



A great blessing to those in need of healing.
—RANDY CLARK

I'M SICK

NOW WHAT?

A BALANCED APPROACH TO
MEDICINE AND GOD'S HEALING



DR.
ANDREW BUTTERWORTH

What People Are Saying About Andrew Butterworth and *I'm Sick, Now What?...*

Dr. Andrew Butterworth has written a very helpful, practical, balanced book on healing. I believe *I'm Sick Now What?* will be a great blessing to those in need of healing and to those who are praying and caring for loved ones with sickness. It is filled with great insight from a pastor who has been a medical doctor. I recommend *I'm Sick Now What?* to you as one of the important books on healing you should have in your library.

—*Dr. Randy Clark*
Founder of Global Awakening
www.globalawakening.com

Finally, a balanced, well-rounded book on healing. *I'm Sick, Now What?* covers the major questions that Christians ask about healing and health. This book is theologically sound, intellectually stimulating, and user-friendly. If you have questions about healing as a Christian, read this book!

—*Steve Murrell*
Cofounder, Every Nation
www.everynation.org
www.stevemurrell.com

Andrew trained as a medical doctor and now works on the pastoral staff of a local church. His unique position is the soil from which this book has grown, with its unique and fully-orbed view of healing. He covers the medical, emotional, spiritual, and theological aspects of healing with thoughtful care. Personally, I have been waiting for a hybrid book on physical healing that calls for personal responsibility in one's physical and emotional health, while still having a theology and expectancy for Jesus to heal. This is that book! May it take root and bear fruit for the good of many and for the glory of God. I commend it to you.

—*Alan Frow*

Lead pastor, Southlands Church, California
www.southlands.net

Finally, a book that combines faith for holistic healing through supernatural means as well as healing through medical means. It's not only theologically sound, but pastorally-minded. It helps to answer our questions when God doesn't heal. I can't wait to get this into the hands of our church members.

—*Bryan Mowrey*

Lead pastor, Jubilee Church, St. Louis, Missouri
www.jubileestl.org

Dr. Butterworth's book is clear, concise, and heartening. He deals with a very sensitive topic in a way that is both encouraging and informative. Take it from someone who has experienced both illness (myeloproliferative disorder) and healing (bone marrow transplant), if there's one book you should read on illness and healing, it's this one.

—*Darryn Botha*

Lead pastor, Cape Town Baptist Church,
Cape Town, South Africa

I'm Sick, Now What? is a balanced examination of healing by a physician-pastor, Dr. Andrew Butterworth, whose name tag should read, "soul doctor." Unlike authors who address the question of healing from a purely physical perspective, dismissing the supernatural, or from a purely metaphysical perspective, dismissing the role of modern medicine, Dr. Butterworth's advice is to seek and employ the best of both, since all truth is from God, and only the truth can set you free. The author is uniquely trained and positioned to address questions related to illness, from a medically infused biblical perspective. Anyone who is sick and wants to know how to approach their illness can benefit from this book.

—David B. Biebel, DMin
Author, editor, publisher
Healthy Life Press
www.healthylifepress.com

Based firmly on biblical truth and years of medical knowledge as a doctor, a hugely practical book. It gives clear guidelines on how to connect deeply with our loving Father God, remove the blockages that may be standing in the way of healing, and pray for healing. It is full of testimonies of supernatural healing as well as healing through the medical profession. Andrew helpfully reminds us, however, that God is primarily interested in our coming to wholeness and fullness of life in Him. He speaks of the holistic health of spirit, soul, and body, which we can find in Him despite and even through physical ailments. I have no doubt that the prophecy spoken over Andrew years ago will be fulfilled and that many will find health and wholeness through this book.

—Steve Goss
International Director, Freedom In Christ Ministries
www.ficminternational.org

Andrew was at our house on the day I was diagnosed with cancer and throughout my ordeal was excellent friend, counselor, and doctor. This book is a great blend of spiritual, medical, and practical wisdom concerning sickness and healing.

—*PJ Smyth*

Founder, GodFirst, Johannesburg, South Africa
Leader of Advance, a worldwide church planting network
www.advancemovement.com

A pastoral, practical, sensible, and inspiring guide to healing that moves the heart, instructs the mind, and lifts faith by repeatedly pointing the reader to Jesus. For a topic that sometimes is beset by the extremes of either unreal triumphalism or faithless fatalism, Dr. Butterworth instead teaches a biblical and expectant realism—that the Divine Healer from Galilee is still walking through our towns and cities and is healing through the church and through the medical professions, daily. The writing style is accessible, engaging, and educational, the stories moving, and the teaching biblically as well as medically informed. I do not know of another book like it and warmly commend it to all who want to understand healing, as well as grow in practicing this vitally important aspect of the church's mission.

—*Dr. Adam Dodds*

Senior pastor, Elim Church, Dunedin, New Zealand
dunedin.elim.org.nz

I have come to know Andrew not only as a co-laborer in the gospel, but as a friend, now an author, and most profoundly as one who lives what he believes. He has prayed for my son who was instantly and supernaturally healed of an illness he battled for months but on another occasion, when he hosted me on a ministry trip and I was ill, he provided me with medication. As you read *I'm Sick, Now What?*, you will find, as I have, that Andrew does not shy away from the difficult questions but rather takes them head on and provides deep and meaningful insights. I have no doubt you will find your paradigms being challenged while discovering handles to experiencing God's unfailing love even when our experiences don't make sense.

—*Frans Olivier*

Senior pastor, Every Nation Church, Nairobi, Kenya
Senior evangelist, Every Nation Southern Africa

Andrew has written a book which I feel will be tremendously helpful to all believers. As a pastor, I see the value of this book in helping people understand and process illness, pain, and disappointment while encouraging them to seek God's loving hand for healing. The strength of this book is its balance and its breadth, including biblical teaching, pastoral sensitivity, medical experience, and many stories of real life. All of this is portrayed with a tender heart desirous of people coming to real wholeness, which is God's heart. I would highly recommend this very thorough and engaging book.

—*Wayne Noland,*

Lead elder/pastor, The Rock Christian Church,
Cape Town, South Africa
www.therockcc.org.za

In this book, Andrew Butterworth shows how medical science sits comfortably within a biblical Christian worldview. His accessible writing style and compelling personal stories make it a must-read for anyone looking for answers to some of life's most painful questions.

—*Sibs Sibanda*

Lead pastor, City Hill Church, Johannesburg, South Africa
www.cityhillchurch.org.za

Dr. Andrew Butterworth has not written a typical “rise and be healed” scenario, but rather a deeply contemplative and extremely well-proportioned insight and prognosis into the very heart of God when it comes to healthy lives. This needs to be a best-seller around the world and read by everyone who desires a thorough understanding of how to deal with the inner conflicts of mankind.

—*Philip DeVries*

CEO, EDEN Leadership Foundation
www.edenleadership.com

In this excellent book, Dr. Andrew Butterworth presents a fascinating set of answers to the problem of sickness. As a trained medical doctor and a pastor of a church, Dr. Butterworth straddles both realms seamlessly. He opens the door for those who have hitherto only considered natural means of healing to venture into the much wider and richer world of the Spirit—while those who have been solely involved with the spiritual world are enriched with wisdom from the natural world. Dr. Butterworth draws very valuable insights that show us that healing from God is not only accessible but also quite a practical matter. He takes us beyond the “how to” of healing and helps us to meet with *Yahweh Rophe*, “the God Who Heals.” I predict that many shall be healed through reading this book, and many more shall be stirred and empowered to bring God's healing to all who are sick.

—*Dr. John Kpikpi*

Senior pastor, City of God Church, Accra, Ghana
www.cityofgodchurch.net

I'M
SICK

NOW WHAT?

DR.
ANDREW BUTTERWORTH



WHITAKER
HOUSE

Note: This book is not intended to provide medical advice or to take the place of medical advice and treatment from your personal physician. Neither the publisher nor the author nor the author's ministry takes any responsibility for any possible consequences from any action taken by any person reading or following the information in this book. If readers are taking prescription medications, they should consult with their physicians and not take themselves off prescribed medicines without the proper supervision of a physician. Always consult your physician or other qualified health care professional before undertaking any change in your physical regimen, whether fasting, diet, medications, or exercise.

