

Learn how to come to terms with
the pain of losing a loved one

Overcoming **Grief and Loss**

part of the



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CHRISTIAN
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Index of abbreviations

All scripture references are from the King James Version, unless otherwise noted.

AMP Amplified Bible • NIV New International Version • NAS New American Standard

NKJ New King James Version • NCV New Century Version • TM The Message • TLB The Living Bible

NRS New Revised Standard Version • PHPS Phillips N.T. in Modern English

• GWT God's Word Translation • TEV Today's English Version • NEB New English Bible

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Welcome

to *Overcoming* Grief and Loss

We will not emerge from this journey unchanged

osing someone or something dear to us is an experience that we all face at some point in our lives. The thoughts and feelings that follow often lead us into painful times of grief in which we find ourselves navigating uncharted emotions – seemingly alone, without a map or compass. Yet even as we walk through the darkest nights of our soul, we are not alone (Psalm 27:10) and we do not *'grieve as those who have no hope'* (1 Thessalonians 4:13).

Jesus is no stranger to suffering; He was not exempt from feeling 'crushed with grief to the point of death' (Mark 14:34) during His life on earth. And yet in our deepest sorrow, sometimes we find ourselves struggling not only with the reality of our loss but often, crucially, with our faith in God. It can be in these most painful times that we may feel God is silent, and wonder where He is in our situation.

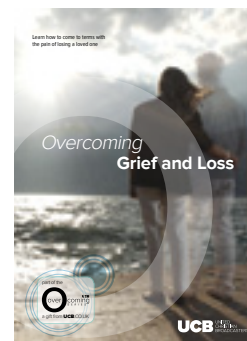
Even in those searching moments, we remember that from the first pages of Genesis through to the climax of Revelation, the Bible is rich in conversation between God and humankind. God's Word speaks of *relationship*, and God wants one with you – whatever is happening in your life.

Overcoming grief and loss is a process, a journey – we overcome not in a single moment of triumph, but gradually, one step at a time. And we will not emerge from this journey unchanged. Whether you are seeking to support someone close to you in their loss, or you are in the midst of your own grief and seemingly hanging on by a mere thread, don't turn back or let go, but take heart.

God's promise is that there will be *'treasures hidden in the darkness'* – that you may know He is the Lord (Isaiah 45:3).

The *Overcoming* Series is designed to help people like you find God's help in dealing with the challenges that face us all.

Contained in these little booklets are big truths from God's Word, guidance on how to pray, and practical suggestions for change. Turn over to begin reading a selection of articles and testimonies written by people who understand what you're going through and long to help you overcome. Then, starting on page 16, there are 28 readings from Bob Gass, author of *The Word For Today*, to help you practice new thought patterns and habits day by day for a month. As the Bible says, 'He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world' (1 John 4:4). With the help of our great God, you can overcome any challenge you face.



Discover the other titles in the *Overcoming* Series on page 35

Grief and Loss -

Where do I start?

'When it comes to grief the one thing that we cannot do is nothing'

– Bill Hybels

There is no blueprint for grief ... how will we then respond?

The death of a loved one, the loss of a job or the breakdown of an important relationship – just a few examples of situations in which we might experience loss. Our grief (the physical and emotional responses to that loss) is never far behind and often even thinking about 'making a start' when it comes to grieving can feel utterly overwhelming.

Speaking of the tragic loss of his mother, wife and child in one fatal car accident, Jerry Sittser writes, 'I thought that I was going to lose my mind ... The foundation of my life was close to caving in.' Yet as he unpacks his grief in the book *A Grace Disguised*, he goes on to conclude, 'The experience does not have to be the defining moment of our lives. Instead the defining moment can be our response to the loss.*'

Psychiatrist Elisabeth Kübler-Ross helped to give definition to the various stages of grief and loss, including Denial, Anger, Bargaining, Depression and Acceptance. But while her research continues to influence the caring profession, in her final book before her own death in 2004 she wrote this about the stages:

'They were never meant to help tuck messy emotions into neat packages. They are responses to loss that many people have, but there is not a typical response to loss, as there is no typical loss. Our grieving is as individual as our lives.'

And so, acknowledging that there is no blueprint for grief, how will we then respond? In our anguish, confusion and despair everything within us desperately seeks to *disconnect* on every level. Yet as we grapple with our loss we realise that what we intensely need is the exact opposite – to *connect*: with the loss; our emotions; our community and most of all with God. This can be our defining moment: that we choose to work *through* our grief, rather than doing our best to work *around* it. The latter may leave us feeling disconnected and unsatisfied but the former, however painful, will take us on a journey of connection, allowing the pull of hope to draw us ever on in our journey of healing.

And God's promise to us in the midst of our loss? That He will bestow on us 'a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of joy instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair' Isaiah 61:3 (NIV).

And so we begin with a choice because, as Pastor of Willow Creek Community Church, Bill Hybels, once said to his congregation, 'When it comes to grief the one thing that we cannot do is nothing'.

**From Jerry Sittser, A Grace Disguised: How the Soul Grows Through Loss (Zondervan, 2004)*

Step by step

Your guide to overcoming the pain of grief and loss with God's help

1. CONNECT: to the loss

'In choosing to face the night, I took my first steps into the sunrise'
- Jerry Sittser

The choice to connect or disconnect is present right from the start. The rawness of a recent grief and the immediate impact of a loss can leave us struggling with day-to-day things, let alone the idea of dealing with our pain. Yet as we journey on, we realise that there is a road we are beckoned to travel.

The first step is a choice – will we stand on the edge of our loss, or enter in to it? Circumstances may thrust us in to the 'valley of the

shadow of death' but in the throes of grief, you have *not* lost God and you are *not* alone. When we fully *connect to the loss* we prepare to enter in to the darkness, yet we do not go without a light. God promises that He is in this with us in this place (Psalm 23).

No matter how you are feeling about God, He will *never* give up on you. Will you give up on God?

TRY...



Lay your loss before the Lord. And listen: 'Let all that I am wait quietly before God, for my hope is in Him.' Psalm 62:5 (NLT).

2. CONNECT: to God

'You either suffer with God, or without God' - W. Langford

As we move to connect with our loss, sometimes we find ourselves grappling with how we feel about God. Is God there? Is God good? The Bible tells us that the answer to both is yes.

We were always going to face trials in this life (e.g. John 16:33) and in times of grief and loss we need to *connect to God*, holding tightly to the truths and promises in His Word. If we push into Him with all our fears and doubts rather than pulling away, we stand to encounter the 'God of all

comfort' (2 Corinthians 1:3 NIV), 'our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble' (Psalm 46:1 NIV).

In every situation God longs to connect with us – and how we need it! In fact, we were made for it (Leviticus 26:12). It can be a struggle to pick up the Bible and pray when things are tough, but don't give up.

TRY...



It can be really helpful to share and pray with a trusted friend who can support you in your walk.

