

# From Weeping to Wonder, Unnesting During COVID-19

A Seven Day Devotional



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Dear Sweet Friend,

I have been thinking about this phrase recently: If the Lord wills it.

I have heard this phrase from time to time, but rarely have I spoken it. To me, the words appeared to convey an unnecessary doubt about things that seemed certain.

Grocery shelves fully stocked.

Dinners out.

High school, collegiate, and professional sports.

University classes held on campus.

Prom.

Commencement ceremonies.

Graduation celebrations.

Church services.

Vacations.

Medical care when needed.

Wedding ceremonies.

Funeral and memorial services.

These were all a given, at least in my mind. But then came COVID-19 and everything changed.

If your family is like mine, then COVID-19 has thrown a wrench in your unnesting experience. One by one, our three chicks were taking flight and we were getting used to the changes.

But things are different now.

Instead of just one remaining chick eager to take flight, there are now two home—and both are feeling as though their wings have been clipped.

And I've been thinking about you, Sweet Friend and fellow unnester. You and your family have been on my mind a lot. I recognize we may not know each other personally, and that our circumstances may be vastly different.

But I do know what it's like to wake up wondering how I'm going to make it through the day, how I'm going to remain sane in the face of all my responsibilities.

I know what it's like to welcome this new, unexpected gift of togetherness and yet wrestle with the difficulties of too much communal living.

I know what it's like to wonder if I have enough TP in the house. Should I return to the store? What about wearing a mask? Or gloves? Are those needed? Are they necessary?

I know what it's like to struggle under the weight of it all.

I also know what it's like to receive the tender mercies of the Father. Steadying me. Encouraging me. Strengthening me for the tasks He's placed before me today.

Just for today.

I know what it is like to hear His reminder not to worry about the future for each day has enough trouble of its own. A reminder to remain present in the here and now.

A reminder to trust Him with my weakness, knowing that He is my strength.

A reminder to shed my fears and put on His courage.

And so I write.

I write this short devotional in the middle of the COVID-19 pandemic that you might be encouraged. My prayer is that, as you work your way through the seven devotions, you will discover a steadfastness under your feet—the Rock that is Jesus Christ—so that you may stand firm today and in the days to come.

I pray that you will be richly blessed by the Father, Son, and Spirit as you seek Him in the storm.

With affection,

Tiffiney

# 1

# Weep

*When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come along with her also weeping, He was deeply moved in spirit and troubled. Jesus Wept.*

*John 11:33, 35*

It's shocking how quickly things have changed.

Not long ago our family made a plan to send our youngest daughter, a high school sophomore, to spend a weekend with her sister, a college freshman in a nearby state a few hours away by train. But on that Friday, the one we had anticipated would see the youngest daughter in route to visit her sister, instead found us renting a van and moving our middle girl back home.

I'm sure you have your own stories of unexpected change, like the canceling of well-planned trips or long hoped-for celebrations.

It's a lot—not so much the changes themselves but rather the sheer number of changes and the speed at which they have come one after another that has been so unsettling.

And the fear, that too has been unsettling. I fear for my loved ones and myself.

What if one of us catches the virus? Will we receive adequate medical care? Will we recover? What about the economy? What if my loved ones, or my husband or I, are laid off? Will we be OK?

It all makes me want to weep.

Instead, I quickly search for the signs of hope in the middle of all the uncertainty, because facing all that has been so quickly taken, grieving the loss—that is *uncomfortable*.

In his book *What to Do on the Worst Day of Your Life*, Brian Zahnd says, "To deny true sorrow is also to deny true joy."

Sweet Friend, if you and I want to experience the fullness of the joy of the LORD, we must give ourselves permission to grieve, to feel uncomfortable, knowing that even Jesus wept.

In this devotional we will grieve, but we will not remain in grief. We will move through it in order to know fully the joy of the LORD that is our strength.

