

The
Place
of
Suffering

comfort and courage for the faith journey

By Lynelle Watford
Illustrated by Cherie Lamborn

As a collection of thoughts and selected scriptures, read these pages slowly, ponder, and apply as needed. Let the words comfort and encourage as they soak deep into your soul.

You may not have the specific challenges mentioned in these readings, but I trust these scriptures will minister to your heart as they do for others.

Lynelle Watford

The illustrator, Cherie Lamborn, creates beautiful watercolors from her home in Ohio.



The Place of Suffering: comfort and courage for the faith journey
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Note: Some names have been changed.

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Hidden Beauty

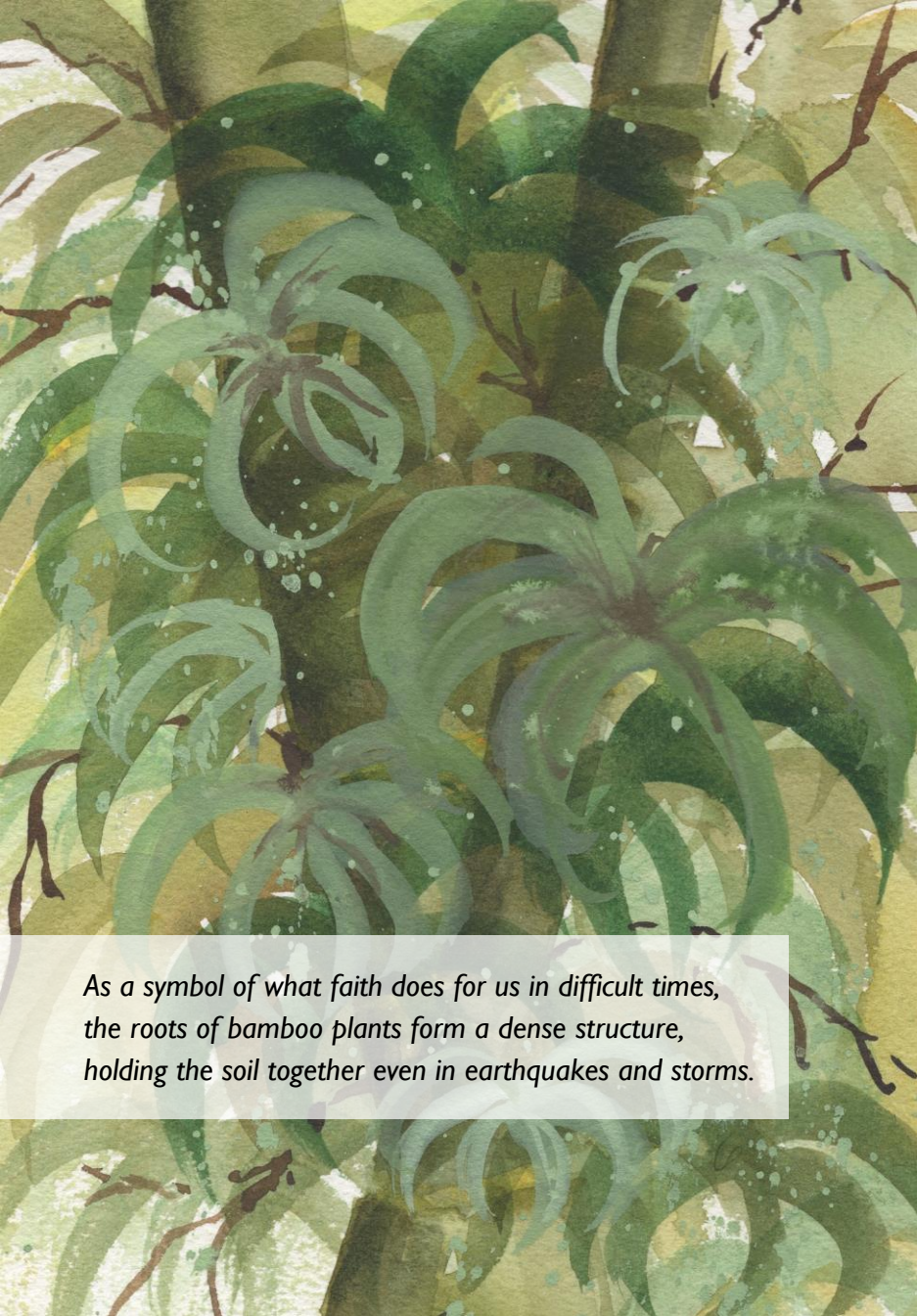
We hide. We hedge.
We duck. We dodge.
We run. We rant.

