Drawing Near
When God Seems Far
FROM THE PRESIDENT
Dr. Mark L. Bailey

Hope through the Night

To listen to some radio and television speakers, you would think that suffering, pain, and even despair are foreign, or at least should be foreign, experiences to the life of the Christian. But throughout the Scriptures as well as the history of the church, men and women of faith have experienced their “dark night of the soul,” a phrase made popular by the sixteenth-century poet, John of the Cross.

For some, such a period accompanies a struggle against sin (see Psalm 22) or follows physical exhaustion. For others, it follows intense prayer answered by God with a “no.” But for many, as with Elijah, it actually follows a time of spiritual success (see 1 Kings 19).

Perhaps you or someone you love are crying, “Save me!” and “Help my unbelieving!” Or maybe like David you’re asking, “Why have you forsaken me?” (Ps. 22:1). As I’ve talked with hundreds, if not thousands, of ministry leaders, I’ve heard the desolation and despair uttered during times of such deep darkness. Sometimes the best we can do is listen and state by our very presence, “You are not alone.”

In this issue of Kindred Spirit, we explore the theme of drawing near when God seems far. Retired DTS professor Dr. Roy Zuck walks us through David’s cry of seeming abandonment echoed by Jesus on the cross. Lesa Engelthaler reflects on her own experience through the sixteenth-century poet, John of the Cross.

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A LITTLE BOY PRAYED, “Lord, please make Boulder the capital of Colorado.” His friend asked, “Why did you pray that?”

“Because that’s the answer I put on my exam.”

Obviously God might not answer that prayer. But what about legitimate prayers? Sometimes we make requests we think are in line with what God wants, but He seems silent. He seems to ignore us. We feel He has gone off and left us. He is distant, far off, unconcerned, and has abandoned us—or so it seems.

David prayed, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me? ... O my God, I cry out by day, but you do not answer me” (Ps. 22:1–2). Many Christians feel that way today. “Why doesn’t He heal me?” “Why doesn’t God bring back my wayward son?” “Why did God take my spouse to heaven?”

When we feel like that, Psalm 22 offers us a guide through the dark.

Since some of the verses in this psalm seem like they are referring to Christ, some say all of it is prophetic of Christ. Yet it seems better to see the psalm as referring first to David’s experiences, with many of the statements then being applied to Christ. In other words, the psalm is recording primarily the experience of David, who was suffering at the hands of wicked men. The psalm shows us a progression of response to physical and emotional pain. These are steps David took, and they are also steps Jesus took.

Tell God your problem (vv. 1–2, 6–8, 11–18). Twice in the first verse David asked “Why?” Yet three times in the first two verses he said “My God.” Even though he wondered why God seemed absent, he voiced his problem to the Lord. On the cross Jesus voiced these same words. He felt forsaken by God the Father because He was bearing the sins of the world. As Peter wrote, Jesus “bore our sins in his body on the tree” (1 Pet. 2:24). And Isaiah wrote, “He was crushed for our iniquities and the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all” (Isa. 53:5–6).

David said that God did not seem to hear his groaning (v. 1), and he said that God did not answer him either in the daytime or at night (v. 2). David also wrote that he felt like a worm—that is, insignificant and unwanted. People despised him, mocked him, and shook their heads at him. In David’s first petition in the psalm (v. 11) he asked that God not be far from him, because trouble was near. Then in figurative language he said that enemies surrounded him like bulls and scavenger dogs (vv. 12, 16), and they tore at him like lions (v. 13). His heart melted (v. 14), his bones were out of joint (v. 14), his strength was gone (v. 15), his body was pierced (v. 16), and he was so emaciated that his bones were exposed (v. 17). He was brutally honest in telling God that it didn’t seem as if He was hearing him.

Yet, though he felt abandoned by God, David did not denounce Him. We too should tell God our problem, even telling Him that He seems remote and aloof.

Remember His faithfulness (vv. 3–5, 9–10). Though God seemed distant, David knew God is holy and can be trusted. Though God was silent, He is still sovereign. In verses 3–5, David used the word “you” six times in referring to God. This shows that in his agony David focused on God and His holiness. Though puzzled, he still praised Him. David mentioned that his own “fathers” (ancestors) put their trust in Him, and so he wanted God to help him too. “You didn’t forsake them, so why forsake me?”

