

Unclaimed Baggage

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A Lesson on how to forgive
yourself and restore your
usefulness in God's kingdom

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INTRODUCTION

Let's pretend that we are in a Disney Movie for a moment. It's one of those movies where objects that are inanimate in real life; have life, personality, emotions, thoughts and speech. In our imagination you are someone's iPad. You've been to Europe and you are in the suitcase on the way home. Thankfully you are laying safely between the pants and the shirts, far away from the underwear. You know you have a layover in New York City on the way home where you will switch planes. You know that because your owner saved the itinerary in your memory.

When you make that first landing, you think to yourself: "Almost home". Just one more short flight. You feel the bumps as the luggage you are in gets tossed from the plane to the luggage carrier, and then the movement as it runs across the pavement. It's fun, like a bit of a roller coaster ride. You giggle and 'tee-hee' until, finally you come to a place of rest. It won't be long now, and you'll get on that final flight and be home; except hours go by. Then more hours. The hours turn into days. The days turn into weeks. The weeks turn into months, and you haven't moved an inch. Any hope of ever being used again is nearly gone. You are now in a suitcase labelled 'unclaimed baggage'.

There are a lot of people that feel exactly like that. They feel like they've been on a roller coaster ride, then subsequently locked up, put away, and forgotten about. To add to the pain of that, many times they feel that the reason they have become unusable is their own doing. It's because of things they have done in the past that have caused them to feel, lost, or broken. It is because of bad decisions, past sin, or something in their life that has caused debilitating low self-esteem. In their minds, God, and the world around them will be better off if they are replaced by someone better. Often these same people have sincerely brought their past sin to God and are forgiven by Him, but they have not dealt with it within themselves. Their past choices, behaviour, or their weakness has become their identity. They have not forgiven themselves, or learned to view themselves as God sees them. They have put themselves in the 'unclaimed baggage' unit because they have not dealt with things in their own life; often-times things that they had no control over.

There are so many possible reasons for this. Here are just a few...

- Abuse: Whether it was verbal, emotional, physical, sexual, or otherwise doesn't matter. Both the abuser and the human mind seem to have the unique ability to make an abused person feel like they are somehow responsible. It totally lessens their feeling of self-worth. They feel like lost and damaged goods. They feel unworthy of

true love either by God, man, or woman. Often, people in this situation settle for very poor relationships because they don't see themselves as worthy of being loved unconditionally.

- Some people, man or woman, became sexually active at a young age. They wish they had waited. They wish they had saved themselves for their true love. As they look back they feel both dirty and damaged, but in their minds it is water under the bridge that cannot be taken back. Often, people in this situation find it difficult to be truly intimate with their love and life-long partner. It isn't that they don't want to be, it is that they see themselves as damaged goods; unworthy of true emotional intimacy expressed through physical love-making.
- Some women who have had an abortion, but have since changed their view on the subject, deal with severe emotional pain. They become an emotional castaway. Or, it can be a man who got a girl pregnant and supported, or even encouraged her in that decision to abort the child. God's grace is bigger than their sin, but they identify themselves with decisions made in their past.
- Perhaps you were a bully. You hurt a lot of people, knowing full well that you were robbing them of their self-esteem. You found joy in destroying people's self-worth, but have now

come to realize how harmful you were. Now it is your own self-worth that is destroyed.

- Maybe you were the one bullied, and your self-esteem was beaten into oblivion.
- Perhaps you cheated on your spouse, and not a soul knows but you. You hate that you did it and you feel like a piece of dirt.
- You have told so many lies to so many people that you can't keep track of them all. You know what others think of you because of it, and you agree.

On and on we could go. You have asked God for forgiveness for any part you have played in the events of your life, and you were graciously forgiven. However, you have still stuffed yourself in a suitcase and treated yourself as non-redeemable. Although you have been forgiven, you haven't seen yourself worthy of being healed. You have dealt with whatever events in the past have so powerfully affected your life on a spiritual level. You have accepted God's forgiveness, but rejected your own. You have unclaimed baggage and hidden yourself away, rendering yourself as unworthy of being used of God or loved by others.

There you remain. While others experience great relationships, a wonderful Christian life - the abundant

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life – doing great things for God’s kingdom, you are watching that life go by because you don’t see yourself as worthy of it. You have unclaimed baggage.

While others are being used by God in His kingdom, the spiritual gifts God has given you are locked up with you. Your value to the family of God is hidden. Your value to the kingdom of God is muted. You are merely tolerating yourself, waiting for your owner, God, to pick you up and take you to heaven where all things are made new. You have buried your past and your present in a closet of low self-worth; making the body of Christ do without the awesome person that you are with the awesome gifts God has given you to be used for His Kingdom.

