

## A DEADLY PARALYSIS

Paralysis is defined as a loss of the power of movement or a sensation which results in a loss of use of the affected area. As unfortunate and difficult as any physical paralysis is for those afflicted, based on my experience, I believe that it is much sadder and far more debilitating to suffer from a different kind of paralysis: the emotional paralysis that occurs when a heart becomes so numb it can no longer feel truly loved or be moved to respond to another with true love. Perhaps you know someone suffering from this very real disability; maybe it's even you. Of all the suffering I've encountered in my five-plus decades, this is one of the most grievous afflictions I have ever seen. While there are a lot of horrible diseases afflicting mankind, the pain of physical diseases and disabilities affects the body, but the heart and spirit can still flourish and continue to find a measure of joy despite the hardship and pain. However, those afflicted with emotional paralysis cannot rise above their pain and find joy in life because their pain hinders their ability to experience the greatest joy God has given us, which alone makes life worth living: an abiding, intimate love relationship both with Himself and with others. Feeling loved makes physical hardship and pain bearable, but feeling unloved creates a need so great, so all-encompassing the pain often results in becoming emotionally immobilized. The consequences, as you can well imagine, are devastating, not only for them, but also for those whose lives become intertwined with theirs.

I experienced these devastating consequences up close and very personally for most of my childhood through my stepfather, who suffered from emotional paralysis. Since then I have encountered this same affliction in a dozen or so friends, family members, co-workers, and acquaintances. Through my interaction with those who suffer from this emotional disability, I have come to the conclusion that it stems from one of two causes: overindulgence or neglect. In the case of my stepfather, it was the result of being completely doted on and indulged as a child. He was never given the *loving* security of healthy boundaries, nor any impressionable consequences for wrongdoing. He was the perfect example of the term "spoiled rotten." In his case, he was never forced to grow up and move beyond a child's immature self-centeredness. To him life was about getting his way and when he didn't he threw a temper-tantrum. His emotional paralysis was based on the fact that like a selfish and indulgent child, he simply *didn't care about others* unless they were a means of getting what he wanted or needed. However, the most common cause of emotional paralysis occurs when a person's emotional stability is shattered, usually as a child, by being deeply wounded and devalued by key people in their lives. In order to stop their hearts from simply withering up and expiring under the pain, they began to develop elaborate defense mechanisms that become the brick and mortar of protective walls around their wounded hearts. However, in the process they ultimately entomb their hearts, consequently creating the perfect environment for them to atrophy and become emotionally paralyzed. Therefore, their reality is that they simply *cannot genuinely care for others* as it is far too frightening to even think of exposing their fragile hearts to such risk. Yet even more sadly is the fact that these same walls not only effectively keep out those who *might* cause more damage, they also bar those longing to offer the restorative powers of truth and love from bringing much needed healing and wholeness. Not having the emotional stability that enables healthy people to mature and

move beyond self, so as to seek the good of others, incapacitates them and prohibits them from moving beyond their protective barriers in order to ever truly experience being loved or to love another unselfishly.

Contrary to what you might think, those suffering from emotional paralysis are not always easy to identify. Due to finely-honed survival instincts they can be *very* adept at presenting themselves as being quite stable. By all appearances they come across as functional, productive people. It is only when you get close enough to interact with them in an '*iron sharpening iron*' way that you begin to realize that underneath their polished exterior is a hardened core of dysfunction ready to turn mercenary at any perceived threat to self. Their greatest dilemma is that like everyone else they need social interaction, yet it is within the context of social interactions, particularly close relationships, that they feel most vulnerable because this is where their greatest fear can be realized: being exposed for who they are. Not for the fraudulent image they've learned to present, but for the real person they believe they are that was found so lacking in virtue or worth that they were made to feel unloved and worthless by those who were close enough to know. Therefore, they must always be in control of every situation in order to avoid exposure. Consequently, they have one modus operandi: self-preservation and it will trump every opportunity to become truly intimate with another or allow the truth and love of God to set them free by healing their wounded hearts. They can never let themselves be truly known, or get beyond themselves to care enough to truly get to know anyone else.

It is for this reason that their consequences are devastating, not only to themselves, but to those whose lives become intertwined with theirs, and the closer the relationship, such as family members, the more devastating the consequences. Because of their consuming fear of being exposed, hurt, and shamed again, all their mental and emotional operating systems are geared to safeguarding their hearts. This makes them completely incapable of meeting the emotional needs of friends and family. Thus, those who love them will ultimately become walking wounded as well, nursing a host of emotions, such as confusion, frustration, anger, hatred, indifference, and even despair as their emotional needs are always being trumped by the needs of those in their lives who suffer from emotional paralysis.

Any attempts to confront them about this or any other issue that are causing relational conflicts, will encounter fierce resistance. These masters of manipulative techniques will do whatever it takes to ensure they remain in control. There can never be any resolution in any conflict with them as they cannot be rational when it comes to matters of their heart. Self-preservation dictates that they are never at fault; are never the cause of any problem; and are always justified in any obvious wrongdoing or failure. In their own minds, everyone else is the problem, and they will spin every detail to that effect. They cannot be trusted to follow through on their word, and often deny having ever given their word. Those who have ever been in conflict with them find themselves caught up in the chaotic whirlwind of their dysfunction and at a complete loss as to how to ground the relationship in reality, truth, and reason. Eventually, having become worn down and totally bewildered and disheartened by the onslaught of manipulation, they end up capitulating and accommodating the dysfunction once again for a measure of sanity and peace. Yet, even so, there can never be any real peace and sanity, only a constant dread of living like you are walking through a mine field, wondering when you will again trip the mechanism that sets off another explosion.

