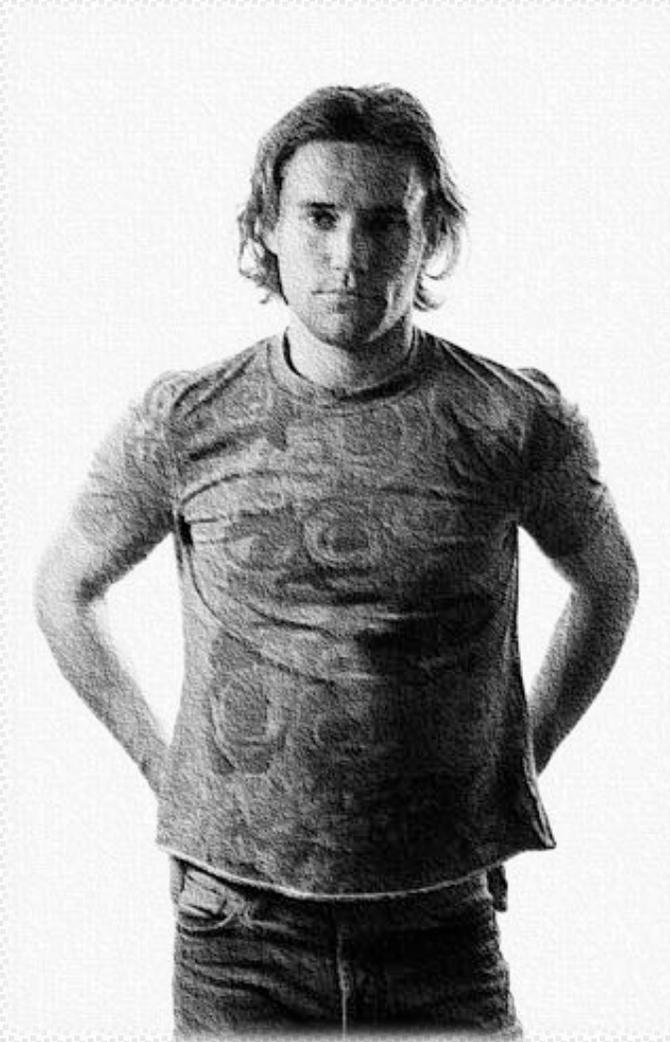


Dear God,
We need to talk about
PAIN and **SUFFERING**



by Ralph C. Ennis

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Some things are personal, very personal. Pain and suffering can be that way. Many of us have questions on the why of pain and suffering, but who can help us find an answer?

In *“Dear God, We need to talk about pain and suffering”*, you are invited to follow Skyler’s journey. To hear the raw, honest questions Skyler has for God. Will God be offended? Will Skyler find answers?

As you follow Skyler through his journal entries that extend over years, I encourage you to find a friend or two to dialogue about this perplexing reality we all face. You will find “Questions to Ponder” for each journal entry on pages 45-51.

Though these entries are not from my personal journals, much of these thoughts mirrors the struggles I have had with pain and suffering through the years and how God has met me in these struggles.

- Ralph C. Ennis

Apart from the presence of God, there is no deep healing for our grief. Time can make it easier, but that is all. The good news when our hearts are broken is that God invites us to freely mourn in the great space of His loving presence. Our pain does not threaten Him; it does not cause Him to fear that we will ruin His reputation. He is not repulsed with the ugliness we feel. Even when we hurt so much that we can hardly bear it, we are still His beloved.

— Sally Breedlove, *Choosing Rest*

Entry

1



Bitterness is not good. It rots the bones.

If bitterness is having unresolved anger over an extended period of time, then I'm bitter! I'm mad about some of the things it seems You let happen to me and to the world.

I'm mad that life just doesn't work the way I want it to. Little things make me frustrated and mad. Why don't cars work right? Why is traffic gridlocked when I'm in a hurry? Why does my neighbor's dog bark when I'm trying to sleep?

