

# WHEN GOD SEES YOUR TEARS

CINDI  
McMENAMIN



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## **WHEN GOD SEES YOUR TEARS**

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*For every dear reader who has written or emailed  
or pulled me aside to ask,  
“Where is God when it hurts?”  
Your stories, your vulnerability, your tears—  
and the God who has seen each one—  
are the inspiration behind this book.*

*And  
for Alena, Amanda, and Ellen—  
I can't begin to understand the depths to which  
you have come to know my Lord through your sufferings...  
but I am privileged to be able to tell your stories  
and help each of you leave a legacy  
of an enduring faith in Christ.*

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# Contents

As the Tears Fall .....	7
1. <b>The Missing Piece:</b> When You're Staring at the Void .....	11
2. <b>The Provocation:</b> When Your Heart Is Harassed .....	33
3. <b>The Blind Spot:</b> When Everyone Else Thinks You're Fine .....	55
4. <b>Pouring It Out:</b> When You Finally Get Desperate .....	69
5. <b>Sudden Backfire:</b> When the Unthinkable Happens .....	87
6. <b>Affirmation:</b> When You're Hanging onto Hope .....	101
7. <b>The Arrival:</b> When Your Prayers Are Finally Answered .....	117
8. <b>The Ultimate Sacrifice:</b> When You Give It Back to God .....	131
9. <b>Continuing On:</b> When You Remain Faithful .....	149
10. <b>Looking Ahead:</b> When Your Longing—or Loss—Becomes a Legacy .....	169
Appendices	
A. <b>How to Know You Are God's Child</b> .....	193
B. <b>Comfort &amp; Promises for Hurting Hearts</b> .....	195
Notes .....	209





## As the Tears Fall

Where is God when it hurts?

I know you've asked that question. Maybe not consciously. But in your heart of hearts, you wonder, at times, if He really cares and if He's really listening as you've cried out to Him.

Why hasn't He come through for you? Why hasn't He given you what you've begged Him for? Why do the prayers continue to be prayed and the tears continue to fall?

I too have asked those questions—when my parents divorced, as I lost the man I thought I was going to marry, as I struggled with trying to have a child, and while I endured seasons of loneliness. I know in my mind and heart that God has never left me. But there were—and are—times I'd like to get to that place where the tears no longer fall.

I have never heard God's audible voice giving me an answer to my questions through the years. But I have countless times felt His comforting presence during the long days and lonely nights, assuring me that He sees it all, He knows what's coming next, and He really *is* capable of carrying me through it.

I won't presume to know what has caused *your* tears or what is on your heart as you hold this book in your hands. But I'm guessing at the core of your heartache is a past of unresolved hurts, an unrealized dream, a crushing disappointment, or the loss of something or someone you loved. In some ways you feel it's the end of life as you know it. And yet you are not on your own, at the whim of fate or your circumstances.

In Psalm 56:8, David the songwriter, shepherd boy, and king wrote:

You number my wanderings;  
Put my tears into Your bottle;  
Are they not in Your book? (NKJV).

Not only does God know about each tear you shed, but He *collects* them, meaning not one of them falls without His notice. Scripture also tells us God has recorded all the days of your life in His book and thinks precious thoughts of you that are too numerable to mention (Psalm 139:16-18). Jesus Himself said in Matthew 10:30 that even the very hairs on your head are numbered.

God is intimately acquainted with all the details of your life. He knows you. He hears you. He sees you. And in His infinite knowledge of you He evidently considers your tears, at the moment, more valuable to Him and your eternal good than giving to you what it is you are hoping for.

As women, it's easy for us to get lost in the drama of us and miss the real, life-changing story—the story God is weaving in our lives about Himself and what He can do when we give our tears to Him. Through the pages of this book I want to encourage you to trust Him with your story... a story that is perhaps in the conflict stage or at the crisis point. Yet God is working toward a concluding chapter that I am convinced will astonish you, even though at this point it may seem to you as if it's hardly possible. I'm convinced that when we give our stories to God from beginning to end, tears and all, He takes our longings—and our losses—and turns them into a legacy.

I want to leave a legacy in my life in spite of the tears that have fallen. And I believe that is ultimately your goal too—to live well, please God in all things, and influence others in a way that changes their world. However, in the day-to-day struggles of life, it's natural for all of us, at times, to simply desire happiness and fulfillment.

