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HEALING AND RECONCILIATION

Healing from the past for a brighter future

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For every student and graduate to be an agent of
godly transformation in church and society

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Healing and Reconciliation

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0. Introduction

During my visit in one school, this teenager girl from a wealthy adoptive family shared how she has been affected by her past. She is an orphan from both parents. Left to her maternal aunt, this one mistreated her to the point of not feed her for some time. While doing this, the aunt used to say, *"Why should I care for you? Your dad was rich but never helped me in any way."* This affected her to the point that she had to leave this family and be raised by another aunt. There she continued to live a miserable life though the family was kind and supportive to her. She was always quiet, thoughtful, never joyful to the point she couldn't enjoy her life fully. She was very suspicious whenever a Hutu was around her. Associating with them was really an issue. Glory be to God for that after attending the seminar on healing and reconciliation she was not only able to be released from the hurt of her past but also to forgive all those people who hurt her not only those who murdered her family but also her aunt who mistreated her.

During National Mourning Week, I visited a friend who was also hurting. Before this time, she has been apparent ok and seemed in good terms with everyone. But on this special occasion of remembering the Tutsi who were killed in the Genocide, she had hard time. It was in the same period that she lost her father and siblings, killed by the soldiers of RPF. For this reason, she was low and didn't want to be in public. It took me time to be with her and spent time with her in prayer for her to open up and share with me not only what happened and what it means for her at this time of her life.

From these testimonies one may ask himself some important questions:

1. How many people are hurting outside there without others to realize what is going on in their lives?
2. Where can one be hurt from?
3. Why did they need healing and reconciliation?
4. What is the role of repentance and forgiveness in all this?
5. What does the Bible say about all this?

It is to all this questions that we will try to find answers and this, relating them to our own context.

I. Definition

a) Healing

According to the Vine's Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words¹ "To heal" may be described as "restoring to normal," an act which God typically performs. Thus, appeals to God for healing are common: "...O Lord, heal me; for my bones are vexed" ([Psa. 6:2](#)); "Heal me, O Lord, and I shall be healed ..." ([Jer. 17:14](#)).

Healing implies restoration to the first state of normality. This means that something went wrong and the person (or country) needs to be restored to the normal state. This healing may be physical, social, emotional, etc. Our focus will be mainly emotional and social healing which is most of the time called healing of the heart.

¹ *Vine's Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*

b) Reconciliation

The New Unger's Bible Dictionary² defines reconciliation as “*the restoration of friendship and fellowship after estrangement.*” Reconciliation, therefore, means that someone or something is completely altered and adjusted to a required standard (cf. [Romans 5:6-11](#)).

It is also a change from enmity to friendship. It is mutual, i.e., it is a change wrought in both parties who have been at enmity³.

II. A broken heart

1 Samuel 1.1-18:

- In this story we have 4 people involved: Elkanah and his two wives Peninnah (who had sons and daughters) and Hannah who was barren for God had closed her womb. We have also Eli the priest.
- They all behaved differently in the situation of Hannah who had no son:
 - o Peninnah was not supportive but used to mistreat her rival; enjoying, provoking and irritating her. She used to do this every year during the time of worship and sacrifice. (V.6-7)
 - o Elkanah was at least supportive to her barren wife: He used to give her a double portion (V. 5), he used to say good words which are not common to many men in our culture talking to barren women (V.8)
 - o Eli the priest: First, he confused Hannah to a drunkard woman (V. 13-14) but later understood her case and blessed her (V.17).
 - o Hannah:
 - She was irritated (grieved, troubled, hurt, etc) by the words of her rival to the point that she wept, could not eat and not able to rejoice before the Lord though it was supposed to be a time of joy before the Lord.
 - She was deeply hurt that she couldn't pray openly; she could only just babble but her vice was not being heard. That's why she was taken to be drunkard.
 - She didn't just enjoy the supportive words of her husband but sought help from God Almighty, the one who created the heart and is able to heal it. (V. 9-11)
 - She was sincere with God but never passed around the bush to tell God her case (V. 11: *If you look at the affliction of your servant, then...*)
 - She received healing from the Lord. (V.18: she was able to eat something and her face was no longer downcast.)

We also behave in one way or another like one of these characters of the story. Some of us are “Peninnahs” mistreating our brethren, enjoying their suffering and sometime being the source of their suffering. What does the Luo say when seeing a Kikuyu suffering? What does a Kikuyu say when a Luo suffering? What do we think when one of the person of the other tribe is sharing about his/her suffering? How do we deal with our hurt when wronged by the others? May the Lord help us!

