

**Devotional Thoughts :: GRIEF****GRIEF - posted by Gwammy (), on: 2007/6/18 1:21**

Precious friend, is your heart broken? Are you in utter despair, not knowing where to turn or whom to trust with your crushing burdens? If so, then please read this message of comfort and hope for yourself and others passing through the waters of trouble and fires of affliction.

Isaiah speaks of the "day of grief and desperate sorrow" (Isaiah 17:11). But, my dear friend, "The Lord shall give thee rest from thy sorrow, and from thy fear" (Isaiah 14:3). Yes, I realize that in your anguish it seems impossible that darkness will again be light and despair will turn to hope.

My grieving brother or sister, I walk in the valley of grief with you, for we lost our oldest son in a terrible tragedy. Because of this I would like to share with you the love of a most merciful and tender Father, as He led me through the valley of sorrow on to the mountain of hope and trust again.

My "day of grief and desperate sorrow" began at what is supposed to be the happiest season of the year. Chuck called from his out-of-town college to tell us he wanted to bring his girl friend home two days later to spend the Christmas holidays with us. That evening and the next day I cleaned and shopped, happily anticipating their arrival. We would be crowded--Chuck had four younger brothers--but we would manage very happily. Imagine the shock when, a day earlier than he was expected, we found his car with all his possessions, but not him. Then we heard his heart-tearing scream and the shot that killed him immediately.

It's a rending experience to close out your child's life--to add a death certificate to the birth certificate. Chuck's life held so much promise. He was a brilliant, stately, dignified young man who often said he wanted the best in life.

Chuck's books revealed perhaps more than he would have wanted us to know. He had marked such lines as "Fortune, honor, beauty, youth, are but blossoms dying! All our joys are but toys ... All is hazard that we have! ... Secret fates guide our states ... " I'll never know what one circumstance or combination of circumstances prompted this desperate final act. It was over three years later that one of his friends finally told me that he was trying to get off drugs when he descended into the depths. (Oh friend, if your child is on drugs, God help you both! We had no idea. Back then we knew so little about the drug culture.) Beside the passage on suicide from MacBeth he wrote in small, close letters, "Life has no meaning, no purpose," and on another page the word "nothing" was written and scratched over many times.

The night Chuck died I sank to my knees and boldly demanded of God, in a grief I didn't think possible, that He keep every one of His promises of comfort. In the midst of the demands I kept saying over and over, "Thank You, Father"--for what, I really didn't know and doubted that night if I ever would know. But I was convinced that if I didn't say those words then--right then--I would never say them again. I thought of all the sons, husbands, and brothers who have been killed in all the wars, whose loved ones will never know their whereabouts. At least we knew. I was grasping for straws of comfort! I would like to share with you another thought that surely the Holy Spirit gave me when my brother-in-law came out from the woods and told us that our son was dead: God our Father was there when His Son died. For the first time in my life I felt I understood what our precious Father must have felt and it overwhelmed my heart. How strange that I never gave it any thought before! Perhaps it was because now I felt I could understand in a small way.

That night, after the police and the ambulance were gone, I sunk to my knees and I begged God to work, through this horror, a good that at that moment I did not think possible. Romans 8:28 became my strength in the hours, days, weeks, and months ahead, and for the birthdays and holidays that would no longer be Chuck's to enjoy. I had to know that all things do indeed work together for good--or lose my sanity. Dear friend, I want you to know that God provided in many marvelous ways. It was only God's grace that enabled me to carry on in the face of such totally unexpected anguish.

I learned to lean on my precious Father as never before and God indeed granted me the gift of knowing for a certainty that much good would come of the evil that Satan had wrought. We were told shortly after Chuck's funeral that someone had slipped LSD into a drink Chuck had set down while at a party in Daytona Beach. Chuck himself admitted to me a few weeks before his death that he smoked marijuana. This has convinced me that one of Satan's most powerful weapons against our priceless young people today is drugs. How sad!

