

Temptations and Opportunities of the Physically Challenged

Those of us who are physically challenged go through trials and emotional turbulence. God is with us every minute, working to bring us closer to him—while Satan is scheming to wrench us away. Being chronically ill is one of the greatest challenges a disciple can face. Sometimes we wish our illnesses were of an acute nature so we could go through them, die and go be with God. Living in constant pain or sickness without knowing when it will end, yet trusting that God truly loves us, summons every bit of faith we have...one day at a time.

I have been ill off and on most of my married life, twenty-one years now. For the past eleven years I have experienced debilitating fatigue and headaches. After many trips to various doctors with no diagnosis, I figured I was crazy or just needed to have more faith. My life as I knew it came to a grinding halt when Ryan and I got out of the ministry ten years ago. It was at this point, after moving to San Diego, that I received a diagnosis of Chronic Fatigue Syndrome. In an open-minded effort to get well, I tried many treatments: traditional therapies consisting of countless prescription drugs; physical therapy; unconventional and natural treatments such as diets, purges, chelation, herbal remedies, vitamins, colonics; a headache clinic; a muscular pain clinic; fibromyalgia treatment; yoga and psychotherapy. I didn't want to close any door that God might use to heal me. In fact, God *is* using some of these things to help me, yet, the spiritual lessons that I have learned have brought far more healing than any drug or treatment—a therapy that goes beyond the physical to the deepest part of my soul. Here are a few things God is teaching me.

Temptations of the Physically Challenged

Bitterness Toward God

A man's own folly ruins his life,
yet his heart rages against the LORD. (Proverbs 19:3)

"Woe to the man who fights with his Creator. Does the pot argue with its maker? Does the clay dispute with him who forms it, saying, 'Stop, you're doing it wrong!' or the pot exclaim, 'How clumsy can you be!'" (Isaiah 45:9, TLB)

As I began dealing with the fact that I was legitimately ill and probably not going to get better, my prayer life disintegrated and my outreach virtually stopped. I was barely even giving to my family. My energies, such as they were, were focused on myself and finding that silver bullet, that right treatment that would heal me. Becoming more and more miserable, I realized that I was very angry with God. A faithful sister, Ramona Garnier, told me to go outside, pray and express my feelings to God. I resisted, stuffed my emotions and attempted to deal with it on a rational level. Trying to find the reason it was happening, I reasoned, *Well, he allowed me to get sick because he wanted to teach me this or that or I had to get sick for certain changes to happen.* I was desperate to understand.

When I finally got down to what I was really feeling, it was like lancing an ugly sore. The words came out like putrid pus. *What terrible thing have I done that you are punishing me like this? Is it that you don't need leaders any more that you decided to make me sick?! Is this your idea of blessing a disciple's life? I've given everything I am and have to you since I was twenty-two years old, and this is what you give me in return?* The bitterness was overflowing.

After an intensive study of Job and lots of reading and counsel, I realized that *God doesn't owe me an explanation.* I do not have to know why he allows things to happen. If he wanted me to know, he would give me a revelation. My job is to trust him. His love cannot be measured in how healthy or prosperous I am. God's devotion to me is clear in his giving Jesus to die for me and forgiving me when I was a rebellious, immoral, self-serving, blaspheming girl intent on fulfilling my life as I saw fit. The proof of his caring for me doesn't get any more potent than that. He has continued to nurture and guide me for twenty-three years as a disciple even though at times I have treated him shabbily.

I remember when Bob Ricker of the San Diego church was dying. He kept repeating over and over to everyone he spoke with how much God loves him. There must have been many painful questions and temptations in his heart, such as why would God take him at thirty-seven, leaving Jayne a widow, two small children without a dad, a thriving ministry he had built, and a huge curriculum-writing responsibility without an editor and leader. But he

didn't let those questions and temptations cause him to lose his trust in God. There will always be unanswered questions. We will die with unanswered questions, but we cannot allow those questions to erode our faith in God.

Questions

1. If you had bad feelings towards God, would it be righteous to tell him? Why or why not? Are your prayers open and honest?
2. Have you asked the "Why...?" questions? What did you come up with? Are these answers your speculations or are they Scripture?
3. How do you feel toward God?
4. What would it take for you to leave God?

Additional Scriptures: Job 1-2, 40:1-8, 41:11; Jeremiah 18:1-6; Lamentations 3:31-33

Depression

A man's spirit sustains him in sickness,
but a crushed spirit who can bear? (Proverbs 18:14)

"The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are good, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eyes are bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light within you is darkness, how great is that darkness!" (Matthew 6:22-23)

Depression is a multi-faced demon. It can have physiological, psychological and spiritual roots. In fact prolonged pain and depression, not surprisingly, seem to go hand in hand. Many psychological experts say that depression can also be anger turned inward. I was angry with God and other people in my life, but didn't feel it was safe or "Christian" to express it. This brought about a crushing sense of hopelessness. Although it is at times belittled, even in the kingdom, depression is very real and often debilitating.

To a person who is experiencing depression, the glass is not just half empty...

It is never going to be full again.

It is my fault that it happened.

I don't have any way to stop the water that's in it now from evaporating so it's just a matter of time before the whole thing goes dry.

I should be able to fill it up but I can't; this is just one example of how bad I really am.

People would be better off without me, and my life is not worth living.

Some of these thoughts may sound humorous, but a person who is seriously depressed sees no humor in these thoughts at all; it is how they really think. Satan's greatest victory is to get someone so warped in her thinking that she would take her life. I've considered this more than once. He turns right into wrong and wrong into right. He makes life seem like slow torture and death like relief. Sometimes the pain of depression is so excruciating that you can almost feel your heart breaking inside your chest. We want to blame ourselves, our illness, God, our family, the medical profession or uncompassionate disciples. The enemy is Satan—and Satan wants me to believe that God has lost my file somewhere and doesn't really care if he finds it. He wants me to believe his lie and separate myself from God.

Some of us don't go so far as to think of killing ourselves, but instead we are the walking dead, going through the motions yet being faithless and hopeless. Satan's purpose is to get us to lose hope to whatever degree he can. The best therapy for depression is to change your mind, change how you think. Most of the time we need help with this because our perceptions can get so distorted and are often deeply rooted. We need each other for reality checks. Even in the best of times, there will always be sin, sadness and negative things vying for our focus. Proverbs 11:27 reminds us that we will find what we are looking for, so we need to choose to look for the good:

He who seeks good finds goodwill,
but evil comes to him who searches for it.

