



GRIEF EDUCATOR CERTIFICATION COURSE

WEEK 8:

# Turning Your Pain Into Purpose



Notes from the Grief Educator Certification Course taught by Dr. David Page through The School of Grief.

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# WEEK 8: TURNING YOUR PAIN INTO PURPOSE

*“God never wastes a hurt! Pain can point you to your purpose. Your greatest ministry will likely come out of your deepest pain.” Rick Warren*

Finding meaning and turning your pain into purpose is the sixth need that all grievors have after loss. It doesn't happen on the first day after your loss but happens over time. Before you turn your pain into purpose, you must acknowledge, accept, and grieve your loss. Know that God can take the most painful experience in your life and use it for good.

## **The Power of Meaning**

Loss is what happens to you; meaning is what you make happen. Meaning reflects the love we have for those we have lost. Finding meaning is often where our healing resides. Finding meaning is the key to finding purpose and joy after loss. I encourage counselors who work with grieving people to help them search for meaning in their loss.

Meaning is relative and personal. It takes time. It usually doesn't appear right away but builds up over the years. Meaning doesn't have to be grand or dramatic. You don't have to start a nonprofit company to find meaning but you do have to grieve your loss prior to finding meaning.

Meaning doesn't equal understanding why your loved one died. You may never understand the reason for your loss. I've reframed my question, changing it from “Why did my daughter die?” to “Why did I live? Why am I still here?” So, what are you still here?

## **How to Discern Your Purpose**

Leadership author, John Maxwell, asks three questions when he wants to really get to know someone. People's answers to these questions give him great insight into their heart. I believe these three questions can help us in discerning our purpose after our loss. The questions are: What do you cry about? What do you dream about? What do you sing about?

The first question answers what will bring you fulfillment tomorrow. It deals with your own pain and considers a way of turning that pain into a purpose that could bless others. The last two questions speak to what touches you at a deep level today.

The answers to these questions can often help people discover their passion and purpose. We need to know our passion to discover our purpose. For me, helping grieving people after their loss is what I cry, dream, and sing about. It brings me great satisfaction and fulfillment. You will want to consider answering these three questions yourself to turn your pain into purpose.

## **My Mess Became My Ministry**

Pain can point you to your purpose in life. Our deepest life messages come out of our deepest pain. My mess became my ministry. My misery became my message. My pain became my purpose. I didn't choose to go into grief ministry; it chose me. But I love what I do. I get to come alongside people in their darkest hour and bring comfort and hope. Nearly every day, I talk to somebody about loss and grief in my role as a care pastor.

A few years after Jackie died, I was asked to speak at Forest Lawn Mortuaries 100-Year Anniversary. I spoke about purpose. Then, they asked if I would do funerals for them and trained me to become a certified funeral celebrant. I conducted celebrant and clergy funeral services for Forest Lawn for over five years. They also asked me to speak at their Holiday Candle Lighting Memorial Services to remember those who died. It's a service to honor a loved one's memory and celebrate all that that person did to light up their life and the lives of everyone they touched. I spoke at these events in different cities as we saw thousands of people attend who were looking for hope.

March 4th used to be the worst day of the year for me. But I decided to be intentional and to turn my pain into purpose by shooting a hundred free throws on that day to raise money for the HEART Ministry in Kenya, Africa, to save lives. I call it Hoops into Hope. I've raised over \$10,000 over the years for this significant ministry.

My life is not defined by my daughter's death but inspired by her life. Her death transformed my life. Now, instead of being tortured each year by the memory of her death, I now view it as a day of hope to help others in her honor.

Jackie loved to dance and was part of the Pamelot School of Dance in Auburn, CA. Pamelot was founded by Pam Harrold. Jackie was learning ballet, tap, and jazz. After her death, Pam created a dance scholarship in Jackie's name, which is given to one young girl dancer each year.

A year after Jackie's passing, we attended a dance recital where Pam presented a young girl with the first Jackie Page Dance Scholarship. We feel so honored that Pam and the Pamelot Family witnessed our grief, honored our little girl, and are keeping Jackie's memory alive.

I turned my pain into purpose by starting our Hope for Grief Community at Shepherd Church. It's become a central gathering for grievers. Our relationship with our loved ones has shifted from one of physical presence to one of memory—a spiritual presence.

Our Grief Community seeks to keep that memory alive and to honor our loved ones by sharing lessons we've learned and are still learning from them. I enjoy organizing and teaching at this unique event. I train staff members and volunteers to help others with grief. We talk about our loved ones. This is a safe place to do that. It's a time to remember the past, live in the present, and trust that the future is going to be good because God is good. Attending our grief community lets everyone know they are not alone in their grief.

