



“I had not finished reading the introduction to this book before I was making a mental list of friends that I knew would find it a balm to their weary hearts. Kristen and Sarah minister to fellow travelers on the road of suffering, out of the resources they have received on their own journeys, from the God of all comfort, grace, and hope.”

Nancy DeMoss Wolgemuth, author; Host/Teacher of *Revive Our Hearts*

“Kristen and Sarah have let us in to listen to their meditations in the midst of pain and limitation. They’ve opened up their hearts, their stories, and their Word-filled words. From our various contexts, we will all learn as we listen. I’m grateful for this book’s faithful call to lift up our eyes to a God of mercy who loves and saves.”

Kathleen Nielson, Director of Women’s Initiatives, The Gospel Coalition

“This is a wonderful, vulnerable and honest book, and I highly recommend it to anyone who needs the good news of Jesus in a difficult time. Kristen and Sarah have suffered immensely, but both of them know that our only hope is found in Jesus.”

Dave Furman, Senior Pastor of Redeemer Church, Dubai; author of *Being There: How to Love Those Who are Hurting*

“We have been told that we can do anything, to dream big, because women are strong and capable. But what happens when you are confronted with your limitations in the form of suffering? When you feel weak and weary? Kristen and Sarah provide hope in your desperation, and they drive us to the cross of Christ, where all of our suffering makes sense.”

Courtney Reissig, author of *The Accidental Feminist*

“Pain is a place where hope grows best, and this book will convince you of that. From beginning to end, *Hope When It Hurts* invites you to see the light of Jesus in the darkest times. As you turn each new page, listen for the voice of God, and you’ll hear him cheering for you.”

Karl Clauson, Radio Host at Moody Radio; author of *Thrill: When Normal is Not Enough*

“If you are in the midst of suffering, or someday will be (and that means us all), you will do well to read this book. I found myself moved, reflecting, and re-engaging with the truth of the gospel in the context of my own suffering. The whole book is full of empathy, a “coming alongside” tone, and insight for your soul.”

Josh Moody, Senior Pastor, College Church, Wheaton

“In a style as comforting as a hand-delivered casserole, on pages as beautiful as the message you’ll find written on each page, this book will drive you to the gospel again and again, lifting your eyes toward the only source of lasting hope. Keep your copy close—you’ll find yourself running to it again and again.”

Erin Davis, author of *Connected* and *Beyond Bath Time*

“Kristen and Sarah speak with fresh voices formed by their love of Scripture and their experience of walking with God through suffering. The faith and courage I’ve seen in them will overflow on you as you read this soothing and insightful book, giving you strength to stay the course even when you are tired of the battle.”

Colin Smith, Senior Pastor, The Orchard Church;
President, Unlocking the Bible

“It’s great to have a book written by people who are still in the thick of suffering, which shows us how to apply the gospel to our struggles so that we can persevere and also grow through them. Honest but not self-focused, this will be an invaluable resource to those in the midst of suffering and to those who seek to support and encourage them.”

Barbara Sherwood, London Women’s Convention Committee

“This isn’t a collection of slogans and Christian jargon. It’s biblical reflections from the heart of two women who have trusted Jesus in the hurts of their own lives. This is refreshingly honest, never condescending, never canned, and always gospel-focused.”

Dan DeWitt, author of *Jesus or Nothing*

KRISTEN WETHERELL
& SARAH WALTON

Hope
when it
hurts

BIBLICAL REFLECTIONS TO HELP YOU GRASP
GOD'S PURPOSE IN YOUR SUFFERING



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Foreword



The suffering itself is bad enough—whether it is brought about by a physical condition or injury, by a sudden loss, or an ongoing situation—but what adds to our agony is our pursuit to discover some meaning in it. When our suffering seems random or senseless, and we can't come up with anything good to point to that has come out of it, the if-onlys are relentless. We don't want our suffering to be for nothing.

We can continue stewing in our chaotic thoughts and unanswered questions, or we can allow the perspective of the Scriptures to begin to shape our perspective. We can allow the truth of the Scriptures to correct our faulty assumptions about the “good” that God has promised to work all things together for. We can allow the hope of the Scriptures to diffuse our despair.

That's what Kristen and Sarah have provided in this solid book—a feast of perspective, truth, and hope to feed upon when our insides are eaten up with frustration, fear, disappointment, and difficulty. They have opened up and examined the Scriptures in search of wisdom and insight for themselves and for all who will invest themselves in this book.

