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LIVING WITH HIV/AIDS



LIVING WITH HIV AND AIDS

Does Life End with HIV Infection?

The answer is “No”. The person who tests and finds himself or herself to be HIV infected can still have years of a productive and fulfilling life. Many individuals who are infected with the HIV virus that causes AIDS, are living three, four or five years and longer. Some have lived even more than 10 years. Therefore, it is important that the HIV-infected person be encouraged to live a quality life for as long as possible.

➡ STAT 34

More than ever before, long term survival after HIV infection is becoming a greater reality for many. Important steps for the HIV-infected person are:

➡ STAT 36

- Knowing that God loves you in your present status, as much as He would love you if you were not HIV infected.
- Believing that you can be among the (as yet) small percentage of those who are beating the odds, and living longer with HIV and AIDS.
- Believing that God wants you to be healthy, active and living a full quality life even with HIV infection.
- Believing that God is still healing people, even with HIV infection and AIDS.

➡ STAT 35

The Christian Church and Helping the HIV Infected

The local church has a big obligation regarding the HIV-infected and their families, as follows:

1. To bring the HIV-infected to a sure relationship with Jesus Christ as personal Saviour and Lord.
2. To teach the HIV-infected that he/she can make decisions that lend to a longer and fulfilling life.
3. To bring encouragement by prayer, and assist the HIV-positive person to a positive attitude about his or her status.
4. To be a support system to the HIV-infected person and his or her family members.

God is greater than HIV and AIDS! We are all either **affected** or **infected** by HIV and AIDS and Christian believers can be encouraged to know how greatly God can use them in this crisis.

➡ FACT 39

“Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? But, in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Christ who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other thing shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus” (Romans 8:35-37).

➡ REFR 13

“This hope we have as an anchor of the soul...” (Hebrews 6:19).

Numbers of studies have been conducted regarding HIV positive (+) survival factors. Survival possibilities can vary depending upon some of the following factors:

- Availability of good food, clean water and healthy environment for longer life
- Availability of good medical facilities and medical personnel
- Educational opportunities regarding sexual safety
- HIV testing availability and knowing one is HIV positive
- Number of other STD’s and physical illnesses the HIV positive person has
- A positive outlook on life even though HIV positive
- Treating all symptoms early
- Positive environment including family support
- Belief in the power of God to sustain life and make it meaningful

Attributes of a Long-Term HIV Positive Survivor

These principles do not all fit every HIV positive survivor. Neither should they be used as a weapon against oneself to make your life more stressful than it already is, when living with HIV. It also should be noted that there are no guarantees as to how long or how short the HIV-positive person can expect to live after infection, even if he/she does most things right in life.

The Principles

1. LONG-TERM SURVIVORS UNDERSTAND AND ACCEPT THE REALITY OF THE AIDS DIAGNOSIS, BUT ALSO REFUSE TO BELIEVE THAT THE SYNDROME IS AN AUTOMATIC, IMMINENT DEATH SENTENCE.

➡ **FACT 40**

Everyone is going to die some day, and for the person with HIV, that possibility seems a more pressing reality. But, in accepting the inevitability of death at some point, we strengthen our resolve to live life more fully in the here and now. Thus, the HIV positive person can acknowledge and deal realistically with the diagnosis of a life-threatening illness, and still maintain the courage and hope to survive. The HIV-positive person can be encouraged to believe in the promise of abundant life, demonstrated through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, God’s Son. The HIV-positive person can stubbornly insist on living!

*“But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us. We are hard pressed on every side, yet not crushed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed – always carrying about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body”
(2 Corinthians 4:7-10).*

False Hope Does Not Help HIV Positive People Survive

HIV-positive persons need a positive outlook on their present and future life. No one has guarantees as to longevity of life. However, there can sometimes be a tendency on the part of both the HIV-**infected** person, and those **affected** who are being a support to the infected, to have or give false hope. Assurances can be given that a cure is just around the corner or that good behaviour will cause HIV to disappear. Others are promised that God will heal them. It is important that HIV-positive persons balance their lives with HOPE and REALITY. Yes, the Bible presents a God who answers prayer and does heal HIV infection, although by no means are all HIV and AIDS infected healed. We do not have the answer as to why God does not heal all illnesses. Cures are also not imminent with HIV and AIDS, although some people will make false claims for ‘magic’ cures. Support persons, especially the Christian Church, need to balance faith, hope and contentment with the present, for the HIV-positive person. False claims, especially by Christians, can bring the Name of Jesus Christ into disrepute and cause untold disillusionment for the HIV-positive persons and their family. The Christian Church must pray for, not only healing for those infected, but also for a fulfilling life for those who continue to live with the disease and are not healed.

