

*Love*  
HAS COME



A 30-DAY JOURNEY  
OF HOPE AND ENCOURAGEMENT FOR  
THOSE EXPERIENCING GRIEF AND LOSS

*Love*  
HAS COME

MELINDA BECKENDORF GORDON

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## *Dedication*

To Clyde and Ashlin, for your unwavering love.  
Thank you for always believing in me, when so often  
I don't believe in myself. Walking this life with you  
makes my heart sing. I love you two with all the love  
my heart can hold.



## *Acknowledgments*

A million thank-yous to the dear friends who edited this book. And even more to the ones who continually encourage me to keep writing.

To Mom, Dad, and family, who live the journey with me, support every adventure, and never question the call.

To Abby, for showing me the real meaning of life and purpose.

To Simon, for teaching me the real meaning of love.

To Jesus, for being the solid rock on which I stand.



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## *Foreword*

**I**t is remarkable how someone so tiny, so helpless, so dependent, who lives only twelve days can change so many lives. Melinda has eloquently and honestly given us a glimpse into what her journey has been like. It is a journey of grace and hope in the midst of unimaginable loss and pain; a journey that likely will not have an end but does find hope along the pathway.

This book is a hug for those who need a light in their grief darkness and a revelation to those who want to help. Melinda competently navigates the tightrope between tears and gratitude, loss and gain, suffering and joy. Her measured honesty is like medicine that stings but leads to healing.

Melinda's story of her daughter Abby's short life and how it impacted so many people will impact you,

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too. It may help you take another step in the direction of healing as you see how one family honors their child's brief life. It may help you tell your own story of how love came to you. It might even inspire you to action or to be ready when your "baby Simon" opportunity comes along.

—Rev. Dr. Tom Blackaby,  
best-selling author, speaker, pastor

## *Preface*

I have prayed hundreds of times in my life for God to use me: use me as a vessel, let me be His hands and feet, use my words, give me the testimony that only He can give to bring Him glory. I admit I had no idea what I was asking. When we pray for God to use us, what we usually mean is: I am yours as long as it's painless, calm, and all the clouds have silver linings.

I've learned we had better be prepared to follow through when we pray these kinds of prayers. These are big words. And they are big shoes to fill.

Never in my wildest dreams did I think a part of my journey would entail the death of a child. If I had known, I surely would never have prayed, "Use me, Lord."

. . . Or would I?

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I've learned that God can use anyone, even me.

Even you, no matter what your circumstances.

He can take the pieces of our broken selves and put them together to make the most beautiful story. Sometimes this story can only be understood by the deepest part of us. When our spirit is impacted, life changes in a way that cannot be explained.



A precious vessel in the form of a three-and-a-half-pound little bundle of goodness named Hope Abigail (“Abby”) touched my spirit, changed me, moved me, and encouraged me.

A journey of heartbreak that could have stolen my joy, killed my dreams, and destroyed my family has only made my faith more alive and my trust deeper . . . trust in a God who can make all things good. Hard? Absolutely. Worth it? Without a doubt.

Thank you, Jesus, for sending a vessel of love in its purest form and for choosing me to be her momma.

One of Abby's gifts to me, to our family, was the lesson that we don't have to be strong enough, smart

## Preface

enough, or have it all together. We just have to be willing. Willing to follow a God who *is*.

I hope that you will come to see your loss, your broken heart, your trial as an opportunity to feel how deeply God loves you because God *is* love. He loves to love the lost, broken, hurting, and helpless.

*Love has come* in a God who is a healer, a deliverer, a teacher, a friend, a redeemer, a Savior. He *is*.



I pray each of you sees yourself as a vessel, whether you have prayed to be used as one or not. Remember, a vessel isn't built to stay anchored at the dock.

Your hardship is real and so is the grief. No matter how stormy the waters, how turbulent the waves, or how rocky the shore, your vessel *will* sail again. God promises that joy *will* come in the morning.

God doesn't bless us simply to bless us. He gives a blessing *to* us so His blessing can flow *through* us to others.

Although you may not know if the waters will be shallow, calm and peaceful, or deep, rough, and treacherous, I pray that you will pull up the anchor, push

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off from the dock, and set your vessel into the *forward* position to share your blessings.

Others need you.

The lessons you learned will encourage others who are going through similar experiences.

You have hugs that need to be given away.

You have words that need to be heard.

You have encouragement that needs to be received.

You have love that needs to be shown.

And, you have a story that needs to be shared.

By the words of your testimony, others will be blessed, and God will be glorified.

## INTRODUCTION:

### *Our Story*

Endurance is not just the ability to bear a hard thing, but to turn it into glory.

—William Barclay

### Taking an Unexpected Loss and Turning it into Unexpected *Gifts*

Doesn't life seem to always happen this way? Just when you think you are finding your stride, you are blindsided by something that takes you by complete surprise. In 2010, Clyde and I experienced just such a “complete surprise.”

With years of infertility issues and a seven-year-old daughter, we surrendered to the fact that we were unable to have another child. However, it seemed God had other plans when we learned the surprising news during my yearly routine checkup that we were pregnant. At twenty-one weeks into the pregnancy, we

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received more unexpected news: our sweet little surprise was a baby girl, and she had a chromosomal condition called trisomy 18 (T18) or Edwards syndrome. As with any genetic condition, there are many unknowns. Doctors prepared us for the worst but encouraged us to expect the best. From this point on, we had to let go of all expectations and accept that we had no idea where the journey would lead. So, our only plan was to love her. And my only wish was to meet her alive.

Hope Abigail “Abby” Gordon was born on September 23, 2010. She weighed just three pounds, five ounces. I laugh now when I tell the story behind the wild collection of infant hats I put together. In researching T18 on the Internet, I quickly learned more than I ever cared to. One of the most common traits of T18 is a disfigured head. Just in case this occurred, I thought no girl should be without a vast collection of fabulous little hand-knitted caps. As it turned out, Abby’s head was perfectly formed, along with the rest of her delicate body. Even though she looked so perfect on the outside, we knew her insides told a different story. Abby was not well and would not be with us as long as our hearts desired. She did, however, prove a few statistics wrong by surviving to term, taking a breath,

and drinking from a bottle, and she continued to defy expectations.

As the days passed in the hospital, the staff saw this fact as well and said, “Abby’s not done here yet. Plan B! You get to take her home!” Because T18 affects every cell in the body, we chose against invasive surgeries. We knew even if surgery could fix the hole in Abby’s heart, there was still a problem in her intestines and kidneys, and so on.

But home? What did it mean to bring Abby home under hospice care? We were familiar with hospice because Clyde’s mom had been with us in our home five years earlier under hospice care. But we’d never heard of hospice for children, especially three and half pound babies. We learned pediatric hospice services and equipment are rare. Very rare. Even getting her home from the hospital was a challenge because car seats are not made for such small babies. Abby had a small feeding tube and couldn’t regulate her body temperature, but the extent of the “care” she needed at home was minimal compared to so many others. Even so, this is also where the bigger challenges began to surface.

Once Abby was home, friends and family stopped by in a steady stream. Our simple goal was fulfilled—there was not a minute of Abby’s life when she wasn’t

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held by someone who loved her. And my wish of meeting her alive was far surpassed. Abby blessed the world with twelve days. Her life touched the hearts of everyone who met her, and we continue to see the impact of her brief time with us.

Just weeks after Abby's death, we started a blanket ministry at the hospital where Abby was born after we learned the previous donations had come to an end. Even though these blankets aren't necessarily meant for warmth, as a mom I knew it was such comfort to see a cozy, beautiful blanket, either with your baby in the NICU, or as a keepsake if your child dies. To date, more than 6,000 families have been blessed with keepsake blankets.

Because of the challenges we faced in caring for Abby, God continues to nudge our hearts to help families just like us on a difficult journey we knew well. When caring for a sick child or grieving the loss of a child, no parent should have to take time to find basic necessities or worry about how to pay for unexpected expenses. For that reason, we founded Abby's Gift, a 501(c)(3) foundation created to help families with a critically-ill or terminally-ill child. The needs of these families are tremendous, and our hearts ache for each and every one. We understand the pain. By turning our

focus on others, it seemed to somehow slowly heal the broken pieces of our hearts.

The biggest priority and greatest need of families is assistance with funeral expenses. This is the main mission of Abby's Gift—easing the stress for grieving families by assisting with the overwhelming and unexpected funeral costs. No one plans to bury their child. We have been described as the foundation with the topic no one wants to talk about but is one of the greatest needs of families.

Without a single word spoken, without a single Scripture quoted, Abby proved lives can be changed, hearts can be mended, and Christ's love can be poured out to the world in surprising and unexpected ways. Love came to us in a sweet little baby who brought an unexpected journey of love and loss. This led us to take the lessons and blessings of her life to share unexpected *gifts* with others.

To learn more about Abby's Gift,  
visit [www.abbysgift.com](http://www.abbysgift.com)

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For whatever type of loss you encountered, we are so sorry. Our hearts ache for you, and we pray God's healing and comfort for you as you step into a new "normal" in life. As you continue to put one foot forward, with one step at a time, we pray you, too, will find healing in giving back.

*Hope Abigail Gordon*  
September 23, 2010  
3 lbs., 5 oz.—15-3/4 inches  
8:09 a.m.



*Introduction: Our Story*

In the spring of 2017, the full story of our journey with Abby will be released in a book titled, “*All the Love a Heart Can Hold*,” where we open our life, our journey, and our hearts to share the gift of HOPE with all the love our hearts can hold.



## *God's Glue Stick*

The Lord is near to those who have a broken heart. And  
He saves those who are broken in spirit.

—Psalm 34:18 (NLV)

**B**roken hearts happen every day. The causes can be: unemployment, cancer, death of a loved one, crumbling marriages, hurtful friends, loneliness, estranged family. No matter what the cause, broken hearts are real, and no one is immune.

