

# **Will You Wipe My Tears?**

**By Joyce Jamerson**

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*Spiritual “equipment” for the contest of life.*



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**Dedicated to all those who want to  
help others**



**In Memory of our  
daughter, Jill  
April 7, 1974 ~  
September 18, 1993**

Some people come into our lives and quickly go.  
Others stay for a while and move our souls to dance.  
They awaken us to understanding with the passing  
whisper of their wisdom. Some people make the sky  
more beautiful to gaze upon. They stay in our lives  
for awhile, leaving footprints on our hearts and we  
are never, ever the same.

Flavia Weedn

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### **FORWARD**

My journey of grief has led to invitations to speak in various places, and eventually to speak at the Florida College lectures in February of 2000. When the invitations to speak were first offered, it was a difficult decision. I didn't know if it would be a good thing; would it cause me to dwell more on grieving or take me to a place where I didn't need to be? Would I be happy doing it? But on the other hand, would I be happy *not* doing it? My decision was made easier because I could see a definite need for better understanding concerning grieving.

In addition, I couldn't picture myself standing before my Lord at judgment, knowing I had this information, to tell Him I didn't want to do His work.

Since the death of our daughter, clippings, poems and general information about grief have gone into a file drawer. You know how preaching families are about these things, I might need that sometime! So the file has served me well, although there were days when the memories were too vivid to continue, and the project had to be set aside. Rarely do we go out of town without someone mentioning *Helping the Grieving*, the tape that was made of the F.C. speech and how the tape of that speech has been copied and shared. This book has come about because of conversations with those who are grieving and comments from those who truly want to help but don't know where to start. The effort to get my thoughts on paper has been a true labor. Many times I wondered *what came over me; why in the world did I ever think I could write a book!*

Since I am neither a writer nor a public speaker, this venture has been blessed by God. We've done it together; I'm unable to do this alone. This shy servant has stood before hundreds, with shaking knees and an occasional tear, being convinced the message is needed. These pages are written to

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Christians. We, of all people, should be able to comfort one another throughout the grieving process; however, if the grief of those around us lasts more than a few weeks, our sympathy bank seems to become overdrawn.

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**If the grief  
of those  
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So I hope you, the reader, can overlook the fact that I've been out of school for many years, and have long forgotten some of the elements of writing. Just accept my words as a small attempt to bring about better understanding, and through this understanding, to ease the pain of a friend. This work only briefly discusses many important topics, so it is my hope that it will inspire the need for deeper study.

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There are several people to thank, especially those who proof read and gave me their constructive comments; but throughout this book, I have purposely not revealed many names. They know who they are and I am deeply grateful for each contribution. Many people helped my family throughout our grief journey and continue to do so. Hopefully, our focus is not on who did what, but on how to help others and how we can glorify God by doing so.

Scripture quotations are from the New American Standard Version of the Bible unless otherwise noted.

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## **Will You Wipe My Tears?** A guide for helping the grieving

### **Introduction**

My husband has often teased me about liking puzzles. He can't understand why anyone would cut a perfectly good picture into 1500 pieces! Many times, my daughter Jill and I would spread a puzzle out on the dining room table, and take days and even weeks to put it together. Sometimes the puzzle would just call our name, and anytime we passed by the table, we'd have to stop and find a few pieces. The reward comes when you see that lovely picture completed. There's a feeling of meeting the challenge and enjoying the accomplishment (although the space it took on my dining room table did become a problem!)

Once in a while someone will ask if I have a hobby. My usual reply is that *I like to cut up fabric and sew it back together again*. Now and then there's a puzzled look until they realize I'm talking about quilting! It's the same concept as a puzzle, but with a much broader sense of accomplishment. When you see it to completion, you have something that doesn't get torn up and put back into a box but involves the same principle of finding and putting together pieces. Cutting up fabric and sewing it back together may seem futile to some, but there are great rewards when you see the design come together.

