

# Trusting God in Adversity



# Introduction

As millions of people through the ages have done, we began a significant journey, pushing through every obstacle in our attempt to discover soul-satisfying answers to one of the great mysteries of life and find clear, if not difficult, insights into the question of why there is suffering in the world. Perhaps, more honestly, we are extremely concerned about why *we* suffer and anxiously wonder what might be waiting for us around the corner. Since God is the self-revealing and omniscient Lord of the universe, we cry out to Him in the darkness, sometimes with anger and almost always with some confusion, longing to hear the soothing and comforting voice of Abba – the voice of the only One who could ever provide answers that conform to “true truth”



# Introduction

(Francis Schaeffer) and the “really real” (James Sire). After C.S. Lewis’ beloved wife, Joy, died, he was raw with agony and penned these words: “Go to Him when your need is desperate, when all other help is vain, and what do you find? A door slammed in your face, and a sound of bolting and double bolting on the inside. After that, silence. You may as well turn away. The longer you wait, the more emphatic the silence will become.” For reasons mostly unknown to us, our experience, like Lewis’, tells us that God sometimes remains hidden and silent as we weep. And the more we weep, the more difficult to discover God’s purposes for us in suffering. “You can’t see anything properly,” Lewis observed, “while your eyes are blurred with tears.”



# Introduction

Now, while we are being forthright, could there be any doubt that one of our great goals in life is to avoid adversity in all of its forms? One of our deepest longings (is it not?) is to live life to the fullest without pain, deprivation, alienation, loss, sickness, bankruptcy, loneliness, betrayal, depression, or any other dreaded state of existence. But what if Dan Allender is right? God “draws us to the extreme edge of life,” he maintains, “where we cannot live by careful, well-planned control. This is where the desert begins. It is where darkness draws us to a realm of desperation and dependence. It is the place where trust can grow. God’s passion is to rig the world so that we are compelled to deal with whatever blocks us from being like His glorious Son.”



# Introduction

What if, in other words, we have been looking so long for a rational answer to suffering and for genuine relief that rarely seems to come, that we have missed the essential meaning of it altogether?

Psychologist Larry Crabb insists this is the case: “In our struggle to handle the pain of shattered dreams, one question is rarely talked about with honesty. We wrestle with the demons of self-pity and pitying friends, with the practical consequences of tragedies that change our lives, but one question tends to be pushed to the side, to be placed off-limits as we devote our energies to handling pain and not being defeated by it. The question is this: *What do we do with how we’re feeling toward God?*”

# Introduction

The previous ten weeks have not been in vain. We have searched the Scriptures so that we might think analogically (think God's thoughts after Him) and embrace all that He has revealed about the place of suffering in this broken world. In our moments together, we have acknowledged the reality of suffering, considered the problem of evil, asked whether God is really in control and whether all things really do work together for good to those who love God, noted the extent of God's providence, considered whether God causes or permits things to happen, learned to ask for wisdom in the midst of our trials, and embraced the biblical way out of paralyzing regret. The next step on our journey is to consider whether or not our hope is in God alone.



# Clues To Where We Are Going

- “Shattered dreams are a prelude to joy” (Larry Crabb).
- “Suffering fashions us into a ‘holy and blameless’ image of Christ” (Joni Eareckson Tada).
- “Somewhere along the line I realized I would have to change my idea of what the ‘good life’ meant and promised. The old definition died on a lonely highway in rural Idaho back in 1991” (Jerry Sittser).
- “When God encounters us with loneliness, silence, and struggle, He does so because He has an unimaginable pleasure for us: *in our suffering He reveals His goodness*. He wants us to revel in His glorious love” (Dan Allender).



# Clues To Where We Are Going

- “There is no tale ever told that men would rather find was true” (J.R.R. Tolkien).
- “From heaven, the most miserable earthly life will look like one bad night in an inconvenient hotel” (St. Teresa).
- “He came. He entered space and time and suffering. He came, like a lover. Love seeks above all intimacy, presence, togetherness. Not happiness....He came. That is the salient fact, the towering truth, that alone keeps us from putting a bullet through our heads. He came. Job is satisfied even though the God who came gave him absolutely no answers at all to his thousand tortured questions” (Peter Kreeft).



