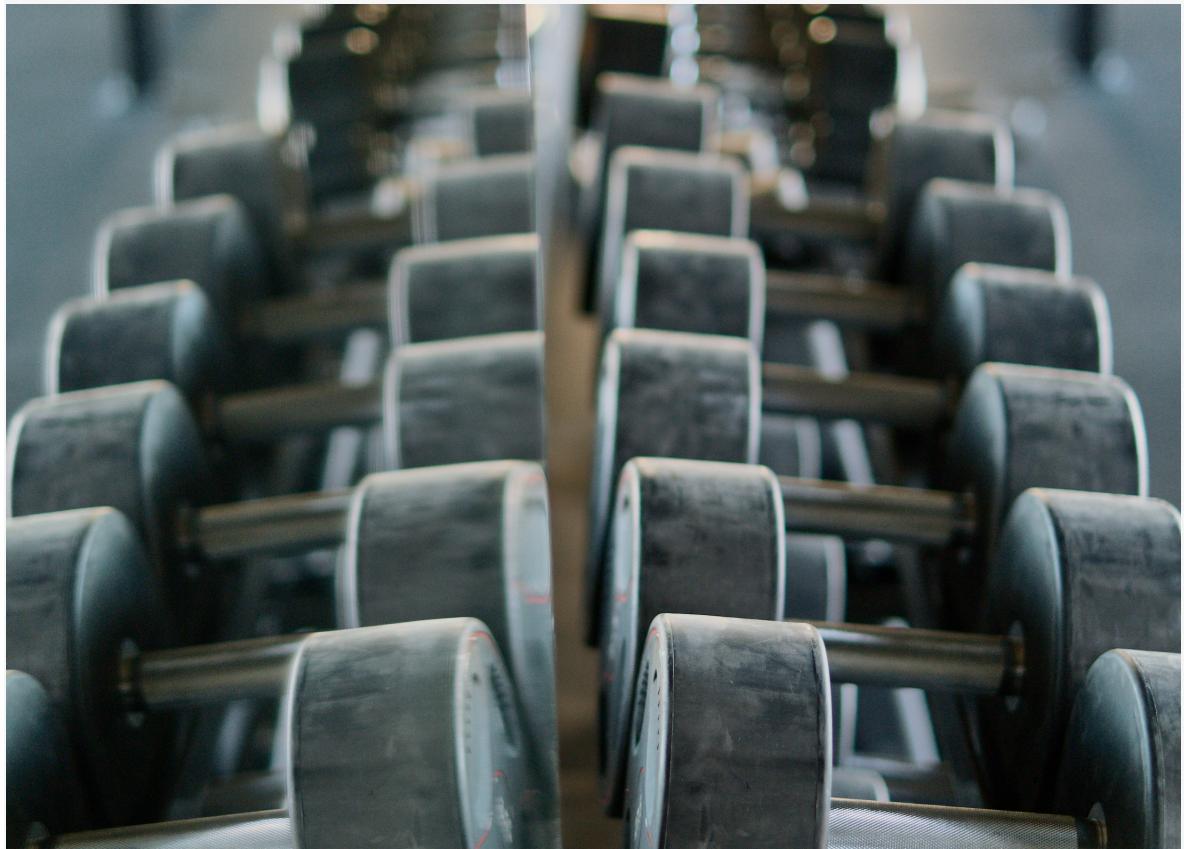


STRENGTH THROUGH WEAKNESS

2 CORINTHIANS 4:13-18

GOD'S GYM



FIRST BYRON CHRISTIAN REFORMED CHURCH

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INTRODUCTION

'No pain, no gain.' We're all familiar with that well-known saying. Whether we're trying to diet, pass an exam, save money, or get fit, 'No pain, no gain.' We're not so familiar with the application of that principle in our spiritual lives. We can understand how pain in these other areas produce gain, but **how does pain produce gain in our spiritual lives?** If we don't get a good answer for this, we will do everything we can to avoid suffering, resent it when it comes into our lives, and lose the potential for gain from pain. Let's look at 2 Corinthians 4:16-18 for God's answer to this question: **How does pain produce gain in our spiritual lives?** The answer involves three exercises in God's gym.

BACKGROUND

Paul saw that the Corinthians were at risk of losing heart because of his present sufferings and the likelihood of their future sufferings (1, 16). He therefore gives six reasons not to lose heart in suffering:

First, because of the light-giving transformative power of the Gospel (1-6).

Second, we do not lose heart because our weakness is the platform for Christ's power (7-12).

Third, we do not lose heart because God uses our witness in suffering to spread grace, thanksgiving and glory to God (13, 15).

Fourth, we do not lose heart because powerful resurrection is ahead for us (14).

Fifth, we do not lose heart because God is renewing us spiritually even while we are dying physically (16).

Sixth, we do not lose heart because God is preparing incomparable eternal compensation for us (17).

These reasons enable us not only not to lose heart in suffering but also to gain heart in suffering.



What's the first exercise?



1. GOD EXERCISES US FOR PRESENT RENEWAL (16)

Outward Pain

Though our outer self is wasting away... (16)

Our 'outer self' is primarily our body, property, and status. It's everything that this world sees and measures when it's calculating someone's success or value.

God exercised Paul with age, pain, conflict, disappointment, service, and persecution, resulting in him losing his health, wealth, and status. God's providence had weakened him physically, socially, and financially. Anyone looking at pictures of Paul would say, "Wow! He's aged badly."

Inner Gain

...our inner self is being renewed day by day (16)

Our 'inner self' is our soul, our heart, our spirit. It's everything that this world cannot see when it comes to assessing someone's success or value. It's our unseen relationship to God and includes our faith, repentance, hope, love, worship, patience, submission, and so on.