Then David reminded the Lord that He had nurtured him right from the moment of his birth; so why should He abandon him now? “Lord, You were faithful in the past, so be faithful now” (vv. 9–10).

Keep praying (vv. 19–21). David went on to voice several requests to God. He asked God to be not far off from him, to help him, to deliver him, to rescue him, and to save him. In referring to dogs, lions, and oxen, he reversed the order of these three animals from the order in which he mentioned them in verses 12–13 and 16.

Praise Him (vv. 22–31). Determined to praise the Lord (v. 22), David called on Israel to praise, fear, and revere Him (v. 23). David was sure that God does see those who are suffering and He hears their cry for help (v. 24). He said he would worship the Lord (v. 25), and then he called on the poor and the rich to praise Him (vv. 26–29), including all the families of the earth (v. 27). Even people not yet born would praise him (vv. 30–31).

In a storm at sea, apparent disaster was ahead. The son of author Robert Louis Stevenson was on board. So he went to the captain’s cabin and asked if something could be done about the bad situation. Just then the pilot turned and smiled. Stevenson’s son went back to the men and said, “I have good news.”

“What do you mean?” they asked.

He said, “I’ve just seen the pilot’s face, and that’s enough.”

We have seen the pilot’s face, and it tells us enough to know all will be well.

Dr. Roy B. Zuck (ThM, 1957; ThD, 1961) is senior professor emeritus of Bible Exposition, DTS, and editor of Bibliotheca Sacra.

Roy B. Zuck

When God Is Silent
Surviving the Silence

How to Help

Lesa Engelthaler

GOD WAS SILENT. I could not feel His presence. And this was different—this time I had been walking with Him, yet it seemed like He moved. Do you know someone with a similar experience? For those with friends suffering such a “dark night,” I have some suggestions.

- **Avoid platitudes.** The standard reply I received was, “Just remember that Moses had to wander for forty years in the desert.” Or “If it feels like God is far away, guess who moved?” More helpful replies were, “That stinks,” and “I am here right now.” Better yet was loving, silent presence.

- **Explore alternative ways to “do church.”** Where two or more gather in His name, Christ is present. During that dark time, meeting with small groups ministered to me far more than church services where I felt like a spectator.

- **Encourage different practices from the usual.** For me that meant exploring silence, solitude, kneeling by the bed to pray, and going on a silent retreat.

- **Recommend a spiritual director.** I needed someone who understood spiritual formation, not merely a therapist. A spiritual director listened without judgment to my raging, and prayed over me.

- **Embrace lamentations together.** When the apostle Paul seemed too black-and-white, and genocide in the Old Testament too harsh, David’s psalms still reached me—like “My God, why have you forsaken me?” I identified with Jeremiah in the book of Lamentations: “He has made me to dwell in darkness... Even when I call out or cry for help, he shuts out my prayers” (Lam. 3:6,8). But Jeremiah also says, “Yet this I call to mind and therefore I have hope: Because of the Lord’s great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail” (vv. 21–23).

- **Recommend new authors.** Eugene Peterson’s classic, *A Long Obedience in the Same Direction,* was a welcome companion. And prayer from the *Book of Common Prayer* reminded me that others had walked the same pathway. Most helpful was the honesty of old saints: John of the Cross, Ignatius, and Thomas Merton. Not many seasoned evangelicals have written on this issue, but the time-tested Christian classic works have endured for a reason.

Eugene Peterson’s words bring a needed reminder that God will hold onto us: “All the persons of faith I know are sinners, doubters, uneven performers. We are secure not because we are sure of ourselves, but because we trust that God is sure of us. Neither our feelings of depression nor the facts of suffering nor the possibilities of defection are evidence that God has abandoned us.”

For more on the journey of Lesa Engelthaler (Mark, ThM, 1984; DMin, 1994), see her related article in the October 2011 issue of *Leadership Journal,* available at LeadershipJournal.net.
In October of 2010, I was diagnosed with trigeminal neuralgia (TN), a nerve disorder characterized by episodes of searing pain that affects either side of the face. In my case TN affects the left side. Besides cluster headaches, TN is the most painful condition known to the medical profession. I’m told that even childbirth and kidney stones cause less agony. TN is so excruciating that it has been called the “suicide disease.” Only a handful of procedures manage the condition, albeit temporarily, and only one offers a cure.

