

When Healing Doesn't Come

People who live with chronic illness or physical challenges need compassion, not condemnation.

Some folks are born with disabilities; others of us become disabled later in life. In my case, I was almost 40 years old when my life took a surprising and challenging detour into chronic illness and disability.

I had been diagnosed with diabetes, asthma and high blood pressure several years before that time but had enjoyed fairly decent health. Then the bottom started dropping out.

I developed a myriad of complications from the diabetes. A head injury sustained in an accident caused a vision disorder that made it impossible for me to safely drive a car on a highway or interstate. I was diagnosed with primary immune deficiency, a disorder that made me sick with various kinds of viral or bacterial infections almost constantly.

At midlife, I found myself unable to perform a full-time job or even drive myself to the doctor's office. Routine activities that I had taken for granted became major challenges or simply had to be given up. My world became increasingly smaller.

I have always been one to count my blessings, and I have been blessed for 24 years to have as my companion and friend my wife, Mary. An inner-city, special-education teacher, Mary had to begin to shoulder much of the load at home (including becoming my "taxi driver"). Our financial situation began to deteriorate when we were forced to live mostly on her modest salary. This added additional stress to our lives.

Mary and I are blessed to have some good Christian friends who offer support, encouragement and intercessory prayer. These are believers who realize that a disabled person needs encouragement and understanding more than anything else.

I wish I could say this has been the case with all of our Christian friends and acquaintances, but then I wouldn't be telling the truth. Others, frankly, have been more a part of the problem than the solution.

As a "full gospel" believer, I know from the Bible that our God is a healing God. I have many friends who have been miraculously healed of a number of serious diseases and illnesses.

I've learned that God does things His way in His time. I prayed for and expected immediate healing, but for reasons known only to the Lord, it hasn't occurred yet.

I began to identify with the biblical character Job, who learned that it wasn't his job to question God but to trust in His love and wait patiently until His deliverance finally came.

Some of my charismatic friends and acquaintances don't see it quite the same way. They find various ways to let me know they view my illness and disability as being somehow my fault.

I've been told I am "worse than an infidel" because I am not able to work full time and my wife has become our primary provider. People have said I must have major unconfessed sin that's keeping me ill or that I must not have enough faith to receive my healing. I've even been reprimanded for not

repeating aloud enough Scriptures with sufficient frequency to earn my healing. The list goes on.

Through all of this, I have learned to place my trust in a God who is always faithful and willing to help, even during the darkest hours. Those of us who have chronic health problems and disabilities aren't looking for pity, and we aren't looking for someone to solve all our problems—only God is capable of that.

But, at the very least, we need to know that our brothers and sisters in Christ are praying for us and standing with us as we face considerable challenges associated with disability and chronic health problems.

Sometimes a compassionate smile and a pat on the back from a Christian brother or sister can be just what the doctor ordered.

When Sickness Hits ... TRUST GOD

By Chris Maxwell

After enduring a painful illness that caused me to lose some of my memory, I had to learn to trust all over again. Here are some steps to take if you are facing physical infirmity.

Trust God. True faith doesn't force change to occur. It believes that God knows best. It allows us to courageously endure. Even in a wheelchair. When we face reality, biblical faith brings victory no matter what the scoreboard says.

Receive help. When healing doesn't come, allow friends to

fulfill their roles as teammates of Christ's body. We aren't called to do it all! We can maintain relationships and launch into new territory when a friend drives us to the doctor or feeds us a meal.

Understand how people might struggle with how we are "different." How can we love those trying to like us? It requires inner security and divine love. It is OK for them to resist change. Confess honestly that you also have to fight through it.

Stick to new rules. If I have to use PowerPoint and a Palm Pilot to remember people's names, so what? Thank God for the help. Submitting to what God has given to save our lives helps us reach our potential for His glory.

Tell your story. Many people need to learn what you know about recovery and hope. Did you not have enough faith? Why didn't you give up? Announcing God's grace in your trial brings glory to Him and truth to His patients. Tell it!

Give your time and talents to help those in need. To get more out of your battle, give more of yourself away. Use your strengths. Offer gifts, prayers and smiles. Hold a hand. Believe in a miracle.

Observe the many opportunities that now belong to the new you. Also use your weaknesses; Paul knew what he was writing about. God's strength shows off when we stand on the stage of life to facilitate an audience of broken people.

Discharge hurt in healthy ways. Release inner infections of hate and anger. Don't deny them; send them away. Laugh and

cry. I often have patients participate in what I call "Writing for the Health of It." Use a journal. Take David's Psalms and make them personal. Your honest writing isn't negative confession. It allows God to turn your mourning into dancing!

Chris Maxwell is pastor of Evangel Assembly of God in Orlando, Florida. He contracted encephalitis in 1996 and required numerous treatments. He has used his illness to share Christ with dozens of nurses, doctors and physical therapists.

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