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I'm Sick, Now What? **A Balanced Approach to Medicine and God's Healing**

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To Michelle,

*“I have set you as a seal upon my heart,
as a seal upon my arm
for love is strong as death,
jealously is fierce as the grave...
many waters cannot quench love.”*

(Song of Solomon 8:6 paraphrase)

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PREFACE

As a pastor, I have books I can recommend on relationships, marriage, parenting, and so on. But when someone or someone's loved one falls ill, I don't have a good book that I can recommend. The books I knew of in this area either focus on teaching healthy people how to pray for the sick, or focus on how to help a sick person process why such bad things as sickness happen. The small selection of books I came across that were targeted at helping a person seek healing tended to be quite narrow and built people up to expect supernatural healing automatically; if the person was in the difficult emotional place of seeking supernatural healing and not receiving it, however, the books had no helpful guidance.

As a trained medical doctor, I needed a book that wouldn't dismiss God's wisdom in modern medicine but as a believer, I needed a book that also wouldn't discard the concept of divine healing. And it needed to be a book that left people in a better place after reading it than before they started it. While I was still being trained as a doctor, a pastor had told me that he thought I would be a spiritual doctor one day and that I would write such a book that would enable people to access healing from God.

Many years later, here it is.

I write from a Christian worldview, but this book is written for everyone and anyone. A few years back, some British doctors went to China to evaluate traditional Chinese medicine from a Western perspective. They were told that the Chinese practitioners would happily explain their system of medicine, but they would need to start by explaining the Buddhist principles that underlined it. Similarly, to understand Christian healing and health, you need to have a grasp of the underlying Christian principles. I will explain these principles, using biblical references, as we go along. If you are open to this process, then you should find the book to very informative and enjoyable, even if you do not always agree with my conclusions.

I have divided the book in three sections. Section one explains why there is sickness in the world. Section two identifies things that can hinder health and healing, while also blocking us from connecting to God. Finally, section three explores how to approach God for healing, whether through conventional or supernatural means.

For ease of language, throughout the book I use the word “sickness” as a generic term to cover illnesses, diseases, disabilities, etc. In this book I give a lot of knowledge from current medical research and show how this confirms the wisdom placed in the Bible in the area of healing. Knowledge is very important, and Jesus said that “*you will know the truth, and the truth that will set you free*” (John 8:32). However, knowledge needs to sink deep into us, descending from our head to our heart to bring true freedom, and this is best done through putting the knowledge we receive into practice. That’s why I’d encourage you to also participate in the practical sections of the book.

Through following the principles in this book, my prayer is that God will give you the wisdom needed to access healing. This may be through leading you to the right healthcare professional, medication, or intervention, but it might also be through God

supernaturally initiating healing in you. Some people reading this may receive a deep spiritual or emotional healing, and, if the vision shared by the pastor who prophesied over me is to be fulfilled, others will receive physical healing through reading this.

Either way, can I encourage you to be expectant as you read?

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Writing a book is a surprisingly big task and I am grateful to all the people who said yes when I came to them asking them for assistance.

John Kpikpi, Malcolm Gamon, Pete Kropman, and Chris Appel reviewed my original proposal and ensured that it was in a state to submit to a publisher. I am grateful for their honesty in the early drafts that vastly improved it. Having published previously, John was particularly encouraging to me. My fellow pastors at Junction Church gave much encouragement; Craig Elliott was particularly helpful as a sounding board for ideas and theological concepts throughout the whole project. Christie Sainsbury proof-read the initial proposal and ensured the grammar and syntax were to a high standard.

I am thankful for Les Stobbe who agreed to represent me and I am grateful for all at Whitaker House who agreed to take me on as an author, even when I was living on the other side of the world. In particular, I am grateful to work with such a great editor at Whitaker House, Judith Dinsmore, who increased the readability and flow of the book. Sibs Sibanda cast his penetrating eye of a couple of the chapters and Glenn Nesbitt, from Johannesburg Bible College, corresponded back and forth, giving

up a lot of his time to read the whole manuscript and ensure that my arguments had a good logical flow and that they were framed with the appropriate theological terminology, even if our views differed slightly.

Liz East gave input for the middle section, drawing on her vast counselling experience, which I am very grateful for. Wayne Noland corrected a number of references and gave great pastoral perspective. Rob Grant, with some assistance from Andrew Badham, chased up the facts of my stories, ensuring things are as accurate as possible. It is common at this point for authors to state that the final responsibility rests with them for accuracy, which is true, but if you do find any errors please inform me so that I can personally have a dig at these two great guys.

My parents John and Jan Butterworth read the entire manuscript and as well as being very encouraging, gave crucial feedback that has made it a much better book than it might have been. Eighty years plus (between them) of reading (and my Dad publishing) Christian books turned them into a great focus group. Jennie Wegerle kindly offered to edit the whole manuscript prior to it going to the publisher. While she has a superb eye for detail and a passion for accurate grammar, she is wise enough to know that syntax and grammar are there to serve the flow and pace of the writing and not obstruct it. I am grateful for the many hours she put in to this endeavor in support of the book.

I love testimonies and stories, and I have put many in to the book. Consequently I am thoroughly grateful to all the people I am friends with, or have ministered to, who gave me permission to include their stories. All their stories are true, but for people's privacy I have often used different names when telling the stories. I am also grateful for all the people who placed their stories in the public domain. Stories that testify to God's goodness are a blessing to the worldwide church, and I trust their inclusion here will also be considered a blessing.

I also want to thank Michelle, my beautiful wife, for her encouragement and support and for allowing me time late at night to write for months on end. Our daughter Pippa was sometimes my writing companion while she was settling into her routine, and she often made it easy to continue writing. In contrast, her brother, JJ, took a big interest in my keyboard and I am grateful that he didn't insert too much text. I am blessed to have such a wonderful family.

Finally, I want to thank God, who is the kindest Being in the universe. I still find it so wonderful that He is interested in the minutiae of my life and that I get to interact with Him and partner with Him. The good news of Jesus is still the most staggering thing ever, and I am looking forward to growing in the knowledge of it, (and the resultant friendship that has come out of it) during every passing year.

This book wouldn't have come about if God didn't initiate it and then line up all the right things to assist and shape it. I trust that He will ensure it be helpful to some of the many people in the world who are experiencing sickness. *Soli Deo Gloria.*

SECTION ONE:

UNDERSTANDING SICKNESS

“Health is not valued till sickness comes.”

—*Thomas Fuller*

Seventeenth-century English vicar

“Scripture presents suffering both as necessary, because of living in a fallen world, and tragic, because suffering is not the way it is supposed to be.”

—*Dr. Gregg Allison*

Twenty-first-century American theologian

“Those who dive in the sea of affliction bring up rare pearls.”

—*Charles Spurgeon*

Renowned nineteenth-century British pastor

CHAPTER 1:

I'VE GOT QUESTIONS

“We are all ill: but even a universal sickness implies
an idea of health.”

—*Lionel Trilling*

Twentieth-century American critic

It was meant to be a joyful moment. The doctor teased out the baby, expecting that in a few moments his first cry would ring out, bringing relief to the room and signifying that all was well. But it didn't happen. The baby opened his eyes and seemed to stare straight into mine for a few penetrating seconds. I watched the life drain out of him—as suddenly as somebody pulling a plug. It was harrowing! I was twenty years old, on a five-week missions trip around Uganda to see if I wanted to spend my life abroad as a missionary doctor. The mother of the child must have come in from the rural areas to give birth at the kindly Church of Uganda Hospital; being from a rural area, she had not been scanned, so nobody was prepared for what was about to happen. Her child was born with an extremely rare condition called anencephaly, a condition where the top of the head fails to form fully. This little baby had enough brain formation to keep him going in the womb, but as soon as he reached the

outside world, the parts of the brain that needed to kick into gear to initiate breathing, etc., just weren't there.

As his tiny, blood-stained body went limp I felt the emotion in the room hit me—the initial tension of the delivery, the joy as the birth occurred, and then the gradual realization by everyone present that the baby, who a few moments before had been absorbing the world around him, had, just as quickly, passed away.

I didn't speak to many people that day. That was the first time I'd witnessed a death—and it was a little newborn, no less. My head was spinning with questions and my heart was aching with different emotions.

Years later I would find myself repeatedly being part of the team that delivered such bad news: "I am sorry, Mr. Martin, but the news is not what you wanted to hear. The sample of tissue came back from the lab and showed abnormal growth. I am sorry to say it is cancerous and it is very advanced." Or, "I am sorry to say that your brother has passed away." A few sentences that would send people's worlds spinning. Shock, anger, feelings of betrayal. Maybe you have experienced some of these feelings of confusion or despair, injustice or unfairness.

Sickness seems to have the power to bring out the most vulnerable part of us.

