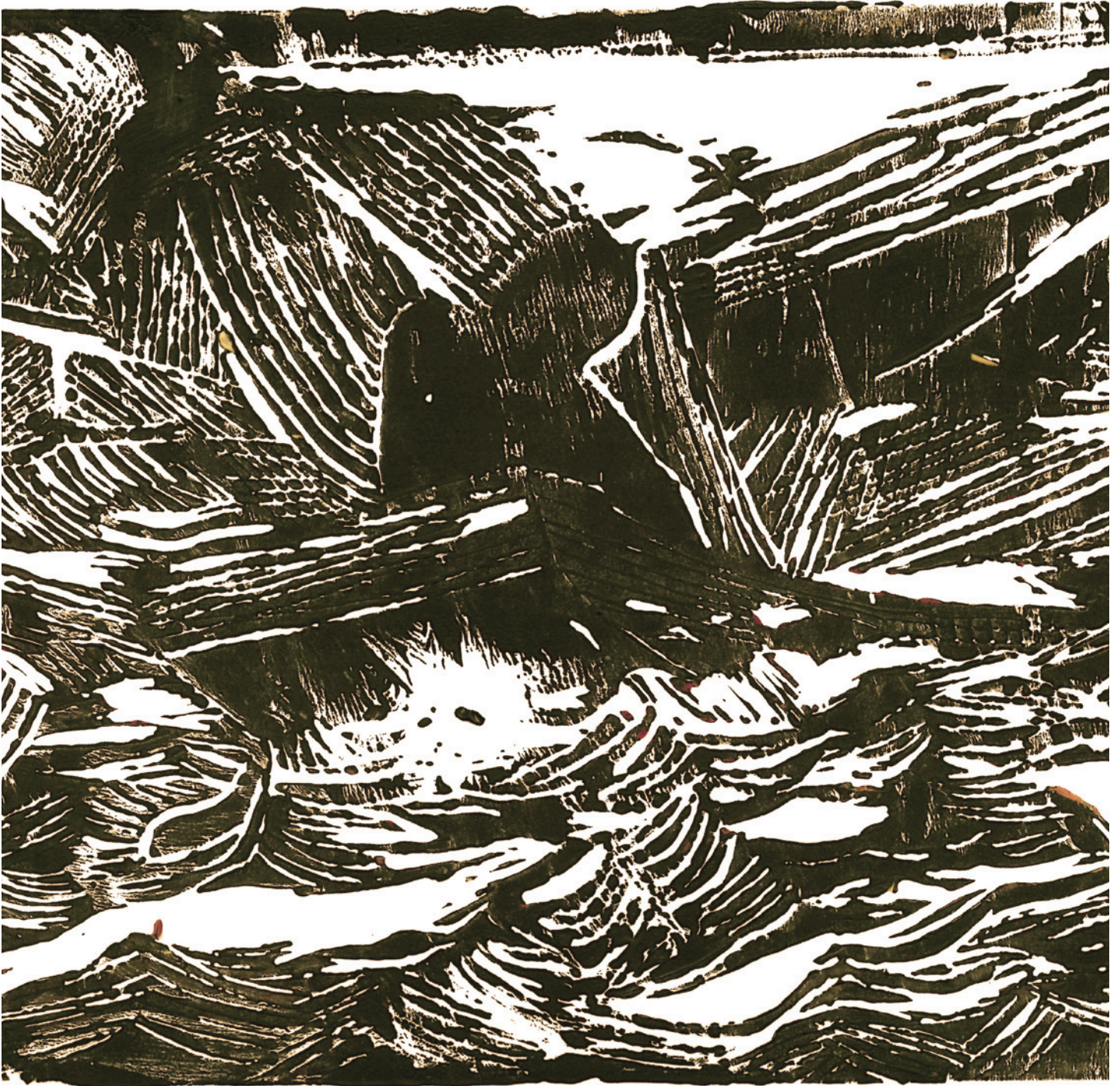


Western

MAGAZINE



FALL 2015 | A THEOLOGY OF SUFFERING



FINDING GOD IN THE STORMY SEA

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The German theologian Helmut Thielecke is often quoted as having remarked that Americans in particular appear to have an inadequate theology of suffering. I suspect one could come to that conclusion based on a handful of factors: we as a country suffer comparatively less than most other parts of the world, we have more resources to deal with many forms of adversity, etc. It is not coincidental that the prosperity gospel (the belief that believers being healthy and wealthy is the normative Christian experience) was birthed on American soil. As a consequence, many of us may not have theologically sound categories by which we can understand and respond to suffering when it confronts us, whether through a national tragedy or through an individual calamity. This issue of the *Western Magazine* is designed to be one step towards a remedy.

While the term “suffering” is frequently used in Scripture to refer to the various forms of persecution that the people of God will inevitably experience as they face the same opposition from the world that ultimately resulted in the crucifixion of our Lord, the Bible also clearly describes a much wider variety of the forms of suffering that people in general will experience in a fallen world. One of *Western’s* newest faculty members, Dr. Ryan Lister, offers a helpful survey of the theological dynamics surrounding suffering that need to be understood by every believer so there is sufficient familiarity with the divine purposes and promises associated with it.

Those dynamics are then illustrated by a series of stories featuring current *Western* students and alumni that illustrate the range of difficult experiences we may encounter, from chronic illness to violent persecution to helping a church and broader community process a deadly shooting in their own backyard. Each circumstance will test both our worldview and our spiritual resiliency. Each brings an opportunity to become either a better or a bitter person. Each also reminds us of our mortality and of the fragility of life here on earth that can never be taken for granted with respect to its duration, urging us to live wisely in a state of constant preparedness should the Lord in His providence determine that our earthly sojourn will conclude earlier than we anticipate (or be even more challenging than we may desire).

We don’t need to have an exhaustive understanding of suffering in general, or of the reasons behind the experience of a specific form of adversity in order to, by God’s grace “improve our affliction” (i.e., allow it to further our growth into Christ-likeness as we participate in the outworking of God’s redemptive purposes). For even the most astute theologian cannot always provide a definitive answer as to why a loving, wise and omnipotent God allows people to experience such pain and adversity in every instance. So we must approach this topic with due humility and restraint. But we do know that it is never capricious, that the sufferings of this present age pale into insignificance when compared to the eternal glories of the age to come, and that the Lord promises to walk with His people as the God of all comfort when they go through deep waters. As a result, we can always trust His heart even if we cannot always trace His hand, and that trust enables us to endure the most formidable of difficulties while we patiently await for the culmination of His redemptive plan. All this lies at the heart of a gospel-centered understanding of suffering; may such a perspective be yours when difficulties, whether major or minor, next enter your life.

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Western Seminary strives to serve as a catalyst and resource for spiritual transformation by providing, with and for the church, advanced training for strategic ministry roles.

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GOD SUFFERING AND GOD

A PREPOSITIONAL THEOLOGY

BEFORE
OVER
IN THE MIDST OF
THROUGH
AFTER

BY DR. J. RYAN LISTER

Suffering makes our true theology known. When the whirlwind comes, nothing is sacred. It exposes our real doctrine, the one that often lies beneath the bleached-whitened veneer of our biblical jargon and Christian platitudes. Suffering demands our theology get real; it bullies us into reevaluating our assumptions about God and ourselves.

No one knew this inner dissonance better than C.S. Lewis. In his lofty academic treatise, *The Problem of Pain*, Lewis penned these well-worn words about suffering:

God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pain. It is His megaphone to rouse a deaf world.

These words creep into our sermon manuscripts because they are true and because they grab us by the collar. They shake up our understanding of God and what He is doing in our pain. Yet Lewis' claim only goes so far. It finds its limits because it leaves God and suffering in the theoretical realm.