Many other puzzles can come about in our lives. When our daily routines are disrupted by the bumps of life ~ illness, accidents, death ~ it may take a while to find all the pieces and get them in order again. The process of grieving is a large difficult puzzle with many pieces and it takes a long time to get the pieces in their proper place. Some struggle with this puzzle for a lifetime and, for some, a few pieces are always missing. Some work on their puzzle privately, refusing to speak of it; so we fail to learn from the experience of others and the cycle of

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misunderstanding continues.

Most of us will face this puzzle at some point in life. For many, it's the death of a parent, spouse, or close friend. The puzzle becomes more difficult when we have to bury a child as children are our hope; our link to the future.

During the September 11 ceremonies in 2004, at the World Trade Center site, this statement was made:

*Men who have lost their wives are called widowers. Women who lose their husbands are called widows. Children who have no parents are orphans but parents who have lost children ~ what are they called? There are no words to describe them.*

Whether it is a sudden traumatic event or a long lingering illness doesn't seem to change the complexity of the puzzle. Birthdays, anniversaries, and special occasions will delay the process of putting the pieces in order and as we struggle with this, many do not understand. For others, it's just a day. For grievers, it's a memory.

The suddenness of a situation may bring many questions; questions about death, about God, and the ever puzzling, *why?* For the friends who gather around, the questions are: *What can we do? How can we help? What should we say?* Can we, will we wipe their tears?

### **How will you help?**

Obviously, the needs of the moment will depend on the situation. At the onset, food, lodging, errands and babysitting may all be needed and we are happy to either fulfill the need or find someone who can. But beyond the obvious lies another set of questions.

How would you help a friend remember a special day? What is appropriate? What would be too much to say and what would be too little? What do you say when someone close to you suffers the unimaginable? When it's time to say goodbye to that aged parent? What do you say to a dying friend? To their



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relatives? To one who has just learned they have an incurable illness? To the couple who suffers a miscarriage or stillbirth? To the one whose spouse breaks their marriage vows? What *can* you say? How can you say anything when the very thought of what they're going through rips through your heart and your own emotions fail to cooperate?

Words escape us during these times and we feel lost, inadequate and frustrated. What can we do to help them with their immediate needs, and then later, to help them find the pieces of their puzzle? After some time has passed, should we even mention it? What if we say the wrong thing? At a time when our friends and family need us the most, words fail us. We don't know how to help and as a result, we usually don't say anything. After all, *time* is the healer, isn't it?

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This study is designed to help those of us who really want to help the grieving ~ to be able to wipe their tears. Perhaps you are the one who is grieving, and these pages will enable you to let others help you. Whatever the case, I hope the pages of this book will serve you; help you to help others and in turn, strengthen us so we can honor God and give Him the glory.

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### **Our Story**

Do you remember the segment on the CBS early morning show some years ago, entitled, *Everyone has a story*? Steve Hartman would throw a dart over his shoulder and it would land at a random place on a map. He then would go to the town, open up a phone book and randomly choose a name, just to see what that person's *story* would be. Everyone has one and this is ours.

Jill Louise Jamerson

The name had a nice ring to it. We had another girl's name picked out for three babies, but they turned out to be Randy, Byron and Allen. On her date of birth, April 7, 1974, the other name didn't seem to fit, but Jill seemed just right. After an initial period of distress, due to meconium aspiration, she was a healthy little bundle of energy.

Her brothers thought she was a queen and treated her as such, often teasing her about being one. They all doted on her, adored her, and as brothers will do, pestered her. They dressed her in funny clothes, invented puppet shows, and one Christmas season wrapped her with artificial pine garlands. We had to stop them when it came time to plug her in.

She loved life and drank it all in. Each stage was a challenge and an accomplishment. Everywhere we went; people were drawn to this friendly, bubbling little ball of enthusiasm. She named Jesus as her Savior and committed her life to Him, obeying Him in baptism and influencing others with her zeal and happiness in doing right.

After the whirl of band concerts, boyfriends, and football games known as high school (oh yes, academics were in there somewhere), she was ready for college days to begin. At the

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chosen school with a Christian atmosphere, she delighted in being able to participate in activities with others who had also chosen to walk with God.

