

# HELPING THOSE WHO SUFFER

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This discussion handout accompanies the *Helping Those Who Suffer* video, found on Youtube.

This can be used as part of a workshop or a small group discussion.

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This handout and the accompanying video is NOT focused on the cause of suffering or why there is evil and suffering in the world. That's an important theoretical question but this discussion and video focus on the practical question of how to face suffering and how to help others who are suffering.

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## Task #1: Are You Afraid of Suffering?

Some people I know are not afraid of dying. It is the suffering and pain that may accompany death that they are afraid of. What about you? Are you afraid of suffering? Or what attitudes do people have towards suffering? Please share with each other your thoughts and feelings.

## Task #2: Looking to Jesus

Read the following slowly, and as you read, circle or underline what strikes you or catches your attention.

When we say "Christ has died," we express the truth that all human suffering in time and place has been suffered by the Son of God who also is the Son of all humanity and thus has been lifted up into the inner life of God Himself. There is no suffering – no guilt, shame, loneliness, hunger, oppression, or exploitation, no torture, imprisonment, or murder, no violence or nuclear threat – that has not been suffered by God. There can be no human beings who are completely alone in their sufferings, since God, in and through Jesus, has become Emmanuel, God with us. It belongs to the center of our faith that God is a faithful God, a God who did not want us to ever be alone but who wanted to understand – to stand under – all that is human. The Good News of the Gospel, therefore, is not that God came to take our suffering away, but that God wanted to become part of it. ... God indeed is *Yahweh Rachamin*, the God who carries His suffering people in His womb with the intimacy and care of a mother. – Henri Nouwen, "Christ of the Americas" *America*, April 21, 1984. Quoted in *Seeds of Hope*, (Bantam 1989) p. 123

Share what you underlined or circled. Why did that catch your attention? What did you feel about it? Does this help you at all with the issue of suffering?

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## Task #3: Watch the *Helping Those Who Suffer* Video

What were the four major principles suggested in the video?

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Notes:

Was there anything new or different for you? Or what did you find most helpful?

Would you add any other principles to this list of four?

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## Task #4: When We Face Suffering

In his book, *A Compassionate Journey: Coming Alongside People with Disabilities or Chronic Illnesses* (Faith Alive Christian Resources 2008), John G. Cook described three phases that people who face chronic illness and disability face:

- **REACTION:** In the reaction phase a person usually responds with a marked emotional decline.
- **ACCEPTANCE:** Acceptance occurs only after someone has struggled to acknowledge the challenges and tasks posed by an illness or disability. Some people are unable or unwilling to accept the illness or disability and veer off into despair and hopelessness.
- **GROWTH:** In the growth phase, the person begins to cope with a new reality, taking up the various tasks of life again as he or she is able. Even if physical or mental health does not rebound, the growth phase is usually defined by spiritual growth and a renewed sense of hope. (p. 12)

Although focused on chronic illness and disabilities, is this also helpful for facing any suffering and tragedy in general?

Share and discuss some of the things we can do or should do during each phase in order to foster a positive outcome.

Reaction:

Acceptance:

Growth:

### Closing Prayer

Consider closing your time together in prayer. If people are comfortable, you can each take turns praying or one person can choose to lead in prayer. Pray for those whom you know are suffering, whether close by or far away. Pray for yourselves, if you suffer, and that God may use you to help others in their suffering.

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If you appreciate this video and discussion handout, please consider sharing it with others. Also please consider partnering with the ministry with your prayers and with your financial gifts.

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