

Therapeutic Theology for Hurting People

by Robertson McQuilkin

I arrived just as my sister, Virginia, was lifted from the ambulance, strapped to a metal stretcher. When she saw me, her greeting was simply, "God has abandoned me."

Maybe you'd feel that way, too, if your husband had died an agonizing death of cancer less than a year before and this was your second car accident in that same year—the one you knew intuitively would end your driving forever. But her voice was flat—no wail of self-pity or angry accusations against God. It wasn't the first time my sister had felt abandoned by God.

Actually, she's felt that way periodically over the past 20 years since Margie, her only daughter and the joy of her life, was brutally killed. It didn't help that her murderer had killed before and had just been released from prison on the advice of a court-appointed psychiatrist. It didn't make sense that a young woman who loved God and people so intensely should be snuffed out by a madman. Perhaps God abandoned her too!

Why do I never feel that way? I thought to myself. Some judge that I have cause enough, but I have never had those feelings. This started a train of thought about other things I've never felt: despondency, depression, anger with God. Then I began to think of feelings I *have experienced*...and I wish I hadn't: unforgiveness, impD0bi-0.0umbness of spirit. Why the differbi-?yinngrdesposesn toexhtenal c rcu m

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I exulted in the confidence of what God has revealed for sure—so sure that all believers of all time would affirm it. But I concluded that most things I would never have figured out no matter how long I investigated and contemplated—things about God's infinities and things about my finitude. Like the meanings of my past, the hopes of my future, the reasons for my

Muriel was blessed with eternal youth—looking 40 when she was actually 55. But that's still far too young to fall before Alzheimer's, the disease of the old. “Early onset” they called it in clinically sterile terminology. Early onset of what? Of grief for me, who must watch the vibrant, creative, sparkling person I knew dimming out. No grief for her, however, except for momentary frustrations quickly forgotten—she never knew what was happening.

So, why us, Lord? There are various theories. One alumnus said it was God's judgment on me for allowing contemporary Christian music on T* radio station. I don't feel guilty about that, but I do know circumstances contrary to T*'s desires are always intended to make us more like Jesus, and God has surely used these two decades of lingering grief to correct me in several deficiencies in my model-of-Jesus role in life. Perhaps God wanted new leadership at Columbia International University, though the Board and administrators didn't buy that theory. Of late, I've begun to wonder if the Lord put me under “house arrest” so I'd do something my busy life didn't allow much of: writing books and articles. Of course, whatever other purposes God has in sending or permitting adversity, there is always the purpose of bringing God glory, either through his mighty deliverance from suffering or his mighty deliverance in suffering. And that he has done in wonderf dimdo In'stald. Sod it' obvrriousle hveg contem latdr

inflated self-image. I'm of infinite worth to God, not for my achievements or possessions, but because he invested in me the life of his own Son.

- Those values are shared by all believers, but I have a value no one else shares. I have a unique destiny. God not only created me to bear his family likeness, he not only purchased me with the life of his only Son, he did so on purpose. He has a purpose for me, something he wants to accomplish on earth through me. No matter how the

Muriel was a chain worrier. One stormy night she was totally stressed out about her three teenagers who were aboin the fringes of the hurricane. She was just as distraught over the last two when the first arrived in good cheer, unscathed, and still immobilized by fear for the third after the second appeared. As she writhed in an agony of worry on her bed, harassing the Lord with her unbelief, he seemed to say to her, *Do you want to spend the rest of your life living like this?*

smile for a fleeting moment, my heart leaps. She's so gentle and contented—oh, I can't explain love. But I believe in love.

Theology seems to have built up my spiritual and psychic immune system. But when that immune system fails, I've discovered theology also has the power to heal, to correct wrong thinking, to renew.

Theology Rehabilitates

I believe in grace.

But I haven't always. Some would say that's because I had a strict, old-fashioned mother who periodically chastised me with a bamboo cane. Or perhaps they would point to my parents' philosophy of life—never compliment the boy lest he be seduced by pride. I can't remember a single affirmation. Show of affection? I never saw my parents embrace. Furthermore, my father would today be called “absentee,” he was so busy and so often traveling. And my mother

¹ “The Two Sides of Forgiveness,” *Moody Magazine*

