

Pilot edition

Healing the Wounded Heart: Catholic Correctional Participant Journal

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For training in how to use this book to carry out trauma healing, visit the Catholic Prison Ministry Coalition at catholicprisonministries.org. For more information on trauma healing, visit TraumaHealingInstitute.org or write to traumahealing@americanbible.org

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WELCOME

Introduction

Discussion

What are your hopes for this group?

In this group, we'll be talking about the wounds of our hearts. Each lesson is interactive, and you may feel uncomfortable emotions at times—perhaps anger, sadness, anxiety, irritability, or tenseness. This is normal. It's part of the healing process, because we can't *heal* until we *feel*.

But you can choose if you want to participate and how much you are willing to share with others.

Discussion

What should be the ground rules for our group?

Healing heart wounds does not happen all at once or once and for all. But this program will take you through key parts of the process in a new way, or perhaps for the first time, and it will give you some spiritual tips on how to continue the journey afterwards.

There are basic experiences involved in healing heart wounds:

- *Making sense of suffering*
- *Telling your story and being heard*
- *Grieving*
- *Lamenting*
- *Bringing your pain to the cross of Christ*
- *Forgiving*
- *Restoration*

The spiritual task of asking God to accompany you and give you the grace to move through each part of the healing journey is essential. Taking your trauma to God, whose own Son experienced enough trauma for all humanity, and whose Spirit brings us healing today, is at the center of this program.

Not everyone goes through these experiences in the same way, the same order, or the same pace.

Welcome.

1. MAKING SENSE OF SUFFERING

1. The story of Ben

Ben grew up in the city of Las Palmas. He never knew his father. Until he was three, he was raised by his mom. Then she died and he had to go live with his aunt. Her husband was cruel to Ben. He beat Ben often and didn't give him enough to eat.

Ben went to school and made friends. His aunt always took him to church. The church became like a family to him, and with the support of people from the church, Ben graduated from high school and got an associate's degree in substance abuse counseling. When he was just twenty-two, he got a job as an addictions counselor at a clinic in a town nearby. He got married and had two sons.

Over the years, gangs began to take control of his neighborhood in Las Palmas. Rival gangs had huge fights nearly every week. Ben saw innocent people being shot—children, women, and passersby. Several of the young girls in his church had been gang raped. Other families were robbed at gunpoint. Las Palmas had become a war zone.

Ben was leaving work one day when he got the dreaded call: come to the emergency room! His five-year-old son Johnson had been hit by a stray bullet. By the time Ben got to the hospital, it was too late. The doctors were not able to save little Johnson's life.

Ben still goes to church, listens to the Word of God, and tries to live it. But he keeps asking why God has let him and his community suffer. He is angry with God and feels that God has deserted him. He has a hard time praying and his heart feels dead toward God. When he thinks of God as his Father, he can't imagine a loving father. In his experience, he only knew a father who was absent and an uncle who beat him cruelly.

For the first time he finds himself thinking that God did not create the world. Ben knew that this was not what he was taught, but some part of him felt it might be true after all. Maybe there wasn't a God listening to his prayers.

Ben still takes his family to church and tries to teach his remaining son about the way God wants us to live, but he feels like a hypocrite because he talks about God's love, but he really feels God is far away.

Discussion

1. What is Ben feeling about God?
2. Why do you think Ben feels this way?
3. When have you ever felt like Ben or seen others feel this way?

2. What do you tell yourself about God in times of suffering?

There are many different messages out there about God, especially during times of suffering. But they don't always match up with what the Scriptures tell us about God.

For reflection

What messages do you tend to tell yourself in times of suffering?

ABOUT GOD	
Messages out there ...	Messages from Scripture ...
<p>God let me down.</p> <p>God is punishing me.</p> <p>God doesn't care really.</p> <p>It's God's will.</p> <p>I haven't done enough to please God.</p> <p>God promised to protect me and broke that promise.</p> <p>This will only make me stronger.</p> <p>Other messages out there that you've heard:</p>	<p>Not everything that happens is God's will.</p> <p>God hates evil and injustice.</p> <p>God understands our suffering.</p> <p>Jesus told us he suffers with those who suffer.</p> <p>Nothing can separate us from the love of God.</p> <p>God will help us get through it.</p> <p><i>(See for example Romans 8:35-39, Hebrews 13: 5b-6, Proverbs 6: 16-19, Isaiah 43:1-5, Matthew 25:35-40, 2 Corinthians 1:8-11.)</i></p>

3. How did suffering come into this world?

Discussion

How do you think suffering came into this world?

Thousands of books have been written about this difficult spiritual question and Scripture points to three answers:

1. In the beginning God made all things to work for the good. But starting with the Adam and Eve story in Genesis 3, humanity disobeyed God and chose to determine good and evil on our own. This “Great Fall,” as it often called, brought death and hardship to the world. The Old Testament describes how humanity continued a sometimes-faithful and sometimes-sinful relationship with God. We still do.
2. God gave us freedom to choose whether or not to live as God intended—and does not take away that free will. In Genesis 4, we see that Cain killed Abel without God’s approval or intervention. Our hearts are often wounded by the consequences of our choices and by the consequences of the free choices others make.
3. Even the angels are free to accept or reject the way God designed for us to live. The Scripture describes Lucifer as a fallen angel, later known as Satan, the “Father of lies” and “Prince of darkness” who tried to mislead Jesus, and tries to mislead us today. Several times a year at Mass, and at our Confirmation, we renew our vows to “renounce Satan” and live by the light of the Holy Spirit, the “Spirit of Truth.” (See some examples in Matthew 4:1–11, John 8:39–44, 2 Corinthians 11:14–15, and 1 Peter 5:8–11.)

As we live in an imperfect world, embracing Christ's suffering, death, and resurrection—what we call the Paschal Mystery—reminds us of a key rhythm of life. Just as Christ suffered, died, and rose again, we too will experience suffering, loss, and a new beginning.

Life will bring us pain. We will experience various kinds of deaths. We also know that the death of one thing means there is space for a new thing to be born. The Paschal Mystery of Christ does not promise us that we will never be hurt. It promises us that God will be with us and will help us get through our seasons of pain. We can participate with God in that process.

Small group discussion

1. Think about and describe a past experience of suffering. Was it followed by a new beginning? For example, the loss of a job followed by a new one; childhood poverty or separation followed by a stable place to grow; a relationship breakup followed by loneliness and then a new relationship?
2. How do you think reflecting on the Paschal Mystery might help you on your current journey of healing?

4. Our childhood image of God affects our healing

Our childhood shapes our image of God as adults.

Discuss in pairs

1. What was your earliest image of God when you were a child?
2. What was the image you had of God as a teenager?
3. How much does your current image of God help you move toward healing?
4. Think about your own father. As a child, did you experience his love?
5. Consider the same with your mother.
6. How does your experience with your parents affect your experience with God?

Children need to feel secure and protected from evil. If we have experienced difficult things as a child, we may find it difficult to trust God when we become adults. For example, if we grew up without a father or mother, or if one of our parents was often angry with us, then we may think God has abandoned us, or is always angry with us, even though our faith teaches us that God is a loving Father (See, for example, John 17:24; Romans 8:14–17; 1 John 3:1).

On the other hand, a loving parent, grandparent, or relative can have a powerful impact on helping us see, feel, and understand God's love. The healing journey is made a bit easier when we take the time to remember and give thanks for those adults who showed us real love.

Let's take time now to reflect on God as our Father.

God our Father offers you pure and genuine love that will not hurt you in any way. Here are some Scriptures to help you reflect on the love of God.

