

## James 1:1-8 (59-7)

### The Truth about Pain and Problems

This week and next are two vital weeks in our life as a church.

Today we are going to learn about something we all share – painful problems.

Next week we are going to learn how God deepens our worship

The Christian life will sometimes be painful and full of problems. Ask Abel, his blood still cries from the earth where it splashed as a wicked brother murdered him in the first religious war. Abel was a man of simple faith and Cain the murderer was a man of human achievement. Or you may wish to listen to Enoch about how painfully hard it was to walk all alone with God when the whole world wasn't. Again you might hear the voice of Noah rising above the hostile crowd who pressured and pestered him for 120 years as he obeyed God even when no one else in the world listened, believed or even cared. The Christian life will sometimes be painful and full of problems.

Scriptures are filled with the painful troubles that follow God's saints. Abraham had to leave all his loved ones and culture behind, to follow God. He wandered in the desert and lived in a tent waiting a son whom it never seemed was going to come. And then he nearly had to kill that son of promise as an offering to God. Jacob wrestled and was crippled, Joseph fled sin and yet God let him get falsely accused, chained and injured. Dinah was a modest young woman yet was kidnapped and raped while in the family tree of the Messiah. Being in God's family doesn't mean a life of leisure. The Christian life will sometimes be painful and full of problems.

Moses chose to follow God and lost everything, was hunted as a criminal, mocked by his own people, belittled by his wife and nearly stoned to death by the rebellious people of God. David, the man after God's own heart was betrayed by friends, pursued by foes, wracked with depression, attacked by his own wife, nearly murdered by his father-in-law and hunted like an animal. Later David would be chased out of town by his own son, usurped for the throne by another as life long friends deserted him for a rival kingdom led by his eldest son. All that while writing some of the sweetest portions of God's Word and singing the songs of highest worship to God. The Christian life will sometimes be painful and full of problems.

Following David come prophets, who are unheeded, mocked and killed. They weep and go on without a single visible sign that anyone is listening. They are dragged off by

enemy armies, thrown in wretched, muddy pits by their own people and one is eventually sawn in half by an angry king. Standing alone these mouthpieces for the Lord are faithful but by all visible signs, failures. The Christian life will sometimes be painful and full of problems.

The New Testament follows the same pattern. The greatest man ever born until Jesus is mocked, imprisoned, forgotten and then silenced by beheading in a dark dungeon as a party favor for a drunken, iniquitous go-go dancer's mother. The Owner of the Universe visits His own and they receive Him not. Instead they revile and mock Him, call Him a drunken, illegitimate, demonized fake. They try to stone Him, push Him off steep hills and interrupt His ministry. Finally after infiltrating the very inner circle of His earthly family His enemies set up a kidnapping murder plan that works and the Lamb of God is slain for the very sinful ones that killed Him. The Christian life will sometimes be painful and full of problems.

After the Crucifixion things only continue to deteriorate. The apostles are imprisoned, roughed up, beaten and harassed nearly 50 times in the book of Acts alone. And those are only the recorded incidents, doubtlessly there were many more. In the end the entire apostolic band is hunted down and either crucified, beheaded, shot through with arrows or skinned alive. Only one survives his execution attempt. John is boiled in oil and lives to go on for Jesus in exile on a barren prison colony island called Patmos. There he writes the last Word from God that promises only more of the same to the end of the world. The Christian life will sometimes be painful and full of problems.

So with all that in mind look at our portion of the Scriptures this morning James 1:1-12.

What did James write as the opening chapter of God's New Covenant people? Simply this, a clear and simple way of life that reflects **A MATURING WALK OF FAITH**. As Christ was received by faith, so the way of life flowing from His presence in a life would be reflected in the walk of faith. So James gives 12 clear indicators of how the walk of faith is going. You are headed toward Christian maturity when these areas are in line:

A Maturing Walk of Faith **ENDURES** troubles 1:2-12

1. Maturing saints see Trials from God's perspective (1:2-8) a source of purifying faith builders. This gives life a whole new orientation.

