

The Truth about Pain part 5 of *Dismissing the Myths that Make Us Miserable*

Message for Sunday, November 18, 2018
by Bruce Fraser

Scripture: James 1:2-4; 1 Peter 4:12-13

Children's Message:

Proverbs 27:12, New International Version:
The prudent see danger and take refuge,
but the simple keep going and suffer for it.

Ask the children, “Is it good to feel pain?” I expect most will say, “No.” So let’s try an experiment.

Light a candle, and hold my hand over it. What would happen if I could not feel pain? (I would get a bad burn).

Let’s suppose my friend and I get mad at each other and say some nasty things to each other, and we both walk away angry and lonely and hurt. What would happen if I could not feel pain? (I wouldn’t care about becoming friends again).

Pain can be good. God gave us pain to help show us the right way to live.

Message “The Truth About Pain” Part 5 in *Dismissing the Myths that Make Us Miserable*, based on a message by Rick Warren

Myth: All pain is bad. Anything I do to get rid of it is good.

I heard another good story this week. A girl came home after playing all afternoon. She complained to her father, “My stomach hurts.” Dad replied, “That’s because it’s empty.” Five minutes later, Mom comes home and says, “My head hurts.” The girl says to her, “Dad says that’s because it’s empty.”

We live in a society that is very pain-conscious. Pharmaceutical companies compete to come up with new formulas to get rid of pain. We’ve gone from Aspirin to Tylenol, to Ibuprofen, to Nuproxin, to the infamous opioids that are getting so many people addicted. Getting rid of pain is a *big* business.

I’m leading us through a series of messages on the theme “Dismissing the Myths that Make Us Miserable.” Every week we look at one of the myths our culture teaches us, and then we compare that with the truth we find in the scriptures. The myth we’re looking at today is: “All pain is bad. Anything I do to get rid of it is good.” If I can ignore the pain—“I’m tough; I can handle it; it doesn’t bother me”; if I can pretend that unpleasant incident never happened and block it out of my memory; if I can mask it with a pill, then I won’t be in pain.

Here’s what’s going on: we’re not just avoiding the pain. We’re avoiding the underlying problem which is causing the pain. Sometimes we’d rather avoid problems than face them. The eminent psychologist Scott Peck has said this:

Fearing pain, almost all of us, to a greater or lesser degree, 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 suffer through them. This tendency to avoid problems and the emotional pain inherent is *the primary basis of human mental illness*.

Wow! That’s powerful.

So the myth is that “All pain is bad. Anything I do to get rid of it is good.” But the truth is that...

TRUTH: Pain is a gift from God for good in my life

The Bible tells us that God created us, and when he was finished, he concluded, “It was very good” [Genesis 1:31]. God designed us with the capacity to feel pain. It’s there for a purpose.

Pain is like a warning light and it says there is something wrong in my life. Now, is it wise to ignore a warning light? No, it’s not, and it’s not wise to ignore your pain; it’s saying something’s wrong.

Here are some ways that God’s gift of pain is for our own good.

1) Pain can motivate me

Pain spurs us into action like nothing else.

Proverbs 20:30, Today's English Version:
Sometimes it takes a painful experience to make us change our ways.

Would you agree with that? Somebody said, “We don’t change when we see the light; we change when we feel the heat.”

You see, pain prompts us to do things we’d rather put off; it prods us and it pushes us and it compels us to change. Pain forces us to change when we don’t want to change. By the way, do you know how many psychiatrists it takes to change a light bulb? One, but the light bulb must really want to be changed.

Now pain really makes you want to be changed. Usually when we hit bottom, then we’re ready to change. That’s what happened in the story Jesus told of the prodigal son:

Luke 15:14-18

“his money ran out... he began to starve... he finally came to his senses and said... ‘I will go home to my father...’ ”

Pain can motivate us. Let’s be honest: we would rarely change anything in our lives if we didn’t feel some pain.

