

Gym Class
“Hurts So Good”
January 29, 2012

Let's pray together.

God, whenever we give attention to the pain that exists in this world and in our own lives, we come to You in hope that we will find healing and relief. And God, sometimes you grant that but sometimes you do not. Sometimes you ordain that we will have to wait for the day when Jesus returns to make all things new and set all things right.

But, this morning, Lord, help us to see that even if that's the case, you have a purpose in this life for the wounds that are not healed and for the pain which is not relieved. Let us, as the scripture

says ...

*... fix our eyes on Jesus,
the author and perfecter
of our faith, who for the
joy set before him
endured the cross,
scorning its shame, and
sat down at the right
hand of the throne of
God. Hebrews 12:2
(NIV)*

In his name we pray, Amen.

Well, good morning everyone. It's great to see you all.

As Kitti said, this is the final week of our Gym Class series and, if this is your first Sunday with us or if you've missed what we've talked about to this point, you should know that this set of messages comes out of an experience I've had over the past year in which I

decided it was time to get serious about my physical condition.

- A little over a year ago, I joined a gym, hired a personal trainer for the first time in my life and I started working out three times a week under his direction.
- Then, about six months ago, after almost passing out in the middle of one of those sessions, I finally decided to take his advice and limit my calories to about 1,500 a day on average (a decision which greatly pleased my trainer, Jonathan, who you all met last week, since he had been nagging me to do so for months, and finally almost keeling over and dying got me to take him seriously).

The result of all that has been two-fold:

- First ... a physical transformation in my

body that, quite frankly, I wasn't really expecting and an ongoing commitment to make even more progress in that area, which I was also not expecting, because I'm not yet where I want or need to be.

- Second, and just as significant ... a deeper understanding of how God changes us in general. Again, going into this, I wasn't really expecting it, but the process of physical transformation has served as a vivid analogy for me and illustration of how spiritual and emotional transformation takes place.

And that's what we've been talking about in this series – four “lessons” from the gym about how God works to grow and change us.

Lesson 1. The power of decision.

In almost every case, change happens in our lives when we *resolve* to change.

Lesson 2. The fruit of going “all in.”

Only by being consistent and fully-engaged over the long haul in whatever process will produce the change, does change really happen. Very rarely does God work a miracle that allows us to jump from A to Z. It doesn't typically work that way.

Lesson 3. The value of an expert trainer.

It's very important because most of us far overestimate our own ability to change and far underestimate the value of someone who will coach us and encourage us as we try to change. Doing “whatever comes naturally” to us doesn't really work in the gym very well or in real life, so, having a trainer is a game-changer. And I think you picked that up last week in my discussion with Jonathan.

Okay, those are the three lessons we've talked about so far and I hope they were encouraging to you: if you missed any of these messages, go to our website and watch, listen or read – whichever you prefer.

Now, today, as Kitti said, the title of this message is "hurts so good" which is what Jonathan says to me whenever I finish an exercise and say something like, "man, that hurt" or "dang, that was hard" or "have I told you lately how much I hate you for making me do this stuff." I say that to him from time to time and he just smiles and says "hurts so good."

And the *reason* he says that isn't because he *likes* to inflicting pain just for pain's sake (at least I don't think so). He says it because he

understands something that seems counterintuitive until you actually experience it for yourself ... and this is the fourth and final lesson I want to share with you from the gym.

He understands the positive payoff of pain; that *wise and judicious engagement in the pain of physical training increases strength, beauty and confidence.*

Let me say that again, because it's a mouthful.

He understands the positive payoff of pain, which is that *wise and judicious engagement in the pain of physical training actually serves to increase your strength, your beauty and your confidence.*

By the way, when I use the word "beauty" it sounds a little weird because I'm a guy. I don't mean "pretty" or "gorgeous" or anything like that. Instead, I mean what Psalm 139 is getting at when it says that we

human beings are “wonderfully made.” Our bodies are amazing and beautiful creations and they ought to be treated as such.

