

A Guide to Counseling the Chronically Ill

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Someone you know likely suffers from chronic illness, whether you are aware of it or not. Maybe you picked up this booklet because you want to help these individuals. Maybe you picked up this booklet because you want to be prepared for the day someone you know finds out that they have a chronic disease. Regardless of your situation my hope is that this booklet is a help to you as you seek to counsel the chronically ill. Where do we start?

The overall goal of Biblical Counselors, Pastors, and all Christians should be to speak the truth in love to the following three groups affected by chronic illness:

1. Individuals with a chronic illness.
2. Yourself, if you are the person who has a chronic illness.
3. The spouse, and other family members, of the person with a chronic illness.

Why must we speak the truth in love to these three groups? We must speak the truth in love as it is what leads us to grow to be like Christ. Ephesians 4:15-16 instructs us to do this:

15 Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, 16 from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.

In the most general sense our goal in helping the chronically ill is no different from our goal when we seek to help any Christian. We hope to see the person repent and believe, follow God, live the new life of putting the old nature to death and putting on the new man. In short, we hope to see the Christian grow in sanctification as they become less sinful and more holy. The way we, as a pastor, counselor, or Christian help any individual with this process is by speaking the truth in love. As we speak the truth in love to the chronically ill, we will encounter specific and unique challenges that flow from living with chronic illness, but our most basic goal is the same as it would be in counseling any other Christian.

As we speak, we must ensure that we speak the truth and that we speak in a loving manner. Speaking that lacks either truth or love does not glorify or please God. Truthful content and a loving manner are both required, so that the hearer may grow in godliness and maturity. Speaking the truth in love does include confronting sin, but it also includes speaking encouragement, help, hope, and God's promises in a way that aims to sustain the sufferer by grace.

How do we speak the truth in love to each of these three groups? We speak the truth in love to these parties by following the instruction of Paul in 1 Thessalonians 5:14. "And we urge you, brothers, *admonish* the idle, *encourage* the fainthearted, *help* the weak, *be patient* with them all." We speak the truth in love by admonishing/rebuking, encouraging, and helping, and by doing them with patience. Someone may need help in one, two, or all three of these categories at the same time. This paper explains how to counsel individuals in these three areas while also addressing situations that can challenge your patience.

This paper is presented in three sections. The three sections give specific ideas on how to encourage, help, and rebuke someone with a chronic illness. An appendix is also included that lists scriptures that you may want to consider using with the ill person.

Section 1 - How may someone with chronic illness need to be encouraged? (Pg. 5-18)

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Appendix 1 - Rebuke, encourage, and help the sufferer with the following scriptures. (Pg. 35-42).

WHY I WROTE THIS PAPER:

I wrote this paper because I see a need for literature within the biblical counseling movement that specifically gives advice on counseling in chronic illness. As the husband of someone with chronic illness, I searched for resources and was unable to find material on this topic. While there were resources for chronic pain, caregivers, suffering, disability, and grief/bereavement, there were no resources specifically addressing chronic illness. These resources were helpful, as chronic illness overlaps many of these issues, but the need for resources specifically addressing chronic illness remains. I

began to write this paper hoping that it would help those who suffer from chronic illness as well as those seeking to provide biblical counseling to individuals with chronic illness.

This paper flows from personal experience, scripture, and the wisdom of others. In January 2010 my wife, Marianne, began to experience chronic fatigue and chronic itching all over her body. The fatigue remained and the itching turned into chronic pain. Soon she felt pain around her liver which radiated throughout her abdomen, as well as numerous other symptoms. She progressively worsened and was confined to bed due to her symptoms until she became jaundiced and eventually passed out from liver pain.

Throughout this process we made numerous trips to urgent care and the emergency room with no help, no diagnosis, and no treatment from the physicians we saw. We were told that there was nothing to be done until we were able to meet with a Gastroenterologist, a specialist who would hopefully have more answers. After months of these symptoms we met with a specialist who was able to give an initial diagnosis of auto-immune hepatitis and auto-immune cholangitis. These two diseases are auto-immune diseases, meaning they result from the body's own immune system overfunctioning and attacking the body in a way that makes it sick. In the case of my wife, her immune system attacks her liver. She was treated with numerous drugs including Prednisone, a drug that is a steroid which kept her body from destroying her liver, but also caused serious side effects in the process. Now, at the two year mark, we still are struggling to see her disease enter remission. Most of the challenges at this point stem from side effects from drugs (mainly Prednisone), not the disease itself.

As we struggled to see Marianne's health improve, I entered a new job opportunity as a hospital chaplain in 2011. I served as a hospital chaplain for 15 months, and in that time I cared for hundreds of patients and their families experiencing a wide range of struggles, including suffering, illness, trauma, and death. Much of this paper is influenced by my experiences and work as a chaplain. Often I was called to care for individuals experiencing profound crisis, trauma, and suffering. Throughout my experience as a chaplain and husband, I struggled in different ways. I experienced fear, anger, desperation, and depression, crushed hopes and expectations, and other struggles that are, in large part, what led me to write this paper.

In these experiences, I knew that God was faithful to work through His Word. I learned to listen well and point people to the truth of God's word and hope of the Gospel. I prayed that God would give grace to myself and those sufferers to whom I ministered. During this time I worked with chaplains who held liberal theological views and who combined those views with secular psychology. Before becoming a chaplain, I had already seen the complete lack of power and truth in liberal theology. However, during my time working as a chaplain, I also witnessed firsthand the insufficiency of secular psychology to help people with their problems. While secular psychology offered helpful insights at the level of observing people and problems, it was inadequate and unable to address the level of interpreting the nature of people and their struggles and the level of prescribing solutions and treatment for people and their problems.

It was at this time I began to read books by Dr. Heath Lambert, Dr. Jay Adams, Dr. David Powlison, and others who presented a model of counseling that was based on the sufficiency of scripture. While I found secular psychology flawed and insufficient to help people with their problems, I found biblical counseling to be sufficient to help people with their problems because God's word is sufficient for life. The Bible does not tell us everything we may want to know about everything, but it is sufficient to tell us everything necessary to help people with their non-physiological problems. Biblical counseling believes scripture is sufficient to comprehensively inform us of everything people need to know to please God. It also teaches that there is help to be found from medicine and science when counseling the chronically ill. Again, scripture is not exhaustive, but it is comprehensive. This belief in the sufficiency of scripture for counseling is compatible with a belief that medicine and science are highly valuable and helpful in counseling. This paragraph cannot address all of the nuances, questions, and complexities that exist between the relation of the sufficiency of scripture and the disciplines of medicine, science, and secular psychology. While the sufficiency of scripture is an essential topic to explore, that is not the focus of this paper. A good place to start exploring this topic is Heath Lambert's chapter on the sufficiency of scripture (Chapter 1) in the book *Counseling the Hard Cases*, edited by Heath Lambert and Stuart Scott. My hope is that the lessons I learned from my personal experience, from my work as a chaplain, and through the works of biblical counselors can help you as you suffer or counsel other sufferers in their illness.

Section 1: HOW MAY SOMEONE WITH CHRONIC ILLNESS NEED TO BE ENCOURAGED?

1. Encourage them to be honest about their feelings with God and others.

A person with chronic illness is going to need some time and space to be sad. They need to be able to express this sadness, and other emotions, with God and other people. Chronic illness is not fun, and Christians need to allow the sufferer to honestly voice the depths of their pain. We need to commit to listen no matter how sad, painful, or dark things get. The ill person may open up at this point and share that they think or feel God has given them more than they can handle, which may be true. The Bible clearly shows that God does give people more suffering than they are able to handle. See points 15-17 in this section on pages 13-17 for an extended look at this topic. The ill person may also open up that they are thinking about, or wanting to, commit suicide. If a person is experiencing pain with no hope of healing, be mindful this may be a possibility. A person may be reluctant to share these feelings and thoughts if we do not encourage the person to be honest and commit to listen and help them.

I remember how inadequate, unprepared, and intimidated I felt the first time I was called to minister to a man who shared suicidal desires. As I sat and talked with this individual, I began by simply trying to listen to this individual's story. This person suffered from Colitis, a chronic illness affecting the intestines, and had severe diarrhea which forced him to go to the bathroom roughly 60 times in a three day period. The man was tired of feeling sick but also incredibly sad as a result of prolonged isolation. It was simply through listening, acknowledging his suffering, and showing that I cared that his desire to die ceased. While this may not occur with every person voicing a desire to die, simply being present, listening, and caring can have a powerful healing effect for a person struggling with sadness and isolation. Obviously if a person voices a desire to die, a counselor should ask specific questions to determine if a person has considered suicide, has a plan, and is intending to act on their desire and take the appropriate steps to protect a person considering suicide.

At times it can be hard for people to know how to relate to people who are sad, ill, and suffering. If this is true for you it is okay that you do not know what to do. The suffering person still needs to be pursued and cared for even when you do not know what to say.