2) Pain can warn me of danger

In another church I served, there was a couple who lived on the shore of a lake, a beautiful location. To get to the beach, there was a steep slope. It was only four or five steps down, but it was tricky. Derek, the husband, slipped and fell down the slope, badly injuring his ankle. Now if that had been you or me, the pain in the ankle would have forced us to stay down at the shore, and wait for help to come. But Derek had advanced diabetes, so that he could not feel anything in his legs below the knees. That meant that he was not aware that anything was wrong with his ankle. He climbed and crawled his way back up the slope, slipping back and starting over several times. He finally got back up to the top.

By then he hadn’t simply broken his ankle. He had completely destroyed the ankle joint. All because he could not feel pain.

Pain can warn us that if we keep going the way we’re going, there’s danger ahead.

Proverbs 27:12, New International Version:

**The prudent see danger and take refuge,
but the simple keep going and suffer for it.**

This is true of all pain, not just physical. Emotional and spiritual pain are equally signs of danger. Guilt can hurt so that we will be motivated to repent and seek forgiveness. Conflict between loved ones is painful; it points us to the underlying source of conflict which must be worked out.

Of course, a person can ignore pain, and the body will adapt to it. It will build up a hard layer of calloused skin to protect itself. Again, the same thing happens when we ignore spiritual and emotional pain. We can harden our hearts towards the source of pain, so that the person or problem behind it no longer bothers us. We don’t care about them any more.

But that isn’t the way God planned it. God gave us pain to warn us of danger.

3) Pain can help me grow

James 1:2-4, New Living Translation:

Dear brothers and sisters, whenever trouble comes your way, let it be an opportunity for joy. For when your faith is tested, your endurance has a chance to grow. So let it grow, for when your endurance is fully developed, you will be strong in character and ready for anything.

1 Peter 4:12-13, New Living Translation:

Dear friends, don’t be surprised at the fiery trials you are going through, as if something strange were happening to you. Instead, be very glad—because these trials will make you partners with Christ in his suffering, and afterward you will have the wonderful joy of sharing his glory when it is displayed to all the world.

My friends, I feel very uncomfortable talking about this. Not because it brings up painful memories for me; but rather because there are no memories. I do not have a lot of experience of pain. I don’t really know what I’m talking about.

I know that some of you here have lived with physical pain that goes back 50 years or more. I know that some of you have emotional pain that is too deep to even talk about. Those hurts are beyond my imagining.

So when I quote a Bible verse that says, in effect, “Let your pain be an opportunity for joy,” I do so

with great apprehension. I wouldn't be surprised if someone got up and walked out.

When I talk with people who are ill or injured or grieving the death of a loved one or going through a divorce, I mostly listen. I don't preach. I don't tell people what to think, or what they should be feeling. I just listen to the pain.

And sometimes, I may ask them, "Where do you see God in all this?" *Oh, how I wish I could share those conversations with you!* Because almost always people tell me about God's faithfulness, about God's care, about God's strength. Even when they are angry as hell with God, they still have the sense of God's presence. Not always. Not everyone. But enough times that there is no question that these promises in God's Word are true.

God can and does use our pain to help us grow in faith, to grow closer to him.

David Kraft grew up near San Francisco, California. His father taught him from a very young age to put his faith in God. David grew up knowing and loving Jesus Christ. He also grew up to be a big, athletic young man. At the age of 32, he was six feet two inches tall and weighed two hundred pounds.

That's when he was diagnosed with cancer. The pain wracked his body, and he dropped from two hundred pounds to eighty pounds.

When he was about ready to pass from this life into eternity, he asked his father to come into his hospital room. Lying there in the bed, he looked up and said, "Dad, do you remember when I was a little boy, how you used to just hold me in your arms close to your chest?"

David's father nodded. Then David said, "Do you think, Dad, you could do that one more time? One last time?"

Again his father nodded. He bent down to pick up his 32-year-old six-foot two-inch, eighty-pound son, and held him close to his chest so the son's face was right next to the father's face. They were eyeball to eyeball. Tears were streaming down both faces. The son said simply to the father, "Thank you for

building the kind of character into my life that can enable me to face even a moment like this."

Let me ask you: what kind of character are you allowing God to build in you, through your pain?

Can God use the pain to motivate you into action? To guide you from danger to the right direction? To grow you?

Where do you see God in all this?

Next Steps:

- Will you—*can you*—allow God to enter into the painful parts of your life? Not that God will remove all your pain, but so that you have a helper.