



Courage through Chronic Disease

Overcoming the challenges of chronic disease requires a level of strength and hope that can demonstrate how remarkable people can be. Carolyn Humphreys, informed by her own experience of a progressive health condition, has written an inspirational book that can help care givers and those suffering from persistent ill health: [Courage through Chronic Disease](#), published by The National Catholic Bioethics Center (NCBC). We want to spread the important message that each of us is a person of inestimable worth regardless of the infirmities we endure.

Our contemporary culture pushes many people to despair and feel useless when they are physically or mentally fragile. There is a temptation to “blame the victim” and not see or validate the heroism of people, especially those with hidden conditions, who are struggling to make it in their everyday lives. The Church has a completely different vision. Rather than viewing persons with disabilities or chronic illness as burdens on society, their families, and themselves, a Christ-centered approach sees blessed opportunities for sacrificial love and solidarity with our brothers and sisters.

I was impressed by the stirring accounts of individuals who excelled despite their chronic health problems, the sound practical advice and reflections, and the selections from beautiful poems and hymns in this relatively short text. It can be overwhelming to learn that a child will have a lifelong illness or that a family member will never walk again after an accident. Modern health care in many cases has transformed what were fatal maladies into “manageable” but permanent or chronic conditions. This presents a whole series of different challenges that definitely require fortitude and even a dose of good humor to face daily trials.

From the initial diagnosis to gradually adjusting to a new disability, this book takes the reader on a hope-filled and even joyous journey despite the many encumbrances on health that can afflict the human body and innumerable other related challenges. The key message is that no one can rightly be defined by illness. The human person transcends disease. Care givers and the sick need

encouragement to look beyond the suffering to a new world of adaptation and possibility and ultimately to live in view of eternal life after death.

We are all persons with problems, some of which can be chronic. Finding meaning in our lives despite this is vital. Most importantly we need a supernatural perspective that we are created in the image and likeness of a loving God who wants what is best for us. Yes, suffering and evil are mysteries we cannot fully comprehend. They are part of our fallen human condition in this “valley of tears” as we recite in the *Salve Regina* prayer. And yet, Jesus’ blessed mother and all the saints and angels have “eyes of mercy” that advocate for us and help us to become “worthy of the promises of Christ.” The most important hope we have is heaven, unimaginable beatitude forever, after going through the trials of this relatively short earthly life.

It is also good to take inspiration and strength from people like Helen Keller, Peer Holm, St. Thérèse of Lisieux, Flannery O’Connor, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, and many others whose words and stories are related in this book. The great temptation of those with chronic disease and those who assist them is discouragement and ultimately despair. One can lose heart when faced with a condition that cannot be physically cured. To fight the sluggish tendency to give up and instead move forward in a positive way takes courage. I believe it requires a supernatural perspective that sees and seeks blessings everywhere.

Carolyn Humphreys says at the end of this wonderful book that it is beautiful to strive for something beyond ourselves. “We grow in the midst of suffering, and it brings us closer to God.” She cites St. Paul: “More than that, we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit which has been given to us.” (Romans 5:3–5).

We can distribute blessings by comforting and consoling others during dark days of suffering, especially as a person approaches death. Encouraging and uplifting others by our words and gestures are deeply meaningful for those we help and for our own personal growth. God is the source of all blessings, the font from which they flow, but we can be channels for that grace. As we grow older and more frail we can focus on our limitations or on unexpected blessings. Love can transform even the most terrible situation. A paradoxical truth is that “when I am weak, then I am strong...” Even though we know every soul is God’s favorite, He

and Our Lady have shown a marked predilection for simple children and those who become child-like by their trusting love and hope.

[Buy this book](#) for yourself or a person you know who needs it, especially during the Thanksgiving/Christmas seasons—when many feel sadness rather than joy. I am so pleased the NCBC is able to offer such a valuable resource as part of our mission to uphold the dignity of each person and contribute to the ministry of Jesus Christ and His Church.

Joseph Meaney

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