Purpose & Possibility in Pain

PROBLEM & POWER OF PAIN • BRAD SAAB • NOVEMBER 1, 2026

BIG IDEA: God has created you to BE something and DO something. He uses pain to PLACE you, PRUNE you, and PERFECT you.

All right, church, let's give Him praise and go ahead and grab a seat. So, we are in week three of The Problem and Power of Pain. We're going to talk about the possibility inside pain today.

What we're going to talk about to start is how you interpret pain points in your life. So here's the deal. You are going to suffer significant emotional pain in your life. I don't know what you're going to go through. I'm going to share some stories of what I've gone through today. There is no way to avoid it. It is the reality of this life.

What you can determine is how you interpret what you go through. Okay, so how you interact: is this something that is a major setback? Is it a prohibition to God's best for your life, or is it a plot point in the story that He is telling in your life? I've shared in week one some of the key pain points in my life, of the story that God is telling. Brutal to go through at the time, but they have been radically developmental in order to get me where God wants me and to cultivate His character inside of me.

One of the stories that I shared with you was that one of the very earliest memories that I have is my mom and my dad coming into my room when I was a kid. My parents separated when I was four, and they divorced when I was eight. Now, when that happened, that started a chain reaction that started points in a story that- check this out- God has worked for good.

All right. So it has led to radical blessing in my life. Now, I have to stop right here, because I thought about not talking about this, because there's a couple things. So there's two things. I got a caveat here. I'm going to share some things with you that I went through based on things that happened to my parents, okay?

Part of their stories, and what God is doing in their lives- what I do not want you to hear is what God is doing in their lives are really just, like,

ways to support what He's doing in my life. Okay. I want you to make sure the storyline is not, bad, and then what my parents go through really just serves Brad, as the hero story of Brad.

Does that make sense? Okay, it's really, really important, when you're interpreting pain that you go through because of sickness or sorrow or divorce or breakdown or bankruptcy, that you don't go, oh, God did that to such-and-such in order to make me the better star of the show. Okay. That is number one. That is not what I'm doing.

I'm going to share some things today, and you cannot hear that, okay? Number two, when I touch on my parents' divorce, I have had it thrown in my face before, pastorally, where I will sit with a married couple who is considering going through divorce, and they like to throw it back in my face. They like to use it, because I'm like, hey, you are trading a temporary problem that is totally fixable in most cases for a permanent pain.

That's what you're doing. And they turn around and they go, well, look at how it worked out in your life. It went pretty good. Statistics show that in the case of divorce, the happy ending is the less frequent ending. Okay. That is what your sociological statistics show. I am not telling you that I have overcome the odds. I'm telling you God has done things in this story, and it has landed well.

So number one, I'm not using my parents as, like, supporting cast in the story of Brad. I'm trying to talk to you about what God did in the story of God, okay? He's the point of this whole thing, and in your life as well. Secondly, please do not use the redemptive things that God has done in my life in order to excuse your decisions and your behavior.

Okay, so there's the caveats. So here's what happened. So my parents separate at four, divorce at eight. I love both my parents. My parents did divorce as well as you could. They didn't bash each other. They weren't smashing each other in front of me, like, oh, your dad is this terrible person. They didn't play me against each other, trying to outdo each other with gifts and manipulate.

They saw all of the problems that that would create, and they chose to act like adults. Okay, so they did that in that way. Both of them got

remarried. I love my stepmom. I love my stepdad. Both of them dated and married well. And so I end up with four parental influences, each with their own unique aspects that they bring into my life that bear fruit in my life today.

Okay, my dad- I'm just going to talk about my dad here for a second, my bio dad, my biological dad. That's George, by the way. If you ever see George, you say, hi, George. He comes to Montana sometimes. So George is a party looking for a place to happen. My dad is fun. Okay? He was a firefighter.

He worked 24 hours on, he got 48 off. Every three weeks he'd get five days off, and he'd be like, we're going to the mountains. And so we would drive from Miami through the night in order to get up to western North Carolina. We would raft and we would camp and we would climb and hike and do all these kind of things.

He's also the friend that you wish you had. He is a guy who will give you his time. He is a guy who will serve. He is the guy that taught me how to be generous. He would sit in the church parking lot. We would pull up to church, and I was a kid, nine, ten, whatever. We would sit, and he would write out his tithe and offering check.

