

# Hope and Healing



*See I have engraved you on the palms of my hands.*

**Isaiah 49:16**



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## Foreword

This material was developed in and around our cancer support group, The Way To Wellness, at Faith Lutheran Church in Oakville, MO. We looked for a Bible study to help us deal with our cancers, but found few resources designed specifically for small groups.

So we asked our group members what topics interested them, what Scriptural help they were searching for, and what needs other resources weren't fulfilling. We asked them (and ourselves) to list their deep, disturbing questions, and then we went to God's Word to see what He had to say about them.

Discussion proved to be a healing and pain-relieving process, although we didn't always find direct answers to our questions. Sometimes the Bible showed us we needed to let go of our desire for answers and just trust God. Our discussions always offered us the opportunity to learn and grow.

In formatting this study guide, we chose to print the scripture readings to the side of the page for your convenience. A section in the back of the study guide contains some ideas group members shared during our discussions. It's not meant to be a leader's guide or provide answers to the questions; it merely encourages thought. If you use this guide in a small group setting, these contributions may stimulate discussion when everyone draws a blank. If you are studying alone, it may help you feel less alone.

In the beginning, our group consisted of only cancer patients, and did not include our loved ones, but we soon recognized that our families and friends go through their own suffering. Sometimes, it seemed to us, those watching us hurt more than we did and asked the same hard questions. So, we made this study guide applicable to both patients and their loved ones, and our group has expanded accordingly.

May you find hope and healing as you study God's Word. If at any point you find our writing difficult to comprehend, we pray you will continue to read and trust in the Word of God, as He is the "author and perfecter of our faith" (Hebrews 12:2 NIV). As the writer of Hebrews encourages, keep your eyes fixed on Him as you run with perseverance the race marked out for you (Hebrews 12:1-2). May God's blessings and grace sustain you.

Shari Grueninger and Chris Pearce

**Note to Reader:** We recognize that many of our readers will be weak from cancer or another serious illness. For this reason we included all scripture references to ease the burden of completing the study. The reader should understand that we have chosen a variety of translations from the Bible. For each question we searched various translations and used the one we felt best dealt with the answer to the proposed question. Several quotes were from the New Living Translation (NLT) and The Message (MSG), which are considered paraphrases of the Bible rather than translations. A translation follows more closely the wording and meaning of the scriptures' original languages, while a paraphrase tries to explain and restate what the passage means in everyday language. Great spiritual blessings can be derived by studying both paraphrase and translations. (Dr. Jeffery A. Gibbs, Associate Professor Concordia Seminary, St. Louis Lutheran Witness Nov.1998) We hope that you are blessed by this study.

## What's the prognosis?

One day you sit, dreaming about the future. You envision leisure activities. You look forward to having children of your own or maybe spending time with your children's children. The next day you hear those awful words: "You have cancer." Life comes to a grinding halt. Your first thought is, "How much time do I have?" Suddenly you no longer wonder whether you will see or enjoy your granddaughter's wedding or make cookies with your children's children. Instead you wonder: Will I see my next birthday? Will I see the refreshing colors of autumn or another white, snow-covered winter day?

A dear friend in our cancer support group, having been diagnosed with colon cancer, was told she had twenty-two months to live. After a few months of intense chemotherapy, her tests revealed that the cancer, while it had not shrunk, had not grown either. She confidently announced to the group that as a result, the doctors had now extended her life expectancy an additional two months. After doing the math, she concluded she now had twenty-one months left to live.

We found this time prediction disturbing. We knew the *doctor's* prognosis, but we decided to explore *God's* prognosis.

Read Jeremiah 1:5, Psalm 139:13-16, and Exodus 15:26b.

Compare the human doctor's knowledge of our bodies and illnesses to the knowledge God possesses.

Who is the Master Physician?

**Jeremiah 1:5a** (NASB)

<sup>5</sup>Before I formed you in the womb I knew you.

**Psalm 139:13-16** (NIV)

<sup>13</sup>For you created my inmost being;  
you knit me together in my mother's womb.

<sup>14</sup>I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made;  
your works are wonderful,  
I know that full well.

<sup>15</sup>My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place.  
When I was woven together in the depths of the earth,

<sup>16</sup>your eyes saw my unformed body.  
All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be.

**Exodus 15:26b** (MSG)

I am GOD your healer.



Let's look at the life of John the Baptist. From its beginning, his life was committed to serving the Lord (John 1:6-7). Even from the womb, he was overjoyed to be in the presence of Jesus (Luke 1:44). He spent a lifetime preparing the way of the Lord. John the Baptist kept the faith. He believed. He shared the joy of knowing Jesus with many others.

How does your relationship to the Lord compare to that of John the Baptist?

Read Matthew 11:1-6.

How could it be that John, this faithful believer, winds up in prison?

John himself seems perplexed. He sends his disciples to ask Jesus if He is really the one they've been waiting for.

If God is who He says He is, then why doesn't God set John free? Why doesn't He set *us* free?

How do we explain John's doubts?

**John 1:6-7 (NASB)**

<sup>6</sup>There came a man sent from God, whose name was John.

<sup>7</sup>He came as a witness, to testify about the Light, so that all might believe through him.

**Luke 1:41-44 (NLT)**

<sup>41</sup>At the sound of Mary's greeting, Elizabeth's child leaped within her, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit.

<sup>42</sup>Elizabeth gave a glad cry and exclaimed to Mary, "You are blessed by God above all other women, and your child is blessed. <sup>43</sup>What an honor this is, that the mother of my Lord should visit me! <sup>44</sup>When you came in and greeted me, my baby jumped for joy the instant I heard your voice!"

**Matthew 11:1-6 (MSG)**

<sup>1</sup>When Jesus finished placing this charge before his twelve disciples, he went on to teach and preach in their villages.

<sup>2</sup>John, meanwhile, had been locked up in prison. When he got wind of what Jesus was doing, he sent his own disciples <sup>3</sup>to ask, "Are you the One we've been expecting, or are we still waiting?"

<sup>4</sup>Jesus told them, "Go back and tell John what's going on:

<sup>5</sup>The blind see,  
The lame walk,  
Lepers are cleansed,  
The deaf hear,  
The dead are raised,  
The wretched of the earth learn that  
God is on their side.

<sup>6</sup>"Is this what you were expecting?  
Then count yourselves most blessed!"



What happens when we focus on our circumstances rather than on God?

Later, Herod has John beheaded (Matthew 14:3a, 10).

What was God's purpose for John the Baptist's life?

Did God accomplish His purpose, or did John's death at the hands of Herod cut short his life and leave his mission unfinished?

What did Jesus say about it? (Matthew 11:7-14)

**Matthew 14:3a** (ASV)

<sup>3</sup> For Herod had laid hold on John, and bound him, and put him in prison.

**Matthew 14:10** (ASV)

<sup>10</sup> and he sent and beheaded John in the prison.

**Matthew 11:7-14** (MSG)

<sup>7</sup>When John's disciples left to report, Jesus started talking to the crowd about John. "What did you expect when you went out to see him in the wild? A weekend camper? <sup>8</sup>Hardly. What then? A sheik in silk pajamas? Not in the wilderness, not by a long shot. <sup>9</sup>What then? A prophet? That's right, a prophet! Probably the best prophet you'll ever hear. <sup>10</sup>He is the prophet that Malachi announced when he wrote, 'I'm sending my prophet ahead of you, to make the road smooth for you.'

<sup>11</sup>"Let me tell you what's going on here: No one in history surpasses John the Baptizer; but in the kingdom he prepared you for, the lowliest person is ahead of him. <sup>12</sup>For a long time now people have tried to force themselves into God's kingdom. <sup>13</sup>But if you read the books of the Prophets and God's Law closely, you will see them culminate in John, teaming up with him in preparing the way for the Messiah of the kingdom. <sup>14</sup>Looked at in this way, John is the 'Elijah' you've all been expecting to arrive and introduce the Messiah."

Read Isaiah 46:9-10, Jeremiah 29:11, Isaiah 50:2b, and Ezekiel 12:25a.

Check the boxes below that you think describe the effects cancer is having on God's purpose and plan for your life:

- It took God by surprise
- It ruined God's plan
- It has shortened my life on earth from the length God planned
- I still have the same number of days that God wrote for me in His book
- It has not changed God's plan
- It was part of God's plan all along
- My mission must be scrapped
- God still has a purpose for me to be here where I am
- God never had a plan – I have my own plan

Explain your responses.

**Isaiah 46:9-10** (ASV)

<sup>9</sup> Remember the former things of old: for I am God, and there is none else; I am God, and there is none like me;

<sup>10</sup> declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times things that are not yet done; saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure;

**Jeremiah 29:11** (NASB)

<sup>11</sup>'For I know the plans that I have for you,' declares the LORD, 'plans for welfare and not for calamity to give you a future and a hope.

**Isaiah 50:2b** (NASB)

Is My hand so short that it cannot ransom?

Or have I no power to deliver?

**Ezekiel 12:25a** (NASB)

For I the Lord will speak, and whatever word I speak will be performed.

### **Prescription for spiritual healing**

Knowing that God has a plan for your life, begin reading His Word and praying daily. Ask God to guide you with His Word and assure you of His plan for you. Ask Him to give you the strength to surrender to His will in your life. Acknowledge that God is in control and you are not. Keep a journal. You may not choose to journal every day but as you have the energy, write and see where God takes you.

## **Why does God allow suffering?**

I climbed to the top of the second reservoir in Palmer Lake, Colorado, with my sister one cool, comfortable summer day. It was late afternoon and a beautiful day for a hike. As we neared the top, a light rain fell, painting the rocks and trees around us with an incredible brilliance and sparkle. The colors were magnificent.

Standing at the top, very close to sunset, we looked down on the water. We could see the sun, the rocks, and the trees reflected in it. The reflection was a perfect replica of the beauty a picture cannot capture.

I remember feeling particularly proud to have climbed this distance, since the previous summer I had been too sick from chemo to even attempt the climb. Standing there looking at the beauty surrounding us, I felt the overwhelming presence of God. Tears filled my eyes.

Moments like those in our lives are priceless. We sometimes call them "mountaintop highs." At times, especially during a struggle with cancer, it seems we spend more time in the valleys than on the mountaintop.

Can you think of a time when you experienced a "mountaintop high?"

What did you learn on the mountaintop?

Can you think of a time you found yourself in the valley?

What did you learn in that valley?

Study the following passages:

Hebrews 5:8

I Peter 1: 6-7

John 15:1-2

Romans 8:18, 28

Apply these scriptures to your times "in the valley."  
Assess how valley experiences matured you or shaped who you are today.

How should we respond to suffering? Read Hebrews 12:2-3.

**Hebrews 5:8** (NLT)

<sup>8</sup>So even though Jesus was God's Son, he learned obedience from the things he suffered.

**1 Peter 1:6-7** (NASB)

<sup>6</sup>In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials,

<sup>7</sup>so that the proof of your faith, being more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

**John 15:1-2** (NLT)

<sup>1</sup>"I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. <sup>2</sup>He cuts off every branch that doesn't produce fruit, and he prunes the branches that do bear fruit so they will produce even more.

**Romans 8:18** (NASB)

<sup>18</sup>For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us.

**Romans 8:28** (NASB)

<sup>28</sup>And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.

**Hebrews 12:2-3** (NIV)

<sup>2</sup>Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. <sup>3</sup>Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.



Think of Joseph and all the tragic things that happened to him. Read Genesis 37:24, Genesis 37:28, Genesis 39:20, and Genesis 41:46a, and list these calamities.

While enduring these things, Joseph seemed to do everything right and Scripture says the Lord was with Him (Genesis 39:2-4, 20-21). Yet his life by our standards seems terribly unfair. Clearly, he spent a great deal of time in the valley.

Describe a time when God stayed with you, even though life seemed very unfair.

Pharaoh brought Joseph out of the valley (or, more accurately, the dungeon) to ask him to interpret a dream.

What was Joseph's response? See Genesis 41:14-16.

**Genesis 37:24** (NIV)

<sup>24</sup> and they took him and threw him into the cistern.

**Genesis 37:28** (NIV)

<sup>28</sup> So when the Midianite merchants came by, his brothers pulled Joseph up out of the cistern and sold him for twenty shekels of silver to the Ishmaelites, who took him to Egypt.

**Genesis 41:46a** (MSG)

<sup>46</sup> Joseph was thirty years old when he went to work for Pharaoh the king of Egypt.

**Genesis 39:2-4** (NLT)

<sup>2</sup>The LORD was with Joseph and blessed him greatly as he served in the home of his Egyptian master. <sup>3</sup>Potiphar noticed this and realized that the LORD was with Joseph, giving him success in everything he did. <sup>4</sup>So Joseph naturally became quite a favorite with him. Potiphar soon put Joseph in charge of his entire household and entrusted him with all his business dealings.

**Genesis 39:20-21** (NIV)

<sup>20</sup> Joseph's master took him and put him in prison, the place where the king's prisoners were confined.

But while Joseph was there in the prison, <sup>21</sup> the LORD was with him; he showed him kindness and granted him favor in the eyes of the prison warden.

**Genesis 41:14-16** (NIV)

<sup>14</sup> So Pharaoh sent for Joseph, and he was quickly brought from the dungeon. When he had shaved and changed his clothes, he came before Pharaoh.

<sup>15</sup> Pharaoh said to Joseph, "I had a dream, and no one can interpret it. But I have heard it said of you that when



While mistreated and imprisoned, Joseph had learned to rely fully on God instead of himself.

Read Proverbs 3:5-6 and Isaiah 55:8.

How had Joseph's suffering helped him learn to trust God?

How did Joseph view his circumstances? Read Genesis 50:18-21.

What confidence do these verses give you about your own situation?

you hear a dream you can interpret it."

<sup>16</sup> "I cannot do it," Joseph replied to Pharaoh, "but God will give Pharaoh the answer he desires."

**Proverbs 3:5-6** (NASB)

<sup>5</sup> Trust in the LORD with all your heart

And do not lean on your own understanding.

