

AFTER YOUR LOVED ONE DIES  
SPIRITUAL GUIDANCE FOR THE WIDOWED

By

Medard Laz



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Those who grieve the death of their spouse are often at a loss for words – their emotions run high. Spiritual help and guidance are so necessary after a dear one is laid to rest. Yet family, friends, and even spiritual guides may not know the right words to say. The selections in this booklet try to put into words the emotions that quiver within the human heart at times like these.

Once the initial shock has been absorbed, there is a great yearning for a spiritual and prayerful journey for the one who has had to say good-bye to his or her spouse through death.

Each selection in this booklet begins with thoughts and feelings of widows and widowers who are struggling to make a new beginning in their lives. Then follows a short reflection or prayer. It is my fond hope that these experiences and prayers will foster an inner healing and bring each reader closer to the wonder and the mystery of God's call to be at home with him. You, too, can journey beyond death to resurrection and a new life.

I extend my sincerest appreciation to the many widows and widowers, especially those who are a part of the JOYFUL AGAIN! Program, who have shared their stories and their lives with me. Within each one I have felt the power of the Almighty easing their pain, lifting their crosses and imparting his presence and his eternal love.

*Medard Laz*

## BITS AND PIECES

Bits and pieces, bits and pieces.

People, people important to you, people unimportant to you, cross your life, touch it with love and carelessness, and move on. There are people who leave you and you breathe a sigh of relief and you wonder why you ever came into contact with them.

There are people who leave you and you breathe a sigh of remorse and wonder why they had to go and leave such a gaping hole.

Children leave parents, friends leave friends, acquaintances move on. You may think on the many who have moved into your hazy memory.....you look on those present and wonder.

I believe in God's master plan for lives. He moves people in and out of each other's lives and leaves his mark on each. You find that you are made up of bits and pieces of all who ever touched your life, and you are more because of it, and you would be less if they had not touched you.

Pray God that you accept the bits and pieces in humility and wonder, and never question and never regret.

Bits and pieces, bits and pieces.

*Author unknown*

When my spouse died I was completely shattered. Our plans, our trips, our tomorrows are now all in pieces. Everything that I touch, from the coffee pot to the bank book, seems to be missing a piece – my mate. Everything in the house is in order, yet only the bits and pieces of a marriage and a wonderful person remain. I am left with such a gaping hole. It is like living with the Grand Canyon in my living room and in my heart.

Oh, how I wished that it was someone else who had died – my spouse's terminally ill roommate in the hospital or an aged aunt or even myself. Why did it have to be the one person I needed the most?

## *Reflection*

Lord, I know that you move people in and out of my life for a purpose – to touch my life ever so gently or to change it around completely. No, I am not a mere pawn in the hands of you, the Master Chess-player. Life is not a game. Every move you make has a God-given reason.

With each person who has passed my way, you have left your indelible mark – like the hungry people you fed with loaves and fishes, the blind person you cured and the paralyzed man you cured. Because of your power and love, I, too, am starting to eat more than hot dogs for supper. I am beginning to see beyond yesterday. And now I have the courage to walk down the street again and chat with the neighbors. I bear within me the wonderful marks of your miracles as well as those of my dear spouse.

It is so hard for me to look at my life as bits and pieces, but I am starting to learn that there is no complete and perfect life outside of you, dear Lord. Help me to take the bits of memories I treasure together with the pieces of dreams I can still fulfill and fashion the mosaic of a new life for myself.



## TO BE BORN

**Interviewer:** “You’re going to be born soon, dear baby. You’ll be released from your mother’s womb. You will grow up to talk and run and play and enjoy the magnificent, outside world.”

**Baby in the mother’s womb:** “Says who?” There is no way that I want to be born. I am very safe, secure and happy right here where I am. You can keep your beautiful, expansive world out there. I’m fed, I’m rested and I’m loved in here. Who could ask for anything more? I’m most content to cuddle up in here and suck my thumb.”

Right now I feel like the baby in the above interview. Like that unborn child, I do not want to leave a safe, secure environment for one that is totally foreign. Yet, my arrival here in the planet Earth meant that I had to leave that security.

My spouse was most content in this world. We shared a good life, wanting for little or nothing. But life here was not the final stage of human existence. It was time to be reborn into eternal life. Since the afterlife is totally foreign, it is therefore totally frightening. But so were the labor pains and the final push to be born. Both birth and death require faith in a loving and a saving God. Fortunately, God is so much a part of both birth and death.

### *Reflection*

Dear Jesus, you were in Mary’s womb for nine months. You lived for thirty-three years in this world. Preferring heaven to earth, you went back there body and soul to spend all eternity. Heaven must be beyond our wildest dreams. Why else have you called all of us to go there?

You did not want to die any more than my spouse did – or I myself want to. The human part of you saw death, even at its best, as frightening and painful. You experienced death at its worst. What my spouse went through was not pretty. But that is all over now, and my beloved has gone on to the freedom and the glory of heaven. That is what you said and what I surely believe.

When I contrast my heartache, tears and pain - as well as that of my family and friends – with the happiness and the freedom that my spouse enjoys today, I am overwhelmed at the difference. I am too earthbound to experience this myself, but I still believe it in my heart.

Someday, I will see for myself. Someday, I will see you face-to-face, Lord. That will be the most glorious sight of all!

Your words, Jesus, excite me and give me hope:

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“I tell you truly:

you will weep and mourn  
while the world rejoices.  
You will grieve for a time,  
but your grief will be turned to  
Joy.

When a woman is in labor  
she is sad that her time has come.  
When she has borne her child,  
she no longer remembers her pain  
for joy that a man has been born  
into the world.

