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Alice: We've been exploring different ways that we can come alongside people who are experiencing great difficulty living with pain of one sort or another in their lives. And as we have talked together, you and I, Karen, we've been talking about some of the ways that we can intervene, that we can come alongside someone and help.

We talked, first of all, about listening and how important it is that we listen without judgment. We've also talked not only about listening but about how important it is to help a person change his or her thinking about the thing that's causing him or her stress. And then the third intervention that we talked about, Karen, was helping a person understand when it's appropriate to change a stressful situation, and when the important thing to do is to change the meaning of that stressful situation.

But we want to move on in this session together looking at a question that you may have asked yourself, and I certainly have at times: What is it that keeps one person from crumbling but keeps another person standing up straight and tall? What is the quality that enables one person to survive, where in a situation in which somebody else just goes down for the count?

I think about so many stories we hear of children who grew up in horrendous situations and as children they were abused. They had very little encouragement if any at all. And yet somehow there was something in them that made it possible for them to surmount all of those difficulties and to become a strong resourceful person.

And what we find is that the thing that characterizes them is something that is called resilience. And what we want to look at in this session together is how we can come alongside people and help them become resilient.

Karen: I think it's so important to find a way for the past to not end up being a prison, but somehow finding a way for the past to open up a new future for a person.

Alice: But the past can so easily become a prison. I don't know about you, but I know that for me, I have thought, well, because of what I have done in the past, or because of what I've been in the past, it's sort of hopeless; there's nothing much that I can do about the future. But that just simply is not the case. The past is not a prison, and we must not allow it to be a prison.

And I think that if this is something that you struggle with, as I have at times, it may be helpful just to make a little sign that you put on your bathroom mirror that says, "That was then, this is now."

Karen: And I think it's so hard, as a person who's ministering to somebody in pain, to sometimes not lose hope either. So there's hopelessness that the person deals with who's going through pain, but sometimes we too—ministers to people in pain—also have to remind ourselves that that was then, and this is now.

Alice: That's exactly right. The past is not a prison. That was then, this is now. And that gives me hope for the future. But I think that there is a second thing that is very important for us to know, and that is that resilience is a choice that we make about stressful or painful circumstances.

God doesn't take pleasure in our pain. But God can give us purpose in our pain. And that's an important distinction that we have to keep in mind as we deal with the painful things that very often were generated in our past and are dogging us now. But we have the power of choice, and we can choose to be resilient people.

Of course, there are people that don't want to be resilient. There are people that don't want to be strong. And I'm sure as a psychologist, Karen, you've talked with people like that.

Karen: It takes a lot of work to make a change. And sometimes people are ready to make those changes and sometimes they aren't.

Alice: And that's what the challenge to us is as we come alongside people who need to build resilience in their lives. And people become resilient when they connect in their lives to something

that matters, something that's important. And as Christians, we can become resilient as we connect to God's story— what God is doing in the world, and what God is calling us to do as well.

So we attach ourselves to something that matters, and we go with that. And in the process we develop resiliency.

There were two researchers, Karen, years ago, Wolin and Wolin, who looked at resiliency and looked at people who were resilient, and they came away from their research saying, okay, there are seven different things that might mark a person who is resilient. And as you and I talk our way through these, Karen, I'd like for those who are with us in this session, just to look at yourself. Think about whether you are characterized by some of these seven things; and in the process, think about how you might come alongside someone else who needs this kind of help, and how you can help someone else develop some of these characteristics of resiliency.

And the first, according to the researchers, is insight. How would you define insight, Karen?

Karen: Well, I think it's the habit of asking questions, of sort of giving thought to what's going on. Asking yourself what's going on, trying to get some insight or some understanding into the process of the pain that a person is experiencing.

Alice: And a small child who is a resilient child may observe that when a parent walks in a certain way or talks in a certain way, that certain things are likely to happen; and that child is developing insight, even as a small child. And as the child grows older, that insight is shown in the kinds of questions that the child is asking, the probing questions, and looking for honest answers, not just settling for any old answer, but just looking for honesty in that.

And so, if you, as you journey with us through this course, find yourself saying, "Well, yeah, I did that when I was a kid," or "I do that now. I'm always asking questions. I'm always looking for honest answers," it very well may be that you are a resilient person characterized by insight, and that you would have the insight to be able to help someone else in pain develop that same characteristic of insight.

Karen: And so there's a way where ministers can come alongside people in pain and help them ask those questions. Help them gain that insight as they're struggling through difficult situations.

