

The Relational God in the Presence of Evil: A Theology of Friendship

El Dios relacional de cara al mal: Una teología de la amistad

Hesron H. Sihombing

Abstract

The problem of suffering has been widely studied in Christian theology throughout history. This paper addresses suffering through a critical redefinition of God's power manifested in the theological locus of friendship embodied in Jesus Christ. In the first part, I will redefine the meaning of God's power and goodness as God's relationality with creation. The second part will explore God's relationality in Jesus as the participation of God in the suffering drawn from the concept of friendship.

Keywords: Power, Suffering, Relationality, Friendship, Solidarity

Resumen

El problema del sufrimiento ha sido ampliamente estudiado en la teología cristiana a través de la historia. Este artículo piensa en el sufrimiento a partir de una redefinición crítica del poder de Dios manifestado en el lugar teológico de la amistad, encarnado en Jesucristo. En la primera parte del texto se redefine el significado del poder de Dios como bondad y relacionalidad de Dios con la creación. En la segunda parte se explora la relacionalidad de Dios, mediante Jesús, como la participación de Dios en el sufrimiento a partir del concepto de amistad.

Palabras clave: Poder, sufrimiento, relacionalidad, amistad, solidaridad.

How do we to affirm God's unlimited power and goodness in the pervasive presence of evil in world process and history? This question arises as the consequence of the presence of

evil and suffering which confronts the traditional conception of God's power and goodness. If God is powerful and good, why is there evil? If God is powerful, why doesn't God prevent

evil from happening? If God is good, why doesn't God prevent evil from occurring?

Some have answered that evil can happen to create greater good for people or to have a pedagogical purpose. Joseph's remarks in Genesis 50:20 have been used to justify this answer, "Even though you intended to do harm to me, God intended it for good, in order to preserve a numerous people, as [God] is doing today." This approach aligns with Irenaean theodicy. John Hick, the proponent, says that we are "immature creatures" created with a purpose to develop spiritually and morally. Our imperfection is given. The Augustinian approach, conversely, affirms the presence of evil as the privation of goodness to argue the existence of free will. Another approach, as noted by Kushner, is to irrationalize evil through blaming the victim as causing the evil to happen.¹ The world is not as bad as it is assumed.

These approaches toward evil, as they try to domesticate and metaphorically transcendentalize evil, ignore the subjectivity of victims and the radical suffering they experience. While the approaches attempt to rationalize the existence and presence of God, they do not provide a strong answer about God's power, which they advocate for,

in the middle of suffering. They fantasize the traditional understanding of God's power as controlling and dominating, not compatible to and challenged by the prevalent presence of evil. The focus of these approaches to justify God's existence, rather than to take the side of people who suffer, make them lack the capability to protest radical suffering as the suffering itself is considered important. Radical suffering, as defined by Wendy Farley, is "suffering that has the power to dehumanize and degrade human beings ... and that cannot be traced to punishment or desert."² Through this paper, I formulate a redefinition of God's power and goodness as God's relational influence manifested in God's friendship with the people who suffer.

Redefining God's Power and Goodness

The world's history displays the rampant manifestation of evil which imposes suffering. To mention some are slavery, colonialization, racism, genocide, child abuse, and many others. Understanding God's power as domination and control does not sufficiently anticipate these kinds of evil. One may ask, if God is controlling, how is it possible that God allows such kinds of evil and suffering? Anna

1 Harold S. Kushner, *When Bad Things Happen to Good People* (New York: Schocken Books, 1981), 39.

2 Wendy Farley, *Tragic Vision and Divine Compassion* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1990), 12.

Case-Winters criticizes this understanding of power as a male-dominated conception. This mode of power also has social consequences as it highlights and elevates the effects of oppression, exploitation, and violence.³ Instead, she proposes the redefinition of God's power through a feminist and process theological lens. Omnipotence for her means, "the power to influence all and to be influenced by all" characterized by being "life-giving" and "world-generating."⁴ God's power is the "power in relation."⁵

The relationality of God and creation is most obvious in the event of incarnation and the cross. God's power is God's relational power which enables God to assume humanity in Jesus Christ because of love. God's goodness is the "suffering love."⁶ God is relational. The relational God is God who can suffer and feel the suffering of people. God can be influenced by the suffering of the whole creation because since the beginning of creation God relates Godself to all creatures.