<sup>6</sup> In all your ways acknowledge Him,

And He will make your paths straight.

**Isaiah 55:8** (NIV)

<sup>8</sup> "For my thoughts are not your thoughts,  
neither are your ways my ways,"  
declares the LORD.

**Genesis 50:18-21** (NLT)

<sup>18</sup> Then his brothers came and bowed low before him. "We are your slaves," they said.

<sup>19</sup> But Joseph told them, "Don't be afraid of me. Am I God, to judge and punish you? <sup>20</sup> As far as I am concerned, God turned into good what you meant for evil. He brought me to the high position I have today so I could save the lives of many people. <sup>21</sup> No, don't be afraid. Indeed, I myself will take care of you and your families." And he spoke very kindly to them, reassuring them.

## Pain relievers

Understanding that God uses our suffering for our good and His glory doesn't change for us the fact that many days it seems overwhelming. Remember, in this ongoing battle the sword of the Spirit is the word of God (Ephesians 6:17). Meditate on His word *daily* or drink it in as often as you need for strength to persevere. The verses below will bring you comfort and peace. If you're too weak to meditate on His word, ask God for help and be assured that "the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express" (Romans 8:26 NIV).

### **Isaiah 43:1-5** (NASB)

- <sup>1</sup>But now, thus says the LORD, your Creator, O Jacob,  
And He who formed you, O Israel,  
"Do not fear, for I have redeemed you;  
I have called you by name; you are Mine!
- <sup>2</sup>"When you pass through the waters, I will be with you;  
And through the rivers, they will not overflow you  
When you walk through the fire, you will not be scorched,  
Nor will the flame burn you.
- <sup>3</sup>"For I am the LORD your God,  
The Holy One of Israel, your Savior;  
I have given Egypt as your ransom,  
Cush and Seba in your place.
- <sup>4</sup>"Since you are precious in My sight,  
Since you are honored and I love you,  
I will give other men in your place and other peoples in exchange for your life.
- <sup>5</sup>"Do not fear, for I am with you;  
I will bring your offspring from the east,  
And gather you from the west.

### **Psalms 103:2-5** (NASB)

- <sup>2</sup>Bless the LORD, O my soul,  
And forget none of His benefits;
- <sup>3</sup>Who pardons all your iniquities,  
Who heals all your diseases;
- <sup>4</sup>Who redeems your life from the pit,  
Who crowns you with lovingkindness and compassion;
- <sup>5</sup>Who satisfies your years with good things,  
So that your youth is renewed like the eagle.

### **Psalms 23:4** (NIV)

- <sup>4</sup> Even though I walk  
through the valley of the shadow of death,  
I will fear no evil,  
for you are with me;

your rod and your staff,  
they comfort me.

**John 16:33** (NIV)

<sup>33</sup>"I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world."

**Psalm 94:18-19** (NLT)

<sup>18</sup>I cried out, "I'm slipping!"  
and your unfailing love, O LORD, supported me.

<sup>19</sup>When doubts filled my mind,  
your comfort gave me renewed hope and cheer.

**Psalm 121** (NASB)

<sup>1</sup>I will lift up my eyes to the mountains;  
From where shall my help come?

<sup>2</sup>My help comes from the LORD,  
Who made heaven and earth.

<sup>3</sup>He will not allow your foot to slip;  
He who keeps you will not slumber.

<sup>4</sup>Behold, He who keeps Israel  
Will neither slumber nor sleep.

<sup>5</sup>The LORD is your keeper;  
The LORD is your shade on your right hand.

<sup>6</sup>The sun will not smite you by day,  
Nor the moon by night.

<sup>7</sup>The LORD will protect you from all evil;  
He will keep your soul.

<sup>8</sup>The LORD will guard your going out and your coming in  
From this time forth and forever.

**2 Corinthians 12:9** (NASB)

<sup>9</sup>And He has said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness." Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me.

**Isaiah 40:11** (NIV)

<sup>11</sup> He tends his flock like a shepherd:  
He gathers the lambs in his arms  
and carries them close to his heart;  
he gently leads those that have young.

**Zephaniah 3:17** (NIV)

<sup>17</sup> The LORD your God is with you,  
he is mighty to save.  
He will take great delight in you,  
he will quiet you with his love,  
he will rejoice over you with singing.

## Why me?

I was shocked when my doctor told me I had cancer. "Why me?" seemed like an appropriate question. Our family had no history of cancer. I was young and in great physical shape. I exercised daily and had a relatively healthy diet. It just did not make sense.

In spite of my shock, I knew that God would not allow this suffering in my life unless it fit into His purpose and plan. In fact, I remember journaling daily asking God to reveal to me what it was He wanted me to do – to explain to me how I might use my circumstances to glorify His name. Even with this generally optimistic attitude, I sometimes felt sorry for myself. I wondered if God would ever reveal His plans to me. I thought maybe the sooner He revealed his purpose to me, the sooner I would be out of my misery. When the answers didn't come, I felt God had abandoned me.

I remember feeling particularly sorry for myself one day. I received a phone call from a friend leading a Bible study I participated in. She called and asked if I could lead the group that evening. I reluctantly said yes. As I hung up the phone, I recall asking myself a question. Can you guess what it was? You got it: Why me? Well, God has a way of putting things into perspective for us, and that's certainly what He did that night as we looked at Jesus' beloved disciple, John, and his exile.

Here is a man who loved and served God faithfully for many years. We know Jesus loved him and he loved Jesus. John was one of only a few people who did not desert Jesus when He was arrested and crucified. From the gospels, we know he is one disciple who stayed and watched the crucifixion to the end and then personally took Jesus' mother Mary into his care.

Yet God allowed his exile to Patmos, a barren island with rocky terrain, hot sun, and rough weather. John had no food, no fresh water, no shelter, and no protection.

What words describe how John might have felt?

Have you ever been in a spiritual place like this?

How did you respond to your situation?

Look at Revelation 1:9 for John's response. How many of us respond to our suffering in this manner?

Read Revelation 1:10. What does John mean by "in the Spirit?"

While John was "in the Spirit," God revealed His message to him. How did God prepare John to receive and write His words?

How do you think John felt about receiving God's revelation?

Read Psalm 119:67, 71, 75. What was the psalmist's attitude?

What did he learn from his afflictions?

**Revelation 1:9 (NIV)**

<sup>9</sup>I, John, your brother and companion in the suffering and kingdom and patient endurance that are ours in Jesus, was on the island of Patmos because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus.

**Revelation 1:10 (NLT)**

<sup>10</sup>It was the Lord's Day, and I was worshiping in the Spirit. Suddenly, I heard a loud voice behind me, a voice that sounded like a trumpet blast.

**Psalm 119:67 (NIV)**

<sup>67</sup> Before I was afflicted I went astray,  
but now I obey your word.

**Psalm 119:71 (NLT)**

<sup>71</sup> The suffering you sent was good for me,

for it taught me to pay attention to your principles.

**Psalm 119:75 (NASB)**

<sup>75</sup>I know, O LORD, that Your judgments are righteous,

And that in faithfulness You have afflicted me.



Read Romans 9:10-13. What does Paul, the writer of Romans, say about circumstances in life?

Are there times when you feel God is being unfair to you?

Does our feeling that way make it true? Read Romans 9:14-16 and explain your response.

Read Hosea 7:14a, 5:15, 6:1, and Psalm 78:34, 35. To whom does God want us to turn in times of suffering?

**Romans 9:10-13 (NLT)**

<sup>10</sup>This son was our ancestor Isaac. When he grew up, he married Rebekah, who gave birth to twins. <sup>11</sup>But before they were born, before they had done anything good or bad, she received a message from God. (This message proves that God chooses according to his own plan, <sup>12</sup>not according to our good or bad works.) She was told, "The descendants of your older son will serve the descendants of your younger son." <sup>13</sup>In the words of the Scriptures, "I loved Jacob, but I rejected Esau."

**Romans 9:14-16 (NLT)**

<sup>14</sup>What can we say? Was God being unfair? Of course not! <sup>15</sup>For God said to Moses,

"I will show mercy to anyone I choose, and I will show compassion to anyone I choose."

<sup>16</sup>So receiving God's promise is not up to us. We can't get it by choosing it or working hard for it. God will show mercy to anyone he chooses.

**Hosea 7:14a (NIV)**

<sup>14</sup> They do not cry out to me from their hearts  
but wail upon their beds.

**Hosea 5:15, 6:1 (NIV)**

<sup>15</sup> Then I will go back to my place  
until they admit their guilt.  
And they will seek my face;  
in their misery they will earnestly  
seek me."

<sup>1</sup> "Come, let us return to the LORD.

He has torn us to pieces  
but he will heal us;  
he has injured us  
but he will bind up our wounds.

**Psalm 78:34, 35 (NIV)**

<sup>34</sup> Whenever God slew them, they



Read 2 Corinthians 4:17, 2 Chronicles 15:4, and Psalm 73:26. What does God desire for His people in their suffering?

Reflect on the relationship you treasure most. What can a relationship with God offer that a relationship with another human being cannot?

Read Isaiah 1:25, Philippians 1:6, and Hebrews 12:6, 7.

According to these scriptures, what is the result of God's discipline in our lives? Check the boxes that apply.

- God continues to carry out what He started in me
- I have learned \_\_\_\_\_
- God has a grudge against me
- God is purifying me
- I am so bad, I need to be punished. I deserve this suffering.
- I am becoming more like Christ
- I truly know that God loves me as a son or daughter
- \_\_\_\_\_

would seek him;

they eagerly turned to him again.

<sup>35</sup> They remembered that God was their Rock,

that God Most High was their Redeemer.

**2 Corinthians 4:17 (NLT)**

<sup>17</sup>For our present troubles are quite small and won't last very long. Yet they produce for us an immeasurably great glory that will last forever!

**2 Chronicles 15:4 (NIV)**

<sup>4</sup> But in their distress they turned to the LORD, the God of Israel, and sought him, and he was found by them.

**Psalm 73:26 (NIV)**

<sup>26</sup> My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.

**Isaiah 1:25 (NIV)**

<sup>25</sup> I will turn my hand against you;

I will thoroughly purge away your dross

and remove all your impurities.

**Philippians 1:6 (NLT)**

<sup>6</sup>And I am sure that God, who began the good work within you, will continue his work until it is finally finished on that day when Christ Jesus comes back again.

**Hebrews 12:6, 7 (NIV)**

<sup>6</sup>because the Lord disciplines those he loves,

and he punishes everyone he accepts as a son."

<sup>7</sup>Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as sons. For what son is not disciplined by his father?

Philippians 4:4-9 According to Paul, how are we to react "always" (even in difficult times)?

How does this advice from Paul compare to John's reaction to his exile to Patmos?

How did this attitude benefit John?

How can this attitude benefit us?

Reflect on and discuss possible ways God is preparing you, like John, for your part in His great plan.

Give examples of how He has already begun His work in you.

**Philippians 4:4-9 (NLT)**

<sup>4</sup>Always be full of joy in the Lord. I say it again--rejoice! <sup>5</sup>Let everyone see that you are considerate in all you do. Remember, the Lord is coming soon.

<sup>6</sup>Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done. <sup>7</sup>If you do this, you will experience God's peace, which is far more wonderful than the human mind can understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus.

<sup>8</sup>And now, dear brothers and sisters, let me say one more thing as I close this letter. Fix your thoughts on what is true and honorable and right. Think about things that are pure and lovely and admirable. Think about things that are excellent and worthy of praise. <sup>9</sup>Keep putting into practice all you learned from me and heard from me and saw me doing, and the God of peace will be with you.

## Spiritual chemo

Take Paul's advice and infuse into your brain thoughts of what is true, honorable, pure, lovely, admirable, excellent, and worthy of praise. Take time for prayer, reflection and relaxation. Spend time in His word and "in the Spirit." See how your thinking and your desires change.

### **Psalm 143:8** (NIV)

<sup>8</sup> Let the morning bring me word of your unfailing love,  
for I have put my trust in you.  
Show me the way I should go,  
for to you I lift up my soul.

### **Psalm 142:5** (NLT)

<sup>5</sup> Then I pray to you, O LORD.  
I say, "You are my place of refuge.  
You are all I really want in life.

## Does prayer help?

In times of trouble, we can choose to respond in one of two ways. First, we can run away from God or second, we can run *to* Him. Our tendency is often to run *away*. When we reject God we often find ourselves angry, even bitter with God.

When first diagnosed with cancer, I never dreamed that within a year's time I would undergo five surgeries and eight rounds of chemotherapy. I remember attending an annual women's retreat with friends from my church right after the diagnosis. Not knowing what would lie ahead for me, I stood up in front of about 50 women and made a commitment to walk in faith *no matter what turned up*. At that moment, I made a conscious decision to run *to* the Lord instead of away.

After I made this commitment all the women surrounding me also made a commitment. They committed to praying for me, and pray they did! Active in my church and a teacher at a Christian school, I knew many people lifted me up in prayer. Those prayers gave me the strength to continue trusting in the Lord. Those prayers allowed me to recognize the abundant blessings God wanted to give me even in the midst of pain and suffering. Prayer and His Word kept me strong. (See Isaiah 40:29 – "He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak.") Knowing that people were praying for me gave me peace and comfort. Confident in the power of prayer, I watched God provide for me and my family in ways I never before imagined!

One of my favorite Bible verses comes from the book of Isaiah, chapter 40 v. 11. It says that the Lord gathers his lambs and holds them close to his heart. The visual is that of a loving father cradling us in his arms. There in his arms, an amazing thing happens. Instead of anger and bitterness, we experience peace and comfort – a peace and comfort many people simply cannot understand.

Making the decision to run to Him rather than away is not always easy, especially in light of our circumstances. Surrendering to God does not mean giving up or ignoring our problem or simply lying down and letting the cancer destroy us. Instead, it means giving that cancer over to God, agreeing to fight the battle in accordance with His will and not our own. We can discover His will for us through prayer and the study of His word.

