



WOMEN WHO PRIZE
BEING FOUND IN CHRIST

Truth Hurts

By: Rhonda Hellstern

I'm not a doctor, but I've been reading some fascinating stuff lately about the brain, specifically about two little almond-shaped structures on either side of the brain, called the *amygdala*. One of the jobs of the amygdala is to create or process pain. There's the obvious kind of pain from physical trauma, like stubbing your toe on the coffee table or getting shot in combat. But there's also a very real kind of pain that comes from something called "cognitive dissonance," **meaning that your brain is having trouble in trying to make sense of two opposing ideas.** For example, "Lying is wrong, so liars are bad people" and "I lied about something, but I'm a good person."

You know, to a greater or lesser extent, every time you learn something new, you are experiencing a bit of this cognitive dissonance. Your old way of thinking, of understanding the world, of thinking about yourself undergoes a challenge when a new thought comes into view. And your amygdala perceives it as a threat, almost the same as the threat of the coffee table to your toe. It feels like pain in your brain.

Matthew 4:16 *"The people living in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned."*

Just think about that for a minute. Have you ever gotten up in the middle of the night and tried to walk through a dark house? Eventually, your eyes get accustomed to the dark, and things make sense to you. Until someone else flips on the light- when that happens, your first reaction is probably not, "Oh, praise the Lord! The light has come!" Probably your eyes have trouble adjusting to the onslaught of this new blessing. You might even feel a tiny bit of anger for just a few seconds while your body tries to process this sensory overload. **Your brain had gotten comfortable with the dark, and the new light, well, hurt.**

This is similar to the way we often respond to new information, especially when it challenges us on an emotional level. When it requires us to admit that what we had been believing was, simply put, wrong. **No normal, mentally healthy person relishes the feeling of discovery that they have been wrong.** That kind of realization forces us to re-examine everything we think we know. Nothing is solid. Nothing is trustworthy. Nothing is sure.

There are, of course, levels of “wrong.” You may have thought that late night snack was a good idea, but if you wake up a few hours later with heartburn, you know “I was wrong.” You may have thought that the meeting was scheduled for 10:00, but when you arrive, you find everyone else has been in place for half an hour. You were wrong.

There are little wrongs that can lead to physical discomfort or emotional embarrassment, but there are big wrongs that can have much more serious consequences. For example, someone might come to realize the good things they have done for other people have sprung from selfish motives rather than love. Maybe you realize that the helpful suggestion you made actually crushed the heart of the person you were trying to help. Or maybe, just maybe, you might learn that the entire religious foundation of your life may not be true. As my dear Muslim friend responded to a presentation of the Gospel, she said,

“If I believe that what you say about Jesus is true, I will be saying that the foundation of my entire life is a lie. I will have to admit that every teacher I have ever loved and respected has told me a lie. I will have to believe that everyone in my family line died believing a lie and that even if I live in heaven for eternity, my friends and family will not be with me, but will be in hell for eternity. This is the truth you are asking me to believe.”

Religious conversion requires admitting a BIG WRONG, causing an incredible amount of cognitive dissonance. It can create an unbelievably deep pain. **This perspective can alter the way we hold conversations with individuals who believe other religions, even if we so dearly want them to come to know Jesus.**

The struggle between what we have believed or want to believe and new truth can be overwhelmingly painful. And in the face of that kind of pain, some will choose to fall back to what they have believed in the past, choosing to bypass new truth for the comfort of the formerly known. **But there are those who are willing to pursue Truth at all costs.** There are those who recognize that sometimes the only thing that hurts more than knowing Truth is not knowing it. As Simon Peter said, John 6:68 *“Where else can we go, Lord? You alone have the words of life.”*

But what if the truth He reveals brings with it a pain too great to bear? What if He shines light in places we don’t want to see? **What if the new revelation He brings costs us every comfortable and precious idea we have ever held?**

Truth can hurt. But we can trust that the same One who brought about the sense of cognitive dissonance can help resolve it. **He is known as the Truth, the Light, and many other names, including the Comforter.** And it is this Comforter who makes all the difference. Yes, knowing the truth will set us free (John 8:32), but sometimes He simply imparts to us a peace that passes understanding. (Phil 4:7)

We may not see every detail, we may not understand how all the pieces fit together right now, but we can know the Person called Truth. **Ultimately, knowing Him is enough.**

conversation starters

1. How does knowing how the brain receives messages impact the way you see confronting friends, or co-workers who may believe differently than you- not just about the Bible, but about parenting, marriage, and other every day things?
2. Why do you think it is important to learn about things like “cognitive dissonance”?
3. When you read and study about this interaction between the writer and her muslim friend, do you think of any situations that you have been in before that have been similar?
4. Name a time where you realized you were wrong, and it hurt.
5. *“There are those who recognize that sometimes the only thing that hurts more than knowing Truth is not knowing it.”* Are you the type of person who wants to know the truth, even if it hurts? What part does knowing the truth play in maturing spiritually?

his heart work

STUDY

Do a Bible study on the word truth. Did you know there are 186 scriptures in the New Testament that contain the word truth? A majority of them are Jesus stating, "I tell you the truth...". If we are to be like Jesus, we're going to have to get great at telling the truth. Read through the verses and discover how Jesus shared the truth in love.

ACT

Ask the Lord to reveal to you how this principle of perspective applies to your life right now, if He brings to your mind a person you know- or a conversation you've had ask Him for fresh perspective on that situation. If there are any 'New Truths' in your life that hurt, ask Him to help your process and heal in those areas. Journal His response!

prayer needs

Write down the prayer requests of your group members, and pray fervently for them! Let your group members know when you are praying for them, if you have any scriptures or encouraging words for them, etc.