In Lutheran understanding, especially in the theology of the cross,

3 Anna Case-Winters, *God's Power: Traditional Understandings and Contemporary Challenges* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1990), 183-9.

4 Case-Winters, *God's Power...*, 231.

5 Case-Winters, *God's Power...*, 227.

6 Douglas John Hall, *God and Human Suffering: An Exercise in the Theology of the Cross* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1986), 94.

God's power is transformed into weakness. God became weak in Jesus Christ in order to be united with human suffering. In the incarnation, God participates in the life of creation, being in solidarity with all. Douglas John Hall points out that God's presence in Jesus Christ signifies the process of God entering the life of the world to change it "from within."⁷ "God meets, takes on, takes into God's *own* being, the burden of our suffering..."⁸ God who came in Jesus Christ reveals God's assumption and bearing of our suffering. At the end, the suffering of God in Jesus Christ did not end with death but in the glory of resurrection. In Jesus Christ, human suffering has been constantly transformed through God's partaking of our suffering. God's power was displayed in God's weakness.

God's weakness also reveals God's goodness. God's goodness is affirmed through God's participation in creation's suffering. God's weakness is not contradictory to God's goodness. They work together as the attributes of God. In Jesus Christ, God's goodness is embodied and personified. God's goodness is shown through the word of the reign of God and its praxis throughout Jesus' life which confronts the evil and its various manifestations. His proclamation about God's radical love opposes religious hypocrisy that

7 Hall, *God and Human...*, 109.

8 Hall, *God and Human...*, 113.

dehumanizes people. God's goodness spreads to the alienated people of his time and tells them that they are accepted and welcome to the banquet. The table of Jesus welcomes debt collectors and adulterers. Human suffering due to sickness is overcome. Women and children are valued. They are given access and visibility in the patriarchal society. The baptism of Jesus is clearly his identification with human sinfulness and suffering. God's goodness is made clear through Jesus' life. God is with the suffering, with us (*Immanuel*). Jesus' life is the demonstration of God taking "perspectival alternation," the transposition from God as the powerful into God as the humanly weak and good. God, therefore, takes the side of the victims of suffering and sin.⁹

God's power as such is not the controlling and dominating one. It does not repudiate human freedom, instead, acknowledge it. Through Jesus, the freedom of God interacts with human freedom. God influences humanity through Jesus' proclamations and deeds. The transformation starts when humanity accepts the relational influence of God. Otherwise, the suffering will remain. The transformation of suffering, therefore, is not a magical action, but a constant process of resistance from within the context. The

resistance and resolution of suffering is marked by the reign of God as the picture of how things should be. God's influence creates hope for people who suffer to walk in line with the vision of the reign of God.

Jesus as the Suffering Friend: God's Participation in Our Pain

God's participation in creation's suffering through Jesus Christ has various manifestations. One of them is as the friend, testified in John 15:12–15 (NRSV):

This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. No one has greater love [*agapēn*] than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends [*philōn*]. You are my friends if you do what I command you. I do not call you servants any longer, because the servant does not know what the master is doing; but I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father.

Jesus is our suffering friend who lays down his life for us, his friends. His friendship embodies God's participatory and solidary love. The true principle of friendship signifies the presence of love. The unconditional love (*agape*) is manifested in this text as friendship. The greatest *agapē* is even a sacrificing *philia*. The friendship love models the ever-embracing

⁹ Andrew Sung Park, *The Wounded Heart of God: The Asian Concept of Han and the Christian Doctrine of Sin* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1993), 105.

love of God. The laying down of Jesus' life was grounded in the spirit of friendship love. Deeper, according to Joas Adiprasetya, Jesus "does not merely talk about laying down his life for his friends. His life is an incarnation of this teaching."¹⁰ It is reasonable, therefore, that as a friend, Jesus is with people who suffer. Through Jesus, God experiences human suffering with solidarity. God feels what creatures feel. God welcomes the suffering because of God's friendship with humanity. God's friendship becomes the underlying principle that is influenced by suffering. God is clearly passible through Jesus' friendship.

