

Why Getting Rid of Your Pain Won't Fix Your Problem

Tomorrow, I begin another round of tests, which will culminate in heart-valve repair surgery. That is not uncommon. What is uncommon is the freedom we Christians have from the fear in pain.

Are there not many pains we are accustomed to that don't hurt as badly as they once did? It doesn't have to mean that your nerves are dulling. The fact is, when we have a pain for the first time, it has a companion: fear of the unknown. Once we are used to it, it doesn't hurt so bad because the fearsome threat in that pain is gone.

You know what puzzles me? There is only one place in Scripture that the tree of the knowledge of good and evil is mentioned. It was the one not to eat—that's important, right? So why isn't it ever referenced again, or explained? Like children who say the darndest things, we can't say, "I don't know." We have to at least make up an answer.

Here's my theory. Prior to their knowledge of good and evil, our first parents were naked and unashamed, even walking with God in the garden. But immediately upon eating it, they knew they were naked. So far, not fatal—except that they began perceiving threats against their well-being. Nakedness was the basis of a threat. The sound of God walking was a threat. Being punished was a threat. They became aware of potential harm to themselves. This is the message that sneaks in on our pains.

When I can have a pain without identifying it as a threat to my well-being, then the peace of God guards my heart and mind in Christ Jesus (Phil. 4:5-6). The battle isn't whether we have pain or not. There is no avoiding pain in this mortal

coil; such a battle would be a losing one. The real warfare is whether we believe the message that pain tries to bring us: I am threatened. Such a message is the source of the fear in a pain.

Fast forward to Jesus' Last Supper teaching in John 16:32-33:

"Listen, the hour is coming. Yes, it has now come that you will be scattered, each to his own home, and will leave Me alone. Yet I am not alone, for the Father is with Me.

"I have told you these things so that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But be of good cheer. I have overcome the world."

Jesus talks to them as if they have no shame for deserting Him. In fact, He says why He told them what they would do: "so that in Me you may have peace." Not in being shame-free, not in avoiding sin, not in knowing the Scripture, not in being associated with Jesus, but in Him. He is our peace.

Likewise, your peace and mine is not in being pain-free. It is in Him. We can paraphrase His confidence as our own: I am not alone, for Jesus is with me. {eoa}

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