In the same way, you are sad  
for a time,  
but I shall see you again.  
Then your hearts will rejoice  
with a joy no one can take from you.  
On that day you will have  
no questions to ask me.  
I give you my assurance,  
whatever you ask the Father  
he will give you in my name....  
Ask and you shall receive,  
that your joy may be full."

*John 16:20-24*



## GOOD-BYES

After awhile you learn  
the subtle difference between  
holding a hand  
and chaining a soul.  
And you learn  
that love doesn't mean  
leaning  
and company doesn't always mean  
security.  
And you begin to learn  
that kisses aren't contracts and  
presents aren't promises  
and you begin to  
accept your defeats  
with the grace of an adult and  
not the grief of a child.  
And you learn  
to build all your roads on today  
because tomorrow's ground is  
too uncertain for plans  
and futures have a way of falling down  
in midflight.  
After awhile you learn  
that even sunshine burns if you ask for too much.  
So plant your own garden  
and decorate your own soil  
instead of waiting for someone  
to bring you flowers.  
And you learn  
that you really can endure  
that you really are strong  
and you really do have worth.  
and you learn,  
and you learn.  
With every good-bye,  
You learn.....

Adam Rickner



I always knew that I had a lot to learn. I tried to obtain most of what I needed from books, teachers and the experience of my parents and my husband.

But the penetrating lessons in my life I have learned from the crosses that I have carried. I have also learned much from the courage it took to allow my husband to be himself, despite my dislike of his human failings. I have paid the price for trying to chain his soul when all he wanted was to have his hand held. I tried leaning on him since leaning seemed the easiest, yet it never led to love. Often I settled for his company when it was intimacy that I really sought. Our kisses and our presents brought us together, but not nearly enough. I still ask myself why I always whined and cried like a child when I did not get my way.

I must tell myself, even a thousand times a day – although a widow does not like to hear it – that *today* is all I have. So I must build on today, letting yesterday lie and tomorrow take care of itself.

I am hurting because I have been burned – by sunshine, by life and now by death. *I* want to bloom more than any flower that I have ever seen. Yet why am I sitting here waiting for him to walk in the door? I must learn the greatest lesson of all – *I* can endure, *I* am strong, and, most of all, *I* have an infinite worth.

### *Reflection*

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Lord, it took a “good-bye” for me to finally learn about life. Death – on a cross for you, on a bed for my husband – was “good-bye.” I detest that word more than any other because I cling to everything that I have. Yet, it is the most life-giving word in the dictionary. With every “good-bye” I learn and I learn and I learn.

With my husband’s “good-bye” I learned that I can endure the idle chatter of family members and can forgive them for being so petty. I am beginning to learn that I am strong. Daily, I pick myself up, and happily I find myself stronger on the day following. And, finally, I have learned that I do have worth, for why else would such a good man have chosen me from all the others and devoted so much of himself to me?

Lord, from your “good-by,” as you returned to the Father in heaven, I learn to endure my solitary life, for I am not really alone. You are with me in our abiding peace. I learn that I am strong in my faith. My house of life has not fallen because my husband and I built it on solid rock. And from your teaching about the birds of the air and the lilies of the field I learn that I am much more important than these. For I am created in the very image of the Father.

And now, having said these “good-byes,” I can finally say “hello” to a new life.

## GODS'S GOAL

Question: Why did God make you?

Answer: God made me to know him, to love him, and to serve him in this world and to be happy with him in the next.

*Baltimore Catechism*

### *Reflection*

Lord, when they were about to close the coffin on my wife's body, I felt that my fate was being sealed, that I would be cursed to living alone for the rest of my life. I even questioned why you had created me. I wanted to be buried with my wife that day so that I would have at least a chance at happiness in the next life.

Then, as I stood there in sadness, I felt a touch on my right arm. It was my son. His eyes were red from crying and his lips quivered. We had never really been close. I was better at doling out discipline than bestowing affection. Usually, I was extremely tired when I came home from work. There was constant concern over money problems and house payments. He was always "up the street" with his friends or off to play some game. Ordinarily, all I saw of him was his back as he headed out the door or his head propped on the pillow after he was asleep.

What we had most in common, though we never realized it, was that lovely lady before us. And she was being taken away. I grasped him by the shoulders and put his head under my chin. We held each other, and we cried together.

Lord, at that moment, I felt that my wife smiled one final time. She now had her wish. Her husband and her son were finally one – through death, through tears, through an embrace. Just as you gave Mary to John and John to Mary beneath the cross, so here you were saying to the two of us: "Father, behold your son"....."Son, behold your father."

"We both loved the same woman very much," I whispered to my son in my arms.

"More than the two of us will ever know, Dad," he replied.

Lord, the months have gone by since that day, but somehow I feel that you two arranged what took place at that moment. My son's life and mine have never been the same since. It suddenly dawned on the both of us that we never tried to know one another. We never gave love a chance. And the only person we have ever served was ourselves.

Not only are we often together, we talk a lot now – about our lives, where we have been and where we are going. And we reminisce about the woman we both loved very much, the woman who brought us together.

My granddaughter in third grade is just like me – she often talks to God. One day I saw her outside trying to learn how to ride her new bike, but she kept falling off. Finally, after many attempts, I heard her praying aloud, “Just give me a push, Lord, and I promise to do all the pedaling.”

### *Reflection*

Being a mother, Lord, I believe in many things.

I believe in life – the life that springs from the earth and becomes tulips, daises and roses. I believe in the life that flutters within the womb and is born as a boy or a girl and someday becomes a man or a woman. I believe in the life that I pray my husband is enjoying with you today.

