

## **“Soul Surgery”**

Hebrews 4:12-13; Psalm 19

*Series: 40 Days in the Word*

*Week 3. Transformation: How the Bible Changes Us*

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“Ouch! What was that?” I suddenly felt a wrenching spasm in my left knee. “Maybe it’s just a ‘Charlie horse.’” I massaged my throbbing joint. But instead of relaxing, it clenched tighter. Then something bizarre happened – for no apparent reason, my limb twisted and jerked backwards. You could say my leg flipped out on me. I had the proverbial “knee jerk reaction”!

Where did I blow out my knee? At the gym? Running on the canal? Skiing down a slope? Nope. It happened on stage in front of two hundred kids and adults during a Vacation Bible School skit. Pain shot through me. I wanted to say some appropriate words – except I remembered I was still in church. After the kids went to their classes I called my personal Physical Therapist: “Lisa, something snapped in my knee. Can you come check it out?” A few hours later, she carefully inspected my leg. “I think you tore your meniscus.” “Can you fix it?” “I’ll need some help.” Now over the years I’ve done a lot of crazy stunts on the stage of our sanctuary during VBS. But in all my wildest dreams, I never imagined the entire VBS cast holding me down in church while my wife tried to pop my knee back into place. It gave a whole new meaning to the phrase: “you’re pulling my leg.”

Lisa was right – I tore my meniscus. After an MRI, the doctor told me to schedule surgery. As the story of my injury spread, it began to stretch a little. The tear occurred while my daughter Kristin lightly leaned her weight on me. But as the tale grew, well-wishers asked, “I heard Kristin jumped into your arms and you collapsed!” Another said, “They told me you jumped off the roof of your house and broke your leg.” But my favorite was: “Someone said you hurt your leg when you jumped off your guitar amp.” I also collected a lot of interesting names as I limped down the halls. Church members saw me and shouted, “Hey, Peg leg!” “How you doin’ Hop along?” or “Here comes Gimp.”

When they asked, “How did you do that?” I wished I could say something exotic such as: “I was chasing three atheists” or “Striking a blow for justice.” But I’d usually mumble, “I did it during Vacation Bible School.” And people would always do the same thing: they’d laugh. One person said, “I told you to knock off that VBS. You’re not a young man anymore.”

I called our church’s insurance company and said, “I’d like to file a workman’s compensation claim. I injured my knee.” The nice lady on the other end of the phone asked, “How do you know it’s workman’s compensation?” she asked. “It happened during Vacation Bible School,” I mumbled. She laughed. “Well do you have any witnesses?” she continued. “Yes.” “How many?” “Two hundred,” I said. “Oh,” she replied. But the most embarrassing part of the story happened when I went for the surgery at a local hospital. I wrote down on the admission form “Cause of injury: VBS.” The

nurse looked at it and said, “I’m telling you church is dangerous. Almost every Sunday someone is brought into the ER from church. Which church was it again?” “Newtown Presbyterian,” I said.

The surgeon did a magnificent job on my meniscus. In fact, he was able to expertly cut and remove the torn piece through two small holes. While I made sure to do my physical therapy rehab for several weeks, I was able to perform an outdoor wedding three days after the surgery.

The Bible has been called many things: the lamp of God to guide us, the mirror of God to correct us, to breath of God to revive us and give us life. But you may not know that the Bible is also like a surgeon’s scalpel. In the hands of the Great Physician it is the only instrument that can perform surgery on your soul. The book of Hebrews says,

For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. (Hebrews 4:12)

Our souls need surgery. The disappointments and desires, the resentments and regrets, the worries and fears, the guilt and shame must be surgically removed by the Great Physician. And the scalpel Jesus uses is the sharpest instrument of all: the Word of God. The Scriptures are not a dead document, but a living, powerful, double-edged blade that slits the invisible division between joint and marrow, soul and spirit. It penetrates into places no medical doctor can reach to bring cleansing and healing. You don’t merely read Scripture, it reads you. When you study the Bible, it studies and examines you. It exposes the thoughts and attitudes in your heart. When all our thoughts and attitudes are laid bare before God, He can start to heal them. The healing comes when we listen for His voice in Scripture and look at our problems through His eyes. Last week Rick Warren taught us why and how to have a daily Quiet Time. Some people give up stuff for Lent. This year, I’m asking you to add a daily Quiet Time with God by reading His Word. Your Bible is a sharp, double-edged scalpel. Let God do some soul surgery on you each day. Let Him daily cut away the infections, the diseases, the growths in your soul and spirit. How will soul surgery change you? What benefits and healing will come?

