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BACK PAIN

Dr. John Sarno, professor of clinical rehabilitation at New York University School of Medicine, has treated thousands of patients with chronic back pain. Although he was a specialist in this area, his success in treating such patients was very poor, with many patients suffering for years or even decades. He discovered that injuries of the back, even herniated disks, are rarely responsible for their pain. He began to question his patients with chronic back pain and discovered that a whopping 88 percent of them had a history of tension-induced reactions. The back-pain sufferers also tended to experience the following: Tension and migraine headaches, Eczema, Colitis, Ulcers, Asthma, Hay fever, Frequent urination, and Irritable bowel syndrome.

Dr. Sarno concluded that painful back spasms and chronic back pain often resulted from chronic tension, stress, frustrations, anxiety, repressed anger, and worry. He says that tension causes the blood vessels supplying the back muscles and nerves to constrict, thus reducing the blood supply and oxygen to the tissues. The result is painful spasms. This condition may eventually lead to numbness, the sensation of "pins and needles," and decreased strength in the muscles. Muscle spasms in the back create constriction of the blood vessels that supply the muscles with blood and oxygen, a process that leads to decreased oxygen for muscles and nerves. The result is a cycle: more spasms and more pain create more anxiety and more tension, which create more spasms and more pain. Muscles of the neck, shoulders, arms and legs may also be impacted, leading to fibromyalgia, fibrositis, myofascitis, repetitive stress injury, and other conditions.

Following Dr. Sarno's research, he began to treat the underlying emotional components related to back pain as well as any structural abnormalities, and he began to experience an astonishing success rate. 90 to 95 percent of his patients reported they were pain-free and cured permanently.

Following are a few of many ancient insights from God's Word:

- *Many a time they afflicted me from my youth; the plowers plowed on my back.* Psalm 129:2-3
- *A calm and undisturbed mind are the life and health of the body, but envy, jealousy, and wrath are like rotteness of the bones.* Proverb 14:30
- *Pleasant words are sweet to the soul and health to the bones.* Proverbs 16:24
- *A merry heart does good like medicine; but a broken spirit dries the bones.* Proverbs 17:22

During the course of my ministry, I have seen God heal scores, even hundreds, of people who were suffering with back pain.

Following is the testimony that a lady in our church, Kathleen, gave me permission to use:

"Last year I was in a terrible condition. I had terrible pain in my back and limbs that prevented me from working, so I had no source of income, and my husband, who has been emotionally abusive, had kicked me out of our home. My father left us when I was 11 years old and I only saw him once more in my life. Then a miracle happened on November 12. You came to speak at my Alpha class and asked if anyone present had a chronic illness. You asked me to come forward and asked me a lot of questions about my past. We went through all the hurts and disappointments in my life, and one by one I released the pain, anger, resentment, and grief. I felt lighter. Two days later I was walking down the seven stairs outside my condo and realized I had used only one foot on each step. I was amazed, as I had not been able to do that for three or four years. I had carefully placed both feet on each stair to reduce the pain. The next day I showed my eight year-old granddaughter and she was amazed. She said, 'Grandma, it's the hand of God!' The rest of the day we were running up and down the stairs. We walked around the lake near my home and even ran awhile.

I continued on that week and could get up from the couch without any pain in my limbs. I slept without waking up from pain. I told everyone I saw. I used to walk like I had wooden shoes on and cried in the night from pain. Two weeks later a friend helped me get a job with her company."

Kathleen said her newfound faith has been severely tested, but she is fighting the good fight of faith and is growing in the grace of God. Praise the Lord!

THE OLDER BROTHER

One of Jesus' parables that is a favorite of most everyone is in Luke 15 and is called "The Parable of the Prodigal Son." It is the story of a lost son who went into the far country, lived a wild lifestyle, came to himself in a pig pen, and returned home to cast himself on the mercy of his father. It is a beautiful story.

The surprising thing is that the story Jesus told is actually about two lost sons, not one, and his focus seems to have been on the older brother, because his audience was a group of Pharisees who were acting the part of "older brothers." They were angry and resentful at Jesus because he was welcoming home younger brothers all over the place: working people who never went to church, prostitutes (for crying out loud!), even tax collectors (those hated traitors who were cooperating with Rome and milking money from their own countrymen). In other words, Jesus was showing God's mercy to sinners! - much to the chagrin of the religious folks.

