**Acceptance (done)**

**Richard:**  Just a note, you're dropping into the middle of a series. If you haven't already, you'll wanna go back and start listening at prologue.

 Previously on Living & Effective season two.

**Speaker 2:**  There are oftentimes where we'll come in you'll play something and it'll make me cry but I love it. It's like a measurement.

**Speaker 3:**  We are dust. That's actually good news for us. We're not healthy when we act like we are in control.

**Diane:**  You get to the place that is the darkest and you can't see the way forward.

**Speaker 3:**  When you pray darkness is my only companion, you are trusting in the God of the covenant even in your desolation.

**Diane:**  It drowns your hope. I mean, clearly somebody's not going to come back to life.

**Speaker 5:**  The memories I do have of the really low moments, kept picturing awful things happening and I couldn't get it out of my head.

**Richard:**  I don't know why God did it.

**Diane:**  When you think about the cross, grieving is a taste of the fellowship of his sufferings. Grief is not the enemy. Death is the enemy. People fight grief like it's a bad thing. It's a necessary thing, it's actually healing to go through grief, as awful as it is. Grief exposes us to ourselves. Even the grief of others exposes us to ourselves, so, you know, you can't go through grief like that and think you're the same person. Life becomes more precious, not less.

**Richard:**  This is Diane (Langberg) , practicing psychologist and the author of Suffering and the Heart of God.

**Diane:**  It's the place where people begin to realize in fact God did not abandon me, He came to dwell with us so that the enemy, death, would be destroyed forever.

**Richard:**  I'm Richard Clark.

**Joy Beth:**  And I'm Joy Beth Smith.

**Richard:**  The Christian Standard Bible and Christianity Today present: Living & Effective, Season Two. A podcast about what happens when the Bible and humanity collide.

 This is our last episode and it's centered around what is often referred to as the final stage of grief: Acceptance. Of course, that's not usually how it works. Acceptance is usually just the beginning of the grief process. And it can lead to even more denial, more anger, more depression, more struggle in general.

 So, for me, grieving a marriage and grieving my dad at the same time exposed a tendency to go through life cavalierly, to take people for granted, to be self-centered, and to be focused on life. And this is the interesting thing, it didn't necessary change all of these things, it just made me more self-aware. So, I still have all of these tendencies. The tendency to put ambition before other people in my life, especially the people who are closest to me. I saw that very clearly. There were regrets I had about spending time with my dad, uh, like I should've spent more time with him throughout my life, like I wish I'd gone fishing with him more when I was a child, all the way to I should've spent more time during the holidays right before he died with him. But, I was trying to, you know, succeed at seminary and like be a minister. And then there were, I spent a lot of time at church. I prioritized not just God but probably church over my wife at the time at moments more than I should've, you know.

**Joy Beth:**  Do you feel like even with the new self-awareness that there are moments where you still grieve those things?

**Richard:**  Grieve, um-

**Joy Beth:**  Like the death of your dad.

**Richard:**  Yes. Definitely. Um, and in fact in, in a way, they increase the grief. They make the grief worse. I mean, there's nothing worse than regret. I think with the self-awareness what I've taken from it is the ability to be a better dad myself. I think that helps me a lot. I think that makes me happier. That helps me to have a healthy relationship with that grief, to have the awareness that Aticus will lose me one day and when feel some of those same feelings. To both be okay with that and help him understand that that's normal. It's okay if he doesn't want to go fishing with me or whatever my version of fishing is. To give him grace in those areas actively, not that my dad didn't, he 100% did (laughs). He totally did, but it's hard no matter what, you know.

 One of the signs of who we are becoming is those people who we gravitate towards, right. We tend to gravitate towards people who at least understand who we are.

 So, I had the chance to hang out with Todd Billings, uh, at his home with his family. I got to meet his kids. That was awesome. Uh, and I got to uh spend some time talking to Rachel, who is his wife, and it seemed like she in particular is starting to gravitate towards people who understand not just what she's dealing with, not just the facts of the situation but also the experience of grief itself and how it changes you.