Lamentations 3:21–24. *Yet hope returns when I remember this one thing: The LORD's unfailing love and mercy still continue, fresh as the morning, as sure as the sunrise. The LORD is all I have, and so in him I put my hope.*

1 John 3:1. *See how much the Father has loved us! His love is so great that we are called God's children—and so, in fact, we are. This is why the world does not know us: it has not known God. My dear friends, we are now God's children, but it is not yet clear what we shall become. But we know that when Christ appears, we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he really is.*

Psalms 103:13. *As a father is kind to his children, so the LORD is kind to those who honor him. He knows what we are made of; he remembers that we are dust.*

1 John 4:9–10. *And God showed his love for us by sending his only Son into the world, so that we might have life through him. This is what love is: it is not that we have loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the means by which our sins are forgiven.*

1 Peter 5:7. *Leave all your worries with him, because he cares for you.*

Taking care of yourself

When we start talking or thinking about the things we have experienced, we can begin to feel strong emotions. Remember, this is normal and is part of the healing process. We can do several things to take care of ourselves while we're healing.

Breathing exercise

Breathing deeply can help us relax during strong emotions. If this makes you feel uncomfortable at any point, you can stop. You're in control.

Get into a comfortable sitting position. (Later you can try this laying on your back.)

Pick a spot on the wall and concentrate on it. Think only about your own breathing.

Slowly breathe in and out, filling your lungs and slowly releasing the air. Imagine that you are pushing the breath to the wall and back. Think to yourself, "[Your name], feel yourself relaxing as oxygen is flowing in and out."

Think about being in a quiet place. It might be the beach, or on a hill or in a tree. You might be alone or with someone who cares for you. You might think about Jesus telling you how much he loves you.

Continue to think about your breathing, flowing in and out, in and out.

After a few minutes, release your gaze from the spot on the wall. Stretch and take one more deep breath.

Discussion

Was this helpful to you? Why or why not?

Wrapping it up

What's one thing you want to remember from this lesson?

Voices

I came to this Jail, not knowing what is going to happen in life. I wanted to start praying to allow God back into my life. While i was here i tried to pray. But I couldn't because I was in this unit. There were only a few Believers. I've ask if anyone had a bible; no-one answer me. And when I was going to give up, I seen this Daily Bread, so i ask if this belong to anyone. No-one said a word. So i took it to my room. Like a new book to Read. I then ask my friend if i could use his Book. He said O.K., but i seen a bible on the countertop. I grab it, and went to my room again. And now I ask God to help me. And come back into my life. Now have someone to teach me. My prayer's were answer. I got to come to this place called God's Mod. My life started to change, I meet some special people there.

There was this little woman that had this glow that I seen. She came up and told us she was going to start a class and see needed guy's to attend it. I wanted to go but the line on the paper was long. Never though I was going to get pick. Though all the other people were going to get pick first because they were here way befor me.

My friend said, Hey we were pick. Are you going to go. I said yes I going to be in this History Event. So here i am. i was not expected to do alot in class. But I was ready for anything. I felt like a Black Kettle there not knowing what the class is about or how hot its going to get. And when it got hot all these's emotion started poping up. I was scared at first. Did any-one see that Bubble pop up. Cry's loud cry's I couldn't explain it. Because when they popped, the word's were writ on my face. I tryed to keep my head down, so that no one could read them. But the tear's started to flow out. And then the tears were washing all my word's from my face.

I feel alot better now, I can say it is time to move on, and I don't have to let my emotion strike to the bottom any more. Thank you God for allowing your Angel Joy come into my life's. I will be going to court for a while. I just got out of leavenworth, KS. I was there for awhile. I prayed in the Sweat Lodge. And I went to the church on ever other Sunday. I work in there M-F day's. Keep my life Busy and had the Lord and the Great Father in my life. Sorry I gave them both up when I got out. Now I have the Lord back in my life. Thank you God.

“The Lord is not outside the cell ... The Lord is inside with you ... No cell is so isolated that it is shut to the Lord, none. He is there, he weeps with you, he works with you, he hopes with you. His paternal and maternal love reaches everywhere.” **Pope Francis**

2. HELPING OUR HEARTS HEAL

Taking care of yourself

Sometimes when we start thinking about the painful things we've experienced, we might feel like we're experiencing them again, like we're in the past rather than the present. When this happens, we can help ourselves by using our bodily senses to focus on the present moment.

Senses exercise

Answer these questions in your mind, as a way to return yourself to the present.

1. What are two things I can see?
2. What are two things I can hear?
3. What are two things I can feel?

Repeat the exercise, if needed, choosing additional things and describing them silently to yourself.

1. The fire

It was three in the morning when the phone rang in Laurel and Pete's bedroom. Laurel looked sleepily at Pete as he answered it, but became more alert as he started to get out of bed as he listened to the caller. "Bad fire," he said, "and it's coming this way!" Pete was a firefighter and Laurel was used to him being called out in the night, but somehow this seemed more serious than usual. Within five minutes Pete was out of the house on his way to the fire. Laurel wondered if she should wake the children, but first she went downstairs to turn on the television and find out what was happening.

Just as Laurel found a channel reporting on the fire, she heard cars driving outside, with loudspeakers telling everyone to get out. It took a while to get the three kids awake and dressed and into the car. As they left, clouds of smoke were getting nearer and they could even see the fire in the distance. Finally they arrived at a friend's house outside the danger zone. Laurel was so relieved to be safe, but then she began to worry about Pete.

There was no news for some hours but then Laurel got a message from a nearby hospital saying she should come at once because her husband was seriously hurt.

As she rushed off, Laurel wondered if she would ever see Pete alive again. At the hospital, she heard that two other men in his unit had been killed and that Pete had burns on most of his body, his leg was crushed, and he had internal injuries. For three dreadful days, she thought he was going to die, but once they amputated his leg, he began to recover. It was a long time, though, before he could leave the hospital.

When he recovered, Pete was given a job in the office of the fire department. Laurel felt that things should be returning to normal, but each week has seemed worse than the last. They both are having trouble sleeping and often have nightmares. But the worst part of it for Laurel has been Pete's personality change. Before the fire, he was generally a happy and balanced guy, but now he gets angry over little things. The children are beginning to be scared of their father because he yells at them when they make any noise. Laurel knows Pete is hurting inside because of the loss of his leg, but he won't talk about it because he thinks men should be strong. His friends just behave as though nothing has happened, but for Pete, his whole life has changed.

Laurel is becoming more and more depressed. She's lost interest in eating. It's especially hard for her at church because she is angry at God for not protecting her husband. Was God not able to protect him? Did God not care? What happened? Most of their friends in the parish are people who have this always H-A-P-P-Y and joyous kind of faith. Laurel knows this is not how she feels.

Finally Laurel talks to her small group leader, Pat. As she talks, she begins to cry and can't stop sobbing. It feels like pressure inside her has been released. Pat listens to Laurel tell what had happened. She asks Laurel to explain how she felt during the whole experience, and finally they talk about what the hardest part of the experience was for Laurel.

Laurel goes away feeling relieved. They have agreed to get together again for coffee the next week.

Discussion

1. Besides the loss of Pete's leg, what else has he lost? What has Laurel lost? What do you think their children have lost?
2. In your area, what are some things people have lost?
3. What does your culture teach people to do with their emotions when they are suffering inside?

2. What is a wound of the heart?

Our hearts can be wounded when we are overwhelmed with intense fear, helplessness, or horror. This is referred to as trauma. It can happen in the face of death, serious injury, betrayal, loss, rape, or other forced sexual activity. And sometimes witnessing trauma can be just as difficult as experiencing it. We can even take on another person's trauma, which is usually called secondary trauma.

Discussion

What are some sources of trauma? Consider those that are caused by humans as well as by nature.

Discussion

How can incarceration contribute to trauma?

A. A heart wound is like a physical wound

Discussion

Think of a physical wound. How does it heal? What helps it heal?

Now compare a physical wound to a heart wound:

PHYSICAL WOUND	HEART WOUND
It is visible.	
It is painful and must be treated with care.	
It must be cleaned to remove any foreign objects/dirt.	
If a wound heals on the surface with infection still inside, it will cause the person to become very sick.	
God has given us people and medicine for healing.	
If not treated, it can get worse.	
It takes time to heal.	
A healed wound may leave a scar.	

