

Walking Through Twilight: A Wife's Illness - A Philosopher's Lament

Available November 21, 2017

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978-0-8308-4518-7

“Searing Honesty . . . Poetic Insight”

“Would I write as Doug Groothuis does here? Could I even begin to? I was profoundly humbled by this memoir. Philosophers are all about clear thinking, but the classroom is beggared by the anguish described here with such searing honesty, such poetic insight, such intense clarity, and such unconquerable hope.”

— **Os Guinness**, author of *Fool's Talk*

“Douglas Groothuis’s *Walking Through Twilight* is an extraordinarily moving memoir of lament. In inviting the reader into the experience of his wife’s progressive dementia, he combines superb writing and the incisive thinking of a first-rate philosopher, which he is. But far beyond this, the book is filled with liberating honesty and the particular beauty of unadorned truth. Hearing God in the thunder and lightning is easy, but hearing him in what sounds mostly like silence takes a particularly keen and delicate ear, one this author possesses in abundance.”

— **Eric Metaxas**, radio host of the Eric Metaxas Show, author of *Bonhoeffer: Pastor, Martyr, Prophet, Spy*

“Poignant. Profound. Powerful. This very personal journey through a wife’s dementia will astound you with its eloquence and insights. The path through twilight is painful, but — thank God! — it’s not without ultimate hope. This is a memoir that will mark you forever.”

— **Lee Strobel**, professor of Christian thought, Houston Baptist University, author of *The Case for Christ* and *The Case for Faith*

“To be honest, I’ve never read a book like this. It overflows with deep reflection on the suffering of life and the apparent absence of God at the very times we need him most. But the specialness of this book lies in Groothuis’s raw, unfiltered, and bewildering expression of emotion — pain, agony, confusion — regarding the journey of his dear wife, Becky, and its impact on Doug’s own pilgrimage. There are no cheap Christian slogans, no slapping of a Bible verse as a Band-Aid on a near-mortal wound, no simplistic happily-ever-after. But there is hope. Hope built on deep reflection about Christianity, suffering, and the meaning of life. To me, this is the best book my dear friend has ever written. Its healing powers will penetrate your soul as you slowly read through its pages.”

— **J. P. Moreland**, distinguished professor of philosophy, Talbot School of Theology, Biola University

“This is a hard book to read — like watching the news and learning about war, poverty, and famine. We would rather look away, ignore, and pretend. God doesn’t pretend; he knows, he enters in, and he loves us. And God calls us to participate in his love and presence. So for those with family or friends walking through the confusion and challenges of dementia,

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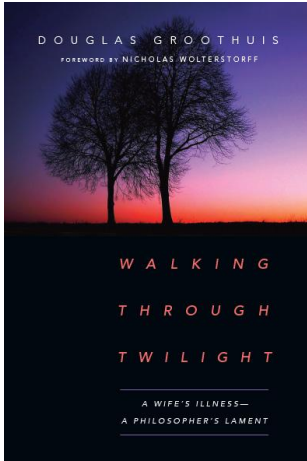
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ENDORSEMENTS

this book is a real gift. Groothuis takes us from admissions of moments of rage to the sweet, tender mercy of Sunny the golden doodle, from painful, honest reflections about the eeriness of the disease to signs of hope that only God can provide. He helps us begin to understand what is beyond our grasp. Many who try to make sense of their own journeys will find here an authentic voice to help along the way.”

—**Kelly M. Kopic**, professor of theological studies, Covenant College, author of
Embodied Hope



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“I did not want to write it, but it wanted to be written.”

Since I was released from graduate school for good behavior, no one has told me what to write. After my doctoral committee accepted my dissertation in 1993, I have written books, articles, editorials, reviews, and letters to the editor. Perhaps I am spoiled, but I work hard at my writing. Writing for me is not *therapeutic*. I have never written merely to make money or *express myself* (a common curse inflicted by egotists on readers). I have been reluctant to write a memoir. The task of extending the knowledge of God, defending “the faith given once to the saints” (Jude 3), and applying the Christian worldview to the whole of life has been my passion, however flawed my efforts. But perhaps I can combine memoir, lament, and philosophical reflection.

