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## **Total Life: Jesus’s Surprising Solution for a Health-Conscious World**

### *Abstract.*

In a context that challenges and changes the very definition of personhood, the concept of health itself requires new perspectives. For cancer patients, the desire for health is ubiquitous; therefore, Jesus’s offer of eternal life rather than perpetual health bears significance.

The age-long pursuit of health (as typified by the ancient Greek healing cults) and of shalom ‘peace’ (as set forth by the Hebrew Bible and practised by Jesus’s contemporaries) are worthy goals that inspire faith in a higher power and optimism in the face of suffering. However, the persistence of disease, diminishment, and death render such optimism unhelpful. When the loss of health is irretrievable and death approaches, despair and disappointment can set in. Jesus’s promise to Martha of resurrection life both in the hereafter and in the present (enacted on Lazarus and promised to all believers) gives substance to our hope for health and peace. Moreover, the total life that Jesus offers – as opposed to the concept of “total pain” experienced by terminal patients – is based on secure attachment and a higher meaning for any painful experience.

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As the reader can glean from John 11, Jesus's interaction with the grieving sisters Mary and Martha opens the window into what God's presence means in times of unbearable loss. For cancer patients, God's accompaniment from the moment of diagnosis onward is available in a similar manner: through mirroring, unconditional love, gentle interaction, encouragement to believe, and hope for restoration.

**Keywords:** eternal life, resurrection, cancer, oncology, total pain, attachment, meaning, John 11

## Introduction

Mrs Hinson was an English woman admitted in hospital in the early 1960s, suffering from terminal illness. When her doctor, Cicely Saunders, asked her about her pain, she responded:

Well doctor, the pain began in my back, but now it seems that all of me is wrong... My husband and son were marvellous but they were at work and they would have had to stay off and lose their money. I could have cried for the pills and injections although I knew I shouldn't. Everything seemed to be against me and nobody seemed to understand... But it's so wonderful to begin to feel safe again.<sup>2</sup>

Mrs Hinson was only one of the countless patients whose multifaceted pain inspired Dame Cicely Saunders to pioneer the modern hospice movement and palliative care. Mrs Hinson's phrase "all of me is wrong" was thereafter used by Dr Saunders to introduce the concept of total pain.<sup>3</sup> Total pain is – as Mrs Hinson describes it – the mental, physical, social, and spiritual distress associated with suffering or a terminal illness.

Since the 1960s, the phrase "total pain" has been used in palliative care to stress that suffering encompasses all the aspects that define our humanity.<sup>4</sup> This perspective

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<sup>2</sup> CLARK, David (2014): "Total Pain": The Work of Cicely Saunders and the Maturing of a Concept. In: *End of Life Studies*. University of Glasgow. Available at: <http://endoflifestudies.academicblogs.co.uk/total-pain-the-work-of-cicely-saunders-and-the-maturing-of-a-concept/>.

<sup>3</sup> Op. cit.

<sup>4</sup> "Total Pain" [entry]. *Pallipedia Palliative Care Dictionary*. Available at: <https://pallipedia.org/total-pain/>.

challenges the biomedical definition of pain, which takes into account only the biological mechanisms and physical experience of pain. “Total pain” recognizes that people are more than biological machines and that pain relates to the lived body.

Total pain is the kind of suffering that a significant percentage of cancer patients dread more than death itself.<sup>5</sup> If total pain is the absolute worst life can offer, what is the absolute best that we can aspire towards? What is the opposite of total pain? Is it health? Peace? Or is it something else? In what follows, I intend to explore the issue of what should be our greatest aspiration, in contrast to total pain, while also examining Jesus’s contribution to the issue, as revealed particularly by the eleventh chapter of the gospel of John.

