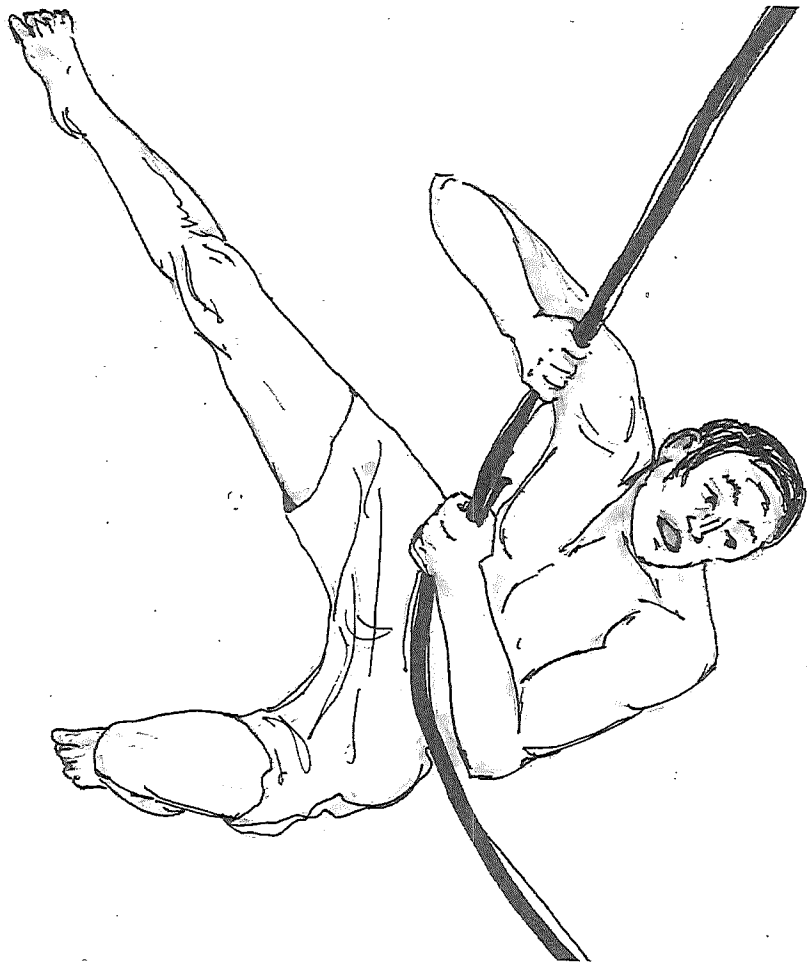


From Larry J. Waters, ed., *When Suffering Is Redemptive: Stories of How Anguish and Pain Accomplish God's Mission* (Wooster, OH: Weaver, 2016)



T W O

*Redeeming a Life of Paralysis:  
Broken Wholeness*

MARK R. TALBOT

You have dealt well with your servant, O LORD.  
... Before I was afflicted I went astray.  
... You are good and do good.  
... It is good for me that I was afflicted,  
that I might learn your statutes.  
The law of your mouth is better to me  
than thousands of gold and silver pieces.  
I know, O LORD, that your rules are righteous,  
and that in faithfulness you have afflicted me.  
(Psalm 119:65, 67, 68, 71-72, 75)

I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.  
(John 10:10)<sup>1</sup>

**W**hen I was seventeen, I fell about fifty feet off a Tarzan-like rope swing, breaking my back and becoming paralyzed from the waist down.<sup>2</sup> I spent six months in two hospitals. Initially, I had no feel-

<sup>1</sup> All Scripture quotations are from the ESV unless otherwise indicated. All emphases are mine.

<sup>2</sup> Portions of this chapter are adapted from my forthcoming book, to be published by Crossway, titled, *When the Stars Disappear: Trusting God When We Suffer*. I am grateful to the Christian Scholars' Fund, who have supported my research and writing for the past

ing or movement in my legs and no bowel or bladder control. I dropped from 200 to 145 pounds because I got sick every time I ate. Once my back had stabilized a little and I had regained some leg movement, my physical therapist tried to help me regain more by having me crawl to breakfast. At the time, I had a calcified stone in my bladder that had formed when they had catheterized me for the first few weeks. The catheter had been removed, but the undetected stone remained. It was causing raging bladder infections. When they would put me on the floor each morning, I would wet myself and, because it was useless to change, remain soaked all day. The stone was finally detected and removed, and when I left the hospital a couple of weeks later I was able to control my bladder in most situations and walk awkwardly with one or two canes.

I am now sixty-five. My walking has become much slower, harder, and more painful, even with crutches. To walk more than fifty feet or to stand for more than a couple of minutes are now daunting prospects, yet I want to stay on my feet. I walk partly on muscle spasm, which raises my blood pressure, making it hard for me to find ways to exercise enough to stay in cardiovascular shape. I have to worry about things most people never even think about. In the last twenty years, I sometimes have had sleep-robbing leg spasms. And in the last ten years, my inability to walk much has depleted the bone density in my hips to the point where, if I take a really serious fall, they may break. Those falls happen more frequently now since my legs sometimes collapse unexpectedly.

Yet my accident is one of the three great blessings of my life. My body may be broken, but I am much more whole as a result.

## Conversion

The greatest blessing of my life is my conversion, which took place when I was twelve.<sup>3</sup> I was frightened by some of my sins, and so when an evangelist made an appeal during a weekend retreat for young junior-high-school boys, I raised my hand, accepting Christ.

Initially, this gave me a new direction and some purpose and meaning. I began memorizing Scripture, and church and youth group became more important to me.

---

few years through their CSF Scholars program. This piece, with some additional footnotes, can be found on the Christian Scholars' Fund website at [www.christianscholarsfund.org](http://www.christianscholarsfund.org).

<sup>3</sup> The third great blessing was God's providential provision of my wonderful wife, Cindy, and our daughter Kim.

## Getting Focused

Yet through junior high and high school, I was floundering. As important as my conversion was, it didn't transform my day-to-day life. I had always had trouble relating to my peers, and that didn't change. My relationships with my teachers were often tense.

I fell in June, two days after the end of my junior year. My high school years had been disquieting. It was always clear I could succeed academically, if I would apply myself. But each day I would carry books home from school and never open them. Looking towards college, I had a gnawing sense of impending failure. I dreamed about experiences I thought college would bring, such as traveling with the University of Washington marching band, but I realized my aimlessness would probably mean I wouldn't survive my first year. I assumed I wouldn't finish college, but I had no idea what else I could do.

