



THE
MENTORING
PROJECT

BY HIS STRIPES
WE ARE HEALED –
TRUSTING GOD
THROUGH ILLNESS
AND PAIN



JOHN SARVER

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**BY HIS STRIPES WE ARE HEALED -
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INTRODUCTION

If you're reading this life skill guide, it's likely because you or someone you know is struggling with illness or chronic disease. Whether it's the debilitating weight of a chronic illness or a temporary ailment, sickness affects us all in ways we often can't predict. But chronic illness—those ongoing conditions that don't seem to have an end in sight—brings its own unique burden. It's easy to feel hopeless or overwhelmed by the persistent nature of such sickness. The frustration of living with chronic illness is far more than just the inconvenience of missed work or disrupted plans. It's a battle that can affect every aspect of life: your energy, your relationships, your outlook on the future, and your very sense of self.

For those who are suffering from chronic disease, there are days when it feels as though nothing will ever be the same again. The ongoing pain and fatigue can make you question if things will ever return to a sense of normalcy. But the good news, even in the face of persistent struggle, is that by His stripes we are healed (Isaiah 53:5). This powerful promise offers us hope—hope that even in the midst of our suffering, healing is available. Healing may not always look like we expect, and it may not come in the way we envision, but through Jesus' sacrifice, by His stripes we are healed in a way that touches both our physical and spiritual well-being.

It's important to acknowledge that, even when sickness seems overwhelming, it's not the final word. Death, illness, and pain may seem like they have the upper hand, but they do not. For those struggling with chronic illness, by His stripes we are healed serves as a reminder that our hope is not tied to our current circumstances, but to the redemptive work of Christ, who came to heal, restore, and make all things new.

Chronic disease is undoubtedly a frustrating experience, but it also calls us to a deeper reliance on God's promises. It challenges us to remember

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that even in our pain and suffering, God is still good, and by His stripes we are healed-not just physically, but in every way we need healing. Let this truth sink deeply into your heart as we walk through how to think biblically about sickness and find peace in God's sovereign plan for healing.

Now, let's dive into some questions that will help us understand sickness, suffering, and healing in light of Scripture.

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1

WHY DO WE GET SICK?

We get sick because of death. And we die because of sin.

Sickness is a bit like the grave extending its grimy hands into the land of the living to alert us to what's coming and then drag us down.

If we weren't destined for death (i.e., if we weren't dying), we wouldn't get sick. And if it weren't for sin, we wouldn't die.

So why do we get sick? Because of sin.

God created us to live. His intention for our first parents was the multiplication of life, not the dispersion of death. The first command, the one preceding the prohibition, in fact, was to "be fruitful and multiply" (Gen. 1:28). That immortality was held out to Adam and Eve is clear from the fact that death is only introduced as a consequence for sin: "*But you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for on the day you eat from it, you will certainly die*" (Gen. 3:17).

God made Adam and Eve so that they would live. They were warned that sin is the consequence of death (Rom. 6:23). But sin they did. And so, God punished the man and the woman following their disobedience:

You will eat bread by the sweat of your brow

until you return to the ground,

since you were taken from it.

For you are dust,

and you will return to dust. (Genesis 3:19).

We die because of sin.

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The irony is that Adam and Eve, being made in the image of God, sat somewhere between heaven and earth, so to speak. But they were discontent with their lot, they strove to be more like God than they should, and so now we're destined to return to the dust. Death humbles us as low as the serpent who fed that first lie.

Yet, even as we face the reality of sickness and death, there is hope for healing. The Bible offers profound Bible verses for healing and strength, reminding us that God's purpose is not just to let us suffer but to heal us through His grace. A beautiful Bible verse for the sick is Psalm 6:2, which says, "Have mercy on me, Lord, for I am faint; heal me, Lord, for my bones are in agony." This verse gives us a clear invitation to seek healing from God, knowing He listens to our cries for mercy.

The author of Ecclesiastes picks up this tragic irony:

For the fate of the children of Adam and the fate of animals is the same. As one dies, so dies the other; they all have the same breath. People have no advantage over animals since everything is futile. 20 All are going to the same place; all come from dust, and all return to dust. (Ecclesiastes 3:19-20).

Death is humiliating. It's God's ultimate limitation on those who thought they could vie with God for power, rule, and autonomy. We thought we could be like God, and now we die like the dogs. We have no advantage over animals in terms of death.

Yet, even in the face of death, the Bible reminds us that healing is possible through God. In Isaiah 53:5, we read, "But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his stripes we are healed." This verse is a powerful Bible reference on healing that shows God's willingness to restore us, not just spiritually but also physically.

Because of sin, we die.