In reality, you are hurting yourself more than anyone.

- God wants you to have purpose
- God wants you to be productive
- God wants to bless you
- God wants you to store up eternal riches in heaven
- God wants to have an intimate relationship with you
- God wants you to see yourself as He sees you.

I want to look at 3 biblical stories that help us get a handle on this subject.

HE IS OUR HIDING PLACE

There is a store in Scottsboro, Alabama; about half hour from my wife's home town, called: "The Unclaimed Baggage Center." The agreement that they have requires the airlines to hold on to the unclaimed baggage for three months, after which they can acquire the unclaimed baggage. You can buy almost anything in this store, all things that came from baggage that has been left unclaimed.

Isn't it hard to believe that people who have their clothing (some of it new that they bought on their trip), their camera, their laptop, their jewelry, and their cell phone in their luggage, wouldn't track it down in that length of time?

I wonder what percentage of Christians have unclaimed baggage that is rendering them inadequate to be used for the kingdom of God in their own minds. In other words, they are carrying around the effects of bad decisions, sin, or events in their life that they could not control, and they have not found healing within themselves; for themselves. They have not dealt with

the impact that those moments in time had on them spiritually, emotionally and psychologically. As a result, they are living without the abundance of life that is rightfully theirs. They are not getting the freedom of life that belongs to them.

It's very possible, some would say 'likely', that Psalm 32 was written soon after David's sin with Bathsheba and the arranged death of her husband.

David had lived an exemplary life. He honoured God in almost everything he did, but not this time.

You know the story well I'm sure. From the roof of his palace he saw this beautiful young woman bathing. He summoned her, slept with her, and got her pregnant. Subsequently, he arranged that her husband would almost certainly die in battle by sending him to the front line of a current conquest. He did die. David intentionally caused the death of another man without laying a hand on him. Call it what you will, but the intent was there for Bathsheba's husband to be killed.

Listen to the agony David felt when the impact of all this finally hit him. Like many do, he tried burying it inside. As a result, this great man of God had unclaimed baggage that was destroying him from the inside out.

Usually we bury the dead, but the impact of unclaimed emotional and/or spiritual baggage buries the living. It continues to infect our emotions and spiritual life, and can render us unfruitful.

The explanation of David's emotional pain is very graphic. This is what happens when we don't forgive ourselves and hide ourselves away like unclaimed baggage.

Listen to this. David is talking about sin not yet confessed to God; but I believe that the affect is the same when we don't forgive ourselves. *“Blessed is the one whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered.*

2 Blessed is the one whose sin the LORD does not count against them and in whose spirit is no deceit.

3 When I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long.

4 For day and night your hand was heavy on me; my strength was sapped as in the heat of summer.” (Psalm 32:1-7)

David's actions became his self-identity. He held it inside. He didn't claim his baggage, and this was the result: *“my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long”* Clearly he was in a state of depression.

He didn't have the strength to do anything. The sin he was hiding inside himself rendered him useless. This great man of God who had defeated a lion, a bear, a giant and mighty armies was depressed and weak to the point of being useless.

The feelings that came with his bad decisions and failures were destroying him from the inside out. This emotional and spiritual infection had two sources.

First, from within himself

Sometimes, we are our own worst enemy. We accept God's forgiveness, but refuse to forgive ourselves. Sometimes the guilt we feel is a result of real sin and sometimes it is merely perceived. It's a result of a lie that we have been told about our self, or one that we simply come to believe through circumstances and over time. Either way, the belief that we are 'damaged goods' eats away at us from the inside out. We don't really mean to, but we put ourselves on the shelf. We crawl helplessly into the room for those with unclaimed baggage. There we sit, useless to the kingdom of God.

Second, from the enemy of our souls

"For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms." (**Ephesians 6:12**)

Satan is relentless. He roams around looking for people with unclaimed baggage. He knows that those people are weak, and have already determined that they are no good to the kingdom of God. He will relentlessly fire flaming arrows into people's thoughts and emotions. One arrow will ratify the conclusion that they are damaged goods, unusable by God. Another will tell

them that God doesn't use sinners. Yet another will make them question God's forgiveness. He will make them ask themselves why they would feel this way if we are forgiven. Satan's flaming arrows will pierce our very core and convince us that we have gone too far. God cannot love, forgive, or use us.