And I was like, what's that? And he's like, we support the mission, church. Great. Okay. He taught me giving and taught me serving. He was- say, if you were renovating your bathroom- this is, like, one of his favorite things to do. When the neighbors in his neighborhood down in Jacksonville- he's still alive. Okay, neighbors down in Jacksonville, they'll be like, I'm renovating a bathroom.

And my dad's like, oh, can I help? I've got the skill and the time. And he'd go donate his skills and his time for free. Drives my stepmom bonkers. Okay, because she's got a long honey-do list, and he's like, I'm going to go help the neighbors, right? And so just neglecting his place. That's my dad. So I learned giving and service and love for outdoors and love for fun.

That's my dad, okay? That's him. My mom goes on and she meets a teacher. My mom was a public educator. She was a PE teacher down in South Florida. She ends up marrying another teacher. His name's Jerry.

Jerry is a guy that's all about developing people, okay? He is a teacher. He is an athletic coach. He gives me a passion for athletics.

He gives me a passion for practice and learning how to level up. I wasn't very coachable as a kid, so don't- I don't want to blow this, all right? He's the one that would, like, try to teach me things and try to have all this patience. He took me on as a son. Okay, so Jerry- he's the one, like, I'm telling you a story right now.

Okay? So I'm telling you a story. I tell y'all stories regularly from the scriptures. When Jerry figured out that I was struggling with language arts- I can't remember if it was middle school or high school. I think it was high school. He would sit and he would say, hey, Brad, you're really struggling with your writing. You're really struggling with telling narrative and understanding comprehension, like reading comprehension, which is what a lot of this is.

Okay? He would sit, and we would write every Thursday night. We would sit next to each other, and we'd pick a word bank and a plot line, and we would write. And he was hysterical. And so he taught me humor. Okay, so my stepdad teaches me humor, all right? And he teaches me storytelling. And every single Sunday of my life, and with my kids and in my parenting, I'm using the skills that he taught and instilled in me.

Okay, so my parents get divorced, and I get these two great fatherly influences, each bringing different things into the story of my life. God worked out the pain of my childhood. And walking around in the early '80s, divorce was nowhere near as common as it is now. All right. It was picking up steam. It was picking up momentum at that time.

But back then, out of all my friends, I didn't know any other kid that came from a divorced family, any other kid in all of my friends. That's the way the world was back then. So it was a painful thing that God used for good. We're going to bounce off that, and I want to tell you how this story unfolds, but we're going to get to the main point here today.

BIG IDEA

And it says the big idea is that God has created you to be something and to do something, and He uses pain to place you, prune you, and perfect

you. Now, quick thing for the church people. When I say perfect, I'm not talking about moral perfection, okay? I'm talking about fulfilling design. We'll talk about it when we get there, okay?

Don't freak out if you're a church person. Like, moral perfection is not where we're going. Okay? So God has created you to be something and do something. Now, caveat again: danger. When I say that God has created you to be something and do something- it's something big. It's something world-shaping. It is something eternity-changing. What people hear is, oh, I'm supposed to be some sort of celebrity.

I'm supposed to have some big all-star role, right? I'm supposed to be this big world changer, general, rock star, president, big crazy thing. Usually delusions of grandeur is what we tend to do, and we neglect to pay attention to the fact that there's one celebrity, that's Jesus. And the whole thing is about Him. And each of us have roles to play.

Small, minor, supporting roles in the story of Jesus. Okay, so don't- when I'm like, hey, God created you to be something, don't go delusions of grandeur. God's called me to be famous and rich and awesome and all this stuff. Okay? God has called you to eternity-shaping, world-changing work that is frequently, overwhelmingly, usually behind the scenes.

Genesis 1:27–28

I want you to see Genesis chapter one.

This is where we're going to get this. This is in creation. God created man in His own image. I'm in verse 27 here. God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him, male and female. He created them- both the ladies and the guys. And God blessed them. And God said to them, be fruitful- here we go.

Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the heavens, and over every living thing that moves on the earth. Here's what you're made to be. You're made to be an image bearer of God. That means it's a status. It's wherever you go.

You bring the morals and wisdom and message and methods of God with you. Okay? So you bring His kingdom into your family, and you

bring His kingdom into your school or your workplace or your dorm or your sports team or your neighborhood. Okay. So you're supposed to image God; that's what you are. And then you're supposed to do something: be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth and subdue it.

