



# Living with Pain. Life Plan Disrupted.

by Roxanne M. Smith

**A**t age 27, I felt like I had it all — a career I loved, great health, a wonderful fiancé — but then it all changed. Overnight I was suddenly struck down by a rare form of degenerative disc disease that disabled me with excruciating back pain. My life came to a screeching halt.

Unable to work or be up on my feet for more than a few minutes at a time, I saw 20 different doctors in the first year of our marriage. They ordered a head-spinning number of diagnostic tests and countless treatments. Eventually, over a multi-year process, I had several surgeries. The surgeons removed much of the weak disc tissue in my spine, replacing my discs with bone, plastic, and metal. To our great disappointment, however, they didn't remove my disabling pain.

I did *not* want to be disabled by pain. That wasn't *my* life plan. I wanted to be married, have four kids, live in Colorado, work as a physical therapist, and enjoy mountain climbing on the weekends. Instead, I have pain 24/7 that forces me to lie horizontal 20 to 22 hours a day. I have a wonderful husband, but having even one child was a huge stretch for us, let alone the envisioned four! As for leisure activities? Not only have active things been taken away, but also sedentary activities are not possible for me. I can't sit up more than about 10 minutes, so I can't even be a spectator at a sporting event or go out to eat in a restaurant. My lifestyle changed from high adventure to being largely homebound. I grieved deeply over this unwanted change.

If this wasn't *my* life plan, was it *God's* plan for me? Jeremiah 29:11 says: "For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope." That sure sounds like God has a plan for each one of us.

I found this to be comforting and yet confusing. Becoming disabled by pain didn't seem like a good plan to me. And to be clear,

I'm not saying that God caused my pain. I'm saying that in His wisdom and sovereignty, He permitted it. Why? I'm not sure. As we'll study in Job, God is not the only spiritual force in the universe. There's a hidden battle going on. But God can bring good out of evil and, in Romans 8:28, He promises to work all things for good in the lives of His children.

I'm sure every one of you can think of lost hopes or unfulfilled expectations as you reflect on the damage that chronic pain has caused in your life. Maybe you were someone who always served others, but now you have to receive help instead. Perhaps you looked forward to relating with grandchildren, only to have physical constraints on what you can do with them.

Or maybe you are still a younger woman with children at home and work to be done, but pain has taken every ounce of your coping ability — and then some. You wonder how in the world you can meet your responsibilities when pain nags away at you. Possibly some of you grieve a decline in physical intimacy with your spouse because of chronic pain ... or have questions about finding a spouse if pain is in the picture ... or have lost a spouse to divorce thanks to pain's caustic effects on families.

Do any of you struggle with feeling useless if you can no longer be productive? I've sure had those days. And because chronic pain is often invisible, it's fairly common to feel alone in it because others just don't understand. Even worse, some of us have had doctors, coworkers, or family members disbelieve we have pain or doubt that it's really as bad as we say it is. This can leave us feeling discounted, discredited, and defensive.

How do we cope? What do we hope for when pain has taken so much away? And how do we look for God's presence in the midst of our trials?

## Open in Prayer

### Read Job Chapter 1

What kind of a man was Job in terms of earthly wealth? \_\_\_\_\_

What kind of a relationship did Job have with God? \_\_\_\_\_

Who presents himself to God, along with the angels? \_\_\_\_\_

How does God describe His servant Job? \_\_\_\_\_

What is Satan's challenge to God? \_\_\_\_\_

Was Job's life interrupted? What was the extent of Job's losses in Chapter One? \_\_\_\_\_

Has pain interrupted your life? What have been some of your losses because of pain? \_\_\_\_\_

What does **James 4:13–14** tell us about our plans? Is human control an illusion? \_\_\_\_\_

In **James 4:15**, how does God instruct us to qualify our plans? \_\_\_\_\_

How does Job respond to the testing that God allows? \_\_\_\_\_

How do you feel that you have responded to your trial of chronic pain? (Please respond honestly, even if you feel you have sinned by blaming God at times.) \_\_\_\_\_

### Read Job 2:1–10

What is Job's second test? What does God give Satan permission to do? \_\_\_\_\_

What limits does God place on Satan's action? \_\_\_\_\_

With what does Satan afflict Job? \_\_\_\_\_

Do you find it validating that physical pain was deemed hard to bear? \_\_\_\_\_

If so, why? \_\_\_\_\_

What does Job's wife encourage him to do? \_\_\_\_\_

What does Job actually do/say? \_\_\_\_\_

What is the difference between grieving your losses, being angry at God, blaming God, and cursing God? Are they responses on a continuum? \_\_\_\_\_

Which responses are sinful? Which are not? \_\_\_\_\_

Which responses preserve the relationship between you and God? \_\_\_\_\_

Which do not? \_\_\_\_\_

When you think about Job's tests, what was the purpose of his life interruption?

From Satan's point of view? \_\_\_\_\_

From God's point of view? \_\_\_\_\_

Has your pain caused you to reach out for help from God? Has God brought you comfort through the promises of His Word? \_\_\_\_\_

Do you think your response to your suffering matters? \_\_\_\_\_

## Close in Prayer

Closing Hymn: Say or sing "What God Ordains Is Always Good" (*LSB* #760; *LW* #422; or *TLH* #521) or "I Leave All Things to God's Direction" (*LSB* #719; *LW* #429; or *TLH* #529).



## In Summary

If you think that Job's response was superhuman and you could never live up to his example, I can tell you that he spends several chapters after this questioning God, wishing he'd never been born and grieving in general. Still, he was deemed faithful.

God wants a loving relationship with each of us. He sent His only Son, Jesus, to die for each one of us, so that by faith in Him we could be saved from our sin. When we're in pain, even if we strike out at Him in anger, He still loves us. He forgives us when we cross the line between trusting submission and accusations against Him for not protecting us completely. He is big enough to handle our anger, even when misplaced. He just doesn't want us to walk away and never come back! God treasures a close, intimate relationship with us, His children. He wants us to come to Him in our bewildering and confusing moments, when our pain causes us to have more questions than answers, when it may feel like we're holding onto our faith by a thread.

Knowing that God loves us and will be faithful to us when we are at our weakest is very reassuring. When we repent of our doubt and times of lashing out, He always forgives and helps us try again. Our goal in responding to our pain is not perfection — it's a Gospel-worked faith, which enables us to grow in intimacy with our heavenly Father!