LIGHT

Grudges

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PUZZLE ANSWERS FROM BACK COVER

Across:
1. Together; 4. Fulfilling; 6. Messenger;
8. Morsels; 10. Launderer; 12. Escape;
13. Garment; 15. Hyssop; 17. Return;
18. Surface

Down:
2. Household; 3. Vanishes; 5. Benaiah;
7. Scattering; 9. Strength; 11. Sycamore;
14. Entered; 16. Summer

Practical Prerequisites—

The Vitamin D Advantage

Your mother may never have told you to take your vitamin D but your daughter probably should. This matters because the majority of older adults are deficient in vitamin D.

Would you prefer not to have cancer, heart disease, infections, arthritis, multiple sclerosis, cognitive decline, or failing vision? Vitamin D is not a miracle drug, but it does improve your chances of avoiding these health challenges.

A University of California, Davis study involving 318 senior adults found a clear association between blood levels of vitamin D and changes in memory and thinking ability. Dr. Joshua Miller, one of the researchers, stated, "Low vitamin D status is very common in older adults, and is associated with accelerated rates of cognitive decline."

Vitamin D also affects eyesight. As reported by Dr. Joseph Mercola, mice receiving increased vitamin D during a six-week study showed improved vision and decreased retinal inflammation. Based on the study, researchers suggest that vitamin D_3 may help prevent age-related macular degeneration (AMD). Another study concluded that subjects with vitamin D levels in the upper one-fifth of participants had a 59 percent lower risk of developing AMD compared to those in the lowest fifth.

Cognitive decline due to Alzheimer's disease and failing vision due to macular degeneration are both associated with the accumulation of a protein known as amyloid beta. Levels of vitamin D and the accumulation of amyloid beta appear to be inversely correlated. That is, the accumulation of amyloid beta is more pronounced when levels of vitamin D are low.

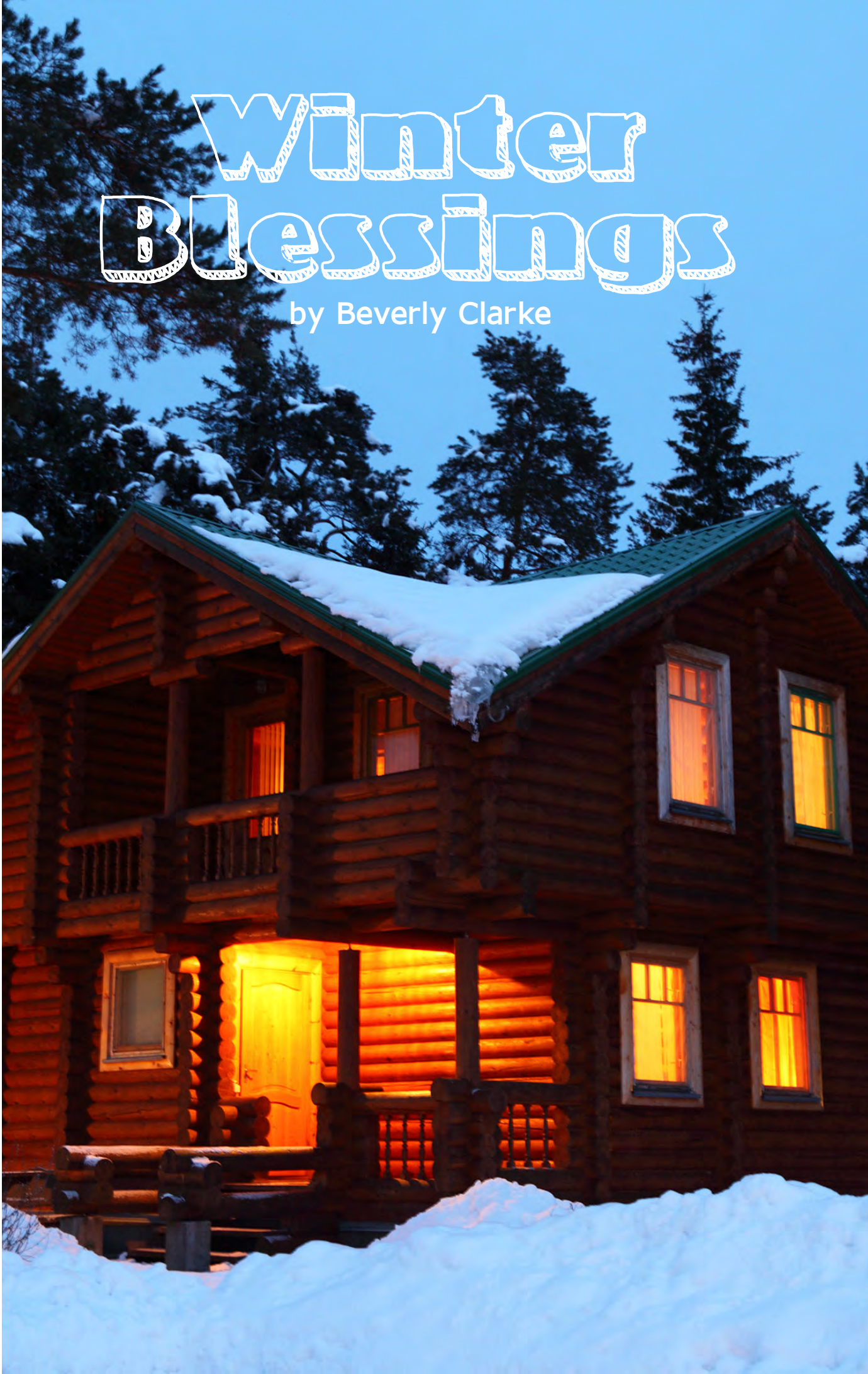
It is possible to get too much vitamin D, so it is wise to increase intake in consultation with your doctor. Though more research is needed, it seems clear that maintaining an optimal level of vitamin D is linked to several key factors related to good health.

Sources:

JAMA Neurology, *November 2015 (Journal of the American Medical Association)*
www.mercola.com/Downloads/bonus/vitamin-d/report.aspx

Winter Blessings

by Beverly Clarke



Initially I felt alarmed when I saw a dozen people closing in around our woodstove. I hardly knew most of them. January weather had brought some folk to our house and a series of happenstances gathered others. Three were stranded by closed roads and I had no idea how long they would need to stay.

"We don't have enough mugs," I whispered to my husband. "No one can reach the front door for the mountain of boots!"

It was so loud! People were standing close together, talking over each other. I could barely follow any of their conversations. The crackling of the fire and the comforting tick tock of the grandfather clock had disappeared in the confusing racket.

ENTHUSIASTIC ARM WAVER

A neighbor waved his arms enthusiastically, embellishing a story about a blizzard. Another argued with someone about the proper technique for stacking firewood. A man I didn't recognize sat on the stool in front of the woodstove, rearranging our kindling box.