Someone at his funeral told me I must accept "God's will." No, friend! Our God does not "will" the agony of mind, heart, and body that has plagued the earth since Adam and Eve lost faith that God knew what was best for them. It surely was not "God's will" for my son to die by his own hand. But it was God's will that I accept what happened and use this tragic circumstance for His glory and for the comfort of others who suffer heartache that seems never-ending. What God always wills for us is to be happy and whole in mind and body. He wants His men, women and children to be at peace with Him and each other. But this peace depends upon our own will and willingness to let Him guide our lives, fortunes, and even, at times, misfortunes.

Many question God's love when something seemingly unbearable happens. I try to view tragedy as a lost-and-found department. We lose someone or something very dear to us, but in the loss we find a treasure far more valuable. I found a loving Shepherd who wants me to live with Him for eternity and will carry me through. Until we are to the point in life when we are forced to admit that there is absolutely nothing we can do about this, then I wonder if we have given ourselves totally to God. The night Chuck died I felt so helpless. My son was dead and there was nothing I could do about it! What a frightening feeling! Another agonizing aspect of sorrow is the possibility that we will never know the answers to many of our whys on this earth. I had a very hard time with this. But we eventually learn that the whys become unimportant. It is what we do with the troubles and sorrows that matter.

I learned to thank God as never before for blessings I had taken for granted all my life. Particularly in grief, a spirit of thanksgiving is a simple yet most profound antidote to the self-defeating feelings of anger, resentment, guilt, and self-pity that so often accompany an incredible sorrow. It amazed me what was in my heart. I was to discover that grief is a sieve that brings up out its swirling waters the deformities of our hearts that we didn't even know existed. I was amazed at the anger and hate that gripped me. My Christianity was certainly in question!

I discovered that no matter how bad my problem is, others have suffered worse trials. How my heart ached as I listened to other parents recount the years of agony they have gone through with children on drugs. Some end up in mental institutions. Some struggle to recover a normal life. Others rest as our son is resting. I will never forget the agony of a father as he sobbed out the horrible details of how his son, on drugs, shot himself to death in the house and the blood ran down the boy's bedroom door. I don't know how that poor father kept sane!

I learned that only in sharing comfort are we comforted: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God" 2 Corinthians 1:3-4. Everyone has problems--deep wounds of the spirit. "The souls of the wounded cry out for help" Job 24:12 NIV. I found many wounded souls! I also began to understand that the person who truly cares about others doesn't constantly load them down with his own aches and pains, either of body or heart. This can be selfish and cruel.

William Barclay, in *The Letters to the Corinthians*, relates the story told by H.L. Gee about two men who met to transact some business during the war. "The one was full of how the train in which he had traveled had been attacked from the air. He would not stop talking about the excitement, the danger, the narrow escape. The other man said quietly, "Well, let's get on with our business now. I'd like to get away fairly early because my house was demolished by a bomb last night."

A certain mental picture helped me greatly. Picture yourself carrying in one hand your suitcase of troubles. It's heavy, and you feel weighted down on one side. Along comes another, weak and tired, with his suitcase of troubles but, unlike you, he can barely walk under his load. The Christian thing for you to do is to offer to carry your brother's troubles, thereby freeing him and balancing your own load.

Alexander Maclaren beautifully expresses the strange conjunction of joy and sorrow: "The highest joy to the Christian almost always comes through suffering. No flower can bloom in Paradise which is not transplanted from Gethsemane. No one can taste of the fruit of the tree of life, that has not tasted of the fruits of the tree of Calvary. The crown is after the cross." Kahlil Gibran, in his essay on joy and sorrow in his book *The Prophet* writes: "The deeper that sorrow carves into your being, the more joy it can contain." And Homer observes: "Even his griefs are a joy long after to one who remembers all that he wrought and endured."

"Being punished isn't enjoyable while it is happening--it hurts! But afterwards we can see the result, a quiet growth in grace and character." Hebrews 12:11, TLB. We all flinch from the unexpected, from pain and suffering. But " ... the Lord upholds all who fall, and raises up all who are bowed down" (Psalm 145:14); "Weeping may endure for a night, but joy comes in the morning." Psalm 30:5; "Affliction will not rise up the second time" (Nahum 1:9). What beautiful and encouraging promises!

In 2 Corinthians 4:8 Paul says: "We are hard-pressed on every side, yet not crushed; we are perplexed, but not in despair." How can this possibly be? Let's consult Philippians 4:6 and 7: "Be anxious for nothing; but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus."