Read Luke 9:23. What does Jesus say about following Him?

Why does He say we must do this daily?

**Luke 9:23 (ASV)**

<sup>23</sup> And he said unto all, If any man would come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me.



Let's take a look at Daniel.

Daniel was a man of prayer, bold and uninhibited by the world around him. He let God's will, rather than the circumstances in which he lived, guide him. Look at his circumstances and consider how easily he might have surrendered to the world rather than to God.

Read Daniel 1:1-14. What choices could Daniel have made?

What choice *did* he make?

Identify some of the temptations Daniel faced.

By our standards, which seems easier, to remain faithful to God or give in to temptations?

**Daniel 1:1-14 (MSG)**

<sup>1</sup>It was the third year of King Jehoiakim's reign in Judah when King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon declared war on Jerusalem and besieged the city. <sup>2</sup>The Master handed King Jehoiakim of Judah over to him, along with some of the furnishings from the Temple of God. Nebuchadnezzar took king and furnishings to the country of Babylon, the ancient Shinar. He put the furnishings in the sacred treasury.

<sup>3</sup>The king told Ashpenaz, head of the palace staff, to get some Israelites from the royal family and nobility <sup>4</sup>-young men who were healthy and handsome, intelligent and well-educated, good prospects for leadership positions in the government, perfect specimens!-and indoctrinate them in the Babylonian language and the lore of magic and fortunetelling. <sup>5</sup>The king then ordered that they be served from the same menu as the royal table--the best food, the finest wine. After three years of training they would be given positions in the king's court.

<sup>6</sup>Four young men from Judah--Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah--were among those selected. <sup>7</sup>The head of the palace staff gave them Babylonian names: Daniel was named Belteshazzar, Hananiah was named Shadrach, Mishael was named Meshach, Azariah was named Abednego.

<sup>8</sup>But Daniel determined that he would not defile himself by eating the king's

Why?

What was the result of Daniel's following God's will?

Read in Daniel 2: 12-18 about another event in Daniel's life, when the king demanded that his wise men tell him his dream (which he had forgotten) and also interpret it. Faced with a death sentence, Daniel asks the king's guard for more time.

How does Daniel spend his time?

To whom does he go for help?

What did he ask his fellow believers to do?

food or drinking his wine, so he asked the head of the palace staff to exempt him from the royal diet. <sup>9</sup>The head of the palace staff, by God's grace, liked Daniel, <sup>10</sup>but he warned him, "I'm afraid of what my master the king will do. He is the one who assigned this diet and if he sees that you are not as healthy as the rest, he'll have my head!"

<sup>11</sup>But Daniel appealed to a steward who had been assigned by the head of the palace staff to be in charge of Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah: <sup>12</sup>"Try us out for ten days on a simple diet of vegetables and water. <sup>13</sup>Then compare us with the young men who eat from the royal menu. Make your decision on the basis of what you see."

<sup>14</sup>The steward agreed to do it and fed them vegetables and water for ten days.

#### **Daniel 2:12-18 (MSG)**

<sup>12</sup>The king was furious when he heard this, and he sent out orders to execute all the wise men of Babylon. <sup>13</sup>And because of the king's decree, men were sent to find and kill Daniel and his friends.

<sup>14</sup>When Arioch, the commander of the king's guard, came to kill them, Daniel handled the situation with wisdom and discretion. <sup>15</sup>He asked Arioch, "Why has the king issued such a harsh decree?" So Arioch told him all that had happened. <sup>16</sup>Daniel went at once to see the king and requested more time so he could tell the king what the dream meant.

<sup>17</sup>Then Daniel went home and told his friends Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah what had happened. <sup>18</sup>He urged them to ask the God of heaven to show them his mercy by telling them the secret, so they would not be executed along with the other wise men of Babylon.



As the years passed, Daniel prayed every day – morning, noon, and evening – and didn't stop even when his enemies made a law against it. In fact, when he heard about the new law, the first thing he did was pray. Soon he was caught, arrested, and thrown into a lions' den. He faced certain death.

Read Daniel 6:6-27.

What was Daniel's first reaction to the new decree?

Why do you think he kept praying, even when he knew he could be executed for it?

**Daniel 6:6-27 (NASB)**

<sup>6</sup>Then these commissioners and satraps came by agreement to the king and spoke to him as follows: "King Darius, live forever!

<sup>7</sup>"All the commissioners of the kingdom, the prefects and the satraps, the high officials and the governors have consulted together that the king should establish a statute and enforce an injunction that anyone who makes a petition to any god or man besides you, O king, for thirty days, shall be cast into the lions' den.

<sup>8</sup>"Now, O king, establish the injunction and sign the document so that it may not be changed, according to the law of the Medes and Persians, which may not be revoked."

<sup>9</sup>Therefore King Darius signed the document, that is, the injunction.

<sup>10</sup>Now when Daniel knew that the document was signed, he entered his house (now in his roof chamber he had windows open toward Jerusalem); and he continued kneeling on his knees three times a day, praying and giving thanks before his God, as he had been doing previously.

<sup>11</sup>Then these men came by agreement and found Daniel making petition and supplication before his God.

<sup>12</sup>Then they approached and spoke before the king about the king's injunction, "Did you not sign an injunction that any man who makes a petition to any god or man besides you, O king, for thirty days, is to be cast into the lions' den?" The king replied, "The statement is true, according to the law of the Medes and Persians, which may not be revoked."

<sup>13</sup>Then they answered and spoke before

What do you think he did all night long in that lions' den?

the king, "Daniel, who is one of the exiles from Judah, pays no attention to you, O king, or to the injunction which you signed, but keeps making his petition three times a day."

<sup>14</sup>Then, as soon as the king heard this statement, he was deeply distressed and set his mind on delivering Daniel; and even until sunset he kept exerting himself to rescue him.

<sup>15</sup>Then these men came by agreement to the king and said to the king, "Recognize, O king, that it is a law of the Medes and Persians that no injunction or statute which the king establishes may be changed."

<sup>16</sup>Then the king gave orders, and Daniel was brought in and cast into the lions' den. The king spoke and said to Daniel, "Your God whom you constantly serve will Himself deliver you."

What good resulted from Daniel's prayers?

<sup>17</sup>A stone was brought and laid over the mouth of the den; and the king sealed it with his own signet ring and with the signet rings of his nobles, so that nothing would be changed in regard to Daniel.

<sup>18</sup>Then the king went off to his palace and spent the night fasting, and no entertainment was brought before him; and his sleep fled from him.

<sup>19</sup>Then the king arose at dawn, at the break of day, and went in haste to the lions' den.

<sup>20</sup>When he had come near the den to Daniel, he cried out with a troubled voice. The king spoke and said to Daniel, "Daniel, servant of the living God, has your God, whom you constantly serve, been able to deliver you from the lions?"

<sup>21</sup>Then Daniel spoke to the king, "O king, live forever!

<sup>22</sup>"My God sent His angel and shut the lions' mouths and they have not harmed

Why do you think God waited all night before removing Daniel from the lions' den?

Whom did Daniel trust to help him through the night?

Share a time when you found yourself in darkness, unsure what was happening.

me, inasmuch as I was found innocent before Him; and also toward you, O king, I have committed no crime."

<sup>23</sup>Then the king was very pleased and gave orders for Daniel to be taken up out of the den. So Daniel was taken up out of the den and no injury whatever was found on him, because he had trusted in his God.

<sup>24</sup>The king then gave orders, and they brought those men who had maliciously accused Daniel, and they cast them, their children and their wives into the lions' den; and they had not reached the bottom of the den before the lions overpowered them and crushed all their bones.

<sup>25</sup>Then Darius the king wrote to all the peoples, nations and men of every language who were living in all the land: "May your peace abound!

<sup>26</sup>"I make a decree that in all the dominion of my kingdom men are to fear and tremble before the God of Daniel;

For He is the living God and enduring forever,

And His kingdom is one which will not be destroyed,

And His dominion will be forever.

<sup>27</sup>"He delivers and rescues and performs signs and wonders

In heaven and on earth,

Who has also delivered Daniel from the power of the lions."

In these times, what attitude does God desire for us to have? Read Isaiah 50:10; Psalm 23: 4

**Isaiah 50:10** (NIV)

<sup>10</sup> Who among you fears the LORD  
and obeys the word of his servant?  
Let him who walks in the dark,  
who has no light,  
trust in the name of the LORD  
and rely on his God.

**Psalm 23:4** (ASV)

<sup>4</sup> Yea, though I walk through the  
valley of the shadow of death, I will fear  
no evil; for thou art with me; Thy rod and  
thy staff, they comfort me.

### **Radiation therapy (light in the darkness)**

Reflect on the following questions: Since cancer has come into your life, how have you grown in your ability to trust God? What areas of your life can you surrender to him today? Can you praise him and commit your future to him even in difficult times?

What do these things have to do with prayer?



## **Is my life worth anything?**

I shouldn't be eating chocolate candy; I should be eating food that's good for me. But who cares, anyway? I don't have the strength to cook or do anything else worthwhile. Someone else will have to cook for me. My whole life is other people taking care of me. What good am I? I'm only a burden. I'd be better off dead.

Sound familiar?

Both cancer and its various treatments are likely to alter chemical or hormonal balances. At times I don't have the energy to take proper care of myself. Sometimes the pain seems endless, my emotions one upheaval after another. I can easily give in to fear, anger, bitterness, or self-pity on any given day. Everywhere I turn I see things to worry about. Will the cancer go away? Will it come back? Am I going to die from it? How can I afford these medical bills? Who will take care of my children? How can I help my children understand what is happening? I am full of questions I want to ask God (Why, why, why? and How long?), but sometimes He seems far away or angry at me, and I'm not sure I dare demand answers.

Depression was a part of my life long before I got cancer. I tried many different treatments for it: medication, psychotherapy, spiritual counseling, and self-help books. Some of that helped, and some didn't, but the years of struggle taught me a lot about the way depression works in me. I remember one time, about a week after a long hospitalization for depression, I felt so much better – until I realized I needed to defrost my freezer. I couldn't face it! It was overwhelming! I literally had to ask my husband to help me defrost the freezer. Now I know – if an ordinary task seems overwhelming, I'm depressed.

Two important concepts have helped me. First, I have learned that the initial cause of depression can be physical, emotional, or spiritual. The depression seems to start in one area, but can quickly spread to the other two. The good news is that the reverse is also true; when it lifts in one area, it can soon lift in the others. Sometimes nothing can be done to treat a physical cause. Often, depression is a side effect of cancer and its treatments, but the treatments are necessary, regardless. However, combating depression spiritually can improve the physical and emotional areas as well.

The second concept involves recognizing that depression is a sign something in my life needs to change. Over the years I have observed that depression is what happens to me when I resist this change or deny that a change is necessary. The good news here is that God's Spirit is always working in me to make me more like Christ. In other words, a work of change goes on continually in my spiritual life. Sometimes all I need to do is surrender to what God is doing, and my depression leaves. At other times, God is helping me to learn and grow, and that may be painful, but He is always there to provide strength and courage.



The Bible shows us several Old Testament characters who struggled with depression. They were ordinary people through whom God did extraordinary things. Let's first look at the experience of the prophet Elijah.

Before you study his story, read Romans 15:4, 5.  
What reassurance does this scripture offer as we look at Elijah and other Old Testament characters?

**Romans 15:4, 5 (NIV)**

<sup>4</sup>For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.

<sup>5</sup>May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you a spirit of unity among yourselves as you follow Christ Jesus....

Read 1 King 19:1-18. What evidence of depression shows in Elijah's behavior?

**1 Kings 19:1-18 (NLT)**

<sup>1</sup>When Ahab got home, he told Jezebel what Elijah had done and that he had slaughtered the prophets of Baal. <sup>2</sup>So Jezebel sent this message to Elijah: "May the gods also kill me if by this time tomorrow I have failed to take your life like those whom you killed."

<sup>3</sup>Elijah was afraid and fled for his life. He went to Beersheba, a town in Judah, and he left his servant there. <sup>4</sup>Then he went on alone into the desert, traveling all day. He sat down under a solitary broom tree and prayed that he might die. "I have had enough, LORD," he said. "Take my life, for I am no better than my ancestors."

<sup>5</sup>Then he lay down and slept under the broom tree. But as he was sleeping, an angel touched him and told him, "Get up and eat!" <sup>6</sup>He looked around and saw some bread baked on hot stones and a jar of water! So he ate and drank and lay

What physical factors contributed to Elijah's depression?

What emotional factors contributed to Elijah's depression?

What spiritual factors contributed to Elijah's depression?

What remedies did God prescribe for Elijah?

Consider the remedies below. Discuss how each one contributed to Elijah's physical, emotional, and spiritual healing.

- Food
- Water
- Sleep, rest
- God's listening to him
- God's giving him a new mission
- Companionship (Elisha)
- God's gentle presence in the midst of turmoil
- God's revelation that Elijah was not alone

down again.

<sup>7</sup>Then the angel of the LORD came again and touched him and said, "Get up and eat some more, for there is a long journey ahead of you."

<sup>8</sup>So he got up and ate and drank, and the food gave him enough strength to travel forty days and forty nights to Mount Sinai, the mountain of God. <sup>9</sup>There he came to a cave, where he spent the night.

But the LORD said to him, "What are you doing here, Elijah?"

<sup>10</sup>Elijah replied, "I have zealously served the LORD God Almighty. But the people of Israel have broken their covenant with you, torn down your altars, and killed every one of your prophets. I alone am left, and now they are trying to kill me, too."

<sup>11</sup>"Go out and stand before me on the mountain," the LORD told him. And as Elijah stood there, the LORD passed by, and a mighty windstorm hit the mountain. It was such a terrible blast that the rocks were torn loose, but the LORD was not in the wind. After the wind there was an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the earthquake. <sup>12</sup>And after the earthquake there was a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire. And after the fire there was the sound of a gentle whisper. <sup>13</sup>When Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face in his cloak and went out and stood at the entrance of the cave.

