

CHRONIC?

Over the years I have been diagnosed with five 'chronic' conditions. The latest of these in November last year, is Chronic Lymphocytic Leukemia. To me, 'chronic' used medically means most likely uncomfortable, probably incurable and yet not likely to be fatal in the short term. I've learned that at times chronic can fluctuate to acute and then back to chronic again, which is not ideal.

But I have no desire to bore you with an old man's aches and pains. Heaven forbid! Thank God we are much more than bodies - so that I am fully alive and am continuing to enjoy the delights of the Lord's loving mercy and boundless grace day by day.

I wonder if there are 'chronic's in the spiritual realm with no negative aspects at all? In other words, are there positive and beautiful things in my life that are long-term and have really become a part of who I am? I would love that! It always seems sad whenever a believer enters into a delightful experience in the Lord, but then before long it seems to ebb away so that they aren't much different than before.

I remember when some guys in South Africa asked me what was wrong with a particular brother who had a leadership role. My immediate response was, "He leaks." How tragic that a good brother could get filled with new blessing, new wine, new visions of God's love, purpose and provision, but quite soon lose the fire, lose the vision and lose the blessing he had received. God plans a better path for us than that, that's for sure!

Here are five positive 'chronic's that far outweigh the five physical ones I have referred to. You can probably list precious things that are long term in your own life. I trust so!

1. I continue to marvel that God loves me. How utterly amazing that the Almighty eternal creator of the universe ever even has a passing thought about a nobody like me – let alone hold me in His arms of love all life through! Oh the wonder of it: He loves me; He loves me. He loves *even* me! He certainly knows my every frailty and failure, yet still loves me every moment of every day, passionately caring about my well being. How could one help but adore a Saviour, Lord, Friend like Him!

2. Linked with marveling that God loves me in the way He does, is a fixation I have on staying aware that My precious Lord Jesus is right here, right now at this very moment. In fact, of course, He actually lives within me, and within all whose lives are wholly His, but there is little comfort in it if it is simply a doctrine we hold to. I find immense pleasure in chatting with Him and listening to His inner promptings, day by day.

3. Further, and perhaps because of my first two points, I seem to be captivated by a spirit of joy. After all, joy is a fruit of the Spirit. Surely an aspect of a desire to be like Jesus, is sharing His joy. He was anointed with an oil of gladness above and beyond that evidenced in those around Him. In a church we pastored many years ago there was an elderly Scottish lady who seemed to have a perpetual gleam in her eyes. A key to that is probably linked to her repeated saying, "Jesus is the joy germ." I

know that He was also a man of sorrows, acquainted with grief, but I have no doubt that laughter and fun were integral parts of the life he shared with His disciples. There's no room for gloom when we are trusting, loving and following our wonderful Lord Jesus.

4. There have been times when I have found it too easy to be taken up with the earth things of daily life, even earth things related to church life. My desire has been to maintain a sense of eternity and to keep a deep conviction that my citizenship is in heaven, not here. I am absolutely convinced that without a deep sense of other-worldliness one would not be at their best for the Lord. It is in the heavenly realms that God has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in Christ. Living in the reality of that makes possible the reality of being seated with Jesus in the heavenly realms. Oh yes, I know it is in the Bible and you believe it – but can it possibly be that your belief is theoretical rather than experiential? All I can say is that I am enthralled with the wonderful reality of life on the highest plane.

Linked in with an awareness of belonging to another realm, I am gripped by a yearning for precious lost people around me to find redemption in Christ Jesus. Many a day there is a tear in my eye and a cry in my heart for divine intervention in the lives of people I see or come in contact with. From a human perspective it seems utterly hopeless. There is an evil, godless generation all around us and all around the world. God have mercy, on me, on us, and especially on them! My dear brother, sister, we dare not simply see people as if this life is all there is for them. They need the Saviour; urgently, desperately and overwhelmingly need the eternal life He offers. I was asked a year or so ago, "Is the fire still there – in your heart?" Oh, yes! I may not express it as I once could, but at least I carry a deep inner desire and yearning for lives to be changed by the redeeming grace of God, fitting them for life now and for eternity!

5. Let me share one other 'chronic' I am gripped with. With every fibre of my being I yearn, pray and cry out that the Lord our God will be *constantly*, gladly given and receive *all* the glory, honour and praise that He deserves. I know this involves a daily taking up of one's cross and a denying of self at every level. This is why I mentioned in one of my books that I have sought divine grace to be a hidden man – a God-filled nobody! This isn't some kind of false humility, but a joyful, trusting acceptance of the way God would have us live – you and me. If this demands that a person be radical and ruthless with themselves, so be it. But 100% of the credit for *anything* good done in our lives and through us belongs exclusively to God. He *will not* share His glory with anyone!

Trouble is perhaps, that we can become so accustomed to mouthing words about 'glory to God' that we stifle the Holy Spirit's prompting within us. I have no doubt that He seeks to put a 'Yuk' inside us when we touch His glory in any way. It is all His and He reserves total right to it. Indeed, may glory, honour and praise be wholeheartedly ascribed to Him both now and eternally, from each and every one of us.

A final thought or two: If you are like me and considerably nearer the end of your earthly pilgrimage than the beginning of it, let me tell you that we need to take good care how we measure the quality of life. When you started reading this paper,

did you think, “Poor John”? Has that changed as you have read on? You see, we dare not measure quality of life by physical and material conditions. The spiritual dimension of life is far more important, surely? I refuse to allow my thoughts to dwell fruitlessly on aches, pains and the increasing uncertainties of life. I will not! By God’s grace alone, my heart and mind are set on things above, not on things of earth.

If the things I have set out seem to be unattainable, and only for some kind of super saint, let me disillusion you. If that were so I’d be last on the list and never make it. Truth is, these chronic conditions are only evident in my life in any measure at all, precisely because I am only too aware of my spiritual frailty as well as my physical frailty.

I need the Lord, and His divine provisions for the like of me, every moment, every day. They are a sign of personal weakness, not strength, and simply an indication of how much I need to be ‘leaning on Jesus’ continually. In Paul’s lovely paradox it is the weak who are strong because they do not rely on human strength, but rely on God’s amazing grace day by day.

When I submitted this paper to our beloved brother and friend, David Rice, he wrote back, “I love the feel of *Chronic*. I think that it a really clear statement that is so very real and accessible.” Indeed it is accessible as each of us live Christ centred, God honouring lives – for God’s glory alone.

This comes to you with much love and a hope that you will find encouragement and inspiration in what I’ve written by the grace of God alone. Since this life is likened to a vapour or a fading flower, let me finally say, “See you Yonder – very soon.”

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