

FOREWORD BY  
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HE  
WILL BE  
*enough*

How God Takes You by the  
Hand through Your  
Hardest Days

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# INTRODUCTION

I love to tell a story once it's finished. I usually don't mind sharing my struggle if I can also tell how it resolved, how I'm better and everything's fixed and right again in my little corner of the universe. Yet the story I'm living is one that isn't wrapped up with a pretty bow or a tidy ending. Instead it's full of unknowns, questions, and complexities. I still don't know how this story will end.

All of us live in the middle of our stories, in one way or another. The question is: *how* will we live in those parts—unanswered questions and all? Jesus said, “I came that they may have life and have it abundantly” (John 10:10). Not just on the good days. Not just when life goes seamlessly. God invites us to live—to live abundant, God-glorifying lives—right in the middle of our stories, and not just when they are attractively packaged and labeled. But how?

## **THE WORLD FLIPPED UPSIDE DOWN**

Perhaps you know what it's like to see life as you know it change in an instant. For me, it was an uncommonly quiet afternoon when the pediatric specialist phoned. The day when instead of merely flipping tiny t-shirts right-side out, my whole world flipped upside down. My three-month-old daughter must have been napping, and her three older

brothers were reading or playing quietly in their shared bedroom. Without disturbing them, I closed my bedroom door to take the call.

The gastroenterologist wanted to run another test to confirm, but he explained that recent lab results indicated the likelihood that one of my sons had Alpha-1 Antitrypsin Deficiency, a serious genetic condition.

A diagnosis. No parent wants to be told her child has a condition she can barely pronounce, and I was no exception. I'd never heard of Alpha-1 until that late spring day when, as warm sunlight streamed through white curtains and danced on the walls, I steadied myself long enough to thank the doctor for the update and say good-bye.

"It has a name," I thought. Here was an explanation for my son's elevated liver enzymes and his perplexing medical history. A month earlier, his high fever and swollen liver had sent my husband, son, and me racing over the bridge to the emergency room at The Children's Hospital of Philadelphia in rush-hour traffic. Although my child's fever resolved, his liver numbers hadn't normalized. His confusing medical history went further back and included feeding issues, reflux, nebulizer treatments, and various childhood illnesses.

But with this name—an answer of sorts—came a host of new questions that were equally perplexing: What would this mean for my child's future? What would this mean for our family? I wanted information, but more than that, I craved understanding. *Where was God in this?*

**WAVES OF GRIEF**

Perhaps you've found yourself in a similar place. To be sure, the specifics of your story may be very different to mine. I don't pretend to have a monopoly on suffering, and I write this conscious of the fact that you may have walked even darker roads. But whatever circumstances you face, I'm guessing you're holding this book because you find yourself in the same kind of territory, spiritually and emotionally—full of questions with no easy answers and wondering if what you're hoping in will be strong enough to hold you.

Even now, years later, it's easier to state the facts than it is to relive the raw emotions of that time. The shock and grief that followed my conversation with the GI doctor that quiet afternoon were only compounded by another phone call about a month later. Once my child's diagnosis had been confirmed, and because Alpha-1 is considered a serious condition, our entire family had been tested and now awaited results. This time it was the pediatrician calling; cured of any naïveté after the previous call, I answered with complete trepidation.

Bracing myself, I sat down at the dining-room table as the doctor confessed that this was one of the hardest phone calls he had ever had to make. I heard his words but struggled to comprehend their meaning: "Katie, two more of your children are a ZZ-genotype. Two more of your children have Alpha-1."

There was no sugar-coating—just sincere sympathy—as he informed me that two more of my children had a medical condition that I now understood could impact the liver and lungs with potentially life-threatening complications over time. Two more children. I didn't have to do the

math; I felt the exponential nature of the moment. Three out of four. Three of my flesh and blood, three people I had carried and birthed, three souls entrusted to my care. If only I could trade places with them. If only the diagnosis had landed on me. Instead, it landed on them, and as much as my heart is bound up with theirs, it landed on me even heavier that way. It wasn't a fraction, impacting three-fourths of my heart; it wasn't multiplication, sorrow times three. It was grief to the third power. Grief upon grief upon grief, and more.

