WEEK 3: PURPOSE & POSSIBILITY IN PAIN

LIFEGROUP

STEP 1 SERMON RECAP

Sunday looked at what God does with pain in the life of someone who belongs to Him. Here is the sermon in five lines:

1. **The Big Idea:** God has created you to BE something and DO something. He uses pain to PLACE you, PRUNE you, and PERFECT you (Genesis 1:27–28).
2. **Place:** God used betrayal, slavery, a false accusation, and prison to put Joseph where he could save many lives (Genesis 50:20).
3. **Prune:** God cuts back even the branches that are bearing fruit, so that they bear more fruit (John 15:1–2). Paul pleaded with God three times to take away his thorn, and God said no (2 Corinthians 12:7–9).
4. **Perfect:** "Perfect" means complete, not sinless. Trials produce endurance, character, and hope (James 1:2–4; Romans 5:3–5). It is not automatic, though. Pain makes some people bitter instead of better.
5. **Where it lands:** The hope of eternal life, which shapes how we interpret pain, starts at the cross, because "while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8). When pain comes, ask God what He is working to accomplish in your life.

STEP 2 ACCOUNTABILITY AND CHECK-IN

Go around the table for the accountability and check-in. In order to avoid over-talking and dominating conversation, keep each answer to about one minute.

- How did it go with the "I Will" statement you made last week? What were the key ingredients of success or failure? (1 minute)
- What is one thing you are thankful for this week? (1 minute)
- What is one challenge you are facing right now? (1 minute)

STEP 3 ONE PERSON READS IDEA 1 ALOUD

While this is read, circle or star anything God points out (John 16:8, 13).

Each idea below ends with three things: (1) an observation about God from the passage, (2) the principle the passage teaches, and (3) a sample "I Will" statement showing one way to apply it.

IDEA 1: God uses pain to place you.

> **Genesis 50:19–20**
> But Joseph said to them, "Do not fear, for am I in the place of God? 20 As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today."

Joseph's brothers sold him into slavery out of jealousy. In Egypt he was falsely accused, thrown in prison, and forgotten, until God raised him to second in command over the country, where he stored grain that kept nations alive through a famine (Genesis 37–41). After their father died, the brothers feared Joseph would finally take revenge. Genesis 50:19–20 is his answer.

OBSERVATION, INTERPRETATION, LIFE APPLICATION:

- **Observation:** The brothers "meant evil," and in the same event "God meant it for good." God worked through their sin to save many lives, including theirs, without approving their attitude or action.
- **Interpretation:** God often places His people where they can serve others through painful roads they never would have chosen. The people who hurt you are responsible for what they did, but God can still use it.
- **Life Application:** I will write down one painful season that put me where I am now, name one person there I can serve, and do one thing for them before we meet next week.

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STEP 4 A SECOND PERSON READS IDEA 2 ALOUD

While this is read, circle or star anything God points out (John 16:8, 13).

IDEA 2: God uses pain to prune you.

> **John 15:1–2**
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> "I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. 2 Every branch in me that does not bear fruit
> he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit."
>
> **2 Corinthians 12:7–9**
>
> So to keep me from becoming conceited because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations,
> a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to harass me, to keep me from becoming
> conceited. 8 Three times I pleaded with the Lord about this, that it should leave me. 9 But he said
> to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will
> boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me.

Jesus said this to His disciples the night before His crucifixion. A vinedresser cuts back branches that are already bearing fruit so that they will bear more. Paul received revelations so great that God gave him a painful "thorn" to keep him from pride. Christians disagree about whether the thorn was a spirit or a person under Satanic influence, but either way, God refused to take it away.

OBSERVATION, INTERPRETATION, LIFE APPLICATION:

- **Observation:** God prunes branches that are already bearing fruit, not only dead ones. When Paul asked three times, God gave him grace instead of relief.
- **Interpretation:** Sometimes God's answer to your pain is no, because the pain is protecting you from something worse. A no from God is not proof that He is angry or absent.
- **Life Application:** I will name one thing I have repeatedly asked God to remove, and ask one person in this group to pray with me by the end of the week about how God may be using it to accomplish good in my life.

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STEP 5 A THIRD PERSON READS IDEA 3 ALOUD

While this is read, circle or star anything God points out (John 16:8, 13).

IDEA 3: God uses pain to perfect you.

> **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.

James wrote to Jewish Christians scattered across the Roman world (James 1:1), many of them poor and mistreated by the rich (James 2:6). The word translated "perfect" (*teleios*) means complete or mature, not sinless. Paul says the same thing: suffering produces endurance, character, and hope (Romans 5:3–4).

OBSERVATION, INTERPRETATION, LIFE APPLICATION:

- **Observation:** God prioritizes our character over our comfort. He uses trials to produce it.
- **Interpretation:** Counting trials as joy is not pretending pain feels good. It is confidence in what God is producing through the pain.
- **Life Application:** I will name one trial I am facing right now, write down what endurance would look like in it this week, and tell one person in this group by the end of the week.

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STEP 6 NOW DISCUSS

Go around the table.

1. Can you recount a time when a painful situation eventually produced good in your life? If you are still waiting to see it, what are you hoping God is doing?

2. Which item that you circled or starred stood out to you most and why?

STEP 7 WRITE YOUR "I WILL" STATEMENT

What is a practical, measurable, tangible step you can take to apply this information this next week?

STEP 8 PRAY

Pray for the person on your right by name and for the "I Will" they just wrote, or the facilitator prays for the whole group.