

Relief without Cutting

Taking Your Negative Feelings
to God

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If I introduced you to Leesa,¹ you'd see a talented young woman who is nice to look at, is a little shy but friendly enough, has done well in school, and is obviously good at whatever she does.

There's also a lot you wouldn't see. Leesa hasn't worn short sleeves for a couple of years. She never puts on a bathing suit. If she did she would reveal a line of scars, perfectly straight and parallel, marching up her arms.

Leesa used to cry, blow up, or get depressed when something upset her. If people were upset with her, if they put her down or made demands, she might blame them or she might blame herself. She might try to do what they wanted or she might act like she didn't care. But none of it ever solved her problem. The pain and pressure inside didn't ease no matter what she did.

Now if something upsets Leesa, others won't see it. She deals with it by going to her room and cutting herself. The blood flowing down her arm brings relief. Leesa feels like she can breathe again. She is calm; the blood makes her feel like the pain is draining from her body.

Leesa knows others think it's abnormal to get relief by cutting, but it does bring release when nothing else seems to help. She reasons, *Why would I give it up when nothing else works?* In her heart, however, she knows this doesn't work either. She now has to cut deeper and deeper, more and more frequently.

Cry Out to God

Many people feel like Leesa. You might be one of them. Maybe it's not hard to understand how you turned to cutting. But it's harder to figure out what to do when you get less and less out of doing something more and more. What happens when you can't get relief anymore? What will you do when the next stressful situation comes along and your best plan no longer works? You're out of ideas.

In your most honest moments, you know it's more than that. Cutting not only doesn't help the way it used to, it's taken on a life of its own. It used to be your safety valve, but now the cutting makes its own demands on you. You feel like you *have* to do it—you don't have a choice. You started cutting because you liked to feel in control, but now, more and more, it feels like cutting is controlling you. It's running things in a lot of ways, and it's not going in a good direction. You need help you can't give yourself, both with the cutting and with the problems you originally thought cutting would solve.

God offers you an alternative to dependence on cutting. As a cutter you have to solve all your own problems without anyone knowing how you do it. But God already knows all about it, and he knows the needs and struggles of your heart. The Lord longs to show pity and mercy to those who struggle. He is close to the

brokenhearted, and *he* binds up their wounds. As you read this, ask the Lord to do that for you. Because God's love compelled him to send his Son to suffer and die for us, his love is strong enough to spill out on every soul who looks to him. And since his power was great enough to raise Christ from the dead, his power is great enough to liberate you from bondage to cutting.

Through Christ's blood, God brings people near who used to be alone. He brings people near who used to be excluded; he comes near to people without hope, people like you. Ask God to show himself to you—cry out to him.

Precious to Him

Psalm 72:12–13 tells us that God will “deliver the needy who cry out, the afflicted who have no one to help. He will take pity on the weak and needy” These are comforting truths by themselves, but the passage continues with something even more comforting: “He will rescue them from oppression and violence, for precious is their blood in his sight” (Psalm 72:14).

Did you notice that last part? Your *blood* is precious in God's sight. When you've locked yourself in your room and raised blood in order to feel calm, God has been there and your blood is precious to him. When you've reopened wounds to get relief, God has been there and your blood is precious to him. When you've

needed the sight of your blood to prove you're in control, God has been there and your blood is precious to him.

Blood Is Powerful

Blood is powerful. You've been using the sight of your blood as a high-powered tool to alleviate your pain, your alienation, your aloneness, your self-loathing, and your guilt. But as you've come to recognize, your cutting doesn't solve the issues at war within your soul. Cutting only offers temporary relief—a relief that is quickly destroyed by more pain, more anxiety, more sadness, more guilt, and more desperation.

Spilling out our own blood in an attempt to find relief falls far short of the image God created us to reflect: his image. God is glorious—splendid, magnificent, radiant, holy, and altogether wonderful. And God created us to reflect his glory (Genesis 1; 1 Corinthians 10:31). We all fall short of this.

