



EXPOSITION

Monthly e-Bulletin from Virginia Beach Theological Seminary



From My Window

What comes to your mind when the term “suffering” is mentioned? One thinker wrote, “Suffering is . . . a calamity without meaning.” It is true that bad things happen to good people in a fallen world ruled by the Evil One. However, Paul writes in Romans that suffering is a painful tool used by God to generate eternal qualities in our lives, such as brave endurance, genuine character, and confident hope (5:3-4). Paul also makes it clear in 8:18 that suffering is not the final word of our identity as people who live in union with Christ. He contrasts “suffering in the now age” with “the coming glory.” In other words, in this present life we will not escape harsh events which cause us to groan; yet our future, eternal glory far outweighs this present pain. Are you facing a hurtful circumstance? I encourage you to set your mind on Romans—God is at work. He is not silent!



On December 18, 1999, Scott and Chelle Osborne were married; and a few months later they moved to Virginia Beach to begin ministry preparation at VBTS. Very quickly Scott established himself as a diligent student, and their home was a model of grace. Upon graduation with his MDiv, he was installed as the new pastor at Redemption Church in Chesapeake, VA. Scott’s continual hunger for truth led him to enroll in the Master of Theology program at VBTS, and he graduated with honors in 2011. Among these visible blessings of life and ministry, the Lord chose to permit a significant tragedy in Scott’s life and in the lives of his beautiful children. This trial has since magnified the grace of God in their family’s suffering. Chelle was diagnosed with brain cancer and met her Savior on June 13, 2016. This past Spring, Scott shared his testimony with the VBTS family, and it so impacted our community that we have dedicated this month’s e-bulletin to suffering and God’s sovereign choice in Scott’s life. Thanks, Scott, for sharing with us. We will never read Psalm 88 (on back) without thinking of God’s grace in your life!



The Dark Night of the Soul (Psalm 88)

Guest Author: VBTS Alumnus Scott Osborne

We all want happy endings. We all want the storybook ending—"And they lived happily ever after." The problem is that in this life there are seldom happy endings. Most people's experience of this life is filled with darkness and tragedy, and eventually death finds us all.

At the end of 2012 my wife was diagnosed with brain cancer. After a 3.5 year battle my wife died. My "happily ever after" died a cruel death. I was broken-hearted, devastated, and confused. My four kids were left without a mother. I didn't know what to do, where to turn, or how to continue. Then God brought Psalm 88 into my life.

Psalm 88 is unique. It is the only lament psalm that doesn't end with praise. It ends in darkness. Literally, the last word in Hebrew is "darkness." In many ways my soul resonated with the psalmist's darkness. The Spirit then showed me the following two realities about the dark night of my soul.

First, it is emotionally healthy to be real with God. I have often heard that it is not spiritual to tell God how you really feel. However, this Psalm seems to betray these realities. As Americans we often want to whitewash everything and to rely on platitudes to cover our deep pain. Sometimes there is just no covering up the pain. If you are tired of faking it, then this psalm is for you. It is filled with honesty and hard words. The psalmist makes no excuses for God. So wrestle with God, he can handle it! He is stronger than you! Get real with God, he can deal with it! His love will eventually quiet your soul.

Second, it is affectionately freeing to see this Psalm is about Jesus. What do you do when a wave of suffering comes so powerfully that it knocks you down (v. 7)? Often we quote Romans 8:28, believing God is working for our good. However, I think there are waves that are so powerful that we begin to question even if Romans 8:28 is really true. Where does one turn when the dark night of the soul is so debilitating that even verses like Romans 8:28 are not enough? This is where I was. It was so dark that quoting familiar Christian platitudes was not enough. The Spirit moved me to keep reading, to keep going until He landed me on v. 31! Here is the singular truth that the Spirit used to preserve my faith: *If God gave me the ultimate good in the person of Jesus, then do I really think he is withholding anything else good from me?*

This is all true because this Psalm is not ultimately about me. Sure, I can relate to it in many ways, yet ultimately in this psalm are the words of Jesus. He was the one whose soul was full of troubles; he was the one who had a prayer request turned down; he is the one who ultimately bore God's wrath; he was the one who was abandoned by all his friends; and he was the one who was truly separated from God!

This means Jesus' experience changes our experience. He was the only one who went through the *real* dark night of the soul — so that we never will. He was abandoned so that we never would be. He bore God's wrath so that all we know is his love. And we are not left in darkness because he defeated all the darkness so that we are now in the light!