

HEALING THE HURTS OF LIFE

In his book *Some Things I Have Learned Since I Knew it All*, Jerry Cook tells the story of his open-heart surgery.

When he had his heart attack, Jerry was pastor of a large church in Oregon that believed in and practiced healing. During his recovery, a woman in his church asked him, "Were you embarrassed to have a heart attack?"

Jerry replied that he was not embarrassed. But the woman was. She was unable to handle the totality of life's experiences—including the fact that pain and suffering are real.

Later, after he recovered, Jerry had a visit from a man who was fearfully facing the prospect of his own bypass surgery. "I want to see your scars," the man said shyly.

Jerry took off his shirt. The man gently traced with his finger the violet scar that ran vertically down Jerry's chest.

The man went on, "The doctor says the most painful part of the operation will be the surgery on my legs. They're going to take out veins from my calf to use in the heart bypass." Looking up at Jerry, he asked, "Can I see your legs?"

Jerry rolled up his pants. The man got on his knees. Without shame, he put his hands on Jerry's legs, touching the scars with his finger. When he rose to his feet there were tears in his eyes.

"Thank you. Now I have hope."

Seeing and touching the scars gave him hope for survival.

Easter night Jesus appeared to His disciples. They were frightened and thought He was a ghost.

"Look at my hands and my feet," He said. "Touch me and see" (Luke 24:39, NIV).

Thomas was not in the room that night. Later he wanted to see His scars. Again Jesus obliged: "Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe" (John 20:27).

Jesus understands our need to see, to touch the scars. Once we do we know we can survive.

Sometimes our lives get scarred. And sometimes we're embarrassed because of them.

We think our scars are ugly—evidence of imperfection. We go to great expense and trouble to hide them with clothes and cosmetics. Sometimes we have them surgically removed.

Scars, though, are not evidence of imperfec-

tion—they are evidence of healing. Scars glorify God, who has brought us through.

I remember the afternoon I stood in our kitchen listening to our pregnant and discouraged daughter talking to her mother. It was Sandy's first baby and she was afraid. In high school she had been president of her class, homecoming queen, the belle of all the balls. Now she was married, and although still beautiful, her stomach was expanding far beyond what she thought was possible.

"I'm afraid I'll just explode," she told her mother tearfully—reaching out to hold her huge, awkward tummy with both arms.

"No," Jackie said, "you won't explode. Your skin just stretches."

"Then I'll go through life with baggy skin," she wailed.

Jackie chuckled, "Everything—including your skin—returns to normal...But there may be scars."

I stood to one side listening to this remarkable conversation. Marveling in the miracle of pregnancy and birth. Marveling even more in Jackie's ability to put her baby daughter's fears to rest.

Then Jackie did something absolutely wonderful. Standing there in the kitchen, she reached down and pulled up her blouse—all the way to her chest. She then pulled down her slacks, exposing her abdomen. After five children, she's scarred.

"Stretch marks," she smiled, running her fingers along the little ridges. "I call them love marks."

Reaching out her hand toward Sandy, she said tenderly, "Touch them."

Hesitatingly, Sandy reached out her hand. Gently she let her fingers trace the scars.

"They look funny," Jackie said. "But every time I see them I think of you—and Bonnie, and Tim, and Robin, and Bruce.

"Pregnancy has left me scarred. But my love for you makes it all worthwhile."

When I think of Mother's Day, I think of Jackie's scars.

Most Christians are scarred. We're not proud of them, but we're not ashamed either. When you're hurt, I pray God will send someone who will take your finger and let you trace their scars. Then after *your* scars are healed—and praise God they will heal—do the same for someone else. Scars are not ugly—they are evidence of God's healing. ■

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