And a voice said, "What are you doing here, Elijah?"

<sup>14</sup>He replied again, "I have zealously served the LORD God Almighty. But the people of Israel have broken their covenant with

Which of these remedies apply to your life? Explain.

you, torn down your altars, and killed every one of your prophets. I alone am left, and now they are trying to kill me, too."

<sup>15</sup>Then the LORD told him, "Go back the way you came, and travel to the wilderness of Damascus. When you arrive there, anoint Hazael to be king of Aram. <sup>16</sup>Then anoint Jehu son of Nimshi to be king of Israel, and anoint Elisha son of Shaphat from Abel-meholah to replace you as my prophet. <sup>17</sup>Anyone who escapes from Hazael will be killed by Jehu, and those who escape Jehu will be killed by Elisha! <sup>18</sup>Yet I will preserve seven thousand others in Israel who have never bowed to Baal or kissed him!"

Perhaps the epitome of suffering is Job. Read Job 3:3-5, 3:24-26, and 30:16-23 for Job's description of how he felt.

Think of a time when you were depressed or discouraged. How would you describe it?

Whom does Job blame for his suffering?

**Job 3:3-5 (NLT)**

<sup>3</sup>"Cursed be the day of my birth, and cursed be the night when I was conceived. <sup>4</sup>Let that day be turned to darkness. Let it be lost even to God on high, and let it be shrouded in darkness. <sup>5</sup>Yes, let the darkness and utter gloom claim it for its own. Let a black cloud overshadow it, and let the darkness terrify it.

**Job 3:24-26 (NLT)**

<sup>24</sup>I cannot eat for sighing; my groans pour out like water. <sup>25</sup>What I always feared has happened to me. What I dreaded has come to be. <sup>26</sup>I have no peace, no quietness. I have no rest; instead, only trouble comes."

**Job 30:16-23 (NLT)**

<sup>16</sup>"And now my heart is broken. Depression haunts my days. <sup>17</sup>My weary nights are filled with pain as though something were relentlessly gnawing at my bones. <sup>18</sup>With a

What do you think Job is saying to God?

strong hand, God grabs my garment. He grips me by the collar of my tunic. <sup>19</sup>He has thrown me into the mud. I have become as dust and ashes.

<sup>20</sup>"I cry to you, O God, but you don't answer me. I stand before you, and you don't bother to look. <sup>21</sup>You have become cruel toward me. You persecute me with your great power. <sup>22</sup>You throw me into the whirlwind and destroy me in the storm. <sup>23</sup>And I know that you are sending me to my death--the destination of all who live.

Read Job 2:9-10. Describe Job's attitude toward suffering and toward God.

**Job 2:9-10 (MSG)**

<sup>9</sup>His wife said, "Still holding on to your precious integrity, are you? Curse God and be done with it!"

<sup>10</sup>He told her, "You're talking like an empty-headed fool. We take the good days from God--why not also the bad days?"

Not once through all this did Job sin. He said nothing against God.

How did God answer Job? Read Job 38:2, 40:2, and 40:8.

**Job 38:2 (NLT)**

<sup>2</sup>"Who is this that questions my wisdom with such ignorant words?

**Job 40:2 (NLT)**

<sup>2</sup>"Do you still want to argue with the Almighty? You are God's critic, but do you have the answers?"

**Job 40:8 (NLT)**

<sup>8</sup>Are you going to discredit my justice and condemn me so you can say you are right?



Read Job 42:2-6. What was Job's final response to God?

How had Job's attitude changed?

What do you think he learned?

What did God say about the things Job had said to Him and about Him? (Job 42:7)

**Job 42:2-6 (MSG)**

<sup>2</sup>"I'm convinced: You can do anything and everything.

Nothing and no one can upset your plans.

<sup>3</sup>You asked, "Who is this muddying the water, ignorantly confusing the issue, second-guessing my purposes?"

I admit it. I was the one. I babbled on about things far beyond me, made small talk about wonders way over my head.

<sup>4</sup>You told me, "Listen, and let me do the talking.

Let me ask the questions. You give the answers.'

<sup>5</sup>I admit I once lived by rumors of you;

now I have it all firsthand--from my own eyes and ears!

<sup>6</sup>I'm sorry--forgive me. I'll never do that again, I promise!

I'll never again live on crusts of hearsay, crumbs of rumor."

**Job 42:7 (NLT)**

<sup>7</sup>After the LORD had finished speaking to Job, he said to Eliphaz the Temanite: "I am angry with you and with your two friends, for you have not been right in what you said about me, as my servant Job was.



### God-prescribed anti-depressants

Spend some time with God, asking Him to show you what He wants to help you change in your life, and what He wants to teach you. Write His responses in your journal and pray about them. Ask God for help to do what *you* need to do, and for willingness to gratefully accept what *He* is doing.

Focus on one area of wellness at a time: physical, emotional, or spiritual.

## What about my family?

With my daughter's permission I would like to share a poem she wrote in fourth grade, during the year I was diagnosed and treated:

I AM

I am smart and athletic  
I wonder if I'll be a teacher like you  
I hear your lovely singing  
I see your pretty eyes  
I want to be like you,  
I am your wonderful daughter.

I imagine being a good mom like you are  
I feel loved by you  
I touch your lovely face,  
I worry something will happen to you  
I cry when you are gone,  
I am your loving child.

I understand you want what is best for me,  
I say my prayers and ask God that my children would see what you are like  
I dream of you all the time,  
I try to help you around the house,  
I hope I'll grow up to be like you,  
I am your awesome kid.

I remember the first tears I really shed after my diagnosis. I remember trying to imagine how my children would deal with my death. I started to cry, knowing they would miss me. God spoke a truth to me at that very moment. He said, *My child, that is pride! Those children are MINE, and I will take care of them no matter what happens to you.*

I realize from this poem that Angela has "self-esteem" and that she has learned to put trust in me. These are not bad things, but will that sustain her? How much "God-esteem" had I instilled in her? So often we rely solely on the people around us, the people who love us. When they are not there for us we are disappointed, depressed or overwhelmed by the circumstances we face.

If we teach our loved ones and perhaps even ourselves to rely on the one true God, we will know where to turn in times of trouble. I realize now that for as long as God leaves these children in my care, it is my job to prepare them, to teach them to rely on God, a *sovereign God* who promises He will never leave us nor forsake us (Hebrews 13:5b).

Whether it is a child or spouse or someone else who relies on you, turn them over to God. I recognize that is a difficult thing to do. I am reminded of Hannah. She prayed for a child and promised God that if He would bless her with one she would give that child over to Him. While most of us will not literally abandon those we love or give them over to someone else, I think the comparison will help us understand the value of raising children or family members who know and love the Lord with all their hearts, souls, and minds. Let's examine Hannah's experience.

Read Hannah's prayer in 1 Samuel 1:9-11.  
With what attitude did Hannah pray to God?

Share a time when you have been this honest and bold with God. Have you, like Hannah, ever "bargained" with God?

Read 1 Samuel 1:6-7, 13-18.  
Identify Hannah's burdens.

**1 Samuel 1:9-11 (NLT)**

<sup>9</sup>Once when they were at Shiloh, Hannah went over to the Tabernacle after supper to pray to the LORD. Eli the priest was sitting at his customary place beside the entrance. <sup>10</sup>Hannah was in deep anguish, crying bitterly as she prayed to the LORD. <sup>11</sup>And she made this vow: "O LORD Almighty, if you will look down upon my sorrow and answer my prayer and give me a son, then I will give him back to you. He will be yours for his entire lifetime, and as a sign that he has been dedicated to the LORD, his hair will never be cut."

**1 Samuel 1:6-7 (MSG)**

<sup>6</sup>But her rival wife taunted her cruelly, rubbing it in and never letting her forget that GOD had not given her children. <sup>7</sup>This went on year after year. Every time she went to the sanctuary of GOD she could expect to be taunted. Hannah was reduced to tears and had no appetite.

**1 Samuel 1:13-18 (NLT)**

<sup>13</sup>Seeing her lips moving but hearing no sound, he thought she had been drinking. <sup>14</sup>"Must you come here drunk?" he demanded. "Throw away your wine!"

<sup>15</sup>"Oh no, sir!" she replied, "I'm not drunk! But I am very sad, and I was pouring out my heart to the LORD."

What two things did God give Hannah in exchange for her burdens?

Consider 1 Peter 5:7 and Psalm 56:8. What further comfort or relief do these verses offer?

Read 1 Samuel 1:20 and 1 Samuel 1:27-2:8. Identify the qualities of God mentioned by Hannah.

<sup>16</sup>Please don't think I am a wicked woman! For I have been praying out of great anguish and sorrow."

<sup>17</sup>"In that case," Eli said, "cheer up! May the God of Israel grant the request you have asked of him."

<sup>18</sup>"Oh, thank you, sir!" she exclaimed. Then she went back and began to eat again, and she was no longer sad.

**1 Peter 5:7** (NIV)

<sup>7</sup>Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.

**Psalm 56:8** (NLT)

<sup>8</sup> You keep track of all my sorrows.

You have collected all my tears in your bottle.

You have recorded each one in your book.

**1 Samuel 1:20** (MSG)

<sup>20</sup>Before the year was out, Hannah had conceived and given birth to a son. She named him Samuel, explaining, "I asked GOD for him."

**1 Samuel 1:27-2:8** (NIV)

<sup>27</sup> I prayed for this child, and the LORD has granted me what I asked of him. <sup>28</sup> So now I give him to the LORD. For his whole life he will be given over to the LORD." And he worshiped the LORD there.

<sup>1</sup> Then Hannah prayed and said:

"My heart rejoices in the LORD;  
in the LORD my horn is lifted high.  
My mouth boasts over my enemies,  
for I delight in your deliverance.

<sup>2</sup> "There is no one holy like the LORD;  
there is no one besides you;  
there is no Rock like our God.

<sup>3</sup> "Do not keep talking so proudly  
or let your mouth speak such  
arrogance,

for the LORD is a God who knows,



How did recognizing these qualities of God help Hannah surrender her child to Him?

Read 1 Samuel 2:18-21, 3:19-4:1a, 7:15.

What were the consequences of Hannah's obedience – turning her child, Samuel, over to God as she promised?

Speculate on what Samuel's life would have been like had Hannah not surrendered her child to God.

and by him deeds are weighed.

<sup>4</sup> "The bows of the warriors are broken, but those who stumbled are armed with strength.

<sup>5</sup> Those who were full hire themselves out for food, but those who were hungry hunger no more.

She who was barren has borne seven children, but she who has had many sons pines away.

<sup>6</sup> "The LORD brings death and makes alive;

he brings down to the grave and raises up.

<sup>7</sup> The LORD sends poverty and wealth; he humbles and he exalts.

<sup>8</sup> He raises the poor from the dust and lifts the needy from the ash heap; he seats them with princes and has them inherit a throne of honor.

"For the foundations of the earth are the LORD's; upon them he has set the world.

**1 Samuel 2:18-21 (NASB)**

<sup>18</sup> Now Samuel was ministering before the LORD, as a boy wearing a linen ephod.

<sup>19</sup> And his mother would make him a little robe and bring it to him from year to year when she would come up with her husband to offer the yearly sacrifice.

<sup>20</sup> Then Eli would bless Elkanah and his wife and say, "May the LORD give you children from this woman in place of the one she dedicated to the LORD." And they went to their own home.

<sup>21</sup> The LORD visited Hannah; and she conceived and gave birth to three sons and two daughters. And the boy Samuel



Compare these speculations to what scripture tells us.

How is giving our children over to God different from Hannah's situation?

How is it the same?

Read Matthew 7:11 and Psalm 46:1-3.  
What are the advantages of surrendering our loved ones to God daily?

What are some assurances God gives to those who trust him?

Think about what Hannah needed to teach Samuel to help him accept his separation from her and trust and love God more than anyone else.

grew before the LORD.

**1 Samuel 3:19-4:1a** (MSG)

<sup>19</sup>Samuel grew up. GOD was with him, and Samuel's prophetic record was flawless. <sup>20</sup>Everyone in Israel, from Dan in the north to Beersheba in the south, recognized that Samuel was the real thing—a true prophet of GOD. <sup>21</sup>GOD continued to show up at Shiloh, revealed through his word to Samuel at Shiloh.

<sup>1</sup>Whatever Samuel said was broadcast all through Israel.

**1 Samuel 7:15** (ASV)

<sup>15</sup> And Samuel judged Israel all the days of his life.

**Matthew 7:11** (NASB)

<sup>11</sup>"If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give what is good to those who ask Him!

**Psalm 46:1-3** (ASV)

<sup>1</sup>God is our refuge and strength, A very present help in trouble.

<sup>2</sup> Therefore will we not fear, though the earth do change, And though the mountains be shaken into the heart of the seas;

<sup>3</sup> Though the waters thereof roar and be troubled, Though the mountains tremble with the swelling thereof.

## Family Care

What limitations do we place on those who depend on us? Are we teaching them to depend on God or on someone else?

Spend time praying about each of your loved ones. Surrender each one to God's care and ask Him to show you how you can help them to rely on Him.

## What comfort and encouragement can I offer my loved ones?

In the two years prior to my initial diagnosis, my children lost both their maternal grandfather and great grandfather. My son was especially overcome with grief for them. He cried at night worrying that I too would die. After my first surgery, a friend from church told me the staff had received a praise request from my son saying that my cancer was gone. He saw that I had survived the first surgery and believed that was the end of the cancer. I knew it would not be that simple.

That evening, struggling for the right words to comfort him, I tried to explain "cancer" in terms he would understand. He loves history, so I compared my cancer to a war, of which the surgery was the first battle. I explained that many more battles would follow. I told him that even if we did not win all the battles we would still win the war, and that God would continue to be with us, no matter what. God is eternal. Nothing is too big for the One True God. I also explained that God does not give us a spirit of fear but a spirit of power, love and self-discipline (2 Timothy 1:7). I explained that when he became fearful, he should recognize that his fear was not from God. To overcome it, he should let others know, especially God.