**Rachel:**  Being able to know other people that you can talk about it with and have it be mundane-

**Richard:**  Uh-huh. Yeah.

**Rachel:**  Is a very helpful thing because there are different groups of people that you need around you at different stages in the process, so like, we had cancer friends, you know, earlier in that process-

**Richard:**  Right.

**Rachel:**  Who we really don't talk to that much now. Like, it's not that we have anything against them, but we don't have the same things in common. We don't talk as actively or seek treatment.

**Richard:**  Mm-hmm (affirmative).

**Rachel:**  And if he goes into treatment again at some point, there will probably be other relationships that are renewed in that context, um, because of that. You know, you hear misery loves company-

**Richard:**  Mm-hmm (affirmative).

**Rachel:**  But like (laughs), um, I saw that misery in the long term likes not having to explain itself (laughs).

**Richard:**  Hmm.

**Rachel:**  Otherwise you're always like, you know, you always have to go through that whole oh, I'm sorry conversation. And it's like, no, it's okay, you know.

**Richard:**  Yeah.

**Rachel:**  It's not traumatic for me anymore, like-

**Richard:**  That's-

**Rachel:**  You've just traumatized somebody else (laughs).

**Richard:**  Yeah.

 Why is this happening to you?

**Todd:**  Um, I don't know.

**Richard:**  (laughs).

 And I think that's a biblical answer.

 Mm-hmm (affirmative).

**Todd:**  Not in the sense that the Bible doesn't address it.

**Richard:**  Yeah.

**Todd:**  I think the Bible does address it and we get the answer, which is, it's beyond human wisdom. Job's friends, I mean, they do pretty good at first by being silent and present with him, and then they start giving all sorts of reasons. The thing is though is that these are actually pretty good theological reasons.

**Richard:**  Hmm.

**Todd:**  Like they're reasons which are reflected in some ways in other parts of scripture.

**Richard:**  Mm-hmm (affirmative).

**Todd:**  You know, not exactly but you know they make sense. They're, they're, they're ways of figuring out why a particular illness or a particular tragedy is happening to a particular person.

**Richard:**  Yeah.

**Todd:**  You know, the Lord rebukes his friends. It's Job who has spoken right of the Lord.

**Richard:**  Mm-hmm (affirmative).

**Todd:**  Much more and the Lord never gives an answer. I mean, the Lord's answer is, you know, in the (theophony) to Job is where were you at the foundations of the world.

**Richard:**  Right.

**Todd:**  Like, basically, I am God, and you are not. This is beyond human wisdom. We need to say to one another that we trust that God is good and that our lives are in the hands of God. We don't know.

 It doesn't settle and we just don't get reasons of, you know, why this happens. Jesus, you know, articulates the same, the same principle. Why was this person, why was this man more blind, was it the sin of his parents, and you know so forth. Now this isn't to say that these things are useless in the economy of God's action. I mean, we believe in the God of the incarnation and the cross of Jesus Christ where God works in powerful ways through weakness and through things that outwardly look like terrible tragedies and outwardly look like just a total defeat and a total mess. It's saying that God works through illness is different from saying I know the reason why God has given this particular illness to me at this time.

**Joy Beth:**  I probably have two very, very best friends-

**Richard:**  Mm-hmm (affirmative).

**Joy Beth:**  Who will sit and let me sob on the phone and will sit and let me rage about something and will sit and let me feel all of my feelings and cycle through as much as many times as I need to and it doesn't push them away and, and they sit in it with me. Our relationship is not affected by my grief. And both of them have experienced pretty significant levels of grief as well-

**Richard:**  Mm-hmm (affirmative).

**Joy Beth:**  And I think that that was an easy thing early on in our friendship that allowed for that kind of significant bonding.

**Richard:**  Right. If there's one thing that I have continually had to remind myself it's that presence is the most important thing here. Don't you think?

