ADAM

God's Creation

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‘The book that will most change your life is the book you write.’

Seth Godin

For Juliana, Joanna, Nathan, and Nicholas

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A NOTE TO THE READER

It is 14 years since our son Adam died. In 2011, there were 2,273 deaths in Australia due to intentional self-harm.

For a death to be called a suicide there must be unmistakable evidence the person wanted to die. It is the responsibility of the coroner to determine intent. If there is any doubt, the death is classified accidental.

Adam wanted to die.

His death cast a long shadow, a reminder that we are all fragile. Sometimes life breaks us, unravelling relationships, disturbing commitments, shattering hopes.

His death created a storm, a turbulence, a flood of thoughts and feelings that would not be silenced.

His death proved to be a catalyst for deep work: remembering, reflecting, researching, reviewing, recording, and recreating. I have tried to write a narrative that contributes to our understanding. I accept that I don't have all the answers as to why Adam wanted to end his life. I acknowledge that some of my conclusions may not capture all there is to know. If, for any reason, you feel let down, disappointed, or annoyed by what I have written, I apologise. Don't allow it to get in the way of the blessing that awaits any thoughtful reader.

Adam is God's creation, made in the image of God. He is a child of God - loved, nurtured, supported, and corrected, prepared for all eternity. God's call on Adam's life is unique, intentional, and beautiful. How Adam responded to God's call is both inspiring and perplexing. Why Adam lost focus on what God intended for him is not easy to unravel, but there are lessons to be learnt.

The book is divided into five parts:

Part One covers the final weeks in Adam's life, a cascade of events that gained momentum and challenged our ability to respond appropriately.

Part Two is biographical, a collection of memories that paint a picture of a life lived fully and purposefully.

Part Three is more technical, a summary of current thinking on suicide and what we can do to prevent it.

Part Four addresses the nature of grief, accepting the premise that no two people grieve the same way.

Part Five deals with the aftermath – How we put our lives back together; How we accommodate the loss of a loved one; How we honour the memory of those who are no longer with us.

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PART ONE

1. Missing

Adam is missing. He hasn't been seen at his flat for a couple of days. His disappearance is uncharacteristic and unsettling.

People go missing.(a) It happens. Sometimes it is a misunderstanding, a failure to communicate clearly, to share your plans. Sometimes it reflects a desire for space, to have the freedom to reassess priorities, to think afresh. Sometimes it is a sign of weariness, a dissatisfaction with the present, the fractured relationships, the financial stressors. The intent is to start again, to reinvent, to have done with the past. Sadly, there are more complex scenarios – an accident, an abduction, a violent assault. The victim may be lost, their whereabouts unknown.

Adam's life is predictable, his routines known, and his priorities understood. He is not prone to erratic behaviour.

Adam's life is in retreat. There have been signs of shrinkage, a diminished persona. He seems awkward and uncomfortable in social settings, where he is less able to control what happens. He is not always present in the moment. His thoughts are elsewhere. He may be longing for a 'safe place,' imagining a setting where life comes together in a more harmonious, connected, and real way.

Adam is averse to the playful, the trivial. Life is serious, not to be squandered on superficial distractions. His focus is singular. He has put aside much, reducing his contacts, refining his interests. The spiritual dimension is what matters. He takes every opportunity to talk about the consequences of wrongdoing and the need for God's approval, His blessing, His grace.

Prior to his disappearance we had planned to celebrate his thirtieth birthday with a round of golf and had arranged to meet at my sister Marie's home in Mount Waverley. We had a ready-made foursome, dad and the three boys. We didn't play often but the occasions never disappointed. We enjoyed being together and the competitive element gave the event added tension. The standard of golf, although mediocre, did provide fleeting moments of brilliance.

Golf releases every emotion. There are anger and exasperation, delight and desperation. I have seen golf balls dispensed into the adjacent scrub, the carpet like putting surface battered, and golf clubs lodged in the branches of trees, none of which meets the standards of golfing etiquette.

Adam has the talent to be a good player. His inconsistency lets him down. His putting can be erratic. We suspect, that on occasions, he manipulates the score card to suit his expectations. The missed tap in doesn't really count.

We were surprised when Adam didn't show up. We were left wondering. It didn't make sense. This was familiar territory, not something to get anxious about. We contacted him, only to discover that he hadn't left home. He made his excuses and apologised for his non-appearance. My eldest son Nathan sensed that he never intended to come. He seemed pre-occupied with personal matters that were weighing him down. We agreed that we would visit him that evening.

When we arrived at the flat Adam had a friend with him. It felt awkward. We sat around and talked but we weren't connecting emotionally. Adam was defensive, unwilling to reveal much. A wall had been erected, and we were on the outside, trying to catch a glimpse, to decipher what was going on.

We had come to expect a robust Adam, strong and healthy. He thrives on physical activity. His job as a roofing plumber takes him outdoors. He works long hours in all kinds of weather. His boss appreciates his work ethic and says he is often the last to leave as he likes to tidy up the work site.

The Adam sitting in the living room lacks the vigour of his former self. I question him about his eating habits. Adam confirms that he has been fasting,(b) going without food so he can concentrate on his prayer life. He is uncompromising in his devotion. I try to explain that he needs to maintain his physical fitness to fight spiritual battles. I mention the prophet Elijah(c) who had a raven bring him food when he was hiding in a cave, fearing for his life, after his victory over the prophets of Baal. I suggest that we weaken our defences and make ourselves vulnerable when we deny ourselves our basic needs.

I see Adam pushing himself to the limit to get a resolution to the issues he is facing. His life is tipping into unchartered territory, and I don't feel confident that he can work his way through the maze of conflicting thoughts. He is fighting a lone hand and that is never going to end well. My main concern centres on Adam's unwillingness to share his struggles with us. There is so much we don't know, don't understand. He has shut us out.

Why would he do that? Does he not want to burden us with his personal struggles? Are the shame and regret so great that he is embarrassed to talk about it? Does he think we would not be able to understand? Has he already decided on a way forward and is searching for the courage to implement his plans?

I left our time with Adam, burdened by what I had witnessed. We were losing our son. He was becoming unreachable. There were emotional wounds that ran deep. It is in our nature to punish ourselves for our failures. I could see Adam exacting a heavy price for so-called wrongdoing. I doubted he had the necessary skills to process his thoughts and feelings and to get a grip on reality.

So often we find ourselves inhabiting a world of our own creation. It is complicated, this interplay of the natural world and the spiritual world, being 'in the world but not of the world.'(d) How does that work? Adam clearly sees the solutions are to be found in the spiritual domain which means he has stopped listening to 'worldly advice.' He is alone with his God and that can feel like a wilderness, a desolate terrain, a lonely place where we are stripped of everything. Adam has nothing. Adam is nothing.

Following his disappearance, I reflect on what might be done to find him. Doing nothing isn't an option. I consider the places he is drawn to – the train station, the bus shelters, the shopping mall, the foreshore, the church, the gardens - familiar places in his immediate neighbourhood. Whenever Adam is not at work, he engages in street evangelism, sharing his faith with anyone who will listen. I hope I can catch sight of him. After hours of searching, I accept that my best efforts are futile. The only thing left to do is wait. Our waiting is never wasted. It is fertile ground, a chance to pause, to re-consider, to prepare.

Several days later, Nicholas, our younger son, talks to a friend of Adam's who knows where he is. Adam is in the Acute Mental Health Unit(e) at the

Frankston Municipal Hospital. I drove past the hospital several times when looking for him, never imagining that he was a patient. There is relief in knowing that he is found, and it is reassuring to know that he is receiving the support he needs. But an Acute Mental Health Unit can be a troubling environment.

I plan to visit the hospital the following day. My expectations are unclear.

2. Lost

As I approach the hospital I feel the weight of uncertainty. I am nervous and apprehensive. I see a group of younger people crossing the road. They are walking towards the city centre. It is market day, and they are taking part in a supervised community access activity. At the back of the group is a forlorn figure, my son. The emotion wells up within me. The cry is involuntary. I am shocked by its intensity. I press the horn and Adam looks up. Recognition spreads across his face. There is no smile, but I detect a look of relief.

Adam is free to leave the group, and we walk around to the entrance of the Botanical Gardens. It used to be a nine-hole golf course many years ago. You can still see evidence of the fairways. We sit at a table where we shared family picnics. The connection is meaningful. We talk. I begin to piece together the series of events that led to Adam's admission. I sense Adam's reluctance to share the complete story. I must be content with the filtered version.

Adam tells me he became disorientated, his thoughts delusional. He feared what he might do. He believed himself at risk, that he might act inappropriately or behave recklessly. His concerns led him to the local police station. It is unclear whether the police suggested that he present himself at the Emergency Department of the Hospital or they took him there.

An assessment is conducted, and Adam is admitted to the Acute Mental Health Unit as a voluntary patient. Being a voluntary patient allows for flexibility in service delivery. It also provides an escape clause for the hospital if the outcomes are complicated.

The mental health facility is always in demand. There is a growing number of people in our community living with a mental illness.(a) Their life may fluctuate, with periods of relative calm and periods of great distress. It is during the more challenging times they might seek admittance to the mental health unit. One person I spoke to later in the day referred to his visit as a holiday, a change from his normal routine, a chance to re-set.

It is a locked facility. There are checks on those entering and strict protocols on what can and can't be brought in. Suicide risk is real, and any electrical cord can be adapted to suit the needs of desperate and despondent people.

Our conversation meanders. Adam is lucid. I resist the urge to prod, allowing him the space to say what he likes. We talk about different family members and what they are doing with their lives. I ask Adam about the future and how he sees that working out. He wants to leave the facility as soon as possible and get back to work. I encourage him to be open to the help available. He struggles with the medication which suppresses his emotions. It subdues him but his anxiety levels are heightened, simmering below the surface.

Adam talks about his relationship with the church he has been attending and the misunderstanding that broke him and caused him great shame. Life is like that. It is the sudden, unexpected events that turn everything upside down, that shatter our dreams and shake the foundations of our being. Adam insists that the difficulties he is facing are spiritual.(b) This is a revelation. It is an insight into how Adam perceives his struggles. He is cautious about the help offered. The staff at the facility aren't aware of this, that any medical assistance offered is tolerated rather than embraced.

I ponder the vision of Adam crossing the road. It speaks of his brokenness, his tenuous hold on life. It is a race, and he is falling behind, losing contact with the leaders, realising that he lacks the strength to fight his way back. There is desperation but also resignation. He is defeated and the will to continue is wavering. His commitment to life is crumbling. His experience mirrors that of a refugee, a wanderer looking for somewhere to call home.

3. Mind

His thought processes have been highjacked. They are fixated on the negative. There is no respite. They are relentless, holding him captive, diminishing his mental agility, confirming his guilt.

The mind is the battleground.(a) It is where we wrestle with the 'dark forces.' Adam perceives himself a failure, his actions misguided, and his motivations misunderstood. He struggles to reconcile his hopes and disappointments. Life can become messy. The hurt is personal, but it doesn't end there. There is the hurt he may have caused others. How do you undo what has already been done? How do you live with feelings of humiliation and shame? How do you stand tall when you want to hide?

Our thoughts shape how we view ourselves. They determine how we interact with others. Our perception of the world reflects how we feel. People overwhelmed with feelings of guilt look at life through a prism of guilt. Adam sees himself as being unworthy, undeserving of any kindness.

The day after his birthday Adam visited us. My wife, Juliana, made him a birthday cake. It is something, a kindness, a reaching out. Adam blows out the candles. We capture the moment on video. It feels staged, not the joyous occasion we hoped for. His participation is guarded. I sense he is doing this for our benefit. His mindset doesn't allow for a celebration of life, to be the centre of attention, to be loved and affirmed.

Adam is wrestling with thoughts of life and death. Adam loves his family, but he doesn't want to be a burden.(b) It is reflected in his reluctance to share what is happening in his life, what he is thinking, what he is planning. Any contact he has with family is brief, minimising the opportunity for meaningful conversation, for connection. We are like billiard balls, bouncing off one another.

It is difficult to understand why people give up on life, why they can't see a future. Life has its challenges. There is frustration, disappointment, and regret. The embarrassing moments are part of our life story – the thoughtless actions, the unkind words. They can't be erased but they can be accommodated. They can instruct us.

Adam's life has purpose. He enjoys his work. He earns a good wage. He has people cheering for him, who pray that he might prosper. He has family – parents, siblings, cousins, aunties, uncles. He is loved.

Sometimes it is hard to see what we have. It becomes lost in our wants and desires. What we think we lack may not bring us the happiness we seek. Contentment can prove elusive. It comes down to how we see ourselves. If we believe we are a failure it is hard to imagine life being any different. People with depression see only dark clouds even when the sun is shining. Adam is depressed. Life is closing in on him. He is restless, agitated.

4. Care

Adam is being cared for. He has a room on his own. He appreciates the privacy it affords. He can retreat from the flurry of life. There is a TV in the common area. I am surprised that it is turned on. I find the noise and the images stressful. Adam doesn't watch TV. He must find it an annoyance. Others may find it a distraction, an escape.

The staff focus on getting Adam to eat. He has been neglectful in this area and has lost weight. His clothes hang off his body. Food is not a priority for him. I don't know what his eating habits are. Like many single young people, he buys prepared food, takeaway meals. Some meals may require heating up. I can't see him cooking anything. He is mindful of the healthier options although he may not be consistent in this. I know he likes to snack on chocolate bars.

The staff are pleased with his progress in this area. Due to 'client confidentiality'(a) it is not easy to obtain the information you would like. I assume they are looking to stabilise Adam, to achieve a measure of consistency and normality. I know Adam is being given antidepressant medication, but I am not aware of the quantity. I feel concern knowing that antidepressants like Diazepam don't work for everyone and the side-effects can be unsettling. Adam is accommodating. He will take the medication when supervised but I doubt he will persist when the responsibility is his alone.

There is always an element of tension in an Acute Mental Health Unit. There are people with delusional thoughts, erratic behaviour, and outbursts of emotion. Staff are watchful, weighing up risk, planning interventions. I don't know the level of interaction Adam has with the staff. I don't know their procedures, how assessments are carried out, what their line of questioning is. Knowing Adam, his answers are not likely to give much away. He would tell them what he thought they wanted to hear.(b)

I push for a family consultation, a chance to hear what the medical professionals are thinking, to establish what Adam will need when he leaves the unit, how we can support him, and to have explained what follow-up is offered. Following his discharge, Adam will return to the life he has been living. Nothing will have changed. The triggers that led to this crisis will still

be present. Adam will be reliant on his own resources to get through. I am concerned that his patterns of behaviour will continue and that the level of risk will remain elevated.

My wife and I attend the consultation. There are medical staff present representing different disciplines. They decide that Adam doesn't need to be there at the start. Their primary interest is in building up a family history, looking for evidence of previous trauma or experiences that may have sown the seeds of mental instability. In some ways we were unprepared for this level of interrogation, and it leads to differing points of view as to what Adam's childhood looked like. It does help us see a history of personal loss, how different events disadvantaged Adam, contributing to underlying feelings of insecurity and self-doubt.

Medical clinicians don't always appreciate the emotional connection parents have with their children, even as adults. They can be dismissive of the level of concern they reveal and are not receptive to their insights. They trust their diagnostic tools. Adam's admission to the Acute Mental Health Unit shocked us. We were still processing what it meant, how Adam's life might be affected, what level of involvement might be required of us. We had questions, we had fears, we needed to feel included. These issues were not addressed.

The mental health professionals' assessment of Adam is still in the preliminary stages. They talk about some signs of schizophrenia. This doesn't sit well with me. It hinges on how you interpret his delusional thoughts. Are they an indication of a confused mental state or do they reflect a lack of food and sleep? Perhaps, both are true. I am disappointed that little is said about the practical ongoing support that Adam will need. I feel let down. Being a 'voluntary admission,' the medical staff have no legal authority over Adam. When he is released, Adam will be provided with a list of services he can access but ultimately the choice rests with him. This is both inadequate and unrealistic.

Juliana and I take Adam for a drive. We are hoping a change of environment might allow for a more relaxed interaction. Adam seems anxious. We visit Mornington. It is no longer a quiet village. Situated by the sea, it is attractive to young families and retirees. We lived in Mornington when Adam was a little boy. The sun is shining. The beautiful views seem lost on him. We drive through an affluent area, large houses, and expansive gardens. Adam regards wealth as a hindrance to knowing God. He is judgmental, prone to generalise, to categorise people, to make assumptions. He is dismissive of

wealth and possessions, seeing them as an indulgence. When Adam speaks of these things he comes across as dogmatic, self-righteous, lacking grace. There is little that can be said in response due to his fixed ideas. As parents, you hope this is a phase, that at some point in their life they might acquire a more balanced outlook.

Adam is provided with a date when he will be discharged from the Acute Mental Health Unit. I request that the staff don't allow him to leave before I can get there. I want to be there to support Adam and to discuss with him his options. If he is agreeable, I will invite him to come and stay with us for a couple of days. When I arrive at midday Adam is gone. He left after breakfast. Being a voluntary patient the decision to leave is his. He can do what he likes. The only insight I am given is that his eye contact was good. What does that mean? He is feeling confident, upbeat, free at last.

The documentation provided on Adam's release states that he is considered a 'low suicide risk.' Again, I am left perplexed. Is the assessment for Adam's benefit or ours? Are we meant to feel positive about the future because his risk is low?

There are numerous factors that contribute to suicide risk. Some are hereditary, some are personal, some relate to trauma, some relate to health. Risk rises and falls dependent on our age, the quality of our relationships, the success or failure of our financial dealings, the way we think or the attitudes we hold, our use of drugs and alcohol, our acceptance of sexual identity, our fears, and anxieties about the future of the world and our place in it. Suicide risk is never static.(c) There are triggers that are unique to the individual. Some reinforce feelings of rejection, some incite feelings of anger and hostility, some confirm a sense of guilt and shame. How can we possibly know where a person sits on the suicide risk spectrum? Even someone who is saying they are going to kill themselves may be looking for attention, or looking to see how people react, or just being provocative. In some instances, it is a genuine cry for help, an admission that their life is spiralling out of control.

I find Adam at his flat. He is glad to be out of the Acute Mental Health Unit. He says he had to share a room. I know he would have found this difficult. In the end he worked out what he needed to do to be released and made this a priority. Perhaps the eye contact was one of the boxes to be ticked. Eating (tick); Sleeping (tick); Medication (tick); Social Engagement (tick).

Adam agrees to come to Bendigo for a couple of days. It doesn't take him long to get back into the swing of things. He is keen to walk into the city

centre to preach in the mall and to give out gospel tracts, a leaflet that explains God's love for all creation. I observe that he is respectful when offering a gospel tract, giving people the freedom to determine their level of interest. If they refuse, he doesn't appear to be offended.

Adam appears settled and ready to put this episode to rest and go back to work. We are relieved to hear him talk this way and hope that he will be able to resolve the issues that undermine his confidence. Adam has decided not to take the prescribed medication. This is a personal choice and suggests he doesn't see any lasting benefit. Prescribing medication is one thing, ensuring people use it as intended is another.

Adam leaves us and returns to his flat. We feel uncertain about his future and recognise his need of supportive people in his life. We worry about the times when he is alone and where his thoughts will take him.

5. Preparations

Adam has contemplated death previously. His journal entries in August 2010 suggest that he saw his death as imminent. He says,

'By the grace of God, I can accept what will happen tonight. It is strange knowing that shortly my eyes will cease to see, my hands will stop working, my feet stop walking, voice stop speaking. So, we all go that way.'

It is difficult to know what Adam is thinking. I don't believe he is talking about ending his own life. There is no mention of the means of death. The *how* is not explicit. Rather, he imagines God taking him, death greeting him, life ceasing. I don't detect reticence or fear. Adam is confident that this is what God wants.

Where do such thoughts come from? Some Christians believe God speaks to them directly, personally. Others believe the Bible provides all the guidance and inspiration we will need. The Bible has a lot to say about death. Some of God's chosen *ones* didn't experience death. It says of Enoch, in the book of Genesis, *'He walked with God and was no more.'*(a) Did Adam believe God would take him and he would be no more?

The Bible warns about deception, how easy it is to be swayed, to be misguided. Christians are in danger of taking a thought from the Bible and believing it to be true while ignoring the context or other references that add to our understanding. The Bible says, *'Except a seed fall into the ground and die it will not produce fruit.'*(b) Martyrdom in the early church was considered a forerunner to the spread of the gospel message. The willingness of people to die for their faith inspired others to welcome the God who suffered on their behalf.

Adam alludes to this when he says,

'It was a Thursday night in late September three years ago God saved me. Praise His Name! It will be a Friday night late in August that I will go to be with Him. To fulfil the ministry Jesus called me to I must depart that others may increase. God has reminded me in strange ways to keep labouring for His kingdom.'

Did Adam believe that his death would allow others to grow in their calling and realise all that God had purposed for them, that his loss would be their gain?

It appears that Adam viewed his death as necessary, an act of surrender to the will of God.

The Bible teaches that sacrifice defines the Christian life, but our calling is to be 'living sacrifices.' We are to take up our cross daily.

The Journal entries are a confession, an admission of his personal failures, but also a celebration of the people that have been a part of his life and a prayer that they will know God and experience the fulness of life in Him. Adam makes a specific request for his funeral. He says,

'Please play that song 'Everything' by Lifehouse(c) *at my funeral. It has a great melody and meaningful words. Remember, the Lord is coming soon and to be ready.'*

"Everything" - LIFEHOUSE

Find me here,
And speak to me.
I want to feel you,
I need to hear you.
You are the light,
That's leading me,
To the place,
Where I find peace again.

You are the strength,
That keeps me walking.
You are the hope,
That keeps me trusting.
You are the light,
To my soul.
You are my purpose,
You're everything.

How can I stand here with you,
And not be moved by you?
Would you tell me,
How could it be,
Any better than this?

You calm the storms,
And you give me rest.
You hold me in your hands,
You won't let me fall.
You steal my heart,
And you take my breath away.
Would you take me in,
Take me deeper now…

Cause you're all I want,
You're all I need,
You're everything, everything.

Would you tell me,
How could it be,
Any better than this… (Edited)

Why this song? Is God Adam's everything? Is God all he wants, all he needs? Is he looking to God to take him deeper now?

Adam is making his final preparations. Whatever he imagined would happen on a Friday night in late August didn't happen. Many Christians interpret God's inaction as a sign to do something, to be more proactive, to be the answer.

The story of Abraham and Sarah(d) in the book of Genesis is revealing. God says to Abraham that he will be the father of many nations, that his descendants will be as the sand on the seashore. But Abraham and Sarah remain childless and therefore no heir. They know what God has promised but assume wrongly that they need to do something. Sarah offers her female Egyptian servant Hagar to Abraham so they might have children through her. Hagar has a son whom Abraham calls Ishmael, but Ishmael is not the heir God intended. God reminds Abraham and Sarah of the promise and that they will have a child in their old age. Isaac is 'the child of promise.' Isaac is God's answer. Isaac will know His blessing.

Adam reviews his financial situation and makes changes to his commitments. His hopes of returning to work haven't materialised. The work of a roofing plumber has inherent dangers. Your mind needs to be focussed on the job. You need to be sure on your feet. Adam's mind isn't in the right place. He is having to rely on accumulated sick leave to provide for his financial needs.

Adam is a generous supporter of Christian missions.(e) He sponsors local people in Asia who are working as pastors or evangelists in regions where the Christian message hasn't penetrated. Adam notifies the mission that he is no longer able to support them financially but is committed to finding other people who will take up the challenge.

Adam continues to make payments on his car loan, but he terminates his car insurance policy. The risk of having an accident is no longer relevant. His possessions have diminished in value and are disposable.

Adam contacts his work colleagues, his friends and family. He appears to be improving, less agitated, gaining in confidence. What we fail to realise is that he is saying his goodbyes.

People contemplating suicide often enter a period of calm immediately before the event. Adam knows what lies before him. His future is mapped out. He is no longer conflicted. He is resolved to end his life.

He is still burdened by the pain and guilt of past failures and personal disappointments. The private torment continues unabated. The self-condemnation knows no end.

I wonder what it must be like to be able to see the end before you, to live with that certainty. It feels like a 'reckless calm.' On the one hand, nothing matters any more, on the other, people matter. I can see Adam reaching out, striving to make his peace, struggling to convey his love. There is confusion, misunderstanding, his actions not always welcomed, his presence not always appreciated.

There is one relationship that evokes feelings of regret, that is broken, beyond repair. It is a relationship that never had a chance, a failed romance. Adam maintains that God revealed to him the young woman he would marry. Such knowledge needs to be handled carefully, sensitively, prayerfully. Any meaningful relationship needs to be cultivated, nurtured. There is giving and receiving. Time and space are needed for love to grow. There is no place for presumption or for pushing a personal agenda.

Adam admits that he behaved badly, revealing his horrible side, both selfish and proud. I fear he may have lacked the emotional maturity to appreciate how his words and actions were being received. He fails to see how uncomfortable he is making her feel.

The church leadership convenes a meeting. Adam assumes the relationship will be given their blessing. Instead, he receives criticism for his overbearing

manner and is instructed to have no further contact with the young woman. We receive a telephone call from Adam requesting prayer for a broken heart.

The wound is deep. The rejection real. The embarrassment great. The shame palpable. The loss permanent. Hope shattered.

6. Dream

Shortly after Adam's release from the Acute Mental Health Unit at the Frankston Hospital I have a dream, a simple, uncomplicated dream. Adam is walking towards me. He looks different, no longer burdened by the cares of the world. He is alive, at peace in his resurrected body. I sense his concern, that we know his love for us.

Dreams and visions have played a significant part in my life. God has used them to encourage, to teach, to comfort, to guide, to warn, to reveal. Dream interpretation is not always obvious or straightforward and needs to be approached with caution.

Dreams feature prominently in the Bible.(a) In the pages of the sacred text, we are provided the keys to understand our dreams and the courage to do what they require.

The language of dreams can be symbolic or factual, painting a picture or providing clear instructions. In the book of Genesis we encounter Joseph, the favoured son of Jacob, who is sold into slavery by his disgruntled brothers. While in Egypt Joseph rises to prominence. A falling out with Potiphar's wife sees him thrown into prison for a crime he didn't commit. While behind bars Joseph interprets the dreams of Pharoah's chief cupbearer and chief baker. He acknowledges his dependence on God in unravelling the meaning of the dreams. The dreams are symbolic, but predictive, revealing what awaits each of these men.

My dream has several elements. I recognise Adam and am relieved to see him looking so well. His resurrected body is reassuring. It points to a continuation of life, a fulfilled life, free of the burden of self-doubt and self-accusation. It also suggests that Adam's death is imminent while not explaining how it might occur. There is the suggestion that his death will cause us to question Adam's love for us, that his actions are a betrayal of trust. This is something he is burdened by and wants to address.

The purpose of dreams can be to warn, or to shed light on what lies ahead. The growing concern I have for Adam is heightened. I determine to allocate a specific time each night to pray. Why pray, you might ask? Prayer is an invitation to God.(b) It is asking God to have His way in our lives and in the lives of those we love. It is also an acknowledgement that we don't have all

the answers, that we need to be open to hear the word of God, to welcome His wisdom and insight. It is entrusting Adam to a loving God who knows, who heals, and who restores but whose ways are strange, beyond our ability to fully understand. I do not doubt that God loves Adam, that He understands his desires and motivations no matter how scrambled they might be.

Dear reader, I hear what you are asking. Why would God reveal to you that your son is going to die? It is an important question, a complex question.

Firstly, God knows the number of our days, the beginning, and the end. He regards Adam's death a tragedy but is allowing it. He sees the broader picture appreciating the impact it will have on those left behind. God is not distant or uncaring. He is sensitive to the sorrow and pain Adam's death will cause, the tears that will be shed. He understands that the loss and grief last a lifetime, but also that out of the ashes new life will emerge. Adam's death will be a defining moment in my life, providing new direction, new purpose, new authority.

Secondly, God wants to underline the nature of the struggle we face daily. The Bible says, 'For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.' (Ephesians 6:12 ESV)

When Adam said his issues were spiritual, he knew what to expect. The mind is the battleground; it is where the forces of darkness and light lock horns. What is at stake is our spiritual destiny. Every follower of God knows what it is to come under spiritual attack, to be assailed with fears and doubts, to question whether our life amounts to anything, to feel abandoned. Adam longs to know that he is accepted by God, that he belongs, that he is deserving of His love and grace.

Thirdly, God wants us to be equipped to deal with adversity. It is important for me to be prepared, to be strengthened within. God knows the challenge that awaits our family, that it will shake the foundations of our existence, that it will shatter our hopes, that it will threaten our survival. We will need to rely on each other for comfort and support, and we will need to keep watch, to ensure our physical, mental, and emotional stability is maintained.

7. Prayer

I want to understand the dream and to avail myself of God's insight. Without understanding our prayers lack substance, direction, and power.

Praying is bringing our thoughts into alignment with God's purposes. When we know what God is doing, we can pray with authority. Prayer without preparation is like trying to find your way to the bathroom in the dark. There are unforeseen obstacles ready to trip you up.

Often our praying is dominated by our concerns. We are eager to be heard. We want to have our say. We want to unburden ourselves. We want to convey our deepest longings. I recall asking God to watch over Adam, to make him aware of the love we have for him.

But prayer is more than unloading. It is about listening. Prayer is being quiet in the presence of God. Prayer is allowing God to reveal what is on His heart. Prayer is an act of humility, being open to receive.

As I waited on God He spoke to me about the root cause of Adam's difficulties. Adam is being harassed by a religious spirit. Harassment is defined as 'aggressive pressure or intimidation.' It is constant, unrelenting, and threatening, causing mental and emotional suffering.

A Christian world view recognises conflict at a personal as well as global level. The forces of darkness strive to negate the purposes of God. The earth is Satan's domain where evil spirits are active in deceiving God's children.

Their work is to trick and torment.

Their goal is to harden people's hearts to the ways of God.

Their method is concealment. Working undercover, they produce confusion, support compromise, and hide the truth. They are skilful at amassing condemning evidence, keeping people in bondage to wrong choices, inappropriate comments, and questionable actions.

A religious spirit(a) substitutes a genuine relationship with God with works and traditions. Life becomes weighed down with obligations and expectations. There is uncertainty, confusion, shame, and guilt.

A religious spirit focuses on appearances. There is a constant striving to win God's approval, to be the best.

A religious spirit develops a harsh, judgmental attitude towards others. This has a polarising effect, causing division, setting people apart.

A religious spirit becomes immovable, resistant to change. There is an unwillingness to consider other thoughts and ideas, to admit to error.

Adam has become proud, self-righteous, angry, and resentful. His manner and conversation make it difficult to communicate with him, to get close to him. We want to talk to him, to convey our concerns. Talking makes us human. It allows us to connect.

Silence keeps us separate, enclosed behind our own barriers, wondering at our own reality.

I sense he doesn't like who he has become but is powerless to do anything about it. By isolating himself he has erected a barrier that seems impenetrable.

8. Gethsemane

Adam came to stay over Easter. We are renting a townhouse, close to the city centre. Adam is agitated and distressed. We try to understand his anguish. We try to untangle his confusion. We try to speak to his mental torment. We try to be positive, infusing our conversation with hope.

It is exhausting. We feel ill-equipped. We don't have a strategy. It is about being present, engaged, alert. It is confronting. We want our son back. We want him well.

On Good Friday we celebrate the sacrament of communion. We sit around the coffee table in the living room. Adam is a reluctant participant. He shares his feelings of unworthiness. He alludes to unresolved issues. He speaks of failure, a failure to find answers to the issues that are causing his life to unravel. He is earnest in his request for us to pray for the young woman he feels he has let down, betrayed, hurt.

The sacrament of communion(a) is a fellowship meal. It is the gathering of the compromised, the wounded and broken, who seek wholeness and a new beginning. It is restorative, an opportunity to receive. God's mercy triumphs over every imperfection. Humbly, expectantly, child-like we come. The bread of Life! The cup of suffering! Completeness! Surrender!

It is unclear what all this means to Adam. Is he open to receive? Is he seeking forgiveness? Does he want life?

We pray with words, and we pray 'in the spirit.'(b) Adam follows our lead. His appearance changes. The look on his face is revealing – mocking, deriding, sneering. The demonic spirit is present, unmasked, unashamed.

The moment passes. I think to myself we will need to revisit this moment and to pray for release, that Adam might be set free from the influence of this evil presence.

I feel an urge to reach out to Adam, to comfort him. I sit on the arm of the chair and put my arm around his shoulders. I sense his rigidity, his awkwardness. Adam struggles with physical closeness. He seems embarrassed when shown affection. I am desperate to reach him, to speak to his pain.

Adam says, ‘I don’t need your comfort.’ The words reverberate in my mind. I feel hurt, deflated, confused. His rebuttal leaves me shaken. I have nowhere to go, no wisdom to offer, no encouraging words to speak.

I am left to wonder at what Adam is trying to convey. Does he believe he is undeserving of God’s comfort? Is he protecting himself from any contact that would challenge his resolve?

Adam is restless. I insist he join us for the evening meal. He is compliant, a measure of respect. He is keen to avoid conflict. Food isn’t a priority. His physical needs are not his primary concern.

Adam’s mind is active. He finds it difficult to relax. Sleep is problematic. We recognise that rest is essential for his physical and mental wellbeing, that a lack of sleep will impair his judgment and affect the way he feels and thinks. We agree to address this need tomorrow, to obtain a prescription for stronger medication to provide some respite, to calm his thoughts.

I hear Adam get up in the middle of the night and drive off. He returns shortly after. I stagger out to check that he is okay. He has been to the local store to buy chocolate bars. Adam loves chocolate, particularly Magnum ice creams. I sit with him on the side of the bed but am too tired to talk coherently. I am grateful when Adam suggests I go back to sleep.

Adam wakes us later that night. He is standing in the doorway of our bedroom. I can clearly see his silhouette. He wants us to pray with him. We are exhausted. I suggest, perhaps unreasonably, that we wait until the morning. How I wish Adam might have been more insistent but that was not his nature. Like the disciples in the Garden of Gethsemane sleep captured us and a moment of friendship and intimacy and shared suffering was lost. How I regret not stirring myself to get out of bed.

Keith Green,(c) the Christian musician, wrote a song ‘Asleep in the light’.

The world is sleeping in the dark
That the church just can't fight
'cause it's asleep in the light
How can you be so dead
When you've been so well fed
Jesus rose from the grave
And you, you can't even get out of bed.

I have often revisited this moment. I cannot comprehend what Adam must have been dealing with, the psychological stress, the panic, the desperation, the fear, even the glimmer of hope that somehow this would all go away. What was he wanting from us? That we might be there for him. That we might witness his struggle. That we might bring some light to the darkest night. What was he wanting us to pray about? To be reassured that God hadn't abandoned him. To have the courage to embrace the unknown. To be certain that the people he cared about would not be forgotten.

9. Final Word

I hear Adam moving about the house in the morning. There is the sound of footsteps on the wooden floor and the clatter of chairs. I half expect Adam to come and check to see that we are awake. The back door slides open. The engine of the Toyota Hilux bursts into life, and I hear him drive away.

We are apprehensive. We doubt his ability to work through his issues. Help seeking is not something that comes naturally to 30-year-old men. They are more likely to act impulsively, to resolve their issues. I don't consider the possibility of not seeing him again.

When we come out into the kitchen area later, we find the note. We are overwhelmed with a sense of foreboding. We cry the tears of desolate parents who sense their loss. Juliana sends a text message to family and close friends, 'Pray for Adam'.

Dear Mum and Dad

Sorry to tell you this way,

but this is how it has got to be.

As you know I am in trouble with God.

I have lost everything that is dear and precious to me.

I no longer have the ability to love.

I am going away to find God.

Please trust that I will find Him.

I love you.

Adam (some minor editing)

It is a short note(a) which captures his thinking at the time. It is concise, coherent, and convincing. There are, however, inconsistencies which leave us feeling uncertain about his intentions. The content of the note confirms how easily our perceptions of reality can become distorted.

As I have reflected on Adam's final word there seem to be five things he wants to say to his family.

1. An apology: 'I'm sorry!'

Adam has exhausted himself looking to make sense of it all, striving to find a way forward. Adam knows what awaits. His intention is to end his life. It is less certain how he will achieve this.

Adam knows we will struggle with his death but I'm sure he doesn't appreciate the extent of the pain and guilt and sorrow he is inflicting on those who love him.

2. An assurance: 'I love you!'

Adam believes he is no longer capable of loving and yet he can declare his love despite the inner confusion. There is no attempt to accuse, to criticise, or to blame. Adam willingly accepts responsibility for the untenable situation he finds himself in. His affirmation of love assumes even greater significance following his death. It allows for the possibility of healing and restoration.

3. An acknowledgement: 'I've messed up!'

Adam is convinced his issues are 'spiritual'. I believe his analysis is accurate but incomplete. Adam struggles with the disconnect between belief and action. Even the apostle Paul wrestled with this issue. It requires maturity to take the words of God and apply them meaningfully and respectfully to our lives. Our hearing is often selective resulting in actions that are self-serving rather than God honouring. Adam believes he has failed God completely.

There are also unresolved psychological issues that Adam ignores or is unwilling to acknowledge. I believe Adam would have benefitted from counselling to help him understand his thought processes and to learn problem-solving techniques. When we see ourselves as a failure, we open ourselves to a raft of feelings including guilt, shame, discouragement, despair, brokenness, and defeat.

Loss is at the heart of Adam's demise. A loss of hope that he might be able to sustain a close and intimate relationship, a loss of connection with the people who share his convictions, a loss of mental agility that would allow him to think through issues, a loss of vocation, the realisation he won't be able to continue as a roofing plumber, and a loss of self-esteem evidenced by his self-neglect. Undoubtedly there are other losses that weigh heavily on him culminating in the belief that life isn't worth living.

4. An answer: 'I'm going away!'

Adam is desperate. He has searched for God without success. He has looked for consolation but has shut himself off. He is incapable of receiving the very thing he desires. He fails to see that God comes to us, but we must be ready to receive Him and embrace His word for our life.