The same events and experiences that weakened Paul outwardly, strengthened him inwardly. It's the same divine exercise machine that's having such different effects. His physical, financial, and social muscles were withering and wasting, but his spiritual muscles were being honed, sculpted, and strengthened with every rep. It's in the present continuous tense, meaning this is a constant daily process.

CHANGING OUR STORIES WITH GOD'S STORY

Pain is gain. It's not just no pain, no gain, it's that every pain causes gain, every pain produces gain. We may not like to think of our wrinkles, our gray hair, our scars, our arthritis, our diabetes, our eczema, our deafness, our missing teeth, our Parkinson's, our MS, our weakness. We try to deny or minimize, but if we do, we are missing out on this encouraging exercise of contrasting the outward loss with the inward gain. We may not see it ourselves, but the Bible tells us it's there, it's happening, and therefore let's be encouraged by this fact. This is a very different way to view old age. "Yes! I'm getting weaker and sorer. That means I'm getting bigger and stronger!"

OLD AGE IS
THE NEW AGE



That's the present. What about the future?

2. GOD EXERCISES US FOR FUTURE GLORY (17)

Light and short pain

For this light momentary affliction... (17)

Paul's pains and sufferings were far from light or short; they were weighty and lengthy (2 Cor. 11:24-31). How then can he call them light and short. They did not feel like that at the time (2 Cor. 1:8). There were moments and periods when Paul felt he could not go on; he could not lift another weight for another second. How can he now say they were light and short? They are light and short only when compared to the heavy and long reward that results from them.

Long and heavy glory

...is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison (17).

God leverages these sufferings so that every pain and every day is multiplied in the opposite direction. Short pains produce eternal gains, light pains produce glorious gains. It's so unequal a comparison, that it's not even worth calling it a comparison. It's like saying "My ingrown toenail resulted in a purple heart." Or, "My running up the stairs resulted in me winning the New York marathon."

Notice especially that it's not 'despite the sufferings we get great glory.' It's 'because of the sufferings.' Christ's sufferings get us into glory, but our sufferings are connected to our experience of glory.

CHANGING OUR STORIES WITH GOD'S STORY

Pain will be gain. Just as the more we stretch and push our muscles, the more we grow and strengthen our muscles, so every sanctified pain produces heavenly gain. The heavier the weight of suffering the heavier the weight of glory. Not one moment of pain is wasted. Every moment of pain here is producing eternal gain in heaven for the Christian.

GOD'S WORKOUTS
WORK OUT



How can that be?

3. GOD EXERCISES US WITH NEW GLASSES (18)

We stop seeing the seen

...as we look not to the things that are seen...for the things that are seen are transient (18).

The Corinthians, like us, tended to just see the seen things. They viewed the visible world as if it was the only world and the lasting world. Paul said that he deliberately looks away from the seen and the visible world. He chooses to stop looking at it. How do you do that? There's only one way, and that's to look at something else.

We start seeing the unseen

...we look....to the things that are unseen. For...the things that are unseen are eternal (18).

If you ever get bi-focal glasses, you know it takes time for your eyes to adjust to them. It takes a bit of effort. Paul is encouraging us to do some visual exercises here, to take God's glasses and train ourselves to look at the world differently, in fact to look at this world less and the world to come much more.

CHANGING OUR STORIES WITH GOD'S STORY

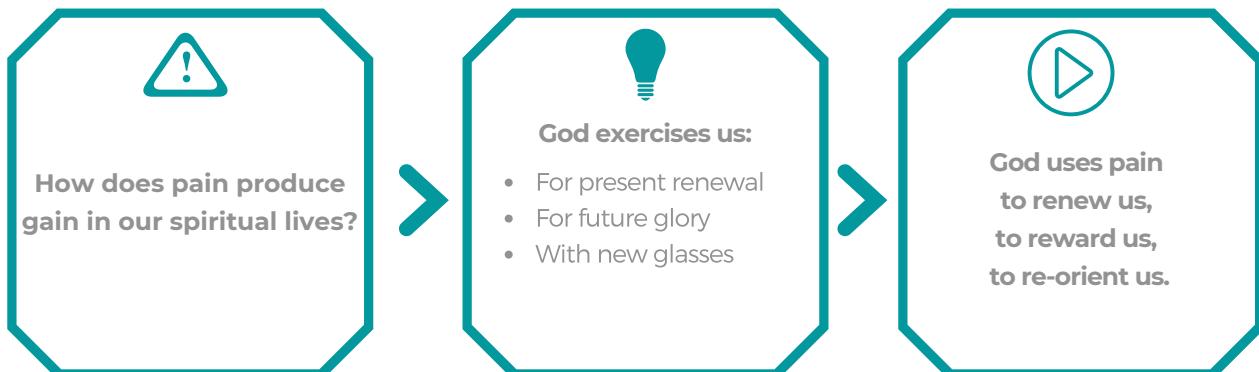
Pain sees gain. We will never see gain without pain. Without pain we cannot see gain. Pain is what helps us see this world differently and the world to come differently. Paul calls us to feast our eyes on the forever world not the fallen world. If we look better, we will see better.

PAIN CHANGES SHORT-SIGHTEDNESS
TO LONG-SIGHTEDNESS



Hear God's Story > Change our story > Tell the Story > Change others' stories

SUMMARY



PRAYER: My Trainer, help me to believe that my pains result in incomparable gains.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS



1. What pain has God brought into your life? How has that affected your spiritual life?
2. Where have you seen gain producing pain in your life or others?
3. What role does faith have in seeing inner renewal?
4. "Christ's sufferings get us into glory, but our sufferings are connected to our experience of glory." How would you explain this to a suffering Christian?
5. How has pain improved your sight?
6. What can you do to improve your sight?

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