**Joy Beth:**  Yes.

**Richard:**  Like, Job's friends at their most valuable sat with him. They just sat with him. My friends, when I needed them most, sat with me and just existed with me in that pain and that means a lot cause it, it feels like a sacrifice. It is a sacrifice. One of the hardest things for me is that I, I don't like uncomfortable situations. I don't like being put in situations where I might say the wrong thing and so I'll often avoid those situations and withdraw.

**Joy Beth:**  That's interesting because you actually feel very comfortable with like darker emotions.

**Richard:**  I am but I think I like to curate when and how this happens.

**Joy Beth:**  That familiarity doesn't make you any more comfortable with other people's pain?

**Richard:**  I mean I think it does. It does. But I also, um, have a hard time putting myself in those situations actively. Like you saw it in episode two, I think, you saw it in a previous episode where I asked Billings and was like I feel really uncomfortable talking to you about this. And, and, uh, when I was interviewing Jennifer I felt uncomfortable. She's crying in front of me. This is my wife, crying in front of me, that should be a regular occasion. It's not. It is not typical me standing there listening to it is not typical. My typical response would be to solve that problem.

**Joy Beth:**  Get the crying to stop.

**Richard:**  Yeah. Like, because I love her, but also because it's uncomfortable. But I knew in that moment my job was to let the situation play out and to get the information I need and to let her say what she felt.

**Joy Beth:**  Yeah. To sit together.

**Richard:**  To hear her.

**Joy Beth:**  Yeah.

**Richard:**  You know? The story of Job just keeps popping up in this podcast as we're working on it. So, it sort of felt natural for me Todd Billings' friend and old testament scholar Travis West about the ending.

**Travis:**  I don't presume to, to know the mind of the author in the original communities that sustained and told that story, but my sense is that the ending, it's supposed to produce ambivalence.

**Richard:**  Travis even performed the biblical ritual of shaving his head as a gesture of support to Todd.

**Travis:**  The arc of the story and particularly God's response to Job is kind of the climax of the story and then this, you know, it's a part of the wisdom tradition, right-

**Richard:**  Mm-hmm (affirmative).

**Travis:**  And wisdom tradition in the Bible is basically one big question saying can you hold the tension. It's letting go of the prosperity gospel of if I do this then God will (crosstalk) -

**Richard:**  Or the opposite thing which is like suffering's always awesome.

**Travis:**  Yeah, right. Absolutely.

**Richard:**  Or uh-

**Travis:**  Are you okay with mystery? Are you okay not knowing?

**Richard:**  Hm.

**Travis:**  Can you find me, God, in the mystery, in the tension, because that's where I reside.

**Richard:**  Yeah, because if you take away that ending, you almost get the sense that Job suffered and then he learned the lesson.

**Travis:**  Mm-hmm (affirmative).

**Richard:**  And that's the end.

**Travis:**  Right.

**Richard:**  And therefore suffering is good because you learn to look to God only for your answers or whatever, or no answers, whatever it is.

**Travis:**  Yeah.

**Richard:**  But, because he got good stuff after, it, it is a giant question mark.

**Travis:**  It gives us nothing in a way.

**Richard:**  I can't imagine Job's life after the curtain falls. He's lost his livelihood, his health, his children just to gain them all back. Now he knows that it can be taken away at any moment. He's been confronted with a reality that is fragile. He's tasked with living a life that he now knows can be derailed at any time.

 By the end of Job's story, God doesn't promise that his suffering will end. And at that point, Job must've known more than anyone that suffering was almost inevitable... and it is for all of us. But sometimes that can be hard to process. The shock of grief is just way too much to take in all at once, and we'll get stuck denying it, ignoring it, or even trying to outrun it. We find our Peter (PawPaw) , someone who tells us that everything's going to be okay and we latch onto them.

**Joy Beth:**  You do this wild adventure and you take this Instagram post, and you just make a joke of it, but there's a little piece of you that hopes that your lottery ticket is a winner.

