

Episode 2-20: Dealing with Chronic Pain

Resources:

Books

[When There is No Cure - Craig Svensson](#)

[Embodied Hope - Kelly Kopic](#)

[Walking with God Through Pain and Suffering - Tim Keller](#)

Websites

[Chronic Joy](#)

[Vision of Hope](#)

Transcript:

Janet: I don't just need to feel better. I need the truth. And ultimately that will make me better.

Alexandra: I just want to make it as totally simple and no brainer as possible for ladies to see that the Bible is really applicable to their everyday life.

Jocelyn: When they understand theology, the application flows out of it quickly with joy.

Janet: It is a journey, but even the journey itself is joyful when I'm doing it, holding the hand of my savior and trusting him all along the way. This is the joyful journey podcast, a podcast to inspire and equip women to passionately pursue beautiful biblical truth on their journey as women of God. When you choose truth, you're choosing joy.

Janet: Well, hello there. Welcome back. I'm here. My name's Janet, once again here with my co-host, Jocelyn.

Jocelyn: Hey there!

Janet: But today, I'm very excited that we have a special guest with us, Dr. Craig Svensson, who is here to share with us concepts that initially I read about in his book, When There is No Cure. I've probably mentioned on the podcast before my daughter and I have a chronic condition. We deal with a certain level of pain, and as a result of that, I was greatly benefited from Craig's book. And I know that it will be a benefit and an encouragement to others to just hear some of your heart, Craig, in this subject. So we've asked you to come and we wanna jump right in, but before we do that, I want to know if you would be willing to share with us just a little bit of your background. I know that you're a professor, and I know that you have been a Dean, maybe still are?

Craig: Not any longer.

Janet: Not any longer? That's what I thought. If you can give us a little bit of your academic background, but also just how then you got interested specifically in this topic.

Craig: Sure. Glad to. Well, thanks for having me.

Janet: Absolutely.

Craig: For the opportunity to share today. Well, I'm a pharmacist scientist by training, and I hold appointments at Purdue. I'm the Dean Emeritus of the College of Pharmacy, and also hold an appointment as a Professor of Medicinal Chemistry and Molecular Pharmacology.

Janet: Easy for you to say.

Craig: That's right. I as well hold an Adjunct Professor of Pharmacology and Toxicology at the Indiana University School of Medicine. So my professional life has really been devoted to preparing the next generation of pharmacists, physicians, nurses, and physician assistants, teaching them about drugs, how drugs act, and how to choose the right drug for the right patient at the right time at the right dose and all that kind of stuff. So obviously there's an interest in pain because of the management that we have of pain often involves drug use, but my interest also comes from my personal journey. As you alluded to with my book, the Lord has seen fit to have me accumulate three different incurable ailments over my lifetime. The second of which came in 1998, when I injured my back, and experienced just a pretty limiting back pain. For 10 years, it was pretty excruciating, hard to sit at any period of time.

Janet: Right.

Craig: And fortunately, the last 10 years, it has not been quite as bad. It still hurts every day, but not as limiting.

Jocelyn: Wow. Praise the Lord.

Craig: I'm grateful for that because then in 2005, I began having neurological symptoms emerged that ultimately were diagnosed as having multiple sclerosis.

Jocelyn: Oh, wow.

Janet: Yeah.

Craig: And for me, I'm blessed that it doesn't lead to disability. Mine's focus purely sensory. So every time I've had a relapse that has left me with a pain, left me with burning sensation, a tingling sensation in different parts of my body that never go away. They're there 24/7, 365. So my own personal journey has involved learning to live with pain as well. And I weave those

together in this book to provide really practical help for people of the challenge of living with an incurable ailment and trying to answer difficult questions that people face.

Janet: And I appreciated that. And one of the things I think where you're uniquely qualified to talk about this is obviously you have a background in understanding the medicines, but when I read the book, I didn't come away thinking the first and only answer is medicine.

Craig: Right.

Janet: But, you understand its role. So it's not, don't ever do that. But it's more than that. And then not only do you have that background and then you're personally working through it yourself, and what I know about you is a passionate follower of Jesus Christ, and a lover of His word. And so how do I put all of those things together in how I deal with chronic pain? And that's what I have really appreciated about you.

Craig: Well, you know, what of the most important things I think to recognize when you're living with chronic pain or other chronic illnesses that won't go away is more important than the physical issues are the heart issues.

Janet: Yeah.

Craig: Because that will determine your journey. That will determine whether you can honor Christ in the midst of it, and realizing that you have serious heart challenges that arise because of the suffering that is there.

Jocelyn: That came out because of that.

Craig: Yes.

Janet: Yeah.

Craig: Whenever you face any kind of enduring trial, I think that's a critical issue to realize whatever the source of that trial might be is your own heart.

Janet: Yes.

Craig: Is more important than anything else.

Janet: You know, it's interesting, I was talking with a friend of mine who will be on a future podcast on grief, Gail McGinty, and they work with grief share and she made the comment how you deal with your grief depends on the heart you brought into it. And so it's the same thing. I mean, the grief is, still horrendously painful.

Craig: Right.

Janet: But how you work through it, just like how you deal with your chronic pain, depends on the heart you bring into it.

Craig: Sure, absolutely.

Janet: So, yeah, I love that.

Jocelyn: So what are some of the truths from scripture that have helped you in your personal journey that has included these diagnoses and this pain?

Craig: I think I would put those into three big buckets. The first, the area of care, knowing that Jesus cares. You know, people who live with an illness that won't go away pain, or other things have surely prayed. They've asked for relief and it hasn't come, and they can feel abandoned. And it's important to know that Jesus cares. I became a Christian in college and when I began reading the Gospels, one of the things that stood out to me so much was the compassion that Jesus showed for those who were afflicted. It just jumps off the pages at you.

Janet: Right.

