

## Childish to Childlike: Pain

1 Corinthians 13: 8-12

Luke 18: 15-17

Romans 8: 22-30



We have officially entered the season of Lent. I'm not sure our culture today knows much of the idea behind this season, beyond a chance to give up chocolate or caffeine for 40 days. I think we mostly view it as a chance to restart those New Year's resolutions we gave up on a month ago.

The word "Lent" comes from the Anglo Saxon word *lencten*, meaning "lengthen." It got that name because it refers to the lengthening days of spring.

Lent is a period of 40 days leading up to Easter, and it's 40 days in length because that was the time Jesus spent in the desert also denying himself and defeating temptation.

Lent is a time for us to try and deny ourselves something we value, but it's more than just a personal challenge.

We do this as a time of personal reflection and self-examination. It's a time for us to center ourselves, to prepare and focus on the upcoming observance of Easter.

So, over the next five weeks, I want to focus on this theme of reflection and self-examination. And what I want us to focus on examining and reflecting on during these five weeks is our faith.

More than once, Jesus himself, along with the authors of the Epistles, use children to illustrate the concept of faith. Sometimes, like in our reading from 1 Corinthians, they tell us to put away childish ways. It tells us to grow up a little bit.

Other times, we get what Jesus says in Luke, chapter 18:



*<sup>15</sup> People were also bringing babies to Jesus for him to place his hands on them. When the disciples saw this, they rebuked them. <sup>16</sup> But Jesus called the children to him and said, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to*

*such as these. <sup>17</sup> Truly I tell you, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it."*

So what's it supposed to be? Are we supposed to grow up, or are we meant to be like children?

Not to confuse you, but the answer is a little bit of both. So this series of sermons is going to look at what it means to have a childish faith and what it takes to get to a childlike faith.

There's a distinction there if you look closely. If I would come up to you after the service and say, "Hey, you were being a little childish in church today," you wouldn't like that, would you? Childish really means immature, it means we're not paying attention, it means we have some growing up to do.

But if we were to say that someone is looking at something with a childlike wonder, we mean something very different. We mean their eyes are wide open, they know what's happening around them, they understand the significance of what they're seeing – even if they don't understand the thing itself.

It's the same root word, child, but the suffix changes the meaning greatly.



So we are looking to go from immaturity in our faith – not seeing the full scope of things – to maturity in our faith – understanding more of God, even if we don't always understand how He works.

Now, before we really dive in, I think this series should come with a word of warning. My hope is that I say something that makes you think, "Oh no. He's talking to me." And if I do that, if something I say makes you feel I'm calling you childish, please, don't be offended.

I say that because I hope that something in the next five weeks will touch all of us at one point or another. And if this happens to us multiple times, that's actually great news. That means we are following through with this Lenten goal of personal reflection, examination, and preparation.

Also know, nothing I say up here excludes me. I am looking forward to my own growth this Lenten season. And, as always, the sermons I write are sermons I need to hear. I'm not talking *at* you. My hope is that I'm reflecting *with* you.

So, with all of that said, let's jump in. I've already talked for a few minutes and we haven't even gotten to the topic yet...and the topic is a rather loaded one.



This week, I want to talk about pain.

I'm not talking about the pain of stubbing your toe or stepping on a Lego or even getting a papercut. Those are each terrible in their own unique way, but I'm talking about deeper pain. I'm talking about spiritual, emotional, even psychological pain.

I'm talking about the pain of knowing we are suffering – mentally, spiritually, physically, whatever you have going on – and also knowing that God isn't taking away our suffering.

I think pain is something we think we know about, something we think we understand...until we're in the middle of it. So today, I want us to understand more of how God works in pain, even if we don't understand the pain itself.

There is a story about a child named Johnny who was arguing with his mother about green beans. Johnny's mother was trying her best to persuade him to eat his green beans, but he wouldn't budge. Finally, in desperation, she said, "Johnny, if you don't eat your green beans, God will punish you."

Still Johnny refused, and eventually his mother sent him to bed. Before long, a huge storm rolled in. Lightning flashed, thunder shook the house, and rain poured down.

Johnny's mother went upstairs to comfort her son. "Johnny, are you okay?" she asked.

"I guess so," he replied, "but this an awful fuss to make about a few green beans."

When we are going through our own anguish or pain, we too often see God as the deliverer of that pain. We must have done something wrong to be in this position we're in now.

Like a child with their parents, we think if we stay on God's good side, if we are good Christians, God in turn will not send us pain or disappointment – or He will take away what we are experiencing at the moment.