But with every broken heart comes the promise of healing. God offers a glue stick stronger than anything you can buy at the local hardware store or from a late-night infomercial. You know the feeling—healing is when you reach that point where you can stretch your big toe just far enough to reach the other side of the pit; the point where you realize you have been holding your breath forever, and you can finally take a sigh of relief; the point where you feel your limbs to make sure

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they are still intact; the point when you open only one eye just to make sure it's over; and the point where your mind ponders, "Am I dreaming, or did I really survive that?"

Healing happens every day. It is different for each of us, but it is real, and no one is denied. God offers. You choose to accept or decline.

God's glue stick connects and fastens the shattered pieces back together. Do they fit perfectly, and does it look the same? If we are lucky, no. If we are lucky, we are completely different on the other side of our broken hearts because of our suffering . . . different in a really good way that offers new perspective, more compassion, and deeper love. God says that our troubles, grief, and sorrow are not in vain. These experiences allow us to learn, grow, and survive so we can press on and move forward with gracious and humble hearts to hold each other up, share one another's burden, and encourage others who are walking where we have walked and who are fighting to survive, just like we did.

*Love has come* . . . to remind us that Jesus will do more *through* us than we could ever do *for* Him.

So step forward, trusting the glue stick, not because it's easy, but because God will be glorified *through* your

*God's Glue Stick*

story, *through* your broken heart, and *through* your healing. Your heart is forever changed; the pieces will never fit together as they once did. Praise God! Step forward in your healing to see life with a new set of eyes. Life is no longer about what you can do for Him, but what He has already done for you.



## *Welcome Home*

Peace I leave with you. My peace I give to you. I do not give peace to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled or afraid.

—John 14:27 (NLV)

(Blog post in “Hope Abigail,” written by Randy Olive, September 2010)



A new sound filled the home of Melinda and Clyde this evening: the tiny squeak of a hungry Abby. Melinda stood over her precious daughter, lifted her out of her car seat, and whispered, “Welcome home, baby girl.” It was like angels were singing harmony behind her. Melinda pulled sweet Abby close to cuddle her face-to-face. She

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kissed her and was lost in the moment—Abby was home. She was never expected to be there. But she was. The story she has already been to each and every one of us . . . a story that says God is God, and He loves us. It's amazing that this child has touched so many. Fourth day birthday celebrated and well into their daughter's fifth day of life, the Gordons are smiling from ear-to-ear, exhausted with love. Clyde was as proud as a dad could be, Ashlin was ready to be the big sister she had been dreaming of, and life has begun its next chapter of grace.



“Welcome home, baby girl!”

## *Welcome Home*



Who knew a form of perfect and holy love could be found in a three-pound, five-ounce bundle of goodness? Who knew meeting our baby girl would unfold upon us and allow us to witness a form of God's love that we had never known?

A piece of our story arrived and we were excited to share her with the world, to witness God's faithfulness, to step back and allow her to fulfill her purpose. She didn't speak a word, but her message was powerful. Her body was weak, but when you stepped into her presence your spirit was awakened.



She was grace, love, and Hope Abigail in a tiny little package. A little package that we would have to give back

much too soon. And, as much as she enjoyed our love,

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I know she was even happier to hear the sweet words of her Jesus when He said, “Welcome home, baby girl!”

*Love has come . . .* to us in our lives in big and small “packages.”

I don't understand the reason some are given and stay longer than others, why some take our breath away, and others leave our hearts troubled and afraid. But there is a promise that comes from the only One who can satisfy our aching hearts with a peace that surpasses all attempts of understanding. One who softly speaks above our whimpers to our broken hearts, as He wipes our tears, “My peace I give to you.”

Do you feel it?

## *Dear Jesus*

The Lord is close to the brokenhearted; He rescues those whose spirits are crushed. The righteous person faces many troubles, but the Lord comes to the rescue each time.

—Psalm 34:18–19 (NLT)

(Blog post, October 5, 2010)

**D**ear Jesus,  
Did Abby arrive safely? Is she ok? What song did the angels sing as she arrived? Are you holding her now? . . .

All these questions from the heart of an earthly mommy. I have not a single doubt that all is well, the angels are still singing, and You are still loving on our sweet Baby Abby.

We talked so much about You to her during her last days. We told her You would be waiting with open arms, that in Your time she would go from my arms

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to Yours in a split second, and that there was no better place to go than from mommy and daddy kisses to Your heavenly kisses.

She is such a special girl, and we will spend the rest of our days thanking You for sharing her with us. We are blessed but so heartbroken right now. And we know Your heart is breaking, too.

Thank you for Your perfect peace, comfort, and strength because that's the only way we are able to stand, or breathe, or take a single step forward.

Thank you for the impact Abby had on this lost world in such a short time. What a bright ray of sunshine, a glimmering ray of *hope* for so many.

Clyde and I will never forget this experience of holiness, miracles, and the touch of Your hand during this journey. We will live our lives blessing others and helping families through similar journeys. Our prayer is that we can *leak* Jesus as well as Abby did. She didn't speak, or tell any stories with words . . . but every second she lived her spirit leaked the goodness, gentleness, peacefulness, righteousness, of You, Jesus. When Abby would come into a room, something was different. The air was sweeter; the room was brighter. It was her leaking! Every ounce of her three-pound body, spirit, and soul leaked Jesus.

*Dear Jesus*

What a gift! We will continue to trust You, the Giver of Life, even at the cost of her death. Thank you for Abby, for twelve love-filled, precious days.

P.S. I know you already know, but as a mommy I have to make sure all of heaven-side knows that baby Abby loves foot massages and having her head stroked. Please kiss her for me on those tiny, petite, sweet lips. I miss her so much.

All the love a heart can hold,

*Melinda*

Blessed to be chosen as Abby's mommy



See, I will create  
new heavens and a new earth.  
The former things will not be remembered,  
nor will they come to mind.  
But be glad and rejoice forever  
in what I will create,  
for I will create Jerusalem to be a delight  
and its people a joy.  
I will rejoice over Jerusalem  
and take delight in my people;

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the sound of weeping and of crying  
will be heard in it no more.  
Never again will there be in it  
an infant who lives but a few days,  
or an old man who does not live out his years;  
the one who dies at a hundred  
will be thought a mere child;  
the one who fails to reach a hundred  
will be considered accursed.

—Isaiah 65:17–20 (NIV)



*Love has come . . . to give hope.*

It is impossible to miss the will of God because His very life is expressed everywhere, if our spirit eyes are open to see. He loves us just the way we are: broken, aching hearts, warts, gray hair, wounded spirits, and all. It's in our brokenness that He is able to be God. It only takes a mustard seed of faith . . . or in our case, a tiny bundle of goodness wrapped in a small, broken body whose joy and beauty were as big and beautiful as the One who created her.

## *The Intersection*

But forget all that—it is nothing compared to what I am going to do. For I am about to do something new. See, I have already begun! Do you not see it? I will make a pathway through the wilderness. I will create rivers in the dry wasteland.

—Isaiah 43:18–19 (NLT)

**I** assume a turning point comes in every sorrow, tragedy, and trial. Something clicks in our minds and awakens us to the fact that we have two options—to continue on the same path *or* choose something different, not really knowing what that something different looks like, feels like, or acts like.

Depression has a way of hiding the truth that we are *not* stuck in our circumstances, options really do exist. We get busy, we get away from prayer, we have jobs that become our priority, we get busy with kids' activities, we have pain that consumes us . . . and all of

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a sudden we are barreling down a one-way street with no visible means of escape.

I was there. I lived it . . . antidepressants to get me through the day and sleeping pills to get me through the night.

I prayed for the intersection without confidence it would come or that it was within my line of sight.

At times along our path, we come to an intersection where awareness and choice are the only items on the map. Awareness tells us there is a problem, and we need to change direction, and it provides the realization we have a choice of which direction we turn. Right or left is irrelevant because we don't know what lies ahead either way we choose.

The moment the Lord opened my eyes and I became aware I was standing flat-footed and still at the crossroads of an intersection, I leaned into the promises in Isaiah. I knew if I remained where I was, nothing would change. Anxiety and fear would only grow stronger because of the unknowns that lay ahead.

In Isaiah 43 God speaks of making a pathway through the wilderness for me. He speaks of creating a river in the dry wasteland for me. This turning point became about *trust*. Simply, did I trust His goodness and faithfulness? Did I believe His promises? No matter

*The Intersection*

what I “felt,” did I believe Him? My answer was *yes* and my *choice* was to trust in the pathways He was making and the rivers He was creating.

*Love has come . . .* to be your *awareness* and remind you there is *choice*.

There is always choice. You are not planted where you are. You are not destined to remain in the havoc of going against the flow on a one-way street. Jesus loves. Time heals. The next step is up to you. If you are sitting at the intersection now, make a choice. If you don't see the intersection yet, keep your eyes focused ahead. It's close, very close. I promise.



## *What I've Learned*

For this God is our God for ever and ever; he will be our guide even to the end.

—Psalm 48:14 (NIV)

I've learned just because you've experienced a devastating heartbreak, doesn't mean you are in the valley. Instead, you can experience something that changes you, something that breaks you down to your soul, and still be standing high on the mountaintop praising a God who has poured out His grace.

I've also learned:

Heartbroken and lost are completely different experiences.

“Spiritually dry” and “cup overflowing” can't be experienced at the same time.

God is better than I ever thought.

My marriage is solid.

God always shows up.

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Who my friends are.

Family is everything.

The most difficult things are not those seen and known by the world but those deep within your soul, unseen, and unknown by anyone, except Jesus.

Everyone falls sometimes.

Modern-day miracles really do happen.

What scared feels like.

Life is so much more than my eyes can see.

We don't understand someone's pain unless we've experienced the same. I don't know the heartache of an addict. I don't know the heartache of abuse. I don't know the heartache of cancer. I can't expect others to understand the loss of a child unless they've lost their own.

What faith can do . . . and how much faith I have.

Broken and beautiful are one in the same in God's eyes.

Speaking my thoughts and feelings results in a babbling mess. My heart is better spoken in writing.

My aspiration is to be half the person Abby was and leak Jesus like she did.

He will carry me when I don't have the strength to stand.

