

# 10 Positive Perspectives on Pain

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## 1. Suffering gives us an opportunity to be loved by others.

Put simply, when we are in pain, we need help. It can be hard to let people help us. Our culture tells us we are supposed to be independent and self-reliant, but that is a lie. We are made for the give-and-take of community. We are made to turn outward, to depend on one another. Allowing others to help us draws us more deeply into relationships that give our lives meaning.

## 2. The suffering of others gives us the opportunity to love them.

Sometimes the Cross we bear is the pain of another person. At times, we may experience the suffering of others with more agony than our own suffering. But once again, suffering becomes an opportunity—a place to show love, to grow in compassion, and to become more human. Remember the Good Samaritan and how *he* benefitted from helping another.

## 3. Suffering has the potential to change us for the better and strengthen us.

We have all witnessed the deepening of mind, heart, and spirit that can take place in a life that has experienced great pain. We may think we want an easy life, but we really want a great life. Sometimes this greatness emerges from pain, if we allow ourselves to be changed by it.

## 4. Suffering can create inside of us a “space” for reflection.

Suffering has the potential to get us off the “hamster wheel” of life so we can reassess and reprioritize our lives. If we won’t get off the hamster wheel ourselves, pain may knock us off, giving us time and space to ponder our situation and perhaps emerge with a fresh outlook and a strengthened spirit.

## 5. Suffering teaches us to surrender, which ultimately gives us peace.

To “surrender” or to “let go” is perhaps the hardest—and the most important—thing we must do in life. Surrender is a prerequisite for love because it allows us to stop focusing on ourselves and demanding our own way. Surrender is not *giving up*; it is *giving over*. It is giving ourselves over to God and his wisdom and plan for us. This exercise in trust is difficult, but it brings peace.

## 6. Suffering allows us to imitate Christ.

*“If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me” (Lk. 9:23).* A disciple *believes in* and *conforms his or her life* to that of the teacher. We want to be like Christ, because this is what we were made for. And so we will take up our Crosses, and we will follow, believe, imitate, and conform our lives to his.

## **7. Suffering allows us to actually *share* in Jesus' sufferings.**

St. Paul wrote: *"I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the sharing of his sufferings by becoming like him in his death"* (Phil. 3:10) and *"I have been crucified with Christ"* (Gal. 2:19). When we share the Cross of Jesus—when we are crucified with him—we know we will share in the joy and triumph of his Resurrection: *"For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his"* (Rom. 6:5).

## **8. Suffering allows us to share in the redemptive work of the Cross.**

Now we move even more deeply into the reality of the Cross and our participation in it. We *imitate* him; we *share in* his sufferings; and because we share in those sufferings, we even share in what they do. John Paul II wrote that redemption—although it has been fully accomplished—*"remains always open to all love expressed in human suffering"* (*Salvifici Doloris* 24).

## **9. When I am weak, then I am strong because the power of Christ dwells in me.**

When we empty ourselves (or when pain empties us), we create a space within ourselves for the power of Christ to dwell. This was an unshakeable conviction of St. Paul, who felt that he had been "taken over" by Christ (Phil 3:12) and who wrote that in his own weakness is where he most felt the power of Christ (2 Cor 12:10). Another way of putting it is this: when we decrease, he increases within us.

## **10. In suffering, God is near, very near.**

*When we suffer, God is near.* Period. You may not see or feel God's presence, but *God is there*—just as Jesus felt abandoned on the Cross, but he most certainly was *not* abandoned. Paul Claudel insightfully wrote: *"Jesus did not come to explain away suffering or remove it. He came to fill it with his presence."* It may seem paradoxical to say that in the midst of our pain, we are intensely loved. But we have only to look upon the Cross to see and to know that it is true.

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