Julie Yarbrough

Beyond The Broken Heart

Daily Devotions for Your Grief Journey
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BEYOND THE BROKEN HEART:
DAILY DEVOTIONS FOR YOUR GRIEF JOURNEY
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The death of one you love is like the death of a part of yourself. Grief is the outpouring of emotion and pain that expresses how you feel because of what has happened in your life. As you grieve, you recognize that your life is shaped forever by your experience of the unalterable circumstance of death for the one you have loved and lost.

We all have a story. “We spend our years as a tale that is told” (Psalm 90:9 KJV). In 2004, my beloved husband, Leighton Farrell, died ninety days after the sudden, unexpected onset of an overwhelmingly terminal disease. He was a United Methodist minister for more than fifty years. He was the great love of my life. When he died, my heart shattered into one million small pieces. For a while, I was certain I would die of a broken heart.

Though my soul survived largely intact, I found myself in frightening, unfamiliar spiritual territory. As I sat alone a few days after Leighton died, I was immobilized by shock as a tidal wave of emotion engulfed my entire being. In that moment I came face to face with the inescapable reality of grief.

There was no other name for the indescribable sense of helplessness and the utter hopelessness that threatened to overwhelm me completely. From deep within I knew that I must go through grief—that I could not deny it or delay it. I could not wait; I sensed that grief might destroy me if I did not experience it completely.

Like you, I have faced death in the first person. Although I am not a therapist or professional, I have endeavored to fully understand my life-altering encounter with death and grief. Over many months I worked at grief. I read about grief and strained to understand grief. Its compelling urgency became my relentless companion.

As I grieved, many would-be comforters tried to encourage my faith with bereavement platitudes. Unintentionally their empty words hurt me more than they helped me. What I came to understand is that grief is not a crisis of faith; it is a matter of faith. In fact, the long journey through the valley of the shadow of death is the most arduous walk of faith imaginable. Grieving is really a demonstration of faith when you trust God to hold you at your most vulnerable at the time when your life is in pieces and your strength is gone. “The eternal God is your refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms” (Deuteronomy 33:27 NIV).

Leighton inspired my heart. His life changed mine forever. There is not a corner of my soul that does not bear the everlasting, eternal imprint of his spirit.
On the last occasion that he was in the pulpit, he offered this pastoral prayer, a benediction to my own journey through grief: “We have come this far by faith, and we will continue to walk with our hand in yours wherever you lead us.” In life, in death, in life beyond death, God is with you. You are not alone.

Julie Yarbrough  
Dallas, Texas
INTRODUCTION

No one really ever expects to grieve. It is not something for which you prepare in life. You cannot anticipate grief or know in advance exactly how you will react when death affects your life, because grief is a real-time experience. Grief never leaves you where it finds you. It may leave you disillusioned or more profound. It may leave you fearful or more confident in the faithfulness of God, depending on how intently you listen to what grief has to say to you.

You may ask, “Why do I grieve?” In my quest to understand grief, I discovered that we grieve because we love. In fact, the more we love, the greater our grief. The ratio of love to loss depends only on the depth of relationship measured by the quality of love. You might say that we grieve in direct proportion to the depth of our love. Few of us would forego love to avoid the pain of grief. Even in the face of grief we give thanks for having loved so deeply that when death touches our lives, we can do nothing for a while except grieve.

Though universal in its fundamental attributes, grief is individual and personal. Just as everyone has a different story, so also everyone grieves differently. I do not grieve in the same way that you grieve, and you do not grieve in the same way that another grieves. This book of meditations on grief and grieving is designed to meet you at your personal place of spiritual need as you grieve. You may want to begin reading the book at the theme or topic that suggests where you are on your journey through grief. You may then want to continue reading forward and, at some time, perhaps review previous months as well. Or you might prefer to pick and choose according to topic; the last section on celebration offers devotions for holidays and special days, which may be read at the appropriate times of the year. Or perhaps you simply will prefer to read from beginning to end. In any case, as you continue reading in the weeks and months ahead, you will sense where you have been and how far you have come on your personal walk through the valley of the shadow of death.

In grief it is often difficult—for a while it may even seem impossible—to focus on more than a single word, thought, or idea when you meditate and pray each day. This is normal. As the mental fog of grief slowly begins to lift, your ability to concentrate will return. It is my experience that spiritual sustenance best nurtures a broken heart when taken in small bites. For this reason, the meditations in this book are intentionally very brief. Over time, the steady diet of care and
comfort found in these daily devotions will help to restore your soul until at last you feast again on life.

Because the Bible is, in part, a narrative of human conflict and struggle, and because many of its rich stories illustrate the pain of loss and grief, scripture is a key element throughout the book. Each month begins with a short personal reflection related to the month’s theme followed by a Preparation scripture and meditation that set the stage for the four weeks to follow. Each week then focuses on a specific topic of grief related to the monthly theme, offering daily meditations that include a Scripture passage, a thought to consider, a prayer, and words of assurance. As a help to your personal meditation, this final takeaway thought is highlighted to help you remember and affirm it throughout the day.