It is *His strength* that will carry us through the COVID-19 experience.

Be encouraged. We are not alone. Jesus took our pain and suffering, even this pain, upon Himself. He understands the emotions we are experiencing.

## **READ:**

Isaiah 53:3-4 He was despised and rejected by mankind, a man of suffering, and familiar with pain. Like one from whom people hide their faces he was despised, and we held him in low esteem. Surely he took up our pain and bore our suffering, yet we considered him punished by God, stricken by him, and afflicted.

Psalms 56:8 You keep track of all my sorrows. You have collected all my tears in your bottle. You have recorded each one in your book.

## **REFLECT:**

Did you know that God collects *all* of your tears? Tears of sorrow. Tears of anger. Tears of joy. Take time to grieve the impact of COVID-19 on you and your family. Record the losses knowing that the God of the universe is grieving with you, collecting your tears, and noting each one in His book. Write down the ways in which He is strengthening and upholding you and your family.

## **PRAY:**

Father, I know my tears matter to you, that you are attentive to the cries of my heart. Thank you for caring about my sorrow, for giving me permission to grieve and acknowledge the loss. Thank you for how you are strengthening and upholding us. This is hard, but You are good. Father, show me the way through this grief to greater joy in You. In Jesus' name, amen.

# 2

# Wrestle

*He determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live. God did this so that men would seek Him and perhaps reach out for Him and find Him.*

*Acts 17:26b-27a*

I am discovering that I thrive on routine.

The morning alarm leads to the morning workout. Shower, dress for work, and drop youngest daughter at school. Sit in traffic. Drink my morning coffee. Work and then head home for a few quiet hours alone. Write before my husband and youngest return. Prepare dinner, eat, chat, clear dishes, and clean the kitchen. Then, in the evening, relax with hubby as youngest does homework.

Things are different now. COVID-19 has turned all our neatly ordered lives upside down.

And I'm learning that without those hard lines holding my routine steady and keeping me on track, I am a bit rudderless. It's embarrassing to admit just how many days I've remained in my pj's past noon—but it's a lot.

Stripped of all that was once predictable, I am forced to wrestle with my human frailty, with my utter dependence on the Creator of the universe. It's apparent that I have kept Jesus at arm's length, have let routine provide the illusion of control, and have willingly believed the lie of self-sufficiency.

The realization is startling.

I have wanted to believe in the near certainty of my plans—plans to travel, to work, and to carry on with my life plans—but it is God who is in control.

I have known this intellectually. But now I am wrestling with the experiential knowledge that, though I make my plans, it is God who determines my steps.

And clearly, I need Him more than I ever realized.

## **READ:**

James 4:13-15 Now listen, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money." Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes. Instead, you ought to say, "If it is the Lord's will, we will live and do this or that."

Proverbs 16:9 In his heart a man plans his course, but the LORD determines his steps.

## **REFLECT:**

Consider the ways in which you have bought into the lie of self-sufficiency. How have you used your God-given strengths to create a false sense of control? Where have you allowed a sense of self-reliance to overshadow your utter dependence on God? What plans have you made without thought to His will?

## **PRAY:**

Father, You are in control of every aspect of my life. You decide where I will live, whether I will travel, work and make money. My very breath is a gift from Your hand. Forgive my denial of Your omniscience. Teach me to rest in Your power, to trust where You lead. In Jesus' name, amen.

# 3

# Repent

*Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret,  
but worldly sorrow brings death.*

*2 Corinthians 7:10*

Are five squirts necessary?

I am trying to decide if my usual five squirts of face wash are necessary, or if three would be enough. COVID-19 has taught me to think about how much of everything I am using, about how to conserve resources so I can put off a return trip to the store.

The pre-COVID-19 excess in our lives is becoming uncomfortably evident.

A full cup of cheese to top the pasta? Isn't a half-cup sufficient?

Toss vegetable scraps? Why not save them for use in making vegetable broth?