You're supposed to take your creative capacities, your intellect, your resources, your social connections, whatever it is, and you are supposed to take the raw material of this world and do something cultivated to make it better. This is the way you're supposed to image God. See, God created out of nothing. There's nothing. And then He speaks. And then there's something. You, as a little image bearer of God, are supposed to take some of the stuff that He makes and make it better, to identify problems and solve them, to identify opportunities and then build towards them.

That's what you're supposed to be doing. So check it out. This is in stark contrast to the American methodology right now, which is: wake up, go to work, make somebody else rich. Leave there, go to the bar, make those people rich, or the gas station, make those people rich. Go home. Look at stuff you're not supposed to on the internet.

Fall asleep, wake up, and do it again, and then just wait for Saturday. You're supposed to be doing so much more than that. You're supposed to image God and build and craft and create. And when God brings pain into your life- when God allows pain, tolerates pain, whether it's active or passive- He will use it to get you back in alignment, or to maximize your ability to bear fruit in what you were created and called to be.

We're going to break these things down. Three parts to this. We're going to talk about placing, pruning, and perfecting today.

PLACE

So God will use pain to place you, to get you where He wants you and where He will maximize your effectiveness in building, crafting, creating, making disciples who do the same, advancing His kingdom here on earth. We looked at Genesis.

Genesis 50:20

We're going to go back to Genesis 50:20. We looked at this in week one. Told you a little bit of the story of Jacob- or, sorry, of Joseph, whose brothers sold him into slavery. Didn't tell you the backstory on that. So he was one of 12. It's a big family. Okay. So he's got a big family. They need to drive around in a couple of those ten-passenger vans in order to get where they needed to go.

Okay, so they're doing all this stuff. I told you that he was his dad's favorite. I'll tell you how they got into this situation. So his dad marries two women. It's a polygamist family. And as is frequently the case with polygamy, there's massive rivalry between the two wives. So he's married- so Joe- Jacob, sorry- his dad is married to two different women.

Leah, or Leah, right? And Rachel. And there's this rivalry going on, and Leah starts having kids, and Rachel sees this, and she's like, man, God has not given me kids. She's wrestling with infertility. So she goes and gets her slave, her servant, and gives her servant to her husband. So now he's sleeping with a third girl. She gets pregnant, she has a couple of kids.

Leah, she's had, like, five kids, and she's like, oh, man, now my sister's servant is having more kids than me. So she gets her servant, brings her servant in. And now Jacob is sitting here, and he's like, this is- I love rivalries. Okay, this is good, okay? Because he's got four girls that he's sleeping with now at this point.

And so he's having all these kids with all these people. Finally, Rachel gets pregnant, and that's Joseph. And he's the favorite. He's the one, because Rachel was the favorite wife out of the whole lot. And so there's this rivalry, and there's all these 12 kids. And so Joseph- or Jacob, sorry, there's a lot of J's- Jacob comes in, and he's like, Joseph is my favorite.

And he gives him this coat that distinguishes him from his brothers. And so he stands out like that. And so he would sit, and he has these dreams where he thinks that God's telling him that his siblings are going to bow down before him, and his parents are going to bow down before him.

And so he's kind of got this thing where he's got this, like, self-exalting dream thing happening.

By the way, if you have dreams about your siblings bowing down before you, don't tell them that, okay? It's going to create problems when it's time to divide up the inheritance. All right. So what you've got is this rivalry. So he shows up. His brothers go out to look at some herds, and his dad goes and sends him off to go check them out.

They capture him, sell him into slavery. Right. So I just want you to catch something to what's going on in Joseph's life. His dad and his mom make all of these decisions that lead to all of this chaos, and the family decisions that he didn't make- he ends up with this rivalry. His siblings come along; they sell him into slavery.

He is passed off to a government official. The government official brings him into his house. Okay. He becomes the second in charge, because the Bible says that God was with him, and so everything he did was flourishing. And so he catches the eye of his owner's wife. And the guy, the house owner's Potiphar. He has a wife, and his wife sees Joseph.

And I don't know, fellas, I'm not the lady whisperer. But I'll tell you something about ladies. They like competence. She- like, competence is drawn to competence. And so Joseph is this guy- Bible says he's a handsome, good-looking dude, and he's competent. And so she's like, come to bed with me, come to bed with me. And so he keeps refusing.