Craig: I've had the habit of every year reading through the New Testament and every time I go through the Gospels, I'm struck by that again, His compassion. The second area of bucket of truth, if you will, is the area of control, that God is in control. In fact, I believe that is the central message of the Bible from Genesis 1:1 to the very end of Revelation.

Jocelyn: Yeah.

Craig: That God is in control of all, at all times, and because of that, nothing happens by mistake.

Janet: Right.

Craig: There's no accidents. We use that word, but there's no true accidents. God's in control and I think that means that there's a purpose in our suffering. Perhaps that might be best illustrated in the case of the blind man in John 9.

Jocelyn: Yeah.

Janet: Yes.

Craig: The man who was born blind and the disciples said to Jesus who sinned? Was it this man? His parents? And Jesus said neither, but rather, in fact, let me quote it here, "That the works of God might be displayed in Him," John 9:3. And if you think that through, this man, and I believe he was a man, an adult, because he was old enough, the account tells us to give it a account for himself before the Jewish leaders, right?

Jocelyn: Yeah.

Craig: So that means he had lived with blindness for decades.

Janet: Yes.

Craig: Day after day, week after week, month after month, all of the challenges that presented we're told he was a beggar, which suggests he had probably been abandoned by his family.

Janet: Yeah.

Craig: Who would've felt shame of having this blind son. He experienced this for decades all so that at that singular moment, Jesus could come and display the works of God in him.

Janet: Yeah.

Craig: His suffering was for that moment and we can be confident that whatever we experience, even if we can't see God's purpose in it, there is a purpose. There is a reason. And then I think that leads to the third bucket, and that is confidence, that God will give us the strength to bear the burden, whatever it is. For me, that became so real when I struggled with the reality of living with back pain that wasn't going to be cured. That the first months were so very difficult. Just going to work in the car I was in tears by the time I got there. Sitting was so painful. When I got home at the end of the day from work, I would literally crawl on my hands and knees up to our bedroom.

Jocelyn: Oh my goodness.

Craig: And lay down. Our kids would take turns having dinner with me upstairs in the room so they didn't forget what their dad looked like. It was just, it was so intrusive into my life, and finally, I was referred to a spinal specialist who took care of the Detroit Red Wings, the Detroit Lions, I figure, well, anybody's gonna be able to figure this out at this guy, right? And so of course he ordered all these diagnostic tests and everything. And I remember meeting with him, he said to me, there's nothing we can do.

Jocelyn: Oh my goodness.

Craig: You just have to live with it.

Jocelyn: Oh my goodness.

Janet: Wow.

Craig: And that was devastating to me to think, because I didn't think I could, and I remember going back to my car and I sat down and I just wept and I cried out to God and I said, Lord, I

can't live like this. I can't keep doing this. And I dunno if you've ever had one of those emotional experiences where you feel like you're just falling into a deep, dark cavern emotionally. And that's where I was at. And Philippians 4:13 came to my mind. I can do all things through Him who strengthens me, and I just kept repeating it each time, emphasizing a different word. I can do all things through Him who strengthens me. I can do all things. By the time I got done that, I just felt this incredible weight off my shoulders. And I realized that if this was God's choice for my life, He would give me the strength to bear it. And the other passage, I think that's been so important is Paul's testimony in 2 Corinthians 12, his thorn in the flesh where he declares that he prayed to the Lord three times.

Jocelyn: Yeah.

Craig: That you would be relieved of that suffering. And the Lord said, no, my grace is sufficient for you. For my power is manifest more in your weakness than healing you in essence is what He said to him. And that's a precious promise to know that God's grace is sufficient and we look ahead we don't think we can do it, but of course, you don't need the grace until the moment you need it.

Janet: Right, and we can't do it without the grace.

Craig: Absolutely.

Janet: So when I look ahead, it is hopeless. I can't do it.

Jocelyn: I was just thinking that about the second bucket, the control bucket. I think that's sometimes what's so hard because you realize you have to do this for the rest of your life possibly, and you can't turn it off.

Craig: Yeah.

Jocelyn: And so I'm glad you're acknowledging how difficult that is, and also the minute by minute existence of it because if you do try to forecast what life is gonna look like in 10 years, if this never stops, I think it that's what brings people to a place of hopelessness like then I'm not willing to keep going forward because that's just incomprehensible.

Janet: Yeah.

Craig: And that's why focusing on today, I only need grace sufficient for today. Jesus told us don't be anxious for tomorrow. Tomorrow have its own troubles. Today there's enough of 'em just worry about today's, right? Just worry about today's and I think Jesus' words help us focus today,

Janet: Right.

Craig: Don't worry about tomorrow. Don't be anxious about tomorrow. God will provide whatever I need tomorrow. I just need to worry about today.

Janet: Yeah.

Craig: And His grace will be sufficient to see me through today.

Janet: And I appreciate because as you were saying that I'm thinking, so if I'm the blind man and I, at some point recognize I've been blind for this moment, unless I understand how good and loving God is, that's not even comforting.

Jocelyn: Yeah.

Janet: You know, like He's in control.

Jocelyn: Like really you ruined my life and...

Janet: you wanted me to live this way forever.

Jocelyn: Yeah.

Janet: Just so people could see you're all that, but you started with my number one is Jesus cares.

Craig: Right.

Janet: You know, I have to know that. I have to know what He's like, and that He cares so that His control is actually a comfort.

Jocelyn: Yeah.

Janet: And so that wanting Him to be glorified is actually an encouraging purpose because it is, but I'm just thinking if I don't really understand the character of God, that's rough.

Jocelyn: And when you're in the middle of it, you're like, I really don't care about anything other than getting this stop.

Janet: Right.

Jocelyn: Because it's terrible, and I can't imagine how this could bring any good, how it could be good, or how God getting glorified through this horrible situation could possibly be worth it.

