

Trauma in the Workplace

Christmas is nearly here, and you can feel the excitement in the air. For many people, however, Christmas' secular hype - and even its sacred messages - seem hollow. The reason is that they are victims of a workplace trauma. The trauma may have resulted from an accident, violence, false accusation, wrongful dismissal, or sudden death. Causes of trauma vary, but their effects have a debilitating effect on how we respond to everything in life.

Some people ask *why* these traumatic events happen; but, the answers either don't come, or if they do, they don't help healing. If, however, they ask: *God, now, what*, there are answers to be found, and Good News to enable healing.

Understanding how trauma works is a helpful place to begin one's healing. Trauma has three parts: intensity, duration and frequency. Intensity refers to the level of anguish we feel, which can be overwhelming. How long this intensity lasts is called, duration. Duration may be days, months or longer. Frequency is how often we experience intense feelings. They may recur many times immediately after the causing event, and fewer times, months later.

Over time, the duration and frequency of trauma's pain diminishes; but, the intensity lingers. Long after the causing event has ended, the intensity remains as strong as ever. As much and as hard as we try to let it go, we can't. Medicine and psychology explain why traumatic intensity affects us this way. As I understand it, to experience undiminished intensity - long after the fact - is normal, as long as the duration and frequency reduce over time. Counseling will help us heal.

On the spiritual side, we have Good News of how Jesus helps us in trauma. He empathizes with us. He knows how much trauma hurts. On the cross, he cried: *My God! My God! Why have you forsaken me?* For a moment, his spirit was broken; his was the cry of a broken spirit! Also, for a moment, he felt that God had abandoned him.

In the next breath, however, Jesus was able to say in faith: *Into your hands, I commend my spirit.* Our Good News, here, is that trauma does not have the final say in our lives! Trauma need never be life's defining or controlling event for us!

We don't know what happened between Jesus' cries of brokenness and faith, but his cry of faith assures us of God's presence and power. God did something to help Jesus through his crucifixion. Our Good News is: God will help us when trauma crucifies us!

Scripture records thousands of stories about God's works and human experiences. For example, the Prophet Isaiah assures us (chpt 53, vss 4-5) that God takes on our sufferings and leads us through them. Matthew's Gospel records Jesus' saying: *Come to me all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest.* Jesus' suffering on the cross give the reality to the promises.

When we cry, *Help!*, Scripture assures us that Jesus listens, empathizes and responds. His motivation is Love. His power is absolute. His commitment is eternal. His goal is to help us experience life as it can be with God - not as a prisoner of trauma.

As our understanding of workplace trauma includes our spiritual needs, real healing - experienced as new life - is possible. Trauma can be especially hurtful at Christmas; but, we have Good News to take us through Christmas, and every new year to come.

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