



# Deathly Diseases, Cancer & Dementia:

Intrusions in God's Kingdom Path

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INTRUDERS IN GOD'S GOOD GARDEN



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## **Introduction — Intruders in God's Good Garden**

In the beginning, there was no hospital.

No oncology wing.

No memory clinic.

No caregiver exhaustion.

God planted a garden.

He called it good.

Very good.

Health was not something pursued.

It was assumed.

Clarity was not fragile.

It was natural.

Relationship was not interrupted by decay.

It was unhindered.

But something entered.

Doubt.

Autonomy.

Rebellion.

And with rebellion came fracture.

With fracture came mortality.

With mortality came decay.

This series explores those intrusions.

Grief.

Evil.

And now —

Cancer.

Dementia.

And the many forms of prolonged debilitation that follow humanity east of Eden.

These are not part of the Gardener's original design.

They are not evidence that He delights in suffering.

They are consequences of a world bent away from Him.

Yet the story does not end in Genesis 3.

The Gardener did not abandon His work.

He promised restoration.

He entered the broken world Himself.

He took on flesh capable of suffering.

He bore death.

And He rose.

This volume does not attempt medical instruction.

It does not promise guaranteed healing.

It does not explain every mystery.

It seeks to do something simpler and perhaps more necessary:

To place prolonged illness inside the larger story of Scripture.

To steady faith when bodies fail.

To anchor hope when memory fades.

To call the Church to draw near rather than retreat.

To remind caregivers their hidden labor is seen.

To assure families that Christ does not lose His own.

If you are suffering, this book walks beside you.

If you are caregiving, this book stands with you.

If you are unsure how to respond, this book calls you closer.

We live between two gardens.

The first, where disease was unknown.

The second, where disease will be no more.

Between them, intrusions press hard.

But they do not have the final word.

The Gardener does.

And He is not finished.



## **Chapter 1 – The Intrusion**

### **The Ordinary Walk**

The walk had been steady.

Not dramatic.

Not crisis-driven.

Just faithful.

Morning prayer.

Scripture read slowly.

Church attendance.

Ordinary trust.

You believed in God's sovereignty.

You believed in His goodness.

You believed in resurrection.

You did not expect this.

### **The Word That Changes the Room**

Sometimes it is a word.

Malignant.

Aggressive.

Inoperable.

Progressive.

Other times it is not a word but a moment.

A blank stare.

A forgotten name.

A repeated question.

A personality shift so subtle you almost ignore it.

At first, you excuse it.

We all forget.

We are tired.

Stress does strange things.

But something does not sit right.

And then the tests come.

And the word settles.

Not loudly.

Quietly.

Like an intruder who has already crossed the threshold.

### **The Quiet Shaking of Faith**

Faith does not evaporate.

But it trembles.

You pray harder.

You quote Scripture more urgently.

You call people to intercede.

Yet underneath is a whisper:

This was not in the plan.

Not our plan.

And that is the fracture point.

Because somewhere — even in mature believers — we carry an unspoken assumption:

If we walk faithfully, perhaps we will avoid certain valleys.

But Scripture never promised valley avoidance.

It promised valley presence.

“Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for You are with me.” (Psalm 23:4)

Through.

Not around.

### **Before the Intrusion**

We must go backward to go forward.

Genesis tells us that God saw everything He made and declared it “very good.” (Genesis 1:31)

Very good includes:

Harmony.

Health.

Clarity.

Communion.

It does not include:

Mutating cells.

Degenerative disease.

Cognitive unraveling.

There were no hospital corridors in Eden.

No oncology units.

No memory wards.

Disease is not original design.

That must be anchored early.

If disease is seen as design, hope erodes.

If disease is seen as intrusion, hope has footing.

### **The Fracture That Changed Everything**

Genesis 3 introduces death.

Not immediate annihilation — but decay.

Dust to dust.

Separation.

Disorder.

Paul later writes:

“Sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin.” (Romans 5:12)

Death is not merely the final breath.

It is the slow bending of creation toward corruption.

Cells that once replicated in order now rebel.

Neurons that once fired cleanly now misfire.

Systems weaken.

The intrusion began at the Fall.

Your diagnosis is downstream.

## **Cancer — When the Body Turns on Itself**

Cancer is a terrible metaphor for the Fall.

Cells designed to serve the body begin serving themselves.

They multiply without submission.

They consume without restraint.

They refuse the order they were given.

Is that not the essence of sin?

Autonomy without harmony.

Growth without obedience.

Cancer is not punishment.

But it reflects a world where order has fractured.

It is not foreign to the theology of Genesis 3.

It is a consequence of living east of Eden.

## **Dementia — When the Mind Unravels**

Dementia feels different.

Cancer attacks visibly.

Dementia erodes quietly.

The mind — that sacred instrument of memory and identity — begins to dim.

You mourn conversations that no longer flow.

You grieve recognition that flickers.

You feel alone while sitting next to someone you love.

And here faith is pressed more deeply.

If memory fades, what remains?

If personality shifts, who is still there?

We will answer this carefully in later chapters.

But for now, hold this:

The image of God is not stored in neurons.

Genesis 1:27 does not hinge on cognitive sharpness.

The soul is not erased by neurological decline.

### **The Early Grief**

Grief usually follows death.

These intrusions begin grief before it.

You mourn what is slipping away.

You mourn what might come.

You mourn the normal you assumed.

And unlike many grief journeys, this one may worsen.

More treatments.

More confusion.

More dependency.

More exhaustion.

The slope is often downward.

And that is where faith must mature beyond slogans.

### **The Questions That Surface**

Is this punishment?

Job's friends thought suffering always traced to guilt.

God rebuked them.

In John 9, the disciples asked who sinned to cause blindness.

Jesus said neither.

Disease does not equal personal judgment.

Yet we must also avoid saying it is meaningless.

Romans 8 tells us creation groans.

Not randomly.

Not chaotically.

But as labor pains.

Pain with a future.

Groaning with direction.

### **Presence Over Removal**

Many prayers in this season ask for removal.

Sometimes removal comes.

Often it does not.

Paul pleaded for his thorn to depart.

The answer he received was not healing.

It was sufficiency.

“My grace is sufficient for you, for My power is made perfect in weakness.”  
(2 Corinthians 12:9)

Grace does not always cure.

Grace sustains.

That distinction becomes survival.

### **The Intrusion Is Real — But Not Ultimate**

Revelation 21 promises:

“He will wipe away every tear... neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore.”

Cancer is temporary.

Dementia is temporary.

Decay is temporary.

Resurrection is permanent.

This does not minimize present suffering.

It contextualizes it.

Between the Gardens, intrusion walks beside us.

But it does not define the final chapter.

### **Where We Go From Here**

This book will not offer easy fixes.

It will not promise guaranteed healing.

It will not accuse the suffering.

It will walk carefully through:

- The theology of decay.
- The fear of fading faith.
- The holiness of caregiving.
- The responsibility of the Church.
- The hope of resurrection.

The intrusion has entered the garden.

But it has not dethroned the Gardener.

And that is where we begin.

### **A Prayer in the Valley**

Father,

We did not expect this.

We believed You were sovereign —  
but we did not imagine this path.

You formed the body in wisdom.

You breathed life into dust.

You declared creation good.

And now we sit with shadows on scans  
and fading memories at the table.

We confess our fear.

We confess our trembling.

We do not understand the intrusion.

But we know You are not absent.

Walk with us through this valley.

When faith feels interrupted, anchor it.

When strength feels thin, sustain it.

When memory fades, remind us that You do not forget.

Guard the soul of the one who suffers.

Guard the heart of the one who watches.

Teach us to trust You in prolonged weakness.

And keep our eyes fixed on the Garden that will not fade.

In Christ,

who conquered decay and will swallow death in victory,

Amen.

## **Chapter 2 – The Garden Without Disease**

### **Before the Hospital Corridor**

Before there were scans,  
there were trees.

Before there were oncology wards,  
there was a river.

Before there were memory clinics,  
there was clarity.

