

SOMETIMES THE LORD MUST LAY US ON OUR BACKS BEFORE WE LOOK UP!

O LORD, do not forsake me; be not far from me, O my God. Come quickly to help me, O Lord my Savior.

Parents, what are you willing to do for your kids? Of course you would do anything. If they fell, you will drop everything to pick them up. Even if they are 25 years old, we still want to rush in to help. You will educate them, teach them all the wisdom you have; you want them to do better than you ever did. You would give up one of your kidneys to save your child's life. You would even die for them.

But would you love them enough to hurt them? Parents hurting children understandably has such a negative connotation in society. Adrian Peterson was banned an entire season from the NFL because he used a branch on his son. We don't want parents abusing their children.

But we need parents who are willing to hurt their children. You will hurt them if you take away a favorite toy because they were misbehaving. You will hurt them if you confront them on not coming to church or if they are committing sin. It is easy being a parent when it means giving a birthday gift to your child, or kissing them goodnight on the forehead before bed. It is hard being a parent when it means hurting them in anyway. And yet, what kind of parents would we be if we didn't?

We are studying Psalm 38 today. I hope you noticed something when we read it earlier: ***"For your arrows have pierced me, and your hand has come down upon me."*** David had a lot of problems. Yet, David says that it was the Lord's hand that came down upon him. Why would God hurt David? Simple. Because he loved him. I pray the Holy Spirit will strengthen our faith to trust God even when he lays us on our backs before finally look up to him.

David was laying on his back. First, he had physical pain. ***"My back is filled with searing pain; there is no health in my body. I am feeble and utterly crushed; I groan in anguish of heart. All my longings lie open before you, O Lord; my sighing is not hidden from you. My heart pounds, my strength fails me; even the light has gone from my eyes."*** I look back on my own aging experience. At age 40 the word "fiber" entered my vocabulary. At 45 I couldn't play shortstop on the softball team anymore; I just couldn't move fast enough. At age fifty Ben Gay entered my vocabulary, as well as trifocals. Now, go to the nursing home, or maybe all you have to do is look in the mirror. Look at the once proud, hard working people who never asked for help, working 12 hours on the farm or who stormed the beaches of Normandy, and now they need help going to the bathroom. Once proud David could hardly get out of bed.

He also had pain in his conscience: ***"Because of your wrath there is no health in my body; my bones have no soundness because of my sin. My guilt has overwhelmed me like a burden too heavy to bear. My wounds fester and are loathsome because of my sinful folly. I am bowed down and brought very low; all day long I go about mourning."*** In Dachau, Germany, there was a concentration camp from World War II. They didn't tear it down; they left it up so we can remember what happened there, the murder of thousands of innocent civilians. The world would become intolerable if we forget what we are capable of. David saw his sins. He committed adultery with one of his best friend's wives, and then murdered her husband. The Lord forgave him, but as a consequence the Lord said his house would be divided. Late in life that came true. Two of his sons tried to overthrow him, Absalom and Adonijah, who died horrible deaths. It was David touring Dachau, David remembering the folly of his sins and mourning because of them.

He had a third pain. ***"My friends and companions avoid me because of my wounds; my neighbors stay far away. Those who seek my life set their traps, those who would harm me talk of my ruin; all day long they plot deception. ... Many are those who are my vigorous enemies; those who hate me without reason are numerous. Those who repay my good with evil slander me when I pursue what is good."*** First it was the groupies who abandoned him. Like piglets they nursed on David's power and wealth until it all dried up, then they abandoned him. Then his friends abandoned him. Finally, smelling blood in the water, his enemies circled him like hungry sharks. Politics has never changed.

David was a broken man. He couldn't resist anymore: ***"I am like a deaf man, who cannot hear, like a mute, who cannot open his mouth; I have become like a man who does not hear, whose mouth can offer no reply."***

I ask you, was David cursed or blessed in our text? Our gut reaction would say he was cursed. This is not the same David who stood alone against Goliath or led armies into battle. If the Hemlock Society, the group who promote assisted suicide, read this text, they would say, "Give him poison and put him out of his misery." But I will shock you. David is blessed in our text. He is better off because of his pain.

