

**Restoring
Shattered
Faith**



**When your world falls apart and God
doesn't show up to save the day.**

RICHARD W. LAFOUNTAIN

Preface

Over 35 years ago our twelve year old daughter stepped out into a busy street to buy bread a block from our home in Brazil. She was hit by a speeding car and never regained consciousness. That event started a never-ending emotional spiral that caught me up in its vortex and left me an emotional basket case without faith and without hope in the God I served. I'm not alone. I have met hundreds of people who have experienced similar life-changing tragedies that have left them spiritually numb, with their faith shattered.

What do you do when God fails to come through for you? Millions of Christians start their walk with God with great hope, faith and dreams that God will always answer their prayers. Then somewhere along the way a crisis happens, a sickness, an accident, a failed marriage, wayward children, or a loved one dies or commits suicide. Suddenly you ask, "Where was God? Why did this happen to me? Why didn't God answer my prayer?" Worse yet, thousands of struggling believers become unbelievers, secretly convinced that God doesn't really care about their circumstances and He doesn't always answer prayer. Therefore they conclude that God lied. His promises are not true.

This is my story of shattered faith and disappointment with God that led to a long road to recovery. You are not alone in your suffering of deep grief. The valley of the shadow of death is a very dark and lonely path. Others have walked it before you. There's a well-worn ancient path of pilgrims from Job to Jeremiah who experienced similar sufferings and shattered faith. In the end they got through to the other side. You will too.

If your faith has been wounded, bruised, shaken or shattered then I have been praying for you as I wrote this book. My prayer is that God will do for you what He did for me in "restoring my soul." David's prayer in Psalm 40 has become my prayer during the writing of this book.

I waited patiently for the LORD; he turned to me and heard my cry. He lifted me out of the slimy pit, out of the mud and mire; he set my feet on a rock and gave me a firm place to stand. He put a new song in my mouth, a hymn of praise to our God. Many will see and fear and put their trust in the LORD. (Psalm 40:1-3)



Part 1

MY STORY, MY PAIN

Deep calls to deep in the roar of your waterfalls; all your waves and breakers have swept over me. Why are you downcast, O my soul? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God. – Psalm 42:7, 11

Losing Faith



Chapter 1

Flashback

Aimee's Asthma

It seems that Aimee was destined for trouble in this world. As a little girl she had trouble with bouts of asthma that made us fear for her life. She would get so bad she could hardly breathe. We'd watch anxiously as her little chest would heave trying to get oxygen. Many times we'd have to rush her to the emergency room to get help.

One night I was on my knees praying with her at bedtime. She prayed her normal prayer but left out asking God to heal her asthma. I reminded her not to forget to pray for her asthma. I waited but she said nothing. I said it louder thinking that maybe she didn't hear me. Nothing. Again I looked right at her and repeated that she should pray for her asthma. As I looked at her, tears streamed down her face and with a broken sob she said, "Daddy, I don't think God hears my prayers. I don't think he's going to heal my asthma." At that point I'm sure I said something spiritual or something positive, I don't remember. But my heart was aching for my little girl's lost faith.

I went back to my room and angrily wept and prayed with my wife as I related what had just happened. How can God ignore childlike faith? Why wasn't God answering her cry? Why does God remain ominously silent when we have such desperate needs?

This shook my faith. It troubled me for weeks as I prayed and mulled over this problem. Then one sunny morning I got a frantic call from a backslidden couple who had left the church years before I came on the scene. It was a petty argument over some insignificant issue. She was calling me to tell me her husband had just had an apparent stroke and was paralyzed from his neck down.

I urged her to call an ambulance immediately but she refused saying her husband insisted on calling me first to pray over him for healing.

As I drove to their house I was angry. It was a man who deliberately alienated himself from fellowship with the church over some petty argument. I'm supposed to pray a prayer of faith over him, while my innocent little daughter continued to struggle with asthma? I had no faith that God would hear my prayer for this man much less answer his prayers. On the way there God clearly directed me to Hebrews 10 and 12 concerning neglecting the assembling of ourselves together and about the roots of bitterness that defile many.

I arrived at their little house to find the man still on his back on the floor and unable to move. As a young pastor I wondered if I was supposed to rebuke him instead of praying for him. To my surprise he said, "Pastor I called you first because God said he has a word for me from you. What is the word God gave you for me?"