Paul too recognizes this connection and writes, "Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, in this way death spread to all people, because all sinned" (Rom. 5:12).

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Death is about separation. Physical death is the separation of soul and body (Jas. 2:26). Spiritual death is the separation of the sinner from God (2 Thess. 1:9). Death is the unmaking or the undoing of man. This is why sickness is a symptom or precursor to death. It is the slow unraveling or unmaking of us before we meet our final fate in the grave, where we return to dust.

That's what Ecclesiastes shows us:

So remember your Creator in the days of your youth:

*Before the days of adversity come,
and the years approach when you will say,
"I have no delight in them";
before the sun and the light are darkened,
and the moon and the stars,
and the clouds return after the rain;
on the day when the guardians of the house tremble,
and the strong men stoop,
the women who grind grain cease because they are few,
and the ones who watch through the windows see dimly,
the doors at the street are shut
while the sound of the mill fades;
when one rises at the sound of a bird,
and all the daughters of song grow faint.
Also, they are afraid of heights and dangers on the road;
the almond tree blossoms,
the grasshopper loses its spring,
and the caper berry has no effect;
for the mere mortal is headed to his eternal home,*

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*and mourners will walk around in the street;
before the silver cord is snapped,
and the gold bowl is broken,
and the jar is shattered at the spring,
and the wheel is broken into the well;
and the dust returns to the earth as it once was,
and the spirit returns to God who gave it. (Ecclesiastes 12:1-7).*

We don't need to worry ourselves with all the details. The picture the author is giving, I think, is that of the human body breaking down in old age. If you live long enough, your hands (guardians) will tremble at the smallest tasks. Your teeth (women who grind grain) will be few in number. Your eyes (the ones who watch) won't see as clearly. What you used to conquer with ease, like walking up a curb, will become a point of fear. You'll lose all kinds of desires. Until finally your life is shattered like a glass on the kitchen floor. Life will be frustrating in these days of adversity, as he calls them.

Because of sin, you die. And because of death, your body will break down until it breaks. Sickness is an early warning sign from the grave. No death; no sickness.

This is where Bible quotes about healing bring comfort. While sickness is part of the human condition due to sin, God offers healing. Bible verses about healing sickness such as Psalm 107:20, "He sent out his word and healed them; he rescued them from the grave," remind us of God's power to restore. Even in our brokenness, there is hope for healing.

I wonder, how often do you connect your sickness to death and sin? If you don't, sickness will likely take you by surprise.

There are two kinds of people reading this life skill guide: those who are dying and know it, and those who are dying and don't. I assume the majority of people in the Western world fall into the latter category. There are exceptions, of course-those who have brushed against death-their

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own or others-or those who can see it on the horizon. For the rest of us, however, we know we're dying, but not really.

Sickness is inexplicable to those who are immortal.

One of the reasons we deny death, I suspect, is that we've minimized our exposure to it. It's not as easy to have its mark left on our hands. We put the elderly in homes. Those who are seriously ill or injured, we leave in hospitals. Those with little hope enter hospice care. Out of sight, out of mind, as they say. This is not to suggest, of course, that assisted living facilities, hospitals, and hospice care are without merit. They are of obvious value. It's only to say that it comes at a cost: a diminished awareness of our own mortality. The less we see people seriously sick and dying, the less likely we are to understand that we're dying. But who wants to think about death? It's that-which-must-not-be-named

Another reason we deny death, I think, is due to modern advances in various technologies. As I'm writing this, I can hear the rain pounding against the window. Its sound is rivaled only by the heater, which keeps the room comfortable. Protection from the elements outside. Conformity of the elements inside to my liking. We assume our "mastery" over nature extends as far as our bodies. The advances made in medicine perpetuate the myth. There is, it would seem, a treatment for nearly any diagnosis a doctor may deliver. It breeds confidence. All of science's merits aside, the cost has been significant: we assume a higher degree of control over life and death than we actually possess. And so, we deny death and we deny our lack of control.

What does this have to do with sickness? Well, if you've come to believe you're not going to die on the one hand and that you should be able to control nature-both life and health on the other-you're going to be very frustrated when your body tells you otherwise. Sickness can be frustrating, much like a faulty engine in a brand-new car. It shouldn't be there!

And in one sense, it shouldn't. Sickness and death are unnatural to what we were destined for. But because of sin, as we've seen, they have become our new normal. So, in another sense, they should be in our world. Sickness and death that follow are God's limits on creatures who thought they should be more. The wages of sin is death. We die because of sin.