In the midst of suffering, we often feel that there is nothing that can fix the hurt. And while Kristen and Sarah offer no quick or easy fixes (in other words, false promises) as they work their way through 2 Corinthians 4 and 5, what they do offer is very real and substantive:

- ~ encouragement that it is possible to suffer and “not lose heart”
- ~ the illumination of “the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ”

- ~ the privilege of exercising “the surpassing power” that “belongs to God and not to us”
- ~ the reality of being “afflicted,” “perplexed,” “persecuted,” and “struck down” along with the rugged confidence that we are not “crushed,” “despairing,” “forsaken,” or “destroyed”
- ~ the vibrancy of “the life of Jesus” being “manifested in our mortal flesh”
- ~ the experience of being renewed day by day
- ~ the expectation of an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison

Because of what we read in 2 Corinthians 4 and 5, we have everything to look forward to, even when day-to-day life here is very hard—“a house not made with hands eternal in the heavens.” And we’re clear on what we should do even as we endure unwelcome and oftentimes unbearable suffering:

- ~ We are always of good courage.
- ~ We walk by faith, not by sight.
- ~ We make it our aim to please him.
- ~ We persuade others.
- ~ We are ambassadors for Christ.

Perhaps best of all in this passage that is so capably illuminated in this book, we discover the best news ever heard by anyone who has felt the impact of the curse on creation in their body or in their relationships or in their circumstances—the good news that the new creation has come. The new creation that will one day rid this world of the curse of sin and will heal all that is broken and disfigured and unwell has already begun its life-restoring, reconciling work. It’s begun on the interior of our lives. All who are in Christ are even now drawing their life from his life, their health from his health, their thoughts from his thoughts, and their hope from him who is our hope. Even now he is making all things new.

As deeply and profoundly true as all that is presented in this book may be, anyone who has suffered knows that it is hard to receive

instruction and encouragement from those whom we think have not suffered themselves. We want to hear from those who have walked, and perhaps continue to walk, in dark valleys, and yet have found Christ to be a light to them, the Spirit a comfort to them, the Father taking care of them. That's what makes Kristen and Sarah such good guides for those who hurt. May you find their companionship and insight a comfort to you on your own journey through the dark and difficult path of life in this world.

Nancy Guthrie
Author of What Grieving People Wish You Knew



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Introduction

Life hurts. We're no strangers to this fact. It's why we wrote this book. And not simply because life hurts, but because there's hope even when it does.

We suspect that you're reading this because you're hurting, or because you love someone who is and wish that you could take away their pain. Perhaps the act of reading these pages is in itself a big deal for you because even the slightest effort feels like it drains you. No matter where you're coming from, whether you're suffering right now or not, we welcome you and are glad you're here.

And if you are currently suffering, we are sorry. We feel for you. But we will not say "we understand" because, most likely, we don't. We don't know your particular situation, or the years of struggle and darkness you've endured. Perhaps our stories share common threads, and if we were having coffee together, we might be so bold as to say, "Me too." Even though your suffering looks different than ours, and may be far greater and harder than we could imagine, we are walking through pain along with you. Pain of different sorts, but pain and suffering nonetheless.

When we are hurting, the pain affects our view of everything—including our view of God. Perhaps yours made you doubt God for the first time, or think about him for the first time. It may have made you grow in your love for him, or in your anger or disbelief. It may have caused you to pray for the first time, or the first time in a long time, or to stop praying at all. Most likely, it caused a conflicting set of feelings toward and questions about God. In all our pain, we have found hope in turning

to him, not away from him, and in wrestling with reality rather than trying to ignore it. This book is in many ways a product of our journey and struggles.

In the following pages, you will find 30 biblical reflections to help you grasp God's purpose in your suffering. Each chapter is relatively short and accessible and (we hope) will take you to the truths of the Bible in a way that gives you hope. You will not find this book to be a comprehensive theology on suffering; nor will you find in it all the answers to your questions. You will find overlap and some repetition through the chapters, because God repeats great truths in his word, and we need reminding of them more than we may think! Though we dig deeply into God's word, this is not an exhaustive Bible study. We hope it will not only inform you intellectually, but help you emotionally.

And it was not written on the other side of suffering, but in the trenches and in the pain. There are moments when we marvel that we even finished this book at all, because of how our own sufferings were woven throughout the whole process.



Kristen's Story

By junior year of college, the healthy, pain-free life I had known began to slowly disintegrate. Over a period of six years, I went from running races and performing theater and energetic days to perpetual weakness, inhibited movement, and chronic fatigue that put me in bed at 8:30pm. I moved to New York to pursue my dream of being a professional actor. And soon I moved back home again, exhausted and in pain. I knew something wasn't right, but no doctor could give me an answer. Every new visit left me with the question mark of defeat, as the easy answer would be repeated: "You're fine. You're young. Go home."

