

Side by Side:

Walking with a

Woman in Pain



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Course Introduction

Pain is universal and inevitable. It finds us wherever we are. Whether rich or poor, sick or in health, it comes to us and causes havoc in our lives. Sometimes, it stays for a moment; other times, it settles in for an extended, uninvited stay. Some people hide their pain, afraid to expose it to the light. Others linger in their distress.

Side by Side: Walking with a Woman in Pain is designed for the Christian woman desiring to live out the scriptural mandate in Galatians 6:2, “Carry each other’s burdens, and in this way, you will fulfill the law of Christ.” We intend to think through some scenarios of how to offer care to someone in need because of pain and suffering in their life.

Before taking this course, women will have completed the Entrust modules *Facilitating Relational Learning (FRL)* and *Developing a Discerning Heart (DDH)*. These trainings, coupled with life experiences, wisdom, and love for the Lord, will further our skills in coming alongside others.

In walking with one who is wounded, we accept her for who she is and believe that she wants to grow into God’s best plan for her. With basic training, person-to-person contact, relationship, and trust, we help and comfort her as she processes her pain and suffering.

This module had its genesis in the hearts of a group of women who met in Colorado Springs, Colorado, to cast a vision for a course that would equip women to walk alongside other women in pain. Many experiences have been considered but not all could be included. *Side by Side* is an opportunity to continue this conversation, but it is not intended to replace professional counseling.

Course Objectives

When you have completed this course, you will be able to

1. demonstrate key skills which will allow you to have an impact in helping people sort through their life issues and problems
2. explain what it means to feel the burden and the call of Christ to come alongside others who are in pain
3. develop basic abilities to positively influence others as you walk together on the road to healing

4. be curious about what the pain stirs up in you as you consider how best to offer care to another person
5. evaluate how you can offer kindness and care when someone is experiencing pain

Side by Side in Relation to the Total Curriculum

Side by Side is an auxiliary module of the Entrust curriculum. As stated before, the prerequisites for taking it are *Facilitating Relational Learning* and *Developing a Discerning Heart*. *Side by Side* is designed to explore how we can best come alongside a woman in pain. We will also learn about suffering from a scriptural viewpoint and how God uses it to fulfill his plan in the lives of his people.

Lesson 1:

The Place We Find Ourselves

Lesson Objectives

When you have completed this lesson, you will be able to

1. discuss the pain that is all around us
2. believe that our identity in Christ calls us to care
3. resolve to extend care as God directs us

Lesson Outline

Pain Is All around Us

Why We Offer Care

What Jesus Taught about Compassion

Our Identity in Christ

Bear One Another's Burdens

Responding to Need

We Are Equipped

Showing Compassion

Holding onto Hope



She hears someone crying. As she walks forward, the muffled sobs grow louder. Rounding the corner, she sees a woman sitting alone, crying into her hands. Others walk by, ignoring her. She wonders, should she stop? Does she even know what to say? She has many places to be, but this woman's pain is obvious. She hesitates only a moment. She cannot just walk away. She feels the woman's pain and distress like it is her own, so she stops. Setting her backpack on the floor, she reaches inside for a tissue and goes to sit beside the woman. She offers a quick prayer that God will give her the right words to say. "Hey, are you alright?"

Pain surfaces unannounced in life. Its timing is inconvenient. But dealing with pain and helping others in their struggle is a necessary part of living and growing in our faith and relationship with Jesus Christ. When we see another who is in pain, we are faced with a choice—do I step up or step away? It hurts to hurt. It hurts even more to suffer alone.

Pain Is All around Us

Pain is all around us. We may not always see it or be aware of it, but it is there. We experience it in every part of our being. Our bodies feel pain in our cells; our nerves alert us when something is outside of normal functioning. Pain exists in our minds, our psyche, impacting our thoughts and feelings and affecting how well we can function. Pain shows

Pain has a way of entering unannounced through the circumstances of our lives.

up socially in our relationships with others; it impacts our family structures, friendships, school and work colleagues, recreational teams, and group activities. Pain impacts us spiritually in how well we do or do not connect with God. Pain and suffering show up in our human condition's physical, emotional, social, and spiritual aspects.

Pain has a way of entering unannounced through the circumstances of our lives. It is usually uninvited and unexpected; it can completely alter our reality. It stems from a variety of issues such as accidents to health, natural disasters, financial ruin, infidelity, and child loss. When pain enters our lives, it changes us. However, our initial response is often to run from it, numb it, fix it, or make it stop.

