

The Purpose of Pain: Internal Conflict Versus Integration into One's Core Values Schema

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An outstanding issue in need of examination is the influence society has on one's core values. Although subtle, its impact is extensive, effecting one's identity, values, ethics, perceptions, attitudes, interpretations and judgments. Some obvious universal and secular influences that have profoundly compromised the self and one's ability to interrelate can be credited to the massive expansion of the electronic age, including media, television, modern-day communication (texting, Facebook, Twitter), Hollywood and education. The desensitization process is elusive, but the aforementioned are responsible for more intrapsychic and interpersonal conflict than any other sources. One can understand why the irreligious or secular portion of the populace adheres to what established culture dictates, since that is the standard those people desire to conform to. Truth is not the predominant theme of their lives, self-fulfillment is.

Those who claim to be disciples of Jesus Christ have chosen a different philosophy to base their lives upon. Within the personal relationship with Christ is "every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places," yet most Believers' do not tap into those resources.¹ Instead of realizing one's wealth in Christ, the multitudes live as if they were indigent, struggling with daily life-issues as those who do not know the Savior, as if they do not have access to everything that is needed for a cornucopias and joyful life. The question being posed is why do Christians deal with life's matters the same way as those who do not have the same unlimited resources in Christ?

Before this consideration continues, clarification of terms is required in order to avoid misinterpretation. God, as described by the Bible, is defined as the divine, supreme, personal Being, Creator of all and eternal, Who is the source of all truth, and desire's a loving communion with humanity. Spirituality refers to the uniquely personal and subjective experience of knowing the sovereign Creator, Who through His Spirit, transforms the heart, mind, desires and choices of the followers of Christ through His objective truth, working in those who by faith surrender the authority of their lives to their Creator's will. Religion refers to the specific and concrete expression of one's spirituality. Religion externalizes the internal encounter that man shares with the One who created him—thus, religion proceeds from spirituality; which proceeds from God.

As Christians, we have the resources of objective truth working in and through the presence and power of the Holy Spirit who indwells every believer. A believer is one who has surrendered the authority of his life to God because of His grace manifested through His Son Jesus Christ. Also as Christians, we submit our lives to the authority of God's Word, which is objective truth in written form. So then, if we as Believer's hold these doctrines to be truth, why is there so little difference between how we as

¹ Eph 1

followers of Christ handle conflict and life's difficulties as compared to those who live without these immeasurable resources?

Understandably, as disciples of Jesus Christ an even greater internal battle rages because objective truth in the Person of the Holy Spirit resides within them; through whom God continually challenges the faulty collective subjective experiences that keep them living by sight (as those who do not believe) instead of by faith as God desires for us.² Both objective truth and one's subjective experiences struggle to define "who I am," regulate "what I think," "what I do," and to express "how I feel."

For those who do not consciously allow God's objective truth to direct them in their self-definition, thinking and choices, God will nevertheless influence them to some degree because His truth is inescapable and woven into the fabric of every culture and community throughout the ages.³ His presence is inescapable, whether one recognizes Him as the source of truth or not, because everything good comes from Him. This can often be observed in the lives of those very good people who have not chosen the way of the cross, and live according to their own desires. Very often, these people are nicer and nobler than those who have committed to following Jesus. This is because God's love and truth are poured out onto all men, saved or not. God's attributes and glory established and sustain the world, even though He does not receive the credit due Him.⁴

Eventually, those who claim to follow Christ must consider what it means to resist conforming to Him, who is Truth incarnate, and the standard God has established for His people to live by. To resist the workings of His Spirit is sin. When a disciple of Jesus resists transformation, he is opposing or defying God's truth. He, as a loving Father, is not satisfied to leave us living in ignorance and rebellion, and because of His love, He will chastise and discipline His child into conformance with His will.⁵

The result of man's self-sufficiency is always the same: brokenness, disillusionment, bitterness and suffering. Exhausting all other options, God will use the experiences of pain in one's life to reveal Himself to those whom He is calling unto Himself. Actually, pain is the most effective tool that God can use so that we would yield to Him and trust in His resources and strength instead of our own. It seems logical, why would the human spirit surrender self-will to the Creator as long as all appears to be going well? Especially on the humanistic level, the concept of surrender runs against the grain because relinquishing control is not inherent to man's will or nature.

