

# THROUGH THE VALLEY OF GRIEF

*A 365-Day Devotional of Spiritual  
Practices for Hope in Suffering*



MATTIE JACKSON

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WaterBrook

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To Mom. You have cried for me, walked with me, and relentlessly fought for me in prayer through my worst valley. More than that, your life has modeled for me what faithful disappointment, waiting, and trust look like. You have suffered your own dear losses with resilience and endured seasons of heart-break and sickness without knowing what God's answers to your "heal us" and "heal me" prayers would look like. On the other side, your love for the Lord shines all the brighter to everyone who knows you. You are an obedient warrior and radiant survivor. Thank you for showing me what it means to fight with hope.

## Introduction

Three weeks before my first wedding anniversary at age twenty-eight, I clung to my young husband's body as doctors and nurses took him off life support. One week later, I sat beside our family and friends and buried him. My life went from newlywed bliss to unforeseen widowhood in an instant. I had no idea how to survive, much less if my faith would.

Ben's death seemingly gave me every reason to walk away from God. How could He permit this to happen if He loved me? Only by His daily, endless, supernatural grace have I found new streams in this desert. By wrestling with, questioning, and clinging to the truth of who Jesus is—my actual Living Hope—I've steadily come to know Him and love Him more deeply than I ever imagined possible.

This book is the one I longed for in the first year after Ben's death. I needed grounding practices to keep me connected to the God I felt so hurt by. I needed something Scripture-rich, brief, and easy to process because my mind was so clouded with grief. I needed daily reminders from the Word of God that the heart of God could be trusted—that His mercies and power were accessible to me and new to me every morning.

Throughout this 365-day devotional, four spiritual practices will lead you from a broken, resentful daughter or son back to restored relationship with and trust in your heavenly Father.

These practices help you navigate the clinical stages of grief—denial and isolation, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance.<sup>1</sup> These rhythms saved my life. They ignited my faith and enriched my relationship with the Lord beyond description. They taught me how to be fully broken, while remaining radically hopeful in the Lord. They carried me through the valley.

- **Wail:** These pages are a safe place for you to express your pain. God invites you to mourn what you've lost and the new realities you're facing. In the practice of lament, I pray you can grieve fully and honestly with God.

With *lament*, you overcome denial.

- **Connect:** Connection is a vital part of your spiritual and mental well-being as you grieve. You certainly need intentional periods of rest and solitude. But you also need healthy relationships to defend against the desire to withdraw too much.

When you *connect*—with others, God, yourself, and nature—you resist the temptation to isolate.

- **Worship:** This part didn't come easily to me. It felt forced at best and dishonest at worst to praise the God I felt had let me down in such a tragic way. But worshipping God anyway—even when you feel reluctant—works miracles in your heart that words can't sufficiently explain.

When you *worship*, you soften anger and distrust toward God.

- **Hope:** Hope is an anchor of peace for you and a light to guide you as you traverse the darkness you're in. And may you never forget: "Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, *for you are with me*" (Psalm 23:4, emphasis added).

When you *hope*, you drive back depression and move toward acceptance.

These practices aren't a perfect solution; healing is a process. But like they did for me, they will equip you to live in the tension between your fragile humanity and God's perfect control and loving presence, which is ever with you in the valley.

## How to Use This Book

Each entry includes a Scripture passage and a brief devotional drawn from one of the four spiritual practices. Simple prompts follow each devotional to call you one step further into these rhythms. I encourage you to keep a journal or write in the margins of this book to make it your own, cataloging your responses throughout the year. You'll be amazed at the record of God's faithfulness you'll accrue there.

As you learn these spiritual practices, you are renewing your mind and training yourself to trust Jesus, your Living Hope, even as you grieve and ultimately move toward peaceful acceptance.

You won't be in this valley forever. You will heal. One day at a time.

For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith . . . that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

—EPHESIANS 3:14–17, 19–21

THROUGH  
THE VALLEY  
OF GRIEF



# Day 1

## W O R S H I P

Seek the LORD and his strength;  
seek his presence continually!  
Remember the wondrous works that he has done,  
his miracles and the judgments he uttered.

