Self-Pity

When you pity someone, you show sympathy and compassion for their difficulties, and as a result, you may be compelled to do something to help.

Self-pity occurs when you feel sympathy for yourself. It is okay to admit to yourself, God, and others that you are struggling and that life is difficult. It is unhealthy to pretend you are not having a hard time when you are. There is absolutely nothing wrong with speaking the truth about your situation.

The problem is that self-pity often results in us acting differently toward ourselves than we would toward someone else. Instead of being compelled to help, self-pity often keeps people in a place of helplessness and victimhood. The “poor me” attitude is self-focused and self-absorbed. We tend to blame others for our misfortune and become resentful toward them.

Victimhood keeps you stuck because your focus is on your circumstances rather than on what you can do to make your situation better. It keeps you from taking responsibility for yourself and the things you can change. Victims want others to feel sorry for them and to enable them to continue being a victim. Just like those who wallow in self-pity, victims expect someone to rescue them. There is much to be gained by staying in a state of victimhood because you can avoid making changes and keep other people doing things for you.

Jonah reluctantly obeyed God’s directive to warn the Ninevites to repent or face destruction. They listened and repented. Jonah became angry that he had gone there only to have God show them compassion. Jonah was self-focused. Rather than rejoicing that the Ninevites were saved from destruction, he was angry at his own waste of time. He became dramatic over it, saying he wanted to die. He was full of self-pity, feeling sorry for himself, and angry with God. God then became angry with him, telling him to quit feeling sorry for himself and instead to expand his focus onto bigger things like the fact that the Ninevites escaped destruction.

As with Jonah, our self-pity narrows our focus. It keeps us looking at our circumstances from a perspective of how bad and hopeless things are. It makes us dramatic and dependent on others because we want to draw them into our pity.
party. If someone in your life uses self-pity to manipulate you into doing for them what they should do for themselves, stop playing the game.

By Karla Downing

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God,

Help me to acknowledge the truth about the things that are difficult for me without getting stuck in self-pity.

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Relationship Prayer

God,

Help me to acknowledge the truth about the things that are difficult for me without getting stuck in self-pity.

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Relationship Challenge

❖ Sit on the pity pot for fifteen minutes to give yourself sympathy. Then get off and do what you can about the things you struggle with.

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Scripture Meditation

Jonah 3:10 - 4:11

When God saw what they did and how they turned from their evil ways, he relented and did not bring on them the destruction he had threatened. But to Jonah this seemed very wrong, and he became angry. He prayed to the LORD, “Isn’t this what I said, LORD, when I was still at home? That is what I tried to forestall by fleeing to Tarshish. I knew that you are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity. Now, LORD, take away my life, for it is better for me to die than to live.” But the LORD replied, “Is it right for you to be angry?” Jonah had gone out and sat down at a place east of the city. There he made himself a shelter, sat in its shade and waited to see what would happen to the city. Then the LORD God provided a leafy plant and made it grow up over Jonah to give shade for his head to ease his discomfort, and Jonah was very happy about the plant. But at dawn the next day
God provided a worm, which chewed the plant so that it withered. When the sun rose, God provided a scorching east wind, and the sun blazed on Jonah’s head so that he grew faint. He wanted to die, and said, “It would be better for me to die than to live.” But God said to Jonah, “Is it right for you to be angry about the plant?” “It is,” he said. “And I’m so angry I wish I were dead.” But the LORD said, “You have been concerned about this plant, though you did not tend it or make it grow. It sprang up overnight and died overnight. And should I not have concern for the great city of Nineveh, in which there are more than a hundred and twenty thousand people who cannot tell their right hand from their left—and also many animals?”

If you have any questions you would like to ask Karla, please feel free to email her. Portions of your email and Karla's response to you may be used anonymously in future materials. By emailing her, you are giving your implied permission.

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