Just before I got married to my wife Michelle, I rented a room in the house of a family. The father was very successful in his industry, a brilliant public speaker, and always very confident and warm toward his staff. But, during my short stay, he was diagnosed with cancer and did not know whether he would live to see his children grow up. Michelle and I had heard the news from others and decided to see how the family was doing. We tentatively knocked on the door to the lounge, where they were all gathered watching TV, and were beckoned in. After muted hellos we tried to ask the most sensitive questions we could, but it was still so raw that as they answered our questions, the family started to cry,

and soon our tears were falling to the floor too. Our limited grasp of the pain they were experiencing was communicated far better through tears than through our awkward attempts to ask questions moments earlier.

Probably the earliest-written book of the Bible tells the story of a man called Job who experienced terrible suffering, culminating in agonizing, total-body sores. In the narrative, three of his friends turned up after hearing the news and for seven whole days they sat in silence—not saying a word but deeply connecting with his suffering. Wisely, they knew this wasn't the time to try and puzzle what had gone wrong, nor the time to exhort him to have faith. These three friends had lived long enough to know that well-meaning words said in the wrong moment can come across as unloving or even harsh, and that good advice unsolicited is rarely heard. If you are familiar with the story you'll know that after that great start, Job's friends became more of a hindrance than a help, and their words caused more frustration than blessing. But their initial empathetic silence was very helpful; and after the week-long time of processing, Job was ready to make sense of the swirling questions and search for answers.

All of us reach that point eventually. It's only natural to want to have answers. We may, like Job, get frustrated and despondent if we don't seem to find the answers initially—if the people we go to don't seem to understand the problem or give us passionate answers that don't seem to resonate with our situation. But that doesn't mean the desire for answers has gone away.

Through my time as a medical doctor and lately as a full-time pastor, I have discovered that there are answers to be found. They might not be the answers we expect, but just as God engaged with Job, He will engage with us—He doesn't show partiality.¹ But God also showed Job that there are no quick fixes to pain; no satisfying pat answers or fortune cookie wisdom. What Job did find out

1. See Romans 2:11; Ephesians 6:9; Acts 10:34.

was that his deepest need for answers was met through a relationship. As another biblical patriarch, Jacob, found out years later, it is through the pursuit of God, not the fleeing from God, that God speaks; through the wrestling and not the withdrawing that God interacts. Both Job and Jacob got more than they expected, but they also got exactly what they needed. If there is anyone who knows what you need in your specific situation, anyone who understands where you are in the journey and what will help at each point along the way, it is God.

The tragedy today is that, often, our view of God has been tainted by negative experiences. We may have had a bad experience with father figures, making it difficult to relate to God as Father. A good friend may have betrayed us, and somehow the concept of Jesus being a Friend who's closer than a brother doesn't sound too attractive anymore. Or someone who was a comfort to us growing up may appear cold toward us now, making it harder to connect to the Holy Spirit as our Comforter.

In any relationship, if we pick up an inaccurate view of the other person, it can create a wedge. Have you ever had those moments where you thought somebody was being unkind toward you only to realize later that you completely misread the situation? If your experiences in life have made it difficult to think of God as utterly loving, then you might find it difficult to connect with Him during dark times. Maybe you read those sentences a couple of paragraphs back about God not showing partiality and thought, *He certainly loves me less—look at my situation compared to what He does for so and so*. But you may be misreading the situation. God said He shows no partiality, and if He really is God, then what He says is true.

Can there be a way to make sense of the situations we find ourselves in? What is God's view on sickness? Is healing possible? Is it possible for me? Does God want me to seek healing?

If the time is right for you—if you have reached the place that Job did and you want to make sense of the questions you have, then perhaps you will be willing to explore these questions with me. As a fellow journeyer, I cannot promise answers to everything, but I can show you what I have discovered, as I've seen times of magnificent victory and times of seemingly devastating defeat, as I've wept and cried with those who have lost relatives, and as I've danced with joy as God broke through miraculously.



It had been an exciting day. After getting up early and driving away from the hustle and bustle of Ghana's capital, it felt as though we had entered a scene from the Robert De Niro and Jeremy Irons film, *The Mission*. It was three years since my trip to Uganda; I was now on my medical elective at the University of Ghana's Teaching Hospital, and on this Saturday, I was taking a trip with my adopted church.

To a British suburbanite, I had finally reached "real" Africa. Sure, my first three months in Ghana's capital, Accra, were very different from anything I had experienced in pretty Middle England where I grew up—J.R.R. Tolkien's inspiration for Hobbiton and the Shire—but Accra was still a city. This was something else.

A clearing in the jungle had long ago made way for a village of thatched-roofed circular wooden huts. Electricity and all the modern conveniences that go with it were still to come to this village. There could have been, perhaps, a battery-operated radio, but little else.

We had come at the request of the village chief to run a small health clinic, which mainly consisted of checking people's blood pressures. After we had given out health advice on preventing heart disease and hypertension and distributed a few different medicines, we gave a talk on another hidden illness similar to high

blood pressure but also quite different, a deeper sickness that had scoured humanity since the first humans: sin.

Everyone listened patiently, and there was tremendous joy amongst our team as it seemed the entire village stood up in positive response to our plea to surrender their lives to Jesus and come to Him to heal them of this particular sickness. Through the translator, we checked to see if they understood why they were standing, but nobody sat down in response to the clarification. This had been the answer to many prayers from my adopted church, and the work would now only just begin as they sought to disciple those who had responded. But that was for the future.

There was, however, still one more highlight at the end of an amazing day: after the meeting, a mother and a young boy came up to our group and asked for prayer. Her son had stopped talking a few months back and when we asked why, his mother told us that his older brother was training to be a witch doctor and had reported to his younger brother that “he had sold his brother’s soul” to advance in his craft.²

The mother took the boy to the local hospital to treat his dumbness, but the medics had told her that this was a spiritual problem and they couldn’t help. His mother had even taken him to the psychiatric department to see if they could help but had been given the same response. This poor, rural Ghanaian who only knew a life of subsistence farming and bartering with other villagers for daily needs had probably used all the money her family had ever had to reach that district hospital—only to receive such confusing news. The experts there couldn’t help. What had she left to hope in?

Through a translator we asked what her son’s views on spirituality were, and his mother assured me that both she and her son were Christians and had trusted in Jesus for their salvation. My

2. Christian theology teaches that selling souls is not possible, but lies can still have a powerful effect on us if we allow ourselves to believe them—which is why Jesus declared that it is the *truth* that will set us free.

adopted church had started a church in the village about a year before, and this mother and son were active members. We agreed that it seemed to be a spiritual problem. Despite now knowing Jesus, years of immersion in the culture of witch doctors had obviously created a fear of their power. Whether out of fear or out of a belief that his brother's words acted like a curse, the boy had stopped speaking. We spent a moment telling him the good news that Jesus had authority over fear and the spiritual realm and had the power to change the situation.

Our team prayed a few short prayers with him, declaring truth and asking Jesus to intervene in the situation. After we prayed, he started vocalizing sounds. His mother broke into tears because these were the first sounds he had uttered from his mouth in three months. His voice box had been out of action for so long, one of my senior colleagues assured me it would take a few days for him to form words again, but soon he would be back to normal. Evil had conspired circumstances to make him dumb, but Jesus had a different plan—one of health.



In contrast to the African tribal boy, Amy had grown up in a middle class, white family in the westernized, hustling city of Johannesburg, South Africa. She was descended from Europeans who had made the dangerous, three-month-long journey by ship many generations ago.

For a couple of years, Amy had had periods of strange illness. She had gone to lots of doctors and been prayed for countless times. Her church friends thought that it must either be spiritual or psychological but this didn't seem to ring true to Amy. Before we married, Michelle had been in the same church as Amy and had invited her over to see if I could make sense of things. For whatever reason, Amy couldn't make the date we set, and somehow we never rescheduled.

A year or so later, Amy was visiting Michelle when I happened to walk in the door. Prompted by the Holy Spirit, I stopped what I was doing, listened to her story, and the various fragments seemed to fall into place. Six weeks previously she had had a scan that revealed the diagnosis but somehow her family doctor hadn't picked this up. Recognizing that her symptoms could all be explained by what was called a multinodular toxic goiter—a condition of the thyroid gland—I urged her to book an appointment with an endocrinologist.

Disillusioned by many trips to specialists that were unfruitful, she was reluctant to try again on yet another doctor's advice—and this one wasn't even practicing medicine but working full time as a pastor! So, in my attempts to persuade her I resorted to that essential modern doctor's handbook: Wikipedia. Through it I showed her how everything fitted together. Her eyes showed a glimmer of hope that this painful two-year journey might have an end. I urged her to go to her family and see if somebody would sponsor the appointment.