In his book, *The Prodigal God*, Timothy Keller has some marvelous insights about this story, and I will share a few:

- The younger son was selfish, immoral, and rebellious. He wanted his father's money, but he had no real love or respect for his father. He wanted independence from his father.
- The older son was exactly the same, except he was living a life of outward morality. He didn't love or respect his father either. While the younger brother went far away, the elder brother stayed close and 'never disobeyed.' He was saying, 'I have never disobeyed you, now you owe me!'
- If, like the older brother, you believe that God ought to bless and help you because you have attended church and worked hard to obey him and be a good person, then Jesus may be your helper, your example, even your inspiration, but he is not your Savior. You are serving as your own Savior.
- Jesus does not divide the world into the moral good guys and the immoral bad guys. He shows us that everyone is dedicated to a project of self-salvation, to using God and others in order to get power and control for themselves. We are just going about it in different ways.
- The gospel of Jesus is not religion or irreligion, morality or immorality, moralism or relativism, conservatism or liberalism. It is something else altogether. In Jesus' view, everyone is wrong, everyone is loved, and everyone is invited to change.
- Elder brothers divide the world in two: 'The good people (like us) are in and the bad people, who are the real problem in the world, are out.'
- Younger brothers, even if they don't believe in God at all, do the same thing, saying, 'No, the open-minded and tolerant people are in and the bigoted, narrow-minded people, who are the real problem with the world, are out.'
- (NOTE: I believe we should connect the worldviews of elder brothers and younger brothers to the liberals and conservatives in our society. You can listen to the incessant barrage of hatred on Fox News and talk-radio on the one hand and MSNBC and the major networks on the other hand. They incessantly accuse one another and talk past one another, each feeling noble and self-righteous. If you think that Jesus is a Republican or a Democrat, you are mistaken. From start to finish, the disciples misunderstood the Kingdom of God that Jesus came to bring, and they tried to make Him an earthly king. He refused. Disciples are still convinced that the Kingdom is going to come via political power. It is not.)
- Jesus says, 'The humble are in and the proud are out.' When a newspaper posed the question, 'What's wrong with the world?' Catholic thinker G. K. Chesterton wrote a brief letter in response: 'Dear Sirs: I am. Sincerely yours, G. K. Chesterton.' That is the attitude of someone who has grasped the message of Jesus.
- Because the elder brother is more blind to what is going on, being an elder brother Pharisee is a more desperate condition. 'How dare you say that?' is how religious people respond if you suggest their relationship with God

isn't right. 'I am there every time the church doors open. I read my Bible. I pray. I tithe.' They were the ones who crucified Jesus.

I believe every one of us has some younger brother and some elder brother inside of us. I certainly know that I do. It is comparatively easy to identify the younger brother spirit: rebellion, independence, fleshly lusts, love of money, celebrity syndrome. How can we identify the elder brother spirit?

- The elder brother 'became angry.' The sign that you have an elder-brother spirit is that when life doesn't go as you want, you aren't just sad but deeply angry and resentful - toward God. Elder brothers believe that if they live a good life everything should go well for them and their loved ones.
- Job was a good man who lived a moral, righteous, generous life (the Bible says so three times). When his life fell apart, he was furious with God. He blamed and cursed God 72 times!
- On the other hand, if you have tried to live a godly life but know that you have fallen short - and then things fall apart in your life, you will be furious with yourself, filled with self-loathing and inner pain.
- Elder brothers have a strong sense of their own superiority. Remember the story of the Pharisee and the tax collector? The Pharisee was praying 'to himself,' and bragged that he wasn't like other men, especially the tax collector. The elder brother had the same attitude. He referred to 'This son of yours,' and would not even acknowledge his own brother.
- Elder brothers may serve God faithfully, but they feel like slaves and have no joy. The older son says, 'All these years I've been slaving for you.'
- A friend attended an MBA program, a business ethics course. The professor counseled honest business practices for two reasons. "First, if you lie or cheat you may be caught, and that would be bad for business. Second, if people in the company know they are working in an honest business, that will be good for morale." These motives appeal to fear, profit, and pride. What happens when telling a lie would be to your great advantage? Your motivation for honesty will evaporate. Some of the biggest corporate scandals of the last decade involved devout, prominent church members.
- Elder brothers may do good to others, but not out of love for people or delight and love for God. They are not really feeding the hungry and clothing the poor, they are feeding and clothing themselves. *And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned (as a martyr), and have not love, it profits me nothing.* (I Cor. 13:3) Why do you think so many churches are plagued with gossip and fighting?
- Elder brothers repress and deny their emotional frustration and inner boredom with life. They are under great pressure to appear, even to themselves, happy and content. That is the reason that sometimes they will blow up their lives, throw off the chains of their obligations, and begin living like younger brothers.