One enjoyable day included lunch with friends, practicing softball after classes and an impromptu volleyball game after supper. The remaining events of the day would change our lives forever.

It was September of 1993 and the details were finally all in place. My husband, Frank, was packed and ready to embark on his first teaching trip to Romania, made possible by the fall of communism. It had been a whirlwind of printing teaching materials, securing Bibles, finding a source of grape juice to be used for communion plus packing supplies and personal needs for the trip. Finally, he was off on an adventure that would last a month and would lead in many directions. What an opportunity! Our excitement was shared by the Southwest church in Lakeland, Florida where he preached and they were supporting him both materially and spiritually.

Since we had never been separated for that long, I wondered what I would do with my time for a month. We had three sons in different locations in Alabama and Jill was just beginning her second year at Florida College in Tampa. Since she lived on campus, there was no need to stay home by myself for a whole month so I was excited about my own travel plans and the opportunity to visit family. Two sons were in Dothan, the oldest was in Selma and my parents lived further north in Athens, Alabama so I intended to see them all. All the appropriate phone numbers and itinerary had been given to friends and family.

My first stop was in Dothan. Byron and Angi had moved into a new house, so I packed the sewing machine with plans to help make curtains while there. Allen and Julie were in the process of building a new house, and the foundation had just been poured. I had worked on curtains most of the day on September 16 and was ready to break the monotony by watching Byron play volleyball with his hospital league. Allen and Julie were with me, so afterward we went by their property

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to see what had been done that day. When I returned to Byron's house, Angi was rather upset, having received a phone call from Florida College. The information received was that Jill had collapsed after a volleyball game and had been taken to University hospital in Tampa and I was to wait there for a call from the doctor. My first thoughts were that she had become dehydrated. I had warned her many times about playing sports in the hot Florida sun, but when the doctor called, it was quite a different picture. She was unconscious due to what they thought was a cerebral hemorrhage and I should come as quickly as I could. When I questioned the doctor, his chilling comment was unsettling. *"These things don't tend to get better."* I knew then we were facing a desperate situation.

Immediately, packing began for the trip home. Leaving as soon as possible, Allen and Julie drove with me to Tampa, and upon our arrival at the hospital in the wee hours of the morning, the doctor took us into a private room to explain there was little hope for recovery. Frank had been contacted and with a few complications, was on his way home. Family arrived to join friends who were waiting with me. Early Saturday morning, September 18<sup>th</sup>, there was no more brain activity. We arranged to donate her vital organs, and that would be done after her daddy arrived, later in the day.

Four months later, the medical report revealed that she had a malignant brain tumor, a grade two astrocytoma that had hemorrhaged. We had no knowledge of this condition, and no warning. There were no previous symptoms.

Neither of us would ever speak to our daughter again and that lone phone call would forever change our lives and throw us into what is known as the grief process.

## **What is Grief, Anyway?**

*"Why is your face sad though you are not sick? This is nothing but sadness of heart," Nehemiah 2:2.*

What would be your own personal definition of grief? In your own mind, you may have several possible definitions. The word naturally reminds us of the difficult time surrounding the loss of a loved one. It may remind us of the ravages of war and of families who have lost a leader, a son or daughter. Miscarriage or still birth brings about a unique kind of sadness that many do not understand. The loneliness of divorce, learning of life threatening illness or being a caretaker throughout illness, losing a job, dealing with disobedient children and many other situations, remind us of times of grief. We even mourn the loss of a beloved pet. Grief is the feeling of loss after an event and may be as simple as a passing moodiness or as intricate as a deep crushing agony.

The scenes of September 11, 2001 are etched in most of our minds and we remember the horrors of that day and the wrenching display of grief: disbelief, agony and deep distress. We had seen a similar display on a much lesser scale on April 19, 1995, the day that 168 people lost their lives at the hand of a madman in the Oklahoma City bombing. On the day he was executed, our local newspaper printed the photos of all those who were killed. I looked at it through tears, realizing every photo represents torn relationships and crushed dreams. Our hearts are touched with the grief of others, especially in the midst of such senseless circumstances. That page of photos is still in my files, knowing that behind each one is a special story of changed lives.