3. CONNECT: to your emotions

'Sorrow is not a state but a process' - C.S. Lewis

The human soul has been created with the ability to feel an incredible depth and range of emotion. You only need to open the Scriptures to see men and women pouring their hearts out to God. You were created to *feel* your feelings, therefore *connecting to your emotions* is part of the process. Let us not be tempted to burying our feelings, nor attempt

to fast-forward uncomfortable emotions as quickly as possible. Don't worry about what you 'should' be feeling – your journey through grief will be as unique as you are. Allow yourself the time and space to connect with each emotion and for it to be felt to the full until it naturally fades and the next one emerges. Be kind to yourself.

You may find it helpful to keep an honest journal of your progress – a place to pour out the many and varied emotions you may have at any given time as words or pictures.



TRY...

4. CONNECT: to community

'...the life-changing events that stand out are often simple experiences of somebody's care' - Dr L. Crabb and Dr D. B. Allender

We were never designed to make it alone (Genesis 2:18). While we will of course need time to ourselves, we should also be aware of remaining connected to others at crucial times of grief and loss in our lives. God intends for us to be *connected to community* in the good times and the bad. It can be tempting to isolate ourselves when we are hurting, but the Bible instructs us to 'weep with those who weep' (Romans 12:15 NLT) which means that there is a two-way responsibility: to be involved in supporting those who are suffering

and to allow others to support us when we are face to face with grief.

Sometimes it is easier to give than receive that support, but accepting (and sometimes *asking* for) help is a great opportunity to allow yourself to be cared for in practical ways by the community around you. Asking for help is not a sign of weakness. **Philippians 1:30** says, '**We are in this struggle together**' (NLT).

When a close friend asks 'How are you?', try allowing yourself to answer the question with honesty.



TRY...

5. CONNECT: to hope

'Earth has no pain that Heaven cannot heal' - Anon

Biblical hope stems from the root of the Hebrew word 'trust' describing 'a strong and confident expectation'.

This kind of hope changes things. It can influence our views, values and actions, going hand in hand with every stage of our journey to connection. Hope is not always a feeling. Hope is for the times when we do not yet have what we long for, when we are not who or where we want to be. *Connecting to hope* is about confidently expecting that there is good to come, healing to come, restoration to come – both here and in heaven where

there will be 'no more death or sorrow or crying or pain' (Revelation 21:4 NLT).

After wrestling all night with God, Jacob proclaimed 'God has made me fruitful in this land of my grief' (Genesis 41:52 NLT) and this can be our experience too as we grieve as one who has hope. The good news is that in the depths of despair, we have to lift our heads only a little to look up.

TRY...



Keep hoping. Try turning yourself and your situation to God, to see what good He can make of it (Romans 8:28.)

Practical:

Understanding the grieving process

Grief and loss can come in any stage of life. The death of a pet or losing a job can cause a person to grieve. Grief is associated with any kind of loss and can vary in length and intensity. It can be said that grief is a part of

the healing process following a traumatic experience. An individual may experience several stages during their period of grief.

Generally speaking, the stages of grief are:

- 1) shock** or disbelief that the loss has occurred
- 2) denial**, in which the person refuses to accept the loss has occurred
- 3) bargaining**, in which the person attempts to reconcile the loss by making deals with other people, and even with God
- 4) guilt**, often marked by statements of 'if only I ...'
- 5) anger**, sometimes directed toward the lost person, or God
- 6) depression**, which may come and go throughout the grief process.
- 7) resignation** usually follows – a sign that the loss has been accepted and the person is ready to move on
- 8) acceptance**, and understanding that life will never be the same although it can go on with meaning and hope

Do's and Don'ts when grief strikes

Do...

- give yourself and people you care about time and permission to grieve in your and their own way
- sort out the different problems associated with grief, and handle those easily remedied first
- talk about the loss and encourage others to do so
- draw on relationships with friends and family
- consider joining a support group
- find ways to celebrate your loss especially on birthdays and key anniversaries
- turn to God in the knowledge that He knows and understands what you are going through

Don't...

- assume there is a right and wrong way to grieve
- be pushed or pressured to stop grieving. You will know when it's time to move on
- be silenced by the loss. Talk about it openly with family and friends
- punish yourself or things you could have done or did not do
- tell someone who is grieving that you know how they feel
- worry if some attributes of a person's grieving makes you uncomfortable
- take over the grieving person's life
- stop visiting and seeing the grieving person
- preach at them
- tell them to call or come over anytime unless you mean it
- cut yourself off from family, friends, church or God



Hope *amidst the* Hurt

*An Edinburgh church
is helping kids come
to terms with the loss
of a parent*

The grief felt at losing a loved one can overwhelm even the most grounded adult. So imagine what it must be like learning to cope with bereavement as a young child. That was the challenge facing the team behind a church-led community project based in Niddrie, a deprived part of south east Edinburgh.

Having established a community café to provide affordable meals for more than 100 local residents each day, **Richmond Craigmillar Church** discovered a large number of grieving families with little or no support. Young children in particular lacked a place to talk about and work through the process of the grief they were feeling at the loss of a mum, a dad, or a sibling.

‘Some of these children had seen terrible sights, which even an adult would find hard to cope with,’ explains Church of Scotland minister Rev Liz Henderson, who began the project in 2003. ‘Some had found their parent dead and been the only person in the house.’

After training in bereavement counselling and play therapy, and with the help of experienced health and childcare officers, Liz set up the project which she named Richmond’s Hope. They welcomed children as young as four, giving them an opportunity to express their hurt and deal with feelings of guilt that often follow the death of a family member or someone close to them.

Through specialised workbooks, fun play areas, dedicated one-to-one sessions and many other creative techniques, staff began to see real change in the lives and behaviour of children struggling to cope with loss.

The first of many children to receive help was eight-year-old David. Since the death of his brother in 1998, David’s behaviour had changed for the worse. In 2001, David’s parents brought him to a church music club where he met Jessie Douglas, another of the project’s original team. Jessie used the experience of losing her son in a motorcycle accident to help David come to terms with his brother’s death.

Richmond’s Hope has grown beyond its founders’ own expectations. It now offers a city-wide service to churches and communities across Edinburgh and the Lothians, and is the UK’s only child bereavement centre open all year round. It also won the Spring Harvest Faithworks Award for excellence in community development.

Staff see spiritual questions as very important in the child’s understanding of death. ‘Amidst the hurt and suffering of a deprived community, this church has combined inspirational faith with practical help and produced remarkable results,’ comments staff member Donna Hastings.

The dedicated work of Richmond’s Hope is producing more than just good results; it is producing changed lives.

For more information, visit www.richmondshope.org.uk or phone 0131 661 6818

Loss and Grief: MY STORY



By Margaret Silvester, Ellel Ministries

Loss can happen very suddenly and unexpectedly and you have no time to prepare for it. Initially you can't grasp the finality of what has happened.

As a young mum I was expecting a much longed-for second child. Due to negligence by medical professionals she was stillborn and I was devastated. She was perfect, just not breathing. We named her Julie. Initially I was in a state of shock and unreality until grief overwhelmed me. My heart was broken and I was consumed with guilt.

