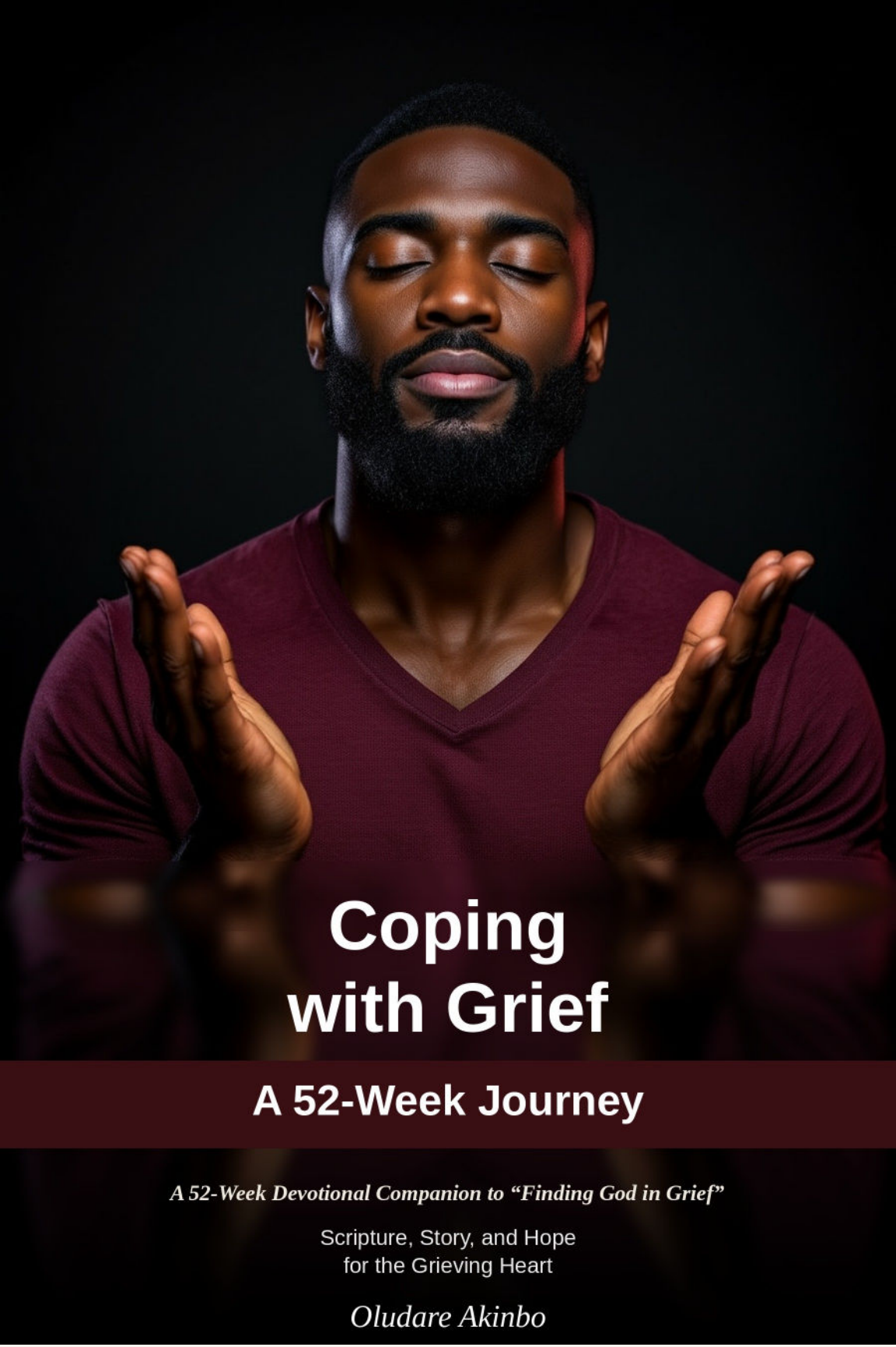


Coping with Grief

A 52-Week Journey

A 52-Week Devotional Companion to "Finding God in Grief"

Scripture, Story, and Hope
for the Grieving Heart

Oludare Akinbo

Coping with Grief

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Acknowledgments

Writing a book like this is never a solo journey. It is born in the sacred space between pain and prayer, between silence and the still, small voice of God.

Coping with Grief grew out of my own story of loss, first written in *Finding God in Grief*, and through the quiet strength, prayers, and presence of those who walked beside me. I often think of King David in the Psalms—pouring out lament and praise, encouraging himself in the Lord when there was no one else to (1 Samuel 30:6). *Finding God in Grief* was written in that same spirit, completed within the same year I lost my beloved wife—an act of catharsis before it was ever meant to be a book.

This devotional began differently—almost two years after her passing, when God had begun to open my heart again to new love and hope. I completed it two years into the journey of loss, a year after the first book, and six months into my remarriage. If the first book was born from the wound, this one was born from the healing —proof that grief and hope can walk the same road together.

First and always, I acknowledge the mercy and goodness of God Almighty, my Refuge and ever-present Help in time of trouble. When I had no words, You listened. When I had no strength, You lifted. This journey has reminded me that grief does not cancel faith —it deepens it.

To my beloved wife, **Oluwatohungbogbo Tolulope Akinbo**, whose radiant spirit and unwavering faith shaped our home and brought out the best in me—I miss you, and wish your time had not come so soon. Your life was a testimony, your worship a weapon, your final days a sacred sermon I'll never forget. This devotional is a tribute to your courage and to the God we trusted until your final breath.

To **Ruth Chidinma Morenike Akinbo**, a friend to my family for decades and a member of my staff long before any of this began:

during the year-long fight for my late wife's life, you carried the burden of care alongside us without complaint. And after, when everyone else had returned to their routines and I was left alone with my thoughts, you did not step back. Your loyalty and quiet, faithful service—offered without expectation—reached far beyond your role. Through that steady presence, God softly broke through the bonds of my despair and kindled a fresh spark of hope and life in me.

To my children—thank you for bearing with me through the quiet days and long nights. You carry your mother's legacy with dignity, and I dedicate this work to the story God is writing through your lives. To my son, **Oluwadurotiwa**, who carried our home and his sisters alongside me, and who—with Ruth—helped me get my work and business back on track: you grew up faster than I wished, with a steadiness I'm grateful for. To my dear gist mate and older daughter, **Olaoluwatomiwale**, my emotional pillar, in whose presence I never had to hide my weakest moments: thank you for your quiet strength. To my younger daughter, **Oluwanifewa** the spitting image of your mother: your resilient, joyful spirit was a balm on the days I felt I could not hold the grief a moment longer.

To my extended family, both mine and hers, and to my spiritual family—pastors, friends, and counsellors who stood with me in prayer and presence when words would not do: thank you. To my close friends who checked in, brought food, and sent quiet texts on the hardest anniversaries: you reminded me I didn't have to be strong all the time, just honest.

To the real people whose stories are woven into these 52 weeks—some well known, some private, all faithful: thank you for living courageously through grief. And to every reader holding this book: thank you for letting me walk beside you. Grief is holy ground. May these words bring comfort, not because they are mine, but because the God who comforted me is walking with you too.

With gratitude, faith, and a heart full of remembrance,

Oludare Akinbo

Phase 1: Shock & the First Days (Weeks 1–9)

1. **When Death Comes Suddenly**
2. **When the Silence is Loud**
3. **Grace for the Caregiver**
4. **Grief Is Not a Straight Line**
5. **The Longest Nights**
6. **Comfort in the Night Watches**
7. **What Do I Do with Her Things?**
8. **Grief in the Quiet Moments**
9. **God Still Cares**

Phase 2: Relationships Under Strain (Weeks 10–19)

10. **The Comfort of Others**
11. **Grief and Friendship**
12. **The Ones Who Stayed**
13. **Friends Who Disappear**

14. **When Friends Fall Away**
15. **Alone in the Small Moments**
16. **Grief and Loneliness**
17. **When the World Moves On**
18. **When People Say the Wrong Thing**
19. **When Others Don't Understand**

Phase 3: Wrestling with God (Weeks 20–29)

20. **When Grief Makes You Angry**
21. **When You Feel Forgotten**
22. **When God Feels Distant**
23. **God in the Silence**
24. **Grief and Faith**
25. **When Faith Feels Fragile**
26. **Lament Is Not Unbelief**

27. **When Lament Turns to Trust**
28. **The God Who Collects Tears**
29. **When the Prayers Weren't Answered**

Phase 4: The Weight of Dates & Memory (Weeks 30–37)

30. **The Pain of Birthdays**
31. **Birthdays, Anniversaries, and Empty Chairs**
32. **When Dates Ambush the Heart**
33. **What Could Have Been**
34. **Grief and Regret**
35. **Words Left Unspoken**
36. **Surprised by Sadness**
37. **When It Hits You Afresh**

Phase 5: Slow, Uneven Healing (Weeks 38–45)

38. **When You're Tired of Grieving**
39. **When Healing Feels Slow**

40. **Slow, Gentle Healing**
41. **Holding On to Hope**
42. **Laughter in the Dark**
43. **Learning to Smile Again**
44. **Grace in Unexpected Places**
45. **When Grief Changes You**

Phase 6: Meaning, Legacy & Ongoing Practice (Weeks 46–52)

46. **When Pain Becomes Purpose**
47. **Keeping Sacred Time**
48. **The Gift of Remembering**

49. **Grief and Worship**

50. **Grief Has No Expiry Date**
51. **When the Journey Feels Long**
52. **Finding Meaning in the Mourning**

Dedication

For **Oluwatohungbogbo Tolulope Akinbo**,
my beloved wife, my constant companion of over two decades,
whose life was a melody of grace,
whose faith never faltered,
and whose love will continue to echo in every corner of my soul.

You walked through the valley with courage,
worshiped through the pain,
and looked heavenward even in your final breath.

This devotional was born from the ache of losing you
and the hope of one day seeing you again.

Your memory is my charge,
your legacy my anthem,
and your faith—still speaking.

Until the Trumpet sounds and all who have been sealed with the Holy Spirit and slept in him rise imperishable and transformed into the glorious immortal beings our Creator planned for us…

Introduction

When the Valley Becomes Your Address

Grief is not a guest that visits politely and leaves quietly.
It breaks in. It rearranges your life. It knocks the wind out of you.
I learned this in the most painful way—on April 24, 2024, when I lost my beloved wife, **Oluwatohungbogbo Tolulope Akinbo**, after a courageous and faith-filled battle with Acute Myeloid Leukemia.

She was not just my wife of close to three decades—she was my love, my partner, my encourager, the heartbeat of our home. Her absence is not just noticed—it is felt in every room, every routine, every breath. I have wept. I have asked God questions. I have stared into the night in our bedroom, with nothing but silence for company. And yet… I have also *met Him*—not always in answers, but in presence. Quiet. Steady, Warm and comforting presence.

This devotional was born in that sacred, sorrowful space. It was not written from a safe distance, but from the very valley of the shadow of death that David described in Psalm 23—the shadowed place where grief walks beside you like a ghost. But it is also the place where God draws near.

Why This Devotional?

As I began to write *Finding God in Grief*, I discovered something unexpected: grief can be a gateway. A doorway into deeper intimacy with God, if we dare to bring Him our pain without filters. The first few chapters of that book hold my rawest prayers, my spiritual wrestling, and the beginnings of fragile hope. But I knew something more than a quick narrative was needed—not just for me, but for others who are walking through their own shadows.

This 52-week devotional is that “something more.” A companion for those walking through the soul searing pain and heartbreak of loss of a dearly loved one. A guide for when your theology is shaken, even

intact, but your soul feels shattered. A whisper that says: *You are not alone, and you are not crazy for still missing them.*

What You will Find Here

Each week is built around six sacred touchpoints:

- **A Scripture** — Always grounded in the eternal truth of God's Word.
- **A True Story** — Featuring someone—well-known or quietly faithful—who walked through loss and kept (or rediscovered) their faith.
- **What This Story Teaches Us** — Drawing out, specifically, what that person's example teaches you before turning to your own story.
- **A Devotional Reflection** — Linking the story and Scripture to your journey.
- **A Prayer** — For when words fail or hurt too much to form.
- **A Prompt and Personal Notes** — Something to write, reflect on, or pray through, followed by ruled "Personal Reader Notes" pages set aside for your own reflections.

Some weeks will stir fresh tears. Others may bring unexpected laughter. Some may take longer to move through than others. That's okay. *This is your journey.* Let it breathe.

Why 52 Weeks?

Because one month isn't enough.
Because anniversaries hurt.
Because the second year can feel harder than the first.
Because your heart deserves time—and so does your healing.

A full year may feel daunting, but here is what I have found: even slow healing is still healing. Even broken hearts can beat again. And even through tears, God is still God.

An Invitation, Not an Expectation

This is not a formula for “getting over it.”
It is not a test of your faith.
It is an invitation to sit with God in your sorrow—and discover that *He is still sitting with you*.

Whether your loss was recent or long ago, whether it was public or unspoken, whether you're grieving a spouse, a child, a parent, or even someone who did not get a proper goodbye—this book is for you.

It’s for those who have heard too many clichés.
It’s for those who smile in public but collapse in private.
It’s for those who have loved deeply—and are now learning how to live again.

You Are Not Alone

Friend, this road is hard—but it is not godless.
I believe—because I have seen it—that even in the darkness, there is still a flicker of light. And that flicker? It’s not your strength. It’s His presence.

You’re allowed to cry. You’re allowed to wonder. You’re allowed to heal at your pace.

And in it all, you are *still held*.

May each week be a gentle hand on your back, a quiet companion for the long nights, and a witness to the God who never wastes a tear.

Welcome to the journey.
We’ll take it one week at a time.

— Oludare Akinbo
In loving memory of Oluwatohungbogbo Tolulope Akinbo
July 8, 1977 - April 24, 2024

Week 1: When Death Comes Suddenly

> **Anchor Scripture**
> *"Teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom."* — Psalm 90:12 NIV

Story: Vanessa Bryant – The Shock of Sudden Loss

The sudden death of Kobe Bryant and his daughter Gianna stunned the world. Vanessa Bryant, his wife, called it “unimaginable pain.” Yet, with quiet strength, she honored their memory through foundations, family, and faith. Her journey reflected the agony and dignity of carrying grief when there’s no time to prepare for it.

What This Story Teaches Us

Vanessa Bryant did not have the luxury of preparation. There was no long illness, no chance to say the things people usually save for a deathbed, no gradual letting go. One moment held a full life; the next held only its absence. She has spoken about the specific disorientation of sudden loss—not just grief, but the mind's inability to catch up to what the heart already knows is true.

That gap between knowing and believing is worth naming plainly, because it is not a failure of faith. If your loss came without warning, you may still find yourself, months or years later, half-expecting the phone to ring. This is not denial. It is simply how the mind processes what happened too fast for it to process at all.

This week, let Vanessa's honesty about disorientation give you room for your own. Sudden grief does not owe anyone a tidy timeline. God's steadiness does not depend on your readiness—He was already present in the moment you were not prepared for, and He remains present in whatever disorientation still lingers.

Personal Reflection

I still remember the day the relapse came. Her strength, once slowly returning, disappeared in days. And just like that—she was gone. No warning. No farewell. No final whispered prayers.

Sudden death doesn't just hurt. It disorients. You find yourself staring at the wall, trying to piece together what just happened. Trying to pray, but forgetting the words.

I had faith. I had hope. But I didn't have time.

In the fog that followed, I discovered something beautiful: God was already there. He didn't need my readiness to show up. He held me before I could scream. He caught the pieces before they shattered too far.

Devotional Insight

Sudden loss feels like the earth shifting beneath your feet. But God never loses His footing. He is already present in the unthinkable. He doesn't ask you to understand it—only to let Him hold you in it.

Scripture Echoes

> *"You will keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on You…"* — Isaiah 26:3 NKJV
>
> *"Even when I walk through the darkest valley… You are with me."* — Psalm 23:4 NLT
>
> *"My times are in Your hands…"* — Psalm 31:15 NKJV

Prayer

Lord, I didn't see this coming. I wasn't ready. But You were. Hold me steady when life takes a turn I never expected. Give me wisdom for each new day.

Reflection Prompt

Write about the moment you first received the news. Then write one truth you still believe about God—even now.

Personal Reader Notes

Week 2: When the Silence is Loud

> **Anchor Scripture**
> *"Be still, and know that I am God."* — Psalm 46:10 (NKJV)

Story: Joan Didion — The Year of Magical Thinking

American writer Joan Didion lost her husband, John Gregory Dunne, to a sudden heart attack at their dinner table in December 2003, just as their forty-year marriage was nearing its next anniversary. In her memoir The Year of Magical Thinking, she described the strange, disorienting silence that followed—the ordinary quiet of an apartment that had once held two lives, now holding only the sound of her own thoughts.

What This Story Teaches Us

Joan Didion, a writer whose entire craft was built on precise observation, found that grief made even ordinary rooms unfamiliar. She wrote of setting the table for two out of habit, of the strange, magical thinking that if she did everything correctly, he might come back. Her honesty matters here: even someone trained to notice everything could not out-think her own loss.

There is a temptation, in the silence that follows a death, to believe that if you just manage your grief correctly—say the right prayers, feel the right amount of sadness, move on at the right pace—the ache will resolve on schedule. Didion's year taught her otherwise. Magical thinking is not a moral failure. It is simply what a mind does while it relearns a world with one less person in it.

This week, do not rush to correct your own strange habits of memory—the plate still set, the name still on your lips. Let the silence be loud without needing to immediately explain it away. God is not waiting for you to think correctly about your loss before He draws near. He is already sitting in the silence with you.

Personal Reflection

The house is never truly silent—there's still the hum of the refrigerator, the traffic outside, the television left on for company. But there's a different kind of silence that grief brings. It's the absence of a particular voice, a particular footstep on the stairs, a particular way someone used to clear their throat before they spoke.

In the earliest weeks, that silence felt unbearable. I would talk out loud to fill it, then feel foolish, then fall quiet again. I didn't know what to do with a silence that loud.

It took time to learn that the silence wasn't empty. God was in it, even when I couldn't feel Him yet.

Devotional Insight

Grief has a way of turning ordinary quiet into something almost deafening. But Scripture doesn't ask us to fill that silence with noise—it invites us to be still in it, and to trust that God is not absent from the quiet. He is often nearest exactly where the silence is loudest.

> **Scripture Echoes**
>
> *"The Lord your God in your midst, the Mighty One, will save; He will rejoice over you with gladness, He will quiet you with His love."* — Zephaniah 3:17 (NKJV)
>
> *"For God alone my soul waits in silence; from him comes my salvation."* — Psalm 62:1 (ESV)

Prayer

Lord, this silence hurts. But help me not to fear it. Let me find You in the stillness. Speak gently and give me ears to hear You in the quiet.