My wife, Joy, and I chose the cure: a microvascular decompression (MVD). It is a type of invasive brain surgery. It is the only procedure that offers the chance of a permanent fix, with a 95-percent success rate. My MVD was scheduled for April. A world-renowned neurosurgeon led my operating team, and I was treated at a premier hospital. A company of people from coast to coast prayed fervently for success. I had the best possible prognosis. All the odds favored success.

But afterward as I lay in ICU among the numerous IV’s and beeps of various monitors, I realized I was in the 5 percent. My surgeon suggested a glycerol rhizotomy as an alternative to deal with my TN. A rhizotomy is less invasive, but it provides only temporary relief. The best it could afford (if successful) was a one- to seven-year respite from pain. Though not a permanent fix, it could be repeated as needed. Statistically this medical procedure offered a 90-percent success rate.

Two months later, I underwent a second surgical procedure. And in the recovery room my neurosurgeon met Joy and me. He explained that everything had gone as planned. He was very pleased, and from his perspective the chance of success was high.

But from my perspective, the left side of my face resembled the cheeks of an overstuffed chipmunk. I felt as if a dentist had over-administered Novocain. And even through the facial numbness of the rhizotomy, the pain came roaring back.

With tears we realized that we were in the 10 percent. Another medical failure. Hopes crushed. A certain future with tremendous pain.

When surgery fails, when the prognosis cannot be any worse, when intense pain is the only certainty, how do you face the rest of life? How do you get out of bed day after day when the only thing you are certain of feeling is pain or the dread of more pain?

And these are only the questions that trouble the body. What about the emotions of the soul, the deep disappointment that threatens to turn to despair, the plague of loneliness, the anxiety and fear that the life once enjoyed is over forever?

As I wrestle with these questions and contemplate a life with pain as a constant companion, I am reminded of certain truths that orient my view of failure. Unfortunately, these thoughts do not eliminate physical pain, but they may encourage the soul.

Failure Does Not Mean That God Does Not Love You

It is easy to imagine in the midst of failure that somehow God has ceased to love. We reason that if God truly loved us, He would grant success. We assume we must read failure as God’s lack of love. Failure, therefore, separates us from God’s love.

While we may feel this way, the truth is much different. The apostle Paul anticipates such emotions in the midst of difficulties, and he asks a rhetorical question of the Christians in Rome: “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword?” (Rom 8:35). Paul’s question is meant to elicit an emphatic “No” from his readers.

Paul was convinced that nothing—even a surgical failure—could separate a believer from the love of God (Rom 8:38–39).
Malachy Marie Williams (ThM, 2004) sat on a mountaintop overlooking the hazy Manhattan skyline. She had just graduated from DTS and moved back to the Northeast. She spoke to God about her work, her life, and her future. She desired to serve where He wanted, so she sought His direction. And the first of many calls came on that mountaintop—literally. Her phone rang.

Malachy’s sister was on the other end, and she asked Malachy to contact FOX5/My9. The television station had an open position, and Malachy’s former boss wanted to speak with her about it.

Malachy soon rejoined New York City’s duopoly FOX5/My9 full-time as sales promotions and marketing producer. She had worked at the station prior to her time at DTS, and the Lord opened the door again on her return. “Every day I walk into something different,” Malachy said.

Since rejoining, Malachy has come to manage many projects year-round, but the one requiring most of her time is the annual McDonald’s Gospelfest. This one-day event—full of Christian artists, speakers, and preachers—takes place in the Prudential Center, in the heart of Newark. The TV station supports the event both by promoting it throughout the year and by recording it, using a full production crew and multi-camera shoot. The station then edits the footage and broadcasts it. Malachy contributes to this process as the show’s lead broadcast producer.

On post-event day, Malachy receives an eight-hour director’s cut, which she and her editor sweat down to a forty-six-minute television show. This airs as a one-hour special across a three-state area, transmitting the gospel to New York City’s eight million citizens and far beyond. “When I’m in the edit room,” Malachy said, “I’m trying to bring integrity to the project as much as possible so it’s clear this is not just a commercial event. We do our best to make sure the gospel is clearly projected.”

As Malachy has diligently worked, people have taken notice—including McDonald’s. The nationwide food chain holds an annual commencement celebration for Black History Month. They recognize “Black Media Legends” in the tri-state area who’ve done outstanding work. And last year, alongside seventeen other such legends, Malachy was honored for her efforts.

