

Trauma Tiredness – God’s Love

Gerry: ...This is a different kind of tiredness. I think a lot of us live with this without knowing what’s happening. We may be doing all the right things to help us sleep but we wake often during the night...and in the morning we wake feeling we’ve done a hard night’s work!

Carol: Hello and welcome to *Women of Hope*, I’m Carol. I wonder if you’ve ever felt like this?

Tammy: Hello, and I’m Tammy. I’m sure we all get tired...but this *does* sound like a different kind of tiredness doesn’t it! Gerry, thanks for coming to talk with us today.

Gerry: You’re welcome...it’s good to be here.

Carol: Gerry is a counselor who works with people suffering all kinds of problems. Welcome Gerry...and how are you?

Gerry: Well this morning I’m feeling *really* tired...and that’s exactly what I want to talk about.

Tammy: Too many late nights?

Gerry: No Tammy. This tiredness has nothing to do with late nights. It’s called *trauma tiredness*.

Carol: What do you mean Gerry?

Gerry: Well...at the moment I’m living in a city where we’ve had some awful earthquakes that have been very frightening.

Carol: I’ve heard about the terrible earthquakes in your country. There seem to have been a lot of natural disasters lately in *many* different countries...hurricanes, earthquakes, tsunamis, floods...and in some places very bad forest fires!

Gerry: That’s right...many people have been very badly affected by these disasters. In my work as a counselor I’ve had so many people saying to me, “I’m just so tired...and I don’t understand why!”

Tammy: So is this what you called ‘trauma tiredness’?

Gerry: Yes...people who have been through disasters often experience it. It also happens when we live with frightening things happening to us just as an individual.

Tammy: I can understand how we might feel tired when a disaster is happening to us and we can’t sleep... But you seem to be talking about tiredness that goes on *after* the disaster has *finished*.

Gerry: Well that’s the problem really. How do we know if a disaster *has* finished? When might it happen again?

Carol: Oh...now I see what you’re talking about. Have the earthquakes stopped yet in your country?

Gerry: Well...we’re not sure – that’s the trouble! The big ones destroyed many homes and office buildings and killed some people...but there have been many after shocks each day.

Tammy: That’s not good...

Gerry: No... and what happens is that we learn ways to protect ourselves from danger. So when we’ve been through a disaster our body continues to keep watch for us.

Carol: That sounds useful. You’re saying our body stays on guard.

Gerry: That’s exactly right. God has made our bodies with this built in safety system called ‘fear’. When we feel fear our body produces a special hormone that gets us ready to fight off the danger, run away to safety or stay completely still. The hormone is *adrenalin*. We call this our *fight flight or freeze* response.

Carol: Let me make sure I understand that. If I’m out at night in the dark and something gives me a fright my body produces adrenalin, my heart starts beating fast and I breathe quickly...

Gerry: Exactly. Your heart and lungs are working together to give you extra energy to run...or to fight...or to stay very still.

Tammy: So what does that have to do with what you call trauma tiredness?

Gerry: Usually when we sleep...the 'fear' system closes down...our body relaxes, our heartbeat slows and we fall into a deep sleep. However when we've been in danger, sometimes this 'fear' system doesn't close down. I notice that since the big earthquake I wake at night with my heart racing... I know that my ears have heard a sound that reminds them of the quake... So without me knowing, they've got me ready to run or fight or freeze. It may just have been a loud truck rumbling past outside...or perhaps the wind blowing and rattling the window!

Tammy: Does this just happen at night?

Gerry: No. It doesn't just happen at night. It happens in the day too but I can calm myself in the day. When I feel myself tense at the rumble of a truck I calmly say to myself, "It's ok...it's not a quake. It's just a truck." And my heartbeat slows and my breathing slows and my body returns to normal again.

Tammy: So do you say that to yourself at night too?

Gerry: I say something like that...but the problem is I'm now fully awake ready for action and it takes a long time to get back to sleep. When this happens a few times in the night I do wake feeling like I've worked hard all night because my body has!

And even in the day, it's tiring when our body is constantly 'on guard'. Each time we jump and feel that fear, our body is flooded with the hormone adrenalin to get us into action. That's tiring too but the waking at night is harder. It becomes a habit that's very hard to break.

