

The redemption of pain – WCG 21/10/2018

(message in English as it was given to me in English)

Today we will be discussing the Redemption of Pain

Pain: - Most common reason for doctor's visits

- Most common reason to prescribe or use medication.
- One of the strongest motivators to change or adapt behaviour
- A complex brain process involving input and alterations from the body and the mind

Allow me a few minutes to try to explain how pain is experienced in a person:

1. Stimulation of a nerve somewhere in the body (e.g. Left foot) by injury/disease (e.g. Stepping with my left foot on a thorn)
2. Conduction of this information about the injury/disease via a nerve and the spinal cord to the brain.
3. Message relayed to the Thalamus (area in the central part of the brain) for distribution to relevant other areas.
4. 1st area of distribution – Sensory cortex: site and intensity of pain (sharp pain in the left foot)
5. 2nd area of distribution – Limbic area: Emotional augmentation/strengthening (useless idiot!)
6. 3rd area of distribution – prefrontal cortex: Higher functions of memory and future planning (you have always been useless as your numerous injuries proof. All your children know how clumsy you are and that is why your wife always gossip to her friends about you. Your clumsiness will one day cause your death, and the sooner that happens, the better, before you have an opportunity to kill someone else in the process too...)

Having explained this complex way of how we perceive pain, we can see that pain is much more than: I step in a thorn – I feel the pain.

Once I understood this mechanism and having seen so many patients that struggles with the complexity and completeness of what pain can do, my mind started thinking about pain.

1. Who designed the body and established the connections between limb, spinal cord, thalamus sensory cortex, limbic system and prefrontal cortex? Scripture says it was God. (Ps 139:14)
2. If God made me like this, why do I dislike pain so much?
3. If God is the author of my pain, what is He trying to tell me?
4. If God is not the author of my pain, why does He allow me to be tortured?
5. What is the purpose of my pain from the God's perspective?
6. If there will be no more pain in heaven (Rev 21:4), will my resurrection body have a brain, with a thalamus, sensory cortex, limbic system and a prefrontal cortex?

Today I will share with you some of my insights – not as a teacher supplying instruction, but more as a scholar comparing notes. Let's dive in and try to find wisdom from the only place where wisdom is to be found – the Word of God – both written as well as expressed in the person of Jesus Christ.

I think my first question is deceptively simple but needs a firm foundation because the answer of the subsequent questions rests on it. I think that most who sits in the church will say that our bodies were planned, designed and formed by God, as we read in Genesis. But why would God make our bodies the way He did if he did not intend a purpose for it? Why would He connect limb to emotions and fears, if He had no purpose for such connections? Adam and Eve's disobedience in the garden changed everything. It was by their choice to live rather by the knowledge of good and evil, than by

the tree of life, that their bodies came under the influence of the murderer of men. It is by the evil plan of Satan that something, that has been created perfect, has been corrupted to establish the purposes of death and destruction. God made us with a body that has the ability to accommodate the express image of God within our members (Col 2:9), and included a spinal cord, thalamus, SC, LS, and PFC. But this body has been corrupted. Its initial purpose has been altered to allow our enemy to torment us with the same thing that God announced to be perfect. When a hostile force takes over a country in a war, it does not discard the old infrastructure like roads and bridges and factories to build its own new infrastructure, it only repurposes the old for the benefit of the new rulers, and the same thing has happened to our bodies. By the effect that Satan has our bodies, our whole pain pathway has been altered to allow torment in our members. What we dislike about pain is the fact that it is used to torment us. It is the suffering that comes with pain that makes us avoid pain at all cost. God is the creator of our bodies, but the enemy is the corruptor thereof, and since it is corrupted, it is yearning for redemption.

