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You Are Not Alone

My soul is crushed with grief.

MARK 14:34 NLT

When my father was in his fifties, he lived through a bloody revolution in the Middle East. Overnight his secure, comfortable world was gone. He watched as his friends were arrested and even put to death. His own life seemed to hang in the balance. After decades of hard work as a physician, he lost his life savings as banks simply collapsed.

Without warning, everything he knew had turned upside down. All this loss proved too much. For two years, anxiety devoured his mind. Eventually, he managed to rebuild a new life, which ultimately led him to faith in Christ.

Twenty-five years later, I fell into my own dark well as I struggled with burnout. Anxiety became my daily companion, sometimes a low hum, sometimes a debilitating roar.

One day as I sat across from my father, I tried to explain my frustration with my inability to reason myself into well-being.

THE RESTED SOUL

“I can’t argue with these irrational feelings. I can’t talk myself out of them. I can’t fix them.”

My father looked at me, his eyes welling up with compassion. He didn’t give me any advice. He didn’t come up with a plan of action. He just whispered, “I know. I know.”

In the long months it took for me to inch my way toward recovery, I have always thought of that as the most helpful moment of my journey. It wasn’t an answer or a cure. It was simply the loving empathy of a man who had lived through a similar ache and made it to the other side to find peace.

This book hinges on that reality: beloved, you are not alone.

I know.

More importantly, other women and men who loved God have walked



You Are Not Alone

this path and emerged on the other side to find rest for their souls. David, who said, “I am feeble and crushed; I groan because of the tumult of my heart,” understands your struggle (Ps. 38:8). Naomi, who felt exceedingly bitter with loss and grief, gets your dark sorrow. They’ve been there.

Most powerful of all, Jesus, who said, “My soul is crushed with grief to the point of death” (Mark 14:34 NLT), knows the burden of suffering and sorrow that you carry. They know.

You are not alone.

And peace awaits on the other side of this journey. There is an end to this travail. Your soul will be quieted. Your heart can find rest.

Settle in that hope.

Your first step is to remember you are not alone. Jesus is with you. He knows.

LINGER

Have I been feeling all alone in my pain?

PRAYER

God, I feel overwhelmed. Help me cling to You in this wilderness. Help me know You cling to *me* through every hard step. Remind me that I’m not alone. Remind me there will be an end. Holy Spirit, help me find peace before I have understanding.

OASIS

Jesus, You understand my weakness. You sympathize with it. Show me how Your companionship in the midst of this struggle is enough to see me through. ~ Hebrews 4:15

REST

*From the end of the earth I call to you
when my heart is faint.*

Lead me to the rock that is higher than I.

PSALM 61:2

Jesus, I will rest in the knowledge that You are my safe place. You are the rock that stands higher than the swelling waves of my emotions.

You Can Endure

Here is a call for the endurance and faith of the saints.

REVELATION 13:10

My husband loves sunflowers. As novice gardeners, we decided to grow several varieties in our small yard. Because we live in the cold climate of New England, we grew the seedlings indoors before transferring them outside. A lot of the seeds never germinated. Having lost over half, every single seedling became precious to us by the time we planted them in the yard.

One of the plants seemed to be doing well until a squirrel beheaded it so that only the two seed leaves remained, and even they were yellowed and more dead than alive. I was certain it could not grow back from that assault. But that plucky thing struggled, and a couple of other leaves finally shot out, followed by a couple more. It was a valiant effort. Hubby and I watched in wonder as it proved us wrong in all our predictions of doom and gloom.

Then some kind of disease attacked the delicate leaves and they

started turning brown. We sprayed them with organic pest-control oil though we had little hope. To our amazement, the sunflower started to grow again, shooting out healthy green leaves.

To our dismay, a mysterious pest started eating our plant. It was so small and damaged by this time that we were sure it couldn't get past this new assault.

But it did.

I was starting to love this plant. Nearby, other sunflowers were growing tall and producing massive blooms that drew the praise of neighbors. Even the goldfinches loved to rest in the enormous disks of their flowers.

But this little plant, which hadn't even had a chance to bloom, stole my heart. That feisty sunflower became the glory of our garden.

Its beauty wasn't in its perfection or productivity. We didn't care that it was slower than the other plants. What we loved was that our fragile sunflower held on.

Maybe right now you feel like that broken sunflower. Maybe in comparison to those around you, you feel like a failure. You feel like you have nothing but pain to show for your life.

When you are crushed by one trauma after another, you may feel like you are not worthy. But God doesn't see your life like that. You are the glory of His garden. Sometimes, our glory comes from a crushed life. A difficult life, well-lived.

Right now, your job is to hang on. To get up again and again. To hold on to Jesus and not let go.

Right now is not the end of your story.

