

Managing Your Suffering



Life is full of pain sometimes. We experience physical pain when our bodies encounter trauma. But we also feel emotional pain when our minds register rejection or fear or stress. When we feel pain, we respond in a way that we have learned. Typically, our response to emotional pain is guided by a certain set of core beliefs, things we believe to be true about how life works. Core beliefs are usually formed deep in our subconscious on the anvil of past experiences, usually intense ones. For example, if we have been repeatedly hurt by someone close to us, we may form a core value that says that the universe (and God) is not safe. We may become suspicious and fearful and have trouble forming trust relationships. Another person may have similar experiences and but conclude that, not only is life safe, but it is an exciting adventure where risk-taking is part of meeting challenges confidently. *Our response to the pains of life determines our level of suffering or satisfaction.*

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The Bible talks about two responses to life's pains: one comes from a place of ego (biblically, "flesh") and the other from a place called "spirit" (or God). The ego is the place that divides and labels and separates things so they can be more easily manipulated. Exercising this kind of control is necessary for surviving. So when the ego judges a situation, all the components are judged according to their value to help or hinder your survival or fulfillment. Is it an enemy or a friend? The ego is cautious, at best, and fearfully self-destructive, at worst. It majors in seeing itself as separate from everything else and exercises judgment, even to excess, where life is never good enough to be truly happy.

The spirit, on the other hand, operates through **connection**. Coming from a place of spirit means that you are able to "connect the dots" in situations, where patterns and themes become apparent. Spirit integrates a larger picture because its home is in God. So from this stance, we are able to let go of excessive judgment and keep the urge to control (and the ego itself) in check. Being in God's Spirit allows us to *connect* with God, others, and ourselves in a healthy, trusting manner. Living from a spiritual point of view enables us to engage the "kingdom of God within us" and learn to live fully in the present in the simplicity of a child... as Jesus would say.

(over)

Only by living in the Spirit can the ego, and all other aspects of our lives, come into a wholesome balance. Jesus, our connection to living spiritually, becomes our wise guide and resource for learning to live *expansively* through the spirit. "Walking in the Spirit", as St. Paul would say, means that we are no longer "tossed by the waves" of life's circumstances (as St. James would say). We come from a place of taking responsibility for our own choices and attitudes (truth) because we are primarily moved by the love of God (the Word). In the Spirit, we are able to discover peace in the midst of the storm, healing and hope in the midst of our pain.

So how can we learn to operate out of the Spirit and not out of the Ego? Here are some suggestions:

- **Affirm *believing* over *blaming*** by allowing the spirit of truth to show you places in your own life that need to be changed rather than trying to change others. So try not to stone your critics. Trust friends to support you.
- **Affirm *service* over *separation*** by finding small ways to serve someone else's needs (as simple as a phone call, short note, small gift, an encouraging meeting for coffee, etc.). Listening works too.
- **Affirm *abundance* over *absence*** by making mental note of things/people for which you are grateful. Practice tithing or giving to others sacrificially. Give some of your "stuff" away. As a friend of mine said, "Live simply so that others may simply live."
- Say aloud each morning some form of "Thank you, God, for this day. I will try to live it in the power and flow of your Spirit. "Then watch for the signs of God's Presence in the details of your day. Listen for Jesus speaking to the quiet side of your heart. Try to read or listen to some Bible verses, God's love letter to you (and the world).

Let us know if we can assist you on your journey:



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