Let's talk about pain for a moment. Pain is, well, painful and we attempt to get rid of it. Last year, as a nation, we spent over 300 billion dollars on drugs and therapies to reduce pain. They also estimate another 360 billion dollars was lost due to time off work or disability from pain. That averages out to \$2,000 per person. About one third of people in the United States have chronic pain, not an occasional headache, but pain that doesn't go away. 70% of those with pain have trouble concentrating, 74% have a reduction in energy, and 80% can't sleep well at night. There is a connection between pain and our physical, mental, and spiritual well-being. Now we understand why the devil wanted to hurt Job, so his pain might shake his spiritual faith in God. We should thank God we have many measures to deal with pain, but pain will never go away.

But is pain always bad? There was a doctor in India who was treating patients with leprosy. They asked him if there was one thing he could give his patients, what would it be? He answered, "pain." The big problem with leprosy is it destroys nerves so you don't feel pain, and most die not from leprosy, but from illnesses or injuries that go untreated because they don't

feel the pain. There is a disease out there called congenital analgesia. People who have this disease can feel no pain, and again their life expectancy is much less because injuries and diseases go untreated. Pain is painful, but it is also good: it tells us something is wrong.

David's pain was good for him. ***"I wait for you, O LORD; you will answer, O Lord my God. ... O LORD, do not forsake me; be not far from me, O my God. Come quickly to help me, O Lord my Savior."*** Never before has David been closer to God. Like a patient finally calling the doctor, David's pain drove him to seek help, not in his friends who abandoned him, not to his own strength, which was gone, but to the only one who helps, the Lord. How? Because of the Lord's pain.

I noticed something. When pain entered the life of our family like a baby in intensive care or life threatening illness, even worry over simple matters, people would come and share how they went through the same thing. And that is how the Lord helps. You see, he answers our pain with the pain he himself experienced. Look to Jesus. Look to the cross. There he had two cups to drink from. The one was from the Lord, which was so bitter, so terrible, he even prayed to God hours before if there was any other way. That bitter cup was us, our sins, our guilt, our damnation in hell. But the soldiers gave him another cup with wine and vinegar. It was a painkiller. He refused it. Jesus wasn't looking for relief on the cross. He was looking for salvation, our salvation and not his own. You see, Jesus was abandoned by his friends, too. He suffered terribly on the cross physically. And like us, he also suffered from guilt and God's anger as a condemned sinner as he became sin for us.

Your Father in heaven wants you in heaven, not in hell. That's his goal. He makes it possible with the pain he inflicted on his own Son. And if he could use pain to get us to heaven, he will hurt us. Pain gets our attention. Suffering and pain destroys any pride, any confidence we have. If we are forgetting about the Lord, pain will lead us to remember him again. Pain breaks us so all we can do is lie on our backs and look up to your Father in heaven. And he answers our pain with his own pain. Because of his pain on the cross, we are going to heaven

Watch a track meet. Watch the runners when they cross the finish line. There is relief. There is even joy. They are happy because of the pain of the race, not in spite of it. That pain led to the finish line, and even if a runner did not place in the race or did not break a personal record, there is satisfaction and joy because of the pain.

Now we know what Paul meant when he said our light and momentary trouble is achieving for us an eternal glory that outweighs anything we face here on earth. Pain is good in that it fills us with the joy that we are about to cross that finish line. Thus, pain tells us we are not home, yet. It is intended to keep us from becoming satisfied with this measly, fallen world. It tells us that nothing will be right until we step foot in heaven and not until then. This is especially true when God hurts us by touring our sins before us. Our prayer is not that God ignores our sin, but that we get caught. In fact, pain whether in childbirth or any pain, is a reminder of sin. And it doesn't have to be your pain. It could be the pain you see in others in the news.

Does God always use pain to lead us to him? No. Imagine a four year old after a cup of hot chocolate, curled up on mom and dad's lap, reading and looking at the pictures of a devotion book. I don't see any pain there. Please don't go around saying today's sermon is about pain. No, it is about God wanting to grab us and take us to heaven. The problem is, we are like children who are so excited by the toy aisle in the store that we wander away from our parents and get lost. So this sermon is about the Lord calling us back to him, and if pain could drive us back to him, he will hurt us. This sermon is about us praying with David, ***"Come quickly to help me, O Lord my Savior."*** This psalm ends in salvation. So do our lives, our pain, even our death. Amen.