

Review: Companions in Suffering

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Companions in Suffering: Comfort for Times of Loss and Loneliness

By Wendy Alsup (InterVarsity Press)

If you have suffered or are suffering, you might roll your eyes at the title.

“Yeah, right. I’ll bet. I’ve heard that before,” you might think.

You might also wonder what Wendy Alsup knows about suffering that  she can write a whole book with sufficient authority.

You might also wonder if this is going to be one more “suck it up and get over it” kind of book.

As it turns out, Alsup is well-acquainted with suffering, so much that she doesn’t have time to be anything less than honest about it.

In her 30s, she miscarried and then struggled to get pregnant again. After giving birth to two sons, her marriage ended in divorce. As a single mother, she moved from the West Coast to the East Coast to be closer to her aging parents and soon after was diagnosed with cancer. During her cancer treatment, her father nearly died of chronic heart failure.

None of these things were supposed to happen to those who followed the rules of “the prosperity gospel of conservative evangelicals.” According to that gospel, a person can avoid trouble by making good decisions. But what

happens when suffering comes at no fault of one's own?

Alsup writes candidly of loneliness, alienation, depression, envy and a general struggle with faith. She reflects on passages of Scripture that ask the hard questions without giving easy answers.

Those with deep or prolonged suffering know all the well-intentioned advice about how to get free of the pain. Alsup doesn't offer that. Instead, she offers fellowship and companionship—"suffering with."

Woven with her own story and questions are the struggles of the psalmists David and Asaph, Jesus, Mary and Martha, and Job. Alsup draws from a deep well in her reflections on these stories.

Companions in Suffering is rich and hopeful. It is written directly to those who know suffering well. For those who wish to offer companionship, the appendix provides good counsel for doing so well.

*Eric Black, executive director, publisher and editor
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