B. How do people with wounded hearts behave?

Proverbs 4:23 (NLT) tells us, “*Guard your heart above all else, for it determines the course of your life.*” What happens to our heart affects how we live.

People with wounded hearts may behave in the following ways:

- **Reliving** the experience
- **Avoiding** reminders of the trauma
- **Being on alert** all the time

Discussion

1. Think about wounded people you know. Have you seen anyone acting in these ways? Have you ever acted in these ways? Explain.
2. How would these things make someone feel?

Reliving the experience

- thinking all the time about the event
- feeling like they’re back in the event, while awake (flashbacks) or asleep (nightmares)
- telling everyone about what happened over and over again

This makes it hard to concentrate on the task at hand.

Avoiding reminders of the trauma

- avoiding anything that brings back memories of event (places, people, emotions)
- going numb, not caring about what happens to them, not disturbed by violence or seeing dead bodies
- not remembering what happened, or only remembering parts of it
- using drugs or alcohol, or eating, working, or exercising too much, to avoid feeling the pain
- completely refusing to talk about it

Being on alert all the time

- always feeling tense, jumpy, frightened
- living in dread of another bad thing happening
- overreacting with violence or anger
- struggling to fall asleep, or waking up very early
- shaking, having a fast or irregular heartbeat
- having headaches and stomachaches
- feeling dizzy or faint, difficulty breathing, panic attacks

3. Jesus wept

Some people say we shouldn't think or talk about our feelings. They say the best way to heal our heart wounds is to just forget the past and move on.

That's not natural. Human nature is emotional. We laugh, sing, and cry. We get angry, sad, and afraid. We feel pain and joy, love, and loneliness.

Spirituality is full of emotions as well. We see this in the Scripture. If we stifle emotions, we stifle spiritual growth. And on the other hand, if we let emotions rule our lives, we lose our spiritual grounding.

Jesus cried in grief when he heard a friend had died. Cried in fear the night before he was arrested. Got angry at injustice.

Peter lost his temper and got violent. Then he cried after lying about his friendship with Jesus. Jonah got angry at God. Hannah got depressed and quit eating. David was so afraid he couldn't stop trembling. In fact, the Psalms are full of songs and prayers describing all human emotions. The writer of one psalm told God, "*I am hurt to the depth of my heart*" (Psalm 109:22). And the first Christians kept encouraging each other to share their feelings as a way of taking care of each other. (Examples of Jesus in John 11:33-35, Matthew 26:37-38, Matthew 21:12-13; Peter in John 18:8-11 and Matthew 26:69-75; Jonah in Jonah 4:1-3; Hannah in 1 Samuel 1:10, 13-16; and David in Psalm 55:4-6.)

Discussion

Growing up, how did your family handle emotions?

4. How can we heal from the wounds of our hearts?

One way we can begin to heal is by talking about our pain. Usually we need to talk to another person about our pain before we are ready to talk to God about it. We may need to tell our story many times. If we are able to talk about our bad experiences, then after a while our reactions will become less and less intense. But if we are not able to talk about our pain, and if there is no one to help us, these reactions may continue for months and even years.

A. What begins to happen when we talk about our pain?

When we talk with someone who knows how to listen:

- We can gain an honest understanding of what happened and how it has affected us.
- We can accept what happened.

- We can feel heard and know we are not alone.
- We can become able to trust and rest in God, and let God begin to heal our hearts (see Psalm 62:8 and Psalm 103:3).

B. What is a good listener like?

Discussion

With what kind of person would you feel free to share your deep pain?

1. Someone who creates a safe space

For us to share the deep wounds of our hearts with someone, we need to know that our listener:

- Cares about us.
- Will keep the information confidential.
- Will listen and understand our pain.
- Will not criticize us or give quick solutions.
- Will not minimize our pain by comparing it with their own pain.

2. Someone who asks helpful questions

Here are three helpful questions to guide us when we are sharing our pain or listening to others:

1. What happened?
2. How did you feel?
3. What was the hardest part for you?

3. Someone who shows they are listening to us

- Looks at us, not out the window, at their watch, or at their phone.
- Doesn't seem impatient for us to finish.
- Says words of agreement like "Mmm."
- From time to time, repeats what they think we've said (so we can correct, restate, or affirm their understanding).

4. Someone who allows the healing process to go at its own pace

- Notices if we become very distressed and knows it's not helpful to continue. "Let's take a break, think about other things, and get calm inside. We can resume telling our story when we feel ready."
- May gently ask us if we would like prayer. If we say "yes," the listener prays but does not preach. If we say "no," the listener honors this.

Listening exercise, in pairs

Talk about one bad thing that happened to you—a small thing, not the worst thing you've experienced. The other person listens, using the three questions above. Then switch roles.

Afterward, discuss these questions as a group:

1. How did you feel during this exercise?
2. Was anything difficult?
3. Did you feel heard when you were listened to? Why or why not?
4. What did the listener do well?

C. Serious cases

1. Some things can make our pain worse

Certain things make heart wounds more serious ...

- Something very personal, for example, a family member dying or being betrayed by a close friend
- Something that goes on for a long time
- Something that happens many times over a period of time.
- Something connected with death
- Something that people have done intentionally to cause pain rather than something that is accidental

People react to painful events differently. Two people may go through the same event, but one may have a severe reaction while the other is not affected much at all. A person is likely to react more severely to trauma if he or she:

- always wants someone else to tell them what to do.
- has mental illness or emotional problems.
- is usually sad or is sensitive.
- had many bad things happen in the past, particularly if they happened when he or she was a child, like both parents dying.
- already had many problems before this happened.

2. What are signs that someone might need additional help?

Here are signs that someone may need more help beyond spending time with a good listener:

- Their behaviors put life and health at risk
- They are unable to complete daily activities or care for basic needs
- They frequently cannot manage their emotions
- They think things are happening that are not real, such as hearing voices or imagining that they are being followed.

These behaviors show that someone needs professional help. If a psychologist or psychiatrist is not available, a doctor or nurse may at least give them medicine to calm them down and help them sleep.

Art exercise

Another way we can get the pain in our hearts out without using words is by drawing. Start by getting quiet inside and asking God to show you the pain in your heart. Begin drawing one of your painful experiences without thinking about it too much. Try to let the pain come out through your fingers. The senses exercise and the breathing exercise can help you if you feel very strong emotions during this exercise.

Discussion

1. Share as much or as little as you'd like about your drawing. Or, if you'd prefer, share what the experience was like of drawing your pain.
 2. Was there anything new you realized about your situation?
-

Taking care of yourself

Do the senses exercise and the breathing exercise before you leave.

What's one thing you will do to take care of yourself today?

Wrapping it up

What's one thing you want to remember from this lesson?

Voices

Oh God

Why do I continue to struggle with everything, why do I continue to loose the war Ive been fighting with my addictions to drugs and anger? Why do you not help me when I start to fall, Why do you seperate me and my family.

I love my family. I love my girl and my little girl so much and you took me away from them. Now I have to spend the rest of my life away from them. I wont get to see my children grow up. I wont get to teach my son how to be a man. I wont get to watch my daughter blossom in to a woman. My children will grow to hate me!

I ask you for mercy lord. I beg you for mercy in the court room.

I ask you to take this away from me God. I beg you please God let me be the father I need to be. Let me be the father my children deserve, even if your will is for me to raise my children from prison. God I trust and believe you are working in my life. God I trust in you and you are a god of mercy. I have never stopped believing that you are my lord and saviour. I have given my life to you, and I understand and have faith in your will, and your will will be done and I am fine with that.

Regardless of the outcome I will continue to praise you, I will continue to bring more and more of your sheep to you. I will stay in the word and spread your word lord. I love you lord

Love your Son



3. WHAT HAPPENS WHEN SOMEONE IS GRIEVING?

Taking care of yourself

Sometimes we can be overwhelmed by what we have experienced but we are not in a situation where we can express how we feel. This exercise can be helpful.

