



*Alice Mathews, PhD*  
*Former Academic Dean,*  
*Christian University GlobalNet*

**Karen:** We've been traveling a journey talking about how to come alongside people in pain. We've talked about many interventions that we can use to help people to manage their pain and to work through it, and we'd like to, in this lesson, apply those interventions to some cases that we've developed. Now you need to know that we developed these cases, that they're completely fictitious. They don't fit any one person that we know. They certainly represent issues that many people that we've talked with have experienced. And in that case they're not unique and fictitious, but these folks do not exist, and let's go ahead and talk about these particular cases and apply these interventions that we've been talking about.

**Alice:** Well, the first case, Karen, is about a woman named Julie. She's 38 years old. She's been married to Chuck now for 7 years and they have two children ages 3 and 1. When Chuck and she had been married about a year and a half, he insisted that she stop working outside the home, which she did. But that was the point at which domestic violence seemed to walk in the front door. If she was late coming home from the grocery store, he got very angry with her.

By the time she was carrying their second child, two different times he pushed her down the stairs. There was an increasing level of violence in the home. And at that point, Julie was very concerned, and she went to talk with her pastor about this. But her pastor said to her, "If you are the right kind of woman, and if you submit, he will stop," and so Julie tried that. She tried to do everything she could to be a submissive wife to Chuck, but the violence escalated. And at one point, when Chuck threatened their older child, Julie reached a point at which she was really beginning to lose it. She had been praying that God would somehow intervene with her husband and cause him to understand what he was doing to the family. And nothing stopped the violence. Not prayer, not her attitude; nothing stopped the violence. And at that point, she

began to question whether God was even there, and whether it was worth pursuing a prayer life with God.

**Karen:** I think there are so many issues that Julie is dealing with, and so many ways also that we can minister to her in this real pain that she's experiencing. And I think the first place where we need to start as we discussed is that we need to make sure that we have our theodicy figured out. We need to understand why she's in this situation, and we need to be able to communicate our own beliefs about that. [Theodicy may be defined as a vindication of God's goodness and justice in the face of the existence of evil.]

**Alice:** Here is a woman who does everything that she knows she's supposed to be doing, and she is praying earnestly for her husband and for her family; and the result is that the violence goes on and even escalates, and it has threatened her faith. And I remember in one of our early sessions, Karen, we talked about the fact that very often pain threatens faith, and this is one case where we see that happening.

**Karen:** And once we have thought through our own theodicy and once we've come alongside Julie to help her think through her understanding of why this is happening to her, one of the first things that we really need to do is just listen.

**Alice:** Oh, my, and I think, Karen, of all of the times that I have sat with women who are going through situations just like Julie's. And I've heard their pain and their agony that just not knowing where to turn or what to do, and of course the very first thing that I had to do was just sit and listen without judging.

**Karen:** I think one of the issues is that sometimes people in domestic violence situations don't actually want to leave, and sometimes we might not be solving the problem that they are looking to have us help them with.

**Alice:** This is true, and there are very often situations in which people find that even though the situation is painful, at least it's familiar. And they are so afraid of the unfamiliar that they would prefer to stay with what they know, even though it is in some cases life-threatening.

**Karen:** And once we've really had a chance to listen, and listen to Julie's pain, listen to the issues that she's struggling with at that point in time, we might want to start listening for thoughts

that need changing. And I'm thinking about some thoughts that women in domestic violence might start struggling with, and one of them could be: "Somehow I deserve it."

**Alice:** That's true, and very often this is reinforced when people say, "Well, if you were a better person; if you were just a different person, this wouldn't be happening." And sometimes violent men will say to their wives, "If you were a different woman, this wouldn't be happening."

**Karen:** Essentially, this is your fault. Somehow you're doing something that perpetuates the violence here in the home. I think also that there might be some circumstances that at some point in time, Julie will want to change.

**Alice:** Well, when her husband was threatening her oldest child, this certainly would get her attention in a way that would be different. I have known women who endured domestic violence for themselves, but it was that point at which a child of theirs was being threatened that they suddenly realized they had to make some changes. They needed to know about a safe house, a resource that they could turn to, because suddenly the life of someone else was hanging in the balance.

