

CHAPTER 13 - Using Your Pain

There is no way to get through life without experiencing pain. But it does not have to be wasted. After feeding the multitudes, Jesus told His disciples to gather up the fragments "so that nothing may be lost and wasted" (John 6:12). The Lord will make use of everything in your life if you let Him. Let your pain be someone else's gain. That's what Jesus did.

Jesus endured horrible pain as He hung on the cross paying for the sins of man. But His pain is our gain. God's Word teaches us that when we don't know how to pray as we should in a situation, the Holy Spirit comes to our aid. He knows the will of the Father in all things and pleads in behalf of all the saints according to and in harmony with God's will. Therefore we can be assured and know that *all* things work together for good for those who love God and are called according to His purposes (See Romans 8:26-28).

No matter what happens in our life, if we will keep praying and trusting God, keep loving Him and walking in His will to the best of our ability. He will cause everything to work out for good. Whatever happened to us in the past may not have been good in and of itself, and it may have led to a struggle with acceptance and desire for approval, but because God is good, He can take a very difficult and painful thing and cause it to work out for our good and the good of others.

GOD'S PURPOSE IS BEYOND OUR COMPREHENSION

The only monument in the world built in the shape of a bug—to honor a bug—is located in Fort Rucker, Alabama. In 1915 the Mexican boll weevil invaded southeast Alabama and destroyed 60 percent of the cotton crop. In desperation, the farmers turned to planting peanuts. By 1917 the peanut industry had become so profitable that the county harvested more peanuts than any other county in the nation. In gratitude, the people of the town erected a statue and inscribed these words, "In profound appreciation of the boll weevil, and what it has done as the herald of prosperity."

The instrument of their suffering had become the means of their blessing.

God is a God of purpose. We may not always understand His purpose, but we can

be sure He definitely has one. Something may initially look terrible to us, and yet all the while God intends to show His glory by working something good from it.

We see an example of this truth in the biblical account of the death of Lazarus as recorded in John 11:1-44.

We are told that Lazarus was sick. His sisters Mary and Martha sent a message to Jesus saying, "He whom You love [so well] is sick" (v. 3). When Jesus received the message. He said the sickness was not unto death but in order that God might be glorified. Instead of going to Lazarus and healing him, Jesus waited until he died. By the time Jesus arrived on the scene, Lazarus had been in the grave four days. Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead. He could have kept him from dying, but He let him die so people could see the miracle-working power of God and know that nothing is too hard for Him.

We wonder sometimes why God waits so long to come to our rescue or why He allows certain things to take place. We cannot always figure out what God is doing, or why He is doing it, but if we trust Him, He will make something wonderful from it.

HURT! HEALED! AND READY TO HELP!

Joseph was a man who was hurt by his brothers. We know from reading God's Word that Joseph's brothers were jealous of him. They hated him because his father favored him. They sold him into slavery and told his father that wild animals had killed him. He was taken to Egypt where he spent thirteen years in prison for a; ^ crime he did not commit (See Genesis 37 -41).]

But God was with Joseph, and he was able to interpret dreams. The ruler of all Egypt, Pharaoh, had a dream that Joseph interpreted, and he was released from prison. He went to work for Pharaoh, and once again was put in charge of everything. During a great famine, Joseph was in a position to save multitudes of people, including his father and his brothers who had treated him so cruelly.

This story is one of the most encouraging in the Bible. We see the power of a good attitude during hard times. We see that no matter where we are. God can give us favor. We see the power of forgiveness when Joseph was willing to feed his brothers who had hurt him so badly. The Bible says God's ways are past finding out (See Romans 11:33 KJV). We may not always understand, but we can trust.

Joseph had been hurt, but he was healed, and stood ready to help. His struggles had made him a better man, not a bitter man. Just think how different his life could

have been had he refused to maintain a godly attitude all the way through his ordeal.

I am sure Esther was hurt when her life and plans were interrupted, and she was taken into the king's harem, which was not something a young Jewish maiden would have been happy about. When we read about people in the Bible, and the things they endured, we don't always think about the emotions they must have experienced. We read their stories almost as if they are fictional characters, but they were real people just like you and me. They went through all the same emotions we would go through in a similar situation.

