

Don't Waste the Pain Lessons

| | |
|---|----|
| Introduction | 1 |
| Lesson 1: Unpack your story and how you feel about it | 3 |
| Lesson 2: Begin to Explore God's Purposes in Your Pain..... | 10 |
| Lesson 3: Consider How Key Relationships are Working as you Face Pain Together..... | 15 |
| Lesson 4: Take a closer look at how you are praying in response to pain..... | 21 |
| Lesson 5: Discuss Attitudes that Facilitate Growing Through Pain | 30 |
| Lesson 6: Where do we go from here?..... | 44 |

Introduction

Welcome!

If you are working through these lessons on your own we want you to know that we are praying for you, and we hope that you will pursue ways to process with others what you are learning here. The best way to do that is with a small group of family or friends working through these lessons together. Or you can join a group of others who have come to our website like you, looking for help. You can process with others face to face, or you can have a conversation online in our Don't Waste the Pain Dining Room.

The Dining Room is a place where we linger and talk and share our hearts. While the dishes wait to be washed, we laugh and cry and try to solve the world's problems. While gathered around a virtual table we each share our stories, wrestle with God's purposes, take a closer look at our relationships, pray and learn to pray, consider what attitudes are helping us or hurting us, and talk about where to go from here. If you join a Dining Room table, take some time to get to know the other people at the table, as well as share a bit of yourself.

People who have done these lessons have found it very helpful to read the *Don't Waste the Pain* book while they are doing the lessons. Reading the book is not required, and you may find it to be more than you want or need to take on at this point. You can benefit greatly from the lessons without reading the book. But if you do read the book along with the lessons, it will add much to your experience. You can order it at www.NavPress.com.

Whether you are doing these lessons alone, or experiencing this with a small group, we pray that week by week you will find your hope rising. We cannot promise a change in your circumstances. But we can promise that as we together allow God's truth and love to permeate our hearts, hope will grow.

You can see from the Table of Contents that we intend to go deep with you. This is a place where people come to wrestle with the hard questions and to see their lives spiritually transformed. If you don't feel you are ready to do that, you may be uncomfortable. But we encourage you to take a deep breath and press forward. God will meet you here.

How is your hope? Do you feel like Job who said that God had uprooted his hope like a tree? (Job 19:10) Are you like King David who said,

“Why are you in despair, O my soul? And why have you become disturbed within me? Hope in God, for I shall again praise Him.” (Psalm 42:5, NASB)

The path out of hopelessness is rarely easy. You will not find easy fixes here. But you will find what you need to restore genuine hope and to resist losing heart.

Lesson 1: Unpack your story and how you feel about it

(If you're reading along in *Don't Waste the Pain*, this would be a good week to read Chapters 1–2.)

What are some ways that people in your society handle pain? (i.e., alcohol, stuffing it down, etc.)

This week we're going to share our stories and how we feel about them. No, this is not a group therapy session! But we need to be real with one another so that Truth can have its full impact on our hearts.

It is important that each of us is truly sharing our heart and each of us is truly listening. Just to pave the way, let's first listen to someone else's story. If you are suffering physical pain, then you may want to read Linda's story. If you are suffering emotional pain, or love someone who is in pain, then you may want to read David's story.

After reading one or both of these, share your own story below. You don't need to write well. Just put it out there.

| | |
|---|--|
| <p><u>Linda's Story</u></p> <p>Cancer seemed like a cruel joke that caught me completely by surprise. Other people get cancer; I don't. My initial symptoms were so harmless that I didn't even consider seeking treatment. I wasn't hungry. "Uh-oh! Call an ambulance! I'm not hungry!" I had a stomachache every so often and gas pains once in a while. Now which of those would send anyone to the doctor? There was bloating, but I also got quite thin. I wasn't big to begin with, and I was doing a lot of physical work, which I assumed led to the weight loss. No two things were ever evident at the same</p> | <p><u>David's Story</u></p> <p>We walked the cancer road with Linda for several years. We helped run her business when she was too sick. We sat by her bed not knowing what to say. We learned the value of saying nothing and just being there. Then, in 2004, God moved my family 1,600 miles across the country, from Virginia to Colorado. There He introduced us to pain of our very own. It was like nothing we'd ever known.</p> <p>One day a couple of years into our own saga, I forced myself to put one foot in front of the other as I walked from my office to the men's room. I must have looked drunk. I wasn't. I wasn't even physically tired. But I was emotionally spent. A phone call from Renee</p> |
|---|--|

time either; it was just every so often.

Then it started to feel as though I was sitting on the business end of a baseball bat when I sat down. Now that was disconcerting. Eventually, I started to notice the uncomfortable symptoms more frequently. Steve began to notice that I complained more often that I didn't feel well. We assumed I wasn't eating right, or was stressed, or was too busy at my job. Then my lower abdomen started to look swollen. I was skin and bone with a little swelling on one side of my belly. Now that was weird.

Finally, I cried out in pain one day during sexual intercourse with my husband. "That's it," he said. "You're going to a doctor." I went to see my doc and told her of my embarrassingly mild, stupid symptoms. I apologized for wasting her time on such an insignificant thing. I probably just had indigestion.

She had me lie down on the gurney and lightly touched my abdomen. The excruciating pain almost threw me onto the floor. Eyes wide open, I looked at her in horror. Looking almost as stunned as I felt, she said quietly, "I think you need to see a specialist." I went in for a CT scan, a transnational sonogram, a colonoscopy, and blood tests, among other things. Two doctors confirmed that I had an ovarian cyst, and surgery was scheduled for the following week. Easy enough—though surgery, however minor, is never convenient.

When I went in a few days later for pre-op testing and preparation, my OB/GYN came back into the room just before I

had confronted me with another family crisis crashing down on us. It seemed I had been getting calls like this nearly every month, like waves pounding against the rocks one after another.

Before moving to Colorado, we had lived a charmed life. Our ministry had flourished. God had blessed us with seven beautiful children. The week we left Virginia a hundred of our closest friends gathered to honor us and send us off. Many had a larger-than-life view of us. We were moving because I had been honored with a big promotion, and it seemed like we were moving to the Promised Land.

Instead, the stress of the move boiled issues to the surface one after another. Soon two children manifested serious eating disorders. A month later, I received an urgent call from a friend in Virginia telling me that one of my children was attempting suicide as we spoke. Later that summer, I was called out of leader meetings to learn that three of my children had been molested by someone in the neighborhood.

It didn't end there. That fall a counselor called us into his office so one of our children could tell us of sexual abuse by a family member years before. Then one of our teens began careening toward self-destruction, getting into trouble with the law and asserting he had gotten a girl pregnant and would be leaving school to support her.

Promised Land, huh?

At the same time, my promotion was leading me into a buzz saw of rejection and frustration at work. And dreams of planting a simple church in our home went up in smoke as we focused on merely surviving.

Then my wife began having flashbacks of

was ready to leave. We talked for a few minutes, and then in the sweetest and gentlest way I could imagine, she said, “We did a blood test on you as a matter of routine with cases like yours. Linda, it’s not a cyst. You have ovarian cancer.”

I remember smiling, silently thinking, No, I don’t. I don’t get cancer. But you’re so sweet to be so nice about it. All I got out was an incredulous “Really?”

She told me that a blood test (called a CA-125) of 30 or less was in the normal range. Hormones could affect the readings. If a test revealed anything over 30, cancer would be considered. Over 100 would require immediate treatment. (Just as a point of reference, in the ensuing years, I’ve never personally met anyone with a reading of more than 250, which is usually considered stage IV.)

Mine was 13,000. No typo, three zeros.

I didn’t stand a chance.

“Real funny, God. I didn’t think You’d take me seriously!” I’d really meant it three weeks earlier when I said I wished I was dead—at least I thought I did. Yeah, I really did. I hated my life, didn’t I? Was the God I thought I knew, yet rarely listened to, really listening to me? Was this His answer?