For the past 30 years, I've been helping women set meaningful



goals for their lives. And frankly, many times our primary goal in life isn't deep enough. To desire marriage or marital fulfillment isn't enough. To want a baby or to raise good and respectful children, or to be remembered as a good mom or a generous woman is shallow, at best. Our goal cannot simply be to achieve a dream or reputation or what we—or the world around us—measure as success. God wants something more of your life and mine. He wants our lives to be stories that give glory and praise to Himself. As our Creator, that is His prerogative. But here's the secret—bringing glory to God with our lives brings immeasurable joy to us as well!

I want to remind you, through these pages, that the outcome or end result of what God is doing in your life through your pain isn't the only thing that's important to Him. He cares very much about what is happening in you *right now* as you're undergoing the molding process. Don't miss the wonder of what God is doing in you at this moment by looking to the someday of when it will all make sense. Treasure what you can learn in the here and now and experience joy as you travel through this process.

As we begin this journey together I want you to hold onto this comforting realization: God loves a broken heart. He doesn't love that we have to *experience* one, but He loves what happens as we are broken and moldable, completely empty, and desperate for Him. It is then that He can fill us with what He most wants us to possess—Himself!

In the pages ahead, I will share the story of one woman in the Bible whose longing for something was so intense that she offered it back to God, regardless of the cost. We will look at what prompted her to get that desperate, how she made her “deal” with God, and how God responded. We will also look at the legacy that God wove into her life through her longing and her eventual loss.

Throughout this book I will also share with you the stories of women, like you, who have cried out to God—many times in anger or confusion—when they were experiencing times of stress,

difficulty, unexplainable pain, or searing loss. Some of them have seen God come through for them in remarkable ways. Some are still, by faith, waiting to see the “good” God will bring out of their situations. But all of them have experienced God’s presence and power through their tears.

You will hear from women who have longed for a child and saw God do the impossible. Women who have lost their husbands and seen God take up that role in their life. Women who have been diagnosed with terminal diseases and found His joy in spite of it all. And their secret to joy can become yours too.

Through these women you are about to meet, you will be convinced that when God sees your tears (spoiler alert: He already has), there is hope. When God sees your tears, there is comfort. When God sees your tears, there is transformation. And when God sees your tears, He is just beginning the process of turning your heartache into hope and your loss into a legacy. Are you ready to discover what that legacy might be? Maybe you just need some comfort and hope to make it through today. Whatever it is your heart is longing for, I want to help. Take my hand and come with me, dear reader, on a journey that will prayerfully give you relief, hope, and tears of joy at a greater understanding of this God who loves you and desires that you ultimately become all He has designed you to be.

God *can* bring a legacy from your loss. Let me show you *how*...

# The Missing Piece

When You're Staring at the Void

To Hannah he would give a double portion,  
for he loved Hannah,  
*but the LORD had closed her womb.*

1 SAMUEL 1:5 (NASB)

I know you can feel the void. It's probably why you picked up this book. Something—or someone—is missing in your life. And it hurts.

We all sense the void, at times. For some of us it's a large, aching hole in our hearts from the absence of something we've longed for all our lives, or the loss of someone or something we don't feel we can live without. It consumes our thoughts and casts shadows over our days. For others, it's a small, festering wound that continues to remind us, now and then, that something is missing.

Lissa is a woman who never considered there might be a void in her life. Until she felt she lost everything.

Lissa felt like the luckiest girl alive as she stood at the altar on her wedding day and exchanged vows with “Jay”—the man she loved and believed she would spend the rest of her life with. Still in her mid-twenties, she was a new bride and looking forward to her happily ever after.

“Little did I know what awaited me in our first week of marriage,” Lissa said.

I'll let her tell you her story in her own words:

“Over the next few days I discovered my husband was severely addicted to pain pills. He couldn't even function without them. Being newly married, I was so confused and hurt about finding this out that I didn't know what to do. I just kept telling myself *I can't lose him. I love him too much*. Besides, what would I do without him?

“So, instead of turning to God in faith that He could give me direction and wisdom on how to handle this, I turned to my own strength and tried to save my marriage on my own. I started working more than 90 hours a week to pay the bills while my husband, who was too incapacitated to work, was trying to get clean of his addiction. It was three months of nearly constant fighting and tears and never even feeling like I was married, let alone a newlywed. Once he got clean, things started to look brighter until I realized he was a completely different person when he was off of the drugs.

