

HELP! What's New This Morning?

Finding New Mercy for Whatever Today Brings

Introduction

HELP!

There are mornings when “What’s new?” is an ordinary question.

What’s on the calendar?

What needs to be done?

Where do I need to be?

What happened while I was sleeping?

And then there are mornings when the question carries considerably more weight.

HELP! What’s new this morning?

For a family caring for someone who is dying, those words can carry fear.

Did something change during the night?

Is Mom still responsive?

Is Dad breathing differently?

Can she still swallow?

Is he weaker?

Will he recognize me today?

Is this the morning everything changes?

For someone living with grief, morning brings another kind of discovery.

For a few seconds after waking, everything may seem normal.

Then we remember.

They are gone.

The world continued turning.

Morning came.

And somehow, we are expected to get out of bed and enter a day we never wanted to experience without them.

But hospice and grief are not the only places where mornings can frighten us.

There are mornings after a diagnosis.

Mornings after the relationship ends.

Mornings after losing a job.

Mornings after the phone call.

Mornings when the bank account frightens us.

Mornings when our children are struggling and we cannot fix it.

Mornings when our bodies remind us that we are changing.

Mornings after something we said that we desperately wish we could take back.

Mornings when faith feels strong.

And mornings when God seems strangely quiet.

There are mornings when we awaken before our courage does.

And sometimes the most honest prayer we can manage is one word:

HELP.

Not an eloquent prayer.

Not a theological explanation.

Not a carefully constructed statement of faith.

Just—

Help.

Perhaps that prayer is more sacred than we realize.

Because Scripture does not tell us that every morning will bring good news.

It does not promise that nothing difficult will change overnight.

It does not tell the caregiver that their loved one will be stronger today.

It does not tell the grieving spouse that today will hurt less than yesterday.

It does not promise that the diagnosis will disappear, the relationship will repair itself, or the problem waiting for us will somehow vanish before breakfast.

Instead, Scripture offers something quieter.

Something deeper.

Something that does not deny reality.

The book of Lamentations was born in devastation.

Its words emerge from loss, destruction, displacement, sorrow and bewilderment.

This is not someone writing from the comfort of an easy life.

The writer has seen things fall apart.

And then, almost unexpectedly, from inside that lament comes one of Scripture's most beautiful declarations:

“The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases;
his mercies never come to an end;
they are new every morning;
great is your faithfulness.”

The writer does not say everything is new every morning.

He says something very specific is new.

Mercy.

That distinction matters.

God's love does not need to become new every morning.

Love is not something God exhausts during the day and replenishes while we sleep.

God does not awaken more loving toward us than He was yesterday.

His grace has not expired.

His faithfulness has not reset.

God is constant.

But we are not.

Every morning we awaken into a life that is slightly different from the one we carried to bed.

Sometimes radically different.

Something has changed.

Something has happened.

Something has been lost.

Something has been discovered.

Something hurts differently.

Someone needs us differently.

Perhaps we need someone differently.

And sometimes we ourselves have changed in ways we do not yet understand.

So maybe mercy is new every morning because mercy is the way the unchanging Love of God meets the ever-changing condition of being human.

The sun is not recreated every morning.

Yet every sunrise is new.

Perhaps mercy is something like that.

The Source has not changed.

But the light is meeting a morning that has never existed before.

And so are we.

This is where another passage becomes important.

Hebrews tells us:

“Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.”

Hebrews 4:16

Notice the words.

Mercy.

Grace.

Help.

Need.

These are not words for people who have everything under control.

They are words for people who need something.

And immediately before this invitation, we are told that Jesus is not unable to sympathize with our weakness.

In other words:

I understand.

Come closer.

Receive mercy.

Find grace.

There is help here.

That changes the meaning of HELP!

Help is not the cry of someone who has failed spiritually.

Help may be one of the most honest prayers a human being can pray.

There may be mornings when you have no beautiful words.

No great faith declaration.

No explanation.

No energy to make sense of what is happening.

Only:

Help me.

And according to Hebrews, that cry does not lead us toward a throne of disappointment.

It leads us toward a throne of grace.

Perhaps this is the invitation of every morning:

We do not have to know what today will bring.

We do not have to possess today's strength before today begins.

We do not have to carry tomorrow's sorrow this morning.

We only have to awaken to the mercy that has already arrived.

Because whatever is new this morning,

mercy is new this morning too.

And when the moment becomes more than we believe we can carry,

there is grace to help in the time of need.

This book is about those mornings.

The beautiful ones.

The frightening ones.

The ordinary ones.

The mornings when nothing seems different.

And the mornings when everything is.

It is for caregivers.

For grieving families.

For people living beside someone they love whose life is changing.

For those facing uncertainty.

For those whose faith has changed.

For those who are tired.

For those beginning again.

And perhaps simply for anyone who has ever opened their eyes in the morning and wondered:

What now?

We will not attempt to predict what will be new.

We will learn instead to recognize what is already waiting for us there.

Mercy.

Grace.

Help.

Presence.

And perhaps tomorrow morning, before our feet ever touch the floor, we can whisper:

HELP! What's new this morning?

And hear something deeper whisper back:

Mercy is.

Chapter One

Why Mercy?

“His mercies are new every morning.”

Why mercy?

That question is worth sitting with.

The passage does not say:

His love is new every morning.

It does not say:

His grace is new every morning.

It does not even say:

God is new every morning.

It says His **mercies** are new.

Perhaps we have used the words love, grace and mercy so interchangeably that we have missed something beautiful in their distinction.

God's love is not a response to our condition.

Love is His nature.

God does not love because we are lovable.

God loves because God is Love.

Grace is the generosity that flows from that Love.

It is gift.

Unearned.

Unforced.

Not payment for good behavior.

Not spiritual wages.

Not something accumulated through religious performance.

But mercy feels different.

Mercy bends toward suffering.

Mercy enters the particular.

Mercy encounters us where life actually hurts.

Mercy is what eternal Love looks like when it touches today's wound.

And wounds change.

Needs change.

Loss changes.

Caregiving changes.

Grief changes.

We change.

That may be why mercy must be new every morning.

Not because yesterday's mercy failed.

But because **today has never happened before.**

The person you love may be different today.

Your capacity may be different today.

Your grief may feel different today.

Your questions may be different today.

Even your understanding of God may be different today.

And mercy does not demand that today look like yesterday.

Mercy meets you here.

This morning.

This breath.

This need.

Perhaps one of the great mistakes we make is trying to survive today on yesterday's mercy.

Yesterday you had strength for the conversation you needed to have.

Today you may need permission to be silent.

Yesterday you were the caregiver.

Today you may need someone to care for you.

Yesterday you held everything together.

Today you may fall apart.

Yesterday you believed without difficulty.

Today you may have questions.

And mercy does not stand over you saying:

“What happened to yesterday’s faith?”

Mercy comes closer and asks:

“What do you need today?”

That is Presence.

Not fixing.

Not explaining.

Not judging.

Not demanding that someone experience today differently.

Simply meeting them in the reality of this morning.

Because perhaps the greatest promise isn’t that tomorrow will be easier.

It is that when tomorrow becomes **today**, mercy will already be there.

And perhaps that changes the way we think about faithfulness.

We often imagine faithfulness as our ability to remain steady.

To keep believing.

To keep trusting.

To keep praying.

To remain strong.

But Lamentations does not conclude:

Great is my faithfulness.

It says:

Great is Your faithfulness.

That is an enormous difference.

Especially on mornings when ours feels very small.

There are mornings when we are faithful.

And there are mornings when all we can do is breathe.

There are mornings when prayer comes naturally.

And mornings when prayer feels impossible.

There are mornings when we feel the Presence of God.

And mornings when Presence seems absent.

There are mornings when hope rises before we do.

And mornings when hope seems to have slept somewhere else.

Yet the mercy of God is not dependent upon the emotional condition in which we awaken.

Great is Your faithfulness.

Not mine.

Perhaps that is why mercy can be new every morning.

Its source is not us.

The Mercy We Thought We Had to Earn

Some of us were introduced to mercy in a strangely conditional way.

We were told God was merciful, but often mercy seemed to arrive only after we had done something.

Confessed correctly.

Repented sufficiently.

Prayed sincerely.

Believed strongly.

Changed our behavior.

Made things right.

And certainly there is beauty in confession, repentance, responsibility and transformation.

But if mercy must first be earned, it is no longer mercy.

Mercy begins in the heart of the One who gives it.

Before we ever know we need it.

Before we know what to call it.

Before we have found the words.

Morning itself becomes a picture of this.

You do not create the sunrise.

You awaken to it.

Perhaps mercy is the same.

You don't manufacture it.

You don't persuade God to provide it.

You awaken and discover:

It is already here.

That does not make our choices meaningless.

It makes transformation possible.

We change not because Love has been withheld until we behave properly.

We change because Love has come near enough for us to become honest.

That is an entirely different spiritual environment.

Fear says:

Change, and perhaps you will be accepted.

Mercy says:

You are met here. Now let us walk from here together.

Mercy Does Not Mean Nothing Hurts

This is particularly important when sitting beside suffering.

Mercy is not the promise that nothing painful will happen today.

Sometimes the morning brings exactly what we feared.

The decline becomes more noticeable.

The physician confirms the diagnosis.

The relationship ends.

The phone rings.

The person dies.

The empty chair remains empty.

The test result is not what we hoped.

The apology never comes.

The situation does not resolve.

If we define mercy as God preventing painful things from happening, then some of the most painful mornings of our lives will appear to be evidence that God has abandoned us.

But perhaps mercy is not always found in what did **not** happen.

Sometimes mercy is discovered in what becomes available to us **while it is happening.**

A strength we did not know we possessed.

A nurse who enters at exactly the right moment.

A friend who sits without trying to explain anything.

A hand reaching across the bed.

A memory that suddenly makes us laugh in the middle of tears.

Permission to stop pretending.

The courage to say goodbye.

The freedom to say, "I don't know."

A moment of unexpected peace.

A breath.

A silence.

A Presence.

Sometimes mercy looks remarkably ordinary.

And because we are looking for the miraculous, we almost miss it.

At the Bedside

Hospice has taught me something about mercy.

Families often become extraordinarily attentive to small changes.

Breathing.

Skin color.

Movement.

Wakefulness.

Appetite.

Speech.

A slight grimace.

A longer period of sleep.

When someone you love is approaching the end of life, ordinary observations can suddenly carry enormous meaning.

Morning can become a kind of assessment.

What's new this morning?

Sometimes the answer is reassuring.

Sometimes it isn't.

And one of the most important things we can offer a family in that moment is not an explanation.

It is Presence.

We cannot promise that their loved one will improve.

We cannot promise how much time remains.

We cannot make grief disappear.

We cannot always answer the question everyone is thinking:

How much longer?

But we can be there.

And perhaps this is one of the ways human beings participate in the mercy of God.

We become mercy for one another.

Not because we are God.

But because Love can move through human presence.

The nurse adjusting a pillow.

The aide gently bathing someone who can no longer bathe themselves.

The social worker listening to a frightened spouse.

The chaplain sitting quietly after words have run out.

The daughter holding her mother's hand.

The husband saying for the hundredth time:

"I'm right here."

These may appear to be small things.

They are not.

They are mercy taking shape.

They are Presence becoming tangible.

Grace to Help

This brings us again to Hebrews:

"Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need."

There is something wonderfully realistic about that phrase:

in time of need.

Not before we ever have needs.

Not after we have successfully resolved them.

In them.

We often want grace that eliminates the time of need.

Hebrews speaks of grace that **helps us in it.**

That may not initially sound as spectacular.

Until you have lived long enough.

Then you discover how sacred help can be.

When someone is drowning, help is not a theological concept.

When someone is grieving, help is not an abstraction.

When someone has been awake all-night caring for a dying spouse, help may look like someone arriving so they can shower.

When a daughter is frightened by changes in her mother's breathing, help may be a nurse calmly explaining what she is seeing.

When someone cannot pray anymore, help may be another person sitting beside them without requiring prayer.

Grace becomes embodied.

And perhaps that is part of what the writer of Hebrews is showing us.

The throne of grace is not merely a destination for the spiritually successful.

It is the place of **help.**

Maybe Help Is Holy

We are often uncomfortable needing help.

We would rather give it.

We would rather be strong.

Independent.

Capable.

Useful.

The one everyone else calls.

Until one morning we become the one who needs someone.

Life has a way of bringing us there.

Age can bring us there.

Illness can bring us there.

Loss can bring us there.

Love can bring us there.

Grief certainly can.

And sometimes the spiritual journey itself brings us there.

We discover that some of the certainties we once carried no longer fit.

We have questions we were once afraid to ask.

We find ourselves standing before God without the religious language that used to make everything seem manageable.

And perhaps all that remains is:

Help.

What if that isn't spiritual failure?

What if it is prayer in its most uncluttered form?

No performance.

No pretending.

No bargaining.

Just need meeting Presence.

Help me.

Hebrews says there is grace for that.

Lamentations says there is mercy for that.

And morning says:

Begin here.

Today Has Never Happened Before

That sentence may be worth remembering.

Today has never happened before.

We have experienced thousands of mornings.

But never this one.

We have loved before.

But never loved from exactly where we stand today.

We have grieved before.

But grief changes as we do.

We have cared for others before.

But today's needs are today's needs.

We have believed before.

But faith itself grows, stretches, sheds old language and discovers deeper ways of seeing.

So perhaps we do not need yesterday's answers for today's questions.

Perhaps we need today's mercy.

That releases us from something.

We don't have to recreate yesterday.

We don't have to feel what we felt yesterday.

We don't have to be who we were yesterday.

We don't even have to understand everything today.

We can simply ask:

What is new this morning?

And then perhaps another question:

Where is mercy meeting me in what is new?

It may not be where we expected.

It may not look religious.

It may arrive through another person.

Through rest.

Through tears.

Through laughter that surprises us.

Through a memory.

Through silence.

Through the courage to ask for help.

Through the realization that we do not have to carry the entire future today.

Maybe that is enough for this morning.

Not answers for the rest of our lives.

Not strength for next month.

Not mercy for next year.

Just this:

Mercy for this morning.

Grace for this moment.

Help for this need.

Presence for this breath.

And tomorrow?

Tomorrow has its own morning.

And when it arrives, mercy will be new there too.

Chapter Two

We Awaken Before We Know

Most mornings begin before we have decided anything.

Our eyes open.

We become aware of the room.

The light.

The sounds.

Our body.

And then, almost immediately, we begin remembering who we are and what life currently requires of us.

Sometimes memory arrives gently.

Sometimes it crashes through the door.

There are mornings when consciousness itself feels like a gift.

And there are mornings when the first difficult thing we experience is simply remembering.

Oh, yes.

This is my life now.

Perhaps that small space between awakening and remembering is one of the most vulnerable places in the human experience.

Because every morning, for just a moment, we arrive before all the explanations do.

Then the story returns.

The diagnosis.

The loss.

The conflict.

The responsibility.

The unanswered question.

The person we miss.

The thing we fear.

And sometimes, before our feet ever touch the floor, we have already traveled miles inside our minds.

What if today is worse?

What if the phone rings?

What if something changes?

What if I cannot handle another thing?

What if this is the morning?

And there it is again:

HELP! What's new this morning?

Perhaps the invitation is not to silence that question.

Perhaps the invitation is to discover that we are not asking it alone.

Before the Day Explains Itself

There is a temptation each morning to immediately begin solving the day.

Before we know what has actually happened, we anticipate what might happen.

We rehearse conversations that have not occurred.

We imagine outcomes that have not arrived.

We prepare ourselves emotionally for losses that may still be somewhere in the distance.

We borrow from tomorrow.

And sometimes we begin grieving things that have not yet happened.

This is especially understandable when life has become unpredictable.

Anyone who has cared for someone whose health is declining understands this.

You learn to watch.

You listen differently.

You notice things other people might not notice.

A change in breathing.

A different expression.

Less appetite.

More sleep.

A little confusion.

A little weakness.

The phone beside the bed becomes louder even when it isn't ringing.

You become attentive because love has made you attentive.

But vigilance has a cost.

Eventually the body forgets how to stop watching.

Even when nothing is happening, something inside remains alert.

What's next?

What changed?

What am I missing?

What if I fall asleep and something happens?

Sometimes caregiving means the body is lying down while the heart remains standing watch.

That is exhausting.

And it deserves compassion, not correction.

Mercy for the Mind That Runs Ahead

Perhaps this is another reason mercy must be new every morning.

Our bodies awaken in one place.

Our minds can awaken in twenty.