It's like, I'm not going to defile myself. I'm not going to turn against my master like this. It's really cool, because, you see, his dad has all of this, like, sexual, messed-up toxicity. And he's like, nope, we're not going there. Okay. So he breaks that chain in his story. Well, she decides that she is going to falsely accuse him of sexual assault.

So she accuses him, gets him thrown in jail. So he ends up in prison. While he's in prison, two of the king of the land's- okay, so this is a different guy, Pharaoh. So two guys that are the king of the land's, they end up in prison with him. They have dreams. And Joseph interprets them, and he says, hey, you, the guy that's going to survive this, when you get back into power, remember me. Tell Pharaoh about me.

Well, he's forgotten about for a long time, until Pharaoh has dreams, and no one can interpret. And lo and behold, God works it out that Joseph ends up having this conversation, and he interprets these dreams that rescue all kinds of people from dying from famine, makes him second in charge in all the land of Egypt.

And we already looked at this verse, but I wanted you to get that. This- we're looking at it from the angle of God's positioning and placing now. So after he rescues these nations from famine, in Genesis 50:20 it says, as for you- he's talking to his brothers here. His brothers end up- his brothers have betrayed him, okay? They end up coming to him for food.

They're safe, and they're worried that he is going to exact revenge on them. He says, 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. So he ends up in this position to be able to save many lives from famine, including his treasonous, traitorous brothers.

Because of his parents' choice, his brothers' choice, false accusation of sexual assault, being forgotten in prison. Pain, pain, pain, pain, pain. And then finally God says, okay, now. And God placed him where He wants him.

Told you about my parents divorcing, them each getting remarried. So Jerry was incredibly special to me, my stepfather. He was incredibly special to me. Okay. All of my parents- each of them taught me different things. In 2002, Jerry was- I was down in school at the University of Florida in Gainesville, Florida. In school there. Get a phone call. Hey, you need to come to North Carolina. What's going on? I actually came home from work, and my roommate goes, hey, you need to call North Carolina.

Your mom's been calling, trying to get in touch with- I call my mom, and a guy picks up the phone. He's like, hey, this isn't good. I'm like, what are we talking about? I don't know what's going on. He's like, yeah, so Jerry's in ICU. And I'm like, whoa, whoa, whoa, what's going on? Short story, short version of this.

Jerry was playing flag football and was shoved in the back, and his head went in the ground, and his body toppled over his neck. C5-C6 injury.

Okay, put him in a wheelchair. I already said this in week one. What I wanted to talk about, though- the reason why I'm revisiting this, and I'm telling it again, is because that was a major, major pain point for me.

I can still see him in traction in ICU. I don't know if you've ever seen that contraption that they put people in, and it pulls their neck back into alignment. I can see it as clearly as I'm seeing you right now. The killer was seeing my sister- sorry- walking through the halls of the hospital, and me going, he's not- he's not going to walk her down the aisle. Killed me. It's crushing.

It was a couple weeks, an incredibly intense pain, and it led to bringing focus. That's when it woke me up, as a- what was I, a 21-year-old at this point- realizing how broken and busted the world was and that people are hurting. This led to me going to a ministry mentor. I've talked to you about him before. His name's Hal.

And because of Jerry's accident, I went to Hal, and I said- I was toying with different things. I was like, man, I don't know if I'm going to go into business, into finance. I was thinking about firefighting. I was thinking about trying to go fly helicopters in the Army. Like, I'm trying to figure out all this stuff. This moment that Jerry goes through, where he's paralyzed, leads me to go to Hal and say, I don't know what I'm going to do, but God's calling me into ministry with the time that I have left.

This life is short. I don't know what I'm going to experience. I don't know what God's going to give me, but I want to help people, because this world is broken and hurting, and I want to do something about it. Okay, it's 21-year-old Brad. It was that moment of my stepfather's pain. Again, it's not that he's the side character; it's that God used this pain to put me in the lane that He has for me to run in.

God used that extreme pain that I went through, seeing someone who was so special to me, who loved me the way a father would. Like, he was my stepdad. I'm his step-kid, and he loved me like I was his own kid and invested so much in me. And now he's in a wheelchair. And so it's crushing.

But it caused focus in my life. God will use pain in order to position you. It was from that point forward that I'm like, okay, now we're chasing

ministry. Was there waffling and questioning? Yep. There was a little bit of that, but overwhelmingly it was, I'm going to do something about the pain and the suffering in this life.

God will use pain to place you.