And then there's the big stuff. Whenever I turn on the TV or look at the Internet I see pictures of disasters—shootings, hurricanes, divorces, famines, global diseases, terrorism. Why, God, do people have to suffer?

Suffering affects the whole world. It seems like everyone I know has at least one friend who died on the road, often killed by a drunk driver. Others took a dare and are paralyzed for a lifetime. And then there's my friend who couldn't take it any more. Suicide. Why, God, do some take their own lives?

I get so mad over stories of rape, sexual abuse and even the selling of children for sex. It's in the news every day. And I'm mad I'm getting so indifferent to it all. Why are people so screwed up when it comes to sexuality?

I'm mad, too, that families are so messed up. Dads leave their kids, others have alcoholic parents and are verbally, physically and sexually abused—the mess goes on and on. And this in a place where you're supposed to be safe!

Then there's floods, tornados, hurricanes and tsunamis that cause so much suffering. You should control such things!

What about crime—violent or cyber? And what about all the wars? . . . especially those where they can't even remember why they've been fighting all these years? Why such horrific suffering . . . especially for the children?

And why do we all have to die? Why do some people get so sick and suffer for months or years on end? Can't You heal them?

I can hardly watch the news any more. Some of those stories are too much like mine. So I tune it out . . . go somewhat numb . . . just stuffing it all inside.

I suppose You think all this is good for me and expect me not to rage at You. My definition of "good" is just not the same as Yours!

And I'm mad at myself since the stuff in my life seems so unimportant compared to what many people in the world have to go through.

God, can You help me make sense of it all?

I can't carry this burden any more.

My bitterness is rotting my bones.



“And so I’m not keeping one bit of this quiet, I’m laying it all out on the table; my complaining to high heaven is bitter, but honest”.
- Job 7:11

The Spirit lifted me and took me away. I went bitterly and angrily. I didn’t want to go. But GOD had me in his grip.
- Ezekiel 3:14

*Give me a Jesus who meets me in the
rushing, crashing waters of my questions.
Let me stand precariously close to the dark
and menacing skies of doubt, so I can hear
the fierce and gentle loving voice of my
Jesus who drowns out my fears and stands
just beyond my questions with open arms.*

— Mike Yaconelli,
Dangerous Wonder

Entry

2



Every day I wear a mask and people think I'm happy most of the time, but there 's so little true happiness deep down inside where bitterness resides.

God, my bitterness won't go away so now I'm questioning Your character. What are Your answers?

I question YOUR JUSTICE!

How can it be fair for You to allow these things?

I question YOUR LOVE!

If You love us, why don't You protect us?

I question YOUR POWER!

Can't you stop people's pain?

I question YOUR WISDOM!

Can't you come up with a better plan for humanity?

I question YOUR GOODNESS!

Is all this suffering really good?

I question YOUR JOY in my happiness!

What happiness? Does it really make any difference to You?

Yet somewhere, deep down inside of me, I want to believe that You are loving, powerful, just, wise, and delight in me. But I need some answers right now. At least I long for answers, deeper answers to life's problems. Every day I wear a mask and people think I'm happy most of the time, but there's so little true happiness deep down inside where bitterness resides. I long not to be bitter—not to flare with anger when even the stupid stuff rubs salt into those inner wounds of bitterness. If You love me, why does it seem like You're out to get me along with all the rest of the world? Please help me! I think You're the only One Who can.

My fear is You won't.



Why do you just stand there and stare, like someone who doesn't know what to do in a crisis? But GOD, you are, in fact, here, here with us! You know who we are—you named us! Don't leave us in the lurch.

- Jeremiah 14:9

Help me, oh help me, GOD, my God, save me through your wonderful love;

- Psalm 109:26

Save me! I'm all yours. I look high and low for your words of wisdom.

- Psalm 119:94

Entry 3



if Your sense of justice was
like mine, You would have destroyed
the human race.

I'm thinking about justice today. I've heard people say You created a perfect world—without resident evil or breach of law. They say that when Adam and Eve chose to eat that piece of fruit they polluted Your perfect creation, so You kicked them out of the Garden of Eden.

