

How Can We Stop Suffering?

A Tale of Greed and Suffering

A story from Cambodia tells about two men who promised to be each other's best friend, committed to each other forever. They swore they would never betray their friendship.

Together these two men laid plans to get rich through trickery. They heard the sounds of a funeral and discovered a lady whose husband had just died. One of them snuck behind the casket and pretended to be the ghost of the corpse. He told the woman that his spirit was hungry and cold. He begged her to put some clothes and the gold they had saved into a wagon and place it in the jungle.

The widow was frightened and quickly obeyed. Then those two wicked friends stole away with all the gold and clothes, laughing and congratulating one another.

Not far down the road, greedy thoughts snuck into their minds. "If only it all belonged to me," each pondered. Soon, while still wearing a smile, each had schemed how to betray the other.

Since they were hungry, the two men decided that one of them should go get some food while the other watched over the gold in the wagon. The one who stayed behind with the wagon prepared a trap along the road that would catch and kill the one bringing the food. The one who went to get food, ate until he was full, and then put poison in the rest of the food. Then he carried the poisoned food to his friend. Suddenly he fell into the trap and died. Laughing at his cleverness, the one who was still alive picked up the food and ate it. Soon he died as well.

Individual Greed Leads to Suffering

Isn't this story similar to the ancient scripture that says, "So are the ways of everyone who is greedy for gain; it takes away the life of its owners. They lie in wait for their own blood, they lurk secretly for their own lives" (Proverbs 1:19, 18).

Have you seen how greediness destroys people? Have you ever suffered because someone took more than his share? We all want to avoid suffering, so let's take some time to focus on three ways that greediness leads to suffering and see how we can lessen our suffering and the suffering of others.

The sad truths of this story can be seen all around us. A man is not content with his wife. He goes looking for other women. What does he find? A few moments of pleasure, and the misery of the disease called AIDS. Somewhere else, a young student becomes tired of being poor. He begins to steal a little. Then he begins to gamble. His luck seems good. He's rich for a moment, then lands in jail, his future ruined.

It's clearly true that much suffering comes from our desires, our greediness. Let us label this first source of suffering with a small circle "individual choices."

1. Individual choices

When we hear the tale of the two greedy friends, we shake our heads at how foolish they were. They lost everything because of their greed, even their lives. They didn't think they were being foolish. They thought they were being clever. There is something very tricky about our greedy thoughts. Our plans seem so smart, so

good, so fun. We are confident that we won't get into trouble. But life is like the proverb "The egret forgets the trap, but the trap doesn't forget the egret." We may forget that bad actions and thoughts lead to suffering, but suffering always waits to destroy us anyway.

How can we wake up to see our greed and turn from it?

We must carefully reflect on other people's mistakes and learn from their bad choices. We can remind ourselves that if we sow the same mistakes, we will also reap similar consequences.

Whenever we suffer we should examine our lives to see what may have led to our suffering. Then we can determine to not make that poor choice again.

We should frequently read the ancient scriptures. They are full of good stories and proverbs that can remind us of the right ways and point out the dangers of wrong choices,

If we will remember how easily we forget to do what's right, we can have more compassion for those who are suffering. Too many people look down on those who are poor, sick, or struggling. This is not right. Everyone needs encouragement. Even though they are hurting because of their own mistakes, we should encourage them and give them hope that they can do better and escape suffering in the future. We would like the same done for us, so let us strive to offer a helpful hand and an uplifting word.

Other People's Greed Leads to our Suffering

In the story above, the two men's greed brought suffering on the widow. She was robbed of her possessions. Other people's greed often causes suffering to others. The man

who gets AIDS by his own sin brings it home to his wife and even his children. One terrorist can destroy a whole crowd of people. Political leaders, seeking wealth and power may start a war that maims and kills thousands of innocent women and children. Suffering can come to us from other people's greed.

We see this also in smaller ways. A father drinks and gambles. His family has less to eat and his children go uneducated. They suffer for his choices. Some societies allow great freedom for all kinds of pornography and immoral movies. Drugs are readily available. Children are wrongly influenced and later suffer because of the decisions of the leaders.

Let's draw a second circle and write the words, "society's choices."

Society's choices

Individual's choices

How can we avoid such suffering? Many people cry out, "It's not fair that I should suffer like this." They blame other people and become very discouraged and bitter. Is this helpful? Does such a response decrease our suffering? No. There is a better way.

We must choose to learn lessons from the mistakes of others and determine to do what is right. This is the joy and great privilege of being human. We have been given the power to choose what is right.

This should lead us to an even greater compassion for one another. We can encourage the son of an alcoholic and gambler to never drink or gamble. We can encourage the daughter of a thief to choose honesty. Let us do this often so we can all progress.

