

PRESENTED TO:

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FROM:

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# DIVINE DISRUPTION

# DIVINE DISRUPTION

**Holding on to Faith**  
When Life Breaks Your Heart

Dr. Tony Evans, Chrystal Evans Hurst,  
Priscilla Shirer, Anthony Evans,  
& Jonathan Evans

with Jamie Blaine



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If God showed us the whole journey,  
we'd never take the first step.

—DR. LOIS EVANS

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# LIFE INTERRUPTED

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness,  
goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

—GALATIANS 5:22-23

## ANTHONY EVANS (JR.)

Gentle strength. That is my mother, her spirit, the way she carried herself. Mom was never aggressive. True strength does not need to push or be loud. It's quiet, calm. Gentle strength comes from the peace that passes understanding, from resting in the Lord.

Whether Sunday morning, Wednesday-night church, or gathered in the kitchen at home, Dr. Lois Evans was the same, and this is how we were raised—Chrystal, Priscilla, Jonathan, and me. With that same gentle strength, in the most difficult moments of her fight, she looked each of us straight in the eye and said, “I want you to be doing ministry together.”

All four of us are involved in some form of ministry individually, each of us doing our own thing. I've been in and out of Los Angeles for years, working in the film and television industry while continuing to do gospel and worship music. Occasionally, we would work together on projects, Priscilla and me or maybe a few dates with Jonathan and Chrystal. But Mom's message was clear. *All of you. Together.*

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With that said, we took the hardest season of our lives, in the midst of personal, national, and global tragedy, to come together and honor our mother's final wish. We are calling this ministry together Kingdom Legacy. It's our way of paying tribute to her strength, her legacy, her faithfulness to raise us day in and day out as servants, to impact people for the kingdom and to glorify God.

This is where we begin. Small steps and open conversations. Telling our story in the most authentic, transparent, and humble way possible. Asking the difficult questions, examining our faith. Is it stage faith, or is it real? What beauty can truly come from ashes? What does it mean to dig deep as life has broken our hearts?

*Broken* has become something of a cliché in Christian culture. We have lost loved ones, battled sickness, and struggled to make it through the toughest of days. We have sat in far too many doctors' offices, hospitals, and funeral homes. Praying, waiting, crying together and alone. Fighting through sleepless nights and anxious cross-country flights. Drinking bad coffee. Seems even our scars have scars. Broken is no cliché. We have all been hit so hard.

**Life has been interrupted, but we have to believe there is a divine message in the disruption somehow. One that could save our lives and, ultimately, bring us closer to each other and God.**

The Evans family is not alone. The entire world is shaking. War, famine, fear, plague, civil unrest, financial loss, and family members dying. Even as I write these words, we are in the midst of a freak winter storm that has trapped Dallas under a blanket of snow and ice. Millions are without power and water, even sleeping in their cars to stay warm.

The regularly scheduled programming of our lives has been disrupted. Remember that? As a kid, it was always frightening (and frustrating) when the network would cut into one of my favorite TV shows with

## LIFE INTERRUPTED

a news bulletin. In Texas that could mean tornadoes coming or gale winds, some man-made or natural disaster barreling down. But the message coming through was important. It just might save your life.

Life has been interrupted, but we have to believe there is a divine message in the disruption somehow. One that could save our lives and, ultimately, bring us closer to each other and God.

So, in starting ministry together, we invite you, the reader, in. Everybody together. My mother always liked that. She knew something was coming. Proverbs says that a good parent lays up treasure for generations to come. *All of you. Together. Trusting God.*

That's the only way through.

# BEFORE WE BEGIN

Here we are, together, all four Evans kids and our dad, to talk about holding tight to faith when life has broken your heart.

This is a different kind of book. In it, you'll find our family's story of disruption, but because we are a family of pastors, teachers, preachers, and worship leaders, it's our nature to take what we have experienced and find the good. We hope you will learn and grow spiritually as we walk this road together, seeing God's hand through hard times.

What follows in part 1 are lots of stories we've never shared before, a little teaching and preaching, and then, in part 2, the tone becomes more devotional. But more importantly, it's all a conversation, like coming over to our family's house on a Saturday evening to sit around the table and talk about life, God, and how to keep moving in the face of enormous struggle and loss. Each of us will speak, and we pray that you find hope and unique perspective in our individual voices.

## JONATHAN EVANS

And some of us might talk more than others. Just as if we were sitting around the table.

## ANTHONY

That's Jonathan, my younger brother. To keep things clear, we'll label each family member before they speak. There will be a lot of back-and-forth, sometimes all five of us, sometimes only two. We've never done anything like this before. Actually, we're not sure anyone else has either.

