

## Being A Parent Or Loved One Of One Suffering From A Disability

Does the Lord speak to us about the whys and wherefores of how it is some of us find ourselves with a child or loved one suffering from a serious disability? As we search the Scriptures, where the Lord of all might and power speaks as a heavenly Father to His children, we wonderfully can find that He does explain such thing to our heart and mind. He has given us light in His Word so that we don't need to stumble and grope through a dark meaningless life. His Word is a light to our feet and a lamp to our path, (Psalm 119:105). For us who live in what can be at times a dark world, He has given in Christ Jesus, a kindly light to lead us in understanding and bring us at last to the land of fullness of light, life and perfection " His land.

I understand that there is much that can be drawn out of Scripture that addresses in various ways our heart-felt and often troubled queries as to why we have a disabled child or loved one. In many ways, it is similar to the whys and wherefores and mental, spiritual, emotional and physical reactions and experiences that overtake us when a loved one is taken from us in death. Just as the Lord explains the whys and wherefores of physical death and of the grief it can bring, so too He explains to us principally about the passing of abilities in our children and loved ones at times. Just as the Lord explains He has come to conquer death and to bring eternal, perfect life, so too He teaches us that He has the answer to the problems of our loved ones in their often grievous disabilities. There is an ultimate healing and fullness of life for them in Him. So, just as there is rich and comforting instruction in God's Word to give us a sure hope in Christ Jesus of an answer to death and a victory over it, so too there is rich Christian hope for those of us who grieve the loss of various abilities in our often severely disabled children and loved ones. Â

Let us consider something then of what our Heavenly Father has to say to us in Scripture on this matter of why our disabled children and loved ones, and why us?Â

Our Heavenly Father Did Not Make Them Like They Are

Some think that because the Lord is truly sovereign, we should see our special needs and disabled children and loved ones as made and created by Him with all their disabilities and often life long struggles. It is thought by some that the Lord is the author of our children's disabilities. We should therefore see such, if sent to us, as God's "beautiful creation" therefore it is wrong of us to feel or express any sorrow or grief that such a child or loved one has been given us. I put it to you that disabilities are no more the Almighty's creation than death is. We should not think that the Lord made us to die. We should no more accept the disabilities of our loved one as a beautiful thing than we would accept death as a beautiful thing. Death, (and the curse as it may be found in a disabled person), is an enemy Christ came to destroy, (1Corinthians 15:25-26). Â

Yes, it is true the Father in His sovereignty does send to parents and families little ones with often sad disabilities, and loved ones battling afflictions that handicap them. They come to us via His mighty, Fatherly hand, but we must correctly understand His attitude to their disabilities and afflictions and why He sent them to us.Â

From where do all disabilities come? From where do all the sad, oft trying, painful, cruel, heart-breaking disabilities originate? They come from the curse that fell on all mankind when man, listening to the Tempter, turned from the Lord's good ways to do their own thing. That Evil One, tempting man, led us into the way of death, suffering, tears and all the afflictions and miseries of life.Â

God is not the author of sin, but He can and does use it to accomplish His great, good and wise purposes. In this way He shows His sovereignty over Satan and the curse. So, do not think of God as the source of sin and its curse " including the disabilities of our loved onesÂ

The origin of sin and the curse is to be found when the mighty archangel Lucifer, created with a free will, chose in pride to make himself as God, and led a great number of once perfect spiritual beings into demonic rebellion against the holy, all wise and good God, (Isaiah 14:12-15 & Jude 6). This Lucifer, also known as Satan and the Devil, then in great subtlety led man by the temptation into rebellion against God as we know from Genesis 3. This pride and rebellion and the natural consequences and fruit that followed, and the then proper activation of God's divine justice to these great wrong, are where the origins of sin, death, pain and suffering are to be found. Christ Jesus clearly attributes a certain woman having an "infirmity eighteen years" as having been "bound by Satan", not God, (Luke 13:11 & 16). Â

