

The Sting
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When I was ten years old,
My family and I were fishing and camping.
Out in the evening near the lake
My brother and I were playing, running
Carrying on, as young boys like to do.
Minding our own business
We suddenly found ourselves surrounded
Not by a swarm, or even a great many
But the buzzing of the bees were around.

I heard a buzzing in my ear, I went to brush it away.
Instead of a fly, it was a bee who struck the hand that was swatting.
I immediately cried out (and went running to Mom)
I don't know that I had felt such pain before.

Mom, wise beyond my years, didn't scrape it out
She didn't apply tweezers or other such aid...
She did something odd – but so very effective,
She packed my thumb in mud – and the mud drew the stinger out.

The intensity subsided but the thumb still throbbed
The stinger was gone but the sting remained.
I was reminded this week that though the stinger is gone
The sting can still remain for some time.

In the past two months I have had to take some actions
Decisions were made to address the sting in my life
There was the sting of gossip and harsh judgment
There was the sting of attack and criticism (some just, most unfair)
There was the sting of betrayal and hostility
And so the decision was made to remove the stinger
(and remove myself – and my family from the ones stinging).

When I resigned from my position in ministry
It was with great sorrow and sadness
I resigned without great demand upon the church
The church in its graciousness, determined to ease the sting
Offered (and actually voted) and approved a severance...

They would provide for my wife and I during the transition
For four months they would continue their support of ministry.

And this week I was reminded that though the stingers are gone
The sting still remains.
The congregation revisited their decision
It was decided that concern for their finances
The church would not be able to keep its commitment
To my wife and I.

The sting does not come from the loss of income
The sting does not even come from the fact that the church would make the decision
without even a “heads up” – a consultation with me about the need in the church.
The sting does not come from the decision or the withdrawal

The sting comes from the fact that three years ago
A man in our church, bullied, threatened, gossiped, undermined and lied
He sought to undermine the church publically and privately and he left
And the church supported him and his family for three months
At great financial sacrifice to the church.

And now at the end of eleven years of ministry,
Investing myself into the lives of people within the church,
Instead of slinking away and gossiping,
Instead of seeking to destroy the church by my words and deeds
Instead of doing what others have done in perpetuating the gossip
I have done what I said I would do –
Remove the stingers so that the church and I could heal.

I was reminded this week that the stingers may be gone...
But the sting sometimes remains.
It's getting better...
I wish for things to be different
And my ministry to be valued...

But the wounds I have suffered are being packed by the ongoing love of God,
The support of my family and closest friends
And the confidence of a future hope in the days ahead.

The stinger is gone...the sting is there but getting better.

Pray that the spiritual and emotional throbbing will continue to ebb.