### **The Case for Desiring Health**

We think of pain as a symptom of illness, a malfunction of the body. Therefore, we believe that the opposite of pain is health. The medical world defines health as a biomedical condition in which all biological systems function properly. In medical or nursing school, students learn that the health state of a person is the state of stability or equilibrium called “homeostasis”.<sup>6</sup> A healthy body is one whose vital signs, blood components, anatomy, and physiology stay within the normal limits. In this biomedical perspective, health is the absence of disease.<sup>7</sup> This view of health was known to the ancient Greeks and Romans, who saw *hygieia* (health) as the polar opposite of *nosos*

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<sup>5</sup> Pain and suffering are shown to be the most significant concern of cancer patients in studies such as LO, Christopher – HALES, Sarah – ZIMMERMANN, Camilla – GAGLIESE, Lucia – RYDALL, Anne – RODIN, Gary (2011): Measuring Death-Related Anxiety in Advanced Cancer: Preliminary Psychometrics of the Death and Dying Distress Scale. In: *Journal of Pediatric Hematology/Oncology*. 33(October). S140–S145. DOI: 10.1097/MPH.0b013e318230e1fd; LI, Y. – DONG, W. – TANG, H. – GUO, X. – WU, S. – LU, G. – LI, X. – CHEN, C. (2024): Correlates of Death Anxiety for Patients with Cancer: A Systematic Review and Meta-analysis. In: *Journal of Clinical Nursing*. 33. 1933–1947. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jocn.17021>; WINSLOW, M. – SEYMOUR, J. – CLARK, D. (2005): Stories of Cancer Pain: A Historical Perspective. In: *Journal of Pain and Symptom Management*. 29. 22–31.; Béla, VAMOS: Halál, gyászfolyamatok, gyógyszerészek lelkipozíciója. In: *Teológiai Fórum*. 2021/1. 90–119

<sup>6</sup> “Homeostasis” [entry]. *Encyclopedia Britannica*. Available at: <https://www.britannica.com/science/homeostasis>.

<sup>7</sup> KING, Helen (2005): What Is Health? In: *Health in Antiquity*. London, Routledge. 2.

(disease).<sup>8</sup> Plutarch, for example, advocated that each person should be familiar with “their healthy self” so that they can recognize disease when that normality is disrupted.<sup>9</sup> In the nineteenth century, physiologist Xavier Bichat wrote, “Life consists in the sum of the functions by which death is resisted.”<sup>10</sup> “The mechanisms of life can be unveiled and proved only by knowledge of the mechanism of death,” believed another physiologist.<sup>11</sup> Based on the biomedical definition of health, the medical process (from diagnosis to treatment and recovery) is an attempt to avoid death by fixing the machine of the body to function properly.

Thanks to developments in psychology, sociology, nursing, and other fields like palliative care, the definition of health has widened. Sociologists tell us that health is “more than mere survival – it is living usefully despite the various diseases and stresses which challenge all of us”.<sup>12</sup> Theologians believe that “health is not a medical or psychological concept, but primarily a relational and theological concept”.<sup>13</sup> In 1946, the World Health Organization defined health as “a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity”.<sup>14</sup> This perspective looks at the person as a whole, in its physical, emotional, and social dimensions. This is the view of health that I call “total health”.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Xavier Bichat quoted in BISHOP, Jeffrey P. (2016): On Medical Corpses. In: Behr, John – Cunningham, Conor (eds.): *The Role of Death in Life: A Multidisciplinary Examination of the Relationship between Life and Death*. Cambridge (UK), James Clarke & Co. 168–169.

<sup>11</sup> Physiologist Claude Bernard, quoted in BISHOP 2016, 169. Bishop provides a further exploration of how the state of death has influenced the medical perspective on what it means to live and be healthy in: BISHOP, Jeffrey P. (2011): *The Anticipatory Corpse*. Indiana, University of Notre Dame Press.

<sup>12</sup> Roberts et al. quoted in KING 2005, 2.

<sup>13</sup> SWINTON, John (2020): *The Spiritual Lives of Christians with Mental Health Challenges*. Duke Divinity School – Theology, Medicine, and Culture. October 14. Available at: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sCBAOycLj30&list=TLPQMDcwNzIwMjUb\\_JtcGXWrKg&index=9](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sCBAOycLj30&list=TLPQMDcwNzIwMjUb_JtcGXWrKg&index=9).

<sup>14</sup> “Constitution”. WHO. Available at: <https://www.who.int/about/governance/constitution>.

<sup>15</sup> Various bodies define “total health” differently. The University of Minnesota describes it as “profound connections” across domains like ecology, agriculture, biology, and economics (<https://clinicalaffairs.umn.edu/news/total-health-comprehensive-approach-wellbeing>).

