

You Don't Have To Suffer In Silence

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Special to ChristianWeek

Last week we received a call from a new client. With much emotion in his voice, he briefly explained his situation and his pain, and that he had finally come to the conclusion that he could no longer deal with life like this.

Upon reaching the end of his heartbreaking story, we wanted to know how long he had been suffering, silently and alone.

Sixteen years.

We've heard similar tales from many clients; one in recent memory even suffered 75 years. Why do people choose to suffer so deeply and for so long? Why do they wait for their life issues to become life crises?

Some people put their trust in self-help—reading books, listening to recordings (usually on-the-go), watching videos, and occasionally attending impersonal seminars. This can work for personal development initiatives and may offer some good ideas, but care must be taken because self-help lacks both objectivity and accountability.

Many people who suffer the pain of a personal loss or a traumatic event are afraid to go through their pain, and instead ignore it. They believe that over time it will go away. It won't. Loss and trauma are deep wounds that fester unless they receive gentle cleaning and binding.

Among believers there can be the belief that the blood of Christ will heal every wound. Carefully said, this is true for the next life. He suffered and died for our salvation, not for a pain-free earthly life. Christ suffered temptation (Matthew 4:1-11), broken relationships (John 22:60-62), fear and anxiety (Mark 14:33-36), loss and grief (John 11) so He could sympathize with us—not miraculously take our troubles from us now. Our suffering is intended to eventually produce character and point our hope to Christ. (Romans 5:4)

Underlying all these reasons is the stigma that the predominant "mental illness" model creates around counseling. You are taught that there is something wrong with you that starts in your brain and is affecting your life. Your brain is broken, and the outcome is disempowering: there is nothing you can do about it.

As believers we should notice this model is different than what Scripture teaches. A Scriptural "emotional anguish" model shows that there is something wrong in the world called sin and it is affecting you and your life. This is not to say that the sin is necessarily your own. (Jn 9:3) The whole world is broken, yet the outcome is empowering: that our all-powerful God is in loving control even when you suffer, and He has ordained ways and means to help you.

Those ways are clearly outlined in Scripture. The first line of help could be your parents. You may have close friends (think of Job) or mentors (Moses' relationship to Joshua) in your life who can offer their wisdom and direction. Elders and pastors should be willing to help, yet their task is for your spiritual wellbeing (Eph 4:11, 12) and so they do not always have the time available for intense counsel or training necessary to help with other life issues. Finally, there are counselors who have heeded a calling to develop special gifts (Rom 12) and minister to your pain.

You don't have to suffer in silence. May you find peace in the life that God wants you to lead.

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