

## Thou Hidden Love of God

Gerhard Tersteegen (1697–1769); tr. John Wesley (1703–1791)

Thou hidden Love of God, whose height,  
whose depth unfathomed, no man knows,  
I see from far Thy beauteous light,  
and inly sigh for Thy repose;  
my heart is pained, nor can it be  
at rest till it finds rest in Thee.

'Tis mercy all that Thou hast brought  
my mind to seek its peace in Thee;  
yet, while I seek, but find Thee not,  
no peace my wand'ring soul shall see.  
O when shall all my wand'rings end,  
and all my steps to Thee-ward tend?

Is there a thing beneath the sun  
that strives with Thee my heart to share?  
Ah! tear it thence, and reign alone,  
the Lord of ev'ry motion there;  
then shall my heart from earth be free,  
when it has found repose in Thee.

O Love, Thy sov'reign aid impart  
to save me from low-thoughted care;  
chase this self-will from all my heart,  
from all its hidden mazes there;  
make me Thy duteous child, that I  
may ceaseless "Abba, Father," cry.

Each moment draw from earth away  
my heart, that lowly waits Thy call;  
speak to my inmost soul, and say  
"I am Thy Love, Thy God, Thy all."  
To feel Thy pow'r, to hear Thy voice,  
to taste Thy love, be all my choice!

## ΤΩ ΚΡΟΝΟΥ ΚΑΙΡΩ

### *In the Nick of Time*

#### **Tried with Fire: When Pain Is Personal**

*Kevin T. Bauder*

For just a moment, Carlos's tearless gaze turned defiant. "I don't understand it," he said. "What I do know is that I'm just so angry. And I have no answers." This conversation took place beside the casket of Carlos's adolescent son. The teenager had been tinkering with the family car in an open garage. A young stranger had come up the driveway, shot Carlos's son, and then walked on as if nothing had happened. To all appearances it was a completely random act.

Not many of us will be asked to suffer in the way Carlos has. Still, ever since the fall, pain has been a basic fact of human existence. Suffering is guaranteed for everybody. Its intensity and variety will vary from person to person, but nobody escapes this world unbruised.

It seems odd, then, that when some new suffering descends upon us, our most common response is to ask *why*. In a world of universal pain, each individual feels as if she or he has been singled out by affliction. Most of us wouldn't find it unusual if we alone were exempted from the universality of suffering. We hardly notice what we don't endure. During our placid moments we may, if we think about it, see the world's evil as a philosophical or theological problem. We may even manage to ignore it. When evil bursts into our own lives, however, the problem turns personal and existential. Our pain takes on a stark and malevolent substantiality. At those moments we rarely ask *why not?* We almost always ask *why me?*

God has not exempted His children from afflictions, nor has He excepted them from the perplexity that comes with pain. Over four decades of ministry I've stood beside Christians who had to face life's worst. I've sat with exhausted families in hospital rooms while they waited for loved ones to die. I've pleaded with the despairing who no longer wanted to live. I've wept beside mothers who clung to their babies' tiny coffins. I've prayed with the victims of shattering betrayals, financial reverses, slanderous accusations, and criminal assaults. Even when these people were believers—even when they had walked with God for years—the hurt was often greater than they thought they could stand.



*In the Nick of Time* is published by Central Baptist Theological Seminary.

Permission is granted to duplicate for personal and church use.

www.centraseminary.edu | info@centraseminary.edu  
900 Forestview Lane N, Plymouth, MN 55441 | 800.827.1043

Those moments mangle the filters through which people usually sift their reactions. Carlos exclaimed, "I'm just so angry!" Heman complained to God, "Why do you hide your face from me?" (Ps 88:14). Job cursed the day of his birth (3:2-10). At such moments, questions come raw from the heart. Why did God allow this? Where is He now? Why do I feel like He's abandoned me? How else will He hurt me? Does any of this matter?

These aren't theoretical queries. They are the utterances of wounded souls: half question, half objection, and all lament. They are the human dimension of Paul's observation that the whole created order groans and suffers in pain together until now (Rom 8:22).

I am not much interested in responding to theoretical questions posed by philosophers and theologians (though I am one of them). My concern is with Christ's lambs who find themselves staggering under the weight of affliction. If God has any purpose in allowing His people to suffer, then I want to find it. If Scripture offers any answers and any hope, then I want to help my brothers and sisters see them. For God does have purposes, Scripture does provide answers, and Christians can find hope in their pain.

Why does God allow His children to suffer? I want to answer that question in three ways. First, I will look back into the past to discover where human suffering, including the suffering of believers, began. Second, I will look ahead into the future to explore what God says He will accomplish with our pain. Third, I will look into the void of seemingly senseless suffering, asking whether we have reason to respond in some ways and not others.

Before proceeding, however, I want to eliminate one false theory. I encountered it recently during a church meeting. I sometimes set aside a service to allow people to pose questions. I tell them that I will answer any honest question, though I reserve the right to answer, "I don't know." One of those services was visited by a woman who (I later discovered) believed in divine healers. I didn't know that at the time, but she raised a question that was clearly intended to lead me down a path. "Wouldn't you agree," she asked, "that God wants everyone to be healed?"

I took her into the last verses of Philippians 2, where Paul tells about Epaphroditus. This faithful man carried a gift from the church at Philippi all the way to Paul in Rome. In the process he contracted a terrible disease and almost died. Yet Paul evidently could not heal him, even though he was deeply grieved by Epaphroditus's illness. The sickness persisted. At the last moment God showed mercy, but only after both Epaphroditus (and Paul) had endured considerable suffering.

I asked the woman why, if God wants everyone to be healed, He waited so long before showing mercy to Epaphroditus. There are two possible answers to that question. The first is that God sees sufficient value in some

sicknesses that He allows them for His own purposes. If that is so, then God does not want everyone to be healed, at least not right away.

The other answer is that God does want everyone to be healed, but that some people don't meet the necessary qualifications. Perhaps they lack sufficient faith, or they aren't obedient enough, or they haven't spoken the right words. If this answer is true, then every sickness actually can be traced directly to at least one spiritual failure or deficiency on the part of the afflicted person. In other words, if this answer is correct, then we are back to the moralistic hypothesis—which the Bible clearly rejects.

The first answer is clearly the biblical answer. There is no reason for afflicted believers to assume that their suffering necessarily results from any failure of faith or obedience. By the same token, there is no reason to believe that God universally intends the health and wellbeing of all of His children *in the here and now*. Quite the contrary: Peter clearly states that Christians are called to suffer (1 Pet 2:20-21).

So what is the cause behind this suffering? What is its purpose? What ought we to think when suffering seems simply random? What can we say to Carlos? These are the questions I want to answer.



---

This essay is by Kevin T. Bauder, Research Professor of Historical and Systematic Theology at Central Baptist Theological Seminary. Not every one of the professors, students, or alumni of Central Seminary necessarily agrees with every opinion that it expresses.

---