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And we get sick because of death. It's death reaching into our lives to warn us of what's coming. It's the engine light flashing on the dashboard. It is God's sign to you that your body is not right because of sin. Soon, you will meet the full extent of its force, and after that, you will meet him who put these limits on you: God. Sickness, like death, should always lead our gaze Godward. It's a reminder of death, sin, and him who is sovereign as judge and merciful as savior.

When you feel the weight of sickness, it's important to turn to biblical quotes for healing. A prayer for sickness and healing, like the one found in James 5:15, can be a powerful response: "And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise them up." These verses help us to remember that God's healing power is greater than our suffering.

Once we come to grips with the root of sin and its inevitability, we are well-positioned to experience growth through it and hope beyond it. But first, we should press more deeply on the question of the root of sickness.

So, we (humanity) get sick because of sin. Got it. But am I sick because of *my* sin?

Reflection Questions:

1. What is the closest you have ever come to death (either yourself or a loved one)? How did it make you feel?
2. When you think of death, do you fear? Do you try to ignore it? Does it change your perspective? How and why?
3. What is the relationship between sin, sickness, and death?

2

AM I SICK BECAUSE OF MY SIN?

Yes. No. Maybe.

Am I sick because of my sin? I want to give a qualified yes to this question. If you weren't a sinner now and in Adam, you wouldn't die, and so, you wouldn't get sick.

If you are in Christ Jesus, however, then you need to know that you are not being *punished* for your sin when you're sick. On this point, Scripture is clear:

"Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus"
Romans 8:1.

If you are in Christ, then every sin you have committed was dealt with on the cross. Your record of debt was canceled in full, and you are forgiven (Col. 2:14-15). It is finished, as Christ promises (John 19:30).

So, your sickness is not God punishing you because of your sin. But, again, if you weren't a sinner, you wouldn't ever get sick. Sickness is a consequence of life in a fallen world and is a precursor to death. Though Christ has suffered in our stead, we still die, though not as a punishment of sin but as its putting off.

Sickness, though not a direct punishment for specific sins, serves as a reminder of the brokenness of our world. As we face sickness, it is essential to remember the promises of God's healing. One Bible verse about healing of the sick is found in James 5:15, where it says, "And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise them up." This speaks to God's grace and healing power, even when sickness is not directly linked to our personal sin.

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Heidelberg 42 asks: Since Christ has died for us, why do we still have to die?

And it answers: “Our death is not payment for our sins, but it puts an end to sin and is an entrance into eternal life.”¹

In a similar fashion, sickness is not payment for our sins, but it is a reminder that we must still put off this body of flesh so that we can be clothed in incorruptibility (1 Cor. 15:53). Sin must be put to death even as we are reminded that death is coming. Until the flesh is put off at death, we will get sick.

Despite the reality of sickness, we hold onto the truth of biblical verses on healing. Isaiah 53:5 powerfully declares, “But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by His stripes we are healed.” This verse reminds us that God’s healing is available to us, even as we live in a world cursed by sin.

So, am I sick because of *my* sin? In the most general sense, as a human living in a world that is cursed because of sin, the answer is yes. However, we are not being punished.

We need to press further, though. Am I sick because of *my* sin? That is, am I sick because of my specific sin? Is this cancer, this Parkinson’s, this Cystic fibrosis, this ALS, this fill-in-the-blank, because of my sin?

Is this specific sickness because of a specific sin? The answer is probably not. It’s because of sin in general, yes, but not your sin specifically.

In John chapter 9, Jesus and his disciples passed by a man who was born blind. “His disciples asked him, ‘Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?’” (John 9:2). It was commonly thought that serious sickness was due to specific sin, hence the disciples’ question. In fact, as the chapter unfolds, this man, who was soon to be healed, would be questioned by the Pharisees because Christ healed him on the Sabbath. They dismiss his testimony (Jesus healed him, and God doesn’t listen to sinners, so God must be at work through him) by calling him a sinner: “You were born entirely in sin,” they replied, “and are you trying to teach us?” Then they threw him out (John 9:34).

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This healing is one of many examples of the healings of Jesus, and it is a powerful reminder that by His stripes we are healed.

So, in keeping with their religious culture, the disciples ask Jesus, not just if this man is blind because of sin. They're sure that's the case. The question is whose sin, though. Christ responds:

“Neither this man nor his parents sinned,” Jesus answered. “This came about so that God’s works might be displayed in him.” (John 9:3). Healing with God always has a greater purpose, one that displays His glory. As it’s written in Isaiah 53:5, “by His stripes we are healed,” showing that God’s plan for healing is part of a greater redemption process for humanity.

After he said these things he spit on the ground, made some mud from the saliva, and spread the mud on his eyes. “Go,” he told him, “wash in the pool of Siloam” (which means “Sent”). So he left, washed, and came back seeing (John 9:6-7).

