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## Chapter 1

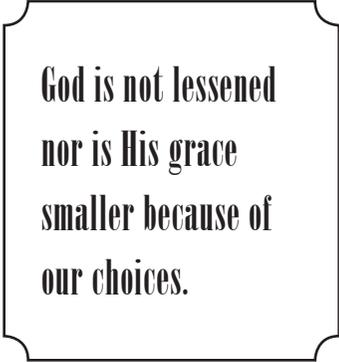
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# *My Valley Stories*

**M**y early years were full of valleys that no child should have to deal with, but the enemy doesn't play fair and he will do whatever he can to steal, kill, or destroy us at an early age. My home life was not stable. My dad was an alcoholic during my early childhood. He stopped drinking by the time I was a freshman in high school, and my mom handled the drinking in the typical codependent manner. I was the one she depended on.

Because I was the oldest child, a lot of responsibility fell on my shoulders much earlier in life than it should have. The challenge of that valley was that I take responsibility for things that aren't necessarily my responsibility. This is still an issue I deal with today. I've learned how to be healthier in figuring out what is and is not my responsibility but there are still times I take on too much. I've also had to learn to process the guilt feelings of not being able to fix everything for everyone and keep everyone happy. It took well into my late twenties before I had dealt with the majority of my own codependent behaviors and attitudes and occasionally, those behaviors and attitudes come knocking at my door to see if I'll let them back into my life.

Part of the fallout of an unstable home life was moving a lot and changing schools frequently. I completely understand how new kids feel because I did that many, many times in my childhood. During my sixth-grade year, I was actually in two different schools six different times until my Grandma refused to let me go back with my parents the last time so that I could finish the year with some stability. An unstable home life leaves you open to all forms of abuse. Unfortunately, I experienced things that an adult should never have to deal with, let alone a child. I have many scars from those experiences and I can see how my relationship with the Lord is really the only thing that brought me through those valleys to



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the other side. I still get a bit prickly if I feel like I'm being taken advantage of in any given situation. I share this with you to say that I haven't always come out of this type of valley in victory. There have been times when I've been satisfied to just have survived the valley experience. I know we are called to a higher place than that, but sometimes I've settled for just surviving the experience and God is not lessened nor is His grace smaller because of my choice. I do believe He is

grieved when we settle for less than the complete wholeness He has for us; but He is still God and He still provides grace and mercy freely in those times as well as in the times when we come out completely victorious.

As a child, I couldn't wait to be a grownup! I thought that once you grew up, you would be able to protect yourself from hurtful things and people, and all would be well. Wow, did I set myself up for one of the deepest valleys I've ever had to fight my way through. There are times I still have to deal with scars from that valley. I graduated high school in May, turned eighteen in June, and got married in July, all of the same

year. I was head over heels in love with my first husband. Looking back, I can see that part of the problem was I put too much on his shoulders. I expected him to meet all my needs, which was extremely unhealthy.

From that marriage came one of my great blessings, our son, James. When he was six months old, we relocated our family to Wisconsin. The only two people I knew were my husband and my son. My husband's family lived in Wisconsin but I had left all my family back in Colorado. I felt isolated and alone. I was the perfect target for the enemy because my circumstances had isolated me and I was not mature enough to realize that I needed to get plugged into my new life, so I left myself open for a lot of hurt.

We moved back to take a youth pastor position in a local church and received wounds from our church family that should never be part of a healthy church! We began attending another church and saw that board inflict similar wounds to its pastor. My husband walked away from the Lord.

Thus began a three-year valley, which became the death valley of our marriage. Our marriage lasted only seven years and could not overcome bad decisions made during that three-year period. I was devastated! I can still see evidence of that devastation in my life, both in my current marriage and with the church leadership issue.

This is one reason I speak of coming out of a valley victorious. If you come out of a valley devastated, oftentimes there are soul (mind, will, or emotions) ties or soul wounds that continue to impact your life. I didn't want to be divorced, but I had no idea how to overcome all the issues, so we divorced shortly after our seventh anniversary.

At twenty-four, I found myself a single mom with no family support. I wasn't trusting of churches since a church situation had caused my first husband to walk away from the Lord. I wasn't trusting of men since I was divorced. I was in a deep, ugly valley and isolated without family support. I had one tried and true friend who walked through the valley

with me. She became my family and guide through that valley. Our friendship has lasted for twenty-five plus years and like the energizer bunny, it will just keep going and going!

When you are a divorced woman, I think you deal with it one of two ways. You either swear off men completely, or you look for another relationship to replace the one you lost. I found a way to combine the two. I was open to another relationship, but I had walls of steel in place to make sure I did not get hurt that way again! Not a good way to go into a marriage. I even said to my current husband, “What if I’m marrying you on the rebound?”

He said, “Somebody has to get the rebound.” He has a great sense of humor. We were married the next year.