**Richard:**  Or we rage against God and the world. We rage against our circumstances.

**Speaker 6:**  Yeah, God, give my one year old a nice journey with cancer. Nobody wants these things.

**Richard:**  Just like (Kostee) must've processed when it came to his son, we know that it's not just for these things to be happening. Suffering is not okay, but acknowledging that injustice is.

**Todd:**  I strongly resist the idea that God gave me cancer so that I could bear witness in the particular way I did.

**Richard:**  Maybe we start striving for some simlets of our old expectations for life, seeing what we have to do to get it back. We lean in and push through.

**Todd:**  Okay, you know, I can, I can do it today. I'm just going to push really hard before those around me, my wife especially, said Todd, stop doing that. You do that for one day, it takes you three or four days to recover.

**Richard:**  We try and construct something good from our tragedy or maybe we need to process and sure, we're bogged down in the darker thoughts.

**Rachel:**  The memories I do have of the really low moments. Kept picturing awful things happening and I couldn't get it out of my head.

**Richard:**  It's almost impossible to process these things because the weight of that reality is unimaginable. And we realize that nothing about our tragedy is good. It just means the world is broken and we're a part of that. Suffering is going to happen and we all have our own ways of dealing with it. And throughout scripture we see examples of that.

**Todd:**  Some of the whole idea of acceptance is um, it's just very different. It's acceptance that I'll continue to get new griefs.

**Richard:**  Mm-hmm (affirmative).

**Todd:**  It's acceptance that this is not going to stop.

**Richard:**  Mm-hmm (affirmative).

**Todd:**  And yet, God is good and life is a gift.

**Richard:**  Yeah.

**Todd:**  Every moment. I think it's something that fits very well with wisdom literature in the Bible, with the book of Ecclesiastes, with parts of the Psalms, with the book of Job.

**Richard:**  Yep.

**Todd:**  Um, like I think there's a lot in the biblical witness that says life is grief. Life is suffering.

**Richard:**  Yeah.

**Todd:**  In many ways. Um, that's what to expect, and yet, it's also a gift and joy and all sorts of unexpected gifts.

**Richard:**  Thanks so much. I appreciate it.

**Todd:**  Yeah.

**Richard:**  I finished up my last interview with Todd, and we parted ways. I wanted to check out chapel on campus, but Todd needed to skip it to go take a nap, so I went alone. While Todd wasn't physically present, it's clear through this podcast and in this community that his presence is deeply felt, even when he's gone home to rest. (crosstalk) .

**Speaker 7:**  So you're kind of hanging out with-

**Richard:**  Yeah, yeah, yeah.

**Speaker 7:**  Kinda hanging out with Todd.

**Richard:**  Yeah. Been kinda following him around when I can, and then too, on the in-between times, kinda talking to other people uh, talked to Kaitlin (Devries) , I talked to-

**Speaker 7:**  Okay.

**Richard:**  I talked to Tim and his wife, I went to his house-

**Speaker 7:**  Okay.

**Richard:**  For a while. So yeah.

**Speaker 7:**  Cool.

**Richard:**  It's been interesting.

**Speaker 7:**  Yeah.

**Speaker 8:**  Romans 8. You know, the whole creation groans, and not just people. The thing that we were fighting, the grief, isn't our enemy. It, it has actually brought us deeper into truth, which is why the creation groans and why we groan, is death, which was never to have been part of our lives.

**Richard:**  I'll be honest. I thought Billings was an exception. But when I left Holland, Michigan and came home to work on this podcast about grief, I started paying attention to the people around me, I discovered a whole world of sorrow. Creation groans. Under every rock you'll find more grief. And of course, this world is infinitely more broken than we want it to be.

**Speaker 8:**  But, the God that we follow conquered death. So, when a person begins to shift in tiny ways, what you're seeing is a taste of the power of the resurrection.

**Speaker 9:**  (singing)

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 (singing)