The biggest hurt in my life was the death of my youngest daughter, Jackie, who died from a brain tumor when she was 5 years old. My heart was broken in a way I never imagined possible. **This was a Turning Point that changed the course of my life as I took my first steps on a lifelong grief journey. Yet, out of the darkness, my deepest life purpose would emerge from the rubble of my pain.**

Nearly every day I talk to somebody about loss and grief in my role as a Care Pastor at Shepherd Church. I didn't choose this ministry, it chose me. But I love what I do. I get to come alongside people in their darkest hour and bring comfort and hope. My mess has become my ministry. My pain has become my purpose. What pain in your life can you help someone else through?

The cross of Jesus Christ reveals to us love of God: His willingness to die in our place for and to take our sin upon himself is mind-blowing. His pain truly was our gain.

An interesting reality of suffering is that our personal pain also speaks to those around us. Our pain becomes God's MEGAPHONE to a hurting and watching world. The world gravitates to a young girl who has hope and peace in the midst of her own cancer diagnosis as she visits other kids with cancer in the hospital and gives out JoyJars she created. **Erik Rees**, her father, started **NEGU** to honor his daughter, 12-year-old **Jesse Rees** who died of cancer. Their mission is to encourage every kid fighting cancer to never ever give up. The Jesse Rees Foundation gave out over 425,000 JoyJars and raised over 32 million dollars in their first 10 years to help kids fight cancer.

Bystanders are astounded over a mom named **Candy Lightner** who endured the death of her 13-year-old daughter, Cari, who was hit by a drunk driver while walking and yet Candy turned around to help others avoid such pain by starting **MADD**.

Mental health sufferers were inspired and encouraged by **Kay Warren**, who out of her own pain over the loss of her son Matthew, who suffered himself from mental health issues and who died from suicide, started a **Mental Health Community** at Saddleback called Hope for Mental Health. Kay recently started a ministry called, **"Hope for Brighter Tomorrows,"** the Christian nonprofit that sponsors the BREATHE Retreat.

I thought we also need a community for those who grieve because grief never dies because our love never dies, so in an effort to create space for the bereaved at Shepherd, and to honor my daughter Jackie, I recently started our new Hope for Grief Community.

Our pain gives us a platform. The question becomes then, what am I saying to the world in the midst of my pain? His character and grace do not change when suffering comes. As I trust God, even in my heartache, I let my life speak of a hope that extends well beyond what we can see or touch.

When the megaphone of pain sounds in our lives and in the lives of our unbelieving friends please let's not respond with a superficial triumphalism or wallow in pessimism.

If unbelievers, who are experiencing their own pain are going to seek out a Christ-follower for help, it will not be because we appear to live lives that are free from trials but because we are honest about our own pain and sufferings.

We will not attempt to have an answer for every question since we know that only God knows certain things, but we will affirm that even in the mystery of his purposes we know the security of His love and we will seek to introduce others to our God who entered our sorrows and our sufferings. As our pain shouts to a hurting world, may our lives always sing of the fact that God is good even when our circumstances are not.

### **Redemptive Suffering**

Redemptive suffering is the practice of taking our pain and allowing God to transform it into a way to help others. Suffering has great value if it is consecrated to God for the sake of serving others. Redemptive suffering is using your pain to help other people in their pain. It unleashes the love of Jesus and brings comfort to a hurting world. This is the key to turning pain into purpose.

Paul said, “Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God” (2 Corinthians 1:3-4 NIV).

### **God is the Father of Compassion**

The Greek word translated as compassion means “deep feeling about someone’s pain or misfortune.” That’s how God the Father feels about you. He’s also “the God of All Comfort.” When our hearts are breaking, when we are overwhelmed with grief, God’s comfort becomes a healing ointment to our souls. He comforts us with the truth of His love, presence, and amazing grace.

### **Doesn’t Waste Your Pain**

God doesn’t want to waste your hurt; he wants to recycle your pain to help others. He will recycle your pain for someone else’s gain. God comforts us for a specific reason, “So that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God.” Our Heavenly Father wants us to do something in response to the comfort He has given to us. God expects us to use our pain to help others.

God uses our pain to make us more sensitive to other people’s pain. Pain makes you more empathetic to those who are experiencing the same kind of pain you are. Rather than focusing on your pain, you can channel it to help others in their pain.

### **God Wants to Redeem Your Suffering**

Who is better qualified to minister to a parent grieving the loss of a child than another parent who has experienced such grief? Who is better qualified to help someone with an addiction than someone who has battled addiction? Who is better qualified to walk with someone through a cancer diagnosis than someone who has fought cancer?

Think of your greatest loss, the most painful situation you've ever faced. God doesn't want you to waste that hurt; rather, He wants to redeem your suffering and use you to serve others.

