

Going Deeper

Dr. Jude Tiersma Watson interviews Krez, an urban youth worker who has experienced significant personal pain and trauma. Krez was born in Central America and arrived in the United States when he was a teenager. He has worked with urban children and youth through public schools, urban Boy Scouts, and youth sports.

Krez, you have encountered a lot of pain and struggle in your life. How has your suffering impacted your understanding of God?

When I was growing up, I got beaten by my dad and other adults. So for years I believed that God was punishing me. I believed that God was only a God of punishment. When I was in high school, I got involved in a youth ministry, and my mentor told me that God was a God of love, not a God of punishment. That changed my life. Now I want to help other kids know how much God loves them, and that the suffering isn't their fault. I want to help others to let go of their anger. If they don't know this, that intense pain can lead them to hurt and kill others. I know, because that was me. I pray for those who don't know God, and I thank God for helping me deal with the pain in my heart.

Say a bit more about what you do when you feel pain and the anger that can come from that pain.

First, I play video games. Sometimes I don't know what else to do, and I don't want to hurt anyone, so the games seem to help a little. But they are like an addiction, and they don't help me deal with my pain long-term. I know I need to face it. Even though it is hard to face the pain, it's the only way to get through it to healing.

I used to keep to myself when I was hurting, until I would almost explode. Now I pray, and I try to talk to someone, and find better ways to express that pain. Talking helps me a lot. Satan likes it when you isolate yourself, because it keeps you in the darkness where he wants you.

What motivates you to face the pain?

Now I know how much Jesus loves me, so that helps me face the pain. You think you can forget the past and move on, but the past comes back and gets in the way of your life. You have to face the pain from the past. Now that I am a father myself, I want healing so I can pass on healing to my son, not violence and pain. It hurts me too, now that I have a son, because it makes me wonder how they could hurt me so much when was little. But I want to choose a better way.

Did you go through a period where you really questioned God and God's goodness?

Yes, for a few years I had a hard time, because I suffered so much. You're given this faith, and it crumbles in the hardship of life. You're brought up to think one way, and then it cracks. And what do you have left? So you are in crisis. I had to

come to realize that Jesus is with me in the struggle, that I need to hold on to Jesus.

What is your view of God now?

I don't try to understand God. I am drawn to the heart of Jesus in the gospels. My love of Jesus gets me through. Jesus endured suffering because of his love for us. I see the compassion in Jesus. People think there is no hope but Jesus is radical, he says to go to the highways and byways where there is no hope. I say to Jesus, "I give you my suffering." I can endure because Jesus did. I find comfort in the sufferings of Jesus.

What other things have helped you face the pain?

You need to talk to other people. I used to keep it inside, but talking to someone I trust really helped me. It releases the pain and the shame. It helps me every time I tell my story because it releases the shame. I try to remember, and be grateful, for the things God has done in my life, instead of focus on the pain.

My art helps me because I express my pain in my art. I also love to express my heart to God in worship. Some songs have really helped me. One of my favorites is "At the Cross": "I know a place, a wonderful place, where accused and condemned find mercy and grace, where the wrongs we have done, and the wrongs done to us, are nailed there with him, there on the cross." That song gives me comfort. I want to live in that place.

Always I hold on to the future hope, too, that one day there will be no more tears. I am waiting for that day we have been promised. When you are suffering, you can't see the future, so you lose hope. You need other people to remind you. I want to be that for other kids now.

God gives beauty for ashes, both you and I, so that he will be glorified. The suffering makes us more like Jesus. God turns our ashes to beauty, and wants to be glorified in us.