IN ALL SEASONS- EPISODE 6- Living Well When We Are Ill

Welcome to **IN ALL SEASONS**. I am Beverly Flanagan, your host on this podcast, for women like me, who love the Lord, in the second half of life.

In this episode, we return to our perpetual question: How does **LIVING WISELY, AGING WELL** relate to our purpose in life? As women? As Christian women?

In the last episode of **IN ALL SEASONS**, we talked about some of the reasons we need to practice Self-Care. We talked about Caregiving, and we have alluded to the calling of our lives as women to care for others. In addition to these, we may ourselves be ill, whether with chronic conditions or have a more serious diagnosis.
HOW DO WE LIVE WELL, WHEN WE ARE ILL?

Getting through the day is a daunting task for anybody battling chronic pain and/or chronic illness. At times we don't feel like we are even living. When surviving is barely doable how can we possibly live for God? When simple daily tasks overwhelm us, how can we even think of living all-out for Jesus? We know God calls us to live for Him, but what does this look like for those of us who are "spoonies" And what is a "spoonie"? A "spoonie" is someone living with a chronic illness. It mostly refers to physical chronic illnesses, though it has been known to be a helpful term for those with chronic mental illness as well.

It originates from Christine Miserandino's Spoon Theory story, in which she explains **what it's like** to live with chronic illness to a friend- she herself has lupus- and uses a handful of **spoons** to demonstrate. For example, daily activities that healthy people tend not to think about take tolls on people with chronic illness. You start the day with a certain number of spoons, and play your day around not running out. **Socializing** might cost spoons, using the stairs might cost spoons, lifting things might cost spoons, etc.

Before we can examine how to go about living for God, we need to talk about what it really means to live for God. When we think of truly living for Jesus our imaginations take us to images of people doing mission work in the jungle, pastors shepherding their flocks tirelessly, or people like Mother Theresa, serving the poorest of the poor in a terrible part of the world. While all of those things are necessary functions of Christ's body, there are so many more ways to live for Jesus. So what does it mean to

live for God? Colossians 3:17 says, **"And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him."** Living for God is simply doing everything you do and saying everything that you say in a way that points others to God and brings Him glory. Notice, this passage doesn't say "whatever somebody else does," but "whatever you do." You don't have to be able to do the same things healthy people can do in order to live for Jesus. No matter what your circumstances look like, there are always ways that you can glorify God through them. You don't have to be healthy to be able to live for God. This brings me to my first point.

1. It's okay that the way we live for Jesus looks different than the way that healthy people do.

Romans 12:4-5 tells us this: **"For as we have many members in one body, but all the members do not have the same function, so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another.**" God didn't create us all with the same gifts or the same circumstances. He doesn't expect us to serve Him in the exact same way that anybody else does. That is one of the most beautiful things about the church. I love seeing how God uses many people in different ways to accomplish things for His Kingdom.

Trying to live for Jesus in a way that is identical to someone else it is actually counter-productive. When we live this way, we become so consumed with trying to measure up to other people that it paralyzes us. Any time our focus shifts from seeking to glorify God, to comparing ourselves with others, it leads to discouragement. The fact is, we can never do as much as healthy people because of our physical limitations, and that's okay. Serving God isn't about how much we can do for Him, but using whatever ability we do have for His glory. Focusing so much on what we are unable to do causes us to stop doing the "small" things that we can do. If we chose to focus on the abilities and opportunities we still have instead, we are able to take action based on the abilities God has given us.

It is not a competition! Serving God in a different way doesn't make it a lesser way. Even healthy people serve in different capacities. The truth is that nobody, regardless of physical ability can live for God and serve Him as much as He deserves. He is infinitely worthy, and even if we poured out our entire lives for Him without fail, it

would still not be enough. So let's stop the fruitless act of comparing ourselves to others in this way.

2. Whatever God calls us to do, He enables us to do it.

All throughout history God has been faithful to provide what His people need in order to live for Him. Exodus 16:29-30 is a great example of this early on in the Old Testament. **"'See! For the Lord has given you the Sabbath; therefore He gives you on the sixth day bread for two days. Let every man remain in his place; let no man go out of his place on the seventh day.' So the people rested on the seventh day."** God commanded the Israelites to rest and not do any work on the 7th day of each week. He could have given this command and left them to figure out how to obey Him on their own. Instead He enabled them to obey by providing for them so they didn't have to work and consequently break the sabbath. The God who displayed such thoughtful mercy in the past is the same today.

Any ability anyone has to live for God is a gift from God. As fallen sinners, we have no ability or even the desire to live for Him. Philippians 2:13 says **"For it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure."** This is incredibly encouraging, because it means we don't have to have any innate qualities or certain circumstances to live for Jesus. If God is the one giving us the strength to live for Him then we don't need to have any of our own. We are reminded daily of the harsh reality of our weakness. Our weakness is not a hindrance to God. It's just a different channel for Him to work through.