Arguing broke out among the children. One had disobeyed the sharing schedule concerning the use of the plastic snow shovel—an indiscretion worthy of much blaming and blustering. They tromped inside with snowy mittens, rosy cheeks, and a burst of air so sharp and cold it started everyone speaking in exclamation marks.

I backed away, overwhelmed.

I enjoy winter for the most part, but what I like is the quiet beauty and solitude it offers. I feel restored when I'm outside in the season's pristine calm, when movements pause and sounds narrow down to the celery-crunching noise my boots make in the snow. A beckoning of the divine is often there as well, as if the silence of frozen air might ease the distance that sometimes creeps between me and my Creator.

Even at the end of January, when snow seems more tiresome than magical and I've grown weary of being cold, I like the hush of this frigid time of year. There's a safe comfort in hunkering down in small spaces of closed-in warmth. Days that move at a slower pace feel less demanding.

Fortunately, for those who prize lonely spaces, who tend to isolate, and who don't always know what's good for them, winter brings something else that's vital: camaraderie. Severe weather repeatedly prompts a sense of community among people. Long relentless winters give us a subject for conversation with everyone in our path. Total strangers who rarely speak to each other will discuss a coming storm or compare snow shoveling strategies. Convenience store clerks and fellow travelers take comfort in sharing weather reports and driving conditions on a mountain pass. Acquaintances in the elevator and the coffee

shop act like dear friends, bonded over having survived icy sidewalks and late snowfalls.

We're just as likely to complain about a heat wave in the spring or too much rain during summer months of course, but it's cold weather that more often collects folk in close quarters. It's the winter season that best creates a sense of being in something together. And that sense of togetherness and community is a true blessing.

Even introverts, who become overwhelmed and easily exhausted by groups and gatherings, benefit from social interactions. Psychologists tell us that friendships and socializing improve our health and minimize cognitive decline as we age.

I believe interacting with others is important for spiritual growth as well. An undisturbed afternoon with an inspiring book or a solitary walk in a snowy wood can bring insight, assurance, and the warmth of God's presence. However, small groups and church fellowship can offer a sense of purpose and a mirror to see ourselves. Fellow believers can prompt courage and discernment, and encourage us to be more tolerant and understanding. Other people with other opinions help us to think more deeply. They introduce us to ideas we might never have considered on our own.

Hebrews 10:25 comes to mind, as it urges, "not giving up meeting together, as some are

in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching" (NIV).

As Barbara Streisand sang in her well-known song, "People who need people" are lucky. And those who *realize* that they need people are doubly blessed.

UNDER INVASION

So, while under "invasion" by our unexpected visitors last winter, the blessing of their companionship came to me only gradually. I stood at the edges of my hostess duties, dismayed and elated in turn as I watched and listened.

A friend stirred hot apple cider at the kitchen stove, adding spices indiscriminately and exaggerating tales about unfortunate recipe adjustments, as if she had my total attention.

Near the warmth of the wood fire a woman related some car trouble misadventure. She raised her voice eagerly, almost shouting

to get to the punch line of the story before her husband did. A mug of tea toppled amid screeching and laughter.

Someone had just begun playing my guitar when the dogs escaped their confinement in the basement. Thrilled about their escape, the mutts charged past a number of strident voices to tangle in the pile of boots at the door.

My husband's eyes reached across the room to me, over the squeal of children, the barking of dogs, and the muddle of too many voices.

Eventually, smiles grew to laughter bubbling from my throat. The sound tasted as delicious as the spice cake on the table that everyone kept "straightening."

IT'S OK

"It's OK," I told my husband quietly. "It's all good. It's wonderful."

And it *was* wonderful. I felt overwhelmed, underprepared and slightly nauseous over having so many guests so unexpectedly, but I felt good too. I had needed this. It was a tonic after days of winter solitude. I never could have—or would have—orchestrated such a gathering. Only winter weather was capable of creating this niche for socializing. Only the remnants of a dreary January could generate this.

Close companionable solidarity and crowded contentment would be unlikely in the summertime with such a diverse assembly of people. In warm weather we'd be strung apart,

dizzy with choices of river shorelines, benches beside the pond, and remote shady corners on the patio. In the summer we'd have no excuse to stand this close to laughter. Only inclement weather would draw this group into such a moment of pleased congeniality.

DRIZZLED SOUNDS

Cackling erupted after the retelling of some less-than-truthful tale of a casserole left in the oven, and then sounds drizzled away as everyone listened to the man playing guitar.

I knew it would be even quieter soon. They'd all be gone, leaving melted snow where there'd been a mountain of boots by the door. Sticky floors would be cleaned, counters cleared, and the sounds of the crackling fire and the ticking clock would once again fill in the spaces of a quiet winter evening. The realization felt like a bruise and I touched it gently to keep the memory safe.

It's my nature to enjoy time alone and I will always appreciate winter for its blessing of quiet solitude. But cold weather also includes gifts of companionship, community, and opportunities to mingle with others. The occasion that surprised me with joy reminded me that camaraderie is a gift—another rich blessing of the winter season.

Freelance writer Beverly Clarke lives in Grand Forks, British Columbia.

"To Everything There Is a Season"

by Beckie Horter

"He sends his command to the earth; his word runs swiftly. He spreads the snow like wool and scatters the frost like ashes. He hurls down his hail like pebbles. Who can withstand his icy blast? He sends his word and melts them; he stirs up his breezes, and the waters flow."
—Psalm 147:15-18 (NIV)

It wasn't always this way. I can honestly say that there was a time when I did not appreciate all the seasons my northeast climate provides. But age and a change in attitude have contributed to my seeing things differently—literally and figuratively. While my mountainous area is famous for its fabulous autumns, we all know what follows those beautiful colors. It is, as Psalm 147:17 records, God's "icy blast."

I've heard people say that we enjoy winter up until the Christmas season, then we're ready to fast-forward to spring.

The locals make all the usual complaints about snow shoveling, driving hassles, falling on ice, and not seeing enough sunlight. By the time February rolls around, they're ready to head south.

But wait! It seems a shame to wish away our God-ordained seasons, including winter. After all, isn't the "snow spread like wool" a lovely thing? My friend, Lynda, thinks so. "Snow is my favorite color!" she told me once. I'm beginning to see what she means.

NOT STUCK

When we study Scripture, we begin to take in God's big view of life—His plan for times and seasons. It provides a radical shift from our limited human perspective. And our tendency, like the Israelites, to grumble.

Right away, in Genesis 1, we read of God creating the heavens and the earth. On the fourth day He placed lights in the sky to separate the day from the night. Then He said, "Let them be signs to mark the seasons, days, and years" (Genesis 1:14, NLT).

"And God saw that it was good."

Marking the seasons was good, and still is good, despite the effects of sin. We may not now experience the pristine nature of Eden, but there is still so much of God's stunning work to admire—even when much is frozen or stuck.

