

WHEN PAIN SPEAKS

Sometimes the most Jesus-like response is not an answer. It's presence.

Pain has a language.

Sometimes pain speaks clearly. Someone tells us they are hurting. They tell us what happened. They let us into the part of their story that hurts.

Other times, pain is harder to hear. It hides behind anger, sarcasm, silence, humor, defensiveness, cynicism, or a reaction that seems much bigger than the moment. We hear the words or see the behavior, but we don't always recognize what might be underneath.



But I wonder if recognizing pain is only part of what we need to learn.

I think we also need to learn how to respond when pain finally speaks.

As followers of Jesus, we can be surprisingly quick with answers. Someone shares something painful, and we want to help.

We offer advice.

We look for a solution.

We reach for a Bible verse.

We share something that helped us.

We remind them that God has a plan.

Most of the time, our intentions are good. We care about the person. We want them to feel better. We believe Jesus offers hope, and we want them to experience it.

But sometimes our need to answer someone's pain has as much to do with our discomfort as their need.

Pain can make us feel helpless. We don't know what to say. We don't know how to make it better. Silence feels awkward, so we fill it. Advice gives us something to offer. An explanation gives us something to say.

But pain may not be asking for an answer.

Sometimes pain simply wants to know if someone will stay.

I keep thinking about Jesus at the tomb of Lazarus.

Jesus already knows how the story is going to end. He knows Lazarus will walk out of that tomb. He knows that resurrection is only moments away. If anyone ever had the right answer in the middle of someone's pain, it was Jesus.

And Jesus weeps.

That fascinates me.

He doesn't stand outside the grief and remind everyone that things are about to get better. He doesn't tell Mary and Martha that their tears are unnecessary because He knows something they don't. He doesn't use His knowledge of what comes next to dismiss what they are experiencing right now.

He enters their pain.

Knowing the answer didn't keep Jesus from entering the pain.

And His tears weren't pointless simply because Lazarus was about to live again. The resurrection that was coming didn't make the grief in front of Him less real.

I think we can forget that.

We know there is hope. We believe God is good. We believe He redeems, restores, heals, and makes all things new. But none of those truths require us to rush someone through what hurts right now.

Hope doesn't have to hurry grief.

There is something deeply Kingdom about that.

Jesus repeatedly allows Himself to be moved by what people are carrying. He sees the crowds and has compassion for them. He weeps over Jerusalem. He stops for people everyone else is walking past.

Jesus doesn't observe human pain from a safe distance.

He comes near.

Near enough to get it on Him.

Near enough to feel the grief.

Near enough to be interrupted by the tears.

Near enough that someone else's pain becomes something He is willing to carry with them.

That's what compassion looks like when it moves beyond feeling sorry for someone. It closes the distance.

Jesus doesn't shout hope from across the room. He steps into the hurt and stands there with us.

That changes the way I think about pain in the harvest.

When someone trusts us enough to let us see behind the curtain, we are standing in a tender place. They may be showing us something they have protected for years. They may not even have words for all of it yet. They may be watching our reaction to decide whether it is safe to keep talking.

Be gentle there.

Our Holy Curiosity doesn't give us permission to start digging. We don't need the rest of the story. We don't need to diagnose what happened or explain why God allowed it. And we certainly don't need to turn someone's vulnerability into an opportunity to accomplish something spiritually.

We can listen. We can ask a gentle question when it seems appropriate. We can allow silence to remain silence. We can grieve with them. We can make room for questions we cannot answer.

We can stay.

And in doing so, we may be revealing more of Jesus than we realize.

Because we don't have to bring Jesus into someone's pain as though He has been waiting outside for us to introduce Him.

He is already there.

If the Kingdom really is near, then Jesus was present before we recognized the pain. He was present before the conversation became vulnerable. He was present before we knew there was a story behind the words, behavior, or expectations we were seeing.

Our invitation may simply be to recognize where He already is and join Him there.

That doesn't mean words never come. Sometimes they will. There may be a moment for Scripture, prayer, encouragement, wisdom, truth, or hope. There may even be something practical we can do.

Jesus did more at Lazarus' tomb than weep.

But He wept first.

He entered their grief before changing their circumstances.

There is a difference between speaking into someone's pain because we need to say something and speaking because trust has made room for it. There is a difference between using Scripture to end an uncomfortable moment and sharing Scripture because someone is ready to receive its hope.

Pain has its own timing.

Love is patient enough to honor it.

So when pain speaks, listen closely. When someone lets you see behind the curtain, be gentle. You don't have to understand everything they are carrying. You don't have to know what happens next. And you certainly don't have to have the answer.

Sometimes the most Jesus-like thing you can do is simply be there.