INVISIBLE WOUNDS

Lanecia A. Rouse

“In the Habit” session for use with devozine meditations for July 27–August 2, 2015.

MAKING THE CONNECTION

“Life is good. Life is also hard. Too many of us journey through life with wounds causing so much pain, and usually no one else has a clue how badly we are suffering. The pain is hidden and tucked in places within us and is often invisible. Hidden pain will not heal. As physical wounds need attention—medicine, bandages, time—the wounds we bear within us need the same kind of loving care. As long as they remain hidden, the wounds will not heal and will only cause more pain for ourselves and other people.

“The invisible wounds that teens experience are often caused by the loss of important relationships, a perceived failure to live up to external and internal expectations, abuse, bullying, troubles at home, and shame. When invisible wounds are not cared for, they can lead to life-draining thoughts, behaviors, and actions. Almost every week a news story tells of teenagers hurting themselves because of invisible wounds. Often the wounds remain invisible because of shame, fear of vulnerability, pressure to appear strong, or unavailability of resources for healing. Sometimes teens do not know they are wounded and need someone who loves and accepts them to help them see that they are bleeding.

“We all want to know we are not alone. We all need to be seen and heard. In Jesus, we are seen, heard, known, accepted, and loved. We do not need to manage our lives and deal with our pain alone. God is with us and calls us to be present for one another. Through our love for one another, God will bring wholeness to our lives and the lives of those we love. Cultivating safe places of grace, love, and vulnerability is important as we enable youth to make visible their wounds. Having relationships rooted in the unconditional love of Jesus Christ is essential. We all need someone who will listen, love, accept, and pray for us as we heal.

“This session will help you to cultivate a safe place for your group. Learning how to have compassion for ourselves and one another and to embrace vulnerability is vital to the healing process. The more we are able to be vulnerable with one another, making visible the places where we are hurting, the more we open our lives for the light and grace of the Lord to shine on our invisible wounds and to bring healing and fullness of life.” —Lanecia
MEET THE WRITER
Lanecia A. Rouse is my name. I am an artist (photography, painting, writing, and speaking) and minister based in Houston, Texas. Before becoming a full-time artist in September 2014, I served as the Project Director of The Art Project, Houston, a therapeutic art and self-empowerment project of the Bread of Life, Inc., for my neighbors living on the streets of Houston, Texas. Prior to the move to Houston in March 2011, I served in youth ministry for thirteen years, most received with the brilliant, bursting, beautiful youth of Belmont United Methodist Church in Nashville, Tennessee. Look for Lanecia online at www.larouse.wordpress.com or www.larartphotography.com.

STUFF YOU WILL NEED
• Bibles
• white or brown butcher paper cut in 12 x 12 inch squares
• markers or Sharpies
• magazines full of images
• scissors
• glue sticks
• pens or pencils
• copies of “Scripture Passages for Reflection” (Leave space on each page to write.)
• a candle and matches

PLUGGED IN
Below are some resources you may find helpful as you guide conversations.

Books and Online Articles/Resources
+ To Write Love on Her Arms (http://twloha.com/) is a good resource to help teens think through the impact of emotional and mental wounds, healthy ways of healing, and healthy ways of relating to people who are experiencing invisible wounds.

+ The Kind Campaign (https://www.kindcampaign.com/) is a movement to bring awareness of how kindness can heal and eradicate girl-on-girl crime, such as bullying. They offer a documentary as well as a magazine for girls.

+ Teen Help offers a variety of resources, including statistics and facts, about teens and depression (http://www.teenhelp.com/teen-depression/depression-statistics.html).

+ Help Guide offers information and support on mental-health issues:
  • “Dealing with Bullying: Helping Bullied Kids and Teens” (http://www.helpguide.org/articles/abuse/dealing-with-bullying.htm)
CHECKING IN

Before diving into this with the youth, receive time to think through the questions below. Invite the volunteers and youth workers to do the same. Bring the leadership team together for conversation. Conclude the time with prayer for one another and the program.

What is an invisible wound? (pain caused by emotional, mental, spiritual, or relational abuse or harm)

What are the invisible wounds that you or people you know have experienced? (Ask people to respond without saying names)

How did your invisible wounds affect your relationship with God? your neighbors? yourself?

What helped you to care for your invisible wounds and to move toward healing and restoration?

In what ways did caring for your pain bring you closer to God? your neighbors? yourself?

A great daily practice is to pray for the youth you lead and the ministry in which you share. Before your community arrives, pray for the time you will share, those who will participate, those who will not be present, your church community, and the city or town in which you live.

When the youth arrive, welcome everyone, extending a special welcome to those joining you for the first time. Bring the group together. Invite discussion:

What is an invisible wound? (emotional, mental, spiritual pain; pain associated with relationships)

What are some of the invisible wounds that you or people you know have experienced? (NOTE: Discourage people from naming names.)

What are some of the ways invisible wounds may affect our relationship with God? our neighbors? ourselves?

Read or say the following in your own words:

“To live in this world is to acquire a few emotional, mental, and relational wounds that demand our attention. Just as we care for an open physical wound by washing it, putting medication on it, dressing it with a bandage, and tending to it as needed so that it can heal, we need to pay attention to our internal wounds for healing to be realized.

“Throughout scripture, we see that God loves us and is with us in joy and sorrow. God weeps with us and for us. Through Jesus Christ, God understands our pain. If we trust the Lord and open ourselves to God’s love, God tends to our wounded and broken places with loving mercy, kindness, forgiveness, and love. And we receive healing.