Adam reasons that if he can't find God in this life, he will surely encounter Him in the next. He literally throws himself on the mercy of God. He knows that God understands everything about him, his strengths and weaknesses, his successes and failures. He believes God will be there for him.

This is also our hope. We are confident that when Adam took his life the God of mercy was there to receive him, to love him, to forgive him, and to restore him.

5. An erasure: 'Adam'

Adam's note is signed 'Adam.' In the original, the word 'Adam' is crossed out, cancelled, deleted. Adam is no more. At least, that is what it suggests. Adam regards his life as over. If we are to talk in terms of success or failure, I'm certain Adam would opt for the latter.

But what does failure look like? Does it relate to not achieving the personal goals you have set for your life? Does it speak to the relationships that never achieved the closeness or intimacy you hoped for? Does it reflect your inability to bring your life into alignment with God's purposes? Does it leave you feeling despondent, derailed, defeated?

This appraisal reflects the life experience of many people apart from Adam, people who find a reason to go on living, who understand that the wind changes direction, that tomorrow offers new possibilities, that reinvention and renewal are real and closer than we can imagine.

10. Silence

The burden of supporting Adam over the past few days has weighed heavily on us. We need a distraction. In times of confusion and despair you need to do something. We decide to attend the Australian Chrysanthemum Championships Show at the Bendigo Exhibition Centre. The organisers have seen fit to combine the Flower Show with a Goat Exhibition. It seems an unlikely match. We appreciate the flower exhibits and comment on the soft ears of the baby goats.

While enjoying a coffee, we voice our concerns. We feel empty, numb, overwhelmed, unwilling to contemplate the unthinkable. We put our wavering hope in the safe return of our dear son.

We travel down to Melbourne on Sunday and stay with my sister Marie in Mount Waverley. We often say it is the best Bed and Breakfast in town. Her garden is always manicured; the splashes of colour feed the soul.

On Monday I drive to Frankston to see if Adam has been back to his flat. I also visit the Acute Mental Health Unit at the Frankston Hospital to ask if Adam has been in contact with them. I ring Triage to ask who Adam's case worker is and if I could have their contact details. None of these initiatives prove fruitful. Adam's whereabouts are unknown, and his mobile phone is switched off.

I thought I would contact the police on Wednesday when we returned to Bendigo. I left the details of Adam's car at home and knew this information would be vital. The Easter period is a busy time for the police force as they endeavour to keep the road toll to a minimum. I figure they might be able to give more time to a missing person after the holiday break.

Adam is constantly in our thoughts. The not knowing weighs heavily. We endeavour to keep busy, to use our time profitably. We are preparing our house in Tyabb for sale. It was my parents' retirement home. I am painting. I want to finish the laundry. It is the last room on my list. Then I can put away the paint brush.

11. Death

The Hastings Police visit later that day. My youngest son Nicholas answers the door. He and his wife Tessa are living in the house until they can find other accommodation. The police have news of Adam. His body has been found. There are no suspicious circumstances.

Nicholas notifies the immediate family and arranges a meeting that night when he will tell us what he knows.

We are seated in Marie's living room. The details of Adam's death are confronting – an empty coal train, a broken body, a disruption to train timetables, disgruntled passengers. Our hearts are broken, our lives shaken. The sorrow is immense. There are tears and there is disbelief. How could this happen? How did we allow this to happen? Why did this happen? A deep sadness enters my heart, and regret. Why didn't I do more?

Grief is intensely personal. Facing the reality of Adam's death evokes differing responses. But all expressions of grief are genuine, no matter how they manifest themselves.

We try to piece together his movements. On that fateful Saturday morning he must have turned right at the first major intersection and headed north. We are left to wonder what he did for those four days, the people he might have spoken to. The agony he must have experienced is beyond imagining, the hardening resolve

The 26th of April 2011, Easter Tuesday, is etched on our hearts. It marks the end of our son's life and the beginning of our grief. We cannot imagine what it will mean and how we will survive.

We have our memories, but when you lose someone to suicide your memories are not neatly catalogued but scattered indiscriminately. Initially, the good times fade from view because the death overshadows everything. We come to appreciate what Tom Smith, author of *The Unique Grief of Suicide: Questions and Hope*(a) says,

"Memories can both comfort us and torment us and sometimes the same memories can do both."

Remembering is important work. Forgetting is not an option. Honouring our loved one places certain demands on us. It asks that we remember truthfully, trying to avoid any embellishments that make a life more acceptable, the story more palatable.

Writing a thoughtful narrative of Adam's life requires insight, wisdom, and kindness. It is a retelling of those events that live on in our hearts and minds.

It is the responsibility of those who are left, his family and friends, to keep his memory alive, and to ensure that he is honoured for the life he lived not the death he died.

PART TWO

12. Early Years

Adam was born at the Royal Women's Hospital, Melbourne, on March 14, 1981. The Birthing Unit was considered innovative but remained under the supervision of the Maternity Ward. It was a supportive environment, where parents were given the freedom to decide how the birth should be approached. We welcomed their statement of belief which says, 'Every woman and every pregnancy is different. We believe that each birth is a natural and unique event.'

I can remember holding Adam in my arms, looking out the window at the lights of Melbourne, contemplating the wonder and beauty of a new life, imagining where his life might take him, who he might become. In the days that followed I wrote a poem, a prayer of dedication.

Father, Life is always a gift,

A sign of love and grace,

A presence that asks commitment,

In a world that's lost in space.

Father, Life has become so violent,

Deception and greed ensnare,

The dependent are now the victims,

In a world that's ceased to care.

Father, Life has lost its fragrance,

Good is no longer right,

What hope of peace for Adam,

In a world of diminishing light?

Father, Life finds a home in Jesus,

Your Son, obedient and true,

He died, despised and rejected,

In a world He longed to renew.

Father, Life is ours to foster,

And Adam is our little boy,

Give us Your patience and wisdom,

In a world that needs Your joy.

When Adam was 18 months old, he fractured his right leg while playing in the lounge room. He was admitted to the Children's Ward of the Frankston Community Hospital. His legs were in traction for two weeks. We sat with him much of the day, but it was not possible to be there all the time. He was heard to say, "Mummy gone! Daddy gone." When Adam was discharged from the hospital, he was encased in pelvic plaster from the waist down. This made moving about difficult. One of his creative solutions was to lie on his skateboard and propel himself forward.

While living in Mornington we had regular contact with my parents. Dad owned a small market garden in Pearcedale. We would visit regularly, helping with the weeding and harvesting, stocking up on fresh vegetables and going for walks along the quiet country roads. Adam enjoyed these excursions. He might see a rabbit scurrying away into the blackberry patch, or a Willy Wagtail catching an insect. There were horses in some of the paddocks and chook sheds.

Adam was 4 years old when we moved to New Zealand. We caught the train from Wellington to Gisborne, a 10.5-hour journey. Adam delighted in the wild seas, the snow-capped mountains, the gorges, the viaducts, the tunnels, the deer farms, the millions of sheep, the tiny settlements, not to mention the freedom to move about on the train.

Gisborne is a city on the east coast of New Zealand's North Island. It is the first city in the world to see the sun. It was to be our home for a couple of years. Adam thrived, making friends (maori and pakeha alike), exploring the beaches and rivers, and constructing things. He developed a passion for fishing and his fondness for animals was clear.

We would fish at the wharf, where the Turanganui River flowed into the sea. Adam would catch cockabullies (a small blunt-nosed freshwater fish) and yellow-eyed mullet. We used the latter as bait when fishing for Kahawai.

When we moved to a house in Wainui Road, we inherited a cat, 'Snowboots,' who later had a litter. We kept Larry, who became a favourite with Adam. Unfortunately, we had to leave Larry behind when we moved to Hastings. We also bought some battery hens who had lived their life caged up. They spent the first few days lying in the sun. Adam would give them a cuddle. He was overjoyed when our neighbour's dog gave birth to ten puppies. With a little encouragement they would all descend on our place.

Here is Adam's account of 'My Animals.'

'We have four chooks and two cats. The cats are called Snowboots and Larry. Two dogs came around one night and got into the chook pen. Daddy and Mummy came out and saved the chooks. Snowboots had four kittens. We kept one of them and called him Larry. Larry climbs the trees, but he doesn't catch any birds. He likes to sleep inside the castle we made from papier mâché.' **ADAM RICKARD 7 YEARS**

While living in Gisborne, Adam experienced several earthquakes. As a family, we often argued about what to do – run outside, hide under the table, or stand in the doorway. One earthquake sent ripples across the surface of the ground. In March 1988 Cyclone Bola(a) pounded the East Coast with up to a metre of rain over three days. The torrential downpour caused landslides, closed roads, and cut power and sewage services. Gisborne's water supply was compromised. Adam watched as his father got on his bicycle, balancing an assortment of plastic containers, and headed off to the supermarket carpark where a water truck waited with fresh drinking water.

Adam was home schooled(b) until he was 8 years old. He was slow to read but showed an aptitude for practical activities. He was inclined to get distracted, wondering what his younger brother, Nicholas, was up to.

Adam commenced his formal education at the Hastings Christian School in 1990. He was an enthusiastic student and had beautiful handwriting. He developed a love of sport, particularly cricket and rugby and came second in an inter-school cross country race.

The boys played cricket in the backyard. Several windows were broken over the years. Inevitably, the ball would be hit over the back fence. Bertie, our elderly neighbour, was often mesmerised by all the activity. He was not impressed when a ball bounced off his roof and was reluctant to give it

back. On one occasion, he notified the police, and they paid us a visit. The children were curious to see two uniformed constables in our kitchen.

On a holiday to Australia, Adam's grandpa told him about a fishing excursion he had planned. He wanted to take Adam to the coastal township of Tooradin where the fishing could be good on the incoming tide. On the day, there was a sense of anticipation. Unfortunately, when they reached the tidal river, instead of fast flowing water they were greeted with mud and mangroves and crabs. A despondent grandpa had misread the tides. Not to be deterred, Adam went exploring and found a blue-tongued lizard under a bush. Their adventure, although not as intended, had a positive outcome.

Adam's early years were positive, despite the odd setback. He was nurtured in a loving and supportive family environment where he received encouragement and affirmation. There was structure and discipline, but Adam was free to pursue his interests. Then there were the people who shared in our life, kind people, generous people, thoughtful people. They had a positive influence on Adam and his development.

Change was a constant in Adam's life. We moved regularly, six houses in eight years with a few shorter stays with other families as well. Relocating to another country was a major undertaking, although the children probably considered it an amazing adventure – new friends, new experiences, new culture. I have often wondered how the lack of permanency played out in our children's lives. *Did Adam, for example, sense the fragility of our existence? Did uncertainty and insecurity become imbedded in his psychological make-up? Did the loss of friends and the many goodbyes unsettle him? Did he feel alone or neglected?*

A broken leg and a stay in hospital was a big ordeal for a young Adam (and his parents). It was a traumatic experience, impacting his physical, emotional, and psychological equilibrium. *Did it alter his view of life? Did he experience fear? Did he feel abandoned?*

Researchers have found that childhood trauma(c) can have a lasting impact on our lives. It is not possible to determine whether Adam was emotionally scarred by his experience or whether it made him stronger and more resilient.


Australia
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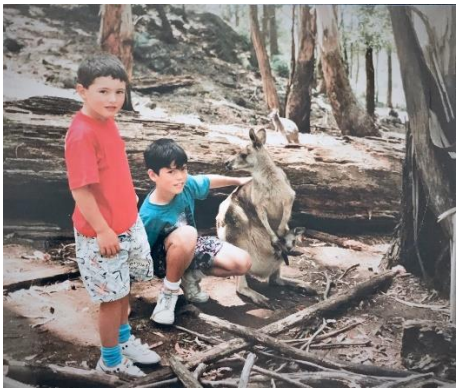
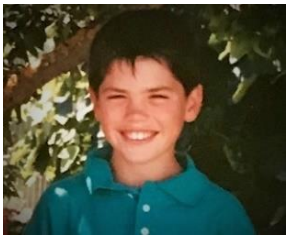
Good news bible





13. Intermediate Years

Our move to Hawke's Bay proved beneficial for Adam. We found a rental property in Outram Road, Hastings, with easy access to the main shopping centre. The region is a major agricultural and horticultural centre. The fertile Heretaunga Plains surrounding the city produce stone fruits, pome fruit – apples and pears, kiwifruit and vegetables, and the area is one of New Zealand's major red wine producers.

The 1931 earthquake(a) caused widespread devastation, reducing many buildings in Napier and Hastings to rubble. My father's second cousin, Marie Buck, was one of seventeen people who died when Roach's department store collapsed. The clock tower in the centre of Hastings features a memorial to those who died.

Having completed his time at the Hastings Christian School Adam moved on to Hastings Intermediate and then St John's College. He enjoyed his school years in New Zealand. St John's College, with its pastoral emphasis, nurtured him and supported his development as a person.

Adam maintained an interest in sport, playing cricket and rugby for St. John's College. He captained the junior cricket team, demonstrating his leadership skills. In 1995 he broke his arm at the wrist trying to run down a ball in a rugby game. The red plaster attracted attention and various remarks which Adam appreciated.

Adam developed a passion for fly-fishing, and the Tukituki River became a favoured location. He would spend many hours with friends pursuing the wild brown and rainbow trout. Fly fishing requires stealth and patience, qualities Adam possessed in abundance. His efforts were regularly rewarded.

The Tukituki is a superb stretch of water and Adam's knowledge of the river grew with the seasons. He wrote about his experiences.

'I have had many memorable experiences fishing the Tukituki River. Describing this magnificent river is hard because it changes around every bend. There are places where the river runs wide with weeping willows on

one side and luscious grass banks on the other. The trout often rise under the willows taking dropping willow grubs.' **ADAM RICKARD**

Fly fishing benefitted Adam in several ways.

The environment: The Tukituki River is a magical place. Every bend in the river offers a new vista. The sights and sounds of nature that you exposed to refresh the spirit – the movement of the river as it shimmers over the shiny pebbles, the bird life around the water's edge, the sound of the wind as it rustles the leaves, a dog barking on a distant rise, the cattle grazing in the field.

The solitude: Adam liked going fishing with his mates. But the actual fishing is a solitary exercise. Fishing for trout requires stealth. Any unnecessary noise will scare the fish. It helps to find a quiet spot where you will be undisturbed. The silence acts as a blanket, a calming presence, making you feel secure.

The challenge: Fly fishing is challenging. It requires knowledge (feeding habits, lures etc.), skill, concentration, patience, and determination. It is the sort of activity that you can lose yourself in. We need distractions, activities that allow a shift in focus rather than dwelling on ourselves.

Adam missed his older sister, Joanna, who had returned to Australia. He wrote the occasional letter telling her of his life.

> *Dear Jo*
>
> *It's Christmas Eve and I have nothing to do so I am going to write a letter to pass the time away. Tomorrow we're going to the Harlands for Christmas tea. I am looking forward to is as I have just spent three hundred dollars on fly fishing gear and the Harland's new house is just a ten-minute walk from a great fly-fishing river.*
>
> *Pussy cat is well and is lying down next to me in the sun. Our new next-door neighbours are very quiet. I don't like them much because they don't throw our tennis balls over. My room is very neat and tidy. Thanks so much for the present you sent me.*
>
> *Next year is school C and I'm not looking forward to it very much. My final exam results were mixed. I was disappointed with my English and Social Studies marks. I could have done better. Science was just too hard for me, and I couldn't have passed it if I tried.*
>
> *These holidays we're going to the Neilson's (our old next-door neighbour) old house which is by the beach. There they have a motor*

bike to ride on the beach. It is also great surfing, fishing, and swimming. I can't wait to go. I'll be going fly-fishing lots this summer.

It was pouring down rain last night and now it is sunny. My life is quite boring at the moment, and I sit around the house waiting until it's time to do my paper run. I still don't have a girlfriend. When I am fifteen, I am going to get a better job than a paper round.

Puss cat is now fast asleep, and I have passed about an hour's time away. I've got mostly new friends you wouldn't know. They're into fishing too. Puss cat has just woken up and had a big yawn and meow. He doesn't have any friends but me. Please write a letter to say how you're going with your pet dog and work.

Love,

AAAAAAA DD AAAAAA MMMMMMMM

The following year, Adam wrote again, shortly after his birthday in March.

Dear Jo

Thanks so much for the card and money. I spent most of it on fishing gear. I want to get some basketball shoes from Australia because they are cheap there. So, I'll be saving up.

I've been trying to go fishing lately but the water is too dirty. I went yesterday but the water was still too dirty to fish. Brett and I went for a walk. We found a creek which led into the main river. We pushed a few bushes and trees out of the way and had a look in the stream. It was about 3 metres wide and at some parts over a metre deep. It was also very clean because I could see the bottom of it everywhere. Under some overhanging trees and bushes was a nice brown trout about 40cm long. It quickly swam away as it saw us. There were plenty of other fish, but it was too hard to catch them with all the overhanging trees and bushes getting in the way of our casting.

Rugby season is starting in a few weeks so that's what we mainly play at school. I'm fifth form this year so I find school pretty hard. I'm looking forward to seeing you.

Love, Adam

Sibling rivalry happens in most families. It is a feeling of tension between two siblings. Children have widely different personalities and

temperaments. There will be competition. There will be anger, jealousy, and resentment. There will be conflict.

Two years separated Nathan and Adam. Nathan was bigger, taller, louder, more socially adept, more academically gifted. Older brothers can be a source of inspiration, but they can also cause feelings of inadequacy and inferiority. This can be a challenge for the younger sibling who is developing their own identity and autonomy. They may resort to actions that offer a release for their frustrations and anxieties. This was true of Adam. In his quest for recognition and equality, he became determined and combative.

We returned to Australia in 1997 having lived in New Zealand for 11 years. We lived in my parent's house in Tyabb. This was a particular wish of my mother before she died.

It was a difficult transition. Life transitions(b) are challenging because they force us to let go of the familiar and face the uncertainty of the unknown. It is common to feel uncomfortable, apprehensive, vulnerable.

For Adam, it was a significant loss. There was so much about New Zealand that suited him. The pace of life, the smaller supportive communities, the sporting opportunities, and recreational pursuits all worked for him in providing an enjoyable and fulfilling life. There was sadness for all that was left behind but also uncertainty and anxiety about what lay ahead.

We enrolled Adam at Mt. Erin Secondary College but underestimated the challenges he would face. Adam found the adjustment to a new school in a country he had been absent from for so long, particularly difficult given his reserved nature. He struggled academically and socially, finding it hard to initiate friendships. His passion for rugby as opposed to Australian rules football, set him apart, made him different.

A highlight for Adam during Year 11 was gaining 1st prize at the Royal Melbourne Show for his wooden bowl made from pine and redwood. During his final year he was known to abscond, but it is unclear what the underlying issues were that prompted this behaviour. Did he want to avoid the scrutiny of his teachers, or did he feel uncomfortable amongst his peers?

Adam completed his Victorian Certificate of Education and took up full time work at Taranto Farms, a market garden in Tyabb. Adam was required to do different tasks including driving the tractor and forklift, but eventually ended up in 'the shed' where he was responsible for the washing and

packing of produce. Quality control was a high priority as they were a supplier for Woolworths. Adam was offered an apprenticeship, but he was hoping for a different vocation.

Like most of us, Adam encountered setbacks, experiences that were disheartening and painful.

In February 1999 he was diagnosed with 'synovial chondromatosis' in his right shoulder. Adam had little strength in his arm, restricting his movement. Surgery was recommended to remove calcification from the bone. A combination of lengthy hospital waiting lists and unexpected cancellations made it a drawn-out process. It was Adam's mother who took up the cause. Her strong and persistent advocacy made the difference and Adam's shoulder was functional again.

When Adam commenced full time employment, he had sufficient funds to purchase a new mountain bike to ride to work. Unfortunately, thieves prized open the window of the garage and took his bike. Adam had his suspicions as to who the culprits were, but the police were unable to solve the case.

In 2002 Adam continued his apprenticeship with the Master Plumbers. He had completed his pre-apprenticeship training the previous year. As well as practical assignments he was studying at Melbourne's R.M.I.T. He found the travel and low pay a disincentive and decided to put his apprenticeship on hold while he sorted out his priorities.

Adam experienced bouts of depression.(c) He did not always like what he saw when he looked within. New Zealand was always there in his thoughts, and it provided a viable and attractive option. It was evident he still had a strong emotional attachment to the Hawke's Bay region. He flew out on Sunday, November 17. He wrote in a letter,

"As I have become someone I do not like, I feel going away is what I need to do. I am sad to go but it is for the best."

It was a positive move. Adam was able to stay with friends and found work in a plant nursery. He wrote in an email,

"I have been well and stress free. Work is good and the people are friendly... Fishing was awesome last week at the Tukituki. Caught about ten and had twenty strikes. They were all around 2 pounds, but one I caught was about 2.5 which I kept and smoked."

In April 2003 Adam returned to Australia and slipped back into his job at the market garden. He purchased a Ford Falcon sedan and started a course in personal training. Adam continued to develop his skills as a guitarist. Life had a certain rhythm, and the future looked positive.

In 2004, at the prompting of his parents, Adam moved out of home. He found a share house in Mt Martha, by the sea. He started a new job as a forklift driver with 'Exfoliators,' a company who specialised in vermiculite and perlite, fireproofing and insulation.

He developed a passion for books and became an avid reader, like his father. We were able to swap books and talk about what we were reading.

Adam was an adventurous person. In 2005 he successfully applied for a counselling position with Camp America. He was appointed to Camp Echo, a few hours out of New York. Adam hoped to be part of the mountain biking program. Adam contracted mumps and experienced swelling in his cheeks and testicles. He was taken to hospital where he was given injections and advised not to undertake any physical activity for five weeks.

Following camp Adam travelled around for a few weeks before flying home. He wrote about his experiences, including his viewing of the 'Statue of Liberty' and the 'Everglades Safari Park' in Miami, Florida. He says,

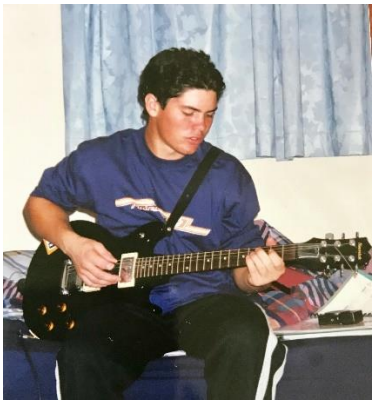
"When I was in New York, we caught the boat out to the Statue of Liberty. The mood was exciting on the way out. I thought it was awesome and took lots of photos. It looks defiant when you look at it front on."

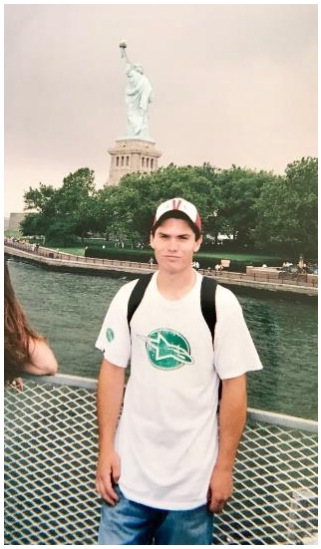
And again,

"We went to the 'Everglades' on a tour and the guide said the water was high (a legacy of Hurricane Katrina). I saw two alligators and a turtle, so it was alright."

Life for Adam had its challenges, but it was a good life with many rich and varied experiences. What happened over the next six years to unravel a life that offered so much promise?


PROSPECT





14. Final Years

Adam had his 25th birthday in 2006. It was the year he resumed his apprenticeship with The Master Plumbers. He still complained that the pay was terrible when compared with the good money he earned at the market garden. His work took him to Mt Hotham where he prepared units for the ski season.

Adam lived in shared rental accommodation in Langwarrin. He was pleased there was a large, unruly dog in residence, which he took for walks. On one occasion he brought the dog home and tied it to the clothesline, assuring us it did not bark. Well, he sure got that wrong.

Adam appreciated being offered transport to family get-togethers and his parents were happy to oblige. During weekdays, his work and study involved a lot of driving in often heavy peak hour traffic.

Adam enjoyed his sport. He played cricket for the Tyabb 4th Eleven.

On a cold and overcast Saturday afternoon, Juliana and I went to watch him play at the Tyabb Cricket Ground in the centre of town. We parked the car by the fence that surrounds the oval. There were few spectators, so we had no trouble finding a suitable place.

Adam noticed our arrival and gave a wave. He wasn't a particularly demonstrative person, choosing to go about his business in a quiet manner. He appeared subdued. His interactions with the other players seemed cautious, respectful. Nervousness or awkwardness had a moderating effect on his behaviour.

Adam opened the bowling. He had a short run but bowled with good tempo. His strength was his consistency, his ability to bowl on a good length, keeping the batsmen on their guard. That is the essence of good bowling, patiently probing, looking for a weakness in technique. Adam won a trophy that year for his efforts with an average of nineteen runs per wicket.

During the winter months, Adam played Australian Rules football with Tyabb. His rugby background shone through. His focus on defence, and his aggressive tackling were features of his play.

In April 2006, Adam's older brother Nathan married Maha at the Basilica of Our Lady of Victories in Camberwell. Adam looked handsome in his suit.

He would need it again later in the year when his younger brother Nicholas married Tessa at Stillwater Winery in Dromana.

Adam wanted a girlfriend. On occasions, he would write about how he viewed life: his frustrations, his disappointments, his negativity, but also his desire to be happy, to focus on the positives and to make the best of life. Adam says,

"What is good for me? Friendships, girlfriend, happy work, health, lifestyle, self-worth, reality."

Adam had a renewed interest in the church and personal belief and attended an independent fellowship in Frankston. He was baptised in the sea at the Frankston foreshore on the 2nd of December 2007.(a)

'Work' and 'Witness' were his life. All other interests – personal fitness, sport, music – could not compete. When he was not working, he was witnessing. He prioritised sharing his faith, handing out bible tracts, engaging people in conversation, and preaching in public places. One of his favoured locations was outside the Southern Cross Railway Station in Melbourne. He became known as 'Preacher Boy,' particularly on social media.

I admired Adam's courage, his willingness to share his understanding of God. His passion was genuine, but I questioned the effectiveness of his methods. It is challenging, addressing a moving mass of people who are intent on catching their train. There is a personal cost in putting yourself out there, being subject to people's indifference, embarrassment, or hostility. It can undermine your self-confidence, not to mention your belief in humanity. It pushes you to the margins, exposes your insecurities, and leaves you drained.

Adam sat his **'**journeyman exam' in 2008 and in April 2010 he was awarded his Certificate III in Plumbing. Adam worked for a company called Trio Plumbing, primarily as a roofing plumber. Some of their projects included the Frankston Hospital and Woodlands Golf Club.

In 2010 Adam purchased a Toyota Hilux(b) for work. From our perspective, it represented a commitment, an investment in the future.

We had regular contact with Adam but did not see him as much as we would have liked. We assumed he was busy. We hoped he was happy and content with his varied activities. But we had our concerns, fearing his life lacked balance and accountability.

There were occasions that added to our uneasiness, suggesting all was not well.

I was speaking to Adam outside our back door. Adam owned several large ceramic pots which he left behind when he moved away from home. I placed them outside, filling them with annuals, pansies, petunias, and dianthus. Without warning, Adam propelled his skateboard into one of the pots, cracking it. He repeated this action several times. Without my intervention, he would have shattered all the pots. When questioned, Adam chose not to respond, offering no explanation for his bizarre behaviour.

Angry outbursts often conceal something deeper, a loneliness, a desperation. I found it disturbing, the wilful destruction of something of beauty and value. Was it a symbolic act? If so, what was Adam trying to say? This was no random occurrence. There was obvious intent. This was calculated, designed to shock. It was impulsive and irrational. I gathered up the pieces and put them in the bin.

Adam's behaviour also pointed to a reservoir of suppressed emotions, anger, resentment, and frustration, that awaited an occasion to reveal themselves. And there was no guarantee that it would be appropriate.

The incident pointed to a lack of emotional intelligence. As parents, we influence our children and shape their behaviour. Sometimes, we get it wrong and fail to equip them adequately to cope with life.

Emotional intelligence(c) is described as *'the ability to understand, use, and manage your own emotions in positive ways to relieve stress, communicate effectively, empathise with others, overcome challenges, and defuse conflict.'* HELPGUIDE.ORG

Emotional intelligence is commonly defined by four attributes – self-management, self-awareness, social awareness, and relationship management. Adam experienced difficulties in each of these areas.

Self-management – Adam was not always in control of his impulsive feelings and behaviours. He had not developed the necessary skills to identify and manage his emotions in healthy ways. His anger and frustration could boil over.

Self-awareness – Adam was not skilled at 'joining the dots,' understanding how particular emotions affect your thoughts and behaviours. If he had been able to identify his emotions more accurately, it would have allowed him to cope better with distressing feelings that affected his moods.

Social-awareness – Adam was a caring person but did not always show empathy. He failed to appreciate the emotional needs and concerns of other people.

This was most graphically illustrated in his much longed for relationship with a young woman at his church. Adam believed God had spoken to him and confirmed that he would marry this person. This insight obviously influenced the way he communicated with her. She felt uncomfortable with his manner and was not interested in a relationship. Sadly, Adam lacked the discernment to see that his attentions were not welcomed.

A meeting was arranged at which the father and the pastor of the church were present. Adam thought he would be able to speak of his desire to marry this young woman. Instead, he was criticised for his insensitivity and warned to back off. He was also told that he was no longer welcome at church.

It was a devastating experience for Adam. He did not see it coming. He was a broken man. The losses were incalculable. The rejection wounded him deeply. His dreams lay in ruins. And yet the hurt was partly his own doing. It was his inability to pick up on emotional cues that caused him to make the situation far worse than it needed to be.

Relationship management – Adam struggled to form relationships. He found it a struggle to relax, to talk about inconsequential things. When his friends disappointed him, annoyed him, frustrated him, or led him astray, he was not able to walk away, to cut his ties. He avoided conflict, choosing to withdraw. He lacked the skills to deal with situations he was not happy with. He was unable to advocate for what was in his best interest.

Adam's church family was the exception. Initially, he found acceptance there. It was a fellowship of like-minded people, where meaningful friendships could grow.

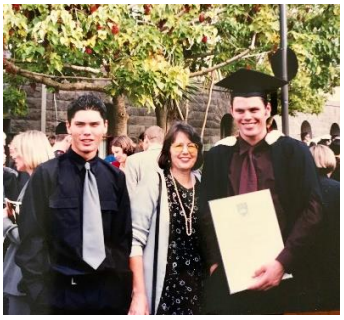
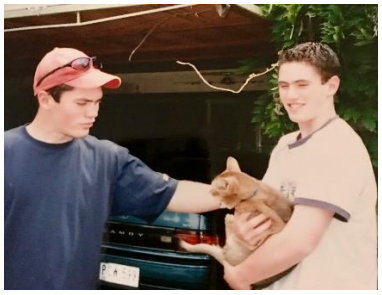
Adam's religious fervour(d) won him admirers. He was praised for his courage in publicly sharing his faith. He was honoured for his sacrificial giving to Christian missions. His commitment to God, his practice of the spiritual disciplines (prayer and fasting), his loyalty and willingness to serve, set him apart.

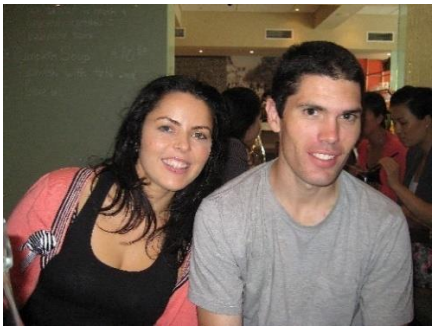
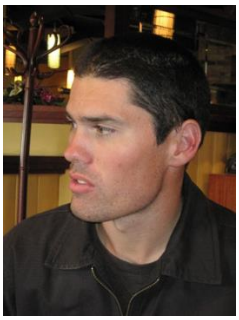
We were not so enamoured. As parents we struggled with his intensity, with his growing judgmental attitude. He was not an easy person to talk to. It seemed his only concern was getting the message out. He had little time for our thoughts and insights. He was happy to dismiss a lifetime of

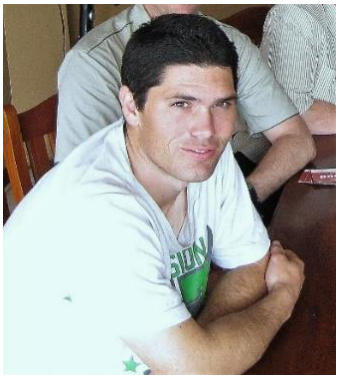
experience. A conversation with Adam was hard work, leaving you feeling drained.

Adam's thirty years included moments of purpose and fulfillment as well as moments of confusion and doubt. There were highs and lows, success and failure, hope and despair. We rejoice in all that was good and positive and life affirming. The darker moments are more difficult to process but are also deserving of our respect.

Adam is God's creation. He lived and loved, worked and played, hoped and dreamed, worshipped and witnessed. He was a son, a brother, an uncle, a cousin. He is forever an example of God's handiwork and an object of His love.




PART THREE

15. The Search for Answers

Those who have lost a friend or loved one to suicide experience tremendous shock and trauma, coupled with a confusing mix of emotions - anger, guilt, grief and despair. Suicide also raises heartrending questions. More than any other kind of sudden death, suicide raises the 'why' questions. Why did this happen? Why did they do it? Why didn't we see it coming?

The cause of suicide is also unknown. It is impossible to know all the factors that lead a person to end their life.

For people grieving a suicide loss the why is important but also elusive. No answer is ever satisfactory. The information available is often inconclusive.

In his book, *'This Sunrise of Wonder,'* Michael Mayne,(a) the then Dean of Westminster, writes of his father's death. He says,

'I never knew my father. He must have known a lot about pain and anguish secretly borne, for one day in May he climbed the church tower in the village where he was rector, threw himself down, and was killed almost instantly. I was three.'

The search for answers is a lifelong pursuit. It is like trying to find explanations for the inexplicable.

Not all questions are the same. Objective questions deal with issues that are visible, concrete. 'What, if anything, caused the suicide?' The subjective questions are more troubling, delving into the less obvious. 'Why would he have done this when he had good reasons to live?'

'Suicide is almost always a very private act, although the legacy of suicide and its impact on those left behind may be very public and powerful.'

When someone takes their life, they create a mystery. It is not wrong to want to understand, to try and fit the pieces together, but no-one can fully explain what motivates a person to end their life.

In her book, *Life After Suicide*, Jennifer Ashton M.D.(b) talks about the endless questions that swirl around in your mind after the death of someone who has been a part of your life for many years, someone you have known intimately. She writes,

‘Rob died by suicide. I couldn’t begin to wrap my head around it. That gentle man, deliberately doing something so violent, and terrifying, and isolated – what could possibly have pushed him to be so resolved to end his life that it overrode the most basic human instinct of survival?

We’d never know, would we, because the only person who could tell us, and answer the countless other questions that were bound to come up, wasn’t here anymore, would never be here again. How was that possible?’

Adele Ryan McDowell, author of *Making Peace with Suicide,*(c) says,

‘Suicide leaves a trail of questions and uncertainties. Knowledge can help make some sense of the unimaginable.’

16. Understanding Suicide

Patrick McGorry,(a) former Australian of the Year (2010) and a leading advocate for mental health issues, had this to say,

'Suicide is a silent killer whose footprints are actively concealed by a frightened and often judgmental society.'

Frank Page's(b) daughter, Melissa, took her life. He writes,

'But suicide? It makes no sense to the thinking mind. It goes against nature and impulse. Only in one's utter desperation is this anomaly able somehow to contort itself into a shape that fits on the same grid with normal life processes. Otherwise, it's something we would always run away from, never toward. Suicide is hard to understand.'

When Adam died, I had a limited understanding of suicide. I felt compelled to address this lack. I read widely, I collected media articles of people who had taken their lives, I talked to people with a lived experience of suicide, I undertook a course of study in Suicide Prevention at Griffith University.

Joseph Conrad(c) expresses what I now know to be true. He says,

'Suicide, I suspect, is very often the outcome of mere mental weariness – not an act of savage energy but the final symptom of complete collapse.'

Suicide does not discriminate. It knows no boundaries. No one is immune. It is not determined by sex, race, creed, nationality, intelligence, health, social or economic status, success level, occupation, marital status, or age. Doctors, lawyers, religious leaders, policemen, emergency services personnel, celebrities, singers, movie stars, tradesmen and farmers have all fallen victim.

Suicide is a solitary pathway. It is walked alone. Often, no-one else is aware of what is being contemplated. It is a private space where thoughts and fears comingle.

Gillian Bouras(d) lost her sister to suicide. She says,

'The world of a suicide is a closed one, a deeply foreign land.'

Suicide is rarely the result of a single factor or event. There are diverse forces at play, undermining a person's will to live. Oversimplifying the causes of suicide is unhelpful and leads to confusion.

In his book *'Myths about Suicide'* Dr. Thomas Joiner(e) poses the question, "Who desires suicide?" He believes that when people hold two specific psychological states in their minds, simultaneously and long enough, they develop the desire for death. These two states are *the perception that one is a burden* and *the sense that one does not belong*.

Perceived burdensomeness is the view that one's existence is a burden to family, friends, and society. This perception could stem from the fact that one is indeed a burden, but it may also be an irrational thought that says I am a liability to others, and I have nothing more to offer. At its core is the belief that I am neither lovable nor worthy of rescue.

There are many types of experiences that can prompt a sense of burdensomeness – losing a job, financial challenges, physical or mental illness, academic failure, undisclosed addictions etc.

As Joiner says, *'The idea is if somebody feels like they are a burden on the people they love, in other words, they have it in their heads, my death will be worth more than my life to people that I care about. If they think that's true, even though it rarely is, it becomes an important precursor to the desire for death.'*

Thwarted belongingness has to do with a breakdown in social connectedness. As human beings we are hard wired to be in relationship with others, and when those ties are cut or dissolve, we suffer isolation.

This feeling can translate into a sense that 'nobody cares about them' or alternately, while others might care, 'nobody can relate to them and understand their situation.'

Returning war veterans often struggle to adjust to life after active service. They can feel estranged from their loved ones who did not experience the same traumatic events.

