

Why Doesn't The Physician Just Take It Away?

Various Passages

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(GA) When I went to college, I wanted to be Physical Therapist. It'd been a dream of mine ever since I flew on a plane, by myself when I was twelve years old, and visited an aunt who was a Physical Therapist at Mayo Clinic. I got to tag along one day... from that point on I knew that's what I wanted to do.

A. So, in college I declared pre-med, taking biology, organic, anatomy & physiology. I couldn't wait to get out of college and get to PT school!

1. Then something happened my junior year, and I gave up my dream. The junior year was the year our school had pre-med students to volunteer fifteen hours a week at hospitals and rehab centers.

a. So I spent six weeks at Lincoln General... six weeks at Bryan Hospital... a six weeks at St. Elizabeth.

i. I did patient transfers... helped in the Physical and Occupational Therapy wards... observed patient check-ups... a bunch of things. I loved it all.

2. Then one beautiful, sunny day I was scheduled to work in the Physical Therapy Room at Madonna in Lincoln.

a. It was my first day, I grabbed lunch on the way, pulled into a park and ate it – the park was full of kids playing and running around, just doing what kids should be doing on a day like that.

i. I finished my lunch, drove to Madonna, and was assigned to work with a 12-year old boy – I'll call him Jerod – who was dying of an inoperable brain tumor.

a) My job was simple – just play with him. Talk with him. Help him enjoy the afternoon. He only had a few left.

i) We thumb-wrestled, played cards, and built a giant tower out of Lego's.

3. The entire time, Jerod never quit smiling. He never quit enjoying himself.

B. We played for about four hours, and then his mom came and got him.

1. I wrote down my volunteer hours on a clipboard, drove back to that same park, and sat in my car crying. Kids still playing all around me.

a. I was a new Christian, I remember praying. I remember asking God over and over, "WHY? Why don't you heal Jerod?"

2. I asked that same question of God for about six more weeks, until Jerod died. It was my first experience of feeling like God was silent.

a. Have you ever felt that way, like God was silent?

C. Well, I finished my junior year and on the last day of school walked into my guidance counselor's office – Dr. Greeger – and said, "I can't do it. I can't work in hospitals or rehab centers."

1. I gave up the dream. I finished college with a pre-med, or biology, major... but my last year I took all my electives in psychology and philosophy.

a. That question of "Why?" has haunted my soul since then. "Why does there have to be so much hurt... and why doesn't God take it away?"

(SN) We're in a preaching series entitled "Hospital." – We're looking at what it means that Heartland is a Hospital, and Jesus is our Great Physician.

A. Last week we looked at the quote from Jesus in *Mark 2* when He said, "Those who are well have no need of a Physician, but those who are sick. I came not to call the righteous, but sinners."

B. This week, we're looking at this question of "WHY?" If we're going to fully appreciate our Great Physician, we ought to understand why he doesn't, sometimes, take our pains and hurts away.

1. We know He *can*. *Psalm 115* tells us: "sits in the heaven and does whatever He pleases," Scripture tells us.

a. And we have the Gospels to show us that Jesus does whatever He pleases on earth to – there are several times when He healed people, or solved their problems.

i. The man lame from birth... the little girl who died... the man lowered through the roof by his friends... on, and on, and on...

2. We know Jesus can simply speak a word, and pain and trials disappear.

C. So why doesn't He do it every time? Why doesn't the Great Physician just take our hurts away? Our diseases... our chronic illnesses... our mental disorders?

(S) I'll tell you why: Because He has something better for us than relief. Jesus has bigger designs for you than to simply remove your pain.

A. Let me show you what I'm talking about – we're going to look at I Peter, if you'd flip there.

1. This group that received Peter's letter knew about suffering. They knew about pain, or emotional distress. These were Hellenistic Jews who'd been forced from their homes – many separated from families – and relocated to what is today modern Turkey.

a. Much like the 110,000 Japanese-Americans were instantly relocated and confined during the internment which followed Pearl Harbor, these believers were exiles in an unwanted land...

i. Turkey is a long way from Jerusalem, isn't it?

a. We're not sure exactly what all their trials were – but we know they suffered. Peter refers to them being "grieved by multiple trials." He also dedicates a large part of his letter, in chapter 3, to how to respond when evil is forced on you.

i. And then he closes his letter addressing the elders, telling them that they'll continue suffering for a while before God restores them.

2. So this group knows about suffering. They're new Christians... I imagine they've wondered, "Why doesn't God take it away?"

B. The reason I think they've wondered this is that Peter gives them an answer.

1. Peter tells them how God has something so much better, more eternal, for them than simply removing the suffering...

a. Let's hear what this ***better and eternal thing*** is that God has for His people.

Listen to *I Peter 1:6-9*.

C. I hear two things hear – two experiences – that only come to a Christian who's going through pain and trials... without the opportunity to walk through suffering, these two things would be available. **There are two things better than relief and removal of pain in this passage... Do you see them? I'll give you a hint... they have to do with FAITH.**

1. The first is found in *verse 7* – in the phrase, "...may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ."

a. What Peter's saying to these people is this: I know you're "grieved by trials now" ... I know you're suffering right now... but the purpose for these trials is to test your faith and show it as genuine, as real.

