

Bali survivors recover – without revenge

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How does someone cope with wrongful imprisonment, torture, or terrible injury? How do you go on with your life when you've suffered a crippling blow? These are questions I've been thinking about in the light of news reports coming out of Iraq, Zimbabwe, and North Korea. Citizens of these countries have been, or continue to be, treated harshly. With so much suffering, can people recover from tragic circumstances and go on with their lives? I found inspiring answers on a recent *60 Minutes* television program.

When the program was aired in Australia, people around the country were holding memorial services for the victims of the terrorist attacks that took place on the Indonesian Island of Bali in October 2002. Although many people were killed when the two powerful bombs were detonated at a popular tourist nightclub, this TV program chose to speak with a group who survived the tragedy.

The opening moments of the interview showed these young men and women talking to each other. They looked happy and carefree. Then the camera revealed the special body suits they wore. We saw the serious burns they had sustained in the blasts six months earlier. We saw that a young woman had lost an arm. A young man now had only one leg.

My eyes filled with tears. I thought of what these people had been through. I was angry at the perpetrators for the havoc they had wreaked on these innocent people. And I recalled how the Bali bombers had boasted about their attack when police first apprehended them. I could see again their faces and hear their admissions that they had meant to kill as many Australians as possible. I was ready to wage a battle of righteous indignation on behalf of the victims.

Imagine my surprise when these young people on the television program began to speak about their lives since that tragic event. There was no anger. No hate. No thirst for revenge. They had endured so much, yet they had pity for the men who had blown their lives apart. "I feel truly sorry for people who are consumed with hate for others," said a recovering burn victim. "Imagine living with those thoughts! I don't want to be filled with hate for these men. I want to put this behind me and move on."

Others in the group echoed this theme. One amputee shared her thoughts: "I can't indulge feelings of revenge. That wouldn't help my healing process. I refuse to devote time to thinking negatively about the men who did this. I am focusing on recovering mentally and physically, and getting on with my life."

Their comments filled me with awe at the strength of the human spirit. The courage. The grace. The absence of bitterness and self-pity. These young people, who were injured while saving others, shared honestly and openly what they felt. And what stood out to me from their conversation was this realization: tragedy cannot crush our real nature – our innate strength, goodness, and mercy.

Magnanimous forgiveness, indomitable courage, and true compassion come to us from God and therefore reside in our hearts and minds. No circumstance can permanently destroy them. Not even a terrorist bombing attack. Since God has created us to love and be loved – no matter what – our lives can be regenerated.

And this is just what happened to one of the Bali terrorists. In a moving media interview, he apologized for his actions and expressed remorse for his part in killing and injuring innocent people.

So what can we do with anger and fear? What can we do with despair? These things were never part of our makeup as the sons and daughters of God. So they are transitory. They can't last, because they aren't from God. These facts can help us through the rough times.

At one period of my life I was working in an area where there was a lot of death and destruction around me. I felt utterly hopeless. Then a female colleague was shot and killed. It was devastating. My employer worried that those of us involved would suffer long-term trauma. I decided I would not allow the appalling situation to leave a bad imprint on my life. I also refused to hate the man who committed this crime.

So I prayed for determination and resiliency. I said to God, "Please help me. I know that You're with me. You're giving me the power to recover from this misery. I know that You have given me buoyancy to keep me from sinking into the depths of discouragement. With Your help I will move forward."

As I continued to pray by remembering facts such as these, my anguish receded and my grief melted away. My life returned to normal. The love of God brought me through that bleak period.

We can all let God's love embrace us – tenderly, firmly. This love will regenerate spirits and restore lives. No experience of the past is strong enough to prevent us from feeling God's healing power and peace, and finding the courage to go on.