here because they focus on the fact that we are unworthy of love.

Ok. Sure. "All have sinned and fallen short of God's glory" and other proof texts like that.

But Paul also said:

"But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us." (Romans 5:8)

As people made in God's image, we are not to fall victim to 'worm theology'. Our worthlessness is not the place the Scriptures focus. And, when they do focus there, it is to demonstrate the riches of God's love.

### **Who He Says You Are**

Another tool we need in our belt to survive the voice of shame is the truth about who God says we are through Christ.

In Matthew 5:13-16 Jesus calls us the salt of the earth and the light of the world.

In 2 Corinthians 5:17-19, Paul tells us we are new creations, and that Christ does not count our sins against us.

In Ephesians 2:1-7, we are told that we are *seated in heavenly places in Christ Jesus*. Literally, in a mystical way, you are seated in heaven with Jesus. Right now. That means authority. That means power. That means security.

In 1 Peter 2:9-10 we are told that we are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's *special possession*.

### **Unburdened from Regret**

Paul says that Godly sorrow brings repentance which leads to salvation and *leaves no regret*.

He seems to give us a test for whether we are in worldly sorrow or Godly sorrow. It's a question:

Do I live in regret?

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<sup>4</sup> Gregory of Nyssa, *Life of Moses*, book 1. 10.

I remember seeing this in action. A pastor I look up to was sharing about his life before he turned back to Jesus. He'd thrown a party and was responsible for someone falling back into addiction. So bad that this guy's wife kicked him out.

But as he told the story, I noticed something. I was expecting him to furrow his brow and whip himself on the back. "Oh, I was so bad, bad, bad." I expected him to say.

He didn't.

He held himself responsible. If he could do it again you know he'd do differently. But he wasn't living in regret.

This was like a decade ago and I still remember in that moment saying, "I want that."

Jesus invites us to share a yoke with him, to take that beam across our shoulders and carry it beside him. Funny thing about animals on yokes, they often wear blinders. They don't look back. They don't look sideways. They look ahead.

Earlier in 2 Corinthians, Paul tells us that "our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all."

If you want that today, if you need that today, turn back towards Jesus. Don't cover your eyes and hide. Stand tall, see yourself how He sees you, boldly approach the throne and say: I did this, and I'm sorry. Make me more like you.

### **Questions/Exercises for Personal Reflection**

1. What are some of your 'shame triggers'? What are some of your habits or compulsions that leave you wanting to hide from God and community?
2. What ways do you 'turn back to Jesus' in your sins? Are there other things you'd like to try?
3. Do you live in regret? If so, what regrets do you have? Pray about them. How can God relieve that burden for you?
4. Consider getting some ammunition in your belt. Read the above verses about your identity or choose some others you know of. Commit them to memory. Leave notes around your house. Find creative ways to let these truths permeate you.