People aware of their vulnerabilities position themselves on the outer. They avoid unnecessary social contact. They pull back on their friendships. They purposefully minimise conversation and prefer their own company. They imagine that if they weren't around, they wouldn't be missed.

An individual who chooses suicide must also have acquired the ability to overcome a natural aversion to hurting oneself during the suicidal act. An

acquired capacity for suicide involves a lowered fear of death and an increased physical pain tolerance.

Experience with injury, pain and the like create a familiarity and fearlessness, which if combined with desire for death, can prove fatal.

17. Suicidal Mind

Suicide is not easily explained. Sometimes it is mental illness, sometimes it is the everyday pressures of living, and sometimes it is the expectations of the people around us.

In their book, '*Healing After the Suicide of a Loved One*,' Ann Smolin and John Guinan(a) write,

'Every suicide is multi-determined, that is, it is the product of a number of motivating factors interacting in a particularly fatal mix.'

What is often misunderstood is that people who suicide are not focussed on death itself but on resolving the inner pain and turmoil. Understanding the suicidal mind allows us to address the underlying causes that drive someone to want to take their life.

Suicidal ideation is a term that refers to a feeling people may have when they are no longer able to cope with an overwhelming situation. Some of the common life events that cause suicidal thoughts are physical and emotional abuse, mental health issues, financial difficulties, bereavement, rejection, relationship breakup and unemployment.

Mental distress can impact on our ability to function well in our daily lives and relationships. It is the pain of excessively felt shame, guilt, fear, anxiety, loneliness, angst, dread of growing old or of dying badly.

Edwin Schneidman, author of *'The Suicidal Mind'*,(b) uses the term *psychache* to describe psychological pain. *Psych* refers to the mind, and *ache* refers to the anguish, hurt, and misery that the person is experiencing.

Schneidman sees suicide as a tragic drama in the mind. He says,

'It is an exclusively human response to extreme psychological pain.'

Catholic priest Ronald Rolheiser(c) expands on this thought. He says,

"The victim of suicide (in most cases) is a trapped person, caught up in a fiery, private chaos that has its roots both in his or her psyche and in his or her biochemistry. Suicide, in most cases, is a desperate attempt to end the unendurable pain."

Rolheiser believes most suicides come about because the person is 'too bruised and oversensitive to have the resiliency needed to absorb some of life's harshness.'

In 1967, a diving accident left Joni Eareckson Tada(d) a quadriplegic at age seventeen. Young, vibrant, and energetic, Joni anticipated the life she would enjoy. In an instant, her world crumbled. Her limp body floated on the water. She was unable to save herself. A life of dependency awaited her.

Years later Joni wrote about what she was thinking in the emergency ward:

I desperately wanted to kill myself….

Why on earth should a person be forced to live out such a dreary existence? How I prayed for some accident or miracle to kill me. The mental and spiritual anguish was as unbearable as the physical torture.

But… there was no way for me to commit suicide. This frustration was also unbearable. I was despondent, but I was also angry because of my helplessness. How I wished for strength and control enough in my fingers to do something, anything, to end my life.

People who have survived a suicide attempt offer a unique insight into the suicidal mind. In her book, '*Life After Suicide*,' Jennifer Ashton M.D. provides this account.

'… a perfect storm of stressors and emotional pain that becomes so all-encompassing you believe the perfect storm is going to be your forever state of mind. Your focus and your purpose narrow to one thing, and only one thing: end the pain. You aren't thinking about your spouse, or your children, or your family, or your work, or the impact your suicide will have on everyone left behind. End the pain. In those final moments, that's all there was. That's all that existed.'

There are various terms that help clarify the workings of the suicidal mind.

***Ambivalence*:** The person at risk of suicide begins a *secret dialogue,* weighing up the reasons for living and reasons for dying simultaneously. A part of them wants to live but death seems like the only way out of their pain and suffering.

They may be making plans for their future at the same time they are considering suicide. They may allow themselves to 'gamble with death,' leaving it up to others to save them.

Most suicidal people do not want to die; they want the pain to stop. The impulse to end it all, however overpowering, does not last forever.

The suicidal mind is in a state of constant tension, knowing not whether to live or die. Roy Baumeister(e) developed the 'escape theory' of suicide. He says,

'Suicide is the result of a chain of reasoning that ends in "escape" as the only viable alternative.'

For many, the fear of life overpowers the fear of death. Life has become untenable. Death will put an end to the suffering.

The German philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer(f) expressed it this way. He says,

'It will generally be found that, as soon as the terrors of life reach the point at which they outweigh the terrors of death, a man will put an end to his life.'

Inner Voice: People who struggle with suicidal thoughts experience what C. G. Jung(g) describes as 'the tension of opposites.' There are numerous examples - light and darkness, hot and cold, love and loss, life and death, evil and goodness. Our experience of one is shaped by the presence of the other. They determine the way we perceive existence.

People who struggle with suicidal thoughts know how difficult it is to remain positive about life due in part to the conflicting voices they constantly hear. They know the battle is won or lost in the mind.

There are different perspectives as to the origin of the voices.

The psychological perspective describes the critical inner voice as 'a well-integrated pattern of destructive thoughts toward us and others.'

It fosters inwardness, distrust, self-criticism, self-denial, addictions and a retreat from goal-directed activities. And it affects every aspect of our lives: our self-esteem and confidence, our personal and intimate relationships, and our performance and accomplishments at school and work.

The Christian perspective regards the source of the negative voices as demonic. Satan invades the person's thought life providing a moment-to-moment commentary on their performance. The voices mock, ridicule, criticise, confuse, condemn, provoke, unsettle, belittle, and destroy. They challenge past decisions, highlight failures, magnify weaknesses, and beat

the person down at every opportunity. If left unchecked, they take charge of their life, submerging them in a sea of harmful and depressing chatter, bullying them into submission.

To live fully we need to be discerning of the forces that would rob us of life. Evil flourishes when we allow negative thoughts to dominate our outlook. A person struggling with suicidal thoughts succumbs to the idea that they are not good enough, not tough enough, not attractive enough, not loving enough, not resilient enough, not successful enough, and not smart enough to make it in life. They see themselves as a failure.

Tunnel vision: A person with suicidal thoughts has a constricted vision of the future. They are looking through suicide-coloured glasses. Their focus is singular. The narrow path before them is clearly defined. They become emotionally detached, losing contact with those they love. Their sense of isolation is magnified. Although offering a sense of protection it places them out of reach. It is like they have become enclosed in a *suicide cocoon*.

Author Matt Haig(h) wrestled with suicidal thoughts. What struck him was that no-one could see what was going on in his mind. He writes,

'The weirdest thing about a mind is that you can have the most intense things going on in there but no one else can see them. The world shrugs. Your pupils might dilate. You may sound incoherent. Your skin might shine with sweat. And there was no way anyone seeing me in that villa could have known what I was feeling, no way they could have appreciated the strange hell I was living through, or why death seemed such a phenomenally good idea.'

By way of contrast, a healthy mind is flexible, open to new knowledge and insight, ready to respond generously. Psychoanalyst, Donald Winnicott(i) explains the operation of a healthy mind. He says,

'A sign of health in the mind is the ability of one individual to enter imaginatively and yet accurately into the thoughts and feelings and hopes and fears of another person; also, to allow the other person to do the same to us.'

Some people's experience of suicidal ideation is a brief encounter, an unwanted distraction, a wake-up call. For others, having suicidal thoughts can be a permanent part of their life.

John Brogden,(j) CEO of Lifeline International and author of *Profiles of Hope* says,

'For them, like it is for me the risk of suicide becomes a lifelong companion. So, it is important to learn how to manage crises and suicidal thoughts so you can live through them.'

One strategy that can help people who struggle with suicidal thoughts is to divert their thinking by asking them questions:

- What activities allow you to empty your mind of negative thoughts?

People who are suicidal are often consumed by negative thoughts. Such thoughts have many different causes, and these causes can differ for everyone. A mental health condition like an anxiety disorder or chronic depression produces negative thinking. Negative life events can also be a catalyst for harmful thoughts.

There are many activities that help us clear our mind. These include talking to a friend, meditation, physical exercise, creative activities, and music.

- When have you been successful in changing your life for the better?

People who are suicidal often find themselves stuck, not knowing how to alter their reality nor having the energy to think through a plan. Sometimes our thinking rules out the possibility of change. We see ourselves as fixed.

Simple choices can make our life more grounded, more robust, more purposeful. Simplify your routines, minimise your exposure to social media, eat healthy, plant some seeds, volunteer at the animal refuge.

- Have you been aiming to be something that you are not?

People who are suicidal lack contentment and are overly critical of their life experience. They are frustrated by their inability to relate to other people, to make meaningful connections. They are prone to put others on a pedestal, imagining their lives to be uncomplicated, free of hassles and disappointments.

Learn to appreciate your uniqueness. You may be imperfect, prone to disappoint yourself and others, but there is only one of you. If you aim to be something you are not, you will always fail.

- Are you able to describe the difference between loneliness and solitude?

People who are suicidal often feel isolated and do not know who to turn to. They feel they have become a burden on society and have nothing useful to offer. They believe they have forfeited their right to life and are undeserving of anyone's care and attention.

Solitude is to be welcomed, not feared. It allows for connection, with our interior self and the world around us.

- What does it mean to have 'a fear of death?'

People who are suicidal have overcome their fear of death and the instinct for self-preservation. To have achieved this level of disregard for their life indicates a fault line in their mental wellness. Psychologist Thomas Joiner says,

'The deterioration of this instinct should be regarded as a symptom of disease…'

What is more concerning is that the 'instinct for self-preservation' no longer affords them protection.

The survival instinct is defined as 'the ability to know what to do to stay alive.' We need people we can call in an emergency, people who understand, people who can de-escalate the situation.

- Can you provide any examples from nature where plants and animals are able to survive against the odds?

People who are suicidal forget that they are surrounded by numerous examples of living things surviving against the odds, life flourishing in inhospitable environments

- Can you imagine a life where you are immunised against sadness?

People who are suicidal feel a deep sadness. They mistakenly conclude that being sad is unacceptable and further evidence that they are not coping. But sadness is a normal response to situations that are upsetting, painful, or disappointing. It is considered one of the basic human emotions. Sadness is a natural part of life and is therefore to be expected.

- What would 'a life worth living' look like?

People who are suicidal have lost sight of 'a life worth living.' The separation and confusion they feel is the product of their analysis of their life, not the life itself. They over-think everything, drowning in a profusion of thoughts and feelings. It is not surprising that people who are overwhelmed or depressed may feel like giving up.

To discover a life worth living we must start with the premise that 'every life has intrinsic value.' Do not neglect your unique abilities. Do not underestimate your influence. Do not give up when the going gets tough.

- Have you ever thought that the emptiness you feel is due to the absence of love?

People who are suicidal are fearful of giving and receiving love. Allowing love into your life can be threatening, activating fears of abandonment and feelings of loneliness from the past. The anxiety love arouses in some people can heighten vulnerability and expose hidden insecurities prompting a defensive reaction.

These are issues that require counselling as love has the power to nurture, strengthen, heal, and unite.

Leo Buscaglia(k) was an American author and motivational speaker with an unflagging commitment to Special Education. He said,

'A life without love, no matter how many other things we have, is an empty, meaningless one.'

- Do you allow your regrets to diminish you and blur your focus?

People who are suicidal can find no respite from their regrets. Whilst it may be true that feelings of regret can motivate us to want to change, they are more often viewed as a negative. Psychologists point out that *'regret can have damaging effects on mind and body when it turns into fruitless rumination and self-blame that keeps people from re-engaging with life.'*

Are you weighed down by your regrets – the thoughts, words, and actions – that you would like to erase? Or perhaps your regrets have more to do with actions not taken or missed opportunities to show love. To be burdened by the past deflates any positivity we might have about the future.

18. Risk Factors

Suicide is a complex phenomenon and rarely occurs as the result of a single event. Risk factors increase the probability of suicidal behaviour. The are not separate entities but are intertwined, adding to their potency.

Among the many risk factors for suicide are mental illness, overwhelming financial troubles, facing legal challenges, previous suicide attempt, history of physical and sexual abuse, childhood trauma, substance abuse, dealing with the death of a loved one, losing a job, going through a breakup or losing a significant relationship, family history of suicide, impulsiveness, isolation, and hopelessness.

Most of us who encounter such challenges learn to cope with them or find ways to overcome them, going on to survive and flourish.

However, an individual experiencing psychological stress might feel overwhelmed, unable to see a way forward. The resultant confusion, anxiety and depression may lead to thoughts about suicide.

Social isolation is arguably the strongest and most reliable predictor of suicidal ideation.

Social isolation is caused by loneliness, social withdrawal, living alone, and having few social supports. Identifying a 'lonely' individual is not straight forward. For example, it would be wrong to assume that someone who is physically isolated or chooses to be alone is lonely.

Loneliness is the painful awareness that you are not feeling connected to others. It reflects a deficiency in an individual's social relationships, and it feels draining, distracting and upsetting.

Dr Michelle Lim(a) of Swinburne University and scientific chair of the Australian Coalition to End Loneliness says,

'The term 'lonely' is used to explain feeling disconnected from others and refers to a negative perception of one's relationships.'

Loneliness is also subjective and does not reflect the size of one's social network or their number of associates. Loneliness is related more to the quality of the relationships than to the quantity. Being part of a crowd of people doesn't guarantee feelings of belonging.

Bestselling author Sir Ken Robinson(b) says,

'One of the tragic ironies of modern life is that so many people feel isolated from each other by the very feelings they have in common, including a fear of failure and a sense of not being enough.'

Loneliness is real. It happens to us all. Author Marilynne Robinson(c) believes loneliness is a constant. We are born into loneliness. She says,

'Loneliness is the default mode of human existence.'

To be lonely is to be human, but often this understanding unfolds over time. Suddenly, we realise we are alone. The insight may come as we reflect on our interior life. As author and psychologist Dr. Kelly Flanagan(d) says,

'Loneliness is as much a part of life as hunger and sunsets and funerals. It is simply what happens when we grow up and realise we have a universe inside of us to which no other person has access, and that every other person contains an unknowable universe as well.'

It might be that we grasp our loneliness through the realisation that no one will see the world the way we do, that our perception of reality is unique but also isolating.

As author Ann Voskamp(e) says,

'You are utterly alone looking through your eyes into the world — and sometimes there is existential terror in this. No one will feel exactly what you feel, when you feel it, how you feel it — the feelings that run through your being are forever yours alone.'

Loneliness is a condition that remains largely hidden until something triggers our feelings of separation. These events are timely reminders that we never shed our loneliness. It is a constant.

There are many reasons for feeling lonely. These include

- when we are estranged from family or friends
- when we fail to meet other people's expectations
- when we experience a significant change in our life
- when we are exposed for being dishonest and unreliable
- when we are prevented from participating in activities we enjoy
- when our knowledge and experience is no longer needed
- when our long-held dreams implode

Warning signs are like a red flag. They alert us to the fact that our friend or loved one is AT RISK. They cause us to stop and reflect. Red flag moments should activate targeted interventions. They are a reality check, telling us we need a strategy to deal with this new development, a response that reflects the seriousness of the threat.

There are numerous warning signs that point to suicide risk. These include

- A sense of hopelessness or no hope for the future.
- Isolation or feeling alone – "No one understands me".
- Aggressiveness and irritability – "Leave me alone".
- Accessing lethal means – medication, weapons.
- A negative view of self – "I'm worthless. I have nothing to give."
- Drastic changes in mood and behaviour.
- Frequently talking about death – "Sometimes I feel like I just want to die".
- Self-harming behaviours like cutting.
- Engaging in risk-taking behaviours – "I'll try anything, I'm not afraid to die".
- Changing eating and sleeping patterns.
- Making funeral arrangements.
- Giving things away (clothes, expensive gifts) – "When I'm gone, I want you to have this".
- Substance abuse.
- Feeling like a burden to others – "You'd be better off without me".
- Making plans or looking for ways to attempt suicide.

Adam's 'red flag' moment wasn't a dramatic declaration of intent but was equally revelatory. Following his admission to the Acute Mental Health Unit Adam was consistent in his view that his issues were 'spiritual.' Whilst he tolerated the interventions of mental health professionals he wasn't

committed to them. He had no intention of persisting with the medication he had been prescribed. A medical solution wasn't on his radar. Adam believed that he had to resolve the issues he was facing alone. This made it difficult for us to get close to him and to understand his thinking.

Wisdom and discernment are required to know the magnitude of the risk and how to respond.

19. Protective Factors

In his best-selling book, '*Man's Search for Meaning*,' Viktor Frankl(a) detailed his time spent in a Nazi concentration camp and his secret to surviving the camp despite losing the family members he was imprisoned with. The secret was finding meaning in even the most horrific circumstances.

In the Forward to Man's Search for Meaning, Harold S. Kushner(b) writes,

'Life is not primarily a quest for pleasure (Freud), or a quest for power (Adler), but a quest for meaning. The greatest task for any person is to find meaning in his or her life.'

Frankl saw three possible sources for meaning: in work (doing something significant), in love (caring for another person), and in courage during difficult times."

Our mental health can be threatened suddenly and unexpectedly. It might be a medical diagnosis or news of a family tragedy. Our world comes crashing down, our wellness undermined. We feel frightened, panic-stricken, broken, lost.

This was author, Matt Haig's experience. He writes about the day his world caved in in his book '*Reasons to Stay Alive*.'(c) He was aged 24 and could see no way to go on living.

Haig was living in Spain, in one of the more sedate and beautiful corners of the island of Ibiza. It was September. He was due to return to London in a fortnight. He describes the onset of depression.

"It started with a thought. Something was going wrong. That was the start. Before I realised what it was. And then, a second or so later, there was a strange sensation inside my head. Some biological activity in the rear of my skull, not far above my neck. A pulsing or intense flickering combined with a tingling sensation. I thought I was about to die."

Haig came to understand that one of the key symptoms of depression is to see no hope. No future**.** He says,

‘Far from the tunnel having light at the end of it, it seems that it is blocked at both ends, and you are inside it.’

But to Haig’s relief, he discovered depression lies. Depression itself isn’t a lie, but it messes with your thinking.

On the third day, Haig left the villa and went outside to kill himself. A depressive just wants to feel an absence of pain.

He made it to the edge of the cliff. As he looked out over what was surely the most beautiful view in the world he reasoned,

‘I could stop feeling this way simply by taking another step. It was so preposterously easy – a single step – versus the pain of being alive.’

There were three things Haig found tipped the scales in favour of life. They were the fear of death; the love of his family and girlfriend; and the realisation that he might not die but be paralysed for the remainder of his life.

Haig says,

‘I think life always provides reasons not to die if we listen hard enough. Those reasons can stem from the past – the people who raised us, maybe, or friends or lovers – or from the future – the possibilities we would be switching off.’

Haig could have surrendered to the impulse to take that final step. He could have ended his life right there. But he summoned the courage to go on living. And he has this word of hope and encouragement for all who struggle with depression.

‘Life is never perfect. I still get depressed from time to time. But I’m in a better place. The pain is never as bad. I’ve found out who I am. I’m happy. Right now, I am happy. The storm ends. Believe me.’

Protective factors can be internal: the ability to cope with stress, problem-solving skills, life satisfaction, or religious beliefs. Protective factors can also be external: a sense of responsibility to family and/or pets, positive therapeutic relationships, social supports.

However, protective factors, even if present, may not counteract significant acute risk.

20. The Suicidal Crisis

How then can we know when someone we care about is experiencing a suicidal crisis?

Psychiatrist Igor Galynker, author of '*The Suicidal Crisis*,'(a) draws on the insights of Dr Thomas Joiner in identifying seven common themes.

(1) Setting up unrealistic life goals:

The final years of Adam's life were characterised by 'religious zeal.' All other considerations came a distant second. His passion for 'perfectionism' included various activities such as tract distribution, personal witnessing, street preaching, financial support of Christian missions, and the spiritual disciplines of prayer and fasting. His behaviour could be described as driven, obsessive, and unbending. His intense focus and singlemindedness were admirable but unsustainable. He was headed for a crash.

> *'Individuals with trait perfectionism tend to set lofty life goals, particularly if they carry a belief that others hold unrealistically high expectations of their behaviour and will only be satisfied if these expectations are met.'* Igor Galynker

(2) Entitlement to happiness:

Towards the end, Adam's life became more contained. His personal goals were difficult to discern. Activities he had enjoyed in the past were put to one side – personal fitness, playing the guitar, listening to music, cricket, rugby, fishing… He lost the capacity to feel joy, to celebrate, to let go. There was one exception. He delighted in the next generation of newborn babies, his nephews, Theodore and Elijah, and his niece, Scarlett.

> *'All of us have future expectations – expectations that once we succeed in our goals, happiness and fulfillment will follow. Sometimes, our expectations are not met, and we are left to come to terms with reality.'* Igor Galynker

(3) Failure to redirect to more realistic goals:

The process of disengaging (from work) was particularly painful for Adam.

It soon became clear, he could either comply with the medication regime, or he could continue his work as a roofing plumber. He could not do both.

However, Adam chose his own path. His actions reflected his sense of resignation and the belief that he was a failure. He did not take the prescribed medication. Although they might not have realised his full intent, Adam farewelled his workmates.

> *'Striving for goals is a universal human experience. People work to attain goals with expectations of self-fulfillment, happiness, and other positive emotions. When goals cannot be attained, humiliation, anxiety, depression, and other negative emotions result.'*
> Igor Galynker

(4) Humiliating personal or social defeat:

Adam believed God had made it clear who he should marry. When the leadership of the church arranged a meeting with Adam and the family of the young woman, he was excited, believing the discussion would centre around their relationship and subsequent marriage. Adam called us on his mobile to tell us of these developments and his hopes for the future. We sensed his obvious excitement but had our concerns.

But the meeting was for another purpose entirely. It was to inform Adam that his behaviour toward this young woman was inappropriate and unacceptable. He was told he was to have nothing more to do with her and that he was no longer welcome at the church. We received a second call from Adam in which he asked that we might pray for 'a broken heart.'

The pain and humiliation Adam felt is difficult to imagine. His dreams were crushed. The respect he had earned for his dedication and service to the church was gone. He was abandoned, left to manage his feelings and emotions, left to deal with his brokenness, left to find a way to survive. It was a devastating outcome that would have tragic consequences.

> *'The magnitude of a social defeat involves not only the size of the "prize" but also the extent of the emotional toll the defeat imparts on the person who has suffered it. The latter could take the form of public embarrassment, shame, indignity, and dishonour.'* Igor Galynker

(5) Perceived burdensomeness:

Perceived burdensomeness is a view that one's existence burdens family, friends, and society. This perception could stem from the fact that one is indeed a burden – financially, emotionally, or practically – but it may also be an irrational thought – "My death will be worth more than my life to people that I care about" – that is present in the potential suicide's mind.

People who have failed in their life goals and have been forced into a position of real or perceived financial and/ or emotional dependency feel like a burden to others.

Adam was shy and reserved. He struggled with social situations and was not one to seek the limelight. Adam developed an aversion to small talk. When visiting family or friends or attending an important event he would leave as soon as he was able.

Adam did not like to impose himself on others but occasionally requested a lift to family functions or special occasions.

Adam valued his independence and would have been embarrassed by the thought of relying on others, either financially or emotionally.

> *'Burdensomeness is defined as the sense that one is a burden to his or her family or loved ones. It is a mental state characterised by the perception that they would be [better off if I were gone.]'* Igor Galynker

(6) Thwarted belongingness:

A person at risk of suicide perceives that they do not fit in. They feel alone, cut off, isolated. They believe that nobody genuinely cares about them or alternately nobody can relate to them and understand their situation. Feelings of isolation and loneliness undermine overall wellbeing and can be detrimental to a person's physical and emotional health, resulting in stress, anxiety, or depression.

The two places Adam had come to expect acceptance, appreciation, and affirmation, the Church, and his work, were no longer accessible to him. There was his family, but even there, relationships had become strained. It may have seemed to Adam that it was preferable to pull back, to withdraw within himself.

> *'The experience of loneliness or thwarted belongingness occurs when the fundamental need to be socially integrated or connected is unmet.'*
> Igor Galynker

(7) Perception of no future:

The concepts of defeat and entrapment have similarities in that both foster negative affect and describe a loss that could be irreversible. Whether it is the inability to escape from defeating circumstances or the acute sense of being locked up in a bad situation, the perception is 'there is no future.'

Adam could see no future. His life was unravelling and there were no obvious answers. The mental health professionals provided no meaningful ongoing support. The Church had distanced themselves and his work mates were no longer in contact. Which left his immediate family. We tried to be there for Adam, but we struggled to know how to respond appropriately, how to address the growing restlessness, how to provide hope.

People may have many negative experiences and emotions, but until they feel trapped in their misery with the door shut, there is always a chance that their circumstances may improve.

Not everyone who attempts to end their life wants to die. They may consider their actions as a way of gaining attention, a cry for help, or a way of communicating their distress to others. What they fail to grasp is that

every form of suicidal behaviour is a serious, potentially fatal problem. People die whether it was their intention or not.

People acting this way want our intervention. They want someone to recognise the magnitude of their pain and commit to walking with them through the dark and difficult times. They want to get their life back on track and regain the confidence and hope needed to pursue the life they want to live. This is not an unreachable dream.

People who survive a suicide attempt are often grateful for the opportunity to live again. It is an established fact that nine out of ten people who attempt suicide and survive will not go on to die by suicide later. Although it may seem contradictory, it is also true that the most consistent predictor of suicide is past attempts.

People who survive a suicide attempt need proper care and help including a review of mental health services and treatment plans. Perhaps, more importantly, people who survive a suicide attempt need people who understand, who are non-judgmental, and who are accessible. Above all, they need people who will never accept that they are unreachable.

21. Supporting Someone who is Suicidal

People who are suicidal have often experienced loss: the loss of relationships, the loss of meaning, the loss of connection, the loss of belonging, the loss of hope. They no longer feel protected and often must contend with negative and hostile thoughts. They no longer feel secure within their own bodies.

The challenge in supporting someone who has suicidal thoughts is to ensure their safety, to provide a secure environment and to work towards helping them *find their way home*. Our son Adam said, "I wish my life could be what it was before." Maybe that's not possible. Maybe life will look different. Maybe it will mean redefining priorities. Maybe it will mean acknowledging the need for ongoing support.

Suicide prevention is about restoring or rebuilding or simply helping to get rid of the rubble so that life can go on. It is about accepting and affirming the person in their brokenness. It is working cooperatively with health professionals to create an effective and workable care plan. It is helping in managing the practicalities of daily life. It is helping the person with suicidal thoughts to overcome feelings of fear and uncertainty and rediscover meaning and purpose. It is being aware that a long-term commitment may be required to see the rebuilding or recovery process through.

Suicide prevention is about being watchful, alert, fearless, determined, understanding, thoughtful, responsive, honest, charitable, persistent, and respectful. Sometimes it can be difficult to accept that we are not responsible for someone else's choices.

For almost half a century, Don Ritchie (1927-2012)(a) lived near a well-known Sydney suicide hotspot – a cliff called 'the Gap – at the entrance to Sydney Harbour. He reached out to people in their darkest moments as they contemplated ending their death.

Don Ritchie married his wife Moya in 1952. They had three daughters, Jan, Donna and Sue, and five grandchildren. They moved to Old South Head

Road, Watsons Bay in 1964, right across the road from the southern end of the Gap Park. He was 85 when he died after a battle with cancer.

When World War II broke out, Ritchie served in the Royal Australian Navy on HMAS Hobart and was on the ship in Tokyo Bay when the Japanese surrendered in 1945.

In 2006 Ritchie received the Medal of the Order of Australia for his voluntary contribution to suicide prevention. He was described as 'The Angel of the Gap.'

Don Ritchie had no training in suicide prevention and yet he is acknowledged to have stopped 160 people from plunging to their deaths. Many believe this figure to be a conservative estimate.

It has been said, *'Only people who understand suicide are capable of preventing it.'* Don Ritchie knew enough to be able to prevent people from taking their lives. He methods embody the 'Seven Proven Principles in Suicide Prevention.'

1. Have a plan:

Ritchie observed that this rugged part of the coastline was popular, and a lot of people came to look at the view. Sometimes he noticed a person standing near the cliff's edge. When he looked again, they would be gone. Ritchie said, *'You can't just sit there and watch them. You gotta try and save them. It's pretty simple.'*

I admire his courage and persistence. He could have looked away. He could have chosen not to get involved. He could have become resentful that people chose to end their life in his neighbourhood, within 50 metres of his front door. Instead, he committed himself to do what he could.

Ritchie continued to live at the house until his death in 2012 – he had no qualms about staying on despite the constant stream of suicide attempts. While most other people would have moved out, he never considered it to be a burden: *"I think, 'Isn't it wonderful that we live here, and we can help people?'"* he used to say.

Every plan must have a purpose and for Don Ritchie, it was about saving lives.

2. Be aware:

Observation was a key factor in Ritchie's approach. He had learnt this skill while serving in the Navy. One of his tasks was to keep watch on the bridge. He was responsible for the safe navigation of the ship. The safety of all those on board was important to him.

But you need to know what you are looking for; you need to know how to identify people at risk.

Experience taught Ritchie to watch for behaviours that would suggest the person was contemplating suicide. They would be alone, appear disturbed or anxious, not engaging with their surroundings, unwilling to move on, and standing too close to the edge.

3. Utilise your training:

Ritchie worked as a Life Insurance salesman. During the day he would talk to people about making adequate preparations for the uncertainties of life. When he returned home, he would often find himself talking to vulnerable people who were struggling to navigate the inner turmoil that was threatening to take over.

Ritchie had learnt the art of conversation. He had learnt how to make the person feel important. He had learnt how to encourage people to express their desires. He had learnt how to support people to make wise choices.

He was a friendly, compassionate person. He was a tall, gentle man with an engaging smile. He was genuine.

Ritchie would say *'I was a salesman for most of my life. I am selling them an alternative. I am selling them life.'*

4. Understand their thinking:

Ritchie learnt that people contemplating suicide are not able to regulate their thoughts. They see themselves as a failure, a disappointment, and a burden. They often feel isolated, not knowing who to talk to. They often feel ambivalent, not knowing what is preferable, life or death. They often feel desperate, desiring a quick resolution.

Ritchie was offering them another option, an escape route. He was offering them a choice, a new chance at life. And as he said, *'Most people appreciate having someone to talk to about life.'*

5. Adopt a non-threatening approach:

Ritchie recognised the importance of being relaxed and exuding confidence. He presented as someone who could be trusted. His calm voice and sympathetic manner generally eased the tension.

Ritchie would wander over with his palms facing up, smile and say something like, *'Is there something I could do to help you?'*

His goal was to encourage conversation. His method was to communicate concern. He would say, *'What are you doing over here? Please come and talk to me. Come over and have a cup of tea, come and have a beer.'*

6. Use physical restraint if necessary:

Ritchie's quiet approach was often successful, though on some occasions he risked his own life by restraining the more determined from making their final leap. In his younger years, Ritchie would climb the fence to hold people back. On one occasion Ritchie struggled with a woman near the edge. She was determined to launch herself over the side. Had she been successful he would have gone with her.

7. Don't allow failure to diminish your commitment:

Ritchie couldn't prevent all the suicides. On one occasion he was speaking to a quiet young man who 'just kept looking ahead.' Ritchie talked to him for about half an hour and thought he was making some headway. He invited the young man to come over to his house for a drink. The young man said 'no' and stepped straight off the edge. His hat blew up and Ritchie caught it in his hand

But he made a conscious effort not to let those deaths haunt him. He often remarked that he tried his best with each person, and if he lost one, he just accepted that there was nothing more he could have done.

A pocket of tranquillity has been set aside in Watsons Bay as a memorial to Don Ritchie. The Don Ritchie Grove is a place where people might find the courage and strength to go on and continue with life.

Suicide prevention measures have recently been introduced at Gap Park. They include cameras, emergency phones and new fences. A Lifeline poster has these words,

Hold onto HOPE. There is always HELP.

We are not always present when someone is contemplating ending their life. The Prayer of Protection can be offered up to God for any person who is struggling with suicidal thoughts.

A Prayer of Protection:

Father, we pray against the spirit of suicide which is influencing people of all ages and from different backgrounds to take their lives.

Father, our authority rests in what your son Jesus accomplished on the cross. Satan is defeated but his influence is still felt as he works to bring people into bondage.

Father, your son Jesus came to break the chains that bind, to release the captives and to set free those who are oppressed.

Father, we bind the spirit of suicide that is harassing ..... We know that the spirit of suicide works to create a situation that is untenable where death is seen as a logical outcome.

Father, we pray for your protection. We pray that ..... won't alienate themselves but will recognise and value the support of family and friends. We pray that ..... won't see themselves as a burden to others but will honestly seek help when they need it.

Father, we pray for clarity of thought based on the wisdom you bring. We know that the spirit of suicide creates confusion and promotes guilt and shame.

Father, we pray that ..... might discover a reason to live and a renewed hope.

Father, we say 'NO!' to Satan, we say 'NO!' to his schemes, we say 'NO!' to his relentless attack on the vulnerable and those at risk. We create a wall of faith around ..... and we will not be moved.

Father, we celebrate your victory, your power and authority that is freely available to those who walk in obedience to your commands. Amen.

22. What Factors Prompt Men to Consider Suicide

Blake Roberts(a) was 17 years old when he attempted suicide. At the time, he was the top player in his football team, had lots of friends, and was involved in church. He says,

'My insides did not match what people saw on the outside. I embodied the agony Maya Angelou(b) talked about when she said, '*There is no greater agony than bearing an untold story inside you.'* I had *many* untold stories inside me and eventually those untold stories felt like too much.'

Roberts, who is a therapist, suggests that at our best, we are 97% honest with ourselves and others and it is the 3% we keep to ourselves that keeps us bound to shame and loneliness, which is a dark place to be.

Having read Blake Roberts' post in recognition of Suicide Prevention Month, Jonathon M. Seidl,(c) storyteller, writer, and speaker, shared his own struggle with suicidal thoughts. His personal photographs show a smiling countenance. Seidl says,

'Hours after these pictures were taken, I hit my 'rock bottom' moment with alcohol. I was drunk, alone, and wading in the ocean in the wee hours of the morning. And I hated myself for it. The lies told me I would be a better husband and father if I just wasn't here anymore.

And I entertained those lies.

But by God's grace, and because I had a foundation of truth to fall back on, I crawled back into bed very, very drunk and woke up to another sunrise.'

Seidl offers this encouragement to anyone contemplating suicide. He says,

'I am you. I had a plan to die once. I knew exactly how I was going to do it. The darkness crept in until it nearly took over everything. I want to let you know there is hope.'

There are many factors that prompt men to consider suicide. Roberts and Seidl reference some – shame, loneliness, addictive behaviour, and self-rejection. These are feelings and destructive patterns of behaviour men

are often unwilling to share, believing they would impose an unwanted burden on those they love.

John Brogden,(d) a businessman and former politician, has a passion for suicide prevention. His recent book, *Profiles in Hope*, shares the stories of 15 Australians who struggle with mental health and have experienced moments of utter despair when their thoughts turned to suicide.

Two decades ago, at the peak of his political career as New South Wales opposition leader, Brogden had his own very public breakdown and first suicide attempt. He was found with self-inflicted injuries in his northern beaches electoral office and was rushed to hospital where he was placed under suicide watch. His wife Lucy and a toddler were at home, but he had convinced himself his death would remove the shame and burden from those who loved him.

Brogden recommends that we exercise restraint when talking about the actions of a person who has tried to end their life. He says,

'I ask that you never judge the most irrational of all actions rationally.'

The path that can lead to thoughts of self-harm is often unpredictable. For some, Brogden points out, it is part of a prolonged battle with mental illness or trauma. For others, it comes at a time of personal difficulty or public humiliation. He says,

'We can live our lives with good mental health but, in a moment of crisis, come to the place where we attempt suicide.'

By identifying the triggers, we can help avoid an escalation of suicidal thinking. James Packer,(e) a one-time richest man in Australia, has lived a privileged life. In recent years Packer has talked openly about his mental health issues. He has known periods of depression and substance abuse often linked with his business crises. He says,

'I think my mental health issues have invariably come from when I have lost money financially or I have been humiliated publicly. I do not do well when I am under pressure.'

Packer has come to recognise the triggers and is aware of the need to manage his time and activities. He knows he must avoid volatile, high-pressure business situations. He knows debt and negative publicity cycles weigh him down. He knows that he struggles with the stimulation of big cities. They wind him up.

We can add to our list of factors that prompt men to consider suicide – ongoing mental illness, substance abuse, trauma, financial loss, personal debt, and public humiliation.

Olympic swimming champion, Ian Thorpe,(f) is someone who has suffered with mental health issues since he was a teen. During 2006, he went through a three-month episode during which he was suicidal. He says,

'I was thinking of a way to do it that would look like an accident… I could not leave the house. I was barely functioning. I was communicating with people, but no one really knew how bad it was.'

Thorpe acknowledges the complexities of mental illness and how difficult it is for men to admit that they are struggling and to allow others to see their inner turmoil. He says,

'From the outside, many would not see my pain nor be able to relate to the sometimes-daily struggle I was facing.

This is part of the deception of depression and mental illness: what may appear at face value is a stark difference from the agony that lies within.'

Thorpe recognises that his independent spirit prevented him from seeking help. He had trained himself to work through things on his own. He discovered that there are some things in life that are bigger than you are, and no amount of self-effort will get you through. You need other people's help – their insight, their life-experience, their encouragement, their thoughtfulness, their support.

It was his self-reliance that cut him off from others and contributed to his low moods. He was isolated and not coping and vulnerable to suicidal thoughts.

Now he knows 'the signs of slippage' and has developed strategies to deal with 'the descent into darkness.' He has friends he will call when he starts to withdraw. He keeps a written list of things he will do each day. He says,

'With it written down I can look at the list (see what I need to do), knowing that when I get through those things the following day will be better.'

Thorpe is a strong advocate of recognising and confronting your mental health issues. Acknowledging that you have a problem is not enough.

'If you concede to your illness and accept its reality you fall into the trap of not only being depressed but also taking on the depressed mindset.'