God's word, the Scriptures, I explained, are the sword of the Spirit, our offensive weapon in the daily battle against Satan (Ephesians 6:17). The more we study and know His word the better equipped we are to use this sword. Finally, I explained that even if we do not have a lot of scripture memorized in our heads, many of the songs we sing at church incorporate God's word. I asked him if he could think of one. He picked Psalm 121, which had been played at his grandfather's funeral. I encouraged him to sing it when he was afraid. Before I tucked him in that evening, we sang this Psalm together.

The greatest comfort we can offer our families is the comfort and peace of knowing, believing, and understanding that God is who He says He is (Isaiah 43:10). Once they recognize this truth we must prepare them for the battles of life. We need to teach them to put on their spiritual armor daily and fight the battles. Let's take a look at Nehemiah. Nehemiah obeyed God's call to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem. He knew his obedience would bring opposition from others, including Satan himself. He and those who helped him would need to work and be on guard at the same time.

Read Nehemiah 1:3. What dangers confronted God's people with Jerusalem's walls down?

### **Nehemiah 1:3 (NIV)**

<sup>3</sup> They said to me, "Those who survived the exile and are back in the province are in great trouble and disgrace. The wall of Jerusalem is broken down, and its gates have been burned with fire."

Nehemiah took his fears to God in prayer.  
Read his prayer in Nehemiah 1:4-11.

Trusting in the Lord, Nehemiah took his concerns to the king. What risks did he take in presenting his request?

How was rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem like battling cancer?

**Nehemiah 1:4-11 (NIV)**

<sup>4</sup> When I heard these things, I sat down and wept. For some days I mourned and fasted and prayed before the God of heaven.

<sup>5</sup> Then I said:

"O LORD, God of heaven, the great and awesome God, who keeps his covenant of love with those who love him and obey his commands, <sup>6</sup> let your ear be attentive and your eyes open to hear the prayer your servant is praying before you day and night for your servants, the people of Israel. I confess the sins we Israelites, including myself and my father's house, have committed against you. <sup>7</sup> We have acted very wickedly toward you. We have not obeyed the commands, decrees and laws you gave your servant Moses.

<sup>8</sup> "Remember the instruction you gave your servant Moses, saying, 'If you are unfaithful, I will scatter you among the nations, <sup>9</sup> but if you return to me and obey my commands, then even if your exiled people are at the farthest horizon, I will gather them from there and bring them to the place I have chosen as a dwelling for my Name.'

<sup>10</sup> "They are your servants and your people, whom you redeemed by your great strength and your mighty hand. <sup>11</sup> O Lord, let your ear be attentive to the prayer of this your servant and to the prayer of your servants who delight in revering your name. Give your servant success today by granting him favor in the presence of this man."

I was cupbearer to the king.



Read Nehemiah 4:1-21.

What obstacles did Nehemiah face in completing his task?

From where did Nehemiah draw his strength to continue to build even in the face of opposition?

Was he able to do this alone?

**Nehemiah 4:1-21 (NASB)**

<sup>1</sup>Now it came about that when Sanballat heard that we were rebuilding the wall, he became furious and very angry and mocked the Jews.

<sup>2</sup>He spoke in the presence of his brothers and the wealthy men of Samaria and said, "What are these feeble Jews doing? Are they going to restore it for themselves? Can they offer sacrifices? Can they finish in a day? Can they revive the stones from the dusty rubble even the burned ones?"

<sup>3</sup>Now Tobiah the Ammonite was near him and he said, "Even what they are building--if a fox should jump on it, he would break their stone wall down!"

<sup>4</sup>Hear, O our God, how we are despised! Return their reproach on their own heads and give them up for plunder in a land of captivity.

<sup>5</sup>Do not forgive their iniquity and let not their sin be blotted out before You, for they have demoralized the builders.

<sup>6</sup>So we built the wall and the whole wall was joined together to half its height, for the people had a mind to work.

<sup>7</sup>Now when Sanballat, Tobiah, the Arabs, the Ammonites and the Ashdodites heard that the repair of the walls of Jerusalem went on, and that the breaches began to be closed, they were very angry.

<sup>8</sup>All of them conspired together to come and fight against Jerusalem and to cause a disturbance in it.

<sup>9</sup>But we prayed to our God, and because of them we set up a guard against them day and night.

<sup>10</sup>Thus in Judah it was said,

"The strength of the burden bearers is failing,

Yet there is much rubbish;

And we ourselves are unable

To rebuild the wall."



What role can family and church play in the battle against cancer?

<sup>11</sup>Our enemies said, "They will not know or see until we come among them, kill them and put a stop to the work."

<sup>12</sup>When the Jews who lived near them came and told us ten times, "They will come up against us from every place where you may turn,"

<sup>13</sup>then I stationed men in the lowest parts of the space behind the wall, the exposed places, and I stationed the people in families with their swords, spears and bows.

<sup>14</sup>When I saw their fear, I rose and spoke to the nobles, the officials and the rest of the people: "Do not be afraid of them; remember the Lord who is great and awesome, and fight for your brothers, your sons, your daughters, your wives and your houses."

<sup>15</sup>When our enemies heard that it was known to us, and that God had frustrated their plan, then all of us returned to the wall, each one to his work.

<sup>16</sup>From that day on, half of my servants carried on the work while half of them held the spears, the shields, the bows and the breastplates; and the captains were behind the whole house of Judah.

<sup>17</sup>Those who were rebuilding the wall and those who carried burdens took their load with one hand doing the work and the other holding a weapon.

<sup>18</sup>As for the builders, each wore his sword girded at his side as he built, while the trumpeter stood near me.

<sup>19</sup>I said to the nobles, the officials and the rest of the people, "The work is great and extensive, and we are separated on the wall far from one another.

<sup>20</sup>"At whatever place you hear the sound of the trumpet, rally to us there. Our God will fight for us."

<sup>21</sup>So we carried on the work with half of them holding spears from dawn until the stars appeared.

Read Nehemiah 6:15-16.

What assurance does this give our families?

Read Deuteronomy 29:29, Psalm 112:7, and John 14:15-17.

How do we help our loved ones learn to rely on God the way Nehemiah relied on God?

Read Psalm 91:1-2 and Isaiah 43:2 and 54:17.  
What has God promised to those who trust in Him?

**Nehemiah 6:15-16** (NIV)

<sup>15</sup> So the wall was completed on the twenty-fifth of Elul, in fifty-two days. <sup>16</sup> When all our enemies heard about this, all the surrounding nations were afraid and lost their self-confidence, because they realized that this work had been done with the help of our God.

**Deuteronomy 29:29** (NLT)

<sup>29</sup>"There are secret things that belong to the LORD our God, but the revealed things belong to us and our descendants forever, so that we may obey these words of the law.

**Psalm 112:7** (NASB)

<sup>7</sup>He will not fear evil tidings;  
His heart is steadfast, trusting in the LORD.

**John 14:15-17** (NIV)

<sup>15</sup>"If you love me, you will obey what I command. <sup>16</sup>And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever— <sup>17</sup>the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you.

**Psalm 91:1-2** (NASB)

<sup>1</sup>He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High

Will abide in the shadow of the Almighty.

<sup>2</sup>I will say to the LORD, "My refuge and my fortress,

My God, in whom I trust!"

**Isaiah 43:2** (NIV)

<sup>2</sup> When you pass through the waters, I will be with you;  
and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you.  
When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned;

the flames will not set you ablaze.

**Isaiah 54:17** (NIV)

<sup>17</sup> no weapon forged against you will prevail,

and you will refute every tongue that accuses you.

This is the heritage of the servants of the LORD,

and this is their vindication from me," declares the LORD.

Read John 16:33 and Ecclesiastes 3:1-13.

Does this mean we can keep our family free from pain?

Free from grieving?

What can we offer to our families in exchange for grief and pain?

What can God offer to our families?

How does being a family fighting cancer compare to being a family on the front line in Nehemiah's battle? See Nehemiah 4:13.

**John 16:33** (NLT)

<sup>33</sup>I have told you all this so that you may have peace in me. Here on earth you will have many trials and sorrows. But take heart, because I have overcome the world."

**Ecclesiastes 3:1-13** (NLT)

<sup>1</sup> There is a time for everything,

a season for every activity under heaven.

<sup>2</sup> A time to be born and a time to die.

A time to plant and a time to harvest.

<sup>3</sup> A time to kill and a time to heal.

A time to tear down and a time to rebuild.

<sup>4</sup> A time to cry and a time to laugh.

A time to grieve and a time to dance.

<sup>5</sup> A time to scatter stones and a time to gather stones.

A time to embrace and a time to turn away.

<sup>6</sup> A time to search and a time to lose.

A time to keep and a time to throw away.

<sup>7</sup> A time to tear and a time to mend.

A time to be quiet and a time to speak up.

<sup>8</sup> A time to love and a time to hate.

A time for war and a time for peace.

<sup>9</sup>What do people really get for all their hard work? <sup>10</sup>I have thought about this in connection with the various kinds of work God has given people to do. <sup>11</sup>God has made everything beautiful for its own time. He has

planted eternity in the human heart, but even so, people cannot see the whole scope of God's work from beginning to end. <sup>12</sup>So I concluded that there is nothing better for people than to be happy and to enjoy themselves as long as they can. <sup>13</sup>And people should eat and drink and enjoy the fruits of their labor, for these are gifts from God.

**Nehemiah 4:13** (NIV)

<sup>13</sup> Therefore I stationed some of the people behind the lowest points of the wall at the exposed places, posting them by families, with their swords, spears and bows.

### **The spiritual battle against cancer**

Even though cancer creates far-reaching challenges for us and our families, many resources also offer strength, encouragement, and help. What weapons has God given us? How can you best use these resources? Who are the people fighting beside you as fellow soldiers and wall builders? Take a moment to thank God for them.



## **Can I still serve the Lord? What good am I?**

These questions bring to mind two situations where clearly God showed me that he would use my weakness to reveal His strengths in unexpected ways.

In the first situation, I considered taking a leave of absence from children's ministries at church. I knew I would lose my hair and probably some weight. I didn't know if I could explain my illness to my group of first graders, and I feared my appearance would be too difficult for the children to deal with. After much prayer and careful consideration I felt God desired I continue as many of my previous activities as I could physically tolerate, including teaching first graders at Sunday school. God confirmed for me in many ways that I made the right decision.

In the months after my decision, I watched these children and saw many families grow in their faith and in their prayer lives. Many parents told me their children asked to pray for me each night before bed. They often expressed surprise at the children's words and at their commitment to prayer. God showed me how powerful and precious are the prayers of a child. I discovered one of the beautiful things about children is that, when God puts something on their hearts, they go to Him in prayer – honestly, boldly, and sincerely.

I remember feeling a little hand on my head as I prayed in church one day. I opened my eyes and saw one of my students standing over me, praying for me. Her mother told me she had prayed I wouldn't lose my hair. I have often chuckled about that because, despite what the nurses predicted, I was never completely bald.

The other situation involved Christine, who brought a meal to my family, and her prayer. Before she left our home she asked if she could pray for me. When I said yes, she told me she had never prayed out loud before and wasn't sure how the prayer would turn out. I assured her it would be just fine. Out of her mouth came the most beautiful words. I think she even surprised herself. When we opened our eyes, my husband stood there with a look of awe on his face. He was so inspired by her prayer he decided he would join the meal ministry at church and deliver food to others once we got through our difficult time. He is now the only man on our meal ministry at church. He loves it! When he takes a meal to a family he spends as much time as he needs to pray with them. He often takes our own children and involves them in the meal preparation and the prayers.

In both instances these people touched others for eternity.

One person I often think of as serving the Lord through or in spite of suffering is Paul. The many hardships he endured could have caused him to give up and feel unable to serve, at least temporarily. Let's take a look at some of these and see what attitude he had about them.

Read Acts 9:1-19.

Contrast Paul's (Saul's) life before and after he was blinded on the road to Damascus.

What was his purpose in life as Saul?

What purpose did God have planned for him as Paul?

**Acts 9:1-19 (NIV)**

<sup>1</sup>Meanwhile, Saul was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples. He went to the high priest <sup>2</sup>and asked him for letters to the synagogues in Damascus, so that if he found any there who belonged to the Way, whether men or women, he might take them as prisoners to Jerusalem. <sup>3</sup>As he neared Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. <sup>4</sup>He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?"

<sup>5</sup>"Who are you, Lord?" Saul asked.

"I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting," he replied. <sup>6</sup>"Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do."

<sup>7</sup>The men traveling with Saul stood there speechless; they heard the sound but did not see anyone. <sup>8</sup>Saul got up from the ground, but when he opened his eyes he could see nothing. So they led him by the hand into Damascus. <sup>9</sup>For three days he was blind, and did not eat or drink anything.

<sup>10</sup>In Damascus there was a disciple named Ananias. The Lord called to him in a vision, "Ananias!"

"Yes, Lord," he answered.

<sup>11</sup>The Lord told him, "Go to the house of Judas on Straight Street and ask for a man from Tarsus named Saul, for he is praying. <sup>12</sup>In a vision he has seen a man named Ananias come and place his hands on him to restore his sight."

<sup>13</sup>"Lord," Ananias answered, "I have heard many reports about this man

God said He would show Paul how much he must suffer for His name. Did God plan for Paul to serve Him also during the times of suffering, or just between them?

How can you relate this to your own life?

What was the source of Paul's confidence before his conversion? See Galatians 1:13-14 and Philippians 3:4-6.

What gifts did Paul have before his conversion?

and all the harm he has done to your saints in Jerusalem. <sup>14</sup>And he has come here with authority from the chief priests to arrest all who call on your name."

<sup>15</sup>But the Lord said to Ananias, "Go! This man is my chosen instrument to carry my name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel. <sup>16</sup>I will show him how much he must suffer for my name."

