Pain is such a negative experience. What purpose does it serve?

Pain helps to keep us out of danger. It keeps us from harming ourselves, and helps us to go through the stages of healing properly.

What causes pain?

Pain is a sensation caused by your nervous system, particularly your brain, through an output system also consisting of nervous system. It is similar to hunger of thirst in that it is meant to bring about an action.

If it is all the nervous system, then why do I hurt in my joints, muscles, and bones?

This is a fairly complex mechanism, so here is a summary.
1) When the brain receives a tigger it perceives as a threat, it wants to know more about it.
2) It therefore will increase the sensitivity of the nerves surrounding the trigger area that is threatened.
3) Nerves that are sensitive do not like to be stretched or pinched. Therefore, they cause the surrounding muscles to tighten up and restrict the stretching and pinching of these nerves.
4) The result is movements become guarded. This is one of the initial jobs of pain. It keeps you from moving so that any tissue problem can resolve.

Important point: This is why hurt does not equal harm. Pain is very effective at keeping you from injuring yourself. Once the pain response is initiated it is highly unlikely that you will cause further tissue damage by moving. The pain won't let you move that way.

5) Since these nerves exist in the moving parts; the muscles, the joints, on the surface of bones, these areas are where you feel the pain. The nerve is actually the sensitive structure though.

This is why certain movements hurt. Certain movements cause the stretch or pinch on these sensitive nerves.

So why does the pain seem to spread out?

Until the brain is convinced that the threat is resolved, it will keep the nerves sensitive. The guarding muscles cause other compensatory movements elsewhere, which themselves can begin to become sensitive.

Also, as the pain becomes chronic, more and more triggers become associated with the original threat.