

WHAT IF THE PAIN DOESN'T GO AWAY!

You have chronic physical pain that hurts every hour of every day seven days a week. Or you have a life-threatening disease like cancer that has been prayed for by countless friends, and it continues to slowly kill you. Or you have prayed for a friend with cancer or some other debilitating illness believing that they will be healed and yet they are not healed but continue to suffer or perhaps die from that sickness. If you are the one suffering, how do you deal with these situations? If you are the one praying for someone else, how do you answer those questions that always surface, the ones that typically begin with why?

YOU BELIEVE

You believe that God heals the sick. *“Stretch out your hand to heal and perform miraculous signs and wonders through the name of your holy servant Jesus.” (Acts 4:30)* Maybe you have prayed for someone who was healed or heard stories of miraculous healing. As a result, your faith is strong and solid. *“I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father.” (John 14:12)* You do not doubt the existence of God and know that He loves you. But you are the one with chronic physical pain that hurts every hour of every day, seven days a week. You believe in the power of prayer and have been prayed for numerous times by friends, casual acquaintances, or even the “big guns” in the healing ministry. You have attended countless healing meetings. At some of these meetings prophetic “words” were given specifically for the physical condition you were dealing with raising your expectation that you would be healed. But nothing changed. You have prayed harder and longer than you thought was possible. You have tried fasting, thinking maybe this was the key to your healing. You have named it and claimed it more times than you care to remember. You have ignored it and denied it, but the pain is still there. You have knelt in front of the TV and placed your hands on the screen as the healing evangelist looked you square in the eye and prayed for your healing. Nothing changed. You have begged, cajoled, pleaded, bargained, cried, screamed in frustration, and yet the heavens remain silent. And the pain is still there.

THIS IS UNRELENTING PAIN

The pain slowly eats at you, demoralizing you, breaking your spirit, and bringing with it a desperation that only those in chronic pain can know and understand. You will try anything to make the pain go away. Both medication and surgery have been tried, and they do not help. The pain is unchanging. To cope you may turn to alcohol, drugs, pornography or some other escape so you can be distracted even for a short time. This is unrelenting pain which the doctors tell you that they can do nothing about; pain which prayer seems to be unable to touch; pain which causes your emotions to swing from anger to acceptance to despair and hopelessness.

Perhaps you are emotionally and spiritually wounded by what has been said or done to you from well meaning friends. You have heard all the standard answers from your Christian brothers and sisters like, “You need to have more faith and claim your healing.” *“Then he touched their eyes and said, ‘According to your faith will it be done to you;’ and their sight was restored.” (Mt. 9:29)* My response is, “I have as much faith as I know how to have. How does one get more faith and how much claiming do I need to do?” Then there are those that are fond of saying, “I think there must be some

sin God is trying to reveal in your life, and when you deal with that sin your healing will come.”
“*Confess your sins to one another and pray for one another that you may be healed.*” (James 4:3) My response to that would be, “Okay God, just show me what that secret sin is and I’ll deal with it. I can’t deal with it if I don’t know what it is.”

If you have tried everything you know to rid yourself of this chronic physical pain and it persists, what do you do? How do you cope? How do you continue to smile and go on with life believing that God will heal you? Is all this healing stuff just false hope? Are you kidding yourself? How do you hold onto hope? How do you keep from screaming, “God, are you listening, do you even care!” You may reach the point where you turn away from God for good.

The answer to these questions is critical because the message you often hear from the Pentecostal, Charismatic, and Evangelical church is that we worship a healing God. It is His will that we be healed; therefore, you should not be suffering from pain. If you are suffering from pain, God must have a reason why at this time He has chosen not to heal you.

GOD’S SECRET PLAN

Perhaps you’ve been told that somehow your pain is a part of God’s “secret plan,” and you must endure it while hanging on to the hope that one day healing will come. Christianity is founded on the assumption that God can and does unilaterally intervene in the affairs of humans. Throughout both the Old and New Testaments we have numerous examples of God’s intervention. So the logical question is why does God’s intervention in the world seem so arbitrary? Yes, we believe that God can heal all sickness. But why does God heal one person and not another? Remember the story of Jesus healing the lame man at the pool of Bethesda, “*Jesus told him, stand up, pickup your sleeping mat and walk. Instantly the man was healed. He rolled up the mat and began walking.*” (John 5 8,9) This was like a hospital and there were crowds of sick people-blind, lame, or paralyzed-laying by the pool. But Jesus only healed one man! We don’t know why he healed only the one man.