God in His sovereignty now takes and uses the curse and death and evil for holy, wise and good purposes. He even uses death and the greatest evil, via the betrayal and death of His only begotten Son, to accomplish the greatest good - the redemption of His children and the whole creation. Â

What is in the heart of the Father and His only begotten Son our Saviour as He comes to rescue us, His children, from the curse? What are His feelings when He sees our sorrows and sufferings? What is His attitude to the crippling things that can happen to the bodies, minds, emotions and lives of our children and loved ones? He has no pleasure as such in these profound sorrows, disabilities and sadnesses. Such things grieve Him. Such things stir up His great compassion, grace and mercy. God Almighty, the faithful covenant God, has come among us to crush the head of the Serpent who

brought the curse and led man astray. The Lord, declares war on the Evil One and the curse (Genesis 3:15), with its subsequent sorrows of life such as the disabilities men suffer. The Father sends His only begotten Son to rescue, save and bring an end to the curse with its death and disabilities.Â

One place where we see these above truths graphically illustrated is in the gospel of John 11:1-45. Here, in this incident of the death and resurrection of Lazarus, we are told much of how the Lord views and yet uses death and suffering, and His attitude to them. Note Christ Jesusâ€™™ reaction and attitude to Lazarusâ€™™ death and to Martha and Maryâ€™™s subsequent pain, confusion and tearful sorrow. In verse 33 & 38 we read in part, â€œHe groaned in the spirit and was troubled. â€¡ Jesus therefore again groaning in Himself â€¡â€• The word groaned and groaning in the original meant to be angry â€“ literally gnashing the teeth. Then we read in verse 35, â€œJesus wept.â€• Is Jesus weeping because He is sad over the death of Lazarus as such? No, because He already knew (see verses 11-15), that Lazarus was dead and that He would raise him from the dead and show the glory of Godâ€™™s grace and power to rescue from the curse in a most wonderful way. I put it to you that Jesus wept because of the pain and hurt and confusion and grief the curse has brought to His children and as He saw it in Martha and Mary. So, we should see Christ Jesus, our wonderful Saviour, declaring war on the curse in this passage and showing us the victory He has over it. All is written here to give us hope and to cause us to trust in Him who has grace and power and can be touched with the feeling of our infirmities. (Hebrew 4:15-16.) All happened that day Lazarus died and the day he was raised from the dead, so we may see these profound things of glory and hope. (Hebrews 2:14-15 & 17-18).Â

So, Christ Jesus hates the curse! He comes to destroy it! He grieves for His children when they are hurt by the pain and sorrow of the curse.Â It Is Not Wrong To Grieve

All this means, I suggest, that we who have disabled and handicapped children and loved ones, do not have to â€“loveâ€™™ what has happened to our child or loved one as if an act of Godâ€™™s love made the handicap of our child. Godâ€™™s original intention was that all things be good and perfect. It is at times inexpressibly sad when a wonderful little human life or a wonderful human being in later life suffers injury or disease leading to a disability. It is sad! It is wrong! It does cause anger, a sense of despair, failure, deep grief and tears similar to that experienced with the death of a loved one. However, grief over the death of a loved one is punctilio â€“ symbolized by a full stop (.). For all its depth and trauma it is a once only event. The grief and trauma over a living loved one with a disability is linear â€“ symbolized by a line ( \_\_\_\_\_ ). Having a disabled loved one can be an ongoing life time of renewed grieving as we regularly face the loss or absence of ability in a loved one. It can and does cause a mental and physical sense of inability to cope. It can create in us the wish to retire and retreat. All these sort of reactions are â€“normalâ€™™. We need to understand them, and in Godâ€™™s grace accept them and be patient with them in our selves and in others.Â

