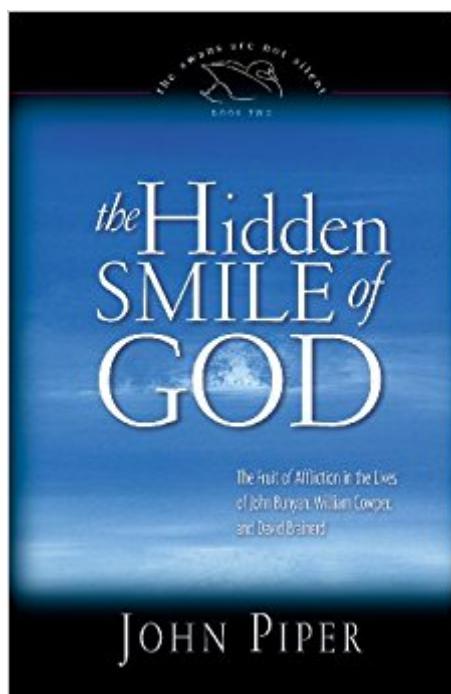


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# The Hidden Smile Of God: The Fruit Of Affliction In The Lives Of John Bunyan, William Cowper, And David Brainerd (Swans Are Not Silent)



## Synopsis

Bunyan. Cowper. Brainerd. We read their stories and wonder how they endured. How does one survive twelve years in a dank prison cell? How does one survive month after month of a depression so debilitating that death seems the only hope? How does one endure tuberculosis? Or cancer, or emptiness, or death, or loneliness, or divorce? Whatever the trial may be, how does one endure without the soul shriveling up and blowing away with the breeze? In the lives of John Bunyan, William Cowper, and David Brainerd, we find the strength of soul that not only endures hardship, but honors God in the midst of it. The Giver and Sustainer of life enabled them to worship through all their suffering. That's why their affliction bore so much fruit. The story of their suffering, their perseverance, and their passion is one that can inspire the same hunger for the supremacy of God in your life. John Piper invites you to read their stories, consider their lives, and be encouraged that no labor and no suffering in the path of Christian obedience is ever in vain. Even the bleak hill of Golgotha was a skull with a frown of affliction on its face. But "behind a frowning providence, He hides a smiling face." Just as Bunyan's, Cowper's, and Brainerd's suffering produced the worship and humility that is essential to Christian living, we too can look to God for great privileges to come from our own pain. And we too can remember, "The bud may have a bitter taste, but sweet will be the flower."

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

John Piper (DTheol, University of Munich) is the founder and teacher of [desiringGod.org](http://desiringGod.org) and the chancellor of Bethlehem College & Seminary. He served for 33 years as the senior pastor of Bethlehem Baptist Church in Minneapolis, Minnesota, and is the author of more than 50 books, including *Desiring God*; *Don't Waste Your Life*; *This Momentary Marriage*; *A Peculiar Glory*; and *Reading the Bible Supernaturally*. --This text refers to the Paperback edition.

Sorrow in the lives of Christians is to be used by God for His glory. But in order for that to happen, the Christian in trials needs strength and faith to cope. This book is a tonic, as it outlines the faith and courage of three Christians who struggled greatly. More important, Piper gives context and meaning to their suffering as he tells their stories. I found great comfort in this book many years ago. As a pastor, I recently bought several more copies of this to give away to people going through trials. Just two days ago, one of those people thanked me on the phone. He is going through a difficult divorce and trying to figure out why life hurts so much. He was grateful for the encouragement he received from this book.

The second of Piper's *The Swans are Not Silent* series, this book was the most difficult to read because of the subject it dealt with - suffering. Piper selected three great men of the faith, known for their devotion to the Lord and their godly walk and let the reader peak behind the curtains of their lives - and the suffering, depression, attempted suicide and struggles of these three men was very distressing. Yet, even as Bunyan faced his twelve years in prison for preaching the gospel, he saw his struggles actually ordained and orchestrated by God for His own glory; a view that both Cowper and Brainerd shared regarding their own hardships and turmoil. In a country where suffering is avoided at all costs and seen by many as spiritual weakness, the lives of Bunyan, Cowper and Brainerd shout a different story about the sovereign hand of God in the lives of His children. 1 Peter chapter 4 tells us that we should not consider suffering strange, but rather as a sign that the Lord truly is in control and that He is working out our salvation for His own glory through our hardships. Looking back at the lives of these three saints, it is easy to see how God has been glorified in their struggles - from the writings of Bunyan to the poems and hymns of Cowper to the effectual call to ministry that the life of Brainerd has had on hundreds if not thousands who followed him. While these three struggled greatly, many have tasted the fruit of eternal peace from their hardships. All four books of this series are outstanding - highly recommended for all Christians to read. Piper introduces us to some great men of the faith and challenges us with their lives to walk in a manner worthy of our calling as those who went before us have done.

This book helps a great deal.

Phenomenal. Found this book amidst a confusing trial. My faith was built up, and I was reminded how I should live. Read it.

If you have not noticed God Smiling, this is the book. I survived his laughter all thru my police career with NOPD. We read their stories and wonder how they endured. How does one survive twelve years in a dank prison cell? How does one survive month after month of a depression so debilitating that death seems the only hope? How does one endure tuberculosis? Or cancer, or emptiness, or death, or loneliness, or divorce? Whatever the trial may be, how does one endure without the soul shriveling up and blowing away with the breeze?

...for mental illness or people who suffer from it, like Cowper. first look at a book by John Piper, famous "Evangelical" author/"pastor"...seems like a lot of repetition in the Bunyan section, same w/ Cowper...it seems piper is genuinely perplexed at how God could possibly save a man like Cowper, who went through such mental darkness. clearly, piper expects that all Christians will experience certain manifestations (sanctification of the spirit, daily prayer and "Bible reading" etc. see pg 85), a very cookie cutter view. he even gives a little lecture on mental health and how we must take ourselves by our bootstraps, as it were, and he betrays his utter ignorance of mental disease. he should have left Cowper alone. With Bunyan, Piper basically makes the case that suffering is good and we should expect to suffer. well, true enough, but very few if any, in this amerikan lukewarm church, like the one he pastors, no doubt, will EVER suffer for their faith, like Bunyan did. to equate our everyday suffering with these men is pointless. true our suffering can be redemptive, but for most of us spoiled fat amurikans, suffering is just blind suffering (look at our empty techno zombie culture, even in churches, and tell me i am wrong!)....finally, it saddens me how men like john piper (all "Evangelical's" (again, pg 85) according to piper) can be so blind as to proclaim "good news" that God will torment the majority of his creatures (humankind) through all eternity. this is a sick tradition and unworthy of the father God.

Piper crafts a timely understanding of three Saints who knew extreme suffering. Yet, he does not simply record their dark days but captures Godly wisdom and consolation from their writings and journals. Bunyan, Cowper, and Edwards speak to us in the 21st century if we would simply listen.

We do not desire affliction and suffering and somehow wrongly expect it to be removed through our education and technology. Piper reveals to us that the result of comfort and health may be we miss the hidden smile of God.

Excellent book, as usual from Piper. Not a popular subject but much needed. I have been encouraged so far, about half way through the book.

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