

For Broadcast: 29<sup>th</sup> August 2021

## WHY NOT ME?

*Round The Table Discussion:  
Pastor Richard Fox, Pastor Noel Due & Celia Fielke*

- Richard:** Yes you have your bad days, your bad moments in life.
- Noel:** Often people who are watching the suffering are asking questions about how can God allow this, and is it fair and so forth. People going through the midst of suffering often ask very different questions.
- Richard:** What questions do you ask when you see or experience suffering? Where do you look for hope to get through? Today Celia and Noel join me to share some of their own experiences and thoughts about suffering. There is a hopeful side.
- Noel:** Celia, that's your third cup of coffee. What's happened? You look like you've had a bad day.
- Celia:** I have had one of those days where I slept in. Normally I never sleep through my alarm but I did. Then I got up and whacked my shin right on the door, as I went into the bathroom. Then I got in the car and I was stuck all the way down the hill coming down in a traffic jam. I just got stressed and then I turned up to the wrong spot!
- Richard:** Oh, dear.
- Celia:** "Sorry, I'm running late!" Everything went wrong. It was just one of those days. It was just horrible.
- Noel:** Welcome to planet Earth.
- Celia:** Yeah.
- Richard:** Yes. Bad things like that can happen to anyone, don't they. Yes, you have your bad days, your bad moments in life.
- Noel:** Some of it's trivial stuff.
- Richard:** True.
- Noel:** Some of it's more serious stuff but everyone has a bad day. Sometimes we have more than a bad day.
- Celia:** Bad weeks, bad months, people have bad years.
- Richard:** Yeah.
- Celia:** Didn't that happen to you, Noel? You had a pretty horrible year.

**Noel:** Are you talking about my wife?

**Celia:** Mm-hmm (affirmative).

**Noel:** Yeah. Well, that's a while back now, but it did go on for some years. I don't know if you know this story, Richard. She was diagnosed with breast cancer and fairly quickly after being given the all-clear, she was then diagnosed as terminally ill. The gap between having been given the all-clear to when she died was very quick in the end. Yeah, I wouldn't want to live through all those years all over again.

**Celia:** Yeah.

**Richard:** What were some things that helped you through those times?

**Noel:** People being present helped but not always trying to explain. Just being present helped.

**Richard:** It reminds me of a story in the Bible on Job. He was a man that went through some excruciating suffering and a couple of his friends came along, and with all good intentions and wanting to try and help, but through their conversations, they were just trying to explain what was actually going on to him-

**Celia:** Why he was suffering.

**Richard:** Yeah, that he should change or correct something he's done wrong. From reading those stories, it didn't actually help. It didn't help Job's situation. It actually made it worse.

**Celia:** Is that what you're kind of saying?

**Noel:** Yeah, that's what I'm kind of saying. My wife ... I've remarried since my first wife died. My wife now has done advanced training in palliative medicine as a doctor. Caring for people who are terminally ill, caring for dying patients and she would sometimes say in a training seminar to people, "Don't just do something, sit there."

**Celia:** The whole reverse of what we normally tell everybody to do.

**Noel:** Yeah. It's very important just to be present, just to be able to sit with a person. Yes, sometimes to be able to do stuff practically, care for the children if they need that sort of care or do some practical stuff but often it's just sitting with people and being available to them.

**Celia:** I snapped my Achilles about four or five years ago now and there were a lot of things I guess I learnt from that but one of them was that the practical help was really important. For me, I'm a bit of a control freak and don't like asking people for help. That's just not my character but the fact that I was completely bedridden, couldn't walk, couldn't do anything, I had to ask for help. That was confronting initially but probably also a bit humbling as well. People were more than willing to help. I had meals brought to me, people helped out with the kids, taking them everywhere and things like that so that to me also showed a lot of things that, yes, you can accept help. People are great. The other part of it was that life goes on, even though you're not controlling it, even though you're not in the driver's seat. The world goes on without you and that, for me was a really important lesson, I guess.

**Richard:** I know when I've gone through suffering times, and I look back on them, they're often the times I've learnt the most about who I am and about where do I go in life. It's not necessarily the good times or the best times, it's actually the suffering times where I've learnt about maybe humility or patience to rely on others. It's never really been about why me? Normally that's been a question of someone from the outside kind of looking back.

**Celia:** Did you ever feel that Noel?

**Noel:** To be honest no. No.

**Celia:** Really?

**Noel:** I don't think either with my first wife's death and I had a major cancer diagnosis a couple of years ago... I don't think in either case really the question arose. I suppose if anything the question and it might sound little bit strange to put it this way but the question is why not me?

**Richard:** How do you get to that point of why not me?

**Noel:** Well, if I had just been stuck with the question why me? I'd think that is sort of a very arrogant jumped up little question to ask as though I deserve not to suffer somehow but Richard my friend can you have it!

**Celia:** I think probably a lot of us think that sometimes. So that is amazing that you have turned it on it's head.

**Noel:** Well, I'm not sure that I would give any credit to myself for turning on its head. It's just the fact that suffering is universal and it's not just physical suffering. Around this table we have all got experiences of physical suffering but the relational suffering is the real pain. In the case of my wife's death, she was suffering physically a dreadful illness but also there was the relational loss she was facing. It's the relational suffering that can be as hard to bear as the physical suffering often.

**Richard:** I was at a funeral recently and listened to a person's eulogy and this man had a very difficult life. You could look at his life and go, "Well, certainly why did all that happen to him?" He had a severe disability and really didn't have the quality of life as we look at it from the outside and spent the last three years just bedridden. In his obituary they pointed out that he never asked the why me question. He was very grateful for living and for being there and what he could do. His question similar to yours Noel was why not me? He was very happy and content with his life.

**Noel:** I think it's true that people going through the midst of suffering often ask very different questions from those asked by people who are watching. Often people watching the suffering are asking questions about how can God allow this and is it fair and so forth. But often people in the middle of suffering are experiencing something very different and they are actually wanting a God to hang onto to rather than a God to justify themselves.

**Celia:** They just want to know who is there with me.

**Noel:** Who is there with me.

**Celia:** Who is walking with me.

**Noel:** Who is walking with me.

**Richard:** Like this guy described in his obituary, God was with him the whole way through and that is what he believed in and it gave him the joy and hope to get through whatever he was facing in his life. I know that's the same for me too, my faith in Jesus. Knowing that even when I don't feel that He's there, He is there guiding me through those tough times.

**Celia:** It's about that perspective isn't.

**Noel:** And sometimes the bad days actually help us. They give us a bit more of a different perspective.

**Celia:** Yes. You can look back on that and say, "At least tomorrow won't be as bad as today."

**Noel:** Yes. Absolutely.

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