

Mark Batterson: How This Famous Spurgeon Quote Inspired Me to 'Kiss the Wave'

I have a friend who has had a migraine for five years. Moments of relief are few and far between. The pain became so debilitating that he eventually had to resign from the church he was pastoring. He's been to countless specialists. He's tried a wide variety of treatment plans. Nothing seems to help much or for long.

I asked him how he's managed the pain and the emotions that go with it. He said, "I've learned to kiss the wave." I must have given him a quizzical look, so my friend explained. He was quoting Charles Spurgeon: "I have learned to kiss the wave that throws me against the Rock of Ages."

It's a powerful sentence all by itself, but the backstory makes it even more meaningful. Before I unpack the whole story, let me say something point blank. Kissing the wave doesn't mean we don't experience storms or get seasick during them. The good news? There is a God who can rebuke the wind and the waves with these words: "Peace, be still." But before you rebuke the storm, you need to accept it. You can't move past the pain if you ignore it or hide it or deny it.

A few years ago, Lora and I found ourselves thrown against the Rock of Ages. Lora was diagnosed with breast cancer. If you've had cancer or have a loved one who has, you know that a thousand questions fire across your synapses. *What stage is it? How do we treat it? What is the prognosis?* Fortunately, we caught it early, and Lora is better than ever.

Can I brag on my wife? I don't think I've ever been prouder of

her. Lora kissed the wave. How? She participated in her own healing process by making some courageous changes. She became intentional about everything she put in her body and in her mind. Along with changing our diet, we did our best to eliminate toxins in our environment. Yes, that includes people. Lora started practicing meditation more regularly. We even started frequenting comedy clubs. Why? Laughter “doeth good like a medicine.”

When you get cancer, denying the diagnosis does no good. If you don't own it, it will own you. Kissing the wave is confessing what's wrong—in this case, cancer. But it's also professing what's right—God's healing power. Remember my miraculous healing from asthma? It began with a *brave prayer*. For Lora, the healing process began with a *brave question* she stumbled across while reading a poem about illness:

What have you come to teach me?

When we find ourselves in difficult situations, we get so focused on getting out of them that we fail to get anything out of them. Then we wonder why we find ourselves in the same situation all over again. There is nothing wrong with asking God to change your circumstances, but His primary objective is changing *you*. The circumstances you're asking God to change may be the very circumstances He is using to change you.

In the words of John Piper, “Don't waste your cancer.” You can fill in the blank with whatever challenge you face. Don't waste it! Maybe it has come to teach you a lesson that could not be learned any other way! Kissing the wave starts with a brave question: *What have you come to teach me?*

You don't need to sabotage yourself—that's for sure. Suffering will find you soon enough. When it does, you must recognize that it has the power to enrich your life in a way that nothing else can. If you find yourself in a season of suffering, that is a difficult sentence to read. I acknowledge

that, and I don't stand in judgment over others, because I don't stand in their shoes. I don't pretend to know the trauma you've endured. I do know this: *everyone is fighting a battle we know nothing about.*

Lora and I have experienced our fair share of grief and pain and disappointment. I'm not sure where we rank on the bell curve, especially compared with those who have experienced injustice or aren't sure where their next meals are coming from. Like our memories, suffering is subjective. We have some long-lasting regrets, like every parent I know. We have deep wells of sadness, like every person I know. We have walked through the valley of the shadow of death more than once, and we have the emotional scars to prove it. We've also seen God turn some of our toughest tests into our most treasured testimonies. We wouldn't want to live those seasons all over again, but we wouldn't trade them for anything in the world. Every *testimony* starts with *test*. Pass the test, and you get a testimony. {eoa}

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Is Your Pain Actually a Gift From God?

To call pain a gift seems like an oxymoron, I know.

But without pain, we would repeatedly reinjure ourselves in the same ways. Without pain we would simply maintain the status quo. Without pain we would ignore problems that can kill us.

In fact, pain saved my life on July 23, 2000. I woke up that Sunday morning with intense pain in my abdomen, but I ignored it. I tried to preach a sermon that Sunday, but it became the only sermon I didn't finish. Five minutes into it I was doubled over in pain.

