

Women Caring for Women: Chronic Illness, Aging & Terminal Illness
CBC Sunday School
October 26, 2025

Discussion question: What is one of your greatest physical accomplishments?

1. What is lost?

a. Physical Health

i. Abilities

1. Sitting or standing for long periods, dietary restrictions, diminished energy/stamina, cannot do favorite hobbies, cannot open jars or lift grandchildren, etc.
2. Pain exhausts, clouds the mind, weakens, sleep loss, irritability

ii. Freedom - Independence - Autonomy

1. Asking for help is frustrating, embarrassing, can lead to anger
2. "When we lose the ability to move our bodies, we lose our freedom and our power to choose. We are constricted and confined, imprisoned and controlled by the whims of our physical bodies. We lose our freedom to physically carry out our plans and dreams." Esther Smith

iii. Plans and dreams

1. Job loss or change, Travel, Experiences (i.e. taking kids skiing)
2. Finances - the cost of medical care can be devastating

b. Relationships and community

i. Friendships - Loneliness

1. "We live in a world that does not stop, and when we can no longer keep up, we get left behind...Friendships that were grounded in shared activities quickly fade when we can't participate in the hiking or dancing or parties that drew our friend groups together in the first place. Other friendships are lost because some people are frightened by our suffering, unsure how to respond to our suffering, or forget about our suffering." Esther Smith

ii. Family strain

1. Spouse may move from partner to caretaker
 - a. Her ability to be intimate may change
 - b. Divorce rates are high
2. Children may become caretakers of mom - a painful role reversal

c. Sense of Self

i. Improper Body Image

1. She may feel she "is not herself" anymore – identity is confused
 - a. "When our bodies fail to work as they should, we transition from confident and capable to uncertain and filled with self-doubt. We are overly aware that we are inept in areas where we used to excel, and this fills us with feelings of inadequacy and shame." Esther Smith
2. She may undervalue (or even hate) her body which causes her such pain
3. She may feel her body can't serve others or participate in ministry
4. She may think of her body as something to endure for now and look forward to "sloughing it off" someday

ii. Biblical Body Image

1. Our bodies ARE us – they are no less a part of us than our souls are
 - a. “We are not merely passengers riding around in skin tight racecars; we are our bodies.” Gregg Allison, *Embodied*
 - b. Our bodies are not simply a tool we use for two purposes: form and/or function
 - i. We might exercise so we can improve our bodily form (lose weight, get toned) or our function (get stronger)
 - ii. We might enjoy our form (beauty, physique) or our function (abilities, strength)
 - c. Our bodies matter as much as our souls
 - i. “We may even consider the body as good, but not as good as the soul. So we spend our time pursuing “spiritual” disciplines while viewing “physical” disciplines as only serving an instrumentalist purpose: to keep our body functioning well so we can engage in the more important matter of spiritual growth, which is unrelated to our body.” Gregg Allison, *Embodied*
2. Our bodies have a divine purpose that is beyond our cultural or personal standards of form and function.
 - a. Our bodies exist to enable us to do things for God’s glory.
 - i. “So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.” 1 Cor 10:31 (He’s talking about very physical, “non spiritual” actions here)
 - ii. God made Adam’s and Eve’s bodies with form (they were attracted to each other) and function (they were capable of fulfilling God’s command to rule and procreate) God’s purpose for them was intertwined with their physical AND spiritual. They could not do what he made them to do apart from their bodies.
 - iii. This means that our bodies – no matter how functional we view them – exist to do things that glorify God. None of us can lose that function because it’s what we were made for
3. Our bodies are a key part of heaven’s perfection.
 - a. There will be an intermediate period where those who die before Christ’s return will be “disembodied” (their bodies are in caskets or cremated) awaiting their reunion with their bodies upon Christ’s return. This is a temporary condition.
 - i. Our very bodies will be made new, but they’re still our bodies
 - ii. This is also a source of our aversion to death-we know deeply that the parting of our material and immaterial humanness is unnatural. It’s right that we want to avoid this and dread it.
 - iii. Jesus experienced this parting of his body and soul but he has been reunited with his body. He is recognizable, and he has his scars

Discussion question: What is a physical ability – big or small – that you’ve lost? It could be from chronic illness, or age or injury.

