

Chronic Pain

Living by Faith When Your Body Hurts

Michael R. Emlet



www.newgrowthpress.com

Pain is Marissa's constant companion. She wakes up with it. She lives through the day with it. She goes to sleep with it. And every day is about the same. Marissa suffers with a chronic headache, which she has had for over a year. She had frequent migraine headaches throughout her teens and early twenties that put her out of commission for a day at most, but she still had been able to pursue her doctoral studies in education with enthusiasm and excellence.

Then one day her life changed. Fourteen months ago she was awakened from a deep sleep with a jackhammer exploding in her head. Despite several hospitalizations and evaluation by multiple specialists, the ultimate cause is elusive and the pain is unrelenting. Various pain medications, diets, antidepressants, regimented schedules, and more have given her only minimal relief. Now she lives at home with her parents, her doctorate on indefinite hold. Most days she forces herself to get out of bed in the morning, although she would rather stay in her room with the covers over her head. Life for Marissa has constricted like the tight bands she feels around her head.

Perhaps you, like Marissa, are experiencing chronic pain. And your life has also constricted. Almost everyone has experienced severe physical pain from illness, injury, or surgery. It hurts for awhile, and then it ends. But chronic pain is different: it doesn't stop. Like Marissa's pain, it is daily and unrelenting, the kind of bone-numbing, soul-wearying pain for which there is no end in sight. If you are experiencing that kind of pain, is it still possible for you to persevere and live out God's purposes for your life, even in the midst of your suffering? Is there grace enough? Yes, there is. God promises that his grace is sufficient for you (2 Corinthians 12:9).

But how can you experience that grace when you are suffering so much? Perhaps you are in so much pain that it's even hard for you to read this. Take your time, and work through this minibook little by little. You will find that in his Word, God has much to say to you that will give you hope, help, and comfort.

Let's begin by looking at the experience of pain and then consider how understanding God's perspective on pain and suffering can give you hope.

Your Pain Is Affected by Many Factors

You probably have already noticed that there is usually a close relationship between a painful stimulus (like touching a hot stove) and your painful experience (“Ouch!!”). But there is a difference between the body’s reaction to a painful stimulus and the experience we interpret and call “pain.”

Two people might touch the stove and have the exact same pain response from the nerves in their skin, but one may merely say “Ouch,” and the other may scream in agony. Two children can receive the same vaccine and one will cry loudly while the other barely bats an eye. What is going on?

Understanding pain is not quite as simple as it first looks. Even acute (short-term) pain is a complex experience, influenced by many different factors. Pain receptors in your skin are set off when you touch a hot stove or get a shot. Nerve fibers carry pain messages to your brain. That is the physical aspect of pain. But there are many other factors that contribute to the heightening or the lessening of your pain experience. Your pain will be affected by your