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Comfort the Sick



Pastoral Leader Training Booklet

38

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The problem of suffering and sickness is a dilemma that has always puzzled mankind.

CAUSES OF SUFFERING AND HOW GOD USES IT FOR OUR GOOD

Let's see what truths the book of Job teaches us on this subject.

In the land of Uz there lived a man whose name was Job. This man was blameless and upright; he feared God and shunned evil. (Job 1:1)

In your opinion, did Job deserve punishment? _____

Why do you say this? _____

PRACTICAL WORK

- Learn by heart 2 Corinthians 1:3-4.
- Using this study, mobilize your congregation to comfort and pray for the sick.
- Write down the names of the sick persons they will visit:

1. Suppose you visit a brother whose illness is due to his own carelessness or vice. What advice would you give him?

2. Suppose you are counselling a faithful elderly believer who is about to die. What consolation will you give him?

3. Suppose that the Holy Spirit reveals to you that a sick person has permitted an evil spirit to control him. How would you pray?

4. Suppose you visit a stranger who is very ill and he can hardly talk. You do not know the cause of the problem, nor his spiritual state. What would you do?

But Job suffered greatly. In spite of him being upright and a man of faith, his sons died, he lost his riches, and Satan afflicted him with painful sores all over his body. (Job 1:13-19, Job 2:7)



Job's wife tempted him saying:

Curse God and die!

The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away; may the name of the Lord be praised. Shall we accept good from God, and not trouble?



Job did not know that Satan had afflicted him. Despite suffering, Job gave glory to God.

- Why did Job, an innocent and just man, become ill?
- Why did he lose his family and his wealth?

- Why do Christians and innocent children suffer today?
- Why do we get sick and grow old?
- Why does God allow suffering?

These are questions that perplex mankind.

God sometimes permits illness to test our faith.

Read Job 1:20-22 and 2:9-10. Here we see two important truths:

- Satan causes illness.
- God sometimes permits suffering so as to test our faith.

Then why did Job suffer?

- ☐ He deserved it as punishment for his sins.
- ☐ God allowed Satan to test Job's faith.

The story has a happy ending. God heals Job and blesses him with double what he had before.

After prayer, counsel the person.

The Lord Jesus Christ gave instructions to the persons He healed. When He raised Jairus' daughter, He ordered them to feed her. (Luke 8:55) The Lord said to the paralytic healed by the Pool of Bethesda, "See, you are well again. Stop sinning, or something worse may happen to you." (John 5:14) If a sick person is not healed, we assure them that God loves them, and explain the different reason for illness. (2 Corinthians 12:7-10)

SUMMARY TEST

Draw a line from the person in the first column, to the cause of his suffering in the second column (the first, Job, is already done, as an example):

SUFFERING PERSON	THE PURPOSE OF HIS SUFFERING
Job	to manifest God's power
The blind man (John 9)	to prove faithfulness in trials
Stephen (Acts 7)	to expose sin
Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5)	to enter glory
The Prodigal Son (Luke 15)	to bring a sinner to repentance
Korah (Numbers 16)	to destroy the evil rebels

- Lay hands on, or touch, the sick person. (Matthew 20:34, Mark 1:31)
- Anoint them with oil. (James 5:14)
- Command in the name of the Lord; “...*in the Name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk.*” (Acts 3:9) Other examples: Matthew 8:3 (a leper); John 11:43 (Lazarus’ resurrection); Acts 9:34 (Aeneas). The word of command is used to cast out demons. (Matthew 8:16, Mark 1:25, Mark 5:8, Mark 9:25) When we do this, we command with the authority that the Lord Jesus Christ has given us. (Matthew 10:1-8)
- Break inherited or satanically inspired patterns. Many alcoholics are children of alcoholics. We can pray: “In the name of Jesus Christ, I break the chain of alcoholism, and free you from the sins of your parents.” God breaks the chains of victims of alcoholism, pornography, homosexuality, addiction to drugs and nicotine, games of chance, etc.
- Pray in your own way, spontaneously (there is no need for everyone to pray the same way).

Note: We do not oppose human medicine. God can use it in healing. The important thing is that the sick person should trust and hope in God.

Read Genesis 3:1-21. Notice how the whole creation was affected by the entrance of sin to the world; enmity, wounds, pain, domination, thorns, difficulty, etc.

So we see that:

- Satan took the human race captive. (Hebrews 2:15)
- Suffering and death came into the world through Adam’s sin. (Romans 5:12, Genesis 3:14-19)
- God sometimes permits suffering, to test our faith and draw us to Him.

