



**Head to Heart**  
Restoration Ministry

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## Tearing Down the Walls of Self-Preservation

When Jim was seven years old his dad came in and told him that he was divorcing his mother and Jim would now be the “man-of-the-house” and would need to take care of his mother and younger sister. In Jim’s seven year old mind, his dad handed him a “brick” of responsibility to begin building his wall of self-preservation. He had to be strong, serious and grown-up long before he was emotionally ready.

When Karen was fifteen years old, she tripped in the school cafeteria, spilling her tray in front of her classmates. The room erupted in laughter and for the rest of the school year Karen was known as “Klutz Cargo Karen.” Karen picked up a “brick” of embarrassment to add to her already growing wall of self-preservation. Karen withdrew inside herself, second guessing her ability to do “anything” right.

Maria had been married for ten years when her husband came home one day and announced that he was leaving and wanted a divorce. Maria was devastated. The grief and loss seemed impossible to work through. Her husband gave her a “brick” of rejection. Maria’s wall was already well established due to a life of broken relationships, poor choices and rejection by others. When Maria put the brick in her wall she was determined to never get hurt like this again.

The bricks in our lives are anything that stands in the way of growing in health, maturity, and the understanding of our position as God’s sons and daughters. Bricks can be in the form of addictions, broken relationships, poor family dynamics, and anything else that causes hurts, wounds, and pain. When we are bound by addictions, our love and care for ourselves and others takes second place over the substance or activity. We allow the substance or activity to live with us within our wall, keeping other out. The combination of the bricks forms the wall of broken emotions.

We all have a wall formed from the bricks of past hurts, fears, wounds, and unmet expectations. We build the wall hoping to protect ourselves from the wounds of the past and prevent wounds in the future. Initially, each time we add a brick we feel a little bit safer, knowing that we have added another layer of protection from pain. One day we realize that we have walled ourselves off from relationship with others. The longer we allow the wall to stand, the more fortified it becomes. The wall of self-preservation becomes the prison of our own making.

How do we build such a prison? It is within each person the need to avoid pain, whether it is emotional, physical or mental. From an early age, we learn that we can’t escape pain. Since we can’t escape it, we do the next best thing, and bury it build walls around ourselves in an attempt to not receive further pain.

From an early age Jim struggled with guilt that he could not take care of his mother and sister like his dad told him to. When he would see his mother crying or struggling with trying to maintain the home, while working full time he would tell himself that if he had been a better son, maybe dad would not have left. If only he was more responsible, maybe mom would not cry. As he moved towards adulthood, Jim realized that he could never meet the expectation set by his dad so he gave up, and tried to avoid being responsible for anyone, including himself. He would become paralyzed with fear and self-doubt anytime he had to make a decision. The simplest of decisions felt overwhelming. For Jim, it was easier to stay behind the wall of self-preservation. He learned that if he could



avoid developing deep emotional relationships with others he would not run the risk of having to make decisions or be viewed as weak and passive.

Karen moved out of adolescence into adulthood avoiding any activity that might possibly include taking a risk. Although Karen had always been an honors student in high school she dropped out her first year of college once she encountered a class assignment that she was afraid she could not do well. Karen would rather not try than risk the embarrassment of being a “failure.” When with others, Karen would negate any compliment given to her. Karen believed she was a failure and no one could convince her that she wasn’t. She built her wall out of fear, negative self-talk and doubt. She was unable to breakthrough and reach her God given potential and destiny.

With the loss of her husband, Maria knew that if she allowed others inside her life beyond the surface she would be rejected again. If her husband rejected her what would make her believe it would not happen again? Over time Maria pulled away from family and friends. Her life became characterized by staying at home alone, free of socialization and relationships. For Maria, being alone was easier than having to deal with the loss of another relationship. Her wall was thick. The bricks were well entrenched and Maria was lonely and miserable.