Grief is deep sorrow caused by an extreme loss. We use the words bereaved, deceased, loss, affliction, and death. We, as Christians, speak of death as a passing ~ from one life to another. Webster defines bereaved (bereft) as *to be deprived of*

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*something; left sad and lonely, as by a death.* There are many terms used synonymously for grief: sorrow, woe, tribulation, sadness, trial, suffering or melancholy. The words mourn, lament, weep and moan all give us the picture of overwhelming distress. Mourning is usually the outward expression of grief and may differ according to cultural background.

Grief produces such feelings as anger, fear, regret, shame, guilt, resentment, loneliness, uselessness and a desire to die. It's extremely difficult to focus ~ on anything. Some will be so crushed they can barely function; others try to put the best face forward while in public and do their grieving privately.

Sudden death seems to complicate all of the above, making adjustment even more difficult. I would compare the grief of sudden death to being severely beaten and when your wounds need attending, those around you expect you to ignore it; to act *normal* as though nothing had happened, saying ~

*Pull yourself together!*

*Be Happy*

*You're young ~ you can marry again or you can have other children*

*The sooner you let go the better*

*Take some time off*

*Get a job*

*Get some rest*

*Stay busy*

Such a conflict of advice and emotions!

Upon suffering a loss, whether from long term illness or from sudden death, there will be three general stages: shock,

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suffering and recovery. (I've often wondered about the word recovery. It sounds as if you'll be able to return to life as it was, when in reality, you'll never be there again.) There are lots of other little stages in-between, but those are the three basic ones. For those who have been care-givers, the shock period is shorter, but it is still there. There are feelings of numbness and hopelessness. Necessary chores are accomplished only by habit. It's easy to become convinced that you are stuck in this unhappiness and will be this way forever.

Grievers vacillate between logic and emotion, and easily bounce from one to the other, depending on the circumstance. They constantly think of the lost one and cannot at first, replace those thoughts regardless of how hard they try. Most grievers will not confess all their thoughts and agonies, and silently bear much of it alone, realizing that their presence as well as their thoughts, if they reveal them, are a burden to others because most people just do not understand. Those grieving might actually try to conceal their own pain, for fear of bringing pain upon their friends, and in desperation, wonder about their own sanity. This fear leads to isolation.

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Going about routine chores for the first time, is exactly that; the *first* time, and the first time for doing everything lasts 365 days. It is a lonely feeling. It is difficult to be in public, whether it be at church or the grocery store. Life is being lived in a cloud or a bubble, only observing and not actually participating; just going through the motions and trying to get through that day, longing for night time so hopefully sleep will come. Just when those enduring grief think they are reaching the top of the grief ladder, they fall down again and have to start over. It's a tiresome, exhausting drudgery ~ every ounce of strength seems to be gone. Eating, a normally enjoyable activity, becomes labor. Exhaustion, whether mental

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or physical, takes its toll on both mind and body.

C.S. Lewis said, "I never knew grief felt so much like fear." The grievors may be tempted to isolate themselves because of fear:

- a) of the unknown
- b) of bringing pain to their friends
- c) of appearing weak or helpless
- d) of losing their own sanity
- e) of entering into life by themselves

There are so many variants in grief it's no wonder that many friends do not know what to do! We don't know what to say and we don't begin to know how to wipe their tears. Sometimes they're in one mood; sometimes another. Why can't they settle down? When will it ever end? Why do they talk about their loved one? Why *don't* they mention their loved one?

Remember the descriptions above and realize that grief doesn't disappear after the funeral. Daily activities are handled out of necessity and the reality of life has not yet begun. In fact, the danger period is from four to seven months following, when most friends no longer visit or send cards and expect the griever to be *over it*. The grief process does not end on a schedule. It may fade and reappear for many years in an unpredictable cycle, sometimes when it is the least expected.