But listen to Paul's admonition later in **Ephesians 6:16-17**. *“In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. 17 Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.”*

David could have stayed in that place of feeling worthless; and easily could have convinced himself and others that he was no good to God any more, that he had ruined his life. He could have put the position for which he was anointed by God, the responsibilities, and the God-given gifts up for grabs in the 2nd hand store. He was lost and couldn't find himself. One choice he could have made was to stay in that lost position, and to harbour his unclaimed baggage.

A lot of people make that choice. Over time that becomes their identity. It's like an old t-shirt. It isn't pretty, but it has become comfortable. I have a few of those t-shirts. Besides, feeling useless gets them out of a lot of jobs, and if they work it right, it gets them some attention.

But that's not what David wanted or did. He

wasn't that type. David claimed his baggage. *“Then I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover up my iniquity. I said, ‘I will confess my transgressions to the LORD.’ And you forgave the guilt of my sin. 6 Therefore let all the faithful pray to you while you may be found; surely the rising of the mighty waters will not reach them. 7 You are my hiding place; you will protect me from trouble and surround me with songs of deliverance. (Psalm 32:5-7)*

He claimed that baggage and presented it to the Lord. I love this sentence...“ *And you forgave the guilt of my sin.*” False guilt is something we feel that disables us from being used by God. It can be self-inflicted or a result of one of Satan's flaming arrows. Real guilt is much more than that. It is the deserving of punishment. If, when we come to God with a repentant heart, we should ask Him to forgive our sin and also to heal our emotions or our self-perception. He will heal the wasting away of our bones. He will put an end to the inner groaning, the weight of the sin, and the lack of strength. He can do all those things because He has taken the punishment for our sin upon Himself. He took our guilt on Himself.

That means that whether our feelings of guilt and shame are real or perceived, He is the solution. He is the healer. He paid a great price to make us whole. Faith in God can and should end the battle within ourselves. Give it to Him.

Not only that, God becomes our protector. He protects us from our own thoughts, as well as the fiery

darts of the enemy. All of the lies that our mind, emotions, and Satan try to tell us about ourselves are eradicated in God's presence. David says: "*You are my hiding place; you will protect me from trouble and surround me with songs of deliverance*" (**Psalm 32:7**). Did you catch that? He surrounds us with **songs of deliverance**, reminders of His grace, constant reminders of His unconditional love and forgiveness. The key is to stay in His presence until His thoughts about you have changed your thoughts about you, so that they are in alignment with one another.

So here is the advice provided by David's example. **1.** Get in the presence of your protector, your hiding place, your Heavenly Father. **2.** Tell Him how you feel about yourself. **3.** Stay there until you begin to hear Him singing loves songs, songs of deliverance, to you. **4.** Don't leave until you feel the same way about yourself as God feels about you.

"The key is to stay in His presence until His thoughts about you have changed your thoughts about you, so that they are in alignment with one another."

Your baggage may make you feel like you are not worthy of being claimed, but God has already claimed you. He will heal you from the inside out. He will protect you from the attacks of the enemy, and He will constantly remind you of His love. You are His child. You are the apple of His eye. He loves you so much He

gave His life for you.

COALS FROM THE ALTAR

Isaiah had unclaimed baggage stored up inside of him. We don't know what it was specifically. Whatever it was, it was keeping him from taking hold of all that was rightfully his as a believer; a believer called of God.

Calling or no calling, he considered himself a man of unclean lips. Did he lie? Was he a gossip? Did he speak badly of God? Did he have a foul mouth? We have no idea, but it was holding him back in his spiritual life and in his service to God. Isaiah wanted to hide himself in a closet somewhere, but he writes this...

"In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord, high and exalted, seated on a throne; and the train of his robe filled the temple.

2 Above him were seraphim, each with six wings: With two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they were flying.

3 And they were calling to one another: "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory."

4 At the sound of their voices the doorposts and thresholds shook

and the temple was filled with smoke.

5 “Woe to me!” I cried. “I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the LORD Almighty.”

6 Then one of the seraphim flew to me with a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with tongs from the altar.

*7 With it he touched my mouth and said, “See, this has touched your lips; **your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for.**”*

8 Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, “Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?” And I said, “Here am I. Send me!”

9 He said, “Go and tell this people: “Be ever hearing, but never understanding; be ever seeing, but never perceiving.”

Isaiah was uncomfortable with God’s presence. When the presence of God filled the temple, you would think that he would be overwhelmed with joy. You would think he would consider it such an incredible honour. You would think he would feel so blessed and thankful, but instead, he saw the reflection of his own sin in the glory of God and that’s all he could focus on. His initial response was not one of worship or joy. It was fear. It was “Woe is me”.