Unfortunately, suffering suffers no academic speculation or conjecture. Suffering will not be trapped under the microscope as Lewis himself learned just a few years later. It was the pain surrounding the death of Lewis' wife that finally backed his academic analysis into the corner.

It also gave birth to a new book—a diary of sorts chronicling Lewis' raw, unchecked emotional experience of God in the wake of his suffering. In *A Grief Observed*, the knife of suffering cuts Lewis' theology, and what pours out of his existential wounds are these words, words very much on the opposite end of the spectrum from his earlier, clinical assessment:

[G]o to [God] when your need is desperate, when all other help is vain, and what do you find? A door slammed in your face, and a sound of bolting and double bolting on the inside. After that, silence.

For Lewis, the God he examined on paper—the One who whispers, speaks, and shouts—stood silent in the crucible of his pain. While the debris of his ivory tower experiment crumbled at the foot of his wife's headstone, the God he thought he had figured out didn't reach for his megaphone, but rather what seemed to be the deadbolt latch. It turns out that God didn't act according to Lewis' plan and it was His silence that was deafening in Lewis' experience, not the divine shouting.

WHEN THE WHIRLWIND HITS

Lewis' experience and, more than likely, our own reveals this about our knowledge of God and suffering: we know

very little at all, and what we think we know, suffering often turns on its head. Suffering is the great equalizer; it does not pause to review our résumés and academic qualifications before it walks through the front door. It does not read our articles on suffering or bow to our unfounded assumptions about God and His ways in the world. Rather, suffering is here—or it is coming—and we better be prepared. We better have something to hold onto when the whirlwind hits.

To help, here is my suggestion: We need a theology of prepositions—one of the strongest and sturdiest theological realities we can grab hold of when suffering comes.

You read that right; you don't need to read it again. I know that it has been awhile since you've probably given English grammar a second thought, but that is just it. You know what prepositions are because you naturally use them every day. Prepositions are the “befores,” the “overs,” the “in the midst ofs,” the “throughs,” and the “afters” in our sentences and speech. These little words—ones that seem insignificant to us—matter in a big way. They matter because they help us understand relationships. They tell us where we stand in relation to someone

or something else. In our theology of suffering, then, prepositions clarify who God is and where He stands in relationship to suffering.

But this is no mere grammatical exercise. These small words help because they get us beyond the theoretical. A theology of prepositions forms the ballast for our knowledge and experience of suffering especially when suffering consumes us. Prepositions help us understand how God relates to our pain and sorrow while also being truths we can cling to in the dark times. They help hold us in place when we don't know which way is up. They can be the emergency latch we pull when we start to drown in the chaos of our grief and sorrow.

This is how a theology of prepositions helps us to both understand and live out our theology of suffering.

GOD BEFORE SUFFERING

We do not find pain and suffering in the first two chapters of our Bibles. All we have is God and the good world He speaks into existence. This tells us that there is but one God; He alone rules. God does not have to wrestle His authority from another. There is no deity or power equal in control and influence with whom He must square off in a cosmic battle for the ages. Scripture makes clear that

Yahweh is the one, true God who creates and rules with an authority that is His alone.

Pain and suffering make their debut in the third chapter of our Bibles. They are introduced as a consequence of Adam and Eve's divine usurpation experiment. They tasted the fruit and found it laced with guilt, shame, and death. Our post-Eden world makes this clear day in and day out: the tree of the knowledge of good and evil is still producing a lethal harvest for all the sons and daughters of Adam, you and me included. In this toxic environment, we must remember that God was before suffering. This means, first, that there never was and never will be any rival to His throne—neither the serpent nor Adam or the suffering they introduce are His equal. We know this because both the first man and Satan succumb to God's immediate judgment in Genesis 3. Second, the world of suffering we know today is the anomaly. Creation, in its current state, is nothing like it was in the beginning nor, as we will see, is it like it will be in eternity. This world of pain and suffering is temporary and short-lived compared to the way the world should be and will be forever.

GOD OVER SUFFERING

Now it is great that God was before suffering but we live east of Eden, in a world stained with blood, sweat, and tears. It is the right starting point to be sure, but reflecting on "the way things should have been" offers very little comfort when our context is one where suffering and pain

constantly loom on the horizon. If the doctor hasn't called to break the news yet, the phone will ring soon. If the police officer isn't at the door he very well may be just a few blocks away. The inevitability of suffering feeds its cruelty. Pain seems unbeatable, unbearable, and unrelenting.

But our Bibles say otherwise. God is not overcome by suffering and evil but rather God rules over it. Now we must tread carefully here. Unorthodoxy lies on both sides of this statement. On one side there is the attempt to distance God so far from suffering that it undercuts His control and rule in the world. On the other side, we could move beyond Scripture to say that God is the author of evil and suffering. But we cannot sacrifice God's sovereignty or God's goodness on the altar of theodicy. Instead we must follow God's revelation of Himself to a right understanding of Him. We hold that the Lord rules and reigns over all things, including the serpent in the garden and the suffering in this world. And, simultaneously, we hold that God is good and righteous, unblemished by sin and evil.

No matter our theological dispositions, whether Calvinist or Arminian, Edwardsian or Wesleyan, we dare not say that there is another power equal to or surpassing God, nor do we lay evil and suffering at God's feet. As Peter preaches Christ crucified, he makes clear that Jesus "was delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God" and also "crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men" (Acts 2:23). The most

scandalous act in history is attributed to sinful men and concurrently Peter makes it clear that this scandalous act is not beyond the bounds of God's rule. In fact, it is a part of His plan.

This may leave us with questions, as is often the case when the finite ponders the infinite or when the sinner contemplates the sinless. But we can cling to this: God is over suffering—He is not caught off guard by it and it is not beyond His control. As we struggle with this and with God's answering our questions with questions of His own ("Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth?" Job 38:4; "Shall a faultfinder contend with the Almighty?" Job 40:2; cf. Job 38–42), may we turn to Him in faith and trust. He is the one who turns things upside down because He is the potter, and He can do as He pleases with the clay He has made (Isa 29:16).

GOD IN THE MIDST OF SUFFERING

Undergirding our trust is the fact that God is no stranger to suffering. Rather, God the Son knows suffering and the powers of evil and temptation far better than we do. Christ faced all of these but never capitulated to them. Where we give in, Christ held out. He overcame evil, sin, and temptation by fighting them for the duration of His life and winning through His suffering, death, and resurrection.

Christ's acquaintance with grief is at the very heart of the gospel. God the Son enters the world in all of its turmoil and catastrophe. He feels heat, cold, thirst, and hunger. He

walks into the wilderness to come face to face with evil itself. He teaches, heals, and ministers to an arrogant people marked by fists clutching stones rather than open palms reaching out for their Messiah. And all along, the Gospels wind slow and steady up the hill of despair where the divine Son will hang from a tree, covered in His own blood, suffering for the sins of sinners.

Suffering then is not something down there in a world far away from its Creator. It is not simply the sinners' punishment for their gaudy disrespect of the King of Kings. No, that King of Kings enters this world as the Suffering Servant, "a man of sorrows, acquainted with grief," "a lamb led to the slaughter" (Isa 53:3,7). In a peculiar, world-turned-upside-down way (one we've frankly grown too accustomed to) the suffering of God is the only way we are saved from the eternal suffering we deserve. Christ was "pierced for our transgressions; He was crushed for our iniquities; upon Him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with His wounds we are healed" (Isa 53:5 ESV). These are some of the most precious and tragic words we will come up against because they tell us that the holy God suffers and He suffers on our behalf.

So when pain and sorrow come into our life, we do well to remember this: God is in the midst of suffering. It's only "when I survey the wondrous cross," that I see that Christ's "sorrow and love flow mingled down." Christ enters our pain-filled world, "not to

be served but to serve and to give His life as a ransom for many” (Mark 10:45; Matt 20:28). Suffering, from this Christ-centered perspective, is part and parcel of the gospel and, therefore, part and parcel of our hope.