## PRISCILLA SHIRER

We have all been through hard seasons, times in life when it seems like the hits keep coming and you can barely catch your breath. Sometimes we look at Christians in the spotlight of public ministry and think they have some secret measure of faith, like they've figured out how to stay above the struggles of life. But no one is above them. We'd all love to find a way to go around trouble, but often you just have to walk through it. Our family has been through it. And we're going to walk you through with us, step-by-step.

**Sometimes we look at Christians in the spotlight of public ministry and think they have some secret measure of faith, like they've figured out how to stay above the struggles of life. But no one is above them.**

## CHRYSTAL EVANS HURST

I'm the oldest child and the processor of the family. Whenever we have conversations, I like to gather my thoughts completely before saying a word. I might come off as quiet at first, but I'm thinking and formulating exactly what I want to communicate.

## BEFORE WE BEGIN

If I've learned anything during this difficult time, it's that we are all in it together. I'm ridiculously aware of how much we need each other. I've never been through anything tougher. I don't think any of us have. I have also never been so grateful for my family.

So welcome to *Divine Disruption*. This is our very first published work as a family and the first ever Kingdom Legacy project. We're sharing our individual experiences, woven together, just as our life stories have been intertwined the last few years. We have been blessed and pray this legacy work blesses you too.

————— **PART ONE** —————

# **GOOD GOD, HARD TIMES**

I will not cause pain  
without allowing something new to be born, says the LORD.

—ISAIAH 66:9 ncv

If there's one thing you can count on in your life,  
it's that your path will not always be easy.

—DR. TONY EVANS

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## ONE

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# WYNTER IN JULY

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

—PSALM 34:18 NIV

## PRISCILLA

July 24, 2018, was my nineteenth wedding anniversary, so my husband, Jerry, and I decided to go out to Clearfork in Fort Worth for our anniversary dinner. Afterward, we stopped at HomeGoods to buy a few things for the family. Apparently, that's what couples who've been married two decades do. Somehow even wandering down the aisles of a regular store seemed romantic that day.

I was halfway down the aisle with some washcloths and towels in my hand when my cell phone rang. I fumbled with it to quickly check the screen.

Jonathan Pitts

That's my cousin Wynter's husband. Growing up in the Evans family, first cousins are like another sibling. In fact, Wynter and I

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actually called each other sister-cousins. And beyond our biological connection, she and I were honest-to-goodness best friends.

Wynter, Jonathan, and their four daughters had been staying in our old house while preparing to transition to an exciting new season in life as God called them to ministry in Tennessee. I tapped the answer button.

“What’s up, Pitts?” I said jokingly. My baby brother’s name is Jonathan, too, so we call Wynter’s husband Pitts.

No reply. “Pitts? You there?”

The deepest, most awful wail echoed through my phone. I froze, waiting. Finally, the words broke through.

“She’s not breathing, Silla,” he cried. “I don’t think she’s breathing.”

“Who’s not breathing?” I said.

Jerry turned to me, sensing something was horribly wrong from the tone of my voice.

“Wynter,” Pitts replied. “She stopped breathing and . . . I don’t think she’s gonna make it.” He kept on talking, but I couldn’t make out the words for all his tears.

“Ambulance!” I shouted. “Did you call the ambulance?”

I looked to Jerry. He nodded back. I threw the towels on the shelf, and we started running for the car.

“We’re on our way,” I told Pitts.

I called our friends Tom and Rachel, who live next door to our old house, and frantically told them what was happening. Within three minutes they were with Jonathan, Wynter, and the girls.

It was a thirty-minute drive from where we had been celebrating to the part of town where Wynter and Pitts were staying. Silence in the car. Jerry reached over and took my hand.

“What if she doesn’t make it?” he asked.

Wynter and I were tight as sisters, together at every step, high and low. I couldn’t even imagine such a thing. We were still so young and had so many plans for our families and ourselves.

## WYNTER IN JULY

Soon I received a text letting us know she was being taken to the emergency room at Baylor University Medical Center, so we drove straight there. All four of Wynter's daughters were in the waiting room with Tom and Rachel when we arrived. We hugged each one, and I looked to Rachel to see if there were any updates on Wynter's condition. Rachel sadly shook her head.

I knew we were supposed to wait out front for further news, but I couldn't. It was unbearable. More than thirty minutes had passed since Pitts first called me, and Wynter was still not breathing? Did that mean breathing on her own? Did they insert a tube or put her on a ventilator or what? I stared at the locked door that led to the back of the emergency room, feeling helpless. And just then my dad walked in.

*All right, enough, I thought. We're doing something about this.*

### DR. TONY EVANS

I was already in bed when the call came that my niece Wynter had been rushed to the hospital. I called Jonathan Pitts, and he said they were at the Baylor emergency room and Wynter still wasn't breathing. He was weeping.

"It doesn't look good," he said.

Pitts and I worked side by side in ministry, and Wynter was as close as one of my own daughters. Their kids even call me Poppy.

