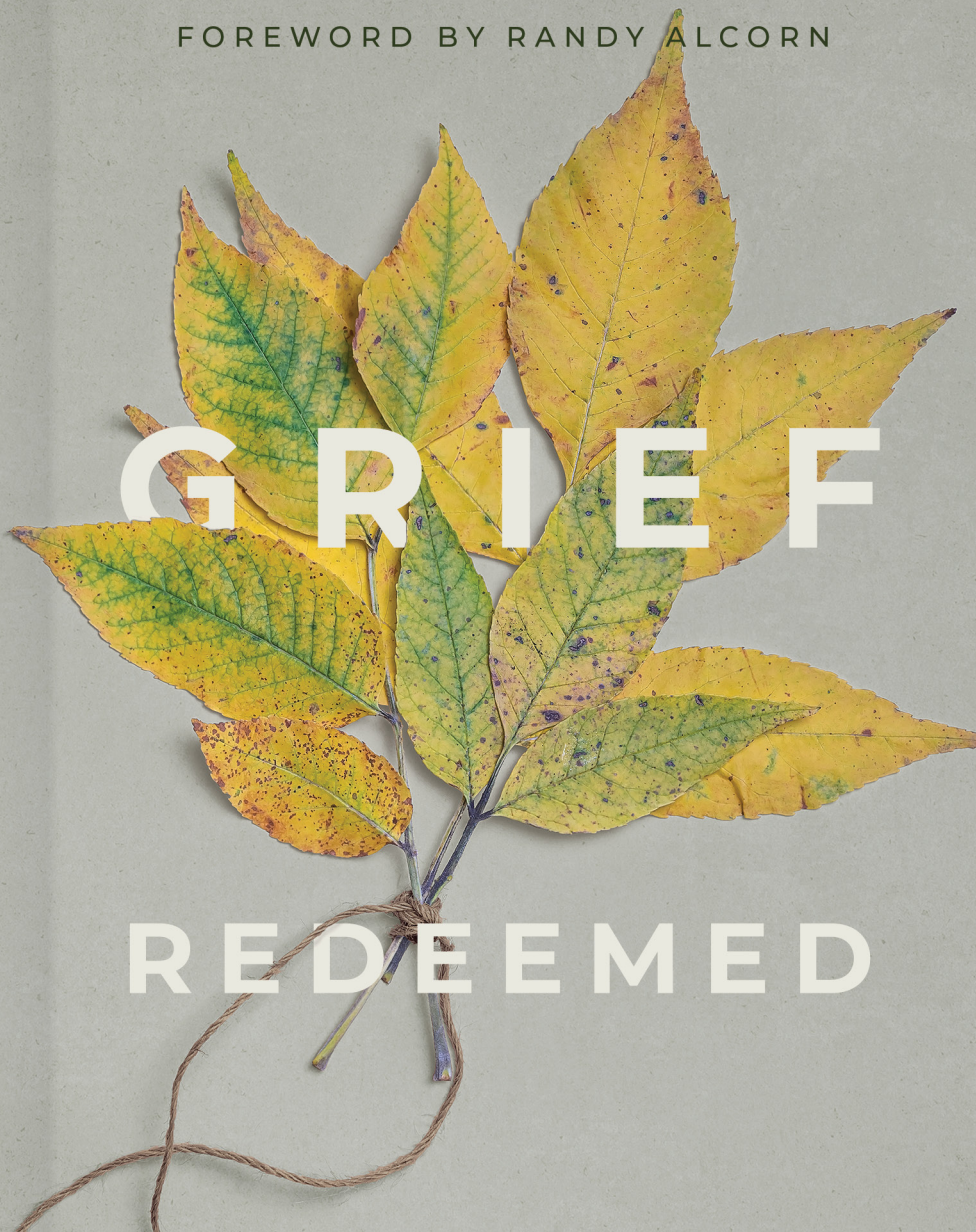


STEPHEN SILVER

FOREWORD BY RANDY ALCORN

GRIEF

REDEEMED



**G R I E F**

**REDEEMED**



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Dedicated to the memory of Sandra Sweeny Silver

*Now faith is the assurance of  
things hoped for, the conviction  
of things not seen.*

Hebrews 11:1 ESV

*For our light and momentary troubles  
are achieving for us an eternal glory  
that far outweighs them all. So we fix our  
eyes not on what is seen, but on what is  
unseen, since what is seen is temporary,  
but what is unseen is eternal.*

2 Corinthians 4:17–18



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## FOREWORD



Just three months before I said goodbye—for now—to my wife, Nanci, Steve Silver's wife, Sandy, went to be with Jesus. One day I didn't know Steve. The next, after a few hours talking together, I knew I'd found a good friend.

