

“Even Though I Walk Through the Valley of the Shadow of Death”

Dear Friend,

As I sat praying about what to write for this devotional, my thoughts were about what could I write that would be uplifting and encouraging. For me, however, recent months have been neither uplifting nor encouraging. Indeed, I have walked through a situation of death.

“So”, I thought, “maybe this is not the right time for me to write; perhaps I should wait until I have come through this time and can share from a place of encouragement.” Then I began to remember that the Scriptures tell us that we “will walk through the valley of the shadow of death”, and that we are to “fear no evil”, for He is with us (Psalm 23). Indeed this is my experience in the darkest days — God guides us through, loving us, protecting us.

So I believe it is right to share my heart with you now, because there are times in everyone’s Christian walk when we find ourselves in a place of death. This may be the death of a relative or a friend, or perhaps of a ministry. Other situations in life may bring similar feelings, such as children leaving home, leaving home for the first time ourselves, or the break-up of a marriage. Death can take many forms, but the result is the same: pain — and a lot of it.

It is not easy to walk through these times. Everything in us wants to cut and run, find another path, locate a hiding place, discover some way to numb the sorrow. But when we choose to walk through it with the Lord, it allows Him and those around us to minister to us. There were times I felt defeated by my situation, and that talking about it, even writing about it, would not be right because it sounded so discouraging. But in YWAM, both in England and internationally, there have been deaths, and I know many people who have lived through difficult situations. So I hope my experience will give hope and reality.

Into the valley

My parents were in their 80s, living on the Essex coast. This was four hours’ drive from their only close relative — me. I knew the end would be difficult, but it was not something they were able to talk about.

In 2005 my mum developed serious dementia, leaving my dad as full-time carer. In April 2006, as mum’s condition deteriorated, he could no longer cope. After 57 years of marriage, she no longer recognised him, or me. This was a terrible blow for him. She needed help with every aspect of life, and slept only about two hours a night. It was then I realised that my dad was looking ill. I got mum into respite care (not easy in itself!) and dad to the doctor — and later the hospital. I was told he had cancer, and



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because of his age and frailty there was nothing they could do. He was given three to six months. I remember coming out of the hospital with him, knowing he didn’t understand his situation, knowing I had my mum to care for as well. It is in these times that we need to not fear and to feel God’s rod and staff leading us on.

The way ahead looked grim, but I knew I had to lay down my responsibilities for a time and focus on caring for my parents. My dad agreed to move in with our family in Derby. I arranged for mum to move into a care home here in the city. Dad lived five months with us, and we had some very happy times. I got to know my dad better than I had ever done before. We went on a lovely holiday together as a family. Our kids were able to build some wonderful memories with him.

One special time was when dad and I toured his old haunts in the East End of London. This was very enlightening for me. I knew he had grown up in difficult times, but now, as we walked around his old neighbourhood, he was able to share much more. It felt quite a Dickensian experience. He showed me this tiny, two-bedroom flat where he had lived with his mum and dad, and had shared a bed with his five brothers. A family of the same size lived downstairs, and both families shared the same outside toilet. He began to tell me how poor the East End was during the early 1920s. Looking back on that visit, it gives me renewed vision for our inner-city areas. We’re not the only ones living in the valley of the shadow of death, and God calls His people to help those in need and find ways to encourage people out of physical and spiritual poverty. (It also reminds me that it is an area similar to this that will be regenerated for the 2012 Olympics!)

Coming through on the other side

We celebrated my dad’s 84th birthday in August. It was only the last two weeks of his life that became difficult, but he passed away peacefully at home with us. As a family we had said our goodbyes over the five months of living life together. In the midst of the sadness, I feel great joy that I was led to walk this final journey with him.

My mum lives in a care home five minutes from me now. She lives in a happy little world all her own, where she sings and dances frequently during the day. In some ways, I have already lost her as well, but I can still see her happiness.

So I thank the Lord for bringing me through this time, where there has been joy even in the hard times. He has taught me yet again that if we trust Him and don’t run away from the difficulties of life, He will take us through to where “goodness and mercy follow us all the days of our lives.”

May you, too, after difficult times, find yourself at the other end of the valley of the shadow of death, knowing that indeed His goodness and mercy has followed you all the days of your life.



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