And so my journey began. But I wouldn’t be alone.

horrific things she had experienced as a child. I had often referred to Renee as Wonder Woman and our children as the Seven Wonders of the World. But Wonder Woman was coming apart at the seams.

My life was coming apart at the seams.

Three years into all of this, it seemed like the worst might be over. Then our sixth child, twelve-year-old Ian, began experiencing chronic cold and flu symptoms and back pain. With so many children, we’ve been around the block a few times with childhood illnesses. We don’t get alarmed easily. But one Saturday night we noticed a bruise on Ian’s foot was growing rather than healing. We made plans to take him in for an exam Monday morning. We never made it to that appointment.

The next night Ian developed searing back pain. We took him to the ER in the middle of the night. Before noon, a doctor pulled Renee and me into a conference room. I don’t remember all that she said. After the words stage-IV cancer, the room went gray. She left us to sob until we could sob no more and to gather ourselves so we could tell Ian. In the coming days we learned that the cancer had destroyed 95 percent of Ian’s bone marrow and that a tumor filling his abdomen was doubling in size every forty-eight hours. No wonder his back hurt.

The pain filling Ian’s body was filling my own heart.

Question 1: Which of these words best describe how you are feeling about what you or someone you love may be suffering right now?

| | | | | |
|----------------------|---------------|-------------------|--------------------|--------------------|
| Abandoned | Depressed | Impotent | On trial | Taken advantage of |
| Able | Despair | In suspense | Optimistic | Taken for granted |
| Abused | Destroyed | Inadequate | Out of control | Tender |
| Afraid | Detached | Incompetent | Out of place | Tense |
| Agitated | Determined | Indomitable | Overwhelmed | Thankful |
| Alienated | Different | Inept | Paralyzed | Threatened |
| Angry | Dirty | Inferior | Patient | Tired |
| Anticipating | Disconnected | Insane | Peaceful | Tortured |
| Anxious | Discouraged | Insecure | Persecuted | Tough |
| Apathetic | Distressed | Intimidated | Petrified | Trapped |
| Apprehensive | Dominated | Irritated | Phony | Ugly |
| Ashamed | Doubtful | Isolated | Positive | Unappreciated |
| Betrayed | Embarrassed | Jealous | Pressured | Unattractive |
| Bitter | Empty | Joyful | Promising | Uncared-for |
| Boring | Envious | Judged | Punished | Uncertain |
| Boxed-in | Esteemed | Left-out | Pushed away | Unclean |
| Brave | Exasperated | Let-down | Raped | Unencumbered |
| Buoyant | Exhausted | Like a bad person | Ready | Unfulfilled |
| Burned-out | Expectant | Like a failure | Real | Unhappy |
| Callous | Exposed | Like a fool | Rejected | Unimportant |
| Calm | Fed-up | Like a hypocrite | Relieved | Unkind |
| Cared for | Foolish | Like a monster | Resentful | Unlikeable |
| Caught in the middle | Free | Like giving up | Resolute | Unlovable |
| | Frightened | Like I am dying | Ridiculed | Unloved |
| Cheap | Frustrated | Like something | Ridiculous | Unprotected |
| Cheated | Full of faith | is wrong with | Sad / bad | Unreliable |
| Cherished | Grateful | me | Screwed-up | Unsure |
| Comforted | Guided | Lonely | Self-conscious | Untrusting |
| Composed | Guilty | Longing | Selfish | Unworthy |
| Condemned | Gutsy | Lost | Serene | Upset |
| Confused | Hatred | Loved | Shallow | Useless |
| Courageous | Helped | Mad | Shattered | Victimized |
| Crazy | Helpless | Mean | Shocked | Violated |
| Crushed | Hopeful | Miserable | Sick to my stomach | Vulnerable |
| Curious | Hopeless | Misled | Silly | Weak |
| Cut-off | Humiliated | Misunderstood | Skeptical | Weird |

| | | | | |
|-------------|---------------|---------------|---------|-----------|
| Cynical | Hurt | Naked | Sound | Willing |
| Daring | Hypocritical | Nervous | Special | Wiped-out |
| Deceived | I want to get | Not needed | Strange | Worried |
| Defeated | even | Not respected | Strong | Worthless |
| Defenseless | Ignored | Numb | Stunned | Wounded |
| Dejected | Immoral | Old | Stupid | |

Question 2: Are there other words that describe the pain? Add them below.

Question 3: Tell us your story in 700 words or less:

As difficult as it can be to put one's story down in writing, many people find that just doing so helps to bring their situation a little more into focus and a little more into reach. Of course as you work through this process, putting your story into words can help you to truly connect with others and help them to connect with you. Don't worry about whether your story is more or less dramatic or painful than others. **It is your story and it matters, a lot!**

Through the rest of these six weeks you will be reflecting on the bigger story, God’s story, into which your story fits. You may not be ready to go there right now. But if you are, it would be good to chew on these passages this week:

Romans 5:3–5 (NIV)

Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us.

2 Corinthians 1:3-4 (NIV)

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God.

2 Corinthians 4:7–11 (NIV)

But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us. We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed. We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body. For we who are alive are always being given over to death for Jesus’ sake, so that his life may be revealed in our mortal body.

James 1:2–4 (NIV)

Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.

Question 4: How are you doing this week? How would you like others to be praying for you? (If you are doing this study on your own, we encourage you to go to www.dontwastethepain.com, join the conversation around this lesson, and share how we can be praying for you. Also, we would encourage you to take the time to share what you’ve learned in this lesson with someone else around you.)

Before you leave today, if you have another five minutes, listen to In The Waiting by Greg Long:

[Click here](#). (Clicking this link will take you to a different website)

In The Waiting

By Greg Long

Pain

The gift nobody longs for, still it comes

And somehow leaves us stronger

When it's gone away

....

Lesson 2: Begin to Explore God’s Purposes in Your Pain

(If you are reading the book *Don’t Waste the Pain*, this would be a good week to read Chapters 3-5.)

Question 1: How are you feeling about God in the midst of your painful experience? (You may want to write a paragraph, or a poem, or even draw then describe a picture that expresses how you are feeling.)

Why me? Why this? Why now?

When we’re in pain, or someone we love is in pain, these questions crowd into our thinking like someone cutting into line. But there is another important question: *What are God’s purposes in this?*

This week we will explore three possible purposes that God may be pursuing: breaking our independence, building our faith and trust in Him, and leading us into knowing Him better.

Breaking Your Independence: A New Way of Breathing

There is something deep within us that resists living in moment-by-moment dependence on God. We fight it—hard.

A compelling scene in the movie *The Abyss* illustrates this. The entire film takes place deep under water. The survival of the underwater crew depends on the captain diving deeper than conventional equipment will allow. He has to use experimental equipment that enables him to “breathe” liquid oxygen. Everything in him fights against what seems so abnormal. The camera zooms in on his face as his helmet fills with liquid. His comrade assures him it will be okay: “Remember, you breathed liquid for nine months in your mother’s womb!” Still, you see the terror on his face as he “inhales” the liquid, literally drowning himself to survive. For a moment he convulses violently because it’s so unnatural. Then he recovers and begins breathing the liquid, then typed on a computer, “This is weird. You should try it!”

That can be what it feels like to relinquish control and enter into moment-by-moment surrender to God. It can feel like dying. No wonder God has to force our hand through our circumstances. Jesus said something about dying so that we can live:

“I tell you the truth, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds” (John 12:24, NIV).

As we walk through extreme difficulties, we must learn to breathe deeply. We must learn to breathe the supernatural air that God designed us to breathe. We can live for weeks without food and for days without water. We can only live for minutes without oxygen. We are designed to take in fresh oxygen all the time. Without it we die. We were also designed to abide in Christ so completely that apart from Him we can do nothing, not even for a few minutes. “I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing” (John 15:5, NIV). Although it sounds weird, we should all try it.

Question 2: Take a moment to ask God to bring back a memory of a time when you found yourself clinging to Him. Dwell there for a few moments. As you know yourself, how do you feel about being dependent on others or on God?