Carol: I heard about someone who had been in a number of different disasters over a short time – like a few months. She felt so fearful that she decided to sleep in her clothes – ready to get up and run when the next one hit.

Gerry: She must have been exhausted!

Carol: Gerry, you said this also happens if we have personal trauma. Can you tell us about that?

Gerry: Yes...let me tell you about my friend Rosa. She was talking to me not long ago about *her* tiredness.

I asked her why she thought this tiredness had taken over her body. This is what she said:

'For me it comes from my childhood. My dad got drunk a lot and when he came home drunk at night he would pull me out of bed...because I was the oldest. If he was angry about something he would hit me and push me around.'

She told me that she became good at listening for his footsteps and could tell from the sound whether he was in a bad mood or not. If she ran into her sister's room he wouldn't come for her so that was a safe place.

Carol: Sadly that's not an uncommon story.

Gerry: No it's not – and she told me that even now that she's an adult and doesn't live at home, the habit of listening at night for danger stays with her. For many years it meant she woke feeling tired...and had to drag herself into the day. She said her ears are still trained to hear that footstep sound and she still often wakes if there's a sound like it. Sometimes now it's just her own teenagers getting home late.

Tammy: That's a long time for her to still be waking...all those years! Has she tried anything to stop the habit?

Gerry: I asked her that question and she said it does happen less now than it used to. There was a period of time when she took sleeping pills to help. But she decided to talk to a counselor about what happened when she was a child and she's learned to live with it more easily now.

That doesn't mean her body has stopped keeping guard but now it only happens a few times in a month. She finds that now when she wakes she just uses that time to pray, which is very soothing and helps her get back to sleep.

Carol: So Gerry do *you* take anything to help you sleep?

Gerry: I don't want to take a sleeping pill because the danger isn't past yet. We're still having after shocks so I may need to run to safety. I've tried some natural sleep aids – herbal sleeping remedies. But now when I wake I will often pray too...or write...or read and that helps me relax and go back to sleep.

'If the danger has been only for a short time, we're able to turn off that *fight, flight or freeze response* and start to rest properly again. But sometimes this 'switch' has been on for too long...so it's harder to turn it off...just like my friend who still struggles with it at times after so many years.

Tammy: It would be good to have a simple *off switch* to flick when the danger is past wouldn't it!

Gerry: It's interesting that you say that Tammy because normally our body does have an *off switch*. You can train yourself to use it. Control your breathing...slow it down, and concentrate on remembering that you're safe now. This stops that fear response in your body from going on and on.

Tammy: How do you do that, Gerry?

Gerry: The first thing is to recognize that you're fearful...what would be the first warning sign for you?

...Yes, it's often your heart beating fast...or feeling you can't get your breath, or feeling sick in your stomach or tense. When you feel that happening, say to yourself: 'Stop, breathe.' And then take some slower, deeper breaths. You can count them if you like – say: 'In 2 3, out 2 3'

Carol: It's been really interesting to hear about this today Gerry. You and your friend's very different situations have left you both experiencing similar trauma tiredness. I wonder if *you* know how they feel?

Tammy: Yes – you might be suffering from trauma tiredness because of some other kind of disaster – or a personal situation that you have no control over...like Gerry's friend. Maybe you could go and talk to a trusted friend or a counselor about it as she did. Someone who can help you to work through the problem and learn how to turn off that 'switch' that keeps your body on guard all the time. And don't forget to practice controlling your breathing.

Carol: I hope that what we've talked about together today has helped you to understand *why* you feel

so tired. Just understanding the reason can sometimes help. And maybe you can try doing what both Gerry and her friend do...when you wake you can pray – pray for others, for family members or friends. And you might find that this calms your body too.

Thank you Gerry...we'll look forward to you coming back and talking to us another time.

Gerry: Thank you for having me – it's been good to be with you.

Carol: We have a new friend with us today on *Women of Hope*. Flo has come to tell us a little true story about her granddaughter. Welcome Flo...how nice that you could join us today.

Flo: Thanks Carol...and Tammy...and hello to *you*. If you're a grandmother you'll appreciate this story. And if you're not I'm sure you can imagine what it would be like...