I believe in *myself*. Thanks to you, Lord, I have brought children into this world. You began it all with the creation of the first man and woman. And since that time you have left the birth and development of children to your creatures here on earth. Fashioning our children into mature men and women has not been easy, but I feel that I can be proud of myself in this area, due to your help and that of my departed husband.

Lord, I believe that cut knees eventually heal, that torrents of tears do run dry, that constant pleas for candy, bubble gum, and toys do simmer down with maturity, and that diapers and dolls do give way to dates and denims.

I believe in *tomorrow*, Lord. For today’s sun is already setting on my aching back, on the bedroom that needs cleaning and on the dishes left undone. I truly believe that our children will make the world a little more tender because my husband and I cared for them. Tomorrow our children will have good marriages because we struggled with ours. Tomorrow our children’s homes will be peaceful because we cared about discipline and all such concerns.

I believe in “*good-byes*,” Lord, though these are so hard to say. To say farewell to the gentle nudges and the needed corrections, the sleepless nights, the vigils with colds and flu, the birthday parties, holidays, and graduations of my children, and then to say “hello” to their new lives as they begin on their own – all these thoughts plague my heart. Distressing as they are, I believe in “good-byes” to my departed husband and to my departing children.

I believe in *you*, Lord. How else could I have made it as a mother, a wife, and now how else can I make it as a widow? Your design for me was to be a woman, to conceive life, carry life, and then give birth. The bond that you and I have, Lord, is mysterious – approaching a miracle. The seed is planted and life begins to grow – conception and birth. Today you have planted the seed of my widowhood, and I know – I believe – that my life will begin to grow and bloom again. Thank you for your seed, your love, your miracles.

I believe in *being a mother*, Lord. What else in life pays not even the minimum wage but rewards me with a lifetime of hugs and kisses? Even Beethoven with all his genius could not compose a symphony to convey the meaning of the words, “Thanks, Mom, I love you!”

## THAT UNCOMFORTABLE FEELING

Last year I went shopping for a new set of golf clubs. With so many brands on the market I went to see a golf pro that a friend recommended. He took me out to the practice range and had me hit a bucket of balls with a new set of clubs.

Viewing my many hooks and slices, he asked me how long I had played the game. I told him it was over twenty-five years. He then made certain adjustments with my stance and in the way I held the golf club. After a few practice shots, the balls all took off dead center down the fairway.

I was delighted with the results and was ready to buy the new set of clubs, but I had to admit to him, "My swing sure feels uncomfortable."

He replied with a chuckle, "If you hit a couple of hundred practice balls every day like the pros do, I guarantee that after awhile it won't feel uncomfortable anymore."

Every time I try anything new, it feels uncomfortable – new shoes, new golf clubs, a new job, and now a new life. The new shoes and the new golf clubs give me blisters. I new job is hard on my ego, and my new life after my wife died is like living in a bombed-out city.

A creature of habit, I do not like changing much of anything. Now everything I do is a new experience, and everything sure feels uncomfortable.

I miss my wife – and especially the little things that she used to do that I hardly ever noticed or appreciated. Yesterday I had the occasion to use my handkerchief she had washed and ironed to perfection many months ago. It was in the pocket of a suit I hadn't worn since before the funeral.

I went rummaging through the kitchen cabinets last week, and I was struck by how clean and orderly they were. That was her style. I dearly miss her and her sense of order.

### *Reflection*

Dear Jesus, how long did you have the lump in your throat and the knot in your stomach after Joseph died?

Did you scream and shun the world when Herod executed John, your innocent cousin?

Did you feel pressured and used at Cana when you went to that wedding and there was no wine with which to celebrate?

Did you wonder what the world was coming to when you gave your all, and all the people wanted to do was to throw you off the cliff?

How long did you shake your head after the rich young man turned down your invitation to follow you?

Did you toss all night, Lord, when only one leper of the ten you cured came back to give you thanks?

Did you have the urge to toss the traitor, Judas, out into the cold when he dared to show his face at the Last Supper?

You must have felt all of this, Lord, and so much more.....

How happy you must have been when the apostles left their nets, boats, and families to follow you.

Were all those hugs and kisses from the little children heavenly, Lord?

Did you feel like "king for the day" after you fed those famished five thousand with a few loaves and fishes?

How long did you savor the ecstasy of the paralyzed man after you told him to pick up his mat and walk?

Did your rapture know any bounds when you greeted your own mother, Mary, on Easter Sunday morning?

Was it difficult for you to keep the secret of your Resurrection as you walked and talked with the two men on the way to Emmaus?

Help me to feel the way you did, dear Lord.



## TO EACH HIS OWN

I was four years old when my grandparents invited me to go with them on vacation. One day my grandfather took me with him when he went to get his hair cut. Never having been in a barbershop before, I sat there, fascinated by the professional touch that the barber gave to each of the customers.

When he finished cutting my grandfather's hair, the barber positioned his scissors and asked, "Sir, may I trim your moustache?"

"No," retorted my grandfather, raising his hand, "I only let *my own barber do that!*"

My grandfather was set in his ways – he made up his own mind about what he would eat, where he would go, and who would trim his moustache. I promised myself that I would never become that way – but I'm afraid I have.

Over the years I adapted somewhat to my spouse's ways and, at the same time, developed and solidified my own habits. I've never been a trusting sort of person. Now that I must depend so much on others, my whole world is turned upside down. Days seem like nights and nights seem like days. People I'd rather not see visit me and those I want to see never get in touch. I sometimes wonder whether I'm still living on the same planet so familiar to me and to my now departed wife.

At one time, my hair – its length and its style – meant so much to me. Now I am afraid to look in the mirror to check it. I hardly dare to gaze at my face reflected there.

