

Ask About Sin, part 3 of Dealing with Suffering
February 25, 2001

Let me tell you about a man. He used to live at a special hospital. He wore special shoes made just for him. The man needed special shoes because he did not have any toes. No, he was not a victim of birth defects. Nor did he lose his toes in an accident or in war. He contracted a disease that affected the skin and nerves. Because of this disease, he lost feeling in his toes. And that is a very dangerous condition to be in.

When we have a sore toe, we are very careful how we walk. We walk slowly, with caution, being careful not to stub it or bump it into furniture. We are careful around other people, especially small children who move quickly without looking where they are stepping.

But, if you could not feel that blister or on your toe, or that in-grown toenail, you would walk along as carefree as ever. All the while the sore would become worse. The sore might become infected. And if infection is not stopped, the wound can develop gangrene. Gangrene is a condition where the skin and other tissues die and rot. You can see pictures on the internet and they are not pretty. If not stopped gangrene can spread to the rest of the body. So the rotten toe needs to be cut off to arrest the rot from spreading to the foot.

This is what happened to the man in that hospital. When the disease killed the nerves in his toes, he no longer felt the warnings of pain. So his toes continued to get injured without his being aware of it. Eventually his toes developed gangrene and had to be surgically removed.

The man, and all the others at that hospital had **Hansen's Disease**, commonly known as leprosy. A nurse would have to check this man's feet every day for new blisters or sores which might easily become infected.

Today there is a cure for Hansen's disease. That hospital is now closed as a hospital and is instead a museum to this disease.

We may not like pain, but pain is very important to our physical well being. Pain warns us. Pain trains us. Pain teaches us. Pain teaches us not to grab a rose bush with our bare hand. Pain teaches us not to hammer wildly, a nail that we hold with our other hand. Pain teaches us not to slide across a wooden floor in our socks. My brother and I did a lot of that growing up and paid for it with splinters in our feet. My parents would have to take a needle and dig out the splinter. Oh the memories I have of that.

Pain teaches us not to rake leaves for very long without gloves on. Pain teaches us not to get the dish water or bath water too hot. Pain teaches us not to spend too long out in the sun without protection.

God designed our bodies with nerve cells all over so that we could feel physical pain. He designed our minds and hearts to feel emotional pain. God designed us to feel pain and suffering. This is the plan of God. This shows the love of God. Pain helps protect us. God always does what is best for us. Pain is a necessary part of accomplishing what is best for us.

Now, the lessons from pain I have pointed out are just everyday lessons. Washing dishes, raking leaves, and playing out in the sun are all just normal lessons of life. Those are lessons that are common to all people. But as Christians we have an added dimension of life. We have a relationship with God.

God sometimes uses pain as discipline, to train us in obedience.

God uses pain to say, "Hey, stop sinning!" This use of pain and suffering is one of the ways God accomplishes His will in us. This experience of pain is the discipline of God. And please, don't hear discipline as punishment. Instead, hear it as training. God doesn't want to hurt you, but to help you. Because God loves you, he wants to help you make right choices. Today's message may appear harsh if you think of God as a stern judge. But if you believe, as the Bible presents, that God loves you tenderly then hear today's message with that in mind.

This morning, we're going to look at several examples of this in the Bible. The first one comes from the history of Israel. As the Israelites began life in the land of Canaan they prospered. God gave them many children, large flocks of animals, abundant crops of grain, and protected them from their enemies.

This is what God agreed to do in His covenant with the Israelites. They agreed to worship and serve Yahweh, their God exclusively. However, in addition to the promises of blessing God had made them, he made promises of discipline if they did not keep the covenant.

As the Israelites prospered they became lax in their obedience to God.

Judges 3:7 (NIV) The Israelites did evil in the eyes of the LORD; they forgot the LORD (Yahweh) their God and served the Baals and the Asherahs (gods of the Canaanites).

They did not keep their end of the covenant. They forgot about Yahweh, who rescued them from Egypt. They were worshipping the gods of the Canaanites.

Judges 3:8 (NIV) The anger of the LORD burned against Israel so that he sold them into the hands of Cushan-Rishathaim king of Aram Naharaim, to whom the Israelites were subject for eight years.

So God responded to their disobedience just as he had promised. God stopped protecting them from their enemies. God used their enemies to discipline them, to call them to confess and repent of their sin.

Let's see what happened next.

Judges 3:9 (NIV) But when they cried out to the LORD, he raised up for them a deliverer, Othniel son of Kenaz, Caleb's younger brother, who saved them.

After awhile of being subject to their enemies, they would remember the promises of Yahweh, their God, and call out to him for help. And He would raise up someone to lead them in victory against their foes. This time he raised up a man named Othniel.

Judges 3:10-11 (NIV) The Spirit of the LORD came upon him, so that he became Israel's judge and went to war. The LORD gave Cushan-Rishathaim king of Aram into the hands of Othniel, who overpowered him. So the land had peace for forty years, until Othniel son of Kenaz died.

In this new time of peace and prosperity, they served Yahweh for awhile, but eventually became lax once again in their obedience to Him. This pattern repeated itself over and over again. You can read this history in the book of Judges.

