



breathing
through
grief

A DEVOTIONAL
JOURNAL FOR
SEASONS OF LOSS



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PROOF

**DORINA LAZO
GILMORE-YOUNG**

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Dorina Lazo Gilmore-Young


Ink &
Willow

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Introduction

WHEN I SPOKE MY WEDDING VOWS, I never dreamed those words—“in sickness and health, until death do us part”—would mean burying my husband eleven years later. I imagined having babies, doing ministry as a team, and chasing careers. We dreamed of traveling to distant shores and fulfilling dreams together.

I never imagined the word *cancer* would one day separate us before we were old and gray.

I never dreamed there would be a day when I would usher my young daughters—ages two, five, and eight—into the room, one by one, and urge them to kiss Daddy one more time.

I never dreamed I would be cradling his hand in mine, fingering that wedding band—an unending circle of love between us—as his hazel eyes moved toward dawn’s light streaming wildly through the blinds of our bedroom window the moment before he left his broken body behind.

I never dreamed I would kneel by his grave when our three girls were still so young, and we would all have to whisper our goodbyes.

This is a story I never would have written for myself. But this is the story I’ve lived. I’ve also learned the grief journey can be lonely. We can start to second guess ourselves when we are navigating grief. We can start to wonder if we are the only ones on this wild and weaving path.

Maybe you haven’t lost a spouse but you have experienced loss in another way. Maybe you have buried a parent, a friend, or a child. Maybe you have left a job, a community, or a church. Maybe you have faced infertility or experienced a miscarriage. Maybe you have been abandoned by a family member or betrayed by a friend. Maybe your marriage is

broken or you have endured some kind of medical trauma. Maybe your heart is bleeding from the injustice in our world.

Friend, this book is for you.

I wish I could give you a five-step plan, grant you a wish from a magic lamp, or write you a how-to guide that could help you get through grief faster. Unfortunately, the only way through grief is *through*. You have to do the work. No prescription or pill will help you bypass that pain. However, I’m here to offer you a hand because I do not want you to journey alone.

This journal is an invitation for you to make space for your own grief. Accompanied by glimpses into my personal story, each devotional section will invite you to process your experience as you fill these pages with thoughts, prayers, fears, and any other whispers of your heart, both in response to the Inhale prompt sections and in the free-writing Exhale sections. As you read these words and write on these lines, I pray that you will be present to your own grief journey in the way that most suits you. After all, grief is always unique, and I hope you will feel the freedom to approach this journal not as a prescribed rule book, but as an encouraging guide, companion, and confidante. My prayer is that these stories, scriptures, prayers, and prompts will help you catch your breath and gently guide you toward the healing that only comes through communion with Christ.



When It Feels Hard to Breathe

I WAS STANDING IN THE MIDDLE OF THE COMMUNITY GARDEN for a “serve day” with my daughter’s second-grade class when I received the phone call. I hardly remember what my husband, Ericlee, said, but I remember I felt like I had just received a sucker punch to the gut. Results of biopsy. Melanoma in the lymph nodes. My healthy, athletic husband had cancer. At forty.

I stood there frozen, somewhere between the rows of corn and kale, holding a diaper bag and several water bottles for the kids on the field trip. *What should I do? Text our family? Call our life group? Cry? Sink into a heap in the dirt? Scream? Pray? Leave the kids and go to my man?*

My head swirled with various scenarios, but I was stress paralyzed. Couldn’t move.

The fear started to suffocate me. It was hard to breathe.

Have you ever had the wind knocked out of you like that?

Maybe you’ve received some devastating news, an unexpected diagnosis, a surprising text message, or a phone call regarding the death of a loved one. It’s tempting in those hardest moments to hold our breath, to power through, or to brace ourselves for the worst.

In the Old Testament in Exodus 3, there’s a moment when Moses asks God His name. He replies, “I AM has sent me to you . . . Say this to the people of Israel: The LORD, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob has sent me to you.” This is my name forever, and thus I am to be remembered throughout all generations” (Exodus 3:15–16, ESV).

In the original Hebrew, God’s name was YHWH—translated LORD in English Bibles today. Bible scholars and commentators explain that these four letters represent breathing sounds or aspirated consonants.