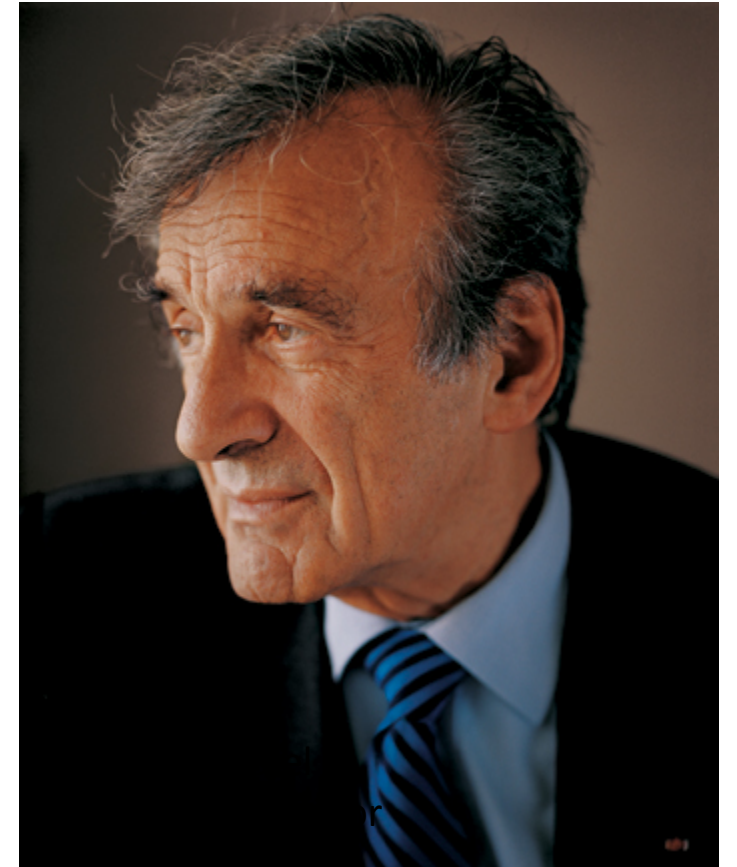
# Let's Begin With Job's Lament

“Why did you bring me out from the womb? Would that I had died before any eye had seen me and were as though I had not been, carried from the womb to the grave. Are not my days few? Then cease, and leave me alone, that I may find a little cheer before I go – and I shall not return – to the land of darkness and deep shadow, the land of gloom like thick darkness, like deep shadow without any order, where light is as thick darkness” (Job 10:18-22).