Twice he interviewed me about my grief journey and my final years with Nanci, and a deep bond was formed. In those interviews, Steve and I talked together about our dear wives, the present heaven they enjoy now, and the future heaven that God will bring down to the new earth, after the resurrection of all God's people.

Sandy and Nanci shared much in common, including their roles as our partners, soulmates, and best friends. Steve and I now share the common pilgrimage of grief, walking a path that, though full of learning and enrichment, is one we would gladly exchange to have our wives with us again. And yet . . . not really, because we both recognize God's sovereignty and love, and His perfect plan, and the fact that our wives are now happier than they have ever been.

Nanci experienced firsthand the closeness of Jesus in her suffering. She wrote in her journal, "My relationship with God has deepened more than I ever could have imagined during this cancer. I have tasted and seen that the Lord is good [Ps. 34:8]! I trust and cling to Him more. I worship Him more. I love Him more! The

Bible speaks to me more. The Holy Spirit's ministry feels more real to me."

I often picture Nanci's entry into Jesus's presence nearly a year ago. I imagine that while Jesus was both Sandy's and Nanci's center of attention, they also loved seeing relatives who had died—in Nanci's case, her mother and father and my parents, and our grandchild she'd not yet met, taken into heaven before birth. It makes me smile to think of Nanci and Sandy meeting each other in heaven and learning that their husbands are now friends.

As I told Steve, one of the truths I so love is that while Sandy and Nanci went ahead of us to the present pre-resurrection heaven, which is "better by far" than this earth under the curse, one day we will all be raised to life on the new earth. There, John says of our Lord, "He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away. He who was seated on the throne said, 'I am making everything new!' Then he said, 'Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true'" (Rev. 21:4–5).

On that day, Sandy and Nanci and Steve and I—and all of God's risen people—will behold "the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb down the middle of the great street of the city. On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. No longer will there be any curse. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in

the city, and his servants will serve him. They will see his face . . .” (Rev. 22:1–4).

Can you imagine what it will be like for us all together—people of every tribe, nation, and language—to behold and experience at last the place that the Carpenter from Nazareth, infinitely creative and powerful, has prepared for us? Wow!

In this deeply personal and thoughtful book, *Grief Redeemed*, Steve Silver pours out his heart and tenderly examines aspects of his grief. He speaks of Sandy as his silent partner. He has “the memories of how Sandy would weigh in on decisions, encourage me in plans, guide me in right actions, and be an advocate for everything done for the Lord.” I so relate. Nanci is my silent partner every day.

And yet in another way, she is not silent, nor is Sandy. Hebrews 11:4 says, “And by faith Abel still speaks, even though he is dead.” Sandy and Nanci still speak to everyone who knew them here. And they speak to those they’ve been reunited with and have met for the first time. And they will forever speak, and one day we will hear not just memories of their voices, but their real present-tense voices, more delightful than ever.

I have written that grief has become my friend. When I saw Steve sharing the same—and also that grief was God’s anvil to work on him—I recognized a common insight from the Holy Spirit. Neither of us asked grief to come into our lives because grief only comes with loss, and who asks for loss? But loss will come uninvited, and good grief can help us move forward through our losses, becoming more like Jesus in the process . . . if we let it.

“For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all” (2 Cor. 4:17). Our deep pain in having to face this fallen world without our wives isn’t just suffering for us to get beyond; it is suffering that is purposeful, achieving what’s of eternal value. Because we know that, the next verse says, “So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal” (v. 18).

If your loved one has already died, I’m sure Steve’s book will help you. If you or your spouse or a family member or close friend are dying, I hope this book will lead you to conversations about Jesus and the afterlife, and the need to prepare for it. I am so grateful that Nanci and I talked about heaven openly and often over decades, and I would encourage you to do the same.

Believing her death was coming soon, Nanci asked me if I would bring together our family of eleven—our two daughters and their husbands, and our five grandchildren. She wanted to speak into all our lives, and we gathered two days later. She spoke to her grandchildren especially, with tenderness and humor, and encouraged them never to resent God for taking her, because God always knows best and works even hard things for our eternal good. When she could speak no longer because of exhaustion, I read to the family from her journals. All of us were deeply touched. There were many tears, but also laughter, and it was Nanci’s laughter that gave permission and blessing to ours.