2. LONG-TERM SURVIVORS BELIEVE THAT THEY CAN COPE ACTIVELY WITH THE DISEASE, AND REFUSE TO SUCCUMB TO A ‘HELPLESS-HOPELESS’ STATE.

➔ **FACT 40**

The HIV infected person needs to feel confident in building the following into his/her life in order to live positively each day to the full through: prayer, meditation, Bible reading, good nutrition, balanced exercise, sufficient rest, work that they are capable of doing to keep challenged, positive and healthy relationships, study and mental exercise, sense of humour, involvement with things in life, and staying informed of the latest developments in the treatment of HIV and AIDS.

Persistence in the face of infection and illness is illustrated in the Bible story of a woman who had a physical illness for over 12 years.

“Now a certain woman had a flow of blood for twelve years, and had suffered many things from many physicians. She had spent all that she had and was no better, but rather grew worse. When she heard about Jesus, she came behind Him in the crowd and touched His garment. For she said, ‘If only I may touch His clothes, I shall be made well.’ Immediately the fountain of her blood was dried up, and she felt in her body that she was healed of the affliction.

...And He said to her, ‘Daughter, your faith has made you well. Go in peace, and be healed of your affliction’ ” (Matthew 9:20-22).

Just as the woman in this story who was a scriptural long-term survivor, the HIV survivor can daily channel his/her energies and take steps to live for a long time. There is a lot the

HIV-positive person can do to help himself/herself to live a quality life for as long as possible.

3. LONG-TERM SURVIVORS MAKE APPROPRIATE, INDIVIDUALISED ADJUSTMENTS IN PERSONAL HABITS AND BEHAVIOUR IN ORDER TO ACCOMMODATE LIVING WITH THE DISEASE.

⇒ FACT 40

When a person is diagnosed with HIV, he/she will feel that everything has changed and is now revolving around the HIV infection. Suddenly perspectives change, priorities change, some habits may need to be broken, and good habits formed in their place. To be a survivor and be HIV infected may mean examining all kinds of attitudes and behaviours that could keep one from being the fully alive person God created them to be. Positive action in the HIV-positive person's life can be a very constructive thing in bringing quality and longevity of life.

“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new” (2 Corinthians 5:17).

4. LONG-TERM SURVIVORS SEE THE PHYSICIAN AS A COLLABORATOR AND TAKE AN ACTIVE PART IN DECISIONS RELATED TO THEIR OWN TREATMENT. THERE IS A SENSE OF PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY FOR HEALTH, AND A BELIEF THAT THEY PERSONALLY CAN INFLUENCE THE OUTCOME OF THE DISEASE.

⇒ FACT 41

Just as in creation where mankind initially worked with God in naming the animals and caring for God's creation, we are to actively participate with God in the outcome of our lives. Similarly, the HIV-positive person is a co-worker with God in the well-being for his life.

“So out of the ground God formed every beast of the field and every bird of the air, and brought them to Adam to see what he would call them” (Genesis 2:19-20).

“For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, you are God's building” (1 Corinthians 3:9).

The HIV-positive person not only cooperates with God in the daily outcome of his life, but also cooperates with the doctor and health workers for good health. They must be partners with the medical people in creating the conditions for healing and wellness. It is important to find medical support people who understand this and who will seek the participation of the HIV-positive person in decisions relating to treatment.

5. LONG-TERM SURVIVORS SHOW A “COMMITMENT TO LIFE”; THERE ARE UNFULFILLED GOALS, DREAMS, AND UNFINISHED BUSINESS THAT THEY COMMIT THEMSELVES TO.

