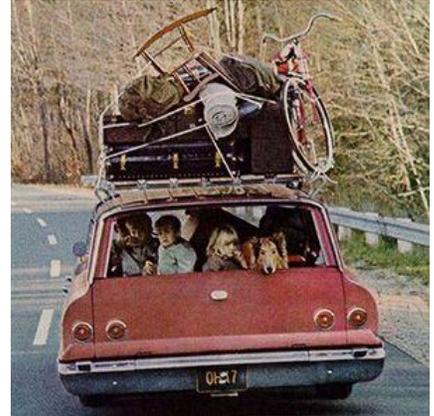


Are We There Yet?

My parents hated that question! Growing up in Texas, our family of five made the 8-hour drive from Greenville to Amarillo several times a year, and every time we made the trip it seemed to grow painfully longer! As kids **we just wanted the drive to be over** so we could enjoy time with Grammy and Grandpa, and all our uncles, aunts and cousins. And this was in the days before video games and movies in the car kept the kids busy! It felt a lot like it does today experiencing a pandemic with the economic shutdown and social distancing. In no way am I minimizing the pain of others, but **we just want it to be over.**



This pandemic with its wide-ranging impact of **loss of life, devastating sickness, social distancing, stay at home orders**, and the **economic shock** of closing businesses and putting so many out of work has been unprecedented. When you are **anxious, worried, afraid** or possibly even **grieving** the loss of a close friend or family member, and you just want this whole thing to be over, what are some ways you can get through this in a healthy way?

The pain of anxiety and fear are a result of our **inability to establish equilibrium** between our **expectations** of life and the **realities** of life. In other words, **what we want** and **what is** are very different, and depending on **how different** and **how long the disparity lasts**, we experience pain.

For decades we have known that as a culture, **we are used to immediate gratification**. When we want something, we want it **our** way and we want it **now!** That works well when you're ordering a **burger and fries** at a fast food drive-through window, but not as well when the risk is the **death of a friend or loved one**. We don't control as much of life as we wish we controlled, and we don't always get what we want. Whether we like it or not, this deadly virus has found its way into our communities, and **we could be the vehicle of transmission!**

We will certainly do all we can to be safe, and to protect the ones we love. This may cause us pain, so it might serve us well to learn a few new skills in our relationship with pain.

Learn to be present in the pain. As a culture **our response** to pain is mostly to **avoid, ignore, or numb** against anything that hurts. I'm not talking about **intense levels** of physical discomfort, but regarding **emotional** and **psychological pain**, being present in that pain is a skill with which we have little experience. We don't know how to **sit well** with pain, **understand** pain, or find ways to **learn** and **grow** through pain. There are ways to **develop strength** by enduring struggle.

Sitting with pain begins with **broadening our awareness** of **all** that is happening to us. As we experience the pain of loneliness, the sadness of loss, or the anxiety of fear of any bad thing that could happen, we can take an **honest look** at how **we are responding**, notice the **actions** and **concerns** of **others**, and ask questions about **how we got here** and additional options available to us to walk through our pain.



In pain **we learn the truth about ourselves**, and what is most important to us. In pain **we discover those who truly care** about us and the extent of their willingness to become personally involved in our suffering. In pain **we are more introspective**, open to **new** and **different ways** of relating to the world, and getting **out of the rut** we've been living in.

In your pain **turn off your electronics**, grab a **notebook & pen**, and take a moment to be **still, quiet**, and **alone**. Allow your **thoughts** to flow, and the healthy expression of your **emotions** as they arise. Open your notebook and write about what you are **thinking, feeling** and **doing** as a result of your pain, and what you are **recognizing** and **discovering** about yourself. *Learn to be present in the pain.*

Learn to be present in the purpose. In a world where both **good and evil** exist, we are destined to experience both. We have learned to expect a certain amount of pain from **unmet expectations**, but when the amount of painful experience seems to be so **disproportionate** to the amount of **positive experience**, we cry out for **understanding**. *Why do I have to lose my job and ability to pay my bills? Why can't I visit my loved one in their time of need? Why do I always feel so alone?*

Those who seem to be **less resilient** tend to follow a pattern.

Pain is perceived as **Personal – Pervasive – Permanent**.

- **Personal**: My pain is a **personal attack** and is directed specifically at me
- **Pervasive**: My pain is **everywhere** in my life and I can't get away from it
- **Permanent**: My pain will **always** be with me and I will **never** be happy again

It would serve us well to identify these **false beliefs** and **trust** in the **truth** we find in the writings of the Bible, that God is able to cause **all things to work for our good**. Losing your ability to support yourself will never be a good thing; however, out of this tragedy, **good can come**. We might not be able to see it now, but **evil will not prevail**. Good will emerge. **Sitting with suffering** allows us to see a larger picture of how from the **ashes** of pain, a **better future** can rise.



*There is meaning and purpose in the pain of life. Suffering is not meaningless. Just because we have yet to see meaning and purpose doesn't mean it isn't there. **Open your notebook** and in your calm and quiet, allow the possibilities of good to emerge, and write down as many examples as you can think of. *Learn to be present in the purpose.**

Learn to be present in the process. Pain is **transformational**. Anyone who has suffered greatly is not the same person they were before the painful experience. The result of living in a world where both good and evil exist is that **we will be changed**. Life is a **process** of moving in and out of **equilibrium**. It has been said that we are all either **entering** a storm, **going through** a storm, or **coming out** of a storm. *We live in a constant process of change.*

Learning to be present in the process is about **encouraging self-awareness** of this change in you. It may sound like a familiar cliché but depending on your willingness to submit to a process, **pain** can either make you **bitter**, or it can make you **better**. I don't have to **like** the suffering I experience in my life, and I don't have to **invite it in**, **make it comfortable**, or **prepare a meal** for it – but I can **take advantage** of its presence to help **shape** the change it creates in me.



One truth I learned in my 20's **enduring** a **year** of **chemotherapy** and **radiation treatments** in my battle with cancer was that **pain will end**. No matter how much I suffered in my treatments against that horrible disease, **it did end**. It had a **start** and a **finish**. This has taught me over the years to be **patient in suffering** and believe that it will **not always feel like it feels right now**. As my friend Kari Eckert says, "There is **HOPE** – **Hang On, Pain Ends.**"

*We may not be there yet, but for now we will learn to be present in the **pain**, present in the **purpose**, and present in the **process**. We will have hope!*

