

**Image:** Peculiarities of language - English difficult because of idioms/colloquialisms/slang (**sentence** of slang/idioms). Time growing up when bad meant good (maybe it still does?). Bad can mean good?

**Need:** Bad things happen to us all in this life, try as we might to avoid them (even before COVID-19 - cancer, divorce, lost job - some our fault, some not). A quick read through the news these days will reveal any number of things that can or have gone wrong (virus, economy, toilet paper shortages). AND here's the thing - it's not just difficulty - even if you manage to get through this outbreak without any effect (don't get sick, pension, tp/food)...even if you manage to get through your life without any major struggle or difficulty...or, miraculously, without anything bad ever happening to you, there's the ultimate enemy waiting at the end...death. And no one escapes that. And, let's be honest, difficulty often feels like a weight bearing down on us preventing us from lifting our heads (frustration, anger, depression - affects all parts of us). But is it possible in these instances that bad can actually mean good? Is it possible that adversity and difficulty can actually be beneficial in our pursuit of joy?

**Context:** **Eccl. 5:8-ch. 7** are about perspectives. In **5:8-6:12** we get perspective on wealth: it might look good, but it won't satisfy. Prosperity is not always good. Today he is going to offer a perspective on adversity and difficulty. He's going to argue that difficulty is not always bad. He's going to offer up something that gets produced in us when we encounter bad things that is actually good.

**Preview:** So how should we feel when we go through difficult times such as these?

## I. Bad can mean good when it causes us to reflect upon all of life (1-3)

### A. Good times are deceitful and short-sighted

1. A good name is better than a good time (perfume **v. 1** sign of good times) lasts longer (1).
2. Why better? Bc death comes to all and, when it does, what will we have to show for it (**v. 2**)?
  - a) Bill eventually comes due and we move from this life to next.
  - b) Reality is good times distract us from the fact that life is short (2 - *NLT*)
    - (1) Qohelet critical of life lived in pursuit of craic (*our escapes from reality - films, hobbies - not bad in themselves but life is more than the pursuit of craic*).
      - (a) **v. 1-3:** name/ointment; death/birth; house of mourning/feasting; sorrow/laughter.
      - (b) These short term things draw our attention away from what is longer/ultimate
    - (2) Difficulty/Death has a way of focusing our att'n on brevity of life and reminding us that we are not in control (*no one is looking at the world thinking we've got it under control - COVID 19/Mohler - we are NOT in control.*) (2b)

### B. Difficulty reminds us there is more to life than meets eye (3-4) *though face is sad, heart may be glad*

1. We might be sad on outside, but something is happening on inside - heart being refined as turned again to what lasts, to what is ultimate, to what matters. That is better.
2. Shapes how we live in present (values). So death becomes an invitation to live for what matters.
  - a) Difficulty/death remind us life is short and we are not in control (*mourning - preaching at funeral vs bar*). So fool sits at funeral and thinks about his 1pm meeting. wise think about fact that their day coming soon (*Edwards*). If you're not thinking about that, you're a fool.
  - b) *YOLO* - maybe think nothing beyond grave...you sure? (*Pascal*). What if you're wrong?

(*Bad can mean good when it causes us to stop and reflect on all of lie - BECAUSE that produces wisdom*)

## II. Difficulty builds wisdom (ability to live this life with the end in view) (4-10)

### A. Difficulty better teacher than good times. Death doesn't own XC followers, but can teach us (*Lewis*).

1. Better. Heart of wise looks at life backward, from the end (4).
  - a) It is better to be reminded of the end than to laugh with fools (5) (**Prov. 17:10**)
  - b) Fools words don't last (thorns in a fire...noise but no heat - useless) (6). (*you know this*)  
Amusement disappears like kindling. film ends, holiday is over, newness of job wears off.
2. Wisdom is a corrective. Not ultimate, God is. It's not foolproof, but it's better (7). Qohelet's measured response. We don't idolise wisdom but better than folly that focuses only on present

### B. Wisdom keeps us focused on the God of the end (8-10) (**Ps. 90:12**)

1. The end may not be as loud as the beginning but it's more important; so it's better to be calm and take the long view of things (8) (*marathon/marraige*).
2. Not to be angry or frustrated, but patient. In context **v. 9** is anger directed at God. Cynicism kills.
3. Wisdom begins with belief God in control. It keeps us looking forward (10).