God's friendship love made manifest in Jesus Christ is not external for Godself. The relationship of the Triune Persons within Godself is grounded in the *philia* through which the Persons love and give to each other. The equality of the Persons, their distinctive Personhood and roles demonstrate their friendship in the *perichoresis*.¹¹ The creative Triune *perichoresis* is life-giving, embracing, and sustaining. *Philia* performance is intrinsically authentic to God. In the creation process, the *philia* of the *perichoresis* performs the distinctive role of the Persons: the Creator uttered; the Logos created forms; the Spirit gave life. Since the creation,

according to Elizabeth Johnson, "God had the character of being a friend of the material world in its full scope ... creating matter, appreciating that it is good, and even declaring that human beings made of the dust of the earth and divine breath were the image of God."¹² This Trinitarian friendship rejects all forms of evil for its antagonistically disconnecting nature.

The incarnation of Jesus in the world was the extension of God's friendship within Godself and with creation. The incarnational coming of God into humanity through Jesus was a bodily human presence. In Jesus' body, the essences of divinity and humanity are united together. The body of Jesus affirms God encountering the suffering of creatures. The divine and humanity are intermingled together as friends, as opposed to the prevalent reality of human disconnection with God. The friendship of the two natures in one body clarifies the radical uniqueness of each nature but also the conceivable unity of two natures which had long been thought to be unreasonable. As friendship, the unity of both natures acknowledges the differences present in the natures without blurring and synthesizing them. The friendship of both natures is God's participation within human suffering.

10 Joas Adiprasetya, "Pastor as Friend: Reinterpreting Christian Leadership," *Dialog*, no. 57 (2018): 48.

11 Meaning the relationship of the Triune God.

12 Elizabeth A. Johnson, *Ask the Beasts: Darwin and the God of Love* (New York: Bloomsbury Continuum, 2014), 196.

Through the coming of Jesus, God's friendship is God's vulnerability and weakness which encompasses all creation. Drawing from the concept of deep incarnation from Niels Gregersen, Johnson states that the incarnation of Jesus extensively embraces every flesh of creation,¹³ through which God let Godself be affected and influenced by creatures. God's *perichoretic* friendship is reflected through bio-friendship, the friendship of all creatures. At the same time, God exercises God's freedom and humility. God's freedom to be "whatever" God intends it to be is manifested through God's vulnerability. In this way, God becomes united with creation. God makes Godself identifiable in human relationship, as friend. Friendship underscores God's power in relation. To relate to creatures as the friend detranscendentalizes God.

As the suffering friend, Jesus was the victim of injustice. He was executed on the cross due to the unjust oppressive system of the empire. For Jesus, the confrontation, accusation, and suffering he experienced were the result of his opposition to the structures and his preferential advocacy for his fellow sufferers. Human suffering, therefore, was not foreign to him. He really understood what it meant to

suffer. Nevertheless, he did not create the suffering, nor did he justify the necessity of suffering and evil. Suffering was imposed on him by the evil system. Jesus, the suffering friend endured suffering for the benefit of people (*pro nobis*). His life orientation was toward the people (*ochlos*).

The cross event displays a reconciliatory motif of God's redemption. Through the cross, the suffering of Jesus generates reconciliation between God and humankind. The redemptive praxis of Jesus' suffering bridges God and humanity, transforming the relationship from enemies into reconciled friends (Romans 5:10). We were the enemies of God, turned into God's friends. The friendship between God and humanity also encompasses reconciliation between humanity and other creatures. Creaturely friendship is regenerated tridirectionally: God, humanity, and other creatures. God participates in the suffering of humankind and the whole creation. Solidary friendship is the guiding principle for the suffering of all existence.

Through the suffering of God in Jesus, the history of suffering becomes the history of God. The history of God contains the history of suffering. God has a history because God has penetrated the history of creation, including the history of suffering. The metaphysical suffering of God in heaven becomes a

13 Elizabeth A. Johnson, *Ask the Beasts: Darwin and the God of Love* (New York: Bloomsbury Continuum, 2014), 196.

realized one of God on earth. Suffering for God becomes historical, experiential, and empirical. The meta-historical God, God who heard the cry of misery of the Israelites in Egypt (Ex. 3:7), performed in Jesus the historical alternation. Through the incarnational friendship, God intervened into the history of misery. God in Jesus made it clear how God responded against evil and suffering. In that way, the influence of God was shown in action. The knowledge of history, therefore, cannot exclude the history of God's suffering.