One of our seventeen-year-old grandsons said, “Grams, if you can trust God like this when facing such hard things, I know I can trust Him too in the tough

times I face.” Another said, “I will never forget what you said to us today.” We placed our hands on her and prayed over my wife, and our daughters’ mother, and our grandsons’ Gramma. It was a sacred time in which we caught glimpses of a far better world that she already had one foot in. What we experienced that day made me realize that none of us needs to wait until we think we’re dying to gather and talk to our family as Nanci did. I’ve since encouraged others to consider doing this sooner rather than later.

Steve says that he didn’t think much about heaven before Sandy went there. That changed everything for him, and he experienced a transformed perspective. I’d thought a great deal about heaven before Nanci died, having written seven books about it. But while what I learned during those hundreds (come to think of it, thousands) of hours spent on research and writing was a great encouragement, it didn’t make saying good-bye to Nanci easy. All that study, however, bolstered my wholehearted belief that her death was not the end of our relationship, only a temporary interruption. The great reunion awaits us, and I anticipate it and delight in imagining it with everything in me.

Jesus kindly delivered Nanci and Sandy from their suffering. To know my sweetheart will never suffer another moment for all eternity brings tears of joy as I write these words.

When Nanci left for heaven, part of me left with her. Other than Jesus, the greatest treasure I’ve ever had on earth is Nanci. And Jesus said, “Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” Because Jesus is in heaven, and He is my greatest treasure, my heart has

long been there. But with Nanci there, as much as I love all my family and friends and church, my heart and mind are often in that other place. I'm encouraged by the command, "Set your hearts on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things" (Col. 3:1-2).

I'm grateful God still has a place for me as long as I'm here, just as Steve is finding the place God has for him. And, like Steve, I instinctively want to do things I would've done when Nanci was still here. One day somebody texted me a photo of their dog, and I immediately thought, I need to forward this to Nanci. Suddenly, the truth dawned on me: Nanci had been with Jesus ten months, yet my default inclination was still to send her that dog photo!

As Steve misses Sandy's daily presence, I find myself missing the thousands of little moments Nanci touched my life. Most of all I miss her laugh, which was frequent, loud, and contagious. She infused our home with happiness. I am still happy, but in Nanci's absence I find I need to be more deliberate in recounting all the reasons in Jesus that make me happy.

The time came, as it has for many others, when Nanci and I changed our prayers from "Lord, please heal Nanci" to "Lord, if You are not going to heal Nanci, please take her home soon."

With tears of joy and a love radiating from her eyes that I still see, she said to me, "Randy, thank you for my life!" Eyes full of tears, I said, "Nanci, thank you for my life!" Later, in her final days here in our earthly home, she said to me, "Randy, please take me Home." I said,

“If I could I would take you Home right now and I would never come back to this world the way it is.”

I resonate when Steve says home for him was wherever Sandy was. It didn’t matter where he was as long as she was there. Likewise, my house is less my home without Nanci, but heaven is more my home.

Steve realizes that his true home is where Jesus is. It warms my heart that Jesus and Sandy are in the same home. Nanci is with Jesus forever, and therefore, when the time comes for me to be with Jesus, it will mean being with Nanci. The two best friends I’ve ever had.

Nanci’s final journal entry was, “I told the doctor today that I don’t want to fight the cancer in order to just give me more time. I am going off chemo. I am so relieved and honestly excited! I will see Jesus pretty soon!!!” Exactly one month later, she did.

I often think of Nanci’s reassurance to herself and to me: “God’s got this! God’s got me!” She wrote, “I will be ready to die when my time comes because my Shepherd will give me His joy, peace, and readiness. It will not be me working up enough faith and trust; my God will fight the battle for me! It will be His perfect ministering Spirit who will carry me peacefully—jubilantly—into God’s arms.”

I was a witness to the “peacefully” part as I watched her fall asleep, and then suddenly, I realized she’d stopped breathing, and, tears running down my face, I kissed her goodbye. Meanwhile, God, the angels, and likely some of heaven’s inhabitants witnessed the “jubilantly” as they opened wide their arms and kissed her hello.



I have no doubt Nanci and Sandy both heard those words that should stir our hearts: “Well done, my good and faithful servant. Enter into your Master’s happiness.”

