

6 Reasons Why We Try to Avoid Emotional Pain

You may already start by avoiding this article, who knows? But today, it seems there is a race to avoid pain like never before.

People's lives are busier, packed with constant activity. We crowd our lives with achievement-driven behaviors or simply immerse ourselves in distractions to avoid anything that makes us feel emotional pain.

Meanwhile, we forget that pain is an indicator. It is a signal that something needs to be addressed. Pain gives your heart an invitation to let God and healthy relationships be a conduit for further health and healing. But we have become professionals at avoiding pain, so we no longer discover the healing that addressing our pain can bring.

Many Christ followers don't even know how to talk about pain. We speak from victory so much, but we get incredibly uncomfortable talking through issues that don't get solved in one quick statement. It angers me when I see believers going through some genuine pain only to have other people, with little ability to stop and let compassion settle in, try to comfort them through clichés, quick Scriptures and a fast pep talk.

In my work helping people, I see pain every day. The biggest thread that contributes to where many are in life is that pain was not properly addressed a long time ago. Therefore, people don't get help until the pain is pulsating to loud, they cannot function or their bodies are breaking down.

One of the reasons I am able to help people going through pain is that I had to be willing to face my own pain. If you know me, you can witness that I never wear it on my sleeve, but I

have come to learn that addressing pain cannot be ignored. Some will spiritualize their denial or ignoring of pain. Others become victims. I choose to be an overcomer. But sometimes in overcoming, you have to face that pain.

So why do we avoid pain? Here are some reasons I believe we do:

1. We have been trained that pain is bad. So many feel that admitting to pain means admitting to weakness and, therefore, failure. There's a subtle undercurrent in our culture where people either deny their pain or go into victim. There's very little ground for recognizing that it is OK to be in pain and process through it. There are gold nuggets of power found when someone goes through the valley. In overcoming, we find new mountaintops we never would have climbed if pain was not faced.

2. We fear facing pain. I think this tops the list. We fear facing the pain, either because we do not think we can handle it or we dread what it may produce.

3. We hate vulnerability. We love to scream about our successes, but we hide our weaknesses and vulnerabilities like the plague. Some people I have worked with shared about times they tried to be vulnerable, only to be shamed or demeaned by the responses of people around them. They made vows never to share again. The pain of being mistreated when you become vulnerable can be excruciating.

I believe one of the greatest calls for believing communities is that we become safe places for people to process their pain. I am not advocating a victim culture. I am calling for maturity—an ability to process through pain—while leading people to a redemptive picture. This takes authentic relationship, a slower pace and an understanding heart. Unless shame is out, vulnerability will not occur.

The moment people feel judged, they hide to avoid

vulnerability. Many pastors and leaders I have helped cannot process their healing fully because their church culture does not allow them to. They cannot handle hearing their leaders are going through pain and struggle.

4. We run to comfort. If left to itself, the body will run away from pain and toward comfort in every situation. We cannot allow this to infiltrate our spiritual walk, because God's No. 1 goal for us is not our comfort. In fact, most of our transformation involves going through an uncomfortable process. But we have subtly believed that if God is in something, than it should come easy. We have been so blessed as a nation we don't value the hardships that it takes to lead to breakthroughs. Yet some of the most influential people on the planet have processed through some deep pain.

5. Some things in life are "working for you." Give someone a well-paying job and some achievements, and they will often ignore their pain for a while. The money, fame and perceive successes won't heal the pain, but mask it long enough to keep the person from addressing the pain. When life seems to be "working," there is no need to address the issues of the heart. Sit down for coffee with this person and ask, "So how is your heart doing these days?" They won't have any idea how to respond.

6. We don't know what to do with pain. We replicate what we've witnessed and what we have been taught. So many of us have witnessed our parents not dealing with their pain, nor did they teach us how to. I find our world is crying out for help, but because they have not been taught how to address and process their pain, they avoid dealing with it. Its easy to shove down pain and keep on going for a while. But until we have some safe places where we can be taught how to process through pain, we will keep seeing the same results.

I do not think the answer to this is that we have more emotional healing centers established, although this could

help. I think the church body needs to be more equipped to process the pain and challenges of life in a deeper way so that we can help minister to one another in redemptive ways.

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