Wow! Talk about an open door. I immediately knew those passages were from God, not from my angry heart. So I opened the Word and preached about grieving the Holy Spirit through disobedience. Immediately the man broke into sobbing tears of repentance asking God for forgiveness. At the end of his prayer he said, "OK Pastor, now you can pray for me."

I was in a dilemma. There I was, still angry and very much without faith that God would heal this man. But like Peter after the night of fruitless fishing, I thought, *"Nevertheless at your word, Lord, we will let down our nets."*

I then obeyed and anointed him with vegetable oil (I had no vial of anointing oil, and all they had in the house was cooking oil) and prayed for his healing. To my utter shock and amazement the man began to move his arms and legs. Soon he rose to his knees and stood up, stretched his arms above his head while shouting "hallelujah!" Then to prove his healing was true he did jumping jacks and then got down and did push-ups. With a grateful heart he and his wife promised to be in church the next Sunday. God had done a miracle. God healed a paralyzed man.

I walked away from that situation confused. Why had God seen fit to heal this disobedient man but not my daughter? It didn't make any sense to me. To this couple's credit they did attend church that Sunday. But to their discredit, that was the only time they ever attended because in that

service they saw the family that they were angry with. They never returned.

Aimee's Broken Arm

We have to admit that at times Aimee was a little uncoordinated, like the time she got rollerskates and decided to learn on our sidewalks. Our home in Brazil was enclosed by high walls, as most homes are, to deter thieves. That meant that we had plenty of cement patio and sidewalks all around the house. Once Aimee was comfortable with that flat surface she decided to skate in front of the house where there was a slope leading down to the sidewalk. She was okay going down but coming back up she slipped and fell hard on her right arm.

We heard her scream and saw the tears, but what shocked us most was seeing her arm broken and crooked. It wasn't a compound fracture where the bone broke through the skin, but it was definitely broken like a snapped twig. My knee-jerk reaction was to do what I had seen in first aid books and films. I grabbed her arm and pulled hard to reset the bone. Bad move! It didn't work. It only made things worse and gave her more pain.

We rushed her to the hospital, had x-rays taken and the bone was reset and put in a cast. The doctor knew we were scheduled to return to the United States on furlough in just a few weeks but he wanted to see Aimee again just to be sure the bone was mending properly.

Weeks later we returned to the doctor. He removed the cast. What we saw broke our hearts for Aimee. The arm was still broken and misaligned almost like it had never been set properly. The doctor put a removable brace on it and told us to see an orthopedic surgeon in the States as soon as possible. He suggested that the surgeon might re-break the bone to reset it, or do surgery and have pins placed in it. I felt so bad for Aimee. I felt like it was my fault for attempting to reset her arm.

So we prayed fervently that Aimee wouldn't have to go through another trauma of surgery or breaking a bone. It took a couple weeks before we could make an appointment with an orthopedic surgeon. We told him what had happened and how the doctor had removed the cast only to find that it was still broken and misaligned. The doctor said, "Well, let's have a look." When he took off the splint and removed the wrappings he found her arm was perfectly healed and straight. We were amazed. The x-rays showed the bone was set properly and mended perfectly. God had answered prayer.

Curious, Isn't It?

Why is it that sometimes God answers our prayers in amazing and surprising ways and other times it feels like He ignores us and doesn't really care? Who can figure out God? Romans 11:33 says His ways are past finding out.

"Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out! "Who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counselor?"

Isaiah 55:8 echoes the same sentiment about the mystery of God.

"For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways," declares the LORD. "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts."

For many of us it is more than a curious question. It is more than a philosophical or even a theological question. For those of us who have experienced great tragedies and losses it is a downright crazy maker. Why is it, that sometimes when you need Him most, God doesn't show up? Why does God allow bad things, terrible things, and even horrible things to happen to His children? And then, in the middle of life changing, earth shattering, heart rending events, He asks us to trust Him.

"Why" is a question that cries for an answer. We want to make sense out of life. But what do you do when something happens that makes no sense at all? In 1982, about 10 years after the asthma issue with Aimee, while we served as missionaries in Brazil, Aimee was killed in a pedestrian accident. She was hit by a speeding car as she attempted to cross a busy street a block from our house. This is my story.