Everyone wants their own way, doing what they want to do for their own personal reasons. All have defined their expectations of what they should receive and deserve, and how they want to get it. All are intolerant of inconvenience; no one likes to be proven wrong, or seems to recognize that the majority of wanting is self-focused and self-fulfilling. "All of us like sheep have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way."⁶ The furthest thing from anyone's natural mind would be that he could gain what

² Rom 7

³ Rom 1:19-20

⁴ Ps 104

⁵ Heb 12:4-17

⁶ Is 53:6

he needs through suffering and surrender. Yet, that is often how God intends for people to stop the busyness of their lives long enough to be introspective and define their need. He also requires it so that they might gain the greatest treasure of all—knowing Him.

At times, God uses His gentle voice in one's life, but pain is used far more often because it is simply more effective—it is too obvious to avoid. One knows that something is wrong when he is experiencing hurt. Following C.S. Lewis' thinking, pain is not only immediately recognizable, it is also impossible to ignore—"it insists on being dealt with."⁷ When pain storms into one's life, and be assured it shall, the last thing that he will usually think about is what he is gaining. Yet as he reflects back over his life, if he is transparent and honest with himself, he will see that it was in the times of storm and travail that he was most receptive to God's intervention. He learned to recognize what the Lord had actually accomplished through his pain; henceforth, he might be more willing to trust that God will continue to work in a way that will ultimately be to his benefit and growth in the present. This is the process of transformation, from trusting in subjective experiences to faith in God's objective truth; the core dynamic where one's internal conflicts succumb to truth, and truth becomes increasingly more integrated into his core value scheme.

Pain is a critical part of the cycle of one's spiritual growth and maturity, but this growth is dependent upon whether or not his perspective and attitude are correct. The Apostle Paul explains this cycle in Romans 5:3-5 where he wrote:

We also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance produces proven character; and proven character hope. And hope does not disappoint us because God has poured out His love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit; Whom He has given to us.

So then, one's problem and pain affords him the opportunity to increase in his patience and endurance, which will develop increased hope; but only if he chooses to trust God, and see His eternal purposes and plan at work in the midst of his sufferings.

As previously discussed in the defense mechanisms, David, the model of the King David Reaction, the second king of Israel, had one of those personalities where he could accomplish amazing feats of courage, strength and faith, as seen in his battle with Goliath. His seemingly impossible victory spared the whole nation of Israel from defeat. Conversely, David also fell into terrible selfishness and sin, as seen in his affair with Bathsheba, and setting up her husband Uriah to die to cover his own wrongdoings. Yet, as seen throughout the Book of Psalms, in either good or bad choices, David always turned to God for protection and forgiveness. Regarding the injustices he faced, David grew into the understanding that his only stable resource for protection, insight and vindication was God, as he expressed in Psalm 42:8-11 declaring:

The Lord will command His loving-kindness in the daytime; and His song will be with me in the night, a prayer to the God of my life. I will say to

⁷ C. S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain* (New York, NY: Harper One Publishing, 2001).

God my Rock, "why hast Thou forgotten me? Why do I go mourning because of the oppression of the enemy?" As a shattering of my bones, my adversaries revile me, while they say to me all day long, "Where is your God?" Why are you in despair, O my soul? And why have you become disturbed within me? Hope in God, for I shall yet praise Him, the help of my countenance, and my God.

Even David had times of struggle and doubt when he could not feel God's presence, or understand what He was doing. Yet, David chose to trust God, not based upon his situation, but based upon the promises God had made to all those who trust Him. The evidence from prior deliverances proved to David that God would work again in the present.

Pain also serves as the catalyst to seek out God's sovereign intervention. Once again, David expressed this point in Psalm 40:1-3a where he wrote, "I waited patiently for the Lord; and He inclined to me, and heard my cry. He brought me up out of the pit of destruction, out of the miry clay; and He set my feet upon a rock making my footsteps firm. And He put a new song in my mouth, a song of praise to our God." In an age of immediate gratification and automation, waiting is no longer seen as a tolerable option. Nevertheless, as circumstances force one to wait, God remolds his child's self-reliance into God-reliance. Waiting is difficult, especially as affluent Americans, because it strips one from his pre-conceived misconceptions that he has control. Patiently waiting addresses one's impulsivities and the issues surrounding the need for instant gratification. Furthermore, it has the potential to establish or reestablish one's submission to the Lord who has all control enveloped in His sovereign grace.