Now, as I said, this particular lesson is counterintuitive because you would think that intentionally setting out to hurt your body in *any* way would make you weaker; it would degrade your appearance and make you feel bad about yourself. But the reality is, when you do it in this way, you actually get stronger, you look better and you feel better about yourself. That’s why the pain “hurts so good.”

Principles of Physiology

And I want to talk to you for a few minutes more specific about how this works in the body because there are three principles I’ve discovered in *this realm* that actually reflect a corollary principle when it comes to life in

general and in the heart and soul realm, as well.

That said ... I want to be clear in what I am about to say that I am by no means an expert on the physiology of exercise. I'm just telling you what I've learned and seen in my own body and what I've been able to ascertain from working with Jonathan and from reading about the subject.

Ok, here's the first principle.

Principle #1. If you want to *make* muscle you have to *break* muscle.

That's probably overstating it just a bit – you don't really want to break muscle to the point that it's unusable. What you want to do in physical training is to stimulate muscle to the point of *trauma* where the connective tissue that surrounds the muscle fiber stretches and then tears. That sounds very dramatic

but it's really not, because these are tiny microscopic tears. But it's this tiny breakdown of tissue that's the first step in causing the muscle to restructure itself and grow.

And it's also what causes the pain that you feel – not in the moment, but a couple of days later. Actually, there are *two kinds* of pain resulting from intense exercise¹:

- One is *temporary lactic acid buildup*, which is what produces the “burn” sensation in the moment. It goes away as soon as you stop the exercise.
- The other pain is *delayed-onset muscle soreness*, the achy feeling which confirms that “yes, you really did *break* muscle” and that your body is ready to *make* muscle.

Of course, just because your body is *ready*

to make muscle doesn't necessarily mean that it *will* make muscle, at least, not optimally. Physiologists tell us that there are two conditions that must be met in order for this to happen... and these are the second and third principles on my list.

So, principle number one ... if you want to make muscle you have to break muscle.

Principle number two ... and this is kind of obvious when you understand principle number one ...

Principle # 2. Muscle development takes place in the *recovery* period following the training.

The training itself serves to *break* your muscles, but it's the time after that – specifically, a 120-hour window – where the development takes place.

Within this window of time, physiologists tell us, there are two phases: healing and then strengthening.

- The *Healing phase* involves repairing those microscopic tears in the muscle fibers and recovering from the stress of the workout. Typically, this phase is completed within 72 hours. You know this phase is over when the soreness is gone - when you can move and you don't feel any kind of stress from what you did a couple of days ago.
- Phase two, however, *strengthening*, takes an additional 48 hours. As the body repairs the torn fibers of a given muscle group it naturally increases the strength of the fibers to protect them from further tearing in the future.

Now, think about this. In a typical workout,

you train one group of muscles hard for 30-45 minutes (like tomorrow, I'll be doing chest and triceps day). So, I'm going to go into the gym and Jonathan is going to put me through a bunch of exercises for about 30-40 minutes that will wear these muscles out, you know, cause this tearing to take place. And then, though, *it takes five full days to recover. Five full days for 30-40 minutes.* Isn't that amazing?

Now here's the kicker about that. You can't shortchange that amount of time if you wanted to ... even if you don't feel sore after a hard workout.ⁱⁱ As one expert puts it:

“Without this rest period muscle growth is impossible as the individual will be breaking down his/her muscles at a faster rate than the body can repair.”ⁱⁱⁱ

That's why you train a specific group of muscles just once-a-week. Anything beyond

that is counterproductive. It's "pain with no gain" ... which is why I said earlier that you have to be wise and judicious if you want to see results. You have to be smart about it. You have to rest and recover in order to see growth.

That's the second principle. Here's the third.

Principle #3. Muscle development is maximized (or minimized) by what and when you eat.

I'm sure you all know that protein is the basic building block of the human body. Well, it turns out that breaking down the connective tissue in muscle has this really cool side-effect: it gives the muscle fibers a unique opportunity to assimilate protein at a much higher rate of efficiency than normal.

But, to take advantage of that opportunity, experts say you have to do two things.