Reflection Prompt

When was the silence most painful for you? What might God be whispering to you in that very silence?

Personal Reader Notes

Week 3: Grace for the Caregiver

> **Anchor Scripture**
> *"Even to your old age and gray hairs I am He, I am He who will sustain you."* — Isaiah 46:4 (NIV)

Story: Dana Reeve — Nine Years of Devoted Care

After actor Christopher Reeve was paralyzed from the neck down in a 1995 riding accident, his wife Dana became his primary caregiver for nine years, all while raising their young son. She later said the experience revealed both a deeper strength in their marriage and the exhausting, unseen sacrifice caregiving requires. Christopher died in 2004; Dana herself died of lung cancer less than two years later, having given nearly a decade of her life to his care.

What This Story Teaches Us

Dana Reeve's caregiving did not begin and end in a single dramatic moment. It was nine years of ordinary, exhausting, unglamorous devotion—medical routines, sleepless nights, decisions no one prepares you to make. She was not a headline for most of that time. She was simply present, day after day, in a role the world rarely applauds until it is over.

If you cared for someone before they died, you may be carrying a specific and often unacknowledged grief: not only the loss of the person, but the loss of the exhausting, sacred rhythm that structured your days for months or years. That rhythm does not simply switch off, and the silence it leaves behind is its own particular ache.

This week, let Dana's example honor what your own caregiving cost you. It was not a small thing. God saw every unseen hour, and He has not forgotten the sacrifice that no one else may have fully witnessed.

Personal Reflection

I know something of that grace—the kind you don't feel until the weight is crushing. When my wife's condition worsened, I became

her nurse, counselor, cheerleader, and guardian. I was with her daily, every moment, from the diagnosis through the months of hospitalization, until her passing. Days blurred into nights. Rest was a luxury.

There were moments I felt powerless—watching her in pain, unable to fix it. There were days I whispered to God, "How long?" But somehow, grace would arrive—not in grand displays, but in quiet strength.

Grace didn't always remove the burden. It helped me bear it.

Devotional Insight

Caregiving during illness or grief is a sacred trust. It's exhausting, yes—but it is also one of the purest expressions of love. God sees every unseen sacrifice, every tear shed in solitude. His sustaining hand is not just for the weak—it's also for the one holding up the weak.

> **Scripture Echoes**
>
> *"As your days, so shall your strength be."* — Deuteronomy 33:25 (NKJV)
>
> *"I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me."* — Philippians 4:13 (NKJV)

Prayer

Lord, strengthen those who care for the sick and dying. Let them feel Your presence in the exhaustion, and Your grace in the sacrifice no one else sees.

Reflection Prompt

What moment of caregiving stretched you the most? Write it down—and ask God to show you where His grace was present in that season.

Personal Reader Notes

Week 4: Grief Is Not a Straight Line

> ***Anchor Scripture:***
> *"The heart knows its own bitterness, and no stranger shares its joy." — Proverbs 14:10 (ESV)*

Story: Kofi Annan — Dignity Through Private Pain

Kofi Annan, former UN Secretary-General, was admired for his calm leadership. Yet he faced deep personal loss, including the death of a daughter. Despite his public calm, his private sorrow took years to process. His life showed that grief doesn't follow a neat timeline —and that even great leaders weep.

What This Story Teaches Us

Kofi Annan carried enormous public responsibility while privately grieving in ways the world rarely saw. Those who worked closely with him described a man who could move between composed diplomatic leadership and quiet, private sorrow—not because one was fake and the other real, but because grief and duty can occupy the same day, the same hour, without canceling each other out.

Many people feel guilty for this exact tension: functioning at work, smiling at a gathering, managing a household, all while carrying real grief underneath. It can feel dishonest, as though composure were a betrayal of how much the loss actually matters. Annan's life suggests otherwise. Dignity in public and devastation in private are not contradictions. They are simply what it looks like to keep living while still grieving.

This week, release the guilt of appearing fine when you are not. Grief is not required to announce itself constantly to be real. God knows exactly what is happening beneath your composed exterior, even when no one else does.

Personal Reflection:

I used to think grief had stages. Denial. Anger. Bargaining. Acceptance. Like some neat ladder you climb and eventually reach

“peace.” But grief isn’t a ladder—it’s a labyrinth. You take two steps forward and fall three back. You laugh one day, then cry in the middle of a supermarket aisle the next.

I’ve learned not to judge my grief. Some days I’m okay. Other days I fall apart brushing past her favorite dress. And that’s okay. Because grief isn’t something to conquer—it’s something to carry.

Like Kofi Annan, I’ve learned that dignified grief doesn’t mean dry eyes. It means staying open to God’s comfort, even when the journey is messy.

God isn’t embarrassed by our emotional detours. He walks them with us.

Devotional Insight:

There’s no “right” way to grieve. Don’t rush the process. God is not timing your tears—He’s catching them.

> **Scripture Echoes:**
>
> *“He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds.”* — Psalm 147:3 (NKJV)
>
> *“Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.”* — Matthew 5:4 (NIV)
>
> *“A bruised reed He will not break.”* — Isaiah 42:3 (NIV)

Prayer:

Father, thank You for not rushing my healing. Thank You for walking with me even when I feel lost in the dark. Hold me gently.

Reflection Prompt:

Reflect on a time when you thought you were “done” grieving, only to feel pain again. What do you think God was showing you in that moment?

Personal Reader Notes

Week 5: The Longest Nights

> **Anchor Scripture**
> *"Weeping may endure for a night, but joy comes in the morning."* — Psalm 30:5 NKJV

Story: Mary and Martha — Waiting in the Dark

When Lazarus died, Mary and Martha sent for Jesus, but He delayed. By the time He arrived, Lazarus was already dead. Their words were drenched in grief: “Lord, if You had been here…” (John 11:21,32). Yet even in the delay, Jesus wept—and then brought resurrection.

What This Story Teaches Us

Mary and Martha did something remarkably human: they sent for Jesus and then waited—and waited, and waited, while their brother died anyway. When Jesus finally arrived, both sisters said nearly the same thing, almost as an accusation: "Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died." Their grief included real disappointment with God's timing, spoken to His face.

If you have ever silently thought some version of that same sentence—if You had come sooner, if You had answered differently, if You had acted when I asked—you are not the first, and you are in good company. Mary and Martha's honesty was not punished. Jesus wept alongside them before He did anything else.

This week, you do not have to manage your disappointment with God's timing before you bring it to Him. Say it plainly, the way the sisters did. He is not afraid of your honest grief, and He is not finished with your story simply because the timing did not make sense to you.

Personal Reflection

The nights after she died felt like the longest of my life. I would lie awake, sometimes until dawn, waiting for the light to come—not just physically, but emotionally. I wanted morning to bring relief. I wanted resurrection.

But the dawn came slowly.

Like Mary and Martha, I wrestled with God's timing. I wanted answers. I wanted intervention. But what I received, slowly and gently, was presence.

Jesus didn't explain everything to Mary and Martha. But He stood with them. He wept with them. And eventually, He acted.

That is the pattern of hope: Presence. Weeping. Resurrection.

Devotional Insight

In your longest nights, Jesus is not absent—He's weeping beside you. And in time, He will speak life again.

Scripture Echoes

> *"The Lord your God in your midst… will quiet you with His love."* — Zephaniah 3:17 NKJV
>
> *"The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light."* — Isaiah 9:2 NKJV

Prayer

Jesus, the nights are long and heavy. But I know You are here. Stay with me until joy finds me again.

Reflection Prompt

Describe one of your darkest nights since your loss. Then reflect on one small glimmer of hope you've seen since. Name it—and thank God for it.

Reflection Prompt:
Describe one of your darkest nights since your loss. Then reflect on one small glimmer of hope you've seen since. Name it—and thank God for it.

Personal Reader Notes

Week 6: Comfort in the Night Watches

> **Anchor Scripture**
> *"When I remember You on my bed, I meditate on You in the night watches."* — Psalm 63:6 (NKJV)

Story: Joni Eareckson Tada — Prayer in the Long Nights

Paralyzed from the shoulders down since a diving accident at seventeen, Joni Eareckson Tada has lived with decades of chronic pain, much of it worst at night, when sleep is hardest to find and she cannot even shift her own position for relief. She has spoken openly about waking in the dark hours and turning immediately to prayer, saying it is often in that exact exhaustion that she senses God's strength most clearly.

What This Story Teaches Us

Joni Eareckson Tada has lived with paralysis and chronic pain for decades, and she has been specific about when her pain is worst: not during the busy distractions of daytime, but in the long, quiet stretches of night, when there is nothing left to occupy her mind but the ache itself. Her response was not to dread those hours, but to turn them into a place of prayer.

Night has its own particular cruelty in grief. The distractions of the day fall away, and whatever you have been outrunning catches up to you in the dark. If your hardest hours are the ones no one else sees—2 a.m., not 2 p.m.—Joni's example matters directly to you.

This week, consider treating your sleepless hours less as wasted time to be endured and more as an appointed space for honest prayer. God does not sleep, and He is not absent from your night watches. Some of the deepest conversations with Him happen exactly when everyone else has gone quiet.

Personal Reflection

The nights after she passed were the hardest. Sleep was elusive. Memories loud. Tears silent, so I wouldn't wake the children.

I used to think those long hours were simply something to endure until morning. Over time, I started treating them differently—as a space, however unwanted, where I could talk to God without anyone else needing me to hold it together.

The night hasn't gotten easier every time. But I've learned it isn't wasted time either.

Devotional Insight

The night hours of grief, when the house is quiet and everyone else is asleep, don't have to be only endured. They can become a space of honest, unhurried prayer—a place where God meets us in our exhaustion rather than waiting for us to compose ourselves first.

> **Scripture Echoes**
>
> *"The Lord will command His lovingkindness in the daytime, and in the night His song shall be with me."* — Psalm 42:8 (NKJV)
>
> *"He gives His beloved sleep."* — Psalm 127:2 (NKJV)

Prayer

Lord, meet me in the sleepless hours. When night stretches long and hope feels thin, wrap me in Your peace. Let Your presence hold what sleep cannot.

Reflection Prompt

What do your nights look like now? Journal a nighttime prayer—short and honest—for the next time rest eludes you.

Personal Reader Notes

Week 7: What Do I Do with Her Things?

> **Anchor Scripture**
> *"There is a time to keep and a time to throw away." —* Ecclesiastes 3:6b (NIV)

Story: Winnie Madikizela-Mandela — Keeping the Memories Alive

After Winnie Mandela's passing, her daughters took time to preserve her possessions, writings, and personal mementos. They turned part of her home into a museum, not out of sentimentality, but as a way of continuing her voice through the physical reminders of her life.

What This Story Teaches Us

Winnie Mandela's daughters made a deliberate choice about their mother's belongings: not to erase them quickly, and not to leave them untouched forever, but to give them ongoing purpose—turning part of her home into a place where her voice could still be heard. Their decision was neither denial nor detachment. It was intentional stewardship of memory.

Most people feel pressure to resolve the question of belongings quickly, as though speed were proof of healthy grieving. Winnie's daughters model something different: there is no required timeline for deciding what to keep, what to release, and what to transform into something new. The goal is not efficiency. It is honoring what the items represent.

This week, if you are staring at a closet, a drawer, a box you have not opened, let this story loosen the pressure to decide today. There is no prize for speed here. Ask God to guide you toward what each item is for now—kept, released, or given new purpose—in His time, not a stranger's expectation.

Personal Reflection

One of the hardest decisions I had to make was what to do with her clothes. Her shoes. Her perfume bottles. Her notebooks.

Each item was a memory, a moment frozen.

I would open the wardrobe just to breathe in the scent she left behind.

And I felt torn—between wanting to preserve everything, and knowing I couldn't live in a shrine of the past forever.

Some things I gave away with trembling hands. Some I've kept, sacredly.

Grief doesn't follow neat guidelines. What matters is letting God guide you gently through the letting go and the holding on.

Devotional Insight

You don't need to rush to "clear out" anything. Grief takes time. God's Spirit is gentle, and He understands how every item may carry weight. There's no shame in keeping what comforts you—or releasing what no longer serves you.

Scripture Echoes

> *"Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth… but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven."* — Matthew 6:19–20 NIV
>
> *"Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."* — Luke 12:34 NKJV

Prayer

Lord, guide my heart as I navigate the sacred spaces and items left behind. Help me honor their meaning without being overwhelmed. Show me what to keep and what to release in peace.

Reflection Prompt

What item of your loved one's are you still holding onto? Why is it meaningful to you? Write a prayer of release, or a blessing over it if you choose to keep it.

Personal Reader Notes

Week 8: Grief in the Quiet Moments

> **Anchor Scripture**
> *"Be still, and know that I am God."* — Psalm 46:10 (NKJV)

Story: Sheryl Sandberg — Option B

After her husband Dave Goldberg died suddenly of a heart condition, Facebook executive Sheryl Sandberg later wrote in her book Option B that grief rarely announced itself only in big moments. It was often the small, ordinary ones—a father-child activity two weeks after the funeral, an unremarkable Tuesday—where the loss hit hardest and most unexpectedly.

What This Story Teaches Us

Sheryl Sandberg's grief did not save its worst moments for the funeral or the anniversary. It ambushed her on an ordinary Tuesday, during an unremarkable father-child activity, when she least expected to need anyone's help. That detail is the whole lesson: grief does not respect the calendar of significant days. It lives in the small, unscheduled hours too.

This matters because many people brace themselves only for the big, marked occasions—the birthday, the death anniversary—and feel blindsided when the real wave comes on a Wednesday afternoon for no visible reason. That blindsiding is not a sign that something is wrong with you. It is simply how grief actually behaves.

This week, stop waiting only for the marked dates to guard your heart. The ordinary Tuesday deserves the same grace and the same permission to feel what you feel. God is present in the unremarkable hour exactly as fully as He is present in the anniversary.

Personal Reflection

It's rarely the funeral or the anniversary that catches me most off guard anymore. It's the ordinary Tuesday afternoon. A song on the radio. A recipe I only knew because she taught it to me.

For a long time I thought grief should look dramatic to be real. But most of my grief doesn't happen in dramatic moments. It happens quietly, folded into an ordinary hour, when I least expect to need God's help.

I've learned to notice those quiet moments instead of rushing past them, and to bring them to God exactly as they are—small, unremarkable, and real.

Devotional Insight

Grief doesn't save itself for the big occasions. It often arrives in the small, quiet, unremarkable moments of an ordinary day. God is not only present at the funeral or the anniversary—He is present in the quiet middle of the afternoon, too.

> **Scripture Echoes**
>
> *"The Lord is near to those who have a broken heart, and saves such as have a contrite spirit."* — Psalm 34:18 (NKJV)
>
> *"Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."* — Matthew 11:28 (NKJV)

Prayer

Lord, meet me in the quiet, unremarkable moments where grief catches me off guard. Help me not to dismiss them, but to bring them honestly to You.

Reflection Prompt

When have you felt the weight of grief in a quiet or ordinary moment? Write about that experience and what God may have been whispering to you in it.

Personal Reader Notes

Week 9: God Still Cares

> ***Anchor Scripture:***
> *"Cast all your care upon Him, for He cares for you." — 1 Peter 5:7 (NKJV)*

Story: Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie — The Grief of Losing a Parent

Acclaimed Nigerian author Chimamanda Adichie lost her father in 2020. She described grief as “a cruel kind of education.” Even as someone celebrated globally, she found herself questioning everything. But in the rawness, she discovered comfort in shared humanity and in the power of stories—and how grief connects us to what matters.

What This Story Teaches Us

Chimamanda Adichie, a writer whose command of language is celebrated worldwide, described grief as something that left her genuinely questioning everything—even with all her skill, all her global recognition, all her hard-won wisdom. She did not perform having it figured out. She named the questioning honestly, and let comfort come from shared humanity rather than certainty.

Achievement, faith maturity, and public composure do not exempt anyone from the disorientation of loss. If you have found yourself, despite years of walking with God, still asking whether He still cares —Chimamanda's honesty gives you permission to ask the question out loud instead of hiding it behind a performance of certainty.

This week, let your questions be questions rather than confessions of failed faith. God is not threatened by "does God still care?" whispered in the dark. He answers that question, patiently, the same way He has answered it for every grieving heart before yours—not always with an explanation, but always with His presence.

Personal Reflection:

When my wife passed, I didn't just lose a spouse—I lost rhythm, structure, a daily sense of belonging. At times, I caught myself asking: "Does God still care?" The prayers we prayed, the tears we cried—were they in vain?

But even in those shadowed thoughts, I noticed unexpected signs of care. A message from someone who didn't know I needed it. A scripture that pierced through my numbness. A moment of laughter with the children that reminded me joy wasn't dead. A deeper awareness of the concern and care of those around me sensitive to my loss.

God's care didn't always look like rescue. It looked like presence. Like nearness. Like daily manna—just enough grace to get through the next moment. Like Chimamanda, I found that grief is a teacher—and one of its most painful but profound lessons is this: God doesn't always take away the pain, but He never abandons you in it.

Devotional Insight:

God doesn't promise we won't suffer. But He promises we won't suffer alone. His care isn't distant—it's daily.

> **Scripture Echoes:**
>
> "The Lord is near to those who have a broken heart, and saves such as have a contrite spirit." — Psalm 34:18 (NKJV)
>
> "Can a woman forget her nursing child?… Yet I will not forget you." — Isaiah 49:15 (NKJV)
>
> "Even when I walk through the valley… You are with me." — Psalm 23:4 (NLT)

Prayer:

Father, I feel fragile. But thank You for not letting me go. Remind me daily that You still care—even when I can't see it.

Reflection Prompt:

Where have you recently felt God’s care, even in small ways? Write them down as reminders that you are not forgotten.

Personal Reader Notes

Week 10: The Comfort of Others

> ***Anchor Scripture:***
> *"Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep." — Romans 12:15 (NKJV)*

Story: Dora Akunyili — Strength Surrounded by Support

Dora Akunyili, the former Director-General of NAFDAC, battled terminal cancer with remarkable courage. Throughout her illness, her family, colleagues, and the nation surrounded her with prayers and tributes—even before her passing. Their comfort was a shield in her suffering.

What This Story Teaches Us

Dora Akunyili did not fight her illness in isolation. Colleagues from NAFDAC, government officials she had served alongside, ordinary Nigerians who had never met her personally, and her own family formed a circle around her that held firm through to the very end. Notice what her story does not say: it does not say she needed to be strong enough to face her illness alone, or that leaning on others was a sign of weakness in a woman widely admired for her courage. Her strength and her supported-ness were not opposites—they existed together.

