

Chronic Illness

Dear Facilitator: For several weeks we have been discussing how successful families communicate, support one another, and organize their lives.

This week we are going to focus on understanding chronic illness.

It might be helpful for you to know what we hope to accomplish through this lesson.

Participants will:

1. See God's presence in the midst of illness.
2. Identify ways to serve God through chronic illness.
3. Find ways to help others who struggle with chronic illness.

We pray that God will give you direction and clarity as you prepare the lesson and activities. We hope that the families in your group will grow together in God's love and become a source of friendship and support for one another.

Blessings



Scripture SUPPORT

Book of Job

John 9

Ephesians 1:3-14

Psalm 16:2,5

I say to the LORD, "You are my LORD; apart from you I have no good thing.

LORD, you alone are my portion and my cup; you make my lot secure.


Psalm 73:25-26

Whom have I in heaven but you? And earth has nothing I desire besides you. My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.


Psalm 142:5

I cry to you, LORD; I say, "You are my refuge, my portion in the land of the living.


Welcome 5 minutes


 **Say:** Welcome back! I hope it's been a good week for all of you as you have been working diligently on many things that are positively influencing your family.

Last week we spent time focusing on the five love languages and learning how each family member experiences and shows love.

 **Ask:** Did anyone try something this past week that made a positive difference in your family that you would be willing to share?

Introduction 5 minutes

 **Ask:** When you get a cold or the flu, how do you feel? If people are available to help, what kind of help do you appreciate?


 **Say:** Typically, after a few days of a cold or flu, our bodies heal, and we return to our normal activities.

Today, we are going to learn about ways to help those who are sick for longer periods of time.

Today's teaching objectives are to:

1. See God's presence in the midst of illness.
2. Identify ways to serve God through chronic illness.
3. Find ways to help others who struggle with chronic illness.

Family & Table Talk 20 minutes

 **Say:** As you enjoy your dinner, discuss the following questions:

1. What do you do for someone who is sick or hurt?
2. Why do you do what you do?

After meal, children are dismissed to their group.

40 minutes

Parent Training

Family Time

CHRONIC ILLNESS

Because of sin, our bodies no longer work as they should. Bodies continue to break down, as one gets older.

When Jesus walked this earth, people believed that if someone was born with a defect, it was because one of the parents committed sin.

While sickness does result from sin, a parent cannot typically be blamed for causing a birth defect.

Read John 9 and hear Jesus's response.

John 9:1-12

Jesus Heals a Man Born Blind

As he went along, he saw a man blind from birth. ² His disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?"

³ "Neither this man nor his parents sinned," said Jesus, "but this happened so that the works of God might be displayed in him. ⁴ As long as it is day, we must do the works of him who sent me. Night is coming,

when no one can work. ⁵ While I am in the world, I am the light of the world."

⁶ After saying this, he spit on the ground, made some mud with the saliva, and put it on the man's eyes.

⁷ "Go," he told him, "wash in the Pool of Siloam" (this word means "Sent"). So the man went and washed, and came home seeing.

⁸ His neighbors and those who had formerly seen him begging asked, "Isn't this the same man who used to sit and beg?" ⁹ Some claimed that he was.

Others said, "No, he only looks like him."

But he himself insisted, "I am the man."

¹⁰ "How then were your eyes opened?" they asked.

¹¹ He replied, “The man they call Jesus made some mud and put it on my eyes. He told me to go to Siloam and wash. So I went and washed, and then I could see.”

¹² “Where is this man?” they asked him.

“I don’t know,” he said.

If we had time to continue reading, we would see how the Pharisees used this man’s healing to put Jesus to the test.

What was Jesus’s response to his disciples?

John 9:3 “Neither this man nor his parents sinned,” said Jesus, “but this happened so that the works of God might be displayed in him.”

Living in chronic pain—pain that does not go away—cannot easily be defined. Esther Smith, a woman who has had chronic pain for many years, wrote *When Chronic Pain & Illness Take Everything Away: How to Mourn our Losses*. In her book, she writes, “...The experience of unrelenting and debilitating pain feels impossible to explain. Chronic pain doesn’t take one or two or three things away. Many times, we lose our first dream our second dream our third dream, and most of the ones that follow” (2016, p.5).

Another author, Kimberly Rae, wrote *Sick and Tired: Empathy, Encouragement, and Practical Help for Those Suffering from Chronic Health Problems*. She describes how it can be difficult when one is sick but, on the outside, looks perfectly healthy. Kimberly felt that people were judging her and thinking she was a hypochondriac.

Chronic pain is more common than one thinks. In the United States, 100 million adults experience moderate or severe chronic pain according to Gaskin and Richard (as cited in Smith 2016).

Think about how Job handled his grief and pain. Job called out to God (Job 7:11). Some people are afraid to cry out to God, giving God our deepest and most raw emotions.

