

## Growing in Gratitude “How To Be Thankful in Pain”

### Part 2

**Intro:** One of the great privileges I have is to pray for you during the week. Every week we ask you to fill out the blue cards and give us prayer requests about your lives. This results in pages of requests. (Last week 7 pages single spaced) Sometimes I wish I could show you the requests without the names of course. WHY? So you can see the overwhelming amount of pain that exists every Sunday when we gather. It's easy to think you're the only one going through hard, painful times. This is simply not true. What I see is that pain is the common denominator for all of us. Pain is the one common life experience we all will taste.

- Right now in this service, there is the pain of loss / the pain of sickness / the pain of fear / the pain of finances / the pain of broken relationships / the pain of overwhelming stress / the pain of parenting / the pain of betrayal / the pain of abuse / the pain of shame and regret / pain of addiction
- Sometimes I am overwhelmed at the responsibility of trying to speak each week with all the variety of pain and the tremendous amount of pain that exists. Truthfully, I feel this way this morning.
- As we tackle a very tough topic; “How to be thankful in pain”, I pray that God gives each one of you something that you need today. For me, this is part of the weekly miracle every Sunday.
- So,...how can we be thankful in the midst of pain? Let me give you 4 ways from the word of God.

### 1. Resist comparing your pain to others

Comparing in any form is going to rob you of joy. Unfortunately, we all have a tendency to compare. In the first century church, people compared leaders. The Apostle Paul was being compared to other leaders and was often criticized because of it. In II Cor. 11, Paul addresses some of his critics and says; “You want to compare?” Compare this!

*II Cor. 11:23-28 “...I have worked much harder, been in prison more frequently, been flogged more severely, and been exposed to death again and again. <sup>24</sup> Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. <sup>25</sup> Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was pelted with stones, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea, <sup>26</sup> I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my fellow Jews, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false believers. <sup>27</sup> I have labored and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked. <sup>28</sup> Besides everything else, I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches.” (NLT)* You want to compare pain and hardship? Here it is! Paul is not trying to get people to feel sorry for him, he is just describing his reality to his critics.

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In Philippians, he is addressing the comparison issue again, but he gives us his conclusion to it all. It is the conclusion we all need.

*Phil. 3:7-8 "I once thought these things were valuable, but now I consider them worthless because of what Christ has done. <sup>8</sup> Yes, everything else is worthless when compared with the infinite value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord."* (NLT) Now, everything is compared through Jesus. Making comparisons with others is fruitless. BUT, seeing my pain through Jesus makes all the difference.

- Choose to see pain through the infinite value of knowing Jesus

*Yes, everything else is worthless when compared with the infinite value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord*

When I see my pain through the lens of knowing Jesus, I can see pain from a bigger perspective.

- I see pain through the lens of eternity – We know that the pain in this life is temporary. Someday it will end forever! There is no sorrow, crying or pain in heaven.
- I see pain through the lens of purpose – As long as I keep following Jesus, there will always be a redemptive narrative to my pain. God will use it in some way for His Kingdom purposes. (In my life and in others)
- I see pain through the lens of His provision – It is in our pain where we have some of the most intimate experiences with Jesus. It is in pain, where we come to understand that Jesus is truly enough.
- All these factors allow me to be thankful even in the midst of pain. I compare my pain through the lens of knowing and experiencing Jesus. The infinite value!

What if we refuse to embrace this perspective? BECAUSE this perspective is not easy.

- Comparing pain only makes your pain worse

HOW? We either think our pain is worse than others or our pain can't compare with others. Either way, it can rob us of gratitude and trusting Jesus with it. You have no eternal perspective. Now, you only have an earthly one.

- When you think your pain is worse than others, it turns you into a victim. You now have a victim mentality...a victim attitude. Victims are not grateful. Victims are hopeless and cynical.
- Victims cannot see events in light of eternity / or purpose / and do not rely on Jesus for provision. They go through pain by themselves. They go through life comparing their pain to others.
- Since they think their pain is worse than others, they shut themselves off from relationships who could help them through this journey.

In a few minutes, I am going to go into more detail with each one of these issues.

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- Comparing pain can minimize it and create denial

Why is this so bad? I've used the phrase or thought; "There's plenty of people who have it worse than me." True, but pain is still pain.

- **For example:** Let's relate pain to physical wounds: Someone may have lost a limb but you only need stitches. In either case, both need medical attention. Ignoring any wound creates the danger of infection. Some people die from the wounds of 1000 cuts not one tragic event. (I see this when I read through your prayer requests)
- Just because someone's wound seems insignificant to you (or to yourself) doesn't mean it's not cut #998, and they're close to death.
- Pain is pain. To exaggerate it or minimize it is unhealthy either way and keeps us from seeing it through the lens of knowing Jesus.

Comparing pain in any way keeps us from trusting Jesus through it.