Some people want to know when to seek help from a professional. Hopefully the number of disciples who are professionally trained counselors will be growing in the future, but in some places this service is not available. If your depression significantly affects your relationships, job or other important areas of your life, causes you considerable distress over a period of time, or you have recurring thoughts of suicide, then it is time to get professional help. Enlist the help of friends to find suitable counseling.

Along with the depression often comes a deep sense of shame. We feel somehow it is our fault, that we deserve to be sick because of things we have done or just because we are “bad” people. Satan often uses experiences in our childhood to wound us and establish a shame-based perception of ourselves. All the more reason to let the cross touch our hearts and see the truth: God loves us and wants to bless us in ways we never dreamed possible. He wants to heal the past and give us a fresh start. Let God change the “eyes of your heart” to see his love and his caring ways every day of your life.

What about medication? Having been on and off antidepressants for many years, my opinion is this: It is not a sin to take medicine for depression if you need it, and you should do what God leads you to do through your doctor (and through prayer and advice!). Of course, it is important to have a doctor that you trust is not “pill happy.” I believe prayer is a vital part of choosing a doctor.

Having said that, here is the bottom line for me: medication, if it is doing its job, is merely going to emotionally bring you up from the ocean floor to the surface so that you can learn to swim. It can bring you to the starting line, but it cannot run the race for you. Nobody can run the race but *you*, and you cannot run it without God. Taking a pill will not change the way you think—and thinking is the chief component of depression.

One of the hardest things for a depressed person to accept is that the Spirit of God will enable them to have control over their thoughts. You are more than what you think. You are more than what you feel (1 John 3:19-20). The Spirit of God in you has all the power (and sanity) of God himself. Colossians 2:9-10 says that Jesus has all the power and character of God (his fullness), and we have Jesus in us! It is like sitting in a cold, dark house with no electricity, no way to get warm, cook or wash. What a miserable life. If someone said you should make yourself something to eat, you would say, “I can’t.” If they said, bring in some light, you would say, “I can’t. There is a little candle but it is going to burn up soon, it’s hopeless.” You could see no way to function. What if someone said the electricity has been on all along, you just *thought* it was out. The reality for a Christian is that we are full of power and wired for maximum wattage “24/7.” We have everything we need for life and godliness. The power is on all the time. The lights work, the heater runs, the stove is ready to use. Our challenge is to realize this and fight against the way Satan deceives us with an impotent mindset.

The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ. (2 Corinthians 10:4-5)

The cognitive aspect of overcoming depression is important. Allowing God to reshape the patterns of your mind through the Scriptures is the key. I believe he uses people to help us with this because so many times we cannot see how skewed our minds have become. God can help you learn to change the way you think, and when your thinking changes to be more spiritually accurate, you will be better able to overcome the schemes of Satan.

Questions

1. How does this section apply to you?
2. On a scale of one to ten, how hopeful do you feel right now? Why?
3. Are you ever tempted to give up? To what extent?
4. Who are your real enemies? (shame, fear, feelings of powerlessness, hopelessness, etc.)
5. Think of a person who can help you change your thinking, and share these feelings with her.

Additional Scriptures: Psalm 112:4, Lamentations 3:19-23, Habakkuk 3:17-19, 2 Corinthians 5:16-17

Self-Pity

When Jesus saw him lying there and learned that he had been in this condition for a long time, he asked him, “Do you want to get well?”

“Sir,” the invalid replied, “I have no one to help me into the pool when the water is stirred. While I am trying to get in, someone else goes down ahead of me.” (John 5:6-7)

If the should foot say, “Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,” it would not for that reason cease to be part of the body. (1 Corinthians 12:15)

Nobody understands what I’m going through. “Each heart knows its own bitterness, and no one else can share its joy” (Proverbs 14:10). *Nobody really knows how I feel and the intensity of the pain I deal with.* This is very true. Nobody, that is, but God. I don’t like to think of myself as self-pitying, but when the cataloging of my afflictions and the recounting of how people have misunderstood or hurt me keeps going through my mind, I know I’m busted. (See how Elijah, after a bout with fatigue and hopelessness, repeatedly journals his woes in 1 Kings 19:10, 14.) Self-pity focuses on the bad, the weak, the sin, the hurts, everything opposite of Philippians 4:8. Self-pity causes you to be defined by what you cannot do, how much you hurt or how much you have been abused instead of letting yourself see the good that God is doing all around you.

I went through a time of feeling very guilty about being sick and the effect I was having on my family. I regretted that I was restricting our family life by my limitations and giving my kids a sick mom as a role model. Once after coming home from the park where I watched parents and kids play soccer, Joe, my then young son, said, “I wish you could play soccer like the other moms.” Instead of letting him express his feelings, I jumped in and scolded, “Be thankful you have a mother and we’re not digging up roots for dinner somewhere in Africa!” I angrily reacted out of my guilt of not being the athletic mom I thought I should be. Sometimes self-pity leads us to envy those who are healthy. Comparing your life to others is a trap of Satan to keep us from finding peace.

God knows what he is doing, and he works all things together for good. If I had not gotten ill, I might not have spent the time with my kids that they needed when they were young. If we were to see all he is doing to help us in our lives, we would probably be in shock! Illness changes our lives and dreams, but it doesn’t have to destroy us! True, I cannot do the things I used to do, but there are things I can do now, that I couldn’t do before—like helping people who are really hurting. I am a better mom because I am more able to prepare my kids for adulthood now that I am in touch with some of the deeper issues of life. I knew a lot of appropriate scriptures but they had no personal meaning. Through the weakening of my body, God has strengthened my spirit, and there is nothing more valuable than that.

Questions

1. Have you experienced self-pity lately? How?
2. How do you feel about the effect of your physical challenge on those around you?
3. Do you truly believe God understands what you are going through, hurts with you and wants to help you? Is that enough?
4. Do you find yourself envying healthy people? Do you confess it as a sin?
5. How has God strengthened your spirit in the last few months?
6. What is the best thing spiritually that has come out of your physical challenge?

Additional Scriptures: Proverbs 14:30, Philippians 4:11-12, James 3:14

Entitlement

“Who has ever given to God,
that God should repay him?” (Romans 11:35)

You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather, serve one another in love. (Galatians 5:13)

As physically challenged disciples, we want people to be compassionate and to trust us when we say we can or cannot do something—after all, “Love always trusts” (1 Corinthians 13:7). That is true and right. But we must never take advantage of someone’s trust in order to get out of doing something that we decided we really aren’t obligated to do. Sometimes we feel that because we are physically challenged, we are already carrying a cross heavier than anyone should have to bear so we don’t have to really be a team player. We reason that our role is to be a longsuffering, yet stoically persevering, disciple—a paragon of martyrdom. We are “the special case,” the loop hole that states that if you are physically challenged then God doesn’t require you to be a full disciple. We expect the boundaries of discipleship to be moved for us because we are afflicted. When we feel too much is being asked of us, are we open and do we go to God; or do we play our trump, the “victim card” that “wins” the hand and justifies our rebellion?

