

## Welcome and Reminders

Welcome to any visitors and welcome back to the group members. It is important to remember that everything said and done in this group is confidential. The expectation is that there will not be discussion about our conversations to anyone outside of the group that is represented here and now. We understand that sometimes personal insights or information may be shared by someone who feels comfortable doing so in this group and not around others. Let's be respectful of that and carry our commitment to confidentiality as we leave this group. *(Pass out the confidentiality reminder to anyone who has not yet received one).*

## Prayer and Praises

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## Suffering Caused By Strangers

Last session we began to explore suffering that is caused by our own poor choices and what we can learn through it. Today we will discuss suffering that is caused by others and other circumstances and what we can learn from it.

We often hear of suffering caused by strangers; a drunk driver, drive-by shootings, physical attacks, random acts where you or a loved one are caught in the wrong place at the wrong time. The result can be pain or disability that lasts a long time, sometimes even a lifetime. People deal with this type of suffering in different ways. Some may get satisfaction when they have the opportunity to take part in causing the person to be convicted and sent to prison, or even death row. Others may remind everyone around them of what happened to them and how much suffering they endure. Still others continue to punish themselves by dwelling on the thought that if they had been somewhere else or done something else, they would not have been hurt. That is much like wishing we made a better choice, as we discussed in the last session.

➤ *How else do people deal with suffering caused by random acts?*

Years ago a woman was going home after a long day. She was speeding, but not carelessly. Coming over a bridge she did not see a child on a bicycle and she hit him. The child died. The newspapers reported the facts that she was driving over the speed limit and was charged for killing the child. The next Sunday someone in my Sunday school class said we should pray for the child and family, and discussion began with much anger toward the driver. Then another person spoke up. The driver was a friend of hers. She told how her friend was suffering. She had a bad day and much on her mind that day. Now, knowing she killed a child, she was devastated to the point of being unable to leave her home or to even get out of bed. She will

carry for the rest of her life the burden of knowing she caused the death of a child and suffering to the family.

- *If you were the child's family, would this perspective change how you would deal with this horrible event?*
- *When we suffer from a random act, how can we remind ourselves to think about it from another perspective?*

## Suffering Caused By Loved Ones

More often than not, suffering caused by others comes from the actions of someone we know and probably care about. That makes it very personal. This is, therefore, often the most painful suffering, at least emotionally and spiritually, that we endure. Someone we know and trust suddenly blind-sides us by word or deed, and it is devastating.

Years ago a friend and neighbor lost her 3-day-old baby, her second child, and since I had been so close to her throughout the pregnancy and the days before he died, she asked me to inform the others in our small, close knitted neighborhood, which I did. A couple of weeks later I was talking to another friend on my back porch. We got to talking about parenting and I mentioned that this friend was more of an overprotective mother, while I was relaxed to the point of being quite under-protective. My next-door-neighbor, working in her garden by the fence, listened to the conversation and went to my friend, reporting that I was talking about her behind her back and criticizing her as a mother. When I went to visit my friend she wouldn't let me in the house, sending me away with accusations of gossip and friendship betrayal. I was crushed, first because she thought I had betrayed her, but also because my misinterpreted, although admittedly careless words, had hurt a friend who had just suffered a horrible loss. Neither woman spoke to me again. In our tight-knit group, that created some awkward moments. Fortunately we moved a few months later, but I never forgot the hurt.

Careless words and gossip probably cause more emotional suffering than any other dynamic, even in churches.

- *Would someone be willing to share a time when someone caused you suffering, how it affected you, if and how it was resolved, and what you learned. It might be appropriate to share something from the past that is unrelated to Valley Ministries or anyone your group knows.*

Sometimes we willingly and needlessly suffer because we take unintended offenses to heart and/or refuse to let go of offenses, sometimes for years.

- *How can we help ourselves and others in this situation?*

Years ago someone wrote a book and coined the profound statement that “hurting people hurt people.” I carried suffering with me for many years for pain caused by my parents. God began

to show me how they had both been raised by parents who did not know how to show love, and had suffered much because of it. They did not have anyone to teach them how to love their own children and, though they truly did everything they knew how to raise us, they unknowingly inflicted much pain. Not because they wanted to hurt, but because they did not know how not to hurt.

