

Cross Current



Real help for real life

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The Snake In Your Grass



If emotions were creatures, resentment would be a grass snake.

Common in most parts of the world, grass snakes can get to be a metre long.

Most are grey-green, sometimes with a yellow or orange collar behind the head, which is why they're sometimes called ringed snakes. As their name implies, these creatures live in long grass in damp places near water, feeding mostly on frogs.

The snakes hibernate in old rabbit holes, wall crevices, piles of manure or under tree roots, lying dormant from October to March. But once they're awake, the snakes are ravenous and find most of their food in and near water. It helps that they're exceptional swimmers. They move with their heads up but, if disturbed, the snakes dive below the surface and stay under for up to an hour.

When it's time to lay their eggs, females put them under rotting logs, manure or compost — all sources of heat that help incubation. Anywhere from 8 to 40 eggs are laid and, when the time is right, the young emerge about as long and big around as a pencil.

When threatened, grass snakes puff up their bodies and hiss loudly, striking with the mouth closed to try and frighten away the threat. If touched, they give off a foul-smelling liquid. If that doesn't chase away the enemy, the snakes roll over on their sides and play dead, remaining perfectly still with their mouth open and tongue hanging out until the danger passes.

But when on the offensive, grass snakes are sit-and-wait predators



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that lunge at prey, hold victims in their teeth and swallow them whole. In other words, the creatures behave very much like the strong and destructive feeling we know as rancour or resentment.

Taken from a French word that means *to feel again and again*, resentment is bitterness that stays largely out of sight but surfaces continually when the conditions are right. It's the snake in the grass of our character, lying dormant for long stretches but very much alive in the holes and crevices of our hearts.

Seething, subtle and insidious, resentment springs from trauma rooted in the past. It incubates in the hot rot of the unresolved — the waste and decay of emotional turmoil — preventing us from letting go and moving on. Why? Because resentment always involves loss, coupled with a grief that makes it impossible to accept that loss.

Every time we try to deal with the issue, the resentment disappears under the surface where it out-waits us, hoping our wariness will turn to weariness. Even when we do manage to confront whatever holds us captive to the past, resentment puffs itself up, seeming larger and harder to defeat than it really is. It surrounds us with the offensive odour of unforgiveness and — if that's not enough to make us back off — resentment plays dead, trying to convince us it's gone when it really isn't. Then, when next we least expect it, rancour lunges again, sinks its teeth into our soul and swallows the heart whole.

In Ephesians 4, Paul says, "*there must be a spiritual renewal of your thoughts and attitudes*". In fact, "*You must display a new nature because you're a new person, created in God's likeness — righteous, holy and true. So... don't sin by letting anger gain control over you... Get rid of all bitterness, rage, anger... forgiving, just as God, through Christ, has forgiven you.*" (4:23, 24, 26, 32)

That process takes time and intentionality. We have to *want* it to happen. But it begins by being honest about our feelings, extending empathy and understanding as much as we're able, and asking God to change our heart because the renewal Paul mentions doesn't come from us. "*Let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think,*" he says in Romans 12:2. Ask God to heal the hurts that let rancour stay hidden. Even if can't yet get rid of the snakes, we can start by getting rid of the grass.

Rick Gamble