"I'll be right there," I told him. I got up, pulled on some clothes, and headed to the hospital.

Priscilla caught me as soon as I walked through the ER doors and somehow talked a nurse into letting us in the back. We walked into the room. Jonathan was sitting beside Wynter's bed with his head in his hands.

"She's gone," he said.

Then he said it again. And again. I felt the sadness, the shock, the

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heartache, seeing a young man sobbing over his thirty-eight-year-old wife. I put my arms around his shoulders, trying to offer comfort.

After a moment, he stood to hug Priscilla, and she helped him walk into the hallway to get some air. I stayed in the room with Wynter for a moment longer. Looking down at her, I was struggling to comprehend how something like this could happen to someone so full of life. It seemed only yesterday she was a tiny girl in my arms, teasing, laughing.

I reached out and touched her cooling hand.

Just a couple of weeks before, a friend of mine had been pronounced dead. While still on the exam table, as the family wailed, he began to twitch. They could not believe what they were seeing, and neither could the doctors, who had just called the time of death. Now, my friend was up, walking around, alive and well, praising the Lord. I have seen it with my own eyes. Something like that will jump-start your faith.

I laid hands on my niece and prayed, *God, you can turn this around right now.* Jesus wept, and Lazarus got up. Jairus's daughter died, and Jesus said, "*She is not dead, only sleeping.*"

*Turn it around, Lord, I pleaded. Please.*

My wife, Lois, arrived soon after. Family and church family began to stream into the lobby of Baylor Medical Center. Wynter's daughters came into a small room where Jonathan told them the devastating news. And then I watched a heartbroken father gather his girls into his arms and lead them in singing "Good Good Father" and several other songs of praise.

In all my years of ministry, it was one of the most incredible displays of spiritual maturity I have ever witnessed. In the midst of tragedy, there was trust. In the most painful moments, something beautiful was taking place. One by one, family

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## WYNTER IN JULY

members slipped into Wynter's room to say their last goodbyes. Pitts joined us and asked Priscilla to lead us in song. She thought a moment before choosing the old hymn "Victory in Jesus."

Lois slid her hand into mine, and we began to sing.

## CHRYSTAL

I was at choir rehearsal. My phone was steadily buzzing, but I was in charge of the music for our upcoming women's conference, so I noticed the noise but didn't pick up. When the buzzing didn't stop, I finally looked down and realized the texts were all from Priscilla.

911 Call Immediately Please

I paused choir rehearsal long enough to call her back. My face was calm, but my heart beat faster as I anticipated what news might be on the other end of the call.

Priscilla didn't say much. She was vague. In normal, everyday life, Priscilla doesn't like to incite drama or unnecessarily excite people, so her voice was calm and steady, but I could tell that whatever was going on, it was bad. She told me I needed to come to the hospital and that something was wrong with Wynter. Immediately, I let the choir know I had an emergency and asked for their prayers. My cousin Faith was in the room, so I grabbed her, and we headed across town to Baylor.

On the way to the hospital, I prayed and asked God to help Wynter, that whatever emergency had caused her to be rushed to the ER would be alleviated as quickly and painlessly as possible. Sensing that it was worse than I could imagine, my prayers intensified. I asked God to cancel whatever arrow the Enemy had aimed at Wynter and her family and for a miracle, if that's what was needed. And I believed that He could do it.

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Like Priscilla, I want to keep things calm, so I don't lead with my emotions. But it's more than that. I'm also processing. As I walked into the emergency room, my face was set, steady. Though waves of worry were rolling inside of me, the surface remained still.

Well, that was me until they led me back to the room and I saw Wynter lying there, so still. I knew the situation was serious, but I didn't know she was already gone. I stood there in disbelief, thinking she would wake up and start talking to me at any moment. I touched her. She was still warm.

It's strange what you notice in traumatic times. Wynter hated for anyone to touch her feet, so of course, being super-close first cousins, I would do it all the time, just to drive her nuts. It was our little inside joke. Grabbing her toes at opportune times and tickling the bottoms of her feet would unnerve her in the best of ways. It gave me a reason to laugh because I loved messing with her. I loved *her*.

Wynter loved to be cozy. And now she was lying in a hospital bed, wearing socks that I had bought for her. Blue socks, the soft, fuzzy kind, hugged her tiny feet. Wynter so loved those fuzzy blue socks. They went with her everywhere.

And now, under bright lights in a sterile cold room, she lay still.

In that moment, I no longer could be rational or calm. There was nothing to think through or process, nothing I could take charge of or change. When there's nothing I can do to make things happen, I am lost.

As the waves rolled to the surface, the tears did too.

## JONATHAN

I was at home, having a normal day with my family. My wife, Kanika, and I were in the bedroom, wrestling with the kids, playing around. Kamden was climbing on my neck while Kylar hopped up into my lap. That's when Priscilla called.

