

FACING YOUR GIANTS



FACING THE GIANT OF

**GRIEF
& LOSS**

UCB UNITED
CHRISTIAN
BROADCASTERS



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Losing someone or something dear to us is an experience that we all face at some point in life. 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.

But even as we walk through the darkest nights of our soul, we are not alone (see Psalm 27:10) and we do not 'grieve as others do who have no hope' (1 Thessalonians 4:13 ESV). 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.

Facing the giant of grief and loss is a journey – not a single moment – that we take one step at a time. And we won't 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, seemingly hanging on by a mere thread, don't turn back or let go. 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 NLT). 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).

The Facing Your Giants 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. There are 28 readings from Bob Gass, author of the UCB Word For Today, to help you practise 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 ESV). With the help of our great God, you can face any giant in front of you.

Every Blessing,



David L'Herroux - Chief Executive, United Christian Broadcasters

PS If working your way through this booklet raises any issues and you would like prayer, please do contact UCB Prayerline. You can find out more at ucb.co.uk/pray or ring us on 01782 363 000

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' (Matthew 5:4 KJV). 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 we 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 NKJV). 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 NKJV

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 NKJV). 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 NKJV). The God who spoke those words is your God!

DAY 5

Who knows? God knows!

'The secret things belong to the LORD our God.'

Deuteronomy 29:29 NKJV

The Bible says: 'Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding' (Proverbs 3:5 NKJV). That Scripture is easy to quote but hard to live by, especially when tragedy and loss touch our lives and we don't understand why. There are times when we pray and God gives us answers, and there are times when we pray and He gives us peace. 'Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done. Then you will experience God's peace, which exceeds anything we can understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus' (Philippians 4:6-7 NLT). In times of pain and loss, here are two Scriptures you can stand on: 1) 'The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but those things which are revealed belong to us.' When it comes to understanding things – we have our territory and God has His. And ours is limited to what He decides to reveal to us. Paul, who wrote half the New Testament by divine revelation, acknowledged, 'We know in part' (1 Corinthians 13:9 NKJV). At best, we will always be limited in our understanding. 2) 'And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose' (Romans 8:28 NKJV). Sometimes God explains things to us, and other times He stamps them 'Will explain later.' So when you're tempted to throw up your hands in despair and say, 'Who knows?', remind yourself, 'God knows!' And today remind yourself that He's working things out for your good and His glory

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 NIV

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?

DAY 7

God's not finished with you yet

'For God has appointed another seed for me.'

Genesis 4:25 NKJV

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 a son and named him Seth, "For God has appointed another seed for me instead of Abel, whom Cain killed"' (Genesis 4:25 NKJV). 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 every day 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 NKJV

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 NKJV). 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 (see 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 Corinthians 13:12 KJV). Will our children still be children and our parents still be old? No. 'When Christ 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 to sonship, 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 NKJV

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 (see 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 NLT). 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? Of course, 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.

Divine appointment

'In My Father's house are many mansions.'

John 14:2 NKJV

Will there be many people in heaven? Yes, a multitude from every nation on earth. But will we be able to understand each other? Of course, 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. Did 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 NIV

God does not punish the innocent for the sins of the guilty. Listen: 'The child will not share the guilt of the parent, nor will the parent share the guilt of the child' (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' (Exodus 34:6 KJV). If you're used to thinking about Him any other way, change the way you think! Jeremiah writes, 'This I call 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 NIV). 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.

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 12:13 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. 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!

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, Amen.

DAY 14

Living in war mode!

'He will renew your life and sustain you in your old age.'

Ruth 4:15 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 KJV). 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! 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 and spent the nights lying in sackcloth 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.

‘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 17

Nothing ‘just happens’!

‘Every purpose of the LORD shall be performed’

Jeremiah 51:29 NKJV

Even in the midst of pain, separation and disappointment, you’re still in God’s protective custody. With Him nothing ‘just happens’. Coincidence is what takes place when He decides to remain anonymous! Look at Jonah: God sent him to Nineveh, but instead he boarded a ship headed in the opposite direction. Now it ‘just happened’ that a storm blew up. He was dumped overboard, a great fish swallowed him, threw him up three days later, and the first words he heard when he hit the beach were, ‘Go to Nineveh.’ You can go the easy way or the hard way, the choice is yours! One thing is certain – every purpose of God shall be performed! A little girl was running to get to Sunday school on time, praying, ‘Lord, don’t let me be late.’ Suddenly she tripped, fell and got her dress dirty. Getting back up she brushed herself off and said, ‘Lord, You know I don’t want to be late, but You don’t have to shove!’

Sometimes God gives us a shove to: a) get us out of our rut, or b) get us over our fear. That’s because He’s in charge. He’ll ‘take you, break you, and make you’, in order to carry out His will. Satan has never once been able to abort God’s plan. In sickness, poverty, abandonment, betrayal or mistreatment, nothing ever ‘just happens’. Behind the scenes, God is orchestrating everything. Romans 8:28 tells us that ‘all things work together...according to His purpose’ (NKJV) including the things you’re going through right now!

PRAYER POINT

I pray that I can give thanks in everything, Lord. Help me to understand that what I go through today may help me or someone else years down the line. Help me to develop grace to get through and a thankful heart. So thank You today, Lord, for the very air I breathe, and for every little thing around me. I give thanks!