This man’s entire life was marked by blindness. Blindness was not, however, because of his sin in some kind of tit-for-tat manner. And at the same time, his blindness was not meaningless. It was so that God’s works might be displayed in him—namely, the revelation of God in Christ, which we would believe is God the Son and Messiah (John 20:31). The healing of Jesus is always intentional and reflects God’s mercy and power to heal. We’ll come back to God’s purpose in our suffering soon enough. The point here is that your sickness is not primarily because of your sin in a punitive manner.

So, is my specific sickness because of my specific sin? Almost certainly not. But we should have a category for sickness as a discipline for specific sin.

So, once again, is my specific sickness because of my specific sin? Probably not, but maybe.

In John 5, Jesus, on the Sabbath, notices a man who had been disabled for 38 years (note the similarities to the blind man in John 9). Jesus asks him if he wants to be made well. The man doesn’t even answer his

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question, likely not thinking healing is within reach. Jesus then, by speaking a word, makes his body whole.

“Get up,” Jesus told him, “pick up your mat and walk.” Instantly the man got well, picked up his mat, and started to walk. (John 5:8).

The Jewish leaders also question this man. Christ finds him after and said to him:

“See, you are well. Do not sin anymore, so that something worse doesn’t happen to you” (John 5:14).

The man is well, but he has been given a warning. Do not sin anymore lest something worse happens. The man in John 9 was given no such warning. Note also how Christ did not have to give him any specifics. The man knows the sin Christ is referencing. This is a reminder that God heals not only the body but also calls us to repentance. Christ’s gracious healing of him demands his repentance. It’s as though Christ is telling him, “I have saved your body from that sin that caused its ruin, don’t return to it, and so bring back that ruin.”

So is my specific sickness because of sin? Maybe. It could be. We at least need to have a category for it. We see something similar in James.

He gives specific advice to Christians in various situations.

“Is anyone among you suffering?” James 5:13a.

What should he do?

“He should pray. Is anyone cheerful?” James 5:13b.

What should he do?

“He should sing praises.” James 5:13c.

“Is anyone among you sick?” James 5:14a.

Ah, what should he do?

He should call for the elders of the church, and they are to pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. The prayer of faith will save the sick person, and the Lord will raise

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him up; if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven. 16 Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, so that you may be healed (Jas. 5:14-16).

Healing with God involves both physical and spiritual restoration. Note the close connection between confessing sin and receiving healing. The sick person is healed, and in the cases where there is sin, they are forgiven. And, so, what should we do: “Confess [our] sins to one another and pray for one another, so that [we] may be healed.” The confession of sin leads to healing. Sometimes we are lovingly disciplined by God for sin through sickness. As the Bible quotes about healing suggest, healing often involves turning our hearts back to God and seeking His grace.

This means in addition to the kinds of questions doctors may ask you about your diet, movement, history, exposure, and so on, one of the diagnostic questions we should be asking ourselves is, “Am I in unrepentant sin?” One of the questions the elders should ask with great care is, “Are you in unrepentant sin?”

Our God is a healer (Exodus 15:26), and He can bring healing, whether it's through prayer or the hands of doctors, or both.

God can and will discipline you because He loves you (Heb. 12:6). And the way He may see fit to rouse you from your hard-heartedness is through sickness. Such questions should be undertaken with prudence and with the help of others, as James suggests.

Depending on your personality, your proclivities, and your background, you may be more inclined to assume any suffering in your life is a result of your specific sin. I would caution against this. We live in a deeply broken world because of sin (in general). God is gracious and gentle with His children, always remembering our frame (Ps. 103:14) and working all things together for our good (Rom. 8:28).

Conversely, you may be the type never to think to ask whether your suffering, in this case your sickness, may be because of your sin. It might be, and it's always worth asking God to search our hearts to uncover sin. It's always worth asking trusted family members, members of our church, and our pastors if they are aware of any blind spots. At a minimum, we

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learn in what ways we might mortify the flesh and so please God. In doing so, we may experience the healing power of God.

So why do we get sick? In the most general sense, because we live in a world stained by sin. And in some exceptional cases, it's because of our specific sin. In either case, we are forced to seek God.

As has been intimated, God heals and is neither uninvolved nor indifferent to our sickness or suffering. He is not taken aback by it. He sends it.

Reflection Questions:

1. Are you more prone to connect sickness with your sin or less? What does this say about your sensitivity to spiritual matters?
2. What should you do when you're sick from a spiritual perspective?
3. Who in your life can you ask good questions about yourself to?

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3

WHERE IS GOD IN MY SICKNESS?