## WYNTER IN JULY

“What are you doing?” she asked.

“Nothing, really. Just messing around with the kids and stuff,” I replied. “Why?”

“Can you leave the room?”

I could hear the seriousness in her voice, so I jetted toward the kitchen.

“Wynter’s on her way to the hospital,” Priscilla said.

*Poor little Wynt, I was thinking. What’d she do? Stub her toe or something?* I was sure it was something minor. Wynter was thirty-eight, in the prime of her life, seemingly healthy in every way.

Silla’s voice cracked as she continued. “Jon, they don’t think she’s going to make it.”

A chill crept up my spine as I tried to process what I’d heard. “What’s going on?”

“She’s not breathing,” Priscilla said. “They’ve got her in an ambulance headed to the ER at Baylor now.”

Kanika must have sensed something was wrong because she came flying out of the room. I hung up and told her what was going on. We have four young children, so I was scrambling, trying to get in touch with our babysitter. The atmosphere in the house was chaotic, as the kids could tell there was trouble going down.

I got in touch with our sitter, told her we had a family emergency, and, thank God, she was able to come right over. She told us to go and not worry about what time we got back. Kanika and I jumped in the car and sped to the hospital, praying the whole way.

*God, I know You’re going to come through. I know You’re going to make this happen. God, save Wynter. Heal her. Make it better, Lord.*

Every prayer we could think of, we were sending up to God. By the time we pulled into the parking lot at Baylor, we were prayed up and hopeful, fully believing the Lord would come through. We felt certain Wynter would be awake and alert by the time we arrived, and we would all have a laugh. Like, *Girl, you almost died on us! What is wrong with*

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*you?* Whatever it was, the doctors would figure it out. God would fix it. Everything would be all right.

We were the last to make it to the emergency room. In the hallway, Wynter's daughters ran to meet us, crying, falling against our chests. Pitts came up, kneeled, and put his arms around them.

"Mama's going to be okay," he promised. "Jesus has her now."

*Yes, amen!* I thought. *The doctors are working it out. Jesus has got her. He's going to make all of this okay.*

We walked over to where the rest of the family was waiting. Everyone seemed too stunned to speak. Jerry, Priscilla's husband, finally told us the news.

"Wynter died," he said. "They're on their way to take her to the morgue now."

At that moment, the gurney passed, carrying her body. That's when the horrific reality hit. And that's when we completely fell apart.

## ANTHONY

It was another fast-paced day in Los Angeles, traffic buzzing, projects pitched and planned, everything running in high gear. That's the way I like it, the life I love to live.

I had a meeting set up with a potential talent manager and was rushing to get dressed, get in the car, and head to a West Hollywood meeting spot, with all its vibed-out glam. I was racing down Sunset Boulevard when I saw the first text from Priscilla. *Catch you later, Silla*, I thought. *I'm already running late.* Then my phone rang, and it was Jerry.

I put it on speaker because it's illegal to hold your phone while driving in L.A. Jerry cut straight to the point. "Wynter's gone," he said.

"Wait, what? What do you mean, Jerry?" I asked, trying to process his words. They could not mean what I think he meant. So I said it again. "What do you mean?"

## WYNTER IN JULY

His tone was solemn. “Anthony,” he said, “Wynter died. She’s gone.”

That’s it. That was all there was to say. Explaining anything more would have been too hard in the moment. My fast-paced day stopped cold. I turned the car around and headed back to throw a bag together. Then I booked a flight and headed out for what felt like the longest ever flight home.

I sat in that tiny airplane seat with a blanket over my head, crying my eyes out, thinking, *This cannot be real*. Wynter and Jonathan Pitts are as close as my own brother and sisters. We had just been together for a Fourth of July weekend at the lake, and they were so excited. Wynter’s writing career was growing, and Pitts had just been hired to a pastoral position at Church of the City in Franklin, Tennessee. Whatever else was going on in life, we all came together every month for a time of pure fellowship and fun, to bond, refresh, and catch up. Life is about family. Family and God. Everything else is just illusion.

Suddenly, the L.A. dream didn’t mean much anymore.

I landed in Dallas late, so it was the next morning before I made it to my family. When I saw Pitts and the girls, we just fell into each other’s arms. We cried and kept holding onto each other. It all felt so surreal, like being stuck in a really bad dream.

There was nothing to say, no words. The only thing that could be done at that point was to be there.

I had never really dealt with anything like this before. I didn’t lose my grandfather until I was twenty-eight years old. I suppose our family had been blessed.

## PRISCILLA

We were at the hospital until well after midnight, consoling each other. Then we slept a few hours before heading back to Jonathan and the girls to offer whatever help we could. It was Wednesday, which meant

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that we had a night service at church to figure out. As usual, Dad was scheduled to finish up a sermon series. Even though Wynter was like a daughter to him, I know my father, and I knew he planned to show up and preach like he always did.

