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“Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ” (Galatians 6:2).

In Times of Sickness

Central Truth: Seek opportunities to minister to the sick.

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Topic: Family; Sickness.

It has been said that a person's attention points in the same direction as his nose. Therefore, he does not look to God until he is flat on his back. Whether or not that is true, it is a fact that sickness often opens a person to receive care in the name of Christ. Christians should be ready to help when problems arise.

The power of medical missions is evident in many areas of the world. By extending medical care, the missionary demonstrates that he or she is truly interested in helping the people. Those who are suspicious of the motive or message of a missionary often become receptive after receiving medical help. Thank God for dedicated physicians, nurses, and others who prepare the way for the gospel through a ministry to sick and hurting people.

One mark of Jesus' ministry was His sympathy for the sick. He healed all kinds of diseases. He healed by a touch or without a touch, by using means or not using means, when He was with the patient and when He was not with the patient. Eighteen specific miracles of healing are attributed to Jesus in the Gospels.

Sickness Is a Common Human Problem

It comes upon all persons — the young and the old, the rich and poor, the weak and the strong. It commonly is not serious enough to end in death, but one day it will be. Some tend to be sickly, while others tend to be healthy. But all experience it.

Why is sickness common? Sickness came into human experience as a consequence of the human fall into sin. Read Genesis 3. A “curse” from God extended to all creation because of their sin. The very earth was cursed. The serpent, through whom the temptation came, was cursed. Even our human bodies were cursed. God said, *“In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return”* (Genesis 3:19). With that sentence of physical death, sickness entered the human experience. But that is only one reason for sickness today.

Sickness often comes upon an individual because of personal sin (Deuteronomy 28:61). Sin often carries its own penalty. Abuse of the body with alcohol and other drugs destroys certain organs of the body and causes sickness, for instance. Or sickness sometimes comes as a consequence of the sins of others. A child may be born with a disease carried by the mother during pregnancy. But the body commonly suffers as a consequence of sin.

Sickness may come as a result of a spiritual battle in the heavenly realms. That was the cause of Job's illness, you remember. And sickness may come to show the power of God through you (John 9). Since you may not know the specific cause of illness, bring every case to God and look to Him for help and healing.

There are different types of sickness. Some sickness is physical. It is related to infection, contagion, or injury. It is painful and difficult to endure. Such a person needs help from caring people who can minister in the name of Jesus.

Some sickness is emotional. Anxiety, bitterness, and related emotions can cause the body to malfunction. Physical infirmity may be directly related to emotional illness. But emotional disability does not always cause physical illness. It may express itself in emotional areas. The person suffering emotional illness needs help also. Jesus is the Great Physician. He can heal all manner of diseases. Bring your sickness to Him and ask His help. He can heal where no other can.

Physicians Can Help the Sick

God has put various chemicals in the organic creation which can assist the healing process. Those who study the medical sciences have found many of them and formulated medicines. Some who read this book will remember the “wonder drugs” which were formulated during World War II and continue to be used today. It is no sign of a lack of faith in God for a person to seek the aid of a physician or to take medicines which God has provided

through His creation.

The Bible reports the presence of physicians. They are first mentioned in Genesis 50:2 in relation to the embalming of Jacob's body. When Jeremiah asked, *“Is there no balm in Gilead; is there no physician there? why then is not the health of the daughter of my people recovered?”* (Jeremiah 8:22), he indicated that the presence of a physician and medicines was expected to bring the recovery of health. Jesus recognized that those who are sick need a physician (Matthew 9:12). Luke is called *“the beloved physician”* in Colossians 4:14 because he accompanied Paul on his mission tours and was his personal physician. There is no condemnation of medical personnel or medical treatment in the Bible. On the contrary, the Bible recognizes the benefit of physicians. Thank God for Christians in the medical professions and the help they render to the sick.

The Bible warns of trusting only in physicians for your healing. It condemns King Asa for seeking help from the physicians only, instead of seeking it from the Lord during his illness. And it reports that he died as a consequence (II Chronicles 16:12, 13). The Bible reports also that there are some cases of illness for which medical science has no cure. Such was the case for the poor woman who suffered a flow of blood for twelve years. She spent all her money on the best medical assistance available in that day, but she was no better. That is not a condemnation of medical science; it is only recognition of its limitations.