Thankfully she was able to go to the appointment, a diagnosis was made, treatment started, and her symptoms all fell away. I saw her again recently, and she said she feels like a completely different person! Somehow, over a couple of years, the enemy had created an environment of confusion and despair, but Jesus, through the guidance of His Spirit, had come to her rescue.



Hannah and her husband Jim had been attending our church since it first started thirteen years before. When Hannah was twelve years old, she had fallen off a horse and damaged her hip. Since then, for forty-three years, she had been troubled with backache.

During a series on the book of Acts, I spoke on the topic of healing and invited people afterwards to receive prayer. I am not

sure why, but Hannah didn't get a chance to be prayed for that week, so she found me the following Sunday and asked if I could pray for her.

My routine in praying for back issues is to sit people down and see if one leg is shorter than the other, because a lot of backaches are caused by slightly different leg lengths. Orthopedic surgeons measure this routinely and distinguish between true leg length discrepancies (when one of the shin or thigh bones is shorter on one leg than the other) and apparent leg length discrepancies (when the shin and thigh bones are the same length, but because of a problem at the hip, the leg is pulled up and appears shorter). After a Sunday service wasn't the appropriate time to get a tape measure out and start measuring points to see if there was a problem at the hip, or if one side hadn't grown as much as the other. However, when Hannah sat square in the chair and I compared her extended legs, it was quite obvious to me, and her accompanying friend, that her left leg looked an inch shorter than her right.

The week before, after my talk on healing, I had prayed for five people with backaches. Three had had one leg shorter than the other and two had had legs the same length. To the joy of everybody around, as we prayed for the people with slightly different leg lengths we saw all three legs grow to equal their counterparts. One of them was a guy in his twenties, named Grant; when we measured his legs, his knees were level but his right ankle was sitting one centimeter shorter than his left. We checked that his hips were square and concluded that his right shin bone was shorter than his left, which he said sounded true because for as long as he could remember he had always worn down the heel of his left shoe more than his right.

We prayed a simple prayer and within a couple of seconds his right leg grew to the same length as his left. There were quite a few people around when we prayed for Grant and we could all see that his knees didn't move and yet his legs were now the same length!

He stood up and said it was weird because he always had felt a little tilted, but for the first time, he now felt level. It took him a week to adjust to walking differently. To this day he has been free of back pain, and now the heels of his shoes wear down evenly.

Hannah had heard about these miracles the week before and that had given her faith to also ask for prayer. As she sat on the chair, with me cross-legged on the floor in front of her cupping her ankles and a few friends gathered around, we prayed for Hannah. Something dramatic happened. Rather than the gentle feeling the others had felt as their leg lengthened, Hannah's whole leg shook violently. All of us were quite shocked, me and Hannah included. As it was happening I watched her hip seem to drop and come forward. When I looked down at her ankles, I saw that they were now level. I asked Hannah to stand, and she started to cry as she realized her legs were straight and the back pain had gone! Wonderfully, her back pain remains healed to this day.



These short stories may have brought some questions to the surface. How do we process sickness and healing? How do we find God's will in all of it? Why do some get healed instantly, some, like Hannah, live with the sickness for decades before healing happens, and still others die from (or with) their sickness? How does the biblical character of a loving, just God stand up to these seeming inconsistencies?

If you have ever seen anybody paint a watercolor, you'll know that it is important to paint the layers of the background first; then, after the background has dried, one can paint in the details. Similarly, before we hone in on sickness and look at some of the specific, detailed answers to these questions, I want to zoom out and paint the wash, the background, looking at how sickness fits into God's overall redemptive story.

GOD'S HEALTH BIAS

After six years at university I remember very well the day my colleagues and I passed our final exams and transitioned from being a “Mr.” to a “Dr.” One of the medical insurance firms had got hold of our names in advance and very shrewdly made up smart badges with our new names and titles. I wore my “Dr. Andrew Butterworth” badge with pride as we celebrated and showed it to all my family.

A few years later, the UK had a series of gasoline strikes, which led to a limited fuel supply. At one point all the gas stations were closed except to those who were considered to be doing essential services. Working as a hospital doctor counted as an essential service, so I was able to draw up to the station, show my hospital badge, and fill up. There wasn't anything special about me that got me onto that forecourt apart from my role as a healer, and the title on my badge that backed it up.

Names and titles can mean a lot—as we British should know more than anyone else, with our love for hierarchy and protocol. God's names, too, can mean a lot. There was a time, centuries and millennia ago, recounted in Exodus, chapter 15, when the Israelites had nothing to drink but bitter water, so God showed Moses a certain log to throw into the water to sweeten it. Once the water became drinkable, God made a promise to them, saying that if they chose to obey him, He wouldn't put on them any of the diseases He had put on the Egyptians. And to prove it, He revealed one of His many names to them: *Yahweh Rophe*, “I am the Lord your healer.”

It should be unsurprising that one of God's names/titles is Healer because healing and health are His overwhelming bias. Have a look at the reasons for this:

1. He is completely sickness-free.

There is no record of God ever being sick. It is entirely inconsistent with His character. When Jesus walked the earth, even though He touched contagious lepers and many other infectious

diseases, He is never mentioned as being sick. Leprosy was so contagious and devastating that lepers were forced to constantly ring a bell to warn people to avoid them, but rather than move away from them, Jesus moved toward them. And rather than the bacteria contaminating Jesus when He made skin-to-skin contact with the lepers, the bacteria chose to flee when it felt His fingers.

2. His home is, always has, and always will be sickness-free.

In the Bible, the name *Zion* is used poetically to refer to the place where God dwells. In the prophecy of Isaiah, we are told, “No one living in Zion will say, ‘I am ill’” (Isaiah 33:24 NIV). In John’s vision of heaven, a voice confidently declared that in the future heaven, there would no longer be any “*mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away*” (Revelation 21:4).

3. He created the world sickness-free.

In Genesis chapter 2, God looks at his creation and pronounces it “good,” which, in Hebrew terminology, means “made perfect, without blemish.” It is only after Adam and Eve sin and are expelled from the garden of Eden that decay and sickness enter the world.

4. When He initiated His kingdom, He made people sickness-free.

“*And Jesus went throughout all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction*” (Matthew 9:35). Amazingly, the gospel accounts show that all those who came to Jesus had their sickness removed. There isn’t a single example of someone approaching Jesus and not receiving healing. For example, after Peter had started following Jesus, he invited Jesus to stay at his house and Jesus healed Peter’s mother-in-law.³ A Roman centurion came to Jesus asking Him to heal his servant, and with a word, healing was granted.⁴ Jairus, the synagogue ruler, begged Jesus to

3. See Luke 4:39.

4. See Matthew 8:5–13.

heal his daughter and on His way there a woman extracted healing from Jesus by touching His cloak. Once Jesus reached Jairus' house He brought the daughter back to life.⁵

Additionally, all ten of the lepers that approached Jesus for skin cleansing received complete healing, even though only one was thankful.⁶ Blind Bartimaeus regained his sight after he ignored the crowd and called out to Jesus for mercy, and at the Pool of Bethesda there were many sick reportedly waiting for an angel to stir the water and yet the man lame for thirty-eight years discovered Jesus and received instant healing.⁷ What might have happened if the others discovered Jesus too?

There are twenty-five separate accounts of Jesus bringing physical healing to individuals or groups and exactly zero accounts of sick people being sent away unhealed. In addition, John, His closest disciple, reported this in his gospel account: "*Now there are also many other things that Jesus did. Were every one of them to be written, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written*" (John 21:25).

5. When He commissioned His followers, He gave them His authority to heal sickness and give people a foretaste of the future sickness-free kingdom.

On sending out the twelve, the seventy-two, and then all the disciples at His final commissioning, He consistently told them to heal the sick.⁸ On commissioning Paul, Jesus instructed Ananias to lay hands on him and cure his blindness.⁹ As Paul was healed from his blindness, he was commissioned to go to the Gentiles. During these missionary trips, Paul performed such a number of miraculous healings that the Bible chooses not to list them all, simply saying while on Malta he healed many diseases, and

5. See Mark 5:22–43.

6. See Luke 17:12–19.

7. See Mark 10:46–52; John 5:2–9.

8. See Matthew 10:1; Luke 10:1, 2, 9; Mark 16:17–18.

9. See Acts 9:10–12.

during his two-year stay in Ephesus he performed “*extraordinary miracles,*” even remotely, through the use of handkerchiefs and aprons.¹⁰ When the Bible does list healings they are quite dramatic, such as Eutychus’ rising from the dead and the healing of the man in Lystra who had been lame from birth.¹¹ Peter saw similar instances, even the healing of people by his shadow passing over them.¹²

Jesus’ commission in the last chapter of Mark states that those who believe will be able to heal the sick, and this is demonstrated in the book of Acts with non-apostles such as Stephen and Philip performing many healing miracles.¹³ Supernatural healing is carried on through church history with Christians being used by Jesus to heal many sick and diseased in every century, right through to the present, including well-known church fathers witnessing and carrying out healings such as Augustine of Hippo and Martin Luther (see the Appendix for a list of instances).

