

In the Margins

Week 4: Emotionally At-Risk

John 11

Several years ago, I got to lead a group that developed a recovery ministry at our church in Kentucky. Our leadership team was an interesting group made up of recovering addicts, a therapist, a mom whose family had been torn apart by addiction, and a man who had recently been released from prison on drug dealing charges. We were a motley crew! It was awesome!

Leading up to the launch of the ministry, we decided to get shirts made. And, after a lively discussion about what to put on the shirts, the guy who'd just been released from prison said, "How about this... *I'm one of those people?*"

Before I had time to move onto the next idea, the entire group was like, *that's it! That's what needs to be on the shirts!* They all knew what it was like to be labeled as "those people" and they wanted to reframe what that phrase meant. Instead of a label that pushed them into the margins of society, and, frankly, even the church, they wanted to be *those people* who were honest about their hurts, hang-ups, and habits, and who recognized their need for Jesus.

After sitting on it for a little while, I realized, I want to be one of *those people*, too. The truth is, I am one of those people who has hurts that reside deep in my heart that I can't overcome on my own. I am one of those people who has hang-ups I can't get over. I am one of those people who has habits I just can't seem to break, no matter how hard I try. I'm one of those people who is in constant need of Jesus and the grace of God in my life.

And, I bet I'm not the only one. In fact, if you're willing, raise your hand if you're one of *those people*, too. Whether we want to admit it or not, I think all of us have some kind of hurt that we've been through and it left a wound on our heart. We have a hang-up that we just can't get over. We have habits that we can't seem to break.

All of us have moments, or months, or even years when we are emotionally at-risk. When we are more susceptible to things like anxiety, or depression, or emotional distress. Something happens in our life that has an effect on our emotional well-being. We experience a season of loneliness and wonder if anyone cares. We feel sad and we don't know why or overwhelmed by worries and fears. The words we speak to ourselves about ourselves become cruel and discouraging. Often times when we're in that headspace, we give into our addictions and find ourselves turning to those same habits to drown out the emotional pain we feel.

None of us are exempt from these things. The question is, will you have the courage to admit it to yourself, to the Lord, to others, and confess your need for Jesus and the grace of God in your life. *Will you be one of those people who allows Jesus to meet you in your pain and help you find hope and healing?*

In our text today, we find two grieving sisters who are feeling more than a little emotionally at-risk. Their brother has just died, and even though they'd sent for him, Jesus didn't come in time. He could have, but he waited, which I think just made their pain even worse. When Jesus finally does go and see them, he's met with an onslaught of emotions. The same emotions you'd expect at any funeral you've been to.

Martha ran out to meet Jesus and greeted him with these words in John 11:21...(READ John 11:21)

She's angry. Disappointed. These are dear friends of Jesus'. She sent word to him days earlier when he had a chance to come and heal her brother, but he didn't. She had to of felt let down, wondering if Jesus cared as much as she thought he did.

Then, the other sister, Mary, comes out and she's not angry, she's heartbroken. She's weeping. Verse 32 says...(READ John 11:32)

So, you have these two sisters that are feeling these strong emotions of grief. Emotions many of us are familiar with. And, Jesus doesn't chastise them for a "lack of faith." He doesn't minimize what they're feeling. In fact, he feels it with them. One of the most human moments of Jesus' life is in verse 35. It simply says, "Jesus wept."

Jesus wept over the death of his friend. He wept over the agony that it caused people he loves. Jesus wept over the brokenness and pain in this world that all of us experience.

And yet, right in the middle of all these emotions, Martha makes a profound statement. She's angry that Jesus wasn't there, but she doesn't lose faith. And so, she says in verse 21...(READ John 11:21-25a)

Jesus steps into this emotionally charged scene and brings resurrection life. He raises Lazarus from the dead and brings hope and healing to those who were feeling the pain of loss. And, what he did then, Jesus continues to do for us today. Jesus meets us in our emotions and brings resurrection life.

When we open ourselves up and allow ourselves to be one of *those* people who acknowledge our hurts, hang-ups, or habits and our desperate need for Jesus, he meets us where we are and continues to bring hope and healing still today. Continues to bring resurrection life into our lives.

