

I Can't Believe He's Gone

A JOURNEY OF FAITH THROUGH LOSS AND TRANSITION

Introduction

Losing someone – whether through death, distance, or a season of transition – shakes us. It forces us to confront grief, questions, and sometimes even our faith. Yet, even in the midst of deep sorrow, God remains present, guiding us through the journey of letting go.

I'll never forget the day I got the news that my mom had passed away. There was an immediate hole that honestly I felt nobody could ever fill, but over time He showed me that even in her absence as long as I seek His presence, it will get me through those difficult days when the loss seems greater than what the future would bring. It is God who's helped me see what it takes to move forward, rather than be hindered by what you've lost behind you.

It's my hope in this short booklet that you can find some hope that God will fill that hole and that void in a way that you never could've imagined and that you'll be able to say goodbye to the pain while welcoming a beautiful future, the future that God has planned for you.

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This booklet is built on the foundation of the Say Goodbye series, reminding us that every goodbye is also an opportunity for growth, healing, and new beginnings.

CHAPTER 1: WHEN REALITY HITS

The moment you hear the news, time seems to stop. Your mind struggles to process what has just happened. One second, everything feels normal – life is moving forward, plans are in place, and then suddenly, something shifts. Someone is gone. And you can't believe it.

Grief has a strange way of distorting time. The world around you keeps spinning, but you feel frozen in place. The people around you talk, laugh, and move on with their routines, but you're stuck in the moment of loss. Whether it's the death of a loved one, the end of a relationship, or an unexpected life transition, goodbyes shake us to our core.

For many, the first reaction is shock. "This can't be real." Even when the loss is expected, when a loved one has been sick for a long time or when the signs of change were evident, it still feels surreal when it happens. You replay the moments leading up to it. You wonder if you missed something, if you could have done something differently. It's an overwhelming mix of disbelief and sorrow.

That's how the disciples must have felt when Jesus died.

The Shock of Loss

They had spent three years following Him, watching Him perform miracles, listening to His teachings, and believing He was the one who would change everything. He was their leader, their friend, their Messiah. And then, in a matter of hours, He was betrayed, arrested, beaten, and nailed to a cross.

Try to imagine what it must have been like for them. They had walked with Him every day, seen Him calm storms, heal the sick, and even raise the dead. Surely, He had the power to stop what was happening. Yet, He didn't. He willingly allowed Himself to be taken, mocked, and killed.

Luke 23:44-46 describes the moment:

"It was now about noon, and darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon, for the sun stopped shining. And the curtain of the temple was torn in two. Jesus called out with a loud voice, 'Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.' When he had said this, he breathed his last."

Can you imagine standing there? Watching Him take His last breath? Feeling the weight of finality as His body was taken down and placed in a tomb?

The disciples were in shock. They didn't just lose a leader; they lost their hope. They had imagined a future where Jesus ruled as King, where everything they had sacrificed was going to be worth it. But now, that future seemed lost.

Maybe you know that feeling. Maybe you had dreams of a future with someone who is no longer here. Maybe you imagined a different outcome, a different ending, only to be left with a silence that feels unbearable.

The First Question: Why?

When loss hits, the first question we often ask is, Why?

- Why did this happen?
- Why now?
- Why didn't God stop it?

Even Jesus, in His humanity, cried out on the cross, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Matthew 27:46).

There’s something deeply human about asking why. It’s an instinctive cry for understanding, for meaning. But often, answers don’t come right away. And sometimes, they don’t come at all.

That’s the hardest part about grief – it doesn’t always make sense. We want to tie everything up with neat theological explanations, but grief is messy. It doesn’t fit into simple answers. And yet, even in the midst of the unknown, God remains present.

The Invitation to Grieve

In moments of deep loss, we often feel the need to be strong. We tell ourselves not to cry, not to feel, not to fall apart. But the truth is, grief is a necessary part of healing. Even Jesus wept when His friend Lazarus died (John 11:35). The shortest verse in the Bible carries a profound truth – Jesus was not afraid to feel grief.