Here, friend, is the practical way to deal with despair. It covers all the circumstances of life and gives us the solution: prayer and thanksgiving. The word "supplication" means to pray for a particular need. What a great Father we have!

D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones tells us in his book *Spiritual Depression, Its Causes and Cure*, "Would you like to be rid of ... depression? The first thing you have to do is to say farewell now once and forever to your past. Realize that it has been covered and blotted out in Christ. Never look back again. Say: "It is finished, it is covered by the Blood of Christ." Thank You, Father!

Matthew and Mark tell us: "My God, my God, why have You forsaken me?" (Matthew 27:46; Mark 15:34). Luke gives us more hope: "Father, into Your hands I commit my spirit" (Luke 23:46). But John, the beloved of Jesus, gives us the insight: "It is finished" (John 19:30). Indeed, the sacrifice has been made and the work of redemption finished so we can have hope of everlasting happiness. It is finished! Whatever happens in between is covered by the bookends of Jesus's birth and death.

My greatest anxiety for weeks after my son's death was his salvation. It haunted me. But two dear editor friends within hours of each other quoted this same verse, and I accept it as a sign from my Father that my mind is forever at rest on this matter: "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" (Genesis 18:25). Of course He will! When we lose a loved one, we must learn to say, "It is finished," and know that God will rightly judge. Too, some presume to know who is saved and who is lost. Because Chuck took his own life, there were some who told me that he would not be saved. My friend, only God knows what was on Chuck's mind and heart that night. How cruel of these well-meaning Christians! It reminds me of the day I went to see my bed-ridden and dying sister-in-law and she was in tears. She told me about the three women who came to comfort her. They told her that if she had enough faith she could be cured and get up and walk. I was outraged. It took me the whole afternoon to convince Dorothy that God doesn't cure everybody. In fact, we all die! We talked about Paul and his thorn and God's grace: "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness" (2 Corinthians 12:9).

This verse became very meaningful to me after both Dorothy's and Chuck's deaths. We wonder how we will manage after something enormous alters our life. Paul's life was transformed on the Road to Damascus. I think in some ways sorrow is our road to Damascus. It fells us and makes us blind and then our kind Father tells us He will give us the grace to bear it, even though we will carry the scar to our grave. I knew that I would never forget my first-born; the scar of remembrance would be there as scars from surgeries I've had. But I also knew that I would recover from the initial intense hurt, as I recovered from the surgeries. This thought really helped in the first months! I knew that God's grace could not remove the scar, but the scar could--as Robert Schuller so eloquently puts it--become a star for me, to guide me in a kinder and gentler direction toward my hurting brothers and sisters. Another thought: those of us who have been gifted with the knowledge and love of God need a greater foundation. As a writer said, "The ship in the high wind needs plenty of ballast. When we build high we must also build low--the lofty building needs a deep foundation." Sorrow builds the deep foundation as joy builds the high sails! God is shifting our ballast. He also promises an abundant provision of grace, for there are some circumstances in life that we cannot alter and that God does not see fit to alter. Inward strength to endure is a great manifestation of the acceptance of God's will and His grace. Outwardly we may be weary and heartbroken, but we can claim the promises of God and enjoy that inward peace that only God can give.

Adversities are God's sieve to help us discover what is most important in our lives. Joseph Hall tells us, "The most generous vine, if not pruned, runs out into many superfluous stems, and grows at last weak and fruitless: so doth the best man if he be not cut short in his desires, and pruned with afflictions." We don't choose affliction, but it may be the only way God can redirect our lives.

When a person is called to rest early in life, Isaiah 57:1 is of great solace: "Merciful men are taken away, while no one considers that the righteous is taken away from evil." It is so difficult to accept the death of your child before he has had the opportunity to partake of life fully. I was told of a mother who prayed desperately that her son might recover from an automobile accident, refusing to accept the possibility that he might die. God answered her prayer, and the boy recovered. But his subsequent life was the tragedy. After years of causing his mother all kinds of grief, he was finally killed in a fight. Perhaps the mother should have simply prayed, "Thy will be done, Lord, and whatever is best I accept it, for I know You

will give me the strength and grace to bear it."