Building Your Trust: The Scary Question

The following excerpt from *Don't Waste the Pain* is helpful to many and alarming to others. Some agree with it. Others don't. But none of us can afford to ignore the questions raised here:

Will God hurt us? It seems important to many people to say that God would never hurt us. That line of thinking sets people up to become disillusioned with God—or with those who teach such things. It also requires us to disregard so much of how God reveals Himself in the Scriptures.

The answer to this scary question is found in the idea of seasoned trust. Naive trust says, “God will always work out things the way I want them to be.” Notice the big “I” in that sentence. But seasoned trust says, “God might hurt me, but I trust Him anyway.” Why would we trust Him? Because we've seen so much of His love and goodness in the Scriptures and even in our own lives. The torrents of pain have to flow around those immovable rocks.

Trust is the cord that keeps us leashed to the mast as the hurricane tears everything else from its moorings. Trust quiets the voices of anger and fear, and allows us to consider that God is working for our good. Trust keeps hope alive, and even eager, as it waits. Trust nurtures and protects our memory of what is true and right. Trust protects our longing for God when it might have been extinguished. Trust strengthens our spirit to keep looking for God when He seems so far away.

“For this reason, when I could stand it no longer I sent [Timothy] to find out about your faith. I was afraid that in some way the tempter might have tempted you and our efforts might have been useless” (1 Thessalonians 3:5 NIV).

Question 3: In the midst of whatever you or someone you love is suffering, what things are most difficult for you to entrust to God?

Learning to Know God Better: Thin Places

Pain can lead us to “thin places” where the barrier between heaven and earth seems to fade away. In the person of Jesus, that barrier disappeared. Jesus told everyone who would listen that in Him, the kingdom of God had come to town. Here is what it was like when Jesus came to Galilee:

“The people living in darkness have seen a great light;
on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned.”

From that time on Jesus began to preach, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near”
(Matthew 4:16–17, NIV).

Jesus wanted everyone to see what it was like where He’d come from. He wanted everyone to experience the beauty He had known and still knew. Think of the most beautiful place you’ve ever seen. Wouldn’t you like to share it with others, to have them experience it like you did? That’s probably what it was like for Jesus. He wanted others to see what He saw and to experience what He experienced. He was willing to go to great lengths to help them see. Unfortunately, we are normally blinded by the mundane things that surround us. We can’t see the stars until it’s dark.

One reason Jesus sought out people in pain may have been because they were most sensitive to His message. Soon they were seeking Him. Wherever He went, the sick thronged to see Him, to touch Him and be touched. And Jesus enlisted and empowered His disciples to join Him in revealing the kingdom to those in pain, telling them to heal the sick and affirm that “the kingdom of God has come near to you.”

One of our highest callings is to live among people in such a way that it is apparent the kingdom of God has come near. And as with Jesus and His disciples, those thin places often come in the midst of pain. But the revealing comes only for those who have ears to hear and eyes to see:

Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again [literally, ‘born from above’] *he cannot see the kingdom of God* (John 3:3, NASB, emphasis added).

In the midst of pain, it is God’s Spirit that enables us to see thin places. He leads us to an intersection of two worlds, where the seen and the unseen overlap in mysterious ways. We are given glimpses of the kingdom breaking through here on earth, just as Jesus said. And those glimpses give us hope, by giving us perspective on what is happening around us here and now. People often say, “*I’m doing fine... under the circumstances.*” What are you doing under there? Seeing the presence of God right in the midst of our pain helps us to rise above our circumstances. When we look at God through our circumstances He looks small and far away. When we look at our circumstances through God’s eyes, things look very different. Mountains become molehills. Insurmountable obstacles become opportunities. We become less self-absorbed. And hope rises.

Question 4: How has your view of God changed for better or for worse through your pain? If it’s helpful for you, try starting your answer with: “Through pain I am learning that God is _____.”

From time to time we’ll ask you to write out a prayer to God. Some may find this uncomfortable. But we encourage you to be very authentic with God, with yourself, and with others who may be walking with you in this. Have you ever noticed how when a person prays with unguarded honesty, it opens the way for others to do the same? Or have you noticed how it helps you to bring your inner thoughts out into the open? This may be an opportunity to help yourself and to help others at the same time.

Question 5: Write a note to God telling Him what you're thinking in response to what you are learning through these meditations:

Question 6: How are you doing this week? How would you like others to be praying for you? (If you are doing this study on your own, we encourage you to go to www.dontwastethepain.com, join the conversation around this lesson, and share how we can be praying for you.)

Some people come to this point and want to look more closely at what the Scriptures say about God's purposes in our pain, or what godly people have written as they've wrestled with these kinds of questions. If you want to read more we encourage you to browse through the library of resources that we're collecting in the Café at www.dontwastethepain.com.

If you have another moment today, listen to When The Time Comes by Avalon:
[Click Here](#) (this link will take you to another page)

When the Time Comes

By Avalon

...
*When the time comes
And the games are finally over
There's no more pretending
All charades are done*
...

Lesson 3: Consider How Key Relationships are Working as you Face Pain Together

(If you are reading Don't Waste the Pain, this would be a good week to read Chapters 6–7. Chapter 7 is helpful especially if your pain involves you with medical professionals.)

The overwhelming majority of families with a child in the Pediatric Intensive Care Unit for very long end up in severe conflict or divorce. All severe pain, whether physical or emotional, places great strain on key relationships. You'd think that we'd pull together. But seemingly small cracks in a relationship often break wide open under strain. Little dysfunctions become disasters. When we most need those closest to us to meet our desperate emotional needs, they themselves are desperately needy. And when we are fighting to save a life or a relationship, we are not very open to differing opinions and styles of handling a crisis.

Question 1: Think of a good or bad experience where someone else tried to help you get through a tough time. Tell what happened.

Beauty from Ashes

We are made for love. We are created to continually receive love and to let it flow through us to others. We are at our best when we live this way. We become radiant, fulfilled, and beautiful.

The world tells us that beauty thrives in the absence of pain, when everything is going smoothly. That can be true. But sometimes the truest form of beauty, the kind produced by authentic love, emerges in life's most painful circumstances. The most beautiful person who ever lived left heaven to wade right into the pain of this world. Look at how He introduced Himself:

The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon Me,
Because the LORD has anointed Me
To preach good tidings to the poor;
He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted,
To proclaim liberty to the captives,

And the opening of the prison to those who are bound;
To proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD,
And the day of vengeance of our God;
To comfort all who mourn,
To console those who mourn in Zion,
To give them beauty for ashes,
The oil of joy for mourning,
The garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness;
That they may be called trees of righteousness,
The planting of the LORD, that He may be glorified.

(Isaiah 61:1–3, NKJV).

Unfortunately, that kind of beauty is too rarely expressed among us. It is too often marred beyond recognition by unresolved conflicts, competition, and ungodly attitudes. Those who were designed to live in beautiful harmony digress into ugly dissonance.

There are exceptions, and those exceptions are often birthed in pain. A sick child, a death, a tragic accident suddenly jars us from our self-centered ways, and we find ourselves caring, loving, sacrificing, nurturing, giving—and beauty emerges. Or it should emerge. But it doesn't always work the way God intended. Pain can also flush selfishness and dysfunction out into the open. Too many of us live isolated lives without experiencing the loving relationships that God designed us to experience. Pain can highlight our isolation and make a hard situation even worse.

Question 2: What is your pain bringing out in those around you?

Question 3: How do you feel right now about letting others love you?

The pain that you or someone you love is facing may be physical or emotional. Regardless of the kind of pain we're experiencing, we desperately want it to stop. And we often wisely turn to others, often professionals such as doctors or counselors or pastors, for help. But as we do, we need to carefully distinguish our part and their part from God's part.