The effect of the corruption of our pain pathways usually happens at the level of the limbic system and the PFC. It is here that the lies from the Father of lies start to work its poison of torture. The limbic system comes under attack from the enemy when your pain causes the emotions that leads to despair or hopelessness. There are few things that can make a person as depressed as the torture of constant pain. Other emotions that can be generated by pain are bitterness, anger, rage, loneliness, victimisation, uselessness, anxiety, and feelings of doom. The enemy will use your current suffering to kill the hope of resurrection, and even of redemption. By using emotional strongholds he takes over your pain pathways and use it to strengthen his plans of your death. Satan's attack on your PFC comes in the form of lies about your past, your future and about who God is. He will try to convince you that your pain is either the proof of your past sins, or the punishment thereof. He will use your planning and reasoning to make God the author of your pain and your suffering. One of the strongest motivators to seek medical help when you have an unexplained pain, is to find out whether you are busy dying. I have often seen the miraculous pain relieving effect of a doctor that tells a patient that all the tests shows that they are not going to die soon. Unfortunately that does not drive out the fear, it only delays it. Pain has the ability to bring and keep death into our minds like few other things. By the constant effort of Satan, our suffering becomes a tool of death in our mind first, and then also in our bodies. Please allow me my first disclaimer here; I am not trying to convince you that pain is just your perception, or your imagination. Pain is very real and even measureable. What I am trying to say is that the interface between body and mind is where the struggle of suffering happens, and it is here where the light of truth must be revealed if there is to be redemption and healing.

From a medical perspective, I think it is important to note here that pain medication is nearly completely useless to suppress pain's effect on the LS and PFC. I often tell my patients that they should bear in mind that the tablets will not put money into their bank accounts, it will not make their children behave, and it will not make the Springboks win the rugby world cup.

The complex mechanism by which humans experience pain, has been created perfectly by the one Creator, the Father of all. It has been corrupted by the enemy, who has no creative abilities. We suffer this corruption by the choices of our ancestors, but if we are to be perfectly honest, we are not making any better choices ourselves.

The word 'redemption' carries three distinct ideas in its meaning: something that rightfully belonged to someone has been lost and by the process of redemption, is being returned to its rightful owner. The three ideas are belonged, lost and returned. In terms of the whole creation from our perspective, we see the same process in the three events of creation, sin and the Lord's return. To

understand the redemption of our bodies, we need to understand God's original plan with our bodies, because that is what we will be redeemed back to. We only need to look at Genesis 1-2 to see what God intended before sin corrupted it all. If we were to meet Adam and Eve in their pre-fall state, I am sure we would find them with physical bodies containing limbs and organs and even some chemical processes. In their skulls, I think we would find an organ, very much like a brain and if we could have dissected that brain, I think we would probably find connections between thalamus, SC, LS and PFC. In this context of God's original plan, what would have been the purpose of these connections in the brains of Adam and Eve? I believe the original and holy purpose of our pain circuitry to be an information system for us to understand what parts of our bodies are in need of our love. Love is the power of the Kingdom of God, and by His perfect love we have been saved, sanctified and made complete. The connection between body and mind as seen in our pain pathways were created to allow love to flow freely between spirit, mind and body. The good news is that it will do so once again, once the Spirit of God breathes its breath in us at rebirth. The term pain pathway actually shows that we are looking at our brains from a corrupted perspective. I might be driving on a road that I call the Robertson road, but for someone living in Robertson, the same stretch of road will be called the Worcester road, so who is right? In the same way what is seen as the pain pathway from a corrupted point of view might be called the love reminder system from a redeemed point of view.

ROMAN 8:18-23

If Paul speaks of redemption for the whole of creation, I would take that it also means redemption for our amazing pain pathways. Everything that we touch with God's love starts to shimmer with the brilliance of His glory as the Life that only the Spirit of God can bring invades previously corrupted territory. It is the love that the Father had for His Son that raised Him from the dead that will also touch our mortal bodies to redeem it to its rightful holy condition. All of this is being made possible by the price of redemption that has been paid through the wounds of Christ's flesh. It has been proven to be adequate when death had to let go of that same flesh and allow it to walk out of the tomb on that Sunday morning.