Gradually, however, I am beginning to see that life itself is the only thing that has any real value for me. Death has made me view life in a whole new way. "Why do people fight?" I ask myself. "Why do they build walls between themselves and others, refusing to see each other for years?" Life is too short, so precious. I want to savor every remaining minute, every second of it.

### *Reflection*

My world, Lord, is more than the one or two people around me that I have come to know and depend upon. Just as your death and Resurrection opened you up beyond your few followers to embrace the whole world, so, through the death of my spouse, you are asking me to open up myself to many others.

Help me to start caring about myself, Lord – not in a selfish way, but in a selfless manner. Teach me to celebrate my life by helping others to celebrate theirs. They are concerned about me, I know. But when I say, "Don't worry," my long face and sad eyes convey a different message. My attitude tells them to worry about me so that I am sure that they care.

Lord, with your help, I am determined to change my way of life. I have not been caring about how I look. Help me to start caring again. My spouse's death moved my heart with compassion and love. Move my heart again and again. There are many suffering people who could use my help. Give me the strength to stop running and to come back to life as you did.

## HIS SECRET

A doctor in the hospital where my husband died was involved in cancer research. He developed an effective treatment for one of the rarer forms of this dreaded disease. People from all over the world came to him for treatment.

As he was getting older, members of his staff asked him to share his treatment procedures with them, so that after his death his life-saving work could be continued.

He told his staff that he would consider their suggestion. Nevertheless, he died with his discovery still his own personal secret.

My husband did not discover any treatment for cancer – nothing as dramatic as that – but at his place of work he did establish methods and procedures that continue on to this day. He was that kind of person. He liked to share. At his wake I was astounded by the many tributes given him. Perhaps I should not have been surprised because I did live with him all those years.

I never actually saw him at work. I knew that he was a good and honest man and well-liked by all. However, I never knew how beloved he was by his fellow workers until he passed away. The disappointments he patiently endured, the people he took under his wings, the sense of humor he used to smooth over dangerous situations, and the cars he fixed, pushed, or helped get out of the snow – these are permanent testaments to the man that he was. From the vantage point of his death I now have a clearer picture of his life. He was not a saint. I do not claim that. He never made me rich or famous, but he made me and many others feel very special.

### *Reflection*

Lord, you told all of us not to hide our light but to let it shine before others. Often, I felt that this was being conceited or boastful. But the years with my husband have taught me that I can brighten a life without polishing my own halo. Getting the job done and not looking for recognition, giving myself and not just putting in time, going out of my way and not letting others know that I have – these are ways of sharing my greatest secret: *my inner beauty*.

You kept no secrets, Jesus. You told us who you were, why you were here, and where you were going. No one other than yourself could have better taught us how to live and how to die. All that really happens, after all, is life and death, nothing else. You showed us how to lay life down so that it could be picked up by the Father.

Help me to lay down my life as my husband did, so that the Father can pick me up from my loss and my grief.

## SELF-MADE OR GOD-MADE

One day I invited my boss to have dinner at my home. He had been concerned about how my young son and I were doing after the death of my wife. That morning I instructed Tony, who was quite precocious, to refrain from misbehaving at the dinner table.

The evening went along smoothly. My boss is a pompous man, and he sat there expounding about the new factory he was building, his new summer home, and the luxury cruiser he was planning to buy. Listening intently, Tony sat there quietly during the entire meal. Finally, after the dessert had been eaten, my boss looked over at Tony, and said, "Well, young man, what do you have to say for yourself?"

I wondered how Tony would answer. He swallowed hard and said, "Sir, my dad has often told me that you are a self-made man. Is that true?"

My boss beamed. "Tony, your father is one of my finest employees. He has been telling you the truth. I am a self-made man."

"If you are a self-made man, sir," Tony responded, "then why did you make yourself *the way you are*?"

I wanted to turn in my resignation the moment my son said those words. How the boss glared at me! Now that time has passed and I am still working for the company, I can reflect on Tony's words. Just what I had wanted to ask the boss for years my son had the courage to utter. Why has the man made himself the way he is?

Death has taught me that material things do not really count. They are nice to have, but they do not put their arms around you. You only lie awake worrying about them. The boss has his houses, his boats and his factories, but little else. I no longer have my wife, but I have my son and we sure have a lot of fun and laughs. We have water and pillow fights, jokes at the dinner table and talks that last long into the night. The death of my wife has not caused us to stop counting our blessings.

### *Reflection*

I am not a self-made man. Lord. I am a God-made man. I am made in your own image and likeness. The challenge of my life is to continue being that shining reflection of you. Selfishness and pride have crusted me over at times so that others only see me hard surface. But I am more brittle than hard.

The suffering and death of my wife has dimmed the spark in my eyes. The task of keeping the house in order – the way she used to keep it – has had me muttering at times. But your words continue to console and guide me.



“Be compassionate as your heavenly Father is compassionate.” How many times you lived those words, Jesus. You cried with Martha and Mary over the death of Lazarus. You wept over a city that was ignoring its God. You grieved with the destitute widow who had just lost her only son. Not satisfied with merely telling us to be as compassionate as your heavenly Father, you yourself practiced that compassion in your daily life.

Duly reflecting on your words, I am becoming more considerate and supportive of those at work, and I will try to make this a daily practice. Instead of hiding my tears over the death of my wife, I have let the tears flow as you did for Lazarus. And the sparkle in my eyes has begun to return. I have changed my murmurs about life’s hardships into praises of your name. There is still so much of a symphony left in me, Lord, and I do not want to die with all of your beautiful music still within me.