“He became distant and appeared uncaring. In fact, I never felt loved again. Resentment started to creep in as I began feeling used by him and like nothing more than an object to satisfy his physical and sexual needs. I worked constantly, asking for his help day after day, only to come home to a messy house, three dogs to care for, and a feeling of exhaustion and hopelessness from getting so little sleep. Jay started working at a friend's family farm (for very little pay), and after that, I barely saw him at all. I found myself pleading with him to at least be home when I got home so he could spend a little time with me in the evenings.

“Then, just four months after we married, I discovered I was pregnant. He seemed excited about the news until I mentioned that he needed to start looking for a job that was stable and paid on a regular basis. A month later, I was diagnosed with Lieden Factor 5—a blood-clotting disorder that causes complications during pregnancy. Suddenly I had a high-risk pregnancy and could no longer work more than 40 hours a week or lift more than 20 pounds. Once Jay

found out I could no longer support the two of us financially, all we did was argue and all I did was cry.

“Another month went by and Jay became even more distant than ever. The more I asked for help, the more hostile he became. So he moved back home with his parents, leaving me alone with the financial responsibilities. I texted and called him every day, asking him to come home. My family tried to help, and we started marriage counseling. After Jay and I attended three sessions, I became hospitalized and couldn’t pay for the counseling anymore. When I asked Jay to pay for the counseling, he refused. Shortly after, I had to move out of our house and move home with my mom because I couldn’t afford to pay rent with all the medical bills I had accrued, plus the monthly living expenses that I was still trying to manage on my own.

“After pleading with Jay to work it out with me and at least try to get a job so we could be a family, he told me he didn’t love me anymore and never would. He told me to stop calling and texting him. He did say he wanted to be a part of our child’s life, but since that response I haven’t heard from him.

“When all this started, I battled with thoughts like *Why is this happening to me? I loved him, God—why did You take him away especially now when I am pregnant? Why didn’t You let it end before a baby was involved?*

“I cried a lot and felt alone and helpless. I remember just hating life. Every day that I didn’t hear from Jay was increasingly more painful. I started attending church with my family, and to be honest, at that time I didn’t know whether to hate God or run to Him for help. I was miserable.”

What woman expects to be pregnant, abandoned, and feeling hopeless just six months after being married? Lissa was living what appeared to be a nightmare. Feeling she had no other choice, no other place to go, she finally poured out her heart to God.

“I was bitter,” she said. “I didn’t want to live. I lost my husband. I lost my job. I lost my house. I almost lost my dog. I nearly lost the

baby. It was one defeat after another. I told my mom I just wanted my life back, and I wanted to feel normal again. My mom came alongside me and told me she knew what I was going through was hard, but I needed to bring my circumstances to God, pour out my heart to Him, and trust Him with everything that was going on.”

### Finding Her Way Out

Once Lissa started taking her pain to God, instead of bottling it up inside of her, she began to emerge from her slump of discouragement.

“I started pouring out my heart to God and looking to His Word for hope,” she said. And she began to see God come through—and provide for her—in one situation after another.

Just a few months before her son was born, Lissa said:

“Right now, my mom, brother, and I have never been a stronger unit that wants to serve the Lord no matter how hard life may be. We are struggling to make ends meet, I have a baby who will be here soon, and we have no money to finish the room downstairs, let alone for food or gas this week, but I am at such peace knowing that God is in control that I can’t even describe it. God has provided everything I need. He is still writing my story. Yes, I am scared sometimes and I still cry and feel alone, but now when I do, I praise Him for the blessings I do have. I have a house to live in, a car to drive, a job to provide income, but most of all a family and a loving God who won’t ever leave me even when my mistakes and pride get in the way. He will always work things out for His good in my life.”

Even though her circumstances were uncertain at that point, Lissa was putting her hope in the certainty of her God and His track record of faithfulness: “God is going to bring me out of the darkness. I don’t know what is going to happen in the days ahead, but my trust is in Him alone, and that is so freeing! I praise God for bringing me back to Him, and I pray He continues to guide and teach me so I can be the mom my son needs and can look up to. I’m so afraid for

when he is born, but I know he is not mine, but God's. It's hard to give that fearfulness to Him, but God has a plan and Jesus won't fail me. He will see me through. No life is more secure than a life that is surrendered to God."

Despite the stress that Lissa was experiencing, and the complications of her blood-clotting condition, a one-month hospitalization, her orders for complete bed rest, and the constant monitoring of her pregnancy beginning at 26 weeks, she was able to carry her baby for 37 weeks and give birth to a perfectly healthy but tiny 5-pound, 9-ounce son. She named him Samuel Isaiah because of how she found comfort in the Bible's story of Hannah and her child, Samuel, and because of how God's Word, in the book of Isaiah, comforted her during her pregnancy.