You Can Endure

Just as all those attacks weren't the end of our sunflower. Eventually, our plant grew sturdy, shooting out healthy stalks and leaves. Every jaw dropped as its multiple blossoms opened and matured. We had long since forgotten the variety of sunflower we had planted. So those flowers took us by surprise. The only Teddy Bear variety growing in our yard produced breathtaking golden yellow fluffy blooms. We couldn't stop staring at those gorgeous, Van Gogh-worthy flowers and sigh with pleasure. After a long, hard battle, they had managed to fulfill our best hopes and plans for them.

You may feel so caught up in this present pain that you have forgotten



the beauty God has planted in you. Let me tell you: you are a marvel of God's creation! Your beauty will be fully revealed in God's time.

God's kingdom intentions for your life are mighty even if they don't translate into worldly success.

As you wait in the midst of this emotional travail, your glory shines for those who have eyes to see. Right now, when I talk to Jesus about you, I whisper, "The glory of Your garden."

LINGER

Is part of me ready to give up?

Do I really believe that God's glory will be seen upon my life?

~ Isaiah 60:2

PRAYER

Father, help me hold on. Help me endure. Help me not give in to discouragement or despair. Jesus, I choose to trust You even though I am running out of strength. Let others see Your glory upon my life in spite of my brokenness. Grant that my life will one day become beautifully fruitful.

OASIS

Jesus, do You want to give me strength to rise again and again?

~ Proverbs 24:16

You Can Endure

Jesus, will You strengthen me when I am faint and weary?

~ Isaiah 40:29-31

REST

Can anything ever separate us from Christ's love? Does it mean he no longer loves us if we have trouble or calamity, or are persecuted, or hungry, or destitute, or in danger, or threatened with death?

ROMANS 8:35 NLT

Jesus, I choose to rest in Your love. Help me be quieted in the knowledge that none of this present trouble can diminish the power of Your love at work in my life.

Enlarge Your Hope

*“Enlarge the place of your tent,
And let the curtains of your habitations be stretched out;
Do not hold back; lengthen your cords
and strengthen your stakes.”*

ISAIAH 54:2

At some point in my long battle with anxiety, I began to wonder if my future was ruined. There were weeks when my hope for restoration shriveled. Sometimes, the enemy whispered that I was now unworthy. And I believed him.

Maybe you feel that way. Maybe you feel like your future is now damaged. That you are yourself damaged. If somewhere in your deepest heart you have come to the conclusion that you are doomed to remain in this pit, small and vulnerable for the rest of your life, listen to Isaiah's words:

Enlarge the place of your tent!

Isaiah said these words to Judah when the kingdom was in a state of helpless captivity. When God's people were at their most broken. When they felt utterly vanquished.

It is one of the most counterintuitive promises of God to His people. In the midst of their shattered and small lives, He promised them an increase.

Don't measure your future by this present experience, Isaiah was promising. Get ready to grow. Get ready to be enlarged. Get ready to bear fruit.

The inference of the whole passage is that Israel will be more than it was before. You and I need to receive this promise for our own lives.

This message is as true for you as it was for captive Judah.

How can I make this claim? Because years before this prophecy, Isaiah made another prediction about the coming Messiah. This prediction was for all who belong to that Messiah, including you and me: "Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end" (Isa. 9:7).

Did you notice the word *increase* in that promise? When you belong to Jesus, His kingdom is steadily increasing within you.

Like captive Israel you are invited to enlarge your expectations of God's kingdom within you because you belong to the Prince of Peace.

Right now, in this dark place, a part of you is being enlarged. Strengthened to carry the weight of the increase that God has for you. Even though you are going through a diminished season, you can trust that God is laying a foundation in that valley for a greater glory in your life.

In every life, this will work out differently. But my friend, your spirit is increasing in this dark valley. When you emerge from it, you may still feel vulnerable. You may feel fragile. But there will be an increase in you that has been wrought by the Spirit of God.

It may be an increase in understanding. In healing. In knowledge. In

patience. In grace. In godliness. You may find an increase in opportunities, in joy, in influence.

God is increasing His influence in you in order to increase His influence through you.

One thing you can bank on: Jesus plans to enlarge your life by governing it through this hard season. So invite Him to take over the full government of your heart during this time. Give Him permission to have His way.

Whatever your increase may look like, you will be able to bless others with it. In this way, this present darkness, this fang of anxiety, will also be the servant of Christ. You can enlarge your hope without fearing disappointment.

LINGER

Have I believed that I am damaged goods, and not as good as everyone else?

Can I really believe that God plans an enlarged life for me?

PRAYER

Jesus, I invite You to increase in me and increase me. Forgive me for putting blocks in Your path. Forgive me for believing that I am worth less than others. Help me enlarge the place of my tent in my spirit. Help me expect more from You. More healing, more understanding, more grace, more influence. I welcome You to strengthen my spirit that I may one day bear the weight of all the

THE RESTED SOUL

increase You have in store for me. I invite You to take over the government of my life.

OASIS

Jesus, do You really want to increase Your kingdom in me?

~ Isaiah 9:7

REST

Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end.

ISAIAH 9:7

Jesus, I rest knowing that You plan to increase Your peace in me.