Yesterday.

Tomorrow.

The doctor's appointment.

The hospital.

The funeral.

The conversation we need to have.

The conversation we wish we had never had.

The thing someone said ten years ago.

The thing we are afraid someone will say this afternoon.

We can live an entire imaginary day before breakfast.

And then Jesus offers a remarkably simple observation:

Today has enough of its own.

“Do not worry about tomorrow,” He says, “for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.”

That is not a criticism of people who worry.

It may actually be mercy.

Jesus is not shaming an anxious mind.

He is relieving it of an impossible assignment.

You do not have to live tomorrow today.

Tomorrow is not asking anything from you yet.

This morning is.

This breath is.

This person is.

This moment is.

Maybe “do not worry about tomorrow” is less command than invitation:

Come back here.

Come back to this morning.

Come back to what is actually happening.

Come back to the grace available now.

Because there is something important about Hebrews 4:16 that we can easily overlook.

It promises “grace to help **in time of need.**”

Not grace for every imaginable future need simultaneously.

Grace for the need when the need becomes present.

We often want tomorrow’s grace today because we are already trying to live tomorrow.

But perhaps tomorrow’s grace isn’t here because tomorrow isn’t here.

Today’s grace is.

What If I Can’t Handle It?

I have heard some version of this question countless times.

Sometimes aloud.

Sometimes hidden inside another question.

“What will happen next?”

“How will I know?”

“What will it look like?”

“How much longer?”

But underneath those questions there is often another:

Will I be able to handle it?

That may be one of the deepest fears surrounding loss.

Not simply that something painful will happen.

But that when it happens, we will not have what we need to survive it.

And people sometimes respond with a familiar phrase:

“God won’t give you more than you can handle.”

It is usually offered kindly.

But life has taught many of us otherwise.

There are things we cannot handle.

That is why we need one another.

That is why we need mercy.

That is why we need grace.

That is why we cry:

Help.

Perhaps faith is not the confidence that I can handle whatever happens.

Perhaps faith is discovering that **I was never required to handle everything alone.**

Hebrews does not say:

Approach the throne of grace so that you can discover how strong you really are.

It says we come there to **obtain mercy and find grace to help.**

Help assumes need.

Help assumes limitation.

Help assumes that sometimes what is before us exceeds what we possess within ourselves.

There is no shame in that.

It may actually be one of the most human things about us.

We need.

And we are needed.

The Sacredness of “I Don’t Know”

Hospice has also taught me the importance of three words:

I don’t know.

People facing the end of life often ask questions for which no honest person can give precise answers.

“How much longer?”

“Will she wake up again?”

“Will he know I’m here?”

“Is this the last day?”

Sometimes experience gives us clues.

Sometimes the body tells us that death is approaching.

But there remains mystery.

And Presence does not require us to fill mystery with certainty.

Sometimes the most compassionate answer begins:

“I don’t know.”

But it doesn’t have to end there.

“I don’t know exactly how long.”

“But I’m here.”

“I don’t know what tomorrow will look like.”

“But we’ll walk through what is happening today.”

“I don’t know whether he can respond.”

“But you can still talk to him.”

“I don’t know how you’re going to feel afterward.”

“But you won’t have to feel it alone.”

There is tremendous tenderness in honest uncertainty.

We sometimes think people need answers.

Often they need someone who is not afraid of their questions.

That is Presence.

Presence does not rush to fill every silence.

It does not manufacture certainty to make discomfort disappear.

It can stand beside mystery and remain.

Perhaps God can too.

Morning at the Bedside

Imagine a woman waking beside her husband.

They have shared a bed for fifty years.

For most of those years, morning had its own familiar rhythm.

Someone got up first.

Coffee was made.

A newspaper opened.

A television murmured.

There were appointments and errands and conversations about ordinary things.

Then illness entered their life.

Gradually the morning ritual changed.

Now she wakes before him.

She listens.

There is a pause between his breaths that wasn't there months ago.

She watches his chest.

Up.

Down.

Pause.

Up.

Down.

She reaches across the bed and touches his hand.

Still warm.

She whispers his name.

He does not answer.

And suddenly the question is no longer philosophical.

What's new this morning?

She doesn't need a theological lecture.

She needs someone willing to enter this morning with her.

Someone who can say:

Let's see what today is asking of us.

Not next week.

Not the funeral.

Not the paperwork.

Not the empty bedroom.

Not all the mornings that may follow.

This one.

Only this one.

There will be time for the others when they arrive.

And mercy will meet her there too.

Anticipatory Grief

There is a particular kind of grief that begins before death.

We grieve while someone is still here.

We grieve what they can no longer do.

We grieve conversations we may never have again.

We grieve independence.

Mobility.

Memory.

Plans.

Roles.

The future we assumed would be ours.

This grief can be confusing because love and loss occupy the same room.

The person is here.

And something is already gone.

So we begin saying goodbye in pieces.

Sometimes without realizing it.

A caregiver may look at the person sleeping in the next room and already miss them.

That does not mean they have given up.

It means love has recognized change.

And mercy does not shame that grief.

Mercy sits beside it.

There is no requirement that we wait until death to acknowledge what has already been lost.

There is also no requirement that every remaining moment be meaningful.

That is another burden we sometimes place upon families.

Make every moment count.

It sounds beautiful.

But it can become exhausting.

Some moments are simply moments.

Someone sleeps.

The television is on.

Laundry needs to be done.

Medication needs to be given.

Someone becomes irritated.

Someone says the wrong thing.

Someone needs a break.

Someone laughs at something completely inappropriate.

This too is life.

You do not have to turn every remaining minute into a sacred ceremony.

Sometimes the sacred thing is simply being there.

Presence Before Answers

This may be one of the central convictions behind everything that follows:

Presence comes before answers.

When someone is hurting, our instinct is often to explain.

Why this happened.

What God is doing.

What they should believe.

What they should feel.

What they should do next.

But explanations offered too quickly can become another form of absence.

We are speaking because we are uncomfortable being still.

Presence asks something different.

Can I remain with you before I try to change what you are experiencing?

Can I hear your fear without correcting it?

Can I hear your anger without defending God?

Can I hear your doubt without trying to rescue your faith?

Can I hear your grief without rushing you toward gratitude?

Can I allow this morning to be what it is?

That does not mean abandoning hope.

It means allowing hope to become honest.

Hope does not have to say:

Everything will turn out the way I want.

Sometimes hope simply says:

Whatever comes, I will not be abandoned in it.

That is a very different kind of hope.

And perhaps a much more durable one.

When Morning Brings the News

There will eventually be a morning when something really is new.

The call comes.

The test result arrives.

The breathing changes.

The person dies.

The relationship is over.

The job is gone.

The child leaves.

The doctor says the words.

And there is a strange moment when life divides itself into two parts:

before I knew

and

after I knew.

The clock may barely move.

But everything has changed.

We cannot prepare ourselves completely for those moments.

And perhaps we shouldn't try.

Because trying to feel tomorrow's pain today does not protect us from tomorrow.

It only causes us to suffer twice.

What we can practice is Presence.

This moment.

This breath.

This morning.

This mercy.

And when the next moment arrives—

this moment.

This breath.

This mercy.

Again.

And again.

And again.

Perhaps this is what “new every morning” begins to teach us.

Life does not arrive all at once.

Neither does mercy.

Mercy meets us as life arrives.

You Are Here

Maybe before asking,

What’s new this morning?

we begin with something even simpler:

I am here.

Not where I thought I would be.

Not necessarily where I want to be.

Not where I was yesterday.

But here.

And God is here.

Mercy is here.

Grace is here.

Help is available here.

Presence is possible here.

That may be enough to begin.

You don't have to understand the whole day.

You don't have to know how the story ends.

You don't have to manufacture courage for something that hasn't happened.

You don't need tomorrow's strength this morning.

You need enough mercy for now.

So when your mind races ahead and asks:

What if?

Perhaps your heart can answer:

Not yet.

When tomorrow demands an answer:

Not yet.

When fear tries to make you live an ending that has not arrived:

Not yet.

And when morning finally asks:

What's new?

We can answer honestly:

I don't know yet.

Then perhaps add:

But mercy is.

And for this morning, that is enough.

Chapter Three

Help Is Not a Failure of Faith

There are moments when prayer becomes very short.

Not because faith has disappeared.

Because life has removed all the unnecessary words.

Help.

Sometimes that is all we have.

And perhaps it is all we need.

We have often imagined mature faith as becoming increasingly self-sufficient.

Strong believers know what to do.

Strong believers know what to say.

Strong believers remain calm.

Strong believers trust without questioning.

Strong believers do not fall apart.

But I wonder where we learned that.

Because when we look carefully at Scripture, we find people crying out.

We find lament.

Questions.

Fear.

Confusion.

Groaning.

Silence.

We find people asking God where He is.

We even find Jesus in anguish.

Maybe faith was never supposed to make us less human.

Maybe faith allows us to become fully human in the Presence of God.

And sometimes the most fully human thing we can say is:

I need help.

Hebrews does not rebuke us for needing it.

It invites us closer because we do.

“Come boldly,” it says.

Not because you are strong.

Not because you performed well yesterday.

Not because your theology is perfectly arranged.

Come because there is mercy to receive.

Come because there is grace to find.

Come because there is **help in the time of need**.

The need itself becomes part of the invitation.

And perhaps that means the cry at the center of this book—

HELP! What's new this morning?

—is not merely the cry of frightened people.

It may be the beginning of communion.

Come Boldly

There is something almost surprising about the word **boldly** in Hebrews 4:16.

“Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace...”

We might expect:

Come carefully.

Come reverently.

Come after examining yourself.

Come after confessing everything.

Come when your faith is strong.

Come when you have cleaned yourself up.

But Hebrews says:

Come boldly.

And the reason for that invitation is found immediately before it.

We have a High Priest who understands human weakness.

The invitation to come near is not based upon our ability to hide our weakness.

It is based upon the assurance that our weakness is already understood.

That changes everything.

Perhaps boldness before God isn't walking into His Presence convinced of our own righteousness.

Perhaps boldness is walking into His Presence with nothing left to hide.

I'm frightened.

Come.

I'm angry.

Come.

I don't understand.

Come.

I'm exhausted.

Come.

I'm not sure what I believe anymore.

Come.

I don't think I can do this.

Come.

Help.

Come.

The throne remains a throne.

But Hebrews names it according to what flows from it:

grace.

Not intimidation.

Not humiliation.

Not rejection.

Grace.

And there we “obtain mercy.”

Perhaps mercy was never something we had to convince God to give.

Perhaps mercy is what we discover when we finally come close enough to stop hiding.

The God Who Understands Weakness

That thought deserves more attention.

Hebrews does not merely say that God knows we are weak.

It speaks of One who can **sympathize** with our weakness.

There is a difference between knowing something and entering it.

A physician can know the symptoms of grief.

A counselor can study trauma.

A chaplain can understand bereavement theory.

But sitting beside the bed of someone you love changes the vocabulary.

Suddenly loss is not a subject.

It has a name.

A face.

A voice.

A chair at the table.

A side of the bed.

A favorite coffee cup.

A phone number you cannot bring yourself to delete.

This is why Presence matters.

Human beings do not only need to be understood intellectually.

We need to be **known from near**.

And the Christ revealed in Hebrews is not observing human suffering from a safe distance.

He knows exhaustion.

Rejection.

Misunderstanding.

Grief.

Betrayal.

Pain.

Fear.

Tears.

He knows what it is to ask for another way.

He knows what it is to cry out.

He knows what it is to weep beside a grave.

So when Hebrews says:

Come boldly,

it is not inviting suffering people toward Someone unfamiliar with suffering.

It is inviting them toward Someone who understands.

Perhaps this is why Presence can be more healing than explanation.

Explanation says:

Here is why.

Presence says:

I know.

Jesus Wept

There may be no better picture of this than two words:

Jesus wept.

He stood outside the tomb of Lazarus.

He knew things the grieving people around Him did not know.

He knew resurrection was coming.

He knew death would not have the final word.

He knew the story was not finished.

And still—

He wept.

That matters.

Jesus did not allow what He knew about tomorrow to prevent Him from entering the sorrow of today.

He did not stand beside Martha and Mary and say:

Stop crying. You don't understand what I'm about to do.

He entered their grief.

Presence first.

Resurrection would come.

But tears were allowed before it.

That may teach us something enormously important about helping people.

Knowing that hope exists does not require us to rush someone toward it.

Knowing there will be another morning does not mean this morning does not hurt.

Knowing mercy is new does not mean grief is small.

We can know something is ultimately held by Love and still weep over what has happened.

Those things are not opposites.

They may actually belong together.

Sometimes Help Looks Like Tears

We often imagine help as making someone feel better.

But sometimes help means creating enough safety for someone to finally feel what they have been carrying.

The tears come.

The shoulders drop.

The story is told.

The anger surfaces.

The fear finally gets spoken aloud.

And nothing has been fixed.

Yet something has changed.

They are no longer carrying it alone.

Perhaps tears themselves can be merciful.

The body has its own language for things words cannot contain.

There are losses too large for sentences.

There are moments when explanation becomes almost insulting.

So the eyes speak.

And another person sits nearby.

No sermon.

No correction.

No spiritual cliché.

No attempt to turn sorrow into a lesson.

Just Presence.

This is sacred ground.

The Courage to Need Someone

There is another side to “Help.”

We must be willing to let another person help us.

That can be surprisingly difficult.

Especially for caregivers.

Caregivers become accustomed to being needed.

They organize.

Remember.

Lift.

Clean.

Call.

Schedule.

Prepare.

Watch.

Advocate.

Comfort.

They know where the medication is.

They know when the last dose was given.

They know what the doctor said.

They know which family member needs to be updated.

They know which bills need attention.

They know what their loved one can tolerate today.

And slowly, almost invisibly, the caregiver's own needs move toward the bottom of the list.

Someone asks:

“How are you doing?”

And the answer comes automatically:

“I’m fine.”

But sometimes “I’m fine” really means:

I don’t have time to fall apart.

Or:

If I start talking about it, I’m afraid I won’t stop.

Or:

Everyone else needs me.

Or simply:

I don’t know anymore.

Mercy may arrive one morning as permission to say something different.

I’m tired.

I’m scared.

I need a break.

I need someone to sit with me.

I need help.

There is no failure in that.

There is humanity.

Receiving Is Also Sacred

Many of us have been taught that giving is more spiritual than receiving.

We admire the giver.

The helper.

The servant.

The caregiver.

But receiving requires its own kind of humility.

To receive is to admit that I am not self-contained.

I need someone.

And perhaps that is not a defect in the human design.

Perhaps it is part of the design.

We were made for relationship.

For community.

For shared burdens.

For hands reaching toward one another.

Sometimes I am the hand reaching out.

Sometimes I am the hand being held.

Both can be holy.

The Presence Network is rooted in a simple conviction:

Presence is the quiet gift we offer when words are not enough.

But even that statement contains two people.

Someone offers Presence.

Someone receives it.

And throughout a lifetime, we will be both.

Maybe mercy moves between us that way.

Today I carry you.

Tomorrow you may carry me.

And neither of us needs to apologize.

Grace With Skin On

Sometimes people ask where God is in suffering.

It is an honest question.

And I would never want to answer it too quickly.

But occasionally, if we remain attentive, we begin noticing something.

God's mercy often arrives wearing ordinary clothes.

A nurse walks through the door.

Someone brings dinner.

A neighbor takes the trash cans to the curb.

A friend remembers the anniversary everyone else forgot.

Someone calls without needing anything.

A hospice aide treats a fragile body with extraordinary dignity.

A volunteer sits with someone so their spouse can leave the house for an hour.

A child crawls into a grandparent's bed.

Someone sends a message:

Thinking of you. No need to respond.

Someone says:

I'll stay. You sleep.

Maybe we have been looking for grace to descend dramatically from heaven while grace has been ringing the doorbell.

Help can be holy.

Human Presence can become a vessel through which divine mercy is experienced.

Not because the human being becomes God.

But because Love has always delighted in becoming tangible.

A voice.

A touch.

A meal.

A chair pulled close.

A person who stays.

Grace with skin on.

The Help We Did Not Ask For

There are also times when mercy arrives before we know enough to ask.

Someone notices.

Someone sees the exhaustion.

Someone recognizes the silence.

Someone says:

"I'm coming over."

Not:

“Call me if you need anything.”

That phrase is usually sincere.

But exhausted people often do not know what to ask for.

Sometimes they don't even have the energy to decide what they need.

More useful questions may be:

Can I bring dinner tonight?