Three thousand years ago, King David explained how the Scriptures change us. **The Bible Revives Your Soul.** David says, “The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul” (Psalm 19:7). How does the Word revive your soul? First, it gives you a new start: a new and eternal life. The Apostle Peter says,

You have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring Word of God. (I Peter 1:23)

I always chuckle a little when someone says to me, “I don’t want to be one of those “born again Christians.” I know what they mean. They don’t want to be the kind of fanatic, pushy Christian that people avoid. You don’t have to be that way. But I must break it to you: if you are a Christian you are born again. And that’s a good thing. Jesus gives us a

new spiritual birth. We are born into a new spiritual family. We have a new spiritual home in heaven.

The Bible also revives our souls by giving us a clean slate. So many people bear the burdens of guilt and shame. Try as we might, we often can't get rid of painful memories or shameful deeds. But God can. The Word of God tells us

There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. (Romans 8:1)  
So God's Word gives you a new start, a clean slate and a renewed spirit. Are you tired? Weary? Worn out? I cannot believe how many exhausted people I see around me. What does Jesus say? Take a rest!

Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light. (Matthew 11:28-30)

Stop right now and ask yourself, "What am I chasing and is it really worth it? What can I cut out of my life and out of my children's lives?" God knows our souls are weary. He gave us the Sabbath not as a burden but a gift. We don't *have* to go to church, we *get* to go and rest in His peace. Here He revives your soul. But why wait a week to rest in Him? Read His Word every day and it will revive your soul.

Second, **The Bible Sharpens Your Mind.** David continues, "The statutes of the Lord are trustworthy, making wise the simple" (Psalm 19:7). They call this "The Information Age." But I think it's the age of disinformation. Readership in newspapers is way down. So to grab your attention, newspapers and television are spicing it up with more celebrity gossip about Lindsey and the Kardashians. All sorts of spiritual beliefs are also flying around these days. When it comes to reincarnation 40% of people surveyed said "yes" or "more likely yes" that they will return to earth in a different body after they die.<sup>1</sup> 43% said "No" or "likely no." There is also a rising interest in other new age beliefs. How can you sift through all the opinions and know the Truth? The Bible reveals God's plan for this life and next. But it does more than fill your head with knowledge. It gives you wisdom. You learn how to discern between truth and fiction. Paul says, "Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind" (Romans 12:2).

Third, **The Bible Enlightens Your Eyes.** Again David says, "The commands of the Lord are radiant, giving light to the eye" (Psalm 19:8). Because I come here pretty early on Sunday morning I have become good at getting ready in the dark. If I follow my faithful path around the bed to the shower or the closet, I don't even need to turn on a light. But, every once in a while, that naughty laundry basket jumps in my way and I stumble and fall. You and I can get along for a while in this world. Yet we are really groping in the dark. Something suddenly jumps in our path - a broken relationship,

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<sup>1</sup> <http://postyour.info/statistics/do-you-believe-in-reincarnation.htm>

unemployment, a divorce, a debt, a death. We trip, stumble, sometimes fall. The Bible is not a crystal ball. The Psalms say,

Your Word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path. (Psalm 119:105)  
It shines God's Light far enough so you can see the next right step. Jesus said,

I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life" (John 8:12).

Fourth, **The Bible Rejoices the Heart**. David says, "The precepts of the Lord are right, giving joy to the heart" (Psalm 19:8). You've heard me say before our culture places a tremendous emphasis on being happy. And for most, the definition of happiness is satisfying a desire, achieving a goal, acquiring a person, place or thing. Did you watch the Super Bowl commercials that appeared this month? The underlying message of all of them is if you drink this beer, own this car, use this website you will be satisfied, you will be happy. The Super Bowl is "super" because only one team will achieve the goal, win the coveted Super Bowl Ring, hoist the Vince Lombardi Trophy and go to Disney World! But will that make them happy? Maybe for awhile. But it doesn't last.

Take for example Tom Brady. In Brady's ten seasons as starting quarterback, the New England Patriots have earned trips to five Super Bowls and won three. He also won two Super Bowl MVP awards and holds the NFL record for most touchdown passes in a single regular season. In 2012, Brady became the first quarterback in NFL history to lead his team to 10 division titles. Back when he was only 30 years old, he'd already won three Super Bowls – a record which marks him as one of the best quarterbacks to ever play the game. Oh, and did I mention in college he played for the University of Michigan?

Most players consider it amazing just to be in one Super Bowl let alone win the coveted ring. But Steve Kroft of 60 Minutes interviewed Tom Brady and found that, despite his fame and record breaking career, Brady felt something was still lacking in his life:

Why do I have three Super Bowl rings and still think there's something greater out there for me? I mean, maybe a lot of people would say, "Hey man, this is what it's all about." I reached my goal, my dream, my life. Me? I think, "God, it's got to be more than this." I mean this isn't—this can't be—all it's cracked up to be.

