

This is a true story from my wife Sandra's life when she was in middle school. And as background info, up to this point she had been an "A-B" honor roll student:

She said:

My dad and I are driving down the street, I was complaining to him about my math homework and how frustrating it was. I was really struggling to keep up on my homework, because I wasn't really understanding what the teacher was saying.

So my dad's response floored me when he said something like:

"Well Sandra, you may not be the smartest kid in the way of intelligence, but you have street smarts and if I had to choose one or the other it would always be street smarts because that will help you get thru life in the long run."

It was a big surprise to me that he saw me that way. That statement made me feel like, "Wow, my dad doesn't look at me and think what a smart kid--- he must think that intellectually, I am very average or below."

This caused me to think that maybe I've just been a poser--because my dad is smart and "really knows me"—maybe I wasn't smart.

It changed the way I saw myself. And it took a very, very long time for me to see myself as being smart.

By the time I hit college, I had worked thru most of those feelings and had a pretty good self image, but even today sometimes it still hits me and I lack the confidence I should have.

(Disclaimer: Sandra's dad is a great guy. Man of God. Great parent etc...)

Wednesday night when I asked Sandra if anyone had told her something when she was a kid that still hurts or feels bad to think about it today --- she recited that story without skipping a beat.

She could see, hear and feel that moment just like it was yesterday. Even though it was unintended by a loving father, it was one of those moments where, pain pierced her heart.

And odds are as you listened to that story, maybe it set off a spark in you of a time when someone said or did something that pierced your heart.

What we're talking about today reminds me of this quote by Simone Weil:

"There are only two things that pierce the human heart. One is beauty. The other is affliction." – Simone Weil (paraphrase)

In other words, beauty or pain are the two things that penetrate our heart. And like it or not, one of the biggest things we all have in common is pain. Because we've all been wounded.

Wounded by small things like a conversation like Sandra had -- to large things like abuse, death and divorce.

Author John Eldredge refers to the things that wound us as "arrows."

Some of us have been shot by a quiver-full of arrows—some big, some small.

Some of us, more like the scene in Braveheart where the archers of “Longshanks” (Edward I) rained down upon William Wallace’s highlanders.

Some of us have arrows we’re not even aware of.

Some of our arrows we still carry from when we were small children.
Some arrows might be a fresh wound from just last week.

Sandra carried that arrow until she was nearly 40 years old. It was that long before she and her father talked about it.

What about you? Maybe as a child:

1) You were made fun of for your ears, your nose, your weight or some physical trait...

2) Maybe when you were a kid your parents divorced and as much as you say “*you’re over it,*” it still hurts...

you tell yourself it’s not your fault, but there’s an arrow you can’t dislodge that says, “*Yep, your fault.*”

3) Maybe as a kid, nothing “bad” happened to you --- but your dad or your mom simply wasn’t there for you...

So when you hear friends talk about their great relationship with their parent, there’s a little ache in your heart...the arrow of absence—missed opportunities.

4) Maybe as a kid something abusive happened to you—something ugly that came from someone you should have been able to trust...

5) Maybe in adolescence, in a very awkward time in your life—someone did or said something and made fun of you, and it has just stayed with you all these years...

6) Maybe right now, you’re in high school—and there’s a picture in your mind of who you’d like to be and what you’d like to look like and who you’d like to hang out with—

But you feel out of place. And you really wish you could change that one thing about your body or your personality or your intellect...the arrow of not fitting in, or being who you’d like to be.

7) Maybe when you were a teenager, a parent, relative or coach, really lost control--and yelled at you and called you a name that all these years later, you can hear loud and clear...

8) Maybe you *had to* get married... and still now, you wish it could have been different.

9) Maybe you started drinking or using something, “*just for fun*”---and now it’s not fun and now you can’t stop...

10) You got married “till death do us part”---but instead it was “till this isn’t working, do us part.”

11) And then there are those times when we lost someone close to us... maybe they didn’t live to a ripe old age...maybe they left before we could tell them the things that we never got a chance to... so there’s that arrow of loss.

“There are only two things that pierce the human heart. One is beauty. The other is pain.”

Was it Simon the Zealot or Michael Stipe who said, “Everybody hurts, sometimes.”?

This seems like a real downer to start this series and this talk this way—but I think this is the only way in.

And I feel like I had to stir us up and make us think about our pain, for a very important reason:

I think we avoid it. I think we hide it. I think society says, “Suck it up, toughen up, hide it in the closet and move on.”

