

[Picture of Basselins] Good morning, Catalyst. My name is Tim Basselin. My family and I have been attending Catalyst for about 2 years. Today we're going to take a walk down memory lane, back to 1999, a whole other millennium. As I read the following list just know that your audible responses may signal your age to those sitting near you.

[1999 collage?] In 1999 Napster was introduced, as was the Blackberry. At the beginning of that year, 150 million people were using the internet. By the end of the year nearly 250 million were. We're at about 3.5 billion now. "SpongeBob SquarePants" was on our TVs and "Livin' la Vida Loca" was on our stereos. And perhaps most significantly, in July of 1999, a young Robin Janssen said "I do" in a marriage ceremony with me :) Also, The Dallas Stars won the Stanley Cup.

Kosovo was in our news throughout much of 1999, as was the Columbine High School massacre. Perhaps some of you remember where you were new years eve in 1999, and how many times Prince's song came on. Do you remember what the news was about all that day and for weeks leading up to it? The Y2K scare. We weren't sure what was going to happen. Computers were created without the forethought of moving from 99 to 00. The function of entire public works systems was in question. Most concerning was the possibility of a nuclear holocaust begun by a confused computer. People were building shelters and stocking them with years of survival supplies. There was a great deal of angst in the air. What, for example, would become of that young married couple? You'll be happy to know they celebrated 17 years of marriage this week.

But artists feed off of angst and tension and uncertainty, which may be a reason why 1999 was an incredible year for film. Think with me for a minute about the many revolutionary ways film was being explored with these 1999 releases.

Star Wars: Episode I - The Phantom Menace – Simply put, the development in storytelling that JarJar Binks brought may never be surpassed.

Seriously, though ... The Matrix.

The Green Mile.

"the 6th sense"

American Beauty.

The Iron Giant.

Being John Malkovich.

Office Space.

Dogma.

Magnolia.

The Talented Mr Ripley.

Eyes Wide Shut.

The Blair Witch Project.

and, of course today's film, Fight Club.

[Poster] As I watched Fight Club again recently and reflected on Y2K, I was struck by what the movie's message seemed to be in relation to the fears of our possible societal collapse – Fight Club suggests the impending collapse may not be such a bad thing.

[Jack's IKEA House] The movie begins with Ed Norton living a meaningless life, and suffering from insomnia. One night he stumbles into a group therapy session and finds people who are feeling something. He joins their hurt and cries with them and then sleeps like a baby that night. Soon, he's attending different group therapy sessions each night of the week. One night he's an alcoholic, the next he's fighting cancer, the next he's lost his spouse. Though he can sleep now, this still doesn't make him alive to his world.

[Jack and Tyler] Enter, Tyler Durden, played by Brad Pitt. Tyler Durden begins to question everything in the main character's life: his job, his Ikea-perfected apartment. And then, they begin to fight. No one's angry, nothing instigated a disagreement, they just want to feel the pain, to have the scars, to realize they are alive. Others start to join in. They create a club, a Fight Club, that allows people otherwise numb to their existence to box bare-fisted. The mass of men that all just want to feel something grows and spreads to multiple clubs and then multiple cities all over the country. The clubs become a network for "Project Mayhem" which is a master plan to take down the financial systems of the country and erase people's debt and put everyone on a level playing field.

So here's the movie's social critique. Fight Club claims that as our society has attempted to protect itself from pain and death, we have created systems that protect us from feeling anything. Very simply, the long metal slide at the playground is a death trap, so we've removed it and put in a short plastic slide. As Tyler Durden puts it rather succinctly, "Martha Stewart's polishing the brass on the Titanic."