GOD THROUGH SUFFERING

In light of this, suffering for the Christian takes on a new identity. For one who has been delivered “from the domain of darkness and transferred...to the kingdom of His beloved Son” (Col 1:13), suffering often becomes a teacher, an instrument by which God prepares us for the world to come. This is why the gospel puts every aspect of our lives under the discipleship of Christ. We are to become like Christ in all things: in His resurrected life and also as we walk with Him on His march to Golgotha (1 Pet 4:13; cf. 1 Pet 2:21). Sharing in Christ’s sufferings is a very real part of the Christian life (Phil 3:10; Matt 16:24; cf. 10:38), no matter what the preacher with the glistening white smile and toll-free number tells you.

So we know that suffering does not bypass God’s people, but we still feel obligated to try and make sense of it all. This is why we are tempted to carry Romans 8:28 and other texts around with us like theological “band-aids” to somehow stop the severed artery of pain and sorrow. We know that God uses all things to work together for the good, for those called according to his purposes (Rom 8:28). And we know suffering, according to Scripture, can be used to discipline us; to free us from the world; to push us deeper

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into holiness and faith; or simply to make His glory known in mysterious ways (cf. Jesus and the man born blind).

But as we feel pain and help others with theirs, we must recognize our limitations here. God promises to work through our suffering, but that is as far as the promise goes. He does not promise to submit His every act and purpose to our finite and fallen judgment for our approval. Our problem with God is that He does not always make clear how He is going to use our pain and sorrow for our good. We want, and at times demand, that God give us a Genesis 50:20 type of guarantee that makes sense of our time in the pit and prison. We want God to interpret our lives as He did Joseph's. But it does not always work this way; sometimes our enemies never bow before us. So even for Christians, there is no magic formula that explains every purpose behind all of God's dealings in our lives. But there is faith and that is where pain and suffering should compel us.

Even though God has promised believers that He is working through their suffering, this is as far as the promise goes, and that should be enough for us. He doesn't tell us how it works out and we should be silent where He does not speak. So be aware of your response to suffering, both in your own experience and in helping others process theirs. We are not called to figure out God's purposes in full; we are called to trust the God who works through suffering. We shouldn't try to be God and we should not try to be Job's friends. Rather, we answer the

inevitable questions of suffering like a fellow sufferer, as one who feels pain and knows sorrow. We listen and weep. And then we weep and listen. And then do it again. And we do all of this in the shadow of the cross.

SO EVEN FOR CHRISTIANS, THERE IS NO MAGIC FORMULA THAT EXPLAINS EVERY PURPOSE BEHIND ALL OF GOD'S DEALINGS IN OUR LIVES. BUT THERE IS FAITH AND THAT IS WHERE PAIN AND SUFFERING SHOULD COMPEL US.

GOD AFTER SUFFERING

This constant struggle is why suffering makes us covet. We are tired of the tears. We long for a better world inoculated from the pain. And God has made this possible through the suffering, death, and resurrection of His Son.

This place we call home, then, is not our final home. We are sojourners and exiles awaiting a better, heavenly city (1 Pet 2:11; Heb 11:13–16). The world as we know it is not the way it was supposed to be and, in God's unfathomable grace, this world will not be like this forever. This place of suffering, shame, and shortcomings is but a dash on the timeline of eternity.

We know this because the Lord graciously pulls back the curtain of the future to prepare, comfort, and encourage His people. And what do we see when He shows us the end? Well, simply put, God wins. Not evil. Not suffering.

But God in the fullness of His glory shows Himself to rule and reign forever.

And because God wins, His people win. The fallen world, with its fallen people, is restored. The creation we know will be surpassed when the heavens and earth meet. The times when it seems suffering and evil have won—like the darkness of Good Friday—will give way to a new and better Paradise, where sin and suffering have no authority and no future. God will correct our fickle assumptions that the prince of the power of the air really rules from this world by casting him into the bottomless pit (Rev 20:3). The Suffering Servant returns

to make all things right again, to do away with pain once and for all, to usher those with faith in His vicarious suffering into the new creation, all with a sword that comes from His mouth (Rev 19:15, 21).

Many of the things we think vital to the human experience—including suffering and pain and sin—will be shown to be obsolete. God is coming to wipe away the final tears from our eyes so that we may see His world as it should and always will be (Rev 21:1–4).

Until then, let us hold fast to the prepositions He has given us. Take hold of God and His promises that He rules before our suffering, is over our suffering, stood in the midst of our suffering, works through our suffering, and will reign after He has dealt with our suffering once and for all. And don't let go.



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HOW CAN I HELP?

BY DR. KAY BRUCE

COME ALONGSIDE, SERVING PRACTICAL NEEDS. THINK BASICS LIKE FOOD, EXERCISE, AND SLEEP (1 KINGS 19). HELP PLAN TASKS OF EVERYDAY LIVING (E.G. CHILD CARE, HOUSE CLEANING, LAWN MOWING).

LISTEN PATIENTLY TO THE DETAILS OF THE PERSON'S SUFFERING, EMPATHIZING WITH THEIR DISTRESS (JAMES 1:19).

PRAY DILIGENTLY FOR THEM AND COMFORT AS YOU HAVE BEEN COMFORTED (2 CORINTHIANS 1).

INQUIRE AS TO HOW GOD HAS HELPED THEM ENDURE PREVIOUS TIMES OF SUFFERING AND CHALLENGE.

IDENTIFY RESOURCES THAT ARE ACCESSIBLE AND CULTURALLY APPROPRIATE, SUCH AS: COUNSELORS, PASTORS, CHAPLAINS, SUPPORT GROUPS AVAILABLE THROUGH CHURCHES, BOOKS, ONLINE INFORMATION, 2-1-1, FRIENDS AND FAMILY MEMBERS.

ENCOURAGE THE PERSON TO OPENLY EXPRESS HIS/HER PAIN TO GOD, USING THE SCRIPTURES AS EXAMPLES.

Ask for His intervention in the circumstances (Psalm 7:1)

Request strength to endure (1 Corinthians 4:12)

Seek His peace (Philippians 4:7)