I frittered away my free time, living for inane experiences, like riding down sunny, winding country roads with my friends while listening to pop music or driving those roads by myself at breakneck speeds. My part-time jobs at boat docks and go-kart tracks increased my sense of life's basic meaninglessness, aggravating my *ennui*.

I sought my identity in risky and brash behavior that alienated me from my teachers and from God. My life seemed out of my control, which frightened me.

My fall's first blessing was that by suddenly cutting off a lot of possibilities, it focused me. Soon after hitting the ground, I saw that my legs were submerged in a little stream, yet I wasn't feeling anything. A few years before, I had met Brian Sternberg, who as a sophomore at the University of Washington in 1963 had twice broken the world record in the pole vault. That summer he had broken his neck when he lost his orientation while training on a trampoline. He became quadriplegic. As soon as I realized my legs weren't feeling anything, I knew that I had done something similar.

Yet, paradoxically, I immediately felt God's love for me. I knew that somehow this accident was from His hand and for my good.<sup>4</sup> Almost everything that had been distracting me fell away, and for the next several months I focused on just one thing: How much could I recover physically from my accident?

---

<sup>4</sup> My sense of God's love for me immediately after my accident may seem more extraordinary than it actually is. I know of several instances where an inexplicable peace from God has followed immediately on some calamity (see Phil. 4:7). In my own case, there was nothing about me or what I believed at the time that could account for what I felt. It was simply God's gift.

## Sensing My Dependence

I spent six weeks on a Stryker frame at Providence Hospital in Seattle. My mom spent each day with me, and then my father would come by after work and read me to sleep with Fulton Oursler's dramatization of our Lord's life in his *The Greatest Story Ever Told*. I then went to Good Samaritan Hospital's rehab center in Puyallup. Those were months without much Christian fellowship or Bible reading, but when I finally went home at Christmas, I regularly felt God's presence, especially after a fall.

By then I was in the habit of praying that God would help me with the most basic bodily tasks like urinating and standing and walking. I prayed during meals that nausea wouldn't keep me from eating. My precarious physiology drove home my need for God's mercies. Over the years my sense of dependence has increased as the difficulties have multiplied.

Of course, we all depend on God's sustaining hand, yet we easily forget this when we are flourishing. We assume we control our lives in ways we do not. At one point in His earthly ministry, our Lord warned His listeners against this assumption:

Then he told them a story: "A rich man had a fertile farm that produced fine crops. He said to himself, 'What should I do? I don't have room for all my crops.' Then he said, 'I know! I'll tear down my barns and build bigger ones. Then I'll have room enough to store all my wheat and other goods. And I'll sit back and say to myself, "My friend, you have enough stored away for years to come. Now take it easy! Eat, drink, and be merry!"'

"But God said to him, 'You fool! You will die this very night. Then who will get everything you worked for?'" (Luke 12:16-20, NLT)

Making the same point in a slightly different way, James wrote this:

Come now, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go into such and such a town and spend a year there and trade and make a profit"—yet you do not know what tomorrow will bring. What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes. *Instead you ought to say, "If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that."* As it is, you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil. (James 4:13-16)

Good health and good fortune tempt us to think we are the masters of our own fate (see Deut. 8:11-14, 17-18). Regarding my health, this is a temptation I will never have to face.

## Finding A New Delight

The psalmist who wrote Psalm 119 testified that his suffering led him to treasure God's words: "I used to wander off until you [afflicted] me; but now I [heed] your word. . . . My suffering was good for me, for it taught me to pay attention to your decrees" (vv. 67, 71, NLT). It has been the same for me.

For the first Christmas after my accident, my parents gave me what Oxford University Press called its Pilgrim Edition of the King James Version of the Bible. It had over 7,000 notes on the Scriptures, written so that they "might be helpful to any young Christians of any age."

Those notes opened the Scriptures for me. God's Word became my delight. I knew God was speaking to me through the words on the biblical pages. Looking at my worn copy now, I find I highlighted, underlined, and annotated some of the Old Testament and almost all of the New. Psalm 119:24 captures what I was experiencing: "Thy testimonies . . . are my delight and my counsellors" (KJV). I began to find my identity in Christ.

The psalmist's suffering led him to value God's words more than great wealth: "Your instructions are more valuable to me than millions in gold and silver" (v. 72, NLT). I found the lure of Scripture trumping even some of my stronger instincts. When I was in Good Sam, I found spending time with the female nursing students to be so attractive that I would allow them to practice drawing my blood. A few weeks after I got home, several of them drove sixty miles to our home to see how I was doing. But my delight in reading Scripture had become so intense that I excused myself after a few minutes, leaving them to talk with my parents as I went to read. Whenever I think about this, it makes me laugh: It seems that God and His Word *can* become more alluring than anything else!

Later trials and afflictions have repeatedly sent me to the Scriptures. When I had my first full-time position as a philosophy professor I became depressed because I was finding it difficult to finish my dissertation. Yet I found I had to open each morning with at least an hour of careful biblical study. Nothing else gave me the solace to go on.

Suffering Christians need to turn to the Scriptures, expecting God to meet them there. As I put it in a piece published in Seattle Pacific College's student newspaper early in my junior year, I had found that the pain of infirmity could not begin to touch the joy of closeness to Him.

## Restored by Steadfast Love

The events recounted in the first chapter of the book of Ruth clearly constitute a personal calamity. Because of a famine in Judah, Elimelech took Naomi and their two sons to sojourn in Moab, where he died and the sons took Moabite wives. The sons then died before fathering children, and so Naomi was left a childless widow in a foreign land. In ancient times, this was perilous. Knowing this, she tried to dissuade her daughters-in-law from returning with her to Bethlehem (see 1:8-13).

As was customary with God's Old Testament people, Naomi took her suffering to have been divinely ordained, which she expressed in terms of "the hand of the LORD [having] gone out" against her, the LORD having "brought [her] back empty" to Bethlehem, the LORD having "testified against" her, as well as "the Almighty [having] brought calamity" upon her (1:13, 21).

Depending on how we construe the Hebrew, the women of Bethlehem's surprised "Is this Naomi?" upon her arrival back in her home village may suggest that Naomi's calamity had weighed so heavily on her that she was almost unrecognizable (1:19). In any case, given the significance of personal names in the ancient Near East, Naomi's reply, "Do not call me Naomi" (which means *pleasant*); "call me Mara" (which means *bitter*), "for the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me" (1:20), shows she felt bitterness would characterize the rest of her life. For the entire time period covered in Ruth's first chapter, the woman whose name meant "pleasant" lost all hope her life would ever be pleasant again.