But we know that's not true, don't we? We know that even as Christians, even if we were to get ourselves to the best possible standing of any Christian on the planet, we'll still have pain. We'll still have sadness. We'll still have disappointment.

And so, thinking that a Christian life means no more pain is a childish faith. God protecting us and God delivering us doesn't mean that life doesn't still happen. Life will happen. And sometimes, that means we're in for some pain.

So what does it take to get from this childish faith to a childlike faith? What do we need to know of God to help us see more of the big picture?

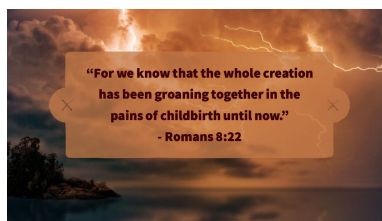


Let's turn to scripture. From Romans 8: 22-30:

*<sup>22</sup> We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. <sup>23</sup> Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption to sonship, the redemption of our bodies. <sup>24</sup> For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what they already have? <sup>25</sup> But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently.*

*<sup>26</sup> In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans. <sup>27</sup> And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for God's people in accordance with the will of God.*

*<sup>28</sup> And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. <sup>29</sup> For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters. <sup>30</sup> And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified.*



I love this passage. I've used it in sermons before, but I had to come back to it this week.

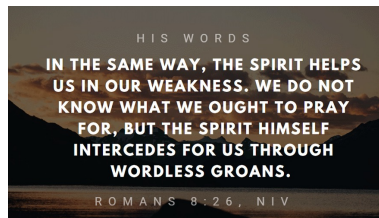
Let's just start at the beginning and work through it, because I think that will get us to where we need to be when we think of pain.

All of creation is groaning as if in the pains of childbirth.

Two things here. First of all, that's no small amount of pain. Roughly half of us know that pain personally. And the other half, even if we haven't felt it personally, can at least picture how much pain we're talking about.

But second, this applies to *all* Creation. Everything and everyone. We are all groaning out in pain. Even, it goes on, we ourselves as Christians. We are not exempt. Our hope in redemption and restoration saves us, but not yet. Right now, we wait.

So we have established we are all in the middle of a life containing pain, sometimes intense pain and suffering.



Moving on, we don't even know what to pray for. Have you ever been in the middle of something so bad, have you ever been so lost and hopeless, that even when someone asks you what they can do to help, you don't even know where to start?

Sometimes, the pain we are in can be so great that we don't even know what we need to talk to God about.



But, and this is where we start to make a connection, the Spirit intercedes for us. God, in the Holy Spirit, knows our hearts and our minds and speaks for us when we can't even speak ourselves.

And then, we know that God works for the good of those who love Him.

Now, I want you to notice a couple things. First, this doesn't say that everything that happens to you will be good. It doesn't even say that God removes the bad from our path. It says that God works good into all who love Him.

And second, there's a big phrase in there: "we know in all things God works." What does that phrase describe to you? To me, it describes trust. Knowing that God is still working in all things, good and bad, is placing our whole trust in Him.

Knowing that when good things are happening we can say, "God, I know this wasn't me. I know this was You" – knowing when bad things are happening we can say, "God, I don't understand

this and don't even know what to pray for. But I know you are still working" – that takes our faith during times of pain and makes it childlike.



One of my most favorite things about parenthood so far has been the “magic kiss.” Parents, or at least parents of kids up to a certain age, seem to possess magic lips with healing powers. When their child is hurt, a simple kiss seems to make it all go away. I have loved being able to fix things with a kiss on a boo-boo.

That is a childlike faith. Why?

Because that boo-boo has to still sting a little. We don't have a magic salve. We don't cause miraculous healing. But that child has faith that even though the pain isn't really gone, mom and dad are still there, trying to make things better.

There is hope, that though they are going through that groaning and crying out in the middle of pain, there is hope that eventually it will be healed.

It's not that good Christians don't face bad things. It's that bad things, when we trust that God is still working, can make us better Christians.

There is pain in this life. We don't get to escape that. Christianity isn't an exclusive “no bad things allowed” club. That would be a childish expectation.

There will be groaning. There will be crying. There will be pain, and sadness, and disappointment.

But there is also hope. There is also help. There is also promise.

When we trust that God can work in the middle of any situation, no matter how good or how bad, we get to know that hope.

We get to receive that help.

We get to live in that promise.

And that would be a childlike faith in the middle of pain.

And all of God's people said...