Just be honest and tell the person you care for him or her and want to be there for the person in his or her sadness. If you feel you do not know what to do, be honest about that as well. One thing you can do is say what facts and feelings you hear them expressing. For example, you could say, "It sounds like you are feeling really sad about the way your disease is preventing you from doing X." Another thing you can do is say what you think about their sadness. For example, you could say, "I am sorry you are going through this right now. It just sounds really difficult and saddening to be going through X." As you listen to the person, encourage them to be honest about their feelings. This applies not only at the time of diagnosis but also all latter times of experiencing the illness. Just because a person knows what to expect in the future as an illness progresses does not make it easier when the illness actually progresses. It still hurts, and he or she may still feel sad. Encourage the sufferer to cry out to God as well. Psalm 13, 77, and 88 are scriptures that show people calling out to God.

2. Encourage the sufferer by being a good listener who is present with the person in his or her suffering.

Just being present with someone in their pain, even in silence, shows love and care for the person. Keep in mind, being present with Job for a week in his pain and saying nothing, is the only thing Job's friends did right. At times, when a person is suffering, nothing can be said to make things better or bring comfort. Too often a person feels the need to fix things instead of realizing that just being present and listening can significantly ease the pain of isolation. There may be things that need to be said at some point, but they may not be wise to share at that time with the sufferer. It is theologically true to tell someone who is sharing their sadness and pain, "I am sure God has a plan in this, He works all things to good." However, at certain times that truth should not be shared, as it would not help the sufferer in that moment. Sometimes just being with a suffering person is what is needed; and then, when the time comes to speak the truth in love to that person, your words will be heard and comforting.

When a person does want to talk, you need to be a good listener because listening matters to God. Scripture constantly records God telling His people to be good listeners. Here are a few instances:

- **James 1:19** – Be quick to hear and slow to speak.
- **Proverbs 18:2** – A fool takes no pleasure in understanding but only in expressing his opinion.
- **Proverbs 18:13** – If one gives an answer before he hears, it is his folly and shame.

Good ministers and counselors must become good listeners who are able to understand the person and knows how to speak the truth in love. If you work at developing good listening skills, you will become a good listener. Probing, reflecting, and using active listening skills are all good skills to develop in order to listen well. Good listening does not provide all the help someone needs, but it is the prerequisite to understanding a person's particular struggle and understanding how he or she particularly needs your help as you speak to them.

3. Remind them of what they already know is true.

Even the most theologically and biblically learned individuals, including pastors, need to be reminded of the truth as they struggle with illness and suffering. Remind the person of the goodness of God in Scripture. Remind the person of the goodness of God in your own life. Remind the person of how God has shown His goodness to them in the past. Remind the person of the eternal realities and perspectives that shape the life of a Christian. Even if the sufferer can tell you all of these things him or herself, speaking these truths to the person is powerful, comforting, and encouraging. Paul and the other apostles made a common practice of writing to remind the churches of things they already knew because they understood the power in encouraging one another with the truth, even if it was already something the hearer knew (see Romans 15:14, 1 Corinthians 4:17, 15:1; 2 Timothy 1:6, 2 Timothy 2:14, Titus 3:1, 2 Peter 1:2, 1:13, 3:1-2, Jude 5). We should do likewise.

4. Encourage suffering ill people to learn to preach to themselves.

The concept of preaching to self is essential and may not be understood by the sufferer yet. The suffering ill person needs to preach to him or herself, not just listen to him or herself. The thoughts that pop into a person's head are often whatever the person's time, thoughts, and emotions are currently focused on and should not be uncritically accepted. We need to assess our thoughts and ask if those thoughts are true. If they are not true, the person needs to acknowledge that his or her thoughts are wrong and tell him or herself the truth. Untrue thoughts must be fought, not believed. Some specific thoughts

that a sufferer will need to fight are "life won't ever be good again," "God must not love me," "my life is over," and "life is not fair". Specific questions may arise like "How can this be God's will?," "Why me?," "Is God punishing me?," etc. Clearly explaining the concept of preaching to yourself to the suffering person will be a great help to him or her as they wrestle with their thoughts and questions. The person needs to preach the Gospel to him or herself and work to apply gospel truth to the specific situations he or she is facing. People may need to constantly remind themselves of some aspect of God's character, such as His goodness, mercy, wisdom, or righteousness. They may need to remind themselves of God's actions, such as how He has been good to them and has provided for them in their past. They may need to preach to themselves specific verses they have memorized throughout their day. A good homework assignment on learning to preach to yourself could be reading the first few chapters from Dr. Martyn Lloyd Jones *Spiritual Depression*. Verses the person may need to read in order to understand this importance are Psalm 42, Psalm 43, 2 Corinthians 10:5, Ephesians 4:17-24, Romans 12:1-2, etc.

5. Remind the suffering ill person of what is real and what is not.

The ill person needs to remember that future hypothetical possibilities are not reality. The ill person may die, but he or she has not died yet. The person may lose the ability to afford his or her home, but have not yet. The person may go broke, but he or she has not gone broke yet. While it is wise to think about, and plan for the future without becoming fearful and anxious, the suffering ill person needs to remember what reality is and what it is not. In the midst of the unknown, changing diagnoses, potential disease outcomes, and other concerns, it can be helpful to think about what the reality in life is at this moment and to leave the rest in God's hands as the sovereign, righteous, loving God who holds our lives in His hands every moment of every day. God is faithful to His promises and will care for us in all situations now and in the future.

6. Point them to Jesus who knows their suffering and struggle, as He suffered and struggled too.

Pointing the person to the grace of God in the midst of suffering and illness is helpful to do, not only with passages like Ephesians 1 that speak of God's love, but also in specific passages that show Jesus' suffering and struggling for them on their behalf such as Isaiah 53, Acts 2:23, Hebrews 2:14-18, 4:11-16, 5:5-10, 10:32-34, 12:1-13. Remember that suffering lets us see more of God's grace and know Him more. As a person suffers,

he or she can know a piece of what Christ endured for them and love Christ more as a result. It is important to be reminded of, and trust in, the truth that God is still gracious to the suffering ill person. God's love is still fully on the person and passionately for him or her. God's grace has not disappeared because the person has an illness.

7. Encourage the ill person to seek comfort in God not just other people.

Seeking comfort in God and the joy of His presence is essential (Psa. 16:11). The ill person should not just seek comfort through other people. True comfort and joy is found through knowing the joy of God's presence. Psalm 34:5 and 8 and Psalm 37:4 are verses that are helpful to give to the ill person to encourage them to seek God.

8. Encourage the person to embrace the fact that they do not have control over their life.

Chronic illness is the tool that has a unique power to break our delusions of self-reliance and self-dependence. Encourage the person to embrace their lack of control and see the grace of God in his or her life moment by moment. Suffering and sickness reminds us that our feelings of having control over our lives is an illusion. God is in control and sustaining everything He created. We are always completely dependent upon God. Suffering reminds us of this fact and leads us to behold the greatness of God, and the smallness of self, in a uniquely powerful way. Encourage sufferers to embrace their dependence upon God for His glory and their good.

9. Encourage the sufferer to see how they are finding joy through circumstances and created things, rather than the Creator and fellowship with Him.

Suffering provides a unique opportunity for a person to become aware of how they are finding joy in life through circumstances and created things rather than through fellowship with God. A person can see this by recognizing when joy is lost as he or she loses the ability to work, money, the ability to eat out, travel, exercise, or a long list of other things. Spouses may experience this as well as their wives/husbands experience chronic illness. They may see that they were finding their joy through feeling healthy, doing fun things with their spouses; emotional, relational, and physical intimacy; going out with friends, family, and other people. It is not wrong to find joy in these great blessings of God. However, when all this gets stripped away, do they still have joy?

Too often my joy was lost as my wife and I were not able to do many activities we previously were able to do. My joy also was lost as I faced the potential that my wife could die. Through these experiences, I found my joy was far too sourced in creation and not sourced enough in fellowship with the Creator. I had to repent of finding my joy, identity, and fulfillment in life in created things rather than fellowship with the Creator (Rom. 1). Encourage individuals who experience the loss of joy to turn to God and find their joy through fellowship with Him. Encourage the sufferer to let suffering change his or her perspective on where joy is found. Suffering and illness should lead a person to aspire far less for a comfortable middle-class lifestyle and instead to seek to live a life that finds its fulfillment through fellowship with the creator. One helpful scripture on this point is Psalm 16:11. "You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore."

10. Encourage sufferers (and their spouses) to appreciate the blessings they do have because death is imminent.

Chronic illness and suffering breaks you out of an unappreciative and unthankful mindset by opening your eyes to the reality that every single thing we have in life is a blessing. The reality is my wife can die tomorrow. I can die tomorrow. I could have a stroke, heart-attack, or aneurism at any time. I can be paralyzed later today in a car accident. You could lose any blessing you have taken for granted your entire life. Illness opens your eyes to the reality that everything you have is a gift to be thankful for every moment of life. This reality is especially helpful for younger people who develop illness. Youth masks the reality of death and can prevent you from seeing, and being thankful for every blessing God has given you. Passages that may help us see the shortness of life are Psa. 39:5, 102:11; James 4:14, and 1 Pet. 1:24.

11. Encourage the sufferer to embrace the fact that suffering often lets you hear and experience God more clearly.

Suffering and illness often allow us to experience God with greater depth than at any other time in life. Encourage the person to seek and experience God in perhaps the clearest way he or she will until death. A person should seek to experience God through prayer, worship, and other spiritual disciplines and to hear God in the scripture.

