

Hungry for Healing

Acts 5:12-16

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There's a lot of hurt and pain in our world, and in our church. Many of you came in today piled with problems and heavy with hurt. I don't know who first said it, but it's certainly true: *"Be kind, for everyone you meet is fighting a hard battle."*

As a way to get a sense of what people are struggling with, Vikki Huisman, our Communications Director, compiled a word cloud containing prayer requests submitted by the people of EBC for every month of 2019. Let's flip through them quickly...

Here are the four most prominent requests from this past year:

1. Family
2. Cancer
3. Surgery
4. Healing

One topic that brings up a lot of pain and hurt today is abortion. On this Sanctity of Life weekend, we affirm, along with thousands of other churches, that every human being, from conception on, is an image bearer of God, stamped with divine dignity and worthy of protection.

Listen to Psalm 139:13-16: *"For you formed my inward parts; you knitted me together in my mother's womb. I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works; my soul knows it very well. My frame was not hidden from you, when I was being made in secret, intricately woven in the depths of the earth. Your eyes saw my unformed substance; in your book were written, every one of them, the days that were formed for me, when as yet there was none of them."*

Before I go further, I recognize some of you may be struggling with the after-effects of abortion. We hurt with you and want you to know that no one is cut off from the cleansing power of the Cross. No sin is too big to be forgiven by the grace of God. We'll talk more about hope and healing at the end of the message.

Since Pregnancy Resources is one of our Go Team partners, I'm delighted to share a report of how God used this ministry of life in 2018...

- Over 1,100 individuals served
- 811 pregnancy tests administered
- 434 ultrasounds
- 910 classes attended
- 79 dads served
- 87 new car seats given
- 514 visits to Bella's Boutique
- 1,006 spiritual discussions/prayer
- Over 2,000 diaper packages given away for free
- The "Forgiven and Set Free" Bible study was offered
- 307 "No Regrets" presentations given in area schools, reaching over 4,000 students with the message of abstinence and sexual purity

Pregnancy Resources has two locations – one in Davenport and one in Moline. They also have the Mobile Medical Van that travels to different communities. BTW, Edgewood raised over \$52,000 several years ago towards the purchase of this van.

As you may know, the Moline center moved to a more visible location near South Park Mall over a year ago (the old Mimzi Building). In this new location, overall visits are up 28%!

Last weekend we tackled a tough text from Acts 5:1-11 and discovered that *the fear of God will help us be faithful to God*. Today we'll see from verses 12-16 how *Jesus heals our hurts*.

I've asked Edgewood member Pam White to read our passage for today. Pam is married to Ken and is the director of the Moline Pregnancy Resources center.

Listen to Acts 5:12-16: ***“Now many signs and wonders were regularly done among the people by the hands of the apostles. And they were all together in Solomon's Portico. None of the rest dared join them, but the people held them in high esteem. And more than ever believers were added to the Lord, multitudes of both men and women, so that they even carried out the sick into the streets and laid them on cots and mats, that as Peter came by at least his shadow might fall on some of them. The people also gathered from the towns around***

Jerusalem, bringing the sick and those afflicted with unclean spirits, and they were all healed.”

The Book of Acts gives us various snapshots of the early church that help us see what it was like. I see six descriptions in this passage.

1. A sense of the miraculous. Listen to the first part of verse 12: *“Now many signs and wonders were regularly done among the people by the hands of the apostles...”* The first thing to notice is this is an answer to the prayer the apostles prayed back in Acts 4:29-30: *“And now, Lord, look upon their threats and grant to your servants to continue to speak your word with all boldness, while you stretch out your hand to heal, and signs and wonders are performed through the name of your holy servant Jesus.”*

The word for *“signs”* means a *“mark or token”* given to point people to God. The word *“wonders”* has to do with the response to these signs. These signs were done by the *“hands of the apostles.”* While God’s judgment came out of the mouth of an apostle in the previous passage, now we see how healing and mercy come through the hands of the apostles. I’m reminded of Habakkuk 3:2: *“O LORD, I have heard the report of you, and your work, O LORD, do I fear. In the midst of the years revive it; in the midst of the years make it known; in wrath remember mercy.”*

These miraculous signs were designed to authenticate the authority of the apostles as we see in 2 Corinthians 12:12: *“The signs of a true apostle were performed among you with utmost patience, with signs and wonders and mighty works.”* Mark 16:20 tells us these signs and wonders also verified the message of the gospel and were not to be sought out for their own sake but rather to point people to Jesus: *“And they went out and preached everywhere, while the Lord worked with them and confirmed the message by accompanying signs.”* I count 17 times in Acts where *“signs”* led to people getting saved. This is in line with what our Lord said in John 4:48: *“Unless you see signs and wonders you will not believe.”*

2. A commitment to gather with each other. Check out the last phrase in verse 12: *“And they were all together in Solomon’s Portico.”* One of the defining characteristics of these first Christians is they were committed to community with each other. Note they were *“all together.”* This was their habit as we saw in Acts 2:1: *“When the day of Pentecost arrived, they were all together in one place”* and in Acts 2:46: *“And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes.”*

While many have stopped attending church, even evangelicals who say they go to church are attending less often. According to one study, on average, evangelicals gather for a worship service only 1.8 times a month! Brothers and sisters, as our culture continues to cave and it becomes increasingly difficult to live for Christ, we need to gather more often, not less often.