Eventually that lonely,
uncomfortable place
imprisons us. The
place of suffering.

Is it possible to see
beyond pain, despair,
and darkness? To
discover comfort,
hope, and light? Even
beauty?

Let's explore our
prison walls—our
place of suffering—
with fresh eyes and
open hearts. Perhaps a
comfort and beauty
that God may unveil is
only a breath away.

*Unto them
that mourn . . .
give unto them
beauty for ashes.*
Isaiah 61:3



*As a symbol of what faith does for us in difficult times,
the roots of bamboo plants form a dense structure,
holding the soil together even in earthquakes and storms.*

Why Me?

When the call came, Karen was alone. The news was not good.

“That took the breath out of me,” Karen told her doctor. “But God is not surprised by this.”

Karen did not ask God, “Why me?” when she heard she had cancer.

Decades earlier, Karen had learned to trust God. As a young teen, a friend’s death challenged her faith. A few years later, she lost a leadership position—hard-earned and well-executed—without explanation. Through these difficulties, Karen sensed peace as she surrendered her will.

Sometimes sufferers ask, “Why me?” or say, “I don’t understand,” but as God’s children we can move past the questions and into faith. Past the angry cries and into admissions of need. We can set aside our questions for now. We can trust that God is good and He loves us.

Knowing God can be trusted, Karen tells others, “I’ve been through enough to know He is enough.”

*I would have fainted
unless I had believed to see
the goodness of Jehovah
in the land
of the living.*

Psalm 27:13 MKJV

A Lonely Place

Stuck in a hospital three hours from home, I waited for blood counts to normalize. I waited to return home to my family—husband and four-year-old and six-month-old sons.

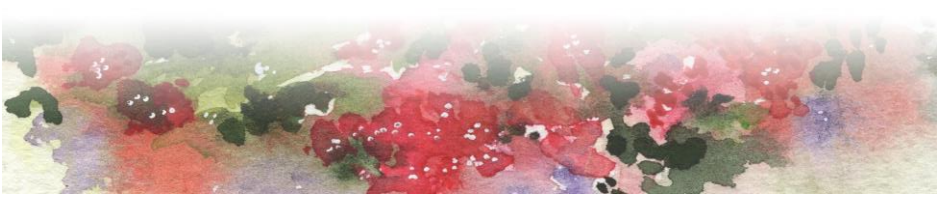
Several years later, from a wheelchair I watched my family leave for church without me. There wasn't time to help me go with them.

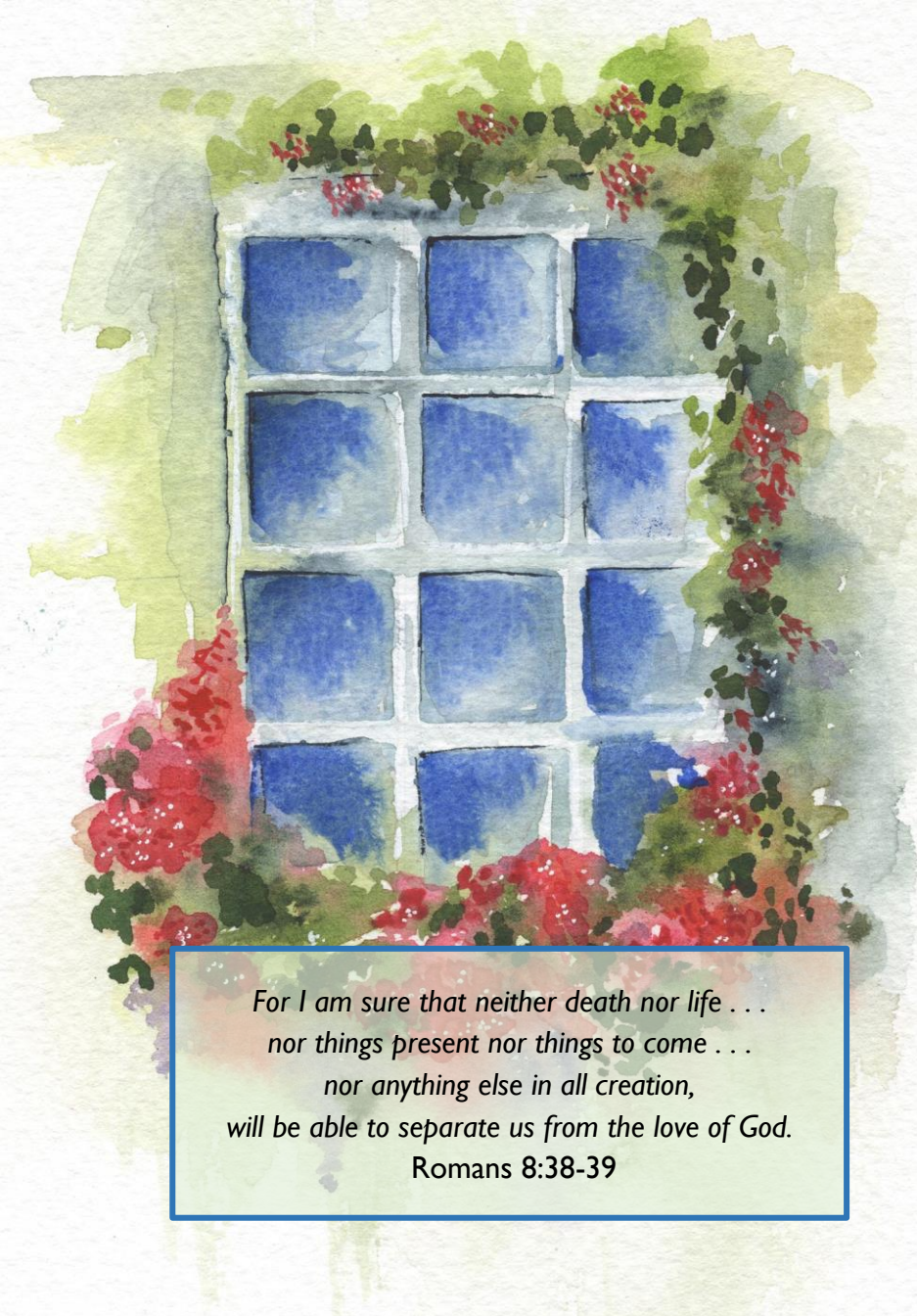
Later still, with deep grief of losing a child to suicide, depression darkened my world.