If Jesus, the Son of God, took time to weep, then why do we rush ourselves through pain?

Sometimes, we think faith means pretending we’re okay. But real faith acknowledges pain and still chooses to trust. Faith is not the absence of sorrow; it’s the belief that even in sorrow, God is still at work.

Finding God in the Silence

One of the most difficult parts of loss is the silence that follows. After Jesus died, there was a period of waiting. Friday was the day of pain, but Saturday was the day of silence. The disciples had no idea what was coming on Sunday.

When we experience loss, we often live in that Saturday moment – the space between what was and what will be. It's the space where prayers seem unanswered, where we wonder if God is even listening.

But just because God is silent doesn't mean He is absent.

Sometimes, our greatest growth happens in the silent seasons. The disciples didn't know it at the time, but Jesus was not finished. The story wasn't over. Resurrection was coming.

Leaning Into Hope

When reality hits, when loss feels unbearable, when you can't believe they're gone – what do you do?

You start by being honest with God. You bring Him your pain, your confusion, your questions. You let yourself grieve. And you hold onto the hope that even though you don't see the full picture yet, God is not finished.

Psalm 34:18 says,

"The Lord is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit."

God is near. Even in the pain. Even in the silence. Even when reality hits harder than you ever imagined.

And just like with the disciples, just like with Jesus, this is not the end of the story.

Reflection Questions

1. What emotions are you experiencing as you process loss?
2. Have you allowed yourself to fully acknowledge the pain, or are you suppressing it?
3. In what ways can you invite God into your grief?
4. How can you remind yourself that even in silence, God is still working?

The weight of loss often doesn't hit immediately. At first, it feels unreal – like life is moving forward, but we are stuck in a moment that we cannot escape.

For the disciples, this was their reality when Jesus died. They had followed Him, given their lives to His mission, and then, in a matter of hours, He was gone. The One they thought would be their leader forever was now lying in a tomb. How could this be happening?

When we lose someone or something important, we wrestle with questions:

- Did I do enough?
- What am I supposed to do now?
- How do I move forward?

The key to facing the reality of loss is allowing yourself to feel it, but not be consumed by it. Jesus Himself wept at the tomb of Lazarus (John 11:35). He didn't rush the process; He entered it.

Reflection: What loss are you facing right now that still feels unreal? What emotions have you been avoiding?

CHAPTER 2: THE WEIGHT OF GOODBYE

Goodbyes leave an emptiness that words struggle to fill. Whether it's the loss of a loved one, the end of a season, or the closing of a chapter you weren't ready to finish, saying goodbye carries a weight that lingers. It's the realization that what once was will never be the same again.

You may find yourself walking into a room and expecting to see them there. You may instinctively reach for your phone to send a message, only to remember that there will never be a response. The weight of goodbye is heavy because it reminds us of what was and what will never be again.

This is the tension that the disciples felt in the hours and days following Jesus' death.

Grieving the Loss of Expectations

For the disciples, the loss wasn't just about Jesus – it was about the future they had imagined with Him. They had left everything to follow Him, believing He was the long-awaited Messiah who would establish His kingdom and overthrow the oppressive Roman rule.

But as they watched Him breathe His last breath on the cross, their hopes crumbled.

"We had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel." (Luke 24:21)

These words, spoken by the two disciples on the road to Emmaus, capture the pain of shattered expectations. "We had hoped." Those three words carry so much weight.

Maybe you've said something similar:

- I had hoped we would have more time together.
- I had hoped this relationship would last.
- I had hoped to see a different outcome.

The pain of goodbye is often not just about losing a person but about losing the future we envisioned with them. The moments we expected to share, the dreams that now feel unfinished – it all adds to the weight we carry.

The disciples were not just mourning Jesus' death; they were mourning the loss of what they thought their lives would be.

Carrying the Weight of What-ifs**One of the hardest parts of saying goodbye is the lingering what-ifs.**

- What if I had spent more time with them?
- What if I had said "I love you" one more time?
- What if I had done something differently?

