



Take Heart in Your Grief

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Chapter 1

Even Though You Are Upset By It

In this world of ours, people are hit by grief. Usually it is some loss or other that makes them grieve, sometimes the loss of a loved one or the loss of something that is very dear to them.

I have seen people grieve because they had to move from one town to another, and had to leave all of their friends and associations behind them. Though they may not always show it, parents often grieve when their children leave home for school, or when they get married. That's a real loss to them.

When a marriage goes wrong, people grieve. They really lost something and it takes a long time to get over it.

Grief has many forms.

It is caused by life with its disappointments and sometimes its despair. Grief is hooked up to death and the sorrow it brings.

Some people seem to think that they ought not show their grief. They try to hide it because somewhere they got the idea that people who grieve prove they are weak. The Bible says that Jesus, who was true God, didn't mind showing His grief when His good friend Lazarus had died. He was not ashamed of His tears. Loss is tough enough to take without making it worse by trying to dam up the tears.

Grief is normal. It is natural. It is sometimes necessary, to be truly human, to take the loss — to feel real pain. Being overcome with grief is a lot different from cracking up altogether.

Don't feel guilty about grief.

If you are grieving don't feel guilty about it. It is natural to grieve. I would like to say to you: Take heart in your grief. Feel your loss, and have faith that God knows what He is doing. There is good reason to take heart in your grief. You are feeling what you are supposed to feel. You have lost a great deal, and maybe you haven't felt all of it even now.

You have met people at the funeral home and talked to them, almost as if nothing had happened. You wonder whether something is wrong with you. You know your loved one is dead but it's still hard to believe. You're almost in a state of shock. You wonder why you didn't feel what you thought you ought to be feeling. Maybe you said to

somebody during those difficult first days, “God has given me strength to bear what I have to bear.” And you were probably right. The shock you felt and the strength you showed are God’s natural way of helping people over the very first difficult days.

Then it happens. There is such a big letdown. The funeral is over. The hectic hours you spent in making funeral arrangements are ended. You no longer have to spend those long hours at the hospital holding the hand of someone you love. People stop coming to see you. All of a sudden a kind of emptiness overcomes you. A sort of boredom sets in. You begin to wonder about life, and then the grief comes.

That is when you realize how dreadful the loss is that you have sustained. That death was real. It really happened. You have lost so much, almost more than you can bear.

Go ahead and cry.

After having held together for so long, you feel the urge to cry. And then you wonder if something is wrong with you. If that is the way you feel, go ahead and cry. Whether you are a man or a woman, crying is not just for the weak. Strong men cry, and strong women cry too.

Grieving is not unhealthy, not unless you try and keep it in and nurse it along until it gets to be a regular part of your life. Crying does not mean that you are falling apart. Bottling up your feelings can do a lot more harm than good. You may have been telling yourself that this is no way to feel or to act. Actually it is quite natural, living as you are at the moment under a cloud cover of loss and sorrow. Above those clouds the sun is still shining. The clouds will clear. The sun will come through. Right now it may be raining, but that’s all right.

Maybe you have a little feeling of guilt.

Maybe you even have a little feeling of guilt. If it isn’t guilt about grief it may be about something else. I have known people who feel guilty because they were not at the hospital the moment their loved one died. Some feel guilty because they feel that they should have done more when their loved one was alive. Everyone experiences these regrets. It is the stuff of which life is made. Anyone who has no regrets hasn’t lived at all.

Some things you don’t need to feel guilty about. If you had been at home instead of at work it might not have happened. If you had been near when your loved one died you might have been able to say something you always wanted to say and didn’t. If you feel guilty about things like that you’ve got good company. Other people do, too. Some of them even feel angry. First at themselves, and then even at the one who died. He or she is responsible for the misery being caused you. People even feel angry against the doctors, and the nurses, and sometimes even at God. Your loss is unfair. Why me and not others? You have to blame someone — yourself, someone else, God.

For all of this there is grace —the real and generous grace of a forgiving God.

He sent His Son, Jesus, to pay the penalty for our harsh words, missed opportunities, and regrets. He died for you. There was a lot of guilt there that day, and He took it all. This is practical and real, maybe more practical and real to you now than it was before. Forgiveness is for the things that are past.