Due to lack of physical ability or emotional weakness, many times suffering left me excluded, set aside, alone. Places marked by twinges of regret or tears of self-pity. But places also of reflection and restoration.

One evening, while others chatted outdoors in cool dampness, I sat inside. Through a large window, I enjoyed lush woods, while meditating on Psalm after Psalm. Those moments refreshed me in body and spirit.

Affliction may separate from activities or relationships, but it holds no power to divide from the God of all comfort.





*For I am sure that neither death nor life . . .
nor things present nor things to come . . .
nor anything else in all creation,
will be able to separate us from the love of God.
Romans 8:38-39*



The Pain of Rejection

At age 29, after a mother-daughter fight in the kitchen over how to make the Spanish rice, her mother admitted Chris was right--Chris could never please her. Her mother expressed disdain for Chris. A disdain that began before she was born.

Her mother was not ready to have a child and resented the career derailment. Although a painful admission, Chris was strangely relieved that the years of never living up to expectations were not imagined.

Rejection had caused Chris to be especially sensitive to others and their suffering. It made her astute in the presence of others, aware of their troubles, willing to enter their pain. Somewhere in the awareness and in the entering, she found a bit of healing.

Chris will take rejection's effect with her to her grave. But grace and mercy do indeed follow her; and then, there's the gift of forgiveness. For that, she is grateful.

*Be kind to one another, tenderhearted,
forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.*

Ephesians 4:32





Only Two Drops

Elisabeth Elliot is my hero. During college, her ‘glass’ looked full. Dreams awaited fulfillment. Less than a decade after graduation, life was upended by the murder of her missionary husband.

She lived her godly life through ministry to her husband’s slayers, as a single parent, and then widowed again years later. Millions were refreshed by her calm voice opening her daily radio program, “You are loved with an everlasting love . . .”

By this time, Elisabeth’s life looked half-full at best. Some may have considered her ‘glass’ with only two or three drops left.

God’s heroes take half-full glasses (or their two or three drops) and eke out all they can. They know every selfless word, every labor of love, every sacrificial smile will live on into eternity. They know things of this world—our bodies, our possessions, our positions—are fading fast. The unseen is what will last. And that is what God’s heroes hold dear.

*We look not
to the things
that are seen
but to the things
that are unseen.
For the things
that are seen
are transient,
but the things
that are unseen
are eternal.
2 Cor. 4:18*

Relentless Loss

Deep, painful losses upended Pam's life. Her eighteen-year-old son drowned. Years later, her husband died after suffering from early-onset Alzheimer's. Soon after, her father died. Then, unimaginably, her eight-year-old granddaughter died.

The losses crushed and squeezed. They piled one on top of another. Loss shattered the landscape of life. Pam needed healing. She needed hope.