Pain Reveals the Heart

In the book, *Don't Waste the Pain*, David writes:

I'm looking out the window of my study, and I see Pikes Peak covered with snow. When we moved into this house, a dear friend looked out this same window and gave me this passage: "I lift up my eyes to the hills—where does my help come from? My help comes from the LORD, the Maker of heaven and earth" (Psalm 121:1–2, NIV).

In the midst of Ian's illness, I personalized this passage this way: "We lift our eyes to the physicians, nurses, chemotherapy, and nutritional therapy—but where does our help come from? Our help comes from the LORD, the Maker of heaven and earth." In other words, we love our physicians and nurses, and we'll do our best with chemotherapy and nutritional therapy. But Ian's Maker is the One who will heal him.

King Asa, from the book of 2 Chronicles, drifted to another perspective. Early in life, Asa had been a great man of faith. When facing an Ethiopian army of a million, outnumbered more than 2-to-1, he prayed:

LORD, there is no one besides You to help in the battle between the powerful and those who have no strength; so help us, O LORD our God, for we trust in You, and in Your name have come against this multitude. O LORD, You are our God; let not man prevail against You. (2 Chronicles 14:11, NASB).

But later in life something had shifted in Asa's heart: "His disease was severe, yet even in his disease he did not seek the LORD, but the physicians" (2 Chronicles 16:12, NASB). Asa's example is sobering. He's not so different from most of us. It's so easy to drift into depending on something or someone other than God.

Question 4: How does this perspective lead you to pray for the key people who are trying to help you? (You could either comment here, or compose a prayer for them.)

Current pain can tend to dredge up past pain. If you have been badly disappointed or hurt by others in the past, that can make it hard to trust and depend on others today. If that has not been your experience, this section may not be so helpful to you. But for others, as we've been reflecting on key relationships in our lives, it is very possible that anger and fear related to old hurts has resurfaced. If so, we may need to let God resolve those old wounds so that they don't interfere with what He is trying to do in our lives today.

Often resolving old wounds can boil down to one word: Forgive. Please don't check out here. Forgiveness does not mean excusing what others have done. It does not mean acting like nothing has happened. And it does not mean giving them a blank check to treat us like that again. It is not loving to enable others to continue destructive behaviors.

But forgiving does mean letting go of the anger and fear that may be controlling us. Forgiveness is serious business. In fact, real forgiveness is supernatural business.

If you do find that looking at your key relationships is stirring up past pain, here is an idea that has helped some people to work through relational tensions. This is something that you do privately in your own heart so that regardless of what does or does not happen in your relationship with those who have hurt you, you can live without being controlled by fear or anger. So, in private between you and God you may need to express forgiveness like this:

1. *It hurt me when you _____.* (Be specific.)

2. *And it made me feel _____.* (You may want to refer to the list of words in Lesson One.)

3. Because the forgiving Christ lives in me and I in Him, I now choose to forgive you. I release you from the debt you owe me. As far as I am concerned, you never have to make it up to me or pay me back. You never have to admit what you've done to me or be sorry for it. As far as I am concerned, you are free.

4. I give up the right to be the judge, jury, and prosecuting attorney in this matter. That is God's job. You are not responsible to me for meeting my standards of whether you were right or wrong in what you did. I now choose to let God be God and I acknowledge that you and your behavior are His responsibility.

5. I accept you unconditionally, which means that my love and acceptance of you does not depend on you or your past performance. I choose to love and accept you just the way you are, even if you never change, even if you get worse.

6. I release you from the responsibility to meet my needs for _____, _____, and _____. I choose to trust Jesus alone as my total, complete, and true source for meeting all my needs, including my needs for _____, _____, and _____. Jesus is everything I need for everything in my life.

7. Since Jesus is my refuge, I can act out of love, not self-protection, in our relationship. Therefore I am willing to risk being hurt again by you and trust Jesus alone as my wisdom about you and the nature of our relationship.

8. God, I give up the right to have my feelings change according to my time schedule. Thank you that I don't have to look to my feelings as the indicator as to whether or not I have forgiven. Thank you that anger and fear no longer have to be what motivate me in this relationship.

Question 5: How do you find yourself responding to the idea of forgiving in this way?

Question 6: How are you doing this week? How would you like others to be praying for you? (If you are doing this study on your own, we encourage you to go to www.dontwastethepain.com, join the conversation around this lesson, and share how we can be praying for you.)

If you are the kind of person who comes to this point wanting to study further or take a closer look at what others have said or taught about these things, then you may want to go to the café at www.dontwastethepain.com. and look at what others have written or said about this.

Take a moment to listen to Face of Love by Greg Long:

[Click here.](#) (This link will take you to a different page)

Face of Love

By Greg Long

...

The face of love

The whisper of

The voice I'm needing to hear

...

Lesson 4: Take a closer look at how you are praying in response to pain

(If you are reading along, this could be a good week to read Chapters 8–9 of *Don't Waste the Pain*.)

Question 1: What are one or two areas that keep popping up in your prayer life these days?

Lord, teach us to pray.

This is a dangerous request. It's dangerous because one of the best ways to learn to pray is to become desperate. And pain is the express train to get there. It's not a pleasant place when you arrive, but you may find that the prayer lessons there make the trip somehow worth it.

Pain offers us a graduate course in prayer. It teaches us what it means to pray with desperation, to pray for the impossible, and to see God break through in the most amazing ways.

Question 2: How has the pain that you face (or someone you love is facing) changed your praying?

Pain tends to boil all kinds of things to the surface of our lives. We might be losing heart or overwhelmed with anxiety. We may be facing tough decisions, or wrestling with our motives. Maybe we just need a miracle.

Read and respond to at least one of the following four prayer challenges. Choose what seems most relevant to your situation. It's OK if you only have time to respond to one. It is better to work through one deeply than to rush through all of them.

Prayer Challenge: Praying Through Anxiety

Many of us have had mountaintop moments in which we confidently stuck out our necks asking for miracles. But does anxiety necessarily go away during those times? Even when we're filled with faith, we're still human. So we find that we have to keep crawling back out on that limb, not looking down, to ask God for the big things that we want from Him.

Of course we feel anxious when we're in pain. And we need to express that anxiety to God openly. But the question is what we'll do with that anxiety. Clinging to Philippians 4:4–8 is a good place to go. Paul urged us to convert anxiety into prayer:

Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. (verse 6, NASB)

This might mean praying something like this: *“O Lord, help me to continually convert every shred of anxiety into prayer. You know the anxiety I am feeling on all fronts today. Right now I commit each front to You. I roll this situation into Your hands. I trust You with all parts of it. Accomplish Your purposes today, however You choose.”*

Philippians 4 also contains a wonderful promise:

And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. (verse 7, NASB)

This spurs us to pray, *“Please make me an island of peace today. Rather, make me an overflowing fountain of peace. Others around me will need it, too. But it has to be Your peace. May it surround me like a bodyguard, fending off every anxious thought.”*

Finally, Paul exhorted us:

Whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, dwell on these things. (verse 8, NASB)

Remembering this helps us to pray, *“Yes, I refuse the Enemy’s whispered doubts and accusations. Help me to dwell on what is true, honorable, right, pure, lovely, good, excellent, and worthy of praise—which sounds like a description of You!”*

Question 3: Make a worry list on a sheet of paper, identifying everything that is worrying you right now. Mark those things that you can do little or nothing about and commit each of them to God in view of Philippians 4:6–8. Then share here how this exercise helped you:

Prayer Challenge: Praying Without Losing Heart

Now He was telling them a parable to show that at all times they ought to pray and not to lose heart. (Luke 18:1, NASB)

Praying in the face of pain can be like an obstacle course; sometimes you end up face down in the mud. The question is whether you’ll get up again to press on.

When the drudgery of painful circumstances remains for an extended amount of time, praying in the face of pain requires endurance. That’s when we have to pull on our hiking boots and keep trudging on toward the summit we long to see.

Question 4: Read through Luke 18:1–8 asking the Lord to give you insight into what’s happening in your own heart as you pray over the tough challenges in your own life.

