



GUIDELINES DAILY COMMENTARY ON LIVING
WITH DR. HAROLD J. SALA

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Subject: Suffering

THANK GOD FOR PAIN?

Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I obey your word. Psalm 119:67

When the pain from an old back injury begins to bother him, Charles Niethold turns on a radio transmitter about the size of a package of cigarettes, which sends a message to his brain. The slight signal of the radio beam causes the brain to kick out a dose of a newly discovered hormone which effectively blocks the pain and brings relief from a few hours to a period as long as several days. "It's like someone taking a load off your back. It is just a pleasant feeling of relief," says the salesman, who has suffered from a back injury for years.

The procedure was developed by a Japanese physician, Dr. Yoshio Hosobuchi, a brain surgeon, who perfected the procedure of planting a tiny electrode in the brain, triggered by a small receiver. Charles Niethold is convinced that it works because he was on crutches and could neither drive nor work until the surgery. Following the implant he walked with a cane and went back to work. The electronic implant is one of a variety of scientific advancements which are now able to block the pain without suffering devastating side effects such as are encountered when drugs or narcotics are used to deaden pain. "It's been fantastic for me...it is like someone taking a load off your back," says Niethold.

Whenever there is the promise of relief from pain, hearts are gladdened. Relief from pain is the goal of all people who hurt. But beyond the displeasure which pain brings, there is a deeper understanding of the issue which may not take the pain away but may help you to better cope with it

Dr. Paul Brand was unquestionably one of our day's outstanding surgeons. It was this brilliant doctor who discovered that lepers lose their limbs because they have lost the ability to sense pain. Also it was he who pioneered resourceful techniques to restore nerves through transplants. Brand said, "Thank God for inventing pain. It is the paragon of his creative genius."



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The late professor of Medieval English and the great apologist of the faith, C. S. Lewis, called pain "the megaphone of God" in his book *The Problem of Pain*, and I believe Lewis is right. However, a megaphone can do one of two things--it can attract or repel. Suppose you are lost and wandering in the darkness and someone is trying to find you, but you cannot hear their voice or their pleas for you to respond. Then they take a megaphone and call. You strain and ask, "Is help on the way?" and finally you are certain that it is. You heard, ever so faintly, the voice of a rescuer calling your name. Pain is often that megaphone letting us hear God's voice; yet, at the same time, too loud a voice through a megaphone can cause you to flee and run.

Pain will never leave you where it finds you; it will either cause you to reach towards God's help or else it will repel you and cause you to flee from Him. When people face pain, almost always their thoughts begin to turn towards God or some religious or metaphysical understanding of pain.

As Charles Haddon Spurgeon commented, "When we cannot trace God's hand we can always trust God's heart." That God through His grace can provide healing and relief from the problem of pain is evidence that He delights in providing for our human physical needs. Nevertheless, be very sure, as C. S. Lewis suggested, God can allow pain to serve as His megaphone, letting us hear His voice and assuring us of His care and concern.

Resource reading: Hebrews 12