Weathering
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A highway sign on Wyoming’s South Pass flashed a warning: INCLEMENT WEATHER. NO UNNECESSARY TRAVEL. My husband, Shane, drove while our 6-month-old, Ellie, and I slept peacefully in the backseat. I woke to the sound of helicopter blades whipping rhythmically in the wind. I remember a cold, numbing feeling — but nothing more — and I couldn’t move my legs.

The accident happened just nine days after Ellie and I left Colorado to join Shane in Wyoming. Six months prior, he had been called by the Southern Baptist Convention to work with churches and pastors across the Pioneer State.

That Sunday — March 26, 2006 — Shane shared a message in Lander, Wyo., about the prodigal son. It was the best sermon I had ever heard him preach; it was never more evident that we were in the center of God’s will. That afternoon, we headed to Big Piney to lead Sunday evening services. We never made it.

En route to the hospital, I learned what happened. Whiteout conditions led to limited visibility on South Pass. A half-ton pickup truck crossed into our lane and hit our car head-on. It seemed implausible to me that on a peaceful spring day, a sudden snow storm could besiege a stretch of that sunny mountain pass. Then I recalled the highway sign and Shane’s words as he assured me, “It will be all right.” Those five words became his last. Ellie died instantly in the crash. Shane died the following day from his injuries. He was 33. And I lived.
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I needed hope.
I wanted assurance that God is in control, that He was not shaken, nor was He taken by surprise the day Shane and Ellie entered His courts.

My torso and limbs were crushed. My back and neck were fractured in four places. My pelvic bone and femur were crushed, and the bones in my left arm were shattered. I suffered severe trauma to the head, broken ribs, a punctured lung, and a torn rotator cuff. I sustained a deep gash to my right leg where the mangled metal pinned me to the backseat of the car. My tongue was mutilated by the vice grip I created with my own teeth. And although the damage to my body was extensive, I believed the damage to my heart was beyond repair.

In an instant, I was stripped of all that I treasured: my beloved spouse, my delightful baby girl, my health, my financial security, and my ministry. I turned to the only thing I had left: my faith in Jesus Christ. In my brokenness, I challenged all that I believed to be true about God's Word and His character.

In the eye of my private storm, I sought answers.
I needed hope. I wanted assurance that God is in control, that He was not shaken, nor was He taken by surprise the day Shane and Ellie entered His courts. Whether waking or sleeping, I could think of nothing else. The weight of grief and the hope of glory consumed my thoughts every moment of every day. I tried to busy my mind with other things but always gravitated back toward understanding God's hand of sovereignty in my tragedy.

I was challenged physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually. I tolerated rehabilitative, occupational, and recreational therapy, and I worked earnestly toward the goal of walking unassisted. When I was at my weakest — and my outlook was the bleakest — I would quietly recite, "[God's] grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness" (2 Corinthians 12:9).

As I poured over the pages of God's Word, it became a regular practice to insert my own name in the text. The Bible became intensely personal, as if written solely for me and specifically for my time of crisis. Over time, God's promises became my soul's anchor. First Peter 4:12-13 affirmed, "Don't be surprised when the fiery ordeal comes among you to test you [Casey] as if something unusual were happening to you. Instead, rejoice as you share in the sufferings of the Messiah [Casey], so that you may also rejoice with great joy at the revelation of His glory."

This passage reminded me of how much the Lord endured on the cross. In my darkest moments, although my pain was great — and at times seemed almost unbearable — the pain Christ suffered to redeem my life from the pit was infinitely greater. My steady spiritual ascent from the valley of darkness began here, as I clung tightly to this glorious thought.

While enduring the physical conditioning of therapy to heal my body, I also began the mental and highly emotional conditioning of writing to heal my heart. My physical therapy sessions helped me flex muscles of endurance and strength, and my writing sessions refined my character and tested my loyalty. Then in January 2007, I began to blog weekly and wrote about my private pain in a public forum.

Over the course of 17 months, I watched my words of lingering anger, debilitating fear, muffled unforgiveness, suffocating guilt, and overwhelming grief transform into words of hope, joy, forgiveness, grace, peace, healing, restoration, and abundant life. Looking back, my “Journey of Faith” blog was pivotal in the recovery process; it was my road to complete healing. By God's design, it became more than a blog for me; it became a destination for people to dialogue about their own memories, losses, and experiences. Suddenly, my eyes were opened to others who were searching — and finding — comfort in Christ alone during life's deepest valleys. From this realization, a beautiful new ministry blossomed, one born out of wrecked seed.

When I'm next door, listening to the downpour with my neighbor, I've noticed that the roar of the rain on my own front porch is virtually silent.

My experience has taught me that our life storms are not meant to be self-consuming, self-perpetuating cycles of despair. Though we may have storms raging internally, the real work is done externally, where we encounter others who are desperately hurting and frantically searching. Christians are called to focus on others’ needs — to be others-centered — and to share the truth about God's presence in the midst of our own difficult circumstances. When I'm next door, listening to the downpour with my neighbor, I've noticed that the roar of the rain on my own front porch is virtually silent.