My siblings and I knew that word had started to get out about Wynter's passing.

"Dad, you can't just preach like nothing happened," we told him. "People are going to know. Would you consider suspending your series and addressing what happened instead? It could be a great help to others who are experiencing unexpected loss and grief. Let tonight's service be about that."

We also knew the only way to get Dad into a conversational style, where he'd share the disappointment and pain he was feeling, would be if all of us were on the platform together, sitting next to him and asking him questions about trusting God during difficult times. No

**How can we reconcile the kindness of God when He allows such difficult things? What do you do when you are disappointed with God?**

pulpit, no podium, no traditional preaching. We had been on the go for more than twenty-four hours by this point and hadn't had time to shower or change clothes, but we decided that "come as you are" applied to our situation.

At 7:00 p.m. we drove to church and walked onstage in flip-flops and jeans, grungy gym clothes, tennis shoes, and hair pulled back into a ponytail. The four kids with Daddy, asking questions, talking about tragedy and unexpected loss. How can we reconcile the kindness of God when He allows such difficult things? What do you do when you are disappointed with God? How does Dr. Tony Evans handle it when something like this happens?

I thought it would be healthy for the church to see their pastor talk

## WYNTER IN JULY

about pain in such a personal way, not as a great and gifted preacher, but simply as a human being struggling to comprehend heartbreak. He has always been viewed as a superhero of the faith. But none of us are superheroes all the time. We hurt and struggle and fall and get back up again. Only by grace and God's help do we find the strength.

---

## TWO

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# GOD KNOWS WHAT HE'S DOING

Teach us to number our days,  
that we may gain a heart of wisdom.

—PSALM 90:12 NIV

### TONY

I struggle with wanting to minister to everyone when a crisis hits and letting that overshadow my own feelings. Obviously, there are people hurting more than I. Four young girls lost their mother; a husband is grieving his wife.

But I do hurt. I hurt. People come to my office and want to give up because life has become too hard. I know they are coming to me and looking for hope. A good shepherd takes care of the sheep. But I also have to be strong enough to try to offer hope when I am hurting too.

The sudden loss of a loved one is something everybody faces or will face at some time. Besides, we had been talking about some intensely emotional issues at the church around that time. It would be hard to stick to the regularly scheduled sermon series while we were in the

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midst of a crisis that could have such a spiritual influence and impact on the congregation.

So I looked at that Wednesday-night church service as a *kairos* moment, an opportune time to reflect on God's heart, offer authenticity, and point to the hope we have in

**We pray, *Let this cup pass from me.* But we have to believe that God knows what He is doing when He's not doing what we want Him to do.**

Jesus. It would allow us to express what we were dealing with and ask our church family to pray for the Pitts family.

There was confusion with me. How could this happen to someone who appeared to be a healthy thirty-eight-year-old mother, especially in light of the new plans the Lord had brought into their lives and the new vision they were sharing? And so it raises the question,

How do you balance the goodness of God with the tragedies of life?

My son Jonathan took the microphone and asked me, "Dad, how do you keep going?"

"Because I believe what I preach," I responded. "Where would I be in a situation like this without an anchor? I believe Wynter is in a better place. I believe in the sovereignty and goodness of God. And because I believe, I keep going."

The Bible is full of questions, people asking why. Why do the righteous suffer? That's the theme of the entire book of Job. How do I make sense of this? How could this happen? Why?

I cannot answer that. Deuteronomy 29:29 says God has secret things, that He does not have to answer our every question. That is His prerogative. But I would tell Wynter's children this: Your mother loved the Lord. And the Lord loved your mother. So, in some way beyond our understanding, He determined it was her time. I don't like it, and you don't like it. We pray, *Let this cup pass from me.* But we have to believe that God knows what He is doing when He's not doing what we want Him to do.

## JONATHAN

I am the most frustrated when I come up against something I have no control over. Death and timing belong to God, and He doesn't allow me into that space. All I can do is trust that God knows what He is doing. My father tells me this, and I am a father, too, so I know it is true. There are things fathers must do that their children cannot understand. That's what trust is.

## ANTHONY

Priscilla told me that Daddy had agreed to do the Wednesday-night service, so that's what we did. We all went to the church. The tech team handed each of us a microphone, and together we walked up the few steps to the platform. Chrystal, Priscilla, Jonathan, and I sat beside Dad.

We all have unique personalities when crises hit. Chrystal is quiet and deep. Jonathan gets logical. Priscilla becomes a caretaker. My dad goes straight to faith, straight to God's Word. Me? I am the super-sensitive member of the Evans family. I go directly to emotions.

