How can you mend a broken heart? We know many people have broken hearts because of all sorts of reasons: the death of a loved one, divorce, loss of a job, health, or betrayal by a friend. Often our wounded heart is the result of someone else’s actions toward us, but sometimes it is because of actions we took.

Today, I want to focus on a situation more like the latter, when we do something and hurt someone we love, and our hearts get shattered. Do you know what I am talking about? Do you know what a broken heart is? If so, you would know that broken hearts are like wounds. If you have ever had an injury or a deep cut, you know how painful it is and how it hurts to be touched. They can be so painful that it seems no one or nothing can make the pain go away.

Sometimes our hearts are like that, wounded and scarred. Suddenly you feel like you have lost everything that matters to you and can’t imagine a future where life gets better because even after a long time, nothing seems to take the pain away.

Have you been wounded in your heart? Do you have any scars? Are you wondering if there is hope for healing a broken heart? The answer is yes, there is a path to healing a broken heart.

There is a story in the Bible about a man who got a broken heart because he betrayed his most loved and trusted friend. His name is Peter, one of the twelve disciples of Jesus. The answer to our question, “Is there healing for a broken heart?” is dramatically and emotionally portrayed in what happened to him. Here is Peter’s story of his broken heart and consequent healing,

John 21:15-17,

“When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, “Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?” He said to him, “Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.” Jesus said to him, “Feed my lambs.” A second time he said to him, “Simon son of John, do you love me?” He said to him, “Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.” Jesus said to him, “Tend my sheep.” He said to him the third time, “Simon son of John, do you love me?” Peter felt hurt because he said to him the third time, “Do you love me?” And he said to him, “Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you.” Jesus said to him, “Feed my sheep.””

This event is the third time Jesus visited his disciples after the resurrection. Here, the Bible describes the conversation Jesus had with Peter after having had breakfast with them.

After their meal, Jesus confronted Peter with the painful question asked three times, “Simon, son of John, do you love me?”

Why is Jesus asking him and only him that question? Because it was Peter who denied Jesus three times the night he was arrested before he was killed the following day. The Bible tells how this experience affected Peter. It says that that night, he went out and wept bitterly (Luke 22:62), for he had failed not only himself but the one that loved him. He had broken his own heart.

But now Jesus is dead no more. He is back. What would this mean to Peter, the one who denied him three times after promising he was willing to die with him? He went from claiming to be full of courage to being a weak coward. Because of that, I imagine Peter was full of doubts concerning where he now stood with his beloved friend. Probably he was expecting Jesus to say something like, “Peter, why did you deny me?” “You are a bad friend.” “Who needs friends like you!” He might have imagined that Jesus would tell him, “I don’t want to see you again. I will never be able to trust and forgive you.”

I could see myself experiencing sorrow, withdrawal, and even guilt if I were Peter. “I am a bad person. I do not deserve Jesus’ love,” I probably would tell myself. All of which is a natural behavior. I mean, when we do something terrible, at a minimum, a normal human being would experience remorse.

So, when our hearts get broken due to something we did, it is inevitable to experience profound sadness and a heavy sense of guilt for our perceived failure. And the typical response is to walk away and perhaps even hide to avoid any social interactions, pushing the knife of shame deeper into our hearts and telling ourselves: “You are not good because of what you did. People will not want you anymore. You are [fill in the blank].”

Perhaps we know how this feels. It simmers, stifles, and sometimes shuts a person completely down. And like a deep wound, a broken heart will not heal overnight and can’t be healed just by anyone. We can’t go to the doctor and say, “I have a broken heart. Can you fix it?” So, we hide it and pretend we are fine when we are barely hanging by a thread. That is how I imagine how Peter felt after what he did to Jesus, and as a result, what he did to himself.

Isn’t it ironic that the more we hurt someone, the more suffering we experience? And the more we love someone, the happier we become? Jesus did this for Peter; he saw and loved him so he could remember to love himself too.

So, when we are experiencing life as Peter did, wounded with broken hearts, who can see us, to whom can we go when we are hurting? Is there anyone who cares?

Well, Jesus saw Peter, and Peter did not even have to ask for healing for Jesus to give it to him. When he came to Peter, it was not to question his denial but to acknowledge his pain. Jesus was doing what he had done before to so many, bringing healing to Peter’s heartache.

By coming to him, Jesus was telling Peter, “I am not abandoning you. Just because you made a mistake does not mean I am not going to love you anymore. In fact, I am going to love you more times than all the mistakes and wrongdoings you will ever make.” It is clear to me, as I look at this story and everything else Jesus did and said, that he wanted Peter to know he did not have to do anything to earn God’s love, favor, or forgiveness.

Now, how amazing and encouraging is that? To know that Jesus forgives us 70 times 7? (Matthew 18:22) The challenge was not if Jesus would forgive Peter but if Peter would welcome Jesus’ healing. You know what I am talking about. When we are wounded with a profound sense of guilt, we don’t want to be healed because we have strong feelings of despise against ourselves for what we did or said. Do you know what I am talking about? When we think, “If God knew what I have done, he would not want me anymore.” And reject the possibility of a forgiving God to keep punishing ourselves and engaging in self-destructing behavior thinking that that would make things right. Like Judas did, for example.

Can you relate to any of this? It is amazing how difficult we can be when someone tries to bless us. My response to that is, “If you know what Jesus has done for you, you would love him and accept his gift of healing with exuberant joy.”

What does Jesus do, then? He saw Peter, he understood Peter, and so he asked him three times, “Do you love me?” Each time he asked this question, he was healing Peter’s denial and restoring him back as if telling him, “Remember, you do love me, and I trust you. Come back to me.” These questions had nothing to do with embarrassing, accusing, or condemning him but with healing, restoring, and redeeming him. Jesus knew that Peter loved him and was giving him the opportunity to profess and remember his love three times, just as he had denied him three times.

I do not think it is possible to find fulfillment, purpose, and true satisfaction in this life with deep, untreated wounds of the heart. I know the pain of past hurts rules many lives. And often, most of us do not know how to go about receiving this wonderful gift of healing from God. Some of us have not been aware that this level of unconditional love and deep healing was available.

But today, through this story, we know. Just as Jesus saw and understood Peter, he sees and gets us too. Just as Jesus brought Peter back by healing his broken heart, he can do the same for us. Jesus loves us. He proves his love by taking the pieces of our broken hearts without judgment. He proves his love by eagerly wanting to put us back together with a tender and graceful invitation to welcome love into our lives. Jesus proves his love by coming to us first without us even searching for him.

What is your story? Though nobody may know about it because you hide it well, do you have a broken heart? For how long have you had it? What is that experience and memory that has wounded you? I hope that today you know that whatever it is, God can handle it. God wants to handle it. And I know this is hard to accept or even believe because sometimes we are so ashamed of ourselves that we automatically feel or believe that Jesus is ashamed of us too. But he is not. He knew we would struggle. He knew we would make wrong choices and decisions. He knew we would go through rough phases, but he still chooses us every time.

Here is the invitation and good news: let the love of God release you from the destructive effects and behaviors of brokenness. Let the Holy Spirit’s presence free you from the emotional, mental, and spiritual battle you have raged against yourself for what you did or said. Let the grace of Jesus bring peace to your heart. Like a wound in the process of healing, it may not heal overnight, but God can heal anyone’s broken heart.

Today, I encourage you to throw open your arms and receive the grace of God that empowers and restores. It is yours for the taking. No matter how far we stray or how low we fall, we are always just one step away from a complete restoration.