

Have you ever broken a bone? An arm, or a leg? I never have, as yet. The closest that I have ever come to it is from playing backyard football with my bare feet. I used to jump up for passes and land with my big toes curled. They got so black that I figured that bones must have been cracked. But none of these breaks were 'official.'

Dr. Paul Brand tells a story of a coal miner who came to him with a strange contraption around his right forearm. When he took the device off, the doctor determined that the man had at one time smashed his forearm so completely that the medical personnel who had attended him could only take the pieces out and close the wound. This left a gap in the bone in his upper arm. Now, when he tried to lift up something with that arm, the flexing of his muscles only shortened his arm. The contraption on the outside of his arm acted as an outward replacement for his bone so that he could continue to work and support himself.

We take for granted the inner strength that our skeleton provides. We don't realize how important our bones are until they become broken. Without them we are totally weak; we cannot live! With them we can support ourselves upright, walk, run, and lift things. Even if one bone is missing or broken, we cannot function normally.

Most of you, I'm sure, have seen crayfish, or crawdads, in the creeks of this area. This is a member of a group of animals who, like the coal miner, have their skeleton on the outside of their body. Think about how you would live if you had this kind of skeleton. Think how hard and unfeeling it would be. Think how hard it would be to grow inside this kind of container.

Our spiritual shell needs inner strength similar to the strength our body has in our human skeleton. It needs a bit of backbone to enable it to stand up for what is right. And it needs to be warm and sensitive on the outside so that others can touch it and be strengthened by it. The backbone that we have spiritually is a combination of our faith in God and our acceptance of his law. When these things become a real and living part of our 'interior', they give us the strength we need to live every day to the utmost, no matter what happens. This 'inner strength' is the real essence of our joy.

Some of us, however, have a skeleton like the crayfish. The hard exterior shell illustrates the idea of a 'surface religion', where the outside is strong and durable, but does not permit a revelation of the inside. Many people who call themselves Christians wear an exoskeleton of 'good works, visible to all'. This covering shows no real warmth or feeling and is very uncomfortable to wear. It is cold, impersonal, and insensitive. Paul says that though we do all manner of good works, if we have no sensitivity (love), we are nothing (1 Corinthians 13).

Inner strength and sensitivity are topics which I think need to be studied together. We have grown up in a society where to be strong, or tough, is synonymous with being callous and insensitive. But the attitudes which the Bible teaches us to instill in our lives indicate that we are to be supersensitive, handling other people's feelings as we would the delicate shell of an egg.

Studies of monkeys with surrogate mothers have shown that touch is essential to life. Dr. Brand tells about the terrible disease of leprosy, of which we read often in the Bible. It is terrible not because it is very contagious, for it is not! The terror of it lies in the fact that it takes away the sense of touch. It deprives its victim of the ability to feel a loving caress, or to be warned of possible injury. This inability to feel causes lepers to ignore their injuries; the injured areas simply rot and die.

Can you imagine how lonely it would be to not be able to feel the warmth of your sweetheart's hand, to never know just how firmly to grasp someone's hand when you meet? There are not too many people in the world who suffer from leprosy anymore, but a type of the disease has taken root in our hearts, a 'spiritual leprosy'. We have become spiritually insensitive to the feelings of our fellow man. We do not always act out of love. An outer shell hides our heart, and those who reach out to touch it are repelled.

The parable of the Good Samaritan in Luke 10:25-37 illustrates very well God's teaching concerning sensitivity. Christ himself was at once the strongest and most sensitive person who ever lived. We must not ever be ashamed of being sensitive towards others. In Romans 12:15 we are instructed to 'rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep'. We are to be a loving, touching, sensitive family, if we are to accomplish the purposes of God.

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