Esther was used by God to save her nation, but first He had to put her in an uncomfortable position. She had to live in a place she did not want to be and do things she did not want to do. (See the book of Esther.)

Ruth's husband died. I am sure that hurt her terribly. No doubt she was lonely, yet she chose to take care of her mother-in-law, an elderly woman named **Naomi** whom she accompanied to her foreign homeland. Once there, they had very little provision, and so Ruth had to glean in the fields in order for them to eat. She ended up marrying a man named **Boaz**, who was very wealthy. As a result, Ruth and Naomi were provided with everything they needed. In addition, by bearing children to Boaz, Ruth became part of the ancestral bloodline of Jesus. (See the book of Ruth and Matthew 1:5.)

My point in recounting these stories is that all of these people, and many others I don't have time to mention, suffered pain, received healing, and went on to help others.

Have you been hurt by someone or something? If so, you can make the same choice these people made. Don't spend your life angry and bitter—don't allow your emotional pain to imprison you in a lifelong struggle with approval. Receive healing and comfort from God, and then go on to help someone else. Don't waste your pain.

During World War II, **Corrie** ten Boom and her sister were held in a horrible concentration camp named **Ravensbruck**. They saw and suffered terrible torments including starvation and nakedness in below-freezing weather. Corrie's sister **Betsie** actually starved to death. During their time there, however, they continually encouraged other prisoners. They kept an attitude of praise, and eventually Corrie was released from the concentration camp through a clerical error.

After her release, she traveled worldwide telling of her experiences and the faithfulness of God. Her ministry surely became more powerful and effective than it would have been without her trials and suffering. Her life and ministry have been a comfort to millions.

One evening after preaching in Germany on God's forgiveness and how no sin is too great for God to forgive, she suddenly recognized a man coming toward her. He had been a guard at Ravensbruck, and one of the people who had tortured the prisoners. The man did not recognize Corrie, but he said he had heard her mention that she was a prisoner in Ravensbruck. He said, "I was a guard there, but have since gone on to become a Christian. I know God has forgiven me for the terrible things I did, but I am asking you for your forgiveness as well."

Corrie said that she immediately saw her beloved sister slowly starving to death, and felt at that moment that even though she needed forgiveness every day herself, she could not forgive this man. As she stood in front of him, she knew that she must forgive him although she did not know how she could. Everything she preached to others would be worthless if she could not forgive. Corrie said she knew it would have to be an act of her will, because nothing in her emotions wanted to do it. As she stood there, she told God, "I can lift my hand, I can do that much, but You will have to do the rest. You must supply the feelings." As she wood-only took the man's hand, she said that the power of God came rushing through her entire being, and she was able to say wholeheartedly, "I forgive you, brother!" "With all my heart, I forgive you." She said that she has never known God's love so intensely as she did at that moment.

Although Corrie had been badly hurt, she allowed God to heal her, and she went on to help others.¹

As I have noted, I was abused and hurt very badly. When I was a young woman in my early twenties, I could never remember being happy or feeling really safe. I spent many years angry, bitter, and resentful. I am thankful that I learned to receive God's comfort and healing and that I am now able to help other people.

GOD IS LOOKING FOR EXPERIENCED HELP!

Have you ever needed a job, but every employment ad you read asked for someone with experience? You wanted a job but did not have any experience, and it frustrated you. I have been in that situation, and I remember thinking, "How can I get experience if nobody will give me a job?"

God also wants experienced help. When we go to work for God in His kingdom,

He will use everything in our past, no matter how painful it was. He considers it experience. We have gone through? Some difficult things, and those things qualify us to help take someone else through them too. Even Jesus gained experience through the things He suffered:

Although He was a Son, He learned [active, special] obedience through what He suffered

And, [His completed experience] making Him perfectly [equipped]. He became the Author and Source of eternal salvation to all those who give heed and obey Him. (Hebrews 5:8-9)

How could I be writing this book right now if I had not gone through some difficult things and gained some valuable experience? How could I teach others how to forgive those who have hurt them if I had not first had the experience of forgiving those who hurt me?