Then He spoke a parable to them, that men always ought to pray and not lose heart, saying: "There was in a certain city a judge who did not fear God nor regard man. Now there was a widow in that city; and she came to him, saying, 'Get justice for me from my adversary.' And he would not for a while; but afterward he said within himself, 'Though I do not fear God nor regard man, yet because this widow troubles me I will avenge her, lest by her continual coming she weary me.' " Then the Lord said, "Hear what the unjust judge said. And shall God not avenge His own elect who cry out day and night to Him, though He bears long with them? I tell you that He will avenge them speedily. Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will He really find faith on the earth?" (NKJV)

How are you doing when it comes to losing heart in prayer?

Prayer Challenge: Praying Through Hard Decisions

Pain can be disorienting and bewildering, like an unexpected two-by-four across the side of the head. Our prayers come out like a mere yelp, and it’s hard to get much beyond that. In the thick of things, even the simplest decisions—what to wear or eat—can be too much. We may long for someone to step in and make our decisions for us. This can be an unwelcome opportunity to connect more deeply with Wisdom Himself.

Question 5: Read through James 1:2–5.

My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have *its* perfect work, that you may be

perfect and complete, lacking nothing. If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him. (NKJV)

Try to take up James' challenge to confidently pray for the wisdom you desperately need right now. Write out your prayer here. Be specific:

Prayer Challenge: Praying for a Miracle

Praying in the face of pain is not a walk in the park. It's more like hopping moguls on a double black diamond ski slope—more excitement than most of us feel prepared to endure.

Pain pushes us to stop dinking around with small prayers. You don't ask for a pistol when you really need an army. You don't ask for a bicycle when you really need a truck. Extraordinary needs evoke extraordinary prayers.

We all love miracles, but few of us want to live in the place where we need a miracle to succeed or survive. We'd rather watch from the audience. But sometimes God chooses us out of the crowd to join Him up on stage, where He intends to amaze everyone. "You there, in the green sweater. Come on up here." Not knowing what to expect, we stumble forward, just as curious as everyone else. No, *a lot more* curious than anyone else. And when it seems like only a miracle will do, we begin to pray as we've never prayed before.

You may be at such a place for the first time in your life, a place where you are desperate for a miracle. Maybe you are taking a fresh look at promises like these:

Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened. (Matthew 7:7–8, NIV)

If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you. This is to my Father’s glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples. (John 15:7–8, NIV)

Until now you have not asked for anything in my name. Ask and you will receive, and your joy will be complete. (John 16:24, NIV)

We may have many questions about how this works, but one thing is very clear: God invites us to ASK.

Question 6: In Luke 18:41, Jesus said to the blind man, “What do you want me to do for you?” What exactly do you want God to do for you? Write that out here then write it on a card and keep asking, seeking, and knocking until you get an answer.

What If God Says No?

Sometimes our prayers don’t get answered the way we hoped. Sometimes God says no. How does that affect the way we’ll pray in the future? Joni Eareckson Tada, before her accident, prayed that God would draw her closer to Him. When she realized she was facing a lifetime as a

quadriplegic, she said to a friend, “If this is the way that God treats His believers, He’s never going to be trusted with another prayer again!”

No is uncomfortable. It’s unsatisfying. It puts us in our place. Still, we must hold tight to our belief that God will never give us less than His best. Kids will sometimes put on a full-court press to get what they want, but a wise parent loves them too much to capitulate to their demands. Instead, the wise parent will do what is best for the child, even if that means saying no.

Isn’t it interesting, then, that we can learn a thing or two about how to respond to no by watching children? In his book, David recounts this story from a friend of his:

My children were among those praying for Ian’s healing, and they prayed with complete confidence that he would be healed. For them, it was a given. And then he died. I was worried about telling them—wondering if this would rock their faith and how I would answer their questions—but it turned out they took it so much better than I did. They didn’t question it at all. It was like, “Oh, so Ian’s in heaven? Well, good.” The amazing thing about childlike faith is not only that you believe without doubt, but you accept no without questions. (Of course, they don’t accept no from me with no questions, but with God, no problem.)

Question 7: When have you experienced God saying no to your prayers? How has that affected how you pray today?

Sometimes God says yes and sometimes He says no. God does intervene with miracles, even today. At other times He allows things to take a tragic course in spite of our praying. So where does that leave us? How do we pray with confidence now?

Paul faced the same dilemma. He had seen God do phenomenal miracles. Through and around him God healed many, and even raised some from the dead. But in at least one very personal and painful case, God said no to Paul. He would not heal Paul of his thorn in the flesh. So Paul kept asking, over and over. His prayers were probably not casual or half-hearted. The guy knew how to pray with authority. But still, God would not heal him.

God's response to Paul is also God's response to all of us: "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness." (2 Corinthians 12:9, NASB)

Could it be that in saying no to us, God is also saying something like this:

It's enough for you to know that I'm smiling on you with My favor. It's enough to know that I have everything under control, and that I have all the resources needed and will always use them to demonstrate My favor on you. It's enough to know that whatever I do in response to your praying, it will be a full and undiluted demonstration of My favor on you.

But, as you've seen, that does not mean that I'm always going to do what you want me to do. I often will do just what you ask. You've seen that. You've experienced that. You know that nothing is too difficult for Me, and that I love to do wonderful and spectacular things for you. I love to amaze you. I love to lavish My gifts on you. But there will also be times when larger purposes will prevail. There will be times when I say no to your desires in order to demonstrate My favor on you in ways that you won't fully understand. When I do that, My love for you is not diminished. When I say no to you, My favor on you has not receded. In fact, those hard times may be the times when My love for you is most evident.

Question 8: How do you feel about 2 Corinthians 12:9?

Question 9: How are you doing this week? How would you like others to be praying for you? (If you are doing this study on your own, we encourage you to go to www.dontwastethepain.com, join the conversation around this lesson, and share how we can be praying for you.)

You may find it helpful to listen to He's My Son by Mark Schultz, a song written about parents praying for their son as he battled leukemia.

[Click Here](#) (This link will take you to a new page)

He's My Son

By Mark Shultz

...
Can You hear me?
Am I getting through tonight?
Can You see him?
Can You make him feel all right?
...

Lesson 5: Discuss Attitudes that Facilitate Growing Through Pain

(If you are reading Don't Waste The Pain as you go through these weeks together, this would be a good time to read Chapters 10–11.)

Endurance 101. Long Suffering 202. Perseverance 303.

We don't find these courses in a seminary catalog. We're not likely to even find them in our Bible class curriculum. But these are requirements to living well, whether we aspire to be great leaders like Joseph or David, or great parents, spouses, or friends. Peter wrote, "To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps" (1 Peter 2:21, NIV).

Certain attitudes keep us going and growing even as we wonder when all the pain will end:

- **Authenticity**
- **Gratitude**
- **Hope**
- **Patience**
- **Courage**
- **Surrender**
- **Joy**

Question 1. As you look at the attitudes above, which seem the most elusive to you? Why?

This lesson is a little bit different. If you try to study every one of these attitudes this week, it's going to take a long time. **So we suggest that at this point you prayerfully read through the rest of the lesson to get an overview without responding to the questions. Then go back and choose just one or two attitude questions where you will prayerfully reflect and respond.**

In the book, *Don't Waste the Pain*, David writes,

It happened again today. I received yet another e-mail from someone marveling at my transparency in sharing our pain. I guess that I don't know how else to live. I long for people to be open and vulnerable with one another, too, and with God. Sometimes we think we need to pretend that life does not hurt. Sunday morning we dress up and paint on our smile. "How are you?" "Praise the Lord, I'm great!" We join in what the band Casting Crowns calls "the stained glass masquerade." Then we go home and kick the wall and cry ourselves to sleep. We are not designed to live that way. We are designed to be authentic with one another—and with God. Otherwise, we shield ourselves from the love we so desperately need.