12. Encourage the sufferer to interpret suffering through the filter of Biblical truth, not just feelings.

Our feelings must not become the interpretive grid for our suffering. Truth is not found through what we feel. Truth is found through the Word of God. Encourage the sufferer to let Scripture be the interpretive grid for suffering. Specifically, encourage the person to let the Biblical storyline shape the way he or she thinks about suffering. I often explain the Biblical storyline in layman's terms as everything was made perfect, perfection was lost through the fall, God's promise of redemption, and the future completion of redemption when God makes His new perfect heaven and earth. This storyline is also commonly referred to as creation, fall, redemption, and restoration. We want people thinking theologically and Biblically about their suffering. Encourage the ill person by helping them make these connections in your conversations. When you are talking about why bad things like this happen, point them to Genesis 3. When you are talking to them about coping with the present suffering, point them to God's promise of redemption and the future restoration. Help them connect the dots between the biblical story and their story by explaining what God has already done and what God has yet to do in making us, and all things, renewed.

One way you may want to encourage the person is by helping them see how the different parts of salvation are good news for them today. For instance,

- Regeneration is good news for today because through regeneration we receive the new heart and Holy Spirit. The new heart is good news for today because the new heart changes your desires, so your health and comfort are no longer an idol and what you desire most. Instead, God being glorified and enjoyed by you is more important. The Holy Spirit is good news for today because the Holy Spirit gives you help and wisdom, most commonly through Scripture, as you pursue holiness.
- Righteousness is good news for today because it gives us the practical assurance that God looks at us with complete favor and blessing because of Christ's righteousness.
- Adoption is good news because it assures us that we are children of God, who are members of God's family.

- God's call upon all Christians to lovingly serve others is good news because you can help others prepare to suffer, comfort sufferers, and witness that joy comes from God not just created things.
- Sanctification is good news because God plans to transform us from sinners to perfect Christ-like people. This transformation gives our suffering meaning as suffering can help us to become more like Jesus. Periods of growth often occur through hardship, not comfort. Sanctification is good news for today because God wants to use this suffering to make you more like Christ and grow you in the fruit of the Spirit (see Rom. 8:17-28, 2 Cor. 4:17, and Gal. 5:22-23).
- The spiritual warfare the ill person faces as they go through the process of sanctification today is good news because diseases, which act like poverty, make you long for heaven and find contentment in God. Illness protects you against the godlessness and pride that abundance and prosperity can bring and frees you from the satanic temptation to live for the idol of comfort.

As you encourage the ill person to process their suffering biblically, regularly ask yourself what encouragements the suffering ill person needs to hear. You can do this by asking yourself questions like “What promises of God do they need to hear?”, “Why?”, “What is their unique struggle stemming from?”, and “What are they struggling to believe?” The answers to these questions will likely change over time, so think of them regularly.

13. Encourage the person by letting him or her talk about, “What’s the worst case scenario?” or “What is your deepest fear?”

Often fear may come from the unknown and from thinking about worst-case scenarios. Ask the person what the worst case scenario is, and let him or her talk about it. Then help the person think through how God will be there in that worst case scenario if it becomes a reality. How does scripture tell us God will be present, faithful, and working in that scenario? If someone does lose his or her house and the ability to work, will God take care of him or her? Will God still be faithful to provide somehow? Can God still be trusted if their worst fears come true? Ask questions like these to help the person work through his or her deepest fears. Then pray that God would help the person believe the truth in those deepest fears.

14. Encourage the sufferer through prayer.

Praying with, and for, the suffering ill person is a powerful way you can encourage the sufferer. When you pray for the person without him or her being present, follow up to tell him or her what you prayed. Praying for the suffering ill person is something most people understand is important. However, following up with that person to let him or her know how you are praying is just as important. Let the sufferer know what you are praying for him or her so that person can see God's faithfulness and be encouraged if and when your prayers are answered. Additionally, help the person work through how to continue to pray over a long period of illness. Encourage the ill person to continue to pray for healing, but also help him or her know that this should not be the only or primary focus of prayer. Holiness, not pain relief, should be the prime focus of our prayers, as it is the main pursuit God has called us to in the Christian life (see 1 Peter 1). Encourage the person to pray for everything, but especially for the ability to sleep (acknowledging their dependence upon God), energy to go through the day, the opportunity to minister to others, the ability to know the joy of being in God's presence, etc.

15. Encourage the sufferer that the God of all mercy and comfort comforts the ill person so they can comfort others.

2 Corinthians 1:3-4 is a source of great encouragement for the suffering ill person as they see the following truths. First, God is the Father of mercy and God of all comfort. This statement is a present fact and reality. It is true whether or not we feel it is true. The ill person must fight to believe that this is true and turn to God for mercy and comfort. Second, God "comforts us in ALL our affliction." In all afflictions, trials, illnesses, and suffering we face, God will comfort us. Third, "we may be able to comfort those who are in ANY affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God." This statement tells us that God wants us to comfort others, and it shows how some positive purpose can come out of our suffering.

However, one truth often gets missed at this point. Note that we are comforted in ALL our affliction, so that we can comfort those in ANY affliction. This text is saying, for example, that the person who goes through a chronic illness (which qualifies under the category of ALL affliction) is able to comfort someone going through divorce, death, or abuse (which qualifies as ANY affliction). This means that the chronically ill person is empowered by God to comfort others. This also means that people who have no

experience of chronic illness are empowered by God to comfort those with illness. This text is showing us that it is not going through the same experience that equips someone to care for another suffering person. We don't have to experience the same kind of illness, loss, etc. to bring comfort to another person. Rather, we see that a person who has experienced an affliction can comfort another person in ANY affliction with the comfort with which we ourselves were comforted by God. It is not shared experience, but knowing God in trials, which enables you to comfort others. Do not worry about the fact that you do not know everything about the other person's experience of illness. Be a good loving listener to the ill person. Point him or her to the goodness of God. Remind the person of how God comforted you and cared for you in suffering. Remind the person of the character and nature of God, so that he or she will find comfort in Him.

16. Encourage the sufferer by acknowledging that God may have given them more than they can handle

2 Corinthians 1:8-10 shows us many important principles and insights for suffering. First, this passage shows us it is wrong to say, "God will not give people more than they can handle." This statement is an extremely common saying among Christians, but it is too general and imprecise because it is only true with sin, not with suffering. It is true that God will never tempt anyone to sin beyond what they can bear, which is clearly taught in 1 Corinthians 10:13. However, this is not a true statement when addressing suffering, as 2 Corinthians 1:8-10 shows.

Before looking at 2 Corinthians 1:8-10, we need to take a moment to explore what 1 Corinthians 10:13 is teaching and what it is not teaching. The context of 1 Corinthians 10 clearly identifies sin, not suffering, as the focus of the passage. Verse 6 is speaking to those who "desire evil." Verse 7 shows that the context of this passage is that of idolatry, not suffering, by addressing "idolaters." Verse 8 continues to show that idolatry is the focus, and identifies idolatry specifically as "sexual immorality." Again this passage is clearly addressing sin not suffering. Verse 9 goes on to address "put(ing) Christ to the test." Verse 10 speaks to "grumble(ing)." Verse 12 gives the exhortation to "therefore, let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall," which continues the focus of the passage on addressing sin. These words and phrases do not reference suffering; the context has only sin in view. In case any lingering questions of context remained, we could continue to read after this verse. When we read verse 14, Paul urges the reader to

“flee from idolatry,” again pointing us toward sin, not suffering, as the context of this passage.

Verse 13 states, "No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and He will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation He will provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it." The word "temptation" here often gets explained as any temptation to sin, any trial, or any suffering. In fact, the Greek word used here for "temptation" can be used to speak of both suffering and sin. This fact should not surprise us as words have a range of meanings. An author can use this Greek word intending to communicate either of these meanings. The specific meaning an author intends to communicate at one specific time is dictated by context. A specific example of this concept is that if I use the word “hit” in a sentence I can communicate 1-someone contacted a ball with a wooden bat, 2-someone injected a narcotic into their arm, or 3- someone began playing a very popular song. You know which meaning I, the author, intend based on the context around the statement. I can intend to communicate the any of these meanings, but not more than one at the same time. The only exception to this rule is if I am intending to communicate with a pun. Thus, the question we need to ask is not what range of meanings a word can possibly have in all of its uses, but rather, what did the author mean to communicate through the word in this specific context. To learn what meaning Paul intended for this word, we look to the overall context, which clearly addresses sin, not suffering. The plain reading of this text should lead us to conclude that Paul chose to use the word “temptation” to address sin, not suffering, in this passage. God clearly is telling us here that no one will be tempted to sin beyond what he or she can bear. Paul is not speaking to the issue of suffering in this passage. What about suffering though? Will God give people more suffering than they can handle?

