



Bumps!

by Mark Brunner

Bumpy Hills! (1 Peter 4:1)

How far will you go to avoid pain? Most of us would boast that we can “take” it, but when push came to shove, we’d express the wish to avoid whatever we could when it comes to pain. The fact is, everyday we do little things to get around pain and its consequences. We handle a piece of rough wood with our hands and we put on a pair of gloves to avoid splinters. We avoid the pain. That makes common sense. But, if we were to approach life from that footing, that everything we did or felt had to be insulated from pain, wouldn’t each of us be one huge walking bandage from foot to toe? When painful things happen in our lives, we usually want God to do a removing job; to keep us safe from the pain. Like a little child we look up to Him and ask, “Will it hurt?” Oftentimes when the answer is “Yes,” our reaction is sorrow, not joy that God Himself is there supervising the hurt.

Is there a side to pain that is good? Could God be actively using that pain to bring about something good in us? Or, is pain just one more consequence of sin and we’ll just have to grin and bear it?

Here’s a story. In 218 B.C. Hannibal invaded Italy in the second of three Punic Wars that determined the fate of Rome and Carthage. From her own people Rome raised an army, animated it with patriotism, and ordered it to fight. The wealthy devoted their treasure to the cause, and all classes

sacrificed everyday amenities for the troops in the field. For fifteen years the Romans defended their homeland against the brilliant Carthaginian—and could never drive him out. But their willingness to persevere assured victory, for Hannibal could never conquer them. He finally disembarked his troops from a lack of support at home. Through persevering the Roman army of citizens gained a footing in an otherwise untenable situation facing superior odds and the fighting ability of their enemy. It was a tough stretch of years for Rome, but the victory set the table for the empire to grow and prosper for the course of the next nearly 800 years.” (Source Unknown.)

When painful things happen in our lives, rather than asking God to do a removing job, perhaps we need to be looking to Him to do an improving job. Over the course of those fifteen years the Roman army went from raw recruits to hardbitten soldiers. It is often said “You cannot dream yourself into the character of endurance; you must hammer and forge yourself into it.” As followers of Christ we should look upon pain as a possibility, not merely a hardship. When we are so disposed to suffer, there is a foothold to faith that lies before us. Our task is to step upon it and rise above the pain and find the joy of hope in Christ.

“Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own” (Matt 6:34)

Enter Into His Rest! (1 Peter 4:17)

Is God busy today? I mean, do you see Him relentlessly passing back and forth throughout the universe as He tries to keep it all together and keep us from pulling it apart? I think many people see God that way, certainly capable and able, but busy and determined to make every last little detail of existence work out right for the moment. They see Him as a fretting Spirit, intervening nervously, perhaps annoyed, in the affairs of men. He just gets one thing under control and something flares up somewhere else that needs his attention. God is everywhere, right? Perhaps that’s why he IS omnipresent? And there is, of course, the matter of the devil. He’s roaming around, as the Bible tells us, as a “roaring lion seeking him he might devour.”

With all that going on, God must be terribly busy. Yet, when you think about it, doesn't the Bible also tell us that God created the heavens and the earth and on the last day he rested? That being the case, maybe He's still resting?

The peace of God. How do WE find it. Perhaps it's no farther away than seeing Him at rest and accepting His invitation to join Him there?

Here's a story. Author Charles Colson, when visiting Humanita prison in Brazil in the 1980s, was astonished to find the inmates smiling—particularly the murderer who held the keys and opened the gates. Wherever he walked he saw men at peace; clean living areas, people working industriously. The walls were decorated with biblical sayings from Psalms and Proverbs. "How is all this possible?" he wondered. He saw the answer when his guide escorted him to the notorious punishment cell once used for torture. They walked to the end of a long concrete corridor. The guide put the key in the lock and opened the lock. Slowly he swung open the massive door, and there he could see the prisoner in the punishment cell: It was a crucifix, beautifully carved by the Humanita inmates. (Adapted—Thanks to Peter Kennedy)

The fact is, when we are reminded of Christ's finished work on the Cross, we CAN be self-controlled in all things and at peace. that peace of God which passes all understanding. God controls all things but He's not nervous or fretting by any means about them. He's sovereign and has all things under control. He IS at peace and His work IS finished. Colson now understood where the peace in that prison derived. The prisoners had found the "peace of God that surpasses all understanding." It was the peace that comes only through knowing Christ and entering into the rest He has declared for Himself and for us if we only believe.

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The Cast of Your Misfortune! (1 Peter 5:1-10)

One of the loneliest times in life is when suffering strikes and it puts you into a category of one. That's the peculiar thing about suffering. Not only is there

the pain and handicap to bear, but there is also the propensity for those who suffer to turn inward, away from the help of others. This is a natural tendency among sinful men since we are by nature corrupted and able to think only about ourselves. That's why when suffering knocks on our door and we open our lives to it, we find it convenient, even comfortable to withdraw into the one thing we know that brings at least some relief, ourselves.

Here's a story. Years ago I broke my arm, braking both bones in my left arm just above the wrist. The pain was excruciating. My family and I were vacationing and the first thoughts that passed through my mind were thoughts of worry and concern. Would we have to abandon our vacation and return home? How would I put the canoe back atop the van with a broken arm? All at that moment seemed pretty dark and foreboding. Yet, my visit to the hospital began to take my mind off of these thoughts. The doctor did not seem to be concerned about the break and felt that even a temporary cast would enable me to continue my vacation without too much risk. After a few days I felt good enough to get back into the canoe and even paddle a bit. When it did come time to pack up our things and leave, there was no task that did not get done. The kids and Holly packed most everything and I was able to even do some minimal lifting. A kind family camping nearby volunteered to lift the canoe back atop the van and with Holly's help I was able to hook up the trailer and drive back home. Overall, despite the pain, the recovery experience was a blessed one. My broken arm achieved friendships and opened the door to people opportunities I had not foreseen.

