



## Why Was I Left Here? Devotion

*For I know the plans I have for you, declares the LORD, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope (Jeremiah 29:11).*

It was over. After suffering for a year with a brain tumor, paralysis, aphasia, and dementia, my husband was with his heavenly Father, free from pain and enjoying heaven. We rejoiced for him!

After the funeral, friends and relatives returned to their normal, everyday lives.

As a new widow, I pondered, “What is **my** normal?” I asked God questions like “Why was I left here?” and “Do You have a purpose for me?”

During Bob’s illness, my purpose was being his caretaker, which was physically, emotionally, and spiritually exhausting. After his death, I actually felt guilty because I could sleep uninterrupted every night. Running errands? It was possible to go on the spur of the moment, without arranging for a friend to sit with him. My time was my own, to go to a movie or out to dinner, or to go to church without spending hours of time and frustration getting him ready and into the car.

Missing my soul mate was evident every day, in big things like companionship, Bob’s spiritual leadership to our children and me, and wisdom in making decisions. Knowing his prognosis, I had had a year to prepare for those types of big changes. However, it was the little things that made me cry, like when I had to fill out a form and check the “widow” box instead of “married.” Or passing the “to my dear husband on his birthday” aisle in the card shop. Or trying to open a jar of pickles. And what about using the BBQ grill or a new remote for the TV? Opening God’s Word on a daily basis showed me He was there to comfort me. He gave me courage to ask friends for help and for their opinions when I needed to make a decision.

Dealing with well-meaning friends was sometimes difficult. A week after the funeral, my church choir held its spring concert. Because choir rehearsal was the one outside-the-home activity I had maintained during his illness, I participated in that service. I heard criticism that it was “too soon” to be joyful and my place was to be in my home, mourning. Several weeks later, an acquaintance asked if I had started dating yet. Both comments were hurtful, but God taught me forgiveness and provided witnessing opportunities to share the joy that Jesus’ death and resurrection gives to those of us who are still here on earth.

Within the next year, several women in my church and neighborhood also experienced the deaths of their husbands. They came to me and asked how I had coped. God led me to share from my heart that relying on Him was the most important aspect of coping. This helped my

friends, as well as myself, to grow in love and respect for the Lord.

God provided time for me to mature in grace through reliance on His guidance and to consider new avenues of service to Him. Prayerfully, I asked Him which way He wanted me to go: Did He want me to go back to work full time or part time, enjoy a very early retirement, go back to school, or \_\_\_? Many doors were available.

After a few false starts, I was drawn into full-time volunteer work through various branches of my church. Leading a media-based LCMS outreach effort in my area, writing, visiting the homebound, serving as an unofficial mentor to new widows, going on mission trips, and becoming more involved in the LWML were and are areas in which I feel God called me to serve Him.

God molded me into **my** new “normal” by guiding me as I dealt with the reality of my new freedom from caretaking. He helped me to cope with the big and little everyday evidences of being a widow, and taught me to forgive others who unwittingly said hurtful things. He opened my heart to new opportunities to serve Him. I’m confident He will do the same for others experiencing the loss of a loved one.

I may never understand why God allowed Bob to die. But over the years, I find that He did, and still does, have answers to the question “Why was I left here?” I was left here for a purpose, and through prayer, searching the Scriptures, and consultation with trusted Christian friends and pastors, He made His choices known to me. Acting on His guidance has been a positive factor in my life, a life that is full and rich. It is a blessing that I can serve Him with all that I am.

**Prayer:** Dear Lord, thank You for leading us to realize that one way to honor a departed loved-one is to take the best parts of his/her personality and attitude and incorporate those attributes into our own selves. We pray that You will continue to guide us to use his/her example of kindness and spiritual leadership. Above all, we ask for Your help so that we may always look to Jesus for the way to live to Your glory. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

The following article was also written by Carolyn. It first appeared in the *Lutheran Woman's Quarterly* Spring, 1998 issue. Copyright 1998 by Lutheran Women's Missionary League, with a 2016 update; reprint is made by permission. It is included here to complement her devotion on the previous page.

## **Life Changes & Choices**

By Carolyn J. Blum

“Dear Jeff and Steve:

Dad and I are going to a nearby resort to celebrate our 27<sup>th</sup> anniversary next weekend! We'll be bicycling, eating out, and just relaxing. Here's the number where we can be reached...”

Thus read the email message to our two sons. Except there was a sudden change in plans. Instead of visiting a resort, our whole family was at the hospital. Instead of relaxing, bicycling, and celebrating that weekend, we were all suffering from various forms of physical and emotional pain.

For several weeks my husband, Bob, had felt weak on his left side. A doctor's appointment on Friday was followed by a CT scan on Monday; on Tuesday Bob was diagnosed with a probable brain tumor. Surgery was performed on Thursday. The tumor was malignant, and only a portion of it could be removed. Further diagnosis revealed that the condition was treatable with radiation and chemotherapy, but it was not considered curable.