The lack of assurance that Julie was in heaven was the hardest thing for me to bear. Months later at a concert, God spoke directly to my heart through a song: 'He's got that little tiny baby in His hands.' Peace flooded me. I knew beyond doubt that I would see her again in heaven. I released Julie to my loving Heavenly Father and painfully forgave those responsible for her death.

Thirty years later, my daughter lost a baby boy at only 13 days old and a little later a baby boy was born to her stillborn. As I spent time with her, comforting her and sharing her heartbreak and tears, **my heart was filled with deep compassion for her.** I would gladly have lifted her pain and her sorrow and made them mine. That is exactly what Jesus has done – He took our grief and our sorrows and made them His very own when He died on the cross. The God who is revealed in Jesus is tender-hearted and compassionate.

In pastoral ministry I have been alongside many other people in times of loss and grief – parents who have lost children, children who have lost parents; husbands who have lost wives, wives who have lost husbands. And of course loss isn't only about bereavement. Grief can come through the loss of a job, a home, a friendship, a pet or the heartbreak of divorce.

I have learned that grief is a process, a long journey down a rough road with bends and

'THROUGH LOSS AND GRIEF WE HAVE TO TRUST IN GOD IN A NEW WAY, BECAUSE WE COME FACE TO FACE WITH CIRCUMSTANCES WE CAN'T FIX OURSELVES.'

turns. As you start the grief process you don't know how long it will take, or how dark it will be. It can't be hurried; it has to be worked through. It is different for each person; there is no pattern to follow.

To move on with life, I had to come to the point when I could release the loss and the past to God. I realised that finding hope again could not be dependent on my circumstances changing, but on the unchangeable character of God and His expressed love to me. From remembering

this I was able to draw inner peace and strength and sense that there were good things ahead.

Through loss and grief we have to trust in God in a new way, because we come face to face with circumstances we can't fix ourselves. Some things we will never understand, but our loving Father assures us that 'in all things God works for the good of those who love Him, who have been called according to His purpose' (Romans 8:28).

Margaret Silvester is part of the Ellel Ministries teaching and ministry team (www.ellelministries.org). Her book 'Stepping Stones to the Father Heart of God' is published by Sovereign World.



Do you need someone to pray with?

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Or visit **ucb.co.uk/prayer**

All calls treated confidentially by trained volunteers

**(Standard call charges apply, although calls from mobiles may cost you more. Check with your supplier for details.)*

UCBPRAYER

More help with Grief and Loss

Advice and Guidance

Many people offer support to those experiencing a personal crisis or the effects of loss. If you begin to feel unable to cope, overwhelmed, are feeling depressed, anxious or having trouble sleeping, seek help.

Speaking to someone else about your situation is a great first step, but in time you may find professional counselling is needed to move forward.

Counselling help can be found through your GP or local health service. Christian counsellors can often be found through your church leader or the Association of Christian Counsellors (see below).

Useful Contacts

Association of Christian Counsellors

ACC describe Counselling as 'a carefully arranged opportunity for people to talk through issues that are affecting their life, with someone trained to help.' They can be reached at www.acc-uk.org

NHS

For help dealing with loss from a health perspective, visit www.nhs.uk/Livewell/emotionalhealth/Pages/Dealingwithloss.aspx

Cruse Bereavement Care

Cruse Bereavement Care works to enable anyone bereaved by death to understand their grief and cope with their loss. Tel. 0844 477 9400 or visit www.crusebereavementcare.org.uk

The Samaritans

A 24 hour service for those experiencing feelings of distress or despair, including those which may lead to suicide. You can call Samaritans anytime on 08457 909 090 or visit www.samaritans.org

Further Reading

*A Grace Disguised: How the Soul Grows through Loss, Jerry Sittser**

One man's journey with God through grief and a time of great loss.

*Shattered Dreams: God's Unexpected Pathway to Joy, Larry Crabb**

A study of how God can awaken the dream beneath the rubble of tragedy and help us learn to live beyond life's deepest pain.

First Steps through Bereavement, Sue Mayfield

Practical advice and steps in dealing with, or supporting others in the loss of a loved one.

Stepping Stones to the Father Heart of God, by Margaret Silvester

Margaret Silvester is part of the Ellel Ministries teaching and ministry team. Read her story on pages 12-13.

**Item available from UCB2GO at www.ucb2go.co.uk*

Your 28 Days of Change

God's spirit is in you and...

'He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world'

It takes time to change long-standing thought patterns, habits and behaviour. We need to keep coming before God in our brokenness and asking for His help.

The rest of this Overcoming booklet is designed to help bring you before God for the next 28 days – to learn from His wisdom in His Word and to access His healing power through prayer.

Make a decision to set aside the time each day to read and respond in prayer. Don't worry if you miss a day or two, just pick up wherever you left off.

Keep a notebook and pen nearby to jot down anything that occurs to you while you read, or quotes that inspire you to think differently. Trust that God will speak to you personally about your healing over the coming weeks.

Remember, Jesus is on your side, willing you to succeed. Right now, He is praying to the Father on your behalf.

God's Spirit is in you, and 'He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world' (1 John 4:4).



The daily readings are written by Bob and Debby Gass, authors of *The Word For Today*, and originally appeared there first. Over a million people around the world read Bob and Debby's warm, encouraging words each day.

You can receive a quarterly copy of *The Word For Today* free of charge – see the back page for more details.

DAY 1 The place 'Then the Lord said, "There is a place near me..."' Exodus 33:21 NIV

HIS MARRIAGE was in trouble, his congregation was worshipping a cow and Joshua, his closest friend, was having trouble understanding God's ways. In a real sense, Moses was totally alone. So where do you go when the things you love and the people closest to you aren't enough?

Here's your answer: 'There is a place near Me'. Understand this: the enemy will do everything he can to keep you from reaching this place, and once you're there, he'll do everything in his power to keep you from staying too long. The reason is that he knows that in this place you'll find answers – real solutions to the problems you're facing. You'll also find empowerment.

After Moses had been there, his appearance changed, his words were more effective and he was able to offer God's people real direction. Yet before he found it, he was no different from anyone else.

In this place he also found rest. Listen: 'My Presence will go with you, and I will give you rest' (Exodus 33:14 NIV). When you get overloaded, your vision gets blurred and you become resistant to the very ideas you need because you just can't handle any more. What's the answer? Listen again: 'There is a place near Me.' Make the passion of your life to find this place and live in it!

Prayer Point

I thank You, God, that You care enough about me to provide a resting place for me near You. I ask Lord, during the times of my anger, that I would find forgiveness, and through the times of denial and depression, that You would just walk with me until I find that oasis of acceptance and peace. Amen.

DAY 2 Dealing with grief 'When they walk through the Valley of Weeping, it will become a place of refreshing springs' Psalm 84:6 NLT

STANDING AT GROUND ZERO, a Christian fire fighter, the only Twin Towers survivor from his fire station, asked, 'How can I ever forgive those who did this?' He'd attended more funerals in two weeks than most of us will in a lifetime. Is God angry when we struggle with honest emotions like hate or fear? No, until we come to grips with the enormity of our loss and the injustice done to us, we're not ready to forgive.