Why did You do that? If I had created a perfect world and someone else polluted it, I'd go after them to keep the pollution from spreading. At the very least I'd get the polluters arrested and jailed—make them suffer for what they had done. And if that didn't work, I'd just wipe out the whole bunch of them and start again. My virtual world would be a much nicer place than this messed up world we live in.

But now that I think about it, if Your sense of justice was like mine, You would have destroyed the human race. Now that's scary! . . . and just. And since You didn't do that, You really must love us even though every day we make choices that aren't any different from the choice that Adam and Eve made to become what they were not—gods. Is it mercy on Your part to forgo executing justice? How can You forgive without wanting revenge?

It's hard to make sense of it all. We have all this pain—fair enough—yet I've heard You called a "God of love." Where, then, is all this love You're supposed to have?

I am in pain and distress; may your salvation, O God, protect me.

- Psalm 69:29

*Why is my pain unending and my wound grievous and incurable?
Will you be to me like a deceptive brook, like a spring that fails?*

- Jeremiah 15:18

*He'll wipe every tear from their eyes. Death is gone for good—
tears gone, crying gone, pain gone—all the first order of things
gone.”*

- Revelation 21:4

Life is not as random as the definition we choose to give it. Words are not puffs of air. We cannot rename wickedness and consider it solved. There is an irrepressible voice, and it is the voice of the soul, which says evil cannot be trivialized. This is what the gospel message is about. This is what the cross is all about. Failing to recognize this has disfigured the soul of America.

— Ravi Zacharias, *Deliver Us From Evil*

Entry

4



. . . You have intentionally made a choice to love me . . . to value me even though I'm far from perfect.

Now that I've married a soul mate, I'm beginning to understand love a little more.

LOVE is a choice of the will.

LOVE is an emotion with great power.

LOVE is a commitment with longevity.

LOVE is a jealousy that both possesses and frees.

LOVE is mysterious and beyond grasping.

When I first fell in love it was unbelievable! But now that "the honeymoon is over," I get really irritated at times. But then I stop . . . take a deep breath, and look beyond the superficial irritation. When I do that I'm able to see the real person . . . the one I fell head over heels in love with and once again I experience "true love." When I do that, then I have to look at my own heart—a heart that can get irritated so easily and seek revenge so quickly. A heart filled with bitterness, fear and selfishness that vents when little stuff doesn't go my way. Then I end up getting really down on myself.

But when I stop and think about what "true love" really is some things begin to make sense about You. That Your true love for me is birthed out of Your mercy and compassion. A love that means You continue to love the people You created—people of great value to You.

I've looked and I can't find a law written anywhere or an internal logic that says You have to love me. I'm not somehow entitled to Your love. So that has to mean that You have intentionally made a choice to love me . . . to value me even though I'm far from perfect—any perfection that even I can imagine.

Love, justice, mercy and compassion. The more I think about them, the more I read about them, they all seem to converge at Jesus' death. His horrible, tortuous death on the cross. Why did Jesus let them kill Him Who is God? What does He know about Your love and mercy that I don't? And why is it important that Jesus rose from the dead and went back to heaven?

An intentional choice to love. ("*. . . no greater love than a man lay down his life for his friend.*") There's a huge cost involved. Can this type of love be real? If it is, I still don't understand why the pain of life goes on across millennia.

I remember a psychology experiment where the subject thought he had the power to punish his victim with an electrical shock if the victim didn't make the right choice. Fortunately, it was only an experiment because most of the subjects chose levels of electrical current that would have tormented their victims.

Are You like that? Will You love me one day and torment me into obedience the next? Don't You feel my pain and suffer with me?

For years I've questioned Your ability to feel my pain, but felt like I couldn't talk about it. Maybe it's because I suppress so much . . . can't be honest with myself, and definitely not with others. I feel like I have to wear a mask so people will like me . . . will accept me. Are You even listening?

