

Jesus, Keep Me Near the Cross: The Staggering Emblem of Suffering and Salvation

John 9 & Galatians 6:14

Big Idea: What looks like meaningless suffering can become the very setting in which God displays His glory and reveals Christ.

1. Whose Fault Is It? Or Who Sinned Caused This? John 9:1–2

“Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?”

- The disciples assumed suffering must have a direct sinful cause.
- The religious tradition viewed blindness as hereditary, incurable, and possibly evidence of God's judgment.
- Their question reflects a common human response to suffering.

“Whose fault is this?” But Jesus refuses their simplistic answer and their misguided questions.

2. The Purpose: “That the Works of God Might Be Displayed” John 9:3–5

“It was neither that this man sinned, nor his parents, but that the works of God might be displayed in him.”

- Jesus does not say the man's blindness was meaningless.
- He reveals God's purpose even in something the man had endured his entire life.
- The disciples saw a problem; They saw an inconvenience. Jesus saw an opportunity for God's glory. How do we see needy people around us? Opportunity or inconvenience?
- The religious saw tradition broken as Jesus broke Sabbath rules.

This does not mean suffering is easy or that every disability will be healed in this life. **It means: God is never absent from the suffering of His people.**

3. Jesus Opens Blind Eyes (He gives spiritual sight) John 9:6–34

Jesus heals the man—and intentionally creates a confrontation with the religious leaders.

- Jesus does what they believed only God could do.
- The healed man becomes an unexpected witness.
- He doesn't know everything about Jesus, but he knows what Jesus did.

His argument is simple:

“If this man were not from God, he could do nothing.” — John 9:33

The religious leaders cannot deny the miracle, so they attack the witness. They cannot explain away what God has done, instead of changing their minds, they are defensive. In their aggressive attempt to regain control they blaspheme God.

4. From Blindness to Sight. John 9:35–41

Jesus finds the man after he has been cast out of religious acceptance and Temple observance.

“Do you believe in the Son of Man?”

The man responds:

“Lord, I believe.”

And he worships Jesus. The greatest miracle wasn't merely that he could see physically. He came to see who Jesus really was. Meanwhile, the religious leaders had physical sight but remained spiritually blind. **The contrast:** The blind man couldn't see Jesus—but eventually saw Him clearly. The religious leaders could see Jesus—but refused to see who He is and worship.

Conclusion: Our Weakness Can Become Our Witness

This man's blindness was not the end of his story. It became part of his testimony. God displayed His work through:

- his blindness,
- his healing,
- his courage,
- his testimony,
- and ultimately his worship.

And for those who continue to live with suffering or disability, the promise is not that God will always remove it immediately. The promise is that God can display His grace through it. Some testify through healing. Others testify through endurance. But one day, every believer will experience complete restoration. The man who was born blind became a witness to the Light of the World and exposed the hollow, religious attempts of Israel's assumptions. John 9:5 — “I am the light of the world.” - Compare Jesus's words to Isaiah 49:6; 42:6 & 60:3 as Jesus applies these prophetic words about Israel to himself.

The Life Story and Impact of Frances J. Crosby

8 Things to Know about Fanny Crosby

1. Although some modern scholars contend she may have had congenital blindness, Fanny developed an eye infection at 6 months old. With the regular physician unavailable, a visiting doctor provided care—insisting her parents place mustard poultices on her eyes. Within a few short weeks, Fanny was declared blind. Then, at 9 months old her father died. Frances would be raised by her 21 year old mother (Mercy) and grandmother (Eunice) for several years before being sent off to a school for the blind at 15 years old. (New York Institute for the Blind)
2. At age 8, the family traveled to New York to see a renowned doctor - only to hear in the kindest of tones, "My child, you can never be made to see!" The loving mother was grief-

stricken, but not so the child. Life had brought her much joy already; would not yet fuller joy come with the years? With anticipation and courage, because of her blindness, her first poem written when she was eight years old:

Oh! What a happy soul I am!
Although I cannot see,
I am resolved that in this world
Contented I will be.
How many blessings I enjoy
That other people don't!
To weep and sigh because I'm blind
I cannot nor I won't.