6. When He returns to usher in His kingdom, He will make the whole of creation sickness-free.

When I was quite young I had an incredibly vivid dream: in my dream, I looked up to the sky and suddenly Jesus had returned surrounded by a multitude of beings; some people on the earth rose to meet Him in the air while others carried on trying to fix a disintegrating earth. I don’t remember much after that but I remember wondering why everybody had not risen to meet Him in the air, because in an instant their bodies were changed and were sickness-free. The apostle Paul describes this future event this way:

For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first.

Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together

10. See Acts 28:8–9; 19:11–12.

11. See Acts 20:9–12; 14:8–10.

12. See Acts 5:12–16.

13. See Mark 16:17; Acts 8:6–8, 13.

with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord. (1 Thessalonians 4:16–17)

For the trumpet will sound, the dead shall be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality.

(1 Corinthians 15:52–53 NIV)

Our bodies perish because of decay or sickness, but when we receive imperishable bodies at Jesus' return, then sickness cannot affect us. Paul gives another metaphor earlier in the passage: "So is it with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is imperishable; what is raised is imperishable...It is sown in weakness; it is raised in power" (1 Corinthians 15:42–43).

This current body is like a seed that is sown into the ground; once the plant shoots up, the seed fades from view. Whether the seed has some marks or imperfections is long forgotten because everyone only sees the glory of the flower. For those of us who are believers, so it will be with our new bodies. When God ushers in His kingdom, the imperfection of the old body will hardly be a consideration. In Revelation, we see the promise that city of God will come down to earth and God will dwell with us permanently. All pain, crying, and death disappear. Sickness will be no more and creation will be set free as we live in the joy of our resurrection bodies.¹⁴

KEY POINTS:

1. Sickness brings us into intense vulnerability.
2. God shows no partiality—He will personally engage with us and our heartfelt questions, regardless of who we are or what our situation.
3. One of God's titles is Healer (*Yahweh Rophe*) because His bias is always toward our health.

¹⁴. See Revelation 21:2, 4; Romans 8:21.

CHAPTER 2:

SEEING THE BIG PICTURE

“Sickness is mankind’s greatest defect.”

—Georg C. Lichtenberg

Eighteenth-century German scientist

SICKNESS’S DARK BACKSTORY¹⁵

Picture a place of perfection. A place where everything works and nothing decays; at its helm, the most perfect, benevolent government the universe has ever known. Why would somebody want to upset a place like this—let alone attempt a coup? But that’s what happened. No, I am not talking about the fall in the garden of Eden. I am talking about something that happened much earlier.

We aren’t given much detail about it, but we know that a very high-ranking angel called Lucifer led a rebellion against God.¹⁶

15. Much of the theology in this chapter has been developed from a talk by PJ Smyth entitled “Suffering, Sickness, and Healing” given at the Together on a Mission conference in Brighton, UK, on 14 July 2011.

16. See Isaiah 14:12–14; Ezekiel 28:12–18 alludes to it; and Revelation 12 describes it apocalyptically.

Seemingly unhappy with his position in creation, Lucifer set himself up as a rival god to the Father Almighty. But as a created being, it was rather like an ant deciding to set himself up as an alternative president of the United States. Jesus was present when it happened, recounting that He saw Satan “*fall like lightning from heaven*” (Luke 10:18). With him went a third of God’s angels, and, no longer looking very angelic, from this point forward they were referred to as demons or devils.¹⁷

Before his fall, Lucifer would have been an eternally beautiful being, but because of his lust for power and total indulgence in pride, he has distorted into the ugly, snarling, sneering enemy of God. Consumed by hatred, he hates everything about God. If there is any being in the universe whose emotion toward us could be the opposite of God, it is Satan. To get a sense of his character, just look at the names the Bible uses for him: the devil, dragon, serpent, enemy, tempter, murderer, Father of Lies, adversary, accuser, destroyer, and, just simply, the evil one.

When God created humans, Lucifer saw his chance. He and his fellow fallen angels chose to adopt the plot line of many a movie since—unable to hurt the Hero (God) they went after the ones He loved (us). As we are beings created in God’s image, Satan was determined to do everything he could to distort that image. The accuser (literally, “Satan”) lied to us, telling us that God was unjust and unloving, and tempted us to seize power and all its illicit benefits for ourselves. Tragically, it was a sham—and we humans traded something authentic and precious for a counterfeit, cutting ourselves off from God.

You may have heard the popular biblical phrase that you reap what you sow.¹⁸ Through that act of disobedience, we humans reaped a judgment by God of death.¹⁹ That day, a new entity came into the universe: mortality. Unlike the beings in heaven, our

17. See Revelation 12:3–9.

18. See Galatians 6:7.

19. See Genesis 2:16–17.

physical bodies became subject to decay, and decay leads only to death.

The tragedy was that this was never meant to be. Jesus' human body didn't decay.²⁰ Heavenly angels don't decay. And as beings made in Jesus' image we weren't meant to decay. It was never the intention of God for creation to experience decay, but because of our rebellion decay happened.

THE PROBLEM OF DECAY

The letter to the Roman church tells us that not only do our bodies become subject to decay but, as stewards of the earth, our rebellion caused the whole of creation to experience decay. Paul informs us that it is not just Jesus' followers who are longing for His return, but that there is a deeper groan that comes from creation as it, too, lives under this slavery.²¹

Just as tooth decay has the capacity to corrupt the whole tooth if left untreated, so, too, does creation decay have an equal pervasiveness. Creation decay affects everything. It is the reason there isn't balance in the world and why natural disasters happen. Its scope is from the macro to the micro; it both causes earthquakes and corrupts the DNA of viruses and bacteria to make them disease-causing.

Would you believe me if I told you there are actually more cells of "good" bacteria living inside us than cells that "belong" to our body? Because of their much smaller size, if bacteria could vote against the cells of our body they would win hands down by sheer numbers. Before you recoil from thinking about a body full of bacteria, it is sobering to note that without these helpful bacteria we'd soon cease to function. They do millions of essential processes for us every second, without which we'd die. Bacteria have a bad name

20. See Acts 2:31.

21. See Romans 8:21–22.

now, but that's just because creation decay messed some of them up; they were created to be good.

Viruses are in a similar boat. Unlike bacteria, they are not even living creatures—just bits of DNA floating in casing that has been borrowed from a host. However, only 1 percent of all viruses cause disease. The rest carry out their original job of maintaining balance in our ecosystem. In Genesis 1, when God declared everything created as “good,” He meant even viruses and bacteria.

Decay, however, brought chaos, and chaos, unlike God, isn't fair in how it distributes itself. Like a whirlwind that wreaks havoc quite randomly, or the injuries that occur through the spray of bullets in a battle scene, from our perspective on earth there is not fairness to how we get affected by creation decay. For example:

- ✦ Because of decay, some people are born with a full set of limbs, but others are not.
- ✦ Because of decay, some people are born with cancers already developing inside them or with the genetic time bomb of a cancer developing later in life. But the other two thirds of the population will never develop any form of cancer.²²
- ✦ Because of decay, some of us will be affected by one or more of the seven hundred or so distinct genetically-caused diseases or one or more of the many more diseases that have a genetic influence—but others will not.²³

The bullets of genetic decay are not discerning in their choice. Like rain, they fall on both the righteous and the unrighteous, and specific bullets, to the puzzlement of many a psalmist and philosopher, may hit the righteous but miss the wicked.²⁴ Take, for instance, the man born blind who was brought to Jesus. “*And his*

22. Cancer Research UK, “Lifetime Risk of Cancer,” <http://www.cancerresearchuk.org/cancer-info/cancerstats/incidence/risk/> (accessed 15 May 2015).

23. “List of genetic disorders,” Wikipedia, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_genetic_disorders (accessed 15 May 2015).

24. See Matthew 5:44–45.

disciples asked him, ‘Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?’ Jesus answered, ‘It was not that this man sinned, or his parents’” (John 9:2–3). Neither he nor his parents had caused his blindness. The fall of man caused it by ushering in decay. Think of all the problems in the world today, and you can trace each one back to the fall of man and its precedent, the fall of angels. So, shouldn’t our anger be directed there?