In unspeakable grief it is difficult to believe that the sun will shine again, that we will again be touched by the beauty of the flowers and the rainbow after the rain, that music will once again bring quietness of spirit. Often in overwhelming sorrow the very things that should comfort us only serve to bring even more sadness because they remind us that we shared them with our loved one.

When tragedy strikes suddenly, sleep can be impossible. I prayed to be spared nightmares, for Chuck's scream etched deeply into my heart. My prayer was answered in a way that caused me to give thanks with an overflowing heart. At this point I want to share something with you that astonished me. The afternoon I received the letter from the publisher telling me he felt the Grief booklet would help many grieving people, I felt very tired, which was unusual. I never took naps then; I worked part-time and was very active. But that afternoon our precious God put me to sleep and gave me a gift.

In this wonderful daydream I was in a room that was totally and purely white. It was as if I was compassed about with clouds but yet it was clearly a room. There were no windows or doors but I didn't feel enclosed or restricted in any way. I wasn't there long when Chuck walked through the cloud. He was so beautiful! I thought him to be about 33 (a figure I wondered about later, because he died just before his 20th birthday), tall which he was in life, and he had long reddish hair, and a beard and mustache, which he never sported in life. But what amazed me was his serenity. He smiled at me and then turned and went back through the cloud. No words were exchanged. I awoke immediately.

I felt overwhelmed! What a gift from our beloved God, I thought. The peace I felt at that moment must be the peace which Jesus spoke of to His disciples: "Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you..." (John 14:27.) I finally shared the dream with a friend and I had to admit that I'm not sure if it was Chuck (who at the time I truly thought it was) or if it was Jesus Himself who I saw. The afternoon I experienced the dream I truly thought it was Chuck, but as time passed and Grief went into a world-wide ministry, I now believe it was Christ Himself who smiled and wordlessly whispered to me not to grieve anymore. He would take it from here. I had done what He wanted me to and the rest I was not even to think about. In his exposition on Mark in *The Interpreter's Bible* (p.652), Halford E. Luccock wrote, "A man's life may have a dull setting ... but if it catches the reflection of the glory of God which is in the face of Jesus Christ, it becomes a burning and a shining light; is given as much meaning and dignity and joy that one of the supreme tragedies is to miss it." I know I caught the reflection of Jesus that afternoon! Precious Father, thank You for healing dreams that encourage us to have faith that all works together for good.

Before our tragedy I felt God didn't want to be bothered with the little, trite parts of our everyday lives, but I have prayed mightily these past months for many little comforts as well as big ones, and each prayer has been answered faithfully. We must not hesitate to bring our requests to Him, no matter how insignificant they may seem, for our loving Father knows that sorrow and its components can be crushing weights on fragile hearts. I take great comfort in the thought that my dear Father is waiting for me to come to Him to have my tears wiped away and to rest my weary head on His shoulder. My earthly father would do no less.

It is vitally important to read God's Word during times of stress. Verses read hastily and indifferently before take on new life and meaning. God gives renewed insight into familiar verses because grief and a desolated spirit changes our perspective on life. Because of the circumstances of Chuck's life--his fear of living and his mode of dying--2 Timothy 1:7 became more meaningful for me: "God has not given us a spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind." Satan gives an unholy spirit. God gives the Holy Spirit.

In almost unbearable heartache one night I decided to read the book of Genesis. Surely God was leading me, for I came across a verse that made me give thanks even in the midst of this horror. Hagar, a mother in grief, cried out, "Let me not see the death of the boy" (Genesis 21:16). Thank You, Father, that I did not see the death of my child!

There are so many verses and chapters in God's priceless Word that give us comfort and hope and joy in sufferings. I personally found my comfort in the Old Testament, and the Book of Job in particular. The Books of Isaiah and Psalms became my spiritual food during this time, too. There were also certain writers who poured balm on my broken spirit.

One of the worst parts of grief is not understanding what has happened and knowing that you may never know. God granted me great comfort from this passage: "The things we may so much desire to do may become a reality after God has proved us in the school of experience, and among our greatest blessings may be counted the thing we were not privileged to do, that would have barred the way from doing the very things best calculated to prepare us for a higher work. The plain, sober duties of real life were essential to prevent the fruitless striving to do things that we were not fitted to do. Our

devised plans often fail that God's plans for us may be a complete success. Oh, it is in the future life we shall see the tangles and mysteries of life, that have so annoyed and disappointed our fond hope, explained. We will see that the prayers and hopes for certain things which have been withheld have been among our greatest blessings" (Anonymous).