Guilt, even when it's undeserved, is a common companion of grief. We replay conversations, analyze moments, and wonder if there was something we missed.

Peter likely carried this weight more than any of the disciples. In the hours before Jesus' death, Peter – one of Jesus' closest friends – denied knowing Him not once, not twice, but three times. After boldly declaring that he would never abandon Jesus, he failed in the moment that mattered most.

Luke 22:61-62 describes the heartbreaking moment:

“The Lord turned and looked straight at Peter. Then Peter remembered the word the Lord had spoken to him: ‘Before the rooster crows today, you will disown me three times.’ And he went outside and wept bitterly.”

Peter was carrying the weight of what-if.

What if he had spoken up? What if he had stood by Jesus? What if he had been braver?

Maybe you’ve been there – wishing you had done something differently, replaying your actions, feeling the weight of regret. But here’s the truth: We can’t change the past, but we can bring our brokenness to the One who heals.

Jesus knew Peter would fail, and yet, He still loved him. He still had a plan for him. And the same is true for you.

Jesus Walks With Us Through Grief

The disciples didn’t know it at the time, but Jesus was closer than they realized.

In Luke 24, two disciples were walking from Jerusalem to Emmaus, a seven-mile journey filled with sorrow. They were deep in conversation about everything that had happened – the crucifixion, the burial, the rumors of an empty tomb. They were grieving.

And then, Jesus showed up.

“As they talked and discussed these things with each other, Jesus himself came up and walked along with them; but they were kept from recognizing him.” (Luke 24:15-16)

This is a powerful image of how Jesus meets us in our grief.

They didn't recognize Him at first. And isn't that often the case with us? In our sorrow, in the weight of goodbye, we don't always see that Jesus is right there, walking with us.

He didn't rush them through their grief. He didn't tell them to stop feeling or to move on. Instead, He walked with them, listened to their pain, and reminded them of the bigger picture.

What if Jesus is walking with you now, even if you don't recognize Him yet?

The Power of Remembering

After walking with them for miles, Jesus sat down to eat with the disciples. Then something incredible happened:

“When he was at the table with them, he took bread, gave thanks, broke it and began to give it to them. Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him, and he disappeared from their sight.” (Luke 24:30-31)

It was in the breaking of the bread – the very act that symbolized Jesus' sacrifice – that they saw Him clearly.

Sometimes, we need reminders to see Jesus in our grief. That's why remembering matters.

- Remembering the love shared.
- Remembering the lessons learned.
- Remembering that God is still writing your story.

Goodbyes feel final, but they don't erase what was. The memories, the love, the impact – they remain. And even more importantly, Jesus remains.

What to Do With the Weight

So how do we carry the weight of goodbye without being crushed by it?

1. Acknowledge the Pain – It's okay to grieve. Jesus wept, and so can you.
2. Bring It to Jesus – Talk to Him about your loss, your regrets, your what-ifs.
3. Look for His Presence – Even when you don't see Him, He is walking with you.
4. Remember What Matters – Goodbye doesn't mean forgetting. It means honoring what was while trusting what's ahead.

Psalm 55:22 says:

“Cast your cares on the Lord and he will sustain you; he will never let the righteous be shaken.”

The weight of goodbye is too heavy to carry alone. But you don't have to. Jesus is walking with you, listening, and reminding you that this is not the end of the story.

Reflection Questions

1. What expectations or dreams have you lost in this season?
2. What what-ifs have been weighing on you?
3. Where have you struggled to see Jesus in your grief?
4. How can you invite Jesus to walk with you in this season of goodbye?

Saying goodbye is never easy. Whether it's a loved one, a dream, or a season of life, goodbyes create a void. But just because something is painful doesn't mean it's purposeless.

The disciples on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:13-35) were walking in sorrow, processing the loss of Jesus, not realizing He was walking with them. That's how grief often works – we think we're alone, but Jesus is nearer than we know.

