



CHRONIC JOY
chronic illness ministry



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Story Matters

Writing the Story of Your Illness



Stories are vital to community. They are how we connect and learn about who we are, why we're here and how we belong. Story preserves history and elicits laughter. It plunges us to the depths of ourselves and sets us soaring the skies.

Story is the tale of our lives. And it matters.

Yet writing your story can be challenging and may not seem worth the time and effort. Add an unexpected illness, and wrestling your thoughts to the page can seem nearly impossible.

Where do I start? What do I write? Will anyone care? Does it even matter?

I've been there. I've asked those questions. Often. And I've discovered, to my surprise, that our stories are who we are, where we begin. They connect us, tearing down walls and shattering isolation.

For story is where hope begins.

As we write down the stories of our lives, perspective shifts, and we begin to see from a distance what we were unable to see in the moment.

If you've ever thought about writing the story of your illness, we'd love to help. We've created thoughtful questions and helpful tips to get you started. But remember, these are only a place to begin.

This is *your* story.

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HELPFUL TIPS

- 1. Be authentic.** This is your story. There is no right or wrong way to tell it.
- 2. Write conversationally.** Include humor, quotes, lyrics, anecdotes, etc., if they speak to you.
- 3. Add familiar details to help explain something others may not have experienced.** For example: Two of my daughters routinely undergo DHE – a series of ten infusions, eight hours apart, something my 15-year-old calls Hell Week – which makes them incredibly sick, much like chemotherapy. Few know what DHE is, but almost everyone is familiar with chemotherapy.
- 4. Ask questions.** Asking a question, instead of telling how you feel or what you've learned, can get your readers thinking and open the door to conversation.
- 5. Stay focused.** Can you tell a portion of your story more effectively than your whole story start-to-finish?
- 6. Weigh the details.** Include just enough to add vibrancy and depth, but not so many that your readers get lost.
- 7. Allow the words to find their way.** Write the first thing that comes to mind. Don't worry about format, spelling, punctuation or editing. Just write. There will be time to edit later.
- 8. Relax.** This isn't an assignment. Give yourself time and space and see what happens.
- 9. Remember, write these words for you.**

QUESTIONS TO HELP YOU BEGIN

1. What is your typical day like?
2. What was your life like before illness?
3. How are you different today?
4. What are the most challenging parts of your life?
5. What losses have been most significant?
6. What has been your lowest point?
7. If you could have one thing back, what would it be? Why?
8. How are your relationships impacted by illness?
9. How have your expectations of yourself and others changed?
10. How has your walk with God changed?
11. When/how/where have you found hope?
12. In what ways have you experienced God's grace in your illness?
13. How do you celebrate the small victories?
14. What is the most unexpected blessing of illness?
15. What character qualities have you gained through illness?
16. What does courage look like to you?
17. What does strength look like in illness?
18. What is the most important thing you wish others knew about illness?
19. If you could sum up chronic illness in five words, what would they be?
20. What encouragement can you offer someone walking through chronic illness?
21. What are some circumstances in your life that others can relate to?
22. How do you handle pain and disappointment?
23. How has God used your weaknesses and turned them into strengths?
24. What is the biggest impact of illness on your life?
25. Contrast who you were before illness with who you are now.

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We can feel isolated and powerless when living with chronic illness, but what if your story begins to bridge the barrier or open a way for someone to connect? What if your story offers a glimmer of hope to someone standing at the edge of hopelessness?

It can feel frightening and vulnerable to share your story. What if people don't like it?

Oh, but what if they do?

What if one person feels less alone because of your story?

What if *your story* starts the conversation?

AN OPPORTUNITY

If you're interested in submitting for publication on our website, here are a few quick guidelines.

1. Stories should be 500-700 words in length.
2. Please submit Word documents only.
3. Include a brief (1-2 sentence) bio – who you are, what you love, a link to your blog, Instagram, etc., and a quality photo of yourself (jpg or png).
4. If you quote Scripture, please include the reference and translation (ie: Romans 15:13 NIV).
5. Be honest as you wrestle with the issues and emotions of living with chronic illness. It's OK to include difficult topics and emotions, and while it isn't necessary or encouraged to offer a "happy ending," the stories we publish will always lean toward hope.
6. If your story has previously been published, please let us know when and where.
7. If accepted for publication, we reserve the right to thoughtfully edit your story, and will notify you as soon as it's scheduled.
8. Just one unbendable rule: We do not accept stories promoting specific medical treatments or medications, specific products or services, or specific healthcare providers. You may include details about your personal experience as part of your story, just not in a "sales or promotion" capacity.

➔ Submit your story: share@chronic-joy.org.