In 2 Corinthians 1, Paul shows that God may give someone more suffering than he or she can handle. He does this by describing his own life experience in verses 8-11. Paul says that he and his companions were “so utterly burdened *beyond our strength* that we despaired of life itself." He continues by saying, "Indeed, we felt that we had received the sentence of death. But that was to make us rely not on ourselves but on God who raises the dead. He delivered us from such a deadly peril, and He will deliver us. On Him we have set our hope that He will deliver us again." This passage shows us Paul was clearly

burdened beyond his strength. To be burdened beyond your strength is by definition to have more than you can handle. God, through Paul, is saying people can experience more suffering than they can handle. This passage is pastorally helpful because many sufferers may feel their suffering is beyond what they can bear. For these individuals hearing the message, “God won’t give you more than you can handle,” can communicate that they are not good enough. This message that “God won’t give you more than you can handle” can also breed a self-focused and self-reliant way of thinking. It can tell sufferers that if they feel their suffering is more than they can bear, they are wrong, are not good enough, or are not trying hard enough and need to pull themselves up by their bootstraps and suck it up. This kind of thinking is antithetical to the Gospel and must be refuted by Gospel preachers and Biblical counselors. People feeling they are enduring more suffering than they can bear are not too weak, soft, or simply needing to trust God more. Paul suffered “beyond (his) strength” and we may as well.

Pastorally speaking, I fear that many who feel that they are enduring more suffering than they can handle are afraid to express this belief. They think they will be told that this belief is a sin. They may feel they are not good enough for God. Freeing suffering individuals from the unscriptural expectation and burden of being able to “handle their suffering” will allow them to find help and comfort from their church. It may also provide freedom from guilt and shame they are feeling from misunderstanding God's Word. Explaining that God may give more suffering than people can handle has been freeing and liberating for individuals I have known suffering through domestic abuse, illness, and other situations.

Ensuring this passage is properly taught and understood is also important for God to receive the glory He is due. Paul tells us that it was when he did not have the strength to handle his own suffering that he was able to find that God was sufficient and able to provide for his need. It was his inability to handle the suffering he faced that led Paul to a greater knowledge and experience of God’s provision, comfort, and deliverance. This passage shows that Paul had to rely on God, not himself and in doing so, he found God's power and faithfulness was sufficient to deliver him. This understanding should shape our counsel to sufferers. God may give the suffering and ill around us more than they can handle, and God wants them to know through this passage that 1) God is all powerful (He raises the dead) and 2) we are able to hope in God and His power. It also

may be beneficial to have the person read Paul's résumé of suffering in 2 Cor. 11:21-33 to see just how much Paul suffered. While we are not in the same situation as Paul, we can still trust that God is all powerful, and we can put our hope in God and His power. He may exercise His power through giving present deliverance from illness. However, He may not give present deliverance; and instead, through death deliver us into His presence and the New Heaven and New Earth. Regardless of how God chooses to act, we must hope in the all-powerful God. It is only through acknowledging that God does give some people more than they can handle that God may receive the glory He is due in the hardest times of suffering a person can face. The suffering you face may be more than you can handle, but it will never be more than God can handle.

17. Encourage the sufferer that the Bible teaches that their illness and suffering is common to man

Often people may use 1 Cor. 10:13 to show that a person's struggles are not unique. The essence of this message is that no one is alone in their suffering; their problem is common to all people. However, as made clear in the last point, the context of this verse is clearly speaking to sin, not suffering. Thus, we cannot say from this passage that our suffering is common to mankind. However, we can say from the whole cannon of scripture that suffering is common to all people. Scripture tells us in Romans 3 that all people are sinners living and suffering on the fallen earth. The only person who uniquely has suffered unlike any other person is Jesus. While a person's suffering may not be common to other people around them in every detail, his or her suffering is common in type to all humanity living under the curse that came upon the world in Genesis 3. All people have physical deterioration unto death in common. All people have the common experience of hunger. Though this is not the same for all people in the specific situations they face, hunger is a type of suffering experienced by the majority of the world as a daily experience. The concept of experiencing the same type of suffering through differing life experiences is also true in regards to abuse, death, the difficulty of work, and pain. Scriptures that may help the sufferer see this truth are Job, 1 Peter, Lamentations, and the story of Jacob. Old Testament narratives are a good place to show this concept as well. Think through which stories may help your specific counselee and choose wisely.

18. Encourage the sufferer to not be consumed with the “what if’s” and look to Jesus.

Sufferers can often be consumed by “what if” types of questions. Hebrews 12 exhorts readers to “let us also lay aside every weight and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us.” Note here the distinction between laying aside “weight” and “sin.” The verse draws a distinction between weight and sin, but what is the distinction? Weight should be taken here as a morally neutral thing. Weights are things that can be good or bad depending on the manner and intent of their use. This verse is especially helpful in counseling sufferers who are struggling with the unknown, or the “what if” questions. Often, the “what if” questions can be wise and helpful to think through. However, when the “what if” questions lead to worries, anxieties, and fears that consume a person they have become sinful. While a person may struggle to determine if a certain concern is a sin or not, this verse urges the hearer to set aside all concerns, whether they are sinful or not. A person can avoid becoming overwhelmed by the unknown and the “what ifs” of life by following the second half of the exhortation in this passage. We overcome weights and sin by “looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.” When we are overcome by weights and sins, which cling closely, we need to think about Jesus and His work on the cross (see verses 1-12). As the suffering ill person does this, he or she will find comfort through remembering the greatness of God and seeing the most prominent display of God’s love. Seeing, meditating, and thinking on God’s love gives us confidence that God will continue to be faithful and to love us in any and all trials we may experience in life. This point is important for anyone being rebuked and also may help the Christian develop a view of discipline as a positive blessing not a negative punishment. We may not know answers to our “what if” questions, but we do know that Jesus endured the cross and is seated at God’s right hand. This reality is our comfort and strength in the unknown.

Section 2: HOW MAY SOMEONE WITH CHRONIC ILLNESS NEED TO BE REBUKED?

It should first be said that any rebuke given to a suffering person needs to be done wisely, sensitively, and compassionately. If you are tempted to rebuke the suffering person out of any motive other than love or any manner other than gentleness toward the person, then you need to first deal with your own sin. At times, the process of discipline progresses and rebuke must be delivered firmly and sternly, but rebuke should always start with a gentle approach toward the person. Do not rush to rebuke, but ensure you have patiently listened well, gathered data, and assumed the best about the person. The goal of rebuking sin is to gently restore a person to obedience to God. If you find yourself needing to rebuke someone for sin, you should prepare your rebuke meditating on the following scriptures. Galatians 6:1-2 and Ephesians 4:29, which both teach that rebuke should be given gently with the intention of restoration. Let these texts guide you as you rebuke.

1. **Anger with God**

The first reason a person may need to be rebuked is for being angry with God. Anger with God may appear as resentment toward God, questioning the goodness of God, ignoring God, or several other actions or feelings. Therefore, one must be a good listener who works hard at data gathering to discern if anger with God is present.

Why would a person be angry? *The first reason a person may be angry is an entitlement mentality.* Anger could also come out because of a victim mentality. In both of these mentalities the sufferer or spouse may feel, think, or believe any of the following statements:

- **I deserve a good life and for things to go well.** The reality is that I do not deserve for things to go well. These feelings do not stem from a correct view of my standing before God as a guilty sinner. As a sinner, I deserve to be punished, blown up, and destroyed every moment of life because I rebelled against God. I do not deserve any good thing I have ever experienced in this life.

- **I feel entitled to all the good things I still have in life.** The reality is I am not entitled and don't deserve any good thing from God; all I do deserve is judgment. We have nothing in our essence, and have done no good thing, to earn any good thing from God. An entitlement mentality expresses a complete lack of gratitude toward God's gracious provision in our lives for every good gift we have (see James 1:17). When I feel entitled to, and am not thankful for, breathing, the warmth of the sun, music, having a home, having a wife, sleeping, having a functional brain, all of God's provisions, and every other good thing I have in life, that is sin.
- **I deserve to keep the good things I have.** The reality is we do not deserve to keep any good gift God has given. God can remove any good gift He has given at any time He chooses, including my life. If God chooses to take a good thing from us that we do not want to lose, He is just as righteous, loving, merciful, and wise as when He gave us those things. At any moment we can lose everything, and God in His wise, righteous, and merciful providence would be just and good for choosing to do so. Nothing is guaranteed to us and to think, feel, or act otherwise is sin. If the sufferer is struggling with this concept take them to Job 1.
- **I am angry that God isn't giving me what I want.** These feelings may stem from pride and arrogance when someone is angry with God for not meeting his or her desires and not bending to his or her will.
- **I am angry toward other people because God has given me this illness and the pain and suffering it causes.** Anger and frustration may be turned outward, so the sufferer acts in unloving ways toward those around him or her. More subtle sins such as being judgmental, discontent, or unwilling to serve others also need to be guarded against. Wise counselors should look for subtle sins, not merely sins that are easily noticed, like fits of anger.

Someone who is angry with God because they possess an entitlement or victim mentality may benefit from exploring scriptures like Romans 3:9-18 and 23, 5:1-11; Job 1; James 1:17, etc.