## **THE TRUTH ABOUT YOUR PAIN, PROBLEMS AND TRIALS**

This morning it is time to remind ourselves about the truth God has given us about painful problems and trials. We are under an avalanche of pain reliever, pain stopper and pain killer commercials. Aspirin, Tylenol, ibuprophen and now nuproxin all promising to instantly stop our pain. Life seems to be one gigantic headache to the advertising perspective.

So, the fact is pain and problems are part of life. To never have any pain in your life is to be inhuman. I mean you may as well be Data on Star Trek, he never cries. But, if you're a human being, you have physical pain, you have emotional pain, and you have spiritual pain. 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, listen to this, "**The primary basis of human mental illness.**" The desire and attempt to avoid pain and face our problems is "the primary basis for human illness." Now, the fact is, God doesn't want you to ignore your pain, He wants you to discover the cause so you can find real relief.

God wants us to know something very clearly: Pain is a tool He uses to develop His good plan in my life. In fact, Jesus said in John 13:7 (NIV), "**Jesus replied, 'You don't realize now what I am doing, but later you will understand.'**" Pain is the ultimate test of that verse. If we can't see the purpose for our pain, we can struggle with it. When we see His purpose, we grow or nurture! So, this morning, look with me at the five things God says about pain in His Word. Five ways God uses Painful problems and trials for good in your life.

### **1. God uses Painful problems and trials To Goad or push Me.**

That word goad or push means to motive me; goad or push means to spur into action. Pain is an incredible motivator. Most people won't go to the dentist until the pain drives them there. You've heard it said many times, "We don't change when we see the light, we change when we feel the heat." God's Word in Pr. 20:30 (GN) says, "**Sometimes it takes a painful experience to make us change our ways.**" Isn't that how we are? Pain pushes, prods and forces us to do things that lead to change?

Usually when we **HIT BOTTOM**, then we're ready to change. That's the Prodigal Son's example here in Lk 15:14-18 (GN), (**Prodigal Son**) "... *spent everything he had . . . and was hungry . . . At last he came to his senses and said . . . 'I'll get up and go to my father . . .*" The hunger pains finally motivated him to move. Do you ever have hunger pains? Some of us have them perpetually. [Laughter]. God uses Painful problems and trials to motivate me, to goad or push me, and we'd rarely change if we didn't have any pain in our life.

Number two:

### **2. God uses Painful problems and trials To Guide or navigate Me.**

In other words, like a bit in a horses mouth, God takes pain and He turns us in different directions because of the pain. Psalm 119:71-72 (LB), "... *it was the best thing that could have happened to me, for it taught me to pay attention to your laws.*" Now, David is saying, **Pain is a teaching tool.** Has God ever gotten your attention through pain? Yes, its loud and clear isn't it. God whispers through pleasure but shouts to us in pain. Even little pains can be steering us if we let them.

Thousands of years ago Aristotle said, "Some things we only **LEARN THROUGH PAIN.**" The longer we live the more we see that the person who has never suffered, really knows nothing. Its hard to be around people who have never had any pain in their life. They're phony, they're fake, they're superficial. They think everything is so easy. It's not. In fact, I would say that the greatest insights in life are found at the center of pain. That's where they're found. Some things you are only going to learn through pain because you're a human being. In the past 14 years as a couple we have spent many

sleepless nights in tears. Tears for ruined marriages, tears for wayward children, tears for hardened hearts, tears for lost and dying friends, tears for beloved ones dying in pain. . . .

And so, God goad or pushes us but He also guide or navigates us with the pain that we have in our lives. But, we never need to doubt God's love. His motive behind all of the pain is to guide or navigate us; it's for our good.

**3. God uses Painful problems and trials Not Only To Goad or push Me, To Guide or navigate Me, But He Uses It To Gauge or measure Me.** In other words, pain is a measuring tool. God uses Painful problems and trials to make us see what we're like inside. For instance, when I experience pain, the way I react to it measures my faith.