When I reflect on the factors that caused my son Adam to take his life in 2011, I ask myself, 'What am I not seeing?' I recognise the shame, the public humiliation, the sense of personal failure, the mental confusion, the loneliness, the withdrawal from life, the concealment of facts that may have provided a clearer picture of what he was experiencing. Did we know these things at the time, or have they become clearer retrospectively?

I can understand why men struggle to talk about having suicidal thoughts. It is risky. Some people will not want to go there. They will trivialise the matter or point out all that you have going for you.

There were many positives in Adam's life. He knew the love of family and friends, he had a job, he was financially secure, he was passionate about his faith in God, but he was lost. He could not see anymore. The lights had gone out. He had convinced himself that death was the better way, the final answer.

It is confronting. Billions of dollars are spent on suicide prevention initiatives, but the prevalence of suicidal ideation grows. Society is not helping. We have become more divided, more combative, more suspicious, more desperate. Our experience of life is diminished.

There is talk of connection, but what many men experience is dislocation. They feel uprooted, stripped of their traditional roles. There is confusion around the concept of masculinity. There is talk of men losing their sense of identity. At times it is offered as a reason for the increase in domestic violence. The feelings of insecurity and inadequacy, the mounting frustration, the excessive alcohol consumption, combine to fuel the verbal tirades and acts of aggression. It is a crisis. Families are splintering and children are left traumatised. And all we can think about is who should we blame. Someone must be responsible!

In 2022, male suicides in Australia made up three quarters of all suicides. Almost half of the men who died by suicide were aged 25 to 49. Suicide is always a tragedy.

John Brogden is the Honorary President of LifeLine International, a position he has held since 2021. He says,

'Out of the darkness, comes the light. Life is better than death.'

23. The Role of the Church in Suicide Prevention

The Christian church is uniquely placed to welcome all who are struggling with the uncertainties of life. Its mission extends to those who are carrying a heavy burden - depression, terminal illness, bereavement, job loss, mental illness, or whatever.

The church teaches that life is precious, worthy of honour and respect. The church believes life is a gift and not something to be carelessly thrown away. The church honours the individual and recognises their uniqueness in the eyes of God. The church knows the power of love to set people free, to restore, to make whole.

- **The church is a community:**

A church community is made up of people whose experience of God's love has changed their lives. They are motivated to share this transforming love with others.

People who are suicidal know their life is not what it should be. Their life is defined by loss, whether it be a health crisis, a broken relationship, financial difficulties, unemployment, mental health issues, bereavement, or shame. They are afraid of not being taken seriously or rejected. They feel alone in their struggle. They feel on the outer. They find no cause for joy; feel separated from those they love and fail to see a purpose to their unrelenting emotional pain.

There is no shame in having suicidal thoughts or asking for help. Indeed, when life's difficulties and disappointments threaten to overwhelm our desire to live, we are urged and invited to talk with trusted others and draw upon their strength.

Church communities aspire to be welcoming, nurturing, caring, affirming and empowering. Their vision is to create a supportive environment where vulnerable people can feel safe.

Regrettably, not all church communities understand the consequences of trauma nor the complexities of mental illness. They can be dismissive or judgmental of people who are battling with hidden challenges.

People experiencing mental illness know how deep, traumatic, and life changing it can be. It can alter a person's thinking, behaviour, and emotions, impacting their ability to work and maintain healthy and positive relationships. These health problems or illnesses are of an emotional and psychological nature, and they can be complex and confronting.

Loving and supporting those struggling with emotional trauma or troubling thoughts requires patience, courage and a long-term commitment. Compassion and care can go a long way in helping people know they don't have to hide.

- **The church is a people of faith:**

Faith is not wishful thinking. It is the belief that God keeps His promises, that He is true to His word. The faith of the church is founded on what God has said. God's revelation of himself is pivotal to all we say and do.

The church is on the side of life. It takes seriously the words of Jesus who says, 'I have come that you may have life – a rich and satisfying life.'(a) It follows then that the church is opposed to death, however it is masked. We live in an age when death is presented as a viable alternative to pain and suffering, a ready solution to the terminally ill. People who take their life, either by medically assisted means or an impulsive action are looking for an answer, a separation from the feelings that are overwhelming them, feelings of shame, or despair, or loss, or fear, or failure. When King Saul(b) fell on his sword, he recognised his defeat, that death had a hold of him, and hastening the end was the only way he believed he could salvage some honour.

Although the Bible neither condones nor condemns suicide it does teach that life is to be valued. It is not something to be treated lightly or to be carelessly discarded. Life is worthy of our respect.

A life of faith accepts that there will be difficult times, when we will be forced to hold on to the promises of God, to believe that hardship and suffering are necessary in developing character and resilience. God is present in our difficulties. His love holds us when we wrestle with

confusing thoughts and uncertainty. His love nurtures us, healing our troubled mind.

The Bible teaches that faith is dynamic. Like a seed planted in the ground, it is full of potential. Faith is never static. There may be periods of waiting, when nothing appears to be happening in our life, when on the surface there is no apparent change, but when the conditions are right, life bursts forth. Growth is in our DNA. We are created to flourish, to live fully, to be fruitful.

A life of faith is confident that God is in control. Despite the doubt and uncertainty, God makes a way. Love makes a way. We may feel abandoned, lost, destitute. God knows. God is there for you. God reaches out His hand. Remember Peter,(c) the disciple of Jesus, brave, belligerent Peter walking on the water until fear took over and his circumstances overwhelmed him. He is desperate. He cries out, 'I perish.' Jesus says, 'Don't be afraid. Take my hand. I'm here for you.'

Having faith in God is a declaration that we cannot do it on our own. We need God. We are not designed to struggle on our own. We are made for community, interdependence, trust.

The writer of Ecclesiastes says, 'A threefold cord is not quickly broken.'(d) Our strength is in our unity. When we walk in love we can overcome.

We have this treasure in earthen vessels, faith in the living God, a God who is unchanging, the same yesterday, today and forever.

- **The church has a message of hope:**

Everyone needs hope. Everyone needs a reason to live. Everyone needs to know they are valued and have a future.

Communities of faith have reason to hope. God is bigger than our circumstances and His perspective greater than we can understand. He knows our beginning and end. He knows our unique experience of life, with all its struggles and setbacks. He knows how suffering can shape our character, making us sensitive to the needs of others.

Stories shape how we think about life. If we are to live hopeful lives, we need to hear stories that inspire courage and determination. We need to know that in times of hardship and loss we can survive; we can make it through.

The Bible abounds in stories of hope, stories of people who discover that God's nature and character is unchanging, that despite the difficulties they encounter God is more than enough.

Abraham(e) received a promise from God that he would be 'the father of many nations.' Abraham knew God to be dependable, trustworthy, true to His word. He believed the promise despite his wife's infertility and their advancing years.

Vulnerable people need to know that they are not alone. God is there for them. His love never runs dry. He can transform the desert into a fertile landscape. He can take our struggles and disappointments and bring forth life, a life to be nurtured and celebrated.

Hannah,(f) one of the wives of Elkanah, is resentful. She is without a child. It seems unfair that she should be denied. The situation torments her. Her pain is personal. She is desperate. She looks to God to honour her request, to show her kindness, to heal the emptiness in her life.

Vulnerable people need to know that God sees. He is not insensitive to their sorrow and disappointment. He hears their cry for help. His overwhelming desire is to bless. Sometimes we fail to see the expansive nature of God's work in our lives. Like Hannah, we need to appreciate that God is wanting to bring our lives into submission to his purposes.

Joseph(g) is Jacob's favoured son. His treatment causes a great deal of angst amongst his brothers. They are bitter and jealous. They find him a constant source of irritation and look for ways to remove him. Their plans come to fruition. They sell their brother into slavery and lie to their father that he was killed by a wild animal. Joseph prospers in Egypt despite times of testing where he is treated unfairly and unjustly.

Vulnerable people need to know God's perspective, that he is on our side, that he is working for us, that although we may feel forgotten and our life of little consequence, we belong, we are his, we are loved. God is faithful and true. He is the restorer of broken promises and shattered hopes. He is our future.

Within any congregation there are people who have lived with adversity, who have found a way to triumph despite their circumstances. They are well placed to provide insight and understanding into the nature of their private struggle. They are survivors who have crafted a robust narrative of hope. Their stories are important. They provide wisdom in understanding human frailty and brokenness. They provide insight into how we can hang

on to God when our world is falling apart. They provide knowledge of what can sustain us when we feel under siege and fear for our sanity.

Vulnerable people need to know that God is near, that he understands their situation perfectly, that he knows what is needed. He sees the anguish, the frustration, the feelings of failure and defeat. God never abandons the lonely and the lost. His love seeks us out when the future seems fraught with danger and difficulty.

God has made us vulnerable for a purpose. It is a reminder that we need to look beyond ourselves when things get tough. A. J. Swoboda(h) captures this sentiment. He says,

'Humanity is created to be vulnerable and to need help.'

Vulnerability is not something to be despised nor is it helpful to view it as a deficit. Brené Brown(i) reminds us,

'Vulnerability isn't a weakness. It is the emotion that we experience during times of uncertainty, risk, and emotional exposure.'

None of us will avoid feeling vulnerable. We may try to hide it, to pretend that we have got it together. But ignoring our feelings is perilous. It places us at risk. We will be unaware of our susceptibility to being influenced, exploited, or easily hurt.

Knowing our vulnerabilities can be a precursor to courage and strength. Living authentically asks that we lean into our vulnerabilities, to see them as an opportunity to grow. Tish Harrison Warren(j) says,

'Flourishing and vulnerability co-exist in our fallen creation.'

God wants us to flourish. God wants to grow strong. God wants us to be courageous. God wants us to see our vulnerability as an invitation to trust in Him, to lean into Him.

- **The church doesn't always get it right:**

Following the Royal Commission into child sexual abuse,(k) the church was forced to own its imperfect past. Leaders in the church were criticised for their abuse of power in covering up inappropriate and hurtful behaviour and failing to ensure the wrongdoers were held to account. Victims felt abandoned, not knowing where to go with their grievances.

The revelations were painful and confronting, undermining trust in the hierarchy of the church. Some people felt betrayed and severed their relationship with their denomination. Others looked to God to heal the wounds and to provide wisdom in formulating appropriate means of restitution.

The issue of church discipline is complex. Some matters, such as sexual abuse, require prompt action and appropriate referrals to the police. Lesser matters, such as doctrinal differences, can be dealt with internally.

The church oversteps the mark when it uses coercive tactics, whether consciously or unconsciously. The culture of a church creates its own boundaries, determining what is acceptable behaviour, whether they be theologically sound or not.

Some churches don't encourage dissenting voices, critical appraisal or mutual accountability, insisting that the leadership group is responsible for the direction of the church and that they are not to be undermined. They argue that any contentious issues be dealt with privately or not at all.

Some churches are heavy handed, imposing harsh sanctions or limiting ministry opportunities, believing the reputation of the church is to be protected at all costs.

Some churches make unrealistic demands on people who are dealing with a personal crisis. There may be directives to keep the matter out of the public domain, to avoid scandal, to limit the damage. Punishments are often arbitrary. Decisions to remove the person from the church and deny them fellowship must never be entered into lightly. Inappropriate behaviour needs to be addressed but the process must be handled sensitively, seasoned with grace and mercy. Whatever the failure, restoration must be high on the agenda. It is wrong to shame people and deny them hope.

Adam received an invitation to attend a meeting in the home of the young woman he was attracted to. The father and a member of the church leadership team were present. Adam received no indication as to the purpose of the meeting. He thought it was to formally acknowledge and

approve the relationship. Why such approval should be required is another matter but does suggest a measure of control.

When Adam spoke to us on the phone prior to the meeting, he was positive and upbeat. He dressed accordingly, putting on his best suit. He was ready for this. But it wasn't affirmation he received; it was accusation. He was criticised for his insensitivity, his overbearing manner, his lack of awareness. His advances were not welcome. The young woman was feeling pressured, overwhelmed, unable to breathe. Adam was informed that he was to have no further contact with her, that any attempt to speak with her would be viewed as harassment, and that he was no longer welcome at any church gatherings.

The incident was a tipping point, from which Adam would never recover. When he phoned us later that night, he asked us to pray for a broken heart. The church should be in the business of healing broken hearts, not causing them. I am not sure the church leadership understood the impact of their disciplinary action. It was harsh, unreasonable, hurtful.

The meeting with Adam was confrontational. Adam wasn't given any formal notice as to the purpose of the meeting. He had no opportunity to reflect on his actions, to prepare a defence, to provide context. Adam had no one to support him during this process, to provide encouragement, understanding, and empathy. He was forced to deal with the accusations alone, to face the consequences alone. This should never have happened.

Loss is painful. It often involves separation and death. It leaves us feeling diminished. Some losses are more difficult to identify or describe. According to Brené Brown, these include the loss of normality, the loss of what could be, and the loss of what we thought we knew or understood about something or someone.

Recovery from loss can be a long process. We need to be gentle with ourselves. We need the love of people who care for us, who understand our circumstances, who believe in us.

Adam had once known acceptance but now had to contend with rejection and it weighed heavily, pushing him down, confirming his negative opinion of himself. Unworthy! Unwanted! Unfit for purpose!

People who are suicidal engage in self-accusation. They focus on the negatives. They fixate on their failures. They question their value, their right to life.

Adam also felt shame. Accusations were made. He had behaved in a manner that was socially unacceptable. I'm not sure Adam had the self-awareness to know that he had acted inappropriately. His social interactions often felt forced, scripted, clumsy. It is normal to feel shame when we have done wrong. But I sense the shame settled over Adam like a dense fog, affecting his ability to see. Author Bijal Shah(l) says,

'When shame becomes persistent, it leaves us feeling chronically inadequate, worthless and anxious, and at risk of social rejection. This type of toxic shame can lead to depression or low self-esteem.'

Shame is debilitating. It takes over, seeping into every part of our being, influencing every thought and action. As Brené Brown says,

'Shame is the intensely painful feeling or experience of believing that we are flawed and therefore unworthy of love, belonging, and connection… Shame thrives on secrecy, silence, and judgment. If you put shame into a petri dish and douse it with these three things, it will grow exponentially into every corner and crevice of our lives.'

Shame reminds us that we are a failure, that we are undeserving, that our best efforts are tainted with self-interest.

If the church is to play an active role in supporting people who have suicidal thoughts, we need to emphasise healing and forgiveness. God is merciful. He loves the lost. He says,

'There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus.' Romans 8:1 NKJV

24. Suicidal Narratives

Suicide narratives, whether real or imagined, provide context for our own loss or kind of suffering. They bed it down, taking it from the forbidden to the familiar, giving it a kind of formality. We need stories to help us feel the pain and desperation and lostness which makes life expendable. We need a language that keeps us from slipping off into abstract space.

Suicide will always remain a mystery, a thing not fully known. There will always be secrets that accompany us to the grave that only an all-knowing God can reclaim.

Some people who have experienced suicide bereavement are unwilling to talk about it. They are unable to find the right words to describe their pain, or they want to hasten closure of that unseemly chapter in their life, or they sense that no one is really interested.

Suicide is messy. Those left behind soon discover how unsettling and complicated life can become as you try to process the unthinkable.

American writer and theologian Frederick Buechner's(a) father died of carbon monoxide poisoning. A few years later his father's younger brother also took his own life. The two tragedies compounded Buechner's sense of loss and awoke in him a sense of his own mortality that never faded away. For a time, he wondered if the family was afflicted with some fatal suicide gene.

Out of consideration for his mother, who insisted on guarding family secrets, Buechner did not write directly of his father's suicide for decades, though scenes of suicide haunt his novels. Finally, Buechner decided that he had as much right to tell his father's story as his mother had not to tell her husband's story.

At the time of his father's death, society viewed suicide with disdain. Buechner writes,

"Suicide was looked on as something a little shabby and shameful in those days."

The shame experienced by those who were left to deal with the stigma of suicide meant that the subject was rarely raised even in a general sense.

Buechner believes our ability to heal, to hope, and to love is found in revealing what has long been hidden, that we need to find a way to give voice to our pain and sorrow.

Not everyone is exposed to suicide in quite the same way. Our understanding of suicide is therefore shaped by external factors, media reports, documentaries, movies, and literature. As a reader of fiction, I am interested in how suicide is presented and the inherent dangers in 'creating art about suicide.' Writing for 'The Atlantic,' Brit Troyen(b) says,

"Many of the features that make a 'good story' are also those known to contribute to suicidal behaviours: heightened emotions, heroic or sentimental portrayal of suicidal characters, and, above all, depiction of suicide itself."

There are risks in reading about suicide. The novel *The Sorrows of Young Werther*,(c) first published in 1774, is a story about unrequited love. It was blamed for a spike of suicides among young men across Europe. We refer to the phenomena as the 'contagion effect.' It is when the portrayal of one person's suicide contributes to the suicide and suicidal behaviours of others.

The depiction of suicide in fiction and nonfiction needs to be approached cautiously and treated sensitively, thus avoiding any unintended consequences. When it is done poorly, it can have a detrimental impact on people, especially young people who are already vulnerable. It is unhelpful to glamorise suicide, to suggest that it is something easy and peaceful, or to provide graphic depictions or explicit details of the method used.

A suicidal narrative is a personal narrative linked to imminent suicide. It is a coherent life story, capturing the struggles and uncertainties, the diminished hope and despair, the progressive failure and alienation, until the future becomes impossible.

Suicidal narratives tell a story that is unique to the individual. As Steven Schlozman, MD,(d) a guest writer for The Clay Centre for Young Healthy Minds says,

"Much of the difficulty in grappling with the concept of suicide often stems from people's inability – or perhaps even unwillingness – to consider suicide in terms of an individual's unique narrative. Once we open

ourselves up to other human beings personal, relatable experiences, we can begin to understand what leads to suicide."

If we are going to understand suicide, we need to understand an individual's story.

Suicidal narratives not only inform, but they also allow us to empathise. As Schlozman says,

"Narrative is the key to building empathy and understanding."

Suicidal narratives bring a sense of order to what otherwise seems like a chaotic series of events. We begin to see a thread, linking what appear to be unrelated occurrences.

Suicidal narratives are not definitive. They do not tell the whole story. They draw attention to some of the factors that may have played a part in shaping a persons' thinking.

'All My Puny Sorrows' by Miriam Toews(e) is a story about two smart and loving sisters, Elfrieda and Yolanda. Elf has a formidable career as a world-renowned musician and a husband her adores her. Yoli is the failed sibling: no money, no job, no spouse, and a sputtering career as a writer. But it is Elf who is intent on death.

The story highlights two important characteristics of the suicidal person: ambivalence and withdrawal.

Ambivalence is a characteristic of the suicidal mind. A person at risk can have reasons for living and reasons for dying simultaneously. Most suicidal people do not want to die; they want the pain to stop.

Although reluctant to acknowledge the internal struggle in her mind Elf states that when she wrestles with the will to live or die, it is a lopsided fight.

People who are suicidal withdraw socially, limiting contact with family and friends. They are reluctant to divulge their thoughts and are less emotionally engaged.

Elf is guarded and unresponsive to any questions put to her. Although able to express emotion she is not looking for an emotional connection nor striving for emotional transparency.

In her story *Home*, Marilynne Robinson(f) has created a character in Jack who is unable to live up to the expectations of other people. Jack is a sensitive person who struggles with conflict but is particularly hard on

himself. The thorough evaluation of Jack's mental and emotional state justifies the inclusion of details relating to his suicide attempt.

Jack is the long-lost son of the aging Reverend Robert Boughton. Jack left the family twenty years earlier having fathered a son with one of the local girls. Jack has been a constant disappointment to his father and feels his disapproval. The gulf between them is due to many factors including theological and generational differences.

The years apart were difficult for Jack. He struggled to find suitable employment, lived rough, neglected to look after himself, copped abuse, and drank too much. His mind was often occupied with negative thoughts – past failures, poor choices, disappointments, misunderstandings, and personal inadequacies. Then there were the feelings of shame, humiliation, rejection, anger, and loneliness that undermined his sense of worth.

Although it is recommended that authors not dwell on the means, in this instance the DeSoto occupied a significant place in Jack's quest for redemption. So, it was not surprising that when Jack's life stalled and began a spiral downward that it should feature in his planned demise.

Jack is in a fragile state. The relationships that provide him purpose and stability are complicated. His father is dying and there is so much that is unresolved and unsaid. Then there is Della who he would like to marry, but the racial tensions of that time prohibit it. They have a young son, Robert, who is not welcomed by either side of the family.

Despite efforts to limit the use of negatively associated language we still hear the word 'commit' frequently in relation to suicide. Suicide Prevention Advisor, Susan Beaton,(g) highlights three historical uses of the word 'commit' which when linked with the word 'suicide' encourage stigma.

1. Religious context: The word 'commit' is commonly used in connection with religious offences. For example, suicide is still considered a moral sin in some religious settings.
2. Criminal context: In the past, suicide was a criminal act in many countries. As late as 1959, suicide was decriminalised in Victoria. Changes were made to the Crimes Act such that it was no longer a crime for a person to commit or to attempt to commit suicide.

3. Mental illness context: The word ‘commit’ has been applied to the incarceration of people against their will in a mental institution.

The word ‘commit’ has negative connotations. It evokes images of illegality, crime, dishonour and guilt. We commit adultery, we commit murder, and we commit treason, but we need more exact and sensitive language to describe suicide. ‘He died by suicide’ or ‘She ended her life’ are less emotive and a more acceptable way of describing what is a tragic event.

‘Success’ is another word that should be avoided when talking about suicide. It is inappropriate to say someone ‘successfully’ ended their life. A suicide death is a tragedy not a success.

Being confident in our use of language frees us to talk about a sensitive subject like suicide with openness and honesty.

Words have power. They shape the way we think about things. Words matter when it comes to talking about suicide.

In a recent article *‘Let’s Talk About Suicide: Language Matters’* co-authors Jonathan Singer and Sean Erreger(h) write,

‘Words can construct a reality of hope and acceptance, or despair and rejection. And when we’re talking about suicide, those words can be a matter of life or death.’

Whenever we speak to someone who has attempted to end their life, avoid labelling their behaviours as ‘attention seeking.‘ Such language is dismissive of the person. Our focus must be on what are they trying to communicate by their actions.

It is often said that ‘Suicide is a permanent solution to a temporary problem.’ But is it true? Are we justified in saying to someone that their pain is temporary? Sometimes the pathway to a life worth living is long and arduous. It is important to acknowledge the person’s pain as real and to commit to being there for them no matter how long it takes.

In all our exchanges with people at risk of suicide we are striving for a language that respects the dignity of the person, as well as inspires hope and solutions.

PART FOUR

Grief is a natural response to loss. Sudden losses, such as the death of a friend or loved one to suicide, are harder to handle. Dealing with the emotions that occur in the grieving process takes time and energy and is usually both physically and emotionally demanding.

When loss and grief are too much to manage, we may choose to push our grief to one side and not engage with the emotions. We may think that if we avoid our feelings for long enough, they will fade away.

But trying to ignore our pain or keep it from surfacing will only make it worse in the long run. Anecdotal evidence suggests that living with unresolved pain has long-term negative effects on emotional and physical health.

Every grief is an intimate and intensely personal experience. Although grief can be heart-wrenching, it is not something to fear.

Grief is a strange thing. It can change your perception of reality. It can imprison you in a world of nothingness.

There is no such thing as the proper way to grieve. Grieving is not formulaic. It can't be reduced to a pattern of behaviour. It is unwise to classify certain kinds of grief as normal and others abnormal.

Research suggests that there are some broad similarities among grievers. Within these contours each person finds his or her own way.

25. Grief is Universal

Grief is a universal experience. When we experience loss, we experience grief. It is a natural process that affects us all. Whatever race, colour or creed, we are all effected when we lose someone or something dear to us.

In an interview, author Naja Marie Aidt(a) speaks about the tragic loss of her 25-year-old son Carl, who jumped from the fifth floor of an apartment in Copenhagen. Although not a regular drug user, he and a friend had been experimenting with magic mushrooms.

Naja Marie Aidt describes how the shock and trauma of his death brought her life to a standstill. She says,

'I could hardly write. I had a feeling that I lost my language. I stopped reading, I stopped writing. I stopped listening to music. I stopped basically everything.'

Time stands still and in that single moment your world is changed forever. Your understanding of how life works is messed up. As Naja Marie Aidt says,

'Everything you thought you understood—you don't get it anymore. And the world keeps going and you're just sitting there in darkness.'

Following Adam's death I remember thinking, 'How can I go on living when something so overwhelming has taken a hold of me?' I felt bound to an unthinkable moment in time. I questioned my ability to function, to manage the practicalities of life.

Adam's death was a defining moment, a line drawn in the sand. The future loomed as something uncertain, forever tainted. Time ceased to exist. At some point it would require rebooting.

In James Runcie's book 'A Road to Grantchester'(b) Sir Cecil and Lady Kendall mourn the loss of their son Robert who was greatly admired by all. He was killed in combat during World War II. Their grief runs deep. They appear to be stuck in time.

The grandfather clock is a reminder of their loss. It stands as a timeless monument, honouring the moment they were told their son wouldn't be returning home.

The grandfather clock is no longer ticking. Lady Kendall sees Sidney notice. 'We didn't stop it deliberately. We just don't have the heart to wind it up.'

26. Grief is Personal

Although it is a universal experience, no two people grieve the same, even in the same family. Grief counsellor, David Kessler(a) says,

'Each person's grief is as unique as their fingerprint.'

Like a snowflake, each person's grief has characteristics all its own. Some people are expressive, some are not. Some have more feelings, some have less. Some are more productive and practical in their grieving style. Some would prefer to move on.

Whatever our lived experience of grief, it has value. It provides insight into how we handled the loss. In circumstances where the loss was unexpected and devastating, it speaks of our courage. It offers a first-hand account of how we navigated the shifting emotions. It shows how we adapted to the 'new normal.' It details the support given and how helpful it was.

Grief is a journey, a road with many twists and turns and the occasional dead-end. Sometimes we meet fellow travellers who put into words what we know to be true. Their words become an affirmation, providing assurance we are not lost.

Naja Marie Aidt describes the moment she was told of her son's death. The telephone rang and then the news. My first response was to howl, like an animal.

I could identify with the primal nature of her grief. When I was told that Adam had taken his life, I wept uncontrollably. The tears came from a reservoir, deep within my being. There was no way of supressing the outpouring of emotion. I gave in to my grief.

Suicide loss is also deeply personal. It erodes your confidence, threatens your sanity, and reshapes your identity.

Suicide loss imposes itself, intruding into every aspect of your life. You cannot escape it. You cannot regulate it. You cannot negotiate with it.

Suicide loss is ever present, influencing your thinking and meddling with your emotions. It is a companion for life.

It is the memories we cherish. They are an integral part of who we are. Memories help us maintain a bond with our loved ones and remind us of the impact they had on our lives. Memories shape us, determining the priorities we set for our life. Memories inspire a commitment to live fully.

Edith Eger(b) says,

'Memory is sacred ground. But it is haunted to. It is the place where my rage and guilt and grief go circling like hungry birds scavenging the same old bones.'

27. Grief is isolating:

Grief is often a private affair, a solitary affliction. It is a process that each person experiences differently.

Indira Naidoo(a), an Australian journalist, broadcaster, and author, lives in a 13th floor apartment in Potts Point, Sydney. She lost her younger sister, *Stargirl*, to suicide during the COVID 19 pandemic.

Indira says,

'No two people feel it the same way. Even when it involves the same event or the same person, you're trapped in a torment tailor-made for you.'

Author Meghan O'Rourke(b) lost her mother to cancer on Christmas Day 2008. She says,

'We still think of grieving as something to be done alone – which only intensifies its isolation.'

This thought is shared by Sloane Crowley(c) who lost a friend to suicide. She says,

'Suicide itself is an isolating death, wants its mourning to be solitary. It wants you to scatter and shrink, for everyone to curl up in their respective balls.'

The pace of modern living prohibits a purposeful engagement with grief. As author Ann Patchett(d) says,

'We don't have enough time to deal with our grief. We're almost embarrassed by grief.'

Grief is not easily accommodated in the workplace.(e) Following the arbitrary time-off to deal with your loss there is an expectation that you will carry on like nothing happened. You realise your well-meaning work colleagues are uncertain how to respond. They are reluctant to raise the matter, fearing it might cause further distress. You are left to determine how to integrate your grief into your working life.

When I returned to work after Adam's death, I sensed that people cared but were unsure what to say. Therefore, most of my work colleagues never

raised the subject. There was no formal process by which grief could be shared.

Instead, the grieving person is encouraged to put on a brave face, to hide their emotion, to internalise their sorrow, to 'muscle through it' and press on.

What is often forgotten or overlooked is that people who are grieving need connection. Meghan O'Rourke speaks to this issue. She says,

'I believe in the importance of individuality, but in the midst of grief I also find myself wanting connection – wanting to be reminded that the sadness I feel is not just mine but ours.'

People who are hurting need to feel that they are not alone. They share a need for their grief to be witnessed. As David Kessler says,

'People who are grieving need to feel their grief acknowledged and reflected by others.'

They need to know that the magnitude of their loss is recognised. They don't need someone trying to reframe it for them or pointing out something positive in the situation.

The act of witnessing someone's vulnerability can bring the person out of isolation if the witnessing is done without judgment.

28. Grief is a gift

Grief may be difficult, but it is vital for our survival. It is given that we might have some way of managing loss. It is given that we might process what we cannot understand. How could we possibly accommodate a tragic death if we were denied the ability to grieve? Grief filters the impact of what would otherwise destroy us. Grief allows us to revisit the past, to engage with it, to know it. But we are not stuck in the past. We are here, alive to the present, grateful for every good gift.

Christian leader and author Pete Deison(a) was married for 43 years. His wife Harriet was a gifted floral designer. She also suffered from chronic depression. Harriet took her life. Deison writes,

'Traversing the landscape of grief is not a journey of choice; it's one that is forced on you. But it is full of purpose.'

Despite grief being a difficult experience, it is also a wise teacher. Grief forces us to grapple with life in a way no other emotion has the power to do. It raises questions, prompting us to wrestle with the how and why of living.

Author Frederick Buechner(b) says,

'Even the saddest things can become, once we have made peace with them, a source of wisdom and strength for the journey that still lies ahead.'

Grief can be a transformative event when fully experienced. It brings an appreciation of the preciousness of life. It reminds us 'Life is short. Learn to value it.'

Grief informs us life is fragile and can't be taken for granted. There are no guarantees. Circumstances may conspire to cut our life short.

Grief is a special kind of suffering**.** It strips us back to our essential being. It challenges our ideas and attitudes. It exposes our trivial notions and opposes our vain pursuits. It overcomes our fear and reticence, instilling in us a renewed strength and purpose.

Novelist Cheryl Strayed(c) challenges our view of suffering. She says,

‘You can’t cry it away or eat it away or starve it away or walk it away or punch it away or even therapy it away. It’s just there, and you have to survive it. You have to endure it. You have to live through it and love it and move on and be better for it.’

Grief is also protective. It shields us from the sting of death. Without the ability to grieve, we would be engulfed by the enormity of our loss. It would destroy us. There would be no opportunity to process the diverse feelings and emotions that overwhelm us.

Grief is foundational to self-discovery. It invites us to explore aspects of our daily lives we usually try to ignore – anger, guilt, fear, loneliness, abandonment.

Grief provides us with a ‘new normal.’ It is ‘what we are to become.’ Anne Coke expresses this thought beautifully in her poem.

You cannot jettison grief
For it is solid and heavy
A stone building block
But look! It has become
The cornerstone, the foundation
On which is built
What you are to become.

Life after a tragic loss is never the same. The world and our place in it are altered. We experience life differently. We think differently. We see differently.

We are more committed to living intentionally in our loving, sharing, caring, communicating.

We know the experience of pain and can offer comfort to those who are hurting.

We see grief as a catalyst for action bringing healing and wholeness to the broken; wisdom and understanding to the confused; and hope and joy to the despairing.

29. The Language of Grief

It is not easy to find the right words to explain grief, words that capture the depth of our pain and hurt, that reveal the nature of our loss and betrayal, that convey the emptiness and exhaustion we feel.

I have read several memoirs about suicide loss. The words used to convey the impact of a suicide on those left behind include shock, despair, numbness, anger, disbelief, sadness, fear, loneliness, pain, heartache, tearfulness, guilt, sorrow, confusion, exhaustion, shame, regret, restlessness.

Shattered is the word that came closest to capturing my experience. A shattered life knows the full force of loss and trauma. When I heard that my son had taken his life, it felt like I had been hit with a sledgehammer, robbing me of breath, forcing me to my knees. I feared that the scattered pieces would never fit back together, that I would be forever diminished, that my hopes and dreams would lack purpose and no longer fire my imagination.

We need words to express our grief. They help us understand what we are experiencing. They allow us to communicate our loss. They reinforce what we need to know to go on living.

In Macbeth, Shakespeare(a) writes,

'Give sorrow words; the grief that does not speak knits up the o-er wrought heart and bids it break.'

Grief is the one emotion that touches everyone. It is a shared experience, an expression of our common humanity. It is something that can draw us closer together, unite us, inspire us. Grief is not an event in our lives, nor a period of mourning. It is part of who we are. As psychotherapist Francis Weller(b) suggests,

'Grief is an ongoing conversation that accompanies us throughout life.'

Our loved ones are never lost to us when we have words to remember them, and to engage with them.

Words help us to reconnect, to re-establish our relationships and to renew our understanding of what our life will look like. Words are a way back to life.

Words also allow us to bring to life the one who is no longer with us.

In The Dictionary of Lost Words by Pip Williams(c) there is a conversation between Esme and her godmother, 'Ditte'. Esme's mother died giving birth, so she is eager to know anything about her.

Esme – *'And then I was born and then she [her mother Lily] died.'*
Ditte – *'Yes.'*
Esme – *'But when we talk about her, she comes to life.'*
Ditte – *'Never forget that Esme. Words are our tools of resurrection*.

30. Rituals of Grief

In her book *A Hole in the World,* author, Amanda Held Opelt(a) writes about the rituals of grief. She says,

'Rituals introduce a healthy rhythm of exposure to grief. They allow us to let off emotional steam at specific moments.'

Rituals tell us what to say. They show us how to act. They provide us with a way forward.

When Amanda Held Opelt experienced her season of sorrow, a time when she suffered three miscarriages and her thirty-seven-year-old sister, Rachel died unexpectedly having contracted the flu, she didn't know what to do with her grief. It felt awkward, cumbersome, a weight too heavy to bear. There were some who advised her to keep busy as it would help her survive, but it felt like avoidance. She says,

'I was evading grief like a meek and skittish mouse. I'd busied myself with tasks and responsibilities, the spaces I knew best.'

Grief cannot be ignored, nor can you make it go away. Grief follows us wherever we go. It won't be silenced.

Amanda Held Opelt felt a need to give herself over to grief. In doing so, she entered *'a landscape carved by grief's rushing water.'* She says,

'It felt like a wilderness, a wild and rugged terrain. In the wilderness, we speak what is primitive and primary. We say what is true. We say what is hard and heartbreaking. We wail.'

Rituals are like navigational aids, providing boundaries for our sorrow,

Sadly, many of the rituals surrounding grief have been lost or diluted. It is left to the individual to discover and implement rituals that speak to them, that make sense for their daily life.

The rituals I found most meaningful were tears, condolences, and food.

(1) Tears:

Dr. Gary LeBlanc(b) lost his son to suicide. He says,

'Tears are not a sign of weakness or lack of trust, but they indicate how deeply we have loved and therefore, how deeply we grieve.'

You never need apologise for your tears. As author Ken Gire(c) says,

'Tears are the language of the soul…Tears not only reveal our true self, they renew our soul, they restore us to one another, and sometimes, in a watershed moment, they even redirect the course of our life. Such is the power of tears.'

In her novel, *The Paris Library,* author Janet Skeslien Charles(d) captures the essence of grief in those early months of loss. She writes,

'Grief is a sea made of your own tears. Salty swells cover the dark depths you must swim at your own pace. It takes time to build stamina. Some days, my arms sliced through the water, and I felt things would be okay, the shore wasn't so far off. Then one memory, one moment would nearly drown me, and I'd be back to the beginning, fighting to stay above the waves, exhausted, sinking in my own sorrow.'

Grief is raw and unpredictable, and it has different rhythms and intensities. Weeping is a fitting response to great sorrow.

When Amanda Held Opelt visited the family cemetery to tell her grandparents of her sister Rachel's death something inside her snapped. Suddenly a cry erupted from her mouth that quickly broke out into a loud sob. She rushed back to her car and slammed the door. She says,

'I screamed into the steering wheel. I pounded the dashboard. I shrieked over and over again. My lungs burned and my vision blurred. I wailed and wailed and wailed.'

When I heard that my son, Adam, had taken his life, a surge of emotion welled up from within and burst forth as a deep sobbing. There was no way of curbing the sorrow or silencing the desperate cry. It could not be contained. The presence of other family members in the room offered comfort but did nothing to stem the flow. The sounds of mourning were laden with meaning for all that had been lost. I sensed it would continue unabated until the tears dried up.

Several years after Adam's death my wife and I attended the funeral of my cousin Robert who died in 2013 of a rare cancer, aged sixty-seven. He served in Vietnam as an engineer and had been exposed to chemical warfare. He also lost a daughter to cancer, aged thirteen and a second daughter, aged two, drowned in a dam on their dairy farm.

During the service I was reflecting on the magnitude of their loss. I felt the layered pain and sorrow of the family and the injustice of it all. A wave of emotion engulfed me, and I wept allowed. There were some who considered my tears inappropriate, a sign of emotional fragility. Others thanked me. It gave them permission to feel their pain, to acknowledge the hurt, and express their sorrow.

(2) Condolences:

The greeting card industry didn't emerge until the mid-nineteenth century. Christmas cards, which originated in England, were designed to spread Christmas cheer. They initially dominated the trade.

Almost every category of greeting card exists to recognise celebratory occasions: birthdays, graduations, weddings, and holidays. Sympathy cards strike a different chord. They offer comfort to the bereaved. They convey concern. They communicate our love at a time when words fail us.