Remember, in Psalm 72 God says he will take pity on the weak and needy. Even though we've failed to reflect God's glory, even though we've looked to our own blood to control the pain and provide relief, God is willing to show us pity. His pity is shown to us in the death of his Son, who suffered and bled so we could receive a pardon for our sins and begin to reflect the glory we were designed to radiate. The blood you spill can never permanently provide relief or atone for your

sins, but the blood Christ spilled for you can offer hope even beyond relief.

If you tend to think about Jesus in narrow, “religious” terms that don’t overlap much with the problems in your life, take a few minutes to consider him in another light. Jesus left heaven to come to earth and fix all the things that had gone wrong since its creation. That includes the things that have hurt and damaged you. It also includes the wrong and damaging ways you have responded.

Jesus understands your struggles far more than you know. He is “a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering” (Isaiah 53:3). He entered into the suffering of this world for our sake. He understands the broken, sinful relationships and situations that have led you to seek relief in your private world of self-injury. But he also knows why that hasn’t worked for you—the inner workings of your heart are broken and sinful too. Your efforts to find relief from the pain and evil of life are also tainted with sin and brokenness. That’s why your efforts to find relief are so often followed by more pain, more anxiety, more sadness, more guilt, and more desperation. Sometimes you even cut yourself to punish yourself for cutting yourself!

You need help from outside yourself. And you need help not only to deal with yourself and other people, but also to restore the relationship with God you were

originally created to enjoy. That's been broken too. It's the reason everything else has gone so desperately wrong.

Jesus died on the cross to break sin's hold on each of us. He took the punishment our sins deserved and defeated the power of evil over us. The barrier between us and God has been removed. Jesus offers forgiveness for everything we have ever done wrong. He gives us a new start, with a new heart that can trust God, a new relationship with God and identity as his child, and a new purpose in life—to know God, to follow him, and to bring him joy and honor. Second Corinthians 5:17 puts it this way: “If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!”

Christ's blood is powerful enough to rescue us from our sins *and* our efforts to rescue ourselves. It's powerful enough to free us to live for the God who knows us completely yet loves us perfectly. Have you cried out to Jesus for his forgiveness and help? Are you ready to trust in his blood instead of your own? Through Christ's blood you can leave your hidden world and allow Jesus to become your relief, satisfaction, savior, comforter, protector, and hope.

The loneliness, guilt, confusion, and powerlessness you've experienced have kept you in a dark place. But when God rescues you through Christ, you can begin to walk in the light because you're walking with Christ, and he *is* the Light. First John 1:7 says, “If we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with

one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.”

Notice that walking in the light brings us into “fellowship”—relationship—with God and with others. The alienation you’ve felt from your parents, your peers, your teachers, your bosses, and from God has a remedy: trust in Jesus’ blood, not your own. Blood is most powerful when it’s Christ’s blood.

Help from God

Trusting in what Jesus has done for you means you can now approach God with a boldness you didn’t have in the past. With Jesus as your Brother and God as your Father, you can be confident when you ask for the help you need. Remember, God says he will deliver the needy who cry out for help. This is your time of need, so ask!

The thing to remember is that God’s help comes in various forms. If you expect it to come in only one way, you may be confused and discouraged if his response doesn’t meet your expectations. But there is no question that God wants to help you stop cutting and leave the world of self-injury for a very different life that is built around him. Let’s consider three ways God provides help.

1. God provides help by changing our circumstances.

Sometimes God helps us by changing our situation so that our circumstances get better. This

happened when Jesus healed the sick, the crippled, and the blind while he was on earth.

Sometimes this help comes without any effort on our part. At other times, we need to take some sort of action. For example, in Matthew 8 when Christ healed the leper, the cure was immediate. No action was required of the leper. But in Luke 17 the ten lepers were told to go and show themselves to the priest. Their healing occurred as they followed Christ's instructions. So when we ask for help, we should always search God's Word to see if he's given any instructions we should follow.

We might be waiting for God to remove from our lives the circumstances and relationships that stress us out and make us want to cut. In some cases God does that. At other times God wants us to participate in changing those circumstances and relationships. We'll look more closely at that later.

2. God provides help by changing our desires.

Sometimes the things we want would choke out our desire for God if he gave them to us (Mark 4:19). In such cases, God may deny our request in order to give us something much better—himself.