



Wisdom from the Word

Hope in the Fire of Suffering

The theme of suffering is a broad one. Google uses words like distress, despair, agony, misery, sorrow, and pain to try to capture the experience of suffering and how it can affect us physically, emotionally, mentally, socially, and spiritually. But words cannot express the depth of the human experience.

As nurses, we often encounter suffering. For some of us, chronic suffering is woven into our days because a family member or close friend is under the weight of suffering. We ourselves can end up in a dark period of suffering.

- How do you know when someone is suffering? Consider verbal, physical, and behavioral clues.
- How do you typically respond to someone else's suffering?

We naturally want to alleviate the suffering of a patient, family member, or friend. When we can't do much about another person's distress, as nurses we may feel like ineffective caregivers. We might turn away from that person's suffering to lessen our own discomfort.

Even when we cannot lessen someone's pain, there is another dimension to this situation: hope. Read these passages and consider the hope they can bring to you and those you care about.

HEARING THE WORD

Read Psalm 73:21-26 (NIV):

When my heart was grieved and my spirit embittered, I was senseless and ignorant; I was a brute beast before you. Yet I am always with you; you hold me by my

right hand. You guide me with your counsel, and afterward you will take me into glory. Whom have I in heaven but you? And earth has nothing I desire besides you. My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.

1 Peter 1:6-7 (NIV):

In all this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. These have come so that the proven genuineness of your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.

RESPONDING TO THE WORD

These Scriptures promise that we are not without hope. God is present with us in our suffering. Though we suffer now, through God, we have the hope that suffering will end. When Jesus died and rose again, he conquered suffering once and for all.

- Ponder the adjectives from the Psalm passage about how the writer felt under the heaviness of suffering: grieved, embittered, senseless, ignorant, a brute beast. Let these words become images in your mind of how a suffering person might behave or appear.
- Consider how God interacted with the Psalm writer. What images and words are expressed?
- Read aloud the metaphor about gold and fire in 1 Peter. This describes what can happen to one's faith during the agonizing

Find this and more downloadable Bible studies on the NCF website: <https://nfc-jcn.org/resource/bible-study-materials>. Use these personally or with other nurses or students.

heat of suffering. What outcomes can our suffering bring about?

APPLICATION

There is hope in suffering. One of the best ways we can care for suffering people is simply to give them our presence. Being present allows the person to share his or her stories, fears, pain, and memories—without judgment but with the compassion Jesus models for us.

Reflect on previous encounters with people who were suffering.

- In what ways were you able to help others, perhaps a patient or a someone is your family, during their time of suffering?
- Maybe a colleague is suffering, lonely, or anxious. How can you simply be with that individual and offer the gift of your presence? (Try asking, "How can I be a good friend to you right now?")

Take time to pray for those you know who are suffering. Ask God to show you who could use his presence through you. Ask God your questions about suffering. Visualize Jesus coming and sitting with you somewhere comfortable.

- How does Jesus respond to your questions?
- What does he say?

He may not say anything, but may simply want to sit with you.

End your time in prayer, thanking Jesus that he is not far off but that he wants to be with you.

Downloaded from <http://journals.lww.com/journalofchristiannursing> by miklwd@hollis.com on 03/07/2023