

## If we get sick ...

R. Stanley, 3 May 2020

As I sit down to write this article on 3 May 2020, the number of people infected by COVID-19 worldwide is about 35,00,000, and nearly 2,50,000 have died. Roughly one third of the infected cases is in an advanced nation like the USA. Fear due to this pandemic has gripped the hearts of us all, at least to some extent, about ourselves and our dear ones. Tomorrow is bleak. In this context, I share here some of the relevant Biblical thoughts we must bear in mind so we may properly handle this situation, and perhaps a similar or worse situation in future. Most of what I write here is what I have understood through personal experience and observation.

**(1)** The first and the foremost assurance we must have is that **our times** are in God's hand (Psa 31:15a). With this assurance, David confesses, "I trust in You, O Lord; I say, 'You are my God'" (v14). Thank God for the eminent doctors He has blessed us with; but our times are *not* in their hands. You will not die one minute before or after God's appointed time. Let's be confident that He would complete the good work He has begun in us until the day of our death or the Day of Christ whichever comes first (Phil 1:6). Without His permission, not a single hair will fall from our head (Lk 12:7; 21:18). We are alive because of the breath of life "He" breathed in our nostrils (Gen 2:7). It is "He" who holds our breath in His hand (Job 12:10; Dan 5:23d; Acts 17:25). "He" alone has the power to stop your breath, whether or not you are on a ventilator!

**(2)** Though we have not witnessed a pandemic of this magnitude and severity, each of us has gone through so many crises in our own life. The God of yesterday is the God of today. The God of today will be the God of tomorrow. In the context of a threat for life, Apostle Paul declared, "God who *delivered* us from so great a death *does deliver* us; in whom we trust that He *will still deliver* us" (2 Cor 1:9,10). Like the people of Israel we tend to soon forget God's **miracles** of the past (Psa 78:11). Instead of asserting, "God can!", they asked, "Can God?" (vv19,20). Even in the very company of Jesus, His disciples quickly forgot His works of the past. He had to remind them of the "twelve baskets" and the "seven baskets" (Mk 8:19,20).

I am guilty of this kind of **forgetfulness** leading to unbelief over God's healing power on my body. Physically I'm a weakling. My drill-master in school called me a drumstick (vegetable)! I have suffered from Typhoid, Malaria, Jaundice, Piles, Vertigo, Renal Colic, Hyperacidity, Sinusitis and so on. I had an open-heart surgery in 1996, my 50th year, and a spinal surgery in 2007. I'm preaching against medical advice as my vocal cords are weak. My pain threshold is extremely low, and physical stamina poor. God anoints me on the pulpit just for that hour and uses me. Folks mistake me for a strong person. I often repeat to myself, "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and **forget not** all His benefits: who forgives all your iniquities, who heals all your diseases, who redeems your life

from destruction, who crowns you with lovingkindness and tender mercies, who satisfies your mouth with good things, so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's" (Psa 103:1-5). Each of us must frequently remind ourselves of this.

**(3)** Let us boost up our faith by looking at the healing **promises** of God afresh. Ex 15:26c, "I am the Lord who heals you!" This was in contrast to the plagues God brought on the Egyptians. Psa 139:13,14 speak of God's intrinsic design of our body and how He cares for it: "O Lord, You have formed my inward parts; You have covered me in my mother's womb. I will praise You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; marvellous are Your works, and that my soul knows very well." The prophecy concerning the healing ministry of the Suffering Saviour was fulfilled in the earthly ministry of Christ: Isa 53:4,5; Mt 8:16,17, "He Himself took our infirmities and bore our sicknesses." Healing to the people of God in answer to prayer was promised in Jeremiah 33:3,6 "Call to Me, and I will answer you, and show you great and mighty things, which you do not know... Behold, I will bring it health and healing; I will heal them and reveal to them the abundance of peace and truth." Here's the apostolic teaching: "The prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise him up" (Js 5:15). As we pass through impossible situations, let's remember the challenge God throws on us: "Behold, I am the Lord, the God of all flesh. Is there anything too hard for Me?" (Jer 32:27; Gen 18:14a; Lk 1:37).

