



Reflections on Pain

The neck and back pain and weakness started a little over four years ago. According to my most recent diagnosis, these will never completely go away in this life, absent from some special providence from our Lord. I am thirty-two years old.

Despite the chronic nature of my condition, with the right care I have been able to both manage my symptoms and experience improvement. I remain able to work and to participate in most normal activities. Still, this experience has prompted me to reflect upon the place of physical suffering in the life of the Christian. I hope the following brief reflections will be a source of encouragement to any who are experiencing pain themselves or have a loved one who is.

1. *This pain was brought into my life by God*

While I have experienced a couple of neck and back injuries, according to my physician the primary cause of my pain is a slight congenital deformity of the spine. There is therefore no single injury or event to which I can look back and say *"If I had done this differently, I would not be in pain now."* Even if there were such an event, if God *"(declares) the end from the beginning"* (Isa. 46:10) and *"worketh all things after the counsel of his own will"* (Eph. 1:11), then I am suffering ultimately because God has willed it.

2. *This pain is intended by God for His glory and my good*

Even those professing Christians who reject Scripture's teaching regarding God's sovereignty and comprehensive decree claim the promise of Romans 8:28 that God works all things for the good of His people. This glorious promise is comforting to the suffering believer in particular, and yet only an omnipotent and sovereign God who is fully able to bring about His decree can keep such a promise. Because my pain is according to God's decree and under His control, I am confident that He can and will use it to bring about my good as He has promised, and that He will be glorified in so doing.

3. *This pain does not excuse me from the responsibilities of work and service*

My wife and I recently read *Meet the Puritans* by Joel Beeke and Randall Pederson during our devotions. From time to time in that volume we encountered statements such as the following about Richard Baxter (1615-1691): *"Baxter worked hard, despite chronic pain from the age of twenty-one until the end of his life"* (p. 64). We marveled at the productivity of such men despite significant physical challenges. Likewise, we read in 2 Corinthians 12 of Paul's *"thorn in the flesh."* God refused to remove this unnamed affliction, but also did not allow Paul to use it as an excuse for despair or slothfulness in service. Rather, Paul's affliction was for the purpose of magnifying Christ. Following Paul's example, I am to persevere in spite of my affliction, working to provide for myself and my family and serving Christ's church, and leaning upon Christ for strength while glorifying Him for whatever I am able to accomplish in that strength.

4. *This pain does not eliminate God's promise to supply all of my needs*

Happily, my pain is usually only a nuisance. But even if this or some future ailment one day causes me to lose the ability to provide for myself and my family through ordinary means, Christ bids me in Luke 12 to not worry, but to seek Him first and trust in His provision. The God who provides food for the ravens and clothing for the lilies will provide for His own people!

5. This pain is a result of the Fall

In Hebrews 12, we read of the fatherly discipline with which the Lord corrects His people. The afflictions that befall believers in this life are not punishments, but correctives that God uses to sanctify us. Nevertheless, we are reminded by the experience of pain and affliction that such evils were not part of the original, “*very good*” creation. Rather, pain, suffering, and death came into the world because man sinned (Rom. 5:12).

6. This pain is not permanent

The physician I visited was correct: in this life I will continue to experience pain. But even as the creation groans in anticipation of the coming redemption (Rom. 8:22), so my pain reminds me to not focus upon earthly things, and instead to fix my eyes upon Christ (Heb. 12:1-3), remembering that “*the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us*” (Rom. 8:18).

Fellow suffering Christian, your suffering is but a temporary affliction that God intends for your good and His glory.

One day, “God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain...”

(Rev. 21:4)

Until then, let us rest upon Christ and, with our eyes fixed upon Him, continue to “*run with patience the race that is set before us*” (Heb. 12:1).

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