About 3 years ago our eldest granddaughter, Alia was staying overnight - she was then 5. Alia's mother had told her not to wake Nanna until after 7 in the morning. She woke early and watched the clock as the hands moved towards 7. At about 2 minutes past 7 she crept into our room and patted me. "Nanna, can I have a snuggle?" "Of course you can," I answered with a little yawn. After making herself very comfortable she lay perfectly still so I was just dozing when she spoke. "Nanna, I have been very worried about something." So I said, "Oh darling Nanna doesn't like you to worry - would you like to tell me what's wrong?" She then said in a very matter of fact voice, "Oh it's okay now Nanna cause I've worked it out". I was very curious but I let her take her time...to see if she wanted to say any more. Then when she spoke again she took me completely by surprise. "Nanna, I couldn't work out why it is that I love you so much!" After gulping back my tears I said, "Oh and why do you think that is darling?" "Oh Nanna, that's easy, it's because you love *me* so much".

Immediately my mind flew to a special part of God's word, the Bible. We chatted for a while and I told her: "That's just the way it is with God. The only reason we can truly love God is because of how much he first loved us and continues to love us." We talked about the ways he has shown us his love...in creation...in family...in life itself...but most especially in giving his Son the Lord Jesus Christ to die for us.

Later we sat together and read that special part from God's word. Would you like me to read it to you? ...It comes from a letter that John, the disciple of Jesus, wrote to encourage the followers of

Jesus. He spent a lot of time with Jesus and is sometimes called 'the one whom Jesus loved'. It's from the first letter of John chapter 4. This is what he said:

1 John 4:7-19 (Contemporary English Version CEV)

7My dear friends, we must love each other. Love comes from God, and when we love each other, it shows that we have been given new life. We are now God's children, and we know him. **8**God is love, and anyone who doesn't love others has never known him. **9**God showed his love for us when he sent his only Son into the world to give us life. **10**Real love isn't *our* love for *God*, but *his* love for *us*. God sent his Son to be the sacrifice by which our sins are forgiven. **11**Dear friends, since God loved us *this much*, we must love each other.

Flo: John went on to write some more important things to Jesus followers. Let me read a little more:

12No one has ever seen God. But if we love each other, God lives in us, and his love is truly in our hearts.

...**19**We love because God loved us first.

Tammy: Thanks Flo for sharing that story with us. Your granddaughter was very wise in what she said wasn't she. She is so certain that you love her...because you show her your love in the things that you do. In the same way God shows us his love in so many ways doesn't he!

Flo: Oh yes. And because God loved me first, and gave his son, Jesus for me, I want to worship him and say thank you to him.

Being loved by God is *so amazing*. How difficult it must have been for the Son of God, the Lord Jesus Christ (who was fully God and fully man) to come and live and die among people who rejected him. It makes me want to fall before him in worship and praise.

Let's pray together...

Father, God, creator of heaven and earth, thank you for who you are and for your great plan of salvation that began before you created the world. Thank you for loving us so that we can love you in return. Father, help us to know you better so that we can appreciate the wonder of your love for us...so we can love you more and serve you with true hearts. We pray this in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen

Carol: It's been good to be together today hasn't it!

Tammy: Oh yes...we've learned from Gerry about *trauma tiredness*...and how we produce adrenalin for the *fight, flight or freeze response*.

Carol: Yes, in a very real disaster, or a traumatic situation that is out of our control, our body turns on this hormone 'switch' that gets us ready to either run away, stay and fight...or keep completely still.

Tammy: But the hard part is turning off that switch once the disaster, or trauma is over.

Carol: Did you notice that both Gerry and her friend said that when they wake in the night, they pray. That's a good idea isn't it Tammy.

Tammy: Yes it is...I often do that too. And when I pray I start to think of all the things I want to thank God for – and then the people I want to pray for. It takes my mind off myself. But of course I might also ask God to calm me down and help me go back to sleep.

Carol: And we heard from Flo about how much God loves us. And just like her granddaughter, who said to her, 'Nanny, I love you because you love *me* so much'...we can tell God we love him, because he loves us so much. So rest in God's love, and know that he wants the best for your life...whatever you're going through. There *is* hope.

Tammy: We have to go now. We'd love you to tell us your story. Goodbye, and may you enjoy God's love every day.

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