Well, it is right to be angry at the destruction that Satan and his demons have sown, and continue to sow, but we shouldn’t make the mistake of putting the rest of it on Adam and Eve. Every one of us did our part in tainting God’s perfect world with our rebellion and selfish ways. If sin brought in decay, aren’t all of us responsible? R. C. Sproul puts it this way:

Sin is cosmic treason. Sin is treason against a perfectly pure Sovereign. It is an act of supreme ingratitude toward the One to whom we owe everything, to the One who has given us life itself. Have you ever considered the deeper implications of the slightest sin, of the minutest peccadillo? What are we saying to our Creator when we disobey Him at the slightest point? We are saying no to the righteousness of God. We are saying, “God, Your law is not good. My judgment is better than Yours. Your authority does not apply to me. I am above and beyond Your jurisdiction. I have the right to do what I want to do, not what You command me to do.”²⁵

In 1910, the author G. K. Chesterton published a book entitled *What’s Wrong with the World*. The story goes that the book came about because, two years earlier, *The Times* (London) had asked a number of authors to submit essays around that same question. Fed up with the blame-shifting and the finger-pointing of the other essayists, G. K. turned the debate inward by submitting the following response:

25. R. C. Sproul, *The Holiness of God* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale, 2000, 2nd ed.), 116.

Dear Sirs,

I am.

Sincerely yours,

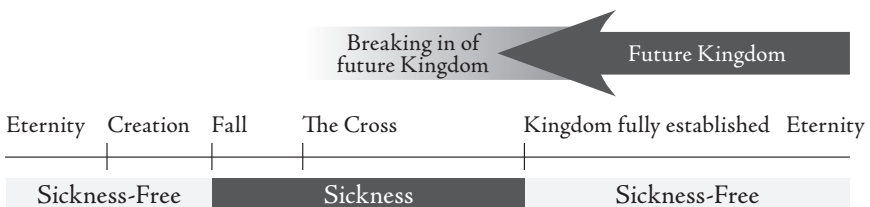
G. K. Chesterton

Who is at fault for sickness in the world? Dear Sirs, I am. Sincerely yours, [insert your own name here]. It was we who opened Pandora's Box. God's heart wasn't for sickness to enter the world, but in our rebellion we caused it. That's right—we—you and I. Not just Adam, not just Hitler, not just your next-door neighbor. Sickness is here because of *us*.

If we are blaming God, or putting all our anger on Adam and Eve or the devil, then we are in danger because the road to healing starts by admitting our part of the problem, no matter how innocent we feel, or how uninvolved we were with our current sickness coming to us. Ultimately, sickness is here because of sin, and not one of us is innocent of sin.

SICKNESS ON THE TIMELINE OF GOD

But if God is all-powerful, why doesn't He put an end to sickness? If we look at the timeline of God, the short answer to that question is—He will! From God's perspective, sickness, like sin, while extremely significant to us, will only be present in the universe for an extremely short time—nestled on either side of eternity.



Sickness came in through the fall but is eradicated when Jesus' kingdom is fully established. On either side of these events is eternity. However, for those of us affected by sickness, this short period where sickness is present is still extremely significant.

Before we look at how to process this, I think it's important to put our experience of sickness in the context of the Christian's great hope: If we have become one of God's children, then He guarantees that He will remove sickness from us for all eternity. The American evangelist D. L. Moody spoke of it this way:

Some day you will read in the papers that D. L. Moody of East Northfield, is dead. Don't you believe a word of it! At that moment I shall be more alive than I am now; I shall have gone up higher, that is all, out of this old clay tene-ment into a house that is immortal—a body that death cannot touch, that sin cannot taint; a body fashioned like unto His glorious body.

“A body fashioned like unto His glorious body” is a hope indeed—especially for those who are suffering in their body through sickness. Even if our body dies contorted by sickness or riddled with cancer, if Jesus has regenerated us spiritually then we will have a fully healed new body for the rest of eternity. David Fairchild, senior pastor of Trinity West Seattle writes:

“For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his” (Romans 6:5). As my wife, Grace, and I sat on either side of her passing mother, Connie, we felt strangely and happily awkward for having so much hope, as if we had a secret just between us. There was a moment Grace and I made eye contact and a wry smile crept across my wife's lips. Were we supposed to feel this way? Was it wrong to feel so joyful in such a difficult situation?

We loved Connie dearly. This was a beautiful and hard-working Latina woman who grew up without the material comforts most enjoy in Southern California. She was as physically strong as she was personally shy. But in the last two years, her cancer physically broke her. And through the deterioration of her body, the Lord answered our prayers and brought her to a living faith in the living Christ. She spent the last year and a half bringing her family members with her to church to hear the gospel until her body denied her mobility. And when the doctors gave the heart-breaking news that her cancer had spread and chemotherapy was no longer an option, she warmly said, "I guess I get to meet my Savior even sooner!"

We miss Connie. But we will not miss her forever.

Connie's cancer was not wasted. She knew her frail, hollowed husk was not permanent and would one day be traded for a resurrection body—a body just like her Savior's. She held hope to her heart like a warm drink on a cold day. She was convinced that her death was an end to her suffering sighs and struggle with sin. And through Jesus' death her life was about to begin. In her last few breaths, I had the honor of whispering this revealed mystery to her, reminding her of what, in only a moment, she would know far better than I.

We miss Connie. But we will not miss her forever. Praise to the One who puts death to death!²⁶

Like the examples given in the previous chapter, as God's kingdom breaks in, some of us may experience healing here on earth. Others of us may be like Connie and only access that healing after our body passes away. But God's promise to His children is that all of us will be fully healed—it's just a question of timing.

26. David Fairchild, "A Resurrection Like His," <http://marshall.com/2012/06/23/a-resurrection-like-his> (article no longer available).

That may be our future, but how do we understand our sickness now? If sickness came in to the universe through mankind's sin, is our job just to wait it out? Not at all! As we will see in later chapters, there is a lot we can do to respond to sickness, but first we must understand sickness as being part of a dynamic process that we can significantly influence.

Four main influencers affect this dynamic: ourselves, other humans, Satan and demons, and God. While it may be tempting to view these on equal footing, because God is the Creator, and Satan, demons and human beings are all created beings, this means that God is able to stand above these other influencers on sickness and restrict and limit sickness, as we will explore further in chapter 4.

THE FOUR INFLUENCERS ON SICKNESS

OURSELVES

As well as being responsible for ushering sickness into the world, we humans have a large responsibility for the high levels of sickness we experience because of the everyday choices we make. For example, on many occasions I have pushed myself leading up to a holiday, only to get there and find that my body collapses and seems to invite in all the bacteria and viruses in the surrounding neighborhood to come and invade.

For more serious illnesses, such as cancer, the lead-time is far longer. Take, for instance, the teenage girl who starts smoking one or two cigarettes on weekends. In her twenties, she's the career woman who relies on cigarettes as much as coffee to give her a pick-up when she is on edge or stressed out; by her thirties, she has developed a life-long forty-a-day habit. If her genes are like the majority of the population, once she reaches sixty years, her chances of dying from lung cancer are one in thirty-five—and, let

me stress, that refers to people who die from, not just contract, lung cancer.²⁷ Forty-five years or so after she made that initial decision to give a cigarette a try, she will likely be looking at a diagnosis of lung cancer. With these sorts of scenarios, there is often a sense of regret and/or injustice that circumstances forced illness upon us, but at a deeper level there is often a knowledge that we played a part in our fate.

Science has recently shown that our choices are much more deeply intertwined with our health than we may have realized, and in the next chapter we'll look at how what we think dramatically shapes our physiology, and specifically, our immune system's ability to resist sickness in quite dramatic ways.

OUR FELLOW HUMAN BEINGS

The seventeenth-century British poet John Donne famously wrote that no man is an island. If you have ever caught the flu by sitting next to somebody on a crowded bus or plane, you'll be able to relate to that statement. And what if there were a chance that you would catch something far more serious than the standard influenza?

On February 21, 2003, Liu Jianlun, a sixty-four-year-old doctor from the Guangdong province of China, was showing symptoms of a fever. Despite not feeling well, he chose to keep his flight to Hong Kong in order to make it to a family wedding. In doing so, he infected six other guests with his illness at the hotel where he was staying.

One of the six, an American businessman, Johnny Chen, took a flight to Hanoi, Vietnam, and there began to develop symptoms of a fever, headache, dry cough and some breathing difficulties. He was admitted to a local hospital, The French Hospital of Hanoi, with what was thought to be a bad case of the flu. There,

27. See <http://nomograms.mskcc.org/Lung/Screening.aspx>. Based on an average of five cigarettes per day for five years, twenty cigarettes per day for ten years, and forty cigarettes per day for thirty years.

his mystery illness quickly infected twenty health care workers, including noted Italian epidemiologist Carlo Urbani, who worked at the Hanoi World Health Organization (WHO) office.