If you are grieving, this matters more than it might first seem. Many people, especially those used to being the strong one, the provider, the one others lean on, feel a quiet shame in needing to be comforted themselves. Dora's story pushes back against that shame directly. The same woman remembered for taking on counterfeit drug cartels, for standing fearlessly against powerful interests, was also a woman who let herself be surrounded, prayed over, and cared for in her weakest hour. Her courage did not require her to refuse help. If anything, her willingness to receive love from others was itself a kind of strength—the strength to stay human, to stay connected, even while everything in her body was failing.

This week, let her example give you permission. You do not have to prove your faith or your resilience by grieving alone. Let the cards

come. Let the calls come. Let the few who show up with real presence, not performance, draw close. Comfort received is not comfort wasted—it is, as this week's Devotional Insight will say, God showing up in people. Dora let herself be held. So can you.

Personal Reflection:

Like Dora, I too received an outpouring of cards, calls, and prayers —from friends and family both near and abroad—throughout my wife's illness and in the days after her passing. But it was in that season that I learned who my true friends actually were. Of the many who reached out, only a very few proved to be truly cherished friends rather than simply acquaintances offering their sympathies. Those few were the ones who kept calling, kept messaging, and supported us tangibly in ways that touched both my wife and me deeply. Some came with long prayers. Others came with quiet hugs. A few simply sat in silence, holding my hand. And those simple acts were like anchors in a storm.

Grief often feels lonely, but comfort makes it bearable. One family friend sends her kids regularly, every few weeks bringing some food stuff for the house, another visits weekly, checks on me several times a day via WhatsApp. Some stayed and quietly helped, served and cared deeply by their actions and service —no sermons, no expectations. Just presence.

And isn't that like our Lord Jesus Christ? Not always explaining, but always staying. I still remember those who helped carry our load during those very difficult one year of struggle. Their love became a testimony—and a reminder that grief may isolate, but God sends people to interrupt our loneliness.

Devotional Insight:

God often shows up in people. When others come close in your sorrow, receive their comfort—it's divine care in human skin.

> **Scripture Echoes:**
>
> *"Two are better than one... If either of them falls, one can help the other up."*
>
> — Ecclesiastes 4:9–10 (NIV)
>
> *"Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ."* — Galatians 6:2 (NKJV)
>
> *"A friend loves at all times."* — Proverbs 17:17 (NKJV)

Prayer:

Lord, thank You for those You've sent to comfort me. Help me recognize their love as part of Your care. Make me a comforter to others too.

Reflection Prompt:

Who brought you comfort in your time of grief? Write them a message of gratitude—or say a prayer for them.

Personal Reader Notes

Week 11: Grief and Friendship

> **Anchor Scripture**
> *"A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for adversity."* — Proverbs 17:17 (NKJV)

Story: Venus and Serena Williams — Sisters and Best Friends in Grief

In 2003, tennis champions Venus and Serena Williams lost their older sister, Yetunde Price, to a shooting in Compton, California. Both sisters have spoken openly about how devastating that loss was—and about how their bond with each other became one of the steadiest things holding them up. Serena later said their mother had always taught them, "your sisters are your best friends... we became each other's biggest supporters." Together, they turned their grief into the Yetunde Price Resource Center, built to support other families facing similar loss.

What This Story Teaches Us

Venus and Serena Williams did not simply endure their sister's murder side by side—they turned toward each other and made that bond one of the steadiest things holding them up. Their mother had taught them that sisters are meant to be each other's best friends, and in the aftermath of unimaginable loss, that teaching became lived reality rather than sentiment.

Grief can isolate even people who love each other, each person retreating into private pain rather than sharing it. The Williams sisters modeled something different: choosing to lean toward each other rather than away, even while each was carrying her own version of the same wound.

This week, consider who in your own life could become a Venus to your Serena—or a Serena to your Venus. Grief shared with someone who understands it firsthand carries a weight that grief carried alone simply cannot. God often provides exactly this kind of companionship; the question is whether we let ourselves lean into it.

Personal Reflection

I've learned that real friendship in grief doesn't always look like grand gestures. Sometimes it looks like someone simply staying present—showing up, sitting in the silence, not needing to fix anything.

The friends who mattered most to me weren't always the ones with the right words. They were the ones who kept showing up, long after the initial flood of support faded.

I try now to be that kind of friend to others—not because I always know what to say, but because I've learned how much it means simply to stay.

Devotional Insight

True friendship reveals itself most clearly in adversity—not in what is said, but in who remains present. God often uses ordinary people, showing up faithfully, as tangible evidence of His own nearness in our grief.

> **Scripture Echoes**
>
> *"Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their labor... for if they fall, one will lift up his companion."* — Ecclesiastes 4:9–10 (NKJV)
>
> *"Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ."* — Galatians 6:2 (NKJV)

Prayer

Thank You, Lord, for the friends who stayed present through my hardest season. Teach me to be that same steady presence for someone else who is grieving.

Reflection Prompt

Who has been a friend to you during this season of grief? Write them a thank-you note or prayer of gratitude—even if it's just for you and God to see.

Personal Reader Notes

Week 12: The Ones Who Stayed

> **Anchor Scripture**
> *"Entreat me not to leave you, or to turn back from following after you; for wherever you go, I will go."* — Ruth 1:16 (NKJV)

Story: Oprah Winfrey and Gayle King — A Friendship That Held

Over more than four decades, Oprah Winfrey and Gayle King's friendship has weathered fame, distance, and personal loss without breaking. Winfrey has spoken openly about how, in her hardest seasons, King simply stayed—present, unhurried, unimpressed by titles or schedules. Not every friendship survives loss. Theirs is often held up as proof that some do, and that the ones who stay are worth naming.

What This Story Teaches Us

Oprah Winfrey and Gayle King's friendship did not stay steady by accident. Across more than four decades, through fame, distance, and personal loss, Gayle simply kept showing up—unhurried, unimpressed by schedules or titles, present in the ordinary moments as much as the hard ones. That consistency, more than any single grand gesture, is what made the friendship durable.

It is easy to assume that meaningful support has to look dramatic—the perfect words, the elaborate gesture. Oprah and Gayle's story suggests the opposite. What actually sustains people through grief is far more often simple, repeated presence: the phone call on an ordinary Tuesday, not just the funeral day.

This week, notice who has been quietly, consistently present in your life—not the loudest gesture, but the steadiest one. Consider telling them what that steadiness has meant. And consider becoming that kind of presence for someone else who is grieving now.

Personal Reflection

I've already written about the friends who disappeared after my wife died. But I don't want that to be the only story I tell, because it isn't the whole one.

A small handful of people did not disappear. They kept showing up long after the casseroles stopped coming and the sympathy cards were put away. They called on random Tuesdays, not just the anniversary. They let me repeat the same stories about her without ever looking tired of hearing them.

For a long time I focused on counting who left. I've since learned it matters more to name who stayed—and to let them know I noticed.

Devotional Insight

Grief doesn't just reveal who leaves. It reveals who stays. Those people are not incidental—they are a specific gift from God, sent to carry a portion of the weight with you. Naming them, thanking them, and staying close to them is its own act of healing.

> **Scripture Echoes**
>
> *"A man who has friends must himself be friendly, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother."* — Proverbs 18:24 (NKJV)
>
> *"The soul of Jonathan was knit to the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul."* — 1 Samuel 18:1 (NKJV)

Prayer

Thank You, Lord, for the ones who stayed. Help me not to take them for granted, and give me the grace to be that same kind of steady presence for someone else who is grieving.

Reflection Prompt

Who stayed present with you through your hardest season? Have you told them what that meant to you? How might you become that same presence for someone else who is grieving right now?

Personal Reader Notes

Week 13: Friends Who Disappear

> **Anchor Scripture**
> *"A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for adversity."* — Proverbs 17:17 (NKJV)

Story: Queen Elizabeth II — A Lifetime of Changing Friendships

Throughout her long reign, Queen Elizabeth II experienced friendships that came and went. After Prince Philip's death, she experienced a notable period of isolation. Despite being the head of the Commonwealth, her personal grief highlighted a reality we all face—grief shifts relationships. Some people draw near. Others, surprisingly, vanish.

What This Story Teaches Us

Queen Elizabeth II's decades on the throne included countless friendships that shifted, faded, or ended entirely under the pressure of position, scrutiny, and simple human change. She experienced, across an extraordinarily public life, the same private ache that ordinary people feel when relationships they expected to last do not.

There is a particular grief in realizing that some friendships cannot survive your season of loss—not because anyone did anything cruel, but because grief reveals which relationships had the depth to endure and which did not. That realization can feel like a second loss stacked on top of the first.

This week, let yourself grieve the friendships that faded without needing to explain away the sadness of it. This is a real loss, not an overreaction. And let it also make you attentive to the friendships that did last—because those, as next week's reflection will show, deserve to be named and treasured.

Personal Reflection

After my wife passed, one of the strangest experiences wasn't the silence in our home—it was the silence from some friends. People I

expected to show up with food, with prayers, with presence… disappeared.

At first, I made excuses for them. Maybe they were giving me space. Maybe they didn't know what to say. Maybe they were grieving too. But over time, the silence became a second kind of loss—a relational bereavement layered on top of the emotional one.

Grief has a way of revealing who really walks with you. And while I am forever grateful for the few who stayed—who checked in months later, who still say her name, who remember dates—I've also had to grieve friendships that quietly died when she did.

But I've come to see that God uses even this. He refines our expectations, redirects our affections, and reassures us that while people may fail us, *He never will.* "When my father and my mother forsake me, then the Lord will take me up." — Psalm 27:10 (KJV)

Jesus too was abandoned in His moment of greatest sorrow. And He still chose love. So, I'm learning to forgive the disappearing friends, bless the ones who stayed, and lean on the One who never leaves.

Devotional Insight

Grief tests relationships. Don't let disappearing friends make you doubt your worth. Let them go in peace—and trust that God will send others to walk with you in this season.

> **Scripture Echoes**
>
> *"Though my companions are gone… the Lord stood at my side."* — 2 Timothy 4:16–17 (NLT)
>
> *"Be strong and courageous… for the Lord your God goes with you; He will never leave you nor forsake you."* — Deuteronomy 31:6 (NIV)

Prayer

Jesus, You know the pain of loneliness. When others walk away, be my constant. Thank You for the friends who stayed. Heal me from the hurt of those who didn't.

Reflection Prompt

Name the people who surprised you during your grief—those who stayed, and those who left. How can you release the pain of one and treasure the gift of the other?

Personal Reader Notes

Week 14: When Friends Fall Away

> **Anchor Scripture**
> *"Even my close friend, in whom I trusted… has lifted his heel against me."* — Psalm 41:9 NKJV

Story: Tupac Shakur — Grief and Betrayal

Rapper Tupac spoke often about betrayal—from friends, the industry, and the people he once trusted. His grief over these broken bonds showed up in lyrics and interviews. Pain from abandonment is a grief of its own. And he wasn't wrong—sometimes, people leave when your pain gets loud.

What This Story Teaches Us

Tupac Shakur spoke often and openly about betrayal—by friends, by an industry, by people who claimed loyalty and then walked away when it mattered. He did not pretend those wounds were minor. His music carried the raw anger of someone who had trusted and been let down, without softening it into something more palatable.

Betrayal grief is different from loss grief, and it deserves to be named as its own category. It is not only sadness—it is the specific sting of realizing someone you counted on chose themselves over you. Pretending that sting does not exist, or rushing to forgive before you have even grieved it, often just buries the wound instead of healing it.

This week, let yourself feel the specific anger of betrayal without rushing to resolve it into a tidy lesson. God can hold your anger at the friend who fell away just as fully as He holds your sorrow over the loss itself. Both are real, and both are welcome in His presence.

Personal Reflection

One of the loneliest realizations after my wife died was this: Not everyone stays. Some friends disappeared. Some avoided me.

Others offered platitudes instead of presence. I was angry at first. Then I was numb.

But over time, I saw that grief doesn't just reveal loss—it reveals loyalty. And while I mourned those who left, I became grateful for those who stayed.

God also sent new people—surprising ones—who carried my pain like it was theirs.

Devotional Insight

When people fall away, God doesn't. He is the Friend who sticks closer than a brother (Proverbs 18:24). Your grief may thin your social circle—but it deepens your spiritual anchor.

Scripture Echoes

> *"I will never leave you nor forsake you."* — Hebrews 13:5 NKJV
>
> *"The Lord is near to the brokenhearted."* — Psalm 34:18 NKJV

Prayer

Jesus, You were betrayed, too. You understand what it means to be abandoned. Thank You for never walking away. Fill the empty places with Your presence.

Reflection Prompt

Is there someone whose absence still hurts you? Write them a letter you may never send—and then release them into God's hands.

Personal Reader Notes

Week 15: Alone in the Small Moments

> **Anchor Scripture**
> *"He will not leave you nor forsake you."* — Deuteronomy 31:6 (NKJV)

Story: Wole Soyinka — A Public Life, A Private Ache

Nobel Laureate Wole Soyinka has spoken about the quiet isolation he experienced after losing his daughter Iyetade. Surrounded by admirers, honors, and responsibilities, he still described an inner loneliness that public life could not touch. It was rarely the large, visible moments that hurt most—it was the small, ordinary ones nobody else could see.

What This Story Teaches Us

Wole Soyinka, a Nobel laureate celebrated on the world stage, described a private isolation after losing his daughter Iyetade that his public honors could not touch. Fame, achievement, and admiration from millions did not shield him from the quiet ache of ordinary, unwitnessed moments.

This matters because it is tempting to assume that a full, celebrated, or busy life should be enough to crowd out loneliness. Soyinka's honesty says otherwise. You can be surrounded by admirers, responsibilities, and a packed calendar, and still feel profoundly alone in the specific, small hours no one else sees.

This week, do not measure your loneliness against how full your life looks from the outside. It is possible to be respected, needed, and surrounded—and still lonely in the empty seat beside you. God does not need your loneliness to make sense to anyone else. He simply meets you in it.

Personal Reflection

It isn't the big occasions that catch me off guard anymore—those, I've learned to prepare for. It's the small ones. Cooking a meal and instinctively reaching for two plates, then quietly putting one back.

Some evenings the house is full—children still at home, doing homework at the table, the television murmuring in the background—and I still feel her absence beside me at that same table. Loneliness doesn't require an empty house. It can sit in the middle of a full one, in the empty seat where she used to be.

Other nights are different. For those whose children are grown and have left the nest—or who never had children at all—the house itself can go quiet. You eat facing an empty chair, in a silent kitchen, with no one to ask how your day went and no one to ask about theirs. That particular silence carries its own weight, distinct from the kind felt with children still underfoot, but no lighter for it.

Whichever kind of quiet is yours, it's the same thousand small gaps in an ordinary day where a whole person used to be.

I've had to learn to notice God in those small gaps, too—not just in the big prayers, but in the quiet middle of an unremarkable afternoon, whether the table is crowded or empty.

Devotional Insight

Loneliness doesn't wait for an empty house. It can sit at a table full of children just as easily as it can sit at a table set for one. Whether your home is full of young voices, or has gone quiet because they've grown and moved on, or because there were no children at all, God's presence isn't reserved for a particular kind of household. He is near in the mundane middle of an average day—in the silence at the table, in the empty chair—whoever else is or isn't in the room with you.

> **Scripture Echoes**
>
> *"Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me."* — Psalm 23:4 (KJV)
>
> *"And lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."* — Matthew 28:20 (NKJV)

Prayer

Lord, meet me in the ordinary, unremarkable moments where loneliness is loudest—whether my table is full or empty tonight. You don't need a special occasion, or a particular kind of household, to be near me. Help me feel You in the small gaps of an average day.

Reflection Prompt

Whether your table is full of children each evening, or quiet because they've grown and gone, or because it was always just the two of you, what's the loneliest ordinary moment in your day? How might you invite God, or a friend, into that specific moment this week?

Personal Reader Notes

Week 16: Grief and Loneliness

> **Anchor Scripture**
> *"Turn to me and be gracious to me, for I am lonely and afflicted."* — Psalm 25:16 (ESV)

Story: C.S. Lewis — A Grief Observed

When his wife Joy Davidman died of cancer after only four years of marriage, the celebrated Christian writer C.S. Lewis kept a private journal of his grief, later published as A Grief Observed. In it he wrote of a loneliness so total that even his faith, which he had spent a lifetime defending in print, felt for a season like "a door slammed in your face."

What This Story Teaches Us

C.S. Lewis, a man who had spent a lifetime defending the reasonableness of faith in print, wrote privately after his wife's death that God felt, for a season, like "a door slammed in your face." He did not edit that sentence out of his journal. He let it stand, exactly as honest as it was.

If a lifetime of theological conviction did not exempt Lewis from feeling abandoned by God in his grief, then feeling that way is not evidence that your own faith has failed. It may simply be evidence that you are grieving as honestly as he did.

This week, you do not have to defend God's reputation by pretending He feels close when He does not. Bring the slammed door to Him directly, the way Lewis did on paper. That kind of honesty was not the end of his faith—it became, over time, the beginning of a deeper one.

Personal Reflection

There are moments in grief when the silence becomes deafening—when even in a room full of people, you feel entirely alone. I understood, reading Lewis, that this wasn't a failure of faith. It was simply what loneliness like this does.

What struck me most was his honesty—that he didn't perform strength he didn't feel. He wrote what was true, even when it was ugly, and let God meet him there rather than in some tidier version of grief.

I've had to learn the same thing. Pretending I wasn't lonely didn't make the loneliness smaller. Naming it to God did.

Devotional Insight

Even the most steady faith can feel the full weight of loneliness in grief—that alone is not evidence of unbelief. What matters is bringing the loneliness honestly to God rather than hiding it, trusting that He can hold what feels unbearable to hold alone.

> **Scripture Echoes**
>
> *"For God alone my soul waits in silence; from him comes my salvation."* — Psalm 62:1 (ESV)
>
> *"I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore with lovingkindness I have drawn you."* — Jeremiah 31:3 (NKJV)

Prayer

Lord, where do I feel most alone right now? Meet me in that exact space. Let me not perform strength I don't feel, but bring You the truth of my loneliness and trust You to hold it.

Reflection Prompt

Where do you feel most alone right now? Invite God into that exact space—and listen for His nearness.

Personal Reader Notes

Week 17: When the World Moves On

> ***Anchor Scripture:***
> *"He was despised and rejected by men, a Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief..."*

— Isaiah 53:3 (NKJV)

Story: Princess Diana — Misunderstood Grief in Public Eyes

Though admired worldwide, Princess Diana often felt misunderstood, especially in her personal pain. After her death, the world mourned—but few fully grasped the private anguish she carried. Her legacy of compassion, however, outlived the noise of misunderstanding.

