

Purpose in Pain Finding Meaning in Tough Times

No one likes pain. We don't go shopping for it and we don't clip coupons trying to get it at some discount. I don't think most of us expend our lives in the pursuit of it, nor are we on some sort of safari with the intent of bagging it as a trophy. In reality, when we see it coming, we typically run as fast and as far as possible in whatever other direction there might be to run. Pain just doesn't seem to elicit some sort of warm feeling that irresistibly draws us to it.

Pain seems to be one of those things that simply shouldn't be. It runs contrary to everything else. It doesn't add to life, it subtracts from it. Pain is most often an obstacle, a hurdle, something that has to be overcome. It pops up as another irritating intrusion that typically makes no sense in the middle of whatever else is going on.

So what about pain? Our main goal when pain comes along typically is to get rid of it. That seems to be our focus. What's the cure? What do I do? We head off to the self-help section of our local bookstore or call our therapist. We check into medications, peruse seven step plans, or call our aunt about some remedy that grandma used to use. Pain elimination consumes us and we miss any other opportunities in pain.

Pain does some things that we don't think about. Have you thought about the possibility of there being something good in pain? That's a strange thought that doesn't add up. But pain may come with some hidden gifts if you look hard enough.

What Do I Learn About Me?

Have you ever thought about what pain reveals about you? In pain, we see ourselves more clearly. Pain kind of strips us down. It removes all the games and facades that we're so good at. Pain makes us raw. The tricks and tweaking that we've mastered don't hold up when life breaks down. We're forced back to ourselves, to whatever it is that's left when all the games and facades fail us.

If we really want to know who we are, we need to take a close look at ourselves when we're in pain. We'll see pieces and parts of ourselves that we normally hide. Everything fake goes away because it doesn't work. Look in the mirror when you're in pain and ask who you see there. It might be the most authentic you you've ever seen.

What Do I Learn About Life?

Sometimes we take a casual view of life, kind of making it look the way we want it to look. Much like a custom home, we want to customize life according to our particular taste or idiosyncrasies. Of course we create something that's typically pretty far removed from real life because real life is not what we'd create if we had the chance. Who wants the real thing when you can create something that you think might be better than the real thing?

2 - Craig D. Lounsbrough, LPC

If we're going to live truly effective lives, we've got to understand what real life is regardless of how far that might be from what we want it to be. Sure we'd change things if we could. It might not be pretty, but it's what's out there.

Pain lets us see life raw and uncut. If we're going to navigate life and hopefully make it better, we have to understand and accept what it is. That doesn't mean that we're ok with it. It simply means that if we're going to impact something for ourselves and others, we have to understand what that is. Pain allows us to see life as it is.

What Do I Learn About Others?

Pain rarely happens in isolation. Of course, sometimes our pain is only about us. Most times however it includes other people too. Pain can help us understand others better so that we can enhance our relationships with them, build more effective management teams, identify weaknesses in organizations, fine tune marriages and simply help others.

Pain is a tremendous resource in exposing all kinds of things in people that allow us to help them and our relationships with them. It would serve us well to think outside the sometimes stifling box of solving pain to what we can learn because it's there. If we're willing to look beyond solution to insight, there's a bunch we can learn.

Thinking Differently

You may want to look at pain differently. That doesn't mean that you don't work toward resolution of pain. Obviously you do that. But as part of that process, take a bigger look at it all. Get something out of it. Grab the gifts inherent in pain. Apply them to your life and the lives of those around you. You'll be amazed by how much you can grow in pain.