This is important, because sometimes our sin or our perceived unworthiness will keep us from the presence of God. It will keep us from doing what David did. Staying away from God’s presence is avoiding the one who heals and restores us. That’s counter-productive at best.

When we are slow to come into God's presence we don't pray much, we don't meditate on His Word, we don't listen to worship music. If we do, we don't really enter into that deep place of worship. We don't do anything that may invite the presence of God, because we perceive the difference between His glory and our unworthiness to be overwhelmingly great. We must push our way through that.

Isaiah said: *"Woe to me!" "I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the LORD Almighty."* All Isaiah could see was a man unworthy of whatever was about to take place.

Many people not only feel unworthy of being close to God, they fear Him. They fear the intensity of God's presence. They are conflicted by a battle of emotions: longing for God's presence and certainty that they are unworthy of experiencing it. So, the lack of forgiveness they feel for themselves, and their low self-esteem pushes the God that they long for away. That being the case, their baggage goes unclaimed.

God was looking for a prophet. He saw what He needed in Isaiah, but Isaiah didn't. God met with Isaiah in a way that would boggle our minds. Millions have prayed to experience God as Isaiah did, but Isaiah's response was: "I don't deserve this. I can't handle this.

This is too much for a man of unclean lips.” He viewed himself as an unholy man in the presence of Holiness. A wrong view of himself nearly cost him the privilege of being one of the great spokesmen for God.

On the Day of Atonement, the one day a year when God forgave intentional sins in Israel, a coal was taken from the altar in the Holy of Holies. In Isaiah’s experience, one of the seraphs took a coal from the altar with tongs. The altar was too pure to be touched, even by angelic hands. In the temple, the use of tongs only took place in the Holy of Holies.

God was sending a clear message that He was welcoming Isaiah into His presence and that he had completely cleansed him of his past sins, whatever they were. Isaiah got that message loud and clear. His response to God’s call changed from “*Woe is me*” to “*Here am I. Send me!*” (**Isaiah 6:8**). That’s what happens when the unclaimed baggage is exposed before God.

I believe that God wants to touch those of you that are reading this and have unclaimed baggage. God wants to touch you with a burning coal. He wants you to know that when He cleanses you, you are a new creature in Christ. The old things have been washed away. All things have become new. God wants you to forgive yourself, and view yourself as He views you. You are His child, and He can do great things in and through your life.

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God has forgiven you. He wants you to know beyond a shadow of a doubt that the things that are keeping you from the freedom that is yours, the joy that is yours, the presence of God that you can enjoy, the power of God that you can experience - was taken care of completely when you gave it to God. It is time you realized that you are no longer the person you have labelled yourself to be.

- You can be intimate with God
- You can experience His power and energy
- You can be used of Him

REUNITED, AND IT FEELS SO GOOD

Luke 22:54-62 *“Then seizing him, they led him away and took him into the house of the high priest. Peter followed at a distance. 55 And when some there had kindled a fire in the middle of the courtyard and had sat down together, Peter sat down with them.*

56 A servant girl saw him seated there in the firelight. She looked closely at him and said, “This man was with him.”

57 But he denied it. “Woman, I don’t know him,” he said.

58 A little later someone else saw him and said, “You also are one of them.” “Man, I am not!” Peter replied.

59 About an hour later another asserted, “Certainly this fellow was with him, for he is a Galilean.”

60 Peter replied, “Man, I don’t know what you’re talking about!” Just as he was speaking, the rooster crowed.

61 The Lord turned and looked straight at Peter. Then Peter remembered the word the Lord had spoken to him: “Before the rooster crows today, you will disown me three times.”

62 And he went outside and wept bitterly.”

This story is about the great Apostle Peter. He was the man listed first in every list of the apostles in the Scripture. He was the disciple who was called to be a fisher of men.

Following Jesus warning that Satan had requested permission to *'sift him as wheat'*, Peter proclaimed to Jesus at the Last Supper: *"Lord, I am ready to go with you to prison and to death."* **(Luke 22:33)**

But, when things got scary, this rough, tough, bold disciple of Christ denied any association with Jesus, and he did it THREE TIMES. He even denied knowing Him. Now, he is ripped apart inside. He loved Jesus, but how could he possibly be worthy of being called a disciple of Christ after what he just did?