This sounds wonderful – maybe even too good to be true. You might point out to the fact that you don't feel any love when you step into a thorn, and you would be right. You might even think that I am trying to convince you that the pain is actually all just in your head, and then you would be wrong. I have found by my own sensory experience that my pain pathways are still corrupted. It still has the tendency to drive me to speak in unholy tongues. It seems this redemption of the pain pathway as I illustrated before is a thing for the future. So, what am I to do in the meantime, or what Paul calls the time of groaning inwardly 2 Cor 5? The message to many of my patients who are tormented by chronic pain, is that they would benefit much less from my medication than from learning a skill to deal with their corrupted pathways. It might sound a little unsympathetic, but I have been accused of worse things in my life, and with a little patience you might find my sympathy for your pain runs much deeper than your expectation. When confronted by the very real problem of pain, I find this advice from the author of the book to the Hebrews very helpful – Heb 12:2.

HEB 12:2

We should look to Jesus who is the author and finisher of our faith, who, for the joy set before Him, He endured the cross and despised the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of God. For me, the critical part of this scripture lies in the motivation that Jesus found that made him endure. He did not sidestep the cross. He did not deny the cross, but continued down that Via Dolorosa with His skin in tatters and His scalp protesting the thorns that were beaten into it. I believe He felt every

blow of the hammer as His spinal cord conveyed the message to all parts of His brain that nails are being driven through His heel bones. When His parched tongue stuck to his palate His scratchy voice rose above the din of the crowd: "I am thirsty". When He experienced the agony of nearing death He did what most Jews of His age would do, he started reciting Psalm 22 – My God, my God why hast thou forsaken me. But what made Him do it? What made Him hold back the 12 legion of angels that stood ready to comfort Him like they did in the desert? From this passage in Hebrews it was the joy that was set before Him. What is this joy that could make him endure the cross and despise the shame? If we could access that joy, would we not also be able to endure our current pain? I believe that when Jesus was walking up the little hill outside the city called Calvarium by people like Pontius Pilate, He was not looking at Friday, but at Sunday. In His mind He saw resurrection and life.

If you look at the public ministry of Jesus, you would see that He prophesied His resurrection from the very beginning. It was already there in John 2 when He said: You can destroy this temple, and I will build it up in three days. It echoed through the grave of Lazarus when He said: 'I am the resurrection and the life' and it was there when he confided in his disciples on the Thursday that his time is near and that they would see Him no more, and then they would see Him again. Never did he mention His death without mentioning His resurrection. Be sure to note that Jesus' focus on His resurrection did not free him from experiencing pain. I now want to call Paul to my defence here.

2COR 12:5-10

This is my second disclaimer: what I am talking about today is not the vanishing of pain or the removal of pain, but the redemption of pain. If you think that it is possible to live without pain, you are in for a painful reality check. Pain is not your enemy - Satan is. If your pain can help you express faith, hope and love to your physical body, then your pain would have been redeemed, not removed. It then means that your pain will remind you of what you will be and will truly be a love reminder system. In love, the pain might not end, but the torment will.

But what about us? It would seem natural that Jesus as the Son of God would be able to endure because He knows what will happen in the future. What about us who do not know what the cause or destination of my current suffering is. The Author of Hebrews seems to think we should be able to achieve this holy state of being, otherwise he would not have wasted his ink to try and motivate us. If you read a little further in his letter you will see that he is even a little disgusted that his audience has not yet shed any blood in defence of the hope that was in them. How is that for a lack of sympathy. Even the emotional Paul joins in with scriptures like 2 Cor 4:17 – our current suffering can never be compared to the glory that will be revealed in us. How do we achieve this? How can we stay focussed on a redeemed body, when we are still in a corrupted one? There is only one answer and it will be given to us by none other than Jesus' best friend, John the apostle. In 1 John 4:18 he states: There is no fear in love, but perfect love drives away fear. It sounds as though the apostle is qualifying this fear dispelling love as not just any love, but perfect love, so what makes love perfect? Is it possible for an imperfect human to love perfectly? I believe that perfect love happens when we love something that is not perfect, as if it is perfect. Another way of explaining it would be to say that we love something not because of who or what that thing is, but because of who we are. It is a choice that is completely one directional and never demands a counter performance. What John is saying then in his first epistle is that our choice to love something that is imperfect as though it is perfect, will make fear, which is the power of the dark kingdom, dislodge itself from our thinking and leave. Do you agree with this statement? Do you really think that loving something is a choice that only you can control? It is my sincere prayer that you would, because it is the truth of the gospel. Just read the rest of 1 John 4.