# The First Night At Auschwitz

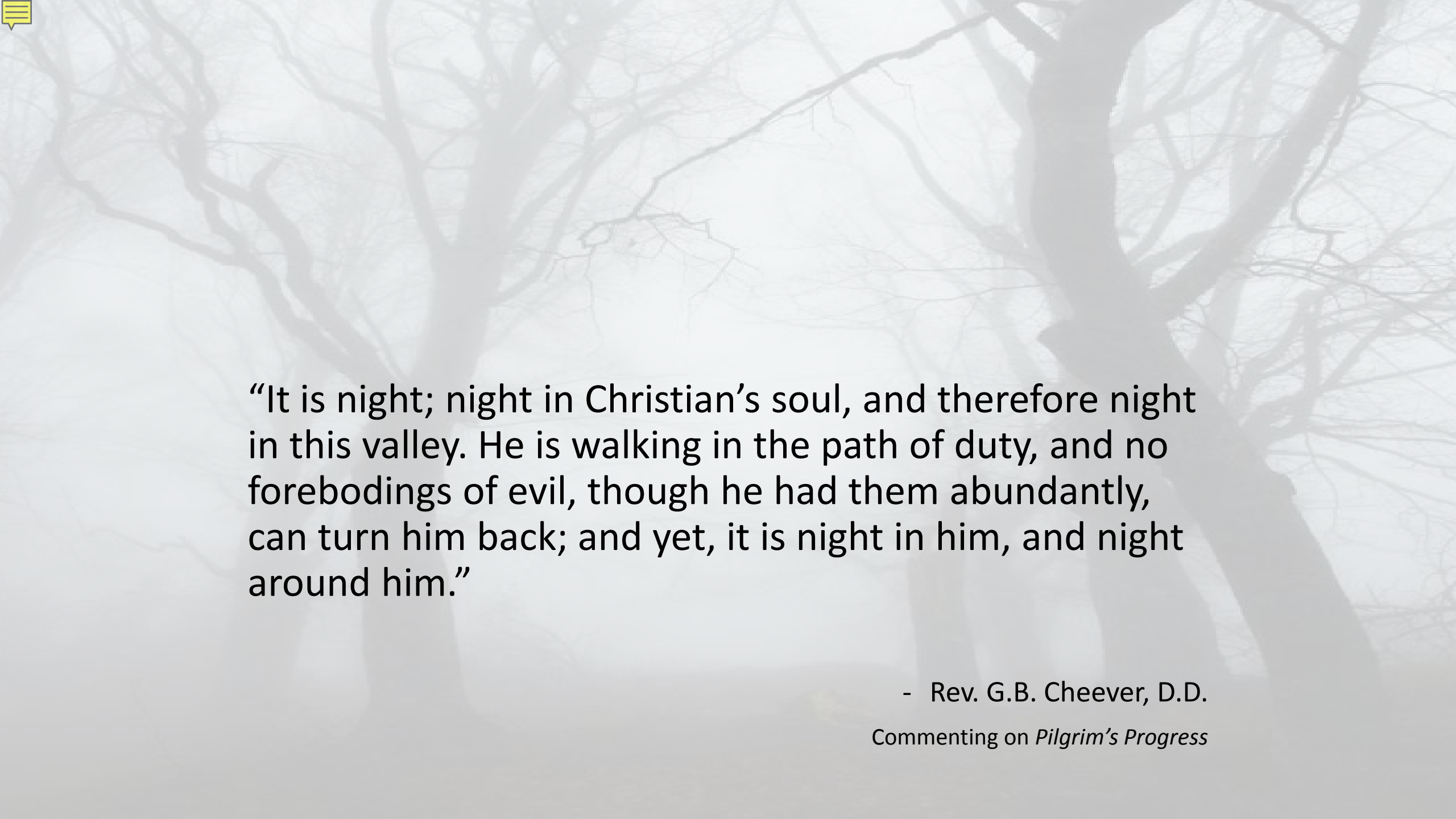
“Never shall I forget that night, the first night in camp, which has turned my life into one long night, seven times cursed and seven times sealed. Never shall I forget that smoke. Never shall I forget the little faces of the children, whose bodies I saw turned into wreaths of smoke beneath a silent blue sky.”

- Elie Wiesel, *Night*



**Elie Wiesel**

1928-2016



“It is night; night in Christian’s soul, and therefore night in this valley. He is walking in the path of duty, and no forebodings of evil, though he had them abundantly, can turn him back; and yet, it is night in him, and night around him.”

- Rev. G.B. Cheever, D.D.

Commenting on *Pilgrim’s Progress*



# Becky, Douglas Groothuis' Wife

Dr. Groothuis is Professor of Philosophy at Denver Theological Seminary. Several years ago, his wife Becky was diagnosed with primary progressive aphasia, a form of dementia. She can no longer find the words to say that she wants to say. This ravaging disease has wreaked havoc on their lives. In his newest book, *Walking Through Twilight*, he writes, "I learned depths of sorrow and distress I had never known before....Little did I know how much psychological agony a human soul could bear....God was now making me an expert in suffering. I wish he had picked someone else. But as a philosopher I must ponder the meaning of suffering, as I am attempting to do in this little book, the one I never wanted to write."

