

Out From Under

“God will work with you.”

John 9:1-7

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Pinned

It's a helpless feeling, when you've gotten yourself into a wrestling match and lose. It doesn't matter whether it's a regulation match like those in high school or in college when you're competing in meets or if you're on the playground or on the street. Losing in wrestling can be a terror. It's not like boxing when you're just knocked down and counted out.

In wrestling, you're pushed and twisted by a stronger opponent to the point where you're on your back and your shoulders are pinned to the floor. No matter how you kick your feet or try to raise your back, wriggling back-and-forth – it is no use. Someone's got you, and you cannot move.

Then there's the count of “three” and it's over; at least that's the way it is in regulation play. In real life though, there are things that can pin you to the ground and never let you go.

Powerful habits can be hard to break. They can keep you pinned. New disciplines for diet, exercise, money management, and a slew of healthy and wise behaviors might never have a chance against something else you carry inside that just won't be gone. Old patterns die hard –they can keep you pinned. And isn't it hard to shake a feeling of hurt or shame when it's been there so long it seems to be a part of you?

Pinned. 45% of us make a resolution on New Year's yearning for new me's – each of us. I suspect there are more of us who make them on birthdays or stop smoking days or whenever else it seems an appropriate time. Sometimes we just don't call them resolutions: but we're still yearning for a “new me.” As a word of encouragement, I've repeated over the last few weeks that almost half of us keep those resolutions beyond the six-month mark– and it *is* encouraging. But the discouraging thing is that over half of us don't.

The old ways do seem to have us pinned. ‘You might wonder, “Why?”

Blame and Rescue

Maybe it's got something to do with your past. In fact, maybe you were even set up before you were born, like it was something your parents did or your grandparents or their parents before them.

Whether there's anything to it or not, that's the way people have reasoned for ages. If you have a stubborn problem that won't go away, there must be a reason for it. If some misfortune has come your way, it must be because you sinned and deserve it. If you can't make a connection, it baffles you. How many times have you heard someone say, "I don't know what I've done to deserve this"?

And if someone was born with a health problem or a troubled disposition, well, then it might be the parents to blame.

That's what was thought in Jesus' day. So, it isn't surprising that Jesus disciples would ask something like they asked the day they were walking along and saw someone who was impaired, somehow obviously from the day they were born. "Was it this guy's sin or was it his parents? Whose fault was it?"

Whose fault? It seems everything that goes wrong has to have someone to blame. Everything. Doesn't it? It doesn't ever seem that it can be just a tough break.

There may be plenty of medical malpractice instances resulting in health complications or death. Yet, I've seen cases I thought doctors' and nurses' care was heroic and appropriate in the face of overwhelming odds to the very end. Family members would still blame them. Negligent drivers cause all kinds of accidents, whether it's because they had been drinking or texting or just in too big of a hurry to drive safely. Yet, haven't you ever been surprised by a patch of black ice no one could reasonably see or react to fast enough – and who can say anyone's to blame for the accident (regardless whether the officer was obligated to issue a ticket)?

Law suits are sometimes appropriate. Justice is often served by guilty verdicts and damages awarded. And it's true that you might be right to assign the responsibility for your overeating on a parent who rewarded you and coddled you with an ice cream here and a candy bar there. But are you or someone else always to blame for a skill you lack, or a hurt you carry, or a habit that's got you pinned?

I wonder how many conflicts never get resolved because no one can agree who's at fault. I wonder how many times people stay pinned by something in their past. We all have memories that keep us broken. We all need the memories healed.

Jesus' friends saw a man who was blind from birth and they asked Jesus, "Who sinned? Was it the man or was it his parents?" And Jesus told them, "That's not the right question."

At the end of the day, if there's something in yourself you really want to change, it doesn't finally matter who's at fault. Sure, you might have to figure out how you got stuck in order to get unstuck. But once you do, it's not going to help just to justify yourself by blame. Even when you're blaming yourself. Sooner or later you're going to have to take responsibility to move on.

Or stay pinned.

It's up to you.

C.S. Lewis, the British author of the *Tales of Narnia*, said "It may be hard for an egg to turn into a bird: it would be a jolly sight harder for it to learn to fly while remaining an egg. We are like eggs at present. And you cannot go on indefinitely being just an ordinary, decent egg. We must be hatched or go bad."

Remember the resolution that was so hard for you to keep that you gave up making resolutions altogether? Maybe it has you pinned because you need a memory healed and you need the power to move on.

His friends asked him who was to blame and Jesus said that was the wrong question. He said that the man wasn't born blind because he sinned or his parents sinned but (and this is the way it's put in a straight translation like the New Revised Standard Version) "he was born blind so that God's works might be revealed in him."

That *doesn't* mean it was all a cruel burden the man was picked to carry for so many years just so a lesson could be taught. Jesus doesn't mean that it's really God to blame. What he means is that the things that have us pinned may all be seen as opportunities for God's work to be done. No matter how they got there.

At the end of the day, the solution is more important than the cause.

Jesus' constant lesson was always that God is at work redeeming the world. God is ever at work to rescue the perishing, free the bound, and find the lost. And that's what Jesus means to do.

Jesus spat on the soil and made a paste. He used it, then, to put on the eyes of the blind man, who at that point hadn't even asked for help. Then he said, "Go and wash it off in the pool called Siloam." The man did as he was told; and he came back able to see.

So, every memory that weighs you down and keeps you from being the person you mean to be can be subject to Jesus' healing love. No matter who's to blame. No matter how it's got you pinned.

A month or two ago Laura brought home a DVD. "Another one of those," I thought (I sometimes resist watching things I haven't heard about myself). But we watched it: one of those inspirational movies by a Christian producer. It was about a young couple who had once been so in love, but their marriage was falling apart by daily engagements of fights and disappointments. Both husband and wife were locked in a downward spiral of unmet needs and goals that conflicted. Both were locked on self interest and failure to recognize the needs of each other.

It was driving them dangerously apart; forgetting their love if not falling right out of it.

And painful memories mounted, driving them toward the end of life together. They were pinned...

...until the husband was challenged by a parent to reverse the trend: one day at a time. The prospects for their marriage didn't change all-at-once and still didn't seem to have a hope until he came to a point when he knew the situation couldn't really change until he gave himself over to the very source of love. You know what I mean. It's that very basic act of faith in which you ask Jesus to come into your heart and be your Lord and Savior. Not just for eternity sometime way off in the future: but to ask him to be your Lord and Savior in your real life now, every day and every minute.

Then he knew, finally what real love was about. It's unconditional. It doesn't depend on how it's received or whether it's deserved. So he started loving his wife even when she rejected his expressions of love. Even when she continued to hurt him in return, each day he'd come back with more love.

Even then, there were no guarantees. But with Jesus working within, he no longer had to function on the impulse of the hurt he carried. Those memories were taken over. Then, he had the freedom to just freely love without conditions –

Like he had been freely loved.*

Un-pinned.

'Some kind of a resolution, don't you think?

Freed

Jesus Christ can change your life. Real life. I believe it. I've seen the same story acted out on the real stage of peoples' lives again and again.

I believe God can change a marriage or a job or a waistline or anything else you're willing to turn over to Christ.

Healing memories that hold you back...

Healing them, and setting you free.

* Fireproof (Never leave your partner behind), starring Kirk Cameron and Erin Bethea. Produced by Affirm Films © 2009.