THE PROBLEM AND POWER OF PAIN
WEEK 3 • DAILY BRIEFING 1 • PLACED

WEEKLY MEMORY VERSE

James 1:2–4

Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, [3]for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. [4]And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

This week follows Sunday's sermon, "Purpose & Possibility in Pain." You can watch or listen to the sermon at 1mso.church or on the One Missoula app.

OPENING PRAYER

Heavenly Father, help me work through the pain in my life so that it does not distract me from the missional calling You have on my life. Wherever I find myself, give me eyes to see the opportunities You have put in front of me, even in the middle of painful realities. While I long and labor to be free from this pain, show me what You would have me do while I am here. In Jesus' name I pray, amen.

TODAY'S TEACHING

On Sunday we saw that God created you to be something and to do something, and that He uses pain to place you, prune you, and perfect you. Today is about the first of those. God puts His people where He wants them, and He often does it through painful circumstances. Most of the time they cannot see why until much later. Tomorrow we will look at what God cuts away, so today stays focused on where He places you.

Most people can point to a move they never would have chosen. A layoff pushed you into a new job in a new town. A diagnosis put you in a waiting room three days a week. A parent's illness changed your address and the people you see every day. When that happens, it is natural to see only what was taken. The Bible pushes us to ask a second question: where has God put me, and who is here?

This goes all the way back to the beginning, before pain and suffering were ever part of the picture. "The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it" (Genesis 2:15). God did not create Adam and leave him to wander. He put him in a specific place with a specific job. On Sunday we saw the same pattern after sin brought suffering and death into the world. The example was Joseph, whose brothers sold him into slavery. Years later, after Joseph had saved them from a famine, he told them, "you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good" (Genesis 50:20). His brothers were responsible for what they did, yet God still used it to put Joseph exactly where he was needed.

The Bible is filled with examples of God using pain to place people in mission-critical positions. About 600 years before Jesus, the Babylonian Empire conquered Jerusalem and carried thousands of Jews hundreds of miles from home (2 Kings 24:14). Daniel was taken as a young man and trained to serve the king of Babylon (Daniel 1:3–6). Decades later, after Persia conquered Babylon, a Jewish man named Nehemiah served the Persian king as his cupbearer, a trusted official who served the king his wine (Nehemiah 1:11). When Nehemiah heard that Jerusalem's walls were still broken down, he sat down and wept, and his position gave him the access to ask the king for help rebuilding them (Nehemiah 1:3–4; 2:4–5).

Today's first passage comes from the book of Esther, which also takes place in Persia, among the Jews who stayed there after the exile. Esther was an orphan raised by her cousin Mordecai (Esther 2:7). When the king ordered young women from across the empire brought to his palace so he could choose a new queen, "Esther also was taken into the king's palace" (Esther 2:8). She had no say in her people's exile, her parents' death, or her being brought into a pagan king's harem. Yet God placed her there, and ultimately the king made her

queen without knowing she was Jewish. A few years later came a “coincidence.” One of the king’s officials, a man named Haman, convinced the king to sign a law to destroy every Jew in the empire (Esther 3:8–13). The king had no idea that his own queen was one of the Jews this law would kill. At the very moment her people were facing death, one of them was wearing the crown. When her cousin Mordecai realized that Esther was uniquely positioned to influence the king, he advocated her strategic use of the circumstance in which God had sovereignly placed her. He sent word asking her to go to the king and plead for her people (Esther 4:8). Esther was afraid, because anyone who went to the king without being summoned could be put to death (Esther 4:11). Today’s first passage is Mordecai’s response to her.

The second passage is part of a letter the prophet Jeremiah (a man God sent to speak His words to Israel) wrote from Jerusalem to the Jews who had already been carried off to Babylon (Jeremiah 29:1).

READ & MEDITATE

Esther 4:13–14

Then Mordecai told them to reply to Esther, “Do not think to yourself that in the king’s palace you will escape any more than all the other Jews. [14]For if you keep silent at this time, relief and deliverance will rise for the Jews from another place, but you and your father’s house will perish. And who knows whether you have not come to the kingdom for such a time as this?”

Jeremiah 29:4, 7

Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, to all the exiles whom I have sent into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon: … [7]But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the LORD on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare.

As you read, notice who Esther and the exiles are told to think about besides themselves.

REFLECT

Answer these honestly. This is between you and God, and nobody else needs to see what you write.

Esther did not choose the palace, and the palace could not protect her.

1. Fill in the blank from Esther 4:14: “And who knows whether you have not come to the kingdom for such a _____ as this?”

What did Mordecai want Esther to see about where she was?

Mordecai was confident that help would come for the Jews one way or another.

2. God’s name is never mentioned in these verses. What do they still tell you about Him?

In fact, the book of Esther never mentions God by name at all. Yet the whole story reads like a God who is quietly arranging every detail, from an orphan girl taken into a palace to a king who could not sleep one night and had the royal records read to him (Esther 6:1–2). God is often working behind the scenes, in places where nobody is saying His name.

The exiles in Babylon wanted to go home and put all of the painful realities of their people's exile and captivity behind them. Meanwhile, some ear ticklers were telling them they would be home soon. This is when God sent a message through His true prophet, Jeremiah.

3. Fill in the blank from Jeremiah 29:7: "But seek the _____ of the city where I have sent you into exile."

According to verse 4, who sent them into exile?

What does that tell you about God's purpose for them, even in a painful place?

Not every painful move ends in a palace the way it did for Esther. Jeremiah told these families to build houses and plant gardens, because they would be in Babylon for a long time (Jeremiah 29:5, 10). God did not promise them a quick way out. He told them they were not there by accident or without purpose, and He gave them something to do while they were there.

Most people have at least one place they never would have chosen to be.

4. Where has a painful season put you? A new job, a hospital room, a different town, a support group, a household you did not plan on, or somewhere else entirely?

Who is there that you would never otherwise have met?

Nehemiah used the access his royal position gave him to help people who were hurting and to bring honor to God's name.

5. What is one way you could seek the good of the people around you this week, right where you are?

6. Have you been treating where you are as a waiting room you are trying to escape, or as a place God may have put you on purpose, even though it hurts?

What would change this week if you prayerfully sought the missional opportunities inside your painful circumstance?

PRAYER

Bring what you just wrote to God. Write your prayer or pray out loud.

MEMORY VERSE

Write or recite James 1:2–4 from memory.