Adam's tragic death prompted many people to send us sympathy cards. Their expressions of love and concern brought comfort (and still do). We purchased an album to display the cards as they are a valuable reminder of our loss. I appreciated the hand-crafted cards or those that diverged from the familiar flowers in muted pastel shades.

Some people wrote personal messages. Those I treasured most had the following elements:

- An acknowledgement of our loss. Our loss was not some nebulous thing. It was personal. It was our precious son. His name was ADAM.

'We are so very, very sad to hear of Adam's tragic death.'

'I was shocked and saddened when I was told of the sudden loss of Adam.'

'You will all miss your dear Adam so much.'

'The love you have for Adam brings with it such terrific pain.'

- An affirmation of the challenges we faced and what would help us survive. We were particularly blessed by the people who could empathise with our suffering and speak hope into our lives.

'Our souls weep at your distress and rejoice in your faith and strength.'

'We cannot imagine the depth of pain and sadness that you would be experiencing.'

“Dear ones, you are now on a journey like no other. Be kind to yourselves, be careful who you choose to walk with you through that journey.’

‘As parents you will be grieving deeply, and many questions must be there for you.’

(3) Food:

The simple act of eating is often the one normal thing you do in grief. As Amanda Held Opelt says,

‘As the anguish rages inside you and all around you, the physical act of eating and drinking forces you back into the bodily rhythms and routines of everyday life.’

Several days after Adam’s death the police informed me that I would need to identify the body. This required travelling interstate. My sons Nathan and Nicholas agreed to accompany me. We caught an early flight and were met at the Newcastle airport by my sister Lorraine who had offered to drive us to our various appointments. Her sensitivity and support were invaluable.

Prior to the viewing, the police provided a summary of Adam’s final moments. The CCTV footage was unambiguous. Adam chose to end his life.

We gathered around Adam’s body in the viewing area. The police and the support staff had left the room, respecting our privacy. There were minor abrasions on Adam’s face. His hand was cold and clammy. God’s peace supported us and sustained us. Adam was gone. We were left with the burden of his loss, and it felt heavy.

We visited a plant nursery and café. It was an ideal setting to think about what the police had shared and to talk about our feelings on seeing Adam’s body. We purchased flowers. Our next destination was the site of Adam’s death.

It remains a mystery why Adam chose this location. The police found his vehicle in the car park near the railway station. The CCTV cameras were strategically positioned. We approached the fence Adam vaulted over. The rumble of an empty coal train could be heard in the distance. We tied the bunches of flowers to the fence.

In the afternoon we arranged a meeting with the funeral directors. The only workable option was to have Adam’s body cremated. My sister offered to collect Adam’s ashes and bring them with her when she flew down to attend the memorial service.

Our final task was to collect Adam's Toyota Hilux. Having completed the paperwork and secured its release, we inspected the vehicle and discovered some minor damage. The mirror on the driver's side had been broken off. It was surreal, sitting in Adam's Ute, sensing his presence, knowing that he would never get to drive it again.

It had been a challenging and stressful day. We felt physically weary and emotionally drained but decided to go out for dinner at a Chinese Restaurant.

Grief is exhausting and diminishes our reserves. It is vital to nourish your body and to re-energise your spirit.

The meal was part celebration and part consolidation. We gave thanks for Adam and his thirty years of life. We were also grateful for what we had accomplished that day. It was important to consolidate our priorities: to affirm our value, to renew our commitment to one another, and to be resolute in our pursuit of life.

Sharing a meal is an act of defiance. It is a declaration that we will not allow this tragedy to overwhelm us, to reduce us, to defeat us. We will find strength in our shared suffering and our togetherness.

Grief breaks us open. Sometimes it feels like we are standing on the edge of an abyss, contemplating the darkness. It draws us in, threatening to consume us. Over time we learn to accommodate our grief, to live with it, and not to fear it.

31. Conversations About Grief

What can you say to someone who is grieving? Celeste Headlee(a) author of the book *'We Need to Talk'* shares a conversation she had with a friend who had lost her father. She says,

'A good friend of mine lost her dad some years back. I found her sitting alone on a bench outside our workplace, not moving, just staring at the horizon. She was distraught and I didn't know what to say to her. It is so easy to say the wrong thing to someone who is grieving and vulnerable. I told her that my dad had drowned in a submarine when I was 9 months old and I always mourned his loss, even though I'd never known him. I just wanted her to realise that she wasn't alone, that I'd been through something similar and could understand how she felt.'

Often when we encounter the raw emotion of pain and sorrow, we don't know what to say. We may feel uneasy, uncertain how to proceed. We look for safer ground, found in our own personal experiences. We look for commonality, dredging up stories that show we understand. While we may be motivated by good intentions our words can be incredibly hurtful.

We overlook a simple truth, 'It's not about us.' Maybe we want it to be. Maybe we are feeling neglected, starved of attention. Maybe we are hurting and are desperate to find healing. Maybe we are pre-occupied and therefore hesitant about sharing in another's sorrow. Or maybe we haven't yet made our peace with pain and suffering. We still puzzle about its arbitrary nature, the unfairness and injustice of it all.

I'm not suggesting you avoid sharing things about yourself. It's fine, so long as you bring the conversation back to the person who initiated the topic.

I recently had an opportunity to talk to someone about our son's death to suicide. It's a topic that rarely comes up in conversation. I was grateful for the chance to reflect on Adam's experience, drawing attention to the positive aspects of his life and providing context for his death. At one point the person I was talking to shared what had helped them through a low period in their life. Their intention wasn't to divert the conversation away from my loss but to expand the topic to include what support we might provide to someone feeling depressed or suicidal. I didn't feel excluded

and was able to speak freely, offering insights I had gained through my reading and personal experience.

Supporting someone who is grieving requires a measure of selflessness. It is about listening more than talking and asking questions that encourage the other person to share their pain.

It is important to bear in mind:

'Grief is different for everybody. No two people experience loss in the exact same way.'

For this reason, it is unwise to compare grief. Such an exercise is unhelpful and is likely to cause confusion and even guilt. Grief is grief, but how you experience it is as unique as you and me.

As writer and widow, Laurie Burrows Grad(b) says

'Comparing grief is a useless cause. This is not a competition. The grief we feel has its own voice and should not be compromised by comparisons.'

Grief is unique. It is complex and complicated and worthy of our respect. Even if you have had a parallel loss, you won't know how the other person feels. How can you? No-one knows the nature of their relationship with the deceased, the extent of their love.

Mental health professional Litsa Williams(c) provides us with a valuable insight. She says,

'We are limited in our ability to truly understand another's grief because most of us have yet to fully understand our own.'

This tendency to want to dictate the conversation and determine the focus, even at the expense of the grieving person, has a name.

Sociologist Charles Derber,(d) author of the book *'The Pursuit of Attention'* found that most people struggle with what he called **'**conversational narcissism.' It's the desire, often unconscious, to take over a conversation, to do most of the talking and to turn the focus of the exchange away from the person in need.

Celeste Headlee reflects on her desire to control the conversation. She says,

'I may have been trying to empathise, at least on a conscious level, but what I did was draw focus away from her anguish and redirect the attention to me. She wanted to talk to me about her father, to tell me about the kind

of man he was, so I could appreciate the magnitude of her loss. Instead, I asked her to stop for a moment and listen to my story about my dad's tragic death.'

People who are grieving will want to talk about their loss at some point. We need to be there for them when the occasion arises. We need to respect their wishes and to recognise the privilege it is to share in someone's grief.

Asking questions is acceptable as long as we allow the person to defer if they so desire. Our role is to offer support not to find solutions. Grief isn't something you can fix. No-one can take away the pain and sadness.

Our intentions are honourable. We want to be responsive, understanding. We want to recognise the significance of their loss. We want to say the right thing.

There are several factors that add to the complexity of this challenge.

Firstly, people respond to loss differently.

Grief counsellor David Kessler says,

'There is not a typical response to loss as there is no typical loss.'

Everyone will confront times of suffering from grief and loss. Loss can be both devastating and diverse. Every loss is unique and personal. This applies to grief as well. The way you grieve reflects who you are. There's no right or wrong way to grieve.

Secondly, people's response to loss changes over time.

A person grieving the loss of a friend or loved one to suicide will experience a variety of emotions including guilt, anger, shame, rejection, loneliness, sadness and abandonment. There will be fluctuations in the intensity of their grief. It will be unpredictable. It won't follow a linear progression. It will last a lifetime.

The process of assimilating the loss will be gradual and there will be setbacks. The complexity of your life will overwhelm you. You will struggle to accommodate your grief, not knowing how to afford it the respect it is due.

Providing support to people who are suffering requires sensitivity. It is important to avoid giving the impression we have all the answers. We don't.

Sensitivity is needed:
– to monitor the needs of the grieving person
– to offer targeted support
– to know what to say and what not to say

It can be tempting to avoid those who have experienced loss. We may believe we're ill-equipped to offer help or we're afraid of saying the wrong thing and making matters worse.

Author and Counsellor James P. Krehbiel(e) says,

'Your attitude and compassion are more important than the words that are spoken.'

We all want to communicate in a positive manner. We want to offer compassion and concern to the bereaved. But we need to be intentional in what we say. We need to think about it. We need to plan it. It is not an occasion for spontaneity. Sometimes our words have unintended consequences.

There are two responses I found inappropriate. I admit to having said the same thing on occasions. They appear harmless but place an added and unnecessary burden on the grieving person.

1. "How are you?"

It is a simple enquiry, but it presents the grieving person with a dilemma.

Is it a question that can be answered honestly? How much information do I want to share? How will the questioner cope if I dump on them my hurts and fears and burst into tears?

Or is the questioner hoping to hear that everything is getting better, the pain is easing, and you are no longer haunted by the thought your loved one took their life?

2. "I'm sorry for your loss."

It is a phrase that has become something of a cliché. It may be a way of fulfilling an obligation without having to do anything. It may communicate that you care, or it may not.

It is a phrase that does not encourage engagement. It leaves the grieving person feeling isolated, that the loss is their loss, and they must carry the weight of that loss alone.

There are five things you could say when a friend or loved one is grieving.

1. I was saddened to hear about the death of……. How are you coping with your loss?

By connecting with their loss, you are giving the grieving person the freedom to talk about their sorrow. This is liberating whereas silence is debilitating. It imprisons.

2. I can't imagine how hard it must be to face these days without……. What are you finding difficult to manage?

One of the worst things you can say is "you know; you understand; you get it; you've been there."

The reality is "you don't know; you have no idea; you couldn't possibly comprehend; your experience is not my experience."

You don't know but you are willing to learn. Our humility gives the grieving person permission to express their sadness and talk about their struggles.

3. I'm sorry but I can't think of anything to say to ease your loss. It must be incredibly difficult to lose someone you love to suicide/cancer/an accident?

Letting a grieving person know you are aware of the emotional difficulty of the situation can help them feel less isolated.

4. I didn't know ……. particularly well. When you are ready, I would like to talk to you about him/her. I do have one special memory I would like to share.

Talking about the person who died, speaking their name, honouring their existence, is healing to the grieving person. You are giving the person they love in life and in death humanity and identity.

Author Nancy Guthrie(f) gives this timely advice. She says,

'Keep on saying the name of the person who died. It is music to the grieving person's ears.'

5. I don't know what you're dealing with, but I am here to help in any way I can. If you need someone to be with you while you……. I'm here.

Grief can leave people feeling alone. Telling them that you love them and are there for them reminds them they are not without support.

It can be difficult for a grieving person to ask for help. There are many reasons for this, such as having no energy or motivation to ask for help.

If you want to help and support a friend or family member who is grieving, take the initiative and make specific suggestions.

PART FIVE

32. Suicide Grief

The important thing is to give ourselves permission to grieve. It is appropriate to hurt deeply, to sob uncontrollably at times, to feel the anguish of separation, to wonder if we will ever rise again from the despair in which we are submerged. Dr. Gary LeBlanc(a)

Grief is a natural response to loss. The more significant the loss, the more intense the grief will be. Everyone grieves in their own way. How you grieve depends on many factors, including your personality and coping style, your life experience, your faith, and the nature of the loss. The grief process is always difficult, but a loss through suicide is like no other.

Suicide grief is defined by its gravity and intensity. Nothing can prepare you for the loss of a loved one so shockingly and dramatically. You are left bereft with sadness in your heart that nothing can remove. Alan D. Wolfelt(b) Ph.D. writes,

Society often makes mourners feel shame or embarrassment about our feelings of grief, particularly suicide grief. It implies that if you, as a grieving person, openly express your feeling of grief, you are being immature. If your feelings are fairly intense, you may be labelled overly emotional or needy. If your feelings are extremely intense, you may even be referred to as crazy or a "pathological mourner."

Suicide grief has been likened to that experienced by holocaust survivors. No one can hope to understand the horror and trauma. Where are the words to describe the sense of desolation? This is forbidden territory.

Suicide grief is intensely personal. A part of you has died with your loved one. The landscape of your life has taken on an unfamiliar appearance. You wonder at your ability to navigate the rough, inhospitable terrain. Can you make friends with the desert of despair? Can you recapture that sense of wonder that is elemental to life? Can you find renewed purpose, a reason to go on?

You feel responsible. If I had been awake, attuned, and pro-active this tragic loss might have been avoided. My words lacked authority and my actions sensitivity. I failed in my efforts to preserve the life of my loved one.

Suicide grief is overwhelmingly complex. How do you resolve the feelings of guilt and shame? How do you acknowledge and affirm the life of your loved one when their mode of death challenges every sensibility? Their resolve to end it all was so fixed, or was it? It is the uncertainties that keep throwing up new possibilities and different outcomes. Surely death wasn't the only remaining option. Surely there was some cause, no matter how small, that provided some reason to go on?

Death is final. It draws a line under a life. It says there is no more striving. There is completeness, a beginning and an end. But what do we make of the years of happiness and heartache? Was a destiny realised or was it a tragic failure? Does the good outweigh the bad? Does faith bring an end to fear or was the striving without purpose, a life that failed to achieve the true heights of love and commitment? We remember but some things we would prefer to forget.

Gillian Bouras(c) says,

Perhaps the first lesson those left behind learn is that the struggle to cope with this specific pain may last forever.

Suicide grief redefines a person. It is grief without 'resolution' or as some prefer 'closure'. It is living with the intimate knowledge that our love was inadequate and our heartfelt concern insufficient to save a life.

How do you accommodate the loss? You can't ignore it, and you can't explain it away. The sorrow and sadness endure. The feelings may not retain their intensity, but the knowing offers little reprieve. This is reality. A loved one chose to end their life.

There are imperatives, actions that reveal the heart. It is important to honour and respect your loved one, to acknowledge their hard-won achievements.

Dr. Sheila Clark(d) advises,

It is important to preserve their 'spirit', to support those causes that captured their mind and won over their hearts. It has been said that 'the future influence of your loved one becomes the responsibility of those who were close to them in life.

It is important to celebrate their life and to remember the important anniversaries and significant milestones.

The aftermath of a loved one's suicide can be physically and emotionally exhausting. It is important to protect your own well-being and to adopt healthy coping strategies.

33. Survival

While living in New Zealand we experienced occasional earthquakes. The ground rippled, the windows rattled, and the pictures on the wall swayed back and forth. Such events often triggered family debates. 'Should we stand in the doorway or clamber under the table?' By the time we came to some consensus, the shaking had ceased. But the survival instinct is strong. When confronted with danger we look for a way out, when faced with adversity we resolve to conquer.

When a loved one chooses to end their life, the experience is akin to a violent earthquake. There may have been warning signs, or it may have been sudden or unexpected. The result is a life traumatised and thrown into turmoil, your life.

Suicide is real. The consequences are devastating. How do you survive a suicide? How do you begin to put the pieces back? How do you deal with the accusations, intended or not? How do you resolve the inner conflict? How do you find a reason to smile?

There are no stereotypes for survival. Survival is distinctive. It reflects the nature of the relationship with the deceased. It mirrors the emotional maturity of the individual and their capacity to own a new reality and discover a new identity.

What is this new reality? It is a life denied the physical presence of your loved one but allows for the continuance of *relationship*. Adam is still my son. My love for him is undiminished. He continues to influence my thinking. He challenges the priorities I set for my life. I look for ways to remember him, to celebrate his achievements and to extend his influence. My *conversations* with Adam are based on a premise. His love for me is not something that has withered and died but something that lives on and actively contributes to my growth and wholeness.

I hear Adam saying,

'I love you. I am sorry I could not resolve the inner turmoil, to find release from the confused thoughts. I became imprisoned in my fears, trapped in

my own feelings of unworthiness. I did not want to hurt you. I did not want to cause you pain.'

The process of adjusting to the new reality requires understanding and patience. The pain and loss are ever present. The hurt and confusion remain. There may be acceptance of the circumstances that led to your loved one taking their life. There is the conviction that it did not have to end that way. It is a tragedy, a shocking tragedy. But there is a choice. Do we allow the death to dominate our life, undermining our resolve, diluting our joy?

Grief is central to the new reality. Grief is multi layered. It engages the mind and the emotions. It immerses our whole being. Grief is never static. It ebbs and flows. Grief is constant. It does not diminish over time. Grief is not to be ignored. It needs to be afforded a place of respect. Handled well, grief can enrich our lives.

And then there is the new identity. Much has been written about the stigma of suicide. Suicide defines who you are. It cuts to the very core of your being. It is a permanent stain, a blot, an unexplainable tragedy. How do you answer the questions, the simple innocuous questions? 'How many children do you have?' 'And where do they live?"'

When we own the death of a loved one and talk about them openly and honestly, we are risking rejection. It is a courageous choice that minimises the possibility of being misunderstood and allows others to feel your pain. But there will be embarrassed looks and awkward silences. Some friendships may not last. The fact is suicide renders the most sociable, the most articulate, and the most knowledgeable uncertain and ineffectual. The feeling of isolation may be real. Your resilience severely tested.

Suicide is a life sentence. There is no closure. The death of your loved one is fixed in time. History cannot be rewritten. You will learn to live with this new reality. You will discover a new identity.

Suffering is universal. It is the defining element of the human story.

'What do we do with our suffering?' This is the question we must all answer. But we need to bear in mind that 'suffering has a way of distorting truth.'

When our son Adam took his life, the pain was unbearable. Survival became paramount. I recall taking a walk. The rhythm of walking has a calming effect. Within my spirit I heard these words – READ, WRITE, SHARE.

Read – You need a better understanding of suicide.

Write – You need to put into words your experience of grief.

Share – You need to find a way to communicate what you learn.

The following activities helped me survive.

Reading:

Reading books can help us understand and process our grief:

When our son Adam took his life, I was desperate for answers. My world had been turned upside down. I was gasping for breath. I was hanging on, striving to comprehend the unfathomable. I needed to know that I hadn't become detached from reality, that the confusion and trauma, the intense, heart wrenching grief were genuine.

The first book I read on suicide grief was *After Suicide: Help for the Bereaved* by Dr Sheila Clark(a). Published in 1995, the book offers practical commonsense and careful guidelines in navigating the challenges of suicide bereavement. It is not a technical book, but it does bring wisdom and perspective to the grief journey.

In the months following Adam's death I experienced guilt feelings. I reasoned that I should have been more attentive, more understanding, more engaged. As a parent you feel responsible. I felt I had failed Adam.

Dr Sheila Clark addresses this issue. She says,

'Guilt can be one of the most difficult and distressing emotions; you may feel guilty for not having been able to save your loved one from taking their life. With hindsight it is too easy to criticise what you have or have not done. Remember: You acted with the information you had at the time.'

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow(b), an American poet and educator, lived in the 19th century. He wrote,

'Take this sorrow to thy heart, and make it part of thee, and it shall nourish thee till thou art strong again.'

Rachel Joyce(c) is an author who has sensitively addressed the complexity of suicide grief in a work of fiction. The novel, Maureen Fry and the Angel of

the North, focusses on the immense sadness and loss experienced by Maureen when her only son David took his life. Joyce describes the devastating impact of David's death on Maureen. She writes,

'After David's suicide thirty years ago, Maureen's grief was so great she thought she would die of it. Really, she couldn't understand how she was not dead. She wanted time to stop. Paralyse itself. But it didn't. She had to get up every day and face his bedroom, the chair where he sat in the kitchen, his great big overcoat with no son inside it. Worse, she had to go out and face women and children, and young men who were high or drunk, and she had to walk past them without screaming.'

It took Maureen many years to acquire the courage to face her loss, to admit to her anger and bitterness, her jealousy, and her judgmental attitude. Maureen's unwillingness to engage with her grief, to hide it away, denied people the opportunity to share in her pain, including her husband, Harold. We read,

'Maureen had laid her deepest loss at the feet of the world and experienced nothing but an affirmation of her left-outness and her shame. David's loss was her secret. It was the rock against which she was forever shattered.'

The term bereavement generally refers to the state of being deprived of something, but it is commonly used to describe a period of mourning related to the loss of a close relative or a friend.

To be 'bereaved' literally means 'to be torn apart. When Adam died, I experienced overwhelming pain. My heart was broken. There was no way I could keep a lid on my grief. As Amanda Held Opelt(d) suggests,

'Grief goes where it wants with or without an invitation. It seeps into the empty spaces.'

My tears were not confined to private spaces. They heralded my pain in public places.

In his book The Wilderness of Suicide Grief, Alan D. Wolfelt PhD(e) discusses what it means to integrate the grief that comes with a suicide death and why it is so important to honour your pain. He says,

'Grief is not a disease. To be human means coming to know loss as part of your life... Being secretive with your emotions doesn't integrate your painful feelings of loss; it complicates them. You cannot hide your feelings and find renewed meaning in your life.'

Gardening:

Indira Naidoo(f), an Australian journalist, broadcaster, and author, lives in a 13th floor apartment in Potts Point, Sydney. She lost her younger sister, *Stargirl*, to suicide during the COVID 19 pandemic.

Indira's little balcony garden, her garden in the sky, lies neglected, a consequence of the unexpected disruption to her life. Indira's garden has taught her some pertinent lesson about life and death. Our survival is never guaranteed. Indira says,

'I can tenderly plant all these seedlings and nurture them attentively, watering and weeding, and still some will not make it.'

Indira knows that tending a garden gives a person the chance to play God in a small way, to give life to something that would not have had that opportunity without your intervention. Gardening allows us to share in the creative process, to play a part in the process of renewal while accepting that life and death are inseparable. Indira says,

'Gardening is not only an act of hope; it is also an act of acceptance. Endings are part of renewal. You can't have one without the other... something may die but something will grow as well.'

When we garden, we allow ourselves to detach from what is concerning us or weighing us down. Our focus is on a world that we have created, a world that is accessible and intimate, a world that we have some control over.

The American poet and devoted gardener Ross Gay(g) said in an interview,

'Part of the delight of my garden is that you just get lost in it before you've even started to do anything.'

Gardening is about communion, experiencing a connection with people past and present, and with the soil. While gardening can be a solitary pursuit it creates pathways for relationships and ultimately community. The act of caring for plants unites us with other gardeners who share a similar passion.

The writer George Orwell(h) 'devoted himself to small and not so small pleasures' like gardening. Orwell had many demands on his time, but gardening kept him grounded and enlarged his writing. In 1940 Orwell wrote,

'Outside my work the thing I care most about is gardening.'

In case you hadn't noticed, life is complex. You never know what joys and heartache await. It is the uncertainties of life that expose our fear and anxiety. Often, we feel ill-equipped to meet the challenges we encounter.

Gardening deals in realities. Some plants prosper; some plants struggle and die. Gardeners don't always know the reason for their failures. Is it the soil, or the amount of water the plant is getting? Perhaps the situation is too shady or too hot, or too much competition.

Gardening is an act of hope. When we plant a bulb in the ground, we have an expectation that when the conditions are right, life will burst forth. Everything the bulb needs is contained within, ready and waiting for their moment to shine.

Walking:

Grief walking is intentional. Rather than hiding from your grief or dismissing it entirely, grief walking offers an opportunity to engage with it, to listen to its heartbeat.

Following Adam's death, I discovered grief walking. The benefits were incalculable.

Grief walking invites connection. It is an opportunity to draw near to your loved one, to be at peace with your loved one.

'I feel compelled to walk. The emotional turmoil threatens my sanity. I need to find a way to address it. The rhythm of walking calms the soul. The forward movement, one step at a time, rebuilds confidence, restores hope.

I wear an item of clothing that belongs to Adam, a jumper, a jacket. It draws me closer, assuring me of his presence, a different presence, something I carry within me.

I received a gift of a hand cross. I carry it in my pocket. I think of Jesus, nailed to the cross. His cross, a symbol of brokenness. It speaks to me of Adam, his broken body, his broken spirit.

My walk takes me along residential streets, through parkland, by a golf course. I find any loud noise, the screech of tyres, a dog barking, distressing. It heightens my unease, my anxiety. It takes time for the calm to return.

The high point of the walk provides a vista of the outskirts of town. In the foreground, a cemetery. Many of the tombstones show signs of neglect,

leaning to one side, or lying abandoned on the ground. I am reminded of our mortality, that death awaits us all. I ponder my son, Adam, jogging to his death.

In the distance is the steeple of a church. It is the church we attend. There is a cross, raised up, crowning the steeple. I hear the words of the Angel, 'He is not here. He is risen.' The resurrection of Jesus is our hope, our only hope. It allows me to boldly declare, 'O death, where is your sting?'

In his book, *A Philosophy of Walking,* Frederic Gros(i) says,

'Walking does not erase sadness, it transforms it.'

Writing:

We grieve through story, but even more so, through story expressed. Author, Rebecca Solnit(j) says,

"Stories are our compasses and architecture, we navigate by them, we build our sanctuaries and prisons out of them, and to be without a story is to be lost in the vastness of the world that spreads in all directions like arctic tundra or sea ice."

Creating a coherent story in the aftermath of a death offers a sense of control over what may otherwise feel like a set of unmanageable events.

Following Adam's death, I felt compelled to write to make sense of what was a strange and confusing landscape. To a healthy mind suicide is unfathomable. It is at cross purposes with our will to survive.

Organising disordered thoughts into a coherent, manageable account is what helps us make sense of a crisis. But the 'making sense' is an ongoing commitment. As new bits of information become available, they force a revision of the entire story. Some facts will never be known, so in that sense, our account is never conclusive or complete.

Hope Edelman(k) says,

'The more effort we put into developing a narrative of loss and recovery, the more likely we are to engage with issues of meaning and the more we engage with issues of meaning, the more we confirm and perpetuate that person's importance in our own life stories.'

Adam's death has brought added meaning to my life. His death has forced me to grapple with many uncomfortable issues and to evaluate my

response to his personal crisis. It has made me stronger, helping me clarify my belief systems and the issues that warrant my support. It has made me more empathetic and compassionate, giving me a clearer understanding and 'feel' for the impact of trauma and loss on the grieving. It has made me more appreciative of life, valuing the little things and being grateful for the relationships I enjoy.

Our stories are to be shared. They provide a bridge, allowing others to enter our journey, to form an emotional connection and to be instructed by our experience.

Without the opportunity to tell their story, no matter the method, a mourner may pull back from trying to connect with others and resolve to get through grief alone, which can lead to isolation and depression.

Hope Edelman emphasises the importance of awareness, of knowing when someone wants to unburden, to share the pain of their loss. She says,

"If sorrow yearns to be given words but no one ever comes along to hear them, what happens to a burdened heart?"

A Survivor's Prayer

Father God

The moment of knowing is but a moment in time. Nothing can prepare you for it. It is life shattering. The past is gone, and a new reality emerges, threatening to consume you. The mind struggles to process the information and yet every fact is seared on your heart, a heart torn in two.

The sentence is so final. There is no chance of a reprieve. There is numbness. I sense this is your way of protecting my spirit. "A bruised reed you will not break." There is uncertainty. I do not know how I can live with this pain, but your comfort is real. You speak to the inner man, 'Peace! Be still.'

I love you but can I trust you? As a parent you want to believe that your children are safe, that no harm will come to them. But is this realistic or is life far more ambiguous? I never doubted your presence. I know you heard the cry of my heart. You were quick to affirm the sacredness of life. I hear you say, 'Don't contemplate the lie.'

Father, I have so many questions. I am not sure that I have the courage to know the answers to some of them. It seems that understanding follows the living. It explains why we make so many mistakes. I cannot help but feel that I failed Adam. I could identify with his struggle. He was a quiet unassuming person. But this belies the inner reserves, the determination, and the strength to go on even when his world was beginning to crumble around him. How long did he suffer? How long did he know? Was death an exit clause if the going got too tough? There are so many questions. But I owe it to Adam to try and understand. It becomes a part of the healing. Healing? Do we really heal or is it more a question of accommodating? Time does not magically reduce the magnitude of the loss. It does allow for scar tissue to form.

Father, you know. You know my vulnerabilities. You are both a rock and a shield. When I think of a rock I think of stability. I need that fixed point on the compass. I need to know that I can trust you and that you are who you say you are. I cannot entertain the thought that you could suddenly turn into a monster that cares little whether I live or die. I need certainty in my world which threatens to crumble around me. I thought the world predictable. I thought that if you loved a child deeply, they would be adequately equipped to face the challenges of life. Did I miss something? Was I being too simplistic? Did I not factor in the dark forces that can rob us of our inner strength, steal our confidence and belief, and destroy the living hope that sustains us? Yes, you equip us for the battle but sometimes we lose sight of you.

Father, Adam could not find you. He feared who he had become. He wanted his problems to be spiritual, but we err when we separate the physical from the spiritual. We are a single entity. Although there are many parts, we are whole, complete, and fitted out for fellowship with you.

Father, you are a shield. The purpose of a shield is to protect. It is not an offensive weapon but rather an object used to absorb or deflect the enemy's thrusts. There is a subtlety to the adversary's advances. It may present itself in the form of a careless word or a premeditated snub. There is a stigma to suicide that drives a wedge and distances a person from those they thought might have been supportive.

Not everyone understands the complexities of suicide. Many find it too difficult to talk about. They do not want to hurt or embarrass. They find refuge in silence. I want to say to them that I would be happy for the simplest of enquiries about Adam. What was Adam like as a child? What

was he good at? What were his passions? I could even handle the BIG questions like, “Did you recognise that he was at risk of suicide?” or “Why do you think he took his life?” I may struggle with the answers. I may even cry. But I like talking about my son. I want to remember him. I want to honour him.

Father, I thank you for your strength which has enabled me to stand tall. I thank you for surrounding me with your love which has been a comfort but has also protected me from discouraging words and hurtful attitudes. I pray that I might be empowered to find ways to celebrate the life of my son and to tell his story honestly, forthrightly, and unashamedly.

Amen

34. Faith

The seeds of faith grow in the soil of adversity. Faith comes when we face challenges that exceed our ability to overcome or are such that we are unable to guarantee a positive outcome. Our vulnerability becomes the foundation for our courage and resourcefulness. As Nick Cave(a) says,

'There is something about being open and vulnerable that is conversely very powerful, maybe even transformative.'

Faith says that no matter the gravity of our situation, something positive will emerge, bringing meaning to our pain and imbue us with a wisdom that only suffering can teach. We become empowered to live more intentionally, more purposefully, more daringly.

Nick Cave says,

'Ultimately, Arthur's death, opened all kinds of possibilities and a strange reckless power came out of it. It was as if the worst had happened and nothing could hurt us, and all our ordinary concerns were little more than indulgences. There was freedom in that.'

Faith says that despite the feelings of devastation, even obliteration, the sun will rise again. Some things do not change. Be expectant. As Nick Cave says,

'You have to be patient and alert to the little miracles nestled in the ordinary.'

If we do not attend to our faith, it can dry up altogether. Imagine a world without faith, a world of cynicism and selfishness, a world of anger and betrayal, a world of retribution and injustice, a world not unlike our own.

In his book, *For Everything a Season,* author Philip Gulley(b) writes about the challenge suffering is to our faith. He says,

'I consider it a mystery how mourning can turn some people soft and others hard. I am acquainted with certain people whose grief immersed them in the holy. But I know others whose suffering tore a spiritual cleft between them and the divine, folks whose faith died right along with their

loved one. Sometimes when we most need faith it seems to flee into the night.'

The vitality of our life is dependent on the object of our faith. Many people place their faith in institutions – religious, political, financial, medical, or educational – believing that they will deliver, ensuring positive outcomes and providing answers to complex issues. Sadly, institutions fail, proving inadequate in times of crisis. They are broken, inevitably leading to heartache and disappointment.

If we are to place our faith in God, we need to understand the nature of his character. In the months following Adam's death I found myself reflecting on the mystery of God.

'It is six months since we received news of Adam's death. His estate has yet to be settled and the occasional correspondence filters through. Subscriptions or news updates from the plumbers' union.

We are still deciding what to do with Adam's possessions. I have been wearing his jeans and a couple of shirts. It is important to connect, to do things that encourage a sense of closeness. We have a candle which we have dedicated to Adam. We light it when we want to be quiet and think about him, when we want to share with God our deepest thoughts and feelings and receive His comfort and assurance.

We are not in recovery. We are being recreated. It is not healing we look for but how to accommodate the tragic loss of our dear son; how to live with the pain and sadness and numbness and despair; how to interpret these events and to construct a future that honours Adam and celebrates the importance of his life.

When we first heard of Adam's death our lives were instantly altered, but what of our faith? Can faith survive an experience that wounds deeply, that shatters your dreams? We are changed people, scarred by the fires of adversity, searching for meaning.

Our thinking may find a certain orderliness, but our emotions will not be dictated to. This is the real issue. How do we resolve the disconnect between our head and our heart? One writer likened it to 'a divorce.' It is one thing to intellectually argue a case but if our experience doesn't match, we have a dilemma.

This was part of Adam's struggle. He knew that the God of all eternity is merciful. In his personal evangelism he emphasized that God extends grace to the humble. In his preaching he declared mercy to those who truly repented. And yet when confronted with his own sense of personal failure God's mercy and grace seemed to elude him.

Many people find God difficult to understand, his response to our plight puzzling. They argue that when they needed God most, He was absent or when they needed a word of hope or comfort, He was silent.

Faith is asserting what we know to be true. Faith acknowledges that God is all loving, all powerful even when our world is falling apart.

When the disciples of Jesus found themselves in a storm that threatened their existence they turned to Jesus, a 'sleeping' Jesus. They were frantic to wake him. Jesus stood and cried out to the wind and the waves, and a great calm descended. It was then he turned to them and questioned their lack of faith.

Faith recognizes who has the authority. It acknowledges that God may choose to act decisively, or He may hold back. We cannot reason with God or manipulate Him. Whatever God says or does demonstrates the greatness and magnificence of His love.

God is unchanging. This I believe.

But am I able to survive the trauma of loss? Am I confident that I can manage what is happening in my life, that I can understand my grief? Do I have the courage to look at my son's life, to confront the demons that may have contributed to his demise?

Sometimes I feel like an *archeologist,* scraping the soil away to reveal what remains, looking for any fragment that might shed light on a life that lost its focus. At other times I am *the resourceful detective,* asking questions, looking for a motive, uncovering the facts, and assembling the evidence.

I look to the past to gain understanding and inspiration. I look to the past to help me 'live' in the present. I look to the past, but I ask God's protection from losing myself in a labyrinth of memories, real or imagined.'

35. Forgiveness

Life is filled with uncertainty. We never know what awaits us around the corner. Our comfortable, secure existence might be torn apart. We may face challenges we feel ill-equipped to handle. We may feel alone and desolate. We may long for the past and a return to safety and normality.

People who lose a loved one to suicide have their lives turned upside down. Nothing makes sense anymore. They feel cast adrift with nothing to hang on to. There is uncertainty and insecurity and frailty. It is not a place of their choosing. It is unfamiliar territory, a strange land.

Survivors of suicide loss need to avoid running from the past or fighting against their present pain. Nothing will erase the suffering and nothing will vanquish the loss.

Suicide is a traumatic event. Those who live in its shadow need to practice the work of not pushing their feelings away, no matter how painful. They need to relive the pain. They must learn to master it. They must learn to forgive it all. It has been said,

'You can't heal what you can't feel.'

When life treats you unfairly or you experience an unspeakable tragedy it is tempting to look for someone or something to blame. Blaming makes life more bearable. It's a way of shifting responsibility.

Rick Warren(a) is the senior pastor of Saddleback Church. He lost his son Matthew to suicide in 2013. He has written about the challenges we face when confronted with unspeakable tragedy. He offers a cautionary word about becoming bitter. He says,

'We can choose to become bitter, but it never changes anything. Blaming others never changes anything. It only makes you feel worse.'

In her novel for young adults, Goodbye, Mr Hitler, Jackie French(b) explores the theme of 'forgiveness.' She says,

"Forgiveness can be the hardest thing in the world. But it must be done, for your own sake, as well as for your family, and the world, even if it must be done again every day of life. You must forgive."

When we fail to forgive, we create barriers, allowing for suspicion and distrust to grow unchecked, hindering our ability to foster meaningful, caring relationships.

Author Ann Voskamp(c) says,

"Forgiveness requires that I go into the past; that I relive histories again and again until I am able to release all wrongs wrought by the frail humanity of others."

To forgive requires a willingness to excuse or pardon an error or offence. It is a letting go of resentment or thoughts of revenge. Forgiveness is releasing all that has hardened and constricted our heart.

Forgiveness is a path we must willingly choose. It is not something that can be demanded or forced upon us. It is our decision alone.

Secular society struggles with forgiveness, despite it being at the centre of our lives. It is easier to criticise, to find fault, to pull down. We are reluctant to let go. Forgiveness requires a shift in how we view things. Forgiveness is a religious question for it is God who sets the standard. Only a God of truth, justice, and mercy can forgive.

If we are to live peaceably, productively, and purposefully in an ever-changing world we need to be able to show mercy, to offer people some slack, to believe in second chances, and be capable of giving and receiving forgiveness.

In his book The Passenger Cormac McCarthy(d) writes,

'Mercy is the province of the person alone. There is mass hatred and there is mass grief. Mass vengeance and even mass suicide. But there is no mass forgiveness.'