What This Story Teaches Us

Princess Diana lived one of the most publicly documented lives in modern history, and still she often described feeling profoundly misunderstood in her private pain. Millions watched her; very few, she felt, actually saw her. Visibility and understanding, her story shows, are not the same thing.

It is possible to be surrounded by people who know your situation—your loss, your circumstances—and still feel that none of them truly grasp what it is costing you. That gap between being observed and being understood is its own quiet grief, separate from the loss itself.

This week, if you feel unseen even by people who technically know what happened to you, you are not imagining the gap. Bring that specific loneliness to God, who does not merely observe your grief from a distance but actually knows it from the inside, fully and without misunderstanding.

Personal Reflection:

A few months after my wife’s death, the calls slowed. The texts stopped. The world, understandably, moved on. But I hadn’t. People who once asked, “How are you?” began to say, “You’re strong.” But I didn’t feel strong. I felt forgotten.

It hurt.

Grief isn't just the pain of loss—it's the ache of being left behind in your sorrow while others resume normal life. But one day, I realized —even Jesus was misunderstood. Even He was left alone in His darkest hour. And yet, He loved still.

That changed me. I stopped expecting others to "get it." I started finding peace in God's understanding. I no longer needed the world to validate my pain. God already saw it—and honored it.

Devotional Insight:

People may forget your sorrow, but God never does. Even when others move on, God moves close.

> **Scripture Echoes:**
>
> *"Even if my father and mother abandon me, the Lord will hold me close."* — Psalm 27:10 (NLT)
>
> *"For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses…"*
>
> — Hebrews 4:15 (NKJV)
>
> "*The Lord is close to the brokenhearted."* — Psalm 34:18 (NIV)

Prayer:

Jesus, thank You for understanding the pain that others overlook. When the world forgets, help me remember that You remain.

Reflection Prompt:

What have others misunderstood about your grief? Tell it to God in a letter—He won't mishear or misjudge you.

Personal Reader Notes

Week 18: When People Say the Wrong Thing

> **Anchor Scripture**
> *"Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned with salt..."*
> — Colossians 4:6 NKJV

Story: Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala – Grace Under Pressure

During her time as Nigeria's Finance Minister and later as WTO Director-General, Dr. Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala faced intense criticism—even during times of personal loss. She remained gracious. Her strength was not in clapping back—but in choosing her battles with wisdom and dignity.

What This Story Teaches Us

Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala led through intense public pressure and scrutiny with composure that did not come from having easy answers, but from grace held under real strain. She did not have the luxury of controlling what critics said about her; she could only control how she carried herself through it.

When people say the wrong thing in your grief—clumsy comments, unhelpful advice, careless questions—you cannot control their words any more than Okonjo-Iweala could control public criticism. What you can control, with God's help, is whether you let those wrong words define your season or simply pass through it.

This week, when someone says the wrong thing, let yourself feel the sting without needing to carry it forward. Grace under pressure is not pretending the comment did not hurt. It is choosing not to let it have the final word over your grief.

Personal Reflection

In the early days after her passing, I heard it all: "God needed her more."

"Don't cry, it's a lack of faith." "At least she's no longer suffering." Each statement was well-meaning. But deeply wounding.

It taught me something: people want to help—but grief makes them uncomfortable. And so, they fill the silence with spiritual slogans or clichés.

I had to learn to guard my heart—but also my response. To receive kindness without absorbing ignorance. To extend grace—to them, and to myself.

Devotional Insight

People may say things that hurt, even when they mean well. Don't let those words define your grief. God knows your heart. He hears what they don't understand—and He speaks healing in that space.

Scripture Echoes

> *"The Lord is close to the brokenhearted…"* — Psalm 34:18 NKJV
>
> *"A gentle answer turns away wrath…"* — Proverbs 15:1 NIV
>
> *"Set a guard over my mouth, Lord…"* — Psalm 141:3 NIV

Prayer

Lord, give me grace for others when they don't know what to say. Let their words pass through the filter of Your truth, and let my heart remain soft.

Reflection Prompt

Has someone said something in your grief that hurt you? Write it out. Then give it to God—and replace it with what He says about your sorrow.

Personal Reader Notes

Week 19: When Others Don't Understand

> **Anchor Scripture**
> *"For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin."* — Hebrews 4:15 (NKJV)

Story: Meghan Markle — "The Losses We Share"

After suffering a miscarriage in 2020, Meghan Markle wrote publicly about how rarely that particular grief is spoken about, even though it is far more common than most people realize. In her essay "The Losses We Share," she described the isolating experience of carrying grief that others either didn't notice or didn't know how to acknowledge.

What This Story Teaches Us

Meghan Markle wrote publicly about her miscarriage specifically because that grief is so rarely spoken about, even though it touches far more people than most conversations acknowledge. Her choice to name it plainly, in print, was itself an act of refusing the silence that so often surrounds this particular loss.

Some griefs carry an added weight: not just the loss itself, but the sense that it is not the kind of loss others know how to talk about. That combination—real pain plus social silence—can make a person feel doubly alone, grieving something the people around them do not know how to acknowledge.

This week, if your grief is a kind that others seem unsure how to respond to, know that your loss does not need external validation to be real. Meghan's willingness to name what is rarely named can be your permission to do the same, even if only to God, in private.

Personal Reflection

There were seasons when the people around me clearly didn't understand what I was carrying—not out of unkindness, but because grief this specific is hard for someone who hasn't lived it to imagine.

It stung more than I expected when a well-meaning comment missed the mark entirely, or when silence followed where I needed someone to simply say, "I don't know what to say, but I'm here."

Over time I stopped needing everyone to understand. I started bringing what they couldn't hold to the One who already did.

Devotional Insight

Being misunderstood in grief is painful, but it is not evidence that your grief is wrong or too much. Jesus Himself was familiar with being misunderstood in His deepest moments of anguish. He does not need explanation to understand you fully.

> **Scripture Echoes**
>
> *"He was despised and rejected by men, a Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief."* — Isaiah 53:3 (NKJV)
>
> *"The Lord is near to those who have a broken heart, and saves such as have a contrite spirit."* — Psalm 34:18 (NKJV)

Prayer

Lord, when others misunderstand my grief, remind me that You never do. Help me release the need to be fully understood by everyone, and rest in being fully known by You.

Reflection Prompt

Have you felt judged or misunderstood in your grief? How can you let that experience teach you to be more tender with others who grieve differently than you do?

Personal Reader Notes

Week 20: When Grief Makes You Angry

> **Anchor Scripture**
> *"Be angry, and do not sin; meditate within your heart on your bed, and be still."*

— Psalm 4:4 (NKJV)

Story: Fela Kuti — Music as a Protest of Pain

When Fela Kuti's mother, Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti, was killed during a military raid, his grief turned into protest. His anger birthed bold music and powerful resistance. Though controversial, his grief-fueled rage became a voice for the voiceless. It's a reminder: anger can destroy—or it can become a tool for transformation.

What This Story Teaches Us

Fela Kuti's mother, Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti, was killed during a military raid on his home—a loss soaked not just in grief but in outrage at the injustice behind it. Fela did not suppress that anger. He channeled it directly into his music, refusing to pretend that rage and grief were incompatible.

Anger is one of the most misunderstood parts of grief, often treated as something to apologize for or quickly move past. Fela's story suggests a different posture: sometimes anger is not a detour from grief but an honest expression of it, especially when the loss involved real injustice or wrong.

This week, if anger has been part of your grief, you do not need to be ashamed of it or rush past it. Bring it to God directly, the way the psalmists so often did. He is not afraid of your rage. He can hold it without being destroyed by it, and He can meet you inside it.

Personal Reflection

Nobody warned me that grief would make me angry.

I wasn't angry *with*, but at God —not in a blasphemous way. But I did have questions. I was angry at cancer. Angry at hospitals.

Angry at the Nigerian systems that delayed needed blood components and treatments. Angry at the silence from people who should've said something—done something.

I was even angry at myself. Should I have taken her somewhere else? Prayed more? Fasted More? Trusted differently?

The Bible says, *"Be angry, and do not sin."* (Ephesians 4:26 NKJV). God understands righteous anger. Even Jesus was angry when death stole Lazarus. His tears flowed with fury and grief intertwined.

So, I've learned not to bottle it up—but to bring it to God. In the secret place, I've yelled. I've wept. I've written. I've worshiped through clenched teeth. And somehow, He meets me there.

Grief isn't clean or polite. But God is not scared of your rawness. He welcomes it. And over time, that fire—if surrendered—can purify, not poison.

Devotional Insight
Anger is part of grief. Don't hide it—bring it to God. Let Him meet you in it and shape it into healing. Like Fela, you can turn your sorrow into sound—your fury into something that speaks.

> **Scripture Echoes**
>
> *"The Lord is near to those who have a broken heart."* — Psalm 34:18 (NKJV)
>
> *"Pour out your heart before Him; God is a refuge for us."* — Psalm 62:8 (NKJV)

Prayer

God, sometimes I'm angry. Not always at You, but at everything. Help me not to sin in my sorrow. Receive my rage, and turn it into something that heals.

Reflection Prompt

What are you angry about in your grief? Write it down in a letter to God. Be honest. Then ask Him to meet you in that place.

Personal Reader Notes

Week 21: When You Feel Forgotten

Anchor Scripture

"Even if my father and mother abandon me, the Lord will hold me close." — Psalm 27:10 (NLT)

Story: Naomi — Grief, Loneliness, and Redemption

Naomi's story in the book of Ruth is soaked in sorrow. She lost her husband and both sons in a foreign land. In her grief, she renamed herself Mara—"bitter." It seemed that life had moved on without her. But in time, God wrote redemption into her story through Ruth, and Naomi found joy again in the arms of her grandson.

What This Story Teaches Us

Naomi did not hide her bitterness. When she returned to Bethlehem after losing her husband and both sons, she told the women there to call her Mara—meaning bitter—rather than pretend the loss had not reshaped her. She named her pain honestly, in public, without performing resilience she did not feel.

There is real pressure, especially in close-knit communities, to present grief tidily—to reassure everyone around you that you are managing, that your faith is intact, that you are fine. Naomi refused that performance. She let her actual state be known, and it was in that honesty that her story was eventually able to move toward redemption.

This week, you do not owe anyone a tidy performance of coping. If you feel forgotten, say so—to God, to a trusted friend, to yourself. Naomi's honesty did not disqualify her from God's redemption. It was simply where her story of restoration began.

Personal Reflection

There were moments after my wife passed that felt like abandonment—not from God, but from people. Friends who once checked in went silent. Invitations dried up. Conversations got

awkward. Life, for others, moved on—and I was still sitting in the ashes of my loss.

The world rarely waits for those who grieve. There's work to do, events to attend, holidays to mark. But inside, everything had stopped for me. It felt like I had been left behind. In those hollow moments, Psalm 27:10 became a lifeline: *"The Lord will hold me close."* While others drifted, God remained near.

His presence wasn't always loud, but it was steady.

And slowly, I began to see what Naomi eventually saw—that grief doesn't mean God is done, and feeling forgotten doesn't mean you are forsaken. The God who brought Ruth to Naomi brings comfort to the brokenhearted in ways we least expect. He brought Boaz to Ruth for her blessing and comfort too.

Devotional Insight

Grief isolates. But God gathers. He surrounds the grieving with reminders of His nearness, sometimes through unlikely people and unexpected blessings.

You are not forgotten.

Heaven still writes your name in love.

> **Scripture Echoes**
>
> *"I will never leave you nor forsake you."* — Hebrews 13:5 NKJV
>
> *"Can a woman forget her nursing child…? Yet I will not forget you."* — Isaiah 49:15 NKJV

Prayer

Lord, when I feel left behind, remind me that You remain. Help me to lean into Your constant presence when others have moved on. Thank You for holding me close.

Reflection Prompt

Who has God used recently to remind you that you are not alone? Write them a message or prayer of gratitude today.

Personal Reader Notes

Week 22: When God Feels Distant

Anchor Scripture:

“Why do You stand afar off, O Lord? Why do You hide in times of trouble?”
— Psalm 10:1 NKJV

Story: Mother Teresa — Silence and Spiritual Darkness

For decades, Mother Teresa served the poor in India with relentless compassion. But her private letters, published after her death, revealed something unexpected: she experienced deep spiritual darkness for years. In those seasons, she felt that God was silent. Yet, she continued to love, serve, and trust.

What This Story Teaches Us

Mother Teresa, a woman the world associated with radiant, tireless faith, privately wrote for decades about feeling God's absence—describing an interior darkness that persisted even as she served the poorest of the poor with unwavering devotion. Her private letters, published after her death, revealed a faith that continued to act even when it could not feel God's presence.

This matters enormously for anyone who assumes that spiritual darkness is proof of spiritual failure. Mother Teresa's decades of service were not undone by her private sense of God's silence. If anything, her continued faithfulness in the absence of feeling is a more remarkable testimony than faithfulness that never faced doubt at all.

This week, if God feels distant despite your continued faith and obedience, you are in the company of one of the most devoted servants in modern history. Distance felt is not the same as distance real. Keep showing up, as she did, even into the silence.

Personal Reflection:

We often imagine faith as a blazing fire—bright, unshakable, full of clarity and warmth. But some seasons of faith feel more like walking through fog with only a whisper of God's presence. That whisper, sometimes, fades into silence. And silence, especially after loss, can feel like abandonment.

After my wife passed, there were days I knelt to pray but felt nothing. No sense of God's nearness. No comfort in worship songs. Just silence. And I wondered — where was the God who promised never to leave? I recalled David writing:

"O My God, I cry in the daytime, but You do not hear; And in the night season, and am not silent." — Psalm 22:2 (NKJV)

"How long, O Lord? Will You forget me forever? How long will You hide Your face from me?" — Psalm 13:1 NKJV

Yet, by the end of the Psalm, David reaffirms his trust in God's deliverance, showing the arc from abandonment to hope—one that mirrors many grief journeys. If someone as devoted as he could feel God's absence and still serve faithfully, maybe I wasn't failing — I was just walking through a valley that faith sometimes requires.

In my own valley, I learned that God's silence isn't a sign of His absence. Sometimes, it's in the silence that He invites us deeper—not to feel Him, but to trust Him.

"The righteous shall live by faith." — Romans 1:17 NKJV

Not by feelings. Not by emotional highs. But by trust in the unseen God who remains faithful even when we can't trace Him. Slowly, gently, the silence broke—not with thunder, but with presence. A verse here. A memory there. A sense of peace during a prayer I didn't think I could pray. He was always near.

"I will never leave you nor forsake you." — Hebrews 13:5 NKJV

Even in silence, He is speaking. Even in grief, He is holding. Even when He seems hidden, His love is not gone.

Sometimes, God doesn't speak in the way we expect. But silence is not absence. He is closer than we feel. He was present even when I was numb. Looking back, I now see His fingerprints in the small mercies: a friend's visit, a song at the right moment, a quiet sense of strength that came from nowhere.

Devotional Insight:

Faith is not the absence of doubt or feeling. It's continuing to trust even when the heavens are silent. When God feels distant, He's often doing deep work in the hidden places of your heart.

> **Scripture Echoes:**
>
> *"My God, my God, why have You forsaken Me?"* — Matthew 27:46 NKJV
>
> *"He Himself has said, 'I will never leave you nor forsake you.'"* — Hebrews 13:5 NKJV
>
> "So *it is impossible for God to lie for we know that his promise and his vow will never change! And now we have run into his heart to hide ourselves in his faithfulness…"* — Hebrews 6:18

Prayer:

God, I miss Your nearness. I miss how things used to feel. But I choose to trust that You are still with me, even in the silence. Help me walk by faith, not by feelings.

Reflection Prompt:

Describe a moment when God felt far away during your grief. How might He have been present even then, in unseen ways?

Personal Reader Notes

Week 23: God in the Silence

> **Anchor Scripture**
> *"When He opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven for about half an hour."* — Revelation 8:1 (NKJV)

Story: Elisabeth Elliot — Trusting God Without Answers

In 1956, missionary Jim Elliot was speared to death in Ecuador alongside four companions while attempting to bring the gospel to a previously uncontacted tribe. His widow, Elisabeth Elliot, had no explanation that made the loss make sense. She stayed in Ecuador, and two years later, walked back into the same tribe's territory to continue the work—trusting God's purposes even where His reasons remained silent.

What This Story Teaches Us

Elisabeth Elliot never received an explanation for why her husband Jim was killed while trying to bring the gospel to a previously uncontacted tribe. She did not get the reason. What she got, instead, was the choice to return to that same territory two years later and continue the work anyway—trusting God's character even where His purposes remained unexplained.

Most grief carries at least one unanswered why. The pressure to resolve that question before moving forward can leave a person stuck indefinitely, waiting for an explanation that may never come. Elisabeth's story shows a different way forward: trust does not require full understanding first.

This week, if your own why has gone unanswered, you do not have to wait for resolution before continuing to walk with God. Elisabeth walked directly back into the place of her deepest loss without ever getting her answer. Her trust was not built on explanation. It was built on who she already knew God to be.

Personal Reflection

There were long stretches after my wife passed when I asked God why, and heard nothing back that resembled an answer. That silence was one of the hardest parts of the grief—not the absence of her, but what felt, for a season, like the absence of God's explanation.

I didn't get answers. What I got, slowly, was a sense that God's silence was not the same as God's absence.

I still don't fully understand why. But I've come to trust that understanding was never actually the thing I needed most.

Devotional Insight

God's silence in the face of our questions is not evidence of His absence or indifference. Some of the deepest trust in Scripture is built not on answers received, but on relationship maintained through unanswered questions. He can be trusted even when He is not explained.

> **Scripture Echoes**
>
> *"For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I shall know just as I also am known."* — 1 Corinthians 13:12 (NKJV)
>
> *"Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding."* — Proverbs 3:5 (NKJV)

Prayer

Lord, I don't understand why. I may never fully understand. But teach me to trust You in the silence, the way I would trust a friend whose character I already know.

Reflection Prompt

When have you felt God was silent? How might He have been working beneath the surface even then, whether or not you could see it at the time?

Personal Reader Notes

Week 24: Grief and Faith

Anchor Scripture

"Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him." — Job 13:15 (NKJV)

Story: Job — A Heart Still Trusting

Job lost everything—his children, his wealth, his health. His friends accused him, his wife told him to curse God, but Job clung to one truth: God was still God. And somehow, that was enough.