# The Impact Of Darkness

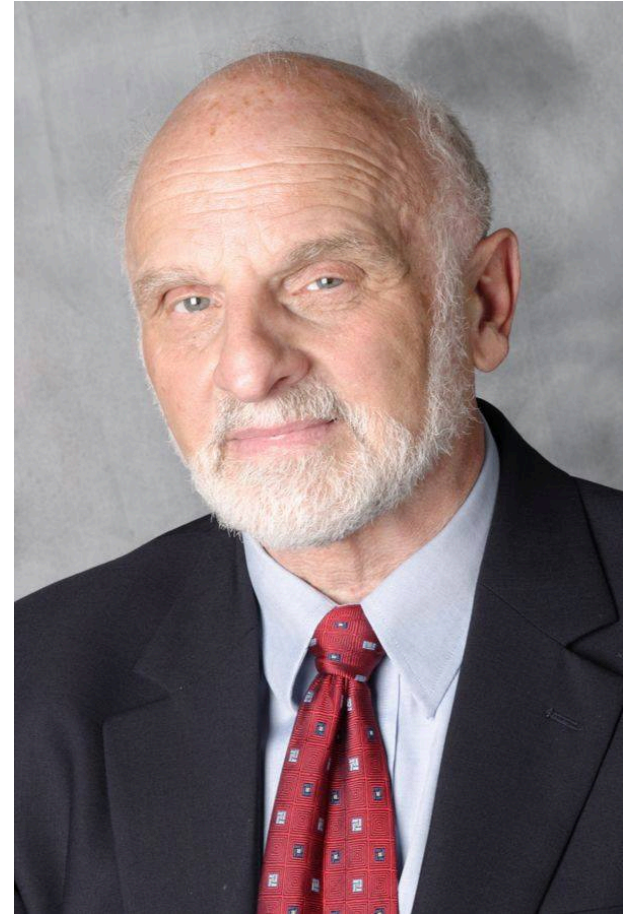
- It breeds fear and terror
- It threatens us
- It induces us to flee or hide
- It makes us want to give up
- It whispers lies in our ears that life is futile
- It provokes us to maintain as much control as possible
- It suggests to us that we are forsaken
- It urges us to lament the day we were born

# The Impact Of Darkness

- It shatters our souls
- It fills our hearts with sorrow
- It reinforces the idea that God is mysterious and unknowable
- It reveals the true nature our hearts
- It plays with our moods and emotions
- It envelops us with a cloak of opacity and impenetrability
- It exposes our limited knowledge, understanding, and power
- It urges us to abandon all hope.

# Understanding Laments

“The laments are refusals to settle for the way things are. They are acts of relentless hope that believes no situation falls outside Yahweh’s capacity for transformation. No situation falls outside of Yahweh’s responsibility.”



**Walter Brueggemann**  
American Old Testament Theologian

# *Walking Through Twilight* by Groothuis

“Sadness intrudes unbidden in a variety of dark shades. I cannot offer a taxonomy or hierarchy of it here. Rather, consider one often-misunderstood form of sorrow – lament. What is it? Frederick Buechner wrote in *Wishful Thinking: A Seeker’s ABC*: ‘The place God calls you to is the place where your deep gladness and the world’s deep hunger meet.’ In that spirit, lament is where our deep sadness meets the world’s deep wounds. And this world has its wounds. Even God Incarnate bears wounds, his and ours.”



**Douglas Groothuis, PhD**

Professor of Philosophy  
Denver Theological Seminary



# Which Is Better: Mourning Or Feasting?

“It is better to go to the house of mourning than to go to the house of feasting, for this is the end of all mankind, and the living will lay it to heart. Sorrow is better than laughter, for by sadness of face the heart is made glad. The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning, but the heart of fools is in the house of mirth” (Eccl. 7:2-4).

“Joy has its lessons, but mourning has lessons that only mourning can teach” (Groothuis).





