

March 7, 2010 PM

## SEASONS OF PAIN EXPERIENCES

Psalm 116:4-9

*“Then I cried, ‘Lord save me! How kind he is! How good he is! So merciful, this God of ours! The Lord protects the simple and the childlike; I was facing death and then he saved me. Now I can relax. For the Lord has done this wonderful miracle for me. He has saved me from death, my eyes from tears, my feet from stumbling. I shall live! Yes, in His presence – here on earth!’”*

America is a pain-conscious society. Everywhere you look we have ads for pain relievers and we see constant abuse of painkillers.

I heard the story of one of our kids who came home and said, “My tummy hurts.” His mother said, “That’s because it’s empty,” and gave him a snack. His dad came home and said, “My head hurts.” The boy said, “Mom says it’s because it’s empty.” The real truth is because we are human that we have physical pain, spiritual pain, emotional pain, etc. The world has taught us many myths about pain that simply are not true. Some are harmless, but one very destructive myth is this: “If I ignore my pain, it will go away.” If I block it out of my memory, if I pretend it never happened, if I gloss it over, I will not be in pain.” Beneath that is another myth that says, “It’s easier to avoid problems than it is to face them.” That is not true.

**Scott Peck says:** “Fear and pain from a greater to a lesser degree tend to avoid problems. We procrastinate hoping they will go away. We ignore and pretend that they don’t exist. We attempt to get out of them rather than suffer through them. This tendency to avoid problems and the emotional pain inherent is the primary basis of human mental illness. God does not want you to avoid your pain. He wants you to discover the cause.”

Pain is like a warning light. It is saying something is wrong in my life. Is it wise to avoid a warning light? It’s not wise to avoid our pain.

**Truth:** Pain is a tool that God uses for good in my life. The problem is that we often don't understand it. We don't realize what the good is. ***“Jesus replied, ‘You don’t realize now what I am doing but later you will understand.’ (John 13:7, NIV)***

That is especially true with pain. If it does not have a purpose, it is hard to handle. Tonight I want us to see how God uses pain for good. We can rejoice, realize it is there and develop a right attitude.

**I. God uses pain to goad (motivate) me.**

**We have to be sick of something to want to move on.**

**A. We have to be motivated for change.**

1. I go to the dentist when the pain is greater than my fear.
2. We don't change when we see the light, but when we feel the heat. That's when we move into action.

***“Sometimes it takes a painful experience to make us change our ways.”***  
***(Proverbs 20:30, GN)***

3. Pain forces us to change when we don't want to change.

**\*JOKE** Do you know how many psychiatrists it takes to change a light bulb? One, but the light bulb must really want to be changed. How many Youth Ministers does it take? Three, one to change the bulb and two to make t-shirts. How many Ministers of Music? One, they hold the bulb in place, believing the world revolves around them.

**B. Biblical example:**

1. The Prodigal Son spent everything he had and then he was hungry. At last he came to his senses and said, “I will get up and go to my father.” The hunger pains motivated him to move. We all have hunger.

**\*JOKE** Paulette said, “Last night there were two pieces of pie in the refrigerator and they are gone, can you explain that?” I said, “Sure, I didn't see but one piece.”

2. Like the Prodigal Son we rarely change our life until we have pain.

## **II. God uses pain to guide me.**

### **A. God uses pain to give me direction.**

***“...it was the best thing that could have happened to me, for it taught me to pay attention to your laws.” (Psalm 119:71-72, LB)***

1. Pain is a teaching tool.
2. Has God ever had to get your attention through pain?
3. God whispers to us in our pleasures, but he shouts to us in our pain, “I want your attention.”
4. Sometimes it does not take a lot.

***“Let God train you for He is doing what any loving father does for his children. Whoever heard of a child who was never corrected?” (Hebrews 12:7, LB)***

### **B. Sometimes the only way to train is through pain.**

1. Parents discipline for the child, not to the child.
2. God disciplines us because He loves us.
3. The person who has never suffered is usually superficial.
4. I can tell you that when you go through pain you don't lose faith in God. Ron Dunn said, “You lose the zippidee do dah faith.”
5. We never need to doubt God's love. His motive behind all the pain is to guide us. It is for our good.

## **III. God uses pain to gauge me.**

### **A. Pain is a measuring tool.**

1. He uses it to help us see what we are like on the inside.
2. When I experience pain, the way I react measures my faith.
3. My commitment can be measured by how I react to my pain.
4. My maturity can be gauged.
5. My patience.

## **B. The Bible compares pain to a refiner's fire.**

1. In the heat the impurities are burned off.
2. God uses it to remove some things.
3. What are you allowing your pain to burn off in your life?
  - a. Pain will burn off selfishness.
  - b. It will burn off materialism.

**\*ILLUSTRATION** of one of my favorite letters.

Hearing all of the testimonies of how God is working in our church family always warms my heart. Even more so to see how my family has been blessed because of a love for God and obedience. However, we had not really experienced God's handiwork until this week. (They went on to explain how they were struggling under the weight of debt because of medical bills) We knew we had to be patient and things would come in God's time. In all this time we remained faithful to God in our stewardship. Beginning at Christmas we saw God's love surround us. What warm feelings to see God take control in such an obvious way. We are also now able to give more to God because of how God has met our needs. Thank you for teaching us principles to live by to serve God better and better. It feels really great to have a specific story in how God has directly touched us.

