

When God Doesn't Heal

"Physical healing is good," Joni Eareckson Tada says, "But if we stop there, we will have missed out on God's best for us." Joni dispensed with the superficial healing narrative decades ago. Paralyzed in a diving accident, Joni was forced to trust a God who doesn't always heal, who doesn't always prevent or alleviate our suffering. Joni describes her response to learning she now has breast cancer:

"I don't fall apart emotionally. There's a lump. Wow, okay, let's get this taken care of. I broke my neck. Yikes. What is this going to mean? Okay, let's buckle down and move forward. I'm the kind of person who cannot allow those emotions to go down the grim path of despair. It's too deep of a miry pit. I'd rather face life head-on and with full force and take things as they come, learn from those things, and move forward."

To hear some Christians tell it, when you trust God—really trust him—you can expect to be healed. While we may deny that we are "health and wealth," in truth that is how we often live. Subtly, deep in our hearts, we think that if we believe enough, pray enough, or do enough, the sufferings of this world will hit "the other guy." They are for other people, we think, or hope.

But sometimes a black cloud of doubt casts a shadow over this assumption. A friend, a loved one contracts cancer or is severely injured in an auto accident. A daughter from a "good Christian home" overdoses on drugs. Where are our assumptions then? Where is our faith? More importantly, where is our God?

"How can a good God allow suffering?" is a classic question and one that has haunted thoughtful people, Christian and non-Christian, for millennia. Yet Joni points out that this question misses a key point: "This earth is wired to be difficult." The earth is under a curse. Suffering is imprinted on the universe's DNA. see Romans 8:18-25

Joni Tada says: "If God being good means he has to get rid of sin, it means he would have to get rid of sinners. God is a God of great generosity and great mercy . . . He's not closing the curtain on suffering yet." Why? Because God is giving space for people to repent. *"By the same word the present heavens and earth are reserved for fire, being kept for the day of judgment and destruction of the ungodly. But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day. The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance"* 2 Peter 3:7-10.

Christians have hope in the midst of suffering. Read 1 Thessalonians 5:16–18. Paul is writing to a church that is undergoing severe persecution from a pagan culture. He does not advocate taking legal action, or organizing self-defense courses, or running and hiding. Instead, he advocates attitudes and actions that reflect a higher reality. In our suffering what reality are we reflecting?

[This is based on an interview with Joni as reported in Christianity Today]