

AFFLICTION AND FEAR

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Affliction. Even the sound of the word conjures up a picture in my mind of enduring pain, distress and grief. As a matter of fact, that is what the word means. Although a part of life, enduring pain, distress or grief is not the badge of achievement we usually pursue. Affliction and suffering are a part of the human condition. Scripture often refers to the fact that becoming a member of God's family means we participate in the sufferings of Christ. This is not my favorite thing to think about, but it's realistic.

Understanding what causes affliction can be helpful. Drawn to James 5:13 during a time of personal affliction, I asked for and, even expected from God, instantaneous healing. Author Andrew Murray notes the difference between healing from sickness and healing from affliction: those who are sick call for the elders of the church. Those who are afflicted are told to pray. The word affliction is derived from two Greek words that combined mean "evil passions". Although most often associated with others afflicting us in some way, our own fleshly desires or 'evil passions' are capable of creating problems for us. The inference is that affliction or suffering, at times, is due to our own insistence on instant comfort rather than on the presence of the Comforter. So...affliction enters our lives by the hand of others and...affliction enters our lives by our own hand. When our own hand brings affliction it means we insist on being in charge of alleviating our fears, rather than walking through the fear with God's presence and power. Initially this principle of growth creates uneasiness. I'm not jumping for joy either, however, it is this process of ownership of our fears that brings us closer to the comfort of God. It brings to our daily life a level of character that is representative of the character of God.

In *The Big Book* of AA, the cause of affliction is described as this: "Selfishness – Self-Centeredness! That we think is the root of our troubles. Driven by a hundred forms of fear...we step on the toes of others and they retaliate. Sometimes they hurt us seemingly without provocation, but we invariably find that sometime in the past we have made decisions based on self which later placed us in a position to be hurt." (*The Big Book Online Fourth Edition*, Alcoholics Anonymous World Services 2008, Ch.5 p.62)

Fears come in many different forms. Here are the four basic fears that influence our belief system and our choices of behavior: Conflict, Abandonment, Rejection, and Failure. Prayer, born out of humility and cooperation with God's presence and power, will reveal your sources of affliction. These fears are not often easily faced. The lessons not always easily learned. That is the point. Character does not come from a life of ease. It comes from being willing to face adversity, no matter the origin, in the light of God's truth. In those moments, we come face to face with the distorted beliefs (fears) or behaviors (based in fear) that keep us in

unhealthy patterns. David expresses this reality in Psalm 51. His brokenness before His loving Savior made it possible for him to become “a man after God’s own heart.” The same grace and mercy of God is available for each of us today. Make it a point to trust in that fact. That is the beginning point of your healing.

Examples of Common Core Fears & Beliefs (Focus is on Self)

1. Abandonment – Nobody cares about me. I’m all alone. I’m not accepted. I don’t matter. I have to care for myself.
2. Conflict – Conflict means loss. Someone will be hurt. That person will be someone I love or myself. I will lose this relationship.
3. Failure - I’m not good enough. I will never be good enough. I’m stupid. I’m hopeless. I’m a failure.
4. Rejection – I’m a burden. I’m unwanted. There is nothing good in me. Nobody wants to spend time with me.

Scriptural Truths for Overcoming Core Fears (Focus is on God)

1. Abandonment – God sent His Son to die for me. I am never alone – the Lord is always with me.
2. Conflict – Disagreements sharpen me. The body of Christ is made of many different people. We can learn from one another. We all contribute uniquely to His kingdom.
3. Failure – Only God knows and can do everything. He promises I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me. I am made complete in Christ. He will finish the work He started in me.
4. Rejection – I am fearfully and wonderfully made. God knew me in my mother’s womb. He has a future and a plan for me.

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