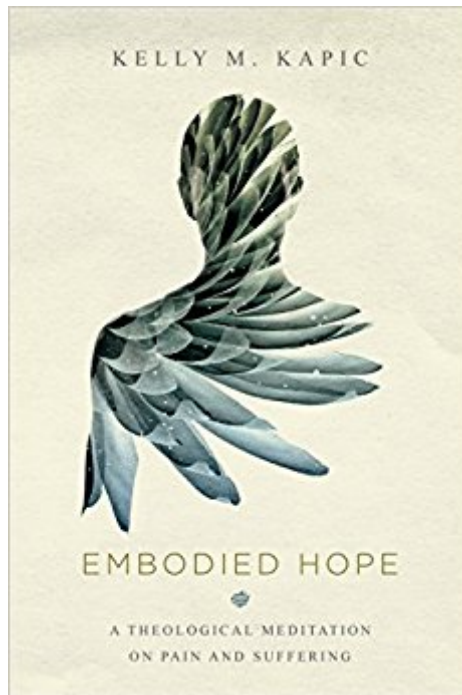




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Embodied Hope: A Theological Meditation On Pain And Suffering



Synopsis

"This book will make no attempt to defend God. . . . If you are looking for a book that boasts triumphantly of conquest over a great enemy, or gives a detached philosophical analysis that neatly solves an absorbing problem, this isn't it." Too often the Christian attitude toward suffering is characterized by a detached academic appeal to God's sovereignty, as if suffering were a game or a math problem. Or maybe we expect that since God is good, everything will just work out all right somehow. But where then is honest lament? Aren't we shortchanging believers of the riches of the Christian teaching about suffering? In *Embodied Hope* Kelly Kopic invites us to consider the example of our Lord Jesus. Only because Jesus has taken on our embodied existence, suffered alongside us, died, and been raised again can we find any hope from the depths of our own dark valleys of pain. As we look to Jesus, we are invited to participate not only in his sufferings, but also in the church, which calls us out of isolation and into the encouragement and consolation of the communal life of Christ. Drawing on his own family's experience with prolonged physical pain, Kopic reshapes our understanding of suffering into the image of Jesus, and brings us to a renewed understanding of *faith* and participation in *faith* our embodied hope.

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Customer Reviews

"Elegant and accessible, Kelly Kopic's personal and probing book *Embodied Hope* gives a theological exploration of suffering that stands apart from other books. Instead of giving Christian clichés or therapeutic platitudes, Kopic testifies to the way in which the triune God's light shines in the darkness of physical pain, chronic illness, and loss. With pastoral sensitivity and theological

insight, Kaptic calls the church to live into her God-given identity, even in difficult seasons. I highly recommend it!" (J. Todd Billings, author of *Rejoicing in Lament*) "I am all too familiar with the topic of this book, having lived as a quadriplegic for nearly fifty years and dealing daily with chronic pain. So I'm always heartened when I stumble upon a rich new resource that really encourages. That describes the remarkable book you hold in your hands. Rather than focus on why, Kelly makes much of how—how to trust God in this world. Best of all, *Embodied Hope* leads the reader to the foot of the cross, the only place to find true relief and healing. I love this book!" (Joni Eareckson Tada, founder and CEO, Joni and Friends International Disability Center) "Kelly Kaptic's *Embodied Hope* is a well-written and tremendously helpful theological meditation on pain and suffering, with many examples of ongoing and long-term conditions, including his wife's chronic pain. It is full of biblical realism, acknowledging struggle, confusion, longing, and lament as human in a compassionate and humane way, centered in Christ and his incarnation, suffering, death, resurrection, ascension, and second coming. It also emphasizes the need for loving and prayerful support from one another in the body of Christ and faithfulness in loving God and others in the midst of such chronic pain and suffering. Highly recommended!" (Siang-Yang Tan, professor of psychology, Fuller Theological Seminary, author of *Counseling and Psychotherapy and Managing Chronic Pain*) "A famous Christian once described preaching as 'truth through personality.' By that definition, Kelly Kaptic's new book is powerful preaching indeed. Kaptic presents a range of biblical expositions, all filtered through his deeply personal wrestling with the ongoing chronic pain of his wife and some of his other friends. Here is sermonic theology to comfort, console, and fortify your faith." (Wesley Hill, assistant professor of biblical studies, Trinity School for Ministry, Ambridge, Pennsylvania) "Out of Kaptic's own encounter with pain has come a book that reflects deeply on the theological challenges it poses. As a theological meditation, it helps sufferers dispel distorted images of God and gently nudges them to engage in consideration of God's full identification with us in the incarnate Christ to find an existential answer to an existential problem. Pastors ministering to people facing the enigma of suffering will find here a resource that is at once theologically robust and pastorally sensitive." (Simon Chan, Trinity Theological College, Singapore) "I know of many books about loss. I know of very few books about physical pain, which is the subject of Kelly Kaptic's insightful and challenging book. His wife's experience of pain awakened him to the problem, and his broad study and deep reflection prepared him for the writing. Kaptic accomplishes what is most difficult. *Embodied Hope* is personal, to be sure. A book like this one almost has to be. But it is also learned and pastoral. He interacts with great minds, both past and present. He explores relevant, even surprising topics, such as the significance of embodiment. Above all he lifts up Jesus Christ as