➡ FACT 41

Many HIV+ people have made extra-ordinary accomplishments after learning they were infected, like finishing school, building a house, or earning a college degree. Some have stayed alive with the hope created by an exciting project that they always wanted to do. The HIV-positive person needs to identify dreams and goals, and pursue them with enthusiasm.

“Therefore, choose life!” (Deuteronomy 30:19).

“For we do not want you to be ignorant of our trouble which came to us in Asia; that we were burdened beyond measure, above strength, so that we despaired even of life. Yes, we had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves but in God who raises the dead; Who delivered us from so great a death, and does deliver us; in Whom we trust that He will still deliver us” (2 Corinthians 1: 8-10).

Whether HIV positive or not, God has made it possible through personal relationship with His Son, Jesus Christ, that we can be over comers in life even when it is difficult. Jesus never fails! Putting trust in Him for life’s situations is particularly comforting when facing HIV infection. The Church has a wonderful message that needs to be freely shared with both the HIV-infected and HIV-affected...which is everyone!

6. LONG-TERM SURVIVORS FIND MEANING AND PURPOSE IN LIFE AND EVEN IN THE DISEASE ITSELF.

➡ FACT 41

Most everyone asks at some time, “Why is there suffering?” That question does not have simple answers. However, we do know that just as Joseph in the Old Testament found much trouble in his life, he was able to say:

“You meant it for evil against me; but God meant it for good in order to bring it about as it is this day, so save many people...” (Genesis 50:20).

Many people suffer with HIV and AIDS. However, many are presently giving testimony that regardless of the trauma caused by HIV and AIDS, their lives have been positively turned around. Since becoming infected they are finding purpose and meaning that they had not known previously. Particularly for the Christian, we know that God does not bring HIV and AIDS upon us. But we do know that in Jesus Christ, one can find renewed peace and fulfillment, in spite of being HIV and AIDS infected. Life for the HIV-positive person can be full of purpose and meaning if they will allow their present circumstances to develop strength of character that can be shared with others.

7. LONG-TERM SURVIVORS HAVE USUALLY HAD A PREVIOUS EXPERIENCE WITH OVERCOMING A LIFE-THREATENING ILLNESS, OR OVERCOMING PREVIOUS DIFFICULT SITUATIONS AND EVENTS.

↪ **FACT 41**

Numerous testimonials are shared by those living with HIV and AIDS that attest to drawing on past difficulties and bringing the needed strength to face their illness. For example: some who are recovering alcoholics and find themselves HIV positive report that the tools they used to achieve and maintain sobriety have given them excellent coping skills for life and living with HIV.

“But we also rejoice in affliction, knowing that affliction produces perseverance; and perseverance, character; and character, hope. Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us. For when we were still without strength, in due time Christ died for sinners” (Romans 5:3-6).

8. LONG-TERM SURVIVORS REPORT THE IMPORTANCE OF SUPPORT AND INFORMATION FROM OTHER PERSONS WITH HIV, AND FURTHERMORE, ARE USUALLY INVOLVED IN ACTIVE SERVICE TO OTHER PERSONS WITH HIV.

↪ **FACT 42**

When one is newly diagnosed with HIV, no one understands what you are going through quite like another person infected with HIV. The information network among people with HIV is one of the most important survival tools available. Many infected persons have discovered the value of moving outside of themselves and being active participants with community HIV and AIDS work. It can be a life-giving measure to be involved with other people, to be part of a community, and to feel you are making a positive contribution in helping others, especially when some people expect you to feel helpless. Many HIV-infected persons find that being open about their status rather than secretive, has been by far a more positive experience than keeping it quiet. This is a personal choice; however, those who do utilize their HIV status to give understanding and share the experience first-hand with the general public, not only enrich themselves, but enlighten so many others.

“To each is given the evidence of the spirit for the common good...if one member suffers, all suffer together; if one is honoured, all rejoice together” (1 Corinthians 12:7 & 26).