What This Story Teaches Us

Job lost his children, his wealth, and his health within a devastatingly short span, and his own wife urged him to curse God and be done with it. He refused—not by denying his pain, which he expressed at length and without restraint, but by continuing to direct that pain toward God rather than away from Him.

There is a difference between losing faith and losing composure, and Job's story draws that line clearly. He said searing, anguished things to God throughout his ordeal. None of it disqualified him. His friends' false comfort was rebuked; his raw honesty was not.

This week, you can say the hard things to God the way Job did—the confusion, the accusation, the exhaustion—without fearing that honesty itself is unfaithfulness. Faith that questions loudly is still faith, as long as the questions are still addressed to Him.

Personal Reflection

I will spend more time here because it’s a huge one.

After my wife's passing, faith felt like a tug-of-war. I knew God was good, but my heart was torn by questions. I prayed. I cried. I waited. Was I still supposed to believe, even after all that happened?

When we are faced with situations that shake us to the core—events that confound and challenge everything we believe about God—it's natural to find it difficult to pray or even open the Bible. Though my faith in God was not destroyed when my wife passed away, it was deeply stretched.

Certain gospel songs— songs my wife and I once cherished—became painful reminders. During the six days she was in a coma from sepsis in the ICU, I had downloaded over 11 hours of worship music: 10,000 Reasons, The Goodness of God, Waymaker, and more. I played them and our church hymns continuously, hoping they'd become a healing atmosphere, and when she came out of her coma, she came out singing "I have seen The Goodness of God". She said those hymns and gospel songs were her anchor to hold on as if reaching her from far far away. But now, whenever I hear them, I recoil. I instinctively close my mind. Even scriptures that once brought me great comfort—like Jeremiah 29:11, "For *I know the thoughts that I think toward you…to give you a future and a hope";* Psalm 107:20*, "He sent His word and healed them…";* Psalm 91:16, "*With long life I will satisfy him, and show him My salvation*" (NKJV)— would leap into my mind, only for me to push them away. I wasn't denying God; I was simply numb to the words that used to give me strength. But even in that numbness, I knew God is good, and eventually, the words of Job began to gently echo within me:

"*Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him*." (Job 13:15, NKJV)

That simple declaration became a soft anchor for me. Over time, I began to open myself again to those same scriptures and songs. I stopped avoiding the memories. I let the sorrow, the pain, and even the tears come. And somewhere in that sacred ache, I began to see glimpses of God's love and wisdom in what He had allowed. One statement of Jesus, once obscure, now carried weight and clarity:

"*And blessed is he who is not offended because of Me*." (Matthew 11:6, NKJV)

He said this when John the Baptist, His forerunner and cousin, was left in prison and eventually beheaded. Jesus let it happen. And yet,

He still called John blessed. That truth slowly settled into my heart—and with it came strength and courage to carry the weight of my grief.

So if you're in a place where you don't feel like praying or reading the Bible, don't feel condemned. Ask for grace. Even if it takes time, know this: God is patient. And if you let Him, He will walk with you—faithfully—out of the valley of the shadow.

Devotional Insight

Faith in grief doesn't mean having all the answers. It means holding onto the One who does. It's not about pretending it doesn't hurt—it's about trusting that God will redeem even this pain.

> **Scripture Echoes**
>
> *"We walk by faith, not by sight."* — 2 Corinthians 5:7 NKJV
>
> *"He who promised is faithful."* — Hebrews 10:23 NKJV

Prayer

Father, my faith feels fragile, but it is Yours. Hold me steady when I can't hold myself. Teach me to trust You even when I don't understand.

Reflection Prompt

What part of your faith has been challenged by your grief? Write a prayer of honesty to God about it today.

Personal Reader Notes

Week 25: When Faith Feels Fragile

> **Anchor Scripture**
> *"Lord, I believe; help my unbelief!"* — Mark 9:24 NKJV

Story: John the Baptist — Doubting in the Darkness

John the Baptist, once bold in declaring Jesus as the Messiah, found himself in prison, doubting. He sent messengers to ask Jesus, “Are You the one?” (Matthew 11:3). Even this great prophet—who baptized Christ Himself—struggled with questions in the dark.

What This Story Teaches Us

John the Baptist had once declared, without hesitation, that Jesus was the Messiah. Later, sitting in prison, facing his own death, he sent messengers to ask Jesus directly: "Are You the Coming One, or do we look for another?" The same man who had once been so certain now needed reassurance. Jesus did not rebuke him for asking.

Certainty is not a permanent condition, even for people whose faith once felt unshakable. Circumstances—especially prison, illness, or grief—can genuinely shake conviction that used to feel solid. John's story shows that this kind of doubt is not the opposite of faith. It can exist within faith, spoken honestly, even from a place of deep conviction.

This week, if your once-confident faith now feels fragile, you are in good company. Ask your honest questions directly, the way John did. Jesus's response to him was not correction. It was evidence—gentle, patient, sufficient for the moment.

Personal Reflection

I never stopped believing in God after my wife died—but I did struggle to understand Him. I believed He was good, yet I couldn’t explain why she had to suffer so deeply. I had faith… and I had questions.

There were nights I sat in my living room, the children asleep, the silence deafening. I would look up at the ceiling and whisper, “God,

where are You?" And still… I prayed. Still… I held on. Faith didn't feel strong—it felt fragile, like a flickering candle in a storm. But even a flicker counts.

Like John the Baptist, I asked God hard questions. And like Jesus responded to John—not with rebuke but with reassurance—I found that God didn't dismiss my doubts. He drew near to them.

Devotional Insight

Faith is not the absence of questions. It's the decision to trust God with your questions. When grief weakens your faith, remember: God doesn't ask for perfection—just for your heart.

Scripture Echoes

> *"A bruised reed He will not break, and smoking flax He will not quench."* — Isaiah 42:3 NKJV
>
> *"If we are faithless, He remains faithful."* — 2 Timothy 2:13 NKJV

Prayer

Father, I believe—but I'm struggling. Meet me in my questions. Strengthen the parts of me that feel too weak to keep hoping.

Reflection Prompt

What doubts or hard questions have you brought to God since your loss? Write them down. Then write a line of truth or scripture that gives you hope.

Personal Reader Notes

Week 26: Lament Is Not Unbelief

Anchor Scripture

"Pour out your heart before Him; God is a refuge for us." — Psalm 62:8 NKJV

Story: David — A Man After God's Own Heart, Who Wept Loudly

David wasn't ashamed to cry out to God. His psalms are filled with raw emotion—anguish, fear, hope, longing. He questioned. He lamented. But through it all, he never walked away from God. He brought his pain to Him.

What This Story Teaches Us

David, described in Scripture as a man after God's own heart, wept loudly and often, and wrote entire psalms devoted to raw complaint before ever arriving at praise. He did not consider lament a lesser form of worship. Much of the book of Psalms exists precisely because he brought his unfiltered grief directly to God rather than editing it first.

There is a common but mistaken idea that mature faith looks calm, composed, and quick to arrive at gratitude. David's example undoes that idea. Some of Scripture's most trusted worship began as loud, unedited complaint—and God did not consider it beneath Him to receive it.

This week, let your lament be as loud and unfiltered as David's, if that is what is true for you. You are not required to arrive at praise before you are ready. Sometimes the praise comes later, exactly the way it did in David's own psalms—but the lament always came first, and it was never wasted.

Personal Reflection

There were days I cried out, "Why, Lord?" and "Where were You?"

In some circles, such questions are frowned upon—seen as signs of weak faith. But I've come to believe the opposite. Lament is not the absence of faith—it's the expression of it.

To cry out to God means I still believe He hears. To bring Him my pain means I still trust Him with it. Like David, I found a strange intimacy with God in lament. It wasn't polished. It wasn't pretty. But it was real. And in the lament, He met me. Not always with answers, but always with presence.

There's a day forever etched in my memory—one that brings both deep sorrow and a sober kind of gratitude. It was around 5 a.m. when I left briefly, planning to return by 8. But not long after, I received a call urging me to come to the ICU immediately. My heart pounded as I rushed over, praying under my breath. My wife had been enduring relentless pain from the brutal effects of GVHD—her transplanted stem cells attacking her gut—causing weeks of nonstop vomiting and diarrhea, unrelieved by treatment. When I arrived, nurses were trying to hold her down. She was crying and thrashing. I rushed in, held her tightly, and called her name. She calmed a bit but still crying, lamenting with tears: "Oh God, this pain is too much ooo. Please help me and take it away. I cannot bear it alone. You said I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me—so come give me strength or take it away. You said I'll walk through the waters and won't be overwhelmed… walk through fire… What does it say again o… Dee, please help me with the rest." I held her close, praying aloud, my heart breaking.

Then I began to recite Isaiah 43:1–2—the verse she had been trying to recall—and she repeated each word after me. When we finished, I moved to Psalm 23 and other scriptures. Slowly, her body relaxed. She grew quiet. And then, she fell asleep.

The Indian Nurses in the ICU were awed. That day, a Nurse came and told me she is a believer, and there are 3 of them in the ICU in the hospital. She said she had not known that prayer could be that fervent, and faith in the word so strong.

Even in that agony and she could not help lamenting, when pain had broken her physically, my dear Oluwatohungbogbo's spirit still reached for God. This was a woman who rarely cried, always encouraging me as I wept in prayer both at her bedside and alone in my hotel room.

Yet in that moment of weakness, she turned instinctively to the Word—for strength, for peace.

And God met her there.

If you find yourself earnestly lamenting and crying out because of the pain of your loss, you are not alone. You have not lost faith.

Devotional Insight

Lament is worship wrapped in tears. It says, "God, I'm hurting—but I'm coming to You anyway." That kind of raw prayer opens the door to healing.

> **Scripture Echoes**
>
> *"My God, my God, why have You forsaken me?"* — Psalm 22:1 NKJV
>
> *"Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted."* — Matthew 5:4 NKJV

Prayer

God, I lament before You today. Not because I've lost faith, but because I still believe You're near. Receive my honest sorrow and meet me in it.

Reflection Prompt

Write your own psalm of lament—no filter. Let your grief speak, and let it lead you to God.

Personal Reader Notes

Week 27: When Lament Turns to Trust

> **Anchor Scripture**
> *"When peace like a river attendeth my way, when sorrows like sea billows roll, whatever my lot, Thou hast taught me to say, it is well, it is well, with my soul."* — paraphrased from Horatio Spafford, 1876

Story: Horatio Spafford — A Hymn Written Over the Water

In 1873, Horatio Spafford's wife and four daughters were crossing the Atlantic when their ship collided with another and sank; all four daughters drowned. Spafford sailed to meet his grieving wife, and as his ship crossed near the place where his daughters had died, grief and faith met in him at once. Out of that season came the hymn "It Is Well with My Soul"—words that never deny the sorrow, but end by choosing to trust God inside of it.

What This Story Teaches Us

Horatio Spafford wrote "It Is Well with My Soul" after losing all four of his daughters in a shipwreck, sailing over the very waters where they drowned. The hymn does not deny the sorrow—it names sea billows and rolling grief plainly. But it does not stay only in complaint. It turns, deliberately, toward a declaration of trust.

That turn matters more than it might first seem. Spafford did not force cheerfulness onto unbearable loss. He wrote through the grief, all the way to a genuine, hard-won word of trust on the other side of it—not instead of the pain, but alongside it.

This week, if you find any small turn toward trust beginning to form in your own lament, do not distrust it as premature. It does not have to erase the sorrow to be genuine. Spafford's hymn holds both the sea billows and the peace in the very same verse, exactly as your own heart may be learning to do.

Personal Reflection

The Psalms of lament follow a pattern I didn't notice until I needed it myself: they rarely stay only in complaint. They pour out anger, confusion, and grief without editing—and then, almost every time, they turn. Not away from the pain, but through it, toward a renewed word of trust.

I used to think that turn had to be forced—that I had to manufacture hope on command to prove my faith was intact. I don't think that anymore. The turn isn't something I perform. It's something that happens, in its own time, when the lament has been fully and honestly spoken.

Some days I can only manage the complaint. Other days, further down the road, I find myself able to say, unforced, that it is well—not because the loss is smaller, but because God has stayed close enough, long enough, for me to trust Him with what I still don't understand.

Devotional Insight

Honest lament is not the opposite of trust—it is usually the road that leads to it. Scripture's own laments rarely end where they begin; they move from raw complaint toward a renewed, hard-won word of confidence in God. Give your grief room to be fully spoken, and don't rush the turn. It will come in its time.

> **Scripture Echoes**
>
> *"Why are you cast down, O my soul? And why are you disquieted within me? Hope in God, for I shall yet praise Him, the help of my countenance and my God."* — Psalm 42:11 (NKJV)
>
> *"Though the fig tree may not blossom... yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation."* — Habakkuk 3:17–18 (NKJV)

Prayer

Lord, I don't want to force a trust I don't yet feel. But I ask You to meet me in my honest lament, and in Your time, bring me to the place where I can say, even through tears, that it is well.

Reflection Prompt

Write your own honest lament today—don't edit it. Then, whenever it comes, however small, add one line of trust to close it.

Personal Reader Notes

Week 28: The God Who Collects Tears

> **Anchor Scripture**
> *"You keep track of all my sorrows. You have collected all my tears in Your bottle."* — Psalm 56:8 NLT

Story: Nick Cannon – Losing His Infant Son

In 2021, entertainer Nick Cannon lost his 5-month-old son, Zen, to a brain tumor. He held his son's hand to the very last breath. Though many questioned why he chose to speak publicly, Cannon said, "I had to speak… to honor him." His tears were raw, but they were sacred—proof of love that could not be silenced.

What This Story Teaches Us

Nick Cannon lost his five-month-old son, Zen, to a brain tumor in 2021—a loss so specific and devastating that few people around him could have any real reference point for it. He spoke publicly about his grief anyway, refusing to let the rarity of his loss silence him into isolation.

Some losses are so particular that it feels like no one could possibly understand them—the loss of a child, an infant, someone gone before their story even fully began. That specific isolation can make grief feel unspeakably lonely, as though no comparison exists that could bring comfort.

This week, know that even a loss with no easy comparison is not a loss God fails to understand. Scripture tells us He collects every tear in a bottle—not generic tears, but yours specifically, for exactly what you lost. Nothing about your grief is too particular for Him to hold.

Personal Reflection

There were days when I thought I had run out of tears. During her illness, especially on nights when her body trembled from chemotherapy and infections pushed her to the brink, I wept. I wept alone. I wept in waiting rooms. I wept in silence beside her bed, knowing I couldn't stop the tide of suffering.

Then came that fateful day at the hospital ICU. Her breath slowed… and then stopped.

I held her hand—and broke.

Since then, I've cried more than I thought possible. I used to feel ashamed of that. As a man. As a believer. Shouldn't I be "strong"? But strength isn't the absence of tears. Real strength is trusting that God sees every tear… and holds it. Just like He held me.

Devotional Insight

Grief is not a failure of faith. It is the evidence of love. And every tear you cry is seen, collected, and cherished by the Father. You're not weeping alone. You are worshiping through sorrow—and God is near.

Scripture Echoes

> *"Jesus wept."* — John 11:35 NKJV
>
> *"Those who sow in tears shall reap in joy."* — Psalm 126:5 NKJV
>
> *"He will wipe every tear from their eyes…"* — Revelation 21:4 NLT

Prayer

Lord, thank You for seeing every tear. For not turning away from my grief. Let each tear I cry water the seeds of healing and become a song of hope in Your time.

Reflection Prompt

When was your deepest moment of weeping? Picture God collecting that tear—what might He want to say to you through it?

Personal Reader Notes

Week 29: When the Prayers Weren't Answered

Anchor Scripture:

"My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness."
— 2 Corinthians 12:9 NKJV

Story: The Apostle Paul – The Unremoved Thorn

Paul, a giant of faith, once begged God to remove a mysterious affliction—his "thorn in the flesh." Yet God said no. Instead of healing, Paul received something deeper: sustaining grace. The unanswered prayer became a door to divine strength.

What This Story Teaches Us

The Apostle Paul begged God three times to remove a painful, unnamed affliction he called a thorn in the flesh. God did not remove it. Instead, He answered with something Paul had not asked for: "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness." The prayer was answered—just not in the form Paul requested.

When prayers for healing, for rescue, for a different outcome go unanswered in the way we hoped, it can feel like God has gone silent. Paul's thorn suggests something else may be happening: not always the absence of an answer, but sometimes an answer reshaped around a different, deeper provision than the one requested.

This week, if a specific prayer of yours has not been answered the way you asked, consider whether God may be offering sufficient grace rather than removed affliction. It is a harder gift to receive. It is still, Paul insisted, genuinely sufficient.

Personal Reflection:

We prayed. Oh, how we prayed. In hospitals, on our knees, with fasting and tears. We quoted promises, gathered prayer chains,

anointed with oil. We believed. We hoped. And still—she slipped away.

I wrestled with God's silence. Not just for the healing we didn't get, but for all the moments afterward that didn't make sense. But like Paul, I began to see that sometimes, grace doesn't mean escape. It means endurance. It means God holding you while you cry, not just stopping the reason for your tears.

Unanswered prayers don't mean unloving silence. They often mean unseen purposes. And I'm learning—through the ache—to lean into the sufficiency of grace.

Devotional Insight:

Faith isn't measured by the number of prayers answered with "yes," but by the trust that remains when the answer is "no." Grace is not the absence of pain—it's the presence of God in the pain.

> **Scripture Echoes:**
>
> *"Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him."* — Job 13:15 NKJV
>
> *"In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world."*
>
> — John 16:33 NIV
>
> *"The Lord is near to those who have a broken heart."* — Psalm 34:18 NKJV

Prayer:

Father, the silence hurts. But I still believe You're good. Teach me to trust even when I don't understand. Let Your grace be enough for the questions I can't answer.

Reflection Prompt:

Write a prayer you once prayed that God didn’t answer the way you hoped. Then, write what grace you now see—if any—growing from that place.

Personal Reader Notes

Week 30: The Pain of Birthdays

> ***Anchor Scripture:***
> *"Teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom." — Psalm 90:12 (NIV)*

Story: Stella Obasanjo — A Life Remembered

Stella Obasanjo, former First Lady of Nigeria, passed suddenly in 2005, just days before her birthday. Her legacy—both personal and national—lives on through tributes and memorials. Yet her family still faces the ache of her absence most poignantly on the day that once marked celebration.

What This Story Teaches Us

Stella Obasanjo died suddenly, just days before what should have been an ordinary celebration—her loss carrying the particular cruelty of arriving right beside a date meant for joy. There was no time to prepare, no space between the life she was living and the grief that replaced it.