Have you ever noticed that the psalms are full of complaints? Among them are Psalm 22, 42, 74, 88, and many others. Since God included them in the Bible (plus the entire book of Lamentations, as well as the book of Job), it's apparent that He embraces our complaints. Picture a father enduring his son's wailing and beating against his father's chest until he collapses into his dad's warm embrace.

Question 2: Read through Psalms 22, 42, 74, and 88, then write your own "prayer of complaint." It does not need to be eloquent or poetic. It can be raw. Just be sure to include these three parts:

- Your **complaint**—a frank prayer saying how you feel about your pain
- Your **appeal**—telling God what you'd like Him to do about it
- Your **affirmation**—reminding yourself of what you know to be true even now

Paul told the Thessalonians to give thanks *in* all circumstances, not for the circumstances themselves. In every circumstance there is *something* for which to give thanks, and finding those things can change the weather in your soul. We see an example of this in Linda's story, from the book, *Don't Waste the Pain*:

So, good news! My cancer count more than doubled to 135, so I have to start chemo again for an unspecified amount of time, up to a year. I know that doesn't sound good; it sounds horrid. But here's the thing: Dr. Boice made the decision for us; we didn't have to agonize over it. I have to make hundreds of decisions every day at work, and I'm tired of deciding things. Besides, I didn't want to have to choose to do chemo. However, it doesn't seem so bad if Dr. Boice tells me I have to do it. There's even more good news.

The CT scan showed nothing. That means the tumor, although still there, is so tiny that it won't even show up on an X-ray. And the doc can't feel anything in my abdomen. Surgery is out of the question since there's no specific place to cut. Whew! He told me weeks ago that if my numbers went over 100, I'd have to take chemo, so I'm ready for that. He agreed not to use the same drug as last time; I'd refuse it anyway. That was like being run over by a train, then beaten for two hours with a sledgehammer. Every week. For months. While bald. This newer drug has fewer side effects. It will make me tired (Will I even notice the difference?) but won't cause the deep pain, neuropathy, nausea, and hair loss as before.

So why is all this relatively bad news making me happy? Well, the injections will be only thirty minutes every week, instead of three to four hours like last time. I don't have to have more surgery. I get to have infusions close to home. I won't lose my hair. The pain will be less than last time. The side effects won't be as bad. The tumor is tiny. And so on. There, see? I told you it was good news. It just depends on how you look at it. And I'm looking at it as someone who has lived through much worse.

Here's a woman who just learned that what she dreaded for years has come upon her. Yet she finds much to rejoice over. She is choosing to find joy in giving thanks.

Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord’s will is. . . . Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord, *always giving thanks to God the Father for everything*, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. (Ephesians 5:17,19–20, NIV, emphasis added)

The phrase “for everything” could be translated “over” or “above” everything. But it’s not. It’s translated “*for*” everything. We may not be ready to thank God for our pain, but we can learn from those who are. In the book, David writes:

I remember one day when I was leading a discussion, I challenged the group to thank God for something they had never thanked Him for before.

I’ll never forget a Taiwanese graduate student struggling to stand, who then leaned on his cane as he thanked God for the polio that had crippled him and left him an outcast in his own society. Choking back tears, he reviewed how God had used that hardship to draw him to Himself. He has never been the same since that day he chose to give thanks.

Then a young woman stunned us by standing to thank God for being raped years before, in view of how God had ultimately changed her life through it. That’s too heavy for me to comprehend. But it creates a lot of space for me to thank God for the sources of pain in my own life.

No matter how badly we’re hurting, we can always find something to thank God for.

Question 3: Write a prayer of thanksgiving, and try to include something for which you’ve never before thanked God.

Viktor Frankl found hope as an inmate in a Nazi concentration camp, a place designed to exterminate hope. He observed how those around him were defined not by what happened to them but by how they chose to respond. In the midst of some of the worst suffering in history, some rose above their circumstances by choosing to pay attention to what was happening in their souls. They watched over their hearts with all diligence, and from their hearts flowed springs of life in the face of death.

Some inmates had a wellspring of hope others did not possess: the hope of heaven. When we face death, that hope becomes more precious than ever. It's no longer just the sweet by and by. It's our next stop. Linda writes in *Don't Waste the Pain* that she found that hope—which is at the foundation of the gospel—to be a sturdy support.

*From Linda's Journal
March 2009*

As someone who has long had to face the likelihood of an early death, I often wonder why, as believers, we fight so hard to not go where we should be “dying” to go. When Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians about running to get the prize, just what do we think that prize is, if not heaven? Why do we so hate the thought of death if it takes us closer to God?

Please don't think it's cavalier of me to say I look forward to death. Actually, it would be more accurate to say I look forward to being in heaven, but not to leaving. I do long to live forever in paradise, but to do so, I have to leave those who love me, and I don't want to leave them. I'd be in heaven in perfect peace, but they'd be heartbroken. I don't want that.

I've given this a lot of thought. Cancer patients are obviously more inclined to think about death, even if we don't think we're dying. I understand now that looking forward to death isn't morbid; for Christians, it's joyful. It's one small gift that others can't relate to. The gift is in knowing where this all leads, and going ahead without fear.

So, why am I still here, when so many who are much younger and healthier have died? I've had to face my final months many times now, drugs and body failing me, cancer growing exponentially within me. Then inevitably I get pulled back from the brink and find myself in remission. And each time, I'm thankful. Why is that? Am I a hypocrite? Why do I look forward to being gone, yet praise God when He lets me stay? Does that make sense?

Question 4: How are you feeling about the idea of going to heaven, really? How are your thoughts and feelings about the hope of heaven affecting the way that you cope with pain?

Why does heaven give us hope? Heaven is where God sets the wrongs right and fixes everything that causes us pain here. Sometimes He fixes things while we're still here on earth. Our hope of heaven is sure and solid. Our hope of God's presence with us and His sovereign and loving control of things here on earth are also sure.

Question 5. In what ways could hope help you to rise above what is happening? Or, if hope isn't an active part of your experience, what might you be able to do to incorporate hope?

Such hope grows larger and larger through life and through pain.

Patience

Patience is a tough one, especially when it comes to pain. We want it over. Now! But pain can take time to do its work. That may be why the Bible speaks of *long-suffering*. Impatience honks its horn and says, "God, have You checked Your watch? I think You're running late!" Patience

quietly says, “God is always on time. He must know what He’s doing.” What does our impatience say about our real theology?

Luke 18:1–8 can be so perplexing. Jesus told His disciples the story of the impertinent widow “to show that at all times they ought to pray and not to lose heart” (verse 1, NASB). Then He gave the punch line:

Will not God bring about justice for His elect [chosen ones] who cry out to Him day and night, and will He delay long over them? I tell you that He will bring about justice for them quickly. (verses 7–8, NASB)

Quickly? Then why do we find ourselves in the position of crying out to Him day and night? That implies a wait. The whole story implies a wait.

Now consider this passage from 2 Peter:

But do not let this one fact escape your notice, beloved, that with the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years like one day. The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance. (2 Peter 3:8–9, NASB)

Peter was addressing those who doubted that Jesus would return, because it had been so long since He had gone back to heaven. Peter’s audience was like the restless three-year-old in the back seat incessantly asking, “Are we there yet?” At that point it had been only about thirty-five years. And here we are two thousand years later. Peter said the Lord is not slow about His promise. He was surely speaking from the perspective of the Ancient of Days, the Eternal One.

Just as Mom and Dad *will* get the family to their destination in spite of the impatient complaining, God most certainly *will* keep His promise. And He often does it suddenly, when we’re not expecting it. It’s often wait, wait, not yet, wait, then BAM! God suddenly fulfills His promise. He’s a little like a martial artist—so patient, then springing into effective action at precisely the right moment.

In 1 Kings 18, we read about Israel waiting for rain for three years. God had deliberately stopped the rain to get Israel's attention. He was waiting for just the right moment; then He moved. And the rain came so suddenly and so hard that Ahab got stuck in the mud before he could get home.

So while we wait and while we pray, we're developing patience and tending our hearts.