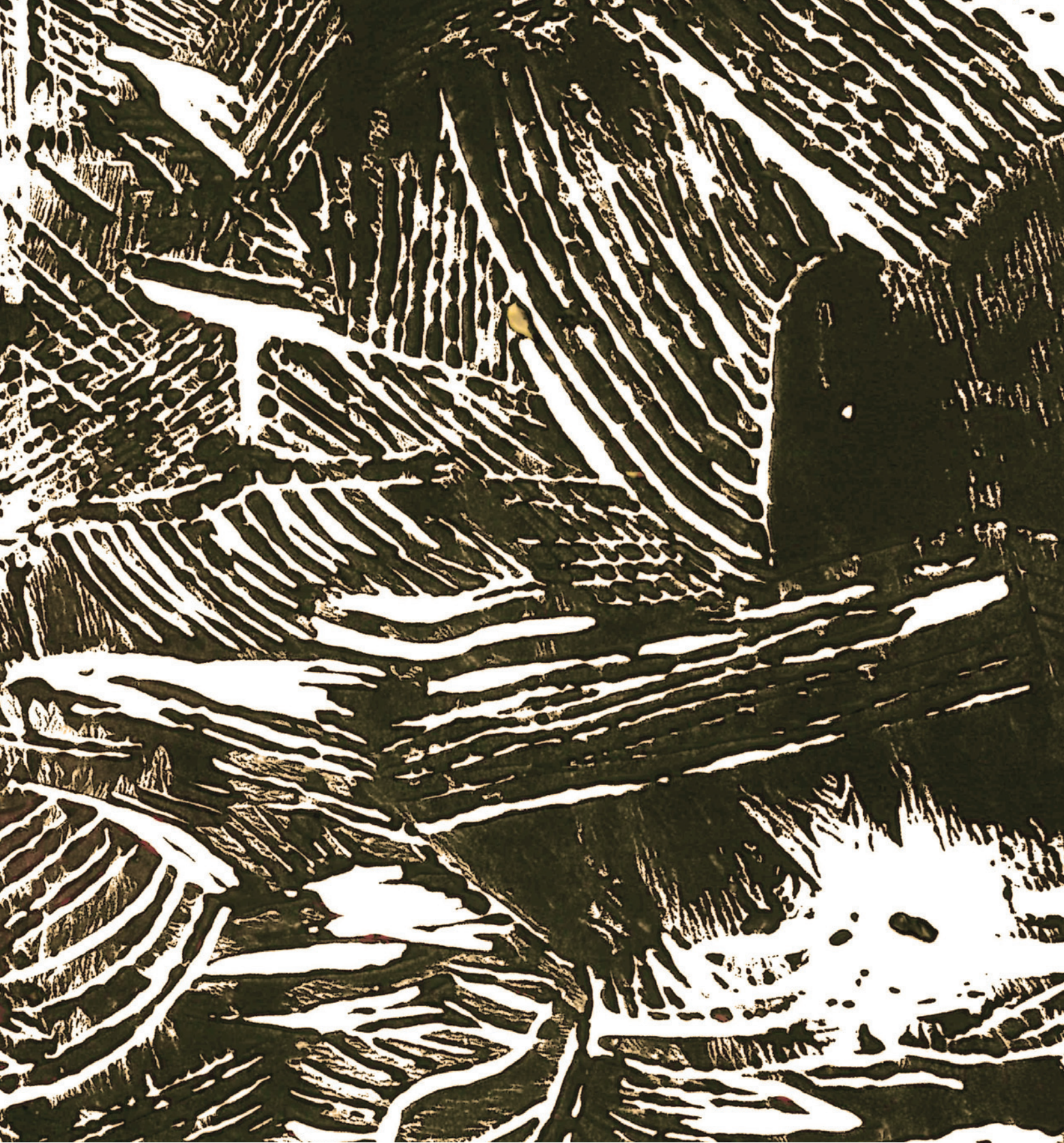
Pursue wisdom in how to respond (James 1:2-5)

Solicit God's intervention in the lives of those who are contributing to your suffering (Matthew 5:44)

Thank Him for what He will do (Philippians 4:6)

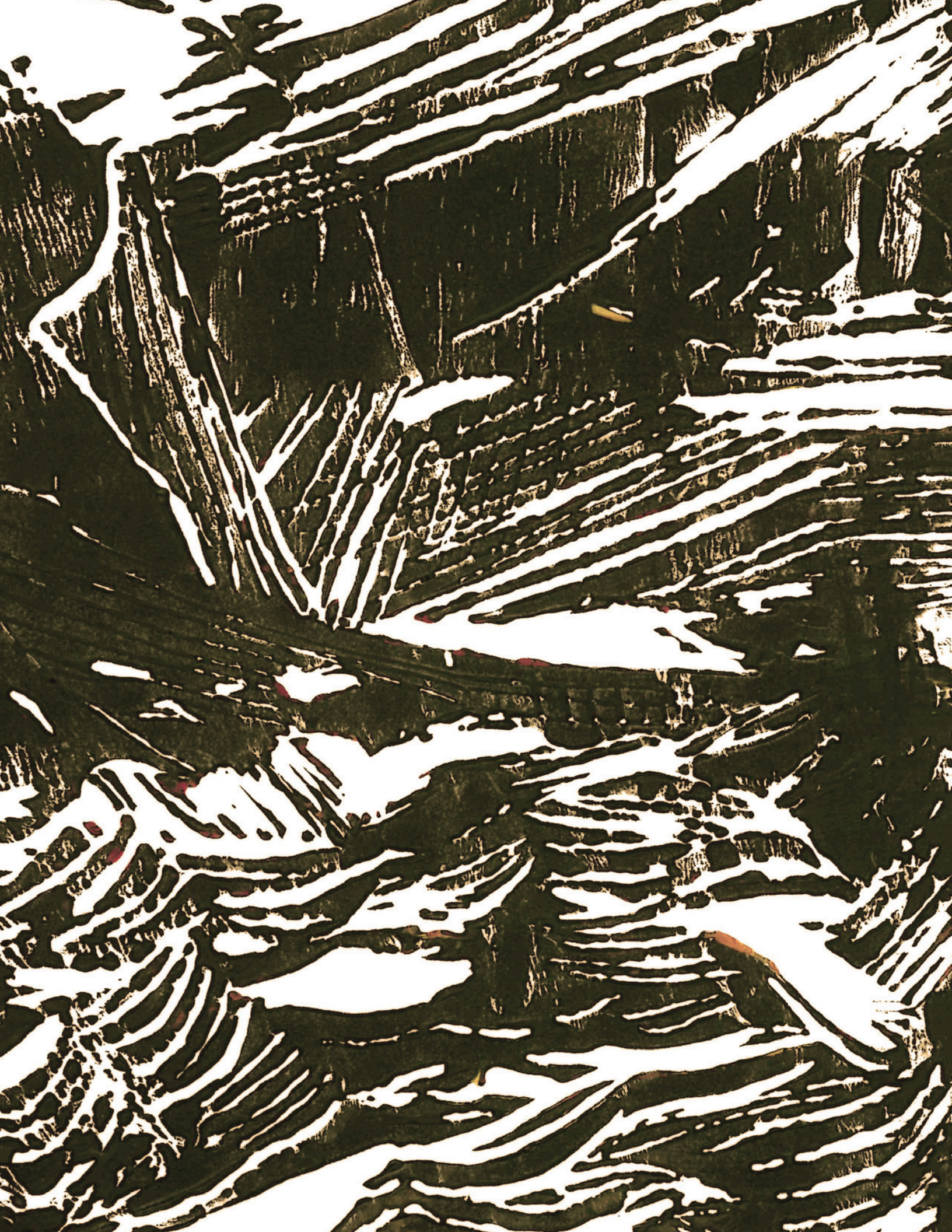


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TOSSED AT SEA

BY TERRY WILLIAMS



My struggle began when a feeling of numbness started in my toes and moved up my legs. Time spent with doctors determined that my auto-immune system was attacking all the sensory nerves in my body, causing numbness in my limbs, affecting even internal organs that function by sensory nerves. Consequently, my kidneys, liver and bladder were having difficulty working right. My lungs and heart were not giving feedback to my brain in the manner they are supposed to, causing pain. When sensory nerves go dead, they do not send the intended message back to the brain correctly, so the brain sends a pain message back out, indicating something is wrong.

The first treatment I went through was an intravenous immunoglobulin (IVIG) treatment. It is very much like chemotherapy; in fact, you are in with all the chemo patients getting IV treatments. The week on IV is very difficult. The process is cold, hard and lonely. You deal with veins getting “blown up,” bloating, constant chilling, headaches, and a myriad of other side effects, none of which are appealing. The week of infusion is followed by a week of side effects, which vary with each infusion. Sometimes the side effects are minimal, lasting only a few days, headaches perhaps being the worst of it. Other times, the side effects are significant, lasting seven or eight days and include severe headaches, nausea, bleeding mucous from your nose and breaking out in hives all over. A week of this

is followed by a third week of feeling not too bad, then you begin the whole cycle over again with your week of infusions. There were times when it became very hard to walk through the front door of the clinic in the morning, knowing what was ahead. An internal mental debate would take place, the benefit of possible healing in the long-range winning out.