Sometimes God uses illness to manifest His glory.

Read John 9:1-3. In this case, a man was born blind; he had a physical impediment. As we said previously, the entrance of sin into the world has affected the whole universe - perfection was lost - which is why so many children are born with deformities.

Looking at a blind man, the disciples asked Jesus: *“Who sinned, he or his parents, that he was born blind? Neither this man nor his parents sinned,”* said Jesus, *“but this happened so that the work of God might be shown in his life.”*

In this case, the cause of the illness was a birth defect, but the healing brought glory to our Heavenly Father. In every case, God gives comfort, patience and endurance to those who ask for them.



God uses illness to show the consequences of sin.

Many illnesses are caused by sin, ignorance or carelessness. Some people become ill **THROUGH THEIR OWN FAULT**, not because God wishes to test them, nor show His glory through them.

It is also important to find out if the person has had adequate medical attention, and if not, to help them to obtain this. Modern medicine is a blessing from God.

Pray with faith in God who heals.

Our God of compassion and mercy comforts us in our tribulations. (2 Corinthians 1:4) *“Everything is possible for him who believes.”* (Mark 9:23) It is God who does it, not us. All involved need faith; whoever prays for the sick person, the sick person himself, and those present. (Mark 2:5, John 11:22)

When we thank and praise God before praying for someone, He increases our faith.

Pray simply and directly.

Examples:

- Make simple requests: “Lord, please heal Robert.” The Lord Jesus Christ made brief petitions. (Mark 7:25, Mark 8:22, Mark 10:51)

HOW TO PRAY FOR THE SICK

Before praying, find out the root cause of the illness.

Sometimes, the Lord Jesus took the sick person aside to speak to them in private. (Mark 8:23)

We ask the sick person (or their family) about the problem. We seek to find the root cause. We are not interested only in the illness: the whole person concerns us; his spiritual, emotional, social, mental and physical state.

For example, some people are ill because they have not forgiven someone who has hurt them. When they forgive, they are healed.

Some people become ill because of demon possession.

(Mark 9:17-30) When we listen to them, the Holy Spirit can reveal the cause. If we do not understand the reason for the illness, it does not matter; we just pray for them.



They do not take care of their own or their family's health.

If the man in the picture below gets ill, what might the probable causes be?

It is easy to condemn the drunkard, because the results of his vice are evident. But some Christians also suffer, not through vice but through carelessness. (For example, not washing hands before preparing food, or after going to the toilet.) They have only themselves to blame if they get sick.



Being poor is no excuse for carelessness. We should feed and wash the children, keep the animals outside, and clean the house.

In 1 Timothy 5:8 Paul says, *“If anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for his immediate family, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.”*

- encouraging them to draw, paint, or do handicrafts,
- giving them a pet to keep them company,
- involving them in teaching children,
- bringing them small gifts.

Serving the elderly is to serve Christ: *“I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of Mine, you did for Me.”* (Matthew 25:40)

Helping the elderly should include involving them in some activity in the church, according to their capacity (prayer, counselling, teaching, handicrafts, etc.)

As a rule, each Christian family should be taught to care for their own grandparents. But the church should care for those who have no family. There is no remedy for old age, but we can make things easier and happier for our old folk.

We can encourage the elderly in many ways:

- reading the Bible to them,
- listening to them,
- chatting with them,
- doing their shopping for them,
- helping them to cook, or taking food to them,
- doing their hair,
- singing for them,
- praying with them,
- helping them to do something at home or in church,
- writing them letters,
- taking them for an outing or a walk,

Paul's stern warning is for:

- ☐ the believer.
- ☐ the unbeliever.

Paul reminds the believer of his duty to first look after his family.

Sometimes God uses illness to correct His disobedient children.

Another purpose of illness is punishment. God is a Father who loves His children; He corrects them when they are rebellious.

(1 Corinthians 11:30-32, Hebrews 12:4-13) God in His mercy uses illness and other sources of pain to discipline His beloved children, to produce in us the fruit of righteousness.

In this case, the illness is to:

- ☐ sanctify us.
- ☐ destroy us.

James 5:14-16 warns us that a Christian can suffer because of his sin. He is to pray for forgiveness and healing. Others also should pray for him, and confess their faults one to another.

Finally, God uses illness and death to end this transitory life.

God uses illness and death so that we may leave behind this corruptible body. If no Christian died, heaven would be empty!