Our marriage has not been without valleys. The year before we were married, he had a brain tumor removed. Four months into our marriage, they thought the tumor had returned but the doctors came out of surgery saying it was only scar tissue. I know God healed that second tumor because they can tell the difference between scar tissue and a tumor. We experienced two miscarriages that were emotionally devastating to me. Through a prophetic word, I stood in faith believing for another child. My second great blessing is my daughter, Kaitlyn Faith.

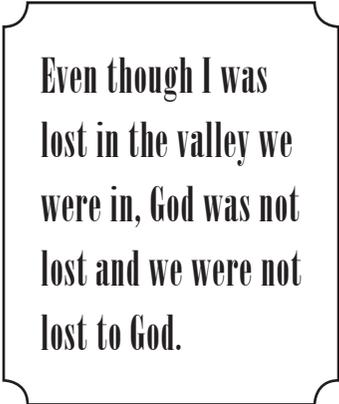
In 1999, I received a phone call that forever changed my life. My Dad had fallen at work and it was discovered that he had injured his C3 vertebra. The doctor told us that it was a “Christopher Reeves” type injury. Dad ended up in a wheelchair for the last three years of his life. I was Dad’s power of attorney for everything and the weight of knowing that when the time came I would need to make the decision to end his life was overwhelming. It helped when someone mentioned to me I was simply enforcing Dad’s wishes.

He passed away in 2005 and I went into one of the deepest, darkest valleys I’ve ever experienced. I was angry that God did not heal my dad. I was angry at anyone who talked to me about healing. I was angry that

I wasn't even forty yet and I had to figure out how to live in a world where my dad wasn't. I had a "my Dad isn't here so nothing matters" attitude about everything.

I regret deeply that my daughter's childhood was impacted by my valley. Thinking about how she was influenced by my valley has tears rolling down my face right now. Sometimes our valleys suck other people in and expose them to things they don't deserve. All you can do at times like this is ask God to redeem your mess and trust He will bring the healing necessary to those affected by your valley. This is yet another reason I feel so strongly about how we travel through our valleys. We are not the only ones impacted by our valley decisions.

July 2012 is a month that will always be etched in my mind. I received a phone call from my husband, Rick, letting me know he had lost his job. I went to the cemetery—that's where you go when things die and I could cry and no one would think I was crazy—and all I could say for over an hour was: "This was not a surprise to God. God is our provider. God is faithful." I thought we were in an unemployment valley, but little did I know that in nine months the real valley would be revealed.



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We are actually in a health crisis valley. Remember the brain tumor Rick had the year before we were married? Well, it did more damage than they realized at the time. Looking back over our long term marriage, I believe we have been dealing with this the whole time, and it has simply become more evident. Rick has been having a number of symptoms that impair his ability to work and make connections with people.

But guess what? This was not a surprise to God. God is our provider, and God is faithful! Even though I was lost in the valley we were in, God was not lost and we were not lost to God. This story is to be continued because we continue to fight the good fight and deal with the health issues as they come, knowing God is faithful and He holds us in His hands. I will be an overcoming warrior and rise above this valley in victory because I know Who is walking the valley with me.

A funny thing happened as I was in the final writing stage of this book. I developed a severe back injury that limited my mobility to the point that I had to use a wheelchair for months at a time. I had back surgery to relieve a severely pinched nerve. As a result of the surgery, I developed scar tissue that impeded my recovery, and almost two years after the symptoms started I had yet to completely regain my mobility. I was finalizing this book about walking in victory through valleys and literally learning to walk again. The irony did not escape my notice. I want to share some of the deep things I learned from experiencing a life-changing disability for a season.

Substantially impacted were my identity, worth, and self-esteem. When you use a wheelchair, people don't know how to respond to you. You find yourself not only dealing with the physical struggles a wheelchair brings into your life but dealing with the emotional struggles as well. People—myself included before this injury—often don't know what to say and oftentimes will say nothing at all. This is devastating! Even people who love you find themselves at a loss for words and that silence is a breeding ground for insecurity and loss of identity and self-worth.

You might remember that I said my dad spent the last three years of his life in a wheelchair and didn't experience healing in this life. That left a multi-layered wound in my life that I wasn't completely aware of until I needed to use a wheelchair. I was suddenly reminded on a daily basis that Dad never got up from the wheelchair. It picked at the healing wound in my life and caused it to bleed again and again because I had

yet to resolve the healing issue I had struggled with since Dad's death. To make it more difficult, this healing issue was so prickly that I found myself isolated and unable to discuss the topic of healing with a long time personal friend.