Sandy and Nanci were recipients of God’s promise: “you will receive a rich welcome into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (2 Pet. 1:11). May each of us experience the same.

I pray each reader of this book will be drawn to Jesus, the Redeemer of Steve and Sandy, and Randy and Nanci, and all who place their trust in Him. He is the One who makes heaven such a wonderful place, all because He is such a wonderful person.

Randy Alcorn | March 2023

*New York Times* bestselling author of *Heaven*

## PREFACE



I started this book of grief lessons in July 2022, seven months after my wife Sandy passed away. While it was a difficult period of grief, I knew I had to document what I was learning in my first year, so I began writing—one year after our 50th wedding anniversary.

Sandy fell in a parking lot in Naples on December 8, 2021, hitting her head hard on the pavement. I wasn't with her at the time but learned of her incident from the voicemail she left me:

“Steve . . . I'm in trouble here in the hospital, I have bleeding in my brain, and I could die. Please, Honey, get here to the Naples Hospital emergency room as soon as you can for me. I love you, Honey. Bye Bye.”

And so began this surreal period of my life.

I arrived in Sandy's emergency room, where she was awake (although heavily medicated), alert, and able to greet and visit with me. I was relieved that she wasn't in worse condition. I asked the ER physician how she was doing and was told “so far so good” because the bleeding had not yet penetrated the interior of her brain. They were monitoring for the possibility of that. Within a few minutes, she became disoriented and attempted

to remove her intravenous tubes because they were uncomfortable.

As I left the room to get an ER nurse to help with the tubes, she leaned over the side of the bed and started vomiting—something I had never seen her do. I was advised this was an indication that the blood had entered the interior of her brain and was asked to leave while they went into triage mode. I had to sign papers authorizing emergency brain surgery (a craniotomy) to save her life.

I had called our three children while en route to the ER, and left voicemails that Mom was in trouble. By this time, they were all returning my calls and I patched us together by phone while in the ER waiting room so we could pray. We prayed for the neurosurgeon. We prayed Sandy would survive the surgery. We prayed for recovery and healing. We were all in this boat together with the Lord at the helm.

Sandy survived the surgery, in which they removed most of the blood to relieve pressure and allow her brain to come back into place within her skull. I met with her surgeon following the procedure and was told that her chances were 50/50 of waking up, and the same odds for survival if she did. There was nothing more to be done than watch, monitor, wait, pray, and trust the Lord with her outcome.

Two of our children flew down from New England the following morning and arrived in Sandy's critical care room that afternoon. Our third child arrived from California two days later and soon our whole family began the ensuing ten-day vigil with Sandy while her

life weighed in the balance. Sandy was the glue of our family.

After thirteen days in and out of consciousness, some of which included seeing all of us at her bedside and heroically smiling and interacting with us as best she could in her badly weakened state, we were told that Sandy was not going to survive the sepsis condition that resulted from her lack of mobility. I'm certain she knew this as the final few days of her life drew to a close.

We had all asked the Lord and hoped for a miraculous recovery, but He chose instead to take her home with Him on December 21, 2021 at 1:10 p.m. We were all at her bedside playing the praise songs and Christmas carols she loved on a small Bluetooth speaker, reading Scripture to her, and telling her how much we loved her—something she told us daily. And so our much-beloved Sandy ended her life in her earthly body and began her eternal life in heaven.

Sandy's departure has been hard for me. She occupied so much of my life for so long, and our love and partnership were profound.

I read to her in the presence of our family at our 50th anniversary celebration in New Hampshire on July 1, 2021, just a few months earlier:

There are so many things about being married to you that have changed, formed, and made life as I know it, there's not enough room here to enumerate them. I suppose I could sum it all up with this: My life began when I married you. I have no life apart from

you. All life centers around you. There truly is not, nor ever has been, anyone like you. You have taught me everything I know about love, kindness, and selflessness. I'm still amazed that you chose me. I guess this is where faith, grace, and marriage intersect. I can't separate them.

When I penned these words about a week before our 50th, I had no idea she would be gone six months later. If I had, I might have thought twice about saying "I have no life apart from you." However, that is what I believed and how I felt at the time. Over our fifty years together, I came to depend on Sandy's love, attention, support, encouragement, spiritual strength, and wisdom in ways beyond what might have been the case if she hadn't been such a life force on all those fronts. But she was, and anyone who knew her would agree. In retrospect, this was both a blessing and somewhat of a handicap for me.