Only God knows what happens next. Speculation is everywhere, and everyone has an opinion. But, no

*What I've Learned*

matter what “research says,” “history shows,” or nay-sayers speak, a T18 little baby named Abby *did* suck a bottle, swallow, tee-tee, poop, smile, and fight like a girl for twelve days . . . all with a perfectly-shaped head!

My best quality is love, and my best feature is kindness.

What true sorrow means.

What pure joy feels like.

My best position and posture is on my knees.

The true and desperate meaning of “better left unsaid.”

“My grace is sufficient for you” (2 Cor. 12:9) is true.

You can't believe in both coincidence and God.

The process of death sucks.

People's motives aren't always pure.

I can function on one hour of sleep, even at my age.

Death is a promotion . . . and my baby daughter outranks me.

What Scripture means when it says God is *love*.

What supernatural intervention feels like.

I have zero tolerance for: the status quo, self-pity, worldliness, and superficiality.

A sad fact that too many people spend too much time on things they can't do anything about and things

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that get them nowhere. These things are: worry, anxiety, stress, and control.

With an open heart we learn something new every day.

In Philippians 1, Paul writes to the people of Philippi about this truth. I pray his words penetrate your spirit and open your eyes and heart to the pure love of Christ. Paul writes:

I pray that your love will overflow more and more, and that you will keep on growing in knowledge and understanding. For I want you to understand what really matters, so that you may live pure and blameless lives until the day of Christ's return. May you always be filled with the fruit of your salvation—the righteous character produced in your life by Jesus Christ—for this will bring much glory and praise to God

—Philippians 1:9–11 (NLT)



*Love has come . . .* to bring clarity to what really matters in this life. Lessons abound if we are willing to learn.

What have you learned?

## *Top Seven Things Not to Say to a Grieving Person*

Gracious words are like a honeycomb, sweetness to the soul and health to the body.

—Proverbs 16:24 (ESV)

(Blog post, December 2010)

**Y**ou will either be appalled or laugh hysterically at this post. We were appalled, now we laugh hysterically. If there is a list of lessons learned, this is one. We'd like to spare you from the "open-mouth, insert-foot" moments when talking to a grieving person or family. Below are just a few of the things we heard and are begging you *not* to say. Today, they make me laugh out loud as I write them.

These are the top seven things not to say to a grieving person or family along with our feelings and commentary.

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1. "You can have another one."

One thing Clyde said to me afterwards, not to the person of course, was "What?! It's like they were talking about a puppy that got hit by a car . . . oh, you can get another one!"

2. "You can always try again."

No, we can't . . . for several reasons . . . chances of chromosomal issues occurring again increase 90 percent; I'm forty!; *and* . . . I got my tubes tied!

3. She is better off.

Although we intellectually and spiritually know this, who cares right now?

4. "You will see her again."

Right. But we are here and she is there. Sucks for now.

5. "It will get easier."

How do you know?

6. "Time is your friend. It will ease the pain."

Really? Time is proving to make it more distant, not less heartbreaking or less painful.

*Top Seven Things Not to Say to a Grieving Person*

7. “I guess this may take some time to get over.”

Are you kidding? Speechless at first. Now, no comment . . . the words from both me and Clyde were too ugly to repeat.

For what it’s worth, for the rest of our lives, here are the words we are going to say to *anyone* experiencing a loss. Nothing more, nothing less: “I am so sorry.”

*Love has come* . . . to remind you that words are powerful.

Words have the power to heal and the power to hurt. They have the power to send a sorrowful soul in a downward spiral or send it soaring on the wings of eagles. Be gracious and speak love to others by the simplicity of your words. And, extend grace to those who have the best of intentions but speak less than “sweetness to the soul and health to the body” with their words.



## *No Mystery in Suffering*

For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.

—Romans 8:18 (ESV)

(Excerpts from blog post, 2010)

There is divine mystery in suffering, one that has a strange and supernatural power. When a person reaches a point where they can be calm and carefree, inwardly experiencing joy in their suffering, and no longer beg God to be delivered from it, then the suffering has accomplished its blessed ministry and perseverance has “finished its work.”

—James 1:4 (NIV)<sup>1</sup>

**I**t is in this experience of complete suffering that the Holy Spirit works many miraculous things deep within our souls. In this condition, our entire being lies

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1 L. B. Cowman, *Streams in the Desert*

## LOVE HAS COME

perfectly still under the hand of God, in the hand of God. Every power and ability of the mind, will, and heart are submissive. The only choice has now become the purpose of God. Circumstances can be what they may, because deep within the soul there is calm assurance that everything, whether good or bad, past or present, works “for the good of those who love Him” (Rom. 8:28).

*Love has come . . .* to say there is beauty, purpose, and blessing when we lose our own strength, wisdom, plans, and desires . . . and to be where every ounce of our being becomes like a peaceful Sea of Galilee under the feet of Jesus.

## *What Faith Can Do*

Let us keep looking to Jesus. Our faith comes from Him and He is the One who makes it perfect. He did not give up when He had to suffer shame and die on a cross. He knew of the joy that would be His later. Now He is sitting at the right side of God.

—Hebrews 12:2 (NLV)

The day we learned of Abby's diagnosis, we were driving home from the doctor and the song, "What Faith Can Do" was playing on the radio. From that point on, it became our family theme song, which we even played at Abby's funeral. Every word of this song spoke to our story and touched our hearts in a way we had never experienced . . . as if the song were written for us, to be played on that day, at that time.



## LOVE HAS COME

Little did we know the power it would take to rise and find the strength to move forward. The song served as our reminder that if we have *faith*, even though our sky may be falling, miracles really do happen, hope is real and doesn't ever end, silent prayers really do get answered, and broken hearts can be healed. We were reminded that the sun will shine again, and new beginnings will come from our ashes . . . if we are willing to embrace them.

And months later, after our daughter was born, we were reminded that the purest form of love can come from a three-and-a-half-pound little girl who spoke volumes of what holiness truly is. We were reminded that life is so much more than our human eyes can see, and that God calls us to face the clouds so He can offer, with outstretched hands, our silver lining. We were reminded that when the world said our baby may only live minutes, divine grace stepped in and gave us twelve days. Faith reminds us that purpose isn't something we search for; purpose is found when we lose sight of self and set our eyes on serving others. Above all else, we were reminded that there are times in life where blind and pure faith truly is all that we have or need.

*What Faith Can Do*

Today when we hear this song, we smile and remember the joy of the sweetest little *Hope Abigail* who ever lived.

*Love has come* . . . to remind us what faith can do.

When we fall, when we are knocked down, faith gives us the strength to pull ourselves up by the bootstraps and keep going, sometimes over and over again. Even when the sky is falling, our faith allows us to *know* our broken hearts will become new, miracles *do* happen, dreams *do* move mountains, silent prayers *are* answered, and the sun *will* indeed soon be shining.



## *Against All Odds*

Then Jesus said, “Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you. Let me teach you, because I am humble and gentle at heart, and you will find rest for your souls.”

—Matthew 11:28–29 (NLT)

**A**bby was diagnosed with a rare and fatal chromosomal disorder called trisomy 18 or Edwards syndrome. We learned of her official diagnosis before her birth at twenty-weeks’ gestation. Our decision going forward was never in question; we were carrying to term.

There were plenty of naysayers in the world to reinforce our doubts and fears. There were plenty who not only listened to our list of odds, but were eager to add to the list.

How about we don’t look at the odds and instead look at God? He isn’t subject to odds.

## LOVE HAS COME

In mid-2010, these were just a few of the “odds” that had us slammed against the wall:

- We had tried for seven years to have another child and were finally told to consider other options.
- We were encouraged to “induce early” when we received the official diagnosis and the “incompatibility with life” future that lay ahead.
- We were told it was likely she would not carry to term and make it to delivery or might be stillborn.
- We were told it was likely if she were born alive, that she would be too weak and sick to cry or breathe on her own.
- We were told it was likely she would not be able to nurse or eat by bottle, so she would live on a feeding tube.
- We were told it was likely she would not be able to poop and would suffer ruptured intestines.
- We were told it was likely she would only live minutes after birth.

## *Against All Odds*

We took our weak, weary, and heavy burdens to the One who is capable of chewing up and spitting out odds. And *against all odds*:

- She didn't exhibit many of the classic physical symptoms of the syndrome, and we had peace beyond all understanding that we were carrying to term, no matter what.
- My one and only prayer from the time of diagnosis was that I'd meet my child alive. I did!
- She let out a loud and powerful cry at delivery!
- She nursed and bottle-fed, although later we chose to give her little body a break and supplement with tube feedings.
- She pooped . . . a lot!
- We didn't get minutes with her. We got twelve *whole days*!



## LOVE HAS COME

*Love has come . . .* to show us the way when the journey offers no indication of how difficult the road may be.

So, what do we do? What is our choice? We can give into the spirit of fear and dwell on so many “what ifs,” or we can run to the arms and embrace of Jesus. He so willingly says, *Come to me. I am here.*

We do have choice about the manner in which we carry out the circumstances that show up in our lives. It’s not easy to give up control and surrender; it’s not without pain and tears. But there is promise of an easy yoke and a light load.

I pray you choose to take your weary bones and heavy burdens to the only One who can give rest to your soul. Aren’t you tired?

## *Above the Wreckage*

Those who sow in tears will reap with songs of joy.

—Psalm 126:5 (NIV)

(Blog post, 2011)

**W**reckage comes in all forms. So do blessings. One year, one month, twenty-six days, two hours, and one minute ago . . . Baby Abby was born.

Blessing . . . big blessing. Twelve days of glory, beautiful moments, and memories that we cling to with all our might.

Then tears . . . so many tears.

With any heartbreak comes mourning and grief; that's the natural cycle of life. Many days are filled with those beautiful memories and absolute joy from the depths of your soul. Other days you find yourself deep within and entangled in a pile of wreckage, one that doesn't seem to offer a way out. You see glimpses of

## LOVE HAS COME

light, so you know there must be an escape. You feel a quick breeze sweep across your face, so you know there must be a small opening somewhere. You hear a faint voice in the distance, so you know there must be someone who knows you are there. You know there is a way out, but you are paralyzed, unable to move.

