

NOVEMBER 2013

## GETTING STUCK IN SUFFERING

BY TIM KELLER

**D**uring the past two years, as I was writing a book on the subject, I have spent time recalling and distilling the many lessons I've learned both as a pastor and a Christian about how to face suffering. Many of these principles for handling trials and afflictions are well known: We should honestly pour out our hearts to God (see especially the Psalms); we should trust and hold on to God as having a purpose in all things (see especially the story of Joseph in Genesis 37-50).

Jesus is of course the ultimate model for both of these things, for he cried out the question, 'My God, why have you forsaken me?' but he also said, 'Thy will be done.' The Bible provides many other well-known directions. We should also pray in God's presence even though we don't feel it (as Job does) and we should discipline ourselves to

remember our final hope (as Paul does in Romans 8:18.)

However, in my research I came across a wise essay that pointed out some of the special pitfalls into which sufferers can fall and in which they may get 'stuck.' It was written by Simone Weil ("The Love of God and Affliction") and it examines how difficult it really can be to walk with God in 'the furnace of affliction' and come out on the other side.

First she mentions the problem of *isolation*. Suffering almost immediately makes you feel cut off from the real world, isolated from your friends who you may feel can't really understand you any more. It is also true that many friends may indeed stay away because the afflicted person challenges them to admit what we would rather deny—that suffering can come upon anyone.

The second is the problem of *self-absorption*. Suffering understandably makes it very difficult to think of others. You have no 'margin,' no energy or thought for anything but your own troubles and needs. Over time your trials can lead to a kind of pride. It can make you feel noble and superior to others who have not had to go through the deep waters that you have.

The third problem is a feeling of *shame and condemnation*. Weil points out that many of us do *not* feel guilty about some things that we ought to be ashamed of. But when great suffering hits it is hard to avoid feeling punished. There may be things that have no direct connection to our difficulty but that we now may feel guilty about. We may feel a vague but persistent sense that we have been condemned.

*(Continued on page 3)*

## PUBLIC FAITH: A LANGUAGE OF PERSUASION

BY ABE CHO

*But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect. — 1 Peter 3:15*

**T**his upcoming ministry year we are focusing our life as a congregation on the theme "Public Faith: Sharing the Hope That is Within." As a result of this year we pray that more and more people in our congregation will have identi-

fied themselves to their friends, co-workers and neighbors as Christians and will be more actively engaging in genuine friendships with those who don't share our faith. We believe that, because the gospel is the news of Jesus Christ dying and rising again on the public stage of human history, it will always "go public" when it truly takes a hold of a life.

In our culture today, the idea of Christianity as a public faith seems strange at best and ominous at worst. Many who see religion as

a personal and therefore completely private affair can't understand why a faith would insist upon being publicly discussed. For those who see religion primarily as driving a political agenda, a public Christian faith seems threatening and coercive.

But we need to think about a third category that is distinct from the categories of "private" and "political." That third category is what we are terming "public." Here's a helpful way to think about it.

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# SPECIAL EVENT: TIM KELLER AND GREG EPSTEIN DISCUSS "CAN LIFE HAVE MEANING WITHOUT GOD?"

**Thursday, November 17, 2013 at 7:00PM**  
**Hunter College Auditorium**

In his essay, "On Living in an Atomic Age," C.S. Lewis questions whether or not life has meaning if God does not exist.

Join us to hear Max Maclean give a dramatic reading of the piece, followed by a conversation between The *New York Times* best-selling authors Greg Epstein and Tim Keller as they discuss whether or not life has meaning without God.

A time for Q&A with the authors to follow.

The East Side congregation is excited to host this special event for all of Redeemer. We hope to see many of you bring friends who are exploring Christianity. RSVP at [www.redeemer.com/cslewisevent](http://www.redeemer.com/cslewisevent)

## THIS MONTH, DONATE A TOY TO "HIS TOY STORE"

The holidays are an especially challenging time for low-income families in our city, so we're excited about the opportunity to show them Christ's generosity this month through *His Toy Store*.

*His Toy Store* is Hope for New York's Christmas toy drive for families in need. In November, people like you donate new toys, and then Hope for New York works with churches and volunteers to host 10 His Toy Stores throughout the city in December. At these stores parents can shop for toys at no cost and are also able to connect to ministries for care and resources.

These parents include the working poor in low-income neighborhoods, formerly incarcerated individuals reconnecting with their

families, single moms living in homeless shelters, and those still recovering from Hurricane Sandy.