If you are suffering, or have suffered, because of pain inflicted by someone you know, ask God to show you how they could be carrying their own suffering from having had pain inflicted on them by someone they knew and trusted. If it is a recent event consider praying for the person that God would heal their pain, and then let God heal yours.

## **Suffering Caused By Circumstances**

One major difference between suffering caused by circumstances and those caused by others is that, unless one chooses to blame God, there is usually no one to blame for circumstantial suffering.

When we think about horrible circumstances we think about natural disasters such as tornadoes, earthquakes, hurricanes or fires. We also could think about sickness: Cancer, AIDS, hepatitis, and other like diseases that cause much suffering, not only for the patient but for friends and family.

Unlike emotional suffering, physical suffering is noticeable, and often causes others to want to help. Disasters sometimes cause people to do things they would never do normally. Think of someone who would never think of stealing from anyone. Disaster hits, he has lost his home and belongings and worries about how to provide for his family, and finds himself looting to get some things he needs. Any of us, given the right circumstances, can yield to temptation.

There are also those who profit from suffering. In Florida, when a hurricane destroys a city, there are some people who will buy a truckload of supplies and dash to the disaster area to sell for top dollar food, water, tools, building materials, and other supplies to those who have means and don't want to wait for FEMA and volunteers to arrive with help.

Disasters also bring out the best in many people. We hear stories of people heroically ignoring their own needs to help others who are in peril. Most of us have gathered food or clothes to send to disaster areas. Some of us have volunteered to deliver supplies, clean up, or provide other services to people. Some years ago we were on vacation when a hurricane hit our city. Friends who lived near the beach used our home as their shelter. After the storm many trees had fallen on homes or vehicles and many were blocking streets and driveways. Our property had little damage and our friends took a chain saw and drove around helping people who needed help removing trees.

We have all had opportunities to see on TV the effects of disasters and how people react. We think of the tsunami in Japan, 9-11 in New York, or hurricane Katrina. It is my observation that a few people seem to have a hero button in their spirits, and immediately begin saving others and

organizing others to help. A few people are unable to cope and just give up, either by not saving themselves when they can or by just sitting and watching others go on by. But the majority of people move through their upside down world in various stages of shock, doing what they can according to what is in front of them. When I watch these events I often wonder I would do in their situation.

- *Does someone have a personal testimony to share about experiencing a disaster or helping someone who has?*
- *What do you think makes the difference in how people react to disaster? Character? Faith? A need for recognition?*

A very common circumstantial suffering is sickness. Most of us have known someone with a serious illness, and some of us have suffered, or even now suffer from health problems.

- *From the point of view of the one who is ill, what are the challenges in dealing with suffering, ranging from moderate symptoms and pain to severe pain and even facing death?*
- *What are the challenges from the point of view of friends and relatives of the patient?*

Another common circumstantial suffering is from loss of a loved one. My first grandson was a full-term stillbirth. I was devastated. I asked someone at church to sing “It Is Well With My Soul,” thinking it would console me, but it didn’t. I cried on and off for several weeks. Although my life moved on, for the next two years there would be occasional moments when I would remember the loss and suffer again for a short time. Then, at a retreat, two friends and I went into a chapel to pray. I had one of those moments and began to cry. One of my friends began to pray for me, including in her prayer how she also felt loss, but because she was never able to have a child. Through that prayer God showed me another perspective, and my suffering left for good. Yes, I still remember the loss, but it doesn’t hurt any more.

- *Again, from the perspective of the one suffering the loss of a loved one, and from the friend who cares, what are the challenges?*

Possibly the hardest part of suffering is feeling we are alone. Let us constantly remind ourselves and each other that we are never alone. Whether or not we feel it, God is always there, pouring out love and comfort. Whether we are suffering or giving support to one who is, I believe we need to remember that God never leaves us. Let us learn to be comforted.

- *If someone would like prayer for pain caused by someone you know, please let us pray for you now.*