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CONGREGATIONAL CARING FOR THOSE EXPERIENCING PAIN AND SUFFERING

A Thesis Presented to the Faculty of
Concordia Seminary, St. Louis,
Department of Practical Theology
In Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Arts

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May 2006

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Biblical references are cited from *Concordia Self-Study Bible* (New International Version). St.Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1986.

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PREFACE

Pain and suffering are a very present reality for all people at various points during their lives. Suffering is part of the condemnation that the Fall from grace demanded and which ultimately ends in death. Pain does not feel good, and suffering is how people often experience and react to the pain in their lives. Suffering can come to people through accidents, sickness, exploitation, oppression, guilt, phobias, persecution, rejection, and death. Physical destruction leads to suffering both emotionally and spiritually. Suffering denies the bearer rational judgment and consolation and can lead to the abandonment of hope. Spiritual wounding occurs as humans find life to be meaningless in the face of their suffering. ¹

For the Christian in pain, there is the hope that God provides in the words, "I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed in us."² But pain must first be recognized, acknowledged, and experienced before hope can be brought into the situation.

Researchers struggle with how to control the pain in people's lives. Church workers struggle with helping people of faith through the questions that pain raises: Why is God doing this to me? What sin has caused this pain? Does God still love me? Will God help me through this? What is the meaning or purpose for my suffering?

Dr. Garth Ludwig, a pastor and anthropologist, proposes an analysis of ill health that can be applied to pain. He describes pain in three ways. Pain can be understood as a real *disease* as it alters biological functioning (the physical), as an *illness* as persons perceive themselves to be ill (the psychology of the self), and as a *sickness* as others see the person's pain and change their

¹ Ekman P.C. Tam, "Wounding, Doubting, and Trusting in Suffering," *The Journal of Pastoral Care & Counseling*. 55, no.2 (Summer 2001),159-161.

² Romans 8:18

social behaviors toward the person (the psychosocial view of others).³ Pain is experienced as suffering under the roles of *illness* and *sickness*. All three understandings of pain involve the spiritual realm also as the person seeks to find meaning for his or her life. It is especially on the levels of illness and sickness that the Christian community can step in to provide healing and wholeness.

Often people feel inadequate both in handling their own pain and in helping others who are in pain. It is easier to walk away and refuse to see the pain we know is there. In a world where self-help books and medical treatments abound, how can the Christian congregation offer its unique contribution of the Gospel? Christian community can help to remove pain, teach skills in coping with pain, and integrate pain meaningfully into life. A benefit of Christian community for individuals is in giving meaning to the pain they experience through Jesus' presence.

Chapter 1 will explore the history and recent research in pain theory to better understand how pain works within people physically, psychologically, psychosocially, and spiritually. Chapter 2 will discuss some of the more popular treatments for pain. Chapter 3 will review secular and religious views for finding meaning for life while in pain. Chapter 4 will review several of the more popular Christian perspectives on pain. Finally, in Chapter 5 some practical applications for the congregation will be presented. The goal of this thesis is to understand pain better and to explore practical means by which a congregation can minister to people in pain. The practical means will include addressing issues in the church's community that increase pain and equipping members in developing caring skills as they relate to people in pain and suffering.

³ Garth D Ludwig, *Order Restored: A Biblical Interpretation of Health, Medicine, and Healing* (St. Louis: Concordia Academic Press, 1999), 31-32.

CHAPTER ONE

PAIN THEORIES

What we call pleasure, and rightly so, is the absence of all pain.¹

Everyone feels pain at some point in his or her life. Pain comes and goes for most people—for some, pain stays. People would much rather experience pleasure instead of pain. Pain research indicates that pain exists for people on four levels: First, pain is a sensory response to recognized danger (physical); second, pain is an affective response that leads to unpleasant emotions (psychological); third, pain is a cognitive response that includes evaluation and decision-making with the help of others (psychosocial); fourth, pain leads to loss of meaning in life which raises personal questions (spiritual). Because of these levels, pain involves physical, psychological, psychosocial, and spiritual factors that must all be treated together for its alleviation.² Each of these factors will be discussed individually in this chapter.

Physical Pain

Physical pain is viewed as a disease to be cured when it alters biological function. The physical senses respond to exterior or interior stimuli that is recognized by the body as dangerous. Pain theories abound in the medical and psychological literature, and research has centered on the role of the nervous system and brain in experiencing and responding to pain. This has been true about research at least since Descartes. During the Renaissance, he first

¹Cicero, *On Ends* in the Loeb Classic Library, trans. H. Rackham (Edinburgh, Scotland: St. Edmundsbury Press, 1999). Cicero lived 106 BC—43 BC. The Latin is *De Finibus* 1.37 “*doloris omnis privatio recte nominata est voluptas*”

² M. E. Shoemaker, “Pain Theory and Research,” ed. Hunter, Rodney, *Dictionary of Pastoral Care and (continued next page)*

argued that the body works like a machine that can be studied by using experimental methods. Descartes' theory proposed that injury activates specific pain receptors and fibers, which then project pain impulses through the spine to a pain center in the brain. The psychological experience of pain was equated with peripheral injury. The picture was simple and treatment based on the theory led to the physical cutting of nerves and pathways. These surgical procedures have proven to be ineffective.³

Before Descartes, in many primitive cultures pain was thought to be caused by "evil fluids" entering the body. Treatment consisted of releasing or driving out the intruder. Greek and Roman cultures speculated philosophically that pain was related to touch. Galen, the Roman physician, was the first to tie pain to the central nervous system and brain function, but his ideas lay dormant for a thousand years. In Western culture, previous to the Renaissance (and often still currently), pain was tied to the concept of sin. Pain was seen as a punishment of God for sinful acts.⁴

In the middle of the nineteenth century the discovery of electrical energy was incorporated into nerve physiology that resulted in the "specificity theory of pain" which postulated specific pain receptors. This model has proven to be too simple to explain what appears to happen when people experience pain. According to the *Dictionary of Pastoral Care and Counseling*, new techniques of biopsy on skin tissue and the central nervous system as well as the discovery of the role of endorphins has led to recent theories that now try to incorporate the complexity and

Counseling (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1990), 818.

³ Ronald Melzack, "Pain, Past, Present, and Future," *Canadian Journal of Experimental Psychology* (47:4, 615-629, 1993). [cited 11 December 2004]. At www.alternatives.com/rave/cpain/melzack2.html, 1. INTERNET.

⁴ Shoemaker, "Pain Theory," 818.

differentiation of the receptors that transmit pain.⁵ There are two dominant contemporary theories to understand physical pain.

The first theory is called Gate Control. Gate Control is one way to describe how acupuncture or massage can alleviate pain by causing “gates” within the nervous system to close so that the pain sensation does not travel to the brain. The theory proposes that there are no specific pain fibers in the body and that the brain plays a major role in pain processes.⁶

The Gate Control Theory was proposed by Melzack and Wall in 1965. Dr. Ronald Melzack popularized the theory in his book, *The Puzzle of Pain*. The proposal outlines a five-step process:⁷

1. The transmission of nerve impulses from inward sending nerve fibres [both large (L) and (S) small] to spinal cord transmission cells (T) is regulated by a spinal gating (SG) mechanism.
2. The spinal gating mechanism is influenced by large fibres (L) to close the gate and by small fibres (S) to open the gate.
3. The gate is also influenced by messages from the brain (Central Control).
4. A specialized system from Central Control activates selective thinking processes that send messages to the gate by way of descending fibres.
5. When the output of the spinal cord transmission (T) cells exceeds a certain level, it activates the Action System—and the person experiences pain.

⁵ Ibid., 818.

⁶ “The Chronic Pain Haven,” [cited 11 December 2004], available from www.chronic-pain-haven.com/pain-theory.html; INTERNET

⁷ Ronald Melzack, *The Puzzle of Pain* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 154-155.

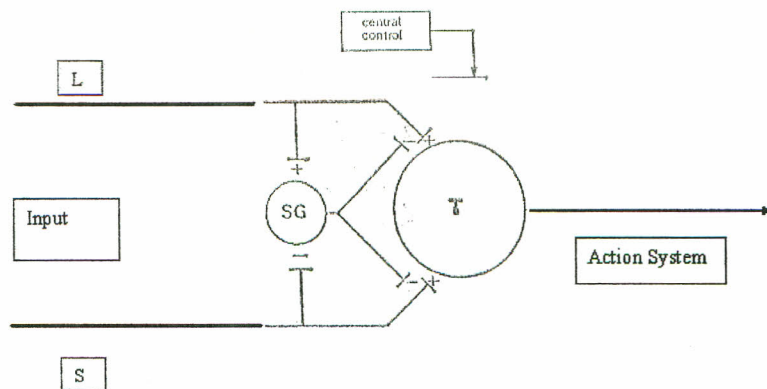


Figure 1. Gate Control Diagram.⁸

As sensory fibers transmit information about pressure, temperature, and chemical changes on the skin, the nerve impulses excite the spinal cord T cells that project the information to the brain, and activate the substantia gelatinosa (a closed system of cells throughout the length of the spinal cord on both sides that receive input from large and small fibres and influence the activity of cells that project to the brain) which regulates the gates.⁹

Some central activities such as anxiety or excitement may open or close the gate for all inputs from any part of the body. Other central activities are localized. The theory suggests that signals from the body must be identified, evaluated in terms of prior experience, and inhibited before the action system responsible for pain perception and response is activated.¹⁰

There are several behaviors that characterize pain, and they are determined by the senses, motivation, and cognition. These three factors work together to influence how the body responds.

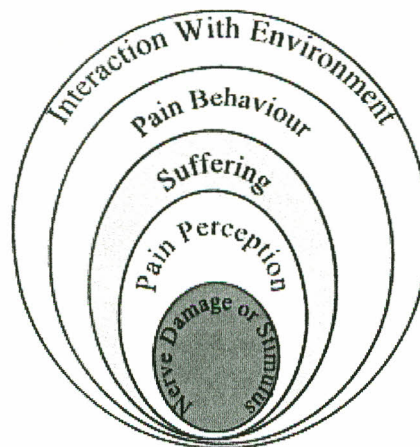
⁸ Ibid., 154.

⁹ Ibid., 158-159.

¹⁰ Ibid., 161.

Even simple reflexes are governed somewhat by the brain. For example, if a person hits her thumb with a hammer and her children are present, she may choose more carefully her verbal response. The gate theory proposes that the presence or absence of pain is determined by the balance between the sensory (external) and the central (internal) inputs to the gate-control system.¹¹

The second theory is named “Loesser’s ‘Onion’.” This theory states that the body’s pain mechanism is like an onion. The center of the nerve contains the damage. The next layer is the perception of pain—how much it throbs. The next layer, suffering, is the response to the internal pain seen in patient distress. The outer layer, interactions with the environment, is the response to pain socially.¹² The two outermost layers are the only ones that can be observed clinically.¹³



Loesser's Onion Theory

Figure 2: Loesser’s Onion Theory.¹⁴

¹¹ Ibid., 165-166, 171.

¹² “The Chronic Pain Haven.” [cited 11 December 2004]. www.chronic-pain-haven.com/pain-theory.html, 1,2; INTERNET.

¹³ “What Is Chronic Pain?” [cited 20 November 2005], available from www.aalways-health.com/PainDisorders3.html; INTERNET.

¹⁴ www.chronic-pain-haven.com/pain-theory.html, 1-2.

Currently pain theories combine gate-control theory and Loesser's onion theory. Doctors integrate the two theories by concentrating on the physical location within the body for what is happening: the body part that hurts, the spinal cord, and the brain (Gate Control, Stimulus and Pain Perception layers of Loesser's Onion). Then the outer three layers of Loesser's Onion are observed as well to discover the best treatment. All perceived pain is a mixture then of psychological and physical factors as the brain sorts out the messages it receives.¹⁵

The more the body is studied, the more scientists and doctors learn that the mechanisms within it are very complex. In the area of pain research experts are often still at a loss to determine both the cause of the pain and its treatment.

Psychological Pain

Psychological or emotional pain is often seen in terms of anger and depression either alone or caused by a present or past physical pain. Under Ludwig's categories of ill health, people experience themselves as ill and have negative emotional responses.

In the gate-control theory, psychological processes such as past experience may influence pain perception and pain response by acting on the gating mechanism. A woman worried she may have breast cancer may feel pain in her breast. Then when the doctor says that she is cancer free, the pain leaves. Psychological needs for attention may also evoke pain in order to get caring responses from others.¹⁶

Pain differs from person to person and it is a highly personal experience. Studies have shown that early experiences from childhood play a huge role in pain perception. The meaning given a situation can also determine the perception of pain. Wounded soldiers overseas will often

¹⁵ Melzack, 2 and www.chronic-pain-haven.com/pain-theory.html, 1-2.

¹⁶ Melchak, *The Puzzle of Pain*, 171-172.

refuse morphine saying their pain is minimal while a similar wound from a stateside accident causes severe pain.¹⁷

Attention to a pain producer can cause pain to feel more severe. Attention to distractions can cause pain to feel less severe. Anxiety also can increase the sensation of pain as can suggestions from other people. As noted above, a woman who thinks she has breast cancer may feel pain in her breasts due to both the anxiety and suggestion of the possibility. The pain is relieved when the suggestion is changed to the fact of a clear biopsy report and all anxiety leaves.¹⁸

Elisabeth Kübler-Ross, author of *On Death and Dying*, noted there are stages in the psychological handling of grief. There have been similar stages noted to coping with suffering in general. Instead of “How do I learn to die?” the question is “How do I learn to live when life no longer seems worth living?” The phases are illustrated in a spiral to show the dynamic struggle that takes place—often throughout a lifetime. The spiral demonstrates that the struggle involves the sufferer’s own reactions and the reactions of others.¹⁹

¹⁷ Ibid., 21-22, 29-30.

¹⁸ Ibid., 31-34.

¹⁹ Erika Schuckhardt, *Why Is This Happening to Me? Guidance and Hope for Those Who Suffer*, trans. Karen Luebe (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1989), 27-28, 37.

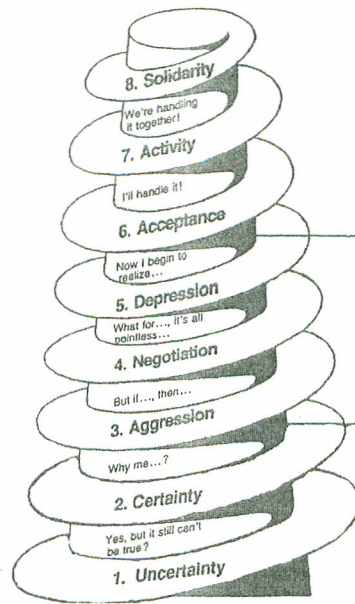


Figure 3 Stages of Suffering.²⁰

When suffering first befalls a person he is filled with *uncertainty*—Phase 1. The accident, the illness, the news, the event, the loss are overwhelming. Normal life is totally changed. This phase involves ignorance of the necessary facts, denying the insecurity he feels, and an inability to accept the facts.²¹

Phase 2 involves *certainty* that life really has changed, yet there is hope against hope that life can return to normal. The person may or may not be able to emotionally bear the truth.²²

Phase 3, *aggression*, involves emotional outbursts and the question: “Why me?” The sufferer’s protests are often misinterpreted by others, which cause her to lash out further and become isolated.²³

²⁰ Ibid., 39.

²¹ Ibid., 28-30.

²² Ibid., 30-32.

In Phase 4, *negotiation*, the sufferer engages in a game to find a cure. Either he goes from one doctor to another seeking new and better treatments or he goes from one faith healer to another seeking a miracle cure. If the person is left alone, he can reach material and spiritual bankruptcy. Each disappointment can lead to further emotional suffering.²⁴

Phase 4 naturally leads to Phase 5, *depression*, as each attempt at negotiation fails. All of the externally directed emotions become internalized as the individual loses hope and declares “Life is pointless.” The losses seem to multiply as friends become distant, careers are lost, and her sense of value is diminished.²⁵

Phase 6 is *acceptance*. Resistance is exhausted. The sufferer realizes she wants to live her life and learns how to live her life under its new conditions.²⁶

Phase 7 is *activity*. The person decides to live with his new limitations. Rational decision-making is now possible, and the sufferer makes the new situation work. The values of the person’s culture stay the same, but they are regrouped to make sense. He learns to act independently.²⁷

The last phase is the key to community—*solidarity*. When properly supported in the first seven phases, sufferers learn to become a part of their society again. The people are comfortable with who they are and are not so much concerned with what they can or cannot do. People in pain learn to live with their problems instead of fighting them. They once again take control of life which gives life meaning.²⁸

²³ Ibid., 32-33.

²⁴ Ibid., 33.

²⁵ Ibid., 34-35.

²⁶ Ibid., 35-36.

²⁷ Ibid., 36.

²⁸ Ibid., 36-37.

Phases 1-5 are all attempts by the person to fight against the cause of pain and alleviate her suffering or flee from it. The fight or flight response however often cause more feelings of suffering, especially if the person is unsupported by her community. In Phases 6-8 she finally comes to peace with her pain and finds ways to live with it that reduce her suffering.

Psychosocial Pain

Differences in how people perceive pain are also linked to people's culture, especially to how they are socialized as children. Socialization also helps to determine acceptable expressions of pain. The complex systems of experiences, family, culture, and community all play a role in the child's development concerning both how to feel pain and how to express it. When pain is expressed it shows a need for help that most often causes responses of sympathy and care. However, some people may feel so much distress that they cannot show care to the person feeling pain. How people react to those experiencing pain falls under Ludwig's category of sickness. Adults influence the behavior of their children in pain by positive or negative reinforcement of signs of complaining and crying. Parents may ignore their children's pain behaviors, overreact with anxiety and empathic distress, or provide appropriate care.²⁹

An example of cultural factors is noted by observing patients in a British hospital where the ability to endure pain with little or no complaint is admired.³⁰ Differences in pain associated with childbearing are also culturally noteworthy. In many cultures a woman works in the fields until the child is to be born. Her husband groans in pain while she bears the child and then goes

²⁹ K.D Craig, "Ontogenetic and Cultural Influences on the Expression of Pain in Man" in *Pain and Society*, eds. H. W Kosterlitz and L. Y Terenius (Report of the Dahlem Workshop on Pain and Society Berlin 1979, November 26-30. Weinheim: Verlag Chemie, 1980), 37-45.