### **The Model of Jesus**

The cross of Jesus Christ reveals the love of God for humanity and his willingness to die in our place to take our sins upon himself. His pain truly was our gain. He turned the greatest adversity the world has ever known into the greatest advantage. Jesus' death on the cross gives meaning to suffering. He "did not come to suppress suffering all at once, nor to explain it, nor to justify it. He came to assume it and to transform it. We can only understand the meaning of suffering by recognizing God's great love, as he gave up His only Son so that we could be forgiven and have eternal life.

### **The Art of Kintsugi**

Kintsugi is a Japanese philosophy, art, and practice that treats breakage and repair as part of the history of an object, rather than something to disguise. Broken pottery is repaired using a lacquer containing gold powder. Instead of attempting to hide the repair, Kintsugi illuminates it. This art form is driven by a deep desire to restore and rebuild, giving new life to something precious that had been broken. It's a great metaphor for healing from loss; God's restoration process.

The result is a mended heart, which pays honor to our Redeemer, history, and story. What was broken has now been restored into something valuable and beautiful. God is in the process of redeeming our stories. Redemption looks to the future but does not erase the past. Jesus bears the scars on his hands on his resurrected body. God promises to redeem our lives by mending what is broken, healing what is sick, and righting what is wrong. This incredible story of redemption is based on the work of Jesus, who came into this world to make us new, which he accomplished through his life, death on a cross, and resurrection.

### **Jackie Power**

One of the most thrilling experiences in my life came one ordinary morning. Jackie's tumor was progressing each day. Malignant brain tumors normally grow quickly and spread into other brain tissue. When a tumor grows into or presses on an area of the brain, it may stop that part of the brain from working the way it should. Brain tumors are like roots of a tree. They can grow vertically or horizontally; in whatever direction they choose. Jackie was losing her motor skills.

She went from running everywhere to walking and then to crawling. She was at a point where she couldn't even crawl anymore. She lost her ability to speak but was able to make sounds, like grunts. We developed a communication system with her so that when she wanted to go somewhere in the house, she would make a certain sound, we'd pick her up, and she would point to where she wanted to go.

On this occasion, I picked her up and she pointed toward the kitchen. I carried her to the kitchen, and she motioned for me to set her down on the kitchen counter. I figured she wanted something to eat so I picked her up and carried her toward the fridge.

She motioned for me to set her down on the counter. I realized she wasn't hungry. She used to climb up on the counter, ask me to back up, and then take a flying leap into my arms. To me, Jackie was The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County. She reached a point where she was leaping nearly four feet across the kitchen into my arms.

I couldn't believe what happened next.

She tried to stand, using every ounce of strength and every fiber in her little body. Looking like a fawn attempting to stand for the first time, her little legs wobbled as she willed her way into a crouched position, finally standing completely upright.

Before the tumor, I would stand a foot away from the counter and she would hold up her right hand and motion for me to move back. Each time she gave the signal, I would take one step back, increasing the length of her jump.

I wanted to ask, "You're not really going to jump, are you? You can't jump. You don't have enough strength in your body to pull it off," but I didn't say a word. I kept my thoughts to myself.

I moved in close about six inches from the counter. "If you want to jump, Daddy will catch you," I said. Jackie raised her little right hand and motioned for me to move back further, away from the counter.

I was awestruck and dumbfounded.

I started to well up with tears, but I didn't want her to see me cry. I stepped back six inches. Normally, I would have stepped back a foot, but I wanted to be close enough in case she just fell straight down from the edge of the counter. She motioned again for me to move back further. I worried that if I took another step back, she would land on the floor and suffer an injury.

However, she believed it was possible. In fact, she looked so confident and that look convinced me to do it her way. I stepped back six more inches. She motioned a third time to move back further. Now, we were moving from the unimaginable to the absurd. I couldn't hide the tears at this point. I again took one small step back.

Without any warning, she jumped off the counter. In reality, she just fell straightforward. I was close enough to lean forward and catch her in my arms. I hugged her for all it was worth. I kissed her little head and held her up in the air. "Jackie, Daddy's so proud of you. That was amazing," I said with joy. She had the biggest smile on her face as we laughed together.

Standing up and jumping off that kitchen counter was the most courageous act I have ever witnessed. It was inconceivable that she was able to pull it off. I'll never forget that moment. It became a watershed moment, a turning point in my life. I realized that we are all capable of so much more than we think.

Jackie's strength amid hardship gave me a motivation to "go for it" in life. She is my hero, inspiration, and the wind beneath my wings.

As I reflect on that moment, the phrase, "Jackie Power," echoes in my mind. Despite everything, she had an unstoppable power in her soul. She willed herself to stand and jump. She believed it was possible and she made it happen.

For me, Jackie Power represents the power I have within myself that comes from God. She was a life force and awakened me to God's power. It's another way of saying, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me" (Philippians 4:13 NKJV).