- My commitments can be measured by how I react to pain.
- My maturity can be measured by how I react to pain.
- My patience can be measured in how I react to pain.

It's one way of seeing what's on the inside of you. You've heard me say before that people are like tea bags -- you don't know what's in them until you drop them in hot water. And, you really don't know what's inside you until you've faced the test of pain.

Scriptures say that pain is a refining fire. God wants us to see the impurities of our lives refined. He wants the dross and chaff removed. Here is the key: when emotional or physical pain hit this week, what did you let God refine in your life?

- If you let it, pain will burn off selfishness -- it just makes you a lot more unselfish.
- If you let it, it will burn off materialism -- the grip of having to have things really don't matter when you're in pain.
- It's a great refiner of ego and pride -- pain pops that ego balloon real quick.
- It will burn off impatience, so many things happen when we let God refine us!

God tells us His plan: Isa. 48:10 (NIV), "**I have tested you in the furnace of affliction.**" When pain hits each time, it is a test. Why? Because we **CAN'T KEEP UP OUR IMAGE** when we are in pain. In everyday life we have our schedule just right, our clothes just right, hair, makeup, composure . . . but just have the flu knock us out for 3 days, then reality hits. We are no longer interested in appearance. God says great think about character. Character matters so much more than appearance, but we spend so much time on what we look like and so little time on character!

Pain tests character. You see, you can say one thing, but pain reveals what you're really are. Look at this verse. James 1:2-3 (Message), ". . . **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.**"

Pain puts the squeeze on us and lets out what is really inside.

The classic example is the Exodus of Israel from Egypt. The Lord turned a two week walk from Egypt to Canaan into a 40 year test. Why? **TO SHOW THEM WHAT WAS**

**INSIDE THEIR HEARTS.** He was goad or pushing them, He was guiding them, and He was gauging them. Notice this verse here. Deut. 8:2 (LB), "**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.**"

How about it? Are you in the wilderness this week? In the wilderness or desert times things dry up.

Are your finances drying up?

Are your Relationships drying up?

Is your Health withering ?

Is your Ministry drying up?

God says, "I'm testing you." And He says, "I'm gauging you so you'll know what's inside of you." And, when you go through those tough times and you say, "I don't have any feelings at all, I just don't feel anything," you're going through a desert. "I feel so apathetic," you're in the wilderness. And God maybe be gauging you, He may be guiding you, He may be goad or pushing you or, number four, he guarding you.

#### **4. GOD USES PAINFUL PROBLEMS AND TRIALS To GUARD OR PROTECT Us.**

Sometimes God uses Painful problems and trials to protect us from something worse, something far worse.

Sometimes He uses pain to protect us and prevent us from getting involved in something that we shouldn't be involved in.

So, God uses it to guard or protect us. Pain can be a blessing in disguise. **FEVER** in our bodies is a good example. An infection triggers a fever to warn us a battle is going on. If we never had the fever an infection could take over and even kill us. Pain is a gift from God to warn, correct and guide or navigate our bodies as well as our souls. Sometimes God uses Painful problems and trials to guard or protectus. I'm simply saying this, Emotions, painful emotions, say something's out of kilter here.

- Every time we feel anger, resentment, bitterness, hostility, worry, apathy or depression it is God shouting to us "something is out of whack in my life, something's out of balance".
- God's saying, "I want you to get this corrected" -- the emotions are just the fever pointing at the infection. God uses Painful problems and trials to guard or protect us.

One of the most beautiful illustrations in the Scriptures is the life of **JOSEPH**. At first his life is like a horror story. He is hated by his family, nearly killed by his brothers, sold as a slave, accused of rape, cruelly treated in prison, alone, forgotten and all unjustly. Enough happens to Joseph to say he was totally abused at work, home, socially and mentally. God turns it all around. He rises to Prime Minister of Egypt. He saves not only Egypt from starvation, but also God's chosen people! What does he say about all this? Listen to his own words at the end of his life he says to the very ones who hurt him, Gen 50:20 (NIV), "***You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good . . .***"

Now, let's review something. There are obviously people in your life who mean to harm you.

