

Part 46: To Carry Pain

Begin with a prayer of gratitude for God's concern and care for each one of us on our journey. Share something of your week with the group.

The pain we carry

In our search for freedom, one of the things we come up with is the pain we carry and our ways of finding people or things to help us relieve the pain or take it away altogether.

Pain can either be something that takes us out of ourselves and gives us an empathetic entry into other people's lives, or else it can lock us in ourselves in its fearful threat of further pain.

Focus on our own pain: When our pain fills our horizons

Strong preoccupation with ourselves because of our own pain can blind us to anyone else's needs for fear of the added pain this may involve. John Powell, in talking about the reasons for lack of love, uses the example of having an intense toothache and not being able to think of anything else all the while. Nothing else can monopolize one's attention more than the inner pain one carries.

Our inner hurts, unfinished business, memories and anxieties all carry pain which fills our threshold and makes it difficult to bear or enter another's pain.

Yet loving another means embracing their whole person, including their pain or misery. We cannot love them on our own terms. When we find ourselves avoiding or being threatened by another's pain, it may be that it reminds us of our own pain which we cannot cope with or have suppressed. It opens the doors to areas we would prefer to leave closed.

Rather than feel awkward when someone bursts into tears and trying to stop them crying, it may be more helpful to support them in their pain by just being there for them and with them, and not trying to solve their problems or remove their reasons for weeping. It would also be constructive to reflect on our own reactions to see where they are leading us and what areas need work.

If we avoid painful areas in our lives and withdraw from them, they will grow in threat and menace and become more difficult to deal with as time passes. As God in God's wisdom allows pains and obstacles to come before us each day, so we need to deal with them as they arise. God allows them in doses that will not overwhelm us and lets them come just as we are needing to work through those issues in our stage of growth. We need to have time available so that such issues can be well worked through. If, because of lack of time or inclination, we just add them to our 'list of things to be done', we are hindering our growth and storing up times of very sore reckoning for the future.

In protecting ourselves from further pain, we may find we will build up our securities to make life more bearable. Pain becomes like a terrifying threat which we cannot bring ourselves to face, allow, or even think about.



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We may in fact find ourselves seeking 'strong' pleasure to ward off or obscure the pain, or to make up for it. Buying chocolate for oneself when one has had a bad day is a small example of this. Many stronger addictions are common.

One may be collecting material possessions or pursuing pastimes for the pleasure or satisfaction that is promised through them, eg. new interests or hobbies with all the gear that they require and with all the fulfilment they represent, just to cover our inner empty pain and hunger for love.

We are able to carry pain

The irony is that pain is very much a part of life and we could not live without it. We are formed with the ability to bear moderate pain. When God sent Adam and Eve out of the garden, he said that pain would be part of their life experience. However, excess pain and our fear of it is an awesome threat.

Scripture says:

'Consider it pure joy, whenever you face trials of many kinds.' (James 1:2)

'In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials.' (1 Peter 1:6)

'The fire will test the quality of each person's work.' (1 Corinthians 3:13)

'Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering . . . so then those who suffer according to God's will should commit themselves to their faithful Creator and continue to do good.' (1 Peter 4:12–19)

'I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings' (Philippians 3:10)

Where is God in all this?

For a Christian, the only thing that is secular is sin; all else is part of our life and is to be seen as holy, so suffering for whatever reason is used by God for our transformation.

Meditate on one of the above passages, then journal and share as appropriate.

This week, look at some of the pain you have had to carry and see what effect it has had on your relationships.

How is Jesus asking you to share his sufferings through this pain?



Sergio Milandri has a Masters in Personal Formation and has been a relationship mentor in South Africa for over 25 years. He and his wife, Elizabeth, live in Hout Bay, Cape Town, and run the Sans Pareil Retreat Centre from there.

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