The guilt is real, but God is real too. And He really forgives. You don't need to look around for things to be guilty of. You are human, and you need forgiveness for the things you should have done and failed to do and for things you did that you wish you hadn't done.

You will never again be the person that you once were.

I don't know exactly how you feel at the moment. And you may not know exactly yourself. That is grief, and it is necessary. You have had a loss, a real loss. And in your grief, you are coming to realize that this is true. The more real it becomes to you, the nearer you are to accepting your loss, accepting the grace of God in your loss, and accepting the grace of life He has to give for the future. Perhaps you may have noticed that as time has gone on you talk about him or her, adding a few more details as they occur to you. The more you recall about the one who is no longer with you, the more you remember the circumstances of that death. The more real it all becomes. Once it has become very real to you, you know it happened. That's the beginning of a new road. The acceptance of a fact of life, as well as the acceptance of God's grace for life that is yet to be.

There is one more step. You have to get used to the idea that you will never ever really get over the feeling of loss that you have. You will never again be the person that you once were. You can't make it stop raining by forgetting your umbrella, but you can take that umbrella and begin to stay dry. Neither you nor anyone else will replace the one you lost. By allowing yourself to grieve, and accepting that grief as normal, natural, and necessary, even though it is painful, you will begin to live with that loss, and to go out again into a world that for a while at least may seem sunless, cheerless, and maybe even heartless.

Take heart in your grief.

Grief is normal, and faith can withstand grief. Faith remains when it is faith in God, who knows what He is doing. There is no substitute for faith in God. You may not know what He is doing, but He knows what He is doing.

You may need a lot of courage at first to take the bull by the horns, so to speak, and to talk about your loss, about the way you feel. You don't have to talk about it all the time, but it's good to talk about it to someone you know and trust. It will be hard to talk about, and sometimes it will be hard to find someone to whom you can talk. As you talk about it, you will find yourself facing the fact a little better each time. And eventually coming to live with that fact in the faith that God knows what He is doing.

On the cross the Lord Jesus Christ had confidence in His Father, that He knew what He was doing. Jesus said, with complete confidence in His Father, "Father into your hands I place My spirit." Jesus died. His Father did not forget Him, and He won't forget you. He raised Jesus from the dead. Faith in Jesus Christ gives hope that is alive.

But now you grieve. Jesus Christ took that, too. He carried our griefs and our sorrows. He understands how alone you feel, and how alone people can be. He was alone, too, on that cross of His. He died there, and He lives. He is alive and well. He is Lord. It is good to have Him with you at this time, in your hour of grief. Now, more than ever, you can get what He was talking about. "I will never leave you, nor forsake you." The living Son of God is with you. He feels for you and He will stay with you.

Even Though You Don't Want To

It may very well seem cruel and kindless to tell you to take heart while you are in your grief. You may not want to. And even if you do, you may have doubts about being able to take heart. It may seem like an impossible task right now. The encouragement to take heart may come across to you as a cold and pious command. You have lost someone special. Someone whose life and presence had a way of flavoring almost everything for you. You might feel somewhat like a recent widow whose well-meaning neighbor tried to encourage her by saying, "You'll need lots of courage now that he's gone." To this she sharply replied, "I don't want courage, I want my husband!"

Perhaps you're at that point in your grief where it's hard to put your heart into anything. Possibly you're busy doing things but you feel that your heart is not in it because you don't have a heart to put into anything and that's the way you want it to be for the moment. What you really want is that person who made your heart throb, whose closeness and kindness warmed your heart, so that you couldn't help but get excited about the things you did together, or even separately.

Although you can remember times in your life that your heart ached, it was never anything like this. You recall the times you cried and laughed, but the person who made you laugh or cry is not here. And even if it was more crying than laughing, you might feel like a widow who said, "He caused me so much trouble, but I miss him just the same."

Get started again.

Whether or not your life together was completely rosy is not the point for you right now. The thought that returns again and again is that life together was your first choice, but taking heart in your grief means settling for second best. That means getting started again. And to do that requires so much oomph and energy that you're just not sure you want to, or that you have what it takes, because this death has taken so much from you.

