

“Please, God, Take The Pain Away”

Matthew 28:20b

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When my daughter, Amy Blair, was four years old, she broke her leg. It happened at church when some bricks stacked under a canopy fell on her. She spent a night in the hospital because the doctor wanted the swelling to subside before he put a cast on it.

I'll never forget one thing that occurred the next day. The doctor came in to set her leg and of course it hurt when they started moving that leg to prepare it for the cast. She looked at me with big tears in her eyes and said, “Daddy, make him stop. It hurts.”

I don't recall hurting that badly up to that point in my life. I was a mess on the inside while trying to act so composed and calm on the outside. I wanted nothing more than to take her pain away, but I could not do it. So, what did I do?

I held her hand ever so tightly and told her I knew it hurt. I assured her that what the doctors were doing was absolutely necessary and that the pain would ease. I told her to grip my hand tightly and look at me, not the doctors. I let her know I would not leave her and be close by her side through this entire ordeal.

That was twenty years ago. While the memories are fading, the lesson I learned that morning is not. I think of it often, especially when I hear someone ask, **“Why can't God take my pain away?”** For one brief moment, I think I can identify with God and understand why even He cannot take away pain from the children He loves so much. Let me explain.

It is not uncommon for me to hear someone ask, “Why won't God take my pain away?” I have heard it from people who have lost loved ones, victims of abuse or neglect and people whose dreams have been shattered.

Most of the time, the request comes from people who are hurting so badly they are not sure they can continue another day or hour. It is usually spoken out of deep anguish.

How would you answer the question? I welcome your insight and input. Feel free to share with me what you have learned from your own experiences. Here is what I have learned.

For God to take away our pain, He would have to take away all feelings. He would have to strip us of joy, happiness, pride, love and a host of other emotions. To take away our feelings would leave nothing but an empty shell. That's not what He wants for us and I have to believe we do not want that either. Oh, we may want that temporarily, but not permanently.

To take away our pain, He would have to erase our memories. While there are times when we might not mind that, there are other times when that would be the last thing we would want.

Have you ever been around anyone with Alzheimer's? It has to be one of the most debilitating diseases anyone could endure. How pitiful to observe the actions of one that has no memory. It is heartbreaking, isn't it?

If you have lost a loved one, I know it hurts and hurts badly. At times, the pain seems unbearable. However, as bad as that pain is, I think it would be worse to have no memory of the person you knew and loved. That would be sad for them and us.

An unknown author has written, “It is better to have gained memories from a love than to have never had the chance, for memories remain in the heart.” Sounds like the more familiar quote, “Better to have loved and lost than never loved at all.”

However, when you love someone, you are going to grieve when he or she is gone. That's normal. As a matter of fact, the more you love them, the more you will grieve. In some ways, the level of pain indicates the level of love you had for that person. How can you expect to love someone and not grieve when he or she is gone? That's impossible unless you had no memory of them. I'll take the pain because I want the memories.

If God will not take the pain away, then what will He do? What did I do with Amy when she broke her leg? I got her the medical attention she needed. I held her hand. I assured her I would stay with her. I told her to look at me. I assured her that this pain would not last forever and that eventually everything would be all right. I cried with her. Those are the things responsible parents do. I think they are the things that God does, too.

Few words are more comforting to me than the final words of Matthew's Gospel. "And surely I am with you always, to the end of the age." Jesus knew his earthly presence was ending but he would be with his disciples in spirit forever. How that promise must have given those early disciples the confidence they needed. It does the same for me.

May I recommend that you read the last chapter of Harold Kushner's book, When Bad Things Happen to Good People. It is entitled, "What Good, Then, Is Religion?" You recall that Kushner wrote this book after the death of his teenage son, Aaron. In the last chapter, he explores the role of God in the lives of hurting people.

"How does God make a difference in our lives if He neither kills nor cures?" writes Kushner. In two ways. First, He gives us strength, courage, confidence, patience, stamina, perseverance, self-discipline, determination, peace and hope.

"When people who were never particularly strong become strong in the face of adversity, when people who tended to think of themselves become unselfish and heroic in an emergency, I have to ask myself where they got these qualities which they would freely admit they did not have. My answer is that this is one of the ways in which God helps us when we suffer beyond the limits of our own strength.

Secondly, God inspires people to help others who have been hurt by life, and by helping them, they protect them from the danger of feeling alone, abandoned or judged. As a nineteenth-century Hasidic rabbi once put it, "human beings are God's language."

Last week, I watched an interview with Ed Smart, father of Elizabeth Smart. You recall that she is the fourteen-year-old girl from Salt Lake City that was abducted while sleeping in her home. The interviewer asked Mr. Smart how he was holding up under such great stress and anxiety. I was impressed with his answer. He attributed it to two things, the support of family and friends and the strength his faith has provided. He mentioned the fact that he and his wife have read cards and letters from all over the country and they have meant so much to them. He then stated that he had never prayed so hard in his life and felt both the presence and power of God.

Has Mr. Smart's faith taken his pain away? No. Has it provided more than adequate strength and courage as well as a loving support group? Yes. Then I believe his faith is working and will serve him well whatever the outcome of his ordeal. I hope you have this kind of faith, too. I know we all need it.