**ON THE WINGS OF A DOVE**

**Phil Van Auken**

Can you see him: the tattooed, long-haired, teen smoking a cigarette approaching you in the parking lot? He wants to know if your church offers drug counseling. Well, do you know someone who can help this young man? Or will he end up like the butterfly, once free but now pinned to a museum display case?

That guy needs help, you say to yourself, but he’s the one who chose to do drugs. What can our church do for him? It takes an expert to do drug counseling. But it’s not right just to ignore someone asking for help, is it? No, but I didn’t invite him to stop by our church. Anyway, I’m on the way to lunch and gotta go. Maybe he’ll come back at a more convenient time and I can think of something to tell him. He sure looks like he needs help right now, though. Darn it, why did this guy have to show up? I’m no miracle worker. I don’t know what to do. I hate this. I don’t even feel like eating lunch any more.

Putting your warring thoughts aside, can you imagine how many teens in your community yearn to be freed from the cruel addictions of this world—to be uplifted on the wings of a dove and flown to freedom?

Allow your mind to wander again. Can you see the small boy on your street letting himself into an empty house after school because his mother recently died and his dad is at work? Is there someone on your block who could rescue him? Or will he end up like a starved, battle-scarred tomcat begging on the doorstep for a morsel of food?

Life sure is tough today, you think out loud, especially for families with kids. Sure am glad I grew up in a better era when mothers were home during the day and two-parent families were the norm. What a mess schools are these days—all those achievement tests, the campus violence, the underpaid teachers. No wonder students do so poorly. Somebody needs to do something about it, that’s for sure, but don’t look at me, I can’t relate to our society today. It’s too bad about that little boy’s mother—I just found out last week that she died. I’m glad my kids never had to go through that! But just because I’m one of the few women on the block who’s home during the day doesn’t mean I’m responsible for other people’s kids. Well, I guess I could at least say hello to him someday when he walks by on the sidewalk. I could do that. But I’m certainly not obligated to. I wonder where his dad works, anyway. He’s never there, but I am. So what? I’m not his mother. Oh, why do I keep going around and around like this? I have a right to live my own life that way I want to, don’t I?

While you continue to argue with yourself, imagine how many children in your town wish they could fly on the wings of a dove into a safe, secure future.

Listen carefully one more time: Can you hear the coworker at your office confiding to a friend that she hides wine bottles in the deep pockets of her overcoat so her emotionally detached husband won’t discover her drinking problem? Is there someone in the office who could help? She seems trapped, like a zoo animal pacing in its man-made concrete jungle.

I didn’t know she had a drinking problem, you say to yourself. She doesn’t ever seem drunk at work. Maybe she’s exaggerating about her problem just to get a little sympathy. Ouch! That’s not a nice way to think—what’s wrong with me, anyhow? I’m just glad I’m not in her shoes. She must be hurting inside or she wouldn’t confide in people here at the office. But that’s not what we’re here for—we’re here to work, not be counselors. Oh, there goes my negative attitude again! I hate being non-sympathetic and judgmental, but how can I get involved in somebody’s private affairs? I’m tired of thinking about this!

As you sit there wrestling with your hot and cold nature, imagine how many husbands and wives in your city would like to ride on the on the wings of a dove to a world where husbands and wives actually love one other.

Living in today’s boiling world, we all share one thing in common: pain. Our material comforts, the escapist entertainment, even our weekly worship service, can’t anesthetize us to pain. The wars don’t stop and the terrorism goes on; so do the abortions, the suicides, the children killed in school, and the shameless political and business corruption.

But for many, emotional pain hurts even more than the world’s roiling turmoil. In the book of Romans, the apostle Paul talks wrestles out loud with his own emotional pain: “I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing that I hate. I can will what is right, but I can’t do it. Wretched man that I am, who will rescue me from this body of death?” Paul knew how the butterfly feels trapped in the net.

Like Paul, we know what we should do, but we’re not sure we want to do it. We want to help the scruffy teen in the parking lot and the lonely boy home alone in our neighborhood. We know our lonely alcoholic coworker needs help but hesitate to get involved. Life is forever complicated and busy, and it’s so easy to pass right by hurting people, even though we detest ourselves for doing it. Like Paul, we feel wretched trying to fight off the self-centered sin nature that clips our wings.

But wait a minute--Paul didn’t end up a wretched man! He overcame his Pharisaical hatred of Christians and his violent persecution of them. He shucked his high social status as a Jewish Pharisee and gladly walked last in line as though he were garbage rather than the greatest Christian theologian and missionary who ever lived. Paul learned the wonder of overcoming his earthbound nature by rising upward on the wings of a dove.

Zechariah also expresses good news to those who long to be rescued from our self-centeredness. He tells us to rejoice greatly and to shout because one day a gentle King will rescue us on a humble donkey. And this King will also bring peace to the battle-scarred nations.

And the psalmist tells us that this King of ours is compassionate, slow to anger, rich in love, good to all, and faithful. The greatest psalmist, David, was rescued from his grievous sins of adultery and murder and transformed into the victorious king that united all the tribes of Israel. A dove flew into David’s sin laden life, transforming him into a man after God’s own heart.

In Matthew’s gospel, the King himself beckons us to join him if we are weary and burdened with our constant internal struggles and pain. We can rest on the wings of Christ and fly to freedom.

But what about the drug addicted teen—who will rescue him and set him free? Christ, the King, did when you brought him into a counseling center for help. They carried him to freedom on their wings.

And Christ rescued the lonely latchkey kid in your neighborhood when you made him a special part of your family by inviting him to stay through supper every day after school. He was lifted on the wings of your caring family.

And your alcoholic coworker—who rescued her and set her free? Christ did when you befriended her, encouraged her with the gospel message, and invited her whole family to come to the church picnic.

 Freed by Christ to put your own needs and burdens aside, you helped transform these hurting people through your unconditional love. You carried them on your wings because Christ transformed you into a dove—and one day these hurting people may sprout wings of their own to transport other struggling people into new horizons.

And the King’s doves all know where to fly: straight into the Son-lit heavens where the air is clean and fresh, the scenery exhilarating, and where hope sparkles. How wonderful it is to be one of God’s doves, soaring into the lives of hurting people uplifting them into a new world and a new life.

What do you say—are you ready to stretch your wings a little?