Prayer is one way you express your relationship with God. You may want to adapt the words of prayer included with each day’s meditation to the language of your own relationship with God. The prayer ideas are intended to inspire you to personalize your thoughts and expand your heart as you reach out to God in grief.

One meditation each week is devoted to Rest for Your Soul. Because grief is hard work, it is important to “put it down” from time to time to rest. Like any faithful companion, grief will wait while you rest. When you return to your grief, it will still be there, though not as insistent as before. Take a day off each week to rest from grief and find rest for your soul.

Each month concludes with a Perspective meditation, offering a backward look that summarizes the weekly meditations in the context of the monthly topic. Every month also includes a page for the expression of your personal journey through grief. If you journal, you already know the benefit of having a place to “ex-press,” that is, to get out your inmost thoughts and feelings. Perhaps you will want to write about your grief as you meditate through the weeks and months. These pages may be a place to record God’s answers to your prayers. Or you may find them a safe, private space for listening intently to your inner voice as it speaks to you in grief.

As you meditate each day on your journey through grief, may the promises of the Bible comfort and encourage you to move from sorrow toward hope—beyond the broken heart.
GRIEF IS SORROW

Did I expect to have the joy without the sorrow? Somewhere in the corner of our shared heart we were aware of the potential for hurt if one of us should die, but we had no idea of the pain of sorrow. Amid my blinding grief and raging sorrow, I encountered my human frailties up close and personal. My spirit vehemently resisted the emotional treachery of loss.

In a sermon on “Grief and Death” my husband, Leighton, said, “I can commend to you a God who loves you, cares about you, who will hold you in his arms if you will let Him.” As he spoke, he poured his power and passion into the word cares. He did not know then that his words of grace and comfort would be meant for me.

Preparation

Be gracious to me, O L ORD, for I am in distress; my eye wastes away from grief, my soul and body also.
For my life is spent with sorrow, and my years with sighing; my strength fails because of my misery, and my bones waste away.
Psalm 31:9-10 NRSV
**Thought:** Grief is sorrow. When the last guest has left, you find yourself alone with grief. It may be then that the raw sorrow of grief descends upon your broken heart. When one you love dies, sorrow is, in fact, your deep emotional reaction to death—perhaps with painful physical symptoms that mirror your emotional devastation. Your head aches. Your stomach churns. This is how sorrow feels. It is a state of soulless heartache. The sorrow that surrounds death is as real as anything in your life. Yet you are assured that God feels your pain. God shares your tears and sadness. God is equal to your sorrow. God is with you as you struggle in your brokenness. God is with you as you grieve.

**Prayer:** God, I am broken. Sorrow surrounds me; sorrow is deep within me. You alone know my inmost heart. Amen.

**Assurance:** God knows my sorrowing heart.

---

**Week 1 – Shock**

**Day 1**

*My soul is weary with sorrow;*  
*strengthen me according to your word.*  
Psalm 119:28 NIV

**Thought:** Grief is shock at the interruption of life’s plans. Your initial reaction to death is shock. Shock plunges you headlong into sorrow. In grief, shock and sorrow are inextricably linked. In the emotionally arduous hours and days that follow the death of your loved one, you are shocked and stunned by the bitter reality of death. God uses shock to protect you from the rude impact of death. God understands completely what has happened even though you do not. Rely on God’s strength.

**Prayer:** God, I am shocked by the death of my beloved. How can this be my reality? My soul is weary with sorrow. Give me strength, I pray. Amen.

**Assurance:** God knows that I am in shock.

---

**Day 2**

*The cords of death entangled me,*  
*the anguish of the grave came over me;*  
*I was overcome by distress and sorrow.*  
Psalm 116:3 NIV
Thought: Shock is a front-end collision with human mortality. On impact, you experience the full force of shock. You simply cannot believe that the one you love has died. Even if you were there at the last breath of your loved one, there is utter disbelief. If death occurred suddenly and unexpectedly, your shock is intensified by the unreality of circumstance and the unfairness of death. It is incomprehensible that your loved one is gone. For a while you may feel strangled as anguish, distress, and sorrow overcome you. God is with you through the shock of grief.


Assurance: God will untangle my heart and soul as I grieve.

Day 3

O my Comforter in sorrow,
my heart is faint within me.
Jeremiah 8:18 NIV

Thought: In shock, you feel faint. Even if death was expected, you are out of balance because of what has happened. Death can cause emotional, mental, and even physical shock. You may be unable to hear what others say to you as they try to explain what happened. When you experience shock, it is not unusual to feel detached and disconnected from yourself and from others. This is full-blown shock. God upholds you when you are faint from shock.

