

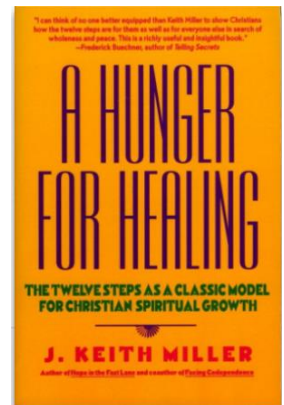
As I mentioned in last week's tardy *Laptop*, I was overtaken late last week by a sinus infection, a malady with which I am unfortunately quite familiar, but which was much worse than usual this time. Although I managed to struggle (foolishly, perhaps) through Sunday morning, I've spent most of the time from Sunday afternoon until this morning in bed, which is a rare occurrence indeed.

I try to learn from every experience of illness, and I was reminded once again of the delicate and wondrous fragility of life. I refreshed my memory on what it's like to have half a degree of fever up to more than three degrees of fever, and as I did, I gave hearty thanks for the miracle of antibiotics and for a comfortable bed in which to rest.

I was sadly reminded of the countless millions in our world for whom neither antibiotics nor beds are available, including the thousands in West Africa who are experiencing much greater fevers and lying and dying simply on the cold, hard, earth. And I've been reminded of Jesus' warning that "*from everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked*" (Luke 12:48b).

There are many ways to contribute to these needs, three of which are attached with this *Laptop*. These documents describe how you can contribute to ministry in the Ebola situation, in the Ukrainian situation, and in the Iraqi/ISIS situation through the Baptist World Alliance.

Although my own illness doesn't even bear comparing with what many experience, I did experience once again what Keith Miller has called "a hunger for healing." And as it happens, this Sunday we begin a four-week examination of Keith's hypothesis that the Twelve Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous actually are an excellent model for understanding Christian growth. I hope you'll come along for the ride.



Finally, while I was doing all this remembering, I remembered that quoted Dr. Jack MacGorman not long ago in his frequent affirmation that **"There is no limit to what God can do through your life, so long as you do not touch the glory."**

That reminded me of another parable from Martin Bell's wonderful little book to which Ben Davis introduced me, *The Way of the Wolf: The Gospel in New Images*. As you may recall, as the Great Lion is the Christ figure in Lewis's *Narnia*, here the Christ figure is the Great Silver Wolf

The Porcupine Whose Name Didn't Matter

Joggi stood before the mystery of his own life much as any other porcupine might have. That is to say, he was exceedingly cautious in the face of it. I do not mean to imply that it was difficult for Joggi to acknowledge the mystery. On the contrary, he had no trouble whatsoever recognizing the ebb and flow of his own limitations and the infinite variety and possibility within his universe.

Joggi knew about the ongoing beat of life. The daily, the humdrum, the having-one-day-showed-up; and now, like it or not, but finding-oneself-here-in-the-midst-of-existence, virtually crushed by the environment, called upon to create the entire world; the bittersweet commingling of all this with an inner insistence to go on, and on, until Until what? Joggi knew something about the ongoing beat of life. It throbbed somewhere deep within him.

Beneath the prickly spines. In the center of his tiny body. A thumping. Steady. Insistent. Unrelenting. The mystery.

Totally aware, more lucid perhaps than he desired to be, Joggi lived and loved, laughed and cried – tentatively. One might say that anger, frustration and tenderness had been so delicately woven into the fabric of his person as to make difficult our perceiving any of them.

Joggi was cautious in the face of the mystery. So cautious, in fact, that almost nobody knew his name. Most of the animals in the forest had seen the nearsighted porcupine moving slowly about, poking his pointed black nose into the vegetation, bristling and puffing, squinting and stumbling. Few had spoken to him. Now and then someone would say hello, and ask after his health – an attempt to strike up a conversation of sorts. This never really led to anything, however, because Joggi would not – no, that isn't fair – Joggi could not risk such a head-on collision.

Joggi's decisional hesitancy usually expressed itself this way. When asked what his name was, he would answer, "It doesn't matter! It doesn't matter what my name is! Can't you see? What difference does it make? I won't tell you what my name is, because it doesn't matter!"

That would be the reply. And, more often than not, that would be the end of the conversation. Joggi could not embrace another, he would not tell anyone his name, and the result was almost always the same: the other animals avoided him.

One significant exception to this was Gamiel, the raccoon. Gamiel did not mind Joggi's reticence at all. It did not bother him when the prickly little porcupine was silent for hours at a time, and he never even thought to ask about Joggi's name.