Can I sit with him while you shower?

Would it help if I made those phone calls?

Can I pick up groceries?

Would you like me to stay for an hour while you rest?

Presence becomes practical.

Mercy does dishes.

Grace takes out the garbage.

Love changes sheets.

Help remembers to bring coffee.

Perhaps we have made spirituality far more complicated than Jesus did.

Help in the Time of Need

Hebrews does not say grace eliminates need.

It says grace helps **in the time of need.**

Those words become increasingly beautiful the longer we live.

Because eventually everyone encounters something they cannot fix.

No amount of intelligence fixes it.

No amount of money fixes it.

No amount of religious language fixes it.

No amount of positive thinking fixes it.

Some things must simply be lived through.

And “through” is an important word.

Because a time of need is a place we move through.

We may not move quickly.

We may crawl.

We may stop.

We may need someone beside us.

But the moment we are in is not the entirety of our existence.

There was life before this moment.

There will be life beyond it.

Even grief, which may remain with us for the rest of our lives, changes shape.

We do not necessarily leave grief behind.

We learn to carry love differently.

And perhaps mercy helps us do that.

When Help Does Not Change the Outcome

This may be one of the hardest truths.

Sometimes we ask for help and the person still dies.

We pray and the disease progresses.

We gather around the bed and the breathing stops.

We ask for more time and time does not come.

Was there no mercy?

Was there no grace?

Was Presence absent?

I don't believe so.

But I also don't believe we should answer those questions cheaply.

There are moments when the most faithful thing we can do is refuse to explain what cannot be explained.

Death hurts because love matters.

Loss hurts because someone mattered.

And sometimes mercy does not appear as prevention.

It appears as accompaniment.

I am with you.

Perhaps those are among the most important words in all of Scripture.

Not:

Nothing painful will happen.

But:

I am with you.

Not:

You will never walk through the valley.

But:

You will not walk through it alone.

Presence does not always change the road.

Sometimes Presence changes what it means to walk it.

The Morning After

And then there is the morning after.

The morning after the death.

The morning after everyone leaves.

The morning after the equipment is removed from the house.

The morning when the medications are gone.

The oxygen concentrator is silent.

The hospital bed is empty.

The house suddenly feels enormous.

For weeks or months, perhaps every morning began with responsibility.

Check the breathing.

Prepare the medication.

Help with the bathroom.

Call the nurse.

Change the bedding.

Make breakfast.

Reposition.

Comfort.

Watch.

Then one morning—

there is nothing to do.

And that can be devastating.

The caregiver has not only lost someone they love.

They may also have lost the role that organized every hour of their life.

What's new this morning?

Silence.

Absence.

An empty bed.

And perhaps the strangest question of all:

What am I supposed to do now?

There is mercy for that morning too.

Not mercy that asks you to move on.

Not mercy that tells you everything happens for a reason.

Not mercy that demands gratitude for the years you had together.

Just mercy that sits beside the empty space.

Grace to help.

Presence.

One breath.

One cup of coffee.

One shower.

One phone call.

One hour.

One morning.

Help Me Through This Morning

Maybe sometimes we ask too much of ourselves.

We ask:

How am I going to live without them?

That question contains years.

No wonder it feels impossible.

Perhaps mercy invites a smaller question.

How will I live this morning?

That is different.

This morning I can breathe.

This morning I can cry.

This morning I can call someone.

This morning I can sit in the chair and remember.

This morning I can do nothing at all.

Tomorrow can ask its questions tomorrow.

Today has only asked for today.

So perhaps our prayer becomes smaller too.

Not:

God, show me how to live the rest of my life.

Maybe simply:

Help me through this morning.

And then, when afternoon arrives:

Help me here.

And tonight:

Stay with me here.

This is not weak faith.

This may be faith stripped down to its most essential form.

Need.

Trust.

Presence.

A Prayer With One Word

If tomorrow morning arrives and you have no words, you do not need to manufacture them.

You don't need to sound spiritual.

You don't need to convince yourself that everything is okay.

You don't have to hide your fear from the One who already knows it.

You can simply say:

Help.

And perhaps before you say anything else, remain there for a moment.

Breathe.

Let the word be enough.

Help.

Maybe you will sense something.

Maybe you won't.

Mercy is not dependent upon sensation.

Presence is not proven by goosebumps.

Grace does not require an emotional experience to exist.

The morning itself has already arrived.

And according to Lamentations, mercy arrived with it.

According to Hebrews, there is grace to help in the time of need.

So perhaps this is enough:

I am here.

I need help.

Mercy is here.

Grace is here.

Presence is here.

And then—

feet on the floor.

One step.

One breath.

One morning.

Chapter Four

When Mercy Looks Ordinary

We often expect mercy to look miraculous.

Sometimes it does.

But most mornings, mercy looks remarkably ordinary.

A cup of coffee.

A few uninterrupted minutes of sleep.

Someone remembering your name.

A text arriving at the right moment.

A nurse who does not seem rushed.

A friend who lets you tell the same story again.

Sunlight through the window.

Someone laughing in a house that has known too much crying.

A hand resting on another hand.

Nothing spectacular.

Nothing that would make the evening news.

And yet—

perhaps heaven has always been closer to ordinary things than we imagined.

We may spend our lives waiting for God to interrupt the natural world while missing the possibility that Love has been moving through it all along.

Maybe today's mercy will not announce itself.

Maybe it will simply arrive.

And perhaps the practice of Presence is learning to notice.

We May Be Looking for the Wrong Thing

There are times when we expect mercy to be dramatic.

The disease disappears.

The relationship is restored.

The financial crisis resolves.

The test comes back negative.

The person we love recovers.

The prayer is answered exactly as we hoped.

And when those things happen, we are grateful.

But if those are the only things we call mercy, we may miss most of it.

Because much of life happens without dramatic intervention.

The disease remains.

The relationship is complicated.

Money is still tight.

The body continues aging.

The person we love continues declining.

The grief remains.

Morning comes anyway.

And mercy comes with it.

Maybe mercy is not always the changing of our circumstances.

Sometimes mercy is what enables us to remain present within circumstances we cannot change.

That is less spectacular.

But perhaps it is no less sacred.

The Cup of Coffee

Imagine a caregiver who has been awake most of the night.

Her husband has been restless.

She has repositioned him several times.

Checked medications.

Adjusted blankets.

Listened to his breathing.

At some point near dawn, he finally settles.

She walks quietly into the kitchen.

The house is still.

She makes coffee.

Nothing miraculous has happened.

Her husband is still dying.

She is still exhausted.

There are still decisions ahead.

But for five minutes she sits near the window with a warm cup between her hands.

No one needs anything.

No phone is ringing.

No question needs answering.

She watches morning light enter the room.

Five minutes.

Could that be mercy?

I think so.

Not because coffee is sacred.

Because rest is.

Because breathing is.

Because receiving five minutes in which nothing is demanded of you can become an enormous gift when every other minute seems to belong to someone else.

Sometimes mercy is simply enough space to remember:

I am still here too.

The Nurse Who Stayed

Families rarely remember every clinical detail of a person's final days.

They may not remember every medication name.

Every dosage.

Every conversation.

Every instruction.

But they often remember how someone made them feel.

They remember the nurse who sat down.

The aide who spoke gently while bathing Dad.

The social worker who listened without looking at the clock.

The chaplain who did not try to explain why God allowed this.

They remember someone who stayed a few minutes longer.

Why?

Because Presence leaves a different kind of memory.

Information matters.

Competence matters.

Good clinical care matters enormously.

But there is something human beings recognize almost instinctively:

You were with me.

Not merely in the room.

With me.

There is a difference.

And sometimes the mercy of God enters a room through someone who decides not to hurry.

Mercy Has Hands

We can make mercy sound abstract.

A theological category.

Something God possesses.

Something preachers discuss.

But mercy has always seemed to want a body.

Hands that lift.

Arms that hold.

Feet that walk through the door.

Eyes that notice.

Ears that listen.

A voice that says:

“Tell me.”

Perhaps this is why the life of Jesus is so physical.

He touches people.

He eats with them.

He sits at tables.

He notices individuals in crowds.

He weeps.

He allows people to interrupt Him.

He takes children into His arms.

He feeds hungry people.

He washes feet.

Love becomes visible.

Presence becomes embodied.

Maybe mercy still prefers embodiment.

Sometimes someone needs prayer.

Sometimes they need lunch.

Sometimes they need both.

Please Don't Just Tell Me You're Praying

There is nothing wrong with saying:

“I’m praying for you.”

Those words can carry tremendous comfort.

But perhaps prayer should occasionally grow hands.

“I am praying for you—and I brought dinner.”

“I am praying for you—and I can sit with Mom for an hour.”

“I am praying for you—and I filled your car with gas.”

“I am praying for you—and I’ll make the phone calls.”

“I am praying for you—and I remembered what today is.”

“I am praying for you—and I’m staying.”

Prayer and Presence were never intended to compete.

Perhaps prayer opens us to Presence.

And Presence asks:

What can Love do here?

Not:

How can I solve everything?

Just:

What can Love do here?

Sometimes the answer is very small.

Small does not mean insignificant.

The Theology of a Sandwich

There are moments when the most spiritual thing you can do for someone is make them a sandwich.

That sentence may sound almost irreverent.

I don't think it is.

A caregiver who has forgotten to eat does not necessarily need a Bible study on God's provision.

They may need food.

A grieving family surrounded by people may not realize no one has eaten since breakfast.

Someone notices.

Bread.

Turkey.

Cheese.

A plate.

"Here. Eat something."

Mercy.

We sometimes divide life into sacred and secular categories that Jesus seemed remarkably uninterested in maintaining.

Feed them.

Give them something to drink.

Visit them.

Clothe them.

Care for them.

Touch them.

See them.

The kingdom repeatedly appears in ordinary human needs.

Maybe heaven has always understood the theology of a sandwich.

When Someone Remembers

Grief has dates.

The calendar remembers things other people forget.

Birthdays.

Anniversaries.

The day of diagnosis.

The day someone died.

Mother's Day.

Father's Day.

Christmas.

A song on the radio.

A season changing.

The first snowfall.

The smell of autumn.

The grieving person can feel the date approaching long before anyone else notices.

And then a message arrives:

“I know what today is. I’m thinking about you.”

Nothing has been fixed.

And everything about that moment matters.

Someone remembered.

Someone else is carrying a small piece of the memory.

The person who died has not disappeared from every conversation.

Their name is still allowed.

That can be mercy.

Perhaps one of the simplest gifts we can offer grieving people is permission to keep loving someone who is no longer physically present.

We do not have to be afraid of their name.

Say it.

Remember them.

Tell the story.

Laugh.

Cry.

Let love continue having language.

The Ordinary Can Become Sacred

We sometimes wait for sacred moments.

But perhaps sacredness is not always something that descends upon ordinary life.

Perhaps it is something we discover within it.

The bed being changed.

The medication being measured.

The dishes being washed.

The dog needing to go outside.

The child asking an inconvenient question.

Someone sleeping in a recliner beside a hospital bed.

The television playing while everyone sits quietly.

A hand being moisturized because the skin has become dry.

Hair being brushed.

A forehead being kissed.

None of these things will appear impressive.

But love rarely asks to be impressive.

It asks to be present.

And maybe that is why so much mercy goes unnoticed.

It is too ordinary for the categories we created for God.

What If Nothing Feels Sacred?

There are mornings when none of this feels beautiful.

Let's say that too.

The coffee does not feel like mercy.

The sunrise does not inspire you.

The nurse is late.

The family is arguing.

You are tired of being patient.

You don't want another lesson about gratitude.

You don't want to "look for the blessing."

You just want this to stop.

That morning belongs in this book too.

Presence does not require us to romanticize suffering.

We do not need to turn every painful experience into something beautiful in order for God to be near.

Sometimes a terrible morning is simply terrible.

Mercy does not ask us to lie about it.

Maybe mercy begins with truth.

This hurts.

I'm angry.

I'm exhausted.

I don't want to do this anymore.

I miss my life.

I miss them.

I don't understand.

And perhaps God is not frightened by any of those sentences.

The throne is still a throne of grace.

The invitation remains:

Come.

No Forced Gratitude

Gratitude can be beautiful.

Forced gratitude can be cruel.

There is a difference between discovering something for which we are grateful and being told we should be grateful while our heart is breaking.

“At least you had fifty years together.”

“At least she isn’t suffering.”

“At least you have other children.”

“At least he lived a long life.”

“At least you got to say goodbye.”

The words usually mean well.

But grief does not need an “at least.”

Love is not mathematics.

One blessing does not cancel one loss.

A person can be grateful for fifty years and still desperately want fifty-one.

A mother can be grateful for every moment with her child and still ache because she wanted more.

A family can be relieved that suffering has ended and devastated that life has ended.

Human beings can carry more than one truth at a time.

Mercy makes room for both.

Thank you.

and

This hurts.

Can live in the same heart.

Enough for Today

Maybe ordinary mercy is about enough.

Not abundance every morning.

Not certainty.

Not answers.

Enough.

Enough strength to get out of bed.

Enough courage to make the call.

Enough patience for one more conversation.

Enough rest to continue.

Enough honesty to say you cannot continue without help.

Enough food.

Enough friendship.

Enough silence.

Enough tears.

Enough laughter to remind you that sorrow has not taken everything.

Enough mercy for today.

This does not mean we settle for deprivation or ignore real needs.

It means we stop demanding from ourselves resources for a future that has not arrived.

There is something deeply compassionate about enough.

Daily Bread

Perhaps that is why Jesus taught people to pray:

“Give us this day our daily bread.”

Daily.

Not a warehouse full of bread for every possible future.

Bread for today.

There is an echo here of manna in the wilderness.

Enough for the day.

The attempt to store tomorrow’s provision out of fear spoiled what had been given for today.

There may be wisdom in that.

We want emotional manna for next month.

Strength for the funeral that has not happened.

Courage for the diagnosis we have not received.

Answers for questions no one has asked.

And maybe God keeps returning us gently to:

this day.

Daily bread.

Daily mercy.

Grace in the time of need.

Presence now.

There seems to be a rhythm running through all of it.

Look Again

Perhaps the spiritual practice for this chapter is extraordinarily simple.

Look again.

Not to pretend everything is beautiful.

Not to find some hidden divine message in every inconvenience.

Just notice.

What helped today?

Who stayed?

What gave you five minutes of rest?

What made you laugh?

Where did you feel safe?

Who listened?

What burden became slightly lighter?

What did someone do without being asked?

Where were you able to breathe?

Maybe mercy was there.

And perhaps tomorrow morning, when you ask:

HELP! What's new this morning?

don't only look for what has gotten worse.

That is especially difficult for caregivers because caregiving trains the eye to detect change.

We need to notice symptoms.

Decline.

Risk.

Pain.

But perhaps alongside that necessary attention we can develop another kind of attentiveness.

Where is mercy?

Both questions can coexist.

What changed?

And—

What arrived to meet the change?

That second question may slowly transform the way we see.

Not because the hard things disappear.

But because they are no longer the only things in the room.

Maybe Mercy Was Already There

There is one more possibility.

Maybe sometimes we ask God to send mercy into a situation where mercy has already arrived.

We simply did not recognize its face.

It was the person sitting beside us.

The meal in the refrigerator.

The friend who called.

The nurse who explained.

The stranger who held the door because our hands were full.

The child who made us laugh.

The quiet five minutes.

The tears that finally came.

The courage to say:

I need help.

The permission to rest.

The realization that we do not have to solve everything today.

Maybe mercy has been arriving all morning.

Quietly.

Without announcement.

Without demanding recognition.

Like light entering a room through a window.

And perhaps this is one of the gifts of Presence:

We begin noticing what has been there all along.

Chapter Five

The Morning After Everything Changes

There are mornings we remember for the rest of our lives.

We remember where we were.

What the room looked like.

Who called.

What they said.

What we were wearing.

The sound of someone's voice.

The strange details that somehow remain when more important things become blurry.

There was life before that morning.

And there was life after it.

The diagnosis.

The accident.

The confession.

The departure.

The death.

Sometimes everything changes in a single sentence.

And then morning comes again.

That may be one of the strangest things about grief.

The sun rises after the worst thing that has ever happened to you.

People drive to work.

Coffee shops open.

School buses arrive.

Someone somewhere is laughing.

The world continues with an almost offensive normalcy.

And you want to ask:

Doesn't anyone know what happened?

But morning does not stop.

And perhaps, eventually, we discover that this is not morning's cruelty.

It may be morning's mercy.

Because the sunrise is not saying:

Forget what happened.

