

Logging Mileage in the Barren Land

It's 12 hours. Around the lake and Flathead cherry orchards. Through Missoula, where we lived in poverty for five months during early marriage—hate that town. An overnight in Bozeman and nabbing my girl from Montana State for a hotel slumber party. Turn at the oil refinery in Laurel.

Grumble at the “Welcome to Wonderful Wyoming” sign because it's immediately followed by a mandatory 10-mile-an-hour drop in speed. Pass the Buffalo Bill Museum in Cody and then go through an hour and a half of land with no people in it. Honk the horn through the tunnels after Thermopolis and then watch the Wind River Mountains, backdrop to my childhood home, grow bluer and taller.

When it's that man of mine driving, he grumbles at the post-Cody stretch. Says he hates driving that leg of the trip the most because it's miles of nothing.

I think it's beautiful.

And on this trip especially, going home again so soon after my dad died, the terrain greets me as an empathetic friend.

I know how you feel, it says.

Brown.

Windblown.

Lonely.

Nothing grows here, except miles of sagebrush and an occasional very brave tree.

I keep driving, enjoying the companionship of a place that

knows it should be sad with me, and the Lord whispers to me: *These miles are a place.*

They're a real place on the highway, lovely or not, and no matter how many times we drive to Wyoming from Kalispell, summer or winter, holiday or for no good reason, we have to go through that part of the country.

And there are stretches of life that we cannot go around.

Pain and grief. Stress and hardship.

They're a real place.

And we can't get from where we are to where we want to go without passing through the soul-lonely land.

But after long, am-I-ever-gonna-get-past-these miles, there will come a place in the road where green grows and color marks the landscape again. A place where water flows fast and there's more to see than just nothing.

We'll get there.

"Though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials ... " (1 Pet. 1:6, NIV).

Christy Fitzwater is the author of *A Study of Psalm 25: Seven Actions to Take When Life Gets Hard*. She is a blogger, pastor's wife and mom of two teenagers and resides in Montana. Visit www.christyfitzwater.com for more information about her ministry.