For many of them, *His Toy Store* is the only opportunity they have to provide gifts for their children. However, this outreach isn't just a one-time giveaway. Our hope is that parents connect with a caring church community for year-round support and spiritual community.

"Events like this help my family as well as the rest of community in a positive way," a mom at our store in Washington Heights told us last year. "This serves as a light to show that God is with you, and He's trying to make it better. It's a sense of hope for everyone."

Our goal is to raise **5,000 donated toys** by December 3.

There are lots of ways you can help:

- Donate a toy via our Amazon Wishlist, where you can pick out a toy and ship it straight to our warehouse.
- Purchase a new toy and send it to us at His Toy Store c/o World Vision, 310 Tiffany Street, Bronx, NY 10474.
- Give a financial gift designated to His Toy Store.
- Volunteer to help sort and pack gift donations.

Find our Amazon Wishlist, make a financial gift, or volunteer to help sort and pack gift donations at [hfnj.org/HTS](http://hfnj.org/HTS).

### REDEEMER REPORT

Kathy Keller  
Heather Klein

Hunter College Auditorium  
East 69th St.  
(between Park & Lexington)  
Services at  
10:30AM & 6PM

W83rd Ministry Center  
150 W. 83rd St.  
(between Columbus & Amsterdam)  
Services at  
9:30AM, 11:30AM, 5PM, 7PM

Salvation Army Auditorium  
120 W. 14th St.  
(between 6th & 7th Aves.)  
Services at  
9:30AM & 5PM

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# WALKING WITH GOD THROUGH PAIN & SUFFERING

BY JENNY CHANG

On October 2, a long line formed outside of the W83 Ministry Center that prompted curious neighbors to inquire whether a rock concert was taking place. “No, it’s something better! It’s a talk on pain and suffering. We have an extra ticket, would you like to come in with us?” Some people ended up attending this event serendipitously while others signed up way in advance and were so excited that their friends (who had never agreed to come to anything with them before) finally said yes to something. The overwhelming response to this event was probably because everyone experiences suffering. Many people want to know why there is so much pain and suffering and how to handle it in a way that will lead to strength and wisdom.

Redeemer’s mercy ministries, the Diaconate, Counseling Services and Hope for New York, were glad to cosponsor the evening with Tim and Kathy Keller and friends on “Walking with God through Pain

and Suffering.” More than 850 attendees came and about 30 to 35% of them were first time attendees to a Redeemer event. We took a survey that evening, and of all the responses, 37% were going through hardship, 39% were caring for someone going through hardship, and 24% wanted to hear Tim’s talk on suf-



fering. The top three categories of suffering were: relationship issues (33%), loss of a loved one (24%) and employment issues (13%).

Tim highlighted the importance of weeping, trusting, praying, reordering our loves and hoping in the midst of pain (a recording of his talk is available on [www.redeemer.com/painandsufferingevent](http://www.redeemer.com/painandsufferingevent)). Eager to provide additional resources and

a more in depth study, the Diaconate, Counseling and HFNY gave a complimentary copy of Tim’s latest book, *Walking with God through Pain and Suffering* to every event attendee. Joni Eareckson Tada, an evangelical Christian author and speaker who is well acquainted with suffering because of a teenage accident that left her a quadriplegic, believes Tim’s book on suffering “may be the most comprehensive contemporary book on the subject.” It has debuted at #18 on the *New York Times* best-seller list.

Kathy led an amazing panel composed of four Christians with diverse backgrounds, ethnicities, ages and genders. All of them gave extraordinarily vulnerable and moving testimonies. Their stories of suffering established that suffering does not discriminate; however their faith journeys confirmed that God also does not discriminate in sending us help because of Jesus Christ’s work on the cross. What a glorious comfort and hope!

## GETTING STUCK IN SUFFERING... (CONT’D FROM PAGE 1)

The fourth pitfall of suffering is *anger*. This depends a great deal on the cause and context of your problem, but anger at God or at other people—or perhaps at yourself—can burn so hot and fierce that you feel you simply can’t control it. There is also the more inchoate anger we call ‘cynicism.’ You can simply become deeply sarcastic and bitter about the injustice and emptiness of life.

Finally, and perhaps as a result of these other factors, it is possible for a sufferer to become, as Weil says, ‘*complicit*’ with the affliction. She writes that suffering can “little by little, turn the soul into its ac-

complice, by injecting a poison of inertia into it.” We may actually become comfortable with our discomfort. We may find the idea of going back into the responsibilities of life daunting. Or self-pity can be sweet and addicting. Or suffering can become an excuse for behavior you could not otherwise justify. Or you may feel you need to pay for your sins and the suffering is the way to do it. So you choose to stay miserable.