When someone is experiencing pain, our thoughts may turn to how we can offer kindness and care. We may wonder about its cause and ponder its sudden presence. However, giving attention to the story behind the pain is important, allowing the details to come without prying.



In our opening narrative, we find a woman who is heart-broken over a situation in her life. We are not given details. Our only clue is that she is hurting and cannot hold back her tears.



Reread the narrative, then answer the following questions.

- A. Think about a time when you encountered someone in distress. Add details to make this scenario personal to your ministry or work setting.
- B. List some of the physical, emotional, social, and spiritual pain this person is likely experiencing.
- C. In what ways are they similar to feelings that might be stirring within you as you see her pain?
- D. What might compel you to stop and offer care?
- E. What might cause you to hesitate or resist offering care?

Being curious about what pain stirs up in us as we think about how to best offer care to another person is an essential part of moving toward another in distress.

Why We Offer Care

At salvation, a seed of compassion is planted deep within our hearts. As it is nurtured and grows, our eyes are open to the needs around us. The Holy Spirit stirs up a desire in us to do something, to be a conduit of Jesus's love to a world that is hurting.

What Jesus Teaches about Compassion

In the story of the good Samaritan, from Luke 10:25-37, we see that Jesus teaches his disciples a new standard of caring for others. Not encumbered by race, social, or religious state, the Samaritan stops and offers care to a stranger. In Luke 10:33, the text tells us that the Samaritan feels *compassion* for the hurt man. Some scholars suggest that compassion is a feeling of sympathy and a deep inner feeling in the gut or bowels. A deep sense of compassion says, "I need to do something now," and moves a person to take quick action. Jesus uses the Samaritan as an example of a person who disrupts his journey, assesses the situation, and responds in mercy. Where others do not stop to help a dying man, the Samaritan acts compassionately showing kindness without judgment or expectation for repayment. Think about the implications for those of us who profess to belong to God as Christians.

1.2



Read Luke 10:25-37.

- A. How does this text influence your description of a neighbor?
- B. What might be some of the reasons why the Samaritan stops to help the injured person?
- C. To what extent does the Samaritan render aid?
- D. What benefits might there be to the person who stops to help another?

Our God is compassionate. He sees those in pain who struggle under the weight of adversity. The Lord does not withhold his face from those who suffer; Psalm 34:18 explains, "The Lord is near to the broken-hearted, and saves the crushed in spirit." As God is near to those in pain and are suffering, he also actively puts people in motion to help others.

Our Identity in Christ

As followers of Jesus Christ, we are called to reflect him in our broken world. Jesus spends much of his time on earth extending care to people (see Matt 4:23, Mark 6:34, Luke 4:40, John 6:1-11). Likewise, Scripture calls us to offer care to those around us. In 2 Corinthians 5, Paul describes how our faith in Christ prepares a foundation for us to live and help others.

- God prepares us to live this life on earth (verse 5).
- We are to walk by faith (verse 7).
- We are to walk in a manner that is pleasing to the Lord (verse 9).
- The love of Christ controls us (verse 14).
- We are his ambassadors (verse 20).

Because we are equipped and prepared by God to live this life by faith, relying on him, we can come alongside those who are hurting. We are his agents of care and compassion to others.

God further equips us to help people by giving us gifts (see 1 Pet 4:10). Each gift is a facet of God's grace that we can show others. Grace is the generous goodwill of God which he has poured out on humanity. As his followers, we extend a portion of his grace as we use our gifts to help people.

We are reminded in 1 Thessalonians 5:11 to encourage and build up each other. Building someone up, or edification, strengthens and encourages her to live for Christ. As we help others grow, we too continue to mature in Christ.

As we help women, it is good to stay rooted in our identity in Christ. The following verses are a reminder of who we are in Christ.

We are daughters of the king (John 1:12, 1 John 3:1).

- We are fearfully and wonderfully made (Ps 139:14).
- We are completely forgiven and free of condemnation (Rom 5:1; 8:1, 1 John 1:9).
- We are new creations of infinite worth and complete in Christ (2 Cor 5:17, Eph 1:3; 3:19, 2 Pet 1:3).
- We are deeply loved and totally accepted by God (Zeph 3:17, John 3:16, Rom 8:39).
- We are reconciled to God and can help others be reconciled (2 Cor 5:18-19).
- We are created by God and for good works (Eph 2:8-10).
- We are the temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 3:16; 6:19, 20).
- We are more than conquerors through him who loves us (Rom 8:37).