A more encompassing view of health is not new. In fact, some might see WHO's move as a return to the ancient Greek concept of *wholeness*, meaning balanced living in all areas. Prof. Helen King describes Greek medicine as a “whole life regimen” that includes exercise, a good environment, and trust in the medical care providers.<sup>16</sup> The “proper balance of the body's elements, as opposed to the unnatural state of disease” was embodied by the Greek goddess Hygieia.<sup>17</sup> The fact that no mythology relating to Hygieia has been recovered so far<sup>18</sup> seems to confirm King's assertion that classical Greek medicine separated the physical condition of illness from the spiritual domain of the gods, and pointed to environmental or individual factors as causing disease.<sup>19</sup> Thus, the cause of illness was something outside of the sick person, and this gave the patient “something to fight against”.<sup>20</sup>

Greek and Latin philosophers equated health with the state of happiness, which was the highest state of being. They debated to what degree a person could be ill and still be happy.<sup>21</sup> “Without health, no one is happy”, says an ancient Greek poet.<sup>22</sup> The Romanian proverb “Să-ți dea Domnu' sănătate, că-i mai bună decât toate” [May the Lord give you health, for it is better than anything.] echoes the conviction that health is the highest good.

Apart from the very lucky few who die after a long and healthy life, for the Greeks, as for us today, the issue remains: what do we do when disease or the inevitable old age

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Others define it as physical, mental, social, and environmental wellness (WANG C. – CHEN, S. M. – SHAO, R. T. – YANG, W. Z. (2023): Redefining Human Health: Physical Wellbeing, Mental Wellbeing, Social Wellbeing, and Environmental Wellbeing. In: *Chin. Med. J.* 136. 2395–2396. DOI: 10.1097/CM9.0000000000002817.

<sup>16</sup> KING, Helen (2015): What Can We Learn from Ancient Greek Medicine? In: *The Open University* [YouTube channel] 31 July. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xi7ma8SJ5tg>.

<sup>17</sup> STAFFORD, Emma (2005): Without You No One Is Happy. In: King, Helen (ed.): *Health in Antiquity*. London, Routledge. 122. Hygieia represents “good health”, and she accompanies her father, Asklepios, in ancient iconography. Op. cit. 123, 127.

<sup>18</sup> Op cit. 134.

<sup>19</sup> KING 2005.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid. King suggests that similarly, in order for modern medicine “to make sense to the patient”, it needs to be holistic, preventative, and tailored to the individual.

<sup>21</sup> KING 2005, 3.

<sup>22</sup> Ariphron, quoted in STAFFORD 2005, 123.

comes? If health is the highest good, how can we cope when our highest good is inevitably lost? Health is a legitimate human longing that – realistically – does not last for long.

## **The Case for Desiring Peace**

In contrast to the Greek and Roman medical worldviews, the Hebrew notion of health – although similar to *wholeness* – infuses a spiritual dimension to health and disease. For the ancient Hebrews, the definition of health is found in the biblical concept of *shalom*.<sup>23</sup> *Shalom* looks at health “not [as] a medical or psychological concept but primarily [as] a relational and theological concept”.<sup>24</sup> According to the Hebrew Bible, *shalom* is God’s kind of health: physical, spiritual, emotional, and mental well-being, bestowed both on the individual body and on the community. *Shalom* has been translated as “peace”, describing the state of harmony with oneself, God, family, community, the land, animals, and all of creation.

Looking at health through the eyes of peace forces us to look at ourselves not just as material bodies but also as “lived bodies”, who experience relationships, community, spirituality, and love.<sup>25</sup> Being a body – living as a body – is a process of interpreting ourselves and the world, in which we are all engaged.<sup>26</sup> If health is peace in all relationships, then disease is non-peace.<sup>27</sup> In the Hebrew Bible, health and illness are opposites in a spectrum of states ranging between *shalom* and *sheol*.<sup>28</sup> While peace is God’s gift to humanity at creation, illness is a disturbance in God’s order for life and for the world. Illness depicts the rift between God and the person or community.<sup>29</sup> Illness

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<sup>23</sup> SWINTON 2020.

<sup>24</sup> Op. cit.