Yesterday a friend showed me a verse from the Bible that says, "*In all their troubles He was troubled, too. He didn't send*

someone else to help them. He did it himself, in person. Out of his own love and pity he redeemed them. He rescued them and carried them along for a long, long time." (Isaiah 63) WOW! "Out of his own love and pity he redeemed them. He rescued them and carried them along . . ." That's comforts my soul. I want to believe You rescued me and are carrying me along. I've never looked at it that way before. In spite of everything, You must be listening!

Why has it taken me so long to recognize You're here with me and feel my pain? I guess I couldn't bear to think that You felt my pain and still did not act. You can't be the Creator of the Universe, a compassionate Teacher, and yet still powerless! Can You? Are You using pain to draw me to Yourself? Okay, You've got my attention! But can't You change the way life works and get rid of my pain and the pain of the world?

Has Satan become so strong that, though people say he can't defeat You, You can't stop him either? Are You in guerrilla warfare with him? My friend says the Bible says You're going to win in the end, but what about all the monumental casualties of war in the meantime?



I am my lover's. I'm all he wants. I'm all the world to him!

- Song of Solomon 7:10

"In all their troubles He was troubled, too. He didn't send someone else to help them. He did it himself, in person. Out of his own love and pity he redeemed them. He rescued them and carried them along for a long, long time."

- Isaiah 63:9

For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. It teaches us to say "No" to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, while we wait for the blessed hope—the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good.

- Titus 2:11-14 (New International Version)

God notices you. The fact is he can't take his eyes off of you. However badly you think of yourself, God is in love with you. Some of us even fear that someday we'll do something so bad that he won't notice us anymore. Well, let me tell you. God loves you completely ... and in the love of God there are no degrees, there is only love.

— Rich Mullins

Entry 5



I deeply long to be loved, but my sense of worthlessness, of shame, makes me feel I don't deserve it.

I was just re-reading my journal from last year. The time when I began questioning Your power. Amazing how much can happen in a year. I've become a parent, so now I can understand Your power a little better. There have been so many times when I've wanted to rescue my child, but I chose not to for her own good. I now understand that if You chose to, You could resolve this issue of pain in an instant. Yet You don't. How can You call such restraint of Your power wise? Does it have something to do with Your being a parent, too?

And while we're at it, there are some other experiences from my life that don't make sense when I really think about it. Things like . . .

. . . Why did You keep that car from running over and killing me when I was three years old?

Did You have something specific in mind for my life? .

. . . Why did my high school friend have to die in that car accident?

Were their lives meaningless to You?

. . . Why did a nine-year-old boy rescue my baby daughter out of a swimming pool?

I'm so very thankful! Do You have something special in mind for her?

. . . Why didn't You protect my friend from being raped?

Where were You? Will she ever get past the pain and shame?

. . . Why do I now have such wonderful friends?

I don't know what I've done to deserve them!

Why do You allow such pain one moment and such pleasure another? Why do You rescue one time and allow death the next? And how can You say it's for our good? This issue of goodness—I just don't feel like I deserve the goodness of love. I deeply long to be loved, but my sense of worthlessness, of shame, makes me feel I don't deserve it. Sometimes I feel like I'm dung. What good is that? And who would love it?

If You can convince me all this is really good, then I'll trust You. Otherwise, I guess I'll live out my life flinching and being distrustful of every little pain while dreading the big pains of life.

My friend told me the Bible says You gave us Your "Holy Spirit" to walk through life with us. What does that feel like? What does that mean? Is my lack of trust in You keeping me from experiencing life to the fullest? How will my bitterness ever be resolved?



But those who suffer he delivers in their suffering; he speaks to them in their affliction.

- Job 36:15

My comfort in my suffering is this: Your promise preserves my life.

- Psalm 119:50

After the suffering of his soul, he will see the light [of life] and be satisfied; by his knowledge my righteous servant will justify many, and he will bear their iniquities.

- Isaiah 53:11

Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us.

- Romans 5:1-5

There are no formulas with God. The way in which God heals our wound is a deeply personal process. He is a person and he insists on working personally. For some, it comes in a moment of divine touch. For others, it takes place over time and through the help of another, maybe several others.