I never saw the handicap part until she was no longer here. I had, in fact, become so reliant on her loving presence in my life that her absence from me now has been particularly difficult. I have effectively had to learn to function without her—a complete reorientation to a new normal I am trying to find, while constantly being reminded of her wherever I turn.

This, for me at least, is the essence of grieving—a long and arduous rehabilitation process. Not back to life as I once knew it but to a new life. One without Sandy but with memories of her and the best of what

we built together. This is the journey I unexpectedly and reluctantly began.

From the sound of this, you might think that I have a dim and hopeless view of life on earth without Sandy, but that is not the case. In fact, I'm looking forward to the journey ahead, even knowing it will be scarred with sadness. This will be a different journey than the one I've been on with her these past fifty-one years. In a way, however, it will be an extension and completion of what we began together. For certain, Sandy will be a "silent partner" along the way. Let me explain.

I know that Sandy is not "with" me anymore. I don't think she's "looking out" for me, "helping" me, or even "encouraging" me from heaven. I simply have no biblical evidence for that, so I choose to look to the Lord, my earthly family, loved ones, close friends, and grief process guides for those roles. Thankfully, I am blessed with many of these people in my life.

What I mean by "silent partner" is the memories of how Sandy would weigh in on decisions, encourage me in plans, guide me in right actions, and be an advocate for everything done for the Lord. Sandy was my ballast whenever I would careen in the wrong direction or get out of balance. She was a predictable and dependable barometer of the Lord to get me back on keel when I would wander off course—which I frequently did.

Because of thousands of iterations of that over the years, I became a better man with her partnership and am equipped to finish well without her daily reminders. I will look to the Lord for those now, but the memories of "Sandy Wisdom" will always serve me well.

I used to say that my marriage was the anvil on which the Lord was forging the new man in Christ that He was fashioning for His purposes on this side of heaven. I now believe that my grief is His new anvil for me, and that the lessons I learn in grief will have redemptive value well beyond this difficult period—however long that lasts.

This journal captures the hopeful lessons I've learned about grief during the first eighteen months since Sandy's death. They have served as helpful guides for navigating my new life here without her and will hopefully be of some help to you—my grief sojourner.

We share the common experience of a painful loss of a loved one. Those who haven't walked in our shoes are able to understand our grief—and even with that understanding, none of us experience it the same. However, there are similarities in our experience—landmarks, so to speak, which you will recognize and with which you will be able to identify.

Your loss may be very recent, or you may be further along in your process. In reading these lessons, you will see a positive progression in my experience. The early lessons reflect more visceral pain than later ones. My disposition gets lighter, joy prevails over sadness, and my outlook for the future brightens. Depending on how early you are in your grief process, you may not be able to relate to my later lessons as well as the earlier ones.

However, I can assure you that your pain will lighten over time and that you, like me, will eventually be able to embrace your future with hope, purpose, and fulfillment. Your sadness will turn to sweet, cherished

memories of your loved one and your tears of anguish will turn to tears of joy—“Weeping may endure for a night, But joy comes in the morning” (Ps. 30:5 NKJV).

Thank you for sharing this journey with me.

Stephen Silver





## LESSON ONE



# GRIEF IS NOT MY ENEMY

I've learned that grief is not my enemy—it is my friend. This insight hasn't mitigated or softened the pain of Sandy's absence from me, nor the loneliness and emptiness I experience every day when reflecting on her love, friendship, companionship, support, encouragement, and beautiful smile. However, I've discovered that the more visceral these feelings, the greater the opportunity to draw closer to the Lord in the midst of my anguish. I've learned that in those moments, He has me exactly where He wants me—pouring out my heart and tears before Him and asking for His help to get me through.

The truth is, I've never experienced real suffering before—not on this level. Like everyone, I've had normal disappointments, regrets, and life challenges with which I've had to cope. But none of those came close to the heartache and pain of the reality of no longer having Sandy by my side or seeing her face again in this life. There's simply no way to sugarcoat or dodge those realizations and related emotions when they come crashing in.

As with most who've experienced heavy grief from loss, these come upon me in the form of giant waves

which capsize and render me momentarily incapacitated. In the first few months after Sandy's death, these came frequently and without warning. All I could do was hold on until they passed, or sometimes call a close family member or friend to help me get through them. Fortunately, these now come less frequently, are less intense, and don't last as long—but I know they are coming.