Dr. Urbani had provided medical care for Mr. Chen and realized that it wasn't the flu that was giving him his symptoms, but something far worse. He quickly notified WHO and a rapid response was started that is credited with vastly reducing the extent of the outbreak.²⁸ On February 28, 2003, Dr. Urbani realized he had discovered a new disease, which he named Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS).

Less than two weeks after making the discovery of SARS, Dr. Urbani flew to speak at a conference in Bangkok but felt feverish on the plane. He was immediately taken to a hospital and placed in isolation. His wife was able to talk to him via an intercom and she saw him conscious only once before he was put on a respirator. After eighteen days of intensive care, at the age of forty-six, and leaving behind three children, Dr. Urbani passed away.

SARS turned out to be a very potent infection, spreading from Hong Kong to thirty-seven countries and infecting eight thousand people. Approximately 10 percent of those who were infected died—from all stages and walks of life. Sadly, Liu Jianlun, Johnny Chen, and Dr. Urbani were among those fatalities.

From the benefit of hindsight, it is easy to ponder what would have happened if Liu Jianlun had decided not to go to the wedding in Hong Kong. Would Dr. Urbani's children still have had their father with them? Would the relatives of the other eight hundred fatalities still have their loved ones with them? We may never know the answers to those specific questions, but what is quite clear is that the SARS outbreak had been growing in the Guangdong Province of China for several months prior to February 2002. If

28. Global Alert and Response, "Dr. Carlo Urbani of the World Health Organization Dies of SARS," World Health Organization, March 29, 2003, <http://www.who.int/csr/sars/urbani/en/> (accessed 15 May 2015).

not Mr. Jianlun, it would have been somebody else who carried SARS out of China and triggered so many cases round the world.

How do you respond, however, when sickness has been brought entirely through somebody else's actions, like the child I saw back in my hospital days who'd had numerous bones broken through the actions of an aggressive, angry, ill-coping parent—actions that affected that child for the rest of his life? Or the wife I met who had become HIV positive through her husband's sexual infidelity? Not only did she have to process what this meant for her marriage, but she also had to come to terms with taking three potent antivirals, with quite serious side-effects, for the rest of her life—each pill acting as a reminder of his costly mistake and betrayal.

Or what about the numerous babies I saw born to intravenous drug-addicted mothers who started to go through “cold turkey” withdrawal the day they were born? If they were worse off, they may also have been infected with Hepatitis C, with a small proportion of them going through childhood with their livers slowly turning to scar tissue, leading to liver failure or liver cancer in adult life. My eyes start to water as I think back to those little babies I briefly cared for in the special care baby unit and how their lives may have turned out today.

We can't even imagine the countless millions of people who have been victims to diseases that have flourished because of squalid man-made living conditions. As part of my time in Ghana, I visited the fifteenth-century Elmina Castle, the oldest European building in existence below the Sahara. Here, thousands upon thousands of captured Africans were held until they could be boarded onto ships to be sold to plantation owners in the New World. As we walked around what can only be described as a dungeon, the guide told us that people would be so cramped, they could barely stand or move while they waited to board a ship. The slaves would defecate in buckets that would often stay in the room

for days at a time. Infectious diseases such as cholera or dysentery claimed the lives of whole families.

After seeing the living quarters for slaves I thought the worst was over, but upstairs we found a very different room that, in a way, was even more horrendous. It was a chapel. As I looked around the simply decorated church building with its wooden pews and pulpit, I pictured eighteenth-century Europeans singing songs like “All Creatures of Our God and King” or preaching about God’s love for humanity, while in the floor below they had enslaved and locked away their fellow creation, treating them worse than animals and making them sick from disease.

We may not have been slave traders, but, whoever we are and wherever we are, by putting our needs ahead of others’, we have all contributed in some way to the quantity of sickness in the world today.

SATAN AND HIS DEMONS

Satan loves sickness. It is a weapon he will try to wield at every opportunity to bring harm to humanity. Jesus told us that Satan’s aim is to “*steal and kill and destroy*” (John 10:10), and sickness is commonly one of his favored means. Specifically, Satan is named in bringing about a spinal disfigurement in a woman who Jesus healed and approximately 25 percent of Jesus’ healings in the gospel of Mark involve demons in the direct cause of the disease.²⁹ In Peter’s first sermon to Gentile believers, he said about Jesus, “*He went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil*” (Acts 10:38).

I have told you already about the boy who went dumb in response to his brother’s occult involvement, but there was another occasion in Ghana when I met a person at a prayer meeting whose witch doctor relative had cast a spell against him, and he’d developed what seemed like pharyngeal candidiasis (a yeast infection

29. See Luke 13:16.

of the lower throat), that, after prayer, went away as quickly as it came.

In the parts of the world where witchcraft and occultism are common, overt, demonically instigated disease is well known. In the rest of the world, however, the link to sickness is less direct—but still very significant. With a third of all the created angels under his control, Satan deploys them in an unseen battle for our will. Suggestions are made, truth is distorted, and sin is glorified. “You can drive home; you’ve done it before” might be a temptation that, if followed by the drunk driver, may lead to an innocent passerby being confined to a wheelchair. Satan is elated, because God’s image is distorted and a chance is created to whisper to the victim, “See? God doesn’t care—He can’t even stop a drunk driver from crippling you. He must really hate you to abandon you like that!” Satan uses sickness to try and drive a wedge between God and us, but in doing so he is true to his name—the Father of Lies. Any idea that God wishes harm for us is just that—a lie from the Father of Lies.

To illustrate, I’ll take us back to the story of Job: “So *Satan went out from the presence of the LORD and struck Job with loathsome sores from the sole of his foot to the crown of his head. And he [Job] took a piece of broken pottery with which to scrape himself while he sat in the ashes*” (Job 2:7–8). Satan caused Job’s sickness, but he didn’t stop there. He went on to discredit God’s character and cause Job to blame God for his own handiwork.³⁰ Once that has happened, it is a simple step for Job to cut off relationship, saying to God: “*Your hands fashioned and made me, and now you have destroyed me altogether... Are not my days few? Then cease, and leave me alone, that I may find a little cheer before I go*” (Job 10:8, 20–21). This is Satan’s great propaganda campaign. He uses sickness to tell his great lies: “God desires for you to be like this. God doesn’t care. God has abandoned you.”

30. See Job 3:23.

Lies are powerful things, particularly if they are told to you regularly. Joseph Goebbels, Adolf Hitler's chief of propaganda in Nazi Germany, once said, "If you tell a lie, tell a big one and tell it often." By repeatedly telling the lie that the Jews were the cause of Germany's woes, the Nazi party convinced a nation to vote Nazism into power. People didn't believe it at first, but after relentless campaigning, some started to be convinced. Once in power, the Nazis seized all communication and kept the lie pounding into people's ears and popping up in front of their eyes for years, with a powerful but devastating effect.

Reading the story of Job is similar to watching a gripping movie or seeing a play. The drama of watching a movie often occurs when the characters get duped by the villain into believing that the hero isn't really a hero. We, the watchers, can see the whole thing clearly but for those characters caught in the middle of it, it is not so clear—that is, until the end draws near, and the true natures of the hero and villain are revealed.

It was the same with Job. In the midst of it all, he sees God as the villain, but as the narrative draws to an end God brings him clarity: *"I know that you can do all things...I have uttered what I did not understand...and you make it known to me"* (Job 42:2–4).

And so, foiling Satan's plan, God draws Job far closer to Himself than Job had ever known before, and the result is great blessing: *"I had heard of you...but now my eye sees you"* (Job 42:5). *"And the Lord blessed the latter days of Job more than his beginning... And Job died, an old man, and full of days"* (Job 42:12, 17).

In God's great story of redemption the end is drawing near; Satan's time of duping believers will soon cease. Against a backdrop of sickness-fueled lies that God isn't good, that God doesn't care, that God isn't fair, a Hero has arrived who has shown us the true character of God: Jesus.

As we said in the opening chapter, God is overwhelmingly anti-sickness and pro-healing. After all, Jesus died to reverse all

the effects of sin, including the effect of sickness. All healing, whether here on earth or our full healing in heaven, is accessed through Jesus. However, the Bible does show that, at times, God uses sickness to fulfill His own purposes.

GOD

If you've read the narrative of Moses' life, you'll remember the time God spoke to him out of a bush that had caught fire but strangely wasn't being consumed. At one point, God says, "*Who gave man his mouth? Who makes him deaf or mute? Who gives him sight or makes him blind? Is it not I, the LORD?*" (Exodus 4:11 NIV). Because we have already seen how pro-health and anti-sickness God is, this seems a difficult statement to understand. But it isn't an isolated incident.