God’s very name—*Yahweh*— means breath. YH was for the inhale, and WH signaled the exhale. This connection is no coincidence, for God Himself fashioned Adam from the dust of the earth and breathed life into his lungs (Genesis 2:7). God spoke the sun, ocean, sea creatures, and wildlife into being. But humans are a special creation because God intentionally breathed life into us.

We were created in God’s image, in His likeness (Genesis 1:26). We are not God, but we are like Him because we have His breath. His spirit dwells inside us.

Friend, I want you to remember that God is our breath. He can breathe new life into you today.



Breath prayers are short meditations or phrases that help us focus on God, who breathes life into us. Breath prayers help us to be mindful of our breath, our bodies, and the Holy Spirit in us. Consider speaking these words out loud or saying them silently to yourself. You might close your eyes and open your hands if you feel comfortable.



INHALE A DEEP BREATH.

EXHALE, EMPTYING ALL THE AIR FROM YOUR DIAPHRAGM.

BREATHE IN DEEPLY AND SAY:

Yah

EXHALE:

weh

INHALE:

Is with

EXHALE:

me

REPEAT THIS A FEW TIMES.

Amen.

inhale

What do you notice about your breathing today? Is it difficult to breathe? Is it easier than yesterday?

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What are some of the things that help you breathe more easily? Maybe it's listening to music, gardening, strolling in your neighborhood, or talking to a friend. Jot down a list of some of the practices you might try.

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When you think about God breathing life into Adam's nostrils, how does it feel to know you have the same breath of God in your lungs?

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exhale

Use the “Exhale” pages for putting down whatever thoughts, fears, worries, sorrows, or other emotions are weighing on your heart.

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The LORD merely spoke, and the heavens were created. He breathed the word, and all the stars were born.

—PSALM 33:6 (NLT)

Permission to Grieve



TOO OFTEN IN OUR CULTURE we get obsessed with getting over grief. We are afraid to pause and give ourselves space to lament the hard things. We stuff down our emotions. We are eager to avoid the memories and get on to the next thing.

But grief is like a tangled ball of yarn. We must unravel it in our own time. It's not linear. Every grief journey is unique. It requires time and space, patience and intention. No step-by-step plan, no stage of grief, and no support group will make it all better. Sometimes what we really need is permission to grieve.

After my husband died, I started saying no to a lot of commitments and a lot of invitations. I stepped down from most of my ministry and leadership roles so that I had margin to grieve. I knew this was an important part of caring for myself and creating necessary space for my three daughters to grieve the loss of their daddy.

I needed people to hug me and say they didn't know what to say. I needed friends to sit with me and weep. I needed permission to travel, to order dinner, to stay up late reading. I needed permission to sing, to run, to write, to eat, and to cry. I needed permission to lean into the hard memories and forge new ones with my girls. All of these were expressions of my grief.

That was the beginning of my journey into lament. In those days, I learned that lament is an invitation to bring our grief, our sorrow, and our pain to God. As Mark Vroegop writes, “There is deep mercy under dark clouds when we discover the grace of lament.” Lament is not a Band-Aid or a quick fix. It's a pathway through the dark night of our souls. It's a



reorientation back toward God. Sorrow and sadness may be endured alone, but lament is bringing our grief into the presence of God.

One of the reasons I love the Psalms is because David provides a perfect model for lament.¹ He is not afraid to cry, question, vent his frustrations, wallow in his emotions, or pour out passionate praise. In many ways, reading the Psalms is like peeking into David's prayer journals. David embraces lament as a practice, and it continues to lead him back to God.

Friend, you have permission to experience grief your way. You don't have to grieve the same way your mama or father-in-law or best friend or that widow grieved. My grief is personal and different, and yours will be too. You have permission to embrace it.



Let David be your lament coach. He wrote 73 of the 150 psalms that are included in the book of Psalms in the Bible. The largest group of psalms are laments, in which the author presents a troubling situation to God and asks Him for help.

Take some time to read Psalm 13 now. In these six short verses, David models for us what an individual lament sounds like. He starts with questions and doubts. He feels distant from God. Then David cries out to God for help and answers. His language is vivid and emotional. He names his fears of his enemies. And in the last two verses, he expresses his trust in God's character.



¹ Mark Vroegop, *Dark Clouds, Deep Mercy* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2019), 22