Yet, the problems worsened as the years passed. After a long day of typing at work, my arms and hands would ring with aching pain, to the point that I couldn't perform simple tasks like opening jars, doing laundry, even holding a pencil. My knees and feet raged with a similar pain, and my ability to exercise—even take short walks—vanished completely. The fatigue

felt like waves of heaviness, like crawling through a dense fog, that would keep me from focus and any sense of normality. There were days when I wondered if my health was completely slipping away.

After six long years, my husband, Brad, and I saw a Lyme-literate doctor because my symptoms matched those of Lyme disease. The day the nurse called with confirmation was bittersweet: so good to have an answer; so scary to realize the road ahead of us. But by God's grace, and after two years of treatment, we have every reason to believe the Lyme is gone (I stay up later than Brad some nights!). Even still, as we sometimes say to people, "The war is won, but the city is ravaged." My body has been left weak and has years of rebuilding to do; some days are long and hard and strewn with discomfort. My struggle with pain looks different now, but it's still an everyday fight: discouragement stemming from dashed dreams, the frailty of a broken body, and the fight to persevere in hope.



Sarah's Story

Without going into detail, during my four years of high school, I experienced bullying along with a form of abuse from peers. At the same time, circumstances that were out of my control brought some devastating re-direction in my life, the most difficult being the end of my athletic dreams. It all sent me into a downward spiral, leading to an eating disorder, a broken relationship with my parents, and depression that resulted in my being admitted to the hospital. It was there that I gave up my attempt to live both for Christ and for the world, and committed myself to following Christ.

Life seemed to become smoother for a time. I met my husband at 20, and to my great surprise I was married and a mother by 23. That was a decade or so ago—and the last 10 years have been greatly marked by loss. From a young age, our eldest son began displaying behavior that was defiant and destructive, and has caused a decade of confusion and chaos in our home. Countless doctors, tests, and evaluations seemed to leave doctors shaking their heads, and all we were left with in the end was an increased financial burden and growing fears. Everything was affected by his illness.

Along with that, my own health grew worse, and with each of the four children I bore, I found myself increasingly unable to function through my chronic pain and illness, along with an ankle injury that left me unable to do much of what I used to love. As my son's disorder continued to intensify, confusion and hurt began to grow in our other children, and our marriage began to suffer under the weight of it all. When we were at our lowest point, convinced that we couldn't endure anything else, my husband lost half of his income and we were forced to sell our dream home and downsize to a smaller rental home as medical expenses continued to pile up. Our family was in crisis. We were broken and wondering where God was and what he was doing. I found myself battling despair, hopelessness, and deep questions of faith that I had never had to face before.

In 2015 we were referred to a group of doctors who diagnosed me with Lyme disease. It wasn't long before this led to testing which revealed that the increasing illness in all four of our children, as well as my husband, were the result of Lyme disease being passed on from me. While we have clarity on one of the enemies we are fighting in our home, now we have a new battle before us: costly, time-consuming treatments, with continued confusion and no guaranteed certainty of complete healing. And then there is the loneliness—because my son's Lyme disease causes him to exhibit aggressive behavior, it keeps us from many normal parenting activities and leaves us feeling weary and broken by its multi-layered effects.

Every day is still a day of uncertainty as I endure the ups and downs of my son's challenges, all four children's Lyme disease, and my own chronic pain and fatigue. It is a moment-by-moment choice to press on through the trenches or give way to the crushing burden of my surrounding circumstances.

Hope in Your Hurts

Suffering is an awful thing. In our hurt, we react in many ways: trying to hide ourselves from it, raging against it, melting down, attempting to numb the pain, even steeling our resolve to beat it. But there's more to suffering than merely getting through it with gritted teeth. Affliction invites us to wrestle with what God might be doing, to seek him right

now in the midst of the pain. The wrestling doesn't come easily—but it does bring hope.

So we wrote this book for you, to point you to hope, because there's more to our suffering than meets the eye. This book is about the God who offers hope, even joy, in suffering. It's a journey through 2 Corinthians 4 and 5, where we see that God wants to give us hope not just beyond our hurts but in our hurts; that he wants us to see how he is able to work in and through suffering and ultimately give us himself.