I ended up in the emergency room at Washington Hospital Center, where an MRI revealed ruptured intestines. I was immediately wheeled into surgery, where I could have, and perhaps should have, died. And I certainly would have died if it weren't for the intense pain I could not ignore.

I was on a respirator for two days, fighting for my life. I lost 25 pounds in seven days. Trust me, there are better ways to lose weight! And the net result is a foot-long scar that bisects my abdomen from top to bottom.

Sometimes the greatest joy follows the worst pain, as mothers of newborns can attest. Few people inflict more pain on themselves than athletes, but the pain is forgotten in the thrill of victory.

Would I want to experience another brush with death like that? Not on my life! But I wouldn't trade it for anything in the

world. I don't take a single day for granted. And the presence of God during those difficult days was as real as anything I've ever felt. It's a presence that is felt and a voice that is heard most clearly during pain.

Remember Joseph in the Old Testament? He had zero emotional intelligence as a teenager, which isn't entirely uncommon. But 13 years of suffering earned him a graduate degree in empathy. And it was one act of empathy—noticing a dejected look on the face of a fellow prisoner—that eventually led to saving two nations.

–Pain can be a professor of theology.

–Pain can be a marriage counselor.

–Pain can be a life coach.

Nothing gets our full attention like pain. It breaks down false idols and purifies false motives. It reveals where we need to heal and where we need to grow. It refocuses priorities like nothing else. And pain is part and parcel of God's sanctification process in our lives. {eoa}

Mark Batterson serves as lead pastor of National Community Church in Washington, D.C. NCC also owns and operates Ebenezers Coffeehouse, The Miracle Theatre and the DC Dream Center. Mark holds a doctor of ministry degree from Regent University and is the New York Times' bestselling author of 17 books, including *The Circle Maker*, *Chase the Lion* and *Whisper*. Mark and his wife, Lora, have three children and live on Capitol Hill.

For the original article, visit .

Mark Batterson: How to Speak With God

What does it mean to speak to God—and to hear Him communicate back? This is a question that continues to be discussed and debated in religious and secular circles alike, especially in an era in which atheists and skeptics are increasingly vocal about their view that “listening to God” is problematic or, at the least, nonsensical.

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Mark Batterson, pastor of National Community Church in Washington, D.C., and author of *Whisper: How to Hear the Voice of God*, recently explained this dynamic during an appearance on ‘s “Pure Talk,” revealing how he believes God communicates with humans.

“There is a God who speaks, and the truth is He’s speaking all the time ... but I think God most often speaks in a whisper,” Batterson said. “1 Kings 19 calls it ‘that still, small voice’ and I have a theory. My theory is this: Yes, God has an outside voice—He can make it thunder. But He usually speaks in a whisper.”

The preacher said that God wants people to be close to Him and to “hear His heart as well as His voice”—and that God is big enough to speak to each and every person. The ways in which the Lord speaks might vary, with Batterson arguing that “each one of us can hear Him uniquely.”

“He has revealed himself through the pages of Scripture,” Batterson said. “He also speaks through desires, and doors,

and dreams, and people and promptings—and through pain.”

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Critics question how this process of speaking with God works, and believers, too, often have many questions about how it plays out. Batterson said that learning to hear God’s voice is like “learning a language.” It’s a process that takes effort, devotion—and time.

“It’s going to take time to really discern that voice that speaks through desire, the voice that opens and closes doors, the voice that speaks through dreams,” he said. “If we don’t listen to everything that the spirit of God has to say, eventually we won’t hear anything.”

Batterson’s point was that it’s essential to listen to everything the Lord says, including the “convicting voice” that seeks to correct people’s hearts and minds. He added that it is in people’s pain, too, that God sometimes speaks.

“Sometimes, it’s in our pain that we discover a God who comforts, a God who gets us through those difficult times,” Batterson said. “When you open your Bible, God opens his mouth. What’s unique about the Bible is we don’t just read it, it reads us.”

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The preacher emphasized the importance of opening the Bible regularly as an effort to better understand how to communicate with God. *Duck Dynasty* star Missy Robertson agreed, explaining the importance of routinely reading scripture.

“The more time we spend in the Word, we understand our God even more and how He works,” she said.

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