LISTENING A NECESSITY

One of the changes I've noticed since losing my central vision is more sensitivity to hearing. Nothing physically happened to my ears. I simply listen more closely, out of necessity.

Apparently, God has turned up the volume on the birds. I do miss seeing their faces and feathers clearly, but I hear their songs with new detail and purity. The doves cry out their mating call, the crows squawk loudly, the owls' hooting pierces the night.

Since I began losing my eyesight, I started a habit of opening a window each morning and

sitting near it, drinking coffee and listening for birds. The outside temperature does not deter me. In fact, sometimes the cold air on my face feels energizing. Strangely, this practice evolved without me planning it. I just realized one day I had developed a new pattern. A pattern of beginning my day by listening to God's world.

Birds are usually among the first harbingers of spring but, in reality, some birds hang around all winter long. Not as many in my area, for sure, but still, life goes on despite the cold and snow.

author Beckie Horter

And here's a winter bonus: wildlife is more visible when the foliage is gone. We regularly spot white-tailed deer at dusk, as they begin feeding. And a squirrel darting across a snowy branch always makes me smile for his hopping, jerking movements. It's an unmistakable sight, even to my low-vision eyes.

THE PURPOSE IN THE PLAN

Storyteller Garrison Keillor writes, "Winter brings us back to basics. There's basic

in-hereness, and there's basic out-thereness. In winter, you are just happy to be an animal who is warm." I like that about winter! Appreciation of the basics reminds us of God. Our need for Him. His faithful provision. And the realization that He knows better, and this is His plan.

Again, looking at God's original design in Genesis, we see Him working six days and resting on the seventh. Winter can be a resting, rejuvenating time before the new cycle of life begins in spring. A slowdown in the rhythm of life is essential to offset our fast-paced lifestyles. Simply watching the outside world from a window, as I do each morning, can calm us. But better yet, a thirty-minute walk in the sharp air clears our heads, resetting our brains to take on the next challenge.

NATURE AND BRAIN

Last winter, *National Geographic* published an article titled, "This is Your Brain on Nature." It cites numerous studies which show how nature is the antidote to relieve stress and improve mental function.

Cell phones, computers, and multi-tasking all contribute to brain fatigue. Experts say we need a break from the technology. A restorative trip outdoors actually lowers blood pressure and stress hormones in the blood. It's an old and basic concept. In fact, our national parks were founded upon the philosophy that nature has healing powers.

"The art of healing comes from nature, not from the physician," wrote the 16th century Swiss-German physician Paracelsus. How did we forget this?

I believe children intuitively know it. The cold air, rain, and snow is no deterrent to enjoyment for children. A weather event is exciting for them. Think snow days, ice skating, sledding, and snowball battles. Think watching a thunderstorm or splashing in puddles.

It is simply true: Soul-life happens as we connect with God by touching His ever-changing natural world.

WHAT JESUS DID

Jesus did not experience stress as a result of modern technology but He did carry a heavy burden. The burden of people—people with problems. Often the crowds would press in on Him, seeking teaching or healing. He had the Jewish leaders after Him, too, but they were seeking something quite different—a reason to take His life. More than anyone, ever, Jesus needed to experience relief from stress. Here's how He did it:

"After he had dismissed them, he went up on a mountainside by himself to pray. When evening came, he was there alone" (Matthew 14:23, NIV).

All the gospels record such experiences. Luke 5:16 reads, "Jesus *often* withdrew to the wilderness for prayer" (italics supplied).

The word "sacred" springs to mind when I picture Jesus being alone with His Father, out of doors, in prayer. Also "connectedness." It's so important for us in our human condition to reach out to the divine in this most fundamental way.

When we follow Jesus' example, we recognize the whole of creation, not just our little sphere of problems. Things relax inside of us, and we regain a balanced perspective. God is still on the throne, involved in our physical and spiritual world; our faith is not unfounded.

TEETERING

The seesaw between winter and spring begins at different times in different places but even though people may be counting down the days until the vernal equinox (the official start of spring), sometimes doubt sneaks in. Will we ever put away these heavy coats? Sigh.

Then one day, as we are hunched over our bowls of chili, we notice it is still light outside at suppertime.

A glimmer of hope emerges. But not without a teetering back and forth. Days of ice and sub-freezing temperatures will alternate with days of sunshine and melting. Nature seems schizophrenic. But the days are lengthening, no one can deny that.

More signs appear. The robins return to set up their nests, and rabbits suddenly seem to

be everywhere. Flower clusters appear on the silver maple. The warming trend continues.

It's another season turning.

REMEMBER WISDOM

King Solomon offered the following reflection on times and seasons: "To everything there is a season, a time for every purpose under heaven" (Ecclesiastes 3:1, NKJV). I want to remember the wisdom of the king! I want to see God's hand in all times and seasons—understanding His good purpose for those of us living under heaven.

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Bicycling as therapy—

Through the Dark

by Trena Reed

It's not like my husband sits on the couch and refuses to do anything. Wait, yes, it is exactly like that—Randy sits on the couch and refuses to do anything. Sometimes, when it's really bad, the dishes pile up in the sink, the car doesn't get regular maintenance, the pantry gets sparse—all those little things he does to keep the house running smoothly remain undone—and worst of all, his bike rests against the wall unridden.

Perhaps "refuses" isn't quite the right word. *Struggles, fights, battles, labors, grapples, wrestles, or strives* might be more accurate.

It's hard.

It's hard on his health. It's hard on my attitude. It's hard on our friends and family. And it's hard on our marriage. Getting life back on track in the midst of depression can feel insurmountable.

I'm still learning how to live with the stranger who sometimes replaces my loving, laughing, caring, thoughtful husband. I'm not going to pretend to understand Randy's depression, but in the seventeen years we've been married I've learned some important things about myself, about Randy, and about how to cope with this monster in our house. Here are some things I've learned:

PRAYER HELPS

Consider Philippians 4:6-7*: "Don't worry about anything. When you feel yourself being

overwhelmed by fears and concerns, pray. In fact, the best thing you can do in any circumstance is to pray. Take everything to God in prayer—no matter how big or small. By asking God for what you need and thanking Him for what He has already done for you, you will be blessed by the spirit of His perfect peace—a peace far beyond anything you can imagine—a peace that comes only from knowing Jesus as your personal Friend and Savior! It's amazing how a Jesus-filled life leaves no room for daily worries and concerns."

This verse, paraphrased by my husband, was meant for me. I spend too much of my time sitting on the couch of anxiety, worrying about things outside of my control. This verse reminds me to pray. In every situation, to pray. And the promise is for God's peace—a peace beyond my comprehension.

So I pray.

I pray for my husband. I pray for strength. I pray for wisdom to walk with him through the difficult times. In my experience, talking with God—I mean really talking with God—changes my heart every single time. Prayer, I've learned, gives me new perspectives and new strength.