It is worth noting at the outset that God hates our suffering. He really does. He sent his Son to become man, to bear the punishment due our sin, to rip the gates off of Hell, and to ascend to the throne of heaven that he might save us from all kinds of suffering.

Christ spent much of his time preaching and healing those who were afflicted (Luke 4:40).

God is moving all of human history along toward its appointed end, where he recreates the cosmos and dwells with man. Having seen this vision, John tells us what God will do:

“He will wipe away every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; grief, crying, and pain will be no more, because the previous things have passed away” (Rev. 21:3-4).

God will not only wipe away our tears, but he will also wipe away the things that cause us to cry. The new creation will not be a place of suffering, of hatred, of enemies, or heartache. It will not be a place of death. That means it won't be a place for sickness. We will find ourselves in the presence of God and the tree of life once again, and “The leaves of the tree” will be “for healing the nations” (Rev. 22:2).

I want you to see that God cares. He cares about you, your tears, your body, your future, and especially your soul. He is good. He is loving. He is powerful. And, yes, he is sovereign over your suffering.

We do well to begin with the goodness of God's character and his plan to remove all suffering. That serves as a comfort as we consider God's sovereignty over sickness.

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He is sovereign over all things-the cosmic and the microscopic.

Consider these texts:

See now that I alone am he;

there is no God but me.

I bring death and I give life;

I wound and I heal.

No one can rescue anyone from my power. — Deuteronomy 32:39.

Note that basic to being God is complete sovereignty over the full spectrum of human life from its beginning to its ending. God gives life and death. He not only heals, but he wounds.

We see something similar in Isaiah:

I form light and create darkness,

I make success and create disaster;

I am the Lord, who does all these things. — Isaiah 45:7

Again, the Lord speaks about his sovereignty over mankind:

*The Lord said to him, "Who placed a mouth on humans? Who makes a person mute or deaf, seeing or blind? Is it not I, the Lord.
— Exodus 4:11*

Christ himself speaks similarly:

Aren't two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them falls to the ground without your Father's consent. But even the hairs of your head have all been counted. - Matthew 10:29-30

Again, we are given a picture of God's meticulous sovereignty. A bird may fall in the forest apart from your knowledge (and they do), but it doesn't happen apart from the Father's consent. In modern and biological terms, we might say that cells don't grow and multiply in your body (cancer) apart from the will of the Father.

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Where is God in my sickness? He sends it.

It is easy enough to confess that God is sovereign in the most general sense-directing human history, causing the rising and fall of nations, swaying kings, and working all things together to bring us good. It's hard to stomach that the good he brings us might be through suffering.

Where is God in my sickness? He is sovereign over it as the one who sends it. He is also present with us in it as the God who sustains us, holds us, guides us, and leads us to greener pastures (Ps. 23).

Reflection Questions:

1. What do you think when you hear that God sends sickness? Is this a surprise to you? If so, why?
2. How might knowing that God is sovereign over sickness be a spiritual comfort?

4

WHAT IS GOD DOING IN MY SICKNESS?

He's doing something.

Twelve years and four kids ago, after struggling with infertility for an extended period of time, and after so many tests, an infertility doctor told my wife it was unlikely she'd get pregnant and less likely she'd be able to carry a child to term.

I wept when I relayed the news to a good friend and mentor of mine. The very first words out of his mouth were, "God is not trying to teach you anything. God is not doing anything. You didn't do anything wrong."

He kept repeating the first refrain, trying to comfort me, "God is not trying to teach you anything."

His attempt to comfort me, if I had listened to him, would have robbed me of the grounds of my hope. Namely, that God is not impotent and my suffering wasn't pointless.

No. God is the king and he works all things, yes all things, together for the good of his people, and so we can say and we can sing "What'er my God Ordains is Right."

God is doing something in your sickness, and he is trying to teach you something. No doubt he is doing more. He is doing a million things-much of it beyond our understanding in this life and perhaps the life to come. But what we can know is what Scripture for healing tells us: God sends the trial not to leave us in a lesser situation but to improve our station altogether. He strips what we think we need (riches, reputation, health) to show us what we really need: him.

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Consider the consistent testimony of Scripture:

The healing that comes from God is not just a quick fix for our suffering; it is a restoration of all things. By His stripes we are healed (Isaiah 53:5), a profound truth that speaks to the total healing of our souls and bodies through Christ's sacrifice. This healing is part of God's eternal plan, where He uses suffering to mold us into His image, and through it, He draws us closer to Him.

