



TORN

Trusting God When Life Leaves You in Pieces

JUD WILHITE

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Jud Wilhite

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JUD WILHITE



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TORN

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Details in some anecdotes and stories have been changed to protect the identities of the persons involved.

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*To the leadership team at Central,
servants with a heart for those who are torn*

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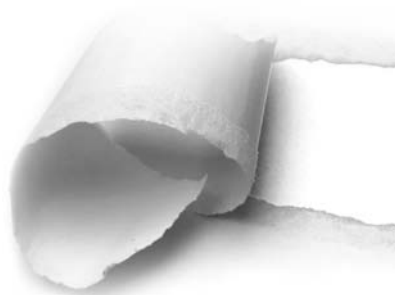
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Introduction

I'm naturally a joyful person who has been accused of smiling too much—an accusation I hope people will toss my way the rest of my life. But I had entered a season when the smile was all but gone. I felt like Bilbo Baggins in *The Fellowship of the Ring* when he said, "I'm old, Gandalf. I know I don't look it, but I'm beginning to feel it in my heart. I feel...thin. Sort of stretched, like...butter scraped over too much bread."¹

We had experienced years of remarkable expansion in the church I served, and I felt like I was always running as hard as I could to keep up. As growth surged, we also found ourselves in a deep local recession. Navigating cutbacks, counseling a sea of individuals and friends who were reduced to desperation, and leading with no compass for unprecedented times began to take its toll. I've traveled enough to know that Western poverty and global poverty are very

different things, yet the pain of this economic struggle was profound and surprising. The number of suicides in our community and our church testified to the reality of the despair.

And then there were more personal struggles. I watched emphysema steal my mom's capacity to breathe and eventually take her life. While grieving her loss, I found myself attacked and mischaracterized by bloggers, some of whom knew almost nothing about me. I topped off the season with a visit to see how my father was holding up after Mom's death. When I got there, I found he had just been taken to the hospital, his own health deteriorating.

As the trials mounted, I found myself wondering why. All this stuff hitting me at the same time just didn't seem fair. Of course, I knew my difficulties didn't compare with the hardships that many face, but they were mine (just as yours are yours), and tough is tough. Perspective provides only so much consolation before it stops providing consolation altogether. One day I found myself sitting with my face in my hands, feeling a weird mix of emptiness and heaviness. Sort of a collision between blah and *arggh*! It felt like my world was ripping apart.

Can you relate? Have you ever wondered where God is in the mess of life? Have you ever felt like something that happened to you just wasn't fair?

Have you ever felt *torn*?

IT'S NOT FAIR!

The sense that things aren't fair ricochets around our planet every second of every day, not least of all around my own home. My daughter, Emma, will say of her brother, "Ethan picked the movie last week, and if he gets to pick again, it's not fair!"

I'll hear, "Emma had two chocolates earlier, and if I don't get another, it's not fair."

I'll say, "I took out the trash last time. It's Mom's turn, or it's not fair!" (Okay, I don't have the guts to say this, but I do think it.)

Everyone knows what it feels like to get the short end of the stick. Your neighbor pulls up in a shiny new car while you drive a beater. Your slacker friend at work gets a raise while you scrape by. Your spouse gets cancer while you're each in your prime. Your teenager starts using drugs. Your child is diagnosed with an incurable condition. Your husband is killed on the battlefield. Your desire for alcohol drowns out everything you love. Your life swirls down the toilet. It's not fair. Even the biblical Job got in the act when he said, "God has no right to treat me like this—it isn't fair!"²

Everyone knows what it feels like to get the short end of the stick.

We're torn. We suffer. We struggle. And we wonder why.

We shout, shout, let it all out. (And, yes, along with Tears for Fears, these are things I can do without.)

STARTING AT *WHY*

Sometimes, in the midst of it all, we are tempted to doubt God's goodness—or at least his goodness to *us*. Sure, he may be a good God, we think, but obviously we're receiving some sort of payback for the wrongs we've done or for the good things we've left undone. Perhaps God is getting even with us for a botched marriage, our mediocre parenting, or the abortion we never told anyone about.