We hide our pain because a lot of times our pain or our wounds, are embarrassing.

Whether we caused the pain or whether the pain crashed into us—we think it’s better kept out of sight.

“If people knew that about me, they’d look at me differently...”

But if this is your first time here at Oakbrook—first of all—thanks for having the guts to get out of your comfort zone and check us out.

But secondly, you need to know that behind our casual middle class clothes and Sunday smiles—we are a church of wounded people.

We look “together,” but all of us have endured arrows and experienced pain.

Some of the people in your row may be in the middle of pain right now. You may have come because of a wound or pain in your life.

(stop & pray for people right now:)
-those limping in, out of gas, shot up...
- those that feel pain, but don’t know what to do with it...
- those that You have helped remove the arrows and heal the wounds...
- Ultimately, the way out of our pain is only through You...

When Sandra was telling me about the conversation with her dad, she said, “Boom, that was a snapshot. That was a snapshot—a picture, I carried with me a long time.”

I love that word: “snapshot,” because it’s the perfect word for our pain.

A snapshot is not the whole story. It’s a slice. It’s a little piece. It’s not our whole life. It’s a snapshot.

What do we do when someone hands us a picture? (in hands) We look at it. We look at everything within the frame.

When we’re handed a picture, we don’t glance at it and then start looking around the room... We’re focused—within the four edges of the snapshot.

And guess what happens when pain jumps into our life?

That pain, that hurt, that arrow—is a snapshot. And so we focus on the pain. We focus on us.

***Snapshots draw our eyes within the frame---
and pain draws our attention within ourselves.***

When we’re hurt, we instinctively focus on ourselves. We instinctively draw inward. And in the initial stages of pain, that’s good!

We need to see how bad we’re hurt, we need to tend to our wounds, we need care, we need help.

But here's the kicker: we cannot *live like Jesus* if we stay self-focused.

We cannot allow the pain to keep us in the world of “*woe is me*” or “*I'll never be good enough, smart enough, whole enough*” or whatever!

Being self-focused and being a Christ follower cannot go together—they're like 2 magnets of the same polarity! (illustrate)

In **John 7:38**, Jesus says,

“Whoever believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him (or her).” niv

Jesus is saying, His grace, forgiveness, power are available to everyone. And living water means “Life in Christ.”

So if we come into a relationship with Christ, the grace of God will flow from us.

Big theological question time:

The “living water” that's in us and flowing out of us --- where is it flowing?
Is it like backyard Koi Pond that re-circulates water?

NO. Living water flows out of us, to OTHERS!...

In other words, for us to stay focused on our selves and our pain, is to “dam up” and keep the living water from flowing to OTHERS!

And here's just my own observation after my 44 years on the planet:

I have never seen a person who keeps looking at their own snapshot, who's anything but miserable.

Sometimes the simplest yet most profound way out of our pain is realizing the truth of John 7:38—that you're not supposed to live in your wound and dam up the living water of Christ.

Because here's the thing:

When Jesus said that we are the ones who are supposed to flow His living water out to others---don't you think that when He said that, He knew we were going to get wounded?

Or when we experienced pain did God say,

“Whew! Wow! Never saw that coming...this really jacks-up that whole John 7:38 thing...OOPS! Sorry!”

No. Because our pain has a purpose. (Audience: My pain has a purpose.)

And here's the purpose:

“And we know that God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to His purposes.”

Romans 8:28 nlt

To figure out that my pain has a purpose, I have to take my eyes off of my snapshot.

I have to realize that my pain, my wound, is a little slice of life and that God wants to work in the entirety, in the enormity of my life and the entirety and enormity of HIS STORY!

What do I mean? What does God mean when He says “causes everything to work together for the good?”

Sandra is maybe the most positive and encouraging person I know. You cannot downward spiral about yourself around her. You cannot make “less than” statements about yourself around her.

She will call you out—in the most loving way!

She'll say, “NO! You are attractive. You are intelligent. You are handsome. You are a great person...”

How many people know what I mean?

Why do you think she does that? What's her fuel?

I would say it's God using that junior high experience to help her fight against the arrows in other people's lives.

Because of the pain she experienced, she's fighting to encourage people and help them see themselves the way God sees them!

Sandra's pain has a purpose.

Years ago a guy in our church, Jim McKinley, found himself in an unexpected divorce. And so God used that pain to lead Jim to start a DivorceCare ministry for adults and kids. For about 10? years now, he's lead a ministry that was birthed out of the wound of divorce.

He let God use him to help other people grow and thrive after divorce.