Most of my work responds to attacks on Christianity or to corruptions within it. Becky was there near the beginning. We met in 1983 when we worked for a campus ministry. As we got to know each other and fell in love, she encouraged two things that changed my life for the better. First, she convinced me that the time was over for research and that I should begin writing my first book. Second, she offered to edit the chapters as I went along. That book, *Unmasking the New Age*, is my best-selling book. We were and are united in our sense of calling. Becky edited all my books, except *Philosophy in Seven Sentences* and this offering. That is one of my reasons for lament.

This book is different from all my others. I did not want to write it, but it wanted to be written. Publishers and friends urged me to write it, but I tried to turn them down. However, I found that not writing the book would be harder than writing it. Unlike my other books, it is not strictly linear or expositional. Unlike *Christian Apologetics*, for example, it is not one long argument for Christianity. *Walking Through Twilight* is only autobiographical for the sake of being pastoral, philosophical, and theological. Expressing myself is not the point, but I need to recount my experiences—some of them raw, many of them tragic—to offer courage, hope, and meaning amid the distinctive suffering of dementia care. But how much should I write about myself? A pastor and long-time friend recently told me that my previous book *Philosophy in Seven Sentences* was his favorite of all my books. (I did not ask how many of them he had read.) His reason surprised me. He said it was because I revealed more of myself in that book. It did, but this book enters new territory for me as a writer. It is a *memoir*, heaven help us. But as I enter my seventh decade on earth and my fifth decade as a Christian, I hope my reflections are worth beholding. I agree with Bertrand Russell that “a long retrospect gives weight and substance to experiences.”

I call this book *Walking Through Twilight*. I chose *twilight* instead of *darkness* since I wrote this book while Becky is at home and I can still communicate with her. When this changes, it will

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BOOK EXCERPT



Douglas Groothuis (PhD, University of Oregon) is professor of philosophy at Denver Seminary in Denver, Colorado, where he heads the Apologetics and Ethics master's degree program. His articles have been published in professional journals such as *Religious Studies*, *Philosophia Christi*, *Themelios*, *Christian Scholar's Review*, *Inquiry*, and *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*. He has written numerous books, including *Philosophy in Seven Sentences* and *Truth Decay*.

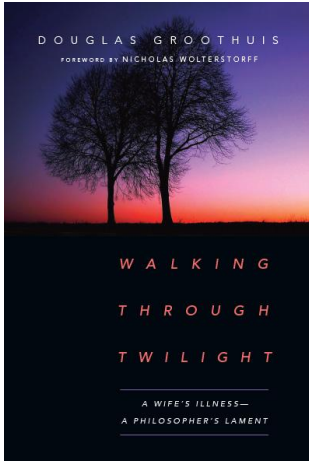
be *darkness*, and I won't write of that. However, Becky and I know that the darkness of the crucifixion is followed by the light of the resurrection. She will be raised immortal in God's good time. Dawn follows darkness, but this comes at the price of agonized waiting. This book is a witness to that waiting.

A memoir contains autobiography, but is not an autobiography proper. Memoir recounts part of one's life that the author takes to be worth sharing with the wider world. It is a difficult genre to do well. And this is my first attempt. At least I will give you many biblical passages and quotations from many authors, many wiser than I.

Oddly, a memoir should not be self-centered. Rather, the self should be centered in a place fit for noting and conveying needful truth to others. Since we are made in God's image and likeness, and since Christians are taught and directed by the Holy Spirit (at least when we are not quenching or grieving him), our lives can be worth a memoir. I hope my reflections on the dark drama of dementia will set up a few guideposts and illuminate a few dark places. We can walk through twilight and into the night with courage, and hope for a new dawn at the far side of suffering.

While reflecting on two paintings of Christ, the poet W. H. Auden wrote that suffering is often hidden from a world not suffering at that moment. While human and beast go about their business, some of us are suffering the "dreadful martyrdom" of being a dementia caregiver. The pedestrian and the agonized soul walk side by side, perhaps we can learn from the other.

— Taken from the introduction, *"Walking Through Twilight"*



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“I hated God and told him so, repeatedly.”

I am not sure what event in Becky's decline enraged me more at God. Perhaps it was when I first visited her in a behavioral health unit. Maybe it was an incident that took place shortly after that. Becky had been transferred to another hospital and had been there for only a day or two. I called and asked how she was, “Oh, fine. She is resting after her first ECT.”

I screamed into the phone, “What? I did not give permission for that!”