We search for a reason. *If God really loves me and cares for me, then why is this happening? If he is good, then why doesn't he step in and make things right? Why doesn't he ride up on a white horse and fix this mess?*

Then we look at the larger world and wonder, *Why doesn't he stop the tsunami before it rolls over thousands of men, women, and children? Why doesn't he prevent the tornado from plowing through a home filled with good people? Why doesn't he stop earthquakes and mud slides and falling bridges? Or terrorist attacks and child abuse and drunk drivers?*

When unexpected and incomprehensible things like these happen, we're also tempted to doubt God's power. *Maybe, we think, he just isn't mighty enough to make a differ-*

ence. Perhaps he's doing his best in this broken world, but there is only so much he can do. This train of thought certainly keeps God's goodness intact, but it isn't very comforting when the next crisis comes.

Some of us turn from the faith altogether. Bart Ehrman became a self-described born-again Christian as a teenager and eventually became a professor of religious studies. But he lost his faith along the way. He's written a book titled *God's Problem: How the Bible Fails to Answer Our Most Important Question—Why We Suffer*. Ehrman said, "I could no longer reconcile the claims of faith with the facts of life.... I came to the point where I simply could not believe that there is a good and kindly disposed Ruler who is in charge."³ Yet to me his answer raises even more questions. To go Ehrman's route is to affirm my loneliness and confusion, leaving me adrift in a universe with no hope.

Such perspectives are not new. There have been countless books and debates on the issue of God and evil, enough to fill entire libraries. Still, the fact remains that you suffer. I suffer. We all suffer. And our reflex to pain and suffering is to ask why.

As I turned to the Bible in my pain, I was surprised to discover that God's response to this question is unlike anything the philosophers or I would expect. In fact, he gives us a new question.

MOVING ON TO *WHO*

When it comes to evil and suffering, the Bible refuses to answer why. It simply and powerfully upholds the validity of the question! We read of a God who is sovereign and good, all-powerful and all-loving. He's strong enough to end our suffering and perfect enough in his goodness to desire the best for us. Yet there is no airtight resolution to the perpetual earthly drama of suffering.

But there is so much more.

We learn in the Bible that God turns our suffering to good, that he trades it for joy later on, that it makes us more like Christ, that it allows his glory to be known in our lives, and that it is an encouragement to trust him (because if everything were perfect all the time, why would we need faith?). But these aren't the answers we're going for when we're torn.

So the testimonies of the Bible about pain and suffering and the consequences of sin are not mathematical formulas for rational understanding. Instead they are constant proclamations about the God who rules and loves, and they are constant reminders to cast our cares on him. God wants us to hope in *him*.

In other words, *why* is not the most fundamental human question when it comes to suffering. Even if we had all the answers to our whys, we might actually find them

unsatisfying and ultimately unredemptive for the pain we are facing. A bigger question emerges.

The most fundamental question, according to the Bible, is *who*. Who will we trust in the calamities and challenges of life? Who will we turn to in the reality of our pain? *Who is worthy of our trust?*

In my recent emotional and spiritual challenges, the trustworthiness of God's character gave me hope. By adjusting my focus from the circumstances in my life to the awesome sovereignty of God, I began to delight in him in deeper and richer ways. I matured. Difficulty has a way of doing that; it grows us up and prepares us for the next phase God has for us.

When the world comes crashing down, all at once or a bit at a time, it does damage to more than our peace; it shakes our assurance, our security, our faith. Something inside us tears. Yet God is near to us when we are torn up, mending the frayed edges of our hearts.

In fact, what we find is that pain doesn't rule out an all-powerful and loving God so much as an all-powerful and loving God rules over pain. Even if you get the *why* question answered, it's not likely to make the pain of losing

Why is not the most fundamental question when it comes to suffering. The most fundamental question is *who*. Who will we trust in the calamities of life?

a loved one or the difficulty in finding work suddenly go away. But if we know who is mighty to save and loving enough to do it in ways we usually don't expect, we can see our pain and suffering in a new light. And then we can go on to deal with it in the here and now.