Indeed when we rush to forgive, we forgive only in part and we're released only in part. Jesus said, 'Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted' (Matt. 5:4). Until you embrace the one, you can't experience the other. It's not time that heals, it's insight! We

all know people who were wounded 20 or 30 years ago, whose wounds are still as fresh today as ever.

As God's children, we're not exempt from the stages of grief: a) denial – 'It's not real, it can't be happening' b) anger – 'It's not fair. Why is God letting this happen to me?' c) bargaining – 'I'll do anything; just make it go away' d) depression – silence and withdrawal, and finally, e) acceptance, when we're ready to pray, 'Not my will but Thine be done.' Whether it's the loss of your child, your marriage, your job, your health, or anything else You value, it's in turning to God that receive the grace to embrace it, grieve it, express it, release it and then 'go from strength to strength.'

DAY 3 Beware the 'theology of denial'

'Very truly I tell you ... you will grieve, but your grief will turn to joy' John 16:20 NIV

BEWARE of a half-baked 'theology of denial' that leaves you spiritually and emotionally crippled for life. What we don't deal with now will deal with us later in harmful ways. When we stuff things into our emotional rubbish bin, we end up squandering precious time and energy sitting on the lid, trying to keep the contents from spilling out. Jesus said, 'You shall know [embrace] the truth [even its painful aspects] and the truth shall make you free' (John 8:32 NKJ).

In *A Better Kind of Grieving*, Bill Hybels writes, 'Fifty years ago industrialists thought they could just bury toxic waste and it would go away. We've since learned it doesn't. It leaks into the water, contaminates the crops and kills animals. Burying

grief does the same thing. It leaks into our emotional system and wreaks havoc. It distorts our perceptions of life and taints our relationships.'

Hybels continues, 'When my father died, I replaced the pain real fast. I think I missed only four days of work. I just substituted my feelings of loss and disappointment with a frenzied ministry schedule. I ran from it. That was a bad move for me and for those around me.'

Are you running from pain today? Are you trying to trade it in prematurely for some other feeling? That's not God's way. Listen: 'Now is your time of grief, but I will see you again and you will rejoice, and no one will take away your joy' (John 16:22 NIV).

Prayer Point

Lord, there are times when I don't want to confront the pain; I just want it to go away. I pray that any grief I have buried, You will help me to deal with and bring me to a place of healing and freedom so I can look to the good times ahead and not the pain of the past that has trapped me for so long. Amen.

DAY 4 The process of becoming whole

'Weeping may endure for a night, but joy comes in the morning' Psalm 30:5 NKJ

THE PROCESS OF BECOMING WHOLE involves: a) feeling deeply, b) dealing honestly, and c) making way for healing. Sometimes we try to find 'quick relief' by releasing it before we've gone through it. We do that because we fear the process. We run from the pain or try to replace it with another feeling as soon as we can. Sometimes we use alcohol, drugs, sex, money or work. But that only makes it worse!

With God's help, you can feel the pain, let it go, and move forward. Listen: 'Weeping may endure for a night, but joy comes in the morning' (Psalm 30:5). You must go through one in order to get to the other.

Moses was the greatest leader Israel ever had. His death was an unspeakable loss. Together God's people

wept on the Plains of Moab. For 30 days and nights God stood by, allowing them to mourn in a healthy expression of grief. No hurrying, no divine censure, no denial. Only when God saw that they had completed the process did He tell Joshua to lead them forward. They had to go through to get through! We all do!

Listen: 'After the death of Moses ... the Lord spoke to Joshua ... saying: "Moses My servant is dead. Now therefore, arise, go over this Jordan, you and all this people, to the land which I am giving to them ... Be strong and of good courage ... do not be afraid, nor be dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go"' (Joshua 1:1-9 NKJ). The God who spoke those words is your God!

DAY 5 Do it again, Lord!

'Won't You revive us again, so your people can rejoice in You?' Psalm 85:6 NLT

AFTER the terrorist attacks on America on September 11, Max Lucado wrote: 'Dear Lord, as the innocent are buried, our innocence is buried as well. We thought we were safe; we should have known better but, we didn't. We don't ask You for Your help, we beg You for it! We know what You can do. We've read the accounts, pondered the stories and now we plead, "Do it again, Lord." Remember the Hebrews in Egypt? You protected their children from the Angel of Death. We have children too, Lord! You took Daniel the captive and made him a King's counsellor. You took Peter the fisherman and made him Peter the apostle. David went from leading sheep to leading armies. Do it again, Lord, for today we need counsellors ... apostles ... leaders.'

'At Calvary, You saw innocence slaughtered, goodness murdered ... mothers weeping ... evil

dancing, heaven's sweetest song buried beneath a rock. But You turned the darkest Friday into the brightest Sunday ... Grant us a September Easter.

'Thank You for these hours of unity; Christians praying with Jews; Republicans standing with Democrats. Skin colour covered by the ash of burning buildings. The enemy sought to bring us to our knees and succeeded. He had no idea that we would kneel before You! Grant those who lead us, wisdom. Have mercy on the souls who have departed and the wounded that remain. Give us grace that we might forgive and faith that we might believe. Look kindly on Your church. For two thousand years, You've used her to heal a hurting world. Do it again, Lord. Do it again!'

Prayer Point

Father I bring my grief to the cross and through Jesus trade my grief for a revival of hope and love in my heart. Help me develop a perspective in life to see what can be done in the place where I am today. Release the creative potential in me to be all that You destined for me in Jesus' precious Name.

DAY 6 Do you have a 'why'?

'I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us' Romans 8:18

WHEN VIKTOR FRANKL was sent to Auschwitz, he'd been researching a book on finding life's meaning. But when his clothes were suddenly taken from him, including the manuscript he'd hidden in his coat lining, he questioned whether his life had real meaning at all. Then something happened: the Nazis gave him the rags of an inmate who'd just been sent to the gas chamber and Frankl found in the pocket a page containing a Jewish prayer (from Deuteronomy 6:4-5): 'Hear, O Israel! The Lord our God is one God. And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.'

'How should I interpret such a coincidence?' he asked himself, 'Other than to live my thoughts instead of

merely putting them on paper?' Later he wrote, 'Nothing in the world will so effectively help you to survive as the knowledge that there is a purpose to your life. He who has a 'why' to live for, can bear almost any 'how.'

Charles Dickens was lame. So was Handel. Homer was blind. Plato was a hunchback. Sir Walter Scott was paralysed. Paul spent all but seven years of his ministry in prison. What gave each of these people the stamina to overcome their circumstances? Purpose! Each of them had a dream, fuelled by a fire within that could not be extinguished. They had a 'why' that was bigger than every 'how'. Do you?