*(Bad can mean good when it builds in us forward looking wisdom. So how should we feel when we go through bad times? What is real and true even in the midst of difficulty?)*

### III. We can and must rest secure in the hands of a God who is at work in our difficulty. GOD DOESN'T REST IN OUR DIFFICULTY SO THAT WE CAN.

#### A. Trials have a beneficial purpose in God's hands (*section in Tom Nelson*)

1. Where we see this in Scripture - how God uses difficulty (**Rom. 5; 1 Pet. 1; Jas. 1**).
2. **(11-12)** Wisdom through difficulty brings life (for our good). Now don't read v. **11-12** and think it means you won't get the virus or that nothing bad will happen to you (it doesn't - never promised that). If wisdom is built through difficulty it has to always think in ultimate terms.
  - a) Protects our hearts by helping us keep our eyes on the prize - what is ultimate (**Heb. 12:1-3**)
  - b) Preserves what really is life - teaching us limitations of life. The wise are the happiest people because they value what matters most and know that they actually control very little.

#### B. We must find our security in knowing that God is at work, even if we can't figure it out. Wisdom gives way to trust and THEN joy. More next week, but v. **13-14** serve as kind of transitional thought calling us to appreciate that wisdom doesn't give all the answers (we want a straight path, but sometimes God's plan curves - not morally crooked, He's good). God uses both good and bad in this world to accomplish His purpose, and we - like Job - can't connect the dots (read **Job 42** - even if God pulled back the veil we couldn't understand it). Wisdom gives way to trust.

1. That's where we feel secure knowing that God's purposes are never thwarted (**Rom. 8:28-32**)
2. And that's where we find rest in His hand (shadow of His wings - **Ps 57:1**)

**Conc:** When we look above what we see around us we find a good and sovereign God is able to make good even out of bad, using it to accomplish His purpose in us. We see that made plain as we consider that the best thing that ever happened in the world came about through the worst thing that ever happened - an Innocent man was crucified so that we, the guilty, might have life everlasting. And it all happened in accordance with God's plan (**John 11:49-52; Acts 2:36**). God the Father took the life of Jesus so that you could have life through faith in Him (**2 Cor 5:21**). So we can rest secure in the knowledge that nothing happens outside of God's control and that God is using all things - even the bad - for our good and His glory. This leads us into next week...How do we carry on when we become acutely aware that we live in a world where we don't have all the answers?

**Image:** Dustin Shramek

Great day to take stock...not of vegetables or toilet paper, but of your heart. Where do you stand? Are you standing in the strong hand of your loving Heavenly Father, trusting in Jesus's blood spilled for you, and knowing that life is yours even now through faith in Him? Our times may go from bad to worse in this life, but nothing can snatch those whose confidence is in Jesus out of His hand.

Maybe you're standing on the precipice of eternal separation, perhaps foolishly believing that it will all be grand? Are you gambling your eternity? If that's you, maybe today would be the day you would move from death to life through faith in Jesus. Listen to how Peter ends his sermon in Acts 2. You can trust in Jesus today. READ **Acts 2:37-38** - REPENT, turn from whatever you're trusting in - ingenuity, morality, merit, science (none are adequate) - TURN and place all your trust; all of your hope for eternity in Jesus

To be continued next week...

***Idioms*** - I feel like I've been stabbed in the back as I didn't expect this to cost an arm and a leg. I'm going to hit the hay and hope that tomorrow I can kill two birds with one stone and that this will end up being a piece of cake.

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***Eccl 7:2*** NLT - Better to spend your time at funerals than at parties. After all, everyone dies—so the living should take this to heart.

