

Dear Friend,

Two weeks ago our four-year-old daughter, Jaimee, had the 24 hour intestinal “flu”. She vomited about every 15 minutes from 9:00pm until 7:00am the next morning. By the middle of the night she was a very thirsty little girl and began begging her mom and later me for a glass of water. We both patiently and firmly explained to her that she couldn’t have any water until she stopped throwing up because it would just make her sicker. She cried and complained and begged for water for at least four hours through the night. We held her and repeatedly told her that we loved her and that we weren’t trying to hurt her but to do what was best for her. I told her, “I know you desperately want water and believe that if I loved you I would give it to you. However, giving you water now would not be good for you. So, because I love you, I can’t give you water right now. I will later.” At several points she told us that we didn’t love her because we wouldn’t give her any water. Eventually she stopped throwing up and we began to give her ice chips and then water to sip and she got better.

Jaimee felt her thirst as suffering. She also knew that I had the ability to stop her suffering by giving her water. Therefore, my unwillingness to give her water felt to her like hatred, not love. Her logic was very simple, “I’m thirsty. My dad says he loves me. I know he has the ability to give me water. When you love someone and have the ability to end their suffering, you always act to end the suffering. Therefore, since he won’t give me water he must not love me.”

As I talked with her I thought that this is how God must feel as he deals with me, with us, much of the time. He is infinitely wise. He loves us with an “unfailing” love and has proven it by killing his own Son for our sins. He knows exactly what we need in order to recover from the disease of sin and make it safely to our heavenly home. Like a wise and loving parent with a sick child, he sometimes withholds things that we desperately want because he knows that to give it to us will only make us sicker. At other times he gives us “medicine”, which we find very distasteful, even bitter. He sends afflictions into our lives to help cure us of our love affair with creation and set us free to love him.

These things are painful and we view them as suffering. When we ask him to give us relief and he doesn’t, then we, like Jaimee, accuse him of not loving us or we decide God is not powerful (or not real) because he doesn’t remove the pain or fix the problem. Yet the reality is that God, like Jane and I with Jaimee, is overflowing with love and compassion and working only for our good. Jaimee should have reasoned like this, “My mom and dad love me. They have shown they love me in countless ways. Right now they are displaying great love by staying up with me all night and holding me tight. They are far wiser than I. They have five children older than I and have dealt with many sick children. I am only four years old and have never cared for someone who was sick. Therefore, while my thirst is a very painful thing, I can trust my mom and dad. I will allow myself to be comforted by their love for me and wait for them to satisfy my thirst when they think it is best.”

“I know, O Lord, that your laws are righteous, and *in faithfulness you have afflicted me*. May your unfailing love be my comfort, according to your promise to your servant.” (Psalm 119: 75-76) “Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as sons. For what son is not disciplined by his father? Our fathers disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but *God*

disciplines us for our good, that we may share in his holiness.” (Hebrews 12: 7 & 10) Christians can know, as every dearly loved child ought to know, that the pain that God brings into our lives is because he loves us and is wisely crafting a perfect salvation for us. The suffering he causes is due to his desire to heal us of our sin and give us the best gift he can give us, himself. We can, while in the midst of suffering, rest in the infinite wisdom and love of our great heavenly father. He is full of compassion and is working out all things for our eternal good.

Resting in his arms,