Those who follow Christ should understand that it is in submitting to God, and relinquishing their illusion of control to Him, that He promises salvation for eternity. Those who trust Him gain freedom, peace and joy deep within their souls while they endure their time on earth, which is a foretaste of what is to come. They will also find happiness because the object of their desire is their Creator and Father in heaven, and happiness is a benefit of pursuing holiness. God's children learn that happiness is a choice in perception. The anecdotal and emotional pleasures that used to define them fade away.

When one does not allow God's intercession in his life, the pain from conflictual resistance usually grows into disillusionment, bitterness, resentment or fear, which is destructive to the physical, mental, emotional and spiritual components of his life. One's internalized pain is often protected unconsciously by his defense mechanisms that seek to safeguard him from the anxiety of change, but the internal war can actually destroy him. Many empirical scientific studies have demonstrated the direct correlation between distress and physical illnesses, especially heart disease, in addition to psychological difficulties.⁸

⁸ Cary Cooper & Judi Marshall, "Occupational Sources of Stress: A Review of the Literature Relating to Coronary Heart Disease and Mental Ill Health" *Journal of Occupational Psychology* 49, no. 1 (2011): 11-28.

Even though the pain is often from resistance, God still offers His resources to transform those who turn to Him, trusting in Him by faith. The Lord asks His followers to trust Him with the hindering weight of their sufferings because man was not designed to carry the burden of all his psychological encumbrances on his own. Jesus said in Matthew 11:28-30, "Come to me, all you who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart; and you shall find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy, and My load is light."

David affirms in Psalm 55:22 to "Cast your burden upon the Lord, and He will sustain you; He will never allow the righteous to be shaken." The Apostle Peter also asserted, "Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God, that He might exalt you at the proper time, casting your anxieties upon Him, because He cares for you."⁹ Again, David wrote, "As for me, I shall call upon God, and the Lord will save me. Evening and morning and noon, I will complain and murmur, and He will hear my voice. He will redeem my soul in peace from the battle which is against me."¹⁰ Indeed, God hears the continual complaints from His children, and cares about their fears because He created them and loves them, even though they are so limited in their understanding. As they choose to turn to Him, and trust Him as their resource, He will bring peace to the inner conflict within their souls.

God also wants them to trust Him with their fears. David knew what fear was. As Saul pursued him, David learned how to be dependent on God saying, "When I am afraid, I will put my trust in Thee. In God, whose word I praise, in God I have put my trust; I will not be afraid, what can mere man do to me?"¹¹ David learned that all men will inevitably disappoint, but God never does. God alone is worthy of all our trust. He will never fail us.

Paul also wrote in Philippians 4:4-7:

Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice! Let your forbearing spirit be known to all men. The Lord is near. Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, shall guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

In this passage, Paul mentions one should exhibit a gentle spirit, which is also a part of the Fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5:22-23. Instead of allowing fear to be the initial response to one's difficulties in life, he is admonished to pray, to ask God for His help, being mindful to recognize and be thankful for all that He has already done for him. God's response to man's supplications is peace, beyond what the third-dimension can comprehend, to protect his mind and heart. Again, here is where the follower of Jesus Christ has the opportunity to demonstrate the power of God to a world that will not believe. When enduring hardship and sufferings, God can demonstrate His power in

⁹ 1 Peter 5:6-7

¹⁰ Ps 55:16-17

¹¹ Ps 56:3-4

one's life if he will trust Him. Imagine the circumstances of the Apostle Paul writing these words in Philippians. As a prisoner in Rome, chained to a guard, not knowing if he was going to be put to death, stating how "God will 'guard' your heart and mind in Christ Jesus" just as the Roman praetorians were guarding him! Paul knew how to use his present sufferings as illustrations of deep spiritual truths.

Fear is often one's first response to pain, which might be defined as looking into the future with 'what-if' thinking; it is often an attempt to exert control over what is yet to come. Specific defense mechanisms are employed to maintain an illusion of peace, but those mechanisms that are designed to assist him may ultimately over protect, possibly setting him up for a harder fall when they unravel. When one lives in the fear of what might happen tomorrow, he cheats himself from the enjoyment of life in the present, and from the resources he needs for that day. Perhaps this is why Jesus challenges his followers to not be worried with tomorrow as each day has enough troubles of its own.