- You have to eat *right after the workout* – within an hour, tops.
- And you have to eat *right* after the workout. You can't just eat sugar and all kinds of junk. You've got to eat something that's high in protein (which obviously makes sense).

In fact, one expert says ...

“If you're lifting weights and you don't protein, it's almost counterproductive.”^{iv}

If you're breaking down muscle, but not giving it the crucial ingredient it needs in order to develop, why bother?

Now, I'm curious about something. I've shared these three principles and I'd like to

do a little survey here. I'm going to ask a question and you can just raise your hand.

How many of you were already aware of principle number one: *if you want to make muscle you have to break muscle*? Did you know that? <raise your hands> So, about half of you.

How many of you were aware of principle number two: *muscle development takes place in the recovery period following the training activity (not during the activity itself)*? How many of you knew that that's when your muscles actually grow? <raise your hands> Oh, a little bit fewer.

How many of you were aware of principle number three: *muscle development is maximized (or minimized) by what and when you eat*? How many knew that? <raise your hands> All of you people with doctor

and nursing degrees, congratulations. The rest of us are idiots.

By saying that, I don't mean to be insulting but, I was at the same point, I mean, when I first started out, I understood the first principle, "No pain, no gain." Everybody knows that. But, the second and third principles? I had no idea how important they were to my physical growth and development.

Anyway, that's some of what I've observed and learned over the past year about pain and physical training. And, if you're involved in some kind of training program or process or thinking about getting involved in one, I hope this is helpful and encouraging to you. I hope it motivates you to be consistent and fully-engaged in the process over the long

haul even though it's hard and it hurts sometimes because there really is a payoff coming. If you wisely and judiciously engage in the pain of physical training, you *will* see an increase in strength, beauty and confidence.

However, that's not the main purpose of this message or this series, so I want to take a turn here and talk about how this lesson about the positive payoff of pain applies to life in general and to the heart and soul in particular.

And I suppose one way to do that would be to tell you about a research project conducted a couple of years ago that determined that "no pain, no gain" actually applies to a person's level of happiness in general. "People who work hard at improving a skill or ability, such as mastering a math problem or learning to

drive, may experience stress in the moment, but experience greater happiness on a daily basis and longer term.

The study found that “people who engage in behaviors that increase competency, for example at work, or in school or the gym, experience *decreased happiness in the moment (they don’t enjoy it while they’re doing it), lower levels of enjoyment and higher levels of momentary stress*. However, the research showed that despite these negative effects felt in the hour, participants later reported that these same activities made them feel happy and satisfied *when they looked back on their day as a whole.*”^v

In other words, people who “hung in there to the end,” even though it was hard, were happy that they did. And, I suppose I could say to you “if you are facing some kind of challenge in your life right now - if you’ve set

a goal, and you're trying to get there and it's hard, and you're struggling and striving - hang in there, because, if you get to the end, you'll be glad you did."

Spiritual Principles

However, on the other hand, as author Robert Dykstra states so eloquently:

"There is simply no guarantee that pain will bring gain, that hardship will yield happiness, that suffering will make one a better person. It may; but it's not inevitable."^{vi}

Wow. Talk about pouring cold water on a sermon. I mean, if you don't have the assurance that spending all that time in the gym dealing with the pain of the moment and the soreness that's sure to follow, if you don't have the assurance that that will result

in increased strength, beauty and confidence, what's the point? Who would do it?

And if you don't have the assurance that hanging in there in the middle of life's crises and difficulties will also produce a strength and beauty of character as well as a sense of confidence in yourself and in God, then why bother? Why not do everything you can to escape from that pain? Believe me, there are a lot of people who come to this conclusion and that is what they do, in one way or another.

But for those of us who know Jesus as our savior and Lord, that is not a road we need to go down because we *do* have the assurance that there is a positive payoff of pain in our lives. We do have the assurance that *wise and judicious engagement in the pain of spiritual training will increase the*

strength, the beauty and confidence that God is trying to grow in us. And we know that, we have that because of Jesus himself.

