

Days of Hope

Passionately communicating the love of God to hurting kids in a gentle way

My Need of Pain

By Jon Wells

What if the blessings that I so deeply desire are not really blessings at all?

What if my perpetual personal comfort will actually lead to my own demise?

Several months ago I had an amazing opportunity to join a group of young men on a wilderness immersion trip into the mountains of Colorado. I recently shared with you some stories from that experience. One of the many treasures that I took from our time in the mountains was the seed of a thought about my need of pain. It all started with a simple conversation.

"It's called induced disequilibrium. You take a person and put them in a state of constant discomfort. That's why we go to the wildernesses. The research tells us that if you put somebody in a state of induced disequilibrium for a week, you can actually change ingrained habits in a short period of time." I didn't know it at the time, but our guide, Miss Kassey, had just planted the seeds of a concept that would grow into a rather large internal struggle for me.

"Pain insists upon being attended to. God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our consciences, but shouts in our pains. It is his megaphone to rouse a deaf world."

C.S. Lewis

The wilderness is disequilibrium. There are no chairs, there are no beds. You are sometimes wet, sometimes cold, sweaty, and stinky. There are no showers, there are no toilets. At the end of a long day, you can choose between the slanted rock and the bumpy log to rest your weary self. To the uninitiated, the wilderness is constant discomfort. The pack is heavy, your feet are sore, and the trail always seems to wind uphill. When you finally lay your head down to sleep, it is on the cold ground. But the wilderness taught me that this discomfort was necessary to bring about the good change we wanted to see in those young men who accompanied us.

If we had taken them to get a pedicure and a one hour massage, they would've had a lot more fun, but little of value would have been accomplished. I am sure they would have much rather used the trip funds to go on a shopping spree at the local mall. I doubt that we would have had a chance at refining their character by purchasing them a pair of Nikes at Footlocker! The wilderness taught me that sometimes pain is necessary. Sometimes pain is a blessing. No one gets to the top of the mountain without pain. No one accomplishes physical

“Do you not see how necessary a world of pains and troubles is to school an intelligence and make it a soul?”

John Keats

goals in the gym without discomfort. No one loses those extra pounds by eating cheesecake. If you want good outcomes in your marriage, I guarantee that the easy road is probably not the right road to be on. It will take great pains to forge a vibrant, thriving relationship with your spouse.

Many in our generation are not willing to go to such pains, committing themselves to the sacrifice that is required to achieve such a lofty goal. For several months now, I have been ruminating in this line of thought. What if the blessings that I so deeply desire are not really blessings at all? What if my perpetual personal comfort will actually lead to my own demise? What if those challenging things that I pray to avoid are really the blessings that have been sent my way in this season of life?

Let me make it clear; I am more than happy to wax eloquent about the hypothetical benefits of someone else's pain. Of course those young men benefitted from the struggles of wilderness living. It is obvious that strong character is forged in the fire. Of course the athlete must suffer the pain of training to reach the podium of success. But when it comes to my personal discomfort, I am much less eager to explore the many benefits of the sorrows I suffer.

I am not quite so depraved as to think that gross violations like rape or abuse are somehow blessings in disguise. But could it be possible that many of the things I label as 'bad' are not altogether a curse? What if the things I think are so 'good' are not really a blessing? As I spoke with kids in residential facilities last month, I asked them what they wanted for Christmas. One common answer makes me laugh a little-
"I want one million dollars."

Look at the stories of so many of those who strike it rich with the lottery and you will find ruined families, bankruptcy, conflict, and regret. It seems that some of the "blessings" we yearn for may not be blessings at all. And the particular disequilibrium I am now enduring may be the most gracious thing God has allowed in my life this week.

So now I wonder, is the pain necessary? Does God need to allow certain types of suffering to accomplish the good things

He desires in my life? Is suffering the price I must pay to gain the good? Do I have a true need of pain?

And this brings us to Christmas. Advent is the season when our thoughts turn to the incarnation of God Himself into humanity. Think about that moment when Jesus was born into this broken world to suffer countless thousands of pains. Born a helpless baby, Jesus' first 24 hours included things like dirty diapers and crying. The Maker became vulnerable and dependent. He suffered the rejection of friends and family, homelessness, scorn, and jeers. Planet earth was the painful wilderness in which God himself chose to live. Talk about induced disequilibrium! Jesus suffered greatly in order to accomplish a greater good, the rescue of those in captivity. But was there not a different way? Was suffering the only path to redemption? The inconceivable strategy of the gospel is that God himself lived among us and allowed Himself to be brutalized and slaughtered in order to accomplish your restoration-to win you back. Was there no other way? This is the very question that Jesus asked His Heavenly Father in the garden of Gethsemane. The gospels tell us that he wrestled in prayer, cried, and even sweat drops of blood. Is pain the only path to redemption? And having heard His answer, he submitted to the cross and walked a very painful road.

As you pack up the decorations and reflect on another Christmas season, remember that God himself suffered to accomplish a very great good. And the next time you encounter pain in your life, ask Him what good may be buried in it. You may be surprised to discover great riches veiled in a cloud of pain.

“For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed in us.”

Apostle Paul

All I want for Christmas is ...

By Aaron Jeffers

I was speaking with a staff member in a cottage recently.

