

THE PASTORS' PEN

articles from the elders of BBC

I just finished reading a book, sitting in a darkened airplane in the middle of the night. When you are sitting for twenty hours, with little hope of sleep, reading can be a good use of time. But depending on what you read, it can also be unsettling. Such has been my experience. The story, combined with my darkened surroundings and the turbulent air, added an even more disturbing tone to what I read. The book, *Even in Our Darkness*, was a bold and painfully honest account of the life and ministry of Jack Deere. It was both sobering and soul-searching.

Deere has written several books, but this is the first one I have read, even though I have known about him for a long time. In fact, I remember the disturbance in the evangelical world in the early 1990s when he was forced to resign from the then-revered Dallas Theological

Seminary because of his wholehearted endorsement of John Wimber and his Vineyard movement. Wimber was associated with the Charismatic movement, with an emphasis on prophesying and healing.

I recall being very surprised, not that Deere believed that God heals people (what Christian does not believe that?), nor that he experienced close communion with God (is this not what we seek?), but at his wholesale, boots-and-all embrace of the alleged authority of experience in place of the authority of clear Scriptural revelation. This overemphasis of the sensational began to characterise his ministry.

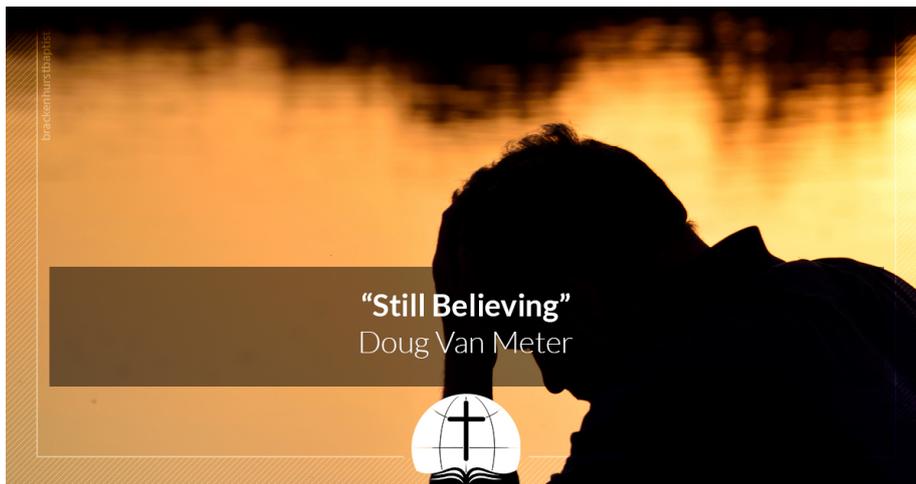
In the book, Deere alludes to many such experiences, but he does so in the context of almost unimaginable darkness that he his family have lived through.

He transparently shares his struggles with sin—from youthful lust to “adult” pride. He writes about the abuse that he and his siblings experienced when they were young. He shares about his father intentionally killing himself with a .22 rifle in the living room of their home. Deere describes his subsequent grief, which boiled into anger. He writes about his miseries of being raised in the home of alcoholics. With his wife’s permission, he shares her story of being sexually abused by her father when she was a little girl. And, with heart-shattering pain, he describes the trials of walking a long road with his wife in her struggle with alcohol and drug abuse—an

addiction precipitated by the suicide of their 22-year-old son. Like his grandfather, whom he never knew, he took his life by a gunshot to his head. Deere heard the shot and rushed to his son’s

room, only to cradle his dead body in his arms.

This scene casts its shadow over other stories of heartache, intensifying them, such as failures of friendships—Christian friendships. He speaks openly and honestly about deep disappointments in his ministry and of several ugly experiences in several churches with which he was associated. I could not help but be moved. And even though I think that Deere is hypercritical of the church, and I would part ways with some of his theology, nevertheless, the book served as a profound reminder that Christians are not called to an easy life. We are called to a life where suffering is to be expected. Deere says that “the most neglected promise in the Bible is, ‘In this world, you will have tribulation ... (and of course, its counterpart, ‘Be of good comfort for I have overcome the word’) (John 16:33).”



How would you respond to such trials? Would you raise the flag of surrender and abandon your trust in God? Sadly, many do. But Deere shares with the reader that even in all of this darkness, the love of God, and the grace of God, and the mercy of God continued to shine. And so Deere, who is now in his late sixties, *still believes*. So should *you*. So should *I*.

After reading Deere, I turned to read my “Psalm of the Day” (though I was a little confused which day it was!) and these words stood out:

I believed, even when I spoke: “I am greatly afflicted”; I said in my alarm, “All mankind are liars.” What shall I render to the LORD for all his benefits to me? I will lift up the cup of salvation and call on the name of the LORD, I will pay my vows to the LORD in the presence of all his people.

(Psalm 116:10-14)

The psalm begins, like so many of the psalms, rather darkly. But the author confesses that, as hopeless as it seemed (death “encompassed” him), he still *believed*. Don’t miss this: He says that even when he was “*greatly afflicted*,” even when he was so cynical that he assumed that “*all men are liars*” he *still believed*. Yes, he “*spoke*” these honest words of suffering, and, yes, he acknowledged the difficulties—but even in his darkness, he still *believed*.

This belief was exercised in the nitty gritty of the grind of real and hard living. As he reflected on all the Lord’s benefits to him (v. 7), he was moved to a persevering faith. He was determined to *still* serve him, to *still* praise him, to *still* sacrifice to him (vv. 12-14). And, don’t miss this, he would do so “*in the presence of his people*.” His was not an individualistic faith.

If we will keep believing, even (especially) in our darkness, we will need the presence of others who *also* believe. We need our brothers and sisters who still believe during their own darkness. The very place and people that at times can contribute to our darkness are *still* the very ones that we need to be with—to *believe* with.

Somewhere over the Atlantic, I needed to think on this, to write this article as a means of preaching to myself. I’ve had Elijah moments lately (in God’s kind and always timely providence, yesterday my devotional reading put me in Elijah passages in 1 Kings). Like Elijah, I’ve just wanted to curl up and give up in self-pity, driven by a sense of overwhelming failure. But Deere and the psalmist have given me new hope. They have kindled my faith to keep on believing. They have reminded me of God’s love, grace, wisdom and mercy.

Even in our darkness, God is up to something good, gracious and glorious—our grief notwithstanding. Let us therefore be among those who are still believing.

