



# WHEN GOD & GRIEF MEET

TRUE STORIES OF COMFORT & COURAGE

**LYNN EIB**

*Author of When God & Cancer Meet*



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*When God & Grief Meet: True Stories of Comfort and Courage*

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“Great writing about grief is all too rare. In this book you will journey with people who have faced incredible losses—the kinds most of us don’t even want to think about: people who have lost loved ones to cancer, heart attacks, car accidents, plane crashes, suicide, and even murder. Yet despite unbelievable grief and distress, each found a God who cared and was present. This is an essential book for all who have suffered a loss—I guess that means everyone.”

**JAMES A. AVERY, M.D.**

Medical director, Visiting Nurse Service of New York Hospice Care; assistant clinical professor, Mount Sinai School of Medicine

“Lynn Eib weaves together a magnificent patchwork of griever’s stories with the golden thread of the powerful testimony of God’s words. If you’re so brokenhearted you don’t know if you’ll survive—if your soul is so parched it feels as if it’s cracking and turning to dust—if you’ve cried to the point that your tear glands feel as if they’ve dried up, don’t miss the soothing and healing balm in this wonderful book. When God and grief meet, true healing can begin.”

**WALT LARIMORE, M.D.**

Award-winning medical journalist; coauthor of *His Brain, Her Brain*

“When you’re grieving, it helps to spend time with other people who’ve been there—people who understand the very real fears, disappointments, and sorrow that you are going through. In *When God & Grief Meet*, Lynn Eib introduces us to a series of people who not only share their stories of grief but who offer us wise insights and practical ideas for getting through it.”

**NANCY GUTHRIE**

Author of  *Holding On to Hope* and coauthor of *When Your Family’s Lost a Loved One*

*“When God & Grief Meet* is a poignant collection of heartwarming real-life stories of those who have found the significance of spirituality in searching for guidance through their grief journeys. This book is a valuable resource to address the most challenging questions one experiences following the loss of a loved one. Lynn has, once again, through the stories of others found comforting words to create peace at this most difficult time in life. I wholly endorse this very valuable grieving tool.”

**JUDY LENTZ, R.N., M.S.N.**

Chief executive officer, Hospice and Palliative Nurses Association

“Grief is hard and lonely work, but in these compelling stories and honest reflections from Lynn Eib, you will find a community of people who understand your sorrow and a God who restores your hope.”

**HAROLD G. KOENIG, M.D.**

Professor of psychiatry and behavioral sciences; associate professor of medicine; codirector, Center for Spirituality, Theology and Health, Duke University Medical Center

“The price of human caring is grief and loss. Whatever one’s present state of loss, Lynn provides the reader with an understanding of the grief process and how the application of an active faith can help one live through troubled times. The gift of this book to someone in need will make all the difference.”

**ROY SMITH, M.Div., Ph.D.**

Licensed psychologist; president, Pennsylvania Counseling Services

“Once again Lynn Eib takes readers on a peace-seeking journey with God as the guide. Lynn masterfully takes on the difficult but universally prevalent subject of grief. Her words will resonate with you and comfort you long after you’ve finished the book.”

**JULIE K. SILVER, M.D.**

Assistant professor, Harvard Medical School; author of *What Helped Get Me Through*

TO MY HUSBAND—

IN THE WORDS OF JOE WISE:

*I'M IN LOVE WITH MY GOD*

*MY GOD'S IN LOVE WITH ME.*

*AND THE MORE I LOVE YOU*

*THE MORE I KNOW.*

*I'M IN LOVE WITH MY GOD.*

I'M FOREVER GRATEFUL

I WAS PART OF GOD'S PLAN

TO TURN YOUR

MOURNING INTO JOY.



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## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Every time I finish writing another book, I am *sure* it will be my last. And then God puts another book inside my head and I have to write again. I can tell you that without His supernatural touch, I would have had nothing of eternal value to say. If anything in this book comforts your heart, please give Him all the credit.

I also would like to say **thank you** to:

My prayer partner and dear friend, **Elizabeth Hirsh**, for praying me through all my writing and expertly editing my manuscript so I look much better to my publisher.

My husband's prayer partner and my dear friend, **Dr. Marc Hirsh**, for giving me a job that allows me to share the Lord with so many suffering and grieving people (and for not retiring yet!).

