



A healing journey through the big questions and emotions of grief. Danita Jenae, a survivor of loss herself, helps lighten your load of sorrow with gripping honesty, reassuring gentleness, and a mild case of dark humor. She braves topics like doubting God's goodness and wondering why this happened.

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PART ONE

FOG AND SHOCK
(how grief affects you)

misplacing wednesdays
(grief brain)

"Sorrow makes us all children again,
destroys all differences of intellect.
The wisest know nothing."

RALPH WALDO EMERSON¹

She didn't seem to understand why I presented myself in her office. With a lilt, I mumbled, "I'm Danita. I have a 10:30 a.m. appointment?" She informed me that our appointment was on Wednesday, which was yesterday. *Not again.* The bad news was I arrived twenty-four hours late. The miracle was I arrived fifteen minutes early.

Braving Wal-Mart was another miracle.

The first time I braved shopping at the superstore after Dan died, I wasn't prepared to pass the camping section, the automotive section, nor the peanut butter cups. Everything is and was Dan and his love and his absence.

I still cannot keep a single number in my head since Dan died. Can't remember my rent or utilities or other numbers one should keep. At the checkout line, I learned I cannot count to three either. And that's okay.

My four-year-old and I made it through checkout in a daze, yet triumphant. But when we arrived in the parking lot, I couldn't find my car anywhere. We were already exhausted from walking the

aisles indoors, and here we were doing it all over again outside.

Is it okay to crumble to the asphalt and bawl in the middle of a Wal-Mart parking lot? I didn't think so either. A family drove by, telling me to use my car alarm beeper. "Can't, key battery is dead." A kid told me I really should remember where I leave my car. I had no words. *I can't. My husband is dead.*

I've burned more chicken since Dan died than in my entire life combined. I began to stutter and spell words backwards. I brushed my teeth with a tube of lotion. I schmeared the deodorant tube across my cheeks and forehead, mistaking it for my face stick. During the initial grocery-panic of the pandemic, when hot dogs were national delicacies, I left bulk quantities of milk, chicken tikka masala, and hot dogs out overnight.

This is referred to as "grief brain." My friend Rosalinda told me all about it.

I'm thankful for "prego brain" and "mommy brain" because they helped me understand grief brain. With mommy brain, the mind and body work double-time to process creating new life. With grief brain, we work double-time to process the death of life. In either case, you may feel like you have lost your mind. You have not.

You have a *fully* functioning mind. Your emotional swings, your forgetfulness, your moments of precise clarity and moments of complete illogical-arity . . . surprisingly, these are proof that your mind is working. Rosalinda told me this is good.

Your mind is working harder than it's ever worked before to process *what just happened*. It's working overtime to make sense of what doesn't make sense. Because we were never created for death. That wasn't part of the original plan. We were created for a life that never ends, to be loved endlessly.

Instead of being hard on your amazingly powerful mind, give

yourself excessive amounts of grace. The shaming or condemning thoughts that say: *You can't do this; it's too hard; you won't make it; see how dumb that was . . .* No. Tell them to be silent in the name of Jesus.

And your best defense after that?

Laughter. If given the choice to laugh or have a nervous breakdown, I'm going to laugh. (Or break down.)



Okay. I told you some of my glory stories. Your turn. List your best grief brain moments. Let's celebrate these as proof that your mind is doing the hard work it *should* be doing.

-
-
-
-

Creator, thank You for giving me a fully functioning mind. I need Your help with important calls, errands, and decisions. I can't do it on my own. Increase my hope that I will get my mind back someday. Until then, please cover all my slip-ups in an excessive amount of grace.

PSALM 31:9–10 • ISAIAH 26:3 • PHILIPPIANS 4:4–7 • HEBREWS 4:14–16

losing taste buds
(grief aversions)

The day after Dan's funeral was "Meet the Teacher Day" at a new school in a new town. I think shock is the only reason we were there. My children and I didn't know left from right, and somehow, in a fog, we ended up in that classroom. Of all the graces, there was another mom there who had lost her husband years prior. She told me to rest, sit down, and always keep a bottle of water and tissues nearby.

Turns out, she was right. I didn't need food. I didn't need much water. I didn't want anything sweet. Soup and shakes felt easy to digest, so that's about all I ate in small quantities, for a time.

I remember my voracious reader of a child whispering one night, "I used to love reading, Mama. But now, I've just lost the taste for it." I hear you, baby.

I met a high school girl who was in a worship band with her mom. When her mom died, she couldn't even listen to music. It was just too painful.

Maybe these precious girls will return to music and reading someday when it's less raw, and maybe not. Either way is just fine.

When there are things you kind of want to taste again, but you're nervous to do so, I call this "grief aversion."

Dancing comes to mind. It makes me feel grounded, joyful, and hopeful. But following my husband's lead was such an intimate

experience that it will take great courage to step on the dance floor again. I know I will dance again. In time. And the Lord will not stop leading me, especially now that my strong and gentle leader of a husband is gone.