AND FINALLY...*How?*

Most people I counsel are eager to see their pain and suffering differently. Often they are desperate for anything that will help them sort out their thoughts and feelings, because the chaos of their circumstances makes them feel as if they're drowning. It's fine to proclaim God's goodness and grace, to assure each other of his sovereign control over our torn lives and broken hearts. We can talk for miles about the right road. But believing the car will go means nothing until we put it into Drive.

After *who*, we want to know—we *need* to know—*how*. How do we move on? How do we sort out our thoughts and feelings? How do we gather strength? How do we build on the ruins around us? How do we forgive? How do we make the millions of tiny decisions that add up to a life committed to God even when our heart is broken?

In the following pages I'll share what I've learned as we explore this God who cares and the hope he provides.

We'll start with the *who* question in part 1, looking at

the importance of trusting a God who is powerful and sovereign even when we are torn apart. We'll reflect on what it means to examine our expectations of God and life from a biblical perspective. And we'll see how worthy God is of our trust, not only because he rules, but also because he is good and he loves.


In part 2, we'll broaden things to consider more of the *how* question so we can move forward and put the pieces of our lives back together. We'll see the importance of participating in community and evaluating our assumptions about God and others. We'll discover practical ways to fight for joy and to deal with negative feelings, such as grief, anger, and depression. We'll discuss how to forgive others and how to embrace forgiveness ourselves. We'll reclaim hope and perspective to heal.

If you long for a God who is worthy for who he is, not just for what he gives...

If you need to know that you aren't alone in your pain, that God is good and powerful and *for you*...

If you are tired of half-baked answers and desire a faith with guts that will stand in the difficulties of life...

Then read on. We'll learn to worship a good God even when we are torn, and we'll discover hope for our broken lives.

A horizontal strip of white paper with a torn, deckled edge. The left end is curled into a loose tube. The text is printed on the paper in a black serif font.

Part 1

Trusting God
When Torn

Torn Apart

When I was growing up, the playground was the setting for an entire series of nonsanctioned school games. These games were different from tag and duck, duck, goose. This elite category of games has been handed down from generation to generation. Games like monkey bar wars, truth or dare, and kill the carrier, to name just a few.

One of the most famous nonsanctioned playground games is bloody knuckles. In case you're not familiar with it, let me explain that bloody knuckles is a simple game that tests your speed, your strength, and most important, your tolerance for pain. Two kids stand facing each other with knuckles touching. Then one tries to whack the other's knuckles as hard as he can. Next, the other kid goes. Back and forth, whack after whack. This goes on until one

of them quits for a simple reason: the pain becomes too intense.

The game has grown so much in popularity that there is now a World Bloody Knuckles Association (WBKA). The WBKA has a commissioner, official rules, and an option for membership. For just ten dollars, you can receive a membership card and a bumper sticker.¹

Ever feel like life is one big game of bloody knuckles? Except for one difference—you can't quit. Every time you turn around, you get whacked. You try to dodge it. *Whack!* You beg it to stop. *Whack!* You pray. *Whack!* You do everything in your power to avoid it. *Whack! Whack! Whack!* The pain intensifies. The suffering is daunting. And you're not sure what to do with it or where God is in it.

Maybe you recently experienced your own version of bloody knuckles. Maybe you lost a loved one, and the hurt has turned to denial and anger. You're really confused. Perhaps you lost a job, and the frustration and discouragement continue to grow. You read about God's promises, but you don't understand why this has happened. Maybe you live with chronic pain. You would give anything just to be free of pain and not be distracted by it.

Regardless of your situation, I know that when your very soul is being torn apart, you want an answer for "What am I supposed to do?" And I know from experience that it often feels as though there's nothing you can do. But the

primary equipment you need to trust God in your pain and suffering *is* your pain and suffering. You already have the necessary tools; you just need the skilled hands of a loving God to wield them. So the first thing to do at the site of rebuilding is to hand over the tools in trust.