PRUNE

Secondly, God will use pain to prune you. Okay, we're going to use an agrarian illustration from the Bible.

John 15:1–2

Jesus, in John 15, He's talking about vines and branches and bearing fruit. Fruit is a spiritual development inside of you. It is also helping others get to know Jesus and grow in Jesus. That's what you see fruitfulness described as in the Bible.

Jesus is using a metaphor. He says, I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. Okay. Imagine a vine, and it's rooted and it's giving life. 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, might bear more fruit.

Some of you, you've been walking with the Lord. You're connected. You're attached to Jesus. Okay? Like, He's the vine, and you're a branch, and you're connected to Him, and you're bearing fruit. You're seeing things growing in your life. You're seeing spiritual development, like Galatians 5, the fruit of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.

You're seeing that in your own life. You're seeing fruitfulness, how God is working in you and through you to help other people to grow in Christ. And yet there's pain that comes, and that pain, what Jesus says, is pruning. You ever try to grow any type of fruit, anything like that? Okay, what happens is you get this vine- we'll just use the illustration that Jesus gave- and you've got these branches, and they're shooting off the vine, and they're bearing fruit.

And then the vinedresser will come and lop off the branches. Ouch. Pruning hurts. You say, why would you do that? It was bearing fruit. Oh,

watch. It's going to bear that much more fruit. Okay, so you can be bearing fruit in your life, and God will come along, and He'll leverage pain, or He'll put you through something painful, or allow something painful in your life, in order to lop off some branches that are already bearing fruit, so that you can bear even more fruit.

Some people get so discouraged by this. They get so connected to God, and, I'm bearing fruit, and then this pain. Why? More fruit, less distractions. Not giving focus to the lesser things, to the comfort and the pleasure in this life. I got to tell you this story about the day that I got the call, the day that I got the call about Jerry's accident, and to tell you where I was.

I was 21 years old, working at Dillard's. Okay, so I'm working at Dillard's in the men's clothing department, and I was sitting there, and I want to tell you this so that you could understand: I was bearing fruit. Like, I was following Jesus. I was connecting with Jesus daily. I was serving in my church, was leading worship bands, doing discipleship with people. I'm doing all these kind of things, but I've got radical immaturity going on. Okay.

When I say that I was working at Dillard's, I need to use the term "work" really loosely. Okay, so I worked in the men's department at Dillard's. There was this clothing brand, Nautica. I don't even know if that's still a thing at all. Okay. It's- never mind. Okay. Right. So I worked in the Nautica section. Across from Nautica, there was Daniel- Daniel, if you go to Dillard's at the mall, there's the Daniel section in Dillard's today. Okay.

And you've got kind of a group of 20-year-old males that worked in the men's department at Dillard's. Now, I don't know if you run a department store or not, but you generally don't want to hire 20-year-old males to do clothing sales. Okay, so what we would do is, we figured out that the security cameras in our department didn't work. So it was like, game on.

And when I say game on, what I mean is that we had these clothing racks that you could take apart, and parts of these clothing racks would make great baseball bats. And so the paper that these shirts and clothes would come packaged in- crumple up, and when you crumpled up the

paper that it was shipped in and it stayed together, made a great baseball.

Okay. So we would play department store baseball, where we would be on the clock, dismantling hardware that is meant to be used to run this thing, and we're pitching from Daniel Crémieux into Nautica and playing department store baseball. Okay, you know how I talk to you guys sometimes about stealing time and being on the clock and not being on your phone?

That comes from me being a moron. We didn't have phones. We weren't sitting there playing on smartphones. We were playing department store baseball at Dillard's. Okay. While we were getting paid however much we were supposed to be paid to sell some shirts. All right, that's just the level of immaturity that's going on. That is what I was doing when I got the call.

Okay, so I've got this fruit in my life, where I'm serving at church, I'm at church regularly, giving, running worship bands, discipleship, all the stuff I've already said. But simultaneously, I'm still goofing around a little bit in school. When I'm on the clock, there's not a lot of seriousness. I'm not treating people the way I would want to be treated if I were a business owner, okay?

There's just massive immaturity. That's where I was in my maturation and my thought process when I get the call that Jerry is paralyzed playing flag football. Bearing fruit, and then God brings pruning, causing more fruit. There was a major need for growing up at this time.