Unmet expectations can send the message that we are not valued or approved of. Many unmet expectations are about our perception and interpretation of life events. Some expectations are not realistic and cannot be met. Other times, the expectation is not met because unforeseen events come up forcing the person to not be available. Regardless of why the expectation was not met, if not dealt with appropriately it can be turned into hurt, and hurts can turn into bricks.

The difference between conviction and shame is that conviction is about our actions being hurtful or a mistake we make. The Holy Spirit convicts us of sin but never brings condemnation and shame. Shame internalizes the action, mixes it with condemnation and says, “I am the mistake.” Shame breeds self-doubt and self-hate. When we walk under a cloud of shame, we can’t imagine why anyone would love or care for us. We reject any attempts from others to connect or build relationship, hiding behind our wall of bricks.

When a relationship becomes strained and words are exchanged that are hurtful, we can easily grab a brick to fortify our wall. We not only prevent the person who hurt us from entering back in to our life, we prevent anyone else from entering in because of the fear of possible future hurts. We hold every relationship at arms-length. Eventually, we have distanced ourselves from having deep meaningful relationships with anyone. Our wall of self-preservation has become our prison.

Grief and loss are part of life. No one escapes the experience of losing someone they love whether it is through death, divorce, misunderstanding, or relocation. It is important to allow ourselves to grieve our losses. We grieve our losses by acknowledging our feelings, talking about it with others, praying, and allowing time to process and heal. If we do not walk through the grieving process, we can wall ourselves off and isolate from others.

How do we tear down the wall of self-preservation? We dismantle the wall just like we built it, one brick at a time.



We must first take time to identify the bricks. In our hurt, we can easily identify a brick as a person instead of an action or event. An abusive parent may create bricks of fear, rejection and anger. Part of identifying the brick involves understanding how long it has been in place and asking the hard question, “Do I really want to get rid of it?” We can become very comfortable with our wall and the fear that comes from dismantling it may seem more overwhelming than what we are willing to deal with.

Once the bricks are identified, we have to take the necessary steps to begin to tear the wall down. Depending on where the brick came from will determine the process for removing it.

Bricks formed through broken relationships may need to be dismantled through reaching out to others with the gift of forgiveness. We have to be willing to acknowledge any part we may have had in the disintegration of the relationship. Forgiving and releasing others is one of the most powerful forces we have for tearing down walls and healing relationships. You may need to meet with specific people that have hurt you, make phone calls, write letters, or seek other ways to reconnect. If they are not willing to forgive, reconnect, are no longer living, or cannot be located, you can still do your part to forgive and release them through prayer. Each repaired relationship is a brick being removed from your wall.

Bricks of self-preservation that were formed out of hurtful events, embarrassing situations, or life issues may require that you stop and allow yourself to recall the event, acknowledge the hurt, and reflect on what happened. Allowing yourself to recall the event and acknowledge your feelings provides a place to forgive and release the people involved as well as yourself. If you allowed the event to cause you to view yourself in a negatively way, you will need to forgive yourself.

Bricks of our own making through negative self-talk, poor self-esteem, and areas of sin or mistakes can be the most difficult to remove. The key to removing self-made bricks is learning, embracing and believing who you are in Christ. Meditate on scripture confirming how God sees you. You are loved, accepted, and forgiven. God loves and accepts you regardless of your past, present or future actions. Take time to reflect on how God views you as his son or daughter. Receiving God’s love and grace is like taking a stick of dynamite to the wall. Become intentional about speaking good things over yourself. When you make mistakes or fail acknowledge the action without speaking that you are the mistake or failure.

A remaining key to tearing down the wall of self-preservation is to take risks to connect with others. God designed us for relationship with him as well as each other. It began in the Garden of Eden and continues today. It is in the context of relationships that we grow, learn, and share life. Many times we need the help of others to take the hammer and chisel to the bricks in our wall. Moving out from under hurts and wounds of the past, our fears, and unmet expectations is much easier in the context of relationships with others. Grab the hammer of forgiveness, the chisel of faith, the love of God and a friend or family member and begin to break some bricks. The freedom you will experience is worth the effort.

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