My fatigue and pain levels grew disproportionately to my aging process, the disease taking over way too fast. What was going on? How could this be happening? I was living a full and fruitful life for our Lord. How could He possibly want this to change and see me become less effective in His service every day? I agonized over this conflict in my own heart and life. I was ministering to college students in a vital way, and I felt like God’s Spirit was using me as part of His work in a redemptive way. I had continued to be physically active, leading basketball camps, hiking and enjoying the outdoors. I had led a small group of college leaders on a camp-out and 15-mile day hike just the summer before. The next, I took a few students on a one-and-a-half mile hike and could not make it without help. What changed?

TOSSED AT SEA

I told God that if He was finished with me here on earth, He could take me home any time. I wish I could say that was the last time I prayed that prayer, but it wasn’t. I asked God how I could be of any productive service to Him, if I could not keep up with life and must live in worsening pain all

the time. Take me home. I am finished. You can see where that prayer has gone—I’m still here!

1 Pet. 5:7 gripped my being most during my suffering: “Cast all your anxiety on Him because He cares for you.” This could just as well read “Cast all your suffering on Him.” Cast whatever we have to cast on God, because He can handle it! For me, for this time, it is this ordeal—this disease and its side effects. It is the last four words in the verse that makes all the difference in the world for me: “He cares for you.” God cares for Terry. Because God cares for Terry, He wants my suffering, my hurting, my questions and confusion tossed all squarely on His shoulders while He embraces me in His Spirit’s firm grip.

To be in the grip of Christ is to be like Peter, pulled out of the stormy sea when his faith failed and he could no longer walk on the water through the storm (Matt. 14:29–31). No matter what storm life throws at you, how you survive and respond all depends on whose hands you are in. As Peter cried out, “Lord, save me” in verse 30, so have I cried out many, many times over the past five years: “Lord, please save me from all of this.”

I throw my hands up in despair, and while the storms may not be a literal raging sea around me like Peter, these storms feel just as terrifying. I cannot see where they are coming from or where they are going. I feel battered and swept wherever the will of the disease wishes to carry me. My faith wants to look up, but I am continually drawn toward

what is happening around me. How can I ignore all of this? So much blood has been taken from me that I cannot believe anymore can be found, yet seemingly with every new office visit, more blood is drawn for yet another test.

Even with this seeming torment going on around me, with my hands thrown up toward Christ, He reaches out and catches me up before falling — again! In suffering, it all depends on whose hands your life is in. I am thankfully cradled firmly in the grasp of my Savior. I am safe from the drowning that could have occurred had I responded differently to the broken world in which I live. Cast all your suffering on Him because He cares for Terry. He cares for Terry, and every other one of His followers.

WHY DO PEOPLE SUFFER?

We are a fallen people in a broken world. Our plight is suffering as a result of our fallen state and imperfect world. Why should we expect to not suffer? Suffering is universal since the fall of man is universal. No one is exempt from its effect. At some time in a person’s life (and probably more than once), each of us will encounter pain and suffering of some type. There may be various reasons for it and varying lengths of time, but we will all experience some sort of suffering. Suffering is a reality in our world. It has been present since Adam and Eve’s fall in Gen. 3:15–17 and has continued on throughout history.

There has to be a reason for people to suffer. At least, it seems like there should be

I FEEL BATTERED AND SWEEPED WHEREVER THE WILL OF THE DISEASE WISHES TO CARRY ME. MY FAITH WANTS TO LOOK UP, BUT I AM CONTINUALLY DRAWN TOWARD WHAT IS HAPPENING AROUND ME.

some cause and effect relationship. This is what the world wants us to believe and it makes sense. Only, all the explanations we encounter leave us short of being satisfied with the answer. If, as Shakespeare writes, “all the world is a stage,” then why do we not get to write the script? Why do earthquakes randomly seem to occur, taking lives without notice and without respect to how good or bad people are? Why does a tsunami wipe out miles and miles of coastal lands across many countries and islands, disabling and killing many? There is damage to buildings, businesses, the economy, and the health of people. This seems like a senseless, random act in our world. Why didn't the Script Writer prevent it from happening? Worse yet, why do so many people around the world feign like they care, when under their breath they mutter, “I am glad that was not me?”

There is a 35 year-old mother with three children diagnosed with rheumatoid arthritis. She hurts every day. Many days she is barely able to get out of bed. Her joints are swollen and tender. She lives with greatly reduced mobility and physical functions, a young mother who used to be in excellent health, but now lives with these new experiences.

What can be done for her? She asks, “Will this bother me for the rest of my life? What happened?” The doctors tell her that pain and fatigue will be her constant companions, which is not the answer to her questions that she was looking for. This invokes emotional responses such as anger, discouragement, anxiety, fear and self-pity—all of which aggravate her pain even more. Is this fair? She is a good mother that loves God with all her heart! Does this young woman deserve her affliction? Where is God in all this?

Natural disasters and diseases do not even take into account all the broken bones, sprains, strains, fractures, impairments and the many other wounds that occur in the world. There is suffering, pain and hardships of all kinds associated with all of these situations and more that could be mentioned.

Second only to public employment, suffering dominates the second largest occupation in our country, health care. “Pain is the primary symptom in over 80% of physician visits per year, and almost 20% of the patients describe their pain as unrelenting and severe” (G.H. Holman, “Chronic Nonmalignant Pain,” *Clinical Geriatrics*, 1997). “Almost half of all Americans will seek some type of treatment for pain yearly” (Donald

W. Swanson, ed., “Mayo Clinic on Chronic Pain,” Rochester: Mayo Clinic, 1999). If this is true, then over a few years time, nearly all Americans may seek some relief for pain. I know there will always be the rare person who brags about how long it has been since they have seen a doctor, but I have to conclude from the previous two statistics that Americans suffer at least physically, and generally speaking, our living conditions are some of the best in the world.

HOPE IT GOES AWAY?

My story is not unique to others. It may be more tragic than some, but it is certainly less tragic than many I have encountered. It can make people sad; in fact, it makes me sad sometimes, though there are happy moments even in the suffering. An important truth that has occurred to me from lessons learned in the Bible and through the lives of others is that, whether sad or happy, joy is a constant. This day and every day is sacred unto our Lord. For the joy of the LORD is our strength (Neh. 8:10).

Joy should not be equated as being our happiness as Jerry Sittser so aptly points out in his book, *Why God Doesn't Answer Your Prayer*. Joy is even greater than our happiness and occurs even when we are not happy, as in times of our suffering.

So when hard times occur, we ask ourselves, “What went wrong?” It is our immediate assumption, our trained response. It is as if to say, “Things are not supposed to go wrong if done right in the first place.” Therein lays the ultimate truth that we, all too often, do not seek deep enough to find. In our shallow lives, we seem to live as if goodness and perfection should be attained somehow in thirty or forty years of living. People usually come to one of three different conclusions: 1) we should have gained enough knowledge through modern medicine to avoid the pitfalls of sickness and disease, 2) we have the Almighty Healer who will heal us by correcting the problem, or allowing us to miraculously live with our problem, or 3) He will take us home to be with Him in Heaven. All three solutions bring ultimate glory to God.

However, it has been my experience that there is a fourth option that outnumbers the other three by a lot. That option is that the believer is tortured through some inexplicable disease, swept away without notice in a tsunami or hurricane without any seeming glory being brought to the Creator, or killed by a drunk driver on a Friday night on the way home from a game, with no reason attached to it at all.

Why, we ask? Our short-sited view says things would not be this bad if things were done right in the first place.

