

The background is an abstract composition of geometric shapes. A large black circle on the right contains the title. To its left, a vertical yellow circle is positioned in the upper left. The lower left features a series of overlapping triangles in maroon and light purple. A yellow triangle is also visible between the black circle and the bottom left.

# **THE STORY OF SUFFERING**

**LAUREN DUCOMMUN**

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Thank you, Cheryl, for listening to my questions, walking with me through my suffering, and reminding me of what is true.

For Leo.

May you know that you do not suffer in vain, and that you have been given a glorious hope to help endure suffering in this life.

*God is our merciful Father and the source of all comfort.  
He comforts us in all our troubles so that we can comfort others.  
When they are troubled, we will be able to give them  
the same comfort God has given us.*

2 Corinthians 1:3-4 NLT



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# **THE STORY OF SUFFERING**

**LAUREN DUCOMMUN**

# Introduction

This little book is written out of a desire to help us understand why we suffer. Why do bad things happen? Why do bad things happen to good people? And ultimately, why is God allowing these hard things to happen to me?

Suffering can often feel lonely and unbearable but take courage. There is hope to be found that can allow us to have joy even when we suffer.

# Chapter 1 - The Setting

Before time began, there was an eternal Spirit that existed in three persons. They were God the Father, God the Son, and the Holy Spirit. They had no beginning and lived together in harmony, loving one another perfectly. They are able to do this because they are perfect and **holy**\*. Together they created spirit beings of different kinds, which we know today as angels. These angels were created to worship and to serve them.

Holy - set apart from everything else; sacred

But one angel wanted to be worshipped. He wanted to be like God, and he led away other angels. God, who knows all things and is more powerful than all beings, cast these disobedient angels down to earth.<sup>1</sup>

Now Earth did not always exist. God created it as a beautiful home for a special creation to display his own glory. In the first chapter of the Bible, we are introduced to all that he made within this universe, and more specifically, on our own planet. He made the birds, the fish, the

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<sup>1</sup> Isaiah 14:12-18; Ezekiel 28:12-16

animals, and on the final day of Creation he made man and woman.<sup>2</sup>

God the Father, Christ the Son, and the Holy Spirit made mankind, or humans, for themselves<sup>3</sup> and for their own pleasure, and to reveal to them their wisdom, power, and love. After he formed their human bodies and gave them spirits, he declared that they were very good.

But not long after, these good creatures, created in God's image, were deceived by the prideful angel, named Satan, who had been cast down to earth.<sup>4</sup> Though the man and woman knew what was right, they chose to disobey God.<sup>5</sup> And when they rejected his way, that is the moment that changed life on earth forever.

Mankind was no longer perfect and holy. They had sinned. Since humans produce after their own kind, this meant that every child born would also be born "in sin" or as sinners. Their sin not only affected their own kind, but it also greatly affected the world they lived in.

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<sup>2</sup> Adam & Eve, first man and woman, Genesis 2

<sup>3</sup> Colossians 1:16

<sup>4</sup> Revelation 12:3–9

<sup>5</sup> The Fall, Genesis 3



Suffering, decay, disease, and evil were now in the world. The man and woman would suffer. Animals would suffer. Our world would groan under the pain of sin.<sup>6</sup> Our suffering would ultimately result in death because the punishment for our disobedience is death.

How could God have let this happen? You may wonder why he even made mankind with the ability to disobey and to sin. Since he is all-knowing, wouldn't he have known what decision they were going to make, and how that would bring suffering into the lives of his beloved creation?

If God allowed suffering, does that mean he wants us to suffer? How do we know we can trust him? How do we know he is good? What's the point of living if life is just full of meaningless suffering?

Thus begins one of the greatest stories ever told. How suffering came to be, how it impacts our daily lives, and how God has **redeemed** us from the suffering in our lives.

Redeemed - set free, loosed from a bond, bought or won back.

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<sup>6</sup> Romans 8:22

## Chapter 2 - Rising Action

Everyone loves a good story. You may not realize it, but you have been exposed to good stories since birth. Maybe it was in movies such as “The Lion King” or “Star Wars”, or classic tales such as *Little Red Riding Hood* or *Peter Rabbit*. All great stories have pieces that make them great: a setting, problem, rising action, climax, falling action, and then a resolution.