“Of course I’m not a legend,” Malachy said. “I don’t know how I got in that lineup. We normally have people in front of the camera receiving these awards. It was a real surprise.” The award came with the honorees’ photos on tri-state area McDonald’s posters and tray liners for the entire month of February. On Malachy’s return to New York, God did more than open the TV station door for her. Along with giving her the job at the TV station, God also called her to academia. “My friend was teaching in the certificate program at New York Seminary,” Malachy explained. “But she had to go on medical leave. She required a replacement and asked me.” Since then, Malachy has taught introductory theology, Christian education, and church history as an adjunct professor at the school. She dedicates her time in the classroom to steering students toward “loving God and loving truth.” She knows learning truth is a process, and she encourages her students to “stay close to God” in that process. She wants them to leave her classroom knowing more intimately that “it’s Jesus Christ who rules and reigns, and He’s the Lord of all.”

Since returning to the station and teaching at the seminary, yet another door has opened. Malachy has answered the call to serve as the associate minister of worship and the arts at her home church. She saw a need, offered to help, and committed to serving in worship and the arts at First Baptist Church in Elizabeth, New Jersey. She believes people are made to worship God, and she has set out to facilitate that connection. Her senior pastor, Reverend Brown, said, “Malachy has such a love for God’s people.” He commends her faithfulness to them and commitment to the importance of worship. Each week, Malachy finds Scripture and hymns that assist people in authentically worshiping the Lord and seeing His truth. “Malachy helps members to be free,” Reverend Brown said. “Free to take on the posture that God has placed in their hearts to worship. She desires for people to worship in truth.”

Malachy said, “God’s the one we have to pursue, and it’s His truth we have to uphold.” As she has pursued Him, He has continued to call her—at the station, in the classroom, and in the church. And millions have benefited from her answer.
COMING UP
LEADERSHIP EVENT
The Gathering at DTS: A Collaborative Learning Environment
Monday, February 13, 2012, 9 AM–3:30 PM
Join us on the Dallas campus for a one-day leadership event. Designed for church and ministry staff members, The Gathering will give you a chance to dialogue about, generate, and apply successful ideas for church ministry in a collaborative atmosphere with other ministry leaders.

2012 WIVES OF MEN IN MINISTRY RETREAT
Sunday, April 15–Tuesday, April 17, 2012
Pine Cove Camp and Conference Center, Tyler, Texas
Visit dts.edu/ccd for more information and to register. Questions? Call the events team at 214-841-3699. Hosted by the Howard G. Hendricks Center for Christian Leadership.

TAKE AN EDU-VACATION WITH DTS
Reformation Tour: May 20–31, 2012
Journey with DTS on a tour of spiritually rich Reformation sights in quaint villages and towns of Germany and Switzerland. There will be plenty of time to shop, dine, and relax in exquisite accommodations. The tour will be led by president Dr. Mark Bailey and Dr. John Hannah, distinguished professor of Historical Theology and research professor of Theological Studies. Dr. Hannah has led Reformation tours through Europe for more than twenty years. For more information visit dts.edu/travel.
NEW RESOURCES from the Seminary Family

The Abrahamic Revolution: God’s Mission in Motion
Dr. Todd Ahrend (MA/BS, 2004)

Cruciform: Living the Cross-Shaped Life**
Jimmy Davis (MA/CE, 1996; MA/BS, 1997)

Muir House: A Novel
150 Quick Questions to Get Your Kids Talking
You Can Raise Courageous and Confident Kids
Mary DeMuth (Patrick, ThM, 2002)

The Lord of the Entire World: Lord Jesus, a Challenge to Lord Caesar?
Dr. Joseph D. Fantin (ThM, 1995; PhD, 2003)*

How to Destroy Your Spiritual Life
Ed Frank (ThM, 1997)

Dying to Live
Dr. Charles Haley (ThM, 1968)

Missional Spirituality: Embracing God’s Love from the Inside Out
Roger Helland (ThM, 1983) and Len Hjalmarson

Twilight’s Last Gleaming
Dr. Robert Jeffress (ThM, 1959)

I Never Thought I’d See the Day! Culture at the Crossroads**
Dr. David Jeremiah (ThM, 1967)

Forgiving As We’ve Been Forgiven
Dr. L. Gregory Jones and Dr. Celestine Musekura (STM, 1998; PhD, 2007)