I sat quietly as Dad talked about clinging to God in hard times. I wanted to support my family, but I was upset. *Why are we sitting on stage at church? Not even twenty-four hours after tragedy hits, and we're up here talking about it in public.* I didn't feel like we owed that to anyone. I didn't feel like anybody would expect it so soon. So when it was my turn to speak, I told the truth about how I felt.

"If I were not in this family, I would have been gone a long time ago," I confessed. "Because this kind of stuff throws me way off. If you're like me, when you lose a family member that is so close, that you are so connected to, and you race to their side and hold her young daughters as they cry, and they look up to you and ask, 'Uncle Nene,

## DIVINE DISRUPTION

why?’ And you are so full of rage because you *cannot* believe this is happening. It wasn’t because of something evil. Wynter’s heart stopped. I feel like God allowed that to happen. So, honestly? I cannot go to hope and faith so quickly. Right now, I am just mad.”

What do you do when you are not built like Dr. Tony Evans, the great theologian? Even though we share the same name, even though I should be thankful for the breath in my lungs, even knowing God does not owe me anything. How do I process my feelings of betrayal and anger? I can’t immediately start quoting Bible verses. First, I have to process the pain.

Thank God, I have always been able to bounce things off my parents, to tell it to them straight. Dad told me it was okay to be angry, as

**Dad told me it was okay to be angry, as long as we do not allow anger to cause us to sin or turn our heart against God.**

long as we do not allow anger to cause us to sin or turn our heart against God. In that moment, the vulnerability, the authenticity of being able to express my anger and confusion, to say it out loud, over a microphone, to all the church members gathered that night—there was freedom just in that simple expression.

Owning my anger was the beginning of understanding that Jesus is still with me, even in grief. We don’t have to get everything resolved before we come to God.

## PRISCILLA

After Anthony spoke so honestly, there was a smattering of soft applause. “I wonder,” I said, “since Anthony is willing to be so honest, who here has ever felt the same way?”

Hands went up all across the room.

## GOD KNOWS WHAT HE'S DOING

Truth is, I felt that way too. Wynter had so much life left to live. We had so many discussions about what our lives could look like once our children were grown. There were trips to take and adventures we intended to have. She was such a gifted writer and speaker, passionate about outreach to young girls, excited to move to Nashville and take the next step in her ministry. Wynter had been incredibly productive in recent years, casting vision for an effective girls ministry and writing books that were blessing thousands of people. She was in the middle of a new writing project and was so excited about that. Through it all, she never let ambition derail her from staying focused on God, loving her husband, and prioritizing her children—and never missing the opportunity to take one of her treasured afternoon naps.

And she always made time for family and friends. Our favorite thing was to slip off for movie night and get lost in a mountain of popcorn, talking, laughing, acting silly. But our conversation could turn deep in an instant. Her welcoming voice was low and raspy, soothing like the first warm cup of morning coffee. The words she shared always came from a place of intuition and peace. There wasn't anything I couldn't tell her. Wynter was my very best friend. I could not understand why a loving God would decide to take her home.

## TONY

Jesus was baptized by His cousin John, and not a year later, King Herod had John thrown into a cruel prison. A devious woman danced for the king, a deal was made, and John the Baptist was brutally executed. Christ was fully God yet fully man. He lost a beloved cousin too.

This shows me that we can be angry but still respectful. It's okay to feel the pain of God disappointing us. God already knows how we feel. Hiding it doesn't help. We can take our anger to Him.

We've also got to have the right theology of death, an eternal

## DIVINE DISRUPTION

perspective. Otherwise, death can only be viewed as destructive. In God's economy, He makes an astounding statement in Psalm 116:15:

**It's okay to feel the pain of God disappointing us. God already knows how we feel. Hiding it doesn't help.**

“Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of his faithful servants” (NIV). And Paul said in 2 Corinthians 5:8, “To be absent from the body [is] to be present with the Lord” (KJV). The body remains, but the soul is very much alive.

Wynter now lives with God. And God is excited about that.

The seventh chapter of Ecclesiastes tells us that it's better to go to a funeral than a party because only at a funeral do we take life seriously. In good times, no one thinks about the end. We are laughing and having fun. That's good, but at a funeral, we face the important things in life: family, love, and the legacy we leave behind. At funerals, we are faced with perspective. “Death is the destiny of everyone,” King Solomon promised in verse 2, “the living should take this to heart” (NIV).

In Psalm 90:12, King David recorded a prayer of Moses: “Teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom” (NIV). No one numbers their days at a wedding party. But at a funeral home? I am in my seventies now. I do not know where the time went. Seems just yesterday I was turning thirty-five. Time goes so fast.

## CHRYSTAL

If you get rid of God, you still have your problems. Sickness and evil still exist. The disciples doubted; they struggled with faith in the face of loss and fear. The Bible says many of them turned away and no longer followed Christ.