So I pray.

IT'S NOT MY STRUGGLE

Depression is different from the many struggles we've faced in our marriage—a

broken collarbone, loss of loved ones, financial challenges, differences of opinion, blown car engines (three of them, as a matter of fact), and a myriad of other challenges. This particular darkness presses down on Randy, and I am left to watch.

I feel helpless.

I am helpless.

Seven years into our marriage, Randy sank into a deep depression. I tried to pull him out. I teased. I joked. I yelled. I demanded. I pushed. I prodded. I cried. I did the dishes. I let the dishes pile up. I tried every trick I'd learned so far in our marriage but every word, every action of love or frustration, fell on a sea of indifference. I was willing to draw a sword and defeat this dragon for him, but I couldn't—and I can't.

This is Randy's war. His dragon. And every time the battle rages I feel helpless. Every time, I am helpless.

But we are never alone.

In this battle—fighting this dragon, facing this impossible mountain—we are not alone. Consider Deuteronomy 31:6: "You have nothing to fear because God is on your side—He always has been and He always will be. Take courage. Stand firm. Don't be intimidated. With God leading the way, nothing can touch you!"*

WE NEED LOVE

All my efforts to force Randy out of his depression have failed—they have failed every time.

This past year I experienced a personal encounter with depression. This experience helped me understand Randy's struggle. For me, depression was physical, a great weight pressing me down. I didn't care about my job. I didn't care about writing. I didn't care about cycling. I didn't care about my relationships. Everything I once loved, turned to ashes in my mouth.

In those gray days, what I wanted, what I needed, was love and understanding. It turns out that empathy is always more useful than sympathy. I can now empathize with Randy in a way I could not before.

There are times when we need to push each other, maybe even push hard, but there are also times when we need to build a nest of understanding (and perhaps pillows and blankets) and wrap each other in love. In our darkest times we need to know unconditional love. We need the security of unconditional love.

I try to give this love to Randy, but I fail. Paul reminds us, though, of a love that will never forsake us. Consider Romans 8:38-39: "I am absolutely convinced that nothing can ever separate us from God's amazing love—nothing!

Life and death can't; angels and demons can't; today's worries can't do it, and neither can tomorrow's fears. Not even the powers of hell can hold back the tide of God's unconditional love."*

And there, in the unmoving love of God, we are held.

EXERCISE DOES HELP

There is one thing that consistently helps Randy: exercise. Randy and I are avid cyclists, we spend our summers (really any beautiful day of the year) exploring trails and quiet Nebraska roadways.

This summer we woke up early every weekend, long before the sun rose, and took a bike ride of 50 miles or more through the countryside. We watched the sun rise over the fields. As the season progressed, we watched the prairie grasses grow and then turn golden. We stopped to photograph wildflowers and sun-lit fields of corn. And in the evening we rode to our sunset-viewing gallery, held hands,

and watched the sun disappear. Nebraska's sunrises and sunsets are spectacular. The prairie provides unobstructed views of the sky, allowing us to take in every painted cloud and every stray strand of sunlight.

Beauty is a balm.

Exercise is a weapon.

Cycling significantly impacts Randy's depression cycles—since we've become avid cyclists he has experienced less depression and his episodes have been shorter and less intense. I've learned the best way for me to assist in his battle is to take him on a bike ride. Fresh air, sunshine, and exercise are an antidote to and a remedy for Randy's depression.

IT'S NOT MY FAULT

But Randy does still battle depression. I used to think I did something wrong. Randy never blamed me; I just assumed a guilt that wasn't mine. I contemplated my every mistake—because we all make mistakes. I made a list of how I could improve. I searched for reasons for his depression—believing that if I discovered the cause I could create a cure.

Depression always has a trigger—that's what I thought. So, I took out my sword and tried to defeat his dragon (Girls can be heroes and dragon-slayers too). But it wasn't my fault, and depression doesn't always have a trigger. When I finally released my guilt, I was able to love instead of defend. Randy was still

depressed but I was freed from my guilt—free to hold his hand and walk with him through the darkness.

PRAYER DOES HELP

The things I've learned have helped me walk this path with Randy, but it's still hard. Every time it's hard.

So I pray.

Jeremiah 29:11-13 is one of my favorite Bible promises. Jeremiah wrote, "'I have amazing things planned for you,' promises the Lord. 'I will be by your side at all times. I will never abandon you! You have every reason to smile; your future is looking bright! When you cry out to Me for help, I will rescue you. And when you seek Me with all your heart, I will come running!'"*

God is waiting for me to pray.

Too often I wait until the life I'd planned is in shambles, then and only then I come to God in prayer. And He is always there. When I call, God listens.

But I don't need to wait to come to God; I can walk in relationship with Him every day. And when the darkness comes, God is already there shining a light.

God never promised a life without difficulties, but He did promise that He would always be there for me—always waiting for me to seek a relationship with Him. This is great news! I can be in an intimate relationship with

the God of the universe!

The truth is I am abundantly blessed. I live a beautiful life with a wonderful man, who, like us all, struggles. And I am learning to celebrate the difficult times.

Consider James 1:2-4: "Celebrate your trials! You heard me right—when troubles come your way, consider it an opportunity for great joy, because only by exercising your faith will it ever get the chance to grow. So let it grow! Don't try to avoid difficult times, but patiently endure as Christ endured, and you will become more like Jesus."*

Wow! My struggles give me the opportunity to become more like Jesus.

So, I am learning to celebrate my suffering. I admit, I don't always celebrate, but I am trusting God to give me a new heart—a heart of celebration, even in times of suffering. Especially in times of suffering. And He gives this heart to Randy too.

And together we continue to build a beautiful life.

**All Bible verses were personally paraphrased by my husband Randy.*

Trena and Randy Reed live in Lincoln, Nebraska.

Grudges

by Ginger Ketting-Weller

Grudges are common and grudges are hurtful. A grudge may or may not hurt the person against whom the grudge is aimed but it will certainly hurt the person who is holding the grudge. This is the beginning of a series of articles on the topic of grudges.

PART 1: THE STORY

Bob, a handsome college religion major, played the guitar. Nellie, a nursing student, played the piano, seemed like a magnet for children, and provided the haircuts for many of her friends. They had both been hired to work at the same summer camp, and as the summer was approaching Nellie realized she was very much attracted to Bob.

We seem like a match made in heaven, Nellie thought. *He's going be a pastor, I have talents that are a complement to his, and people keep saying I'd make a great pastor's wife. Could this be the start of my life's love story?*

Nellie prayed about it, watched for indications that her feelings were returned, and started noticing signs of Bob's interest in her. She had already signed up to spend the next school year working at a Christian school in the Pacific Islands, but that didn't deter her enthusiasm for the possibilities with Bob.

