



Living with Pain
Strength and Survival

LEADER'S EDITION

Roxanne M. Smith



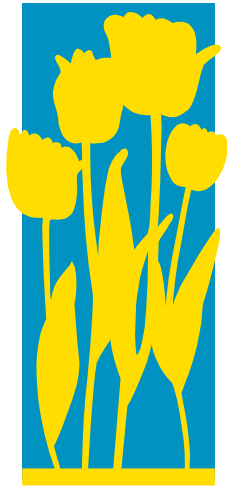
Copyright © 2013, revised 2022
All rights reserved.
Lutheran Women's Missionary League
801 Seminary Pl, Ste. L010
St. Louis, MO 63105
lwml.org



Table of Contents

For Leaders:	2
Introduction	3
Session One: Life Plan Disrupted	6
Session Two: My Heart's Cry	13
Session Three: What About Healing?	19
Session Four: What About Healing? Part 2	24
Session Five: The Call to Prayer	28
Session Six: The Great Cure-Giver's Gifts	35
Session Seven: Our Hope of Heaven	42
Session Eight: Legacy	47
Appendix: Biblical Reference Guide	52
About the Author	55

Scripture quotations are from the ESV® Bible (The Holy Bible, English Standard Version®), Copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved. Scripture quotations marked (NIV) are taken from the Holy Bible, New International Version®, NIV®. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.™ Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved worldwide.



Living with Pain
Strength and Survival

For Leaders:

Thank you for being willing to facilitate a group who will work through this study together.

I want to briefly explain my rationale for asking “open-ended” rather than “yes/no” questions. Open-ended questions encourage the reader to look at the Bible passage and really think about what God, through the Holy Spirit, is communicating to her. As a facilitator, I encourage you to invite sharing and vulnerability. This is desperately needed by those caught in the midst of suffering: in this case, chronic pain.

As well as encouraging such “risky” sharing, always be prepared to point the “sufferer” to the “Ultimate Sufferer,” Jesus. As the Lamb of God, He takes away the ultimate root of all suffering — the sin of a world which is utterly caught in it.

Jesus is the incarnation of the Gospel, so ultimately the “sufferer” needs to be pointed to Jesus, the Gospel of God in human flesh. And as Luther says in his Smalcald Articles (III, IV), this Gospel comes to us in more than one way. It comes through the spoken word of forgiveness, Baptism, the Lord’s Supper, the power of the keys, and finally, through “the mutual conversation and consolation of brethren.” It is this mutual conversation and consolation which you will be facilitating.

This Bible study should always be understood in that context. However, the study will be most fruitful if the women participating in it come to these convictions through a wrestling with the specific texts. The Holy Spirit will use such wrestling to bring truth, reassurance, and comfort to the participants.



Living with Pain
Strength and Survival

Introduction

Pain. It's been called the great equalizer. Your advantages in life — education, money, station, connections — won't protect you from it.

Pain is powerful. It can totally destroy some lives, cripple others, and burden many more.

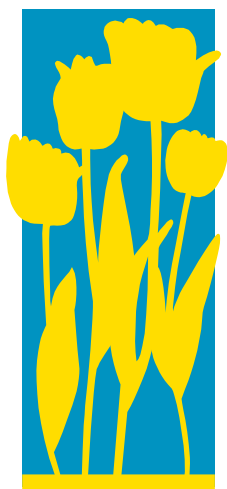
I know pain firsthand. I am disabled by pain. I have suffered severe chronic pain for 23 years! And I'm just now turning 50. It stole my youth; it robbed me of my career. It even took my ability to stand up and to be vertical! For 23 years I've been lying on a bed of suffering, only having two hours out of bed per day. My pain is caused by early-onset degenerative disc disease. Four spine surgeries have left me with a fused spine that doesn't bend or rotate in any direction, but it hurts all the time. 24/7. Day in. Day out.

Sometimes it feels like a deep, searing pain in my back; other times cramping muscle spasms make it hurt to talk and even to breathe; still other times my pain radiates down one or both legs. By the time I've had my two hours out of bed, I feel like the pain is screaming at me. Lying down helps to reduce it somewhat, but I'm still in pain. Medications help, too; but I still hear the dull roar.

How about you? What is your burden of pain? If you are participating in this Bible study, I'm guessing that pain has become a regular companion in your life. It's not a welcome companion, but pain doesn't wait for an invitation, does it? It invades your life without being asked. It overstays its welcome, never apologizes, and steals your physical abilities. That would be bad enough, but pain doesn't stop there. It brings its rotten friends along with it: bad apples like fear, anxiety, frustration/anger, powerlessness, and depression. They invade your life, too.

It doesn't really matter what the source of the pain is; when pain moves in, there are some universal truths.

1. Pain is a toxic companion.
2. Pain is a thief.
3. Pain brings its rotten friends along with it.
4. Pain demands a response.



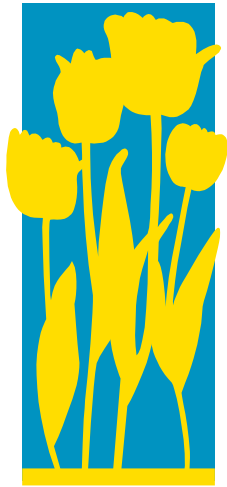
Living with Pain
Strength and Survival

And what is your response? Well, naturally, you try the simple things first. You try rest, or changing posture or position. You might apply ice, heat, elevate the leg or lower the head. You might take over-the-counter medications like ibuprofen or acetaminophen. You might let some time go by, hoping the body will heal itself. If the pain doesn't improve, you'll probably go to your doctor. He or she might prescribe medication or order diagnostic tests, which may or may not find the tissue pathology (cause). You could be sent to physical therapy or referred to a specialist. You may be prescribed stronger medications or sent to a pain clinic to try injections of steroids to reduce your pain. You might try searching the Internet for explanations, become totally overwhelmed with information, and potentially scare yourself half to death!

Some of you will try surgery, others alternative medicine. Some find the medical system so frustrating or expensive that they will stop searching for answers. A blessed few will get better, thank God for their healing, and resume normal lives. But what about the chronic pain sufferers? What if the condition which plagues us is not correctable, at least not yet? And what about the destructive tentacles of our pain, which reach out and affect those around us whom we love the most?

I'm going to suggest that just as pain demands a physical response, it also demands a spiritual one. C. S. Lewis said: "Pain insists on being attended to. God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our consciences, but shouts in our pains."¹ My own spiritual wrestling with God over my chronic pain has been one of the greatest drivers of spiritual growth in my life. It has driven me to the foot of the cross, seeking the help of my Savior Jesus, again and again. It has brought me to greater intimacy with God than I ever would have expected: I need him more and depend more on His strength than I did before pain invaded my life. I won't pretend that I haven't experienced — and don't sometimes still experience — sadness, frustration, anxiety, and even short-term despair. But God's work in my life in the midst of my suffering has also led me to have a vibrant hope, a dedication to joy, gratitude for simple blessings, and an eager longing for heaven. And I want those good things for you, too.

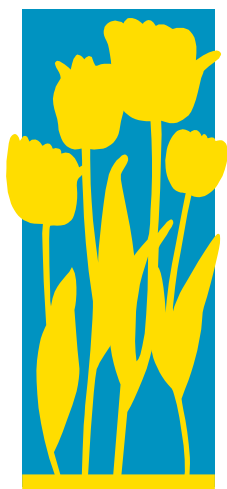
As you work through this Bible study with me, this is my prayer for you: that God will help you see Him more clearly and walk in closer fellowship with Him. Intimacy with God is not the **natural** outcome of suffering pain. It's the **supernatural** outcome, only made possible by our **supernatural** Heavenly Father. He accomplishes this through the "Means of Grace" — the Gospel in His Word and Sacraments. Through Jesus, our Father freely offers us His amazing gifts of forgiveness of sins, salvation, and eternal life. God's grace is what enables us to endure the pain in our lives.



Living with Pain
Strength and Survival

So be encouraged: God will bless you as you struggle to respond — not only physically, but spiritually and emotionally — to your pain. He promises in Isaiah 55:11 that His Word will not return to Him void. One of God's promises goes back to His Word about Baptism, which says that we were buried into Christ's death and resurrection (Romans 6:4; Colossians 2:12). Imagine! Even before we were conscious of God's grace, it was lavished upon us through this miracle of water and Spirit! So as we work through select Bible verses with open hearts and honest reflection, may He bless us with His Holy Spirit, guiding us, encouraging us, and leading us. Come, Lord Jesus.

Sincerely, Roxanne



Living with Pain
Strength and Survival

Session One: Life Plan Disrupted

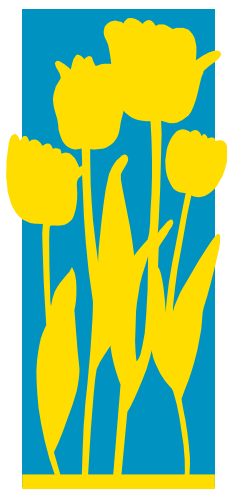
I'm wondering whether your life is at all like mine? I had one set of plans for my life, and it seems that God had a different set. For example, I had a very active childhood. I played sports, marched in my high school band, and worked at part-time job beginning at age 14. I was involved in my church youth group, did well academically, and was constantly on the go. Even the major I chose in college was for a very active profession: Physical Therapy.

At 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, which 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,



Living with Pain
Strength and Survival

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?

Read Job Chapter 1

1. What kind of a man was Job in terms of earthly wealth?

He owned thousands of animals, he had a large number of servants, and he was the greatest man among all the peoples of the East (v. 3).

2. What kind of a relationship did Job have with God?

Job was blameless and upright; he feared God and shunned evil (v. 1b).

Job sacrificed burnt offerings for his children in case they had sinned and cursed God in their hearts (v. 5).