One year, one month, fourteen days, and one hour ago, Abby died.

Within the wreckage, it is hard to see, understand, hear, believe, or comprehend, that something good, anything good, lies within the heap of rubble. But it does. *Always*. The guarantee is that “the good” will never come in the form or way you expect it. *Never*.

Our minds can't imagine such goodness that only God can make. In the depths of the wreckage, we see only the loss, we feel the hurt, we believe dreams have been crushed, and we are unable to recognize the blessings.

Rising above the wreckage is not accomplished by our own strength, for sure. Because, above the wreckage is a Christ who has lived the pain and now catches every tear. A Christ who stands above the wreckage, proving He is the glimpse of light that we saw. He provided the breath of air. He is the faint voice that we heard. And He is faithful to send the people who offer

## *Above the Wreckage*

to help lift a heavy load, ease a burden, and pull us out. A tiny glimpse of hope through a call that comes out of the blue, or an e-mail with encouraging words, or a text that lifts a wounded spirit. Coincidence? No way.

The words “wreckage” and “blessing” seem as if they should be like oil and water, at opposite ends of the spectrum. But, is it possible that the wreckage is part of the blessing?

We tend to feel we are doing the greatest good in the world when we are strong and healthy, when we are diving head-first into acts of service, and all is right within our little world.

Now, I am almost certain it is because of the wreckage, the sorrow, the pain, the tears, and the heartbreak that we are capable of doing our greatest good in the world. Maybe the wreckage offers the greatest lessons in faith, of being certain of what we do not or cannot see. Maybe it's our broken hearts that drive us to do our greatest good.

Wreckage comes in all forms. Your wreckage may not be the loss of your child. But I am certain wreckage exists for everyone. How we choose to act when we are buried deep within the wreckage seems to be an important step in the journey. How will you choose?

## LOVE HAS COME

*Love has come . . .* to remind us that above the wreckage and in the blessing, we know songs of joy are playing, if we stop long enough to listen. We know that at the end of our hope, we find the brightest beginning of fulfillment and purpose. We know that our joys are made better when sorrow is in the midst of them. And where darkness seems the deepest, the most radiant light is set to emerge. Do you see it?

## *Geri*

There is a special time for everything. There is a time for everything that happens under heaven. There is a time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pick what is planted. There is a time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up. There is a time to cry, and a time to laugh; a time to have sorrow, and a time to dance. There is a time to throw stones, and a time to gather stones; a time to kiss, and a time to turn from kissing. There is a time to try to find, and a time to lose; a time to keep, and a time to throw away. There is a time to tear apart, and a time to sew together; a time to be quiet, and a time to speak. There is a time to love, and a time to hate; a time for war, and a time for peace.

—Ecclesiastes 3 (NLV)

**T**he February after Abby died, I went to the Cenacle Retreat House for the weekend. It's a place where Catholic nuns live but is open to group and individual retreats. It is simplicity at its best. My intention was to

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sleep, enjoy the quiet outdoors, sleep, pray, be quiet, and sleep.

When I arrived, I noticed the sign in the lobby saying a “Silent Weekend Retreat” was in progress, so all guests must adhere to the silence. Perfect! My heart leaped for joy because I was coming for quiet. I didn’t have to engage with anyone beyond eye contact and a polite smile, no talking. I was in heaven.

At the Cenacle, dinner is served promptly at 5:30. Everyone goes through the line, the food is scooped and put on your plate like elementary school; you tell Mary what you want to drink, then move on to the dining room. Since there was a group retreat, those of us who came individually were eating in a separate room, much smaller and more my style. As I walked in and chose my seat, I saw only one lady dining. I never thought of saying anything to her, and I didn’t feel bad because the sign out front clearly said “Silent.”

The Lord had other plans. He obviously didn’t see the sign or maybe He doesn’t follow the rules, even at the nuns’ house. He had plans for me and a sixty-eight-year-old woman, the only other woman in the dining room with me.

Lady: “You here for the weekend?”

Me: “Yes” (thinking to myself, *Did she just talk to me? It is silence!*).

Lady: “There is fruit and hard-boiled eggs in that little fridge if you want that for breakfast.”

Me: “OK, thank you” (thinking to myself again, *Silence!*).

Lady: “My name is Geri.”

Me: “Nice to meet you. My name is Melinda” (thinking to myself, *Ugghhh . . . here we go*).

Geri: “Have you been to the Cenacle before?”

Me: “Yes, several times, and I really enjoy it. Have you?”

Geri: “No, this is my first time. But I’ve been here for a week. I am leaving tomorrow.”

Me: “Wow, that’s great. I would love to stay for a week. Are you from Houston?”

Geri: “No. The sisters have been kind enough to let me stay this long . . . I’ve kind of lost my way.”

Me: “Oh, I’m sorry. Where will you go tomorrow?”

Geri: “I’m not sure. I guess where that old jalopy out there takes me. I’ve been divorced for twenty-three years. I was a mother who stayed home with my sons until they went to college. My husband of twenty-five years left me soon after with no support. I hate him for it. I would kill him if it

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were in me to do that sort of thing. He has turned my sons against me, too. I have been looking for a steady job for years, but they say I'm not qualified. Do you know anyone hiring?"

Me: "I am so sorry. No, I don't, offhand, but I will think about it before tomorrow."

Geri: "Are you here just to rest?"

Me: "Well, yes, sort of. My daughter died in October, and I just needed to get away from the house for a few days. My husband is home with our other daughter."

Silence. She stares at me with wide eyes for a bit, then stares out the window. I look back at my food and try to continue eating.

Geri: "I am sorry about your daughter. Are you so angry at God? I imagine you are so bitter. I am angry at what my husband did to me!"

Me: "No. I'm not angry or bitter, but I am heartbroken. Her name was Abby, and she lived for twelve days. It was the best twelve days of our lives because she wasn't expected to live at all. To me, it's kind of like, OK (I say with a deep breath and long sigh), this happened and now what am I going to do with it, how can I glorify God in this absolute heartbreak."

Geri: "What?"

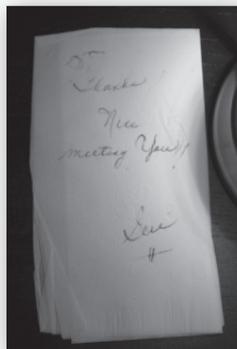
Me: "God was with us every step of the way. He never promised life would be easy, but He does promise that He will never leave us. To me, this was one of those 'what was meant for evil, God can make good' kind of life events. I believe the enemy so hoped to destroy the pregnancy, our marriage, our family, our faith. But, he didn't win. Abby made us stronger because of the way we felt God's presence. So, even heartbroken, we pray for strength to move forward and say, 'What are we going to do with this experience?'"

Geri: "I am a believer but I could *never* do that." Then she turned her chair to continue eating.

I prayed for Geri most of the night. She had lost her way in more ways than one, and I was heartbroken for her. The next morning at breakfast I was happy to see her sitting at her same table in our dining room. I patted her on the back as I walked by. Things were silent today. The only noise in the room was the clinking of the silverware hitting our plates. Then I saw a white rectangular napkin appear beside my plate. I looked up and Geri was standing there in the same clothes she wore the day before with a pen in her hand. The writing on the napkin said, "Thanks! Nice meeting you! Geri"

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I took my napkin and borrowed her pen and wrote, “You too. God will help you, if you let Him. Pray, and I will also pray for you. There is always hope.”



She wrote back, “Our conversation made me see things differently. I knocked on your door last night, but I guess you were sleeping. I wanted to thank you. It changed my life.” I looked up at her, in her eyes, and I broke the rules of silence, “God bless you, Geri. You be safe out there.” She smiled and walked out the door.

I don’t know where Geri is or where her old jalopy took her that day. I pray she is well, safe, warm, fed, and that she figured out “what to do with it.”

That weekend we shared the common ground of “it.”

Geri’s “it” was a twenty-five-year marriage that ended in an ugly way and was followed by twenty-three years of wandering in her desert called, “I’ve lost my way.”

My “it” was the loss of my daughter and wandering along the path of grief. Neither of us right or wrong or

indifferent, both in desperate need to be showered in God's love.

*Love has come . . .* to remind us that no matter what our "it" is in life—our burden or heartbreak that seems too great to bear, we have a choice in our action, our attitude, our reaction, our perspective, and our words.

There is beauty in your story. By the words of your testimony, others will be blessed. Suffering provides opportunity for God's glory, our transformation, testimony, and ministry.

We always have a choice. What are you going to choose to do with your hardship? Are you ready to share the beauty of your story?



## *A Weak Hallelujah*

Sorrow beats *foolish* laughter; embracing sadness somehow gladdens our hearts.

—Ecclesiastes 7:3 (The Voice)

(Blog post, December 2010)

Today, my hallelujah is weak. I love the Lord. He is mine, and I am His. But, words can't describe my heart and my ache. I experienced another "first" today that took me back down to my knees. Not back down to my knees asking why. Not asking how. Only down to my knees in tears. I had someone ask, "So, how's the baby?"

Do you try and explain? Do you turn and walk away? What do you say? —"She died"? It's harsh, but those were the first words that came to mind. How do you act? What are the right words? I graciously and politely answered her question in the most eloquent

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words my mind could muster and my mouth could speak, considering the question. I know it was possibly more uncomfortable and awkward for her than it was for me. Nonetheless, it sucked for both of us.

As I left the appointment, a song began playing in my head—Amy Grant’s “Better Than a Hallelujah.” As I sat in the car weeping, pouring out my miseries, I was grateful for a God who heard it all as a sweet melody. The mess that I am, the honest cries of my broken heart . . . are better than a hallelujah, sometimes.

*Love has come . . . to comfort you when your hallelujah is weak.*

Whether you are speaking your miseries or singing a melody, God is there. Whether you are shedding tears or shouting pleading prayers, God is there. You can fool others, maybe even yourself, but there is no fooling a God who knows the beautiful mess you are.