*Let us fix our eyes on Jesus,
the author and perfecter of
our faith, who for the joy set
before him endured the cross,
scorning its shame, and sat
down at the right hand of the
throne of God. Hebrews 12:2
(NIV)*

This is one of my favorite verses in the whole Bible because it teaches that Jesus was not only God in the flesh, Jesus was also fully human. And being fully human meant that he, just like we do, had to live by faith, every day, moment to moment ... and he did. It says here that he was the Author, he was the Leader, he was the Perfecter of faith, the ideal believer, and therefore he is the ideal pattern for us to follow. So, when he tells us, when God tells us in the scripture, that pain

really does hurt so good, it's not just a cliché. It's his experience. He's done it. He's lived it - when he went to the cross.

So, the question is, what enabled him to endure the pain of the cross as well as the shame of it? Well, the scripture tells us right there, *It was the joy set before him.*

Well, what does that mean? The joy set before Jesus? Well, I think it means that Jesus trusted that the pain of the cross really was going to produce great gain; that the hurt he was going to go through really was going to result in something incredibly good – a gain so great and a good so incredible that the long-term joy of that was going to far surpass the short-term pain of the cross and the shame associated with that.

“What are you talking about, Rick? What kind of gain and good was there for Jesus?”

Well, Albert Barnes explains that the joy set before Jesus, the good and the gain, included all the honor which he would receive at the right hand of his father God, and the happiness which he would experience from the consciousness and awareness that he had completed his mission, that he had done the Father's will and that he had redeemed the world from sin.^{vii} There would be the satisfaction, he could see it in his mind's eye, the satisfaction as millions after millions of people who would become believers in him were presented holy and complete to the Father as redemption out of his creation. And the promise of the joy that would come from that good and that gain gave him the confidence to embrace the pain of the cross. I think that's what it means.

Now, obviously, you and I are not

accomplishing the same kind of thing through *our* pain because we're not saving the world ... however we *are* told to look to Jesus and follow his example ... to trust that, in the end, God will use whatever pain we suffer to produce strength, beauty and confidence. And that's the joy – or at least, part of the joy – that is set before us.

But if we're going to do that, if we're really going to embrace this – to trust God, we need to understand how He does this in our lives. And, amazingly, what happens in the gym provides a great metaphor. The same three principles that apply there, also apply in the spiritual world.

First of all, in the same way that to make muscle you have to break muscle ...

1. For God to make you, for God to make me, He has to break you, He has to break me.

And again, just to be clear, this *is* His goal in your life – to make you like Jesus. Yes, he loves you just as you are (there’s grace – favor that you cannot earn and do not deserve) but He loves you too much to leave you as you are (there’s always the hard truth about the gap between who we really are and who we need to be and He is constantly trying to close that).

And to make you – and me – into what He wants you to be, God is going to break away the old you – the rebellious sinner nature full of pride, self-centeredness, anger, lust, greed, spite, judgmentalism, and so on. He needs to break *that* nature, off of you, off of me, so that the *new* nature – the Spirit of Jesus which now lives in you - can come out.

And breaking us spiritually, just as it does physically, implies pain ... specifically, three

kinds of pain. And God uses these three kinds of pain in your life.

1. There's pain that comes from life in a sin-cursed world. <illness, disease, random calamity, the sin of other people which gets pointed at us sometimes intentionally and sometimes unintentionally> Just pain from living in this sin-cursed world that you and I actually contribute to in our own sin.
2. There's pain that comes from the consequences of our own foolish/sinful actions. <we ignore or abuse our bodies, our health suffers; we ignore or abuse our loved ones, our relationships suffer; we ignore or abuse our responsibilities, our careers or our finances suffer> Pain that comes from the consequences of our own simple actions.

3. And there's also pain that comes from disciplines into which we willingly enter in order to stretch or train ourselves, kind of like going to the spiritual gym. I'm talking about things like fasting. Sometimes we just look at the tv and say, "for my own good, I just have to turn that off for a week. I just need to not have anything to do with that." Or, fasting from food, "I'm not going to eat this particular thing," or, "I'm not going to eat at all for a day or two." I'm going to feel some pain so I can have some spiritual gain in my life. Another example is giving. Giving is an example of this discipline that causes you pain, because, guess what, you can't spend that money on yourself because you're spending it on God's Kingdom. It's a discipline – it's painful. Engaging in community with other believers and

setting a time to make that a part of your life. That's painful because you've got to say "no" to something else. See, there's a cost associated with all of those things.