Craig: And yet throughout the Bible, we are reminded of instances where that is true.

Janet: Yes.

Craig: Where suffering has brought a good purpose for God. I mean, of course you think of the case of Joseph and all that he went through.

Janet: Yes.

Craig: And ultimately he could see in his lifetime, he did get to see that reality or think about the Exodus and the plagues that came, you know, we tend to think about the contest between Pharaoh and Moses and God, but there was this whole population of Egyptians that had nothing to do with this conflict.

Jocelyn: That's true.

Craig: I mean, they didn't care about the God of Israel. They didn't care about the Israelite because they were busy making the cities and the monuments for the Pharaoh.

Janet: Right.

Craig: They were doing them. They didn't care what happened, but yet they experienced the loss of their crops.

Janet: Yes.

Craig: They experienced the agony of all the pestilence that came in everything. And why? Well, God tells us seven different times in that whole account so that you might know that I am the Lord God.

Janet: Yes.

Craig: They're suffering had a purpose, to display that God is God.

Janet: Yes.

Craig: And He's above every other. And His purposes were accomplished in the suffering of many people, not just Pharaoh.

Janet: Right.

Craig: But all the people of the land experienced it. Ultimately they lost their firstborn.

Janet: Yes.

Craig: All for God to be able to show. And in the end, clearly they saw it, that this Yahweh, this God of Israel is greater than our gods. He is the God.

Janet: And to know it's easier for me at a distance because I'm not, I didn't live through it.

Craig: Yeah.

Janet: To see, and that wasn't mean of God. That is what their souls needed. Their souls needed to know that He was the only true God, so that they'd have the opportunity to be with Him forever. Like this is, what's far more important than temporary suffering.

Craig: Yeah.

Janet: Is what He was doing was also best for them.

Craig: Right.

Janet: You know, but I really need to know the scriptures, and I really need to know the character of God to be able to draw on that in the midst of my own suffering.

Craig: And I think another helpful point is to remember Jesus wasn't spared suffering.

Janet: Yes.

Craig: Why do we think we should be as His followers?

Janet: Right. And I, yes, and I've talked to women before, you know, we say, I want my life to be conformed to the image of Christ. And if Christ was called a suffering servant, why are we always shocked

Craig: Right.

Janet: That being conformed to the image of Christ

Craig: Yeah.

Jocelyn: Right.

Janet: includes suffering. But we are, we think I wanna be conformed to Christ.

Jocelyn: I want the good parts of Jesus and I don't wanna go through what it takes to get it.

Janet: Yeah. If I follow all the things, then my life will go well.

Jocelyn: Right.

Janet: Because I'm doing all the right things. Well, it didn't go well for Jesus, as far as an absence of suffering.

Jocelyn: It's not a formula. It's worship, not a formula.

Janet: Right. Right.

Jocelyn: So how can we suffer well, in a way that would honor God in the process?

Craig: I think there are two key steps. The first is to recognize that they're a risk with chronic illness of any sort. And I would even say you could spread that to not just an illness, but any enduring trial. They're a spiritual risk. We need to realize that in fact illness, particularly acute illness threatens your health, but chronic illness threatens yourself. When I have an acute illness, my head hurts. I've got a sore throat, whatever it might be. I know that's gonna pass.

Janet: Right.

Craig: Maybe it prevents me from doing some things for a while, but life's gonna get back to normal. But when you have a chronic illness, that's not going to be cured, life is never gonna get back to normal. And in fact, things may only get worse and as a consequence, it may change the way that you live out roles in your life. Things that you do as a spouse, as a parent.

Janet: Right.

Craig: As an employee. And it can change those roles and as a consequence of that, if you are finding your satisfaction in those roles rather than in Jesus, yourself is now threatened. And it becomes a heart issue. That's why often the locus of suffering for people, it shifts from the body to the personhood, not that the pains and the body go away, but it's the limitations that come upon their personhood that they struggle with most deeply.

Janet: Yes.

Craig: They can't do the things they used to do. They can't be the person and they never will be again because of this chronic illness. And we need to realize that the place that Satan wants us is to think that our satisfaction is gonna be found in health.

Janet: Yes.

Craig: Rather than in Jesus.

Jocelyn: Or any of those identities.

Janet: Abilities.

Craig: Absolutely.

Jocelyn: Yeah, any of those things that made you, who you think you are.

Craig: Absolutely. Trials will either make us better or bitter.

Janet: Right, right.

Craig: And how we respond to those trials will determine that. And so that's really the second part and that is we have to determine to fight for joy every day, and for me, my north star has been Hebrews 12, and I think it's worth reading. Of course it'd be worth reading anything in scripture, but especially Hebrews 12: 1 & 2. And for me, this has just been my focus and I'm reading from the ESV in case people hear different words. The writer of Hebrew says, therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, I probably oughta stop there since we're jumping in the middle of an epistle that therefore is obviously there for a reason.

Janet: Right.

Craig: Pointing back to Chapter 11, that cloud of witnesses.

Janet: Yes.

Craig: Are the people in the hall of faith, the men and women who have experienced so much, and many of them have experienced great suffering because they serve the Lord God of Israel. He says, let us also, in other words, let us be like them. Let us lay aside every weight and sin, which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who, for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross despising the shame and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God. You know, we all have our own race to run, and we all have different obstacles in our lives. For some people, the obstacle is chronic pain. For some people, it is the memory of past abuse. For some people, it is a relationship that was broken that will never be healed, but because of what Jesus has done, we can know joy.

Janet: Yes.

Craig: And Jesus wants us to experience that. This is what He said in John 15:11, "These things I have spoken to you that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be full". I mean, that's why Paul could say we rejoice in our sufferings.

Janet: Right. Well, and to think Jesus was saying that the night before He was crucified.

Craig: Absolutely.

Janet: I mean the context of Him even saying about His joy.

