

Topher Endress with John Endress. *Accompanying Disability: Caretaking, Family, and Faith*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2025. 149 pages.

Topher Endress situates his book *Accompanying Disability* in the world of disability theology while carving out a new sphere: “accompaniment theology” (p. 4). The book integrates the voice of Topher’s father, John Endress, throughout. John tells his own story of his hiking accident and his life afterwards, living with quadriplegia. Topher’s and John’s interpolated chapters model that the disabled person and the caregiver are distinct and interconnected and each person’s experience should be honored. “To accompany is to participate in the Spirit in a process of becoming something you were not, and that shift functions to give this book a thoroughly theological focus” (pp. 26–27). For Endress, the one body with many parts that Paul speaks of in First Corinthians, means that caring for a person with disabilities is intrinsically part of who that caregiver is.

The book’s chapters are organized around time, economy, history, space, and performance. As Endress takes the reader through the world of accompaniment, he highlights wisdom that makes for robust living. “To live in true accompaniment with disability, even as someone whose life looks a whole lot like the ‘standard,’ is to become attuned to the brokenness of life in ways that are transformative, generative, and, ultimately, comforting” (p. 41). Rather than seeking shelter from the reality of brokenness and impermanence, accompaniment enables people to embrace the human condition and find a larger comfort by being part of divine time, which is vast and enduring.

Endress challenges those who see the caregiver as embodying God and says it’s the opposite: as you gaze at the person who needs care, “You are seeing God before you. And you are being disciplined, formed for a life that is more gentle, peaceful, loving, graceful, and slow. You are, through your accompaniment, being radically re-created” (p. 54). He does not gloss over the moments that are “really gross and difficult” (p. 61), but holds them alongside the beautiful because they are an essential part of the truth.

Endress addresses the legacy of Christian scriptures that tell stories of people being healed, which some view as meaning that all bodies ought to be healed. But by healing only some bodies, not all, Christian scriptures teach that “Christ has authority over all bodies of every sort” (p. 86). This invites all bodies into community. With this large embrace, “All of life is an opportunity for God’s presence to be made known” (p. 89). The interconnection that is intrinsic to accompaniment is grounded in the opportunity to listen well, to choose humility, to ask for help and to “accept that perfection is a myth” (p. 121).

Endress puts forward a theology of accompaniment that elucidates how accompaniment is a living out of life as it is. Hope lies not in avoidance but in loving embrace. Endress has made an important contribution to the fields of disability theology

and caregiving, and to all people who care about the intersection of experience and faith, as he holds the reality of brokenness as a beloved aspect of God's holy world.

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