3. Who presents himself to God, along with the angels?

Satan also came with them (v. 6).



Living with Pain
Strength and Survival

4. How does God describe His servant Job?

And the LORD said to Satan, "Have you considered my servant Job, that there is none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, who fears God and turns away from evil?" (v. 8)

5. What is Satan's challenge to God?

Satan accuses Job of only fearing God in order to get a blessing. He predicts that if God strikes everything Job has, Job will curse God to his face (vv. 9–11).

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

Yes, Job's life was interrupted! He lost his wealth and his children.

The Sabeans stole his oxen and donkeys and killed his servants (vv. 13–15).

Lightning burned Job's sheep and servants (v. 16).

The Chaldeans took his camels and killed the servants (v. 17).

A mighty wind killed Job's seven sons and three daughters (vv. 18–19).

Although God gave permission, all Job's calamity was caused by Satan (v. 12).

7. Has pain interrupted your life? What have been some of your losses because of pain?

Please encourage open sharing among the group participants. It may be emotionally painful to talk about losses, but it is healing. Use affirming body language and active listening skills here. Be conscious of the time, however, and limit sharing to no more than ten minutes or so. Let participants know how much time you can devote to this.

8. What does James 4:13–14 tell us about our plans? Is human control an illusion?

When we make plans for the future, we need to remember that we don't even know what will happen tomorrow. Yes, human control is an illusion.

9. In James 4:15, how does God instruct us to qualify our plans?

Instead you ought to say, "If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that."



10. How does Job respond to the testing that God allows?

Job tore his robe, shaved his head, and fell to the ground and worshiped God. He did not sin by charging God with wrongdoing (vv. 20–22).

11. 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.)

Possible responses include begging God for relief, asking “Why?”, being angry at God, blaming God, wondering whether pain might be a punishment, feeling like God is distant, and other reactions to pain. Emphasize that God loves each woman deeply even though pain’s presence may make it hard to feel His love. Our belief in God’s love for us is based on His Word rather than on our feelings. Remind the women that God freely offers forgiveness for any response to pain which may have been sinful.

Read Job 2:1–10.

12. What is Job’s second test. What does God give Satan permission to do?

Satan challenges God to “*stretch out your hand and touch his (Job’s) bone and his flesh, and he will curse you to your face*” (v. 5).

An the LORD said to Satan, “Behold, he is in your hand” (v. 6).

13. What limits does God place on Satan’s action?

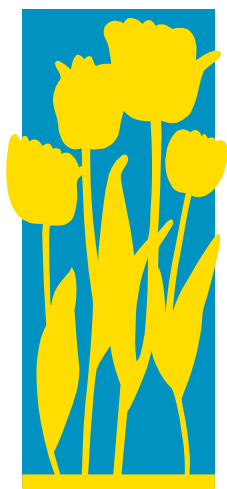
“... only spare his life ...” (v. 6).

14. With what does Satan afflict Job?

So Satan went out from the presence of the LORD and struck Job with loathsome sores from the sole of his foot to the crown of his head. (v.7).

15. Do you find it validating that physical pain was deemed hard to bear? If so, why?

Physical pain, especially when it’s chronic, is a steady, noxious assault on one’s nervous system. It is physiologically linked to depression and is experienced by most people as a serious burden. Knowing that this is true can validate the sufferer’s experience.



Living with Pain
Strength and Survival

16. What does Job's wife encourage him to do?

Then his wife said to him, "Do you still hold fast your integrity? Curse God and die" (v. 9).

17. What does Job actually do/say?

But he said to her, "You speak as one of the foolish women would speak. Shall we receive good from God, and shall we not receive evil?" In all this Job did not sin with his lips (v. 10).

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

Grief is a normal human response to loss and is a stage on the road to acceptance.

Being angry in the face of loss is also normal, but we are cautioned in Psalm 4:4, *Be angry, do not sin*. As a cry of pain from the heart, voicing anger is acceptable.

Blaming God for a loss is accusing God of failing to be our Protector. It overlooks the fact that we live in a fallen world where sin and its results cause suffering of many kinds.

Cursing God, as Job's wife demanded, violates the second commandment: *"You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain"* (Exodus 20:7). Cursing God assassinates His character.

19. Which responses are sinful? Which are not?

If our anger becomes an accusation against God's goodness, it becomes sinful. However, grieving and cries of distress from our hearts are not sinful.

20. Which responses preserve the relationship between you and God? Which do not?

No sin terminates the relationship with God except for the sin against the Holy Spirit: persistent rejection of God's gracious offer of forgiveness and salvation. (Matthew 12:31, 32).

Blaming God and even cursing God can be followed by repentance, forgiveness, and restoration of relationship. God is eager to forgive even if, in a moment of anger, you cursed Him! If you already carry the burden of pain, you don't need to carry the extra burden of guilt. Confess your sin to God, and receive His wonderful forgiveness.

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



- From Satan's point of view?

Satan wants to prove that Job only loves God for the blessings he receives from God. Satan wants to tempt Job to lose his faith.

- From God's point of view?

God would enable Job to respond in faith, proving Satan wrong! Job fears and loves God, but not just for the material blessings which God can give. God's purpose is to test and strengthen Job's faith in God as his Redeemer.

God does not cause evil, but when evil happens, He brings good from it. *And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose* (Romans 8:28).

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

Encourage the women to share a favorite Bible verse which has helped them.

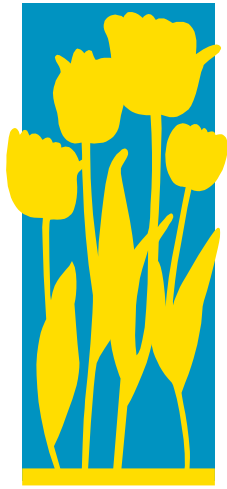
23. Do you think your response to your suffering matters?

As Christian women, we are ambassadors for God, and yes, our response to our suffering matters. Others will see us turning to God for help and relying on God's loving strength, even when we don't understand our suffering. God gives us encouragement to trust Him in Proverbs 3:5, 6: *Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths.*

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



Living with Pain
Strength and Survival

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!



Session Two: My Heart's Cry

After completing college and two years of graduate school, I became a licensed physical therapist. I was disabled at age 27, but prior to that I was able to work for five years in my field. I am also a trained and active Stephen Minister. Physical therapists focus on the biological, or physical sources of pain. Stephen Ministers focus on the emotional and spiritual aspects of pain. So let's talk about all three.

Does your pain fall into any of these categories?

Fibromyalgia	Whiplash	Headaches
Osteoarthritis	Rheumatoid arthritis	Back or neck pain
Motor vehicle accident	Burn injuries	Crush injuries
Tendonitis	Frozen shoulder	Cancer
Multiple Sclerosis	Cerebral Palsy	Post Polio syndrome
Nerve injury	Muscle tears	Ligament sprains
Amputated limb	Phantom limb pain	Chronic fatigue syndrome
Complex Regional Pain syndrome	Neuropathy	Spinal cord injury

Write down the type of pain you have in a sentence or two.

How long have you had your pain?

Do any of the statements below reflect how you think about your pain?

- A burden that I have to carry, but I'm doing alright.
- A burden that I usually can tolerate, but it sometimes gets overwhelming.
- A burden that is so crushing, it consumes all my energy and coping ability just to carry on each day.

Do any of the statements below reflect how you feel about your pain?

- I'm angry, frustrated, and sick of it!
- I'm afraid I won't be able to keep handling it.



- I'm sad much of the time because I'm in pain.
- I'm anxious and don't feel a sense of well-being anymore.
- My pain causes me to fear the future.

So far we're describing the primary issue: the pain itself. But unresolved chronic pain can and often does cause secondary issues. Which, if any, of these have you experienced?

Missing work	Medical expenses	Possible job loss
Financial stress	Social isolation	Strained relationships
Childlessness	Depression / Anxiety	Divorce
I feel useless, like a burden	I feel prematurely old	I've had thoughts of suicide
My relationship with my doctor has suffered	My sense of fair play has been violated	My motives have been questioned

Are there other secondary problems which have affected you?

How has your chronic pain experience affected your view of God?

- God seems distant.
- I'm angry at God.
- I don't blame God; I just feel let down by Him.
- My relationship with God hasn't changed that much.
- My view of God is bigger than it used to be.

How has your chronic pain experience affected your view of prayer?

- I've prayed so many times for relief, but it doesn't seem to do any good.
- Prayer feels like banging my head against a wall.
- I don't pray about my pain a whole lot; I find it easier to pray about anything else!
- Other people are praying for me, but they seem frustrated that I'm not getting well.
- My pain has driven me to pray more just to get through my days.

In my case, pain cost me my career and my income. I was only able to survive financially because I had just gotten married and my husband was employed. Concerning prayer, my family and I, along with our friends,



Living with Pain
Strength and Survival

prayed thousands of times that God would heal me and return me to an active life. Instead, God's plan for my life seemed to include ongoing suffering. I was also turned down twice by the Social Security system, which said I wasn't disabled when I really was. It took me 18 years, four major back surgeries, and an appeal with an attorney to receive Social Security disability benefits.

Read Psalm 13

1. How does David, the author of Psalm 13, express his feelings to God? In which ways is David's response different from Job's? Similar?

David asks the Lord "How long?" four times in the first two verses. He feels like God has forgotten him and is hiding His face from him (v. 1). David speaks of wrestling with his thoughts and feeling sorrow in his heart (v. 2).

2. David expresses his raw feelings very openly to God; Job was more reserved with his feelings, at least initially. Both David and Job turned to God as a response to their suffering, just as our children have turned to us when they have been hurt. Think of a toddler who has fallen and scraped his knee, who comes running to his parent, tears streaming down his face, howling at the top of his lungs, needing to be held and comforted. This is a picture of us coming to God with our pain.
3. How does David deal with his anger toward God? Do you think it's justified or appropriate? Does God invite it?