Craig: Yeah.

Janet: He was facing what He knew was gonna be the most horrendous thing He had been through.

Craig: Absolutely I think one of the ways that we can honor God is by knowing the fullness of joy that He would have as know, and that means we determine to fight for joy every day.

Jocelyn: Do you have any tips on doing that well?

Craig: Yeah, I think it starts with prayer.

Jocelyn: Okay.

Janet: Yes.

Craig: At the beginning of the day, asking God to give you the joy that Jesus has won, and that you would experience it and display it that day. I think the second is saturate yourself with Gospel Truth. When you think of the great exchange that has taken place, right? That Jesus became sin for us, and the weight of the transgressions that was against us was put on Him and His righteousness was put on us so that we could experience the blessings of heaven. How can you not be joyful? How can you not know joy when you realize what has been done, how you have been rescued because of that great exchange? And then I think the third thing is asking others to intercede for you. You know, the great reality is that when we're saved or not just saved from something we're saved into something, right? That is God's forever family. We have the privilege of praying for one another, and one of the advantages of these phones that we have is we're so connected now. We can easily shoot off a text, and ask someone to pray for me today, I'm struggling to know the joy that Jesus would have.

Jocelyn: How do you fight against possibly feeling like, oh, I'm such a burden to my friends. I'm in pain a lot. I'm asking for their help a lot. I mean, Janet and I are involved in so many people's lives that are just heavy.

Craig: Yes.

Jocelyn: And they often feel like just, uh, I hate to bother you, but I really need to have some prayer and we're like bother us. Then we know specifically what to ask for, but how do you fight to not go into that slump of like, oh, I'm asking for too much, too often?

Craig: Maybe it comes to the people that I do approach and I know they want to, I mean, not everybody's a prayer warrior.

Janet: Right. That's right.

Craig: And you need some prayer warriors in your life that you turn to.

Jocelyn: Okay.

Craig: And that, you know, that's a joy for them to intercede, and of course, generally it's a mutual exchange. Right? So I might be struggling with pain, but the person that I'm reaching out to is struggling with something else.

Janet: Yes.

Craig: And how often you send one of those texts and say, I will and could you pray for this for me? Right. And so we are able to hold one another up in prayer. We should see intercession as a privilege. And it's important for us to realize that people wanna help. They wanna be of help.

Janet: Yes.

Craig: And when you reach out to them and ask, well, boy, that's something I can do right now. It's something tangible. Of course, I will do it. That we're not being a burden to them. We're actually giving them an avenue to display their compassion that they have for us.

Jocelyn: And God promises so much joy in serving. Like He tells us.

Craig: Absolutely.

Jocelyn: When we function as a body, we will receive His joy. And so to not tell someone is to kind of be a joy stealer. Like you take their opportunity away from them being able to serve you in that way, if they don't know.

Janet: And I think for the person getting that text, when they feel that as a burden, it may be because I was thinking, why would I feel that as a burden? And I would think it could be a couple of things. One is I don't recognize the power and the joy of intercession. So in my mind, I feel the weight of I need to fix this. You know, Jocelyn's just told me I'm struggling with this, would you pray for me? And I'm thinking, well, how do I help make it better? I don't know what to do. I don't know how to fix it. I don't know. It's like, she didn't me to do that. Like there's one who knows. So either I'm trying to take on a burden that isn't mine or I don't understand the privilege and the freedom of prayer. I don't need to bear it. I need to take it to the One who will bear that burden.

Jocelyn: That's a great reminder.

Craig: And sometimes people who have gone through a similar journey can understand that even more so.

Janet: Absolutely.

Craig: There can be a danger in bringing people together who are going through a similar struggle because it can turn into a pity party.

Janet: Right.

Craig: And you don't want that, obviously it can turn into just focusing on your problems. On the other hand, if it's a healthy interaction, they understand, and they actually know better how to pray.

Janet: Yes.

Jocelyn: True, very true.

Janet: I love that. So that's what we ought to do, but I would say to you, maybe it's just me, maybe nobody else does this, but I'm tempted and give into temptation more than once to not see, how can I just honor the Lord in it? What I really want in that moment is escape. I want comfort. I want control. I'm somehow looking for something other than Jesus. Do you have any ideas? What encouragement thoughts would you have for someone who's tempted to try to get out the pain in their life instead of fighting for joy in it?

Craig: Yeah, I think you have to accept the hard truth that not everything that is broken can be mended.

Janet: Yeah.

Craig: Not every wound is going to be healed. There are some burdens that must be born. That's a hard truth for people to accept.

Janet: I think it's harder today.

Jocelyn: That is very hard.

Janet: And I think there are cultures in the past that no one ever enjoyed it, but they weren't shocked by it.

Jocelyn: Right. It was part of life.

Janet: Our culture seems to be shocked by anything that can't be fixed

Jocelyn: Or anything that's hard or hurts or can't be quickly realized.

Janet: Yeah. So we don't expect that. That's a shock.

Craig: It's the other side of the coin of pleasure. One you seek pleasure and the other, you want to avoid pain.

Janet: Yes.

Craig: And part of that is we need to understand that there is benefit in trials. And two really important passages in this regard are first of all, Romans 5, where we learn the reality that it is often in the crucible of affliction that we can grow the most. Paul says this, "Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Through Him, we also have obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand. And we rejoice in hope of the glory of God. 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 put us to shame because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the holy spirit who has been given to us". And let me read a parallel passage in James, the one that in fact, didn't you two do a podcast, right?

Jocelyn: I was actually just thinking, oh, I love this one.

Craig: I think I heard about that. James 1:2, "Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing". There is benefit in experiencing trial. We will grow through it. And I think it's real important to recognize that gold is not refined by being taken out of the fire. It's refined by being in the fire.

Janet: Yes.