Even if you are ready to get going again you might doubt if you can. You knew it was going to be different, but you didn't know just how different it would really be. You look around wondering where you're going to get the help and strength you need. A long time ago the poet suggested an answer to that in Psalm 121: "*I lift up my eyes to the hills,*" he said. "*Where does my help come from? My help comes from the lord, the Maker of heaven and earth ... the lord will watch over your coming and going both now and forevermore.*"

It's the Lord who helps.

He's there. He's helping you up, shouldering both you and your load. He's holding you, though your knees may be about to give way. He's holding you though you may be struggling with a backbreaking burden of sorrow and grief that nearly has you down.

Somehow this grief has not destroyed you. It could have. Though it may have destroyed all your dreams and plans and joys, you have not been destroyed by the grief because your Helper and Protector is acquainted with grief Himself. He's the man Jesus Christ. As the prophet Isaiah says, "He has borne our griefs, He carried our sorrows." He is God's Son, raised from the dead Himself, and He's been with you all

the way. He's been with you even though you may not have been aware of it. In all of your weakness, there beside you is the everlasting God who neither grows weary nor faint, who gives vigor and strength to the exhausted. *"But those who hope in the lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint"* (Isaiah 40:31).

Take heart in your grief.

God will wait for you. He is not going to rush you. He can wait as long as you need to wait, and He will hold you all the while and will be ready to help you move on when you are ready to move on. He knows you need time to sit and cry. There is nothing unhealthy about that. He also will know when you are ready to get up and try to pick up the pieces of a broken life.

Jesus stands by you, alive, and ready to help.

He lives and grants you daily breath,
He lives and you shall conquer death,
He lives to silence all your fears,
He lives to wipe away your tears,
He lives to calm your troubled heart,
He lives all blessings to impart.

Jesus died to forgive and heal. He came alive again, and He gives you new life. He will help you take heart in your grief — to face up to and live through — with hope — the new things you now experience. By now you know very well that nothing could possibly be the same again. In this new life, Jesus Christ stands beside you to help you in a way that will support you as you explore new possibilities, gain new perspectives, and enjoy new experiences. He stands by you to help you accept and overcome your loss.

Your faith in Him will help you embrace and accept this painful experience and live through it a day at a time. There will be many times when your heart will be fearful, rather than cheerful. In those times, take heart in all of your grief. Jesus Christ, the one who knows both grief and victory is by your side, ready to help you take heart.

Chapter 3

Even Though It's As if Life Has Folded

A few years ago it was announced that one of America's most popular magazines was coming to an end. It was *Life* magazine. Through the years *Life* had been coming into millions of homes regularly, capturing in pictures the panorama of life. For a while *Life* had stopped coming. For those who had looked forward to it in the past there was a certain emptiness, a feeling that something was missing each month.

What had happened to *Life* magazine might be a parable of what happens to people in their grief. For them, too, it seems as though life has folded. It is not only the end of life with a loved one, but also one's own life that seems to have folded and come to an end.

Life has folded but time continues. This makes for confusion if not anxiety. It's hard, because you must continue to live. Even if your relationship with the one you lost was less than you desired, what relationship doesn't leave something to be desired? You still miss that familiar face and your familiar ways together. Whether that familiarity was always pleasant or not, it provided a kind of security. With that gone it seems as if life has folded and you wonder how you can continue.

A kind of paralysis may have set in. If you have regrets for the past, if you feel somewhat guilty, of having caused unhappiness for the one you lost, if you feel you should have done more during that person's life that is quite understandable. But there is no need to be your own worst enemy and to bring your own life to a standstill.

One key person remains.

He can move you along the way. He is the one who came to bring an abundant life, Jesus Christ. He is the one who picked up that paralyzed young man who had his own feelings of depression and guilt. It was to him Jesus said, "Take heart, your sins are forgiven. Now walk."

Jesus Christ forgives you. He accepts you as you are. You need His acceptance to accept yourself as you are. He helps you take the present and gives you faith and courage to look to the future. That's what it takes. It takes Jesus Christ to forgive you the faults of your past, and to give you new hope for the future.

Time does not stand still. It keeps on moving. Jesus Christ is in every bit of it. Maybe there was a time when you just could not look to the future. Maybe that time is still with you. Jesus Christ died in the past, but He is alive in the present. In Him there is brand new forgiveness and brand new hope every day, to help you in your grief.