[Image of the Fight Club + the quote in red] For these fight clubs, the answer to insomnia, the answer to walking through life in a daze of half-awake, half-asleep, is pain. Pain jolts us into recognition. It saves us from the greater enemy, which is apathy. CS Lewis has a quote that kind of agrees with this. He says, God shouts to us in our pain. There is a religious element to the fighting in the movie. The narrator describes one of the fight scenes in the basement of a club, "the hysterical shouting was in tongues, like a Pentecostal church. When the fight was over, nothing was solved, but nothing mattered. After it was over, **we all felt saved.**" For this movie, pain is not simply to be avoided. Instead, it offers us salvation.

[Comptuer/phone Screens protecting us from natural disasters, homelessness, etc?] We are a society of cost benefit analysis, which happens to be the narrator's job in the film. Whether we are talking about drone strikes or shopping with a credit card or the food system that delivers our meat to us saran-wrapped, we have created systems that protect us from pain. Too often, we give the appearance of care, but only if we don't actually have to risk anything. We give money to help out in tragedies instead of giving of ourselves. It's called slacktivism and it sedates our guilt for a while and allows us to feel like we did some good or made some change. But, WE are not changed by the tragedy. Our expendable income protects us.

[The crucifix from Mad Max week?] The good news today, though, is that when we get ourselves into a world of hurt, whether we think of it on a personal level or on the cosmic level of all of humanity being sinful, God doesn't just give out of his abundance and fix everything like a cosmic Santa Claus. He doesn't toss some giant gold coins down from heaven and shout "good luck," or worse, "God bless." Last week Amy told us how Jesus gave us the gift of going first. She read from Mark 8 where Jesus said to his disciples (and to us) "If any of you wants to be my follower, you must give up your own way, take up your cross, and follow me." As Amy told us, though, this was not just a command shouted from heaven. Jesus went first. He took on the pain of becoming a fleshy, human person. My question for us this week is how do we choose to do the same, to enter into a painful world rather than trying to fix it from a safe distance?

I think the church in America has little understanding of this language of taking up our crosses and following Christ. And to take it even further, listen to what Paul wrote at the beginning of his letter to the Colossians.

Here's how the New Revised Standard Version puts it:

24 I am now rejoicing in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am completing what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church. -- Colossians 1:24

Here's the same verse in the New American Standard Bible:

24 Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I do my share on behalf of His body, which is the church, in filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions.

Paul is not simply enduring pain here for the sake of pain, or waiting for a trial to be over. Rather, he willingly suffers. As the body of Christ, he shares in the Colossians' pain, but even more he sees his pain as participation in Christ's suffering, which he says is ongoing. He fills up in his body what "is lacking" in Christ's affliction. That's a bold statement.

But it's hard for us in the wealthiest country on earth to understand these verses about choosing suffering. **We have the luxury of building systems that protect us as much as possible from pain. We are a society full of medications that address our symptoms while ignoring the roots of our anguish.** It's like when we give a couple of bucks to the homeless man on the corner and take no action to change the circumstances that brought him there or that keep him there.

My favorite image along these lines comes from Amos, who begins his book by proclaiming judgment against all the nations around Israel. He then turns his attention to Israel and proclaims judgement. And the very first reason he gives?

**Amos 2:6 "Because they sell the righteous for silver,
and the needy for a pair of sandals—**

[A person being sold for sandals] He goes on with more, much more, but this image has always stuck with me. Amos is addressing a privileged class of people that are buying rather nice sandals. I doubt, though, that they were going to the market and trading actual poor people for a

nice pair of Jimmy Chus or Samson Strongs. But maybe they traded slaves in the morning and then went shopping in the afternoon. It was two separate events, because that's what privileged people do. We build systems that separate ourselves from our own evil. The people of Amos' time had built systems that separated them from the pain, the injustice of buying and selling people. And through the prophet, God was shouting at them.

Our pain can be prophetic. Remember Lewis' quote, that 'God shouts through our pain.' How can pain break through the systems we create to shield ourselves from injustice? How can we become more aware of those connections we try to ignore?

