

Fibromyalgia

God's Grace for Chronic
Pain Sufferers

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“I have suffered with horrible pain for years,” explained Susan. “My physician diagnosed me with a condition called fibromyalgia.” Susan’s diagnosis refers to her chronic physical pain, but she also experiences great emotional pain from having to miss her son’s soccer games or her daughter’s concerts because her body is in agony. Her absence from important events and her seeming inconsistency has often brought criticism from her coworkers, friends, and family. Susan frequently feels frustrated by the skeptical and insensitive responses she receives when she explains her condition. This lack of compassion toward her is intensified by her own feelings of disappointment with her life. She feels hindered from being the person she wants to be and from doing the activities she enjoys most. Her desire to be an attentive wife, an involved mother, an accomplished employee, and a skilled servant seem foolish and hopeless. Susan wants answers but can’t seem to find them.

Do you identify with Susan’s story? If so, take comfort that answers can be found. Even though you won’t find fibromyalgia mentioned in the Bible, God has much to say to those who are suffering. He wants you to come to him with all of your questions, doubts, and fears and then trust his love and grace for you. You will find that his promises in the Bible give you hope and direction in the midst of your suffering. To better understand what those promises are and how they apply to your condition, let’s start with what is known (and not known) about fibromyalgia.

Understanding Fibromyalgia

Medical professionals estimate that less than 5 percent of the U.S. population has fibromyalgia, and that it affects approximately four times more women than men¹ between the ages of twenty and fifty.² The name *fibromyalgia* is a medical term made up of three parts. *Fibro-* refers to connective tissue; *my-* means muscle; *-algia* means pain. Thus, the word literally means “connective tissue muscle pain.”

This is appropriate since the primary symptom of fibromyalgia is chronic pain. Patients experience pain in varying degrees of severity that can get better or worse from one day to the next. They also report having chronic pain for most, if not all, of their lives.³ Interestingly, no permanent damage to the body seems to accompany this ongoing pain.

The major criterion for a diagnosis of fibromyalgia is the complaint of generalized pain or pain in many areas of the body. So if your doctor has given you this diagnosis, it is likely that he based his evaluation on when your pain started, what has aggravated and lessened your pain, your previous methods of treatment, and your history of other medical conditions. The doctor may have done a physical examination to find any obvious physical problems that may have caused your symptoms and that could be treated. In the case of fibromyalgia, it is unlikely that other problems were found (as will be explained in a moment). Laboratory tests are usually done for the

purpose of uncovering and ruling out diseases that require specific treatment.

Initially, your diagnosis may have alleviated your fears that cancer or some other life-threatening disease was present, but then you found yourself with the unanswered question of what causes this painful condition. Much research has been done looking for answers. Many proposed causes have been presented in scientific and nonscientific literature, and many theories have been developed to explain the symptoms. However, to date, no consistent or specific cause has been found, and no theory has been proven to be factual. If you read or hear of some alleged cause of fibromyalgia, don't be fooled. No consistent evidence for disease (a proven abnormality causing the symptoms) has been produced from the extensive research performed. If a proven cause is found, it will be widely reported.

The absence of a proven cause does not mean the pain is "all in your head." On the contrary, researchers have concluded that the pain you are experiencing is real, which of course you already know! However, just because the pain is real does not necessarily mean your body has a disease. People often erroneously conclude that any symptom of pain means a disease is present. This may or may not be the case. With fibromyalgia, pain signals originate in the connective tissue and pass through nerves to the spinal cord and from there to the brain where they are interpreted. However, researchers have not found any connective tissue disorder to