She was mistaken, as Ruth's last chapter shows. Naomi's inability in the midst of her suffering to hope her life could ever be pleasant again was no measure of God's ability to work out everything for her good. When she took Ruth's infant Obed into her arms at the story's end, her life was being restored by the same God who had made it so bitter. It became no irony to call her *Pleasant* again.

How did God restore Naomi's life? We are told in chapter 1 that He ended Israel's famine, prompting Naomi to get up and take to the road leading back to Judah (see 1:6-7). Then in Ruth's last chapter we read, "[T]he LORD gave [the previously barren Ruth] conception, and she bore a son" (4:13).

These two events bracket Naomi's story and thus emphasize two things.

First, they emphasize God's steadfast love for Naomi. By ending Israel's famine, He initiated the train of events that would restore her, even if she didn't know it then. Then, by giving Ruth conception, He opened the way for the event that would make her name appropriate again. For Obed's

birth gave her a new lease on life. As the Bethlehem women exclaimed: "He will renew your life and sustain you in your old age" (4:15, NIV). And besides, they noted, she already was enjoying the great pleasure of Ruth's love: "For . . . your daughter-in-law . . . loves you and has been better to you than seven sons!"<sup>5</sup>

In the Hebrew Scriptures, God's steadfast love is called His *hesed*. This is a very rich word. Those who practice *hesed* show startling, disarming loving-kindness to others.<sup>6</sup> God proclaimed this sort of love to be central to who He is when He showed Moses His glory. Descending in a cloud, He passed before Moses, saying:

"The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love [*hesed*] and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love [*hesed*] for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children's children, to the third and the fourth generation." (Exod. 34:6-7)

This sort of love exceeds anything we can ask or imagine. It saves sinners from themselves (see Pss. 103:1-14; 130:3-4, 7-8). It lasts forever (see 1 Chron. 16:34; Ps. 136). It is the kind of love God pledged to show Naomi's descendants throughout all time (see 2 Sam. 7:11-16).

Secondly, the fact that just these two events—the famine's end and Ruth's conception—are attributed directly to God emphasizes that He often acts indirectly. In Ruth, God accomplishes His *hesed* through His people's *hesed*. The steadfast love and kindness of Naomi, Ruth, and Boaz for each other animate the story. Each knew that life was not all about them. So even in the depths of her own grief and hopelessness, Naomi was concerned for her daughters-in-law, urging them to return to their mothers' households

5 4:15, NLT. The Hebrew adjective *tôb*, translated as "better" by the NLT, carries overtones of pleasantness. Israelites considered a family of seven sons to be ideal (see 1 Sam. 2:5).

6 Daniel I. Block writes: "*Hesed* is . . . a strong relational term that wraps up in itself an entire cluster of concepts, all the positive attributes of God—love, mercy, grace, kindness, goodness, benevolence, loyalty, covenant faithfulness; in short, *that quality that moves a person to act for the benefit of another without respect to the advantage it might bring to the one who expresses it*" (*Judges, Ruth*, New American Commentary 6 [Nashville: B & H, 1999], 605, my emphasis).

The little dot under the *h* with a transliterated Hebrew word means the consonant is pronounced as the *ch* in *Bach*. So *hesed* is pronounced *che-SED*.

because she felt it would be better for them (see 1:8–13, 15).<sup>7</sup> Ruth’s loyal and loving reply exemplified her *hesed*:

“Don’t ask me to leave you and turn back. Wherever you go, I will go; wherever you live, I will live. Your people will be my people, and your God will be my God. Wherever you die, I will die, and there I will be buried. May the LORD punish me severely if I allow anything but death to separate us!” (1:16–17; NLT)

And from the very start, Boaz was kind to Ruth as part of his being loyal, kind, and loving to his kinswoman Naomi (see 2:1, 5–6, 5–16, 20). The story never portrays these saints as praying for themselves; those who practice *hesed* think more of others than they think of themselves.

Practicing *hesed* outstrips anything we can reasonably require of others. Those who don’t practice it—such as when Naomi’s unnamed relative decides not to redeem her field because he would endanger his inheritance by having to marry Ruth (see Ruth 4:1–6)—are doing nothing wrong. Those who do practice it are doing something extraordinary and unexpected.

Yet, startlingly (and paradoxically), God does require *hesed* of His people: “He has told you, O [mortal], what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness [*hesed*], and to walk humbly with your God?” (Micah 6:8). In the New Testament, this is the love that is patient and kind, that doesn’t envy or boast, that isn’t arrogant or rude, that doesn’t insist on its own way, that isn’t irritable or resentful, and that doesn’t rejoice at wrongdoing but rejoices in the truth. This kind of love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, and endures all things (see 1 Cor. 13:4–7).

From the moment I realized I was paralyzed, I began feeling God’s steadfast love for me. Yet it still strikes me as extraordinary how, when I went to college fifteen months later, He accomplished His *hesed* through others’ *hesed*. From the day I arrived as part of Seattle Pacific’s class of 1972, some students, faculty, and administrators showed me startling and disarming lovingkindness—fetching my meals when I was too weak to walk to the dining hall, excusing my absences from classes while encouraging me to do everything I could to attend, and becoming my advocates and friends.

Four men in particular showed that they knew their lives were not to

<sup>7</sup> Naomi implied that Orpah and Ruth had shown her *hesed* at 1:8—“May the LORD deal kindly [*hesed*] with you, as you have dealt with the dead and with me.”

be all about them: David McKenna, Seattle Pacific’s new President; Frank Kline, the Dean of Religion; Cliff McCrath, the Dean of Students who came to Seattle Pacific in my junior year; and Donald McNichols, a professor of English. The first three devoted scores of hours to encouraging me, enabling me to understand myself and others, and helping me find my career track. Professor McNichols spent many hours helping me improve my prose.

Practicing *hesed* is costly, often requiring a long-term commitment to another’s good. God’s *hesed* to me, conveyed through the *hesed* of these men, still prompts me to practice *hesed*. This often means meeting regularly with someone for months or years. When this gets tiring, I remember these men and realize how ungrateful I would be not to show to others the same sort of steadfast love God moved them to show me. When it is late in the day and I am eager to go home and yet another student wants to talk, I remember waiting to see Frank Kline. Often I had no appointment, and so I would wait until his appointments were over. Then, as I would walk into his office, he would call his wife and say, “Betty, Mark is here. I’ll be late for dinner.”