We do not err then to think of the handicap/s of our loved ones as wrong and to feel uncomfortable with them and to long for deliverance from them for our loved ones and ourselves. In doing this we are neither betraying nor hating God nor Godâ€™™s good works of creation â€“ we hate the curse and the cruel havoc it has wrought. Â

We do not err that we long for a cure for our loved ones affliction and to find an end to the curse that blights their life. To long for such is to follow in the footsteps of Christ Jesus â€“ who went on to work and win such deliverance.Â

It is not wrong to feel sad, angry and to grieve at what is lost and gone, just as it is not wrong to grieve in the death of a loved one. Only, we are not to blame the One who does all things well, and is good and holy and righteous in all His works. Nor is it right to grieve as those who have no hope. Rather, in the light of all the glorious things that Christ Jesus is and has done and will do in the restoration and healing of all things, we are to comfort and encourage one another (1Thessalonians 4:13-18). Â Our Sure And Certain Christian Hope

We should see our loved ones battling a disability as part of what has gone wrong in the world. They are casualties in the great war of the Seed of the Woman and the Seed of the Serpent. The suffering to our disabled loved ones and our suffering who love them, as well as the actual disabilities, are part of the same problem as death.Â They are Christâ€™™s enemies (1 Corinthians 15:25-26). He has come to destroy the power of such. Our Saviour showed His attitude to the sufferings of people by His deep compassion and extending life giving power in raising the dead and healing all manner of sickness and disability. In Him, we and our disabled loved ones are shown, there really is true, honest hope in life now and in that life to come, in Christ Jesus.Â

One day, in Christ Jesus, our loved ones will be made perfect and healed in body and mind and spirit â€“ in Messiahâ€™™s land Emmanuelâ€™™s country of glory and perfection.Â

How should we then view our disabled loved ones? We frankly are to recognize their struggles, limitations, what is lost to them, their present and perhaps future difficulties and struggles and pains. Recognizing them causes us who love them to struggle and to feel pain too. But, here is our sure and certain hope in Christ our wonderful Redeemer. We are to recognize and see our children in the Lord Jesus as they will be one day. My wife Christine and I have a quite severely disabled little boy â€“ though he is now aged 16 years of age. He has had and has and will have all his life in this world, a whole range of severe and disabling afflictions of body and mind. Yet when I see this son of mine with his somewhat deformed little body, his struggling intellect and battle to communicate, I see him with the spectacles of faith of what he

will be one day. Already now, in Christ, I see him as he will be one day in the land of perfection, I see him a big, strong, perfect, beautifully, fully capable, restored and healed in all parts, glorious young man in every way. Knowing this helps me not to be afraid to face what ever has to be faced by God's grace. Knowing this, helps me to be patient and caring of him. Knowing this helps me to be brave and to rest in the Lord as a faithful covenant God to us and our children. Knowing this encourages me to teach him of the Lord and where his and my help in life and death, is truly to be found. Knowing these things helps me as a man, a husband and a father to be brave and to have courage in the Lord as we patiently and daily battle this enemy. Knowing this I can yet laugh and find a joy in life with him and others still. I know there is victory in the Lord Jesus. This is our Christian hope which is a sure and certain hope. Why Does Our Heavenly Father Send Them To Us?

While the Lord did not make our children with their handicaps, we should understand that these wounded ones and casualties of the curse did not come to us because of "bad luck" or "undirected chance". These victims of the war of the Seed of the Woman against the Evil One and the curse are sent to us by our Heavenly Father in His good, wise and perfect providence, for us to care for them. A

But, why are they sent to us?