TERRIBLY ROMANTIC

Nellie had enjoyed reading books about true love discovered through letter-writing,

and thought it would be terribly romantic to correspond across the miles. She had it all worked out, day-dreamed about how their friendship would deepen as they worked together at camp, and wasn't concerned about the dampening effect of an ocean between them in the next school year.

Nellie's girlfriends, of course, knew about her crush on Bob. Several of them were praying for Nellie, hoping to watch her dreams come true, and were checking in with her regularly.

"How's it going?" they would ask, and Nellie would relate the latest interaction with Bob, down to the nuances of his indications of interest. Bob had a way of looking at Nellie with a twinkle in his eye and that million-dollar smile. Hooh boy! It was like she could think of nothing else in that moment.

CLOSE-KNIT GROUP

Summer camp dynamics being what they are, the counselors and directors became an extremely close-knit group that summer as they worked, prayed, and played together. Nellie crossed paths with Bob many times a day. Once he realized that she could give haircuts, Bob asked Nellie to do his haircuts during the summer, and they made music together for the campfire programs in the evening. Nellie invited Bob to go huckleberry picking with her and several of their friends on

her day off, and that was fun, too. During the summer a couple of their friends got married, and Nellie and Bob sang at the reception. Oh, it was rich!

And as the summer ended, Bob asked for one more haircut before camp was over and they went their separate ways.

"Now's the time," Nellie thought. "He's going to bring up our friendship, and talk about keeping in touch while I'm in the islands."

But as she set up the chair on the sidewalk in front of the camp administration building and pulled out her hair-cutting scissors, other coworkers gathered around to watch the haircut, and there was no opportunity for a heart-to-heart.

Then, suddenly, the summer was over and Nellie found herself at home packing for her year overseas.

CRYING HERSELF TO SLEEP

During Nellie's first two weeks on the island she cried daily from homesickness. The culture shock was deep and dark. There was only one other American working in the island school, a girl who had come from another college across the country. Nellie felt horribly lonely with the sudden jolt of going from a close group of workers to a place where she knew no one. It felt like she had fallen into a hole.

Whenever the mail plane flew in she hung around the mailboxes to pick up her letters

from home. But there was never anything from Bob, not even a note on the aerogrammes that the college missions office sent, full of notes from her college friends. Not a word. It was so disappointing.

One day about two months into her year abroad, Nellie's sister called her long distance. "I think maybe you should hear this from me rather than some other way, Nellie," she said. "Bob is dating Amy."

PUNCH IN THE GUT

The news came like a punch in Nellie's gut. Amy had dropped by to chat with Nellie all through the spring term at college, and then all through the summer. She would ask how it was going with Bob and say she was praying for them. Just a couple of years younger than Nellie, Amy was a sweet, earnest-faced friend—except not so sweet, apparently. Nellie now realized Amy's interest had been for herself.

As Nellie's sister shared the news, Nellie realized that Amy had moved right in on Bob the minute Nellie was out of the picture. Nellie felt deeply betrayed. She was angry. Bitterness quickly set in. By the time Nellie returned to the United States the next summer, Bob and Amy were engaged to be married at Christmastime.

As Nellie returned to college in the fall, she was nursing a bucket-load of anger and a great deal of dread. Bob and Amy couldn't miss

noticing that Nellie had built up a simmering grudge of epic proportions. She avoided them on the sidewalks and in the halls at college, and it seemed to her that Amy was staying out of her way, too.

Nellie's roommate—whose fiancé was a classmate of Bob's—got an earful of bitterness in Nellie's tale about how Amy had solicited her trust and invited her to open up about her hopes, and then turned around and used that to her advantage. This was the issue, Nellie told her new roommate: not that Amy had won his heart, but that she had taken advantage of Nellie's confidence as she built her own hopes for a love story with Bob.

Following college graduation Nellie moved to another city for graduate school. And—oh, horrors!—it just so happened that Bob and Amy had moved to that area and attended her church. The grudge still sat cold and hard in her stomach, and her greeting to them was chilly, barely civil. There was not enough room in the church for all three of them, Nellie concluded.

To be continued in the next issue of Light.

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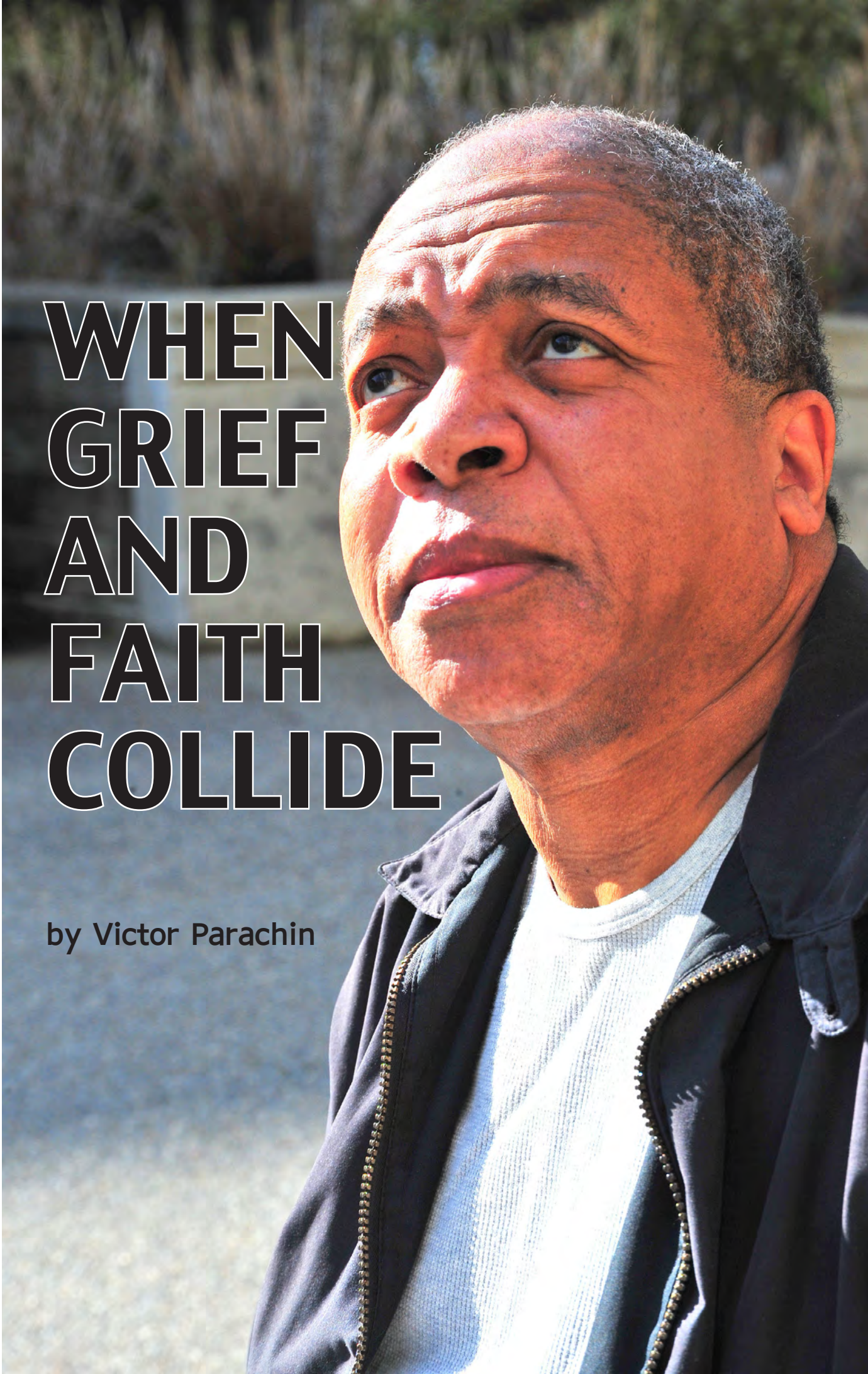