God must not be ignored in times of sickness. Physicians do not heal. Medicines do not heal. The body does not even heal itself. Whence does the healing come? God says, *“I am the LORD that healeth thee”* (Exodus 15:26). God is the healer of every kind of physical, emotional, and spiritual maladies. The Bible teaches that you may seek the best medical assistance available, but always look to God for healing. His healing may be now or later. It may be immediate health or slow recovery. It may be with medical aid or without it. But He is the Lord who heals you.

Jesus Is the Great Physician

Like an emergency vehicle trying to make its way on a crowded freeway, Jesus was pressing through the crowd. He was on His way to the home of Jairus, whose daughter was desperately ill. The crowd made His progress very slow. That allowed a woman who suffered from a hemorrhage to press through the crowd toward Him. She finally drew close enough to touch Him, and healing virtue flowed from Him. The woman was healed. But that is only part of the story; read the fun account in Mark 5:27-34.

Jesus is the Great Physician to those who come to Him. The woman had to press through the crowd. Jairus had to journey from His home to where Jesus was. Four friends had to carry the palsied man on a stretcher to the roof of the house (Mark 2). And you must come to Jesus for your healing.

You do not come to Him by pressing through a crowd or making a journey to a shrine. You come to Him by faith. You recognize Him as the Great Physician who heals. You commit your case into His hands. You ask Him to give wisdom and skill to the medical personnel who minister to you. You follow their directions, but you look to Him to do the healing.

Jesus is the Great Physician to those with faith to touch Him. The woman was sure that if she could get close enough to touch even the hem of His garment, she would be healed. She touched, and she was healed. The word of that healing spread. When Jesus went to Gennesaret, a crowd gathered, wanting to touch Him. And as many as touched Him were healed (Matthew 14:34-36).

The touch of curiosity profits nothing. Jesus was thronged by the crowd. Many touched Him as He moved among them. But only when a hand reached out with the touch of faith did anything happen. That is always the case. Is your hand extended to Him in faith? You will find, “*according to your faith be it unto you*” (Matthew 9:29).

Jesus is the Great Physician from whom healing flows. Luke, the beloved physician, gives an explanation of how healing went from Jesus to the woman. He records the words of Jesus, “*Somebody hath touched me: for I perceive that virtue is gone out of me*” (Luke 8:46). How did Jesus know power had flowed from Him? What was the power like? The details are not given. It is enough for us to know that something moved from Jesus to the woman and effected her healing. That is not surprising since He is the Lord who heals us.

Do you attribute your healing to the power of God? Note the psalmist's list of the blessings of God upon his life (Psalm 103). The first is forgiveness of sin. The second is healing of diseases. All through the Bible you will find spiritual people attributing their healing to God. And so it should be today. To whom do you attribute your healing? When you recover from an illness, do like the woman mentioned in Mark 5. Confess publicly what He did for you, and let Him get the glory.

We Are God's Agents to Hurting People (Hebrews 13:3)

We should recognize their hurt. “*Remember them.*” It is so easy to go

about your daily affairs and ignore the sick. Even the best intentions go unfulfilled. But the Christian should never be so busy with himself that he neglects others. That is the very opposite of the spirit of Christ.

We should empathize with them in their hurt. The Hebrew writer admonishes you to think of yourself “*as being . . . also in the body.*” The problem with Job's “friends” was that they did not enter into his sufferings with him. The virtuous woman of Proverbs 31 is noted for reaching out to people in need (verse 20). Jesus praised the good Samaritan who identified with the suffering traveler and took care of him (Luke 10:33, 34).

We should spiritualize our help. Do not think only that you are helping a dear friend or an elderly shut-in. You are not. Jesus said, “*Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me*” (Matthew 25:40). Let your mind turn to your Lord as you help others. Let your assistance be to them as well as to Him. You are serving God by serving people in the name and in the spirit of God. Like Stephanas, become addicted to serving (I Corinthians 16:15).

Jesus is still ministering to people who are in need. He performs that ministry through Christians like you and me. Look for an opportunity to minister to someone this week.

Questions for Discussion

1. Why is sickness in the world today?
2. What types of sickness are common today?
3. What is the Bible attitude toward physicians?
4. Why does the Bible warn against seeking physicians but ignoring God?
5. Why is it not a sign of a lack of faith to seek a physician today?
6. How does Jesus heal today?
7. How can you have faith that He will heal you?
8. What ministry can you render to someone who is sick?
9. Why is your ministry to the sick a spiritual service?
10. Why is helping the sick a blessing, not a burden?