Let’s take a look at the story of *Little Red Riding Hood*. At the beginning of the story, we are introduced to the setting, which is the woods going to grandmother’s house. The problem is that there is a wolf that prowls in the woods. Little Red Riding Hood encounters the wolf which then creates rising action – events that point to the tensest part of the story. Will the wolf succeed in his plan of devouring her? It appears that he does because he deceives Little Red Riding Hood and gobbles her up. What a problem to have! This is the climax of our story—but it’s not the ending. The falling action, events that happen after the climax, is when we don’t know if Little Red will be saved. A nearby hunter realizes what has happened. This leads to the

resolution—the end of the story—when the hunter rescues Little Red and kills the wolf.

In our own life story, the setting is a world that was corrupted by sin. The rising action is that we are suffering, and we are wondering how we are going to find relief from it. No matter what we do, we can't seem to find long-lasting relief. So what are the climax, falling action, and resolution? Are we supposed to suffer forever? What is the point of living if we will continue to encounter great pain, sorrow, and disappointment on earth?

Let's first talk about the problem of suffering. In our lives, there are three ways that men and women, girls and boys, now suffer. The first is suffering which is the result of sin in our own lives. In other words, consequences we face because of our personal sin. If you get caught stealing from someone, you suffer because that person can't trust you anymore. If a robber steals money from a bank, he will most likely be thrown into jail.

The second is suffering resulting from someone sinning against us. Someone who is bullied is suffering ill-treatment and nastiness from someone who is sinning against them. Sometimes people suffer even though it was someone else who was sinned against. The

consequences of sin often spread past the one person for whom it was intended. Some children suffer hardship during wars between countries or people groups.

The third reason for suffering is simply living in a world that has been corrupted with sin. You suffer pain when you trip and fall. You are sad and grieve when a loved one dies from an illness. You may even have to leave your home because of a natural disaster. These are all realities of living in a world that has been completely altered by the consequences of man's sin.

So this is our problem. Since sin has entered the world, from the time we are born to the time we die, we will experience suffering. It won't be all the time, but sometimes it can feel like you have suffered a long time. You may be suffering deeply right now, with no end of suffering within sight. You may wonder why God allows certain things to happen to you, or you may doubt that he cares for you.

These are normal feelings and questions, and they are good to think about. Does God care and how do we know He does? Did he create us simply to abandon us in our suffering? Thankfully, there is more to our story. Spoiler alert: God does care for you.

## Chapter 3 - The Hero & The Climax

So what do we know about God so far? Because God the Father, God the Son, and the Holy Spirit are all one, they all have the same **attributes**. They also never change; this means their attributes always remain the same! We talked earlier about their holiness. They are perfect in love, fair and true, and worthy of worship. We also know that they keep their promises. This will always be true of them.

Attributes - special characteristics of God

When God put man and woman in the Garden of Eden he promised that if they disobeyed his command not to eat from the Tree of Knowledge, there would be death. After they had disobeyed, God kept his promises to them. He explained that because of their disobedience and sin that they would now suffer. Men would suffer, women would suffer, and the world would suffer. This was not because he was being spiteful or mean, but because it was what sin brought. He was stating the natural result of their sinful actions.

Mankind willingly chose to sin and the consequences for their actions were severe. Just as Satan\* and the rest of the rebellious angels were separated from God and cast out of heaven, mankind was also now separated from God. They would no longer be able to enjoy the same sweet fellowship with God the Father, God the Son, and the Holy Spirit. One day they would die, and their spirit would exist for the rest of **eternity** separated from God in even greater pain and suffering.

Eternity - time everlasting

We still experience the consequences of sin today. With sin in the world and in our lives, we feel pain and experience distress and hardship. We, too, are separated from God because of our sin, and our spirit is destined to an eternity apart from God. This may seem unfair. Why would a kind God allow this? Well, if God always keeps his promises and he said there would be a consequence for sin—and if there wasn't suffering in our world, then God wouldn't be keeping his word. And if he doesn't keep his word, then how can we know that he is **just** or trustworthy? Can someone who breaks his promises be good?