Dump small branches and pinecones into yard waste? Couldn't we use them for kindling?

I hadn't realized how much of God's abundance I had taken for granted, had come to expect, and had even regarded as my due.

Not only had I counted on having plenty of resources in our home, I had also taken as a given the abundance of choices and opportunities available to us.

Choices like a variety of toppings at our favorite pizzeria—which is currently only offering five pies, each with its own predetermined toppings. Even the use of the word *only* betrays my expectation that there should be more, more, more options.

Opportunities like gathering with loved ones, exploring local parks, and *working*.

It's not that I don't love the LORD. I do. It's just that I have loved many, many things more than Him. I have loved my dependable routine and the lie of control it provided. I have loved the plenty—plenty of resources, plenty of choices, plenty of opportunities.



And that realization grieves me. I am grieved over how much COVID-19 has changed things. I am grieved over the big and small ways I have denied His provision.

Sweet Friend, may you and I never again take for granted the gift of His abundance. For the LORD gives and the LORD takes away. Praise be the name of the LORD.

## **READ:**

2 Peter 3:9 The Lord is not slow in keeping His promises, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.

Job 1:21 The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away; may the name of the LORD be praised.

Job 23:12 I have treasured the words of His mouth more than my daily bread.

## **REFLECT:**

Consider where you have denied the ways in which the LORD has provided for you and your family. List as many as you can think of, large and small. Repent and acknowledge His sovereignty over your life.

## **PRAY:**

Father, forgive me. I have been blind to the ways in which you provide for me and my family. I have believed that the choices and opportunities in my life were my doing, rather than Your gifting. Teach me to treasure the words of Your mouth more than my daily bread. In Jesus' name, amen.

# 4

# Remember

*My soul is downcast within me therefore I will remember You.*

*Psalm 42:6a*

I awake in the middle of the night, mind racing, wondering if we will make it through this. Then His spirit speaks, reminding me to remember all He has brought us through so far.

Like the time when I got an unexpected call while I was at the fair with two of our three girls. It was a friend of our other daughter, the one who had stayed home. The friend was worried, concerned about our girl's mental state.

The happy faces, the smell of cotton candy, the laughter of strangers—all of it discordant with the realities on the other end of the phone. I felt helpless. I desperately wished I was home with our daughter in that moment.

Our dearly loved daughter had been struggling for some time. Being a target for the school bully the year before had left her wounded. The fallout of that experience was dark. And that darkness lasted a long time.

I clung to the LORD through the darkness, ate of His Word.

I related with King David who said, "I am worn out from groaning; all night long I flood my bed with weeping and drench my couch with tears. My eyes grow weak with sorrow."

And I prayed. Never have I prayed like I did in that season.

Jesus carried me through and He brought our sweet girl out of darkness into His healing light. Praise God!

There was a moment just before the Israelites crossed into the Promised Land when Moses told them to *remember* all the LORD had done for them. Moses explained that this is why they were commanded to observe the Sabbath day.

Jesus also instructed us to *remember* Him on the Sabbath. (Luke 22:19)

The Sabbath is a day of rest *and* a day of remembering all the LORD has done.

Sweet Friend, may you and I take this unexpected gift of time-slowed to rest and remember all the hard circumstances the LORD has already brought us through. May this knowledge bring us peace.

## **READ:**

Deuteronomy 5:15 Remember that you were slaves in Egypt and that the LORD your God brought you out of there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. Therefore, the LORD your God has commanded you to observe the Sabbath day.

Psalms 77:11-15 I will remember the deeds of the LORD; yes, I will remember Your miracles of long ago. I will meditate on all Your works and consider all Your mighty deeds. Your ways, O God, are holy. What god is so great as our God? You are the God who performs miracles; You display Your power among the peoples, with Your mighty arm You redeem Your people, the descendants of Jacob and Joseph.