Goodbyes hurt because they signal the end of something familiar. But every goodbye is also an invitation to trust God in a deeper way.

- If we never had to say goodbye, we'd never learn to rely on Him.
- If we never had to release something, we'd never have room to receive something new.

Reflection: Have you been resisting a necessary goodbye? How might God be present in your pain?

CHAPTER 3: LEARNING TO LIVE IN THE IN-BETWEEN

There is a moment after every goodbye when the shock begins to fade, but the pain still lingers. You know life must go on, but you're not sure how to move forward. The world around you continues at full speed, yet inside, you feel stuck. This is the in-between – the space between what was and what will be.

It's the season where grief still grips you, but healing feels distant. You wake up every day, knowing things have changed, but unsure of how to embrace a future without what you lost.

This is exactly where the disciples found themselves in the days following Jesus' death. The One they had followed for years was gone. Their purpose, their hope, their direction – all of it seemed lost. Even though Jesus had told them He would rise again, they couldn't fully grasp what that meant. And so, they waited.

Waiting is hard. The in-between can feel unbearable. But it is also in these moments that God is working in ways we cannot yet see.

The Pain of the In-Between

One of the most difficult realities of grief is that it doesn't resolve quickly. There is no fast-forward button. You can't skip ahead to healing. Instead, you are left to sit in the discomfort of what has been lost while waiting for clarity on what comes next.

For the disciples, the day after Jesus' crucifixion was a day of silence.

"Then they went home and prepared spices and perfumes. But they rested on the Sabbath in obedience to the commandment." (Luke 23:56)

They rested. But it wasn't a peaceful rest – it was the kind of waiting filled with unanswered questions, uncertainty, and sorrow.

Imagine what that day must have felt like for them:

- The streets of Jerusalem were still bustling with life, but their world had stopped.
- The echoes of Jesus' final words still rang in their ears.
- The cross still stood, a painful reminder of everything they had lost.

They didn't yet know that resurrection was coming.

And neither do we when we are in the in-between. We don't know how God is going to bring healing. We don't know how we will ever feel whole again. All we know is the weight of loss and the uncertainty of what comes next.

When You Don't Know What to Do

When we find ourselves in the in-between, the question that haunts us is: What now?

- What do I do with the empty space left behind?
- What do I do with the memories that bring both comfort and pain?
- What do I do with the loneliness that lingers after the goodbye?

For the disciples, the answer wasn't immediate. Some of them hid in fear (John 20:19). Others, like Peter, returned to the only thing they knew – fishing (John 21:3).

Grief often drives us back to what feels familiar. When the future is unclear, we cling to what is known, even if it doesn't satisfy.

Maybe you've found yourself doing the same. Maybe you've thrown yourself into work, distractions, or old habits, just to avoid facing the pain of loss. But what if, instead of rushing to fill the void, we allowed ourselves to sit in the discomfort of the in-between?

What if, instead of numbing ourselves, we invited God into the waiting?

God Is Still Working

Just because you don't see what's next doesn't mean God isn't working.

On the surface, the day between Jesus' death and resurrection seemed like an empty day. But in the unseen realm, something powerful was happening. Jesus wasn't gone; He was defeating death itself. The disciples couldn't see it, but resurrection was already in motion.

The same is true in your season of in-between. You may not see the healing yet. You may not understand what God is doing. But that doesn't mean He isn't moving.

Isaiah 43:19 says:

"See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the wilderness and streams in the wasteland."

You may feel like you are wandering in the wilderness, lost and alone. But God is making a way. Even if you can't perceive it yet, He is at work.

How to Live in the In-Between

So how do we survive the waiting? How do we navigate the space between loss and healing? Here are three ways:

1. Acknowledge Where You Are

You don't have to pretend you're okay when you're not. God isn't asking you to rush past your grief. The disciples didn't immediately move on – they sat in their sorrow. It's okay to admit that you're struggling. Healing begins when we are honest with ourselves and with God.

