



# **Reason FOR THE Season**

**Ministerial Reflections on  
Grief & Suffering as  
Spiritual Formations**

**EDITED BY:  
Bob R. Agee & Roger D. Duke**

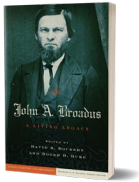
## About the Author

Dr. Roger D. Duke is an author, theologian, educator, itinerant preacher, published scholar, and professor at several institutions of higher learning including: Union University, Baptist College of Health Sciences, Liberty University, Memphis Theological Seminary, and Columbia Evangelical Seminary.

He earned his D.Min from The University of the South (Sewanee) School of Theology, performed post-graduate Ph.D studies at the University of Memphis, completed his M.A. at Harding University, and attained a M.Div at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary.

[www.DrRogerDDuke.com](http://www.DrRogerDDuke.com)

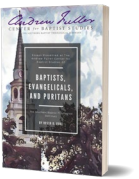
## Also by Dr. Roger D. Duke



[John A. Broadus: A Living Legacy](#)



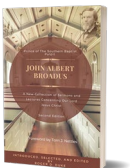
[The Four Callings of William Carey: The Father of Modern Missions](#)



[Baptists, Evangelicals and Puritans: Essays Presented at the Andrew Fuller Center for Baptist Studies at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary](#)



[Venture All for God: Piety in the Writings of John Bunyan](#)



[John Albert Broadus: Prince of the Southern Baptist Pulpit: A New Collection of Sermons and Lectures Concerning Our Lord Jesus Christ](#)

---

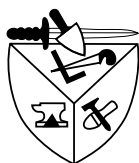
# Reason for the Season

## Ministerial Reflections On Personal Grief, Suffering and Loss

---

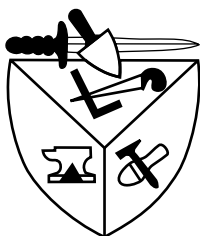
Edited by  
Bob R. Agee  
and  
Roger D. Duke

---



**Founders Press**

*Committed to historic Baptist principles*  
Cape Coral, Florida



Published by

**Founders Press**

*Committed to historic Baptist principles*

P.O. Box 150931 • Cape Coral, FL 33915

Phone (239) 772-1400 • Fax: (239) 772-1140

Electronic Mail: [founders@founders.org](mailto:founders@founders.org) or

Website: <http://www.founders.org>

©2010 Founders Press

Printed in the United States of America

ISBN: 978-0-9785711-7-7

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted in any form by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopy, recording or otherwise, without prior permission of the publisher, except as provided by USA copyright law.

Cover design by —

# Contents

Preface . . . . .	iii
Acknowledgements . . . . .	vii
Dedication . . . . .	ix
“I Asked the Lord that I Might Grow” . . . . .	xi
 <b>Part I: Ministers’ Contributions . . . . .</b>	 <b>1</b>
1. God’s Enabling Grace in the Path of Suffering . . . . .	3
<b>Roger D. Duke</b>	
2. Cancer and Pastoral Care . . . . .	1
<b>L. Rush Bush</b>	
3. How to Deal with a Life-Threatening Illness . . . . .	1
<b>Bob R. Agee</b>	
4. Exalting Jesus in the Loss of a Loved-One . . . . .	1
<b>Curtis McClain</b>	
5. A Journey in Providence . . . . .	1
<b>David Miller</b>	
6. Listening to the Silence . . . . .	1
<b>Danny Blair</b>	
7. Serving God through the Storm . . . . .	1
<b>Fred Luter</b>	
8. God’s Sufficiency and Abundant Grace . . . . .	1
<b>Michael Spradlin</b>	
9. Hope that Helps When Life Hurts . . . . .	1
<b>Paul Barkley</b>	
 <b>Part II: Physicians’ Contributions . . . . .</b>	 <b>1</b>
10. Facing the Realities of Suffering and Death . . . . .	1
<b>Scott Morris, MD</b>	
11. A Country Doctor’s Perspective on Grief and Suffering . . . . .	1
<b>Wayne Rhear, MD</b>	



## Preface

When this work was first conceived, it was thought that laypeople might appreciate some insights into the little realized fact that ministers suffer in the same way as they themselves do. Many are the times when a minister will convene, console, and comfort at some calamity, bereavement, or other appointment seemingly ordained by the Hand of God. But who consoles and comforts the minister as he goes through his own “dark night of the soul?” Who acts as pastor to the pastor? It was during the incubation of this thought that one of the co-editors<sup>1</sup> came across some *Spiritual Formation* readings of Dr. M. Robert Mulholland, Jr.<sup>2</sup> He was smitten by Mulholland’s “Definition of Spiritual Formation.”<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Roger D. Duke.