God does not wish to destroy us when suffering comes. He wants to refine and sanctify us. When bowed in grief, we should turn to Him for support and love. Joseph was able to say to his brothers: "But as for you, you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good" (Genesis 50:20). Joseph was able to see the hand of God in many instances of unfair suffering in his life. During my own time of grieving, Joseph became a hero and I often reread his life and his graciousness in dealing with situations that most of us could not have handled. It helps if we remember in both good and bad times that God's purpose always is to redeem us. But He will not force salvation on us. If we do not refuse or hinder the workings of His Spirit, He can help us to accept His saving grace in the bad times, too.

I want to stress how important it is to take care in what we read and in the company we seek out during times of affliction. I became very discouraged when certain friends and relatives told me I would never get over the death of my son and the circumstances surrounding it. I finally learned to stay away from even my well-meaning relatives and friends who only made me feel worse. I think it is true that we never forget certain events, but that is far different from never getting over a tragedy. So it is necessary to read positive material and be around positive-thinking people. This is true even in normal times!

Why You?

And now, dear friend, why you for the blizzards of life that temporarily whip off the blossoms and fruit? Because God loves you! He wants to strengthen you so you can be His special ambassador to carry to others His message of hope to a struggling world so in need of comfort and love. If you can see your sorrow as a gift from God (yes, I know this sounds impossible!) then I believe it helps the healing process. I tried to see Chuck's death as his legacy to the world, and that God appointed me his executor to pass on a message of hope and comfort.

In Isaiah 48:10 the Father tells us that He has chosen us in the furnace of affliction. He doesn't want us to while away our lives in comfortable beds when we should be up and doing for others, in spite of our gnawing griefs. I read many times this admonition from Joshua, "Get up! Why do you lie on your face?" (Joshua 7:10b). And He certainly doesn't want us in the local bar drowning our burdened mind and heart in liquid anesthetic. Indeed, we lose a precious blessing that He has just for us, when we try to escape. But He kneels and weeps with us! Oh, friend, please believe that! The shortest and most poignant verse in the Bible is "Jesus wept." How marvelous--the Man of Sorrows, acquainted with our unspeakable griefs, kneeling and weeping with us, His gentle arms enfolding us as we cry out in anguish. Dear friend, what a beautiful thought! There were many dark nights when I felt those arms! In my distress I pictured the Father as giving strength, the Son giving hope, and the Holy Spirit giving wisdom. These we need so urgently, so quickly, so completely, in the darkest moments.

At this point I would like to share with you tried and true steps in dealing with deep grief. Dear friend, I want for you at this moment of your sorrow that peace that only God can give. May He bless you and grant you comfort and calm as you read these practical steps in dealing with what now seems so impossible.

1. Don't constantly talk about your feelings of despair. We need to share, yes, but try to speak of hope. Confine your deepest grief for friends who really do understand. When we constantly talk of the negative aspects of our grief, we make it just that much more difficult to recover. It may be tempting to open your bleeding heart for all to see and suffer with you, but a wound always exposed and being probed doesn't heal. God will provide the balm. Please believe that!

2. Don't worry about eloquent prayers, but do pray. Realize the prayers may be silent or sobbing prayers. In your confusion you may not know what to pray for, but God knows and that is the important thing. Just keep the line open. God understands the temporary static. Don't feel He has lost you or left you because of the way you feel. He, too, walked the earth, He felt pain as we do, He loved as we love, and He felt losses as keenly as--yes, more keenly than--we ever could. Remember that God surely hears these prayers--the silent ones, the weeping ones. He hears them instantly. Our agony deeply touches His heart. The eighth verse of Psalm 56 is a prayer in itself: "Put my tears into Your bottle." How extraordinary! God takes note of every tear, drop by sorrowful drop. The word bottle takes on a holy significance, for it is God's receptacle in which He preserves and then transforms our tears into pearls. What a thought when we feel we cannot go on another hour!

