

Called to a Suffering World

by Grace Tazelaar, MS, RN

As Christians, we reflect on the suffering that Jesus experienced on our behalf in order that we may have a relationship with a Holy God. Suffering is not something we would choose, yet Jesus chose to suffer for us out of his love for us.

There are millions of people suffering around the world who did not choose the path of suffering. They may have been born into poverty to parents who did not want them or could not provide for them, or perhaps due to war or AIDS they have no parents to care for them, send them to school, or teach them about God. Others suffer because of chronic disease or unrelenting pain which prevents them from work and prohibits their ability to care for their daily needs, let alone the needs of others. Some have experienced indescribable evil. They have been tortured, raped, sold into human or sexual slavery, or had their bodies disfigured in sadistic rituals.

When we are healthy and well with food, clothes and a comfortable home, it is easy to forget those who are suffering. At times the amount of suffering in the world overwhelms us and the enormity of it paralyzes us from even trying to do something about it.

Yet when I am not feeling well, when a member of my family dies, or when I suffer in some way, I want someone to do something about it. I cry out to God to take my suffering away. I want relief from suffering -- and I want it quickly.

The suffering taking place in the world doesn't concern us until it affects us. We may be concerned about the suffering of others, but we really don't want to suffer ourselves to help alleviate that suffering.

I frequently encounter this paradox as I talk with students who are concerned about social justice. They want to address the suffering that takes place in the world but often they are reluctant to sacrifice their personal comfort and careers to bring the gospel and relief to those who are suffering.

The call to missions is counter-cultural. God calls missionaries to live lives that advance his Kingdom rather than their careers. This may mean surrendering their personal

desires for marriage and family to fully serve God. It may require giving up personal comforts and lifestyles so that others may realize small improvements in their daily lives.

Becoming a follower of Jesus does not guarantee a life free from suffering. Each of us has been given a cross to bear and an opportunity to enter the fellowship of the sufferings of Christ. "I want to know Christ—yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead" (Philippians 3:10-11 TNIV).

The [Urbana Student Missions conferences](#) have played an important role in calling missionaries to bring the Good News of Jesus to a suffering world. A few years ago, I was talking with a missionary couple to the Philippines and mentioned that I was working on the healthcare focus for an Urbana conference. The husband said, "I went to two Urbana conferences and they were important events in our decision to go into missions." This is an often-repeated scenario around the globe. Missionaries sometimes ask, "Which Urbana did you attend?" and proceed to compare notes on their Urbana experiences.

The challenges facing missions (healthcare missions in particular) continue to be daunting. God has given us marvelous technology and convenient air travel. There are open doors in restricted access countries because of breakthroughs in healthcare with concomitant invitations for teaching, and incredible accessibility through communication.

Yet the Lord still confounds us with his desire to use the mission endeavor, and our partnership in it, to bring about his Kingdom purposes. Christ's call to sacrifice reminds us of the sacrifice he paid for us. His call to address suffering, whether in the lives of others or our own, reminds us of the suffering he endured on our behalf.

Christ's defeat of the Evil One on the cross and assurance of eternal life compels us to share this Good News with others.



[Grace Tazelaar](#) is a veteran missionary nurse who offers wisdom from years of experience serving God cross-culturally. Find more resources, best practices, and what you need to know about missionary nursing at [NCF Missions](#).