And God uses all of these kinds of pain to accomplish His work in your life and mine, which is why Paul wrote:

We glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. Romans 5:3-4 (NIV)

This week, as I was preparing for this message I came across a blog post by a Christian guy who has also drawn a similar parallel between pain in the gym and pain in his spiritual life.

He wrote:

I don't consider myself to have a high pain tolerance at all, but pain never keeps me away from the gym. I can barely walk up and down stairs today from squats and leg presses the night before last, and I love it. The pain means I'm doing something right. It means I'm working hard enough to produce growth for my muscles. I can't see the results yet, but I can feel the hurt of progress. The hurt keeps me looking for the progress. I expect progress because I feel pain.

I wonder what would happen in my life if I approached my spirit the same way? When God asks me to endure hardships, does the pain I feel excite me because it means growth is happening in my spirit?

I can't lie and say that is the case for me. I run away from spiritual pain and sometimes even spiritual discipline. I'm not as eager to do things that don't make me feel good. I don't like the taste of personal sacrifice. I don't see the same value in it that I see in the "blekk in a bottle" protein shakes I drink for muscle growth and health.

I know that it's impossible to grow muscle without pain and shock, but for some reason I allow myself to believe that spiritual growth is possible without the same work and pain.^{viii}

Wow, I'm reading that and I wonder ... how many of us believe the same thing? We want to see progress in our heart and soul ... we want to see our relationships improve, we want to feel closer to God, but we don't want

the pain that God either brings into our lives or allows into our lives, or the kind of pain that He asks us to willingly enter into as a discipline – We don't want that.

And I suppose a good question at this point is ... what is that in your life right now? What is it that God is bringing in? What is He asking you to embrace? And will you embrace it as something that's designed to increase your strength, your beauty and your confidence?

Now, having said all that, I think I should also say that most serious Christians – most people who have been following Jesus for a while – they're aware of this principle in their spiritual life. This is not news. We understand that God works all things together for our good. We get that. But we

are not as aware of the other two principles.

Remember, just because your body is *ready* to make muscle doesn't necessarily mean that it *will* make muscle, at least, not optimally. There are two other conditions that must be met ... and these same conditions apply spiritually.

In the same way that physical development happens in the recovery period ...

Principle # 2. Spiritual development also requires rest and recovery (which is often referred to as “the Sabbath principle”).

Now, a lot of people are confused about the Sabbath principle. They think, “oh, yeah, Sabbath principle, that means I gotta get up and go to church on Sunday and not do any work. Well, that's crazy in this society because everybody works, so it doesn't really apply to us.” But that's a very limited

and legalistic understanding of the Sabbath, so let me give you a little bit of background on this.

Bottom line, the Sabbath principle as it applies to humans originated when Moses told the Israelites to not work on the seventh day. And this is how it went down, he said:

"The LORD has made the Sabbath a day of rest for you. So on the sixth day he will give you enough food (they were out in the desert when this happened) for two days, but on the seventh day each of you must stay where you are. Do not go anywhere." So the people rested on the seventh day. Exodus 16:28-30 (NCV)

Now, this seems on the surface to be a physical principle, just don't do anything ...

but it actually had a spiritual purpose: *to teach people to depend on God and not themselves.* See, human beings were never meant to carry the weight of the world on their shoulders. We're supposed to partner with God. He is supposed to be part of our lives and helping us. And if you work 24/7, if you're constantly pushing the weight, and never take a break in your life, then you're saying, "I don't need God." And what God is saying is, "No, you need to take a break, because I'm God and you're not." And, even when you look at the life of Jesus, Jesus did the same thing. He does these huge projects of ministry. He wears himself out. He's spiritually exercising his life. And then, what happens, the next day they wake up and they say, "Okay, Jesus, there are more people who need help. Jesus, are you in there?" No. He's up on a mountain; He's praying. He's quiet; He's pulled out. "I'm taking a break. I need a Sabbath."