### Discovering My Life’s Meaning

My walking prompted these men to notice me. I am reminded how unnatural it looks when small children stop and stare as I walk by. Yet the visible marks of God’s severe mercies to us can help us find our life’s meaning.

I remember falling as I got off the bus at Seattle Pacific’s Camp Casey for freshman orientation. It was embarrassing. I spent most of my time alone that weekend because I was too weak to participate in most of the activities. Yet my struggles to live a fairly normal life and stay on my feet encouraged some of my new classmates to seek me out when they were struggling. Sometimes trying to hide our struggles is inappropriate.

I learned during those years that focusing on helping others to understand and cope with their suffering gave meaning to my own suffering. God’s providence in my fall became clearer. His *hesed* to me came into focus through my *hesed* to others. My life’s story began to make sense. In helping others I discovered much of what has become my life’s meaning—and I thus found that God was redeeming my own suffering.

Something similar happens when we are willing to help others in the light of struggles and scars they do not see. Some years ago I went through something I just couldn’t understand. It felt as if God was being deliberately cruel to me. A few years later I found myself needing to help a couple whose

son had committed suicide. And suddenly the reason for my own suffering became clear: As difficult as my experience had been, it gave me insights I needed in order to help them.

Paul enunciated this principle at the beginning of 2 Corinthians, when he spoke of some terrible burden—some dreadful crisis or affliction—that had so overwhelmed him and his co-worker Timothy while they were in Asia that they thought they would die (see 1:8). “But that,” Paul explained, “was to make us rely not on ourselves but on God who raises the dead” (1:9). God then rescued them, teaching them to trust that he would deliver them no matter what. With their hope restored, they could encourage the Corinthians to be hopeful whenever they were suffering, no matter how difficult it might be (see 1:8–10). Paul wrote:

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. . . . If we are afflicted, it is for your comfort and salvation; and if we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which you experience when you patiently endure the same sufferings that we suffer. (2 Cor. 1:3–4, 6)

The Greek terms that the ESV translates as “comfort” in these verses are better translated as *encouragement* and *encourage*, rendering the passage like this:

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all encouragement, who encourages us in all our troubles, so that we may be able to encourage those experiencing any trouble with the encouragement with which we ourselves are encouraged by God. . . . If we are distressed, it is for your encouragement and salvation; if we are encouraged, it is for your encouragement that you experience in your patient endurance of the same sufferings that we also suffer.<sup>8</sup>

8 This is Robert H. Mounce and William D. Mounce’s translation in their *The Mounce Reverse-Interlinear New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006). The Greek noun that the ESV translates as “comfort” in verse 3 is *paraklēseōs*. In verse 4, the equivalent verb is *parakalōn*. Louw & Nida say these words mean “to cause someone to be encouraged or consoled, either by verbal or non-verbal means” (Johannes P. Louw and Eugene A. Nida, eds., *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* [New York: United Bible Societies, 1988, 1989], entry 25.150, vol. 1, p. 306). *Paraklēseōs* and *parakalōn* are sometimes rendered as

“Encourage” is better than “comfort” because someone can comfort us merely by patting our hand and saying, “There, there!” But Paul was not just soothing the Corinthians. He told them how God had rescued him and Timothy from a humanly hopeless situation so that the Corinthians could take courage in knowing that God was not merely *capable* of delivering His people from suffering but that He *would* deliver them.

Paul found the deeper meaning of his profound suffering in its meaning for the Corinthians: “If we are distressed, *it is for your encouragement and salvation*” (1:6a, Mounce).<sup>9</sup> The larger purpose of his suffering was to benefit other Christians. In fact, Paul *blessed* God for his suffering because it enabled him to help others! “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, . . . who encourages us in all our troubles, *so that* we may be able to encourage those experiencing any trouble” (1:3–4, Mounce). Paul took God’s ultimate aim in encouraging him to be what it would do for others rather than what it did for him: “if we are encouraged, *it is for your encouragement*” (1:6b, Mounce). His suffering in Asia was redeemed by how he could use what he had learned through it to help other Christians.

Paul found that the encouragement he and Timothy experienced enabled them “to encourage those experiencing *any* trouble.” When we are suffering deeply for the first time we often feel that no one else has ever suffered as much. Yet my experience is that profound suffering is simply profound suffering. It doesn’t matter much what has caused it; once we have suffered profoundly, we know what profound suffering is—and so we can encourage those who are suffering profoundly, no matter what the cause.

Nor, paradoxically enough, do we always have to experience God’s deliverance before we can begin encouraging others. I often sense God’s sustaining mercy to me as I am assuring others that God has not abandoned them.

When we or our loved ones are suffering our first reaction is often to ask,

*exhortation* and *exhort* rather than *encouragement* and *encourage*, which highlights their verbal aspect. Compare the ESV with the NIV and the NLT at, e.g., Acts 11:23; Romans 12:8; 1 Thessalonians 3:2; Hebrews 3:13 and 12:5; and 1 Peter 5:12.

9 Paul and Timothy experienced what I call “profound suffering,” which is suffering that is so deep and disruptive that it dominates our consciousness and at least threatens to overwhelm us, sometimes tempting us to lose all hope that our lives can ever be good again. Both acute calamities (such as losing a child to suicide) and chronic conditions (such as the day-by-day care of a severely disabled child or someone’s seemingly never-ending struggle with some psychological affliction) can produce profound suffering. Whether someone experiences something as profound suffering depends in part on the person and the circumstances. I have never felt my paralysis to be profound suffering, but I have had other experiences that have been.

Why me? or Why us? We want an answer focused on ourselves. There may be such an answer. Perhaps we are suffering because of some character flaw or because we have done something wrong. I walk as I do at least in part because I wouldn't heed my father's advice not to play on such a dangerous rope swing. Sometimes we can see that our suffering is good for us, prompting us to re-examine our values or come back to Christ. Yet our quest for a personal answer may hide the fact that our lives are not to be all about us. As Paul wrote elsewhere, we should not be self-centered. We should value others more than ourselves, "not looking to [our] own interests but each of [us] to the interests of the others" (Phil. 2:4, NIV). He continued:

In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus:

Who, being in very nature God,  
did not consider equality with God  
something to be used to his own advantage;  
rather, he made himself nothing  
by taking the very nature of a servant,  
being made in human likeness.  
And being found in appearance as a man,  
he humbled himself  
by becoming obedient to death —  
even death on a cross! (Phil 2:6–8, NIV)

Our Lord's mindset was the ultimate expression of *hesed*. In a way and to a degree that no other human being will ever exemplify, He modeled what it means to be more concerned for others than for ourselves (see Phil. 2:3, 6 with Matt. 26:36–44). And yet we are to emulate this.