When loss lands close to a birthday, an anniversary, or any date meant for celebration, it can permanently alter how that date feels for years afterward. The calendar itself becomes a wound. This is not an overreaction; it is simply what happens when joy and grief become entangled on the same day.

This week, if a particular date now carries this kind of double weight for you, you do not have to force it back into being purely a celebration. Let it hold both truths—what was lost, and what is still worth marking—without demanding it resolve into simple joy before you are ready.

Personal Reflection:

Birthdays used to be bright in our home. My wife loved surprises—even the badly planned ones. She would sing the loudest “Happy Birthday” to our children, decorate the house with simple beauty, and always made our birthdays feel like holidays.

After she passed, anniversaries became complicated. Our wedding anniversary? Painful. My birthday? Hollow. Hers? Unbearable. The children's? Bittersweet. I didn't know whether to celebrate, cry, retreat, or all three.

Grief is funny like that. It sneaks into the calendar. Special dates become landmines. Everyone else may move on—but your heart circles the day like it's yesterday.

I realized something, though.

These dates didn't just bring pain—they brought memory. And memory brought love. And love, even when bruised by grief, is still sacred. I began to find meaning not in avoiding those anniversaries, but in honoring them—lighting candles not just for the years lived, but for the love shared.

Devotional Insight:

God knows the weight certain dates carry. They aren't just numbers —they're sacred markers. Grief may stain them, but grace can reclaim them.

> **Scripture Echoes:**
>
> *"Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints."*
> — Psalm 116:15 (NKJV)
>
> "Your eyes saw my substance... all the days ordained for me were written in Your book."
> — Psalm 139:16 (NIV)
>
> *"There is a time for everything... a time to weep and a time to laugh."*
> — Ecclesiastes 3:1–4 (NIV)

Prayer:

Lord, these days are hard. These birthdays feel heavy. Help me not to fear remembering. Let memory turn pain into praise, and loss into legacy.

Reflection Prompt:

Which dates are hardest for you? Plan one meaningful act to honor your loved one on that day—not in sorrow, but in love.

Personal Reader Notes

Week 31: Birthdays, Anniversaries, and Empty Chairs

> **Anchor Scripture**
> *"The Lord is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit."* — Psalm 34:18 (NIV)

Story: Jacqueline Kennedy — An Eternal Flame

After President John F. Kennedy's assassination in November 1963, his widow Jacqueline Kennedy asked that an eternal flame be lit at his grave at Arlington National Cemetery. It has burned continuously ever since, a flame that returns every visitor's eye to a single, specific loss, kept deliberately visible rather than tucked away.

What This Story Teaches Us

Jacqueline Kennedy chose, deliberately, to keep a flame burning at her husband's grave rather than let time quietly close over the memory. She did not treat the anniversary of his death as something to survive privately and move past. She made it visible, permanent, and returned to on purpose.

There is a quiet dignity in choosing to mark a hard date rather than dread it into silence. An eternal flame does not keep grief raw forever—it simply refuses to let love be erased by the passage of time. That is a very different posture than merely enduring the day.

This week, consider what your own version of an eternal flame might look like—some small, deliberate practice that marks a hard date on purpose, rather than letting it pass by unspoken. Marking it is not dwelling in the past. It is honoring what deserves to be remembered.

Personal Reflection

Certain dates arrive whether I'm ready or not. Her birthday. Our anniversary. The date she passed. Each one carries its own particular

ache, different from ordinary grief because it's tied to a specific chair at a specific table that is now, and will always be, empty.

For a while I dreaded these dates and tried to get through them as quickly as possible. Over time I've started doing something closer to what that flame does—choosing to mark the day on purpose, rather than just surviving it.

An empty chair doesn't have to be ignored to be bearable. Sometimes naming it out loud, and marking the day with intention, is what makes it bearable at all.

Devotional Insight

Significant dates don't have to be feared into silence. Like a flame kept burning on purpose, they can become a place where love is deliberately remembered rather than quietly avoided. God is present in the marking as much as in the mourning.

> **Scripture Echoes**
>
> *"The memory of the righteous is blessed."* — Proverbs 10:7 (NKJV)
>
> *"Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted."* — Matthew 5:4 (NKJV)

Prayer

Lord, You see how hard these dates are. Thank You for knowing what each one means to me. Help me honor them with grace, and find comfort in remembrance.

Reflection Prompt

What significant dates bring both joy and sorrow? How can you intentionally honor your loved one on those days in a way that feels sacred rather than simply survived?

Personal Reader Notes

Week 32: When Dates Ambush the Heart

> **Anchor Scripture**
> *"You number my wanderings; Put my tears into Your bottle; Are they not in Your book?"* — Psalm 56:8 NKJV

Story: Oba Adesoji Aderemi — Honoring a Life Remembered

Oba Aderemi, the first African governor in the British Commonwealth and a long-reigning Ooni of Ife, was widely mourned upon his death. Till today, his anniversaries are marked with celebrations and tributes—not to relive grief but to honor a life that shaped many. His memory is a legacy.

What This Story Teaches Us

Oba Adesoji Aderemi's community did not rush past his passing quickly. They marked it with the full weight it deserved, honoring both the specific loss and the larger legacy behind it—understanding that a life of real significance calls for a remembrance that matches its weight, not a hurried one.

There is often pressure to move through anniversaries and hard dates efficiently, as though lingering too long were somehow unhealthy. This story suggests otherwise: a loss that mattered deserves a remembrance that also matters, given whatever time and attention it actually needs.

This week, do not rush your own hard date past you just because efficiency is easier than feeling. Give the day the weight it deserves. God is not in a hurry for you to move on faster than your heart actually can.

Personal Reflection

The days leading to my wife’s birthday, our wedding anniversary, and the date of her passing always feel like an emotional ambush. I find myself growing quiet, my chest heavy, without even realizing why—until I look at the calendar and remember.

Grief sharpens time. Dates carry weight. The rest of the world moves on, but we count the days.

And yet, I've learned not to fight those feelings. I now see those days not as curses, but as sacred markers. Days to light a candle. To cry if I must. To remember a love that was real.

Like those who still honor Oba Aderemi's legacy, I now use anniversaries to honor my wife's life—not just mourn her death. I pray. I share stories with the children. I give thanks.

Devotional Insight

Anniversaries don't mean you're stuck—they mean you still love. Grief doesn't follow a calendar, but memory honors the heart. God holds those days tenderly with you.

Scripture Echoes

> *"The memory of the righteous is blessed."* — Proverbs 10:7 NKJV
>
> *"Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted."* — Matthew 5:4 NKJV

Prayer

Lord, You see how hard these dates are. Thank You for knowing what each one means to me. Help me honor them with grace, and find comfort in remembrance.

Reflection Prompt

Choose one anniversary you dread. Plan now how you'd like to mark it—with meaning, memory, and mercy for yourself.

Personal Reader Notes

Week 33: What Could Have Been

> **Anchor Scripture**
> *"Hope deferred makes the heart sick, but a longing fulfilled is a tree of life."* — Proverbs 13:12 NIV

Story: Princess Margaret — Dreams Unfulfilled

Princess Margaret, sister to Queen Elizabeth II, gave up her first great love to preserve royal expectations. Though she lived with wealth and title, she was often described as a woman longing for something more. Her life reminds us of the ache of dreams unfulfilled.

What This Story Teaches Us

Princess Margaret gave up her first great love under enormous institutional pressure, and she carried the weight of that unfulfilled future for the rest of her life. Her grief was not only for what happened, but for the entire different life that never got to exist—a private mourning for a future that was taken rather than simply lost.

Grieving what could have been is its own distinct category, separate from grieving what actually was. It is possible to mourn a future—plans, milestones, an entire imagined life together—that never had the chance to happen at all. That grief is real, even though there is no specific memory to point to, only an absence where a future was supposed to be.

This week, if part of your grief is for a future that will now never happen, let that be named as its own loss. You are not only grieving a person. You may also be grieving everything that person's continued presence would have made possible.

Personal Reflection

After losing my wife, it wasn’t just her absence I grieved—it was all the things we never got to do. The trips we planned. The ministry we dreamed of together. The way she looked forward to seeing our children grow up and thrive. All those hopes… gone in a moment.

It felt like the future had collapsed.

I now realize that part of grief is not just missing the past—but mourning what could have been. The conversations left unsaid. The goals left unfinished. The anniversaries that will now be remembered, not celebrated.

But I've also come to know this: God holds both what was and what could have been. Nothing is lost to Him—not even our unrealized dreams.

Devotional Insight

It's okay to grieve what never happened. God understands those silent sorrows too. He holds not only your memories but your missed moments—and He promises to restore joy in time.

Scripture Echoes

> *"He restores my soul."* — Psalm 23:3 NKJV
>
> *"I will repay you for the years the locusts have eaten."* — Joel 2:25 NIV

Prayer

God, I bring You the ache of all we never got to do. The dreams that ended too soon. Fill those empty places with Your presence and peace.

Reflection Prompt

What future plans or dreams do you grieve the most? Write them down, and offer them to God with honesty and hope.

Personal Reader Notes

Week 34: Grief and Regret

> **Anchor Scripture**
> *"If our hearts condemn us, we know that God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything."* — 1 John 3:20 NIV

Story: Cissy Houston – A Mother's Silent Questions

After Whitney Houston's death, her mother Cissy expressed deep sorrow and guilt. "Could I have done more?" she asked. Her memoir reflected a faith that carried her through—but the questions still lingered. In the end, she surrendered what she couldn't fix to a God who knows all.

What This Story Teaches Us

Cissy Houston, after her daughter Whitney's death, spoke openly about the questions that lingered—the things she wondered whether she could have done differently. She did not silence that self-examination, but she also did not let it consume her completely. She carried both her grief and her questions honestly, without pretending either had easy resolution.

Regret often travels alongside grief uninvited, whispering about what might have been done differently. That whispering can become relentless if it goes unexamined. Cissy's honesty about her own questions, spoken aloud rather than buried, models a healthier way of carrying regret: naming it, rather than letting it fester in silence.

This week, if regret has been part of your grief, bring the specific question to God directly rather than replaying it alone in the dark. He can hold your what-ifs without needing you to resolve them perfectly first.

Personal Reflection

Regret has sharp edges. Even when I knew we had loved fiercely, prayed persistently, and fought her illness together—there were still whispers: "What if?"

There are moments I wish I'd said more. Done something differently. But grief taught me something deeper: I was never in control of the outcome. Only God was.

When regret rises, I now surrender it. Not because it disappears, but because God is greater. Greater than my memory. Greater than my inner critic. His mercy rewrites every "if only" with "I was there."

Devotional Insight

Regret often travels with grief. But grace walks beside them both. You are not condemned. The One who sees all also forgives all—and loves you still.

Scripture Echoes

> *"Cast all your anxiety on Him…"* — 1 Peter 5:7 NKJV
>
> *"My grace is sufficient for you…"* — 2 Corinthians 12:9 NKJV
>
> *"All the days ordained for me were written in Your book…"* — Psalm 139:16 NIV

Prayer

Father, I release my regrets into Your hands. You see the whole story. Let Your mercy speak louder than my memory. Help me rest in the peace of Your sovereignty.

Reflection Prompt

Write down one regret that still weighs on your heart. Now cross it out and write "God's Grace" next to it. Let that be your declaration.

Personal Reader Notes

Week 35: Words Left Unspoken

> **Anchor Scripture**
> *"Whereas you do not know what will happen tomorrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away."* — James 4:14 (NKJV)

Story: Stephen Keshi — A Love That Ran Out of Time

Stephen Keshi, legendary Nigerian footballer and coach, lost his wife in 2015. He died less than a year later—many say, from a broken heart. Those who knew him described a man carrying not just sorrow, but the quiet weight of everything he still meant to say and do with her.

What This Story Teaches Us

Stephen Keshi died less than a year after his wife, and those close to him described a man carrying not only sorrow but the quiet weight of everything still unsaid between them. His story is a sobering reminder that grief sometimes exposes exactly how much we assumed we still had time for.

It is easy to believe that important words—an apology, a thank you, an unspoken "I'm proud of you"—can wait for a better moment. Most of the time, they can. But Stephen Keshi's story is a quiet, urgent nudge: the people still in front of you are not guaranteed an indefinite amount of time either.

This week, let his story prompt a specific action rather than only a feeling. Is there a word you have been postponing, for someone still living? Consider saying it today, while there is still a room for it to be said in.

Personal Reflection

I've already written about the plans we lost—the future we won't get to live. But there's a different kind of regret I carry too: the ordinary words I simply didn't get around to saying. An apology I kept

meaning to make. A thank you I assumed I had time for. "I'm proud of you," said out loud instead of just felt.

For a while, I let that regret pull me backward, replaying what I should have said until it was all I could think about. But dwelling there changed nothing. It didn't bring back the moment, and it didn't honor her by keeping me stuck.

What regret can do, if I let it, is teach me. It shows me exactly where I fell short, so that I can do differently with the people still in front of me. So now, when something needs to be said, I try to say it while the person is still in the room—not as a way of erasing the past, but as the adjustment the past is asking me to make.

Devotional Insight

Regret often isn't about grand, unfulfilled plans—it's about small words left unspoken. You cannot go back and say them to the one who is gone, and dwelling in regret for its own sake benefits no one; it just keeps you circling a door that's already closed. The better response is to let regret teach you, then act on the lesson now, with the people who are still here, rather than living in the past to no benefit.

> **Scripture Echoes**
>
> *"Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers."* — Ephesians 4:29 (NKJV)
>
> *"Forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus."* — Philippians 3:13–14 (NKJV)

Prayer

Lord, I cannot undo the words I left unspoken, and I don't want to spend what's left of my life mourning that alone. Teach me what this regret is trying to show me, and give me the courage to act on it

today, with the people still in front of me, rather than staying stuck in what can't be changed.

Reflection Prompt

Is there something you wish you had said before it was too late? Rather than staying in regret, what specific adjustment could you make starting today with someone still living, so this regret becomes a lesson instead of a life sentence?

Personal Reader Notes

Week 36: Surprised by Sadness

> **Anchor Scripture**
> *"When my heart is overwhelmed; lead me to the rock that is higher than I."* — Psalm 61:2 NKJV

Story: Maya Angelou — Grief's Lingering Echoes

Years after losing her mother, Maya Angelou shared that grief still surprised her—decades later—on quiet days. A scent, a voice, a song. She once said, "I can be caught off guard by memory… and I weep like a child." Yet she allowed those moments to deepen her poetry and compassion, rather than shame her.

What This Story Teaches Us

Maya Angelou, decades after losing her mother, admitted that grief still occasionally caught her by surprise—not because she had failed to heal, but because that is simply how deep love and deep loss continue to interact over a lifetime. She did not treat this lingering ache as a problem to solve.

There is an unspoken expectation that grief should shrink neatly over time until it disappears. Maya Angelou's honesty pushes back against that expectation. Grief does not always follow a tidy downward curve. It can resurface years later, unannounced, without meaning anything has gone wrong.

This week, if grief has surprised you again after you thought you had moved past it, receive that not as failure but as evidence of how much the person mattered. Angelou's honesty gives you permission to be surprised by sadness without needing to apologize for it.

Personal Reflection

Grief doesn't knock. It simply walks in.

One minute, I'm laughing with friends; the next, a song comes on the radio, and tears rush in like a flood. Sometimes it's her favorite meal, her scent in the air, a hospital corridor that feels too familiar. Out of nowhere, I'm reminded: I'm still grieving.

For a while, I thought I was “relapsing.” But I’ve come to see that grief doesn’t follow a linear path. It loops and returns, often unannounced. But every wave is softer now. Less crushing. More cleansing. God doesn’t scold me for these tears. He collects them. And He meets me in the sudden ache.

Devotional Insight

Don’t be ashamed when grief catches you off guard. God is not surprised. He walks every step of the journey with you—even the ones that circle back. These emotions don’t signal weakness. They point to love.

Scripture Echoes

> *“We do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses…”* — Hebrews 4:15 NKJV
>
> *“Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil, for You are with me…”* — Psalm 23:4 NIV
>
> *“He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds.”* — Psalm 147:3 NKJV

Prayer

Lord, thank You for not rushing me through grief. When sadness surprises me, let Your peace steady me. Help me welcome the tears without guilt and meet You in them.

Reflection Prompt

Can you recall the last time grief caught you off guard? What triggered it—and how did you respond? How might God be speaking through that moment?

Personal Reader Notes

Week 37: When It Hits You Afresh

> **Anchor Scripture**
> *"The Lord is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit."* — Psalm 34:18 (NIV)

Story: Lupita Nyong'o — Grief Rekindled

When Oscar-winning actress Lupita Nyong'o lost friend and co-star Chadwick Boseman in 2020, she spoke of how the pain resurfaced unexpectedly—long after the world had moved on. She described moments of peace being pierced by fresh waves of grief. Even years later, reminders triggered tears.

What This Story Teaches Us

Lupita Nyong'o's grief over Chadwick Boseman's death did not stay in the past—it returned, sharply, at moments she did not expect, reopened by reminders she could not always predict or avoid. She spoke honestly about how loss she thought she had processed could still ambush her freshly, months later.

Fresh grief returning after a season of relative calm can feel like regression, as though all the earlier progress has been undone. It has not. A wave returning does not erase the ground already covered. It simply means love is still alive, and so, sometimes, is the ache that comes with it.

This week, if grief has hit you afresh after a period of feeling more settled, do not read that as failure. Lupita's honesty about this exact experience is proof that even people who appear to have "moved on" publicly still carry moments where the loss returns in full force.

Personal Reflection

Grief has no expiration date. I've had days—months after the funeral—when I felt suddenly engulfed by a wave of sadness, as though the loss just happened yesterday.

Sometimes it's a scent. Sometimes a date on the calendar. Sometimes it's the sound of laughter in a hallway—laughter that used to be hers.

And when it hits, I'm not always ready.

There was a day I sat in my car, parked, immobilized by a memory. It came out of nowhere and broke me open again. I cried like it was the first week of mourning.

I used to feel ashamed of those moments—thinking they meant I hadn't healed. But I've learned that healing is not linear. Grief is not tidy. And love is never fully gone.

These revisits of sorrow don't mean I've regressed—they mean I still love deeply.

Devotional Insight

God is not impatient with your repeated sorrow. He does not roll His eyes when grief returns. Instead, He draws near again, and again, and again. The same God who comforted you in the early days will meet you in these surprise moments too.

Scripture Echoes

> *"Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted."* — Matthew 5:4 NKJV
>
> *"Even when I walk through the darkest valley, I will not be afraid, for You are close beside me."* — Psalm 23:4 NLT

Prayer

Lord, when the grief hits again and catches me off guard, remind me that I'm not alone. Hold me close, like You did before. Let every tear be a reminder of how deeply I've loved—and how faithfully You walk with me.

