

Pain as Pointer

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Christianity provides a unique perspective on the problem of pain. While not glorying in pain or seeking it out as a glutton for punishment or an ascetic, a Christian understands that pain is the result of living in a world gone awry from God's original intent for it. As such, pain can serve as a pointer to the life for which we were created and to the life-maker by whom we were made.

Isaiah 53, the song of the suffering servant, poetically depicts (thousands of years before His stepping into our mess) the Messiah as "a man of sorrows, well acquainted with grief" (**verse 3**). The Spirit, through His prophetic mouthpiece, predicts a Sent One who would bear our griefs, carry our sorrows, and be stricken by God on our behalf (**verse 4**). Christ, uttering parts of Psalm 22 on the Cross, fulfilled Isaiah's prediction, taking upon Himself our pain and punishment.

After His resurrection, in His glorified body, Christ still bore scars as reminders of His redemptive pain. Rather than promise them a ticket out of pain, Christ promised His followers pain and trouble; however, He also promised and provided a live-in Comforter in the Third Person of the Trinity. He promised that, for those who believed on Him, pain would be punctuated and purposeful.

Pain can serve as an often-unwelcome homing device which intrusively reminds us that we were made for a better city whose builder and architect is God (**Hebrews 11:16**). Pain can point to hidden patterns in our lives that are dangerous to our bodies, our souls, or our relationships. Chronic back pain can point out improper posture or prolonged stress. The pain of being isolated from God can be the catalyst we need to repent and return to Him for whom our souls were made. Relational tension can sometimes help us to see that the way we are relating to others is unintentionally harmful.

Punctuated Pain

No matter its source, for the believer, pain is punctuated, meaning it will not go on forever, but will have a decisive end. **Isaiah 35** and **Revelation 21** are short glimpses into the eternal painless days ahead of those who hide in Christ.

The Apostle Paul, like the Master he served, was well-acquainted with pain in all its various forms. Yet, when he placed the heavy weights of suffering which he bore on the scales of eternity, he knew they would be shown to be light and momentary even when they felt crushing and unending in the moment (**2 Corinthians 4:16-18**).

When in the throes of physical, mental, spiritual or relational pain, the believer can find some relief in knowing that one day it will end, never to be seen or felt again.



Purposeful Pain

For the believer, pain is not a wasted, nihilistic experience. Rather, it is a necessary dark thread woven into the beautiful tapestry of redemption by the skilled artisan who is Adonai, Lord.

Corrie ten Boom, a saint who was far more acquainted with pain than most through her experiences in a concentration camp, loved to keep a tapestry with her when she spoke. She would show the messy, knotted underside of the tapestry as our present, limited perspective on the pain in our lives; then she would flip the tapestry to the front, showing the beauty on the other side.

Coming from someone like Corrie who experienced inhumane hatred and brutality, this lesson powerfully depicted that all things would, indeed, work together for good to those who love God and are called according to His purposes (**Romans 8:28**).

As unwelcome a visitor as pain is, the believer in Christ can slowly begin to befriend pain as a pointer until that day when it will be eradicated as we stand in the presence of the One who conquered it through His life, death and resurrection.