Even now, Lissa can see the blessings God has already bestowed on her and little Samuel. "Every time I come in for a visit, my doctor is just speechless. She said Samuel is the healthiest baby and she's never seen anything like this, in light of all the problems I had during pregnancy."

Does Lissa still cry out to God and trust that He sees her tears? Absolutely.

"I haven't heard from my husband for quite a long time. I've just been praying and trusting that God has a plan for our lives. My mom and brother and also church friends

have been so supportive that right now all I can do is thank God for everything even in the midst of wishing I had my husband at my side. God is gracious, loving, and merciful, and He knows my husband's heart. All I can do is trust."

Although Lissa's husband is absent from her life, she realizes what God has given to her in the meantime: "Right now God's answer is not a *yes* to restoring my marriage, but it is a *yes* to restoring my faith and trust in Jesus. Every time I feel defeated or start to worry about things or what is going to come of custody for my son and

  
"God is faithful, and I know He loves me."



how I will pay for a lawyer to help, or how I will even pay for diapers, I praise God through listening to songs, quoting Scripture, and reading His Word and books of encouragement. I fill my thoughts with Him instead of the ‘what ifs.’ It isn’t easy and I have a long way to go, but God is faithful, and I know He loves me.”

Throughout her ordeal, including her abandonment, her high-risk pregnancy, and the uncertainty about her future, Lissa has claimed Isaiah 49:15-16 as God’s promise to her:

Can a mother forget the baby at her breast  
and have no compassion on the child she has  
borne?  
Though she may forget,  
I will not forget you!  
See, I have engraved you on the palms of my  
hands;  
your walls are ever before me.

“Even though I have no idea what the years ahead may bring, I know God has a plan and purpose for me, and He will enable me to keep running the race even when I feel defeated,” Lissa said.

At the time of this writing, just a year from the day she married, she holds her son (whom she calls her “little peanut”) in her arms and faces life as a single mom who is confident in her son’s Capable Heavenly Father—a Father who protects her, loves her, and will always come through for her and her son.

“Just last week we were out of diapers. And someone [a long-time friend of her mother’s] who didn’t know we were all out gave us three boxes of diapers just in time. When I asked her how she knew, she said she was praying and felt compelled to bring diapers for the new baby. One thing I’ve learned in the past year is to have total dependence on God and to not be too proud to receive help when it’s offered. God broke me of my pride of not wanting to let others know I needed help. Since I began admitting to God that I



needed His help—and the help of others—my whole walk with God has changed.”

### Why the Hurt Comes

Think about it. If we felt complete in every way, and our lives were simply wonderful, would we really *need* God? Of course we would. Our very existence depends on Him and without a faith and trust in Christ, we have no ability to stand righteous before a holy God, let alone get through life in a way that pleases Him and live to the potential for which He created us. But it is human nature for us to forget God—and our true need for Him—when everything in our life is lovely. And God knows that. He knows that when we’re pretty comfortable—physically, emotionally, and financially—we are less likely to depend on Him for our protection, for our provision, for wisdom to make the right choices. God knows if we’re not hurting in some way, frustrated in some way, *desperate* in some way, we won’t cling to Him. And He knows what it will take in each of our lives for us to recognize the huge void within us...and allow Him to fill it.

As imperfect humans, we tend to think we know what will fill that void, that missing piece. For you it might be a love that you’ve longed for. For your friend it might be the emotional connection or harmony she is searching for in her marriage. For the woman you work with it might be a child she longs to hold in her arms. For still others it may be a dream they long to achieve, a measure of success they hope to attain, or a burning purpose they feel they have yet to discover.

We each have a different definition of what we believe is our missing piece—that one wish come true that we believe will make our lives fulfilling and complete. Yet God sees a missing piece in us that is far more extraordinary, has far more eternal consequences than the temporary fixes we seek. He sees a dependence on Him that we have yet to experience, a transformation He has been waiting to

make, a legacy He wants us to leave behind when we die, a vessel of potential glory for Himself that He knows best how to use.

At 22 years old, I believed my missing piece was a husband who would make me feel complete. All around me, friends were getting engaged or married, and I had just broken up with a boyfriend of four years. I remember that ache—and fear of lifelong loneliness. Looking back now, I was ridiculously young to be so fearful that I would spend my life alone. But at the time, the ache—and fears—were intense.