³⁰ M. R. Bond, "The Suffering of Severe Intractable Pain" in *Pain and Society*, eds. H. W. Kosterlitz and L. Y. Terenius (Report of the Dahlem Workshop on Pain and Society Berlin 1979, November 26-30. Weinheim: Verlag Chemie, 1980), 53-54.

back to tending the crops. In the United States women insist on pain killers (epidurals are the best!) and do the groaning themselves.³¹

People can push themselves to tolerate a great deal of pain. Of note are the Hindu monks who walk on coals while in a meditative state and the trial by ordeal ceremonies of many tribal cultures to prove manhood. The North American Plains Indians have their young men participate in a sun dance where the flesh is torn from their backs, yet the young men are in ecstasy and their wounds heal quickly.³² Another example of pain perception thresholds varying with culture is that same levels of radiant heat are reported as painful by people of Mediterranean origin whereas Northern Europeans feel only warmth.³³

Spiritual Pain

Pain is a universal experience that must be interpreted by each individual. Spiritual pain is tightly linked to all three of the other pain types. Physical pain brings on spiritual pain when the person is unable to find meaning in it, which is often related to the person's upbringing and culture (psychosocial pain). Also, spiritual pain over doubts about the person's role in life leading to depression (psychological pain) can bring on physical pain. More will be said about the spiritual side of pain in chapters 3-5. Chapter 3 will focus on how people in general seek spiritual answers to pain through finding meaning in life. Chapters 4 and 5 will discuss Christian approaches to the question of suffering. A small taste is given here of one Buddhist and one Christian perspective.

Pain is an integral part of Buddhist teaching as part of the Four Noble Truths:

1. Grasping after both likes and dislikes brings on suffering.
2. Craving for delight, greed, and sensuous experiences all create pain.

³¹ Melzack, *The Puzzle of Pain*, 23-24.

³² *Ibid.*, 26-27.

³³ *Ibid.*, 25.

3. Pain is stopped by stopping craving.
4. A person must therefore have right views, right intentions, right speech, etc.³⁴

For the Buddhist suffering underlies human existence as a whole through birth, aging, sickness, and death. To overcome suffering and transcend pain the Buddhist practices the art of destroying all cravings—to be disinterested in pleasurable feelings and develop a spirit of detachment through an intensely religious form of life. Suffering can properly be understood as a way to strengthen the body and deepen the spirit.³⁵ This last “use” of suffering is shared by Christian teaching.

Religious insights help people to deal with their spiritual pain. For Christians, pain is part of living in a sinful world—the consequence being death. Pain also helps people to respond to God’s presence in their life. The Christian in spiritual pain assumes God’s existence and is often asking these three questions:

- Is God unfair?
- Is God silent?
- Is God hidden?

The answers to these questions can seem disappointing when a person is suffering.³⁶

The importance of religious conviction in helping a person deal with his spiritual pain is part of the complexity of the system. Religious ceremonies, icons, religious books, and specialized practitioners can all help the sufferer to recognize the significance of her pain and find meaning and healing.

³⁴ W. Tu. “A Religiophilosophical Perspective on Pain” in *Pain and Society*, eds. H. W. Kosterlitz and L. Y. Terenius (Report of the Dahlem Workshop on Pain and Society Berlin 1979, November 26-30. Weinheim: Verlag Chemie, 1980), 67-68.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 69-70.

³⁶ Philip Yancey, *Disappointment with God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1988), 36-37.

The four types of pain discussed here are all interrelated and lead to various perceptions of suffering. Physical pain (disease), mental anguish (illness), social ostracism (sickness), and spiritual doubt feed off each other as the person continues to suffer. How pain is treated by doctors, by patients, and by spiritual caregivers bears greatly on the amount of suffering experienced by the person in chronic pain.

CHAPTER TWO

PAIN TREATMENTS

“Play anyway! Don’t let your body push you around!”³⁷

People in the United States expect relief from pain as evidenced by the many commercials for pain killers and frequent visits to doctors. Pain management today offers multiple therapies that treat pain as an illness in itself rather than as a symptom of tissue damage. New medical approaches attempt to relieve pain by analgesic medication, local anesthetic blocks and electrical stimulation. According to Shoemaker, the management techniques are all aimed at reducing the perception of pain and not pain itself.³⁸ Pain management is still a young science with pain clinics started only twenty-five years ago. These clinics may have one of three different orientations. Modality clinics use only one approach like nerve blocks, syndrome clinics treat chronic pain syndromes with a variety of methods, and comprehensive clinics use a variety of diagnostic and treatment approaches and rely on psychological evaluations and treatments.³⁹ This chapter will review some of the physical and psychological treatments for pain and introduce briefly the nature of spiritual treatments. Christian methods for helping people will be reviewed in chapter 5.

³⁷ Dennis C. Turk, Ph.D. and Frits Winter, Ph.D. *The Pain Survival Guide: How to Reclaim Your Life*. (Washington, D.C.: American Psychological Association, 2006), 5. In the Peanuts cartoon, this is Lucy’s advice to Charlie Brown to play baseball despite everything hurting.

³⁸ M. E Shoemaker, “Pain Management/Pain Clinic” in *Dictionary of Pastoral Care and Counseling*, ed. Rodney Hunter (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1990), 817.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 817.

Physical Treatments

There are multiple tests and scoring systems for determining the intensity and therefore the treatment for pain. One example is the McGill Pain Questionnaire. See Appendix Two for a sample portion of the questionnaire. The questionnaire has three major measures: the pain rating index, based on two types of numerical values that can be assigned to each word descriptor, the number of words chosen, and the present pain intensity based on a 1-5 intensity scale. Questions ask about both the sensory and affective dimension of pain.⁴⁰

The gate-control theory has highlighted the need for new approaches to control pain. Older neuro-surgical techniques based on specific pain sites have often proven ineffective. Surgical techniques tried to cut the “pain pathway” to the brain at every possible place along the pathway but there has been a disheartening tendency for the pain to reoccur. Lesions made in the brain itself in the hopes of pain relief are often ineffective. Cutting the peripheral or central nervous system does not always stop an input from reaching the brain.⁴¹

The gate-control theory suggests three general methods to control pain by modulating the input:

1. Anesthetic blocking agents to decrease the number of nerve impulses to the T cells;
2. Low-level stimulation to activate large fibres which close the gates to the T cells;
3. Intense stimulation to activate brainstem mechanisms that inhibit the gate-control system.⁴²

Stimulation is often provided by a form of electric shock. One electronic device to help with pain management is the TENS (Transcutaneous Electrical Nerve Stimulation) device. The

⁴⁰ “Center to Improve Care for the Dying” [cited 19 December 2004], available from www.gwu.edu/~cicd/toolkit/physical.htm, INTERNET.

⁴¹ Melzack, *The Problem of Pain*, 191-193.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 196.

unit sends gentle electrical impulses to pain sites on the body that block pain signals before they reach the brain.⁴³

Drugs may control pain at the receptor level, at the dorsal horn or at the brain stem. Some drugs may act at all three sites. One example is aspirin which is an analgesic that works at both the receptor level and the brain stem. Anesthetic drugs abolish the small fibre activity that opens the gates. New drugs are constantly being tested as scientists learn more about the chemicals that make up the nervous system.⁴⁴

The practice of acupuncture may provide proof for the accuracy of the gate-control-theory. It is increasingly popular as a treatment option for pain in the United States. When used during operations, the site of insertion of acupuncture needles is different for each kind of operation and never near the actual site of the operation. For example, a thyroid operation requires the acupuncture needles be inserted into each forearm, at a point about four inches above the wrist, and at a depth of about one inch. The stimulation of particular nerves or tissues brings about increased input that closes the gates to inputs from select body areas.⁴⁵

⁴³ www.paintechnology.com/046.htm, 1.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 194-195.

⁴⁵ Melzack, *The Puzzle of Pain*, 185-188.

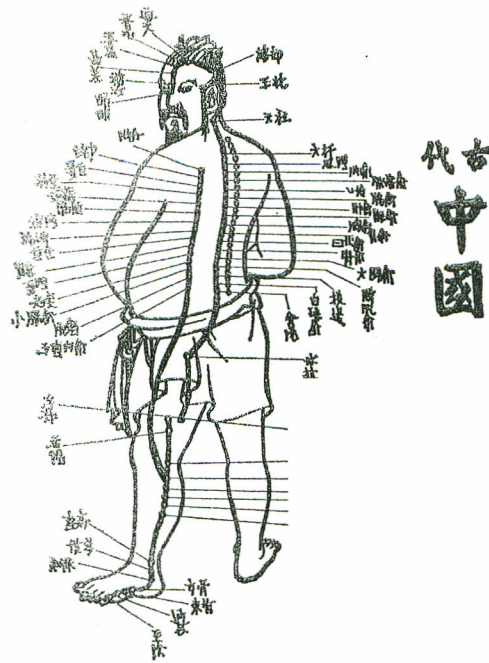


Figure 4: Acupuncture Chart.⁴⁶

Psychological Treatments

Researchers in treatment of pain recognize the role of learning/environmental factors and psychology/cognitive factors on pain perception, tolerance and expression. Meditation, hypnosis and biofeedback are used to help people gain control of their pain perceptions.⁴⁷

Psychological factors, which used to be dismissed as reactions to pain, are now seen as an integral part of pain processing. A new host of methods to modulate the input of pain are being studied. Medication is only a part of the treatment for pain and suffering. Complementary therapies are designed to block pain from reaching the brain, or to change a person's perception of his or her suffering. The mind does influence how pain is perceived. Some tools that therapists

⁴⁶ Ibid., 190.

⁴⁷ Shoemaker, "Pain Theory," 818.

use include relaxation therapy, creative visualization, meditation, Tai Chi, journaling, and exercise.⁴⁸ Additional therapies may include desensitization techniques, hypnosis, and utilizing electro-encephalography. These techniques are devised to help people develop a state of mind that allows them to cope with pain. Distraction techniques, psychotherapeutic and pharmacological techniques also help people to relieve depression.⁴⁹

There is often competition between the “drug therapy” camp and the “talk therapy” camp when it comes to psychological pain. Psychiatrists and family doctors will most likely prescribe drugs and do little talk therapy. Psychologists and family counselors will use differing counseling approaches focusing on upbringing and/or on behavioral therapy.⁵⁰ It can be helpful for a person in pain to find a team that can offer both drugs and counseling.

The American Psychological Association recently published a program called *The Pain Survival Guide*. It is a ten lesson program that teaches people to reclaim their lives from pain. Doctors, family, and friends may give up and end up increasing a sufferer’s pain by their indifference or blame. This program encourages the sufferer to take control instead of being pushed around by either her body or anyone else.⁵¹

Lesson 1 reviews the gate-control theory of pain and various pain treatments. Knowledge is power. It includes a pain assessment tool and requires the sufferer to start a personal pain journal to track his pain.⁵²

⁴⁸ Ronald Melzack, “Pain, Past, Present, and Future,” *Canadian Journal of Experimental Psychology* 47:4 (1993) 615-629. [cited 11 December 2004], available from www.alternatives.com/rave/cpain/melzack2.html; INTERNET.

⁴⁹ Melzack, *The Puzzle of Pain*, 201.

⁵⁰ David Burns, M.D. *Feeling Good: The New Mood Therapy* (New York: Quill, 2000), 456.

⁵¹ Turk, 3-5.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 9-29.

Lesson 2 helps the person to become her own expert on her body's pain so that she can pace herself between activity and rest, finding the right personal balance. Short-term goals are set for each activity the person does. Goals are set one at a time after discovering a personal baseline.⁵³

Lesson 3 is about learning to relax. The person discovers his personal stress factors and learns some relaxation techniques that include relaxing muscles, controlled breathing, meditation, and prayer.⁵⁴

Lesson 4 teaches how to combat fatigue. Discussions of diet and sleep help the sufferer to find balance in these areas.⁵⁵

Lesson 5 discusses how to keep pain from ruining personal relationships. Effective communication is the key. The sufferer asks why people are insensitive to his pain, and may not realize the mixed cues he is giving or the extent of other people's misunderstanding. Guidelines for improved communication are given, including a discussion of assertiveness and how to maintain relationships.⁵⁶

Lesson 6 is one of the most difficult lessons—changing behavior. Change is hard. The authors discuss what they call the *laws of learning*, which show the role of positive reinforcement and appropriate attention. People learn to recognize what factors negatively affect their behavior and what factors will help them to change. Lesson 7 continues the discussion by specifically giving methods to change thoughts and feelings that are negative and increase pain.⁵⁷

⁵³ Ibid., 30-49.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 51-74.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 75-91.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 93-111.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 112-147.

Lesson 8 gives methods for gaining self-confidence. Learning to control what can be controlled and problem solving is part of learning to love the self. Lessons 9 and 10 discuss how to put all the steps of the program together and then maintain the program despite setbacks.⁵⁸

Spiritual Treatments

Treatment of the spiritual aspects of pain may begin with a visit by a chaplain in the clinical setting and/or by a person's home pastor. A chaplain or professional church worker's instruments may be whatever counseling training he or she has had alongside spiritual counseling skills. Church workers should not be afraid to work alongside medical professionals in offering spiritual care even if their training has been limited. Church workers will understand their own sinfulness and pain as a wounded healer. Therefore they can establish a rapport with people in pain; listen to their thoughts and feelings; help them deal with any guilt; help them find meaning; and help guide their thinking.⁵⁹

Dealing with suffering is one of the chief job descriptions for pastoral care. For Christians, the goal is not to find explanations or cures for the pain but to plunge into the experience of pain with the sufferer. This sharing of pain with another follows the example of God's promised presence as Isaiah proclaims, "Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows" (Isaiah 53:4).⁶⁰ Jesus is the suffering servant who carried our sorrows to the cross while he lived among us. He set the example for the community of believers to serve by walking with the sufferer. Suffering may alienate a person from God when she feels either totally abandoned or punished. The Christian community demonstrates that God hates sin not the sinner and God's mercy

⁵⁸ Ibid., 149-183.

⁵⁹ James Vanderpool, *People in Pain: A Guide to Pastoral Care* (Springfield, IL: Charles C Thomas, 1979), 173-177.

⁶⁰ Eugene Peterson, *Five Smooth Stones for Pastoral Work* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1980), 114.

delivers from judgment. God wounds but He also binds up; He is God of the cross and the resurrection. Instead of making light of pain, the caregiver pays attention to the myriad of feelings found within it.⁶¹ God's mercy restores the sinner who feels she is under judgment as Psalm 136 boldly declares multiple times "for his mercy endures forever."

Physical treatments for pain seek to relieve the amount of suffering of the person in pain by physically masking or deadening pain pathways in the body. Psychological treatments for pain seek to relieve suffering by focusing the attention of sufferers on how best to handle their pain within themselves and with others in their environment. Spiritual treatments for pain can assist with perceptions of physical and psychological suffering as well as spiritual suffering. The role of meaning and coping for dealing with pain and suffering will be discussed in chapter 3. Specifically Christian understandings and treatments for coping with pain and suffering that can be pursued by congregations will be discussed in chapters 4 and 5.

⁶¹ Ibid., 117-119.

CHAPTER THREE

MEANING AND COPING

*If there is a meaning in life at all, then there must be a meaning in suffering.*⁶²

All of the types of pain humans experience can be treated and managed through religious experience or through secular means of coping. People often find themselves to be alone in their endeavors to deal with their pain either through religion or through finding other meanings to life, even when they belong to a community of believers. The Christian community will best serve its own people and surrounding community when it understands how people cope with pain by finding meaning in their lives.

Giving Life Meaning

Roy Baumeister, a psychologist, discusses four needs for meaning in life that, when missing, cause people pain. They can also be lost during experiences that cause pain, thereby adding anguish to the pain of the original event.⁶³

The first need is *purpose*. Purpose is about setting goals for one's life and feeling good about striving toward the goals even if they are never reached. People need to see their life activities as moving toward a purpose. People organize their lives by conceiving goals, by analyzing behaviors to see whether they will help to reach the goals, and by making choices that work toward achieving the goals. Some behaviors will be intermediate steps toward

⁶² Viktor E. Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning*, trans. Ilse Lasch (New York: Pocket Books, 1963), 106.

⁶³ Roy F. Baumeister, *The Meanings of Life* (New York: Guilford Press, 1992), 232.

accomplishing goals and some behaviors are simply fun and don't lead to future goals. Both long-term and short-term goals are equally valuable in giving meaning to life.⁶⁴

The second need is *value* or *justification*. People need to feel that their actions are good and right and justifiable. While morals that help to determine the justifiability of action may be relative to culture, each culture does have a system of morals to enable people to live together. Whether a person feels good or bad is often tied to his or her moral system.⁶⁵

The third need is *efficacy*. People need to feel that they are in control over the events of their life and that their life does make a difference. People need to feel capable and effective in reaching their goals and maintaining their values.⁶⁶

The fourth need is *self-worth*. People need to feel that they have positive worth in their society. Unfortunately for many people, this takes the form of needing to feel superior to others. People can draw a sense of self worth from several sources such as work or family.⁶⁷

While these four needs can be fulfilled through religious practices, they can also be fulfilled in secular ways. According to Baumeister, pain and suffering occur or increase when these needs are not met.

Viktor Frankl, a Holocaust survivor, has proposed three ways of finding meaning in life: by doing a deed, by experiencing a value, and by suffering.⁶⁸ Frankl survived the Nazi death camps using all three of these ways of finding meaning in life. He had the opportunity to help a colleague by volunteering for medical duties in another camp with typhus patients. He thought it

⁶⁴ Ibid., 32-36.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 36-41.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 41-44.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 44-47.

⁶⁸ Frankl, 176.

would provide more meaning to his life to help his comrades as a doctor than to vegetate as an unproductive laborer.⁶⁹

One of the values Frankl experienced to help him find meaning in life was love for his wife. In the morning walks through the bitter cold to the place where Frankl worked, he would have conversations with his wife. He did not know if she was alive or dead, but nothing could touch the strength of his love and the support the image of her gave to him.⁷⁰

Frankl observed that one possible achievement in the camps was enduring suffering in the right way—an honorable way. Frankl saw a man's suffering as being like a gas. No matter what quantity is present in a room, it will fill the room completely and evenly, just as suffering fills the soul and mind, no matter whether it is great or little. If there is a meaning to life, it must include suffering because this is as much a part of life as death. The way in which a person accepts the suffering that fate brings to her adds deeper meaning to life. A person becomes worthy of her sufferings when she remains brave, dignified, and unselfish.⁷¹

Controlling Self and Environment

People are more willing to endure pain and suffering if some meaning—a purpose, justification, efficacy, or self-worth—can be found in or through the pain. When meaning can't be found, the suffering increases. Victimization through crime, accidents, war or disease destroys people's ability to find meaning because the world no longer makes sense. It is no longer a world that is kind and fair where people get what they deserve.⁷²

⁶⁹ Ibid., 77-78.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 59-61.

