OVERCOMING PERSECUTION AND DISCRIMINATION

IS IT POSSIBLE TO OVERCOME THESE GREAT INJUSTICES?

As a person who has lived with mental health challenges all her adult life, I have cried out for years about the pain of stigma we experience. I’ve pleaded for us to be looked on as the real people we are, though not accepted as such. The world has turned its back on us. We are marginalized. Few consider what might be happening in our heart and soul. Few can understand how much we suffer.

In the work I’m doing today, I feel the same way towards people like the Rohingya who have for generations had to face discrimination and persecution—even genocide. In the way I cried out about stigma felt by my brother and sisters with mental health conditions, I now cry out about the suffering the Rohingya are experiencing. When I hear their stories, I suffer along with them.

Can you imagine what it must be like to be in their shoes?

* to be shunned, rejected, excluded,
* experiencing displacement,
* having an uncertain future,
* suffering great losses,
* having endless hardships,
* losing courage, strength and hope.

Listen to the words of refugees and all who are persecuted:

Just like every other person created by God, we have worth, we count, and we want a meaningful life. If only the world could understand this and help us be part of the family of man.

Pause for a moment and consider how many individuals are suffering as refugees—their lives wasted.

“But” you might say, “There have always been refugees. It has always been a problem. How could things possibly change? Why even try?”

Hopefully, there will come a time when eyes are opened, and we will see how wrong it is for a whole population to be thought less of in the way so many are.

I can’t help thinking of the many “impossibilities” that have become possibilities by determined and courageous leaders of the past. The passion and perseverance of these leaders showed what can be done to overcome seemingly impossible odds to change the world.

One of my favorite statements from Jesus is, *“With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.”* (Matthew 19:26) Those with great faith have believed those words and found the resolve to make a difference. They realized their work was God’s and did not depend on themselves alone.

Though the task might have seemed impossible, leaders in history who identified injustices of their time have shown what could be accomplished with the passion to set things right. They’re an inspiration to those who long to make a difference to the injustices of today.

Three examples are William Wilberforce who helped abolish the Atlantic Slave Trade in Britain, Martin Luther King, Jr. who gave his life while trying to bring an end to racial segregation in the U.S., and Nelson Mandela who gave his all to bring an end to apartheid in South Africa. Even where success was only partial, the difference they made was significant.

In Romans 12:21, the apostle Paul says, *“Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.”* In my life I’ve found the “good” to be in the example Jesus set for us in his compassionate treatment of outcasts and other marginalized individuals of his day.

Martin Luther King Jr. once said this about his fight for desegregation, “It is the triumph of the cause that I am concerned about. And I have always felt that ultimately along the way of life an individual must stand up and be counted and be willing to face the consequences whatever they are. And if he is filled with fear he cannot do it.”

Could we adopt that kind of spirit in the fight to overcome mental health discrimination?

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