

to give up in the fight against any tendency to become discouraged. I have learned to view Jehovah as my Father and his organization as my Mother. I have come to realize that if we make the effort, Jehovah can use any one of us to be an effective servant of his.

Even though I at times have felt that I was, as it were, "thrown down," I have 'not been destroyed.' I have never been abandoned by Jehovah and his organization, nor by my family and my Christian brothers.

Thanks to my reaching out for the Bible and starting to read it, I regained spiritual strength. I am grateful to Jehovah God, who gives "power beyond what is normal" when we trust in him.—2 Corinthians 4:7.

With full confidence and complete trust in Jehovah, I am eagerly looking forward to the future. I am confident that very soon Jehovah God will fulfill his promise about a restored paradise here on earth along with all the wonderful blessings it will bring.—Revelation 21:3, 4.

## Comfort for those with a "stricken spirit"

**T**ODAY, Satan's world has come to be "past all moral sense." (Ephesians 4:19; 1 John 5:19) Adultery and fornication are pandemic. In many lands 50 percent or more of marriages end in divorce. Homosexuality is widely accepted. Sexual violence—rape—is often in the news. Pornography is a billion-dollar industry.—Romans 1:26, 27.

Among the vilest perversions is the sexual abuse of innocent children. Like the wisdom of Satan's world, child sexual abuse is "animal, demonic." (James 3:15) In the United States alone, *Time* magazine says, "more than 400,000 reports of verifiable sexual assaults are filed with authorities each year by teachers and doctors." When victims of this abuse become adults, many still carry painful wounds, and those wounds are real! The Bible says: "The spirit [mental inclination, inner feelings and thoughts] of a man can put up with his malady; but as for a stricken [wounded, afflicted] spirit, who can bear it?"—Proverbs 18:14.

The good news of God's Kingdom appeals to people of all kinds, including "the brokenhearted" and those with a "downheart-

ed spirit." (Isaiah 61:1-4) Not surprisingly, many who are in emotional pain respond to the invitation: "Let anyone thirsting come; let anyone that wishes take life's water free." (Revelation 22:17) The Christian congregation can be a place of comfort for these. They rejoice to learn that suffering will soon be a thing of the past. (Isaiah 65:17) Until that time, though, they may need to be 'comforted' and have their wounds 'bound up.' Well did Paul counsel Christians: "Speak consolingly to the depressed souls, support the weak, be long-suffering toward all."—1 Thessalonians 5:14.

### "Repressed Memories"

In recent years some have been "brokenhearted" for reasons that others find difficult to understand. They are adults who, on the basis of what have been described as "repressed memories," say that they were sexually abused when they were children.\* Some have no thought of having been molested until, unexpectedly, they experience flashbacks and "memories" of an adult (or adults)

\* "Repressed memories" and similar expressions are enclosed in quotation marks to distinguish them from the more typical memories that all of us have.

abusing them when they were young. Do any in the Christian congregation have such disturbing thoughts? In a few lands, yes, and these dedicated ones may experience deep distress, anger, guilt, shame, or loneliness. Like David they may feel isolated from God and cry out: "Why, O Jehovah, do you keep standing afar off? Why do you keep yourself hid in times of distress?"—Psalm 10:1.

Many aspects of these "memories" are not well understood by mental-health professionals. Still, such "memories" can affect the spirituality of dedicated Christians. So we look with confidence to God's Word for guidance in handling them. The Bible provides "discernment in all things." (2 Timothy 2:7; 3:16) It also helps all concerned to put faith in Jehovah, "the Father of tender mercies and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our tribulation."—2 Corinthians 1:3, 4.

### **Did It Really Happen?**

In the world, there is much controversy as to what these "memories" are and to what extent they represent things that actually happened. Jehovah's Witnesses are "no part of the world" and take no part in this controversy. (John 17:16) According to published reports, "memories" have sometimes proved to be accurate. For example, after insurance adjuster Frank Fitzpatrick "remembered" being molested by a certain priest, almost one hundred others came forward to claim that they too had been abused by the same priest. The priest reportedly admitted to the abuse.

It is noteworthy, however, that a number of individuals have been unable to corroborate their "memories." Some afflicted in this way have had vivid recollections of a certain individual committing abuse or of the abuse being committed in a specific place. Later, though, legitimate evidence to the contrary made it clear that these "remembered" details could not be true.

### **Providing a Refuge**

Nevertheless, how can comfort be given to those who experience a "stricken spirit" because of such "memories"? Remember Jesus' parable of the neighborly Samaritan. A man was set upon by robbers, beaten, and stripped of his possessions. When the Samaritan came along, his heart went out to the wounded man. What did he do? Did he insist on hearing every last detail about the beating? Or did the Samaritan get a description of the robbers and immediately chase after them? No. The man was hurt! So the Samaritan gently dressed his wounds and lovingly carried him to the safety of a nearby inn where he could recover.—Luke 10:30-37.

