

Scars

[or the beauty of wounds that sear soul-deep]

When I was a teenager, I took a tumble down the sharp precipice of a riverbank walled with jagged, razor-like rocks. (I shall not confess at the moment the condition that preceded my fall, but it was more than an innocent accident.) During my involuntary descent, one of those serrated stones dug deeply into my leg and ripped the Tibialis anterior muscle [yeah, that big one that rests just against the shin and wraps to the calf] almost in half. I sat there in a fog gazing at the gaping hole in my leg, several inches wide, several inches deep, and several inches long. My body was in shock. I saw white light and heard humming in my ears, but before I surrendered consciousness, I remember wondering to myself why this enormous hole in my leg was not bleeding. I saw bone. I saw muscle. I saw things I will not describe. But there was no blood. I learned that day that some of our deepest wounds do not bleed.

Of course, the doctors did a fine job sewing me up. The only painful part of the entire ordeal was washing the wound. The cut didn't hurt. It was not excruciating to watch them sew the deep muscle together, then the tissue and then the skin. But when they washed the gravel and dirt from the gash, it was less than paradise.

Funny thing about wounds. Sometimes the healing stings worse than the hurt. And then you are left with the scars. I'm often reminded of the folly of my youth when I feel the burn deep in my leg as I chase my kids or ride a bike. There are many moments on the field that I twinge at the ripping sensation of rounding bases. I feel my scar now as I sit at my desk and tell this story. In fact, the pain is always with me. It's just that sometimes I forget.

I wished I could say that day was a rare occasion for me. That ER trips were uncommon during my wonder years. The fact is, I felt like Norm at *Cheers* whenever I walked through the doors at either of the two hospitals in my hometown. Everyone knew my name. Broken bones, suture-worthy lacerations, third-degree burns, multiple car-crashes (none my fault) and reconstructive surgery were all the norm for me. I am a man riddled with scars.

Some scars are deep. Some are ugly. Some hurt long after the initial wound. Some fade away with time, others we live with all our lives. Some cause us to feel awkward or embarrassed. Some are hidden while others are in plain view for all the world to see. Some we have become so accustomed to, we don't even see them any more, yet they are the first features other people notice. Some we wear proudly as badges of honor. Others we attempt to mask. Few people know that the reason I wear a goatee is to cover a scar from a car accident that even reconstructive surgery could not fully remove.

Some of us nurse our scars, and some of us ignore them. Some of us allow our scars to define us. Some of us pretend they're not there.

Life is full of scars. Tender reminders of life experiences that changed us, somehow, forever. Slight and stark, they are with us. Sometimes they haunt us.

But it is not the flesh wounds that affect us most deeply. It is those lacerations that sear the soul that wound the worst. Those broken expectations that result in shattered hearts. Those hurts that if ignored fester into anger, then canker into resentment, and result in a prison we cannot escape. They remain open wounds, scabbed but not scarred. They cut deep, and perhaps they do not bleed, so we think there is no need for treatment. But left unattended they fester with infection that spreads to even the healthy parts of our lives. Soul-deep wounds affect our marriages, make intimacy impossible, joy an illusion, peace a practical joke. They fetter us to chains that bind us as parents and make friendship an elusive vapor. They drive us to worship our careers and get lost in our toys. They steal our rest and cause us to sleep through our dreams. They hound us down every path, hide for us behind every corner and greet us with grins at the dawn of each new day.

That is why I am convinced that the gospel is such good news. It offers hope for the heart held hostage. It gives serenity for the soul that bleeds, or has forgotten how to. Jesus' death and resurrection is recompense for the scarred spirit in need of ransom. According to his words in John 10:10, Jesus did not merely come to give us life, but to make us fully alive... scars and all.

I am convinced that healing comes from God. Whether he uses a miracle or a medicine, it is in him we live and move and have our being (Acts 18:28.) There were two occasions in my life when God unmistakably and instantly healed my body. Documented in my medical records as a mystery to the physicians, I have tasted first-hand the physical intervention of God. But most of the time, God has chosen to use less sensational methods of healing in my life. And most of the time, my wounds left scars.

I think it is the same with wounded hearts. Yes, God can and does at times miraculously close the wounds that sear our souls. I've seen it several times. But more often than that, I've seen God walk through the valley of shadows with his loved ones, using the voice of a helper to whisper the gentle thunder of transforming truth. I've witnessed him use the objectivity, clarity and wisdom of a godly counselor to shepherd his wounded sheep back to health. And yes, even with the help of a specialist, the wounds still leave scars.

The beauty of scars is their ugliness. They remind us of an earlier hurt, a painful place, a foolish choice. But more than that, they are blatant testaments that we are not the same. In Christ, we are made new. No longer are we slaves to our wounds. We are freed by our scars. No, we are freed by his scars. And by the way, his scars are the only things in heaven made on earth. Our scars remain conspicuously absent *there*.