Reflection Prompt

Can you recall a moment when grief surprised you long after you thought you were "doing better"? How did you respond? Write a prayer or letter to God from that moment.

Personal Reader Notes

Week 38: When You're Tired of Grieving

> **Anchor Scripture**
> *"Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."* — Matthew 11:28 NKJV

Story: Pastor Bimbo Odukoya – Legacy in the Midst of Loss

When Pastor Bimbo Odukoya tragically died in a 2005 plane crash, her death shook the nation. Her children and husband grieved publicly. But her daughter, Tolu, later shared how she got tired of being "the grieving girl." She found strength in God—not by pretending to be okay, but by bringing her exhaustion to Him.

What This Story Teaches Us

Pastor Bimbo Odukoya died suddenly in a plane crash while actively serving in ministry, and those she left behind faced the exhausting task of grieving while also carrying forward the responsibilities and legacy she had built. There was no pause button available—grief and duty had to coexist immediately.

Grief fatigue is real, especially when loss arrives in the middle of ongoing responsibility that cannot simply stop. The exhaustion of grieving while still having to function, lead, or care for others is its own particular weight, distinct from grief experienced with the luxury of withdrawal.

This week, if you are simply tired of grieving—tired of carrying it while life demands you keep functioning—that exhaustion is valid and does not need justification. Ask God for strength for exactly this kind of tired, the kind that still has to show up tomorrow.

Personal Reflection

There came a season when even my grief grew tired. I wasn’t done mourning. But I was done weeping.

The energy it took to feel the loss, explain the loss, survive the loss—it drained me.

I wasn't angry. I wasn't okay either. I was just… empty. That was when I heard Jesus whisper again: "Come to Me."

I didn't need to impress Him. I didn't need to pray the "right" way. I just needed to show up tired—and He would carry the rest.

Devotional Insight

God doesn't expect you to grieve endlessly or "move on" quickly. He simply asks you to come. When sorrow wears you out, rest is holy. Grief is a journey—but He never intended for you to walk it alone.

Scripture Echoes

> *"He gives power to the weak…"* — Isaiah 40:29 NKJV
>
> *"My flesh and my heart fail; but God is the strength of my heart…"* — Psalm 73:26 NKJV
>
> *"The Lord will fight for you; you need only to be still."* — Exodus 14:14 NIV

Prayer

Jesus, I'm tired. I don't know what to feel anymore. I bring You my weariness. Please give me rest—not just sleep, but soul-rest.

Reflection Prompt

Are you tired of grieving? What part of your soul needs rest today? Let that become your honest prayer.

Personal Reader Notes

Week 39: When Healing Feels Slow

> **Anchor Scripture**
> *"Let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing."* — James 1:4 NKJV

Story: Immaculée Ilibagiza — Ninety-One Days, and a Lifetime After

During the 1994 Rwandan genocide, Immaculée Ilibagiza hid for ninety-one days in a cramped bathroom with seven other women while militia hunted for them outside. She survived, but nearly her entire family did not. In the years that followed, she has been honest that healing did not arrive all at once when the killing stopped—it came slowly, through years of prayer, and eventually led her to forgive the men who murdered her family. She has since said forgiveness “is all I have to offer,” and that even now, healing continues to unfold one day at a time.

What This Story Teaches Us

Immaculée Ilibagiza's healing after the Rwandan genocide did not arrive quickly or all at once. It came slowly, over years, through sustained prayer, eventually leading her to forgive the men who murdered her family—a process she has been honest was neither instant nor easy, and which she describes as still unfolding even now.

When healing feels impossibly slow, there can be pressure to believe something is wrong—that enough time has passed, that you should be further along by now. Immaculée's story, forged in one of history's most devastating tragedies, insists otherwise: healing measured in years, not weeks, is not failure. It is simply honest about the size of what was lost.

This week, release any deadline you have imposed on your own healing. Slow healing, as this week's devotional insight says, is still healing. Immaculée's decades-long journey did not disqualify her forgiveness from being real. Let your own timeline be equally unhurried and equally valid.

Personal Reflection

I expected healing to feel like sunrise—sudden and bright. But for me, it was more like a dim candle—flickering, unsure, but steady.

Some days I feel stronger. Other days I feel as fragile as the moment I watched her take her final breath.

But God has not rushed me. He's been patient, like a Father walking slowly beside His limping child.

And now I see: healing isn't a race. It's a relationship.

Devotional Insight

God doesn't demand that you "move on." He invites you to move with Him—step by step, tear by tear. Healing is not about forgetting. It's about being gently restored.

Scripture Echoes

> *"He heals the brokenhearted…"* — Psalm 147:3 NKJV
>
> *"The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in mercy."* — Psalm 103:8 NKJV

Prayer

Lord, thank You for not rushing me. Teach me to walk at the pace of grace. Let each slow step be one of trust.

Reflection Prompt

How has your view of healing changed in this season? What slow progress are you starting to notice in your heart?

Personal Reader Notes

Week 40: Slow, Gentle Healing

> **Anchor Scripture**
> *"He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds." —* Psalm 147:3 NIV

Story: Trevor Noah – Losing His Grandmother

When Trevor Noah's beloved grandmother passed, he gave a touching tribute. "I don't cry the way people expect," he said. "It sneaks up in the quiet moments." His healing didn't come all at once. It arrived through memories, laughter, and the slow honoring of her legacy.

What This Story Teaches Us

Trevor Noah's tribute to his grandmother was tender rather than triumphant—he did not claim to have fully processed the loss, only that he was learning to hold gratitude and grief together at the same time. His healing was gentle and gradual, not a dramatic breakthrough but a slow softening.

Healing does not always announce itself with a clear before-and-after moment. More often, it looks like Trevor Noah's tribute: still tender, still aware of the loss, but able to hold gratitude alongside the sorrow without one canceling out the other.

This week, notice any small, gentle signs of healing in yourself, even ones that do not feel dramatic. A moment of gratitude sitting beside your grief, rather than replacing it, is not a small thing. It is exactly the kind of slow, gentle healing this story points toward.

Personal Reflection

After the initial shock of loss, I expected healing to follow a straight line. But it didn't. Some days felt worse than the early ones. Other days carried surprising peace. I would be folding her clothes or hearing one of her favorite hymns—and suddenly, the tears would come.

I wanted a clear ending. God offered slow healing.

It came gently—like dawn breaking over weeks and months.

At first, I felt guilty for still grieving. Wasn't I "better" by now? But God never asked me to heal quickly. He simply asked me to walk with Him. I've learned that recovery is not proof of strength—it's the result of grace.

Devotional Insight

Healing doesn't always roar. Sometimes it whispers. Sometimes it sits with you in silence. Trust that the One who binds wounds is still at work—even when you can't feel it.

Scripture Echoes

> *"Even when I walk through the darkest valley… You are close beside me."* — Psalm 23:4 NLT
>
> *"He will give a crown of beauty for ashes…"* — Isaiah 61:3 NLT
>
> *"Come to Me, all who are weary… and I will give you rest."* — Matthew 11:28 NKJV

Prayer

Father, I want to be whole, but I'm still hurting. Teach me to rest in Your pace, to trust in Your process, and to welcome healing when it comes slowly.

Reflection Prompt

What are the smallest signs of healing you've noticed lately? Write them down. Let them remind you that progress is still progress.

Personal Reader Notes

Week 41: Holding On to Hope

> **Anchor Scripture**
> *"But I will hope continually, and will yet praise You more and more."* — Psalm 71:14 KJV

Story: Sammie Okposo – Hope Beyond Mistakes

Before his passing in 2022, gospel artist Sammie Okposo had endured both public failure and personal pain. But even in his brokenness, he clung to God's mercy, returned to music, and reminded the world that grace has the final say. His songs declared: God is not done with you.

What This Story Teaches Us

Sammie Okposo's life included both public failure and public restoration before his passing—a reminder that hope does not require a flawless record to remain genuine. His story was not one of unbroken triumph. It included real mistakes, real consequences, and still, real hope that outlasted them.

There can be a quiet fear that grief compounded by regret, mistakes, or a complicated relationship with the person lost disqualifies you from genuine hope going forward. Sammie's story says otherwise: hope does not require a spotless history to be legitimate. It simply requires continuing to reach for God, mistakes and all.

This week, if your grief is tangled with your own past failures or a complicated relationship, let that complexity coexist with hope rather than canceling it out. Hope beyond mistakes was Sammie's story. It can be yours too.

Personal Reflection

Grief brings with it a haunting echo of regret. I replayed scenes, conversations, decisions. Could I have done more? Prayed better? Trusted deeper? But somewhere amidst the noise of guilt came another voice—the Shepherd's.

It reminded me: hope isn't denial. It's defiance. It says, "This pain is not the end of your story."

Like Sammie, I began to reclaim the music of hope. In my prayers. In my parenting. In the OASIS Foundation, which now continues her legacy. I've learned to hope while hurting. To worship while wounded. And to trust that God is still writing my story—with tenderness and purpose.

Devotional Insight

Hope is not always loud. But it is always present. God invites you to cling to it—not because you're strong, but because He is faithful. His promises are not buried with your loss.

Scripture Echoes

> *"We have this hope as an anchor for the soul…"* — Hebrews 6:19 TPT
>
> *"Let us hold fast… for He who promised is faithful."* — Hebrews 10:23 NKJV
>
> *"God… gives power to the weak…"* — Isaiah 40:29 NKJV

Prayer

Jesus, even in my brokenness, I choose to hope. Anchor me again in Your faithfulness. Let my heart beat again with courage and trust.

Reflection Prompt

What would a declaration of hope sound like from your mouth today? Speak it aloud, even through your tears.

Personal Reader Notes

Week 42: Laughter in the Dark

> **Anchor Scripture**
> *"A merry heart does good, like medicine..."* — Proverbs 17:22 NKJV

Story: Basketmouth – Grief Behind the Comedy

One of Nigeria's most beloved comedians, Basketmouth, once spoke about using laughter as a way to process difficult seasons—including personal loss. While his audiences laughed, he sometimes stood on stage hiding fresh wounds. Laughter didn't remove the pain—but it helped him breathe.

What This Story Teaches Us

Basketmouth, one of Nigeria's most beloved comedians, has spoken about using laughter deliberately during his own grief—not as denial, but as a genuine coping tool, a way of staying connected to life even while carrying real sorrow underneath the humor.

There is sometimes guilt attached to laughing during grief, as though joy were a betrayal of the loss. Basketmouth's example dismantles that guilt. Laughter used honestly, not as avoidance but as a real expression of continuing to live, can coexist with genuine mourning rather than contradicting it.

This week, if you catch yourself laughing and feel a flicker of guilt afterward, let this story release that guilt. Laughter in the dark is not disrespect toward what you lost. It is often evidence that life, real life, is still finding its way back into you.

Personal Reflection

I remember the first time I laughed after she died. It startled me. Guilt crept in like an unwelcome guest. "Should I be laughing this soon? Does it mean I've moved on?" But then I remembered—she loved to laugh. We shared so many ridiculous jokes, even during her treatments. Our humor didn't avoid the pain. It kept us human in it.

Now, when joy bubbles up—through a child's joke, a funny memory, or shared laughter with friends—I no longer push it away.

It’s not betrayal. It’s a gift. Grief and joy are not enemies. They dance together. One doesn’t cancel the other. They coexist in the same heart that loved deeply.

Devotional Insight

Joy is not proof that you’ve “moved on.” It’s evidence that you’re still alive. God never forbids laughter in grief. In fact, He often uses it to revive the weary heart. Let joy come. Let it surprise you. Let it heal you.

Scripture Echoes

> *“You have turned my mourning into dancing…”* — Psalm 30:11 NKJV
>
> *“The joy of the Lord is your strength.”* — Nehemiah 8:10 NKJV
>
> *“Weeping may endure for a night, but joy comes in the morning.”* — Psalm 30:5 NKJV

Prayer

Lord, thank You for joy. For laughter. For light that finds me even in the shadows. Help me receive joy without guilt, and let it be part of my healing.

Reflection Prompt

What moment of laughter surprised you most after your loss? What did it teach you about healing?

Personal Reader Notes

Week 43: Learning to Smile Again

> **Anchor Scripture**
> *"Weeping may endure for a night, but joy comes in the morning."* — Psalm 30:5 NKJV

Story: Helen Folasade Adu (Sade) — A Voice from the Ashes

Sade, the Nigerian-born music icon, disappeared from the spotlight for over a decade after personal tragedies, including divorce and heartbreak. But when she returned, her music was deeper, her smile softer. Life had pressed her, but not destroyed her. Her voice carried healing, not just to others—but to herself.

What This Story Teaches Us

Sade disappeared from the public spotlight for years at a time, choosing quiet, private seasons over the pressure to remain constantly visible. When she returned, her voice had not disappeared—it had simply been given the space it needed before re-emerging.

Learning to smile again, to re-engage with life and even joy, does not happen on anyone else's schedule. Sade's long absences were not failures to perform recovery on cue. They were simply what she needed, and her eventual return proved the withdrawal had not erased what mattered.

This week, if you are not ready to fully re-engage with life the way others expect, you do not owe anyone a premature return to normal. Take the quiet season you need. Whatever is genuine in you will still be there when you are ready to let it be seen again.

Personal Reflection

There was a day I laughed—and then felt guilty for it.

How could I find joy when the one I loved was no longer here?

Was it betrayal to smile again?

But the more I sat with God, the more I realized: joy is not a denial of grief. It is the fruit of healing.

It comes slowly—through music, through nature, through the giggles of our children.

And when it comes, I don't push it away anymore.

I welcome it as a guest sent by grace.

Devotional Insight

God never asked you to wear mourning forever. There is permission to smile again. Not because the loss didn't matter—but because life, touched by God, keeps rising from the ashes.

Scripture Echoes

> *"The joy of the Lord is your strength."* — Nehemiah 8:10 NKJV
>
> *"To all who mourn… He will give a crown of beauty for ashes."* — Isaiah 61:3 NLT

Prayer

Father, teach me to smile again without shame. Let my laughter be a song of survival, a testimony that You are still with me.

Reflection Prompt

What moment made you smile unexpectedly this week? Can you see it as a gift from God?

Personal Reader Notes

Week 44: Grace in Unexpected Places

> **Anchor Scripture**
> *"You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; You anoint my head with oil; my cup runs over."* — Psalm 23:5 (NKJV)

Story: Oba Adeyemi III (Alaafin of Oyo) — Honor in Hard Places

The late Oba Lamidi Adeyemi III of Oyo faced many political challenges during his long reign. Yet even during exile under military regimes, he held onto his dignity and calling. Years later, he returned stronger, honored, and influential. Grace found him in unexpected places.

What This Story Teaches Us

Oba Adeyemi III faced real political hardship and even exile during his reign, yet found that God's grace showed up in unexpected places even during those difficult seasons—not always where he might have looked for it first, but present nonetheless.

Grace in grief rarely arrives in the form we expect. We often look for it in the obvious places—a sermon, a scheduled prayer time—while it actually shows up in a phone call, an unplanned kindness, a moment of unexpected relief. Oba Adeyemi's story is a reminder to keep our eyes open to the unscripted places grace tends to appear.

This week, watch for grace in the places you were not expecting to find it. It may not look like what you thought comfort was supposed to look like. Let yourself receive it anyway, exactly as it comes.

Personal Reflection

When I thought I had reached my emotional limit, grace arrived—not loudly, not dramatically, but unmistakably. A call from an old friend. A song that brought comfort. A quiet moment with my children that felt like sunlight breaking through the clouds.

Sometimes grace came through other people. Other times it came through memories, or through tears that finally washed away what I couldn't say in words.

Just like Oba Adeyemi, I began to see that even in painful seasons, God was preparing something rich—right there in the ashes.

Devotional Insight

God often surprises us by showing up where we least expect Him—right in the thick of our pain. His grace doesn't wait for life to feel right; it meets us as we are.

> **Scripture Echoes**
>
> *"My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness."* — 2 Corinthians 12:9 (NKJV)
>
> *"Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life."* — Psalm 23:6 (NKJV)

Prayer

Father, thank You for showing up in the hard places. Let my eyes stay open to see grace, even when I feel buried in sorrow. Surprise me with Your love.

Reflection Prompt

What moment of unexpected grace have you experienced recently? How did it shift your grief, even slightly?

Personal Reader Notes

Week 45: When Grief Changes You

> **Anchor Scripture**
> *"But we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose."* — Romans 8:28 (NKJV)

Story: Bono — Grief Poured Into Purpose

U2 frontman Bono was fourteen when his mother, Iris, died suddenly of a brain aneurysm at her own father's funeral. He later said that the rage he carried afterward was, in his words, grief he didn't yet know how to name—and that he poured it into music instead. Decades of his songwriting, including the song "Iris," trace directly back to that early loss.

What This Story Teaches Us

Bono was fourteen when his mother died suddenly, and he has said plainly that the rage he carried for years afterward was, in fact, grief he did not yet know how to name. Rather than let that rage destroy him, he poured it into music—transforming an unprocessed wound into decades of meaningful work.

Grief does not always arrive labeled correctly. Sometimes it shows up as anger, restlessness, or an inability to sit still, long before a person recognizes it as grief at all. Bono's honesty about mistaking his own grief for rage gives language to an experience many people have without ever naming it accurately.

This week, consider whether any anger, restlessness, or unexplained agitation in your own life might actually be grief wearing a different face. Naming it accurately, the way Bono eventually did, is often the first step toward letting it change you for good rather than simply consuming you.

Personal Reflection

I didn't choose this loss, and for a long time I resented what it took from me. But I've noticed, slowly, that grief has also changed things

in me I didn't expect—a deeper patience, a tenderness toward other people's pain I didn't have before.

I don't say this to make the loss sound worth it. It isn't. But I don't want to waste what it's teaching me either.

Grief has stripped away some things I thought mattered, and it's left behind things I didn't know were in me until I needed them.

Devotional Insight

Grief doesn't leave us where it found us. It can harden us, or—when we bring it honestly to God—it can deepen our compassion, our patience, and our capacity to sit with other people's pain. Watch for what God is forming in you, even through what you never would have chosen.

> **Scripture Echoes**
>
> *"Tribulation produces perseverance; and perseverance, character; and character, hope."* — Romans 5:3–4 (NKJV)
>
> *"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort."* — 2 Corinthians 1:3 (NKJV)

Prayer

Lord, I didn't choose this loss, but I don't want to waste what You might be forming in me through it. Show me what is changing in me, and help it be for good.

Reflection Prompt

In what ways has grief changed you—for the better? Write down at least three traits you see emerging through the sorrow.