. . . The point is this: Healing never happens outside of intimacy with Christ. The healing of our wound flows out of our union with him.

— John Eldredge, *Wild at Heart: Discovering the Secrets of a Man's Soul*

Entry 6



I'm beginning to realize that You
jealously love me. My soul is too
important to You to shield me from all
the pain of life.

I guess some of us are slower than others. I've been reading the Bible a lot lately, and I came across the story of Job in the Bible. You talked with him a long time after his life really got bad—disease, financial failure, death of children, un-understanding friends, etc. You asked Job a lot of questions to see if he could understand things about the world You created. You asked him to explain his thinking about time, the stars, light, the sea, death, dimensions of the earth, snow, the laws of the heavens, mountain goats and about many other aspects of nature. He couldn't answer. At first I couldn't figure out why You drilled him with these questions. Now I think You wanted him to see that Your wisdom, though he couldn't understand it all, was best for creation. I think You also wanted him to trust Your wisdom about the pain of life, too.

Reading this story and talking about it with my friend has helped me begin to understand a little better what the Apostle Paul meant when he wrote, *"My task is to bring out into the open and make plain what God, who created all this in the first place, has been doing in secret and behind the scenes all along. . .this extraordinary plan of God is becoming known and talked about even among the angels."* (Ephesians 3:9-10)

So much more is going on in our universe than meets the eye! I know that You want ordinary people to be able to see Your

justice, love, power, wisdom and goodness. It seems like only the angels can really comprehend Your plan. But day-by-day I'm beginning to understand some, too.

For now my starting point is learning how to be content with the part of Your wisdom I can appreciate—the beauty of people in love, the sight of leaves changing colors in the fall, the taste of an apple, the sound of a baby crying to be fed. I may have to start with the little things, but I have to hold tight to what You said - *“For as the sky soars high above the earth, so the way I work surpasses the way you work, and the way I think is beyond the way you think.”* (Isaiah 55:9).

I'm even beginning to understand Your use of pain. Through it I'm reminded how much I need You; that I must come to You and rely on You rather than on my way of doing things. You use pain to get my attention; to move me and my heart toward You. And I need people I can trust! I now understand that I can't rely just on myself, and my abilities, to handle all the junk that life throws at me. I admit it, I don't know everything or hardly anything. And to rely on myself all the time is just plain arrogance on my part. And it doesn't get me anywhere either!

So I'm changing the lens that I look through for life's experiences. And now I realize there are a lot of things I need to thank You for that are wise and good over time, when I'm really honest with myself.

THANKS that somehow You can use my pain to mold my character and to teach me what healthy living looks like. And through it all to deepen my relationship with You.

THANKS that I suffer only a fraction of what Jesus suffered on the cross. It's helping me to begin to appreciate how much You love me . . . choosing to go through that kind of physical and relational pain!

THANKS that You are helping me be open and honest with myself, to take off the mask, to be willing to see my shame over the painful experiences in my life. I'm beginning by taking baby steps to learn how to trust You and others more.

THANKS that I can be a friend to others . . . to comfort others who've had a similar type of pain in life . . . show compassion to them.

THANKS that You reveal Yourself to others through my pain. I believe with time I may befriend the thorns I experience daily. But not yet.

This is hard to say . . . but THANKS that there are many things I can't understand. If I'm really honest, I would be crushed under the weight of all that knowledge!

THANKS for Your kindness that forgives me when I am willing to admit I've hurt You by the choices I've made. Your mercy, forgiveness and compassion are truly beyond anything I can understand!

And You know what is really great? That You are the one Person I can be totally honest with when life really gets me down, and You are always going to listen and understand because You've been there!

