

I recently read a thoughtful article entitled *A Both/And Path to Truth*. In it the writer stated that a lifetime of evangelical thinking had primed her for *either/or* questions, which bred a deep distrust of *both/and* propositions.

While acknowledging that a wariness of pluralistic worldviews is completely warranted, she nonetheless suggested that, “if (we are) not careful, that insistence can mutate into creating artificial schisms that fly in the face of a God who desires to make us whole in radical ways.”

This resonated with what I wrote about in our last GO, about how Jesus, our model for integrated mission, was able to hold together the challenging tension of word, sign and deed... a tension that the rest of us often find challenging. There are many areas in life which escape our attempts to neatly package them in easy-to-understand theology; one that I have wrestled with over the years is the tension between suffering and God’s overcoming victory, both on an individual level and for our communities.

When we serve a God who has the power to heal and deliver, how do we cope with a loved one dying of cancer, especially when we know of other people He has miraculously healed? How do we survive the grief of the senseless murders of a team of ten dedicated men and women serving in Afghanistan, or make sense of the mystery of the Christian workers abducted in

Yemen more than two years ago, who are still unaccounted for? And where does the agonising cruelty fit which we see displayed almost daily on our television screens – tonight a warehouse in Libya filled with the charred bodies of regime opponents, murdered by a desperate dictator clinging to the vestiges of power? Do we not serve an all-powerful, merciful God who despises injustice, and fights on behalf of the poor and the down-trodden? So how do we reconcile biblical examples such as Exodus 2-4, where God says, “I have heard the cries of My people, yes, I have seen their oppression – and I have come to deliver them now,” with the knowledge that many believers are still enslaved, persecuted and oppressed?

Those of us who think in terms of *either/or* often struggle with God when we face suffering, whereas those with a *both/and* worldview are better equipped to embrace suffering with a more holistic understanding: they grieve with all their being when disaster strikes, yet are also able to embrace the power of God in a way that allows Him to work in miraculous ways, such as healing and delivering, and even raising the dead. Don’t get me wrong: I am utterly convinced that suffering is evil and is not God’s intent for humankind. But we cannot simply polarise, dichotomise, and ‘believe’ it away – it is an integral part of life’s journey and it provides us with many opportunities to grow.

Our western, dualistic response has tended to insulate us from suffering by creating many (well-meant) safety networks and allowing us to worship comfort in almost idolatrous fashion. It has attempted to explain and rationalise our world in a way that excludes mystery – an aspect of God which does not fit well within our systems of understanding. But no matter what we believe, we all face an abundance of *both/and* situations in our lives, and we somehow have to live with that tension on an ongoing basis.

I believe that we can learn a great deal from our brothers and sisters in the majority world who embrace the *both/and* path to the truth about God. May we be willing to abandon our tendency to neatly package God, and instead allow Him to make us whole in radical ways.

Jonas