Just - lawful and right

These were not the only promises that God made that day in the garden. He immediately promised

something else. Something that was good. Something that was hopeful. He promised that one day an **offspring** would come and crush the head of the serpent. In other words, one day a child who descended from Adam and Eve would crush and defeat Satan, to redeem them from sin and death.

Offspring - a person's child or children

So here we are introduced to the hero of our story. God the Father, who loved God the Son and the Holy Spirit for eternity before creation,<sup>7</sup> also loved the people that they had created in their image. He created them to bring glory to his name,<sup>8</sup> and what a way to show his magnificence by doing something absolutely jaw-dropping.

The problem in our story is that the law of death is upon us. Man, whom God created in his image and for his glory, is now corrupted by sin. Because they chose to reject God's way, mankind is sentenced to death. It seems shocking that God would let mankind to sin and in turn allow suffering to enter this world. What was the point of even making mankind if he knew his good creation would be destroyed? How would these corrupted people now bring glory to his name? Because we know that he can't

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<sup>7</sup> John 17:24; Ephesians 1:4; 2 Timothy 1:9

<sup>8</sup> Isaiah 43:7

go against his word, his promises, or change the consequences.

Yet God the Father had a solution! He loved us so much that he willingly chose to send his beloved Son down to earth to provide a way for suffering sinners to be freed. Through the Son we were freed from the consequences and corruption of sin and the presence of suffering and freed to live with God and for God.

Our hero was the divine Son himself, who also willingly chose to take human form. He was born as a baby named Jesus and lived a perfect life without any sin. He experienced human suffering in this world, and then willingly suffered even more. He accepted the **penalty** of sin by bearing all of our sins on the cross.<sup>9</sup> God poured out his wrath for sin on Jesus, God the Son, instead of on sinners. This was the immensity of his great love for us.

Penalty - fine  
or punishment

Jesus died to save us and deliver us from our sin. He also died to reveal God's character, and to make him known to us. His death reminded us again that God keeps his promises. It revealed the magnitude of God's great love for

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<sup>9</sup> Romans 6:23, 1 John 2:2



us<sup>10</sup> and that God is just. He kept his promise—that sin has a consequence of death and suffering, but also of his promise that one day a son would come and crush the head of the serpent.

Three days after Jesus died on the cross, he came back to life! This resurrection showed his divine power over sin and death. He had defeated it! The offspring of Adam and Eve had crushed Satan! His death was accepted on our behalf, and mankind no longer was under the law of death. They were free. But they could only be free if they believed this truth and trusted that Jesus' death and resurrection freed them from the penalty of sin.

This was the climax of our story. Mankind sinned and because of that, we would suffer. We would suffer as a result of our own personal sin. We would suffer as a result of being sinned against. We would suffer simply because our world has been corrupted by sin. And ultimately suffer death and eternal separation from God. Yet Jesus chose to die in our place. Did this solve our problem? Yes! It was the turning point of our story when there was finally a solution to our sin and hope for us in our suffering.

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<sup>10</sup> Romans 3:25-26

Because of what God the Father, God the Son, and the Holy Spirit planned from before time began—that Jesus would die for our sins and rise again from the dead—we now have hope. Everyone who believes in this message and admits that it is true, that they are a sinner in need of a **Savior**, will be saved. Yes, those who were once corrupted by sin will be recreated into someone who is incorruptible and because of Jesus, death will not be eternal separation from God, but a reunion with him.

Savior - a person who rescued someone from danger

We will have sweet fellowship with God once again [in Heaven and the New Earth]—though we don't have to wait for eternity to have this fellowship. Jesus says that one day he will return and take us to a place where there will be no more pain, no more tears and death.<sup>11</sup>

So now we know what the source of our suffering is and where it came from. We know that God *does* love us and cares for us, and doesn't want us to suffer forever.