Scripture does not begin in a valley.

It begins in a garden.

“In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.” (Genesis 1:1)

And at the end of His creative work, He saw everything He had made —  
and behold, it was very good. (Genesis 1:31)

Very good is not sentimental language.

It is moral language.

Functional language.

Harmonious language.

It means nothing was bent.

Nothing rebelled.

Nothing deteriorated.

### **Very Good Means Whole**

When God formed man from the dust and breathed into him the breath of life  
(Genesis 2:7),

He did not create a fragile mistake.

The body worked.

The mind was clear.

Memory was intact.

Emotion was ordered.

There was no cellular confusion.

No neurological unraveling.

No fear of diagnosis.

Health was not a gift occasionally granted.

It was the baseline condition of creation.

### **Communion Without Obstruction**

Adam and Eve walked with God.

There was no hiding.

No shame.

No internal corruption.

Faith was not strained.

Trust was not contested by suffering.

The body did not distract from communion.

The mind did not distort reality.

Imagine what that means.

No anticipatory grief.

No slow goodbye.

No watching someone fade.

The Garden did not contain the seeds of disease.

It contained life.

### **The Tree of Life**

In the midst of the Garden stood the Tree of Life. (Genesis 2:9)

This was not symbolic decoration.

It was provision.

Life was sustained in fellowship with God.

Decay was not inevitable.

Death was not natural.

Death entered later.

That is crucial.

If death were natural,  
then disease would simply be biological progression.

But Scripture frames death as an enemy.

“The last enemy to be destroyed is death.” (1 Corinthians 15:26)

Enemies are not original citizens.

They are invaders.

Cancer is downstream of death.

Dementia is downstream of death.

Both trace back to an enemy that was never meant to reign.

## **Why This Matters**

Some modern voices call death “part of the circle of life.”

Scripture does not.

Scripture calls it wages.

“For the wages of sin is death...” (Romans 6:23)

Wages are earned outcomes.

Not creative design.

Disease, therefore, is not morally neutral.

It belongs to the broken order.

This is not to say every illness traces to a specific sin.

We already rejected that in Chapter 1.

But we must be clear:

Decay is not the fingerprint of Eden.

It is the scar of the Fall.

## **The Mind in the Garden**

Pause and consider this:

Before sin, there was no confusion.

No misfiring thought.

No misplaced word.

No identity crisis.

The human mind was not merely intelligent —  
it was aligned.

Dementia feels especially cruel because it attacks something that once  
reflected God's image so beautifully.

Reason.

Memory.

Recognition.

But the image of God was never limited to cognition alone.

It includes:

Relational capacity.

Moral awareness.

Spiritual orientation.

Dominion under God.

When dementia erodes memory,  
it does not erase image.

It obscures expression.

That distinction will matter deeply later.

### **The Body in the Garden**

The body, too, was not disposable.

It was called good.

Christian hope is not escape from the body.

It is resurrection of the body.

That means bodies matter.

Which means the corruption of the body grieves God.

He does not delight in tumors.

He does not celebrate deterioration.

He weeps at tombs.

Jesus stood before Lazarus's grave and wept. (John 11:35)

He knew resurrection was minutes away.

And He still wept.

That tells us something about how heaven views decay.

### **When We Romanticize the Present**

One reason prolonged illness destabilizes faith is because we subconsciously treat our current world as if it were the final one.

We build as though permanence is guaranteed.

We assume longevity.

We quietly expect steady health.

Eden was steady health.

This world is not Eden.

Between Genesis 3 and Revelation 21 lies a long wilderness.

In that wilderness,  
bodies weaken.

Minds falter.

Relationships strain.

Creation groans.

### **The Longing That Disease Awakens**

Cancer and dementia do something unexpected.

They awaken longing.

Not just for healing.

For restoration.

For the way things were meant to be.

Even unbelievers feel it.

“This is not how it should be.”

That instinct is theological.

It is memory of design.

Ecclesiastes says God has set eternity in the human heart. (Ecclesiastes 3:11)

We know, deep down,  
that decay is not ultimate.

Disease reminds us forcefully.

### **The Danger of Forgetting the First Garden**

If we forget Eden,  
we will misinterpret suffering.

We will either:

Blame God.

Or blame ourselves.

Or declare everything meaningless.

But if we remember:

God designed life without corruption.

Corruption entered through rebellion.

And God has already initiated restoration through Christ.

Then disease, though terrible,  
is not inexplicable.

It is tragic.

But not random.

It is grievous.

But not purposeless.

It belongs to a chapter that will end.

### **The Promise of the Second Garden**

The Bible ends where it began —  
in a garden-city.

Revelation describes the Tree of Life again. (Revelation 22:2)

This time, no serpent lurks.

No curse remains.

“No longer will there be anything accursed.” (Revelation 22:3)

That includes:

No malignant growth.

No cognitive erosion.

No hospice wing.

The arc bends from garden  
through intrusion  
back to garden.

Not repetition.

Redemption.

### **Why This Chapter Matters for the Valley**

When you sit beside someone receiving chemotherapy,  
or help someone dress who once dressed themselves,  
you are witnessing something foreign to God's first design.

That should not make you despair.

It should clarify your hope.

You are not crazy to feel this is wrong.

It is wrong.

It is intrusion.

But it is temporary.

The Gardener has not abandoned His work.

He has already planted resurrection in the soil.

### **A Prayer for Remembering**

Lord,

Remind us of what You first made.

When hospitals feel permanent  
and decline feels unstoppable,  
take us back to the beginning.

You created bodies good.

You created minds clear.

You walked with humanity in peace.

Help us remember that disease is not Your delight.

It is not the final word.

When we are tempted to see this world as ultimate,  
lift our eyes to the Garden to come.

Strengthen our hope.

Root us in the promise that corruption will be swallowed by life.

And as we walk through this broken chapter,  
keep our hearts anchored in Your original design  
and Your final restoration.

In Jesus' name,

Amen.

## **Chapter 3 — The Fracture That Allowed Decay**

### **When Harmony Broke**

The Garden did not slowly deteriorate.

It ruptured.

Genesis 3 is not poetic myth.

It is theological earthquake.

The serpent questioned.

The woman listened.

The man followed.

Trust fractured.

And with that fracture came disorder.

Not only relational disorder —

but cosmic disorder.

Creation did not collapse instantly.

But it bent.

And once bent, it began its long decline.

### **The Moment Death Entered**

Paul writes with clarity:

“Sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men...” (Romans 5:12)

Death spread.

It was not contained.

It moved through:

Soil.  
Body.  
Mind.  
Generation.

The Fall was not merely moral failure.

It was structural corruption.

The engine of creation began running with grit in its gears.

Cells still divide.

But not always rightly.

Neurons still fire.

But not always clearly.

Systems still function.

But not forever.

### **Disorder in the Body**

Before the Fall, the body operated in submission to God's design.

After the Fall, autonomy entered everything.

Sin is autonomy — self-rule without reference to God.

It is not surprising that disease mirrors this.

Cancer is growth without submission.

An internal rebellion.

Cells no longer serving the whole.

Growing for themselves.

That metaphor is not meant to accuse the sufferer.

It is meant to show that disease reflects a world no longer fully ordered.

ALS slowly silences muscles.

Parkinson's tightens what once moved freely.

Multiple sclerosis strips insulation from nerves.

The forms vary.

The fracture is shared.

### **Disorder in the Mind**

The mind, too, was not spared.

Genesis 3 shows confusion immediately.

Blame-shifting.

Fear.

Hiding.

Shame.

The fracture did not remain external.

It entered cognition.

Dementia is not simply forgetfulness.

It is unraveling.

It exposes how fragile the brain truly is.

And that fragility traces back to mortality itself.

Dust you are.

To dust you shall return. (Genesis 3:19)

Returning to dust is not only burial.

It is the slow weakening before burial.

### **The Groaning of Creation**

Romans 8 gives language that feels almost written for hospital corridors:

“The creation was subjected to futility... and the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now.” (Romans 8:20–22)

Futility.

