

# Prayer Ministry

## Small Group Study Guide

### Lesson 3. The Purpose of Pain

Pain without a purpose is intolerable, but when we understand the purpose of the pain it is amazing how much we can tolerate. Pain occurs where there is a conflict between our true identity and our active identity. When we identify the pain it leads us to the source of conflict. When we resolve that conflict between identities the source of the pain is healed.

#### Instruction

Where does it hurt?

This question is often asked by a health professional to identify the root of a problem. It is also a good question to guide prayer ministry. As stated earlier, the pain originates where there is conflict between who you are being and who God created you to be. By looking into the pain we can discover where we are out of alignment.

The body is designed to repair itself, and pain plays an important role in the process. For instance, the pain of an injury triggers the four phases of wound healing: a) coagulation and hemostasis; b) inflammation; c) proliferation; and d) wound remodeling and scar tissue formation. Experiments have shown that blocking the pain can hinder these natural responses and get in the way of healing.

The pain is an attention-getter. Like a warning light on a dashboard, the pain indicates a problem within the system. It is neither wise to ignore the pain, nor to mask it. The pain is not the problem, but points to it.

The easiest pain to recognize is intense pain. On a pain scale of 1 - 10 it is usually rated 7 or higher. It may have a sudden onset or may reach intensity gradually, but it is impossible to ignore. A kidney stone or gall bladder attack in the physical realm, or an outburst of anger or pang of sorrow in the emotional realm are examples.

There are mid-range aches and pains that fall between 4 and 7 on the pain scale. They are impossible to ignore though they may be possible to tolerate. Often they require lifestyle adjustments, such as restricted movement or feelings.

Chronic pain is any pain that a person believes cannot be healed. There is an emotional toll to chronic physical pain because there seems to be no purpose to it.

Dull pain, rating between 1 and 4 on the pain scale, can be harder to pinpoint. Often it is the remnant of ignored or suppressed pain. When a person willfully chooses to deny pain, either by pretending it does not exist or intentionally losing contact with it, it becomes accepted as "normal." This becomes a disadvantage for diagnosis.

Pain in the physical realm is easy. It is experienced in the body when some stimulus creates a message that is passed through the nervous system to the brain: something is wrong and needs attention. The brain immediately sends signals for chemical (adrenalin, dopamine) and physiological (shock, fever) responses.

Health is normally measured by pain levels. The absence of pain is considered healthy, while the presence of pain indicates discomfort, dysfunction, and disease.

## Prayer Ministry Small Group Study Guide

Pain in the emotional realm is felt and expressed through the soul: the mind, will and emotions. Emotions are neither good nor bad; they are simply a person's response to an event and what he or she believes to be true because of it. However, some emotions are considered painful, such as sorrow, anger, embarrassment, and fear.

An emotional pain is a feeling that persists beyond the appropriate response time for an event. For instance, a fear or anger response can be a key to safety if you are endangered by another driver on the road. However, if that fear or anger persists much beyond the moment, then it turns into an emotional pain.

Some examples of chronic emotional pain are anxiety, bitterness, and despair. These feelings are often considered permanent, and for that reason are not expected to be healed. We have seen great success in healing these painful emotions through the work of forgiveness.

Pain in the spiritual realm is almost always represented by broken relationship. Primarily it is broken relationship with God. This can be the result of shame or a besetting sin. It is also demonstrated by broken relationships with others. The Holy Spirit convicts of sin through discernment and conscience. In addition to the evidence of broken relationships, a guilty conscience or sudden awareness of wrong can indicate pain in the spiritual realm.

A pain may originate in one realm, but over time will affect each of the realms. For instance, an emotional pain expressed as hopelessness or despair can be diagnosed as depression. In the physical realm this may be corroborated by a chemical imbalance. In the spiritual realm, depression manifests as broken relationships because it tends to be inner-focused at the expense of relating to others.

Temporomandibular Joint Disorders (TMJ) can be another example of cross-realm pain. Dentists and doctors can measure, describe, and treat the pain in the physical realm, but it often originates in the emotional realm. Stress, which can cause you to tighten facial and jaw muscles or clench the teeth, may be the root cause of the physical pain. That stress can be described as a spiritual problem because we are commanded to "cast all our cares on Him." The solution to the pain may begin in any of the realms, but once resolved it will heal the person in all of three of them.

Sometimes we discover transferred pain. This occurs when the presenting pain is identified in one place, but the source of the pain is in another. For example, my wife had a sore knee that bothered her when she walked. She went to a chiropractor for evaluation and was surprised when the x-rays showed a misalignment in her hips. The knee problem was traced back to the way her body compensated for a broken collar bone many years before, and that rebalance changed her spinal alignment. The pain of misalignment was transferred to her knee though the source was in her spine.

