

Learning To Know God Through Our Pain
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Any truly intimate relationship requires that both parties understand and identify with each other. Some of the most fulfilling and satisfying friends we will ever have are those with whom similar backgrounds and experiences have created a bonding almost beyond belief.

Take just a moment to write on the line below the name of anyone with whom you've had the experience of being able to understand each other due to similar backgrounds or experiences:

This principle of intimacy has as much influence in our relationship with Jesus Christ as in any other. In order for a complete bonding to take place, He must understand us, and we must be able to identify with Him.

The fact that He can identify with us is stated with great clarity in the following verse from the Bible:

"Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are -- yet without sin."
Hebrews 4:14,15

Although the fact of His identifying with us is an overwhelming truth, it is not sufficient to assure intimacy. There must be mutual identification. We must be able to feel with Him as well.

The Apostle Paul refers to this process in the following verse when he writes:

"I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in His sufferings, becoming like Him in His death," Philippians 3:10

Contained within the phrase "the fellowship of sharing in His sufferings" Paul tells us his realization that he would never know Christ intimately without also experiencing His sufferings. Identification would be impossible without those experiences.

In spite of his knowing that suffering would be part of the process, Paul says that there is nothing that he desires more than to be intimate with this central Person of the entire universe.

As one reflects on His life, so much of Christ's sufferings came as a direct result of His being born into a fallen world. He did nothing to bring suffering upon Himself and still He suffered. He felt hurt.

That last statement is very important before proceeding further. Too often, Jesus can be viewed as an emotionless Person. His handling of His grief and hurt was so mature that we are tempted to say, "The only possible way that He could have responded the way He did was for Him to have been emotionless." We lose so much when we think in that manner. The emotion of hurt and pain is AMORAL. It is not IMMORAL. Nowhere in the Bible does God ever command "Thou shalt not hurt!" Hurting is part of our humanity and our existence in a fallen world.

In contrast to our often faulty thinking, Isaiah 53:3 refers to Jesus as "a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering." What would it take for you to label someone as "a man of sorrows?" Jesus met all the qualifications! Too often we have limited His humanity to feeling thirsty and tired. This study desires to expand our understanding to hurting as well.

"How was Jesus feeling?" is the central question of discussion within this presentation. This question is difficult to answer if the reader has not yet experienced the pain referred to in a given passage of Scripture. Nevertheless, as life proceeds to bring us in contact with the death of a friend, the rejection of our affections, or the pain of being the focal point of malicious gossip, "the fellowship of sharing in His sufferings" will have its desired effect.

We now read many verses from the Bible differently. We can feel with Him in more and more situations. There is a bonding that is occurring, and an intimacy that is developing.

For many of us, we longed for this closeness with Christ. We had no idea what a painful process it would take in order for us to arrive at that goal.

Yet along with Paul we realize that one day in heaven when all suffering has ceased, there will only be one question that matters:

How well do you know Jesus Christ, Who has now become the entire focal point of our eternal existence?

Paul knew that the intimacy he was gaining on earth through pain could never be taken from him. Instead, that intimacy would only continue its growth throughout eternity.

The following study has been designed to aid you in seeing your own pain as building blocks for closeness in your relationship with Christ. The bold print lists the pain-producing experiences from the life of Christ. Below the listing are the verses from the Bible containing the accounts of those experiences. Then there are some blank lines for

you to record your understanding of how Jesus must have felt during that painful experience.

Remember: Jesus' feelings never involved bitterness, revenge, or any other immoral grief reaction – only those emotions like hurt, grief, and anger.

Since no reader has experienced all pain to this point in his/her life, some of the situations will be more difficult in seeking to understand and feel with Christ. Consequently, begin with those you have already experienced or are currently experiencing in your life. If you live long enough, you'll probably be able to relate to others later.

"He was despised and rejected by man,
a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering. Like one
from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed
him not." Isaiah 53:3 (pg. 625)

BEING MIS-UNDERSTOOD BY FAMILY

Luke 2:41-52 _____

Mark 3:13-35 _____

BEING MIS-UNDERSTOOD BY CLOSE FRIENDS

Mark 8:13-39 _____

Luke 22:14-38 _____

BEING MIS-UNDERSTOOD BY OUTSIDERS

Luke 4:14-30 First Rejection _____

Matthew 13:53-58 Second Rejection _____

Mark 3:1-6 _____

BEING DESERTED

John 6:63-66 _____

Matthew 26:55,56 _____

DEATH OF A FRIEND

Matthew 14:1-14 _____

John 11:1-44 _____

REJECTED LOVE

Luke 14:1-6,16-24 _____

Matthew 23:37-39 _____

WATCHING ANOTHER IN PAIN

Matthew 14:1-14 _____

John 9:30-41 _____

Matthew 9:36,37 _____

UNBELIEVING RESPONSE

Mark 5:35-43 _____

LACK OF EMOTIONAL SUPPORT

Luke 22:39-46 _____

Luke 22:54-62 _____

BETRAYAL OF A FRIENDSHIP

Luke 22:47,48 _____

Luke 23:13-25 _____

TERMINAL ILLNESS

Matthew 16:21-23 _____

Matthew 26:6-13 _____

WATCHING THE INEVITABLE PLAY OUT

Matthew 26:52-54 _____

Mark 14:32-42 _____

PHYSICAL PAIN

Psalm 22:6-18 _____

INSULTING COMMENTS

Matthew 27:39-44 _____

DEMEANING TREATMENT

Matthew 26:27-31 _____

May God continue to bring each of us closer to the maturity showed by the Apostle Paul when he said:

"I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in His sufferings, becoming like Him in His death," Philippians 3:10 (pg. 993)

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