Container exercise

Close your eyes or look down at the floor so you are not distracted. Imagine a big container. It could be a big box or a shipping container. Imagine a way to lock the container, like a key or a padlock.

Now imagine putting all the things that are disturbing you right now into the container: big things, small things—everything that is disturbing you. When they are all inside the container, close it. Now lock the container and put the key somewhere safe. Do not throw it away. When you are ready, open your eyes and look up.

Later, find a time when you can get quiet. Take the key and open the container, then one by one take out the things you have put inside. You may want to do this with someone who can help you talk about these things. Do not leave them in the container forever!

1. The night that changed Tony's life

Tony was home with his family after a long day at school and work. He lived on the “bad” side of town—if you weren't from there you would never go there, except by accident. Tony lived in a cramped one-bedroom apartment with his two younger brothers and his mom. He had goals to get his GED and help his mom raise his brothers. He worked hard to stay out of trouble and to avoid the gangs that so many of his friends had joined.

One night Tony took an extra shift at the pizza place where he worked, so he didn't get off until 11 p.m. The busy corner where he lived was on the line dividing two opposing gangs in his neighborhood. They were continually fighting for control of this neutral street.

On this night, a terrible battle broke out right in front of Tony's house. His mom was on her way home from picking up his brothers and they found themselves in the middle of it. His youngest brother was shot and killed immediately, and Joe, his other brother, was seriously wounded and taken to the hospital.

Tony came home to see police tape on the scene, and police everywhere. His neighbor got to him first and told him what happened. Tony ran toward the house, pushing wildly through the crowd. When a police officer tried to stop him, Tony punched him. The officer cuffed him, wrestled him to the police car, and booked him on assault.

In the jail, Tony's grief began to overwhelm him. He found himself crying when no one was looking. This made him feel embarrassed and he tried hard to hold in his feelings. He began losing sleep and was tormented with thoughts of guilt and regret. "If only I had been there, I could have stopped it!" Over and over again these thoughts ran through his mind. He also began to plot revenge on the gang members who had destroyed his family.

Because he had not been sentenced he was not able to furlough to his brother's funeral. He felt enraged at everyone—the officer who arrested him, the gang members, the attorney for not arranging a furlough, God for letting all this happen. When he didn't feel enraged, he felt numb, like he was walking through fog. "I can't believe this is happening to me."

Discussion

1. What has Tony lost?
2. What are some things you have lost as a result of being incarcerated?

2. What is grieving?

Grieving is feeling the loss of something.

Discussion

What kind of losses can we grieve?

Life includes moments of heart-wrenching loss. Grieving is part of the normal process of recovering from loss. When we lose someone or something important to us, we may also lose a sense of who we are. As we grieve, our sense of who we are gradually changes and we adjust to our new stage of life. This takes time.

Grieving is one of the important experiences that helps with healing. Spending time grieving is actually a good thing. Let yourself do so if you haven't already.

The Scriptures tell us that there is a time for everything in life—including the different dynamics of grieving.

A Time for Everything

*He sets the time for birth and the time for death,
the time for planting and the time for pulling up,
the time for killing and the time for healing,
the time for tearing down and the time for building.
He sets the time for sorrow and the time for joy,
the time for mourning and the time for dancing,
the time for making love and the time for not making love,
the time for kissing and the time for not kissing.*

*He sets the time for finding and the time for losing,
the time for saving and the time for throwing away,
the time for tearing and the time for mending,
the time for silence and the time for talk.
He sets the time for love and the time for hate,
the time for war and the time for peace.*

Ecclesiastes 3:2-8 GNT

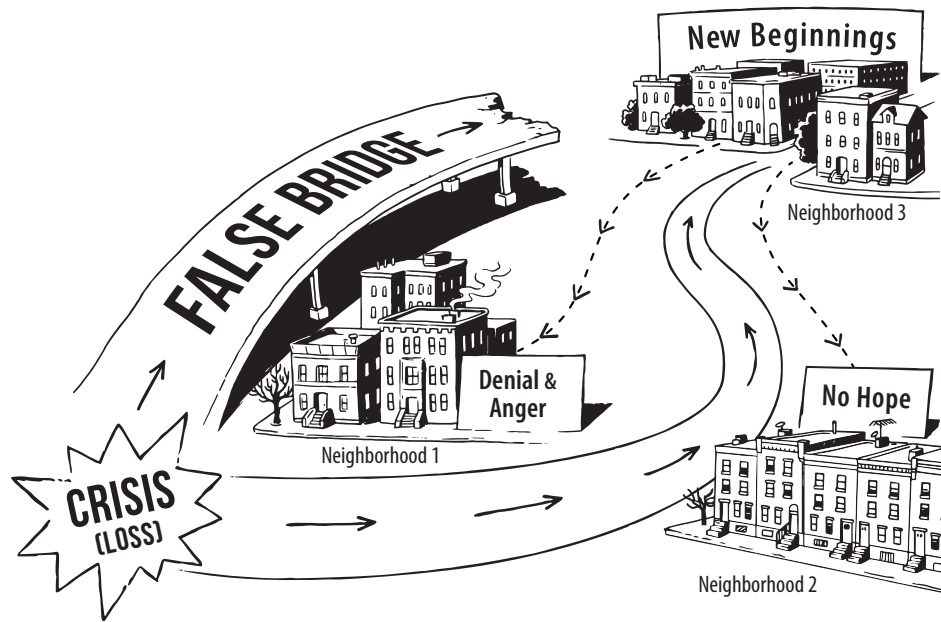
Discussion

1. What do you think the writer of Ecclesiastes is trying to point out?
2. Which line stands out most for you and why?
3. How would name this “time” in your life?

3. How can we grieve in a way that brings healing?

The grief journey

Grieving itself can be looked at like a journey that leads to healing. “Getting through it quickly” is a myth. It usually requires visits to a few places. Check out the illustration here.



Neighborhood 1: Denial and Anger

- Numb
- Not aware of what is happening around us
- Can't believe the person has died or the event has happened
- May suddenly start to cry or erupt in anger
- May be angry with God
- May be angry with a person who has died, for leaving us alone
- "If only I had done this or that, the person wouldn't have died" or "I wish I had ..."
- "Why did this happen to me?"
- May find someone to blame for the death
- May take revenge, which results in conflict and more pain
- May think we hear or see the dead person

Neighborhood 2: No Hope

- Sad and hopeless
- Hard to organize life
- Long for the dead person to come back
- May feel lonely
- May want to kill ourselves
- May feel guilty even if there is no reason to

Neighborhood 3: New Beginnings

- Think about moving on to a new life
- Ready to go out with friends and have fun

- May consider remarrying if a spouse died, or having another child if a child died
- Changed by the loss; may be stronger, more tender

Backtracks and the ‘false bridge’

The grief journey is not always direct. It is normal for people to revisit previous stops for a short period of time. Sometimes this happens in response to an event like the anniversary of a death or another traumatic event.

It is tempting to try to bypass the process of grieving. We want to start over without dealing with our feelings about our loss, but this is not healthy. The grief will stay inside us and cause problems for many years. The “false bridge” is a dead end.

Discussion in pairs

1. Think of a loss you have experienced. How would you describe that time?
2. In your grief journey, have you looped back or gotten stuck along the way? Explain.
3. Have you tried to take the false bridge to avoid feeling the pain of loss? Explain.

4. What can make grieving more difficult?

Some things can make grieving more difficult.

A. The type of loss

- When there are too many deaths or losses at the same time
- When the death or loss is sudden and unexpected
- When the death or loss is violent
- When there is no body to be buried or no way to confirm that the person has died
- When the person that provided for the family has died
- When we had unresolved problems with the dead person
- When the death is a suicide or murder
- When a child has died

B. Cultural beliefs about grieving

Our culture or family’s preferred way of grieving may not be the most helpful approach to our own. For example, if it doesn’t allow us to cry, we’ll hold our grief inside rather than letting it out. If it lingers too long at one “neighborhood” or

another, we will get stuck. If it believes in false bridges, we will not get to the real place of healing.