1 JOHN 4 7-19

I want you to think about the time you first started loving your child. I believe that the feeling you had when you first looked at that angelic little face for the first time was only the confirmation of a choice that you made even before that day. I am certain that your love for your child started even before you knew anything about that child. In fact, it is the love that you chose long before the birth of your child that transformed that little wrinkled, slippery, toothless and crying burden of responsibility into the angel that was talking about. And years later, after many sleepless nights and many disappointments, it seems that nothing can change your mind about your obviously imperfect child. Can you see what perfect love has done to you? It has made you God-like. Now, if it is possible to love an imperfect child as if it is perfect, could it not also be possible to love a corrupted member of your body as if it has been redeemed?

Before we get to the practical side of things, one more theoretical stone in the foundation of what I have learned so far, and not just any stone, the Chief Cornerstone. I would need the help of the apostle John again. In 1 John 3:8, he states that for this reason the Son of God was revealed, to destroy the works of the enemy.

1 JOHN 3:8

Sin's destruction was by the prime act of perfect love, when the creator of the universe completed His journey of obedience and sacrificed himself for a corrupt creation - the sinless for the sinner. At this revelation of how God loves us, the grip that the accuser has on our pain pathways is shattered and the captives shall walk free. For our pain pathways to be redeemed into our love reminder system we need to have this revelation. We need to see Jesus and there is no other way. I have been accused by some of preaching positive thinking or optimism, even hypnosis. That a revelation of Jesus would give a positive or optimistic view of the future, I will not deny, but what I am talking about is not something of the mind, it is something of the Spirit. Be certain that my message is this: If you seek a pain free life, that is the best you can achieve, but if you are seeking a revelation of Christ, you will achieve that and with Him everything else (Rom 8:32). At the revelation of Jesus the works of the enemy in my LS will be destroyed to have my emotions freed to rejoice in mourning, find grace in a time of need and repent of a bitter heart. As my PFC gets released from my anxious anticipation of death, I will be able to echo Paul in 1 Cor 13 - and now remains faith, hope and love and the greatest of these is love.

Let's just run through my notes once more before we change gears: Your brain was planned and made by God. It was created with a perfect purpose and that purpose has not changed. By sin, this perfect purpose was corrupted to allow torment in the place of joy. By the revelation of Christ our bodies can be redeemed to once again reach our perfect purpose. The way to allow redemption to take place is by perfect love. It is again Christ's example that leads the charge in modeling perfect love. This love will not take my pain away, but give it new meaning by releasing my LS and PFC from torment to contemplate the hope of complete redemption as a process starting now.

I will spend the next few minutes on a practical approach to pain in your own body. This is the type of advice that I give my patients once we have established a diagnosis and prognosis for their pain. I think it can be applicable to all pain, but I mostly advise it to patients that has chronic or constant pain. It is free, safe and effective - it is the perfect remedy.

I do believe that the Spirit of God can only work in an environment of love, not because I can limit God's power, but because He has defined Himself as love. We do this by announcing that I take ownership and responsibility for my body (or painful member). I proclaim that I have chosen to love

this body, even in it's painful state. I then proceed to declare that my body will be healed by the Spirit of God that lives inside my body. I declare that the price for the healing and redemption of my body has been paid by the wounds of Christ, and that in His name I receive everything God has in store for my body. This can be done at any occasion that you experience pain, or you can do it even more regular than that. What happens if you still feel pain after your declaration, or the pain gets worse? I suggest you read Heb 12:2 again, and you meditate on that until you notice the absence of torment in Christ's victory over shame.

A prayer for the redemption of my pain would then sound something like this:

This is my knee. I love my knee and don't want any other knee than this one. I want the Holy Spirit of God that lives in my knee to heal it, to be the knee that God intended for me from before the beginning of time. By the wounds of Christ, there is healing for this knee, and I accept His healing. I commit to cover this knee in love every time I feel pain, according to the hope I have for my redemption. I pray this in the Name of Jesus. Amen