True, there is a difference between physical wounds and a "stricken spirit" caused by actual childhood sexual abuse. But both cause great suffering. Hence, what the Samaritan did for the wounded Jew shows what can be done to help an afflicted fellow Christian. The first priority is to give loving comfort and to help him recover.

The Devil afflicted faithful Job, apparently confident that either emotional or physical pain would break his integrity. (Job 1:11; 2:5) Since then, Satan has often tried to use suffering—whether he directly causes it or not—to weaken the faith of God's servants. (Compare 2 Corinthians 12:7-9.) Can we doubt that the Devil now plays upon child abuse and the "downhearted spirit" of many adults who suffered this (or are troubled by "memories" of having suffered it) to try to weaken the faith of Christians? Like Jesus when under attack by Satan, a Christian who suffers pain but who stalwartly refuses to abandon his integrity is saying: "Go away, Satan!"—Matthew 4:10.

### **Stay Spiritually Strong**

"The faithful and discreet slave" has published information to help handle the spir-

itual and emotional hurt caused by child abuse. (Matthew 24:45-47) Experience shows that the sufferer is helped if he can rely on the 'power of the Lord and the mightiness of his strength,' putting on "the complete suit of armor from God." (Ephesians 6:10-17) This armor includes Bible "truth," which exposes Satan as the ultimate enemy and dissipates the darkness in which he and his henchmen work. (John 3:19) Then, there is "the breastplate of righteousness." The afflicted one should strive to hold to righteous standards. For example, some have strong impulses to harm themselves or to commit immorality. Every time they resist these impulses, they win a victory!

Spiritual armor also includes "the good news of peace." Talking to others about Jehovah's purposes strengthens the one talking as well as anyone who listens. (1 Timothy 4:16) If you should be one with a "stricken spirit," making it difficult for you to talk about the good news, try to accompany another Christian as he or she does this vital work. And do not forget "the large shield of faith." Have faith that Jehovah loves you and that he will restore all that you have lost. Believe without reservation that Jesus also loves you, and he proved this by dying for you. (John 3:16) Satan has always falsely claimed that Jehovah does not care for his servants. That is just another of his gross, vicious lies.—John 8:44; compare Job 4:1, 15-18; 42:10-15.

If pain of heart makes it difficult to believe that Jehovah is concerned about you, it will help to associate with others who firmly believe that he does have concern. (Psalm 119:107, 111; Proverbs 18:1; Hebrews 10:23-25) Refuse to allow Satan to rob you of the prize of life. Remember, "the helmet of salvation" is part of the armor; so is "the sword of the spirit." The Bible is inspired by holy spirit, which Satan cannot defeat. (2 Timo-

thy 3:16; Hebrews 4:12) Its healing words can soothe emotional pain.—Compare Psalm 107:20; 2 Corinthians 10:4, 5.

Finally, pray constantly for the strength to endure. (Romans 12:12; Ephesians 6:18) Heartfelt prayer sustained Jesus through intense emotional agony, and it can help you too. (Luke 22:41-43) Is it difficult for you to pray? Ask others to pray with you and for you. (Colossians 1:3; James 5:14) Holy spirit will support your prayers. (Compare Romans 8:26, 27.) As with a painful physical illness, some with deep emotional wounds may not be completely healed in this system of things. But with Jehovah's help we can endure, and endurance is victory, as it was in Jesus' case. (John 16:33) "Trust in [Jehovah] at all times, O people. Before him pour out your heart. God is a refuge for us."—Psalm 62:8.

#### **What of the Alleged Abuser?**

A person who actually abuses a child sexually is a rapist and should be viewed as such. Anyone victimized in this way has the right to accuse his abuser. Still, an accusation should not be made hastily if it is based solely on "repressed memories" of abuse. In this case the most important thing is for the sufferer to regain a degree of emotional stability. After the passage of some time, he may be in a better position to assess the "memories" and decide what, if anything, he wants to do about them.

Consider the case of Donna. She reportedly had eating disorders and went to a counselor—apparently one of dubious competence. Soon she was accusing her father of incest and he was taken to court. The jury was deadlocked, so the father did not go to prison, but he was left with \$100,000 in legal bills. Then, after all that, Donna told her parents that she no longer believed that the abuse happened!

Wisely, Solomon said: "Do not go forth to conduct a legal case hastily." (Proverbs 25:8) If there is some valid reason to suspect that the alleged perpetrator is still abusing children, a warning may have to be given. The congregation elders can help in such a case. Otherwise, take your time. Eventually, you may be content to let the matter drop. If, though, you want to confront the alleged perpetrator (after first assessing how you would feel about the possible responses), you have a right to do so.