I finished the call and sunk in my chair. I needed my husband, and I couldn't think past that. Scott rushed home from work, and we sat on our front porch as our children played inside, oblivious to the waves of grief washing into our house. After giving Scott a simple report, I was undone. Those pent-up emotions, controlled and measured during the waiting, overflowed. As I pictured each child's face, one by one, a new lump rose in my throat and fresh tears filled my eyes. Even the child who didn't have Alpha-1 came to mind; how would this play out, watching siblings bear this burden?

I wanted—I needed—to grieve for each of my children, but I also grieved the sum-total of it. I groaned as question after question surfaced, as wave after wave of emotion pushed me under. I wept for them, for me, for our family. For the present and the future, for the unknown. I couldn't have cared less what the neighbors thought because all I really cared about—my faith and my family—was being tossed by this unforeseen flood.

**WRITE IN THE MIDDLE**

The question I was faced with on that day, and on many days since, was this: *Will Jesus be enough, even now? Even when I don't understand? Even when the future I mapped out has been upended? Even when I'm in the middle of a story I wouldn't have written this way?* In the years since that day, I've discovered that the answer to those questions is *Yes, Jesus is enough.* Although our family's story isn't over, I know that he will continue to be enough. And I'm convinced that if you seek him, you will find him to be enough for you too, no matter what you're walking through and no matter what questions and doubts and struggles you face.

All of us live in the middle of our stories. Life doesn't stop for loss. Life goes on even when we wonder how it can continue. Almost a decade later, my life continues to reveal my weakness and fragility, my utter dependence on Jesus. There are days when I want to be invisible and days when I want to proclaim the glory of the one who took on flesh and stepped into time; the one who wrote The Story and stepped into The Story; the one who enters and transforms the stories of all who welcome him.

As a Christian, I aim to live by faith right now, in the present, in the most-middle part of my story. I don't want to get to the end and realize I missed it; that I was too busy borrowing tomorrow's trouble that I missed enjoying the Lord and my family and doing the work God entrusted to me today; that I missed the call to worship God every day he gives on this earth.

We need God's help to live with unanswered questions; to trust him even if our circumstances don't change and even

when we don't see how God is working them for our good. It's natural for our suffering to lead us to ask questions of God and even to ask him to take away our suffering, to bargain with him, and make demands. It's the work of the Holy Spirit that enables us to offer our suffering to the Lord and pray instead, "Even if our trials never change, please use them to change us—to help us know, love, and trust you more. Lord, show us your true character, teach us to cling to your promises, and enable us to honor you in our afflictions."

### **THIS BOOK IS FOR YOU**

Perhaps you're standing on the edge of your own trial, wondering how to get your footing as the world you know seems to sink on every side. Or maybe you're already in the thick of a challenging situation, wondering if or how you'll ever make it to the other side. Perhaps your afflictions have been piling on top of one another for a long time, and you're trying to make sense of past months and years. If so, this book is for you.

If you're anything like me, one of the questions behind many of your other questions is, "Will God really be enough?" This book is my best answer to that question. In each chapter, we'll consider a truth about God that reassures us that he is enough in the midst of our hardest days, and even more than enough.

God sees you in your suffering. He hears your cries for help. And he cares about you more than you can possibly imagine, enough to send Jesus to enter the middle of the story of history and offer hope in the middle of yours. Rather

than despising your pain, God wants to take you by the hand and lead you through it.

As you read, I'm praying for you. So are my friends. We're asking God to meet you in the pages of *He Will Be Enough* and strengthen your faith for the long-haul. Our hope is that the stories and Scriptures you encounter would refresh your heart and give you truths about God's character and his promises that you can cling to on your hardest days.

# 1. LEARNING TO SEE

*God is gracious*

*“For the grace of God has appeared, bringing  
salvation for all people.”*

*Titus 2:11*

**B**lood shots. That’s what my daughter, at seven years old, called bloodwork. In the backseat, she and her brother compared who had had the most tubes collected that day as I navigated our minivan out of the parking lot of the specialty care center. We followed the winding business road past an ice-hockey rink, preschool, and restaurants to the stop light. As I waited for the light to turn green, I stared across the highway at the apartment complex.