In this chapter we'll consider what it looks like to hand over these tools and worship God in our struggles. Most of us, when faced with enormous obstacles or daunting challenges, like to pull ourselves up by our own bootstraps, trust in our own abilities, and say confidently, "I've got this." But since we have a relationship with the God of the universe, who loves us and cares for us, it makes infinitely more sense to submit to him and say, "God, *you* take this one."

Most of us, when faced with daunting challenges, say confidently, "I've got this." But it makes infinitely more sense to say, "God, *you* take this one."

DREAM DETOURS

My friends Chris and Kim Trethewey went through several years that felt like one long, losing game of bloody knuckles. About a year and a half into their marriage, they decided to start trying to have kids. The thought of having a family captured their hearts and consumed their conversations. They assumed that in no time they'd have two kids

and the white picket fence. They would live the American Dream.

The reality was far from the ideal, and it tore their lives apart. After enduring three and a half years of unsuccessful fertility treatments, they sat down with a doctor who said, “We’ve done everything we can. We don’t know why, but you’re not able to have kids.”

Chris and Kim walked with an emotional limp after this tremendous blow, but eventually they explored other options. Through an incredible series of events, they adopted two siblings: Kiara, who had just turned one, and Caden, who was three months old.

Caden was born four months premature and was still in the hospital when my friends first saw him. He had been there since birth, with three holes in his heart and underdeveloped lungs. A devoted medical team repaired his heart and inserted a tracheal tube to help his breathing. Remarkably, his health improved, and the doctors were extremely positive about his future. He began eating regular foods and drinking out of bottles. Time was all that was needed for his lungs to develop.

Chris and Kim virtually lived at the hospital for months until they finally got both kids home. Each day they thanked God for answering their prayers and blessing them with children. Their dream had finally become a reality.

Then one morning around seven o’clock, Caden’s apnea

monitor went off. Chris ran in to find Caden in his crib with a distressed look on his face unlike any Chris had seen before. Chris called 911 and tried to give little Caden CPR, but it wasn't working.

Chris remembers, "I'll never lose that image in my mind of just knowing there was nothing I could do. I begged God. I begged him for a miracle. I begged God to save his life. I sat there, and I said everything I could to say, 'God, please! I've seen you work miracle after miracle in the lives of so many people. Today I need you to save my son. I know that you can. I know you have the power to save him. Please! Give me that one request.' But he was silent."

My friend continues, "To this day I'm not sure why God didn't answer my request. I still wonder why. I'm not sure there is really a reason God could give me. What I do know is that God hurts with us. Our loss is his loss."

I begged God, "Today I need you to save my son." But he was silent.

In their anger and hurt, Chris said there was a still, small voice inside him and his wife that said, "God gave you this child. It's his to take away."

I sat with Chris at the hospital that day. I watched as he shifted into autopilot to move through the next days and weeks. I wept for Chris and Kim and prayed with them. I saw how deep a crater Caden's death had left in their hearts.

Countless moments of grief came at them from nowhere. The sense of loss touched everything in their lives.

As the months passed, they began to work through the stages of grief. They had times of guilt, anger, rage, hurt, and just plain numbness. It was hard for them to understand what they were feeling and how to deal with it in a healthy way.

Kim had been feeling sick at one point and was convinced she had the flu, but her sister surprised her and said, “Kim, you don’t have the flu. You’re pregnant.”

Kim dismissed the idea, saying, “Okay, you’re a school-teacher. I paid a lot of money to a man who specializes in this, and he said there is no way.” But she decided to take a pregnancy test. She prepared herself emotionally for the test to be negative, as it had been countless times before. But this time, amazingly, it was positive. She couldn’t believe it. Despite the fact that all the doctors had said it was impossible, she was expecting.

Later that year she gave birth to a beautiful little girl they named Claire. Chris said, “I kind of laughed the first time I held Claire. It was a laugh to say, ‘God, I get it. You’ve called us to follow you. Not to make sense out of all the stuff going on. Not to understand it.’ As I held Claire for the first time, I was blown away by the miracle of birth. It was God saying, ‘I’m with you.’”