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All **the grievers in this book** for unselfishly sharing their stories with the hope they might encourage others.

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And most important, my family for loving me and cheering me on: my husband, **Ralph**; my daughter **Bethany** and her husband, **Josh**; my daughter **Danielle Joy**; and my daughter **Lindsey** and her *new*,

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wonderful husband, **Frank**. (Please note: Now that I have three books, each daughter has had a turn to be mentioned *first*—whew! Hopefully, my sons-in-law are not as competitive and won't demand equal time.)

And, of course, my parents, **Robert and Gaynor Yoxtheimer**, for giving me such a great start in life and for living long enough to see my writing success!





## TRUSTING THE MAGNETIC POLES OF THE EARTH

Let's be honest: I never wanted to write a grief book and you never wanted to need one.

Frankly, I like movies with happy endings, fairy tales where everyone lives happily ever after, and answered prayers for miracle healings. But right now you and I are past all those hopes and dreams. Instead we are faced with harsh reality.

I don't know your exact circumstances. Perhaps this enemy called Death snuck up and unexpectedly stole away your loved one. Or perhaps you had been expecting its arrival for some time. Either way it was an unwelcome intruder which brought the ending you never wanted to see.

So I *do* understand that you'd rather not be in the position to *need* this book. But if you picked it up for yourself, I'm honored you have chosen to take my words along with you on your grief journey. If someone gave you this book, I'm praying you'll be just curious enough about

what will happen when God meets your grief that you'll keep reading. And if you're not quite ready to read yet, that's okay with me. Just put the book aside (hopefully on the top of your pile!). I believe that sometime in the coming weeks you'll know you're ready. I'll still be here for you then.



It might seem strange for me to say I didn't want to write this book. After all, I am a journalist, and writing normally gives me great joy. I write and speak mostly on the topic of faith and medicine, drawing on my years of experience as a patient advocate offering emotional and spiritual support to cancer patients and their caregivers. As a longtime cancer survivor myself—I was diagnosed with advanced colon cancer at the age of thirty-six in 1990—I love working in my oncologist's office encouraging those facing this dreaded disease. It *can* be a very sad job because more than half our patients die from their cancer. But at least some become survivors, and there's always a glimmer of hope that even those with dire prognoses might defy the odds.

With grief, there's no such glimmer. Nothing I write will change the reality of the loss you are mourning—which is why I was reluctant to write this book. But while my words can't change your past, I believe these true stories from others' grief-storms will give you comfort in your present and courage for your future.

These stories come from people of all walks of life

who have experienced many kinds of difficult losses. Some have lost loved ones to cancer and heart attacks; others have had their worlds ripped apart by a car accident, a plane crash, a suicide, and even a murder. I have no doubt you'll find at least one person facing a grief-storm who has feelings very similar to yours.

The focus of the stories is *not* on how the loved ones died but on how those left behind are finding the strength to continue living without them. My hope is that these stories will help heal your heartache as much as they have mine.

I started feeling especially helpless dealing with grief a few years ago as I watched a march of mourning people come to my office searching for answers, direction, and peace after their loved ones passed away. Many had attended my Cancer Prayer Support Groups with their loved ones and really missed the encouragement those groups offered them. I kept sensing God asking me to start a similar group for griever, but if you've read my other books, you know I'm not always eager to say yes to the hard things God calls me to do. (If you haven't read my books, let's just say I tend to think I have things all figured out and can convince the Almighty my way is right!)

Starting a grief group sounded *really* depressing to me. Granted, starting a cancer support group sounded *really* depressing to me back in 1991, and it turned out to be an incredible joy, but I was certain this time that a grief group *definitely* would be depressing.

Yet the march of mourners continued to come through my office door, and I found myself spending more and more time each day offering comfort and consolation. I also was having a harder time dealing with my own grief as the deaths of my patient-friends began to add up. Every week another one would die; sometimes a couple of friends would pass in the same day.

God kept tugging on my heart, and I finally asked my boss, Dr. Marc Hirsh, if it would be okay for me to start a grief group at the office. I could tell he really didn't see the necessity of such a gathering, but if I wanted to do it, he wouldn't say no.

So I sent out notes to my grieving friends, inviting them to come to a group meeting at our office. Bringing a bunch of sorrowful souls together in the same room still seemed like a depressing plan—especially because I was powerless to change their painful reality.