Craig: And if you take it out too soon, it's impure. And so I think coming to recognize that God will grow me through this experience, you know, Job declared when he has tried me, I will come forth as gold.

Janet: Yes.

Craig: And if we can gain that perspective on understanding that Paul and James and Job talked about. It prevents us from just trying to run from the trial, and instead realize there's growth in the journey.

Janet: Yeah.

Craig: That truly in the crucible of affliction, I will grow. I don't know what your experiences are like, but I have seen new Christians over the years, and watched their growth patterns. And those who went through sore affliction, grew the most in the soonest. Have you found that?

Janet: The deepest roots.

Jocelyn: Yes, and Janet and I often comment because on the one hand we each have our own stuff that God wants us to go through, but what kills us is when our kids have to go through hard stuff.

Craig: Sure.

Jocelyn: Because what we want is warrior women. I have two daughters. I want warriors for Christ. And Janet wants that for her son. She wants him to be a warrior, I don't want my kids to ever have to go to battle. I just want them to be strong without having had to experience pain. And for me, it's like a moment of confession. God, I repent of wanting something that You don't want and You didn't design for it to work that way, and I bend the knee to your greater plan because it's such an uncomfortable plan.

Janet: But it comes back to what Craig said earlier about being saturated with the Gospel. Because what I realize because I fight those battles. We do talk about this a lot because we both fight these battles when it comes to our children. I don't want anything hard for them, and yet that's obviously not right. But when I understand that God really loves them better than I do, then my hand can open a little more. I'll stop clinging so much. When I realize again, I'm saturated with the Gospel. I'm wrong that this pain is bad for them. I'm wrong. Because He loves them better.

Jocelyn: It's so cool to look back on periods that were really tough and where we really had to dig into the Romans truth and James truth that you just said like, okay, we're fighting. We're gonna do what honors God in this situation. And then God gives you the ability to look back with perspective and see that growth did happen.

Janet: Yes.

Jocelyn: And I'm sure you can even see that your days when you crawled up the stairs into your bed like you look back on that and say, I don't know that I'd ever wanna relive it, but boy, wow, did God do some amazing things.

Craig: Yeah, and others who are watching you will learn as well, right?

Janet: Yes.

Craig: There is an opportunity to give testimony through suffering that doesn't happen when things are going well.

Jocelyn: Yes.

Janet: True.

Craig: And you can never tell when your willingness to bear suffering, and to do it with joy, will be used to touch another person, who needs to know the good news of Jesus Christ.

Jocelyn: Because apparently it's such a common theme for all of us, right?

Craig: Yes.

Jocelyn: I mean, we all, if we're gonna be growing through pain.

Craig: Absolutely.

Jocelyn: Then when we are willing to engage with the Lord in it, it is offering encouragement to someone else who's watching because we're all about to go in it.

Craig: Right.

Janet: I don't remember the exact verse. You might. I remember Brent explaining to me the context of a verse that we use a lot that talks about always being ready and being prepared to give a defense, and that the context is because you've suffered.

Craig: Right.

Janet: That's the context of that verse. It's not, know all of the apologetics facts.

Craig: 1 Peter. Yep.

Janet: It's about because of the way you've suffered, always be ready to explain. There's your platform for evangelism and ministry is them watching how you suffer.

Craig: The history of the church is populated by the impact of martyrs of the church.

Janet: Yes.

Craig: Right.

Jocelyn: And Hebrews 11. Like the end of Hebrews 11, it says, all those different people in their story. And then it just says, name, name, name, name, name, all those people are just murdered. They were just tortured.

Craig: Yep.

Jocelyn: And now they're dead.

Craig: And the world was not worthy of them.

Janet: Yes.

Jocelyn: Yes. So how do you gauge when and how to seek remedies that might help get rid of that pain or make it manageable without losing the pain becoming some new idol.

Craig: Yeah. I think this is particularly important for people who live with chronic pain because most people who live with chronic pain, there's no discernable reason for their pain. They might remember some kind of event, a fall, a surgery, an injury of some sort, but that's healed, and we can't tell why they still have pain. There's nothing in methods of diagnostic and it is frustrating. And so what that can do though, is it can send you on this endless pursuit of trying to find an answer for my pain. And it's understandable, but most of the time, it's not going to come. Most people with pain, it's sort of like, you know, a rock you throw in a pond. It quickly slips below the surface and you can't discern it, but it has ripple effects that keep going for a long time, and that's the way it is for most people that live with chronic pain. So people have to realize that most often that pain is not gonna be able to be cured. It's gonna be there. Now, it's good and right for people to seek relief, to get good medical care.

Janet: Yes.

Craig: Get an assessment and seek it where it is, and when your first foray into the medical system, doesn't provide you with relief, it is wise to seek a second opinion from specialists, who really have the knowledge to be able to assess pain. I guess, I feel like I ought to give a warning. There's a lot of charlatans out there.

Janet: Yes.

Craig: Some who have impressive degrees behind their name, who are willing to take your money.

Jocelyn: Yeah.

Craig: And fill you with promises that they're not gonna be able to fill.

Jocelyn: I'm thankful you mentioned that.

Craig: People need to be very discerning and careful of where they go, but when a second opinion doesn't provide relief and an avenue for escape, I do think there's a place to sit back and say, Lord, is this Your will for my life? That it is Your desire that in Your providence for this time in my life, this is what I am going to live with, and to be willing to accept that because there are ways that we can manage pain, even when we can't take it away. There are ways in which we can help people endure and live with pain, and especially when you know it's not going to go away, there's a way in which you need to shift your focus to your heart.

Janet: Yeah.

Craig: And away from your body. You know, early on, we gotta see if we can get this thing fixed. It's coming from my body. But when it's not gonna go away, we need to realize that the key is to begin focusing on our heart. Because when people live with chronic pain, they can really

experience a progressive decline in both their spiritual and their physical well-being. I often like to use a diagram. Doesn't do any good here on a podcast.

