

Making Sense of Our Pain

CGGC eNews—Vol. 10, No. 8

February 19, 2016

Pain: it's a part of our human experience; it's a very real fruit of a fallen and broken world. Some of our pain is self-inflicted through our own choices or lack of wisdom. Some of our pain is brought on by others, whether intended or unintended, malicious or just coincidence, we experience pain at the hands of other human beings. This past week my experience with the story of Joseph in Genesis has brought me to reflect on my own ability or willingness to reflect upon the pain in my own life in order to gain some new perspective into God's sovereign grace.



If you're not familiar with the story of Joseph, spend some time in Genesis 38-50. He was the dreamer and favorite son of his father, Jacob. His brothers despised him because of their father's favor for him and because he liked to share his self-endorsing dreams a bit much. They had considered killing him but sold him into slavery and told Jacob that he'd been killed by a wild animal. Joseph's experience with pain didn't end there. He's a slave in a foreign land. He was falsely accused by his boss' wife and imprisoned for a crime he didn't commit. He was forgotten by the very one he helped during his time in prison. Joseph knew pain.

His father's favoritism wasn't intended to do him harm, but the fruit of Jacob's favoritism caused a painful rift between his sons. We don't know why Joseph chose to be so free in sharing his dreams of self-exaltation (it's the kind of thing an obnoxious little brother is prone to do), but it exacerbated the situation between him and his brothers. Joseph made the honorable choice only to have Potiphar's wife lie and falsely accuse him. He had served Potiphar faithfully and yet he had him thrown in jail. He had shown kindness to the cupbearer in prison, only to be forgotten by him once he was restored to his previous office.

My guess is that you know some pain too. Perhaps you know the pain of dysfunctional family dynamics or have been betrayed by those who are supposed to love and protect you, or have been falsely accused, or misunderstood or forgotten. What stands out to me in reading Joseph's story is the fact that he's able to gain some perspective on his own pain in light of what God was doing in and through his experience with pain. In Genesis 45 and again in chapter 50, when his brothers are rightly afraid because they remember what they did to him (and they're assuming he remembers and may want to exact revenge), Joseph has gained enough perspective that he's able to make sense of the pain he's endured. This is most clear in Genesis 50:20, "You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives." God had redeemed the terribly broken and painful circumstances of Joseph's life story and was using it to accomplish His will in Joseph's life, his family's life and the lives of countless thousands too. Looking back over his life, Joseph could make sense of his pain.

Are you able to make sense of your pain? Are you able to look back upon the pain of your life and see how God has used those experiences to accomplish His good and pleasing will both in you and through you? Do you have any sense of perspective on your own pain and the work that God accomplished in you and through you during those painful experiences? Are you able to forgive those

who've cause your pain because you now have greater clarity on how God worked to redeem what might have been meant for harm?

I'm slowly learning to make sense of my pain. I'm gaining greater perspective on how God was at work through the most painful moments of my own life. This is what I'm learning through my own experience with pain:

1. I have a greater ability to own the pain which I brought on myself through poor choices or sinful behaviors and attitudes. This alone has increased my appreciation for the grace that God has shown to me over and over again.
2. I am better able to see God's hand at work when I look back at my past experiences to understand how He's worked through the pain in my life to shape my character and to make me more useful to His purposes. He's made me more sensitive to the pain of others and used the most painful experiences of my life to deepen my trust in Him.
3. I'm quicker to forgive and release others who have harmed me because I can appreciate how God has worked to redeem even the pain that's been brought about with a malicious intent.
4. I am better able to trust God in the midst of my present pain or in those times when, even in retrospect, when the pain just doesn't make sense. There are situations where we may not be able to see what God was accomplishing through our pain, but I've gained enough perspective to know that He's at work in my pain, even if I don't see it or understand it completely.

If you haven't slowed down enough to make sense of your pain, I'd encourage you to do so. The best leaders I know are individuals who possess the self-awareness to make sense of their own pain. Take the time to name your pain and come to understand how God uses even our most painful experiences to accomplish His will in and through us as we learn to follow Him.

Christ's Peace,

Lance