## *Because You Lived*

How the precious children of Zion, once worth their weight in gold, are now considered as pots of clay, the work of a potter's hands.

—Lamentations 4:2 (NIV)

Years ago I wrote a letter to Ashlin and put it in her baby book. The day of Abby's funeral, I wrote her a letter and put it in her baby book.

October 9, 2010

Dear Abby,

The moment I set eyes on you and heard your cry, my heart melted. Joy, pure joy. You are a brave girl, and you make me want to be brave. Because of you, I love deeper, my heart is purer, and my soul is full of immeasurable joy. Because of you, I see the world with a different set of eyes. I see people and situations from my heart, not with my eyes. Because you loved me and needed me (later to realize that it was I who needed you!), it makes me want to stand taller, hold my chin up, and walk with a spring in my step. What was meant to throw me off

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track has straightened my path. What was meant to hold me down and crush me has deepened my purpose. What was meant to paralyze me has motivated me even more to shine the light of Jesus into the darkest night, life, and situation. The glimpse of “holy” that you brought into this world and into my life has changed me forever. Thank you, sweet girl.

Because you lived in this world, because I got to love you, because you stole my heart, because Jesus said, “Yes” for me to be your mamma . . . I am infinitely grateful.

We love you more than words can express. You are our little rock star! You stole the hearts of so many. As Ashlin says, “You are famous!” Help us to carry on the purity and love you leaked, the love you whispered each day just by your presence. Hugs to Jesus from each of us.

Until our eyes meet again and I get to kiss your gorgeous little lips . . .

All the love a heart can hold,  
Mamma

Life is a gift so easily taken for granted. Making the most out of the time we are given sadly takes a backseat to the everyday tasks of life. What will others say about your life? Because you lived . . .

Following is a note we received from one of Abby’s nurses:

*Because You Lived*

Thank you so much for sharing your heaven on earth with us. I can remember touching her face and looking into her eyes and holding her body, and mostly I will never forget how I felt when my eyes beheld her . . . Every single time! The joyful peace and awe and the tickle in my heart just thinking about her. And the knowledge that you made a very real choice that blessed me and anyone else I shared my Abby story with. I'm so honored to have been able to serve you and your family even if it had only been for a day! I assure you that meeting the Gordon family changed my life forever. My service at my job is fuller and my role as a mother is enriched. My relationship with my Lord, my Father, my Savior, is strengthened. But the most impressive thing about it all is that I have been touched by eternity, and my soul responded. All my love and forever gratitude. I hope we can all slow down and not only treasure life but make it so that we bless others because we lived.

*Love has come . . .* to remind you that life is precious.

It's a gift not to be taken lightly or for granted. Carefully crafted and delicately molded in the palm of the potter's hand, you are His child, His most precious treasure. You are loved, cherished, and beautifully and wonderfully made.



## LOVE HAS COME

Hearts are fuller, love is deeper . . . because you lived. Here's to you, sweet babies and friends of Abby's Gift . . .

Abby, Simon, Daniel, Nichola Grace, Noah, Leon, Brynlie, Faith Marie, Will, Amelia Grace, Aubri, Zachary, Reese, Kylie, Loralai, Bryce, Hanna, Leyla, Kenslee, Adrial, Odin, Earley, Isaac, Sarrah, Rio, Julian, Kyrin, Michael, Paola, Pariella, Giselle, Scarlett, Mia, Edwin, Ulysses, Joe, Breland, Monica, Journey, Day, Angel, Jaron, Kade, Ashlynn, Fair, William, Toby, Seth, Salazar, Ryder, Cecilia, Easton, Cailee, Christopher, Ema, Kesly, Lily, Paloma, Kesly, Max, Ciera, Joshua, Brianna, Alejondro, Ana, Andrew, Annabelle, Arantxa, Arianie, Avalyn, Baylee, Brooke, Carl, Chelsea, Christy, Daijah, Denell, Devany, Devin, Domilola, Fatina, Gideon, Kingston, Kash, Juan, Juliana, George, Erin, Emily, MaKaylin, Douglas, Colton, Carlos, Brook, Bobbie, Garcia, Julie, Laelah, Jon, Jihanna, Nathan, Miles, Miguel, Levi, Santiago, Maya, Kaylee, Leilani, Mark, Lilyanne, Wyatt, Hannah, Joy, Jermane, Hope, Andy, Benjamin, Jay, Alberto, Carter, Ciera, Rubio, Ava, Den, Sarah, David, Phillip, Nick, Dylan, Jackson, Dellen, MiKay, Dilon, Peter, Dixon, Laura, Bud, Robert

## *In The Midst*

I pray that Christ may live in your hearts by faith. I pray that you will be filled with love. I pray that you will be able to understand how wide and how long and how high and how deep His love is. I pray that you will know the love of Christ. His love goes beyond anything we can understand. I pray that you will be filled with God Himself.

—Ephesians 3:17-19 (NLV)

**T**oday, if you are deep in the battle with obstacles on every side, fighting with every ounce of your heart, body, spirit, and soul to make it through the next hour . . . you are not alone.

My heart breaks for the families who are at the dreaded place of having to make the unbearable decision to put their child on hospice. Dear God, help them, comfort them, strengthen them, soak them with Your peace until they are drenched. In this place, there

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is no mental capacity to think about tomorrow or next week or five years from now. The only time is now.

My heart breaks for the families who, this very day, are in the midst of Comfort Care and are in the minute-by-minute, nauseating, heart-wrenching wait—trying to grasp every memory and feature of their child's face, every ounce of smell, kisses, hugs, caresses of their hair—all this as their hearts cry out in silent, desperate prayer for a miracle in this very moment.

In the midst of the plea that it ends soon, yet begging for one more minute, your prayers are not wasted. In the midst of it all, you are not alone.

*Love has come . . .* to remind us that autumn comes. It always does. Goodbye comes. It always does, too. Sometimes we choose our goodbyes and sometimes they choose us. In the goodbye and the journey that follows, we both give ourselves and find ourselves.

We stand with you in your grieving and your pain and pray that you will know and feel the depths of God's love. There is promise of rest in seasons of tiredness, comfort in seasons of sorrow, peace in seasons of distress, strength in seasons of great weakness.

*In The Midst*

In the midst, lean into what you know. God's love goes beyond anything we can understand: the width, the length, the height, the depth.

Be filled to the fullest with God Himself.



## *What Were We Thinking?*

Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not trust in your own understanding.

—Proverbs 3:5 (NLV)

(Blog post, February 2011)

The heart doesn't fear . . . the mind does. The mind will get us into trouble if we let it. I am convinced this is why God is so diligent in teaching us to take every thought captive. When our spiritual eyes are focused at the heart level, fear is impossible.

The grief monster hit again today. It was so strange. I feel like I experienced two kingdoms colliding within a matter of minutes. I was driving, running errands, and all of a sudden panic overcame me. I gasped out loud, my hands got sweaty, my heart



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was pounding, and I felt like I was going to throw up. The physical sensation lasted only minutes, but what came with it was the question: *What in heaven's name was I thinking by sending Abby to the nursery at night—for four nights???*

I remember praying out loud when the panic hit: “Oh God, what is this all about? How could I have not even considered this before now? Why am I just now thinking about this? Lord, what is this? What was I thinking? What if she had died in the nursery?”

It has been three and a half months since she was born. Why is this just now coming up? A good mother would have thought of this when we were actually *in* the hospital!! We knew she was going to die; she could have died at any minute. Surely, if we were good parents, we would have at least debated the pros and cons. We needed the rest, and it was best that we got some sleep. But who cares about sleep when we only have a short time with Abby? Maybe she could have gone to the nursery for just a few hours, then come back with us. Wouldn't this have been great dialogue between two parents on the verge of losing their daughter? What were we thinking?

After my panic, I asked Clyde if he ever questioned sending her to the nursery. He said, “I never even thought about it.” Me either!! I believe the reason

## *What Were We Thinking?*

we never thought of it while we were in the hospital is because God didn't allow the thought to cross our minds. We were overwhelmed with perfect peace, the entire time, all twelve days. The NICU for four nights was exactly what He had planned. Our humanness and questioning and debating and dialogue would have only gotten in His way. Had our selfishness to keep her close to us seeped through our supernatural covering of peace, we would have interfered with His will.

He had a plan for the people she met behind those walls. A plan for the lives she would touch. He knew exactly who needed to meet her, who needed a dose of Him and a reminder of His holiness, whose eyes needed to see her, whose heart may have been broken or discouraged or maybe had become cold and needed to be warmed. He knew it all, and it unfolded just as He planned.

*Love has come . . .* to remind us life is about more than our eyes can see and our hearts can understand. Trust in what you don't understand, trust the Spirit's prompting, and trust your heart's instinct, even when it doesn't make sense. God has a perfect plan and sees all the tiny details of the past, present, and future. Don't think. Just trust.



## *“My Bellesed Life”*

Second Grade Autobiography  
by Ashlin Grace Gordon

Even when I walk through the darkest valley, I will not be afraid, for you are close beside me. Your rod and your staff protect and comfort me. You prepare a feast for me in the presence of my enemies. You honor me by anointing my head with oil. My cup overflows with blessings.

—Psalm 23:4-5 (NLT)

(Blog post, November 2010)

Every Friday brings with it a full backpack of the week’s most precious artwork and writings: trash, to-do, and keepsakes. At first glance, I laughed out loud because of the sweetness and innocence of



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her spelling. I could see her sitting there sounding out “Blessed.”

Her autobiography includes the day she was born, her birthdays, when her Nanny died, when “we got new cousins: Blake, Tucker and Carter,” her dog Sally, when she found out mom was “pregnet,” when she found out that she was having a sister, and “we allso found out she was sik,” and the day Abby was born.

The last page sums it up: “after that she died but I still love her so much even if she’s not with me. The End.”

I’m not sure how many other eight-year-olds have had hospice care in their home twice within four years. But I am certain that God has touched my second grader’s heart, because even in her circumstances she titles the story of her life as “Bellesed.”