Yet, some people, offended by their pain, stay in their pessimism and egocentrism; allowing their sufferings to define them as victims. As pain shatters their illusion of wellness, they resign themselves to a different misconception that is equally dangerous. This new and faulty construct of self-pity, which promises safety in their protective defenses, allows the pain to establish and propagate a negative mantra that slowly redefines their life by fear and defeat. Nothing else in life really matters much when pain absorbs all of one's passion and joy. He isolates from other relationships to avoid the vulnerability of trusting, which might lead to more pain, despair and hopelessness, which subsequently colors and skews every new situation. One's subjective experiences become fortified behind protective defensive walls of Justification, Rationalization, Projection or Intellectualization, which is only a few of the dozens of defense mechanisms one's mind employs to avoid pain. But one needs to be careful which direction he allows his pain takes him. Even the slightest deviation from objective truth leads back to one's prior values, which will gradually lead him into a new sinking, self-centered situation.

An illustration of this idea is apparent to a seaman; when sailing through a storm, the last thing he should do is drop the sails. To do so would cause the boat to lose its forward motion and its ability to maintain direction. Rather, when facing turbulent weather, a seafarer will use a 'storm jib.' This sail is smaller than the others because it is not designed for speed; instead, its function is to maintain stability and to keep the craft pointing in the correct direction so that it can pull the bow of the boat through the storm. One is usually not afforded a choice regarding the vessel, nor of the weather of life; but much can be done in the management of the sails and the guidance of the helm to ensure he accurately stays the course.

Although there are those storms that are beyond one's ability to manage. According to Biblical records, the Apostle Paul was in at least three shipwrecks. In Acts 27:17; Paul records one of those harrowing experiences, where his ship was 'violently storm-tossed' during a strong Nor'easter. After doing everything else possible, the crewmen undergirded the ship with supporting cables. This undergirding is called 'frapping.' The deck men would literally wrap cables every few feet, from bow to stern,

around the ship, holding the port and starboard sides securely together, so that the wooden vessel would be tightly enveloped, thus helping to prevent the timbers from shattering into pieces during the squall.

This term is used only one other time in Scripture, in Hebrews 4:16. In this reference, the author states: “Let us therefore draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, that we might receive mercy and may find grace to ‘help’ in time of need.” God is telling His children that He wants to envelope them in His love, grace and mercy when the storms are about to break them. When challenged by these storms and difficulties—especially those that make one feel like he is sinking—he should pray. This verse clearly states that God will meet the crisis at hand with tailor-made help, specific to his situation; and that he should come to the Lord with confidence; finding his steadfastness, security and strength in Jesus Christ, the perfect High Priest.

It is because of the discomfort of being challenged physically, emotionally, mentally and spiritually that one learns to bend, be remolded, and grow more adaptable, capable and resilient than before. But how one chooses to perceive his trials will determine the direction that he will take. Usually unrecognizable in the midst of one’s affliction is the hand of a loving Father, who is training His child and directing each of his steps so that he will grow stronger. The child struggles, remembering his mastery of crawling, yet the Father looks forward to the day when His child is able to run with endurance, grace and power! Even though one may understand this principle intellectually, he still tends to avoid its reality experientially. Yet once one does apply, he will allow the newly established truths to become integrated into his core value system. This is also where one’s personal testimony of faith lies.

Some people will accept their inevitable pain with grace because they have learned this principle from earlier experiences. Others will fight it, repeatedly, as if they do not deserve the adversity that had befallen them. The latter perspective, which reflects the tendency to be self-focused or proud, is very dangerous and will often lead to bitterness, resentment, and more suffering, until they learn the lessons of refinement that God is trying to teach them.

Pain is often the unfair result of sin and brokenness. Whether one suffers the consequences of his own poor choices, or because of the poor choices of another, pain is the natural result. The question remains what does one do with his pain? When one allows these afflictions to reside within, they will bring more discord and disharmony to his soul. This is another shortcoming endured as humans—the illusion of self-sufficiency. Man’s stubborn illusion of self-sufficiency must be shattered, not for the infinite Creator’s sake, but for man’s sake, and this is often accomplished through the pain people despise and try so hard to avoid.