It caused fear to be a constant unwanted companion, especially as the months dragged on and I was not regaining my mobility. A great deal of anger flooded my life and my relationships. I discovered that anger is my safe emotion to express because people usually back off when I unleash my anger. I also became aware that I needed to deal with what is under the anger, those vulnerable emotions you don't want anyone to see because you already feel exposed with a disability. Panic, fearing a loss of control, resentment, helplessness, fear of being alone, despair, hurt when others couldn't understand, shame, a feeling of being unwanted and inadequate, and struggles with my worth and value to myself, my family, my friends, my workplace, and to God all plagued my soul-mind, will, and emotions on a daily basis. Is it any wonder anger was the emotion I chose to express? All those other emotions are scary and left me exposed and vulnerable.

I realized that my identity, self-esteem, and worth and value as a person were coming under fire. God in His faithfulness brought me to the story of Mephibosheth from the Old Testament.

We find out in 2 Samuel 4:4 that Jonathan's son at five years old, due to an accident, was maimed in both feet for the rest of his life. In 2 Samuel 9, we catch up with Mephibosheth as an adult. King David is looking to show kindness to anyone remaining from Saul's family in honor of his friend Jonathan. Verse 8 in The Message Bible gives us the core of what I was struggling with because of the wheelchair: "Shuffling and stammering, not looking him in the eye, Mephibosheth said, "Who am I that you pay attention to a stray dog like me?" I felt so unworthy, devalued, and alone—I'm sure it was something akin to what Mephibosheth must have felt.

David restores all to Mephibosheth and puts his servant Ziba in charge of Mephibosheth's holdings and charged him with managing it well. In verse 12 we see that Mephibosheth ate at David's table like one of the royal family, and he was lame in both feet. Now I can tell you that while I am still struggling with a lack of mobility, my confession holds that this condition is *not* my final outcome, but the realization that worth and value were not in what Mephibosheth could do for King David but rather in who he was related to, began to sink into my dry and weary soul.

I honestly thought I had a well-balanced sense of worth and value in who I am in Christ but this injury exposed the deep-seated seedlings that said I only had worth and value if I could do things for Christ. I had to learn how to relate to my heavenly Father, completely exposed by this disability and all the lack that came with it, as one of His beloved children whose worth and value should be fully cemented in Whose I am and not what I could do for Him.

My son said recently in one of his sermons, "Your past has brought you to your circumstance, but your God wants to bring a victory to your future." All my insecurities and uncertainties about healing or lack of healing had brought me to a painful place. *But God* used this back injury to begin to bring victory and healing to those raw and wounded areas. He also began to bring course correction to misguided thought patterns and feelings of unworthiness that were deep-seated in my life.

Most everyone is familiar with the story of Job from the Bible. Here's an observation you might not have heard before: Job was overwhelmed with loss over and over. Read Job 1 and you will see that the phrase "While he was still speaking" occurs twice to bring a total of three bad reports almost simultaneously to Job.

First, a messenger comes to tell him that the oxen and donkeys have been stolen and the field hands killed. Then while he was still speaking, another messenger comes to tell him that bolts of lightning struck the

sheep and all the shepherds and killed them. While he was still speaking, the last messenger comes to report that a tornado had killed all of Job's children.

That is how I felt with my back and nerve injury. I was still dealing with my husband's health diagnosis while dealing with the back injury and becoming an empty nester.

Similar to having to use the wheelchair and it being a constant reminder of the healing issue and my dad's death, because of the injury I had to relocate my bedroom to the first floor in my daughter's empty room. Daily I had the empty nest and all that meant in my life right in my face and my emotions.

Now if you ask either of my adult children, they will tell you I frequently told them, "I gave you roots to give you wings, so fly, baby, fly." I wanted to be one of those moms who graciously moved from one stage of life to the next. Having been a young mom, I looked forward to when my raising-my-kids stage was over and they were responsible adults and I could do some of the things I had delayed for motherhood.

Yet even with that mindset, being in her room day in and day out brought waves of grief over being an empty nester. Both her room and the wheelchair were constant, unrelenting reminders of loss, grief, pain, unknown change, and lack of control.

Like the wheelchair, being in her room uncovered some unresolved issues. I literally went from being responsible in my parents' home, to being a wife and mother, to being a single mom, to being a wife and mother again, and in that entire process many of my hopes and dreams were left unattended or unrealized. Do I regret becoming a mom at a young age? Absolutely not! I would never trade either of my children for any experience I might have missed. There has been a realization for me, though, that the time is now to begin to attend to those dreams and hopes that were simply delayed. So yes, I am an empty nester and

I will make the second half of my life productive and as full of life and success as my child-raising years have been.

I pray that sharing my heart and my valley stories with you has been a blessing to you. I pray you have been able to see my failures and learn from them. I pray you have been able to see my successes, rejoice with me, and see a bit of yourself in them. I pray above all that you will realize that we all go through valleys—sometimes well and sometimes not—but God is able to redeem all our experiences if we will allow Him to do His work in our lives in the valleys, through the valleys, and out of the valleys.