

How You Can Find Hope, Even in Your Valley of Grief

My new book *The Christian's Journey Through Grief* released May 7, 2019. Today, I'm sharing the introduction to my new book. I hope you enjoy!

"Death, you may think you have won. Yes, the wounds you have inflicted are deep. And we will mourn as we nurse those wounds. But in truth you have lost again! While to human eyes you may seem to have won this battle, in reality you have already lost the war. And every life you take—temporarily—is but another nail in your own coffin. Death, you will be destroyed! And Al Tanksley, along with me and all the rest of us who trust in Jesus, will live forever.

Then where, O death, will be your sting? Where, O grave, will be your victory?"

With those words I declared once more the death of death. Facing family and friends, my husband's casket draped in the stars and stripes behind me, I thanked Al for having loved me so completely. Then I dug deep to find the faith and hope to speak the words you just read through pain that was beyond description. I knew the days and months ahead would be hard, and they were. Very hard.

As I write these words, it is Easter. This morning I visited the cemetery where I laid my husband's body to rest, and through my tears, I sang resurrection hymns over his grave. I looked around at all the other graves and thought yet again that too many people are being buried.

A woman visiting her mother's grave came over and spoke to me. She was struggling to imagine anything beyond the pain of her loss, anything beyond that day. I pointed to the words engraved on the back of my husband's headstone.

Death is swallowed up in victory.

O death, where is thy sting?

O grave, where is thy victory? (1 Cor. 15:54-55, KJV).

I told her, "I don't know how anyone can go on who does not know Jesus. It's only because He is alive that we can look forward to the resurrection. Only because He lives do we have hope." I pray my words somehow encouraged and comforted her.

As I sat there looking at all the graves, the reality of the resurrection hit me all over again. Real people are buried here, but there is a tomb that is empty. After Jesus' death and resurrection, the angel told His disciples, "Why do you seek the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen!" (Luke 24:5-6, MEV). At the cross Jesus declared the end of sin, and in the resurrection, He declared the end of death. Not yet, of course, but their end will come.

Because of Easter, cemeteries are temporary.

Yet to our human senses death seems so final. So heavy. So impenetrable. So dark. Some speak of finding closure after the death of a loved one. Those of us grieving may want to scream, "Closure? What's that?" Most people shrink from death. We do everything possible to avoid thinking about it, talking about it, seeing it, or accepting it.

Yet the Bible says the fear of death is bondage (Heb. 2:15). When the funeral is done—the ashes spread or the body lowered into the ground—it all feels so final. It's over—ashes to ashes, dust to dust. But is it really over?

Our final is God's temporary. In the full scheme of things, cemeteries are temporary. There will be no graves to visit in heaven or in the new earth. There will be no funerals, no headstones, no urns, no ashes, no mausoleums, no undertakers, no caskets, no hearses, no hymns meant to comfort those left behind.

In only a little while, our tears will be wiped away.

For those who believe in Jesus, death is temporary.

If you're grieving right now, you may wish "temporary" meant your anguish would quickly go away and things could go back to the way they were. But your loved one is gone, and death doesn't feel temporary at all. Right now the only thing you may be aware of is your heart crying, "Just make the pain stop!"

Your head may know that Jesus has already dealt with death, yet your heart feels a grief that's too big to express. The people who gathered around you when your loved one first died are going on with their lives now, but you still find it difficult to even think. Your emotions are all tangled: regrets, anger, loneliness, confusion, sadness, fear, anxiety, exhaustion, hopelessness, relief—it's too much. It may feel as though your faith is on life support. Like Mary and Martha, you may be crying, "Lord, if You had been here, my [loved one] would not have died" (John 11:21, 32).

How can you make it through this dark valley of grief? What are you supposed to do now? Is it really supposed to hurt this much if you're a believer? You can't imagine getting through the next hour, let alone the next year. You grasp at anything that promises to make the pain go away even for a moment.

The witness of the New Testament and of those who have believed in Jesus during the past 2,000-plus years is that believers still grieve. Death still hurts—a lot! But we do "not grieve as others who have no hope" (1 Thess. 4:13b). We grieve, but we grieve differently.

This book is about that difference.

It's about going through the dark valley and finding your way to the other side.

It's about learning to embrace excruciating pain and irrepressible hope at the same time.

It's about riding the waves of grief that threaten to drown you and feeling God's hand rescue you.

It's about doing the human work of grief while giving God full opportunity to bring real healing.

It's about embracing the "not OK-ness" of death and eventually choosing to go on living anyway.

It's about grieving but grieving differently because Jesus is alive and with you.

Your grief journey will be your own. No one else can walk it for you. It will be confusing and irregular at times. There are unique elements of your past with your loved one, the way your loved one died and your present circumstances that color your grief in a way only you can fully appreciate.

But you do not have to make your way alone. Others have walked this journey before you—I am one of them. Let me put my hand on your shoulder. Let this book be a lifeline when nothing much makes sense. Let me hold the Christlight for you, walking one step ahead of you as you make your way through this darkness, confident that you can find the light again—the light that never stopped shining. {eoa}

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This article originally appeared at .

To hear more from Dr. Carol about her grief journey, listen to the podcast included with this article.