I believe that the greatest prayer we mortals can offer is an ever-present prayer of thanksgiving. Oh, yes, dear hurting so

ul, thanksgiving! But how can you be thankful when struggling under a load too heavy for a human heart to bear? Give it to Jesus, my friend. Right now, as you read this. Pray, "Jesus, please, I beg You, hold this broken, shattered heart of mine in Your gentle hands." Picture Jesus giving it healing, rest and peace. Thank Him, friend, and know that He is healing your heart.

Then open your Bible to Philippians 4 and read over and over these verses. Verse 6: "Be anxious for nothing: but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God." Verse 11: "I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content." Verse 13: "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." Mark these verses. Go to them in moments of searing pain.

3. Count your blessings. Trite, but I have found this to be truly helpful. Charles L. Allen, in his book *All Things Are Possible Through Prayer*, tells of the lady who asked him, "What have I done to deserve this?" His reply was, "Nothing. Neither have you done anything to deserve many of your blessings." Mr. Allen also points out that every blessing has within it the risk of sorrow. If we love, we risk losing the object of that love. But surely, as the saying goes, it is far better to have loved and lost than never to have loved at all. If it helps you, jot down your blessings (you will be surprised to see how many you have); and when grief begins to overwhelm you, read them again. I found this to be particularly helpful. Tangibles such as a note to read can stabilize our emotions and clear our clouded minds.

4. Take one step at a time and one day at a time. We hear this so often, but it becomes a practical necessity in times of extreme suffering. God has promised help for the day and strength for the next agonizing hour, and He has yet to break a promise. It is up to us to cling to that promise. Allow friends and relatives to take over the physical and mental duties for however long you need their help. They want to. Don't deprive them of this Spirit-inspired wish to be of service. Someday they may need you. Thank God for them and accept their help graciously.

At the time of sorrow it is imperative that we keep up our strength. When searching Scripture for comfort, I was impressed with the many promises of actual strength. One of the treasures I discovered in my sorrow was: our God is a practical God. Isaiah 40:29 and 31 became as necessary for my heart as food for my body: "He gives power to the weak, and to those who have no might He increases strength ... But those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint." Our God is a God who "neither faints nor is weary," (Isaiah 40:28b) so He is there for us every moment. But, dear friend, don't run ahead of God! Don't become impatient if He allows you to remain in the valley for a while. There may be lessons we still have to learn. "The hand of the Lord came upon me and brought me out in the Spirit of the Lord, and set me down in the midst of the valley; and it was full of bones" (Ezekiel 37:1).

Adversity is frightening. It also becomes the test of strength, including physical, for stress can affect our physical condition. I tried to understand that when difficult situations come into our lives it is because God knows we are strong enough to endure this and this temporary grief will make us even stronger. Psalm 46:1 assures us that "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble." What a blessed promise! Another thought I would like to share: while reading the Book of Job it occurred to me that it wasn't so much that Job trusted God, but that God trusted Job! For some inexplicable reason, that thought got me through some very bad moments when I thought I was losing it. But I would stop and think, "God trusts you, Pat, to come through this! He's depending on you to bring victory from this."

5. Get busy as soon as possible. This is imperative. I cannot stress it too much. Work keeps mind, heart and body intact. Start jobs that have accumulated over the months and years. If you have a paying job, get back to it as soon as possible. Physical exercise with a friend is most helpful also: jogging, walking, camping, swimming, picnics, tennis, basketball--whatever you like to do--but do it with a friend and do it outdoors whenever possible. Nature has definite healing powers for the hurting hurt.

I believe this is one of the most important steps in dealing with grief. In New England there is an expression used for those in heart pain: "Go out and tell it to the bees." The bees stay busy. Physicians tell us that we use the brain cells of our frontal lobes when we are worried and fearful. Other brain cells control muscular activity. In physical activity we relieve the strain on the cells of the important frontal lobes and allow them to rest from their intense stress. The very worst thing we can do is withdraw from life, crawl into bed, and pull the covers over our heads, and reflect on what an injustice we have been dealt. God's natural world provides the fresh air, sunshine and beauty we so need at all times, but especially in the dark times.

