

INSTRUMENTS IN THE REDEEMER'S HANDS

Lesson 6 – Love II: Building Relationships in Which God's Work Will Thrive

Concepts and Objectives

- Concept: God calls us to suffer so that we would be qualified agents of his comfort and compassion.
- Personalized: I need to ask, "Where has God led me through suffering and what has he taught me through it?"
- Related to others: I need to look for the sufferers that God has placed in my path. Have I functioned in their lives as God's agents of comfort?

Lesson Content

Four Elements of a Loving Relationship

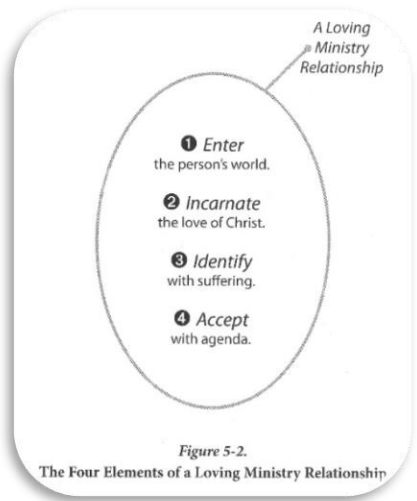
1. Enter the Person's World.
2. Incarnate the love of Christ.
3. Identify with Suffering (Hebrews 2:10-11).

Christ is not ashamed to call us "brothers." This means:

- We are in the same family.
- We are in a similar position in the family.
- We share similar life experiences because of that position.

What is the thing we have in common with Christ? Suffering.

We follow the path of Christ to glory.



Christ: perfect Son of God

Believers: declared perfect in Christ

Made perfect through suffering.

Christ: demonstrated righteousness on earth.

Believers: actual personal holiness

The identity we share on this path:

- Brothers (equal position).
- Brothers in suffering (same experience).
- Brothers in suffering that leads to holiness (same goal).

Here's how this identity should shape personal ministry:

- It determines our posture in personal ministry. We stand alongside them, looking to the Father for help.
- It determines the character of our ministry. We minister with humble compassion.
- It deals with the dependency issue. We – the helpers – are not what the people need.
- It redeems our experiences. Our stories become windows through which others can see the grace and glory of the Lord.

How to Tell Your Story (2 Corinthians 1:3-11).

1. *The Paradigm*: Viewing suffering redemptively.
 - God is the source of true compassion (v. 3).
 - God's comfort has ministry in view (v. 4).
 - God intends for us to share in Christ's suffering (v. 5).
 - Even our suffering does not belong to us but to the Lord (v. 6).
 - The redemptive purpose in all of this is firm hope amid the harsh realities of a fallen world (v. 7).
2. *The Methodology*: Telling the stories of my struggle and the Lord's help.
 - Tell your story in a way that breaks down the misconception that you are essentially different from the person you are helping (v. 8).
 - Always tell a completed story. It needs to include a difficult situation, your struggle in the midst of it, and how God helped you (v. 8).
 - As you tell your story, be honest in describing your struggles and failures (v. 9).
 - Be discerning and purposeful as you tell your story. Limit the amount of "gory" details. The situation is not the focus, but the God who met you in the middle of it (v. 9).
 - Always tell your story in a way that makes God the key actor in the drama (v. 10).

- Tell your story with humility, admitting your continuing need for grace. Perhaps you will seek help (prayer) from the person to whom you are ministering (v. 10-11).
- Always state that the story makes it clear that you are not what this person needs – God is. At best, you are one of God’s instruments, who shares a daily need for his mercy and grace (v. 9).
- The goal of your story should always be worship. All true hope and comfort are rooted in a recognition of and thankfulness for God, his character, and his help. True hope does not come because you try to say something that will somehow make the person feel better (v. 11).

3. *Corollary Passage: 2 Corinthians 4:7-18.*

4. Accept with Agenda (Titus 2:11-3:8)

We are accepted into God’s family, *and* we are in need of radical personal change.

- We need to rest in his gift of grace, knowing that we do not have to earn acceptance with him.
- At the same time we need to realize that he calls us to participate in his lifelong work of change.

As we work with others:

- We must grant the same grace and love that we received from God.
- We must also hold before them God’s call to change.

The Big Question: Are you building relationships in which acceptance and a call to change are woven together?

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Concepts

1. God ordains for us to suffer so that we would be qualified agents of his comfort and compassion.
2. God calls us to offer to others the same loving acceptance that he has given us. That acceptance always has change as its goal.

Personalized

1. Have I tended to hoard the comfort that God has given me?
2. Am I taking advantage of the opportunities God is giving me to comfort others with the comfort I have received from Him?
3. Have I accepted God's call to participate in his process of life-long change?

Related to Others

1. I need to look for the sufferers God has placed in my path.
2. What stories in my own life could be used as examples of the hope and comfort God gives us in suffering?
3. Right now, where is God giving me the opportunity to offer grace leading to change to another person?

Make It Real

In 2 Corinthians 1:3-7, Paul makes it clear that our suffering and our experience of God's comfort have ministry in view. As we consider our own stories, we prepare ourselves to offer to others the same comfort we received from the Lord. We look back on our experiences not to be thankful for what God has done but to encourage others to rely on the grace of Christ as they suffer. So, let's celebrate God's comfort as we look back, but don't just celebrate! Let's look for the ways God has equipped us to bring his comfort to others. Ask him, "Is there someone I know who needs this comfort right now?"

1. List three situations in which God ministered his comfort to you in the midst of difficulty, suffering, or trial.
2. List the things you learned from these situations about God's presence, power, grace, love, promises, provisions, and so on.
3. In light of your Personal Ministry Opportunity, write out one of your "stories" using the guide from 2 Corinthians 1:3-11. Connect your story specifically to the person or group you have chosen as your focus. Pray for an opportunity to share it.