However we are not with him right now, and Jesus hasn't yet returned. We are still suffering here and now. What are we supposed to do when we are in pain? What about when we have tears? How long do we have to wait?

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<sup>11</sup> Revelation 21:4

## Chapter 4 - Falling Action

From wars and poverty to death and illness, suffering is still present in our daily lives. Even though Jesus came down and provided a solution to our problem of sin, we are still living in a corrupted world. We are still waiting for the time when sin will be no more. While we are waiting you may think, “This is too painful!” “This is too much!” “Why isn’t God helping me?” We find ourselves in the falling action section of the story, eagerly longing for the grand resolution to it all.

Suffering is real. It hurts. It’s overwhelming. It’s evil and unfair. When we are hurting it is easy to focus on ourselves and our pain and forget to lift our eyes up to God to see and remember what is true. It’s important to know that we are not hurting right now because of God, but because of sin. We also need to remind ourselves daily that Jesus died and rose again to give us hope. Hope allows us to have joy now, even when we are hurting. This hope tells us that our suffering can have a purpose, thanks to God. In fact, we know of at least three ways that good can come out of suffering. First, it can produce character in us, and help us become more like Jesus. Second, it can

also help us comfort others who are hurting. And thirdly, our response to our suffering can bring glory to God. We can continue to live out our created purpose, to bring glory to God, even in our corrupted state.

Just as God made promises to the first man and woman, he also made promises to those who believe in him. He promises that all things will work together for good.<sup>12</sup> He promises that he is with us always.<sup>13</sup> He also promises that suffering will produce **endurance** which brings character and ultimately hope.<sup>14</sup>

Endurance - patience,  
unswerving resolve,  
steadfastness

Isn't this amazing? Throughout this whole story, God knew what would happen, and he had a plan. He had already planned to redeem the suffering in our lives that came about through mankind's choice to sin. God was able to take one man's disobedience (Adam) that made us all sinners and brought suffering to all mankind.<sup>15</sup> Then by one man's perfect obedience and willingness (Jesus), righteousness and eternal life were made available to all mankind. We are

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<sup>12</sup> Romans 8:28

<sup>13</sup> Matthew 28:20

<sup>14</sup> Romans 5:3-5

<sup>15</sup> Romans 5:19

reminded yet again how a loving and just God was able to come to our rescue and do something about our suffering.

But how do we endure suffering? Sometimes we may find ourselves in situations that are completely overwhelming. It may feel like you are in the middle of the ocean trying to tread water, and wave after wave keeps pushing you under. During these difficult moments, it is easy to think of things that are untrue: “God is punishing me” “I am all alone” “God doesn’t care” “What am I living for?” These thoughts are common, as we are simply ordinary beings. Our sinful hearts tend to focus on ourselves.

Maybe you can relate to one of these people from the Bible: David, a King of Israel, wrote, “O Lord, how long will you forget me? Forever? How long will you look the other way? How long must I struggle with anguish in my soul, with sorrow in my heart every day?”<sup>16</sup> Job, a friend of God, said, “Why, then, did you deliver me from my mother’s womb? Why didn’t you let me die at birth?”<sup>17</sup> Paul shared, “We were burdened beyond measure, above strength, so

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<sup>16</sup> Psalm 13:1-2, NLT

<sup>17</sup> Job 10:18, NLT

that we despaired even of life.”<sup>18</sup> Even Moses said, “But why me?”<sup>19</sup>

These are common responses to suffering, and these are common thoughts to have. What is important is how we respond to these thoughts. What we think and feel isn’t always true, because we still have sinful hearts that don’t always think about what is true.<sup>20</sup> It may feel that God has forgotten us, but when we remember his plan for saving mankind we know that isn’t true. We may feel so sad that it doesn’t seem like there is any good left in the world. Still we can remember what Jesus has done on the cross for us and the new life we have in him, and then we can hope and have joy. When we let our sad thoughts lead us to despair, it is as if we are telling God we don’t believe what he says is true. When we remain bitter and angry, we aren’t being thankful for all that God has done for us.