Solid Stepping Stones for the Christian Journey
Dr. Robert Lightner (ThM, 1959; ThD, 1964)**

The Gift: A Novel
Dr. Bryan Litfin (ThM, 1997)

Live Life on Purpose
Claude Hickman (MA/BS, 2008)

First Date: A Novel
Krista McGee (David, ThM, 2003)

Wednesday Crucifixion
George Miller (ThM, 1959)

I Never Thought I’d See the Day! Culture at the Crossroads**
Dr. David Jeremiah (ThM, 1967)

Prayer Journey Bible
Dr. Elmer L. Towns (ThM, 1958)

Beyond Boundaries: Learning to Trust Again in Relationships
Dr. John Townsend (ThM, 1980)*

Is Love Wrong? An Evangelical Christian Encounters a Gay Activist
Chris Plekenpol (ThM, 2010)

The Camouflaged Church
Dr. James B. Rainford Sr. (ThM, 1969; DMin, 1990)

Stepping Up: A Call to Courageous Manhood
Dr. Dennis Rainey (MA/BS, 1976)

Cyber Meltdown
1001 Unforgettable Quotes about God, Faith and the Bible
Bite-Size Bible Answers
Bite-Size Bible Definitions
Dr. Ron Rhodes (ThM, 1983; ThD, 1986)

52 Things Kids Need from a Mom
Angela Thomas (MA/CE, 1987)

The Story of Your Life
Angela Thomas (MA/CE, 1987) and Matthew West

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*Denotes DTS faculty member

**Excerpt online at www.dts.edu/ks
BOOK NOTES AND QUOTES

THE 925 WINDOW

“If you have had much to do with the missionary move- ment over the past 20 years, you will probably recognize the term ‘10-40 Window,’” says Dale Losch (ThM, 1987). in his brochure, A Better Way: Make Disciples Wherever Life Happens. “It was coined by missionary strategist Luis Bush in 1990 to refer to those regions of the eastern hemisphere, located between 10°–40° degrees north of the equator, having the highest concentration of least-reached people on the planet. While many are familiar with the 10–40 Window, surprisingly few have heard of another unreached group of people living in the zone called the ‘925 Window.’ The 925 Window is the window of opportunity most believers have from 9 to 5 every day, being salt and light in an unbelieving world. It is a natural window of opportunity that allows us to enter the ordinary world of people that Jesus came to seek and to save.”

The Resolution for Women, by Priscilla Shirer (MAIBS, 1998) has been named as a finalist in the USA “Best Books 2011” Awards from USA Book News, an premiere online magazine and review site for mainstream and independent publishing houses. The book is a New York Times bestseller.

Publishers Weekly says, “The zombie invasion of the popular culture has become so pervasive that it makes a History Channel show [on the subject] a no-brainer—pun intended. In other zombie news, AMC’s second-season premier of ‘The Walking Dead’ opened to an eye-popping 7.3 million viewers … breaking cable ratings records among adults 18–49 and 25–54.” It is this culture to which Jeff Kinley (ThM, 1986) introduces The Christian Zombie Killers Handbook: Slaying the Living Dead Within (excerpt online).

There are three conditions for “drawing near to God.” First, we must have a “true heart,” which means an honest attempt to relate to God. “The word ‘draw near’ is prosuche- mat, which comes from pros, “toward,” and euchomat, “the face.” A true heart is honestly seeking God’s face. Second, we must come “in full assurance,” which means “we believe God exists” (Heb. 11:6, ELI). Third, “having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience” (Heb. 10:22).

—Dr. Elmer Towns in Prayer Journey Bible

When All Else Fails (continued from page 9)

Failure Does Not Mean That All Hope Is Lost

Bodily failure may lead to despair, and despair breeds hopelessness. Yet in the face of a physical and emotional collapse, Asaph declared, “My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever” (Ps. 73:26).

Whether we’re enduring emotional or physical pain or both, life is not contingent on the strength of the physical body or the emotional self. While “my flesh may fail” with continual pain, and hope for relief may be but a distant dream, there is another present reality: “But God…” In the midst of physical anguish there is always God, whose presence is our strength, even when the body betrays us.

Failure Reminds Us to Look Beyond This Life

With the advances in medical science, we sometimes believe the newest surgical technique or the just-released prescription drug will prove successful. Our hope is pinned on statistics that suggest success favors our condition. Yet when we sit on the wrong side of the medical data, we are forced to look elsewhere for hope and relief.