Please forgive my bitterness—my ongoing anger wrapped up in my deep fears. Please heal my soul and the disfigurements of bitterness. I'm beginning to realize that You jealously love me. My soul is too important to You to shield me from all the pain of life. You see indescribable beauty in my soul when I only see shame. Your jealousy is not corrupt like mine. You cherish, protect, possess, free and delight in me! I'm beginning to like that kind of

jealous love. Please give me Your strength to accept pain as coming from Your loving hand and to *"Consider it a sheer gift, friends, when tests and challenges come at you from all sides...your faith-life is forced into the open and shows its true colors."* (James 1:2,3)

My bitterness has been a part of my life for a long time . . . many years! But now I'm ready to listen to these words a friend shared with me. Words that come from You. *"Don't stay angry. Don't go to bed angry. Don't give the Devil that kind of foothold in your life"* (Ephesians 4:26). It's been quite a mess to deal with all the anger that has festered for decades because I've tried to deal with it on my own. Help me to be honest in identifying anger sooner, and to face it head on, not repressing it and not taking revenge—even revenge on myself.

Thanks for the people You are bringing into my life to walk this journey with me. And thanks that You promise that in heaven . . .

*"He'll wipe every tear from their eyes.
Death is gone for good—tears gone,
Crying gone, pain gone..."* (Revelation 21:4)

I long for that! Please don't let me down. I need You!

I'm taking hold of Your hand! Help me keep taking steps toward loving and trusting You!



"My task is to bring out into the open and make plain what God, who created all this in the first place, has been doing in secret and behind the scenes all along . . . this extraordinary plan of God is becoming known and talked about even among the angels."

- Ephesians 3:9-10

"For as the sky soars high above the earth, so the way I work surpasses the way you work, and the way I think is beyond the way you think."

- Isaiah 55:9

God's wisdom is something mysterious that goes deep into the interior of his purposes. You don't find it lying around on the surface. It's not the latest message, but more like the oldest—what God determined as the way to bring out his best in us, long before we ever arrived on the scene.

- 1 Corinthians 2:7

Now that the worst is over, we're pleased we can report that we've come out of this with conscience and faith intact, and can face the world—and even more importantly, face you with our heads held high. But it wasn't by any fancy footwork on our part. It was God who kept us focused on him, uncompromised.

- 2 Corinthians 1:12

But I do more than thank. I ask—ask the God of our Master, Jesus Christ, the God of glory—to make you intelligent and discerning in knowing him personally . . .

- Ephesians 1:17

Don't worship any other god. GOD—his name is The-Jealous-One—is a jealous God.

- - Exodus 34:14

. . . *h*oly jealousy is at the very core of who God is. Within the depths of his being burns and inextinguishable fire of loved call jealousy. His jealousy is a blazing passion to protect a love relationship that is eternally precious to Him and to defend it when it is broken. Divine jealousy is that unbridled energy in God which stirs Him to take aggressive action against whomever or whatever stands in the way of His enjoyment of those He loves and desires. This has always been the real motivation behind His judgments.

— S.J. Hill, *The Burning Desire*

Entry

7



God, thank You for Your "immense mercy" and "incredible love," showered on me every day.

Joy! For so many years it's seemed so illusive, and I couldn't understand why. Then one day I gained the courage to face the shame I felt behind my bitterness. As I look back, I've always felt so flawed, so defective, like I was never quite good enough to make the grade—to be loved.

Now I realize that You never were grading me! It's finally reached my heart . . . if You—the God of the entire universe—love and accept me just the way I am, then who am I to argue with You?

Now deep in my soul I'm beginning to experience how far You've taken away this shame of mine. You've removed it completely and wrapped me in Your jealous love and awesome beauty through Your mercy lived out in Jesus!

Jesus, I hate to tell You, but the media gives You a really bad name! You are blamed for much. What I see on the screen sure isn't much like the Jesus I'm experiencing. Not only do You feel my pains, but You have endured such incredible pain and the shame of us all. You're so merciful . . . You're so beautiful . . . You're so mysterious . . . and You're so alive at this moment.

You're so much more than the two-dimensional media images of Your life. My joy explodes! I can experience a Jesus that really lives (and isn't some mystic un-dead guy)!