To the left, tucked out of sight, was our first apartment: the place my husband and I spent our wedding night. Fifteen years earlier, Scott had carried me over the threshold at twilight, streaks of color painting the July sky above us. It was a beautiful night for giddy newlyweds intoxicated by love.

Ten months later, we carried our newborn son across the same threshold in a baby carrier. Marriage and parenting came together for us, part of the same package, one that delivered heights of joy and depths of grief that we could only have imagined that first night.

Instead of traveling further down memory lane, I turned right, veering away from our honeymoon year and into the present. “Each day has enough trouble of its own” (Matthew 6:34 NIV).

I had memorized the verse as a child. And it was certainly true of the day ahead of me. I had two children in the car and three more waiting for me to come home. There was the 40-minute drive, followed by oatmeal-crusting bowls, a mountain of laundry, and homeschool lessons waiting for me on the other side.

It had been seven years since three of our children had been diagnosed with Alpha-1 Antitrypsin Deficiency. Yet moments like these—while driving in the car or preparing a meal or jogging or taking a shower—are an invitation to pause. To step out of the minutes and see the days and the years. To see the connectedness of past and present, places and people, and our still unfolding stories, and how God’s sovereign hand was weaving them all into his story for his glory.

As I looked back, I could see how far we’d come. In those early days after diagnosis, each blood draw was a matter for prayer. I would text friends the night before saying, “Please pray. It’s a lab day.” No rhyme intended.

My friends would pray, and my children knew they were being prayed for, and God wove grace into that part of their story. Our story. The phlebotomist finding the vein on the first stick was grace. A child gripping my hand instead of throwing a tantrum was grace. A child singing the “ABC’s” and “Jesus Loves Me” was grace.

It was abundant grace, supplied repeatedly, until today was

a win. A no-tears day. An in-and-out day. A “How-many-tubes-did-you-get?” day. A grace day.

### **YOUR HARD IS YOUR SUFFERING**

I don't know what your hard is. Maybe you're single, and you want to be married. Maybe you just found out that your mom has cancer. Maybe your husband has been cheating on you. Maybe your baby is in the NICU. Whatever it is, your hard is your suffering. Christian writer Elisabeth Elliot's definition sums it up well: “Suffering is having what you don't want or wanting what you don't have.”<sup>1</sup>

Our family's primary suffering, the thing we have that we wish we didn't, is a life-threatening condition that impacts three of our children. But over the years it's taken other forms, including transitions in and out of full-time ministry, pregnancy complications, unemployment and financial pressures, additional health challenges and more.

What's your suffering? Maybe you don't want vertigo, but your head spins when you sit up in the morning. You want a vacation, but you can't afford one. You wish your child didn't have food allergies, but she has an anaphylactic reaction to peanuts. You want a closer relationship with your son, but he resists your efforts, and you don't know how to reach him.

We don't want what we have. We want what we don't have. That is our suffering. That is our hard. We know it like the backs of our hands.

My question is, in our hard, can we see God's grace?

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1 Elisabeth Elliot, *Suffering Is Never for Nothing* (B&H, 2019), p 9.

## GOD'S GRACE HAS APPEARED

Grace is a word so familiar to many of us that it can sometimes lose its impact. So consider: when the apostle Paul tells us that “the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people” (Titus 2:11), what does he mean by “grace”? Grace is an undeserved gift, and in the Bible, it “indicates God’s (unmerited) favor that brings blessing and joy.”<sup>2</sup> When Paul wrote about God’s grace appearing, he had the saving grace of Christ in mind.

God has always been gracious. It’s his character; it’s who he is. In the Old Testament, God proclaimed himself to be “The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin” (Exodus 34:6-7a). King David later echoed these words when he wrote Psalm 145:8: “The LORD is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.” God was gracious yesterday, he is gracious today, and he will always be gracious.

But in the New Testament, God’s grace became visible in a new way. John, the disciple of Jesus, wrote that the Word (Jesus) “became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth” (John 1:14). Mystery of mysteries, grace appeared in the form of a person, the Son of God; and as “the image of the invisible God” (Colossians 1:15), when he walked on earth, Jesus personified the grace of our gracious God in a way that could be seen. And his ultimate expression

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<sup>2</sup> *ESV Study Bible* (Crossway, 2014), text note for John 1:16-17.

of this grace brought “salvation for all people,” as the second half of Titus 2:11 so eloquently expresses. God’s expansive generosity overflows to peoples of all tribes and tongues and nations. Salvation is available to all.

