

Week 19: From Limping Lonely to Walking Together

I didn't know the drinking glass was broken until I stepped on it.

My wife had dropped it a day earlier. It had shattered, and she had done a meticulous job of cleaning it up. But an impossibly small shard had wedged itself in the rug in front of the kitchen sink. Sticking straight up. When my heel landed on it, the pain was exquisite.

It took a while for me to realize the shard was still in there, it took a while for my wife to dig it out, and it took a while for the wound to heal—every step felt like I was wounding it all over again. So, I started limping. And it helped. It protected the wound from further injury and, within a week, my foot was healed. Because our bodies have been built to heal themselves.

Our hearts have been crafted that way, too.

We get glass in our foot and we get glass in our soul. Sometimes, someone is to blame—we get attacked and beat up and mistreated and abused and neglected and stripped of our dignity in countless ways. Other times, no one is to blame—sometimes loneliness is just loneliness and shame is just shame and pain is just part of being alive.

Either way, the good news is, generally, wounds heal.

With just a little attention and tender loving care, the body does what it's supposed to do—skin closes up and bones reunite, even harder and stronger than before. And with just a bit of intention and guidance, the heart heals too—it lets go, releases, forgives, expands, reaches out, and loves again. Our wounds, usually, are temporary.

Unfortunately, the ways we *protect* our wounds oftentimes become *permanent*.

I limped to protect my wounded foot, and it worked. But protecting it had become a habit and, unconsciously, I continued to limp a little, even after my heel was healed. And before long, my uneven gait was causing my back to hurt in strange places. Then my hip started to ache. A week after I'd felt the last of the pain from my heel, I felt a searing pain in the opposite *knee*. It stopped me in my tracks. The habit of hobbling was wounding me worse.

That's how heart-wounds work, too.

The limping we do to protect our wounded hearts—the pretending and defending, hiding and resisting, faking and fighting—can become, without us even realizing it, the gait with which we walk through this life. Then, the pain we experience has little to do with our original wound and an awful lot to do with our methods of protecting it.

When did you first feel the loneliness of shame, and when did you start protecting it with hiding, and how is your hiding making you even lonelier? When did you first get attacked and when did you start protecting by retaliating and how much more violence is it attracting? When were you made to feel small and how did you start protecting by acting bigger than—and better than—everyone else, and how much smaller has your life become because of it?

We're all limping a little. And we developed our habits of protection for good reasons. We needed them to create space for healing. And it's quite possible they were completely *effective*—our original wounds may have healed a long time ago. But we've been limping ever since.

And protecting for a lifetime can riddle that lifetime with unnecessary pain.

After I felt the knee pain, I started doing something differently. I started paying *attention*. I noticed my protective limp, and I realized if I was going to feel better and heal completely, I would need to start walking normally again. The problem was, walking normally no longer came naturally. As soon as I quit paying attention, I slipped back into my limp. So for the next week, everywhere I went, I focused on walking. In other words, I focused on simply moving normally.

Sometimes normal is the hardest thing to do.

What if we all decided to do the hard thing? What if we paid attention to all the ways we hide and attack and elevate ourselves? And what if we made the conscious and determined choice to stop doing those things? What if, instead, we got back to normal and started stepping authentically into love and into life? It's possible we'd step down and feel a searing pain and realize our hearts still have some healing to do.

If so, *do* it—find a professional to walk with you while you heal.

But it's also quite possible the pain you've been feeling all along was caused mostly by your *protecting*. It's quite possible your original wounds have already healed and your heart is already prepared to do again what it naturally does: to be open, courageous, hopeful, vulnerable, generous, and together.

Yes, it's scary, because you could get wounded again. In fact, you probably will. After all, there are shards of glass everywhere. But there is redemption in even this, because this is how you find your place of belonging. The people who want to dig out your glass with you—even when it was their shard you stepped upon, *especially* when it was their shard—are your people.

May we stop protecting *against* each other and start digging *with* each other.