

#238 “For Those with Pain that Doesn’t Go Away”

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There is such a thing as a pain that doesn't go away in this lifetime. For some, that is hard to imagine. For others, they know it is true because they experience it every day. Our body may be the temple of the Holy Spirit, but it in its mortal, perishable form is marred by sin, weakness, and eventual death. This earthly body will die one day, for then we will be given a new eternal body that will live forever with Christ in heaven (1 Corinthians 15:35-37). There all pain will be gone and all tears wiped away (Revelation 21:4). There will be no more death or sorrow, for all things will be made new. Things that doctors cannot heal on earth will be healed and restored in heaven. There are no prosthetic limbs in heaven, no wheelchairs, no eyeglasses, no eye patches, no heart monitors, no pacemakers, no splints, no shunts, no feeding tubes, etc. Heaven is not a hospital, and there are no cemeteries there. Death, pain, and sin have no reign, and even now, as we look forward to then, we can say that death has lost its sting. It has no more bite, nothing to hold over our heads to make us live in fear and hopelessness. We have the hope of heaven, the promise of new life, new health, and no more pain.

Thankfully, our bodies do heal, but there are conditions that don't go away but, rather, even get worse. Even the things that do heal may only partially heal and never be the same as they used to be. For example, my grandfather has bone cancer, and the disease can grow exceedingly painful. It is pain that won't go away entirely even with medicine. How does he handle it? How does he process it? How does he endure? He endures because he believes in a God Who leaves a legacy of goodness and mercy in his life. He endures because he believes the promise of the next life and the reality that we who love Christ will all meet again. He endures because he believes that God is faithful and true and that, even in this time, he can still be used of God. He doesn't write God off because he knows God will never write him off. There is a joy and a peace that no amount of pain will take away and that death cannot touch. However, there is still a physical pain that doesn't go away. There is another dear loved one who has a rare autonomic disorder that triggers severely high heart rates, interrupts sleep patterns, causes light-headedness and fainting, migraines, and extreme fatigue. There is no cure as the disease has only recently been understood and classified. Things will likely not get better, but they could get worse. How does one live with this pain or any other chronic condition?

I want to share some from my experience as one who has some serious health complications. Despite five eye muscles surgeries, I have incurable double vision which requires me to occlude one eye in order to function at all. I still get dizzy, I lose my spatial orientation, I can't close my eyes without feeling lost in space and nauseated, and my eye muscles will spasm with intense pain. I have to limit my activities, pace myself, and say "no" to a lot of things. It is difficult, and it has only been complicated by my foot injury that has triggered a rare nerve disorder (RSD) that makes my foot feel like it is burning. Sometimes I even feel like I am being electrocuted throughout my entire body. This might resolve, but likely things will always ache and burn despite my best efforts to do therapy. There are times when all of it becomes overwhelming, but I am learning better to endure. I am learning that my strength runs

out frequently and that my only hope is faith and prayer. Yet I feel an even deeper sorrow when I watch those near and dear to my heart suffer in many ways more severely than I, and I am helpless to do anything to help them other than pray and care for them. Their sorrow brings me sorrow, for I mourn with those who mourn (Romans 12:15). There is an emotional pain that doesn't go away.

God can and does help us endure the emotions that come with disabilities and the pain of life. The grief of what is given up because of health ailments is often hard to bear, but He can bear it even when we cannot. This is why we must cast our cares upon Him, for He cares for us (1 Peter 5:7). We must let Him bear the burdens that are too much for us to bear alone. But there is also a role for the body of Christ when our brothers and sisters suffer. As a pastor recently shared at a men's breakfast I attended, **we cannot fulfill the command of Scripture to bear one another's burdens (Galatians 6:2) unless we take the time and make the effort to know and understand what the burdens of others actually are.** Those who hurt need to be reminded that God cares for them, and the best way we can do this is as we care for them, trying our best to understand what they are going through so that we can sympathize and feel what they feel. This will likely force us out of our comfort zones, but it is commanded that we do so. God knows that we might actually be encouraged and learn much when we decide to connect with those who initially might make us feel uncomfortable.

In Jesus' day, people believed that a person was born blind because of his parents' sin or his own sin. How could a person sin even before he was born? It is certainly easier to judge somebody than to understand them. It is easier to leave the blind man on the street than to accommodate him and enable him to live a God-honoring life within his physical limitations. The church must present a different picture for the less fortunate, for, as Jesus said about the man born blind, health problems may well exist so that God can be shown glory in and through that person (John 9:1-3). It can be shown as that person fights for joy and perseverance. The works of God can be displayed through him as the world watches how the church loves him or her as their own. We as the church of Jesus Christ must not judge the disabled or push them to the side but really, truly love them by understanding them and getting to know their hearts. The disabled don't want to be the sum of their feeble parts but rather a valued member of Christ's body. They have a part to play, and they need love.

A man with Down syndrome also had an eye muscle surgery, and he asked me what happened to my eye. Then he asked me if it hurt, and then he wanted to know if it will get better. Every time I see him he asks how I am doing, and he tells me that he is praying for me. This seems so simple, but he bothered to understand, he didn't judge, he tried to sympathize, and he did what he could to demonstrate care and concern. I learned a lot from those encounters, and I only hope that I can do the same for others.

Let it be that, having trusted that all that comes our way is ordained by God as necessarily the kindest, wisest, and best, we will bow and worship, in good times and bad, standing hand in hand with those who hurt, one holy family worshipping the only wise God.