

MYTHS ABOUT PAIN

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GOD'S PRINCIPLES ON PAIN

This lesson is about myths involving pain. We are a very pain-conscious society. Everywhere you turn there are ads for pain relievers and painkillers. Technology has led us from aspirin to Tylenol to Ibuprofen to Naproxen to I don't even know what's out there. It seems like the whole world has a headache, doesn't it?

One of the facts of life is that we all face problems, and we all feel pain. As long as we are alive, we are going to have pain. You are going to have physical, emotional, and spiritual pain. The world gives us a whole collection of myths about what to do with that pain.

The world basically says pain is an awful thing. It's the worst thing you can experience. So just avoid problems if you possibly can; don't face them. Two major myths the world would have you believe are (a) ignore it, it will go away and (b) escape it, take a drink, a pill or something else. All myths have a grain of appeal in the short term, but they tend to bring major misery in the long run.

The eminent psychologist Scott Peck said, "Fearing pain, almost all of us to one degree or another, attempt to avoid problems. We procrastinate, hoping they will go away. We ignore and pretend they don't exist. We attempt to get out of them, rather than to suffer through them." He concluded with, "This tendency to avoid problems and the emotional pain inherent in them is the primary basis for human mental illness." Did you hear that? "The tendency to avoid problems

and pain inherent in them is the primary basis for human mental illness." He's right, and the fact is God doesn't want you to ignore your pain. He doesn't really want you to run from your pain. God wants you to discover the cause of your pain and then go to the root for real relief.

Pain is like a warning light on the dashboard of your car. When that warning light comes on, it indicates that something is wrong. You can take a hammer and crash it if you want to ignore it, or you can just turn your head. But the fact of the matter is, if you're prudent, you'll go find out what's causing the problem (or pain) and cure it. The myth then is to run from pain, to ignore pain, to find an escape from it. The truth is that pain is a tool that God uses to bring good in my life. The problem is, we don't tend to understand it or recognize the good that pain can ultimately bring to our lives.

This lesson is not how to do away with your pain. Nothing short of death will do that. It is to help us to understand pain. Once we understand a purpose behind pain, it's a lot easier to deal with.

Those of you who are ex-athletes can remember the endless practices in whatever sport you were involved in. You would have the conditioning time, lining up and doing those wind sprints. You think your legs were going to buckle and your lungs were going to explode, but you knew there was a greater purpose than just the running. It was to accomplish something better.

God uses our pain to:

1. Motivate me.

He uses my pain to spur me into action. Some people are so afraid to go to the dentist that the only thing that will make them go is a pain that is greater than their fear. Pain can be a great motivator. I like what some wise fellow said, "We don't change when we see the light, we change when we feel the heat." That's when we're motivated to make a change. The alcoholic, drug addict and chemically dependent will seldom seek help before they hit bottom. To hit bottom, simply means, experiencing enough pain physically, emotionally, and spiritually, that their pain is worse than their desire for the drug. They say, "I can't see going on like this anymore." Nothing short of that will get them to change.

In the Bible, the parable of the Prodigal Son is the classic example. He goes to father and says, "I want all that's due to me, and I want it right now." Then he takes it and goes to some far country where he just wastes it, he blows it. The

Bible says he went out looking for a job. He got a job feeding pigs, it's a shame and disgrace for a Jewish boy to feed pigs, but he got so hungry he would have scooted the pigs over and got right down there and eaten with them. The hunger pain motivated him.

2. To mold me.

Pain will mold or shape me like clay into what I need to be. David said, "It was good for me to be afflicted so that I might learn your decrees." (Psalm 119:71) David says pain is a teaching tool. It makes us pliable. God uses pain not just to motivate me, just to get me off square one; he then uses it but to mold me, to teach me. It's like a bit in a horse's mouth. Are you equestrians or raised on a farm with a horse or a mule? You put that bit there and just the slightest pull causes the pain. It causes the horse to go one way or the other. That's the way God uses our pain. Somebody says that God whispers to us in our pleasure, but he SHOUTS to us in our pain. Has God ever shouted to you through your pain? Aristotle rightly observed that there are some things that a human can only learn through pain. Mark Twain putting it in his homespun way said, "If a cat ever sits on a hot stove, he'll never sit on a hot stove again." Of course, he'll never sit on a cold one either. But the point is, by being burned, he learned like that cat. There are some things you can learn only by being burned.