<sup>2</sup> The Asbury Seminary web page, <http://www.asburyseminary.edu/faculty/bob-mulholland/> says concerning Mulholland: “Dr. Mulholland is a nationally known biblical scholar, listed in *Who’s Who* in the Methodist Church, *Who’s Who* in Biblical Studies and Archaeology and *Who’s Who* in Religion. He is the author of several books on Scripture and spiritual formation, including his latest book, *The Deeper Journey: The Spirituality of Discovering your True Self* (InterVarsity Press, 2006). He is currently a consulting editor for *The Journal of Spiritual Formation and Soul Care*.... [He is also] An elder in the Kentucky Conference of the United Methodist Church and a member of the Wesleyan Theological Society and Society of Biblical Literature, Dr. Mulholland is a frequent speaker at Bible and spiritual renewal conferences, and serves as a faculty member of the Academy for Spiritual Formation.” Electronic source cited 12 July 2009.

<sup>3</sup> M. Robert Mulholland, Jr., *Invitation to a Journey: A Road Map for Spiritual Formation* (Downers Grove, IL., Inter Varsity Press, 1993), 15–17.

Because this has become the “heart and soul” of these essays, this definition is stated at length:

[I]... may [need]... to develop a working definition of spiritual formation that has integrity with the scriptural witness to life in relationship with God, and let you work out its relationship to whatever other definition of spiritual formation you may have adopted.

...[W]e will develop a fourfold definition of spiritual formation as[;]

- (1) a process
- (2) of being conformed
- (3) to the image of Christ
- (4) for the sake of others.<sup>4</sup>

When these special testimonials were recruited, each was selected because they were unique to the Christian Ministry. As the selection process came about for chapter contributors, mostly based on personal or professional relationships, it became more apparent that there were a greater number of ministers who had suffered, grieved, lost loved ones, or had an ongoing condition than had been initially understood. The contributors were asked to take one part of Mulholland’s definition, or the whole, and use it as a lens through which to reflect and write. Each, in his own way and from his own perspective, adds a dynamic to the discussion of *Spiritual Formation* that, we hope, will add aid and comfort to all who suffer and read these reflections. We especially hope that theses personal “testimonies” will speak to the hearts of the Gospel Ministers during their “valleys” and “shadows of death.”

In one of his many works on Christian Piety, Michael A.G. Haykin quoted a somewhat lengthy personal letter of the Anglican Divine John Newton. It had been Newton’s custom to mentor young ministers and aid them in their pastoral ministry and proper biblical understandings. One such minister was John Collett Ryland. Haykin recalls one such instance: “During his early years of ministry Ryland received much solid and judicious advice and encouragement from John Newton.”<sup>5</sup> “One gets a good understanding of the way that Newton ... helped ... when Ryland’s ... first wife Betsy was on the verge of death.”<sup>6</sup> Newton’s letter to Ryland during

<sup>4</sup> Ibid, 15.

<sup>5</sup> Michael A.G. Haykin, “A Cloud of Witnesses: Calvinistic Baptists in the 18th Century” *Evangelical Times Perspective* No. 3 (Faverdale North, Darlington, England: Evangelical Times, 2006), 45–51.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid, 48.



these dark days, may best capture the heart and soul of what the editors and contributors seek to do with this humble volume:

My dear friend, I feel, but I do not fear for you. The God whom thou servest can support and deliver you. He is all sufficient, and his promise sure. Plenty of advice is at hand, but I dare not offer you much in this way. You are in the heat of a trial; I am at present quiet. It would be easy for me to press patience and resignation upon you, and to remind you that a pardoned sinner ought never to complain. You could speak the same language to me, if I were in your case, and you were at ease. Yet though we may and ought to compassionate one another under our various trials, and to speak with tenderness where the heart is wounded, there are truths which, if trouble hides them from our view, it is the office of a friend to recall them. You and I are ministers. As such, how often have we commended the gospel as the TO EV ["the one thing" that is needed], affording those who truly receive it, a balm for every wound, a cordial for every care!

How often have we told our hearers, that our all-sufficient and faithful Lord can and will make good every want and loss! How often have we spoken of the lights of his countenance as a full compensation for every suffering, and of the trials of the present life as not worthy to be compared with the exceeding abundant and eternal weight of glory to which they are leading! We must not therefore wonder, if we are sometimes called to exemplify the power of what we have said, and to show our people that we have not set before them unfelt truths which we have learnt from books and men only. You are now in the post of honour, and many eyes are upon you. May the Lord enable you to glorify *him*, and to encourage *them*, by your exemplary submission to his will!