The important thing to know about transferred pain is that the source or root of the pain is different than the presenting symptom. Our western culture tends to treat physical pain as "more real" than emotional or spiritual pain. We often find that a spiritual or emotional root is what needs to be healed to eliminate the pain in the physical realm.

Referred pain is in a class by itself. Sometimes called sympathy pains, it is an example of pain that is transferred from one person to another in an unseen way. The manifestation of pain can come in any of the three realms. For instance, a husband may experience nausea

## Prayer Ministry Small Group Study Guide

or contractions in sympathy with his pregnant wife. The fact that science does not have a nice physical law with which to predict this phenomenon does not negate its existence.

We sometimes see a similar referred pain expressed in an intercessor. There are some spiritual gifts that allow one person to identify with another so strongly that he or she experiences the same sensations. For instance, several years ago we served on a prayer team with a woman that had this gift. It was not uncommon for her to experience a specific pain, such as in her back, and then be given an opportunity to pray for someone with that need. She described it as a sympathy pain that God allowed her to experience to equip her to intercede for others.

When there is conflict between the person you are being and the person God created you to be there is pain. The solution to the pain is reconciliation between your active identity (the person you are being) and your true identity (the person God created you to be.) The truth about pain is this: it is not God's punishment on us, but His great gift by which He prompts us to accept Him and be conformed to His likeness.

Treating the symptoms masks the problem, but does not stop the pain. Since the purpose of pain is to identify the conflict, treating the pain can be counter-productive to the healing process. When a person does not understand the purpose pain seems intolerable. His only concern is to "fix it, numb it, or remove it" to make the pain go away. Symptom management may reduce the pain for a time or transfer it to another part of the person, but does nothing toward true reconciliation and healing.

True healing happens when the source of the pain is discovered and resolved with God's truth. We begin by identifying the pain and asking God to reveal its source. Irrespective of where we first recognized the pain, the source may be primarily in the spiritual, emotional or physical realm.

We interrogate the pain by asking God to reveal its purpose. The purpose of some pain, particularly in the physical realm, is to signal the natural healing process. The purpose of other pain, often in the emotional and spiritual realms, is to indicate a conflict between God's design and the way we are choosing to be.

Then we are ready to ask the Lord what must happen to resolve any conflict. It may require repentance from a sinful way of life. It may require forgiving and releasing offenses held against others. It may require mind renewal so you can be transformed to your true identity. God is faithful to answer our prayers.

## Prayer Ministry Small Group Study Guide

### Exercise: Purpose of Pain

The first exercise is to conduct a pain audit. Use the table below to record your findings. In the first column write a description of the pain, such as “stomach pain.” In the middle column denote the type of pain, such as “chronic” or “sharp.” The third column will be used for the second exercise.

Make a list of different pains you have experienced in the physical realm. Circle any pain you are currently experiencing.

Physical Pain	Type of pain	Source of conflict

Make a list of pains you have experienced in the emotional realm. Circle any current emotional pain you are experiencing.

Emotional Pain	Type of pain	Source of conflict

Make a list of pain experienced in the spiritual realm. Identify any current spiritual pain you are experiencing.

Spiritual Pain	Type of pain	Source of conflict

The second exercise is to interrogate the pain. Pray the following simple prayer and spend some time listening for God to reveal truth.

*Lord, please reveal to me the pain that You have been using to get my attention. ... Now that I have identified this pain, please help me understand the source of that pain. What is the conflict at the root of this pain? ... What must happen to resolve this conflict? ... Lord, I choose to obey and take the necessary steps to be reconciled to You.*

Share testimonies of new truth learned, as you are led by the Spirit.

## Prayer Ministry Small Group Study Guide

### **Sharing: Purpose of Pain**

This exercise is designed to build compassion and increase communication capability regarding pain. It is played like the board game Apples to Apples™.

To begin, each person will write a pain on a slip of paper. For example: migraines, arthritis, cancer, depression, allergies, divorce, grieving, etc. This becomes the "draw pile."

Take turns being the reader. The reader draws a slip of paper and expresses that pain as if sharing with a friend or intercessor. For instance, if the paper says "migraines" the reader might say "Last week I had another of my terrible migraine headaches. What do you think that is about?"

Each person in the group then writes a brief description of a possible source or cause of that pain.

The reader collects these suggestions and reads them aloud, one by one. Then the reader picks the answer he likes best, giving a short explanation for his choice.

When each of the pains has been paired up with an answer, brainstorm the possible prayer strategies to resolve that pain.

### **Caring: Purpose of Pain**

Place a chair in the middle of the room and invite anyone with a discovered pain to sit there to receive prayer. As the Holy Spirit leads, lay hands on and pray for that person.