

Meditations for grieving hearts



GOD'S
GRACE
IN THE VALLEY

Faythelma Bechtel

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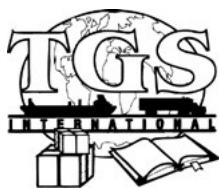
CAM's policy is to use the King James Version of the Bible except in cases, such as in this book, when a few verses from another translation may be quoted for clarity. In such cases, the version used will be noted in the text.

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Dedication

In loving memory of my dear daughter, Sonya, who accepted the challenges of life and death with great fortitude and faith.

Preface

Like my first book of devotional meditations, *Reflections of God's Grace in Grief*, this book is born out of the tears, sorrow, and pain of my journeys with God and my loved ones through the valley of the shadow of death. As I reflect on those years, they seem like a mysterious nightmare, yet God's compassion and care have been a reality.

I cared for my mother for seven years in our home before she passed away on July 12, 2004. All through her life she had struggled with enormous mood swings. Today her disorder would be diagnosed as bipolar. Caring for her had been a colossal challenge that left me emotionally frazzled.

On February 14, 2005, our oldest daughter, Cynthia Bechtel Kropf, was diagnosed with inflammatory breast cancer, a rare, fast-growing cancer. Seven months later, she passed away, leaving her devoted husband and four children ages twelve to eighteen. She was buried on September 18, 2005, which would have been her forty-third birthday.

In August 2005, a month before our daughter's death, my husband was diagnosed with frontotemporal dementia. The doctor explained that he would regress into childhood and then become like an infant. He said that given Wilmer's strong, healthy body and his age of sixty-five, he could be an invalid for as long as twenty years. How difficult to accept this news! However, Wilmer's health and behavior deteriorated much more quickly than the doctor anticipated.

Life became a continual hassle and trauma. Changing my husband's diapers, cleaning up his messes, and finding him eating garbage, running off, and getting into everything that was not locked up were the events that made up my day.

Working through the loneliness, the crushed dreams, and then the grief of losing our daughter and seeing my husband deteriorate were almost more than my body and mind could handle. I was carrying a load I could not bear. My cry was, "Why, Lord, why can't I handle this? You said you would not give me more than I could bear. What is wrong with me?"

In 2007, we moved Wilmer to a care facility. I was forced to admit I could no longer do what I felt was my duty. However, Wilmer seemed to adjust well and was always smiling when I went to visit him. On April 21, 2008, just two days past his sixty-eighth birthday, Wilmer died of pneumonia, although dementia was the underlying cause of his death.

I was still walking the dark valley of widowhood when I received a life-changing

call from Sonya, our youngest biological daughter. She called the week before Thanksgiving, in 2009. “I’m in the hospital, testing, finding nothing, but I have terrible pain.” Her call came as a shock. I had no idea she had been sick.

I made an instant decision. “I’ll be there as soon as I can get packed and get a ticket.” The distance I would need to travel from Oregon to Missouri seemed insignificant compared to my daughter’s pain.

I wrestled with God over fears about my daughter’s condition. God couldn’t be asking me to give up another dear daughter! Surely God would touch and heal her. However, she needed several surgeries on her intestine and colon. After the surgeries, we waited several days for the biopsy report to come back. One day four sober-faced doctors entered the hospital room and told us, “It is cancer.” As soon as they disappeared from the room, I leaned over on the bed and wept. I thought I couldn’t bear it. Why? Why? Why? Her three-year-old needed her. The rest of her family needed her. My finite human heart simply could not understand what God was doing.

Sonya took the news much more calmly than I, though she seemed in shock. But she chose to accept whatever God had planned for her. She was weak and slow in recovering from surgery. Still, she was ready to try some treatment. After a downhill struggle, Sonya passed away at her home in La Monte, Missouri, on May 12, 2010, three months before her forty-first birthday.

Only God knows the heart-wrenching pain of giving up yet another loved one. How often must I remind myself that my children are God’s? They are gifts to me only as long as He deems necessary to fulfill His plan. In the midst of the pain, I had the peaceful joy of knowing that Sonya is fully recovered and resting in Christ’s loving care, enjoying the presence of Jesus with her sister and father. How I long to see my loved ones up there!

Sonya’s passing has wrung from my heart another collection of devotional meditations. Where could I go with a broken heart but to the Lord and His Word? Searching for comfort from God’s Word, writing these meditations, and reading poetry and quotes from other hurting hearts have definitely been part of my healing process.

At the end of each devotional, I have provided questions that you may answer in your heart or record in your journal. Writing your responses provides a way to look back on them and observe your growth in the healing process.

My prayer is that these words will encourage and comfort your heart during your difficult journey through whatever dark valley you may be traversing. Life is never the same after losing a loved one, but life can be good again with God.

*A fellow traveler,
Faythelma Bechtel*

Acknowledgments

- A special thanks to my son Nolan, who preached many sermons—unknowingly for me—inspiring me, convicting me, directing my mind to pastures of peace and comfort, moving my focus from the reality of my humanity and my pain to the reality of God’s greatness.
- I owe a special debt of gratitude to my daughter-in-law Annette for her ability to empathize and to offer words of encouragement. I thank God for her place in my heart.
- Most of all, I thank my Good Shepherd for walking with me through the dark valley. I thank Him for carrying me when my strength failed. I thank Him for His compassion and understanding and for the lessons learned in the valley.