The reasoning often goes something like this: if God can heal one blind man at one time, it seems He could heal any blind man any time. Thus, it appears the reason many remain blind is because God is unwilling to heal them. And if He’s unwilling to heal them, it must be His will they remain blind. Hence, whether a person is born blind or with sight and whether he or she remains blind or is healed is all part of God’s “secret plan.”

This line of reasoning is then applied to all diseases and personal tragedies. Therefore, it is concluded whatever happens must be because God wants it to happen or at least because God didn’t want to stop it from happening.

WHEN I DISCOVERED PAIN

My journey with chronic pain began with a ski trip. It couldn’t have been a better day to snow ski. It was a warm spring day in the California mountains, and I was at a popular ski resort on the last run of the day finishing up what had been a tremendous two days of skiing. As I headed down the ski slope and neared the end of the run, I jumped over a small mogul. When I landed my skis came to an abrupt stop in the wet, sticky snow. However, my ski bindings released, and my body did a somersault

slamming into the snow with such impact that I momentarily lost consciousness. When I regained consciousness, I knew I was in trouble as I lay on my back in the snow. I didn't fully understand how much trouble until I tried to reach for my ski poles, and I realized that I had no feeling in my hands or legs. That realization brought fear like I have never experienced before as my mind very quickly translated all of this into, "You have broken your neck and are paralyzed." As I lay there trying to fully comprehend what had just happened, suddenly the pain came like hot needles shooting down my arms and into my hands. The pain was intense, but it was also a relief for if I were paralyzed there would be no feeling in my hands at all.

After lying there for some time, I was able to stand and slowly, painfully make my way down to the bottom of the ski slope where my friend was waiting for me at the lodge. After I told him what had happened, we immediately got in his car and drove three hours back to Bakersfield where I was admitted to the hospital.

On the way home I called a friend of mine who was an orthopedic surgeon and told him what had happened. He told me which hospital to go to, and he called them and told them I was coming in and what they were to do. When I arrived, they immediately placed me on a gurney, immobilized my head, covered me with a blanket and placed me in a room to begin a series of tests. At that point I went into shock and started shivering. After hours of X-ray's, probing and MRI's, the doctors gave me the diagnosis.

This traumatic accident had broken my wrist, severely sprained both thumbs and seriously damaged three discs in my neck. The doctor told me that I was fortunate to be able to walk as the trauma to my neck could easily have left me totally paralyzed.

As a result of this accident over forty years ago, I have been dealing with continuous pain in both hands. This pain is with me 24 hours a day, seven days a week. The only way I can cope with the pain is through medication, which does not totally alleviate the pain but makes it tolerable and allows me to function.

Shortly after this incident I had my first neck surgery which I was told by the surgeon would relieve 85% of the pain. It didn't but I will write more about that later. Most recently in 2024 I had another neck surgery to repair what the first surgeon had done, and to stabilize my neck which was continuing to deteriorate. This surgeon was successful in stabilizing the neck, the purpose being to prevent it from causing more pain.

Incidentally, this accident also caused some serious issues with my back which needed to be addressed. When I went to a primary care doctor here in Bakersfield, CA he referred me to a specialist at USC Medical Center in Southern California. They sent my x-rays and the MRI results to this doctor prior to my visit. Later, when I walked into his office, with a shocked look on his face he said, "From what I saw on your tests I expected you to be in a wheelchair. I don't understand how you are walking!"

IS GOD TO BLAME?

Some believe and teach that God sends physical pain and suffering to teach us something and build our character. I do not believe that physical pain and suffering are from God. He does not send pain and suffering to build our character. He does not cause accidents to teach us lessons. If that were the case, how does one explain that to a mother whose child was run down in the street? Is this something God allowed because He has a greater purpose for this child? This is not the God that I worship. He does not bring about the horror of a 9/11 because somehow it fits into His “secret plan,” a plan which many believe we will one day understand.

