

CLINGING TO HOPE

STUDY TWO

When Suffering Leaves Its Mark

Selected Scriptures

What can we say to those who hoped for healing but were never healed? They need answers based on the Word of God.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

HAS a serious illness afflicted you or someone you love? Or has an accident left you or a family member with a disability? Or has an emotional trauma caused deep depression or spiritual turmoil?

If so, you need hope . . . *but what do you hope for . . . and whom do you hope in?*

Some hang their hope on self-proclaimed miracle workers. Desperately ill, they travel long distances and spend their life savings chasing a dream of restored health. Sadly, when healing never comes, a cloud of disillusionment darkens their souls and their hope crumbles. They wonder, *Why didn't God heal?* Maybe they lacked faith. Perhaps they used the wrong prayer technique or harbored some unconfessed sin.

To clear the fog of confusion about sickness and healing, we must go straight to God's Word. Accounts of miracles leap off the pages of Scripture, so we know that God can heal. And yet, we still have questions. Does God heal people today as He did in the past? If so, why doesn't God heal me and those I love? Why do so many people suffer?

Let's begin our search for answers by laying a row of theological truths on which to construct a solid hope in God.



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PREPARE YOUR HEART

As you open the Word, lay out before the Lord what heartache or pain you may have. Draw near to Him in prayer so you can feel His peace and find answers from His Word.

Father, suffering is a real issue in my life. With a humble desire to know Your heart, I acknowledge that Your ways are higher than mine, and I trust You with the mysteries of heaven that elude my grasp . . . but I seek answers. I come to You for wisdom, comfort, assurance, guidance, and peace from Your Word. In Jesus' name, amen.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

In the previous *Searching the Scriptures* study, James assured us that, someday, God will issue His weary children “the crown of life” (James 1:12) when Christ returns to renew all things and cleanse His creation of suffering, sickness, and sin.

Until then, we live in a fallen world—the tragic aftermath of Adam and Eve’s disobedience (Genesis 3:1–24). Understanding how their original sin relates to sickness and healing is vital to knowing where to place our hope.



Observation: Four Foundational Passages

In the initial phase of *Searching the Scriptures*, we observe what the Bible says without shading the words with our own opinions. Notice contrasts and comparisons, repetitions, and key statements that you can come back to in the interpretation phase.

Sin

David traced the origin of his sin to what point in time, according to *Psalms 51:5*?



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How did Paul explain the origin of all human depravity in *Romans 5:12*?

Sickness

How did David say his sin impacted him physically in *Psalms 32:3–5*?

What assumption did the disciples make about the reason for the man's sight impairment in *John 9:1–3*?
How did Jesus respond?

On these foundational passages, five truths about sin, sickness, and healing emerge.

David went to the root of his problem: "I was born a sinner" (Psalm 51:5). We disobey God because we have a nature addicted to sinfulness. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



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Interpretation: Five Foundational Truths

In the interpretation phase, we draw out the meaning of the Scripture we observed, looking carefully at the context of the passages.

Primarily, there are two types of sin—*original sin* and *personal sin*. This statement is based on comparing Psalm 51:5—“I was born a sinner”—with 51:7—“Purify me from my sins.” We are sinners by nature who commit sins through our actions. Look up *original sin* and *personal sins* in your Bible study resources and explain what these terms mean. For an online resource, consult *The Encyclopedia of the Bible* at biblegateway.com.

Think of it this way, original sin is the root; personal sins represent the fruit that comes from a sinful nature. We are sinners by nature from birth and become sinners by choice as we carry out acts of personal sinfulness. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Original sin introduced sickness, suffering, and death to the human race. Romans 5:12 and 1 Corinthians 15:21 elaborate this point. How did Paul connect the first sin of Adam to sickness, suffering, and death in the world? Read Romans 5:13–19 for his complete thoughts.

Had Adam and Eve never eaten the forbidden fruit, there would never have been death in the human race. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



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Often, there exists a direct relationship between personal sins and physical sickness. David's experience in *Psalm 32:3–5* illustrates this point, as does Paul's warning in *1 Corinthians 11:29–30*. How might personal sins lead to physical sickness?

Sometimes there is no relationship between personal sins and human afflictions. Jesus corrected the disciples, saying, "It was not because of his sins or his parents' sins" (John 9:3). What can you conclude about making assumptions regarding the cause of a person's suffering?

Jesus healed the man born blind, but He did not heal many others.
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Sometimes it is not God's will that we be healed. Paul's experience in *2 Corinthians 12:7–9* and also *2 Timothy 4:20* confirms what point about God's will and healing?



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Our prayer for those going through sickness must acknowledge His will. “Lord, if it is Your will and if it is according to Your plan, bring healing to my loved one.” We pray, and then we leave the results with God. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Correlation: By His Wounds We Are Healed

The fifth statement above—that sometimes God does not want to heal—is the most controversial. Some Bible teachers teach that healing is always God’s will, and they point to *Isaiah 53:5* and *1 Peter 2:21–24* as proof. They say that Jesus’ suffering on the cross promises physical healing for all who believe. Read these passages and explain your interpretation of the phrase, “by his wounds you are healed,” in the space below. To what kind of healing was each author referring?

Christ’s death promises deliverance from sin’s curse and ultimate healing when we step from this life into glory where death and disease will be no more. Paul’s example of not getting healed and similar examples of others in the New Testament demonstrate that healing is not always God’s will. He is sovereign over our lives and has the right to heal us now or heal us later.

It was not God’s will to heal Paul of his thorn in the flesh. Why not? The mystery rests with God. Leave it with Him. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



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Application: The Ministry of Comfort

As we conclude our study, let's listen to Paul's counsel to those who bear the marks of suffering. From his experience of suffering, Paul offered the following guidelines.

Comfort others with the comfort you receive from God. Paul's pain opened doors of ministry to others in pain. "When they are troubled," Paul wrote, "we will be able to give them the same comfort God has given us" (2 Corinthians 1:4).

Allow your troubles to remind you to rely on God, not yourself. Paul's suffering taught him to stop trusting in himself and "to rely only on God" (1:9).

Give thanks to God for answered prayer. Paul focused on answered prayer and the grace of God. "Then many people will give thanks because God has graciously answered so many prayers for our safety" (1:11).

The common thread is God—His comfort, His trustworthiness, His grace. How can you draw your thoughts to God during your troubles today? If you don't know how to begin, try finding something for which to give Him thanks.

Paul also leveraged his suffering to help him *draw near* to others in their pain and to *draw upon* others for prayer. We tend to hide from people when we suffer. What can you do today to move from isolation to deeper relationships?



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God can heal the sick, and He does heal . . . but not everyone. Why does He heal some and not others? The full answer resides in the mind of God, which is beyond our comprehension. So, we view the subject of healing through the lens of faith, resting our hope on His sovereign plan. Thankfully, Scripture doesn't leave us wondering what to do when we're sick. James offers specific steps in James 5:13–16, which we'll discover in the next *Searching the Scriptures* study.



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, thank You my Shepherd that, although I walk through dark valleys, I do not need to be afraid. “You are close beside me,” assured the psalmist, and I cling to that promise (Psalm 23:4). You also promise a feast of blessings and a cup that overflows awaiting me in Your house someday. I long for that day. In Jesus’ name, amen.