Why would a person be angry? *A second reason a person may be angry with God is that the person does not want to suffer.* A sufferer may be angry that God has given, or at least allowed him or her to experience a disease depending on the person's view of providence. If a person is angry, in his or her view, that God gave them the disease, it is important to ask if the person believes the disease is a punishment from God. If they believe the illness is a punishment from God, the person needs to understand that Christ's work on the cross took all the punishment for his or her sin. God will discipline all true Christians, but He never punishes His children; thus, they can rest assured their illness is not a punishment from God. The doctrine of providence should lead us to affirm that God is in control of everything including our bodies and diseases. While the aim of this paper is not to extensively explore the doctrine of providence, we can trust that illness falls under God's control. It is also important to affirm that God does allow that which He hates to exist and occur, such as evil, disease, and the fall. In doing so, however, God also does not do evil or become evil in any way. Our understanding of the doctrine of God's providence must affirm that God permissively allows that which He hates to accomplish what He wants. Admittedly, it is difficult to fully understand all the implications and questions we have regarding this doctrine. Two places in scripture clearly show that God allows His people to experience evil, which He condemns, to accomplish what He loves. The first place this is seen in scripture is through the death of Christ which we read in Acts 2:23 is part of God's plan. The second example is Joseph's abuse at the hands of his brothers. We read in Gen 50:20 that his brothers meant to do evil through their actions, but God brought good from their actions. We may have unanswered questions, but must affirm that God is in control over all things, including our disease, while remaining good and righteous and promising to bring good from the suffering and evil situations we face in life. For further reading on this subject Dr. Bruce Ware's book *God's Greater Glory* is a great resource.

Scripture teaches that God wants to use illness to make us more like Christ, as God's will is to make His people holy and to sanctify them until they become conformed to the image of Christ (see Romans 8, especially verses 23-30; 2 Cor. 3:18; 1 Peter 1:13-25; etc). This sanctification may not be the desire of the sufferer though. The person may want a nice, comfortable, prosperous lifestyle. Perhaps he or she just wants to be pain free and comfortable. This orientation may be displayed in a person through him or her voicing anger against God, expressing fears, or becoming a functional atheist by

avoiding God and refusing to pray, read scripture, and/or have fellowship with other Christians.

It also may be helpful to note at this point that when a person responds sinfully in thought and/or emotion to pain and illness, the pain and illness can actually be made worse. Pain intensity can actually increase when pain relief is not forthcoming.

The greater the desire for relief, the greater the misery and intensity of pain when relief is not found. Thus, a person who is ill or in pain can make the experience worse based on his or her reaction. This effect should not be surprising to Christians. Christians historically have recognized that the body and soul, the material and immaterial parts of our personhood, are connected and affect one another.

-Dr. Jim Halla, *Pain: The Plight of Fallen Man*.

So how do you help this person? Speaking the truth in love begins with leading the person to assess how his or her desires are being shaped by God's will for His people. This requires asking questions to discern if the person has a clear understanding of the theology of the Christian life. If they do not have a clear understanding instruction is needed. If the person does understand the theology of the Christian life, he or she will need to be called to repent of a desire for comfort and happiness and pursue growth in holiness and a life of worship (see Eph. 1:4, 2 Cor. 5:9, 1 Cor. 10:31, etc).

Suffering and disease reveal the disconnect between the theology that we intellectually affirm and the beliefs that shape our reaction to our experience. A person may affirm that they deserve nothing but wrath due to sin, but simultaneously feel angry because God is not giving them what they want.

I struggled to embrace suffering as an opportunity to grow because of the comfort mindset I held. I viewed suffering as an enemy to the comfortable life I desired, not as an opportunity to grow in godliness. When my wife became ill, this mindset was revealed. The experience of suffering forced me to assess if I was living in line with what I intellectually affirmed as true. Suffering forced me to acknowledge that my desire to live a comfortable life was greater than my desire to glorify God in all situations I experienced. I saw I needed to turn away from that mindset, and embrace the opportunity to grow in holiness and to glorify God in my suffering. While I am not thankful

for disease, brokenness, and suffering, I am thankful for how God has used my wife's illness to make us holy.

As I have struggled to walk in repentance from a comfort driven mindset, 1 Peter 1 has been especially helpful. This letter was written by Peter to the "elect exiles of the dispersion" (v.1). Meditating on the fact that God's chosen people, the "elect" in v1, were also exiles who had run for their lives, leaving their homes and possessions behind, helped me rest in the fact that I am not alone as a suffering follower of Christ. For those doubting their position with God, reading that these individuals were elect exiles "according to the foreknowledge of God" may help them accept that what they are going through is indeed God's plan for them. God's completely wise, righteous, loving, and merciful plan is the best plan for us even if that does not feel true or make sense to us.

Another helpful point of this passage is reading that these elect exiles are to praise God ("blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" in v. 3). "Blessed" can also be translated as "praise." The elect exiles in their suffering were told to praise God because "He has caused us to be born again," "according to His great mercy" (v.3). Though they have lost so much, they are to praise God because of the mercy He gave through Christ's work on the cross, which brings them into "an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven." In this, they are to rejoice, "though now for a little while, if necessary you have been grieved by various trials" (v.5-6). This text convicted me of my need to reorient my focus from my suffering to the Cross, God's merciful nature, and the inheritance for those in Christ. This text forced me to see the need to change my perspective and to focus on what is eternal and to praise God even in my worst life circumstances. Later in 1 Peter, we read that the suffering of the exiles tests their faith and allows them to prove their belief in the greatness of God (vs. 6-9). In the midst of their suffering, their proclamation of the greatness of God is to be an undeniable and convincing witness (2:9). In our suffering, our question is often "Why is this happening?" or "How can I escape?" We need to ask the suffering person, "How can you use this suffering to bring God the most glory and show the world His greatness?" Other helpful scriptures you can give the person are Romans 5:1-11, 8:18-39, 2 Cor. 1:3-11, Phil. 3:7-17, and James 5:7-14.

2. Self-Centeredness

A second reason people may need to be rebuked is for self-centeredness. This self-centeredness may be expressed as worry, ingratitude, a demanding spirit, or a critical spirit. These feelings, actions, or thoughts that flow from self-centeredness need to be rebuked. Another way self-centeredness may be expressed is impatience. A person suffering and in pain may become impatient with their spouse, children, or others when asked to serve, play, or do basic physical tasks. This person must be called to repent and be gracious and patient despite illness and/or pain. Another way self-centeredness may be expressed is through an unwillingness to listen to others. This may come out as an unwillingness to let the conversation be about someone else, especially others in less severe situations of suffering. The ill person may not care about giving grace and encouragement to others in their trials since theirs seems worse. Another expression of self-centeredness is a lack of grace or unwillingness to forbear with others. The ill person may not like the way others have responded to his or her illness by avoiding them, not listening well, etc. A person may be angry at how someone else has treated him or her now that he or she has an illness. These individuals need to be called to repent by forgiving and loving others. They also need to overlook offenses when possible and follow Matthew 18 and confront others if their actions are sinful enough that confrontation is necessary. A good text to take this person to is Eph. 4:31-32. Self-centered individuals may also become insistent upon their preferences and desires and feel that these actions are justified because of how hard their life is compared to others. This problem could be obvious in some people but less obvious and harder to observe in others. An example may be the introvert who withdraws from relationships and feels justified because of the suffering they are experiencing. Any of these various expressions of self-centeredness need to be rebuked.

Self-centered individuals need to be rebuked by being called to love, serve, care for, forbear with, and be patient with others. Illness may limit the ways individuals do these things, but they are still commanded to do them as Christians. Direct these individuals to verses that call the Christian to good works like 2 Cor. 9:8 and Eph. 2:10.

3. Fear

A third reason people may need to be rebuked is fear. Rebuking someone for fear should be done with the goal of enabling the sufferer to trust and hope in God despite their circumstances. Fears could stem from:

- **DEATH:** The spouse and family members may fear the death of the ill person soon or in the distant future. This fear may arise at routine checkups or when thinking about far off life events like graduations, weddings, etc. The ill person also may fear not being able to grow old with their spouse, see their children grow up, etc.
- **LOSING FINANCIAL STABILITY:** "Will I have to go on disability?" "Will I be able to pay medical bills?" "Will I be able to buy a home/keep our home?" "Will I be able to have children?" "Will I be able to be sexually intimate with my spouse?" "Will I be able to provide for my family?" These are legitimate questions to ask. Concern for these issues is not a sin, but to let these concerns rise to the level of worry, anxiety, or fear is to distrust in the goodness and character of the God who has promised to provide. That type of fear is sinful and needs to be rebuked. Again, when someone is struggling with fear, rebuke needs to occur graciously and encouragingly by reminding a person of why they can trust Christ and by appealing to them to trust in God. The goal of rebuke is restoration.
- **OTHERS:** Not being able to have children, needing an organ transplant, being a burden to others, losing independence, becoming physically dependent on others to walk, write, speak, bathe, use the bathroom, etc.

Rebuking someone for fear can be done by pointing a person to texts that will help them believe in God's love, goodness, wisdom, provision, mercy, and grace, like Mat. 6:25-34. When doing this make sure you allow the person to express his or her fears and work through them. If you rush to the step of giving a verse, then you may not fully understand the person's problem and thus be unable to give them the comfort scripture brings to their specific need. We never want the suffering person to feel like we are slapping a verse on their problem without taking the time to listen well.

4. Turning to sin for comfort

A fourth reason a person may need to be rebuked is for turning to sin for comfort.