I encourage you to look at your pain from a different viewpoint. A right perspective can make all the difference in the world. Take a look at how you can use your pain for someone else's gain. Can your mess become your ministry? Maybe you have gone through so much that you feel you have enough experience to be a specialist in some area. I am a specialist in overcoming shame, guilt, poor self-image, lack of confidence, fear, anger, bitterness, self-pity, et cetera. Press past your pain and get your "master's degree" so you can work in the kingdom for the One Who is the Master of restoring hurting people.

THE BEST KEPT SECRET

Do not let yourself be overcome by evil, but overcome (master) evil with good.
(Romans 12:21)

We overcome evil with good. I believe this truth is one of the most powerful weapons we possess, and the best kept secret. God wants everyone to know it, but Satan keeps us so entrenched in our problems and personal pain that few of us ever understand the dynamics of it. We can get Satan back for the painful things he has brought into our lives by being good to others. We overcome him (evil) by being good to other people. Actually, it is God Who overcomes Satan as we allow Him to work His good through us. Satan wants to use our pain to destroy us, but we destroy his plan by doing the opposite of what he expects.

Being good to someone else not only defeats Satan, it also releases joy in our own

lives. Historically, people who have been hurt by someone frequently experience depression. I believe this is partially due to the fact that their attention is on their own pain instead of on what they can do to relieve someone else's pain. God has not called us to "in-reach," He has called us to "out-reach." When we reach out to others, God reaches into our souls and heals us. He is the only One Who can heal the brokenhearted and make the wounded better than new.

I call this "overcoming evil with good" principle a secret because so few of us seem to know it or follow it. When we are hurting, our natural tendency is to nurse our wounds. We may want to isolate ourselves and think about how pitifully we have been treated. I have discovered that when I am hurting, the best thing I can do is keep moving. While I am hurting, I just keep doing what I would be doing if I were not hurting. I go to work, I study, I pray, I go out and preach, I keep my commitments. I keep doing the good things God has given me to do, and I trust Him to take care of the evil things.

Do you see it? You can overcome evil with good just as the Bible says in Romans 12:21. Understanding this principle has been literally life changing for me, and I believe it can be for you, too.

OUR THINKING IS ALL WRONG

Our daughter Sandra shared that she was dreading seeing a certain individual because in the past that person had not been very pleasant to her. As she struggled with negative thoughts about the upcoming encounter, God spoke to her heart and said, "You don't need to be concerned about how others treat you; your concern should be how you treat them."

This message had a strong impact on Sandra's life as well as on mine. How true it is. We are so concerned about how we are being treated that we have little or no concern for how we treat others. We are afraid of being taken advantage of, especially if our experience with someone has been painful in the past. The fear and dread we feel probably makes us supersensitive to everything that is said or done. We may even misinterpret things and see them in a negative way because of our expectations. What we fear does come upon us, according to God's Word (Job 3:25).

I agree that it is difficult not to be concerned that others will treat us badly if they have done so in the past. That is why it is so important not to think about it at all. We

are to deposit ourselves with God and trust Him to take care of us (See 1 Peter 4:19). He is our Vindicator (See Job 19:25), and as long as we behave properly toward others, including our enemies. God will bring a reward into our lives.

Because of what God had spoken to **Sandra's** heart, she approached the meeting with a totally different attitude. She concentrated on being nice to the person who had previously not been nice to her. She made an effort to be encouraging and to show interest in what interested the other person. She reported to me that the **^**results were quite amazing. She spent several days with the individual in question, and never once did she feel mistreated in anyway.

The Bible says we are to be "mindful" to be a blessing (See **Galatians** 6:10). That means that we are to have our minds full of ways we can help others. When our minds are filled with ways to be a blessing, we have no time to dwell on our personal problems. It gives God an opportunity to work on them for us.

GIVE AWAY WHAT YOU WANT

What do you want? If it is approval, then give approval to others. Make a special effort to make people feel valued and loved. Be aggressive in agreement. Often we are silent when we agree and verbal when we disagree. I find that the words "I agree" give confidence to people. If I have an opinion or an idea about something, it really increases my confidence level when my husband says, "I agree." I don't expect him to agree with me about everything, but when he does agree, it is really nice to hear it. I think hearing about the times when people do agree helps us better handle the times when they don't.

If you want compliments, then give them away. Every time you think anything good about anyone, verbalize it. People cannot read your mind; your thoughts have power and may affect their confidence level in a minor way, but your words can really lift them up and encourage them.