- They may have harmed you as a child, they may be harming you right now, emotionally, physically, or in some other way their out to harm you and, that may hurt,
- but, God says, "I have a plan and purpose bigger than that and they mean it for bad, but I mean it for good."

You see, all along in Joseph's life, God was guarding, and guiding, and goad or pushing, and gauging Joseph for greatness because, listen, **there is no greatness without pain.** And so he says, "You meant it for bad, but God meant it for good; He was guarding me."

Remember my favorite lesson from the life of Joseph? Later on in life he had two sons and he named them Manasseh and Ephraim. Do you know what they mean?

- Manasseh means in Hebrew: God made me to forget.
- Ephraim means: God made me Fruitful or successful.

So after 40 years of pain, he could say "God has blessed me so much and I can see the picture clearer now, that it's made me forget all of that pain from my childhood and He's made me successful now." And this morning that is exactly what God wants to do in your life.

## **5. GOD USES PAINFUL PROBLEMS AND TRIALS TO GROW OR NURTURE ME.**

Pain is God's path to maturity. Margaret Clarksen has written a book called "*Grace Grow or nurtures Best In Winter*" and I love that title. You see, it is possible to grow or nurture spiritually and emotionally during bright, healthy, cheerful, sunny days of summer when everything's going great and life's fantastic. Sure you can grow or nurture in that but, you grow or nurture far faster and far deeper in the dark phase of the soul. You grow or nurture far deeper and far greater in the valleys rather than in the mountain tops -- it's just the way you're made. I mean, I could bring in here a stack of letters from the last 20 years in ministry, people who have written me and said, "Pastor, I've had the toughest time of my life but I'd have to say that

- I've grown or nurtured more through this separation than any other time in my life."
- "I've grown or nurtured more through this unemployment than any other time in my life."
- "I've grown or nurtured more through this loss of a loved one than in any other time in my life."
- "I've grown or nurtured more through this illness than in any other time in my life."
- "I've grown or nurtured more through this crisis than in any other time in my life."
- "I've grown or nurtured more through this loneliness than in any other time my life."

Because grace grow or nurtures best in winter and God uses Painful problems and trials to grow or nurture me. James 1:4 (LB) read it with me, **"For when the way is rough, your patience has a chance to grow or nurture. So let it grow or nurture, and don't try to squirm out of your problems . . . then you will be ready for**

**anything, strong in character, full and complete.**" Now, somewhere on your outline would write this sentence in: **Pain is the high cost of growth.**

I mean, its trite, but its true; there is no gain without pain. It just doesn't come any other way. There are no five easy steps to the wonderful life. There is no gain without pain. The fact is, we want the product without the process. What's the product? Oh, we want the maturity, we want the emotional stability, we want the health and wholeness, we want the confidence and the meaning and significance and purpose of life, but we don't want the process which is pain and suffering, and tough times. We want all of the stability and wholeness of emotions, but we don't want to go through the process. But, you can't short circuit it. In fact, if I were to summarize everything I want to say to you this morning, it would be this: **The very thing that discourages you the most God uses to develop you** and it is not an accident.

Look at what the message says, James 1:4. ". . . **So don't try to get out of anything prematurely. Let it do its work so you become mature and well developed.**"

The best known part of the Bible is probably the Psalms. Most of them were written by a man who faced more pain than we can conceive of. David was rejected by his family, unloved by his father who wouldn't even invite him in for special family times, left alone for long periods out doing family chores, ignored even when great events happened in his life . . . and yet out of those and even more trying times come the Psalms! That is the very reason Paul says it like this, talking about the pain he has experienced, 1 Cor. 1:9 (Ph), "(*This happened*) . . . so we might learn to trust, not in ourselves, but in God . . . ." You see, you don't know, you really don't know that Jesus Christ is all you need until Jesus Christ is all you've got. Then you'll know it.