Listen, when I'm telling you these stories, the idea here is that you go, oh, in my story, God is using pain to get me into or out of a relationship. God is using pain to get me into a job, or out of a major, or away from some friends. Okay? And then He prunes. He prunes, and He'll bring pain into your life. Like, if you're just sitting here, like, I just want to seek pleasure and comfort and all this kind of stuff, right? This is what I want to be able to do.

God puts you through pruning. You've come to church. You've started serving. You started giving, you started bearing fruit. You started helping other people, right? You started all of these things. But there's still

immaturity and idolatry to deal with. And so God will use pain in your life to prune off branches that are bearing fruit so that you might bear more fruit.

2 Corinthians 12:7–9

You see this in Second Corinthians chapter 12. Okay, Second Corinthians chapter 12. You've got the apostle Paul, and he is a guy who's running around the Middle East. He's starting churches, he's making disciples, and he's having a lot of fruit. But there is something that needs to be pruned out of his life, and it is his pride. Okay.

It's a trait. It is his conceit and his arrogance. Because when you start bearing fruit, it's world-changing and eternity-shaping, pride is knocking at the door. So he's going to talk about a thorn in the flesh. He says this in Second Corinthians 12:7–9: 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.

Second time he says this phrase: to keep me from becoming conceited. Check it out. He's abiding in Christ. He's following the Lord. He's on mission, he's bearing fruit. And yet God's like, we need to take something out. And so he's given a thorn in the flesh. That should sound uncomfortable, and that should sound painful. Okay. He says it's a tormentor from Satan.

And Christians debate about whether this is an actual spirit, that is, like a supernatural spirit that is getting him, or whether it's a person who is influenced in demonic ways, like a human being. So people debate that back and forth, but it's something from Satan. You should be thinking back to last week, okay, back to what Job goes through.

I've been talking about spiritual warfare in this, right? In order to keep him from becoming conceited. Verse eight, he says, three times I pleaded with the Lord about this, that it should leave me. But He said to me, My grace is sufficient for you. My power is made perfect- we're going to transition, talk about this word. This is the word teleo. Teleo, teleo- there we go, thank you- teleo. In weakness it's made perfect.

Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses. You should circle that word: boast. We can talk about that, and rejoicing, in just a second. All the more gladly in my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me.

So check it out. If you have been bearing fruit, and if you have been afflicted by something painful, a thorn in the flesh, okay, whatever that is, and you've prayed and you've pleaded with God, and you've thought, if I just have enough faith, if I just have enough faith, if I just have enough faith, it'll go away- listen, this guy wrote the, like, parts of the Bible.

At least 13 books in the Bible, right? This is a missionary. He's bearing fruit, he's praying, he's pleading, and God is still pruning. God is still developing and cultivating. So if your prayers have gone unanswered, be encouraged. Paul went, and he got a no also, and he was put under this situation. People would be like, oh, man, what am I doing to make God mad at me?

How do I get Him to do what I want? Dude, God was working in Paul's- like, Paul was abiding, he was bearing fruit, but there was a danger. And so God brings this pruning aspect.

PERFECT

Now, I want to transition off of this word, perfect. Teleo. Let's talk about this for a second. So this word isn't, like, perfect, flawless.

It is fulfilling your design. All right. You'll see in a daily briefing this coming week, we're going to talk about Jesus being made perfect in His sufferings. Okay. When we use the word perfect, what our brains go to is moral perfectionism. It's actually that you are maturing into, and becoming, and fulfilling the thing that God made you to be, which gets us to our last P.

So we've got place, prune, and perfect, okay? To perfect. So we're going to bounce off this concept of God saying, My grace is sufficient. My power's made perfect- it's fulfilled and brought to completion- in weakness. So God uses pain to perfect you.

James 1:2–4

James 1:2–4, one of the most famous passages on how Christians should think about pain and suffering in their lives, says, count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds.

Count it all joy when you face trials of various kinds. Okay, this is a junk-drawer term for whatever you might face. It might be relational, it might be medical, it might be economic, it might be political. When you face trials of various kinds, count it all joy. This is not asking you to be happy about the pain.

Like, yay, I'm suffering, this is great. If you get that, then you're probably not suffering, because that's the definition of the word, isn't it? It's not a happy thing. He says, count it joy. And then he tells you why. For- okay, verse three- for you know that the testing of your faith produces something. It's building and creating something in you, okay?

It produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be- here it is- perfect. Teleios, right? Looks like the other one. And you can see me struggling with both of them. Okay. It can be that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. The Greek word here, on this, is the concept that God is cultivating.