2 Corinthians 3:4-5 reads like this; **"And we have such trust through Christ toward God. Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think of anything as being from ourselves, but our sufficiency is from God."** As this verse points out, a biblical view of our insufficiency leads to increased trust in God. Because we know there isn't anything in and of ourselves that makes us able to serve Him, we can trust that His love will remain constant. His love remains constant even in the seasons when we feel like we are not able to live for Him how we would like to. As Christians, we have the very Spirit of God, the third person of the Trinity in us! He is always at work in us and providing us with the strength we need to live for God. Anything God calls us to do, He will give us the strength to accomplish through the power His Spirit.

3. God knows your limitations and has prepared things that you can do for Him with your current physical state.

God isn't surprised that you are sick. He didn't have a list of "big things" He planned for you to do, only to find out later that you can't do them since you are too sick. No way! Our God is sovereign and all-knowing. He knew before you were even born that you would become chronically ill. He knew what limitations you would face before the world began. And He planned out things for you to do to His glory as you live life with chronic illness and pain! Ephesians 2:10 tells us this; **"For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them."**

Our limitations are real and valid. Because we live in a fallen world, there will always be things that make it physically difficult to live for God. But God's "glorious power" is not inhibited by our physical limitations. Colossians 1:10-11 says **"you may walk worthy of The Lord, fully pleasing Him, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; strengthened with all might according to His glorious power…"** Because of the power of Jesus we can live fully for Him and be "fruitful in every good work." God does not have to be restrained by illnesses and physical difficulties. He can miraculously work through us in ways that are impossible for anyone but Him. But, He often chooses to demonstrate His glory in seemingly mundane and insignificant ways, which is summarized in my final point.

4. Simply living and seeking to glorify God while encompassed by suffering is a way to serve God

Simply living life, trusting God, and praising Him in the midst of the storms we face doesn't seem flashy or very important. We all want to look like we are super Christians to those around us, but God isn't concerned with how we look to other people. Merely being faithful to Jesus in the midst of suffering doesn't seem like a very "big" way to serve God, but honestly it can be harder to persevere in the day to day struggles of life than to do one "huge" thing for God. Simply living for God and displaying our weakness brings Him just as much (if not more glory) than doing "big things" for God. Instead of people thinking "Wow, look how she is serving God!" they know we are struggling and how weak we are, so they say "Wow look at how great God is! I know it is humanly impossible to have joy in her circumstances."

In order for us to actually live for God by living our lives **for Him** through all the suffering and pain, we have to be vulnerable. If we don't let people know the truth about our illnesses, how will they be able to see the amazing power of God at work in weak people like us? I don't mean you have to tell everybody every single symptom and everything you are going through in detail, but share enough to let them know you are suffering. If we intentionally hide all our pain from others, we are robbing them of an opportunity to see God at work.

We also have to be prayerful. Prayer is how we ask God for the strength to live for Him, whether that be the strength to serve Him well on the mission field or begging Him for the ability to make it to Bible study. Prayer itself is a lifestyle and a huge aspect of living for God.

Joyfulness is a primary way to live for God. Our circumstances are very difficult, and when people see that we still have joy even though we are suffering, it points them to Christ. It is only through Him that we can have true joy, which is not shaped or determined by any circumstance. Where do we get and keep that kind of joy? That joy is a result of regularly saturating ourselves with God's Word. By constantly keeping our eyes fixed on the Gospel and reminding ourselves of what God has done for us in the past, we can have peace and joy, knowing that He has the present under control, and is working for our good. With God's help we can live in Chronic Joy!

Let people see that you are suffering, but also let them see your Savior and Sustainer by the way you live for God with joy and trust Him in the day to day suffering you experience. Living for God is not easy, especially when you are chronically ill. It takes work, but praise God that He is the one who enables us to work out our salvation and live for Him. Even if the way you serve God looks different than the way others do, it is not lesser. Keep looking to Jesus, the Author and Finisher of our faith, and keep on living for Him out of gratitude for the gospel!

And another thing: what if, in addition to the self-care we have come to understand is a good thing, we need care from others? This can be very difficult, on a personal basis, to accept that we may need help. As Christians, and as Christian women, we are frequently somehow led to believe that we care for others & do not need to ask, or maybe even shouldn't ask, for others to serve us. But here's the thing-- it is good for people to serve one another-- and by needing assistance with activities of daily living,

and care from family, friends, and professionals-- we are providing them an opportunity to grow! And to succeed in answering the call of God on their lives, to **"do for others as you would have them do for you",** as Jesus said.

Believe me, I know this can be hard. I have had arthritic knees for a long time, and for a couple years that impacted everything I did. What would I do each day, how much driving or walking might I have to do, where would I park? How much pain would I have to deal with while at work or with grandchildren? How could I manage public transportation, stairs, long rides even as a passenger? And then I had a knee replacement, and for the first month, needed my husband's help with essentially everything. Getting that leg in & out of bed, going to and from the bathroom, cooking, cleaning-- neither of us were used to any of that. He rose to the occasion & served me with great distinction. and I learned an empathy for disabled & elderly individuals such as I have never had.

In the next episode of **IN ALL SEASONS**, we are going to talk about how does **LIVING WISELY, AGING WELL** relate to **RETIREMENT**? What is "**RETIREMENT**"? What is the purpose and goal of retirement for us as Christians?

This is Beverly Flanagan, signing off for today, and thank you for joining me on **IN ALL SEASONS,** for women like me, who love the Lord, in the second half of life!

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