I've hardly ever been honest with myself without self-deception wrapped in self-protection, so it's hard for me to really

know the joy of what it means to be Your child. It's beyond imagination to believe that You would be delighted with me . . . and that You actually take pleasure in me! I knew in my head that You took away my guilt of sin. But I just couldn't understand that You had also dealt with my shame—the ugliness of my soul. Now I know deep in my heart that I'm free from sin. I'm free from the consequences of sin: guilt, shame, and spiritual death. And even though my body's going to wear down and I'm going to die some day, I can look forward to what's next. The day when I'm in heaven and there will be no more sin or pain. So I can feel real joy! And every day I'm learning how to experience that joy in Your presence, even in this messed up, bloody world. So to help me remember what You've done for me, I take these words from the Bible and reflect on them as I go:

It wasn't so long ago that I was mired in that old stagnant life of sin. I let the world, which doesn't know the first thing about living, tell me how to live. I filled my lungs with polluted unbelief, and then exhaled disobedience.

We all did it, all of us doing what we felt like doing, when we felt like doing it, all of us in the same boat. It's a wonder God didn't lose his temper and do away with the whole lot of us.

Instead, immense in mercy and with an incredible love He embraced me. He took my dead-sin life and made me alive in Christ. He did all this on his own, with no help from me! Then he picked me up and set me down in highest heaven, in company with Jesus, my Messiah. (Ephesians 2:1-6)

God, thank You for Your “immense mercy” and “incredible love,” showered on me every day. As I walk my journey help me to truly experience the joy of being utterly dependent on You! Help me savor Your delight in me. Help me find my joy in You – in Your awesome beauty and perfection! As I keep journeying into Your jealous love, I know somehow that You will reconcile my pains and sufferings into inexpressible joy!

God, please keep leading me into this adventure of experiencing You deeply—an experience beyond my wildest imagination! Lead me into Your jealous love that holds onto and delights in me forever!

And dear loving God . . . thanks for listening to my raging!



What a gift life is to those who stay the course! You've heard, of course, of Job's staying power, and you know how God brought it all together for him at the end. That's because God cares, cares right down to the last detail.

- James 5:11

Yes, we should make the most of what God gives, both the bounty and the capacity to enjoy it, accepting what's given and delighting in the work. It's God's gift!

- Ecclesiastes 5:19

Every desirable and beneficial gift comes out of heaven. The gifts are rivers of light cascading down from the Father of Light. There is nothing deceitful in God, nothing two-faced, nothing fickle.

- James 1:17

This is how much God loved the world: He gave his Son, his one and only Son. And this is why: so that no one need be destroyed; by believing in him, anyone can have a whole and lasting life.

- John 3:16

We do not want merely to see beauty, though, God knows, even that is bounty enough. We want something else which can hardly be put into words[] to be united with the beauty we see, to pass into it, to receive it into ourselves, to bathe in it, to become part of it.

— C.S. Lewis, *The Weight of Glory*

Entry

8



God, Who is just, powerful, wise,
joyful and the jealous Lover of my
soul—He has adopted me into
His family of followers of His Son
Jesus.

*For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to
fall back into fear, but you have received the
Spirit of **adoption** as sons, by whom we cry,
“Abba! Father!”*

- Romans 8:15



Questions to Ponder

Entry – 1

- Skyler has a lot of questions for this person called, "God." Does God have anything to do with where the world and humankind have come from? Why or why not?

- When you think of the world, who do you think is responsible for pain and suffering?

- Describe one global issue you may be angry or numb about. Who do you think is responsible, and who should take care of it? Who do you talk to about it?

- Describe one personal issue you may be angry about. Who do you think is responsible, and who should take care of it? When you think about this issue, how does it affect you emotionally and/or physically? . . . bitterness? . . . numbness?

- How long has this anger gone unresolved? . . . a month? . . . a year? Why do you think this is so?

- Is there a difference between what you think God feels about global issues vs. your personal issues?

Entry – 2

- Skyler is questioning God. How about you? When you think about pain and suffering, what are your questions? Whom do you question?

- Do you even like God? Do you think God likes you?

