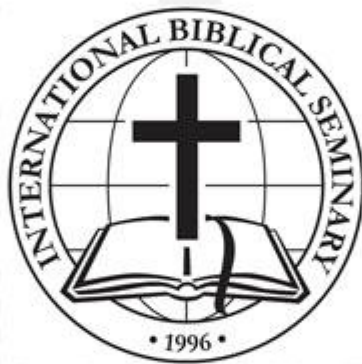


Mentor

One on One



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IBS

International Biblical Seminary--Bivocational Ministry.

Chapter 10:

Mentoring in suffering

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Chapter Ten: Mentoring in suffering

Suffering is a human experience. I don't even say "common experience" for common could mean often, frequent, ordinary occurrences, but suffering is a universal experience; everyone suffers. To exist as a human being suffering is a part of life. For Christians, we understand it perhaps differently; we accept the biblical teaching that Adam and Eve brought sin into the world, and suffering is a consequence of sin in all human lives; yet, for those who do not buy in the fundamental truth, suffering still is viewed as inevitable.

However, interestingly, Christians or non-Christians alike accept sufferings as consequences of our own wrong-doing or misbehavior with a lot less complaint. It is the 'unjust' suffering we have difficulty to deal with; it is the presumably innocent that suffers that disturbs us. Even the most non-religious have the concept of deservedness; an overused comment, "He deserves it," reveals the deepest religious need to 'believe' in a just God. And in this, the concept of punishment is tied with suffering. There are 'just sufferings' and there are 'unjust sufferings.' Thus, 'suffer injustice' also becomes a humanistic and legal concern. That is, we reckon that no human being would be allowed to do any kind of atrocity, to cause a fellow human being the sufferings, unpunished. These simplistic concepts, when put together become complicated issues; for instance, death penalty is a hotly debated political and ethical topic in recent years.

Biblical examples are plenty on sufferings of injustice: Jesus, the most important and celebrated One whom we adore because of His suffering for us; Job, the good man who was a 'practice target' for celestial beings; and Joseph, the beloved paternal favorite son. Each suffered for different purposes. (I try to avoid saying different reasons.) Jesus suffered injustice for our redemption; Job after unnecessary suffering was a purified gold, which roughly speaking in NT terminology, is a process of sanctification; and Joseph, while we are not sure if his innocence or naivety provoked the jealousy of his brothers, nevertheless matured and set examples of forgiveness and godliness.

Knowing this, however, does not make us immune to human sufferings. We still suffer; we suffer physically, emotionally, psychologically and spiritually. We suffer the death of our beloved ones; we suffer in sickness ourselves or with pains watch others in suffering; we suffer in financial crises; we suffer when a dream evaporated; we suffer when we lose a job, money, friends, a car, even a pet. Betrayal, cheating, unfair competition, all cause us angers and anxieties. We suffer in natural disasters, in man-made debacles, and in accidents. We suffer a broken relation. We suffer for our kids, for our parents; they suffer us too. No wonder medical people developed stress index, measuring the traumatic impacts of sufferings on the sufferers.

My wife is a cancer survivor. She had 13 operations or procedures. Although she is now in remission for over 10 years the shadow of cancer lingers for all these long time, and the pains from her cheloid

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(scar tissues) and hernia are constant reminders of her ordeal. In fact, *I cannot forget* the last operation which lasted 10 hours (said to be 3 hours) when the doctor finally removed her right kidney. I had never seen a paler face as he emerged from OR. He informed me that they punctured an artery in the process and 16-20 units of blood passed through her (he lost counts) before miraculously the bleeding stopped. However, he gave me the grim perspectives, all seven of them, none good: that she may die if the internal bleeding would start again and there would be no time to open her up, that she may never wake up from coma, that she may wake up with severe brain damage, that her heart may have been damaged, that there may be blood clots developed, causing heart failure or a stroke, or that she may not be able to walk if the blood clots went to either leg. I was numbed, did not know how to respond. For the next 11 days I drove back and forth the hospital and home (almost 60 miles one way) as a living dead. Praise God, none of these happened; saved the cheloid as a souvenir. All I remember of these days were that I wrote an email one night to my friends asking for prayer supports, and that I ate at the Arby's every day.

