

# In the Presence of Pain

BY SHILOH HOWARD



I was upstairs in the loft of our cabin, editing a story for the *United in Prayer* mailing, when I heard it—a soft *thud* against the window. A bird, probably. It startled me for a moment, but I kept working. It happens sometimes. Usually, they don't make it. I felt a twinge of sadness, but I was busy. I told myself it was probably already gone.

About fifteen minutes later, I reached a good stopping point in my editing, and I headed downstairs. That's when I saw it. A songbird rested on the porch a few inches from the sliding glass door. It wasn't dead. Somehow, it had managed to sit upright on its tiny feet, sides heaving with each ragged breath.

I didn't want to frighten it, so I laid down quietly on the couch and watched it through the glass.

It was so small! A Black-and-white Warbler, fragile and trembling. Its whole body shook as it panted in pain, its eyes squeezed shut.

At first, I whispered a hopeful prayer. *God... please heal it. It's almost Sabbath. You care for it, don't You? This would be such a beautiful little Sabbath miracle.*

But as I watched it struggle—eyes shut, wings tucked close, body trembling—I changed my prayer. *Please, God... don't let it suffer like this. Just let it go peacefully. Let it die unafraid.*

But nothing happened. It kept breathing. Kept trembling. Kept suffering.

I started to cry.

And I started to get angry.

This was a bird. A *bird*. Not a person, not a turning point in someone's salvation story. Just one small creature whose healing (or death!) wouldn't change the course of history. It wouldn't impact anyone's free will or the fate of nations. So *why*, God? Why let this tiny, helpless creature suffer? Why not do something?

For the next half hour or more, I lay on the couch, soaking the cushion with my tears as I watched and raged silently. And in that stillness, I heard God answer.

When I begged Him to put the bird out of its misery, a thought came gently: *Maybe that's why I sent you here.*

My immediate reaction was panic. *No. Absolutely not. I can't do that. I can't kill it, God. I don't even like to kill spiders. There is absolutely no way I could kill this bird!*

And then came the whisper to my heart: *And you think that I, the Creator and Sustainer, can? You think death is ever the answer for Me? It is the enemy. The last thing I desire for any of My creatures.*

That stopped me cold.

Later, when the sobs quieted and I was simply sitting with it in silence, I heard His soft voice in my heart again. *I don't leave in suffering. I don't just note the sparrow's fall and move on. I sit with it. I mourn with it.*

And with that came the invitation:

*Do that. Sit with the least of these. Cry with them. Hurt with them. Even if you can't fix it. Even if they won't let you help. That is what I do. That is what I'm asking you to do right now.*

So, I stayed. I watched. I waited. I wept.

Eventually, the little bird cracked its eyes open. Then it stretched its tiny beak in what looked like several tiny bird yawns. It turned its head, still panting, still trembling. But the heaviness lifted. That strong sense of *stay* faded. Soon I got up and returned to preparing the *United in Prayer* mailing.

About thirty minutes later, I checked again. It was gone.

I looked all over the porch, under it, out into the yard. Nothing. I let the cat out and followed her carefully, just to make sure she hadn't seen where it went.

And then I heard it—the call of a warbler from a nearby tree.

Praise God.

Through that tiny bird, God reminded me that He never overlooks pain. He doesn't rush past it, too busy with bigger matters. But neither does He always take it away. Instead, He enters into it. He sits with us in our weakness, our fear, our trembling.

And because of that, we can have hope.

Jesus said, "Therefore you now have sorrow; but I will see you again and your heart will rejoice, and your joy no one will take from you" (John 16:22, NKJV).

*Lord, thank You for being near in our pain. Teach us not to rush past the hurting, but to sit with them as You do. May we trust in Your presence, even when the healing isn't instant and the answers don't come. And may we rejoice in knowing we will see You again. Amen.*



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# World Church Prayer Requests

JULY 11 — 17, 2025

- **World Church:** Pray for the leaders, delegates, and members of the church around the world as they journey home from the General Conference Session 2025. Pray that the Holy Spirit will be poured out without measure and that we will unite in Christ's call to finish the work.
- **Jamaica:** Pray for the Gordon Town Cell Group, a small group designed to reach young and old with the good news of Jesus. Pray they will turn their hearts to Him and be revived.
- **United States:** Pray for the Mt. Calvary SDA Church that they will be in one accord in Christ as they seek to serve their community through Pentecost 2025 evangelism.
- **Malawi:** Pray for the Chimwanya SDA Church as they seek to raise funds for a roof on their new church building. They wish to use it for outreach but can't yet as the people get wet every time it rains. Pray that God will provide the funds, workers, and spirit of unity as they seek to use this new building as a witness to their community.
- **Botswana:** Pray that the Holy Spirit will be poured into every church member in South Botswana Conference. Pray also that those He is inviting to be career literature evangelists will accept the call and rise up as courageous missionaries for Jesus.
- **Canada:** Pray for the children's ministry departments of the churches in Canada as the teachers seek unity with each other and with Christ. Pray that they will be filled with the Holy Spirit to create engaging and inspiring programs about Jesus that the children will be eager to attend.
- **United Kingdom:** Pray for the leaders of the church in the United Kingdom as they seek unity and Spirit-led wisdom in guiding their congregations to personal relationships with Jesus. Pray that each person, leader and lay person alike, would be fully and completely dedicated to Jesus.