Consider and answer me, O LORD my God; light up my eyes, lest I sleep the sleep of death (v. 3). David demands an answer from God. He fears for his life, and he is totally dependent upon God's rescue.

Lest my enemy say, "I have prevailed over him," lest my foes rejoice because I am shaken (v. 4).

David reminds God of what's at stake: this is a life and death matter.

In 1 Samuel 13:14, God calls David a man after His own heart. God created humans with emotions, and David shares his feelings readily with God.

4. What does God seem to do with David's questions?

Here and in many other Psalms, God seems to allow and accept David's questions and his voiced emotions. Later in the Psalm God leads David to remember His past faithfulness. In verses 5 and 6, David expresses this: *But I have trusted in your steadfast love; my*



heart shall rejoice in your salvation. I will sing to the LORD, for he has dealt bountifully with me.

5. From David's example, we learn that it is permissible to tell God that we are hurting. Have you told Him that you don't understand what He is doing in your life?

6. Please complete the following phrases:

Oh, Heavenly Father, I am hurting! I _____

I don't understand _____

7. Based on what you know of God from Scripture, what do you think God hears when David asks "why?" or "how long?"

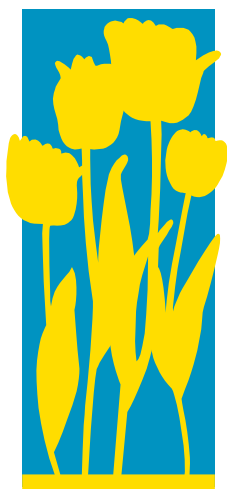
Since God sees David as a man after His own heart, and since the Lord is David's Shepherd, (Psalm 23), I believe that God hears David's cries as a plea for relief from circumstances which feel crushing to David. He is turning to his loving Father and Good Shepherd for help, amid circumstances which David experiences as intolerable.

8. Please complete the following:

Why are you allowing this to happen to me? I am especially confused about _____

How long will I have to _____

?



Living with Pain
Strength and Survival

9. David expresses both fear and despair in various Psalms. How do we reconcile this with the New Testament commands, *Do not be anxious about anything*, and *Rejoice in the Lord always*, as found in Philippians 4:6, 4?

Difficult circumstances in our lives can and often do bring anxiety, fear, and despair. Our response to these circumstances is encouraged in Philippians 4:6: *but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.*

Also, we are instructed to rejoice in the Lord, which is different from rejoicing in our difficult circumstances themselves. God is at work; that's why we rejoice in Him.

10. What light does Ecclesiastes 3:1–4 shed on this?

For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven (v. 1).

A time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance (v. 4).

Weeping and mourning are appropriate during times of loss!

11. Refer again to Psalm 13. How does David express hope or trust in God?

David knows God's character, His unfailing love; David knows God as his Savior; his heart rejoices in God's salvation (v. 5).

David remembers that God *has dealt bountifully with me* (v. 6).

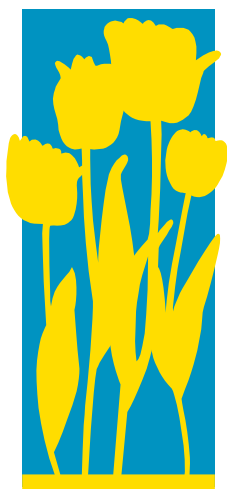
12. Even when you are hurting, or when you don't have answers, can you express trust in God before you know the outcome of the situation? Try writing a short prayer here. Please consider being very honest and real with God. He knows everything you are going through, and He wants you to come to Him with your heart's cry. If you are struggling with this, look through the Psalms for godly examples of people expressing their hearts' cries to God.



Living with Pain
Strength and Survival

Here and in many other Psalms, God seems to allow and accept David's questions and his voiced emotions. Later in the Psalm God leads David to remember His past faithfulness. In verses 5 and 6 of Psalm 13 David expresses this: *But I have trusted in your steadfast love; my heart shall rejoice in your salvation. I will sing to the LORD, for He has dealt bountifully with me.*

We can do the same: we can come to our Father with our heart's cry, and we can also remember God's past faithfulness to us.



Living with Pain
Strength and Survival

Session Three: What About Healing?

What would you do if you could meet Jesus face to face? I've spent many hours imagining this, and I'm pretty sure I'm not alone. While reading the New Testament, I've longed to be one of the many sick people who came to Jesus for healing while He walked on this earth. There are numerous descriptions of Jesus' healing ministry, and as far as I can tell, He healed anyone who came to Him and received His touch. Oh, how I've envied them. I thought if only I could have lived 2,000 years ago in that small part of the world — Israel — during Jesus' three years of public ministry — I could have been lifted from my bed of pain and — imagine! — been restored to a normal life!

But since Jesus really is God, time and location shouldn't matter. He is equally capable of healing me in this current year, in the country of the United States of America, as He was in the year 30 A.D. in Israel. In the same vein, He is equally capable of healing you. So why doesn't He heal us of all of our diseases and pain when we cry to Him now?

Jesus does heal His children now, but our understanding of healing needs to be broadened.

Read Mark 2:1–12

1. From this passage, what does Jesus do for the paralyzed man?

Jesus said to the paralytic, "Son, your sins are forgiven" (v. 5).

He said to the paralytic — "I say to you, rise, pick up your bed and go home." And he rose and immediately picked up his bed and went out before them all (vv. 10b–12a).

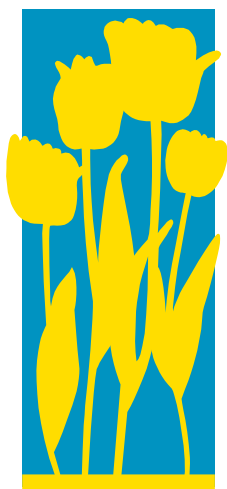
2. Which of the two actions does Jesus do first?

Jesus first forgives the man's sins.

3. Which seems to be of greater value to Jesus, and, by extension, to His Father: forgiveness of sins, or physical healing?

Jesus places greater value on forgiveness of sins.

"Which is easier to say to the paralytic, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to



Living with Pain
Strength and Survival

say, ‘Rise, take up your bed and walk? But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins’ — he said to the paralytic — “I say to you, rise, pick up your bed, and go home” (v. 9–11).

4. Would you consider forgiveness of sins to be spiritual healing?

Yes. Our deepest spiritual need is rebirth in Christ through forgiveness of sins.

5. Which type of healing has temporary value? Which has eternal value?

Physical healing has temporary value, but even those who receive it eventually die. Spiritual healing brings eternal life!

6. Is Jesus’ spiritual healing available to all?

John 3:16 tells us, *For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.* Christ died for all. This truth can comfort the chronic pain sufferer, because she has already received the greatest healing of all!

Forgiveness of sins is Jesus’ first priority, and it is a type of healing, since our deepest spiritual need is rebirth in Christ through the forgiveness of our sins. Physical healing has temporary value, and we naturally long for it, but even those who receive it will eventually die. Spiritual healing, by contrast, brings eternal life! This truth can comfort us as chronic pain sufferers who know Jesus, because we have already received the greatest healing of all!

Forgiveness can also have an impact on our physical well-being. Jesus showed that He knew our sins could weigh us down and prevent physical healing. It has been important in my life to forgive and to be forgiven, to let go of anger against people and systems which have damaged me. I’ve also had to ask my husband and son to forgive me for the short fuse which pain can create in me. Forgiveness eases tension and stress which we hold in our bodies, which in turn affect pain and healing.

7. Is there anyone whom you need to forgive.

8. Is there anyone from whom you need to ask forgiveness?

We usually think of the New Testament as the place to read about God’s healing power, but it is also recorded in the Old Testament. Over 3,000 years ago, Naaman, commander of the army of the king of Aram, traveled to seek help for his health problems.



Read 2 Kings 5:1–15

9. What was wrong with Naaman's health?

He was a mighty man of valor, but he was a leper (v. 1b).

10. How did Naaman hear about God's power to heal?

Naaman's wife had a young servant girl who had been captured from Israel (v. 2).

She said to her mistress, "Would that my lord were with the prophet who is in Samaria! He would cure him of his leprosy" (v. 3).

11. Contrast the faith of the king of Israel with the faith of the servant girl.

The king of Israel tore his robes in despair that the king of Aram had sent Naaman to be cured of leprosy (vv. 5–7). The servant girl believed that the Lord's prophet could and would cure Naaman (v. 3). We can't conclude, however, that God will heal every time a person believes He will.

12. Why do you think Elisha gave such simple advice for Naaman to follow?

And Elisha sent a messenger to him, saying, "Go and wash in the Jordan seven times, and your flesh shall be restored, and you shall be clean" (v. 10).

Simple advice would make it clear to Naaman that it was God's power, not the simple cure itself, that accomplished the healing.

13. Why did Naaman find it difficult to comply with such a simple request?

Naaman's pride was offended. He had expected Elisha to meet him directly rather than send a messenger (v. 11). Naaman also thought the two rivers of Damascus to be superior to the Jordan River, and he didn't want to humble himself (v. 12).

14. Was Naaman ultimately able to follow God's leading?

Yes; his servant convinced him to try. *So he went down and dipped himself seven times in the Jordan, according to the word of the man of God* (v. 14a).

15. What outcome did Naaman receive?

His flesh was restored like the flesh of a little child, and he was clean (v. 14b).



Living with Pain
Strength and Survival

16. Why do you think God required some effort from Naaman when God could have easily healed him without it?

God wanted Naaman to step out in faith and to understand that he was relying on God's power, not his own actions. God knew this was the way to obtain an active response of Naaman's heart.