2. Where is God in the pain?

- a. When everything and everyone else moves on at a faster pace, God stays
 - i. “Though my father and mother forsake me, the Lord will receive me.” Ps 27:10
 - ii. “Those who live with us may walk right past us in life, but God walks right alongside us. Our family and friends may move on when we are unable to participate in life, but God slows down to our pace. He stays no matter what. Our mother or father, sister, friend, doctor or church may forsake us, but the Lord will receive us every single time. He will never falter, fade, or leave us, for he does not change like the shifting shadows, but is the same today, tomorrow, and for eternity.” Esther Smith
- b. When there are hard questions, God answers with himself
 - i. “Many times in the Christian life, God answers our cries “why, oh Lord?” not by explaining his Providence, but by giving us a deeper understanding of his person. In other words, when we cry, “Lord, why are you doing this?” He often answers by saying, ‘Let me show you who I am.’ And if you see him, he will be enough.” -Ligon Duncan, *When Pain is Real and God Seems Silent*
 - ii. In his earthly ministry, Jesus healed some, but passed over many more. His purpose was not to remove all ailments, but to show himself, to be known, to complete his work of healing hearts.
 - iii. Moses is changed after God shows himself
- c. When faith is hard, God’s tender grip is secure
 - i. Nothing can separate us from God’s love - not even chronic illness
 - 1. “For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.” Rom 8:38-39
 - ii. Our future is glory
 - 1. “The trials of this life are the worst thing you’ll ever endure.” Ligon Duncan
 - a. “I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.” Rom 8:18
 - 2. “Suffering makes the times of good so much sweeter. And I consider this from the perspective of eternity. I consider the joy set before us. That day when the tears will be wiped from my eyes, and I will know in my heart that death is no more. I am waiting for that day when I will no longer mourn, cry, or feel any pain. I am waiting for the former things to pass away, for that day when I get to dwell with God.” Esther Smith

Discussion question: What do you think it must have been like to be one of the ailing people in the crowds that followed Jesus, hopefully – only to be passed over, unnoticed, unhealed?

3. What does healing look like?

- a. A pattern of grief
 - i. God designed us to grieve our losses, not push them aside or pretend they don’t matter
 - 1. “Grieving happens when we recognize and take hold of all that we feel, question, and remember. We take all of this loss in our hands – refusing to keep it inside in an act of stoicism, resisting the urge to hurl it at the

nearest and safest human target – and instead, we honestly and transparently speak it before a God who hears us and responds to us in our pain.” Esther Smith

2. “Therefore I will not keep silent; I will speak out in the anguish of my spirit, I will complain in the bitterness of my soul” (Job 7:11).
3. “Why have you made me your target? Have I become a burden to you? ...Does it please you to oppress me, to spurn the work of your hands, while you smile on the plans of the wicked? ...Your hands shaped me and made me Will you now turn and destroy me?” (Job 7:20b, 10:3, 10:8).
- ii. Because chronic/terminal illness is a loss that manifests every day (often with increased losses over time as you lose abilities or experience more pain or have to say no to more things) she must find a way to grieve regularly.
 1. “Grief should be a lifelong practice that we intentionally incorporate into our daily lives of illness and pain. Our diseases and conditions may shift and change in intensity across seasons, but they are always constantly present. We mourn our losses because there is no way to fix our losses or get our old lives back. There is no way not to experience the pain, and so in grief, we dive in headfirst, experiencing our pain to the fullest extent, that we might know it, understand it, and move through it, believing God is with us every step of the way.” Esther Smith
 - a. Tell your story (writing, speaking, journaling, praying each detail, scheduling a time to purposefully tell your story to a friend)
 - b. Find others who have experiences similar to yours
 - c. Create a regular place and time to feel your feelings (listening to music and crying, praying aloud when nobody is around and being 100% honest about your feelings)
- b. Admire your treasure
 - i. “The man who has God for his treasure has all things in One...Whatever he may lose he has actually lost nothing, for he now has it all in One. And has it purely, legitimately, and forever.” Tozer
- c. Turn heads - Phil 2:14-15 says that when you are free from murmuring/complaining, you shine like a light. A light gets attention, it breaks through the darkness.
- d. Turn away from the mirror - be a Susanna or a Joni and live your life focused on others. Don't draw attention to your own injuries or disabilities but instead look out for the suffering and pain of others
 - i. Phil 2:4–5. “Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus.”
 - ii. Prayer ministry
 1. “Praying for others may diminish the focus on their own pain while advancing the kingdom of God.” Bev Hislop, *Shepherding Women in Pain*
 - iii. Creative ministry
 1. Susanna Spurgeon's Book Fund - housebound with chronic illness, she collected funds and gifted books and her husband's sermons to 25,000 pastors, bringing enormous spiritual encouragement and instruction to the country and furthering her husband's ministry.
 2. Joni Eareckson Tada, a quadriplegic with chronic pain - was instrumental in creating the ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act) and Joni and Friends, as well as helping many through her 45 books and as a speaker.