You remember where we started? God made you to do something, or to be something and do something. He has created and called you for these things, right? And so when we're perfected, that is that we are where God wants us, doing what He wants us to do in the way that He wants it done. And we are becoming the fullness of the image that He has created to be on this side of the grave.

Okay, there's still more to be done beyond the grave. Okay, but here and now, you see, pain- and pain produces something. So God will use pain to place us, prune us, and perfect us.

Romans 5:2–8

Romans 5, similar passage to James 1. They are frequently cited together, so we're going to do that now. Romans chapter five says,

through Him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope, in the hope of the glory of God.

So he starts off in verse two. He's going to tell you where he locates his hope. It's in the glory of God. Now, this is language for what we are going to receive beyond the grave. He's looking beyond this life. And when you take an eternal perspective on your pain that you're going through right now, the suffering and the trial and the testing of various kinds in this life- when you have an eternal perspective on where we're going, that we are headed towards the glory of God, beyond this, beyond this world- it helps interpret the pain in this life in the ways that he's about to launch into.

In verse three, he picks up, and he says, not only that, but we rejoice. Okay, the word here is boasts. Remember how I had you circle boast? Last passage. The word here is boasting, right? We boast in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance. Let's talk about boasting here. This is radically countercultural. Paul lives, and he's writing, in the Roman Empire.

And the way that they look is, you boast in your successes, you boast in your wins, you boast in your strength. To come along and say, we boast, or we rejoice, in suffering is a completely countercultural view on- a view that just values power and success. The way of Jesus was countercultural from the beginning. Some of you are here.

You're checking out Christianity. You're checking out the claims of Christ, and you're like, oh, well, that works for them. Back then, it was countercultural. Back then. He is looking eternally, and he's going to go, okay, we boast and we rejoice in suffering, knowing that suffering- here it is- produces endurance. Produces, again- here we go- it causes endurance, causes us to be perfected.

And endurance produces character. Character- circle that word, character. Your pain is producing something in you, if you will work with God. It's not automatic. I want to be super clear on this. Many, many people in this world, they hit pain in this life and they get bitter, not better. Right? So this is, am I going to work with where God is trying to place me, what He's trying to prune out of my life, and what He's trying to build into my life?

This is going to build character, and character produces hope. How does character produce hope? When it talks about character here, it talks about a thing that has gone through testing and has been found genuine. So they'll talk about testing metals. If you've ever heard of somebody testing metal- like, you go and you go up in the mountains, and you dig gold out of the earth, and then you take it to someone who's going to sit there, going to test it. They're going to go, we're going to test it to see if it's gold, okay?

That is a thing. It goes through, and they wipe off the dross. They go, yeah, you got all this gold right here. This is actually the real deal, right? That's character in this sense. It's that you are actually the real thing. You are a follower of Jesus who has also taken up your cross to follow Him. You are someone who has set their eyes on eternity.

You are someone who is here to serve and glorify God and be a blessing to others. You go through trial, and you go through testing. It produces endurance, and the endurance produces this character, this quality in you that shows, yeah, you're the real thing. And when you know, yeah, you're the real thing, then it produces hope. Hope of the glory of God.

And hope- I'm in verse five here- and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us. For while we were still weak, at the right time, Christ died for the ungodly. He's going to launch in here. He's going to talk about why he has eternal hope, and it's because of the sacrifice of Jesus.

He says, for one will scarcely die for a righteous person, though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die. But God shows His love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. How does he thread all these together? Number one, he's going to- our hope is because we look and we see beyond this world, beyond this life, into eternity.

We see beyond the grave. That is where our hope is. Because that is where our hope is, this is what suffering produces in our lives. Suffering produces endurance, and pain produces endurance. And it creates this character, so that we can walk around and we go, I have been tested and found faithful. I'm the genuine thing.

I've genuinely put my faith in Jesus. My hope is in Him. And then these last verses, he goes, hey, here, this is why you have hope. It is because Jesus Christ has died and has put His love in your heart. Jesus Christ died for your sins. Okay? And so here's the thing. Here's the danger. Because I can get up, and I can give you the three P's of pain and what pain produces in your life.

Okay, I can talk about how God can place you, and He can prune you, and He can perfect you. And it gets really encouraging. And what we could do is we could take it as a nice motivational TED talk. Let's talk about what pain can do in your life. But it starts somewhere. And where it starts is with Jesus Christ dying on the cross, and us putting our hope and our faith in Him.