But I almost had forgotten that Someone else was going to show up. From the very first grief group, it was obvious to me that God was going to do something special in our midst. Sure, there were plenty of tissues and tear-filled memories, but there also were laughs and comfort-filled words. Instead of being depressed by hearing each other's stories, we all felt just a little better as we realized we weren't quite so alone. Instead of drowning in our own self-pity, grievors reached out, as if we were throwing life preservers to one another. And instead of feeling far from God, we began to sense His love was very near.

Now, more than five years after that first meeting, the grief group members enjoy each other so much that we also meet monthly for breakfast and dinner and have gotten together for picnics, shows, and concerts. An evening group has been added for those who can't come during the day. And my boss thinks facilitating our ministry to griever is one of the more important things I do in the office and one of the best ways our patients' families can continue to see God meet their greatest needs.

So my prayer for you as you read these pages is that you'll feel as if you've been to some really good support group meetings. You'll have to add great snacks and jokes if you want them to be more like our group. (Yes, I said jokes. I start every meeting with them because I have found that griever usually haven't had much to smile about and need a safe place to learn to laugh again.)

You can "go" to a support group meeting once a day, once a week, or once a month depending on how quickly you read this book. You'll know what the right pace is for you. (And if you just can't put the book down, go ahead and have a marathon meeting—but after you finish you'll probably want to come back now and then to give the words a chance to really soak in.)

As we walk this grief journey together, I think you'll discover that many others share your deep feelings. And while I can appreciate the popular psychology that feelings are "neither right nor wrong," I also know that feelings do not necessarily mirror God's undeniable truth.



I witnessed this dilemma of strong feelings at odds with facts a few years ago when my husband and I were out on a boat with my boss, Marc, and his wife, Elizabeth.

The four of us had set out for our annual Labor Day weekend cruise on their thirty-two-foot Bayliner, despite rather foul-looking weather. We were headed up the Chesapeake Bay to a scenic, lively marina called Skipjack Cove on the Sassafas River of Maryland's eastern shore. Elizabeth had checked with her brother who lives right on the Gunpowder River leading into the Chesapeake, and he had assured us the weather reports didn't look that bad, despite a hurricane that was heading northward up the coast. (We later learned he had accidentally listened to the *wrong* forecast.)

So we took off, knowing that Marc and Elizabeth were seasoned boaters—although the whitecaps on the usually calm river should have been our first clue it wasn't a good idea.

We had a short two-hour cruise ahead of us, but it wasn't long before the whitecaps turned into three-foot waves. The wind whipped up, and then the thunder, lightning, and rain came. At first we all laughed and enjoyed the warm rain soaking us as the boat pounded through the waves. But then I stopped laughing, and my stomach started rebelling. Elizabeth handed me a supply of Ziploc bags, which I started filling. The waves were now five feet high and crashing clear over the top of the

boat's windshield, drenching us. It was nearly impossible for Marc to see out of the rain-splattered windshield, and my husband and Elizabeth were trying to read the navigational charts and look for the numbered buoys, which would keep us in the correct channel away from large shipping vessels, shallow water, and crab pots. We were too far out to turn back toward home, yet not sure we could make it to our planned destination.

And then it got really bad.

Marc announced that according to the boat's compass we were headed in exactly the wrong direction: south when we should have been heading north.

The rest of us were sure we hadn't turned around—Elizabeth was especially positive we were still pointing in the right direction. She was convinced she would have noticed if the boat had made an about-face. From past experience, I knew she usually was right whenever the two of them had a disagreement about boating.

The three of us looked at Marc, waiting to see what he would do. (Well, I didn't look long because I was busy praying there were enough Ziploc bags.)

After a long pause, Marc posed his now-famous question: "Should I trust my wife . . . or the magnetic poles of the earth?"

It wouldn't have surprised me if he'd gone with Elizabeth's feelings because she was so adamant about them, but his scientific brain won out and Marc made a 180-degree turn with the boat.

Within a few moments, we sighted buoys, confirming

that we, indeed, had been going in the wrong direction despite all of us “feeling” otherwise.

The storm raging around us had distorted reality, and our feelings had fallen fickle.



