SCRIPTURE:
Your old sin-loving nature was buried with him by baptism when he died; and when God the Father, with glorious power, brought him back to life again, you were given his wonderful new life to enjoy. –Romans 6:4 TLB

MEDITATION:
Immediately upon arriving at my parents' home earlier this week, I saw my father's latest experiment: a 3' x 3' test plot bursting with green grass cornered by old wooden tomato stakes painted bright yellow for safety. When I asked my father, a retired horticulture professor, what he was testing with the grass, he proceeded to explain his hypothesis of roughing up the soil with a rake before sowing would allow for better seed/soil contact, and thus, better germination and growth. His hypothesis was proved correct by the sharp division between his test plot and the rest of the yard.

After delighting with Daddy about his successful experiment, I realized his hypothesis would also apply to the soil of my soul. For when my life has been roughed up with a rake of suffering, the soil of my soul is more ready to receive those mustard seeds of faith necessary for a Matthew 13:23-sized harvest (see Matt. 17:20). If the soil of my soul is prepared for the germination and growth of faith, then I'm more likely to reap a 30-, 60-, or 100-fold harvest of faith. And that kind of harvest is what any plant or soil science professor (retired or not) dreams of when designing research experiments and yearns for seeing in their lives.

The work of and in suffering usually isn't easy or quick, but it's always growth-giving. Suffering brings growth because it loosens thatched-in traditions, matted-up misinformation, and compacted compassion. As importantly, suffering digs out those pesky weeds of pride always trying to choke any growth in grace. In these actions, suffering exposes and opens the soil of my soul to better receive and give a formerly leached-out love. No other amendment can replace the work of love in its distinctive power of bringing new life to my soul all the way down to the very smallest particle.

Love’s distinctive power was displayed 2,000 years ago when Jesus came out of the grave after undergoing a suffering beyond compare to bring new life to me (see Isa. 53). Love’s distinctive power can be displayed today when I put my plans in the grave and take up Jesus’s cross to find a new life of his making for
me (see Matt. 16:24 and Eph. 2:10). Love’s distinctive power will be displayed on that glorious day when Jesus returns for all who have received a new life from him in mercies made new every morning with a grace that can only be accepted, never earned (see Lam. 3:22–23 and Eph. 2:8–9). And hallelujah! None of those statements are hypotheses or even theories, they’re truths as plain and straight as the line around Daddy’s test plot.

Suffering’s pain compels me to pray even harder for those in my life who don’t know the joy of love’s power in a new life now or the hope of it for eternity. The rake of suffering also makes me long more in each moment for the new life present in the new body, new heaven, and new earth promised at my Jesus’s return (see 2 Pet. 3:13 and Rev. 21:1). For not even the delight found in successful experiments or the beauty of bright green grass in spring will ever satisfy the longing for the new life found only with his appearing – The one who has spoken these things says, “I am coming soon!” So, Lord Jesus, please come soon! (Rev. 22:20 CEV).

REFLECTION:
As a Christian who’s a soil scientist, I know how desperately I need the soil of my soul to be good ground for growing faith for a harvest of new life. I know I need faith to flourish for trusting my Good God in his plans for good for my life and others, be they family, friends, colleagues, or students. I don’t want the rake of suffering in my life, but I do know my response of receiving it for God’s glory is necessary for growth in my and others’ lives. With all of that in mind, I need to ask myself these questions:

1. What has suffering produced in my life? If it hasn’t produced new life, then what has grown in my life?
2. What new life do I yearn to see growing in my life? In the life of my family, friends, colleagues, or students?
3. What changes do I need to make in my life to promote growth of new life?

PRAYER:
Dear Father,

Thank you that you can and do use all things for your glory and the good of your people. Thank you that you gave Jesus for my redemption and new life for today and eternity. Please help me to receive your plan for growth and grace in my life every day. Please keep doing your good work in and through me for others to find hope by knowing you and your great love for them.

In the strong name of Jesus,

Amen.
ABOUT THE AUTHOR:
Beth Madison is grateful to her Good God for the gift of being a wife, mother, grandmother,* professor, and author. She and Andy, her husband of nearly 32 years, delight in teaching multiple courses in biology and environmental science at Union University in Jackson, TN. She also has the joy of teaching women’s Bible studies and working as a librarian at her church. Her weekly blog, soulscientistblog.com, addresses a variety of topics ranging from soil science and faith to patient advocacy and whatever else she finds interesting along the way. Her books, Good Ground: Volumes 1 and 2 are inspirational Bible studies highlighting how soil science displays God’s beauty in creation and our everyday lives as Christians. Both books are available at Amazon, Barnes and Noble, and directly from Northeastern Baptist Press (nebpvermont.com).

*cutest grandbaby girl ever—Beth has the photographic proof to support her conclusion.