To say that our whole family's lifestyle changed would be an understatement. Nothing would ever be the same again. Bob had to cope with pain, disability, confusion, speech problems, frustration, and the prospect of a shorter life span than he had anticipated. The rest of us had to adjust to his condition, encourage him, and try to make some sense out of all of this. We dealt with doctors, hospitals, medication, and insurance.

Bob, husband and father, was uppermost in our thoughts and prayers. After all, *he* was the one with the disease. The rest of the family could only imagine what he was going through. We spent our time helping him deal with the situation, becoming more exhausted, confused, and anxious each day. Friends, relatives, counselors, pastors, nurses, and a host of others encouraged us with “take care of yourself!” But how could we take time for ourselves with our loved one in so much agony?

One person explained the rationale behind the “take care of yourself” directive. Just before an airplane takes off, flight attendants demonstrate the proper use of oxygen masks. Anyone traveling with an infant or a person with a disability is told to “first place the oxygen mask on *your* face, *then* help the other person.” It makes sense on a plane. How can you help others unless you have enough oxygen yourself?

The same principle applies to caregivers. We can only “give” if first our own basic needs are met. This means getting adequate rest, eating nutritious food, and taking a break now and then to refresh our spirits.

Throughout this traumatic time, our family discovered strategies for coping. First, and foremost, is to hang on to our anchor – Jesus. Although our whole world is changing, spinning, and whirling out of control, Jesus is our changeless One. He is always there to hear us when we pour out our hearts to Him. He is never too tired, too busy, or too uncaring to listen.

And *we* must take the time to listen to *Him*, too. I find that He not only speaks to me through the Bible, but He also works through devotional materials and people whom He places by my side. Starting the day with devotions and Bible reading strengthens my spirit. To me, this is just as important as the bowl of cereal that strengthens my body.

The very first day we were given the news, my sons and I each chose one friend to be a confidante. Jeff would soon leave to return to his job 2,000 miles away, and Steve would travel 1,000 miles to continue his college studies. Each son would need someone close to him to listen to his concerns. I, too, would require a friend to help me struggle through this. Each of us purposely chose a non-family member. Outside of the strength that we received directly from God, we have found this confidante to be our greatest source of comfort. God has truly used these friends to encourage us, and we thank Him for this blessing each day.

So many people have offered to help us, everything from listening to doing yard work, to running errands, or staying with Bob so I can get out. The love showered on us has been very humbling. When a friend learned that I was finally going to the beauty shop for a permanent, she brought a seven-course dinner for me to eat while I was under the dryer!

Accepting help from others is important for two reasons. First, the help provided makes your life easier and more enjoyable. Second, it allows your friends to apply their Christian love in a practical, meaningful way.

Are you experiencing changes in your life? Accept the fact that change has occurred. Be prepared for further changes. Develop patience and flexibility. Rarely will things go the way you anticipate. Surprises, some good and some not so good, await you each day. No matter how bad the day has been, try to find at least one blessing that God has handed to you.

Sometimes it may seem there have been absolutely no blessings that day. If you prayerfully search, however, you *will* find one, two or even more. One particularly bad day I finally decided that my *only* blessing was that my car did not run out of gas. Then I realized that even *having* a car was a blessing, the engine *started*, I did not have an accident, and on and on...

Look around and you'll see people whose situation is worse than your own. Bob is frustrated because at times he has difficulty speaking; the right words just will not come to him. His problem was put into perspective, however, when he met a person who couldn't speak at all.

Maintain some of the outside activities you enjoyed before the catastrophic change hit your life. It helps keep things in perspective and allows your emotions to take a break. Other than worship service, my first priority in outside activities is remaining in our church choir. Two

hours of singing each Wednesday evening revives my spirits.

Physical exercise is important. Be creative. I used to take a bicycle ride around my neighborhood each day, but can no longer do that because Bob cannot be left alone. Now I set a monitor by his lounge chair, put the remote in my pocket, and take a refreshing ride up and down the driveway.

Finally, realize that you will not be able to cope perfectly every day. There are days when you absolutely *cannot* be patient, when you *cannot* keep up with your exercises, or be flexible. There will be days when you will not even want to read your devotions. But life goes on and, with God's help, you will find strength to cope with further changes.

Throughout my years I frequently have asked God, "What do you want me to do with my life?" Always He has answered by providing challenging situations for me to handle. And, in the past, He has granted me the strength and ability to cope with whatever He has given me to do. Now, in my greatest hour of need, why would I fear He would abandon me? As our son, Steve, told me, "God blesses us by making His love easy to see most of the time. Therefore we know He loves us and is caring for us. He then promises that He doesn't change, so we can be assured that when things are tough (i.e., when His love is not as easy for us to see), He is still caring for us and holding us in His arms."