## 2. Believe in God's sovereign purposes

*Rom. 8:28 "And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose." (NIV)*

This is one of the most often quoted bible verses and yet one of the most misunderstood. Before I explain this verse, let me say one thing to those with friends or loved ones in pain. Please do not quote this to someone. It is a great verse, but saying this to someone hurting doesn't help. When people hurt, they need love not advice or cliché's

- Now, let me explain this verse – (Explain) – Because of the truth of this verse...
- Pain cannot rob you of God's plan for your life
  - Pain and negative circumstances, tragedy, crisis cannot rob you of God's plan for your life. As long as you keep following Jesus even in the confusion of painful events, nothing can hinder God's destiny for your life.
  - Please do not think pain has more defining power over your life than Jesus. If we believe pain has more power than Jesus it will be impossible to be thankful in pain.
  - Being thankful in pain is not thanking Jesus for the negative circumstances, it is choosing to see Jesus in the circumstances.
  - We have been called according to His purposes and whatever painful event happens to us in this life cannot alter the sovereign plans of God for your life. What you are going through right now is not more powerful than Jesus.
  - We don't have to understand painful events. We simply must follow Jesus through them.
- God has a redemptive narrative with my pain
  - Because of God's goodness, God will take our pain and redeem it. He will use our pain and use it for good. God can even take what other people meant for harm and use it for His good and His glory.

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- This is why it is essential to not lose your confidence in following Jesus when life doesn't make sense. If you will simply keep loving Him and follow Him, He will always redeem your pain. All things will work together for good. This truth will be your story!
- One of the best biblical examples of this is the story of Joseph in the book of Genesis. (Summarize)

*Gen. 50:20 "You intended to harm me, but God intended it all for good. He brought me to this position so I could save the lives of many people." (NLT)*

- Notice the gratitude and the confidence in God's sovereign purposes. We can be thankful as well knowing God is doing the same thing with us.

### **3. Resist isolation**

Often, when we experience pain we have a tendency to isolate from one another. Isolation may feel right, but it does not help us.

- Isolation distorts reality

- Story of Elijah – I Kings 18-19 – summarize context.

*I Kings 19:4 "Then he went on alone into the wilderness, traveling all day. He sat down under a solitary broom tree and prayed that he might die. "I have had enough, LORD," he said. "Take my life, for I am no better than my ancestors who have already died." (NLT)*

*I Kings 19:9-10 "But the LORD said to him, "What are you doing here, Elijah?"<sup>10</sup> Elijah replied, "I have zealously served the LORD God Almighty. But the people of Israel have broken their covenant with you, torn down your altars, and killed every one of your prophets. I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me, too." (NLT)*

- There is a reason solitary confinement is one of the worst forms of punishment. It makes people crazy! Unfortunately, we self-impose this punishment on ourselves when we're in pain. This increases our isolation and distorts our reality.
  - God did not design us to go through pain alone. We are relational beings and we must go through pain being relationally connected. Isolation destroys gratitude in us.
  - As you read the story of Elijah, we see how God defined reality, connected relationally with Elijah; gave him new purpose and gave him an apprentice.
  - God will do the same with you if you allow Him to and move out of your isolation. Isolation is dangerous. When we isolate, pull away from others and then blame others for not reaching out to us. It's an ugly cycle.
- Isolation blocks God's encouragement through others
    - As we pray for God's help when we're in pain, it is easy to forget that His help often comes through others. Therefore, when we isolate ourselves, we are cutting ourselves off from the main conduit of God's encouragement.

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- God will often answer our prayers for help by sending us people to be the encouragement we need. By rejecting this, we can be rejecting the very answers to our prayers.
- When we see how much time the biblical writers spent addressing relationships, it is no surprise God answers this way. When we see God show up in our pain this way, it promotes gratitude in our hearts.
- God can use others in a variety of ways. A few years ago, I was really struggling with discouragement. There were a number of factors involved, but the result was a deep seeded discouragement in my heart. Sometimes the pain is emotional pain.
  - I asked God to show Himself to me. Would you let me know you're proud of me...you care for me? Can I just "feel" your favor? Share

#### 4. Choose to lean in to Jesus

- Pain is the conduit where we experience Jesus being enough

*II Cor. 1:3-4 "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, <sup>4</sup> who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God." (NIV)*

- The pain we go through in this life will either make us worse / cynical / joyless and ungrateful OR it can teach us how to lean in to Jesus and discover He is truly enough.
- How do we lean in to Jesus? Surrender to Jesus in your pain. Stop fighting against the pain.
- Share about Nov. 1997.
- Nothing in my circumstances changed that day, yet I changed forever. My greatest life lessons and greatest experiences with God have all come out of pain. Pain has taught me to lean in to Jesus, never away from Him.
- The best thing you can do today is lean in. Surrender. Stop fighting. Experience Jesus being enough. This will flood your life with gratitude.

I know many of you are in pain this morning. Please know I love you and I am praying for you. We can have thankful hearts even in our pain. I will continue to pray God removes the pain from your life...BUT I will also pray you experience Him being enough.

- This is a great prayer for some of you today – prayer time.

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