For some death will lead to everlasting glory; for others it will mean going to eternal punishment. (Matthew 25:46, Galatians 6:8)

But, for God's children, according to Romans 8:18, our sufferings here cannot be compared to the coming glory, if we love the Lord. (Romans 8:28)

So we see that there are many causes of suffering and illness, all of which began with Satan and the entrance of sin into the world. But we must not judge the sick; illness comes from many causes.

We must pray for the sick and encourage them to trust in God and to seek the comfort of His Spirit. If they are ill through their own fault, they need our love and help, to turn to God.

We must command any demons to leave, using the Name of Christ with authority. If we resist the devil, he will flee. (James 4:7) The devil fears the Christian who prays in faith and who has the authority of Christ. The devil is limited in what he can do; Christ defeated him, in His death and resurrection.

A person who wants to be delivered must also exercise faith. He will need the counsel and prayers of mature and well-prepared Christians.

For further help, see the Pastoral Training Booklet 57 "Overcoming the Darkness."

We should take special care of the elderly.

Elderly people, who cannot hear well, see clearly or who walk with difficulty, can become discouraged. We should help them to feel useful and to do whatever they can. Light work will help them to feel needed, involved, and appreciated, and they won't feel useless.

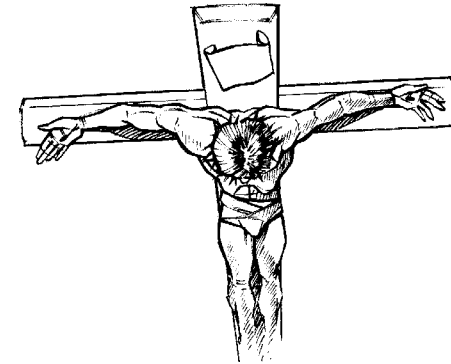
If they are believers, read one of the following passages:

- Philippians 1:21-23 (For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain.)
- 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 (At death, we only “sleep in Christ.” He will raise us to be with Him.)
- Philippians 3:20-21 (Our citizenship is in Heaven.)
- 1 Corinthians 15:35-38 and 2 Corinthians 5:1
(At the resurrection, we will have a new, immortal body.)
- Romans 8:35 (Nothing can separate us from the love of Christ; neither tribulation, nor angels or death.)

We must free the sick that are oppressed by Satan.

This ministry normally requires experienced Christians.

If evil spirits oppress the sick person, we must cast them out, with prayer and fasting. (Mark 9:29)



Jesus shared in, and understands our sufferings. Isaiah prophesied of the coming Christ: *“a man of sorrows and familiar with suffering... he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows.”* (Isaiah 53:4)

We have a Savior who Himself knows our sufferings and pains.

Jesus, during His earthly ministry, freed the captives. (Luke 4:18-19)
When He died on the cross and rose again, He began a new creation. (2 Corinthians. 5:17) This will be completed when our Lord returns and restores all things, giving us incorruptible bodies like His own. (Romans 8:21, Philippians 3:20-21)

Who accompanies us in our sufferings? _____

HOW TO COUNSEL AND ENCOURAGE THE SICK

We must comfort the sick, with love.

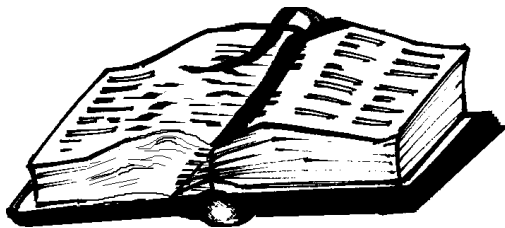
Those who are sick suffer, and need our help and love.

We can visit them, keep them company, pray for them, and help them with whatever they need.

According to James 1:2-4, we help them to face trials joyfully.

We should help the sick to trust in God.

Psalm 23 assures the sick person of the presence and protection of the Good Shepherd, even in death, for those who trust in Him.



In Matthew 8:5-13, Jesus healed the centurion's servant, because of the centurion's faith.

In Mark 2:1-12, Jesus healed the paralytic, but first He forgave his sins. If the sick person is not a believer, the most important thing is to seek his spiritual salvation.

According to Romans 8:16-28, all things work together for our good.

We must pray for their healing.

According to James 5:14-16, if a fellow Christian is ill, the elders of the church should visit him, anoint him with oil, and pray.

We should prepare the sick to die.

Every human being has to die, believers and unbelievers. If the person is dying, we should help them to die in Christ. If they are not believers, we should, tenderly, endeavor to lead them to repentance and faith in Christ. We can rejoice in the fact that at death all Christians go to be with Christ.