Some people were less fortunate, they did not make it. Louise, my one time parishioner lost her husband; he collapsed in a pick-up game on the neighborhood basketball court. She was devastated when I first met her. It was a good thing William happened to visit us and lead a series of revival meetings. He was a flutist, and once a Chaplain at Stanford University. I watched him operate when Louise poured her heart out. He sat there listening attentively, but did not utter many words. After a while, as if he looked away from Louise and into a far distance, saying very softly but compassionately. What he said in his grandfatherly tone I will never forget. Repeatedly he said, "Sister, it is alright, it is alright, how you feel is very normal in your situation." Of course, spoken from a psychologist, a PhD from Stanford the words really soothed the hearer. When she stopped sobbing he explained to her the mourning process (or grief cycle) for most people: denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance; the cycle then repeats, perhaps several times. William later told me that the average person would need a whole year to process mourning and 'recover'. In the case of a sudden death, the process may take even much longer. I listened; I never had any death in my family at the time. Since then, I performed numerous funerals, and comforted the families but I never knew whether my words were effective for I did not share the mourning experience.

It hit me finally. Fikrst, my grandparents died. Then, my parents passed away within 5 months of each other, though they went in very different ways. Dad suffered minor front lobe strokes many times. A neighbor would take him home and he told us he found himself suddenly sitting down in the middle of a street, but remembered nothing. "Perhaps my legs gave way," he said. In the last 7 years we watched his quality of life drop so drastically. Depressed, he wanted to 'go home' early. My mom suffered with him, staying with him in his bedroom on a couch and listened to his droves of sighs all night. In the last month of his life we watched him being shuffled between emergency and convalescence, helplessly. I was running around between work, home and hospitals all day. An issue

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was the code; in their Living Trust he and mom both agreed, and we too, that he would want no code. Yet, while he was still conscious, the nurse asked him if he wanted resuscitation; he nodded. We watched him prolonged his agony unnecessarily. He died of aspiratory pneumonia. To this day, I still wonder if he knew the consequence of his decision, or if he understood what he did.

Mom went much quicker and I had a much harder time to recover. I don't know if the suddenness was the only reason or was it because her death super-ceded dad's departure. She went to China to visit her sister on Chinese New Year Day and never made back. After a long flight and with all the excitement of seeing many relatives in the New Year celebrations they sent her back to a hotel; when she stepped out the car on her own she suddenly fell and was gone. The doctor said she died of cerebral hemorrhage, same way her dad went. My sister and I went to Canton and took her body back; it was another heart-breaking experience. I would spare the details; but that new year was a record cold winter and a super long weekend; we were stuck in a 6 by 10 'hotel room' in Hong Kong, waiting for visa into China. The owner called it 'hotel' but it was a pigeon hole. Under the circumstance when tens of thousands of people trapped in Hong Kong unexpectedly because of a snow storm and the railroad shutdown, we were 'lucky' to have a shelter at all. Strange, but it almost felt 'proper' for us to suffer in this occasion.

It has been more than 4 years now and I can barely bring myself to talk about it. I know, and I counsel others, too, that talking about it helps to accept the fact, to heal and to recover. I know, but knowing is not doing. There is just too much emptiness every time I think of the loss of my mom. But then again, I know that I became a better listener on bereavement, just as Ting became more compassionate in supplications for the sick. Paul said it so well in 2 Cor 1:3-7, that he became a better comforter by way of sufferings.

There are sufferings for ministry's sake and for the church; in Paul's teaching, he called it a cross, and sometimes travail in birth (Gal 4:19), for to him it (the suffering) was necessary in order for Christ to be formed in believers. I do not know the specifics why Paul was saying this, but in principle we all suffer before we 'grow up'. In a church split, for instant, no matter on which side one stands, no one is immune of pains and hurts. We only learn when we are hurt enough to avoid the next split. And some people never learn, too. Those who learn, especially for the wrongly accused ones who suffered injustice, will become more tolerate, slower to anger and less agitating. This is the mystery of the cross: in death one finds life. One of the reasons of such emergence spiritually is perhaps we find consolation only in the word of God.

The psalmist of 119 understood the benefits of sufferings; "Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I keep thy words; . . . It is good for me that I have been afflicted, that I might learn thy statutes." (vv. 67 and 71) Now, the commentators have discussed the background of this particular psalm in

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length; if the prevailing recognition is correct, then we are witnessing the people returning from exile to teach the generations what they have learned in all the sufferings associated with the exile, which was the consequence of departure from God's word.

So, there is a component of redemption in every chastisement, after all.

