THE PROBLEM AND POWER OF PAIN
WEEK 3 • DAILY BRIEFING 5 • THE SECRET THIRD OPTION

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, I do not want the pain You have allowed in my life to go to waste. Show me what You are teaching me, and give me the wisdom to grow instead of just moving on. In Jesus' name I pray, amen.

TODAY'S TEACHING

On Sunday we asked whether your pain is a setback or a plot point in the story God is telling through your life. Yesterday we looked at two roads: bitter or better. Today we look at a secret third option, and it may be the most common one. You can go through pain, come out the other side, and be exactly the same person you were before. That is the third option: wasted pain.

Here is what it usually looks like. The crisis passes. The scan comes back clear, the debt gets paid down, or the marriage survives the blowup. Relief kicks in, and within a few weeks life is back to normal, including the habits that caused some of the trouble in the first place. Nobody stops to ask what God was trying to teach them.

You may have heard that the Chinese word for crisis is made of two characters meaning "danger" and "opportunity." It shows up in a lot of business and leadership books, and John F. Kennedy used it in his speeches. But scholars of the Chinese language point out that the second character in that word does not mean "opportunity." It means something closer to a crucial point, the moment when things begin to change. The corrected version is actually closer to what the Bible teaches. Pain is a turning point, and you decide whether you turn.

The first passage today comes from the book of Exodus. The Israelites had been slaves in Egypt for generations, and God sent Moses to tell Pharaoh, the king of Egypt, to let them go. When Pharaoh refused, God sent a series of plagues on Egypt. Today's passage comes after the seventh, a hailstorm that struck down people, animals, and crops across the whole country (Exodus 9:25). The second passage comes from Proverbs, a book of short wise sayings. In Proverbs, a "fool" is not someone with a low IQ. A fool is someone who refuses to be corrected.

One important clarification before you read. Pharaoh's pain came from his own sin and rebellion against God, but not all pain works that way. If you are grieving the death of someone you love or facing an illness you did nothing to cause, your pain is not a punishment, and God is not settling a score with you. Jesus refused to blame a man's suffering on his sin or his parents' sin (John 9:1–3). We are learning from Pharaoh because his story shows how anyone can waste pain, no matter where the pain came from.

READ & MEDITATE

Exodus 9:27–28, 34

Then Pharaoh sent and called Moses and Aaron and said to them, “This time I have sinned; the LORD is in the right, and I and my people are in the wrong. [28]Plead with the LORD, for there has been enough of God’s thunder and hail. I will let you go, and you shall stay no longer.” … [34]But when Pharaoh saw that the rain and the hail and the thunder had ceased, he sinned yet again and hardened his heart, he and his servants.

Proverbs 27:22

Crush a fool in a mortar with a pestle along with crushed grain, yet his folly will not depart from him.

A mortar and pestle are a stone bowl and a heavy grinding tool used to crush grain into flour. As you read, pay attention to the timing in Pharaoh’s story.

REFLECT

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

Pharaoh’s words in verse 27 sound like real repentance.

1. Fill in the blank from Exodus 9:34: “he sinned yet again and _____ his heart, he and his servants.”

What changed between verse 27 and verse 34?

Nothing changed in Pharaoh. Only his circumstances changed. He was sorry about the hail, not about his sin, so when the hail stopped, so did his sorrow.

Most people have prayed some version of Pharaoh’s prayer.

2. Think of a painful season that is now behind you. What did you promise God, or yourself, while you were in it?

How much of your commitment has been realized in your life today?

The proverb describes about as much pressure as a person could imagine.

3. What does Proverbs 27:22 tell you about whether pain alone can change a person?

Pain by itself does not change anyone. Near the end of the Bible, people suffering under God's judgment "cursed the name of God who had power over these plagues. They did not repent and give him glory" (Revelation 16:9). What changes a person is turning to God in the pain.

God sent Moses back to Pharaoh again and again, both before and after the hail.

4. What does that tell you about God?

Wasting pain usually looks like moving on as fast as possible.

5. What pain are you in right now, or just came through, that you are tempted to rush past without asking God what He is doing in you?

What might God be growing in you through it?

MY "I WILL" STATEMENT

This week we saw that God uses pain to place you, prune you, and perfect you, and that you can come out of it bitter, better, or unchanged. On Sunday we will look at the pain we bring on ourselves.

Write one sentence that begins with the words "I will." Make it something you can actually do in the next seven days, name the day you will do it, and tie it to the pain you named in question 5.

Example: I will spend twenty minutes on Saturday morning writing down what God has been teaching me through my layoff, and I will share it with one friend from church by Sunday.

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.