WHEN GRIEF AND FAITH COLLIDE

by Victor Parachin

The death of a loved one can create havoc with one's religious faith. True, some people find that their faith remains intact after loss. Others find themselves struggling with their faith and beliefs. Here are some ways of managing grief when it collides with faith.

REVIEW YOUR VIEW OF GOD

Theologian Lewis B. Smedes tells about a painful loss early in his career as a professor of theology. His wife, Doris, gave birth to a beautiful baby boy who died a few hours later. "God's face has never looked the same to me since," he writes. Prior to the death of his son, Smedes says, he was raised to believe in a "sovereign absolutely in control of absolutely everything. Every good thing, every bad thing, every triumph, every tragedy. Everything was under God's strange, silent control." After his baby died, Smedes continues: "I knew that my portrait of God would have to be repainted. On the day that our baby boy died, I knew that I could never again believe that God had arranged for our tiny child to die before he had hardly begun to live."

Smedes "repainted' his portrait of God as one who comforts rather than controls.

DON'T BLAME GOD

After his father died by suicide, Albert Hus processed his grief and then wrote a book titled

Grieving A Suicide. In the book he cautions against blaming God, and reminds grievers, "Because we live in a fallen world, we should expect pain and suffering. Good and evil are at war, and we are sometimes casualties of the crossfire. We shouldn't assume that our sufferings are instigated by God. More likely they are simply the result of living in an imperfect world. Things are not the way God intended them to be."

GOD GRIEVES WITH YOU

Rather than assuming God is distant, consider that God is grieving right alongside you. Peter Gomes, minister of Harvard University's Memorial Chapel, noted: "God is with us at the most terrible moment of our time. He is not in front to lead, nor behind to push, not above to protect, but 'Beside us to guide us.'"

This was the experience of Dr. Smedes and his wife. "Doris and I cried a lot, and we knew in our tears that God was with us, paying attention to us, shedding ten thousand tears for every one of ours. Neither of us had a moment's inclination to give up on God, to quit believing in God or to quit trusting God. In fact, God never seemed more real to either of us. Never closer, never more important."

PERMISSION TO QUESTION

Upon learning that a loved one has died, questions such as these commonly arise: *Why*

did this happen? How could God permit this to take place? Where was God in all of this? Why did God allow this to fall upon me? Does God even care about me?

Questioning does not imply lack of faith. Even Jesus questioned, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Mark 15:34, NIV). It is OK to wonder why a tragedy has taken place, and why God would permit such a loss. And it is equally OK to conclude: "I don't know why."

TALK WITH SOMEONE YOU TRUST

It may be your religious leader or it may be a friend whose spiritual maturity you respect. Find that person and talk about what is happening with your faith. Resolutions and answers may emerge.

In her book, *Finding Your Way After Your Spouse Dies*, Marta Felber offers this advice: "The blow you were dealt when your loved one died may have thrown you off the rock of your faith. With help, you can slowly but surely climb back to a secure spot on your rock of faith. Meet with your pastor, or with someone else whom you trust as a spiritual advisor. They have much to offer you. Ask questions that share your doubts and fears."

PRACTICES THAT NOURISH

Some find a simple walk in nature is healing. Some find that joining with others for

worship is healing. Some find that being alone in meditation or prayer is healing. After her son was killed, one mother was devastated. "As soon as I learned about my son's tragic death, many questions swirled around in my mind about God and God's goodness. What helped me was remembering Mary, the mother of Jesus. She also lost her son and yet continued to embrace her faith. I have tried to follow her example in dealing with the death of my son."

ANGER IS NOT UNBELIEF

In his book, *Living With Loss, Healing With Hope*, Rabbi Earl Grollman offers this wisdom about anger and faith: "If you believe in God, the death of your loved one may leave you feeling betrayed or outraged. . . . Your anger is a natural and normal response to extreme anguish. Your anger at God could be your form of prayer. No one can hurt you like those closest to you, those you trust the most. To be furious at God could indicate that God was once a presence in your life *and may be again*."

EMOTIONAL AND RATIONAL

Kathleen O'Hara writes that, upon learning that her son, Aaron, was murdered at college, she sought to balance her emotional side with her rational side, realizing that:

- God did not murder Aaron. "It wasn't God who took my Aaron. It is the evil in the world that kills the innocent, not God."

- God does not stop bullets. "God permits us through our free will to hurt each other, and God does bring good out of evil. The words of Saint Paul came to me over and over again—*All things work together for the good, for those who love God"* (Romans 8:28).
- There are no simple answers to tragic losses. "Why was my son murdered? I don't know. Why my son? I don't know, but is my son any more precious than anyone else's son?" Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 13:12, "We see only a reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known."

DEEPENED NOT DESTROYED

After the death of her husband and their 21-month-old daughter, killed by an intoxicated driver, Paula D'Arcy reported that her faith became deeper and more authentic. She explained: "In the aftermath of my loss, I prayed what I think was the first honest prayer of my life, which was, 'God, if you are really out there and if you are real, then help me; let me find you; show me who you are.' That's when there was a major shift from a God out there to a God within."

From that prayer on D'Arcy began to put the focus on growing through the pain. "I looked at what strengthened me and what weakened. I realized every choice causes a

ripple. If I wanted to get to a deeper place within, I had to support that with the decisions I made."

SPIRITUAL PERSPECTIVE

Look at your loss and everything which comes with it—sorrow, sadness, anger, frustration, despair—as an experience which, rather than testing your faith, is tempering it. The word "temper" comes from the manufacturing world where steel or glass is heated at high temperatures in order to make it hard and strong. Adopt the spiritual perspective that the turmoil you currently experience is one which can transform your life and faith into something stronger and more vibrant than ever. This may be what Phillips Brooks had in mind when he advised: "Do not pray for easy lives. Pray to be stronger men."