If you are a Christian then—whether you feel it or not—these things are true of you and for you. If you are not, then they could be. Please remember as you read through that hope and joy in suffering are found in giving your life over to Jesus, to walk with him as your ruler and trust him as your rescuer.

You can read your way through the whole book, or go in any order; read one chapter a day when you have a moment, or one per week (though occasionally chapters refer to one another, we wrote them to work well in any order); go through it with a friend, a group, or by yourself; engage with the reflection questions at the end of each chapter and spend time in prayer; and write down your thoughts, insights, questions and prayers on the journaling pages. You can also use the other resources we've created for you at: thegoodbook.com/hopewhenhurts.

We praise God for how he has kindly allowed us to write this book, and we praise him that you are reading it. Our deep prayer is that you would be drawn closer to the suffering Savior, Jesus, who is also the risen, death-defeating Lord, able to give the most enduring hope there is.

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.

(2 Corinthians 1 v 3-4)

With love,

Kristen Sarah

CHAPTER ONE



*The Gospel Makes
the Difference*



“God, who said, ‘Let light shine out of darkness,’
has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge
of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ”

2 CORINTHIANS 4 V 6

To suffer well, you will need the gospel. Most likely you are reading this book because you or someone you care about is suffering, and you want to know how to get through it. You may be tired of self-help tactics, which never seem to work. You may well be wrestling with the hard questions of faith. You are fighting for joy in the pain, feeling confused about why God (if he is even there) would allow these trials to touch you.

You need a reminder of what is true, as you fight doubt and the depths of despair.

You want to know what it looks like to suffer well. Rest assured, friend—Sarah and I are with you. That is why we wrote this book.

As I have suffered over the last several years, these questions and many others have brought me to my knees (metaphorically-speaking—knee pain doesn't allow me to kneel). Suffering has made me desperate for truth, comfort, and peace. Through the searching and with God's help, I am grasping more and more that the gospel speaks into every aspect of my suffering, giving me hope and purpose.

This has come through a growing understanding of the gospel, and how it impacts every nook and cranny of life, from the mundane

struggles to the most devastating of tragedies, as well as in the daily smiles and the greatest joys. As I write this, I'm laying on our couch, pain throbbing through my right leg. I'm not even sure how I managed this one—I hurt often for inexplicable reasons—but I'm acutely aware of pain's realness, and how it exposes my need.

And I need something to meet my need, something beyond meds and appointments and good luck. What I need, and you need, is the truth about Jesus Christ, because our suffering only makes any sense and we only retain any hope when we look at ourselves through a gospel lens.

Apart from the gospel, affliction is a dead end. It is the glass half-empty or worse. Suffering, when removed from a foundation of biblical truth, becomes an obstacle to "get through" at its best and, at its worst, brings us to a place of hopelessness and despair. Maybe that's where you are right now.

But the gospel offers hope, clarity, and joy in times that otherwise would be hopeless, confusing, and crushing. It sounds so simple! But there's a catch: to know this hope, clarity, and joy in suffering, we must know the true gospel. To soak in the light of it, we must think through the great salvation story of the Bible and preach it to ourselves on a daily basis. We need the gospel to suffer well, to bring God glory and to find our joy in him during the darkest of times.

Do you know the true gospel? If we sat down for coffee right now, would you be able to put it into words? And would those words make a practical difference in your every day life?

If your answer is no, you've no reason to worry! God's word provides all that we need for life and godliness, and here is what it says:

The gospel is the stunning reality of what Jesus Christ has done for sinners—through his perfect life, his death on the cross, his death-defeating resurrection, and his heavenly ascension—to give us eternal life with him, out of his undeserved kindness. And our part is simply to say "yes" to his rescue and his rule.

The gospel is anything but normal; it is miraculous. We did nothing to deserve it; through it, we are given far more than we deserve.

In 2 Corinthians 4 v 3-6, the apostle Paul, the great missionary and church-planter, uses the metaphors of light and darkness to explain what Christ has done for us:

And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. For what we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

Light shining out of darkness—if you are a Christian, that's what happened when you believed! Jesus, the light of the world, caused his light and truth to dawn upon your heart, removing the veil and fog of unbelief that once blinded you to him. He gave the light; he did the shining, and you found you could see God for who he truly is and love the gospel for what it really is. And if you are reading this and you are not a Christian, I'm so glad and grateful you have picked this book up; this light is what you need to shine upon your heart.