# A Way Forward

- **Articulate your experience of darkness.** See Job 19:8-10 - “He has walled up my way, so that I cannot pass, and he has set darkness upon my paths. He has stripped from me my glory and taken the crown from my head. He breaks me down on every side, and I am gone, and my hope has he pulled up like a tree.”
- **Lose your sense of self-absorption.**
- **See your circumstances** not with the eyes of the flesh but the vision of faith.
- **Hope in God.** “Light dawns in the darkness for the upright; he is gracious, merciful, and righteous” (Ps. 112:4).
- **Know that the Lord has not forsaken you.** “I will never leave you, nor will I ever forsake you” (Heb. 13:5).

# A Glimpse Of God's Character

“All emotions, including the darker ones, give us a glimpse of the character of God....Far more important than the way in which emotions reveal the movement of the heart is the way in which our most difficult emotions – anger, fear, jealousy, despair, contempt, and shame – uniquely reveal something about the heart of God....The darker struggles with emotion can point us to priceless glimpses of God's character through scriptural revelation of God's own emotions.”



**Dan Allender, PhD**

Professor of Counseling Psychology  
The Seattle School of Theology & Psychology

# Where God Meets You



“Hanging by a Thread”

“Don’t assume that resolving your turbulent emotions is the key to meeting God. It is actually within the inner mayhem of life that a stage is built for the intrusive story of His light and hope. The absence of tumult, more than its presence, is an enemy of the soul. God meets you in your weakness, not in your strength. He comforts those who mourn, not those who live above desperation. He reveals Himself more often in darkness than in the happy moments of life” (Allender).

# Using God



Natchez Trace, Louisiana

“He (God) can’t be used as a road. If you’re approaching Him not as the goal but as a road, not as the end but as a means, you’re not really approaching Him at all.”

- C.S. Lewis

# Avoid Quick Fixes



**Sinclair B. Ferguson**

Professor of Systematic Theology  
Reformed Theological Seminary

“Quick counsel will only see us through from one crisis to the next. We need long-term help, and that can only be provided by long-term measures. Disciplined, thoughtful, prayerful study of God’s word, undertaken with the Spirit’s help is what we need. It will change the way we think, and consequently the way we live, and ultimately the way we feel.”

# When The Path Is Dark



*Let him who walks in the dark,  
who has no light,  
Trust in the name of the Lord  
and rely on his God.*

*- Isaiah 50:10 (NIV)*

# God's Promises

“Learn the promises of God in advance. When the time of crisis or darkness comes, it is too late to start learning them. Store up the Word of God, like a squirrel storing up nuts for the winter; for the wintertime of life will surely come when you will need God's promises to act as an anchor for your soul.”

- Sinclair B. Ferguson





# God, Our Lamp

- “If I say, ‘Surely the darkness shall cover me, and the light about me be night,’ even the darkness is not dark to you; the night is bright as the day, for darkness is as light with you” (Ps. 139:11-12).
- “For you are my lamp, O Lord, and my God lightens my darkness” (II Sam. 12:29).
- “For it is you who light my lamp; the Lord my God lightens my darkness. For by you I can run against a troop, and by my God I can leap over a wall. This God – his way is perfect; the word of the Lord proves true; he is a shield for all those who take refuge in him” (Ps. 18:28-30).

# A Great Light

- “The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned” (Is. 9:2).
- “Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me” (Ps. 23:4).

# *Light Shining Out Of Darkness*

God moves in a mysterious way  
His wonders to perform;  
He plants his footsteps in the sea,  
And rides upon the storm.

Deep in unfathomable mines  
Of never-failing skill,  
He treasures up his bright designs,  
And works his sovereign will.



**William Cowper** (1731-1800)  
Portrait by Lemuel Francis Abbott (1760-1802)  
National Portrait Gallery, London

# *Light Shining Out Of Darkness*

Ye fearful saints, fresh courage take,  
The clouds ye so much dread  
Are big with mercy, and shall break  
In blessings on your head.

Judge not the Lord by feeble sense,  
But trust him for his grace:  
Behind a frowning providence  
He hides a smiling face.

His purposes will ripen fast,  
Unfolding every hour;  
The bud may have a bitter taste,  
But sweet will be the flower.

Blind unbelief is sure to err,  
And scan his work in vain:  
God is his own interpreter,  
And he will make it plain.