If we are seriously going to apply James 1:2 to our lives, “Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds,” then statistical data and our own personal experience tell us that pain and suffering in

makes his steps firm; though he stumble, he will not fall, for the LORD upholds him with his hand.” We need Gal. 2:20 type verses to encourage us and help us daily, sometimes even moment by moment, live by our faith in Christ: “I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the

CHRISTLIKENESS FROM SUFFERING

We have no assurance that physical or emotional pain will go away, but we can have assurance that our faith will help us. When aiding others who are suffering, we must learn to show mercy as Christ would since we are developing the character of Christ. We should pray believing that

the other side of the pain and suffering, there is the immediate joy set before us that leads each step of the way. We cannot know if this situation or another situation will take us across to the other side, but we can stay focused on the joy set before us—the fixing of our eyes squarely on Jesus.

Perhaps a person’s pain or illness may exist merely for God’s glory; bodily problems are part of life. The issue is not between pain and no pain, but rather how one will respond to the body or life’s failures when they occur. I suggest that one’s response will depend on one’s theology. There simply are no guarantees in life pertaining to pain relief. God’s truth helps us to be motivated, however, about satisfaction and contentment, even finding contentment at times, while experiencing suffering. We might even surprise ourselves (and others) by finding excitement and joy occasionally during hard times. We simplify life by focusing on pleasing God with our life as best we are able—not on the pain relief solution.

When we do not get the relief we want, our contentment has to be found in our relationship with Christ. How easy it would be if we were healed and could pick up our cot, so to speak, dancing and praising God for the miracle He brought into our life. Others would celebrate with us because that is how we think on earth. We want earthly victories and stories that make us feel good here today. While God can, and I think sometimes does, work this way, it is all for His glory and how His glory can be revealed. If healing is not to come, His glory is revealed in

WE GROW, CHANGE AND DEVELOP THE CHARACTER OF CHRIST IN OUR THOUGHTS, DESIRES AND ACTIONS AT ALL TIMES, BUT ESPECIALLY WHEN OUR MINDS AND WILLS COULD BE CLOUDED BY OTHER CIRCUMSTANCES.

life occur almost serendipitously. Perhaps with a better biblical understanding, we might understand the script better, or at least our roles in the script.

It is apparent we are meant to have pain, and to grieve and mourn in this world (John 16:20–22). But Jesus is our joy and nothing can take that away from us. The closer we draw to Him, the greater our joy becomes. It is the maturing (Jms. 1:4) and perfecting (Heb. 12:2) of our faith. We gain confidence through suffering in the steadfast love of Christ because of our faith.

This is in contrast to the “hope it goes away” or “hope it doesn’t return” attitude to life that holds us hostage at the mercy of pain. We need the affirmation of passages like Psalm 37:23–24 to encourage our faith: “If the LORD delights in a man’s way, he

Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.”

Paul points out that our goal is to please Christ, “whether we are at home in the body or away from it” (2 Cor. 5:9). Paul exhorts us that we should no longer live for ourselves, but for Christ who died for us (2 Cor. 5:15). The presence of pain and suffering is no exception to the rule. In fact, it highlights the rule and clarifies the importance and need for doing so in our lives. This is where we find joy when joy cannot be found because of our emotional or physical circumstances. We grow, change and develop the character of Christ in our thoughts, desires and actions at all times, but especially when our minds and wills are clouded by other circumstances (Luke 9:23–26; 14:26–27). A close intimate relationship with Christ completes us.

God can be called upon by His faithful to hear our pleas and petitions, and that He is good.

The believer must be convinced that suffering can help him or her become more like Christ. Consider Heb. 12:2, “Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.” It is clear enough in this verse that Jesus saw the joy set before Him of sitting down with His Heavenly Father. That was enough to get Him through the cross and the suffering. Can I see through my pain and suffering to see that if I fix my eyes on Jesus, my faith is perfected and the joy He sets before me can get me through my own situation? There is a bridge principle here. While the reward seems to be on

other remarkable ways, but if our eyes are not fixed on Jesus, we fail to see the joy set before us.

In the case of pain, how can Christlikeness develop? Dr. James Halla, in his book *Pain: The Plight of Fallen Man*, suggests that Christlikeness can be developed through the pain experience. I would like to share his ideas and suggest three ways Christlikeness can be developed as a result of our pain and suffering. I think these points may be the epicenter of our suffering experience, where the Spirit of God can anchor our soul and show us we still have purpose in life. I have to be reminded often of these points, however, as the body is weak. Discouragement is a cloud that hangs close and easily moves in when I am not feeling well or the pain persists day after day. Thoughts of how life used to be can occupy an idle mind and existence. Fear of the future can creep into my wonderings about what's next on this journey. Faith, while strong in our Almighty God, can be shaken believing He will not heal me. Not that He cannot heal me, but that He will not because it somehow serves His purpose better. I say all this to show my weakness and frailty. I have not laid hold of the following three points to the extent I wish I could. But I am a work in progress and with the help of the Spirit of God, I strive to grow in Christlikeness just like any believer, suffering or not.

First, Christ strengthens me. Christlikeness develops because I can still accomplish Christ's purpose for me. "I can do everything through him

who gives me strength" (Phil. 4:13). If this isn't a theme verse for the sufferer, I don't know what is! To say that because I suffer I cannot accomplish Christ's purpose would be unthinkable. No one would say that, although I fear we think it often. I know the sufferer can be inclined to think that way. If you are the hurting one, or you know someone that is hurting, remind them that they are never separated from being able to accomplish God's purpose through and for them. Consider Rom. 8:35-37: "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? As it is written: 'For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.' No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us."

A second point in thinking about how Christlikeness can be developed through my suffering is that my daily discomfort or unpleasantness in life can still be used as God's agent of change. Good things can happen through my life. I can still be part of God's redemptive work on earth. How could I lose sight of that when I became sick? What made me think God could not use me anymore, like He just tossed me out? I can use Paul's example in Phil. 1:12-18 as the model in my own suffering situation. Just like Paul, I can look down at my "chains" and still minister to others. The "chains" of my disease do not need to hinder the possibilities of how I might still reach out to people and rejoice all the while doing it (vs. 18).

My life can still be an effective agent for change in God's redemptive work on earth.

The third point of how Christlikeness can develop through my suffering is I can still use the body God gave me for His glory, no matter how damaged or disappointed in it I am. "And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose" (Rom. 8:28). I may be (okay, I really, really am) disappointed in my body and what is happening to it. It's damaged goods! But God can still use it for His purpose, for His glory. In all of my questioning of God, how could I have forgotten that? Brothers and sisters, it is really easy. However, just like Joseph's brothers meant what they did for Joseph's harm, God intended it for good (Gen. 50:19-21). God can take broken pieces and make beautiful sculptures out of them. He can bring glory to himself out of jars of clay. God can use my broken body to bring glory to Himself and regardless of my disappointment, I need to join God in His purpose.

When we have come to the end of wrestling with our suffering and all of our emotions, arguments, logic and earnest prayer have been laid out before our Lord, we have to join Paul in his words written in the second part of Phil. 4:11, "I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances." Jesus has already modeled for us how to endure suffering and pain to attain joy in our Father. We become content in our circumstances when we fix our eyes on Jesus, our model and our Comforter.

Becoming like Jesus teaches us how to endure our suffering and pain. Because of His great love, I long to serve Him in whatever state I exist. But while striving to serve, I share John the Apostle's sentiments in Rev. 22:20, "Come, Lord Jesus."



Terry Williams was formerly the coach of Corban University's women's basketball team. He built the program there for 14 years, winning 240 games. During his career at Corban, Williams was forced to retire twice because of an immune system illness that caused nerve sensory loss. While his disease is still present, Williams was able to come out of retirement in 2014 to coach the West Salem High School girl's basketball team. "The neat thing about it is how God uses these situations to be a testimony to others in how you respond to these situations" says Williams. "It is how you respond, what you say, the people you meet that treat you, the other patients you meet, and on and on. 'Whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God' (1 Cor 10:31)."