Paul says in 1 Corinthians 10:13 that there is nothing happening to you that has not happened to someone else before. Sometimes in our minds we think we are being targeted by the “Demon of Ongoing Hardship.” We think we could win a “Who’s Got the Worst Problems?” contest (or at least make the finals). But the scripture says that our problems (even though legitimate) are not unique. Other people have experienced them and overcome. God is faithful. He will not let things go on to the extent that you will be crushed. He always provides an escape, so you can stand up under Satan’s pressure.

What about Jesus? If anyone was entitled, he was. In Philippians 2:6-7 it says that Jesus did not cling to his rights or privileges. He had the power of heaven and earth. He did not have to die, experience temptations of the flesh (sexual, pride, greed, etc.) or ever be separated from his Father. Yet, he gave it all up to come down into the trenches of humanity, daily giving up his freedom to redeem a thankless people and show them a picture of what God is like.

The stipulations of following Jesus are no different for us than for a healthy person. We simply need to implement them more creatively. It is not *if* I’m going to be a disciple but *how*. By the power of the Spirit, we can still reach out, still love our brothers and sisters, still be an involved part of the church in ways that God will make clear, even if we don’t make all the activities. Even with my physical challenge and its accompanying temptations and the demands of having teenagers, by God’s grace, I am more fruitful now than I have ever been in my Christian life.

Questions

1. Do you ever find yourself feeling like “Martha Martyr”? “Wendy Whiner”? “Sally Stoic”? Explain.
2. How did Jesus deal with his entitlement? (Philippians 2: 5-11)
3. What “loopholes” have you written into your life? In what ways do you feel exempt from participating because of your physical challenge?
4. What is God trying to say to you about entitlement?

Additional Scriptures: Proverbs 16:18, 29:23

Fear and Anxiety

I sought the LORD, and he answered me;
he delivered me from all my fears. (Psalm 34:4)

“In repentance and rest is your salvation,
in quietness and trust is your strength. (Isaiah 30:15)

Anxiety is as debilitating as a physical illness. It is a spiritual panic, a faithless response to a challenging situation. There is nothing more miserable than being in the grip of fear. Sometimes we are like King Asa: “Though his disease was severe, even in his illness he did not seek help from the LORD, but only from physicians” (2 Chronicles 16:12). At times I have put more faith in doctors and therapeutic regimens than in God. Oh, I would pray for guidance and blessing but my hopes were more in the process than the Provider. “Unless the LORD builds the house, its builders labor in vain” (Psalm 127:1a). God is the great healer. He uses treatments to help us. Too often we “run after all these things” like pagans (Matthew 6:32) and then wonder why the storm demolishes our house. Medical treatments, as good as they are, do not provide the peace that passes understanding.

At times we get down on our knees to pray and get up with the heart of an atheist! It is like we never prayed—our faith is so low. Faith is believing that after you ask God for help, he *will indeed* help you. Faith is not, “Maybe he will,” or “Wouldn’t it be nice if he...” Realize that it may not be the way you had planned or the answer you wanted, but he will always give you the fruit of the Spirit when you pray for that fruit with a humble heart. At times I have caught myself thinking, *I’m forty-six now; how can I face thirty more years of fatigue? What is going to happen to me if Ryan dies; how can I support the family? How can I raise the kids by myself with this illness?* Worries and fears not given over to God will only make our health worse and destroy us spiritually.

In 1999, I went through severe trials with my family and health, yet I experienced peace like I have never before felt. Even while waves crash into the boat, God longs to calm the storm of fear in our hearts. He will always give us the ability to handle whatever comes. He wants to give us peace and joy. I have filled so many prayer journals giving my cares over to him. He wants to help us “overcome evil with good” by calling on him in faith. “If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!” (Luke 11:13).

Consider Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane. He was so stressed that he was literally sweating blood. He was overwhelmed with sadness to the point of dying from it (severe depression?). What did he do? He could have freaked out and run away. He could have gotten angry and gone into a tirade or lashed out at his unsupportive friends. Instead, he decided to pray, even protectively encouraging his buddies to pray for themselves as he walked away. After he prayed once, it says an angel appeared and strengthened him. Wow! What would that feel like—to be strengthened by an angel? Did he jump up, high-five the angel and say, “I’m healed! It’s going to be all right.”? No, the strength he received was to enable him to go back and pray again “more earnestly,” to persevere through the anguish (Luke 22:39-44). God gave Jesus the staying power he needed—and he will do the same for us.

Questions

1. What is your first response when you receive bad news about your health? Then what do you do?
2. Do you find yourself worrying? About what?
3. Read Philippians 4:4-7. How does God guard your heart?
4. How do you rate your prayer life? Where is your faith *after* you pray?
5. Which fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23) do you most want to grow in?

Additional Scriptures: Psalm 46:1-2, 94:17-19, 112:7-8; Proverbs 3:21-26; Isaiah 41:10, 43:1-2; 1 Peter 5:7

Deceitfulness

Surely you desire truth in the inner parts;
you teach me wisdom in the inmost place. (Psalm 51:6)

If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. (1 John 1:8)

There are different ways of being deceitful. Sometimes we deceive ourselves by denying that we have a physical problem or the severity of it. We don’t want to face the possibility of cancer or something life altering, so we pretend that nothing is wrong. At one point I had an elder’s wife, our regional leaders, and my husband all telling me I should take the medication recommended to me by four different doctors. Why did they have to come at me in force? Because I didn’t think I needed it. I was afraid taking drugs would mean I was weak. I could handle things myself. My pride and denial were making me deceive myself. Also, as the illness progresses, we sometimes feel that we cannot cope with another loss, so we ignore the symptoms and do not act responsibly with our health. Denial is self-deception, a fear of the truth. With God’s help we can face the unacceptable.

Sometimes we hide behind the illness and use it as an excuse not to do the things we really don’t want to do anyway. Our hearts become divided. Do I protect myself and stay “safe” or trust God and his people to lead me? Sometimes we don’t express our feelings because we don’t want to complain or we don’t want people to think we are whining. But then we end up with festering attitudes. The truth is that those of us who are physically challenged have sin just like everyone else, and we need to have the spiritual integrity to confess it. Sometimes our minds and hearts get in a big confusing muddle of pain, disillusionment, fear and self-protection. The best way to get things sorted out is to share how you feel and start confessing sin. Satan always works the night shift. He hides in the dark crevices of our closed mouths.