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***COVID - MOHLER*** - Now all of a sudden we're talking about this tiny little infectious agent being a world changer. How did that happen? We're supposed to be living in an age of radical modern advances. We are living in the age of modern medicine and yet here is this little organism that is turning the world upside down. We're also looking at an organism that despite all of modern science and modern medicine is not yet completely understood.

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***Edwards - Mohler*** - We human beings are always closer than we would like to think to something that will kill us. This point was made emphatically by one of the greatest preachers in American history Jonathan Edwards in his famous sermon entitled "Sinners in the Hand of an Angry God." He based that sermon upon Deuteronomy 32:35, "Their foot shall slide in due time."

Edwards preached that sermon on July the eighth of 1741 in Enfield, Massachusetts. Here's what he said, "It is no security to wicked men for one moment that there are no visible means of death at hand. It is no security to a natural man that he is now in health and that he does not see which way he should immediately go out of the world by any accident and that there is no visible danger in any respect in his circumstances. The manifold and continual experience of the world in all ages shows that this is no evidence that a man is not on the very brink of eternity and that the next step will not be into another world. The unseen, unthought ways and means a person's going suddenly out of the world are actually innumerable and inconceivable. Unconverted men walk over the pit of hell on a rotten covering. And there are innumerable places in this covering so weak that they will not bear their weight and these places are not seen. The arrows of death fly unseen at noon day. The sharpest sight cannot discern them. God has so many different unsearchable ways of taking wicked men out of the world and sending them to hell, that there is nothing to make it appear that God had need to be at the expense of a miracle or go out of the ordinary course of his providence to destroy any wicked man at any moment. All the means that there are of sinners going out of the world are so in God's hands and so

universally and absolutely subject to his power and determination that it does not depend at all the less on the mere will of God where the sinners shall at any moment go to hell then if means we're never made use of or at all concerned in the case."

***PARAPHRASE:*** The fact that there are no visible signs of death at hand is no security to wicked men. It is no security to a natural man, that he is now in health, and that he does not foresee any accident, and that there is no visible danger in his circumstances. **The experience of the world in all ages, demonstrates here that a man is on the brink of eternity, that his next step could be into another world. The unseen, unthought-of ways in which people go suddenly out of the world are innumerable and inconceivable. Unconverted men walk over the pit of hell on a rotten covering, and there are innumerable places in this covering so weak that they will not bear their weight, and these places are not seen. The arrows of death fly unseen at noon-day; the sharpest sight cannot discern them.** God has so many different unsearchable ways of taking wicked men out of the world and sending them to hell, that there is no reason to think that He needs a miracle, or needs to do anything out of the ordinary to destroy any wicked man, at any moment. All the means that there are of sinners going out of the world, are in God's hands, at his disposal so that it is only the will of God whether sinners at any moment go to hell, than if means were never made use of, or at all concerned in the case.

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***Pascal's Wager*** - seventeenth-century French [philosopher](#), [mathematician](#) and [physicist](#), [Blaise Pascal](#) (1623–1662).<sup>[1]</sup> It posits that humans bet with their lives that God either [exists](#) or does not. Pascal argues that a rational person should live as though God exists and seek to believe in God. If God does not actually exist, such a person will have only a finite loss (some pleasures, luxury, etc.), whereas he stands to receive infinite gains (as represented by eternity in [Heaven](#)) and avoid infinite losses (eternity in [Hell](#)). The original wager was set out in section 233 of Pascal's posthumously published [Pensées](#) ("Thoughts"). These previously unpublished notes were assembled to form an incomplete [treatise](#) on [Christian apologetics](#).

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**Lewis** - In his book *The Problem of Pain*, C. S. Lewis observes that “God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pains: it is His megaphone to rouse a deaf world.” Suffering often helps us to redirect our focus. It shifts our thinking from immediate circumstances so we can listen to God concerning His work in our lives. Life as usual is replaced by a spiritual schoolroom.