I've been challenged by something John Stott wrote:

“An unchurched Christian is a grotesque anomaly. The New Testament knows nothing of such a person. For the church lies at the very center of the eternal purpose of God. It is not a divine afterthought. It is not an accident of history. The church is God’s new community.”

Zach and Jessica Ulfers and their two sons are new to Edgewood – their first time here was Dedication Weekend. They were invited by their neighbors, Karl and Jennifer Heitman, who have since moved to California. They are both newer believers – Jessica was saved at the end of the 10:45 service on December 15! It's been a joy to see Jesus working in their lives. I asked them to put into words their commitment to gather for worship each weekend.

“We have made the very conscious choice for consistent church attendance at Edgewood to be a family priority. We know our ever-growing faith requires constant care and attention, so we design our lives around attending service on Saturday or Sunday. We have found that the best way to train our hearts and minds is to, quite literally, show-up. Be present.

Scheduling difficulties do arise and when they do – we adapt. In December we shortened our vacation by one day so we would be able to attend Sunday service. Last week we attended Saturday service because Sunday required early travel for work. We want to maintain our thankful hearts and vigilant minds. We want to glorify God and give Him our undivided attention – and weekly service is that opportunity to show God our love and appreciation.”

These first followers gathered in **“Solomon’s Portico,”** a covered porch area that ran along the eastern wall of the Temple. It was where the lame man was healed and where the apostles had been arrested in Acts 4:3 for preaching about Jesus. Yet, here they are, gathered together in this very public place in the center of the city. For perspective, this would be like gathering at the Washington Monument, only more so, because the Temple was the religious center of Judaism.

3. A high view of God's holiness. Last weekend we spent a lot of time on the holiness of God and now we see the reaction of unbelievers in verse 13: "***None of the rest dared join them...***" The word "***none***" literally means, "*not even one.*" The word "***dared***" has the idea of "*courage.*" Interestingly, the word "***join***" is used seven times in Acts and means, "*to cleave or be glued together.*" It's a good reminder that when we join a church, we are gluing ourselves to gather with God's people.

After hearing what happened to a couple who wallowed in hollow hypocrisy, many unbelievers were afraid to attend. In short, they were hesitant to join with believers because of the holiness of God. I'm reminded of something D.L. Moody often said, "*The Bible will keep you from sin or sin will keep you from the Bible.*"

While we want our facility to be user-friendly, we will never water down the gospel or minimize the holiness of God just to make people happy. In an age of easy believism, superficial spirituality, and cheap grace, we will continue to proclaim that Jesus is the only way, that the way is narrow, and discipleship demands our very lives. No matter what our society says, marriage is between one man and one woman for life and life begins at conception and must be protected. There's a cost to following Christ, isn't there?

4. A good reputation in the community. Even though there was a hesitancy to join the First Church of Jerusalem, Christ followers were thought of highly according to the last part of verse 13: "***...but the people held them in high esteem.***" The phrase "***high esteem***" comes from the word to mean, "*enlarge.*" Christians were considered favorably because of how they cared for the little, the least and the lost.

It's helpful to know the cultural setting in which this passage was written. Rome had a law called *patria potestas*, which meant "the father's power." By law, children were regarded as the patriarch's personal property, and he could do with them what he wished. A displeased dad could disown his kids, sell them into slavery, or even kill them with no consequences.

When a child was born, the newborn was placed between the father's feet. If the father picked up the baby, the child stayed in the home. If he turned and walked away, the child was either left to die or sold at auction into slavery.

This week I read an article called, “How Christianity Invented Children” by Pascal Gobry.

“We have forgotten just how deep a cultural revolution Christianity wrought. In fact, we forget about it precisely because of how deep it was: There are many ideas that we simply take for granted as natural and obvious, when in fact they didn't exist until the arrival of Christianity changed things completely. Take, for instance, the idea of children.

One of the most notorious ancient practices that Christianity rebelled against was the frequent practice of “expositio,” basically the abandonment of unwanted infants. But really, Christianity's invention of children — that is, its invention of the cultural idea of children as treasured human beings — was really an outgrowth of its most stupendous and revolutionary idea: the radical equality, and the infinite value, of every single human being as [made in the image of God].”