2. Look for Jesus in the Silence

Even when we don't feel Him, Jesus is near. Just as He appeared to the disciples in their fear and uncertainty (John 20:19-29), He meets us in our pain. Sometimes, His presence is quiet – a sense of peace in the midst of chaos, a whispered truth in prayer, a moment of comfort that seems unexplainable. Pay attention to those small moments.

3. Trust That This is Not the End

The in-between is not your final destination. Grief is a process, but it is not a prison. The disciples' story didn't end in sorrow. And neither will yours.

Psalm 30:5 reminds us:

“Weeping may stay for the night, but rejoicing comes in the morning.”

You may be in the night right now, but morning is coming.

A Future Beyond the In-Between

Eventually, the disciples saw what they could not have imagined – Jesus was alive. Their sorrow turned to joy, their fear to boldness, and their despair to purpose.

And that is what God wants to do in your story.

The in-between is hard. It is painful. It is uncertain. But it is not permanent. Healing is coming. Purpose is coming. Resurrection is coming.

For now, you may not feel ready to move forward. That’s okay. Just take the next small step. Invite Jesus into your grief. Open your heart to His presence. And trust that even in the silence, He is working.

You are not forgotten. You are not alone. And this is not the end of your story.

Reflection Questions

1. Where do you feel stuck in your grief right now?
2. Have you been avoiding the in-between by distracting yourself?
3. How can you invite Jesus into this season of waiting?
4. What is one small step you can take toward healing today?

One of the hardest places to be is between what was and what will be. After a goodbye, we long for closure, but healing takes time.

The disciples hid in fear after Jesus' crucifixion. They were in a season of uncertainty, not knowing what was next. But in their waiting, Jesus appeared (John 20:19-29). He met them in their fear, doubt, and questions.

God doesn't rush us through grief – He walks with us through it.

Here's how to navigate the in-between:

1. Acknowledge the loss – Don't pretend it doesn't hurt. Bring your pain to God.
2. Seek community – Don't isolate yourself. Let others walk with you.
3. Look for God's presence – Even in silence, He is working.

Reflection: What is one small step you can take toward healing today?

CHAPTER 4: MOVING FORWARD WITHOUT FORGETTING

Loss has a way of marking us. It changes us, leaving imprints of memories, love, and lessons that don't simply disappear when someone is gone. The pain may lessen over time, but the impact remains.

So how do we move forward without forgetting?

This is the tension we wrestle with after saying goodbye. We know life must go on, but we don't want to lose the significance of what we had. We want to keep the memories alive while also stepping into whatever comes next.

The disciples had to face this same reality after Jesus' death and resurrection. For three years, they had followed Him, built their lives around Him, and seen Him perform miracles. And then, He was gone. Then, He was back. And then, He ascended into heaven, leaving them once again.

This time, though, something was different.

Their grief, while real, did not hold them back. Instead of retreating in sorrow as they did after the crucifixion, they stepped forward with purpose. They honored Jesus not by clinging to the past, but by living out the mission He had given them.

This is the balance we must learn – to remember, to honor, and to move forward without losing what matters.

The Fear of Moving Forward

One of the greatest struggles in grief is the fear that moving forward means forgetting.

- If I stop grieving so much, does it mean I don't care anymore?
- If I start laughing again, does it mean I'm leaving them behind?
- If I embrace a new season, does it mean I'm replacing what I lost?

The answer is no.

Moving forward does not mean forgetting. Healing does not erase the past. Instead, it allows you to carry it with you in a way that brings life rather than weighs you down.

Think about how Jesus responded to Peter after His resurrection. Peter had failed Him, denied Him, and was likely still carrying guilt over what had happened. But Jesus didn't let Peter stay in his shame. He didn't let him get stuck in his grief.

Instead, He asked Peter three times: "Do you love me?" (John 21:15-17).

Peter responded each time with a yes, and each time, Jesus followed with a command: "Feed my sheep."