Those bereaved by suicide need to find forgiveness for their loved one: forgiving them for leaving without saying goodbye; forgiving them for not being able to see the world through their eyes; forgiving them for not asking for help.

They need to find forgiveness for the people they believe could have done more to support their loved one – friends and family, work colleagues, medical professionals, counsellors and support workers.

They need to find forgiveness for themselves: for not appreciating the seriousness of the situation; for lacking an understanding of the risk factors that contribute to suicidal thinking; for failing to provide the care

and support their loved one required; for fixating on the choices they think they could or should have made.

Dr Edith Eger(e), a survivor of Auschwitz, says,

"How easily a life can become a litany of guilt and regret, a song that keeps echoing with the same chorus, with the inability to forgive ourselves."

The present doesn't diminish the past. Forgiveness is not about rewriting the past. Forgiveness is an effective way of dealing with the past.

Forgiveness doesn't mean forgetting or excusing the hurt done to you. Forgiveness acknowledges the wrong done, the abuse experienced. Forgiveness requires an acceptance of what happened and what didn't happen.

It takes courage and strength to forgive. Forgiveness accepts and addresses the past but focuses on the future. When we forgive it opens the door to peace, hope, gratitude and joy.

36. Hope

A world without hope is a world headed for destruction. Hope galvanises our thoughts, giving us something to believe in, something to strive for.

We cannot live without hope. Hope inspires. It is the reason we persevere and press on. Sometimes, when things are desperate, we need to put ourselves in the way of hope.

In her book Landlines, Raynor Winn(a) explains that when you walk along a well-trodden path you will meet other travellers who provide the encouragement needed. Raynor and her husband Moth met two rock climbers whose timely words had a calming effect. They said,

'We do the same thing every time we hang on a rope. We hope. Hope we'll get to the top, hope the protection will hold, hope this will be the perfect climb. Hope. It's powerful; it can change things. But you've got to put yourself in the way of it, let yourself feel it. Let the power of it lift you up. That's what you're doing: putting yourself in the way of hope. Do that and anything can happen.'

Hope is a beautiful thing. It is the thing we most want to cling on to in periods of despair or worry.

We live in a world where hope is hard to find. It seems we preference negativity, pulling down rather than building up, criticising rather than affirming, judging rather than forgiving.

Author Matt Haig(b) reminds us that even when we feel bombarded by challenging events that threaten to overwhelm any vestige of positivity, hope is undaunted.

'Hope can feel in scarce supply for everyone these days. Global pandemics, brutal injustices, political turmoil and glaring inequalities can all take their toll on your reserves. And yet, the thing with hope is that it is persistent. It has the potential to exist in the most troubled times.'

We might feel that it is hard to cultivate hope when in a state of despair. The thing is, hope is born from the uncertain fabric of life, so give hope a

chance. Sometimes hope comes to us unexpectedly and all we can do is look on with wonder. Matt Haig had such an experience. He says,

'*I can remember one night in the middle of a depression feeling suicidal and looking up at a cloudless sky of infinite stars. I felt a mental pain so deep it was physical. But seeing the sky, our small glimpse of the universe, flooded me with hope and wonder of life, and the world is full of such moments.*'

Hope is available to all. Some people are tempted to give up on hope, feeling that it fails to deliver. But hope is the basis of life. Without hope we die. Matt Haig said he clutched on to hope like a security blanket. Do not let anyone talk you out of hope. Do not let anyone prise it out of your hands. Shield it. Protect it. Own it.

Hope is the acceptance of possibility. It is believing that change is a fact of life. Nothing stays the same. We may think the clouds are stationary until we look a little closer and wait a little longer. It is believing that even when the darkness presses in on us, a tiny speck of light can make all the difference.

Matt Haig encourages us to light a candle. He says,

'*When things go dark, we can't see what we have. All we need is to light a candle, or ignite some hope, and we can see that what we thought was lost was merely hidden.*'

If we are to believe in a better future, we must keep hope alive. Matt Haig offers this final word of encouragement. He says,

'Nothing is stronger than a small hope that doesn't give up.

Everybody needs hope in their lives. When we rob people of hope, we deny them a future. We see this played out in our homes, our schools, our churches, our sporting clubs, our hospitals, our aged care centres, and our workplaces. Its impact is felt by the vulnerable, the disadvantaged, people who are unable to advocate for themselves.

Hope is dependent on the nature of our relationships. Where there is empathy and understanding, care and support, people feel affirmed, enabling them to flourish despite the challenges they may be facing. Where there is insensitivity and intolerance, abuse and neglect, people pull back, erect emotional barriers and channel their energies into self-preservation.

Sometimes we lose sight of hope. We allow our circumstances, the challenges we are facing and the changes we are experiencing, to blur our vision. We shift our focus, searching for something to hold on to. But…

Hope is not optimism. It is not looking for a positive angle to eliminate fear and anxiety. When we hear misplaced optimism, particularly in a time of crisis, it can sound aloof, out of touch, and insincere.

Hope is not the belief that everything will be fine. There are many situations in which a negative outcome is more probable than not. In this context, hope is nothing more than a wish for a favourable outcome.

Hope is choosing to see beyond our current circumstances to something better. It is an invitation to act. As Barack Obama(c) says,

'Hope is that thing inside us that insists, despite all evidence to the contrary, that something better awaits us if we have the courage to reach for it, and to work for it, and to fight for it.'

Corporate and educational consultant Dr Judith Rich(d) emphasises the value in being able to see a way forward. For her, it is hope which provides the illumination. She says,

'Hope is a match in a dark tunnel, a moment of light, just enough to reveal the path ahead and ultimately the way out.'

Author Ann Voskamp(e) says,

'As long as you still are, all is not lost. Being is hope, and hope is presence, and this present moment is a gift pulsing with hope.'

Hope is a key protective factor against suicidal behaviour and is a catalyst for the recovery process. Hope is nurtured by finding meaning and purpose in life.

Hopeful people are survivors. They emerge out of the rubble, battered and bruised, determined to grasp the opportunities that come their way. They know what it is to suffer, to be stripped bare, to have nothing, to be nothing. They are not looking for sympathy. They know the hard-earned qualities of patience and perseverance are enough to triumph over adversity. Their hope is founded in a mystery, that brokenness has its own reward, new life.

Singer and song writer, Nick Cave(f) understands. He says,

'Hope is optimism with a broken heart.'

Hope sustains our life, providing a reason to persevere. Even in times of hardship, struggle, and tragedy, hope refreshes our flagging spirit, inspires courage, and instils renewed purpose.

Hope is pivotal to our survival. Without hope we are lost. Without hope there is no life.

Abram Goldberg(g), born in 1924 in Lodz, Poland, is a holocaust survivor. He has recently documented his experiences in his book *The Strength of Hope*.

When the Germans invaded Poland the Goldberg family were consigned to the Lodz ghetto. These were desperate times, living in cramped quarters with little food and fuel. Life was about survival and tending to the flicker of hope. In the words of Abram's father,

'We must always believe we can overcome this.'

Hope makes all the difference.

37. Post-Traumatic Growth

Despite the devastation of suicide loss, Post Traumatic Growth is possible. Post Traumatic Growth can be explained as experiencing unexpected positive changes because of negative events. It suggests the possibility of personal growth within the context of a highly challenging, stressful, and traumatic event. This does not mean that trauma is not also destructive and distressing. No one welcomes adversity. But the research evidence shows us that over time people can find benefits in their struggle with adversity, that appreciable growth can occur within the context of pain and loss.

Positive Psychologist, Miriam Akhtar(a), uses the metaphor of a broken vase to help us understand this concept. She says,

'When you experience a life-shattering event there are two choices. Glue the fragments back together – life will look the same, but it will be more fragile than it was before. Or you can pick up the pieces and make a beautiful mosaic from them. Life is different but, in many ways, stronger.'

Clinical Psychologist, Dr Rob Gordon(b), has worked with trauma victims for many years. He has counselled survivors of the Bali Bombing, the Black Saturday Bush Fires and the Queensland floods.

Dr Gordon explains the difference between grief and trauma. He says,

'Grief is focused on the person, where trauma chains us to the event. Grief is a way of remembering while trauma is a wound that needs treating.'

People who have been shaken and uprooted by suicide must contend with these two processes. As trauma is different to grief, trauma and grief may be experienced either alternately or at the same time.

Trauma is an emotional response to a terrible event which often results in lasting mental and physical effects.

H. Norman Wright(c), author of *Finding Hope When Life Goes Wrong*, says,

'Trauma is the response to any event that shatters your world'.

The traumatic aspect of suicide is the shattering of human connections. Perry & Szalavitz(d), co-authors of *The Boy Who Was Raised as a Dog,* write*,*

'Because humans are inescapably social beings, the worst catastrophes that can befall us involve relational loss.'

Trauma also upsets reality. It scrambles some of our basic assumptions about life. Traumatic events shake the foundations of our beliefs and shatter our trust. Trauma often fragments our identity, leaving us feeling confused and broken inside.

Dr Gordon explains that there are two types of trauma – sensory trauma and informational trauma.

Sensory trauma occurs where a person finds the body. Suicide can be a violent death. Discovering the body may not only be unrehearsed but painfully shocking. The images formed are particularly exact and are seared into our consciousness.

Informational trauma occurs where a person hears about the death. The telling is often fragmentary, leaving gaps in the story. This leads to uncertainty and the likelihood of rationalisations. Sufferers tend to squeeze the words for every ounce of meaning and are likely to attach greater importance to incidentals than is justified.

People who lose someone they love to suicide will experience trauma. But the converse is also true. People who are exposed to trauma are also at risk.

Post Traumatic Growth occurs when a person finds a way of accommodating the tragedy into their mental landscape. They recognise that life won't ever be the same, but they can pick up the pieces and put life back together in a fresh, different form that holds appeal for them.

Researchers have found that many who successfully deal with adversity grow in positive ways.

There are five domains where this psychological growth occurs:

1. Relating to Others: The desire for greater honesty; the willingness to express my emotions; an increased compassion for those who have experienced trauma; an appreciation of what others can offer in times of distress; and a genuine wish to develop more meaningful relationships.

2. New Possibilities: A willingness to change things that need changing; the courage to pursue new interests; the openness to discovering a different path for my life; and the self-assurance to tackle fresh challenges.
3. Personal Strength: A renewed confidence that I can handle trouble or difficulties; a knowledge that I can survive; and the ability to accept how things work out.
4. Spiritual Change: A better understanding of spiritual matters; a deeper connectedness with God; openness to moments of wonder and awe; and a greater hunger for truth.
5. Appreciation of Life: A clearer understanding of what is important to me; a strong conviction that life is to be valued; and a desire to fully appreciate what each day has to offer, to live in the moment.

The idea that adversity and suffering can lead to transformation is not new. Various religious traditions have explored this concept in their writings.

Viktor Frankl(e), in Man's Search for Meaning (1946), promoted the idea when he wrote about his experiences in the German concentration camp where he was incarcerated during World War Two. He observed the sense of hopelessness that overwhelmed some of the prisoners but also saw evidence of the potential for growth. He says,

'...*even the helpless victim of a hopeless situation, facing a fate he cannot change, may rise above himself, may grow beyond himself, and by so doing change himself...turn a personal tragedy into a triumph.'*

Suicide shatters our assumptions about fairness and justice. It forces us to rethink our understanding of the world. It says to us that we do not know what the future holds, that life changing events can enter our lives at any time in many ways.

The concept of Post Traumatic Growth challenges us to see every tragedy, every hardship, and every painful and distressing event as an opportunity to grow.

I recall the moment I was told my son, Adam, had taken his life. I can still feel the utter sense of horror and brokenness. It seemed I would drown in a flood of tears.

However, within a week of his death I had resolved to find 'a positive' in this situation. I could not accept that the tragedy of Adam's death was all darkness, devoid of any light. I could not see the virtue in wallowing in self-

pity or self-recrimination. There had to be a way of reclaiming Adam's dignity, of exploring the context of his hopelessness and despair. Suicide feels like an abject failure, but Adam was much more than his violent death. He lived and loved, worked and played, hoped and dreamed, worshipped and witnessed. He was a son, a brother, an uncle, a cousin. He belonged.

I also felt the need to understand suicide and to appreciate the grief process. I wrote about what I was thinking and feeling and made it available to family members. This desire to explore, to navigate the treacherous waters of personal tragedy led to the development of a website, http://www.hopefortomorrow.info, which aims to encourage, to educate, and to empower, providing a hope that will remain strong into the future.

38. Letters

Why would you write a letter to your deceased loved one? Is this crazy or what? When a loved one dies, particularly a traumatic death, our lives are thrown into confusion. Grief can be perplexing and painful because we don't normally experience such intensity of emotion.

When our son, Adam, took his life, I found letter writing important in maintaining my relationship with him and in clarifying what I was experiencing.

The act of writing created structure in chaotic times. It forced me to examine my life and to recognise the reality and finality of Adam's death.

Writing letters to your loved one is beneficial in the following ways.

- **It validates your life.**

It says, 'This is how it is.' It is a declaration of the hurt and pain and also the hope and trust that is our life. It may not be neat and tidy, an orderly process. Grief has a way of upending everything, challenging us to know ourselves and to re-define our purpose.

- **It is a way of processing your grief.**

In grief or trauma, it is important to externalise emotions. If we deny or inhibit them, we lose our capacity to be touched and changed by life's experiences. When we write, we give form to thoughts and feelings, allowing us to begin the process of understanding. Acknowledging and labelling our emotions contributes to our physical and emotional health. Author Alan D. Wolfelt(a) PhD says,

'We cannot heal what we cannot feel or do not allow ourselves to feel.'

- **It allows you to keep your memories alive.**

When a loved one dies our relationship continues but in a different form. Writing about our memories preserves the past: the good times, the happiness, the sorrow, and the heartache. Memories give value to life and are an acknowledgement of all that has gone before. They are worth preserving so they can be passed on.

- **It is helpful if there is unfinished business in your relationship with your loved one.**

The suicide of a loved one is often sudden and unexpected. You are left to rue the fact that you couldn't comprehend the extent of their pain and confusion. This has the potential to amplify your sense of guilt and remorseful thoughts.

In his book, The Lord is My Shepherd, Harold S Kushner writes,

'God, who is immortal, assures us that death may take a person out of our future but cannot remove him from our past, that all the things we loved a person for have entered so deeply into our souls that they remain part of us. The Lord gives, but the Lord does not take away.'

Letter One:

October 2011

Dear Adam,

You can't imagine the sorrow and pain you have caused your mother and me. It feels like something has been wrenched from us. We are still coming to terms with your death. It is the permanency that is so hard to accept. The dominant feeling is that of sadness.

Sadness that your life had to end the way it did. We think of the morning you left and regret that our weariness kept us from engaging with you even though we could hear you up and about. The sounds of that morning reverberate in my head. The sound of you bumping into something, the back door sliding open and shut, the front gate rattling, your car revving up and accelerating away. I had this sense that you were gone, that you had walked out of our lives.

We didn't want you to go. We would have supported you, prayed for you, loved you. We would have done our best to try and help you unscramble your thoughts. Our sadness is compounded by the fact that you kept things from us. You didn't allow us into the secret recesses of your heart. It seems you didn't want to burden us, or you recognized we couldn't cope with the complexities of your struggle.

Thank you for the note and the reassurance of your love. We know that you couldn't possibly understand the ramifications of your death. You

probably thought you wouldn't be missed or was it your mind was so completely focused on your distress all other thoughts were crowded out.

But we do miss you, desperately. We miss your presence at family gatherings. We miss hearing about your work. Your mother was so proud that you completed your plumbing apprenticeship. You were a conscientious worker. You could be relied on. Your consideration didn't go unnoticed.

You are part of our story, and the telling has lost its carefreeness knowing you are not here. We huddle for photos but there is a space that can never be filled.

We miss communicating with you. Our exchanges were often brief, but we listened. We tried to get a sense of where you were at. You may have noted our concern over your inflexibility, your set views on things spiritual. We weren't rejecting you. We were concerned you may fall into the trap of believing yourself superior.

But that was certainly not evident in the last days. You were a broken man. You wept uncontrollably and our hearts ached. Your passionate concern was for others. You didn't seem to care about yourself anymore. It was as though you had ceased to matter.

Adam, we want to say how proud we are as parents to have you as our son. We admired your courage, your commitment, your generosity, your giftedness. The intensity of your relationship with God challenges us still. We will continue to speak of you and to remember your ways. Coming to terms with your death is not so easy.

This will have to suffice for the moment. I'll write again soon.

With our love,

Mum and Dad.

Letter Two:

December 2011

Hi Adam!

The house at No.8 was sold on Friday. A young couple who had been renting in Tyabb bought it. It seems like a large house for two people. Julie and I feel a sense of relief. We spent several weekends painting, gardening,

cleaning, and organising what to do with all the stuff we had accumulated. We weren't sure what to do with your queen-size bed. We decided to put it out by the gate with a sign "Free!" A lady from up the road wanted it for her holiday house. Her father enjoyed talking to your grandfather. I always thought of him as the man with the wooden leg. He was involved in the local branch of the CFA. He asked me if I was interested in becoming a member, but I declined.

My parents had the house built as their retirement home. They considered purchasing a house in Pearcedale which was on ten acres, but mum thought it was too isolated. Dad bought the adjoining ten acres for his market garden. You used to go out there when you were a small boy. We helped granddad harvest the vegetables. We would go for walks along the gravel road. We might see a rabbit scurrying away into the blackberry patch or a Willy Wagtail catching an insect. There were horses in some of the paddocks and chook sheds.

My parents moved to Tyabb the year I started teaching. My first appointment was at a one teacher school at Wonyip via Toora in South Gippsland. There were twelve students attending from five families. I boarded with a lady and her son on a dairy farm at Woorarra East. Mum and dad began attending the 'black' church around the corner. It was a weatherboard construction that had been stained black. Dad hadn't been a regular church goer but perhaps he saw this as an opportunity to meet people. My dad had been educated Catholic but there were some issues that proved a stumbling block to his coming to faith. I remember family discussions around the dinner table about "being made in the image of God." I don't recall what the arguments were. However, dad began attending a discipleship group and discovered that Christianity is a 'reasonable faith'. His conversion took us by surprise, particularly my mother. Like you, dad studied the bible and wanted to share his newfound faith. He was a methodical person and would often plan what he was going to say before he met with someone.

It was a house full of memories. I remember the first time I brought your mum down to meet my parents. I don't think they thought I would ever find someone to share my life with. I was considered a quiet person who had never had a girlfriend. Dad was welcoming but mum was more cautious. She was probably overprotective of her youngest child.

I remember saying goodbye to my parents when we left for New Zealand. I can't imagine the sadness they must have felt being denied the

opportunity to watch their grandchildren grow up. What was an exciting adventure for us was a painful separation for them. We did return on several occasions for holidays but growing old is a relentless pursuit. Both my parents died while we were living overseas.

I regret that I didn't communicate with them more often. It is easy to make excuses that life is too busy, or the challenges of daily affairs are all consuming. Sometimes we become so preoccupied with what is important or pressing we neglect those closest to us, those who want to be included, those who are well placed to speak truth into our lives and bring a balanced perspective.

You began working at Taranto's Market Garden while you were still at school. Sometimes I would see you on the tractor. On one occasion you told me about 'taking out' one of the sprinklers. Were you distracted or just going too fast? You would ride your bike to work. One night the garage was broken into, and your bike stolen. The police were notified but didn't seem that interested. You said you had your suspicions. You seemed resigned to disappointment. The bike was never found.

I went with you to Hastings the day you bought your white Ford Falcon sedan. It proved to be a reliable car. You always seemed to have a stash of coins by the driver's seat. I was never sure why they were there. Did you keep them for the parking meter, or didn't you like them jangling around in your pocket?

Juliana and I hope to buy a house in Bendigo. Julie wants a swimming pool. I want lead lighting in the front door. We both wish you were here to share in our lives. Your death hasn't negated our joy, but it has tainted it. Joy and sadness are our companions.

Love,

Mum and Dad.

Letter Three:

March 2012

Hi Adam!

I'm sitting in the Fitzroy Gardens. It is a warm sunny day with wispy white clouds encroaching on the sea of blue. Captain Cooks' Cottage

remains a must see with the tourists who come in their bus loads. I always thought the rooms were poky.

The gardens were a popular destination with my family. My mother liked the area near the Conservatory with the spread of lush green lawn and the manicured garden beds layered with colour and texture.

You may recall we met at the same spot for my 60th birthday. We have a photo of you perched on the picnic rug. We enjoyed a nourishing breakfast with complimentary cake. We then wandered over to the Melbourne Cricket Ground to watch Australia and South Africa battle it out in the Boxing Day Test. Mike Hussey and Glenn McGrath put together a solid partnership to rescue Australia.

You were a useful cricketer. As always, your performance was understated. I remember you captaining one of the junior teams at St John's College in Hastings, New Zealand. You kept wickets and gave clear instructions to your team, whether they were bowling or fielding. You may not have seen yourself as a leader, but you inspired confidence and were an encourager.

Today, Mum and I went to a funeral for Simon's dad. The service was held at St Gregory the Great Catholic Church in Doncaster. There was a good crowd, many of Croatian descent. Simon's dad was a builder. He was a hard worker and a devoted family man. He loved his wife and children and committed himself to their wellbeing. He was very happy that Simon and Joanna had found each other, and that Joanna was carrying their baby. He had wrestled with cancer for 10 years but wanted to halt its progress until the birth of his granddaughter. In the providence of God this wasn't to be. He was nearly 72 when he died. It seems the cancer robbed him of years of happiness and contentment. But he didn't go without a fight.

Adam, you were a fighter too, but your fight played out on a different plane.

It was a fight for sanity. I can't imagine the pain and torment you experienced as you struggled with your confusing and conflicting thoughts. I was reminded again recently that prolonged sleeplessness produces psychosis. I know you found it increasingly difficult to sleep. The tablets did little to still your troubled mind.

And then there were the condemnatory thoughts undermining the fabric of your existence.

Relentless thoughts driving you to despair.

Destructive thoughts dismantling your resistance.

Unsolicited thoughts denying you rest.

It was also a fight for sainthood. You understood that you were chosen by God. 'To be chosen', this is a challenging thought. Some see it as favouritism. But God's choosing is always that others might be blessed.

Adam, you dedicated yourself to God and His purposes. You were a messenger of good news to the masses. You preached on the platforms of busy railway stations, you preached in shopping malls, and you preached on street corners. You gave out gospel tracts to people waiting at the bus stop, to people carrying their shopping bags, to busy people who had other things on their mind. You were faithful, you were purposeful, and you were brave. You weren't ashamed of the Gospel of Christ. You knew it had the power to save. You wept for those who didn't know God. You prayed that the light of God's word might penetrate the darkness, might find a way into their hearts. You were abused, laughed at, misunderstood. You stood with God. You stood for God.

Allan Boesak(b) was a South African resistance leader and minister. He said this,

We will go before God to be judged and God will ask, "Where are your wounds?"

And we will say, "We have no wounds."

And God will ask, "Was nothing worth fighting for?"

Adam, you fought well for that which you believed in. You will be judged a good and faithful servant. You have surely entered God's rest.

Love,

Mum and Dad

Letter Four:

May 2012

Hi Adam!

The month of May marks the first-year anniversary of the Service of Thanksgiving we held following your death. It wasn't a traditional funeral

service as there wasn't a casket. Following discussions with the funeral directors we decided to have your body cremated. It would have been costly to have your remains flown back to Victoria and there were time constraints that suggested this wasn't the best option.

We thought it important for family and friends to have the opportunity to gather publicly to remember you. Such occasions are a necessary element in the grieving process. Aunty Laine brought your ashes with her when she flew down from Newcastle for the service.

Laine and Vic have also placed a cross at the site of your death. You may recall seeing crosses by the side of country roads. They are memorials, marking the place where a life was tragically lost. They are a reminder of the sacredness of life, a symbol of the love people have for the person who has died, and a warning to be vigilant.

The service was held in St Pauls Anglican Church, Frankston. Those responsible for hiring out the church buildings were very generous in allowing us the use of their worship sanctuary. The Churchwarden, Kaylene Vlasveld, was particularly helpful with the practical details. She said she understood our pain as she had lost a child in tragic circumstances 21 years ago.

Greg Harris, our pastor and rector of the South-East Bendigo Anglican Parish led the service. Greg's father was killed in a car rally accident when he was a boy. Greg knows what it is to lose someone close, someone who has been an integral part of your life, and someone whose love you value.

We have a record of those who attended the service. They wrote their names in a register. There were many names we didn't recognise. You would have been surprised at the number of people your life touched.

Matt your boss had some kind words to say. He was concerned for you. He lost his son to suicide, but you knew that. Did you ever consider the hurt Matt felt over his family tragedy? Did you ever sense his pain? Death by suicide will always remain an unresolved loss. No amount of crying will satisfy the sorrow.

Helen Taranto also attended. You were somewhat ambivalent about your time at the market garden but Joe, Helen's husband, said you were a good worker. I know you shared *the gospel* with Helen and Joe not long before your death. Sometimes your sharing was forceful and condemnatory. I can understand that when you have strong convictions and are passionate about your calling you can become insensitive to the

thoughts and feelings of others. But it is important to remember that discovering God is a unique journey for everyone. Some would even argue that we do not find God, He finds us. Respect for others demands that we be humble and never give the impression we know it all.

Greg our neighbour was sitting towards the back of the church. He was devastated by your death. He was there with you in the Acute Mental Health Unit at the Frankston Hospital. He said to Julie and me that you did not deserve to be there. Greg had battled mental health problems for many years. Julie seemed to sense when he was struggling. His restlessness was apparent. But Greg had come to some acceptance of the challenges that life presented. Why was it you could not have a similar perspective? Was it the sense of not understanding what was happening to you? Was it the weight of expectation?

There was a segment in the service where we watched a visual presentation of your life. The many pictures captured different stages of your earthly existence. There was one picture that caused me more emotion than any other. There you were as a little boy wearing a fireman's hat. I have tried to understand why the tears came then and not at some other moment. Was it an image of innocence, a child lost in their thoughts? Was it a *dream time*, thoughts of what life might become? Was it a prophetic symbol hinting at your destiny, one who would save people from the *fire* of God's wrath? Or was it simply the beauty of your smile, a shy, hesitant smile?

After the service we gathered outside before moving off to the hall to get something to eat. Scarlett, our first grandchild and your niece, wandered over and held my hand. I needed that reassurance and the reminder that life is precious and there is a new generation needing our love and affirmation and encouragement.

Love,

Mum and Dad

Letter Five:

October 2012

Dear Adam,

We are approaching the eighteen-month anniversary of your death. I am finding it difficult to monitor my grief. I fear it is retreating within. The

pain of loss no longer overwhelms me. The tears are less frequent. It is the sadness that lingers and has become my constant companion.

I can understand the intense pain you experienced. One writer describes it as *psychache*, 'the hurt, anguish or ache that takes hold in the mind'. I can even understand that you saw death as a way of alleviating that pain. Your decisive action killed your pain. It was a permanent solution. But there was still pain, inherited pain, the pain experienced by those who were left to mourn. This is a severe pain. You found closure while we are left to wrestle with disclosure. What do we say? How much do we say? When do we grasp the moment to talk about you?

You were important to us, Adam. You were a part of us. We shared in your struggles. We celebrated your triumphs. It is your failures we are left to contemplate. Parents feel a deep attachment to their children. Their love is constant. We loved you Adam and continue to love you. We want so much for you to be understood. We search for answers and strive for understanding. Knowing why someone would choose to take their life is a deeply personal search but we do gain some insight which helps us to grieve. The journey is difficult as it is an invitation to thoroughly examine our own lives.

The sadness I feel relates to the missed opportunities, the unfulfilled dreams, the wasted talents and abilities. Yours was a life denied the chance to attain maturity. Is that being unfair? Adam, you had so much to give and so much to live. I am not prepared to concede your life was a failure. I can accept that it fell short of God's best for you. We are all encouraged to run the race set before us. Some of us stumble and fall and lose the desire to continue. It's easy to stand back and criticise mishap, it's easy to point the finger at defeat. But who fully understands the desperate struggle of mental illness. It is like quicksand. The more agitated we become the deeper we sink. Unable to free ourselves we are at the mercy of the 'tides', anything that would overtake us.

A prominent mental health professional made the comment at a forum on Youth Suicide that *suicide is preventable.* The statement 'rattled my cage'. The latter is an unusual expression. We still have a budgerigar, 'James Henry'. He is the one survivor from our time in Tyabb. If I bump his cage accidentally, he becomes frightened and flies wildly about uncertain where to land. I want to believe that suicide is preventable. But there are over 2000 suicides in Australia every year. That's not to mention the

unsuccessful attempts. If suicide is preventable, we are not doing a very good job.

In your case Adam, were you endeavouring to tell us that life had lost all meaning for you? Were you looking for us to rescue you from your thoughts? Did you want us to provide answers to your pain? I'm sorry Adam. We didn't do very well. Our understanding was limited. We believed in you. We thought you would find a way through your disappointments. We thought God and you would come through. But somehow you lost the sense of God's reassuring presence. I can feel the fear that must have gripped your heart. This is a hard sentence for a parent. Your death magnifies our own weakness and failure. We are left to ponder and cry out to God.

Don't misunderstand me, Adam. We still have the capacity to feel joy. We are not embarrassed to laugh. We look to celebrate the good times. Our grandchildren are a delight. They miss their uncle Adam. This may not be a conscious awareness. But you are very much a part of their life. How we convey you to these little ones is a great challenge. But your life will always be instructive. You were a good man, a generous man, a man of passion and commitment.

We miss you! We love you!

Mum and Dad

Letter Six:

February 2013

Hi Adam,

It has been a hot dry summer. We haven't had any significant rain for five months. There have been bushfires in different parts of the state, some still burning in inaccessible terrain. We are learning about the intense heat of bushfires. In some instances, trees have exploded. It is now argued that it is generally wiser to leave your home than stay and defend.

The township of Licola was cut off by a fire which claimed the life of an eighty-year-old man. He was in his car. You may remember we spent a day trout fishing in the Macalister River near Licola. We could see the trout breaking the surface of the water; some even followed the lure into the bank. Like many a day fishing it was relaxing and enjoyable but there were no fish to show for all our effort.

I read a passage in church this morning from Jeremiah 7. I made the comment that there was ‘fire’ in these words. Our God is a consuming fire. I find it amazing the intense heat required to extract gold from rock. It is something like 1000°C. In times of economic uncertainty investors put their money in gold. It is thought that precious metals retain their value and are not adversely affected by market fluctuations.

There are times when God applies heat to our lives. It might be extremely uncomfortable. We may plead to be removed from the situation. But God is about purity and character. He wants a people tried by fire; a people made strong through adversity; a people free of every encumbrance; a people who will stand victorious.

Sometimes we do not understand why God allows us to go through difficult experiences, why we must feel so much pain. It can be confusing and often we miss what God is doing, what He wants to achieve in our lives.

Did you misunderstand God? Did you feel He had left you? Did you try to sort out your life in your own way? None of us a particularly good at that. God’s ways are different to ours. He can see the bigger picture. He knows the plan. He wants us to prosper in all that we think and say and do. It is a good plan. He needs our acceptance. He longs for our gratitude. No matter how difficult life might seem, God can provide a way. He can lead us through the fire unharmed, victorious.

I assume you know all this. Heaven provides a wonderful perspective. I look forward to browsing the Book of Life, to get a sense of how God sees our life, what he regards as our successes and our failures, what brought him the greatest pleasure. His love is what conquers all our doubts and fears. His love is what heals and restores our broken spirit. His love is what makes us a new creation.

Mum and I find comfort in knowing that you are loved by God and are precious to Him. We join with you in offering Him our praise and thanks. All honour and power and glory are His for all eternity.

With all our love,

Mum and Dad

39. Memorials

A memorial is an object or place which serves as a focus for the memory of a person or an event. There are four memorials that contribute to our loving thoughts and memories of Adam - a river, a tree, a garden, a fund.

The Tukituki River

Our son Adam loved to fish the Tukituki River in New Zealand. It is considered one of Hawke's Bays top trout fishing locations with good numbers of rainbow trout and brown trout present.

The Tukituki River rises in the Ruahine Range, flowing across Hawke's Bay, before entering the Pacific Ocean near Haumoana, south of Napier, a distance of 110 kms.

The Maori name Tukituki roughly translates "to demolish", presumably referring to the power of the river in flood. In 1893 floods on the Tukituki washed away road and rail bridges and inundated the township of Clive.

The river flows through dry hill country, lush river flats, and willow lined riverbanks. The land bordering the river is used for farming, vineyards, and holiday cottages.

Adam would always invite a friend to accompany him on his fishing expeditions. They would access the river from the lower reaches and work their way upstream stalking their prey.

Adam taught himself the art of fly fishing and had a selection of flies to suit different conditions. Here Adam elaborates on varying approaches to accommodate the changing seasons.

'There are different fly-fishing techniques to use depending on the seasons. In winter a sinking line with a fly like a small fish can reach the trout at the bottom of the deep holes whereas in the summer when the river levels have gone down the fish rise frantically after dry flies and take a nymph without hesitation.'

Standing on the banks of the Tukituki River we watch the clear, crystal waters cascade over the small pebbles and papa rock. We are holding an urn containing Adam's ashes. It is five years ago today that Adam took his life. I'm sure he had no knowledge of the immense pain he would cause his parents, siblings and those who loved him. His sole focus was on finding a permanent solution for his intense psychological pain, confusion and despair. Adam's death wasn't an accident. There was intent. It was a demolishing of sorts, a destructive act.

We are returning Adam's ashes to the river which he described as a 'spectacular wide river which flows down from the snowcapped hills and makes its way through many twists and turns and departs out to sea."

Adam was thirty when he died. His life knew many twists and turns. He was a talented person, a competent guitarist, and a capable sportsman in cricket and rugby. He completed his plumbing apprenticeship and worked as a roofing plumber. He was also an active member of his local church spending many hours sharing his faith. Adam knew disappointment and felt guilt and shame over some of his actions. He experienced a psychotic episode and spent some time in an acute mental health unit as a voluntary patient.

His death doesn't make sense. There are questions that will ever remain a mystery. We are left with our grief which is real and constant. Like the Tukituki River there are periods when it feels more intense. We don't think of closure. It is more about assimilation, recognising its presence and acknowledging its power. Grief is never wasted unless it becomes self-indulgent. Grief has the power to transform like a turbulent river reshaping the landscape as it relentlessly rushes on toward the sea.

A Moment in Time:

It is the fifth anniversary of Adam’s death. We have been anticipating this day for weeks, if not months. It provided the impetus for our return to New Zealand, and particularly, Hawke’s Bay. We are feeling expectant and a little nervous. We spent several hours yesterday looking for a suitable site where we might spread Adam’s ashes but found the vegetation along the riverbank too thick and overgrown or the walk to the river too long and arduous.

We are reminded of another part of the Tukituki River where we dropped Adam and a friend off for a day's fishing. We find the place and pull off the road. A sign indicates that this is one of several designated access points for fly fishermen. Permission is given to walk across private property. The only request is that we close the gates to stop the cows wandering.

As we stand on the pebbly bank by the river's edge, we reflect on what a glorious autumn day we have been given. We have a sense that this moment in time is of special significance. We feel a connection with Adam knowing that this river brought him so much pleasure. It was here that he knew peace and contentment. It was here his thoughts disentangled and he was able to focus on living.

Looking upstream we observe a flock of white geese floating around a bend in the river. Their reflection in the water is enhanced by the bright morning sun.

Before us is a tree embedded in the river. There is a synchronicity here. Only yesterday we were visiting friends and had occasion to select a watercolour painting from an art folio of original works. The tree before us has an uncanny resemblance to the tree in the painting.

We take the urn with Adam's ashes and spread them on the water. Instead of flowing downstream with the current the ashes settle on the riverbed. They have become one with the river. We are overcome with emotion, joy and sadness in equal measure.

We pause to reflect. We hear the water rippling over the granite pebbles; we see the sun's rays dancing on the surface of the water. The river has become for us a living memorial and this section of the river, a sacred site.

A Memorial Tree

In a letter to the Frankston City Council, we provided a detailed request for a memorial tree to be planted in the George Pentland Gardens to acknowledge the life of our son Adam. We suggested, a small remembrance plaque, with the following wording, be displayed by the tree.

IN GRATEFUL THANKS FOR THE LIFE
OF
ADAM JOEL RICKARD

14th MARCH 1981 - 26th APRIL 2011

If you are struggling with mental health issues, don't keep it to yourself,
talk to someone who can help.

The Frankston City Council rejected our request, believing it would create a precedent. Although disappointed, we realised we could choose a tree to be our memorial tree, ‘Adam’s Tree.’

Trees are living memorials. They can remind us of the past. They can honour an individual’s life and achievements. They can symbolise what we have lost.

We often become personally attached to trees that we, or those we love, have planted. They provide comfort, assurance, and hope. They stand tall, reminding us that we too can be made strong through adversity.

Our adopted tree is found in the Frankston Botanical Gardens and is a memorial to our son Adam who took his life fourteen years ago. We refer to it as **‘Adam’s Tree.’** It is in an area of the garden where we met for family picnics. The tree draws us, inviting us to stop and remember, and give thanks for his life. It also reminds us of the commitment we have made to support one another whatever the circumstances.

A Memorial Garden

In a sheltered corner of our front yard, we have planted a memorial garden. It is a tiered garden with an arch. A plaque rests against a honey-coloured rock. It says,

IN LOVING MEMORY OF

ADAM JOEL RICKARD

14th March 1981 - 26th April 2011

Our beautiful, loving, kind, gentle son and brother

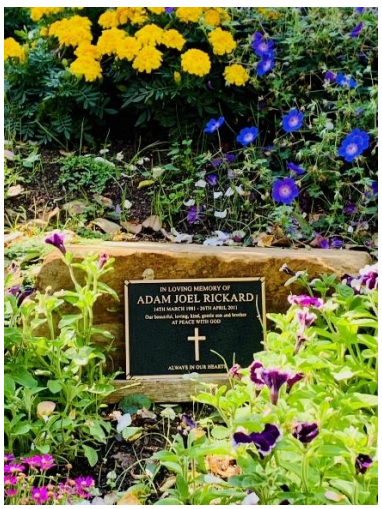
AT PEACE WITH GOD

Always in our hearts

The garden features climbing roses, standard roses, and hybrid tea bush roses, as well as bulbs, ground covers, and annuals.