⁷¹ Ibid., 59, 69-70, 106-107.

⁷² Baumeister, 232-246.

People either alter meanings or find new ones in order to construct meaning in response to suffering and to cope with their suffering. The sufferer interprets the events causing his pain. These interpretations may or may not be objective or true—they just need to work for the individual to keep on living.⁷³

The need for *purpose* will lead people in pain to look for a higher or more desirable purpose to their life in the midst of suffering. People may intentionally cause themselves suffering in order to achieve a goal, such as an Olympian practicing so intensely that his body is in pain. But people suffering from disease or tragedy will also seek to find a benefit from the crises in which they find themselves. They will find ways to make the most of their lives and reorder priorities, allowing the bad to create something new and good. For example, a recovering cancer victim may find new purpose in relationships that suffered in the past. Even if a person cannot guess a higher goal in the face of her pain, she may find religious comfort in knowing God has a higher purpose that she just can't understand.⁷⁴

The need for *value and justification* leads people to overcome their feelings of guilt by explaining away and making excuses for wrong behaviors that cause themselves or others pain. For example, an accident victim may ask, "Why me?" and come to the conclusion that she is being punished for past wrong behaviors. Beliefs that suffering builds character and that sacrifice leads to a more holy life can make suffering easier to bear.⁷⁵

The need for *efficacy* leads people to try to control the uncontrollable so that they can be effective again. In the case of a victim of disease, control may not be possible, but knowledge and understanding can help the person to feel in control. Victims may transfer responsibility for

⁷³ Ibid., 247-250.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 251-253.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 253-259.

the event and or follow up care to others who they see as being in control in order to avoid responsibility.⁷⁶

The need for *self-worth* leads people to convince themselves of their goodness and usefulness despite their current suffering. Often people do this by finding others who are worse off than themselves. People want others to look approvingly on them, and so they will hide thoughts and feelings of pain that might make others look down on them.⁷⁷

Frankl found that it was possible for spiritual life to deepen and be enriched through the pain of the concentration camps. People with a strong spiritual life were able to retreat from their surroundings into spiritual freedom. Some people of weaker physical make-ups survived better than the physically strong.⁷⁸

For many years psychologist Kenneth Pargament of Bowling Green State University has studied the role of religion in coping. He has found that when it seems possible to change a situation that creates pain, people use problem-focused thinking and behaviors. When people face painful circumstances that can't be changed, they resort to emotion-focused coping which often involves religion. People use specific cues such as religious medals, crosses, and prayers. Forgiveness also helps people to cope and gain control by overcoming feelings of anger and fear and by reducing anxiety.⁷⁹ People feel they are coping best when they feel they are in control. However, in cases of serious illness Bernard Spilka's research found that there is a tendency to avoid blaming God for the bad things that happen and to credit God for positive possibilities and outcomes. When God is viewed as being in control of things, self-esteem improves because

⁷⁶ Ibid., 259-261.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 261-263

⁷⁸ Frankl, 56-57.

⁷⁹ Bernard Spilka, Ralph Hood, Bruce Hunsberger, and Richard Gorsuch, *The Psychology of Religion* (New York: The Guilford Press, 2003), 481-493. Quoting K. I. Pargament, *The Psychology of Religion and Coping* (New York: Guilford Press, 1997).

people feel safe and feel less threatened by their pain. When they can do something active in coping with pain like praying, there are concrete felt benefits.⁸⁰

Christians, like all people, need to know that their lives has meaning. While they too will struggle with needs for purpose, value, efficacy, and self worth, they will find different answers based on God's love for them through Jesus. Life's meaning is found in a personal relationship with a loving Father instead of through personal actions. Christians find life's meaning most readily through knowing that they are God's beloved children through the sacrifice made by God's Son, Jesus Christ. God's purpose for each individual Christian varies with the gifts and talents that person has from God. At the same time, God's purpose for each person is one and the same—loving God and loving neighbor.⁸¹ God himself provides the power to live this new life through his means of grace. When Christians experience pain, the resultant loss of meaning leads them to question the role of God in their life. Various Christian answers pertinent to this exploration and to the questions raised by pain are considered next.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 502-504.

⁸¹ Luke 10:27 and Micah 6:8

CHAPTER FOUR

CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVES ON PAIN

Surely I spoke of things I did not understand, things too wonderful for me to know.⁸²

What is God's role and the human role in pain? Several dichotomies are immediately apparent: God causes pain vs. God relieves pain; people cause their own pain vs. a sinful world (nature) causes pain; and Christians suffer as part of Christ's suffering vs. Christian community helps to relieve pain. Some people take comfort in knowing that God is in control of all things, even their pain. Some people refuse to believe an all-loving God has any part in pain at all, and that evil simply happens. Perhaps the apparent dichotomies are false, and the circumstances of pain are really a paradox that includes both/and.

Biblical Discussion

How the people of God have experienced pain is a frequent theme of the biblical text. We will examine five words that depict pain in the Old Testament, עמל, כאב, חלה, ענה, and רעע. A few samples of each usage will be cited.⁸³

עמל as a verb is the condition of someone exhausted from work who is in trouble, misery, and ruin. As a noun it is often used in the psalms of lament to signify affliction. In wisdom literature it signifies the burdens of life. It is often used in conjunction with עני:⁸⁴ In Psalm 25:18 the psalmist asks God to consider his affliction (עני), his trouble (עמל), and to forgive all his sins.

⁸² Job 42:3

⁸³ See the *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament* references for further study.

⁸⁴ Arhus Otzen, "עמל," *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, eds Botterweck, Ringgren, and Fabry, (continued next page)

The psalmist asks God to teach him the paths of the Lord and be merciful. Asking for forgiveness and asking God to teach right behavior imply that the afflictions are seen as a punishment for wrong behavior. In Deuteronomy 26:7, 8 the people cried to the Lord from their affliction (עני) and toil (עמל) and God saved them from the land of Egypt. No cause is given for the suffering in Deuteronomy, but the people call for God's saving presence.

כאב is a verb that describes injury as an objective fact and the feeling it produces is suffering. Pain can be unceasing and afflicts the person at the heart of his life. Suffering is the result of discipline, sin, or simply unexplained. The suffering of the Man of Sorrows in Isaiah is caused by the sins of others.⁸⁵ In Psalm 32:10 the juxtaposition is made between the sorrows (כאב) of the wicked and the steadfast love that surrounds the one who trusts in the Lord. Proverbs 13:14 states the opposite, that even the laughter and joy of the righteous can turn to an aching (כאב) heart.

חלה is the opposite of shalom. It implies sickness and the pain that goes along with disease.⁸⁶ In Jeremiah 6:7 the Lord speaks of Jerusalem as a place where sickness (חלה) and wounds are ever before him at a time when the city is under his wrath and judgment. Isaiah 53:10 states that the will of the Lord was to crush the Suffering Servant and to put him to grief (חלה). In both of these examples the Lord causes the sickness as a punishment—in the first case for the people's own sins and in the second case on behalf of the sins of others.

ענה with its second meaning is used to portray the experience of affliction in its various forms—hardship, torment, and pain. It is also used to speak of the Day of Affliction, which is a

trans. David Green, vol. XI (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 2001), 196-201.

⁸⁵ Mosis Eichstätt, "כאב," *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, eds. Botterweck, Ringgren, and Fabry, trans. David Green, vol. VII (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 1995), 7-12.

⁸⁶ Kiel Seybold, "חלה," *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, eds. Botterweck, Ringgren, and Fabry, trans. David Green, vol. IV (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 1980), 399-408.

future evil time of intense suffering. The situations are often oppressive to the point of being life threatening so there is fear of impending death.⁸⁷ In Psalm 90:14, 15 the psalmist says that God makes us glad even for the days he has afflicted (ענה) us, trusting that the Lord will have pity on us and return so we may rejoice in all our days. Exodus 3:7 states that the Lord has seen the affliction (ענה) of his people under the Egyptians and knows their sufferings (כָּאֵב). In verse 12, he promises his presence and redemption. Both of these texts express hope that the suffering will end when God acts on the people's behalf.

רע and רעה' from רעע are translated with a variety of English words from evil, distress, and misery to injury. The forms can describe anything from bad water and figs to grievous boils that all cause suffering. רעע is a negative experience whether the result of misfortune, aggression, or destructive human actions. It is an inevitable part of life that challenges the meaning of life. Humans struggle with question of the nature of evil as they reflect on their existence. Evil is perceived as whatever causes us to suffer—an attack on the existence of life.⁸⁸ Psalm 90 mentioned above is a song praising the LORD for all that he has done including controlling the number of our days and the time of our death. In a section pleading for the LORD to return and have pity the psalmist says in verse 15, “Make us glad for as many days you have afflicted us, and for as many years as we have seen evil (רעה)” The evil years would be years of affliction. Psalm 23:4 says that even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil (רע). In this case the evil is an affliction that may cause the person's death.

⁸⁷ Giessen Gerstenberger “ענה,” *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, eds. Botterweck, Ringgren, and Fabry, trans. David Green, vol. XI (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 2001), 230-252.

⁸⁸ D. Rick. “רעע,” *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, eds. Botterweck, Ringgren, and Fabry, trans. David Green, vol. XIII (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 2001), 567-568.

We will also examine four words that depict pain in the New Testament: παθήματα, ἔπαθεν, συνωδίνω, and θλίψεως. A few samples of each usage will be cited.⁸⁹

παθήματα and ἔπαθεν occur in the New Testament to depict the suffering of Christ—specifically that related to his death and the sufferings of Christians for his sake.⁹⁰ In 1 Corinthians 1:5 Paul writes that we as Christians share in Christ’s suffering (παθήματα) so that we may share in Christ’s comfort. Romans 8:18 states that the sufferings (παθήματα) of the present time cannot be compared to a future glory. While the first verse specifically relates to suffering in Christ, they both reflect a sense of honor in suffering. The first points to comfort by Christ during suffering, and the second points to a future time without suffering. In Hebrews 5:8 the author writes that, even for Jesus, suffering (ἔπαθεν) teaches obedience. 1 Peter 2:21 speaks to Christian servants, saying that Christ suffered (ἔπαθεν) for them as an example to follow. In both cases these verses indicate that suffering provides teaching for life.

συνωδίνω comes from ὠδίνω and is commonly used for pain and agony as suffered during childbirth.⁹¹ In Romans 8:22 Paul writes that the whole creation groans as with pangs of childbirth (συνωδίνω) because God subjected it to futility. In Matthew 24:8 Jesus describes the suffering caused by wars and earthquakes that are signs of the last days as birth pains (συνωδίνω). In both these verses, pain in bearing children is used to describe a current suffering that will end with Jesus’ return.

⁸⁹ See the references to the *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* for further study.

⁹⁰ Wilhelm Michaelis, “πασχω,” “παθημα,” “κακοπαθεια,” and “προπασχω,” *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel, vol. V (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1967), 904, 912-923.

⁹¹ Georg Bertram, “ωδίνω,” *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*. ed. Gerhard Kittel, vol. IX (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1974), 667-674.

θλιψις is used to depict both the nature and experience of tribulation. Suffering is inseparable from Christian life and may include death.⁹² Paul speaks of his own pain (θλίψεως) and anguish on behalf of the Corinthians in 2 Corinthians 2:4. His love for them has caused this pain because he wishes them to continue to follow Christ. In Mark 13:19, Jesus speaks of the close of the age as a time of tribulation (θλιψις) greater than any since the beginning of creation. The sufferings in these verses is caused by people's sinfulness. In both cases the suffering will have an end, either when the sin is forgiven or when Jesus returns.

The biblical record of pain and suffering is extensive. Causes for pain range from sinfulness in general—the person's own, others toward the person, or the chaos of the world—to God himself. Suffering may result in learning for the believer who may come close to despair, but who trusts in God for strength during the time of trial and relief—the sooner, the better. Throughout history, Christians have struggled with integrating the teachings of the Bible with their faith and lives.

Historical Discussion

Cyprian, bishop of Carthage, wrote in 252 of the plague that terrorized its citizens, both Christian and non-Christian. Cyprian's answer to the problem of the plague is that both the good and evil of nature come to all people. The difference is the Christian's response in seeing the plague as a challenge to virtue and a testing ground of faith. Christian preachers often present plagues and epidemics as a visitation of the wrath of God on specific evils. Usually, suffering is not seen as a collective punishment from God. Since Christians reject the idea of an anti-god in

⁹² Heinrich Schlier, "θλιψις" *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*. ed. Gerhard Kittel, vol. III (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1965), 139-148.

creating suffering, they are open to explaining its existence in view of God's love.⁹³ The

Venerable Bede wrote of five reasons that people suffer:

To increase their merits, as Job and the Martyrs; to preserve their humility as Paul by Satan's messenger; or in order that they should perceive and correct their sins, as Miriam, the sister of Moses, and this paralytic; for the glory of God, as the man born blind and Lazarus; or as the start of the pains of damnation, as Herod and Antiochus.⁹⁴

While some may not agree with Bede's interpretations, his comments help us to see suffering in terms of both the spiritual life of the person and the mystery of the will of God. For the sufferer, finding a positive meaning in life while suffering offers the possibility of creating a sense of meaning and even of special vocation in life at the point at which life may seem unbearable.⁹⁵

Thomas Á Kempis wrote:

Nothing is more acceptable to God, and nothing more salutary for yourself, than to suffer gladly for Christ's sake. And if it lies in your choice, you should choose rather to suffer hardships for Christ's sake, than to be refreshed by many consolations; for thus you will more closely resemble Christ and all His Saints. For our merit and spiritual progress do not consist in enjoying great delight and consolation, but rather in the bearing of great burdens and troubles.⁹⁶

Thomas emphasizes the Christian's choice in suffering in order to follow Christ's example. He also emphasizes the comfort that only God can give a Christian:

It is in You, then, O Lord God, that I place my whole hope and trust. On you I lay all my trouble and distress; for wherever I look elsewhere, I find all things weak and unstable. The number of my friends will be unavailing; powerful allies will be unable to help; wise counselors will not be able to give me a helpful answer, nor learned books give comfort; no precious substance can ransom me, nor can any secret and pleasant place

⁹³ David Melling, "Suffering and Sanctification in Christianity" in *Religion, Health and Suffering*, eds. John Hinnells and Roy Porter (New York: Kegan Paul International, 1999), 46-48.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 49.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 50,55.

⁹⁶ Thomas Á Kempis, *The Imitation of Christ*, trans. Leo Sherley-Price (London: Penguin, 1952), 88.

afford refuge, unless You Yourself stand at my side to help me, to strengthen, cheer, instruct, and protect me.⁹⁷

For Luther, the suffering of a Christian follows the example of Jesus' own suffering. Suffering worthy of the name of Jesus must honestly grip and hurt like great danger to property, honor, body, and life—suffering that really weighs us down. Suffering is not to be chosen by the Christian, but when it comes the Christian is to patiently bear and suffer it. Luther does not leave the Christian alone to suffer. God is faithful and will come and will help the sufferer as he has always helped his own from the beginning, as he helped Jesus in the garden. In affliction, the burdened turn their eyes away from the present suffering to the consolation and promise of Christ that “In me you shall have peace” [John 16:33].⁹⁸ In the *Large Catechism* in the Confessions, Luther speaks of suffering in the Sixth Petition of the Lord's Prayer. As long as we are in this life we will be attacked and must endure perils, so that we cry to God for help so that we will not fall into sin.⁹⁹ Article XII on repentance in the *Apology of the Augsburg Confession* says that Scripture explains through Job's example that not all suffering is punishment or signs of wrath; often it is an alien work of God intended for our benefit and to demonstrate God's power through our weakness. In Article IV on Justification, Psalm 50 is quoted as the richest consolation in all afflictions—to know that God has said we should call on him in the day of trouble, and he will deliver us.¹⁰⁰

Francis Pieper in his section concerning the “Doctrine of Man,” states that believers are free from the guilt and punishment of sin (Romans 5:1). Yet Scripture also calls suffering just

⁹⁷ Ibid., 181

⁹⁸ Martin Luther, “Sermon at Coburg on Cross and Suffering,” 1530. *Luther's Works on CD-Rom*, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan and Helmut T. Lehmann (Minneapolis and St. Louis: Fortress Press and Concordia Publishing House, 1957) www.libronix.com.

⁹⁹ Robert Kolb and Timothy Wengert, eds. *The Book of Concord* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 454.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 130, 215.

that—a punishment (1 Peter 4:17). Sufferings are also called “father chastisements” meant to keep us from turning from God (1 Corinthians 11:32).¹⁰¹ Pieper writes in his section on “Sanctification and Good Works” that God gives us the strength to bear whatever cross or trial we may face. With Paul, Christians are able to disregard current sufferings because of the assurance of the glory that awaits them (Romans 8:18). Because of sin in the world, the whole creation suffers (Romans 7:24), but the Christian prays with confidence in the Lord’s Prayer “Thy Kingdom come”—a time of deliverance from evil.¹⁰²

Dietrich Bonhoeffer reflected on suffering while in a Nazi prison under charges of treason. He wrote:

God wants us to realize his presence, not in unsolved problems but in those that are solved. That is true of the relationship between God and scientific knowledge, but it is also true of the wider human problems of death, suffering, and guilt. It is now possible to find, even for these questions, human answers that take no account whatever of God. In point of fact, people deal with these questions without God (it has always been so), and it is simply not true to say that only Christianity has the answers to them. As to the idea of ‘solving’ problems, it may be that the Christian answers are just as unconvincing—or convincing—as any others. Here again, God is no stop-gap; he must be recognized at the center of life, not when we are at the end of our resources; it is his will to be recognized in life, and not only when death comes; in health and vigor, and not only in suffering; in our activities, and not only in sin. The ground for this lies in the revelation of God in Jesus Christ. He is the center of life, and he certainly didn’t ‘come’ to answer our unsolved problems. From the center of life certain questions, and their answers, are seen to be wholly irrelevant.¹⁰³

Bonhoeffer acknowledges that the Christian finds meaning in both life and pain through Jesus, while others can find meaning elsewhere. Bonhoeffer also wrote from prison on Christmas Eve of 1943 about separation from loved ones:

¹⁰¹ Francis Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, vol. I (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1950), 537.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 74-76.

¹⁰³ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, ed. Eberhard Bethge (New York: SCM Press, 1971), 311-312.