Trusting God when there are no answers

'The secret things belong to the Lord.'

Deuteronomy 29:29 NIV

Life's losses leave us hurting and wondering. Cancer takes a young mother or father. Divorce strikes your happy home. Financial ruin devastates your retirement plans. A child goes to jail, is killed or commits suicide. Such times raise questions which are difficult, if not impossible to answer. We examine the circumstances again and again. We speculate about the details, searching for clues that might make some sense and make it easier for us to bear. We turn the spotlight on ourselves, others, even God, wondering what could or should have been done differently that might have prevented this. We turn to friends, fellow believers and pastors only to hear what sounds like religious platitudes and inadequate attempts to minimise our pain. When answers don't seem forthcoming and the heavens are silent, what should you do? Here are two Scriptures to help you in such times: 1) 'The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but those things which are revealed belong to us' (Deuteronomy 29:29 NKJV). When it comes to understanding things, we have our territory, God has His. And ours is limited to what He decides to reveal. At that point you must 'Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding' (Proverbs 3:5 NKJV) 2) 'And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God...' (Romans 8:28 KJV). God may explain it to you, or He may not. But He's 'the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End' (Revelation 22:13 NKJV), which means, He has a plan and He's working it out for our good and His glory. So trust Him!

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 NKJV). 2) Jesus shows us how to grieve! 'Jesus wept' (John 11:35 NIV), 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 NKJV). Wow! The 'Uppertaker' puts every undertaker out of business! Don't you love it?

PRAYER POINT

Lord, help me to connect with those that need something or someone in their grief. 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. Help me, Lord, to be a channel of Your comfort, love and peace.

Let God comfort you

'God is...the source of all comfort.'

2 Corinthians 1:3 NLT

When you lose someone you love, you go through a grieving process. And God will comfort you and walk you through it. Jesus said, 'Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted' (Matthew 5:4 NIV). Grieving is the healthy way to process your emotions, to express your pain and move beyond it. Recovery doesn't happen overnight; it happens in proportion to the size of your loss. Only small losses are healed quickly. Zig Ziglar says: 'The longest twenty hours of my life were those right after my daughter's death. When making her funeral arrangements, I had to listen to a salesman who was an incessant talker, and who told me thirty times that he wasn't a salesman. Twice I had to leave the room; I simply couldn't handle him. The night before, half asleep and half awake, I kept thinking my daughter was wondering when her daddy was coming to get her. The next morning I took a walk, praying and crying the whole way. When I returned, the Lord spoke to me in such a distinct way: "She's fine. She's with me, and you're going to be fine too.

I'm all you need. Keep walking. Keep talking. Keep praying. Keep crying.'" Grief and loss can't be solved, but they are experiences you don't have to go through alone. The best-known Psalm in Scripture says, 'Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for You are with me' (Psalm 23:4 NKJV). The sun will shine again. 'Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning' (Psalm 30:5 KJV).
Your joy will return – God promises it!

DAY 21

'If I could only know for sure'

'And then there will be one huge family reunion.'

1 Thessalonians 4:17 MSG

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. Then the rest of us...will be caught up with them...to meet the Master...then there will be one huge family reunion' (1 Thessalonians 4:15-17 MSG). 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 MSG). 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.

He can make it up to you

'My father and mother walked out and left me, but GOD took me in.'

Psalm 27:10 MSG

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 MSG). 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 NIVUK). When you feel like an orphan, He can be to you an 'Everlasting Father' (Isaiah 9:6 NIV) 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.

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.

Be Christ-like, stay in touch

'Better is a neighbour nearby than a brother far away.'

Proverbs 27:10 NKJV

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 NKJV). 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 (see 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!

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 lawyer, 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 AMPC) – 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. Thank You, Lord, that in times of distress and pain, You're there to bring comfort and peace. Thank You for being the light in my moments of darkness. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Healing for Your Grief

'He heals the brokenhearted.'

Psalms 147:3 NIV

One of the most moving scenes in Scripture is Jesus weeping at the graveside of Lazarus. It's not that He was powerless to change the situation, which He did, but that He empathises with us in our time of loss. 'He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds.'

The Lord didn't promise to protect us from pain and loss, but to bring us through it. Perhaps these suggestions will help: 1) Don't isolate. Expand your 'family.' 'Better a nearby friend than a distant family' (Proverbs 27:10 MSG). If you don't have family nearby, reach out to caring people who are close by. As part of a group you discover that you're not alone, that mourning isn't sickness or self-indulgence, and that sharing brings healing. 2) Don't deny your loss. 'The memory of the just is blessed' (Proverbs 10:7 KJV). When you're around friends, don't hesitate to talk about your loss. When you do, you're saying it's okay for them to share their memories too. A burden shared is a burden lightened. 3) Don't try to do it all. 'There is a time to cry' (Ecclesiastes 3:4 NCV). Because grief is draining, you'll need more rest than usual. So while your ability to function is reduced, let others help with the everyday stuff like cooking, cleaning and shopping until you feel stronger. 4) Don't neglect your legitimate needs. Respect your body by using the acronym D.E.E.R. (drink, eat, exercise, rest) to help you stay focused and set healthy boundaries.

Nobody knows how you feel better than you,
so give yourself permission to say, 'No thanks'
or 'Some other time' without feeling guilty.

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.

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 paralyses 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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