

Does Your Pain Indicate A Need For Change?

By Ken Korkow

Years ago, Dr. Paul Brand and Philip Yancey wrote a book called *Pain: The Gift Nobody Wants*. If there was ever an appropriately titled book, that was it. Because who among us wants to experience pain? Who seeks it out? And yet, pain is as much a part of real life as the sun and birds flying overhead.

For me, among of the most common forms of pain have been recurring headaches. Not mild annoyances, but debilitating ones that at times have left me incapable of participating in the most common activities.

During one month about a year ago, I had to take seven headache pills, and halfway through the next month I had already taken six more. Then I read a Wall Street Journal article entitled, "You are what you don't eat." After reading that, I realized perhaps I was a contributor to my own pain.

Since then I have avoided eating wheat (bread and gluten products), dairy (milk, cheese, ice cream, etc.), eggs, sugar, soy, peanuts (and I love extra-chunky peanut butter - probably one of the reasons my body has always been "extra chunky"), or white potatoes. At the same time - and I do not think it was a coincidence - I did not have to take a headache pill after starting this dietary discipline; I lost some weight, and began feeling better physically and mentally.

As someone has wisely stated, God does not waste pain. And as it turned out, my headache pain finally caused me to get serious about what I ate, lose some weight, become more conscious of good nutrition, and my overall physical well-being improved. As Brand and Yancey noted in their book, despite all of our efforts to avoid pain, there are times when it offers great benefits.

Reflecting on this, I realized there are many other instances when pain we experience could be signaling a need to make some changes. For example, debt and the pressures of mounting bills can cause much stress, but that pain may be telling us it is time to become more responsible financially.

Sometimes our jobs and careers bring about pain in our lives. This may indicate a need to change jobs, especially if we find ourselves stuck in a position we do not enjoy or that offers little or no promise for advancement. But our "pain" could also be revealing the need for a stronger commitment to our work, or to pursue more education or training to perform the work in a more productive, more rewarding manner.

When experiencing painful relationships - with our spouse, children, coworkers or even friends - this could be showing us the necessity to change our attitudes, becoming less selfish, more giving of ourselves, and more considerate of the interests of others. We

probably do not need to sever those relationships, but rather to make some changes ourselves to make them better.

Let me ask: Is there some pain in your life that God may be using to cause you to consider change? After all, the Scriptures tell us, "we rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope" (Romans 5:3). James 1:2-3 adds, "Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything."

It might seem difficult to "rejoice" in times of pain, but often hindsight shows how much we needed it.

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Reflection/Discussion Questions

1. How do you typically respond when confronted with pain - or severe difficulties - of various kinds? Do you try to find a quick remedy?
2. Can you think of any time when pain can truly be perceived as a "gift," even when it seems unwelcome at the time? Explain your answer.
3. What kind(s) of "pain" are you currently experiencing - or enduring - in your life?
4. Why do you think the Bible admonishes us to "rejoice" or "consider it pure joy" during periods of pain and great distress? Has there ever been a time in your life, after going through much difficulty, that you were able (in retrospect) to feel thankful for having gone through the experience? If so, describe the circumstances and how they proved to be beneficial.

If you would like to look at or discuss other portions of the Bible that relate to this topic, consider the following brief sampling of passages:

Proverbs 10:17, 13:18,24, 15:32; Romans 8:18; 2 Corinthians 4:16-18; Hebrews 12:5-6