This is the dilemma that so many believers struggle with. They love Jesus, but their behavior in their day-to-day life denies knowing him. They cower at the presence or calling of God. They feel so ashamed, so unworthy, so unfaithful because their heart and their life are out of alignment. They love God, but they live as if they don't know Him.

Some people make this their identity. It's who they see themselves being now. They love Jesus, but they view themselves as weak. They sin, they know it, and it seems that they don't have the will or the ability to change it. As a result they view themselves as damaged. Their spiritual self-worth is extremely low and they have accepted that that's just who they are. They will even weep over this truth, but nothing changes. They are who they are (in their own opinion). They are nothing more than a weak believer who has failed, and continues to regularly fail their Saviour.

The events following must have been so hard for Peter. He couldn't even talk to Jesus about it. There was no opportunity. He couldn't even get close enough to Jesus to apologize. Instead, he had to watch the Jesus he denied knowing being scourged for him, beaten for him, spat upon for him, and ultimately crucified for him.

After Jesus' resurrection, and before His ascension, the scene at which Peter was called the first time was completely duplicated. Jesus would call Peter again, in the exact same way, in the exact same scenario. Peter and the other disciples were fishing, but catching nothing. Jesus stands on the shore of the Sea of Galilee and hollers out to them to fish on the other side of the boat. Just like the first time, some three years before, the disciples had a miraculous catch.

“When they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, “Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?” “Yes, Lord,” he said, “you know that I love you.” Jesus said, “Feed my lambs.”

16 Again Jesus said, “Simon son of John, do you love me?” He answered, “Yes, Lord, you know that I love you.” Jesus said, “Take care of my sheep.”

17 The third time he said to him, “Simon son of John, do you love me?” Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him the third time, “Do you love me?” He said, “Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you.” Jesus said, “Feed my sheep.” (John 21:15-19).

As annoying as it seemed in the moment, Jesus gave Peter opportunity to confirm his love for Him three

times. Each time, Jesus re-called Peter into ministry. Each time, Jesus erased one of the times Peter denied knowing Jesus. Jesus and Peter were three for three.

Jesus wants to give everything back to you, just as He did Peter. He does not want your sin to keep you from attaining the spiritual and eternal blessings that are yours by being an effective disciple. He wants you to have the gifts that are yours. He has paid for them already. He wants you to have the opportunity to use those gifts so that you can store up riches in heaven.

CONCLUSION

The choices are simple. One choice is to let our past decisions, sin, our inabilities, or our perceived sin and inabilities to cause us to cower from God's presence. Those things often cause people to avoid intimacy with God. They feel so unworthy of His presence because they cling to their unclaimed baggage.

When we do so we are very vulnerable to our own negative emotions. We put ourselves in the closet and feel like our very bones are wasting away. We also become vulnerable to Satan's attacks, which reinforces the thoughts that have caused us to be depressed. We have low spiritual self-esteem and feel like we can do nothing for God.

The alternative is to forgive ourselves, as God has forgiven whatever sin we have repented of; and to view ourselves as God sees us. We need to run into His presence where He will heal our emotions and protect us from the attacks of the enemy. He is our hiding place.

When we get close to God, we can cry "*Woe is me*". We can claim unworthiness because we have unclaimed baggage. We can cower away. The better

option is to accept that, if we have confessed our sin He has cleansed us from all unrighteousness. If we have talked to Him about our illogical feelings of low self-worth, He will talk to us about how we are the crowning glory of His creation. We are His child. He has a purpose for our life.

Through Christ we are allowed into the very holy of Holies. If God sees us as worthy of His presence through His Son; we can view ourselves as worthy.

Another option is to forget the call of God and go fishing. We can simply go about our lives, loving God; but not fulfilling His purpose for us. That's what Peter and a few other disciples did. If that's what you are doing; look carefully. Listen carefully. Someone is calling your name. Someone wants to unravel a plan for you. The Saviour, whom you love, wants you to know that He has a place for you. There is a job to be done and your gifts and talents are the perfect solution. He wants to use you.

He would love the opportunity to sit down with you, as He did with Peter on the seashore, so He can call you once again. There you can confess your lack of self-forgiveness. You can confess that you have viewed yourself as something less than what God sees you. You can confess that you view yourself as nothing more than a suitcase full of baggage, but you would like for Him to heal those emotions. You can tell Him that you love Him. He will tell you that He wants to restore to the

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place He has for you.

Don't let the lies that you have accepted about yourself hold you back from what God wants to do in your life. You only have unclaimed baggage if you choose to. Jesus came to seek and to save that which is lost. Sometimes that is a believer hidden in the recesses of their own low self-worth, full of unclaimed baggage.