Personal Reader Notes

Week 46: When Pain Becomes Purpose

> **Anchor Scripture**
> *"The Lord is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit."* — Psalm 34:18 (NKJV)

Story: Malala Yousafzai — From an Attack to a Movement

In October 2012, Malala Yousafzai was shot by a Taliban gunman for speaking publicly about girls' right to education. She survived, and rather than the attack silencing her, it amplified her voice: the United Nations later designated her birthday, July 12, as Malala Day, marking not the violence she suffered but the advocacy that grew out of it—now carried forward through the Malala Fund on behalf of millions of girls.

What This Story Teaches Us

Malala Yousafzai was shot for speaking about girls' education, and rather than let that violence silence her, she let it amplify her voice—her birthday later becoming a globally recognized day of advocacy, not because the attack was minimized, but because her response to it was so deliberately redirected toward purpose.

Pain does not automatically become purposeful. It requires a deliberate choice, often made slowly and imperfectly, to let the wound become something that serves others rather than only something endured privately. Malala's story shows that this redirection is possible even after violence as severe as an assassination attempt.

This week, you do not need to have your pain fully resolved before considering what it might eventually be for. Malala's advocacy did not wait for her wound to fully heal first. It grew directly out of the wound itself, redirected rather than erased.

Personal Reflection

The first year after my wife passed, the hardest dates were just that—hard. I braced for them, endured them, and was relieved when they

were over. I didn't expect them to ever mean anything more than pain.

But something shifted with time. The same dates that once flattened me became days I found myself reaching for others—sharing what I had learned, sitting with someone newly widowed, writing a little more honestly about grief than I had before. The ache never fully left. But it started making room for something else alongside it.

I don't think the passing of time erased my sorrow. I think it gave the sorrow a job to do.

Devotional Insight

Time doesn't erase a wound—but placed in God's hands, it can redeem one. A date that once only took something from you can, over the years, become a date that gives something through you: empathy, testimony, ministry to someone else's pain. That is not a betrayal of your grief. It is grief growing up.

> **Scripture Echoes**
>
> *"But as for you, you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, in order to bring it about as it is this day, to save many people alive."* — Genesis 50:20 (NKJV)
>
> *"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."* — 2 Corinthians 1:3–4 (NKJV)

Prayer

Lord, I don't ask You to erase this day from the calendar. I ask You to redeem it. Take what it costs me and let it become something that serves someone else. Turn my scar into a place You can work through.

Reflection Prompt

Has the meaning of your hardest anniversary changed over the years? What has this particular pain equipped you to offer someone else who is walking a similar road?

Personal Reader Notes

Week 47: Keeping Sacred Time

> **Anchor Scripture**
> *"Teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom."* — Psalm 90:12 (NKJV)

Story: Chinua Achebe — Dates That Echo Legacy

When Chinua Achebe passed in 2013, the world mourned. But his family and admirers did not simply let the date pass unmarked—every year, the anniversary of his death became an occasion set apart: readings, tributes, quiet reflection on what he gave the world. The date was not just endured. It was kept.

What This Story Teaches Us

Chinua Achebe's family and admirers did not let his death anniversary pass unmarked. They built deliberate, repeated practices around remembering him—readings, tributes, quiet reflection—turning a single sorrowful date into an annual, intentional act of honoring his legacy.

A remembrance practice, repeated on purpose year after year, becomes something more than a coping mechanism. It becomes a kind of sacred rhythm—not unlike the memorial stones and feast days God commanded His own people to keep, so that what mattered would never simply be forgotten by the passage of time.

This week, consider what deliberate, repeatable practice you might build around remembering your own loved one. It does not need to be elaborate. It only needs to be intentional, and kept, the way Achebe's own legacy continues to be kept by those who loved him.

Personal Reflection

In Scripture, God's people didn't just remember privately and move on—they built memorials. Stones stacked by the Jordan. A yearly Passover meal. A practice repeated on purpose, generation after generation, so that no one would forget what God had done.

I've started doing something similar with the dates that matter most. I light a candle on the day she was born, and again on the day she left. I play the worship songs she loved. I tell our children one story about her they haven't heard yet. None of these gestures are complicated. But because I do them every year, on purpose, they've become something more than a coping mechanism—they've become a small liturgy.

It isn't about staying stuck in the past. It's about building a rhythm that keeps her memory, and my gratitude to God, in their proper place—returned to, on purpose, year after year.

Devotional Insight

God commanded His people to build memorials—remembering isn't self-indulgent; it can be sacred obedience. A practice you return to every year doesn't trap you in grief. It teaches the next generation what mattered, and it teaches your own heart to number its days with wisdom instead of dread.

> **Scripture Echoes**
>
> *"And these stones shall be for a memorial to the children of Israel forever."* — Joshua 4:6–7 (NKJV)
>
> *"So this day shall be to you a memorial; and you shall keep it as a feast to the Lord throughout your generations. You shall keep it as a feast by an everlasting ordinance."* — Exodus 12:14 (NKJV)

Prayer

Lord, give me the discipline to keep returning to these days on purpose, rather than only surviving them. Let every small practice I build become a way of teaching my family—and reminding my own heart—what mattered, and who You have been to us.

Reflection Prompt

What practice or ritual could you establish to mark this date every year going forward? Who could you invite into that practice with you, so the remembering isn't carried alone?

Personal Reader Notes

Week 48: The Gift of Remembering

> **Anchor Scripture**
> *"Remember the former things of old, for I am God..."* — Isaiah 46:9 NKJV

Story: Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti — A Legacy Passed Down

Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti wasn't just a political activist—she was a mother, mentor, and matriarch. Today, her descendants keep her memory alive—not just in history books, but in values, music, and activism. Remembering is how her story continues.

What This Story Teaches Us

Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti was not only a political activist in her own right—she was a mother whose convictions and courage were passed down directly to her children, becoming a legacy carried forward rather than a story that ended with her.

Remembering someone well is not only about looking backward. It can also mean actively carrying forward what mattered most to them—their values, their courage, their way of loving others—so that their influence continues through you, not just in your memory of them.

This week, consider what specific quality or conviction of your loved one you might deliberately carry forward, the way Funmilayo's children carried hers. That, too, is a gift of remembering—not just recalling who they were, but continuing to live out what they gave you.

Personal Reflection

Memory is not a trap. It's a gift. Sometimes it arrives through scent—her perfume in the hallway.

Other times, through music—her favorite worship songs. Often, through our children—saying things she once said.

And for a while, I tried to avoid it. I thought remembering would break me.

But it didn’t. It blessed me. Memory became communion. A way to sit with her again—not physically, but spiritually.

Devotional Insight

Remembering doesn’t keep you stuck. It keeps you connected. Let memory bless you, not break you. God often speaks through what we remember.

Scripture Echoes

> *“This I recall to mind, therefore I have hope…”* — Lamentations 3:21 NKJV
>
> *“Do this in remembrance of Me.”* — Luke 22:19 NKJV

Prayer

God of memory, thank You for the moments that return. Let each memory be a doorway to gratitude, not only to grief.

Reflection Prompt

Write down your most joyful memory with your loved one. Return to it often. Let it remind you that love was real—and still is.

Personal Reader Notes

Week 49: Grief and Worship

> **Anchor Scripture**
> *"Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him."* — Job 13:15 (NKJV)

Story: Sinach — Singing Through Silent Battles

Sinach's worship music has touched millions, yet she has spoken about personal delays and private struggles—including long years of waiting for motherhood. Through it all, she kept worshipping, turning pain into praise. Her songs, born from broken places, became healing for many others.

What This Story Teaches Us

Sinach, whose worship songs have touched millions, has spoken about her own private struggles and delays—including years of waiting for something she deeply desired. She kept worshipping through it, not because the pain had resolved, but because worship in grief is less a celebration of comfort and more a act of surrendered trust.

There is a difference between worship that waits for feelings to align first and worship offered honestly in the middle of genuine struggle. Sinach's own songs, many born from real waiting and real pain, model the second kind—worship as surrender, not as a reward for having already arrived at peace.

This week, if worship feels difficult right now, remember that some of the most powerful songs of faith were written from exactly this place. Your broken hallelujah is still received. God does not require your worship to wait for your grief to end first.

Personal Reflection

After loss, worship feels strange. You lift your hands, but they tremble. You sing, but the tears come mid-verse. And still, you sing.

I remember moments of worship after my wife passed. They weren't loud, and they weren't even especially strong. But they were true. Worship in grief is different—it isn't just a song, it's a surrender. It's saying, even in this, I trust You.

Job said, "Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him." That isn't blind faith—it's brave faith. Worship has become my anchor, shaky at times, but honest. And God receives it exactly as it is.

Devotional Insight

Worship may sound quieter in grief, but it is never less powerful. God receives your broken hallelujahs. He meets you in the sound of surrender, not just in the sound of strength.

> **Scripture Echoes**
>
> *"The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord."* — Job 1:21 (NKJV)
>
> *"Let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name."* — Hebrews 13:15 (NKJV)

Prayer

Father, I bring You my hallelujah, even when it hurts. Let my worship rise from these ashes and carry me into Your arms.

Reflection Prompt

What worship song helped you most in this season? Play it again this week—let it carry you one more step forward.

Personal Reader Notes

Week 50: Grief Has No Expiry Date

> **Anchor Scripture**
> *"Let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing."* — James 1:4 (NKJV)

Story: Coretta Scott King — Nearly Four Decades of Carrying His Legacy

After Martin Luther King Jr. was assassinated in 1968, his widow Coretta Scott King did not simply move past the loss on any tidy timeline. For almost forty years, until her own death in 2006, she continued the work they had shared, founded the King Center in his memory, and spoke often of carrying both the grief and the mission forward together. Her mourning and her purpose lived side by side for the rest of her life.

What This Story Teaches Us

Coretta Scott King carried her husband's legacy and mission forward for nearly four decades after his assassination, refusing to let either her grief or her purpose expire on anyone else's schedule. She did not move past her loss quickly, nor did she let it stop her from continuing meaningful work for the rest of her life.

There is no expiration date on grief, and Coretta's decades-long devotion proves it does not need one to remain faithful and productive. Grief and ongoing purpose are not opposites that must be resolved before the other can begin. They can, and often do, exist together for a lifetime.

This week, release any pressure to have "finished" grieving by now. Coretta Scott King never did, not fully, and it did not disqualify her from decades of faithful, purposeful living. Your grief, too, is allowed to last as long as it lasts.

Personal Reflection

People sometimes expect grief to have a shelf life—a year, maybe two, and then you should be "over it." I've stopped expecting that of myself.

Years later, certain moments still catch me off guard with the same rawness as the early days. That used to alarm me, like I was doing something wrong. Now I understand it differently.

Grief doesn't expire. It changes shape, it becomes more livable, but love this real doesn't come with a deadline for missing it.

Devotional Insight

There is no expiration date on grief, and no timeline you are failing to meet. Some sorrow will still surface years later, and that is not regression—it's evidence of how deeply you loved. God's patience with your process is not running out, even if the world's has.

> **Scripture Echoes**
>
> *"To everything there is a season, a time for every purpose under heaven."* — Ecclesiastes 3:1 (NKJV)
>
> *"Weeping may endure for a night, but joy comes in the morning."* — Psalm 30:5 (NKJV)

Prayer

Lord, thank You that You don't put a deadline on my healing. Meet me in the moments, even years from now, when grief resurfaces—and remind me that this doesn't mean I've failed to heal.

Reflection Prompt

What traditions, memories, or habits still connect you to your loved one? Embrace one of them this week without guilt over how much time has passed.

Personal Reader Notes

Week 51: When the Journey Feels Long

> **Anchor Scripture**
> *"Let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart."* — Galatians 6:9 NKJV

Story: Bishop Desmond Tutu — The Long Road to Justice

Bishop Tutu fought apartheid with passion, prayer, and perseverance. The journey was long, painful, and often filled with setbacks. But he kept walking—because he believed that even a long journey, if taken with hope, can still lead to healing.

What This Story Teaches Us

Bishop Desmond Tutu fought apartheid for decades, through setbacks that would have exhausted a lesser resolve, sustained by passion, prayer, and sheer perseverance across what became a genuinely long road toward justice. He did not have the comfort of a quick resolution. He simply kept walking, year after year.

When the grief journey feels endless, it can help to remember that some of history's most meaningful work required exactly this kind of long, unglamorous perseverance—not one dramatic breakthrough, but faithful, repeated steps across a road with no visible end in sight.

This week, if your own journey feels impossibly long, let Bishop Tutu's decades of perseverance encourage you. Each step, even the ones that feel like no progress at all, is still part of the road. You are not required to see the end to keep faithfully walking it.

Personal Reflection

Grief has its own timeline. And some days, the journey feels never-ending. I’ve had days when the weight felt lighter—and then one memory, one scent, or one picture brought the heaviness flooding back.

There were times I thought: “Shouldn’t I be better by now?” But grief doesn’t go by dates on a calendar.

The journey may be long—but I'm learning that it doesn't mean I'm doing it wrong.

Each step is a step forward, even if it's limping. Even if it's through tears.

Even if I have to sit and rest for a while. I remember Desmond Tutu's gentle but firm resilience.

He knew the pain, but he didn't quit. So I keep walking too.

Devotional Insight

Grief is not a sprint—it's a marathon. Don't rush your heart. God isn't in a hurry with your healing. He walks every mile beside you.

Scripture Echoes

> *"You will show me the path of life…"* — Psalm 16:11 NKJV
>
> *"They shall walk and not faint."* — Isaiah 40:31 NKJV

Prayer

Lord, when I feel weary and unsure, remind me that You're walking with me. Help me not to measure my healing by speed, but by trust.

Reflection Prompt

What's one sign that you've come farther than you thought on this journey? Pause and thank God for that step forward.

Personal Reader Notes

Week 52: Finding Meaning in the Mourning

> **Anchor Scripture**
> *"I will restore to you the years that the swarming locust has eaten..."* — Joel 2:25 NKJV

Story: Nelson Mandela — Legacy Born of Loss

Nelson Mandela spent 27 years in prison, losing time with his family, his freedom, and years he could never reclaim. Yet from that immense loss, he emerged not bitter, but purposeful—leading South Africa through reconciliation rather than revenge. His life became a testimony that mourning, however long, does not have to be the final chapter.

What This Story Teaches Us

Nelson Mandela's twenty-seven years in prison cost him time, freedom, and relationships he could never fully reclaim. Yet he emerged not consumed by bitterness but carrying a purpose that reshaped an entire nation—proof that mourning, however long and however costly, does not have to be the final word on a life.

This is the note the whole book has been building toward: your grief does not have to be wasted. It can, in God's hands, become part of a larger story—not one that erases what was lost, but one that lets the loss become part of something meaningful going forward, exactly as Mandela's imprisonment became part of his legacy rather than the end of it.

This week, as you close this year of reflection, consider what meaning God might be inviting you to find in your own mourning—not instead of the grief, but alongside it, the way Mandela's purpose grew directly out of everything he had lost.

Personal Reflection

A year ago, I could not have imagined finding meaning in this. I only knew the ache, the disbelief, the long nights.

But slowly, God has shown me that grief and meaning are not opposites. My mourning has taught me to hold what matters more

tightly, to speak love out loud rather than assume it's known, and to trust God even when I cannot see the whole picture.

This is not the ending I would have chosen. But it is the story God is still writing, and I am learning to trust the Author even through the hardest chapters.

Devotional Insight

Mourning does not have to be wasted. When surrendered to God, even our deepest losses can become part of a larger story of restoration, purpose, and hope for others who are still walking through their own valleys.

Scripture Echoes

> *"Weeping may endure for a night, but joy comes in the morning."* — Psalm 30:5 NKJV
>
> *"All things work together for good to those who love God..."* — Romans 8:28 NKJV

Prayer

Father, thank You for walking with me through this year of grief. Let my pain not be wasted—use it to deepen my faith, soften my heart, and prepare me to comfort others the way You have comforted me.

Reflection Prompt

Looking back over these 52 weeks, what has God revealed to you through your grief? Write a final letter to your loved one—or to God—expressing what you've learned.

Personal Reader Notes

Closing Words

Still Held. Still Healing. Still His.

If you've made it to this final page, then I want to say something simple, yet sacred:

Well done.

You've walked through fifty-two weeks of honesty, heartbreak, hope, and healing.
You've given your grief room to breathe—and you've allowed God to walk with you through it.
You've cried, prayed, questioned, remembered. You've stood still in places that used to undo you. And perhaps, just perhaps, you've begun to see signs of life again.

But let me say this: *grief does not operate on a schedule.*
Finishing this devotional does not mean you're "over it." There is no "over"—only *through*. And if you're still going through it, that's okay. That's human. That's holy. God is not in a hurry to move you beyond your pain. He's simply committed to staying with you in it—and leading you gently toward hope.

Some days, you may still feel like you're back at Week One. Don't be discouraged.
Other days, you'll find yourself encouraging others with the same comfort you were once desperate to receive. And in those moments, you'll realize something powerful:

God is transforming your grief.

Not erasing it.
Not minimizing it.
But redeeming it.

Now What?

As you close this devotional, consider taking a few simple steps:

- **Revisit** the weeks that spoke most deeply to you. They may offer new insight in this season.
- **Journal** your own 53rd week—write your story, your testimony, your next step.
- **Share** what God has done. Whether through words, presence, or compassion, your journey can be someone else's lifeline.
- **Rest** in the truth that you are still being carried. God has not finished writing your story. Not even close.

And if this devotional has spoken to you in some small way—if God has met you through its pages—would you consider sharing it with someone else who may be hurting too?

I also humbly invite you to recommend or gift a copy of my book, **Finding God in Grief**, to someone navigating loss. It tells the deeper story behind this devotional—of love, faith, suffering, and the raw reality of holding on to hope when life doesn't make sense. You never know who may be silently searching for words, comfort, or a flicker of light. Your small act of sharing could open a doorway to healing for another heart.

One Final Truth

You are not forgotten.
You are not broken beyond repair.
You are not grieving alone.

You are **seen**.
You are **loved**.
You are still **His**.

And in the hands of the Master Potter, even shattered pieces become vessels of beauty and light.

So walk forward—not with forced strength, but with sacred trust.
Because the same God who walked with you through the valley…
will walk with you into resurrection.

We grieve.
But not without hope.
And never without Him.

With love, faith, and the deepest grace,

Oludare Akinbo
In memory. In healing. In hope.

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- Isaiah 26:3 NKJV
- Psalm 23:4 NLT
- Psalm 31:15 NKJV

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- Psalm 46:10 NKJV
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- Deuteronomy 33:25 NKJV
- Philippians 4:13 NKJV

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