Discussion

1. What does your culture or family think about men grieving? What does it say about women grieving?
2. Looking back at how we have described the Grief Journey (Neighborhood 1, Neighborhood 2, Neighborhood 3, the false bridge), would you say that your culture or family tends to promote one part of the Grief Journey more than the others? Explain.

5. What helps us when we are grieving?

Discussion, in small groups

1. When you have been mourning the loss of someone or something, what sort of helpful things have people done or said?
2. What sort of unhelpful things have people done or said?

What helps when we're grieving?

- People who listen to our pain, who do more listening than talking. We cannot absorb teaching and sermons at this time (Job 21:2; Proverbs 18:13).
- People who help us with practical things, at time of funeral but also in following months and years.
- Reminding ourselves that it is normal to grieve, and that it is a process that will take time. We will not always feel like we do today.
- Avoiding big decisions and major changes, like marrying someone. When we are in the Neighborhood of New Beginnings, we will be able to make better decisions.
- Getting exercise and wearing ourselves out physically, so we can sleep better. It's common to have difficulty sleeping in the weeks and months after a loss.
- Reading the psalms, especially the lamentations. These can provide great comfort.
- Bringing our losses to the Lord, one by one. The more specific we can be, the better.

Lamentations

One of the tools we can use to help us grieve is the ancient spiritual practice of lamentation. In a lamentation, people pour out their complaints to God and ask God to act on their behalf, while also stating their hope or trust in God.

Lamentations in the Bible can have the following parts.

- Address to God (“O God”)
- Review of God’s faithfulness in the past
- **A complaint**
- A confession of sin or claim of innocence
- A request for help
- God’s response (often not stated)
- A vow to praise God or a statement of trust in God

Not all parts are present in each lamentation, and they are not always in the same order. The essential part is the complaint.

A lamentation allows a person to fully express their grief and even accuse God, but this is often followed by a statement of trust in God. This combination makes for a very powerful prayer. The grief is not hidden, but the person does not stay in their grief—they call on God and try to express their trust. Lamentations encourage people be honest with God, to speak the truth about their feelings and doubts. To lament to God is a sign of faith, not doubt.

In a lamentation, people do not attempt to solve the problem themselves, but they cry to God for help. They look to God, not an enemy or random chance, as the one ultimately in control of the situation. They ask God to take action to bring justice rather than taking action themselves or cursing the enemy.

Psalm 13	Part of the lamentation
How much longer will you forget me, LORD? Forever? How much longer will you hide yourself from me? How long must I endure trouble? How long will sorrow fill my heart day and night? How long will my enemies triumph over me?	Address and complaint
Look at me, O LORD my God, and answer me. Restore my strength; don’t let me die. Don’t let my enemies say, “We have defeated him.” Don’t let them gloat over my downfall.	Request

I rely on your constant love;	Statement of trust in God
I will be glad, because you will rescue me. I will sing to you, O LORD, because you have been good to me.	Vow to praise

(Sixty-seven of the Psalms are considered laments—more than any other type of psalm. Some were for use by individuals; others were used by the community together. The individual lamentation Psalms are: 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 9-10, 11, 13, 16, 17, 22, 25, 26, 27, 28, 31, 35, 36, 38, 39, 40, 42, 43, 51, 52, 54, 55, 56, 57, 59, 61, 62, 63, 64, 69, 70, 71, 77, 86, 88, 94, 102, 109, 120, 130, 140, 141, 142, 143. The community lamentations Psalms are: 12, 14, 44, 53, 58, 60, 74, 79, 80, 83, 85, 90, 106, 108, 123, 126, and 137.)

Write a lamentation

Take some time to create a lamentation to God. Read Psalm 13 as an example. Your lamentation could be a song, rap, poem, prayer, or any creative way you wish to express your feelings to God. It does not have to include all parts of a lament, but it does need to have a complaint and an expression of faith in God.

Use this space or a separate sheet of paper to write your lamentation.

Discussion, in small groups

Share as much or as little as you'd like of your lamentation. Or share what the process of writing a lamentation was like for you.

Taking care of yourself

It can be hard to go right back into your cell or unit after opening up so many strong emotions. Do the container exercise again to help you put some things “back in the box” until later, when you can process them more fully. You can also do the breathing exercise and the senses exercise.

What's one thing you will do to take care of yourself today?

Wrapping it up

What's one thing you want to remember from this lesson?

Voices

Lament of a Forgiven Son

Father you Created me, you Knew me Even when I was in my mothers womb. What a disappointment I must have been when you looked upon me, for from the beginning I suffered, from the moment I came into this world my life has been full of torment and pain. From my Fathers hand Death tried to seize me, pain and fear ruled my life til the age of fourteen—when truth from my mother’s life set me free; Only to set me up for the next tramatic scene to Grip my Life, to riddle my hopes and Dreams, with agony and pain. Death to come in and take from me the only women I had and would ever Love, but not only my Queen but the child I longed to love, my “baby Girl” who I would never be able to hold-to-comfort in her time of fear—of a world filled with hatred and evil, to read to her and watch over her as she slept, to Laugh with her and when in pain, to cry with and Shield her as best I could from all Evil. Which til this Day the pain and agony of there memory Cripples me. I am stuck in my mind of what could and should have been. So I Replace Love with addiction and pain. Until the Death at my birth catches up with me, to write the mistake of my Fathers hand. For truly I wish i had died that day.

For what good is man, but to be fruitful and multiply. I have no wife, no heir, nothing to remind the world that I existed. So Lord what truly Did my birth accomplish. Why my Lord? Why Let me Live? End the pain which is my life.

My Lord Creator of heaven and earth Look down and have mercy on me for the trouble of my heart is heavy. If you dont help me truly the weight shall crush me. for my tears dont stop flowing and I am weak from sobbing. I cant eat for food no longer sustains me. There is no pleasure no taste in my mouth. The water I drink just feeds the tears of my heart. Help me Lord for I am tired and there is no rest for me.

Father God from the day of my youth I was taught of your Love and mercy, how it endurers forever, and how your love is always present. So I Shall still my heart and trust in you, for I know you are my savior my God and my King. And that the whole world is under your Dominion. I know you are a just God and that you hear the cries of your people. So I shall wait on you my Lord. for I know true Deliverance comes from you.



4. TAKING YOUR PAIN TO THE CROSS

Taking care of yourself

When we remember painful experiences, we need to stay aware of our bodies and to remind ourselves that we are no longer in the past. Consider using the breathing exercise or the senses exercise before starting this lesson.

Pain to the cross ceremony

We have taken time to recognize the pains we are carrying. So far, we have reminded ourselves of how the experiences of making sense of suffering, telling our story and being heard, grieving, and lamenting can help us heal. Now we will focus on the foundation of our healing and bring our pain to God, whose own Son experienced enough trauma for all humanity and whose Spirit brings us healing today. Prayerfully bringing our pain to God is at the spiritual center of the healing journey.

In this session, we will write down the wounds of our hearts, bring these wounds and our pain to Jesus, and call upon the Holy Spirit to help us in the healing process.

You may find this ceremony helpful. It will not heal all heart wounds instantaneously. You may need to bring your pain to Christ again many times as you journey to healing. You can do so in your thoughts and prayers, even in the middle of the night. You can do so alone and with others.

Now let us take our pain to the God our Father who created us, sent his only Son to die for us, and has given us the Holy Spirit to guide, strengthen, and comfort us.

Jesus himself chose to reveal his identity by publicly reading these words the prophet Isaiah: *“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has chosen me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set free the oppressed ...”* (Luke 4:18).

He taught us: *“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are they who mourn, for they will be comforted.”* And he tells us: *“Come to me, all who labor and are burdened, and I will give you rest.”* (Matthew 5:3-4; 11:28 NABRE)

It is God’s will that Jesus would suffer, die, and rise again so that we would be able to go through our own suffering, loss, and renewal. Our Catholic faith calls this the Paschal Mystery, and right now we will explore the power of that mystery by bringing our pain to the cross of Jesus.