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**Proverbs 17:10** - (NET) A rebuke makes a greater impression on a discerning person than a hundred blows on a fool.

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**Psalms 90:12** - (NLT) Teach us to realize the brevity of life, so that we may grow in wisdom.

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**John 16:33** In this world you will have trouble but Take heart I have overcome the world

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**Jas. 1:2-4; 12** - Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love him.

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**Rom. 5:3-5** - Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame, because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.

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**1 Peter 1:6-7** - In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

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**Hebrews 12:1-2** - let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that

was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.

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**Rom. 8:28-32** - And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.

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**Psalms 57:1** - Be merciful to me, O God, be merciful to me, for in you my soul takes refuge; in the shadow of your wings I will take refuge, till the storms of destruction pass by.

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**John 11:49-52** - But Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, said, “You know nothing at all. Nor do you understand it is better for you that one man should die for the people, not that the whole nation should perish.” He did not say this of his own accord, but being high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus would die for the nation, and not for the nation only, but also to gather into one the children of God who are scattered abroad.

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**Acts 2:36** - Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified.”

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**2 Cor 5:21** - For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

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**Dustin Shramek, Suffering and the Sovereignty of God** - Experiencing grief and pain is like falling off a cliff. Everything has been turned upside down, and we are no longer in control. As we fall, we see one and only one tree that is growing out from the rock face. So we grab hold of it and cling to it with all our might. This tree is our holy God. He alone can keep us from falling headfirst to our doom. There simply aren't any other trees to grab. So we cling to this tree (the holy God) with all our might.

But what we didn't realize is that when we fell and grabbed the tree our arm actually became entangled in the branches, so that in reality, the tree is holding us. We hold on to keep from falling, but what we don't realize is that we can't fall because the tree has us. We are safe. God, in his holiness, is keeping us and showing mercy to us. We may not be aware of it, but it is true. He is with us even in the deepest and darkest pit.”





	God Does Exist	God Doesn't Exist
I Do Believe	I Go To Heaven	Nothing Happens
I Don't Believe	I Go To Hell	Nothing Happens

Pascal's Wager

**Tada alternative ending** - When asked in another article to recount how she has been able to make it for 50 years, here's what she said...

It has everything to do with God and his grace—not just grace over the long haul, but grace in tiny moments, like breathing in and out, like stepping stones leading you from one experience to the next. The beauty of such grace is that it eclipses the suffering until one July morning, you look back and see five decades of God working in a mighty way.

Grace softens the edges of past pains, helping to highlight the eternal. What you are left with is peace that's profound, joy that's unshakable, faith that's ironclad.

It's the hard, but beautiful, stuff of which God makes 50 years of your life. Like . . . when did *that* happen? I cannot say, but I sure love Jesus for it.

**Tada** - The core of God's plan is to rescue me from sin and self, and to keep rescuing me. The apostle Paul calls it "the gospel . . . by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you" (1 Cor. 15:1–2). I'm in constant need of saving. My displaced hip and scoliosis are sheep dogs that constantly snap at my heels, driving me down the road to Calvary, where I die to the sins Jesus died for. Sure, I have a long way to go before I am whom God destined me to be in glory, but thankfully my paralysis keeps pushing me to "strive to reach for that heavenly prize" (Phil. 3:14).

**Tada** - God uses suffering to purge sin from our lives, strengthen our commitment to Him, force us to depend on grace, bind us together with other believers, produce discernment, foster sensitivity, discipline our minds, spend our time wisely, stretch our hope, cause us to know Christ better, make us long for truth, lead us to repentance of sin, teach us to give thanks in time of sorrow, increase faith, and strengthen character.

**Tada** - Real satisfaction comes not in understanding God's motives, but in understanding His character, in trusting in His promises, and in leaning on Him and resting in Him as the Sovereign who knows what He is doing and does all things well.

Swindoll - If we truly believe God is sovereign we must believe that the pain is just as important as the pleasure.

