

God's plan for our pain.

Hello friends, we all go through seasons in life when the depth of our faith is measured by the height of our suffering. Last week, Brother Britan talked about "staying connected to one another and our Christian community is vital for our faith, just like a coal needs other coals to stay burning." What @Britan Cosand shared spoke to my spirit as my family, and I have been navigating a challenging season recently. Thinking about my own struggles, I realized how we have been blessed by the love, care, and encouragement of our brothers and sisters in Christ. I also thought about you, all of you who continually carry one another's burden in faith, serve your community, love the unlovable, reach the unreached, and feel the weight of poverty, injustice, corruption, and persecution. A constant ache that may steal your joy wherever you are doing God's work. Many of you face hardships and struggles that can test even the strongest of faith.

Yesterday, my wife and I witnessed something beautiful. Our daughter Ariana shared her testimony of redemption at the church she attends, followed by a powerful sermon about the story of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in the book of Daniel.

As I was listening to that sermon, I don't know why, but I thought about you, that so many of you have experienced the proverbial fiery furnace at some point or another. Yet, like those men, you too, stand tall in the face of adversity. "If we are thrown into the fiery furnace, the God we serve is able to deliver us from it... But even if he does not, we want you to know, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up" Daniel 3:17-18. They knew pain might come, but their faith remained unshaken. Your resilience in the face of trials is a testament to the strength of your faith.

The Bible is filled with stories of people who cried out to God in their pain. Psalm 34:18 tells us, "The Lord is near to the brokenhearted and saves the crushed in spirit." Friends, God does not turn away from our suffering; He comes closer. His truth burns brighter than any hardship. Do you know why? Because God has a plan for our pain!

What is God's plan for our pain? Romans 5:3-5 offers a powerful answer: "_We also rejoice in our sufferings because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not put us to shame because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us."

Our pain, though difficult, is meant to ultimately lead us closer to God's love. And yes, He will use our pain to shape us into a beacon of hope for others facing similar struggles. And His love will transform our pain into a source of hope and strength.

Just like the fire could not consume Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, our suffering cannot extinguish the light of Christ within us. "He will be our refuge, our strength, a very present help in trouble," says Psalm 46:1. God wants us to share our burdens with Him and trust that He works in our lives, even when we cannot see it. God has a plan for our pain.

In closing, I want you to know that though the path may be difficult, you are not alone. God sees you, hears you, and values you. May your faith be your shield, and may you find strength and hope in the love of Jesus. Let your pain become a source of strength and compassion as you continue to

Equip, Engage, Empower, and Serve your communities. You are God's light in the darkness and a testament to His unwavering love, in Jesus' name.