We’ll do this in five steps.

Step 1: Write down your worst pain.

- Painful things that have been done to you.
- Painful things you have seen done to others, or bad dreams you have had.
- Painful things you have heard about that have happened to others.
- Painful things that you have done to others.

Write these things on sticky notes or other paper.

Step 2: Talk about it with someone.

In small groups, share as much or as little as you wish of what you wrote down, or share what the process of writing it down was like. Listen without criticizing or offering advice. Share openly but don’t dwell on violent parts. Pray for each other if you feel comfortable doing so.

Step 3: Personally talk to Christ about your pain.

Isaiah said this about Jesus’s suffering:

*We are healed by the punishment he suffered,
made whole by the blows he received.
All of us were like sheep that were lost,
each of us going his own way.
But the LORD made the punishment fall on him,
the punishment all of us deserved.
He was treated harshly, but endured it humbly.
He never said a word.
Like a lamb about to be slaughtered, like a sheep to be sheared,
he never said a word.* (Isaiah 53:5b-7)

Take some time to bring your pain to Jesus. Tell him exactly what it is—anger, sadness, loneliness, betrayal, guilt, feeling abandoned, or anything else. Try to let out all the pain and emotions you feel about your loss or hurt.

Step 4: Bring your pain to the cross.

Attach each of your sticky notes to your fingers on one hand. Then clench that hand into a fist. As you do, say “This is how we have hung onto our pain.”

Open your clenched fist and say, “God has invited us to hand them over. Christ has died. Christ has risen. Christ will come again.”

Place the crumpled sticky notes with your pains on the image of the crucifix of Christ. In your own words, say something like, “I hand this over to you, Lord. Take my pain.”



Step 5: Conclude this time.

Destroy the papers as a sign of God taking our pain into himself.

Receive the gift of the Spirit

Before he left this earth, Jesus told his followers: *“I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, who will stay with you forever ... The Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything and make you remember all that I have told you.*

“Peace is what I leave with you; it is my own peace that I give you. Do not be worried and upset; do not be afraid.” (John 14:16, 26–27)

Let us pray

Leader: Christ assures us that the Holy Spirit is God's gift to us. Each of us is invited to walk with the Spirit and to count on the Spirit's power and presence as we continue to travel the journey to healing.

Participants: Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful and enkindle in us the fire of your love.

Leader: Send forth your Spirit and they shall be created.

Participants: And you shall renew the face of the earth.

All: O God, by the light of the Holy Spirit you instruct the hearts of the faithful. Grant in us the same Spirit to be truly wise and receive his consolation. Heal our hearts, through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Taking care of yourself

Remembering the most painful things in your life takes a lot of courage and energy. It is normal to feel more tired or emotional than usual, or to have difficulty sleeping. Don't be discouraged. Recognize and celebrate the ways you have been courageous.

Remember the exercises you've learned to cope with strong emotions. Before you leave, consider doing the breathing exercise or the senses exercise. What's one thing you will do to take care of yourself today?

Wrapping it up

What's one thing you want to remember from this lesson?

Voices

December 12, 2016

When I walked into the class room at Douglas County Corrections, at age 56, I was facing my (4) fourth prison number and a parole violation from my (3) third prison number.

The scars were so deeply hidden—I could not verbally express them. Struck down by physical abuse of the body, I thought it was no cure. My life was chaotic, and out of control. You feel ungodly when ungodly things happen to you. I was hurt—hopeless—it was too hard to move on.

I started stuffing instead of forgiving. I ran from one pain to find

another.

Where is the comfort, and peace I once knew in God.

What is this pain that's holding me back from the blessed life I deserve to live. My emotions can not cope with the pain

The drugs could not numb the pain. The alcohol could not drown the pain. The abcess had made a hole so deep and ugly in my heart.

How could God heal me? Physically. Emotionally. Spiritually Exhausted.

How can the wounds of the heart heal

Walking in the classroom—My God gave me the strength to talk about the trauma (the core of my pain).

I talked—I cried, I grieved, got mad

I called on God, and shared my complaints. I asked for help, and trusted in His Power. The soothing oil from Jesus poured over me, as I nailed my pain to the cross.

I have seen my own brokenness, and given every shattered piece to God. Through His grace and mercy—Praise honor and glory belong to Him. God snatched me out—before I fell in deep depression

He knows me better than anyone. I don't have to keep exhausting myself trying to rebuild my life after another shipwreck.

He controls the storm.

Through his grace and mercy I see a new vision. I see the others, the 97% of women who suffer trauma, and don't know it.

Now I have an eye to see the other's and extend a helping hand.

The grace to step outside myself.

5. HOW CAN WE FORGIVE OTHERS?

Taking care of yourself

We've done three exercises to help manage strong emotions: the breathing exercise, the senses exercise, the container exercise. Practicing these exercises when we're not stressed will help us cope when we are stressed. Pick the one you like most and do it again.

1. Forgiveness skits

Think about the forgiveness skits you saw or participated in.

Discussion

1. Which of these skits shows real forgiveness?
2. How is it different from the others?

2. Forgiveness is not ...

Forgiveness is not	Forgiveness is

Forgiveness is not ...

- Taking the false bridge by:
 - Saying the offense didn't matter or that we were not hurt by what the person did.
 - Acting as if the event never happened.
- Being able to make sense of why the person did what he or she did.
- Dependent on the offender apologizing first or changing their behavior.
- Letting those who do wrong avoid the consequences of their action.
- Letting the offender hurt us or other innocent people again.
- Trusting a person again right after they hurt us.

Forgiveness is a decision to release our right to pay back the offender. It acknowledges what has happened and how it has affected us. It is an ongoing process of reaffirming our decision to let go each time we remember the offense. It does not require us to trust the person again nor release them from the consequences of the offense.

3. How can we forgive others?

A lot of times we need help from above to forgive a hurt deep within. "Letting go" often requires more than we can muster. It requires grace from God. And while forgiveness helps us on the road toward healing, it can take a while for us to "get there." Here are four suggestions:

1. Ask for God's help.

We know that those who live the Twelve Steps in AA learn to call upon their Higher Power early on. Why? Because our human nature doesn't have enough strength on its own to do the things we know are best. Like St. Paul said, "*For even though the desire to do good is in me, I am not able to do it*" (Romans 7:18b).

2. Do not wait for the other person to apologize.

Waiting for the one who has hurt us to apologize will keep us enslaved by that person's wrongdoing. By waiting, we stay a victim of the hurt instead of moving on our journey toward healing.

3. Allow time for the process.

Getting impatient over the time it takes for our hearts to be able to forgive will make us feel worse. We can worry that if we don't forgive quickly, we may "get stuck" in bitterness. But if we rush to saying or thinking we have forgiven our offender before our hearts are ready, it's fake forgiveness—a false bridge.

4. Leave judgment to God.

Our faith teaches us that all of us will be judged by God, who knows our hearts, our motivations, our weaknesses, our intentions, our acts of grace, our acts of disgrace, our sins. We will each have to account to God for our decisions and actions. Remembering this can free us to let go of our need for revenge, to move forward, and to leave judgment to the One who is both merciful and just.

Discussion

What do you see, feel, and think about this photo of Pope Francis with those at the Paliano prison?



4. Forgiveness is good for the soul

Try to be at peace with everyone, and try to live a holy life, because no one can see the Lord without it. Guard against turning back from the grace of God. Let no one become like a bitter plant that grows up and causes many troubles with its poison.
(Hebrews 12:14-15)

- Forgiveness liberates us. It frees us from anger and bitterness, which also impacts those around us.
- Forgiveness shows that we understand the way God has forgiven us: as a gift we should then pass on to others.
- Forgiveness makes it possible for our relationship with those who have offended us to be restored. Full restoration, however, requires repentance and forgiveness by both parties.
- Forgiveness can sometimes change the person who offended us. It may be the start of God bringing that person to a better way.