² *New Unger's Bible Dictionary (1957)*

³ *Easton's Illustrated Dictionary (1988).*

III. The source of our pain

Our hearts are wounded in different ways:

- 1) **From our family:** This happens when we don't find the basic needs of every human being. These go beyond the physiological needs (food, clothing, etc). They are needed from the time the child is still in the womb of his mother and are the following ones:
 - a. **Love:** the child needs not only to see love from the parents' actions but also to hear it from their mouths. Consequences of lack of love: it is hard to love people, it is not easy to receive love from other people, and you may confuse normal care and concern to love or become a love beggar.
 - b. **Peace/security:** being born in a clam and peaceful environment help in building up of our personality. Consequences: Being very fearful or becoming troublemaker.
 - c. **Value:** any child needs to know that he is valued and the family and society has great expectations from him or her. Consequences of lack of value: Inferiority complex (rejecting responsibility) or trying to find value by all means (becoming a star, fashion people, etc.)
 - d. Knowing your family line: it good and healthy to know your relatives (parents, dad, mum, aunts, uncles, cousins, etc.) This helps to feel part of the human society. But not every child knows his/her real parents, has his relatives alive. This makes them feel like strangers in the human race (human society).
- 2) **Tribal (ethnic) conflict:** People tend to think tribal conflict to be that time when the tribes have crushes or fights openly. However, they fail to realize that the conflict has been there in their history and the crush is simply the result of unsolved passed hurt between the communities. For example, for anyone to be able to understand the genocide of Tutsi in Rwanda he needs to go back in the Rwandan history to be able to know the roots of the problem. The same with the post-election crush in Kenya. It didn't start just in 2007 but some years before. Looking at closely, you will find that the history of these communities is marked of wounds and hurt which were not addressed but covered. The bad thing is that most of the time, it is passed on from parents to their children. An example is young men in prison who, once asked why they killed Tutsi, said: "we have carried them enough," referring to pre-colonial time when kings used to be carried. Amazingly, how can this people who were under 30 years old, born in the time of 1st and 2nd Republics have carried kings? They were simply working out of the wounds and hurts of their parents, passed on to them by telling them stories of that time from a wounded perspective.

Another challenge in this is strengthened by stereotypes and prejudices made by each community against the other. You will find that saying a Luo to Kikuyu may mean an arrogant person, while a Kikuyu mean simply a money-lover to a Luo. Surprisingly, people tend to identify themselves to this stereotypes and prejudices. For instance: Kikuyu know and identify themselves as people who like money, some Tutsi believe themselves to be cunning, etc.

Soon or later, the devil will help people to find that these stereotypes are true through history. A very simply example is the Hutu who were known to be without pity, killers, etc till the devil helped them to prove this during the genocide of Tutsi where they even killed babies without pity.

Most of these conflicts lead to crushes and leave us with pain, sorrow, grief, anger, etc. it creates suspicions among communities and most of the time hatred. This is worse when some of us have lost their relatives, property etc. during that conflict. This becomes a good reason (and in way the understandable one humanly speaking) to hate one another. However, if this cycle doesn't end somewhere, our history will always be bloodshed.

- 3) **What we pass through:** this may be at work, in marriage, in courtship, at church/ministry, etc. Our experiences in these areas of life vary and some of them are not that pleasant even to hear or remember.

IV. Why do we need healing and reconciliation?

- a. It is painful to live with a wounded heart. (Proverbs 15,13; Prov. 17.22; Prov. 18.14)
- b. Though it not a sin but it may lead to sin. Example: 2 Samuel 13: Absalom revenging because he covered his wound/hurt cause by his step brother who raped his sister.
- c. The devil uses your hurt to interfere with God's purpose on your life. You are not yourself, the person the Lord created you to be when living with wounded heart. Example of Hannah who
- d. It is God's will for people to live in harmony (Psalm 133.1-3)
- e. Jesus prayed for His people to be one as He is one with the Father (John 17.20-23)

V. Jesus Christ, the key to our healing and reconciliation

Many people tend to focus on reconciliation forgetting the process of healing. However, true reconciliation will never happen if there is not real healing from the hurt of the past. It would be simply covering up, coexisting peacefully but not really living in harmony.

Jesus is the answer!