<sup>25</sup> SWINTON, John (2023): The Importance of Embodiment for Understanding Mental Health. In: *Intersections*. 19 April. Available at: [www.cbhd.org/intersections/the-importance-of-embodiment-for-understanding-mental-health](http://www.cbhd.org/intersections/the-importance-of-embodiment-for-understanding-mental-health).

<sup>26</sup> KING 2005, 6.

<sup>27</sup> SWINTON 2020.

<sup>28</sup> *Sheol* is not only the place of the dead but a place that can be experienced even while a person is alive (see 2Sam 22:6, Ps 18:5, and Ps 30:3).

<sup>29</sup> RHEE, Helen (2022): *Illness, Pain, and Health Care in Early Christianity*. Grand Rapids (MI), Eerdmans. 82.

can be sent or used by God as a “pedagogical tool” to bring about “repentance and redemption” where there was disobedience or sin.<sup>30</sup> The two antipodes reflect the degree of God’s involvement and of the centrifugal forces of destruction at work.<sup>31</sup> Healing, therefore, is the process of taking an individual or a community from the state of death – alienation from God, self, family, or the world – to a state of communion with the same. Healing is about relationship quality.

As church father Lactantius observed, when shalom is disrupted the mind always turns to God. The bereaved, the traumatized, and the chronically ill also experience spiritual pain, of which they might not be as aware as of other kinds of pain. People diagnosed with cancer, much like Job, go through a time of self-reflection and self-accusation: what did I do to deserve this? Why me? Where is God? What kind of God is this who could allow me to suffer so much? The spiritual dimension of pain relates to “a sense of hopelessness, focus on suffering rather than pain, feelings of guilt and shame, unresolved anger, inability to trust, lack of inner peace, and a sense of disconnectedness.”<sup>32</sup>

Similar to the desire for health, the desire for shalom meets certain limitations. The good life lived in holistic peace is a desire circumscribed by time (until the moment of death) and by material comfort (described by the prophet Micah’s metaphor “everyone under his own vine and fig tree”). For the people of Israel, who had never experienced such a time even in the golden age of Solomon, shalom remained the equivalent of utopia. Even today, a realistic perspective on people and the world seems to confirm the practical hopelessness that a desire for complete peace can be fulfilled.

### **The Case for Desiring Total Life**

Chapter 11 of the Gospel of John is a biblical passage that is particularly suited to address the subject of total pain. The pericope from v. 1 to 44 of the chapter records Jesus intervening into the disruption of shalom that is illness. To set the scene, we

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Op. cit. 83, quoting H. Mowvley.

<sup>32</sup> SPECK, Peter (2003): *Spiritual/Religious Issues in Care of the Dying*. In: Ellershaw, John – Wilkinson, Susie (eds.): *Care for the Dying: A Pathway to Excellence*. Oxford, Oxford University Press. 103.

remember that the “good life” for which the people of God were longing was best described by the image of everyone sitting under their own vine and fig tree, without anyone making them afraid (Mi 4:4). Politically, the Roman occupation impeded this goal, hence the acute zeal for a political leader, messiah figure, who would drive out the Roman armies. Spiritually, this objective was hindered by the people’s estrangement from God. Religious movements sought to overcome this hurdle by turning the people back to God through (John the Baptizer), through purity and isolation (the Essene community), or through a stricter observance of the Law (the Pharisees). Against the grain of his time, Jesus offered a different definition of and way into “the good life”.

The story involves Jesus’s best friends, siblings Lazarus, Martha, and Mary. When Lazarus falls ill, the sisters send a message to Jesus, who is hiding from the people trying to arrest him. Jesus delays his coming, and by the time he finally arrives, Lazarus is dead. When Jesus meets the grieving sisters, we realize that they are experiencing a loss that encompasses more than bodily illness, and it includes disappointment, spiritual brokenness, grief, and shock. Jesus reacts to their pain and then goes to Lazarus’s tomb, prays to the Father, and commands Lazarus to come out – which he does. The episode is the final blow for the religious establishment, whose leaders decide to have Jesus killed.

In raising Lazarus, I believe that Jesus brings the siblings a solution to their total pain that is not health, nor shalom, but total life.