Suffering in our life often reveals areas of thinking that we need to correct or actions that we need to change. We think, “God, this is not what I wanted” “Why are you doing this to me?” “How could you have let this happen?” In a way, we are actually saying that we didn’t get what we

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<sup>18</sup> 2 Corinthians 1:8

<sup>19</sup> Exodus 3:11, The Message

<sup>20</sup> Jeremiah 17:9

wanted or what we had hoped for. Maybe we were expecting an easy or comfortable life? Or maybe we expected our life to turn out like our friends'? When things don't go the way we had hoped it doesn't seem fair or kind, we can choose to be angry or anxious.

But when we say, "Lord, I want what you want whenever you want it" instead of "I want what I want when I want it" we are choosing to desire his will and not ours. What does God want for us? He doesn't want us to suffer, but he wants us to love him with all our heart, mind, and soul.<sup>21</sup> When we desire to glorify him in our difficult circumstances and choose to do or think what is right, it brings endurance. This choice will produce the fruit of the Spirit in our lives,<sup>22</sup> which builds character. Both of these together will help us to view our circumstances the way God sees them, which gives us hope.

The word for *hope* in Hebrew means a "joyful expectation of good that is based not on circumstances but rather on the character of God who controls circumstances."<sup>23</sup> This means that because our hope comes from God, we can

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<sup>21</sup> Deuteronomy 6:4-7

<sup>22</sup> Galatians 5:22

<sup>23</sup> James Strong, *Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible* (Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers, 1993), "*mibtach*." Thank you to Dr. Cheryl Bell for this insight.

have hope when we are going through difficult times in our life or when things aren't going the way we want. We can have hope when we are suffering.

So as we wait for the resolution of our story, we can have hope now. We can be comforted now. And we can comfort others with this hope now.



## Chapter 5 - Resolution

After our hero, Jesus, came back to life and conquered death, he returned to heaven to prepare a place for us there.<sup>24</sup> He also left so the Holy Spirit would come down to not only dwell with us but dwell within us.<sup>25</sup> When anyone trusts Jesus for his or her salvation, the Holy Spirit enters hearts to remain as a sign and reminder of what is to come.<sup>26</sup> We now have a Helper and a Comforter to remind us of truth, see our sin, and help us have joy and hope.<sup>27</sup>

Even though sin entered God's good world, he had a good plan. He didn't allow sin to rule and keep us separated from Him forever. He didn't allow sin to keep people made in his image corrupted forever. After years of showing mankind the depth of their sin and their need for a Savior, He sent Jesus down to earth to deliver us from the penalty and power of our sin. We know Jesus will come again one last time, to deliver us from the presence of sin.

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<sup>24</sup> John 14:2

<sup>25</sup> John 14:17, 26; Romans 8:9

<sup>26</sup> 2 Corinthians 1:22

<sup>27</sup> Romans 15:13, 1. Thessalonians 1:6, 2 Corinthians 13:14

You may wonder, “Why didn’t God stop sin earlier? Why didn’t he stop it after Satan led his fellow angels astray? Why didn’t he stop it immediately after Adam and Eve sinned? How long will we have to wait?” One day we will be able to ask him these questions directly. For now we can know that even though we are still suffering from the consequences of sin, from this suffering comes a great story in which God’s glory shines through.<sup>28</sup> God was able to remain just while redeeming our great problem of sin, and bring glory to his name through his magnificent and merciful plan.

Before sin entered the world, we had fellowship with God and walked with him, but now we have the Holy Spirit dwelling within us. Before we were stewards of the earth, but now we are co-heirs.<sup>29</sup> Before we knew that God cared for us, but now we know the depth and width and breadth of his great love for us. Though sin was not good, God was able to take the evil that happened and bring something glorious out of it.

When we are hurting or feel overwhelmed, it may not feel like God cares for us. But he does. More than we can ever imagine. While he is working out something glorious on a

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<sup>28</sup> Phrase taken from "Why Does God Allow Satan to Live", an article by John Piper.