## **REFLECT:**

Remember and write down the challenging circumstances the LORD has brought you through. Write them below. In the coming days, when you feel down, return to your list to remind yourself of His work in your life. Praise Him and rest in His faithfulness, knowing He will see you through your unique COVID-19 challenges.

## **PRAY:**

Father, thank you for the work of Your mighty Hand in my life and for all You have brought me through. Help me to remember You when I am down. When I doubt help me to remember your faithfulness, to know that You are my sure foundation. In Jesus' name, amen.

# *Congratulations, Sweet Friend!*

You have worked through grieving, wrestling, and repenting.

I pray that remembering all the LORD has done and brought you through has caused your heart to be encouraged.

Now, let's rejoice and praise Him who is big enough to lead us through this pandemic.

# 5

# Rejoice

*Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstance,  
for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.*

*1 Thessalonians 5:16-18*



Rejoice in the Lord always and again I say rejoice. Rejoice! Rejoice!

I remember singing that song when our daughters were little. We'd clap and dance as we sang the joyful tune. It's a happy memory.

Living out that joy *always*, even in times of suffering? It's a struggle.

When teens go sideways, rejoice?

When finances dry up, rejoice?

When a global pandemic rages, rejoice?

How can we possibly rejoice in the face of so much suffering and uncertainty?

At the Last Supper Jesus took bread and broke it. He then acknowledged that the broken bread represented His soon-to-be-broken body. Jesus received the hard thing as a *joy* set before Him and *gave thanks*.

In that moment, Jesus saw the hard thing as a good thing.

The Apostle Paul wrote that we are to rejoice always, even in the face of suffering. He tells us we do this by taking our thoughts captive, refusing to give our mind the freedom to run wild down the path of fear and anxiety. (2 Corinthians 10:5) We then redirect those captured thoughts and point them toward whatever is true, noble, right, pure, lovely, or admirable. We are to focus our thoughts on anything that is excellent or praiseworthy—and rejoice.

When I'm worried that loved ones will succumb to COVID-19, I rejoice that today we are all healthy.

When I'm stressed by the difficulties of a suddenly full home, all of us on top of each other all day, I rejoice over this gift of togetherness—something which is increasingly rare in our emptying-nest.

When I fear the isolation of the stay-home order, I rejoice that the Glory of God cannot be contained. I rejoice that only God could stop the whole world in its tracks. I rejoice that technology enables continued connection.

Sweet Friend, may you and I rejoice that we have all received one blessing after another, grace upon grace. (John 1:16)

## **READ:**

Philippians 4:4-8 Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things.

Hebrews 12:2 Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

## **REFLECT:**

What COVID-19 related fears, worries, and concerns consume your thoughts? How can you turn those thoughts upside-down, take them captive, and turn them into an opportunity to rejoice? Write them down.

## **PRAY:**

Father, Your thoughts are not my thoughts. Your ways are not my ways. Teach me to take my fearful, anxious thoughts captive. Show me how to view them with Your perspective that I may rejoice and praise You. In Jesus' name, amen.

# 6

# Worship

*Shout for joy to the Lord, all the earth. Worship the Lord with gladness;  
come before Him with joyful songs.*

*Psalm 100:1-2*

While sitting on the back step in the quiet of these slower mornings, I hear the birds. Wrens, juncos and robins—all of them singing a melody so sweet so joyful.

I wish there were a way to bottle this moment, to take hold of the peace, and carry it with me throughout the day.

When I hear the latest COVID-19 statistics, I wish there were a way to again drink in that early morning peace.

When I hear of loved ones struggling, I wish there were a way.

When I learn of friends out of work, I wish there were a way.

All of this wishing for a way reminds me of the song *Way Maker*, written by Sinach. And I find myself humming the tune, especially its repeated refrain:

 Way maker. Miracle worker. Promise keeper. Light in the darkness—that is Who You are.

And I remember that *He* is my peace. He is *the way* and He is *making a way*.