Discussion question: What kinds of things do you think would make you feel seen if you were facing an “invisible” hardship?

4. What can comforters do?

- a. See her - Chronic pain/illness can feel invisible
 - i. A small gesture to let her know she's seen: a card/gift/care package, a text, a homemade treat, a genuine hug, positive comments about her, an offer to go for a walk/ car ride together
 - ii. *Amy says to meet needs: take her laundry home to wash and return, ask about their family's favorite meal and bring it over, contact a family member about cleaning her house (she may be reluctant to accept help - although if she says no, don't push it)*
 - iii. *Daveda says: Look and listen – most people won't say they are having a bad day, so watch their eyes, how they walk, how they talk.*
 - iv. *Pegge says: Person-to-person connection is so important. Don't assume others are connecting with her - reach out!*
 - v. *Amy says: Ask something besides “how can I help?” such as “Can I do laundry, can I provide a meal, can I run errands, etc.? Suggesting ways to help lets them know what exactly you're offering to do.*
 - vi. *Daveda says: If they say they can't do something, say no problem – don't make them feel guilty.*
 - vii. *Amy says: Check on her family. Do the kids need rides, playdates, help with homework?*
- b. Help her grieve
 - i. Ask her what she used to be able to do that she misses. Let the tears fall - hers and yours. It is healthy to remember and to mourn.
- c. Slow down to her speed
 - i. She may feel that she is always slowing others down, never able to keep up. Ask her what is something she loves doing but can't keep up and see if you can do that thing at her speed with her.
- d. Do normal things with her - talk about normal things with her
 - i. Talk about food, eat together. If she has dietary restrictions, learn how to make (or buy) things she can enjoy.
 - ii. Enjoy nature together
 - iii. Read a book together that has nothing to do with illness
- e. Pray for her to see the good that has come from her illness - God's trials are never wasted. The Bible emphasizes the extreme value of tested faith and it is only attainable through hardship. She may not be ready for you to preach that to her, but pray that God will gently show her in his time.
 - i. “I am sure that I have run more swiftly with a lame leg than I ever did with a sound one. I am certain that I have seen more in the dark than ever I saw in the light, – more stars, most certainly, – more things in heaven if fewer things on earth. The anvil, the fire, and the hammer, are the making of us; we do not get fashioned much by anything else. That heavy hammer falling on us helps to shape us; therefore let affliction and trouble and trial come.” Charles Spurgeon
 - ii. *Pegge recommends reading Chronic Illness: Walking by Faith by Esther Smith and starting a gratitude journal*

iii. Pray Habakkuk 3:17-19

1. Though the fig tree does not bud
and there are no grapes on the vines,
though the olive crop fails
and the fields produce no food,
though there are no sheep in the pen
and no cattle in the stalls,
yet I will rejoice in the Lord,
I will be joyful in God my Savior.

f. For the terminally ill: (*For more info see Shepherd Women in Pain* by Bev Hislop)

- i. Be okay with silence (don't talk incessantly - this is tiring to a dying person) but also be willing to talk about anything – even funeral arrangements if she brings it up
- ii. Don't tell your own stories, but focus on the one who is ill
- iii. Let her make choices as much as she can - don't take that away from her
- iv. Death is scary. It is evil and unnatural and our last enemy. She may want to talk about the fear or avoid it. Don't force either. Listen and validate her feelings.

Recommended Resources:

When Chronic Pain & Illness Take Everything Away: How to Mourn our Losses by Esther Smith

The Scars that have Shaped Me by Vaneetha Randall Risner

Susie: The Life and Legacy of Susanna Spurgeon, Wife of Charles H. Spurgeon by Ray Rhodes Jr.

When Pain is Real and God Seems Silent: Finding Hope in the Psalms by Ligon Duncan

Embodied: Living as Whole People in a Fractured World by Gregg R. Allison

Women Caring for Women CBC Sunday School Syllabus

Part 1

Oct 5:	Introduction to loss, grief, suffering and healing
Oct 12:	Infertility & Miscarriage
Oct 19:	Depression
Oct 26:	Chronic Illness & Terminal Illness
Nov 2:	Post Abortive Syndrome
Nov 9:	Divorce

Part 2

Jan 18:	Domestic Abuse
Jan 25:	Sexual abuse
Feb 1:	Eating disorders
Feb 8:	Addiction
Feb 15:	Pornography / Infidelity
Feb 22:	Same Sex Attraction

Questions or feedback? Contact us!

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