Many years ago, Ryan talked with someone who was very depressed. He spent several hours trying to help him and never heard back about his progress. Much later it became known that this person had loads of hidden sin that eventually caused him to lose his marriage and family. Unconfessed sin will affect your mind, emotions, body and spirit.

The life of a physically challenged disciple naturally provides many potential crevices of darkness with the isolation, pain and disappointments we experience. Fight back. Tell the truth. Own up to your sin. Psalm 32 says that having unconfessed sin affects your health; it saps your strength and makes you feel as if you are wasting away. I think one reason that I am able to do more now than in the past is that I am dealing with the sin in my heart, and that is giving me more energy through the Spirit.

Questions

1. In what ways have you been in denial? Deceitful?
2. What is the hardest thing for you to face about your life or future?
3. Do you ever protect yourself in wrong ways or for wrong reasons? How?
4. What would God say to you right now about your heart?
5. Do you regularly confess your sins? Are there sins in your life that you have been afraid to confess?

Additional Scriptures: *Psalm 15:1-2, 86:11; James 3:14; 1 John 1:5-7*

Unrighteous Escapes

“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.” (Matthew 11:28)

“Everything is permissible for me”—but not everything is beneficial. “Everything is permissible for me”—but I will not be mastered by anything. (1 Corinthians 6:12)

The proper use of medication is an ever-present issue in the life of many physically- challenged disciples. One of the hardest areas for the physically challenged, especially those with chronic pain and sleep problems, is to learn how to manage their prescription drugs without becoming addicted or psychologically dependent. I could not begin to tell you how many different prescription drugs I have tried over the years. One thing I know is that you have to ask yourself, “Why am I taking this?” Am I taking this because there is legitimate pain that I can no longer handle, or am I taking this because I am weary of fighting and I want to escape? Is this a spiritual anesthetic? Only God can fill the deep needs of our souls. Using a drug to fill a spiritual void is a sin and will only prolong the pain because now you have added guilt and a possible addiction. Do I go to the medicine cabinet before I go to God? Do I thank God for the technology that he allowed to be discovered so I could have this great treatment? Do I ask him to guide me in the righteous use of this gift?

What about food? Many of us go to food for comfort and end up hurting ourselves by what we eat. We aggravate our illness or create new ones by not being self-controlled in our diets. A few days of poor dietary choices can set me back significantly. At times in the past I’ve resented having to add such a restricted lifestyle to all my other challenges; I felt like God had me on a short leash. Technically everyone is on a short leash. We can do nothing without God. Maybe those of us with constant health choices to make are the more fortunate because we are consciously and absolutely unable to function without calling out to God for his strength.

At times, in an effort to avoid pain pills, I would lose myself in a novel. After a while, the “losing myself” (from the emotional pain of my life) became as attractive as the alleviation of physical pain. In fact, losing myself would numb me in many ways. I had found a refuge but it was not God. Consequently, my life was not blessed like it could have been (Psalm 34:8). One day I was reading Jonah 2:8: “Those who cling to worthless idols forfeit the grace that could be theirs.” I became convicted that I was trading the grace of God for my escapes, which is a really poor exchange.

Many of us who are physically challenged have a problem with insomnia. What do you do when you are up at night, all alone? It is very easy to slip into entertaining ourselves by watching or reading things we shouldn’t or ruminating about our sorry plight. Even benign things can take the place of using the time to draw closer to God. I’ve made a commitment not to get into worldly things if I can’t sleep. I can write cards to people, brainstorm ways

to encourage others, pray, or read my Bible or some good spiritual books. Let's not give Satan an appointment with us after bedtime.

God wants to be involved in our every need. He wants to give us discipline to say no to unrighteous ways of coping. Reach out for him. When we shut God out of the process or use sinful ways to deal with our pain, we grieve the Spirit and keep God from giving us true peace, even in our distress.

Questions

1. What are the issues you are facing with medications?
2. Do you thank God for these medications and ask for guidance in using them properly? Why or why not?
3. Are there areas of your life that are out of control? In what ways would God have you draw more self-control from his Spirit?
4. Where do you usually go for comfort? Does it work?
5. How could prayer be more a part of your "therapy"?

Additional Scriptures: *Psalm 31, 121; 2 Corinthians 1:3; 1 Timothy 5:23*

The Opportunities of the Physically Challenged

Being physically challenged has brought many opportunities for spiritual growth into my life, many of which I did not consider a blessing. They have, however, turned out to be some of the most precious treasures in my life. This growth was well worth the grief it took to acquire it. Consider the following opportunities that your physical challenge offers you.

Experience Grace

For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: "The righteous will live by faith." (Romans 1:17)

If, in fact, Abraham was justified by works, he had something to boast about—but not before God. What does the Scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness." (Romans 4:2-3)

There was a time when I was very grateful for God's grace but was not desperately dependent on it. I could function in every aspect as a disciple, lead people and raise my family. As my illness grew more debilitating, I could no longer "perform" as I had before. I felt worthless, and finally came to see that I got my self-esteem from what I could do. Since I could no longer do the things I once did, then what use was I? This propelled me into a study of grace and a complete reevaluation of my perception of my worth to God. I began to see that God wants my heart, my faith, my trust. He will work out all the other details.

Seven years ago, Suzanne Atkins, a thirty-two year old disciple with two small boys, became ill. She was hospitalized, and three and a half weeks later died of cancer. I remember going to see her in the hospital. She was discouraged and very concerned about her relationship with God because she could not "do" anything. (Suzanne had always been very active in the ministry.) I asked her if, when she was baptized, she had repented and given her whole life over to God.

"Yes, I did," she replied.

"Then you were forgiven, and that's what you've got to hold on to now, by faith."

We read some scriptures, and from that point on she was at peace, trusting God to keep his promise of taking her to be with him forever. In fact, even though she was bald and bloated, she became radiantly beautiful (Psalm 34:5) because she accepted that the shame of her sin was taken away on the cross. I'll never forget the glow on her face and the brilliance of her blue eyes. She arranged a party for one of her friends in her hospital room. She called old friends, trying to get them to church up until the time she died. Once she trusted that she could not earn her salvation with her "works," she was able to see the things she *could* do—and she did them in joy and gratitude. The words of the psalmist show us clearly that God does not delight in what we do; he delights in who we are:

His pleasure is not in the strength of the horse,

nor his delight in the legs of a [woman];
the LORD delights in those who fear him,
who put their hope in his unfailing love. (Psalm 147:10-11, emphasis added)

As physically challenged disciples, we have the opportunity to extend grace to others. Sometimes we react to each other, yes, even our own physically challenged sisters, with an attitude of “Well, I’m being tough, why aren’t you? Just pull it together!” Sometimes it is easy to feel this way toward healthy people who have the flu or an obviously short-term illness. We have many opportunities to show grace to those who are insensitive or who simply do not understand what we are going through. When I am not letting God’s grace permeate my heart, I do not extend it to others. It is a sign that I’m spiritually grinding it out at the salt mines, not letting God lead me to the oasis.