(See *Developing a Discerning Heart*, pages 61-64, for additional verses of who we are in Christ.)

Since our identity is in Christ, our characters are shaped and defined by him and influence our desire to live in a way that pleases God and serves others.

Bear One Another's Burdens

Galatians 6:2-5 reminds us to carry each other's burdens. This exhortation means to share and lighten the load so that the other person does not bear it alone. The word burden alludes to travelers who are carrying excess, heavy baggage, are weak and tired, and need help from others traveling with them. Burden is a term that connotes a heavy, crushing load that is beyond the person's ability to carry by herself.

Scripture reminds us that there are heavy loads in life, and the associated pain is a common experience that need not be carried alone. It is restorative when others help to

**It is restorative
when others help
to carry a load.**

carry a load. Sharing the load requires people willing to help shoulder the burden and for the burden bearer to be willing to receive help from others. Sometimes when a person has been abandoned or hurt by others, she is afraid to risk further rejection by reaching out for help and being refused. People from cultures where it is a source of pride to be independent and care for themselves may have difficulty receiving help

or even recognizing when a burden is too heavy to bear. They may mistake heavy loads for light packs. God wants Christ followers to help: to be a powerful healing force, a beautiful demonstration of his love, and an active caring body of believers to ease the burdens of others.

When we have determined to offer help to those in need, the decision does not just come from within. The resolve to help others comes from God our Father, his Spirit, and faith in Christ his Son who roots and grounds us in love (see Eph 3:14-21). We are reminded that this is a part of our worship, an offering with prayer to our triune God who enables us and fills us to do and be what he envisions for us.

1.3 

Read and reflect on these verses: 2 Corinthians 5:1-21, Galatians 6:2-5, Ephesians 3:14-21, 1 Thessalonians 5:11, and 1 Peter 4:10.

- A. In your own words, what are some of the things we are encouraged to do because of our identity in Christ?
- B. What are some warnings we can heed as we respond with compassion to the needs of others?
- C. In what ways do these words of Scripture give you boldness or courage to offer help even if you are not sure what to do or how to do it?

Responding to Need

God opens our eyes to the needs around us and assures us that he has not left us empty-handed. He has prepared us to care. When we are in God's will, he equips the believers to help others in need.

We Are Equipped

From Hebrews 13:20-21, we learn that God equips the believer to do his will through Christ. Doing God's will might be stopping and helping someone in need.

In 1 Corinthians 12:4-7, we are given gifts of the Holy Spirit to use for the common good. So, we can appeal to God for his Spirit to equip us as we desire to reach out and help others.

By exploring Ephesians 2:8-10, we learn that God has prepared work for us to do because of our salvation and faith in Christ. God equips us to help others. He gives us gifts from his Spirit so we can serve one another. The Spirit leads and guides us in the work he has prepared for us to do. For instance, his prompting might come to mind in prayer, it will be confirmed in a sermon, and it will be the theme of a song we hear. Watch for what God is doing and join him in his work.



Read and reflect on these verses: 1 Corinthians 12:4-7, Ephesians 2:8-10, and Hebrews 13:20-21.

- A. In what ways does God equip the believer to help others?
- B. What are some of the ways you can know if God wants you to help someone else?
- C. How can you feel more confident to move from compassion to action?

It might be helpful to think of our equipping as something we have in our backpack—things we have with us on our journey but might not remember that we have. Along the way, we will be reminded of some practical ways to remember what tools we have. Looking for these reminders will give us confidence that God is with us.

Showing Compassion

Compassionate care is meeting the needs of others while at the same time not overextending ourselves. We might be able to help with logistics, provide food, or relieve some responsibilities. At times, this help can lead to an emotional investment which overwhelm us. However, empathy need not result in us being stuck in the pit with them.

A great example of empathetic care is found in Jeremiah 38:7-13. In addition, this story illustrates that good care is mindful about guarding against further injury to the person in pain.

In 587 B.C., as punishment for predicting the fall of Jerusalem to the Babylonians, Jeremiah is thrown into a muddy cistern and left to die.

Ebed-Melech, a Cushite eunuch, approaches King Zedekiah, “These men have acted wickedly in all that they have done to Jeremiah the prophet” (Jer 38:9). With the king’s approval, Ebed-Melech recruits thirty men to rescue Jeremiah from the cistern.

Good care is mindful about guarding against further injury to the person in pain.

