

# Finding God in Pain or Illness

Living day in and day out with sickness is just plain difficult. Listen to this person's own experience.

"I lived with a father who had a stroke at the age of 52 and died at 56. Two years later I broke my neck in a freak accident which left not only my body but my world and my spirit shattered. Where was God in all of this?"

I think my search for answers began with my father's death. I had lived with him as he went down a long path of failing health, frustration, anger and depression, despair and finally death.

And on that cold January day as the plastic covering carefully concealed his waiting grave, I hadn't a glimmer of understanding, only a sense of loss and separation, a chill in my heart as numbing as the swirling wind that buffeted the tent. Eighteen months later, as I lay on the floor of my college apartment, unable to move from the impact of the fall, I foresaw a road in front of me as terrifying as my father's. Although it became evident over the following months that I would have no lasting paralysis or dysfunction, I would have years, maybe a lifetime of pain and poor health.

I began to seek out friends, professionals, doctors, and healers, anyone who held out any hope of reducing my pain: physical, psychological and spiritual.

I railed against the injustice of my suffering, screaming anguished questions to an unyielding silence. Why did this happen to me? How am I supposed to cope? How can I even pray?

## *Working your way through*

These are gripping human questions and they do not have easy answers, but for me asking for, confronting, and accepting the answers was the beginning of a faith that has enabled me not only to pray, but to believe more profoundly than ever before.

Perhaps sharing in my experience might enable you to seek your own answers and a faith to sustain you in your own suffering, or the suffering of someone you care for.

## *Allow yourself to get angry with God*

I know now that sickness can be redemptive, that it can force us to search the very depths of our being where we find God's indwelling and faithful presence. I am in no way implying that through sickness or in sickness we necessarily find redemption, as if sickness were essential for our spiritual growth. While it is true that we might find God there, from what I've seen and experienced, most people are likely to become embittered and turn away from God than to view sickness as spiritual opportunity

*Depression is so much a part of suffering that it seems trite to mention it ... the God we pray to does not seem to respond or to initiate any new consciousness. Praying is like singing down an empty hall ... we hear only our own song ... we scream and in the scream is the beginning of prayer.*

*Nathan Kollat- - "Songs of Suffering"*

We get tired of the daily struggle, we don't feel good, and we don't like the way we look or the way we have no tolerance for others, and the way we sometimes hurt others because we hurt.

## *Listen for God's response*

I live near a huge cemetery, and there I would take long, painful walks, thinking about life and death and sickness. I listened to the geese flying over, and I listened to silence. Slowly, finally the silence seemed to speak. During a moment of deep prayer, I sensed the grace-filled touch of the divine on my shattered humanity, and I saw the boundless horizon, to which the spirit flies, unencumbered by brokenness. A very ancient prayer came to my lips seeking to explain the unexplainable: "God within me, God without,"...

*God within me, God without, how ever can I be in doubt...? I am the sower and the sown, God's self unfolding and God's own.*

*From a Runic saying*

I slowly began to understand that even if a single one of us is not whole, God too is diminished. It was as if the glory of life couldn't truly be realised until there is no more death, no more sickness. As God is in each one of us, so we are in God and in one another, and to the extent that any one of us is not whole, then God's creation is not whole.

Once I began to feel this communion with others and with God, I did not feel so isolated and alone. I felt more at peace, with a flickering of strength inside. Waiting for the results of tests and agonising through numerous medical procedures became less frightening because I was never alone. God was right there with me, if not in stillness then in the friends gathered around me, or in a beautiful bird that only some Creator-mind could have made to soar. The wisdom of the Creator became evident, everywhere and in everything around me.

### *Accept reality; rejoice in the good*

We get tired of the daily struggle, we don't feel good, and we don't like the way we look or the way we have no tolerance for others, and the way we sometimes hurt others because we hurt.

I know in my own case my frustration made me want to raise my fist in rage at this "all powerful omniscient God" who could allow such horrible things to happen. How could I praise such a cruel being? Why hadn't God protected me? What had I done to deserve this? I can't say I got specific answers to all my furious questions, I can only say that the questioning itself seemed to be a stage that I had to go through in the gradual "unfolding" of myself through sickness. This first step of seeming disbelief and lack of faith can ultimately lead to peace of soul and physical health.

### *Pray for your own healing*

We are imperfect vessels yet the one who is perfect dwells within and longs to heal and bring us to perfection. Pray for healing and look for it and don't be surprised if it is your outlook which first needs healing. You must look into your heart and find a reason, however small, for living and then realise that God created reason and longs to help you live in wholeness and happiness.

We so often elevate healing to the miraculous that we forget it is within us to heal, for God is within as well as without. We are to come to God as a child to a loving parent and not only look but also ask, expecting good things.

Anyone can pray like this. Don't listen to the lie that you are not "holy" enough to be "worthy" of healing. No saint, or guru, no pastoral minister is any more powerful than you are. The gift of God within is of equal measure.

Admittedly we often do not see healing. Disease consumes life all around us. Is that God's fault? If not, whose fault is it? I learned through my own futile questioning that it isn't nearly as important to know where the "blame" lies as it is to know where the "cure" comes from.

***I do not believe that sheer suffering teaches. If suffering alone taught, then the entire world would be wise, since everyone suffers. To suffering must be added mourning, understanding, patience, love, openness, and the willingness to remain vulnerable.***

*-Anne Morrow Lindbergh "Hour of Gold, Hour, of Lead"*

## *Prayer for others healing*

It's better and certainly more effective to reach out your own hand in healing touch and love. I realised that my own tongue had often been as mute in my neighbour's tragedy as I had accused God of being in mine. I began to ask new questions like - how much life do we give to those who hurt us?

I not only started praying for healing but also to be a healer. I learned to "soak" those around me with light and love. All you need to do is bring people into your heart and let them rest there. Then as you go about your daily routine, set aside 15 or 20 minutes to visualise them whole and healthy, returned to the vitality that they were created to enjoy.

## *Take heart*

I have seen wonderful things happen by being aware of God's presence and holding people in this presence through prayer.

Even the negative feelings and emptiness I had over my Dad's death were turned around this way in my prayer. He was transformed and I began to see him alive in heaven.

I too have been transformed from a person full of doubts and questions, to someone learning through my own journey with sickness how to reach out to others. God began to speak to me in the very centre of my being that before had harboured only anger and confusion, God became the Light I was trying to bathe others in.

God wants to heal, comfort, and restore in you and through you. Touch and heal all you can, so that you may reap what you have sown ... God's unfolding as well as your own."