Alice: Good. I think the second characteristic that Wolin and Wolin found in people who are resilient is a certain independence. Have you ever seen a kid who just, well . . . I remember your son Chris when he was tiny. Whatever you would try to help him with, he would say, "I can do that myself." And that's independence. That's this characteristic that also shows a certain resilience in life when we are able to say, "Wait a minute, I can do that myself. I'm not dependent on other people to do everything for me."

Karen: I think there's a way, too, where children who are characterized by independence set boundaries. They realize that the situation that they find themselves in can be very damaging situations. And so they create boundaries where they actually find safe places to go to.

So, for instance, some children who are resilient might actually leave the house when the parents are beginning to argue. They have that insight that this argument could lead to particular difficult situations, and they actually leave the house. That's very healthy independence.

Alice: That's good. The third form of resilience that Wolin and Wolin found in their research is that resilient people develop relationships. This is a very important part of being a resilient person. When children are very small, they begin to connect themselves to available individuals, available adults, maybe it's a teacher in school, maybe it's a Sunday school teacher in the primary department. They find adults that they can connect with. And as they grow older, they reach out and they find mentors. They find people that they will allow them to come alongside and learn from them.

And so this development of relationship is a third mark of a resilient person. And you—as you go with us in this journey as we talk together about ministering to people in pain—you may look at yourself and say, "You know, I do that. I am a person who is constantly making relationships and attaching myself to people." Or you might look at yourself and say, "You know, I could do a better job at that myself." And the more you do it yourself, the more you will be able to see the importance of helping someone else develop those kinds of relationships.

Karen: I think social support is such an important piece of people's health. And helping people connect in their relationships with other people is such an important part of ministering to people in pain. So brainstorming with people around how they could increase those relationships with support of other people is such an important part of ministering to people in pain.

Alice: Developing resilience. So let's stop, Karen, and just review for a minute these first three before we go on to the others.

The first is insight.

Karen: Insight.

Alice: That's right. Then second...

Karen: Independence.

Alice: Independence. And third now is...

Karen: Relationship.

Alice: Relationship, that's correct. And the fourth one that Wolin and Wolin found is taking initiative. Not depending on somebody else to figure out what you're going to do with your spare time, but finding out what you're going to do with it yourself. It is this determining what is going to be going on in your own life, this taking initiative.

The researchers found that in small children this often showed up when they go around opening and closing drawers and looking in closets and conducting trial and error experiments to see what they could succeed with. And by the time they get into school, they are much more focused. They're much more goal oriented over a wide range of activities. They're generating things. They're not waiting for someone else to guide them, but they are out there showing initiative. And this is the fourth characteristic of a resilient person.

Karen: I think it's challenging when you're working with somebody who has learned to be helpless in this situation that they find themselves in. And helping them to learn to take initiative is one of those important parts of ministering to people in pain. It can be a challenge because, as we said before, sometimes people are not interested in making those changes. But coming alongside

them and encouraging them towards taking the responsibility to take initiative in their life can be an important part of ministering to people in pain.

Alice: Great. And as Wolin and Wolin continued their study, they found that the next two characteristics of a resilient person really interlock. And they are creativity and humor.

And as the researchers put it: Creativity turns nothing into something, but humor turns something into nothing. Sometimes you can make a joke out of something and it loses its teeth. Whereas creativity takes something very little, and turns it into something. These are safe harbors. These are ways in which people can deal with life, with the painful aspects of life, either by making nothing out of something through humor, or making something out of nothing when they really are left with absolutely nothing to work with.

And so we find the resilient person playing let's pretend. Pretending to be a superhero; pretending to be the beautiful princess in the tower; pretending to be a space explorer or something. And when this imagination then is channeled into creative activity and into humor, these are ways that people can deal resiliently with the stresses of life.

Karen: At the same time you wouldn't want people to stay too much in that fantasy world. You want them to be able to understand that that's a fantasy and that they are able to come out of that.

And at the same time use that creativity to manage the incredible challenge that's before them. And sometimes when you are coming along somebody who's in pain, sometimes it's helpful to brainstorm in a situation like this. Just brainstorm. Help them to, in a sense, think outside the box that they're in at that point and time.

Alice: Good, very good. Then there's one more, Karen, that Wolin and Wolin came up with, and it's a bit different. And what they found is that the seventh form of resilience is morality; being a holy person in an unholy world. It's interesting that secular researchers would come to this and say this is really an important evidence of resilience.

