

Music beyond sound—a balm for the broken

STEVE BELL—*SOLACE FOR SEASONS OF SUFFERING*
WINNIPEG, MB: SIGNPOST MUSIC, 2005 CDN \$25



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When friends experience devastating sorrow, how can we tell them we understand without making it seem we're dismissing their pain?

As disease gradually undermines their health, or as they mourn the loss of a loved one, how can we encourage them with assurances of God's goodness, when they aren't feeling that God has been particularly good to them?

Steve Bell's newest album *Solace for Seasons of Suffering* is one way.

Solace was not put together for those of us who have been Steve Bell fans for years, or even for those wanting an overview of Bell's music, although it does successfully do that.

This CD was the vision of Ben McLean, a friend who was suffering from cancer and has since passed away. His idea was for a "sustaining" compilation of Bell's music that would help the dying and their families.

The goal is not primarily to sell the recordings (although it is available for sale) but to be a gift of comfort to palliative patients in Canada's hospitals. Already the Solace Project (www.solaceproject.com) has given thousands away to individu-

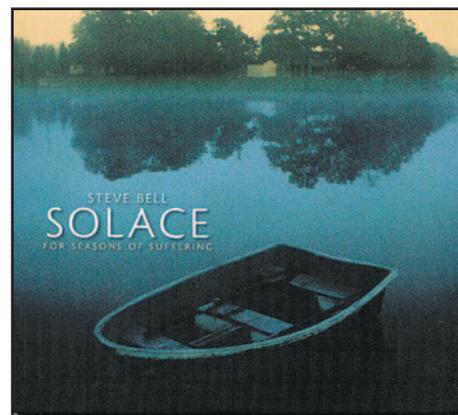
als, chaplains, hospitals, palliative care workers and families who are experiencing loss.

We've long been aware of the therapeutic quality of music. When King Saul was troubled by an evil spirit, the young David's harp-playing brought him relief (1 Samuel 16). There are, of course, already thousands of albums of relaxing music out there. So, besides the peaceful quality of the music, what makes this particular album sustaining?

These songs have been selected for the believable and encouraging quality of their lyrics. What makes this collection especially meaningful is the conscious effort to not get caught in the trap of spouting pat answers. Many of the songs are prayers requesting blessing, protection, peace—which of course is different than claiming these things are already ours.

Most of the songs are adapted from Psalms, or from early Christian poetry. In "How Long," based on Psalm 13, along with the psalmist he asks God the tough questions, and says, "Look on me/ Answer my call/ I cry every night/ But you don't seem to hear at all." It is this sort of honesty that gives Bell the authority to also testify to the goodness of God.

There's a second disc included, which is an audio magazine on the subject "Can God Be Trusted?" Although very few will listen to this part over and over, it certainly is a valuable resource for anyone wrestling through their own "Dark Night of the Soul." Bell interviews several people including John Stackhouse, the author of the



book *Can God Be Trusted?*, and Jamie Howison, who discusses the books *A Grief Observed* by C.S. Lewis, and Nicholas Wolterstorff's *Lament For A Son*.

He also talks with suffering people—one facing the degenerative effects of Lou Gehrig's disease, and another who lashed out at God at the death of her husband. Interspersed with the dialogue on disc two is music by Glen Soderholm, Lou Reed, Bruce Cockburn and Bell—including his cover of Cockburn's "Wondering Where The Lions Are."

These two discs contain two quite different approaches to dealing honestly with grief. Those who are already familiar with Bell will understand how his recordings of pieces such as "God Our Protector," "Wings Of An Eagle" and "Hear Our Prayer" would indeed be comforting. You may choose to buy a copy of *Solace for Seasons of Suffering* for someone you know, or contribute to the Solace Project to reach out to someone you don't.



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