

# YOUR PAIN CAN BE YOUR VICTORY!



Pain is an unwelcome but important element of reality in this world. It is not only often helpful but is absolutely necessary to human health and well-being. How do you know to keep your hands away from an open flame? To flush a grain of sand from your eye? Any physician will tell you that a person whose nerves can't send pain signals will have serious problems in living a normal life.

Yet there is a serious error in some churches, Bible study

materials and personal belief systems when the naive claim is made that true faith delivers one from suffering. Really? Then I wonder why it didn't keep innocent Naboth from being stoned to death when wicked King Ahab decided to seize his land? How could Stephen have been murdered for bearing witness to Jesus? How could an assassin's bullet take the life of Martin Luther King? Why are babies born with defects or innocent children become victims of predators?

God allows suffering, but he is not the one who causes it and sends it into our lives. We experience pain because we live in physical bodies in a contingent world. We suffer emotional pain because we are sensitive to misfortune, loss, and injustice. And the most horrible wounds that come to our spirits are traceable to our own wrong choices — rebelling against God and doing horrible things to one another.

Faith is not a vaccine against these things. If it were, everyone would be a Christian for the worst possible reason! It would indulge our selfishness. It would exempt us from the tough things "those other people" have to face in this life. More correctly, faith is a relationship with God that provides the daily presence, strength, and encouragement of the Living Christ for whatever comes your way. It doesn't exempt you, but it does sustain you.

Accident, injury, family stress, divorce, job transfer, layoff — these are some of the high-stress events that can shake our poise.

The danger is that these things can send people into panic mode. She makes some totally irresponsible statement. He acts without thinking.

The same events can shake our theological footing. Long-resolved doubts resurface. She withdraws from Christian friends. He begins to blame God for what is happening in his life.

Am I just imagining that people react to life's sneak attacks in these ways? Haven't you seen it too? Is some form of it going on with you?

Imagine that your scared-for-his-life husband offered you as a

sexual playmate to the man he feared, that you were a teenager forced to spend years in jail because of someone's lie about you, that all your children have been killed in the same horrible storm, or that your racial identity caused some people to deny you your civil rights. These "hypothetical" episodes are the real biblical stories of Sarah, Joseph, Job, and Paul.

The people whose stories we know from the Bible are not figures in stained-glass windows. They were real flesh-and-blood people like you and me. They emerged from their crisis situations in victory mode. Yet they lost precious things and certainly bore scars from what had happened to them.

If we could look into heaven at those bitter junctures of life, though, our hearts would be reassured. Looking into God's face, we would discover there is no sweat on His upper lip. Even if we are shocked and disoriented, He is not. Oh, His lip would be quivering with compassion for our pain, but He is sovereign over His universe. Nothing catches Him by surprise, and He knows precisely how to get His wounded children through their most harrowing life crises.

The sounds of a howling mob, a whip ripping into bare flesh, and a hammer driving nails into hands and feet were overwhelming sounds – until the tomb was found empty. The same power that raised Him then sustains us now.

So, when you feel you are about to lose it, visualize God's upper lip. Trust His promises. Know you are not alone. Wait for victory.

Are miracles real? Does God still deliver people from their suffering by clear and direct intervention? Certainly. But miracles are by definition rare. So I'm suspicious of the person who offers to make the uncommon and infrequent into on-demand events.

The answer Paul was given is surely the more typical reply to suffering people: "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness" (II Corinthians 12:9). Instant peace and easy answers are not God's promise to you. His pledge is that you will never be unloved and alone.

Pray for pain to be a bridge rather than a barrier for you. Never

**feel obliged to deny its reality or menace. But trust God to provide sufficient grace for each day. Give him the chance to turn Satan's attempt to destroy your faith into a solid spiritual victory.**