17. Was curing Naaman's leprosy God's ultimate goal, or was it having a relationship with Naaman? See verse 15. In other words, is physical healing God's highest priority?

Then he returned to the man of God, he and all his company, and he came and stood before him. And he said, "Behold, I know that there is no God in all the earth but in Israel."

In curing Naaman, God displayed His power and revealed Himself as the only true God. God's ultimate goal for His people is that He "desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth (1 Timothy 2:4).

18. Could God be leading you to a treatment for your pain that you are hesitant to try? Ask Him to guide you as you weigh potential treatment options. Pray for the courage and the resources to follow through with what He leads you toward.

Read Psalm 23, or recite it if you have it memorized.

19. List the verbs from Psalm 23. What do they tell us about the Shepherd?

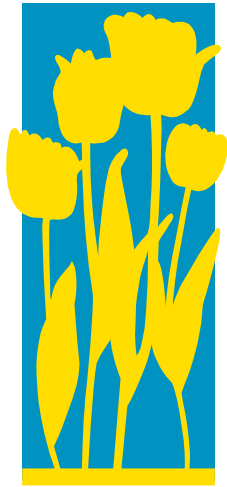
The Lord is my Shepherd; He makes, leads, restores, comforts, prepares, anoints.

The Good Shepherd is constantly attentive to His sheep. He is active and proactive on their behalf.

20. What is God's character, especially in relating to His children?

God is love. God is our Heavenly Father, the only perfect parent. God promises to work in all things for our good (Romans 8:28) and that He will never leave us nor forsake us (Joshua 1:5).

21. Can you visualize yourself being the lamb in this Psalm? If you are hurt (suffer chronic pain), what does the Shepherd do? Does He gently pick you up and hold you tenderly, close to His heart? Does He whisper reassurances of His love and care?



Living with Pain
Strength and Survival

Participants can take comfort in imagining the tenderness of their Shepherd toward them.

22. What else might you picture the Shepherd doing to care for you?

Possible responses might be providing supportive family or friends, a church home, medical care, prompting people to pray, providing a Stephen Minister or pastoral visitation.

We will spend one more session studying healing. Take some time this week to read God's Word about and reflect on the image of the Good Shepherd — who carries you in His arms, who tenderly bandages your wounds, and who will never leave you nor forsake you.



Session Four: What About Healing? Part 2

You may be wondering why we are spending two sessions studying healing. I have found it to be an area fraught with confusion and mistaken teachings, which can even cause Christians to question God's love for them — especially if they believe they have not received any of God's healing. Last session we looked at the paralyzed man and Naaman. This session we will look at three more examples from Scripture.

Read John 9:1–7

1. What assumptions had the disciples made about the man's blindness?

And his disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" (v. 2)

2. What reason does Jesus give for this man's blindness?

"It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be displayed in him" (v. 3).

3. What does this tell us about human assumptions and judgments?

People can be wrong! They can even go as far as blaming the victim!

4. Have you ever wondered whether your pain might be a punishment from God? How do you handle this question?

Jesus' response is encouraging to those who may ask God, "Is my pain a punishment?" It sure can feel like a punishment sometimes. But here Jesus indicates that God's power and work is displayed in our lives, even lives burdened by suffering, maybe especially in lives burdened by suffering!



Read Mark 5: 25–34

5. Does this woman's story remind you at all of your story? Hint: She had suffered a great deal under the care of many doctors and had spent all she had, yet instead of getting better, her condition grew worse.

Most people with chronic pain have seen numerous health care professionals and tried various treatments and therapies, only to end up frustrated by how little has been accomplished. It is typically a very long, expensive, and discouraging process.

6. Have you ever felt let down by the medical system? Please explain.

As a leader, be aware that this question can be emotional dynamite! However, feelings of anger, sadness, or disappointment are valid and appropriate. Sometimes doctors injure patients outright, or, to a lesser degree, promise things they can't deliver. Patients may pay for expensive treatments or endure surgeries and have them fail to relieve pain. Other patients may not have qualified for a treatment which may have helped. Finally, many people with chronic pain have been judged to be failures by a medical system which only wants to acknowledge successes.

7. Jesus healed this woman, but how did God's time-frame in her life compare to our usual expectations?

The woman had been bleeding for twelve years before she was healed. Our usual expectations are that we want to be "better" in days, weeks, or months. One year would be a very long time, let alone twelve years!

8. To what does Jesus attribute her healing? See verses 30 and 34.

And Jesus, perceiving in himself that power had gone out from him (v. 30).

He said to her, "Daughter, your faith has made you well" (v. 34).

Read John 5:1–13.

9. Who did Jesus heal in this instance?

A man lying by the pool of Bethesda in Jerusalem (vv. 2, 5).

10. How long had the man been disabled?

He had been an invalid for 38 years! (v. 5)

11. Was it the man's faith in Jesus' healing power that made him well?



Living with Pain
Strength and Survival

See verses 12 and 13.

They asked him, “Who is the man who said to you, ‘Take up your bed and walk’?” Now the man who had been healed did not know who it was, for Jesus had withdrawn, as there was a crowd in the place.

12. Have you ever been told that you didn't have enough faith to be healed? If so, what does this illustration help to clarify? Is Jesus' healing power dependent upon our faith?

Jesus healed the man at the Pool of Bethesda without the man having faith in Jesus' power to heal; the man didn't even know who Jesus was!

13. What would be the difference between asking for healing and insisting on healing?

God encourages us to ask him for healing in James 5:13a and 14. *Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord.* Asking for healing leaves the results up to God. Insisting on healing is more like giving God an ultimatum: “Healing me is the only answer I will accept from you.”

14. Is it sometimes tempting to value healing, the gift, more than God, the Giver?

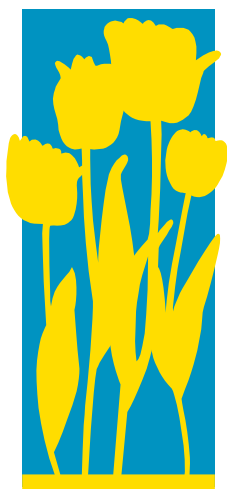
Yes; even though healing is a good thing, it can become an idol if we value it more than we value God Himself.

15. Is it natural or supernatural to pray “Thy will be done?” How did Jesus model this prayer for us in Gethsemane?

Our sinful nature wants to have our own way. “My will be done!” Our new nature wants to have God's way. *“Thy will be done.”* In the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus asked His Father to take the cup of suffering from Him. He knew that dying on the cross for the sins of the world would be excruciatingly painful: physically, emotionally, and spiritually. But He left the answer to His request in His Father's hands, praying, “Thy will, not my will, be done.” Jesus is our model of submission to the will of the Father.

Summary:

Yes, our understanding of healing needs to be broadened. God can, and sometimes does, grant instantaneous, miraculous, physical healing. He tells us to ask Him for the desires of our heart! There's nothing inherently wrong with asking for a miracle. He is Almighty God, Creator of heaven and earth. He has total authority over His physical creation, including our



Living with Pain
Strength and Survival

bodies. Miracles are gifts from God which bring great joy and celebration when they occur. But they are not God's highest value. Miraculous healing is temporary in nature, and God's highest value involves the eternal.

God's greatest concern in this world is salvation by grace through faith in Jesus Christ. That is God's ultimate healing, and it's spiritual, as well as eternal, in nature. That should encourage those of us who suffer with chronic pain. We can receive salvation through Jesus, the forgiveness of sins, and eternal life. In heaven we will have new, glorified bodies, which will never have pain again. That's an amazing future to which we can look forward.

In the meantime, if we haven't been healed of our pain, let's remember not to regard healing as all or nothing. God **is** at work in our lives. Short of a miracle, God may grant partial physical healing, which is a slower process. He may choose to grant emotional healing. He may ease panic attacks or depression; He may help us work through our anger or heal traumatic memories. He may help us reach acceptance of our chronic pain, which is also a form of healing.

The Holy Spirit is always at work in the life of a Christian, bringing the fruit of the Spirit to replace our natural fruit. The natural fruit of suffering, or what comes naturally to us, is: resentment, envy, anger, bitterness, hopelessness, and even despair. The fruit of the Spirit is the antidote: *love, joy, peace; patience, kindness, goodness; faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control* (Galatians 5:22, 23). Certainly when we exhibit spiritual fruit, rather than our natural fruit, that is a type of healing! It shows the power and work of God.

Praise God for His healing — in all of its forms!



Session Five: The Call to Prayer

It's all too easy for any of us to list the things which pain has taken away. For the first several years after I became disabled by pain, I wrestled with the shock of no longer being able to work, to travel, or to enjoy active leisure pursuits. There were losses for my new husband Andy, too. Much of our time the first year we were married was spent with him taking me to doctor appointments and diagnostic tests. Our honeymoon to the Canadian Rockies had to be canceled. Our newlywed physical intimacy was severely limited by my constant and frightening level of pain.

1. How about you? What has pain taken from you? What are some activities you used to enjoy that aren't worth the price you have to pay in pain now?

My limitations also impacted my ability to be active in my congregation. Most of the roles there seemed to be designed for able-bodied people. How could I serve others when I could barely take care of myself? I could no longer teach Sunday School, volunteer with the youth, help out with a women's retreat, or serve in the nursery. I couldn't sign up for Altar Guild, attend meetings, or offer to cook food for fellowship events. Much of the time I had trouble even attending church services, let alone doing more than that.

2. Think about the changes you've had to make in your church involvements to accommodate your pain. Would you say they are large or small adjustments? Have you been able to find areas of service or involvement which accommodate your limitations?

Identifying our losses is easy. What's challenging is identifying our gains. What do I mean by that? I found that pain forced me to retreat from the world around me. My life became more of an inner life. I had more time alone than I had ever had before. I turned to God more frequently in prayer — in fact, God seemed to be calling me to a **lifestyle** of prayer!