First: nothing can make up for the absence of someone whom we love, and it would be wrong to try to find a substitute; we must simply hold out and see it through. That sounds very hard at first, but at the same time it is a great consolation, for the gap, as long as it remains unfilled, preserves the bonds between us. It is nonsense to say that God fills the gap; he doesn't fill it, but on the contrary, he keeps it empty and so helps us to keep alive our former communion with each other, even at the cost of pain.¹⁰⁴

In this example God doesn't take away pain by filling in a loss, but allows us to keep the pain in order to preserve a communion with the absent ones.

For Lewis, Christianity creates rather than solves the problem of pain because we believe that God is good and loving.¹⁰⁵ Lewis uses philosophical arguments about the nature of God and the nature of humans to explain his views on why pain exists. Lewis sees the possibility of God loving us enough to correct us—which causes us pain. This position takes for granted the Christian view that people since the time of Adam are wicked by nature. “The problem of reconciling human suffering with the existence of a God who loves, is only insoluble so long as we attach a trivial meaning to the word ‘love,’ and look on things as if man were the center of them . . . because he already loves us, he must labor to make us lovable.”¹⁰⁶ God is also omnipotent, but what does that mean for the existence of pain in our lives? While all things are possible with God, he created humans with the freedom to choose, and often people choose to cause pain to one another.¹⁰⁷ Consequences flow from the laws of nature which God established, and these also can cause pain. Lewis writes, “Try to exclude the possibility of suffering which the order of nature and the existence of free wills involve, and you find that you have excluded life itself.”¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁴ Bonhoeffer, 176.

¹⁰⁵ C.S Lewis. *The Problem of Pain* (New York: Collier Books, 1962), 24.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 48.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 32-33.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 35.

Four-fifths of people's experience of pain is caused by the creative wickedness of themselves through means of torture, war, slavery, and persecution. Lewis spends a whole chapter on the evils of human beings that cause pain, including sadism, masochism, poverty, and vengeance.

The full submission of the self to God also demands pain in order to have the true motive of love of God. From the Christian perspective the real problem of pain now becomes not why do pious Christians suffer, but why some do not.¹⁰⁹

Aslan speaks to a frightened Jill in the following dialogue:

“Do you eat girls?” she said.

“I have swallowed up girls and boys, women and men, kings and emperors, cities and realms,” said the Lion. It didn't say this as if it were boasting, nor as if it were sorry, nor as if it were angry. It just said it.

“I daren't come and drink,” said Jill.

“Then you will die of thirst,” said the Lion.

“Oh, dear!” said Jill, coming another step nearer. “I suppose I must go and look for another stream then.”

“There is no other stream,” said the Lion.

It never occurred to Jill to disbelieve the Lion—no one who had seen his stern face could do that—and her mind suddenly made itself up. It was the worst thing she had ever had to do, but she went forward to the stream, knelt down, and began scooping up water. . . .¹¹⁰

Aslan, representing Jesus, presents a clear “no” to the very thirsty Jill. He does eat girls and he offers no comfort in her pain. Yet Jill trusts somehow that, despite what might happen, drinking in Aslan's presence is the right thing to do. The Christian may hear a clear “no” from Jesus, but trust leads to action in Jesus' presence.

¹⁰⁹Ibid., 89,99,104.

¹¹⁰ C.S. Lewis, *The Silver Chair* (New York: Harper-Collins, 1953), 21.

Ultimately what is good in any painful experience is, for the sufferer, his submission to the will of God, and, for the spectators, the compassion aroused and the acts of mercy to which it leads.¹¹¹ While grieving his wife's death, Lewis made the following two observations:

. . . when I think of my own suffering. It is harder when I think of hers. What is grief compared with physical pain? Whatever fools may say, the body can suffer twenty times more than the mind. The mind has always some power of evasion. At worst, the unbearable thought only comes back and back, but the physical pain can be absolutely continuous. Grief is like a bomber circling round and dropping its bombs each time the circle brings it over head; physical pain is like the steady barrage on a trench in World War One, hours of it with no let-up for a moment. Thought is never static; pain often is.

When I lay these questions before God I get no answer. But a rather special sort of "No answer." It is not the locked door. It is more like a silent, certainly not uncompassionate, gaze. As though He shook His head not in refusal but waiving the question. Like, "Peace, child; you don't understand."¹¹²

The hope for Christians is that pain comes to an end and its sequel is joy, both here on earth and ultimately in heaven. Gene Veith writes that Dante's definition of comedy—life starts sad but ends happy—can apply to our understanding of suffering. Pain is not the ultimate end for Christians who know that God will wipe away every tear (Revelation 7:17).¹¹³

The historical record of Christians dealing with pain and suffering is similar to the biblical record in its variety of thought. The question remains for each person on how to synthesize God's promises of presence and love with his or her own felt pain. Views range from discipline from God to participation in the suffering of Christ to show God's power through our weakness. People also cause their own and each other's pain as the consequences of sin. Christians find hope in the promises that current suffering will be replaced with glory in heaven.

¹¹¹ Lewis, *The Problem of Pain*, 110.

¹¹² C. S. Lewis, *A Grief Observed* (New York: Bantam, 1961), 46-47, 80-81.

¹¹³ Gene Veith, *Reading Between the Lines: A Christian Guide to Literature* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1990), 103-104.

Recent Discussion

Joseph Fichter writes that one of the main reasons for a religion to exist is in order to provide collective support for human beings who are troubled with misery, anguish, pain, and suffering. When the gift of miraculous healing is absent, Christians have historically provided specialized care of the sick through deacons, deaconesses, hospitals, and chaplains in a variety of care facilities. As part of fulfilling the Christian mission to bring the good news of salvation, the Christian response to human pain and suffering is a means of bringing God's love to people and people to God's love.¹¹⁴

One of the chief problems for the Christian sufferer is doubting one's former beliefs. Suffering tends to contradict our images of who God is and how he works in our life. How a person can receive strength and hope from his beliefs is complicated. Yet in the midst of doubt, if the person can confront God and ask the questions that trouble him, he can learn to see the true God who cares, suffers with him, and empowers him. The person learns from personal experience who God is and the meaning of his suffering for his life.¹¹⁵

Henri Nouwen shares the story of a young student chaplain's visit to a poor farmer who is alone in the world and about to face a surgery from which he may not recover. In Nouwen's analysis of the possibilities to bring hope to the patient, he writes that God's revelation in Jesus Christ—his death and resurrection—are the foundation of our understanding of human pain. First, Jesus reveals to us the possibility of following him in faithful waiting for a place beyond the boundaries which separate life from death. Second, Jesus gives a deep-rooted faith that provides value and meaning of life even when the days look dark. Third, he gives an outgoing

¹¹⁴ Joseph Fichter, *Religion and Pain* (New York: Crossroads, 1981) 66-69, 119.

¹¹⁵ Ekman Tam, "Wounding, Doubting, and Trust in Suffering" *The Journal of Pastoral Care & Counseling* 55:2 (summer 2001), 162-163.

hope looking for tomorrow beyond the moment of death. No God can save human life except a suffering God—a God who comes today in the middle of our pain, standing right here with us.¹¹⁶

Dorothee Sölle, a German Protestant theologian, has a problem with the systematic theology which names and pigeonholes suffering when silence would be more appropriate. Each attempt to view suffering as being directly or indirectly caused by God entails the risk of thinking God is sadistic. Her answer is to allow the un-understandable paradox to stand as it is: God loves us even when nothing of his love is visible. Jesus identifies with those who suffer and stands alongside them, showing us the way to do so as well.¹¹⁷ Theologian Sharon Betcher shares similar insights. People with chronic pain or disabilities cannot overcome the pain of their bodies, and therefore need a religious hope that stays honest to their bodies, that knows how to cry, yet trusts in life. Too often in our culture pain is seen as inhuman and oppressive, making the one in pain inhuman and oppressed.¹¹⁸ Sometimes it is the one in pain who reaches out to heal the “normal” person who is lost and doesn’t know what to do or say:

“Excuse me,” I say, “I need some help here.” In that moment the frozen wall between us topples; in your converted countenance, I discern that, as if in the twinkling of an eye, *you* have been changed. For the 45 seconds I needed you, you did not feel extraneous to the world. Some times I will ask for help just to save you, the nondisabled, from superficiality and irrelevance—just to save us from your own worst fear.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁶ Henri Nouwen, *The Wounded Healer* (New York, Bantam Doubleday Dell, 1972), 71, 73, 95.

¹¹⁷ Dorothee Soelle, *Suffering*, trans. Everett Kalin (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1975), 19-25, 166-167.

¹¹⁸ Sharon Betcher, “Wisdom to Make the World Go On: On Disability and the Cultural Delegation of Suffering,” in *God, Evil, and Suffering: Essays in Honor of Paul R. Sponheim*, ed. Terence Fretheim and Curtis Thompson (St. Paul, MN: Word & World-Luther Seminary, 2000), 87, 92.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 93.

There are two possible paths through pain: to dissociate from the body as much as possible or to become even more one with the body as it suffers.¹²⁰ Both possibilities can involve God's presence and care as the person hopes for heaven and hopes to bear her pain well on earth.

The idea of two possible paths through pain bears further thought. Both paths are viable options within the Christian tradition, although the paths do hold a tension between them. Dissociating from the body can be part of contemplative practice seeking a closer relationship with God by "denying the self and taking up my cross" as Jesus said in Matthew 16:24. Thomas A'Kempis wrote:

If your inner life were rightly ordered and your heart pure, all things would turn to your good and advantage. As it is, you are often displeased and disturbed, because you are not yet completely dead to self, nor detached from all worldly things. Nothing defiles and ensnares the heart of man more than a selfish love of creatures. If you renounce all outward consolation, you will be able to contemplate heavenly things, and often experience great joy of heart¹²¹

So long as you wear this mortal body you will be subject to weariness and sadness of heart. Therefore, in this life, you will often lament the burden of the body, which hinders your giving yourself wholly to the life of the spirit and to divine contemplation.¹²²

And Pieper writes:

The fallen reason and will of man operates only in spiritual darkness (1 Cor. 2:14, Rom 8:7) The human nature after the fall is no longer perfect, but thoroughly and in its innermost part corrupt.¹²³

The Christian who is both sinner and saint longs to be free of his corrupt body which is subject to pain and suffering. Hope of heaven and contemplation of spiritual heavenly matters can help relieve pain such as the guided imagery practices discussed in chapter 5. Pain treatments like

¹²⁰ Ibid., 95.

¹²¹ Thomas A'Kempis, *The Imitation of Christ*. trans. Leo Sherley-Price (London: Penguin, 1952), 69.

¹²² Ibid., 165.

¹²³ Francis Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics* vol. I (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1950), 520.

drug therapy or acupuncture mentioned in chapter 3 help the sufferer to become free of the pain being produced by their bodies.

Christians may also follow the way of the cross and become more one with the body as it suffers. In *The Way to Christ: Of the Super-Sensual Life* Jacob Boehme wrote a dialogue between disciple and master. The following is the master's response to a query by the disciple about how to handle his sinful body:

There is no other Way for thee that I know, but to *present* the Body whereof thou complainest (which is the Beast to be sacrificed) "*a living Sacrifice, holy and acceptable unto God*": And this shall be thy "rational Service", whereby this thy Body will be put, as thou desirest, into the Imitation of Jesus Christ, who said, His Kingdom was not of this World. Be not thou then "*conformed*" to it, but be *transformed* by the Renewing of thy Mind"; which renewed Mind is to have Dominion over the Body, that so thou mayest prove, both in Body and Mind, what is the perfect Will of God, and accordingly perform the same with and by his Grace operating.¹²⁴

Boehme follows Paul's reasoning in Romans 12 that the body itself is transformed by Christ giving the Christian dominion over it. The *Formula of Concord* states:

For God created not only the body and soul of Adam and eve before the fall but also our body and soul after the fall, even though they are corrupted. God also still recognizes them as his own work, as it is written, Job 10:[8] "Your hands fashioned and made me, together all around."

Furthermore, the Son of God assumed this human nature into the unity of his person—of course, without sin—and what he assumed was not another kind of flesh but our flesh. In this way he became our true brother. Hebrews 2:[14], "Since the children share flesh and blood, he himself likewise shared the same things." And [2:16,17] "He did not 'assume the nature of] the angels but of the descendants of Abraham; thus, he had to become like this brothers and sisters in every respect," apart from sin.

Therefore, Christ also redeemed human nature as his creation, sanctifies it as his creation, awakens it from the dead, and adorns it in glorious fashion as his

¹²⁴ Jacob Boehme, "The Way to Christ: Of the Super-Sensual Life," (1622) in *Christian Classics Ethereal Library* Early Church Fathers version 2.0, Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, series I, vol. VIII, Psalm CXXX. (Calvin College, 1999).

creation.¹²⁵

Christians who are both sinners and saints realize that their bodies are redeemed by the Lord. In chapter 3 on pain treatments several of the methods help sufferers to become more aware of their bodies and to work with them. In chapter 5 as the community of the church follows the liturgical year of the life of Christ, the Christian is encouraged to participate in Christ's suffering and death as part of his or her own suffering.

In most cases chronic pain leads a person to seek multiple solutions for her suffering. Hence the tension as the person seeks to avoid her pain and to accept it.

Philip Yancey asks if the expectations of Christians who commit their lives to God are realistic in hoping that they will get something in return. As observed earlier in chapter 1, Christians rightfully ask three questions when pain and suffering comes upon them: Is God unfair? Is God silent? Is God hidden?¹²⁶

Yancey admits that God does seem unfair, silent, and hidden. In his study of the book of Job, he finds that God does not answer Job's questions because humans cannot understand. There are no explanations that will solve suffering. Yancey affirms that this is why God sent his own Son as one response to our pain. The incarnation doesn't solve our suffering in this life, but it is a personal and active response.¹²⁷ Yancey also speaks of the eternal present of God's perspective. To people trapped in a present disappointment with God, the Bible points us to consider the past—all that God has done through the prophets, through Jesus, in our own lives. The Bible also points us to consider the future—a state of happiness, justice, and peace with the coming of God's kingdom. Faith means believing in advance what will only make sense in

¹²⁵ Kolb and Wengert, 488.

¹²⁶ Yancey, *Disappointment*, 36-37.

reverse. The three-day pattern presented by Jesus of tragedy, darkness, and triumph becomes a pattern for our own times of testing.¹²⁸

The recent record of Christian writings surveyed continues the struggle with hard questions that have no easy answers for the individual who is suffering. The focus of all of these authors is on the role of the community responding to the person who is suffering. Those trained by the church to bring the Good News of hope to the struggling individual, must learn to do so with loving care. Instead of trying to explain the pain or speak too soon of the relief heaven will provide, the focus becomes the sufferer and his or her faith. Except for the Venerable Bede who talked about earning merits through suffering, all of the theological understandings about why and how we suffer may be applicable to any individual at various times throughout his or her life. The key in Christian practice is to listen first to sufferers to determine where they are at both in terms of their suffering and in terms of their faith and relationship with God. Then the care giver can dialogue with the sufferer in caring ways to demonstrate God's loving presence and provide hope.

As Yancey suggests, the answer to our struggle is in asking a different question: Is the church silent? God has chosen the church to be his mouthpiece to a suffering world.¹²⁹ How the church answers this question becomes the witness of hope to those in pain, which will lead us to our next chapter.

¹²⁷ Ibid., 191-192.

¹²⁸ Ibid., 199-201, 211.

¹²⁹ Ibid., 226.

CHAPTER FIVE

HOPE: THE ROLE OF THE CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY

Only when we take human existence upon ourselves in its starkest and most humiliating misery—a misery in which nothing has meaning—can we win through to the only possible way to live. Only when we taste the lot of all, when we become involved deeply in world suffering, one in heart with the need of humanity, can we win through to our true vocation. Only when the conscience becomes active, only when love is born out of suffering, only when hardship leads to liberating action, is victory near.¹³⁰

The cross symbolizes God's suffering *with* the people He created. It also symbolizes the power of God to do what no one would do—to suffer in order to save. Seeing God as powerful through weakness allows Christians to hope that God understands as well as providing renewed strength and courage for the living of this life.¹³¹ Hebrews 5:7-9a states:

During the days of Jesus' life on earth, he offered up prayers and petitions with loud cries and tears to the one who could save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission. Although he was a son, he learned obedience from what he suffered and, once made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him.

Jesus suffered so that those who believe will have eternal life despite the sin and death, pain and suffering that surround them.

People in chronic pain are forced to wait. Waiting with hope is a blessing from God that Christians share with each other. There are many stories in the Bible where a faithful, waiting sufferer cries out to the Lord for mercy and expresses hope. One example would be the prayer of

¹³⁰ Eberhard Arnold (1883-1935), German Christian writer, philosopher, and theologian from a public lecture 1919. [cited 19 December 2005], available from <http://www.digitaldivide.net/blog/Taran/view?PostID=5818>, INTERNET.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 166.

Hannah in 1 Samuel 1 where she cries “look on the affliction of your servant” and then hopes that her prayer will be fulfilled. Waiting and hoping are expressed together in Lamentations 3: 19-26:

I remember my affliction and my wandering, the bitterness and the gall. I well remember them, and my soul is downcast within me. Yet this I call to mind and therefore I have hope: Because of the Lord’s great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. . . . I say to myself, “The Lord is my portion; therefore I will wait for him.”

Lamentations says that the Lord provides and so the person has hope and waits for him. This is the same sentiment expressed in Psalm 130:5, “I wait for the LORD, my soul waits, and in his word I put my hope.” In verse five the waiting progresses to hope in God’s word which also reminds us of the important role of the word of God in providing promises in which the believer trusts. Psalm 119: 49 also speaks of hoping in God’s Word. The word used for hope in Hebrew (יָחַד) also carries the meaning of waiting. Romans 8:25 defines hope as waiting with patience. In verse 7 of the same Psalm all of Israel is commanded to hope in the LORD. Psalm 130 is specifically about suffering caused by sin and guilt, however, when people are feeling pain it can provide great comfort that hope is not futile. The morning will come and so will God’s provision of care. Christians hope in the promises provided in God’s word for his presence in the here and now and for life eternal without pain. The Christian community may help to bring the sufferer into God’s presence by sharing Jesus’ love with her.

In chapter 4 it was noted that some people take comfort in knowing that God is in control of all things, even in their pain, and that some people refuse to believe an all-loving God has any part in pain and that evil simply happens. Good pastoral care involves listening and beginning with the person where the person is. Depending on the circumstances, relief of guilt or simply the gift of presence will allow people to find their own meaning in the face of their pain.