- i. To prove to Jesus when He returns that you're faith is made of the right stuff – it's not shallow, it's not lip-service, it's been tested and proved and will be seen by Jesus. Jesus will be pleased with it.
- 2. Let's be honest – It can be hard to get excited about the idea of Jesus seeing our faith and being pleased with it. None of you would admit it, but you might even be thinking, "So what... Jesus will be pleased... I'd almost rather live with less pain, and see a little less pleasure on Jesus' face."
 - a. But let me tell you something – in that moment, when Jesus returns, as a man, and you look each other in the eyes – you look your Savior in the eyes – in that moment the only thing you are going to care about is what Jesus thinks of your faith.
 - i. I'm serious – eternity will be great, getting to know Jesus and the Saints... but in that first moment of Jesus' revelation, all you're care about is what Jesus thinks of your faith.
 - a) You're not going to talk about the weather... or the Huskers... in that moment.
 - b) You're not going to ask Him about whether Heaven's like the cream cheese commercial, or whether Calvin or Arminius was more right.
 - b) You're not going to ask Him which denomination would He attend if He were back on earth..
 - b. No, in that moment, when you're face to face with the One who died for your sins and says, "The just shall live by faith" and "Without faith it is impossible to please God" – The only thing you'll care about is Jesus' opinion of your faith.
 - i. It reminds me a bit of my dog, Hank. Hank was the runt of a litter of black labs – he had short, stubby legs and nobody wanted him. So I took him. Hank would do ANYTHING for me.
 - a) I know all dogs are known for being loyal, but Hank was freakishly loyal to me. With one word, or look, he'd fetch, roll over, play dead, even bite a neighbor kid if I asked. (That got me in trouble several times...)
 - i) You know why Hank woke up every day eager to hear and do my every command?
 - a) Not because I ever gave him a reward, or a doggy treat. Not because it meant he got to sleep inside. Not because it meant he got any kind of material reward. No.
 - ii) No, Hank did all that he did to see on my face and hear in my tone of voice – he was smart – my pleasure in him. He lived for my approval and pleasure.
 - c. It's hard to imagine, but in that moment when we face Christ, every cell in our body will be fixated and eager and we'll be panting, waiting to see what Jesus thinks of our faith.
 - i. I honestly think that one of the best experiences in the life of a Christian – on earth or heaven – will be that potential moment when he faces Jesus, eye-to-eye, and hears Jesus say, "I've seen you're faith... I tested it... I allowed the Enemy to put it through pain and suffering and loss... and it remained beautiful. I am so pleased with you."

- i. Oh, friends, in that moment, Scripture tells us that you will receive praise and glory and honor from Jesus because of your tested genuineness of faith... and I honestly don't think you can imagine how wonderful that moment will be.
- 2. But you need to try, because this is the first great experience God wants to give us... which means at times, leaving us in a trial. But there's a second great experience, and this one you might not need to wait as long for...
 - a. It's found in *verses 8-9*. "Though you have not seen him, **you love him**. Though you do not now see him, you **believe in him** and **rejoice with joy** that is inexpressible and filled with glory, obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls."
 - i. Remember, Peter's talking to people suffering. People in pain.
 - a) Now Peter says to them, "You're in trials... you're in pain... and you don't see Jesus. He's not here in bodily form. He's not putting His arm around you, or physically walking with you through this trial. **But you love Him!**"
 - b) Peter says, "You're grieved by trials and you can't see your Rescuer coming over the hill in a chariot to save – **but you believe in him!** In fact, you believe in Him with such deep faith, that you have joy!"
 - a) "Joy that can't be expressed..."
 - b. Have you ever watched someone go through unimaginable pain; pain so severe that the world would say, "Grieve however you want... throw things, seethe with anger, get bitter... grieve however you want because life is rotten and you just got sucker punched!"
 - i. Have you ever watched someone go through that degree of pain – the loss of a spouse, or child, or dream... the prolonged suffering of watching a life die...
 - a) Maybe it's you I'm talking about.
 - c. **Peter's recipients knew pain like this. Yet, they had something mysterious... something special. They had a genuine faith which produces an intimacy with God only needed, only experienced, by suffering people. We see this in *verses 8-9*.**
 - i. Peter sees this intimacy with God... he uses words like "...you love Him" and "...you believe in Him"... and you "rejoice with inexpressible joy" to describe what He sees.
 - d. I don't know how else to say it, but that's intimacy-language. The testing of faith in trials can produce a connection, a fellowship, with Jesus that is literally indescribable...
 - i. And this shouldn't surprise us. If there's one thing Scripture teaches, it's that God is with the broken hearted... the hurting... the disabled, crippled, dying, sick... God is not only with them... He came to earth and suffered to be in solidarity with them. To be one of them.
 - a) Timothy Keller, one of my favorite pastors and authors, once said, "God binds up his heart so closely with suffering people that he interprets any move against them as a move against Him."