This could include turning to pornography, lustful fantasies, gluttony, substance abuse, shopping sprees, entertainment, etc. Keep in mind that a person could also turn to morally neutral things that are used sinfully. When thinking specifically about sin, it is important to watch for sins that are externally visible and also sins that are internal and not visible. Some sins could be easy to observe while others are subtle and less observable. Jerry Bridges book *Respectable Sins* is a great place to start for observing and responding to these subtle and less observable sins.

5. Making pain relief and/or healing the primary goal

A fifth reason a person may need to be rebuked is for making pain relief and/or healing the primary goal.

The most common response to illness and pain is the desire for relief. Wanting relief from illness, suffering, and pain is not wrong. However, when pursuing pain relief, remission from disease, or healing is the only or primary goal, then the person needs to be rebuked. The primary goal of any Christian, whether ill or not, must be to glorify God. For the ill person glorifying God means stewarding the body well (see 1 Cor. 6:19-20), whether healed or not from their illness and pains. Seeking pain relief, healing, and remission from disease are good goals that should be pursued, but they must not become the ultimate goal. In light of this, it is important to ask the ill person why he or she is seeking pain relief and healing. Are they seeking to steward the body well? Do they have any motivation beyond wanting to feel good again or being able to do the things they used to do? When the body begins to fail, as Romans 5:12-14 tells us it will, what is the person's response? Is this person become angry, frustrated, depressed, or despairing? Do they turn to God in faith? Are they still living for God's glory? We may be in pain throughout our lives, and to seek pain relief is not a sin. Our goal is to seek God and His kingdom above all, whether or not we find relief from pain and illness.

6. Poor stewardship of the body

A sixth reason a person may need to be rebuked is for poor stewardship of the body.

I need to begin this point by stating that what is poor stewardship of the body for some may not be poor stewardship of the body for others. Understanding the specific disease(s), medication(s), and physical abilities of the person given their specific illness

is essential before attempting to discern what is wise stewardship or sinful behavior. This being said, an ill person can respond to pain and illness in numerous ways, some of which are sinful and need to be rebuked. For instance, when a person experiencing pain associated with their disease responds with disappointment, sadness, and frustration, then they may respond by becoming physically inactive. As Dr. Jim Halla explains in his book, *Pain: the Plight of Fallen Man*, if a person is physically inactive because they are in pain, then their inactivity can actually aggravate the body and contribute to feeling even more pain. The response at the other end of the spectrum is when a person experiencing pain attempts to ignore and push through the pain in order to maintain whatever level of activity they think is “normal.” Both of these responses to pain and illness are choices made in reaction to feelings, rather than an intentional desire to steward the body well. The desire to steward the body well should lead Christians to care well for the body by giving it sufficient rest or physical activity as needed, observing the plan of care given by a doctor, and consistently taking medications.

A Word to Spouses

Spouses specifically may need to be rebuked for lack of gratitude, discontentment, fear, worry, anxiety, etc in slightly different ways.

They may feel fear, anger, or anxiety about a wide range of concerns. These concerns may include the death of a spouse, loss of financial stability, inability to buy a house, becoming a caretaker, loss of sexual intimacy, or the inability to have kids. These situations may be guaranteed outcomes or may only be possible outcomes.

Spouses may feel love for their ill spouse, but respond to the situation by seeking a means of escape. This escapism can be internal, which could include indulging in a fantasy thought life or constantly thinking of the future once their spouse returns to full health, a better condition, or their spouse dies. This escapism could also be external as they use all their free time to hang out with others, spend money, eat, work out, etc. No matter how spouses may turn to escapism, it is important to note that he or she may still love and be as fully committed to their spouse as they ever were. Escapism in this case is not a matter of desiring to escape the marriage; it is a matter of desiring to escape the disease and current life situation. In other cases, the desire to escape from the current life situation may lead to a desire to escape the marriage through affairs, emotional affairs, or other choices that need to be rebuked.

Spouses may face unique challenges and complicated grief in cases where he or she watches his or her spouse die over an extended period of time. How will they respond to their wife/husband's slow mental decline due to dementia, ALS, or other diseases that attack the mind? Though their spouse is physically present, it may feel like their spouse was lost years ago. Are they still faithful in their mind and actions? Have they begun to move on and seek romantic companionship from other people? Sometimes sin is clear cut and sometimes it may not be clear in a person's life. Tread lightly in situations that are unclear. Ensure you are slow to judge and slow to speak. Listen and gather data patiently. Seek wisdom from older wiser Christians who have more experience and knowledge caring for individuals in these situations. Help and encourage the person to remain faithful to their spouse, rebuke sin that is clear, and help them make wise decisions understanding their situation is complex, incredibly painful, and likely isolating.

As you seek to help the suffering person through rebuke of each of these points, it will be helpful to remember James 4:1-2 which says, "What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you? You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel. You do not have, because you do not ask."

This text helps us greatly because each of these areas of sin that require rebuke often arise when good and legitimate desires go unfulfilled. When desires go unfulfilled, they may become demands. When a good desire becomes a demand, a person has allowed that thing to become a sinful idol. In order to help the sufferer we must deal with his or her heart and desires. In light of this, we should seek to identify desires and help the person repent of making desires into sinful idols that he or she demands from God. The sins of discontent, grumbling, or lack of thankfulness are likely present in all of the sins discussed and must be rebuked. Ultimately, all people must be driven by the desire to obey and please God even if we do not receive good things we have desired in life.

Section 3:

HOW MAY SOMEONE WITH CHRONIC ILLNESS NEED TO BE HELPED?

Any of the following needs *may* be present, but also *may not* be present in the life of an ill person. Keep in mind that these may or may not be issues the specific person you know needs help facing.

- **Isolation** – Is the ill person, his or her spouse, or family members becoming isolated due to the complications of the disease? Fight against the isolation that this person is experiencing by enlisting a team of individuals to regularly be present with the ill person.
- **Money** – How does the illness impact the person financially?
- **Food** – Is the person in need of meals? Are they able to cook?
- **The initial shock of being diagnosed** – Some people discover they have chronic illness by developing symptoms. Others do not find out they have a chronic illness through developing symptoms. Individuals who have no symptoms are often shocked to find out that they have a chronic illness. In early 2013, I had some routine blood tests performed. A few days later, I was called and informed by a nurse practitioner that I tested positive for Hepatitis B. For the next two weeks I struggled to process this diagnosis while I waited to see a specialist for further evaluation. During those two weeks I struggled to learn about the disease and come to grips with the positive test. I struggled to determine what the possible outcomes of this disease could be. I struggled with having to educate myself in the face of the unknown. I also struggled to know if I actually had Hepatitis B. I thought I had been vaccinated against it and wondered if follow up tests could determine if I was immune or actually had been infected. During this time, I needed help in numerous ways and was helped by other Christians. I was helped by Christians being present with me, asking about my feelings, asking about my thoughts, asking how I was theologically processing, and reminding me of the cross and the promises and character of God.

As I wrestled with these questions I came to a place of peace and hope. I realized that sometime in the next 1-60 years my body will fail, and I will die. I realized that whether I

die in 1 year or 60 years, I know where I am going since I have put my trust in Christ. I realized that whether or not I ended up actually having Hepatitis B right now or not, I will eventually get sick from something else and die. Whether I am sick now with Hepatitis B, or with something else I develop in the next 1-60 years, I know how my story will end. God's character and promises had not changed because I was diagnosed with a chronic illness. I may not like what happens in this life as a result of having Hepatitis B, but God is still faithful, and His promises are still sure, and this life that is a vapor will soon be left behind for eternity in the new heaven and new earth with the Lord. It was thinking on these things that caused me to be able to rest by trusting and hoping in God. Two weeks after being told I had Hepatitis B, I saw a specialist who performed follow up tests that determined I did not have Hepatitis B. I tested positive as a result of successfully being immunized. While I am thankful I do not have Hepatitis B, I am also thankful God allowed me to go through this experience in order to help me see spiritual growth that has happened. You can help people diagnosed with chronic illness by being physically present with them, asking about and then listening to them share their emotions, asking about and listening to them share how they are theologically processing these events, and reminding them of the promises and character of God. The most helpful question someone asked me during this time of shock was, "How are you processing and thinking about this theologically? What are you thinking about God in all this?" Asking spiritual questions like these will bless the ill person.

- **Counsel and wisdom from older, mature believers, sufferers, etc.** – Do they have other older and wiser people they can turn to for wisdom and help?
- **Cleaning** – Does the person need help cleaning? Are they able to do normal household chores? Does the church need to help?
- **Childcare** – Does the person need help with childcare? It may seem counterintuitive for a homebound person to need help with childcare, but what if that person suffers from insomnia, needs to take pain medication that causes extreme drowsiness, or needs to go to the doctor? For the non-homebound person, and the homebound person, childcare needs may increase at the same time they are unable to afford it.