It’s amazing how our definition of “blessed” changes as we get older and as we endure life circumstances far beyond our control. Blessed used to mean “things” to me. But as a heartbroken parent who sees life with a new set of eyes, blessed is not what I live in or what I drive, how much money is in the bank, or what I look like, where I work or how many digits are in my salary.

At the end of this life, not a single one of these “things” matters. Blessed is knowing a God who

*“My Bellesed Life”*

loves me more than I can comprehend, in spite of myself. Blessed is being surrounded by people I love and who love me with no conditions. Blessed is being healthy enough to help others. Blessed is having enough hope to give it away to those who have none.

*Love has come . . .* to remind us that circumstances don't define us, our hope, or our joy. No matter what life or circumstances bring, we are love, hope, joy, peace, faith, and above all else . . . *bellesed*.



*Healing Comes in Many Ways:  
Don't Box It In*

The Lord is near to the brokenhearted and saves the crushed in spirit.

—Psalm 34:18 (ESV)

(Blog post, 2011)

Grief is weird, a different animal of sorts. It can be gentle. It can be a monster. It's big. It's ferocious. It's sneaky. It's quiet. Just when you think you can get up and walk, it jumps you from behind.

I think somewhere along the way I professed that, for the rest of my life, I would only say four words to a grieving person: "I am so sorry."

It still stands true today. It really is all that's required. Today, a bit further down the back roads of grief, I profess other words for a few months after a

## LOVE HAS COME

loss: “I hope you are doing as well as can be expected. Is there anything I can do or that you need?”

That’s it.

I believe people have good intentions, but the uncomfortable realm of grief makes people say not-so-smart things.

When we learned the organization that had been donating blankets to the NICU where Abby was born could no longer donate, I quickly volunteered. We wanted other families, siblings, and the community to be able to donate as well, so we planned our first Giving Back Baby Shower.

In the midst of telling other families and advertising the event, a comment was made that we were doing this as a “distraction from reality.” We did lots of self-reflection and tried hard to look beyond the event to see how some would see our efforts this way.

Was our discernment meter not registering? Maybe. Personally, we didn’t feel this was the case. We asked people we trusted for accountability. Our motives did prove pure, and so was our reality.

When you lose a child, there are no “distractions from reality.” Reality is real, and it stares you in the face twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. The child is gone. That is the reality.



I recently came upon Hebrews 12:1 that says, “Let us run with patience.” It sunk into my heart with new meaning. It described who we were in that particular season—the Gordon family grieving from the loss of a child. As a family, as we were patient with the process of our grief, it was and is our nature to continue to move . . . to help others, to gather blankets for other sick babies, to encourage other families who are in the midst of losing their child, to share the gift of hope, to give back . . . *even* with a heavy heart, *even* with deep sorrow in our spirit, *even* with mighty grief breathing down our necks. It’s simply who God made us to be. It’s in the fiber of our being, individually, and as a family.

So was this event a distraction? No. We learned giving back *is* our healing. We have learned so many things on this journey, and this is one: healing comes in many forms, different for everyone, and there is no right or wrong. I believe it is God’s will for us to heal from our pain and sorrow and suffering. Everything is for a season, and joy will come in the morning. For us, we continue to be patient with our pain, slaying the monster when we can, and embracing life as it comes.

## LOVE HAS COME

And we will continue to run, run to share God's love, to share our joy, and to share the gift of *Hope*.

On the day I came across Hebrew 12:1, I also came across this poem by George Matheson<sup>2</sup> in *Streams in the Desert* (of course, no coincidence):

When all our hopes are gone,  
It is best our hands keep toiling on for others' sake;  
For strength to bear is found in duty done;  
And he is best indeed who learns to make  
The joy of others cure his own heartache.

*Love has come . . .* to encourage you that your healing will indeed come.

Move forward, “toiling on for others’ sake,” to turn focus from self. Knowing, without judgment, there is no right or wrong way to grieve or to heal. The only box these two fit into is the box we place around them.

No fear. No judgment. Just move.

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<sup>2</sup> L.B.E. Cowman, Jim Reimann, *Streams in the Desert* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan), 1997.

## *God's Grace . . . through the Simplicity of a Blanket*

With all the love our hearts can hold, we say thank you, Mike and Julie, for sharing your life and Colton with us so we could be a part of this unending story of *grace*.



Your word is a lamp to guide my feet and a light for my path.

—Psalm 119:105 (NLT)

(Blog post, 2011)

**T**oday Abby would have been six months old. A bittersweet day. Sad that she is no longer with us. Grateful she isn't living a life of pain. There is beauty in any story if we are willing to see. Enduring the last six months has been a challenge. But, there is grace and

## LOVE HAS COME

beauty all around . . . every single day. In an unbelievable story that can only be described as God-ordained, I share this story of God's grace and glory:

Last month we attended a church for the first time at the request of friends who are members. We sat in the middle section, middle of the row. The minute I sat down, my eyes (and heart) were immediately drawn to a couple a few rows ahead. They were embracing each other. Both faces were sad and eyes red from tears.

The service began. I can't tell you what the songs were, what the message was about, or who was around me. My entire being was in prayer for this couple . . . but I had no idea why. At the end of the service, as people began leaving the pews, I saw a man sitting beside the couple pass a picture back to them. In a split second, I saw it was a picture of a baby. With the church nearly empty, my spirit was compelled to go talk to them. I didn't tell Clyde where I was going, and I have no doubt he thought I was nuts at this point. I walked over, knelt down in the pew behind them and said something like this, "Hello. I have been praying for you the entire service, but I am not sure why. I felt God pushing me over here, but I am not sure why."

The lady proceeded to show me the picture of their baby boy, Colton, born only three days earlier. He had

a traumatic birth and was alive and in critical condition at Texas Children's. People around us started to listen in on our conversation, I'm sure wondering who this stranger was butting into their business.

I told her I lost a baby four months ago, that God was good, and that the journey is hard but blessings will come, at which time the entire row of people began crying. I prayed with her and told her to hold on to the hope and never lose faith that God was bigger than all of this.

As I was walking away, she said, "Excuse me, what's your name?" I had been so determined to do what God was telling me to do that I completely forgot to introduce myself. I gave her my phone number and e-mail, and I left.

Julie e-mailed me a few days later, and we shared our stories over many more e-mails. We planned a coffee date for the next week. From the minute our eyes met again, there was a spiritual connection. We were not two strangers crying together at a random church; we were two mothers grieving for our babies. From our conversation, I learned that our babies were even born at the same hospital.

*Then . . .* she mentioned a blanket! A blanket the nurses had given her. A blanket she sleeps with every

## LOVE HAS COME

night. A blanket that means more to her than anything in the world. A blanket she would run in to save if her house caught on fire. A blanket she clings to as hope that Colton will come home soon.

I felt my body collapse on the table in tears, in joy, in the beauty of God allowing me to see an Abby Blanket come full circle . . . in only a way that can be described as divine grace. In all my days and with all my imagination, I could not have dreamed a better story. This isn't an instance of being in the right place at the right time. It isn't about coincidence or random chance. It is about God's glory being illuminated . . . through the simplicity of a baby blanket as a way to shower His love onto others and a way to share His gift of hope . . . one Abby Blanket at a time.



Baby Colton

*God's Grace . . . Through the Simplicity of a Blanket*

*Love has come . . .* to remind us God, long ago, set the stage. Scene by scene, chapter by chapter. His plot, the twists and turns, only surprise us. He is not surprised. He wrote the story.



## *Right Up the Road*

Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.

—Galatians 6:2 (NIV)

There is a wonderful, saving-grace kind of a place in Houston, Texas, called Bo's Place, that offers grief support to kids who have lost a sibling or parent. What a blessing for us who were struggling to help our child work through the death of her sister. It's complicated to say the least.

As we ended one of our evening grief-support sessions, the leaders had us all stand in a circle and hold hands as they played the song, "Lean On Me." Truth be told, I have sung the song countless times in my past, tapping my toes to its catchy beat. But I never really paid attention to the words. Or maybe it's that they really didn't mean anything to me then. It was just a song.

## LOVE HAS COME

But that night, it was different. Life circumstances and new perspective changes things.

The song talks about us all having pain and sorrow in our lives and how the simple kindness of a friend to lean on brings the hope of so many things . . . another tomorrow, things to borrow, a call to say hello, shared burdens, and help to carry the load. But the catch is we have to swallow our pride and ask, or call, or text, or e-mail. People cannot read our minds as much as we'd like to think this was possible. It's a give and a take.

I pray I can return that *lean on me* and *right up the road* act of service a hundredfold—to encourage, love, support, gather baby blankets, hug a momma who just lost her child, be the hands and feet of God, give hope when there is none, and help carry a load that can't be carried alone. I pray I can help find a rock for you to stand on, and I pray that with every breath I breathe, I breathe the breath of God.

*Love has come* . . . to remind us we are not alone.

Others are willing and *right up the road* to help carry the load we just can't bear on our own . . . *if* . . . *if* we are willing to allow, call, e-mail, text, share. There are times we have to set aside our pride, open our hearts,

*Right Up the Road*

extend a hand, and lean on others. Help is right up the road.

What are you waiting for?



## *All the Love a Heart Can Hold*

Jesus said, “but this happened so that the work of God might be displayed in his life.”

—John 9:3 (NIV)

We’re not necessarily doubting that God will do the best for us; we are wondering how painful the best will turn out to be.

—C.S. Lewis

**A**s parents, we want to fix problems, heal the wounds, shield from the hurts, defend against the bullies, cure the illnesses, buffer the blows, secure the future, guard against heartbreaks, and be the armor that protects our precious children from the viciousness of this world. But, you know as well as I do, this is simply impossible to do.

With all the love and sacrifice in our hearts, we’d do anything and everything for our children in a time of need.

## LOVE HAS COME

But, in the greatest time of need for my child, I was helpless. No matter what I did, what I prayed, what I begged, what I wanted . . . I was utterly helpless. It was in this time of unknowns and helplessness that I had to reach to the depths of my faith, pull myself up by the bootstraps, and trust in the things unseen that can only be done by the One in whom my faith resided.

