



## Healing: Wrestling with a Sovereign God

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At the end of 1992 I had a traffic accident with life-threatening injuries that almost cost me my life and left me paraplegic.

What about the many healings I have read about so often in the Bible? Especially in the Gospel of Matthew it says again and again: Jesus healed all, and all were healed...

Of course God would heal me, there was no doubt about that, after all I had known for a long time that he wanted me to become a missionary.

It took several months before it slowly occurred to me that God might have something else in mind for my life than to heal me of my paralysis. Above all, I wanted him to make clear to me what he actually wanted.

My whole world view, my plans, perspectives... everything collapsed at that time and I did not know how my life could look like in the future.

There were times when I thought that the other people in the clinic, where I was being treated, were better off because they didn't have to deal with God. For them, it was just something that happened and that was it. Over time, however, I experienced that God was there. Frustratingly, he did not answer all my burning questions, but was close to me with his presence and withstood my anger, complaints and pain.

Gradually did I realize how valuable it is not to have to just shout at the empty walls and not to have to accept a vague sense of fate. I have someone who is there and who endures tensions with me and is close to me, even when I yell at him and get angry with him. If no one is there, you can't scold anyone, but my fate is in the hands of a person with whom I can deal.

During this time, I wrestled a lot with the idea of God's sovereignty and the passages we usually turn to when we think about it, like: 'My ways are not your ways. My ways are beyond your understanding. Your task is to hold faithfully to what you know.' (Isaiah 55:8-9). My desires are often so strong, and I have my ideas of how God should act and what would be good. God is greater than everything. Am I really ready to give God everything? To trust him in everything? Do I only want my needs met by him or do I want to submit to him in everything, trust him no matter what circumstances I live in?

Another passage: 'We know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are called according to his purpose' (Romans 8:28). I have come to believe that this promise is not fulfilled automatically, but comes about when we begin to entrust our lives into God's hands.

When I visited my Muslim acquaintances and friends, I realized how different they reacted to my wheelchair situation. For them, Allah's sovereignty is beyond doubt, and whatever happens, there is nothing they can do but bear it and put up with it. Allah does not let us throw our anger at him and he does not deal with his creatures. As a result, one is pushed into a passivity in which one lets one's fate pass over one's head, becoming resigned to a sort of fatalism.

By contrast again, we in secular Europe do not want to recognize God's sovereignty at all. Everything must be possible for us in our own strength; we want to be able to determine our health, life, and death on our own terms.

The thing that hurts me more than the behaviour of those other people, however, is the fact that many Christians cannot cope with my disability and react awkwardly to it. Unfortunately, so little is taught about this topic in our congregations and one encounters a great uncertainty among many Christians as to how they should theologically classify disability, healing or non-healing. What happened to me can happen to any Christian believer. There are things that happen to us without us being able to do anything and I think we should learn to accept that and to be able to deal with it with God. Maybe with this view it will be easier for us to see people who are affected by disability as what they are, namely normal fellow human beings who have to overcome some more obstacles.

I came to see in a new way that God is sovereign, and he carries out his plan with me, even if it doesn't suit me, but he does care about me. He is not far away and above everything, but he has always gone ahead of me and goes through everything with me. He is in the beautiful things in life, and when it gets hard he is all the closer and holds my hand tighter.

God still does heal and it's our duty to pray for those who want prayer, but no human being is spared suffering. illness, accidents, war, catastrophes, the death of loved ones and, at the latest, our own death let us know that there is no one who is always well. How to deal with suffering that can't be avoided? Do I passively accept it as my fate and resign? Do I become totally bitter against God and the world and against myself? Do I try to adapt and somehow get the best out of it by my own strength? Or do I seek contact with God through Jesus in order to come to terms with him?

It took time, but this latter way was what I had chosen.

'You people trust in him at all times, and pour out your hearts to him! God is our refuge.' (Psalm 62:8)

I experienced how good it feels to pour out one's heart to God and to experience that he gets involved in such an argument, though not always in the way I had imagined. God proved to be a real rock and fortress during this time, holding me fast when the ground collapsed beneath my feet.