Every episode of suffering has a closure as we learn our lessons and change into more Christ-likeness. I did not plan on writing this when I started this booklet for I had no idea that this would happen. A couple weeks ago Edward came to visit me. He is the new President of a prominent Christian Ministry; I didn't know him before. After my opening prayer he said to me, "Let me start; and perhaps it will make our conversation a lot easier." Then, immediately he apologized to me on behalf of the ministry for the wrong-doing of his predecessor. And he said, after he took the job he went around the world to meet with the leaders of this great organization in different countries. One of the international leaders gave him a long list to investigate, and my name was on top of it. Eight years ago, I was forced to resign and suffered gross injustice, but could not do a thing—this is the wonder of cross. I was contemplating lawsuit against the person but I did not want to hurt the ministry which I gave my prime years to, and loved. Now I believe God has avenged me. I think Edward is very courageous. In this day and age, people do not admit their wrong doings for fear of monetary retributions; but for Christians we answer to God when there are more important things than money, and Edward did the right thing. I don't know how much more damage did his predecessor do to the organization and people but I trust, with God's help, Edward will be able to restore the name and integrity of this ministry. Eight-year may be too long for me, but God knows the timing. God's name is to be praised.

What have we covered about suffering?

- Suffering is a universal experience. To exist as a human being suffering is a part of life
- Christians understand that suffering is a consequence of sin in all human lives. For non-Christians, even if they don't believe in the Bible suffering still is viewed as inevitable.
- Christians or non-Christians alike, accept sufferings as consequences of our own wrong-doing with a lot less complaint.
- There are 'just sufferings' and 'unjust sufferings.' And in this, even the most non-religious have a need to 'believe' in a just God. And the concept of punishment is tied with suffering.
- Biblical examples are plenty on sufferings of injustice: Jesus, Job, and Joseph; each suffered for different purposes.

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- We suffer physically, emotionally, psychologically and spiritually. We suffer in many aspects
- An illness and the treatment of diseases bring physical pains and emotional stresses to the patient, family, and friends; not to mention death if the disease is incurable.
- In facing death, there is a mourning process (or grief cycle) for the living: denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance; this is common to all people
- The average person would need a whole year to process mourning and 'recover'. In the case of a sudden death, the process may take even much longer.
- A Living Trust is a legal instrument for people, while living and in good mental health, to decide certain things before they become incapacitated to make these decisions.
- Talking about the deceased and detailing the final stage may help the living to accept the fact, and to heal and to recover, although it may bring up some pains in the process.
- Sometimes suffering is necessary for us in order that Christ may be formed in us. We become more mature. This is the mystery of the cross: in death one finds life.
- Many people became better comforters because of their own experiences of suffering
- The Jewish psalmist returning from exile taught the generations the consequence of departure from God's word, and how sufferings and afflictions bring them back to His word.
- There is a component of redemption in every chastisement.
- Every episode of suffering has a closure as we learn our lessons and change into more Christ-likeness.
- It is very courageous and noble for someone to admit wrong doings which cause others pains

Here are a few questions deserving discussion:

1. Why is suffering an experience necessarily to be mentored?
2. Which do you think we take better, injustice or suffering? What kind of sufferings are we less likely to complain?
3. Are there divine purposes in suffering? Why does Bible tell us so many stories of suffering with

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good people? What can you learn from their lives?

4. Share your own story of suffering in recent years. Describe the circumstances and your emotions; and then, any lessons you have learned.
5. Have you (or a close family member) been in surgeries before? What are the risks involved? Were you afraid? Why did you (the person) go through it, and how did you deal with it?
6. Have you heard of stress index? How do you make use of it in counseling? Have you heard of grief cycle? How does it help us to do counseling? Check them out online if you have no idea.
7. How was I (the author) mentored to counsel others in grief? (Who mentored me?)
8. What is the 'bargaining' part of the grief cycle? In my mother's case this posed for me the most difficulty, why? Do people really recover from such grieves?
9. Are you knowledgeable of a Living Trust? What does it do? Should you have one? What is 'no code'? Do you understand?
10. What is the 'component of redemption' in suffering or afflictions? Think of Job, or Joseph.
11. Have you been put in a spot—by God, and you cannot do a thing? Now, do you understand the wonder of cross?
12. Find 12 scripture references teaching us, the Christians to understand and deal with sufferings.

Action Items:

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