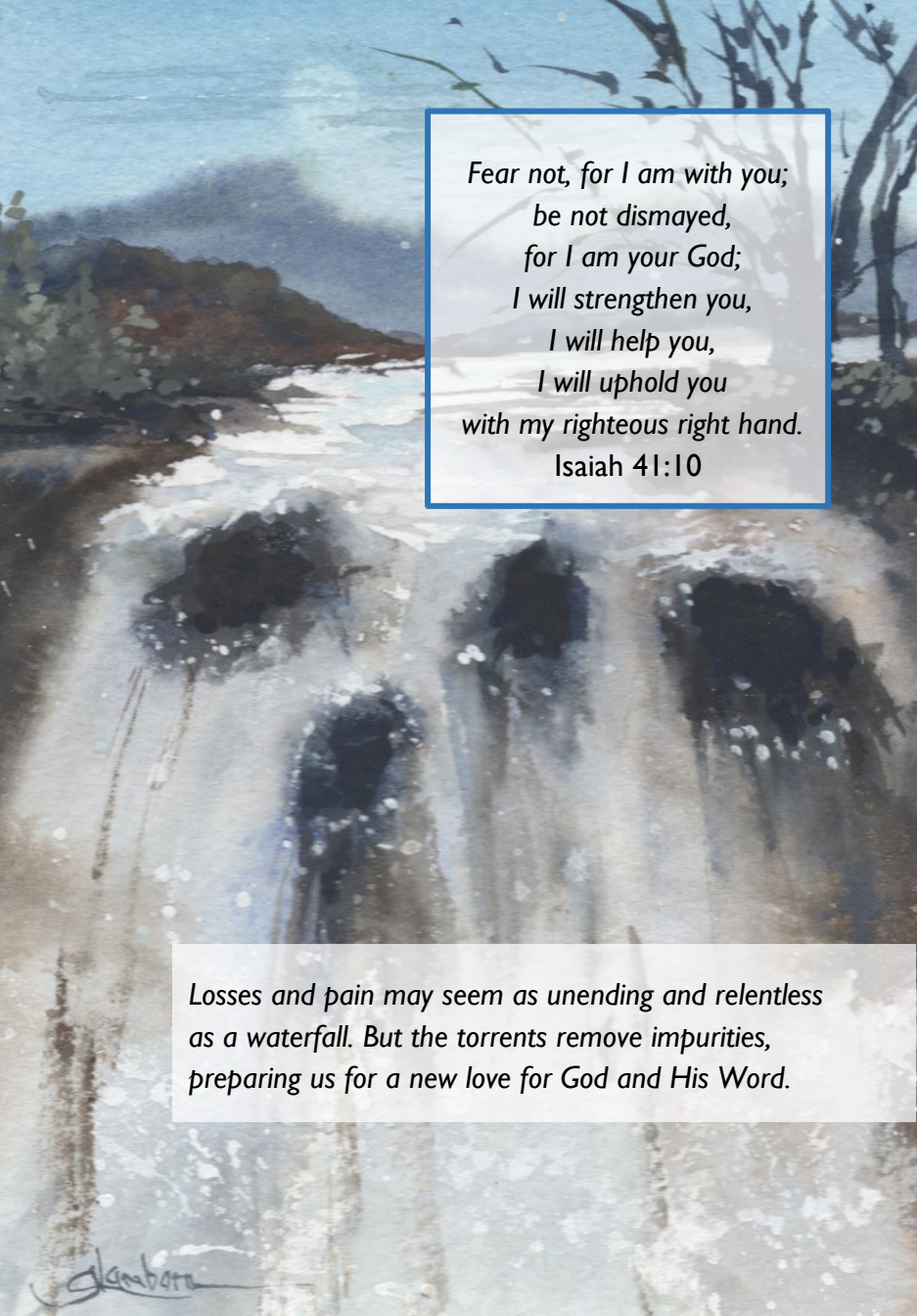
In desperation, Pam cried out to God. Searched scriptures for healing balms, for threads of hope.

"If I didn't have scripture, have the Lord, and have hope, I wouldn't want to live," reflects Pam.

Now, a year and a half after the deaths of her husband, father, and granddaughter, grief still haunts. The losses, still stark.

But Pam has a new thirst for God's presence and peace. A new hunger for God's Word. Scripture speaks in ways it never could have, apart from deep, relentless loss.





*Fear not, for I am with you;
be not dismayed,
for I am your God;
I will strengthen you,
I will help you,
I will uphold you
with my righteous right hand.
Isaiah 41:10*

*Losses and pain may seem as unending and relentless
as a waterfall. But the torrents remove impurities,
preparing us for a new love for God and His Word.*

glambata



Unwanted & Unplanned

John's life had taken a sudden turn—apparently for the worse. Once independent, well-known, and an outdoorsman, he was set aside, imprisoned. No fresh air. No fresh options.