<sup>17</sup>Then Ananias went to the house and entered it. Placing his hands on Saul, he said, "Brother Saul, the Lord—Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you were coming here—has sent me so that you may see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit."

<sup>18</sup>Immediately, something like scales fell from Saul's eyes, and he could see again. He got up and was baptized, <sup>19</sup>and after taking some food, he regained his strength.

**Galatians 1:13-14 (MSG)**

<sup>13</sup>I'm sure that you've heard the story of my earlier life when I lived in the Jewish way. In those days I went all out in persecuting God's church. I was systematically destroying it. <sup>14</sup>I was so enthusiastic about the traditions of my ancestors that I advanced head and shoulders above my peers in my career.

**Philippians 3:4-6 (NLT)**

<sup>4</sup>Yet I could have confidence in myself if anyone could. If others have reason for confidence in their own efforts, I have even more! <sup>5</sup>For I was circumcised when I was eight days old, having been born into a pure-blooded Jewish family that is a branch of the tribe of Benjamin. So I am a real



How did God use these gifts in Paul the Apostle?

Paul suffered from a physical affliction, perhaps something to do with his eyesight. Read 2 Corinthians 12:7-10.

What was his attitude toward this affliction?

What was the source of his confidence?

For more insight into Paul's attitude about suffering, read 2 Corinthians 11:24-30 and 2 Corinthians 1:3-9.

What does Paul say he gained from suffering?

Jew if there ever was one! What's more, I was a member of the Pharisees, who demand the strictest obedience to the Jewish law. <sup>6</sup>And zealous? Yes, in fact, I harshly persecuted the church. And I obeyed the Jewish law so carefully that I was never accused of any fault.

**2 Corinthians 12:7-10 (NIV)**

<sup>7</sup>To keep me from becoming conceited because of these surpassingly great revelations, there was given me a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me. <sup>8</sup>Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. <sup>9</sup>But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. <sup>10</sup>That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

**2 Corinthians 11:24-30 (NIV)**

<sup>24</sup>Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. <sup>25</sup>Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea, <sup>26</sup>I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my own countrymen, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false brothers. <sup>27</sup>I have labored and toiled and have often



How did he use it to serve the Lord and others?

Do you think Paul always saw the fruit of his suffering?

What kept him going?

How can Paul's attitude keep you going?

gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked. <sup>28</sup>Besides everything else, I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches. <sup>29</sup>Who is weak, and I do not feel weak? Who is led into sin, and I do not inwardly burn?

<sup>30</sup>If I must boast, I will boast of the things that show my weakness.

**2 Corinthians 1:3-9** (NIV)

<sup>3</sup>Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, <sup>4</sup>who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God. <sup>5</sup>For just as the sufferings of Christ flow over into our lives, so also through Christ our comfort overflows. <sup>6</sup>If we are distressed, it is for your comfort and salvation; if we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which produces in you patient endurance of the same sufferings we suffer. <sup>7</sup>And our hope for you is firm, because we know that just as you share in our sufferings, so also you share in our comfort.

<sup>8</sup>We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about the hardships we suffered in the province of Asia. We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired even of life. <sup>9</sup>Indeed, in our hearts we felt the sentence of death. But this happened that we might not rely on ourselves but on God, who raises the dead.

Read Philippians 1:12-30.

Paul spent the last years of his life imprisoned in Rome.

How has his attitude progressed at this stage in his life?

How were other people's lives changed by what he went through?

How did Paul feel about death?

**Philippians 1:12-30 (NIV)**

<sup>12</sup>Now I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel. <sup>13</sup>As a result, it has become clear throughout the whole palace guard and to everyone else that I am in chains for Christ. <sup>14</sup>Because of my chains, most of the brothers in the Lord have been encouraged to speak the word of God more courageously and fearlessly.

<sup>15</sup>It is true that some preach Christ out of envy and rivalry, but others out of goodwill. <sup>16</sup>The latter do so in love, knowing that I am put here for the defense of the gospel. <sup>17</sup>The former preach Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely, supposing that they can stir up trouble for me while I am in chains. <sup>18</sup>But what does it matter? The important thing is that in every way, whether from false motives or true, Christ is preached. And because of this I rejoice.

Yes, and I will continue to rejoice, <sup>19</sup>for I know that through your prayers and the help given by the Spirit of Jesus Christ, what has happened to me will turn out for my deliverance. <sup>20</sup>I eagerly expect and hope that I will in no way be ashamed, but will have sufficient courage so that now as always Christ will be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death. <sup>21</sup>For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. <sup>22</sup>If I am to go on living in the body, this will mean fruitful labor for me. Yet what shall I choose? I do not know! <sup>23</sup>I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far; <sup>24</sup>but it is more necessary for you that I remain in the

What possibilities for serving the Lord did Paul find for that time of his life? Did he ask, "What good am I?"

How could you use your experience with suffering to serve the Lord and help others? (Review 2 Cor. 1:3-9 on the previous page)

body. <sup>25</sup>Convinced of this, I know that I will remain, and I will continue with all of you for your progress and joy in the faith, <sup>26</sup>so that through my being with you again your joy in Christ Jesus will overflow on account of me.

<sup>27</sup>Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. Then, whether I come and see you or only hear about you in my absence, I will know that you stand firm in one spirit, contending as one man for the faith of the gospel <sup>28</sup>without being frightened in any way by those who oppose you. This is a sign to them that they will be destroyed, but that you will be saved—and that by God. <sup>29</sup>For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for him, <sup>30</sup>since you are going through the same struggle you saw I had, and now hear that I still have.

### **Spiritual Strength Training**

Consider how God plans for you to serve Him even now as you suffer through the chemo, radiation or other devastating treatments you may be experiencing. What "weights" are you lifting and what spiritual muscles are being strengthened? Might God be preparing you to act as a coach or trainer to someone else?

Spend a moment in prayer, surrendering your life to God for whatever service He has planned.

## Why must I go through all this pain?

Purify my heart, mold me, shape me, cleanse me. How often have I uttered these words, sung these lyrics in a song? Did I have any idea what I was asking the Lord to do in my life? After weeks of non-stop pain, I believe that suffering and sorrow may be my only true companions. Yes, Lord, I know that you promised "to never leave me nor forsake me." Yet I cannot help but ask, "Are you *really* here? Have you not heard my groans?" I wake up in pain, I work all day in pain, and then I go to bed with pain. When will it end?

Recently I sat on the edge of my son's bed. As I tucked him in, he asked me a question. How long did Enoch walk with God? At that moment I wasn't sure I really knew or cared to know much about Enoch. Yet we took the time to look him up in scripture. We discovered that beginning at age 65, he walked with God three hundred years! My daughter replied, "Hey mom, that's not fair! How come all the people in the Old Testament got to live so long and we don't?" I managed to smile even though the thought going through my head at that moment was *Praise the Lord we don't!* Without sharing my true thoughts, I simply responded, "I don't know."

After tucking them both in bed, I began to read my Bible, hoping to keep my mind off the pain until I fell asleep. Missing my husband, Jim (he was out of town on a mission trip), I decided to read the book of James. I didn't get very far. I read James 1:2-4 (NIV). "Consider it pure joy, my brothers, when you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking in anything." I actually felt rage welling up inside of me at that. So who *is* this James? How much did he really know about suffering? What did he know about trials? Nobody in their right mind would consider unending pain "pure joy." At the same time, I began to reflect and ask God, "Why should I persevere in the midst of this trial?"

Have you experienced similar emotions? What is your reaction or attitude toward pain?



Compare your attitudes to those of James.

The greater the pain, the more I am driven to

<u>Us</u>	<u>James</u>
<input type="checkbox"/> Ask why	James 1:5-6
<input type="checkbox"/> Live with it contentedly	James 5:10-11
<input type="checkbox"/> Draw away from God	James 4:7-8a
<input type="checkbox"/> Be open to God	James 4:7-8a
<input type="checkbox"/> Reject God	James 1:19
<input type="checkbox"/> Be angry at God	James 1:19
<input type="checkbox"/> Do anything to get rid of the pain	James 5:10-11
<input type="checkbox"/> _____	

Where have my attitudes gotten me?

How can we apply James' ideas to our situations?

How do you typically respond to your pain?

- Allow the pain to consume you
- Allow the pain to build your character
- Learn to tolerate it
- Find ways to ignore it
- Find ways to numb it
- Find ways to distract yourself, get your mind off it
- Wonder what you have done to deserve it
- Do without pain pills, out of pride
- Demand to know why
- Allow the pain to increase your faith
- \_\_\_\_\_

**James 1:5-6 (NLT)**

<sup>5</sup>If you need wisdom--if you want to know what God wants you to do--ask him, and he will gladly tell you. He will not resent your asking. <sup>6</sup>But when you ask him, be sure that you really expect him to answer, for a doubtful mind is as unsettled as a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind.

**James 5:10-11 (NLT)**

<sup>10</sup>For examples of patience in suffering, dear brothers and sisters, look at the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. <sup>11</sup>We give great honor to those who endure under suffering. Job is an example of a man who endured patiently. From his experience we see how the Lord's plan finally ended in good, for he is full of tenderness and mercy.

**James 4:7-8a (NLT)**

<sup>7</sup>So humble yourselves before God. Resist the Devil, and he will flee from you. <sup>8</sup>Draw close to God, and God will draw close to you.

**James 1:19 (NLT)**

<sup>19</sup>My dear brothers and sisters, be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to get angry.

Perhaps the key question for you is: Why isn't God taking away the pain? He could if He wanted to.

Read Romans 8:28-29a, Jeremiah 29:11-14, 1 Chronicles 16:34, and Romans 5:1-8.

Is God good?

Does He act toward us in a capricious manner, or does He plan things out for our good?

Does He really love us?

What proof do we have of this?

**Romans 8:28-29a** (NIV)

<sup>28</sup>And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. <sup>29</sup>For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son.

**Jeremiah 29:11-14** (NASB)

<sup>11</sup>'For I know the plans that I have for you,' declares the Lord, 'plans for welfare and not for calamity to give you a future and a hope.

<sup>12</sup>'Then you will call upon Me and come and pray to Me, and I will listen to you.

<sup>13</sup>'You will seek Me and find Me when you search for Me with all your heart.

<sup>14</sup>'I will be found by you,' declares the Lord, 'and I will restore your fortunes and will gather you from all the nations and from all the places where I have driven you,' declares the Lord, 'and I will bring you back to the place from where I sent you into exile.'

**1 Chronicles 16:34** (NLT)

<sup>34</sup>Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good!

His faithful love endures forever.

**Romans 5:1-8** (NIV)

<sup>1</sup>Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, <sup>2</sup>through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. <sup>3</sup>Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance;

One person in the Bible was born to suffer pain and death. He voluntarily gave up His position as ruler of the universe to become one of us. He did this all out of love for us. He didn't deserve any of the pain He suffered. God the Father loved Him infinitely, yet He didn't give even His own Son a pain-free life.

In what way is Jesus an example for us? 1 Peter 2:21.

Let's look at Jesus' response to pain during four events in His life.

In the wilderness:

Read Matthew 4:1-10.

Describe the suffering of Jesus in this passage – physical, emotional, spiritual.

How did Jesus respond to this pain?

<sup>4</sup>perseverance, character; and character, hope. <sup>5</sup>And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us.

<sup>6</sup>You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. <sup>7</sup>Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. <sup>8</sup>But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

**1 Peter 2:21** (NLT)

<sup>21</sup>This suffering is all part of what God has called you to. Christ, who suffered for you, is your example. Follow in his steps.

**Matthew 4:1-10** (MSG)

<sup>1-3</sup> Next Jesus was taken into the wild by the Spirit for the Test. The Devil was ready to give it. Jesus prepared for the Test by fasting forty days and forty nights. That left him, of course, in a state of extreme hunger, which the Devil took advantage of in the first test: "Since you are God's Son, speak the word that will turn these stones into loaves of bread."

<sup>4</sup>Jesus answered by quoting Deuteronomy: "It takes more than bread to stay alive. It takes a steady stream of words from God's mouth."

<sup>5-6</sup>For the second test the Devil took him to the Holy City. He sat him on top of the Temple and said, "Since



What comfort does this passage offer?

What can we learn from Jesus' response?

Discuss ways you can apply this teaching in your own life.

In the garden:

Read Matthew 26:38-39, 26:42 and Luke 22:44.

What kind of pain did Jesus experience here?

How did Jesus respond to this pain?

What can we learn about Jesus' relationship with His Father from these passages?

How can we use this example?

you are God's Son, jump." The Devil goaded him by quoting Psalm 91: "He has placed you in the care of angels. They will catch you so that you won't so much as stub your toe on a stone."

<sup>7</sup>Jesus countered with another citation from Deuteronomy: "Don't you dare test the Lord your God."

<sup>8-9</sup>For the third test, the Devil took him to the peak of a huge mountain. He gestured expansively, pointing out all the earth's kingdoms, how glorious they all were. Then he said, "They're yours—lock, stock, and barrel. Just go down on your knees and worship me, and they're yours."

<sup>10</sup>Jesus' refusal was curt: "Beat it, Satan!" He backed his rebuke with a third quotation from Deuteronomy: "Worship the Lord your God, and only him. Serve him with absolute single-heartedness."

**Matthew 26:38-39** (NLT)

<sup>38</sup>He told them, "My soul is crushed with grief to the point of death. Stay here and watch with me."

<sup>39</sup>He went on a little farther and fell face down on the ground, praying, "My Father! If it is possible, let this cup of suffering be taken away from me. Yet I want your will, not mine."

**Matthew 26:42** (NLT)

<sup>42</sup>Again he left them and prayed, "My Father! If this cup cannot be taken away until I drink it, your will be done."

**Luke 22:44** (ASV)

<sup>44</sup> And being in an agony he prayed more earnestly; and his sweat became as it were great drops of blood falling down upon the ground.



The hours leading up to the cross:

Read John 18:3-4, Luke 22:47-48, Luke 22:63-65, John 19:1-3, John 19:7-11, and Isaiah 52:13-14.