SHEPHERDING DURING CRISIS

FACING PERSECUTION AS A CHURCH



PASTOR NATHANIEL WAZIRI

Nathaniel is a Pastor with the Evangelical Church Winning All denomination in Nigeria, as well as an alumnus of Western Seminary.

Persecution against Christians in Nigeria has a long history that has developed over years and has its roots in a systematic Islamic expansionist agenda for the nation. The northern states in Nigeria adopted *Sharia* (Islamic) Law in open and gross violation of Nigeria's constitution which recognizes the country as a secular state. As a result, Christians in northern Nigeria are victims of marginalization who are disenfranchised politically, economically and socially in their own states and by their own ethnic groups, due to their religious identity.

Christians are denied equal rights, the right to own property, most state jobs and promotions and admission into government owned institutions in the North. The level of discrimination is such that many Muslim managers refuse to hire a Christian outright. Christian neighborhoods are frequently overlooked for development or basic maintenance and denied social amenities such as schools, drinking water, electricity and medical facilities.

Most recently, the group *Boko Haram* has committed many atrocities against Christians. Though the group attacks government structures, and sometimes moderate Muslims, the main agenda of *Boko Haram* (as articulated by their leader) is to eliminate Christianity. The group is responsible for the bombing of Christian places of worship, kidnapping of young boys in Christian areas and forcing them to fight on the front line and kidnapping of Christian women and young girls for slaves, sex slaves, forced marriages and conversion into Islamic religion.

On July 17, 2012, the church I was pastoring fell victim to *Boko Haram* and was bombed. I was at the pulpit and I heard a car driving furiously, then hit the main gate to the church premises. We

have two buildings, one main building and the other where the children go during the service. The driver aimed between those two buildings. The bomb detonated early, so he did not make it beyond the gate. We lost some of our members in the explosion and several others were injured. Some lost their sight, others lost their fingers. Muslims were standing on the highway, jubilating, thinking everyone in the church had been killed.

Christians in Nigeria, just like many other places, have been struggling on how to respond to the frequent attacks of Muslims over the years. Non-violence is easier said than done, when you are faced with reality, watching someone kill your loved ones. We go to church with no defense for ourselves and suddenly we are attacked. Opinions on how to respond now vary. Some fear returning violence for violence goes contrary to the teachings of the Scriptures, while others fear that Muslims will take advantage of any passivity and inflict further pain on them.

Unfortunately, we witnessed this tension play out on the day our church was attacked. A nearby town with a large Christian population heard a false report that there were a hundred victims. In reaction, the Christians in that town started attacking the Muslims. When the situation is tense, in the confusion, there are times when you can't control anyone. I have seen that time without number. Now, because we expect attacks in different forms every day, this has created great enmity in the hearts of some Christians towards Muslims. Some youths in different churches are now suggesting that churches should buy guns for self-defense, especially during worship, which pastors have vehemently resisted.

Though the persecution Christians have passed through has been painful, strength and commitment have also grown out of it. For example, the following Sunday after our church was attacked the church was filled with worshipers who were praising God. We saw many church members who had not been in church for some time show up. We saw God drawing us closer to Him. We also saw a quick response to rebuild the church that was destroyed as a result of the explosion.

If any country is free from persecution today, that does not mean that it will never come. Challenge may come in the future, through physical attacks or other forms of oppression. The freedom and opportunity to practice religion without any challenge should not be misused. That is, I think, the time to learn how to be committed to Christianity and to winning souls. Pray for those who are being persecuted, for strength and wisdom in how to respond to violence so that the doors for evangelism do not close.

HOW TO COPE WHEN TRAGEDY STRIKES YOUR COMMUNITY



PASTOR GRANT GOINS

Grant is the Associate Pastor at Roseburg Alliance Church in Roseburg, OR, as well as an alumnus of Western Seminary.



PASTOR RON LAEGER

Ron is the Senior Pastor at Wellspring Bible Fellowship in Roseburg, OR, as well as an alumnus of Western Seminary.

In the midst of an act of community violence in which eight students, a teacher, and the gunman lost their lives, our region has been dramatically impacted. There is a palpable difference when one walks the streets of our town. An insight the Lord has given me in my pastoral role is the need to equip God's people to be "spiritual first responders," looking for and walking through the many open doors we have as our community processes grief and loss. Even a simple shift in wording from "How are you doing?" to "How are you holding up?" yields amazing results. Medical professionals have had patients pour out their souls, pizza deliverers have wept with their customers, employers have counseled employees whose kids were shot. The Christians in our county need to be incarnational, empathetic listeners on the front lines of grief.

The opportunities we've had to minister to the community at large have been plentiful and instructive. I've learned that many who are not part of local churches still want to gather together and grieve, yet they aren't coming to local churches to do it. They want to gather in public places to pray, hear Scripture, and sing. The night of the shooting was my first such lesson: our governor and several elected officials spoke at a candle-light vigil in a public park. The official program was finished in 15 minutes, yet people remained in the park. Some shouted, "We want 'Amazing Grace!'" and others made small talk with their neighbors, yet few turned to go home. A pastor friend called me and suggested we make our way to the stage and begin praying into the open microphone. I wasn't sure this was a good idea, yet I began praying when he handed me the mic. I then handed the microphone to several others, led the group of a couple thousand in "Amazing Grace," and another pastor from our ministerial fellowship closed in prayer and dismissed the gathering. The general public was not satisfied by the terse, official words of sympathy its government offered, they were hungering for more. I've seen this same sentiment play out several times since.

I'm optimistic about what God has in store for our region. I've seen unlikely partnerships, walls broken down, and gospel movement begun in many sectors. Please pray for a bountiful harvest as God's people make the most of these opportunities!

When you receive the call to pastor a local church, you also are called to minister to that community. You never fully know what will occur in that community, but you know you better be ready. When shots rang out at the campus of Umpqua Community College (UCC) on Thursday, October 1st, 2015, local pastors in Roseburg, OR were challenged with how to respond.

My wife, Tanya, and I went immediately to a staging area where students and faculty were being bussed away from the crime scene. We brought bottled water, granola bars, and a listening ear. We prayed with hurting students awaiting families and transportation. A local leadership team of evangelical pastors known as the Douglas County Evangelical Fellowship (DCEF) began directing resources and working with key community leaders to make certain that people struggling with the event had competent community care, a listening ear, and the gospel. Global ministries were present in Roseburg within 12 hours of the shooting, including the Billy Graham Rapid Response Team of Chaplains seeking opportunities to bring support to the churches. Within 48 hours, 10 chaplains were on site with a ministry vehicle for counseling, prayer, and to share the good news of Jesus Christ. Eleven people placed their faith in Christ and nearly 330 people prayed with the chaplains.

Wellspring Bible Fellowship hosted the chaplains and used the testimony of one chaplain in the Sunday sermon following the shooting. To show how churches were responding to the horrific incident, two media outlets videoed the church service for the evening news.

We've been supporting our people with pastoral counseling and sending our law enforcement officers struggling with PTSD to officer retreats. We also hosted an evening of training for community ministry leaders on ministering to trauma and grief and worked with the DCEF team that planned and hosted a community gathering of churches to nurture healing at the Douglas County Fairgrounds.

I'm constantly in awe of how God uses us to bring His comfort and healing to hurting people. I'm grateful for the prayers and contacts by the Western Seminary family within hours of the incident.

MINISTRY UPDATES



Photo: Jessica Lyons

NEW MINISTRY LAUNCHED

By Whitney Woollard

The Verity Fellowship started when two Western Seminary students, Taylor Turkington and Katie Roberts, began thinking about how they could help contribute to the equipping of women for the various types of gospel ministries they may be involved in. They were motivated to help women see the truth that the good news of Jesus Christ is central not simply to how a person understands the message of the Bible, but furthermore, must remain at the center of their lives and ministries. After almost two years of prayer and preparation, Taylor and Katie launched the Verity Fellowship this year, in partnership with Western Seminary, as an ongoing ministry to meet this need.

