

SECTION 5: THIRST

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Pain is a great leveler, cracking us wide open even as we struggle valiantly to maintain control. In Section 3, we listed some of the false identities we depend on, but there's nothing like suffering to strip all of that away and change our perspectives. Have you noticed, after surviving something you thought would end you, how certain things simply aren't as important anymore? Having an enormous bank account is no longer as relevant after you've lost a child; having a fit, unblemished body is not a top concern after you've nearly died from cancer; and having a mighty impressive title doesn't matter after you've been downsized.

*Things must change, and we must change, after our lives capsize.
This also holds true for when they get righted again.*

A longtime friend has accompanied her husband through decades of his medical challenges and emergencies; in recent years, this culminated in a long-awaited organ transplant. His medical crises have required years of living a smaller, safer, and slower life out of necessity, so this opportunity seemed to promise a broader, braver, and busier future. Yet when I saw her soon after his surgery, she was grateful but more contemplative than celebratory, and she said something so profound I've never forgotten it.

"The transplant doctors do not prepare you for the reality of walking into the hospital seven-eighths dead and then walking out four days later, assuming all goes well, healthier than you've been in a long, long time. It changes *everything*, including your identity as 'sick person,' and it's a bumpier transition than you'd think," she says. "And also: I had a husband who always filtered out the things he didn't really want to do by saying, 'I dunno... Maybe we shouldn't commit; I don't know how I'm going to feel by then.' Now he needs a different excuse to not-live."

Her words lodged deep. Being deathly ill or otherwise physically, emotionally, financially, or spiritually compromised in some way is a great excuse to not-live. Then we don't have to overextend ourselves; we can circle our wagons and hang onto whatever makes us feel safe. Such self-protective behaviors also work well for handling fear, hurt, disappointment, abuse, rejection, and far more. It's like a one-size-fits-all, Get-Out-Of-Living-Free card.

Even after we've been redeemed—no longer seven-eighths gone, given another chance, freed from our heartache and despair—we still can choose to not-live.

We may be used to suffering as an identity, dependent on the sympathy that comes with it.

We may feel lost, be angry, or fear change, not having a clue how to move forward or what life might look like after our storms.

This is an uncomfortable but perfect opportunity for the Church to teach believers more about life after loss—of letting go of the things that never served us, and taking hold of the gifts of suffering.