Righteousness comes from God. By faith I believe that he makes me righteous. In all those times in my day when I am faced with reacting out of my sinful nature, I can choose to obey, choose to believe because of all that he has done for me. What freedom! I am secure in his love for me. I have already won the spiritual lottery. Can I share my winnings with you?

Questions

1. How would you describe grace?
2. In what ways has God shown you his grace?
3. Does Suzanne’s example call you higher? How?
4. Do you really believe you are forgiven? Why or why not?
5. If not, who could you talk with about it? When will you?

Additional Scriptures: *Romans 4:18-25, 11:5-6; Galatians 2:21, 3:10-11*

Recognize Sin

A rebuke impresses a man of discernment
more than a hundred lashes a fool. (Proverbs 17:10)

Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. (Romans 12:9b)

As we in California know, when the internal pressure inside the earth reaches a certain point, an earthquake will occur along a weak crack—a fault line. Physical illness is like that increasing pressure in your life. Pretty soon, you will be able to map out your fault lines because that is the first place you will blow. The San Andreas fault is no comparison to the faults that have erupted in my life as I have reacted sinfully during my illness. I have seen the shallowness of my faith—how it could not support an open-ended illness. I’ve seen how I can become irritable, withdrawn and self-protective. At times I have robbed my husband of a loving wife and my kids of a happy, involved mom. I have seen how easy it is for me to put myself in God’s place by deciding what my future should hold. It is a blessing that he has shown me my faults because those are the things that could keep me from being happy, and more than anything, keep me from getting to heaven.

God brought our beloved sister, Irene Gurganus, back from the doors of death last year. She says that it is extremely difficult for her to have therapists come every day to her house and teach her again how to walk, cook and take care of herself. Being eighty, she wanted to stay in bed and rest. She found herself questioning God as to why he would save her life and then give her a debilitating handicap requiring a grueling daily rehabilitation regimen for months. Wouldn’t it have been easier to let her die when she was unconscious anyway? Then she realized her sin of ungratefulness. She prayed a lot and began to count her blessings. Now the worst is over and she is mobile again. More importantly, she is thankful.

Irene also has had to deal with the process of aging. For example, she can no longer drive. At first she fought the dependency of having to ask for rides, but now she has come to accept that aging is part of God’s plan. As she says, if she fights this—she is fighting God. Again, she counts her blessings.

Where are your fault lines? Mine are laid open before you and I challenge you as a fellow physically challenged disciple to pray to see your sinful reactions (you know you have them) and to repent daily. We fight a lot of things—insurance companies, our limitations and the fast pace of life—but our primary battle should be against our sin, against the things that steal our joy, sap our strength and weaken our impact on the lost.

Questions

1. In what ways has having a physical challenge put pressure on you? On your family?
2. How does Satan usually come after you?
3. What are the cracks you have seen as a result of the pressure? (i.e., your sinful nature)
4. Are you fighting God? How?
5. Are you grateful to have your sin exposed so you can repent and grow?

Additional Scriptures: *Exodus 17:1-3, Matthew 7:24-27, Mark 4:18-19*

Live in a Miracle

But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. (1 Corinthians 1:27)

But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. For when I am weak, then I am strong. (2 Corinthians 12:9, 10b)

There are many paradoxes in the Bible. God seems to delight in them. An uneducated, manual laborer changing the course of history. A shameful, criminal execution bringing resurrection to all mankind. When I have no strength or ability, God uses me most powerfully. I consider myself one of the Biblically "weak." I am weak physically (definitely) and emotionally (at times). Since I have stopped trying to be "super disciple" and have let God be my strength, he has made miraculous changes in my heart and life. I am doing things that I could not have imagined before. Why? Not because I have been healed, but because I have finally acknowledged what God has always known to be true—I have no power, no talent, no strength apart from him.

A miracle we can experience any day is having the Holy Spirit pray for us when we are disturbed and unable to pray:

In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express. And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God's will" (Romans 8:26-27).

When we don't know the words to say, he acts like an interpreter of the deep emotions of our hearts and presents them to God as an advocate.

I have a small part-time business supervising parents who are ordered by the court to be monitored when they visit their children. One day while driving to a visit, I wished I could turn around and go home. I felt extremely tired and confused, definitely not up to the constant attentiveness and activity of following around a small boy and his parent. I was fearful that I would do a poor job, missing some important interactions or just not be able to keep up with their pace. Since these visits are court ordered and highly structured, there was no way I could cancel. I was in too much of a muddle in my mind to pray a long prayer, so I just said, "Help me, God" and put on some Christian music. As it played, I forced myself to sing along. After about ten minutes, I began to feel stronger. By the time I arrived at Chucky Cheese, God had filled me with the Spirit and given me a joy and energy that was miraculous. I was a different person, still tired but now with a faithful and happy attitude that God was right there helping me, and it would be okay.

How many times have I felt impotent, tired and unable to face something imminent in my day—a meeting, a job, another doctor's appointment, a discipling time, a study, whatever? And then, when I have called out to God (sometimes with a long prayer, sometimes just a "Help!") and either sung songs of praise or put on Christian music to be filled with the Spirit (Ephesians 5:18-19), he always resurrects my faith and gives me a new, courageous heart.

God can change your weariness to worship. What miracle does he have in store for you today?

Questions

1. Why might you doubt that God's grace is sufficient for you? What does it mean to you that it is?
2. In what ways has God shown you that in your weakness you are strong?
3. Why does God want us to sing?
4. What miracle (apart from being healed) would you like to see God do in your life today? This week? This year?

Additional Scriptures: *Jeremiah 29:11, Psalm 40:5, 1 Corinthians 2:9*

Discover New Gifts

But in fact God has arranged the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be. (1 Corinthians 12:18)

For if the willingness is there, the gift is acceptable according to what one has, not according to what he does not have. (2 Corinthians 8:12)

Many of us grieve the loss of what we can no longer do, the death of the dreams and expectations we had for our lives. This often becomes depression (anger turned inward) and we feel useless. Our God is the King of Resurrection, the Mighty Recycler. He can raise our physically challenged life from the dead and give us a new role, tapping gifts we never realized we had. Before I got sick, I was not a person to sit around for very long. I liked to stay busy with the ministry and countless household projects and renovations, not to mention gardening, crafts and thrift shopping. Becoming ill has drastically changed my life, and I discovered gifts that I would have never noticed living that busy lifestyle. For example, I love to read and write. I have also been able to clear out the "fun but not eternal" things that used to keep me so busy. Would the whole kingdom (and those generations to come) be so incredibly blessed with the wisdom from our DPI books had Tom Jones not gotten Multiple Sclerosis and had to "slow down"?