The suffering of God as a friend has a comforting dimension. Never we would say that God does not understand in the experience of suffering. Hebrews 4:15 (NRSV) testifies, "For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who in every respect has been tested as we are, yet without sin." God in Jesus can comprehend our vulnerability and weakness. He is our friend who understands the struggles that we experience. As the suffering friend, God participates in our suffering. Every time we see suffering people, we are directed to Jesus, the fellow sufferer.

Those Who Suffered as the Friends of Jesus

Jesus the true friend wept with those who wept. Those who wept

were Jesus' friends and Jesus affectively sympathized with them. Lazarus' death is one clear example of Jesus' sorrowful sadness as he was deeply affected by suffering. Numerous times are recorded that Jesus had compassion towards the people he encountered (Luke 7:13; Matt. 9:36; 14:14; etc.). The compassion he had moved him to advocate for them, to heal the sick, to feed them, i.e. to resolve human suffering. He never blamed the victims of suffering but elevated their lives through an active compassion.

Those who suffered were the friends of Jesus. Jesus took their side. Jesus was with the oppressed, poor, and excluded. Acting as the friend of the suffering, Jesus was present in the middle of evil and suffering. Jesus was not only present, but also protested evil. The friendship of Jesus was universal in that it did not only include his disciples whom he loved, but also those who wanted to lay down their lives for other people.¹⁴ Given this universality, Jesus' actions were directed not only to his disciples, but also to all people; not only to the people of Israel, but also the Samaritans.

His invitation to the solidarity of friendship also addressed the people

¹⁴ Daniel B. Stevick, *Jesus and His Own: A Commentary on John 13-17* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011), 211.

in power, such as religious leaders and wealthy landlords. They were called to compassion and repentance. Zacchaeus, a debt collector, positively responded to the invitation through actualizing compassion to the oppressed poor (Luke 19:8). Beforehand, Jesus openly conveyed his intention to stay at Zacchaeus' house, though Zacchaeus was considered a sinner and betrayer of the people. In this way, Jesus deliberately bridged the societal disconnection based on social prejudice and stereotypes. The suffering of Zacchaeus and the people was resolved through the repentance of Zacchaeus and reconciliation. The responsibility of the sinner was attended. The oppression through which suffering occurred was resolved through Jesus performing his friendship.

Some of the Pharisees and Sadducees did not accept the critique of Jesus. Instead, they were greatly disturbed by the presence of Jesus. Jesus was their enemy. Many times, they tried to test Jesus that they might have grounds to provoke a trial. They did not realize the multi-faceted oppression the system had exercised to the people. The privilege of power and wealth blinded them from the meaning of true relationship. They were not friends of the suffering, because their religious ideal centered on legalistic purity concepts, rather than the praxis of compassion. God, for them, was not the God of all-embracing love, but the

God of punishment, segregation, and purity. No wonder, the perpetuation of the unjust religious and social system was necessary to endure their influence in the society. Because they considered Jesus to be an enemy, they were incapable to appreciate the compassion behind Jesus' critiques of them. Jesus opened himself to discuss with certain people from the groups. Nicodemus was an example of how Jesus' openness embraced those privilege groups. A true friend gives warning and advice.

Jesus realized that the system was manifesting evil and generating suffering in the people. The system outcasted people of poverty, disability, and need. In the middle of the Roman empire, powerless people were impoverished. Beggars were a normal presence outside Jerusalem. Sick people, because they were considered impure, could not be integrated to the society. Cities in the empire were segregated and classified into the lavish *polis* and poor *chora*. People labeled certain prejudices to different city dwellers: nothing good comes from Nazareth; Samaritans were mixed-blooded and idolatrous; Galileans were rebellious. Worship was segregated: in Gerizim for Samaritans and Jerusalem for Judeans. Slavery, debt imposition, corrupted religious leaders, and unjust tax systems created enormous suffering. For those who experienced suffering because of these systems, Jesus was a friend. Wherever

Jesus traveled, his attention was always on the victims of suffering.