The same thing can happen in the storms of grief. We can *feel* as if we are completely alone or without purpose or unable to cope. These are the times we need a compass—something that always will steer us in the right direction. Don’t worry; I’m not suggesting that I’ll be your compass. After half a century of living, I continue to be directionally challenged. (My husband still cringes when he recalls that I once described Spain as being to “the left” of Germany!) Besides, you probably don’t need one more helpful person in your life telling you what you *should* (or *shouldn’t*) be doing.

What I am suggesting is that the God of the universe has a special affinity for brokenhearted people, and His words are the perfect compass for grievers. A magnetic compass always will point you to the North Pole, and God’s Word *always* will point you to His unchanging truths and promises.

*The LORD is close to the brokenhearted; he rescues those whose spirits are crushed.* PSALM 34:18

*He heals the brokenhearted and bandages their wounds.*  
PSALM 147:3



As our “group” facilitator, it’s not going to be my job to try and solve your problems. I can’t change the reality of your loved one’s death—no one can. But I hope to show or perhaps remind you that a deeper spiritual reality transcends our earthly reality. I’ll do it by pointing to God’s Word as your compass of undeniable truth. If you already think of the Bible as your guide to life, I know you’ll appreciate these tender reminders. But if you’ve not seriously given God’s Word central importance in your life, I hope you’ll give it a try now. You really have nothing to lose and everything to gain.

*I weep with sorrow; encourage me by your word.*

PSALM 119:28

*When doubts filled my mind, your comfort gave me renewed hope and cheer.* PSALM 94:19

And the truth of that second verse is the reason I decided I would write this book I never wanted to write—because God *can* supernaturally comfort and bring renewed hope and even cheer to those whose minds are filled with doubts and whose hearts are filled with grief.

If you want a book by a psychological expert, you’ll have to find an author with a lot more initials after his or her name than I have. If you want in-depth theological answers to the questions of suffering and dying, you’ll need to locate some of the resources I’ve listed in the back of this book. But if you want someone to

ride with you in your grief-storm and read the compass, then I'm your person. For some reason that only God knows, I believe He has entrusted me with a message for mourners. And as I share with you God's words to the brokenhearted, I believe you will see that when God and grief meet, His power, peace, and presence are bigger and more real than our uncertainties, sorrow, and loneliness. He is able to be our guiding compass.

*The LORD will guide you continually, giving you water when you are dry and restoring your strength.*

ISAIAH 58:11

*The LORD says, "I will guide you along the best pathway for your life. I will advise you and watch over you."*

PSALM 32:8

*Your word is a lamp to guide my feet  
and a light for my path. . . .*

*I have suffered much, O LORD;  
restore my life again as you promised.*

PSALM 119:105, 107

Like Marc as he captained our boat during that stormy trip, it's your choice whether or not to trust the magnetic poles of the earth.

**TAKE COMFORT:** Grief may distort reality, but there is a deeper spiritual reality that always can be trusted.

## GRIEF BOOKS FOR ADULTS

In addition to this book, *When God & Grief Meet* (Tyndale, 2009), I recommend the following resources:

*Confessions of a Grieving Christian* by Zig Ziglar (Broadman & Holman, 2004). Lessons learned by this well-known motivational speaker after the loss of his adult daughter.

*A Decembered Grief* by Harold Ivan Smith (Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 1999). Living with loss while others are celebrating.

*Don't Sing Songs to a Heavy Heart* by Kenneth C. Haugk (Stephen Ministries, 2004). How to relate to those who are suffering.

*Everyday Comfort: Meditations for Seasons of Grief* by Randy Becton (Baker Books, 2006). Thirty daily devotions to help navigate through heartache.

*Experiencing Grief* by H. Norman Wright (B&H Publishing Group, 2004). A short book helping readers deal with the five stages of grief.

*Finding Your Way after the Suicide of Someone You Love* by David B. Biebel and Suzanne L. Foster (Zondervan, 2005). A compassionate and practical guide that addresses the intensely personal issues of suicide for those left behind.

*Forgiving God* by Carla Killough McClafferty (Discovery House Publishers, 2000). Written by a mother who lost her young son and attempts to forgive a loving God who did not answer her prayers for her son.

*Getting to the Other Side of Grief: Overcoming the Loss of a Spouse* by Susan J. Zonnebelt-Smeenge and Robert C. De Vries (Baker Books, 1998). Written by two widowed persons on “overcoming” the loss of a spouse.