Janet: If you'll let us, we'll put it in our show notes though, so people can see it.

Craig: It's a twofold wheel. On the one hand, you have people that physically decline and what happens very naturally when we experience pain, we decrease our activity.

Janet: Yes.

Craig: And we withdraw from things that provoke pain. But what that does is it provides a physical deconditioning. If you have an exercise routine, you know, if you don't exercise for a couple weeks because you're ill or because you're on vacation, you go back to doing, you can't run as far, you can't row as hard, and you become deconditioned. Well that happen to people in pain, so their body becomes deconditioned, so now less movement causes pain. So they pull back more, their body becomes more decondition. So what happens? They get pain at less movement, so they pull back more. They become more deconditioned and you can watch somebody physically becoming less and less active with pain. But the same thing happens on the spiritual and the emotional side. They are fearful. They're anxious. This pain's not going away. They're fearful about what's gonna provoke it. They get an impoverished mood that makes them more sensitive to pain. It just feeds. You've got these wheels of this progressive decline where people will decline physically, spiritually, and emotionally. People need to recognize that you need to break the cycle. Pain's not gonna go away. So how do I break this downward cycle?

Janet: Right.

Craig: That I have.

Janet: Yep, and I think, when you were saying, at some point we make the switch because obviously nobody in this room is saying, don't go to the doctor.

Craig: Right.

Janet: So we do that. What I found at least on our personal journey with my daughter and myself, there was a, and still can be a constant need. Constant is too much, continual need to reassess like what is stewardship versus idolatry is how we've tried to think about it. Okay, we need to get the second opinion, and I know for us after nine years, at least there was a diagnosis. There's not a cure, but there is a diagnosis.

Jocelyn: You understand what it is.

Janet: So we know something.

Jocelyn: Yeah.

Janet: Then it's okay, what is stewardship? Now, I would tell you, and this may sound weird, but the other side of where I will battle is even if there's an opportunity that might help, I'm tired of being disappointed. I don't even try. And that's wrong too. That's not stewardship. Which is like idolatry only. It's the reverse. If I can't get better.

Craig: Right.

Janet: I don't even wanna think about it.

Jocelyn: It's hopeless. Yeah.

Janet: So I'm not leaning into it saying how do I work on my heart in it? I'm just saying, whatever.

Jocelyn: Whatever. Yeah.

Janet: And then when I do hear, here's someone who really might be able to help. Do I wanna do this? So what I find is

Jocelyn: It's like it becomes cynical almost.

Janet: Yes.

Jocelyn: Yeah.

Janet: So it's like it's a heart issue. I've gotta deal with my hope is not in getting a cure, and my hope is not in avoiding disappointment. My hope is in Christ, and I want a steward which might mean pursuing something that is wise, even if I'm disappointed again.

Jocelyn: That's hard.

Janet: And that has its own heart issues that have surprised me. I think.

Jocelyn: There's also just the exorbitant amount of money that you could spend.

Craig: Of course.

Jocelyn: In trying to be cured or get relief. That's also not good stewardship.

Janet: There's another stewardship issue here.

Jocelyn: Your family has a finite amount of money and you do have to decide, I mean, it's God's money. You have to decide.

Janet: Yeah.

Jocelyn: How much of God's money are you gonna invest in this thing that, like you said, may not ever have any positive relief, and then you have spent that money and nothing is different.

Janet: I think it's so helpful to have other people in your lives who are wise, love Jesus, love you, and can help you think through those that don't have the log in the eye that I might.

Craig: I think that's very important because you can become consumed.

Janet: Yes.

Craig: In one direction or the other.

Janet: Yes.

Craig: You need people that can help you. I often picture this as falling into ditches while driving down the road, you can fall into the ditch of becoming completely consumed with your ailment and everything becomes about your ailment.

Jocelyn: And your whole identity.

Craig: All this time. Yep, and that's all you wanna talk about that you go to conferences about, all this kind of stuff, or the other end where you become apathetic.

Janet: Yes.

Craig: And you're just gonna live with whatever limitations it produces and you don't wanna be in either ditch. And from time to time, we need those who love us to help us pull us out of the ditch.

Janet: Yes.

Craig: And that requires an openness of being willing to have someone else kind of examine you, and open your heart to them.

Janet: Which is part of the being in the body. Like I so appreciated when I was going through this early on with my daughter and we didn't have a diagnosis. I had a good friend who was also a nurse practitioner. So I was like, okay, she loves Jesus. She loves my family. And she knows some things about science, not everything I get, but she's a wise woman. And so I've said I've been encouraged to try this, whatever, at what point am I now that loon who's going after everything. Yeah. Like where am I? And it was so helpful cuz she asked me, well, how much does it cost? How intrusive is it? How much time will it take? What are the risks? And at the end

of the day, she said, I don't think it's that big a deal. Give it a shot. If it doesn't work, it doesn't work. Like it's not that big.

Jocelyn: You're not losing that much money.

Janet: It's not like they're doing something to your body. It's a blood work. So it's not like you're gonna get hurt. Risks are low.

Jocelyn: It's not irreversible. Yeah.

Janet: You know, so, but it was just helpful to have. I needed someone outside me because I'm like, I don't even know anymore what's reasonable.

Jocelyn: You're too close to it.

Janet: Yeah.

Jocelyn: I was also thinking the body of believers in a church, like when somebody has a crisis, like if you had a surgery or something, you know, we know that a crisis takes a certain amount of weeks to recover from, and you have the body of believers that spins into your life and helps hold that up. But it's also a whole different picture when it's not like it's a six week recovery and then you're normal. It's like, that's the two wheels that you were just talking about. So if you're having spiritual difficulty and you're having physical difficulty, it's not like one of them ever becomes this giant crisis, but you need people to intervene in the middle of that. So that has to be really challenging to figure out how to ask for help from the people that love you without your life being a constant crisis all the time. It would just be so challenging.