It may simply be saying:

There is still a today.

You do not yet have to know what to do with it.

You only have to arrive.

When the World Keeps Moving

One of the strangest experiences of profound loss is discovering that the rest of the world did not stop.

It feels as though it should have.

Something enormous happened.

Someone died.

A marriage ended.

A diagnosis changed the future.

A family received news that divided life into before and after.

And yet someone is mowing their lawn.

Traffic lights keep changing.

Bills still arrive.

Someone is complaining because their coffee order is wrong.

People are planning vacations.

The grocery store is open.

And there can be something almost insulting about the normalcy of everyone else's life.

Don't you know what happened?

Of course they don't.

And perhaps that is part of grief.

The world that changed was yours.

Before and After

There are events that reorganize time.

We stop measuring life only by years and begin measuring it by what happened.

Before Dad died.

After Mom got sick.

Before the diagnosis.

After the accident.

Before the divorce.

After the phone call.

Before we knew.

After we knew.

The calendar still says Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday.

But the heart has created another calendar entirely.

Before.

After.

And perhaps one of the most disorienting discoveries is realizing that the person who awakened this morning is not exactly the person who went to sleep before everything changed.

Something has been taken.

Something has been revealed.

Something has ended.

Something has begun.

We may not yet know what.

So if Lamentations says mercy is new every morning, perhaps mercy must sometimes meet not merely a new day—

but a new version of us.

I Don't Know Who I Am Now

Loss does not only take people from us.

Sometimes it takes part of our identity.

For years someone was a wife.

A husband.

A mother.

A father.

A caregiver.

A partner.

A daughter who called Mom every morning.

A son who stopped by Dad's house every evening.

Then something changes.

And suddenly the relationship remains in the heart while its daily expression disappears.

A widow does not stop loving her husband because he died.

A parent does not stop being a parent because a child is gone.

Love continues.

But the shape of the relationship changes.

And that can create a painful question:

Who am I now?

There may be no immediate answer.

Mercy does not demand one.

You do not have to reinvent yourself the morning after loss.

You do not need a new purpose by Friday.

You do not need to discover "what God is going to do with this."

You are allowed simply to grieve.

Identity will find new language in time.

For now:

You are here.

And you are loved here.

The Empty Side of the Bed

Absence has geography.

There are places where grief seems to live.

The empty side of the bed.

The chair.

The closet.

The garage.

The kitchen table.

The passenger seat.

The place where their shoes used to be.

Their toothbrush.

Their reading glasses.

The indentation in a favorite chair.

A coat hanging exactly where they left it.

Objects become strangely sacred because they still remember the shape of the person.

Sometimes people rush grieving families to remove these things.

Other times they insist nothing should be touched.

There is no universal rule.

Grief is personal.

Maybe the question isn't:

What should I do?

Maybe it is:

What can I bear today?

If today you need the clothes to remain in the closet, let them remain.

If tomorrow you need to move one shirt, move one shirt.

If months from now you still cannot open the drawer, perhaps that drawer can wait.

Mercy is not impatient.

The Silence After Caregiving

For caregivers, the morning after death can contain another kind of loss.

The work stops.

No medications.

No repositioning.

No checking oxygen.

No watching the clock.

No calling the nurse.

No listening for movement.

No wondering whether someone needs you.

For months, perhaps years, your nervous system organized itself around another person's needs.

Then suddenly—

silence.

People may say:

“Now you can rest.”

And physically, perhaps you can.

But rest may not come easily.

Because the body has learned vigilance.

You may wake at the usual medication time.

You may think you heard them call.

You may walk toward the room before remembering.

You may look at the clock and instinctively think:

It's time for the medicine.

Then remember.

No, it isn't.

That is grief too.

The body remembers routines after the routine has ended.

Be gentle with it.

It spent a long time learning how to protect someone you love.

It may take time to learn that its assignment has changed.

Mercy for the Body

We often speak about grief as though it exists only in the heart.

But grief has a body.

It can be exhaustion.

Restlessness.

Tight shoulders.

A heavy chest.

Forgetfulness.

Difficulty concentrating.

Changes in appetite.

A strange sense of unreality.

The feeling that you should be doing something when there is nothing to do.

The body may react before the mind understands.

This is another place for mercy.

Not judgment.

You may not function the way you normally function.

You may walk into a room and forget why you went there.

You may reread the same paragraph five times.

You may cry because someone asked what you want for dinner.

You may be perfectly composed at the funeral and fall apart three days later because you found a sock.

Grief does not follow the schedule we would design for it.

Mercy does not require it to.

The Sock

Perhaps that sounds trivial.

A sock.

But grief is often hidden inside ordinary things.

You survive the hospital.

The death.

The funeral home.

The service.

The flowers.

The visitors.

The paperwork.

You hold yourself together through all the things everyone expects to be difficult.

Then one morning you are doing laundry.

And there it is.

Their sock.

You hold it.

And suddenly you cannot breathe.

Why?

Because grief is not logical.

Love attached itself to thousands of ordinary things.

So loss appears there too.

The mug.

The pillow.

The handwriting.

The voicemail.

The grocery item you no longer need to buy.

The television program you watched together.

The empty hook where the keys used to hang.

These small encounters can hurt enormously.

They can also become tender.

In time, the thing that once made you collapse may someday make you smile.

Not because you stopped missing them.

Because grief and love slowly learn how to inhabit the same memory.

Don't Rush the Morning

There is enormous pressure in our culture to return.

Return to work.

Return to normal.

Return phone calls.

Return messages.

Return to church.

Return to social life.

Return to yourself.

But what if the self you are supposed to return to no longer exists in exactly the same way?

Perhaps grief isn't primarily about returning.

Maybe it is about slowly learning to inhabit the life that remains.

That takes time.

And mercy has time.

God is not standing at the end of your grief shouting:

Hurry up.

There may not even be an end in the way we imagine.

Grief changes.

Softens.

Moves.

Surprises us.

Returns.

Becomes integrated.

But love does not disappear.

Why would grief disappear completely if grief is one of the ways love responds to absence?

Perhaps healing does not mean no longer grieving.

Perhaps healing means grief no longer requires us to stop living.

We carry both.

Love for what was.

Presence within what is.

Hope for what may yet be.

You Don't Have to Move On

I have never particularly liked the phrase:

Move on.

Move on to where?

From whom?

From what?

If someone mattered deeply, why would the goal be to move on from them?

Maybe a gentler phrase is:

move with.

We move with the love.

With the memories.

With what the relationship gave us.

With what we learned.

Even with some of what hurt.

The person is no longer physically walking beside us, but their life has entered ours.

Their phrases.

Their humor.

Their habits.

Their influence.

Their love.

Perhaps grief is not the process of leaving them behind.

It is learning how to carry the relationship differently.

And some mornings that will feel beautiful.

Other mornings it will feel unbearable.

Both belong.

When People Stop Asking

Immediately after a loss, people often gather.

Food arrives.

Messages come.

Flowers appear.

Calls are made.

Then gradually the world returns to its routines.

And the grieving person is left with something everyone else has begun moving away from.

This can create another painful morning:

the morning you realize people have stopped asking.

Not because they don't care.

Often they simply do not know what to say.

Or they are afraid mentioning the person will make you sad.

But grieving people are often already thinking about the person.

Saying their name does not create the grief.

The loss created the grief.

Remembering can actually create connection.

This is where Presence becomes particularly important.

Not only in the first week.

Not only at the funeral.

Presence returns.

A month later.

Three months later.

On the birthday.

On the anniversary.

On the random Tuesday when everyone else has forgotten.

“I was thinking about you today.”

Mercy can sound like that.

What Do I Do With Today?

Eventually, after everything changes, there is still a day to live.

That may feel almost impossible.

So make the day smaller.

You do not need to live the rest of your life today.

You don't even need to understand today.

Perhaps you only need to ask:

What does this moment require?

Drink some water.

Take a shower.

Open the curtains.

Sit outside.

Cry.

Call someone.

Eat something.

Sleep.

Walk around the block.

Say their name.

Tell the story.

Do absolutely nothing for a while.

These things may seem insignificant compared with the size of the loss.

But life often returns through small doors.

Do not despise small beginnings.

The Morning Did Not Betray You

There may be mornings when waking itself feels cruel.

For a few seconds you forgot.

Then consciousness returned and brought the loss with it.

You may even wish you could go back to sleep.

But perhaps, very slowly, morning can become something other than an enemy.

Not because it asks you to forget.

Because it gives you another place to remember.

Another place to love.

Another place to become.

Another place to encounter mercy.

The morning did not betray you by arriving.

It simply came.

And mercy came with it.

Maybe that is what Lamentations understands better than we sometimes do.

Those words were not written by someone untouched by catastrophe.

They emerged from catastrophe.

New every morning is not sentimental optimism.

It is defiant hope spoken from inside lament.

Something has been destroyed.

Something has been lost.

Something will never be exactly the same again.

And still—

mercy.

And Still

Perhaps those two words deserve a place in grief.

And still.

I miss you.

And still, morning came.

I don't understand.

And still, I breathed.

I cried today.

And still, I laughed once.

I wish you were here.

And still, love remains.

I don't know who I am now.

And still, I am becoming.

I don't know what tomorrow holds.

And still, there is mercy today.

“And still” does not cancel what came before it.

It simply refuses to let loss have the only word.

The First New Thing

Maybe after everything changes, we become afraid of new things.

New routines feel like betrayal.

New friendships can feel strange.

The first laugh can produce guilt.

The first enjoyable day may leave us wondering:

How could I have enjoyed myself when they are gone?

The first morning we wake without immediately thinking about them can frighten us.

Are we forgetting?

No.

Perhaps we are healing.

Healing is not betrayal.

Laughter is not betrayal.

Rest is not betrayal.

Living is not betrayal.

Love does not require perpetual suffering as proof that it was real.

Maybe one of mercy's most tender gifts is eventually allowing something new to exist beside what was lost.

Not replacing it.

Beside it.

A new memory.

A new rhythm.

A new relationship.

A new interest.

A new way of understanding yourself.

A new morning.

And perhaps one day, almost without noticing, you will ask:

What's new this morning?

And the question will not frighten you quite as much.

Something may even be new that you welcome.

That too is mercy.

Mercy Does Not Forget

There is something important we should say before leaving this morning.

New mercy does not require old love to disappear.

God's mercies are new every morning precisely because yesterday mattered.

The new does not erase the old.

It meets what the old has left with us.

Memory.

Scars.

Wisdom.

Questions.

Love.

Loss.

Mercy takes all of it seriously.

So if this morning happens to be one of those mornings after everything changed, perhaps there is no great task before you.

You do not need to understand why.

You do not need to find meaning yet.

You do not need to call it good.

You do not need to pretend you are okay.

Just arrive.

This morning is here.

You are here.

And mercy is here.

For now, perhaps that is enough.

Chapter Six

Mercy for Yesterday

Morning may be new.

But sometimes yesterday follows us into it.

We awaken carrying something we wish we had done differently.

A conversation.

A decision.

A failure.

A moment of impatience.

Something we said.

Something we did not say.

Something we cannot undo.

And suddenly the question is not:

What's new this morning?

It is:

What do I do with yesterday?

There are mornings when the heaviest thing in the room is not what someone did to us.

It is what we believe we did wrong.

Caregivers know these mornings too.

I should have been more patient.

I shouldn't have gotten angry.

I should have noticed sooner.

I should have called the nurse earlier.

I should have stayed another hour.

I should have known.

And after someone dies, those sentences can become merciless.

We replay the final days.

The final conversation.

The final look.

The last time we left the room.

We search backward through memory as though somewhere inside yesterday there is a door we can reopen.

There isn't.

Yesterday is inaccessible.

But mercy is not.

Perhaps this is another reason mercy is new every morning.

Because sometimes the first person who needs mercy today—
is us.

The Courtroom in Our Head

There is a courtroom many of us carry inside.

We are the accused.

We are also the prosecutor.

Sometimes we are the witness.

And almost always, we appoint ourselves judge.

We present the evidence.

You should have known better.

You should have done more.

You shouldn't have said that.

Why didn't you notice?

Why weren't you more patient?

Then we replay the scene.

Again.

And again.

And again.

As though repetition might somehow produce a different verdict.

It rarely does.

Usually it simply deepens the sentence.

Guilty.

Some guilt is appropriate.

We do hurt people.

We make poor decisions.

We fail to love well.

We become impatient.

We speak carelessly.

We sometimes need to apologize, repair what can be repaired, accept responsibility and change.

Mercy does not eliminate responsibility.

But neither does responsibility require endless self-punishment.

There is a difference between conviction that leads us toward truth and condemnation that keeps us chained to something we can no longer change.

One says:

Look honestly at what happened.

The other says:

This is who you are forever.

Mercy tells the truth without destroying the person who must hear it.

The Cruelty of Hindsight

Hindsight knows things yesterday did not know.

That makes hindsight an unfair judge.

After the diagnosis, symptoms suddenly look obvious.

After the accident, the decision seems reckless.

After someone dies, the last conversation becomes unbearably important.

After the relationship ends, every warning sign seems visible.

But you are looking backward with information you did not possess while you were living forward.

That matters.

“I should have known.”

Should you?

Perhaps.

But perhaps not.

Maybe you knew what you knew when you knew it.

Maybe you made the best decision available to you with the information, strength, maturity and resources you possessed at the time.

Could you have done differently?

Possibly.

That is part of being human.

But mercy asks us to judge yesterday's self with truth—not with information only today's self possesses.

Caregiver Guilt

Caregiving creates fertile ground for guilt because the needs can become endless.

There is always one more thing that could have been done.

One more glass of water.

One more repositioning.

One more phone call.

One more night you could have stayed awake.

One more question you could have asked the doctor.

One more moment you could have been patient.

And because love wants to do everything, the realization that we cannot do everything can feel like failure.

But limitation is not failure.

You are a human being.

You require sleep.

Food.

Space.

Patience has limits.

Bodies become exhausted.

Nervous systems become overwhelmed.

People caring for someone they love sometimes become irritated with the very person they would give anything to keep.

That contradiction can produce enormous shame.

How could I be frustrated with someone who is dying?

Because you are tired.

Because you are scared.

Because you are grieving while caregiving.

Because you are human.

Love does not remove humanity.

Sometimes love exposes it.

I Wish I Had Been More Patient

After death, small moments can grow enormous.

Maybe Dad asked the same question for the twentieth time and you snapped.

Maybe Mom needed something just as you finally sat down and you sighed loudly enough for her to hear.

Maybe you were looking at your phone when you wish you had been looking at them.

Maybe you left early.

Maybe you didn't visit that day.

Maybe your last conversation was ordinary.

Maybe your last words weren't profound.

And now you wish you could go back.

Just five minutes.

One minute.

Long enough to say:

I'm sorry.

Or:

I love you.

Or simply:

I'm here.

But love cannot be measured by the worst five minutes of a relationship.

Nor should an entire lifetime be judged by its final conversation.

You were more than that moment.

So were they.

The relationship was larger than its ending.

Mercy remembers the whole story.

The Last Conversation

We place enormous pressure on last words.

Perhaps because we usually do not know they are last words until later.

If we knew, we would choose them carefully.

We would say everything.

We would leave nothing unresolved.

We would hug longer.

We would stay another minute.

But most human beings do not receive that kind of warning.

A final conversation may be:

“Do you need anything from the store?”

“I’ll call you tomorrow.”

“Love you.”

“Drive safe.”

“See you later.”

Or perhaps there was tension.

Perhaps you were angry.

Perhaps they were.

And then there was no next conversation.

If that is part of your story, mercy belongs there too.

Love is not invalidated because the final sentence was imperfect.

A relationship is an entire book.

Do not let one unfinished sentence rewrite every chapter that came before it.

What If I Really Was Wrong?

But what if you were?

What if the regret is not imagined?

What if you truly hurt someone?

Mercy can bear that truth too.

We do not need to turn every regret into a misunderstanding.

Sometimes we were wrong.

Sometimes we failed.

Sometimes we chose selfishly.

Sometimes our fear hurt people.

Sometimes we withheld love.

Sometimes we knew better and did it anyway.

Mercy does not ask us to pretend otherwise.

In fact, mercy makes honesty possible.

If Love disappears the moment we tell the truth about ourselves, we will spend our lives hiding.

But if Love remains—

we can finally look.

Yes. I did that.

Yes. I regret it.

Yes. I wish I could change it.

Yes. I need forgiveness.

And then comes the harder sentence:

I cannot change yesterday.

But I can allow truth to change today.

That is repentance in its healthiest form.