This is my struggle. This is my loss of faith and hope in a God who hears and answers prayer. I'm not proud of giving up on God, but millions like me, God-fearing, faith-filled people have gone through similar faith shattering experiences.

This book is my story of loss, hopelessness, and eventually restored faith in a God who hears and answers prayer. I hope in some small way it might help a few other struggling pilgrims along life's pathway.



Chapter 2

The Event

Aimee Loved Her Friends

In 1981 to 1982 we spent a good year at home on furlough from our missionary assignment. We had finished a five year stint as missionaries with The Christian and Missionary Alliance in Porto Alegre, Brazil. During our furlough we preached in many churches sharing our vision and burden for Brazil. Aimee shared that burden for Brazil and for her neighborhood friends. She was determined to share Christ with them.

On our return to Brazil in July of 1982 we needed to buy a car but didn't have enough money to do so. A friend told us that if we went to Argentina, a neighboring country, we would get a better exchange rate to make up the difference between what we had and what we needed. My neighbor was a Uruguayan, an immigrant who was a naturalized citizen of Brazil. He thought it was a good idea to exchange our car savings in Argentina. He said he was going to visit his parents in Uruguay and would be happy to accompany me that far and lodge me at their home.

We all had been praying for Leopoldo, his wife and family and were looking for opportunities to share Christ with them. After praying about it we decided I should go with him.

Before going however, Aimee had saved her money and wanted to buy Bibles for her two neighborhood friends. We decided to spend the day together since I had to go downtown to exchange money and pay bills. I would take care of my business and then we would go to the Christian bookstore to find appropriate Bibles. We spent a good deal of time considering different Bible translations before finally deciding on a

Portuguese version of Good News for Modern Man. That night as I prayed with her before bed I asked her if she had given the Bibles to the girls. She said emphatically, "No Daddy, it's not time yet. When the time is right I'll give them the Bibles."

The Accident

The next day I was scheduled to leave with my neighbor for Uruguay and Argentina. I wasn't looking forward to leaving the family so soon after returning to Brazil, and I dreaded the long bus trip to Uruguay and then a boat ride to Argentina. As Marilyn and I stood in the doorway saying goodbye she said, "I don't want you to go. I've had a bad feeling about this trip like something will happen or you're going to die." I agreed, I too had a foreboding in my spirit about this trip, but we had prayed about it and it was really about spending time with Leopoldo more than exchanging money. We agreed and I left for an eight hour bus ride and then a ride across the bay to Argentina.

The trip was long. I don't remember if I was able to share Christ with Leopoldo or his family. The next day I headed to Argentina on an "*aliscafo*," a hydrofoil boat that crossed the huge Rio de la Plata to Buenos Aires. I was scheduled to meet friends there at the Alliance Bible Institute.

When I arrived the missionaries had an urgent message to call home. There had been an accident. My daughter Aimee had been hit by a car and was in serious condition. I immediately called Marilyn and found out from her that Aimee was crossing the busy street with her friends to buy bread and was hit by a speeding car. She had been rushed to the hospital with serious injuries and was in intensive care. I'll never forget the terror in Marilyn's voice as she said to me, "Dick you need to get home now. She's dying!"

There were no flights to Brazil until the next morning. I spent a sleepless night in tears. I prayed pleading with God to spare her life, or at least to allow me to arrive home before she would die. That night as I read the Scriptures God gave me an insightful promise from Psalm 45:7-15

"You have loved righteousness and hated wickedness therefore God, your God, has set you above your companions by anointing you with the oil of joy. All your robes are fragrant with myrrh and aloes and cassia; from palaces adorned with ivory the music of the strings makes you glad. 9 Daughters of kings are among your honored women; at your right hand is the royal bride in gold of Ophir. Listen, daughter, and pay careful attention: Forget your people and your father's house. Let the king be enthralled

by your beauty; honor him, for he is your lord. The city of Tyre will come with a gift. People of wealth will seek your favor. All glorious is the princess within her chamber; her gown is interwoven with gold. In embroidered garments she is led to the king; her virgin companions follow her-those brought to be with her. Led in with joy and gladness, they enter the palace of the king."