Craig: It's part of the reason though, why we need to be engaged in relationships with people, to whom we are accountable. Some level of small group.

Janet: Yes.

Craig: Whatever that might look like because are there people in your life who could actually take your temperature of how you're doing spiritually? Are there people in your life who could tell, wait a minute, things are getting worse here? What can we do to help?

Jocelyn: Yes, how can we intervene?

Craig: But yet when you are suffering, there's a tendency to withdraw.

Janet: Yes.

Craig: Because it's hard. It's hard. It's hard to get out. It's hard to go to do things you're not feeling well, and so it's very easy to come up with an excuse. Ah, I'm not gonna go. I just don't feel the greatest.

Janet: I need a rest.

Craig: Yes, there are times you can't. Yeah, I need a break, but if we're not engaged with a small group of believers, then it's easy in our isolation for things to spin out of control and no one realizes that it's become a crisis. In addition, there aren't people who are regularly encouraging us. You know, when somebody undergoes surgery in our church, we know it and we rally around them. But are they engaged with people 6-8 weeks later that people know how they're doing? So I think that really just speaks to why it is so important to be engaged in the body.

Janet: Yeah.

Craig: And have people in your life who really know how you're doing spiritually and overall in your life.

Jocelyn: Yeah. What a great point.

Janet: Yeah. Yeah.

Craig: But especially when you're going through a trial.

Janet: So can you think about just some times in your life because you've obviously had seasons of great deal of pain. Do you have any examples or stories that might be able to encourage us as far as Jesus drawing near to you in that time?

Craig: Yeah, certainly the one I spoke of earlier when I was in that car, after I got that diagnosis.

Janet: Yes.

Craig: Which was really a dark moment in my life, and just the recognition that He would be there to help me through if I need it. You know, one other one that stands out to me was emotional pain, not physical pain was at the death of my mother. My mother died in '92 She had an autoimmune disorder and died one organ at a time. Oh, it was a very painful experience. Her last years.

Jocelyn: That'd be horrible.

Craig: It was very hard. She had come to faith in Christ and so she just wanted to go home to heaven.

Janet: Sure.

Craig: And be relieved. And so there's an element where her death was, oh, she's not suffering anymore, but I was not prepared for the depth of grief that I experienced. I just didn't expect it. It literally just gripped me and it wouldn't let go. And I can remember, in fact, one night, we had a desk in our bedroom, in the house we lived and that's where I did my studying. I was trying to prepare a message for Sunday morning I just couldn't concentrate. I realized I was so engulfed by grief and I got down on my knees beside our bed and started praying. I couldn't, I just couldn't pray.

Janet: Wow.

Craig: And it was one of those moments where the spirit groans on your behalf, if you've ever had those experiences. And it was just a very important time because what happened next was, as I was in this depth of grief, suddenly all of these thoughts of gratitude about what my mother meant for me in my life.

Janet: Wow.

Craig: That I had her, she was on this earth for 62 years. The way that she helped me through some really difficult times in my life, and suddenly I changed from grief to gratitude.

Jocelyn: Oh, that's so cool.

Craig: And began giving praise to God of gratitude for my mother. I kinda like woke up and said, what, wait a minute, what just happened here? This has been a work of God in my heart.

Janet: Wow.

Craig: Where He has moved me from grief to gratitude.

Jocelyn: That's so beautiful.

Craig: And other times have come in those moments of prayer, wrestling in prayer, where prayer was hard, where maybe I didn't even feel like I could pray.

Janet: Yes.

Craig: Have often been those times where I have felt the nearness of God the most.

Janet: And I appreciate that encouragement because I think we don't want to slow down to pray. I've even had seasons where I've thought praying means I have to think about it. And I don't wanna think about it anymore. So I don't even wanna pray, which is, I know where I need to go, because I'll have to think about it. Or we're in a hurry I've said, yeah, God help me, and then I move on. But to realize the persevering in prayer when I'm not wanting to. God meets us there.

Craig: When did Jacob get blessed? When he wrestled.

Jocelyn: He was wrestling.

Craig: With God.

Jocelyn: Yeah.

Craig: And what happened after that? For the rest of his life, he walked with the Lord.

Janet: He lived.

Craig: He was reminded of that moment of that special time with God.

Janet: I love that.

Jocelyn: What are some promises God gives to those who are in pain?

Craig: Yeah. Well certainly, Hebrews 4:16, we can come with confidence and find grace to help.

Janet: Yes.

Craig: In time of need. And that's when we need it, that's when we'll get it.

Janet: Yes.

Craig: You know, it's not, we're not given a savings account of grace.

Janet: But we all want one.

Craig: We want one, right? We want to be visible. We want it to be memorable.

Jocelyn: I want it to be bursting.

Craig: I wanna withdraw when I wanna withdraw, right?

Janet: Yes, and know there's still a lot left.

Craig: But that's a precious promise. We will get the grace in our time of need and we need to trust Him for that, and that is a very precious promise. Of course, I think we can grab the promise that was given to the apostle Paul, that His grace is sufficient and all of us have probably experienced where that's been true in our lives.

Janet: Yes.

Craig: We didn't know how we were gonna make it through, but His grace absolutely is sufficient. Those two, I think are the most precious.

Jocelyn: Oh, it's beautiful.

Janet: You know, you mentioned knowing that when your mom died and not only the grief that was there, but the fact that you knew she was in heaven and that certainly had an impact.

Craig: Yes.

Janet: On how you deal with that. How does the promise of heaven help you deal with long-term chronic pain here?