Has God ever gotten your attention through pain? I know some workaholics. God has gotten their attention through an ulcer, through angina. I know some workaholics for whom God has gotten their attention through emotional pain when their spouse came to them and said, "I'm not putting up with it anymore."

Some folks have been overextended financially, been up to their eyes in debt, leveraged everything they owned, had a severe case of "wantitis." Do you know what happened? They got burned. If they've got an ounce of common sense, they learned through that pain. You don't want pain to be the only or the main source of your total education. You're going to have an extremely miserable life if that's the case. But some of life's deepest insights are learned only at the expense of pain. Those lessons are there because God loves you. He will motivate, and mold you.

3. To measure me.

It helps us see what we are really like on the inside. For instance, when I experience pain, the way I react to it measures my faith. My commitment can be measured by how I react to pain. My maturity is measured by how I react to pain. My patience is measured by how I react to pain. Your problems and the pain that they bring with them are among the best ways to see what's inside of you. The reason pain is

among the best barometers of what's inside of you is because it's impossible to maintain an image when you're in pain.

Now let's be honest, we all project images, don't we? Sure, you do. We project physical images. We comb our hair and we brush our teeth. Ladies, you put on your make-up. We project a social image. We smile and we have pleasant social conversation. But give yourself three days at home with the flu and see how much any of those things matter to you. You just drag into the bathroom and look into the mirror, you've got that bad case of bed-head look, like a wreck and you don't care. The pain has stripped away the image.

Now that's not just true physically. That's true with emotional pain. All the time, people will get up, dress up and go to work. They've got their image shields up, but underneath, there is a personal problem, there is a relationship problem, there is a sin that's beginning to dominate their life. It's no longer got just a foothold; it's developing a stronghold over their heart. As that pain intensifies, sooner or later in front of somebody, those images will come down. Sooner or later, that person will fall and just break down. The image is gone and as unpleasant as that sounds, God says that's not really bad because you ought to be more concerned about your character than your image. Pain tests character.

You may say, "I'm a person of integrity." But when the pain gets intense, you'll find out if you stand for the truth or if you buckle under. You may declare, "I'm committed to Christ." But, when pain is there, you'll run to what you're most committed. The real question is: What does pain say about your life? When you're in a squeeze, what comes out of you? Are you a fair-weathered believer or a consistent believer?

As long as things were okay, the Children of Israel were okay, but when pain came, they yielded. This is the reason they wandered in the wilderness for 40 years instead of getting to the Promised Land. God says, "Remember how the Lord your God led you all the way into the desert these 40 years, to humble you and to test you in order to know what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep his commands." (Deuteronomy 8:2) After they had gone through a parted Red Sea and seen the Egyptians defeated, they yielded to the pain of thirst and began griping and complaining. This pain of thirst measured their hearts. God knew they were not ready to obey His commands. They were not ready to have a commitment that will extend through pain. In my pain, God measures me.

4. To monitor me.

God will use my pain to keep me on track, just to put parameters around me and just make sure that I don't get too far afield. For example, a fever is the way your body is telling you that you may have an infection somewhere. The pain you

feel with a sore throat tells you that there is a deeper problem. But if you never have either or those symptoms, those problems could have gotten much worse, maybe even life threatening. God uses pain to monitor us and to allow us to monitor ourselves.

A practical application of this is painful emotions. These painful emotions are telling you that something is out of kilter. When I feel depressed over a prolonged period of time, feel resentful and I can't get over it, feel increasingly hostile, totally fearful, or get apathetic and say, "Nothing matters," my painful emotions are telling me something is wrong. They are our barometers. They are letting us know. We should get a thing checked out. Pain is a monitoring device for our protection.

Two thousand years ago Shepherds who had a sheep or a lamb that was a little too aggressive or tended to get a little wayward would break its legs. They still do that today. After they break its legs, they put a splint on it. That little old sheep can hardly move. It just pegs around a little bit. I know that sounds cruel, but they're doing it for their protection.

Sometimes God puts a splint on your life to keep you from wandering too far from the flock. You may resent it, resist it and you may curse it, but it's because God loves you.

