

Ministering to Others when You Are in Pain

by Bill Faulkner

There is no place in the Bible that promises us a life without pain. In fact, the Bible teaches us that pain is part of life. Jesus said in John 16:33, "in the world you have tribulation." The word used there for tribulation means, "to press, or crush." It gives the picture of a winepress, crushing the grapes so the pure juice flows out. When a rose petal is crushed, the aroma of the rose is evident.

There is a purpose behind the suffering and pain that comes into our lives. James says in James 1:2-4, "Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. And let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing." If we respond properly to the pressures of life that come our way, we will come out of them stronger for having gone through them. Now, I know that is true, but it does not make me any more anxious to go through it. It hurts, and I don't like to hurt. None of us get up in the morning and say, "Oh, I need a little pain in my life today to make me a better person."

There have been times in the last twenty years that I didn't even want to get up and face another day. I didn't want to hear anybody else's problem. Didn't they know I had enough of my own without having to carry theirs too? Then I would remember what the Scripture said, "You are not your own, for you have been bought with a price." (1 Corinthians 6:19-20) I would go ahead and minister to the person in need.

The Word of God began to really come alive to me during those days as I began to rely more heavily than ever before on the truth of God's Word. I decided, "OK, Lord, its either true or not. If I am telling your people they can depend upon Your Word, then I'd better do it myself." The Lord, His Word, and His people became more precious to me. I would like to take a few moments now to share with you some very practical principles I have discovered that have enabled me to continue to minister in the midst of pain.

REMEMBER THAT PAIN IS PART OF LIFE To think that we can make it all the way to end of life without pain is unrealistic. God never promised us there wouldn't be pain. On the contrary, He simply stated there would be pain. He didn't say we might have tribulation, He said we would have tribulation. But, He also said that we could take courage because He had overcome the world. He told us we are more than conquerors in this world. It is a shame it took a shoe company to remind us of that. The word for conquer, or victory, is "nike." However, we are hyper-nike. We are more than victorious, but I didn't feel victorious. I felt pain. I was hurting, so, I had to claim by faith what I didn't feel.

BE TRANSPARENT—DON'T TRY TO HIDE YOUR PAIN Pain becomes our greatest platform. It is the comfort that you receive from others that enables you to comfort. Comfort is first a divine commodity. It comes first from God. II Corinthians 1:3-4 says, "*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of all mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction so that we will be able to comfort those who are in any affliction with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.*" We cannot give what we have not received. When we hide our pain, deny our pain, or ignore our pain, we do not receive the comfort God wants to give us, directly from Himself and indirectly through others. No one can comfort a parent of a child who is abusing drugs like a parent whose child is abusing drugs. It is the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted.

MAINTAIN THE MIND OF CHRIST Jesus gave us the example. He said, "the Son of Man did not come to be served, and to serve." Matthew 20:28 Jesus served with the pain of the cross on

His mind. He came to bear our sin upon Himself. He gave up His right to Himself to serve us. Paul tells us in Philippians 2:7 that Jesus “emptied Himself, and took on the form of a bondservant...and became obedient to the point of death.” Our attitude has to be an attitude of service regardless of the circumstances of life.

SURROUND YOURSELF WITH PRAYER WARRIORS There were times when I was so weary that I couldn’t even pray. We called people all over the world to join us in prayer. Prayer not only for our son, but also prayer for our own strength. We sought out people who would pray for us but would not judge or condemn us; people who had a heart for God and knew how to intercede for us. We not only had people pray for us, we had people pray with us. We gathered people around with whom we could trust our innermost feelings. Just as Moses had Aaron and Hur holding up his arms, we need people around us who can do the same thing.

KEEP YOUR FOCUS UPWARD AND OUTWARD Realize your need, but don’t focus on your need. Focus on the needs of others. Allow your pain to produce compassion in your heart for others. Realize that there are other people who are feeling the same pain you are feeling. Let God use you as a channel through which He might minister comfort to hurting people. I began to realize that as I ministered to others, they ministered to me. Sometimes the counsel I was giving others was ricocheting back to me. I learned in a practical way that God was moving and working even when I couldn’t see it. Don’t focus on your pain; focus on Him in your pain. Hebrews 13:5 became very important to me. God said, “*I will never desert you, nor will I ever forsake you.*” Let me translate what that means to me. **God will never leave me alone in my pain. He is right there with me all the way.**

LIVE ONE DAY AT A TIME There are two things that can wipe us out. To dwell on the past and wish we could do things differently, or to fear the potential disasters of the future can cripple us in the present. We can only deal with what is. We can’t deal with what was, or with what might be. We can’t relive yesterday, and we can’t pre-live tomorrow. We can only live today. The Scripture says that God’s mercies are new every morning. His mercy and grace come in daily supply. We can’t live today on tomorrow’s grace. **We live on today’s grace for today.** Remember what Jesus said in Matthew 6:34, “So do not worry about tomorrow; for tomorrow will care for itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.”

YOU MUST BE WILLING TO LET OTHERS MINISTER WHEN YOU CANNOT There will be times when you have nothing to give. It is OK to say, “I can’t do that right now.” There will be times when you are emotionally spent. I can remember times when I had to say to a staff member, “You are going to have to do that. I just can’t right now.” If you don’t have staff, there is a layperson to whom you might have to entrust some things. Remember, everyone has a right to be ministered to, but no one has the right to choose who does the ministering. It may get so heavy sometimes that you just have to get away from it. Even our Lord retreated. Sometimes we have to come apart before we come apart.

DON’T BEAT YOURSELF UP—AND DON’T LET OTHERS BEAT YOU UP Not one of us in this room is a perfect parent. Not one of us decided to get up one morning and mess up our kids that day. Adam and Eve were in a perfect environment, in relationship with a perfect Father, and they blew it. God, the heavenly Father loved them, walked with them, and warned them. They disregarded His love, His fellowship, and His warning and messed it up for all of us. All of us have made mistakes. Don’t deny those mistakes, but don’t dwell on them either.

LEARN TO REJOICE WITH THOSE WHO REJOICE, AND WEEP WITH THOSE WHO WEEP We must enter into the pain of others as well as the pain of others. It is often more difficult to enter into the joy of others when you are hurting so badly yourself.

- *The joy of a wedding.*
- *A child making the honor roll.*
- *Those wonderful Christmas letters from friends telling you about their perfect kids.*
- *College graduations.*

- *Those seemingly insignificant problems church members have, compared to yours.*

REMEMBER YOUR CALL When God called us into the ministry, He did not call us into a bubble where life cannot touch us. He called us into ministry in a broken world filled with broken people. Because of sin and brokenness ministry is tough, and sometimes the only thing we have to hang onto is the fact that God called us. He knew everything we would face before He called us, and He called us anyway. He didn't promise us an easy road, but He promised us He would walk with us every step of the way.

These are principles that God is working out in the crucible of my own life. I am sure there are many more that we could talk about in this setting, but these are the ones the Lord is using in my life to enable me to continue to minister in the midst of incredible pain. I pray that in some way they will strengthen and encourage you.