Question 6: What does your patience or impatience say about your real view of God? What truths about God make it easier for you to be patient while you suffer?

Courage

Just as muscles grow through heavy lifting, so courage should grow in the face of pain. In his book, David writes about the courage he saw unfolding in his son Ian as he battled against cancer:

Courage grew in Ian like the stars coming out at night. Soon his favorite verse showed up on his Facebook page and remained there: "Therefore we do not lose heart, but though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day" (2 Corinthians 4:16, NASB).

Courage became the hallmark of Ian's life. Have you ever wondered what they will say about your life at your funeral? Here's what I had to say about my son:

"Just before Ian was struck down with seizures at play rehearsal, a friend asked if he wanted to request prayer. Ian said, 'No, I don't want to be known as the cancer kid.' Ian would avoid drawing attention to himself, but the way he lived drew a lot of attention anyway. There was something about him beyond his

winsome smile and quirky sense of humor. There was something inside him that was winning our hearts and changing us forever.

“Ian was tough. He was becoming a man’s man. Last summer, we went on a father/son retreat. He went with a port in his chest from weeks of intensive chemo that would have left most of us whining. He went with the ‘chemo cut,’ a bald head that marked him as the kid with cancer. But he covered it with a bandanna, hoping no one would notice. We broke into teams, and the one kid who had every excuse to be timid led the way with fierce enthusiasm. The final competition was a tug-of-war. Ian took the post position, tied in to lead the way with the rope around his chest. Mom would have begged him to be careful. But he threw himself into it so hard that the rope broke loose as his team won, leaving him splayed on the ground laughing. The kid with cancer not only fully participated, he led the way.”

When Joshua was facing the most frightening and dangerous challenge of his life, God injected these words into his soul:

Joshua 1:9 (NIV)

Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be terrified; do not be discouraged, for the LORD your God will be with you wherever you go.

Are we allowing our pain to make us more courageous?

Question 7: In the absence of courage we are controlled by our fears. In the midst of your suffering, what do you fear the most? How are you overcoming the temptation to let that fear control you?

Surrender

Do we see surrender as a virtue to be cultivated, like hope, patience, and courage? Maybe not. We tend to associate surrender with white flags and losers. And that would be appropriate if we were surrendering to anyone but God Himself. But when we surrender to God, we are surrendering to the One who made us and is eager to display His beautiful life through us. This is so counterintuitive. When we are in pain, we naturally shift to self-preservation. We desperately want to seize control of the situation and make it stop. But that's not the instruction we receive from the Bible: "For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it; but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it" (Matthew 16:25, NASB).

Psalm 46:10 says, "Cease striving and know that I am God" (NASB). The Hebrew word for "cease striving" means to "relax or abandon." It is the word for dropping the reins of your horse. That's a powerful image. In a horse race, the winning rider and horse experience a melding of their intentions as they both strain for the finish line. Which is in control? At that moment, it does not matter. They are one. And that's where we need to be. Jesus asked His Father on our behalf:

I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one: I in them and you in me. (John 17:22–23, NIV)

In the midst of our most trying difficulties, surrender is actually the easiest way out. Instead of trying to go through it alone, we give it to God, and He will carry us.

Question 8: Why is it that we so desperately want to be in control when we are in the midst of pain and suffering? Why does surrender feel like dying?

“Our hearts ache, but we always have joy” (2 Corinthians 6:10, NLT).

From David’s Journal

March 13, 2008

Yesterday one of our pastors said, “Remember to find God’s joy in this.” I was talking to him from the hospital, and I guess he sensed my weariness. His words have been echoing through my heart as I search for that joy. This morning I went back to some familiar passages. What I found is not new, but it is fresh for me. My heart feels as if it’s been plowed up. It doesn’t feel good, but that freshly plowed ground is fertile soil for seed to grow. Here are some seeds freshly planted in my heart.

In the Bible, the word “joy” can refer to superficial feelings. But key passages point toward a joy that is deeper than happiness. Happiness depends on what happens. Joy can rise above what happens.

There is a joy that grows only in the fertile ground of hardship. It’s abundant and overflowing joy. It cannot be contained—not even by pain. Jesus spoke of having our joy made full and complete. It makes sense that if we experience His joy, it would overflow from our mere mortal hearts.

Have we got that joy? Paul “got” it in the midst of conflict and rejection (2 Corinthians 7:4). The Macedonians “got” it in the midst of poverty and suffering (2 Corinthians 8:2). The Hebrews “got” it in the midst of great injustice (Hebrews 10:34). Jesus “got” it as He faced the cross (Hebrews 12:2).

What does it mean to “consider it all joy” (James 1:2, NASB)? It’s probably not pretending there is no agony or weariness. It’s not putting on a smiley face. It seems to be thoughtfully, by faith, entering into the way God sees things—the way they really are—rather than limiting ourselves to what we can see. It seems to be found in deliberately allowing God to wean us away from letting our feelings be controlled by circumstances. It seems to be found in consciously embracing the mysterious joy in God’s heart (the joy of the Holy Spirit) even when we don’t understand.

The Scriptures offer at least six places we can find joy even while we are in pain:

- Choosing to give thanks for something (1 Thessalonians 5:16–18)
- Focusing on the great reward waiting for us in heaven (Matthew 5:11–12)
- Considering how God is growing us through our pain (1 Peter 1:6–7)
- Marveling at how God is influencing others through our suffering (Philippians 2:17; 2 Corinthians 13:9)
- Using humor as delightful medicine (Proverbs 17:22)
- Leaning into the joy of the One living inside of us (John 15:11; 17:13)

Question 9: Where are you finding joy, even in the midst of your difficulties? In view of these passages, where do you think you might find more joy?

To sum up, the presence of these attitudes either facilitates us growing in the midst of our suffering, or the absence of these qualities hinders us from growing:

- Authenticity
- Gratitude
- Hope
- Patience
- Courage
- Surrender
- Joy

Now that you've done some reflecting on attitudes where you need to grow, take a moment to celebrate what God has already grown in your life.

Question 10: Which of these attitudes is most sustaining you these days? Please encourage others in your group by sharing what that has been like for you.

Question 11: In which of these attitudes do you think God may be nudging you to grow? What may be the next steps for you in cultivating that attitude?

Question 12: How are you doing this week? How would you like others to be praying for you? (If you are doing this study on your own, we encourage you to go to www.dontwastethepain.com, join the conversation around this lesson, and share how we can be praying for you.)

If you have five minutes, you would probably find encouragement in listening to Where Joy and Sorrow Meet by Avalon.

[Click Here](#). (Clicking this link will open new page)

Where Joy and Sorrow Meet

By Avalon

...

*There is a place where hope remains
In crowns of thorns and crimson stains
And tears that fall on Jesus' feet
Where joy and sorrow meet*

...

Lesson 6: Where do we go from here?

(If you haven't done so already, this might be a good time to read the closing chapter of *Don't Waste the Pain*.)

In *Don't Waste the Pain*, David tells of a note he received from a friend shortly after Ian's cancer diagnosis:

“There is a fraternity of suffering people. It's not an official group, and we haven't posed for a photo yet, but we know each other when we meet. Not one of us applied for membership. Suddenly we found ourselves having been inducted into this order.”

No, none of us applied, but all were invited. We are not called to a pain-free life. In fact, Peter said:

Do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice that you participate [literally, fellowship] in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed. (1 Peter 4:12–13, NIV)

Paul actually celebrated entering into the fellowship of suffering, and he aspired to enter it more deeply.

But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith. I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the *fellowship of sharing in his sufferings*. (Philippians 3:7–10, NIV, emphasis added)

What does it mean to participate in the sufferings of Christ? Jesus said, “It is finished” (John 19:30, NIV), so it doesn't seem to participate with His work on the cross. More likely, it means entering into the pain that the members of His body suffer today. Paul lived and breathed this. He entered into it with his whole being.