The seeds of morality are sown in children's minds and hearts at a very early age. And we see it in small children when we find that they have a sense of justice, justice denied to someone. When things don't seem fair, and they're saying on the playground that that isn't right, there is a different way that life should be lived. And this turns into valuing principles like decency and compassion and fair play and honesty. And they are living a life that is a moral life in a very immoral situation in which they find themselves. I think, as Wolin and Wolin have said, the first six, that is insight and...

Karen: Independence.

Alice: Independence.

Karen: And relationships.

Alice: Relationships.

Karen: Initiative.

Alice: Initiative.

Karen: And creativity and humor.

Alice: These six keep the past in its place so that the past does not stay a prison, but it's the seventh one, morality, that gives hope for the future. I think about the Civil Rights Movement back in the 1960s. This was a time that created an environment for change in American life, because there was a holiness in an unholy world. There was a morality that was being put forward; a justice that had been denied. And this made a difference and it gave hope to many.

So let's review these seven again. And I'm not doing as well as you are, Karen, in remembering them. But let's go through them again. The first is insight.

Karen: Insight.

Alice: The second is independence.

Karen: Independence.

Alice: The third is relationship.

Karen: Relationships.

Alice: The fourth is initiative.

Karen: Initiative.

Alice: The fifth and the sixth are creativity and humor.

Karen: Creativity and humor.

Alice: And the seventh is morality.

Karen: Morality.

Alice: Or holiness in an unholy world.

Karen: I think one of the things that amazes me as a psychologist is seeing the resilience in human beings who have grown up in very impossible situations. And I sit back and I'm amazed that people are able to survive and even thrive despite those past circumstances.

And I think sometimes as we come alongside people and minister to people in pain, I think one of the things we might do around the morality resilience piece, is sometimes teach people what justice is.

I think sometimes people lose sight of the fact that they are or have lived in a situation that was very unjust; that they did not, in fact, deserve what it is that happened to them. Sometimes in fostering that morality piece of resilience, sometimes we have to teach people what justice is, if they have not had a chance to learn it themselves.

Alice: I think that's a very important point that will enable us to come alongside people and be helpful. And I'd like to explore that just a little bit further. What are some of the things that we, as Christian ministers, people who are called to serve others by Jesus Christ, as we come alongside people, how can we help people build resilience into their lives—the kinds of things that we've been talking about?

The first, of course, is to remind them that they are empowered by God. They are loved by God, and God wants for them the right kind of decisions in their lives that will enable them to be all that God

has created them to be. And so I think the first thing for us to do is to remind people that they are saved and they are empowered by a God who has created them with gifts that can be strengthened and can be used for His glory as they develop resilience.

Karen: And if they haven't yet received the grace of God's salvation, it's a free offer for anybody who will take it.

Alice: That's right. That's good. But I think then, too, there are some questions that we can ask. And when we are talking with somebody who doesn't seem to have the resilience—the cookie seems to be crumbling rather than staying together—I think we can ask that person some pointed questions: Are the decisions that you are making right now good decisions for you? Is this really a good direction for you to be moving at this time? Are these decisions producing in your life the fruit of God's Spirit?

And we can say to people, you know, if it's not working you don't have to do it. You can change. Resilience is a choice.

And then I think we can say to the person, you know, I can hear what you're saying, but I don't think I understand what you mean by that. What would be the bad thing that would happen if you were to change?

Karen: I think that's such an important question, because many people don't change because there's something in the way. And that question can help get at what is that thing that's standing in the way of this person changing or wanting to change. And it's not until we really identify what those obstacles are, that we're really able to, then, help them figure out how to get around those obstacles and move towards change and move towards growth and move towards resilience.

Alice: Good. I think for the Christian there are two truths that we always must keep in mind. The first truth is that we live in a sinful, broken world, and all around us there are the effects of that sin and that brokenness: innocent people suffer, bad people appear to get ahead, and that is one truth about ourselves and about our world that we have to keep in mind. But there's a second truth and that is that God, who has already taken major steps to redeem this world, has not come to the end of His resources. And we are not at the end of the story yet. God will triumph. And the day will come when all things will change.

We know that God will triumph in the end. But we still live in this broken world. And so resilience—is that trait in us? When we look pain right in the face, and we say, “By God’s enabling grace, I can manage you, because I know this isn’t the end of the story, that the day will come when everything will be changed,” God will triumph and this pain will pass away.

And resilience comes when we take our rightful place in God’s story as revealed in Scripture. We can do it when we remember that our pain is not a prison that keeps us locked in the past, but resilience comes when we choose to deal with our situation knowing that ultimately God will bring all things together for good. And this gives a different way of looking at our pain.