Jesus was a friend for the people of suffering. He was in solidarity with them. He gathered, organized, preached, healed, liberated, forgave, and fed. Sometimes he criticized severely, but in different circumstances he would only ask short yet profound question as he posed to Peter after his resurrection, or even remain silent as he did on his trial. Up to the cross, his solitary friendship welcomed the criminal: “Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise” (Luke 23:43, NRSV).

The Church and Its Call to be Friends in the World of Suffering

Jesus invited his disciples to follow his command to love other people in the spirit of life-giving *philia*. Friendship love is the authentic signification of Jesus’ disciples. The presence of Jesus’ disciples as friends for the suffering is the genuine call of Christianity. Christians are called to be constantly present in the very reality of human pain and misery. To be a friend means to stay on the side of the suffering people. Friendship love shifts the relationship shape from hierarchical servant-master into equal friends, from top-down to, as Martin Buber states, an “I-Thou” approach.¹⁵

In the friendship relationship, a Christian should listen more than speak, accompany rather than advise, learn from rather than teach to, appreciate rather than judge and accuse, and cry with rather than look down on. Presence itself is comforting, life-giving, encouraging, and supporting. A friend influences and is influenced. A friend learns from the perspective of the suffering, acknowledging the hardship of their agony and staying with them. At the same time, theological friendship reflects the continuous presence of Christ as the ultimate friend to the people of suffering. Like Jesus, a Christian should not be neutral. A Christian is called to raise his/her voice against the oppressor, to challenge the unjust system, and to advocate for the victims. As Elie Wiesel states, “we must always take sides. Neutrality helps the oppressor, never the victim. Silence encourages the tormentor, never the tormented.”¹⁶

The history of suffering in the world opposes the spirit of loving *philia*. Colonialization and slavery, for example, dehumanized people, changed them into a commodity of trade, business, development, pride and other interests. Modern slavery benefits from cheap labor and fuels an unjust economy. The Nazis racialized people, built ghettos, separated

¹⁵ See Martin Buber, *I and Thou*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Touchstone, 1996).

¹⁶ Elie Wiesel, *Night*, trans. Marion Wiesel (New York: Hill and Wang, 2006), 118.

people from their families, and objectified them as slaves for work (*arbeit macht frei*). The groaning of creation emerges from pyramidal anthropocentrism. Patriarchal systems select man as the ultimate creature and subdue women. These despotic systems disembody the virtue of friendship and connectivity.

Jesus' solidarity as the ultimate friend is a model for his disciples to practice friendship grounded by love in their relationship as one community. Wendy Farley writes, "Jesus encourages the community gathered in his name to continue to make God present in the world through their love for one another."¹⁷ Jesus gave them examples of how to be a friend for those who are in suffering. The community of disciples is a community of loving friendship. In the community, they were equally welcomed and accepted. Therefore, the Church community should be a community of friendship for people who suffer. The presence of the Church needs to be inclusive of all races, cultures, genders, social and economic status in order for this friendship to flourish.

The Church itself has been long focused on gaining and exercising

abusive power. Hierarchical administration and leadership tend to avoid the presence of the needy. The Church concentrates its attention on the wealthy, privileged, and productive, those who can benefit the Church. A theology of the suffering friend criticizes these principles as the Church shifts its gaze from the top to the bottom, to those who are weak and powerless. As a community of friendship, all members must be regarded as saints, which is called by Martin Luther "the priesthood of all believers." The priesthood of all believers comprises "the friendship of all believers."

The suffering of other people becomes an integral suffering of the whole community. One's liberation defines the total liberation and conversely. There is no true liberation without the liberation of every friend. One's suffering resolution and salvation becomes everyone's salvation. No one is saved without the salvation of every friends. Salvation is transformed into relational salvation. Selfish individualist spirituality cannot be justified any longer since spirituality is defined and practiced within the friendship. New life has its new meaning: to be a friend with the people of suffering.