He is making a way for a slower pace of life; causing me to take notice of what I had previously rushed past. He is making a way for deeper conversations with loved ones. He is making a way for contemplating what enriches my life and what is best set aside.

He works miracles. He keeps His promises. He is faithful.

And He never stops working, as “Way Maker” reminds us.

We have seen this all throughout the Bible. When life was uncertain, when circumstances looked unbearably bleak, and when all seemed lost, time and time again, our God was busy

working *His* will. He was busy making a way for *His* people keeping *His* promises, often in the most spectacular and unexpected ways.

Sweet Friend, we do not know what the LORD is doing in and through this pandemic. How could we? His ways are higher than our ways; His thoughts are higher than our thoughts.

What I do know—what I am confident of—is that He is doing and will continue to do more than we could ever ask or imagine. May that cause us to sing His praises and worship His name.

## **READ:**

Psalm 150:6 Let everything that has breath praise the Lord.

Isaiah 55:8-9 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.

Ephesians 3:20-21 Now to Him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to His power that is at work within us, to Him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever. Amen.

## **REFLECT:**

Consider how God is using COVID-19 to make a way in your life. Consider how you spent your time before the pandemic. What enriched your life? What depleted you and might be best set aside? Ask God to give you eyes to see some of what He is doing—some of the "more than we could ask or imagine." Praise and worship Him for what He reveals.

## **PRAY:**

Father, thank you for using COVID-19 to make a way for me to experience more of You. Show me what has enriched my life and what is best set aside. Give me eyes to see the "more than I could ask or imagine" that You are doing in, through and around me. In Jesus' name, amen.



# 7

# Wonder

*Many, O LORD my God, are the wonders you have done.  
The things You planned for us no one can recount to You;  
were I to speak and tell of them they would be too many to declare.*

*Psalm 40:5*

I cannot help but wonder at and be in awe of the things God is doing during this time.

I wonder at His tender care for us, so intimate that not a single tear escapes His notice.

I wonder at His power; even the wind and waves obey Him. Pandemics, too, are under His control.

I wonder at how He will use it all, even the hard things, to accomplish good things.

I wonder about our college daughter (home months early) and how God might use the time to deepen her relationship with her sister. I wonder at how He might use it to repair hurts between her and me.

I wonder about my husband and me as we both work from home. I wonder how He might use this time to inspire new patterns and new habits (walks after dinner or talks in the quiet of the morning).

And I wonder how He—the God of abundance—might use me, how He might use all believers, for good today and in the days to come.

The Bible tells us that He planned for us to co-labor with Him in the good He is accomplishing. In fact, the good He planned for us to do, even during this pandemic, is *immeasurable*. The good He planned literally *cannot be counted*.

The joy of that truth is sustaining. It is the joy of the LORD, which is our strength.

Remember that, Sweet Friend, when the enemy of your soul tries to steal your joy. Remember that the God of the Universe *has not overlooked you*. He *has invited you to join Him* in the good, new thing He is doing in, through and around you. Remember and be strengthened.

And know this: there is nothing new under the sun. These days of uncertainty, while hard, are not new. It's just that our good, good God has graciously given us eyes to see how uncertain life is on this earth and to know that He alone is our strength.

## **READ:**

Ephesians 2:10 For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

1 Corinthians 3:9 For we are co-workers in God's service; you are God's field, God's building.

Isaiah 43:19 See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the wilderness and streams in the wasteland. – Isaiah 43:19

## **REFLECT:**

Sometimes the good we do is simply the action of graciously receiving the good someone does for us. With that in mind, where is God inviting you to join Him in the good He is doing? What new thing is God doing in, through and around you?

## **PRAY:**

Father, it is humbling to know that You planned for me to join You in the good You are doing. Give me eyes to see the good You prepared in advance for me to do. May I graciously receive what others may give me, knowing that too is good. Thank you. In Jesus name, amen.