CS Lewis - Pain insists upon being attended to. God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pain: it is His megaphone to rouse a deaf world.

<https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/god-shouts-to-us-in-our-pain>

<http://www.christianitytoday.com/women/2017/july/joni-eareckson-tada-fifty-years-wheelchair-walk-jesus.html>

<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/reflections-on-50th-anniversary-of-my-diving-accident>

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Joni\\_Eareckson\\_Tada](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Joni_Eareckson_Tada)

<http://joniarecksontadastory.com/jonis-story-page-1/>





God is more concerned with conforming me to the likeness of His Son than leaving me in my comfort zones. God is more interested in inward qualities than outward circumstances - things like refining my faith, humbling my heart, cleaning up my thought life and strengthening my character.

— *Joni Eareckson Tada* —

**AZ QUOTES**

## Affliction as the Training Camp of Holiness

Therefore, preach to your people a theology of suffering that places all our trials in the hands and will of a loving Father. [Hebrews 12](#) teaches us to view our sorrows, even the persecutions of wicked men, as part of God's fatherly discipline: "Ye have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin. And ye have forgotten the exhortation which speaketh unto you as unto children, My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him: for whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth" ([Heb. 12:4–6](#)). Why would a loving God discipline his children so severely? He does it so "that we might be partakers of his holiness," for without that holiness, "no man shall see the Lord" ([Heb 12:10, 14](#)). He is drawing us into his fatherly presence by engraving his image upon us, even through the strokes of a rod.

Teach your congregation to view their sufferings as their training for holiness. Encourage them to submit to the rod of their Father, trusting in his goodness and love revealed at the cross ([Rom. 8:32](#)). Show them the many benefits of submitting to God's sanctifying trials with meekness. Thomas Brooks says that Christians should be "mute" or quiet under the smiting of God's rod so that they can (1) learn from God's correction and repent of sin, (2) distinguish themselves from the world, which murmurs against and curses God, (3) become like Christ, who suffered quietly as a lamb led to slaughter, (4) escape the curse of a fretful spirit, which is a thousand times worse than any outward affliction, (5) enjoy the comfort of inward peace, (6) avoid a futile striving against almighty God, (7) frustrate Satan's design to tempt them to blaspheme God, and (8) follow in the footsteps of other saints who patiently endured suffering before us.<sup>2</sup> - Joel Beeke

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## 6 Pillars of a Christian View on Suffering

June 2, 2013

Ever since the ancient revolt, suffering has been woven, with perplexity and pain, into the fabric of human experience. We all live and move and have our being amid Eden's wreckage. Affliction and evil—universal as they are real—haunt us, stalk us, plague us.

In a recent lecture delivered at Houston's [Lanier Theological Library](#) titled "Going Beyond Clichés: Christian Reflection on Suffering and Evil", Don Carson proposes six pillars to support a Christian worldview for stability through suffering. "A Christian worldview rests on huge, biblically established, theological frameworks—all of which have to be accepted all of the time," the research professor of New Testament at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School and author of [How Long, O Lord?: Reflections on Suffering and Evil](#) explains. "And this massive structure is stable and comprehensive enough to give you a great deal of stability when you go through your darkest hours." His proposed pillars aren't cute musings, in other words, but crucial bulwarks.

After differentiating "natural" evil (e.g., tornados), "malicious" evil (e.g., sexual assault), and "accidental" evil (e.g., a bridge collapse)—and observing that this isn't a uniquely Christian challenge ("No matter your worldview, you must face the reality of suffering and evil")—Carson proceeds to reveal the six pillars.