*My son, do not take the Lord's discipline lightly
or lose heart when you are reprov'd by him,
for the Lord disciplines the one he loves
and punishes every son he receives.*

Endure suffering as discipline: God is dealing with you as sons. For what son is there that a father does not discipline? But if you are without discipline — which all receive — then you are illegitimate children and not sons. Furthermore, we had human fathers discipline us, and we respected them. Shouldn't we submit even more to the Father of spirits and live? For they disciplined us for a short time based on what seemed good to them, but he does it for our benefit, so that we can share his holiness. No discipline seems enjoyable at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.

Therefore, strengthen your tired hands and weakened knees, and make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be dislocated but healed instead.

— Hebrews 12:5-13

Healing with God is both a physical and spiritual process. When we endure suffering, we are not just receiving physical restoration, but we are being trained to experience greater spiritual health and wholeness. The healing of Jesus was not merely to restore the body but to restore the entire person-body, soul, and spirit.

What do you see in the text regarding your suffering and God's purposes?

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The author of Hebrews grasps how discouraging our suffering is, and he calls us to take heart by pointing us to the purpose of the pain and the heart behind its sender: God is applying pressure in your life that you might experience greater degrees of righteousness and, verse 13, spiritual healing with God. He does this because he loves you. In fact, if God didn't love you, he'd let you be.

Consider Romans 5:

And not only that, but we also boast in our afflictions, because we know that affliction produces endurance, 4 endurance produces proven character, and proven character produces hope. 5 This hope will not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured out in our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us — Romans 5:3-5

If we never suffered, if life always went as we planned, we'd have no need for hope. Why hope for a future if your present is perfect? God, in his kindness, unsettles us, in order that we might be reminded of our need for heaven's glories and so take courage. Sickness may weigh down our physical bodies, but it propels our spiritual running. We need more Jesus. We need more heaven.

Sickness uniquely reminds us of the sting of death that we might long to be free from sin in resurrection glory.

Peter speaks in similar terms:

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Because of his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead and into an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you. You are being guarded by God's power through faith for a salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time. You rejoice in this, even though now for a short time, if necessary, you suffer grief in various trials so that the proven character of your faith — more valuable than gold which, though

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perishable, is refined by fire — may result in praise, glory, and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ. Though you have not seen him, you love him; though not seeing him now, you believe in him, and you rejoice with inexpressible and glorious joy, because you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls. — 1 Peter 1:3-9

Healing with God means enduring through trials that refine our faith. By His stripes we are healed, not just from sickness but from the root cause of our suffering: sin. This healing is transformative, drawing us nearer to God.

Suffering refines our faith, which is worth more than gold, and certainly, then, worth more than physical wellness. Further, the character of our faith, and especially the worthiness of its object, results in praise, glory, and honor at the coming of Christ. Your suffering is an opportunity to grow in trust and glory.

What would you rather have, though? Physical wellness now? Or Spiritual maturity that comes on the other side of testing and trial? Physical glory here or when Christ returns?

You can be physically well and not happy. If you suffer well, though, you will have inexpressible and glorious joy even in the midst of your suffering because your trial gives you the opportunity to see the power and nearness of God in your sickness. As he sustains us, we see him not as far off but near and able.

Is God's outcome for your suffering worth more to you than the alternative?

At the end of the day, we are called to trust God. If he thought it would be better for us not to be sick, we wouldn't be sick.

I struggle with chronic, in some seasons, daily migraines. I have to regularly remind myself that if God knew it was better for me to be whole, I would be. He has and is teaching me that he is all I need. Not less pain. Not clear thinking. Not less sensitivity to light and sounds. What I need is Christ's grace.

Sickness is an opportunity to learn this. Listen to what Paul says:

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For if I want to boast, I wouldn't be a fool, because I would be telling the truth. But I will spare you, so that no one can credit me with something beyond what he sees in me or hears from me, especially because of the extraordinary revelations. Therefore, so that I would not exalt myself, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to torment me so that I would not exalt myself. Concerning this, I pleaded with the Lord three times that it would leave me. But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is perfected in weakness." — 2 Corinthians 12:6-9

To keep Paul from boasting, God imposed some kind of limit on him. Some sort of painful reminder of his weakness (and the infinite power of God). He was given a thorn in the flesh, and though he asked for it to be removed, God did not take it away. Paul learned God's grace was sufficient for him. His power is made perfect in weakness.

God often does more for us and through us and to us when we're weak than when we're strong. When we're weak, we are put in a position to look to him for aid, for help, for strength, for hope. That's what sickness in general, and especially chronic sickness, gives us an opportunity to cast ourselves onto the mercies of Christ, abiding in him lest we do nothing (John 15:5).

Is God's grace sufficient for you? Are you content for his power to be displayed in your weakness? Or would you rather display your power in your health?