[[Jack and Tyler w/ Lye + Quote](#)] Enter Tyler Durden. The narrator at the beginning of *Fight Club* is oblivious to how his Ikea lifestyle is related to his insomnia and despair. At about the midpoint of the movie, Tyler Durden grabs Ed Norton's character by the wrist and pins him against the counter and pours lye onto his hand. It burns through his skin as he squirms and screams and attempts to get away. Durden holds him steady and forces him to accept the pain. He says, "What you're feeling is premature enlightenment. Our fathers were our model for God. If our fathers abandoned us, what does that say about God? [You have to consider the possibility that God is not concerned about you.](#) First you have to know, not fear, that someday you're going to die. Once you've lost everything, you're free to do anything."

The experience Durden is forcing is an acknowledgement of pain, and of death. And he's saying this has enormous significance for how we live our lives. If you've seen the movie *Schindler's List*, it changes how you view history. If you've seen *12 Years A Slave*, it will affect your perception of race relations in America. If you've watched *Food, Inc*, it changes the type of food you buy.

Durden is telling us to stop pretending our choices for comfort don't have unintended, horrible consequences. AND he's saying that if your God is just pie in the sky, then we're abandoned down here on this painful planet. Isn't this precisely the dark suspicion we have when pain overwhelms us? We become unsure whether God cares. We wonder how suffering can happen if God is actually good. This is a big reason we shield ourselves from pain. Deep in our understanding of the world, we think being more powerful makes us more like God. But in the face of the world's pain, what did Christ do with all the power of heaven? He laid it aside and became incarnate in a vulnerable, helpless, pain-filled humanity. And he calls us to FOLLOW HIM. To take up our crosses. To enter into the pain of the world with him.

[[The Burial of Christ - leave this up until Flannery](#)] Tyler's questions are ones we don't address well enough in our churches. When tragedies strike, we jump straight to loving and giving. We see a dam breaking and we lavish it with the best-made bandaids on the planet. Or to put it in theological terms. When we see a cross, we hop straight to the resurrection! BUT... I'm suggesting we miss something about the good news when we don't help take Christ down off the cross and carry his body to the grave. We miss something when we don't wait for a couple of very anxious days in uncertainty -- friday, saturday -- before being surprised by the power of

God's Spirit to resurrect the dead on Sunday. And what we miss is ... waiting on the Spirit to do the resurrection.

When we live in a place of wealth and power, we assume we've been given the ability, even the responsibility, to fix everything. But the reality is that we can't stop all tragedies. Since we can't, we create these systems that distance us from tragedy, so we don't get hurt.

The way salvation often gets communicated to us is that Christ died for us and it is done. Because Christ accomplished the work, and it is finished, we now have access to the power of his resurrection. That is, of course, true. It is only by Christ's death that we have access to salvation, and no one and nothing else can accomplish our salvation. And yet, there seems to be something more. Christ tells us to take up our crosses and follow. Paul tells us that he joins in Christ's suffering, somehow completing them in his own body. It's a mystery, and we don't tend to like sitting with those for long, but somehow participating in Christ's suffering is part of our salvation. And participating requires a willingness to be vulnerable, to be hurt, to sit for a couple of very anxious days with no answers, not knowing where or if the Holy Spirit empowered resurrection will occur. The movie *Fight Club* helped me recognize my own tendency to avoid pain. My tendency to be one of Job's friends, showing up with answers rather than just sitting with Job in his pain.

Some good news today: it's not our job to fix people. We don't resurrect the dead. Only the Holy Spirit can. We are called to take up our crosses and follow. We are called to "complete what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body." We are called to bear one another's burdens.

If I'm going to learn to not inadvertently sell the poor for a pair of sandals. I'm going to have to learn how to sit, very uncomfortably, with the poor and the hurting and wait for the Holy Spirit to make the next move. That is my calling. I am not called to fix the world. I am called to sit in the world's pain and be the redeemed vision that can recognize the movement of the Holy Spirit and speak hope by pointing out where God is at work. And I simply can't do that from a distance. It has to start with sitting in the pain.

