

On Writing *Saints, Sufferers, & Sinners*

by Mike Emler

I was a second semester seminary student taking a class called “Methods of Biblical Change.” The professor showed a video of himself counseling a man who was very angry. Self-justification, blame-shifting, and finger-pointing marked this man’s speech. In his eyes, it was clear that he wasn’t the problem. Everyone else was.

We watched thirty minutes of this man ranting during his counseling session. Our assignment was to answer the question, “If you were his counselor, where would you go for the second half of this man’s counseling time? What would *you* say to him?”

This was years ago, but I remember it well. My roommate and I discussed it, and we agreed that we should let this guy have it (on paper, at least!). “He’s so blind. There’s no way he’s even going to come back for a second session. We’ve got thirty minutes to speak truth boldly to him so that he can see what his problem is.” That’s how I wrote my response paper. But our professor’s comments at the beginning of our next class stopped me in my tracks.

He said if we didn’t know how to connect with this man’s pain, there would be no way that we would make progress with him. There I sat, guilty as charged. I had only seen this man as a sinner; that aspect of his personhood had loomed large in my eyes. There was clear evidence of sin, no doubt. But I learned that day that suffering or pain is often the entry gate into people’s lives. This insight became the earliest seed of what eventually solidified as the paradigm described in *Saints, Sufferers, & Sinners: Loving Others as God Loves Us*.



The question this book seeks to address is “How do we love people wisely?” Many years ago in that classroom, I began to learn about what is true of all believers. In the Scriptures, God moves toward his people, confirming their identity as beloved children. He moves toward suffering people in ways that bring comfort and consolation. And he addresses sin in the lives of his children with redemptive mercy. That framework – seeing a believer as a saint, a sufferer, and a sinner – offers a vital pathway for understanding and wisely loving the brother or sister in front of you.

Mike serves as a counselor and the Dean of Faculty at CCEF. More information about *Saints, Sufferers, & Sinners: Loving Others as God Loves Us* is available at ccef.org/saints.



MODERN PROBLEMS

CARING FOR SOULS IN THE 21ST CENTURY

What should we do when we’re trying to help people struggling with 21st century problems that don’t seem to be found in the Bible? We want to offer relevant, God-centered help, but we often feel somewhat lost and out of our element. Still, if God has given us everything we need for life and godliness (2 Peter 1:3), then surely his Word has something meaningful and life-giving to say as we care for hurting and troubled souls.

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