

SILENT SUFFERERS

Part I

Text: Genesis 37:1-36; Luke 15:11-32

Key Word: Suffering

Key Thought: A Breakdown of a Family Relationship Leaves One in a State of Silently Suffering

A broken down relationship is one of the most hurtful experiences that someone can become engulfed with. This is especially true when it involved members of our immediate family. The scars that these leave in our life may never seem to heal. Thoughts of rejection come from the separation which often leads to a lifetime of isolation. But it doesn't need to be this way. **It is a lethal action to attempt to go through life without building close relationships.**

*** Leonard Syme, a professor of epidemiology at the University of California at Berkeley, indicates the importance of social ties and social support systems in relationship to mortality and disease rates. He points to Japan as being number one in the world with respect to health and then discusses the close social, cultural, and traditional ties in that country as the reason.

He believes that the more social ties, the better the health and the lower the death rate. Conversely, he indicates that the more isolated the person, the poorer the health and the higher the death rate. Social ties are good preventive medicine for physical problems and for mental-emotional-behavior problems. ***

Martin & Diedre Bobgan
"How to Counsel From Scripture"
Moody Press, 1985, p. 18

Today I want to blend together two Biblical stories to show how the Bible offers important answers to this common problem. Even though they both approach the problem from two different perspectives there are some incredible similarities that should not be overlooked. The stories I'm referring to are that of Joseph and his father/elder brothers as well as the prodigal son with his Father/elder brother.

What Should We Guard Ourselves Against When we Experience a Breakdown of Relationship With Immediate Family Members?

- I. FEELINGS OF REJECTION**
- II. MOMENTS OF SEPARATION**
- III. PLACES OF ISOLATION**

I. FEELINGS OF REJECTION

When I say that we should guard ourselves against feelings of rejection I'm sure some of you may be saying "yeah sure" this pastor is living in a false world. It just won't happen. As long as we try to convince ourselves that it is hopeless to even try, we are nailing the coffin shut.

Even though we may never be able to change the pattern of the past, we definitely can do something about the future. Why should we go through life with feelings of rejection just because someone or some group of people chose to bring harm to us?

The story of Joseph and his elder brothers is a classic in Biblical literature. It has overtones that have been repeated over and over again in family relationship breakdowns. We find it unveils the immaturity and perhaps self-centeredness of Joseph before his family. On the other hand, we are told that it is God who gave Joseph the dreams that made him appear to be this way. We have no way for sure of knowing the tone Joseph used when approaching his family with the revelation of these dreams.

His elder brothers (for the most part) had little time for this. They portrayed him as a spoiled 17-year-old brat who got everything (including a multicolored robe) from their father even though he did little to deserve it. After all they were the ones who cared for the flocks and traveled from place to place in search of good pasture. They were more concerned about the protection and provision of the flock than they were for their brother.

We find a great similarity between the story of the **prodical son**. Here again the Father has a great love for his younger son. The elder brother despises the younger. He feels that he has been the one who has been faithful in caring for the flocks at home (Luke 15:29). Why should this younger son get the best robe; ring; sandals and a fatted calf to celebrate his homecoming after wasting his Father's inheritance?

In both of these stories the elder brothers feel like they have been rejected when in fact they allowed themselves to build up these feelings. **Rejection breeds rejection whether it is perceived or real.** Perhaps there was an imbalance in who was loved the most but that didn't mean that the "lesser ones" were being rejected by their father. Sometimes in not knowing what to do we can react in an inappropriate manner.

*** In 1858 the Illinois legislature——using an obscure statute——sent Stephen A. Douglas to the U.S. Senate instead of Abraham Lincoln, although Lincoln had won the popular vote. When a sympathetic friend asked Lincoln how he felt, he said, *"Like the boy who stubbed his toe: I am too big to cry and too badly hurt to laugh."* ***

Source Unknown

II. MOMENTS OF SEPARATION

FEELINGS OF REJECTION never remain stagnant. They lead to **MOMENTS OF SEPARATION**. Feelings of rejection can often lead us into a progressive downward spiral that becomes occasional times of separation. This should come as a warning sign to take a good look at what we are allowing to happen. Nobody puts us in this stage. **We put ourselves here.** Circumstances can add to the problem, but we choose whether the problem is going to find grounds for its existence.

“We are not to be **isolated but insulated**,” said Vance Havner, “*moving in the midst of evil but untouched by it.*” Separation is contact with contamination. Jesus was “holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners” (Heb. 7:26), yet He was “*a friend of tax collectors and sinners*” (Luke 7:34).”

Warren W. Wiersbe
“*The Integrity Crisis*”
Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1991, p. 81

Separation can progress from **moments to long-term memories**. We can forget the details of how the real circumstances took place but we can still continue to promote the problem by the signs we portray for everyone to read.

Name of a church seen in Michigan, “*Original Church of God, Number Two.*”

Source Unknown

As we notice in the story of the prodigal son, the younger one chose to separate himself from his father and family (Luke 15:13 ff) for a period of time. The elder brother was physically present in the family but clearly separated from his younger brother in his emotions and feelings. The father attempted to bring the elder son back into fellowship with his younger brother by saying “*your brother has come*” - Luke 15:27. He in turn throws it back into the face of his father by saying, “*this son of yours*” - Luke 15:30. He wasn’t wanting a **Moment of Separation**. He would prefer a **Lifetime of Separation**.

