

## When Languor and Disease Invade

*Augustus Toplady (1740–1778)*

When languor and disease invade  
This trembling house of clay,  
'Tis sweet to look beyond my pains,  
And long to fly away.

Sweet to look inward, and attend  
The whispers of his love;  
Sweet to look upward to the place  
Where Jesus pleads above.

Sweet to look back, and see my name  
In life's fair book set down;  
Sweet to look forward and behold  
Eternal joys my own.

Sweet to reflect how grace divine  
My sins on Jesus laid;  
Sweet to remember that his blood  
My debt of suffering paid.

Sweet in his righteousness to stand,  
Which saves from second death;  
Sweet to experience, day by day,  
His Spirit's quick'ning breath.

If such the sweetness of the streams,  
What must the fountain be,  
Where saints and angels draw their bliss  
Immediately from thee!

## ΤΩ ΚΡΟΝΟΥ ΚΑΙΡΩ

### *In the Nick of Time*

#### One Month Later

*Kevin T. Bauder*

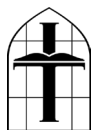
Just about a month ago both Mrs. Bauder and I tested positive for COVID-19. I wrote about that experience at the time, still under the influence of both the disease and its treatment. In retrospect, I believe that I've only been sicker once or twice in my life. Given that fact and given the number of people whose lives this disease has taken, I wish to express public gratitude to God for His mercies in restoring a measure of health to us.

I include the word "measure" because there are a few symptoms which I've still not shaken off (though I believe that Mrs. Bauder has). While COVID was not the worst illness I've had, it has certainly taken the longest to recover from. Several symptoms are still bothering me, of which three are particularly annoying: I am weak all the time, I get tired easily, and I lack mental focus.

These symptoms directly affect my ability to work. Sometimes they even affect my ability to carry on a conversation. I'll be in the middle of a train of thought while writing or talking, and suddenly I'll lose the whole thing. I'll start a job and have to leave it to rest. Often, I'll have trouble finding motivation to even start the job. The truth is that I'm not very efficient right now, and that bothers me. Frankly, it's humiliating.

For example, an important part of my job is reading. One of the reasons that I've pursued my vocation is that I like reading certain kinds of boring books, and teaching gives me an excuse to do that. I typically aim to read a couple of serious volumes every week, covering categories such as theology, biblical studies, hermeneutics, philosophy, history, psychology, anthropology, economics, literary theory, biography, devotion, and ministry, with occasional excursions into the hard sciences, sports, or other disciplines. I like to read, and while I don't read as much as real scholars must, I do read quite a bit.

When I came down with COVID I stopped reading. Stopped cold. For the first time, ever. I didn't read a book for over a month. I couldn't even concentrate well enough to make sense of simple fiction. The effort exhausted me. Only during the past week have I been able to begin reading again, though at a slower pace than before.



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The good news is that I'm still seeing regular improvement. Not that I feel this improvement day to day—it's not that rapid. Looking at my performance over any stretch of several days, however, I do see progress. For example, I walk for exercise. The week after I finished taking Paxlovid I tried to return to a walking schedule. I found that I couldn't walk a mile without having to stop and rest. I could only walk longer distances by taking them in shifts. Now, however, I'm able to walk over 10K without undue stress. That's getting back toward normal, which involves walking that distance once or twice a week.

In short, I'm still experiencing problems, but also experiencing progress. This situation has led me to wonder, however, how I would respond if I weren't experiencing progress. What if my weakness, tiredness, and lack of mental focus were a permanent result of the disease? As I've thought about this question, I've realized something else. The symptoms that I've summarized are also an apt summary of advancing age. Before many years go by, I almost certainly will have less strength, endurance, and focus than at any time in my adult life. How will I respond then?

For me, the question is particularly acute. Advancing age has brought Alzheimer's and dementia to relatives on both sides of my extended family. Is that what I have to look forward to? Can that be God's will for me?

Even if not, old age will come. I've seen it happen to dear friends, people who at one time were giants of Christian service. I have watched them live out the time foreseen by Qoheleth, "when the keepers of the house shall tremble, and the strong men shall bow themselves, and the grinders cease because they are few, and those that look out of the windows be darkened, And the doors shall be shut in the streets, when the sound of the grinding is low, and he shall rise up at the voice of the bird, and all the daughters of musick shall be brought low; Also *when* they shall be afraid of *that which is* high, and fears *shall be* in the way, and the almond tree shall flourish, and the grasshopper shall be a burden, and desire shall fail," (Eccl 12:3-5). What is there at that time but to wait for death, and to wonder why it takes so long? Can such a person be any use to God?

The answer is that my usefulness to God is not conditioned upon my perception of being used. God is infinitely wise, just as He is infinitely kind. He never leads His children into humiliating circumstances without a reason, but He may not (and usually does not) disclose the reason. What He asks of us is that we accept His seeming-severe Providences and His distressing dispensations, and that we trust Him. The enfeebled, the disoriented, the disabled, and even the comatose—God can and does use such individuals according to His own plan and purpose, irrespective of their ability to gauge their own usefulness to Him.

These are the things of which I am reminding myself today, even as I struggle to write coherently. God knows what He is doing. I don't have to understand any of it. My responsibility is to submit to His pleasure, whether now or in the future. Those things that are outside my control—whether persecution, or distress, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword—those things I must view as His appointments. I must trust Him not only that He knows what He is doing but also that He is doing it for my good.

Such things are easy to say. They are easy to grasp as theoretical truths. In the moment, however, they become difficult to practice. They require a perception and conviction of the absolute trustworthiness of God. One thinks of Polycarp's words, "Eighty and six years have I served him, and he has done me no wrong," spoken on the very precipice of martyrdom. Polycarp blessed God that he was counted worthy to die in flames. It is no less important to bless God that one is counted worthy to die by degrees. God superintends both life and death for His glory and our good.



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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.

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