



# ***Finding God When You Hurt***

LifeCare Memos® Messages of Compassion

## ***Suffering and Pain***

John had multiple sclerosis. He had to be fed, changed, and he could not even lift his hand to his face. He suffered constant pain. His wife had died in a car accident several years earlier and he had recently alienated his children. One day he said to me, *“I cannot believe there is a God. If there is, He must be pretty mean, otherwise I wouldn’t be suffering the way I am.”*

John’s case is certainly extreme, yet his situation brings up an important issue in life—pain and suffering. The question is, how can we find God in the midst of suffering?

## ***Hope for the Hurting***

The Bible gives clues to help us experience God in the midst of suffering.

### **First, realize that suffering is inevitable.**

Everyone has, or will, experience pain and suffering in one form or another. Jesus tried to prepare us for this reality when He said,

*“I have told you these things so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart I have overcome the world”* (John 16:33).

We are fallible and vulnerable people and live in a world that is scarred by sin. The question *“Why me?”* springs from not properly understanding the reality of the world and our situation. Suffering can throw us off balance.

In my childhood, I picked up the subtle messages that obedience to God and righteousness were protectors from suffering, and thus, when we suffer, then something must be wrong with us. Neither of these messages are true, nor are they taught in the Bible. The Apostle Paul said he was given a *“thorn in the flesh”* (II Corinthians 12:7). He prayed several times and yet continued to suffer. Though perfect, Jesus too suffered for us, even to the point of death.

### **Second, affirm God’s presence in the midst of suffering.**

Even though we may feel that God leaves us during times of suffering, He does not. It is important for us to understand that suffering is not a sign of God’s anger

or displeasure. In fact, God is present with us in a more powerful way in the midst of suffering. The Apostle Paul questioned,

*“Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?”* (Romans 8:35).

He made a list of things that we often think separates us from God—in essence, a list of suffering. Then he shared these words of assurance and comfort,

*“Nothing in all of creation will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord”* (Romans 8:39).

Jesus’ death on the cross was the payment for our sin and is the basis for our forgiveness. He suffered for us and with us. When we suffer we are invited to identify with Him and learn from Him so we might feel His presence and love in the midst of our suffering. Paul says,

*“We are hard pressed on every side but not crushed; perplexed but not in despair; persecuted but not abandoned; struck down but not destroyed. We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus might be revealed”* (II Corinthians 4:8-10).

### **Third, be committed to growing from suffering.**

Growth is the attitude behind the following:

*“Consider it pure joy, my brothers, when you face trials of many kinds”* (James 1:2).

*“Not only so but we rejoice in our sufferings”* (Romans 5:3).

Joy in suffering does not seem humanly possible—we are usually sad or depressed. We may not be happy with our circumstances but we can be joyful in trust and dependence on God knowing that He will work through the suffering for our good.

*“And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose”* (Romans 8:28).

If we let God be involved in our lives, He will shape us to be more like Christ through our suffering.

Joni Eareckson Tada, paralyzed from her neck down, writes about growth through suffering.

*“When I was a young teenager I cared very little about being made more like Christ.... My ideas took a sharp turn after my injury. Suddenly I began to see*

*that suffering was inextricably linked with being more like Christ. Helplessness really had something to do with holiness. And pain had a great deal to do with piety. My purpose in life began to change. The abundant life now meant any degree of Christ's character that could be found in me—like peace, patience, endurance, tolerance, kindness, or sensitivity. It dawned on me what real success and beauty was all about—Jesus living in, and reflecting through me.” (Glorious Intruder, page 247)*

### **Practical Tips to Help Someone Who is Suffering**

- 1) Let them share their honest feelings. Suffering is difficult and feelings are a part of who we are.
- 2) Be the presence of Christ when the one suffering might not feel that God is present.
- 3) Do not offer pat answers or platitudes. Wait until the suffering person wants to talk and process what is happening. Then you can share your ideas and thoughts.
- 4) Offer to pray for, and with, the suffering person.
- 5) Offer the Psalms as an honest expression of one person's suffering.
- 6) Be hopeful and faithful because God is at work.

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### **LifeCare Memos<sup>®</sup>**

When experiencing the stresses of life, people need support. The Psalmist needed that support and found it when he turned to God. He said, *“Look to my right and see; no one is concerned for me. I have no refuge; no one **cares for my life**. I cry to you, O LORD; I say, ‘You are my refuge, my portion in the land of the living’”* (Psalm 142:4-5).

**LifeCare Memos** are designed as messages of compassion that integrate biblical guidelines for emotional and spiritual well-being. Topics focus on various life-care issues and address them from the perspective of Scripture.