- Do you ever question God's character in the face of yours or others' suffering? If so, what aspects of His character do you question or have difficulty trusting? Why do think this is so?

Entry – 3

- Justice. Do you think we deserve a pain free life? . . . a fair life? . . . does life need to be equal to be fair? Unpack that thought.

- What would it look like for God to give you justice? What would it look like for God to give you mercy?

- What does it look like for you extend justice and/or mercy to others? How do you feel when this happens?

Entry – 4

- Skyler said, “When I first fell in love it was unbelievable!” What does the pang of “true love” look like to you?

- Does giving love come easy for you? If “no”, why not?

- Does receiving love come easy for you? Why, or why not?

- Think again about these statements Skyler made about love: LOVE is a choice of the will. LOVE is an emotion with great power. LOVE is a commitment with longevity. LOVE is a jealousy that both possesses and frees. LOVE is mysterious. What goes into a relationship with a love that looks like that?

- What kind of love do you prefer to receive? ... to give?

- We often think of jealousy being something negative, but think again about the statement, “Love is a jealousy that both possesses and frees.” How would you like for someone to be a jealous lover of your soul? How would you like for GOD to be the jealous Lover of your soul?

- Can you imagine your behavior grieving the Lover of your soul? What do you think would be the result?

- Think about God being a jealous Lover for you ... a Lover of your soul. What do you feel when you think about grieving the heart of God? Will God still love you if you grieve Him?

Entry – 5

- Is being powerful a positive or negative concept to you? Unpack that thought.

- Skyler has expressed experiences of powerlessness, of not being in control. When have you felt powerless? How was that experience for you?

- On the other hand, when have you felt powerful? How was that experience for you?

- What role has suffering played when you felt powerless? . . . when you felt powerful?

- What good has come in your life through suffering? . . . from pleasure?

- Now think about God. Is He powerful or powerless to you? Does it feel safe to you for God to be powerful? . . . to be powerless?

Entry – 6

- Who, of your acquaintances, would you describe as being wise? Why?
- Do you seem wise to yourself?
- What is wisdom regarding pain and suffering?
- How about God, does He seem wise to you? Why or why not?
- Remember when you were sharing your thoughts about global issues? What is your wisdom about those issues? Do they appear to be different than God's wisdom?
- How do you deal with any difference of wisdom between you and God?
- Do you like the reality that God is God and you are not?
- Skyler came to a place of being able to say, "thanks" to God even though there were still a lot of questions. Can you say, "thanks"? Can you trust God for your good? ... for the good of humanity?

Entry – 7

- Skyler says, “As I look back, I’ve always felt so flawed, so defective, like I was never quite good enough to make the grade.” Do you relate at all to that statement? If so, how or why?

- Early on in Skyler’s journal there was reference to being “made in God’s image”. If that is true, do you still believe that God would consider you to be defective?

- Love, justice, mercy and compassion, have all been expressed to us by the Triune God. Read again . . . *It wasn’t so long ago that I was mired in that old stagnant life of sin. I let the world, which doesn’t know the first thing about living, tell me how to live. I filled my lungs with polluted unbelief, and then exhaled disobedience. We all did it, all of us doing what we felt like doing, when we felt like doing it, all of us in the same boat. It’s a wonder God didn’t lose his temper and do away with the whole lot of us. Instead, immense in mercy and with an incredible love He embraced me. He took my dead-sin life and made me alive in Christ. He did all this on his own, with no help from me! Then he picked me up and set me down in highest heaven, in company with Jesus, my Messiah.* (Ephesians 2:1-6)

- The journey of life can indeed be hard. How have your feelings and/or understanding of God changed since you started reflecting on Skyler’s journal?

- What questions do you still have that may be a barrier between you and God, the Lover of your soul?

Entry – 8

- Take some time now to talk with God, listen to God, and reflect on the beauty of His immense mercy and incredible love poured out on you. What does His offer of adoption mean to you? What does receiving mean to you in the midst of pain and suffering?

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

To view and order resource by Ralph Ennis, please see:

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