

The Problem with Pain . . .

by Janet Wheeler

Pain. It's one of those weird things. Everyone experiences it. But very few of us know what to do with it. When something happens that hurts us, we may try to deny it . . . run from it . . . or use it as an excuse, but, unfortunately, none of these efforts can keep it from affecting our lives.

Measuring Pain

We are a society that thrives on comparisons. We are quick to measure whether something is bigger, smaller, older, newer, taller, shorter, stronger, or weaker. And when we see emotional or physical pain in our own lives or the lives of others, our natural instinct is to size it up as well, and assign it its "proper" place on the pain continuum. Our minds make determinations like "losing a baby at full term must be worse than losing one at six weeks"; "the death of a spouse must be worse than divorce"; or "living with an abusive father is far worse than growing up with a rageful alcoholic mother".

The danger in trying to categorize pain is that it keeps us from dealing with it appropriately. We have a tendency to either view our pain as insignificant and unworthy of any attention because "others have it so much worse than us" or we may begin to see ourselves as unique, and maybe even somehow superior, because of the degree of our anguish and suffering. Both thought processes keep us stuck—one because we think our problem is too small to need tending . . . the other because we can begin to believe that no one can possibly understand us enough to help us get through it. Either way it causes us to discount either our own pain or that of others.

Consider two different scenarios:

In the first someone stumbles on a toy and falls down the stairs. In the second, there is a huge multi-car accident where the sounds of screeching tires and shattering glass mix with images of flames and crumpled vehicles. In both cases the individuals involved suffer a broken leg. Whose pain is worse?

When all is said and done, both of them have to have their leg set; both of them end up on crutches; both experience the pain . . . and later the itching that goes along with bone fractures and casts. And ultimately, both must go through the same steps to healing.

The Great Equalizer

It really doesn't matter how we received the pain or whether it was administered through a traumatic violation to our person, or by seemingly "innocent" words or actions that happened behind middle-class doors and a little picket fence. If it negatively changed the way we think about ourselves or the world around us, it needs to be addressed.

To be honest, the pain, itself, is not even the real issue. As strange as it seems, pain is actually a gift from God. Without it we might not realize that damage has been done to us. We might not know that we have a wound that needs God's healing touch.



Even though, in a perfect world, we should never have been subjected to the negative attitudes, actions, and abuse that we experi-

enced, the offenses aren't nearly as important as what we were left with and what steps we are taking to 'get better'. When we focus on HOW we were wounded instead of tending to the wound itself . . . we can never get past it.

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For the most part, references to pain in the Bible speak about physical issues. Emotional hurt is more often termed "distress". Today, we normally use the word distress to describe something rather mild and maybe even self-fabricated. The dictionary, however, defines it as "anguish of body or mind", "a painful situation", "a state of being in danger or desperate need"—a clear description of deep emotional pain.

It is this emotional pain that sends up a red flag that we have been hurt. We need only look at what was done to us and feel that pain long enough to locate the wound that we received. When we become aware of the loss, fear, or distorted thinking that has been borne out of the incident, we can then hold that wounded area open to be cleansed and restored by a loving God. If we ignore the pain; stay focused on what was done to us; or hold onto our wound as an excuse for our own behaviors, the cycle of healing cannot be completed.

When we are unwilling or unable to acknowledge the many facets of a deep wound all at once, God uses his people to gently "bump" against our remaining injuries and bring new twinges of pain that remind us that we still have areas that have not been completely healed. Sometimes the healing process is long and exhausting, but only our willingness to persist will bring us to a place of true freedom and peace.

Courtesy of Life More Abundant Network, a Christ-centered ministry based in Bellingham, WA ministering to individuals and families struggling with compulsive sexual behaviors.

For more information about Life More Abundant Network, visit our website at www.lifemoreabundant.net