Not self-hatred.

Turning.

Learning.

Repairing what can still be repaired.

Becoming more awake.

More compassionate.

More honest.

More loving.

Yesterday cannot be rewritten.

But yesterday can become a teacher rather than a prison.

Mercy and Responsibility

Mercy without responsibility can become avoidance.

Responsibility without mercy can become shame.

We need both.

Mercy says:

You are more than what you did.

Responsibility says:

What you did still matters.

Mercy says:

Come closer.

Responsibility says:

Tell the truth.

Mercy says:

You are loved.

Responsibility says:

Let Love transform you.

These are not enemies.

Together they create a space in which genuine change becomes possible.

Fear may alter behavior temporarily.

Shame may make us hide.

But being fully seen and still loved can reach places punishment never touches.

If They Are No Longer Here

Sometimes the person we need to apologize to has died.

There can be enormous pain in that.

No conversation.

No response.

No opportunity to hear:

I forgive you.

What do we do then?

Perhaps we speak anyway.

Not because we can manufacture a response from the dead.

But because the heart sometimes needs to give language to what remains unfinished.

Write the letter.

Say the words aloud.

Sit somewhere meaningful.

Tell the truth.

I wish I had...

I'm sorry that...

I hope you knew...

I loved you even when I didn't show it well.

Thank you.

Forgive me.

I forgive you.

I miss you.

There is no formula.

No required ritual.

Just honesty.

Sometimes unfinished relationships need a place for unfinished words.

What About God's Forgiveness?

Many people believe God forgives them more easily than they forgive themselves.

They may even say:

"I know God forgives me, but I can't forgive myself."

I understand what they mean.

But perhaps beneath that sentence is a question worth examining.

If God sees more clearly than I do—

knows the motives, the wounds, the consequences, the entire truth—

and mercy still moves toward me,

what authority do I possess to establish a harsher court than God's?

Self-forgiveness does not mean declaring ourselves innocent when we were not.

It means agreeing that punishment is not the only possible response to failure.

We can grieve what we did.

Repair what we can.

Learn.

Change.

And still receive mercy.

Perhaps refusing mercy does not honor the person we hurt.

Becoming more loving might.

The Morning Does Not Ask You to Go Back

Every sunrise has an interesting characteristic.

It illuminates what is in front of us.

Morning light does not travel backward into yesterday.

Neither can we.

We can remember yesterday.

Learn from it.

Grieve it.

Make amends because of it.

But we cannot live there.

The invitation of mercy is always toward life.

Here.

This morning.

This choice.

This conversation.

This opportunity to love differently.

Maybe that is what new mercy makes possible.

Not pretending yesterday never happened.

But refusing to let yesterday be the only thing that happens.

Regret Can Become Compassion

Some of the most compassionate people I have known are people who remember what it feels like to fail.

They are slower to judge.

Quicker to listen.

Less impressed with appearances.

More comfortable around imperfection.

Why?

Because mercy has changed the way they see other human beings.

Once you know what it feels like to need mercy, you become less interested in withholding it.

Perhaps even our regrets can be redeemed that way.

Not erased.

Redeemed.

The impatient caregiver becomes the person who tells another exhausted caregiver:

“You are allowed to be tired.”

The person who once failed to show up becomes someone who now shows up.

The person whose words caused harm learns to listen.

The person who knows what shame feels like creates safer spaces for others.

Yesterday becomes wisdom.

That is mercy too.

A Different Question

Maybe instead of asking:

How could I have done that?

we eventually ask:

What can this teach me about how I want to live today?

Instead of:

Why wasn't I better?

perhaps:

How can I become more present now?

Instead of:

Why didn't I say it then?

perhaps:

Who needs to hear it today?

Tell them.

Do not wait for the perfect moment.

Say:

I love you.

I'm sorry.

Thank you.

I forgive you.

I need you.

You matter to me.

Maybe yesterday's regret can become today's courage.

Mercy Is New Because Yesterday Is Over

Perhaps this is another way of hearing Lamentations:

Yesterday had mercy.

Today has mercy.

Tomorrow will have mercy.

But they are not interchangeable.

Yesterday's mercy met yesterday's life.

Today's mercy meets who you are now.

Including everything yesterday taught you.

Including what you regret.

Including what you wish you could undo.

Including what you still do not understand.

You do not awaken outside the reach of mercy because yesterday was imperfect.

You awaken precisely where mercy knows how to find you.

This morning.

Before Your Feet Touch the Floor

Maybe some mornings the first conversation we need is with ourselves.

Before accusation begins.

Before yesterday's mistakes start speaking.

Before shame gets out of bed with us.

Perhaps we can say:

Yesterday happened.

Some of it was beautiful.

Some of it was painful.

Some of it I would change if I could.

I cannot.

But I am here.

God is here.

Mercy is new.

And then perhaps:

What can Love do with me today?

That is a very different morning.

Not denial.

Not excuse.

Not forgetting.

Mercy.

And maybe that is enough to put our feet on the floor.

Chapter Seven

Mercy for the Things We Cannot Fix

There comes a point in almost every life when we encounter something that refuses to be fixed.

We try.

We pray.

We talk.

We research.

We call specialists.

We change strategies.

We apologize.

We negotiate.

We hope.

We wait.

And still—

the thing remains.

For those of us who are accustomed to helping, this can be especially difficult.

We know how to do things.

Solve things.

Organize things.

Make calls.

Find resources.

Develop plans.

We are often the people others turn to when something goes wrong.

Then life introduces us to something our competence cannot repair.

A terminal illness.

A death.

A relationship another person does not want restored.

A child whose choices we cannot control.

A body that will not return to what it once was.

A past that cannot be rewritten.

And suddenly the question changes.

It is no longer:

How do I fix this?

It becomes:

How do I love what I cannot fix?

That may be one of the deepest questions Presence asks of us.

The Difference Between Fixing and Loving

We often confuse helping with fixing.

Sometimes helping does involve fixing something.

A medication can be adjusted.

A symptom can be treated.

A meal can be prepared.

A problem can be solved.

A misunderstanding can be clarified.

A broken appliance can be repaired.

Those things matter.

But eventually love encounters something beyond its ability to repair.

And then love must decide whether it will remain when it can no longer produce the outcome it wants.

That is a different kind of love.

Perhaps a deeper one.

Can I stay when I cannot fix this?

Can I sit beside someone whose grief I cannot remove?

Can I hold the hand of someone whose body I cannot heal?

Can I love a child whose choices I cannot control?

Can I remain tender toward someone whose memory is disappearing?

Can I forgive myself for having limits?

Can I allow God to be present in a situation I do not understand?

Fixing asks:

What can I change?

Presence asks:

How can I be here?

Both questions have their place.

Wisdom is learning which question the moment is asking.

The Exhaustion of Trying to Control the Uncontrollable

Control is exhausting.

Especially when we are trying to control something that cannot be controlled.

We replay scenarios.

Research endlessly.

Search for one more treatment.

One more opinion.

One more explanation.

One more conversation.

One more way to make someone understand.

One more way to make the story end differently.

Sometimes this is appropriate.

Persistence can save lives.

Advocacy matters.

Good medicine matters.

Counseling matters.

Reconciliation matters.

We should not surrender simply because something is difficult.

But there is a difference between perseverance and refusing to acknowledge reality.

At some point, wisdom may ask:

Is there anything more I can actually do?

That can be a painful question.

Because sometimes the answer is:

No.

And “no” can feel like failure.

But perhaps “no” is sometimes simply truth.

Hospice and the Change of Question

Hospice embodies this shift in a particularly profound way.

For much of medicine, the central question is:

How do we cure this?

How do we stop the disease?

How do we extend life?

How do we restore function?

These are beautiful questions.

But there comes a time when the question may need to change.

Not because life has lost value.

Precisely because life remains valuable.

The question becomes:

How do we care now?

How do we relieve suffering?

How do we preserve dignity?

How do we help this person live as fully as possible within the reality that now exists?

How do we support the family?

How do we create enough safety for honest conversations?

How do we love someone when cure is no longer the goal?

That is not giving up.

It is changing the form of hope.

Hope may no longer mean:

We are going to beat this.

Hope may become:

You will not be abandoned in this.

That is not lesser hope.

Sometimes it is the most courageous hope available.

When Hope Changes Clothes

We sometimes imagine hope wearing only one outfit.

Recovery.

Restoration.

Reconciliation.

Success.

Survival.

But hope may change clothes as circumstances change.

At diagnosis, hope may be cure.

Later, hope may be more time.

Later still, hope may be comfort.

A meaningful conversation.

A peaceful night.

One more visit.

Enough clarity to say goodbye.

Freedom from pain.

The presence of family.

A death without fear.

Hope has not disappeared.

It has become honest.

Perhaps mercy helps hope become honest without becoming hopeless.

“But I Have to Do Something”

There are moments when doing nothing feels unbearable.

So we do.

We straighten the blanket again.

Ask another question.

Search another website.

Call another person.

Rearrange something that does not need rearranging.

Activity can protect us temporarily from helplessness.

There is nothing wrong with that.

Sometimes our hands need somewhere to put their love.

But eventually we may sit down.

And there it is.

The thing beneath all the activity:

I cannot stop this.

That realization can break something open inside us.

Tears may come.

Anger.

Silence.

Prayer.

Or nothing at all.

Maybe this is where mercy becomes especially important.

Because helplessness is not the same as uselessness.

You may be unable to change the outcome and still have something extraordinary to give.

Your Presence.

Presence Is Something

Never underestimate the gift of being there.

Sitting beside a bed may feel like doing nothing.

It is not nothing.

Holding a hand is something.

Listening is something.

Wetting dry lips is something.

Reading aloud is something.

Playing someone's favorite music is something.

Saying:

"I'm here."

is something.

Allowing silence is something.

Letting someone sleep while you remain nearby is something.

Sometimes we measure value by productivity.

But love does not always produce.

Sometimes love accompanies.

There may be no measurable outcome.

No improvement.

No problem solved.

And still—

love was there.

That matters.

The Ministry of Not Knowing

There is humility in admitting:

I don't know how to fix this.

Perhaps even:

I don't know what to say.

We are often afraid those words will expose inadequacy.

But sometimes they create trust.

Imagine sitting beside someone whose child has died.

What sentence could possibly explain that?

What theological formula would make it acceptable?

What words could balance the equation?

There are none.

So perhaps instead:

“I don't know what to say. I just didn't want you to be alone.”

That may be one of the most honest forms of ministry.

Not bringing answers.

Bringing yourself.

When We Try to Fix Grief

Grief is one of the places where our fixing instinct can become particularly harmful.

We want the grieving person to feel better.

So we offer explanations.

“They're in a better place.”

“Everything happens for a reason.”

“God needed another angel.”

“You’ll see them again.”

“Be thankful for the time you had.”

“At least they’re no longer suffering.”

Sometimes these statements reflect sincere beliefs.

But timing matters.

Presence matters.

A statement can be theologically meaningful and emotionally unhelpful in a particular moment.

The grieving person may not need their loss explained.

They may need their loss acknowledged.

This hurts.

They mattered.

You loved them.

I miss them too.

I’m here.

Perhaps grief is not a problem to solve.

It is love learning to live with absence.

And that takes time.

Letting Someone Hurt

This may be one of the hardest disciplines of Presence:

allowing someone we love to hurt without immediately trying to make the hurt disappear.

Everything in us wants to rescue them.

Especially when it is our child.

Our spouse.

Our friend.

But sometimes pain needs witness more than rescue.

Can we sit beside tears without saying:

“Don’t cry”?

Can we hear anger without saying:

“You shouldn’t feel that way”?

Can we hear doubt without saying:

“You just need more faith”?

Can we allow someone to say:

“I’m angry with God”

without becoming God’s defense attorney?

God may be more capable of handling human honesty than we imagine.

The Psalms certainly suggest so.

Lamentations does too.

Faith has always had room for lament.

Perhaps we are the ones who made the room smaller.

God Does Not Need Our Defense

Sometimes when suffering enters a room, we become uncomfortable with what it seems to imply about God.

So we rush to explain Him.

There must be a reason.

There must be a plan.

God allowed it because...

God needed...

God is teaching...

Maybe.

But perhaps we should be careful.

A grieving person's bedside is not the place to solve the problem of suffering.

And God's character does not depend upon our ability to produce a satisfactory explanation for tragedy.

Sometimes defending God can cause us to stop hearing the person in front of us.

Presence listens first.

Maybe for a long time.

Maybe forever.

There are mysteries we may never explain.

Love does not require an explanation before it can enter the room.

Jesus Did Not Fix Every Moment Immediately

Even in the story of Lazarus, Jesus does something remarkable.

He knows resurrection is coming.

Yet He still allows grief to exist.

He listens.

He encounters Martha.

He encounters Mary.

He sees tears.

And He weeps.

Resurrection does not make the tears unnecessary.

Knowing the ending does not invalidate the sorrow in the middle.

Perhaps this tells us something about God.

God is not so obsessed with the resolution that He refuses to inhabit the unresolved moment.

He can be present in the middle.

Before the answer.

Before the breakthrough.

Before we understand.

And sometimes when there is no resolution we can see at all.

Presence remains.

The Serenity of Limits

There can be unexpected peace in finally acknowledging:

This is beyond me.

Not indifference.

Not resignation.

Not abandonment.

Just recognition.

I cannot control another person's choices.

I cannot make someone love me.

I cannot force reconciliation.

I cannot undo death.

I cannot stop time.

I cannot make every person understand me.

I cannot carry everyone.

I cannot save everyone.

I cannot be everywhere.

I cannot fix everything.

There is grief in those sentences.

There is also freedom.

Because once I stop pretending to possess power I do not have, I can become available to the power I do have.

I can love.

I can listen.

I can apologize.

I can forgive.

I can set boundaries.

I can ask for help.

I can remain.

I can leave when leaving is necessary.

I can speak truth.

I can be silent.

I can choose how I inhabit this moment.

Those things are not small.

Mercy for the Helper

Helpers need mercy too.

Perhaps especially helpers.

When your identity has been built around caring for people, inability can feel like personal failure.

If someone remains in pain, you wonder what you missed.

If a family is dissatisfied, you replay the conversation.

If someone dies, part of you may wonder whether more could have been done.

If a person rejects your help, you may carry that home.

But compassion without limits eventually becomes depletion.

Presence does not mean absorbing everyone else's suffering until there is nothing left of you.

You are present.

You are not omnipresent.

You care.

You are not the cure.

You accompany.

You are not responsible for controlling the outcome.

That distinction can save the heart of a caregiver.

You Are Not God

Perhaps that sounds obvious.

But many exhausted people are living as though it isn't.

We carry responsibilities that belong to God.

We try to manage outcomes.

Protect everyone.

Prevent every painful consequence.

Know every answer.

Meet every need.

Then collapse under a weight we were never designed to carry.

There may be mercy in remembering:

I am not God.

And perhaps even greater mercy in discovering:

I was never asked to be.

I can be human.

Limited.

Present.

Loving.

Dependent.

Sometimes confused.

Sometimes tired.

Sometimes in need of help myself.

And still useful.

Still worthy.

Still loved.

What Can Love Do Here?

Maybe this becomes the question when fixing is no longer possible.

Not:

How do I make this go away?

But:

What can Love do here?

Love can sit.

Love can listen.

Love can advocate.

Love can relieve pain when possible.

Love can tell the truth.

Love can make the room quieter.

Love can ask what matters now.

Love can honor someone's wishes.

Love can say goodbye.

Love can remain through the last breath.

Love can leave the room afterward and cry.

Love can return the next morning to care for someone else.

Love may not fix everything.

But love is never nothing.

The Mercy of Release

Sometimes mercy is holding on.

Sometimes mercy is letting go.

That phrase must be handled gently.

No one should be rushed toward letting go.

No one should be told that their loved one is “waiting for permission” as though a family member carries responsibility for the timing of another person’s death.

Death is mysterious.

Bodies have their own processes.

But emotionally, there may come a moment when love changes its language.

From:

Please don’t leave me.

to:

I love you.

Thank you.

I’ll miss you.

You can rest.

Not because we want them gone.

Because love has become large enough to stop demanding that someone remain for our sake.

That can be one of the most painful expressions of love.

And perhaps one of the most merciful.

When the Prayer Changes

There may also come a time when prayer changes.

At first:

God, heal them.

Then:

God, give us more time.

Then perhaps:

God, keep them comfortable.

And eventually:

God, hold them.

Was the first prayer wrong?

No.

Was the last prayer less faithful?

No.

