

Introduction

If you are reading this book, chances are that you have experienced pain. You may be suffering now; you may know someone who is suffering. You may have exhausted all possibilities, explored all avenues for relief, begged God until you have doubted His ability or even His existence.

Still, I want to offer you something that can help. It is not a cure, and it might not bring immediate relief, but it can put your soul at ease. It will give you comfort, strength, and hope.

Pearl, my wife's mother, was in pain—for more than 30 years. Arthritis ravaged her body, curled her fingers, and left her lying immobile in bed. Thin skin hung loosely on aching bones. Her husband, my father-in-law, faithfully provided for her, but they slept in separate bedrooms for three decades. She was alone in her pain. During the last two years of her life, Pearl stayed in a rest home near us. My wife spent precious time there everyday. By then Mom weighed less than 70 pounds. With every movement, her bones made cracking and grinding sounds. Only during the last few days of her life did her eyes cease crying out for help.

Pearl was God-fearing. When she was younger, she faithfully took her daughter (my wife) to church. I am glad she raised my wife in the way that she did. God was and is very important to both of them.

If God Is Good...

I don't know what Pearl thought about God during the last few years of her life. I was afraid to ask. It was painful to talk. Now I wish I'd had the courage to discuss with her some of the things I have learned since then—things I have written in this book.

Today, much of my work is in the poorer regions of Africa. I have seen tens of thousands of people living in garbage, with no jobs, no sewer system, and no clean water. Destitute children are everywhere—bare feet, open sores, sunken eyes. They live and die in those conditions.

Among other things, I teach them about God—how good He is.

In some cities in Africa, the orphan children who walk the streets carry small cups cut from the bottoms of plastic bottles. In the cups they put small amounts of glue, gasoline, or other toxins. The cups are held between their teeth to encompass their noses; they inhale the vapors constantly, keeping themselves in a state of stupor. I want to take them home, but the natives who live there warn me: "If you take them home, they will slit your throat at night!" Behind those glazed-over eyes are souls that never have been loved.

I have helped establish several orphanages in Africa, but the need is overwhelming, with hundreds of children being newly orphaned every day. War is a thief that takes parents away. AIDS leaves bodies where children find them. Other diseases move across the land as ripples across a pond.

Sometimes I cry. In spite of the pain, I still

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understand that God is good. In the following pages I will explain how that can be.

If your emotional wounds are fresh, then my answers may seem too simplistic, too calculated, for you to embrace at this time. If your heart is in anguish, then your head may not be ready to assemble thoughts that can make sense out of life. In that case, you need a hand to hold, seasons to pass, and a bird singing on your window sill. Although I cannot offer you those personal touches through these pages, I do desire to speak to your heart, in addition to your head. If I can help you calm the pain within, you may be able to grasp the ways of God—perhaps even know His presence in the midst of difficult times.

In my personal struggle, I did a lot of studying. In fact, I wrote another book, a more scholarly one, as I wrestled with the related questions and answers. That book is entitled, *Who Is God?* I recommend it for counselors, ministers, students of philosophy or theology, and leaders who must have a fuller understanding. The book you are holding is meant to help those who personally have faced pain and suffering, but now are ready to reassemble their thoughts, according to an anchoring belief that God is good.