<sup>29</sup> Romans 8:17

grander scale, we also see how he is working out something glorious in our individual lives. We wouldn't have seen the depth of the wickedness of sin and what we were saved from. We wouldn't have seen the miraculous ways that God worked to provide us with His Offspring who could defeat death and sin. In the same way, when we willingly choose to have hope and joy despite our suffering, it is more glorious than if we chose to have hope without any suffering. Throughout it all, God's glory shines brightly.

When we focus on only a small part of the story, we forget the other parts such as the setting and the climax. If we only focus on the problem of the story—our suffering—it is easy to believe the lies that Satan would like us to believe. “What if this whole Jesus thing isn't real?” “What if God doesn't care if we suffer or not?” Yet when we remember the whole story, and that we already know the resolution and are simply waiting for it we can reply, “God is real, the resolution when Jesus returns to remove all our suffering simply has not yet come.”<sup>30</sup>

We don't know *when* Jesus will return, but we know that he will. Since God kept his earlier promises, we know he

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<sup>30</sup> Thank you, Pastor Aaron Scarbrough, (Graceview Baptist Church; Burleson, TX) for this illustration.

will keep his future promises. Our hope is that our life here on earth is just a blip in time before we are reunited with God. Imagine standing on a beach holding on to the longest rope you've ever seen. Near your hands are two knots about an inch apart. The rest of the rope extends across the beach into the ocean, and you can't see the end of it. This rope represents eternity. The two knots next to your hand represent our time on earth. In comparison to the rest of the rope, which has no ending, our time on earth will be extremely short. While our suffering is real, it is also temporary. One day, life will be like living in God's good garden again, but even sweeter.

Until then, God sees your pain. Jesus *knows* your sorrow. He knows every tear you've cried and every word you've prayed. He knows how you are feeling and what you are going through, and he cares. He longs to comfort you, protect you, and provide what is best for you. Though we will experience suffering while we wait for redemption, he will not let this suffering go to waste.

Sometimes he cares so much yet he knows that pain will bring more good than no pain. A dentist often has to inflict discomfort or pain in order to remove a cavity. We endure the pain with hope knowing that removing the cavity is

worth the pain because it will be best for our teeth in the long run.

Similarly, God may allow the pain, knowing that it will be worth it. In the end, everything will work out for his good and for his glory. Enduring suffering is not easy or enjoyable, but if people in the Old Testament waited for thousands of years for an Offspring to crush the serpent's head, then we can follow their example and wait for his return with hope, too.<sup>31</sup>

While we wait, and are comforted by Jesus, we can also comfort others. We can comfort others who believe in Jesus but are discouraged or need reminding of what is true. We can also comfort those without any hope—those who have never heard of why we suffer and what relief is available. We can share the good news of Jesus with them.

Suffering is real and it hurts, and we are still all sinners living in a sinful world. So we need to constantly remind ourselves of what is true. One day we will find ourselves no longer in the presence of sin and suffering but in the presence of God the Father and God the Son. What a day of rejoicing that will be! We will again dwell with God for

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<sup>31</sup> Another quote from Aaron Scarbrough

the rest of time—remembering and praising God for His great goodness towards us. We will be able to remind ourselves and remind each other of the Story of Suffering. The greatest story ever told. Until then, encourage one another with these truths.<sup>32</sup>

*“But we are looking forward  
to the new heavens and new earth he has promised,  
a world filled with God’s righteousness.”  
2 Peter 3:13 NLT*

*“See, I will create  
new heavens and a new earth.  
The former things will not be remembered,  
nor will they come to mind.*

*But be glad and rejoice forever  
in what I will create,  
for I will create Jerusalem to be a delight  
and its people a joy.*

*I will rejoice over Jerusalem  
and take delight in my people;  
the sound of weeping and of crying  
will be heard in it no more.”  
Isaiah 65:17-19 NIV*

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<sup>32</sup> 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

## Recommended Resources

- *A Grief Observed* by C. S. Lewis
- *All My Questions* by Bethany Barnard
- *Confronting Christianity* by Rebecca MacLaughlin
- “He is Worthy” by Andrew Peterson
- *The Incarnation of the Word of God* by St. Athanasius
- *Suffering: Discerning God’s Purposes for Pain* by Dr. Cheryl Bell