

PRAYING FOR THE SICK

3 John 2

INTRODUCTION

- Very few of us can say that we are completely free of sickness or health problems
- Some of us are dealing with very serious afflictions
- Everywhere we look, there are people suffering, lives being disrupted and cut short by injury and disease
- For the unbeliever, the best he can do is to seek medical help, stay positive and make the best of his miserable situation
- But for the believer, God has given a means of accessing divine assistance during these times of affliction, by which we may be sustained in, or delivered from them – and that is prayer
- Gaius was a faithful servant of God, but was evidently plagued by physical sickness
- The apostle John told Gaius of his wish (*euchomai* – prayer) that his body might have health, even as his soul was in health
- But how exactly are we to pray for ourselves or others when sickness comes?
- The apostolic gift of healing (2 Corinthians 12:12), which produced the miraculous healings recorded in the gospels and Acts, has passed away

- Even during the apostolic period, there is a clear decline in healings
 - ✓ Paul suffered infirmities (2 Corinthians 12:7; Galatians 4:13)
 - ✓ Epaphroditus suffered serious sickness (Philippians 2:27)
 - ✓ Timothy had a bad stomach and suffered “often infirmities” (1 Timothy 5:23)
 - ✓ Trophimus was unable to travel with Paul due to sickness (2 Timothy 4:20)
- And while God can and does grant healing today, it is not always his will to heal
- But before we pray regarding sickness, it is vital for us to understand God’s purpose in sickness, viewing it from his perspective, which will then inform our prayers

I. REALISE THE PURPOSE OF SICKNESS

- A. God’s providence oversees and governs all his creatures
 1. Sickness, health, death and life are in his hands
 2. “I kill, and I make alive; I wound, and I heal” (Deuteronomy 32:39)
 3. “For he maketh sore, and bindeth up: he woundeth, and his hands make whole” (Job 5:17-18)
- B. Sickness is part of the curse of sin upon all creation (Genesis 3:17-19; Romans 8:19-23)

C. Afflictions may be the result of our own choices and actions

1. We reap what we sow (Romans 8:12-13; Galatians 6:7-8; 1 Timothy 6:9; James 1:14)
2. Sin brings its own punishment (Jeremiah 2:19)
3. Foolish, self-willed choices result in punishment (Proverbs 27:12)
4. Slothfulness brings affliction (Proverbs 6:9-11; 15:19; 19:15; 20:4,13; 24:30-34)

D. God uses suffering to work good in the believer's life

1. Trials promote spiritual growth and godliness (Romans 5:3-5; James 1:3-4; 1 Peter 1:6-7; 4:12-13)
2. Trials equip us to comfort others in trouble (2 Corinthians 1:3-5)
3. Suffering teaches us obedience to God (Hebrews 5:8)
4. God chastens and corrects us through suffering (Psalms 119:67,71,75; Hebrews 12:5-11; 1 Corinthians 11:28-32)
5. Suffering humbles us and exalts God's power in us (2 Corinthians 1:8-9; 4:7-12; 12:7-10)
6. Suffering works to perfect our future reward in glory (1 Peter 1:7; 2 Corinthians 4:17)

II. RETAIN PERSPECTIVE OF SICKNESS

A. The flesh views and responds to suffering wrongly

1. Fear
2. Envy
3. Doubt
4. Discouragement
5. Bitterness towards God

B. We must seek to view sickness and suffering with God's perspective

1. It is the soul, not the body, that is the priority (2 Corinthians 4:16)
 - a. This body is a mere temporary tabernacle for our eternal souls
 - b. As in Job's case, our suffering should be viewed as a part of the greater warfare between the kingdom of light and the kingdom of darkness
2. Even in the darkest of trials, we can have confidence that God is with us (Psalm 23:4; Matthew 28:20; Hebrews 13:5; John 14:16)
3. The Lord Jesus suffered in his flesh, is touched with the feeling of our infirmities, and is able to succour them that are tempted (Hebrews 2:18; 4:14-16)