Luther distinguishes between a “theology of glory” (man’s ways) and a “theology of the cross” (God’s ways). The theology of the cross says that God comes to us through weakness and suffering, on the cross and in our own sufferings. God says to his people, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness” (2 Corinthians 12:9). Most people hold to a theology of glory at times, not wanting to surrender all to God, but holding out for how we want God to appear and do his magic in the midst of our troubles. People want God to justify himself when they suffer by providing healing and success. Pastoral care becomes *not* doing something to remove suffering but interpreting suffering in the light of the cross, acknowledging helplessness in the face of suffering and waiting on God.¹³²

Christian caregiving to people in pain can include a variety of ministries within a community of believers. The key is to be ready to listen to the sufferers to discover what their true needs are. Communities need to watch out for solution-finding agendas that are their own and not the sufferers. By listening and being present to those in pain, the community offers the love of Jesus. Caregivers can provide referral to the most helpful services thereby bringing God’s blessing through an awareness of resources within the larger community as well as resources within the individual congregation

As a person spirals through the stages of suffering mentioned by Erika Schuckhardt in chapter 1, it is important to have support from others at each stage—if only in the form of acceptance of the resulting behaviors. Here is where Christianity community can be at its best accepting and encouraging sufferers through their experience of pain.

It may be helpful for a congregation to evaluate its caring ministry as part of its mission. What are the specific goals for caring ministry and how well are they being met? How well are caregivers being trained to serve in their specific areas? One tool for evaluation is to view the

¹³² Richard Eyer, *Pastoral Care under the Cross* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1994), 25-33.

caring ministry on a continuum for meeting the physical and spiritual needs of its members. A variety of ministries can work together and form referral resources for one another.

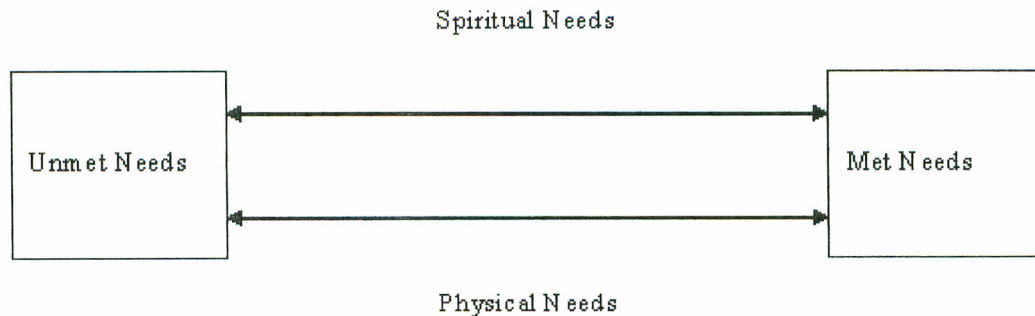


Figure 5: Continuum for Care.

In Figure 5 there is a separate continuum line for meeting spiritual and physical needs. The closer to the “Met Needs” box the congregation’s ministries place themselves, the closer they are toward reaching their goal of helping people in pain. Ministries that meet the spiritual needs of people in pain could include visitation, special services, support groups, etc. Ministries that meet the physical needs of people in pain could include the bringing of meals, pet care, lawn care, grocery shopping, and so forth. Some specific examples of possibilities that a congregation might consider form the rest of this chapter.

Liturgy and Hymnody

For those churches that follow the church year and observe its seasons of Advent, Lent, Easter, and specific festival days such as All Saints, there are special opportunities to reach out intentionally to those in pain by highlighting what occurs naturally in worship. The collect for the first Sunday in Advent prays for the Lord to come that, by his protection, we may be rescued from the threatening perils of our sins and be saved by his mighty deliverance. This prayer includes both a plea for protection in the present and hope for future deliverance from the pains

of this life.¹³³ Advent reminds us of our Lord's second coming when all suffering will end for the believer. In terms of finding meaning Advent helps sufferers to find self-worth through knowledge of God's love for them in coming to earth to save them.

In Lent the gradual proclaims:

Oh, come, Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame. . .¹³⁴

This short verse spoken between the reading of the lessons during each Sunday in Lent combines the terms “joy” and “endured the cross” in a way that both challenges and comforts the faithful. Jesus experienced pain to its fullest, yet because of its meaning—saving his people—he endured it with joy. Lent is a time of repentance, acknowledging God's wrath against sin—especially against his own Son on the cross—so that we may find forgiveness. For sufferers Lent is a time of becoming one with the pain in their bodies as they endure suffering knowing that Jesus who endured such suffering on our behalf is with them. 1 Corinthians 1:5 and Romans 8: 18 discussed in the biblical section both highlight our participation with Christ in his suffering.

Easter provides the full hope of victory over pain in the resurrection of Jesus. The psalmody for Easter reminds the sufferer that God made us and cares for us as the shepherd cares for his sheep. The Lord is good and his faithfulness to his people lasts forever.¹³⁵ God's shepherding care is proclaimed most clearly in Psalm 23 which was discussed in the chapter 4. This promise provides a handle that believers in pain can cling to—a certainty that God is for us even if it appears that he has abandoned us. As Lewis wrote in the dialogue between Jill and Aslan, what we perceive to be a no from God does not negate his care for us.

¹³³ *Lutheran Worship* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1982), 10.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, 32, from Hebrews 12:2.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 48, from Psalm 100.

In the prayer life of the Christian under the theology of the cross, the suffering of the praying, faithful petitioner is subordinated to another purpose. Trouble is accepted for the sake of Christ as God's power is made perfect in weakness. The sufferer subordinates his trouble and pain to that of witness to others and the will and purpose of God like Jesus' prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane. Paul sets an example when he seeks the prayers of the community for his deliverance from trouble, and it is his commitment to the way of Christ that evoke his pleas, not his own well-being. Intercession for the suffering is a regular part of the faithful prayer of the community of believers.¹³⁶

All Saints Day provides a special opportunity for those who grieve to remember those who have died in the last year and to join their prayers for comfort, peace, and hope with those of the whole church. The promise of the resurrection of the body and the hope of joining loved ones in heaven brings joy in midst of sorrow. Verses 4 and 5 of the hymn "For All the Saints" particularly speak to those in pain:

Oh, blest communion, fellowship divine,
We feebly struggle, they in glory shine;
Alleluia! Alleluia!
And when the strife is fierce, the warfare long,
Steals on the ear the distant triumph song,
And hearts are brave again and arms are strong.
Alleluia! Alleluia!¹³⁷

Using the metaphors of battle, the hymn recognizes the struggles of this life, yet gives assurance of the help of fellow saints and of future victory through the metaphors of brave hearts and strong arms of the community. These community connections provide both a sense of self-worth and efficacy as people reach out to each other in love. As Yancey suggests the community is called to be God's mouthpiece to a world in pain.

¹³⁶ Patrick D. Miller, *They Cried to the Lord: The Form and Theology of Biblical Prayer* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994), 323-324.

The proclamation of the Word through the reading of the lessons, the liturgy, and preaching can focus on Christian understandings of pain at appropriate times during the church year. This focus helps all of the members of a congregation to find meaning in individual pain when it comes to them and to reach out to assist their brothers and sisters in Christ. The meaning of pain will differ for each individual Christian, but foundational hope is found in the identity of being a child of God and the promise of Jesus' presence—Jesus who has suffered all things and who has risen from the dead.

In the celebration of the sacraments the lives of the faithful are joined to the body of Christ. In the baptismal liturgy we pray:

. . . we thank and praise you that you graciously preserve and enlarge your family and have granted _____ the new birth in Holy Baptism and made _____ a member of your Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, and an heir of your heavenly kingdom.¹³⁸

The believer is welcomed into the family of God, a spiritual place where comfort and healing is part of his new life. In the communion liturgy, we pray with the saints, “Lamb of God, you take away the sin of the world; grant us peace.”¹³⁹ This peace from the Lamb who suffered and died and rose is a meaningful peace that comforts the believer in pain. The sacraments provide a special tangible time of receiving God's forgiveness. As Pargament found, forgiveness helps a person to gain control by overcoming feelings of anger and fear as well as reducing anxiety.

One means of allowing people the opportunity to express their pain is through lament. The Old Testament records a variety of laments: songs that give sorrow words and help people to make sense of their experiences.¹⁴⁰ The great number of lament psalms and the book of

¹³⁷ Ibid., Hymn 191.

¹³⁸ Ibid., 203.

¹³⁹ Ibid., 172.

¹⁴⁰ Patricia Byrne, “‘Give Sorrow Words’: Lament—Contemporary Need for Job's Old time Religion” *The Journal of Pastoral Care & Counseling* 56:3 (Fall 2002), 253-264.

Lamentations all give witness to the fact that people of faith can not only recognize that suffering is real and significant but provide a public place for people to grieve together with weeping and groaning.¹⁴¹ Gospel hymns and spirituals often follow the pattern of laments for corporate worship. Laments allow people to express their pain while leaving God in control of the situation, trusting him for comfort and relief. The decision to place God in control provides a sense of efficacy for the person. Spilka noted that people in painful situations that have no hope of full recovery often refuse to blame God for the bad and credit God for the good. The laments sometimes do blame God for the bad in a person's life and sometimes blame others or the self. But most do credit God for the hoped for good outcome and rejoice in him. The act of lament itself provides a sense of control for people as they pray.

The acts of worship acknowledge the presence of pain and refocus the attention of worshippers onto their relationship with God.¹⁴² Worship may help sufferers to relax, find meaning, and visualize Christ with them in their pain.

Healing Services

There are a growing number of resources available for healing services which very intentionally acknowledge the presence of pain in our lives. One resource is *Moments of Grace: Hymns, Worship Services & Meditations for Caring and Healing Ministries*. This resource does exactly what the title says: reminding people of their baptismal grace and Jesus' caring and healing. The service includes directions for laying on of hands and anointing

¹⁴¹ Reed Lessing, "Living with the Laments," *Concordia Journal* 31:3 (July 2005), 218.

¹⁴² Wayne E Oates and Charles E Oates, *People in Pain: Guidelines for Pastoral Care* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1985), 125.

participants.¹⁴³ Laying on of hands and anointing of the sick is prescribed in the book of James for the forgiveness of sins and that the Lord will “raise him up.”¹⁴⁴

Another means is to provide ceremonies of grieving for pain and loss in which people are encouraged to write out their feelings of pain and then offer them to God in prayer as their notes are burned and then buried in ashes.¹⁴⁵ Good times to offer this kind of service during the church year are All Saints and Advent when people are focused on missing their lost loved ones. Some churches call their grief service before Christmas a “Blue Christmas.” The service focuses on prayers, soft music, and wrapping grieving persons in homemade prayer shawls.¹⁴⁶ These special types of services that focus on people’s pain allow them to find meaning in life through their worship and expectations of God’s presence with them. The symbols used help the person to visualize and touch God’s healing. The person is actively finding means to cope with his pain which helps his self-esteem.

Guidance in Personal Techniques

Images are found everywhere in the stories, parables, and metaphors of the Bible. These images can help people in pain express their faith in profound ways. Many people find private prayer to be difficult—not knowing the words to say. The caregiver can remind people that the Spirit prays on their behalf.¹⁴⁷ “Prayer can be as simple a matter as breathing in and out while concentrating on a single religious image or phrase like *Jesus is my Good Shepherd*. Rather than thinking or talking, prayer is more a matter of sensing, loving, and intuiting. Imagery is then a

¹⁴³ David Christian with John Eckrich and Arden Mead. *Moments of Grace: Hymns, Worship Services and Mediations for Caring and Healing Ministries* (St. Louis: Creative Communications, 2002) 2, 60-61.

¹⁴⁴ James 5:13-18.

¹⁴⁵ Henry Close, “A Ceremony for Grieving” *The Journal of Pastoral Care & Counseling* 56:1 (Spring 2002), 63-68.

¹⁴⁶ Lisa Cromwell, “Forest Grove ‘Blue Christmas’ service to help lessen seasonal sadness” *The Hillsboro Argus*. [cited December 15, 2005] www.hillsboroargus.com. INTERNET.

resource for prayer that the Christian can learn to cultivate.”¹⁴⁸ Meditating on who God is and what he means to our lives may quiet the questioning soul.

Images can also be used in guided imagery where the caregiver leads the person in pain on a healing journey, asking the person to imagine with him or her. One portion of a guided imagery for people in chronic pain follows:

Imagine yourself in some public place, perhaps in church or out on the street, your disability obvious to everyone around you. Jesus passes by this place. One of the people who has been staring at you stops Jesus, points at you, and asks him a question. Though you can't hear the question, you know it's about you and your disability. Without answering the question, Jesus comes directly to you. Imagine him approaching you now. Look into his face. Let his eyes meet yours. What do you see there? What do you need most from him? What do you expect from Him? Ask Jesus anything you want about your disability . . . why you have it . . . what it says about you . . . how you're coping with it. After you've asked Jesus what you wish to ask him about your disability, listen carefully to what he has to say to you about that disability.¹⁴⁹

Journaling is another way in which people can find healing. Sufferers can be encouraged to write out their own laments to share or not with their community. Or they can simply write down their feelings. An example is found in one woman's journey through cancer in her letters, journal notes, and poems shared with a pastor. One entry states:

I stumbled and hit my head against the wall. (I am back in the hospital.) “I don't want to die like this!” I cried out to the empty room. “How *do* you want to die, Dona?” a calm voice asked. I turned around. Pastor Bob was sitting in the big chair. “Neat. I want to die *neat*,” I said. We both smiled, and he was gone. I know I imagined him there—yet panic was no longer in charge of me, so I took it as a comfort from God.¹⁵⁰

Writing can be therapeutic on multiple levels. Writing about one's pain can be a means of working through the pain, allowing the person to distance herself from it.¹⁵¹ Mediation, imaging,

¹⁴⁷ Romans 8:27.

¹⁴⁸ Thomas Droege, *The Faith Factor in Healing* (Philadelphia: Trinity Press, 1991), 109-110.

¹⁴⁹ Thomas Droege, *The Healing Presence* (San Francisco: Harper, 1992), 43.

¹⁵⁰ Dona Hoffman, *Yes, Lord* (St. Louis: Stephen Ministries, 2003), 46.

and journaling are all ways to relax the body and depending on the particular goal of the person may help her to embrace her pain or find a short escape from it.

Pastoral and Lay Caring Ministry

Part of good caregiving on the part of caregivers is reflecting on their own pain and understanding themselves well in order to follow the admonition of St. Paul in 2 Corinthians.¹⁵²

Chaplain Jason Cusick shares his reflection on an experience of pain, saying:

I wish I could say that I was quite spiritual as I went through my pain, but I wasn't. I didn't pray so much as I simply repeatedly groaned, "Oh God." I felt like I was being punished for my sins. I cried and made all kinds of weird bargains with God. All the things I guide my patients away from in their pain, I did. My mind was filled with recollection of patients. . . I felt their pain and could do nothing but cry out with them and wait.¹⁵³

According to Richard Eyer, hospital chaplain, there are five skills that can be taught to aid the caregiver in ministry. The first, *nurturing intimacy*, is modeling love as a commitment to care that expresses God's care. By refusing to offer answers but instead feeling vulnerable with the person in pain, the caregiver shares God's loving presence. The second, *encouraging complaint*, is helping the sufferer bring her complaints before God just as Job did. The third, *helping to tell a story*, guides her in telling the story of her life from God creating her (birth) to the promise of eternal life (death) so that it has meaning. The fourth, *sharing suffering*, allows her to see God through the caregiver's bearing of sorrow, interpreting her relationship with God to know that God is for her. The fifth, *comforting*, is not meant to make the person feel better but to bring to voice acceptance and forgiveness at the appropriate time, being careful not to

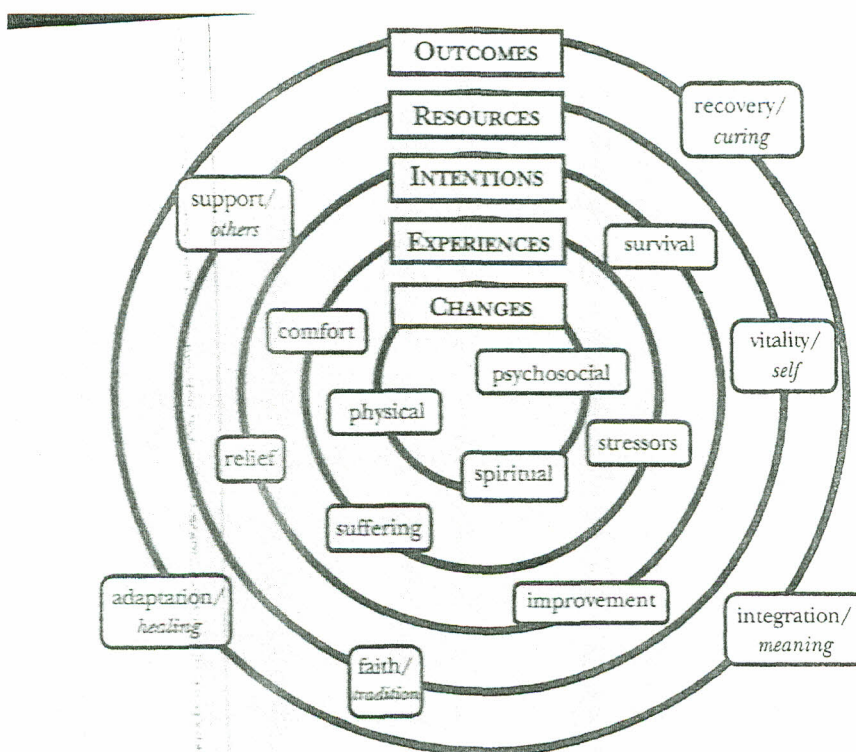
¹⁵¹ Jim W Hickey, "Writing through the Pain," *The Journal of Pastoral Counseling* vol. XXXIV (1999), 117.

¹⁵² 2 Corinthians 1:3-7.

¹⁵³ Jason Cusick, "Four Days in the School of Pain," *The Journal of Pastoral Care* 54:2 (summer 2000) 201.

diminish her pain or her confession.¹⁵⁴ One tool for this kind of teaching is through study of a book like *Don't Sing Songs to a Heavy Heart*.¹⁵⁵ A study guide for this book is provided in the appendix.

Another pastoral approach to helping congregation members with pain management is described by Timothy Ledbetter. Based on a medical model of caring for the whole person, the caregiver becomes part of the pain management team by helping in five areas: changes, experiences, intentions, resources, and outcomes.



5Triads © Timothy J. Ledbetter, BCC, 10/99

Figure 6. Ledbetter's Five Triads of Pastoral Perspective.¹⁵⁶

¹⁵⁴ Eyer, 71-76.

