

Your Pain Can Become Your Beauty—Here's How the Apostle Paul Did It

We've all seen them—people who look like they've had a hard life. Pain and disappointment weigh so heavily upon them that they've become hated friends that never leave. Weary ones dragging their feet; their rough edges cutting through the atmosphere, announcing to the world that life has dealt them a bad hand.

Then there are the others. The ones who have also felt the pain and disappointment that tried to shackle their souls, but instead they embraced grace. Though they may walk with a limp, they seem taller than others. As if their scars have made them beautiful. As if they've discovered a secret they proudly dug through the dung for. And they're willing to share. Humbly aware of the great strength alive within them. This is the power God has given each of us to use the ashes of defeat as rich, fertile soil for our souls.

Wisdom and grace are reaching; beckoning us to refuse the right to be angry, bitter and vindictive. To grasp with shaking hands ways that are higher than our own. To believe with every ounce of our being that God is good and able to not only restore but create anew. To not just acknowledge pain, but to stand on its head and use it as a launching pad for our most glorious leap into freedom, forgiveness and confidence. To be those who live with authentic vulnerability, offering hope, creating inspiration and encouraging others not to be afraid of their pain, because from it, we discover the Lord's copious faithfulness.

"I don't depend on my own strength to accomplish this; however I do have one compelling focus: I forget all of the past as I

fasten my heart to the future instead. I run straight for the divine invitation of reaching the heavenly goal and gaining the victory-prize through the anointing of Jesus” (Phil. 3:13-14, The Passion Translation).

Gretchen Rodriguez recently co-authored *Prayers on Fire 365 Days Praying the Psalms* and *The Divine Romance: 365 Days Meditating on the Song of Songs* with *Brian Simmons*. Their newest devotional, *Ever-Present Love: 365 Days Discovering Jesus in the Gospels* will be released September, 2018. (All three books published by BroadStreet Publishing.) She is a writer, dancer and ballet teacher. Her heart burns with one main message: *Intimacy with Jesus and discovering the reality of His presence*. She and her husband invested nine years as missionaries in Puerto Rico, along with their three daughters, and now make California, their home.

You can find Gretchen here: