



When the Tent Collapses

God's Promises During Physical Suffering

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Lord,

May you make this book the gift of comfort you want it to be. May it point to Jesus Christ as the source of all comfort and hope.

Amen

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Introduction

Linda's Reflections

When I fell ill, life changed suddenly. Little did I know the long journey on which my family and I were about to embark. I looked for a book of spiritual comfort to remind me of God's promises when bearing a cross of physical suffering and could not find one. Therefore, I pray this book will be a book of comfort to those who are carrying a cross of physical suffering or bearing a cross for someone who is.

Maybe your life change was the result of a sudden accident, maybe it was a slow-progressing illness, or maybe you spend your time caring for someone you love. In any case, the sinful, physical body has failed to allow for the health for which you hoped and planned. Maybe, with time, your situation will be blessed with a miracle and healing will come. Or maybe, like Paul with the thorn in His flesh, you will learn to trust Christ's strength in your weakness.

Whatever your circumstances, what if these experiences are all part of the plan for your spiritual life and sanctification? What if they are exactly what you are promised on this broken earth? What if you could have peace and trust a God who is

good, and who keeps His promises regardless of what your life holds?

Whatever journey you are on and crosses you are carrying, I hope your time in this book will remind you of the hope you have in Christ, point you to His Words, and remind you that you are worth more than you know. You are loved, forgiven, and valuable. Hang in there brothers and sisters in Christ!

Pastor's Counsel

Each chapter will be blessed with further insight from Pastor Richard Langness. He has served two congregations in Kansas and is currently serving his third congregation in Colorado. Pastor Langness is blessed with a wife of 30 years, Kim. He and Kim also share the blessings of five children, a son-in-law, two daughters-in-law, and eight grandchildren. He will remind us of the distinction between the Law and the Gospel and the gifts we have in Christ.

Musician Notes

Musician notes after each chapter provide examples of hymn stanzas that address the themes of each chapter. Hymns often contain words of encouragement. Some are written as prayers, so one way to look at a hymnal is as a collection of the

prayers and encouragements of the Church at all times and in all places. Because of this, hymnals are a wonderful devotional resource as well as a source of comfort and encouragement.

If you do not already have a copy of a hymnal at home, a searchable, online database of thousands of hymnals can be found at hymnary.org. Due to copyright, not every hymn text is available online, but many, many are. For the sake of brevity, the hymnal *Lutheran Service Book* (Concordia Publishing House, 2006) will be referred to in citations by the acronym LSB.

Chapter 1: Suffering Is Hard!

And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.

Philippians 1:6

I am one who likes to be in control. I like to know why things happen the way they do and, if something is not well, how I can make it better. There was a time in life when I was reading Scripture like a puzzle to be solved. If I took the right actions, I could receive this or that blessing. Then, I could avoid pain and suffering and have a “good” life. I thought I could control the blessings and trials I received, but I have had far less control than I realized.

In the few years before I became ill, my life was amazing! I was connected to a good church home, I had family in Christ and friends who I could laugh and cry with, work that I was passionate about, and a safe place to live. Then, life changed suddenly. I contracted several viruses which I had not known existed prior to my experience. Although I will spare you the details of the severe symptoms that ravaged my entire body

those first few months, I will tell you I thought I was going to die. Months later, I wished I had died rather than continue to experience so much physical and emotional pain. Dying would have kept me from becoming a high-maintenance burden to my already overworked family after I was forced to move in with them. It would also have spared me from experiencing the rejection of a few groups and individuals I was close to that I thought supported me, from having to struggle through dealing with doctors, and from managing depleting finances.

Why did this happen? Was it all really my fault? Could I will myself well again? Could I will myself back to independence? Many believe the lie that God helps those who help themselves. In reality, these circumstances lie outside of our control. Some people go through life with the blessing of little suffering while others are blessed with one trial after another. There are many who have suffered more than me. But, Jesus died for all of us when we were dead in our sins, unable to help ourselves. We are healed by His wounds (Isaiah 53:5) not our willpower. We are stewards over how we care for and use our bodies, but we cannot heal them any more than a farmer who cares for his plants can make them grow

(Deuteronomy 32:39). Healing and growth are gifts from God. We are reminded in James 1:17 that every good and perfect gift is from above. Apart from Him, we will find nothing good (Psalm 16:2).

Why Did This Happen?

I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world.

John 16:33

Why does God allow suffering to happen? We know it does not happen because God is out to destroy and ruin us. Although He rules over suffering, “he does not willingly afflict or grieve the children of men” (Lamentations 3:32–33). God is out to save us and give us life! He is out not only to redeem us and grant us eternal life to come, but also to give us life now. Suffering entered into creation because of the curse of sin. Before the fall, God's physical creation and its blessings like work, marriage, and our bodies were perfect. After the fall, the curse of sin and death is shown in all parts of creation throughout our world, relationships, and our bodies. Until Christ

returns to make a new heaven and earth without the curse (Isaiah 65:17), we wait, repent, and hope.

Jesus told us we would face suffering and trials in this life (John 16:33). God never lies to us. In Matthew 7, at the end of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus talks about the house built on the rock and the house built on the sand. The rain poured and the wind blew on both of the houses. In our lives, whether we build our house on sand or rock, we can expect times of trial and rain. Even the Psalms reminds us that we will face “many troubles” (Psalm 34:17, 19). Troubles are a result of living in a broken world filled with broken people.

I prayed many times for a miracle knowing that we have a God who spent time on earth performing miracles and healing. He could easily take our suffering away and give us miracles, but in the times He does not, we still live in His care and grace. We are His. He bought us with a costly price (1 Corinthians 6:20). He has not forgotten us. There is nothing that can happen to us outside of His control. There is no suffering that can separate us from His love and care (Romans 8:38-39).

I like to remember Job. Job was unaware that he was the subject of multiple conversations in the heavenly courts

between God and Satan. Job was that valuable. I do not know your circumstances or why I became so ill, but maybe, like Job, we are the subject of a conversation in the heavenly courts. Maybe your suffering is just a result of being on a sinful and broken planet. We may never fully understand the causes of our circumstances, but we can live in God's "peace which surpasses all understanding" anyway and trust that God is guarding our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus even as our bodies fail us (Philippians 4:7). God has a plan.

When the Rain Pours

Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.

Romans 5:3–5

Every day, we are dependent on grace upon grace (John 1:16). Even during the times when life went smoothly, we were

still dependent upon daily grace for our health, relationships, meals, wealth, and daily breath. It is only during times of suffering that we recognize and feel how dependent we are on God's grace. We understand how small we are and how big God is. We draw near to Him because we are aware that sin and suffering is a bigger problem than we can fix on our own. We start to appreciate the blessings from the cross and Resurrection all the more.

A former pastor of mine used to say, "God cares more about our character than our happiness." I believe that as a good Father, God desires us to grow in character, fruits, and faith. Even when God was silent during Job's time of suffering, God did not love Job any less. When God answered Job, God made His glory and power clear. In Job's time of suffering, his worst fears came true. I know I can relate to Job when he cried out, "what I dread befalls me" (Job 3:25).

It is easy to live and have faith when all is well. It is easy to feel God's love when our lives are filled with earthly blessings, comfortable living, a healthy and capable body, a sound mind, and good relationships. How does one live when facing suffering and death? There is nothing like facing

suffering and death to feel the reality of sin and sin's wages. How do we trust that even in our suffering God has good for us? How do we trust that He wants and desires us to draw near to Him? How do we know He desires to share and carry our burdens and fears?

To trust in God's promises when life is hard, resources are low, and needs may not be met takes faith which we are granted through the work of the Holy Spirit. God has given us a number of ways to recall His many promises including His Word, Baptism, Communion, and the redeeming work done at the cross. Consider the power of His Word. In Genesis, when God spoke, creation happened. In His Word, God speaks many promises and grants blessings for us. What God speaks, happens.

Theology of the Cross

And he said to all, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it.”

Luke 9:23–24

We may be called to carry many kinds of crosses in this life. Sometimes the crosses we carry are the result of events we had no control over, sometimes the crosses are a result of our own poor life choices, and sometimes we carry crosses for other people. We may experience crosses passively such as in times of illness, or we may experience crosses actively when we are called to love and care for our neighbor. Crosses in this life are used as part of our sanctification and growth in faith (Romans 5:3–5).

As Christians, we are called to share each other's burdens as the body of Christ (Galatians 6:2). I have had three family members be my caregivers during my illness and many family in Christ and friends who have reached out to help in

other ways. My mother has had to work the hardest to care for me while still working two jobs. I can see it has been a heavy cross for her to carry. If you are a caregiver, I am sure you have felt the weight of your cross.

Whether we are suffering passively or actively, God's promises still hold true. Christ shares in our suffering: the suffering He already endured and conquered at the cross and Resurrection. Like we share in His suffering, we will also share with Him in eternal glory (Romans 8:17–18). Later comes the glorification for Christ and for those in Christ. But for now, we carry crosses. The God who changes seasons (Daniel 2:20–21) and made a time for everything (Ecclesiastes 3:1–8) gave our earthly life as a time for bearing crosses.

Patience, Joy, Strength, and Hope?

*My flesh and my heart may fail,
but God is the strength of my heart and my
portion forever.*

Psalm 73:26

We have a God who values patience. In Galatians 5:22, which lists the fruits of the Spirit, patience can also be translated as long-suffering or forbearance. It is so easy to become impatient and discontented, especially if we listen to the world and its values. For example, if we compare ourselves to others and their blessings, we may become jealous and break the commandments regarding coveting. During times of waiting, we need to stay focused. We need to focus on Christ, His promises, and truth. There is nothing like believing lies and having unrealistic expectations to make us discontented.

The attitude of Christ when He endured the cross was one of “joy” (Hebrews 12:2). Joy is another fruit of the Spirit. There is not only more happening in our suffering than what we can see and feel but also more to come. My story and your story are not over. May we pray for patience and joy as the

story unfolds. We have a God who, no matter how much our physical body fails, grants us enough strength and patience for each day. This is true even when it feels impossible to go on.

Journeys

A few brothers and sisters in Christ agreed to share parts of their journey and experiences in this book. Here are some of the difficult crosses that brothers and sisters in Christ have experienced:

I went to work for a hospital in 1990. In October of 1993, I was struck by a pickup while crossing the street to enter the hospital. My face had to be completely redone with wire mesh. I can't remember what I looked like before. It took me a year to mend. Then, in February of 2000, I was run over in a store parking lot. My right shoulder was permanently broken. In March of 2003, I was returning from a home visit and a young person came off the ramp from the interstate demolishing my car and I. —Rosalie

Sometimes it seems like life isn't going quite the way we want. About six years ago my wife of seventeen years was

diagnosed with a movement disorder called dystonia. It prevents her from walking or standing for any length of time. She uses a wheelchair when we go out and, at this point in time, is incurable by today's medical knowledge. Our youngest of three children was 2 years old when this hit us. It is still difficult some days for us, but we trust God has a plan for us.

–Aaron

I am primarily home bound and I have had extensive periods of six months to a year and a half completely bedridden and in the care of my family 24/7. My journey began with a gradual decline of energy accompanied by memory issues, balance problems, allergic reactions, severe hormone disruptions, mood swings, and swollen lymph nodes. I was working at a medical clinic and would constantly feel like I had a bladder infection or throat infection. When I would test myself, I would always receive a negative test result. Over time, I began to experience severe chemical reactions, panic attacks, muscle weakness, night sweats, neurological symptoms, and a host of other symptoms until my body completely collapsed. As a medical professional, I ordered a slew of testing and

everything came back normal. I was in my mid-thirties and was terrified and traumatized by the lack of support and belief that I received from my colleagues. It took quite some time before I finally received a diagnosis and was told that there was no available treatment. I've been ill for 25 years so there is much more to the story. –Sandi

Pastor's Counsel

Mercy is only fully understood through experience. To know how to show it we must first experience the need for it. This truth is expressed in the beatitude, “Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy” (Matthew 5:7). We are blessed when we are able to show mercy and we are certainly blessed to be the recipients of God’s mercy. The downside of this, however, is that the need for mercy is only recognized through trials and pain.

In the midst of suffering it is easy to cry out and accuse God of being uncaring or even delighting in our pain. It simply seems unfair that the God we trust for our very salvation would not protect us from pain and heartache. We question if God truly loves us and in the process we forget the cross. We forget that this great tribulation that we are in is a result of mercy. If God were unmerciful, Jesus would not have been set apart to go to the cross before the foundation of the world. With Adam’s rebellion God could have simply destroyed him and moved on to a different creation. But God chose to endure His own wrath and judgment for our sin upon the cross. He did this in His mercy.

There is a tension that must be maintained with the Law and the Gospel. One cannot overlook the one in view of the other. The beauty of the Gospel is not seen apart from the terrors of the Law. Likewise, the terrors of the Law only lead to despair without the comfort and hope of the Gospel. This tension also exists with suffering and mercy. To suffer without a view towards showing mercy to another only turns our eyes inward as we give into despair. In turn, when we see the mercy of God revealed through the suffering Savior, our Lord Jesus Christ, our suffering, although very real, certainly pales in comparison. We grasp a mercy and love of God that was once incomprehensible but now connected with us in the face of our own circumstance.

There was a man who was born blind. The people around him made the assumption that either he had sinned against God or his parents had. Jesus answered, "It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be displayed in him" (John 9:3). There are three sources of temptation; the devil, the world, and our own sinful nature. In the same way, there are three sources of our suffering; the devil's attacks, the sin of the world, and our own sin. With our

suffering there is the temptation to focus upon our self rather than embrace the work that God might display in us.

The blind man suffered. His pain was real. And yet, because of his suffering and pain, God revealed a mercy and a healing that baffled the learned and the rulers of the day. They questioned him and, even though they wanted to reject the work of God, the man stood strong and maintained a faithful witness. God met him in his suffering and revealed grace and mercy. The sufferings and pain that we endure are real. In many ways, they can be hard to understand. Nevertheless, God is never distant. He meets us in our need and teaches us grace and mercy. You are not forgotten or forsaken. God has a plan for you that will give purpose and meaning to the sufferings and pain you are going through. Mercy is yours and you will be blessed to show mercy to others.

Musician Notes

*“The soul that on Jesus has leaned for repose
I will not, I will not, desert to his foes;
That soul, though all hell should endeavor to shake,
I'll never, no never, no never, forsake.*

*“When through fiery trials your pathway will lie,
My grace, all-sufficient, will be your supply.
The flames will not hurt you; I only design
Your dross to consume and your gold to refine.”*

“How Firm a Foundation”

LSB 728:3-4

*Christ leads me through no darker rooms
Than He went through before;
He that unto God's kingdom comes
Must enter by this door.*

“Lord, It Belongs Not to My Care”

LSB 757:3

Chapter 2: The Truth

For my thoughts are not your thoughts,

neither are your ways my ways, declares the LORD.

Isaiah 55:8

Before my illness, I felt fulfilled and was highly active using my God-given gifts and talents. Since the onset of my illness, I have rarely felt like myself and have spent most of my time in bed propped up with pillows. I dream of being able to once again do simple chores like shovel snow or take out the trash. No longer being able to work and needing help of family everyday made me feel worthless. Initially, I did not have these feelings but, the more time passed, the more I felt like I was a disappointment. There were many moments when I wondered why and how I was still alive. I have heard these thoughts echoed by a few others with prolonged illness. Maybe you have had these thoughts and feelings too?

Even though circumstances can change the way we feel about ourselves, our circumstances have not changed how God feels about us, how He sees us, or His plans for us. We look to Scripture for the truth, not to our feelings or circumstances.

Again, remember Job, his life was valued enough to have conversations about him in heaven! Even though God remained silent while Job suffered, God had not forgotten Job. Similarly, God has not forgotten us. The way we feel and think about ourselves and the world may change, but God's character and the truth of who we are will never change. Therefore, let's review some truth.

Truth 1: God Gives Life

*The LORD will fulfill his purpose for me;
your steadfast love, O LORD, endures forever.
Do not forsake the work of your hands.*

Psalms 138:8

In the United States, we live in a society that highly values independence and devalues life to the point of abortions and suicides. But, God's ways are not like ours (Isaiah 55:8). One of the ten commandments, "thou shalt not kill" (Exodus 20:13; Deuteronomy 5:17; King James Version, public domain), is there because we have a God who values life! That includes my life and your life. He has plans to make all things new

(Revelation 21:5). Although we may no longer have much worth in the eyes of the world, God sees us with a different set of eyes.

In God's eyes, even when we can no longer “do” anything “useful”, our worth remains the same as it was when we were self-sufficient. Our value is not in what we earn, whether we can heal, or what we can accomplish. When we could do nothing to save ourselves (Romans 5:6–7), Christ died for us. Christ died not because of anything we did but because of His love and grace. God wants us dependent on that grace.

Apart from Him and the life He gives, we can do nothing (John 15:5). Paul says in Acts 17:28a that in Him “we live and move and have our being”. The almighty God who spoke and created the stars and universe formed and breathed life into us. Psalm 139:14 says that we are “fearfully and wonderfully made.” Let us breathe in that truth with a deep inhale: “fearfully and wonderfully made.” Not only that, but, back in Genesis, we are told that we are created in the image of God (Genesis 1:27). We still hold that image. Although we may not understand right now, He has a good purpose for us (Psalm 138:8).

Apart from Him, not only can we do nothing, we also are nothing. We have life, worth, and value because of Christ. Apart from Christ, we are all worthless. Romans 3:11-12 says all are worthless and we cannot save ourselves. We all turn aside from God, break God's commands, and forget to seek God above all else. Even in our worthless, dying state, God sees us and redeems us.

We resonate with Psalm 40:17, "As for me, I am poor and needy, but the Lord takes thought for me." He takes thought for us because He loves and values the life He created, a life that is depending on Him. He even "delights" in those He redeems and who dwell in His love (Psalm 18:19; Psalm 147:11). His delight includes you and me even in our suffering. Therefore, instead of depending on ourselves, let us remember and depend on the God who gives us life, love, and everything good.

Truth 2: God Loves Us

So we have come to know and to believe the love that God has for us. God is love, and whoever abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him.

1 John 4:16

“For God so loved the world...” (John 3:16a). The world includes us. Nothing, no amount of suffering, can separate us from that love (Romans 8:35–39). No illness, no attack of evil, past win, present failure can change the way God feels about us and what Christ did for us on the cross. “...that he gave his only Son that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16b). God moved to save us from our sin and the brokenness of this world so that we would not suffer forever but could be with Him forever! So on those days we do not feel loved, we can look to the cross and remember we are loved.

The kind of love God has for us is an all-encompassing, unconditional love that is not dependent on us, those around us, our circumstances, or our body but is dependent upon His

loving character (1 John 4:8,16). He acted in love first. “In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins” (1 John 4:10). We do not need to worry about losing His love but can enjoy living in His love and grace.

Love is seen not only in God's character but also throughout His creation, a creation that He is renewing daily and one day will restore anew. Although creation, our bodies, and our relationships are broken, we get glimpses of God's love in creation when we have food to eat, enjoy a flower, receive a hug, or are given the Sacraments. No amount of suffering or brokenness can change that we are loved by a God who redeemed us.

Truth 3: God Will Care for Us as His Children

*See what kind of love the Father has given to us,
that we should be called children of God; and so we
are.*

1 John 3:1

Jesus taught us to pray by starting with “Our Father”. But even in times of suffering, how do we know we are still God's

children and He is still “Our” Father? Remember your Baptism. We were each made God's child when we were baptized “in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.” As His child, we were each adopted into a new, eternal family. As part of that family, we look to Him to care for all of our needs, from our spiritual needs, like forgiveness, to our daily physical needs.

We can recall the image in Psalm 17:8 that asks that God would keep us “as the apple of His eye and in the shadow of His wings.” What a great image of His tender care and protection. Even in our pain and suffering, we can expect good from our Father. Psalm 103:13 says, “As a father shows compassion to his children, so the LORD shows compassion to those who fear him.” Because God is good, He desires us to ask and expect good from Him (Matthew 7:11; Luke 11:13). He wants to fulfill His good purpose for us (Philippians 2:13). He promises He will finish the work He started in us when Christ returns (Philippians 1:6).

So we do not need to be afraid that our suffering is God disowning us, but we can take comfort in knowing that in His love He sustains us in times of suffering. He knows how hard suffering is to endure (Hebrews 4:15). He knows how hard it is

because He suffered while carrying the sins of the world to the cross. He wants to carry us and show us His goodness even in our times of suffering. Will we accept the love He shares with us through His words, the Sacraments, and family in Christ?

Truth 4: He Is Our Good Shepherd

The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.

John 10:10

During times of suffering, we stay close to our Good Shepherd knowing that He cares deeply for us. Here are some of the ways the Good Shepherd looks after His sheep:

- When the Good Shepherd sees one of His sheep straying, He goes after His sheep (Luke 15:4).
- When He sees one of His sheep is sick, He draws close to His sheep (Psalm 34:18).
- When He sees one of His sheep being attacked, He protects His sheep (John 10:15; John 17:15).

- When He sees one of His sheep dying, He treasures His sheep's death (Psalm 116:15).

Our Good Shepherd even understands what it is like to be a lamb among wolves. Several times in the books of John and Revelation, Jesus is referred to as the Lamb, the Lamb which was sacrificed for the sins of the world.

In a world full of suffering and wolves, we have a Good Shepherd looking out for us. Although imperfect, God gives us earthly shepherds in our pastors and flocks us together in communities and congregations mixed with sheep and goats (Matthew 25:32). We were made for community and fellowship with other sheep. How we have community and fellowship may change during times of illness, but it is the Shepherd and His voice that herds us.

Truth 5: The Church Is His Bride

For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church...

Ephesians 5:29

As part of the Church and the Bride of Christ, we have the marriage supper of the Lamb (Revelation 19:9b) to look forward

to. The Bible starts with the wedding of Adam and Eve and ends with the wedding of Christ and His Church. Until the wedding feast of the Lamb, Christ cares for His bride here on earth. Ephesians 5:29 beautifully states how Christ cares for His Church: “nourishes and cherishes.”

How does Christ “nourish and cherish” His Church? He gives of His very body and blood in Communion for the forgiveness of our sins and the sustaining of faith. He feeds us with His Word. Many think that going to church each week is about us and what we give back to God. Instead, the entire service is actually about what Christ is giving to His Church.

During my illness, I missed being able to attend service each week. I missed it so much that I tried lying in a church pew with a face mask and gloves on. I had never seen anyone do it before. The church was fantastic about welcoming me to the service. I tried multiple times but even that was too much for my sick body. Going to church was the best part of my week before getting ill. I did not understand why even those treasures would be taken away in my suffering when I needed encouragement and to hear the Word the most.

Even when we are unable to attend service, God knows. He knows exactly what is wrong with our bodies. He knows our limitations and will still nourish and cherish us as part of His Church. We are His Bride. He has not forgotten us. We are His in sickness and health.

Journeys

I find comfort in the promise that we were no people and now we are God's people (Revelation 21:3). –Rosalie

I have often referred to Jeremiah 29:11. –Aaron

He has the wisdom that the world lacks and He will guide you through this very challenging, frightening journey. Place your life in His hands and you will have peace that passes all understanding (Philippians 4:7). –Sandi

Pastor's Counsel

There are some who would say that there is no such thing as absolute truth. The problem with that idea is that it must be absolutely true if there is to be no absolute truth, which only confirms the reality of absolute truth. What is at the heart of the debate is the simple question, “Is there a real and true God who deals with me in ways that are solid and unchanging?” When our world collapses underneath our feet, can we count on a God who will not abandon us but walk with us through all the suffering and lead us to a life that is truly worth living? I can answer absolutely that we have that God, and He knows the pain we are going through for He alone knows the full judgment and consequences of our sin and the sin of the world.

If you were to study the life of the apostle Paul, you would find that his life was a life of suffering. Suffering as a result of his own sin, suffering because of his faith in Jesus Christ, and suffering as a means through which God drew him closer to Himself. God did this so that Paul would understand the love and mercy of God revealed through the sufferings and death that Jesus endured upon the cross. Paul writes these words to Timothy, a fellow believer in Jesus Christ:

Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord, nor of me his prisoner, but share in suffering for the gospel by the power of God, who saved us and called us to a holy calling, not because of our works but because of his own purpose and grace, which he gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages began, and which now has been manifested through the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus, who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel, for which I was appointed a preacher and apostle and teacher, which is why I suffer as I do. But I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed, and I am convinced that he is able to guard until that day what has been entrusted to me.

2 Timothy 1:8-12

Now the profound thought expressed here is that God knew of our sin and the pain that it would cause long before He spoke the world into existence. The truth that goes along with that is that God also knew how much He would have to suffer in

order to pay the judgment our sin deserved. There is an absolute judgment that our sin deserves. We see this judgment in the Law of God which Paul summarizes quite concisely, “For the wages of sin is death...” (Romans 6:23a). God does not waver in the truth of the judgment we rightly deserve. Jesus knew that judgment before the ages began, and He still desired to be one with you. He would go to the cross for you. This is why Paul doesn’t stop with the statement of the Law but goes on with a wonderful declaration of the Gospel, “...but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 6:23b).

God has never lost sight of you and the pain and frustration that you are experiencing. The wages of sin is death because sin destroys; it destroys our health, our relationships, and ultimately our peace. For God to deal with our sin, He must die, and this He has done for you. God has suffered the judgment of humanity’s sin. We may not see the effects of God’s work yet but that does not negate the truth of what is ours when Jesus returns. Our suffering is for a moment. It may feel like it will never end but, as surely as Jesus has died and risen for you, so also will He come for you and remove the very

When the Tent Collapses

tears from your eyes. When your world collapses, Jesus still holds on to you, and He is able to guard until His return what has been entrusted to you; and that is life in Him.

Musician Notes

Why should cross and trial grieve me?

Christ is near

With His cheer;

Never will He leave me.

Who can rob me of the heaven

That God's Son

For me won

When His life was given?

When life's troubles rise to meet me,

Though their weight

May be great,

They will not defeat me.

God, my loving Savior, sends them

He who knows

All my woes

Knows how best to end them.

God gives me my days of gladness,

And I will

Trust Him still

When He send me sadness.

God is good; His love attends me

Day by day,

Come what may,

Guides me and defends me.

“Why Should Cross and Trial Grieve Me”

LSB 756:1-3

Chapter 3: All These Feelings

This God—his way is perfect;

the word of the LORD proves true;

he is a shield for all those who take refuge in him.

Psalm 18:30

Maybe you had a strong knowledge of Scripture and have gone through your suffering with joy! If so, praise be to God! For me, I had to learn how to navigate physical suffering along with how to receive love and help from others. Times of suffering and trial cause us to re-evaluate our view of ourselves, the world, and life. They are also times when Satan may choose to throw flaming darts (Ephesians 6:16). If you are able, stay close to truth and God's Word. Since I was too sick to read much of God's Word for a time, I struggled with why I was suffering and how to make sense of it.

Thankfully, how we feel does not change the truth of who God is and the promises we have. I experienced many emotions during my time of illness. You may have had different feelings and experiences or maybe you have had some of the same thoughts and feelings. If you are well enough to read, the

book of Psalms is full of feelings and is a good place to look for encouragement.

Feeling Alone

I will never leave you nor forsake you.

Hebrews 13:5b

When my illness hit, I could no longer live alone or care for myself. My family helped move me over a thousand miles so I could have their help. I was too sick to say goodbye to family in Christ and friends in the place I considered to be home: Indiana. I had hoped to recover quickly so I could return back to Indiana but that has not been the case. I love my family but moving to a new place in order to live with them was hard. I felt guilty about needing help, but I could not do simple things like cook food on my own, drive, or get groceries. I asked a few people outside of my family for help once I moved but was turned away. Back in Indiana, I had several dozen people who I could ask for such help. But here, no one knew me, and I was too sick to socialize.

I did not know that would be the case when I moved. Family in Christ, friends, former co-workers, and former clients

helped my family pack a trailer from my condo and gave away, sold, or donated the rest of my possessions. Someone from church sold items that were not donated at a garage sale. My mom said a good thirty people were involved. They sent me cards of encouragement, verses, updates, books, and care packages. Some were praying for me daily and continue to do so today at the time I write this. I felt so encouraged to have their help and support. I wished these individuals were nearby because I missed the love, support, and community I had back in Indiana. Where I moved to, it took over a week for my family to unload the trailer because they did not have that kind of community and help here.

I.

Felt.

Alone.

Maybe, like me, your circle of support has changed along with your circumstances, and you feel alone. When you feel alone, or maybe even abandoned, pray. Pray to your Heavenly Father who promised never to leave you nor forsake you (Hebrews 13:5) and to hear every word (Psalm 34:17). He is right there with you. Tell Him why you feel alone. He

experienced rejection, suffering, being misunderstood, and death. Think of how much He loves you that He came to earth to experience such suffering for you. He understands your pain.

Being Rejected

But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven.

Matthew 5:44–45a

When I read Scriptures, I see examples where Job and David faced changes in relationships during their times of illness. As Job and David did, I have also faced some rejection and received untrue advice during my time of illness, and it is possible you have too. Both David and Job had hurtful events occur with both family and friends. Rejection is hard enough to handle when one is well but is harder to navigate when one is emotionally and physically weak.

Job's wife essentially encouraged Job to give up on God and life. Some have even thought that she was encouraging him to commit suicide. In Job 2:9, Job's wife says “Do you still hold fast your integrity? Curse God and die.” Then, in the

Psalms, we see a reference about being forsaken by those who are a foundation for our physical and emotional development: our parents (Psalm 27:10). Parents are often a foundation of our development and how we define ourselves. When family rejects us, it provides opportunity for us to find our identity in Christ.

When it comes to friends and community, examples of hardship and rejection can be found in both Job and the Psalms. For Job, God was silent when Job's friends spoke, but at the end when He finally did speak, God was angry with Job's friends for speaking words which were untrue. God said in Job 42:7b to Eliphaz the Temanite, "My anger burns against you and against your two friends, for you have not spoken of me what is right, as my servant Job has." David laments that he cared when his friends were sick but that he is being treated harshly now when he is ill (Psalm 35:13-16). When friends reject us and give us bad advice, it gives us the opportunity to forgive them and speak the truth in love to them.

I had to learn to sort out the truth from the lies in the advice people gave me. With Job, the majority of people who spoke (i.e. Job's wife and friends) were wrong. It may even feel

like your family or those who were your friends are now your enemies. We need to pray for those who are hard on us (Matthew 5:44) and forgive them. Jesus faced rejection during His time on earth, so we know He understands what facing rejection is like. With Jesus Christ as our Refuge, we seek peace and truth as much as possible, praying for comfort and protection from the rejection and lies.

Letting Go of Anger, and Forgiving

Be angry, and do not sin;

*ponder in your own hearts on your beds,
and be silent.*

Offer right sacrifices,

and put your trust in the LORD.

Psalm 4:4-5

Traditional medical doctors have not been very helpful during my illness. I became angry at the medical community for passing me around and offering me no hope for recovery. Originally, I was misdiagnosed and the treatment the doctor gave me made me more ill. I had tried to be a good financial planner before my illness having paid into short-term financial

assistance. My doctor in Indiana helped fill out the paperwork to get it started. When I moved, the new doctors refused to fill out paperwork in a timely manner. This means I have not had income since my move, and my family and friends are now paying for my basic needs. Even though money, good doctors, or the right treatment are helpful tools to have, we cannot place trust and security in them.

I have found that forgiveness and faith that God is just are the best antidotes to anger. God is the judge and we are not, but we can entrust ourselves to the one who judges justly because He promises to work everything for our good (Romans 8:28). He has forgiven our sins and now we are free to extend that same forgiveness to others like we pray in the Lord's Prayer (Matthew 6:12). This kind of unconditional forgiveness may take time and practice.

One of my mentors before my illness taught me that forgiveness is like a muscle. You need to practice forgiveness to get good at it. He felt if you started with something big it may feel difficult. He recommended starting with something small and practicing with small things to get better and stronger. So start practicing. My circumstances provided plenty of ways to

practice forgiveness, and your circumstances probably do too. Therefore, let us forsake anger, wrath, evil, and fretting (Psalm 37:8) and forgive.

Facing Fear

Fear not, therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows.

Matthew 10:31

I was scared and shocked after a letter arrived encouraging my family to treat me with tough love. It was eight pages full of “burning anger” expressing disappointment in my lack of ability to get well. It even said that if I did not get back to being independent soon, my mother was going to die from being too tired from caring for me while working. I had moved over a thousand miles to have help of family. What would I do if my family took the advice and stopped helping me with meals and food? When people are ill, if someone is not helping them with food and meals, they are not eating. Where would I go? Every place I knew I could stay was over a thousand miles away. Thankfully, my family has a better understanding of the

situation and did not listen to the letter. Nevertheless, it certainly threw me off guard.

We find the words “do not be afraid” many times in Scripture. There is a healthy fear of God and an unhealthy fear which paralyzes our faith. God already knows your situation, He knows your needs, He knows your past, He is with you in the present, and He will be with you in the future. When we face paralyzing fear, we can learn to trust in His many promises for us. Trust that His grace is sufficient for you (2 Corinthians 12:9). Trust that He is working His good purpose in and around you (Romans 8:28). Trust that the God who created and died for you and the world, and makes seasons turn (Daniel 2:20-21), plants grow (Psalm 104:14), and knows the number of hairs on your head (Matthew 10:30) is going to care for you. He already carried this fear to the cross, so hand it over to Him.

My confirmation verse is John 14:27 where Jesus says, “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid.” Peace sounds nice, doesn't it? In John 14, Jesus explains that He will be leaving to be with the Father, that He will send the Holy Spirit, and that He will come

back for us. We can take a deep breath because even the worst case scenario will be okay.

Loss, Grief, and Disappointment

And when he drew near and saw the city, he wept over it.

Luke 19:41

When I became ill and moved to live with family, I lost not only my independence and health, but also a community. I had to sell my condo, leave work that I enjoyed, leave my doctor, leave my dentist, and no longer see familiar places. I missed the people I had left back home. I even missed the simple things like the fallen tree forming a bridge over the river I could sit on to read, the rainbow that would extend from one field of a golden dandelion covered grass field to the other, the cross at the front of my church home, the hugs I would give to the family in Christ at church, and the ability to take walks and spend time in the sunshine. As time passes, I have had new losses and disappointments to grieve. It has been hard to miss weddings, births, and funerals of the people who are important to me, but

it gets easier to accept a new normal as I pray for these people from my bed.

Grief is a complex, unpredictable, and difficult process to go through. It is ok to grieve your losses. Jesus cried in His grief. The shortest verse in Scripture, “Jesus wept” (John 11:35) is when Jesus wept after Lazarus' death before raising Lazarus from the dead. Jesus also wept over Jerusalem before His death on the cross (Luke 19:41-44). We have a God who even takes notice of our tears. Psalm 56:8 says, “You have kept count of my tossings; put my tears in your bottle. Are they not in your book?”

It is ok to cry and grieve. Grieving shows what you hold as valuable. The greater the grief, the greater the value to you. So go ahead and cry. Grieve your losses but do not despair! You have a God who promises to be close to those with broken hearts and to bind up wounds (Psalm 34:18). He will not break His promise to you. Even though it may feel like a confusing time of emotions, as you grieve, tell yourself, “These are just feelings, and they are just for now.” Or repeat Psalm 30:5b, “Weeping may tarry for the night, but joy comes with the morning.”

Guilt and Shame

There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

Romans 8:1

Guilt is a feeling that is experienced when we fail to meet certain standards of God, ourselves, or others. Shame happens when we meditate on guilt and start to define ourselves by our failures. Shame did not exist before the fall (Genesis 2:25). It had its beginning after the fall when Adam and Eve recognized their sin, guilt, and shame, and they hid from God (Genesis 3:7,10). In the same way, we may have the tendency to want to hide too.

There is healthy and unhealthy guilt. Healthy guilt leads us to contrition and then repentance for the ways we fall short of standards regarding how to treat God, our neighbors, and ourselves. This kind of guilt often leads to better relationships with God and others. When we repent, God says He removes our sin as far as the east is from the west (Psalm 103:12), and He makes our sins white as snow (Isaiah 1:18). Healthy guilt

convicts us to change, seek forgiveness, and move forward with a clear conscience.

Unhealthy guilt keeps us stuck in the past. If allowed to grow, this guilt can condemn us to be held captive by lies and shame, turn us toward ourselves, and encourage us to hide from relationships with God and community. This is far from the life God wants to give us. He wants to make us new (2 Corinthians 5:17), give us a pure conscience (Hebrews 10:2, 9:14), and have us live in light (Ephesians 5:8). I have struggled with sorting out guilt and shame for not being able to live up to expectations of myself and others during all of my life changes. What is the antidote to guilt and shame? Forgiveness, repentance, and truth. When we hold on to guilt and shame, we are condemning ourselves in a way Christ has not. There is no condemnation for those who are in Jesus Christ (Romans 8:1). What there is for those who are in Jesus Christ are fruits like grace, mercy, peace, truth, and love (2 John 1:3). We practice filling our minds with truth found in Scripture and bringing every thought captive to the Word of God (2 Corinthians 10:5). This discipline keeps our identity grounded in Christ.

Journeys

I was married to a local man and we had our first son one-and-a-half years after marrying. The doctor discovered a cancerous growth on my thyroid. Our son was born on a Monday; biopsy on Wednesday; extensive surgery on Friday. When I was released from the hospital, my mother came to stay with us, taking care of me and baby. She was working full-time so couldn't stay as long as needed. My husband was taking a certificated course to enhance his employment choices. I returned to full-time teaching during the two years he took to complete his course work. My vocal chords were damaged in surgery and healing was incredibly painful because so many nerves in my head had been severed. Those two years were some of my darkest of days. I felt alone and didn't want to be a mother or married. Guilt ensued, of course. When our second son was born, he was big and I was little. I lost so much blood, my vitals indicated I was dead. Again, my mother came to help. I was angry at God for denying me the care of a newborn. —Rosalie

The severity of the debility, such that one is living a living death, while watching others go on with life and being left to sit in the shards of the shattered dreams for your own life is incredibly painful. At this point in my journey, the most difficult thing to handle is the feeling of having no purpose or direction. I feel aimless. Being a very goal-oriented individual whose chief aim was to serve God and others and make a difference in this hurting world, I find this is very stressful to just exist. Doing nothing is the hardest thing I've ever done!

Another thing that is difficult is the isolation. Not being able to get out and do the "normal" things that people do leads to a feeling of disconnection for me. This is emotionally difficult for me. I had always dreamed of "big" life—full of adventure and accomplishment and satisfying relationships—but I now live in a "small box" and have no control over the direction of my life or the ability to use my gifts and talents and training. This is so perplexing! —Sandi

Pastor's Counsel

Feelings are real, but feelings are not a source of truth. We can have honest feelings, true, and real feelings, but feelings in themselves do not define the truth of our circumstance. Consider the feelings one might experience on a first date. There might be excitement, fear, and even confusion. These feelings may add to the experience, but the truth of who the person is you are dating will ultimately determine whether the excitement or fear is justified. I met my wife through a letter that she wrote on behalf of a mutual friend. That letter motivated me to make the 450 mile drive to meet her. I was excited to put a person with the personality in the letter, but there was also fear. Would she like me? Would she accept me? After 30 years of marriage, I can truthfully say that my fear was not justified. She has seen and experienced the worst in and through me and still loves and accepts me.

When we go through times of suffering or struggle, we have to maintain a proper tension between our thoughts and our feelings. Feelings are real and they come from within. Yet, in the face of our feelings we must seek after the truth of our situation with our thoughts and reason. Feelings affect our

reason and thoughts so this is not a simple task. With that, we need not deny either our thoughts or our feelings.

A simple way to understand the difference between what we are feeling and what we are thinking is to use the word, “that”. If the word “that” fits in your description of your feeling, it is not a feeling but a thought. In the face of suffering it is easy to say, “I feel that God has abandoned me.” That is a judgment and not a feeling. When we make that judgment we fail to address the real emotions like hurt, loneliness, confusion, and despair. Indeed, those feelings can make us think that God has abandoned us but, again, those feelings do not define what is actually true. God went the distance to suffer and die upon the cross so that we could be with Him forever.

When we encounter suffering, it is important that we seek after the truth, specifically the truth of God’s Word. God has spoken one specific Word that is not only The Truth but The Way and The Life as well. The way to understand our feelings is Jesus. Now that might be an overly simple answer to what you are feeling but, in truth, it is the only way to see the true life that is yours in the very midst of your suffering. The suffering which Jesus endured culminating on the cross is a suffering that is

beyond our comprehension. It may be difficult to believe that God can understand what we are going through, but, when we begin to grasp a little of what Jesus went through to redeem us and give us life again, we can feel connected to the One who truly understands and knows us.

Musician Notes

*In love Christ shed His tears,
our grief and sorrow meeting.*

*In love Christ shed His blood,
our sin and death defeating.*

*On seeing Mary's tears,
her brother's death then mourning,
Christ mourned with her and wept,
His sorrow with hers joining.*

*When near Jerusalem,
aggrieved by its rejection,
Christ in His mercy wept
then walked toward crucifixion.*

*When crucified for us,
Christ's tears find consummation,
In love's defining act:
Christ's blood shed for redemption.*

*In love Christ shed His tears,
our grief and sorrow meeting.
In love Christ shed His blood,
our sin and death defeating.*

“In Love Christ Shed His Tears”

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Chapter 4: Prayer

And he told them a parable to the effect that they ought always to pray and not lose heart.

Luke 18:1

During suffering and times of waiting, it is easy to lose hope and want to give up. I almost gave up praying for what I really wanted: healing. Thankfully, my family pointed out the parable Jesus told of the widow and the judge (Luke 18:1-8). In the parable, a widow goes to a judge daily asking for justice. Eventually, the judge grants her wishes because of her persistence. Jesus told the parable to encourage us to be persistent in prayer and to pray without losing hope. During my time of prolonged illness, it has been hard to be patient and to understand that God still has a good purpose whether or not He grants my request.

I have been so dependent on others that I have not been able to do much for anyone except pray for them. I have prayed for caregivers, doctors, leaders, family in Christ, and those who are not in the faith. Before my illness and move, I had friends who I could be genuine with and know on a heart level. We

could pray with and for one another. Where I moved to, people seem so hesitant to pray with others because they do not feel comfortable or good at it. If that is you, I want to encourage you to pray. Start a conversation with God. Enjoy the blessing and fellowship of praying with others. It is not something to fear. It is a gift God has given to you and your fellow Christians. Enjoy your blessing and use it!

Pray Expecting Good

“If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him!”

Matthew 7:11

As His children, God wants to hear from us in prayer. He already knows what our needs are, but Jesus teaches us how to pray (Luke 11:2–4). We can pray continually (1 Thessalonians 5:17) expecting good gifts from our Heavenly Father (Matthew 7:11). As Rosalie shared: *“Jesus says He knows every hair on our head. That means He doesn’t think anything is too small to be important to share with Him and our*

fellow Christians.” He already knows what our needs, struggles, and cares are and promises to answer us when we pray (1 John 5:14–15). Share it all with the giver of all good and perfect gifts (James 1:17).

God not only wants to hear our thanksgiving and praise, but also wants to hear our struggles and burdens. “Cast your burden on the LORD, and he will sustain you; he will never permit the righteous to be moved” (Psalm 55:22). We have a God who responds to our prayers in His love and answers them (Psalm 86:5-7; Psalm 57:1–3). Even when He does not answer our prayers the way we hope, we know it is in His love and goodness. Like a good parent whose child asks for a pony, He does not always give us what we ask, but He does answer prayers for our needs, like forgiveness, when we repent.

God promises to hear our prayers and answer them in His goodness. I knew someone with a progressive illness who would keep a bowl full of pieces of paper with one prayer request on each piece of paper. Each day, she would take one prayer request out, pray for it, and put it into another bowl. When she went through all the pieces, she would start over. When God had answered a prayer, she would take the request

out and praise God for how He answered it. Praying in this way, she was able to keep count of God's goodness as He answered prayers.

Nothing is too big or too small to pray about. I have prayed prayers ranging from big prayers for a miraculous healing to small prayers to be able to do a simple task like putting dishes in the dishwasher. God has been good to me: I am currently able to put dishes in the dishwasher. I am praying that, someday, I may be able to make my own bed and prepare my own breakfast. I have also been praying for things of eternal significance, like praying for the people back home who are not currently in the faith. I miss these people and would like to see them again in heaven even if I am unable to see them again on this earth.

When We Don't Know What to Pray

Pray then like this: "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name."

Matthew 6:9

When we don't know what to pray, we can follow the example of Jesus. He gave us the Lord's Prayer. In the Lord's Prayer, we are taught to pray a number of petitions to "Our Father" such as His kingdom coming, our daily needs being supplied, forgiveness of sins, and protection from evil (Matthew 6:9-13). Jesus prayed before His arrest and Crucifixion. When He prayed for the saints, He prayed that we might not be removed from the world, but be protected from the evil one (John 17:15). In the Lord's Prayer, He taught us to pray that we would be delivered from evil (Matthew 6:13). May we continue to pray for the protection of our hearts, minds, bodies, and souls.

When we don't know what to pray, we can pray the Psalms. The Psalms are full of emotion but also full of reminders of God's steadfast love, faithfulness, and character. If you are at a loss about how to pray or what to pray for, consider

praying verses from the Psalms like Psalm 86:5-7 or Psalm 25:16-18:

*For you, O Lord, are good and forgiving,
abounding in steadfast love to all who call upon you.*

Give ear, O LORD, to my prayer;

listen to my plea for grace.

In the day of my trouble I call upon you,

for you answer me. Psalm 86:5-7

Turn to me and be gracious to me,

for I am lonely and afflicted.

The troubles of my heart are enlarged;

bring me out of my distresses.

Consider my affliction and my trouble,

and forgive all my sins. Psalm 25:16-18

Some verses in the Psalms talk about crying out to the Lord. Psalm 57:2 says, "I cry out to God Most High, to God who fulfills his purpose for me." Like a good parent who knows the meaning of the cries of her child, so the Lord hears our cries and understands them.

Even when we do not feel like it, we can pray anyway. Sandi shared from her experience: *“He is waiting! He makes a way where there is none. He will never leave you. Pray, pray, pray. And learn to hear from Him. Spend time in His presence.”* We have the Holy Spirit interceding for us “with groanings too deep for words” (Romans 8:26). We pray to the Father, through the Son, and by the Holy Spirit. It does not need to be long. Many, many days I prayed the words of the blind man in Matthew 9:27b, “Have mercy on us, Son of David.” Or you can pray a long prayer, sharing all that is on your heart. Like Psalm 62:8, “Trust in him at all times, O people; pour out your heart before him; God is a refuge for us.” Go for it and pour out the words and groanings of your heart before Him.

Pray, Trust, and Wait

“The LORD is my portion,” says my soul,

“therefore I will hope in him.”

The LORD is good to those who wait for him,

to the soul who seeks him.

It is good that one should wait quietly

for the salvation of the LORD.”

Lamentations 3:24-26

I have gotten very little sleep since the onset of my illness. When I have been able to sleep, I have sometimes woken up with anxiety. I recently learned to look at what these experiences were teaching me when I learned that “heart” in Psalm 16:7 could also be translated “kidney”: “I bless the LORD who gives me counsel; in the night also my heart instructs me.” The kidneys filter out the waste from the blood to be removed from the body. Maybe those many sleepless nights would have been a great time to pray about what needs to be filtered and removed from my thoughts and life?

I am still waiting to see what good will come from this trial of physical suffering. I remember a time in my life when I faced grief and picked Psalm 27:13 as my verse of comfort: “I believe

that I shall look upon the goodness of the LORD in the land of the living!” It was not my first time experiencing a trial, but it was my first time going through that depth of loss. The verse talks about seeing God's goodness on earth. I can attest that when I got through that time of grief, God showed me His goodness. He showed me His goodness in the people He put in my life and with whom I was blessed to share life with. Each person was like a daisy that when gathered together made a beautiful bouquet. So we wait now, knowing that God is good to those who wait for Him (Lamentations 3:24-26).

While we wait, we can remember, like Job, that our Redeemer lives (Job 19:25a). We know we will not have to suffer forever. We know we have a God who suffers with us, and we know He will keep His promises. Faith is how Christians are called to live each day. Aaron shared:

One thing that has come out of our ordeal is a closer relationship with God. I try to find quiet moments between prayers to listen for His answer and seek His wisdom. I hope that on the other side of your situation, you come out with a stronger faith, even if it doesn't seem possible today.

We have confidence to approach the Father in prayer because of Christ's death and Resurrection. Since we know God desires to hear our prayers, "Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need" (Hebrews 4:16). We know God is on our side. David says in Psalm 56:9b, "This I know, that God is for me." So, when we question if we should continue praying or if God hears us, we can reassure ourselves and set our concerns aside.

Pastor's Counsel

As a man and an introvert, I am not much of a conversationalist. I can watch my wife talk with my children in amazement at how easy it is for her to ask questions and remember all the details. Communication, especially the communication of what I am feeling, is difficult for me. And yet, I cannot imagine what my marriage would be like if I were silent and just expected my wife to know what I was thinking and feeling. I want my wife to tell me what she is thinking and feeling. In the same manner, God wants us to express our desires and emotions to Him.

God knows all things. That truth gives me an easy out when it comes to prayer. Since God knows all things, and since He knows what is best for me, why should I take the time to tell Him what I am thinking and feeling? Why should I tell Him my desires? But the problem with that thinking and behavior is that prayer is seen as only a means to give God a list of my wants. It misses the whole idea of relationship.

Being married is not a deterrent or cure all for having other lovers. In the same way, being a Christian is not a deterrent from having other gods. It is not the nature of the

relationship that binds us to the love of our life; it is the nurture of the relationship. Good communication is essential for a good marriage. Great communication is essential for a great marriage. The better one engages the thoughts and feelings of another, the better the relationship grows. This is why God both invites us and commands us to pray. He desires a deep and vibrant relationship with us. He wants us to know His love for us just as He already knows our love for Him.

When a marriage encounters troubled times it is critical that both parties take the time and effort to communicate, but good communication can be hindered by our confusion. Words spoken may not express the true thought or the real feeling. Thus, the practice of listening is just as important as the practice of speaking. When we encounter times of trials or suffering, it is critical that we take the time to communicate with God. We may not have all the right words to say, but we are blessed with a God who is a great listener and has already spoken His love to us through His Word.

Prayer is a two way conversation: we speak and God listens; God speaks and we listen. I do not like it when others put words in my mouth or emotions in my heart that are not

there. But how often do we treat God and His Word in the same way? There is always the challenge to simply let God speak, let the Bible speak, and let it speak the voice of God rather than our own thoughts and emotions. Thus, God invites us to pour out our soul to Him in prayer, and He in turn pours out His soul to us through the study of His Word.

God also gives us a helper. He gives us the Holy Spirit to speak on our behalf when the groanings within are too deep for our words to express. He also gives us the Holy Spirit to enlighten us to the truth of His Word. God desires a conversation with you. Don't hold back. Start speaking to God and let the Holy Spirit take it from there. Then, enjoy the wonderful surprise as God speaks His love to you in a new way.

Musician Notes

*In God, my faithful God,
I trust when dark my road;
Great woes may overtake me,
Yet He will not forsake me.
My troubles He can alter;
His hand lets nothing falter.*

“In God, My Faithful God”

LSB 745:1

*I leave all things to God's direction;
He loves me both in joy and woe.
His will is good, sure His affection;
His tender love is true, I know.
My fortress and my rock is He:
What pleases God, that pleases me.*

*My God has all things in His keeping;
He is the ever faithful friend.
He gives me laughter after weeping,
And all His ways in blessings end.
His love endures eternally:
What pleases God, that pleases me.*

“I Leave All Things to God's Direction”

LSB 719:1, 4

Chapter 5: Going Home

For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.

Philippians 1:21

Can you breathe? Praise the Lord! Where there is breath there is still life and hope. Are you dying? Praise the Lord! Soon you will be home and far away from suffering and evil. Even if you are dying and young, it is still reason to praise the Lord! Isaiah 57:1 indicates that God, in His goodness, protects them from further evil. Are you old and going home? Praise the Lord! He granted you a full life on earth and sustained you in faith! Whether you live longer, die, or the Lord returns, praise the Lord because you know He has good plans for you. Like Paul, we are in a win-win (Philippians 1:21).

For all of us, our days are fragile and short compared to eternity. In the prayer of Moses, Psalm 90:12, Moses talks about numbering our days. In Psalm 103:14-16, David says:

For he knows our frame;

he remembers that we are dust.

As for man, his days are like grass;

he flourishes like a flower of the field;

*for the wind passes over it, and it is gone,
and its place knows it no more.*

David goes on to say in Psalm 103:17 that what will last forever is the Lord's steadfast love! Faith, hope, and love will all last for eternity (1 Corinthians 13:13).

Faith gives us an eternal hope that “the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us” (Romans 8:18). This allows us to pray as Moses prayed in Psalm 90:15: “Make us glad for as many days as you have afflicted us, and for as many years as we have seen evil.”

Going Home Soon?

*Precious in the sight of the LORD
is the death of his saints.*

Psalm 116:15

When I was sick—really sick—I could have easily had a heart attack and died. I had not faced death so closely before, and no one wanted to talk about death with me. Everyone wanted to see me get better, get stronger, and get back to who I was before my illness. I knew some life experiences change you and there is no going back. You just find a new normal. But,

I knew what I was feeling was nowhere close to normal. Every day felt like a fight to stay alive.

Maybe you are in a similar place where you have thoughts that those around you do not want to hear or discuss with you, or you feel your days may be numbered. Hopefully, you have a good pastor with time and energy to talk with you. Most pastors are well experienced in life and death issues. I wanted to have something to focus on if I was rushed to the hospital and dying. Thankfully, a pastor I asked gave me that.

He suggested going back to the most important events in history: Christ's Crucifixion and Resurrection. To see Christ on the cross dying for you, and to see Him dying for your sin, suffering, illness, and pain. He already took it all to the cross. See Christ in the tomb and the Resurrection. Visualize the stone rolled away from the tomb, and see Him risen! Then, see your resurrection with Christ. This meditation of the cross brought me peace. I also used it during times of intense pain and suffering to envision Christ carrying it for me on the cross. I did not want to carry it alone.

Since being able to read again, I have taken comfort in Psalm 31:5, "Into your hand I commit my spirit; you have

redeemed me, O LORD, faithful God.” It is a prayer we do not need to wait to say until we die but we can say every day. The reality is that every day we are slowly dying. As the sinful nature and our bodies die, it is then that we have a great reversal. It is in this death of self and our earthly body that we find life in Christ. Praise the Lord that sin and death have been defeated. We have life now and are being renewed each day (2 Corinthians 4:16). When we have completed our last good work on this earth and our death does come (Ephesians 2:10), we can take heart in knowing that our death is precious to the Lord (Psalm 116:15).

Grieving the Earthly Losses

For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known.

1 Corinthians 13:12

If you are going home soon, whether young or old, maybe you do not want to leave your friends and family or give up dreams for the future here on earth. There may be many changes and grief not only for you but also for those around

you. There may be many tears, but we entrust those we are leaving on earth to the Lord. He is a God of mercy and comfort (2 Corinthians 1:3). For those in faith, there is a party to look forward to (Revelation 19:9). You simply may be beating your loved ones there. Let Him comfort you and your loved ones in the grief of your losses during this time.

Right now, your circumstances may not make sense. We get glimpses and foretastes here on earth of heaven and God's goodness and character. As described in 1 Corinthians, we see dimly and only get part of the picture. But soon, we will get to know our God intimately. He knows us fully. Soon, we get to be with Him and know Him fully too.

Christ Always Has Us in His Care

*But He said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you,
for my power is made perfect in weakness."*

2 Corinthians 12:9a

I have worked in care facilities for people with Alzheimer's, so I could recognize I was having issues with my brain and memory when my illness was at its worst. I wondered if I was developing some kind of early-onset Alzheimer's and

wondered what would happen if that was the case. I wondered if my Heavenly Father would keep me in faith if I literally lost my mind. He promises He will. I know because He says He will complete the work He started in me (Philippians 1:6). He started this work in my Baptism. We are reminded that, in our Baptism, we were buried with Christ and now live each day in Him (Colossians 2:12; Romans 6:4). In Baptism, we are reminded we are to die to sin every day. In Baptism, we were buried with Christ. In Baptism, we were given life in Christ. Whether I live with a sound mind or live with a broken one, I will still be in Christ.

In the first few weeks of my illness, my pastor sent me the verses of 2 Corinthians 12:8-9 as comfort. At the time, I did not find these verses very comforting because Paul never got better. Paul pleaded with the Lord, and the Lord left Paul with His weakness. Why? So God could show His power and strength through Paul. When healing does not come as we would like and we have pleaded and pleaded with the Lord, like He said to Paul, Christ says to us, "My grace is sufficient for you." We underestimate how big our God is. This is the God who spoke and created the universe. The God who is in control.

The God who can work good out of any circumstance. The God whose grace is sufficient for you.

Since He is our light and our stronghold, what have we to fear (Psalm 27:1)? If you are living with prolonged illness like me, you probably have much you could worry about. Christ says in Matthew, do not worry about tomorrow, today has enough going on (Matthew 6:34). That does not mean we do not plan, but it does mean we do not need to waste energy worrying. Even in our worst case scenarios, Christ will be there caring for us.

For Now, We Are Just Camping

For 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.

2 Corinthians 5:1

Our heavenly home and our resurrected bodies are going to be abundantly better than anything we have tasted here on earth. In 2 Corinthians 5, it describes the earthly, tent-like body groaning for its eternal home. I do not know about your body, but my body has been groaning. As 2 Corinthians 5 continues,

it talks about how we keep courage, walk by faith, and make it our aim to please God. We see our bodies and the world differently. We understand that the Lord holds our life in His hands (Psalm 27:1). We understand the need for forgiveness and repentance and how Christ is the only cure for the sin, suffering, and death (2 Corinthians 5:20-21).

I found the image of the body being a tent and us camping on earth comforting. Although I have never been camping, I have heard stories of how miserable camping can be when the weather is cold and wet and you are hungry. I have also heard stories of how refreshing it can be when the weather is good. The tent is just a temporary home. The permanent home is yet to come. On the hard days when the weather is poor, telling myself “I am just camping” has helped.

None of us know how long we have to “camp” here on earth, but we have a God who holds our time in His hands (Psalm 31:14-15a). He determined where and when we would be born and the guidelines for the life we have. Acts 17:26 says, “And he made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place.” As we

camp in our allotted time and dwellings, may we learn to enjoy the changing weather and take comfort in knowing that home awaits.

What Will Home Be Like?

And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also.

John 14:3

In the last couple chapters of Revelation, we are given some details of the new heaven and the new earth. We know what will not be there. There will not be illness, pain, or suffering. There will be no need for marriage because the Church will be the bride of Christ. Satan, his demons, and evil will be cast out forever. The new city sounds beautiful and bright. The glory of God will be the light of the city. As I have a love for water, I look forward to seeing the river that flows in its center.

We will be with the saints and, most importantly, be with the Trinity forever. I do not think there is a good way to fathom

what it will be like, but I imagine it will feel like home. One of the reoccurring dreams I have is walking into the various entrances of the church I grew up in. That church to me represents “home”. Unlike a church building, we will never need to leave our eternal home. The best part will be that we will be with God.

We know Jesus will come back for us (John 14:3) We know God is our Redeemer and will save us. Psalm 34:22 reminds us, “The LORD redeems the life of his servants; none of those who take refuge in him will be condemned.” Although we can try to imagine what eternity will be like, we are told in 1 Corinthians 2:9b: “What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love him.” We do not need to know all the details of what will happen because we know Who we will be with, and that is enough.

Journeys

I always liked the Bible verse that says Jesus' house has many mansions, and He will take us there (John 14:2).

–Rosalie

I have always had an extreme fear of death since I was a kid. However, living with this level of emotional and physical suffering has led me to explore my fear of death and how it has controlled me despite salvation. I found that when we focus our Christian faith on our sin and on our performing and doing, we will not live in the fullness of joy that God's grace is meant to imbue us with. This revelation has changed my fear of death into an eager anticipation of meeting my Lord face to face and dancing before Him with my new, incorruptible body. No more suffering! Hallelujah! —Sandi

Pastor's Counsel

When I was young, I fell into the trap of thinking that heaven was the final destination and that I would spend eternity floating around in a spiritual realm. It was a foreign existence that seemed boring to a boy looking to experience all the wonders of life. I had failed to grasp the truth that God created us to be both body and soul. I failed to understand that it was not me who was to ascend to God but that it was God who makes His dwelling with man, with me!

One of the greatest truths that I have learned is that God had His plan from the beginning, and it did not evolve. God did not create us with bodies so that we could leave the physical and spend eternity like angels. No, He created us body and soul, and we are not complete if we are missing either. St. John says:

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying,

“Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they 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.” Revelation 21:1-4

Our eternity with God is a restored eternity. We will live as God planned from the beginning.

There is a time sense that gets overlooked. It is the perfect presence. As we live, it is easy to get caught up in the past, present, or future. We look back at things we have done. We live in the present with all its joys and struggles, and we wonder what the future might hold. Yet, we miss the life we have in Jesus Christ. It is easy for us to say statements like “I was saved”, “I will be forgiven”, or “I was baptized”. The truth, however, is that what God purposed from the beginning is timeless. God saved the world when Jesus was set apart to go to the cross. What God promises, He does. Jesus did indeed suffer and die upon the cross. Thus we say, “I am saved”, “I am forgiven”, or “I am baptized”.

God is not surprised. God knows us. He knows how we were created, and He knows how we live. God knows our sin. He knows our suffering and death. When the Psalmist writes, “Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints”, we do not interpret the word precious as sweet as in a precious child. The true understanding is that of a precious stone, a costly stone, a stone that one sells all he or she has in order to possess. Your life may not be sweet. You may not be sweet. But you are precious, and your life is precious because it cost God His life as He suffered and died in your stead.

The trials and suffering that you endure today are not the measure of your life, your value, or your future. You are redeemed. You are forgiven. You are a restored creation of God. As you look into the mirror, the image you see may not seem all that glorious or precious. That is because the mirror is shadowed by sin. But when you shine the light of the precious blood of Christ upon that image, you will see the image that God has known from the beginning and will know for eternity. It is the image in which He now dwells.

Musician Notes

*Hold me ever in Your keeping;
Comfort me in pain and strife
In my laughter and my weeping
Be with me throughout my life.
Give me greater love for You
And my faith and hope renew
In Your birth, Your life, and passion,
In Your death and resurrection.*

“Praise to You and Adoration”

LSB 692:2

*The King of love my shepherd is,
Whose goodness faileth never;
I nothing lack if I am His
And He is mine forever.*

*In death's dark vale I fear no ill
With Thee, dear Lord, beside me,
Thy rod and staff my comfort still,
Thy cross before to guide me.*

“The King of Love My Shepherd Is”

LSB 709:1, 4

Chapter 6: God of All Comfort

Every word of God proves true;

he is a shield to those who take refuge in him.

Proverbs 30:5

Scripture has many names and functions for the persons of the Trinity, but a few include our Father, our Redeemer, our Good Shepherd, our Comforter, our Fortress, and our Shield. When sin and death stare us in the face on this earth, we need care, protection, comfort, and forgiveness. We find all these things in the Trinity. We have a Father who cares and provides for us, a Redeemer who saved us, and the Holy Spirit who comforts us and gives us faith.

Suffering is real, hard, and painful, but God will be who He says He is even in the suffering. To trust that requires faith. Faith to look outside of ourselves and our circumstances, to trust that what God says is true, and to believe that what is seen now is temporary but what we cannot yet see will be eternal (2 Corinthians 4:18). We develop an eternal view by focusing on what is to come. Apart from our complete dependency on God, we grow no good fruit. We require the

vine, being rooted in Christ (John 15:5). When we are rooted in Christ, then we can echo Job saying, “For I know that my Redeemer lives” (Job 19:25a).

God's Promises Never Fail, Even When We Do

*If we are faithless, he remains faithful—
for he cannot deny himself.*

2 Timothy 2:13

We will often fail. In Romans 3:23, we read that all have sinned. We especially fail in those times when we fail to put our focus and faith in Christ. When we put our faith in things on this earth like money, independence, or people, we will be disappointed. When we can no longer put faith in the things we once had, like financial security, money, or our physical health, it requires us to lean on God more and on those He has placed in our lives. Even when we are faithless, God is patient with us. He forgives. He loves. He is faithful. Not because we deserve it, but because it is His character and we are His.

Sometimes the people, the pastors, and the community God has placed in our life will fail as well, but God will work through all the brokenness to make something beautiful. We

can trust Him to work through the broken world with its failed medical treatments, hurtful comments, or lack of support. He can use even the toughest times for our good. So we trust Him and allow Him to plant seeds of good fruit in our heart. Seeds of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Galatians 5:22-23). Seeds of faith and hope.

Sometimes the pain is so bad and the circumstances so hard we are not sure if we can, or want to, make it through the day. In those moments we cry, "Lord, have mercy!" For months that was all I would cry each morning after a sleepless night. We rely on Christ's mercy and strength in these times. We pray for Him to grant us ways to be comforted in our pain and suffering. We trust He still has a plan and grace not only for the future, but also to sustain us today. We hear Christ's words: "My grace is sufficient for you" (2 Corinthians 12:9).