But this grace isn’t so wide as to cease to be personal. The same gracious God who extends saving grace through Jesus also supplies daily grace to sustain his children. When faith opens our eyes (and hearts), we can see God’s grace in a multitude of things—including a smooth appointment.

### **CHALLENGES TO SEEING GOD’S GRACE**

That’s all very well, you might be thinking, but what about all the days that *aren’t* a win?

What about the countless times when the kids *have* crumpled at the sight of the needle? What about when they’ve been stuck multiple times and come home with a bruised arm? And what about the time when we left our appointment only to find our car broken down in the parking lot? Was God gracious then too?

Even though we might know in our heads that God is gracious, it can be easy to lose sight of that when all we can see in front of us is our trials. Our challenging circumstances can take up more headspace than our infinitely gracious God does.

Similarly, when our problems loom large and our view of God shrinks, our questions “How could God...?” and “Why would God...?” can lead us to doubt aspects of God’s character. Is God really good? Does he really love me? Is he really who he says he is? And when those seeds of doubt take root

in the heart, the seat of our affections, we are less inclined to expect or look for God's grace.

Left to myself, I struggle to see grace in our family's hard. Some days, more than others. Despite being a Christian since childhood, there have been months, if not years, when I was more aware of my trials than God's presence with me in them. As one who is naturally inclined to see a glass as half-empty rather than half-full, it's been a fight to see evidence of God's grace. Along the way, I've realized that the goal isn't to find the bright side or cast an optimistic spin on grim reality. Rather, faith involves taking God at his word and asking the Holy Spirit to help me believe and apply biblical truths about God's grace to challenging circumstances.

Even when everything does seem to go wrong, it's still possible to see God's grace in Christ.

### **SEEING GRACE BEGINS WITH KNOWING JESUS**

As grateful as I am for what it has taught me, I wouldn't have chosen my hard. I would've been glad to learn some lessons an easier way. Maybe that's why I find Jesus' prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane, the night before his crucifixion, to be so encouraging. This is what he prayed: "Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me" (Luke 22:42a).

Jesus. The one who became like us but never sinned. Even he asked God to remove a cup of suffering from him. It must not be wrong to ask God to change our circumstances, to want him to replace our cup. But it doesn't stop there, and that's not how Jesus finished his prayer.

*“Nevertheless, not my will, but yours, be done.”*

*(Luke 22:42b)*

It's only because Jesus drank the cup of God's wrath on behalf of sinners such as me that we can experience his saving grace, made available through his obedient death and subsequent resurrection. It's only through faith in Jesus that we truly come to know him and that our eyes are opened to who he is, the hope we have in him, and his abundant grace toward us.

It's only by God's grace that we too can say, “Not my will, but yours, be done.” In our marriage (or singleness). In our infertility. In our parenting. In our employment. In our friendships. In our churches. In our joy. And in our suffering.

*Your will be done in all of it.*

And it's only by God's grace that “glass half-empty” people like me can learn to see his grace in the form of “blood shots” faced down without a tear or a hand to hold in the emergency room or a friend who texts at just the right moment or an extra bag of groceries on the front step.

Thank God, God is gracious. Can we see it?

*Dear Lord, you are a gracious God. Open our eyes to see your grace in Jesus, extended to us in the gospel and available to us in our suffering. Help us to recognize how you are providing and taking care of us. In Jesus' name, Amen.*

## EXPLORATION

1. “Suffering is having what you don’t want or wanting what you don’t have.” Do you agree with Elisabeth Elliot’s definition of suffering? What’s a current circumstance that you wish you didn’t have, or something you wish you had, but don’t?
2. In your hard, can you see God’s grace? What makes it challenging to see?
3. Reflect on Luke 22:42, “Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me. Nevertheless, not my will, but yours, be done.” How does Jesus’ prayer encourage or challenge you?
4. Read Titus 2:11-14. How should God’s grace impact the way believers think and live, especially in difficult circumstances?