I couldn't even drink coffee for over two months after Dan died. Because everybody who knew Dan knew he loved French press coffee every morning. Because he even had a travel-size French press for his hardcore backpacking trips. Because part of our evening routine was the sound of the coffee grinder, preparing for the next morning, so he wouldn't wake us in the wee hours of the morning's slumber. Who knew that drinking your first cup of coffee after someone's death would be such a milestone? Death turns all kinds of things into milestones. Proof of rebuilding life, stone after stone.

I only drink coffee on special occasions. So, after Dan died, my special occasion and first cup of joe was to celebrate the fact that I was still alive and still putting one foot in front of the other, and there happened to be a coffee shop inside the grocery store. I wasn't ready yet to go to a real coffee shop without Dan, so this felt like a good baby step.

Let me tell you, buying groceries in that season was a special occasion and a huge victory. Still is. Every aisle was like a Monet of my life with Dan: the "muddy buddies," the saltines for making his favorite chicken fried steak, and the cumin for his favorite tikka masala.

The aisles held a colorful impressionistic blur of spending beautiful time with a beautiful man. Without him, life didn't have any taste left. It took me months to try to taste anything sweet and even longer to actually savor it.

But life does come back. And our taste buds do come back from the grave.



Did you do anything out of total shock shortly after the death or funeral of your loved one that you can't believe you actually did?

What foods or activities have you lost a taste for since losing your loved one?

What big or small "firsts" have you experienced since your loved one died that felt like monumental milestones? (Like when I drank my first coffee.)

Someday, when you're ready, what do you want to do again to feel fully alive that's closely tied to the person you lost?

Can you think of a baby step to take in that direction?

losing taste buds (grief aversions)

God who made me, You know every part of me.
You know every craving and aversion. My whole body
aches for my loved one. Help me gain strength and eat
again. Help me find foods that feel good. While my
body needs nourishment, my soul needs hope. Please
give me a hope for my future. Give me hope for the plans
You have for me. Help me take each step one at a time.
I desperately need You.

PSALM 43:5 • PSALM 139

where can i hide?
(grief covering)

In bed. Lights out. Eyes closed. One by one, the fears of tomorrow surround my home, march into my room, and threaten my peace. So, I do what any brave and mighty warrior would do.

I hide.

I've never hidden more in my life than since my husband died. I hide myself and my girls, our property, our loved ones. I tuck us all away in the shelter of the Most High. God's cloak covers us, and the enemy can't find us anymore.

We're hidden in Christ.

Long ago, a woman told me that fear is just smoke and mirrors. It puffs itself up to look and sound bigger than it is. We know fear is a defeated foe, but it sure can seem overpowering. When fear comes in ready to bully me and my peace, I just hide and take cover.

You know the story about Moses and the Israelites? How, through him, God told Pharaoh to set His people free, or else? That king chose ten "or else's." Swarms of bugs so thick it got dark, frogs, and plagues. But the final consequence of disobedience was death.

God also gave Moses life-saving instructions for His people: cover the top and sides of the doorframes with the blood of a lamb or a goat. The Lord would not allow the destroyer to enter their homes or harm them; it had to "pass over" those homes. (This is where the term "Passover" comes from.¹) However, those who

did not sacrifice the lamb and cover their homes with the blood lost their firstborn sons. Including Pharaoh.² The Bible says there has never been and never will be wailing like that in all of Egypt.³

Covering their doorframes with blood was an act of faith for the people. The lamb's lifeblood stood in for their own. This is also where we get the phrase "covered in the blood of Jesus." Jesus is our pure and spotless Lamb. By His blood, the consequences of eternal death pass over us. By His blood, we're set free from bondage and released to live in a promised land of freedom.

And, yet, we still live in a fallen world, and death is still a part of life. Loss can make us feel uncovered, exposed, and insecure. But Jesus covers over us. Everything we fear—it's already covered by God. He'll take care of it.

Shortly after Dan died, an old friend mailed me a necklace, a little clay rectangle stamped with a pair of wings. Underneath the wings was the word "covered." Before I went into overwhelming meetings and appointments, I wrapped a hand around the necklace, and it reminded me that I am covered by His wings. And so are my children. My loved ones. My future. My past. My finances. My concerns. My hopes. All are covered under His wings.

God's got me covered.

God chose us to be his very own through what Christ would do for us; he decided then to make us holy in his eyes, without a single fault—we who stand before him **covered with his love**. His unchanging plan has always been to adopt us into his own family by sending Jesus Christ to die for us. And he did this because he wanted to!⁴

I am covered with His love . . . and so are you.



We can take cover under His wings. What are your thoughts on hiding under the blood of Christ?

In what ways has your loss left you feeling uncovered, exposed, afraid, or insecure?

Can you prayerfully place the things you listed above under the blood of Jesus?

As you read the following liturgy, imagine God covering each of these things with His wings and His love.

