Karen’s Kounsel

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KLynn Counseling

 a place for new beginnings

**When it is dark enough, you can see the stars.**

**Charles A Beard**

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Years ago in my first psychology class I had to do a short research paper every month. I have forgotten all those papers except one. In perusing through some psychology journals I came across an article about something the writer called “the psychology of meaning”. I have long since lost the article and the paper I wrote may, or may not, be buried in my numerous boxes of school work down in the basement, but I have not lost the profound truth it contained.

Some studies had been done with people who had suffered profound or prolonged trauma in their lives. This included people who had been in terrible natural disasters, lost loved ones, or lived through the terrors of war. Among these people were also some who had survived the Holocaust. What was found in this study was that those who not only survived, but thrived, were the people had taken what had happened to them and found a way to bring good from the horror – good to their own lives and also good to others around them. People who became withdrawn and bitter turned mostly inward and their lives became centered around themselves. This led to a variety of mental disorders including depression and anxiety.

A popular saying tells us that “time heals all wounds”. Not only do I believe that this saying is untrue, I believe that it is dangerous. It is not time that heals. Time buries. And what is buried in the human heart eventually resurfaces. It can come back sometimes years later. It can take the form of physical problems like headaches, digestion problems, or blood pressure issues. It can pop out in unexplained anger or anxiety or depression. There are many healthy and unhealthy ways to cope with the pain we have experienced in life. The more unhealthy ways include alcohol, drugs, or taking out that hidden anger on those around us. There are also numerous ways to bring healing. One balm that I have seen do wonders is what I called earlier “the psychology of meaning”. Let’s look at a few examples.

The news media is full of stories of those who have buried their pain and let it turn into bitterness. How many times have we heard of someone whose marriage had fallen apart and the end result was the murder of the ex-wife and even the children, and then the suicide of the perpetrator? This is a worst case scenario but it is vivid proof that time alone has no healing powers.

For the remainder of this newsletter, I would like to focus on some of those who have brought meaning out of tragedy, because these examples bring us hope. Some of our great reformers are people who came through difficulties and grief and used these experiences to bring great changes in our world. Elie Wiesel was a Jew, born in Romania. During the Holocaust he was a prisoner in Auschwitz, Bona, and Buchenwald. He was also winner of the Nobel Peace Prize in 1986. He is a writer and political activist who used his personal experiences to be an advocate for peace.

Candy Lightner, the founder of Mothers Against Drunk Driving worked tirelessly to raise awareness of the problem of drunk driving and promote tougher legislation to deal with this crime. Candy Lightner lost her 13 year old daughter Cari to a drunk driver in 1980.

The great evangelist, Corrie Ten Boom, was a Dutch woman whose family helped to hide Jewish people who were escaping from the Nazis. For this “crime” she, and her entire family, were sentenced to prison camps in Germany. Corrie was the only one who survived. She and her sister Betsie were subjected to unspeakable treatment and she watched Betsie slowly and painfully die at the hands of their captors. In spite of this, when Corrie was released, she opened a home for others who had suffered in prisoner of war camps. She eventually worked with Nazi soldiers who were now ostracized by society. She preached a gospel of forgiveness and reconciliation around the world until her death at the age of 93. Her exuberant faith was a testament to the healing power of God in the most terrible of circumstances when you don’t give in to the temptation to become bitter and angry.

I have the privilege of being personally acquainted with many people who have done the same – that is taken the most grievous experiences and decided to not only allow themselves to receive healing, but bring healing to others. “Meg” lived through a dysfunctional childhood and then years of an abusive marriage. She became a teacher, bringing love and knowledge to many children. Her words – “I did not survive this, I have thrived” have been an inspiration to me. There is “John” who let the trauma of an alcoholic father and an abusive mother propel him into college, a successful career and a life in which he loves and serves everyone he meets with humility. His joyful faith in God helped to restore my own faith after a heart breaking time in my life.

Read Hebrews chapter 11. This is commonly called the “faith hall of fame”. It is full of those who endured hardship, challenges, and persecution, but triumphed – Abraham, Joseph, Moses, the prophets, and those of whom the Bible says “the world was not worthy”. When the most tragic of circumstances occur, there is a time to sit back, to process it, to grieve. That is right and healthy. We should surround ourselves with the comfort of friends and family if we are able, to seek help if we need to, and to take refuge in prayer and the strength in God’s presence. There is hope that what we have been through does not have to be meaningless, because ***“we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose”. (Romans 8:28)*** It is easy to fall into bitterness and despair. It takes courage to face the worst and seek healing for ourselves and others. Be one of those who looks for the beauty of the stars when the night gets dark.

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***For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord”. Romans 8:38-39***