The elder brothers in the story of Joseph also never thought that they would ever see their brother again. They chose to live as if it were to be a **Lifetime of Separation**. Joseph (and the young prodigal) on the other hand wanted to return home many times because they were mistreated by those in the world. But they continued to **SUFFER IN SILENCE**.

What we do during these times of separation makes a difference as to whether our heart becomes hard or pliable in God’s hand. Both of the younger sons became pliable while the older ones grew more hardened. **Anytime separation happens we must guard our attitude.**

II. MOMENTS OF SEPARATION (Contd.)

*** It is often argued that we should stay in the midst of churches and bodies whose sins and follies we deplore, in the hope of saving them for God and mankind. Such reasoning has a good deal of force in the first stages of decline. A strong protest may arrest error and stop the gangrene.

But as time advances, and the whole body becomes diseased; when the protests have been disregarded, and the arguments trampled underfoot; when the majority have clearly taken up their position against the truth—we have no alternative but to come out and be separate.

The place from which we can exert the strongest influence for good is not from within, but from without. Lot lost all influence of his life in Sodom; but Abraham, from the heights of Mamre, was able to exert a mighty influence on its history. ***

F. B. Meyer

III. PLACES OF ISOLATION

MOMENTS OF SEPARATION normally lead to **PLACES OF ISOLATION**. As for Joseph he was forced into a place of Isolation. The prodical chose his place of Isolation. The elder brothers although not isolated from their father maintained their distance because of their hardened hearts. Both Joseph and the prodical were actually closer to the heart of their fathers because they chose to keep the door of reconciliation open as time progressed.

How we perceive this time is of utmost importance if we are to become healthy and beneficial to those who will need us in the future.

** *“You have a very rare and extremely contagious condition,”* the doctor told his patient. *“We’re going to put you in an isolation unit, where you’ll be on a diet of pancakes and pizza.”*
“Will pancakes and pizza cure my condition?”
“No,” replied the doctor. *“They’re the only things we can slip under the door.”* **

Contributed by Darleen Giannini
“Reader’s Digest”
February, 1995, p. 59

The fathers, although separated from their sons chose not to isolate their feelings and emotions. If anything, these thoughts and feelings grew as time progressed. They used their time wisely so that when the day of isolation had ended that something profitable would take place.

III. PLACES OF ISOLATION (Contd.)

*** In 1832, French engineer Ferdin and Marie Lesseps were traveling in the Mediterranean when one of the passengers became sick and the ship was quarantined. Lesseps was an active man, so the confinement was terribly frustrating for him.

The many long hours aboard that isolated vessel, however, gave him time to read the memoirs of Charles le Pere, a man who had studied the feasibility of building a canal from the Red Sea to the Mediterranean. That volume prompted Lesseps to devise in his own mind a detailed plan for the construction of the Suez Canal. When it was finally built under his leadership some 30 years later, it brought invaluable service to the world. **That quarantine had proven to be immensely profitable.** ***

Source Unknown

Silent sufferers can and will become some of the greatest contributors to our world and our churches if they see the value of using their time wisely. Don't take on the elder brother syndrome. Take a step back and you may discover a merit in your earthly trial.

*** At the end of a tour of the United States in 1963, Helmut Thielicke, the distinguished German preacher-theologian, was interviewed by a group of journalists and theological students. **One of those present at the press conference asked Thielicke what he considered to be the most important question of that time for Americans.** His carefully measured answer is just as relevant now as it was then, particularly in a discussion of excellence

I would rather if you will permit me to make a judgment—mention an entirely different problem as being the most important question which you are facing. Not a single person ever raised it in any discussion I had in this country (it would therefore appear that people are astonishingly unconscious of it); and whenever I raised it myself, it seemed to evoke a kind of disconcerted amazement, I might almost say, a kind of embarrassment, which was probably the reason why nobody ever broached the subject. **I mean the question of how Americans deal with suffering.** Yes, you have heard aright; I mean the problem of suffering. If I have not been totally blind on this journey, I believe I have seen that Americans do not have this color on their otherwise so richly furnished palette . . .

(Contd.)

III. PLACES OF ISOLATION (Contd.)

*** Again and again I have the feeling that suffering is regarded as something which is fundamentally inadmissible, distressing, embarrassing, and not to be endured. Naturally, we are called upon to combat and diminish suffering. All medical and social action is motivated by the perfectly justified passion for this goal. But the idea that suffering is a burden which can or even should be fundamentally radically exterminated can only lead to disastrous illusions. One perhaps does not even have to be a Christian to know that suffering belongs to the very nature of this our world and will not pass away until this world passes away. And beyond this, we Christians know that in a hidden way it is connected with man's reaching for the forbidden fruit, but that God can transform even this burden of a fallen world into a blessing and fill it with meaning.

Gary Inrig
"A Call to Excellence"
Victor Books, (a division of SP Publ., Wheaton, Ill;),
1985 p. 119

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Date: Apr 18/21

Place: FCA Time: 10:30Am

Song: Be Still (and Know that he is God) - E

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I. FEELINGS OF REJECTION - *Luke 15:29*

II. MOMENTS OF SEPARATION - *Hebrews 7:26; Luke 7:34; Luke 15:13 ff; Luke 15:27; Luke 15:30.*

III. PLACES OF ISOLATION