Scripture asserts that God honors those who practice *hesed* and repays their kindness to others with kindness to them.<sup>10</sup> Much of the kindness we can show to others involves our encouraging them to endure when they are suffering. Practicing *hesed* when we are suffering is a pathway to discovering the redemption of our suffering. It can even be a pathway to finding our life's meaning.

<sup>10</sup> This principle generally holds even during our earthly lifetimes, although God has not promised it will hold in this life. For the general principle, see 2 Samuel 22:26 (the word the ESV translates as "merciful" in this verse is the adjectival form of *hesed*) and Proverbs 19:17. For its ultimate eschatological fulfillment, see Matthew 5:7; 10:42; 25:31–46; and Luke 6:37–38.

A careful reading of the book of Ruth makes clear that God providentially made Naomi's selfless, steadfast love for Ruth the vehicle for her own restoration. When suffering overwhelms us, we may at first be unable to consider anything other than ourselves. But if I could give only one bit of advice to those who are suffering—and especially to those who are suffering profoundly—it would be this: As soon as you can, stop thinking primarily in terms of yourselves. Stop asking, "Why has God allowed this to happen to me?" Instead, be alert to those you can encourage because of how you are suffering, remembering that it is often only as we focus on relieving others' suffering that we ourselves find significant relief.<sup>11</sup>

### The Stories of Our Lives

The award-winning novelist Reynolds Price writes:

A need to tell and hear stories is essential to the species *homo sapiens*—second in necessity apparently after nourishment and before love and shelter. Millions survive without love or home, almost none in silence; the opposite of silence leads quickly to narrative, and *the sound of story is the dominant sound of our lives*, from the small accounts of our days' events to the vast incommunicable constructs of psychopaths.<sup>12</sup>

We make sense of our lives in terms of the stories we tell about them. When sufferers ask, "Why?" they are really asking for a story that explains their suffering. Sometimes, like Paul and Timothy, we know why quite quickly, and so can tell a story about what our suffering means almost immediately. Sometimes, as with my accident, we only understand the story over a significant length of time. Sometimes learning the story may take a lifetime or more.

Consider Joseph. In Genesis 37–50, we read that because he was favored by his father, he said things that led his brothers to hate him. They plotted to

<sup>11</sup> As a friend of mine said after reading this section, Christian suffering is communal in nature. "God has in mind *all* of His people as He sovereignly ordains each individual's events. He has in mind all of the interactions of every saint with every other saint, and their individual physical, psychological, and spiritual needs, and He orchestrates their experiences and their sharing of those experiences to sanctify the church."

<sup>12</sup> Reynolds Price, *A Palpable God: Thirty Stories Translated from the Bible with An Essay on the Origins and Life of Narrative* (Berkeley, CA: North Point, 1985), 3; my emphasis.

kill him but then sold him into slavery instead. Taken to Egypt, he rose, by God's blessing, to oversee everything Pharaoh's captain of the guard owned. But Potiphar's wife wanted him, and when he wouldn't sleep with her, she accused him of the very act he had rejected because it would have betrayed his master and been a sin.

Believing his wife, Potiphar threw Joseph into prison. God gave him favor with the warden, who put him in charge of everything. Sometime later, Pharaoh threw his cupbearer and baker into prison. One night they both had dreams. Joseph interpreted their dreams, predicting that in three days the cupbearer would regain his position and the baker would be put to death. He asked the cupbearer to remember him when he regained his position. But although everything happened as Joseph said, the cupbearer forgot Joseph, leaving him in prison.

Two years later, Pharaoh had two dreams that his wise men and magicians couldn't interpret. Then the cupbearer told Pharaoh about Joseph, and so Pharaoh sent for him. Joseph told Pharaoh his dreams meant that God was sending seven years of great abundance and then seven years of severe famine to the region, so Pharaoh should appoint a wise, discerning man to supervise the stockpiling of food during the good years so that Egypt could survive the bad ones. Pharaoh recognized God's Spirit in Joseph and so appointed him, making him his second-in-command. He also made Joseph part of Egyptian royalty by giving him an Egyptian name and a prominent Egyptian bride.

Joseph's wife bore him two sons. He called the first Manasseh, which means "causing to forget," saying, "It is because God has made me forget all my trouble and all my father's household." He called the second Ephraim, which means "making doubly fruitful," saying, "It is because God has made me fruitful in the land of my suffering" (Gen. 41:51-52, NIV). These names show Joseph identified with his new family and his new life, recognizing some of the good God had brought through his suffering. But so far he knew nothing about its deeper meaning.

The famine began, and in due course Jacob sent Joseph's brothers to Egypt to buy food. When they appeared before him, he recognized them but they didn't recognize him. Deciding to test them, he accused them of being spies and, when they told him they had another brother, he demanded they go home and bring him back with them. After some delay, they brought Benjamin to Joseph. Wanting to be sure they were truly repentant about having sold him into slavery, Joseph honored them with a feast and then sent them on their way back home, having hatched a plot to make Benjamin

his slave. When the plot was realized, their repentance became clearer, and so he told them who he was.<sup>13</sup> Now Joseph knew more of what his suffering was for. As he said to his brothers:

"I am your brother Joseph, the one you sold into Egypt! And now, do not be distressed and do not be angry with yourselves for selling me here, because *it was to save lives that God sent me ahead of you*. For two years now there has been famine in the land, and for the next five years there will be no plowing and reaping. But *God sent me ahead of you to preserve for you a remnant on earth and to save your lives by a great deliverance*. (Gen. 45:4-7, NIV)

It was now clear that what had happened to Joseph was not all about him. It was also about his birth family.

In fact, Joseph's suffering was part of a much larger story extending far beyond God's caring for Jacob's immediate family. As God said to Jacob when he was on his way to be reunited with his long-lost son, "Do not be afraid to go down to Egypt, for there I will make your family into a great nation. I will go with you down to Egypt, and I will bring you back again" (Gen. 46:3-4, NLT). What God did for Jacob's family was just one early step on the way God went about fulfilling His promise to Abraham to make his descendants a great nation (see Gen. 15:13-16). At the end of his story Joseph summarized what God had been doing all along. His brothers had intended to harm him by selling him into slavery, but God had intended their evil act to produce a greater good—namely, the saving of many lives, including those of many Egyptians (see Gen. 50:20). Joseph's suffering had a purpose beyond saving his birth family. But this became clear to Joseph only over a span of thirty-nine years!<sup>14</sup>

<sup>13</sup> During their first appearance before Joseph, the brothers had made statements in Hebrew that Joseph had understood, although they didn't know it. Those statements acknowledged their guilt in selling Joseph into slavery and expressed their regret (see Gen. 42:18-24). Joseph's plot to make Benjamin a slave revealed their hearts even more clearly and thus convinced Joseph that they had changed.