Holy communion essentially reflects our common need for liberation. At the same time, it reflects the union of Christ with his friends. Every friend

¹⁷ Farley, *Tragic Vision and Divine Compassion*, 113.

is equally welcomed to the table. Connectivity is restored, grace is bestowed through the means of the substance, and reconciliation is expressed. Communion invites every perpetrator to repent from the suffering one generated. Yet, the call of communion does not stop there since it summons the violators to repair the friendship they have damaged, through apology and responsibility. To the suffering people, communion presents Christ, their friend, who strengthens them with influential and sacrificing love. Further, it also empowers them to resolve suffering and fight against evil because Christ is present, and his presence is always transforming.

The friendship principles highlight the forms of relationship in the community. The Church enhances the friendship model of Jesus, the ultimate friend, to the world of suffering. For this reason, The Church cannot be quiet in the prevalent occurrence of evil and be passive amid worldly suffering. The Church as a friendship community takes action.

Friendship and Solidarity

The multi-faceted variations of evil in world's history may potentially establish a hierarchy of suffering. One suffering contests competitively with another suffering in the public square. In the mind of the

people who suffer in a certain way, the distinctiveness of their suffering can rule out another's suffering. One might think that certain suffering is more severe than others and therefore requires more attention. Memories of suffering can compete. Michael Rothberg, for example, notes the statement of Khalid Muhammad, an African American, on 3 April 1994 at Howard University, "the black holocaust was 100 times worse than the so-called Jew Holocaust. You say you lost six million. We question that, but ... we lost 600 million."¹⁸ He questions the establishment of the U.S. Holocaust Museum on the mall in Washington, DC which the federal government funds, while the Holocaust does not have historical significance to the U.S. The African American struggle is portrayed as if it competes with the Holocaust.

Rothberg suggests using "multidirectional memory" as opposed to competitive memory. Multidirectional memory brings to public view the various experiences of suffering as if they are owned together. The various past sufferings are brought into the present to form solidarity within people. Instead of competing, the memories of different forms and events of suffering are used "as subject to ongoing

¹⁸ Michael Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2009), 1.

negotiation, cross-referencing, and borrowing; as productive and not privative.”¹⁹ The multidirectional principle of memory can generate the possibility for solidarity. The memory is extended into presence to solidify people’s commitment to fight against present forms of imposed suffering.

Through the principles of friendship, multidirectional memory of suffering can be achieved. The question is shifted from, “who is suffering more?” into “who is my friend who experiences suffering?” In this way, all victims share the common understanding of what it means to suffer. Multidirectional memory makes the victims learn from and support each other in the spirit of friendship: fellow sufferers. In this way, the suffering caused by the Holocaust cannot be superior to the suffering experienced by those subjected to slavery and colonization, or the other way around. Therefore, the remembrance of every event should be recognized proportionately and cooperatively.

The friendship of every victim of each suffering brings up solidarity among themselves. The unifying ground is the commonly shared feeling of suffering. The unity of fellow sufferers motivates solidary actions against all forms of evil. The friendship universally transcends religion/faith, nationality, race, culture, economy, and

political ideology. Since suffering is universally experienced throughout the world, friendship can be universally implemented. Therefore, the intersectionality of suffering needs to enlighten the practice of friendship-in-suffering. The economically oppressed man should learn to respect the domestically abused woman. The Holocaust needs to be respected multidirectionally in considering peace in the Israel-Palestine conflicts. Religiously oppressed in Asia, Asian Christians should reconsider their support, if any, of banning Muslims. Sexual minority communities in the U.S. should protest any imperialist and narrow nationalistic agenda of the U.S.

In friendship, however, power relations have to be addressed since privilege and power influence how friendship is implemented. There is no egalitarianism without an analysis of power. Relations which address power does not utilize friendship for one’s self-interest. Solidary friendship does not primarily speak on behalf the suffering friend, but to be present and to provide space for one to express the suffering. To listen pathetically and support from within, not before a friend, manifests the Trinitarian and incarnational friendship presence. In this sense, solidary human friendship constitutes deep friendship: the realization of the Trinitarian equal friendship into human inclusive relationships.

¹⁹ Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory*..., 3-4.

Through enacting solidarity in friendship, the people of suffering can avoid the hierarchy of suffering. The universal values of friendship transpire into creating interfaith, ecological, interdisciplinary, and intercultural friendships in the context of evil and suffering. As people become friends for people who suffer, just as Jesus became friend for the suffering and for all, God's power and goodness are experienced, and God's relational presence is affirmed.

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