

# 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}

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