



hurt and healing

David Julen, DMIN

*I hurt myself today
To see if I still feel
I focus on the pain
The only thing that's real
- Hurt, Trent Reznor*

Trent Reznor and Johnny Cash came from opposite sides of the musical universe. Reznor is founder and lead singer of the industrial rock band Nine Inch Nails; a genre characterized by harsh sounds and provocative lyrics. Cash, a country music icon, friend of Billy Graham, and performer for presidents, found common ground in Reznor's song, *Hurt*, which gave voice to Cash's experience of heartache and addiction.

It was not an easy sell. Rick Rubin, record producer extraordinaire, repeatedly pitched the song to the aging Cash, sensing there was something Cash could capture and own in the song.

Johnny Cash knew pain in his life. The defining moment, according to

those who knew him, was the accidental death of his brother, Jack, in a sawmill accident. Cash's father added to the pain, often shaming Johnny and implying the wrong son died. Years of alcohol abuse, barbiturates, amphetamines, endless touring, affairs, and conflict left their mark on Cash as he tried to work through his profound hurt and guilt.

Cash finally agreed to perform the song, which was captured on a video showing an aging Cash, without makeup, largely filmed in The House of Cash, a museum dedicated to Johnny that had fallen into disrepair. The video features images of Cash's life combined with him walking around his abandoned homeplace, concerts, the strutting star, the brooding anger, and an aging Cash seeming to reflect on the pain he inflicted on others and himself. The trappings of fame that became "my empire of dirt" as he sang the lyrics of *Hurt*, mixed with images of Christ's pain on the cross.

I believe the church often fails to acknowledge the pain that frequently feeds addictions.

We discuss where the blame lies. We ask, is it a medical or moral problem? We inquire, what is the most "truly Christian" recovery path? Yet we often overlook that

the addict is often trying to find a way to soothe the pain of trauma, depression, anxiety or shame. This pain may be seen in the suicide rate that is at its highest point since World War II and has increased 33% since 1999. Self-medication often drives the addicts' drug use because it works, for a while. However, self-medication takes the shape of the parable told by Jesus in Luke 11:24-25 where the unclean spirit is driven out, only to return with seven other spirits worse than himself and the last state becomes worse than the first.

Opioids – oxycodone, heroin, morphine – reduce intense feelings of anger, rage and agitation. Depressants – alcohol, benzodiazepines, barbiturates – can relax anxieties, and in large doses, obliterate all distressing emotions. Stimulants such as cocaine, amphetamines and meth can activate and energize depressed individuals. (*Psychiatric Times*, February 2017).

Unfortunately, far too often we believe we must clean up, on the outside and the inside, before we attend church. Saddleback pastor and Celebrate Recovery co-founder Rick Warren notes, "In fact, there are two kinds of people in the world: those that know they are broken

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and those who are broken but don't know it." (*Our Churches Should Be No Shame Zones*, Warren, Rick Church Leaders).

In my conversations with those in active addiction, and those in active recovery, I echo Warren's critique. The church is perceived not as a No Shame Zone, (a safe place that resists shaming) but as a Know Shame/No Share zone, unless the addiction is safely far in the rear-view mirror.

For those of us that love the church, it is painful to hear this, but sometimes church is the last place people go when they are struggling

with addiction. Have we unwittingly changed the call of Jesus from, "Come to me all of you who are weary and burdened and I will give you rest" (NIV, Matt. 11:28); to "come to me all of you who are fit, unbroken, and high energy and you will fit in, and become even more self-actualized!" We sometimes forget Jesus intentionally served prostitutes, the leper, Samaritans, the lame, and the possessed. As the church, we are to emulate our Savior. "Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it." (1 Corin. 12 :28).

This attitude can promote a false superficial piety. Lament Psalms acknowledge the suffering and loss,

shame and despair that are a part of the human condition for God's children. They reveal a real relationship and honesty.

"Superficial piety often denies reality and keeps us from authentic encounters with God." (*Reflections: Daily Devotional Guide*, Furr, Gary) See Psalm 51, 69, 44, 60.

Addiction is a complex condition and the promise of healing and victory over it should always be our goal. But, we must remember we proclaim a Savior that was ridiculed, spit upon and died a violent death. Our churches are the places for the hurting to go!

My teacher, Wayne Oates, examined his own addictive tendencies and coined the term "workaholic" to describe how he used work to fill the emptiness and remove the hurt in his life. He wrote in his biography, *The Struggle To Be Free*, that his calling has since been to "...gently take off the cheap price tags people place on themselves and ask their permission to bestow the price tag God our heavenly Father placed on us with a love that is more than human love. For this nobody need walk in shame for any reason." (page 44).

We can disagree on causes and effects concerning addiction but come together and affirm God intends our churches to seek and welcome those who hurt.