God's Promises Never Fail, Even When the Kitchen Sink Falls Apart

*Though the fig tree should not blossom,
nor fruit be on the vines,
the produce of the olive fail
and the fields yield no food,
the flock be cut off from the fold
and there be no herd in the stalls,
yet I will rejoice in the Lord;
I will take joy in the God of my salvation.
God, the LORD, is my strength;
he makes my feet like the deer's;
he makes me tread on my high places.*

Habakkuk 3:17-19

When I was well and working, people would often ask me why I chose to live and work where I did when I did not have family there. When friends or clients of mine would ask if I planned to move, I would often tell them that the place I worked would have to close and the kitchen sink fall apart before I would move. God must have a sense of humor because in the

few weeks following the onset of my illness, not only did the studio where I worked announce its closing, but the garbage disposal fell off of the sink. I have not found it as funny as my family has yet.

Sometimes in life, the kitchen sink will fall apart. At the end of Habakkuk 3, there is a list of many ways that circumstances are not well. At the end of that list is an affirmation of rejoicing in the Lord because He is our salvation and strength. Paul mentioned in Philippians 4 that he learned how to be content in whatever circumstances he was in. I have appreciated how Paul notes that this is something he has learned. In other words, he practiced. He practiced being content whatever the circumstances by focusing on a God who is bigger than his circumstances, and by focusing on Christ who will put an end to suffering and provide renewal with a new heaven and new earth.

God's Promises Never Fail, Even When the Tent Collapses

For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us 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 Corinthians 4:17-18

Unless Christ returns quickly, our earthy bodies will fail and we will die. In 2 Corinthians, we are reminded that the body we have is temporary, but it will be okay. At the resurrection, there is a body that will not be stricken with illness, pain, or disease, and it will reside in a new place. An eternal body and home. A place without the problems here on earth that affect our bodies and our society. We will be home with God and our fellow believers.

Until He calls us to our heavenly home, we trust that He will grant us the strength to do whatever work He has for us to do on this earth (Ephesians 2:10). We pray to Him. We praise Him. We cry to Him. We rely on Him. We give Him our pain and

burdens. We suffer with Him. We wait for Him. We trust Him. We trust He is bigger than our circumstances. We trust in His faithfulness and love. We trust that nothing on this earth will separate us from His love. We allow our suffering to draw us closer to Him. We try to let go of all the worry and stress of this life. When we fail, He picks us back up and we try again.

Sandi shared:

God is my Wonderful Counselor! If not for Him, I could not, and likely, would not be able to go on like this on a daily basis for 25 years! He has used this journey as a crucible to facilitate much spiritual growth. I now live for eternity. My hope is entirely in the Lord alone. He is my joy. Being stripped of nearly everything and suffering to a degree in my body that I never thought possible has given me new focus. I am a new creation indeed. If not for this illness—had I lived out my life the way I had planned—I fear where I would be right now. As awful as living with this illness is—the thought of who I would have become were it not for God and how He has used this illness in my life—that just

strikes terror in my heart. So, I have learned my lessons. I have learned Who is really in control of my life. I have learned to live in the light of eternity. I've learned who I am and who He is!

God's Promises Never Fail

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.

Romans 8:38-39

We have a God who doesn't change (Hebrews 13:8). He is our Rock. Even though our circumstances may have changed, our God is the same. We do not want to look to ourselves or our circumstances as a reflection of who God is or how He feels about us. Instead, we want to look at what was done at the cross, believe the truth in Scripture, and receive the blessing of the Sacraments. Aaron says, *"This may sound a little foreign at first, but I choose to live a life of Christ and not let today's challenges bring me down. I choose to live in my*

vision for me and my family, and it keeps me positive and motivated in spite of my wife's condition."

God loves us so much He has not left us here on earth to suffer alone. He has given us the Church and fellow believers to rely on during our journey. He has given us forgiveness and hope for the eternal future to come. And right now, in our suffering, He promises He is there. He promises to hear our prayers. He promises to wrap us in His love as we wait for Him. He promises to give us strength as we depend on Him. And, in a great reversal, our daily death and dying grants us life. We live knowing that the more we slowly die, the more life grows. Not by our own work but by Christ's work. This gives us hope. We hang in there knowing that God is good, and He is holding us. And we look forward to the day we will see Him face to face and He will wipe away every tear from our eyes (Revelation 21:4).

Like Paul wrote in Philippians 3:13b–14, “But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.” It may feel like all you can do is survive right now. If that is the case, keep surviving and focus

on Christ. Since we have a lot to look forward to, “Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory” (Colossians 3:2-4).

Pastor's Counsel

One of the greatest questions in the world is, “Why?” That simple question can take on endless nuances as we attach our own specifics to it. Why am I suffering? Why do I hurt? Why have my friends abandoned me? Those questions get personal. There is also one fundamental question that gets asked in the face of our trials and pain, “Why did God allow sin?” God does not give us the specific answer to this question, but He does point us to a greater answer. That answer comes in the form of another question, “Why would God allow Himself to suffer?”

There was a reason for God’s suffering. It was you. It was the salvation of every sinner. God could have brought forth a creation that was immune to temptation and sin, but God chose to put His image upon us, an image that we could honor or despise. For you and me to truly live out the image of God, we cannot live our lives according to our own will. We must, in humility, put God and others above us. We must embrace the full definition of mercy, a definition that is not learned through words but through actions. Mercy is the driving force behind the joy that endures the cross.

As Jesus suffered upon the cross, there were those who rejoiced to see Him there. But Jesus endured the pain, agony, and even sorrow for those who rejected Him. Yet, Jesus knew that He was bringing life into the world. That life gave Him joy. Jesus said, “As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commandments and abide in his love. These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full. This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you” (John 15:9-12). When we encounter suffering, we also encounter an opportunity to learn and experience mercy and joy, for ourselves and for others. Our suffering can point us back to our own sin and the forgiveness we have in Jesus. It can also point us to the needs of our neighbor and ways that we can bring life to them even in the midst of our pain. When we abide in the love of God, He will turn our sorrow into joy.

Musician Notes

*Christ the life of all the living,
Christ, the death of death, our foe,
Who, Thyself for me once giving
To the darkest depths of woe;
Through Thy suff'rings, death, and merit
I eternal life inherit.
Thousand, thousand thanks shall be,
Dearest Jesus, unto Thee.*

*Thou hast borne the smiting only
That my wounds might all be whole;
Thou hast suffered, sad and lonely,
Rest to give my weary soul;
Yea, the curse of God enduring,
Blessing unto me securing .
Thousand, thousand thanks shall be,
Dearest Jesus, unto Thee.*

“Christ the Life of All the Living”

LSB 420:1, 3

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To you the reader, thank you for looking for ways to grow in character and faith during a difficult time. Until we meet in eternity, may the Lord bless you and keep you closely in His care.

Love,

Linda Paden

Appendix A: Hymns in Order Referenced

- “How Firm a Foundation” LSB 728: 3-4
- “Lord, It Belongs Not to My Care” LSB 757:3
- “Why Should Cross and Trial Grieve Me” LSB 756:1-3
- “In Love Christ Shed His Tears” © 2014 Richard A. Bicknase
First published in *Lutheran Forum*,
vol. 48, no. 4, Winter 2014, pg. 29
- “In God, My Faithful God” LSB 745:1
- “I Leave All Things to God's Direction” LSB 719:1, 4
- “Praise to You and Adoration” LSB 692:2
- “The King of Love My Shepherd Is” LSB 709:1, 4
- “Christ the Life of All the Living” LSB 420:1, 3

Appendix B: Verses Referenced

Genesis 1:27; 2:25; 3:7, 10

Exodus 20:13

Deuteronomy 5:17; 32:39

Job 2:9; 3:25; 19:25a; 42:7b

Psalms 4:4–5; 16:2, 7; 17:8; 18:19, 30; 25:16–18;

27:1, 10, 13; 30:5b; 31:5, 14–15a; 34:17–19, 22;

35:13–16; 37:8; 40:17; 55:22; 56:8–9b; 57:1–3; 62:8;

73:26; 86:5–7; 90:12, 15; 103; 104:14; 116:15; 138:8;

139:14; 147:11

Proverbs 30:5

Ecclesiastes 3:1–8

Isaiah 1:18; 53:5; 55:8; 57:1; 65:17

Jeremiah 29:11

Lamentations 3:24–26, 32–33

Daniel 2:20–21

Habakkuk 3:17–19

Matthew 5:7, 44–45a; 6:9–13, 34; 7:11; 9:27b; 10:30–31; 25:32

Luke 9:23–24; 11:2–4, 13; 15:4; 18:1–8; 19:41–44

John 1:16; 3:16; 9:3; 10:10, 15; 11:35; 14:2–3, 27; 15:5, 9–12;

16:33; 17:15

When the Tent Collapses

Acts 17:26, 28a

Romans 3:11–12, 23; 5:3–7; 6:4, 23; 8:1, 17–18, 26, 28, 35–39

1 Corinthians 2:9b; 6:20; 13:12–13

2 Corinthians 1:3; 4:16–18; 5:1, 17, 20–21; 10:5; 12:8–9;

Galatians 5:22–23; 6:2

Ephesians 2:10; 5:8, 29; 6:16

Philippians 1:6, 21; 2:13; 3:13b–14; 4:7

Colossians 2:12; 3:2–4

1 Thessalonians 5:17

2 Timothy 1:8–12; 2:13


Hebrews 4:15–16; 9:14; 10:2; 12:2; 13:5b, 8

James 1:17

1 John 3:1; 4:8, 10, 16; 5:14–15

2 John 1:3

Revelation 19:9; 21:1–5



In *When the Tent Collapses: God's Promises During Physical Suffering*, Linda Paden and Pastor Richard Langness use Scripture verses, meditations, personal struggles, real stories, and hymn stanzas to remind fellow Christians they are not alone in their striving. This resource points to Jesus Christ as the source of all comfort and hope. It is available at lindapaden.com and avoiceofgrace.com.