

ULTIMATE UPGRADE: The Splinter

Up until recently, phones were very simple. If your phone wasn't working properly, it was fairly easy to deduce the problem. The 2 most common problems were the phone wires down or a bad connection in your phone junction box. The phones themselves almost never had mechanical problems. But today, phones are much more fragile & susceptible to problems that can lead to failure: cracked screen, faulty power charger or jack, even malware & viruses. If you don't fix these issues quickly, they can grow & ruin your phone. The sooner you deal with the problem the better.

Life is just like that and has some clear analogies to these phone problems. Take a splinter for instance. You might get a splinter & not even realize that you have it. But eventually it gets irritated or even a little infected, then it starts hurting. You have three choices of what to do with a splinter: 1.) work on it & dig it out, 2.) ignore it & hope it goes away, or 3.) push it further in to hide it. Splinters or little puncture wounds can seem harmless, but left alone can cause immense trouble. My dad stepped on something on a beach in Florida once. Two days later, he had a terrible fever from a blood infection that the puncture wound in his foot caused. He was treated with very powerful antibiotics, which literally saved his life. In 1937, my great-grandfather stepped on a rusty nail. A few days later, he *died from it* because there was no cure for aggressive infection then.

In life, people get physical wounds, like splinters; and they deal with them to prevent worse problems. In life, people also get wounded in other ways: relationally, emotionally, psychologically, etc. Some of these things may seem small, but they have a big impact. And just like a splinter, if you don't deal with it, if you ignore it or try to push it deeper, it just festers & gets worse. That's what happened with Trenton's character in the skit. Like all tough guys/bullies, they really are hurt children on the inside. But that hurt, that splinter, wasn't removed. So it grew into insecurity, resentment, frustration, bitterness, anger, hatred, and then violence. A lot of people are in jail because they're like Trently—hurt people that never had their splinters removed. So that pain just festered until it broke out into criminal acts. And only one person that is laughing about it: Satan.

The fact of the matter is that we're all like Trently on some level. We all have these little splinters in us that manifest themselves as far bigger problems – and in turn create even bigger problems in our lives. But we're all taught in this world to be tough, to make like nothing's wrong, like we've got it all under control, to push the splinter in deeper.

There was a guy back in the time of Jesus who pushed the painful splinters of his life deep inside of him. The wounds of his early life they made him feel stupid & insecure. So he pushed that hurt down inside of himself & tried to make it all go away by becoming the smartest guy his class. But he took it too far & became a smug, irritating "know-it-all"- the guy you could never win an argument with. Because of his intelligence, he rose high in the religious ranks. He memorized all the religious rules (1000s of them) & he could nail you with them at any time. But the splinters in him drove him to be "Mr. Perfect", the guy who was never wrong and could never be criticized. His splinters eventually led him to hate Christians & became the lead agent in hunting them down for persecution, jail & execution. But one day while on a mission to arrest Christians, this man of many splinters met the risen Jesus Christ. Jesus exposed those splinters/wounds & revealed this man's pride, arrogance and errors. Jesus began to heal his wounds & remove his splinters. Jesus even gave this man a new name, he went from Saul to Paul. Instead of hunting & killing Christians, this new man, Paul, became a follower of Jesus & started many new churches across the Mediterranean world. Paul went on to say one of the most confounding & amazing statements ever: "*For when I am weak, then I am strong.*" **2Cor 12:10b**. We are truly strong when we realize our true weakness & our total need for God. Jesus said something similar in **Mt 5:3**, "*God blesses those who are poor and realize their need for Him, for the Kingdom of Heaven is theirs.*"

Folks, we can go around making like everything's ok, pushing the splinters & hurt further down. We can be cool, hip, trendy, great on the outside people who are actually dying on the inside. All this will only cause more pain in your life & in the lives of others (just like for Trently's character). Or you can be totally honest & weak before God & say, "God, I need you! Jesus, come into my life, take out my splinters, heal my pain." That is a position of true strength. So my prayer tonight is that you, me, all of us, realize our positions, face our splinters/wounds & pain and cry out to God. That kind of honesty & openness is what God needs to get started in healing us, freeing us from ourselves & from our demons & making a new life. That's what Christmas is – Jesus coming to this earth as a little baby to grow up & eventually die on a brutal Roman cross to free us from our sins—the sins that are destroying us & separating us from God (**Lk 2:10-11**). So tonight, let's drop the facades – let's all admit our weakness & turn to God through Jesus. The healing, the new life could all begin right here, right now.

Key Verses

2Cor 12:10b "*For when I am weak, then I am strong.*"

Mt 5:3 (CEV) God blesses those people who depend only on Him. They belong to the kingdom of heaven!

Mt 5:3 (NLT) "*God blesses those who are poor and realize their need for Him, for the Kingdom of Heaven is theirs.*"

Lk 2:10-11 (NLT) but the angel reassured them. "Don't be afraid!" he said. "I bring you good news that will bring great joy to all people. The Savior—yes, the Messiah, the Lord—has been born today in Bethlehem, the city of David!"

Discussion Questions

1. Splinters are small but can hurt & cause infection. What's your worst splinter story? Did you ever get an infection from one?
2. What kind of 'splinters' do you think Trently may have had in life? How did he deal with them?
3. We talked about *life's splinters* tonight. Name some splinters from the past that could negatively affect someone's present life.
4. Instead of removing the hurtful "splinters" of the past, how do many people deal with them? Where could this eventually lead?
5. Read 2Cor 12:10b. These are the words of Paul, the former "Mr. Perfect" who was healed & changed by Jesus. What does this verse mean? How is this verse a key clue in digging out the festering 'splinters' or your past?
6. Read both versions of Mt 5:3. God wants you to trust in Him to help you deal with the past & live victoriously in the present. Has God healed anyone here tonight from a past 'splinter' experience that was negatively affecting your life? What happened?
7. Read Lk 2:10-11. Christmas is a time of hope and that hope is in Jesus Christ. A.) Does anyone here want or need to be healed from past 'splinter' experiences? B.) If so, trust in Jesus to remove that splinter and heal your wounds as we pray for you.

PRAYER: Father God, we've all been hurt in the past, we've all received splinters that were never removed. Show us those splinters, Father, and please take them away. Take away the pain of the past. And deliver us from the wrong pathways we've allowed these splinters to take us on. Free us from hurtful thoughts, words & actions and lead us gently down the road of your peace & righteousness. Amen