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DAY 7 God's not finished with you yet 'For God has appointed another seed for me...' Genesis 4:25 NKJ

SATAN'S GOAL was to infect Adam before his first son was born – that way he could contaminate all the rest of us. And it almost worked! Cain, his firstborn, murdered his brother Abel. But God wasn't finished with Adam yet. Listen: 'Adam knew his wife again and she bore him a son and named him Seth, "For God has appointed another seed for me instead of Abel, whom Cain killed"' (Genesis 4:25 NKJ)

How wonderful! For everything you've loved and lost, God has another seed. For everything that has died or been stolen from you, God has another seed. You see, your seed is your future and God has another one for you to birth. He has another miracle for you to hold. Where you are right now is not where you're going.

The devil knew God had a plan for you; that's why he worked so hard to wipe you out. He didn't want you to live long enough to receive what God had in mind. But he failed, didn't he? The very fact that you're still here says that God's not through with you yet.

Start looking ahead – there's something coming up on God's calendar that's got your name on it. 'God hath appointed...'. There's something good just over the horizon; something good for your life... your marriage... your family... your career... your ministry. If you are not on your deathbed, then God still has an appointed task for you to finish. Get up! Get going! He's called you with an eternal purpose!

Prayer Point

Lord, it's great to know that everyday I live I create a legacy for the future. In my work, in my family, in my very existence there is the potential to bless someone. I know and recognise, Lord, that one day, all the grief of this life will be cast into the shadows, when Heaven reveals its full nature and beauty. Praise Your wonderful Name.

DAY 8 What's Heaven like? 'In my Father's house are many mansions...' John 14:2 NKJ

ON SEPTEMBER 11, 2001, a mother told her four-year-old that his dad, a New York City cop, wouldn't be coming home that night because he'd gone to Heaven. 'Can we call him on his mobile phone?' the child asked. 'No, but some day we'll go to see him,' she replied. After a pause the four-year-old looked up and asked, 'Mommy, what's Heaven like?' Multitudes ask that question. Who's qualified to answer it? Jesus! Listen: 'In My Father's house are many mansions... I go to prepare a place for you' (John 14:2). *What's Heaven like?* Like moving into a part of your heavenly Father's house, specially prepared for you. No renovating, no parts unfinished, no disappointments on moving day.

What will we do there? Serve God day and night (Revelation 7:15). *Doing what?* Ruling angels. Being

responsible for whole cities. *Will we know our loved ones?* Would we know less in Heaven than we did on earth? '... face to face ... then shall I know even as also I am known' (1 Cor. 13:12 KJV). *Will our children still be children and our parents still be old?* No. '... when He appears, we shall be like Him ...' (1 John 3:2 NIV) Jesus, who left us at 33.

What about the physically challenged? Listen: '...our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us ... as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies' (Romans 8:18-23 NIV). Joni Eareckson Tada says, 'That will be the day after my death when I, the quadriplegic, will be on my feet dancing!' Heaven will be wonderful! Are you going?

DAY 9 You don't get to Heaven by chance

'In my Father's house are many mansions...'
John 14:2 NKJ

HOW will I recognise my loved ones without their earthly bodies? The same way the disciples recognised Moses and Elijah even though they'd died hundreds of years before (Mark 9:4). You'll be as much God's child in Heaven as you are on earth, except without your earthly body. That awaits the return of the Lord when, '...we will all be [transformed] ...' (1 Corinthians 15:51 NIV).

Will we still be learning and growing? Absolutely! The structure of an atom will be child's play compared to what you'll learn there. Imagine being able to study all of history from God's perspective! Or travelling, not at the speed of light, but of thought! *Will we have time for leisure and relaxation?* Sure, Heaven's a place of rest. You can

plant a garden without sweat, drought or weeds. You can create a poem or an oratorio. You can carve wood or paint a landscape. To praise God? Yes, everything in Heaven is for His praise.

Will there be anything there to worry about? No. No guns, bombs, crime, drunkenness, violence, theft or war. The doors won't have locks on them. All the things that made life fearful here on earth will be gone forever '...no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away' (Revelation 21:4 NIV). *How do you get to heaven?* By choice, not chance; by accepting Christ as your Lord and Saviour. Have you done that yet?

Prayer Point

Lord, I yearn for a day when there will be no stress or worry. Yet I realise today I can live a life that will release all the grief and pain in my life. I choose today to have that appointment with You, that moment where it's You and me, where nothing comes in between. Thank You, Amen.

DAY 10 Divine appointment

'In my Father's house are many mansions...'
John 14:2 NKJ

WILL there be many people in Heaven? Yes, a multitude from every nation on earth. *But will we be able to understand each other?* Sure, we'll all speak one language, just as it was before the Tower of Babel. *If there's such a big crowd, won't I feel a bit lost or lonely?* No, you will be the same you in Heaven as you are on Earth, uniquely you and uniquely His. God will call each of us by name. Moses will still be Moses, I'll still be me and you'll still be you.

I'm ashamed to admit it, but I'm a little scared. I really like this world – how can I adjust to somewhere so different? This world is like a womb. Just as a baby is contained in his mother's womb, so

we are bound by the limitations of this life. Maybe the baby would be a little scared leaving the womb. *Then death is ...?* You've got it, a journey from earth life to the newness of Heaven life. We'll go through a tunnel; we may experience momentary struggle, like we did when we were born, but beyond the tunnel is Heaven. Think of holding a hand and finding it's God's hand! Of breathing new air and finding it's celestial air. Of feeling invigorated and finding it's immortality. Of passing from storm and tempest into unknown calm. Of waking up and finding it's home. *Anybody ever get there by accident?* No, it's by appointment only. Have you made yours yet?

DAY 11 When the innocent perish

'For we know in part...' 1 Corinthians 13:9

GOD does not punish the innocent for the sins of the guilty. Listen: '...The son will not share the guilt of the father, nor will the father share the guilt of the son...' (Ezekiel 18:20 NIV).

Leonard Pitts says, 'In times of crisis, God has more spokespersons than Avon. Some claim to know His mind as surely as if they had read His diary. What you discover is that these people have created God in their own image. They interpret Him according to their biases and predispositions, attributing to Him their political party, motivations, hatreds and even their timetable.'

God's character never changes! On Mount Sinai, He introduced Himself as 'merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness.' If you're used

to thinking about Him any other way, change the way you think! Jeremiah writes, 'This I recall to mind and therefore I have hope: because of the Lord's great love, we are not consumed, for His compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is Your faithfulness' (Lamentations 3:21–23 NIV).

When Billy Graham was asked by family members of the Oklahoma City bombing victims, 'Why did God let this happen?' he humbly replied, 'I don't know.' Paul says, 'We know in part ...' (1 Corinthians 13:9). Let's not act as though we know more than we do! God stamps some things 'will explain later.' One thing you can be sure of, God's too wise to make a mistake and too good to do anything bad. So trust Him, He's earned it!

Prayer Point

Lord, I come to You with, 'Why did it happen?' I know one day I will see the bigger picture so, until then, I'll treasure the question. Help me not to live in the moments of lost friendship, help me to strengthen the friendships I have and look forward to making new friends with people I don't yet know. Amen.

