

Judo, Wounds, and Hope

A friend last week explained to me how Judo works. The key in Judo, he said, is to use the enemy's force—his strength, balance and momentum—against him. So when the opponent lunges in a kick or steps into a punch, you merely move aside and pull. And the momentum of the opponent—aided by the tiniest of pulls—throws him off balance.

You redirect their strategy to bring their defeat. You use their own strength to bring about their own demise.

This is a great picture of how the Lord works in the world and in our hearts. We have a God who doesn't create the evil in this world, but he manages it, arranges it, and redirects it so that the evil eventually destroys itself.

In each of our lives we have received deep wounds:

- Our parents may have beaten or neglected us; or they may have spoiled us; or they may have placed impossibly high expectations on us.
- Perhaps our teachers seriously misunderstood us and publicly humiliated us, or perhaps they grievously misdirected us.
- Some of our bosses took credit for our ideas and blamed us for their failures, and some fired us to meet abstract employment quotas.
- At times our spouses spoke incredibly painful hurts, or at times they distanced themselves, or they simply ceased to love us.
- Our churches (or prayer groups) occasionally reject us or relegate us to inconsequential tasks; or they "peg" us as "this" when we know we are "that."

We've been overlooked, worked unsatisfying jobs, felt financial failure, lost closest friends, and been stabbed in the back. To some degree we all have had deep distress (or we will, if we are still young).

And worse, many of these wounds are self inflicted. We've done stupid things. We've missed opportunities. We've blown great friendships. And we think our life is over. We believe we are on Plan B.

When—or if—we review our lives, don't we occasionally wonder, "What possible good can come from that? Have I royally blown it? Are there ever any second chances?"

We have a hope, and God has a pattern. Tolkien says it best when Sam Gamgee exclaims, "Is everything sad going to come untrue?" This hope brings joy out of wounds and life out of weakness. Our hope is in the nature of God.

Not only is Christ the Heavenly King and our Ultimate love; he is the Master Judo Black Belt. Jesus our hope arranges even the plans of the enemy to bring about godly plans in

our hearts and lives. He redirects the momentum of the enemy's evil so we are never on Plan B.

Most of us miss this important lesson. God is not merely about restoring our former condition. He is not merely patching things up. He doesn't only bring us back to ground zero. The Lord is about victory. Let us make no bones about it.

God's pattern of victory from defeat weaves itself throughout the scriptures. He takes a broken situation or a weak person or an evil event and he turns it into victory. Not a mere return to status quo. Victory.

Below are two famous examples. Because they are well known, it is easy to gloss over them, but I encourage us to look into the despair of broken dreams and shattered lives and see his incredible life-giving hope.

Joseph

God gives Joseph dreams early in his life, but Joseph is an immature self focused boy. He needs a heart transplant. Joseph's father dotes on Joseph, and Joseph becomes a spoiled boy. Joseph's father neglects his brothers, and his brothers are murderously jealous. What good can come from this brokenness?

But wait, it gets worse. Joseph's brothers sell him into slavery and celebrate their windfall. As Joseph begins to mature, he finally acts righteously, rebuffing an abusive sexual advance. So what happens? When Joseph and his brothers act out of brokenness, things go bad. When Joseph acts out of righteousness, things get even worse. He is thrown in to prison—and history teaches us these prisons were brutal beyond our nightmares.

Out of this train wreck of a life, Joseph becomes Prime Minister of Egypt and he saves his father and brothers, and Egypt too. Not only are thousands of lives physically saved, Joseph's heart is spiritually saved, and he says to his brothers, "you meant this for evil, but God meant it for good."

Can we see God's Black Belt in Judo at work? There was woundedness and sin—the spoiling of Joseph, the neglect of his brothers, the selling into slavery, the sexual advance, and the wrongful accusation—and God uses the momentum of the enemy to bring about victory. He saves lives and he heals hearts. It is not merely a return to the things as normal.