*A Gift of Mourning Glories: Restoring Your Life After Loss* by Georgia Shaffer (Vine Books, 2000). An excellent book on restoring your life after all kinds of loss.

*God on the Witness Stand: Questions Christians Ask in Personal Tragedy* by Daniel T. Hans (Baker Publishing Group, 1989). A pastor whose little girl died from a brain tumor answers the questions Christians ask during personal tragedy. (Hans also authored the booklet *When a Child Dies* [Desert Ministries, 1998]).

*Good Grief* by Granger E. Westberg (Augsburg Fortress, 2005). Since its first edition in 1962, this booklet has become a standard resource for people grieving losses. Written by a pioneer in the holistic health movement.

## GRIEF BOOKS FOR KIDS

*Heaven for Kids* by Randy Alcorn (Tyndale, 2006). Answers kids will understand based on the book *Heaven*. Written in an easy-to-use Q&A format, the book covers the eternal topics kids wonder about.

*It's Okay to Cry: A Parent's Guide to Helping Children through the Losses of Life* by H. Norman Wright (WaterBrook Press, 2004). Practical helps for parents explaining the symptoms of loss and unresolved grief so parents can walk with their children on this journey. Includes help for all losses, not just death.

*Saying Goodbye When You Don't Want To* by Martha Bolton (Vine Books, 2002). For teens dealing with the death of relatives or friends, as well as other non-death-related grief.

*Someday Heaven* by Larry Libby and Wayne McLoughlin (Zonderkidz, 2001). Provides biblically based answers on a topic that is not always easy to explain to a young child.

*Someone I Loved Died (Please Help Me, God)* by Christine Harder Tangvald (Chariot Victor Publishing, 1988). Includes a faith-parenting guide and helpful, personal activities.

*Tear Soup* by Pat Schwiebert and Chuck DeKlyen (Grief Watch, 1999). This wonderful picture book affirms the bereaved, educates the nonbereaved, and is a building block for children understanding grief. Excellent for adults and children. Also available in CD and video at [www.griefwatch.com/tearsoup](http://www.griefwatch.com/tearsoup).

*What Happens When We Die?* by Carolyn Nystrom and Eira Reeves, Mini Book Edition (Moody Press, 1992) A simple yet profound book showing younger children some of the reasons people die and what God has in store for us in Heaven.

## GRIEF CARE ORGANIZATIONS AND RESOURCES

***The Compassionate Friends.*** National support group for bereaved parents, siblings, and grandparents who have experienced the death of a child at any age. 877-969-0010. **[www.compassionatefriends.org](http://www.compassionatefriends.org)**

***The Dougy Center.*** National center for grieving children and families. Provides peer support groups for grieving children at no charge. **[www.dougy.org](http://www.dougy.org)**

***GriefNet.*** An Internet community of persons dealing with grief, death, and major loss at **[www.griefnet.org](http://www.griefnet.org)**, offering dozens of e-mail support groups. Their sister site, **<http://kidsaid.com>**, is a safe place for children to share and help each other deal with grief. Visitors can share feelings, show artwork, or meet with peers online.

***Grief Recovery.*** Workbooks, personal workshops, and other resources to aid in the grieving process. **[www.grief-recovery.com](http://www.grief-recovery.com)**

***GriefShare.*** Seminars and support groups (from a Christian perspective) are led by people who understand what you are going through and want to help. There are thousands of GriefShare grief recovery support groups meeting throughout the United States, Canada, and in more than ten countries. Daily devotions available online, as well as other helpful resources. **[www.griefshare.org](http://www.griefshare.org)**

***Grief Watch.*** Resources for bereaved families and professional caregivers, including those who have lost an infant before or after birth. 503-284-7426. **[www.griefwatch.com](http://www.griefwatch.com)**

***Outreach of Hope.*** Resources from a Christian perspective offering guidance and support for those who suffer, including those who have lost a loved one to cancer. Prayer support, online devotionals, and professional resources. 719-481-3528. **[www.outreachofhope.org](http://www.outreachofhope.org)**

***Stephen Ministries.*** A one-to-one caring ministry by trained lay ministers in local Christian congregations. Devotions, as well as grief resources and training opportunities for Stephen Ministers, are available online. **[www.stephenministries.org](http://www.stephenministries.org)**