*The following is an excerpt from* On Common Grounds*, a 30-Day Devotional written by Chi Alpha students at Georgetown University. This entry is from Day 16 of the devotional, written by Kaylee Walsh.*

*“No discipline is enjoyable while it is happening—it’s painful! But afterward there will be a peaceful harvest of right living for those who are trained this way. So take a new grip with your tired hands and strengthen your weak knees. Mark out a straight path for your feet so that those who are weak and lame will not fall but become strong.”*

Hebrews 12:11-13

*“The Lord himself will fight for you. Just stay calm.”*

Exodus 14:14

There are five stages of grief: denial, bargaining, anger, despair, and acceptance. Everybody knows that. And they are supposed to follow a predictable pattern. That’s a Hallmark ploy dreamt up to sell self-help books. The reality is that grief comes in any form, any time, anywhere. And guess what? It’s here to stay. People want you to believe it will all get better. And there’s a very paradoxical reality to that: It does and it doesn’t.

My dad lost his battle with Lou Gehrigs disease when I was 19, 2 days before Christmas. It was a horrible time—a war really—that spanned high school and spilled into college. I often get asked how I kept my faith through something like that. Something like what? Being thousands of dollars in debt and repeatedly spoon-feeding my favorite person in the world?

Grief isn’t glamorous, and yet as Christians we seem to glamorize it: “God has a plan. Everything happens for a reason.” We say: “You’re stronger than this.” But I’m not. Being *in* the struggle made me stronger, made me better. And if God planned for things like that to happen, well then I don’t want to be a Christian anymore. God pulls reason out of chaos, and He gives that sliver of sanity purpose. Not the other way around. God doesn’t set you up to fail; He holds your hand so you can survive. And that’s what grief is—surviving.

I call it a war, because much like real war, there is no winning and losing. It’s about making it through each day and marching forward. That doesn’t mean marching forward stoically. It doesn’t even mean marching forward at a pace anything other than glacial. But surviving doesn’t make you weak. People ask me often how I stayed “strong.” Strong is fighting. It’s hard, and it’s painful, and it’s every day.

Forget the self-help books and look at grief in the Bible: in Job, Psalms, Ruth, Ecclesiastes, Lamentations, and the books of history. Grief is as relevant to scripture as love because the two are intrinsically intertwined. Over and over we see that God let men grieve viscerally, angrily, and out of order. The grief never leaves, but neither does God. Time doesn’t heal all wounds. It just heals you. God makes you stronger, and gives you endurance and courage. People often try to give an explanation for suffering, as if that would make it better. God doesn't do that. Instead of explaining why you're suffering, He chose to take on your suffering. His life, death, and resurrection are a testament to the truth that while there is grief in life, there is hope.

I asked my godmother once, after my father died, if she still missed her mom. “Every day,” she replied. Her mother died when she was 8, more than 40 years earlier. Christ is the only one who truly understands how she feels. Grief in Christianity is glossed over, but Christ doesn’t neglect it. Just as, though it may feel that way, He has never neglected you.

*Prayer*

God, help me grow closer to you. I am broken. You are the potter, but I have shattered. Recast my old self so that Your light shines through the cracks. Help me find solace in your word and know that nothing I’m feeling is too terrible to take. Amen.

*Reflection Question*

What haven’t you said to God that needs to be said?