- **Help them find medically knowledgeable people to give input on which doctor to choose** – The person may need help with knowing where to go to get diagnosed and treated by a medical specialist. The rarer or harder the disease, the more the person may struggle to find a doctor who can actually help. Use the relational connections of the church to connect the ill person to someone who can help find options for treatment. Do you have nurses or MD's in your congregation who can help the ill person discover how to find the right specialist in his or her area of expertise? These individuals are also important in helping the sufferer know what possible side effects they may experience. These individuals also are essential in helping keep the sufferer accountable to follow the plan of care given by the MD. They have an inherent authority when they ask the suffering person if he or she is following through with meds, exercises, and treatments. Make sure they see their MD if they have not, and that someone is following up to ensure they observe the plan of care. Such action can be especially important with autoimmune diseases, which can be hard to diagnose and treat.
- **Encourage alternative medicine** - Has the person sought treatment from a chiropractor, naturopath, masseuse, dietician, etc? Identifying food allergies and airborne allergies can be a huge relief to sufferers. Encouraging the sufferer to treat these issues may be helpful.
- **Don't make events food centered** - This applies to any kind of event or meeting. If a person has any type of food allergy, disease that affects digestion or metabolism, or is on medication that affects their diet, then they may not be able to participate.
- **Encouragement through the Gospel and Bible** – Encourage them by calling, visiting, giving books, reading texts, giving notes, etc.
- **Reach out to the homebound** – Is the homebound ill person being regularly reached by the church? Is the person still experiencing fellowship with believers even if he or she is unable to attend Sunday services? Work to find ways to keep the person incorporated in the church family. Bring worship to the person at home, even if it is just a couple people and a recording or hymnal. Corporate worship may be meaningful. Are the Pastors regularly visiting the ill person and extending pastoral care to him or her?

- **Give car rides and/or other transportation as needed** – Help the suffering person with car rides. This act is an especially easy way for teens and singles to build relationships and care for elderly and ill members of the congregation, with whom they may not have strong relationships established.
- **Help the ill person connect with other people, who have had similar illness or have had the same medications** – Use the church members' relational networks to connect the suffering ill person to others with the same, or similar, illnesses or medications.
- **Help the person on medication by reminding them that they aren't crazy, their life isn't over, and it's okay to be emotional** – The ill person may feel life as they knew it is over simply from the experience of the disease. However, certain drugs can greatly intensify this feeling. Help these individuals by reminding them life isn't over. They may need to find a new normal as they cope with the effects of their medications, but God has still blessed them with life. Further, remind the suffering ill person that he or she is not crazy. The importance of this point cannot be understated especially if the person is on drugs that make them emotional. One such drug is Prednisone, a drug commonly given to patients with an auto-immune disease. If the person is on Prednisone, he or she may need to hear this message every day. My wife has been on Prednisone for over a year and a half. During this time she has felt like her emotions and thoughts were completely disconnected. She could start crying for no reason at a moment's notice. The drug was hard on her body and emotions in numerous ways. The hardest part of being on this drug for my wife was feeling like she was no longer herself. Encourage people on prednisone, or similar drugs, that they aren't crazy and they do not need to feel embarrassed if they become emotional. Further, Prednisone, like other drugs and conditions, can cause insomnia, which exacerbates the already unpleasant symptoms. My wife only slept between one and four hours almost every night for a two-year period.

The person may appear always to be fatigued. Ways to help the fatigued person are to be patient, compassionate, and flexible with any plans that are made. Understand the extreme side effects life-saving drugs like Prednisone can place on the body. The ill person may have to be on a drug like prednisone for numerous years with symptoms and complications worsening with their length of use. Personally, most challenges my wife faced since diagnosed with her diseases resulted more from Prednisone, and other

drugs, than her actual illness. All chronic illnesses are different, but this could be the case for the person you are counseling as well. Ask questions and be a good listener, understanding that the effect of medications on a person may be just as important, and sometimes more important, than the actual illness.

- **Help the ill person get their affairs in order** - Some individuals suffer from illness that will or may potentially lead to their death. In light of this, it is important to help the ill person get their affairs in order before they die. Getting affairs in order includes getting life insurance, creating a will, completing a living will, talking about desires for organ, tissue, and cornea donation, which the person may still be eligible for despite his or her disease. Getting affairs in order also includes non-legal affairs. Encourage the ill person to think about the legacy he or she wants to leave for their children, family, and friends. The person may want to write a biography, goodbye letters, write letters or record video messages for major life events that arise after he or she has died like a wedding, graduation, etc. The person may want the family to participate in other memory making activities or trips.
- **Help the ill person by giving them homework assignments** - Homework could be any number of things such as reading/listening to the Bible and books/audio books on suffering or their disease. Homework could include scripture memorization, thankfulness lists, praying for self and others, serving others in whatever way they are able. Homework could include worship through hymns and other worship songs. Homework could include writing lists of what they are tempted to believe and writing another corresponding list of what scripture says is true. Homework could include more practical things such as exercise, sleep, and taking medication, all of which have theological and practical significance as the person seeks to steward their body well for God's glory.

As you focus on counseling and caring for those with chronic illness, remember you will need patience not only in the specific conversations you have, but with the process. Counseling the chronically ill may look very similar or very different from your other counseling experiences. Your counseling may focus more on suffering than sin, depending on the person's struggle. Your counseling may need to have a very different timeline from your normal pattern of 6-8 sessions. The need for help may be far less frequent and intense; instead, it may look like meeting once a quarter to help the sufferer

work through challenges. Patience may be needed with the process as you pastor and give counsel as the need for help and counsel may not go away until the person dies.

As you pastor and counsel these individuals the sufferer may seem to continue to struggle through the same reappearing issues over long periods of time. You may feel your encouragement, rebuke, or help is repetitive. This process may be exactly what the counselee needs; though, it may feel like you are not getting anywhere. The person may make progress with an issue such as fear, and then have a health setback seeming to erase all the previous work that had been done. If this struggle occurs, realize that this person's struggle to trust God may look more cyclical than linear. Maybe they do revert to a pattern of selfishness, discontentment, etc. due to a medical setback. However, do they remain in the pattern for as long as they did before? Do they move to repentance more quickly than in the past? Observe changes in the process of a struggle over time, not just the content of conversations with the counselee as you seek to help the sufferer.

IN CONCLUSION...

While this work certainly is incomplete and lacking in many ways, I hope it will be a blessing and a help to you as you seek to give care and counsel to those individuals God has placed in your life who suffer from chronic illness. This booklet is not written by an expert, it is written by someone who is in the middle of the struggle. I hope this booklet will encourage others struggling with chronic illness to begin to create resources as well, sharing their thoughts, experiences, wisdom, and insights. My hope is that this work inspires other works which improve on the ideas and concepts I have put forward.

Lastly, if you, or someone you know, is struggling with chronic illness, I want to encourage you to hope in God. While the personal suffering my wife and I have experienced has been great, the faithfulness and mercy of God is greater. I fully trust that God's mercy, love, and faithfulness will overwhelm the suffering you experience as well. We can both be sure of this because of the promises He has made in scripture. Do not be afraid. He is with you. He is for you. He loves you. He always will.

Appendix 1:

REBUKE, ENCOURAGE, AND HELP THE SUFFERER BY READING AND MEDIATING ON THE FOLLOWING SCRIPTURES:

The following scriptures may be a good place to take your counselee or church member. Scriptures are provided in canonical order. Numerous scriptures are provided to give you as many different passages as possible to work with as resources. Beware going over too much with your counselee in a single conversation. Ideally, stick to one of these texts per week/session/conversation, so that they will be able to meditate on its truth without being overwhelmed or lost in detail.

1. Genesis 3

A good answer cannot be given as to why a person is experiencing his or her specific sufferings in life, and possibly this illness. However, Genesis 3 will provide them with a general answer for why he or she is suffering and ill, and that answer is Adam's sin. Helping the person meditate on the brokenness of the world that sin and the curse bring may help the person greatly as he or she tries to process their suffering and illness.

2. The Story of Joseph (Genesis 37-50)

The story of Joseph may help the sufferer in many ways. Joseph suffered greatly and was completely isolated. Joseph suffered yet acted righteously and obeyed God. Joseph also demonstrates belief in the providence of God (Genesis 50:20). For these and other reasons, Joseph may be helpful for your counselee.

3. 1 Kings 19

Meditating on Elijah's story in 1 Kings 19 may help an ill person struggling with depression, despair, or who pushes themselves too hard physically.

4. The Book of Job

It is essential for the sufferer to read and wrestle through the book of Job. Without a Bible handbook, the middle of Job may become cumbersome and hard to understand. However, it can be extremely helpful to meditate on the beginning and end of Job. Job chapter 1 may help the person wrestle with the "why" questions, the lack of answers, and how one should respond to illness. The closing chapters of Job feature God's

extended answer to Job, which is a display of God's greatness. It also features God's response to Job's "friends," which may be helpful if the person has received hurtful messages from "friends" as well.

5. Read and Pray the Psalms of Lament

I am thankful for Dr. Mark Talbot for opening my eyes to the importance of this activity for the sufferer in his talk, "Longing for Wholeness: Chronic Suffering and Christian Hope," which was given at the 2012 Desiring God conference entitled *The Works of God*. Dr Talbot specifically gave the following three guidelines as we pray the lament Psalms. First, keep it personal. The Psalmists do not complain to others about God, rather the complaints are always addressed to God. Second, be honest. The Psalmists are brutally honest with God. Psalms 10, 43, 44, and 79 are good places to start to see this kind of honesty. Third, rehearse your hopes. There is only one Psalm of lament that does not turn to a vow of praise or actual praise (Psalm 88). The Psalmists did not lose hope in their laments, but rather rehearsed their hope in God to keep their hope alive. You can read and pray through numerous lament Psalms with the chronically ill person. Consider starting with Psalm 55, 57, 77, or 86.