The new heavens and the new earth are not topics that one hears preached about much on any given Sunday. But for those who must live with failure, the guarantee of a new order is a sure promise of a new life, a life without pain or tears. In his vision from God, John writes, “He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain” (Rev. 21:4). While this may sound like pie in the sky or even morbid, it was meant to give comfort to hurting saints and to demonstrate that pain, suffering, and even death are confined to this world and not the next.

Even when medical options are exhausted and days clouded by painful tears, with this divine assurance those who live with failure look forward to the time when the Savior Himself will banish tears, pain, and death itself. In the new heavens and the new earth no one will experience failed surgeries.

Failure Reminds Us That the Outer Person Is Decaying But...

TN has taught me a significant theological truth about myself: I am a frail creature. Intellectually we know humanity is frail, but somehow individually we believe ourselves immune from experiencing the flesh’s weakness and decay. But the reality is we are dust (Gen. 3:14), and grass (Isa. 40:6–8), and our days are like grass (Ps. 103:15).

Yet in our frailty there is another significant theological truth: “Therefore we do not lose heart.

Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day” (2 Cor. 4:16). While our physical body may experience failure, our spirit is renewed daily. And our renewed spirit affords us the grace to live with a frail body that is subject to pain.

Disappointment, discouragement, and pain accompany the person living with a broken body. There may be an apprehension that the pain may even get worse. But in the midst of brokenness, we can believe there is a God who loves us, who is present with us in our suffering, who is our strength in physical weakness, and who has promised that a day is coming that includes no tears of failure.

These are truths that will not fail, even when surgery does.

—Dr. Mark McGovern (MAIBS, 1991) is an associate professor of Old Testament at Baptist Bible College and Seminary in Clarks Summit, Pennsylvania.
NORTHEAST
Dr. Oscar Lopez
Mar 2–4, 9–11 Hispanic Minister Conference, Mansfield, Texas
Wesleyan Church, Mansfield, Texas
Feb 28–Mar 1 Cornerstone Bible Church, Lubbock, Texas
Dr. Vic Anderson
Mar 23 Perspectives on the World Christian Movement, First Baptist Church, Plano, Texas
Jan 24 Perspectives on the World Christian Movement, McKinney Memorial Church, Fort Worth, Texas;
Feb 1 Perspectives on the World Christian Movement, Pantego Bible Church, Arlington, Texas
Dr. Mark Bailey
Mar 2–4 Permian Basin Bible Conference, First Baptist Church, Odessa, Texas
Dr. Darrell Bock
Feb 17–18 Eschatology Lectureship, Texas Baptist Church, Lubbock, Texas
Dr. Mark Bailey
Mar 2–4 Bible College Conference, First Baptist Church, Mansfield, Texas
Dr. Stephen Bramer
Jan 16–20 The Central Seminary/SETECA, Guatemala City, Guatemala
Dr. John Hannah
Jan 16–20 The Central American Theological Seminary/SETCA, Guatemala City, Guatemala
Dr. Oscar Lopez
Apr 26–29 Anniversary Conference, Nazareth Church, Guatemala City, Guatemala

SOUTHEAST
Dr. Mark Bailey
Feb 29 Bryan College Chapel, Dayton, Tennessee; Mar 18 Grace Church, Greenville, South Carolina
Dr. Robert Lightner
Apr 9–13 Piedmont Baptist Graduate School, Winston-Salem, North Carolina
Dr. Stanley Toussaint
Feb 12–17 Word of Life Bible Conference, Hudson, Florida
Dr. Daniel B. Wallace
Jan 27 New Testament Lectureship, Florida International University, Miami, Florida; Feb 1 Reliability of the NT Debate with Dr. Bart Ehrman, University of North Carolina Chapel Hill, Chapel Hill, North Carolina; Feb 14 “The Bible’s Survival and Success: New Discoveries, Technologies and Challenges,” Passages Exhibit, Atlanta, Georgia; Feb 28–29 Theological Forum, Mid-America Baptist Seminary, Cordova, Tennessee
Dr. Abraham Kuruvilla
Feb 17 Missionaries Conference, Mansfield Bible Church, Mansfield, Texas
Dr. Scott Horrell
Feb 18 Faith Bible Church, The Woodlands, Texas