¹⁵⁵ Kenneth Haugk, *Don't Sing Songs to a Heavy Heart: How to Relate to Those Who Are Suffering* (St. Louis: Stephen Ministries, 2004).

The caregiver acknowledges that *change* has occurred in the sufferer's life causing him to report feelings of pain. Validating the feelings of pain helps the one in pain. The caregiver's special role is to help the person in his struggle with the goodness of God. People *experience* pain as suffering which is often commingled with depression, anxiety, and fear. The caregiver's role is to help him find meaning often through previously hidden gifts of tolerance, community, and opportunity. *Intentions* in responding to pain include most commonly seeking relief, survival, and improvement. The caregiver can help the sufferer seek relief through making her aware of new pain treatments and most importantly through worship and God's Word. The caregiver can become a valuable library of *resources* to help the sufferer and find mediation/advocacy when needed. Support of faith can be given through blessing, prayer, meditation, and sacraments. Support in the area of pain management can also be part of the referral process by helping the receiver of care become aware of the various interventions possible for both physical and psychological pain. Progress toward adaptation or healing *outcomes* is possible as change is recognized and a new future is visualized.¹⁵⁷

There are four particular temptations that face the person in pain. The person may feel abandoned by God and act in ways that encourage people to abandon him as well. He may feel tempted to give up and give in to the pain, crawling into a shell of painful existence. He may be tempted to expect physicians and others to be perfect. He may also be tempted to allow the pain to overwhelm his life and become its god. The caregiver, knowing these temptations, becomes the comrade in arms of the sufferer in struggling against them. Care giver and care receiver pray

¹⁵⁶ Timothy Ledbetter, "A Pastoral Perspective on Pain Management" *The Journal of Pastoral Care & Counseling*, 556:4 (winter 2001), 380.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 381-387.

together offering up to God annoying situations that increase pain and allowing God to help with the stresses of life.¹⁵⁸

A complete program for training caregivers in one-to-one lay ministry is available through Stephen Ministries. The Stephen Series provides congregations with the structure, training, and resources to set up and administer a complete system for lay caring ministry (called Stephen Ministry) in the congregation. Stephen Minister helps pastors and congregations provide quality caring ministry for as long as people need it.¹⁵⁹

Mourning is a particular kind of pain where the Christian caregiver can bring special comfort. Remembering a person throughout the first year following a loss and not just through the time of the funeral is an important gift to the grieving person. One tool that can be used is *Journeying through Grief*, which is a set of four books given one at a time at three weeks, three months, six months, and eleven months following the loss. These books highlight the feelings often experienced by grieverers at those particular times and can also help the caregiver to know what to listen for.¹⁶⁰ Mourning a loss recognizes the end of future stories that involve the lost person (or abilities) in our lives. The mourning process helps the person to rewrite his or her future in a way that can peacefully move on in the absence of the lost one.¹⁶¹ As people spiral through the stages of suffering or grief they are helped emotionally and spiritually to know that they are not alone and that the honest expressions of their pain are acceptable.

¹⁵⁸ Oates, 120-126.

¹⁵⁹ Stephen Ministry. *The Stephen Series: One-to-One Christian Caregiving*. [cited 26 December 2005], available from www.stephenministries.org/Stephen_Series/Learn_More/what_it_is.cfm; INTERNET.

¹⁶⁰ Kenneth Haugk, *Journeying through Grief* (St. Louis: Stephen Ministries, 2004).

¹⁶¹ Rosa Matthew, "Responding to Suffering: A Review of Robert Wicks' *Companion in Hope*" *The Journal of Pastoral Counseling* vol. XXXIII (1998) as found in Robert J Wicks, *Companions in Hope: the Art of Christian Caring* (Mahway: Paulist Press, 1998).

Addressing Pain in the Church's Community

In a study of over 500 life stories of disabled people, the disabled shared three common experiences with how the church related to them. The first experience was that the church treated them as objects of good works instead of people. The church worked for them but not with them. The second experience was that they were “preached at” and told their crisis was a privilege, and that they should be consoled with thoughts of the next life. When preaching at the sufferers the church passes over their pain. The third experience was of pastors playing official roles who never reached out to them with a willingness to suffer with them.¹⁶² A friend wrote to Philip Yancey about working with a woman in desperate straits who, when he suggested she seek help at her local church, said, “Church! Why would I ever go there? I was already feeling terrible about myself. They’d just make me feel worse.”¹⁶³ Churches can change these perceptions by listening to those in pain within their larger communities instead of treating them like objects.

Congregations often focus their attention primarily within their church membership. One challenge for the Christian community is to assess the needs not only within their membership but within their neighborhood and larger community. The church can choose to reach out to its neighbors in pain by assessing needs and helping people to find the resources and support that will bring them the love of Christ. Resources to assist LCMS congregations in healing ministries are available through LCMS World Relief and Human Care.¹⁶⁴ Parish nurses and deaconesses are specially trained to lead programs for the larger community as well as within the congregation.¹⁶⁵

¹⁶² Erika Schuckhardt, *Why Is This Happening to Me? Guidance and Hope for Those Who Suffer*. trans. Karen Luebe (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1989), 16-17.

¹⁶³ Yancey, Philip, *What's So Amazing About Grace?* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1997), 11.

¹⁶⁴ Contact Rev. Carlos Hernandez at carolos.hernandez@lcms.org for information about the “Planting Gospel Seeds: While Serving Human Needs” project.

¹⁶⁵ Resources from LCMS World Relief and Human Care may be viewed at www.lcms.org>LCMS World Relief and Human Care > Programs and Projects > Domestic Ministry > Health & Wellness > Health Ministry Resources

Congregations may choose to put together a Community Resource Binder of places who offer varying treatments for pain from physical to psychological. Resources should be researched or recommended by a member who has used their services. Being aware of the treatments discussed in chapter 2 will be beneficial to gathering resources to provide people.

Small Group Ministry

A vibrant small group ministry where group leaders are trained to reach out to people with the love of Christ is another way for a church to reach out to its neighborhood. In the ChristCare program¹⁶⁶ of small group leader training, leaders are intentionally taught to embody God's grace with their group members. They embody God's grace to members in pain through staying connected with God through study of his Word and prayer. They also are trained to create a safe place where people can share without being judged yet be challenged to change in response to God's grace at the appropriate time.¹⁶⁷ Small groups very intentionally create a community of support around people in pain so that they can find meaning and are able to communicate their feelings in a safe place.

¹⁶⁶ ChristCare is a small group training ministry system of Stephen Ministries. Information about ChristCare can be found at www.stephenministries.org.

¹⁶⁷ David Paap, "Gospel-Centered Caring." ChristCare *ETC Packet of Presentation Outlines*. St. Louis: Stephen Ministries, 1999.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

*Suffering people should be able to feel and express their pain without shame.*¹⁶⁸

Current pain theories in the medical and psychological communities emphasize the complicated and diverse nature of pain and how it is experienced as suffering. The theories seek to map pathways between the presenting site of pain, the nervous system, and the brain. People's experiences of pain as suffering are highly individual and so an eclectic approach to discovering what may work in terms of treating pain is warranted. Suffering is not simply a matter of finding physical relief but is tied to people's psychological and spiritual experience of life. The pastoral staff of a congregation will find it helpful to have a knowledge of current pain theories and treatment practices as they minister to the spiritual needs of those dealing with chronic pain.

Chronic suffering invokes "loss of meaning in life" issues for many people. People believe they are in control of their lives and that their lives have value. When life's value is lost, people often seek ways to recover its meaning through a variety of means. For Christians the meaning of life is found by their relationship with the Triune God.

Individual Christians struggle with their relationship with God while experiencing pain. Throughout history the people of God have found comfort and meaning through diverse understandings of the biblical record which itself presents a varied witness including the following: God uses pain to teach his people faithfulness; God brings relief when outside evildoers cause pain; God brings healing when sickness overcomes a person. In the New Testament, pain is specifically tied to the suffering of Christ and the Christians' participation in

¹⁶⁸ Kenneth Haugk, "Helping the Hurting Without Hurting while Helping How to Relate to Those Who Are Suffering," speech delivered at the 2005 Theological Symposium, Concordia Seminary, September 21, 2005.

that suffering as a witness to the world. Does God cause pain or is pain simply a result of sin in the world, and how and when does God choose to relieve our pain? Christians will first listen to the sufferer and then help the sufferer to find comfort in the cross of Christ and His presence. Jesus is present with the sufferer through his Word and through his people in their daily lives. The ultimate hope of their resurrection with Jesus stands as a final source of comfort. No matter how Christians find individual comfort in their relationship with their Savior, the role of the Christian community as a witness becomes the key to sharing God's love with both its members and the world.

It is good for a local congregation to evaluate where it is in terms of caring ministry to those in pain. Looking back at Figure 4: "The Continuum of Care," (page 48) some helpful questions would be:

- What are the congregation's goals for caring ministry?
- Is there a means for listening to our members when they are in pain to find out how we can be of help?
- What are the methods we currently use to meet the physical needs of those in pain? (food, household duties, rides, etc.)
- What are the methods we currently use to meet the spiritual needs of those in pain? (hospital visitation, home visitation, healing services, etc.)
- Is there training for our lay people so that they are equipped to help in these ministries?
- What are the needs most often expressed by our members?

Based on the answers to these questions the following can be asked: What areas need improvement or what new ministries do we want to provide? What will our plan be to implement the improvements or new ministries, and how will we evaluate our progress?

Dallas Willard wrote, "Meaning is not a luxury for us. It is a kind of spiritual oxygen, we might say, that enables our souls to live."¹⁶⁹ For the Christian, meaning is found in Jesus Christ who helps us to live with and to transcend our current state of pain and to dwell in his peace in the community of believers.

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God. For just as the sufferings of Christ flow over into our lives, so also through Christ our comfort overflows.¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁹ Dallas Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy: Rediscovering Our Hidden Life in God* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1998), 386.

¹⁷⁰ 2 Corinthians 1:3-5.

APPENDIX ONE

STUDY GUIDE FOR DON'T SING SONGS TO A HEAVY HEART

Church people often assume that caring for people comes naturally to them. In our culture we easily ask, “How are you?” The problem is that we expect people to say “Fine,” and we often don’t know what to do or say when they are actually honest and tell us. Asking someone who is obviously in pain, “How are you?” can easily elicit the response (more often thought and not spoken), “How do you think I’m feeling? I’m in pain.” Professional church staff can make it a priority for a congregation to be a caring place, but that means that people must be taught how to be caring. *Don’t Sing Songs to a Heavy Heart* by Ken Haugk is one resource for doing just that. What follows is a study guide for use with *Don’t Sing Songs*.¹

Instructions for the Group Leader

The lessons assume a teaching time of 90 minutes. Depending on the time allowed for your class, you may choose to discuss only some of the questions. You may also choose between the experiential learning exercise and the script practice. The script practices include some scripts with blank responses to the care receiver’s statements and some scripts with filled in responses to the care receiver’s statement. The filled in responses are often negative examples based on the theme of the chapter. These responses should serve as fodder for a good discussion on how to improve the dialogue in order to care better for the person in pain.

¹ Kenneth Haugk, *Don’t Sing Songs to a Heavy Heart: How to Relate to Those Who Are Suffering*. St. Louis: Stephen Ministries, 2004.

Introduction and Chapter 1: The Call to Care

Goals

Get to know the members of the class

Realize you are not alone in feeling uncomfortable around those who are suffering

Accept the responsibility to learn new caregiving skills

Recognize which areas in ministering to the suffering are most difficult for yourself

Opening Prayer

Dear Jesus you suffered to save us from our sins. You know our suffering and the suffering of our friends and family. Send us your Spirit now to guide us as we learn to care for each other with the care that you share with us. Amen.

Icebreaker Activity

Think of the first time you remember being sad or scared in grade school. Share why you felt sad and if anyone helped you.

Introduction

Both experiencing pain and caring for those in pain is part of our common human experience. Many songs, especially of the country western or blues variety speak to the pain of lost love and other losses with the hope that the song will cheer or comfort the singer. Neil

Diamond popularized a song whose first verse says:

Song sung blue, everybody knows one;
Song sung blue, every garden grows one;
Me and you are subject to the blues now and then;
But when you take the blues and make a song;
You sing them out again;

You sing 'em out again.¹

The song moves the singer to “sing out” the blues he is feeling so he can be happy again. Music touches human emotions and makes us laugh with joy or cry in sorrow. “Song, Sung Blues” moves from sadness to inner joy like many psalms begin in pain but end in hope. Psalm 69 is an example of this. Another example of joy and sadness being confused is when Jesus rebuked the Pharisees because they criticized Jesus when he was happy, and they criticized Jesus when he was sad. No loving care was shown to Jesus. The question for us becomes *what* is appropriate *when*. How can we share in the pain without moving too quickly to a hope or joy that our care receiver does not yet feel? We love the people before us yet everything we think to say seems to come out wrong. How can we show our care without hurting them? Philip Yancey writes:

And if I ever wonder about the appropriate “spiritual” response to pain and suffering, I can note how Jesus responded to his own: with fear and trembling, with loud cries and tears.²

Bible Study

Read Psalm 69 together. How does the psalmist move from pain to praise? How does the Psalm make you feel? How would it make you feel if you were in pain?

Discussion Questions

The Introduction relates the very personal journey of Ken Haugk’s wife with cancer. We each have stories related to pain in our own lives. Are our stories easy to share with others? What

1 Neil Diamond, “Song Sung Blue,” 1972. [cited 21 February 2005], available from www.seeklyrics.com/lyrics/Neil-Diamond/Song-Sung-Blue.html; INTERNET.

2 Phillip Yancey, *Disappointment with God* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1988), 125.

(continued next page)

makes it hard to share our stories?

When you feel sad, do you want to be cheered up? Give some examples.

Pages 15-16 talk about the “should” of Christians being happy. Is it a sin to be sad?

Look at the list of challenges on pages 16-17. Which challenges hit home for you? How do the challenges fit with how you see your personality?

Experiential Learning Exercises

Our book describes sadness and pain as a “heavy heart.” Brainstorm more pictures for what sadness and pain look like. Make a list of all the pictures the group has brainstormed. Pick out which picture is most meaningful to you and share what it means for you.

Scenario: Your brother has broken his leg and will be off work for several months. This will create hardship for his family. You just learned the news. Have two people role play a short conversation and then discuss it.

Script Practice for Alternate Scenario

Your care receiver lives in a nursing home. She is preparing for eye surgery and has pain in her hips:

CR 1: I’m so sore in my hips. Both sides now. They stick me every night with pain medication and it hurts so much. This one side hurts more than the other side.

CM1:

CR 2: Yes, it sure does hurt. They don’t like me to holler, but it hurts too much when they stick me and I have to.

CM2:

CR 3: I don’t know why they have to keep on sticking me. When it hurts they said they’d call the doctor. I don’t need no doctor. They’re the ones sticking me. And they keep giving me those eye drops so my eyes stay foggy. I want them to clear up so I can get my glasses. They said I’ll be getting glasses.

CM3:

CR 4: My Mom had eye surgery too. Three times. They did it the old way for her. For me, I stayed awake and put my head back and he popped the cataract out before I knew it.

CM4:

CR 5: They just popped it out. They didn't show me the cataract, but I know they got it out. And now I have these eye drops, and I still can't see clearly. And my hips hurt so bad.

CM5:

Closing Prayer

Heavenly Father, the creation declares your glory and your loving provision. Thank you for loving and caring for us so much to send your Son to save us. Teach us to love and provide care that helps our neighbor. Amen.

Chapter 2: A Biblical Understanding of Suffering

Goals

Become familiar with common biblical texts used with the suffering

Learn when and how to use them well.

Opening Prayer

Open our minds Lord to the influence of your blessed word, let your love shine through your words as we proclaim them to your beloved people. Amen

Icebreaker Activity

List five biblical characters who experienced suffering and tell how those around them reacted to their suffering.

Introduction

The children's Sunday School song "Zacchaeus" retells the story of one man's pain and hope:

Zacchaeus was a wee little man, a wee little man was he.
He climbed up in the sycamore tree, for the Lord he wanted to see.
And when the Savior passed that way,
He looked up in the tree, and said, "Zacchaeus,
You come down from there.
For I'm coming to your house today,
I'm coming to your house today."¹

¹ Traditional children's song.

Zacchaeus was wealthy but miserable and alone. The Lord's word of acknowledgment, calling Zacchaeus by name, and welcoming himself into his home brought hope and healing. As we enter into the homes of suffering care receivers, we want to bring them also the Lord's acknowledgment of calling them by name, welcoming, hope, and healing. The key is how to do that with sensitivity to the suffering so that the expression of both pain and hope can be real. In *Christ and the End of Meaning* Paul Hessert writes:

Passion has to do with Jesus rejecting the customary ways people have of blunting the reality of suffering through comforting thoughts such as, "Everything will work out in the long run." . . . Passion is refusing to take refuge in the make believe.²

We will discuss Romans 8:28 in a minute, but the question needs to be asked, "When will everything work out?" in light of Paul saying that we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him.

Bible Study/Discussion Questions

Break up into groups of four people and ask one person to be secretary. Divide the verses according to the number of groups you have. Allow 15 minutes. Following the exercise, invite one person from each group to share his or her discoveries.

For each Bible verse:

1. Tell what it says in your own words.
2. Tell how the verse can be used in a harmful way.
3. Tell how to use the verse in a good way.

² Paul Hessert. *Christ and the End of Meaning: The Theology of Passion* (Rockport, Mass: Element, 1993), 95-96.

Romans 8:17-18, 22, 28
2 Corinthians 12:1-10
Revelation 21:4-5
Psalm 23
2 Corinthians 1:3-5
1 John 4:12
Romans 12:5, 15
Philippians 3:10-11

Experiential Learning Exercises

Choose one of your favorite verses of comfort when you are suffering. How would you illustrate the verse if you were to draw a picture of it?

Scenario: Your care receiver's battle with cancer has taken a turn for the worse, and she feels worn out from the battle. You are visiting her after one more piece of bad news. Have two people role play a short conversation and then discuss it.

Script Practice for Alternate Scenario

Your care receiver often cries in your presence and is very sad after both her husband and her sister's deaths.

CR1: I'm glad you came to visit.

CM1:

CR 2: I hurt so much.

CM2:

CR 3: I'm sorry to cry so much. I don't feel like doing much of anything anymore.

CM3:

CR 4: My little sister visits every other day and we eat together. She wants me to come to church with her. I don't know if I want to do that.

CM4:

CR 5: God has left me all alone.

CM5:

Closing Prayer

Dear Lord, thank you for never leaving us alone. Send us your Spirit as a guide into the

Scriptures. Help us to learn them well, and be able to share them with others in the right time and place so that they can know your love.