At times, pain helps one to change his limited perspective of life and recognize all of the areas where he should be content. As one looks at his life subjectively, he can see that he always want more—his desires of self-fulfillment are insatiable. Pain can serve him by adding a solid foundation of objective truth and contentment. James 1:2-4 says, “Consider it all joy, my brothers, when you encounter the various trials, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full

effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.” The meanings of the word “consider” infer to chew on, or contemplate deeply. James is making a clear declaration on how one ought to think and perceive his difficulties in life.

There is a clear implication here that one has the ability to choose how he will perceive life circumstances. One’s thinking has the ability to override the limited perspective of his prior experiences when the framework of truth is made a viable option of consideration. How does this alternate perspective of the solid foundation of truth compare to the prior option of the shifting sands of subjective reasoning? The Apostle Paul urges the followers of Christ in Rome to demonstrate their spiritual service of worship by keeping their bodies pure, set apart from the worldly impurities, to stay away from those philosophies that undermine or compromise God’s standard of truth so that He might shine brightly through His children.¹²

Paul continues to challenge these people with a principle that further supports the Core Values Model. Each person has a choice regarding what he will base his life upon. Inevitably, each must choose one of the two options. The first is conformation to this world and its values, which means one will imitate those whom society applauds and venerates—secular role models, movie stars, musicians, models and politicians—most of whom are limited by their vanity and arrogant self-sufficiency. Secondly, one can choose transformation by the renewing of his mind. Transformation also means revolution and renovation. Both imply a radical and complete change from what was to something new. Objective truth gives one the opportunity to be new by an insurgence from the limits of the temporal and physical to the eternal and spiritual.¹³

In addition, pain also shows one his areas of need. How often does one assume that he needs nothing? He says all is well in his life, especially enjoying the opulence of the American lifestyle. He acts as if each situation throughout the day will go as planned simply because it is how he wants it to go, he sets himself up with expectations. In this instance, pain is not even considered until he is plunged into the middle of it. And even then it is avoided because he does not perceive his need. Yet, how can he know what he needs until he has seen his life according to the Creator’s sovereign plan?

God spoke through the prophet Jeremiah answering this question when He declared,

For I know the plans I have for you’, declares the Lord, ‘plans for welfare and not for calamity to give you a future and a hope. Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. And you will seek Me and find me, when you search for Me with all of your heart. And I will be found by you’, declares the Lord.¹⁴

Very often, one’s heart must be broken before he will be willing to recognize its deeper needs. Still, God’s ultimate purpose in the breaking is restoration and wholeness. God will not spare someone from the sufferings He is using to cultivate, nurture, develop and improve him as His child. This in itself might be a difficult

¹² Rom 12:1

¹³ Rom 12:2

¹⁴ Jer 29:11-14a

statement to grasp and accept because if someone has not met God, what does he use as a standard of measurement when considering fulfillment? How can someone actually know if he possesses all there is when he measures fulfillment by his subjective and limited perspective? Isaiah also spoke the words of God as He compared Himself to the idols His people chose to worship over Him:

Even to your old age, I shall be the same, and even to your graying years, I shall bear you! I have done it, and I shall carry you; and I shall bear you, and I shall deliver you. To whom would you liken Me, and make Me equal and compare Me, that we should be alike? Those who lavish gold from the purse and weigh silver on the scale hire a goldsmith, and he makes it into a god; they bow down, indeed they worship it. They lift it upon the shoulder and carry it; they set it in its place and it stands there. It does not move from its place. Though one may cry to it, it cannot answer; it cannot deliver him from his distress.¹⁵

There is a battle within every person's soul, between their subjective, self-sufficiency and the false promises that these deceitful idols make to them regarding the assurance of happiness; in opposition stands the truth of a loving, living Heavenly Father who desires an intimate and personal relationship with His children; but people need their bubbles popped before they can recognize the need. What idols fill the place in their hearts that prevent them from fully enjoying their spiritual relationship with God? There is a dichotomy between the human will and what God's will is for their lives. Again, this is the contrast, and often contradiction, between the value systems within man's subjective experiences as opposed to God's objective truth.

