

Jesus knows a secret

By [Chris Brundage](#)

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Fifteen years ago Mike Turner was hiking in the Wyoming wilderness. He came across a field of boulders next to a lake. He was jumping from boulder to boulder when one moved. His feet slipped and he began to slide down. The boulder fell over and came to rest against another one, pinning Mike by his legs between two boulders. They came together in such a way as not to injure his legs but hold them securely, his feet dangling above the ground. He couldn't free himself. He was alone in a desolate place.

He spent the next nine days dying of hypothermia and dehydration, with a clear mountain lake 30 feet away. His death left his wife and children bereaved. Mike Turner was a Presbyterian minister who loved walking alone in wild places. He wrote a Job-like journal while dying, pouring out his lament and praise.

I wish God had altered the laws of physics and freed Mike Turner from the boulder's grip, but that didn't happen. I wish God would alter the laws of biochemistry and free bodies in the grip of cancer, or minds afflicted with dementia, but that doesn't happen either, at least for particular people I know. God lets natural processes alone, even when they harm and kill. I suspect God cannot alter the habits of nature constantly, saving everyone from accident or disease, because we need nature to be dependable in other ways. I suspect becoming Creator entailed a renunciation of power in God, like becoming a parent involves a renunciation of power for human beings.

Do you see what I just did? I limited God's power. When confronted with suffering, we must either limit God's power or God's love. Either God can't save the child dying of leukemia or God won't save her. We take the first option because we want to keep God's love whole and unlimited. But who am I to limit God's power? I am animated dust.

Perhaps God's power and love are not separate knobs to adjust, like volume and tuning on a radio. Perhaps God's love and God's power are the same thing. In

almighty love God brings forth a universe out of nothing, giving him a creation to love. In suffering love God endures the depth of the world's evil on the cross of Christ. A love that does these things is a power beyond powers, in a class unlike all powers we are accustomed to.

In the Gospels Jesus heals people. I am convinced authentic events lie behind these healing stories. Jesus had a power that temporarily arrested the natural processes of disease and death, restoring bits of creation (bodies) to their original health and integrity. His ability was limited, though, in its scope and duration. He healed a few hundred people whose bodies later succumbed to disease and death. Lazarus rested in his tomb a second time.

When Jesus encounters death in the Gospels, he often treats it in a light and playful way. The 12-year-old girl is not dead but only sleeping, he says. To the widow of Nain, he smiles and says, "Do not weep." Who tells a grieving mother not to cry? To sophisticated Sadducees, learned in theological education, Jesus says resurrection is real because God is not God of the dead but of the living. "All are alive to him." In the middle of his own dying, he says to a man dying next to him, "Today you will be with me in paradise." It is as if Jesus knows a secret we do not know.

He knows what we perceive with our senses is only a sliver of all that is real. He knows the unbounded love of God is the most potent power in the universe. He knows when we open ourselves to God's love, a seed of his love grows within us that is stronger than death. He knows God will never leave us or abandon us. Suffering leaves us dangling over a void, but we are held securely in the gentle grip of a love larger than we can know. Death bereaves, but it also births into an unimaginable life.

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