We ask, "why us?" because disabled children and loved ones, for all the blessing they can be, and as much as we love them "even because we love them - cost us. It is often a cost we fear we cannot pay" such as our life now not being our own, acute pressures of mind, feelings, and daily living, inward pain, sorrow and grief. We know we should not worry, but we at times do become anxious over what will become of them in their life. For example, we find ourselves asking, "What will happen to them if we should die? Who would look after them?" It is not wrong to wish that such things had never happened to us. It is not wrong to wish we did not have to face such hard and painful decisions and deal with such uncertainty. Christ our Saviour also, in light of the cost He had to pay to care for His disabled, handicapped people, instinctively "drew back" in the Garden of Gethsemane didn't He? (Matthew 26:39). As a man, I have felt a failure, and have felt that somehow I have "lost face" in society because of having a disabled child. There are at times a whole range of emotions and difficult issues with which I have to wrestle. Yes, it is unreasonable in a way for a Christian to have such negative feelings and difficulties but such feelings are common, and part of our "pain". It is O.K. not to want such burdens and to drink of "that cup". Just like it is not wrong to not want to die. Both are part of the dreadful curse from which we long for deliverance and, thank God, we surely find in Christ Jesus.

But yet, in this world some of us are called upon by the Lord whom we serve, to bear such a cross, carry such a burden, drink of such a cup.

But why should it be us? Some of us are called to this because the Lord, in His great work of salvation and crushing the curse, has an important task yet to perform in the world and in the lives of His people and as a witness to the world. In Colossians 1:24 we read of the Lord teaching Paul a truth he expresses this way, "Who now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for His body's sake, which is the church". This verse is indicating that Christ in His work of redemption in the great war against the curse and the Evil One, while winning a decisive victory at Calvary, has yet mopping up operations to complete. There is a work of grace yet to be brought to completion via the way of affliction for his people. In this, His people are called to play a part. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ must be seen to triumph in and through the afflictions of His children.

You no doubt have realized that some people only profess the Christian faith when all things are going well in their life. Their faith in God only works when all is fine. How can the watching world, and at times our own hearts, know the reality of God's grace and life in Christ Jesus when we are only fair weather believers? It is when the going is heavy, and the circumstances are difficult, that His love and power to keep and help are clearly highlighted. In such times we see the reality of the living Saviour and His ability to hold, keep and bless.

Part too, of why God sends a disabled loved one for them to bear, is explained in the life and events of Job. The Lord permitted grief, confusion, hurt and deep sorrow to enter the life of Job. He suffered the loss of much and he could not understand why him. His friends could not understand why either. Yet, we know that the Lord, to show the great wonder of His love and grace allowed the curse in a deep way to touch Job. We hardly could find a man in history who has suffered the loss of so much as Job suffered, and given so much pain to bear. Yet in spite of all he was called upon to bear, the Lord showed to the Evil One and the watching world that He can keep and care for His children in such a time of need. He showed His grace is sufficient and victorious in all that life or death can bring.

So, even though things were so painful for Job that at times he wished he was not born, yet we see grace triumphing when he is led to cast himself on the Lord. He knew that the Lord was in control. He could not understand, but he knew the Lord understood what was going on in all that was happening. Job said, "Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him." (Job 13:15). Job's hope, the hope we need in the hour of our need, in all that can possibly come to hurt in life and death, was expressed in Job 19:25, "For I know that my Redeemer liveth, and that He shall stand at the latter day upon the earth". We need to remember too, to see the latter end God has in store for His children when they are called to carry heavy burdens. We can be very positive! We read of Job's wonderful, positive end in chapter 42:12-17, where in part we are told, "So the Lord blessed the latter end of Job more than his beginning". When we wonder why did the Lord send a

difficult thing for me to face and live with, let us remember the Lord has had a great, good, glorious purpose in it, and that in Christ Jesus we shall have a most blessed end.

Another reason why the Lord sends to us His wounded and weak ones is so that we and the covenant community of believers may have a community built on the right perspective of what is most important in life. We are told in 1 Corinthians 12:12-27 that the body of Christ is never complete without members of all sorts of various gifts and needs. It is when we are "put together" with all our abilities and disabilities that the "body life" of Christ our head is seen in a We are reminded by such that the most important qualities and things in life are not physical perfection, intellectual superiority, material possessions and social success. It is the graces and qualities of soul, character and personality that make life eminently worthwhile. At times our disabled members have a beauty and worth that put to shame the physically and intellectually capable members.