Jim's pain has a purpose.

Most of you who were in the “Chase the Lion” small groups got to meet Mike Bolinger thru DVD in week two.

He's a friend who's been diagnosed with terminal cancer. (As a result retired, closed his law office, etc)

At a retirement dinner in front of most of the attorneys in Kokomo he in no uncertain terms, shared Christ. And afterward some of them found they way to pick his brain about what he said.

He could have sold his law office. Instead, he and his wife gifted it to the Kokomo Rescue Mission...

Right now, he's teaching a highly entertaining and wisdom-filled Wednesday night class to help people with their marriages.

He played guitar in the Beatles concert to help raise money for a great cause and so some people could walk into this church for the very first time.

By the way-- he HATES that I'm doing this—but this is God's story.

Because Mike fought through the pain of his prognosis.

Because he has *chosen* to respond to God's lead, and chosen to take his focus off of his own snapshot; God is blessing lives through Mike & Lynne.

I've never seen Mike Bolinger physically, spiritually, relationally—healthier or stronger than he is right now.

Mike & Lynne's pain has a purpose.

YOUR pain has a purpose.

I'd like to show you a snapshot: (Christ being lifted down off the cross from "*Passion of the Christ.*")

Imagine if you were an apostle and had been with Him. You thought you were on mission to change the world. Bt you're there on that day and this is how it ends.

The man you followed. The one you saw walk on water...feed 5,000...bring Lazarus out of the tomb...turn water into "really good" wine...

Now lifeless...being lifted down off the cross...And you're looking at this snapshot and thinking, this is it—this is the end.

And it was just before this moment that Jesus says words that don't necessarily make sense to us. He said,

"My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?"

Every wonder why he said that? It sounds kind of weak. Kind of like words we wouldn't expect Him to say.

First of all, this was the one moment where God did allow Jesus to be alone. This was the moment he would pay for our sin. It had to be hideous and extreme to be able to cover anyone's greatest sin.

But Jesus was quoting **Psalm 22** when He said, "My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?"

And Psalm 22 goes on for seventeen verses about the agony of the pain being endured. But then in verse 19 this Psalm that Jesus was quoting takes a turn:

O LORD, do not stay far away!

You are my strength; come quickly to my aid!

²⁰ **Save me from the sword;**

spare my precious life from these dogs.

²¹ **Snatch me from the lion's jaws**

and from the horns of these wild oxen.

²² **I will proclaim your name to my brothers and sisters.^[a]**

I will praise you among your assembled people.

²³ **Praise the LORD, all you who fear him!**

Honor him, all you descendants of Jacob!

Show him reverence, all you descendants of Israel!

²⁴ **For he has not ignored or belittled the suffering of the needy.**

**He has not turned his back on them,
but has listened to their cries for help.**

²⁵ **I will praise you in the great assembly.**

I will fulfill my vows in the presence of those who worship you.

²⁶ **The poor will eat and be satisfied.**

All who seek the LORD will praise him.

Their hearts will rejoice with everlasting joy.

²⁷ **The whole earth will acknowledge the LORD and return to him.**

All the families of the nations will bow down before him.

**²⁸ For royal power belongs to the LORD.
He rules all the nations.**

**²⁹ Let the rich of the earth feast and worship.
Bow before him, all who are mortal,
all whose lives will end as dust.**

**³⁰ Our children will also serve him.
Future generations will hear about the wonders of the Lord.**

**³¹ His righteous acts will be told to those not yet born.
They will hear about everything he has done.**

That is the Scripture that Jesus referenced during this snapshot—a Scripture that starts with doom and gloom of Jesus dead on the cross. But a Scripture that crescendos to the much bigger picture—that God will have His way.

Jesus knew that His pain had a purpose.

This idea that God can flow rivers of living water through our pain and our wounds starts HERE at the cross!

The way out of our pain, is always through Christ.

When someone who's been where we are, comes and ministers to us—it's because what Christ has first done in their life.

One of Mike's most profound visits months ago, was from a man who fought cancer.

No one understands divorce like the divorced.

No one can really relate with someone with low self-esteem like someone who God has brought through it.

The way out, IS through Christ.

It is through us taking our focus off of our own snapshot and allowing God to pour living water through us to others.

And without this snapshot (cross)...there could never be *these* snapshots...that were foretold in Psalm 22 that Jesus quoted..."Future generations will hear about the wonders of the Lord..."

(Slowly scroll through some baptism pictures.)

(Jlee and band take it on out. "Stronger" -Hillsong)