“Read this Christmas list.” She said.

I start skimming the page; “Stuffed animals, skateboard, shoes, and Nerf gun. Yeah, that’s pretty sweet.”

“No...did you see the whole list?”

I then read more carefully; at the very bottom of the page it said, “Me not to have depression no more and me not to be on extreme precautions.” I sunk into my chair.

She said, “Doesn’t that just break your heart? Now read this one,” she said as tears started pouring on to the letters.

If you think about it, the Christmas list a person has on their heart is kind of like a barometer, measuring a person’s level of contentment. I want big fluffy towels, my wife wants a card table, and my children want a Play Station Four. These kids in residential want their innocence back, emotions redeemed so that they don’t destroy themselves, and “normal” privileges that we take for granted like just going for a walk by ourselves.

The best thing about a Christmas list like these kids crayoned out is that you might be part of the answer. We know Saint Nick can’t give innocence back, but Jesus can. When you personalize a Bible, and highlight how you are a new creation in Christ and that God makes all things new...God has just used you to deliver on that list.

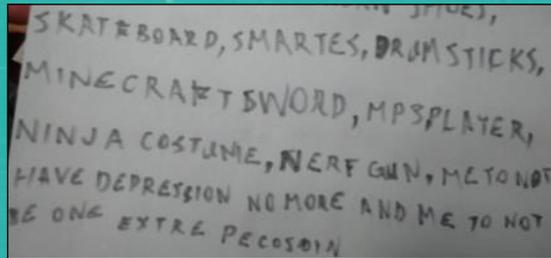
We’ve all heard that song, “All I want for Christmas is my two front teeth.” I’m not a dentist, but when Jon, I, or another chaplain has the opportunity and privilege to sit down and let a kid unpack their toxic emotions, we get to hand them a new package. They discover that we are no longer defined by our feelings, but are defined by what God says about us. We

get to share the good news that Christ can take the broken package of your life in exchange for the package of His. We all deserve a truckload of coal in our stockings, but we trade the ashes of our

sin in exchange for the beauty of his righteousness in our life.

There are countless girls that have been abused, victims of sex trafficking, and now they hardly ever get to see their family for obvious reasons. But they still miss their family, especially their moms. At “Girls Night Out” I’ve seen an army of lady volunteers with Days of Hope adopt these girls for a night, and fulfill that role for an evening of hope and healing. It may only be a short time, but I’ve seen it usher over thirteen girls into a Christ-filled eternity at one event.

A Play Station Four is about 350 bucks plus tax, and many people can’t just cough that kind of cash up. But your gift to these kids when you volunteer in ministering to them through your time, talent, or treasure, is priceless.



The logo for Days of Hope features the words "Days of Hope" in a stylized, colorful font. The "o" in "of" is small and positioned between "Days" and "Hope". The "H" in "Hope" is green and has a cross above it. The background is white with a subtle sunburst pattern behind the text.

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Christmas Day Outreach

Christmas Day was a big success! *Special Thanks to the folks at Great Circle, HiStriker, Family Christian Bookstores, The Waynesville Nazarene Church, Sole Hope, our donors, volunteers, the Mitchell Clinic, and teachers from Rose Acres Elementary!* This event simply could not happen without the combined effort of so many.

We had more youth on campus Christmas Day than we have ever had before. More than 70 residents spent December 25th in a residential treatment unit. Some simply had nowhere to go; many others were unsafe to be sent back to the community. One by one we ran groups of cottages through; inviting them to join us in a service project, serving refreshments, playing on the inflatables, and finally sharing with them the gospel message as we gave them each a stocking filled with goodies. I did give an opportunity to respond to some of the groups, and many kids responded in prayer.

We had a great group of volunteers, and plenty of refreshments thanks to those who baked for us. In fact, we were able to send snacks back with each group so they could enjoy them throughout the day!

There were a number of setbacks in December, problems seemed to spring up out of nowhere. But I am learning that nothing surprises God. It seems that just as one challenge would rise, an answer would be provided. In the end we lacked for nothing, in spite of the many twists and turns.

Each child responded differently to the outreach. Some were understandably sad and angry to be away from home, others were more excited. I will not soon forget one little girl who was completely dumbfounded— she simply could not understand why we would do this for her. My reasons fell flat— she just teared up as I tried to explain. Thanks be to God and thanks to each of you who invested in this special day.

In addition to our Christmas day event, we were able to provide several special Christmas services at facilities in December.



Christmas Service At Great Circle

Special Thanks to Our Agency Partners!

Every year, thousands of children and teens are sent to the residential facilities we serve to receive help with the overwhelming problems they are facing. *At **Days of Hope** we continue to insist that God's solution to all of the innumerable challenges is found in the person of Jesus Christ.*

We are a not for profit, inter-denominational Christian ministry that seeks to address the spiritual needs of children and teens who are in residential psychiatric care at facilities throughout central Missouri. We are supported by the prayer and gifts of individuals and churches in our community. We work alongside many dedicated professionals including educators, therapists, doctors and nurses, child care workers and so many more who strive to help these children who have been scarred by every form of abuse, abandonment, neglect, and harm.

Through the ministries that are offered at Days of Hope, Bibles are distributed, pastoral counsel, services, and groups are provided, and these children are given an opportunity to respond to the gospel message.



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