**(4)** The above promises however do not guarantee **sickness-free** life on earth. Let me explain this. Christ bore our sins on the cross (Isa 53:4,5; Jn 1:29; 1 Pet 2:24). But even after believing on Him and becoming God's children, we cannot say we have no sin (1 Jn 1:8; Rom 7:17). In the same way, no doubt Christ bore our sicknesses on the cross (Isa 53:4; Mt 8:17). But we cannot say that we are absolutely free from any health setback. Now we are enjoying only the "firstfruits" of salvation and healing (Rom 8:23a). Only in the Second Advent of Christ, we will enter a life that's sin-free, sickness-free, sorrow-free and death-free (Heb 9:28; Rev 21:4). This is *after* the full **redemption of our body** which we await (Rom 8:23). Then our corruptible body will put on incorruption, and the mortal body will put on immortality (1 Cor 15:50-54). Only *after* that, death will be swallowed up in victory; and we can challenge, "O Death, where is your sting? O Hades, where is your victory?" (vv54b,55). We are now saved only from the "Curse of the Law" and not yet from the "Curse of the Fall" (Gal 3:13,14; Gen 3:16,17; Rom 8:22,23). Dear Brothers and Sisters, if you don't understand this truth properly, you will become susceptible to all kinds of false teaching.

**(5)** False doctrines are mostly due to loss of **balance** in interpreting the Bible. Excessive emphasis of any one truth at the cost of the other leads to eccentricity. Eccentricity leads to extremism. The God of the Bible is known for balance. He is not only Jehovah-Rapha, the One who heals, *but also* Jehovah-Makkeh, the One who strikes (Ex 15:26; Ezek 7:9). He kills *and* He resurrects; He wounds *and* He heals (Dt 32:39; Job 5:18; Hos 6:1). He makes "everything beautiful in its time," by dividing it as a time to be born *and* a time to die, a time to laugh

*and* a time to weep, a time to gain *and* a time to lose, and so on (Eccl 3:1-11). He appoints the “day of prosperity” *as well as* the “day of adversity” for our lives so we cannot be cocksure about tomorrow (7:14). Prophet Jeremiah asks, “Is it not from the mouth of the Most High that woe *and* wellbeing proceed?” (Lam 3:38). Let’s go to two outstanding Bible characters: One is Moses the humblest man on earth, and the other is Job from whom we are to learn patience (Num 12:3; Js 5:11). See how both of them balanced prosperity and adversity: Moses prayed, “Lord, make us glad according to the days in which You have afflicted us, and the years in which we have seen evil” (Psa 90:15). Job challenged his wife, “Shall we indeed accept good from God, and shall we not accept adversity?” (Job 2:10). Today there is both day *and* night; only in the New Heaven and New Earth, there will be no night (Gen 8:22; Rev 21:25; 22:5). Do not forget that the first day of creation started with night (Gen 1:5)! The prosperity doctrine thrives on the soil of our ignorance of this Biblical truth of balance. I am aware that I may be accused of injecting negativism into the minds of God’s people. I think that the words “positive” and “negative” are electrical terms, not spiritual or Scriptural!

**(6)** The first thing we are admonished to do *if we get sick* is to “**pray**” (Js 5:13-16). First the sufferer must pray; then the Church elders must pray for him; and finally the sufferer and fellow-believers should pray for one another. This triple prayer exercise is like a “threefold cord!” (Eccl 4:12). Prayer by self, prayer by shepherds, and prayer by saints! When God calls us to pray, it only means that He *desires* to answer our prayers. David addresses God as the “One who hears prayer” (Psa 65:2). God is moved by our tears. When King Hezekiah cried unto Him in his sickbed, He sent him the message, “I have heard your prayer, I have seen your tears” (Isa 38:1-5). God respects our **prayers** and records them in His book; He collects our **tears** in His bottle (Psa 56:8). In the Book of Psalms, only 26 are Psalms of Worship, but 51 are Psalms of Lamentation! What a comforting observation! Do not be discouraged if the answer is not instant. Keep seeking God’s face as Apostle Paul did. God would either remove the thorn from your body or release sufficient grace and extra strength to take care of your weaknesses (2 Cor 12:7-10). Any unsolved problem will help character development (Rom 5:3,4; Js 1:2-4). Even though you may be feeding on the “bread of adversity” and the “water of affliction,” God would be teaching you His truths as never before (Isa 30:20; Psa 119:71).

**(7)** We often sing that Jesus the Healer is the same yesterday, today and forever. The two outstanding titles by which He is known in the Gospels are “Son of God” and “Son of Man.” As the Son of God, He manifests to us the power of God. As the Son of Man, He presents our pains before God. I request my theologian friends to be patient with my interpretation here, please! According to my count, the title, “Son of God,” occurs 44 times in the New Testament, and the title “Son of Man,” 88 times! Glory! I feel like jumping to the roof! No wonder He is called the First In all our afflictions He is also afflicted (Isa 63:9). The author of Hebrews has put it rightly: “We do not have a High

Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly to the Throne of Grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need” (Heb 4:15,16). Jesus never fell sick, but He did experience physical pain when He sweated blood in Gethsemane and shed blood in Golgotha!