A Liturgy of Covering

every exposed insecurity—covered
every puffed-up fear—covered
every negative imagination—covered
every moment of my past—covered
all my days ahead—covered
everyone I love and hold dear—covered
covered in the blood of Jesus.

where can i hide? (grief covering)

Lamb of God, You are holy and pure. You are also my shield and fortress. I am so grateful I can hide in You when I'm afraid and feel attacked. You are my hiding place and my refuge. Help me take my thoughts, fears, and worries captive and put them under the authority of Christ. Cover all my insecurities under the blood of Jesus.

PSALM 32:7 • 1 PETER 4:8 • PSALM 91:4 • COLOSSIANS 3:1-4

i can't move
(grief fever)

New wrinkles trace and retrace my long nights and sobbing like a map on my face. I haven't showered, and I'm in pajamas. So today, my video is off for the online meeting.

The speaker became a young widow decades ago. Today she wears make-up and her hair is done; she looks rested and peaceful.

She observes, "I was only twenty-two when my husband died, but I felt a hundred years old."¹

Wow. I am not twenty-two, but even she once felt as weary then as I do now.

This woman is hope with skin on.

One of my biggest surprises in grief is the physical penalties of it. When brokenhearted, my heart literally feels pierced and torn. Sorrow is agony across my shoulders. Loss is a trembling in my gut. Grief is also 1,000 percent exhaustion.

Grieving children often show symptoms of car sickness, tummy aches, or nightmares. I do too. Our breathing is shallow in "fight or flight" mode, and we grind our teeth at night. Sleeplessness compounds it all. Often, I cannot get out of bed. The kids arrive to school late daily. (Except that one time.) But when we can't move, we can't move.

Rosalinda explained that this is called "grief fever." That's why

we need sick days and mental health days. (And if we need down days, our kids do too.)

I've experienced natural and complicated traumatic child-births, but it's possible that bearing death is more physically painful than bearing life. Grief's like the debilitating state of severe postpartum depression . . . but it lasts much longer. People expect me to bounce back after a month or two. They expect me to be able to spell my name correctly and answer simple questions and even be able to drive. And I just can't.

I've learned to value stretch marks from childbearing by calling them glory marks. Will I ever see grief wrinkles as glory lines? I don't know.

At the end of a long day, I look at my half-sentence journal entry from this morning. My first response is to laugh.²

I woke up

This was as far as I got in my quiet morning moment. I laugh because I didn't even get to finish this sentence. The second half is missing. There's no punctuation, which actually seems fitting right now. We are in a semicolon season between what was and what is to come; our story isn't finished yet.

But as I reassess my lot, my day, the boundary lines drawn around me, and the responsibilities on my plate, I no longer snicker at myself. As my day winds down and sweet potatoes roast in the oven, I reconsider my self-laughter. I see how Grace Himself sees me.

I think about how deeply profound this statement actually is:

I woke up

And I think about how deeply profound it is that my feet kept taking steps and my mind kept making calls and my children made it to the doctor's and we snuggled up to watch *Cat in the Hat* and jammed to "Burn the Ships" and prayed and battled. It

can only be proof of God's grace when we can't complete a basic sentence and then we run a full run-on-sentence kind of day. How in the world did I accomplish all that today?

I woke up

Grace carries me. There's no other possible explanation.

I woke up

And that alone proves that Resurrection power lives in me.

And you woke up too. Reading this is proof. Resurrection power lives in you too.

“Wake up, sleeper,
Rise from the dead
And Christ will shine on you.”³

Many days, I wake up and just lie flat in bed all day. Those days are grace too. Because when we can't move, God is working a profound healing in our bodies and souls. It's a mending work that takes a careful, slow, and steady stitch. He's putting the left brain back together with the right brain, renewing our mind after trauma and loss split us in two.

There's grace for the physical pain and grace for days we can't budge. God can move mountains that won't budge and raise up dry bones from the ash heap. And He's so kind to just hold us there some days too, requiring nothing of us, offering the ministry of His quiet presence.



A big part of the rebuilding we'll do together in this book happens here in the question-and-answer section. The whole narrative leads up to this moment. It's where you'll process everything you

just read and begin to put the pieces of your heart and life back together. Take your time, reflect on them throughout your week, and record answers as they come to you:

What's one of your biggest surprises in grief?

How would you explain what grief feels like to you? Where and how does grief or trauma manifest in your body?

Do you know anyone who has lost and survived and are now your "hope with skin on"?

God of Resurrection, thank You for the gift of waking up.
Thank You for grace to rebuild and rest. Thank You for another day. Please help me take deep breaths and long exhales. Fill me with Your Spirit, and give me my breath back. Please bring healing to these places in my bones and sinews that carry such anguish. In the face of death, bring me back to life.

MATTHEW 11:28-30 • PHILIPPIANS 3:10-11 • JOHN 20:22 • EZEKIEL 37:6-9

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