[Flannery + Quote] The first time I got a hint of understanding this movement was when I was reading through Flannery O'Connor's letters. O'Connor was a short story writer in the 1950's and '60's. She lived with her mother in rural Georgia because she had lupus. She died at the age of 39. A year before her death, her friend Betty Hester wrote her a letter in which she complained about being stuck with a family who did not love or understand her. O'Connor wrote back to her, "It all comes under the larger heading of what individuals have to suffer for the common good, a mystery, and part of the suffering of Christ."

Part of the suffering of Christ? WHAT?. How could this petty complaint about being annoyed by one's relatives be *compared* to the suffering of Christ, much less part of it? And if anyone's sufferings could be compared to Christ's, surely it was O'Connor who would die within the next year. What I eventually came to understand about O'Connor's perspective, though, was that it

had to do with acceptance, not running away from pain, but sitting with it, even actively embracing it. O'Connor understood the world sacramentally, meaning that God's grace flows to us through the world, like what Joshua preached about two weeks ago. And the world is good and bad. And both can be means of God's grace to us. To deny pain is to deny a large part of our humanity and a means of God's grace. And ultimately, to avoid pain is to deny the need for the incarnation, the need for God to become a human. God might as well have remained up in heaven and just magically fixed everything. By entering into that hurt and sitting with it, O'Connor was telling her friend, she was making the same movement toward pain that God made in the incarnation.

My question for you this week is, where do you avoid pain? Maybe you have some trying relatives like Flannery's friend had, and you just tend to avoid them. Maybe you have a stressful work environment that builds angst in other areas of your life as well. Maybe your home is chaotic. Maybe like Jack, you shield yourself from the injustices in our world and you feel numb.

What would it look like to stop avoiding those places of pain this week? What would it look like to heed the words of Flannery, the words of Tyler Durden, and sit with the pain, face it, embrace it? What would happen if instead of trying to fix it all or trying to avoid it all, you just waited in that pain for the Holy Spirit to move?

Christ is our example. He went first. And he calls us to follow him.

[Communion Slide] And this is precisely what we enact at the Lord's table. In taking communion, we choose to follow in our Lord's way, a broken body and blood poured out for the sake of the world. You do not need to be a member of Catalyst to take communion. If you desire to follow in the way of Christ, you can move in that direction this morning by participating with us.

But I believe Christ didn't just go first a long time ago. Christ is alive and doing things and wants to go first in your present pain. He will go first this week as you move toward those places of pain, you will find he is already at work. He's been there long before you decided to show up. As we prepare to take communion, I would like to lead us in a prayer of examen to consider our entry into the world's pain and suffering.

- When in the last week have you avoided the world's pain in preference for your comfort?
- What might it have looked like for you to sit with that pain instead of avoiding it?
- When in the next week might you be invited into someone's suffering?
- What might waiting on the Holy Spirit's movement look like in that situation?

Prayer of Consecration

God, our loving Father who shouts to us in our pain,

We come before you today as a people who does not like pain, a people who are happy to shield ourselves from the suffering of the world, and from how we participate in that suffering. But we have heard today that you are not the kind of God who ignores our suffering, that you

enter into our suffering, embrace our pain even to the point of death. And you turn to us and shout to us, "Follow me."

We confess we are frightened by this call to pick up our crosses, to follow you into pain. We prefer the joy of your resurrection. Teach us today to sit in the pain of our world, to wait on your Holy Spirit that we might find your life.

We approach your table this morning as a people who need your grace. We come to the meal of your suffering willing to follow you but afraid of the cost. May these wafers and juice become a spiritual food that nourishes our spirits, that gives us the grace to follow you into the pain in our lives, that we might find your Holy Spirit, living and active and working resurrection.

We offer these prayers and approach your table in the name of your son, Jesus.