Perhaps prayer changes because love is responding honestly to reality.

Faith is not insisting that one outcome must occur in order for God to remain good.

Faith may sometimes be opening our hands when every instinct wants to close them.

Not because we understand.

Because we trust Love more than we trust our ability to control the story.

Tomorrow May Still Be Hard

Acknowledging what cannot be fixed does not guarantee peace the next morning.

You may wake up and reach for control again.

That is human.

You may Google something.

Replay something.

Try one more thing.

Maybe there is one more thing worth trying.

Discernment is rarely clean.

Mercy does not demand perfection here either.

It simply keeps inviting us back:

What belongs to you today?

And:

What does not?

Do what love gives you to do.

Release what love does not require you to control.

Then breathe.

When Nothing Changes

Perhaps tomorrow morning you will awaken and discover that nothing has changed.

The disease is still there.

The grief is still there.

The unanswered question remains.

The relationship is still unresolved.

The empty chair is still empty.

And you may ask:

Where is the new mercy in this?

Maybe sometimes the new thing is not the circumstance.

Maybe the new thing is the capacity to meet it again.

One more breath.

One more day.

One more moment of Presence.

One more willingness to love what cannot be fixed.

And perhaps mercy whispers:

You don't have to fix this to be faithful.

You don't have to understand this to be present.

You don't have to control this to love.

Sometimes all Love asks is:

Stay here with Me.

Chapter Eight

Maybe one of the deepest forms of faith is learning that silence does not necessarily mean absence.

When God Seems Quiet

There are mornings when the hardest thing that is new is not what happened around us.

It is what seems to have happened within us.

Yesterday we believed.

Today we are not so sure.

Yesterday prayer felt natural.

Today the words will not come.

Yesterday God seemed near.

This morning—

silence.

And silence can become frightening when we have been taught that God's Presence should always be felt.

So we begin wondering:

What did I do wrong?

Why can't I feel God?

Did God leave?

Did I lose my faith?

Am I failing spiritually?

Perhaps not.

Maybe some mornings are simply quiet.

And perhaps mercy is present there too.

Because Presence is not the same thing as sensation.

Someone can be sitting beside you without speaking.

They have not left.

Maybe one of the deepest forms of faith is learning that silence does not necessarily mean absence.

We Learned to Look for Noise

Many of us were introduced to God through sound.

Sermons.

Songs.

Prayers.

Testimonies.

Scripture readings.

People telling us what God was saying.

Some of those sounds were beautiful.

Some became part of us.

But somewhere along the way, we may have learned to associate God's Presence with activity.

Something must be happening.

Something must be felt.

Something must be heard.

God must be speaking.

We must be receiving.

We must be growing.

We must be doing.

And then life brings us into a season where none of that seems to happen.

We pray.

Nothing.

We listen.

Nothing.

We open Scripture and the words seem flat.

We sing and feel nothing.

We sit in silence and encounter—

silence.

And we wonder whether something has gone wrong.

Maybe nothing has.

Silence Is Not Empty

Silence can feel empty because we are accustomed to filling it.

But silence is not necessarily the absence of something.

Sometimes silence is space.

Space in which we stop performing.

Space in which we stop explaining.

Space in which we no longer have to manufacture spiritual experience.

Space in which Presence can simply be Presence.

Think of sitting beside someone you deeply love.

There are relationships in which silence feels uncomfortable.

Someone must speak.

But there are other relationships where silence becomes evidence of intimacy.

No one needs to fill the room.

No one needs to entertain the other.

No one needs to prove anything.

You simply sit.

Together.

Perhaps prayer can become like that.

Not always asking.

Not always speaking.

Not always searching for an answer.

Sometimes simply:

Here I am.

And perhaps:

Here You are.

Nothing more.

The Sound Beneath the Noise

There is an old story in Scripture about Elijah.

He has known dramatic encounters.

Fire.

Power.

Conflict.

Victory.

Fear.

Then he finds himself exhausted and afraid.

He goes into the wilderness.

And eventually he stands before God.

There is wind.

There is earthquake.

There is fire.

But the text tells us God was not in those dramatic manifestations in the way Elijah expected.

Then comes what has been translated in different ways:

A still small voice.

A gentle whisper.

A thin silence.

That last rendering has always been particularly beautiful.

A thin silence.

What if silence is not where God disappears?

What if silence is sometimes where the noise becomes thin enough for us to notice what has always been there?

Presence.

The God We Thought Had to Shout

Perhaps some of us became accustomed to a God who always seemed to be shouting.

Do this.

Don't do that.

Go here.

Stop that.

Believe this.

Avoid them.

Repent.

Work harder.

Try again.

Be better.

And perhaps some of those messages came from sincere people trying to help us.

But eventually the noise becomes exhausting.

Then one morning we discover that God may not be shouting at all.

Perhaps Love does not need to.

Love can whisper.

Love can wait.

Love can sit beside us.

Love can allow a question to remain unanswered without becoming threatened by it.

Maybe God is quieter than some of the people who speak for Him.

When Prayer Stops Working

There are seasons when prayer seems not to work.

We should be honest about that.

You asked.

The person still died.

You prayed for the marriage.

It still ended.

You prayed for healing.

The diagnosis remained.

You prayed for your child.

They still made the choice.

You prayed for clarity.

You became more confused.

You prayed to feel God.

Nothing happened.

What do we do with that?

Perhaps first we stop pretending.

There is no value in telling God we are fine when we are not.

If prayer is relationship, then honesty belongs there.

I asked You.

I don't understand.

I'm disappointed.

I'm angry.

I thought You would do something.

Where are You?

Those are prayers too.

Scripture is filled with them.

Where Are You?

“Where are You?” may be one of the most ancient prayers.

And perhaps it is interesting that Scripture also begins with God asking humanity a similar question:

“Where are you?”

Maybe the relationship has always contained searching.

We search for God.

God searches for us.

Not because God lacks information.

But because relationship asks for Presence.

Where are you?

Not:

What doctrine are you defending?

Not:

How well did you perform yesterday?

Not:

Did you get everything right?

Where are you?

Perhaps the answer this morning is:

I'm here.

Confused.

Tired.

Angry.

Hopeful.

Numb.

Grieving.

Grateful.

Uncertain.

But here.

And maybe that is enough for relationship to begin again.

Numb Is a Feeling Too

There are times when people expect themselves to feel something and cannot.

This happens frequently in grief.

Someone dies and the person does not cry.

They feel nothing.

Then guilt arrives.

What's wrong with me?

Nothing necessarily.

The human system sometimes protects itself.

There are experiences too large to absorb all at once.

Numbness can be the body's way of saying:

Not all of this right now.

The tears may come tomorrow.

Next month.

In the grocery store.

During a song.

Or they may come differently than expected.

There is no required emotional response to loss.

There is also no required emotional response to God.

You do not have to feel Presence for Presence to be real.

Mercy does not require an emotional performance.

Faith Without Feeling

Perhaps faith has been confused with certainty.

Or emotion.

Or enthusiasm.

But some of the deepest faith may occur when none of those are present.

Faith can be:

I don't feel You, but I am still here.

Faith can be:

I don't understand, but I am willing to remain open.

Faith can be:

I have questions I cannot resolve.

Faith can even be:

I don't know what I believe today, but I haven't stopped listening.

That may not sound impressive.

Maybe faith was never meant to impress anyone.

Perhaps faith is simply relationship refusing to disappear because certainty has.

Don't Manufacture God

When God seems quiet, we can become tempted to manufacture an experience.

We turn up the music.

Search for another sermon.

Look for a sign.

Ask someone to tell us what God is saying.

There is nothing inherently wrong with any of those things.

Music can comfort.

Teaching can help.

Other people can offer wisdom.

But there is a difference between receiving something and needing something to happen so we can prove God is still there.

What if nothing happens?

Can we remain?

Can we sit in the quiet?

Can we allow God to be present without requiring God to perform?

That may be a very mature form of intimacy.

The Hospice Room at 3:00 A.M.

Some rooms become very quiet at night.

A family has been talking all day.

People have visited.

The nurse has come and gone.

Phone calls have been made.

Then 3:00 a.m. arrives.

The house is dark.

Everyone else is asleep.

One person sits beside the bed.

The breathing is slow.

There is nothing to do.

Nothing to say.

No theological question needs answering.

A hand rests inside another hand.

Breath.

Pause.

Breath.

Pause.

Perhaps God is not absent from that room.

Perhaps that room is full of Presence.

No music.

No sermon.

No explanation.

Just two people.

One keeping vigil.

One nearing the end.

And something sacred in the silence between breaths.

Presence Does Not Always Speak

Maybe we have assumed that if God is present, God must say something.

But think about the people who have helped you most.

Were they always the people who had the best words?

Or were some of them simply the people who stayed?

Maybe divine Presence is sometimes like that.

No explanation.

No answer.

No new information.

Just:

I am here.

Perhaps “I am” has always been enough.

When God Seems Absent From Suffering

There are forms of suffering that make any easy statement about God feel inadequate.

We should not rush through them.

There are tragedies for which “God has a plan” can sound almost unbearable.

There are losses where explanations feel obscene.

So perhaps we resist the urge to explain God.

We allow the question:

Where were You?

We let it remain a question.

Maybe faith does not always answer.

Sometimes faith weeps.

Sometimes faith protests.

Sometimes faith sits in ashes.

Sometimes faith says nothing at all.

Lament is not the opposite of faith.

Lament is what faith sounds like when love encounters something it cannot reconcile.

Lamentations itself bears witness to that.

And it is from within lament—not outside it—that we hear:

His mercies are new every morning.

Mercy in the Silence

What would mercy look like on a morning when God seems quiet?

Maybe mercy is permission not to force an answer.

Permission not to feel anything.

Permission to question.

Permission to rest from religious effort.

Permission to stop trying to hear something.

Perhaps mercy says:

You don't have to find Me this morning.

You are already found.

That changes the spiritual posture.

We stop straining.

Maybe we breathe.

Maybe we sit near a window.

Maybe we drink coffee.

Maybe we walk outside.

Maybe we say nothing.

And perhaps, underneath all our searching, there remains the quiet possibility:

Presence was here before I started looking.

Great Is Your Faithfulness

Once again we return to the words of Lamentations.

Not:

Great is my ability to sense You.

Not:

Great is my certainty.

Not:

Great is my prayer life.

Not:

Great is my understanding.

Great is Your faithfulness.

God's faithfulness is not measured by the intensity of our spiritual experience.

There are mornings when we may feel nothing.

And mercy is still new.

There are mornings when we cannot pray.

And grace is still available.

There are mornings when we have more questions than answers.

And Presence remains.

Perhaps the deepest security is not:

I am holding tightly to God.

Maybe it is:

I am held.

When the Silence Breaks

Sometimes silence eventually gives way to something.

Not necessarily a voice.

Maybe a realization.

A memory.

A person.

A sentence we have read a hundred times suddenly becoming alive.

A bird outside the window.

A song.

A tear.

A moment when we realize we have been breathing peacefully for several minutes.

And perhaps we think:

There You are.

But maybe God was not absent before that moment.

Maybe our awareness changed.

Like morning light slowly revealing furniture that was already in the room.

The room did not become furnished at sunrise.

We simply began to see what had been there in the darkness.

Perhaps Presence is sometimes like that.

If All You Hear Is Silence

So tomorrow morning, if you ask:

HELP! What's new this morning?

and all you hear is silence—

do not assume silence means abandonment.

Sit for a moment.

Breathe.

You do not need to fill the space.

You do not need to produce faith.

You do not need to manufacture hope.

Maybe simply whisper:

I'm here.

And perhaps allow the possibility that Love answers without words:

So am I.

Chapter Nine

Mercy Does Not Ask Us to Pretend

There is a kind of spirituality that becomes frightened by honesty.

Everything must be okay.

We must remain positive.

We must speak faith.

We must not confess fear because fear might somehow strengthen it.

We must not question because questioning might reveal doubt.

We must not admit anger because anger seems irreverent.

We must not say we are tired because someone may think we are ungrateful.

So we smile.

We say:

“I’m blessed.”

Sometimes we are.

Sometimes we are also falling apart.

Those two things can coexist.

Perhaps mercy begins where pretending ends.

Because Presence cannot meet the person we are pretending to be.

Presence meets us where we actually are.

And where we actually are may be messy.

This morning may hurt.

We may be angry.

We may be afraid.

We may be grateful and grieving at the same time.

We may love God and be disappointed with God.

We may trust and doubt in the same breath.

Maybe none of that disqualifies us from mercy.

Maybe that is exactly why mercy is new this morning.

The Exhaustion of Being Fine

There is a particular exhaustion that comes from pretending to be okay.

Someone asks:

“How are you?”

And almost automatically we answer:

“Fine.”

Sometimes “fine” is simply social shorthand.

No deception intended.

But there are seasons when “fine” becomes a hiding place.

Because telling the truth would take too long.

Because we do not know whether the person asking really wants to know.

Because we don’t want to cry.

Because we are tired of explaining.

Because everyone seems relieved when we say we’re doing better.

Or because we ourselves do not know how we are.

So:

Fine.

But the heart knows.

The body knows.

The quiet room at night knows.

Mercy knows.

And perhaps there needs to be at least one place in our lives where “fine” is unnecessary.

A person.

A room.

A prayer.

A Presence.

Somewhere we can say:

Actually, today is hard.

God Already Knows

We sometimes behave as though honesty might surprise God.

As though God believes the public version of us.

As though if we don't say we're angry, God will not know.

If we don't admit we're frightened, perhaps God will mistake us for courageous.

If we don't voice the doubt, perhaps God will assume certainty.

But if God already knows, then hiding accomplishes nothing except distance within us.

Perhaps confession, in its broadest and most beautiful sense, is simply agreeing to tell the truth in the Presence of Love.

Not only truth about wrongdoing.

Truth about everything.

I'm tired.

I'm jealous.

I'm afraid.

I don't understand.

I'm relieved—and I feel guilty for being relieved.

I love them—and caregiving has exhausted me.

I miss them—and part of me is angry with them.

I believe—and I have doubts.

I'm grateful—and this still hurts.

These are not contradictions to be eliminated.

They are human experiences to be held.

The Relief After Death

There is one feeling grieving caregivers sometimes hesitate to admit.

Relief.

Someone they love dies after months or years of illness.

And beneath the grief, perhaps even alongside devastation, comes relief.

The suffering is over.

The vigilance is over.

The medications are over.

The nighttime awakenings are over.

The uncertainty is over.

Then guilt arrives.

How can I feel relieved that someone I love died?

Perhaps because relief is not the same as wishing they were dead.

You can desperately miss someone and still be relieved that their suffering has ended.

You can grieve them and feel your own exhausted body finally exhale.

Those feelings can coexist.

Mercy does not force you to choose one.

Love is complicated because human beings are complicated.

The heart can hold grief and relief in the same room.

I Love You, and I'm Tired

Caregivers need permission to say this:

I love you, and I'm tired.

One does not cancel the other.

Fatigue does not measure love.

Irritation does not erase devotion.

Wanting an hour alone does not mean you want someone gone.

Needing help does not mean you have failed them.

There may even be moments when you resent what illness has required of you.

That does not necessarily mean you resent the person.

Sometimes we direct our frustration toward the nearest face because disease itself has no face we can confront.

Mercy helps us separate those things.

I love you.

I hate what this is doing to us.

Both can be true.

Anger Belongs Somewhere

Anger often frightens religious people.

Especially anger toward God.

We may have been taught that reverence requires us to suppress it.

But anger does not disappear because we refuse to name it.

It simply finds another place to live.

Sometimes it becomes bitterness.

Sometimes depression.

Sometimes irritation toward innocent people.

Sometimes distance from God.

What if prayer is actually one of the safest places for anger?

The Psalms certainly seem to think so.

The biblical writers ask:

How long?

Why?

Where are You?

Why have You forgotten me?

They protest.

They lament.

They accuse.

They plead.

And somehow those words became Scripture.

Perhaps God would rather receive our honest anger than our dishonest worship.

Relationship can survive truth.

Maybe genuine relationship requires it.

Don't Protect God From Your Questions

God does not need protection from you.

You are allowed to ask.

Why?

Where were You?

Why didn't You stop this?

Why did I pray if this was going to happen anyway?

Why them?

Why now?

There may not be satisfying answers.

But the questions themselves do not exile us from Presence.

Sometimes questions are evidence that relationship still matters.

We do not usually argue passionately with someone whose response means nothing to us.

Perhaps even our protest can be a form of reaching.

I am still talking to You.

Even if the conversation is angry.

Even if it is confused.