All people need affirmation, especially those who have been emotionally wounded or hurt by someone. We have more power than we realize we do. We can help people! Right words spoken at the right time have the power to heal: "A man has joy in making an apt answer, and a word spoken at the right moment—how good it is!" (Proverbs 15:23).

Not only are right words spoken at the right time good for others, they are good for us. We experience joy in building others up. We are created by God to be a blessing.

He told Abraham, "I will bless you and make you a blessing" (See Genesis 12:1-3). We are blessed in being a blessing.

God made you to be a blessing. Start being what you were made to be, and you will start receiving what you are meant to receive!

"I NEED HEALING"

You may be thinking, "I've been hurt, and I want to help others, but I need healing." I used this statement previously: "Hurt! Healed! And ready to help!" The healing is very necessary. There are lots of people in ministry who are trying to heal others, and they are wounded themselves. I call them "wounded healers." Many people hide from their own issues while trying to uncover someone else's. The blind cannot lead the blind—if they try to do so, they will both fall into a ditch (See Matthew 15:14). Trying to help others while ignoring our own problems never produces good fruit for anyone.

How does the healing come? We know how we got hurt. We have a vision to help others. But how does our own healing come? We need the help of the Great Physician. We need His presence in our lives. Spending time with God is the most vital thing we can do, especially when we have been wounded.

We must spend time reading and studying God's Word, because it has inherent power to heal. The Bible says we are to attend to God's Word because it brings health and healing to all of our flesh (See Proverbs 4:20-22). Our emotions and our mind are part of what the Bible calls "the flesh." According to Psalm 119:130 (KJV), the entrance of God's Word brings light, which is something many are missing. We don't always see what we need to do. Often we don't even see our own problems. We think everyone else has a problem, and if everyone else would change, everything would be fine. We need light from God to understand ourselves.

As I began my healing journey with God, His Holy Spirit started leading me into truth. Truth is another way to describe light. There were many things I did not understand. I didn't understand why I felt certain ways in certain situations or about certain types of people. My lack of light brought confusion in my life. It contributed to my negative feelings about myself. I didn't like many of my ways, but I could do nothing about them because I was in the dark. I felt trapped! I didn't like the things I did; I didn't understand them, but I kept on doing them.

I always disliked men who had strong personalities, which is really funny since I have a very strong personality myself. When God brought light into my life, I began to realize I was uncomfortable with a strong male authority figure because my father

who abused me had a strong personality. I was responding to other men's personalities similar to my father's as I would have responded to him. I was always uncomfortable around my father, so I was uncomfortable around anyone like him.

The light God gave me helped me a great deal in relationships. For one thing, I stopped rejecting people just because they were men and had strong personalities. I had preferred to be around people who would let me take the lead; I had to be in control to be comfortable. Why? When God brought light into my life, I began to realize it was because I was *afraid* to let anyone else lead. I didn't trust they would have any real concern for my happiness.

I was not a mean person as the devil had tried to make me believe; I was just frightened. I had developed a complex system of ways to protect and take care of myself. I knew how to manipulate almost any situation to make sure no one took advantage of me. Yet I was tired of trying to protect and take care of myself all the time. I said I wanted someone to take care of me, but when anyone tried, I would not allow it. I wouldn't even let God take care of me. But His light set me free. Little by little He showed me things that opened my eyes and heart and allowed change to come.

All healing is a process that takes time, especially emotional healing. It is not all easy. Sometimes it is quite painful. Sometimes people have wounds that are still infected. The wound must be opened up and the infection taken out before they can heal properly. Only God knows how to do this and do it properly. Spending time with God in His Word and in His presence are the two main ingredients to being healed after being hurt.

HELP SOMEBODY ON PURPOSE

While you are letting God work in your own life, use your pain. Be aggressive in helping others. Don't wait to feel like it. Don't wait for some supernatural sign that God wants to use you. Just get started. God will use you in your world, with the people you are around in your daily life. What you make happen for somebody else. God will make happen for you. Every seed you sow into somebody else's life represents a harvest you will reap in your own life—especially in your pursuit to overcome approval addiction. Don't waste your pain. Let it be somebody else's gain!