

Youth Culture Lesson
Finding Teachable Moments in Culture
From *YouthWorker Journal* and YouthWorker.com

The Valley of Death

Christian Doctor Contracts Ebola and Lives to Tell About It

By Paul Asay

What Happened

When Dr. Kent Brantly went to the African nation of Liberia with the Christian organization Samaritan's Purse, he knew his work would be important there. The impoverished country needed all the doctors it could get.

However, he could not be prepared for what was to come. In the summer of 2014, the dreaded Ebola virus exploded across West Africa, and Brantly was besieged with people suffering from the disease. He was one of only two doctors in the capital city of Monrovia who would dare treat it. Ebola has a high mortality rate, and of all the patients he treated, only one survived.

"Ebola is a humiliating disease that strips you of your dignity," he wrote in *Time*. "You are removed from family and put into isolation where you cannot even see the faces of those caring for you due to the protective suits—you can only see their eyes... That is why we tried our best to treat patients [as we would] our own family. Through our protective gear we spoke to each patient, calling them by name and touching them. We wanted them to know they were valuable, that they were loved, and that we were there to serve them."

Then on July 23, Brantly knew he, too, was getting sick. At first he thought it was a cold. Then he prayed it was just denga fever. After four days, the diagnosis came down. Brantly had contracted Ebola.

Brantly and his caregivers fought the disease as best as possible, but when he was given the opportunity to take an experimental drug, he passed it off to fellow missionary and Ebola sufferer Nancy Writebol, because she was sicker than he was. "I was not trying to be a hero," he wrote. "I was making a rational decision as a doctor."

Eventually, he was flown home to the United States to get treatment and be given the drug there. Slowly, Ebola began to release its grip on Brantly. Was it the drug? Perhaps in part, Brantly says, but he said others who've received the experimental medicine died. Brantly believes there was more at work: God was a part of his recovery, too.

"I am not saying [the drug] was ineffective," he told NBC News. "I think God uses people and drugs and events and circumstances all the time to work His miracles."

Talk About It

"Even when I was facing death, I remained full of faith," Brantly wrote in *Time*. "I did not want to be faithful to God all the way up to serving in Liberia for [10] months, only to give up at the end because I was sick."

It can be hard to have faith in the midst of serious illness or tragedy or difficulties. Has your faith ever been challenged in times of trouble? When?

Though Brantly credits God with his recovery, he also says that even had he died, God would have been with him to the end. Where does God show up in the midst of hardship? Does He always take away the pain? Does He sometimes work or teach lessons

in the midst of that pain? Can He help comfort you through it? Is there a time in your life when you felt God was with you when you were feeling miserable?

What the Bible Says

“We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed” (2 Cor. 4:8-9).

“I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. I can do all things through him who strengthens me” (Phil. 4:12-13).

“And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose” (Rom. 8:28).

“Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be frightened, and do not be dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go” (Josh. 1:9).

Paul Asay has written for *The Washington Post*, *Christianity Today*, *Beliefnet.com*, and *The (Colorado Springs) Gazette*. He writes about culture for *PluggedIn* and wrote the Batman book, *God on the Streets of Gotham* (Tyndale). He recently collaborated with Jim Daly, president of Focus on the Family, on his book *The Good Dad*. He lives in Colorado Springs with wife Wendy and his two children. Follow him on Twitter at @AsayPaul.