Chapter 3: A Guest in a Holy Place

Goals

To recognize each suffering person as unique

To learn to accept suffering people where they are at, and not bring our own agendas

Opening Prayer

Dear Jesus, who has suffered all things for us, guide us as we enter the special places of the suffering. Teach us how to understand and empathize with those who suffer, to know them as you know us. Amen.

Icebreaker Activity

Tell the group about a place that is special and holy to you. What makes it holy? What makes it special?

Introduction

There is popular Christian song called "Holy Ground" by Geron Davis. It goes like this:

This is holy ground ---- We're standing on holy ground,
For the Lord is present and where He is is holy.
This is holy ground ---- We're standing on holy ground,
For the Lord is present and where He is is holy.³

³ Geron Davis "Holy Ground," Meadowgreen Music Company/Songchannel Music, 1983, [cited 21 February 2005], available from www.homestead.com/deehymn/holyground-~ie4.html; INTERNET.

Holy ground. The song says that God's presence makes a place holy ground—which, in one sense, can mean the whole earth. So what makes a place especially holy? (being set aside or consecrated as a holy place like a church, being in the presence of two or three gathered in his name—as Jesus said in Matthew 18:20)

When you enter into the place where a person is suffering, Jesus is there present with the sufferer, and you are called into caring, and so it becomes a holy place. Jeff Means writes in *Trauma & Evil*:

The incarnation is an act of profound love. God taking on human form, we are shown how far God is willing to go to relate to us and to help us. This makes the incarnation the supreme model of empathy. God's willingness, in the form of Jesus Christ, to be affected by human life points to the importance of being willing to be affected and changed by those we seek to help.⁴

Are we willing to follow Jesus' example and in the holy places of pain be truly empathic without over-identifying and so becoming unable to help?

Bible Study

Read Exodus 3. God called Moses out of the burning bush and said "Do not come any closer, take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground." (Exodus 3:5) Places called holy ground come with expectations. Discuss what happened with Moses in Exodus 3. Talk about the expectations to learn of God's will, the expectations to serve God, and God's gift of being empowered by the Spirit.

4 J. Jeffrey Means. *Trauma & Evil: Healing the Wounded Soul* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 172.

Discussion Questions

What are some rules of courtesy we follow when we visit someone in his or her home?

How can these apply to visiting someone in pain? (35-36)

Can or should we compare the “depths” of suffering and a person’s ability to “get over it.”

(40-41)

What are some things from a person’s past and present that affect how a person handles his or her suffering? (whole chapter)

As a caregiver, how you can help a person locate resources that would be helpful to him or her in the present?

Experiential Learning Exercises

Think about the last time you had a cold or the flu, and you wanted to get over it. What were resources that were helpful to you? What were resources that were not helpful?

Scenario: Your care receiver must have heart surgery and then, assuming the surgery goes well, go on a special restricted diet plan and exercise for the rest of his/her life. He/she seems bitter and angry about what is happening. You want him/her to be thankful for this new lease on life. Have two people role play a short conversation and then discuss it.

Script Practice for Alternate Scenario

The care receiver is in a nursing home and does not leave her room much. She has a cast on one leg. She doesn’t talk with people and stays to herself. The caregiver wants to help her to socialize more.

CR1: I’m okay I guess, my leg is full of fever in this cast. Put your hand on it and you can feel the fever.

CM1:

CR2: You can never track down the doctor. I don't know what he thinks. I'm anxious to get the cast off. It's good to know my neighbor is looking after my house.

CM2:

CR3: I just sit here. I don't like to talk to anybody. I just want to go home.

CM3:

CR4: I just like to stay by myself.

CM4:

Closing Prayer

Dear Lord Jesus, thank you for your promise to be present where two or three are gathered. Help us to recognize the holy places that exist when we meet each other in your name. Send your Spirit to guide our words and actions so that they respect the uniqueness of each of your loved ones. Amen.

Chapter 4: Who You Bring to the Relationship

Goals

Recognize our own feelings and fears as we relate to those in pain.

Know that Jesus is always present with us.

Rely on the power of the ministry of presence.

Learn to use our own pain in showing compassion to others.

Opening Prayer

Dear Father in heaven, you are holy and righteous and loving. Thank you for sending Jesus to be our savior. We are sinners Lord, quick to do wrong. We are saints Lord, eager to do your will. Help us know and understand ourselves so that we can better serve you. Amen.

Icebreaker Activity

Who are you? What would the top three adjectives be that you would use to describe yourself?

Introduction

The song "I Want to Walk as a Child of the Light" by Thomerson is one way to describe who we are as Christians who care:

I want to walk as a child of the light.
I want to follow Jesus.
God set the stars to give light to the world.
The star of my life is Jesus.
In him there is no darkness at all

The night and the day are both alike.
The lamb is the light of the city of God.
Shine in my heart, Lord Jesus.⁵

The light of Jesus' love shines through us as we meet people in pain. As we follow Jesus, Jesus leads us to the people who need to see his love through us. Henri Nouwen writes:

Making our own wounds a source of healing is not a matter of us finding ways to share our own personal pains, but rather involves a "constant willingness to see one's own pain and suffering as rising from the depth of the human condition which all men share."⁶

Part of ministry is knowing ourselves well, knowing our own pains—not to share them with the hurting individual but to gauge our own responses and provide the best care.

Bible Study

Read Ephesians 2:4-10. According to these verses, who are we and what does God empower us to do?

Discussion Questions

On page 44 the author relates the story of a nurse and patient. How does it make you feel to be able to bring God's love to another person?

When feeling anxious, fearful, and helpless in the presence of a person in pain, what can we do? (46-48)

⁵ Kathleen Thomerson "I want to walk as a child of the light," 1970. Music: Houston, [cited 21 February 2005], available from www.everything2.com/index.pl?node_id=1111965; INTERNET.

⁶ Henri Nouwen, *The Wounded Healer* (New York, Bantam Doubleday Dell, 1972), 88.

Experiential Learning Exercises

What are some ways in which you have been wounded that will help you to be compassionate to others in pain? How can we best use those wounds to help others?

Scenario: Your care receiver is a single mom with four children. She struggles with parenting problems on a daily basis. In this visit she tell you that her second grade son got into a fight at school. Have two people role play a short conversation and then discuss it.

Script Practice for Alternate Scenario

Your care receiver has had several strokes recently and is paralyzed on the left side. She goes to therapy and is working hard to learn to be able to care for herself.

CR1: You're here, I'm so glad you came to see me.

CM1:

CR2: I was walking on Monday. It was hard, but I did it.

CM2:

CR3: I've been feeling sick lately, and today they wouldn't let me go to therapy.

CM3:

CR4: I was sitting outside last night, and it got cold, and my husband couldn't hear when I called for him to bring me inside, so I got chilled.

CM4:

CR5: I don't understand why I got sick, when I was just starting to improve.

CM5:

CR6: I'd better rest now, thanks for coming to see me.

CM6:

Closing Prayer

Dear Lord Jesus, thank you for the gift of yourself in my life. As you shine through me with love to those I meet who are in pain, help me to recognize the pain in myself. Help me to be filled with compassion. Amen.

Chapter 5: What Do You Do After You Say Hello

Goals

Learn appropriate first words when visiting someone in pain

Learn appropriate responses of touch and silence

Opening Prayer

Dear Father, be present with us as we learn words and actions that can truly express your agape love to those in pain. Lord Jesus, bless us with the ability to think first of others. Spirit, guide our hearts and minds to remember what you would have us say and do.

Icebreaker Activity

What is your favorite topic to discuss with friends or co-workers and why?

Introduction

The Beatles sang:

You say yes, I say no,
You say stop, and I say go, go, go.
Oh no
You say Goodbye, and I say hello
Hello, hello,
I don't know why you say goodbye,
I say hello, hello, hello⁷

⁷ Lennon & McCartney "Hello Goodbye," Maclen Music Inc., 1967, [cited 21 February 2005], available from [www.lyricsfind.com/b/beatles/unkown-album/hello;-goodbye\(lennon-mccartney\).php](http://www.lyricsfind.com/b/beatles/unkown-album/hello;-goodbye(lennon-mccartney).php), INTERNET.

The Beatles are talking about people talking past each other. That often happens when visiting people who are suffering. We don't know what to say, and we say the opposite of what the person wants to hear. Immediately after saying hello, we often want to say goodbye. This chapter outlines several very practical things to say and do after we say hello so that we don't hurt the person we are visiting.

Proverbs 18:13 says, "He who answers before listening—that is his folly and his shame." On the top of page 57, Dr. Haugk talks about suffering people having lots of conflicting feelings. How does the proverb describe what might happen? How does listening fit in with agape love? (57)

Walter Wangerin in discussing a caregiver visiting a grieving individual writes:

... do not impose the script upon her, nor presume to know which act she's in without first reading her behavior. Always take your cues from her. By instinct *she* is leading in patience you are serving.⁸

Caregivers serve through listening and silence. Dr. Haugk talks about following the other person's lead on pages 56-57. Why is it important to follow the other person's lead?

Bible Study

Read Psalm 131. What are the attitudes and feelings of the Psalmist? How could these attitudes and feelings be helpful to us during caring visits? How important is it for you as a caregiver to put your hope in the Lord *now*.

⁸ Walter Wangerin, *Mourning into Dancing* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1992), 170.

Discussion Questions

What are the first three steps after you say “hello”? Discuss how these steps are helpful to people. (55)

How do we keep the focus of conversation on the person in pain? (57-58)

When is it helpful to share personal experiences/When is it not helpful? (58-61)

What are the dangers of sharing experiences of others? (61-63)

What can we do to make times of silence more bearable? (63-64)

Experiential Learning Exercises

Share about a time when you were ill and someone visited you. How did the conversation go?

Scenario: A friend has been in a diving accident and is now a paraplegic. This is the first time you will visit him in the hospital. Have two people role play a short conversation and then discuss it.

Script Practice for Alternate Scenario

Your care receiver has been in the nursing home since her stroke a few years ago. Her husband died and was her only family in town. Her room has none of the usual personal effects, cards, or notes. She is staring out the window. The full script is given. Review both sides of the conversation and suggest improvements to the CM responses.

CR1: (silence)

CM1: Hi, How are you today?

CR2: Okay.

CM2: You look like you're watching for someone.

CR3: No, I don't have anyone to watch for.

CM3: You're all by yourself.

CR4: Yes.

CM4: That's a pretty lonely feeling.

Closing Prayer

Dear Lord thank you for your example of love and caring. Bless us with your agape love that we may bless those who suffer with that same love. Amen.

Chapter 6: Cry, Feel Awful

Goals

Learn to let people cry in front of you.

Learn to cry yourself in front of others when appropriate.

Learn to share the hurt without over-identification.

Learn to be present when people are angry with God.

Opening Prayer

Dear Father in heaven, you wept for your people as a mother for her lost child. Dear Jesus, you cried for your friend Lazarus. Holy Spirit, you groan with us in our prayers. Teach us to cry and weep and so to heal. Amen.

Icebreaker Activity

What are some things that people do when a baby is crying?

Introduction

The gospel hymn “Precious Lord” speaks these words:

When my way grows drear, precious Lord, linger near,
When my life is almost gone,
Hear my cry, hear my call, hold my hand lest I fall.
Take my hand, precious Lord, Lead me home.⁹

⁹ Thomas A. Dorsey “Precious Lord,” *Words*: 1932. *Music*: Adapted by Thomas Dorsey from the tune “Maitland,” by George N. Allen (1812-1877), [cited 21 February 2005], available from www.cyberhymnal.org/htm/p/l/pltmhand.htm; INTERNET.

(continued next page)

The person in the hymn is near life's end. She or he is feeling sorrow and trust at the same time. When a person needs to cry, often the best thing to offer, besides Kleenex is a hand to hold his or her hand and if appropriate a tear. Jesus wept publicly at Lazareth's death. (John 11: 35). Yet we often feel like it's embarrassing to cry in front of other people. We don't want to make them feel embarrassed or awkward, and we don't want to feel that way ourselves.

Bible Study

In Psalm 137 the people of Israel are in exile. They have lost their homes and their loved ones. They feel abandoned by God. Yet in despair and anger they turn to God even asking for revenge.

By the rivers of Babylon we sat and wept when we remembered Zion.
There on the poplars we hung our harps,
for there our captors asked us for songs, our tormentors demanded songs of joy;
they said, "Sing us one of the songs of Zion!"

How can we sing the songs of the LORD while in a foreign land?
If I forget you, O Jerusalem, may my right hand forget its skill.
May my tongue cling to the roof of my mouth if I do not remember you,
if I do not consider Jerusalem my highest joy.

Remember, O LORD, what the Edomites did on the day Jerusalem fell.
"Tear it down," they cried, "tear it down to its foundations!"
O Daughter of Babylon, doomed to destruction, happy is he who repays you
for what you have done to us- he who seizes your infants
and dashes them against the rocks.

What would be a caring response to the words of this psalm? Dr. Haugk quotes Philip Yancey who wrote, "One bold message in the book of Job is that you can say anything to God."

Throw at him your grief, your anger, your doubt, your bitterness, your betrayal, your disappointment—he can absorb them all.”¹⁰

Discussion Questions

Why do people say, “Don’t cry” to people?

What are good ways to validate another person’s feelings?

How can we share the hurt without over-identifying?

Hebrews 13:3 talks about identifying with prisoners. (70) Can you identify with someone if you’ve never experienced what he or she is going through?

What are the two pitfalls mentioned on page 76 and how can we avoid them?

Experiential Learning Exercises

When was the last time you cried? Do you ever cry in public? How do you feel when you cry in public/in private?

Scenario: The care receiver’s wife/husband died 3 weeks ago. This will be the second caring visit you have made with the care receiver. He/she seems very frustrated in general and give curt responses to your questions and comments. You sense he/she may be angry with God. Have two people role play a short conversation and then discuss it.

Script Practice for Alternate Scenario

The care receiver is in a lot of pain everywhere, and it is overwhelming for her. The full

¹⁰ Philip Yancey, *Disappointment with God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1988), 235.

script is given. Review both sides of the conversation and suggest improvements to the CM responses.

CR1: I'm hurting.

CM1: Is it your leg?

CR2: It's my hip. It hurts and so does my ankle and my arm.

CM2: Oh, you have hurts all over.

CR3: Yes, and it's so bad.

CM3: You're suffering a lot.

CR4: I wish I could go, I wish God would take me.

CM4: It hurt's that much, You've been through a lot lately.

CR5: I just wish I could go, no one can help me. (She begins to cry.)

CM5: Would you like me to get some Kleenex?

Closing Prayer

Lord, you have promised always to be with us. Thank you for caring. Thank you for loving us even when we don't understand—even when we are angry. Help us not to fear the tears and anger felt by others or ourselves but to bring them trustingly into your presence. Amen.

Chapter 7: Wishing Hurts Away, Don't You Wish

Goals

How not to set goals: develop process vs. results thinking.

Learn to ask what the care receiver's agenda is and then follow along.

Let God be the cure-giver.

Opening Prayer

Father in heaven, you care for your creation. Jesus our Lord and Savior, you care for the needs of your people. Holy Spirit, you comfort the people of God. Bless us with wisdom to care for the hurting and leave the healing to you.

Icebreaker Activity

Share about a time when something was broken and you tried (successfully or unsuccessfully) to fix it.

Introduction

The African American song "Lift Every Voice and Sing" includes the following verse:

We have come over a way that with tears has been watered;
We have come, treading our path through the blood of the slaughtered,
Out from the gloom-y past, till now we stand at last

Where the white gleam of our bright star is cast.¹¹

This song was written to express the pain of slavery and racism—a pain which for many African Americans continues today. Yet the song expresses a wish for the pain to go away—to reach the “other side” where the pain is no more. This is the wish of all people—for pain to go away.

Bible Study

In the book of Job, Job’s three friends try to convince Job that he must have sinned, and all he needs to do is figure out what it was and ask God for forgiveness. Then God will heal him. He’ll be all fixed. Read Job 19. 1-29. Where is Job coming from? What is Job’s agenda? What is Job’s wish?

Discussion Questions

When people are hurting, what wishes do we have from them?

Dr. Haugk mentions that we should “fix things, but relate to people.” (81) How can this be helpful to us when we are with someone in pain?

How does not having to have an agenda take some of the pressure off? How does not having an agenda put some pressure on?

Read Matthew 7:24-27. How does the story of the two kinds of builders fit in with our discussion of goals and fixing things?

¹¹ James W. Johnson “Lift Every Voice and Sing,” *Music*: John R. Johnson, 1899, [cited 21 February 2005], available from www.africanamericans.com/NegroNationalAnthem.htm; INTERNET.

Experiential Learning Exercises

Are you a person who likes to fix things or who likes to let others fix them? In a recent caring situation what are some “fixes” you had to try?

Scenario: John has been caring for his elderly father in his own home for several years. As his father needs more care, John has been going out less and less with friends. He’s feeling overwhelmed. Have two people role play a short conversation and then discuss it.

Script Practice for Alternate Scenario

The care receiver is elderly and blind. He’s been in a nursing home several years and receives few visitors. He doesn’t talk much with other residents and only participates in required activities. Review both sides of the conversation and suggest improvements to the CM responses.

The following lines occur in the middle of a visit to his room:

CR1: I could tell you a lot of stories. Course I don’t get away from here as much as I used to since I’ve been blind.

CM1: Can you see at all? I mean, can you tell light and darkness?

CR2: Hell, no. I’d just as soon sleep with my eyes open. Besides, I don’t require much sleep. Always been that way.

CM2: I hope you’ve been getting enough sleep. Although I never hear you complain about it, a person doesn’t feel up to par without enough rest.

CR3: I don’t really get that tired. I just go from here to the sunroom in the daytime and come back here at night.

CM3: By the way, how long have you been blind, has it been just recently or quite a few years?

CR4: Oh about 15 years, but I’ve always had trouble with my eyes, and the doctors could never help.

CM4: That must be tough to live with.

CR5: Yes, but I manage. My dad died when he was only 41 of consumption, and here I still am at 77. I’m one of 14 kids. Only three of us are left.

CM5: Well, it looks like they’re ready to turn out the lights, I’ll have to go. Maybe we can talk more next time I visit. Goodnight.

Closing Prayer

Lord, bless us with patience to care and follow the leading of our care receivers. Amen

Chapter 8: For Better or for Worse

Goals

Use helpful not hurtful caring actions right from the start of a visit or relationship.