### ***Total Life Is the End Goal***

The text begins and ends with prayers for life. In the beginning, the sisters ask for the restoration of Lazarus’s health. They want a reversal of his total pain into total health. Jesus does not answer this prayer. In this instance, he has something else in mind. At the end of the pericope, Jesus asks the Father for Lazarus’s life. Although he asks for the same thing as the sisters (life), we note the significance of Jesus’s words in v. 25, between the two requests: the kind of life he offers is different from the kind of life that the sisters requested. What Jesus offers is not total health but what I have come to call “total life”.

The life of the ages, as scholar N. T. Wright translates *zoe aionios*,<sup>33</sup> is a main recurring theme of the gospel of John. In “secular Greek, *aionios* means eternal”,<sup>34</sup> but in John “[w]hat makes [“life”] special is not the fact that it’s endless, but it has a particular quality: ‘the life of the new age’.”<sup>35</sup> John transforms the phrase “eternal life” to mean “the new life enjoyed by the faithful ... more than ordinary physical existence: it is the life of faith ... radically different from natural life”, and it is received as a result of belief in Jesus.<sup>36</sup>

According to N. T. Wright, this “new life which will be consummated in the resurrection itself works backwards into the present”.<sup>37</sup> When Lazarus was raised back to life, he did not receive an immortal, glorified body like that of the resurrected Jesus.<sup>38</sup> He came back in the same kind of body, “resuming ordinary activities”, now including the threat to his life, and was subject to another biological death.<sup>39</sup> However, what happened to his perishable body was a foretaste of the future imperishable resurrection, a sign that “present, undying ‘eternal life’ is available, anticipating that resurrection, for all who believe”.<sup>40</sup>

Wright also warns that resurrection as “a metaphor for present spiritual life” is not the only layer of meaning in John, but it must be coupled with “the promise of eventual resurrection”.<sup>41</sup> In fulfilment of Jesus’s words to Martha, and also of his promises in chapters 5 and 6, Lazarus’s resuscitation shows that “those who believe are given a real, new identity in the present, a life which now will never die”.<sup>42</sup> Thus, the “life of the age to come” is both for the present and for the future.<sup>43</sup> Like all believers, Lazarus had to continue living day by day with the life of the age to come present in his mortal body, in the hope of eternal life in the great resurrection.

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<sup>33</sup> WRIGHT, N. T. (2003): *The Resurrection of the Son of God*. Minneapolis (MN), Fortress Press. Ch. 9. 6.

<sup>34</sup> What is eternal life in *John* is the life of the kingdom in the Synoptics. ASHTON, John (2007): *Understanding the Fourth Gospel*. Oxford, Oxford University Press. 404.

<sup>35</sup> Op. cit. 402.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> WRIGHT 2006, Ch. 9. 6.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

Different from the concept of *shalom*, the abundant life offered by Jesus (10:10) is independent of material comfort or health status. Total life may include illness and suffering, and it does not avoid death. Rather than it being an escape from mortal life, it is a taste of future immortality.

### ***Total Life Is the Antidote to Death***

When Jesus declares that Lazarus is sleeping and he will go wake him up (v. 11), the disciples think in terms of semiology: that undisturbed sleep shows a body recovering from illness.<sup>44</sup> We note that the author uses sleep to describe both restored health and death. The extent to which Judaism understood sleep as a metaphor for a future resurrection or used it as a simple idiom is debated.<sup>45</sup> Ancient biblical and extra-biblical sources document the use of the image of death as sleep.<sup>46</sup>

To render the disciples' understanding of Lazarus's wake-up call, the gospel author uses the word *sozo*, which carries both the meaning "to heal" and "to save".<sup>47</sup> The hope that the disciples have for Lazarus is healing, recovery, a cure (salvation).<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Jesus does not deny that Lazarus will be saved, but he does not pick up that word. He chooses to continue with the sleep metaphor, which to me says that "waking up" is a more accurate term for what is about to happen than "salvation" or "healing". A study of the word *sozo* 'salvation' in the context of life in John hints at the idea that salvation as healing has one purpose only: the eternal life of the ages.

<sup>45</sup> KEENER, Craig S. (2003): *The Gospel of John*. 2 vols. Grand Rapids (MI), Baker Academic. 2: 841. PAROSCHI, Wilson (2017): Death as Sleep: The (Mis)use of a Biblical Metaphor. In: *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society*. 28, 1. 37–41. For an exhaustive treatment of the subject of beliefs about death and resurrection in antiquity, see WRIGHT 2003.