Diane Goff was an interpreter and co-leader of the deaf ministry in the church for many years before her physical challenge forced her to stop. This was extremely disappointing. For a while, she felt adrift and useless. Battling depression and fighting to keep her faith she thought, *I can't do anything so why bother even trying?* As she learned to trust that God knows what he is doing, she began to look for other ways to serve. Diane had always been good at crafts, and someone asked her to make some things for the children's ministry. Through this she and her husband, Dana, got involved with the Kingdom Kid's Curriculum helping with supplies, organization and distribution—very important behind-the-scene responsibilities. They are invaluable in the running of our children's program. Diane says, "I'm amazed at what I can do when my heart is right. When my heart is focused on the teachers and the kids, I have much more energy. It is not that I *have* to do this, but I'm happy that I *can* do something to serve."

God always has a plan to prosper you and meet the needs of the kingdom. *You cannot be happy without a place and a way to serve.* Prayer warriors are just as important as those on the front lines. In fact, there could be some debate about where the "front lines" really are. We are all one body. God wants to reveal his plan for you because he wants you to be happy and useful. Let God reinvent you.

Questions

1. Have you grieved over losses as a result of your physical challenge? How did you come to accept the changes?
2. What are the essential things in your life now?
3. What gifts have you discovered since you have been sick or injured?
4. What would you like to do to serve in the kingdom?

Additional Scriptures: *Romans 12:3-8, 1 Corinthians 12:4-6, 1 Peter 4:10*

Develop Compassion

When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them and healed their sick. (Matthew 14:14)

We have different gifts, according to the grace given us. If a man's gift is...showing mercy, let him do it cheerfully. (Romans 12:6-8)

Before I got sick, I thought if you were ill you went to the doctor, got some medicine and then you got well. I had no real concept of chronic illness, except a vague suspicion of hypochondria. When I was growing up, complaining about ailments was mocked, and malingering was considered a cardinal sin. Being physically challenged has opened the doors of my heart in so many ways. I was accustomed to running on a fast track with little time for prolonged interruptions. In many ways I was skimming along the surface of life, trying to avoid the deeper issues. I remember when I was newly pregnant with Joe, an older brother, Harold, came to dinner at our house. He had cerebral palsy. He was in a wheelchair, drooled constantly, had hands that trembled and made a big mess when he ate, and he smelled bad. I tried to eat at the same table but got nauseous and had to vomit. I remember struggling with the situation and thought, *What if that were you, Linda? Would you want people being grossed out by you when you were doing the best you could? Would you want people to avoid you? He didn't ask to be that way.* I decided that I just needed to throw up and go on, asking God to change my heart.

Glen Kirkpatrick, a former law enforcement officer, became a disciple after being diagnosed with Hodgkins Disease. Because of how God had worked in his life and illness, he was able to help Andy Hicks, seventy-eight, (also formerly in law enforcement) become a disciple. Andy was blind and paralyzed from the waist down. Glen said that he was able to learn compassion for Andy as he gave him shots, fed him, listened to him and gave him rides to church in his special van. He was then able to bring in other brothers to help Andy, discipling them in how to have compassion.

Consider Jesus having been awake for two days—bleeding, beaten to an inch of his life and abandoned by all his friends. He was about as physically challenged as you can get, almost dead, hanging on nails. Instead of pulling inward to survive like most of us would do, he sees his mother and remembers that she will need a protector in her old age and tells John to take care of her. A criminal who had belittled him earlier has a change of heart and defends him to his fellow thief, then asks Jesus to remember him when he goes into heaven. Jesus jumps on that last minute contrition and forgives the man, comforting him with the assurance of being with him in paradise that very day. What a great model of compassion during physical struggles! What a great model of unconditional love.

Pain and struggle are part of the lives of so many. Jesus always responded with compassion to sick or handicapped people. He was never disgusted—even with nasty, contagious skin conditions. He was never insensitive or contemptuous—even when people were ungrateful for their healing. I believe that he “comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God” (2 Corinthians 1:4). When we feel Jesus' compassion for us, we can pass it on to others.

Questions

1. Before you got ill (or before you were a disciple), what was your concept of people with chronic illness?
2. How has being physically challenged opened the doors of your heart?
3. Is there someone who is physically challenged that you find it hard to treat compassionately?
4. How could your compassion be a blessing to others?

Additional Scriptures: Psalm 116:5, 145:9; Isaiah 49:15; Matthew 20:34

Be Part of God's Special Forces

If one falls down,
his friend can help him up.
But pity the man who falls
and has no one to help him up! (Ecclesiastes 4:10)

The Sovereign LORD has given me an instructed tongue,
to know the word that sustains the weary. (Isaiah 50:4)

Be Part of God's Special Forces

My cousin, Mike, is a high ranking officer in the Army. His job is to take a special unit into foreign countries who have experienced a natural disaster, famine or devastation from war. They help rebuild homes, transport food, bring medical support and generally assist the people in getting their country back together. His units are trained to meet all kinds of needs in all kinds of situations. In many war-torn countries, they go in and train the civilians on how to spot and disarm landmines. They show them how, but do not do it for them.

Those of us who have been dealing with physical challenges have a special calling. We are specially trained to recognize the needs of our fellow strugglers. We know what it is like to experience the losses, pain, fears, anger and all the ups and downs of a physically challenged life. Like the special forces, we comfort, love, support and train, but it is up to each physically challenged person to, with God's help, remove their own landmines. Each one of us in our hearts has to come to faith in God in our distinctive situation, while drawing encouragement from and sometimes being carried by each other.

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we have received from God. For just as the sufferings of Christ flow over into our lives, so also through Christ our comfort overflows. (2 Corinthians 1:3-5)

Two fellow special team members have gone on to be with God, but they taught us by the way they handled their physical challenge and death. Nidia Feast became a Christian as she was dying of cancer. She was able to attend one Women's Day and one service before she was incapacitated. Her husband persecuted her faith and was a bitter man. The disciples served her family (she had two sons) with meals. Staying strong in her faith, she died five months later. Three months after her death, her husband agreed to study the Bible and became a disciple—and then one of her sons also became a disciple!