Gamiel can remember very little before the accident, and much of what happened since was blurred somewhere in the recesses of his brain, all but lost to memory. Raccoons are generally alert and resourceful creatures with keen perceptions and excellent memories. But all of this had changed for Gamiel. Ironically, he wasn't even certain why.

There had been a flash of light, and then something hard ripped into the side of his head. His whole body convulsed with pain; white-hot, wet, thrashing, God-when-will-it-stop pain that pitched him bleeding from the tree into the underbrush and drove him forward without his left side pulling any weight at all, by instinct only; screaming pain that shrieked behind his eyes, and then, as suddenly as it had come, was gone.

Gamiel had only to look at himself in the quiet waters of the forest pond to recognize why no one would come near him anymore. Everything had changed. He did not even look like a raccoon. The whole left side of his head was missing, he had no fur at all around his eyes where once the elegant mask had been, and he could barely pull himself along with his right front leg. Gamiel had only to look at himself in the forest pond to realize why everyone hurried past when he called out to them.

But the crippled raccoon would never again look at his reflection in the quiet waters. Not because he wasn't willing to see his disfigured image, but because he wasn't able to see anything at all. Ever since the accident, Gamiel had been totally blind.

Joggi found Gamiel about two days after the pain has stopped, and approximately three hours after the raccoon had given up all hope. There was a sound close by. Gamiel trembled.

"Is someone there?" he whispered.

At first Joggi didn't say anything. He looked at Gamiel and noted that his left side was paralyzed. Then, after a moment, he realized that the animal was blind. The nearsighted porcupine moved closer.

"You're a raccoon," he said out loud.

“Oh, yes, indeed I am!” Gamiel stuttered. “Only I think something awful has happened to me. I cannot see anything at all, and I can barely move. Please, tell me what is happened to me! Am I going to die? Why won’t anyone stop when I cry out? Why can’t I see? What has happened? Please, I’m afraid . . .” And in Gamiel’s searching, empty, sightless eyes tears began to form.

Joggi sniffed. In the center of his body the beat of life. Faster now. Answer him. Don’t just stand there with your spines bristling and your heart pounding. Answer him!

Joggi spoke with a steady and quiet voice. “I believe you have been shot. I cannot be certain, of course, but that is my opinion. Are you in a great deal of pain?”

“No. At first there was pain. But I can’t feel anything now. In fact, my whole left side is numb. No. No more pain. Just, well . . . Nothing.” Gamiel’s eyes opened and closed aimlessly.

Joggi was silent. His tiny body shivering; breathing labored, short difficult breaths. What now? An extended period of time.

Gamiel spoke in a hoarse voice, “Are you still there?”

Joggi’s heart beat faster. “Yes, I’m here. I was just wondering what to do now.”

“Oh, you don’t have to do anything! Honestly, I mean that! You don’t have to do anything at all. Just stay with me for a little while. Just be there. Just don’t go away. Please. You don’t have to do anything! Just stay with me. I’m afraid! You won’t go away, will you?”

Joggi swallowed hard. “No,” he said deliberately and with as much conviction as he could muster, “no, I won’t go away.”

“Thank you,” Gamiel said quietly. And then the wounded raccoon fell asleep.

Joggi stood beside Gamiel all that day. Then when evening came, a cool breeze made his spines whistle slightly. The sound woke the raccoon.

“Are you there?”

“Yes. I told you I wouldn’t go away.”

“I’m hungry.”

“I thought you probably would be,” Joggi replied. “Can you move at all?”

Gamiel stretched his right leg forward and pulled himself along the ground.

“Good for you!” said Joggi. “That will do nicely. I can bring you food, but you will need to maneuver for yourself in order to get water. I believe you have enough strength to reach the pond; it isn’t very far, and I can guide you directly to it. Come on. Let’s see how it goes.”

That was how it began. An unusual partnership, perhaps. Certainly the rest of the animals in the forest were surprised to see the pair of them moving slowly about, managing to live from one day to the next without really doing much of anything. Occasionally Joggi would describe something for Gamiel, or answer a question, or direct the crippled raccoon toward a tasty morsel of food. Gamiel, for his part, chattered happily, basked in the sun, and generally enjoyed his friend’s company.

They made a home for one another, Joggi and Gamiel. Not a regular home exactly; not a place. More like a shelter from the excessive pain that each of them had known. The coming together of two lonely and frightened creatures. A bond of trust that asked no questions, expected nothing at all except the merciful being together that made waking up tomorrow possible. Gamiel didn’t mind when Joggi was silent for hours at a time. He could sense the beat. Thumping, ongoing, steady. There. It was enough.