5. People were getting saved all the time. While some people stayed away, others were drawn to Christ as we see in verse 14: **“And more than ever believers were added to the Lord, multitudes of both men and women.”** While following Christ was alarming to some, many others found Christ to be extremely appealing. The word **“added”** means, *“kept on being added,”* showing this happened all the time. The word **“multitudes”** refers to *“a great many, a throng of people.”*

Let’s review the explosive growth of Christianity in the book of Acts so far...

2:41: **“there were added that day about three thousand souls.”**

2:47: **“And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.”**

Acts 4:4: **“But many of those who had heard the word believed, and the number of the men came to about five thousand.”**

By A.D. 300, there were millions of believers scattered throughout the Roman empire.

In a culture which looked down on women, don’t miss how Luke mentions both **“men and women”** were getting saved. There are a dozen other references to women coming to Christ in Acts.

6. Hurting people were being healed. Notice the first two words of verse 15: ***“So that...”*** Because there was a sense of the miraculous, a commitment to gather with each other, a high view of God’s holiness, believers had a good reputation in the community and people were getting saved all the time, those who were hurting were hungry for healing. Verse 15 paints a picture of the streets filled with the sick and the suffering: ***“So that they even carried out the sick into the streets and laid them on cots and mats, that as Peter came by at least his shadow might fall on some of them.”***

It’s quite a picture isn’t it? Those who were sick were taken outside into the streets. The word ***“sick,”*** doesn’t just refer to physical illnesses, though it certainly does include physical ailments; it also describes those who are *“vacillating in faith, doubting, weak, powerless and without strength.”*

The use of ***“cots”*** and ***“mats”*** helps us see that Christianity is not only for all genders but for all classes of people as ***“cots”*** were soft couches used by the wealthy and ***“mats”*** were used by the poor.

People esteemed the apostles so much they felt if they could just get in Peter’s shadow they would be healed of their sickness. There was a belief in that culture that a shadow had power – they would flee from an evil man’s shadow but would seek to come into the shadow of a good man. There’s no evidence that Peter’s shadow had any power but it does remind us of Psalm 121:5: ***“the LORD is your shade on your right hand”*** and Psalm 91:1: ***“He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will abide in the shadow of the Almighty.”***

Verse 16 shows how badly the hurting wanted to be healed. These people were not only from all classes and genders, but they came from all places: ***“The people also gathered from the towns around Jerusalem, bringing the sick and those afflicted with unclean spirits, and they were all healed.”***

This parallels what Jesus did in Matthew 4:24: ***“So His fame spread throughout all Syria, and they brought Him all the sick, those afflicted with various diseases and pains, those oppressed by demons, those having seizures, and paralytics, and He healed them.”*** This makes sense because Jesus said in John 14:12: ***“Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes in me will also do the works that I do; and greater works than these will he do, because I am going to the Father.”***

The word ***“afflicted”*** means to be harassed and helpless and the word for ***“healed”*** also means to serve. Once people were set free, they were able to serve others.

We're reminded we are saved *to* serve. 2 Corinthians 1:4 says God "***comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.***"

One of the unseen results of abortion in our country is the affliction this has caused women who have had an abortion, as well as the men who who've encouraged them.

Are you aware that abortion is the leading cause of death in the world today? In 2019, there were 42.4 million lives lost from abortion, which is approximately 125,000 each day. This is twice the number of all deaths caused by cancer, smoking, alcohol, traffic accidents, malaria and HIV/AIDS *combined!*

In the US, there have been over 61 million deaths since Roe v. Wade legalized abortion in 1973. That's the population of 26 states, or to bring it closer to home, it would be like losing all the people in the Midwest states of Illinois, Iowa, Michigan, Wisconsin, Indiana, Minnesota, Kentucky, and Ohio.

Along with all this death has come despair, regret, guilt and shame. In order to help us see how Jesus can heal our hearts, I've asked Edgewood member Kathy Nagle to share her story.

1. Tell us a bit about yourself.

I grew up in Salisbury, Maryland but have spent most of my adult life in the Iowa Quad Cities, so I'm really a Hawkeye! I am married to Jim and we have 2 children and 6 grandkids. I have been attending Edgewood since last Easter. I had heard for a few years of the work God was doing here and I am glad to finally be a part of this body of Christ.

2. I know you've typed out a testimony that deals with some pain and struggle but also with forgiveness and freedom. Could you share this with us?

I have been involved in pro-life ministry by volunteering and being on staff of Pregnancy Resources for almost 30 years. My main focus during all these years has been working with women who have suffered emotionally from abortion. Having had an abortion myself, I understand the sorrow and regret that women feel.