Fanny Crosby never considered blindness a hindrance. Instead, she attributed her keen memory to a lack of sight.

3. Utilizing her power of recall, Fanny memorized numerous books of the Bible as a youth. These included the Pentateuch, the Gospels, the book of Proverbs, the Song of Solomon, and multiple Psalms. She also served as a Baptist deaconess, missionary, and lay preacher in the various missions in New York. Fanny attended many churches across the denominational divide and had close friends in the “holiness movement” of the day.

4. Although Fanny married (1858), she used her maiden name professionally at the suggestion of her husband, Alexander Van Alstyne, Jr. The two met as teachers at the School for the Blind in New York. A year later (1859), Fanny gave birth to their daughter and named her Frances. Their baby died shortly after birth. Years later, Fanny Crosby and her husband, Alexander Van Alstyne, separated primarily due to the profound grief of losing their infant daughter and their differing personal priorities in life. Alexander became deeply withdrawn and reclusive following the tragedy, while Fanny channeled her sorrow into her work. They remained legally married and on friendly terms until “Van’s” death in 1902.

5. Known as the “Queen of Gospel Song Writers,” Fanny wrote more than eight thousand hymns under various pen names. These included Miss Grace Elliot, Grace J. Frances, Victoria Frances, Jennie Garnett, Robert Bruce, and hundreds more. Although she wrote and published multiple books of poetry, two biographies, cantatas, patriotic songs, Fanny prayed her hymns would change lives. After her conversion at 31, she never wrote another secular poem or literature again. Planning to witness to one million men and women through her music, Fanny recorded the names of those who shared they had confessed faith in Jesus.

6. . Fanny Crosby passionately invested in supporting and ministering to the needy as an urban mission worker. Earning only one or two dollars per hymn, she gave most of her income to the rescue “gospel” missions in which she served immigrants and the inner city poor—even moving into the poorest slums of New York City, investing daily in the lives of the hurting about whom she wrote,

“Rescue the perishing, care for the dying,
Snatch them in pity from sin and the grave;
Weep o’er the erring one, lift up the fallen,
Tell them of Jesus the mighty to save.”

7. It was her life serving in the Urban missions in New York City that Crosby earned the nickname “Aunt Fanny.” She engaged in her most ardent urban mission work from age 60-90. Upon her death, Fanny even willed funds toward developing a mission named in her honor, the Fanny Crosby Memorial Home for the Aged. The group operated from 1925-1966, and later continued her legacy as the Bridgeport Rescue Mission.

8. Fanny was a turn of the century influencer. A lobbyist, Fanny advocated for students with special needs. In 1843, she spoke to the United States Senate. The following year, she and a group of other students from the New York Institute for the Blind sang about the importance of providing education for blind students in all states—an effort John Quincy Adams celebrated. Two years later, Fanny also testified before a joint session of Congress advocating for those with disabilities. She was close friends with Grover Cleveland who at one time scribed poetry for her as a young man. They remained friends and wrote to each other throughout her life. Grover Cleveland would later become the 22nd and 24th President of the United States.

The Conversion Story of Fanny Crosby

In 1849, a cholera outbreak flooded both the city and the New York Institution of the Blind. Many of Fanny’s friends died. One night, Fanny dreamed of a friend who appeared close to death. He asked about her eternal salvation. When she awakened, Fanny felt unsettled and began attending numerous church services. While religious and brimming with Biblical knowledge, Fanny did not know Christ experientially, only intellectually. She was religious but did not know nor was she indwelt by the Holy Spirit. It was the fall of 1850, at age 31, while attending gospel meetings at a Methodist church in New York City that she was truly born from above as she recalls. It was the truth in a hymn that God used to reach her — a hymn written by Isaac Watts and the words: “*Alas! and did my Saviour bleed, and did my Sovereign die?Here, Lord, I give myself away, ‘Tis all that I can do.*” The great truth dawned on Fanny that Christ loved her and died for her on the cross.

To learn more of F. Crosby <https://www.wholesomewords.org/biography/bcrosby8.html>

He is our sight and light out of darkness,
Preston