Joggi was with Gamiel for one full year before the injured raccoon finally died. It was a quiet event, almost a surprise but that Joggi had been expecting it for so long. Gamiel's strength just finally gave out and the mystery enveloped him completely.

"You know, I've been expecting this for quite some time now," Joggi said to the raccoon who lay there on the ground, no longer able to hear him. "I am surprised that you managed to stay alive as long as you did. I knew the day that I found you it couldn't last. Not for long. You'd been hurt too badly. I never expected you to live this long. And yet . . . well, I had hoped that it might have been a little longer. Do you know what I mean?"

"You see, I never knew anybody very well before. Not that we ever talked much, or anything like that. But I felt like I knew you anyway. Even without talking. I have a really hard time talking to anybody, or getting to know anybody. And nobody ever wants to get very close to me because of all these spines that I have sticking out of me.

"I don't suppose you ever knew that I had spines sticking out all over me, did you? They're sort of like needles and they're sharp. I guess they scare everybody a bit. I hope you don't mind my talking so much. I really don't know why I'm talking to you now. I suppose it's just that I had a little more to tell you before you died; I have been wanting to say this for almost a year and never quite found the right time to do it. It's too late now, I realize, but I've been wanting to tell you that it has been an honor to meet you, and you are indeed a very handsome raccoon, and that I would like to consider you my friend."

The porcupine cleared his throat. A tear dropped onto his nose. In the center of his body the ongoing beat of life. Beneath the prickly spines. Wildly thumping. Tell him! Don't just stand there with your spines bristling and your heart pounding. Tell him!

"Oh, and by the way, I'd like to tell you what my name is. It's a funny name, I suppose. But I'd like you to know what it is."

A moment's hesitation, and then, "It's Joggi."

Without another word, the tiny porcupine turned away from Gamiel's lifeless form and began to cry. What he did not see was a great silver wolf standing, statue-like in the shadows, fiery eyes smoldering.



The Joshua Code: Fifty-Two Verses Every Believer Should Know **O.S. Hawkins (Thomas Nelson, 2012)**

Week thirty-nine: A Faith that Works

“For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also” (James 2:26).

There has always been an ongoing controversy in ecclesiastical circles over the nature of our salvation. People tend to gravitate toward one of two extreme views. One view overemphasizes faith while forgetting works; the other overemphasizes works while forgetting faith. The former is referred to as “easy believism.” Proponents of this viewpoint think one can say a simple “sinner’s prayer” without any change of lifestyle, any prayer or Bible study, or any desire for spiritual things and still be saved because he or she “prayed the prayer.” The latter is referred to as a “works salvation.” Proponents of this approach seem to think one can earn salvation through good works.

This conflict between faith and works is as old as the church itself. The entire argument finds its roots in the second chapter of James and in particular here in James 2:26: *“Faith without works is dead.”* All through Scripture, the emphasis is on the fact that salvation is wholly by grace through faith in Christ Jesus alone and *“not of works, lest anyone should boast”* (Ephesians 2:9). However, the Bible also teaches that **true saving faith is always accompanied by fruit and will result in good works.**

On the surface it appears to some that the message of Paul and the message of James are in diametric opposition to one another. For example, James asked, *“Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered Isaac his son on the altar?”* (James 2:21). Paul countered, *“If Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. For what does the Scripture say? ‘Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness’”* (Romans 4:2–3). However, in reality, the two do not contradict each other; in fact, they actually complement each other.

FAITH AND WORKS ACCORDING TO JAMES

James and Paul were coming at the same issue from different perspectives. Paul was writing to the Judaizers who were saying that one had to add works of the law to faith in order to receive salvation. Thus his emphasis was on faith alone as the basis for salvation. Paul was arguing for the primacy of faith. James, on the other hand, was writing to people who went to the other extreme. They claimed to have faith but, in reality, had only intellectual assent. Therefore, his emphasis was on what Jesus called the “fruit” of our faith. James was simply arguing for the evidence of faith.

FAITH AND WORKS ACCORDING TO PAUL

Paul consistently emphasized that no one enters God’s kingdom except by faith and by faith alone. James was in agreement with him. He began his letter saying, *“[God] chose to give us birth through the word of truth”* (James 1:18 NIV). Here in the second chapter, James was simply reinforcing the point that good works are the natural response of true saving faith. He was not saying that works are the requirement for salvation, but that they are the result of our salvation.

“As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead.” It is not a faith *with* works at issue here, but a faith *that* works. Paul reminded us that *“we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them”* (Ephesians 2:10). We are saved by faith alone, but faith that saves is never alone.