I met Hugh that same summer, and we were engaged and married within a year of meeting each other. At that point I had a career job, a husband, and a promise of a happily ever after, so I figured I had all I needed to be content for the rest of my days. But four years into my marriage (to a pastor, nonetheless!), I realized a man cannot fill the deep recesses of my soul in the way God was meant to. I had to find that my fulfillment and sense of completion can only come from Him.<sup>1</sup> And when we give the Lord first place in our lives, He has a way of filling us with joy and strength—just as He had done for Lissa.

Within each of us is a void that cries out for fulfillment. You are not the only one experiencing that—a void from unmet expectations, or a failed marriage, or the death of a child, or the loss of a dream, or the desire for that “something more.” It’s that part of our life that we feel will be complete *if only*... And God is the only One who can fill that void with whatever it is we are asking for. But sometimes, in order to get us to seek Him, He decides not to. Such was the case with Hannah.

### Hannah’s Missing Piece

Hannah felt a void in her life too. Her story is recorded in the Bible in the beginning chapters of 1 Samuel and touches our hearts because of how desperately she cried out to God for what she wanted. She pleaded with Him to fill an intense void and give her a child. All around her, women were giving birth to babies and raising children.

But Hannah couldn't conceive a child. In case you're not familiar with her story, let me give you some background.

Hannah had a husband, Elkanah, who loved her. Scripture implies he loved her even more than his other wife, Peninnah. I know, that's strange, but they lived in a part of the world where polygamy was culturally acceptable. It certainly wasn't God's design for His people, but it was permitted by Jewish law under certain circumstances, which might explain why Elkanah had two wives.<sup>2</sup> But even though Hannah was loved by her husband, she longed for something more. She wanted to have a child. And she lived in a culture that considered it a shame and reproach for a woman to be childless. To make matters worse, her husband's other wife, Peninnah, had children and would provoke Hannah to tears because she was without a child.

Follow the story with me:

When the day came that Elkanah sacrificed, he would give portions to Peninnah his wife and to all her sons and her daughters; but to Hannah he would give a double portion, for he loved Hannah, *but the LORD had closed her womb*. Her rival, however, would provoke her bitterly to irritate her, *because the LORD had closed her womb*. It happened year after year, as often as she went up to the house of the LORD, she would provoke her; so she wept and would not eat (1 Samuel 1:4-7 NASB).

Hannah's husband tried to console her by saying, in a sense, "Why are you so upset? You have *me*. What more could you want?" (I *know* what you're thinking at this point. But hold that thought...we'll get to Hannah's husband in chapter 3.) The story goes on to say that Hannah pulled herself together, ate and drank, and then found a quiet place to pour out her heart to God in prayer.

And she made a vow, saying, "LORD Almighty, if you will only look on your servant's misery and remember me,

and not forget your servant but give her a son, then I will give him to the LORD for all the days of his life” (verse 11).

Hannah was not only asking God for what she believed would make her life complete, but for what would ease her suffering and torment. She was asking to be remembered, relieved, and restored. Her prayer was, in essence, “Give me this one desire of mine, and I’ll give it back to You for Your glory.”

We are going to come back to Hannah’s story throughout this book and see how God lovingly—and surprisingly—granted her request. We will look at Hannah’s heartfelt “deal” with God, how she handled a misunderstanding as she was making that deal, and the risks she took—years later—by following through with her vow to God. We will also look at what God was divinely orchestrating with an entire nation of people that may have prompted God to withhold a baby from Hannah long enough for her to get desperate enough to make that deal with God. But for now, let’s look at a pivotal phrase in that story that may help you understand what God might be doing in *your* life as He sees your tears.

### Four Disturbing Words

There were some disturbing words in the Bible passage we looked at a moment ago. Did you notice them? There were seven words in that narrative that cut me to the core: “because the Lord had closed her womb.”

*Four* of those seven words cut *all* of us to the core in one way or another as they become a narrative of *our* lives as well: “*because the Lord had...*”

Dear reader, I would feel so much better if that sentence about Hannah read “because she was unable to bear children.” But that verse specifically tells us that *the Lord* was the One withholding from Hannah the one thing she wanted so badly. God was behind the coveted missing piece in her life. He was the One who not only allowed, but *engineered* the void she was experiencing.

Now before you throw this book against the wall, thinking *That's it... I knew it. God IS the One who is responsible for my pain*—please stay with me and let me explain.