Lord, I will not be at rest as long as I know that there are children in this world who still have tears in their eyes. For I and they have been fashioned in your own wonderful and magnificent image.



## NEW BEGININGS

Why begin again?  
Life is a beginning.  
When I do not have time  
Consider God's time.  
When I feel too old  
Renew just one day.  
When my arms are too weary  
Embrace a child.  
When there is no human understanding  
God is at work.

*Medard Laz*

### *Reflection*

*Why begin again?* That question, Lord, has hounded me since the death of my spouse. Left so terminally alone, I just don't feel like starting over. I know it is healthy to grieve. But I am so afraid that if I do I will waste away in hopeless misery.

*Life is a beginning.* Death too is a beginning. My first cry was a beginning and my last gasp will be a beginning. The breath that I am taking and the face that I am making right now can be a new beginning.

*I do not have time.* That is my greatest excuse. No one on the face of the earth has enough time. Everyone is running out of time. And – with the death of my spouse – that *time bomb* has exploded in my face.

When *I consider your time*, dear God, I realize that you are beyond time, and my beloved has joined you. Time means nothing to you because you are totally present to each moment. Help me to live and savor *now* and not worry about time.

*I feel so old* that I count my wrinkles instead of my blessings. And I think that the only name I have anymore is "grandparent."

*Yesterday* I could not handle. *Tomorrow* may be an eternity away. Grant me the grace *to renew today* with my gentleness and my considerateness.

I have been a torchbearer these many years – for one cause or another. Today I no longer view myself as a Statue of Liberty. My arms *grow weary* with the weight of grocery bags and laundry baskets. So do help me, Lord, to share my hugs with the neighbor’s kids as well as my own grandchildren. Teach me – in imitation of you – *to embrace all children*.

Lord, I still repeat for everyone to hear: “I’m fine,” “I’m doing much better.” But I will never in this world understand why my spouse had to die so early in life. I know I am too human to understand your ways.

Your designs, Lord, are those of an eternal Creator. On the very same day you fashion babies in mother’s wombs, you call souls home to be happy with you forever.

*When there is no human understanding  
God is at work.*



## CLEANING HOUSE

I was riding with a friend one day when I noticed the bumper sticker on the rear of the car in front of us: HAVE YOU HUGGED YOUR TRASH HAULER TODAY? Pointing it out, my friend asked, with a smirk, if I had hugged my trash hauler lately.

“Oh no,” I shuddered.

Trash disturbs me. I always left the job of taking out the trash to my husband or to one of the children. Now I have to do it myself. I don't mind bringing in groceries or other merchandise from the store, but I hate getting rid of kitchen waste or what is old or used. Pure and simple, I hate trash!

After my husband's death I was reluctant to tackle the problem of all the junk that accumulated in our closets, attic, basement and garage. So many things had been buried there over the years. I have also been afraid to confront myself, because of all that has been buried within me over the years.

Things did not always go smoothly in our marriage. There were fights, arguments, wasted days and ruined weekends because one or the other of us displayed stubbornness or childishness. I know I have to dispose of all this inner trash. My temper and my hardheadedness disrupted the whole household. At the time I expressed my sorrow to my spouse, to others and to God. I want to renew that sorrow now. I want to really clean house, getting rid of all the trash that remains in my heart. I need further forgiveness.

### *Reflection*

Dear Jesus, you hugged and you forgave the blind, the lame, the deaf, the lepers, and even prostitutes and tax collectors. I am sure that if you were physically present with me right now, you would give me a hug. I know that you see me as lovable. Why else would you have suffered and died? Though a physical hug is not possible, I still feel your warmth and your closeness. Your death on the cross is a sign that my sins are forgiven. How much lighter I feel. Your sweat, your suffering and your death have eased my burden. A thousand times in the past few months I have said to my departed spouse, “Please forgive me.”

Finally, help me to forgive myself. This is the most difficult of all, for I am always hardest on myself.

Thank you, Lord, for helping me to clean the house of my soul.

## TOTAL COMMITMENT

One morning a chicken and a pig went out for a walk. They were having a grand time enjoying the sights, until the pig stopped dead in his tracks. Seeing the horror on his face, the chicken asked his friend what was the matter. "Over there, that restaurant!" gestured the pig.

The chicken looked across the street and saw nothing unusual. He remarked, "All the sign says is: Ham & Eggs Special -- \$6.99. Why are you so upset?"

"Upset! You'd be upset too," replied the pig. "For you it's a token offering, for me it's *a total commitment!*"

My life before marriage fluctuated between total commitment and token offering. When I married I made a total commitment. There was nothing that I would not do for my wife. We loved each other so much. As the years passed, my love remained. But all too often I gave her only token offerings – a rare evening out, an occasional drive into the country, or a half-hearted hand with a household project. Gradually, however, my job became my total commitment. My marriage placed a poor second to my job of earning a living.

### *Reflection*

Dear Lord, it troubles me deeply that I did not maintain my total commitment in marriage. I let bills, worries at work and sports on TV lessen my commitment to the woman I truly loved. The day I laid her to rest, my past life became painfully clear. What I had with her and what we tried to share were beyond human words. I regret that I did not give more of myself to her in many instances.

Lest I appear too harsh on myself, I must confess that my offerings were sometimes more than tokens. I felt that they were, even though it is difficult to explain. Her smiles, her gratitude, her tenderness, were all signs that whatever I offered, even in a token way, was truly appreciated.

Today, Lord, I make a new commitment – to myself, to those close to me, and to you. I commit myself to any and all opportunities to grow. I vow to never tell myself that I am too old to take risks or to leave my comfortable hiding places.