DAY 12 Reach out and touch somebody

'... we all share the same Spirit'
1 Corinthians 12:13 NLT

IT'S EASY TO FALL BY THE WAYSIDE and get run over without anybody ever noticing. You're afraid to ask for help in case somebody questions your experience with God. Refuse to live that way! Not reaching out to your brothers and sisters in Christ can: a) keep you vulnerable to attack, b) cut you off from your supply lines.

Paul says, '... we were all given the one Spirit to drink' (1 Corinthians 12:12–13 NIV). In wartime, enemies would lock their prisoners in 'the hole' for long periods. Without need for physical abuse, the darkness and isolation would break them down.

Sometimes church can feel like a dark, isolated place; especially when you're hurting and you don't feel you can reach out for help. It's filled with the greatest actors and actresses of our time. In fact, if

Hollywood needed extras, they'd find them in the pews! God said, 'It is not good that man should be alone.' Why? Because we're communal by nature; we need to feel 'connected.' This applies not only to marriage and family, but to other close relationships too. We need people to talk to, laugh and interact with. When that doesn't happen, we're not strengthened by receiving, and others aren't blessed by giving.

A note of caution, however: a) never hold others in such high esteem that your fellowship becomes idolatry, b) never worship at the altar of their opinions in order to stay in their good graces, and c) never be intimidated into being anyone other than the person God made you. Having realised that, reach out – the help you need is available today.

DAY 13 Partners in pain

'The woman was left ... with her daughters in law'
Ruth 1:5-6 KJV

WHEN THEIR HUSBANDS DIED, Naomi, Ruth and Orpah became partners in pain. Unless you've been there, you can't relate to it. It's a fellowship that transcends age, race, background and status; it brings the oddest people together. When you're hurting, don't look for validation from those who haven't walked in your shoes. People can't give you what they don't have. Often the best they have to offer is the kind of optimism that's glib and quickly becomes annoying.

Until you can start to make sense of your pain and see the greater good in it, you'll feel like a victim. But once you see God's grace at work, and His purpose in it all, you can begin to move ahead... to marry, to have another baby, to get another job, to dream another dream, to live again.

Prayer Point

Thank You, Lord, for the people around me who have been there during periods of pain in my life. Even though I still struggle through issues, Lord, I am not finished yet. Let me dust off some of those past dreams and be determined to see them happen, as all things are possible for those who believe. In Jesus' name.

DAY 14 Living in war mode!

'He will renew your life and sustain you in your old age'
Ruth 4:15n NIV

WHAT do you do when you've got the wisdom, but not the time, to do it all again? Your window of opportunity seems closed. You've still got the desire, but when you look in the mirror, the wrinkles and sags confirm that the clock is against you. Listen to Naomi: 'Go your way; for I am too old ...' (Ruth 1:12).

She was saying, 'Don't hang around waiting for me. My life's over!' When you feel as if you've run out of time you can get bitter and start pushing people away, especially when it seems they are asking for what you can no longer give. Good news! Just when you think God's forgotten you and your 'sell by' date has expired, He can re-commission you. Oh yes, He can! He's the God of second chances. With Him you're never too old!

Spurgeon wrote: 'Just as old soldiers compare stories and scars, when we arrive at our heavenly home we'll tell of the faithfulness of God who brought us through. I wouldn't like to be pointed out as the only one who never experienced sorrow or feel like a stranger in the midst of that sacred fellowship. Therefore, be content to share in the battle, for soon we will wear the crown.'

When it feels as if all Hell has broken loose in your life, remember, satan hasn't snatched the steering wheel from God. No, God's got it all worked out. Victory is born out of struggle. Be encouraged! God often accomplishes more through our pain than He does through our successes. So, hold on to His unchanging hand!

Listen: 'So Boaz took Ruth ... and she gave birth to a son. The women said to Naomi: "Praise be to the Lord, who this day has not left you without a guardian-redeemer ... He will renew your life and sustain you in your old age" ... Then Naomi took the child in her arms and cared for him' (Ruth 4:13-16 NIV).

Biologically, it was impossible for Naomi to give birth to a baby! But when God wants to give you something, even if it breaks every rule in the book, He'll do it. It's not over until God says it's over! He can do things you've never seen before and can't even begin to explain. So trust Him!

DAY 15 The 'gift of goodbye'

'Then Orpah kissed her mother-in-law good-bye and went back home...' Ruth 1:14 GNB

CERTAIN PEOPLE will leave you. When they do, let them go! Don't try to talk them into staying. Your destiny is seldom tied to those who walk away! The Bible says, 'They went out from us, but they did not really belong to us' (1 John 2:19 NIV). When people don't belong in your life anymore, even a bucket of super glue won't make them stay!

Orpah's leaving didn't make her a bad person; it just meant her part in the story was over. Recognise when somebody's part in your story is over as well, otherwise you'll keep trying to raise the dead. David pleaded with God for his baby's life. He 'fasted ... spent the nights lying on

the ground ... and he would not eat...' (2 Samuel 12:16-17 NIV). But when the child died, he had to accept that there was nothing more he could do, so he 'got up ... washed ... changed his clothes ... and he ate' (2 Samuel 12:20 NIV).

Know when something's over! If God means you to have it, He'll give it to you. When you've tried to make it work and it hasn't, accept His will in the matter. Never beg anyone to stay with you against their will. Their leaving is no accident – the 'gift of goodbye' is a scriptural one. It means God's got something better in store for you (and possibly them too), so keep trusting Him until it comes to pass!

Prayer Point

Lord, help me to identify the path and direction I should take when things around me seem to be going wrong. Father, I pray that I would not hinder the lives of the people around me. I pray that You bless me, Lord, and let me be a blessing to others, in Jesus' name. Amen.

DAY 16 'Stumbling' into blessings

'As it turned out, she was working in a field belonging to Boaz' Ruth 2:3 NIV

ALTHOUGH Ruth started out for one destination, she stumbled into another. Her plan was to pick leftover grain, but she happened to 'light on a part of the field' (KJV) belonging to Boaz – and it changed her life.

When Boaz called her name, she came from the background to a place of blessing in the foreground. That's how quickly it can happen! Ruth's life had been spiralling downward. Her husband had died. She'd left her old home, and wasn't accepted in her new one. She was in survival mode, making the best of a bad job by gleaning just enough to stay alive. Then God turned things around! The reapers began deliberately dropping handfuls of wheat in her path. She started picking up undeserved blessings.

Did you know that God can leave you 'a blessings trail'? After struggling so long just to get by, He'll begin to drop blessings into your path, and all you have to do is keep following. Even though the odds might seem against you today, don't let satan push you back. You've been through too much to be intimidated by him. You're about to come into a blessing that'll change your life. '... along unfamiliar paths I will guide them; I will turn the darkness into light before them...' (Isaiah 42:16 NIV).

God can let you 'stumble' into good things, helping you to show up at the right place, at the right time, and meet the right person with the right answer. He has a way of 'tripping' us into blessing.