The reality is that in many, if not all cases, the capable and able bodied and minded people have their own spiritual and personality disabilities. Disabled members often have an openness, simplicity, lack of hypocrisy, joy in little things, appreciation of kindness etc that abled members lack. Our little boy Mark, for all his disabilities, is such a willing helper, a cheerful companion, one who knows what it is to readily laugh, a really brave little boy for all that he has suffered in bodily pain and discomfort. We have never ever seen him angry. All such put me to shame at this young man's ability in these most excellent characteristics of human nature.

I must mention also that among the most impressive people "the most impressive" Christians "I have ever met have been those battling serious disabilities. I think of a man called Willie Mack, who battled severe Down Syndrome and his sister Lily Mack, who cared for him. Their Christian graces and faithfulness will live in my heart always. Then there is Merv Deavereaux "severely crippled by Muscular Dystrophy and deprived of all social and material advantage, who overcame in the Lord so many seemingly impossible obstacles to be an outstanding Christian man of sterling worth. I remember too Rodney Holmes, again suffering the ravages of Muscular Dystrophy, who was brought at the 11th hour of his life to an abundance of life in Christ, and first taught me how wonderfully death is conquered in the Saviour "as are all disabilities. The qualities of humanity, or Christian graces that enhance life so much, including a wonderful sense of humour and joy, were so evident in them. These people, and many more, were and are wonderful trophies of God's grace. To me they were and are the salt of the earth. I am all the richer for having known them. I am challenged in my Christian life by their graces.

It can be very hard work, emotionally and physically draining and a great challenge to have a disabled loved one dependent upon you, often for all your or their life. There are at times great difficulties and sorrows to be born. Yet this must be said too, it is a great privilege to be involved with such a person.

It is in the hour of need that the Christian graces of faith, hope and love are called forth. In such times, for both our disabled loved ones and ourselves, the reality of Jesus and His work in such lives is seen. We see and there are formed in us such beautiful qualities as bravery, self-sacrifice, understanding, selflessness, compassion, kindness, empathy, sympathy and patience. That is why the Lord sends to us the wounded and casualties of the curse and war of the ages. This is what Romans 5:3-5 and James 1:3-4 teach us. We read: "And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience; and patience experience; and experience, hope: and hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us." And, "Knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience. But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing." Conclusion

The Lord takes what are sad, broken, disabled, souls in need and works wonder and gives glory in Christ Jesus to them, and to those that care for them. His grace is made perfect in weakness. He will work all things together for good. (Romans 8:28). We can trust Him for the present and for a good future.

We need, as those that care for one another, to remind one another of the promises and truths of the great God of our salvation. We need, as brethren to share, encourage and help one another in our pilgrimage to final healing and perfection in Immanuel's Land. Remember, too, that while there is at times a burden to be born in having and caring for a disabled loved one, that there are blessings to be counted too, and that, "Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord." (1 Corinthians 15:58)

Isn't it a wonderful privilege to have our life in the care and keeping of the Saviour, who does all things well, and will perfect that which concerns us? This tremendous truth is confessed in Heidelberg Catechism Question and Answer number One? Let us not only read it, but go forth and live in whatever our calling, wherever or lot is cast, whatever our afflictions, in the light, sure future hope and grace of it. A

Q. What is your only comfort in life and death?

A. That I am not my own, but belong with body and soul, both in life and in death, to my faithful Saviour Jesus Christ. He has fully paid for all my sins with His precious blood, and has set me free from all the power of the devil. He also preserves me in such a way that without the will of my heavenly Father not a hair can fall from my head; indeed, all

things must work together for my salvation. Therefore, by His Holy Spirit He also assures me of eternal life and makes me heartily willing and ready from now on to live for Him. Â

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