Prayer as Lament:

For you, O Lord, are good and forgiving, abounding in steadfast love to all who call upon you. Give ear, O LORD, to my prayer; listen to my plea for grace. In the day of my trouble I call upon you, for you answer me (Psalm 86:5–7).



This type of prayer is called a lament. When pain is severe, this prayer may be all that our minds can process. Put these verses into your own words. For example: Please help me, God! I need You! I'm in pain! Don't forget me!

Here is another example of a lament, especially verses 7 and 9:

*7) Deep calls to deep at the roar of your waterfalls;
all your breakers and your waves have gone over me.*

*8) By day the LORD commands his steadfast love,
and at night his song is with me,
a prayer to the God of my life.*

*9) I say to God my rock: "Why have you forgotten me?
Why do I go mourning, because of the oppression
of the enemy?" (Psalm 42:7–9).*

3. How is your battle against the enemy, pain, especially intense at night? Does it ever keep you from sleeping? According to verse 8 above, what should we focus on if we're awake in the middle of the night?

David refers to the Lord's song being with him. Some theologians believe that David is meaning this Psalm, a portion of God's Word. Focusing on God's Word takes us out of our own perspective, when our thoughts can be jumbled by pain, fatigue, and medications, and reminds us of God's heart toward us. Is there a particular Bible passage which could be used for this purpose? Could you print the words and lay them on your nightstand?

If you feel completely hopeless, unable even to formulate a prayer, it's all right. Remember that through your Baptism you are a child of God, and *He* holds on to *you*. You can rest in the confidence that you belong to Him; you were baptized in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit! You are God's precious daughter. Rest in that promise!

Prayer for Comfort:

Likewise, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words. And he who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God (Romans 8:26, 27).



4. How is it comforting to know that the Holy Spirit groans for us when we are suffering physically, emotionally, or spiritually?

Suffering pain can be very exhausting and overwhelming, especially when it's chronic and unrelieved. We don't always know what to pray for beyond asking for relief, and here the Bible assures us that God's Spirit himself groans for us in prayer! We have an incredibly caring Heavenly Father who is moved by our pain; His Spirit groans with and for us.

Let's read another Bible passage about comfort:

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. For as we share abundantly in Christ's sufferings, so through Christ we share abundantly in comfort too (2 Corinthians 1:3–5).

5. How can God use our suffering to equip us to intercede for others, and to offer comfort to them?

God has given us an incredible gift to strengthen and to comfort us: the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper. Jesus Himself is present in, with, and under the bread and wine which we receive in Holy Communion. When you receive Jesus in His body and blood, you receive your Savior's forgiveness and strength. His body was broken by dying on the cross; in that very act, He was broken for me and for you. You are not alone in your suffering. Jesus knows suffering, and His broken body is connected to your broken body! Remarkably, in that Sacrament, He enters into your painful body and He helps, comforts, and strengthens you. Praise God!

Prayer as Service:

Do not be slothful in zeal, be fervent in spirit, serve the Lord. Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer (Romans 12:11–12).

6. In the verse above, how does God instruct us to respond to affliction? Do you think His instructions afterward regarding prayer follow hand-in-hand? In other words, does patience in affliction allow us to be more faithful and useful in prayer?

If we are patient in our own affliction, we will be more equipped to persevere in prayer for others in their challenges, rather than losing heart quickly if there isn't a quick answer. We can pray for God to sustain them in their challenges but also to use those challenges for His purposes.



Living with Pain
Strength and Survival

I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine for you all making my prayer with joy, because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now (Philippians 1:3–5).

7. When Paul wrote this letter to the Philippians, he was in prison, chained to a Roman guard. How can pain become like a prison?

Just as Paul couldn't leave prison, we can't leave our painful bodies. I've often wanted to take a vacation from my pain, but unfortunately it comes with me wherever I go. Another way in which pain is like prison is that it significantly limits what we can do.

We can learn from Paul about focusing on prayer for others and for the spread of the Gospel when we're in a prison of pain. Paul's purpose was not compromised by his imprisonment. He continued to write letters to the churches he had started, he witnessed to his prison guards, and he prayed for the early Christian church. In these ways he continued to have influence outside of the prison walls. God was building His kingdom, and He allowed Paul to have an active role!

We, too, can focus outside of our prison of pain, by thinking about the needs of others and praying for them. LWML women are women of service; when pain limits the ways in which we can serve, we can still labor in prayer for God's kingdom! We can pray for the mission of LWML; for the faith development of our children and grandchildren; for unsaved friends and family members; for our local congregations; for missionaries; for the sick and dying; the list is endless! This is important work to which God calls us! Thank God for giving those of us who suffer chronic pain meaningful service to be able to offer back to Him!

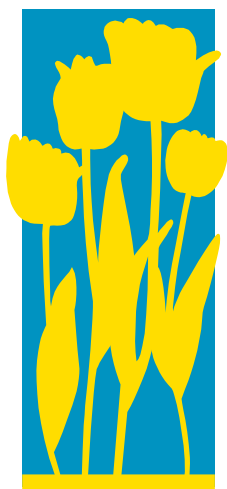
8. Refer again to the previous passage from Philippians 1. What emotion did partnership in the Gospel bring to Paul?

Paul refers in Philippians 4:1 to praying with joy. His focus was on relationships and on the spread of the Gospel rather than on his own personal freedom from prison. We can share Paul's focus — and his joy! It comes from the Lord, and not from our circumstances.

Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving. At the same time, pray also for us, that God may open to us a door for the word, to declare the mystery of Christ (Colossians 4:2–3a).

9. How might God use our pain to "open a door for our message, so that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ?"

When people observe us coping with pain, they may wonder how we do it. If they ask, we have a chance to speak of God being our strength and



Living with Pain
Strength and Survival

of Jesus being our Savior and our model of the suffering servant. God may also give us opportunities to witness to our health professionals.

For Further Study: If time is limited, skip to the summary. If time allows, however, continue with questions 14–18, or complete them on your own. They are especially relevant for anyone who needs encouragement in prayer.

And when he had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each holding a harp, and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints (Revelation 5:8).

And another angel came and stood at the altar with a golden censer, and he was given much incense to offer with the prayers of all the saints on the golden altar before the throne, and the smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, rose before God from the hand of the angel (Revelation 8:3–4).

10. What is the significance of prayer in the book of Revelation? How is it described?

It has eternal value! The prayer of the saints is a bowl of incense in God's throne room! Incense was used in the Temple as a fragrant offering to the Lord. The implication is that God is pleased to receive our prayers and delighted to respond to them according to His perfect will.

11. Isn't it amazing that our almighty God loves us so much that He delights in hearing our prayers. He brings them into His very presence in heaven and promises to respond to our every call to Him according to His perfect will!

Participants may feel like they have nothing to contribute if they can't serve on Altar Guild, cook a meal for someone who is ill, volunteer teaching Sunday School, or do a myriad of physical tasks which they may have done before their pain began. Remind them that God values prayer, and they may have more time to pray than many able-bodied women!

Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand; do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus (Philippians 4:5–7).



12. How do we gain true peace? How would you describe the link between prayer and peace?

God gives us peace in Christ. Therefore we can present our requests to God in every situation rather than just being anxious about our situations. God assures us here that He will bring peace to our hearts and minds. It is a supernatural peace which comes from God, reminding us that all things are under His control, and that He uses even our pain for something good that He is accomplishing.

13. What specific quality are we told to express?

“With thanksgiving”— always remembering that God is the source of everything good in our lives, and being grateful to Him for our blessings.

... praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints ... (Ephesians 6:18).

14. When are we urged to pray, and for what?

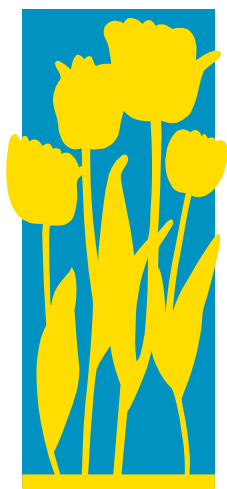
“On all occasions,” “always,” “with all kinds of prayers and requests..

Summary:

Intercessory prayer is hard work. This work wouldn't get done without God's calling² in the lives of His people, perhaps especially His people with physical pain or illness, who are less able to serve physically. In God's wisdom He creates space in our lives which is more contemplative, because pain forces us to withdraw. Withdrawing seems like a loss, but consider that the role of “prayer warrior” might be **one of your gains**. If you've been wondering how you can serve, praise God for giving you the calling and work of intercession. You are helping in meaningful ways to spread God's kingdom! In addition, you can thank Him for growing your sensitivity to others in pain, and for your ability to share the comfort which you've received with them.

On the other hand, there may be times when you can't pray for others or for the spread of the Gospel. When pain is intense, it can make breathing difficult and thought nearly impossible. Pain medications can certainly jumble the mind. The last thing I would want to do is to make you feel guilty about that! At those times, I have found a simple breathing exercise to be helpful. Just try to focus on a single word, like “peace” as you focus

² The word “call” has several different meanings. Here we are not talking about the call God gives to every Christian, the call to faith. Nor are we talking about the call of an ordained pastor to a congregation. Rather, this refers to what Luther cited as the “calling,” or vocation, that God assigns to each believer. Although every Christian is instructed to pray, some Christians are “called” to prayer as their primary ministry, like Anna in Luke 2:36–37.



Living with Pain
Strength and Survival

on your breathing. Breathe “peace” in. breathe “peace” out. Or breathe “Jesus” in; “loves me” out. Remember that the Holy Spirit intercedes for you when you can’t pray. You are baptized; you are a child of God. Just entrust yourself and those you love to the Father’s care, and rest in Him.