DAY 19 Jesus at the scene of death

'Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep; but I am going ... to wake him up.' **John 11:11 NIV**

WHAT DO YOU SAY to those who are heartbroken, angry and questioning because of death? Tell them about Lazarus whom Jesus raised from the dead. Tell them:

1) Jesus allows us to question! Martha asked, in effect, 'Where were you when we needed you, Lord?' Was Jesus upset with her? No. In moments like these we learn things about ourselves we never knew before. In times of heartache we discover 'His compassions fail not. They are new every morning: great is [His] faithfulness' (Lamentations 3:22–23 NKJ).

2) Jesus shows us how to grieve! 'Jesus wept,' not because He was powerless, but because He was our example. If you bury your emotions, you bury them alive and they'll rise again to hurt you. The process of

becoming whole involves: a) feeling deeply, b) dealing honestly, c) making way for healing. Are you running from pain? Are you trading it in prematurely for some other feeling? That's not God's way. He says, '... you will weep and mourn ... but [eventually] your grief will turn to joy' (John 16:20 NIV).

3) Jesus gives us hope! Listen: 'Lazarus has fallen asleep; but I am going ... to wake him up.' Know how you feel after a great night's sleep? Well, multiply that feeling by infinity and you still haven't come close. 'Goodnight' here means 'good morning' there. Jesus said, '... nor can they die anymore, for they are equal to the angels ...' (Luke 20:36 NKJ). Wow! The 'Uppertaker' puts every undertaker out of business! Don't you love it?

Prayer Point

Lord, never let me focus on things that don't matter. Help me, Lord, to connect with those that need something or someone. Help me, Lord, to be a reflection of You, to go and do what others might find beneath them. Help me, Lord, always have time for people. Let my life mean something to others more than it means to me.

DAY 20 Longing for forgiveness

'If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins' **1 John 1:9**

CHRISTMAS CAN BE A DIFFICULT TIME, especially when you've lost a loved one. The sounds and sights that once brought you such joy now remind you of them and reinforce your sense of loss. There is no magic formula; grief is a process you must walk through, and it takes time. Here are some personal thoughts that might help.

Try to keep things in perspective. Christmas is only one day out of 365. You can do anything for 24 hours because God promised that '... your strength will equal your days' (Deuteronomy 33:25 NIV). Check and see if there's a needy family or a lonely neighbour who'd enjoy spending an hour with you. Reaching out is difficult, but it brings healing. *Don't accept the myth that everybody else is having 'a perfect Christmas'*

while you struggle. The truth is, even for Christians, Jesus' birth gets eclipsed by unrealistic demands and the pressures of shopping, entertaining and gift-giving. Why do you think we're so relieved when it's all over?

Don't maintain old traditions if they make you feel worse. Create new ones that work for you now – you might even want to keep them. If you're struggling with Christmas this year, here's a prayer for you: 'Lord, You know how I feel today because Your Word says You are familiar with grief. Heal my heart and fill its emptiness. Become more real to me than the activity without and the loneliness within. Help me to discover You and, in so doing, make this a Christmas like none I've ever known. Amen.'

DAY 21 'If I could only know for sure'

'And then there will be one huge family reunion...' **1 Thessalonians 4:17 TM**

ARE YOU TRYING to get used to sleeping in an empty bed, or making dinner for one? Has death left you quarantined in grief, wondering 'Where is God?' Have you been thinking, 'If only I could know for sure that my loved one is alright?' Listen: 'We can tell you with complete confidence ... that when the Master comes again to get us, those of us who are still alive will not get a jump on the dead and leave them behind. In actual fact, they'll be ahead of us. The Master Himself will ... come down from Heaven and the dead in Christ will rise; they'll go first ... the rest of us ... will be caught up with them ... to meet the Master ... then there will be one huge family reunion...' (1Thessalonians 4:15–17 TM).

You say, 'How can I be sure?' Because at the cross, a showdown took place; Jesus 'called satan's hand.' Tired of seeing us intimidated, He walked into the dark tunnel of death, turned it into a lit underpass to Heaven, came out triumphantly and announced, 'Death, who's afraid of you now?' (1 Corinthians 15:55 TM).

At Dan Richardson's memorial service they distributed these words, 'Cancer is limited. It cannot cripple love, corrode faith, eat away peace, destroy confidence, kill friendship, shut out memories, silence courage, invade the soul, reduce eternal life, or lessen the power of the resurrection'. Be encouraged today – God's planning 'one huge family reunion!'

Prayer Point

Lord, I thank You it's not wrong to be upset or to show emotion, You created that within me. I thank You Lord that even in grief You are there with me, walking through it with me.. Thank You, Lord, that I can express to You how I feel in prayer, and You never judge me for that. Amen

DAY 22 He can make it up to you

'My father and mother walked out and left me, but God took me in' **Psalms 27:10 TM**

HAS DEATH OR DIVORCE robbed you of a parent? Are you still grieving for lost hugs and birthdays without bicycles? The loss of these things can cause you to struggle all your life to find your identity. When you grow up listening to endless arguments but never seeing affection, it's easy to think that's normal, then later you find yourself asking, 'How should I act as a parent? And why do I still feel like a lost child?' David said, 'My father and mother walked out and left me, but God took me in' (Psalm 27:10 TM).

How wonderful! God can hold you and heal your pain. When you're hurting, He can put you on His couch and be your 'Wonderful Counsellor' (Isaiah

9:6). When you feel like an orphan, He can be to you an 'Everlasting Father' who doesn't abandon His children, no matter what. With Him you're always safe and protected, because that's what loving fathers do. You're His child, which means if something's important to you, it's important to Him too! What's more, He can send people into your life who'll be to you the father, the mother, the brother, or the sister you never had. Listen: 'God sets the lonely in families...' (Psalm 68:6 NIV). Don't be so focused on your losses that you fail to see Him at work, or recognise those He sends into your life to make it better.

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DAY 23 From the lesser to the greater ‘A kernel of wheat ... if it dies ... produces many seeds’ John 12:24 NIV

WHAT DO YOU SAY to those who believe in miracles when they don’t get one? Or when your life suddenly hits the wall? Or your business burns to the ground and your insurance won’t cover it? Or your spouse gets involved with somebody else? There lie your hopes for a marriage that would last forever. There lie the ashes of what you had to lose, in order to gain what God has in store for you next. It’s both a place of death and a place of birth. And it hurts!

To reach the next dimension of anything, something you presently have may be the sacrificial offering required. Jesus taught that some things in our lives must die in order to be

reborn to the next level. Is that what’s happening to you? When trouble comes, our questions often place God’s integrity on the line. Indeed, He has to be extremely secure to stick to His plan in the face of our vacillating and complaining.

The truth is, it’s not until we look back that we realise what we went through was just the ‘bar mitzvah’ (coming of age) of our ability to trust; the time weak faith changed into a faith previously beyond our grasp. It’s on the other side of pain that our faith gets its diploma, and from then on, refuses to be intimidated by anyone or anything. Think about it!

Prayer Point

Lord, I will trust You through the storm. Today I’m holding my hand open and allowing You to take from me what You feel is right and place into my hand the things You would have me to do. Let the words from my lips be Your words, let my actions be as though You were there. Amen.