So much of the Good News is about forgiveness. See, for example, Paul's words in Ephesians 3:16-19 and 4:31-32. Read what the writer of 1 John 4:7-20 says about the Holy Spirit and love.

Discussion in small groups

1. What do you find the hardest thing about forgiving someone?
2. What has helped you the most to forgive others?
3. Have you ever experienced forgiveness being good for your soul? If yes, explain.

5. What if we are the ones who have caused the offense?

We need to admit it ...

- Allow the Holy Spirit to show us how much we have hurt others.
- Take responsibility for what we have done and clearly state it.
- Seek God's forgiveness, and then accept that God has forgiven us. Consider participating in the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Your chaplain can provide details of when and how.
- Ask those we've offended to forgive us, without excusing ourselves, blaming them, or demanding that they trust us again right away.
- Show our repentance by the way we act.
- If possible, make restitution by paying back what is owed.

(See Numbers 5:5-7; Psalm 32:3-5; Proverbs 28:13; Acts 26:20b; 2 Corinthians 7:10; James 4:8-9; James 5:16; 1 John 1:9.)

Forgiveness exercise

(1) If you need to forgive someone

Write down the name of a person (or people) you need to forgive. Use a symbol to represent the person if you are concerned about privacy: _____

What do you need to forgive them for?

How did their actions make you feel?

Pray: "God, I forgive [*or, please help me to forgive*] _____ for doing _____.

It made me feel _____."

(2) If you need to be forgiven for harm you have done

I need to ask _____ to forgive me.

What harm did you do to them?

How might you have made them feel?

Pray: “God, please forgive me for doing _____
to _____. Please help me do the things that show I
have repented.”

What plans can you make to ask the person you hurt for forgiveness?

If we confess our sins to God, he will keep his promise and do what is right: he will forgive us our sins and purify us from all our wrongdoing. (1 John 1:9)

Taking care of yourself

Take a moment to see how you are feeling now. Do you need to do a breathing exercise or the senses exercise? What’s one thing you can do to take care of yourself today?

Wrapping it up

What’s one thing you want to remember from this lesson?

Want some homework? Read the incredible Old Testament saga of Joseph. It is found in the first book of the Bible, Genesis, chapters 37–50. See which of his heart wounds you can relate to and how forgiveness helps the healing.

Voices

Things started off rough in my life from the very beginning. My dad was a violent alcoholic and my older brother and I witnessed a lot of abuse with my father beating my mother. When my mother was pregnant with me, my dad held my brother and mother hostage at gun point. Violence was a constant occurrence in our home until age four, when they finally divorced. Our lives became normal enough after that. I lived with my mom and I got a good step dad. I had friends and we played Barbie; I liked sports. Our family went together to the Catholic Church. Things became pretty normal.

My brother, however, always seemed to be in trouble and my parent's full attention was on him. Like my dad, he was very violent not only to family members but would tear up the house in his rages. They were always correcting and disciplining him until finally one day, they gave him over to the state. I think this is when I remember the shift happening in our family. I felt a sense of uneasiness that my parents would give up on him. I got the feeling that if I did enough wrong, they would give me up as well. Also at this time with my brother gone, all of their attentions turned in my direction. That correction and discipline they had used on my brother was suddenly focused on me. From the age of 10 to age 18 my mom, with the help of my step dad, would hold me down and spank me like a little child when I did wrong. I felt humiliation with this and really hated being restrained by my step dad. I began seething with anger.

I had always done well in school. I was a good student, a cheerleader, and even received a college scholarship in cheerleading, and I was active in sports. I did, however, still have a huge amount of anger built up inside of me. I learned to release it by fighting. Usually on a weekly basis, matches would be arranged in a field for me and a large number of kids from our small town, 60 to 80, would gather to watch me fight. This was the only way I knew how to release my building, internal rage.

One time when I was about 15, my mother drug tested me and discovered that I tested positive for pot. To punish me my step-dad held me down so my mom could spank me. He had on a robe and I could feel his unclothed body under the robe up against my skin. I was screaming for him to get off me but he kept holding me down. Out of desperation I bit him. My parents' response was to call the police and let me sit in jail for five days. They then kicked me out of the house. I ended up losing all my scholarships for college as I scrambled to live life on my own. It was at this time that I started using cocaine, alcohol, and eventually crack.

During the process of all of this chaos, I had two beautiful children. Sadly, I raised them with this explosive anger and they experienced many things children should not see.

I was arrested in March 2016 on an assault charge. The night before I was arrested I had been in a fight with my boyfriend and threw my cell phone at him so hard that I cracked his skull. While in jail I caught an additional assault on a woman who I had cut with a knife and brutally beat. I was in once again in jail full of anger, hatred, and rage. I was like a bomb ready to explode.

It was during my jail stay that I heard about this class on trauma healing. I was asked to sign up. I not only came to faith in Christ during this class but God brought this entire trauma in my life to the forefront. I had no idea that the trauma of my childhood was the underlying factor in my anger. It was always under the surface ready to explode but the class taught me how to deal with it. I was taught how to deal with it by writing laments, talking, and bringing it to the cross and eventually forgiveness. I know now that if I did not let God heal the trauma, I would be back in jail on another assault charge.

When I first came to jail, I was often locked down for fighting. That was who I was. But after taking the class and getting to the root of my anger, I have since walked away from countless encounters. One day the chaplain who taught the trauma class was in the housing unit and was able to witness first hand the change that has taken place in my life. I had an inmate try to verbally provoke a physical fight with me. She was in my face, being physically aggressive, screaming obscenities. Oh, my old behavior would have unleashed on this woman but I was able to put both my hands in the air, walk away, and go to my cell. The women even followed after me with taunts but I no longer felt the need to fight.

I see so many women in jail come in and out and in again whose hearts are overflowing with pain. There are so many who have unresolved trauma in their lives. My desire is to first go back to be a loving mom with my kids in Colorado but eventually go into the jail and conduct trauma healing classes. These classes have truly changed my life.

LOOKING BACK

In this final section we will revisit two important topics and then use our imagination to help us move forward.

Making sense of our own suffering

There is no easy way to explain why bad things happen to good people, or why life comes with suffering. And even if we could, it would not take the pain away.

But we do know that God's love, mercy, and grace will help heal our heart wounds.

Our heart wounds are not to be taken lightly. They have had a real impact on us. Yet it can also be helpful to look back at our suffering to see if it helped us be more sensitive to the pain of others, more able to comfort others, or simply reminded us of our need to live more carefully, patiently, or thoughtfully. Sometimes, painful experiences may even have strengthened our faith.

Discussion

1. How might suffering in your life be used for good?
2. Read Ephesians chapter 4. Discuss St. Paul's advice to the Ephesians. Which words of advice speak to you most at this time?

Share responses in the large group.

The healing process

We have learned several steps of the process of healing from heart wounds. We have seen the importance of expressing our pain through words and art. We have seen how helpful it is to participate in grieving, lamenting, bringing our pain to the cross, and forgiving. As we continue to practice these things, we will be able to rebuild our lives and be better able to face suffering in the future. We will have good days and bad days—it's all part of the journey. And as we learned in this group, we can talk to God at every step of the way toward healing.

Discussion

1. Which of these six experiences has been most helpful to you so far?
 - Making sense of suffering
 - Telling your story and being heard
 - Grieving
 - Lamentation
 - Bringing your pain to the Cross
 - Forgiving
 2. Which do you plan on revisiting or continuing?
-

Taking care of yourself

This exercise can help us build the ability to handle tough situations and emotions and prepare our mind for future conflict. To prepare, take a few deep breaths and try to clear your mind of everything you have been thinking and talking about. Focus instead on the images you read or hear from the Scripture text.

Try to use your imagination and stay with the exercise if you can. If you aren't able to do so, it's okay to use this time instead to quiet your mind.

Tree exercise

Read Psalm 1:1-3a.

