

Permission to Grieve
By Cherie J. Drew

There is a feeling that rises from your heart and pushes upwards until it reaches your throat. Then with a familiar tight squeeze, your physical distress takes the shape of the emotional cry of the human spirit. Your eyes begin to twitch, and suddenly hurt rolls down your face in the form of tears. While this pain grips your heart, fear seizes your mind.

The emotion that forced me to depend completely on God's strength has many names, and I have called it "grief." Some call it sorrow, anguish, or agony, but no matter what we call it, God took the hurt that Satan meant as destruction and has given me this opportunity for ministry. And as this familiar pain started to take over my thought pattern, God allowed me to see His might and to see Him strong. The widow's might is not something; the *widow's might* is Someone. God is our might.

Who is this King of glory? The Lord strong and mighty, the Lord mighty in battle. Lift up your heads, O ye gates; even lift them up, ye everlasting doors.
(Psalm 24:8-9)

I decided to memorize more scriptures. I committed the entire Twenty-fourth Psalm as part of my daily confession because it speaks of our might and then tells us to lift up our heads. Then I drove to one of those scenic viewpoints, and as I looked over the mountains I saw Jesus. The scripture was so real to me that says, *I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help* (Psalm 121:1)

I am sure many of you are reading this because you need the same power that God has graciously given me. So as I consider you and your need, I will share my experiences; I believe they will help you get through your today and give you strength for tomorrow and hope for the future.

I was with a friend when he ran into the widow of his late army buddy. I had not had the opportunity to meet her, but as they greeted one another, I listened while the appropriate questions were asked. "How are you holding up? How is the family?" I had to bury my desire to run up to her and say what I was sure she needed to hear. I wanted to say, "Permission to grieve granted." As the surviving spouse of a retired military noncommissioned officer, she would understand the terminology. I wanted to assure her and her family they had the right and the privilege to grieve. The daughter of the

deceased told my friend that she was taking it better than anyone else because she was the strongest. Why is it that we think it is required that we be strong after the loss of our loved ones? Where is it written that we must “hold up”? What does it mean to hold up anyway? I guess it is the opposite of “fall apart.” Well, I fell apart. I realized that I was not as strong as people thought; they seemed to see vitality when I only felt sluggish. People expected me to be enthusiastic, and I did. I held up, all right, but when I got home and was alone, I would then fall apart.

Grief is normal, and I learned that all my organizational skills and time management practices were not needed now. I did not set any time frames, and as I had the strength, then and only then, would I empty drawers and deal with my late husband’s personal items.

When Garcia died, I thought it was the most difficult thing I would ever have to deal with. My children were still young, and the need to be an example aided my recovery; the actual mourning time, although seemingly long lasting, was only two months.

We cannot anticipate the time or the emotional pain associated with the adjustment of living without our loved ones; it is different for every person and for every situation.

Although the mourning period was short, I did have a very severe depression. I spent endless days and nights on the sofa and ate chocolate cake. It was only after my son asked me if I ever planned to shower again that I realized it had been quite a while since I bathed – and I hadn’t even noticed. I used the old faithful scripture that seemed to be etched in my mind and a part of my daily confession:

Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might.

(Ephesians 6:10)

This verse starts with the word *finally*. It fit my situation because the word *finally* means lastly, or in conclusion, after all else is done. My husband was gone, so these words fit my situation. I understood what it meant to be strong, but the phrase “in the Lord” was confusing. So I did a search and discovered the word *in* meant a position of rest. To be “strong in the Lord” meant that I was to rest in Christ. The Holy Spirit is the power of God’s might. So although I was not required by God or anyone else to be strong in my own ability, I did have permission to rest in Christ. The position of rest is God’s permission to grieve.

Strength and might are interchangeable. I had convinced myself that I needed to be strong for all of those around me, but I was so wrong; it was a

natural course of life to grieve. I think my in-laws were also hurt because they did not see me properly mourn their brother, son, and uncle.

After my shower I didn't feel better, but I had to do exactly what I did not feel like doing. We've often done things that we do not feel like doing, so even though I did not feel like getting up or cleaning up or looking up, I did. I wish I could tell you that I miraculously was better and that suddenly everything changed, but it didn't. There was still an empty seat at the dinner table and an unoccupied chair next to me in church. I still refused to sleep in the middle of our bed. I slept on my side only. I realize now that I thought of his side of the bed as still occupied. I remember losing my keys, and without thinking,

I found my mouth forming the words and out of habit I asked Garcia if he saw where I had put them. When he died, I lost my life partner, the one who could tell me why

I came in a room when I had completely forgot, the stabilizing force when I was on a rampage. So I had earned the right to grieve. Now I needed to understand what God said about grief.

After looking up *grieve* and *grieving* in *Vine's Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words*, I discovered that the Bible uses the word *sorrow*. It also defines grief as "hard to deal with." OK, I knew this, and in my hurt and frustration I started to cry – not the simple strain of tears that slowly meander down your cheek, but the face-drenching, body jerking sobs of a woman deeply injured. After I finally stopped, I actually felt better, really; I gained my composure and felt better.

When researching this book I discovered that tears contain leucine-enkephalin, which is one of the brain's natural pain relievers. I also discovered that there is a hormone – prolactin – in tears that encourages the production of more tears. I believe that fact to be true, because I would start crying and continue for hours on end. God has provided us a natural relief, a physical property in our tears that are a true medicine.

One day when I was concerned that I may be grieving too long, I spoke to my aunt. She also was a widow and understood so much of what I experienced. I could actually speak to her without feeling as though she had no clue about my numbness. She understood my many feelings and did not think it strange that the niece she knew, the young lady who had been so driven, the person who was once willing to take on the world had lost all motivation.

God provided someone to listen to me, and my aunt's encouragement and counsel were simple: grief is a natural part of life. Don't deny it or avoid it; take the journey and do it recognizing that God is taking care of you.

Many believe you can predict the stages of grief, and I wish that had been true in my case. If there had been some way I could know what was coming next, I would have been prepared, but unfortunately that wasn't the case in my situation. I want to encourage you again with the fact that grief is unique to the person who is experiencing the suffering.

Some of us grieve days, weeks, or months, while others grieve for years. Do not feel guilty or weak because you grieve long, and don't feel guilty if you grieve a short period of time. Our lives are in God's hands, and He will not allow more sorrow than we can bear.