

Hello Orange Cove Church Family & Friends of Orange Cove,

Pastor's Weekly Letter: January 3, 2017 – "Pain-Pointers"

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Happy Tuesday, January 3, 2017. How do we go into another new year? Do we just go into another year thinking about our temporal wants and desires, or do we refocus our thinking toward eternal matters, the end of the world and the soon coming of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ? My prayer is that we will make the latter our first priority.

This Week's Devotional – "Pain-Pointers"

Life in America, one of the elite first world countries, is comfortable and relatively easy. The majority of Americans have jobs, a roof over their heads and food on their tables. One could say that most Americans live in a bubble that doesn't have too much pain and suffering. As a result, many people forget that they live in a troubled world where millions are suffering from hunger, the ravages of war, homelessness, illnesses, etc. To be reminded of what is happening in so many parts of the world, one just has to type in the word, "Aleppo," or "ISIS" into Google Images and see the horrors within the world.

From time to time, the utopian bubble of those living in America (or a prosperous first world country) is burst by a painful event or circumstance—the loss of a loved one, a broken relationship, the loss of a job, the onset of a life-threatening disease, or betrayal by a close family member or friend. The reality of being exposed to the pain that comes with a deep, heart-wrenching crisis brings out doubt, questions, anger or resentment toward God. "Why is this happening we me," someone might ask, or they might say, "Why would a loving God allow this pain to come into my life?"

What is the answer? Well, before we answer those questions, we must first answer this question— "Where are we living: In heaven or on a planet that has fallen into sin?" If we are living in heaven, then we can expect to be living in a perfect bubble, free of stress and pain. But, if we are living on a planet that has fallen into sin, shouldn't we expect that we will experience the loss of loved ones, broken relationships, losing a job, the possibility of a life-threatening disease, or being betrayed by a close family member or friend? Jesus clearly stated in John 16:33 that "in the world you will have tribulation." We need to adjust our expectations and stop striving to live a life without pain and suffering, right?

Shouldn't we see all the pain and suffering in the world as "Pain-Pointers," that point us to the fact that life on this earth was NOT the way life was meant to be? Shouldn't all the pain and suffering in the world point us to what life was meant to be and point us to living in hope for the day when the earth will be restored to what it was meant to be? How often don't we cling to life on this earth, expecting things to keep getting better to where we can be comfortable and live 'happily ever after'?

Instead of blaming God for the choices our forefathers made to separate themselves from God, shouldn't we lower our expectations of what the consequences of living in a fallen world should be? Shouldn't we expect pain and suffering? Shouldn't we use the pain and suffering to reform our priorities to where we are ONLY living to hasten the coming of Christ and get off this fallen planet? If we embrace our pain and suffering as motivators to drive us from the allurements and the distractions that separate us from God, wouldn't we be living in the presence of God continually and consistently?

The bible tells us of a group of people that did this. Hebrews 11:13-16, ¹³ *These (the champions of faith) all died in faith, not having received the promises (of God), but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced them and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth.* ¹⁴ *For those who say such things declare plainly that they seek a homeland.* ¹⁵ *And truly if they had called to mind that country from which they had come out, they would have had opportunity to return.* ¹⁶ *But now they desire a better, that is, a heavenly country. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared a city for them."*

My friends, let us truly live as aliens and strangers on this earth, seeking our heavenly home as our first priority.

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