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IT'S TOO PAINFUL

Stumbling Blocks To Forgiveness: # 7

"The pain is too much!"
"It is an insurmountable obstacle."
"I don't want to re-live the agony."
"You have no idea how much I have been through."
"The forgiveness process is too difficult."

Many of us stumble when it comes to forgiving others because it is seemingly too painful. We have a very understandable aversion to pain. Furthermore, we usually lack the desire and wisdom to handle the uncomfortable and painful experiences in life. Consequently, we are often doomed to repeat the same discipline/suffering until we are "trained by it."

No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but *painful*. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace *for those who have been trained by it*.

Hebrews 12:11, italics added

"Everyone undergoes discipline" (Heb 12:8), but not everyone is "trained by it." What makes the difference? The key is one's *response* to suffering, correction, and discipline. This is revealed in the last eight words of the verse: "*for those who have been trained by it.*"

No one likes the sensation of pain, yet God, in His love and wisdom, designed us to experience pain. No one likes to be hurt or uncomfortable, yet this is often when the greatest growth occurs.

Pain is painful; there is no way around it. But pain has a godly purpose (Heb 12:5-11; Rom 5:1-5; Phil 3:10-11; Jas 1:2-4; 1 Pet 1:6-9). With this divine appreciation you can deal with hardship head-on so that you can move on, grow, and be free. Without this understanding you will try to avoid, appease, and dilly-dally around the difficulties in life. Choosing this way, will leave you limited and controlled by your pain—sometimes forever!

We can choose to either be someone who is "trained" through the difficulties of life, or we can resist and resent God's discipline, thereby avoiding the promised "harvest of

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righteousness and peace.” What is more, by choosing the latter, we may have to experience the same hardship again and again—until we *do* learn!

Growing up near the beach, I quickly learned to tell the difference between the tourists and the locals, simply by the way they approached the art of body surfing (okay, maybe it was their tan lines as well). When it came to body surfing, there was an easily observable distinction between foolish inexperience and that of wisdom learned through experience.

The visitor or novice gradually wades into the cold water with the hopes of eventually finding the right place to catch a wave. He needlessly prolongs the dreaded acclimation to the sometimes freezing cold water. I am sure that this tactic makes perfect sense to the tourist, but it is truly an unnecessary and miserable experience. While inching along with chattering teeth, he struggles to get past the initial set of waves. He tries to somehow get around these waves but, instead, receives continual setbacks to his overall quest. Eventually, after being frozen and battered around for what seems an eternity, he reaches his desired destination (of course, actually catching a wave is another painful issue!).

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This inexperienced and ill-advised line of attack mirrors the method of many in their approach to conflict and the process of forgiveness. And, like inexperienced surfing, forgiveness does *not* have to be so prolonged and painful!

In stark contrast, the approach that the seasoned veteran takes to body surfing probably seems insane to the rookie, at least at first. The veteran already knows from experience that the water *will be* cold and uncomfortable, while the waves will relentlessly thwart his advances. Wisdom also tells him that he cannot control or change the temperature or the force of the waves. However, he knows that he *can* alter his attitude and approach and, therefore, his experience and success.

With this in mind, the local makes a beeline straight for the waves. He sprints as far as he can until confronted with the first significant wave. In a move that seems, at least to the uninitiated, crazy, he dives head first, just under the wave. His momentum gained from the sprint takes him easily beyond the turbulence to the calm of the other side. This is precisely where he needs to be in order to experience the joy of riding the waves.

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Again, this appears crazy and believe me, it is not comfortable. In fact, it is quite a shock to your body. Yet it is an exhilarating jolt like no other. What is more, within a few seconds, you are quickly acclimated to the cold water and you are exactly where you want to be. You are now free to do what you came to do.

Furthermore, the wiser and more experienced body surfer has several wonderful experiences before the vacationer even has one. On top of this, even that one experience for the novice is a cold and miserable one.

The tourist may look at the local’s approach and think “Wow! That is painful. He’s crazy! Whatever I do, I am not doing *that*.” Yet, what the tourist fails to realize is that there is no way to avoid the pain and discomfort of the water and waves. It is one’s *approach* to the inevitable that makes all the difference.

In the same way, pain is inevitable in every person's life. And here too, it is one's attitude and approach to the storms of life that will make all the difference. We can attack the storms head on, or we can prolong our misery. We can be free and enjoy life, or we can be battered around—limited and controlled by our unwise and undisciplined mindset.

The forgiveness process will be uncomfortable. Experience tells us this much. Wisdom tells us that if we approach it head on, with the right attitude, we will come out on the other end right where we want and need to be. This unnatural and unworldly approach (i.e., discipline) brings freedom and joy to life, no matter what the conditions.

Are you an avoider, a novice, a tourist when it comes to approaching the pain of the past and your responsibility to deal with it in the present? Or do you, by faith, wisdom, discipline, and maybe some experience, run right at difficulties and responsibility, thereby experiencing the fruit of God's design?

The uncomfortable, sometimes agonizing, process of forgiveness is our only true hope of dealing with, ridding ourselves of, and growing from the pain of the past. Yet, many of us make it far more difficult than it needs to be.