It may be difficult to understand why they behave as they do. If we are patient and wait for appropriate moments, we can show our willingness to help. Quietly letting them know we are available when they want to talk is another way to bring comfort. Prepare brief questions: *Does it still make you sad to speak of \_\_\_\_\_? Whenever you are ready, I would enjoy hearing some stories of \_\_\_\_\_ (life, school, work, dreams, marriage, etc.)*

Remember, they're not only mourning the personal loss, but also the loss of relationship. It may be a spouse, son, daughter, friend, brother, sister, etc. The relationship seems



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to be gone. It's a rare person who doesn't love to hear stories about their loved one. Memories are made to be shared. We still enjoy seeing Jill's friends from time to time and love to hear funny *Jill* stories. She is our daughter and in our hearts, the relationship is still there. The stories are part of her. To some, the relationship is lost, unless they have sufficient memories to sustain it. She was a child, grandchild, sister, niece, cousin, friend, girlfriend, pal, acquaintance, counselor and so on. In the sweet and poignant story Tuesday's with Morrie,<sup>1</sup> one of Morrie's aphorisms is: *Death ends a life, not a relationship*. Oh, the lessons Mitch learned while caring for his old friend and mentor. It's a wonderful chronicle of caring ~ each one for the other.

### **Grief reactions**

Shock

Numbness

Loneliness

Anger

Disoriented ~ Confused

Lack of appetite ~ Increased appetite

Hard to face friends

Want to be with people

Want to be alone

Too depressing to be with others ~ Dragging others down

Difficult to be in public

Foggy and forgetful

Emotional

Pre-occupied

Overwhelmed with legal details

Questions regarding faith

Depressed

Illness

Guilt ~ Regret

Fear

JOY

HOPE

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This list, and many variations of it, appears in grief management materials and I offer my apologies for not being able to note its original source. Joy and Hope are at the bottom of the grieving list and they do qualify as grief reactions.

**Death ends  
a life, not a  
relationship**  
– Morrie  
Schwartz

Eventually joy and hope will return, as grievers turn outward instead of inward. Progress is being made when they can reach out to help someone else, and in the process, begin to heal themselves. Laughter will eventually return and the sting of the loss will soften.

All of the above symptoms are part of the whole grieving picture, so you can see that it can be quite confusing. Men and women grieve very differently. Many women would rather discuss the situation, and most men will retreat and not discuss it until they can find a solution and once again face the world. Ways to grieve and lengths of time to grieve vary according to personality, upbringing and culture. The first year was so difficult, both Frank and I silently wished we *could* hide somewhere until it had passed. In our society though, continued isolation only increases the problem. Although his book is not about grieving, John Gray points out the differences in problem solving in Men are from Mars; Women are from Venus.<sup>2</sup>

When a person, either male or female, just cannot talk about it, journaling may be helpful. It gets the feelings out without fear of embarrassment. (For several months, I would incessantly run details over and over in my mind, unable to control it or put them aside, until I finally wrote them all down. Was I afraid I'd forget? I don't know, but writing it all down helped solve the problem and I think I've referred to that document only once since.)

*"So I said, 'Oh, that I had wings like a dove! I would fly away and be at rest. Indeed, I would wander far off, and remain in the wilderness,'" Psalm 55:6, 7.*

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### **Questions for study & discussion:**

1. Give your own personal definition of grief.
2. Name and discuss the three general stages of grief.
3. Prepare three brief questions that would help start a conversation with a griever.
4. Can you add to the list of grief reactions?
5. Why are joy and hope at the bottom of the list of grief reactions?
6. Make a list of Bible characters who suffered the loss of family members.

### **THE MOST CARING CHILD**

Author and lecturer Leo Buscaglia once talked about a contest he was asked to judge. The purpose of the contest was to find the most caring child. The winner was a four-year-old child whose next door neighbor was an elderly gentleman who had recently lost his wife. Upon seeing the man cry, the little boy went into the old gentleman's yard, climbed onto his lap, and just sat there. When his mother asked him what he had said to the neighbor, the little boy said, *Nothing, I just helped him cry.*<sup>3</sup>