<sup>14</sup> Joseph was seventeen when he was sold into slavery (see Gen. 37:2).<sup>2</sup> He became Pharaoh's second-in-command at thirty (see 41:46) and then eight years later his brothers came to Egypt to buy grain (see 41:53-54). So it took twenty-one years for Joseph to realize that part of the meaning of his suffering was that God would save his family through it. When Jacob came to live in Egypt he was 130 (see 47:9) and he lived another seventeen years (see 47:28). Assuming that only two years had elapsed from the start of the famine and Jacob's arrival in Egypt (see 45:6), this adds up to thirty-nine years.



## Misbegotten Stories

Stories like Joseph's settle our minds. They make sense of what has been happening to us. But they also tempt us. When something bad happens, we naturally ask, "Why?" We want a story that explains why we are suffering. But we also want to know what will happen next. What can we now expect? How will our story end? In trying to answer that question, we don't even require a happy ending. In fact, our need for closure is often so strong that we accept whatever strikes us as the most plausible story, even if it has a bad ending.

For instance, as depressed, grief-stricken Naomi arrived back in Bethlehem, she felt sure her life would never be pleasant again. Likewise Job, in the throes of his affliction, was sure his eye would "never again see good" (Job 7:7). Yet Naomi's story took a permanently pleasant turn when she laid her grandson Obed on her lap, and Job's story closes with him comfortably at home again, with the Lord blessing his "latter days . . . more than his beginning" (Job 42:12).

Job's case is instructive, furnishing a lesson and even a warning to us. Both he and his friends were eager to explain his suffering. They thought the story had to be that Job was an egregious, secret sinner whom God was finally exposing. Job thought the story was that God had wronged him (see Job 19:6). So he sought an audience with God where he could press his case. When he finally got one, God manifested His displeasure by appearing in a whirlwind. He then challenged Job: "Who is this that questions my wisdom with such ignorant words? Brace yourself like a man, because I have some questions for you, and you must answer them" (38:2-3, NLT). Job thought he understood God's ways (see 38:4-5). He thought he was seeing everything more or less whole, when in fact his knowledge even of his own story was crucially incomplete. We know that Job's miseries were occasioned by God's great regard for his righteousness and that his suffering was meant to prove that his exemplary fear of God would survive the removal of all of the benefits that had accompanied it (see 1:8-12; 2:3-6). But *Job* didn't know he was being tested, and if he had, there would have been no test.

God's first set of questions was meant to make Job realize he couldn't fathom God's wisdom. They succeeded and Job declared, "I am nothing—how could I ever find the answers? I will cover my mouth with my hand. I have said too much already. I have nothing more to say" (40:4-5, NLT). But God persisted: "Would you discredit my justice? Would you condemn me to justify yourself?" (40:8, NIV). Job was "a blameless and upright man" (2:3; see 1:1, 8) and so it wasn't wrong for him to insist on his innocence. But

it seems he thought he could appear regally before God and successfully contend against him (see 31:35-37). And so God challenged Job's assumption that he controlled his fate:

Have you an arm like God,  
and can you thunder with a voice like his?  
Adorn yourself with majesty and dignity;  
clothe yourself with glory and splendor.  
Pour out the overflowings of your anger,  
and look on everyone who is proud and abase him.  
Look on everyone who is proud and bring him low  
and tread down the wicked where they stand.  
Hide them all in the dust together;  
bind their faces in the world below.  
*Then will I also acknowledge to you  
that your own right hand can save you.* (40:9-14)

Only God can do these things. He alone is Lord of history. Lacking God's power, majesty, dignity, glory, and splendor, Job couldn't force God to vindicate him. If he were to receive justice, then God would have to give it.

God's speeches to Job stressed He is both Creator and Lord (see chaps. 38-40). Consequently, His perspective on things is vastly different than ours, at once perfectly detailed and comprehensively panoramic. As the world's Maker and Sustainer, only He fully knows and completely rules over the natural and moral worlds. He alone knows the story of the world's beginning, middle, and end (see Isa. 46:9b-11; Matt. 24:36).

At the end of God's speeches, Job finally understood:

"I know that you can do all things;  
no purpose of yours can be thwarted. . . .  
Surely I spoke of things I did not understand,  
things too wonderful for me to know. . . .  
My ears had heard of you  
but now my eyes have seen you.  
Therefore I despise myself  
and repent in dust and ashes." (42:2-3, 5-6, NIV)

Job's despair had arisen because he had embraced a misbegotten story, one that lacked crucial information and settled too quickly on an explanation

of his suffering. He had thought he could only make sense of his story by concluding God was unfair. Wasn't there reason to hope his righteousness would ultimately be rewarded?<sup>15</sup> There was, but he had been expecting his rewards too soon.

### Living By Faith

The antidote to the despair that comes from embracing a misbegotten story is to live by faith. Hebrews 11 shows us what that means. Living by faith means believing God—in other words, believing what God says and living according to it—even about things that are yet unseen (see vv. 1, 7).

Believing God is not the same as believing a likely story. Many of the Old Testament saints commended in Hebrews 11 couldn't tell likely stories about how their lives would end. "It was by faith," we are told, "that Abraham obeyed when God called him to leave home and go to another land that God would give him as his inheritance. *He went without knowing where he was going*" (v. 8, NLT). When he got there, he had to continue living by faith—for while he was living in the land God had promised to him, "he was like a foreigner, living in tents" (v. 9, NLT). At some point he came to realize God was not giving him just a piece of earth. Faith enabled him, as well as Isaac and Jacob, to welcome their inheritance from afar, acknowledging they would never be more than "foreigners and nomads here on earth" (v. 13, NLT). By faith, "they were longing for a better country—a heavenly one," and therefore "God is not ashamed to be called their God" (v. 16, NIV).

By faith Abraham believed when God promised him a son, although he had become impotent and his wife, Sarah, was both barren and past child-bearing age.<sup>16</sup> Isaac's birth was humanly inconceivable. And yet because

<sup>15</sup> For evidence that Job practiced *hesed*, see 29:11–17. For his expectations stemming from that, see 29:18–20 and especially 31:3—"Is not calamity for the unrighteous, and disaster for the workers of iniquity?"