Craig: Yeah. You know, I think the old Negro spirituals as they're called can teach us a lesson here because the songs of the African Americans who live through the violent oppression for so long and experienced the just a depth of affliction that is hard for us to imagine. And you look at those old Negro spirituals and how often they talk about heaven, how often they speak about the release that comes through Jesus. They're a marvelous example of how the hope of heaven can enable us to endure, and the hope of heaven is given, I think, in part for that purpose to help us endure those difficult times. We can cling to that and be reminded of the truth that this part of our story isn't the end.

Janet: Yes.

Craig: And act two is gonna be glorious.

Jocelyn: And eternal, going on forever.

Craig: Isn't that why Paul says it's nothing, what we experienced in this life compared to the glory that will be ours in Christ Jesus? That's such a helpful perspective to have.

Janet: Yes.

Craig: On those days when it's hard, okay, but you know what? This is nothing compared to the glory that will be ours. Eye hasn't seen. Mind can't comprehend. I've never been particularly benefited by books of heaven because they can't come close to the reality.

Janet: Right.

Craig: Just being reminded that nobody can imagine how glorious it is going to be.

Janet: Right.

Craig: And that's all I need to cling to.

Jocelyn: It helps to think of the, you know, no matter how many years that we have here on earth, it's an investment in our enjoyment of heaven, and the glory that's gonna be revealed was in part because of how we handled our years here on earth, and, you know, being conformed to Jesus Christ through the sufferings and being perfected will make heaven even more enjoyable. I think that helps me when stuff is hard on earth now.

Craig: And isn't there also an element where we want to finish well. I mean, we talk about that in the face of persecution and it's true, but there are people who face chronic ailments and become bitter.

Janet: Yes.

Craig: And some lose their faith. And I want to finish well.

Janet: Yes.

Craig: I want to endure whatever suffering and finish well to the honor of Jesus Christ.

Janet: And we see that there's a crown for those who longed for His appearing. And I think, you know, when you're suffering, I think you long for His appearing.

Craig: Sure.

Janet: I mean, it draw you to heaven. It makes me think about when my son, Josh, was little. He was probably about four. We were talking about heaven I don't remember exactly how he said it, but he basically said he felt really guilty about the fact that he wasn't really excited about going to heaven because it's pretty good here. And I thought, I don't know that he needs to feel guilty about that. He hasn't experienced a lot of suffering. So I took that and it just went well, thank you, Lord that in his young life, it's not been full of abuse and horrible things.

Jocelyn: Yeah.

Craig: Right.

Janet: So thank you for that, but he didn't long for heaven when he didn't understand that this life was hard. And it was funny, it was probably two years ago, we happened to be talking about that for some reason, and as we were talking, he was like I long for heaven and I thought.

Jocelyn: You had enough hard stuff.

Janet: And he has a wonderful wife. It's not that, but life is hard.

Craig: Right.

Janet: And there is, and we long for what heaven offers, but it's in our suffering, it's in the trials, it's in the hard that our eyes are open to that.

Craig: Even creation groans for its redemption.

Janet: Yes.

Craig: It's a funny way to put it.

Janet: Yes.

Craig: But that's how Paul expressed the brokenness of physical creation to understand that it too, even longs for it.

Jocelyn: I think it's a helpful way to understand it. Like anytime something bad happens, it's like the earth is just sighing, like, oh, this is not working correctly. So we love resources. Do you have any resources or training that you recommend?

Craig: Sure.

Jocelyn: That would help someone who is suffering from chronic pain, to deal with it well?

Janet: First thing we'll say is your book, When There is No Cure will be linked in the show notes for people because that was very helpful to me.

Craig: Yeah, and that's a book that's written for a broad audience. It's not a Christian book, as you know. It's written for, to be very practical about how to think through things like what to do when no one knows what to do.

Janet: Yes.

Craig: What to do when the pain's not gonna go away. And then the last chapter gives my testimony, my Christian faith, and how that has helped me. I think a couple of other books would be Kelly Kopic's book, Embodied Hope. Kelly Kopic, K-A-P-I-C. Dr. Kopic is I think a professor of theology at Covenant College in Lookout Mountain. This is a book of meditations and I've known a number of people that live with chronic ailments who have found this to be a really helpful book for them. I think one of the best books to help you think biblically about pain and suffering is Tim Keller's book, Walking with God Through Pain and Suffering. I think it's one of the most accessible, comprehensive, and clearly biblical books on the topic.

Janet: I have not even heard of that one and I really appreciate Keller's teaching.

Craig: Yeah.

Janet: But I have not heard of that book.

Craig: I really, if I was to point somebody to what would be the best book to see it from a biblical lens, I think his book is the best.

Janet: That's really helpful.

Craig: There's also a ministry called, Chronic Joy, a chronic illness ministry. People could just Google, "Chronic Joy". They have a lot of resources. For example, they have a Bible study for couples, you know, there's special challenges in a marriage when one lives with chronic pain and the other does not. They have other types of resources there that are Bible studies. They have a blog where people that have different types of ailments write things, including some poetry and the like, to help you think through and different types of resources on their website that are specifically for people living with chronic illness.

Jocelyn: I was just thinking about that earlier because you have been a part of our church for so many years, and I have seen you standing in the back of service so often, thinking, oh, sweet Sue, she's sitting there by herself, you know, she's experiencing service without you sitting next to her and that's not something that every wife has to experience.

Janet: Right.

Jocelyn: And so as a part of a couple, there are challenges with pain that you wouldn't imagine. So that's good to know about that resource.

Craig: Yeah, that's good.

Janet: That's excellent. Well, thank you, Craig. Again, I was reminded, I love that our desire in the podcast, we're talking about pain, but most of what we talked about was Jesus, and that's the answer to everything, but applying it specifically to how do we deal with pain. So thank you for what you've written, thank you for your life of living it, and then for being willing to share that with us today.

Craig: My pleasure. Thanks for having me.

Janet: And thank you for listening to us this episode, and I pray that you will come back for our next episode as we continue on the journey together.

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