Groaning.

Labor pains.

Not chaos without direction.

Not cruelty without hope.

Labor pains anticipate birth.

That is crucial.

Decay is not meaningless.

It is movement toward restoration.

But that movement is painful.

Cancer groans.

Dementia groans.

Chronic pain groans.

Autoimmune collapse groans.

Caregivers groan.

And Scripture dares to say:

The Spirit groans with us. (Romans 8:26)

God is not detached from decline.

### **Why Some Conditions Feel Crueler**

There is something particularly destabilizing about degenerative disease.

Sudden death is shocking.

Progressive decline is wearing.

It stretches grief across months and years.

It forces daily adjustment.

It confronts you repeatedly.

Genesis 3 introduced toil.

“By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread...”

Toil is slow.

Disease often mirrors toil.

Slow erosion.

Incremental loss.

This is part of the curse’s texture.

Not theatrical destruction.

Relentless wearing.

## **Is God Then the Author of Disease?**

This question must be handled carefully.

God permitted the Fall.

He pronounced consequences.

But Scripture does not depict Him as delighting in decay.

Ezekiel says, "I have no pleasure in the death of anyone." (Ezekiel 18:32)

Jesus healed repeatedly.

He did not explain suffering away.

He moved toward it.

That tells us something.

Disease belongs to the broken order.

Redemption belongs to God.

We must not confuse the two.

## **The Enemy Named**

Paul calls death an enemy. (1 Corinthians 15:26)

Enemies are defeated, not embraced.

Modern culture often speaks of death as natural closure.

Scripture speaks of resurrection.

If death were natural in the ultimate sense, resurrection would be unnecessary.

But Christ came precisely because death is intrusion.

Every degenerative condition whispers the same reality:

This world is not yet restored.

### **The Personal Weight of the Fracture**

The theology explains the structure.

But explanation does not erase ache.

When your spouse no longer tracks conversation,  
when your parent cannot remember your childhood,  
when your own body turns against you,

Genesis 3 feels close.

Not ancient.

Present.

The fracture is not theoretical.

It sits at your table.

And this is where faith matures.

Not by denying the fracture.

But by refusing to let it rewrite the ending.

### **The Already and the Not Yet**

The cross addressed sin.

The resurrection defeated death.

And yet bodies still fail.

This is the tension of the “already and not yet.”

Already redeemed.

Not yet fully restored.

Already sealed by the Spirit.

Not yet glorified.

Already justified.

Not yet incorruptible.

That tension explains why healing sometimes happens now —  
and sometimes waits.

It explains why some tumors shrink —  
and others do not.

Why some minds remain sharp —  
and others fade.

We live between victory secured and victory applied in full.

### **The Fracture Is Real — But Limited**

Genesis 3 is not the last chapter.

Revelation 22 reverses the curse.

“No longer will there be anything accursed.”

That includes:

Neurological erosion.

Genetic mutation.

Systemic collapse.

Dust will give way to glory.

But until then, the fracture shapes our experience.

Not as final authority.

But as present reality.

### **What This Means for Us**

Understanding the fracture does not remove sorrow.

It does remove confusion.

Disease is not proof that God abandoned you.

It is evidence you live east of Eden.

It is not evidence your faith failed.

It is evidence mortality persists.

The intrusion is terrible.

But it is not sovereign.

The fracture explains decay.

It does not define destiny.

### **A Prayer in the Midst of Fracture**

Lord,

We feel the bend of a broken world.

We see bodies fail.

We see minds falter.

We see strength diminish.

Help us understand without hardening.

Keep us from blaming where You have not blamed.

Keep us from despairing where You have promised hope.

When the fracture feels personal,  
remind us it began long before us —  
and will end because of You.

Teach us to live faithfully  
between what has been broken  
and what will be restored.

Through Christ,  
who conquered death and will undo every curse,

Amen.

## **Chapter 4 — When Cells Rebel**

### **The Intrusion of Cancer**

#### **The Word No One Prepares For**

There are words that divide life into before and after.

Cancer is one of them.

It does not shout when it first enters.

It hides.

A shadow on a scan.

A lump discovered in passing.

Fatigue that lingers longer than it should.

Then the phone call.

Then the meeting.

Then the sentence that rearranges everything.

“We found something.”

You sit still.

You nod.

You ask questions you never rehearsed.

And the room feels smaller.

#### **The Body Turning Inward**

Cancer is not an external invader like a virus.

It is internal rebellion.

Cells that once served the body begin serving themselves.

They multiply without restraint.

They refuse the signals that say, "Stop."

They consume resources meant for the whole.

It is growth detached from order.

That is what makes it so unsettling.

It is not foreign tissue from elsewhere.

It is your own.

And that feels personal.

### **The Shock of Betrayal**

There is something uniquely disorienting about internal betrayal.

You trusted your body.

You did not think about it much.

It simply worked.

Now it feels unreliable.

Fragile.

Suspicious.

And faith must now operate inside a body you no longer fully trust.

This is not merely medical.

It is existential.

The body that carried you through decades  
now feels uncertain.

### **Fear in the Quiet Hours**

Cancer is not only the disease.

It is the waiting.

Waiting for biopsy results.

Waiting for staging.

Waiting for treatment plans.

Waiting for side effects.

Waiting for follow-up scans.

Waiting to see if it spreads.

Fear rarely screams during the day.

It whispers at 2 a.m.

What if it's aggressive?

What if it returns?

What if this is the beginning of the end?

Faith is tested not in public declarations —  
but in private hours.

### **The Spiritual Temptations**

Cancer brings specific temptations.

The temptation to blame:

Did I cause this?  
Was this lifestyle?  
Was this negligence?  
Is God correcting something?

The temptation to bargain:

If I pray harder...  
If I promise more...  
If I repent deeper...

The temptation to despair:

What is the point?  
Why build anything?  
Why plan?

The temptation to withdraw:

From church.  
From community.  
From hope.

These temptations are as real as chemotherapy.

## **The Theology Under Pressure**

We must return to what we established earlier:

Disease is not automatically punishment.

In John 9, Jesus dismantled that assumption.

Cancer does not equal divine accusation.

But cancer does expose how fragile our assumptions about control were.

We believed:

Eat right.

Exercise.

Manage stress.

And you should be safe.

Sometimes those things help.

Sometimes they do not.

Mortality is not entirely managed by discipline.

We live in a fractured creation.

That truth humbles us.

### **The Physical Cost**

Chemotherapy strips more than tumors.

It strips energy.

It strips hair.

It strips appetite.

Radiation burns.

Surgery scars.

The body that once moved freely now moves cautiously.

Dependence increases.

Autonomy decreases.

And dignity feels threatened.

This is where we must speak carefully.

Dignity is not measured by independence.

It is rooted in image.

Genesis 1:27 still stands in hospital gowns.

### **When Healing Comes — And When It Does Not**

Some receive remission.

Scans clear.

Tumors shrink.

We rejoice.

Others fight faithfully and decline anyway.

We weep.

The cross and resurrection guarantee ultimate healing.

They do not guarantee immediate removal.

Paul's thorn remained.

Timothy had stomach ailments.

Trophimus was left ill in Miletus. (2 Timothy 4:20)

The New Testament does not pretend that every believer is cured in this age.

It promises something deeper:

Christ's presence.

And resurrection beyond this age.

### **The Caregiver's Layer**

Cancer rarely isolates only one person.

Spouses carry weight.

Children absorb fear.

Friends do not know what to say.

Appointments multiply.

Schedules bend.

Finances strain.

And slowly, the household reorganizes around survival.

This is where quiet holiness begins.

We will explore caregiving more fully later.

But here we must acknowledge:

The suffering radiates outward.

The intrusion touches many lives.

### **The Weariness of Prolonged Treatment**

Perhaps the hardest part is not the diagnosis.

It is the duration.

Treatment cycles.

Scan cycles.

Hope rising and falling.

Every good report brings relief.

Every ambiguous report brings dread.