During the time that the one experiencing "memories" is healing, awkward situations may arise. For example, an individual may have vivid mental images of being molested by someone he or she sees every day. No rules can be laid down for handling this. "Each one will carry his own load." (Galatians 6:5) Sometimes one may feel that a relative or a member of one's immediate family is involved. Remember the dubious nature of some "repressed memories" when it comes to identifying the one suspected of being a perpetrator. In such a situation, as long as the matter has not been firmly established, keeping contact with the family—at least by occasional visits, by letter, or by telephone—would show that one is trying to follow a Scriptural course.—Compare Ephesians 6:1-3.

#### What Can Elders Do?

If the elders are approached by a member of the congregation who is experiencing flashbacks or "repressed memories" of child abuse, two of them are usually assigned to help. These elders should kindly encourage the afflicted one to focus for the time being on coping with the emotional distress. The names of any "remembered" abusers should be kept in strict confidence.

The elders' primary task is to act as shepherds. (Isaiah 32:1, 2; 1 Peter 5:2, 3) They should be especially careful to "clothe

[themselves] with the tender affections of compassion, kindness, lowliness of mind, mildness, and long-suffering." (Colossians 3:12) Let them listen in a kindly way and then apply healing words from the Scriptures. (Proverbs 12:18) Some who are afflicted with painful "memories" have expressed appreciation for elders who make regular visits or even telephone calls to check to see how they are doing. Such contacts need not take a lot of time, but they show that Jehovah's organization cares. When the afflicted one realizes that his Christian brothers truly love him, he may be helped to recover a considerable degree of emotional balance.

What if the sufferer decides that he wants to make an accusation?\* Then the two elders can advise him that, in line with the principle at Matthew 18:15, he should personally approach the accused about the matter. If the accuser is not emotionally able to do this face-to-face, it can be done by telephone or perhaps by writing a letter. In this way the one accused is given the opportunity to go on record before Jehovah with his answer to the accusation. He may even be able to present evidence that he could not have committed the abuse. Or perhaps the one accused will confess, and a reconciliation may be achieved. What a blessing that would be! If there is a confession, the two elders can handle matters further in accordance with Scriptural principles.

If the accusation is denied, the elders should explain to the accuser that nothing more can be done in a judicial way. And the congregation will continue to view the one accused as an innocent person. The Bible says that there must be two or three witnesses before judicial action can be taken. (2 Corinthians 13:1; 1 Timothy 5:19) Even if more than one person "remembers" abuse

\* It may also be necessary for the step outlined in this paragraph to be taken if the matter has become common knowledge in the congregation.



by the same individual, the nature of these recalls is just too uncertain to base judicial decisions on them without other supporting evidence. This does not mean that such "memories" are viewed as false (or that they are viewed as true). But Bible principles must be followed in establishing a matter judicially.

What if the one accused—though denying the wrongdoing—is really guilty? Does he "get away with it," as it were? Certainly not! The question of his guilt or innocence can be safely left in Jehovah's hands. "The sins of some men are publicly manifest, leading directly to judgment, but as for other men their sins also become manifest later." (1 Timothy 5:24; Romans 12:19; 14:12) The book of Proverbs says: "The expectation of the righteous ones is a rejoicing, but the very hope of the wicked ones will perish." "When a wicked man dies, his hope perishes." (Proverbs 10:28; 11:7) Ultimately, Jeho-

vah God and Christ Jesus render everlasting judgment in justice.—1 Corinthians 4:5.

### Resisting the Devil

When dedicated souls endure in the face of great physical or emotional pain, what an evidence it is of their inner strength and love for God! And what a testimony to the power of Jehovah's spirit to sustain them! —Compare 2 Corinthians 4:7.

Peter's words apply to such ones: "Take your stand against [Satan] solid in the faith." (1 Peter 5:9) Doing so may not be easy. Sometimes, it may even be difficult to think clearly and logically. But take heart! Soon, the Devil and his crafty acts will no longer exist. Truly, we long for that time when "God himself . . . will wipe out every tear from their eyes, and death will be no more, neither will mourning nor outcry nor pain be anymore. The former things have passed away."—Revelation 21:3, 4.

## Box Meal Gives Witness

**I**N THE days following the earthquake in Kobe, Japan, last January, people in the affected area had a hard time finding food. Still, Jehovah's Witnesses did not lack sustenance, thanks to the kind assistance of their friends. For the first two or three days after the quake, nearby congregations provided rice balls. Soon, caring friends were providing box meals. To the box meals, many attached notes expressing concern for the affected ones. Those who received the meals said that every meal was "salted" as they could not hold back their tears when reading the notes.

Jehovah's Witnesses shared their food with others who were in need. One Witness found himself eating his lunch while traveling

by car with a non-Witness colleague working in the same company. So he shared one of the box meals he had received.

"Where did you buy this box lunch?" his colleague asked. The brother explained the relief work of the Witnesses. "I haven't eaten vegetables for days. I'm going to save some and take it home for my family," the man said appreciatively.

The third time this happened, the colleague handed 3,000 yen (about \$35, U.S.) to the Witness and said: "I'm familiar with your activities, so please let me make a donation to your work. I appreciate your sharing your lunch with me. Really, your friends are all such nice people."