<sup>16</sup> We find this in Hebrews 11:

By faith Sarah herself *received power to conceive, even when she was past the age*, since she considered him faithful who had promised. Therefore from one man, *and him as good as dead*, were born descendants as many as the stars of heaven and as many as the innumerable grains of sand by the seashore. (vv. 11–12)

Genesis 17 clarifies how humanly hopeless Abraham took the situation to be, for when God reiterated to him that he was to have a son by Sarah, we are told he "fell on his face and laughed and said to himself, 'Shall a child be born to a man who is a hundred years old? Shall

Abraham and Sarah believed the One "who brings the dead back to life and who creates new things out of nothing" (Rom. 4:17, NLT), they hoped in spite of complete human hopelessness—and so their descendants have become as numerous as the stars in the heavens and the grains of sand by the sea (see Gen. 22:16–17; Rom. 4:16–21; and Heb. 11:12).

Some of those commended in Hebrews 11 did great things through faith, conquering kingdoms, securing justice, obtaining promises, stopping lions' mouths, walking in the midst of flames, escaping the edge of the sword, having their weakness turned to strength, and putting whole armies to flight (see vv. 33–34): Some women saw loved ones resurrected (see v. 35). Yet others were tortured, refusing to accept release "so that they might gain an even better resurrection." Some faced jeering, bloody floggings, "and even chains and imprisonment" (vv. 35–36, NIV). Some were stoned to death; others sawed in two; some were cut down by sword. Some were dressed in rags, wandering about "in deserts and mountains, living in caves and in holes in the ground" (vv. 37–38, NIV).

Yet no matter what their earthly story and whatever they did or didn't receive, all of these Old Testament saints kept the faith. Because they believed God, they lived in the light of things yet unseen, trusting He would ultimately fulfill His promises.

### We Must Expect to Suffer

Hebrews 11 was written to encourage us to persevere in our faith. God promises us, as he promised Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and the first-century Christians to whom the book of Hebrews was written, an everlasting inheritance, but only if we, as they, continue living by faith (see Heb. 3:7–4:11; 1 Cor. 15:1–2). Believing God about what we cannot yet see is especially crucial for us when we are suffering.

We need to live by faith because in this world we will have trouble (see John 16:33). Our Lord knew some of us would face hunger, thirst, estrangement, sickness, poverty, and imprisonment.<sup>17</sup> He said some of us will be

Sarah, who is ninety years old, bear a child?" (v. 17). Even in her prime childbearing years, Sarah had not been able to bear a child. So Abraham said to God, "Oh that Ishmael"—his now-teenaged son by Sarah's servant Hagar—"might live before you!" (v. 18). The only plausible story Abraham could imagine involved Ishmael being his promised heir.

<sup>17</sup> Jesus declared that part of the evidence that will be cited at the Final Judgment in order to separate His true followers from others will be whether someone cared for his

prosecuted and dragged before political leaders to defend our faith, and some of our families will hate us, handing us over for execution (see Matt. 10:16-21). He declared we will be hated by everyone because of him, which will cause the love of many professed believers to grow cold, yet if we endure “to the end [we] will be saved” (see Matt. 10:22 and 24:9-13).

The rest of the New Testament reiterates this. After commending those who lived by faith in Hebrews 11, Hebrews 12 encourages us to “run with endurance the race . . . set before us,” remembering what Jesus endured so that we don’t grow weary and give up (see vv. 1-3). We are urged not to forget Proverbs’ exhortation that “addresses [us] as a father addresses his son”; saying,

“My son, do not make light of the Lord’s discipline,  
and do not lose heart when he rebukes you,  
because the Lord disciplines the one he loves,  
and he chastens everyone he accepts as his son.”  
(Heb. 12:5-6, NIV, quoting Prov. 3:11-12).

Undergoing this discipline is painful (see v. 11)—in other words, it involves suffering—but it shows that God is treating us as His children. And later it will produce “a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it” (v. 11, NIV; see vv. 7-10).

Paul told the Corinthians that their sharing in his sufferings meant they would also share in God’s comfort (see 2 Cor. 1:7). Later, in Romans, he wrote, “Now we call [God], ‘Abba, Father.’ For his Spirit joins with our spirit to affirm that we are God’s [true] children. And since we are his children, we are his heirs. In fact, together with Christ we are heirs of God’s glory. But *if we are to share his glory, we must also share his suffering*” (Rom. 8:16-17, NLT).

Because he was our Lord’s specially chosen instrument for carrying Jesus’ name to the whole world, Paul was destined to suffer enormously (see Acts 9:15-16). He chronicled some of his suffering in 2 Corinthians. In addition to his life-despairing experience in Asia, he endured three shipwrecks (not including the one mentioned in Acts), with one involving a night and a day

Christian brothers and sisters when they were hungry or thirsty or lonely or sick or naked or imprisoned (see Matt. 25:31-46). But this could not serve as evidence if no Christians suffer in these ways.

Matthew 25:31-46 is often read as requiring Christians to minister to everyone, including non-Christians. For what I take to be the correct interpretation, see D. A. Carson, *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, vol. 8 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), 518-23.

adrift on the open sea. He was imprisoned, repeatedly whipped as well as beaten with rods, and once stoned and left for dead. He was in danger from raging rivers and roadway robbers as well as from Jews and Gentiles and false Christians. He faced death again and again. He knew many cold and sleepless nights and hungry and thirsty days. And on top of it all, he was constantly anxious for all of the churches (see 2 Cor. 11:16-12:10).<sup>18</sup> Yet precisely because of what he had learned through all this, he could confidently declare, “If God is for us, who can be against us?” For how will He “who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, . . . not also with him graciously give us all things?” (Rom. 8:31-32).

### How Our Stories Will End

Paul had learned through his suffering to trust God and His promises, for in his suffering he had experienced God’s love and deliverance again and again. Regarding the life-despairing experience he and Timothy had in Asia, he said: “He delivered us from such a deadly peril, and he will deliver us. *On him we have set our hope that he will deliver us again*” (2 Cor. 1:10). Elsewhere in his epistles, he invoked this hope repeatedly.<sup>19</sup> Firmly convinced of our Lord’s resurrection and our reconciliation with God through Him, he proclaimed: “For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom. 8:38). Trusting in this truth is the hope that accompanies saving faith (see Rom. 8:24).<sup>20</sup>

18 Paul Barnett explores in detail the place of suffering in Paul’s life and ministry in his *2 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997).