The desire to be healthy is good and natural. But is it your greatest desire? Do you trust God and desire his grace more?

God sends us sickness for his glory (John 9:3) and for our good (Rom. 8:28; Gen. 50:20).

So we've considered why we get sick. We've considered God's place in our sickness. In this section, we've considered why he sends it: to conform us to his character, to increase our trust in him, to whet our appetite for heaven, to give us endurance as we run, and to show us he is enough.

But how do we suffer well in our sickness?

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Reflection Questions:

1. In what ways is sickness an opportunity to grow spiritually?
2. How have you seen God work in you through sickness? How have you been encouraged by his work in others during times of sickness?
3. How is God's sovereignty over sickness different from the perspective of the world?

5

WHAT SHOULD I DO IN MY SICKNESS?

This should go without saying, but if you're sick, you should consult a doctor, multiple doctors perhaps, and consider their counsel. You may experience improvement by modifying your diet, adjusting your lifestyle, getting better sleep, considering surgery, or taking medication. I don't know your condition, and I'm not a doctor. Pursue legitimate solutions to your physical problems insofar as you're able.

What I want to do is to focus on your spiritual practices during your sickness.

What should you do when you are sick?

First, pray.

As we saw in 2 Corinthians 12, when Paul was afflicted (perhaps with a physical ailment), his instinct was to pray. He prayed because he knew both that God is powerful and willing to bring healing prayer for a friend if it were for his best.

Have you been praying for healing? In times of sickness, we are reminded that our God is healer, and we can bring our pain to Him, knowing that He cares for us deeply and is capable of bringing both biblical healing and miraculous healing in His perfect timing.

Consider Luke 11:

So I say to you, ask, and it will be given to you. Seek, and you will find. Knock, and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one

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who knocks, the door will be opened. What father among you, if his son asks for a fish, will give him a snake instead of a fish? Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him? — Luke 11:5-14.

Along similar lines, Christ contrasts a wicked judge with the good Father in Luke 18:1-8.

There is a widow who persists in her demands for justice and prevails upon him. Christ then teaches:

Then the Lord said, “Listen to what the unjust judge says. Will not God grant justice to his elect who cry out to him day and night? Will he delay helping them? — Luke 18:6-7

Christ told us this so that we would grasp our need for prayer and never give up.

Have you given up praying to God for healing? If earthly fathers give good gifts and bad judges even administer justice, how much more desirous is your good and perfectly heavenly Father to bring you what is good? If that’s healing, He will. Ask Him for it.

To be clear, simply asking for healing does not guarantee that you will receive it. Part of what we do in prayer is to submit our desires to God. We don’t just ask of Him because He has the power to supply, but because He has the wisdom and righteousness to do what is right.

When we ask, “Father, will you remove this disease from me,” we are implicitly saying, “but your will be done.” In the act of prayer, we not only ask, but we also acknowledge that He knows best and that we will trust His answer.

When we ask for healing, the answer is always “yes, now” or “yes, in glory.” Keep praying until you’re healed—here or in heaven.

The first thing you should do is pray.

The second thing you should do is pray with others. Have you called the elders of your church together to pray for you, as we saw in James 5? If

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you have good pastors, they will love to come and lay hands on you in prayer.

The third thing you should do, in keeping with James 5, is consider if you have unrepentant sin. Again, your specific sickness could be a result of your specific sin. It probably isn't, but we should have a category for it. Ask God to search you out. Ask your pastors and friends to speak the truth to you. At a minimum, you may learn of some sin to be mortified and so walk closer to Christ.

Fourth, hold fast to Christ. If the reason God providentially sends you suffering is so that your faith will be refined, what a shame it would be to waste it.

The author of Ecclesiastes tells us:

"The heart of the wise is in a house of mourning, but the heart of fools is in a house of pleasure." — Ecclesiastes 7:4

The wise person sees the advantage of looking death and tragedy in the face, because by it they grow. The fool only seeks escape.

Don't waste your suffering. View your physical weakness as a means of clinging to the power of Christ.

Joni Eareckson Tada developed quadriplegia after a diving accident when she was 17. She's in her late 70s now. She's spent her life in a wheelchair, and rather than despising her pain, she speaks of it as God's instrument for her greater joy:

...I always say that in a way, I hope I can take my wheelchair to heaven with me—I know that's not biblically correct, but if I were able, I would have my wheelchair up in heaven right next to me when God gives me my brand new, glorified body. And I will then turn to Jesus and say, 'Lord, do you see that wheelchair right there? Well, you were right when you said that in this world we would have trouble, because that wheelchair was a lot of trouble! But Jesus, the weaker I was in that thing, the harder I leaned on you. And the harder I leaned on you, the stronger I discovered you to be. So thank you for what you did in my life through that wheelchair.'