Living scan to scan can shrink life to survival.

And faith must fight to widen perspective again.

### **Where Is God in the Oncology Ward?**

He is not absent.

But He is not always dramatic either.

He is present in:

A nurse who lingers kindly.

A friend who brings a meal.

A spouse who stays steady.

A verse remembered at the right moment.

He is present in weakness.

“My grace is sufficient for you, for My power is made perfect in weakness.”  
(2 Corinthians 12:9)

Weakness is not evidence of abandonment.

It is often the place of encounter.

### **Cancer and the Illusion of Permanence**

Cancer exposes something we rarely admit:

We assumed permanence.

We assumed tomorrow.

We assumed our plans would unfold uninterrupted.

Cancer shatters that illusion.

But perhaps that illusion was never safe.

James writes:

“You do not know what tomorrow will bring... You are a mist.” (James 4:14)

That is not cruelty.

It is clarity.

Cancer accelerates that clarity.

It reminds us that our hope must extend beyond this body.

### **The Resurrection Anchor**

Paul declares:

“This perishable body must put on the imperishable.” (1 Corinthians 15:53)

Perishable.

That word matters.

Perishable means subject to decay.

Cancer proves it.

But perishable is not permanent.

Imperishable is coming.

That does not minimize chemotherapy.

It contextualizes it.

This body may falter.

But the story does not end in faltering.

### **The Intrusion Is Not Identity**

Cancer may define a season.  
It does not define the soul.  
You are not your diagnosis.  
You are not your scan result.  
You are not your tumor marker count.  
You are image-bearer.  
Redeemed in Christ.  
Held in covenant.  
Even if the body weakens.  
Even if treatment fails.  
The intrusion is real.  
But it is not ultimate.

### **A Prayer for the Battle Within the Body**

Father,  
You formed this body in wisdom.  
You know every cell,  
every signal,  
every fracture.  
We confess our fear.  
We confess our exhaustion.  
When the body feels like an enemy,  
remind us You are not.

Guard the one who fights disease.

Strengthen the one who watches.

Give wisdom to physicians.

Give steadiness to caregivers.

And when treatment is long and hope feels thin,  
anchor us in resurrection.

Teach us to trust You  
even when our own bodies feel uncertain.

Through Christ,  
who bore weakness and conquered death,

Amen.



## **Chapter 5 — When Memory Fades**

### **The Mystery of Dementia**

#### **The First Small Slips**

It rarely begins dramatically.

A misplaced word.

A forgotten appointment.

A story told twice in the same afternoon.

You smile.

You excuse it.

We all forget.

We are busy.

We are tired.

But then the slips accumulate.

Names drift.

Dates blur.

Familiar roads become uncertain.

And slowly — quietly — something feels different.

Not catastrophic.

But altered.

## **The Long Realization**

Cancer often announces itself.

Dementia reveals itself gradually.

It is not one moment.

It is many small moments.

You notice patterns.

You compare months.

You ask careful questions.

And eventually the neurologist speaks gently.

Mild cognitive impairment.

Early stage.

Progressive.

That word again.

Progressive.

It does not promise improvement.

It promises movement.

## **The Grief Before Goodbye**

Dementia introduces a unique sorrow.

You are losing someone who is still sitting beside you.

They are present.

But not fully present.

You mourn conversations that no longer flow.

You mourn shared memories that now live only in you.

You mourn recognition that flickers and fades.

This is grief stretched thin across time.

Not a funeral.

A slow dimming.

And it can feel lonelier than death.

### **Who Is Still There?**

This question whispers beneath everything:

If memory fades, who remains?

If personality shifts, who am I speaking to?

If faith once confessed can no longer be articulated, what then?

Dementia does not just attack cognition.

It presses theology.

Because much of our modern faith expression is verbal.

Confession.

Explanation.

Reasoning.

But salvation was never stored in the brain's electrical patterns.

It was sealed by the Spirit.

“In Him you also... were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit.” (Ephesians 1:13)

Sealed.

Not lightly attached.

Not dependent on daily recall.

Sealed.

### **The Image Beneath the Fog**

Genesis 1:27 declares humanity made in the image of God.

That image includes reason.

But it is not limited to reason.

It includes:

Relational capacity.

Moral awareness.

Spiritual orientation.

Embodied existence.

Even when expression weakens, essence remains.

A person with dementia is not becoming less human.

They are becoming more dependent.

And dependence is not indignity.

Christ Himself became dependent in infancy.

Dependence is not erasure of image.

## **The Fear That Faith Has Vanished**

Families often ask:

“They used to pray. Now they cannot form sentences. What does that mean?”

Or,

“They once knew Scripture. Now they barely know me.”

We must tread carefully.

Scripture does not teach that salvation depends on sustained cognitive clarity.

It teaches that salvation rests on Christ’s finished work.

“If we are faithless, He remains faithful — for He cannot deny Himself.” (2 Timothy 2:13)

That verse was not written only for temporary doubt.

It reveals the steadiness of God.

The covenant does not evaporate with memory.

The Shepherd does not misplace His sheep because their thoughts falter.

## **The Slow Role Reversal**

Dementia reorganizes families.

Children parent parents.

Spouses supervise what once was shared.

Decision-making shifts.

Authority softens.

This can feel humiliating — especially to the one declining.

And exhausting to the one carrying.

The slope is rarely straight.

Some days are clear.

Others are fog.

Hope rises.

Hope falls.

The unpredictability wears on everyone.

### **The Awkward Silence of Others**

Visitors often decrease.

Conversations grow strained.

Friends do not know what to say.

They feel unsure.

Uncomfortable.

They mean well — but they retreat.

Dementia isolates quietly.

It does not demand attention like an emergency room.

It slowly shrinks circles.

And that isolation can wound as deeply as the disease itself.

We will address this fully in the chapter on “the least of these.”

For now, we simply acknowledge it.

## **The Mind Is Not the Soul**

Modern culture equates personhood with cognition.

If you can think sharply, you matter.

If you cannot, you diminish.

Scripture never makes that equation.

The soul is not identical to neurological efficiency.

The body houses the soul.

The brain mediates expression.

But identity rests deeper.

When Jesus raised Jairus's daughter, He said, "The child is not dead but sleeping." (Mark 5:39)

Her body lay still.

Her identity remained intact.

Dementia clouds expression.

It does not annihilate being.

## **The Groaning of the Brain**

Romans 8 tells us creation groans.

That includes the brain.

Neurons misfire.

Connections degrade.

Structures shrink.

This is not random cruelty.

It is the ongoing reality of a creation subjected to futility.

Not willingly.

But in hope.

“In hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption.” (Romans 8:21)

Bondage to corruption.

That phrase fits degenerative disease precisely.

Bondage is not identity.

It is condition.

Condition is temporary.

### **The Hidden Pain of the Caregiver**

With dementia, the caregiver often suffers invisibly.

The repetition.

The correction.

The vigilance.

The constant recalibration.

Patience becomes daily crucifixion.

Not dramatic.

Steady.

And here faith must mature into endurance.

Love becomes less about conversation and more about presence.

Less about exchange and more about stability.

This is sacred work.

### **When Recognition Fails**

One of the deepest wounds comes when a loved one does not recognize you.

The one who held you as a child now asks your name.

The spouse who shared decades looks uncertain.

In those moments, emotion surges:

Am I gone to them?

Have we vanished?

Hold this carefully:

Their recognition does not define your relationship.

Your shared history does not evaporate because recall falters.

God does not forget covenant.

He remembers when we do not.

“If we are faithless, He remains faithful.”

That promise extends here.

### **The Long Goodbye**

Dementia often feels like saying goodbye in fragments.

Today a memory disappears.

Tomorrow a skill fades.

Later a sentence shortens.

It is not one farewell.

It is many.

But even here, the arc holds.

There was a first Garden with clarity.

There will be a final Garden with clarity restored.

No cognitive fog.

No forgotten names.

No fractured recall.

Resurrection does not merely revive the body.

It restores the whole person.