We would like to think that God is the One behind only the blessings and rewards in life and that when we stumble upon difficult times or have something withheld from us it's because of the natural consequences of a bad decision, or the unfortunate consequences of living in a fallen world, or maybe even God's *punishment* for some sin in our lives. But we have a hard time wrapping our minds around the possibility that God would allow—or even arrange—certain difficulties to come our way. Yet that is one of the primary ways He awakens our need for Him, grows our dependence on Him, shapes our character, and draws us closer to Himself.

Scripture tells us that God can do “all things, and that no purpose of [His] can be thwarted” (Job 42:2). It also tells us that “every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows” (James 1:17). So if every gift is from God, and you're praying for a “gift” and it's not arriving, God is the One who, for some reason, is deciding to withhold that gift. And I have learned through the years that some of God's “gifts” to us are the very things He decides to withhold. These “gifts” sometimes take the form of difficulties, losses, frustrations, and outright pain. Initially we don't see them as gifts, but more like disappointments, aggravations, or even rejection. But they are gifts, nonetheless, that are given to us to grow us to a new level in our spiritual life or to prepare us for something better that God has in store for us, or perhaps to even help us see something extraordinary about God that we couldn't see before.

### When God's “Gift” Is No

I remember not wanting to accept one of the “gifts” God was giving me, primarily because I saw it as His withholding, not as His giving. I struggled with not being able to have a second child (what

doctors now refer to as secondary infertility). It was a struggle for me because I remember “claiming” a verse as my promise that I would have another child: “No good thing will he withhold from those who walk uprightly” (Psalm 84:11 NASB).

I first highlighted that verse in my Bible when I prayed to the Lord and asked for Hugh to become my husband. “Lord, Hugh is a good thing, and I am walking uprightly. Certainly You will not withhold him from me.” And God didn’t. A year after saying that prayer, Hugh and I were married, and I can confirm that over the past 25 years Hugh has been a “good thing” in my life.

So I figured the same prayer would work when it came to having a second child. “Surely another baby is a good thing, God,” I prayed. “Certainly You will not withhold that.” And yet He did. Hugh and I were not able to have a second child, and in the years since, God has graciously shown me that having only one child was, and still is, His idea of “good” for me. Apparently what God considered a “good thing” was not birthing a second child, but birthing a writing and speaking ministry instead. Although at the time I felt that God was withholding something from me, today I can see His withholding as a “gift” in terms of a different life direction that He had planned for me.

Through the years I’ve seen, over and over again, that God’s idea of a good thing (and ultimately what’s best for me in my faith walk with Him) may be completely different than mine. Although my opinion has often differed from God’s in His early stages of withholding something from me (for example, I know quite a few women who have both a ministry to women *and* a second or third or fifth child too!), I have learned to not question the wisdom and actions of an all-knowing, all-loving God who is much more capable of managing my life than I am.

I do not have a second child today *because the Lord has closed my womb*. But I can also say, “I am living the dream God has placed on my heart—through my writing and speaking—because the Lord has closed my womb.”

I could give you a lengthy list of other “gifts” that I have received at God’s hand but didn’t originally see as gifts because they all included the phrase *because the Lord had...*

I didn’t marry Mike *because the Lord had changed his heart.*

I lost a good friend *because the Lord had taken her away.*

I went through a season of loss *because the Lord had shut the door.*

But there are other ways of looking at those same “gifts” (or withholdings):

I married Hugh *because the Lord had changed Mike’s heart.*

I was spared further hurt *because the Lord had taken her away.*

I can minister to women today *because the Lord had shut that door.*

What are some *because the Lord had* phrases that have affected your life and caused your tears to flow? Are you a woman who is where she is today...

*because the Lord had closed that door?*

*because the Lord had changed his heart?*

*because the Lord had taken her away?*

*because the Lord didn’t let you marry?*

*because the Lord has not healed you?*

*because the Lord let you get cancer?*

*because the Lord had not stopped it?*

My friend, God has His reason for why He has allowed or prevented something from happening in your life. And it’s not because He doesn’t love you or care about you or hear your prayers. It’s very possible that He wants to bless you from another angle. And it’s very possible He wants you to realize that the one thing you need the most—your one missing piece—is Himself.

### **Lissa’s Missing Piece**

Lissa, who is now raising her child on her own and depending on God every step of the way, realizes what her missing piece was all along.