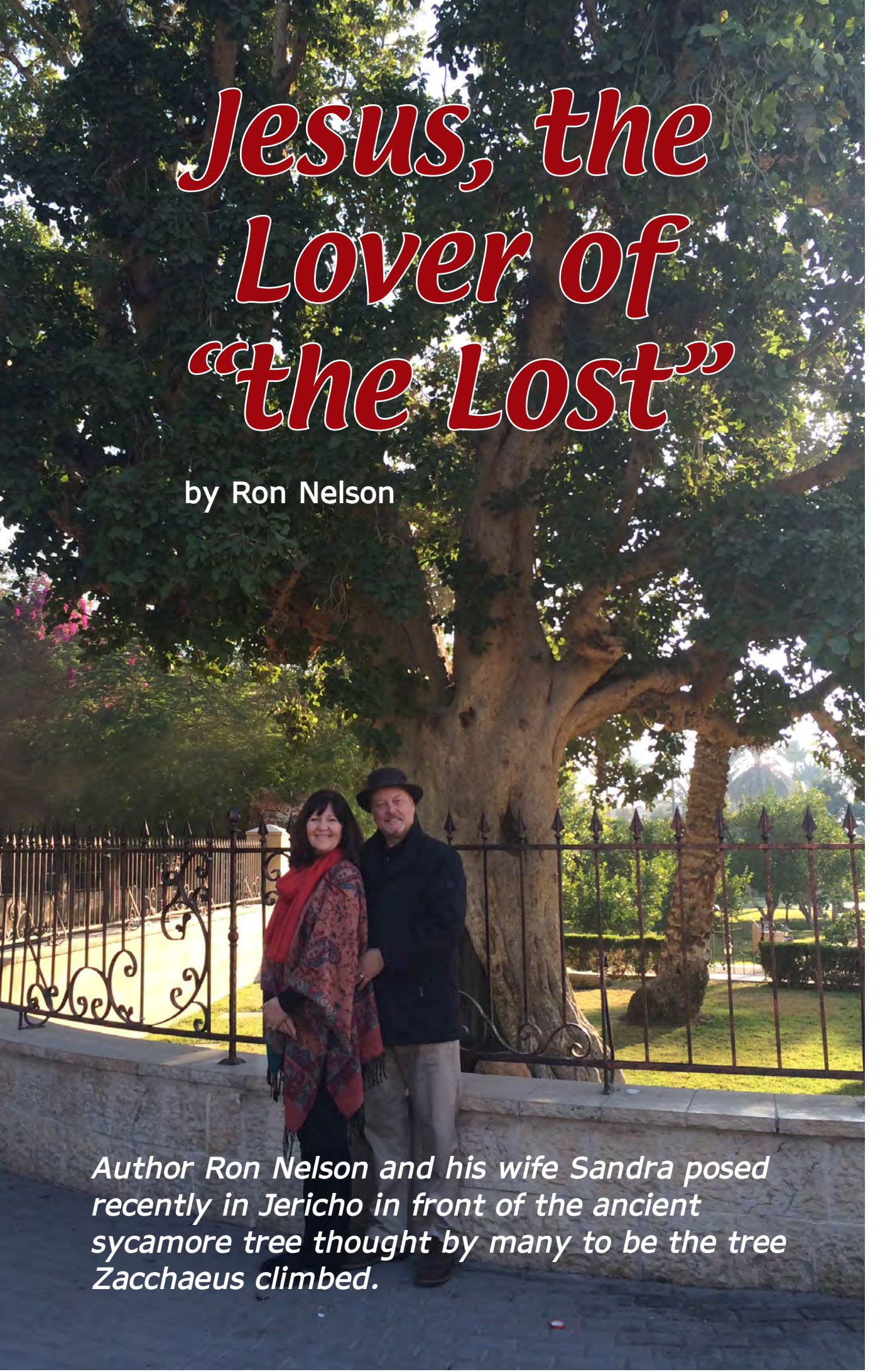
Victor Parachin is a freelance writer living in Tulsa, Oklahoma.

The pessimist sees difficulty in every opportunity. The optimist sees the opportunity in every difficulty.

—Winston Churchill

Jesus, the Lover of "the Lost"

by Ron Nelson



Author Ron Nelson and his wife Sandra posed recently in Jericho in front of the ancient sycamore tree thought by many to be the tree Zacchaeus climbed.

Jesus was going through the city of Jericho. A man was there named Zacchaeus, who was a very important tax collector, and he was wealthy. He wanted to see who Jesus was, but he was not able because he was too short to see above the crowd. He ran ahead to a place where Jesus would come, and he climbed a sycamore tree so he could see him. When Jesus came to that place, he looked up and said to him, "Zacchaeus, hurry and come down! I must stay at your house today."

Zacchaeus came down quickly and welcomed him gladly. All the people saw this and began to complain, "Jesus is staying with a sinner!"

But Zacchaeus stood and said to the Lord, "I will give half of my possessions to the poor. And if I have cheated anyone, I will pay back four times more."

Jesus said to him, "Salvation has come to this house today, because this man also belongs to the family of Abraham. The Son of Man came to find lost people and save them."

—Luke 19:1-10 (NCV)

It must have been a lonely life. Most people looked at him with disdain. Zacchaeus was Jewish, but he had "sold out" to the Romans. As a tax collector, he would have been scorned and hated by his fellow Jewish countrymen. Yet Jesus, the Lover of the Lost, took the time to meet with him, and to

extend grace to him. Through a relationship with Jesus, Zacchaeus experienced a complete change of heart and a restoration of privilege and influence with his people. Jesus made a huge difference in his life.

As I reflected upon the narrative of Luke's gospel, I was impressed with the thought that this change of status was preceded by a decision to place himself within the sphere of Christ's influence. Luke tells us, "He sought to see who Jesus was, but could not because of the crowd, for he was of short stature. So he ran ahead and climbed up into a sycamore tree to see Him, for he was going to pass that way" (verses 3 and 4).

Jesus desired Zacchaeus's friendship. Through an act of kindness, our Lord extended friendship to Zacchaeus, and His new found relationship with Jesus led him to reflect Christ's passion for reconciliation. In verse 8, we find that Zacchaeus said to the Lord, "I give half of my goods to the poor; and if I have taken anything from anyone by false accusation, I restore fourfold."

In Christ, *we* are called to be ambassadors of reconciliation. It is *our* privilege to reflect the impartial, benevolent love of Christ to those with whom we associate.

Finally, Zacchaeus personally enjoyed Christ's presence in the sense of a restored spiritual status. The Lord declared, "Today, salvation has come to this house, because he

also is a son of Abraham; for the Son of Man came to seek and to save that which was lost" (verses 9 and 10). Zacchaeus was accepted by Jesus, who desired that Zacchaeus be accepted by God's people as a joint heir of salvation.