In Exodus we read that when the Egyptian nation resisted God's request to release His people from slavery, two (or possibly three) of the ten plagues God sent against them were sickness-related: the boils, the plague on the livestock, and possibly the deaths of all first-borns.³¹ In response to the Philistines' capture of the ark of the covenant, God sent cancers on those Philistines nearby.³² But it wasn't just Israel's enemies on whom God brought sickness. The book of Numbers details how God sent poisonous snakes amongst the Israelites because of their impatience, and that "*many*" (Numbers 21:6) died from being bitten. Then later in the book of Deuteronomy, as well as declaring many blessings for following His commands, God also threatened punishment for not following them, which included various sicknesses:

The LORD will strike you with wasting disease and with fever, inflammation and fiery heat,...with the boils of Egypt, and with tumors and scabs and itch...with madness and blindness and confusion of mind...sicknesses grievous and lasting...

31. See Exodus 7–11.

32. See 1 Samuel 5:6.

Every sickness also and every affliction that is not recorded in the book of this law, the LORD will bring upon you until you, are destroyed. (Deuteronomy 28:22, 27, 28, 59, 61)

Much later on, because of King Jehoram's evil practices, God brought what appears to be terminal bowel cancer on him and then bubonic plague on his people.³³

To those of us from a Western mind-set, this may seem difficult to fathom. Would God seriously send sickness? But the Bible is unapologetic—He does. Like everything in the universe, sickness is available to God to be used by Him for His purposes. You may recall that God used foreign nations to bring judgment on Judah and Israel; using sickness doesn't seem any different—and certainly King David, at least, considered it kinder. When David disobeyed God and took a census to massage his own ego, God offered him three options as consequences.³⁴ David chose three days of God-sent sickness over three months of enemy attack or three years of famine because he argued that God's mercy is far greater than being placed in the hands of humans.

These are all examples from the Old Testament. In the New Testament, God's character doesn't change; He still uses sickness in judgment, but now, through the death and resurrection of Jesus, we have protection from that judgment.

For example, God used Paul to supernaturally place blindness on the sorcerer Elymas, whose dark arts were being used to discourage the island's governor from hearing the gospel.³⁵ And as an unbeliever, Paul himself was blinded by Jesus on the Damascus Road.³⁶ In what seems to be parallel to the judgment plagues in Egypt, the book of Revelation shows there will be three sets of

33. See <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/15785440> (accessed 15 May 2015); 2 Chronicles 21:14–15, 19.

34. See 2 Samuel 24:10; 1 Chronicles 21:1–18.

35. See Acts 13:6–12.

36. See Acts 9:8.

seven judgments placed on unbelievers.³⁷ Sickness is a part of each set of judgments, and God specifically directs the angels to bring these sicknesses on the earth.

In the “seal” judgments, the fourth seal releases two riders of pale horses that are given authority to inflict a quarter of the earth with pestilence (sickness), among other things.³⁸ In the “trumpet” judgments, the blowing of the third trumpet causes an angel to release something that turns the water bitter. The poisoned water is deadly for some people.³⁹ Finally, in the “bowl” judgments, the first bowl is poured out by an angel that releases something on to the earth that causes people to develop sores on their skin.⁴⁰

This seems to be a gigantic amount of God-sent sickness. How do we process this? Is this a parallel to the destruction of Jerusalem prior to the city’s restoration? Is sickness sent one last time before the world is made sickness-free? Some people take the view that this represents the sicknesses and disasters that humanity has experienced throughout the centuries since Revelation was penned. Others feel it relates to a future event. Either way, God clearly sends sickness. But does He send it on Christian believers?

Perhaps, but never as punishment. The Bible is clear that things are very different for those who worship God *after* Jesus’ death and resurrection than for those who worshipped God prior to it. Before the cross, God’s people often reaped a judgment of sickness through their actions, but for those of us alive after Jesus’ first coming, we know that Jesus has borne our judgment. He “*took our illnesses*” (Matthew 8:17) and became a curse on our behalf.⁴¹ For those of us who trust in Jesus, God’s judgment through the use of sickness has been spent.

37. Some theologians argue that the judgments are already happening, spread through the centuries. Either way, the point I am making still holds: God seems to be initiating sickness.

38. See Revelation 6:8.

39. See Revelation 8:10–11.

40. See Revelation 16:2.

41. See Galatians 3:13.

So, if there is a final judgment of sickness coming, it is more important than ever that people turn to Jesus because He will be their only protection. Even during the Egyptian judgments when God sent the twelve plagues, it was quite clear that the Israelites were uniquely protected.⁴² How much more will those be protected during any final judgment who have already turned to Christ for their salvation, and have been adopted into God's family?

HOW DO WE MAKE SENSE OF THIS?

While it is clear that God has used, and will use, sickness as part of His judgment, Jesus bore the judgment for the sins of those who have repented and been adopted into His family. For example, when Israel repented for the sin that caused God to send the poisonous snakes, God provided a place of healing and foreshadowed the healing that Christ would bring. Similarly, when David repented, God also stopped the judgment process. And, in the New Testament, although God judged Paul with blindness, after Paul showed humility and repentance, God healed him.

Cleansing from sin (and any resultant sickness) follows repentance. When we become believers, we repent of the sin that separates us from God and then receive the guarantee of a future sin-free and sickness-free existence.

As we go on to live lives as believers we continue to repent of sin that we become convicted of, therefore allowing God to bring cleansing to our bodies and halt, or even reverse, any effects the sin may have had within us.⁴³ The Reformer, Martin Luther, famously wrote in the first of his Ninety-Five Theses: "When our Lord and Master Jesus Christ said 'Repent,' he intended that the entire life of believers should be repentance."⁴⁴

42. See Exodus 8:22–23; 9:4, 7, 26; 11:4–7.

43. See 1 John 1:9.

44. Quoted in David Mathis, "Luther's First Thesis and Last Words," *DesiringGod.com*, October 31, 2008, <http://www.desiringgod.org/blog/posts/luthers-first-thesis-and-last-words> (accessed 15 May 2015).

As we will see in the next chapter, if we take for granted what Jesus did for us and live in in longstanding, unrepentant rebellion and idolatry, God still reserves the right to use sickness to bring believers to repentance.⁴⁵ I don't believe God does this lightly. Instead, He is weighing up the effect of the sickness against the greater harm that unrepentant sin causes. His motive in this is love. It may be similar to a desperate father who might instigate a police charge against his teenage son who repeatedly and willfully takes his car for drunken joy rides. This is not what normal fathers do, but this is not a normal situation. Likewise, it is not Yahweh Rophe's nature to bring sickness except out of a desire to lovingly bring us back to repentance and right relationship.

DRAWING IT ALL TOGETHER

So, to come back to the question at the beginning of the chapter, why would God allow a man to be born blind? Was it caused by his sin or his parents' sin? In His typical fashion, Jesus didn't answer the question directly: Jesus could have stopped and done a teaching session, breaking their personal sin paradigm, but instead He chose the deeper answer. This came about, Jesus explained, "*That the works of God might be displayed in him*" (John 9:3).

You may have the same question of God, and I suspect Jesus will respond in the same way, moving you away from what's happened to what He wants to do. "Why am I sick, God?" "So that I can work it for good—using it as a means to connect deeper with you," He will answer. The big question is: Are you prepared to let Him do this, to work your sickness 'round for your good? I can't promise supernatural healing, but I can promise that if you, like Job, choose to engage with God, He will draw close and engage with you in mercy and love. Perhaps you will take up His offer of eternal healing (if you haven't already) and perhaps He may even demonstrate that future healing power to you here on earth.

45. See 1 Corinthians 11:27–32.

Before mankind's sin and disobedience against God, sickness was unknown in the universe. Sickness was ushered in to our world because of us. This situation isn't a static one, but it is affected by four influencers of sickness today: ourselves, our fellow humans, Satan and demons, and God. We have seen from the previous chapter that God allows this situation only temporarily and has made a way to remove sickness from the universe in the future. In chapter 4 we'll look at how we can process this situation for ourselves, but first we look at greater detail at how our own thought processes and perspective on sickness can influence the way we experience sickness.

KEY POINTS:

1. God never intended for His creation to experience decay, but through our rebellion, decay and sickness entered the world.
2. Our current experience of sickness is affected by four factors: ourselves, our fellow human beings, evil, and God.
3. Sickness is only temporary, and God has made a plan to restore His creation to be free of sickness.

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