Session Six: The Great Cure-Giver's Gifts

When I was trained to be a Stephen Minister, I was grouped into a class of ten adults. Local Stephen Ministry Leaders invested two hours per week, or fifty hours total, in teaching us how to be caregivers to our future care receivers. We learned things like using active listening skills, reflecting feelings, praying with our care receivers, and how to be trustworthy as well as Christ-centered in our ministry. Dr. Kenneth Haugk, Founder and Director of Stephen Ministry International in St. Louis, emphasized key concepts in the training materials. We would serve as “care givers” but God would be the “Cure-Giver.” We would meet once a week with our care receivers, but God would supply the power within our ministry, and He would be the avenue for making broken people whole again.

Part One: What are the Great Cure-Giver's gifts?

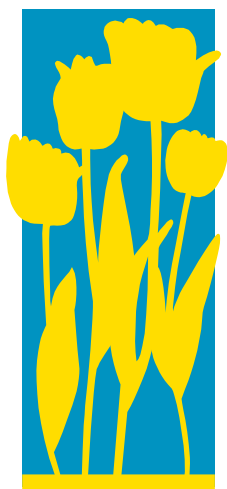
The greatest gift — that of salvation — can only be given by the Great Cure-Giver Himself. He tells us clearly in John 3:16, *“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have eternal life.”* The book of John continues quoting Jesus in verse 17, *“For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.”*

God's grace reaches out to each one of us, and we can receive it by faith. Jesus suffered so that each of us might be redeemed, forgiven, and spiritually healed. He gave Himself up so that we can have the hope of eternal, resurrected healing. What did it cost Him? What is the true face of love?

Read Isaiah 53:3–5

1. Isaiah wrote this passage prophetically, by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, hundreds of years before Jesus was born. In describing the coming Messiah, how does Isaiah portray Jesus in verse 3?

He was despised and rejected by mankind, a man of suffering, and familiar with pain.



Living with Pain
Strength and Survival

2. Jesus fulfilled this “Suffering Servant” passage in His passion, crucifixion, and death. Read Mark 15: 16–41. List three or four ways in which Jesus suffered pain for us.

Crown of thorns; struck repeatedly by soldiers; carried his own cross; crucifixion including pain of the nails, pain of hanging vertically for hours, extreme dehydration and thirst, and pain of suffocation.

3. Sometimes it can seem like God is distant when we are in pain. Does God know suffering firsthand?

Some people think that the existence of suffering proves that there is no God. In fact, our God voluntarily chose the path of suffering in order to end ours! Jesus suffered crucifixion and death. God the Father experienced the agony of watching as His Son suffered and died. Many of us who are mothers would rather take pain ourselves than watch one of our children suffer; yet God was willing to embrace this very pain of a parent watching his child die. He did this in order to buy us back from sin, death, and the power of the devil. Amazing!

4. Returning to Isaiah 53, what does verse 5 tell us about **how** Jesus accomplishes our salvation and healing?

But he was wounded for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his stripes we are healed.

On a personal note, knowing that Jesus suffered excruciating pain for me just about rips my heart out sometimes. On my bad days, when my pain is a burden that feels like it’s crushing me, I find it hard to fathom Christ taking on my pain **voluntarily**. I would give almost anything to get *out* of severe pain; yet Jesus entered *into* pain that He didn’t have to endure. And He took on far more pain than I will ever have to bear — physically, emotionally, and spiritually. In addition to the horror of crucifixion, He took on the weight of the sins of the whole world. When I think about these things, all I can do is kneel before my Savior’s cross in gratitude. Living with chronic pain has taught me about the magnitude of Jesus’ sacrifice and the measurelessness of His love. I want to encourage you to reflect on this thought, too. Our pain is not meaningless if it helps us to identify with the sufferings of Christ, and to understand more clearly what He has done for us.

Perhaps that is part of the mystery which Paul is talking about in Colossians 1:24: *Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am filling up what is lacking in Christ’s afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church.* Jesus’ sacrifice is certainly complete in paying the price for sin and in freeing us from the power of sin, death, and the devil. But God may use some aspects of our earthly suffering in the furthering of His church.



Part 2: The Great Cure-Giver's gift of salvation flows out to us through the Means of Grace.

Our Lord connects us to His death and resurrection, as well as to the hope of eternal, resurrected life, through His Word and Sacraments. Let's go back to the book of Isaiah, because it has some very rich passages. As you look up some of the following sections of this prophetic book, I encourage you to think about these questions: How does our Lord's Gospel pour over us in these passages, giving us God's forgiving grace? How do these sections of God's Word comfort us in our distress?

1. Read Isaiah 1:18.

"Come now, let us reason together, says the LORD: though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall become like wool."

Although my sins are like scarlet, God's incredible forgiveness will make them white as snow! I will be cleansed.

2. Look up Isaiah 9:2–7. Verse 6:

For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

I am comforted to know the Wonderful Counselor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace — personally.

3. Next read Isaiah 25:6–9

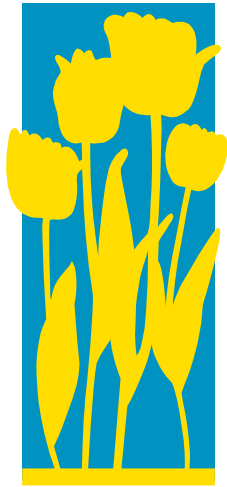
⁶On this mountain the LORD of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wine, of rich food full of marrow, of aged wine well refined.

⁷And he will swallow up on this mountain the covering that is cast over all peoples, the veil that is spread over all nations.

⁸He will swallow up death forever; and the Lord GOD will wipe away tears from all faces, and the reproach of his people he will take away from all the earth, for the LORD has spoken.

⁹It will be said on that day, "Behold, this is our God; we have waited for him, that he might save us. This is the LORD; we have waited for him; let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation."

I love verse 8 where the Lord wipes away the tears from all faces; what a comfort for those of us whose chronic pain and all of its fallout has provoked us to tears!



Living with Pain
Strength and Survival

4. The ten verses of Isaiah 35 describe the joy of the redeemed. They are encouraging words, indeed, when you are feeling discouraged, especially verse 4.
5. Look up Isaiah 40:1–5.

Verses 1 and 2 bring immense comfort:

*Comfort, comfort my people, says your God.
2 Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and cry to her
that her warfare is ended,
that her iniquity is pardoned,
that she has received from the LORD's hand
double for all her sins.*

6. Finally, refer to Isaiah 43:1–3a.

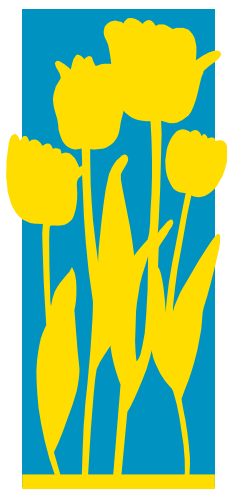
Notice how personal the verbs are in verse 1: The Lord has created us, formed us, redeemed us, summoned us by name; we are His! In verse 2, notice the many hardships through which God accompanies us; we are not alone in our suffering!

Let's transition to the New Testament, which contains many precious passages of the Gospel. We'll also look at passages concerning the Sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper, which Christ instituted during His time on earth. **Choose three of the following passages and read through them, underlining phrases which you find especially meaningful.** Try to pick one from the last four which include the Sacraments. You may wish to read through all of them at a later time. All passages are from the New International Version.

- Ephesians 2:1–10

Made Alive in Christ

And you were dead in the trespasses and sins ² in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience —³ among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.^a ⁴ But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, ⁵ even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ — by grace you have been saved —⁶ and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus,⁷ so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace, in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. ⁸ For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift



Living with Pain
Strength and Survival

of God, ⁹ not a result of works, so that no one may boast. ¹⁰ For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

- 1 Peter 1:3–9

Praise to God for a Living Hope

³ Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, ⁴ to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, ⁵ who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. ⁶ In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, ⁷ so that the tested genuineness of your faith — more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire ... ⁸ Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, ⁹ obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

- Galatians 3:26–29

²⁶ For in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. ²⁷ For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. ²⁸ There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. ²⁹ And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise.

- Romans 3:21–28

Righteousness Through Faith

²¹ But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it — ²² the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: ²³ for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, ²⁴ and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, ²⁵ whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in is divine forbearance he had passed over former sins. ²⁶ It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus. ²⁷ Then what becomes of our boasting? It is excluded. By what kind of law? By a law of works? No, but by the law of faith. ²⁸ For we hold that one is justified by faith apart from the works of the law.



- Colossians 1:22

²² he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him.

- Romans 6:1–5

Baptism: Dead to Sin, Alive in Christ

What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? ² By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it? ³ Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? ⁴ We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. ⁵ For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his.

- 1 Corinthians 11:23–26

The Lord's Supper

²³ "For I received from the Lord what I also deliver. to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed. took bread,²⁴ and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, "This is my body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me."²⁵ In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me."²⁶ For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes."

- 1 Corinthians 10:16–17

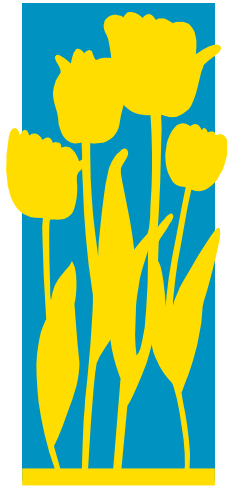
The Lord's Supper

¹⁶ The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ? ¹⁷ Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread.

- Matthew 26:28

The Lord's Supper

²⁸ "for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins."

