

# PAIN

By Isaac Smythia

Exquisite pain! That's the name I gave to what I experienced for the first 12 hours following my ten-foot fall off a ladder onto a hard, polished stone floor in Uruguay, South America. The bones in both of my heels shattered under the direct weight of my falling body. It was like nothing that I had experienced before or since, and it began a six-month journey that saw me medevacked back to the States for the insertion of 10 screws and a plate into each of my heels. I was wheelchair-bound while my heels knit themselves together so that I could walk again.

I believe in the healing power that comes from faith in the name of Jesus Christ. My broken wrist was healed when I was 17. I had fallen from a rope swing onto my right wrist on a Saturday evening. Our family doctor set my wrist and wrapped it in a splint until the swelling went down enough to put it in a cast. But during the following Sunday evening youth service, a prophetic word declared that God had healed me. I removed the splint and believed God. The doctor talked to my mother about forcing me to get the cast, but Mom stood with me in faith. For the past 50+ years, I have not had a single problem with my wrist.

However, there is a difference between believing God for healing and denying the harsh reality of pain. Pain is God's engine light for our bodies and hearts. Your car runs low on oil, and the check engine light comes on. Your engine overheats, and the needle moves into the red zone, or a light pops on your dash. Regardless of the indicator, the message is the same: something is wrong, and you need to take action.

Look at what happens when you feel no pain. The horrible New Testament plague of leprosy is treatable now. 180,000 – 250,000 people around the world today have what is now known as Hansen's disease. It affects

the skin and nerves. If left untreated, patients lose the sense of pain in their limbs. Many are unaware that the stove they touch is searingly hot or fail to notice the serious damage to their body from a knife cut. The results can be devastating, loss of noses, ears, fingers, even arms and legs.

Pain cannot be long ignored. A few months after getting back on my feet from surgery, I took my family to Niagara Falls. We walked all over the area, down a walkway that took us under a part of the falls and to some of the most spectacular vistas I have ever seen. I felt some discomfort but didn't want to ruin the time for my wife and kids, so I kept going. Discomfort turned into pain, and the pain grew worse. But I decided to just ignore it. A big mistake! I had not yet learned to listen to my pain, and as a result spent the following two days on the couch, unable to walk.

The same is true for emotional pain. The pain of losing a loved one, rejection, or deep humiliation is part of being human. The warning light that pops on in your soul is just as important as any kind of physical pain.

Several years before my fall, I officiated my mother's funeral, stuffing my own grief to minister to my family and friends gathered at my home church. I thought that I had handled everything pretty well. Two childhood friends made commitments to Jesus Christ because of "Aunt Dot's" lifelong testimony. One is a pastor today. However, a few weeks later, I did the funeral for a long-suffering saint in the church we pastored at the time. Her passing was expected, and the service was a time of memories, tears, and smiles. I was not expecting to start blubbering at the end of the service while standing at the foot of the casket as family and friends passed by. I will never forget the strange look from the deceased woman's daughter as she watched

me weep. Conducting that funeral unexpectedly tapped into the deluge of feelings I had dammed up inside me weeks before. You can ignore pain for only so long.

Pain is a strict schoolmaster. It doesn't say, "You've suffered enough for today. I will let you get a good night's rest." Pain has no mercy. Its primary task is to motivate you to look for relief. I worked for ten years with Uruguayan drug addicts in our Teen Challenge, a drug rehabilitation program. Some came through the doors but soon left to return to drugs and life on the streets. But many others stayed and experienced incredible miracles in their lives. They were the ones who decided to make difficult but transformative changes in Christ to finally leave drugs. Time after time, I watched that transformation come only after those addicts could no longer endure the pain of their addiction.

Pain instructs. It teaches endurance and patience. Pain teaches humility of spirit and mind. That humility comes from realizing your weakness in the face of pain. Pain gives insight as you look for meaning in situations and places that you might never have considered before. Pain develops your character. Pain teaches dependence. I often think of Paul's words of consolation in Romans.

*We also boast in tribulation, knowing that tribulation produces patience, patience produces character, and character produces hope. And hope does not disappoint because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.*  
(Romans 5:3-5)

Paul documented his own struggle with pain.

*... a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me, lest I be exalted above measure. I asked the Lord three times that this thing might depart from me. But He said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness." Therefore, most gladly I will boast in my weaknesses, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. So, I take pleasure in weaknesses, in reproaches, in hardships, in persecutions, and in distresses for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong. (2 Corinthians 12:7-10)*

We don't know exactly what Paul's thorn was. Some experts say that it was a literal messenger of Satan in the form of someone who made his life miserable. Others believe that it may have been an eye problem that he made reference to in Galatians 4:15. All we know for sure is that it was a torment to him. More importantly, however, it led Paul to depend on Christ's strength in his own weakness.

Author Hannah Hurnard penned the Christian classic *Hinds Feet on High Places* many years ago. I first read the book when I was in college, long before my foot problems. The book planted a seed in me that has influenced my walk with the Lord. I have recommended it to several of the people that I have counseled. It's an allegory about Much Afraid and her journey to the Chief Shepherd's high places. Because of her crippled feet, she was given two companions named Sorrow and Suffering to help her. At each stop along her difficult path of obedience, she collected a stone from the ground as a remembrance of the lesson she had learned. At the end of her journey Much Afraid emptied her bag of

memory stones to discover each had become a beautiful jewel. Each trial, each pain acquired great value, great meaning.

Pain can have meaning if we look to the Lord to give it purpose. I have often been asked for my thoughts as to why I fell and shattered my heels. I chuckle and say there are three possible reasons. “First possibility: God decided to give me a Job-like experience that would help me be more like Jesus. Second possibility: It was a Satanic attack designed to destroy or damage me as much as possible”. Then I pause. “Of course, it could have simply been human stupidity that caused me to use the wrong ladder on a slick floor!”

I can laugh now because the why doesn't really matter to me so much. I thank the Lord for this amazing path that I have walked with Him, sometimes limping. If it was an attack, I rejoice that what the enemy intended for my harm has brought glory to the Lord and transformed me more into the image of Christ. And to cover any lack of wisdom on my part, I am especially careful around ladders nowadays!

I go forward for prayer for healing when opportunities come along. I know God is more than able to touch my body and remove the twenty screws and two plates I have lived with for twenty-plus years. But until God heals me on earth or in heaven ... His grace is sufficient for me. His strength is made perfect in my weakness.

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