Do you recall the story of Joseph? It's a story of pain. He was betrayed by his brothers and sold by them into slavery. He goes to a place where he doesn't know the people, he doesn't know the language or the customs. He is a slave in a man's house, but he walks uprightly and faithfully. While he is there he is falsely accused by his master's wife, thrown into prison and forgotten. Years later he comes out and by God's amazing providence, rises the second in charge of all Egypt. But even then, there's a pain. There's a pain of about 20 years knowing that he was abandoned by his family.

Finally, his brothers come down looking for food and Joseph reveals himself to them and all the family comes down, but at the very end of the book of Genesis, after Jacob, Joseph's father, dies, all of his brothers feared that Joseph was going to get even. He's going to get his revenge. Instead, Joseph said, "You intended it for my harm, but God intended it for good." You intended it for harm, but that's all right, God intended it for good. God was monitoring Joseph's life all along. He was watching him. God used the pain in Joseph's life to motivate him, to mold him, and to measure him for greatness.

There are people in your life who mean to harm you. We all have those people. They may have harmed you as a child, they may be harming you right now, physically, emotionally,

some other way and it hurts. But the great news I have for you is that God says to you, I've got a plan, I've got a purpose that's bigger than that. They may mean it for your harm, but don't worry, I'm your God and I'm going to work it out for your good.

At the end of Joseph's life, we find out he had two sons. One of them was named Manasseh and the other one was named Ephraim. I don't know about you, but I like the meaning of names. Manasseh means "he made me forget" and Ephraim means, "fruitful" or "successful." Joseph named his two boys that because Joseph realized that in all the pain he had endured, God worked and monitored his life for preparing him for greatness. He said, "God has made me forget that pain and now he has made me successful. He has made me fruitful." Folks, God will use that same pain that you feel to monitor you to greatness. But you must allow Him to do so.

5. To mature me.

It is possible to grow spiritually and emotionally during bright, healthy, cheerful, sunny days of spring and summer, when everything is going great, and life is fantastic. You can grow during good times but will grow far more and far deeper in the dark days of the soul. You will grow far deeper in the valleys than on the mountains. That's just the way humans are made.

Through the years, people have told me countless times as they have gone through the valley, "I've learned more this past year being out of work, than I've ever known prior to that time." Somebody said, "I've learned more through this financial crisis than I ever could have matured any other way." Speaking of the death of a loved one somebody said, "I didn't know how to trust in God until I went through this, and now I know how to trust in God." These are true statements because grace does grow best in winter. That's when God matures you.

Jesus's brother said, "Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking in anything." (James 1:2, 3) He said all the perseverance and all the problems work together so you can be mature and complete. Pain is the high cost of growth! We've heard it since we were kids, it's trite but it's true, there is no gain without pain. Contrary to what the world wants to tell you there are no five easy steps to a wonderful life.

The truth of the matter is that we live in a time when we want the product without paying the price.

The product we want is maturity, emotional stability, a sense of fulfillment and satisfaction, happiness and wisdom. That's the product we all want, but we don't want to pay the price. The price is pain in one form or another. There are no shortcuts.

The very thing that is discouraging you the most, God is using to develop you. The apostle Paul said, "I've got a thorn in my flesh, and three times I sought the Lord and said, 'Lord, take that thorn away from me.'" (2 Corinthians 12:7 -10) We don't know what that thorn was and I'm glad we don't, because we can relate to it. But I know one thing about a thorn. It hurts. I've never had a thorn in me that didn't hurt. It brought pain. As badly as he wanted the pain of my thorn taken away Paul concluded, after God refused to remove the thorn, "through it I learned how desperately I needed the presence of Jesus Christ in my life."

You really don't know that Jesus Christ is all you need until Jesus Christ is all you've got and then you'll know.
Amazing Grace lesson #1247

Questions:

1. You can ignore most problems and they will go away?
True _____ False _____
2. Pain is used by God to bring good into one's life?
True _____ False _____
3. Pain motivates some into action
True _____ False _____
4. Pain is an education tool as it causes one to change?
True _____ False _____
5. Pain measures the internal man?
True _____ False _____
6. Painful emotions are telling you that something is out of control?
True _____ False _____