See, the same thing that's true in the physical realm is true in the spiritual realm. "Without this rest period, spiritual growth is impossible as the individual will be breaking down his/her spiritual muscles at a faster rate than the soul can repair."

Now, practically speaking ... what that means for you and me is that we've got to call a time out, friends. We need to call a time out -whether it's daily, or weekly, or monthly, or annually – we have got to say we're just disconnecting. And, I say this all the time, but I'm going to say it again: this is why we have church. This is why we have Sunday services, because, this is the time when we actually apply what it says in Hebrews 10:

*Let us consider how we may
spur one another on toward*

love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another. Hebrews 10:24-25 (NIV)

Let this be a time of withdraw and rest from the world so you can renew your souls so that the growth you need in order to take on the challenges is happening in your heart and in your soul. And, so many Christians fail because they never take out this time for rest. It's a sign of weakness, "well, I *have* to work" No you don't! You can carve out time. You can and you need to or you're going to crash and burn.

Ok, let's move to the third and final principle ... in the same way that physical development is maximized by what and when you eat ...

Principle #3. Spiritual development is also maximized by eating “spiritual food” at the right time.

What is the spiritual food?

Jesus answered, “It is written, ‘Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.’” Matthew 4:4 (ESV)

He was talking about the scripture. And, referring to that scripture, Peter later wrote to some of the believers he was working with, he said ...

Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation. 1 Peter 2:2-3 (NIV)

And the author of the letter to the Hebrews, which we’ve been reading out of this

morning, encourages them to go beyond the milk to the meat of God's word.

See, the primary spiritual food in the life of a follower of Jesus is the scripture. And, just like with literal food, we have to constantly be "eating it." You can't just eat every once in a while, you have to eat regularly.

But, one of the most important times for you and I to eat spiritual food is right after we suffer pain; to call a time out and go reflect on what God says about you and about Him and about life in this world, and you take that and you let what He says, as food, wash over and into your soul; let it remind you of the truth about who He is and what He is doing in your life.

Personally, and I think maybe you've seen this in some of the things I've talked about in the last several years, this is something that

I've been experiencing myself. As I hit painful moments, I gotta go get my head straight, my heart straight. I've got to take spiritual food because this was just really hard, what we just went through or what I just went through.

This week I got an email from a gal in this church who has done this. She wrote:

When I look back at my life, no I am not happy or thrilled with the fact that I had to endure physical and sexual abuse. It was awful. I would no way wish that on anyone. But I also would not have believed 20 years ago that someday I would no longer live my life as a victim; that I would have found healing and forgiveness for those who hurt me; that I would be set free from the patterns of thinking that kept me trapped for years.

It wasn't just the abuse done to me that caused pain but the lies I believed that said I deserved it or that I wasn't worth enough to deserve better.

Now, here's where the food comes in, listen, here is what she said ...

I had to go through years and years of counseling and mentoring, constant, day after day, moment-by-moment choices to change my mind; to believe that God loved me, that He had a plan to use my past pain to bring healing to others, that if I would choose Him and believe that He was good, that He was for me, that He loved me...if I would choose to believe that day after day, someday the old tapes would be re-recorded. That someday, I would have a life that was far from what I ever imagined - a life with purpose, a life

with a healthy marriage, a life where I believed I was worth something.

Now, let me ask you – where did those thoughts come from? They're not coming from the world, friends. They're not coming from inside. They are coming from the word of God. And, that's what happened in her life. And, that's what happens when we get in this situation where we begin to go through pain, we need to apply the word right now. We need to eat right now, putting the truth into us. Feeding, in those moments.