Journaling Through the Valley

This devotional book with questions is intended to help you recognize and work through emotions that may be causing physical and spiritual illness. Whatever your loss or distress, we pray these meditations will increase your faith and reliance on the Good Shepherd.

Journaling is not so much about giving the right answers as it is about being honest with God, opening your heart and telling Him just how it is at the moment. God is interested in your feelings and cares about them. He is even more concerned about how you respond to the trials and pains that come into your life. His Word teaches you how to respond and deals with your attitude.

Grief has no orderly sequence. It enters the heart in chaotic confusion. One week you may be dealing with one emotion and another week a different one. One day you may have one fear and the next day face a different fear. One minute you may be in tears and the next minute you may be smiling. The emotional seesaw of grief is like riding the surging waves of the wild ocean.

Examine this brief list of losses and identify those that have been or are yours. When you think of your losses, think of your attitudes and responses; then always remember God's mercies and grace in your life. When the scales do not seem to balance, remember the greatest mercy and grace is still to come to the faithful—eternity with your Savior.

LOSSES

innocence	wealth	sibling by death
purity	necessities	parent by death
caring parents	friends	friend by death
parent by abandonment	security	child by death
happy childhood	physical ability	companion by death
stable home	mental ability	companion by divorce
health	love	material possessions

Whatever your loss, whatever your pain, you will find it beneficial and healing to journal as you journey through your dark valley. So if you desire healing, dig deep and be honest. Allow God to adjust your attitudes and responses. Here are a few pointers as you journal:

- Always write the date of entry. This will give you a reference point to look back at and see your progress.
- You do not need to work straight through this journal. If the next meditation does not seem appropriate for your present need, skip it and page on to something that fits your day.
- Never allow the lines given to limit your writing. Have a notebook ready for the overflow. Always list the page number of the devotional book on your notebook page.
- From meditation to meditation, you will find some of the same or nearly the same questions. As you work through this book, you may discover that your feelings about the same question change at different points and times.
- Use a concordance to find the needed Scriptures.
- At the end of each lesson write a statement of what you have learned or what meant the most to you in that meditation.

Emotions are a gift from God, never meant to rule your life, but meant to improve and broaden your experiences. The emotions that come with grief, sorrow, and loss are necessary to help you heal. They are not all wrong. What you do with the emotions is what makes them beneficial or harmful. For that reason you need to bring your thoughts into captivity and your feeling into control, without denying them or burying them.

Your knowledge of God and your relationship with Him will have the greatest bearing on how you deal with your grief. What do you know about the attributes of God? How have they helped you through life thus far? Do you have a head knowledge or a heart knowledge of the greatness of God? Studying the attributes of God, thinking on them, and thanking God for them, will help you work through your grief with a greater peace and assurance than you ever believed possible.

PART ONE

FACING THE PAIN

Guests

Pain knocked upon my door and said
That she had come to stay;
And though I would not welcome her
But bade her go away,

She entered in. Like my own shade
She followed after me,
And from her stabbing, stinging sword
No moment was I free.

And then one day another knocked
Most gently at my door.
I cried, "No, Pain is living here,
There is not room for more."

And then I heard His tender voice,
" 'Tis I, be not afraid."
And from the day He entered in,
What difference it has made!

For though He did not bid her leave,
(My strange, unwelcome guest)
He taught me how to live with her.
Oh, I had never guessed

That we could dwell so sweetly here,
My Lord and Pain and I,
Within this fragile house of clay
While years slip slowly by!

—Martha Snell Nicholson

Search Me

Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting. Psalm 139:23–24

How fitting this prayer is when I am going through a trial. Trying times set my mind rolling, often in the wrong direction. Some days my thoughts recycle and recycle; some nights my mind will not shut off or quiet down. How can I survive this pain? How can I endure this heartbreak? How should I deal with this problem? Why is God letting this happen to me?

Recycling, for the most part, is beneficial and economical when it refers to bottles, cardboard, and paper. However, when it comes to recycling negative thoughts, the results are just the opposite—loss of sleep, energy, and creativity. This leads to stress, physical and mental pain, and spiritual distress. There is nothing beneficial or economical about recycling negative thoughts.

In a time of grief or trial, we have many questions and problems. But analyzing, scrutinizing, and dissecting them repeatedly will do us no good. Some questions have no sensible answers; trying to solve them muddles the brain. When the mind gets into the recycling mode, it is time to feed it some good thoughts to recycle. Here are some examples:

“How precious also are thy thoughts unto me, O God! how great is the sum of them! If I should count them, they are more in number than the sand: when I awake, I am still with thee” (Psalm 139:17–18).

“For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the LORD, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end” (Jeremiah 29:11).

“Commit thy works unto the LORD, and thy thoughts shall be established” (Proverbs 16:3).

“For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts” (Isaiah 55:8–9).

When life becomes complicated and agonizing, let’s ask God to help us recycle thoughts of Him. It is not in man to understand all the purposes of God—that would make him equal with God.

Lord, help me to remember that my thoughts control my daily walk.