A memorial garden offers you an opportunity for quiet reflection any time of the day. It is a constant reminder, calling you to be still. It invites gratitude for the seasons, a time to be born and a time to die, a time to plant and a time to reap, a time to mourn and a time to dance.

When I tend the garden, I am reminded that God is committed to our growth. He watches over us in life and death. His love nurtures us and protects us. He doesn't give up on us. I know Adam is safe in his loving arms.



The Adam Joel Rickard Memorial Fund

The *Adam Joel Rickard Memorial Fund* was established in 2015 with Steer Incorporated.

Steer Incorporated is a not-for-profit mission support organisation that uses its income-tax exempt status to assist those who want to give to missions. In recent times (November 2017) Steer Incorporated partnered with Baptist Financial Services Australia Limited to meet new regulatory requirements.

Presently, more than 430 people are partnering with Steer during this financial year (2023-2024) to provide over $4.82 million to Missions in Australia and overseas and over $95 million since we started in 1962.

Steer Incorporated invests the Interest Free Loan and distributes income to the mission and outreach programs nominated. We nominated four Mission Agencies Adam supported. They are

- Bible League International
- Samaritan's Purse Australia
- World Vision Australia
- Bible Society Australia

The Memorial Fund is a way of honouring our son, Adam, and his commitment to Christian missions.

40. Anniversaries

First Christmas:

As I'm taking down the last of the Christmas decorations, putting away the 'peace' and 'joy', tears stream down my face as my eyes rest on a photo of Adam.

The first Christmas without him.

Before long it will be a year since I have seen my brother, and yet life keeps on.

I wish I had been a better sister, listened more, intervened when it was obvious he needed help. I wish he had more happiness in his life and that he knew how loved he was. I wish he knew he was a valued human being, friend, brother and son, that we needed him, the world needed him.

I'm still in shock that he is gone. I don't talk about him much or mention his name too often. This doesn't mean I don't think of him or that my heart doesn't break most days.

I still feel that sinking feeling when I drive through Frankston and ache at the thought of those last few times we spent together.

The world is less without him. Not to say there aren't still journeys a soul can take to touch this world without a body.

There are many mysteries.

Sometimes I feel helpless as the fear of him slipping away takes hold. But then a dream, a breeze, a thought or a word comforts me. I'm reminded to acknowledge the blessing of knowing him for 30 years, to direct my thinking to the memories of love and happy times and know that no bond of love can ever be broken, not even by death.

He is my brother and always will be.

I find myself searching for memories of him and going over as much of his life as I can remember. It dawned on me how interesting this is. If Adam was still with us, would I take as much interest in him, his life, and my memories of him? I doubt it, and truth be told I didn't.

Do I look at anyone's life with such attention? Would I know if my other brothers or parents are hurting and in need of help? And would I take action? Again sadly, probably not.

Someone you love dies and you grasp at all of their memories, to keep as the only replacement you can hold on to, yet when they are living you pay little interest.

If I think of life on a spiritual level, that it's continual, that a soul is eternal, that there are lessons for us all in every experience, even suicide, then I can accept to some extent what has happened and find a little relief that all the pain and suffering he felt has hopefully ceased.

The hardest thing to deal with is the finality of it all. I will never see him or speak to him physically in this world again. Ever.

It's a hard concept to understand and accept yet I must.

So, I'll continue to live and be thankful for life's experiences, the good the bad, the happy and the sad.

I wish with all my heart that the love we feel can reach him still.

Jo

Early Christmas morning I went for a walk through the leafy streets of Mount Waverley. Some of the gardens were manicured while others appeared overgrown and neglected, a reflection of the number of properties that are now leased. Some houses were garnished with Christmas lights while Santa and his sleigh were soaring over roofs or embedded in the front lawn. Children could be heard in some of the houses running from room to room sampling their toys. One family had started the Breakfast BBQ and guests were arriving with platters of food. The mauve flowers from the Jacaranda carpeted the ground and footpath.

I was retracing an earlier walk that I took on the day following Adam’s death. I had struck out in the hope of gaining some equilibrium. I seemed incapable of processing Adam’s death. How could this have happened? The sense of desolation and pain washed over me. I walked with purpose and intensity. I walked with no thought of where I was going. I walked in search of consolation. Walking has a rhythm, and the tempo became a prayer. “Father God, Hear me.” “Father God, Help me.” “Father God,

Calm me." "Father God, Keep me." The tears would not be contained, the loss too painful to accommodate. I was vulnerable. I was shaken.

I passed people on the pavement. An elderly Chinese man was trimming the edges of his lawn with a spade. I avoided eye contact. I didn't want to be seen, to have others trying to fathom my reddened eyes and tear-stained face.

The writer of Proverbs tells us that, 'Wisdom shouts in the streets.'

I knew in my heart that God could get me through this crisis. I was once accused at a job interview of using God as a crutch. But what a disservice this is to God. God isn't some inanimate external object that can be picked up and put down at will. He is a living reality, an eternal presence, a person who thinks and feels, who loves and comforts, who strengthens and inspires. He is Creator God. Nothing exists without Him.

What was the old man telling me? His simple actions were testimony that life goes on. The lawn will need mowing and the edges cutting. We have our responsibilities, to care, to maintain, and to bring order.

Author Sue Monk Kidd writes,

'It is the peculiar nature of the world to go on spinning no matter what sort of heartbreak is happening.'

Dad

Three-month Anniversary:

On the three-month anniversary of Adam's death, I was walking to work. I had a fleeting vision of Adam. He was standing apart. He said, "Er! G'day dad!" It was a greeting I recognized, a welcome I was familiar with. It was a personal encounter, an encouragement on a day I would feel the gravity of my loss. It was a further confirmation that Adam would continue to be a part of my life even in his death.

There is no way of reconciling the death of a loved one to suicide. It haunts you, chastens you, and shakes you. You want resolution but the questions

are unrelenting, unending. How can you get used to the tragedy of a life cut short? All that potential for good snuffed out. It is like looking at Adam's tools of trade in the back of his Toyota Hilux and realizing that their intended usefulness is over. They have been abandoned. Their owner has moved on.

There is no denying the finality of death. It is a full stop. Our son's earthly existence is complete. The book is closed. There will be no more conversations. Instead, there will be memories and with the memories an awakening. "Why didn't I see that?" "How could I be so blind?" "Where was I when he most needed me?"

Guilt is always an option. It is a convenient way to inflict punishment on yourself. We do fail each other. We do miss the mark. We don't listen as we should. We are often impatient and intolerant. We are quick to judge. We don't grasp what motivates another person. We don't hear the warning bells. We are often hesitant to get involved. We reason that we don't have the reserves to accommodate the needs of the hurting. Put simply, we were not enough to keep our loved one alive.

Guilt is not something to ignore. Dr Sheila Clark writes, 'Unless it is dealt with carefully, guilt can be one of the most destructive emotions.' Guilt is cancerous. It will destroy. It must be faced. It must be owned. It must be put to rest. The starting point is an acknowledgement of your failure. Some will suggest that we acted on the information we had at the time. But it doesn't excuse the lack of discernment, or diligence, or desperation.

Did we know Adam was suicidal? This is a difficult question to consider. Adam was asked whether he had contemplated suicide. He denied any such thoughts. We had a growing awareness that he was deeply troubled and confused. Our concern was real, but we accepted Adam's diagnosis that his problems were 'spiritual'. There was a knowing but not knowing, a fear that something was wrong. There was a sense that his spirit was broken. We loved our son. We would have done anything to preserve his life.

Wisdom says that life throws up some dark days, tunnels of despair, so dark that hope fades, but not so dark that you end it all. Suicide is not an answer. It is a choice, a drastic choice, a devastating choice. The darkness

is a present reality. For some it overwhelms. But the darkness always gives way to the dawn.

For Adam, his new day was in eternity.

For us the challenge is to embrace our new day with gratitude, to choose life and to honour the remembrance of our son who lives on in our hearts.

Dad

First Year Anniversary:

Bendigo March/April

Hi Joanna, Nathan & Nicholas,
Here is a letter to my 3 children on the 1st anniversary of Adam's death. It may be a tad disjointed. Your letters will be much the same. As I approach this anniversary what is there to say? Still many questions, still so many ponderings, still so much sadness, & this is how it will continue.

Who would believe that our family would become a statistic in suicide deaths?
Who would believe that our family would lose Adam at 30 years, in what should have been the prime of his life?

It has been quite a journey in grief this year. At times my crying has turned to wailing & I wondered if the neighbours could hear. I have never known such sadness & anguish.

As a mother one never forgets her children. Her thoughts & prayers go to them, wondering if they are safe on the roads, wonder if they are content. As a Mothers' Day gift plaque says, 'A Mother holds her children's hand for a while, **their hearts forever.'**

As you know you have a wonderful father, & I have benefitted from Bruce's love, care, counsel & thoughtfulness. God was good in sending us to Bendigo. Our life is fruitful, supportive & satisfying. Bruce enjoys his job & I have friends & activities that bring me nourishment & satisfaction. We are blessed with the ministry at Holy Trinity Church in the SE Bendigo Anglican

Parish.

The Bible Study Group has been an ongoing source of support. Some of these dear ladies have lost husbands, a grandchild to an accident, a son in his 20's to an accident. They have known pain & bereavement. I know they pray for me & our family & I am very appreciative. Our study of 'Isaiah' has reminded me of the fact that God knows our beginning & our end. I marvel & struggle to think that God knew that Adam would die at 30 when he was born. Not that this was His will. He allowed it for reasons that I will not know this side of eternity.

I am so proud of you all. You & yours have supported Bruce & me in many ways. You have helped us to go on, given us purpose when life was so hard. You eased the burden especially in the early stages in practical ways.

Nicholas & Tessa thank you for helping with Adam's funeral. People commented on your singing Nick. I don't know how you could do that. Thanks also for helping with Adam's flat, clearing up, taking loads to the tip.
Theo & Scarlett in their young innocence helped us to remember that life goes on.

Nathan thank you for looking after Adam's car. You spent time & money when it would have been a burden for us. Adam's Toyota Hilux was parked outside your place for months while you wrangled with the insurance company, got the dent fixed, distributed Adam's tools, then sold the car to someone in Eaglehawk, just out of Bendigo!

Joanna thank you for your support, especially for me. I felt your love & care. Thank you for vouchers for massages etc, keeping in touch, being encouraging, telling us we were good parents!

Family, relatives & friends have taken on a new meaning & we have all experienced how God works through people in bringing comfort & solace.

Finally, I have known God's presence all my life. I have always known there was someone out there bigger than my little universe. I have believed & experienced God's mercy & grace. He is my Creator & Redeemer. The loss of Adam has rocked me like nothing else. I am trying not to base my theology on this experience though it certainly can shake one's confidence

in life. God is the same yesterday, today & in the future.

So, we go on living a full life when Adam could not. I pray for us all that we may learn courage & resilience to give HOPE for the future generations.

Love

Mum

41. Tributes

RICKARD, Adam Joel 14.03.1981 - 26.04.2011

It is with deep sadness that we announce the death of our son Adam. He was a strong & courageous man, a man of conviction, kind & generous.

Adam was a loving friend to his sister Joanna, brothers Nathan & Nicholas, sisters-in-law Maha & Tessa, niece Scarlett, & nephews Theodore & Elijah.

We know that Adam is at peace, resting in the loving arms of Jesus.

Bruce & Juliana Rickard

If I Had Known

“If I had known you were going to die, I would have given you more time. I would have listened more, been there for you. Made sure you knew how loved you were.

If I had known you were going to take your life, I would have gone with you to find help. I would have taken your weight loss seriously and tried to confront the sadness in your eyes.

If I had known that time in the park was our last time together, I would have held you in my arms and never let you go.

I would have checked you out of hospital and found some sunshine for you, somewhere.

If I had known.”

Joanna Rickard

Adam

When I'll think of you...
...When I'll remember you.
I'll think of a fragile heart.

Though I didn't know you well,
Your fragile heart beat through
Your love shone through
Your fragile heart, your fragile heart
It couldn't accept all the love surrounding it
Sickness shrouded the love that could have saved you
– This I understood –
You loved others by your actions, by your words
When I'll think of you...
This is what I'll remember of you.

But I'll always wish that you could
have found a safe haven
As I did, when I too was fragile
But we still remember the love
that shone through you – the memories.

When I'll think of you...
...When I remember you.
I know God has you in his keeping
He always was in your fragile heart.

– One day we'll find out why it broke –

Jennie Peschke

NOTES

PART ONE

1. Missing

(a) 'missing'

In Australia, a missing person is defined as 'anyone who is reported missing to police, whose whereabouts are unknown and there are serious concerns for their safety and welfare. Between 2008 and 2015 over 305,000 people were reported missing in Australia, an average 38,159 reports each year.

More than sixty percent of those who go missing return or are found within 48 hours. Ninety-eight percent are ultimately located, most alive.

(Missing persons in Australia 2008-2015 Samantha Bricknell and Lauren Renshaw)

(b) 'fasting'

From the earliest days of the church, fasting has been recognised as an important way to draw near to God, deepen one's relationship with Him, and seek His help in times of special need.

In the New Testament, the Greek word we translate as 'fast' is *nesteuo',* which means 'to abstain from eating.'

Fasting is God's appointed way for us to cry out to Him in situations of special need.

(Thomas A. Tarrants. III, D. MIN. 'The Place of Fasting in the Christian Life.' C. S. Lewis Institute)

(c) Prophet Elijah

Elijah, whose name means the 'Lord is my God,' is one of the most significant figures in Israel's history. He appeared along with Moses at the transfiguration.

Elijah was a mighty prophet at a turbulent time in Israel's history. He confronted idolatry, performed miracles, spoke God's judgment, and changed his world. (Various sources)

(d) 'In the world but not of the world' John 17:14-19

Jesus' true followers have not only been crucified to the world but also raised to new life and sent back 'into the world' to free others. We've been rescued from the darkness and given the Light not merely to flee the darkness, but to guide our steps as we go back

'into the world' to rescue others. (David Mathis - Senior Teacher, Desiring God 2012)

(e) Acute Mental Health Unit
Peninsula Health's Mental Health Inpatient Unit (2 West) is an adult mental health inpatient unit providing short-term, specialist mental health care in a safe, secure and all-inclusive, mixed gender environment.
2 West has a 6 bed, low stimulus unit and a larger 23 bed unit, comprised of several indoor and outdoor spaces.
Our service is recovery focussed, individually tailored to meet your ongoing physical, psychological, social and spiritual goals and needs. (Peninsula Health, Frankston 2025)

2. Lost

(a) Incidence of mental illness
'A mental illness can be defined as 'a clinically diagnosable disorder that significantly interferes with a person's cognitive, emotional or social abilities.' (COAG Health Council 2017)
From the 2020-2022 National Study of Mental Health and Wellbeing it is estimated that:
8.5 million Australians (43% of the population) had experienced a mental illness at some time in their life
4.3 million (22% of the population) had experienced a mental illness in the previous 12 months
(Australian Institute of Health and Welfare)

(b) 'Adam insists that the difficulties he is facing are spiritual.'
'Spiritual means relating to people's thoughts and beliefs, rather than to their bodies and physical surroundings.' (Collins Dictionary)
When a person becomes a Christian, they are 'born again.' This is not a physical birth but a spiritual birth. They are born 'of the Spirit.' The new life they receive is lived according to the Spirit - to live by the Spirit is to surrender to the Spirit's leading, to accept the Spirit's correction, to welcome the Spirit's power. When life becomes complicated, stressful, confusing, we can become insensitive to the leading of the Spirit, we can feel estranged, lost, fearful, desperate for answers.

3. Mind

(a) 'The mind is the battleground.'

The biggest battleground of our time is within our minds. If the devil can influence our mind, he can influence our life. If the devil can convince us that our thoughts are our own, he can oppress us and convince us we are the problem.
Harassing and tormenting thoughts are the most private form of demonic oppression one can have.
Victory over demonic oppression is not the absence of attack.
Victory is being able to identify when an attack is occurring. (Eric Knopf 'Your Mind is a Battleground)

(b) 'He doesn't want to be a burden.'
Feeling like a burden to those around you, including family members, friends, children, or other loved ones, can make it hard to be your authentic self and ask for what you need.
Feeling like a burden can mean you are frequently afraid you are inconveniencing, annoying, or frustrating other people. You might worry that others are growing tired of you and your needs or requests.
Feeling like a burden can cause you to isolate yourself from others. (BetterHelp Editorial Team 2025)

4. Care

(a) 'Client confidentiality'
The Mental Health and Wellbeing Act 2022 adopts a consent-driven approach to information sharing. As a general rule, consumer consent is required for the sharing of health and personal information, and consumers are able to withdraw this consent at any time.
The Act includes a positive duty for providers to share some or all of a person's health information to family, a carer or a supporter, if the consumer has consented to the sharing of that information, following the consumer's admission or discharge from an impatient service.
(Suicide prevention in mental health services - Guidelines)
We found it difficult to obtain accurate details of Adam's treatment plan, limiting our ability to support Adam and to offer considered advice.

(b) 'He would tell them what he thought they wanted to hear.'
In his book Portrait of a Suicidal Mind, Clancy Martin writes about his experience in intense psychiatric care. He says,
'I had momentarily forgotten to lie about what I was thinking. That's the cardinal rule of intensive psychiatric care... With psychiatrists, 'lie, lie, lie' is the only way to survive, the only hope of ever getting out of there.'

I sensed Adam's response to care was motivated by the thought, 'What do I need to say and do to get out of here?'

(c) 'Suicide risk is never static.'
The treatment and care of a person at risk of suicide should always be appropriate to their assessed level of risk.
Suicide risk is influenced by multiple factors. When Adam was discharged from the Acute Mental Health Unit his risk of suicide was low. However, there is evidence that the period immediately following discharge from an impatient unit is a time when suicide risk is at its greatest. (People recently discharged from acute psychiatric services are particularly vulnerable, exhibiting a suicide risk 100 to 200 times greater than normal in the month after discharge.)
Maintaining active clinical contact with a person after their discharge can alleviate this risk. Adam didn't receive this level of support.

5. Preparations

(a) 'He walked with God and was no more.' Genesis 5:24
Enoch is the father of Methuselah, the longest-living man. Enoch lived a holy and faithful life to the Lord. He is also only one of two people taken directly to heaven without experiencing death.

(b) 'Except a seed fall into the ground and die it will not produce fruit.' John 12:24
Jesus likens his ministry and the Christian life to the process of a grain dying in the ground so that it might sprout and produce fruit. Jesus died on the cross that we might have life, his life. When a person becomes a follower of Jesus they live to please him. 'Dying to self' is choosing God's will over our will. To live a fruitful life is to put God first and to live fully in his resurrection power.

(c) 'Abraham and Sarah' Genesis 21
God promised Abraham that he would father a great nation that would bless the world. Sarah, his wife, had been childless for many years. They had to wait a further twenty-five years before Isaac was born. God keeps his promises in his own way and in his own time. He wants to grow our faith and patience. (Hebrews 6:12)

(d) Lifehouse
Lifehouse is an alternative rock band from Los Angeles, California best known for their mega hits 'Hanging by A Moment' and "You and Me.' In the last 20 years, Lifehouse has released seven albums.

(e) 'A supporter of Christian missions.'

Adam was a generous supporter of Gospel For Asia, particularly their program of 'sponsoring national missionaries.'
'We connect you with a national worker (or multiple workers) in developing nations - these simple, humble servants of God minister to people's deepest needs both physically and spiritually, in communities that are in need.' (GFA World)

6. Dream

(a) 'Dreams feature prominently in the Bible.'
Throughout the Bible - in both the Old and New Testaments - dreams are mentioned over a hundred times, often prominently, and are usually messages from God.
God speaks to His people in many ways, and dreams are just one of the avenues He uses to reveal His will. Not every dream is a direct communication from God; therefore, wisdom and spiritual discernment are needed when interpreting dreams.

(b) 'Prayer is an invitation to God.'
It is an acknowledgement of our need of God, His wisdom, His understanding, His truth. We are inviting God to rule in our hearts and minds, to have His way with us. We are desperate to know His presence. We need His light to see the way forward. The alternative is 'a groping in the dark.'

7. Prayer

(a) 'a religious spirit'
It can be defined as 'an appearance or façade of righteousness and goodness Christians choose over authentic heart change.'
A person with a religious spirit wants people to think well of them. The person creates a superficial image of piety and spirituality, but it is just a veneer, effectively covering up a multitude of spiritual, emotional and relational issues and problems.
The seeds that produce a religious spirit are pride, self-sufficiency and a reluctance to appear less-than-perfect. (Reference: Lisa M. Price 2024)

8. Gethsemane

(a) 'The sacrament of communion'

It is a celebration of God's presence. The bread and the wine are symbols of His life given for us. We remember the brokenness of Jesus on the cross and His words, 'Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.'
When we eat the bread and drink the wine we welcome Jesus into our lives, and we give thanks for all that He gives to us - the 'words of life' that are unshakable, the 'promises of God' that are immovable, and 'the Spirit of God' who lives within us - our teacher, our comforter, our guarantor of life eternal.

(b) 'Praying in the Spirit'
It is praying for things the Spirit leads us to pray for. It is harmonising our thoughts and desires with the will of God. It is an exercise of faith, trusting God to hear, understand, and act.
When we pray in the Spirit our words are inspired by the Spirit. We give voice to His concerns; we speak with the authority he bestows. Some situations demand that we allow the Spirit of God to speak through us. The Bible refers to this form of prayer as 'praying in tongues.' It allows the Spirit of God to formulate prayers that are beyond our understanding, that reflect a 'deeper wisdom,' that capture the heart of God.

(c) Keith Green
A Christian singer and songwriter who died tragically in a small plane crash at the age of 28. He was a powerful storyteller and a passionate evangelist, who used his concerts to share his love of Jesus. He challenged Christian young people to 'wake-up' and take seriously the call of God on their life. He argued that there was no room for compromise.

9. Final Word

(a) Suicide notes
A message written by a person who intends to die by suicide. Suicide notes are generally handwritten and offer insight into the mind of the deceased. They are a final word to the bereaved. They cover themes such as anger, guilt, shame, sorrow, regret, hopelessness, frustration, personal failure, and love for those left behind.

10. Silence

11. Death

(a) ‘The Unique Grief of Suicide: Questions and Hope’
Tom Smith draws on his own grief following the suicide of his twenty-six-year-old daughter, Karla, to address some of the painful questions that arise. He readily admits that some questions do not have easy answers.

PART TWO

12. Early Years

(a) Cyclone Bola
Cyclone Bola struck the Hawkes Bay and the Gisborne/East Cape region on the East Coast of the North Island on 7 March 1988. It was one of the most damaging cyclones to hit New Zealand.
The cyclone slowed as it moved over the area, resulting in over three days of torrential rain. The rain caused devastating floods and slips, resulting in the evacuation of thousands of people and the death of three persons.

(b) Home schooling
Home schooling is where you take on responsibility for teaching your child. It is an alternative to your child going to school.
Home schooling can take many forms, including
- one or more parents educating their child
- groups of home-schooling students coming together for short periods
attending excursions and activities in the community
- using a tutor for individual subjects, for example tutoring in maths
(VRQA - Victorian Registration & Qualification Authority)

(c) Childhood trauma
Childhood trauma can occur when a child witnesses or experiences overwhelming negative events in childhood. A definition:
‘The experience of an event by a child that is emotionally painful or distressful, which often results in lasting mental and physical effects.’
(The National Institute of Mental Health -USA)
The trauma can be interpersonal - trauma that happens between people - abuse, neglect...
The trauma can be caused by events, such as accidents, natural disasters, medical procedures, or the sudden loss of a parent or caregiver.

In Australia one in four adults - approximately 5 million people - are estimated to have experienced significant childhood trauma. (Kezelman et al., 2015)

13. Intermediate Years

(a) 1931 Earthquake

On 3 February 1931, a magnitude 7.8 earthquake occurred in the Hawke's Bay region of New Zealand, causing extensive damage to much of Napier city and Hastings. The total death toll was 256 and much of Napier's CBD was destroyed by fires that began within minutes of the earthquake and rapidly swept through the city.
The event caused the largest loss of life and most extensive damage of any quake in New Zealand's history.

(b) Life transitions

A transition is an event that changes the course of your life. They can be expected - changing schools, or unexpected - the loss of a friend or loved one.
Humans value consistency and routine. Any significant change requires adjustment and may take a toll on our mental health. We may experience mixed emotions - anxiety, excitement, loss, hope. Each time we transition, we have to let go of something.

(c) Depression

Depression is a common mental disorder. It involves a depressed mood or loss of pleasure or interest in activities for long periods of time.
It can affect all aspects of life, including relationships with family, friends, and community. It can result from or lead to problems at school and at work.
Depression can happen to anyone. People who have lived through abuse, severe losses or other stressful events are more likely to develop depression. (World Health Organisation)

14. Final Years

(a) Baptism

Christian baptism is a sacrament of the Church.
It is a symbol of Christ's burial and resurrection. It identifies us with Christ's death on the cross. It is an act of faith, uniting us to Christ and his people. It is a public, outward declaration that reflects a personal, inward faith and commitment.

(b) Toyota Hilux
Adam purchased a Toyota Hilux that was listed on the Written-Off Vehicle Register.
A vehicle is written off if the cost to repair it would be more than the value of the vehicle. A vehicle can also be written off if it is so badly damaged that it wouldn't be safe to drive.
It is unclear if Adam knew he was purchasing a vehicle that had been written off, or whether he asked the seller for written proof of what had been repaired. It is advised that the vehicle be checked by a professional inspector to assess the quality of repairs.

(c) Emotional intelligence
Emotional intelligence is the ability to perceive, interpret, demonstrate, control, evaluate, and use emotions to communicate with and relate to others effectively and constructively.
People who have fewer emotional skills tend to get in more arguments, have lower quality relationships, and have poor emotional coping skills. (Kendra Cherry, Very Well Mind, 2024)

(d) Religious fervour
Religious fervour refers to an intense and passionate commitment to a particular faith or belief system, often resulting in active participation in religious practices and a desire to spread those beliefs. Men like Paul, St Augustine, and Martin Luther exhibited spiritual fervour.
Religious fervour takes on a negative aspect when it seen as the intense passion associated with religious devotion that leads to potential dangers of self-will and passion overshadowing righteousness.

PART THREE

15. The Search for Answers

(a) 'This Sunrise of Wonder' – Michael Mayne
Michael Mayne was the Dean of Westminster Abbey 1986-96. His father died by suicide when he was very young.
Michael Mayne is considered one of the greatest Anglican Priest-writers. *This Sunrise of Wonder* contains twenty-four letters, an offering to his grandchildren of all that has inspired him in literature, music, and art.

(b) 'Life After Suicide' – Jennifer Ashton MD

Jennifer Ashton, M.D., has witnessed firsthand the impact of a loved one's suicide. When her ex-husband killed himself soon after their divorce, her worlds - and that of her children - was shattered.
Life After Suicide is both a call to arms against this dangerous, devastating epidemic, and an affecting story of personal grief and loss.

(c) 'Making Peace with Suicide' – Adele Ryan McDowell, Ph.D.
Adele Ryan McDowell, Ph.D., is a psychotherapist with over 35 years experience. Her work focuses on helping clients find hope, balance, and peace in the face of crisis, trauma, abuse, and grief.
Making Peace with Suicide includes stories of courage, vulnerability, and steadfastness from both the survivors of suicidal loss as well as the unique perspective of the formerly suicidal.

16. Understanding Suicide

(a) Patrick McGorry
Professor Patrick McGorry AO is a psychiatrist known world-wide for his development and scaling up of early intervention and youth mental health services and for mental health innovation, advocacy and reform.
In 2010 Professor McGorry was selected as Australian of the Year and became an Officer of the Order of Australia.

(b) Frank Page
Dr. Frank Page was a successful church pastor for many years. He was the president of the Southern Baptist Convention from 2006 to 2008, and the president of the denomination's Executive Committee from 2010 to 2018. His daughter, Melissa, took her life in 2009. The book '*Melissa: A Father's Lessons from a Daughter's Suicide'* was published June 1, 2013.

(c) Joseph Conrad
Joseph Conrad was a native of the Polish Ukraine who grew up under Russian rule, spoke fluent French, and became a major modern author in English. He wrote novels and stories, many in nautical settings, that depicted crises of human individuality in the midst of what he saw as an indifferent, inscrutable, and amoral world. His notable works include *Heart of Darkness* (1899) and *Lord Jim* (1900).

(d) Gillian Bouras
Gillian Bouras is an Australian writer who has been based in the Peloponnese, Greece, for more than 30 years. She has had eight books published. In 1966, her younger sister Jacqui died by suicide, after decades of mental illness. In her book, *No Time for Dances,*

Bouras explores her sister's life in an attempt to understand her suicide.

(e) Dr. Thomas Joiner
Dr. Thomas Joiner is a professor of psychology who has devoted much time and thought toward studying suicide. His books, *Why People Die by Suicide* and *Myths About Suicide,* present academic and personal insights into the subject, stemming from both his research and the experience of losing his father to suicide in 1990.

17. Suicidal Mind

(a) 'Healing After the Suicide of a Loved One' – Ann Smolin and John Guinin
The book, *Healing After the Suicide of a Loved One,* was published in June 1993. This excellent handbook is a guide to recovery and healing in the aftermath of a loved one's suicide. It includes straightforward information about psychiatric disorders, when to seek professional help, and practical strategies for coping and healing.

(b) 'The Suicidal Mind' – Edwin S. Schneidman
Schneidman was an American clinical psychologist and a pioneer in the field of suicide prevention. He died in 2009.
The book, *The Suicidal Mind,* was published in April 1998. It is a groundbreaking work providing insight into the suicidal impulse and gives helpful suggestions on how to counteract it. Dr Schneidman presents a bold and simple premise: the main cause of suicide is psychological pain or 'psychache,' which stems from thwarted or distorted psychological needs.

(c) Ronald Rolheiser
Fr. Rolheiser is a Roman Catholic priest. He is a lecturer and writer with a weekly column that is carried in more than 50 newspapers.
In his book, *Bruised and Wounded: Struggling to Understand Suicide,* published in December 2019, Rolheiser offers hope and healing to those who have experienced the loss of a loved one or anyone trying to understand suicide.

(d) Joni Eareckson Tada
Joni has been a quadriplegic for over fifty years. She is an internationally known advocate for people with disabilities. She is the founder and CEO of Joni and Friends International Disability Centre, the author of more than 50 books, and a featured speaker on numerous media outlets.

(e) Roy F. Baumeister

Professor Roy F. Baumeister is a social psychologist, known for his work on willpower, self-control and self-esteem, and how they relate to human morality and success.

(f) Arthur Schopenhauer

Arthur Schopenhauer was a German philosopher in the 19th century. He was often called the 'philosopher of pessimism,' who was primarily important as the exponent of a metaphysical doctrine of the will.

(g) C G Jung

Carl Gustav Jung was one of psychology's pioneering figures of the 20th century. He founded the idea of analytical psychology. The core of Carl Jung's theory system was the belief that the whole of the individual's experience should be respected and included, rather than aspects being pathologized or disavowed; this included the individual's unwanted 'shadow' aspects - such as, for example, their aggressive, envious, destructive qualities, as well as their spiritual longings and experiences.

(h) Matt Haig

Matt Haig is an English author and journalist. He has written both fiction and non-fiction books for children and adults.

His book, *Reasons to Stay Alive,'* published in March 2015, is a novel and memoir. It is based on his experiences of living with depression and anxiety disorder, which he suffered from the age of 24. It documents his journey back from the brink of an emotional breakdown.

(i) Donald Winnicott

Donald Woods Winnicott was a British paediatrician and psychoanalyst who studied child development in the 20th century. For Donald Winnicott, your psyche isn't just in your head - it emerges from your relationships with others and the world.

(j) John Brogden

John Brogden is an Australian businessman, former politician, former Chair of Lifeline Australia and the Honorary President of LifeLine International.

A global leader in suicide prevention and crisis helplines, Brogden's passion for mental illness recovery stems from his own suicide attempt which marked a turning point in his life and reframed the public discourse around depression and suicide.

He is a figure now synonymous with organisational leadership and the advocacy of mental wellbeing and resilience. He has walked a very public journey of success, failure and redemption.

His book, *Profiles of Hope,* published in September 2024, is a collection of powerful Australian stories of survival, recovery, and purpose.

(k) Leo Buscaglia
Leo Buscaglia was an American professor of special education, motivational speaker, and author. He died in 1998. He wrote more than a dozen books, most of which deal with the experience of love. These include *Living, Loving, and Learning; Loving Each Other; Born for Love.*

18. Rick Factors

(a) Dr. Michelle Lim
Dr. Michelle Lim is a senior lecturer in clinical psychology at Swinburne University of Technology. Dr Lim is the head of the Social Health and Wellbeing Laboratory which aims to generate rigorous research related to loneliness.

(b) Sir Ken Robinson
Sir Ken Robinson was a British-born teacher, author and lecturer. He challenged the way we educate children, championing a radical rethink of how our school systems cultivate creativity and acknowledge multiple types of intelligence. His books have inspired millions around the world, including *Out of Our Minds: Learning to Be Creative (2001).* He died aged 70 of cancer on August 21, 2020.

(c) Marilynne Robinson
Marilynne Robinson was born in 1943 in Sandpoint, Idaho. She is an American novelist and essayist who has received numerous awards across her writing career. Her novel *Gilead* (2005) won her the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction. She brings serious theology into her fictional works. She wrote in one essay, 'Where religion has *dropped out of the cultural conversation,* we begin to adopt *a very small view of ourselves and others.*

(d) Dr. Kelly Flanagan
Dr. Kelly Flanagan is an author, speaker, personal and relationship coach, and licensed clinical psychologist with two decades of expertise in interpersonal relationships. He has written two non-fiction books - *Loveable and True Companions,* and his bestselling first novel, *The Unhiding of Elijah Campbell,* has won multiple literary awards.

(e) Ann Voskamp

Ann Voskamp is a Christian blogger and author of *One Thousand Gifts, Waymaker,* and other life affirming books. She is married to a farmer and is a mother to seven children (one adopted). She describes her family as simple, farming folk who worship in a Brethren Bible Chapel.

19 Protective Factors

(a) 'Man's Search for Meaning' – Viktor Frankl
Man's Search for Meaning is Victor Frankl's story of his struggle for survival in Auschwitz and other Nazi concentration camps. The book delves deep into the human psyche, exploring themes of suffering, purpose, and hope.
Viktor E. Frankl (1905-1997) was an Austrian neurologist and psychiatrist as well as a Holocaust survivor. He was the founder of 'the school of logotherapy.' He published more than thirty books.

(b) Harold S. Kushner
Harold S. Kushner was a Jewish Rabbi, storyteller, interpreter of the Bible, and counsellor, whose best-selling books - *When Bad Things Happen to Good People* - encourage readers to maintain their belief in God's benevolence even when things seem to go wrong, that God provides solace to those who are afflicted.

(c) 'Reason to Stay Alive' - Matt Haig
Refer: 17. The Suicidal Mind - (H)

20. The Suicidal Crisis

(a) 'The Suicidal Crisis' – Igor Galynker, MD, PhD
The Suicidal Crisis is an essential work for every mental health professional and for anyone who would like to have a framework for understanding suicide. Written by master clinician Dr. Igor Galynker, the book presents methods for a systematic and comprehensive assessment of short-term suicide risk and for conducting risk assessment interviews in different settings.

21. Supporting Someone who is Suicidal

(a) Don Ritchie

Don Ritchie, sometimes known as the angel or watchman of the Gap, is acknowledged to have stopped about 160 people from jumping to their deaths. His kind words and invitations into his home in times of trouble made an enormous difference. The Don Ritchie Grove was established to commemorate a man who saved hundreds of lives by taking the time to talk to troubled souls who were contemplating ending their life.

22. What Factors Prompt Men to Consider Suicide

(a) Blake Roberts
Blake Roberts is a licensed trauma therapist. He owns a private practice outside of Nashville, TN. He writes on Substack, helping people to be more intentional with their relationships, their creativity, and their faith.

(b) Maya Angelou
Maya Angelou was an acclaimed American poet, storyteller, and activist, whose several volumes of autobiography explore the themes of economic, racial, and sexual oppression. Through her powerful writings she has inspired generations of women and all people who struggle to overcome prejudice, discrimination and abuse.

(c) Jonathon M. Seidl
Jonathon Seidl is a bestselling author and speaker on faith, mental health, and addiction. He writes a daily blog 'The Veritas Daily' where he shares thoughts on faith, life, family, mental health, addiction, recovery, and whatever else God tells him to write about.

(d) John Brogden
Refer: 17. Suicidal Mind - (j)

(e) James Packer
James Packer is an Australian billionaire businessman and investor. He is the son of the famous media owner Kerry Packer. Packer speaks openly about his struggles with mental health. In 2020 he revealed he had bipolar disorder.

(f) Ian Thorpe
Ian Thorpe is one of Australia's most successful Olympians. He won five Olympic Games gold medals. Since being medically diagnosed with depression, he has found ways to cope with the illness and now openly talks about it to remove the stigma and raise awareness of mental health conditions.

23. The Role of the Church in Suicide Prevention

(a) 'I have come...'
John 10:10 The abundant life Jesus promises is about an internal transformation. We can experience the fullness of joy, love, and peace that Jesus offers, regardless of our external circumstances.

(b) King Saul
Saul was chosen by God to be the first king of Israel. He was anointed by the prophet Samuel. At the height of his career Saul achieved military victories over his enemies - Moab, the Ammonites, Edom, the kings of Zobah, and the Philistines.
Saul's character flaws led to his downfall. He failed to listen to God and to obey his instructions.
After losing his sons and his troops in battle, Saul ended his life by falling on his sword.

(c) Peter
Peter was a disciple of Jesus, and along with James and John, was one of Jesus' closest companions. In the gospels, he is portrayed as impetuous, always speaking his mind and acting on impulse. Peter became a prominent leader in the early church.