So let's use Paul's explanation to discover what the gospel is and how the gospel enables us to suffer well:

Suffering Is a Result of Sin Entering the World

God created us to know him, display him and be like him, to honor his loving authority and to follow him; he created us to walk in his light. But we each chose our own way, under our own authority, and rebelled against him. We chose the way of sin, and cast ourselves into spiritual darkness:

Although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. (Romans 1 v 21)

Our rebellion against God is the cause of our perishing in darkness. It has made us blind to enjoying life and light in God's presence—the gospel's declaration that Jesus is the God who made us and who knows what is best for us. Our blindness means that we are unable to see God's beauty, trust God's purposes, honor his authority, and dwell near to him—forever.

And sin not only affects humanity spiritually; it has also caused physical, mental, and environmental brokenness—suffering. It's the reason I'm laid up on this couch right now.

Now, I'm not in pain because I sinned. Suffering isn't always or necessarily a direct result of our own sin, but it is a direct result of sin's entrance into the world. It was Adam and Eve's rebellion against God in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3) that ultimately caused physical and spiritual death, broken relationships, and the difficult, confusing, and tragic experiences we encounter every day.

This is, surprisingly, good news—though it may not feel like it! If suffering has no explanation—if it is merely the misalignment of some atoms, a case of bad luck in the face of a blind universe—then suffering can have no solution. But the general suffering of the human race is a consequence of the sinfulness of the human race. And the gospel is good news for sinners...



Jesus Christ Saves Suffering Sinners

The darkness of sin left us needing the light of the Savior, and so he came. Through the gospel, God has shined his light into our hearts to see our need to be rescued from the darkness of sin—and Jesus is the one who does this for us!

Paul says that Jesus is the Christ, the promised King, who came to show us the wonder and nature of his eternal kingdom. He is also “Jesus” which means “God saves.” This man took our place and took our sin, bore the darkness of hell that our sin deserves as he perished in our place, and rose again to open the way into his kingdom for those who would put their eternal trust in him. Because of Jesus, we can enjoy God's glory, light and power, rather than being scared of it, because in

Jesus we discover that there is a divine King against whom we have sinned—but we also find that the same King has died to forgive us.

So Jesus suffered to free our souls from eternal suffering. If God has opened your eyes to see your sin, and if you have trusted in Christ to save you from it, then sin no longer has the final word over the eternal destination of your soul—Jesus does. He became your suffering servant to keep you from perishing in sin. Jesus suffered death and was forsaken by his Father on the cross so that your death would become a gateway to eternal life.

Not only this, but Jesus suffered to comfort our hearts in our present sufferings. Through him, you are a child of God. You have a God who is near to you in your trials. You have a God who is at work to transform you into the image of Jesus, and who uses all things—even suffering—for your good.



Suffering Will Come to an End

What God is doing in our souls will come to its climax when Jesus Christ returns to deal the final blow to death. Tears, mourning, and pain will be no more when he restores this creation to a new one and takes believers home to final glory (see Revelation 21 v 1-4), and the temporary reign of sin will end, as will all of its effects. “The light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” (2 Corinthians 4 v 6) will become perfectly clear to us, in all its dazzling wonder, as we finally meet our Lord and Savior face to face and worship him for eternity in the perfection of heaven.

The gospel tells you why suffering is. It tells you how suffering ends. Because of the light of Jesus Christ shining into our hearts, eternal darkness has been defeated, and our present darkness is being transformed.

We need God’s gospel to suffer well. We need it every day, and never more than when life hurts. The better we know it, and the more we remind ourselves of it, the more precious we will realize it is. Without it, suffering makes no sense (and neither will this book!)—with it, suffering is transformed. Friend, this is only the beginning of our journey together—there is much more to come!—but it is the only place where we can start, and it will undergird everything else.

Reflect

- ~ What do you hope to take away from this book as a whole? At the end of our time together, how do you hope to have changed?
- ~ Was any part of this chapter new for you? Do you struggle with any part of the gospel? If you have questions, I would encourage you to talk with a committed Christian or a pastor at a Bible-teaching church; and read through the book of Romans.
- ~ How do each of the three gospel insights on suffering speak to you in your particular trials? Take some time to think about—to meditate on—how the work of Christ speaks to your afflictions and hardships.

Pray

Heavenly Father, I am in awe of your gospel, and would like to be more so. I am a sinner in desperate need of a salvation, and you have provided me a perfect Savior in Jesus Christ. Thank you for sparing me from your just punishment in him and for drawing near to me in him. Thank you that there is a life beyond pain and without tears. Please use this book to help me in my present suffering. Amen.

For further meditation: Isaiah 53; Ephesians 1 v 3-10; Titus 2 v 11-14

