



WALK THROUGH THE VALLEY:

**Words of Comfort and Hope
for Those Who Are Grieving**

By Bass Mitchell

Book One

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This Book is Presented To:

From:

Walk Through the Valley

Before reading this meditation, please read over Psalm 23 at least twice, with one time being out loud. If you can do so from memory, so much the better. As you read, record below any thoughts or feelings that come to you from this much beloved Psalm:

there was something else in their expressions that day. At the time I did not know what it was but now I do. It was a look of the loss of innocence, my innocence. For they realized, as I did, that my world had changed that day. I knew from that moment on that that which was precious to me, that I loved, I could lose. Grief, death came into my world that day giving me but a prelude, you see, that it would come again...and it has, many times...with my grandparents, with close friends, with my father, my father-in-law...

A Death in the Family

I will never forget that rainy day when I was about 10 years old. A stranger knocked on the front door and in his arms he held my beloved pet dog, Trixie. With genuine sorrow, he told how she had run out into the road, and he tried to stop but could not in time. He even volunteered to buy me another dog. But I just shook my head and took Trixie, holding her for a long time...then I went out to the backyard, to the edge of the garden, not far away from the banks of the Neuse River, where we had spent so much time playing together. I took a shovel and dug a small grave there for her, covering it with red bricks. I made a sign with her name on it, attached it to a stick which I drove into the ground. And as I stood there crying, the rain started to fall. After awhile I turned and started toward the house. There, looking out through the kitchen window, were Mom and Dad. I could tell from the expression on their faces that they were hurting for me, but they were wise enough to allow me that time to be alone, to grieve. But

Record in the space below the first time you experienced grief, loss.

David, in this much beloved psalm, describes it as walking in a very dark valley. He's right. This grief, this loss we feel is very much like that - and you wonder if that valley will ever end, if you will ever see a mountaintop again, if the

numbing ache in your soul will ever ease...

This is one reason why I find the psalms and the whole Bible so meaningful. They do not promise us a rose garden with no thorns, a journey from one mountaintop to another with no valley's. The Bible is honest. It tells it like it is. Sometimes we will have to walk through dark valleys of loss, of grief, of pain, of death.

Can't Avoid This Valley

Everyone has to go through valleys of loss sometime, my friends. That's just a fact of life. Some fight it, try to go around the valley, or think they can avoid it. They may even suppress their grief, their loss, thinking they can keep it away. Have you ever tried to hold a beach ball under water? Not easy. Takes a great deal of energy, constantly working to hold it down, to keep it from coming to the surface. You eventually get weary and the beach ball comes to the surface anyway.



Suppressing our grief can do the same thing to us. Denying we feel it. Thinking we don't have to face it is trying to hold it all in and under, and it will wear us down. It will make us sick. It will find ways to surface anyway, you see.

Ours is a society that doesn't deal well with death. We don't like to think about it or talk about it. We do get the message that encourages us to suppress it, you see, to try to hold it down. Unlike days gone by when the person died at home and stayed at home for a certain period

of time, today we push death away from us, try to confine it to hospitals, funeral homes...keep it away from us...

But we can't. This valley is one we all must walk through. No one, however strong or nimble, can leap from mountaintop to mountain top...there will always be the valley of grief, of loss.

Can't Run Through This Valley

Others seem to think they can run through the valley - get over it quickly. They do not allow themselves enough time to grieve, to feel the loss, which is really just another way of trying to avoid or suppress it.



I was at a funeral visitation service once for a woman whose husband had died. Her heart was broken. I actually heard someone tell her, "*Maybe you'll get married again.*" In other words, get over it! Death happens! Heal in a hurry! We are in a hurry about most everything these days, aren't we? Even in a hurry to heal. But we must be patient with ourselves and one another. We can do much to help a wound heal - go to the physician - have it treated - put on the very best salve and bandages, but it will still take time to heal. And the deeper the wound, the longer it will take to heal...Grief is a very deep wound...

What are the worst things you have heard persons say to someone who was grieving?

Walk Through This Valley

Grief is not a 24 hour virus. We do a great disservice to people when we put them on a time schedule for grief...expect them to work through it much more quickly than is needed. It is normal to grieve a loss for a long time. This dark valley of loss is often very long, and there is no way to run through it. The Psalmist is wise when he says we must WALK through this valley.

I think that's the only way to cope with loss, with grief--to "walk through the valley." Not to try to avoid it or rush through it, but walk, but accept it, embrace our pain and loss, give ourselves and each other permission, time to grieve. For this is the first step toward healing.

We have tear ducts in our eyes. They are there, not just to cleanse our eyes, but also help begin to wash away the pain in our souls, to help soothe our grief. How I have held onto persons as they cried and have them tell me afterward that they felt better. Crying is one of God's ways of healing us.

We men seem to have a problem with it. I never saw my father cry, even though I know he suffered considerable loss. I wish I had seen him cry, for I cannot help but believe that he did, if only inside.

Jesus was very much a man. Yet, when he heard that his friend Lazarus had died and saw the grief of Mary and Martha, he did not tell them to get a grip on themselves. What did he do? He cried with them. He allowed himself to feel the loss.

A Companion for the Journey

When we allow ourselves to feel loss, to cry, to express it, to talk about it, then we begin to make our way through this valley. To try to suppress it or ignore it is imprisoning ourselves in that valley, to set up camp there! The promise here is to "walk THROUGH the valley," not be left there.

And let us remember that we do not walk alone in this valley. Many others have walked through it too, and walk through it with us. Look around you and there you will find many others - a spouse, a brother or sister, a friend, a minister, and a whole community of fellow pilgrims walking with you through this valley. From their presence, we can draw great comfort and strength. We are not alone.

But best of all, the Good Shepherd is with us, One who has been through every dark valley. He's been there, and done that! He is a man of sorrows, well acquainted with our grief. He knows the way through the valley. He promises not to leave us there but to guide us THROUGH it.

Etty Hillisum, who lost most of her family and friends in a concentration camp, wrote in the midst of all that loss, "There are moments when I feel like a little bird, tucked away in a great protective Hand" (Etty Hillisum from, *An Interrupted Life: The Diaries of Etty Hillisum, 1941-1943*).



That is the promise the Good Shepherd makes to us. God surrounds us, holds us in a mighty hand from which nothing in any dark valley can take us away. We are not alone. We can walk through each valley.

For the next two weeks at least and beyond if you like, pray this prayer first thing in the morning and the last thing at night (anytime in-between that you need it):

O God, you have ordered this wonderful world and know all things in earth and heaven. Give us such faith that by day and by night, at all times and in all places, we may without fear commit ourselves and those dear to us to your never-failing love, in this life.