In Him life begins all over again — every day.

For tomorrow, help comes from Jesus Christ. Help from Jesus puts grief in a new perspective. Because of Him it is now unnecessary to grieve as those who have no hope. We believe that Jesus died and rose again, and so it will be for those who die as His followers. God will bring them to life with Jesus. It's not just me who is saying that! It was one of God's great men who said that, the apostle Paul. He wants you to know two things: Anyone who has a trusting faith in his Savior is eternally safe, and your eternal safety is ensured through your trust in your Savior. That's what makes grief different and bearable. This hope makes pain more bearable even now.

The hopefulness that Jesus brings to men and women today is no different than the message of hope that He gave to His followers then, who saw Him die. They were sad at the time, of course, just as you are sad today. When Jesus rose from the dead, He reminded them that the important reason for His dying was to bring victory over sin and death for all people. Though they were sad again when Jesus left them to return to heaven, His message of victory over death allowed them to carry on with courage and vigor in the work Christ had left them to do.

He can give you the start you need.

I am sure that you and your loved one believed and depended on each other. Now it is up to you to embrace the values that you shared together, even though you must do so now alone. Your capacity to rely on your own resources and your own strength — those God has given you — may surprise and startle you even though you may find it hard to believe now that He can do this for you.

Life does not have to fold for you. It can start moving again. Just as your loved one had faith in you, Jesus had faith in His disciples. Jesus has faith in you, too.

As time goes on, God's strength will empower you to do for yourself things that seem impossible now. Even if life seems to have folded for you now, take heart in your grief. Take heart, because your grief is different from those who grieve without hope. With hope and trust in God, life will not fold for you. It will only unfold in ways that you can hardly believe.

Chapter 4

Even Though Your Loss Makes You Feel Lost

No one else is feeling your loss in the same way that you are. Your grief is your own. Others, of course, may miss the same person you miss, but you miss that person in a very special way.

Your loss is painful.

I was talking to a woman just the other day — 80 years old — who lost her husband about two years ago. She was composed, cheerful, and very willing to talk. I asked her, “How long did you feel the pain?” “Oh,” she said, “about six months.” And she said, “Do you want to know something? That was real pain!”

There is loneliness, and a sense of separation even from the people around you. The grief is yours, and you are in it. You may not even be able to say how deep your grief is. Maybe all that you know is that you feel lost in a loneliness that you may never have expected. The loss may have left you bewildered and up in the air. Your despair may be so deep that in your grief you fear that you may never see your way clear, never find your way out.

I don't know exactly how you feel. Perhaps you feel like a man showing up for work and finding that he had been fired and suddenly had nothing to do. That is a lost feeling all right; except that your loss is much more severe because yours is a final separation and you may be feeling cut off totally and finally. It is understandable that this is hard to take. It is understandable that you may be wondering if you will ever be able to see your way again.

It is understandable that this loss is hard to take.

A friend of mine told me about losing his appointment book halfway through the course of a year. The book itself was not that valuable. It was only a couple of pieces of vinyl with paper pages in between full of pencil scribbling. Yet my friend was lost. He didn't know what appointments were coming up. He couldn't schedule anything else without that uneasy feeling that his date might not be clear. He could

never be sure that he was going to the right place at the right time. A new book just couldn't replace the old one. He depended on that old book with all its dates and places and times to give him direction.

Now, if a few pages of paper that could be replaced for less than \$10 can be that important to someone, it is quite understandable how lost you feel when you have lost a person on whom you depended for direction, or affection, or purpose in your life.

There are a lot of people in the world but no one can replace the one you lost. In that kind of a loss you may have lost heart. You may be having a hard time finding your way. But there is help — help from God who makes it possible to take heart again, help from Jesus Christ, God's Son who has a heart for you.

At times you may not even feel up to reaching for the hand of that Lord and Savior, whose heart has a great big place for you. But the one you have come to know is the Good Shepherd, that great Shepherd of the sheep. He is seeking out lost people, also people lost in their grief, so that He can hold them close to His heart and bring them back with the others who are milling around in the wilderness of our world. He wants to help you find your way, to help bring you back to others so that you won't be left alone. That is why He enters into the lostness that you are in.