- The last sign of the elder-brother spirit is a lack of assurance of the Father's love. The older son says, 'You never threw *me* a party.' As long as you try to earn your salvation by controlling God through goodness, you will never be sure you have been good enough for him. You simply aren't sure God loves and delights in you.
- What are the signs of this lack of assurance? Every time something goes wrong in your life or a prayer goes unanswered, you wonder if it is because you aren't living right in this or that area. Another sign is that criticism from others doesn't just hurt your feelings, it devastates you...because you desperately need the approval of others to bolster your sense of value. You will also feel continuous guilt. Your conscience torments you for a long time, even after you repent. You can't be sure you have repented deeply enough, so you beat yourself up over and over. Elder brothers may be diligent in prayer, but there is no wonder, awe, intimacy, or delight in their conversations with God.
- Many people have abandoned their faith because they see the churches are full of elder brothers. Our big cities are filled with younger brothers who fled from churches in the heartland that were dominated by elder brothers. All they got from their churches was coldness, sarcasm, rejection, judgmentalism, and condemnation."

Let me reiterate that in my opinion all of us can find some younger brother and elder brother hidden in our hearts. The good news is that our Heavenly Father continually reaches out to us and invites us to repent, accept His forgiveness, and come to the party. He is ready to run to each of us with open arms, clothe us with His robe, ring, and sandals, and say, "Welcome home, my precious son!"

GEMS FROM GOD'S WORD

- *Godly wisdom is more precious than rubies; nothing you can wish for can be compared to her.* (Proverbs 3:15)
WISDOM is insight into the ways and purposes of God.
- "Fear of the Lord," which is "the beginning of wisdom," is something you choose. See Proverbs 1:29.-
- The Kingdom of God is not stuff. It is righteousness, peace and joy. (Romans 14:17) And although I don't always do right, God views me as righteous because as a believer I have the righteousness of Christ. (Romans 5:17)
- *If you live according to the dictates of the flesh, you will surely die. But if through the power of the Holy Spirit you are habitually putting to death the evil deeds prompted by the body, you shall live forever. For all who are led by the Spirit are sons of God.* (Romans 8:13-14)

As it says in the book of Hezekiah, "You are only as old as you feel." I keep claiming that verse, because for some reason, since I passed my 82nd milestone back in February, I have at times been feeling a little older. I know it is only a weakness of the flesh, and I have been resisting the temptation to doze. I am planning to go with a team from our church on a mission trip to Haiti at the end of the year. And I recently transferred my health club membership to a new Gold's Gym that is very close to my home.

Unfortunately, they make me wear a long-sleeved shirt to work out, because I don't have any tattoos. You should see them down there: tattoos all over, and muscles bulging, and that's the girls! I see the guys standing in front of big mirrors flexing their biceps and rippling their abs, and I laugh inside. I'm thinking, "Just wait 60 years or so and see what you look like. Gravity and Twinkies will win in the end."

I had a frightening experience last week. I had a sore place on my face, and for the first time in years I put on my reading glasses and looked in the mirror at my face close up. Don't ever do that after you pass 75! It was like looking at the Grand Canyon from space. I used to look like Brad Pitt. Now I look like a gravel pit. I take courage from knowing that it's what you look like inside that counts. But I had an MRI taken awhile back, and the inside doesn't look too great either. Let us pray.

God Bless,

Glenn

Web-site: www.glennbrownministries.com

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RESISTING THE TEMPTATION TO GET OLD