I got the first flight in the morning and told the stewardess of my urgent need to get off the plane immediately when it landed. They were gracious. They put me in the first seat and I was the first to exit. My friend and missionary colleague Steve Renicks was there to greet me and rush me to the hospital.

Oh, the horror of seeing my daughter in ICU horribly bruised and swollen, her hair shaved and head wrapped in bandages, being kept alive by a respirator and tubes. The doctor informed us that Aimee had suffered traumatic brain injuries in the accident and there was no longer any brain activity. The machines were keeping her body alive but she was gone. They informed us that we needed to give them the order to disconnect the life-support system. We could not make that decision. The doctor told us that she had a strong young heart and that her heart could continue beating for several months while being maintained by the life support system.

We went home to pray and grieve together. I remember that none of us wanted to go to sleep. Andrew and Angelica slept in our bedroom with us that night. Before going to sleep we prayed and asked God that if Aimee was indeed already in heaven that He would make her heart to stop so that we didn't have to make that decision. At 1:10 in the morning the hospital called to tell us that Aimee's little heart had stopped beating on its own. She had gone to be with Jesus.

Strange Events Surrounding Her Death

There were some strange events, miraculous coincidences to this story.

First, the driver of the car that hit Aimee was a Baptist pastor. He was rushing to get a senior pastor's wife to a church meeting. His name I can never forget, Pastor Jose.

A worker from the pharmacy ran over, put her in his car and took her to the hospital, since ambulances would take much too long to arrive on the scene.

Jose found out who Aimee was and where she lived. He came to the door and informed Marilyn of the accident and offered to take her to the hospital. They had to go to two different ER's before finding her.

He also refused to leave Marilyn's side after taking her to the hospital. In fact, despite urgings from the medical professionals he stayed until I arrived. The doctors and staff warned him that he shouldn't be there because the father would attempt to kill him once he discovered that he was the driver. Jose assured them that this was not the case, that we were both believers and that we would embrace as brothers.

As I entered the intensive care unit I thought it was odd that all the medical professionals were eyeing me carefully as I walked in. Steve Renicks, our missionary colleague, had told me who the driver was and that he had been with Aimee and Marilyn nonstop since the accident. Upon entering the ICU and being introduced to Jose I embraced him with tears and we wept together. I assured him that there was no animosity or hostility in my heart towards him. Who among us has not been careless in our driving when rushing to an appointment? I am certainly guilty of that. I was glad that Aimee had a fellow pastor by her side during this trauma.

Second, Aimee's girlfriends who she wanted to win to Christ were with her when she was hit by the car. They related to us that when they arrived at the crosswalk a city bus had stopped to board passengers and was blocking their view of traffic. The girls said they didn't see a car coming but must have heard or sensed it. One of the girls had put her arm out to block Aimee from stepping out into traffic, but Aimee was just beyond her reach and had already stepped out to look around the bus.

It was for these girls that Aimee had purchased the Bibles the day before. Little did we know that Aimee had already signed the Bibles and written her testimony in the inside covers. The girls were not permitted to attend the funeral with their parents. But we gave the Bibles to their parents at Aimee's funeral.

Third, Marilyn and I both had been warned by the Holy Spirit that on our return to Brazil great trials awaited us. I was so impacted by this impression from the Lord that I wrote it in my devotional journal while I was still in the States. I remember it clearly because the impression was so strong I called Marilyn into my study where I had been praying. I remember sitting her on my lap and showing her the Scriptures the Lord had given to me and asking her "Are we still willing to return to Brazil?" We both considered it and said a unified, "Yes!"

Fourth, the corner on which Aimee was struck by the car is the same place where I had envisioned the location of our future Alliance Church in Parque Santa Fe.

Fifth, Marilyn's parents were able to arrive in time to be with us for the funeral. Aimee was hit by the car on August 4, 1982 and died on August 6. In Brazil it is required by law that since embalming was rare and expensive the deceased must be buried within 24 hours of their death. Marilyn's parents had to get visas approved and airline tickets within 36 hours of hearing of the accident. Miraculously the Brazilian consulate broke all regulations in approving their visas and expedited their trip to Brazil. They arrived a half hour before the funeral. Years later we heard first hand from the woman at the consulate who went out of her way to make sure that my wife's parents got visas and seats on the plane to Brazil.