3. God's heart is with suffering people... and this produces inexpressible joy. And that amazes a world that shakes it's fist at the sky when pain happens... it seems utterly backwards to them!!!

- a. You see, a person of genuine faith doesn't shake their fist at the sky. She mourns... he feels sad... he cries...
 - i. A biblical Christian going through pain will feel an appropriate sadness over how things on earth are NOT like they are in heaven, yet... that's appropriate and good.
 - a) A person can have inexpressible joy and mourn at the same time, can't they? Can't we? Jesus did both.
- b. Peter's point is that there's an experience of love and belief and joy in Christ that ONLY a person slogging through a painful trial experiences.
 - i. It's hard to explain... but if you asked me, or many Christians: What is the richest, most-intimate, life-changing, worshipful memory you have of your relationship with Jesus... if will likely be attached to a severe painful trial.

D. All that to say, Why doesn't the Great Physician just take our pain away? Because He's got something, so many things, that are richer and deeper for us. He wants us to have inexpressible joy and a future hope... and trials are, at times, one of the tools He uses to accomplish these plans for our good.

(VR) This is a hard subject. It's hard for me to preach on, in part, because I'm involved in some of your lives... some of our people at Heartland are in very painful trials. This is not a theoretical... ivory tower... discussion for some of us.

A. This is real stuff. Many of us are praying that God would take a specific pain, or injury away... or that He would heal someone... or that He would restore a marriage, or a parent-child relationship...

1. Many of us are in pain and are putting a lot of fervor into our prayers for God to take these problems away.

- a. And this is good... these prayers are good. But, if some of these pains and hurts are used by God to do accomplish these awesome things in our lives we just examined... there is a challenge in this for us.

B. Let me explain the challenge by looking at the Apostle Paul, someone obviously biblical and very intimate with the Great Physician. Let's see how he handled a painful trial.

1. He calls it his "thorn in the flesh" in II Corinthians 12 – and I'm not sure this passage was meant to be "Prescriptive," but rather simply "Descriptive" of what Paul did... but, in this case, I think Paul's example is a very good one to follow.

- a. Listen to Paul's approach to a painful trial: *Read II Corinthians 12:7-10.*

- i. We don't know what the thorn was... could have been ulcers, could have been blindness... could have been something entirely different. But it was painful – Paul uses words like "thorn" and "messenger of Satan" and "harass" – strong language. Paul was at best frustrated... but likely in pain.

- a) So, what did Paul do? When something is painful?

- i) He pleaded with God to remove it... not once, not twice, but three times. He begged, this word says. "God, I don't like it... I think my life would be so much better if it were gone! Will you please take it from me?"

ii. Friends, I just don't think there's anything wrong with pleading and begging God to remove the things that hurt us... the things that are clearly not occurring on earth as they will occur someday in heaven...

a) Lord, remove this cancer...

b) Jesus, take away my chronic back pain... or depression...

c) Father, restore my marriage or relationship with my child...

2. But here's the part of Paul's experience that really challenges me. He pleads with God – clearly hating the thorn and wanting it gone – but at some point He flip-flops, and realizes God's goodness is in the thorn staying. It's God's will that it remains.

a. For Him, it was after asking three times... I don't think that's a formula, perhaps for you, you'll plead with God fifty times... perhaps five times... but the point is, at some point, we must be open to hearing God say, "My good purposes and plans for you involve this trial sticking around... at least for now."

i. Paul, and this amazes me, when he sensed this from God – that God's good purposes involved the trial sticking around – he changed attitude and celebrated the pain.

a) It literally says, "I will boast all the more" because this painful trial gives me an experience of Christ I wouldn't trade for all the world.

(A) I want to challenge us to view our pain and losses and hurts in light of a Sovereign God who loves us so much.

A. They sure may have our Enemies fingerprints on them – some of our hurts have a smell of evil to them. But, good theology teaches us that if a pain or trial is in our life – no matter what it is – it's there because God's wants to accomplish something awesome in us.

1. Our enemy doesn't want us to know this. He wants us to feel distant from God during these times. Like a wolf that runs a caribou off the herd to make it feel alone, unprotected...

a. But that couldn't be further from the truth. When you're in pain – whatever it is – that is when God is nearest to you. His Heart is BOUND to yours!

2. Our enemy would also want you to feel that when you're caught up in a trial, or painful circumstance, you're not effective as a Christian... you're not doing good Christian work... again, not true.

a. Faith enduring and being tested in trials is some of the most powerful work God wants to do through us.

i. It speaks to and challenges all who see it – Christians and non-Christians alike.

B. Friends, when God allows pain and hurt and loss in our lives – He is very near. His work on us is very active.

1. I like how Michael Card writes about this: "The truth is, all of us have felt forsaken. At the precise point Jesus was most forsaken by God, He was being used the most by God. When He was lamenting God's perceived absence, something was being accomplished His life that would save the world. It is often the same for us."

C. My challenge for you this week is simple – whatever trial you're going through, exercise a faith that is precious and more valuable than gold, that perishes when the flames are too hot...

1. There are great things ahead for you when your faith has been tested and proved to be genuine.