Can the Greed of Evil Spirits Cause Me Suffering?

In Thailand a lady wanted to be a great fortune teller. In a séance, she committed herself to a specific spirit and promised it could use her if it would make her great by knowing the future. She became well known for her abilities. But it came at a price. The spirit liked to be worshipped and often demanded sacrifices. If the lady complained that the sacrifices were too costly, she experienced great pain until she offered them. As time passed, her suffering increased. Her suffering was connected to her own choices, but it was also related to the spirit's greediness for worship.

Many have experienced harassment by evil spirits. They have often pretended to be ghosts, acting and looking like deceased relatives in order to trick people into performing various offerings and ceremonies. This makes the people more and more poor, with less money for food, education and medical treatment. Spirits have been known to cause people to become sick just so they will go and offer sacrifices.

It's like the story about the cocks and the chickens that were all living happily together. One day someone put soot from the kettle on the cocks until they didn't recognize each other. They fought and fought until they both died.

Haven't you seen this happen to people? A husband and wife can be so close to each other and then suddenly the family dissolves into fighting and ends in divorce. Who is the one who puts soot on them? Who else causes suffering? Truly the greediness of spirits causes people to suffer as well.

Let's draw a third circle and label it "evil spirit choices."

evil spirit choices

When we see people struggling under the harassment of evil spirits, how our hearts go out in compassion to them. Some have brought it on themselves, others seem to have the problems because of other's curses or just the hatefulness of the spirits. Regardless, they need our compassion.

But how can we help? To look for the answer, let us explore something that is outside the three circles we have drawn.

Outside the Circles of Suffering

Ancient scriptures teach that there is something totally outside of the circles that we know. They say that there is a God who is the ultimate spirit, who exists everywhere and knows all things.

He is not a god who is subject to karma and has many lives. The scriptures say that He has always existed and He is more powerful than anything. Humans cannot understand or know Him except when as He chooses to reveal Himself. If this is true, than He is surely Lord of the Universe and powerful enough to help us with all of the problems that lead to suffering.

According to the scriptures, this God has a merciful heart for people and wants to save people from suffering. He is like an organization who removes landmines. The organization doesn't want people to die and so it puts out signs saying, "Don't touch landmines! Be careful or you will die." He has given us the scriptures to point out what things will lead to suffering so that we can escape them. Wouldn't it be wise to read them and follow them?

The Choice Regarding Suffering is Yours

There was a greedy man who always wanted more than he needed. His children had no good example to follow and they became untrustworthy. They didn't obey their father. They didn't help their mother. His wife didn't feel she could trust him like she used to and their relationship was no longer close. Even his colleagues at work didn't want to be around him because he only thought of himself.

In the end he felt extremely lonely. He realized that his suffering was because of his own poor choices and greed. He came to understand that his life was completely meaningless when focused on the things of this world. Greed had broken his relationships and his values and morals. He began to change his life, letting go of his greed. He chose to be helpful to his colleagues and to his wife and children. At first they were skeptical, but over time they began to trust him again. His relationships were restored.

He was especially troubled because he was becoming convinced that there was a God able to see and judge all things. How happy he was when he discovered this God to be all-wise and mighty, compassionate enough to give good counsel to help people escape suffering. He determined to continue to learn the scriptures and understand the commandments and instructions from God.

What about you? In this lesson we have discussed that suffering comes from bad choices. We reap what we sow. Society reaps what it sows, affecting us. Even evil spirits reap what they sow and also cause us suffering.

You can choose your response to suffering. You can learn from it like a child learns from discipline at home and in the school. Study carefully the scriptures and follow the wise

path. Your life will truly be blessed.

Points to Remember

You reap what you sow.

You may forget your wrong doing, but your wrong doing will not forget you.

Others may cause us suffering and evil spirits may try to attack, but it is our choice what response we will give and what actions we will choose.

Questions

1. What lesson does the story of two Cambodian friends teach? Check the correct answers.

_____ Greediness leads to suffering.

_____ Even good friends cannot be trusted if greed is in their hearts.

_____ Those who are clever will get rich and be happy.

2. What can we do to help ourselves escape from suffering? Check the correct answers.

_____ Complain to others about our problems.

_____ Think about other's bad choices and learn to avoid doing the same.

_____ Read ancient scriptures and follow their good teaching.

3. Underline the sentences that are correct.

Suffering can be caused by other people.

There are evil spirits who also cause suffering.

4. Write true or false.

_____ The ancient scriptures teach about a God who is bigger and beyond life as we know it.

_____ The scriptures say He is a compassionate God who wants to help us.

5. If this statement is true of your choice today, check it:

_____ I want to be free from suffering and so I choose to turn from my wrong desires and follow after what is good.