God is speaking about trusting in Him because He has proven, and will continue to prove His faithfulness, love and protection. He desires to save man from the illusion that his idols will offer security, fulfillment or true lasting comfort or peace. God is speaking about a relationship with Him, the Lord who created man and knows him better than he knows himself. God knows one's heart's desire because He created man's heart to connect to His. This connection with God is made possible by placing one's trust and confidence in Jesus Christ, who is God's Son, the Creator and heir of all things.

Again, the author of Hebrews explains God's amazing relationship to Jesus by stating in the first chapter, verse three, and "He is the radiance of God's glory." These words try to express the inability to separate God from Jesus; like trying to separate the sun from the rays of light it shines. Thus, Jesus is One to be trusted even as God is, because they are inseparable.

Jesus Christ elaborated on this point when He said in John 15:4-5, "Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you, unless you abide in Me. I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me, and I in him, he bears much fruit; for apart from Me, you can do nothing." Jesus is making an exclusive statement to man that only He can provide the resources

¹⁵ Is 46:4-7

one needs to be fruitful in life. One's answers for the meaning of life can never be found in the physical realm, only in the spiritual dimension. Apart from Jesus, like a branch severed from the vine, one loses his identity, wilts and spiritually dies.

Jesus' choice in using a vine to illustrate His point is interesting. As Christians, they expect some light pruning. It is the severe pruning in life that shakes everyone to his core. It is reasonable that the cognitive and emotional blow will produce the same initial response in believers as those who do not have their spiritual resources in Christ. But as followers, the perspective must shift over to God and His resources because His Spirit is living inside of them. When one does not yield, he will fight, because he has chosen to be in conflict with God's purposes in his life. Sometimes, one's pruning is great; but there is always a plan and purpose for it. To be used greatly, one must often suffer greatly. To pen these words brings trepidation, but they are true for those who choose to follow Jesus Christ, because to do so equals death to self.

Again, the author of Hebrews shares words that are both frightening and comforting at the same time. In Hebrews 4:13 he says, "And there is no creature hidden from his sight, but all things are open and laid bare to the eyes of Him with Whom we have to do." It is terrifying because He sees all of one's greed, selfishness and sin; but comforting because He also sees all of one's fear, shame, deepest desires and pain; even the things of which one is not aware. When one chooses to not look at his own heart, or rationalizes, intellectualizes, minimizes or denies what is inside, he only fools himself; this is one's stubborn pride.

Moreover, this pride multiplies one's pain, makes him a victim, and prevents him from looking at his struggles objectively. It also prevents one from the healing, growth and productivity that God wants to develop in him through the pain. Pride whispers the lie into one's heart that shields him from the humility required to seek truth. This internal divergence is obvious to all while enduring it. Everyone has allowed his pride to mask his conscience so that it might protect him from guilt, embarrassment, shame; or any other uncomfortable emotion, designed to propel him toward truth. Nevertheless, God knows the truth. Because Christ is Truth, all are without excuse because He is also whispering His truth into mans hearts.

Romans 1:20 says that, "Since the creation of the world, God's invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse." Yet they chose to, as people do today, suppress the truth and follow their own foolishness. How great a love He has! He continues to call people in His time, through circumstances that He has carefully woven together in His sovereign grace, to bring each person to the place of recognizing what his needs are, forgiveness, unconditional love and a deep relational connection to the Savior of the world, Jesus.

Pain is so often a part of the formula God uses to cause man to look to the Him for Truth, so that one might reevaluate his life to redefine its purpose based upon those things that have eternal value. Instead of running with Him, following the Author and Perfector of this race called life, man so often runs from Him.¹⁶ The power of sin has

¹⁶ Heb 12:1-2

been broken, yet it still keeps so many believers' living in brokenness. Sin will always prevent people from fully submitting to God and tapping into His eternal resources and strength.