*What a Friend we have in Jesus, All our sins and griefs to bear!  
What a privilege to carry, Everything to God in prayer!*

*Can we find a Friend so faithful, Who will all our sorrows share?  
Jesus knows our every weakness; Take it to the Lord in prayer!*

**(8)** You can spend the days or weeks in your sickbed profitably. **Self-examine** yourself to find out if there’s any unconfessed sin (Lam 3:28,40). Set matters right with God. There’s a striking promise in this passage: vv32,33, “Though the Lord causes grief, yet He will show compassion according to the multitude of His mercies. For He does not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men!” When sin is covered up, it affects our “bones” and “vitality” (Psa 32:3,4). Spiritual health and physical wellbeing are interrelated (Psa 38:3b; Prov 14:30; Jn 5:14; 3 Jn 2). Think of those against whom you harbour bitterness. Forgive everyone freely and fully. Decide that you would reconcile with the wronged when you get well (1 Pet 3:8-11; Js 5:16). You can perhaps make calls now. Pray for even those who had not been helpful enough in your crises (Job 42:10). Make decisions to reprioritise your life for seeking first God’s Kingdom (Mt 6:25,33). Plan to set aside a substantial amount, may be another tithe, to bless the **poor**. Here’s David’s observation: “Blessed is he who considers the poor... the Lord will strengthen him on his bed of illness; He will restore him on his sickbed” (Psa 41:1-3). Read also Isaiah 58:6-9.

**(9)** Praying for those in the **medical profession** should be a regular item in our list. They are the Good Samaritans who pour oil and wine on the wounds (Lk 10:33,34). I revere the confession of the French Surgeon, Dr. Ambrose Pare (1510-1590): “I bandage, God heals!” Whenever and wherever possible, we must thank those who treated us. Apostle Paul was respectful of Dr. Luke who obviously attended to the medical needs of the missionary team. Paul calls him as Luke the “*beloved*” physician (Col 4:14a). It’s now 24 years (1996) since I had my 6-hour heart surgery in CMC, Vellore. Every year on the surgery day, 23 April, I have remembered to thank my Cardiologist, Dr. Jacob Jose, and my Surgeon, Dr. Roy Korulla, and my blood donors. How much the Health and Sanitary Workers risk their lives in treating the COVID-19 patients! Decide to form a small team for visitation ministries to Hospitals, Leprosariums, Homes for the Differently Abled, Old Age Homes and the like. Identify with the suffering in whatever way possible (Psa 35:13,14). You will earn the smile of the Saviour! Over 2/3 of the Mission Hospitals in the Northern States have already been closed due to understaffing and lack of funds. The situation has become worse now. Will we the Churches, Fellowships and Christian families in the South take up this challenge and send our young doctors and paramedicals to needy

areas as Medical Missionaries? Medical Missionaries report that even simple treatment heals acute cases. Yes, God's miracle-working power will have a greater manifestation on those who live where there's little medical facility.

**(10) Health** is more important than healing. The secular world publishes lots of health tips. Follow whichever appeals to you. Be regular with physical exercises. Yoga is questionable for a Christian. Regulation of food habits is extremely important. Do not *overeat!* (Lk 21:34). Eat balanced food. Avoid fatty foods (Prov 23:1-3). Fat and sweet were only for celebrations (Neh 8:10). For us the New Testament Christians, there's no meat that's unclean (Rom 14:14). But whatever was forbidden under the Law of the Old Covenant has medical reasons (Dan 1:8). Be moderate in everything, even if it's honey (Prov 25:16). Too much of eating out is undoubtedly injurious to health. Lessen your consumption of synthetic and junk food. Away with addictions (1 Cor 6:12,13). Do not *overwork!* (Prov 23:4). God did not rest on the seventh day because He became tired, no! (Isa 40:28). He has taught us the principle of periodic rest. He prescribed rest even for the land (Lev 26:34,35). Do not *oversleep!* (Prov 6:9,10). Follow the golden rule: "Early to bed, Early to rise!" Do not *overindulge* in pleasures! (1 Cor 7:29-31). Have periodic medical check-up. Stick to medical advice. Prevention is better than cure. Cleanliness is next to godliness (Eccl 9:8). Stay smart even while fasting (Mt 6:17). Be brisk (Prov 6:6; Job 12:7,8).

■ This article will be incomplete without a reference to our **glorious future**. I will call the Apostles themselves to speak to us directly. Here's Paul: 2 Cor 4:16-18, "We do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day. For, our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal." Next comes Peter: 1 Pet 1:6,7, "In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been distressed by various trials, that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honour, and glory at the Revelation of Jesus Christ." John, who wiped the tears of Jesus' mummy, comes next with his revelation of the Glory Land: Rev 7:17b; 21:4a, "God will wipe away EVERY tear from our eyes!"

(This article is available in Tamil also.)

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