The Fellowship's inaugural conference, held in September 2015, was focused on 'The Big Story of Scripture'. This conference addressed the desire of so many evangelical women today for teaching and training that serves to bolster their understanding of the truth of the gospel. The intent of the event, quite simply, was to train women to better grasp the storyline of Scripture, so they might effectively point to Christ in their ministries. This was done through corporate worship, plenary sessions taught by Nancy Guthrie, and hands-on workshops—all directed towards savoring Christ's beauty in greater capacities.

Over 360 women representing more than 90 local churches from different ages, cultural backgrounds, and denominations gathered in one place to learn more about Jesus. Southeast Portland's Hinson Baptist Church stepped in at the last hour to host the conference after it became clear that interest had outgrown the capacity of Western's chapel. Throughout the weekend Nancy spent three sessions tracing major biblical-theological themes across the redemptive-historical landscape, showing how every theme found its ultimate meaning in the person and work of Christ. Witnessing hundreds of women sacrifice their weekend to grow in the knowledge of the truth was a great reminder that the gospel really is all of our greatest need. And this is what is so important about Verity Fellowship: it's driven by an awareness that all of life must ultimately point towards Jesus. For more information, visit www.westernseminary.edu/verityfellowship.

10 YEAR ANNIVERSARIES

THE SPURGEON FELLOWSHIP

The Spurgeon Fellowship (TSF), which began under the leadership of Dr. Art Azurdia and continues under his direction, celebrates its tenth anniversary this year. The Spurgeon Fellowship is "devoted to seeking the wisdom of classical pastoral theology for contemporary church ministry" and draws on experienced practitioners and theologians, such as D.A. Carson, Kent Hughes, Bruce Ware, Alistair Begg, and Dan Doriani, to enhance the personal character and professional competency of pastors and, thus, contribute to the renewal of local congregations.

When TSF began, there were about 60 local pastors and church leaders who gathered in Johnson Chapel. Now, in these ten years, the Spurgeon Fellowship has blossomed, by God's grace, to an attendance at its regular meetings of 250–350. In addition to the regular meetings on Western Seminary's campus, TSF added a yearly Pastor's Conference that meets at Cannon Beach, OR. For the fourth year (January 18–20, 2016) of the Pastor's Conference, Dr. Bryan Chapell, pastor and author of *Christ-Centered Preaching*, will be the keynote speaker.

The key distinctive of The Spurgeon Fellowship is to keep the gospel central and to point consistently to the gospel and its influence on all aspects of ministry. TSF has a great line-up of speakers for this year and next. If you would you like more information about The Spurgeon Fellowship or would like to attend one of the meetings, please visit www.thespurgeonfellowship.org for more information.

COACHING

Coaching is about turning ideas into reality and this year celebrates 10 years since the idea of coaching became a reality at Western Seminary. In the fall of 2005, the first pilot coaching course was held on the Portland campus. That course was the brainchild of Dr. Norm Theisen along with professional coaches Linda Miller and Jane Creswell. It didn't take long for that first course to generate enough interest for a second course, and then a third. Soon coaching was a fixture on all three campuses and the coaching program was born.

These days Western offers a dozen different coaching courses to students from all over North America. The program has trained over a thousand people and just over a year ago awarded the first Certificate in Transformational Coaching (CTC). As of October 23, 2015, the International Coach Federation officially recognized the CTC program as an Approved Coach Training Program (ACTP). This is the highest ICF designation, awarded to all-inclusive programs that provide basic to advanced training and produce professional-level coaches.

Western stands as a pioneer in the coaching field as the first (and one of the only) seminaries in the world to offer coach training. For more information on this program, please visit www.westernseminary.edu/coaching.

REMEMBERING DR. COOK



IN 1965, DR. EARL RADMACHER INVITED DR. COOK TO JOIN THE FACULTY OF WESTERN SEMINARY. HE TAUGHT THEOLOGY AND LATER SERVED AS VICE PRESIDENT AND ACADEMIC DEAN UNTIL HIS RETIREMENT FROM THOSE POSITIONS IN 1986.

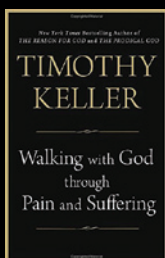
A Personal Remembrance from Dr. Jim Sweeney

When you have the opportunity to witness the life of a godly man for over fifty years, you learn about what it means to be godly. You have a great role model. When you have the privilege of walking beside him, drawn into his life, becoming the beneficiary of his wisdom and guidance, you have more than a role model—you have a godly mentor. Dr. Bob Cook was that, and more, to me. I sat as a student in his theology classes; I was thrilled several years later when he invited me to become a part of the faculty he led. I could not have imagined that when he laid aside the role of seminary dean to return full-time to the classroom, he would think of me to pick up that task. Apparently he felt that since he had mentored me I probably wouldn't fail too badly.

In a recent conversation with a Western alumnus—a graduate of a couple decades ago—we found ourselves reminiscing about the seminary's past. He was curious to know to what I attributed its growth from a small regional school in the early 1960s to its current place as one of the largest and most respected seminaries in the nation. I mentioned several factors, but the conversation quickly turned to Dr. Robert Cook. He had come to Western to teach in 1965, recruited by Dr. Earl Radmacher who had just become president. Dr. Radmacher knew that he would need a colleague beside him with the wisdom and skills to oversee the strengthening of curriculum and faculty he envisioned. Dr. Cook was that man. No one more than he can be given credit for establishing the foundation of academic excellence, theological rigor and biblical integrity upon which Western is now built.

In my conversation with the seminary grad I apparently used a variety of words to characterize Dr. Cook, words which my friend noted. As we learned of Bob's home going last week, he reminded me of some of my words in particular: unflinching integrity, quiet command, and authentic humility. Words are only concepts until they take on flesh and blood. Dr. Cook was the embodiment of those words. He lived his life to invest it in others for the cause of Christ. As he ended his tenure as Academic Vice President he was asked, What was the reward for you in all this? He replied, "I would say it is the ministry and lives of the students and faculty as they honor the Lord." Bob Cook's investment continues to bear interest in lives around the world, to the glory of God.

RECOMMENDED RESOURCES



Walking with God through Pain and Suffering

Timothy Keller
Riverhead Books, 2013

"First, Keller examines human suffering through the ages and the ways that different cultures and religions have coped. Next, he discusses what the Bible says about suffering. Finally, he offers practical advice on how to live through it. He discusses the problem of evil, the reasons for suffering, the varieties of suffering, and the necessity of hope. A luminous and ultimately hopeful examination of the many aspects of suffering." June Sawyers, *Booklist*



Be Still My Soul: Embracing God's Purpose and Provision in Suffering

Edited by Nancy Guthrie
Crossway, 2010

This anthology includes essays from both classic and contemporary theologians, Bible teachers, and missionaries such as John Calvin, Charles Spurgeon, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, John Piper, Corrie ten Boom, Joni Eareckson Tada, and Helen Roseveare. Each entry expounds on a Bible verse, leading readers to see and be comforted by God's perspective, purpose, and provision in suffering.



If God Is Good: Faith in the Midst of Suffering

Randy Alcorn
Multnomah Press, 2009

"Because the main argument of atheists against the existence of God is suffering in the world, Alcorn lays out a weighty and classically reasoned argument to the problem of suffering...Evil comes from human rebellion or sin, and suffering is a secondary evil brought on by that primary evil. By granting free will to humanity, God allows for an eternal good that humans don't always see now but will experience in the life to come if faithful." Excerpted from *Publisher's Weekly* review



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