



Suffering and Singing

John Hindley







Suffering and Singing

Knowing God's Love in the Pain and Despair

John Hindley



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Psalm 44

For the director of music. Of the Sons of Korah. A maskil.

¹ We have heard it with our ears, O God;
our ancestors have told us
what you did in their days,
in days long ago.

² With your hand you drove out the nations
and planted our ancestors;
you crushed the peoples
and made our ancestors flourish.

³ It was not by their sword that they won the land,
nor did their arm bring them victory;
it was your right hand, your arm,
and the light of your face, for you loved them.

⁴ You are my King and my God,
who decrees victories for Jacob.

⁵ Through you we push back our enemies;
through your name we trample our foes.

⁶ I put no trust in my bow,
my sword does not bring me victory;

⁷ but you give us victory over our enemies,
you put our adversaries to shame.

⁸ In God we make our boast all day long,
and we will praise your name for ever.

⁹ But now you have rejected and humbled us;
you no longer go out with our armies.

¹⁰ You made us retreat before the enemy,
and our adversaries have plundered us.

¹¹ You gave us up to be devoured like sheep
and have scattered us among the nations.

¹² You sold your people for a pittance,
gaining nothing from their sale.





- ¹³ You have made us a reproach to our neighbours,
the scorn and derision of those around us.
- ¹⁴ You have made us a byword among the nations;
the peoples shake their heads at us.
- ¹⁵ I live in disgrace all day long,
and my face is covered with shame
- ¹⁶ at the taunts of those who reproach and revile me,
because of the enemy, who is bent on revenge.
- ¹⁷ All this came upon us,
though we had not forgotten you;
we had not been false to your covenant.
- ¹⁸ Our hearts had not turned back;
our feet had not strayed from your path.
- ¹⁹ But you crushed us and made us a haunt for jackals;
you covered us over with deep darkness.
- ²⁰ If we had forgotten the name of our God
or spread out our hands to a foreign god,
- ²¹ would not God have discovered it,
since he knows the secrets of the heart?
- ²² Yet for your sake we face death all day long;
we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.
- ²³ Awake, Lord! Why do you sleep?
Rouse yourself! Do not reject us for ever.
- ²⁴ Why do you hide your face
and forget our misery and oppression?
- ²⁵ We are brought down to the dust;
our bodies cling to the ground.
- ²⁶ Rise up and help us;
rescue us because of your unfailing love.





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For those who are hurting

1

I assume that your heart is broken and that you are tired with pain. You may well have no tears left for your sobs and be lurching between fear and anger. There are few good marriages, and most singleness is terribly lonely. Bringing up children is hard, and not bringing up children is hard. No-one lives that long without grieving someone close to them, and those wounds do not close. Illness lays us low and cancer scares us. I am not yet forty and I have buried friends from this disease. One friend is going through chemotherapy at the moment, while today – as I write this – another friend is having a scan to see if the hints a doctor picked up are cancer. Eighteen months ago I sat in the same waiting room, though it turned out the lump was nothing to worry about. Then there is the simple suffering of life – work pressures, household chores, money



worries and debts, difficult friendships and family tensions. Life is often a grind.

Of course there is joy, hope and laughter, and my life has been far freer from suffering than many I know. I almost feel embarrassed to write about this subject – what do I have to say? But we must look suffering in the face and square up to it, and not hide, run or escape from it. The latter are all the options the

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world around has to offer us – we could escape the pain of life in a beer can, a cult TV series, a shopping spree or an idyllic holiday. Or we could pretend that life is good, and update our status with a smiley face.

We do not struggle with the laughter and joy, and we do not struggle to know where God is in these. We talk of how the Lord has blessed us with a new job or how grateful we are that we can go on holiday. We are slower to see the blessing in redundancy or be grateful for the cancelled holiday as we drive to the hospital.





In this book we are going to see how the pain of suffering nearly overwhelms the faith of God's people. We will see how it threatens to break their trust in a God they have known and experienced and been close to for years. We are going to see that the writers of this psalm are faithful men who have served the Lord well and feel utterly confused by the way he is letting them suffer. And then we will see how he draws them to himself through their suffering – how he turns it from being a mark of his distance from them to an experience of his closeness to them. We will also see how God displays his love for us and his approval of us through our sufferings.

This book simply follows Psalm 44. It is a hard psalm, because it faces up to the truth of suffering. Yet since it is a hard psalm, it is also a glorious one, because the hope and love that it holds out are solid. They are as solid as a cross and as glorious as an empty tomb.

Wherever you are as you read this, I pray that you will see, know and feel the love of Christ in and through your suffering. I am confident that God will answer this prayer for you, for he is a Father who gives good things to his children.





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