Now, it’s not as though Claire was an even exchange

for Caden. It's not as though having Claire meant not grieving the loss of Caden. In a way, it actually intensified the loss they were still trying to make sense of. But in the gift of Claire, the Tretheweys learned that even though they did not know why things happened as they did, they had settled the *who* question. They knew they could trust God, and they derived their strength from him.

SOVEREIGN GOD

When our world falls apart and the pain of life settles in, yes, we are looking for explanations and meaning and rationale, but even more so we want assurance. Yes, we want answers. But these cries of pain, whether to God explicitly or just into the universe, are evidence of an implicit trust that something or someone greater—someone with answers!—is out there. Our hearts are rocked by regrets, sin, failures, and flaws, and in our distress we ache for resolution, restoration, and renewal.

Cries of pain are evidence of an implicit trust that someone greater—someone with answers!—is out there.

A battle is waged within us with every *why* question we've entertained. *Why me? Why, God, didn't you _____* (fill in the blank)? *Why was the person texting while driving? Why didn't the doctors catch it sooner? Why didn't the chemo*

work? Why did he leave me and the kids? Why? But the danger with *why* questions is that they lead to a dark, confusing, frustrating, lonely, disconnected place.

Think about it. Does *why* bring healing? Does *why* bring closure? Rarely. *Why* keeps you in the past and blocks you from moving forward. *Why* keeps you stuck in the pain and chokes out the potential to heal. This is the reason that the better question—the question Christians should move into sooner rather than later—is *who*. Who is in charge? Who's in control? Who has all things in his hand? Who will make all things right? Who is restoring all things?

The Bible answers this question clearly and profoundly. One of the starkest, most beautiful pictures of God's sovereign rule comes from the apostle Paul in Colossians 1:15–18:

Christ is the visible image of the invisible God.

He existed before anything was created and

is supreme over all creation,

for through him God created everything

in the heavenly realms and on earth.

He made the things we can see

and the things we can't see—

such as thrones, kingdoms, rulers, and authorities

in the unseen world.

Everything was created through him and for him.

He existed before anything else,
and he holds all creation together.
Christ is also the head of the church,
which is his body.
He is the beginning,
supreme over all who rise from the dead.
So he is first in everything.

What a breathtaking piece of poetry this is! And what a bedrock of comfort it can be to know that Christ “existed before anything else, and he holds all creation together”! That’s what we *really* want to know when life feels as if it’s tearing apart. Is someone holding it together? Because we know *we* sure can’t.

Although we pop out of our mommies believing the universe revolves around us, the entire time God is working in each person and each event and each second of every day to his own ends. Nothing happens beyond his watch; nothing takes him by surprise. God announces as much when he says,

Remember the things I have done in the past.
For I alone am God!
I am God, and there is none like me.
Only I can tell you the future
before it even happens.

Everything I plan will come to pass,
for I do whatever I wish.²

This means that, before time began, before God even created the world, he was aware of what every millisecond in the future would hold. And before any of us came to be, he knew who we were, what we would do, what we would think, and even how many hairs are on our heads at each fluctuation. (And believe me, the older I get, the more fluctuations there are!)

We find affirmation of God's control over the universe throughout the pages of Scripture, from the opening lines of his work of creation to the closing lines of his judgment and restoration. God upholds at every second the entire structure of the world. He established the earth on its foundation, bounded the sea, and created the light. He knows and rules the most obscure recesses of the earth, including the hidden depths, the distant horizons, the light and the darkness, and the heights. He oversees the blackest pools in the deepest caverns, where marvels of bioluminescence will never be seen by human eyes, and the thinnest-air peaks, where even birds do not perch. He manipulates Saturn and Venus and planets in solar systems we will never discover. He holds in his sovereign hand black holes and wormholes in outer space, juggles quarks and protons, pulls the levers of inner space and hyperspace. When a tree falls in the

woods and nobody is around, *he* hears it. In short, God created all the elements of heaven and earth and steers them to his own ends.³ Nothing happens away from God's watchful eye. Everything happens because God wills it or allows it, and nothing happens that God cannot either stop or redeem.