What must you do? If you suffer then you—or your friends and care-givers—must be keenly aware of these possibilities so you can move through them. Obviously, any

afflicted person needs times of solitude, but isolation must ultimately be resisted. Suffering can make you more lonely or drive you into deeper community. Let it be the latter. And while all afflicted persons need to spend a great deal of time self-examining and healing, at some point they must face outward and think of others and love their neighbors and not think exclusively of themselves.

Even for Christians who understand the gospel, the feeling of condemnation can be a great challenge, but it is in the end a welcome one. We may think we believe we are saved by grace, but in times of  
(Continued on page 5)

# THE GOTHAM FELLOWSHIP EXPERIENCE

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BY LEAH HOLLINGSWORTH

Last month, I managed to navigate through Penn Station on a Friday afternoon—suitcase, 10-month-old baby, diaper bag, car seat, stroller, and husband (last but not least) in tow. Perhaps an inauspicious start to a life-changing weekend.

Each new class of Redeemer's Gotham Fellowship begins the year with a fall retreat on the Princeton campus, and although I was eager for the program to begin, I also didn't quite know what to expect.

I assumed that the program itself would be primarily "heady," given the kinds of summer reading we had been assigned (600+ pages of theology, plus Tim Keller's *Every Good Endeavour* and extensive lecture notes on Cultural Renewal).

I assumed that the weekend would be like most retreats; a good dose of warm and fuzzy mixed with appropriate amounts of learning. It's not that the retreat wasn't those

things, but it was so much more.

The word that comes to mind is *intentional*. Every aspect was designed to draw us out, help us know each other and ourselves better, and ultimately lead towards a richer personal relationship with the Lord. The overall experience was both "heady" and also unexpectedly "heavy," seamlessly and easily woven together in a manner that encouraged authenticity and candid sharing.

Each activity and exercise was revelatory, whether an ice-breaker that exposed the fellow with the longest second toe (myself), or a group discussion identifying the strengths and weaknesses of our varied spiritual influences and backgrounds. We spread out our entire lives on post-it notes and then shared it in ten-minute sketches that proved more powerful than any lengthy testimony I've given or witnessed.

The power and place of experi-

encing God in a sensory way was neither neglected nor over-emphasized, and on Sunday morning we studied Psalm 23 and shared the Lord's Supper in a way that I'm fairly certain moved everyone in the room.

Requisite time was taken for "orientation" to the program, the nuts and bolts of its logistics, but also the philosophy behind the program. The Gotham Fellowship is not just a study of theology or a yearlong devotional, but exists to promote a deeper understanding of God through intense study of the way He works in scripture; through His son Jesus Christ, and through the Holy Spirit. It's certainly an intense yearlong program, but that weekend I realized that Gotham is so much more—it's about a new life, a changed heart, and cultivating a deeper relationship with the Lord through a deeper understanding of Him.

## PUBLIC FAITH... (CONT'D FROM PAGE 1)

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When it comes to things that are "private," the discourse that we use is **the language of preference** or opinion. In this category, everyone is entitled to his or her opinion and to insist that one's opinion is the only correct one would rightly be seen as unreasonable and intolerant.

When it comes to things that we would categorize as "political," the discourse that we tend to use is **the language of coercion**. Collect enough like-minded voters and the rule of the majority will use its power to coerce policies they support.

When it comes to talking about the Christian faith, neither of these two ways of speaking is helpful. If we speak of the Christian faith using the language of preference (the "private" category), it implicitly makes Jesus out to be just one option among many. Most Christians would say that that is a grave mis-

characterization of their faith and so that language fails us. But if we were to speak of Christianity using the discourse of coercion (the "political" category), it would suggest that the Christian faith is essentially about using state power to coerce others into beliefs and values that they reject. This is clearly not the case.

What we lack then is this third category of "public, not political" and a third language. In this category, we do not use the privatized language of preference ("Jesus is my way") or the politicized language of coercion ("Jesus will be your way whether you like it or not"); we use the public **language of persuasion** ("Can I show you how Jesus is the way?") This is the language that ought to characterize our civil society. It is also the language we use when we have become convinced

that something is true and we want to help others to see its truthfulness for themselves. 1 Peter 3:15 puts it most succinctly when it says that we ought to be prepared to share the hope that is within, but we must do it "with gentleness and respect."

When we speak of Christianity as a public faith, we are saying that it is a faith that cannot be privatized or politicized without altering its very nature. As such, it is a faith that has always insisted on being public, using the language of persuasion. Because Jesus did in fact rise from the dead on the public stage of human history, that is enormously important for us all, regardless of what we believe. And we want to be a congregation that is known in New York City for speaking of this decisive public event with our neighbors "with gentleness and respect."