<sup>46</sup> KEENER 2003, 2: 840–841; MEYE THOMPSON, Marriane (2015): *John: A Commentary*. Louisville (KY), Westminster John Knox Press. 242. Popular belief associates sleep during illness with signs of recovery; in Greek iconography, also, Sleep (Hypnos) accompanies Health (Hygieia). STAFFORD 2005, 122. In Greek, the word *koimeterion* 'sleeping chamber' is a euphemism for "burial place" and the source of the word "cemetery". In Romanian, some describe the deceased as sleeping the eternal sleep (*își doarme somnul cel de veci*). For the Greeks, the word bears no hint of a possible resurrection in a "hereafter" – there is no "waking up" from this sleep. WRIGHT 2003, Ch. 9. 6.

<sup>47</sup> In the Synoptics, *sozo* is also used both for salvation and for physical healing. ASHTON 2007, 405. Depending on the translation, the text in Jn 11:12 says, "he will get better", "he will do well", "he will recover", "he will come out of it", "he will be all right", and "he will be saved".

<sup>48</sup> ASHTON 2007, 405.

The word *sozo* is used six times in John: once by the narrator, once by the disciples (v. 12 in our text), and four times by Jesus. Once, Jesus uses the verb to speak about the Father sparing him from the coming suffering (12:27). Three times (5:34, 10:9, 12:47), Jesus speaks about others being saved, and each time he connects salvation with life.<sup>49</sup> Thus, in John, salvation or healing has one purpose: *zoe aionios*, the life of the age to come.

John uses the misunderstanding of terms to point to the new quality of life that Jesus is bringing in the here and now, not only in the eschaton.<sup>50</sup> When Jesus uses sleep as a metaphor for death (albeit not a frequent metaphor)<sup>51</sup> and waking up as a metaphor for resurrection (v. 11),<sup>52</sup> he associates sleep with death rather than with disease, as the disciples had done, and as the Greek healing cults did. Implicitly, this means that Jesus connects “waking up from sleep” to resurrection rather than to healing.<sup>53</sup> By waking Lazarus from the dead, Jesus foreshadowed the final resurrection of the dead on “the last day”.<sup>54</sup>

By pioneering the resurrection life in a time and space before the eschaton, he inaugurated a new kind of life, ontologically different from any other kind of life: *zoe aionios*. As theologian John Ashton noted, “A life that is not subject to death differs

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<sup>49</sup> Salvation comes through the testimony of his words (in context, 5:40 specifies “that you may have life”); through Jesus, who is the door to pasture (in context, 10:10 states his purpose is to give abundant life to his sheep); and through him and his teaching (in context, the salvation he offers the world is linked to the eternal life that the Father proclaims, 12:50).

<sup>50</sup> ASHTON 2007, 405.

<sup>51</sup> WRIGHT 2003, Ch. 9. 6.

<sup>52</sup> When the disciples say Lazarus is sleeping, they think literally, and expect Jesus is thinking literally, too. v. 13. Jesus must clarify that when he said “sleeps”, he was referring to death. He does not clarify what he meant to say by “waking him up” – perhaps he wanted them to figure it out.

<sup>53</sup> One observation we can make is the relevance of this association for those who think of death as a surmountable disease and obsessively research ways of overcoming it through techniques such as cryogenics, mind uploading, and transhumanism. Examples for the general public can be found by MLADIN, Nathan (2024): *AI and the Afterlife: From Digital Mourning to Mind Uploading*. In: *Theos Think Tank Report* (15.02.2024). Available at: <https://www.theosthinktank.co.uk/research/2024/02/15/ai-and-the-afterlife-from-digital-mourning-to-mind-uploading>; MARR, Bernard (2023): *AI Can Now Make You Immortal – But Should It?* In: *Forbes* 21 February. Available at: <https://www.forbes.com/sites/bernardmarr/2023/02/21/ai-can-now-make-you-immortal—but-should-it/>. The point remains that Jesus can “wake up” those who “sleep the sleep of death”. The hope needed to address death anxiety is Jesus’s definitive victory over death, not scientific solutions that see death as a conquerable disease.