Not only is God in control, but God created the world for the purpose of displaying his worth, beauty, and glory.

The ultimate mindfreak is not Criss Angel, although some of his magic is pretty freaky. The ultimate mindfreak is realizing that the universe is truly, utterly, and completely about God—and thus not about me—and then finding my greatest happiness in celebrating this reality. The Bible says, “Everything comes from [God] and exists by his power and is intended for his glory. All glory to him forever!”⁴ It is not that some things or a few things are intended for his glory but that *everything* exists to give God glory.

Nothing could be more important in this time of self-help and reality television and Facebook status updates and Twitter tweets and indie everything than realizing that we are not the main attraction of this world.

As we understand this, our framework shifts from being me-centered to being God-centered. The universe was not created for us but for him. Nothing could be more

important in this time of self-help and reality television and Facebook status updates and Twitter tweets and indie everything than realizing that we are not the main attraction of this world. The world does not revolve around us, as much as we would like to think it does. Our daily challenges and decisions become opportunities to live for God's glory. As we reorient our lives around God, we have the opportunity more and more to join creation in turning up the volume on God's worth. This is the single most important lesson I've learned in my own valleys. By reorienting everything back to where it belongs—around God—I find my footing again.

So what about evil? Does God's rule mean that he created evil? Does it mean he authored it or orchestrates it?

The Bible is crystal-clear that God is holy and righteous; there is no slice of sin in his being at all, and there never will be. We can deny that God authored evil and affirm at the same time that he rules over it. To say that God can control, stop, use, or allow evil is not the same as saying that evil comes from him. While this tension of truth may be hard to maintain without more questions arising, we can find great assurance in knowing that, whatever comes to pass, even sin is accounted for by God. He will punish it or redeem it or both.

This means that the God you trust and love, the one

who is worthy and beautiful, can protect you. Though you may face all kinds of evil and pain in your life, you do not have to live in fear. No matter what happens—no matter what a terrorist does or which nations go to war or what befalls the country—you can rest in the arms of God. No darkness, no evil, no hate, no destruction, no calamity strikes without the permission of God. He is good. He does not do evil. He does not commit any crimes against you or his own holiness. He is in control. If you love God and delight in him and trust him, this is nothing but wonderful news.

If God were not in control, if he did not set the boundaries, you'd have reason to fear just about everything. As it is, though, the Bible challenges us to fear God, not people.⁵

God isn't sitting in heaven wringing his hands in fear. He is bringing his plan to fruition.

When the stock market crashes, when depression creeps in, when a horrible tragedy strikes, you are not alone. You can live in perfect peace today, knowing that no matter what happens tomorrow, it won't happen outside the range of God's watchful eye. He neither slumbers nor sleeps. He knows all things and providentially oversees all things.

This world is not spiraling out of God's control. It isn't barreling ahead into an unknown future with a powerless

God at the helm. God isn't sitting in heaven wringing his hands in fear. He is bringing his plan to fruition. He is working in our world each day to bring himself glory. In due time he will overthrow Satan, sin, and death.

LETTER TO GOD

Four years after Kim and Chris Trethewey faced the loss of Caden, they had an opportunity to spend a week at Blessing Ranch, a place for people to experience healing. You see, life had moved on, but Chris was still stuck.

Chris was not wrestling with the *who*. He got it. What he couldn't quite grasp was the *why*. *Why* haunted his every thought.

That week at the ranch saved his life, his marriage, his family, and the ministry God had called him to. During the week Chris was given three simple homework assignments. All three were letters that he was supposed to write. The first was a letter from him to his son. The second letter was by Chris and his wife from the point of view of what they thought Caden would say to them. The third letter? A letter from Chris to God. Chris shared with me that initially he thought the homework was pointless and verged on psychobabble. Yet the experience brought overwhelming healing.

Here is part of the letter that Chris wrote to God:

Heavenly Father,

I am not sure exactly where to start, what should be or needs to be said. I guess I ask that you will just guide my heart and my thoughts.