I had to *trust* in my God who said He would comfort me and give me strength. I had to *trust* in my God who promised joy would come. I had to *trust* in my God who promised to wipe my every tear. I had to trust in the goodness and faithfulness I had previously experienced because holding my child and loving on her as she took her final breath, I had *nothing*. My strength was gone. My body was weak. My spirit was crushed.

Even with all the love my heart could hold, I couldn't save my daughter. I couldn't make it better. I couldn't change the outcome. All the love in my heart wasn't enough to do what I desired be done.

Maybe this place, this point of helplessness, is a place of surrender. Maybe this is a place of rest. Maybe this is a place of complete brokenness. Maybe, just maybe, this is a place of pure love so the work of God might be displayed in our lives. He loves us more than

we could ever love our children. Certainly, this is a place beyond our comprehension where God can be God and show His true identity of love and grace, and mercy and forgiveness, and peace and compassion as He walks alongside us in our heartbreak . . . with all the love His heart can hold.

In her book,  *Holding On to Hope*, Nancy Guthrie says, “God wants to bring you to a place where you can say, ‘I’ve not only heard of you, I’ve seen you! I know you!’ And perhaps He used pain to bring you to that place.”<sup>3</sup>

Perspective is a mighty tool and a saving grace. In our brokenness, if we will be open and allow God to speak to the depths of our hearts, we will see His perspective.

Even though all the love in my heart couldn’t save Abby, I could *love* her with all the love a heart can hold. And I did, indeed.

*Love has come* . . . to remind you that everyone is fighting a battle of his or her own. Your sling and stone are waiting. For whatever Goliath you are up against,

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3 Guthrie, Nancy,  *Holding On to Hope*, (Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc.), 2002 and 2004.

## LOVE HAS COME

I pray you stand strong today, trusting in nothing but God's best, trusting in His promises, trusting in the work of a God who loves you with all the love His heart can hold. And my friend, that's a lot of love!



God is always working to make His children aware of a dream that remains alive beneath the rubble of every shattered dream and broken heart, a new dream that when realized will release a new song, sung with tears, til God wipes them away and we sing with nothing but joy in our hearts.

—Larry Crabb<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Crabb, Larry, *Shattered Dreams: God's Unexpected Pathway to Joy*, (Colorado Springs: Waterbrook Press), 2001.

## *Baby Simon*

But he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.”

—2 Corinthians 12:9 (NIV)

**I**n a whirlwind of a day last week, I received a call early in the morning from a NICU nurse in Texas. This was her first time contacting our foundation, Abby’s Gift, so she was very timid in her questions about our services. Now I know why. It was complicated, indeed.

A mother had given birth to a forty-one-week baby boy on July 30, 2016. She intended to give him up for adoption but made no plans to move in this direction before the birth. So, there was no agency, no CPS, or any intervention efforts. After birth, mom refused to see the baby, hold him, or talk about him. He was placed in the NICU for breathing complications and unforeseen by anyone, died the next day. While in the NICU, the nurses named him Simon. When he died,

## LOVE HAS COME

they were unsure what to do and someone suggested they call Abby's Gift.

I interrupted the nurse before she could even finish the story to ask, "Do you think the mother would be willing to give up her rights and allow Clyde and me to 'adopt' him?"

"The mother refuses to talk about him. I'm not even sure if he would be considered under the care of the state or under her care," the nurse said.

Fast forward several hours and a hundred phone calls later, the mother signed. Clyde and I were able to be the guardians for Baby Simon. It was important to us to honor his sweet spirit by showing he was accepted, loved, valued, and chosen . . . with all the love our hearts could hold.

The kindness of those at Distinctive Life Funeral Home made it possible, and in just a few days we were on our way, along with twenty-seven of our family, to a small graveside service for our little boy, Simon.

In claiming Simon as our own, in giving him a family, in this little baby's weakness and abandonment, God's power was made perfect and His love and grace were sufficient. If God, in His love, has chosen us as His children, who were we, in our love, not to choose Simon as our child?

*Baby Simon*

*Love has come . . .* in unexpected adventures and blessings.

Although maybe not in the things we plan, but always in God's perfect plans, if our ears are open to hear, our eyes are focused to see, and our hearts are open to receive and obey.

Love has come in a Savior who died on a cross for the sins of all people.

Love has come in a God of perfect power and sufficient grace.

Love has come in a God who loves all children, His children.

Love has come in a precious child named Simon.

Will you *be love* the next time an unexpected adventure shows up? It will bless your heart, I promise.



Jesus loves the little children.  
All the children of the world.  
Red and yellow, black and white,  
They are precious in His sight.  
Jesus loves the little children of the world.

—Clare H. Woolston

LOVE HAS COME

Simon B. Gordon  
July 30, 2016–August 2, 2016

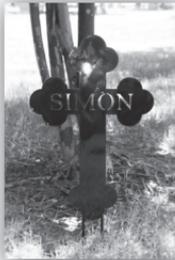


For someone who had no one, this lucky little boy had a new family that dropped everything to drive from Houston to Dallas to honor him, love him, and call him our own. We are forever grateful to our family.

*Baby Simon*



Papa and Grammy (Charles and Mary Beckendorf); Uncle Larry and Aunt Janet, Kelby; Aunt Lori and Clay; Uncle Brian and Aunt Michelle: Breanna, Kimberly, Colby; Uncle Jay and Aunt Mildred; and adopted Aunt Brenda and Aunt Sabrina.



A beautiful purple cross to adorn Simon's headstone, the men gathering around in honor, and a balloon release. It was a day we will cherish forever.



*The Cross. The Grave. The Beauty.  
The Miracle.*

He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.

—Revelation 21:4 (ESV)

Only God knows what life will bring us on this journey we are walking. What I do know is that because of sorrow . . .

- My heart experienced joy that I had never experienced before.
- My soul knows deep sorrow and the power of God's grace.
- I have felt the touch of the Father's hand.
- I understand the meaning of His perfect peace and strength in the moment.

## LOVE HAS COME

*Love has come . . .* to show us there is beauty in our tears in troubled times.

We are often blind to this in the midst of our pain. God willing, the beauty of our cries will be revealed when our eyes are able to see and our hearts are able to understand.

Sorrow and suffering aren't new. They started when the world began and sin entered the world.

*But there is more.*

Together as we continue this journey of unknowns, we are to never forget that what happened on the cross saved us. The grave gives us the hope of eternal life. Both prove the beauty and miracle of a God who we long to know better.

May we always strive to be a people who remembers the cross, the grave, the beauty, and the miracle.

## *So That*

He comforts us in all our troubles *so that* we can comfort others. When they are troubled, we will be able to give them the same comfort God has given us.

—2 Corinthians 1:4 (NLT)

(Excerpts from a 2010 blog post, “27 Days to Go”)

**I**t’s amazing what people say in an attempt to console. Some words are super sweet, some words are super weird, and some things should really stay in people’s heads and not leave their lips! I had a lady say to me yesterday, “I wonder what’s going on; why is this happening?” My response was silence and a polite but awkward smile and shoulder shrug.

My mind hadn’t gone there. Why would I ask “Why?” Why wouldn’t I ask “Why?” Should I ask “Why?”

There are spiritual, emotional, physical, and mental lessons to be learned in everything . . . the good and

## LOVE HAS COME

the bad. I have not asked “Why?” or “Why me?” and I hope I don’t. That may be the one thing that would actually drive me crazy—trying to figure out the “why.” I don’t need to know why. If God chooses to reveal that answer, He will do so in His time. I have to move forward trusting this. Driving myself crazy trying to figure it out is not the answer. I am certain of that.

I have to focus on what I am certain of. It’s real. It’s the season we are in. There are lessons to be learned, character to be refined, prayers to be prayed, joy to be felt, thanks to be given, a God to be praised, lives to be touched, things to be done. I choose to see the glass as half full.

I believe with my whole heart that suffering and sorrow isn’t punishment for sin. I am reminded of John 9 when Jesus was asked who sinned when a man was born blind. The underlying “why” was not punishment, but glory. So that . . . *God’s glory could be magnified!* So that . . . *the works of God could be displayed!* So that . . . *a big deal could be made of a God who heals!* So that . . .

*Love has come . . . to refocus you.*

*So that* you can click the reset button if you are stuck in the “why me” cycle.

## *So That*

*So that* you can switch gears and set your eyes (and physical pain, grief, illness, or depression) on the glory to be given to the God who can keep us from going crazy and fill us with indescribable peace.

The *why* may not be necessary.

Move forward in your journey *so that* love and grace reside. Your story is touching lives in ways you may never know.



## *Jesus' Momma*

When Jesus saw his mother standing there beside the disciple he loved, he said to her, “Dear woman, here is your son.”

—John 19:26 (NLT)

One day as I sat at gymnastics watching Ashlin do cartwheels and round-offs (if I am honest with myself, it was more of a trance than focused, motherly attention), my teary eyes turned to huge crocodile tears as a vision flooded my mind. It was one of those scenes that’s so vivid it’s as if it really happened.

In my mind, I am standing at the foot of the cross. Silent. Attentive. My heart aching.

I see Mary at Jesus’ feet, weakened, and on her knees. Sobbing. Terrified. Traumatized. Sad beyond comprehension. Helpless. Helpless to do anything for her child. Hearing his pain, seeing the blood shed . . . simply helpless.

## LOVE HAS COME

I can't begin to wrap my brain around what she experienced and the emotions she felt. But in faith, Mary said, "Be it as you have said."

Although her life held great honor, her calling demanded great suffering.

Her purpose seems beyond my comprehension, but there is one thing I know for sure. Even though she knew His purpose, at the end of the day . . . she was still a momma. A momma watching, hearing, experiencing, feeling, pleading, praying for her child.

Jesus, you are my Savior.

Mary, you are my hero.

*Love has come . . . to remind us that love triumphs over all. Love isn't past tense. Love is.*



For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son,  
that whoever believes in him should not perish but have  
eternal life.