My startled outrage seemed too explosive to be housed in my body. I roared, snorted, lashed out at two innocent objects in the house, and stormed off to the hospital. A bit of sanity slipped into my consciousness, and I stopped by a good friend's house on the way to the hospital. After more yelling, crying, and lamenting the day of my birth (like Job), I settled down a bit and did what I had to do.

ECT means electroconvulsive therapy. It is used to treat extreme depression. Becky and I had been briefed about this a few days earlier by a neurologist who droned on and on with almost no awareness that two shattered souls sat near him. I listened intently, but came to no decision on the treatment, which is nothing like what I saw in the film *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, forty years ago. It does not jolt patients into seizures and is very effective. It was right for Becky. But I did not give permission for it.

Livid is too tame a word for how I felt. I called three different doctors as soon as I could about this. They all concurred that ECT was a good idea. I then gave permission for continued treatment. I stopped yelling. I didn't sue anyone. The ECT did help Becky come out of depression. It did nothing to abate her dementia. In fact, it revealed it. If Becky had depression mimicking dementia (which was her earlier diagnosis), the lifting of depression would have restored her cognitive abilities. But it did not.

Part of coming out of my rage was pragmatic, not devotional. I had to decide what to do for the sake of my wife. I had to think clearly. But I did not think dearly of God. Didn't he know I was already overloaded with fear, pain, and sorrow? Didn't he care about my wife, who had been his redeemed child for so long?

I hated God and told him so, repeatedly. I hated myself for doing it, but I did it. But, pragmatically speaking, I needed God's help more than at any other time in my fifty-seven years on earth. I knew rage was of the flesh, not of the Spirit. I never questioned God's existence, only his goodness. I was bordering on misotheism – the “hatred of God.” Or maybe I had taken a guest pass into that thought-world. It seemed right, but felt awful. God must have been hearing me, but was not answering – not from a whirlwind or from anywhere else. However, I knew in my bones that God – this mysterious, seemingly heartless God – was my

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God and that *he was my only hope*. “I will be with you in trouble,” says he (Psalm 91:15).

I was no model of sanctity while thrashing about in this cauldron of white hot chaos. There was no “peace that passes understanding.” What passed understanding was the meaning of these uncharted events. I had let them steal most all of my affection for God. I had lost much of my fear of him as well. I was insolent before the Almighty. My foundations were shaken, but my responsibilities were intensified. The one thing I could not do was ignore God. I am a God-haunted man who knows God and is known by God.

Yet I have a young and brilliant friend who hates God and has no love for him whatsoever. He was raised by godly parents, whose hearts now break for him. I have spoken to and corresponded with this troubled soul. He wrote me one letter (not an email) that was six pages long, typed and single-spaced. He would like to condemn God to hell for the way his family suffered in serving God. I cannot crack his hatred with reason. I wait and pray, and understand some of his rage.

Martin Luther offers me some solace for my tempestuous emotions. A man of courage, intellect, and deep piety, the Reformer was sometimes tempestuous. He reportedly said, “Love God? Sometimes I hate him!” Hating God (episodically) may have its benefits. But, please understand, I do not advise it. Nevertheless, you realize there is a God to be angry with, a God you cannot ignore. And you know God is not ignoring you. Your heart is revealed. No cover-up is possible. When you accuse God, your mood utterly differs from when you love God and sense his love. That sheer juxtaposition of moods may alert you to the fix you are in and drive you back to God in love. I assure you that love is better than hate.

I cannot leave Jesus permanently. Although my trust waxes and wanes, unlike the routine of the tides, it is unpredictable. Unlike Peter, I have not denied Jesus before others, but like a fool I have told God off in the presence of another. When I am outraged at God, I try to think of God in Christ hanging on a cross for me. This sometimes brings me back to theological and psychological sanity if not sanctity. I must work with what I have and seek more as I walk through an ever-darkening twilight.

The best way to hate God is on your knees (literally or in your heart), hoping that hate will be transformed into submissive love in the divine presence. Surely, this Godward accusation is better than indifference or apathy. As William Backus argued, most Christians have a “hidden rift with God,” which God wants to take away. But some of us have an open and bleeding and wide rift with God. Like the patriarch Jacob, we should wrestle with God until he blesses us. The blessing, however, always comes with a wound (Genesis 33:22-32), and we limp along until we rise again, never to limp again.

— Adapted from chapter five, “The Temptation to Hate God”