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If all you do is seek escape in the midst of your trial by means of a screen, a bottle, a book, or a friend, you will miss out on the point of the suffering and the more valuable product it yields. Here's the point: You'll never feel the strength of Christ if you never lean on Him in pain.

Is that enough for you?

In your sickness and suffering, cling to Christ. Search his Word for sweet promises. Pray to him on your knees. Sing to him with your friends. Talk about him as you lie down and wake up. Let the pains of sickness cause you to cling to the strength of his promises and the sufficiency of his goodness.

If you rely on him, you will find that though sickness has poked holes in your life, your cup still overflows. That is how satisfying Christ is.

And lastly, long for heaven.

We get sick because we die, and we die because of sin. It should cause us to long to be free of sin, to long for death to be put away once and for all, and for us to reign in resurrection power.

Sickness is the flashing sign on your dashboard telling you-this body isn't it. This place isn't home. As such, it's a kind of gift from a very kind God.

But one day we will lay aside what is corruptible and decaying and put on what will not. Paul writes of our hope:

Listen, I am telling you a mystery: We will not all fall asleep, but we will all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we will be changed. For this corruptible body must be clothed with incorruptibility, and this mortal body must be clothed with immortality. When this corruptible body is clothed with incorruptibility, and this mortal body is clothed with immortality, then the saying that is written will take place:

Death has been swallowed up in victory.

Where, death, is your victory?

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Where, death, is your sting?

The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. 57 But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ! — 1 Corinthians 15:51-57

Sickness, especially chronic or fatal sickness, should increase our longing to be free from it and its root: sin and death. It should cause us to long for the resurrection of Christ, where the curse will be removed as far as it is found. If you never suffered in the flesh, you wouldn't want to put it off. If Earth were perfect, you'd not need heaven.

Sickness teaches you to cling to Christ. It causes us to look to him.

In John 11, Martha, Mary, and Lazarus rightly looked to Christ when Lazarus was ill. Christ gave the sisters a promise that I think we can take as our own: "This sickness will not end in death but is for the glory of God."

It doesn't always come, however, according to our timing. And so Martha and Mary both lamented to Christ, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother wouldn't have died."

Christ assured them that he is the resurrection and the life and that those who believe in him, though they die, will live, and they will live and never die.

Reflection Questions:

1. How does thinking about heaven bring you hope in your suffering?
2. In your sickness, what kinds of things do you pray for? Who do you pray with?

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CONCLUSION

No sickness can bring us to death in an absolute sense because Christ has risen from the grave. By His stripes we are healed, and one day, when He returns, we will be raised with Him, clothed in new bodies that will never decay. The healing we truly need is not found in this world, but in the world to come. By His stripes we are healed, and that healing encompasses so much more than physical restoration-it's the complete redemption of all things.

While we pray for healing now, by His stripes we are healed, and we continue to hope for the day when every sickness, every pain, and every ailment will be wiped away. Sickness, especially when faced with chronic or life-threatening conditions, gives us a unique opportunity to look forward to that day with an anticipation that others may not fully understand. It's a gift from God, one that points us to something greater.

By His stripes we are healed, and as we walk through our own struggles, we can offer healing prayers for friends, knowing that the same promise of healing extends to them. Christ's sacrifice on the cross means that His healing power is available, not just in the future but in the present as well. By His stripes we are healed, and that promise allows us to support each other with unwavering hope, even in the midst of illness.

And so we sing:

*1 On Jordan's stormy banks I stand,
and cast a wishful eye
to Canaan's fair and happy land,
where my possessions lie.*

*I am bound for the promised land,
I am bound for the promised land;*

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*oh, who will come and go with me?
I am bound for the promised land.*

*2 O'er all those wide extended plains
shines one eternal day;
there God the Son forever reigns,
and scatters night away.*

*3 No chilling winds or poisonous breath
can reach that healthful shore;
sickness and sorrow, pain and death,
are felt and feared no more.*

*4 When I shall reach that happy place,
I'll be forever blest,
for I shall see my Father's face,
and in his bosom rest.*

When will we reach that place where sickness, pain, and death no longer haunt us? By His stripes we are healed, and that day is on the horizon. As we wait, we live in the hope that one day, Christ will fully restore us, and everything broken will be made whole.

We get sick because of death, and we die because of sin. But one day, by His stripes we are healed, and Christ will put an end to both. That is our hope: a complete healing, a complete restoration, for all who believe.

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END NOTES

1. Heidelberg Catechism. *Heidelberg Catechism*. Revised Edition. Cleveland, OH: Central Publishing House, 1907.



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