

LAMENT FOR A SON

On October 10, 2004, my heart shattered like a bottle thrown from a speeding car. That was the day my 21 year-old son died from chronic rejection of a heart/lung transplant he'd received almost five years earlier.

We were blindsided when Jordan was diagnosed with pulmonary hypertension just after he'd turned three. There had been little warning. When the doctors finally realized and explain-ed the condition, we were told in no uncertain terms that he would not live to graduate from high school. The timely miracle of a transplant in January, 2000, gave us new hope and two really good years before he developed bronchiolitis obliterans, a death knell for lung transplant recipients. In 2002 we were again told time was short.

For virtually eighteen years we lived in the shadow of a guillotine, with a two-year reprieve, before he actually died. I'm so grateful for the nearly five years the transplant gave us. He could once again do things he hadn't been able to do for years, like ride a bike and play basketball with his dad and siblings. It allowed him time to buy and wreck a couple of cars, begin college, get a job and move out from under our protective care and experience a bit of grown-up independence. Even more precious to my mother's heart, it allowed us time to watch him grow from a teenager into a wonderful, engaging and godly young man. The time and memories are priceless.

But just in case there is any doubt, the anguish is overwhelming. From the moment Jordan was born I couldn't imagine a world without him in it, and now that world is here, tilted off its axis. I miss him every day, and will even if I live to be 100. When I lie awake at night I can see him so clearly in my mind's eye I swear I could count his eyelashes! His familiar voice reverberates in my head. My dreams play tricks on me because in them he is always very much alive. I strain to hold on to every memory. I'm terrified of forgetting the smallest detail.

My dear friend Paula, who lost her fourteen year-old son Scott to bone cancer over eleven years ago, called me after the funeral and said, "Just don't be surprised when the world goes on." But it wasn't the world going on that was shocking, it was *me* going on. Sleeping, waking, showering, scrambling eggs, loading the dishwasher, grocery shopping, answering the phone. I felt as if I were sleepwalking through my life. It still seems surreal to be doing normal things when everything about my life feels abnormal now.

I lost one of the few people who knows me better than anyone and still loved me unconditionally. Yet I know he is safe and well and whole and rejoicing in the presence of the Lord! I know he has tasted the glories of heaven and wouldn't come back if he could. Part of me wouldn't want him to. I'm torn because I have two other children and a husband who need me and there is still much for me to do here, but there is also an unquenchable yearning in my heart to be with Jordan. Like Paul, I can say with conviction, "Oh death, where is thy sting?" When it's my turn, I will only rejoice.

Sometimes I miss him so much I can't draw a normal breath because of the crushing weight of the loss. It's then that I cry out to God and He comforts me with the comfort that only He can give. He has been "my Rock and Redeemer; my very present

help in times of trouble.” In my prayer time one morning He directed me to John 11 where I read the story of Lazarus. In verse 4, Jesus tells His distraught disciples, “this sickness is not unto death, but unto the glory of God, that the Son of God may be glorified by it.” But curiously, down in verse 35, it says simply, “Jesus wept.” That struck me. Why was Jesus weeping? He’d just declared that God was going to be glorified!

I found the answer in Genesis. In chapter 1:26-28, mankind was given the power to produce life in a deathless world. Adam and Eve were expected to fill the earth with children who would never know death. God’s original plan was that all lives ever conceived would live for eternity. Our Bible should have only been two chapters long and ended with the last verse in chapter two where it says, “And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed.”

Unfortunately, we have chapter three. You probably know the story. Adam and Eve got stupid and the world God intended was plunged into chaos. The most heart-breaking verse in the entire Bible has got to be Genesis 6:6 where God surveys the aftermath of sin on His precious creation and it says, “The Lord was sorry He had made man on the earth and was grieved in His heart.”

Have you ever been sorry you had kids? I mean, kids are kids and I’ve had three of them and we’ve certainly had our moments, but I’ve never been sorry I had them. Even with the stress of one being chronically ill and ultimately dying, I’d do it all over again.

God didn’t need us. He enjoyed wonderful, perfect, satisfying fellowship within Himself for eons before He decided to branch out and experiment. However, the nature of love is to give and God wanted to exercise His great power and creativity by focusing on something where He could pour out His love. Voila! Here we are!

So why was the God/man Jesus weeping before He raised Lazarus from the dead? The only possible explanation is that just as in Genesis, He was overcome by the devastating toll sin had taken on His precious creation. He saw the tremendous cost of Satan’s temporary victory and the tragic consequences of the fall even though He knew He was about to empty hell and take back the keys of Hades and death. People were suffering and dying and He wept because it was all so unnecessary.

God never intended a world in which awful, tragic, horrible events occur. Because they do, and we suffer, His own heart is broken into infinite pieces. When we experience a grief, a loss or a tragedy, we are devastated. Yet God suffers exponentially. Daily people are going to a place He never intended for them.

Here’s a staggering thought: God, who lived perfectly within His entity before creation, chose to separate part of Himself from Himself after the fall. God the Son came to earth and was physically separated from God the Father for the first and only time in all eternity. They still communicated through prayer, but they were physically separated. That one act forever changed the Godhead because now Jesus sits at the right hand of the Father in His resurrected body!

But He went even further than that when He died. The Bible defines death as separation from God. If you know God through salvation in Christ, only your physical body dies, which is, of course, the easiest death. When Jesus died on the cross not only

did His physical body expire, but His *spirit* was separated from God. The great and mighty God of the universe, the One who created everything we see and can't see, the One who named all the stars (Isa. 40:26) was ripped apart! It's no wonder the earth shook and the sky turned black. Creation itself was crying out in agony for its Creator. For three long days God experienced something He had never experienced before and will never experience again! Who can grasp this?

Why would God subject Himself to something so cataclysmic and unthinkable? For us, of course! To provide a way of escape so not a single person would have to suffer the same fate He did, of being separated from God. Because of that great act of love, I *will* see my son again! Not as soon as I'd like of course, but I will see Jordan one day and when I do, we will never be apart again. Ever! (By the way, I've already submitted my request for God to build my mansion next to his.)

Consider this: God who loves us with an everlasting love, who meets us in our grief because He knows a more staggering grief than we will ever know, longs to comfort us. When sorrow overtakes me and I cry out, "I've buried my son!" He whispers to my heart, "I did too." He understands our suffering. He wants us to fall into Him, to pour out our hearts and receive true comfort that only He can give. We will be doing ourselves a huge favor if we let Him. And maybe, in doing what He longs for us to do, in responding to Him, we can be part of healing *His* heart.