19 See Romans 5:3-5; 8:20-25; 12:12; 15:4; and 15:13, where he calls God “the God of hope” and invokes “the power of the Holy Spirit” to help us “abound in hope.” In addition, see Ephesians 1:18; Colossians 1:23, 27; 1 Thessalonians 1:3; 5:8; 2 Thessalonians 2:16; and Titus 1:2 and 3:7. Hope is also a major theme in Hebrews (see, e.g., 3:6; 6:11, 18-19; 10:23) and in 1 Peter, where we find the same invocation of faith and hope in response to suffering as we find in Paul and in Hebrews (see 1 Peter 1:3-7; 4:13).

20 Douglas J. Moo comments on this verse: “Christians, though saved, are nevertheless also saved ‘with hope’ — and hope, by its very nature, means that expectant and patient waiting is going to be necessary. . . . Always our salvation, while definitively secured for us at conversion, has had an element of incompleteness, in which the forward look is necessary. . . . “hope” . . . involves looking in confidence for that which one cannot see” (*The Epistle to the Romans* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996], 521-22).

But we must not pin our hope on whether we are able to tell a plausibly detailed story about how God will keep us in His love. Paul could not always tell such stories. He could be *troubled* in many ways, *perplexed* about his circumstances and how God would work good for him in them, *hounded* by enemies, and even *floored* by what was happening to him. In other words, even he was subject to all sorts of unpleasant and potentially disorienting mental states. Yet he declared that though he was troubled, he was not *completely overwhelmed*; though he was perplexed, his perplexity did not *drive him to despair*; though he was hounded by those who hated him, he was not *forsaken*; and though he was floored by what was happening to him, he was not *destroyed*.<sup>21</sup> He continued hoping even in humanly hopeless circumstances.

How could he? The answer has several parts. First, he had learned through personal experience that something may feel differently than how it actually is. This taught him endurance and developed his character so that he could hope steadily (see Rom. 5:3–5). Second, he knew from Scripture that a life of faith must also be a life of hope, expecting God’s final and complete fulfillment of His promises only in the *eschaton*.<sup>22</sup> Third, he had learned to lift his eyes from his suffering to anticipate what he could not yet see, reminding himself, as he reminds us, that whatever we are going through, no matter how awful, is but a “*light momentary affliction*” that “*is preparing us for an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison*,” as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal” (2 Cor. 4:17–18). Thus armed, Paul could continue hoping even when he could not tell a plausible

Paul goes on to say that “hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience” (8:24b–25). The word the ESV translates as *patience* (*hupomonē* in Greek) and Moo translates as *endurance* or *patient endurance* “suggests,” according to Moo, “the connotation of ‘bearing up’ under intense pressure” (522), including no doubt the intense pressure of profound suffering.

21 See 2 Corinthians 4:8–9. The first four italicized terms in my text all, in this passage, express mental states, while the latter four express what Paul knows to be objectively the case. The translations are my own.

22 See Romans 15:4, 2 Timothy 3:14–17, and, again, Hebrews 11. I use the word *eschaton* to refer to the time after our Lord returns to wrap up this world’s history. That time, also known as the Consummation, will inaugurate a new heaven and a new earth, where His saints “will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away” (Rev. 21:3–4). We will then begin to marvel for all eternity at the stories of God’s grace and mercy to us.

story about how God would deliver him.<sup>23</sup> He knew by faith that God would work everything in his life together for good (see Rom. 8:28), even though how God would do so was not something he could yet see.

And so, Paul concluded,

we know that if the tent that is our earthly home is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. . . . For while we are still in this tent, we groan, being burdened—not that we would be unclothed, but that we would be further clothed, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life. He who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who has given us the Spirit as a guarantee.

*So we are always of good courage. We know that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord, for we walk by faith, not by sight.* (2 Cor. 5:1, 4–7)

Paul had learned that what happens to God’s saints in this world is never the last word.

### Broken Wholeness

In fact, that last word will be much more marvelous than anything we can now imagine it to be. For Paul’s declaration at 2 Corinthians 4:16–17 means this: No matter what we suffer in this world, we will know in glory that our suffering was an integral part of an even greater good. We will then realize that if we could go back and relive our lives, we would not trade that good for less suffering.

Right now, I don’t know the details about how my story will end. Sometimes I’m troubled by the ever-increasing consequences of my accident. Even this morning I find myself asking, “Will what I am experiencing today stop me from being able to teach, to speak, and to preach?” I have sometimes been deeply perplexed by what was happening to me and how God could be working in it for my good. But I know my story’s Author, and I know what He has promised will be its end. I know He has often turned real evils into

23 Paul sometimes uses military metaphors to urge his readers to fight the good fight of faith. See, e.g., Ephesians 6:10–20, 1 Timothy 6:12, and especially 2 Thessalonians 5:8—“But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, having put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation.”

greater goods for me. And I know it is through suffering that He prompts me to lift my gaze above the world's distractions to live in conscious dependence on Him. My suffering focuses me, driving those distractions away.

Our Lord declared, "I came that they may have life and have it abundantly" (John 10:10). My accident and all the other suffering I have known have given me a life abundant in its depth and meaning. Like Paul, "I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong" (2 Cor. 12:10). Through all such things, God has graciously broken me to teach me that I can be whole only in Him. Knowing that is abundant life indeed.

### Discussion Questions

1. How has God used the *hesed* of others to redeem suffering in your life? What can you do to "pass on" that *hesed* to others who are suffering?
2. Have you ever been discouraged by looking for the purpose of your suffering within your own life? How might your perspective change when you think about the way your suffering can influence others?
3. Hebrews 11 lists a number of saints who persevered in faith through suffering. What sufferings saints, biblical or otherwise, particularly inspire you to persevere, and in what way(s)?
4. How does understanding faith as the hope of things not seen influence your response to your own suffering?

### Resources for Further Study

#### Books

- Timothy Keller, *Walking with God through Pain and Suffering* (New York: Riverhead, 2015)
- John Piper and Justin Taylor, eds., *Suffering and the Sovereignty of God* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2006)
- Joyce Sackett. *Goodbye, Jeanine: A Mother's Faith Journey After Her Daughter's Suicide* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2005)
- Joni Eareckson Tada, *A Place of Healing: Wrestling with the Mysteries of Suffering, Pain, and God's Sovereignty* (Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook, 2015)

#### Article

Mark R. Talbot, "True Freedom: The Liberty that Scripture Portrays as Worth Having," in John Piper, Justin Taylor, and Paul Kjos Helseth, eds., *Beyond the Bounds: Open Theism and the Undermining of Biblical Christianity* (Crossway, 2003)