<sup>54</sup> MEYE THOMPSON 2015, 242–243.

from natural life in essence, not just in duration.”<sup>55</sup> The life of the ages is what I call the “total life”.

### ***Total Life Is a Secure Attachment***

The gospel author makes a strong case for the premise that Jesus loves his suffering friends. At the beginning of the story, John emphasizes that Jesus loved the three siblings, as individuals and as a family (vv. 3, 5, 11).<sup>56</sup> He implies the same when he names them repeatedly, describing their relationship and their closeness.<sup>57</sup> By naming the sisters first in the sequence of the beloved (v. 5), the author implies either that the women were closer to Jesus than their brother or more important to the author.<sup>58</sup>

Love is at the basis of what modern psychology calls “secure attachment”. Attachment theory says that humans are “programmed to seek bonds and relationships of affection with others”.<sup>59</sup> People’s ability to have healthy relationships in adulthood depends largely on the quality of attachment to their carer that they had as an infant.<sup>60</sup> In attachment theory, love is important for its implications for one’s resilience and ability to handle suffering and trauma.<sup>61</sup> In the context of death, lack of love and an

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<sup>55</sup> ASHTON 2007, 403.

<sup>56</sup> MORRIS, Leon (1971): *The Gospel According to John*. Grand Rapids (MI), Eerdmans. 539.

<sup>57</sup> Mary and Martha are the only named women said to have been loved by Jesus. WITHERINGTON III, Ben (1990): *Women and the Genesis of Christianity*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press. 105.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid. Ancient literature listed people in order of their importance. This has ramifications (not explored here) in approaching the subject of women involved in the ministry of the early church, for example.

<sup>59</sup> COCKAYNE, Joshua – HARROWER, Scott – HILL, Preston (2022): *Dawn of Sunday: The Trinity and Trauma-Safe Churches*. Eugene (OR), Cascade Books. Ch. 3.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid. “Our attachments with others are determined by the right combination of (i) being safely loved and (ii) having safe boundaries.” Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> RINGEL, Shoshana (2020): Attachment Theory. In: Ringel, Shoshana – Brandell, Jerrold R. (eds.): *Trauma: Contemporary Directions in Trauma Theory, Research and Practice*. New York (NY), Columbia University Press. 128–130; BOWLBY, John (1980): *Attachment and Loss*. 3 vols. New York: Basic Books. 3: 241–242; THOMPSON, Curt (2023): *The Deepest Place: Suffering and the Formation of Hope*. Grand Rapids (MI), Zondervan. *passim*.

insecure attachment style is at the heart of pathological grieving.<sup>62</sup> A trauma such as illness or death disrupts our sense of safety, which is “essential to human flourishing and our relationships of attachment with others is one of the key factors in this sense of safety”.<sup>63</sup> Psychologist Curt Thompson emphasizes that suffering and healing can only be understood in the context of a person’s attachment to God.<sup>64</sup>

Throughout John 11, we see ways in which Jesus develops secure attachment between him and his friends, a testimony that “strong bonds create deep trust”.<sup>65</sup> We see Jesus mirroring the emotions of the women: he discusses theology with Martha, as she processes her pain verbally (vv. 21–27), and he cries with Mary, as she processes her pain by ruminating and collapsing (vv. 32–35). Jesus recognizes their pain, validates it, and compounds it with his own grief and lament (vv. 33, 35, 38). We intuit thus that the women are safely connected to Jesus, because he truly sees them and is attuned to their needs.<sup>66</sup> The picture here is of a fully man God who joins humans in the very depth of their sorrow: Jesus loves, therefore he suffers (v. 35); he suffers, therefore he loves (v. 36). Jesus is the suffering God, and such a god, in the words of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, is the only God who can help.<sup>67</sup>

To be safely loved is one of two components needed for the sense of safety – the other one is safe boundaries.<sup>68</sup> The boundaries that Jesus drew in the case of Lazarus’s illness can cause consternation: he delayed his coming (v. 6), and he expressed joy at the thought of his absence at the moment of his friend’s death (vv. 14, 15). By setting these uncomfortable boundaries, Jesus shows that he alone is in control of his own actions, and he has a higher purpose for the pain.