I dedicate myself to others. Ignoring temptations to self-pity, I will unlock my doors and encourage others to enter into my life. Help me to keep my head up, the better to see and respond to the needs of others. Teach me how to bow my head in fervent prayer, Lord, and to lift my eyes in ardent charity. Your time in the tomb was very brief. Please help me to leave my tomb and begin to reach out and touch others.

I commit myself to you, dear Lord. During my childhood I often wondered who *Jesus Christ* was. Were you God, hidden in the tabernacle at church? Were you the central character in the Gospels? Were you the one to whom everyone was told to pray? At long last, I know who you are. You are the one and only God, who loved me so much that you came down on this earth to live and die *with me*.

You endured total rejection. You were betrayed by those closet to you. You bore the sins of every person who ever lived. Why? Yours was a most special kind of love. You loved without asking for anything in return. You promised a life that none of us had ever seen or could even dream of. Eternal glory awaited you, and you pledged the same of all of your faithful followers.

Thank you for coming my way, Lord! Thank you for letting my wife come my way!



## MAKING IT THROUGH

Our next-door neighbors had eight girls before a son was born to them. At Christmastime, when Joey was two years old, each day he would station himself in front of the family fireplace, gazing up the chimney. When asked what he was doing, he answered that he was trying to figure out how Santa Claus would manage to squeeze through that narrow opening. It took a good deal of time, but his sisters finally convinced him that the Man in Red would make it through all right.

But on Christmas Eve Joey was back at his post in front of the fireplace again, with his nose pointed upward. His oldest sister saw him and said, "I thought we already settled how Santa would make it down."

"Oh, I know how Santa will do it," responded little Joey. "Now I'm trying to figure out how Baby Jesus is going to make his way down!"

I am very much like Joey – always trying to figure out what is going to happen and how it will take place. I take little on faith. Even matters concerning life and death need solid proof before I am convinced.

As a child, I, too, wondered how Santa Claus got down off the roof or made it in through the chimney. But I must admit that I never asked – as Joey did – how Baby Jesus made his way down the chimney and into our home.

Now, as an adult, I find myself asking Joey's question. Facing the holidays alone – and, in fact, dreading them without my spouse – I am uncertain how Jesus will make his way into my life.

### *Reflection*

Lord, you are the Master of entry and re-entry. You use anything: stables, chimneys, hearts, words, bread, wine – whatever it takes to make yourself present.

Holidays, especially Christmas and New Year's, are the hardest for me since the death of my spouse. I would like to skip over December and the first few days of January, but the calendar makers won't listen to my suggestion.

Lord, I never got everything I wanted as a child. I am trying not to dwell on everything I cannot have this Christmas: my spouse, the good old days and all the family traditions. I am not wondering what Santa Claus can bring me. Rather, I am praying for what you can give me – inner healing, abiding peace, the richest of memories and your own newborn presence.

Lord, I am going to decorate a real Christmas tree this year. In the past, we used artificial ones because the real ones were too messy. In my opinion, artificial trees are shaped too perfectly. The real ones have bare spots – which is what makes them so real. But by facing the bare spots to the wall, the fuller branches can be enjoyed by all. I hope to do the same with my life this year. I resolve to turn my life around so that my bare spots face the wall and my fuller branches embrace everyone around me. With your help, Lord, I will make it through the holidays this year and always.

## TO THE ONE WHO NEEDS IT MOST

My wife developed a rare disease and was greatly in need of blood. Many of the parents of the school children whom she taught decided to donate their blood for her.

One particular Saturday a dozen or more parents who had journeyed to the hospital were filling out the information necessary for blood donations. In walked a shabbily dressed young man who approached the nurse at the desk. He inquired about giving his blood. A bit apprehensively she gave him the card to fill out. He was pleasant and talkative to those who were waiting.

After completing the card, he returned it to the nurse. She gazed at it and said: "Young man, you did not fill in the box at the bottom. Of course you want the forty dollars the hospital is offering for your blood."

"No," he replied. "I am not here for the money."

"Are you a friend of the teacher who needs blood?"

"I don't know any teacher," he answered.

Obviously perplexed, she said, "Well, if it is not for the money and you do not know the teacher, then to whom should we give your blood, young man?"

"To the one who needs it the most!" he replied.

I wanted to meet this young man, but he could not be traced. All he left behind was a pint of his blood and this cherished story.

I donated blood for my wife every chance I got. I would have given her my last drop if I could have. But a total stranger coming in with such a selfless offer was indeed heartwarming. He has taught me an important lesson. Why am I so skeptical of persons because of their appearance? My prejudice, no doubt, has prevented me from meeting some rare and special people. This young man may have looked poor and shabby, but within he must have been rich and beautiful.

### *Reflection*

Jesus Lord, I finally figured out who that young man was – *it was you!* You willingly give your blood to anyone who needs it – the most and the least deserving. Your coming here on earth to live and die the way you did was no mere gesture. Your blood fortifies our human weakness. You appear again and again when we least expect it, ready to give your blood, your all.

As I watched my wife being fed the blood plasma, drop by drop, I thought of you as you were shedding your blood, drop by drop. Yes, my wife is dead. Her body no longer lives. But her spirit is not dead, since your blood gave her soul eternal life. Her spirit cannot die. These are your words:



“Let me solemnly assure you,  
if you do not eat the flesh of  
the Son of Man  
and drink his blood,  
you have no life in you.  
He who feeds on my flesh  
and drinks my blood  
has life eternal,  
and I will raise him up  
on the last day.  
For my flesh is real food  
and my blood real drink.  
The man who feeds on my flesh  
and drinks my blood  
remains in me and I in him.  
Just as the Father  
who has life sent me  
and I have life  
because of the Father,  
so the man who feeds on me  
will have life because of me.