He had known life would change. Had even proclaimed, “I must decrease.” (John 3:30) But prison? Why not a job change?

John must have struggled with yielding his will. With accepting the Unwanted and Unplanned.

While John, known as John the Baptist, kept the faith, he did have questions. Behind his question to Jesus, “Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?” (Matthew 11:3), were perhaps deeper questions: “Is my ministry over? Am I in my last days?”

John's last days encourage me. I, too, am in the Unwanted and Unplanned. I question. I want to keep the faith. To live my days, imprisoned by physical suffering, so others will be more established in their faith.

Clearly, the Unwanted and Unplanned have much value.

[The] God of all comfort comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction. 2 Corinthians 1:3-4



Grace for the Moment

Continual physical challenges. Unrelenting emotional pressures. Baby Emily's extreme needs, due to a rare genetic syndrome, pushed her parents, Mike and Lisa Gathright, to their limits. When they envisioned future care, the burden was too great.

Too great to bear in one moment, that is. Tomorrow's fears and burdens are too heavy for today. God gives grace—His strength—only for trials of today.

Years ago, two million people wandered in a desert. Not for a few hours with sack lunches and bottled water, but for forty years. Future demands would have crushed them. But God.

Every day, God sent manna. Every day, the hungry bent and gathered. It was enough.

God gave the Gathrights strength for the moment—each moment they spent with Emily and each moment without her since Emily went to live with Jesus thirteen years ago.

Today, those who hunger for God's grace, bend hearts, admitting needs. Strength comes for another day, another moment of suffering.

Perhaps you are in a similar situation as the Gathrights. Mike and Lisa would be glad to hear from you.
(michaelgathright@gmail.com)

*"My grace
is all you need,
for my power
is greatest when
you are weak."*

**2 Corinthians
12:9 GNB**

Healing Words

“*What* is wrong with me?” I asked, exasperated.

I forgot to write two index word cards for my granddaughter’s reading lesson. This was not the first time I had overlooked words.

In the past, even harsher thoughts spewed from my mind. Not from forgetting word cards but from actions or words that caused physical or emotional suffering.

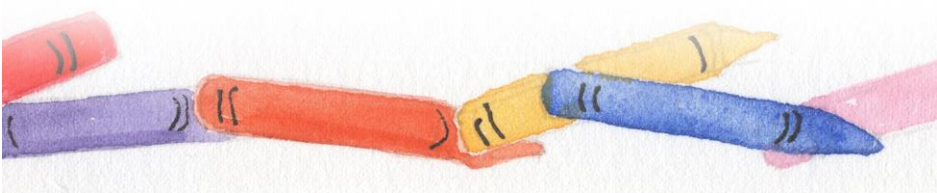
Or demeaning thoughts from emotional wounds such as: “Lyn, you are so stupid!” or “I can’t believe I did that!” I wouldn’t say those things to others. I shouldn’t say them to myself.

The lies of thinking I am stupid and worthless are overcome by truth. Healing truth. God says I am loved, treasured, chosen, accepted in Christ, precious, and so much more.

Sometimes I still speak to myself in ways that grieve God’s heart. Like today, when I asked, “*What* is wrong with me?”

But in today’s moment, my six-year-old granddaughter spoke God’s perspective.

When I asked, “*What* is wrong with me?” she responded with one word, “Nothing.”





*You are precious in my eyes,
and honored, and I love you.*

Isaiah 43:4



Some days, some seasons, feel like the
frigidness of winter. Yet even pines retain
their greenery through the bitterest of times.



Pain. Perseverance. Purpose.

“I should be dead. Or paralyzed. But I’m not.”

For almost five years since Rich fell seventeen feet off a ladder, chronic pain has fettered him. Some days the pain seems off the 10-point pain scale.

He doesn’t deny the pain, but he doesn’t let it rule either.

“I realize I am here for a purpose. Every day I have breath,” Rich explains.

Before the accident, Rich was a sought-after counselor, known for his gentleness, wisdom, and empathy. Now, each counseling session is a challenge. To set aside his pain. To focus on another’s.

How does Rich do it when his own pain hits a “10”? Before his tortured feet and weak legs hit the floor each morning, Rich whispers, “I cannot do this without You, God.” Then, in God’s strength, he tackles the pain with perseverance and fulfills his God-given purpose.

*I am the LORD All-Powerful.
So don't depend on your own power or strength,
but on my Spirit. Zechariah 4:6 CEV*