Jesus was saying, I know you're grieving. I know you have regrets. But you still have a purpose. Move forward – not by forgetting, but by honoring what you've learned and using it to make a difference.

The same is true for you.

You are not meant to stay stuck in sorrow. There is more ahead for you. And moving forward doesn't dishonor what you lost – it honors it by allowing it to shape you into who God is calling you to be.

Carrying the Lessons, Not the Weight

So how do you move forward without feeling like you are leaving something behind?

Here are a few ways:

1. Remember the Good

Grief often makes us focus on what we lost, but we must also remember what we were given.

Instead of just mourning that someone is gone, celebrate what they left behind:

- The lessons they taught you
- The love they gave you
- The impact they had on your life

Jesus didn't tell the disciples to forget Him when He left. He told them to remember Him – not just in their sorrow, but in their purpose.

“Do this in remembrance of me.” (Luke 22:19)

The best way to honor someone is to live out the good they brought into your life.

2. Allow the Loss to Shape Your Purpose

Every loss changes us. The question is: Will it break you, or will it shape you?

The disciples could have let their grief paralyze them. Instead, they let it propel them. They carried Jesus' words and mission into the world, spreading His message far beyond what they could have imagined.

What if the loss you experienced was meant to shape something in you?

- A deeper love for others
- A renewed sense of purpose
- A call to help those who are hurting

What if the pain you endured could be used to bring healing to someone else?

Romans 8:28 reminds us:

“And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.”

Even in loss, God is working for your good. Even in sorrow, He is shaping something beautiful.

3. Step Into the New Season With Faith

Moving forward means embracing what's next, even when you don't fully understand it.

After Jesus ascended, the disciples didn't just sit around mourning. They took action. They gathered, prayed, and prepared for what was coming. And then, in Acts 2, the Holy Spirit came, empowering them to step into the future God had for them.

They didn't have all the answers. They didn't know exactly what was ahead. But they stepped forward in faith.

The same is true for you.

You don't have to have it all figured out. You don't have to have a perfect plan. You just have to trust that God is still writing your story.

"Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past. See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it?" (Isaiah 43:18-19)

God is doing something new. The question is: Will you step into it?

Hope Beyond the Goodbye

Saying goodbye is never easy. The weight of loss is real. But so is the promise of hope.

The disciples had to say goodbye to Jesus – twice. Yet, in both instances, goodbye was not the end of the story. First, it led to resurrection. Then, it led to the birth of the Church and the spread of the Gospel to the world.

Your story doesn't end with loss.

Your goodbye is not the final chapter.

There is still life ahead. There is still purpose. There is still hope.

And as you move forward, you do so not by forgetting, but by carrying the love, the lessons, and the memories with you into what's next.

Jesus is with you. He is leading you. And the best is still to come.

Reflection Questions

1. What are some lessons or memories you want to carry forward?
2. Have you been afraid to move forward because it feels like forgetting?
3. What is one small step you can take toward embracing what's next?
4. How can you honor what was while still stepping into the future God has for you?

Chapter 4: Moving Forward Without Forgetting

Goodbyes don't erase memories. They shape us, but they don't have to define us. The resurrection of Jesus proves that even after loss, new life is possible.

When Jesus ascended into heaven, the disciples didn't stay in grief – they stepped into their purpose (Acts 1:6-11). The same is true for us.

Moving forward doesn't mean forgetting; it means honoring what was while embracing what is ahead.

- Remember what was good – Celebrate the impact that person or season had on your life.
- Carry forward the lessons – Let their influence continue in how you live.
- Trust God for what's next – Every goodbye creates space for something new.

Reflection: What is one way you can honor what you've lost while stepping into what's ahead?

Conclusion: Hope Beyond the Goodbye

Loss is painful, but it's not the end of the story. When we say goodbye, God invites us to trust Him in new ways. There is life after loss, and there is hope beyond the goodbye.

You may not understand everything right now, but one thing is certain: You are not alone. He is walking with you.

Final Thought: Instead of only mourning what's gone, ask God what He wants to do next in your life.