Learn helpful things to do for six caring actions: sending cards and notes, making phone calls, asking questions, using humor, sharing reading materials, assuring people of God's love.

Opening Prayer

Beloved Father, who acted in creation to lovingly make us, Dearest Jesus, who acted by suffering and dying for our salvation, Loving Spirit, who teaches us to remember all things needed, be with us as we study how our actions can be guided by the advice of those who have been in pain. Amen.

Icebreaker Activity

How do the members of some of our church groups express care for each other? How does the church as a whole act to show care for its members?

Introduction

In the song "Bridge Over Troubled Waters" Simon and Garfunkel wrote:

When you're weary, feeling small,
When tears are in your eyes, I will dry them all;
I'm on your side. When times get rough
And friends just can't be found,
Like a bridge over troubled water
I will lay me down.

When you're down and out,
When you're on the street,

When evening falls so hard
I will comfort you.
I'll take your part
When darkness comes
And pain is all around,
Like a bridge over troubled water
I will lay me down.¹²

What are the actions that this friend is willing to do? (dry tears, stay on his/her side, be a bridge over troubled waters to safety on the other side, give comfort) Saying you will stick by someone and actually doing it are two different things. How could you demonstrate that you are sticking by a friend who is in pain?

Bible Study

Read 2 Kings 20:1-11. Hezekiah is dying. What does he feel, and what does he do? What does Isaiah do first? Then after Hezekiah prays, what does Isaiah do? How is this similar to what we would do in a caring relationship? How is it different?

Discussion Questions

Make a chart on the white/chalk board including rows for each of the six topics below and columns for the following two headings : What should we do? What shouldn't we do?

Sending cards and notes
Making phone calls
Asking questions
Using humor
Sharing reading materials
Assuring people of God's love

¹² Simon & Garfunkel "Bridge Over Troubled Waters," Columbia Records, 1972. [cited 21 February 2005]. available from www.lyricsxp.com/lyrics/b/bridge_over_troubled_water_simon_and_garfunkle.html; INTERNET.

Ask everyone to help fill in the chart one topic at a time.

Experiential Learning Exercises

Share an experience you have had when you've done one of the actions described in this chapter to show care to someone in pain.

Scenario: Mary is having a spiritual crisis and doubts that God could still love her. She feels like God is angry at her for some recent things she has done. She feels that everything in her life is going wrong right now because God is angry with her. Have two people role play a short conversation and then discuss it.

Script Practice for Alternate Scenario

The care receiver has had surgery to remove a cancerous tumor and is now undergoing chemotherapy. She is in the hospital for more tests and is wearing a blue bonnet. Review both sides of the conversation and suggest improvements to the CM responses.

CR1: As you can see, I lost my hair and my lashes and all because of the chemotherapy.

CM1: I like your bonnet. It matches your eyes. It's been awhile since I've seen you. Are things going okay?

CR2: Oh, yes. I've had several treatments and everyone's been so nice. The pastor has been out to give my husband and me communion. All of our friends have sent plants and flowers until I have them coming out my ears. People have been over to the house and here in the hospital. It's been exhausting. I make little pot-holders and things so I'll have something to give them when they come. I've also made a dress and some other things.

CM2: Sounds like you've stayed really busy.

CR3: I try to, but sometimes it's hard. How are you?

CM3: Up to my eyeballs in work. The thing that keeps me going is the story of the Red Sea. How God doesn't open up a path for us, let us get half-way through and close the waters over us. He takes us all the way through whatever we have to do. That's a promise we need to claim.

CR4: That's the truth. If it weren't for my faith, I would have given up a long time ago. But I'm still fighting this.

CM4: How's it going for you? I heard the nurse say something about a CAT scan?

Closing Prayer

Dear Lord, lead our hearts and minds to do the do the right things, share the right information, provide the best care so that we can be your instruments of healing. Amen.

Chapter 9: Words that Hurt, Not Heal

Goals

Learn to think about the impact of our words before we say them.

Learn seven clichés that almost always hurt.

Determine alternative things to say when a cliché pops into mind.

Opening Prayer

Precious Father, you know our hearts and know what we need. Precious Lord, you spoke words of comfort to the ill. Precious Spirit, guide our words to bring healing not harm. Amen.

Icebreaker Activity

Share an experience where you said something that later—or even instantly—you knew was the wrong thing to say. How did the person you said it to feel? How did you feel?

Introduction

In the musical “Tommy,” Tommy is a blind, deaf, and mute boy who’s family and church do not understand how to care for him. In one scene, the minister sings:

I believe in love.
But how can men who’ve never seen
Light be enlightened?
Only if he’s cured
Will his spirit’s future level ever heighten.

And Tommy sings:

See me, feel me,

Touch me, heal me.
See me, feel me . . .
Touch me, heal me.¹³

All Tommy wants is to be touched and therefore to know love. Yet the people in his life never touch him except to hurt him. The minister's words hurt even though Tommy doesn't hear them. The words prevented the minister from reaching out to Tommy and touching him—from showing Jesus' love by action—not words.

Bible Study

Read 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18. Paul writes this letter to encourage the Thessalonians during a time of persecution. They are recent converts to the faith, and Paul did not get to spend much time with them. How could these admonitions of Paul be hurtful to someone in pain? How could they provide healing?

Read James 3:5-11. Why is controlling the tongue so hard? What help does James provide in understanding how to handle our words?

Discussion Questions

For each of the seven clichés discuss how people feel when they hear the cliché and brainstorm alternative things to say to replace the cliché:

“I know how you feel”
“It's for the best”
“Keep a stiff upper lip”

¹³ Des McAnuff and Peter Townshend “Tommy” The Musical: Premiere: Thursday, April 22, 1993, [cited 2 February 2005], available from www.libretto.musicals.ru/text.php?textid=355&language=1; INTERNET.

“At least . . .”

“You should/shouldn’t . . .”

“God doesn’t give you any more than you can handle”

“It’s God’s will”

Experiential Learning Exercises

Think back to the experiences shared at the beginning of the study. As humans we tend to rerun events in our heads wishing we had done things better. Discuss the experiences shared and think about alternative things that could have been said.

Scenario: Henry’s wife had died a few years ago while his children were teenagers. The family hung together, and Henry was a good supportive father. Now the last of his three children has gone off to college, and Henry is alone at home with no wife and no kids. Have two people role play a short conversation and then discuss it.

Script Practice for Alternate Scenario

The care receiver feels like everyone is hurting her and God is punishing her. She has been ill and depressed. Review both sides of the conversation and suggest improvements to the CM responses.

CR1: I want to get away from here. People here hurt me.

CM1 Do they say mean things to you?

CR2: They always push me around. Do this, do that. They want me to walk.

CM2: Have you been going to Physical Therapy?

CR3: They push too hard. I want out of here. You don’t know what it’s like.

CM3: You’re right. I don’t know what it’s like. Can you tell me?

CR4: They make me get up, they make me try to walk. It hurts too much.

CM4: You said you want to leave here. You’ll have to be walking to do that. Is the pain worth it?

CR5: I want to give up.

CM5: I’m sorry, you’re right, I haven’t experienced pain like that. Would you like to pray? Does prayer help with the pain?

CR6: No.

CM6: It sounds like you’re angry with God right now.

Closing Prayer

Lord, our tongues often get away from us. Thank you for helping us to control our tongues.
Guide our words so that we can bring your love and blessings to those we care for. Amen.

Chapter 10: Pink Thinking

Goals

Learn to exhibit appropriate hopeful thinking.

Learn specific ways of being encouraging without hurting the care receiver.

Opening Prayer

Dear Father, your gift of your Son brings us joy even in sorrow; Dear Jesus, who for the joy set before you endured the cross; Dear Spirit, who leaves us not in fear but gives us power, love, and self-discipline, teach us to discern where and when joy and hope can be a meaningful part of our caring for those in pain.

Icebreaker Activity

Think of a time when you were sad and someone tried to cheer you up. Did it work? Did you like being cheered up?

Introduction

Two songs come into my mind when I think of joy and celebration “Rejoice in the Lord Always” and “Celebration”:

Rejoice in the Lord Always
And again I say Rejoice
Rejoice in the Lord Always
And again I say Rejoice
Rejoice, Rejoice, and again I say Rejoice

Celebrate good times, come on! (Let's celebrate)
Celebrate good times, come on! (Let's celebrate)

There's a party goin' on right here
A celebration to last throughout the years
So bring your good times, and your laughter too
We gonna celebrate your party with you¹⁴

The upbeat music and words of both songs encourage everyone to join in and be happy. If you were sad, you would feel very out of place with everyone around you rejoicing. We can make our care receivers feel out of place as well if we try too hard to cheer them up.

Bible Study

Read Philippians 4: 4-7. Discuss what Paul says here. Paul encourages the Philippians and us to always pray with rejoicing and to bring everything to God in prayer so that we won't be anxious. Paul also reminds us to present our requests to God with thanksgiving. When we remember to ask God with thanksgiving, then peace will guard our hearts and minds. Praying with joy and thanksgiving while making requests is something we often forget to do. When we're in pain, all we think about is "help me" and our hearts and minds are definitely not peaceful. How could the words of these verses be appropriately used with a care receiver who is suffering?

¹⁴ Everything's Kool & The Gang "Celebrate Good Times" , Celebration, W B MUSIC CORP LOS ANGELES, 1980, [cited 21 February 2005], available from www.energyexpressband.com/lyrics/wedding%20lyrics%20celebration%20kool%20; INTERNET.

Discussion Questions

What are some of the reactions people in pain had to being cheered up in the book?

(pp.116-118)

What does “glossing over” someone’s pain mean? (pp. 118-119)

Denial is a normal stage of grief. It can be especially difficult, though, when the care receiver is no longer in denial but his or her caregivers are. If you recognize denial in yourself, what can you do?

What are ways we can let people know it’s okay to be weak? (pp. 120-122)

Who should initiate celebrations of both small and large victories? How do people in pain feel if people start celebrating when they can’t? (122-123)

Experiential Learning Exercises

Think of a time when you tried to cheer someone up. Describe what you did and how successful you were.

Scenario: A young recently married care receiver has discovered she and her husband are infertile. Regular infertility treatments haven’t been working, and she and her husband don’t believe it is morally right to use sperm or egg donations. The care giver mentions adoption as an alternative and becomes excited about sharing various organizations that can help. Have two people role play a short conversation and then discuss it.

Script Practice for Alternate Scenario

The care receiver is elderly and lives alone at home. She can’t get out and is dependent on people visiting her; few do. She does get a ride to a weekly bible study and to church. Review

both sides of the conversation and suggest improvements to the CM responses.

CR1: I haven't got any friends anymore. My friend doesn't like me any more.

CM1 Were you able to go to the bible class last night?

CR2: Yes, we had a good discussion. But my usual driver didn't come.

CM2: You sound like you have a sore throat.

CR3: Yes, I always feel weak nowadays and lonely. My care taker is ruining my hair with all the stuff she puts on it.

CM3: Could you ask her to use your own shampoo?

CR4: Yes, I suppose I could.

CM4: You really do look good today, and it is beautiful outside.

CR5: I don't feel good.

CM5 : I hope you feel better soon.

Closing Prayer

Lord, bless us with discernment to know when people don't want or need to be cheered up.

Help us to know the true joy of your salvation that touches us no matter how we feel.

Chapter 11: Creating a Safe Place

Goals

Learn to create a safe place for honest and open discussion concerning where the care receiver is at.

Learn to be process oriented instead of goal oriented.

Learn “heart responses” to replace “head responses.”

Opening Prayer

Dear Father, you made a wonderful world for us to live in, Dear Jesus, you through forgiveness you heal the spaces between people, Dear Spirit, you create a safe place in our hearts. Guide as we learn to create safe places through the power of your love.

Icebreaker Activity

Think about Sunday mornings when you greet the people you have not seen for a week. What happens when we ask “How are you?”

Introduction

“Jesus Loves Me” is a traditional song that most people think of fondly as they remember Sunday School experiences. It helps children to feel safe in Jesus’ arms.

The song originally appeared as a poem inside the novel, *Say and Seal*, by Anna and Susan Warner. In the book, the words are spoken to a dying child, and in that context, there is another stanza not commonly sung:

Jesus loves me! Loves me still,

Though I'm very weak and ill,
That I might from sin be free
Bled and died upon the tree.¹⁵

Jesus' love creates safe places even for the dying. Has anyone here experienced singing old favorite hymns with someone near death?

Bible Study

Read Psalm 63. How does the first verse describe the author's feelings? What changes in verse two? How is the Lord's love described? Verses 5-8 praise the Lord even though the person appears to be sick in bed—why? Verses 9-11 indicate a hope of destruction for the author's enemies. How do we respond when our care receivers tell us about their anger with other people?

Discussion Questions

What does "fine" really mean according to Dr. Haugk's friend and how can that help us in relating to people? (125)

When people are being pushed to "make progress" how can we be helpful? (127-129)

What are some good "heart responses?" Can you think of others? (130)

What is the difference between asking, "What do you think?" and "What do you feel?"

What is good body language for making a safe place? (130-131)

What are three ways to demonstrate acceptance of bad news? (133)

¹⁵ David Rutherford McGuire "Jesus Loves Me" *Words*: Stanzas 2-3, *Music*: William B. Bradbury, 1862, [cited 21 February 2005], available from www.gbgm.umc.org/umw/bible/lovesme.stm; INTERNET.

Experiential Learning Exercises

Share about a time when you were being pushed to do something you didn't want to do.

What did it feel like? How was the situation resolved?

Scenario: There has been a natural disaster, a tornado went through town, and you are assigned to give care to a mother of two grade school children who have lost their home. Have two people role play a short conversation and then discuss it.

Script Practice for Alternate Scenario

The care receiver has just come back from the hospital and is preparing to die. He is tired all the time. Review both sides of the conversation and suggest improvements to the CM responses.

CR1: Lord have mercy.

CM1: Are you in pain?

CR2: No, everything's all right.

CM2: You feel like everything is all right?

CR3: Yes, everything's all right, I'm just tired.

CM3: You're tired a lot now?

CR4: I like to rest here in bed. Sometimes they make me get up.

CM4: You just got back from the hospital, have you been getting better?

CR5: No, everything's all right. Lord have mercy.

CM5: The Lord will have mercy.

CR6: I just rest here.

CM6: You're just waiting.

Closing Prayer

Dear Lord, thank you for creating a safe place between us and God the Father. Help us to create safe places for all who meet. Amen.

Chapter 12: Simple and Profound and Epilogue: Out of the Fire

Goals

Learn seven specific helpful ways to show care.

Learn to be patient with yourself and the care receiver as you are present with him or her in his or her pain.

Opening Prayer

Dear Father, who gave us your son, Dear Jesus, who fed the hungry, Dear Spirit, who consoles the suffering. Teach us also to care in very specific clear ways and so demonstrate your care to those who you bring into our lives. Amen.

Icebreaker Activity

Share about a time when you “reminisced” with someone.

Introduction

Simple things can often be the most helpful and give the most glory to God even though in our society people think of “glorious” work as being something that puts you on TV and makes you famous.

In It Will Be Daybreak Soon, Archibald Rutledge wrote:

On a day memorable to me, I boarded a tiny tugboat I used often on a southern river and saw that we had a new engineer. He sat in the doorway of the engine room reading the Bible and in his eyes was the splendor of ancient wisdom and peace with the world. I noticed that the characteristic odors that had always emanated from the engine room were no longer there. And the engine! It gleamed and shone; from beneath its seat all the bilge water was gone. Instead of grime and filth and stench I found beauty and order. When I asked the engineer how in the world he had

managed to clean up the old room and the old engine, he answered in words that would go far toward solving life's main problems for many people.

“Cap'n’ he said, nodding fondly in the direction of the engine, ‘it's just this way: I got a glory.’

“Making that engine the best on the river was his glory in life, and having a glory he had everything. The only sure way out of suffering that I know is to find a glory, and to give to it the strength we might otherwise spend in despair.”¹⁶

Bible Study

Read Matthew 25: 34-40. Jesus mentions here some very specific acts that people have done for other people. What are they? Are these easy or hard things to do? Jesus calls the people who do these things “the righteous” yet they didn’t know what they were doing. Where does the power to do these acts come from?

Discussion Questions

For each of the seven “sure winners” give an example of what you can do or have done:

Genuine Prayer (136-137)

Showing Up (137-138)

Naming the Elephant (138-140)

Reminiscing (140-142)

Asking Others How They Are Doing (142-143)

Practical Help (143-146)

Following Up (146-148)

Experiential Learning Exercise

What are some ways that our congregation helps to provide specific care to those in need?

¹⁶ J. Warren McClure, “Freedom to Achieve,” *Ener/Gem 3, Bloom Where You’re Planted* (Burlington, VT: Ener/Gem Success Systems, Inc., 1980), Activity 5, page 1.

A young business man has been accused of embezzling at his firm. He is angry and confused by the legal process. Have two people role play a short conversation and then discuss it.

Script Practice for Alternate Scenario

The care receiver lives in a retirement home. She has been ill with a stomach flu recently, and she often complains that her things are being stolen. Review both sides of the conversation and suggest improvements to the CM responses.

CR1: I threw-up the last five days in a row.

CM1: You've been really sick.

CR2: I have pains in my stomach from acid, it burns so.

CM2: The burning keeps you feeling bad.

CR3: Yes, and my shoes were stolen, they were hurting my feet.

CM3: Do you have another pair of shoes?

CR4: No, I just wear my slippers now.

CM4: Do you ever sign up to go on the shopping trips? Maybe you could get a new pair and something for your stomach as well.

CR5: I've never signed-up. I'm afraid to go alone.

CM5: Perhaps I could find out when the next trip is and go with you.

CR6: That would be nice, I'd like that.

CM6: I'm sorry you've been feeling so badly lately.

Closing Prayer

Dear Lord, we often overlook the simple things. We think we have to do great things, and then we often do nothing. Bless us with wisdom to take advantage of the opportunities you give us to share your love in very specific caring ways.

APPENDIX TWO

SHORT-FORM MCGILL PAIN QUESTIONNAIRE SAMPLE

Descriptors	NONE	MILD	MODERATE	SEVERE
Throbbing				
Shooting				
Sharp				
Aching				

Intensity	Scale
0	No Pain
1	Mild
2	Discomforting
3	Distressing
4	Horrible
5	Excruciating

Figure 7. Short-Form McGill Pain Questionnaire¹

¹ Ronald Melzack, *SHORT-FORM MCGILL PAIN QUESTIONNAIRE*. 1984, [Cited January 26, 2006], available from www.cher.brown.edu/pcoc/SHORTMCGILLQUEST.PDF.

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