6. Hold on to faith--faith in today and, above all, faith in tomorrow. This perhaps is the most difficult step of all. Does God really know best? Does He really care about our tangled hearts, our shattered dreams, our sleepless nights, our Gethse

mane moments? Oh yes, my dear friend, He does! At the time you may not believe it, but hold on to the reality that when you are trapped in that terrible valley of despair, the everlasting hills are all around you.

In the immediate aftermath of grief we are so tempted to ask why. Indeed, we feel we have a right to know why we have been singled out for such an unbearable burden. We may pass through the futile and self-pitying stage of thinking that no one else suffers as we do. My friend, go next door, to church, to the grocery store, to the halls of Congress, to that friend who seems so carefree, and seek out a fellow sufferer. The world is filled with them! Grief is universal and is no respecter of age or status.

Rather than wasting time and emotion threatening God--"I'll never trust you again, God!"--study His Word. There you will find an answer to your grief, although you may not find the reason why grief is permitted. There are certain pieces to God's puzzle that He reserves for Himself to test our faith. But you will find an answer to wait in faith on God. Faith is simple in definition but enormously difficult in practice. It is admitting and believing that our Father has complete control of our lives. We are not the masters of our fate, as Henley in his poem *Invictus* would have us believe, but we can choose the Master of our fate.

7. Keep in mind that in grief there is a peculiar ministry. I use the word "peculiar" in the sense that it is used in God's Word: set apart, consecrated, exclusively God's. You who have borne sorrows made bearable through a divinely renewed heart and mind have a special work for God. Your heart has been broken up, watered with tears, and planted with God's special seeds so that you may bear the graceful blooms of hope, love and gentleness for others to appropriate in their darkest moments. What a beautiful ministry!

8. Remember that only God knows the end from the beginning. There is a sublime purpose for and in our lives which includes everything that happens to us. Joseph's beginning was full of trials: he was sold by his brothers into slavery and then he was imprisoned for something he didn't do. But he believed, he held on to his faith and he was rewarded. God had a plan for Joseph, and it could only be fulfilled with his cooperation. So it must be with our lives. "Faith never knows where it is being led, but it loves and knows the One Who is leading" (Oswald Chambers).

Job is another example of stability and steadfastness in the face of catastrophe. He lost all, he was afflicted bodily, and yet he could still say, "Though He slay me, yet will I trust him" (Job 13:15). Still another example of Job's complete trust: "The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord" (Job 1:21). In Job 42:10 (KJV) we are told that "The Lord turned the captivity of Job, when he prayed for his friends." The word "captivity" is significant. We become captive to feelings of anger, hate and distrust in extremity of heart or body. When Job prayed for others his captivity was turned and he was given twice the blessings he had before. When sorrow descends on us, it is so easy to be made a captive of self-pity and resentment. But in praying for others, in listening to the even greater burdens others must carry, we can be liberated from our own prison of discontent.

There are well-meaning friends and relatives who tell us that time heals. They are right, it does. But I'm grateful for the advice of a good friend who warned me that before the hurt is lessened it might get much worse. God may ask us to remain in the dark for a while, to learn more lessons and to discover the shadows in our heart that we don't even know we have. Only in the dark can we finally see the Light. The school of sorrow has within its walls a unique kind of education obtained nowhere else.

G.R. Nash writes: "When the famous artist Sir James Thornhill was painting the inside of St. Paul's Cathedral he stepped back one day to view the effects of his work, bringing himself, without knowing it, so near to the edge of the scaffolding that another step would have sent him hurtling down to certain death. His assistant, seeing the danger but not daring to shout lest the shock should make the other lose his balance and his life, rushed forward, then snatching up a brush he rubbed it straight over the painting. Overcome with rage, Sir James sprang forward to save his work, only to be pacified with these words: "I spoiled your painting, Sir James, that I might save your life." (When Days are Dark, p.29.)

It is at these times we must appropriate the precious promises. One of the dearest promises in all the Bible is Revelation 21:4: "And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away." This is the verse on my son's grave.

Think of it, dear weeping friend! No more tears; no more pain in body, mind or heart; no more parting from loved ones. We shall know as we are known; we shall again meet those we have loved. We shall walk hand in hand with our lovely Savior up into the everlasting hills.

Thank You, Father!