Some of you are here today, and you have been testing the claims of Jesus Christ. You have been testing the claims of religion. You have been checking out faith. And you're like, what is this? How does this matter in this life? What the apostle Paul just said is, if you want to have that hope in the suffering, if you want the development that God wants to build into you, it starts with you receiving Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior.

Here's what the Bible teaches. We started in the very first chapter of the Bible today. The Bible teaches that you have a purpose. You have a calling on your life. You are supposed to be building and creating the world as God designed it, right? This is Genesis 1, before sin, before the fall. This is what you have been called and created to do.

Are you doing it? The Bible teaches that every single one of us, in one way or another, has undermined that mission. We have gone against God's design. We've harmed others through active attack or passive negligence. We've acted selfishly. And what we're supposed to point to Him, we've pointed to ourselves. Instead of saying, hey, He is the main character, we've said, I'm the main character, and all of these other people, all these other people, they're just supporting cast in the story of me.

God, He's just a supporting actor in the story of me. All of us have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. That is what the Bible teaches us. And so, because of that- that's treason. God looks at that, as

the King of the universe, and He says, that's treason against the King. It's treason against your Creator.

And because He's a just God, there is no hope of fixing that. You can't pay for treason. Treason is a capital crime. It must be paid for by death. And so either you can pay for your sins, or someone else can stand in your place who's an adequate payment. And that's what Jesus is. When Paul starts talking about someone coming and dying for sinners, right?

God shows His love for us, that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. We see Jesus- seeing us in the mess that we made and sending His Son to die on the cross for our sins. If you're here, and you're trying to process pain, and you're like, man, is this like a thing that God is using to get me where He wants me, and to remove the things, to prune out the things that are slowing you down, and to build into me the character traits- right, if you're processing that, I want to start here. Have you returned to the Lord through Jesus? That's where this must start.

Is you accepting that God created you and called you for a purpose, and He will use pain, and He will use suffering, to get you where He wants you and to create in you what He has called you to be and to do. Have you received the Lord? Because if not, we're just sitting through motivational talk. Pain can develop character. Okay, you can hop on YouTube and hear that all day long.

The reason we have hope is because there is something God is doing across the course of eternity, and He has a role for you to play in it. If you are a Christian in here and you've received Jesus, are you processing your pain biblically? Are you processing your pain, asking, when you hit the pain points and the suffering, do you say, God, what are You up to? What are You up to?

Are you sitting there going, oh, man, I had this vision for my life, and then pain got in the way, and now I'm down here, and all I can do now is just wait to die and go to heaven when I die? Right? It's God's thing. Or, my thing was up here, and then my story is down here because of relational problems, financial, sickness. Right. And I'm just processing like that? Or is it, yeah, so I had this thing over here, but God had this. And so He used pain to get me all the way over here, and now I'm doing this instead.

See, that's a different story. Are you, as a Christian, processing your pain like it's some sort of barrier to what God wants, or some sort of way where He places, prunes, and produces in you- perfects in you- what He wants for you to do? We're going to move now to a time of reflection. We're going to pause, and we're going to sit and process through these things.

If you're not a Christian, this is your time to sit and to pray and say, God, show Yourself to me. I need to call on You, because I have not been walking, pursuing my design, pursuing the calling that You have on my life. If you are a Christian, how are you processing your pain? Have you been processing it as the main character in your story, or have you been processing it where there is a God who has created and called you to something, and He is using pain in this story in order to accomplish eternity-shaping good, world-changing good?

These are challenging perspectives. So I want to pray for you and ask for God's help through the Holy Spirit and the truth of His Word. So I'm gonna ask you to pray with me now.

Heavenly Father, I ask that You would help us to process pain biblically. Help us to be people who walk in humility, trusting You for the story that You are telling in our lives and through our lives.

God, I pray that we would never see other people as supporting cast. I pray that You would- that we would never see ourselves as the superstar, the celebrity, the point, but that we would see that You are God and that You are good. And it is Your story and Your world, and You have given us beautiful ministry inside of this.

God, I pray for endurance and for patience and steadfastness, that people would have that character of being proven and true through trial. God, help us to know that You are not caught off guard, so that we might walk with You, trusting in what You are doing in us and through us. And I pray these things in the name of Jesus.

Amen.