I believe that we must come to a place where we accept that there are many things that happen in this universe that are outside of God’s plan. He created both us and other spiritual beings with a free will. We know some of these spirit beings made a choice to rebel, as man did, and that there are consequences for these choices. *“But they put God to the test and rebelled against the Most High; they did not keep His statutes.” (Psalm 78:56)* Because of His love for us He allows these choices to be made and sometimes these choices clearly go against His will. We also know that we live in a fallen world in which Satan and his evil hordes have free reign to cause chaos and destruction. Satan’s goal is to destroy mankind and all the good things God has done. *“The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy...” (John 10:10)*

THREE ERRONEOUS REASONS OFTEN GIVEN WHY YOU ARE SUFFERING

If you are suffering from pain, you may hear three reasons to explain your pain. People offer these three reasons to explain why you are suffering, and they claim once you hear and accept these reasons, you should experience immediate comfort in your pain.

First, God wants to heal you. So, people will say if you are suffering from pain, there must be something wrong with you. This is always very helpful to know because it means that as soon as I figure out what is wrong and take steps to correct it, God will heal me. Some will say it’s because you have so little faith. In Matthew 17 when the disciples came to Jesus and asked why they couldn’t drive the demon out of the boy He replied, *“Because you have so little faith.” (Matthew 17:20)* Others will claim it’s because of some secret sin in your life. *“Confess your sins to one another and pray for one another that you may be healed. (James 5:16).*

Second, people will say this pain is from God and it is your cross to bear. *“Then he said to them all: If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.” (Luke 9:23)* Just like Paul this is your thorn in the flesh, and it will work for your greater good. *“To keep me from becoming conceited because of these surpassingly great revelations, there was given me a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me.” (2Cor.12:7)* You know, I hear that one a lot; it seems to be a favorite. So, God is going to make you bear this physical pain to build your character. I know from firsthand experience that God can take whatever circumstances we find ourselves in and bring good out of those circumstances. But I don’t believe He causes things to happen which bring pain to make you a better person by building your character.

Until this accident I had been very healthy. I did not have to deal with any chronic sickness or pain, and I had little empathy for people who were dealing with it. However, all of that changed because of this skiing accident. I now have a better understanding and empathy for those who have chronic pain, which they can do nothing about. I have watched how in my own life God has brought some good out

of this debilitating accident. However, I find it difficult to believe that God will not ever heal me because He wants to further refine my character. This way of thinking is not only discouraging but brings a sense of hopelessness. A pain-filled future is not very appealing to anyone. This type of erroneous thinking may also affect how I pray for others. If I believe that the reason they are suffering is because God is building their character, isn't it presumptuous on my part to pray for them to be healed? I heard a man once say, "If I treated my children like this, I would be arrested for child abuse." Honestly, would I use pain to build character when there are better ways to build character?

Third, this is suffering which you must accept because God is using this to teach you something. *"But those who suffer He delivers in their suffering; He speaks to them in their affliction."* (Job 36:15) This one is especially demoralizing since you often have no clue as to what God is trying to teach you. It logically follows that the sooner you figure out what He is trying to teach you, the sooner you will be healed. The problem is He rarely reveals what He is trying to teach you. If you were going to teach me something it would be helpful if you revealed to me what you are trying to teach me. Hey, I'm listening God! What are you trying to teach me? Chances are I won't get it if you don't.

For most people these three reasons are easy to give to someone else. But, if you are the one living in pain, these are the last things three things you want to hear. I have no doubt that perhaps there are times these statements are right on, but I believe that at times we unthinkingly speak to them and expect the person suffering, once having heard our wise counsel, to accept their lot in life and move on. It's kind of like when someone comes to you needing food and shelter and you say, "The Lord bless you and fill you my friend," and you send them on their way without any food or shelter. What good is this? *"Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to him, go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed, but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it?"* (James 2:15-16)

WELL-MEANING FRIENDS

In my forty-year journey with pain I have heard all these statements. Believe me when I say that they do not help. Moreover, I know that I am not alone in this journey. We need to be more sensitive to those in pain when we throw these statements around as if they are the last word from God. These words can and often do, cause deep wounding.

Over the years I have on occasion needed prayer for the anger I've felt towards others due to the emotional & spiritual abuse I've suffered at their hands. Admittedly, this was often unintentional and misguided help, but nevertheless it happened. Those of us in pain can suffer much emotional wounding because of being prayed for or given "Godly counsel" by well-meaning but misguided "friends." I know this has happened to many people, but my thinking is along these lines; "I am in the healing ministry and logically it would seem that God would want me to be healed." That makes sense to me, but the reality is far different. What I do in full time ministry is travel around the world and conduct prayer seminars and healing conferences using our training manual Learning To Do What Jesus Did (How to pray for Physical, Emotional and Spiritual Healing). I pray for people to be healed and many of them are healed. Obviously if someone should be healed it would be me. What better example for God to use than me, right? Wrong!