**Karen:** I think it's so important when we're ministering to a person who is struggling in a situation of domestic violence, so important that we give them those resources you were talking about. Helping them get information about local battered women shelters, other kinds of resources; helping them get the phone number for these resources; putting those phone numbers in safe places that won't escalate the violence. Perhaps the woman may carry that phone number in her shoe or leave it at her neighbor's house, but somehow getting her connected with resources so that when in fact situations escalate even more than they have escalated already, she will have a safe place where she can go.

**Alice:** Good.

**Karen:** I think that's so important. So, in addition to changing circumstances, we've also talked about helping the person develop resilience. How are we going to do that? That's a big job.

**Alice:** That is a big job, and yet it sometimes is the turning point for many, many women. I think that there is the developing insight that is coming through the degrading situation, the situation that

is becoming worse and worse and somehow this may push women to an independence that they didn't know that they were capable of. It sometimes happens that way as they begin to move into some of the resources that they have to become resilient people.

**Karen:** Part of what we've talked about is developing relationships with other people, and sometimes we're that relationship. The person who's ministering to the woman in pain in this situation is the relationship for that woman, and I think sometimes they can be so key in helping them hang on to the possibility of a different future.

**Alice:** That's right, and it can also through that relationship develop some initiative. Very often people who have been battered, who have been put down again and again, don't realize that they can take initiative. But it's that helping person coming alongside who very often can inspire the person in that situation to make change and to initiate something that is going to alter a situation that has become dangerous.

**Karen:** And we move on to the even more difficult intervention of forgiveness. I think it's so difficult because in this case the violence is ongoing, and there is no trust to be had in this particular relationship. Julie, in fact, is not in a position where she can trust her husband, Chuck, to not return to being violent. And so in this case, we would not unfortunately be working towards reconciliation.

**Alice:** That's true, because as you have pointed out in the past, Karen, it takes two to reconcile. One can forgive, but it takes both to reconcile, and if Chuck has not made any changes, then reconciliation is not a possibility.

**Karen:** Certainly. The last intervention that we've been talking about, the intervention of prayer, is one that we're going to be engaging in continually. We're going to in a sense stand between the world, that is so painful for Julie, and God, and intercede for her.

**Alice:** And even when Julie herself has given up on prayer, and even as Julie is questioning whether God is there, we as ministers, as those who are ministering to people in pain, we can be that intercessor. We can stand in the gap between that person in pain and God and a work of intercession on their behalf.

**Karen:** Now one of the things that's important also to remember is that there are many other interventions as far as ministering to Julie. There are many other things that we can do. We've talked very little about her children, and her children need support. Her children need safety. So there are many other interventions that we could use as we're coming alongside her. It's important to realize that what we've traveled, as far as this journey goes in talking about ministering to people in pain, is just a snapshot of all the things that we might end up doing for Julie.

**Alice:** This is very true. And, Karen, let's just take one more case before we end, and tell me about this person that we need to talk about, a fellow named Dan.

**Karen:** Okay, so Dan, our second case, is a 37-year-old single man whose life has gone from difficult to overwhelming because he hates his job. He has worked for a learning solutions company for the last 11 years. He has a master's degree in education and has worked his way up to Vice President of Training Products, but he was recently passed over for promotion and this is a source of deep pain for Dan, primarily because one of his male colleagues who only had a bachelor's degree and had only been with the company for 3 years was promoted over him as the Vice President of Global Learning. So he's feeling angry. He's feeling hurt. He really wonders if he should leave the company that he's been working for, but he has other things that he's dealing with at the same time.

He's been feeling very lonely, and this loneliness has intensified every since being passed over for a promotion. All of his friends at church have gotten married. They invite him to go out with them, but he really feels like a fifth wheel. He keeps reminding himself, he's really a great person—he's loved by God. But he feels lonely, and he feels rejected. He prays and asks God for a wife, but so far he feels like he's gotten no answer. So how are we going to come alongside Dan?

**Alice:** You tell me.

**Karen:** Well, again I think we go back to that issue of theodicy. We have to be clear in our own minds why it is that Dan has not heard from God or felt like he's received an answer from God.

**Alice:** Here is somebody who is in church, who obviously has relationships in the church—these couples that he has talked

about—but I would suspect that Dan has been praying about this. That he has been praying about a wife; he’s been praying about his job. He’s been praying about a lot of these issues, and yet somehow it hasn’t come together for him yet. And so you’re right, Karen. One of the first things that we have to be clear about is that he is loved by God, and that this is a point in his life that is very painful, but it’s not the totality of his life and that God is at work through the pain, and that God will bring something good out of this pain.