### **The Fear of Final Loss**

There is another unspoken fear:

“What if they die confused?”

“What if they no longer consciously cling to Christ?”

We return again:

Salvation rests on Christ’s grasp of us — not our uninterrupted grasp of Him.

“My sheep hear My voice... and no one will snatch them out of My hand.”  
(John 10:27–28)

Dementia is not stronger than the Shepherd’s grip.

Neurological decline cannot overpower divine covenant.

That truth must steady trembling hearts.

### **The Intrusion Is Real — But Not Sovereign**

Dementia intrudes.

It diminishes expression.

It disrupts normalcy.

It fractures communication.

But it does not reign.

It is not sovereign.

It is temporary.

The mind may fade in this age.

But clarity awaits in the next.

And that hope is not sentiment.

It is promise.

### **A Prayer in the Fog**

Father,

We do not understand the unraveling of the mind.

We watch memories fade  
and feel helpless.

Guard the one whose thoughts grow dim.

Hold their soul steady  
even when words fail.

Strengthen the caregiver  
whose patience is stretched daily.

When recognition disappears,  
remind us that You never forget.

When clarity flickers,  
anchor us in Your covenant.

And give us hope  
that one day every mind will be restored,  
every name remembered,  
every relationship renewed.

Through Christ,  
the Shepherd who never loses His sheep,

Amen.

## **Chapter 6 – Is This Punishment?**

### **The Question Few Say Out Loud**

It often comes quietly.

Not publicly.

Not boldly.

But privately.

Did we do something wrong?

Was this preventable in a spiritual sense?

Is God correcting us?

The mind searches for causation.

Because causation feels controllable.

If suffering has a clear reason, perhaps it can be avoided next time.

But Scripture does not allow simple formulas.

### **Job and the Danger of Certainty**

Job suffered intensely.

Loss of children.

Loss of wealth.

Loss of health.

His friends were confident.

They were also wrong.

They insisted suffering must trace back to personal sin.

Hidden guilt.

Divine retribution.

God rebuked them sharply.

“You have not spoken of Me what is right.” (Job 42:7)

That warning matters.

Explaining suffering too quickly can misrepresent God.

### **The Disciples’ Assumption**

In the Gospel of John, Chapter 9, the disciples saw a man blind from birth and asked:

“Who sinned, this man or his parents?”

It seemed logical to them.

Jesus answered:

“It was not that this man sinned, or his parents.”

That single sentence dismantles automatic blame.

Not all suffering is traceable to specific wrongdoing.

### **Consequence vs. Curse**

We must distinguish two things.

There are consequences for actions.

Certain behaviors increase health risk.

That is reality.

But degenerative disease does not equal divine accusation.

We live in a fallen creation.

The curse of Genesis 3 introduced mortality universally.

Decay does not require a personalized indictment.

It requires only humanity.

### **The Temptation to Bargain**

When illness lingers, bargaining often follows.

“If I confess more...”

“If I promise more...”

“If I serve more...”

But grace is not a transaction.

God is not a negotiator.

The cross already settled the matter of wrath for those in Christ.

There is discipline in the Christian life.

But discipline aims at correction and growth.

It is not random affliction.

Hebrews tells us discipline produces righteousness.

Cancer is not described as God’s preferred instrument of sanctification.

We must be careful not to attribute to God what Scripture does not.

### **Sovereignty Without Cruelty**

Here is where balance is required.

God is sovereign.

Nothing surprises Him.

Nothing escapes His authority.

But sovereignty does not equal delight in suffering.

Jesus wept at Lazarus's tomb.

He did not say, "This is good for you."

He entered grief.

That tells us the heart of God toward decay.

He permits within His larger redemptive plan.

But He does not mock the mourner.

### **When Sin Does Play a Role**

We must not swing too far.

Some suffering does follow destructive patterns.

Substance abuse can damage organs.

Recklessness can injure.

Choices matter.

But even then, grace meets consequences.

And many debilitating conditions have no moral trigger.

They simply arise within fragile biology.

We must resist simplistic theology.

## **The Weight of False Guilt**

Few burdens are heavier than suffering plus guilt.

If someone battling cancer also believes God is punishing them, hope erodes quickly.

If a caregiver believes dementia is divine retribution, despair multiplies.

Scripture does not give us authority to declare hidden reasons.

Deuteronomy reminds us:

“The secret things belong to the Lord our God.” (Deuteronomy 29:29)

We are not equipped to interpret every valley.

## **What We Can Say With Confidence**

We can say:

God is not arbitrary.

God is not cruel.

God is not surprised.

God is near to the brokenhearted. (Psalm 34:18)

We can say:

Christ bore wrath fully.

There is therefore now no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus. (Romans 8:1)

No condemnation includes hospital rooms.

No condemnation includes memory wards.

## **The Deeper Purpose We Can Trust**

While we cannot assign specific causes, we can trust broader truths.

Suffering exposes dependence.

Suffering humbles pride.

Suffering clarifies eternity.

That does not make suffering pleasant.

It makes it purposeful within God's larger arc.

But purpose is not always visible in the moment.

And that is where faith rests.

## **Refusing Easy Answers**

When someone asks, "Why is this happening?"

Sometimes the most faithful answer is:

"I do not know."

But I know who walks with you.

Job never received a detailed explanation.

He received revelation of God's majesty.

And that was enough to steady him.

## **A Prayer When Accusation Whispers**

Father,

When illness tempts us to blame ourselves,

quiet the accusations.

Guard us from false guilt.

Keep us from assigning reasons You have not revealed.

Help us trust Your character  
even when we cannot trace Your plan.

Thank You that in Christ  
there is no condemnation.

Anchor us in grace  
when fear tries to rewrite the story.

Through Jesus,  
who bore judgment fully,

Amen.



## **Chapter 7 – The Theology of Groaning**

### **The Sound Beneath the Silence**

Hospitals are rarely loud in the way we imagine.

There are machines.

Footsteps.

Muted conversations.

But beneath it all, there is another sound.

Groaning.

Not always audible.

But real.

The groan of a body under treatment.

The groan of a mind struggling for clarity.

The groan of a caregiver who has not slept well in months.

The groan of a prayer that cannot find words.

Scripture gives that sound a name.

### **Creation Was Subjected**

Paul writes in Romans 8:

“The creation was subjected to futility... in hope.”

Subjected.

Not willingly.

Not because it desired corruption.

But because the Fall introduced it.

Futility means frustration.

Things not working as intended.

Bodies breaking down.

Systems failing.

Progressive decline.

Cancer is futility.

Dementia is futility.

ALS is futility.

Chronic pain is futility.

They are not moral failures.

They are creation under strain.

### **The Whole Creation Groans**

“For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now.” (Romans 8:22)

Whole creation.

Not isolated cases.

Not rare anomalies.

This world is not functioning at full strength.

Groaning is universal.

But notice the comparison:

Labor pains.

Labor pains hurt.

They are intense.

They can feel overwhelming.

But they are not death pains.

They are birth pains.

Pain with direction.

Pain that anticipates life.

That distinction changes perspective.

### **We Ourselves Groan**

Paul does not speak abstractly.

“We ourselves... groan inwardly.”

Even believers.

Even Spirit-filled believers.

Groaning is not lack of faith.

It is evidence that we recognize something is wrong.

When you sit beside someone who no longer remembers your name and feel the ache in your chest — that is groaning.

When treatment stretches on and fatigue settles in your bones — that is groaning.

When you pray and feel the weight instead of relief — that is groaning.

Scripture normalizes it.

## **The Spirit Groans With Us**

Romans 8 goes further:

“The Spirit helps us in our weakness... the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words.” (Romans 8:26)

This may be one of the most tender verses in the New Testament.

When your prayer collapses into silence.

When you cannot articulate what you need.

When all you feel is heaviness.

The Spirit does not withdraw.

He groans with you.

Not detached.

Not distant.

Present in weakness.

You are not groaning alone.

## **Groaning Is Not Complaining**

There is a difference.