I fill up in my flesh what is still lacking in regard to Christ's afflictions, for the sake of his body, which is the church. (Colossians 1:24, NIV)

Besides everything else, I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches. Who is weak, and I do not feel weak? (2 Corinthians 11:28–29, NIV).

So now that we've been initiated into the fellowship of suffering, where do we go from here?

Be There

Where is God in the most painful moments in our lives? David examines this question in his book:

Years ago, I went to a seminar that featured prayer as a primary path toward healing. We explored the sources of our destructive thoughts and feelings and asked God to lead us back to where we first learned those patterns. In spite of my doubts about the process, I asked God to take me back to one traumatic experience that had shaped me.

As a boy I had just two friends: two brothers who were the only children within miles. One day they invited me to meet them on a nearby hill after dark. When I arrived, there was another boy who was much bigger than any of us. Before I knew it, he was on top of me pounding me to a bloody mess while my "friends" stood by and laughed. They had paid him to beat me up as revenge for some perceived wrong. I had been violently betrayed by my only friends.

In the seminar, I was prompted to ask God, "Where were You that night?" That question led me into one of my most profound encounters with Him. He showed me where He had been. He had been right there with me and even in me. He was there feeling every blow as that boy hit me.

And He was right there when a little girl I know was tortured and raped. He was there when Jerry Sittser's mother and wife and daughter were killed by a drunk driver. And both that little girl (who is now an adult) and Jerry Sittser would tell

you that somehow knowing God was there with His arms wrapped around them in their pain has brought profound healing.

He was there the morning my son died. When his vital signs were vanishing, all the medical staff left the room so that Renee and I could be alone with him. We sat on either side of him, each holding his hands. But the Father of compassion was holding us. The God of all comfort wept with us.

Question 1: Pause and quiet your heart and ask God, “Where have you been in the midst of my pain?” Describe ideas or images that come to mind.

Breaking Through Isolation

God is with us, just as He calls us to be there for others who are in pain. As members of the fellowship of suffering we are invited into the deep bonds that form among those who suffer together. Sometimes we are drafted into the fellowship of suffering when pain tragically breaks into our lives. At other times, we voluntarily participate when we choose to be there for others in pain.

People in pain often feel isolated and overwhelmed. They feel that no one really understands, that no one really bears the burden with them. To some degree, that’s true. Proverbs 14:10 says that each heart knows its own bitterness, and no one else can fully enter into it. So don’t say “I know how you feel” when you really don’t and can’t. That can feel like you’re making light of that person’s pain.

But people in pain also long for someone to genuinely enter in as much as possible, to draw near and carry the burden with them. Galatians 6:2 calls us to “carry each other’s burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ” (NIV).

And 2 Corinthians 1:3–4 says that the “God of all comfort . . . comforts us in all our troubles *so that* we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God” (emphasis added).

Question 2: How have the ways that you comfort others been shaped by the ways that you have been comforted by God?

Question 3: Do you sense that you might be called to “be there” for someone who is in pain? Who? What is their situation?

Powerful Gifts

So what does it look like to be there for someone else? Where do we start? It might begin by simply saying from the heart, “I’m so sorry.” If they sense that is coming from deep within us, they will find comfort in how we are drawing near and entering into their pain. We can say, “I can’t fully understand what you are feeling, but I’m hurting with you.” It may be less helpful to say, “I can’t imagine what you are feeling.” That tends to confirm their feelings of isolation.

Sometimes the best way to enter in is to say nothing and simply weep with those who weep. Maybe all we need to say is, “Can I give you a hug?” Physical comfort can sometimes say so much more than words.

The Power of Showing Up

Just as the Father of compassion is there for us, we’re called to be there to comfort others in pain. One of the simplest ways to do that is to just show up. Have you ever met someone who had the knack of simply being there when people needed him or her most? Those people have the ministry of showing up.

Helping people in pain is not that complex. Yes, it can get complicated, but at the root, it’s simply being there for them as God is there for us. We do not have to be heroic or extraordinary. Mother Teresa once said, “In this life we cannot do great things. But we can do small things with great love.”

The Power of Listening

When God does call us to be there for a friend in pain, our most important role is to be fully present and to listen, not to pry or to preach. Job’s friends showed up. They sat with him and shared his agony for days. They were at their best when they were silent. When they opened their mouths, they lost their redemptive influence. Although they had come to help, they had not come to listen. That became evident when Job poured out his heart to them.

When Job spilled out his agony, they found it difficult to just listen. What would have happened if they had just listened? Swiss physician and author Paul Tournier said that being listened to is so close to being loved that most people can’t tell the difference.

Question 4: Can you recount a time when you sensed someone else really understood your pain? Can you describe what they did and how you felt?

The Power of Life-Giving Words

There is great comfort in listening, but there is also a time to open our mouths and allow life-giving words to flow. Often those come in written form. Written notes have the advantage of giving us the freedom to receive and process them when we're ready.

Don't be too afraid about saying the wrong thing. Life-giving words overflow from love-filled hearts. Even if we say the wrong thing, if sincere love is our motive, the receiver will sense that. The apostle Peter was right when he said that love covers a multitude of sins (1 Peter 4:8, NASB).

The Power of Life-Giving Actions

Even life-giving words can't stand alone. If a picture is worth a thousand words, actions must be priceless. When people are in pain, they often don't really know what they need, which is another reason to be sensitive to the Spirit. "Let me know if there's anything I can do" is rarely helpful. Most will never call. They don't want to impose, or they can't think far enough in advance to make it convenient for you to help. Plus, it can feel humbling to be on the receiving end.

What may be most helpful is when we take practical, sensitive initiative to help. Most of us know what we're good at and how God uses us. Some of us clean houses and make casseroles, others send flowers or write letters. In our pain we want the huggers to hug, the pray-ers to pray, the givers to give, and the nurses to nurse. Paul encouraged the church in Rome: "Let's just go ahead and be what we were made to be, without being envious or full of pride by comparing ourselves with each other, or trying to be something we aren't" (Romans 12:6, MSG).

Question 5: What are some ways you can "just do what you do" for someone else who is in pain?

We'll close this final session with some thoughts from the book, *Don't Waste the Pain*. In his parting words, David explains why he wrote the book when he did and how it has helped him make the most of his pain.

As I write this it is less than a year since my son died. So why am I working on building and launching this internet ministry? Why did I take time to write Don't Waste The Pain less than six months after Ian died? Why did I invest so much in maintaining our Caring Bridge weblog throughout the 15 months of Ian's battle with cancer?

The primary answer is this: I don't want to waste the pain. I want our pain to make me into a better person, and I want our experience to benefit others. And helping others even in the midst of our pain has played a significant role in our own healing.

A few days ago I received a heart-wrenching note from a mother whose 12-year-old son died from a brain tumor just a few weeks ago. My soul howled with agony. I careened through fresh memories of those first moments and hours and days and weeks following Ian's death. It is bitter to welcome a grieving mother into our fellowship of suffering.

As I lay in bed, I wondered how to gently coax her out from under her pain, lest her pain shape her in destructive rather than redemptive ways. I half dreamed, half imagined a prisoner of war who refuses to be defined by his circumstances, a man whose soul has somehow grown larger than his cell, larger than his captors, larger than his pain. I dreamed of a man whose captors secretly stand in awe of him, wondering what kind of man could endure what he endures with such dignity, what kind of person could even find joy and sing in the night in spite of all the pain they inflict on him. I long to be that kind of man in the face of my pain. I long for this mother to join us in the fellowship of sufferers who rise above their pain to become more. And we long for you to join us.

Question 6: As you look back over these six sessions, what are some major lessons, insights, or decisions that you feel led to carry forward in your life?

If you are doing this study on your own, we once again encourage you to join the conversation in the Dining Room at www.dontwastethepain.com. If you are already in the Dining Room and would like to continue this conversation with others, we want you to know that we plan to soon launch a Don't Waste the Pain Family Room where you and others can continue walking together.

As you complete this lesson and move on, continue to reflect on this question: What will it look like for you to not waste your pain?