God gave Jackie the strength to jump off that counter one last time. Whenever I think I don't have enough strength, I call upon my Jackie Power. Her example of courage inspires me to overcome any fear, challenge, or obstacle I face. We all have Jackie Power if we tap into it and believe in the possibilities. Are you aware of the God-given life force you have within you?

My Jackie Power started with weightlifting. I was lifting some heavy weights on the bench press with a goal of doing six repetitions. On the sixth rep, my arms started to shake, and I didn't think I could get the bar up. I pictured Jackie in my mind struggling to stand on the counter and finally stranding erect. The thought gave me a shot of adrenaline as I pushed the bar all the way up.

I felt led to go back to school and get an MBA degree. I was now in my forties. The idea of studying and writing two papers a week for a couple of years was daunting. I enrolled in the MBA program at the Ken Blanchard School of Business at Grand Canyon University. It was a grueling program that stretched me to the limit. Three months in, I felt overwhelmed and wanted to quit. As I was about to throw in the towel, I thought of Jackie, her tenacity and courage, and I powered through.

I enrolled in a doctorate program at Biola University in my early fifties. The final project was to write a 250-page dissertation. I didn't think I could do it, but I remembered Jackie's act of courage. I completed the dissertation and graduated recently with my doctorate. I had always wanted to write a book, and I finally finished it. I'm doing so much more than I had ever imagined was possible.

Four years ago I was diagnosed with leukemia. I was shocked and scared. I have CLL, chronic lymphocytic leukemia, a terminal blood cancer. I once again thought of Jackie and my perspective changed. I began to tell myself, "I am living with leukemia, not dying with leukemia."

What a gift Jackie gave me the day she jumped off the kitchen counter. I am now willing to venture outside my comfort zone, attempt big projects, and achieve things I never dreamed possible.

All of this because of a little girl with a brain tumor who wouldn't give up. She fought for every moment of fun. Her accomplishments may seem tiny to you, but they're on a grand scale to me.



## **Practical Ways to Turn Your Pain Into Purpose**

From a Christian perspective, transforming pain into purpose involves leaning on your faith, allowing yourself to grieve freely and openly while trusting that God is with you, and actively seeking ways to serve others, channeling your pain into positive actions that honor the memory of your lost loved one and reflect God's love in the world.

### **Key Points to Remember**

- Acknowledge your pain and grieve openly:

The Bible encourages acknowledging your grief and bringing it to God in prayer, recognizing that even God himself understands sorrow. Don't try to rush through the pain; allow yourself to feel it and process your emotions fully.

- Find comfort in scripture:

Verses like Matthew 5:4 ("Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted") remind us that God is present in our pain and will provide solace.

- Seek community support:

Lean on your church community for prayer, support, and shared experiences of grief.

- Reflect on your loved one's life:

Think about their passions, values, and what they were most proud of achieving.

- Identify areas of alignment:

Consider how your skills and interests can be used to support a cause that resonates with your loss.

- Start small:

Begin with manageable actions like donating to a charity, attending a related event, or reaching out to others who might be experiencing similar grief.

- Reflect on God's purpose in suffering:

While difficult, consider how your pain can be used to grow closer to God, develop empathy for others, and become a vessel for His love.

- Turn pain into service:

Once you feel ready, find ways to serve others who are experiencing loss, using your own experiences to comfort and support them.

### **Examples of How to Turn Pain into Purpose**

- Volunteer at a grief support group:

Share your story and offer emotional support to others going through similar loss.

- Donate to a cause close to the deceased's heart:

Honor their memory by contributing to a charity they were passionate about.

- Share your faith with others:

Speak openly about how your faith has helped you through your grief, offering hope and encouragement to those around you.

- Practice acts of kindness:

Perform random acts of kindness in the name of the person you lost, spreading positivity in their memory.

### **Examples of Turning Pain into Purpose**

- If your loved one was passionate about environmental issues:

Volunteer for a tree planting organization, advocate for clean energy policies, or start a community garden.

- If your loved one was a dedicated educator:

Volunteer to tutor children, donate to a school supply drive, or create a scholarship fund in their name.

- If your loved one battled a specific illness:

Raise awareness about the disease, donate to research, or support patient advocacy groups.

Important points to remember:

- Be patient with yourself: Healing takes time, and there will be ups and downs.
- Don't pressure yourself to find the “perfect” purpose: Even small acts of kindness can make a difference.
- Honor your loved one's memory: Find ways to keep their legacy alive through your actions.

### **Important Considerations:**

- Allow time to heal: Don't pressure yourself to “get over” your loss quickly.
- Seek professional help if needed: If you are struggling to cope with grief, consider seeking guidance from a pastor, therapist or counselor

In our next session, you will learn about the final need grievers have: the hope of heaven after we die and being united with our loved ones.

**THE END**



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