### 1. Insights from the beginning of the Bible's storyline.

The scriptural narrative opens with God crafting a world of breathtaking beauty and unfathomable goodness. Paradise pulsates with order, harmony, wholeness, and life. But this garden scene is short-lived. Indeed, in contrast to other worldviews such as Hinduism and dualism, the Bible insists we are now dwelling in a [Genesis 3](#) world marked by sin, suffering, death, and decay. Concerning Jesus' reflection on suffering in [Luke 13](#), Carson observes: "What Jesus seems to presuppose is that all the sufferings of the world—whether caused by malice [as in [Luke 13:1–3](#)] or by accident [as in [Luke 13:4–5](#)]<sup>1</sup>—are not peculiar examples of judgment falling on the distinctively evil, but rather examples of the bare, stark fact that we are all under sentence of death."

### 2. Insights from the end of the Bible's storyline.

The believer's ultimate hope is that the created order—now so disordered by the effects of sin—will one day be set right ([Rom. 8:18–25](#)). In Christ the King, everything sad will become gloriously untrue. Properly understanding and anticipating the story's end, then, helps us to eschew a naïve (and ultimately crushing) utopianism now. As Carson reminds us, “We have just come through the bloodiest century in human history. This is a damned world. Human life has never been, is not, and will never be ‘perfectable-so-long-as-we-get-our-politics-right.’”

### **3. Insights from the place of innocent suffering.**

“[Job 42](#) is to the rest of Job what [Revelation 21–22](#) is to the rest of Revelation,” Carson observes. “Not only is justice done, it's also *seen* to be done.”

Until the curtain drops, however, we live in “all kinds of ambiguities where we do not know the mind of God—and we dare not act as if God owes us detailed explanations.” There are times when the godliest thing we can do is say with Job, “Though he slay me, yet will I trust him” ([Job 13:15](#)). Indeed, Carson suggests, “God wants our trust [even] more than he wants our understanding.”

### **4. Insights from the mystery of providence.**

Here Carson sketches a brief defense of compatibilism in which he demonstrates two scriptural tensions: (1) God is absolutely sovereign, but his sovereignty never functions to mitigate human responsibility, and (2) men and women are morally responsible creatures, but their moral responsibility never makes God absolutely contingent.

### **5. Insights from the centrality of the incarnation and the cross.**

God was not blindsided by Calvary ([Acts 2:23; 4:27–28](#)). In fact, because of his supreme sovereignty, Christians can proclaim that the cross was a throne. With mystery and glory, the bleeding Nazarene reigned from where he hung. Christianity is uniquely comforting because only the Christian God plunged into the suffering we experience. As Edward Shillito once wrote in a poem titled “Jesus of the Scars”: “But to our wounds only God's wounds can speak / And not a god has wounds, but Thou alone.”

### **6. Insights from taking up our cross (learning from the persecuted global church).**

Though we often think of suffering primarily in terms of “cancer or old age or poverty or war,” Carson notes, the New Testament texts that most commonly speak of suffering have to do with *Christian* suffering —“and they are remarkable” (see, for example, [Acts 5:40–42; Rom. 8:17; Phil. 1:29; 3:10; 1 Pet. 2:20–23](#)). As he observes, “There have been more Christian conversions since 1800 than in the previous 1,800 years combined, and there have been more Christian *martyrs* since 1800 than in the previous 1,800 years combined. And to this you have been called [[1 Pet. 2:21](#)].”

A robust theology of suffering is necessary but not sufficient, Carson insists, for at least two additional attitudes characterize mature Christians: (1) they admit their guilt before God and cry to him for renewal and revival (see, for example, [Neh. 8–9](#)), and (2) they are quick to talk about the sheer goodness of God.

To be sure, Carson's framework is *not* necessarily the most helpful thing to offer someone first entering the throes of terrible suffering. “You've just been diagnosed with Stage 4 Melanoma; do you want this lecture?” he asks. Of course not—and you shouldn't. The importance of relational sensitivity and tangible compassion in the midst of crisis cannot be overestimated. Moreover, when the immediate needs are concrete (e.g., water, security, shelter), God's people should be quick to respond in love.

Every believer, Carson concludes, would do well to ponder these six pillars prophylactically—*before* the evil days come. Only then will we be best positioned to face the complexities of suffering with stability, humility, compassion, and joy.