First, I know you are God. Your ways are perfect, flawless, without fault. I am totally confident in that. I know that you have the ability to take the circumstances that occur in life and use them for your good. I guess that is why I find myself pulled in opposite directions. I find myself totally relying on your will—which I know is perfect. I can grasp the thought that you have called the willing to step out in faith. But faith so many times just doesn't make sense. I know the stories in the Bible. Abraham and his son Isaac and that long walk up the mountain. Joseph being sold into slavery. You just call us to follow. To be willing. I get that.

But why Caden? No, I don't blame you for his death. I know that you didn't cause it. But why didn't you save him? Why didn't you work a miracle? Why didn't you reach out and touch him? Why didn't you flick that plug out of his airway so he could breathe? Why didn't you? I guess that is the question that can't be answered. But I wonder, if you gave me the answer, would it resolve the hurt

I feel inside? Would it bring closure? Would the “answer” bring understanding? Would knowing draw me closer to you? Would comprehending the answer take away the longing to hold Caden again? I think the answer is simply...no. Understanding the “why” would probably bring with it another list of questions, hurts, and misunderstandings. Plus, no answer would ever help me understand the loss of my son.

I guess I have resolved in myself that you are God; I am not. You love me so very much—you hurt when I hurt. You experience loss when I experience loss. You grieve when I grieve. You totally understand the pain of losing a son.

Okay, one request. Could you wrap your big arms around Caden for me every morning and give him a hug for me? Could you whisper in his ear that I love him? Could you tuck him in at night for me? If you can do that for me, I have a peace inside knowing that he is okay because he is with you.

Chris’s letter is deeply moving because it describes both his faith and his struggle. When we are left without answers, God is all we have. Sometimes our hurt is with God himself. And while we may desire a cut-and-dried answer for our suffering, part of the healing is found, not so much

in getting an answer, but in asking the questions and crying out to God.

WORSHIP IN THE PAIN

What we are talking about, essentially, is worship. Whatever we trust in is what we worship. Whatever we place our hope in is what we worship. When life falls apart, when things tear apart, many of us retreat inward and trust ourselves to make it through. We're resilient. We're strong. This is a knee-jerk reaction when pain hits—to protect ourselves, to insulate ourselves, to fight our way out with our power and sensibilities. But healing is found in worship.

When life gets torn, we don't have to sit passively by (that can lead to more depression and despair), nor do we need to beat our fists against everything (that leads to bitterness and abuse). We can turn ground zero into a sanctuary of worship to God. As Paul says, "We can rejoice... when we run into problems and trials, for we know that they help us develop endurance. And endurance develops strength of character, and character strengthens our confident hope of salvation."⁶

How do you rejoice? Are we talking about cranking up the Katrina and the Waves hit "Walking on Sunshine" and bouncing off the walls? Well, sure, if you can swing it. But we all know that when life reeks, you don't feel joyful, you

don't feel like dancing. You don't even know the steps! And that's why you have to follow God's lead. When the only music blaring is grief, sickness, divorce, abuse, addiction, or any other painful numbers, don't sit passively, and don't boil over with rage. Trust God's promises. Trust him even in the darkest hour, and worship him. He is in the lead, holding out his hand for you to follow him. He may lead you through the valley of the shadow of death, but he won't leave you there.

Perhaps it's time for you to sit down and write a letter to God, as Chris did. Express your heart with absolute trans-

We can turn ground
zero into a sanctuary
of worship to God.

parency. Write about the struggle and confusion. Maybe it's time to admit that bottling it all up isn't working. Be honest with God. He can take it. He's a big boy. Whatever

you are feeling, it's okay. Anger. Shock. Denial. Bitterness. Tell him about it. God can handle your pain. And meanwhile, you'll be worshipping him, even if it doesn't feel like it.

In your suffering you may not understand the why, but now you know the who, and that's what really matters. When your life is torn, God is ready and waiting. He is there for you.



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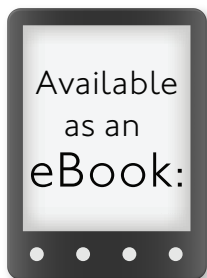
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