—John 3:16 (ESV)

## *Caleb—A Whisper in My Story*

But Jesus said, “Let the little children come to me and do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of heaven.”

—Matthew 19:14 (ESV)

I vividly remember a conversation with my dad as we were driving to the funeral home to visit our dear friends Marvin and Doris who had just lost their son, Caleb. I was around seventeen years old, driving my white Grand Am, my dad in the passenger seat. I remember the stretch of road and the turn we were approaching as if it's burned into my mind. His words are still as clear this moment as they were then. They bypassed my ears, ripped through my body, and burrowed to the deepest



## LOVE HAS COME

part of my heart: “There is nothing worse than losing a child. I just can’t imagine. Bless their hearts.”

I was a teenager; I didn’t have kids so I didn’t know the depth of what he was saying. I really couldn’t imagine. He could. I could not. But it was as if God captured that moment for me, like a Polaroid camera that spits out the picture yet takes time to reveal the image, as a way to prepare my own heart for my unfolding journey.

Doris, all my love to you, one momma to another. And you know what? It’s true. There is nothing worse than losing them, but . . . *nothing better* than having the chance to *love* them! If only for a moment.



January 2015—From Marvin and Doris, the precious family friends we went to see that very night so many years ago:

It has been 14 years since I lost my precious Caleb and there is not a day that goes by that I don’t think of him in some way. Time never eases the pain in my heart . . . His little heart was HUGE. He loved everyone he came in contact with and never met a stranger. I sure miss that sweet face . . . Love you K-Bob!

*Love has come . . .* to prove God's goodness and gracious preparation of our hearts long before we know we need it, His whisper of love.

Our journey may be the same, but each story brings a different, yet glorious, testimony of love, peace, and hope. What's your story?



## *Not My Will, But Yours Be Done*

Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done.

—Luke 22:42 (NIV)

**W**e didn't know what the future held for us. We were scared. We were tired. We were waiting in anticipation of how the Lord would unfold His plan. He was working, no doubt. With the plan already made, there were parts of me that wanted to know how the story ends, and the details of each and every chapter until then. Maybe just a glimpse.

*I wonder what my role is? What part do I play? What is Clyde's part? What is Ashlin's part? How will the mystery unfold?*

We offered up this simple prayer:

Lord, as you watch our faces, I pray you don't wonder if wiser ones should have had our place in this journey. I graciously, yet fearfully, offer all we are for the mercy of

## LOVE HAS COME

Your plan. We cling to Your promises. We know that before a heartache can ever touch our lives, it goes through Your hands. There is purpose in everything under heaven. As all we know to do, we lay ourselves at your feet. Come, Kingdom of God. Be done, will of God. Amen.

*Love has come . . . as our dwelling place.*

At the cross, at His feet, we lay down our past, our mistakes, our questions, our dreams, our worry of the future, we lay down our lives. Not in our strength, but in His, freedom is found and peace is possible.

Oh, how our hearts long to rest there and never leave! No matter what this world brings, we stand firm on this . . . not my will, but Yours be done.

## *One Teardrop at a Time*

For the Lamb on the throne will be their Shepherd. He will lead them to springs of life-giving water. And God will wipe every tear from their eyes.

—Revelation 7:17 (NLT)

Don't ever discount the wonder of your tears. They can be healing waters and a stream of joy.

Sometimes they are the best words the heart can speak.

—William Paul Young, *The Shack*<sup>5</sup>

There are days when you think your tears could fill the five oceans of the world. For Clyde and me, it was when the shock had worn off, sleep deprivation was over, loved ones no longer flooded our home, and sympathy cards no longer arrived. We were expected to begin life in our “new normal” but it felt as if nothing would be the same again. There was nothing that felt natural any more, except tears.

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5 Los Angeles, CA: Windblown Media, 2008, page 68.

## LOVE HAS COME

It also seemed as if Clyde and I tag-teamed the “I’m a wreck!” days. One day I would do well, and he’s carrying the box of tissue. The next day (or week) he did well, and I was a walking disaster. Grief is like that. Just when you think you are moving forward, it creeps in and launches an attack.

We began asking people to not run when they saw us at the grocery store, gas station, or a restaurant. We truly didn’t mean to begin to cry, it just happened. Kind of like when you sneeze and wet your pants, you don’t mean to do it . . . it just happens. That was us. And if that’s you, it’s okay. Be kind to yourself.

No tears are wasted or shed in vain. They have a way of shaping and molding us into the people Christ made us to be. I believe eternity holds greater joy than our minds can comprehend, and I believe God wipes away our tears, holds them tenderly in His hands, and speaks softly to our hearts.

There is a sacredness in tears. They are not the mark of  
weakness, but of power.  
They speak more eloquently than ten thousand tongues.  
They are messengers of overwhelming grief . . . and  
unspeakable love.

—Washington Irving  
1783–1859

*One Teardrop at a Time*

*Love has come* . . . as springs of living water to replenish your soul.

When there are no words that will come, only tears that flow, remember, like all things, tears come for a season. There is no shame in your tears. Will you lean into Him, lay your head on His shoulder, and allow His gentle Spirit to love you, one teardrop at a time?



## *The Great Escape*

. . . he refreshes my soul. He guides me along the right paths for his name's sake. Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.

—Psalms 23: 3-4 (NIV)

Everyone's journey, at some point or another, takes them through a valley. Valleys come in all shapes and forms. For some, it's the cancer valley. For another, the valley looks like chronic unemployment, leaving an empty wallet and three cans of food in the pantry to feed a family of five. And for others, the valley may be illness, heartbreak, or the death of a marriage. Valleys can be as deep as a black hole or as shallow as a bathtub. Either way, valleys exist. But they do not last forever.

Grief can be a monster. It can be subtle, it can be overwhelming, and it can lie dormant then, out of nowhere, jump you from behind. Until we pass through the valley, until we are on the other side of the grief,

## LOVE HAS COME

there are times when the burdens are so heavy we want to crawl into a hole and never come out. Our souls ache from the very deepest places for rescue. It may not be so much about trying to keep grief in its rightful place because where exactly would the right place be?

My great escape wasn't an exotic vacation on a desert island, although that probably would have been nice. I found my great escape in the unlikeliest of places. The mall. The mall proved to be a welcome distraction. It wasn't until we went to buy a birthday gift that I realized I went an entire hour without thinking. I realized even an hour of mindless wandering gave me "rest."

For the next four to six months, Clyde would take me to the mall once or twice a month to "rest" for an hour. We never bought a single item during our visits, but the different environment, the array of people, the hustle and bustle of the crowd, the shuffling through racks of items took my mind to a neutral place. It was what I needed, if only for a little while.

As with all seasons, valleys come and go, and so was my need for the great escape. Give yourself permission to escape and to rest from the depths of the valley. It's only temporary.

*The Great Escape*

*Love has come . . .* to encourage you to find *your* place and escape there, if only for an hour, or ten minutes. If you are willing to wait through the darkness of night, you can rest in knowing morning will surely come.



## *Strength When You Need It*

Instead, let the Spirit renew your thoughts and attitudes.  
—Ephesians 4:23 (NLT)

**W**e knew our daughter would not live long, but what does “long” really mean? Millions of times in my mind, I imagined how things would go. None of it came true. All that occurred was much worse than I imagined. You know why? Because until I experienced it, all I had as a reference point was my imagination.

Sometimes reality takes us to the place of sorrow and suffering deeper than our imaginations could ever make up on its own. In a miraculous way, just when we needed the most peace, God provided. In the exact moment we needed comfort, God provided. When our strength was gone and weakness overcame us, God provided. Even in the midst of panic, not knowing what we needed, God provided.

## LOVE HAS COME

Suffering provides opportunity for God's glory, for our transformation because of His glory and grace, for a beautiful testimony to emerge, and for us to comfort others going through the same.

Hope comes from sorrow. You will always find the sun after you go through the night; but you do have to go through the night. Night bursts into day every time! Even if the day is rainy, the light is still there.

—Jesse McMillan,

Pastor of The Church at Cross Lake, Tomball, Texas

*Love has come* . . . when you are in way over your head, to lift you above the raging waters to give you a breath, to provide just what you need in the moment you need it, to hold you steady on the slippery slope, to bring you comfort from those who have walked the journey before you, and to help you navigate the winding roads until the path begins to straighten.

## *Perspective*

I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.

—John 16:33 (NIV)

**O**n Abby's eight-month "Angel-versary," we went to the cemetery. My stomach always does a flip-flop the moment we drive into Baby Land, and the feeling of living someone else's life sets in. It's as if my self-protection mechanism kicks into overdrive to guard my heart from exploding.

We had a truckload of kids during this visit, and before the truck came to a complete stop they all jumped out and raced to find Abby's headstone. They immediately went to work pulling weeds, and even dusting sand off the stones of Abby's little neighbors. There was lots of chatter, then, as if they had planned it, they got quiet. Each walked quietly around the area reading the headstones.

## LOVE HAS COME

“This baby lived two days.”

“This one only lived four days.”

“This boy lived only one day.”

“So did this little girl.”

“This one, too.”

Clyde and I explained there is only one date on the stone because some sweet babies are not alive when they are born, and some only live a few minutes or hours after their birth.

With a serious face and tone my nephew said, “Aunt Melinda, we were so lucky to have Abby for twelve *whole* days.”

*Twelve whole days.* We were so lucky, indeed.

*Love has come . . .* to remind us that there will be trials and trouble in our lives.

It’s a guarantee in this earthly world. Even though we may never have complete understanding in this lifetime, take heart! One day we will know, we will understand, and we will be able to say we were *so lucky, indeed.*

HOPE ABIGAIL GORDON

*“Baby Abby”*



LOVE HAS COME



*"Baby Abby"*



LOVE HAS COME



*“Baby Abby”*



## LOVE HAS COME



### Great-Grandpa's first conversation with Abby

This picture was taken on his way home from a two-month stay in the hospital and he couldn't wait any longer to meet her. He told Abby that he wasn't sure who would make it to heaven first . . . him or her.

She won.

*Contact Information*



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