



# Healing from a Painful Past

*How can a congregation move beyond the times of difficulty?*

Philippians 4:2–3; Romans 15:1–7

**The Case** A spirit of distrust of boards has pervaded Parkway Church. The church had to call business meetings on three consecutive Sundays in an attempt to pass a budget. People believed the board was “up to something” or “trying to pull a fast one.”

Several people in the congregation have said, “Our church doesn’t know what it wants to be when it grows up. Who are we? Where are we going?”

Finally, there is nagging criticism of the pastor. One member wrote a 15-page epistle correcting his view of baptism. Another complained that the Sunday evening service was dull. Plus, the board chairman has mildly criticized the youth pastor.

The church atmosphere became a topic at board meetings. The pastor proposed a retreat to rehearse and evaluate the history of the church. During that retreat, stories from the church’s early years came out, marvelous ones: the church was a training ground for evangelism, and pastors came from across the country for training. But those stories aren’t told in the church now, because about 22 years ago the church went through a horrific split. The whole board resigned. In the course of a month, half of 500 people left the church, about 125 one Sunday alone.

Some leaders wept as they remembered the pain.

- What Would You Do?**
- ◆ Twenty-two years is a long time. Can a church split from that long ago be the source of problems now? Why or why not?
  - ◆ What is the value in bringing up the past? The danger in bringing it up?
  - ◆ What would you recommend this board do next?

**What Happened** The church leaders felt they needed to do something publicly to begin the healing process. The church’s 40th anniversary was their opportunity.

The pastor preached a series on learning from Israel’s history—how God works in good times and bad. He started his first sermon by reading the minutes of that church-splitting board meeting. Some people did not understand: “Why are you dredging up the past? There are so few here from that time.”

The church also decided to create a service on Good Friday to bring healing. One of the most painful events in the split was when the entire choir joined another church. So the congregation joined in worship with that congregation where the choir members had gone. The service was packed. The sermon was on “By his wounds, you were healed,” and the service included Communion.

“There was a sense of both sorrow and repentance followed by healing, unity, and joy,” the pastor reports. One couple spoke to people they hadn’t talked to in 22 years.

Through this process, the pastor says, the church has become a safer, warmer, more open community.

—KENNETH QUICK

- Discuss**
1. What things can a church’s leaders do now to help a church heal from its past?
  2. What has caused pain in our church’s history?
  3. What have we done, if anything, to bring healing? What could we do?