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<sup>62</sup> Insecure attachment is characteristic of children raised by parents who, “for reasons stemming from their own childhoods and/or from difficulties in the marriage, found their children’s desire for love and care a burden and responded to them irritably – by ignoring, scolding or moralizing.” BOWLBY 1980, 216–217.

<sup>63</sup> COCKAYNE – HARROWER – HILL 2022, Ch. 3.

<sup>64</sup> THOMPSON 2023, 8–9.

<sup>65</sup> COCKAYNE – HARROWER – HILL, Ch. 3.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>67</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer quoted by BAUCKHAM, Richard (1984): “Only the Suffering God Can Help”: Divine Passibility in Modern Theology. In: *Themelios* 9, 3(April). 6–12.

<sup>68</sup> COCKAYNE – HARROWER – HILL, Ch. 3.

### ***Total Life Is the Fulfilment of Meaning***

Psychology confirms that meaning-making is essential for the trauma recovery process.<sup>69</sup> Some faith systems offer little in terms of meaning for illness or death. In the Hebrew Bible and other religious systems (such as Islam), suffering can indicate God's displeasure or punishment. By virtue of Second Temple interpretations, a valid option for Mary and Martha was to interpret their brother's untimely death as God's chastisement (the text does not say that this is what they did). Jesus himself did not correlate the siblings' suffering with God's displeasure or punishment.

There are several ways in which the gospel author imbues suffering and death with meaning and purpose. First, he insists that the siblings were Jesus's beloved friends (11:5). Then, he stresses the intentionality of Jesus's delay (v. 6). Most importantly, he records Jesus's explicit meaning-making: that the illness is for the glory of God, that the Son of God might be glorified through it (v. 4). For Jesus, the display of the glory of God is worth any pain, including his own. Lest we dismiss the glory of God as an unworthy cause, we would do well to remember that on the eve of his assassination, Martin Luther King Jr. had this to say about the cost of God's glory in his life: "Like anybody, I would like to live a long life... But I'm not concerned with that now. I just want to do God's will... I'm not worried about anything. I'm not fearing any man. Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord."<sup>70</sup> What makes life worth living and gives meaning to life for Mary and Martha, for Martin Luther King Jr, and for all believers in Christ is to see the glory of God.

In the context of John's gospel and of chapter 11 in particular, God's glory is linked to Jesus's identity as Life and Resurrection, not only through raising Lazarus, but also through his own resurrection. In Jesus, the resuscitation of a decomposing body is expanded to resurrection into eternal life and glory.<sup>71</sup> Jesus as the Resurrection brings humanity a tangible way to anticipate the state of perfect health and happiness available

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<sup>69</sup> HERMAN, Judith (1992): *Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence – From Domestic Abuse to Political Terror*. New York (NY), Basic Books. *passim*.

<sup>70</sup> Martin Luther King Jr quoted in CONE, James H. (2011): *The Cross and the Lynching Tree*. Maryknoll (NY), Orbis Books. 91.

<sup>71</sup> One point of the Lazarus story seems to be that anything typically human (life, emotion) is held by Jesus even more so. Jesus is the archetypal Human, the "original pattern or model of which all things of the same type are representations or copies" (Merriam-Webster, *archetype*).

at only two points in history: in the first past and in the final future. In Resurrection, Jesus restores the human that was lost in the first Garden to eternal life in the ultimate Garden-City.

## Conclusions

Seeking health as the highest good is ultimately disappointing. Shalom may be available in the New Creation, but it is unattainable in the here and now. Illness, old age, and death eventually catch up with everyone. In contrast to these goals, the total life that Jesus offers provides present meaning, purpose, hope, companionship, and community. This life is not only eschatological but available through faith in Jesus, even to those in the process of dying: the one who believes will live, even if he dies, and everyone who lives and believes will never die (vv. 25, 26).

A natural life full of health, joy, and peace is good and desirable. But a suffering life in which Jesus intervenes is better, as it bears the quality of God's future kingdom, of God's good, total life. Total pain does not cohabit with shalom, because shalom by definition excludes any kind of pain. Total pain can, however, cohabit with total life – the life of the ages that is given to those who believe in Jesus in the struggles of life here and now, even while “all of us is wrong”.

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