You are doubtless allowed to pour out your heart before him, and even to pray for Mrs. Rylands's recovery, and I will join with you as far as I dare.... I pray for her, that he may enable her quietly and cheerfully to commit herself into his hands; and I pray for you, that you may do the same. You may be assured he will not try you beyond what he enable you to bear. If it be for your good, especially for your chief good, his *glory*, she shall recover; he will restore her, though a hundred physicians had given her up. If otherwise, I doubt not but he will help you to say, Thy will be done. And hereafter you shall see that his will was best. ... Accept this hasty line as a token of my sympathy. I was not willing to wait till I could find more leisure. May the Lord bless you both. And may we all so weep as becomes those who expect, ere long, to have all our tears wiped away.

I am sincerely and affectionately yours,

John Newton<sup>7</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, 48–49.

Within these essays the reader will encounter many varied circumstances: a minister with uncertain life expectancies due to cancer, a minister who “flat-lined” from a heart attack and lived, a minister who lived through and continued to minister in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, a minister who has ongoing and severe chronic health issues with his children for thirty years, a minister who has lived with a “special needs” child for more than a quarter-century, a minister who has been confined to a wheel chair for many years and continues to preach, a minister whose father was murdered, a minister who married a woman who was deaf, and yes, even a minister who died of cancer. If the Christian life is about anything—it is about suffering. But not suffering in the abstract, but suffering in the “here and now.”

We the contributors and editors of this simple volume, pray that the “God of all peace” will use this as an instrument to bring a measure of His grace, peace and rest to you as you hopefully encounter God’s presence here.

Soli Deo Gloria!

Bob R. Agee

Roger D. Duke

Summer 2009

## Acknowledgements

As the editors worked with the people and their stories as told in the pages of this book, we were touched deeply by their depth of faith and their ability to take the difficult events of life and allow God to use them to help them grow and develop spiritually. Our empathy stemmed from the fact that the two of us are indeed “fellow sufferers” whose courage and faith have been tested in the fires of life-threatening illness and the heavy weight of caring for a loved one through challenging circumstances.

It is not always easy to reflect on and talk about parts of the journey which have led the contributors to this work through pain and struggle. Early on I tried to turn my encounter with cancer into a story/sermon that I shared on several occasions only to find each time was emotionally draining. The compensation for the emotional struggle in delivering the sermon came in the fact that I never told the story without people responding by telling me that they or a member of their family had just been diagnosed with cancer or had been battling cancer for some time. Invariably more than one person would thank me for talking about the journey. I came to realize that on those rare occasions when I felt led to share the message, God was leading because He knew someone would be there who needed what was said.

Our lives have been enriched as we read the individual stories and sensed the heart-beat of those willing to reflect on and write about their journey. Each contributor, out his own unique perspective, was so open and transparent. Physical and emotional struggles are very real for everyone and the minister of the gospel is not exempt. I have learned that faith does not protect us from bad things. It does, on the other hand, equip and em-

power us to deal with life's valley times with a special kind of courage and hope. On more than one occasion I have stood at the hospital bedside or at the graveside with families who had been smacked in the face with a hard fist of suffering. I have watched the way people handle their difficulties and am absolutely convinced that a personal relationship with Jesus Christ and the ensuing constant presence of a loving Heavenly Father make a phenomenal difference in way people process their experiences.

Those of us who shared our stories in this volume would be quick to tell you—ministers suffer and struggle too. Just like those great souls in the pews, we walk through the “valley of the shadow of death” and reach out to the promise that He is with us every step of the way. We don't offer “quick fixes” or shallow platitudes about just having to accept things without thought and the search for a sense of God's presence.

To each colleague who contributed to the *Reason for the Season*, the editors offer our genuine heartfelt gratitude. Our prayer is that people's faith will be strengthened and each reader will find a source of affirmation and comfort that will help them deal with what life throws at them with renewed courage and strength.

We would also like to thank Dr. David Dockery, President of Union University, for suggesting the title, *Reason for the Season*. He made this suggestion while on the Union University's “Retrace the Reformation” tour to Europe with Dr. and Mrs. Roger D. Duke in the Summer of 2007.