Even today, listening to life storms of others continues to be a powerful remedy for my pain. People everywhere
are hurting. God alone can deliver us from wickedness and harm, as it so beautifully states in Psalm 91.

**So, why does God** permit the existence of pain and suffering in the lives of those He loves? Surely, a good, loving, and compassionate God would not allow His children to suffer needlessly!

According to Randy Alcorn in his book *The Goodness of God* (Multnomah), evil and suffering fulfill a divine purpose. Alcorn writes, “From before the very beginning, God knew the very worst — as well as the very best it would one day bring.” He asserts that God uses pain as a catalyst to draw people to Himself. That is certainly true for me. I could have allowed my muscles to atrophy with apathy, or decidedly run away from God, but my legs and my heart were strengthened by taking strides toward Him.

### Resources for Trials
- *God of All Comfort* by Hannah Whitall Smith (Whitaker House)
- *Am I Not Still God?* by Kathy Troccoli (W Publishing Group)
- *Just Give Me Jesus* (Thomas Nelson) and *My Heart’s Cry* (W Publishing Group) by Anne Graham Lotz
- *From Grief to Glory* by James W. Bruce III (Banner of Truth)
- *When God Weeps* by Joni Eareckson Tada and Steven Estes (Zondervan)

Although these days the world appears to be out of control and seems utterly chaotic, know that there is a God with a perfect order to things, a God who does everything out of love to produce something better in us. The pain we experience is the principle consequence of living in a fallen and flawed world. But God’s redemptive promise is that, one day, He will remove evil and suffering from this world, after accomplishing a greater, eternal good.

The Bible tells us in Matthew 5:45 that God causes His sunlight to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. Regardless of the climate today or the forecast tomorrow, keep the faith. Muster the strength to pray:

> **Dear God,** whether or not You choose to change my circumstances, I will trust in You still. And Lord, whether or not You call on me to suffer a little longer, I will worship You even still, for You embodied ‘suffering well’ for my sake. Either way, Lord, I know that You are in control.

> **Not my will,** but Yours be done. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

Perhaps you’re currently facing the buffeting tempests of a job loss, a financial crisis, a startling medical diagnosis, or personal tragedy. As believers, we don’t have to linger in the dark storms of life, waiting for the ominous shadows to pass. We can walk in the assurance of God’s redemptive plan because we’re covered by the ultimate umbrella of protection: Jesus Christ. Second Corinthians 4:17 reminds us, “For our momentary light affliction is producing for us an absolutely incomparable eternal weight of glory.”

Whether you’re grieving a natural disaster, mourning our disordered universe, or weeping over misfortunes of your own making, don’t allow your current trial to blot out the light. Look toward the Son, and you will find refuge in Christ alone during life’s fiercest storms.

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In her lifetime, **Casey Ewen Avenriep** has experienced the fullness of God’s presence through times of great joy and unspeakable heartache. She has marveled at the births of three children and has grieved the deaths of two of those children — Caleb at 15 days old, who died from complications of prematurity, and Ellie at 6 months, who died in the car accident that also claimed the life of Shane Ewen, Casey’s husband of four years. She is committed to sharing about those experiences through her writing and her speaking and loves ministering to others who are searching — and finding — comfort in Christ alone during life’s deepest valleys. Her story is an inspiring one, centering on the redemptive power of God to heal and restore the brokenhearted. Casey and her husband, Brett, live in the windy plains of Texas with their 2-year-old son, Grayson.

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**I could have allowed my muscles to atrophy with apathy, or decidedly run away from God, but my legs and my heart were strengthened by taking strides toward Him.**

**No matter what your storm may be,** it will pass. The Bible says there is a time for everything and a season for every activity. I believed that God would — in His perfect timing — deliver me from a lifetime of pain and heartache. One day, I remember thanking God for my storms because I knew that the sun would shine again. The stormy season would not last forever.

Nearly two years after I lost the family I cherished, God put an end to my storm. I met Brett, and my heart was restored and awakened to love once more. In August 2008, we exchanged wedding vows and one month later, we learned that a little boy would arrive in the spring. We learned that a little boy would arrive in the spring. We went through the miraculous birth of Grayson James, our little sunbeam. My union with Brett is merely a wisps of God’s masterful plan at work. Although we live in uncertain times, we can say with absolute certainty that we trust Him with our family and our future.

**Since that fateful day in 2006,** I’ve witnessed all of the good that has come out of tragedy, and I’m beginning to recognize why it was necessary. The flashing sign INCLEMENT WEATHER. NO UNNECESSARY TRAVEL was a word of admonition; it was a word of instruction. God was teaching me His wisdom for living the Christian life. I cracked the code: Trials are necessary to accomplish God’s higher purposes. This is for my good and His glory.