“At first I thought my missing piece was my husband. I thought my life was over and I could never find love again or even be happy

again. I begged God to bring him back, and I just didn't understand why this was happening to me. But once I realized how silly and selfish those words sounded (because I was focused on me), I discovered that the true missing piece in my life was the One I had pushed away for the past two years of my life.

"I had a mom who instilled the truth in me and always taught me that only Jesus can meet and satisfy my needs and wants and desires. But I was too prideful to listen, and I ended up letting things and the wrong people influence me. I now realize how my life had taken a downward spiral. I came to regret the decisions I had made and how I had become reliant on myself because I thought I had a good job and because I was married to a man I thought loved me, and because I was going to have a family. God had to strip me of all of that to bring me back to where I once was—to a place of total surrender to Jesus."

If you had asked Lissa a year ago why her life had taken the course it had, she might have told you, in anger or confusion, "Because the Lord let my husband leave."

And, having heard her story, you might agree that those seven words had surely changed the course of her life.

But today Lissa looks not at what God has withheld, but at the blessings He has brought to her *through* her loss. And the seven words to describe how the course of her life has changed sound differently today: "Because the Lord has shown me mercy."

I wonder if she could even say "Because the Lord has become my Husband."

Lissa says, "I still love my husband and I miss him even after all the wrong he has done. But I often wonder where I would be right now if he had worked it out with me. I know I would not have turned to my Savior, the Lord Jesus, whom I cried out to in my desperation. And all the pain and hurt I felt and am still feeling was worth it because I will be able to pass on to my son a faith that I wouldn't have if I was still with my husband."



Did you catch that?

Lissa is aware that a legacy is coming out of the loss she experienced. Through her ordeal, she came to know God intimately, and she now has a living faith and trust in the Lord that she can pass on to her son.

“God has given me a healthy baby boy, a wonderful blessing,” Lissa said. “And He definitely has a plan for my little peanut. I tell my son every day he’s going to grow up to be a strong, courageous man of God.”

She is also resting in the fact that God is in complete control of her life’s circumstances.

“God opened my womb for a reason. And there’s also a reason my husband is not here, and I don’t know what that is. I struggle with that, but I have to keep it in the forefront of my mind that God’s in control of all of this and He knows what He’s doing.”

### Searching for a Reason

It’s in our human nature to try to figure out the reason or purpose behind our suffering. Sometimes we find ourselves saying, “If someone somewhere can gain something from what I’ve been through, then it will all be worthwhile.” But rest assured, my friend, of these two things:

1. *Sometimes you won’t be able to see it.* Even if you can’t figure out *how* God can use whatever you are going through, that doesn’t mean He can’t. God may choose to give you a glimpse of what He is doing and how He is working. If He does, then thank Him for that. He has been gracious in giving you a small picture of His big plan. But God doesn’t always give us a clue as to how He is working and the way He will receive glory from our lives. He is not obligated to let us know *how* He is working or *why* He is doing something. He doesn’t need our



Can you hold onto God for the beautiful result of what He is doing in and through you?



approval or our suggestions either. That is where our trust comes in. If you are surrendered to Him, He will do whatever He desires with your situation—in His own timing, and in His own way.

2. *Sometimes you are the one who stands to gain from what you are going through.* We tend to think that God's plan always involves "some future good" or some eternal outcome somewhere for someone else. At times we hold onto the idea of a great end result eventually pacifying our pain or bringing purpose to our suffering. And yet God is very much concerned about what is happening in you *right now* as you sort through the complexities of life and sift through your sorrow. Of course He can use your pain for good in someone else's life or for some benefit that is still future. He is God. He can do *anything*. But His process of transformation in you is just as important to Him as any end result or greater good that you are hoping to see. Can you trust the process? Can you hold onto God for the beautiful result of what He is doing in and through *you*? Can you be satisfied with *His* contentment over yours when it comes to what He is doing in your life?

### Unmet Expectations

No young woman—like Lissa—imagines that she will end up becoming a struggling single mom just a year into her marriage. No little girl—like some I've met—expects to find herself without a daddy or wondering if she is really loved. No woman past her forties expects to live out the rest of her days without a husband or children or grandchildren. No one, for that matter, imagines in advance the heartaches and heartbreaks that will come their way. And yet consider the world we live in. Imperfect people. Hearts that devise wicked schemes. Selfishness. Broken promises. And in the midst of all of that is One who is still absolutely and inarguably in control.