In many ways, our spiritual dilemma is reflected in the life experience of Zacchaeus. Sin has positioned us outside of the security of salvation. We all "fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23) and our only hope is found in a relationship with Jesus. Even as Zacchaeus responded to the call of Christ, so we may experience spiritual renewal and reinstatement into the family of God. The Lord has left the opportunity of salvation open for us to embrace. We must choose to place ourselves within the sphere of His influence, that we might receive His grace and participate in offering salvation to others. This is Christ's passion and it is our privilege to proclaim it.

Recently, my wife and I traveled to Israel. We stood by a sycamore tree in Jericho. It reminded me of Zacchaeus, who chose to seek a friendship with Jesus. He responded to the call and came down to enjoy renewed peace and purpose as a disciple of Jesus. May the Lord help each of us to also respond to that call, that we might be blessed and be a blessing to others.

Pastor Ron Nelson is a singer/songwriter and recording artist. Visit his website at www.ronnelsonmusic.com.

WHITER THAN SNOW

A crossword puzzle by Richard Clark Jr.
(Answers from the NKJV)

Across

1. "Come now, and let us reason __," says the LORD, "Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow." Isaiah 1:18

4. Praise the LORD from the earth, you … fire and hail, snow and clouds; stormy wind, __ His word. Psalm 148:7-8

6. Like the cold of snow in time of harvest is a faithful __ to those who send him. Proverbs 25:13

8. He gives snow like wool; He scatters the frost like ashes; He casts out His hail like __; who can stand before His cold? Psalm 147:16-17

10. His clothes became shining, exceedingly white, like snow, such as no __ on earth can whiten them. Mark 9:3

12. I would hasten my __ from the windy storm and tempest. Psalm 55:8

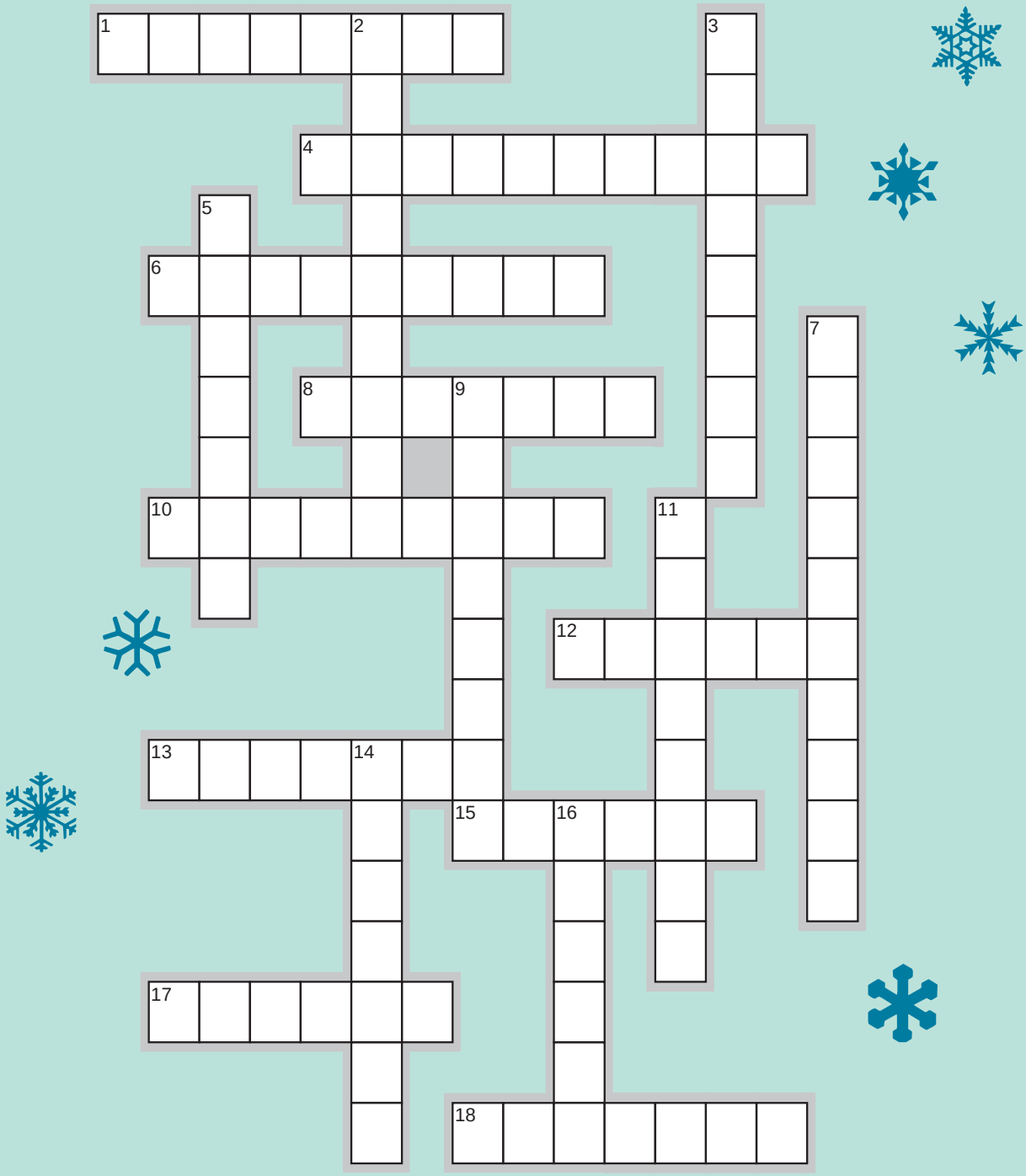
13. Like one who takes away a __ in cold weather, and like vinegar on soda, is one who sings songs to a heavy heart. Proverbs 25:20

15. Purge me with __, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. Psalm 51:7

17. As the rain comes down, and the snow from

heaven, and do not __ there, but water the earth, and make it bring forth and bud, … so shall My word be. Isaiah 55:10-11
18. The waters harden like stone, and the __ of the deep is frozen. Job 38:30

Down
2. She is not afraid of snow for her __. Proverbs 31:21
3. My brothers have dealt deceitfully…, like the streams of the brooks that pass away, which are dark because of the ice, and into which the snow __. Job 6:15-16
5. __ … also had gone down and killed a lion in the midst of a pit on a snowy day. 2 Samuel 23:20
7. From the chamber of the south comes the whirlwind, and cold from the __ winds of the north. By the breath of God ice is given, and the broad waters are frozen. Job 37:9-10
9. He says to the snow, `Fall on the earth'; likewise to the gentle rain and the heavy rain of His __. Job 37:6
11. He destroyed their vines with hail, and their __ trees with frost. Psalm 78:47
14. Have you __ the treasury of snow, or have you seen the treasury of hail…? Job 38:22
16. As snow in __ and rain in harvest, so honor is not fitting for a fool. Proverbs 26:1



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