But first, Ebed-Melech makes an important decision. He knows the men who lowered Jeremiah into the pit have not treated him kindly. He guesses that Jeremiah has sustained injuries from the ropes that lowered him, including broken skin and painful rope burns. So, before going to the cistern, Ebed-Melech detours to the rag room under the royal palace. There he gathers rags to pad the ropes that will be used to pull Jeremiah from the cistern.

Once at the cistern, Ebed-Melech tells Jeremiah, “Put these old rags and worn-out clothes under your arms to pad the ropes” (Jer 38:12). Not only is Ebed-Melech interested in getting Jeremiah out of the cistern, he wants to do it in such a way as to not further injure him.

In our backpacks, we have tools that will help us minister to one who is hurting: kind words, a non-judgmental spirit, or ways to *pad our ropes* as we help. Or we might think of a more creative way to help (like using a ladder to help Jeremiah out of the cistern). We must not inflict pain or more harm on the person we are helping.

Another way of looking at this posture of having a helping attitude is *to be stirred but not shaken*. This attitude comes from combining the concepts from 2 Thessalonians 2:2, “we ask you not to be soon shaken in mind or troubled...” and 2 Timothy 1:6, “stir up the gift of God which is in you...” This idea encourages our emotions to be stirred up and willing to offer help without being so overwhelmed that it rocks our foundation.

As a person who extends care to others, we want to offer them compassion, empathy, and support while at the same time balancing our availability and maintaining a healthy personal mental state. For those who profess faith in Christ, we find this health in our faith, in the stability of our triune God, in God’s Word, and in regular prayer. When we have these stabilizing factors, we can have one hand solidly holding on to God while extending the other one to help someone in need.

We can have one hand solidly holding on to God while extending the other one to help someone in need.

God may lead us to take a meal or send a card—and that is the extent of our help. Other times we may be more involved by regular texts, a visit or two, or coffee dates. And sometimes, God leads us to be an Ebed-Melech who is actively engaged and recruits others to be involved as well.

Holding onto Hope

When someone is deeply hurting, it may be hard for her to see past her pain or circumstances. She may be unable to process the details of her situation, her thinking may be jumbled or contain gaps, and she may be unable to express herself clearly. It may seem to her as if she is going through a dark tunnel and does not know what might be coming her way.

As God guides us, we can come alongside our friend and offer hope and another perspective. Perhaps it is the awareness of what is coming ahead or some protection from danger or harm. Walking with her, we can encourage her to keep going and not despair. We are women of hope; we are not without hope. We have hope because of our identity in Christ. We know and believe God is at work, and we hold onto hope (sometimes silently) and help her not give up.

The hope of Christ is a view of what is beyond that dark tunnel for those who belong to God through faith in Jesus Christ. It is comforting to remember that our hope is in God who is always with us; it is a living hope that can bring peace to our hearts and minds. Because Jesus gives us hope for our future, we can hold and offer this hope to others in pain until they can hold and realize it for themselves.

1.5

Based on what you have learned so far, return to the opening narrative.

- A. What types of pain might others be experiencing that you feel drawn to help with?
- B. What types of pain cause warnings in your mind that make you hesitant to help?
- C. What needs to be stable in your own life before you can offer help to others?
- D. In what ways can you hold onto hope for a person in despair?

We have discussed that pain is all around us. We encounter it in our day-to-day lives. Sometimes, we may not feel like responding to a need and stopping in the middle of our busy day. Yet as followers of Christ who reflect him to the world around us, he calls us to bear one another's burdens. We are privileged to stop and care. It may be God's work for us today.

God equips us to respond to the needs of others. It is an opportunity for growth and to offer hope as Christ modeled it for us. We have just touched the surface of the importance of helping in such a way as to avoid harming ourselves or others. Sit back and take a deep breath; we have just started our journey. There is much more to learn. God is with us in this place we find ourselves. In the next lesson, we will look at the Biblical narrative and where God fits into the question of pain.

Lesson Summary

- The place we find ourselves is not always one of comfort or convenience because pain is all around us.
- We are called to care for others in need because of who we are in Christ.
- As God directs, we extend care. Be curious and kind when listening to another's pain.
- We can help others in need because our triune God has given us tools. (Remember what is in our backpack.)
- God has given us the ability to hold hope for others until they are able to realize it again for themselves.



Adoration

God, I know that it is you who equips me to be able to help others. I praise you for comforting me and showing me how to comfort others in their time of need. Thank you for giving me a heart of compassion and may it continue to grow as I study your Word. Thank you for equipping me with ears to listen and a mouth to encourage as I walk side by side with whom you put in my path each day. May you be glorified. Amen.