Prayer: God, I am usually so strong and capable. But I am scarcely functioning. Uphold me in body and in spirit. Amen.

Assurance: When I am in shock, I can yield to the power of God’s protection.

Day 4

How long must I bear pain in my soul,
and have sorrow in my heart all day long?
Psalm 13:2 NRSV

Thought: Shock enshrouds you in its protection, which at once insulates and smothers you. You may go through the rites and rituals of death with vague detachment from the surreal perspective of shock. Perhaps you remember; perhaps it all seems like an out-of-body experience. Yet grief insists that you comprehend
the reality of death so that one day you will no longer have sorrow in your heart. God is here. God alone knows your sorrow.

*Prayer:* God, I am in pain in my soul. It is so great that I can hardly bear it. I am distraught over the death of my beloved. This does not feel like love. Amen.

*Assurance:* **God understands my pain.**

**Day 5**

*I will turn their mourning into joy,*
*I will comfort them, and give them gladness for sorrow.*

Jeremiah 31:13 NRSV

*Thought:* When you are in shock, it is difficult to imagine ever again feeling anything. Comfort? You are numb, dumbfounded by death. Gladness? It seems impossible when sorrow overwhels every fiber of your being. Joy? For now, it is a remembrance of that which has passed away. One day your sorrow will cease and mourning will turn into joy. God comforts you now.

*Prayer:* God, I feel nothing except my searing sorrow. Are your promises really for me? Help me in this moment so that I may yet live. Amen.

*Assurance:* **Though it may seem impossible to believe God’s promises right now, I know they are true.**

**Day 6**

*The LORD will be your everlasting light,*
*and your days of sorrow will end.*

Isaiah 60:20 NIV

*Thought:* You listen at the door, expecting your loved one to return, hoping against hope that your dawning reality is only a bad dream, like a nightmare that frightens and then quickly fades. Shock is darkness, a place of emotional blackout. For a while you must grope through the unfamiliar darkness of death. Somewhere there is yet light, even everlasting light. God’s light surrounds you amid the darkness of shock and sorrow.

*Prayer:* God, thank you for the assurance of light. Through the darkness of my sorrow, shine your light into the corners of my broken heart. Amen.

*Assurance:* **God is my everlasting light.**
Day 7 – Rest for Your Soul

The LORD has added sorrow to my pain; I am worn out with groaning and find no rest.  
Jeremiah 45:3 NIV

Thought: When shock has taken up residence in your heart, your sustained pain and sorrow are emotionally and physically wearying. You may not be able to sleep, or your sleep may be restless and wakeful. Your dreams interrupt you with hope and then quickly remind you of death. Your mind cannot turn off. You find no rest for your body or soul. You must do nothing for a while to recover physically from the shock of grief. Begin today. Remember to breathe. Consciously inhale. Consciously exhale. Step outside for fresh air. Breathe. Rest. There is life beyond grief.

Prayer: God, my exterior is stalwart, but I am worn out with my inward groaning. There is no rest for my body or soul. But I know that there is rest in you, who gives life. Help me to rest, to breathe, to live. Amen.

Assurance: God wants me to care for myself even in my sorrow and pain.

Week 2 – Anger

Day 1

Be angry but do not sin.  
Ephesians 4:26 NRSV

Thought: Grief is anger at the untimeliness of death. When shock gradually lifts, anger may show up unannounced. Anger may surprise you with its force and power. You are not prepared for its full frontal assault on your heart. Anger thrives and consumes vital energy if you provide a place in your heart for it to take root and grow. Anger is a manageable, short-term reaction to the death of your loved one.

Prayer: God, I am shocked by the anger in my heart. I want to lash out and blame someone for the death of my loved one. May my anger not become sin. Amen.

Assurance: Anger is a normal response to the injustice of death.
How do you understand grief when your heart is broken by the death of a loved one?

To survive and live forward, you must find answers. This daily devotional offers comforting and encouraging devotions for the first year of your grief journey. Designed so that you may begin at any time of the year, each month begins with a short reflection from the author's own experience of grief, followed by a Scripture and meditation that set the stage for the next four weeks. Each brief daily meditation includes a Scripture, a thought to consider, a prayer, and words of assurance. Space is provided at the end of each month for recording your thoughts and feelings along your journey of grief.

"An authentic and helpful gift from one who has responded to the call of God to be a faithful steward of her own grief for the sake of others."

Zan Holmes, Pastor Emeritus
St. Luke "Community" United Methodist Church, Dallas, Texas

"Guides the brokenhearted on an honest journey toward acceptance and hope."

Stephen Bauman, Senior Minister
Christ Church, New York City

“I commend this remarkable grief resource to you highly.”

James W. Moore, Pastor in Residence
Highland Park United Methodist Church, Dallas, Texas