Until recently, I saw these “grief waves” as unwelcome but unavoidable enemies to be endured until they let me out of their clutches. That may be because I didn't know how deep they would cut, or how to manage them when they showed up. I now have more experience with them and have come to understand that they are not my enemies at all but, as I have said, are indeed my friends.

There's no way to rationalize away the profound sadness of missing the presence of someone you deeply loved and on who's special closeness you came to depend. *Dependence* entails counting on the certain and confident knowledge that they will always be there—across the dinner or card table, in the car seat next to you, on the couch watching a movie, in the bed beside you, holding your hand, calling on the phone . . . the list goes on. These are thousands of daily touch points that make up life together and became as natural and necessary as breathing.

When these are all removed at the passing of your loved one, but the memories of them persist, their absence can be heart wrenching and you would give anything to experience again any of what you probably once took for granted. Fortunately, time and new

experiences have a way of taking over those “touch points” and replacing them with a new normal—but there are those memories, and something needs to be done with them when they come.

So why would you welcome memories which only make you sad? How could they be your friends? Wouldn't it be better to be free and clear of them? Logic would seem to argue the case for pressing the sad memories delete button. Simple as that. But let's explore that option.

What if you could do it? Wave your hand and be 100 percent clear of all memories of your loved one? What would you gain? You may be a happier person. You wouldn't be sideswiped by the pangs of sadness that come over you throughout the day. Crying would no longer be as frequent for you, nor loom below the surface of conversations when in the company of friends and family. You would likely be easier to be around. You could get on with your new life more quickly and have a nice spring in your step. But what would you lose?

I can only speak for myself here. For me, I would lose the opportunity to become a better man and more useful instrument for the Lord. The sadness I experience in grief over memories of Sandy is the raw material, so to speak, that the Lord has been using to draw me closer to Him—closer than I would have ever been able to be without the grief. It is breaking down my self-reliance, increasing my dependence on Him, and making me more vulnerable to others. It is softening me, making me more tenderhearted, sensitive to others, and interested in their lives. In short, it is making me more accessible and less self-centered.

When I am particularly missing Sandy and the tears come, they are now a form of soul-cleansing that somehow make me feel renewed, refreshed, and better equipped for the day. The pain of missing Sandy is still acute, and I find myself loving her more each day. However, I think I've turned the corner of "needing" and depending on her, to being thankful for what I had with her here for more than fifty years, rejoicing in her present fullness in heaven, looking forward to our reunion there, and embracing what the Lord has left for me to do here in my "new and improved" state.

I ask myself, given the choice, if I would turn back the clock and change the circumstances of her death to have her back with me to pick up where we left off before her fall—and my answer is *no*, I wouldn't. Her life has improved exponentially being in heaven, and I wouldn't want to deprive her of that; and the grief I've acquired through her absence will now be my new companion and tutor for a life I wasn't planning or welcoming but that the Lord has chosen as His plan for me.

So yes, grief is my friend.

## Questions for Reflection

1. Have you found unexpected closeness to the Lord and comfort from Him in pouring out your heart and tears to Him in your deepest moments of sadness? If so, you understand this silver lining in grief. If not, why do you think you have been holding yourself back from Him?
2. It's easy to get trapped in the feeling of wishing things could go back to the way it was. If you were able to miraculously have that, what would you gain and what would you lose?

**"BLESSED ARE THOSE WHO MOURN, FOR  
THEY WILL BE COMFORTED." (MATT. 5:4)**

“ I used to say that my marriage was the anvil on which the Lord was forging the new man in Christ that He was fashioning for His purposes on this side of heaven. I now believe that my grief is His new anvil for me, and that the lessons I learn in grief will have redemptive value well beyond this difficult period—however long that lasts. ”

## GRIEF IS A JOURNEY NO ONE TRULY UNDERSTANDS UNTIL THEY WALK IT.

This short book captures lessons learned along that grief journey during the first eighteen months following author Stephen Silver's wife Sandy's unexpected death. These lessons serve as helpful, practical signposts for other grief sojourners navigating the “new country” after loss.



**STEPHEN SILVER** is a retired management consultant, author, public speaker, and men's ministry leader. His consulting career spanned thirty years in operations and technology for major public and private companies with the firm he founded. He is the author of *New Man Journey*, and the founder of Men's Golf Fellowship.

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