Starting His ministry in Luke 4.16-21 Jesus Christ gave the plan of action, or business plan of his ministry on earth. He was quoting Isaiah 61.1-3: He is the one who has the Spirit of the Sovereign Lord and anointed to do different things such as:

- Preaching the good news to the poor
- Healing (binding up) the broken-hearted
- Proclaiming freedom to the captives
- Proclaiming release from darkness for the prisoners
- To comfort all who mourn
- For those who mourn in Zion:
 - o A crown of beauty instead of ashes
 - o The oil of gladness & mourning
 - o A garment of praise & a spirit of despair
- The purpose is for this people to be called the trees of righteousness, a planting of the Lord so that He may be glorified.

This is what the Lord is able to do in our hearts and lives.

Isaiah 53.1-5: prophecy about his coming and reason of his suffering

- He was despised and rejected by people, a man of sorrow familiar with suffering
- He accepted all these for our sake: not only our
 - o Sins and iniquities but also
 - o Our sorrow and pain
- By His wounds we are healed.

Remember his life: birth in poorest conditions (in a manger); surviving a massacre (or a genocide) of every male child under 2 years old, living a refugee life, being hated by those he did well; he was rejected by all even his disciple denied him. He suffered a terrible death at the cross being hanged on a tree but he endured all these for our sake so that he will be able to listen and understand our sorrow and pain whenever we bring this to him.

That is the basis of his moral authority in declaring in Matthew 11.28-30: *"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."*

We need to come to Him by Faith and with sincerity of heart and humility for us to be healed and find rest for our souls.

Exercise:

- Write down all the pain and hurt you have ever experienced in your own words or by images or drawings (life line for example)
- Take all these (your pain and the person who hurt you) to Jesus by faith: either on the cross in front or by praying over these. Make sure you burn or destroy this paper as an act of faith that Jesus is dealing and healing your wounds. The reason of taking even the person at the cross is to hand him over to the righteous Judge Jesus Christ who knows how to deal with him properly. This facilitates the process of repentance and forgiveness to be discussed in the next part.
- Take time to thank him and rejoice in him for his cross that saves from sins and heals the brokenhearted
- Start a new life: joining others to encourage one another.

VI. The role of repentance and forgiveness in healing and reconciliation

Repentance and forgiveness are key to the process of healing and reconciliation. When we don't confess our wrongdoings (sins) we are simply covering up them and cannot expect blessings from God (among which His healing). The same with Forgiveness: it facilitates us to get rid of the burden of the sorrow in our hearts. Otherwise, we keep on carrying up the pain in our hearts and for this reason we are not yet ready to restore friendship with the person who hurt us.

What the Bible say about the two:

- a. Repentance: it a change of heart and mind which will be manifested also in the actions and behavior. It is about turning from the bad way to the good one. This requires acknowledging your wrongdoing, feeling sorry about it, resolving to turn no matter the cost. That is why it should be a personal decision.

In Matthew 5.23-26, Jesus Christ encourages people to repent as soon as possible. He doesn't expect people to offer their sacrifices without repenting to their brothers. I suspect if Christians have

understood this principle we would see changes in our lives and the way we deal with wrongdoings within and out of the church.

- b. Forgiveness: it is a decision to release the person who hurt you from your heart, taking him by faith to the cross and leaving the judgment to Jesus Christ the righteous Judge. Forgiveness is not forgetting, minimizing the hurt or not allowing the justice to do its work.

It is beneficial for the one forgiving to do this even when the person is not willing to repent. It relieves you and facilitates your personal healing process. Once Nelson Mandela was asked the reason he forgave white people before even they asked forgiveness and said: “Refusing to forgive is like taking (drinking) poison and expecting the other person to die”.

Jesus in Matthew 18.15-35 talks about forgiving. He first shows that the hurt person is also expected to make the first step of showing the offender his fault and the process to follow if he refuses. He also gives a parable to show how merciful and forgiving any one who has been forgiven should have toward his brother who hurt him. He ends it with a powerful principle: *“forgiveness should be from the heart”*

Having said this, people would think that repentance and forgiveness are this simple. However, they are not. Actually they are not human. Adam failed to ask forgiveness and started giving reasons and shifting the responsibility to Eve and God who brought her. And it is only at the cross that this may happen and be lasting.

Conclusion: Our role as Christians

- Peacemaker (Matt.5.9)
- God’s ambassadors (2 Corinthians 5.20)
- Ministers of reconciliations (2 Corinthians 5.18-21)
- Connecting God’s people who are hurting to the loving and caring heart of God
- Demonstrating God’s Kingdom by living in harmony with one another (John 17. 20-23, Ps. 133; John 13.31-35)