BTW, this is why it is so important to be part of a group of believers even in those times when you are not experiencing great pain. We call it the "velcro principle" around here: you get involved in a church – it doesn't have to be this church – you get involved with a group of people and you kind of velcro to them. You may not have a whole lot going on

right now but the day is coming when something is going to crash into your life and you're going to go, "I'm in PAIN." And you want to run and hide, and you've got these people sitting here that say, "hey, we love you. Let us tell you the truth. God loves you. God is for you. He is going to use this in your life." You have to be re-velcroed to people so that you can be fed because sometimes you don't even have the strength to feed yourself.

Reflection

That's what I've learned in the gym. That ...

1. For God to make you, He has to break you.
2. Spiritual development also requires rest and recovery (which is often referred to as "the Sabbath principle").
3. Spiritual development is also

maximized by eating “spiritual food” at the right time.

Just the same way it works in the gym.

But, I want to go back to that blog post I referred to earlier and read you the conclusion because I think it really applies to us.

He wrote:

My prayer is that God would help me endure in my spirit the same way I am determined to endure pain to grow physically. *I pray for growth all the time, but I also pray for the pain to go away.*

I think a lot of us are like that, aren't we? Then he writes a prayer:

Lord help me embrace the process that

leads to growth. Teach me not to pray away the pain of growth. Teach me that You aren't out to kill me, but to grow me up. Teach me that there is no gain without experiencing pain.^{ix}

And I want to pray that prayer for you right now.

God, thank you for giving us light to see what it is that is going on in our life. God, this morning some of us are sitting here and we're feeling pain and we're all confused by it, but it's pain that you are using, whether it's pain from being in a sinful world, or pain from our own stupid, foolish or sinful behavior, or pain that we've chosen to enter into – you are using it. And, God, as this brother has prayed, help us to embrace that process. Help us to not pray away the pain and the growth, but use it to grow us up. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.

Feature – “Blessings”

Communion

Earlier in this service, we read this scripture:

*Let us fix our eyes on Jesus,
the author and perfecter of
our faith, who for the joy set
before him endured the cross,
scorning its shame, and sat
down at the right hand of the
throne of God. Hebrews 12:2
(NIV)*

As we close this morning, I think it would be fitting to do just that: to stop looking at our circumstances right now – it’s natural to do that, no condemnation – but, to just stop that for a minute and fix our eyes on Jesus and draw encouragement from his example. That’s why the scripture is there.

And, one of the ways we do that is through

communion. Communion can mean several things – one of them is “having something in common because of the union. Communion.” Friends we have something in common with Jesus because we are in union with him, and that is: suffering. Jesus suffered, just like we suffer. And, Jesus, just like we suffer, suffered for a purpose. God was using it for incredible good and incredible gain. And He is doing the same thing in your life and mine.

So, for the next few minutes, we’re just going to open up the communion table. We do the bread and the juice as a reminder that Jesus’ body and his blood were given for our salvation.

But, this morning as we take communion, remember that, but also remember that whatever you are going through right now, little or big, remember that Jesus has that in

common with you; Jesus has that in union with you. So, in a way, you are kind of walking in his footsteps. And, as you receive communion this morning, ask him to give you the power and strength to hang in there and endure to see the fruit that is waiting for you.

We'll do that now. Come as you feel led ... then we'll close in song.

Worship Song – “Beautiful the Blood”

Endnotes

ⁱ totalbodyclient.com/2010/11/22/hurts-so-good/

ⁱⁱ www.simplyshredded.com/top-10-muscle-myths-we-test-research-the-10-biggest-axioms-of-bodybuilding.html

ⁱⁱⁱ <http://www.theundergroundbootcamp.com/fitness/bodybuildingthe-importance-of-resting-muscles-for-muscle-growth/>

^{iv} <http://www.menshealth.com/mhlists/guide-to-protein/protein-after-workout.php#ixzz1kng8p1Sl>

^v <http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2009/10/091029120900.htm>

^{vi} Robert Dykstra, She Never Said Good-bye quoted at <http://www.goodreads.com/quotes/show/366281>

^{vii} Barnes, A: Notes on the NT

^{viii} See <http://coreyevan.com/2009/11/no-pain-no-gain/>

^{ix} See <http://coreyevan.com/2009/11/no-pain-no-gain/>