— 1 CHRONICLES 16:11–12

**M**y friend, I am sorry you are so weary. I have been too. I have fought for hope and lost. Chased peace and found no rest. It seemed like every day, with what little strength remained, I merely endured from one moment to the next. What else could I possibly do?

The answer is so much simpler than we expect—and far more powerful than we can imagine. Call on the Lord! As Jesus walked on this earth in human flesh, He faced exhaustion, persecution, and despair. He called out to His Father in His darkest hours. He knew the power of putting human sorrow into the hands of divine strength.

God *never* expects you to carry life's burdens on your own. Seek His heart in Scripture, His tender presence in prayer, every moment you feel weary. And His supernatural strength will surely be given to you. If this feels hard to believe, look back on the countless ways the Lord has carried you when you were weak, scared, or unsure in earlier seasons of your life. Ask friends to share how they've seen God work for your good (and their own) in the past. Let me be the first to remind you: He is with you yesterday, today, and tomorrow. He is still your rock and your redeemer.

Look back over the past weeks or months. What is one moment of peace, strength, joy, or rest you can hold on to for today?

O Lord, all my longing is before you;  
my sighing is not hidden from you.

—PSALM 38:9

**T**he Lord loved you and chose you before the foundation of the world (Ephesians 1:4). And because He knows every corner of your hurting heart, you can bring your whole self before Him—your spirit, your heart, your mind, and all the details of your life. In your suffering, you can draw nearer to God than ever before. He is your creator, your Father, and your beloved groom (John 3:29).

Perhaps some have misled you, saying, “Don’t question God about the pain you’re suffering. Everything happens for a reason.” Please hear me! You have every right to grieve the affliction that’s befallen you. Like any good father, God is brokenhearted when you suffer. Though He may not always remove your pain, miracles happen when you courageously offer Him the hurts and hopes of your heart. The Holy Spirit works in you to bring tiny moments of lightness in the midst of such heaviness.

When you bring every fear, desire, and uncertainty to your Savior, you are singing a song of complete trust—a song that resounds sweetly in His ears. He hears you, beloved. He is with you.

What question, doubt, or frustration have you been withholding from God? Shout it out in prayer to Him! Lay it brokenly and honestly at His feet, and rest in His tender love for you.

# Day 3

## H O P E

No one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might understand the things freely given us by God.

— I CORINTHIANS 2:11–12

Grief brings constant inner turmoil. Especially in times of trial, we crave explanation, vindication, and retribution. We long for answers to all the whys and the how-longs of this uncontrollable situation. Like me, you may want an apology from God for allowing this to happen. We wish we had a timeline from Him to help us understand what's happening. But remember, the Lord is outside time. His ways are higher than our ways (Isaiah 55:9), and His plan is infinitely larger than we can comprehend.

That said, God hasn't left you alone. The moment you accepted Christ, He gave you the Holy Spirit, who dwells in you and will never leave you. He may not give you the answers you desire, but He *will* give you “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control,” and countless other gifts (Galatians 5:22–23). You have access to all of this through Christ! Rest in this promise, even as your mind reels with questions. The fruit of His Spirit is free to you. Call out to God and receive it.

*Lord, thank You for providing every gift I need in order to survive today. Please produce the fruit of Your Spirit in me. For Your glory, amen.*

“Go out and stand on the mount before the LORD.” And behold, the LORD passed by, and a great and strong wind tore the mountains and broke in pieces the rocks before the LORD, but the LORD was not in the wind. And after the wind an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the earthquake. And after the earthquake a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire. And after the fire the sound of a low whisper.

— I KINGS 19:11–12

God wants to meet with you personally, just as His Spirit did with Elijah. He hears your every cry. His heart swells with love for you when you call on His power and hope in His promises. Jesus lived and died because He wants to meet you right in the middle of your struggles and sorrows.