A living example of this truth was a dear friend who was tortured by cancer until her death. She was my personal secretary at our ministry in New England. Her name is Doris Kornfield.

Piece by piece cancer ravaged her body. Her hair went, her body was cut out surgery by surgery, radiation by radiation, chemo by chemo. But never her smile.

The last day I saw her on earth she was propped up by the copy machine, trying to hold her hand still long enough to push the copy button one last time as she ran off the bulletins for Sunday. Cancer had stolen the muscles to hold her head up so she felt for the button and pushed it. Then with a smile of triumph she let us lead her to the car where her loving and loyal husband of 45 years drove her home. She never got out of bed again until she stepped upon the shores of Glory.

Psalms 116:1-6: "I love the Lord, for he heard my voice; he heard me cry for mercy. Because he turned his ear to me, I will call on him as long as I live. The cords of death entangled me, the anguish of the grave came upon me; I was overcome by trouble and sorrow. . . . The Lord is gracious and righteous; our Lord, our God is full of compassion. The Lord protects the simple hearted; when I was in great need, he saved me."

Only Jesus Christ can give that kind of courage and that kind of peace of mind in spite of enormous pain. Doesn't that make some of your complaints seem a little puny. But, listen, your pain matters to God, it does. And He hurts with you, and He cares about you. Now, pain never leaves you where it finds you; it always moves you.

My question is, where are you allowing your pain to move you? Look at this verse on your outline. Gal. 3:4 (Ph), "**Has all your painful experience brought you nowhere?**" What I'm saying here is don't waste your hurt, don't waste your pain.

Pain turns some people into saints but it turns other people into devils. It makes some people bitter, it makes some people better, and that's your choice. Robert Johnson says, "Pain is inevitable, it's a part of life, but misery is optional. And, if you let your hurts, emotional, physical, or what ever, lead you into a relationship with Christ and to know Him, then you will be able to say like Paul said in 2 Cor 7:9 (LB), "**Now I am glad . . . not because it hurt you but because the pain turned you to God . . .**" My plea to you today is that you will give your hurt and your heart to Jesus Christ, the great physician.

1 Peter 4:19 (LB) says, "**If you are suffering according to God's will, keep on doing what is right and trust yourself to the God who made you, for he will never fail you.**" You can't say that about anybody else. **HE WILL NEVER FAIL YOU.** I want to encourage you to close today with a little self-evaluation and you think of the hurt that you're going through and the pain you're going through and ask yourself this, Father,

- are you using this to goad or push me, to motivate me into action, to do something I know I ought to be doing anyway?
- Are you using this pain to guide or navigate me, to point me in a new direction?
- Are you using this pain to gauge or measure me, to help me measure myself and see what I'm really like on the inside and see what needs to be changed. Is it a warning light that something's out of kilter?
- Are you using this pain to guard me, to protect me from something worse, to keep me from wandering too far, to keep me dependent upon you?
- Are you using this pain to grow or nurture me, to make me more like your Son, Jesus Christ? Paul said, "**(This happened) . . . so that we might learn to trust, not in ourselves, but in God.**"

Let's bow our heads:

*Father, I know that there are many people here today that are in pain. Some of them have been carrying a load for weeks, for months, some having been carrying loads for years, and it hurts. Thank you that you care about our pain and our hurt. Thank you that you helped me with my hurt, and I ask you to help others today.*

Now, why don't you talk to God. Why don't you say this,  
*Dear God, would you help me with my hurt.*

- *Thank you that it matters to you.*
- *Thank you that I matter to you.*

- *Thank you that you love me.*
- *Thank you that you sent your Son, Jesus Christ, for my sake. Not to explain my pain away but to walk through it with me.*

*And, so today, dear Jesus, I ask you to take every part of my life, especially the part that hurts, and use it for good in my life and help me walk through this. I want to trust you and I want to know you. In your name I pray. Amen*