*Happy are those who reject the advice of evil people,
who do not follow the example of sinners
or join those who have no use for God.*

*Instead, they find joy in obeying the Law of the LORD,
and they study it day and night.*

*They are like trees that grow beside a stream,
that bear fruit at the right time,
and whose leaves do not dry up.*

**Now fix your eyes in one place or, if you're comfortable, close your eyes.
Imagine that you are a tree.**

What kind of tree would you be? See yourself as that kind of tree.

In your imagination, look around. Is your tree by itself?

What's the landscape around you?

Now look at the trunk of the tree.

Notice it going down into the earth and up into the branches. Follow the branches way out into the leaves. (If it's a fruit tree, see the fruit hanging from the branches.)

Now follow the trunk down to the roots.

Look at the roots—is it a long single root or many roots going out? Notice how the roots are anchored into the ground.

Now watch how the root system is bringing water and nutrients to the roots and how those nutrients travel up the tree to the branches.

Notice the weather.

Imagine the sun shining on the leaves, making oxygen. Imagine the tree just being there in just the right temperature and light.

Now the tree needs a bit of water. Imagine a gentle rain slowly coming down over the leaves and going towards the roots. See the water going down, down into the roots. See the moisture being taken up into the tree.

Now stop the rain; see the sun coming out to dry the leaves.

Now imagine the tree with some live creatures—perhaps birds, or squirrels or insects going up and down. Watch all the activity.

Now there's a storm.

Black clouds are beginning to form in the distance. The storm won't harm or destroy the tree, but the storm will come.

The wind is picking up and the clouds are coming. The branches are shaking. The trunk is moving back and forth. Some of the leaves are falling and some of the fruit is falling.

Now focus on how the roots are holding firm and allowing the tree to move back and forth in the wind. Let the storm go on a bit. Feel the tree moving back and forth with its roots firmly planted in the ground.

Now the storm is slowing gradually until everything is still again.

How is the tree feeling after the storm?

Now the sun is returning. The insects and birds are coming back out again.

Things are drying. Imagine the tree coming back to normal.

When the tree is still again, the sun is shining, and the insects and the birds are back out again, gradually take some deep breaths and open your eyes.

Discussion

Were you able to stay with it? Share what it was like for you.

ON YOUR OWN

So strengthen your drooping hands and your weak knees. Make straight paths for your feet, that what is lame may not be dislocated but healed.

(Hebrews 12:12-13 NABRE)

The continued work of restoration lies ahead. You will need legal and financial support, and spiritual support as well. Our Catholic faith offers us several spiritual practices that you can continue to do alone or with others.

Spiritual practices

A spiritual practice is a specific action you do intentionally and often. It opens you to God's grace and makes you an instrument of God's grace. Dorothy Day, founder of the Catholic Worker house serving those on the streets, once wrote, "The very word *practice* brings with it the idea of learning. And any practice is awkward and difficult at first. But it is necessary to attain any kind of proficiency in the spiritual life."

Here are several classic spiritual practices that can help you on your own journey toward healing.

Lectio Divina

This ancient practice of praying with the Bible comes to us from the early monks. Follow these steps:

- 1. Reading.** Read the verses aloud, slowly and carefully, realizing that God is speaking through the sacred text. Imagine the scene, notice the feelings evoked by the text.
- 2. Meditation.** Considering what particular phrases or images have caught your attention, ask yourself what the text is saying personally to you. What insight, comfort, or challenge is God offering you?
- 3. Prayer.** Respond to God who has spoken to you in the text. In words of thanks, praise, repentance, or petition, speak to God from the heart.
- 4. Contemplation.** Just rest in God's presence. Trust God to work within you. Stay in silence and savor the Holy Spirit.
- 5. Action.** Determine how you can let the power of God's Word have an effect in your life.

Prayer and fasting

We are familiar with fasting during Lent by giving up things or doing extra things. But *combining* fasting with prayer is a powerful spiritual practice. Consider for a season giving up something simple and within the limits of good health. *As you do*, take time to bring to God the heart wounds you would like to see healed.

Contemplative prayer

St. Teresa of Avila wrote that “Contemplative prayer in my opinion is nothing else than a close sharing between friends; it means taking time frequently to be alone with him who we know loves us.” And the Catechism of the Catholic Church calls contemplative prayer “the prayer of a child of God” and an “intense time of prayer” when “we gather up the heart, let our masks fall, and turn our hearts back to the Lord who loves us.”

We can also practice contemplative prayer at various times during the day while we are doing routine tasks. Some Catholics pray the Rosary as a means of practicing contemplative prayer.

Aspirations

This is the simple practice of regularly reciting short prayer statements such as “Lord be with me” or “Heal my heart, Lord” or “Help me be more like you” or “Come Holy Spirit” or “Thank you for your blessings” or “I love you, Lord.” You can also recite phrases from favorite Scripture passages, such as “The Lord is my shepherd” (Psalm 23) or “Lord, only say the word and I shall be healed” (based on Matthew 8:8). Once you come up with a few favorite aspirations, you can go through them all during your day as a way of keeping your attention on your spiritual path.

Ignatian spiritual exercises

The Exercises are a series of meditations, reflections, and imaginative practices developed by St. Ignatius of Loyola, one of the founders of the Jesuits. Originally created for a thirty-day retreat, they have been adapted so that you can go through them every day right where you are. The first set of exercises, for example, focuses on the need for inner healing. Depending on your circumstances, you may need someone’s help getting a copy of the Ignatian Exercises so you can begin your own retreat. They are readily available in print and online.

Eucharist and reconciliation

These two sacraments offer us spiritual food for the journey and forgiveness for our wrongdoings. They offer us a certain kind of grace not found anywhere else, while also reminding us of who we are and whose we are. When we make time in our lives for regular participation in these sacraments, we can establish a spiritual rhythm to the work of restoration.

Bible study

There are many ways to engage in this spiritual practice. You can do it alone or with others. You can study what the Word of God has to say about different topics like hope, love, courage, and doing the right thing. You can learn from the experiences of various biblical characters, like how God worked with Moses and David in their faithfulness and in their failures. You can study the teachings of Jesus as recorded in the four Gospels. You can study the work of the Holy Spirit or the Christian way to live as described in the New Testament letters of St. Paul and others. Many Bible study modules focus on life experiences or challenges. Or you can join in solidarity with Catholics worldwide by studying the readings assigned for the daily masses.

Singing

This ancient spiritual practice has also been called *hymning*. Hymns can be mournful laments, such as many of the spirituals. Or they can be celebrations—a happy dance of the soul. They can be sung privately or in public. When Moses and the Israelites crossed the Red Sea and escaped Egyptian slavery, the first thing they did was break out the instruments and *sing* (Exodus 14:30–15:1, 19–21). At the end of the Last Supper, Jesus and the apostles sang together (Matthew 26:26–30, Mark 14:26). You can sing hymns to yourself while you work or at church. Like a trustworthy friend, your favorite songs can keep you company as you work on restoration.

Journaling

We've seen how we move toward healing by taking what is "inside" and placing it "outside" by talking with someone or through art and writing. By journaling, you can make this a regular practice. Some people journal at the same time every day or week. Or you can practice it whenever you feel the need for reflection, lamentation, or celebration. You can get started here in the space provided below. Later you may want to get a prayer journal to continue the practice of journaling to support

your ongoing work of restoration and resilience. This is usually a private practice. Tracking the way your feelings shift each day or week can also give you an opportunity to look back months and years later and see areas of growth or signs of God's comfort and provision.

“Life is a journey. We all know that life is a journey, along different roads, different paths, which leave their mark on us. We also know in faith that Jesus seeks us out. He wants to heal our wounds, to soothe our feet that hurt from traveling alone, to wash us clean of the dust from our journey ... Jesus comes to meet us so he can restore our dignity as children of God. He wants to help us set out again, to resume our journey, to recover our hope, to restore our faith and trust ... to all of us he stretches out a helping hand.” **Pope Francis**