Describe Jesus' suffering – physical, emotional, spiritual – in this passage.

How did Jesus respond to this pain?

Ponder and discuss why Jesus would endure the humiliation and suffering when he had the power to stop it.

**John 18:3-4** (NIV)

<sup>3</sup>So Judas came to the grove, guiding a detachment of soldiers and some officials from the chief priests and Pharisees. They were carrying torches, lanterns and weapons.

<sup>4</sup>Jesus, knowing all that was going to happen to him, went out and asked them, "Who is it you want?"

**Luke 22:47-48** (NLT)

<sup>47</sup>But even as he said this, a mob approached, led by Judas, one of his twelve disciples. Judas walked over to Jesus and greeted him with a kiss.

<sup>48</sup>But Jesus said, "Judas, how can you betray me, the Son of Man, with a kiss?"

**Luke 22:63-65** (NIV)

<sup>63</sup>The men who were guarding Jesus began mocking and beating him.

<sup>64</sup>They blindfolded him and demanded, "Prophecy! Who hit you?"

<sup>65</sup>And they said many other insulting things to him.

**John 19:1-3** (NLT)

<sup>1</sup>Then Pilate had Jesus flogged with a lead-tipped whip. <sup>2</sup>The soldiers made a crown of long, sharp thorns and put it on his head, and they put a royal purple robe on him. <sup>3</sup>"Hail! King of the Jews!" they mocked, and they hit him with their fists.

**John 19:7-11** (NIV)

<sup>7</sup>The Jews insisted, "We have a law, and according to that law he must die, because he claimed to be the Son of God."

<sup>8</sup>When Pilate heard this, he was even more afraid, <sup>9</sup>and he went back inside the palace. "Where do you come from?" he asked Jesus, but Jesus gave

What can we learn from Jesus' response?

What conclusions can you draw about pain from His suffering to apply to your life?

On the cross:

Read Mark 15:22-27, Matthew 27:45-47, Isaiah 53:3-5 Hebrews 2:17-18, and Hebrews 4:14-16.

Describe Jesus' suffering – physical, emotional, spiritual – in this passage.

him no answer. <sup>10</sup>"Do you refuse to speak to me?" Pilate said. "Don't you realize I have power either to free you or to crucify you?"

<sup>11</sup>Jesus answered, "You would have no power over me if it were not given to you from above. Therefore the one who handed me over to you is guilty of a greater sin."

**Isaiah 52:13-14 (MSG)**

<sup>13-15</sup>"Just watch my servant blossom!

Exalted, tall, head and shoulders above the crowd!

But he didn't begin that way.

At first everyone was appalled.

He didn't even look human—

a ruined face, disfigured past recognition.

Nations all over the world will be in awe, taken aback,

kings shocked into silence when they see him.

For what was unheard of they'll see with their own eyes,

what was unthinkable they'll have right before them."

**Mark 15:22-27 (NIV)**

<sup>22</sup>They brought Jesus to the place called Golgotha (which means The Place of the Skull). <sup>23</sup>Then they offered him wine mixed with myrrh, but he did not take it. <sup>24</sup>And they crucified him. Dividing up his clothes, they cast lots to see what each would get.

<sup>25</sup>It was the third hour when they crucified him. <sup>26</sup>The written notice of the charge against him read: THE KING OF THE JEWS. <sup>27</sup>They crucified two robbers with him, one on his right and one on his left.

How did Jesus respond to this pain?

**Matthew 27:45-47** (NIV)

<sup>45</sup>From the sixth hour until the ninth hour darkness came over all the land.

<sup>46</sup>About the ninth hour Jesus cried out in a loud voice, "Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?"—which means, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

<sup>47</sup>When some of those standing there heard this, they said, "He's calling Elijah."

What are the benefits of His suffering?

**Isaiah 53:3-5** (NLT)

<sup>3</sup>He was despised and rejected—a man of sorrows, acquainted with bitterest grief. We turned our backs on him and looked the other way when he went by. He was despised, and we did not care.

<sup>4</sup>Yet it was our weaknesses he carried; it was our sorrows that weighed him down. And we thought his troubles were a punishment from God for his own sins! <sup>5</sup>But he was wounded and crushed for our sins. He was beaten that we might have peace. He was whipped, and we were healed!

What hope does His suffering offer to us?

**Hebrews 2: 17-18** (NLT)

<sup>17</sup>Therefore, it was necessary for Jesus to be in every respect like us, his brothers and sisters, so that he could be our merciful and faithful High Priest before God. He then could offer a sacrifice that would take away the sins of the people. <sup>18</sup>Since he himself has gone through suffering and temptation, he is able to help us when we are being tempted.

**Hebrews 4: 14-16** (MSG)

<sup>14-16</sup>Now that we know what we have—Jesus, this great High Priest with ready access to God—let's not let it slip through our fingers. We

don't have a priest who is out of touch with our reality. He's been through weakness and testing, experienced it all—all but the sin. So let's walk right up to him and get what he is so ready to give. Take the mercy, accept the help.

Read Habakkuk 3: 17-19.

What hope does He offer in the midst of OUR suffering?

**Habakkuk 3:17-19 (MSG)**

<sup>17-19</sup>Though the cherry trees don't blossom

and the strawberries don't ripen,  
Though the apples are worm-eaten  
and the wheat fields stunted,  
Though the sheep pens are sheepless  
and the cattle barns empty,  
I'm singing joyful praise to God.

I'm turning cartwheels of joy to my Savior God.

Counting on God's Rule to prevail,  
I take heart and gain strength.

I run like a deer.

I feel like I'm king of the mountain!



## Soothing Salve: the Word of God

As you apply this salve remember that our God is a God of truth. He does not lie to us and tell us that life will be easy. In fact, he tells us in John 16:33 that we will have troubles in this world. Like salve, the road to healing may sting us before we know victory. He assures us that if we submit to *His truth* He will equip us to resist the temptations of Satan. We can surrender to *His will* and trust that if we walk in obedience and come to Him in prayer He will give us the endurance to fight the good fight. Only God can bring us true peace and comfort in the midst of our pain and suffering. Jesus endured suffering, shame, and pain so that He might fully comprehend our sorrows and sufferings and serve as a merciful and faithful minister to our needs (Hebrews 2:17-18 and 4:15). Apply His word to your pain. As you rest in His hands, reflect on the following scriptures:

### **John 11:1-6** (MSG)

<sup>1</sup>A man was sick, Lazarus of Bethany, the town of Mary and her sister Martha. <sup>2</sup>This was the same Mary who massaged the Lord's feet with aromatic oils and then wiped them with her hair. It was her brother Lazarus who was sick. <sup>3</sup>So the sisters sent word to Jesus, "Master, the one you love so very much is sick."

<sup>4</sup>When Jesus got the message, he said, "This sickness is not fatal. It will become an occasion to show God's glory by glorifying God's Son."

<sup>5</sup>Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus, <sup>6</sup>but oddly, when he heard that Lazarus was sick, he stayed on where he was for two more days.

### **Job 23:10** (NASB)

<sup>10</sup>But He knows the way I take;

When He has tried me, I shall come forth as gold.

### **Isaiah 1:25** (NIV)

<sup>25</sup> I will turn my hand against you;

I will thoroughly purge away your dross  
and remove all your impurities.

### **1 Peter 4:12-13** (MSG)

<sup>12</sup>Friends, when life gets really difficult, don't jump to the conclusion that God isn't on the job.

<sup>13</sup>Instead, be glad that you are in the very thick of what Christ experienced. This is a spiritual refining process, with glory just around the corner.

### **Psalm 34:19** (NASB)

<sup>19</sup>Many are the afflictions of the righteous; but the Lord delivers him out of them all.

## **Things heard around the group**

One of the four drugs I'm taking is not the one that ruins your fingernails and toenails, so at least they won't get worse.

As soon as they let me out of the hospital, I had new nails put on. I couldn't stand it!

Hot flashes:

My son brings me a paper towel to mop the sweat running off my bald head.

My children tell me I'm having one, and they blow on me.

Time really flies when you can't remember.

People tell me if I just believe, the cancer will go away, because it's from Satan.

If you allowed your friends to control you with their beliefs about cancer, you would be worse off.

I don't want you to fix it; I just want you to listen.

## Group Sharing

We had the privilege of working through this study guide with some members of our cancer support group at Faith Lutheran Church. During our discussions we recorded some of the ideas shared by the group. Consequently, this section is not meant to be a leader's guide or provide the "correct answers." Feel free to agree, disagree, or use the answers to encourage thought provoking discussion. We hope you are blessed by these ideas whether you are studying alone or in a group setting.

### 1. What's the prognosis?

*Compare the human doctor's knowledge of our bodies and illnesses to the knowledge God possesses. Doctors don't have all the answers. There is much they don't know. God already knows the solution. Doctors look for tangible, visible answers. If they can't find them, they write you off, giving you tranquilizers or pain killers.*

You can lose two hours to a "brain fade out", and they can't tell you why.

You can't put your trust in doctors.

God is more familiar with how my body works than any doctor who has only studied medicine for one lifetime.

*How does your relationship to the Lord compare to that of John the Baptist?*

I think I was sent by God, but I don't think I've lived up to it.

People today don't have that kind of joy at anybody's presence, especially at the presence of Jesus.

*How could it be that John, this faithful believer, winds up in prison?*

He spoke out against Herod, who had just married his sister.

*If God is who He says He is, then why doesn't God set John free? Why doesn't He set us free?*

We don't know, but it's all part of God's plan.

*How do we explain John's doubts?*

He's human. Suffering makes us question. We get distracted.

*What happens when we focus on our circumstances rather than on God?*

We are tempted to try to fix things instead of trusting in God's plan.

We fear not knowing the future, or not being able to deal with it.

Worry is the illusion we are somehow in control.

Not having control can lead to fear or to peace.

*What was God's purpose for John the Baptist's life?*

He was sent by God to prepare the way for Jesus.

*Did God accomplish His purpose, or did John's death at the hands of Herod cut short his life and leave his mission unfinished?*

He accomplished everything he was sent to do.

*Explain your responses to the boxes you checked that describe the effects your cancer is having on God's purpose and plan for your life:*

I still don't know what God's purpose and plan for my life are.

We have a wonderful future in heaven, even if we have none here on earth.

Maybe it's God's plan for me to die now. All those people that tell me I'm going to be healed will feel betrayed if I die.

## **2. Why does God allow suffering?**

*What did you learn in the valley?*

How to depend on God.

Practice.

Letting go.

You don't get out of the valley until you've learned what you're supposed to learn.

*Assess how valley experiences matured you or shaped who you are today.*

We can be changed so much that we are very different people than we used to be.

*How should we respond to suffering?*

Trust.

We are being prepared for our joyful future. We should look forward to that joy.

*Describe a time in your life when God stayed with you, even though life seemed very unfair.*

The more things go bad, the more likely God is in it. It couldn't be just coincidence.

*Pharaoh brought Joseph out of the valley (or, more accurately, the dungeon) to ask him to interpret a dream. What was Joseph's response?*

"I can't do it, but God can."

He didn't grab this opportunity to get out of prison by telling Pharaoh what he wanted to hear.

*How had Joseph's suffering helped him learn to trust God?*

When you're in the valley, there is no other choice to get through it.

We don't always understand why. We may not be able to comprehend God's goals and purposes until we get to heaven.



*How did Joseph view his circumstances?*

He wasn't bitter. He forgave them.  
He saw God's hand in it.  
He felt God had a purpose.

*What confidence do these verses give you about your own situation?*

God is with me and He has a reason.  
I don't need to know why. I just need to trust Him.

### 3. Why me?

*Have you ever been in a spiritual place like this?*

When things are going bad, I feel God has abandoned me.  
I felt pretty helpless when I was first diagnosed and lying in a hospital bed.

*How did you respond to your situations?*

A conscious effort to turn to God.  
When we are really helpless, what else is there to do but ask God for help? (One good side to helplessness.)  
Another Christian can help guide us back to God.

*How many of us respond to our suffering like John did?*

Not too many. It's not a human viewpoint.  
Our response would be, "Why are You doing this to me after all I've done for You?"  
It takes a while to come to accept it is God's will.

*How did God prepare John to receive and write His words?*

He was preparing him his whole life – being a disciple at an early age, many years as a church elder.  
He removed distractions.  
Maybe Patmos was a way of getting John away from being too busy serving God to listen.

*How do you think John felt about receiving God's revelation?*

Awed that God would choose him to write this.  
Nervous – have to get it right.  
Discussion on John's experience with Jesus – comparison of the Jesus on earth, familiar loved friend, to Jesus in Glory, God Almighty.

*What was the psalmist's attitude toward his affliction?*

He was grateful for the good that came out of the suffering.

He had confidence in God's motives.

Gratitude helps to bring us back when we go astray and shows us we were headed down the wrong path.

*What did the psalmist learn from his afflictions?*

Obedience, trust, decrees, faithfulness.

He got to know God better – who He was, His Word.

When God takes the time to afflict us, He has something special planned.

*What does Paul, the writer of Romans, say about circumstances in life?*

God is in absolute control of what happens in our lives.

He chooses events.

It's God, not us. Get over this self-centered "I've got to fix this thing!" attitude.

*If we feel God has been unfair to us, does that make it true?*

We can't understand God. He's beyond our capabilities to understand.

Maybe God has rejected me, like Esau. Maybe that's why things are going so badly.

John 3:16 says whosoever believes on Jesus will not perish. He doesn't reject anyone who seeks Him.

*What can a relationship with God offer that a relationship with another human being cannot?*

He will never fail us.

He loves us unconditionally.

#### **4. Does prayer help?**

*What does Jesus say about following Him?*

Deny yourself. Do it daily.

No self pity.

Don't fight against the suffering. Let God do what He's doing, because He's doing something.

*Why does he say we must do this daily?*

We only have strength for one day.

Each day we commit again.

We're not perfect, we need to try over and over. Practice.