Even if it contains words we would never say in church.

God has heard worse.

Read Job.

Read the Psalms.

Read Lamentations.

Scripture is far more emotionally honest than much of the spirituality we constructed around it.

The Violence of Easy Answers

There are times when an answer can become a kind of violence.

Not because the words are intentionally cruel.

Because they arrive before Presence.

A child dies.

“God needed another angel.”

A spouse dies.

“It was God’s timing.”

Someone receives a terminal diagnosis.

“Everything happens for a reason.”

A person is devastated.

“God won’t give you more than you can handle.”

These phrases attempt to close a wound that has barely opened.

Maybe we say them because helplessness makes us uncomfortable.

We want to give suffering a shape.

An explanation.

A reason.

But some pain should not be explained while it is still bleeding.

Perhaps the holier response is:

“I’m so sorry.”

“This is terrible.”

“I don’t understand either.”

“I’m here.”

Presence does not always answer the question.

Sometimes Presence honors the question enough not to cheapen it.

Truth Without Despair

Honesty does not require hopelessness.

That distinction matters.

We can say:

This is awful.

without saying:

Nothing will ever matter again.

We can say:

I don't know how I'm going to do this.

without deciding:

I cannot take the next step.

We can say:

I'm angry with God.

without concluding:

God has abandoned me.

We can say:

I don't feel hope today.

and allow someone else to hold hope nearby without forcing it into our hands.

Sometimes hope is communal.

When I cannot carry it, you carry it.

When you cannot carry it, perhaps I will.

No one has to pretend.

Borrowed Hope

There are mornings when we cannot access hope ourselves.

Maybe that is when Presence becomes especially important.

Someone sits beside us who can see farther than we can.

They do not tell us to cheer up.

They do not demand positivity.

They simply remain.

Their Presence quietly says:

You don't have to believe everything will be okay right now.

I'll sit here while you don't know.

That may be borrowed hope.

Not someone forcing their certainty upon us.

Someone lending us enough safety to remain inside uncertainty.

Perhaps this is another way mercy moves between people.

The Freedom to Say "I Don't Know"

We have returned to these words several times because they matter:

I don't know.

They may be among the most honest words in spiritual care.

I don't know why this happened.

I don't know how long.

I don't know what tomorrow looks like.

I don't know why God did not intervene the way we hoped.

I don't know exactly what happens in every mystery beyond death.

I don't know.

But ignorance does not require absence.

I can still sit here.

I can still love you.

I can still listen.

I can still hold your hand.

I can still believe that mercy is possible even when explanation is not.

Perhaps certainty has been given too much responsibility in our understanding of faith.

Maybe Faith Is Trust, Not Certainty

Certainty says:

I know what is going to happen.

Trust says:

I don't know, but I am willing to take the next step.

Those are not the same thing.

A person can possess certainty without relationship.

Trust requires relationship.

Maybe this is why some of our deepest spiritual growth happens when certainty begins to loosen.

We discover what remains after all the explanations have been stripped away.

Perhaps:

Love.

Presence.

Mercy.

Trust.

Maybe that is enough.

Jesus Did Not Pretend

Jesus wept.

Jesus became tired.

Jesus withdrew.

Jesus asked questions.

Jesus expressed anguish.

Jesus asked for the cup to pass.

Jesus cried from the cross.

Whatever else we say about Him, we cannot say He modeled emotional dishonesty.

His humanity was not an inconvenience to His spirituality.

His humanity was where divine Love became visible.

Perhaps ours is too.

Maybe being spiritually mature does not mean becoming less affected by life.

Maybe it means becoming more honest about what life does to us while remaining open to Love within it.

When the Smile Comes Back

There will be mornings when you smile again.

Perhaps unexpectedly.

Something is funny.

Really funny.

And you laugh.

Then for a moment you may feel guilty.

How can I laugh?

Because you are alive.

Laughter does not dishonor grief.

Joy does not betray the dead.

A good morning does not erase a terrible one.

Human beings are capable of carrying sorrow and joy together.

This may be one of our greatest capacities.

We do not have to wait until grief completely disappears before allowing beauty to return.

Beauty may return while grief is sitting beside it.

Let it.

Mercy does not only meet us in tears.

Sometimes mercy makes us laugh.

Tell the Truth This Morning

Maybe this chapter asks for one small practice.

Before you decide how you should feel, ask:

How do I actually feel?

No judgment.

No correction.

No spiritual grading system.

Just notice.

Tired?

Say tired.

Angry?

Say angry.

Peaceful?

Say peaceful.

Numb?

Say numb.

Grateful?

Say grateful.

Terrified?

Say terrified.

Several of them at once?

That is allowed too.

Then perhaps say:

This is where I am this morning.

And imagine mercy responding:

Then this is where I will meet you.

Because mercy does not wait at the destination.

Mercy meets us here.

No Mask Required

Perhaps the throne of grace has a very simple dress code.

Come as you are.

Not the version you think God prefers.

Not the version your family expects.

Not the version your religious community applauds.

You.

The tired you.

The questioning you.

The grieving you.

The angry you.

The grateful you.

The uncertain you.

The laughing-again you.

The barely-holding-on you.

Come boldly.

Obtain mercy.

Find grace to help.

In the time of need.

This time.

This need.

This morning.

Maybe that is what is new.

Not a new mask.

Not a new performance.

New mercy for the person who actually woke up today.

Chapter Ten

Enough Mercy for This Morning

Perhaps we have been asking mercy to do something it was never intended to do.

We want it to tell us the future.

We want assurance that everything will work out.

We want enough strength today to carry what might happen next month.

We want certainty.

But morning does not give us the whole day at once.

It arrives gradually.

A little light.

A little more.

Then enough to see what is in front of us.

Maybe mercy works like that.

Enough light for this step.

Enough grace for this need.

Enough strength for this conversation.

Enough Presence for this moment.

We may not receive everything we need for the rest of our lives this morning.

Perhaps we don't need to.

We only need enough mercy to begin.

We Keep Asking for Tomorrow's Mercy

Much of our fear is future tense.

What if?

What if Mom gets worse?

What if Dad dies tonight?

What if the treatment doesn't work?

What if I lose the job?

What if they leave?

What if I cannot afford it?

What if I end up alone?

What if I fall apart?

The mind is remarkably creative.

It can generate a hundred tomorrows before we finish our first cup of coffee.

And then we try to emotionally survive all of them.

No wonder we are exhausted.

Perhaps mercy gently interrupts:

Which of those things is happening right now?

Maybe none.

Maybe one.

Then let us meet the one.

The Grace Will Be There When the Need Is There

Hebrews does not promise grace for imagined emergencies.

It promises:

grace to help in time of need.

When the need becomes present, grace will meet the need.

This does not mean we never prepare.

Preparation can be wise.

Advance directives matter.

Conversations matter.

Planning matters.

Saving money matters.

Making arrangements matters.

But preparation and pre-suffering are not the same thing.

Preparation asks:

What can I wisely do today?

Pre-suffering asks:

How can I emotionally experience every possible tragedy before it occurs?

One can help us.

The other consumes us.

Maybe we can prepare without trying to feel tomorrow before tomorrow arrives.

Just This Morning

For someone in grief, the question:

How will I live the rest of my life without them?

may be unbearable.

So don't answer it this morning.

It is too large.

Ask:

What do I need for the next hour?

Water?

Coffee?

A shower?

Silence?

Someone to call?

A walk?

Sleep?

Tears?

Then do that.

Later, another hour will arrive.

You can meet it then.

This is not avoidance.

It is mercy-sized living.

Mercy-Sized Living

Perhaps we need a new measurement for life.

Not year-sized.

Not future-sized.

Not catastrophe-sized.

Mercy-sized.

What is the amount of life I am actually being asked to live right now?

This conversation.

This meal.

This appointment.

This bedside.

This breath.

That is all.

We often suffer because our minds attempt to hold an entire future inside one present moment.

No human heart was designed to do that.

Maybe mercy makes life smaller enough to carry.

Not insignificant.

Carryable.

Give Us This Day

Jesus taught:

“Give us this day our daily bread.”

There is humility in daily bread.

It admits dependence.

I will need again tomorrow.

We prefer stockpiles.

Enough money so we never worry.

Enough certainty so we never doubt.

Enough strength so we never need anyone.

Enough answers so mystery never frightens us.

But daily bread creates relationship.

Today I receive.

Tomorrow I return.

Maybe mercy is daily for the same reason.

Not because God is withholding tomorrow's mercy.

Because tomorrow's relationship has not yet arrived.

This morning has.

The Manna We Cannot Store

The wilderness story gives us another picture.

Manna came daily.

Enough.

When people tried to store it out of fear, it spoiled.

Perhaps there are things we cannot store.

Yesterday's courage cannot be preserved in a jar.

Tomorrow's peace cannot be accumulated today.

But neither does today's fear predict tomorrow's capacity.

You may look at something ahead and say:

I could never survive that.

Maybe you could not survive it today.

You are not there.

If that day comes, you will not arrive alone.

Mercy will have a morning there too.

You Have Survived Mornings Before

There may be evidence in your own life.

Think of mornings you once feared.

The morning after the diagnosis.

The morning of the funeral.

The morning after the divorce.

The morning you walked into the hospital.

The morning you packed the belongings.

The morning you returned to work.

The first birthday without them.

The anniversary.

You may not have done those mornings beautifully.

That was never the requirement.

But you arrived.

You breathed.

You lived them.

Somehow.

Perhaps mercy was there in ways you recognized.

Perhaps in ways you did not.

And here you are.

Not untouched.

Not unchanged.

But here.

Enough Does Not Mean Easy

“Enough mercy” should never be mistaken for:

This won’t hurt.

It may hurt terribly.

Enough does not mean easy.

Enough means there will be something with which to meet what comes.

Maybe tears are enough.

Maybe a friend’s shoulder is enough.

Maybe medication is part of enough.

Maybe professional support is part of enough.

Maybe rest.

Maybe prayer.

Maybe silence.

Maybe the courage to ask someone to come over.

Mercy is not threatened by practical help.

Grace does not compete with medicine, counseling, nursing, community or friendship.

Perhaps these are often among the ways help arrives.

What Do I Need Now?

This may be one of the healthiest questions we can learn.

Not:

What should I be able to handle?

Not:

Why am I not stronger?

Simply:

What do I need now?

Sometimes the answer will be spiritual.

Sometimes physical.

Sometimes emotional.

Sometimes relational.

Sometimes the answer is:

I don't know.

Then perhaps begin with the body.

Have I eaten?

Have I had water?

Have I slept?

Have I been outside?

Have I spoken with anyone?

We are embodied people.

Sometimes the soul feels like it is collapsing because the body has been awake for thirty hours.

Mercy cares about bodies too.

Receiving Today's Portion

There is something gentle about receiving rather than achieving.

We achieve goals.

We accomplish tasks.

We earn wages.

But mercy is received.

Grace is found.

Daily bread is given.

Presence is welcomed.

This may be difficult for those of us who have spent our lives doing.

Maybe morning begins not with:

What must I accomplish?

but:

What is being given?

Breath.

Light.

Another opportunity.

A person beside us.

A memory.

A moment of quiet.

A chance to repair something.

A chance to rest.

A chance simply to exist.

Not every morning will feel like a gift.

We do not have to force that language.

But perhaps every morning contains something we can receive.

The Morning Question

So perhaps we have arrived at a different way of asking the title question.

At first:

HELP! What's new this morning?

may sound frightened.

And some mornings it should.

But over time perhaps the tone changes.

What's new this morning?

What mercy has arrived?

What grace is available?

What help is here?

What does Love invite me to notice?

What belongs to today?

What can wait until tomorrow?

And perhaps the most important question:

What is enough for now?

Before You Stand Up

Tomorrow morning, perhaps don't stand immediately.

Give yourself ten seconds.

Maybe thirty.

Before the phone.

Before the news.

Before email.

Before the list.

Before you begin carrying everyone else.

Breathe.

Then perhaps say:

This is a morning I have never lived before.

I do not know everything it will bring.

I do not need to.

Mercy is new.

Grace will help when need arrives.

Presence is here.

I have enough for this moment.

Then put your feet on the floor.

That may be faith.

Not certainty about the day.

Willingness to enter it.

One morning at a time.

Chapter Eleven

What If Something Beautiful Is New?

We have spent a great deal of time acknowledging why the question can frighten us.

What's new this morning?

For many people, new has meant loss.

Change.

Decline.

Bad news.

Another problem.

So eventually we begin bracing whenever life changes.

But perhaps there is another question mercy wants to teach us.

What if something beautiful is new?

Not as denial.

Not as forced optimism.

But as openness.

What if today contains something we did not anticipate that is good?

A conversation.

A reconciliation.

A moment of clarity.

A laugh we thought we had lost.

A person we did not expect to meet.

A new way of seeing an old wound.

A little more peace than yesterday.

The first morning we realize we slept through the night.

The first memory that makes us smile before it makes us cry.

Perhaps new does not always have to frighten us.

Maybe mercy is teaching us how to become curious again.

When We Learn to Brace

After enough painful surprises, the body learns.

The phone rings late at night and your stomach tightens.

A doctor says, "I'd like to talk with you," and your mind races ahead.

Someone says, "We need to talk," and you immediately imagine loss.

You wake in the morning and listen before moving.

Is everything okay?

What happened overnight?

Pain trains us to brace.

That response is not weakness.

It is the body's attempt to protect us.

Once something terrible has happened unexpectedly, unexpected itself can begin to feel dangerous.

We become suspicious of new.

Perhaps this is why healing sometimes involves more than learning to survive difficult things.

We may also have to relearn how to receive good things.

Waiting for the Other Shoe

Have you ever had a genuinely good day and found yourself waiting for something to ruin it?

Everything is quiet.

People you love are okay.

Nothing urgent is happening.

And instead of enjoying the peace, something inside whispers:

This won't last.

Perhaps it won't.

Nothing does.

But impermanence does not make goodness meaningless.

A sunset lasts minutes.

We still stop to watch it.

A flower blooms and fades.

We still call it beautiful.

A conversation ends.

A song finishes.

A meal is eaten.

A child grows.

A season passes.

Perhaps something does not have to last forever to be received fully today.

Mercy may sometimes say:

You don't have to protect yourself from this moment.

You can enjoy it.

Joy Is Not Naivety

Some people become suspicious of joy after suffering.

They know how quickly life can change.

They have seen too much.

They know the phone can ring.

They know healthy people become sick.

They know relationships end.

They know people die.

So joy begins to feel almost irresponsible.

But perhaps joy after suffering is not naivety.

Perhaps it is courage.

Before suffering, we may enjoy life because we assume it will continue.

After suffering, we may enjoy life knowing it will change.

That is a different kind of joy.

More tender.

More awake.

Less entitled.

We no longer say:

This must last.

We say:

This is here.

And we receive it.

The First Laugh

There is often a first laugh after loss.

Not the polite laugh we give other people because they are trying to cheer us up.

A real one.

The kind that escapes before we can stop it.

For one moment, we forget to be sad.

Then we remember.

And sometimes guilt immediately follows.

How can I laugh?

Because grief did not remove your humanity.

Because the person you love did not take your capacity for joy with them.

Because sorrow and laughter have always lived closer together than we realize.

Perhaps the first real laugh after loss is not evidence that grief is ending.

It may be evidence that life is returning to sit beside it.

Let it.

When the Memory Changes

There are memories that initially hurt every time they appear.

A photograph.

A song.

A phrase.

A place.

The memory comes and grief follows immediately behind it.

Then one day something subtle happens.

The memory comes.

And before the pain—

a smile.

You remember the way they laughed.

The ridiculous thing they always said.

The story everyone in the family knows.

The thing they did that drove you crazy and that you would now give anything to see one more time.

You laugh.

Maybe through tears.

That is not forgetting.

It may be one of the ways memory heals.

The memory no longer belongs exclusively to death.

It belongs again to the life that came before it.

Perhaps mercy has slowly returned the memory to you.

New Does Not Mean Replacement

This is especially important in grief.

Something new does not replace someone old.

A new friendship does not replace the person who died.

A new relationship does not erase a former love.

A new home does not invalidate the memories made in the old one.

A new season of life does not mean the previous season mattered less.

Human love is not a room with only one chair.

The heart expands.

We do not necessarily remove one love to make room for another.

Maybe we learn that love can accumulate.

The people we have loved become part of how we love the people who are still coming.

Permission to Live

There can come a moment in grief when living itself feels complicated.

If I enjoy my life, does that mean I didn't love them enough?

If I travel again?