Some days you will feel the Holy Spirit almost palpably. Thank God for those. But you will also have days when the Spirit's presence won't be obvious in grand impressions or poignant moments. Many days He will speak in a whisper, not through an earthquake or fire. For me, it was a specific whisper of wind. After a long, tearful walk with my dog, Ryman, I stood atop a small hill in Ben's and my neighborhood. I felt the most arrestingly gentle breeze, and I remembered this story. I remembered that God is always in the tender whispers. Hold tight to those hushed moments of intimacy with Him. Know that He is with you. Continue to ask Him for what your weary soul needs, and wait expectantly with open eyes and ears. Ask God to show you daily signs of His presence.

Take five minutes to silently listen to and observe the world around you today, and ask the Lord for a sweet whisper from the Spirit.

See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are.

—1 JOHN 3:1

When I felt hurt or scared as a child, I would *sprint* down the long upstairs hallway toward my parents' room, often in the middle of the night. Even if they couldn't fix what was broken or make my nightmares go away, with them was still the only place I felt safe. In your most painful moments, God desires to be near you to comfort you. You are His child. Whether you feel like it or not, He wants you to sprint to Him.

The Lord chose you, specifically, to be His child—a daughter or son of the King of the universe and a co-heir with the risen Christ. As His beloved child, your heavenly Father's arms are always open to you. He *can* fix what is broken. No matter what you're facing, He is a safe lap to climb into, a strong hand to cling to, and a loving Father to run to in the dark. God can calm your fear and comfort you in your pain infinitely more than earthly parents can. Fall into His arms. Wail to Him. Rest with Him. He is always a safe place.

What are you most afraid of today? Speak it aloud to your loving Father, and pray for His supernatural comfort.

What is sown is perishable; what is raised is imperishable.  
It is sown in dishonor; it is raised in glory. It is sown in  
weakness; it is raised in power. It is sown a natural body;  
it is raised a spiritual body.

— I CORINTHIANS 15:42–44

**T**he kingdom of God is a kingdom defined by sacrifice—physical and spiritual deaths. We know this and acknowledge it every spring when we celebrate Christ’s ultimate sacrifice on the cross. Yet what we celebrate in the life of Jesus, we fear and avoid at all costs in our own lives. We long for glory but distrust God when He allows the pain that often comes first. We so easily pray, “Father, take this cup from me,” but struggle to say, “Not as I will, but as You will” (Luke 22:42).

Hear this loud and clear: God doesn’t like to see you suffer. He is always good and loving and fighting for the flourishing of His kids. I believe He hurts for us when we face difficulties. But even when He allows them, He never wastes them. Though it doesn’t feel like it now, there is valuable treasure for you to find in this trial. He can do abundantly more than you can ask or imagine with your suffering (Ephesians 3:20). As you endure faithfully, laying down the person or things you’ve lost, God’s work to raise you back up and refine you never stops. He is a restorer. “The sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to [you]” (Romans 8:18). He is making you glorious.

*Lord, I hate the pain I’m in right now. Remind me today that grieving honestly and hopefully with You is worth it because of the goodness, growth, and glory You’re working in me.*

Thus says the Lord GOD: Behold, I, I myself will search for my sheep and will seek them out.

—EZEKIEL 34:11

Sometimes pain feels so overwhelming, so smothering, you become blind to God's presence. Sometimes fear is so great, it's hard to hear His voice. Even in nights of desperation, calling out for a word or a dream to comfort me, I didn't always get answers. Many times the Father's reply was simply "Wait." He is going to feel absent at times in your grief, but I assure you, He is always near. The volume of all that's happening in your life is so loud, the mixed messages and emotions swirling around you so unclear, it's no wonder God's gentle voice can be hard to hear.

God isn't playing spiritual hide-and-seek with you. You already have what you need through the Holy Spirit. He is your Good Shepherd who seeks you every time you're lost. You're never beyond His protective gaze. Jesus is always pursuing you, so put yourself in an expectant posture, ready and eager to hear His voice. Quiet the other voices, turn down the noise, and find a still place where you have the capacity to receive Him.

| What is distracting you from hearing God's voice? What do you need to turn off, hit pause on, or say no to?

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