Amy Calkins lived with cancer off and on for five years. She went through chemo and radiation yet was always cheerful. She hardly ever missed a service. I remember at our last marriage retreat, she was in her wheelchair with the oxygen tank strapped on and the tube in her nose, her denim hat on with a big flower (she had lost her hair), out on the dance floor with her husband, Will. She was dancing with her upper body, Will was dancing while spinning her around and popping wheelies with her chair. Those of us looking on held our breath that she would survive the stunts, but they were having a blast. She went home to be with God a year ago and left her joyful legacy with her two girls, who are very active in the youth ministry.

Recently a long time friend and disciple called me very distraught, mildly hysterical. She had just found out that her Hepatitis C had progressed to the point that the doctor prescribed debilitating chemotherapy (Interferon) for a year. The same day she was told that because of the degenerative arthritis in her knees she would have to permanently go into a wheelchair, or arm brace crutches for short treks. The doctors said a knee replacement would help, but that she was too young, refusing to think about it until another ten to fifteen years. How do you think she was feeling? What would you have said if you were me? She was grieving, angry and emotional. How could she continue to work in the children's ministry, which she loves so dearly? How can she face giving herself shots that produce nausea and fatigue for a whole year? Why is God letting this happen now? Since I didn't and probably will never know the answer to those questions, I decided to just listen while conveying my love and support. Knowing how it feels when you are in an emotional crisis, I refrained from rushing over with a copy of this article or giving her an exegetical lesson on faith or insisting she pray with me. She knows all this anyway and it was not the time.

Later she read in Tom Jones' book *Mind Change*,
We need to change our minds about life. Life is a gift. It comes from someone else, and it comes to accomplish his purposes, not ours. When you change your mind about this, it changes the way you look at a lot of things.¹
I remember the first time I read that book. What an encouragement! He was willing to open up and help us understand the games Satan is trying to play between our ears (and our hearts). As Tom shared about his life and the lives of others, God's Spirit was able to minister to me. Again, when I listened to his tapes, *Finding God in Pain and*

Thomas A. Jones, *Mind Change; The Overcomer's Handbook, Second Edition* (Billercia, Mass.: Discipleship Publications International, 1997), 73.

Problems, my heart was disciplined.² He is a great example of using what he has learned to help others. Satan wants us to be self-centered and to isolate ourselves, but true joy is found in openly giving and taking care of others.

Questions

1. In what ways are you uniquely qualified to help others?
2. Name a specific defeat and a victory that you could share to help someone.
3. Do you feel a bond with your fellow physically challenged disciples? In what ways could you help “rescue” other physically challenged disciples? In what ways could you encourage them to help each other?

Additional Scriptures: *Romans 13:8, 2 Corinthians 1:8-11, Colossians 3:16, 1 Thessalonians 5:11*

Bear Fruit

Then Jesus came to them and said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.” (Matthew 28:18-20)

“Neither this man nor his parents sinned,” said Jesus, “but this happened so that the work of God might be displayed in his life.” (John 9:3)

Everything God does is to “bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ” (Ephesians 1:10). God truly wants all men and women to be saved. He wants us to have the attitude of Paul when he says, “What has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel” (Philippians 1:12). Too often we let our challenges isolate us or make us self-absorbed. Then we end up too stifled by doubts to share our faith.

I remember being in an emergency room with my friend, Angie, while she was experiencing a debilitating migraine. In between throwing up, getting shots and taking medication, she managed to share her faith with someone. I felt so convicted about the times I let my fatigue and moods keep me from speaking about my God.

Bob Ricker, although with God for two years now, is still bearing fruit. The last Sunday he was able to come to services he had six guests with him. From his deathbed, he was adamant about Jayne, his wife, following up with his hair stylist. After Bob died, the man and his wife were baptized. They are now in the full-time ministry as interns, bearing fruit themselves.

A few months ago, Ryan and I decided to go and meet some people since we had moved into a new neighborhood. When the time came to go out, I was exhausted. I asked Rachel to go with him and, as I was praying, they met a family pulling in with their moving van. They were able to help unload the van and watch their two small girls (things I would not have been able to physically do). Later we planned to go back and invite them again to church. I was feeling really bad and struggled with going but I went anyway. She is now your sister in Christ. God worked in spite of my weakness. He’s always at work.

He keeps reminding me that it is his power and not mine. He has the people he wants to be invited and loved. I look back over the last few years at the women I have been able to help become Christians. There was no time during their studies when I felt “able” to lead them. On a physical level I had to deny myself to make every study, every appointment. It isn’t how good I feel, how I look, how sharp my mind is, or even the abundance of faith I have. But God has open people for me to reach out to and if I make myself available, sick or well, he will lead me in helping them.

Questions

1. How is your outreach? How is it affected by your physical challenge?
2. Who would you like to see saved because of your efforts?
3. How can the work of God be shown in your life?

² Thomas A. Jones, *Finding God in Pain and Problems, Audio Tape Series* (Billerica, Mass.: Discipleship Publications International, 1999).

4. How much of your prayer time is given to the lost?

Additional Scriptures: Luke 23:38-43; Acts 16:22-25, 17:26-27

To Friends of the Physically Challenged

Some people don't look sick. This can compound your efforts to understand what they are going through. Some people do look ill, and it makes you nervous or uncomfortable. Being around the physically challenged may bring up fears and questions in your mind. Are they contagious? What if this were to happen to me? How would I deal with it? Becoming close to someone physically challenged can cause you to question your own faith and the character of God. If you find yourself resistant to getting close to your physically challenged friend, it may be that it is bringing up fears in you about your future and mortality.

Paul says in Galatians 4:14, "Even though my illness was a trial to you, you did not treat me with contempt or scorn. Instead you welcomed me as if I were an angel of God, as if I were Christ Jesus himself." Being ill is a trial for the person—and for those around her. Sometimes we react with contempt like, "They're probably making it up," or "It couldn't be *that* bad," or "You manage to do the things you want to do." We must be careful to guard our hearts against suspicion and mistrust.

Earlier, I mentioned a physically challenged man named Harold. As I watched him be lifted from chair to couch to car, watched his trembling gnarled hands unsuccessfully attempt to wipe the drool from his face and food from his clothes, watched him struggle to form the words to ask people to take him home with them, watched those lonely eyes look to see if someone would stop and take the time and effort to talk and listen to him, I began to struggle with my own faith. One day I blurted out to Ryan, "If I were Harold, I just don't know what I would do!" He adeptly replied, "If you were Harold, you would have to come to faith." I'll never forget that. There are so many things we can't explain and cause us consternation, but the call is to be a disciple in whatever situation we find ourselves. "Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ" (Philippians 1:27a).

