

MINISTRY IS OFTEN GOD'S REDEMPTION OF PAIN

Everyone living has experienced pain, some have experienced it on levels that I can only imagine. In my own life, I remember driving along the interstate and entertaining the question for the briefest of moments, "Is the pain I'm experiencing right now worse than the pain of just letting go of the steering wheel and closing my eyes to it all."

That dark place in my life was years ago now, and thankfully I had enough faith in eternity to keep driving that day. It's still tough to write it though because it reminds me of a very low place in my life where emotional pain was overwhelming me.

Someday I may write about the source of that pain, but God hasn't released me on that one yet. I just want you to know that I'm not writing from a place of distant idealism. I'm writing from a place of personal experience.

When we find ourselves overwhelmed with pain, there are choices we have to make. There is a process that we all go through, but ultimately we must answer the question, "How will I respond to this pain?"

You can internalize it. If you hold on to it and refuse to let it go, that pain will become your identity. You will allow your life to be defined by the wounds you've experienced. You'll view every new situation and experience through the jaded lenses of your own injuries. You'll become bitter, broken, and disconnected from the people in your life.

You can weaponize it. If you convert your pain to blame and begin projecting it onto others, your pain will become hostility. Your life will still be defined by the wounds you've experienced, but now you'll view people through the eyes of anger and hate. You'll blame the ones who caused the pain. You'll blame those who didn't stop it. You'll blame society, family, friends, and more than likely God.

Your pain will become the clenched fists that separate you from the very people who could lead you through the healing process.

You can release it. Eventually, the only healthy way to deal with pain is to let go of it. There are two key components to letting go of pain.

The first is forgiveness. We must forgive the one(s) we hold responsible for our pain. It might be ourselves, our parents, our spouse, our children, or even our God. Until we are willing to forgive, the pain of the past will be inseparable from our present day lives. This process can take a moment, or it can take years. The only way to increase our ability to forgive is to increase our capacity to love. If you can't forgive, ask God to give you a greater capacity to receive and give love.

The second is hope. I think that in order to let go of some pains in our lives there must be a hope that something good can come from the pain we've experienced. We have to believe that there is a greater purpose working in this world that can somehow turn our pain into something that plants seeds of life and hope in our future. The greatest place to find this hope is in the face of a sovereign and loving God.

Pain becomes somehow easier to let go of when I know that new life and hope can grow from the ashes of my experiences. When I believe that God can somehow take the wounds and injuries I've experienced and use them to not only make my own life better, but also the lives of others, I find it much easier to let it go.

Since forgiveness and hope are such significant elements of the healing process, we cultivate love and faith as we heal. Love and faith are the heart and hands of ministry. This is why we find that many of the people who love greatly and have great faith have experienced great pain.

Through the healing process we become the kind of person that God can use to impact the lives of others who are in pain or on a path leading to pain,

because through that healing process we take on the very core of Christ's identity.

Perhaps today, you're in a place of pain. Maybe you're internalizing it, or maybe you're weaponizing it. I'd like to encourage you to begin the healing process. Carry the pain to the foot of a cross and lay it down. Ask God to help you heal. He will, and you may find that your pain will become a light of hope for others. Your journey can become a priceless gift that you give to the world and possibly usher you directly into your greater purpose.

~ Ministry is often God's redemption of pain.

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