*John 6:53-57*



## BEDTIME PRAYERS

One evening, several months after my husband died, I visited my married daughter's home. We spent most of the time bemoaning not only my husband's death, but also all of our current family problems.

Toward the end of the evening I went to tuck my granddaughter into bed. At the doorway I overheard her saying her bedtime prayers.

"God bless Grandma, Mommy and Daddy, Auntie Jane and Uncle Marty, and all the other people in the world who are falling apart!"

I think my granddaughter was praying especially for me – I have been falling apart. Even when my tears stop, I don't feel a whole lot better. I am terribly distraught. My sorrow is like an open wound – so difficult to hide. Having become so vulnerable, I complain constantly, wear a long face and let everyone know that I am falling apart. Only halfheartedly have I tried to find the glue to keep myself together. I knit, I phone my friends and I baby-sit in order to get through the days and nights. But nothing seems to work.

### *Reflection*

Lord, my little granddaughter has taught me a lesson. She heard all of us complaining about the bad state of affairs and she responded with a prayer.

Before every major decision in your life – beginning your public life, choosing your apostles, going up to Jerusalem to suffer and die – you made time for prayer. And finally, in the Garden the night before your crucifixion, you prayed that you could plainly hear what your Father in heaven wanted and that you would have the strength to respond to his will. I, too, need to pray in a similar fashion.

Since my husband's illness, I have been flooding heaven with my pointed petitions. I have only just begun to listen to what you have had to say or to what you thought best for my spouse or myself. I am trying to transform my prayers into ones of listening. In the past I have unknowingly started every prayer with: "Listen, Lord, your servant is speaking." Now I much more humbly begin by saying, "Speak, Lord, your servant is listening."

Lord, when I truly listen, your healing words gently lift me out of my anxious restlessness into the fullness of life. You tell me not to take myself so seriously. Now when I visit my family or stop at the home of a sick friend, I suddenly realize that being together with them and with you for a few hours is the most important time in my life. Even when I am doing the dishes, I sense your presence. Through my kitchen window I see your marigolds unfolding and your trees softly swaying. They remind me to open myself in prayer and to incline in my to yours.

Yes, Lord, it is good simply to be alive and to be looking out my kitchen window with wonder. In a quiet church, it is so gratifying to stop talking and to place myself in you're here-and-now presence. It is in these moments that I sense all of the love and nurturing that you and my dear husband have given me over the years.

At times like these I am astounded that there seems to be nothing more for me to ask. However, I do have one final request, Lord. When I am with my granddaughter, let her see that I am not really coming apart at the seams.



## SURPRISE

One of my earliest memories dates back to the time when I was barely three years old. My mother usually dressed me, but one morning I decided to surprise her by showing her that I was old enough to dress myself. While she was downstairs, I quickly put on my clothes, ran a wet comb through my hair and even tied my own shoelaces.

After she prepared breakfast for the family, she came back upstairs to dress me for the day. She found me sitting proudly on the edge of my bed, my arms folded. Her face lit up with surprise and then delight as she noticed that I had dressed myself. Then she began to laugh as she pointed to a piece of clothing lying beneath my feet. I was completely dress, except for one vital article – *my underwear!*

Today it is a struggle for me to get out of bed, even though I have been lying there awake for hours. Every morning I get dressed, but there is nowhere to go. Of course, there is work and the store and the family to visit. But I feel so lonely because the love of my life is missing.

I look back on all the firsts in my life – dressing myself, combing my own hair, tying my own shoelaces, and, of course, the embarrassment which followed.

Now, at my age, I have a new repertoire of firsts – my first Christmas alone, my first ironing that I have ever done, the first button that I have sewn, and the embarrassment when I attended a party wearing different-colored socks.

No longer do I have a mother or a wife to surprise anymore. So the only one left to surprise is *myself!* My biggest surprise is that I am beginning to accept my new life without my wife. I have never had to live with just me. As strange as this sounds, I am starting to like and enjoy myself. I will never relish the loneliness, but I do believe that I am a pretty special person.

### *Reflection*

I am the kind of person who usually forgets something – my underwear as a child, my keys or my cell phone as an adult. In the past, I often forgot to say to my wife. “I love you” or “I am sorry.” Despite my faults in married life, the two of us laughed a lot and our laughter was healing. It has taken me a long time, but I am learning to laugh again. This has not been easy, but I find that laughter has strengthened my resolve to renew my life.

Then, just when I think that I have my life set and all figured out with everything in its proper place, Lord, you let me know that I have forgotten something. My embarrassment reminds me of how much I depended on others in the past – my wife, my children and my parents – but I’m beginning to learn.

Today, I want you, Lord, to help me to laugh – with others and at myself. Teach me to remember and not to forget.

## GETTING STARTED

While I was away on vacation I needed the use of a rental car. Thought that I had been given a nice compact at an affordable weekly rate. It ran all right on the way to the motel, but the next morning, try as I might, I could not get it started.

After an hour of frustrated tinkering, I called the rental agency to tell them that the car would not start.

“Other than that,” said the agent, “is there anything else wrong with the car?”

“I don’t know,” I replied, “I have not gone anywhere with it. It won’t start!”

After my spouse died, I was just like that rental car. I could not get started, try as I might. I was in shock, in a daze. Events were happening all around me and I was hardly aware of them. Many things went wrong – a leaky roof, a broken window, a dented fender – but these were nothing compared to the total loss that I felt.

I am very open and sensitive to life right now. But I am frustrated by this awareness because I do not know where I am going with my life. The spark – the very essence of my life – my spouse – is dead!