4. In view of eternity, even the gravest of trials is a “light affliction” (2 Corinthians 4:17-18)
5. Death for the believer is merely a promotion to glory (Philippians 1:21,23)
6. God in his wisdom may mercifully take a believer’s life early, to spare him from evil to come (Isaiah 57:1-2; 1 Kings 14:10-13)
7. God’s grace is sufficient to sustain us *through* sickness, if God does not deliver us *from* it (2 Corinthians 12:7-10)
8. We must always submit to God’s sovereignty, whose thoughts and ways are far above ours (Isaiah 55:8-9)
 - a. He does whatsoever pleases him (Psalm 115:3)
 - b. Even sickness and disease may bring glory to God (John 9:2-3)
 - c. All things, including sickness, work together for the believer’s good (Romans 8:28)
 - d. Those who suffer according to God’s will must commit their way unto him (1 Peter 4:19)

III. RIGHTLY PRAY IN SICKNESS

- A. Hindrances to prayer must be dealt with and avoided
 1. Selfish purposes (James 4:3)
 2. Iniquities (Isaiah 59:1-2; Psalm 139:23-24; 66:18)

3. Idols in the heart (Ezekiel 14:3)
4. Ignoring the needs of others (Proverbs 21:13)
5. Disobedience to God's word (1 John 3:22; Proverbs 28:9)
6. Not forgiving others (Mark 11:25)
7. Strained relationships between husband and wife (1 Peter 3:7)
8. Unbelief (James 1:5-7; Hebrews 11:6)
9. Not abiding in Christ (John 15:7)
10. Not abiding in truth (Psalm 145:18)

B. The right spirit of effectual prayer

1. Reverential worship (Matthew 6:9)
2. Holiness (1 Timothy 2:8; James 5:16)
3. Faith (Matthew 21:22)
4. Fervency (James 5:16)
5. Persistence (Luke 18:1; Matthew 7:7-8)
6. With thanksgiving (Philippians 4:6)
7. With fasting (Matthew 6:17-18; 17:21)

C. The right content of effectual prayer

1. Pray according to God's will (Matthew 6:10; Luke 22:42; 1 John 5:14-15)
2. For God's glory to be exalted (Philippians 1:20; 2 Thessalonians 1:12)
3. For God's grace to be given (2 Corinthians 12:9; Hebrews 4:16)
4. For God's peace to keep the heart and mind (Philippians 4:7)
5. For the God of all comfort to bring comfort (2 Corinthians 1:3-4)
6. To enable the sufferer to maintain a good witness of Jesus Christ before the world
7. For unbelievers to be convicted and converted through this testimony
8. For doctors to have wisdom in treating the sickness
9. For healing
 - a. The fourth petition of the Lord's Prayer, "Give us this day our daily bread," (Matthew 6:11) invites us to petition God for those things which promote our physical life and health
 - b. The prayer for healing ought not be for selfish purposes, but that God would be glorified in it (Psalm 85:6; Isaiah 38:18-20)
 - c. God does not promise to give all we want, but all that is good for us (Psalm 84:11)

- d. Accept that if God wills not to heal, to be content (2 Samuel 12:22-23; 2 Corinthians 12:8-10)

CONCLUSION

1. Suffering transforms, for better or worse
2. Sickness ought not to be seen as an unwelcome intruder, but a divine opportunity for God to show himself strong on the behalf of his people
3. "Is any among you afflicted? let him pray" (James 5:13)
4. In trials, some seek answers, some solutions, but few seek God
5. How often can it be said of you, "Ye have not, because ye ask not"? (James 4:2)
6. What a privilege to carry everything to God in prayer!
7. We are doing our duty to love the brethren, and to bear one another's burdens by praying for them in their time of need
8. Are you praying *for* those in need; and are you praying *with* those in need?
9. We are not merely encouraged, but *commanded* to "be careful for nothing" (Philippians 4:6) and to "cast all your care upon him; for he careth for you" (1 Peter 5:7)