

When Life is Messy

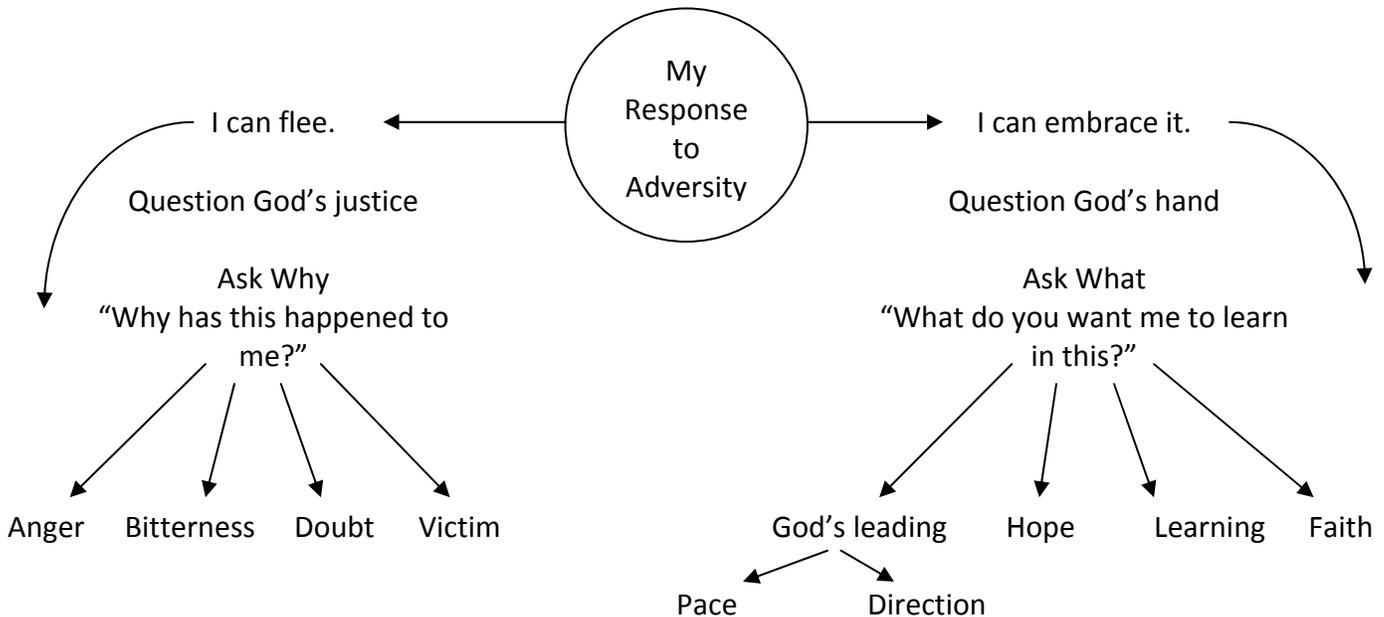
Big Idea: A constructive response to our own suffering involves humbly depending on God for strength to endure, and humbly receiving comfort from other people. A constructive response to another person's suffering involves standing with them, not giving advice.

Two sessions have been devoted to the topic of suffering, because too often it stalls a believer's growth instead of enhancing it. Suffering is supposed to lead to endurance, character, and hope, but frequently it brings merely discouragement, bitterness, and despair. It produces this opposite result when we misjudge God's role in it and choose to respond poorly. In Session 8, we looked at God's role in suffering; in this session we'll consider our response.



1. What are two ways you can respond to adversity?

- You can flee from it
- You can embrace it



Ministering When Others Experience Suffering and Adversity

2. If you flee from adversity, what might your attitude be towards God?

You might question God's justice and ask, "Why has this happened?"

3. What might your emotional response be to asking why something has happened?

Anger, bitterness, doubt, victim

4. If you embrace adversity, what might your attitude be towards God?

Accept God's hand and ask, "What do you want me to learn?"

5. What might your spiritual response be to asking "What do you want me to learn?"

God's leading, hope, learning, faith.

6. How did each of these characters handle their own pain or uncertainty?

Bill & Jackie - he listened to his minister, talked to Jackie, began to discuss it with his spiritual friends.

Mary Beth & Raz - fearful; they both mentioned Beth's situation to their friends.

Gerry & Linda - prayed together; Gerry listened to Steve's experience. They took responsibility for their own life and relied on others. They took time to pray alone, to feel their emotions yet they weren't whining.

1. *Demonstrate love and commitment by taking the time to communicate your awareness of their situation and their needs.*
2. *Refrain from giving your advice. Rather, mourn with those who mourn. Words are often not necessary; silent service is always safe. Otherwise you could become like one of Job's friends.*
3. *Avoid over-spiritualizing and help others avoid it. Refrain from saying, "God told me to tell you..." even if it seems God did. By making that statement, you elevate the authority of your words to where they are beyond dispute.*
4. *Help people recognize that adversity can come from many sources. Help them focus on how to respond rather than on attaching blame or criticizing external circumstances.*
5. *When we suffer, it is an opportunity to be transparent with our sisters and brothers. When they suffer, it's an opportunity to practice community.*
6. *Trials are dangerous. They can discourage and dishearten. This opens the way for Satan to cause permanent damage, such as bitterness. We must pray for people in trials and encourage them.*

*Jim Petersen,
Lifestyle Discipleship, pp. 149-150*

7. How did the group handle the others pain?

They listened, entered into their pain without trying to fix them.

They were physically “with them.”

They used physical touch when appropriate.

They shared their own experience with pain (Steve with Gerry).

They were warmly involved without meddling.



8. How have you handled hard times in the past?

9. What is one stress you are currently facing?

Suggested Additional Reading:

Read chapter 10 of *Lifestyle Discipleship*