Not only do I have to deal with the constant pain from the injury but also, I occasionally wrestle with the tough questions regarding my own lack of healing, questions which quite naturally arise because I spend much of my time praying for people dealing with a variety of physical, emotional and spiritual pain. Pain from which God heals them! There is also puzzlement over the fact that when I pray for people for extended periods of time, my hands often throb with pain long after I am finished praying.

PAIN BRINGS DESPERATION

We know that pain brings desperation. Chronic pain can cause one to do stupid things. You may have a high pain threshold. But even at that you can come to the point where you are willing to try anything to make the pain go away. This includes allowing yourself to be prayed for by some very unorthodox people. Perhaps their style and approach to prayer is a little over the edge for you, but because of your desperation you are willing to try anything. Often the result is not healing but rather emotional, physical and spiritual abuse.

PHYSICAL, EMOTIONAL AND SPIRITUAL ABUSE

Let me share an example of this abuse, which I have found to be quite common. I was attending a pastor's prayer retreat and one afternoon we set aside time to pray for each other. In the process of sharing my needs I asked for prayer for the pain I was experiencing in my hands. As all the pastors gathered around me to pray, Alex, being a gregarious fellow grabbed my head with both hands and began to loudly petition God to heal my neck-proclaiming all doubt to be cast away, and citing all of the scriptures that seem to indicate that if you name it, claim it, believe it, loud enough and long enough, it's going to happen. While he is doing this with his hands on my head, he is turning and twisting my head and neck with no concern that he might be doing even further injury in his enthusiasm to get me healed! When this was all over, the pain was still there. In fact, it increased as the hours went by due to the irritation to the nerves caused by this twisting and turning of my neck.

The most incredible part is that I sat and let this happen! I was so desperate for healing and relief from the pain that I was willing to let anyone who could pray try anything. Remember when I said earlier that pain brings desperation?

After the "healing prayer" I immediately got up to leave. I needed to get outside and take a walk. As I walked down the road thinking about what had just been done to me, I became increasingly angry and I felt as if I had been physically, emotionally and spiritually violated. Also, in some strange way I felt as if I had failed in that I had allowed myself to be subjected to that insanity. How could I have been so stupid? I know intellectually that was not the case but that's how I felt. I was angry with Alex, and I felt betrayed by my brothers in ministry who didn't stop this nonsense. Soon I was asking, "God, how could you have let this happen?" Now I had to deal with my anger towards Alex, my brothers, God and myself. It took some time, but fortunately I did deal with the anger and have experienced the freedom that comes with forgiveness.

FOUR STAGES

I've discovered that there are typically four stages that one goes through when dealing with chronic pain.

1. **Helping Stage.** In the beginning the doctors prescribed medications for me so that I could cope with the pain. In this stage I went through innumerable tests, assorted physical therapies and a variety of medications. They were truly trying to help. When none of these provided much help in relieving the pain, the doctors, because of their busy schedules and frustration that nothing was working, grew weary of dealing with me. I admit that this may not have been the case, but it was my perception of what was happening.
2. **Shuffle Stage.** After being shuffled about to numerous doctors, one finally said, “Even though there is a discernible injury, there is nothing we can do about it. You will have to live with it.” Not willing to accept this, I pressed on until I found a doctor who would sit patiently and listen to my story before prescribing treatment.

Up until this time one of the most frustrating experiences with the doctors was that they would breeze into the room with my chart tucked under their arm, ask a couple of questions, prescribe some medication, and fly out the door. None of them sat down and listened to me tell them how the injury occurred and what I was feeling.

Being the persistent fellow that I am, I continued to push for more testing, therapy, medication or even surgery if that would help. Whatever it was going to take to get rid of this pain, I was willing to try. I was insistent that we could not stop until all the options had been explored. After a great deal of testing and probing by specialists scattered about the state, they finally decided to try surgery.