DAY 24 Be Christ-like, stay in touch ‘Better is a neighbour nearby than a brother far away’ Proverbs 27:10 NKJ

A FEW WINTERS AGO in Sweden, an 84-year-old woman sat for two months on her balcony before her neighbours discovered she was dead. They realised something was wrong when they saw her sitting there around the clock, despite the freezing temperatures. One neighbour said, ‘I feel terrible. I hope this makes us stop and think more about one another.’

In one of the lowest moments in David’s life, he wrote, ‘Look on my right hand and see, for there is no one who acknowledges me ... I cried out to You, O Lord; I said, “You are my refuge, my portion in the land of the living”’ (Psalm 142:4–5 NKJ).

Doctor Philip Zimbardo writes in Psychology Today, ‘I know of no more potent killer than loneliness. It’s

the central agent in depression and suicide. It’s the devil’s strategy for isolating us from one another, while creating the delusion that the reasons are ... time-pressures ...work demands ... or anxieties created by economic uncertainty.’

Jesus heard cries that nobody else heard. He noticed people that others had no time for. When the disciples tried to silence blind Bartimaeus, He stopped them and restored his sight. He walked for days to meet with a hurting woman whose heart was as empty as her water pots (John 4). He’s the Good Shepherd who left 99 sheep in the fold and went out to look for the one that was lost. Do you want to be more like Him? Care about people; let Him love a hurting world through you!

DO YOU NEED PRAYER?

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DAY 25 Let Him comfort you

'Praise be to ... the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort' 2 Corinthians 1:3 NIV

GOD CAN make you comfortable in the most uncomfortable places. He can pull you out of situations you thought you'd be stuck in forever. He can give you peace even in the midst of trauma. Before your life is over, you will live, love and experience loss. Losing some things will actually help you to appreciate the things you still have. It's the taste of failure that makes success so sweet. How can you celebrate victory unless you've known defeat? You'll live each day not knowing what tomorrow holds, but knowing that God holds all your tomorrows. They're not in the hands of your boss, your broker, your friend or anybody else. Nor are they in your hands to manipulate and control.

No, all your tomorrows are in God's hands! So whatever you do, get to know Him; because you will need Him and He will be there for you. He'll be there when everybody and everything else has gone. He'll be there for you in the dark places. His promise to you is, '...Weeping may endure for a night, but joy comes in the morning' (Psalm 30:5 AMP) – however long the night, morning always comes and with it His joy. Just think, no matter how dark the night, you've always lived to see the morning, right? Somehow His grace has protected you, provided for you, secured you, calmed and comforted you and brought you through. Times and seasons change, but not God. He is always 'the God of all comfort' and He's watching over you today!

Prayer Point

I pray today, Lord, that I might be able to understand more of Your character, more of Your heart and more of who You are; that my relationship with You outgrows my failings and that Your correcting hand would be on my life to bring it in line with Your will. In Jesus' name, Amen.

DAY 26 Fruitful life

'No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful' Hebrews 12:11 NIV

WHY would a loving God permit us to experience pain, even a small dose? To get our attention! To bring about change! Listen: 'God disciplines us for our good' (Hebrews 12:10 NIV). God's intention is always to nudge us lovingly, wisely and persistently, toward the life and character we desire but can't reach without His help. The Bible says, 'No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace' (Hebrews 12:11 NIV). What does God want? Fruit! He knows that without regular pruning, the vine will only live up to a fraction of its potential. That's why we all have our 'pruning stories'.

God's discipline usually starts because of a sin problem; a behaviour or attitude that's blighting

our lives that we haven't confronted. It ends when the problem ends. The discipline doesn't have to continue! It's up to us! We only experience pain as long as we hang on to our sin. Does discipline feel good? No! Is discipline the way of committed love? Absolutely! Satan would love to convince you that because your Father is dealing firmly with you, you're a worthless loser. The opposite is true! Only if you've never received discipline should you doubt His favour.

The Bible says, 'If you are without chastening, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate and not sons' (Hebrews 12:8 NKJ). Today, you can lengthen or shorten the discipline process in your life – it's entirely up to you!

DAY 27 Everybody does time in the cave

'David ... escaped to the cave of Adullam' 1 Samuel 22:1 NIV

PSYCHOLOGIST DANIEL GOLEMAN says that, above all else what distinguishes top performers in every field is their 'enthusiasm and persistence in the face of setbacks'. Your response to failure is more important than your IQ, looks, charm or money.

So why does failure energise some people and paralyse others? For a while, David couldn't lose – everything he touched turned to gold. Samuel anointed him to be the next king; he defeated Goliath; Saul chose him as a warrior and musician; the army loved him and wrote songs about him. But then he lost it all. His job and his marriage failed; Samuel, his old mentor, died; his best friend Jonathan couldn't help him and Saul's soldiers hounded him so much that he had to hide in a cave.

Eventually, everybody does time in the cave! It's where you end up when all your earthly supports are gone; your boss gives you your P45; you're in debt up to your ears; your dreams have shattered; you've lost someone dear to you; your health is failing. But the hardest part about being there is thinking, 'God's forgotten me. I'll never get out. I'll die here.'

The cave is where you learn things about yourself you could never learn anywhere else. It's also where God does His best work in moulding and shaping you, because now all your other props are gone. Now all you've got is God, and you discover He's enough! It's where your worst inadequacies confirm that you're out of your league, and God sends His power to flow through your weakness. Welcome to the cave.

Prayer Point

Lord, I pray that through the times when parts of my life seem as if they are being stripped away, You would truly mould and shape me for the future. I pray that You give me a new sense of purpose. Let me learn about myself in this season, to end up being someone that has a deeper walk with You. Amen.

DAY 28 The cycle of lethargy

'Go after them. You will surely recover everything that was taken from you!' 1 Samuel 30:8 NLT

AFTER LOSING EVERYTHING at Ziklag, David could have said, 'I think I'll just stay in this cave the rest of my life and let Saul be king.' Instead, he asked God what his next move should be and God said, 'Go after them; you will recover everything that was taken from you!' When David obeyed these words he got back everything he'd lost and re-established his leadership.

Taking action is very powerful! One single step forward can rob failure of its destructive power. The reason failure paralyzes us is that we don't take the time to understand why we failed in the first place and then work to change it. Instead, we wait for some outside force or person to rescue us, when all the time God's calling us to act. When you're worried about failing, the worst thing you can do is nothing! Failure can be a

tremendous motivator, especially when it drives you to make changes leading to new levels of understanding.

Writing about what he terms the 'cycle of lethargy', psychologist David Burns says, 'When I'm faced with a challenge and do nothing, it leads to distorted thoughts that I'm helpless, hopeless and beyond change. Those in turn lead to destructive emotions; loss of energy and motivation, damaged self-esteem and feeling overwhelmed. The end-result is self-defeating behaviour; procrastination, avoidance and escapism. These negative emotions reinforce one another and the whole cycle spirals downward.' When you act and win, it's glorious. When you act and lose, it's painful, but it's not failure. Failure is refusing to act at all!



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