

# **A Pastor's "Heart Talk" To Those "Suffering With Little Hope of Cure"**

**This brochure is modified from a Letter written to a parishioner whose husband faced continuing illness for which Drs. give little hope of recovery**

**Rev. Bill Bowdle**

**Our prayers continue with you for God's touch of grace, mercy, healing and sustaining grace. That is certainly our longing and our preference for your loved one! The following is written for that phase in life, hopefully in the very distant future, when God turns the pathway of your loved one's life toward heaven rather than earthly healing.**

As you relate to all the issues around the difficulties of a prolonged illness, you must find your resources stretched to the very limit. As we walk along beside you in this journey, and as I reflect on my own life, I find myself thinking thoughts like these below.

Our lifelong patterns of thought, and our culture, emphasize so much the issues of living, and making a living, that we arrive at the closing quarter of our journey without the practiced habits for facing hits to our health, and the final journey down the home stretch of life. The frustrations of illness, medical procedures, and uncertainty of hope for health or extension of life, certainly can blow in gray clouds that shut out the brightness we would prefer to feel.

What a struggle it can be to balance the dynamic tension between our need for hope on earth, and finding our hope in heaven. We also face the dynamic tension between prayer for complete healing on earth, and the prayer of submission to God's permissive will, even if our life traces its way through some dark pathways of suffering and pain on our way to the golden streets of heaven.

In our culture, for most our lives, we've found quick relief, surgical

interventions, medicinal remedies, therapeutic treatments, and answered prayers that brought healing to most of our ailments.

We've been blessed with sufficient resources to meet our needs for daily bread, shelter, transportation, etc. So it's a little harder for us to come to grips with our own mortality.

Our "can do" American culture of "solution orientation," and our faith orientation of confidence in prayer, makes us feel so let down, and dismayed when the answers are elusive, and the prospects for solution seem to slip away. We expect better than that, and grow frustrated and dismayed when we encounter the "I don't know's" and the "I'm not sure we can fix this" remarks from the Doctors. Our frustration deepens when our prayers seem to be knocking on heaven's doors in vain.

It may be helpful to wrestle with the "suffering servant" passages of Isaiah, as they portray a God who joined us on the human pathway of mortal life, and shared our experiences of pain as God's messianic "suffering servant." I'm so grateful that I've not had to be a "frequent flier" along that pathway of the suffering servant. Yet, I know

that, even as God's child, I am not immune from having to follow in the footsteps of suffering that were traced by our Savior.

I wonder if it's possible for us to feel some alternative sense of hope and help, simply in knowing that our stumbling efforts to walk through our valleys of suffering can find us walking side by side with the Christ of the Emmaus Road. He accompanied two distraught disciples, even though they did not know it was He that was walking by their side. Could it be that he is walking by our side right now, whether or not we are aware that he is there?

May you sense His presence standing by your side as you break the bread of suffering, and prepare to drink an eventual cup of sorrow. His nail-pierced hand is now stretched out to give you strength to face another day, and walk another mile.

As you lay your head upon Christ's strong and holy shoulder, and look up, you'll see gentle compassion in his eyes, and above his eyes, see the impress of the crown of thorns that left their mark upon his holy brow. Those scars that survived upon his holy form, even past his resurrection, can assure you with

unspoken words that whisper deep into your spirit, "I know what you're facing; I care, and I will be your strength as you walk with me through this valley."

In the words of Paul from Romans 8:38-39, (NIV) *"For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, {39} neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord."*

We join hands with you and your loved one, and together in prayer, we lift your hands, and place them into His nail-scarred hands. We pray that you may find them to be healing hands in this life. But we know that you'll find peace and strength, and confidence in the continued care of his crucified hands because they belong to the resurrected Son of God.

With love and care,  
Pastor Bill

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