

How To Triumph Over Pain

On Sunday, we began a new sermon series called “Reflections on the Cross.” For the next five weeks, we’ll consider what we can learn from Jesus’ experience on the cross that can help us in our own times of stress and distress.

1. Warm up question. On the cross Jesus experienced enormous physical pain. In your own life, when have you experienced the most physical pain?
2. For the next five weeks, we will be focusing on a single passage that tells a portion of the story of the cross. Our goal is to notice details in the story that are often overlooked, yet contain great insights. In worship each week, we’ll chant the passage. For tonight, let’s simply read it, but do so slowly, noticing each word. Read Matthew 27:31-44.
 - a. Imagine yourself in Jesus’ place. You’ve been marched to a hill outside the gates of the city to be crucified. You know what’s coming – six-inch spikes will be driven through your wrists and ankles, then you’ll be hung up in the air, wracked with pain, struggling to breathe, until your body gives out. If you are there, about to be nailed to a cross, what are you thinking and feeling? What do you think Jesus was thinking and feeling?
 - b. On top of the physical pain, Jesus also experienced great emotional pain. Judas betrayed him. At his arrest, all the disciples fled. During his trial, Peter denied knowing him. Which of these points of emotional pain do you think weighed most heavily on Jesus – and why?
 - c. From the cross, Jesus cried out, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” Previously, Jesus had predicted that his crucifixion was inevitable. So why do you think he felt so godforsaken when it actually happened? Have you ever felt godforsaken? If so, how would you describe that pain?
 - d. What’s the deepest emotional pain you’ve ever experienced?
3. On Sunday we focused on the detail found in verses 33-34. “When they came to the place called Golgotha . . . , they offered Jesus wine to drink, mixed with gall. But when he tasted it, he would not drink it.” “Gall” means a bitter substance. Mark’s Gospel tells us that the bitter substance was myrrh (Mark 15:23), which was used in ancient times to reduce swelling and numb pain. In Jewish culture, convicted criminals were sometimes offered wine mixed with myrrh before Roman crucifixion to help with pain. But Jesus refused to wine and myrrh. From this, Jeff drew the first of three insights for triumphing over pain. ***Step 1: We must face our pain and feel it, rather than trying to suppress or avoid it.***
 - a. Some people try to avoid pain by stuffing it deep inside, distracting themselves, and ignoring it. Other people try to avoid pain by numbing themselves with

alcohol, drugs, sex, spending, or food. When you face pain, what method of avoidance are you most likely to be tempted to embrace? Does it help?

- b. I John 4:4 says, “Greater is the One that is in you than the one that is in the world.” Philippians 4:13 says, “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.” In the context of coping with pain, what do these verses say to you?
 - c. Jeff invited us to envision pain as a roaring monster standing over us bearing its teeth. Instead of running or cowering, he challenged us to summon the courage to look the pain in the eye, as Jesus did. After the death of his wife, child, and mother, Jerry Sittser’s sister told him, “The quickest way to reach the sun is not to go west, but to head east, to move fully into the darkness until you reach the sunrise.” Based on her advice, Jerry says, “I decided at that point to walk into the darkness rather than try to outrun it, to let my experience of loss take me on a journey wherever it would lead, and to allow myself to be transformed by my suffering rather than to think I could somehow avoid it.” Why is it so important that we allow ourselves to face and feel our pain? What does it look like to face our pain – what are some things we can do to face it?
4. ***Step 2: Let yourself learn from your pain and be transformed by it.*** Again and again, the Bible teaches that when we face our pain, rather than running from it, God can help us extract something good from it.
- a. Read II Corinthians 4:7-18. Here Paul describes his own experience with pain. Look again at verses 17-18, where Paul states his conclusion. What do you think he means? Put it in your own words.
 - b. Read Romans 8:28. What do you think it means? Put it in your own words.
 - c. Think about your greatest point of pain in life thus far. What did you learn from it? How did it change you for the better?
5. ***Step 3: Once you’ve processed your pain, don’t get stuck; let it go and move on.***
- a. Jeff said, “Let your pain transform you, but not define you.” What’s the difference?
 - b. When Grace Dennis was diagnosed with terminal cancer, she invited her friends to dinner and enjoyed a great meal. When asked how she could eat at a time like that, Grace said, “If you grieve over everything that happens in life, you’ll never get anything else done.” What do you think she meant?
 - c. Jeff also told the true story of an Iowa farmer who lost his arm to his picker. After his physical and emotional recovery, the farmer was asked how he could be so serene about his tragedy. He said, “One day I just came out here [to where the picker still sat], got down on my knees, and made peace with God and the picker.” In your own experience, what’s the best way to make peace and move on? On a practical level, what kinds of things have helped you let go?