

Stretch

No Pain, No Gain

Philippians 2:5-11

January 5, 2020

The phrase “no pain, no gain” is used in all kinds of situations. I first heard it when I was in high school during marching band summer camp and we all felt like we were dying. I heard it again being shouted in my face by a Marine Corps drill instructor when we had done more pushups and sit ups that what seemed humanly possible. I heard it again when my wife was delivering one of our children and the nurse said it in reference to the pain of childbirth in relationship to the joy of parenting. I’ve heard it in the gym, on a bicycle while pushing up a Pennsylvania mountain, and at the end of a very long workday when I just didn’t have anything left.

The thought process is this...there is precious little in life that happens with out some form of sacrifice or discomfort. The **easy stuff is usually filled with disappointment or is quickly forgotten**. The things that challenge us leave a deep and lasting mark on our souls and sometimes on our bodies and those things we just never forget. The things that last a lifetime are those that are often acquired through struggle or hardship. It seems like the feeling of pain sears a lasting memory in our minds that is not easy to nearly impossible to remove. Whether it’s the hand on the hot stove or the shin on the coffee table in the dark or the hand from what seemed like out of nowhere when you sassed your mother...all of them taught us to not go back there again.

Our entire justice system is based on the idea of aversion to pain. The phrase - don’t do the crime if you can’t do the time – is set on the notion that with illegitimate gain come pain too. As the chaplain for the Dauphin County Veterans Court I have seen the painful results of trying to sneak around the system when a person who is found guilty is taken away in

cuffs. None of us like pain. So, why is it that we do not count the cost of our actions before we jump in with both feet. And tell me this...why don't we listen to those who have been there – done that and bear the scars that should inform all of us of the risks involved. Instructions say things like; for the best results, for the safest use, to prevent harm. A few weeks ago Pastor Vince mentioned that we are all like chainsaws...strong and powerful tools that can do a great deal of good or inflict a huge amount of pain. That's not a lesson I want to learn.

So, how many of us in here have a scar of two on their body somewhere. Now, don't get me wrong, this is not show and tell time. But, I'm asking that question because I believe **we have all learned some valuable lessons from the scars in our lives.** Like you, I have some scars that serve as the reminders of some of the knowledge I've gained over the years.

A while back I was working out with friend who is my physical trainer. I made the mistake of jumping into my workout without properly stretching first. He proceeded to tell me to go back and stretch with the stern warning that I could do some serious damage if I don't stretch before workouts. This is a guy who knows what he's talking about and I figured I needed to do what he tells me...plus, he can kick my butt.

So, let's use this metaphor to talk about our spiritual lives. Most of us are convinced that becoming more spiritual, a more devoted follower of Jesus will be painful in some way. We're convinced that it will take too much time away from the things we're already doing or impose on an already busy schedule. We believe that it will require uncomfortable conversations with people close to us or in one of those small groups where people sit in a circle, hold hands and sing kumbaya...and who wants that. Or it will cause pain when we're told we'll have to give up this and surrender that and reject that group of friends, and only go to G rated movies....no more fun for you!

Let's be honest...we like some of the stuff that we've heard we might have to give up. I went to a Christian college that required the students to sign a covenant promising that they would not drink or dance or play card games. When visiting a person of the opposite sex there was a rule that the dorm door had to be open at least 18 inches. So, let me tell you...**stretching your faith to a new place is not about rules – its about readiness**. Stretching is about getting yourself ready for the life God has instore for you. The only way you can be ready for the challenges that this life is going to throw at you is to stretch your faith to a new level. Yes, stretching is uncomfortable for a time. Yes, stretching feels like a pain but, not stretching can cause even more pain.

To simply live this life thinking that when trouble comes I'll be ready, when heartache comes I'll be fit, when hardship comes I'll be in shape is as crazy as thinking that we can go to the gym and start working out without being ready by stretching. A lot of people are going to go back to the gym in January. Many of them will not stay committed to what it takes to be physically fit. So, let me ask you...are you willing to do what it takes to be spiritually fit? Are you stretching yourself spiritually each day? Are you prepping your spiritual body for the rigors of this life? This world will do all it can to challenge us and to cause us leave our faith like a out of shape person stops hitting the gym membership in February and goes back to hitting the Dunkin Donuts until next year.

Jesus has an expectation for all of us to live up to...that we are spiritually working out so that we are growing in our faith. The first thing to do is to stretch. A stretching routine at the gym is often custom fit to the persons current condition, range of motion, current abilities, work out history, overall fitness, and the goals that they've set. So, are you going to jump into the deep end...I hope not. There might be a few here today could do that and have it work. For most of us, we need to step in slowly and with

purpose and with a plan. Maybe a stretch for you would include Our Daily Bread or The Upper Room. Maybe for you a stretch would be a daily You Version Bible app challenge. For some it might mean joining a LifeGroup. For another person it might mean going on a mission trip. For someone here today it means volunteering somewhere.

Here's what I know...**fear will hold us back and keep us from living the full and fulfilled life God has planned for us.** Fear is not of God...it's a tool that Satan uses to keep people from stretching their faith in ways that will cause growth, development and strong – spiritual muscles. It is not God's plan that you live a life that is fearful of stretching and growing. God is hoping that we will roar like lions. We're going to need to stretch our spiritual muscles if we're going to do that or we'll crash and burn. Here's what I mean [clip from Lion King of Simba trying to roar]. **If we are ever going to stand tall and strong for God...especially when trials and troubles and temptations hit **we are going to need to stretch.****

We have the perfect example. Jesus stretched himself for us. Philippians 2 says that he left heaven – that's a stretch. It says that he gave up his divine privileges – that's a stretch. We're told that he humbled himself – wow, that's a stretch. That he gave his life for ours on the cross – that's the ultimate stretch. And because he did all of that...he won the day and saved all of us for an eternity...what a stretch.

Will you commit to stretching your spiritual life in 2020?

Communion...