While going through such dark times, we do not always get the response or explanation we want back from God.

With Job, after all his friends sat with him and gave him horrible counsel, Job realizes, “Surely I spoke of things I did not understand, things too wonderful for me to know.” He realized that God is bigger than he could imagine.

How do you handle suffering?

Some try to distract themselves. While it might work for a while, it never continues to work. It is never easy to understand God’s purpose in the midst of suffering.

Esther Smith writes, “As I purposefully approached God, He began to change my heart. He began to give me a desire to trust him. I still cry, but it no longer overcomes me” (p. 20).

Esther Smith provides helpful suggestions to help us through the process of grief over chronic pain.

1. The story needs to be told either to a friend, counselor, journal, others, or through art.
2. Identify a way to grieve such as writing a letter to your pain, spending time in nature, acknowledge anniversaries and milestones (both good and bad), creating a visual of what you would like to be in the midst of pain, creating a reverse bucket list of what you could do before the pain began.

Psalm 27:10 (NLT)

“Though my father and mother forsake me, the LORD will receive me.”

While living, it is important for people to be loved, feel love for others, have hope, and have a purpose. Sometimes those with chronic pain wonder how they can serve or have a purpose in God’s kingdom.

Esther Smith also wrote *But God Wouldn't I be More Useful to You if I were Healthy?*

Notes

Can you imagine yourself saying something similar?

Going back to the importance of being loved, to love others, to have hope, and to have a purpose, let's think of ways in which we can provide examples of each:

- Being loved
- To love others
- Have hope
- Have a purpose

Who do you know that suffers with chronic pain? How can you help? What will you commit to this week?

SUMMARY

We covered a lot of material in the lesson. Our objectives were to:

1. See God's presence in the midst of illness.
2. Identify ways to serve God through chronic illness.
3. Find ways to help others who struggle with chronic illness.

To end our lesson, please answer the following:

1. Who has an insight tonight about something you've learned or want to try?
2. What will you change or improve in your role as a parent this week?

Ages 4-16

40 minutes

Student Training

Family Time

CHRONIC ILLNESS

Objectives

- Help children be aware of what chronic illness is.
- Help children be aware of why there is sickness, disease, and death in the world.
- Help children be aware of how they can serve a person who is chronically ill.
- Help children be aware of what the Bible says about serving one another.
- Help children be aware that Jesus will one day end all sickness, disease, sorrow, and death.

Today we are going to discuss the topic of chronic illness. Chronic illness is a human health condition or disease that lasts for more than three months. Most of us know what it is like to experience being sick with a cold, the flu, or other minor afflictions that come and go. Even those minor ailments cause us great discomfort! It's no fun! But can you imagine how difficult it is to suffer with a sickness that doesn't go away? Chronic illness can happen to children as well as adults. No one expects that they would ever become sick with an illness that lasts for months and sometimes years.

Unfortunately, we live in a world where sickness is a part of life. In the beginning

of the world when God created man, Adam, and woman, Eve, they enjoyed perfect health. But when Adam and Eve committed the first sin by disobeying God, the consequence of their sin was passed on to all of us. When sin came into the world, it caused us to have to deal with sickness, disease, chronic illness, and even death. Romans 5:12 says, "...sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin."

When people suffer with a long-term sickness, it not only affects them, but also everyone who loves and cares for them. At first, they may be overwhelmed with feelings of sadness and anger when they hear that they have an ailment that is going

to require long-term medical treatment. Sometimes it takes them a while to believe what the doctor is telling them. Eventually, patients are forced to change their daily life activities, and their family and friends become their much depended upon support team.

This is where you can be a blessing as a child of God. You can become a valuable part of the ill person's support team. Those of us who have good health can show God our gratitude by doing what we can to ease the suffering of our sick friend or family member. Throughout the Bible, God makes it clear that we are to serve one another. Serving is a way of giving! One of the most important character traits of a Christian is a heart that loves to give to others in need. Galatians 6:2 says, "Carry each other's burdens, and in this way, you will fulfill the law of Christ." And Romans 15:1 says, "We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves." You may be young, but God loves to see His children of all ages serve and demonstrate His love for others. The younger you are when you learn to serve, the better. Then you will have many years of pleasing God!

Let us think of some things you can do as a young person to care for someone who needs your support. First, remember that the most powerful thing you can do for anyone dealing with chronic illness is to pray for them. When we pray, we are calling on God to come into the situation and work on the problem. Praying also gives us a chance to exercise and strengthen our faith and that is pleasing to God. Philippians 4:6 says, "Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God." So be sure to pray for them daily.