Bob R. Agee, President Emeritus  
Oklahoma Baptist University

Roger Duke, Professor of Religion & Communication  
Baptist College of Health Sciences

THIS VOLUME IS LOVINGLY DEDICATED TO THE MEMORY OF

L. RUSS BUSH

PREACHER, SCHOLAR, THEOLOGIAN, PHILOSOPHER, FRIEND, DE-  
VOTED HUSBAND AND FATHER,  
AND FAITHFUL FOLLOWER OF JESUS CHRIST



L. RUSS BUSH  
1944–2008

*Revelation 2:10 “... Be thou faithful unto death ...”*

All Christians suffer. The New Testament tells us to expect it. We may experience the suffering of persecution, the suffering of temptation, the suffering of loss, the suffering of sickness, and a suffering that we are virtually sure will lead to death. But God, who raises the dead makes us more than conquerors, even in the moment that we are accounted as sheep for

the slaughter, through Him who loved us by giving Himself for us. This volume in that broad sense is dedicated, therefore, to all Christians.

In a specific sense, however, it is dedicated to one of the contributors whose suffering in a particularly aggressive type of cancer led to his death shortly after his work for this volume was completed. L. Russ Bush left this earthly life in January 2008. He was a Christian theologian, philosopher, preacher, defender of the faith, seminary administrator, and encouraging friend. As one may easily discern from the content of his article, Russ always operated under the assumption that Christian truth bore immediate relevance to Christian suffering. He worked to demonstrate that in his classes in philosophy and apologetics and he lived that in his fight with, to use his graphic image, the “terrorist” that finally took his life. All the way through his crisis he had hope, expressed optimism in conversations, and used every means at his disposal to beat back the enemy death in order to gain a bit more time to serve Christ and complete projects that he believed would help further the cause of Christian truth. When the doctors finally told him that nothing more could be done than had been done and that his time was short, his family said, “Let us pray for you.” He responded, “No, let me pray for you.” And he asked for God’s gracious providential care over all of those that depended in greater or lesser degrees on his presence. In a talk with his wife, Cindy, he requested that at the funeral she be confident and assured and that she look good. She did both. With the hope that this volume may help many readers face the crisis of suffering with the grace and courage that he did, we dedicate this volume to him.

Tom J. Nettles, PhD  
Professor of Historical Theology  
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

## *I Asked the Lord that I Might Grow*

I asked the Lord that I might grow  
In faith, and love, and every grace;  
Might more of His salvation know,  
And seek, more earnestly, His face.

'Twas He who taught me thus to pray,  
And He, I trust, has answered prayer!  
But it has been in such a way,  
As almost drove me to despair.

I hoped that in some favored hour,  
At once He'd answer my request;  
And by His love's constraining pow'r,  
Subdue my sins, and give me rest.

Instead of this, He made me feel  
The hidden evils of my heart;  
And let the angry pow'rs of hell  
Assault my soul in every part.

Yea more, with His own hand He seemed  
Intent to aggravate my woe;  
Crossed all the fair designs I schemed,  
Blasted my gourds, and laid me low.

Lord, why is this, I trembling cried,  
Wilt thou pursue thy worm to death?  
"Tis in this way, the Lord replied,  
I answer prayer for grace and faith.

These inward trials I employ,  
From self, and pride, to set thee free;  
And break thy schemes of earthly joy,  
That thou may'st find thy all in Me."

Hymn composed by John Newton, #36 in Book III of *Olney Hymns* (London: W. Oliver, 1779), taken from electronic source <http://www.hymntime.com/tch/htm/i/a/iaskedtl.htm>, 16 July 2009. See also *The Works of John Newton*, vol. 3 (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1985), 607–608.

## Enjoyed this Sample?

---

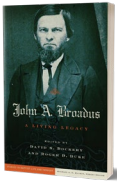
This has been a sample excerpt from the works of Dr. Roger D. Duke.

If you have benefited from this sample,  
please consider sharing this work and purchasing the full book.

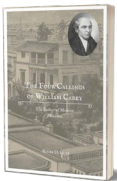
More selected works can be found at  
[www.DrRogerDDuke.com](http://www.DrRogerDDuke.com)

---

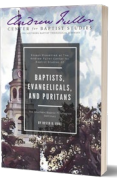
### Also by Dr. Roger D. Duke



[John A. Broadus: A Living Legacy](#)



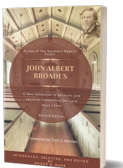
[The Four Callings of William Carey: The Father of Modern Missions](#)



[Baptists, Evangelicals and Puritans: Essays Presented at the Andrew Fuller Center for Baptist Studies at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary](#)



[Venture All for God: Piety in the Writings of John Bunyan](#)



[John Albert Broadus: Prince of the Southern Baptist Pulpit: A New Collection of Sermons and Lectures Concerning Our Lord Jesus Christ](#)

---