

Monday Morning Rewind – July 5, 2010

Good evening! It's hard to believe but it has been a month since I wrote the last rewind. Much has transpired in those few short weeks. We've had camp meeting, Vacation Bible School, a baby dedication, baptisms, and shockingly, the sudden passing of one of our beloved church members and friends. The message this past Sabbath, "Where is God When it Hurts?" was given to help our church family find comfort in a time of great sorrow. Today's rewind will recap that message.

Where is God when we're hurting? Rewind to Psalm 139:7-12 and the answer comes through loud and clear that **there's no place we can go, or experience we can have where God is not present.** Even in the grave, He is there. So where is God when we hurt? Where He's always been, where He always is, and where He always will be—*with us!* Hebrews 13:5 quotes God directly: "For He [God] Himself has said, 'I will not in any way fail you nor give you up nor leave you without support. [I will] not, [I will] not, [I will] not in any degree leave you helpless nor forsake nor let [you] down (relax My hold on you)! [Assuredly not!]." (*Amplified*)

With a three-fold oath, God promises never to leave us helpless or forsaken in any circumstance—even in our pain. We are not alone when we hurt. Nevertheless, we still hurt. We may not be alone in our pain, but we experience pain nonetheless. What about that? Here's a truth we must accept: **God's presence doesn't always take away our pain, but it gives us the strength to bear it.**

I don't know about you, but to be brutally honest, I don't want to bear pain. And I don't know of too many people who do. We don't go to our medicine cabinets or to the neighborhood pharmacy to get pain *bearers*, we go to get pain *killers*. We have no intention of carrying pain; we seek to eliminate it so we can be "pain-free."

And herein lies the rub for believers—we seek a pain-free existence on Planet Pain, which is an oxymoron and an impossibility. The very air we breathe is poisoned with pain and sorrow. On Planet Pain (or earth), the eco system is poisoned with sin and suffering infiltrates every aspect of it. Paul says the "whole creation groans" under the burden of sin (see Romans 8:19-22). Yet we somehow expect an exemption because we're on God's team, though He never made such a promise.

So what are we supposed to do with pain? It's clear that while living here we're not going to be free of it, so what are we to do? In review, I'd like to suggest three things we must do with pain.

1. Let it hurt. It's supposed to hurt. The ability to feel pain means you're alive. One of the things that worried us during Taine's ordeal was her lack of a pain response. That was a bad sign. You're supposed to react to pain. The fact that we grieve is proof that we're alive and that we care. We're reacting normally. And sometimes there's nothing to do but to experience it.

2. Let it teach. Pain is a great teacher. C.S. Lewis called it "the megaphone of God." "God whispers to us in our pleasures," he said, "speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pains. It is His megaphone to rouse a deaf world." So what can pain teach us?

- *Pain can teach us truth about the reality of our faith.* Philip Yancy said, "Faith means believing in advance what will only make sense in reverse." The presence of pain does not mean the absence of God, but neither does the absence of pain mean the presence of God. Because we live where we live we must learn to experience both pain & God's presence at the same time. This, then, is true faith—not "Where is God when it hurts," but to trust that God is there even when it does.
- *Pain can teach us patience.* Sometimes people are the way they are because they're hurting. Remember what you're like when you're hurting, and ask the Lord to give you more patience.
- *Pain can teach us to hate sin.* This world is still too much with us. When we're not hurting we are much too cozy with sin and lose the sense of its horror. Pain teaches us that sin is the enemy and the blood of Jesus is the remedy. Every trial and headache should remind us that we, like the gulf relief crews, are here to clean up the disaster and not here to play in the oil.

Pain gives us a reality check and if we let it, it will remind us why we hate sin, why we must leave it alone, and why we want Jesus to come and get us.

And do not suppose that Revelation 21:4 is only meant for us. "He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away." The tears God wipes away include His own! Sin turned earth—His crown of creation—into an orbiting cemetery, and it is His sons and daughters who sleep beneath the grave markers that mar His lost paradise. We are not alone in our grief.

3. Let it lead you to Jesus. Pain's purpose in the body is to be a communication network designed to warn us of destruction. It sounds a warning that shouts "Stop" and "Get Help!" We ignore that warning at great risk. When we're hurting, we need to pay attention to the communication network of prayer, stop everything, and get help in our time of need at the throne of grace.

From the cross, Jesus asked "Why"? When He didn't get an answer, He did what we all must do if we truly walk by faith—He trusted the Father's heart even though He couldn't feel the Father's touch. With His dying breath He said, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit." And we must do the same. When answers aren't enough there is Jesus. Trust Him with your pain. Commit it all to Him.

Ultimately, what we most need from each other in times of pain, is love. Love is something we all can do and it's what we're here to do—heal—not necessarily with the power to perform miracles, but with the ordinary power to be available and non-judgmental, to listen more than we speak, to pray instead of pretending nothing has happened, and to give a cup of cold water to someone who's thirsty.

Where is God when it hurts? Where are *you* when it hurts? Where you are, God is... ministering to the hurting through you. The bottom line? "Love one another" (John 13:34). –Pastor Randy

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2 Chron. 7:14

"The need is great. The key is prayer. The time is now."