“In this session we will reflect on how God tends to our invisible wounds, name spiritual practices that are helpful in caring for our internal wounds, and learn ways to love others so that we do not wound them.

“The Book of Psalms is filled with songs in which the psalmist expresses the thoughts, feelings, and beliefs of human experience. Psalm 147 praises God for God’s loving care and sustaining presence. The psalm is rooted in gratitude for God’s care for those who
are in need and in trust that God will continue to care for those who are suffering, hurt, oppressed, and in pain. In the next few minutes, we are going to ponder the good news of Psalm 147:3 and other texts that point us toward God and community when we are experiencing emotional, mental, and relational pain."

EXPLORING THE WORD
Scripture: Psalm 147:3

Read aloud Psalm 147:3. Then ask some or all of the following questions:

Reflect on the teaching and ministry of Jesus recorded in the Bible. In what ways can Jesus be a source of healing for our invisible wounds?

What are some of the reasons we keep our wounds hidden from other people?

Why is it important to make our invisible wounds visible?

How can you be an extension of Christ’s love for someone who is experiencing pain and suffering from wounds similar to those you have experienced?

What are some things that are not helpful to hear when you are hurting emotionally, spiritually, or mentally? In what ways can we do harm to people suffering from invisible wounds?

Invite group members to reflect in silence on these questions:

When have you caused someone to experience an invisible wound?

What did you learn from that experience?

What would you do differently in a similar situation?

Allow a minute or two for reflection; then invite volunteers to talk about their experiences.

Say something like this:

“A quotation attributed to Plato says, ‘Be kind; everyone you meet is fighting a hard battle.’ At some point in our lives we all experience pain, hurt, suffering that will leave us with deep wounds.

“As followers of Christ, we are invited to learn, practice, and live a way of life that is healing, restoring, and loving. God is with us even in our darkest and most painful moments. God always shines a light toward possibility, hope, forgiveness, and healing love. As we grow in trust and awareness of God’s healing love, we experience God’s being present to us and we become agents of God’s love to all we meet.”

Heart Prayer Collage
Lead into the activity, saying, “We are going to spend some time engaged in a visual art prayer practice.”

Distribute these materials: 12x12 inch squares of butcher paper, pens or pencils, markers or Sharpies, magazines, glue sticks, and copies of the “Scripture Passages for Reflection” (see below). Then gently guide the group members through the following process. As they pray and create, let them know how much time they have left for each section.
First, ask each person to draw a large heart that covers an entire piece of butcher paper. Then ask each person to write a prayer, in the form of a letter, telling God about the places in his or her heart and mind that need Jesus’ healing touch. Encourage people to be honest, and reassure them that their prayers are between God and them.

As they complete their prayers, invite group members to reflect in silence on one of the scripture passages below, allowing the words to soak in and to tend to their wounds with love. Encourage them to write down whatever thoughts come to mind.

**Scripture Passages for Reflection**
(from the New Revised Standard Version)

- But he was wounded for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the punishment that made us whole, and by his bruises we are healed. —Isaiah 53:5

- Then your light shall break forth like the dawn, and your healing shall spring up quickly; your vindicator shall go before you, the glory of the Lord shall be your rear guard. —Isaiah 58:8

- He heals the brokenhearted, and binds up their wounds. —Psalm 147:3

- Pleasant words are like a honeycomb, sweetness to the soul and health to the body. —Proverb 16:24

- Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. —Matthew 11:28

After 5–10 minutes of reflection, ask group members to select pictures or words that reflect what the scripture revealed to them or what Jesus’ touching their invisible wounds is like. Invite them to make a collage of pictures on top of the letter, creating something new. Allow 15 minutes for them to make the collage.
**Alternative Activity: Write Love on the Heart**

Distribute 12x12 inch precut squares of butcher paper, pens or pencils, markers or Sharpies.

Ask each participant to draw a large heart that fills up the sheet of butcher paper and to write his or her name in the center of the heart.

Tape each person’s piece of paper down on the table. Invite group members to walk around the table and, beginning with the paper to their left, to write words of love, affirmation, and encouragement or a prayer for the person whose name is on the heart.

Once people have written on all the hearts, give the each person 5 minutes to read the affirmations or prayers written on his or her heart.

**SHARING IN PRAYER**

Ask group members to sit in a circle. Place a lighted candle in the center. Invite volunteers to talk about the previous activity. Then pick up the candle and pass it around the circle. Invite each person in turn, while holding the candle, to respond to one or more of the questions about the session below. (Let people know they may choose not to speak, and simply pass the candle to the next person.)

- When did you experience the presence of God?
- What gave you life or joy?
- What are you thankful for today?

Invite group members to pray, using this prayer or another of your choosing:

“Creating and Re-Creating God, empower us by your love to walk in truth and grace. Heal our wounds. By your love, enable us to make visible the places that need to be seen so that light and love can bring us healing. Surround us with people who can help us move toward healing. Wipe away our tears, and remind us that we are your beloved and we are never alone. Amen.”

**TAKING IT FURTHER**

“Be kind; everyone you meet is fighting a hard battle.” —attributed to Plato

- Invite group members to write notes of kindness. Each note will be a message of love and encouragement for the reader. Ask the group to pray for people who will find the notes. Then ask the youth to place the notes in random places around town. What a great gift this will be for whoever receives them!
- Offer a quarterly healing service for youth in your community. The service may be a time of naming pain, hearing an encouraging word of good news and forgiveness, and introducing a prayer practice that can help them to heal.

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