The Rest of the Story

Steve Renicks, our missionary colleague and friend adds this to the account. He had an inside track on the story.

There were no airline seats available out of JFK in New York and they had missed their flight to Miami. The person at the consulate had gone to the airport with them, went into the Varig airline office and got them on the plane that was supposedly full.

When we were back in the States for our furlough after Aimee's death, we spoke at Diane's home church in Rivervale, NJ. We showed our slides and shared about the work in Brazil. Our last slide was of Dick and Marilyn. We told what had happened, and asked the church to pray for you.

At the end of the service, a Brazilian woman who was attending the church service that night approached us and said, "I always wondered if they made it in time for the funeral." She worked in the Brazilian Consulate in New York and was the person who had stamped the visas and had gotten them on the Varig flight. She broke down in tears as she realized how God had used her in that situation. I always stand amazed at God's love, mercy and providence.

Curious, Isn't It?

You would think that with all these evidences of God's presence with us throughout Aimee's death and funeral that I would have seen the hand of God. God was certainly at work in these circumstances - but I was blind to it. I couldn't see anything good in her death. It did not fit with my world

view. Things like this just don't happen. Not to me. Not to us. Not to Aimee! Nothing comforted my broken heart and the devastation I felt. I just wanted God to undo it or to wake up and find it was all a terrible nightmare that didn't really happen.



Chapter 3

Deep Grief

How do you deal with the sudden death of a child? Our theology tells us we accept it as an inevitable part of life. People die. Accidents happen. Sickness takes a toll. Bad things happen to good people. The innocent suffer.

But in real life it's not so simple. Everyone handles sudden grief in different ways, and you don't know what your way of handling it will be until it happens. In fact, while it's happening you still don't know how you are going to handle it. You often think you are handling it but you are not. What you are really doing is covering it up, putting a bandage on an open wound, and hiding it from public view.

Grief

Grief is horrible. It is a sifting, a "winnowing" of your life's foundations, beliefs, and thinking patterns. It shakes you to the core. It strips you of your foolish façades, theoretical theology, clever clichés, and your veneer of Bible verses. It's like being suddenly thrown naked into an Artic winter in a blinding blizzard not knowing where you are, where you are going, not seeing ahead, nor behind, and no place to hide away from the ever increasing stabbing cold. You become so desperate you make foolish decisions and take precipitous actions that you would have never done when clothed and in your right mind. In short, grief takes over your life, your thinking, your faith, your relationships, your job, your hopes and dreams of the way things should be. Life is turned upside down and inside out. You have no control over it.

Angelica

Aimee's little sister, Angelica, at three years old didn't understand it all. She began to bury her dolls in the back yard. It was her way of coping with this sudden loss.

Andrew

Andrew, her brother, was stoic through Aimee's death and funeral and seemed to be in denial walking around like a zombie, pretending it wasn't really happening. He didn't cry. Within a few weeks he developed a nervous twitch in his face and neck. He would be sitting at the table and suddenly his face and neck would spasm and he would jerk his head up and sideways. It was unsettling to see. We took him to doctors and to a psychologist but no one could put their finger on the cause. Medicines didn't help. We were growing more deeply concerned that this would become a life-long tick if it weren't remedied. Along with this came a troubling stomach ache night and day for months, and sleep disturbances that left him unable to sleep in a room alone.

Another Trauma

A few months into these physical reactions we were driving home, taking a short cut through a poor slum. Slums are filthy places where dogs often run wild in the streets and alleys and are often covered with flees and mange. As we passed through, a dog suddenly ran right out in front of my car. I didn't have time to react. I couldn't do anything to avoid it.

We hit the dog and ran right over it with our tires. Immediately people ran out into the street shaking their fists at us and throwing things at our car. I had learned from a friend at the American consulate that in such cases an American should never stop, thinking you can control a mob. Knowing this I stepped on the gas to get out of that dangerous situation as quickly as I could. We all felt badly. I explained my reaction to the family in the car. But Andrew went ballistic. He freaked out screaming, "You killed it. You killed that dog! You've got to go back. Daddy, go back!" This continued for the fifteen minutes it took us to get home. When we pulled into the driveway Andrew burst out of the car and ran to his room and slammed the door. There he lay on his bed sobbing his heart out for a scrawny mangy ownerless dog. We tried to comfort him but he was inconsolable. It took some time for him to settle down and talk about it. Later he said, "Dad, that's what happened to Aimee!"