I believe the book of Job has much to say to a person experiencing physical challenge and trials and to the people surrounding them. In fact, it is the most comprehensive piece that God has given to us to understand suffering and how the sufferer and friends should deal with it. Here is an unprofessional thumbnail version of its message and how it could apply to us today.

- Satan wanted to destroy Job. After massacring all his livestock, servants, and children (notice he didn't take his wife...it seems she was more of a weapon alive than dead), Job still trusted God and maintained his faith. Satan was stumped and probably frustrated (note the exclamation point in the scripture below). He decided to pull out his biggest gun, his ace in the hole, and attack Job's health.

"Skin for skin!" Satan replied. "A man will give all he has for his own life. But stretch out your hand and strike his flesh and bones, and he will surely curse you to your face."
(Job 2: 4-5)

Job was afflicted with "painful sores from the soles of his feet to the top of his head" (Job 2:7).

- Satan continues his attack using the person closest to Job, his wife, to entice him to sin. "Are you still holding on to your integrity? Curse God and die!" (Job 2:9). Maybe Job wondered why she could not have been visiting the children when the tornado struck, such help that she was! Then again, she had just lost all her children, servants and income as well—but she handled it faithlessly, tempting her husband to give up.
- Then Satan moves on to Job's friends. At first they were sympathetic and showed compassionate understanding by quietly being by Job's side. Then after a week, Job begins to express his sorrow.

"Why is light given to those in misery,
and life to the bitter of soul,
to those who long for death that does not come,
who search for it more than hidden treasure,
who are filled with gladness

and rejoice when they reach the grave?" (Job 3:20-22)

How many times have we been in pain and have wished that we could go on to heaven and be done with it? We know we are going there, so why can't we go now? Job's friends had heard enough of this depressing talk and they wanted to "fix" him. It is very hard to stand by and watch someone suffer. It evokes all kinds of emotions within us. They wanted to make sense of this devastation. They couldn't handle it. There had to be a way to get this resolved. It is very frustrating to be around someone who is suffering and not be able to do anything about it. But, God was using the situation to convict them of their pride in presuming to explain why God allowed Job to suffer.

- Eliphaz contemptuously twists the truth in an attempt to shame Job.

"Your words have supported those who stumbled;
you have strengthened faltering knees.
But now trouble comes to you, and you are discouraged;
it strikes you, and you are dismayed.
Should not your piety be your confidence
and your blameless ways your hope?" (Job 4:4-6)

In effect, he says, "What's your problem? You can do all this good to help others when they are suffering, but let it happen to you and you fall apart." This is abusive, with Satan intending to undermine Job's confidence in himself and God. Job is a righteous man; he does not tout his goodness, but neither does he admit doing anything that would warrant this kind of pain. He is confident of his relationship with God. He refers to his friends as "unreliable" and "of no help."

- Job continues to express his agony and bitterness, honestly expressing his emotions, while holding on to the goodness of God.

"Therefore I will not keep silent;
I will speak in of the anguish of my spirit,
I will complain in of the bitterness of my soul." (Job 7:11)

"Oh, that I might have my request,
that God would grant me what I hope for,
that God would be willing to crush me,
to loose his hand and cut me off!
Then I would still have this consolation—
my joy in unrelenting pain—
that I had not denied the words of the Holy One." (Job 6:8-10)

One thing I have learned from Job is that God wants us to express our feelings no matter how ugly or seemingly unfaithful. Just think what might have happened to Job had he stuffed all this! Asaph and David are also great examples of expressing their doubts. "Has God forgotten to be merciful?" (Psalm 77:9). Then they move on to the fact of God's love. God wants us to express our innermost doubts and fears outloud and then follow this by expressing confidence in his love—even if we don't feel like we understand anything. Job's friends used the Scriptures and spiritual common sense, but they did not use it in the right way. Remember Satan tempting Jesus in the wilderness? He used scripture and the truths of God but did not apply it properly to the situation. We have to be really careful in counseling each other during trials. We need to use the Truth to help and heal in the way God intends. Don't give in to the urge to put everything in a box with a nice neat explanation, "This happened because...."

- In the end, Job repented of speaking about things he did not understand. He repented not of secret sins, but of questioning God's authority to do what he thinks is best. God would not hear the prayers of Job's friends; he was so angry with them. Job shows his soft heart by forgiving their false accusations and praying for God to forgive them for their haughtiness and pride. I wonder about Job's wife—did she repent? Did she ever see how Satan tried to use her to spiritually destroy her husband?

- When we go through spiritual trials, Satan wants to destroy our faith by making us question whether we are really righteous, really loved by God. Actually, most of us do not need a trial to question our righteousness! The very first temptation assaulted on Jesus (when he was obviously challenged from a forty-day fast) was Satan proposing, “*If you really are the Son of God.*” When we suffer, Satan tries to get us to question our salvation and if God really cares, and to doubt our righteousness that was a gift at our baptism.
- Having a physical challenge (or being close to someone who does), will refine your faith and make you stronger if you hold on to your confidence in Jesus’ blood and his forgiveness of you. Sin does not necessarily *cause* illness, but we can easily sin in how we *deal* with it. Job had to repent of his lack of faith. Do you express your feelings to God? Do you then confess your faith in him?
- Even if you are not materially blessed or healed, you will be blessed spiritually and, eventually, go to heaven. Job’s life was blessed afterward, but I am sure he always grieved his lost children. He bore the sadness of all his servants losing their lives and probably carried the marks of disease on his body until he died. The happily-ever-after ending comes only when we meet Jesus face to face. Until then, we learn to be content in any situation because God is all we need.

Someone going through a physical challenge needs a friend who will listen to her, who is concerned about the details of what is going on, who will tell her the truth in love when she needs to hear it. Whatever the case, God will use your relationship with a physically challenged person to refine you, to strengthen your faith, to bring you to a deeper understanding of Jesus’ compassionate heart and to see the reality of suffering and death...and eternity.

Questions

1. How do you feel around someone who is physically challenged? What uncomfortable emotions do you feel? Name them specifically.
2. In what ways are you like Jesus in your attitude regarding the sick? In what ways are you not?
3. What are some ways you can encourage your physically challenged friend? Have you ever been like Job’s friends? What could you change?
4. Exercise: Ask your physically challenged friend to verbally walk through her day with you, including how she feels physically and emotionally. Offer very little input...just listen and try to feel what it is like to be in her shoes.

Additional Scriptures: *Job 13:15; Proverbs 20:5; Matthew 4:23-25, 12:22; Mark 2:1-5, 8:22; Galatians 4:14*

Linda Howard

Note: (Linda now lives in Denver. After the death of her husband several years ago, she is remarried and is now Linda Howard Haney)