As Lissa told me her story, her emphasis was not on the void that her husband had left, but the void that was being filled by the true

“Husband” in her life, the Lord her Maker, who has proven Himself to be her spiritual Husband, Provider, Protector and Friend.<sup>3</sup>

Lissa wisely came to recognize what she needed most—a dependence upon God that she never even realized she could have. And today, she is beginning to see how God has taken a huge loss in her life and is turning it into a legacy.

### What About You?

I won't presume to know what your void looks like. But God knows exactly what it is...and perhaps He knows it's the only thing that is going to cause you to depend fully on Him.

One morning, as I was praying for God to fill that one void in my life that keeps surfacing as a result of unmet expectations, I remember thinking that it wasn't a huge request of God. He could easily handle it. He could grant it at any time.

And yet I will never forget the whisper I heard on my heart that morning: “My child, why would I give you the one thing that would keep you from clinging so tightly to Me?”

In the moment that I “heard” that, I wasn't disappointed that God was again saying *no*. I was, instead, overcome by His love and jealousy of me. My “unmet desire” really *is* what keeps me on my knees before Him, keeps me clinging to Him, keeps me coming up alongside His heart. And so He continues to withhold that one thing because He knows what is best for me from an eternal standpoint. He wants to remain first in my heart. He wants me to look to *Him* for what I need most. He wants to *be* the One I desire. And He is—

*because the Lord has continued to withhold.*

Sometimes I wonder if God withholds whatever it is that will eventually become an idol in our lives—whatever it is that might keep us from putting Him first. If God gives you a husband, will you still keep the Lord first in your life? If He gives you a child, will it take His place as first in your heart? If He allows you to live your dream,

will you leave Him in the dust and live for yourself? If He eases your financial worries, will you still depend on Him for your daily bread? God knows what each of us needs—and what we should be without—in order to keep us clinging to Him. He knows—and He will allow or withhold—whatever will keep us right where we need to be when it comes to our relationship with Him.

In Hannah's case, God granted her a child. But as we will see in the coming chapters, she didn't take God's gift and wander off. She handed that same child back to God and continued to live in dependence on Him. She continued to be a woman of prayer. In fact, the granting of her request may have made her even *more* dependent on God. Is that the case with whatever you are asking God for? Will the fulfillment of your desire make you even *more* dependent on the Lord?

Wherever you are in your experience of staring at the void, I hope you will see not the disappointment or disaster in front of you, but the dependence on God that you can cultivate. That dependence on God will eventually fill any void that cries out for more. Trust Him with your tears, my friend. And trust Him with the void. Oh, how He wants to fill it with Himself!



## Letting God Fill the Void

Take some time to reflect on these questions as a way of processing what you've just read and applying it to your situation.

1. In a sentence or two, try to describe what the void looks like in your life.
  
2. Through your void or loss, how might God want to be developing you into a person who is more dependent on Him?
  
3. As you consider the following ways that God wants to fill the void in your life, read the verses listed under each one (you may even want to write them out as a reminder of how God wants to fill the void in your life):
  - He wants to be your emotional provider and Spiritual Husband  
Isaiah 54:5—
  
  - He wants to be your material provider  
Philippians 4:19—

- He wants to be your heart's delight

Psalm 37:4—

Matthew 22:37—

- He wants to make you more like His Son

Romans 8:28-29—



## A Prayer of Invitation

If you've never surrendered your life to Jesus Christ and asked Him to fill that void in your heart, you can do that now (and if you already have, you can adapt this prayer so it speaks of rededication or recommitment):

Lord,

I know You have a plan and a purpose for my life. And I want to bring my life in alignment with Your plan and purpose. But I can't do that as long as I am holding the reins of my life. So I surrender my heart, my will, my life to You. I realize that I am a sinner, by nature, and that nothing I do can ever earn me the favor of God. It is only through Your perfect, sinless, righteous Son, Jesus Christ, and His death and resurrection for me, that I can be accepted by You. So I ask that Jesus' atoning death on the cross apply to *my* sin. Be the Lord of my life and the keeper of my heart. Help me to live from this day forward in obedience to You out of love and appreciation to You for Your tremendous sacrifice for me—allowing, and *planning in advance*, that Your Own Son die to pay the penalty for my sin and to purchase a place in heaven for me. Fill that void in my life with Yourself and become the One thing I desire so that You can trust me with the desires of my heart.

Thank You for knowing me, hearing me, and wanting me to cling to You no matter what is going on in my life. Hold me close and show me what it means to find my fulfillment in You.