Complaining accuses God.

Groaning acknowledges pain while still facing Him.

The Psalms are filled with groaning.

“How long, O Lord?”

That is not rebellion.

It is relationship.

Faith does not suppress sorrow.

It brings sorrow into conversation with God.

### **The Tension of the Already and Not Yet**

Why do believers still groan if Christ has risen?

Because redemption has been secured — but not fully applied.

We have the Spirit as a guarantee.

But we await adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. (Romans 8:23)

Redemption of our bodies.

That phrase matters.

It acknowledges that bodies remain fragile for now.

The Spirit inside us is evidence of future restoration.

But the body still waits.

So we live in tension.

Saved.

Yet still mortal.

Sealed.

Yet still groaning.

### **Hope in the Middle of Pain**

“For in this hope we were saved.” (Romans 8:24)

Hope is not denial of suffering.

It is confidence in what is coming.

Hope does not erase chemotherapy.

It does not restore memory overnight.

It does not eliminate progressive disease.

But it reframes the timeline.

This season is not the end.

This groaning is not ultimate.

Birth follows labor.

Resurrection follows decay.

### **Why This Chapter Matters**

Without a theology of groaning, believers often assume:

If I were stronger, I would not struggle like this.

If my faith were deeper, I would not feel so heavy.

But Scripture expects groaning.

Even the apostle Paul groaned.

Even creation groans.

Even the Spirit groans.

Groaning is not weakness of faith.

It is realism within hope.

## **When Groaning Feels Endless**

Some seasons are short.

Others stretch.

Months become years.

Energy thins.

Hope flickers.

In those moments, Romans 8 anchors us again:

“We know that for those who love God all things work together for good...”

That verse is often quoted quickly.

But its context is groaning.

The good promised is not always comfort.

It is conformity to Christ.

And Christ Himself suffered before glory.

## **The End of Groaning**

Revelation promises a day when groaning ceases.

No more death.

No more mourning.

No more pain.

The labor will be over.

The birth complete.

Until then, we groan with direction.

Not despair.

Direction.

Toward restoration.

### **A Prayer in the Groaning**

Father,

You hear what we cannot say.

You know what we cannot express.

When our prayers collapse into silence,  
let Your Spirit carry them.

Teach us to groan without losing hope.

Help us endure prolonged weakness  
without mistaking it for abandonment.

Remind us that labor pain means life is coming.

Keep us anchored in resurrection  
while we walk through decay.

Through Christ,  
who suffered before glory,

Amen.

## **Chapter 8 – When Faith Cannot Speak**

### **The Quiet Fear**

It returns again and again.

Not loudly.

But persistently.

“If they no longer remember Christ... what then?”

“If they cannot confess... what then?”

“If their words disappear... what remains?”

Dementia presses this question harder than cancer ever could.

Because cancer attacks the body.

Dementia seems to attack belief itself.

Or so it appears.

### **Faith Was Never Merely Words**

Much of our faith expression is verbal.

We confess.

We testify.

We recite Scripture.

But Scripture never equates salvation with ongoing verbal clarity.

The thief on the cross spoke only briefly.

The infant in Christ cannot articulate doctrine.

The believer in a coma cannot confess aloud.

Yet salvation rests not on eloquence —  
but on Christ.

### **Sealed, Not Suspended**

Paul writes in Ephesians 1:13:

“You were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit.”

Sealed.

A seal marks ownership.

A seal protects.

A seal authenticates.

It does not flicker with cognitive fluctuation.

The Spirit does not abandon because neurons weaken.

He is not dependent on memory retention.

The covenant is not stored in the hippocampus.

It is secured in Christ.

### **The Shepherd's Grip**

Jesus said in John 10:

“My sheep hear My voice... and no one will snatch them out of My hand.”

Dementia cannot snatch.

Neurological erosion cannot overpower divine grip.

The Shepherd's hold is not fragile.

If salvation depended on our sustained mental clarity,  
none of us would stand long.

We forget daily.

We falter daily.

Yet He remains faithful.

### **When Recognition Fails**

There may come a day when your loved one does not recognize you.

That wound is deep.

But consider this:

If their recognition of you does not define your relationship,  
why would their fluctuating awareness define Christ's?

God's covenant does not weaken with confusion.

He remembers when we do not.

Psalms 103 says, "He knows our frame; He remembers that we are dust."

Dust forgets.

God does not.

### **Faith Beneath the Surface**

Even when verbal confession disappears, something often remains:

Calm when hymns are sung.

Softening at familiar prayers.

Tears at certain Scriptures.

Fragments of spiritual memory.

The Spirit's work is not erased easily.

And even when outward response fades completely,  
we trust the promise more than the performance.

Salvation rests on Christ's righteousness — not ours.

On His grip — not our grasp.

### **The Danger of Performance Theology**

We must guard against subtle performance theology.

The idea that continued clarity proves continued salvation.

That mindset will crush families walking through dementia.

Scripture says:

“There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.”  
(Romans 8:1)

No condemnation includes diminished cognition.

No condemnation includes fading speech.

No condemnation includes silence.

### **What Remains**

When memory fades, three things remain steady:

God's character.

Christ's finished work.

The Spirit's seal.

The brain may weaken.

The covenant does not.

This does not eliminate sorrow.

It removes terror.

### **For the Caregiver's Heart**

If you are watching someone fade,  
hear this clearly:

Their confusion does not mean Christ has released them.

Their silence does not mean heaven is uncertain.

Their fog does not mean faith is gone.

The Shepherd does not misplace His own.

### **A Prayer of Assurance**

Father,

When fear whispers that faith has vanished,  
anchor us in truth.

Remind us that salvation rests on Christ,  
not cognitive strength.

Guard our hearts from performance thinking.

Steady us when memory fades around us.

Thank You that You do not forget Your children.

Hold fast those who cannot hold fast themselves.

Through Jesus,

our faithful Shepherd,

Amen.

## **Chapter 9 – The Hidden Holiness of Caregiving**

### **The Work No One Applauds**

It rarely makes headlines.

It is not dramatic.

It does not trend.

It is quiet.

Repetitive.

Unseen.

Medication schedules.

Appointment calendars.

Gentle corrections.

Bathing assistance.

Meals cut small.

Stories answered again.

Caregiving is not glamorous.

It is steady.

And steady love is rarely celebrated in a culture that prizes spectacle.

### **The Slow Crucifixion of Self**

Caregiving is not a single heroic act.

It is daily surrender.

You rearrange your time.

You bend your plans.

You lose sleep.

You repeat yourself patiently.

You absorb frustration without returning it.

You become interpreter, advocate, nurse, companion.

And often, you do it without applause.

That kind of love resembles something.

It resembles the cross.

### **When Strength Becomes Service**

Jesus washed feet.

Not symbolically only.

Physically.

Patiently.

The Lord of glory knelt.

Caregiving is kneeling work.

It is strength expressed as service.

It is leadership expressed as humility.

And it is often exhausting.

Which is why it must be seen not merely as duty—

but as calling.

**“The Least of These”**

In Gospel of Matthew 25, Jesus says:

“As you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to Me.”

He speaks of:

Feeding the hungry.

Visiting the sick.

Clothing the vulnerable.

Notice what is absent.

No grand theology.

No platform.

No recognition.

Just proximity to weakness.

Caregiving places you directly in that proximity.

And Christ identifies Himself there.

### **When the Patient Cannot Repay**

One of the quiet tests of love is this:

Will you serve someone who cannot repay you?

Who cannot thank you clearly?

Who may not remember what you did?

Caregiving strips away transactional love.

It leaves only covenant love.

You give because they are yours.

Because you are bound.

Because love does not calculate return.

That kind of love matures faith deeply.

### **The Temptation to Resent**

We must be honest.

Caregiving can breed resentment.

Fatigue accumulates.

Isolation increases.

Visitors thin out.

You watch others live freely while you reorganize around decline.

Resentment whispers:

This is unfair.

This is too much.

Scripture does not shame that feeling.

It redirects it.

“Bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.” (Galatians 6:2)

Burden-bearing is not optional in Christian community.

But when community falters, one person often bears more than most.

God sees that.

### **Dignity in Dependence**

Modern culture worships independence.

Caregiving exposes dependence.

But dependence is not disgrace.

Christ became dependent as a child.

He accepted help carrying His cross.

He allowed others to minister to Him.

Dependence is human.

Caregiving reminds us that autonomy was never ultimate.

Love was.

### **The Spiritual Formation of the Caregiver**

Few spiritual disciplines are as refining as prolonged caregiving.

Patience is tested daily.

Humility is practiced hourly.

Self-denial becomes routine.

You are sanctified in small moments.

Not in conference rooms.

Not on platforms.

In kitchens.

In bedrooms.

In waiting rooms.

Hidden holiness forms there.

### **When No One Sees**

Some seasons of caregiving feel invisible.

Church attendance decreases.

Social circles shrink.

Conversations narrow.

You may feel forgotten.

But Scripture assures:

“Your Father who sees in secret will reward you.” (Matthew 6:4)

God sees the unseen.

He measures faithfulness differently than culture does.

He counts quiet endurance.

### **Not All Caregiving Is Chosen**

Some step into caregiving willingly.

Others are forced by circumstance.

Either way, it becomes sacred when offered to God.

You may not have chosen the valley.

But you can choose how you walk in it.

Love can transform obligation into offering.

### **The Cross-Shaped Pattern**

Christ’s love was not efficient.

It was sacrificial.

Caregiving follows that pattern.

Time given.

Energy spent.

Comfort delayed.

The world may call it burden.

Heaven calls it service.

And one day, what felt heavy may be revealed as holy.

### **When You Feel Empty**

There will be days when compassion runs thin.

When patience feels exhausted.

When tears replace prayers.

In those moments, remember:

You are not the Savior.

You are the servant.

You do not carry eternal outcomes.

You carry daily faithfulness.

And the Spirit helps in weakness.

### **The Quiet Crown**

Scripture speaks of crowns.

Not earthly status.

Faithfulness.

Endurance.

Love under pressure.

Caregiving may feel small.

But eternity measures differently.

The one who wipes tears today  
may hear “Well done” in a way few others do.

### **A Prayer for the Caregiver**

Father,

You see what others do not.

You see the repetition.

You see the fatigue.

You see the quiet tears.

Strengthen the one who serves.

Guard them from resentment.

Protect their body and mind.

Surround them with help where possible.

Remind them that hidden faithfulness is not wasted.

Let their service reflect Christ’s love.

And when they feel empty,

fill them again.

Through Jesus,  
who knelt and served,

Amen.

## **Chapter 10 – The Ones We Avoid – Seeing Christ in the Least**

### **The Quiet Step Back**

There is a moment most of us recognize.

You see someone struggling.

Speech fragmented.

Movement uneven.

Eye contact absent.

Behavior unpredictable.

And without thinking, you step back.

Not dramatically.

Just slightly.

You do not know what to say.

You fear saying the wrong thing.

So you say nothing.

You look away.

You move on.

No malice.

Just discomfort.

But avoidance is powerful.

### **The People We Do Not Know How to Approach**

Cancer draws sympathy.

Dementia draws sorrow.

But certain conditions draw confusion.

Autism spectrum disorders.

Severe cognitive disability.

Down syndrome.

Schizophrenia.

Traumatic brain injury.

Nonverbal conditions.

Profound developmental delay.

These do not fit easy conversational patterns.

They interrupt social rhythm.

They unsettle our sense of normal.

And so many of us retreat.

Not cruelly.

Awkwardly.

### **The Sin of Comfortable Distance**

Avoidance often hides beneath politeness.

“We don’t want to intrude.”

“We don’t want to embarrass them.”

“We don’t know what to say.”

But sometimes those phrases mask fear.

Fear of awkwardness.

Fear of unpredictability.

Fear of confronting fragility.

The irony is striking.

We avoid those whose lives already feel isolated.

And in doing so, we deepen their isolation.

### **What Jesus Actually Said**

In Gospel of Matthew 25, Jesus describes a scene of judgment.

Not for doctrinal precision.

Not for spiritual vocabulary.

For response to weakness.

“I was sick and you visited Me.”

“When did we see You sick?”

“As you did it to one of the least of these... you did it to Me.”

The least.

Not the impressive.

Not the articulate.

Not the socially fluid.

The least.

And Christ identifies Himself there.

### **The Image of God in the Unfamiliar**

Genesis 1:27 does not contain a cognitive threshold.

It does not say:

“In the image of God, provided comprehension remains.”

Every human bears the image.

That includes:

The child who cannot speak.

The adult who flaps their hands when overwhelmed.

The man whose thoughts fracture into paranoia.

The woman whose words loop endlessly.

The elder who stares blankly.

The image may be obscured.

It is not erased.

When we avoid them, we avoid image.

When we draw near, we honor image.

### **Autism Is Not Moral Failure**

We must be careful here.

Autism is not sin.

It is not punishment.

It is neurological difference.

It may bring difficulty.

It may bring social strain.

But it does not diminish worth.

The Church must be especially careful not to treat neurological difference as spiritual defect.

Christ did not move away from difference.

He moved toward it.

### **When We Do Not Know What to Do**

Many people avoid engagement because they feel unprepared.

What do I say?

How do I respond?

What if I offend?

But Scripture does not require expertise.

It requires love.

Love may look like:

Sitting beside.

Smiling.

Speaking gently.

Asking caregivers how to help.

Learning patterns.

Being patient with repetition.

Presence is often enough.

Silence can be ministry.

### **The Church's Responsibility**

If the Church cannot welcome the neurologically fragile,

what does it mean to be the body of Christ?

A body has many parts.

Some strong.

Some weak.

Paul says:

“The parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable.” (1 Corinthians 12:22)

Indispensable.

That is not sentimental language.

It is theological.

The weaker parts reveal the heart of the whole.

### **The Mirror We Avoid**

There is another reason we step back.

The vulnerable remind us of our own fragility.

The cognitively impaired confront our illusion of control.

The severely disabled expose our dependence.

And that is uncomfortable.

But perhaps that discomfort is grace.

Because dependence was always meant to define us.

On God.

On one another.

### **Moving Toward Instead of Away**

The Kingdom of God moves opposite to instinct.

Instinct withdraws.

Christ approaches.

Instinct protects comfort.

Christ embraces cost.

Moving toward the least does not solve every difficulty.

It may still be awkward.

It may still feel uncertain.

But obedience often feels uncertain.

Love chooses proximity.

### **When Caregivers Feel Invisible**

Families of those with profound disability often feel forgotten.

Their world narrows.

Their conversations repeat.

Their schedules revolve around care.

When friends disappear, the weight doubles.

Matthew 25 does not only apply to the individual suffering.

It applies to the household around them.

To serve them is to serve Christ.

### **The Weight of This Teaching**

This is not meant to shame.

It is meant to awaken.

Every one of us has stepped back at some point.

Every one of us has chosen comfort over courage.

But the gospel calls us forward.

Christ moved toward us when we were weak.

Helpless.

Unattractive in our sin.

If He had stepped back, we would be lost.

### **The Eternal Reversal**

One day, the least will be seen clearly.

The fog will lift.

The disability will dissolve.

The socially awkward will stand radiant.

The nonverbal will speak.

The trembling will steady.

The Kingdom reverses what this world marginalizes.

And those who moved toward them will see Christ smiling.

### **A Prayer for Courage to Draw Near**

Father,

Forgive us for the times we have stepped back.

Forgive our fear of awkwardness.

Forgive our comfort-driven distance.

Open our eyes to see Your image clearly  
in every person.

Give us courage to move toward  
rather than away.

Teach us to love without expertise.

Help Your Church become a place  
where the weak are not merely tolerated  
but treasured.

Let us serve the least  
as though we were serving You—

because we are.

Through Jesus,  
who drew near to us in our weakness,

Amen.