When we are afflicted, the worst thing that we can do is turn inward and dwell on our misfortune. In short time we will begin to believe that we are the only one suffering so. For when we abandon our lives to self-interest, we become the only person actually living in "our" world. God uses our suffering to make us strong, battle-tested Christians. Affliction is just one of his tools. Our suffering may be new to us and certainly difficult to deal with when we are not used to it, but we must remember that others have suffered before this, are suffering now and will suffer in the future. When suffering comes, take advantage of the opportunity and remember this: when God's purpose in this suffering is completed, you will be the better for it. Wear the cast of your suffering confidently and with courage. It will attract other

fellow sufferers in Christ. Their kind words and supportive gestures will make a fine signature on the cast of your misfortune.

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Clothed In Humility! (1 Peter 5:5)

I cleaned out my toolbox recently and discovered to my surprise that I had thirteen Phillip’s screwdrivers and eleven pan head screwdrivers. That’s a lot of screwdrivers for a guy who could get by with three or four. So, I started sorting them out putting the newer and less worn tools on the right and the older, worn out ones on the left. Into the bin they went and I was left with five, new assorted screwdrivers. But before I had a chance to take the rejects out to the junk bin I began to have pangs of remorse. There were a couple of well worn but very comfortable screwdrivers that hadn't made the cut. You know, they just fit well in your hand. Less noble in a way because of their grease-stained blades and nicked handles, there was something too valuable in these old friends to discard. They weren’t new but they were somehow more useful in their own way.

Those old screwdrivers weren’t in first place when it comes to looks, but sometimes first place isn’t the best place to be.

Here’s a story: The rarest medal in the Olympics wasn’t created from gold, but a bolt. The story begins on a cold, winter afternoon in Innsbruck at the 1964 Olympic two-man bobsled competition. A British team driven by Tony Nash had just completed its first run, which had put them in second place. Then they made a most disheartening discovery. They had broken a bolt on the rear axle of their sled, which would put them out of the competition. At the bottom of the hill, the great Italian bobsled driver Eugenio Monti, who was in first place, heard of their plight. Without hesitation, Monti removed the bolt from the rear axle of his own sled and sent it to the top of the hill. The British team affixed it to their sled and then completed their run down the mountain, winning the gold medal. Monti’s Italian team took the bronze.

When asked about his act of sportsmanship, Eugenio Monti deflected any praise, saying, "Tony Nash did not win because I gave him a bolt. Tony Nash won because he was the best driver." (pkennedy@devotional.com)

Each of us has a choice; whether to be proud or humble. Monti chose humility over pride. He didn't win the event, but he won the hearts of everyone watching the competition as well as the *De Corbetain medal for Sportsmanship* that year. There was something noble about Monti's willingness to put the needs of other before his own. There was a time when that was called chivalry. Winning is often fresh and exciting, like those new screwdrivers in my toolbox. But humility, like those old, comfortable tools of mine, still has a way of capturing our love despite its familiar and well-worn face. It's the character trait that **MAKES THE CUT** with God every time.

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Fixable Mess? (1 Peter 5:7)

The funny thing about life is that one of the first tools we reach for when things go wrong is probably the one tool we should have left on the shelf in the first place: blame. Recently I pulled into our garage and cut the turn too sharply. The rear fender of my Corvair grazed the plastic guide around the garage doorframe putting a nasty, plastic burn right through my custom paint job. Ouch! You know what my first thought was? That stupid strip of plastic got in my way!" I got out of the car and stared at that strip with real anger. I was ready to pick a fight with a piece of plastic! When you think about it, blame must be pretty useless because if it weren't we wouldn't make such incredible stupid claims by it; blaming inanimate objects for things that we do wrong or for our own shortcomings.

Life's messes are often made worse because, in pride, we just aren't willing to admit we messed up in the first place.

Here's a remarkable customer service story: Customer: "You people sent me this install disk, and now my A: drive won't work." Tech Support: "Did you

get an error message?" Customer: "No. The disk got stuck so I got these pliers and tried to get it out." Tech Support: "You did what, sir?" Customer: "I got these pliers but it wouldn't budge." Tech Support: "Did you push the eject button?" Customer: "No, I melted a stick of butter and used a turkey baster and put the butter in the drive and that got it loose." Tech Support: "Did you push the disk eject button?"— Silence — Tech Support: "Sir?" Customer: "No, but you people are going to fix my computer, or I am going to sue you." Tech Support: "Let me get this straight. You're going to sue because you didn't follow the instructions and didn't consult your user's manual?" Customer: "Ummmm." Tech Support: "Do you really think you stand a chance, since we do record every call and have it on tape?" Customer: (now rather humbled) "But you're supposed to help!" Tech Support: "I am sorry sir. Have a nice day." (Alan Smith)

Sounds like the mess we sometimes make of our lives. We don't consult God's "instruction manual" (the Bible), we don't call for assistance (pray), we just try to "fix" the problems in our lives by ourselves, often doing some pretty stupid things. But there's one big difference. When we finally reach the point where we realize we've made a mess, and we humble ourselves in the presence of God, He doesn't say, "There's nothing I can do for you." Rather, He stands ready to help. Listen to these word from the Bible: "Therefore we ought to humble ourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He might exalt us in due time, casting all our care upon Him, for He cares for us" (1 Peter 5:5b-7). Made a mess of something lately? Don't play the "blame" game. Instead, give God a call. His "tech support" line is open and ready to take your call.

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