Andrew never again twitched. The tick was gone. Stress was relieved. Something he held inside was released, and he could finally cry over Aimee's death.

Suck it up!

As pastors and missionaries we are in the public eye. We are up front where everyone can see us. We are supposed to be strong, victorious, and overcomers. But the pain of sudden loss is no respecter of persons. We can pretend that we don't have to go through those painful steps of grief, but in reality we are only putting off the inevitable. Grief will find a way of sneaking up on us. It screams to be dealt with.

My father-in-law's last words before boarding his flight back home after the funeral were, "Dick, don't think about it. Bury yourself in your work." That was well meaning but about the worst advice you could give to a workaholic. But, I agreed. I'm a fighter. I'm tough. Nothing bothers me. The best therapy for me was to push harder, work faster, demand more of myself and everyone else. I was a more-than-a-conqueror as the Apostle Paul told us to be in Romans 8. I would rip victory out of this seeming defeat if it killed me. It nearly did.

Elisabeth Kubler Ross wrote the book, *On Grief and Grieving*, defining five stages of grief that everyone goes through. It is helpful in that it points out that there are some strange things that you are going to go through. The trouble is, they don't happen in sequence, or in chronological order, neither are they all of the same duration and intensity. In fact, you can go through all of them in one day only to go through it all again the next day, and the day after that, and so on, for years. Then there is the inevitable fact that you can stall on any one of these steps and get stuck, unable to move forward. In such cases of extreme prolonged stress we look for ways of escape, anything that will get us out of this never-ending pain and give us some normalcy in life.

Ross's book on grief identified five stages of grief, 1) Denial, 2) Anger, 3) Depression, 4) Bargaining, 5) Acceptance. I would include a few more just to give grieving people a heads-up on what is yet to come. My own grief included, 6) Shock, 7) Paralysis, 8) Isolation, 9) Questioning, 10) Guilt, 11) Blaming, and 12) Death Wish. That would give you 12 stages, none of them come in any exact order, all of them, like waves of an angry sea, keep bowling you over again and again at unexpected times and seasons.¹

I experienced all of these emotions. Most were happening on the inside where no one could see. I was in torment from an event so contrary to everything I believed about life and God's love and care. It did not compute. It didn't make sense. My mind worked on it day and night. There had to be a reason for this.

The Question Why

The question of "why" was predominant in my every waking thought. Why did this happen? Why Aimee? Why me? Why us? Why now? Why

this way? What was the purpose? I never saw the greater purpose. No one came to Christ through our daughter's death. Aimee's friends did not soften to the Gospel through this tragic event. Revival did not break out. There was no great harvest of souls.

I cried much. I prayed much. I pleaded much. I begged much. I identified with Job 23:3-5, 16, Lamentations 3:1-33, Psalm 42 and Psalm 77:8 *"Is his mercy gone forever? Does His promise fail for all time?"* Where was God in all this? Where did He go? Why didn't He save her, heal her, or raise her from the dead? Why wasn't He answering? Where are His miracles?

Staying On

For two years we stayed in Brazil working hard, pouring ourselves into the work as my father-in-law suggested. But inside where no one could see, I was hurting. Something was wounded. Something was infected. Something was sick and getting sicker by the day. Something was dying inside me.

I was working hard. I had suffered many losses, endured persecutions, had bad accidents, got paid very little, and ultimately I was left alone to do the work of two missionaries in our last year in Brazil. I was tired. I was wrung out. I was stressed. I was frustrated. I needed to grieve but there was no time to grieve.

The work went onward. Steve and Diane Renicks, our close friends and missionary colleagues, were there with us for the first year after Aimee's death and that was such an important blessing. I don't think I could have managed even getting through the bureaucracy of death certificates and all the running that had to be done during those dark days. Steve did it all.

Where Was God?