He takes the grief with you.

That's why He takes the grief with you, so that you are not totally alone. Like the Good Shepherd He really is, He knows you. He knows you well enough to know that your loved one is absent from you and that no group or gathering will ever be quite the same for you again. Jesus knows how alone you feel even in a crowd, and He wants to help you overcome that. He wants to help you find your way back to life, the full and abundant life that He came to give. He wants to help you take heart. He wants to help you find your way clear, to go on living and functioning — not as though nothing had happened, but because something has happened to you. Perhaps you have wanted to pray, as you have never prayed before, but nothing seems to come. You don't know where to begin, you don't know what to say, and you don't even know what you really need. That depresses you and disheartens you even more, as if you were not already discouraged enough.

His good heart can help you take heart when you have lost heart.

The Apostle Paul talked about the problem that we often don't know how to pray. Then, he says, "The Spirit Himself pleads with God for us in groans that words cannot express. And God who sees in the hearts of men knows what the thought of the Spirit is." God can see into your broken heart, my friend. He hears the groaning from the depth of your grief. He can understand what you are experiencing and thinking and feeling. He knows what you want to say or need to say, but find impossible to say. He accepts that helpless feeling as your prayer, and He unites Himself with you. Through that oneness with you, He strengthens your heart and helps you find your way back into the fellowship and community of others who can also help to sustain you. They can help give you love and kindness you need at this time.

You may feel so lost at times that you even wonder if other people care. It's true; some don't care and couldn't care less. But there are others who do care. You need once again to be with them, in order to keep on going. Your heart may not be in it now, but our Lord wants you to be with the rest of His people both for His sake and for yours.

It's possible that at some point you have given up attending church because you don't feel that it helps or because you feel so lost and alone. Maybe you have attended worship services regularly in the past, but now find that nothing seems to register. You have just lost heart for a while. The great thing about the Good Shepherd is that He is by your side anyway, trying to help you take heart so that you can find your way through the life that is still before you. Even when you don't, or can't, seek Him out. He is constantly seeking you, anxious to hold you close, to comfort and console. You need Him with you, and you need to stay close to Him. Though a key person is missing, there is life that God doesn't want you to miss out on. Take heart even though you feel lost in your grief. God has a heart for you. He will help you find your way.

Chapter 5

Even Though the Heart Is Heavy

People in grief feel a deep and heavy hurt in their hearts. You may feel it, too. You may feel like bursting at any moment from the pain inside you. If only once again your heart would be light and beat with joy.

As the shock of your loss begins to wear off, there may be times when the stabbing hurt of your loss seems to get sharper and sharper. How do you get over this kind of pain? Some people I know feel sorry for themselves at this point and become extremely hard on themselves, intentionally avoiding any kind of enjoyment, thinking that maybe in this way the pain will go away. This doesn't really help.

Others have tried to enjoy themselves by doing things or traveling to places that they never had the chance to travel to before. What they usually find is that they really have no choice but to take the hurt and the heavy heart with them.

Someone has pointed out that a change of scenery doesn't really change you. Only a changed you can change the scenery. The only change that really helps is the change in you that accepts the changes that have occurred, and will continue to occur, because of your loss. This is really the goal isn't it, to accept the change?

It may not be easy to accept the changes that have occurred.

Once you have reached that point there will be less need to either deprive or drive yourself — you will have learned to live with what has changed.

It may not be easy to accept the changes that have occurred. It may take outside help. It certainly takes faith — faith in Jesus Christ, who was claimed by death Himself, and overcame death. Many others have found comfort and strength in Him. He is the one who can help you get things in perspective again. He is the one who said, "Be assured that I am with you always to the end of time." He is the One! He stands by you in your grief. He takes your hand in your loneliness and in your heartache. He is the One! He suffered and went through the valley of the shadow of death. He feels for you and tells you that He will be with you in all of your coming and going in every way and in every day. In His hand are the powers of heaven and earth. He will help you find and keep your balance. He lifts the heavy heart. He will keep you from falling all over yourself.

It may sound strange, but sometimes in trying to run away people keep running into themselves. The prophet Amos said, "It will be as though a man fled from a lion only to meet a bear, as though he entered his house and rested his hand on the wall only to have a snake bite him." He knew life — that Amos.