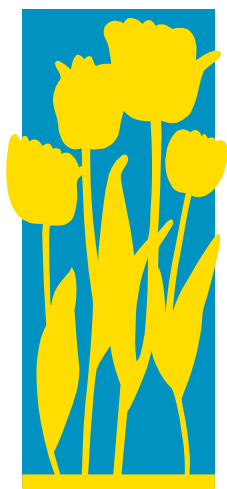


Living with Pain
Strength and Survival

Summary:

To summarize this section, I would encourage you to discuss several of these passages with your group. How do the Biblical words give Christ's gift of forgiveness? How do they teach us about His grace that comes when we received Baptism and as we receive Communion? How do God's Word and Sacraments (God's Word with visible signs) give you comfort, peace, and hope in bearing with your sufferings.

For me personally, the Gospel has often comforted me in my trials. I've been blessed to have several caring pastors who have visited me over the years, and when they give me the Sacrament of Holy Communion I receive a fresh indwelling of the Holy Spirit. By taking in the body and blood of Jesus, I know that my sins are forgiven. I have a new start because God Himself is strengthening me to take up my burden of pain. I don't have to do it alone. Suffering, pain, weakness, depression, and isolation all shrink in the presence of the bright Light of Jesus. For this reason, I want to commend each of you to receive the comfort and spiritual healing that is given in God's Word and Sacraments as often as you can!



Living with Pain
Strength and Survival

Session Seven: Our Hope of Heaven

Despite all the things I know about my purpose, some days my struggle with pain still overwhelms me. Can you relate? I know that God has a good plan for my life and that He will listen to my heart's cry. He has given me a type of healing — the healing that comes from His forgiving grace found in His Word and Sacraments — which gives me strength to accept my pain. God has work for me to do, and I have the privilege of lifting others up to my Lord in prayer. Ye. I still have days when I'm miserable. In fact, I have given myself permission to have 1–2 miserable days per month! I am especially vulnerable to this when my pain flares up and I have to cancel plans, or when I can't attend something that's important to me, like a family event.

Sometimes I allow myself to grieve the life that could have been. Living in pain just gets too hard, and I need an escape. On those days, what sustains me is the promise which God gives me of eternity with Him. Oh, how I long for the Lord's gift of heaven! Paul writes in his letter to the Romans that the whole creation longs for heaven!

For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God (Romans 8:18–21).

1. How do you see creation's bondage to decay in your own life?

Chronic pain and the limitations or disability which accompany it are part of creation's bondage to decay. Whether the tissue originally causing the pain has been unable to heal completely, or whether the nervous system itself is processing pain abnormally, chronic pain is a departure from God's original design for our bodies.

2. How powerful is the contrast of suffering and decay with glory? Does it seem too good to be true?

We have suffering now. We are in bondage to decay for this present life. But after Jesus returns, we will live with Him forever in His kingdom. We will have glorified bodies, just like He does (1 Corinthians 15: 35–58). Praise God! No more pain, ever again! It DOES seem too good to be true; it's the best news ever!



Living with Pain
Strength and Survival

For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience (Romans 8:22–25).

3. How does hope for a future that's better than the present sustain us?

We know that our pain and suffering won't last forever. Jesus will return to take us home with Him. This life is not all there is. Chronic pain significantly diminishes our quality of life; when quality of life is diminished, this hope of a better future can sustain us.

4. Is this just wishful thinking. How do we base our hopes on something solid. Who is giving us this hope of a better future?

God is — in His Word!

But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself. (Philippians 3:20–21).

5. Are our current circumstances “all there is”? Where is our primary citizenship?

No. Our citizenship is in heaven, not in this world.

6. Who has control of all things? What will He do with our bodies?

The Lord Jesus Christ has control of all things. He “will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.”

7. What will it be like for us in heaven when we are transformed to be like Jesus? What do we know about Jesus' resurrected, glorious body?

Jesus was seen and recognized by His disciples after His resurrection. He talked, walked, and ate with them. We, too, will have physical, perfected bodies with freedom of movement and the pleasure of eating but without weakness, illness, or pain.

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Behold, the



Living with Pain
Strength and Survival

dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away” (Revelation 21:1–4).

8. Can you imagine life without death, crying, or pain? Try to visualize such intimacy with God that He wipes your tears away!

9. To what do you look forward the most? No funerals? No pain? Proximity to God?

Meanwhile we struggle on with this world, this life, this burden of chronic pain. The great apostle Paul suffered from a thorn in the flesh. He asked God three times to remove it, but God said no. He told Paul that His grace was sufficient for him. Paul was to continue suffering his thorn in the flesh. We learn elsewhere that Paul longed for heaven. He expresses this longing in his letter to the Philippians.

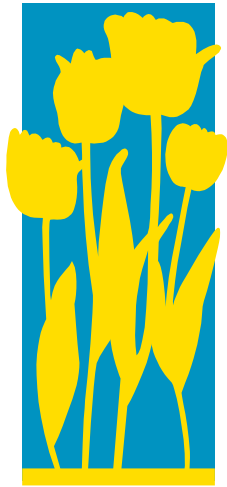
For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me. Yet which I shall choose I cannot tell. I am hard pressed between the two. My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better. But to remain in the flesh is more necessary on your account (Philippians 1:21–24).

10. How is Paul’s longing different than a death wish? Have you ever felt that “to die is gain”?

Paul knew that to “be with Christ” was “better by far,” but he also knew that his life in this world had meaning and a purpose. Many chronic pain sufferers long for relief from their pain, and for believers with chronic pain, the idea of being with the Lord in heaven can be very appealing. That’s different than wanting to die.

11. How might it benefit others that we remain in this world until God calls us home? If you can’t think of any ways, consider asking someone who is close to you. It might surprise you to find out what you mean to them!

God has meaningful work for each of His children to do until He calls us home to Himself. Consider the value in the following things you may have to offer: listening to a friend and caring for her; reading to a grandchild; sending an encouraging card to someone who is sick; giving the gift of your attention to a family member.



Living with Pain
Strength and Survival

For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them (Ephesians 2:10).

Of course, that is not to say that we can earn heaven with our good works. Those of us who suffer pain may realize, even more than many, that we can't work to earn anything from God. We can only receive the unmerited, unearned, freely given love of God. And God understands our frailty. He gives us the Eucharist as a foretaste of the feast to come.

For Further Study: If time is limited, skip to the summary. If time allows, however, continue with the following, or think about it on your own. It is especially relevant if you just need an escape.

God has blessed me with a specific way of receiving His care, and maybe it will bless you. As our Creator, He has given us the gift of our imaginations, and we are told to meditate on Scripture, day and night. I've found that imagining myself being close to God is hugely comforting. Here are some scenes which I've pictured in my mind when things got really hard. These first three are loosely based on the image of Jesus inviting the children to come to Him in Mark 10:14.

- Sitting on Jesus' lap with His arms around me, simply being held.
- Jesus entering my living room where I am lying, tenderly covering me with a blanket.
- Jesus sitting quietly near my daybed, keeping me company with a look of love on His face.

The last two are based on Biblical scenes from Revelation:

- Having a beautiful new body, dancing for Jesus. I'm barefoot, dancing on green grass near the bank of the River of Life — and I'm actually graceful!
- Being one of the billions of people in heaven, worshiping God and singing praises to Him in a huge multitude of harmonious voices!

12. Does one of these images in particular speak to you? Can you think of an image you could use in a similar way? Take a moment to jot it down here:



Living with Pain
Strength and Survival

Summary:

The last encouragement I want to give you is from the Old Testament. Already 3,000 years ago, God was promising His people a better future some day.

No lion will be there, nor any ravenous beast; they will not be found there. But only the redeemed will walk there, and those the LORD has rescued will return. They will enter Zion with singing; everlasting joy will crown their heads. Gladness and joy will overtake them, and sorrow and sighing will flee away (Isaiah 35:9–10 NIV).

Can you imagine? Joy will overtake us — we won't be able to escape it! Not pain, not sorrow, not sighing, but JOY. I can hardly wait, can you?

Heaven is our future, thanks to what Jesus has done for us. Celebrate that fact, cling to it, hope for it, imagine it. God will strengthen you through this hope given in His Word. Every day you live through, you are one day closer. And it's going to be amazing!



Session Eight: Legacy

I want to conclude this Bible study with a startling thought: Your willingness to carry your burden of chronic pain with faith, hope, and love may be part of your life calling. Passing down an example of perseverance in suffering may be part of your legacy to your children and grandchildren, or, if you're single, to your nieces, nephews, and friends. Your response to your pain and limitations matters. And our legacy is not only for our families, but it is for all those watching us, watching how we Christians react to circumstances in our lives.

Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us (Romans 5:3–5 NIV).

1. Does perseverance naturally flow out of suffering? Can you think of another potential response?

Although the Romans 5 passage above states that suffering produces perseverance, we have a choice in our response to suffering.

We can respond with rage, resentment, and bitterness instead of perseverance. We can even choose to reject our faith in God as a response to suffering.

2. Can you think of examples of perseverance producing character? Boot camp, for example? Do any spiritual examples come to mind?

Ruth persevered in caring for Naomi; Sarah persevered in waiting on God's promise that she would have a child in her old age; Paul persevered through shipwrecks, beatings, and great trials to spread the Gospel.

3. Does character develop quickly? Or does it take time?

Those of us who have raised children know that character development takes time!



4. How do you see character leading to hope? What kind of hope can character produce? Is it merely hope for the removal of suffering, or is it a deeper form of hope?

Character can lead to hope in God's loving purposes for our lives, even if suffering isn't entirely removed. We have the hope of God strengthening us through His Word and Sacraments. We also have the hope of heaven.

In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, so that the tested genuineness of your faith — more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire — may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ (1 Peter 1:6–7).

5. How does Peter draw a relationship between trials and faith?

Peter states that trials refine our faith, which is worth more than gold!

