

Cling to These 7 Christ-Focused Principles When Suffering Chronic Illness

Is God continually teaching us through the various situations in our lives? Is He sovereign and in control of every detail and circumstance that happens to us? Yes, I think the Bible clearly teaches us these truths. 1 Thessalonians 4:3a says, "For this is the will of God, your sanctification." The Reformation Study Bible defines sanctification as "the process by which God's Holy Spirit transforms believers' thoughts, motives and behavior to conform to the holiness of Christ Himself." It seems that this sanctification process more often occurs during times of affliction than when everything is going our way.

God has used a chronic disease in my life to transform me to become more of the person He wants me to be in Christ. I am thankful for the lessons He has taught me, and I'd like to share them with you.

What is a chronic illness or disease? The U.S. National Center for Health Statistics defines it as "one lasting three months or more which generally cannot be prevented by vaccines or cured by medication nor just disappears." Several years ago I was diagnosed with microscopic colitis for which there is no definitive cause or cure. Since this diagnosis I have tried special diets, steroids and over the counter medications. My husband and I have prayed. My Christian friends have prayed. But I still have the condition.

I know that God can heal me completely because He has healed me of another long-lasting, serious illness. But, so far, He has chosen to let me experience this chronic condition. I don't know all of His purpose in this, but I think part of the

reason is to teach me some of His principles for living, brings Him glory, blesses me and equips me to better teach the Pathway 2 Wholeness Bible Study to other.

These are the 7 principles:

1. Seek God's kingdom before everything else (Matt. 6:33).
2. Focus on today—don't be anxious about tomorrow (Matt. 6:34).
3. Know that God causes all things to work together for your good (Rom. 8:28-29).
4. Always have hope in God (Rom. 5:3-5).
5. Pray and receive prayer from other believers (James 5:16).
6. Depend on God's grace, moment by moment (2 Cor. 12:9).
7. Be thankful for God's good gifts in managing the disease (James 1:17).

Seek God's kingdom before everything else

Jesus proclaimed His purpose for coming into this world was to "preach the kingdom of God" (Luke 4:43). If this was Jesus' mission, then we, His followers must also make the kingdom of God and His righteousness the focus of our lives. Instead of constantly concerning ourselves with meeting our physical needs, which only breeds anxiety, we are to make our relationship with Him the highest priority in life. God promises to meet all the needs of those who trust in Him.

Focus on today—don't be anxious about tomorrow

Jesus cautioned His disciples—as He cautions us—about worrying over our physical necessities. Instead, He promises to meet our needs when we seek Him first. Therefore, we are not to focus on what we need in the future but to concentrate on God's provision for us today.

In addition, we know that God will work everything, pleasant or unpleasant, for our good because we love Him and have been called by Him to become like Jesus.

Always have hope in God

Difficulties and sufferings can lead to hope. Hope from God is quite different from uncertain, wishful thinking. The Lord promises that our hope in God will not disappoint us because God's love has been poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit. Since God's love is steadfast, His mercies are new for us each morning, and His faithfulness is so great, we can always have hope (Lam. 3:22-23).

Pray and receive prayer from other believers

James, inspired by the Holy Spirit, reminds us to confess our sins to one another and pray for one another, that we may be healed. Sin can block healing. Confession to another faithful believer requires humility and honesty. But God says that the prayer of a godly, righteous person has great power. Through the faithful prayers of others, we can experience a renewed vitality in our souls which can lead to an improved physical condition.

Depend on God's grace moment by moment

The Apostle Paul pleaded with God several times to remove the "thorn in his flesh." Whatever the thorn was, it was a difficult, painful trial. But God didn't remove the thorn. Instead he gave Paul His grace so that God's power would be manifested through Paul. God will accomplish His good purpose for our lives despite the hindrances or weaknesses we experience.

Be thankful for God's good gifts

God's greatest gift to us is Jesus Christ, His Son and our Savior and Lord. But all good gifts ultimately come from

above, from our Father. So, the Lord gives medicines and therapies to help manage a chronic condition. He has poured out His grace through scientific and medical advancements.

Certainly, I would like to be completely free of microscopic colitis, but by the grace of God, I am learning to be content whatever my physical situation. I am able to be content when I remember and practice God's principles and when I focus on the Lord Jesus. He is my strength (Phil. 4:11-13). {eoa}

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