David

Early in David's life, a prophet comes to David's father Jesse to anoint Israel's next king. There is a feast, but someone is missing. The prophet asks who is missing, and David's

father replies that all but one are present, all save the “youngest.” But the Hebrew word David’s father uses for youngest is the word “hakaton.” Hakaton is hard to translate because it combines the image of youth with the impression of inconsequentiality. Therefore the “youngest” isn’t pejorative enough in this context. Basically, a good English rendering of Jesse’s reply is, “No this is not all of them; there is the runt.”

Imagine growing up as the youngest of seven boys, and imagine your father calling you the runt of the litter. There is a deep wounding, a gut-wrenching stab, and a sense of abandonment. There is a feeling of being completely unknown and misunderstood. There is the evil of neglectful parenting, horrible sibling relations, and complete isolation.

And God, using his Ultimate Judo Black Belt, draws on the abandoned shepherd boy to defeat the giant enemy Goliath. If David had gone to the Israelite equivalent of a West Point military academy, he would have cowered with the rest of Saul’s army. Later, David writes a song in which he explains God’s strange and wonderful working through his pain and suffering. In Psalm 144 David sings,

*Blessed be the Lord, my rock.
He trains my hands for war
And my fingers for battle.*

We have a God who doesn’t create the evil in this world, but he manages it, arranges it, and redirects it so that the evil eventually destroys itself.

Take a moment and think of all the evil that has happened to you. I have a sister whose ten-year-old son was killed in the street by a car. I have a friend who as a young boy was raped by an older boy. I have a friend whose business partners cheated him out of millions. You too have wounds. Put this paper down or turn away from the computer screen and intentionally remember the worst wounds, the deepest pains, the greatest humiliations, and the most evil insults.

Wow, you say, that was depressing! Now, what can we do with these memories?

God is moving heaven and earth to redirect these very evils to bring about a good in us and in this world. Someday like Joseph we will be able to say, “The world meant it for evil, but God arranged it for good.” Someday like David we will be able to sing, “Blessed be the Lord, he personally trained my heart and my hands and my fingers.”

But how can we *know* he will bring victory? Today. How can we be certain in our hearts? How can we have the joy that comes with the hope of his promise?

We can know this because of the wounds of Jesus. On the road to Emmaus, the disciples despair over the condemnation and crucifixion of Jesus, saying, “We had hoped he was the one to redeem Israel.” This was their darkest hour.

Don't we see? God let his beloved son enter into the brokenness and evil of the world, and he let his only son be unjustly lynched. But God rearranged that evil, and he redirected the condemnation and crucifixion, so that sin and death—through Christ—brought about a self-destruction.

Have you ever wondered why the risen body of Christ still has scars? Isn't it weird? This is God at his most mysterious and powerful. He raises his son from death; he gives him a new glorious spiritual body; and that body still has wounds in its hands, feet, and side. And Jesus deliberately points out those scars to everyone he meets.

His scars are a testament to the glory and victory of the Father bringing victory out of defeat. His wounds become his glory. Not only is Christ not ashamed of them, his risen body will carry them for eternity. The wounds did not win. Rather, through them God rearranged evil to eventually destroy itself. His risen body is perfect and his risen body will show his wounds forever.

Can we see the Master Black Belt in action? He takes the momentum of despair at Christ's death and, with a tug, brings about the greatest delight in human history. In fact, part of his victory is turning things inside out and upside down, so that what we thought was our greatest wound becomes our great glory.

Do we see this pattern in God? He doesn't create the evil in the world, but he is so powerful, so brilliant, so loving, and so creative that he can rearrange the evil and suffering to bring about unimaginable good and beauty. He is the Ultimate Judo Black Belt. And he is alive, performing this miracle in us. Every day. Sometimes we see it, and sometimes we don't. But we shall see it all, eventually.

So we have hope.

Isn't he wonderful!

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