3. **Frustration and Confusion Stage.** One highly recommended doctor, one of the best orthopedic surgeons in the world for neck injuries, diagnosed the problem and said, “I can fix it, and there is an 85% chance of getting rid of the pain completely.” I responded, “Great let’s go for it!” However, before I went for surgery my HMO required that I go back to see another one of their specialists. He advised me not to have the surgery for two reasons. First, that it wouldn’t help, and second that it was very risky. Oh, by the way, I was told that he was highly respected among his peers and also one of the best Orthopedic Surgeons in the world.

So here I am at the frustration stage, having dealt with this pain for years, standing between two of the best doctors in the world in dealing with this type of surgery, and they are giving me totally opposite counsel. By this time, I am willing to do anything to stop the pain. Whom do you believe?

4. **Desperation Stage.** I finally decided, to have the surgery. I had tried medicine, I had tried physical therapy, I had tried meditation, and I had tried prayer. Nothing had worked yet, so surgery seemed like the next option. What could possibly go wrong?

OH, BY THE WAY

Picture this; I am on the gurney waiting to go under the knife. Just as I am drifting off the surgeon comes walking over and says, “I have revised the outcome to be a 50% chance that I can do anything about the pain!” As I am going down into the black hole, I am thinking to myself, what do you mean 50%! I only did this because you said there was an 85% chance that all the pain would be gone! Then everything went dark. That’s the last thing I remembered before I woke up in recovery. After he does

the surgery, I'm recovering in the hospital thinking everything is great until the morphine begins to wear off. It's then that I realize the surgery didn't work. Not only do I still have the pain in my hands, but I now know that because of the surgery, scar tissue will form that will increase the pain. This was why the other world-famous surgeon told me not to have the operation. In addition, I am placed on medication that, if I take as much as is needed to completely dull the pain, makes me into a mental zombie

LET'S START OVER

Let me recap this for you. I have tried everything I know to get rid of the pain. I am in a ministry of healing prayer and over the years I prayed for my own healing, and I have had prayer from others. After awhile you tire of asking for prayer, not only because you begin to feel you are a bother, but you get this unspoken feeling that people are tired of you asking for prayer for the same thing repeatedly. I feel they are thinking, "Can't you come up with something else? We're getting tired of this!"

I started this article with the question; "What If the Pain Doesn't Go Away?" Let me answer that question as best I can. In our training manual, Learning To Do What Jesus Did we stated emphatically that we believe healing is for today and then give a solid biblical basis for our belief. We touch on questions such as, "What about believers who do not get well?" "Are suffering and sickness from God?" "Does everyone who believes get well?" "If you have enough faith will God heal you?"

We have answers for all these questions, but I still have the pain, and it has been there for over forty years eating away at me physically and emotionally. How do I deal with it? Honestly, some days better than others.

In this journey I have come to realize two things:

First, although God did not cause this, He has used this pain to help me become more empathetic toward people in relentless, debilitating pain. I pray for them with a better understanding of what they are dealing with.

Second, it serves to remind me that we are in spiritual warfare and there may be numerous reasons why I have not been healed. *"For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds."* (2Cor. 10:3-4) It always brings me back to the issue of trust. Do I trust God or not? I know it is God's will for me to be healed. I have absolutely no doubt that my Father in heaven can heal me in a flash if He so chooses. Until then, I will live with the pain, sometimes under it, but most of the time above it. I remind myself that I am precious to Him and that He is helping me to overcome this adversity.

WE NEED SENSITIVITY

If you are reading this, I trust this will have helped raise your level of sensitivity to those of us dealing with chronic pain. We need your understanding and sensitivity to what we are dealing with daily. I did not say we want your pity. We do not want your pity. We need your encouragement, and we need your

persistent prayers. We do not need trite, religious dribble. We need you, operating in love and grace, to come along side and walk with us through the pain.

If you are one of those dealing with never-ending pain, know that there are others who truly understand and likewise are walking in obedience and trust that someday healing will come.

Do not give in to the pain. You can learn to deal with pain in one of two ways. You can allow it to beat you down or you can live above it. Most days I can live above it, but there are days when it beats me down. When this happens, I accept it, and hope for a better day tomorrow. Do not allow the pain to keep you from seeking the healing and restoring love of God. Do not allow it to shut him out. He is a God of infinite mercy and grace, and you are His beloved. This you must hold onto at all costs.

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