## **Chapter 11 – The Church in the Valley**

### **When the Valley Becomes Visible**

Illness exposes the strength of a congregation.

Not its music.

Not its programs.

Not its branding.

Its endurance.

When cancer lingers for months,  
when dementia stretches across years,  
when disability reshapes daily life—

the Church is revealed.

Some rally quickly.

Meals arrive.

Prayers multiply.

Visits are frequent.

But as time passes, energy fades.

Attendance normalizes.

Life resumes.

And the valley remains.

### **The Early Response**

In the beginning, support often feels strong.

Text messages.

Group prayers.

Care calendars.

It is easier to mobilize for crisis.

Harder to sustain presence.

But prolonged illness is rarely a crisis.

It is a season.

A long one.

And long seasons test communal love.

### **Bearing One Another's Burdens**

Paul writes:

“Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.” (Galatians 6:2)

Burdens are not singular events.

They are weights carried over time.

To bear a burden means more than acknowledging it.

It means sharing it.

Listening repeatedly.

Showing up consistently.

Helping practically.

Sometimes saying nothing at all.

The law of Christ is love enacted under pressure.

## **Where the Church Often Falters**

Not from cruelty.

From fatigue.

From discomfort.

From uncertainty.

Members may not know what to say after the tenth update.

They may fear intruding.

They may assume others are helping.

Gradually, distance grows.

And the caregiver feels invisible.

The one suffering feels sidelined.

Silence can wound deeply.

## **A Body That Functions Together**

In First Epistle to the Corinthians 12, Paul describes the Church as a body.

“When one member suffers, all suffer together.”

All.

Not just a few.

If prolonged illness isolates a family within a congregation,  
the body is not functioning as intended.

The stronger parts must support the weaker.

Not occasionally.

Continually.

### **The Ministry of Presence**

The Church often overestimates speech.

It underestimates presence.

You do not need answers.

You need availability.

Sit.

Listen.

Stay.

Bring a meal.

Offer childcare.

Attend an appointment.

Mow the lawn.

Small acts over long seasons preach louder than polished sermons.

### **Protecting the Caregiver**

Caregivers are particularly vulnerable.

They may not ask for help.

They may minimize their exhaustion.

They may disappear from gatherings quietly.

A healthy church notices.

A healthy church initiates.

Not once.

Repeatedly.

Without guilt.

Without pressure.

Just steady love.

### **Creating Space for the Different**

Congregations must also adapt.

Noise-sensitive individuals.

Unpredictable behaviors.

Mobility challenges.

Communication barriers.

A church shaped by the gospel makes room.

Not as a side project.

As identity.

The Church that welcomes the least reflects Christ accurately.

### **Guarding Against Pity**

There is a difference between pity and compassion.

Pity looks down.

Compassion draws near.

Pity distances.

Compassion participates.

The Church must guard its posture.

We are not rescuers from above.

We are fellow groaners awaiting redemption.

### **When the Church Gets It Right**

When the Church endures with a suffering family:

Faith deepens.

Children observe love embodied.

The watching world sees something rare.

And the valley becomes sacred ground.

Not because suffering is good.

But because love proves real.

### **A Warning and a Hope**

Jesus said the world would know His disciples by their love.

Prolonged illness tests that claim.

Not in crisis.

In continuity.

The Church that remains near for years reflects heaven.

The Church that fades away reflects comfort culture.

But grace is available for congregations too.

We can learn.

We can repent.

We can grow.

### **The Coming Gathering**

One day, there will be no prayer chains for disease.

No meal trains.

No hospice visits.

The assembly will be whole.

Until then, the Church lives in the valley together.

Not perfectly.

But intentionally.

And in doing so, it rehearses eternity.

### **A Prayer for the Church**

Father,

Shape Your Church into a people who endure in love.

Guard us from short-lived compassion.

Give us courage to remain present over long seasons.

Help us notice the caregiver who grows weary.

Help us welcome those who are different.

Teach us to bear burdens faithfully.

Let our congregations reflect heaven's patience.

And in every valley,  
make us a body that functions in love.

Through Christ,  
the Head of the Church,

Amen.

## **Chapter 12 – The Hope Beyond the Intrusion**

### **When the Fight Is Over**

There comes a moment when treatment ends.

Sometimes in remission.

Sometimes in hospice.

Sometimes in exhaustion.

The machines quiet.

The medications stop.

The room grows still.

And for those who remain, the valley feels empty.

But Scripture does not end in hospital rooms.

It does not end in memory wards.

It does not end in hospice beds.

It ends in restoration.

### **The Enemy Will Not Win**

Paul writes in First Epistle to the Corinthians 15:

“The last enemy to be destroyed is death.”

Enemy.

Not companion.

Not natural friend.

Enemy.

Cancer is not ultimate.

Dementia is not ultimate.

ALS is not ultimate.

Chronic degeneration is not ultimate.

Death itself is temporary.

Because Christ entered it and came out.

### **The Perishable and the Imperishable**

“This perishable body must put on the imperishable.” (1 Corinthians 15:53)

Perishable.

That word describes every diagnosis we have discussed.

Bodies that break down.

Brains that falter.

Systems that weaken.

But Paul does not say perishable is permanent.

He says it will be clothed with something else.

Imperishable.

Resurrection is not metaphor.

It is not memory.

It is bodily restoration.

The body that chemotherapy scarred.

The mind that dementia clouded.

The frame that disease thinned.

Raised.

Whole.

### **The Mind Restored**

If dementia feels especially cruel now,

imagine clarity restored.

Every memory intact.

Every name remembered.

Every conversation unbroken.

The fog lifted completely.

Scripture promises not disembodied existence,

but renewal.

Revelation describes the Tree of Life again. (Revelation 22:2)

The curse removed.

“No longer will there be anything accursed.” (Revelation 22:3)

That includes neurological decay.

That includes genetic mutation.

That includes all that has groaned.

## **The Body Without Betrayal**

Imagine a body that does not turn inward.

Cells that function in harmony.

Strength without fatigue.

Movement without pain.

No scans.

No follow-ups.

No fear of recurrence.

The resurrection body does not carry the fragility of this age.

Christ's own risen body is the pattern.

Recognizable.

Yet glorified.

Whole.

## **The End of Groaning**

Romans 8 spoke of labor pains.

Labor ends in birth.

Revelation 21 says:

“He will wipe away every tear... neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore.”

No more tears.

Not fewer.

None.

No more pain.

Not managed.

Gone.

The long season of caregiving will end.

The prolonged goodbye will reverse.

The hidden service will be revealed.

The least will stand radiant.

### **What About Now?**

Hope does not erase present sorrow.

It steadies it.

It prevents despair from becoming final.

Christian hope is not optimism.

It is anchored certainty.

The Gardener who planted Eden  
has already secured its restoration.

The cross addressed sin.

The resurrection defeated death.

The final Garden awaits.

Between the two, we endure.

## **The Intrusion Is Temporary**

Cancer intrudes.

Dementia intrudes.

Disability intrudes.

But they do not define eternity.

They are chapters.

Not conclusions.

When we stand in the restored creation,

these years will not vanish.

They will be redeemed.

Tears wiped.

Love remembered.

Faith honored.

The One who walked with us in the valley

will stand before us without veil.

## **Living Toward That Day**

Until then:

We serve.

We endure.

We draw near to the least.

We care without applause.

We groan without losing hope.

We cling to Christ when bodies fail.

We trust the Shepherd when minds fade.

Because resurrection is not wishful thinking.

It is promise sealed in blood.

### **A Final Prayer**

Father,

Thank You that decay is not the final word.

Thank You that death is an enemy already defeated.

When we grow weary in prolonged suffering,

lift our eyes to the Garden to come.

Let resurrection steady our hearts.

Let hope sustain our service.

Let eternity shape our endurance.

And when our own bodies falter,

hold us fast.

Until the day

when every intrusion is removed

and You make all things new.

Through Jesus Christ,

118 of 118

the risen Lord,

Amen.