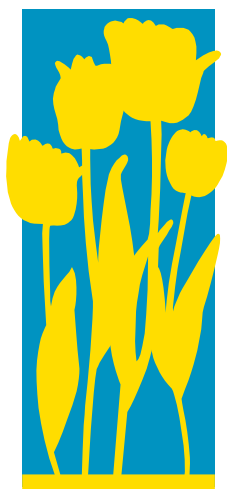
6. What, according to Peter, are the results of refined faith? Does it encourage you to think that your response of faith will be celebrated one day in heaven?

"Your faith ... may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory, and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed." This is very encouraging, and it reminds us that our response to our suffering matters, even in an eternal sense! All glory to God!

7. Personal thought: Your Heavenly Father is trustworthy with the trials of your life, so that in His grace your faith can be refined and proved genuine. Pray for willingness to trust God and for the Holy Spirit's strength to do so. As we are connected with our Savior in His grace, Jesus' prayer "Thy will be done" is also our prayer.

I want to tell you about someone in my family who left a legacy of a faith-filled response to suffering. My Uncle Gilbert died over 50 years ago, and he is still inspiring his extended family today. My mom told me about him on numerous occasions, and I feel like I know Uncle Gilbert even though he died before I was born! Gilbert had juvenile onset rheumatoid arthritis, and his joint pain was so severe that in 1936, at age 23, he spent seven months at The Mayo Clinic. Gilbert had one operation after another to fuse both hips and both of his knees. He spent the rest of his life in a reclining wheelchair with his legs held out straight in front of him because they couldn't bend. He had pain every day and died in his early 50's from cancer in his spine.

God enabled my Uncle Gilbert to leave a legacy. He never married or had children, and he watched while his eight brothers and sisters grew up and left home. He never moved away from the farm house where he was



Living with Pain
Strength and Survival

born and where Grandma took impeccable care of him; he didn't get to have a career or profession. But he had the joy of the Lord. He had been baptized and he knew that his most important identity was that of "child of God." The pages of his Bible were worn thin. The local pastor loved visiting him because Gilbert thought about others in the community and prayed for them. Gilbert relied on receiving God's grace, strength, and forgiveness through Holy Communion. The pastor always left with his own spirits lifted.

Uncle Gilbert left a legacy of resilience for his eight siblings and 23 nieces and nephews! By God's grace, Gilbert responded to pain and suffering in a way that inspires us. Although he couldn't "work," Gilbert passed his time productively, learning how to do leatherwork while lying down in bed. He was willing to let God use his life in a very different way than he would have chosen. I think he accepted his present circumstances and made the best of them, but his focus was on the unseen, the eternal, the promise of heaven. His response to suffering has helped me to formulate mine. And my response, in turn, may leave a legacy for someone else in the future — just as your response can!

But we have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us. We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed. (2 Corinthians 4:7–9).

8. How does Paul contrast what has happened to him with what hasn't happened?

Paul speaks very directly of the hardships he's suffering: he is hard pressed, perplexed, persecuted, and even struck down. Yet he is not crushed, in despair, abandoned, or destroyed. It's a matter of degree. His life isn't easy, but God has made Paul's life possible.

9. Have you felt struck down? If so, how has God been there to make sure you are not destroyed?

Participants may relate to this metaphor if their pain has caused significant physical limitations and losses. God's provision may have come through tangible, physical assistance from family members, friends, neighbors, or their church: through people bringing meals, giving them rides, or visiting them — at home or in the hospital. They may have received help with errands, housework, or other forms of caregiving. God may have used health care professionals to help them in either outpatient or inpatient settings, or in assisted living facilities or nursing homes. God may have provided pastors or chaplains bringing the ministry of Word and Sacrament. He may have provided Stephen Ministers; mental health professionals; and other



Living with Pain
Strength and Survival

encouragers to make the spiritual and emotional aspects of living with pain possible. God may have provided financial support of some kind.

Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths (Proverbs 3:5–6).

10. How can this Scripture help us to trust God with our life purpose and with the legacy which we leave behind?

We are told to trust in the Lord with all our hearts. It's good to remember that God has purposes for our lives and that He doesn't waste our suffering! He uses it, in ways we won't fully understand until heaven. For now, we can trust the promises of His Word.

11. Is there a difference between trying to understand and leaning on our understanding? What is the danger in that?

Trying to understand what God is doing can be encouraging to us if we see something good coming out of our suffering; for example, if we see the fruit of patience growing in our lives or the lives of family members. Leaning on our own understanding, however, assumes that we can figure out all that God is doing in our lives, and that's all He is doing. We're warned against this in Isaiah 55:9

For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.

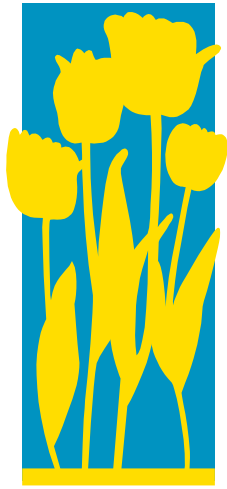
Know therefore that the LORD your God is God, the faithful God who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments, to a thousand generations (Deuteronomy 7:9).

So we have come to know and to believe the love that God has for us. God is love, and whoever abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him (1 John 4:16).

12. What do we know about God's character? Is He trustworthy?

God doesn't change; He is faithful; He keeps His covenant of love to a thousand generations of those who love Him; He is trustworthy!

Some people believe that the presence of suffering in the world proves that there can't be a loving God in the universe. The Bible tells us that's not true. Our loving God was moved by the suffering of the world, and He did something about it — at great cost to Himself. God's ultimate answer to suffering is that He sent Jesus into our broken world. Jesus is the Incarnation of the Gospel; He is the Gospel of God in human flesh. Jesus died for us, paying the price for our sin, so that everyone who believes in



Living with Pain
Strength and Survival

Him can have eternal life with Him in heaven. THAT good news enables us to trust God, even when we don't understand.

Pray we will be drawn by God's grace to trust Him with the trials, pain, and disappointments in our lives. Let's keep our focus on Jesus, continually nourished by His Word, His body, and His blood, as we *press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus* (Philippians 3:14).



Living with Pain
Strength and Survival

Appendix: Biblical Reference Guide

Because your time working through this study in a group is limited, here is an optional resource of Scripture readings which can be used as part of your daily devotion, if desired. The readings specifically address God's promise of help and His gift of comfort in times of suffering.

So to keep me from becoming conceited because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to harass me, to keep me from becoming conceited. Three times I pleaded with the Lord about this, that it should leave me. But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness" (2 Corinthians 12:7–9).

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. For as we share abundantly in Christ's sufferings, so through Christ we share abundantly in comfort too. If we are afflicted, it is for your comfort and salvation; and if we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which you experience when you patiently endure the same sufferings that we suffer (2 Corinthians 1:3–7).

So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal (2 Corinthians 4:16–18).

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him (John 3:16, 17).

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away ... "the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away" (Revelation 21:1, 3, 4).



Living with Pain
Strength and Survival

For I, the LORD your God, hold your right hand; it is I who say to you, "Fear not, I am the one who helps you." I am the one who helps you, declares the LORD; your Redeemer is the Holy One of Israel (Isaiah 41:13–14).

"In returning and rest you shall be saved; in quietness and in trust shall be your strength" ... Therefore the LORD waits to be gracious to you, and therefore he exalts himself to show mercy to you. For the LORD is a God of justice; blessed are all those who wait for him (Isaiah 30:15a, 18).

"Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be frightened, and do not be dismayed, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go" (Joshua 1:9).

Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths (Proverbs 3:5, 6).

"For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways," declares the LORD. "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts" (Isaiah 55:8, 9).

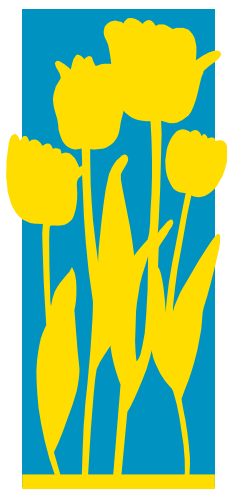
I will give thanks to you, O LORD, among the peoples; I will sing praises to you among the nations. For your steadfast love is great above the heavens; your faithfulness reaches to the clouds. Be exalted, O God, above the heavens! Let your glory be over all the earth! (Psalm 108:3–5)

But we have this treasure in jars of clay (our human bodies), to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us. We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed. (2 Corinthians 4:7–9).

More than that, we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us (Romans 5:3–5).

Though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, so that the tested genuineness of your faith — more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire — may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ (1 Peter 1:6b–7).

He (God) gives power to the faint, and to him who has no might he increases strength. Even youths shall faint and be weary, and young men shall fall exhausted; but they who wait for the LORD shall renew their



Living with Pain
Strength and Survival

strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint (Isaiah 40:29–31).

You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore (Psalm 16:11).

“For thus says the LORD: When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will visit you, and I will fulfill to you my promise and bring you back to this place. 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. Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will hear you. You will seek me and find me, when you seek me with all your heart. I will be found by you, declares the LORD, and I will restore your fortunes and gather you from all the nations and all the places where I have driven you, declares the LORD, and I will bring you back to the place from which I sent you into exile” (Jeremiah 29:10–14).



Living with Pain
Strength and Survival

About the Author



Blessed by God, Roxanne M. Smith is witnessing to the love and comfort God can give through pain and struggle. Her love for her Savior and devotion to Him explodes through this Bible study and through her book, *Struck Down But Not Destroyed*. She is a published writer, Stephen Minister, and a member of her parish health

ministry team. She and her husband, Andy, and their son, Jakob, reside in Michigan. To read more, visit her website: RoxanneSmith.org.



Copyright © 2013, revised 2022

All rights reserved.

Lutheran Women's Missionary League

801 Seminary Pl, Ste. L010

St. Louis, MO 63105

lwml.org

Designed by: Kristy Stark Knapp