(d) 'a threefold cord'
Ecclesiastes 4:12 The imagery of a three-stranded cord illustrates the strength found in unity. Individually, strands can break easily, but when woven together, they become much stronger and resilient.
(Ref: Global Disciples Canada)

(e) Abraham
Abraham is the father of the Jewish people and husband to Sarah. He is considered the father of faith. The promises God made to him were received by faith. Faith is more than believing, it is acting on what God has said. Abraham was able to make a full and unconditional surrender to God's will because he knew the One who was asking it.

(f) Hannah
Hannah was one of the wives of Elkanah. Although infertile, she prays to God for a child. Her faith and perseverance are rewarded, and she becomes the mother of Samuel the prophet.

(g) Joseph
Joseph is the son of Jacob and his wife Rachel (Genesis 37-50) He is known as 'the righteous one.' He was favoured by his father. His brothers sold him into slavery. Joseph trusted God. His life of faithful

service in the Egyptian court brought blessing to himself, his family, and the nations.

(h) A. J. Swoboda
A. J. Swobada (Ph.D., Birmingham) is an associate professor of Bible and Theology at Bushnell University and lead mentor for the Doctor of Ministry Program on Spiritual Formation and Soul Care at Friends University. He is the author of many books and writes the widely read 'Low-Level Theologian' Substack.

(i) Brené Brown
Brené Brown is a researcher, storyteller, and Texan who has spent the past two decades studying courage, vulnerability shame, and empathy. She is the author of six #1 New York Times bestsellers including *Dare to Lead* and *The Gifts of Imperfection.*

(j) Tish Harrison Warren
Tish Harrison Warren is a writer and an Anglican priest. She is the author of several books, including *Liturgy of the Ordinary: Sacred Practices in Everyday Life* and *Prayer in the Night: For Those Who Work, or Watch, or Weep* which won the 2022 ECPA Christian Book of the Year.

(k) Royal Commission into child sexual abuse
The Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse was established on 11 January 2013 by the former Governor-General of the Commonwealth of Australia, the Honourable Dame Quentin Bryce AD CVO, in response to allegations of sexual abuse of children in institutional contexts that had been emerging in Australia for many years. The Final Report included a total of 189 new recommendations, many of which aimed at making institutions safer for children.

(l) Bijal Shah
Bijal Shah is a bibliotherapist, author, book curator, and founder of Book Therapy. Her recent book *Bibliotherapy: The Healing Power of Reading* offers readers tools and insights to embark on their own bibliotherapy journeys, harnessing the transformative potential of literature for their own well-being and growth.

24. Suicidal Narratives

(a) Frederick Buechner
Frederick Buechner was an American writer and theologian. The author of thirty-nine published books, he has been and continues to

be an important source of inspiration and learning for many readers, writers, preachers, and theologians. Buechner's writing has often been praised for its ability to inspire readers to see grace in their daily lives.

(b) Brit Troyen
The Atlantic is an American magazine and multi-platform publisher based in Washinton, D.C. It features articles on politics, foreign affairs, business, culture, technology, health, and more.

(c) 'The Sorrows of Young Werther'
The Sorrows of Young Werther was written by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe and published in 1774. A revised edition appeared in 1787. It explores the mind of a sensitive young man at odds with society and ill-equipped to cope with life. The book was an immediate success, and a cult rapidly grew up around it, resulting in numerous copycat deaths.

(d) Steven Schlozman MD
Steven Schlozman, M.D. is an assistant professor of Psychiatry at Harvard Medical School. He teaches psychiatry at Harvard Medical School. He is a novelist and short story writer.

(e) 'All My Puny Sorrows' – Miriam Toews
Miriam Toews was born and raised in Steinbach, Manitoba, Canada, the second daughter of Mennonite parents.
All My Puny Sorrows is the story of two sisters, Elfrieda and Yolandi, suicide and how to carry on with hope when grief loads the heart.

(f) 'Home' – Marilynne Robinson
Home is a moving book about families, family secrets, and the passing of the generations, about love and death and faith.

(g) Susan Beaton
Susan Beaton is a psychologist with 25 years of experience working in the Suicide Prevention field. She has been involved with suicide prevention both in Australian and the USA. Her most recent publication is *Safety First - not last! Suicide Safety Planning Intervention (SPI)*

(h) 'Let's Talk About Suicide: Language Matters' – Jonathon Singer and Sean Erreger
The article was awarded the 2016 NASW Media Award for best magazine article.
Jonathon B. Singer, Ph.D., LCSW, is an associate professor of social work at Loyola University Chicago.
Sean Erreger, LCSW, is a clinical mental health case manager for youth.

PART FOUR

25. Grief is Universal

(a) Naja Marie Aidt
Naja Marie Aidt is a Danish poet and writer. She was born in Greenland in 1963, where her father worked as a teacher. In 1970, the family moved to Copenhagen. In addition to fiction, she has published poetry collections, theatre and radio plays, lyrics and children's books. In 2017 she published *When Death Takes Something from You, Give it Back: Carl's Book,* about the death of her son.

(b) 'A Road to Grantchester' - James Runcie
The Hon. James Robert Runcie (born 1959 in Cambridge) is a British novelist, documentary filmmaker, television producer, and theatre director.
The Road to Grantchester is the prequel to the Grantchester series that follows a young Sidney Chambers through wartime Italy and post-war London until his arrival in Grantchester.

26. Grief is Personal

(a) David Kessler
David Kessler is an American author, public speaker, and death and grieving expert. He is the author of seven books on grief, including his latest bestselling book, *Finding Meaning: The Sixth Stage of Grief.*

(b) Edith Eger
Edith Eva Eger is a Czechoslovakian-born American psychologist, a Holocaust survivor and a specialist in the treatment of post-traumatic stress disorder. Her memoir entitled *The Choice: Embrace the Possible,* published in 2017, became an international bestseller.

27. Grief is Isolating

(a) Indira Naidoo
Indira Naidoo is an Australian author, journalist, and television and radio presenter. During her 30-year award-winning journalistic

career, Ms Naidoo has hosted and reported for some of the country's most distinguished news and current affair programs. She currently hosts the Compass show on ABC TV.

(b) Meghan O'Rourke
Meghan O'Rourke is a bestselling author, poet, and speaker, working at the intersection of health, illness and social psychology, with the goal of helping people think and feel better. Her latest book, The Invisible Kingdom: Reimagining Chronic Illness was published in 2022.

(c) Sloane Crowley
Sloane Crowley is a New York Times bestselling author of the memoir *Grief is for People,* published in 2024. After the pain and confusion of losing her closest friend to suicide, she looks for answers in philosophy and art, hoping for a framework more useful than the unavoidable stages of grief.

(d) Ann Patchett
Ann Patchett is the author of nine novels including *The Dutch House* and *Tom Lake.* Her books have been both New York Times Notable Books and New York Times bestsellers. Her work has been translated into more than thirty languages. In 2012 she was named by Time magazine as one of the 100 Most Influential People in the World.

(e) Grief... in the workplace
Most people spend a good part of their day at work and, as a result, the people the work with can become like a close extended family. When a colleague dies, or when someone in the workplace is grieving a death, the impact on co-workers can significantly affect the workplace.

Workers who feel cared for and supported are more likely to experience an improved recovery. Colleagues and employers don't need to be experts in bereavement, but it is important they have some understanding of the impact of grief and how to respond appropriately. (Grief Australia - Bereavement in the Workplace)

28. Grief is a Gift

(a) Pete Deison
Dr. Pete Deison is a pastor, teacher, and president of Park Cities Presbyterian Church Foundation. He has served as a pastor in the

Presbyterian Church of America since 1978. In his book, *Visits from Heaven,* he writes about the tragic loss of his wife to suicide.

(b) Frederick Buechner
Refer: 24. Suicidal Narratives (a)

(c) Cheryl Strayed
Cheryl Strayed is an American writer and podcast host. Her bestselling book *Wild: From Lost to Found on the Pacific Crest Trail,* was made into an Oscar-nominated film. Her books have sold more than 5 million copies around the world and have been translated into forty languages.

29. The Language of Grief

(a) 'Macbeth' - William Shakespeare
Macbeth is a tragedy by William Shakespeare, thought to have been first performed in 1606. It is considered one of his darkest and most powerful works. Set primarily in Scotland, the play mixes witchcraft, prophecy, and murder.

(b) Francis Weller
Francis Weller is a California-based psychotherapist and writer whose work focuses on the sacred power of loss, darkness and self-renewal.

(c) 'The Dictionary of Lost Words' - Pip Williams
The Dictionary of Lost Words is the debut novel by Australian writer Pip Williams, published in March 2020. Set in England during the time of World War 1 and the women's suffrage movement, it tells a fictionalised tale of a true event: the creation of the Oxford English Dictionary.

30. Rituals of Grief

(a) 'A Hole in the World' - Amanda Held Opelt
Amanda Held Opelt is a songwriter, speaker, and author of the books *A Hole in the World* and *Holy Unhappiness.* She writes about faith, grief, and creativity, and believes in the power of community, ritual, shared worship, and storytelling to heal even our deepest wounds.

(b) Dr. Gary LeBlanc
Dr. Gary LeBlanc is Professor of Sociology at Atlantic Baptist University, in Moncton, N.B. Canada. In *Grieving the Unexpected: The Suicide of a Son,* Dr. LeBlanc openly discusses his family's struggle to

survive such a dreadful event, the variables that sustained them during the initial shock and the healing process that enabled them to commence their journey toward wholeness.

(c) Ken Gire
Ken Gire, a full-time writer and speaker, is the founder of Reflective Living, a nonprofit ministry devoted to helping people to slow down and live more reflective lives so they can experience life more deeply, especially life with God and other people. He is the author of more than twenty books including *The Divine Embrace* and *Windows of the Soul.*

(d) 'The Paris Library' - Janet Skeslien Charles
Janet Skeslien Charles is the New York Times and internationally bestselling author of *The Paris Library.* The novel is based on the true Second World War story of the heroic librarians at the American Library in Paris. The novel is all about the power of reading and its ability to build resilience.

31. Conversations About Grief

(a) 'We Need to Talk' - Celeste Headlee
Celeste Headlee is the host of the daily news show *On Second Thought* on Georgia Public Broadcasting. In *We Need to Talk,* she outlines the strategies that have made her a better conversationalist - and offers simple tools that can improve anyone's communication.

(b) Laurie Burrows Grad
Laurie Burrows Grad is a grief blogger, cookbook author, television chef, food journalist, and activist/fundraiser for the Alzheimer's Association. In 2015 her husband of 47 years died suddenly. She encourages her readers to talk openly about their grief.

(c) Litsa Williams
Litsa Williams, MA, LCSW-C, is the co-founder of the online grief community *What's Your Grief* and a grief therapist with 15 years of experience in specialising in sudden and traumatic loss, substance abuse, and ambiguous grief.

(d) 'The Pursuit of Attention' - Charles Derber
Charles Derber is a professor of Sociology at Boston College. In his book *The Pursuit of Attention,* Derber argues that there is a general lack of social support in today's America, one which causes people to vie hungrily for attention, and he shows how individuals will often employ numerous techniques to turn the course of a conversation towards themselves.

(e) James P. Krehbiel
James P. Krehbiel, Ed.S., LPC, CCBT is an educator, writer, licensed professional counsellor and nationally certified cognitive-behavioural therapist practicing in Scottsdale, Arizona. He specialises in treating anxiety and depression for adults and children.

(f) Nancy Guthrie
Nancy Guthrie attends Cornerstone Presbyterian Church, in Franklin, Tennessee. Following the loss of two of her children, Guthrie has written numerous books on the nature of grief and suffering including *What Grieving People Wish You Knew About What Really Helps (and What Really Hurts).*

PART FIVE

32. Suicide Grief

(a) Dr. Gary LeBlanc

Refer: 30. Rituals of Grief (b)

(b) Alan D. Wolfelt, Ph.D., CT
Alan D. Wolfelt is the director of the Centre for Loss and Life Transition which offers education and support to grievers and bereavement caregivers. Dr. Alan Wolfelt has been recognised as one of North America's leading death educators and grief counsellors. His books have sold more than a million copies including *You're Not Crazy - You're Grieving.*

(c) Gillian Bouras

Refer: 16. Understanding Suicide (d)

(d) Dr. Sheila Clark
Dr Sheila Clark is a GP with a special interest in grief counselling, based in Adelaide, and adjunct senior lecturer with the Discipline of General Practice at the University of Adelaide. She is the author of *After Suicide - Help for the Bereaved,* a comprehensive handbook dealing with a specific area of bereavement after suicide. It shows practical commonsense and careful guidelines to help people find their way through this time.

33. Survival

(a) Dr. Sheila Clark

Refer: 32. Suicide Grief - (d)

(b) Henry Wordsworth Longfellow

Henry Wordsworth Longfellow (1807-1882) was the most popular American poet in the 19th century, known for such works as *The Song of Hiawatha* (1855) and *Paul Revere's Ride* (1863)

During his lifetime he was loved and admired both at home and abroad. In 1884 he was honoured by the placing of a memorial bust in Poet's Corner of Westminster Abbey in London, the first American to be so recognised.

(c) Rachel Joyce

Rachel Joyce is the award-winning author of 5 international bestselling novels including *Miss Benson's Beetle* and the *Unlikely Pilgrimage of Harold Fry* which has been made into a movie starring Jim Broadbent and Penelope Wilton.

She writes in an old shepherd's hut in a field, looking over the valley. It's a place that feels alive with light and weather, nature and stories.

(d) Amanda Held Opelt

Refer: 30. Rituals of Grief - (a)

(e) Alan D. Wolfelt PhD

Refer: 32. Suicide Grief - (b)

(f) Indira Naidoo

Refer: 27. Grief is Isolating - (a)

(g) Ross Gay

Ross Gay is a poet, essayist, teacher, and passionate community gardener. He lives in Bloomington, Indiana, where he's a professor of English at Indiana University. His books include *The Book of Delights, The Book of (More) Delights,* and *Inciting Joy.*

(h) George Orwell

George Orwell, whose real name was Eric Blair, was a British journalist and author, who wrote two of the most famous novels of the 20th century 'Animal Farm' and 'Nineteen Eighty-Four'.

(i) Frederic Gros

Frederic Gros is a professor of philosophy at the University of Paris XII and the Institute of Political Studies, Paris. In *A Philosophy of Walking,* he uses philosophy to show how walking can bring about a sense of peace.

(j) Rebecca Solnit
Writer, historian, and activist Rebecca Solinti is the author of more than twenty books on feminism, western and urban history, popular power, social change and insurrection, wandering and walking, hope and catastrophe. Her books include *Orwell's Roses, Hope in the Dark* and *A Paradise Built in Hell.*

(k) Hope Edelman
Hope Edelman has been writing, speaking, and leading workshops and retreats in the bereavement field for more than 25 years. She was 17 when she lost her mother to breast cancer and 40 when her father died, events that inspired her to offer grief education and support to those who cannot otherwise receive it.

34. Faith

(a) Nick Cave
Nick Cave is a musician, songwriter, screenwriter, novelist and actor. He was born in Warracknabeal, Victoria in 1957 and educated at Caulfield Grammar School. His 15-year-old son, Arthur, fell off a cliff in Brighton, England, in 2015, and his eldest son Jethro died in 2022 at age 31. His website, The Red Hand Files, is a place where fans ask him questions and he can talk about what it is to be human.

(b) Philip Gulley
Philip Gulley is a Quaker pastor and popular author and speaker from Danville, Indiana where he lives today with his wife, Joan. He has written twenty-two books including the Harmony fiction series.

35. Forgiveness

(a) Rick Warren
Pastor Rick Warren and his wife, Kay, founded Saddleback Church in 1980 in Lake Forest, California. His books include *The Purpose Driven Life* and *The Purpose Driven Church.*

(b) Jackie French Jackie French is an Australian author historian and ecologist. She has written more than 200 books, including best-sellers such as *Diary of a Wombat* and *Hitler's Daughter.*

(c) Ann Voskamp

Refer: 18. Risk Factors - (e)

(d) Cormac McCarthy

Cormac McCarthy was a highly acclaimed American novelist and screenwriter celebrated for his distinctive literary style, philosophical depth, and exploration of violence, morality, and the human condition. His writing was often characterised by sparse punctuation and lyrical biblical language.

(e) Dr. Edith Eger

Refer: 26. Grief is Personal - (b)

36. Hope

(a) Raynor Winn

Raynor Winn is the author and protagonist of one of the most successful British non-fiction books in recent years. *The Salt Path* was published in 2018, selling more than two million copies worldwide. There is considerable debate about the accuracy of some of the author's claims.

(b) Matt Haig

Refer: 17. Suicidal Mind - (h)

(c) Barack Obama

Barack Obama served as the 44th president of the United States from 2009 to 2017. A member of the Democratic Party, he was the first African American president. His memoir *A Promised Land* received critical acclaim.

(d) Dr. Judith Rich

Dr. Judith Rich is a transformational coach, consciousness midwife, retreat leader and author.

(e) Ann Voskamp

Refer: 18. Risk Factors - (e)

(f) Nick Cave

Refer: 34. Faith - (a)

(g) Abram Goldberg

Abram Goldberg was a Holocaust survivor. He died, aged 100. Abram and his sister were the only survivors of his entire family, around nearly fifty. Although small in stature, Abram told his story with humour and vitality until the end.

37. Post Traumatic Growth

(a) Miriam Akhtar

Miriam Akhtar is a positive psychologist, author, wellbeing consultant, keynote speaker, trainer, and educator. She delivers wellbeing and resilience programs for a range of clients. She is the author of 6 books including Positive Psychology for Overcoming Depression.

(b) Dr. Rob Gordon

Dr Peter Rob Gordon OAM is a clinical psychologist and disaster recovery pioneer. He has worked with communities who have experienced traumatic events for almost 40 years including the 2009 Black Saturday and the Christchurch earthquake.

He specialises in clinical treatment of trauma and educating affected people in understanding and managing the stresses of recovery.

(c) H. Norman Wright

H. Norman Wright was a licensed Marriage, Family and Child Therapist. He is the author of over ninety books including *Experiencing Grief, The New Guide to Crisis and Trauma Counselling,* and *Recovering from the Losses of Life.*

He conducted seminars on Parenting, Recovering from the Losses of Life, Trauma and Crisis Counselling, and Marriage Enrichment.

(d) Perry & Szalavitz

Bruce D. Perry is a renowned child-psychiatrist. Maia Szalavitz is an award-winning science journalist. The co-authored the book *The Boy W*ho Was Raised as a Dog where they address questions like 'What happens when a young child is traumatised?' 'How does terror affect a child's mind and how can that mind recover?'

(e) Viktor Frankl

Viktor Frankl was an Austrian neurologist, psychiatrist, philosopher, and Holocaust survivor, who founded logotherapy, a school of psychotherapy that describes a search for a life's meaning as the central human motivational force. He wrote 39 books including *Man's Search for Meaning* which was published in 1959 and became an international best seller.

Frankl coined the term 'existential vacuum' to describe the void of meaninglessness that was being experienced by so many people, especially students. He warned that this void would produce anxiety, depression, addiction, and even suicide.

38. Letters

(a) Alan D. Wolfelt PhD

Refer: 32. Suicide Grief - (b)

(b) Allan Boesak

Allan Boesak - minister, theologian, former politician - is a patriarch of the modern anti-apartheid movement in South Africa. He emerged as the most visible leader of the United Democratic Front, the largest anti-apartheid movement in South Africa's history. During that tumultuous time, he also became the leader of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches.

ADDENDUM

101 Grief Quotes:

Grief is a cruel kind of education. You learn how ungentle mourning can be, how full of anger. You learn how glib condolences can feel. You learn how much grief is about language, the failure of language and the grasping for language.
Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie *'Notes On Grief'*

Grief is not gauzy; it is substantial, oppressive, a thing opaque. The weight is heaviest in the mornings, post-sleep: a leaden heart, a stubborn reality that refuses to budge. **Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie** *'Notes On Grief'*

Though grief was an emotion I knew well, it became a too familiar garment that I resisted taking off – walking in it, sleeping in it, washing it once a week.
Melissa Ashley *'The Birdman's Wife'*

Your grief can sentence you to the dark, bitter life of a victim, or it can fuel a rich life of finding ways to honour your loved one and keep them alive through you. The choice is yours. **Jennifer Ashton, M.D.** *'Life After Suicide'*

Your pain is your pain, and it deserves the dignity of recognition, for that is where healing begins. **Adriel Booker** *'Grace Like Scarlett'*

Grief hit like that. Something would remind us of the past, of home, of a person, and then we would remember that it was all gone.
Octavia E. Butler *'Parable of the Sower'*

Tend your grief like hard ground and wait. One day, something will grow; there won't be an answer, but you will see you've found a way to live, and to live with death. **Robyn Cadwallader** *'The Anchoress'*

In grief, you become deeply acquainted with the idea of human mortality. You go to a very dark place and experience the extremities of your own pain – you are taken to the very limits of suffering.
Nick Cave & Sean O'Hagan *'Faith, Hope and Carnage'*

Grief can have a chastening effect. It makes demands on us. It asks us to be empathetic, to be understanding, to be forgiving, despite our suffering.
Nick Cave & Sean O'Hagan *'Faith, Hope and Carnage'*

Many grieving people just remain silent, trapped in their own secret thoughts, trapped in their own minds, with their only form of company being the dead themselves. **Nick Cave & Sean O'Hagan** *'Faith, Hope and Carnage'*

Grief can produce an emotional disconnect that is very hard to claw back – a kind of stoppage. **Nick Cave & Sean O'Hagan** *'Faith, Hope and Carnage'*

The bereaved need encouragement to speak sometimes. They are prone to silence because they're worried about the effect their sadness will have on other people. And this silence becomes habitual but also builds up like a terrible pressure. **Nick Cave & Sean O'Hagan** *'Faith, Hope and Carnage'*

Grief is a sea made of your own tears. Salty swells cover the dark depths you must swim at your own pace. It takes time to build stamina. Some days, my arms sliced through the water, and I felt things would be okay, the shore wasn't so far off. Then one memory, one moment would nearly drown me, and I'd be back to the beginning, fighting to stay above the waves, exhausted, sinking in my own sorrow. **Janet Skeslien Charles** *'The Paris Library'*

Grief sneaks up on us, threatening our sense of stability and security.
Brandon Cox

I grieve for what I cannot remember. It's a peculiar mourning. Lost childhood remains stubbornly present, its absence an abiding life.
Clifton Crais *'History Lessons'*

I start shutting out friends. With some, I cannot bear to see my pain reflected in their eyes. There are craters in their timelines as well, ancient holes in the shape of someone gone too soon. **Sloane Crowley** *'Grief is For People'*

Those living with grief know the particular sleeplessness it engenders – so nonnegotiable. **Sloane Crowley** *'Grief is For People'*

You can ignore grief. You push it around your plate. But you cannot give it away.
Sloane Crowley *'Grief is For People'*

But now his heart ached. The weight of his loss choked at him, and he cried silently, staring out at the place where the water met the sky and bled into one. Where this world slipped into the next.
Fiona Curnow *'Before the Swallows Come Back'*

For the past year he had tried not to think about his loss. It hurt too much. But now it felt like he could, he should. Memories like that couldn't be allowed to fade. He had no one to tell stories to. No one to share the family history with. Such an integral part of his life – of their lives – had been snatched from him. It was a part of his soul. Sharing in stories, huddling around a campfire, listening to the soft sounds of his parents' voices, the laughter of his brothers, the singing of their songs. **Fiona Curnow** *'Before the Swallows Come Back'*

Grief is different. Grief has no distance. Grief comes in waves, paroxysms, sudden apprehensions that weaken the knees and blind the eyes and obliterate the dailiness of life. **Joan Didion** *'The Year of Magical Thinking'*

People who have recently lost someone have a certain look, recognisable maybe only to those who have seen that look on their own faces. The look is one of extreme vulnerability, nakedness, openness. **Joan Didion** *'The Year of Magical Thinking'*

Only the survivors of a death are truly left alone. The connections that made up their life – both the deep connections and the apparently (until they are broken) insignificant connections – have all vanished.
Joan Didion *'The Year of Magical Thinking'*

Grief is a country that has no definite borderlines and that recognises no single trajectory. It is a space that did not exist before your loss, and that will never disappear from your map, no matter how hard you rub at the charcoal lines. **Kerri ní Dochartaigh** *'Thin Places'*

Grief is not linear; it is not even circular. Grief grows and mutates, shape-shifts and hides. I still don't know if there is anywhere for grief to go; I still don't know if it ever does go away. **Kerri ní Dochartaigh** *'Thin Places'*

After his mother died, he and his father lived together like timid roommates, almost strangers, never touching, speaking softly over meals about nothing important. **Anthony Doerr** *'About Grace'*

The darker the night
the brighter the stars,
the deeper the grief,
the closer is God. **Fyodor Dostoevsky**

Grief is a solitary task. You work at it alone, or with those few companions of your deliberate choice. **Robert Dykstra** *'She Never Said Goodbye'*

To claim that all is resolved, that my sorrow has passed away with the morning fogs, that every stab of pain is behind me for good, would be deceitful, foolish. **Robert Dykstra** *'She Never Said Goodbye'*

She is gone. Death always comes in the past perfect tense. The action is completed, over and done. And I am alone, desperately alone. The initial shock and stunning unbelief are giving way to the deep abiding sorrow of absence. **Robert Dykstra** *'She Never Said Goodbye'*

Grief makes us wander in a winter desert; causes us to take unmeasured steps, sing out of tune. I find myself so often talking to myself like that desert hermit. **Robert Dykstra** *'She Never Said Goodbye'*

In grief, life takes the shape of a giant question mark.
Robert Dykstra *'She Never Said Goodbye'*

Death empties us of all our treasures, of everything that fits like an old shoe, of all the landmarks that tell us where we are. Grief is the struggle to find the way when we are far from home. **Robert Dykstra** *'She Never Said Goodbye'*

When we force our truths and stories into hiding, secrets can become their own trauma, their own prison. **Dr Edith Eger** *'The Choice'*

When you grieve, it's not just over what happened: we grieve for what didn't happen. **Dr Edith Eger** *'The Choice'*

Resolving grief means both to release ourselves from responsibility for all the things that weren't up to us, and to come to terms with the choices we've made that can't be undone. **Dr Edith Eger** *'The Gift'*

Grief has so many layers and flavours: sorrow, fear, relief, survivor's guilt, existential questioning, diminished safety, fragility. Our whole sense of the world is interrupted and rearranged. The adage says, 'Time heals all wounds.' But I disagree. Time doesn't heal. It's what you do with the time. **Dr Edith Eger** *'The Gift'*

The loss of a child is an abyss from which few families return. Some claw their way again toward the light, perhaps finding a narrow ledge where in time, memory can shed its skin of pain. Others dwell in darkness forever.
Nicholas Evans *'The Loop'*

Grief isn't just opening our eyes to the truth. We hate grief because it hurts. But not everything that hurts is bad. Whatever grief may be, it is one thing for certain. Grief is the truest evidence of love. **Richard Paul Evans** *'A Christmas Story'*

Grief isn't a luxury; it is an appropriate response to loss. You just don't will it away. If you allow it to run its course, it will fade with time, but if you ignore it or pretend it doesn't exist, it only gets worse. **Richard Paul Evans** *'A Step of Faith'*

There can be moments in a person's life when grief over the loss of a loved one is stronger than faith. **Michel Faber** *'The Book of Strange New Things'*

Grief is the extension of love. **Anna Funder** *'All That I Am'*

Quakers do have something very special to offer the dying and the bereaved, namely that we are at home in silence. Not only are we thoroughly used to it and unembarrassed by it but we know something about sharing it, encountering others in its depths and, above all, letting ourselves be used in it...You don't get over sorrow; you work your way right to the centre of it.
Patrick Gale *'Notes from An Exhibition'*

The grief we feel has its own voice and should not be compromised by comparisons. **Laurie Burrows Grad**

I had forgotten how grief walks alongside, sits on your shoulders. At any time, your proud little house of cards can tumble down.
Airdre Grant *'Stumbling Stones: A Path Through Grief, Love, and Loss'*

Whatever way you come to it, the journey through grief is long and unpredictable. The only way through it is through it. There are no shortcuts. The more you step into it the better. Avoidance only brings it back more strongly later on.
Airdre Grant *'Stumbling Stones: A Path Through Grief, Love, and Loss'*

The consolations of grief are not obvious. The gift of heightened awareness of the value of life, of the preciousness of love, the importance of ritual – these are not things that spring to mind when we are sorrowful and desolate with suffering.
Airdre Grant *'Stumbling Stones: A Path Through Grief, Love, and Loss'*

In our lives, the darkest times, the days that are bleak and black add depth to every other experience. Like the dark bits of colour in a mosaic, they add the contrast and the shadows that give beauty to the whole, but they are just a small part of the big picture. **Amy Grant** *'Mosaics'*

It's only when we name our grief that it can begin to transform us instead of numbing us. **Marianne Griebler**

I consider it a mystery how mourning can turn some people soft and others hard. I am acquainted with certain people whose grief immersed them in the holy. But I know others whose suffering tore a spiritual cleft between them and the divine, folks whose faith died right along with their loved one. Sometimes when we most need faith it seems to flee into the night. **Philip Gulley** *'Healing Through the Seasons'*

I felt like that is what happened to me, that grief and guilt had cauterised me and there was nothing new to experience. Just a wound to look at and keep prodding for a sign of feeling. **Matt Haig** *'The Life Impossible'*

Grief is an engine. Feels like that. It does not fade, what they say, with time. Sometimes it accelerates. **Peter Heller** *'The Painter'*

I was not myself that whole spring. I know what it means when they say 'beside yourself' with grief. That's what it felt like. Like I was standing a few feet away from my body as I went through the motions. Remote. From my feelings, from a clear view of anything. **Peter Heller** *'The Painter'*

She would have wept if that were possible, but it wasn't; nobody wept in Auschwitz after the first month. **Robert Hillman** *'The Bookshop of the Broken Hearted'*

Your grief won't go away; it's not a door you can close, or a book you can put back on the shelf, or a kiss you can give back once it has been given.
Alice Hoffman *'The World That We Knew'*

This was what grief was, she understood that now. It was never-ending and you carried it with you. You could not stop it or regret it; you could only keep it close to your heart. **Alice Hoffman** *'The World That We Knew'*

Time would heal, Mrs Sussex said. Byron's loss would grow more bearable. But here was the nub. He didn't want to lose his loss. Loss was all he had left of his mother. If time healed the gap, it would be as if she had never been there.
Rachel Joyce '*Perfect'*

Grief isn't constant. It wavers, tugging and letting go like the waves on the sea.
Zoulfa Katough *'As Long as the Lemon Trees Grow'*

Each person's grief is as unique as their fingerprint. But no matter how they grieve, they share a need for their grief to be witnessed. That doesn't mean needing someone to try to lessen it or reframe it for them. The need is for someone to be fully present to the magnitude of their loss.
David Kessler *'Finding Meaning: The Sixth Stage of Grief'*

Every loss has meaning, and all losses are to be grieved – and witnessed. 'If the love is real, the grief is real.' **David Kessler** *'Finding Meaning: The Sixth Stage of Grief'*

The death shapes the grief. If we are mourning a more problematic death, we are likely to have a more complicated grief.
David Kessler *'Finding Meaning: The Sixth Stage of Grief'*

The word 'bereaved' has its origins in the Old English words *deprived of, seized,* and *robbed*. This is how it feels when your loved one has been taken from you – as excruciating as if your arm had been ripped from your body. You've been robbed of what is dearest to you. **David Kessler** *'Finding Meaning: The Sixth Stage of Grief'*

Grief may get postponed, but it cannot be eradicated. The avoidance of grief will only prolong the pain of grief. **David Kessler** *'Finding Meaning: The Sixth Stage of Grief'*

It is the peculiar nature of the world to go on spinning no matter what sought of heartbreak is happening. **Sue Monk Kidd** *'The Secret Life of Bees'*

The world grows quickly impatient with grief. **Barbara Kingsolver** *'Prodigal Summer'*

Death shatters our illusion that we are actually in control. Grief has always been an experience that presents the opportunity to redefine ourselves and our world and find new meaning, value and vision for our lives.
Dr Louis E. Lagrand *'Healing Grief, Finding Peace'*

Grief comes in waves; healing comes in inches.
Tara J. Lal *'Standing on My Brother's Shoulders'*

There is no end to grief: it is not linear; there is no finish line, no destination to be reached. There is no time frame. **Tara J. Lal** *'Standing on My Brother's Shoulders'*

The lifelong fear of grief keeps us in a barren, isolated place. Only grieving can heal grief; the passage of time will lessen the acuteness, but time alone, without the direct experience of grief, will not heal it. **Anne Lamott** *'Small Victories'*

For in grief nothing 'stays put.' One keeps on emerging from a phase, but it always recurs. Round and round. Everything repeats. Am I going in circles or dare I hope I am on a spiral. **C. S. Lewis** *'A Grief Observed'*

Grief has taught me many things about the fragility of life and the finality of death. To lose that which means the most to us is a lesson in helplessness and humility and survival. **Gordon Livingston M.D.** *'Too Soon Old, Too Late Smart'*

For all his dedication, there were times he thought the fine sweet edge of his grief was thinning. **Cormac McCarthy** *'The Passenger'*

Grief is a natural, healthy and painful response to loss of anyone or anything we value dearly. We grieve as we have lived.
Mal McKissock & Dianne McKissock *'Coping with Grief'*

The loneliness of grief is hard to describe – a feeling that seems to go to the very core of our being. As hard as it might be to imagine, the intensity and constancy of these feelings will not last forever. Grief will change – not be 'cured'.
Mal McKissock & Dianne McKissock *'Coping with Grief'*

Grief is such a solitary affliction. No two people feel it the same way. Even when it involves the same event or the same person, you're trapped in a torment tailor-made for you. **Indira Naidoo** *'The Space Between the Stars'*

Silence enveloped us in the days and weeks after the funeral. It wasn't just a blanket of grief but the white shock of disbelief.
Jayne Newling *'Missing Christopher'*

Grief is personal. It writes its own script. We can only keep it together when we believe God holds us together. **Henri Nouwen**

Sometimes we must allow grief to have its way with us for a while. We need to get lost in the landscape of grief. It is a wild and rugged wilderness terrain to be sure, but it is here that we meet our truest selves. And we are met by God.
Amanda Held Opelt *'A Hole in the World'*

The pilgrimage of grief is a toilsome one, long and arduous. Sometimes, it lasts a lifetime. **Amanda Held Opelt** *'A Hole in the World'*

Grief is like water. It follows gravity. It finds the lowest part of you and hollows it out even more. It exploits your weaknesses. Grief goes where it wants with or without an invitation. It seeps into the empty spaces. It cannot be harnessed or redirected, at least not easily. It branches out from the headwaters of the main event into hundreds of tributaries. Few acres of your life remain untouched.
Amanda Held Opelt *'A Hole in the World'*

When I grieve, it is not just my heart that grieves. My body grieves too.
Amanda Held Opelt *'A Hole in the World'*

The work of grief is less about release and more about learning how to hold on in a way that is healthy and whole. To grieve is to love.
Amanda Held Opelt *'A Hole in the World'*

Grief increases our capacity to be thankful. The good things in life taste sweeter when we have tasted the bitterness of death.
Amanda Held Opelt *'A Hole in the World'*

There is something about grief that wants to be seen. There is something about grief that wants to be known. **Jan Richardson.**

I believe there is a dignity in sorrow simply because it is God's good pleasure that there should be. He is forever raising up those who are brought low. **Marilynne Robinson** *'Gilead'*

Grief takes a persona whose needs are paramount. Grief requires quiet and solitude. Grief demands rest, lots of rest. At the most grief requires a cup of tea given without talk, without advice, without weeping. Grief does not need platitudes. **Shirley Shackleton** *'The Circle of Silence'*

I was pushing the rock of question-laden grief up the hill, only to find it at the bottom again the next day, or the next hour. **Susan Delaney Spear**

In our buttoned-up western world, grieving is to be done discretely and behind closed doors. Our fixation with happiness has taught us to airbrush death out of life's narrative. **Jill Stark** *'Happy Never After'*

It's possible to choose to be okay while at the same time living with a broken heart. **Jill Stark** *'Happy Never After'*

Grief taught me things. It showed me shades and hues I couldn't have otherwise seen. It required me to suffer. It compelled me to reach.
Cheryl Strayed *'Tiny Beautiful Things'*

No matter how much time passes, those we have loved never slip away from us entirely. **Amor Towles** *'A Gentleman in Moscow'*

There's nothing as deafening as grief. No matter what you do it just rings loud in your ears. **Donna VanLiere** *'The Angels of Morgan Hill'*

Grief is a gift, and after a rain of tears, there is always more of you than before. Rain always brings growth. **Ann Voskamp** *'The Broken Way'*

The worst grief is the hidden grief that cannot speak. **Ann Voskamp**

I found the adage about time healing all wounds to be false: grief doesn't fade. Grief scabs over like my scars and pulls into new, painful configurations as it knits. It hurts in new ways. We are never free from grief.
Jesmyn Ward *'Men We Reaped'*

'Sorrow is a heavy fruit,' Monsieur Durand says in sympathy. 'But we have to trust the Almighty doesn't let it grow on branches too weak to bear it.'
Michael Whatling *'The French Baker's War'*

He mourns with the emotions of a lone survivor of a sunken ship – sorrow for a loved one is made worse by the question: Why wasn't it me?
Michael Whatling *'The French Baker's War'*

We need an affirmation of God's Presence in our grief.
Nicholas Wolterstorff, philosopher

Grieving is a disorderly process. It can't be controlled, and it can't be scheduled.
H. Norman Wright *'Experiencing the Loss of a Family Member'*

Whenever there is loss, there will be grief. But some people do not grieve or mourn; they make a choice to repress all the feelings inside of them, so their grief accumulates. Saving it up won't lessen grief's pain; it will only intensify it. **H. Norman Wright** *'Experiencing the Loss of a Family Member'*

You never need to apologise for your tears.
H. Norman Wright *'Experiencing the Loss of a Family Member'*