**Karen:** And so we’re going to listen to that pain and all that time remember that God has a larger story at work in Dan’s life. And so that first piece after theodicy is really listening to the pain that Dan is feeling.

**Alice:** And if he is really struggling with loneliness, he may very well have felt that he tried to communicate with other people in the past and that people really weren’t interested. And so giving him the gift of listening, careful listening, may be one of the finest things that you can do for him.

**Karen:** That sense of rejection could dissipate for those few minutes as he’s feeling heard by you as you minister to him.

We next move to thinking about: Are there ways where Dan needs to change his thinking? He’s feeling very rejected, and he’s feeling rejected not only in his job but also now in his personal life. And it may be that there are some thoughts that he has around not belonging or not fitting in or not being a part of this world the same way that other people are a part of this world, that we need to listen for carefully and think about perhaps challenging some of those thoughts.

**Alice:** Yes, because when you were telling his story—that Dan could say to himself, “I am a good person. I really am a fine person,” but does he really believe that? And does he need to reevaluate some of the thoughts that he has? I remember, Karen, you made the comment when we were looking at this earlier in the course that it’s important maybe just to jot your thoughts down, and you might just be surprised by what’s going through your mind that you’re only half conscious of.

**Karen:** Absolutely, and after sort of thinking through those thoughts and perhaps challenging those thoughts, one of the

other interventions we've talked about is changing circumstances, and I wonder if Dan needs to sit down and talk with his supervisor.

**Alice:** Yes, talk with his supervisor, and in the end he may come to the conclusion that he needs to change his job. He may conclude that he needs to change his city. He may conclude that he needs to make some major changes in his life.

**Karen:** He may need to change his supervisor. He may also find that after he talks with his supervisor, he understands the decision from another perspective that is satisfying to him. So there are things that Dan can do to, in a sense, take initiative and try to get some understanding about his situation with regards to his supervisor.

He also might want to start going out on some dates. Maybe Dan has tried this in the past and there are reasons for not pursuing that course of action, but there might be other reasons why that might be a course of action he thinks about.

**Alice:** And he might choose to join some groups where he is meeting new people, and there may very well be the possibility of meeting someone with whom he can eventually share his entire life.

**Karen:** And, in the meantime, we are that person that creates that connection to the social world for him. We come alongside and provide that relationship to him, which is all part of building resilience in Dan, and there are many other ways we can build resilience.

**Alice:** Yes, there are. If he gains insight as he develops initiative, as he reaches out in relationships, and as he pursues a life that is honoring to God, at some point that resilience will develop in greater measure and he will be a stronger person.

**Karen:** There are also potentially morality issues as he develops his resilience. Being aware of the justice issues or the injustice issues that just occurred in his workplace and becoming more deeply aware of those can also help Dan develop that resilience. There could be forgiveness issues.

**Alice:** Well, someone else got the job he thought he was in line for, and he has to deal with his own failure to get the job, and he may have some resentment of the person who got the job. And so

there may be some forgiveness issues that he does need to deal with.

**Karen:** There could be issues of lack of forgiveness that get in the way of his relationship with his supervisor, with the person who got the job, and other people who are co-workers of his. There could be all kinds of issues of forgiveness that he might have to face, and this is going to be a process for him. This is not going to be an overnight forgiveness.

**Alice:** And so as you work with Dan, of course, you need to keep him in your prayers. You need to intercede for him that he will understand God's purposes in his life, that he may be able to make the changes that he needs to make in his life, and you stand between him and his pain as you keep him in prayer.

**Karen:** So in summary, let's talk one more time about those interventions that we've been enumerating. The first is developing a theodicy that helps explain a powerful God, a good God who allows us pain in our lives. The next has to do with thinking about our situation differently. Seeing if there are ways where we need to think differently about what's going on. The next intervention that we discussed was changing the circumstances that we're involved in or changing the meaning of the circumstances that we're involved in. We might need to develop resilience, and there were many ways where we can develop resilience. And you don't need to develop resilience on each one of these points, but even just one will help this person develop resilience through insight or independence, through relationships, through taking initiative, through creativity and humor, through morality. We've also talked about the importance of helping the person to forgive, at least move towards forgiveness. Move towards making that commitment to forgive. And then finally, and very much last but very much not least, prayer. Praying for the person. And we wish you well on your journey of coming alongside and ministering to the people that God puts in your path, people who are in pain.