## GOD KNOWS WHAT HE'S DOING

In John 6:67–68, Jesus said to those who remained, “Do you want to leave, too?”

“Lord, who would we go to?” the apostle Peter replied. “You have the words that give eternal life” (NCV).

We have not solved our problems by running from God. The goodness of God is all around us. It only comes into question when bad things happen. So, now, when facing tragedy, we question God.

But what about all the days when there were no questions, when we were laughing and celebrating life? We have to put the sorrow and pain against the history of God’s goodness.

How can a good God allow evil? That is the question of theodicy, the virtue of God versus the reality of evil. God has given us a choice. Joshua 24:15 says, “If serving the LORD seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve” (NIV).

With choice, the potential for evil exists because we can choose against the good. Freedom allows evil to exist, but we make evil happen. Choices have consequences. The decisions we make affect others.

That is why we need a sovereign God who can at least choose to intervene in the reality of evil in this world. If I am left to other people, then I’m subject to anything anybody wants to do, anytime they want to do it. But if I have God, then evil has to flow through His fingers before it can get to me. Even when things seem out of control, I have hope that God is in control.

Like Peter, I ask, Where else could I go? If you take that away from me, I have no hope. I would rather cast my life with a God I don’t understand than with people.

For believers, the present is not life. This is only an introduction to life. If we keep that in mind while expressing our honesty to God,

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## DIVINE DISRUPTION

we can keep the right perspective in our pain. We can offer praise in the midst of our tears. Like the apostle Paul, we can pray at midnight while still in chains.

When the storm is raging, trust God.

## THREE

# A NEW NORMAL

Therefore we will not be afraid,  
though the earth trembles  
and the mountains topple  
into the depths of the seas,  
though its water roars and foams  
and the mountains quake with its turmoil. *Selah*

—PSALM 46:2-3

## PRISCILLA

In March 2019, Dad was inducted into the National Religious Broadcasters' Hall of Fame at the annual Christian Media Convention held that year in Anaheim, California. We were all so incredibly proud. According to the program that night, the NRB Hall of Fame stands as "a showcase of warriors for Christ who have lived exemplary lives of valor and compassion, blazing trails and leaving paths for succeeding generations to follow. NRB's most prestigious award is presented . . . for invaluable contribution to the field of Christian communications, exhibition of the highest standards and evidence of faithfulness in Christ."

## DIVINE DISRUPTION

That's my father. He has worked so hard and been so faithful. My siblings, Mom, and I all flew out to Anaheim for his big night.

Once we arrived, Dad seemed preoccupied, always tied up on the phone in another room. Obviously, something was heavy on his mind. By contrast, Mom was lighthearted, but the dynamic still felt uneasy and strained. Something didn't seem quite right. NRB is always fun for my parents, catching up with old friends and making plans for the future of the ministry and the broadcast. When you have been in ministry for more than thirty years, this annual gathering is like a big high school reunion. And here Dad was, being honored for his exceptional work, but he did not seem to be enjoying it one bit.

At one point, Jonathan and I both had eyes on Dad. "Something seem wrong with Daddy to you?" I asked.

"Yeah," Jonathan said. "I see it too."

We walked over to him. "Dad, are you excited?" I asked, fishing for some clue of what the problem might be. "Tomorrow's your big day."

"We'll get there when we get there," he replied dryly.

"What's wrong? Are you all right?"

"Fine, I'm fine," he said, flashing that thousand-watt Tony Evans smile. "We'll talk about it later."

Jonathan shot me a look. We weren't buying it, but Dad is Dad. If something was bothering him, we figured he would let us know soon enough.

Friday rolled around. Jonathan knocked on my door early in the morning and grabbed my hand to snatch me out of the room. I was still in my pajamas, but so were Chrystal and Anthony, who joined us as we ran through the hotel hallway like kids on Christmas morning. I banged on the door to Mom and Dad's room. He opened it to let us in.

"It's Friday, Dad!" I said. "Tonight you're going to be inducted into the NRB Hall of Fame!"

No response. He just nodded while Mom patted him on the shoulder.

## A NEW NORMAL

“Daddy, what is wrong?” I asked. Again, he did not answer.

Later that night, we all got dressed to the nines. Banquets and ceremonies can be a bit stuffy, but when the Evans family gets together, there’s always going to be some laughs and clowning around. At least at our table.

Mom had a smile on. Dad’s old friends were stopping by the table to congratulate him on the award. He was pleasant but stoic, nowhere near his usual jovial self. We were all shooting looks back and forth at that point, wondering what could be on our father’s mind.

### JONATHAN

Dad should be on the mountaintop, but he’s stuck in the valley instead. I walked around to his side of the table and stooped down, close to his ear. “Dad,” I asked, resting my hand on his shoulder. “Are you going to be okay?”

“I love you, Jon Jon,” he replied, avoiding the question.