Oh, how my heart goes out to both those who suffer from emotional paralysis and those who suffer because of them! I have experienced both sides of this impasse. Having been verbally and physically abused by my stepfather I know enough of heartache, devaluation, fear, and insecurity to identify with those who are emotionally paralyzed. Yet, at the same time I also empathize with the feelings of frustration, anger, emptiness, and hopelessness of those who love them. I would still be tied up in the knots of these negative emotions except that God persisted in making Himself known to me until I finally surrendered, willingly giving up my control, my desire to see justice done, my self-loathing, my fear, and my insecurity to embrace His amazing unconditional love for me. However, it is one thing to *believe* God loves you, and it's another to *receive* His love for you. Many who are afflicted with emotional paralysis mentally acknowledge that God loves them, but because in the depths of their souls they do not believe they are lovable, this all-important truth is never fully believed. Apart from their allowing this truth to silence all feelings and lies to the contrary, they will never experience their minds being made whole and their hearts being healed as God promises.

God is love! To say you believe in God, but deny that His love could include you, is to deny both who God is, and who God created you to be! Are the words, actions, and feelings of others toward you far more indicative of who you are than those of your Creator? Can you really believe that God is powerful enough to save you from suffering eternally in hell for your sins, but not powerful enough to save you from the hell you're living in because of the sins others committed against you? Sin is sin and Christ's resurrection from the dead conquered *all* sin: mine, yours, and others, once and for all! If God's sacrifice of His only begotten Son on a cross to save you from the power and penalty of sin isn't convincing enough proof of His perfect love for you, then I can't think of anything anyone can do to make you feel loved. All I *know* is that I have come to rest and bask in the fact that God loves me; in the *fact* that there is nothing I can do to make Him love me more and there is nothing I can do to make Him love me less. He loves me as much as He loves Christ because I am in Christ and He is in me: the two have become one! What a *freeing* truth I have found this to be!

So, too, can you! God promises that at the moment you truly believe Him and let His truth silence the lies that feed all the negative emotions paralyzing you, then you will become a new creation, the old things having passed away. Now, He who began this new work in you will faithfully complete it, meaning God is faithful to redeem *everything* by working it for good. I would still be *bound* in the prison of my pain and fear, but for the love and grace of God! I cannot fathom living apart from Him! Living paralyzed by lies of being unlovable, either because of something intrinsically wrong with you or because you are damaged goods is hell on earth and if it keeps you from truly believing God loves you so as to keep your heart from Him, then it will also be hell eternally! That is why this is such a *deadly* paralysis. My heart's desire is for you to see that being a perpetual victim is far more painful and devastating than anything you've ever suffered. Christ's victory through the cross and resurrection enables you to break free from being a *victim* and become a *victor* in Him. I beseech you that you let no one keep you from the loving relationships you were created to fully participate in and enjoy, beginning with God. He waits with open arms!

### Prayer:

Lord God, my heart is so full of gratitude that You loved me so much that you were willing to make the ultimate sacrifice to redeem me from slavery to sin, mine and that done to me by others. I am so grateful that Your love and Your truth have set me free from my fear and shame, so that I am now not only free to love You and others unselfishly, but also receive love without doubting it is possible. Thank You for the peace, joy, and rest that I now experience as opposed to the insecurity and fear that haunted me daily. Lord God Your greatest work is to restore that which is broken through the power of Your perfect love, a love that is absolutely pure as it is utterly selfless. Therefore, it is in Your love that we can find a place of refuge, healing, and hope for our battered hearts.

It is my prayer that those who You lead to read this who are hurting, afraid, and feeling hopeless will have the darkness of their imprisoned soul pierced by Your light, their minds persuaded by Your truth, and their hearts touched by the miracle of Your love to the point they are compelled to respond and finally be set free. Lord, resurrect Your children from the tombs of their emotional paralysis to living abundantly through the restorative power of Your love. Amen

### Challenge:

One of the things I have noticed about those who suffer from emotional paralysis is that they live in a survival mode. They believe that their greatest victory against those who hurt and shamed them is maintaining a façade of success and happiness in order to prove their abusers wrong. It is also the only way they feel any measure of worth. If this resonates with you, my challenge is for you to take a good look at your life and ask yourself: is living to merely survive all that God intended for life to be? Is this your only lot in life? Is this the *abundant life* He promised? I beg you to no longer let fear, shame, bitterness, or despair keep you from the most miraculous truth, the most compelling love, and the freest and most abundant life possible (*i.e., God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in Him will not perish, but have everlasting life (Jn.3:16)*). How long are you going to let the hurtful words and actions of those blinded by their own pain and self-righteousness *blind* you to the truth of what God believes about you? How much more of your life and energy are you going to waste nurturing and feeding the monstrous lies that imprison your heart and mind? How long are you going to resist the truth that will set you free? God is a gentleman. He will continue to woo you to Himself, but will leave the choice to you. So what will you choose? The truth or lies? Freedom or imprisonment? Peace or fear? Hope or hopelessness? Abundant life or survival? Wholeness or dysfunction? Knowing love or being loveless? You must decide; there is no middle ground. If what you've been doing isn't really working for you, then why not try something new? After all, what have you got to lose? Embrace God; He's already embraced you!

*Scriptures referenced and applicable:* Psalm 23; 62:5-8; Isaiah 42:16; John 8:32; Romans 8:1, 15-17, 28, 35-39; Ephesians 2:4-7; 3:14-20; 4:23-24; Philippians 1:6; 3:13-14; 4:8; Colossians 1:9-14, 25-28; I John 4:8, 16-20; Revelation 3:20-21

*Recommended resources:*

The Sensation of Being Somebody by Dr. Maurice Wagner

The Search for Significance by Robert S. McGee

Breaking Free and Believing God Bible Studies by Beth Moore

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