When Kroft pressed Brady as to what he thought the right answer was, Brady added: "What's the answer? I wish I knew..."<sup>2</sup>

The Bible does not promise you happiness because it knows happiness is haphazard. It comes and goes. No matter how many Super Bowl rings you get, it never is enough. What the Bible offers is joy. In Scripture, joy is contentment, peace and strength. Happiness rises and falls with the circumstances. But joy is God's gift. It lasts through the roller coaster of life. While sitting in a prison, the Apostle Paul wrote,

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<sup>2</sup> www.cbsnews.com and 60 Minutes (CBS, 2007).

Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do everything through him who gives me strength (Philippians 4:4, 12-13).

Read the Bible every day. It will rejoice your heart, enlighten your eyes, sharpen your mind and revive your soul. But the Great Physician cannot heal you unless you submit to his surgery. My knee would not have healed if I did not take my doctor's advice, show up for the surgery and do the follow up rehab. You will not receive the healing blessings in this book unless you learn them, accept them, and act on them. Take these Next Growth Steps.

1. Hear the Messages on Sunday or online
2. Join a Growth Group
3. Do the Daily Devotional Journal in the study guide
4. Apply what you learn.

That's how to get healing power of God's Word into your life. Tom Brady is searching for more in this life. A couple of weeks ago I sat in on the Thursday Morning Men's Group. Before 40 Days in the Word started they were reading a book by Tony Dungy, another Super Bowl champion. Dungy was raised in a Christian home. His grandfather was a minister. His mother taught Sunday school in their Detroit Baptist church and made sure her family was founded on the Bible. Tony recalls, "I learned the importance of making Jesus Christ the Lord of my life." Through all the ups and downs of the next thirty years that faith would be tested.

In 1977 Tony Dungy started playing for the Pittsburgh Steelers. He was influenced by several Christian teammates who helped him walk the talk of Jesus. At the age of 33 he became the youngest defensive coordinator in the NFL and the only African-American. But in '89 he was let go. It was hard for him to find another position because he was a calm, polite leader who never swore. In '86 the Eagles chose Buddy Ryan over Tony. "I'm sure that approach caused me to not get certain jobs. But I had to be true to myself, too. As a Christian in a high profile job like mine, I had to remember that I was always representing God, and that by carrying on the way a lot of coaches do, I would not be glorifying God."

There would be more ups and downs. Despite leading the Tampa Bay Buccaneers to four playoff appearances he was fired in 2002 two days after a crushing defeat to the Eagles. That same year he became the head coach of the Indianapolis Colts and in 2005, as the Colts were heading toward a successful post season, Tony and Lauren Dungy suddenly faced every parent's worst nightmare. Their oldest son James, 18, took his life in a Tampa apartment. He left no note and the reasons are still unknown.

Jamie's death will never make sense to me, and the pain of losing him will never go away. But in the midst of it all, I truly believe that hope is available to *all* of us – for joy in today and peace in the certainty that heaven's glory awaits us. That is the lowest valley in Tony Dungy's life.

On February 4th, 2007, he reached the highest peak. Tony Dungy and his Colts defeated the Chicago Bears led by his very good friend Lovie Smith in Super Bowl XLI. Dungy made history becoming the first African American coach to win the trophy. At the presentation ceremony, he was asked about the social significance of this moment. With grace and integrity, Tony Dungy acknowledged the importance of this milestone not just for African-Americans but for all America. But he didn't stop there. He took us all to a higher level.

I'm proud to represent African-American coaches, to be the first African-American to win this. It means an awful lot to our country. But again, more than anything, I've said it before, (Chicago Bears Coach) Lovie Smith and I are not only the first two African-American coaches (in the Super Bowl), but Christian coaches showing that you can win doing it the Lord's way, we're more proud of that.

Instead of the usually insane post game locker-room celebration, there is a picture of the Colts locker room. In it you will see a sidelined Super Bowl Trophy and in the center, Tony Dungy kneeling with his players, hands clasped in prayer. Long ago the Bible taught Tony Dungy what's most important: "Despite these ups and downs, God is with us. God is for us. He won't ever abandon us."<sup>3</sup>

...the Bible tells me so.

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<sup>3</sup> Quotations come from Tony Dungy, Quiet Strength: The Principles, Practices, & Priorities of a Winning Life, Carol Stream: Tyndale Publishers, 2007 and Michael Michelsen, Jr., "Gentle Warrior," Today's Christian (September/October 2007).