If one recognizes that God made him, he needs to understand that the Lord knows who each man is personally. King David sang of how great God's knowledge and intimacy is toward man and recorded these thoughts in the 139th Psalm proclaiming:

O Lord, Thou has searched me and known me. Thou dost know when I sit down and when I rise up; Thou dost know my thoughts from afar. Thou dost scrutinize my path and my lying down, and art intimately acquainted with all my ways. Even before there is a word on my tongue, behold O Lord, Thou dost know it all. Thou hast enclosed me behind and before, and laid Thy hand upon me. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is too high; I cannot attain it.¹⁷

It is so far beyond mans limited comprehension to understand how well God knows us! He knows exactly what each person wants and needs. Most importantly, God knows that He designed man with a void within his soul that can only be filled by His Holy Spirit; this is the only place where true joy and fulfillment can be found. Yet, if one is honest, he will admit that he will not seek God as long as the heavenly Father leaves any other alternative where happiness could possibly be looked for. As long as one's own life remains pleasant, he will probably not surrender all of his will to God. The God of Abraham proved not only His love, but also his jealousy for His children by inflicting pain to punish their self-reliance and idol worship. Again, David wrote,

Yet they tempted and rebelled against the Most High God, and did not keep His testimonies, but turned back and acted treacherously like their fathers; they turned aside like a treacherous bow. For they provoked Him with their high places, and aroused His jealousy with their graven images. When God heard, he was filled with wrath, and greatly abhorred Israel.¹⁸

How should those who have lived in the prosperity and blessings of America view these verses? Are the idols within this great land not obvious enough? Is it plausible that God's people provoke God's wrath and jealousy because of the obsessions and ideals that have filled the places only He deserves? Furthermore, Isaiah elaborates on this point when he wrote in 48:10-11, "Behold, I have refined you, but not as silver; I have tested you in the furnace of affliction. For My own sake, for My own sake, I will act; for how can My name be profaned? And My glory I will not give to another."¹⁹ God refines man in the furnace of affliction to teach him who He is, and who man is apart from Him, and most importantly, who man is in Him.

The Apostle Paul explains this profound mystery when he wrote,

¹⁷ Ps 139:1-6

¹⁸ Ps 78:56-59

¹⁹ Is 48:10-11

In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation—having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise, Who is given as a pledge of our inheritance, with a view to the redemption of God’s own possession, to the praise of His glory.²⁰

The purpose of being in Christ is to reinforce God’s greatest priority of relationship and connection between He and His Son Jesus, and between Jesus and those who trust in Him with their lives by faith. The word ‘seal’ actually translates from Greek to mean an engagement ring. The closest one can come to understanding the depth and passion of God’s love is to compare it to a man’s love for his soon-to-be bride who has been sealed with a ring as a guaranteed pledge.

The Apostle Peter understood fear and suffering. When one looks at the man he was in the different Gospel accounts, especially in the 18th chapter of John, where he denied knowing Christ because of his fear; even though only days before he brazenly swore that he would die for his Lord. He was impulsive, stubborn and fearful. It was not until the Holy Spirit entered his life that he had the true boldness (what God often does with man’s impulsivities) and courage to suffer for Truth. Peter’s amazing transformation, from basing his perception, thinking, feelings and behavior on his prior subjective experiences to objective truth was vividly demonstrated in Acts 2:14 through the fourth chapter, as he spoke with remarkable power and conviction about Jesus saying: “Peter, taking his stand with the eleven, raised his voice and declared to them: ‘Men of Judea and all of you who live in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and give heed to my words’”. “...And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under Heaven that has been given among men, by which we must be saved.”²¹ The fearless part is that he preached his convicting message in front of the same Jewish leaders who put Christ to death!

In his book, 1 Peter 1:6-7, Peter shared why we can see our pain joyfully when he wrote,

In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials, that the proof of your faith, being more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

One has the ability to transform how he perceives misery and sorrow because, instead of reacting to circumstances from subjective experiences alone, he has objective truth, in addition to the power of God’s Spirit, to respond to sufferings with the anticipation and expectation of trust and therefore spiritual and emotional growth. Here God uses pain to eradicate one’s temporal false sense of security, to draw him closer, and more dependent and reliant upon Him, our Protector and Comforter.

²⁰ Eph 1:14-15

²¹ Acts 4:12

What is most amazing is that God is not proud like man tends to be; He does not wait for one's initiative or until one has earned His love. The Lord graciously meets each person where he is in life. The Apostle Paul wrote in Ephesians 2:8-9 [NIV] that, "...it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast." He will accept a person even though he as a man, with his little finite mind and limited understanding, would prefer almost anything to God and His truth.