6. Psalm 13

Psalm 13 teaches the sufferer to 1) call out to God with their honest feelings (vs. 1-2), 2) turn to God in complete dependence (vs. 3-4), and 3) preach to themselves (vs. 5-6). Help them specifically preach to themselves about 1) God's character (v. 5a), 2) God's salvation/the Gospel (v. 5b), and 3) how God has been faithful in the past (v. 6b). 4) Lastly, help the person respond in worship to God (v 5a).

7. Psalm 88

Psalm 88 is a uniquely dark Psalm. It is the only Psalm that does not turn from expressing darkness and depression to God to expressing praise, trust, and hope in God. The Psalm does not have a happy ending, and it does not contain preaching to self about the promises, character, or past faithfulness of God. This Psalm may be important to read with the suffering ill person to assess how this Psalmist approaches God in faithfulness and holiness despite the darkness they are experiencing.

8. Various Psalms

There are dozens of Psalms that could be listed because all the Psalms are helpful for a person with chronic illness to read carefully. The Psalms show us how we can approach God in the midst of real life struggles even if they do not overtly address the content of the struggle the ill person is having. Certain Psalms you may want to think about using in your counsel for the ill person are Psalm 6, 7, 16, 18, 22, 23, 27, 33, 34, 37, 42, 46, 73, 77, 117, 118, 119, 130, 131, 136, 142, and 143.

9. Proverbs 3:5-8

This passage can help the sufferer and ill person as he or she struggles with the "why?" questions. As the ill person asks this question, he or she may find comfort in this voice as he or she sees that it is not necessary to understand and comprehend everything. Trusting in the Lord, acknowledging Him, and turning away from evil bring life and healing even if he or she is not delivered from illness.

10. Isaiah 53

Jesus is the man of sorrow who was acquainted with grief and has known suffering. He was despised and rejected by men. He bore our grief and carried our sorrow. He was wounded for our transgression and crushed for our iniquities. He took our chastisement, stripes, and iniquity. He was afflicted and was led to slaughter. He was crushed and put to grief by the will of the Father (v. 10). Jesus experienced anguish in His soul. He did all of this for us. We may suffer physically due to illness, yet Christ willingly suffered physically through his trial and crucifixion for us. This text helps us see so much and is especially helpful for anyone doubting God's love or asking questions like, "Can I still trust God is good?"

11. Matthew 9

Matthew 9 is like many passages in the Gospel that describe stories of Jesus healing individuals with chronic illness. The main point of these passages is showing that Jesus is God through his ability and power to heal disease, cast out demons, etc. However, while not the main point of these stories, we can see that one lesson we can learn from the healing passages like Matthew 9 is that Jesus has great compassion and mercy for individuals with chronic illness. Use these passages to help the chronically ill person see God's love for them.

12. Luke 22:39-24:53

Meditating on the end of Jesus' life is a beneficial thing for any Christian. Meditating on Jesus prayer in the garden, arrest and betrayal, trial, crucifixion, death, resurrection, and appearing to the disciples can help the sufferer in many ways.

13. John 11:1-44

The death of Lazarus contains numerous helpful points for the sufferer and ill person. Jesus' compassion and grief over the death of Lazarus and grief of his family help us see Jesus' compassionate nature.

14. Romans 5:1-19

This text is helpful for numerous reasons, such as the initial declaration of peace with God through justification, access to God, rejoicing in suffering, Christ's death for the ungodly, and death through Adam and life through Christ.

15. Romans 8

This text is essential for the Christian for many reasons. This text provides a guarantee of God's love for the ill and suffering person. Nothing will separate the Christian from God's love including the failure of the body due to chronic illness. This includes those who lose the ability to control their body due to diseases like MS (Multiple Sclerosis), ALS (Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis, commonly called Lou Gehrig's Disease), Parkinson's, CIPD (Chronic Inflammatory Demyelinating Polyradiculoneuropathy), etc. or lose their mental faculties due to diseases like Dementia, Huntington's Disease, etc. This passage also points us to the future glory that is to come in vs.18-25 and the help the Spirit provides as we wait for future glory in vs. 26-30.

16. 2 Corinthians 1:3-4

See section 1, point 15, pages 13-14 for discussion of this passage.

17. 2 Corinthians 1:8-10

See section 1, point 16, pages 14-17 for discussion of this passage.

18. 2 Corinthians 4:16-5:9

This passage is essential to developing an eternal mindset and keeping our hope in the midst of our body deteriorating. Paul says, "We do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day." This helps the sufferer see that joy does not flow from the healing and health of the body, but through the renewal of the inner man and growth in our spirit as we become like Christ. This passage also encourages the sufferer to focus on the eternal glory to come.

19. 2 Corinthians 12

Paul shares that he was given a thorn in the flesh, and he prays for healing. He also shares the reason he was given this thorn, God's answer and purpose for the thorn, and his own reaction to God's unwillingness to heal. This text can help the sufferer and ill person work through the question of "How do you respond when you pray for healing and God does not heal you?" This passage gives an essential truth for the ill person; God's grace is sufficient.

20. Ephesians 1:1-2:10

This passage is helpful to work through with the ill person to gain a solid foundation of God's nature, providence, and the benefits of salvation. The prayer in the second half of Ephesians 1 can shape the prayer of the sufferer, and it transitions into one of the clearest statements of the Gospel in the entire Bible from 2:1-10.

21. Ephesians 4:17-4:32

This passage helps explain the new life, the Christian life, and the need to put off the old self and put on the new self. This passage is helpful for teaching in general as well as giving specific rebuke.

22. Philippians 1:6, 9-11

Paul tells the Philippians that God began a good work (of salvation) in them that He will bring to completion. Paul could be sure of this because of God's character and promises. All Christians can trust that God will bring them to completion no matter how their bodies and minds fail them. This fact also frees the Christian to take up Paul's prayer in vs. 9-11 as their own and pursue the goal of being found pure and blameless on the day of Christ's return, when God will be glorified and praised through them.

23. Philippians 3:13-15

Often people in pain can end up looking back at how life used to be. They can regret, become resentful, or angry at what they have lost. Especially when in pain for an extended period of time, people can end up focusing on the past. This verse is an encouragement to forget what lies behind and strain forward to what lies ahead. It encourages the person to press on toward holiness and sanctification, and glorification.

24. Philippians 4:4-13

This passage may seem impossible for the suffering and ill person. However the command to rejoice is for the healthy and ill alike. This passage opens the door to conversation about freedom from anxiety and the path to peace through prayer. This prayer produces can produce contentment as Christ strengthens believers (v.11-13).

25. Colossians 3:1-17

This text, like Ephesians 4, is a good explanation of the new life in Christ. This text features a call to set your mind on the things above, the need to put to death/put off the old self and to put on the new self and traits of the new self.

26. 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

This text can help prepare the Christian for death as well as help address fears of death. The intent of this text is to encourage, see v.18.

27. 1 Timothy 5:23

This verse is an aside given by Paul to Timothy to drink wine to treat illness. This verse can demonstrate the validity of medication, refute the health and wealth gospel, and numerous other points.

28. Hebrews 2:6-11, 17-18

This passage shows numerous helpful truths, such as the reality of Jesus' rule over the universe being accomplished but not fully realized, the reality of Christ's sufferings, and his ability to help the sufferer.

29. Hebrews 4:14-5:10

This passage shows that Jesus is our great high priest who can sympathize with us in suffering, the reality of his sinless nature, and exhortation to draw near to Christ to receive grace and mercy in our time of need.

30. Hebrews 10:19-39

This passage shows the reality of reconciliation to God through Christ's work, exhortation to meet and serve one another, a warning not to persist in sin, and encouragement to recall past victory and look forward to future blessing in Christ.

31. Hebrews 12:1-14.

See section 1, point 18 on page 18.

32. James 1

This passage gives an explanation of how to view trials for the Christian. Verses 12-15 help explain temptation, while verses 16-17 help the Christian see that all blessings are from God. The conclusion of this chapter provides practical instruction that is helpful and challenging to those who may suffer with impatience due to their disease.

33. James 5:7-18

This passage is a help to the sufferer as James directly addresses the need to be patient and wait on the Lord without sinning. It specifically puts forward the examples of the Prophets and Job, which also opens numerous Old Testament narratives to explore with the counselee. The passage then goes on to encourage the sufferer to pray and seek the prayer of the elders and to confess sin.

34. 1 Peter 1

See comments made in the section 2, subpoint 1 - anger, on pg's 19-23.

35. 2 Peter 1

This text explains that God has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness through knowing God, who called us to glory and excellence. This text also gives the Christian the exhortation to make every effort to pursue Christian maturity.

36. 1 John 1:9 and 3:3

This passage gives assurance that Christ is faithful and just and forgives sin and cleanses the Christian from unrighteousness if they confess sin.

37. Revelation 21-22.

Revelation 21, especially vs. 3-5, is the greatest source of encouragement and hope in all creation as it points the sufferer to the reality that they will dwell with God as one of His people, be comforted by God, and witness the end of death, mourning, crying, pain, suffering, and sickness at the creation of the New Heavens and New Earth.

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