Sometimes in trying to solve problems, we create even bigger problems because we ourselves are part of the problem. Perhaps you have already found that your heart, hurting and heavy as it is, keeps getting in the way just as you think the hurt is being healed.

God's goal for you is to help you live with yourself. You have been experiencing various kinds of separation all of your life, but none quite like this one. Other separations you have experienced may have saddened you momentarily or even given you a happy, light heart. It may have been your children who went off to school for the first time. You watched them leave. In one way it was with a heavy heart: You were sad to watch them go — no longer needing you as much, no longer there to fill the house all day with all kinds of noise and sniffles and muddy feet. At the same time, it did you good to see those children reaching a new stage of growth and maturity. You were probably glad that for a while you could have some freedom for yourself and do some of the things that they kept you from doing before they went to school.

But now you look at the separation you have sustained, and it doesn't do your heart any good at all. You may feel that it has done you so much harm that you cannot stand yourself and you would like to leave but you can't. The feelings of hopelessness and helplessness nearly overwhelm you.

These are hard obstacles for you. The obstacles are high, high as a mountain, and deep, deep as a valley. The going is rough, as rough as the roughest of roads. You cry, when you are able to cry. Sometimes your cries are confusing and bewildering. Your life seems to be in a wilderness now. But there is an echo. You cry and the echo seems to come back like the words from Isaiah, "There is a voice that cries, prepare a way for the Lord through the wilderness. Clear a highway across the desert for our God. Every valley shall be lifted up, every mountain and hill brought down, rugged places shall be made smooth and mountain ranges shall become like a plain." Of course I know that God has no giant road construction crew or land leveling operation in a literal way but I've seen it happen in people who belong to Jesus Christ.

He comes into the wilderness with you to strengthen you to face what needs to be done and what needs to be faced. He lifts you physically and spiritually.

God can do His work in you.

If there was ever a man who was down in the dumps and heavy with a burden of his own, it was the Psalmist who cried to God: "When I did not confess my sins I was worn out from crying all day long. My strength was completely drained as moisture is dried up by the summer heat." Here was a man who was in no shape to climb a mountain or descend into a valley or walk a rough road. Through the good and generous grace of God, that man could stand up once again and jump for joy as a forgiven child of God.

The going may be rough as the roughest of roads when you lose a loved one. Somehow God is going to pick you up, heavy heart and all, and help you get that burden off your shoulders. He's the one who offers the invitation: "Come to Me all you who are tired from carrying your heavy loads, and I will give you rest." He takes it on His shoulders. That's the greatest thing about faith in Christ! You don't have to go it alone because Jesus Christ, who was dead and is alive again, is standing beside you calling you by name, encouraging you, guiding you, and giving you strength for the future as He forgives your mistakes in the past. His mercy is new to you every morning. In His love and tenderness, He prepares you for that final morning when you will wake up in His arms and see Him face to face. Your heart may be heavy now, but the Son of God is there to lighten the weight. He carries the load. Surely He bears our griefs and carries our sorrows.

Even Though the Hole Is Big

A friend of mine described a comic wall plaque that he saw hanging in a gift shop a while back. It was intended for boating enthusiasts. On the plaque was this definition of a boat: “A hole in the water covered with wood into which you pour money.” This really has nothing to do with grief. But some time later a lady told him something that reminded him of that boat. She had been a widow for three years, but she still remembered her husband, and said about him, “I never knew one person, short as he was, that could leave such a big hole in the world.” She went on to say that they had lived for each other, and now she seems to have no one for whom she can live.

Once there was fullness and now there is only emptiness. Her husband, like the boat, was someone she could fill with care and love. She could fill the empty spots in his life with things only she could give, and now he was gone. Only a big hole was left. That hole created by his death broke up her world, her life, and her heart. In fact she said she had been sick for the last three years, all, she thought, as a result of her husband’s sudden death. And she was only now starting to talk about it. For the longest time she said she was like a hunk of stone, and yet she was not like stone. She said it felt like her heart was coming apart.

Indeed maybe her heart was coming apart. She had a broken heart that put a real hole there. Perhaps the idea of a broken heart is more fact than fancy. All her life she had a hole to fill. The person who created that hole is now gone, like a boat that disappears, washing away all the money and love and labor poured into it.