In the Gospel of John, chapter 15:16-17, Jesus said: "You did not choose me, but I chose you, and appointed you that you would go and bear fruit, and that your fruit would remain, so that whatever you ask of the Father in my name He may give to you. This I command you, that you love one another." When God has chosen someone, He will often pursue him with pain so that the distractions will be removed and he has the opportunity to consider the Truth and God's desire for his life. Before this can happen, one must first understand and accept how He suffered so that reconciliation can take place. Perhaps this is the simple reason that one might believe Jesus is the Christ and God's only beloved Son as the Scriptures declare in John 3:16, "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life." As difficult as the human condition might be, God has never, nor will He ever, ask a person to suffer pain that He Himself had not endured.²²

God loves mankind so much that He was willing to put His eternal deity aside and enter the restraints of time. He was willing to endure the pain and humble position of being a man—to leave His majesty and glory at the right hand of God the Father to become flesh and bone. He knows man's pain because He has experienced it too, far more so than any other. God had to do this so that Heaven's gates could be opened for humanity. No other sacrifice was great enough to pay the price of mankind's sin. Only His life could purchase eternal freedom.²³

If one would simply yield his self-sufficiency by believing what God did for him in Jesus Christ, he would have the opportunity to find freedom from the weight of his suffering and see his tribulations from God's perspective. To be willing to accept what the Lord accomplished for us by dying on the cross, so that His precious atoning blood could cleanse man from sin, and he would be saved.²⁴ Moreover, that by His being raised from death one can be assured that he will defeat death too.²⁵

Jesus, who never experienced sin before, took on all sin. The Author of all life laid down His life so that mankind could have life. His pain was far beyond human understanding. In Isaiah 52:14b-53: 3 [NIV], the author wrote that,

His appearance was so disfigured beyond that of any man and his form marred beyond human likeness—so He will sprinkle many nations... He

²² Is 53:3-4 (NIV)

²³ Jn 14:6 (NIV)

²⁴ Jn 3:16

²⁵ 1 Cor 15:50-58 (NIV)

had no beauty or majesty to attract us to Him, nothing in His appearance that we should desire Him. He was despised and rejected of men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering. Like one from whom men hide their faces He was despised and we esteemed Him not.

Isaiah 53 continues to give insight into the heart and intentions of God in verse 10 when he wrote: “But the Lord was pleased to crush Him, putting Him to grief; if He would render Himself as a guilt offering... as a result of the anguish of His soul, He will see it and be satisfied; by His knowledge, the Righteous One, My Servant, will justify the many, and He will bear their iniquities.” Isaiah is explaining that God was content to put Jesus Christ through more suffering than any other man ever endured so that the outpouring of His blood would cover the price for all of mankind’s wrongdoings. God established the standard in truth, and then He filled the requirements of His standard in Truth.

Jesus’ blood is abundantly beyond more than enough to cover every sin, shame, hurt and everything else that need redeeming in one’s life. He covers every sin that everyone has ever committed, past, present and future. Jesus also covers every wrongdoing that others’ had ever inflicted upon you, so that you can bestow the same grace that you have received. Jesus Christ’s sufferings ensure that one can be free from the weight of his sorrows and afflictions. The sufferings of one’s pride, the offenses he has committed, the offenses that have been committed against him, his bitterness and resentment from unmet expectations, etcetera. One can be made right in the eyes of his loving Creator and gain access to God’s unlimited resources if he would simply place his trust in the redeeming work that God did for humanity by making His only Son the scapegoat for man’s sin. God’s unmerited favor and pardon is a free gift to all, mankind simply needs to receive it.

Yet, it was not free to Him. It cost God everything to meet the standard He required to be met for humanity’s forgiveness and freedom; this did not surprise Him. It was His plan since before the beginning of time. Nevertheless, it was worth it to God because it allows those who rest in His love and grace to enjoy the presence of His majesty and splendor, all because of the sufferings of His Son, the Mediator and true High Priest for mankind, Jesus Christ. Jesus Himself demonstrates why pain is ultimately good. When embraced, it teaches what is most important in life, and directs one outside of self to seek God’s eternal perspective and plan. More importantly, pain affords people the opportunity to rely upon the strength and resources of the One who created them and loves them most.