I had an abortion in 1975. I was 11 weeks pregnant at the time. When I found out I was pregnant, by a phone call to the clinic that day, the woman on the other end of the

phone, a complete stranger, suggested abortion and told me where I could get one. I had not thought of abortion before she mentioned it, but once it was in my head, that was all I could think about doing. That would solve my problem of an unplanned pregnancy. So that's what I did.

Immediately after having the abortion, I regretted my decision, but it was not something I could change, so I just stuffed my emotions and moved on. Some of the symptoms I experienced at that time were depression, anxiety, denial, shame and guilt. However, I did not necessarily attribute them to my abortion, just the general turmoil of my life at that time.

The close relationships I had at the time of my abortion really disintegrated. I had confided in very few people about my abortion and the few who knew or were directly impacted by my decision – those relationships ended shortly after that. I moved, a lot, major moves, from New Hampshire to Maryland to Iowa in the course of 6 months. Once here, I moved from place to place, I was running from myself, the trouble was – I kept going with me!

Eventually my life settled down and I began going to church and I recommitted my life to Christ. I heard about Pregnancy Resources and decided to go to their training so I could volunteer and work off my sin of abortion! But God had a different plan!

I went through Pregnancy Resources Post Abortion Healing program, the Bible Study called Forgiven and Set Free, 16 years after my abortion, and all the pieces came together. I saw that much of what I had dealt with for so long was a result of my abortion. It was an opportunity to address the emotions and lay them to rest.

At that time, I had still told very few people about my abortion. That was probably the greatest obstacle to healing sooner, confiding in others about what I was feeling. I was so ashamed that I could not even tell people, especially after I became a Christian. That was hard, to admit to such a despicable sin. And not really knowing what things I had to bring before the Lord concerning my abortion, my sin, was another obstacle. I didn't know about the grief, the denial, the anger, the varied emotions and wrong thinking that needed to be addressed.

I knew I had been forgiven by God for my sins when I acknowledged them before Him, repented and asked for forgiveness. But the tragedy of abortion is not just the sin against God, as huge as that is, but what it does to a woman created to nurture life, not take part in destroying it.

Going through a healing program takes all those wounded parts and applies God's healing balm to them. It allows a person to take that box of memories and diffuse them of the pain. Bringing the whole experience into God's light leaves the enemy with little ammunition.

One of the things I remember most about my healing experience was describing it as if I had a bruised area that for years I was favoring and protecting and after the healing I was amazed to touch it and it didn't hurt anymore!

I didn't forget and I will always regret having had my abortion, but I no longer carried the shame and the guilt. And that freed me up to be a help to others who needed that same healing themselves. God could not have used me as He has in helping others, if I had not let Him take care of my own healing.

Women are hurt by abortion. It is unfortunate that the decision that was made that was supposed to bring relief and freedom ends up bringing a lifetime of regret and shame. But, thankfully, there is healing and help available. God's healing is there, available to everyone who comes to Him. You just have to take that first step.

3. You mentioned in your story that there is healing and help available. Can you tell us about the study you lead at Pregnancy Resources?

The study we use is Forgiven and Set Free. It is a 10-week Bible study done in a group setting. It gives women a chance to be open and honest about their abortions. It ends with an opportunity for them to name their child and have a memorial service.

4. Pregnancy Resources provides a wide span of care, along with a variety of free resources. Could you share these with us?

The center offers pregnancy tests, ultrasounds, parenting classes for women and men, dad's classes taught by men for men, a clothing room -Bella's Boutique, as well as diapers and car seats. We have the mobile Medical Van that goes out into the community, providing pregnancy tests and ultrasounds too. We have a presenter who goes into the Jr and Sr High Schools with our No Regrets program teaching about relationships and sexual abstinence. And, our post-abortion healing. And all of the services are free.

5. In what ways could someone get involved with Pregnancy Resources?

There are many ways the Edgewood congregation can get involved with Pregnancy Resources. And a lot of you already are. A number of staff and volunteers attend here. Prayer support is always appreciated. There are ways to support Pregnancy Resources by attending our Annual Fundraising Banquet and inviting others to join you to learn more about the work that is done. There's Baby Bottles for Life in May or joining the Walk for Life in September. And a Volunteer training is coming up in February. We will have all the information you need at our table in the lobby.

Let me come back to a common prayer request submitted by the people of Edgewood. Every week people pray that God would bring salvation to family members, neighbors, co-workers and classmates – there are over 2,000 names up on the wall in the Worship Center.

The greatest miracle of all is when God extends His mercy to sinners like you and like me. Whatever you've done, you can be forgiven. You can be saved by repenting of your sins and by receiving Jesus Christ as your Savior. He will forgive you and set you free from your sin and your shame, your guilt and your grievances.

Indeed, Jesus is the ultimate sign and the ultimate wonder and when you are born again, you will become a miracle of mercy!

Closing Song: "Your Mercy"

New Member – Robert Sanders