*What choices could Daniel have made?*  
Go along with eating the king's food.  
Not eat at all – go on a hunger strike.  
Try to run away.

*What was the result of Daniel's following God's will?*  
The official showed favor to them.  
Just the suggestion could have gotten Daniel killed. God protected him.  
Daniel had great faith in God.

*What do you think he did all night long in that lions' den?*  
Pray.  
Prayer is more about a relationship with God than about answers.  
The act of praying says something about our faith.

*What good resulted from Daniel's prayers?*  
A witness to the king and Daniel's enemies.  
The king came to believe in Daniel's living God.  
The king proclaimed that the whole nation should respect God.

*Why do you think God waited all night before removing Daniel from the lion's den?*  
So God got the credit (glory).  
There would be no thoughts that someone else rescued Daniel.

*Whom did Daniel trust to help him through the night?*  
God, all the way.

*In times of darkness and uncertainty, what attitude does God desire for us to have?*  
Trust Him.  
Rely only on Him.  
Don't fear evil.

## **5. Is my life worth anything?**

*What evidence of depression shows in Elijah's behavior?*  
He wanted to die, asked God to take his life, went to sleep, gave up, didn't eat, and slept through the day.

*What physical factors contributed to Elijah's depression?*  
Exhaustion, dehydration, and hunger.  
He was probably overheated.

*What emotional factors contributed to Elijah's depression?*

He was afraid, discouraged, alone.

*What spiritual factors contributed to Elijah's depression?*

He didn't trust God to protect him from Jezebel, after God had given him the strength to kill her prophets.

He preached, but the people rejected God's message.

He was spiritually drained.

He didn't want to listen to God.

*What remedies did God prescribe for Elijah?*

Food and water.

The angel made him feel like God hadn't forsaken him.

Told him to go back to the battle.

Gave him a new mission.

Gave him companionship.

Let him know he wasn't the only one to remain true to God.

Asked him why he was there, which gave him an opportunity to express his feelings.

The wind, earthquake, and fire woke Elijah up so he could hear God.

*Which of these remedies apply to your life?*

Making sure you get the proper food, water, and rest.

Feeling not alone – cancer support group.

Companionship – family and church family.

*Think of a time when you were depressed or discouraged. How would you describe it?*

Job does a pretty good job of it.

Most of the time after chemo I wished I was dead.

*Who does Job blame for his suffering?*

God. He doesn't blame anyone else.

He recognizes God's sovereignty.

*What do you think Job is saying to God?*

WHY?

What have I done wrong?

I don't understand.

He's not hiding his feelings.

*Describe Job's attitude toward suffering and toward God.*

He didn't curse God.

We should accept both good and bad from God.



*How did God answer Job?*

Who are you to question me?

Why not you?

That would smack some sense into you if God said that to you.

*How had Job's attitude changed?*

It's not his place to know or question why God does things, just to accept it.

*What do you think he learned?*

Not to demand that God explain himself, but rather to ask what God wants him to do.

Came to know God, a benefit of all the suffering.

*What did God say about the things Job had said to Him and about Him?*

What Job said was right.

God wasn't angry at Job.

## **6. What about my family?**

*With what attitude did Hannah pray to God?*

Honestly.

In bitterness of soul.

From great pain.

*Share a time when you have been this honest and bold with God.*

It's usually when I'm totally desperate – at my wit's end. I've exhausted everything I can do.

*Identify Hannah's burdens.*

Childless.

Picked on by her husband's other wife.

*What two things did God give Hannah in exchange for her burdens?*

Peace.

Hope.

Be a part of life again.

Eli's blessing – almost a promise.

Belief that God would give her a child.

*What further comfort or relief do these verses offer?*

Relief from stress and the burdens of anxiety.

He keeps track of our sorrows, so we don't have to.

He's always there for us, never turns His back on us.

God sees us, sees our pain.

*Identify the qualities of God mentioned by Hannah.*

Deliverer, holy, stability, strength, sovereign, fair, rock, creator, sustainer.

Above all, knows everything and judges.

He controls the balance of things, controls life and death.

He created and maintains the world.

He raises up and tears down, exalts and humbles.

*How did recognizing these qualities of God help Hannah surrender her child to Him?*

She saw God was all knowing and powerful, so she didn't have to worry about Samuel.

He is not just in control, but He is able to do it best.

Relieves her fears, gives her comfort and peace.

*What were the consequences of Hannah's obedience – turning her child, Samuel, over to God as she promised?*

She had more children.

Got blessings every year from God, through Eli.

Samuel had a great impact on Israel.

*Speculate on what Samuel's life would have been like if Hannah had not surrendered her child to God.*

Spoiled, only child.

*Compare these speculations to what scripture tells us.*

He blessed Israel all his life.

*How is giving our children over to God different from Hannah's situation?*

Not a physical separation.

"I give up, she's all yours!"

*How is it the same?*

Still have to trust, have faith.

Being at peace.

Recognizing we don't have control over what happens to them.

*What are the advantages of surrendering our loved ones to God daily?*

Comfort.

Keeps us on track.

Recognizing God's sovereignty every day.

*What are some assurances God gives to those who trust Him?*

Help – in trouble.

God's presence – He's with us.

Peace and trust through changes.

*Think about what Hannah needed to teach Samuel to help him accept his separation from her and trust and love God more than anyone else.*

God loves him.

Trust in God.

Higher purpose.

## **7. What comfort and encouragement can I offer my family?**

*What dangers confronted God's people with Jerusalem's walls down?*

Enemies. A physical threat of conquering the city. An emotional threat of having a burden hanging over you – fear.

*What risks did Nehemiah take in presenting his request to the king?*

The king could say, "Off with your head."

The fear of losing favor with the king.

*How was rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem like battling cancer?*

There are no guarantees.

We have to trust God, rely on Him.

There is nothing He calls us to do that we can do on our own.

Just like Nehemiah heard God's call to rebuild the wall, He gives us the grace to fight the battle of cancer.

*What obstacles did Nehemiah face in completing his task?*

The wall was very high and thick.

The old stone was falling apart – rubble.

Having to roll huge rocks up hill.

Compromise from the inside and outside – almost like a civil war with his own people.

Problems motivating his own people – opposition.

*From where did Nehemiah draw his strength to continue to build even in the face of opposition?*  
From God and the Word of God – scripture, the words of Jeremiah the prophet plus oral tradition.

*Was he able to do this alone?*

No. He didn't have a lot of other support.

*What role can family and church play in the battle against cancer?*

Remember God's promises and remind the patient of God's promises.

That is the call of the church – to support the sick.

The church is a community, not a building.

The Greek word used for church in the New Testament means "gathering" or "congregation."

*What assurance does Nehemiah 6:15-16 give our families?*

When the cancer treatment is successful it's easy to give credit to God. What about treatments that are not successful? If you survive, it is a gift from God, but if you do not, it means God is calling you home.

*How do we help our loved ones learn to rely on God the way Nehemiah relied on God?*

They won't rely on God unless they have a need to rely on God.

Show them, share with them the power of prayer and the Word of God.

Seeing us work through difficult circumstances and allowing and trusting God to get us through is helping them.

*What has God promised to those who trust in Him?*

Shelter, protection, provisions, strength, sufficiency – everything we need to endure whatever comes our way.

We have nothing to fear, we are His.

*Does this mean we can keep our family free from pain?*

No. Life is not a bed of roses – there are thorns in there too.

Enjoy the good while you can.

*Free from grieving?*

No. Not in this life.

*What can we offer our families in exchange for grief and pain?*

Peace of mind that comes with knowing Jesus.

We can point them to God.

We ourselves can offer nothing that compares to what they can get from God.

Maybe the best thing we can offer them is hope and turning them toward God and His Word.



*What can God offer our families?*

God comforts us and loves us.

We can trust Him.

*How does being a family fighting cancer compare to being a family on the front line in Nehemiah's battle?*

Nehemiah's plan was to make sure they had people to fall back on.

God gives us family to support us.

Being placed together in exposed places gave families more reason to pull together.

### **8. Can I still serve the Lord? What good am I?**

*Contrast Paul's (Saul's) life before and after he was blinded on the road to Damascus.*

Before, he persecuted Christians.

After, he preached to them.

*What was his purpose in life as Saul?*

Enforce the laws and traditions of Judaism.

Punish those who did not follow the laws.

*What purpose did God have planned for him as Paul?*

To preach the gospel of Jesus Christ to both the gentiles and Jews.

*What was the source of Paul's confidence before his conversion?*

Who he was in the flesh – his ancestry.

Knowledge, status.

Obedied the law.

*What gifts did Paul have before his conversion?*

Zeal for God.

Knowledge, intelligence, confidence, respect.

*How did God use these gifts in Paul the Apostle?*

Perfect for preaching and teaching the gospel.

His knowledge of the law was made for communicating to others who do not know the law.

*What was Paul's attitude toward his affliction?*

Without the affliction, he might have become too prideful. It helped keep him grounded and reminded him of who had the power.

*What was the source of his confidence?*

Christ.

God working through him.

*What does Paul say he gained from suffering?*

Comfort, compassion.

Learned to rely on God instead of himself.

*How did he use it to serve the Lord and others?*

Comfort flowed through him to comfort others.

Helped people see the reason for suffering and how to endure it.

*What kept him going?*

Faith in God.

God's comfort allows you to endure.

*How can Paul's attitude keep you going?*

What he has endured is so much more than I can even imagine.

*How has his attitude progressed at this stage in his life?*

Before he operated "by the book" and kept the traditions.

Now he is no longer asking that the thorn in the flesh be removed.

He has found joy in suffering.

*How were other people's lives changed by what he went through?*

Others were encouraged to speak the Word of God more.

They recognized Paul was there for Christ.

*How did Paul feel about death?*

He desired to depart and be with Christ, but recognized the need to endure.

*What possibilities for serving the Lord did Paul find for that time of his life?*

He was convinced he could still serve the Lord. Even chains could not stop him.

He was eager to do the work.

He desired courage to do his work.

## **9. Why must I go through all this pain?**

*Have you experienced similar emotions? What is your reaction or attitude toward pain?*

Yes. It sucks.

*The greater the pain, the more I am driven to...*  
Ask "Why can't I go home?"  
I just live with it, but not contentedly.  
Why not me? I don't want it to be somebody else.  
I have to ask why.

*Where have my attitudes gotten me?*  
Acceptance and being open to God has kept me alive.

*How do you typically respond to your pain?*  
Regulating the pain allows me to go on with my life – I'm not preoccupied with it.

*Is God good? Does He act toward us in a capricious manner, or does He plan things out for our good?*  
Obviously, yes, but if we are honest, we have our doubts.

*What proof do we have that He really loves us?*  
It's throughout the Bible.  
I experience peace when I think of it, no matter what's happening.  
It gives me strength.

*In what way is Jesus an example for us?*  
His pain was so much more than mine, it makes me feel mine less.

*Describe the suffering of Jesus in the wilderness – physical, emotional, spiritual.*  
Physical – hunger.  
Spiritual – temptation.  
Emotional – Satan rubbing his nose in all He gave up.

*How did Jesus respond to this pain?*  
He quoted scripture.  
It reminds me of the saying, "Rehearse in the dark what we know in the light."  
He chose to be obedient in spite of the pain.

*What comfort do these passages offer?*  
With God's help, everything is possible.  
Jesus was being human, so He knows how we suffer.

*What can we learn from Jesus' response?*  
Remember God's character.  
The Bible has an answer for everything.

*Discuss ways you can apply this teaching in your own life.*

We could say, "Beat it, Satan!" more often.

Stay in God's plan, don't listen to Satan. God has our best in mind.

*What kind of pain did Jesus experience in the garden?*

Emotional – anticipation of the coming pain and loss of connection to the Father, let down by the disciples.

Physical – sweating drops of blood, perhaps a headache from crying hard.

Spiritual – knew He would be taking on the burden of our sins and that would separate Him from the Father.

*How did Jesus respond to this pain?*

Remembered God's promises.

Remained obedient and in the plan.

*What can we learn about Jesus' relationship with His Father from these passages?*

He was honest with His feelings.

The relationship was very close and important to Him.

*How can we use this example?*

We can say to God what we are feeling.

*Describe Jesus' suffering in the hours leading up to the cross.*

Physical – whips, thorns, beating, disfigurement.

Emotional – betrayal by the disciples and by the people of Israel.

Spiritual – Pilate said he had power over Jesus' life.

*How did Jesus respond to this pain?*

Silently.

He submitted to it.

He didn't use His power to escape it.

*Ponder and discuss why Jesus would endure the humiliation and suffering when he had the power to stop it.*

He was looking at the big picture.

Love for us kept Him in the plan.

He chose to stay in the Father's plan.

He chose to fully experience the worst pain so He can comfort us in our pain.

*What can we learn from Jesus' response?*

When people say things against you, you know God knows the truth. Sometimes it makes it worse to justify yourself.

Remember God is sovereign and sometimes allows certain people to be in power.



*What conclusions can you draw about pain from His suffering to apply to your life?*

God always has a purpose for what happens.

The ultimate end of the plan is good.

I can't lose: either I will be healed or I will be in heaven.

*Describe Jesus' suffering on the cross.*

Physical – He refused the painkiller.

Emotional – it was humiliating to have His clothes divided and to be crucified between two robbers. They labeled Him “King of the Jews” but He actually was.

Spiritual – the Father left Him. He was forsaken.

*How did Jesus respond to this pain?*

He honestly expressed His feelings.

He wanted to experience all of it because it was necessary (Hebrews 2:17-18).

He chose obedience. He stayed with God's plan. He knew the final outcome.

*What are the benefits of His suffering?*

No more need for sacrifices.

Our salvation is finished, paid for.

*What hope does His suffering offer to us?*

“Joy comes with the morning.”

We know we have that new life ahead of us.

Jesus literally understands what we are going through.

*What hope does He offer in the midst of OUR suffering?*

We will be dancing, running, turning cartwheels, feeling like the king of the mountain.

We can have joy in the middle of the pain.