We stayed on in Brazil to continue our ministry, but inside I was hurting terribly. I would sit up late at night looking at Aimee's picture on the mantle and say to myself over and over, "It didn't happen. This could not happen. It's just a bad dream. I'm going to wake up and find out it was all just a bad dream." But I didn't wake up. It wasn't a dream. It was a living nightmare. It was like being caught in a vortex or a whirlpool that swirls around you pulling at you constantly trying to pull you under and drown you.

I couldn't get out of that whirlpool. I was stuck between heaven and earth. Nothing had meaning. Nothing brought pleasure. Nothing made me smile. Everything I loved and hoped for was shattered. My hopes

were dashed. My faith was staggered. I felt like the world was unreal. Everything felt artificial. Nothing was real. I was living in a fog.

We got up every day and went about our business. We put on the happy face. We did the job. We went through the motions. But I wasn't there. I was somewhere else. I died with Aimee. I didn't want to live anymore. I wished God would take me. I begged God to turn back time and take me instead. Kids aren't supposed to die, adults die. I prayed but my prayer was backtracking, begging for God to undo what was done, to say it wasn't true, that it was just a dream. I begged. I pleaded. I argued. I bargained.

There is a scene in the Superman Movie when Lois Lane dies in an earthquake and Clark Kent was off saving someone else while she was in peril. He arrived too late. She died. He couldn't do anything about it. Then he looks up to heaven in anger and screams, "NO!!!!" Then in his fury he takes matters into his own hands and powers himself through the air around the earth over and over until the earth reversed its spin and time unwound just enough for him to go back and save Lois.

I felt like that. I wanted to turn back time. I couldn't. I was paralyzed. I couldn't save the day. I couldn't turn back time. I couldn't make it better. I couldn't make this bad dream go away. I couldn't bring Aimee back to life. I failed.

Day after day and night after night I was consumed with the question of why. Why did God do this to Aimee, to me, to us? What caused His displeasure? Why did He turn His face away? Why did He not hear our cry for help? Why did He let Aimee die?

Dying Inside

I was dying inside. I was grieving. I was becoming desperate for God to answer the "Why?" of my heart. No answer came. In fact, three other people had been killed on the same corner where Aimee had been hit by a car. I was becoming bitter toward Brazil and the disrespect for laws. The day came I wanted to throw my briefcase through the windshield of a speeding car.

Then Steve and Diane Renicks left for furlough. Steve had begged the mission for someone to take their place so that we would not be left alone while still going through our own deep grief, but no one was assigned to Porto Alegre. So, we were left alone to do that work. I was exhausted by the work. I was stressed out. I was frustrated. I remember Steve telling a mission leader that if they did not send someone to be with us to carry the load then he believed we would not be there when they came back after a year. He was right.

Breaking Down

During that year I started to feel the physical effect of my emotional distress. I had what we thought was a heart attack, pains in my chest, a band around my head squeezing, and dizziness so great I could not stand up without falling over. I was rushed to emergency care. Tests were done but no heart problem was found. Later our family doctor asked about stress and we told him the story of our daughter's death. He said he believed it was reactive depression from the stress of our daughter's accident and death. He put me on strong antidepressants.

Marilyn and I knew we were at the breaking point. She talked about going home, taking a break and getting help. I wouldn't hear of it. I remember standing in the kitchen and declaring, "God called me here and the only way I'm quitting is if they carry me out on a stretcher!" They nearly did. The doctor put me on heavy medications to try to relieve some of the anxiety and stress. By the time we boarded a plane to leave I could barely walk. I couldn't even pack up properly. I was an emotional and physical basket case.

The Decision to Go Home

The director for the mission in South America visited us in our home and we shared with him what we were experiencing. I told him of my growing anger at the traffic and wanting to throw my briefcase through someone's window. At that he said, "Dick, I think it's time you go home and get some help." I was grieved to hear that because I loved Brazil and our ministry. But I was relieved to hear someone make the decision for me.

During our preparations for departure the stress of packing, caring for the church, and taking care of a myriad of administrative tasks took a toll on me. I was under such strong medications I slept a lot and I cannot remember the last few days. It was as if I was being carried out on a stretcher. I had said they would have to carry me out on a stretcher before I would quit and leave. Now the decision was out of my hands. We left in June of 1984, just short of two years after Aimee's death.



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