Maybe you feel somewhat as she did. Maybe you found a hole that now needs filling. And maybe you found that nothing can really do the job, that no one can fill that hole or satisfy you the way your loved one did, because no one understands you the way that person did. Your heart is broken because you can no longer care for that person’s need.

There is someone who stands by you to take care of your needs. He stands by you to take your broken heart into His hand. He stands by you to take hold again and to help you take hold of yourself. He stands by you to help you take heart. He helps you to fill up the hole in your life, to talk about it and to work at it. That someone is Jesus Christ.

There is a beautiful section in the book of Isaiah, parts of which our Lord many years later quoted and applied to Himself. That section of Isaiah reads: *“The Spirit of the Sovereign lord is on me, because the lord has anointed me ... to bind up the broken hearted ... to proclaim the year of the lord’s favor ... to comfort all who mourn, to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning ... a garment of praise instead of spirit of despair. They will be called oaks of righteousness, a planting of the lord for the display of His splendor. They will rebuild ancient ruins and restore the places long devastated; they will renew the ruined cities that have been devastated for generations”* (Isaiah 61:1-4).

You will begin to rebuild.

These words of comfort were first spoken to people grieving over the destruction of their city, Jerusalem. Yet these words are appropriate for you whose heart and life feel broken and desolate and ruined. I hope that you will take heart from this promise, so that you begin to rebuild. You can find yourself saying with the prophet, “Let me rejoice in the Lord with all my heart. Let me exalt in my God.”

When Jesus said, “Happy are those who mourn, for God will comfort them,” He did not expect that the

loss would make you happy. He did not for one minute pretend to think that mourning would be a happy process. But the happiness, the blessing, the relief, is that there is one with you to share this experience with you. He is Jesus Christ. He is open to you when you seek to share your quiet, even secret, hurts with Him.

Perhaps this prayer will be helpful to you as you share your feelings with Jesus Christ:

Jesus, You are the Resurrection and the Life. You have given me hope, but I still have sorrow. I remember joy that was shared, and I cannot believe that it is all over. Help me to understand, and to fix my eyes where true joys are found. I remember the opportunities we had to share our love, but which we neglected. I remember the times when we were irritated or impatient or insensitive. I feel ashamed and guilty now. Forgive me. Forgive me as only You can. I remember the Easters we celebrated and how the thought of Easter and the promise of victory over death always seemed to be for someone else. But now I know that it was meant for me.

As You wept at the grave of Your friend, Lazarus, Lord, open my eyes to express my grief. I am lonely and restless and heartsick. As you rescued those who mourned when Jairus' daughter died, rescue me from despair by Your power. I don't want to give up or run away, but I want to be able to face tomorrow with hope and confidence.

As You consoled Your mother in the hour of Your own death, comfort me with the joyful hope of resurrection and life everlasting. "O death where is your sting. O, grave where is your victory?" Oh, God, thank You for the victory You have given me through Jesus Christ. And thank You for the people who encourage me by their hope and faith and love, and by their willingness to share my burden in these hours when I need help so much. I know they speak for You as well as for themselves, and this makes their concern and comfort doubly helpful. Let Your peace and hope fill me and start me again on my way to abundant joy in Jesus Christ. Amen.

My friend, you have prayed. Now take heart in your grief, even though the hole is big.

Take heart — with Jesus Christ!

Helpful Web sites

www.aarp.org/griefandloss

www.griefnet.org

www.widownet.org

www.parentswithoutpartners.org

www.elderhope.com

www.growthhouse.org

www.compassionatefriends.org
(for parents who have lost a child)

www.cgcmaine.org
(Center for Grieving Children)

*Check out LHM's online store
for a variety of ministry resources*

If you would like to get hard-copy booklets
of this item, you can do so by going to

<http://www.lhmgift.org/storefront/products.asp?by=topic&id=7>.

There you will find this and other **Project Connect** booklets,
with many titles in Spanish as well. Subjects like peace,
divorce, forgiveness, cancer, gambling, post-traumatic
stress disorder and loneliness are only a few of the topics
sensitively addressed in these concise, Christ-centered volumes.



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