SOUTHWEST
Dr. Ronald Allen
Jan 29 Cornerstone Bible Church, Lubbock, Texas
Dr. Vic Anderson
Jan 23 Perspectives on the World Christian Movement, First Baptist Church, Plano, Texas
Dr. Mark Bailey
Mar 2–4 Permian Basin Bible Conference, First Baptist Church, Odessa, Texas
Dr. Darrell Bock
Feb 17–18 Eschatology Lectureship, Texas Baptist Church, Lubbock, Texas
Dr. Mark Bailey
Mar 2–4 Bible College Conference, First Baptist Church, Mansfield, Texas
Dr. Scott Horrell
Feb 18 Faith Bible Church, The Woodlands, Texas
Dr. Abraham Kuruvilla
Feb 12 Missions Conference, Mansfield Bible Church, Mansfield, Texas

WEST
Dr. Mark Bailey
Mar 28–Apr 1 Hasta Bible College Conference, Redding, California; Apr 28 Western Seminary Commencement, Portland, Oregon
Dr. Stephen Bramer
Mar 4–16 Insight for Living Israel Tour, Various locations, ISRAEL
Dr. John Hannah
Jan 16–20 The Central American Theological Seminary/SETCA, Guatemala City, Guatemala
Dr. Mark Bailey
Mar 23–24 Church History Lectureship, Tyndale Theological Seminary, Fort Worth, Texas
Dr. Scott Horrell
Feb 18 Faith Bible Church, The Woodlands, Texas
Dr. Abraham Kuruvilla
Feb 12 Missions Conference, Mansfield Bible Church, Mansfield, Texas

FROM THE CHANCELLOR
Dr. Charles R. Swindoll
Do you reject the sure promise of our faithful God that we are not alone. Our loyal minister at these locations in the months ahead.

The Pit, the Rust, and Help

Who would guess that a book published in 1678 would be relevant today? It has never gone out of print; has been translated into more than two hundred languages and is regarded as one of the most significant works of religion literature. I’m referring, of course, to John Bunyan’s Christian allegory, The Pilgrim’s Progress.

The story follows Christian on his treacherous journey from the City of Destruction to the Celestial City. Along the way, Christian and a companion approach “a very miry slough.” They fall into the bog, and “the name of the slough was Despond. Here, therefore, they wallowed for a time, being grievously bedaubed with dirt.”

Christian’s traveling companion somehow gets out, but rather than giving a hand up, he abandons the path and flees home. Christian, then, is left struggling alone in the boggy, muddy hole until a man named Help—the Holy Spirit—pulls him free from despondency’s pit and sets him on solid ground.

Christian asks Help why this dangerous plot of land has not been “mended that poor travellers might go” on heaven’s journey “with more security!” And Help tellingly replies, “This miry slough is such a place as cannot be mended.”

How true this is to real life! No matter how hard we try or how spiritually mature we are, miry sloughs are inevitable—not because we have failed, but because no one is immune to depression. It is “such a place as cannot be mended,” only traveled through.

What John Bunyan related in fiction form, the preacher Charles Spurgeon described about two hundred years later in Lectures to My Students. Spurgeon wrote of how depression often came over him before a great success, sometimes after a great success, and usually because of something he couldn’t explain. Pay attention to his candid remarks on “The Minister’s Fainting Fits”: “Fits of depression come over most of us. Usually cheerful as we may be, we must at intervals be cast down. The strong are not always vigorous; the wise, not always ready; the brave, not always courageous; and the joyous, not always happy. There may be here and there men of iron … but surely the rust frets even these.”

These great writers follow in a long tradition that we can trace all the way back to the Psalms. Though most expressions in the ancient Hebrew hymnal end with statements of hope, one psalm—Psalm 88—does not. There the psalmist calls out with, “I cry to you for help, O L ORD; in the morning my prayer comes before you. Why, O L ORD, does not.” There the psalmist calls out with, “I cry to you for help, O L ORD; in the morning my prayer comes before you. Why, O L ORD, does not.”

In desolate times of depression—when we stumble into the pit, when rust covers our iron—we may not always feel His presence, but we have the sure promise of our faithful God that we are not alone. Our loyal friend, Help, is ever near.

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YOUR PATH LED through the SEA, through the MIGHTY WATERS, though YOUR FOOTPRINTS were NOT SEEN.

PSALM 77:19