- c. It will pop the balloon of ego. It forces us to realize what is really important.

***"I have tested you in the furnace of affliction."* (Isaiah 48:10, NIV)**

- d. Pain is a test that exposes the real you on the inside. You can't maintain the image when you are in pain. When you are miserable you don't care about image. God is interested in character. Pain tests character. It is easy to say, "I am totally committed to Christ," but when pain comes as a result of commitment you see how real it is.

***“...tests and challenges come at you from all sides. And you know that under pressure, your faith life is forced into the open and shows its true colors.” (James 1:23, The Message)***

4. What does pressure reveal about you? When you are in a squeeze, what comes out of you? Are you a fair weather believer or a consistent believer?

**\*NOTE** This is why Israel was in the wilderness for 40 years. You know they could have made that journey in 2-3 weeks, but it took them 40 years. Why? Because out in that desert God let them wander around and around and put them through tests so they would know what they were like on the inside. He was goading them, guiding them and gauging them.

***“God led you through the wilderness for forty years, humbling you and testing you to find out how you would respond, and whether or not you would really obey Him.” (Deuteronomy 8:2, LB)***

- a. Some of you are going through a desert right now and in the desert things dry up.
- b. A relationship has dried up, finances, opportunity, your health.
- c. God says it is a test. I am gauging you to see what is inside you.

#### **IV. God uses pain to guard me.**

##### **A. Sometimes God uses pain to protect us from something worse.**

1. A fever is an indicator of infection.
2. God uses it sometimes to keep us from being in situations that will devastate our lives.
3. When shepherds have sheep that are prone to wander from the flock, they will break their leg. They do that out of love.

##### **B. Sometimes God puts a splint on our life.**

1. It keeps us from wandering.
2. You may resent it and resist it but it is because God loves you.
3. Do you remember Joseph's story. His life is a massive heartache. But God was preparing him to save both Egypt and Israel.

***“You intent to harm me, but God intended it for good...” (Genesis 50:20, NIV)***

4. There are people who mean to hurt and harm you. They are no good and it hurts, but God has a plan and purpose bigger than we are.
5. God was goading, guiding, gauging, and guarding Joseph. God was preparing him. Joseph named his two sons Manasseh and Ephraim.
  - a. Manasseh means “he made me to forget.”
  - b. Ephraim means “fruitful.

After 40 years of pain he could say, “God has blessed me so much and I can see the picture so clearly now. It has made me forget the pain and has made me successful.”

**V. God uses pain to grow me.**

**A. We grow faster and deeper in grace.**

1. It is in the valleys, not on the mountaintops that real growth takes place.
2. It is in grace that we have sunshine.
3. I know it was in painful times that God has grown me. It was in a valley of despair that I had a vision for this church, even if I did not understand it then.

**B. Pain is the high cost of growth.**

***“For when the way is rough, your patience has a chance to grow...so let it grow, and don't try to squirm out of your problems...then you will be ready for anything; strong in character, full and complete.” (James 1:4, The Message)***

1. There is no growing without pain. There are no five easy steps in life.
2. We want the product with the process.
  - a. The product: Maturity, emotional stability.
  - b. We want meaning, purpose, and confidence in life.
3. The very thing that discourages you the most, God is using to develop you. It is not an accident.
4. David went through loneliness, neglect, rejection, and it was in those painful times that God spoke to him to write most of the Psalms.

***“...so don’t try to get out of anything prematurely. Let it do its work so you become mature and well developed.” (James 1:4)***

***“This happened...so we might learn to trust, not in ourselves, but in God.” (1 Corinthians 1:9, Ph)***

5. You don’t know Jesus Christ is all you need until Jesus Christ is all you have. Then you will know.

### **C. The greatest thing pain can do is turn you to God.**

1. God loves you and you matter to Him!
2. The Christian faith is about a relationship with God, and out of that, hope and healing for the hurting.
3. We are able to live life in Jesus one day at a time.
4. We can choose to focus on our pain and hurt; or our joy in Jesus Christ.
5. Pain never leaves you where it finds you. You need to allow your pain to move you into the arms of a loving God.

***“Has all your painful experience brought you nowhere?” (Galatians 3:4, Ph)***

6. Don’t waste your hurt.
  - a. It turns some into saints.
  - b. It turns others into sinners.
  - c. It makes some better, some bitter. It’s your choice.

*“Pain is inevitable, but misery is optional.” (Barbara Johnson)*

***“Now I am glad...not because it hurt you but because the pain turned you to God...” (2 Corinthians 7:9, LB)***

7. My plea is that you will give your hurt and your heart to Jesus Christ. He is the great physician.

***“If you are suffering according to God’s will, keep on doing what is right and trust yourself to God who made you, for he will never fail you.” (1 Peter 4:19, LB)***

8. You can’t say that about anyone else. “He will never fail you.”

Ask God:

1. Is this to motivate me to change?
2. To point me in a new direction?
3. To help me see my heart?
4. To protect me from wandering, to stay dependent?
5. To make me more like Jesus?

***“This happened so we would not trust in ourselves but in God.” (1 Corinthians 9)***