

LENT 2 SERMON NOTES AND DISCUSSION GUIDE

SUFFERING AND HOPE



PT 2. PULLING THROUGH PAIN

WELCOME

As you gather it is important to be a community – eat and drink together. Don't let things become 'intellectual' without being grounded in real life. We pray that you might be comfortable to discuss real life – even your own. So let's "keep it real"!

Some Opening Discussion Questions...

- *What is the most painful thing you recall experiencing!*
- *What has helped you when you are experiencing pain?*

PAIN IS NOT SIMPLE – NEVER OVERSIMPLIFY SOMEONE’S PAIN

Read each of the following variety of quotes one by one. After each one pause and discuss what you think of it! Please spend the most time on the one from the Bible!

“The biology of pain is never really straightforward, even when it appears to be.” - Lorimer Moseley

“Do you not see how necessary a world of pains is to school an intelligence and make it a soul?” - John Keats

“Pain insists upon being attended to. God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our consciences, but shouts in our pains. It is his megaphone to rouse a deaf world.” - C.S. Lewis

Genesis 3:16-19

To the woman he said, "I will surely multiply your pain in childbearing; in pain you shall bring forth children. Your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you." And to Adam he said, "Because you have listened to the voice of your wife and have eaten of the tree of which I commanded you, 'You shall not eat of it,' cursed is the ground because of you; in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life; thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you; and you shall eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return."

A PAINFUL STORY

1 in 5 Australians suffer chronic pain. For seven years I experienced pain - all day every day - due to back problems. I do not exaggerate at all when I say it was ‘all day every day’ – sometimes less and sometimes worse. Doctors call pain that lasts for a short time (a few months at most) “acute pain”. But pain that lasts for a long time (even for years) is called “chronic pain”. I have come to some sort of a truce with my pain for now! The underlying condition is still there and I do still battle regular pain. But I do not battle bad pain every day – now it comes and goes. A great doctor helped me with lots of cool injections in the spine! But one fantastic thing that doctor did was get me learning about pain. He lent me books on the biology and psychology of pain. I got to learn about the physical and psychological things around pain and try some new approaches. I discovered that pain is not simple. Pain perception is influenced by emotion, by stress, by psychology, and by the rest of your body. Pain is influenced by food, relationships, forgiveness, and by your attitude too. Pain is real but complicated. I can be in terrible pain but I don’t notice the pain as much while I’m focussing deeply on the other person’s needs. Pain, like noise or music, can be drowned out – it can also drown out good things. If we give attention to pain it can increase. But if we ignore it we can sometimes make things worse. It’s complicated! I’m not saying “pain is all the mind”. It certainly is real and it hurts physically. But pain is more complicated than we think. We should be careful not to just give simple answers to those in pain!

If we suffer chronic pain we could:

- *Learn new ways to think about pain.*
- *Get help to learn not to catastrophize or dramatize your pain.*
- *Be aware of the emotional effects of pain.*
- *Learn to breathe.*

- Create pleasant sensory experiences to calm your brain.
- Reduce fear and anxiety in your life.
- Be aware of sleep, eating patterns, drug or alcohol use.
- Commit to regular appropriate (gentle) exercise.
- If you can't fix the source of pain you can work on other things in life.
- Don't wallow in the 'worst case' or 'disaster predictions' medical staff may give.
- Firmly grab hold of the purposeful things in your life and especially to your faith.
- Let your pain call you to prayer.
- Trust God all the more.

Discuss: What does this story bring up for you? What do you want to say about it?

PAIN CALLS FOR AN EXPLANATION! (BUT BEWARE OF THE STORIES WE CREATE AROUND PAIN)

Jeremiah 15:18

Why is my pain unceasing, my wound incurable, refusing to be healed? Will you be to me like a deceitful brook, like waters that fail?

WHAT IS THIS PAIN? Our brains seek a physical explanation for the sensation we experience.

WHY IS THIS PAIN? Our minds seek to find meaning for the pain we have.

Pain isn't just something in our bodies or a thing we perceive in our brain. It's something we have emotions, feelings, and thoughts about. We tend to create stories about our pain. In the book of Job we have a man suffering incredible pain. He has scraped the boils on his skin with a piece of pottery and is sitting in ashes suffering. And his mates offer all sorts of explanations and stories about his pain. Here are some of their explanations (stories) about his pain...

ELIPHAZ: Your pain is because you are bad! (Ch 6)

BILDAD: You are in pain as a punishment. (Ch 8)

ZOPHAR: You are in pain because you refuse to repent. (Ch 11)

ELIPHAZ: Bad things happen to bad people. (Ch 18)

JOB: Perhaps I am in pain because God has forsaken me? (Ch 23)

ELIHU: You are in pain for all sorts of theological deep reasons to give God glory. (Ch 32-37)

What do you make of these explanations or 'stories' about pain?

Which of these stories have you used or had used on you?

Discuss the following two quotes:

Pain removes the veil; it plants the flag of truth within the fortress of a rebel soul. - C.S. Lewis

I am certain that I never did grow in grace one-half so much anywhere as I have upon the bed of pain. - Charles Spurgeon

PAIN POINTS TO PARADISE

Pain reveals in us a kind of incompleteness. If you've suffered really bad pain you know it feels like an unanswered question. It hurts so much and it demands relief – like a huge unanswered question. Pain screams loud at us 'incomplete'. Pain calls for a resolution. Pain calls for an answer. And the open festering wound of suffering that is pain is a great question. I believe this question has an answer. Pain is a question that is answered by paradise!

Revelation 21:4

He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away."

Romans 8:23-25

We, who have the first-fruits of the Spirit, groan silently as we wait eagerly for adoption as God's children – when our bodies will finally be set free. This hope saved us! But hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.

Reflect quietly for a while on the above two Bible verses. Spend time just reflecting and praying.

Share what you have noticed or heard here in God's word.

When the Apostle Paul talked about pain. He said that God's Holy Spirit in us leads us to long, to groan for heaven. We have the beginnings of a new creation and we have become aware of the completion to come. Before our pain was just incompleteness. But now we can begin to taste the answer. We can set our hearts and hopes on the great answer of heaven!

AN ETERNAL PERSPECTIVE ON PAIN.

Discuss: What if someone said to you, "If you suffer 30 minutes of pain now, you will be pain free for the rest of your life?" How would that 30 minutes seem then?

[This proposition is from Phillip Yancey's Book "Where Is God When It Hurts." Pg. 176]

Quietly reflect on the following Bible passages for a while. Discuss what you feel and hear!

2 Corinthians 4:16-17

So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison...

Romans 8:18

For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.

Finish with prayer.