So, what can we do when we feel emotionally at-risk? When we feel angry, sad, anxious? Or, what can we do when someone we love feels that way? How can we help them find hope and healing in Christ? I want to invite my friend, Claudia Mitchell, to join me in a conversation about that this morning. Will you please help me welcome Claudia to the stage?

Interview with Claudia

1. You work with a lot of people. What would you say is the current state of mental and emotional health? What are some common emotions you see in people these days?
2. How have you seen Jesus step into people's pain to provide hope and healing?
3. As I work through my own mental and emotional health, something I'm learning is that this is a multifaceted issue. It's not just spiritual or emotional. I think of it like a battlefield where the enemy is attacking from three different sides. There's the spiritual attack, but there's also the emotional and physical. And so, if the attack is coming at us from multiple angles, then our counterattack needs to do the same. What are your thoughts about that? Is that something you've seen over the years?
4. So, let's talk about those three battlefields and how we can counterattack them. And I want to talk specifically about anxiety and depression because those two seem to be what so many people are struggling with. So, how can someone fight that battle:
 - a. Spiritually? (Example of Martha. Scripture memorization. Lament. "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him" -Job 13:15)
 - b. Physically? (Breathing exercises, nerve sensors, medication)
 - c. Emotionally? (Counseling, Ask, "Is it true, is it kind, is it helpful?")
5. What if we have a friend, or someone we love, who is going through a hard time right now? How can we help someone fight that battle? (Claudia points to video of mom comforting daughter)
 - a. Spiritually? (Pray with them right there, listen to their fears and doubts without judgement, be a safe place for them like Jesus was for Mary and Martha)
 - b. Physically? (Breathe with them, appropriate touch)
 - c. Emotionally? (Listen, support, be empathetic. Remind them who they are and counter the things they're saying to and about themselves. Offer to go to counseling with them if they need the support.)
6. What would you say to the person who is in the room struggling right now?

You've heard it every week of this series, and will continue to hear it in a variety of ways, but our vision at Sherwood Oaks is to **unleash the Church with the love of Jesus to make an eternal difference in the lives of at-risk people.** We want to raise up and send out followers of Jesus who move into the margins to serve those Jesus came to serve.

For the emotionally at-risk, we will go to any length necessary to give hope to the hopeless and freedom to those held captive by their hurts, hang-ups, and habits. We want to move towards people who are hurting emotionally and suffering the effects of it. We want to mobilize the church to make a difference in one of the greatest crises threatening our society today. Mental and emotional health.

To do so, we're working on taking our counseling ministry to the next level. We have a great group of peer counselors already serving and coming alongside of individuals and couples. We're developing more mentoring programs and a more robust peer-to-peer counseling ministry.

Personally, I have a vision for us to launch a non-profit counseling center in Bloomington that's also a training center for Christian Counseling students looking for a place to do their residency. If we developed something like that, I believe we'd be able to offer high-quality, low-cost counseling services for individuals and families in our community and send out Kingdom workers who will continue to fight this battle. There's a group of people currently dreaming about what that could look like.

Jesus moved into the margins to meet people where they were. As a Church, we want to do the same thing. We want to move towards the people Jesus moved towards and help them find hope and healing from their hurts, hang-ups, and habits.

Imagine the difference we could see in our community if a church like Sherwood Oaks was unleashed with the love of Jesus to go out and make an eternal difference in the lives of at-risk people. If we partnered with organizations in our community and filled in the gaps when needed. If we focused our resources on tackling tough issues our communities face. If we used our gifts to be the hands and feet of Jesus outside of the walls of our church.

That's the church I want to be a part of and it's the Church I believe Jesus is building here. A Church that moves towards those in the margins because Jesus moved towards us. When we were hurting, when we were lost and without hope, when we were stuck in the rut of our addictions and habits, Jesus moved towards us with mercy, grace and love.

The Apostle Paul says in Romans 5:8 that God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. While we were still separated from God, Jesus moved towards us, towards the cross, so we could be forgiven and set free from our hurts, hang-ups, and habits.

Let's remember and celebrate that now.