



When the Pain Seems Unbearable

By Kathy Gallagher

My heart is heavy and full after the two telephone calls I received today. The unfortunate truth of the matter is that these were fairly typical of the conversations I engage in regularly at Pure Life Ministries.

The first call I received was from a distraught woman named Julie. Her marriage has been, in her words, “27 years of hell,” misery caused in part by her husband’s anger. Like other wives in similar situations, she has vacillated between being rebellious and trying to appease his insane episodes of rage.

A few nights ago, Julie and her husband got into a huge fight because he insisted on going to the grocery store without her. This was so out of character for him that she became suspicious and decided to follow him. Years of confusion and uncertainty were cleared up when she watched him park at a gay bar. When she confronted him later that evening, he admitted that he had been involved in homosexual activity for years.

Julie was devastated, partially because she was completely unaware of his secret life. Having had first-hand experience with the confusion and anguish she was going through, I could understand why she sobbed uncontrollably one minute and was furious the next. When she got off the phone with me, she was still undecided about staying with her husband.

Brandy, who also called today, is “celebrating” her fifth wedding anniversary while living in a different state than her husband. Despite the fact that Randy is a pastor, he sent her to Wisconsin because he isn’t sure he wants to stay married to her. Tension began to mount in their relationship when she discovered he had been viewing Internet pornography and talking with other women in “chat rooms” for several years. When she confronted him, his reaction was anything but contrite: “You’re making a big deal out of nothing!” he told her. “I have to look elsewhere because you don’t satisfy my needs!”

Brandy was so confused. One minute she was angry with him; then she was feeling guilty over the things he has said about her. “I can’t live without him!” she finally blurted out.

Counseling women who feel such unbearable pain is very difficult. Even though the Word of God is exactly what these hurting women need, popping off Bible verses can seem trite and insensitive. Every call I receive brings a new tale of heartache and requires careful handling. “What do I tell this one, Lord?” I silently pray. “What can I say that will really help?”

One of the challenges I face during these phone calls is working through the fluctuating emotions and confusion these women are experiencing. The right answers are not necessarily what they want to hear while in this state of mind. They feel hurt, angry, confused, and often wonder why

God has allowed this to happen to them. Furthermore, I realize one telephone call is not going to change the damage that has occurred to the marriage, nor will it alleviate the pain.

Most women who call simply want to share their struggles with someone who has been there. Giving them answers, per se, is not necessarily the right thing to do. However, in those cases that warrant it, I try to accomplish two fundamental goals.

My first priority is to get the woman to calm down so that she doesn't exacerbate the situation with rash or emotional decisions. It is easy for a wife in this situation to be controlled by her emotions. However, it is very important that she base her every decision on the Word of God, the only trustworthy source she has to turn to.

The second thing I want to accomplish is to turn her to Christ in a real way. Jesus described Himself as a fountain of Living Water. It has been my experience that wives who truly get a sight of the Lord gain a completely different perspective on their situation. Even though the pain is still very real, His presence makes the unbearable bearable. Without the Fountain to draw upon, these problems can leave a wife feeling utterly hopeless. Inevitably, she will frantically attempt to hold it all together in her own strength. This approach usually only makes her more miserable.

It is true that the pain can be overwhelming to the point of seeming intolerable, but my personal testimony is that Jesus can take the very worst things and make them better than if they never happened. As Corrie Ten Boom said, "No pit is so deep that He is not deeper still."

Kathy Gallagher is the co-founder of Pure Life Ministries.

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