9. LONG-TERM SURVIVORS ARE ASSERTIVE, CAN SAY “NO” AND WITHDRAW FROM INVOLVEMENTS WHEN SELF-CARE BECOMES NECESSARY.

↪ **FACT 42**

It has long been noted that people who survive life-threatening illnesses against all odds are the ones who are assertive, yet not demanding about their own needs. This may mean becoming very forthright about your rights as a patient at a hospital or clinic. It may mean refusing additional outside demands when you need to rest. HIV long-term survivors

must consider their own needs as a priority, and give care and attention to their own well-being from the onset if they are going to stay well. Even Jesus saw His own need at times to get away and rest a while from those who needed Him. People may misunderstand this priority, but the HIV-positive person can feel confident knowing that this is the correct thing for him or her to do.

“And after Jesus had dismissed the crowds, He went up on the mountain by Himself to pray. When evening came, He was there alone...” (Matthew 14:23).

10. LONG-TERM SURVIVORS DEVELOP AN ABILITY TO LISTEN TO THEIR OWN BODY, AND TO SENSITIVELY CARE FOR IT, AND TO COMMUNICATE OPENLY ABOUT THEIR CONCERNS WITHOUT FEELING SELFISH.

↘
FACT 42

Even with the best self-care program and the greatest faith, persons with HIV experience opportunistic infections and illnesses, because their body’s immune system is suppressed. It is important for the HIV+ persons to be aware of their body’s signals, and to be assertive about communicating these concerns to a healthcare professional for advice. Times of illness, which can produce great fear and anxiety, can be transformed into opportunities to experience God’s peace that passes all normal understanding. When one is sick it is easy to feel down and depressed, and to wonder what you did to deserve this! The HIV-positive person again can rest in the confidence that God does not give illness. The HIV virus did! God is with you and you can rest knowing that He is with you.

“...Casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you” (1 Peter 5:7).

“Fear not, I am with you; be not dismayed, I am your God. I will strengthen you, I will help you; I will uphold you with my victorious hand.” (Isaiah 41:10).

Surviving Has a Great Deal to Do with ‘Choices’

Many HIV-infected people are now living longer with their infection. They enjoy full, exciting lives. Many people with HIV and AIDS have learned through their diagnosis to embrace all of life, including illnesses and even death, yet not lose their joy. By God’s grace, He allows us all to be joyfully alive every day, even with HIV infection.

For both the HIV-infected and affected (all of us), it is only when we truly embrace the inevitability of death that we can fully embrace the truth of the Resurrection. The truth of the Resurrection practically demonstrates that even with a life-threatening infection like HIV, the Risen Jesus Christ, Immanuel, God-with-us, is alive, here and now, helping us to transform our pain, fear, and anger into life-giving action. Jesus Christ did that for us when He died and rose again. When we invite Him into our lives, He helps us to do the same.

Right ‘choices’ about living, health, positive attitudes, honesty, service to others, etc. open every way for God to keep the HIV-positive person in health. However, these ‘right

choices' are not bribery to get God to extend life. These choices lend to longer life! As stated previously, there are no guarantees for anybody as to length of life. Ultimately, length of life is in God's hands. Choices facilitate longer life, but they do not guarantee it. It only makes good sense to choose those things that lend to life rather than death.

HIV-infected persons are encouraged to look for God's power every day. Look for evidence of the Resurrection! Believe in God's love for you, and in turn, share that love with others. This will be a life-giving experience for you.

“Who (or what...even AIDS?/author’s comment) shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 8:35, 37, 38 & 39).

Not even AIDS or anything else can separate those whom God loves (which includes us all) from Him.

Christians and The Church have a great task in proclaiming God's infinite love to the many people who are suffering with HIV and AIDS.

A PRAYER FOR DELIVERANCE

**“BE GRACIOUS TO ME, O GOD, BE GRACIOUS TO ME. FOR MY SOUL TAKES REFUGE IN YOU; AND IN THE SHADOW OF YOUR WINGS I WILL TAKE MY REFUGE, UNTIL DESTRUCTION PASSES BY”
(Psalm 57:1).**

Thank you, Lord Jesus Christ, because you loved me first just the way I am. You cleanse me and receive me. You make me your chosen child. You favour me with good things all the days of my life and your blessing rests upon me. May you enable me to return that love to you by blessing others. Thank you for giving me peace that even I cannot sometimes understand myself. I fully trust you with my life; that you have numbered my days and that I can live each one of them with the assurance that my life has purpose and meaning. I love you, Jesus! Amen.