# REDEEMER DIACONATE OPEN HOUSE

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**Thursday, November 21, 2013 at 7:00PM**  
**Redeemer Offices, 1359 Broadway, 4th Floor**

Come meet your friendly deacons and deaconesses! You are cordially invited to meet the Redeemer Diaconate\*, a ministry that carries out mercy through deeds. Come learn what the Diaconate ministry does, hear about what it is like to be a deacon/deaconess and find out how you can be involved.

For more information go to [www.redeemer.com/diaconate](http://www.redeemer.com/diaconate)

*\*The Diaconate is Redeemer's mercy ministry addressing the needs of those in our church family experiencing hardship. The Diaconate is our response to God's calling to be merciful, to love and care for one another in practical ways. If you know any regular attendees or church members in need of practical assistance, please encourage them to call the Diaconate helpline, (917) 719-0259.*

## CFW LAUNCHES *CITY RHYTHMS*

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On September 19 the Center for Faith & Work launched *City Rhythms*, a new monthly, cross-vocational gathering spotlighting specific vocational sectors each month. These evenings bring together a diverse group of professionals and focus on developing a collective understanding of particular industries in order to incite a larger vision of God's love for the city. Our call is to re-imagine our own work through the lens of what God is doing in New York City as a whole.

We tend to think about church as defined by what happens on a Sunday, when we gather together as a corporate body. But what happens during the rest of the week, when the people of God scatter into every sector of society?

With *City Rhythms*, we are demonstrating that if we, as the "week-day" church, aspire to taking seriously the idea of seeking the good

of our city, we must understand how the different sectors of the city are interconnected. Anyone who understands the economy of New York City knows that the arts—fashion, theater, music, etc.—are as critical to the holistic prosperity of the city as the finance industry we associate with Wall Street.

Consider the analogy of the human body. If something is sick or broken in the body, one must understand anatomy, knowing the major systems of the body and how they relate to each other, in order to be able to accurately diagnose, treat, and heal disease. As we think about questions concerning how we work collectively to seek the flourishing of this city, we need to understand what is happening in sectors outside own and see the interrelations and correlations of shifts and trends.

From a theological perspective, there is reason for us to believe that

our various industries are connected. We hold that interdependence exists because of our conviction that God is sovereign and providential over all of it, that there is a cohesion and coherence in all things, and that all things hold together in Christ himself.

As the *City Rhythms* series progresses, we hope that those who participate will begin to see how these myriad fields reflect the rhythms of this city, and the interconnectedness and interdependence of our society. May we, as a community, cultivate a deeper appreciation and insight for what it means for us individually and collectively to participate in seeking the greater flourishing of our city.

*City Rhythms* gathers on the third Thursday of each month. For information about upcoming events please refer to [www.faithandwork.org/cityrhythms](http://www.faithandwork.org/cityrhythms).

## GETTING STUCK IN SUFFERING... (CONT'D FROM PAGE 3)

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difficulty we can finally learn to use the doctrine we know on our hearts, remembering that God's wrath and punishment of our sin

fell into the heart of Jesus, and now that we believe in him, "there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (Romans 8:1)

Our anger can be the greatest challenge of all. Again, the answer is to not merely believe gospel doctrine  
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## NOVEMBER IS NOMINATION MONTH FOR ELDERS, DEACONS AND DEACONESSES

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### **Send your nomination in today!**

Once again, our church is accepting nominations for elders, deacons and deaconesses. We need the help of all Redeemer members to identify new servant leaders.

As Redeemer's mercy ministry, the deacons and deaconesses serve on the Diaconate and provide practical assistance to those in our congregation who are facing challenging situations (Acts 6:1-4 and 1 Timothy 3:8-13). The elders serve on the Session and provide spiritual leadership to our congregation through oversight of Redeemer ministries, leaders and members (1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:6-9).

If you are a member, please prayerfully consider whether you or a fellow member you know could serve as elder, deacon or deaconess.

Nominate a fellow member today at: [www.redeemer.com/nominations](http://www.redeemer.com/nominations).

## GETTING STUCK IN SUFFERING... (CONT'D FROM PAGE 5)

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but use it. Did Jesus die for you? Then you can forgive yourself. Did Jesus die for you? Then you can and should forgive others. Did Jesus die for you? Then, despite all the unanswered questions, you can be sure that he loves you, he understands, and he's with you even if you don't feel him.