“I love you, too, Daddy.”



## DIVINE DISRUPTION

They called his name from the stage and announced the honor. He went up and did what I've always known my dad to do: preach a powerful, gospel-filled message about the will of God, His Word, and how the Lord can make a miracle from a mess.

### PRISCILLA

Dad received the award, posed for pictures, and shook hands with all those who came to congratulate him. We rushed to his side as soon as the induction was done. Family pictures, platform pictures, greenroom pictures. So many pictures that it felt like the paparazzi had descended on the convention center. This should have been one of the happiest days in our family's history. But for some reason, it was not. We were posing for another picture, all of us kids gathered around my father as he held his award high. After the camera flashed, I grabbed his sleeve.

"Dad, come on now," I pleaded. "You're always excited at NRB. You just got inducted into the hall of fame, and the whole night you've had a grimace on your face. Please tell us what's going on."

"Meet me in my room in ten minutes," he said, "and I'll tell you."

### CHRYSTAL

I knew right then, something was up.

### JONATHAN

We all did. You talk about four hearts pounding. All of the hairs on my arm took flight.

## PRISCILLA

We changed clothes and headed straight to Mom and Dad's room. It took me a bit longer to get my kids situated, so I was the last to arrive. When I walked in, the room was solemn.

"Okay, now we can start," Dad said, nodding to me. "Let's go."

I took a seat next to Mom.

"Kids, your mother felt a little knot on her side a couple of weeks ago," he began. "So she went to the doctor, and they performed a scan. Her cancer has returned."

Whatever air was in the room was sucked out in that moment. I reached over and grabbed my mother's hand. She wasn't tearful or upset. In fact, she was smiling calmly in a way that seemed to say, *It is what it is.*

"We are still believing God for healing," my father added. "But medically, there's nothing they can do."

## JONATHAN

I was not able to process what Dad was saying at the time. I was too numb.

"She's in stage four," he explained. "The tumor has spread all the way across her abdomen. I've talked to the best doctors. I've gone high, and I've gone low. I have gone everywhere in-between, and there is absolutely nothing they can do about it. So if I've been somber all week, it's because we are facing the hardest time we've ever faced in our family."

Dad dropped the hammer on us. Mommy had cancer, and it was terminal. Even after we were grown, my siblings and I still called her "Mommy." She never stopped mothering, mentoring, and caring for us.

## PRISCILLA

Let me explain something about our father. He's a fixer. Faith in action. Let's make a plan, come up with solutions. That has always been Dad's love language with my mother. He fixes things. Whatever it is, he takes care of it.

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Mom finally spoke. "They're not saying I'm going to die soon or anything like that," she said. "They haven't given me a time." The room was silent. "I want you all to trust God with this season of my life. I am."

Opening the Notes app on her phone, Mom began to read a few Scriptures she'd been keeping close to her heart. She told us, in no uncertain terms, that her illness should not stop the ministry from going forward, that the Enemy would take too much pleasure in our discouragement and defeat. She talked about trusting God and moving forward.

All of a sudden, from the other side of the room, a wail broke out, piercing the silence and sending a chill through our hearts. It was Dad. Up until that time I had witnessed my father shed tears maybe twice in my life. He didn't even cry openly at his parents' funerals. But that day, he began to weep and cry out, "Oh, God. Oh, God."

We were all shocked. None of us had ever seen our father break down this way. We ran to him and threw our arms around him. That's when we all began to cry.

## CHRYSTAL

To see my father not just get tearful but totally fall apart meant things were truly bad. This was a problem he could not fix. It was also why he

## A NEW NORMAL

had been on the phone so much. Dad was on a mission. He'd been calling everyone he could, any connection, anyone who might know of an experimental treatment or a clinical trial—anything that might save our mom. If my father had already turned over every rock, because he is that kind of guy, then apart from some raging miracle . . . I honestly could not bring myself to put into words the reality of what we were facing.

And then to look over at my mother, with the same level of stillness and peace she had the whole weekend, right then and there I started losing her. I hugged Mommy before we left the room and held on to her for a really long time. There was nothing to say or do in that moment, nothing except to hold on.

### TONY

Just before NRB, Lois discovered a knot on the opposite side from where her gallbladder had been removed and had it biopsied. It was a cancerous tumor. As I studied her condition, I discovered how aggressive the cancer was. I felt totally helpless because the survival rate is low, especially once it spreads across the stomach. I knew we were dealing with a serious issue. The weight of the diagnosis was so very heavy to bear. Then to have to share the news with our children? It was nearly intolerable.

### ANTHONY

I remember staring out the hotel window feeling completely blank. Our family is so used to taking action. When a problem comes up, we jump into figuring out a plan for attack. So when we heard that the end had already been determined, that medically there was no solution to Mom's problem, we felt helpless. There was nothing we could do.