We face the dangers of prosperity too. By world standards we are very prosperous. In most of the world, all of us are doing very well financially. We are comfortable. We are prosperous. We enjoy luxuries like coffee and dessert any time we want. And in our prosperity we are in danger of becoming lax in our faith and obedience to Jesus. We must guard every day against this by maintaining our humility before God in prayer. God blesses the humble but opposes the proud.

Let us turn now to a New Testament example of God disciplining His people. We are looking at the letter of 1 Corinthians. There were many problems in the church in the city of Corinth as you will see when you read the whole letter.

One of the problems concerned their practice of the Lord's Supper. Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper to be a special act of worship within the gathered church. Unfortunately the church in Corinth was not practicing the Lord's Supper correctly.

Paul does not give us all the details of what they were doing wrong. We have to infer from what he does say and from other ancient sources what their sin was.

Jesus had introduced the Lord's Supper in the Jewish Passover meal the night before he died on the cross. So it became the practice of many early churches to have a fellowship meal together and observe the Lord's Supper at the end of the meal. The fellowship meal would be a potluck meal where everyone brought something and it was all shared among everyone.

Evidently what was happening at Corinth is that the meal was not a shared meal. The richer members were feasting and the poorer members had not much of anything to eat. In addition, those who arrived first went ahead and ate and did not wait for the rest to arrive. There was no sense of church, no sense of fellowship. They were ignoring the relationship to each other that Jesus wanted when he created the church. They were acting selfishly and independent of each other.

In addition, the meal became more of a feasting and drinking party for some who were getting drunk. They were not treating the Lord's Supper as an act of worship. There was no reverence, no humility before God.

Paul rebukes them for this practice and calls them to repent. With that background, let's read part of Paul's letter.

1 Corinthians 11:17-22 In the following directives I have no praise for you, for your meetings do more harm than good... When you come together, it is not the Lord's Supper you eat, for as you eat, each of you goes ahead without waiting for

anybody else. One remains hungry, another gets drunk. Don't you have homes to eat and drink in? Or do you despise the church of God and humiliate those who have nothing?

Because of this great sin, God disciplined the guilty. Look further in the text.

1 Corinthians 11:29-32 For anyone who eats and drinks without recognizing the body of the Lord (the church) eats and drinks judgment on himself. That is why many among you are weak and sick, and a number of you have fallen asleep (died). But if we judged ourselves, we would not come under judgment (by the Lord). When we are judged by the Lord, we are being disciplined so that we will not be condemned with the world.

God disciplined the members of this church. Some became sick. Others God simply removed by death. They were causing too much harm in the church and had to be stopped.

God sometimes uses pain as discipline, to train us in obedience. Look at several passages with me that states this.

Deuteronomy 8:5 Know then in your heart that as a man disciplines his son, so the Lord your God disciplines you.

Revelation 3:19 Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest, and repent.

God sometimes uses pain as discipline, to train us in obedience. And there are two kinds of consequences you may suffer.

Two Kinds of Consequences = The first are natural or direct consequences.

These are a natural result of your sin. Let me give you an example. Let us say there is a rule in your home not to play ball in the house. If you play ball in the house and a lamp gets broken, the broken lamp is a natural or direct consequence of your playing ball in the house.

If you smoke for many decades, you may develop lung cancer. That is a natural consequence of your smoking. If you make a habit of lying, people will lose respect for you and will distrust you. This is a natural consequence of your lying.

Natural consequences are the natural or direct results of your sin. And sometimes, we suffer the natural consequences of someone else's sin, someone close to us. Parents often suffer along with their children in the natural consequences of their children's acts.

The second type of consequences are logical consequences.

These are consequences that someone in authority imposes upon you. They are added to any natural consequences that may exist for your sin.

Let's go back to our example. If you play ball in the house and lamp breaks, that is a natural consequence of your sin. Then on top of that consequence, your parents may

add other consequences. They may put you on restriction, may make you clean up the broken lamp, and make you work to pay for the purchase of a replacement lamp. These are three logical consequences for your sin.

So your physical pain, emotional suffering, or mental anguish may be a natural result of your sin, a logical consequence of your sin, or both. God sometimes uses pain or suffering as a logical consequence to get your attention to the sin you need to repent of. Your pain and suffering may be God's wake up call to admit and repent of your sin.

Caution: Not all pain and suffering are discipline from God. Jesus points this out several times in the gospels.

But you should consider this a possibility and ask God if it is the case. You must hold out that as a possibility. So respond to pain and suffering with prayers of question.

Lord, is my pain and suffering a call to repent? If so, of what?

God sometimes uses pain and suffering to discipline His people. G does so because he loves us. God loves us and wants what is best for us.

When a parent takes a child to the doctor and the child needs a shot, you know what the child is thinking. "If you loved me you wouldn't let that guy poke me with the needle." And the parent is thinking, "I don't like this either, but it is best for you to get the shot to keep you from getting sick."

God does not enjoy our pain. But sometimes it is necessary to get our attention and call us to repent of our sin. God does so because He loves us.

God loves each of us. That's why He sent us the Savior we all need, Jesus.

Won't you put your faith in Jesus today?

Won't you turn your life over to Him?