The aftermath of death encompasses me. I see that a great deal of my life belonged to my spouse and to my family. Today I realize that almost all of my life *belongs to me*. I am not sure that I want my whole life given back to me. I would rather be giving my life to my spouse and to my family.

Getting started is everything in life. How hard I have worked to make life happen. Now I have to watch the dearest life of all pass away from me. I get many invitations to go out, but I have neither the desire nor the energy to do so. I’m healing, I’m hurting and I’m trying to grow new roots.

### *Reflection*

Lord, you started up again that Easter Sunday morning. Make one of my tomorrows an Easter morning. You announced to Mary, your disciples and your followers that you were alive. I, too, need to let the world know that I am alive. You walked along with the two men on the road to Emmaus, and you broke bread with them. I, too, am trying to match strides with the family and the people at work. And occasionally, I invite them over for coffee or a drink.

As risen Savior, you said, “Peace be with you” so very often. Teach me to bring peace to those who have been so supportive of me. Help me to restore peace to the younger family members who are having such a hard time adjusting to the death of their mother and grandmother. Make me a part of the healing process for those who stood back and, for one reason or another, could not cope with death and its consequences.

Please, Lord, ignite my soul and body so I can get started once again.

## PERSONS ARE GIFTS

Persons are gifts – at least Jesus thought so. “Father, I want those you have given me to be where I am.” I agree with Jesus. I also want those whom the Father has given me to be where I am.

Persons are wrapped gifts which the Father sends to me. Some are wrapped very beautifully. They are very attractive when I first see them. Some come in very ordinary wrapping paper. Others have been mishandled in the mail. Once in awhile there is a “Special Delivery.” Some persons are gifts which come very loosely wrapped, others very tightly.

But the wrapping is not the gift. It is so easy to make this mistake. It is amusing when babies make it.

Sometimes the gift is very easy to open. Sometimes I need others to help. Is it because they are afraid? Does it hurt? Maybe they have been opened before and thrown away. Could it be the gift is not for me?

I am a person. Therefore, I am a gift too. A gift to myself first of all. The Father gave myself to me. Have I ever really looked inside the wrapping paper? Am I afraid? Perhaps I’ve never seen the wonderful gift that I am. Could it be that there is something more inside the wrappings than what I think there is? Could the Father’s gift be anything but beautiful? I love the gifts which those who love me give to me. Why not this gift from the Father?

I am a gift to other persons. Am I willing to be given by the Father to others – a person for others? Do others have to be content with the wrappings and never be permitted to enjoy the gift?

Every meeting of persons is an exchange of gifts. But a gift without a giver is not a gift. It is a thing devoid of a relationship to a giver or a receiver.

Friendship is a relationship between persons who see themselves as they truly are – gifts of the Father to each other for others – brothers and sisters! A friend is a gift not to me only but to others through me.

When I keep my friend – possess him or her – I destroy their giftedness. If I save their life for me, I lose it! If I lose it for others, I save it!

Persons are gifts, gifts received and gifts given – like the Son.

Friendship is the response of persons – a gift to the Father. Friendship is Eucharist!

*Rev. George Wintemann*

My spouse was such a gift! As we grew older our physical beauty began to fade, but her inner beauty more than made up for the loss. How patient she was with the children, how confident that a new job would be found, how reassuring after a family disaster.

At times our gifts of love were very beautiful, at other times they were ordinary, and sometimes they were even mishandled. But it was the *Special Deliveries* that I enjoyed the most: a surprise candlelight dinner, a backrub at the end of an arduous day, a phone call at work, a love note on the bathroom mirror, and her attentive bedside manner when I was sick. I just know that there are *Special Deliveries* in heaven!

### *Reflection*

Dear Lord, I thank you and my spouse for helping me discover that I, too, am a gift. Her death took off my wrapping, which should have been removed a long time before. My dear one saw me as a gift. That is why I received so many smiles and special treatment during our marriage.

Today I am more of a gift than I have ever been. Formerly, I was a gift for one person only. Now I am a present for many people. I do want to give my life to others. If in doing so I lose it, that is all right because I will become something far greater. Lord, help me to further appreciate the gift of myself. Help me to spread my wings now that I have left the cocoon in which I have been hiding.

So much of my life has been spent in taking – paychecks, afternoon naps, evenings away from the family. Now I find happiness in giving my gift – my own self – to anyone who wants me: my neighbor to help clean out his garage, my parish to help organize it seniors' club and the local hospital to volunteer my time.

From your birth in Bethlehem to your death at Calvary, dear Lord, you were a gift. As a human being, I will sometimes fail to give, but with your help I can truly be a *Special Delivery* to others.



## **JOYFUL AGAIN!**

**JOYFUL AGAIN!** is a two-day program for widows and widowers who want to resolve the grief that they feel inside and begin to live again after the death of their spouse.

Twenty-five to thirty widowers and widows gather to view a video presentation which summarizes the feeling and the thoughts of four people who have lost a spouse to death.

Time to reflect is then afforded so that each participant has a chance to sort out and get in touch with their own feelings and thoughts.

Small group sharing then takes place. In groups of five or six people, the participants talk out the way they themselves feel, listen to the story and feelings of others, support one another, and thus begin to heal from the grief and the loss.

Various topics are presented, reflected upon, and discussed in the course of the two days. Trained facilitators who have been widowed themselves, help with the weekend and the discussions.

Over 20,000 people have made and enjoyed the **Joyful Again!** weekend over the past thirty years. It is offered in various cities throughout the country during the year.

For more information and to watch an Introduction video, please check the **Joyful Again!** website:

[Joyfulagain.org](http://Joyfulagain.org)