the one who suffers with us and for us, who conquers death, who stands with us. This fresh book does it all. I learned a great deal while reading this book; I also felt a great deal. It is the combination of the two that I found so helpful." (Gerald L. Sittser, professor of theology, Whitworth University, author of *A Grace Disguised* and *A Grace Revealed*) "True theology is shaped, refined, and informed by the harsh realities of life. In *Embodied Hope*, Kelly Kopic re-examines Christian theology from the vantage point of the ongoing physical suffering that has invaded his own family. This is theology that touches down in real life. It moves from abstract, theoretical notions of God to truth that is necessary for faith to survive. Against the backdrop of human suffering, *Embodied Hope* invites honest engagement with the God who loves us. This book is a gift for those who are wrestling with hard questions and an important resource for ministry leaders in the church and the academy." (Carolyn Custis James, author of *Half the Church* and *Malestrom*) "Here is a rare gift of love to the Christian church—especially for sufferers, their watchers, and all who observe deep pain. Kelly Kopic combines love for Scripture, familiarity with the spiritual masters of the past (Athanasius, Luther, and John Owen, to name but a few), and friendship with contemporary sufferers, together with a gracious sensitivity to the sometimes inscrutable wisdom of God. Kopic's reliable and gently applied theology, married as it is to personal experience, offers exactly what the title suggests: embodied hope." (Sinclair Ferguson, teaching fellow, Ligonier Ministries, author of *Deserted by God?*)

Kelly M. Kopic (PhD, King's College London) is professor of theological studies at Covenant College in Lookout Mountain, Georgia. He is the author or editor of numerous books including *A Little Book for New Theologians*, *God So Loved He Gave*, *Communion with God*, *Mapping Modern Theology*, *Sanctification*, and *Pocket Dictionary of the Reformed Tradition*.

Slow reading at first, but laying the Theological foundation is important. Excellently written. Kept my attention. We are learning more about suffering and pain as we walk our journey. This book was helpful.

This is a beautifully personal and theologically rich book, that points us to the Incarnation and exhorts us to hope through our bodies rather than in spite of them. Kopic's writing is clear and accessible, but also richly footnoted for those looking for additional resources. While certainly suited to personal study, this book would also serve well as source material for a small group or Sunday School.

This is an excellent book, a rushing cataract of good, challenging, and, best of all, true and healing words. If you are looking for a philosophical defense of God's goodness in the midst of suffering or a theological analysis explaining how to overcome your suffering, you won't find it here. Kaptic knows God needs no defense, that God is perfectly capable of defending himself, and that there is nothing more presumptuous than a human explaining the crushing mystery that pain is. But what you will find is an honest, nourishing, experienced, biblically founded, church centered, and theologically sensitive meditation on the seriousness of human affliction, its damaging grip in people's lives, and, most importantly, God's serious response to the seriousness of suffering. Kaptic's masterful and expert range of knowledge in history, theology, and pastoral care is impressive, but most impressive of all is his ability to give suffering a human face and genuine voice, bring it to the foot of the cross where the derelict One hung forsaken, and guide the reader to encounter the God who is known as the One who does not philosophically solve or deny or do nothing about our suffering, but absorbs it into his very being in Jesus Christ. I highly recommend this book to every human.

If one thing is certain about life on earth, it's that pain and suffering are inevitable realities regardless of who you are or where you grew up. There has been much Christian literature written to mend this reality and provide hope for a hurting world, and rightly so. But, few of these books have actually sought to share in the lament of human suffering, as they seem to be more focused on providing canned Christian answers that explain away the problem than actually dealing with the reality of suffering itself. Fortunately, *Embodied Hope: A Theological Meditation on Pain and Suffering* by Kelly M. Kaptic has provided a much-needed breath of fresh air that is both theologically grounded and biblically sensitive. Kelly M Kaptic is professor of theological studies at Covenant College in Lookout Mountain, Georgia. Kaptic received his PhD from King's College, University of London and is the author or editor of several books, including *A Little Book for New Theologians* and *Mapping Modern Theology*. *Embodied Hope* is somewhat of a personal memoir about pain and suffering in the life of the author. As Kaptic notes, "although I have a PhD, I find that I rarely know what I think really about something until I have had to write about it . . . therefore, after a few years, and under the encouragement of others including my wife I have aimed to wrestle through some of these questions in a more public manner" (p. 3). Still, *Embodied Hope* is not a personal memoir, but a theological entry ramp into a much larger conversation concerning who we are in this world and how we relate to God therein.

“This book will make no attempt to defend God,” Kopic writes, “I will not try to justify God or explain away the physical suffering in this world. Instead, I wrestle with nagging questions about our lives, our purpose, and our struggles” (p. 7-8). This gives the book a very raw, but surprisingly polished and organic feeling. Embodied Hope is comprised of three parts: (1) the struggle, (2) the strangeness of God, and (3) life together. Kopic recognizes the problem, articulates how God identifies with us through the incarnation, death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus, and finally provides a solution (if it can be called such) in a community-driven model of life. The heart of the book is discovered in the second section. Kopic points the reader to Jesus as a model for embodied hope. Still, the most rewarding and encouraging section (apart from the necessary road to be traveled in the person and work of Christ), in my opinion, is the destination of the book—namely that life should be lived together in faithful perseverance in Christ. Embodied Hope: A Theological Meditation on Pain and Suffering by Kelly M. Kopic is a book on a familiar topic, done in a not so familiar way. Kopic is deeply entrenched, both personally and professionally, in the realities that knock at the door of every human being. Kopic is bold and unashamed of the suffering that he and his family face, because he knows that it will bring glory to Christ. But, more than that, Kopic is confident that embodied hope is made manifest in the person and work of Christ, and lived out in faithfulness and community. This is a book that accomplishes what it sets out to do. Kopic does not defend God, he provides hope. Kopic does not offer theological remedies, he demonstrates true theological meditation. Healing and comfort are found within these pages, and I can think of no reason not to recommend Embodied Hope, because everyone will need it at some point.

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