God has given children and young people a special ability to bring smiles and happiness to any situation. Another way you can show support to someone who is sick is through a visit and a hug! There is nothing like a hug from a child that can lift the spirit, cause laughter, and bring a smile to the face of a friend or family member who is not feeling well. The laughter

and smiles you bring are like medicine! Proverbs 17:22 says, “A cheerful heart is good medicine.” You can also take the time to make a card for your friend or loved one or write them a letter to express your love and support.

If they have a pet, perhaps you can make sure that the pet is fed on schedule and taken for a walk each day. The person may appreciate you tidying up their room or simply getting them a glass of water. Don't hesitate to ask the person what you can do for them. Then do what you can.

Remember everything you do for the person who is enduring poor health is serving and serving is giving. Acts 20:35 says, “In everything I did, I showed you that by this kind of hard work we must help the weak, remembering the words the LORD Jesus himself said: ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive.’” And in Matthew Chapter 25, Jesus tells us that when we care for the sick, we are really caring for Him in disguise. He says, “Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.”

The good news is that just as the first Adam by sinning brought sin, sickness, and death into the world, Christ Jesus, as the “last Adam” brings renewed life into the world. And He has promised that one day He will return and establish a new heaven and a new earth. Then there will be no more sickness, pain, sorrow, crying, or death. Rev 21:4 says, “He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.” Yes, that is very good news!

Notes



Scripture SUPPORT

Romans 5:12

Sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin.

Galatians 6:2

Carry each other's burdens, and in this way, you will fulfill the law of Christ.

Romans 15:1

We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves.

Philippians 4:6

Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.

Proverbs 17:22

A cheerful heart is good medicine.

DISCUSS

- Lead children in a discussion about what chronic illness means.
- Lead children in a discussion about what it must feel like to have a chronic illness.
- Lead children in a discussion about how a loved one's chronic illness affects their family and friends.
- Lead children in discussion about what the Bible tells those of us who are strong to do.
- Lead children in a discussion about how they can serve and be supportive of their sick loved one.



Activities

Activities are age appropriate. One is focused on ages 4-11, and the second is for older children ages 12-16.

AGES 4-11

Materials

"A Love Letter for You" worksheet
White board and erasable markers
Pencils, crayons, markers

Have children view YouTube:

"If we could see inside others hearts": Life in 4 min (must type in title). Discuss briefly.

(If not possible, do activity without video.)

- Tell children they are going to write letters of encouragement to people who are suffering from chronic illness. Let them know you will be sending their letters to a nursing home to encourage and be a blessing to people who are suffering from a long-term sickness. Begin by asking children what kind of things they could say to encourage the people who will receive their letters and make them feel better. Write their responses on the white board.

- Pass out “A Love Letter for You” worksheet. Have them start the letter with: “Dear Friend.” Have children write the sentences from the board that they have suggested on their blank Love Letter form. When they are finished, gather all their letters and place them in a big envelope and mail them to a nearby nursing home with instructions enclosed.

(See enclosed instructions to include.)

AGES 12-16

Materials

Poster board
Pencils, markers

Have children view YouTube:

“If we could see inside others hearts”: Life in 4 min (must type in title). Discuss briefly.

(If not possible, do activity without video.)

- As a group, have children develop a list of things that people can do to support and encourage those who are chronically ill. Let them know they will use their suggestions to make a poster to hang in the church to remind people to bless “the least of these.” The heading on the poster is: “Serving Those Who Have a Chronic Illness.” Once children have generated a list, in the middle of their poster board have them write:

Matthew 25:40

Jesus said, “Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.”

- Around the scripture have them write ways they can encourage and support those who suffer with a chronic illness.
- When their poster is finished, post it in the church so hearts will be convicted to minister to those who suffer with chronic illness.



Scripture SUPPORT

Acts 20:35

In everything I did, I showed you that by this kind of hard work we must help the weak, remembering the words the LORD Jesus himself said: “It is more blessed to give than to receive.”

Matthew 25:40

The King will reply, “Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.”

Revelations 21:4

He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.




CHALLENGE QUESTION

WHAT AM I DOING FOR THE “LEAST OF THESE”?

CHALLENGE COMMITMENT

WHAT ARE YOU WILLING
TO DO TO WORK ON THE CHALLENGE
QUESTION THIS WEEK?

	AFFIRMATION <i>Have children repeat:</i>
	<i>I am a kind and caring person.</i>



A *Love Letter* for You

Dear _____

Signed _____



Resources & Materials

- Rae, Kimberly. *Sick and Tired: Empathy, Encouragement, and Practical Help for Those Suffering from Chronic Health Problems*
- Smith, Esther. *When Chronic Pain & Illness Take Everything Away: How to Mourn Our Losses* (Chronic Pain and the Christian Life)
- Smith, Esther. *But God, Wouldn't I Be More Useful to You If I Were Healthy?* (Chronic Pain and the Christian Life)