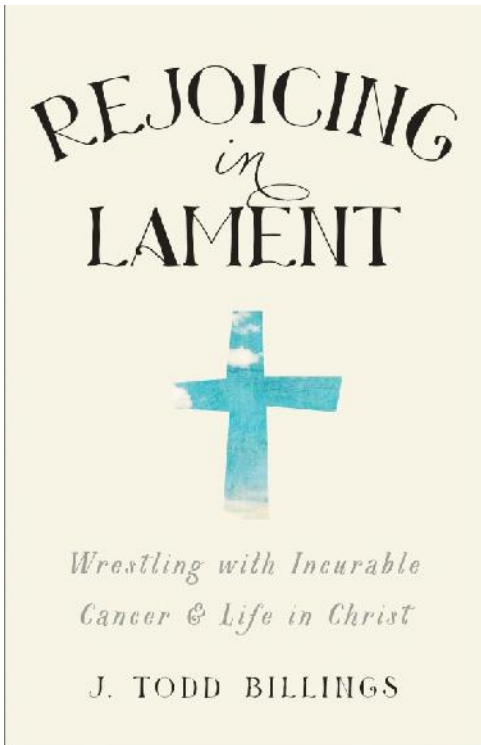




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Rejoicing in Lament
*Wrestling with Incurable Cancer
and Life in Christ*
by J. Todd Billings

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A Theologian’s Reflections on Suffering, Hope, and Incurable Cancer

“Along with disclosing his wrenching questions, fears, and hopes, Billings explores ‘the ways in which God’s story intersects with the cancer story.’ His poignant insight into the role of lament in faithful Christian living makes this a work of both astute scholarship and powerful testimony.”

—*Publishers Weekly* (starred review)

At the age of 39, Christian theologian Todd Billings was diagnosed with a rare form of incurable cancer. In the wake of that diagnosis, he began grappling with the hard theological questions we face in the midst of crisis: Why me? Why now? Where is God in all of this? This eloquently written book shares Billings’s journey, struggle, and reflections on providence, lament, and life in Christ in light of his illness, moving beyond pat answers toward hope in God’s promises. This hope is expressed in prayers and actions of lament and thanksgiving, compassionate protest against injustice, and a joyful entry into life amid loss.

Theologically robust yet eminently practical, *Rejoicing in Lament* engages the open questions, areas of mystery, and times of disorientation in the Christian life. Billings offers concrete examples through autobiography, cultural commentary, and stories from others, showing how our human stories of joy and grief can be incorporated into the larger biblical story of God’s saving work in Christ. Students in systematic and pastoral theology courses, pastors, counselors, caretakers, and anyone seeking a theologically informed reflection on suffering will appreciate *Rejoicing in Lament*.



J. Todd Billings (ThD, Harvard University Divinity School) is Gordon H. Girod Research Professor of Reformed Theology at Western Theological Seminary in Holland, Michigan, and an ordained minister in the Reformed Church in America.

He is the author of several books, including the *Christianity Today* Book Award Winner *Union with Christ* and *Calvin, Participation, and the Gift*, which received a 2009 John Templeton Award for Theological Promise.



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Praise for *Rejoicing in Lament*:

“In his remarkable book . . . [Billings] presents an unflinching look at how life changes after a medical death sentence. In the same tradition as C. S. Lewis’s *A Grief Observed* and Joan Didion’s *The Year of Magical Thinking*, *Rejoicing in Lament* is brave, honest, and probing. But this book has one important difference. Most writers in this genre look at death and dying through the eyes of a family member who survives. Billings surveys the same terrain, but through the lens of someone who is dying. . . . Billings is refreshing when he grapples with the cosmic questions that accompany suffering. . . . This does not mean that Billings strikes a note of uncertainty. He is a *practicing* Christian, in the best sense of the word. In his effort to understand the theological issues related to illness and death, Billings turned to the foundational texts of his faith, combining them with the elemental disciplines of the Christian life. . . . *Rejoicing in Lament* is both a comfort and a guide for all who labor along the same path as Billings does. It also provides insight to family members and friends of those suffering from cancer or other serious illnesses. Others will benefit from engagement with spiritual and theological reflection in the venerable tradition of *ars moriendi* (the art of dying). They will discover that we are all traveling in company with Billings—not as prisoners trudging through life under a grim sentence of death, but as pilgrims making our way to the house of God in the undiscovered country, singing Psalms of ascent.”

—**John Koessler**, *Christianity Today* (5-star review)

“J. Todd Billings has written a book that stands in a long line of distinguished books written out of deep suffering and reflection in faith and for the church. This book is informed—or better, formed—by the entire Bible, including those passages we often overlook. It is formed by the witness of the church, its history and struggles. It is formed by the mysterious, wrenching, and beautiful conversation between his own experience of incurable cancer and the Christian faith. *Rejoicing in Lament* is a profound witness to the gospel. I can hardly find words to express its intelligence, honesty, and richness.”

—**Gerald L. Sittser**, professor of theology, Whitworth University; author of *A Grace Disguised* and *A Grace Revealed*

“Good theology prepares us for suffering. Todd Billings has been giving us great theology for some years now. But in this book it is distilled through the rocky depths of an ongoing struggle with cancer. Every chapter brims with pools of insight, pointing us beyond platitudes to the God who has met us—and keeps on meeting us—in the Suffering and Risen Servant. This is a book not just for reading but for meditation and prayer.”

—**Michael Horton**, J. Gresham Machen Professor of Theology, Westminster Seminary California

“If you are looking for an abstract theological treatise on God’s relation to human suffering, you will not find it here. In *Rejoicing in Lament*, Billings shares his intensely personal search for God’s presence even in his own devastating illness. He responds to his unbidden suffering with a lament much like that of the psalmist. As a devout Christian, Billings seeks the blessings amid the curses of his disease. His Jacob-like struggle with the Lord ultimately blesses not only himself but also his family, colleagues, students, and readers. *Rejoicing in Lament* will touch and shape those who give pastoral care and will offer hope and meaning for all Christians who face great suffering.”

—**Kathryn Greene-McCreight**, associate chaplain, the Episcopal Church at Yale; author of *Darkness Is My Only Companion: A Christian Response to Mental Illness*

“Courageous, revealing, sometimes raw—this book reminds us that lament is an act of faith and that faith is a communal treasure. Billings’s testimony is that love is stronger than death. Unforgettable!”

—**Cornelius Plantinga Jr.**, author of *Engaging God’s World*

“Weaving theological and Scriptural reflection throughout the narrative of his struggle with cancer, Todd Billings gracefully models how to read one’s life in light of Scripture and Scripture in light of one’s life. Here there is no simplistic moralizing but a persistently questing witness to a God who is present in the midst of life-changing sorrow. To read with Todd is to join him in struggle and faith, doubt and hope, lament and praise.”

—**Marianne Meye Thompson**, George Eldon Ladd Professor of New Testament, Fuller Theological Seminary

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