Date again?

Laugh again?

Celebrate again?

Decorate for Christmas?

Go to the restaurant we loved?

Listen to our song?

What if I have a beautiful day?

Would they want me to remain miserable as evidence that they mattered?

Probably not.

Perhaps one of the greatest ways we honor those we love is not by remaining permanently inside the moment of their death.

It is by allowing their life to continue influencing ours.

Carry the love forward.

Not the obligation to suffer forever.

The Caregiver After Caregiving

For a caregiver, something beautiful being new may feel particularly strange.

For months or years, life may have been organized around illness.

Appointments.

Medication.

Symptoms.

Meals.

Sleep.

Safety.

The caregiver learns to arrange life around another person's needs.

Then caregiving ends.

At first, the freedom can feel empty.

Even cruel.

Then perhaps one morning you realize:

I can go somewhere.

And immediately another feeling arrives.

Guilt.

How can freedom feel good when freedom came through loss?

Because human emotions do not obey simple equations.

You can wish with everything in you that the person were still here and also rediscover parts of your own life that disappeared during caregiving.

Both can be true.

Mercy makes room for both.

Rediscovering Yourself

Caregiving can quietly consume identity.

“What do you need?”

becomes the central question of every day.

Then one morning no one is asking.

And eventually another question emerges:

What do I need?

That may be surprisingly difficult to answer.

What do I enjoy?

Where would I like to go?

Who am I when no one needs medication at 8:00?

What did I stop doing?

What part of myself became quiet?

There is no rush to answer.

But perhaps curiosity itself is new.

Maybe mercy is not only helping you survive what ended.

Maybe mercy is gently introducing you to who you are becoming.

Becoming Is Not Betrayal

We sometimes think loyalty requires us to remain unchanged.

But everyone we love changes us.

Perhaps the question is not whether we will change after loss.

We will.

The question is what the love will become within us.

Maybe their kindness becomes our kindness.

Their humor becomes a story we tell.

Their generosity becomes something we practice.

Their mistakes become wisdom.

Their suffering deepens our compassion.

Their life continues creating life through ours.

That does not make death good.

It means Love is remarkably resistant to endings.

The Surprise of Desire

There may come a morning when you want something again.

That is significant.

You want to travel.

Plant flowers.

Call someone.

Write.

Learn.

Cook.

Go out to dinner.

Attend a concert.

Sit near the water.

Start something.

Love someone.

For a long time, desire may have felt dangerous because wanting creates the possibility of losing.

But perhaps desire returning is mercy.

Life saying:

There is still something in you reaching forward.

You do not have to rush.

But notice it.

Something is alive.

New Mercy May Create New Possibility

We have mostly spoken about mercy as what meets suffering.

But perhaps mercy does more.

Maybe mercy creates space.

Space for a new thought.

A new relationship.

A new understanding.

A new way of seeing ourselves.

A new capacity for compassion.

A new freedom from something that once controlled us.

A new willingness to forgive.

A new willingness to be forgiven.

A new way of understanding God.

Sometimes what is new this morning is not merely mercy meeting pain.

Sometimes mercy has quietly grown something.

What If God Is Better Than We Thought?

Perhaps one of the most beautiful new things can be a changing understanding of God.

Some of us inherited images of God that made us afraid.

A God easily offended.

A God keeping score.

A God watching for failure.

A God whose Presence depended upon our performance.

Then life happens.

Certainties crack.

Questions emerge.

And somehow, beneath all the religious noise, we begin encountering something simpler.

Love.

Not sentimental love.

Not permissiveness.

Love strong enough for truth.

Love that does not disappear when we fail.

Love that enters grief.

Love that can sit in silence.

Love that does not demand we pretend.

Love that meets us every morning.

And perhaps we realize:

God did not become better.

Our lens changed.

Maybe mercy was there all along.

The New Lens

Sometimes the problem is not the light.

It is the lens through which we see it.

A clouded lens distorts what is present.

Fear can become a lens.

Shame can become a lens.

Trauma can become a lens.

Religious experiences can become lenses.

Things people told us about God can become lenses.

Then we assume what we see through the lens is exactly what God is like.

But what if healing sometimes means the lens becoming clearer?

The light did not change.

Our ability to receive it did.

Maybe this is another meaning hidden inside the morning.

The sun is not new.

The light meets us new.

God's Love is not new.

Our capacity to recognize it may be.

Curiosity Instead of Fear

So perhaps eventually the title question changes again.

At the beginning of this book:

HELP! WHAT'S NEW THIS MORNING?

may have sounded like alarm.

What happened?

What's worse?

What changed?

But maybe, slowly, mercy changes the punctuation inside us.

What's new this morning?

Curiosity.

Maybe even wonder.

Not because we have become naïve.

We know what life can do.

We know mornings can carry terrible news.

But we also know something else now.

We have survived mornings.

We have found mercy there.

We have discovered help.

We have experienced Presence.

So maybe new no longer automatically means danger.

It might mean possibility.

Look for Something Alive

Perhaps tomorrow morning, after you notice what hurts, look for something alive.

Not as a denial of what hurts.

Alongside it.

A bird.

A tree.

A person.

Your own breath.

Something growing through a crack.

Someone laughing.

The smell of coffee.

A memory that warms you.

A desire you thought was gone.

A little curiosity.

Something.

Life is remarkably persistent.

Perhaps mercy is too.

What If Today Surprises You?

We spend so much energy preparing ourselves for bad surprises.

Perhaps we can leave a little room for another possibility.

What if someone calls with good news?

What if the conversation goes better than expected?

What if you feel peaceful for an hour?

What if something makes you laugh?

What if you realize you are stronger than you thought?

What if someone enters your life?

What if an old wound begins to loosen?

What if you forgive?

What if you finally forgive yourself?

What if you hear God differently?

What if you discover that Presence has been closer than you imagined?

What if something beautiful is new?

You do not have to expect it.

Just don't close the door.

Mercy Can Surprise Us Too

Perhaps this is why mercy is plural in Lamentations.

Mercies.

Not one mercy.

Mercies.

More than one expression.

More than one form.

More than one way Love meets us.

We may spend the morning looking for one particular answer while mercy arrives through another door.

We asked for strength.

Mercy sent a friend.

We asked for an answer.

Mercy gave us peace without one.

We asked for the situation to change.

Mercy changed something within us.

We asked not to cry.

Mercy gave us tears.

We asked to forget.

Mercy taught us how to remember without being destroyed.

We asked for yesterday back.

Mercy slowly introduced us to tomorrow.

Tomorrow Is Allowed to Be Different

This may be especially important after loss.

Tomorrow is allowed to be different.

Different does not mean disloyal.

Different does not mean better than the person you lost.

Different simply means life continues becoming.

You are allowed to become too.

There may be mornings ahead that you cannot yet imagine.

Beautiful ones.

Ordinary ones.

Difficult ones.

Surprising ones.

You will not meet them as the person you are today.

You will meet them as the person you are becoming.

And mercy will meet that person too.

Maybe Something Beautiful Is You

Perhaps the beautiful new thing is not something that happens to you.

Maybe it is something happening within you.

You are becoming gentler.

Less judgmental.

More honest.

More willing to ask for help.

More comfortable with mystery.

Less afraid of silence.

More attentive to ordinary things.

More capable of sitting beside someone else's pain without needing to fix it.

More aware that love and grief can coexist.

More willing to receive.

More present.

Maybe suffering did not make those things good.

But mercy refused to waste what suffering exposed.

Perhaps you are becoming someone who can carry Presence into another person's morning.

And that is beautiful.

What's New This Morning?

So ask again.

What's new this morning?

Maybe something hurts.

Name it.

Maybe something frightens you.

Honor it.

Maybe nothing feels new at all.

That's okay.

But perhaps also ask:

Is anything beautiful here?

Not spectacular.

Beautiful.

A breath.

A face.

A memory.

A possibility.

A little light.

A little hope.

A little desire.

A little laughter.

A little more capacity than yesterday.

Maybe you will find something.

Maybe you won't.

There is no assignment to succeed at.

Mercy is not a scavenger hunt.

You don't have to find it for it to exist.

But perhaps, over time, we become better at noticing.

And one morning we may discover that the question we once feared has become an invitation:

What's new this morning?

Maybe mercy.

Maybe possibility.

Maybe me.

Chapter Twelve

Mercy Is Already Awake

Before you opened your eyes this morning, mercy did not need to be awakened.

God did not rise before you and decide whether you had earned another day of compassion.

Grace did not check yesterday's performance before making itself available.

Love did not review your failures during the night.

Presence did not wait at the edge of the room until you remembered to pray.

Mercy was already awake.

Perhaps that is where this entire journey has been leading us.

Morning is not when God begins again.

Morning is when **we discover that God never stopped.**

The Love was constant.

The faithfulness remained.

The Presence stayed.

And now another morning has arrived.

A morning no one has ever lived before.

Including you.

You do not know everything it contains.

Neither do I.

Maybe that was never ours to know.

The question was never whether we could predict what would be new.

The question was whether we could trust what would meet us there.

And Lamentations gives its answer:

Mercy.

Before You Asked

There is something beautiful about the order.

We awaken.

Mercy is already new.

We recognize our need.

Grace is already available.

We cry:

Help.

And Hebrews tells us there is already a throne of grace toward which we are invited.

Perhaps we have imagined ourselves initiating the encounter.

We pray, and God responds.

We cry, and God notices.

We repent, and God becomes merciful.

We reach toward God, and God finally reaches toward us.

But what if Love has always moved first?

What if our cry for help occurs inside a mercy that has already surrounded us?

What if prayer is less about getting God's attention and more about awakening to the Presence that has never stopped attending to us?

That changes prayer.

Help!

is no longer a desperate attempt to convince a distant God to come closer.

It becomes the honest cry of someone beginning to recognize:

I need what is already being offered.

Mercy Was Not Created This Morning

When Lamentations says God's mercies are new every morning, it cannot mean that mercy did not exist yesterday.

The previous line makes that impossible.

His mercies never come to an end.

They are endless—

and new.

Constant—

and fresh.

Ancient—

and arriving.

Perhaps sunrise gives us the language again.

The sun did not begin existing when it appeared over the horizon.

Morning simply gave us another encounter with its light.

God did not become merciful this morning.

We awakened into mercy.

Maybe that is one of the most important distinctions in this entire book.

God does not begin again every morning.

We do.

You Woke Up Different

Even if nothing dramatic happened overnight, you are not exactly who you were yesterday.

You have lived another day.

Carried another experience.

Had another conversation.

Remembered something.

Forgotten something.

Learned something.

Lost something.

Loved someone.

Been disappointed.

Been surprised.

Perhaps been changed in ways too small to recognize yet.

And mercy meets this version of you.

Not the person you were ten years ago.

Not the person your family expects you to be.

Not the person your religious community told you that you should become.

Not even the person you were yesterday.

You.

Here.

Now.

This morning.

Maybe this is why mercy must feel new.

Because Love is infinitely capable of meeting what is actually present.

No Leftover Mercy

We sometimes treat ourselves as though we should be able to survive on yesterday's spiritual experience.

Yesterday I felt strong.

Why am I afraid today?

Yesterday I trusted.

Why am I questioning today?

Yesterday I accepted the loss.

Why am I crying again?

Yesterday I thought I had forgiven them.

Why am I angry this morning?

Because you are human.

Grief moves.

Healing moves.

Faith moves.

Relationships move.

Bodies move.

Life moves.

Mercy moves toward us within all of it.

Yesterday's peace was real.

Today's tears do not invalidate it.

Yesterday's courage was real.

Today's fear does not erase it.

Yesterday's laughter was real.

Today's grief does not betray it.

There is mercy for all of these mornings.

The Morning We Feared

Perhaps somewhere tonight there is a woman sleeping lightly beside her husband.

She has been listening to his breathing for weeks.

Every morning begins with the same question.

What changed?

She knows he is dying.

She has known.

But knowing something will happen does not tell the heart how it will feel when it does.

Tomorrow may be the morning she has feared.

She may awaken and realize his breathing has changed.

Or perhaps it has stopped.

There may be no words.

No beautiful spiritual experience.

No sudden understanding of death.

Only shock.

Love.

Loss.

Silence.

And perhaps:

Help.

If that is tomorrow's morning, tomorrow's mercy will meet her there.

Not today's imagined mercy.

Not a theological explanation she was supposed to memorize beforehand.

Mercy appropriate to **that** morning.

Perhaps a nurse answers the phone.

Perhaps a daughter arrives.

Perhaps someone holds her.

Perhaps she sits beside him and cries.

Perhaps she feels absolutely nothing for a while.

Mercy can hold numbness too.

Whatever form it takes, she does not have to possess it tonight.

It belongs to tomorrow.

We Cannot Pre-Live the Morning

This may be one of the gentlest truths we can give ourselves.

You cannot pre-live tomorrow.

You can imagine it.

Fear it.

Plan for it.

Prepare wisely for it.

But you cannot actually live it until it becomes today.

So you do not need the emotional strength tonight for something that has not happened.

This is not denial.

It is recognition of time.

Life arrives sequentially.

Moment after moment.

Breath after breath.

Morning after morning.

Mercy meets us the same way.

The Throne Is Still Grace

And when tomorrow becomes today, Hebrews remains.

Come boldly.

Not because the morning is easy.

Come because it isn't.

Come because you need mercy.

Come because you need grace.

Come because you need help.

Maybe you do not even know how to come.

Then perhaps:

Help

is coming.

Maybe tears are coming.

Maybe silence is coming.

Maybe simply turning inward for one moment and admitting:

I cannot carry this alone

is coming.

The throne has not changed because your circumstances did.

It remains:

a throne of grace.

Mercy for the Person Who Is Dying

We have spoken often about families and caregivers.

But what about the person approaching death?

They have mornings too.

Perhaps they awaken and immediately notice another loss.

Walking is harder.

Eating is harder.

Breathing is harder.

They need help with something they once did privately.

The body that carried them through decades of life no longer responds as it once did.

That can involve grief.

Fear.

Embarrassment.

Anger.

Acceptance.

Sometimes all of them.

There is mercy for that morning too.

And perhaps one of the ways mercy arrives is through people who preserve dignity.

Not treating someone as a diagnosis.

Not talking over them.

Not reducing them to the tasks of care.

Looking into their eyes.

Calling them by name.

Asking permission.

Explaining what we are doing.

Listening when they still have something to say.

Remaining attentive when words have become difficult.

A dying person is still a person.

Still worthy of tenderness.

Still worthy of choice where choice remains.

Still worthy of Presence.

Until the last breath.

The Last Morning

There will be a last morning for every one of us.

We do not know which morning it will be.

Perhaps that is mercy too.

But someday the words:

His mercies are new every morning

will meet the final morning of our earthly life.

What then?

I do not think mercy suddenly expires at the boundary of death.

If God is Love—

if mercy never comes to an end—

then perhaps the last morning here is not the end of mercy.

It is simply the last morning we recognize from this side.

We need not pretend to know every mystery beyond that threshold.

But we can trust the character of the One toward whom the threshold opens.

The God revealed in Christ does not become less loving when our breathing stops.

Love remains Love.

For Those Who Remain

And then another morning comes for those who remain.

The first morning without them.

We have already stood in that room.

The empty side of the bed.

The quiet equipment.

The medication no longer needed.

The strange absence of responsibility.

That morning has mercy too.

Then another.

And another.

Some will hurt terribly.

Some will surprise us.

Some will eventually contain laughter.

One may contain a memory that feels warm instead of sharp.

One may contain the realization:

I am going to be okay.

Not the same.

Never exactly the same.

But alive.

Capable of carrying both love and loss.

That is not forgetting.

That is mercy teaching grief how to breathe.

Mercy Does Not Hurry

There is no schedule here.

No thirty-day requirement.

No six-month deadline.

No anniversary by which you should have “moved on.”

Mercy is patient.

It does not stand over grief with a stopwatch.

It does not say:

You were doing better last week.

It does not shame the unexpected hard morning.

It does not demand linear progress.

Perhaps healing is less like climbing a staircase and more like learning a landscape.

There are hills.

Valleys.

Familiar places.

Unexpected turns.

Places we revisit.

And slowly we learn where we are.

Presence walks the landscape with us.

Great Is Your Faithfulness

And now we return once more to the sentence that has quietly carried this entire book.

Great is Your faithfulness.

Not mine.

Yours.

That means I can have an unfaithful-feeling morning and still awaken inside divine faithfulness.

I can question.

You remain.

I can grieve.

You remain.

I can become angry.

You remain.

I can lose language.

You remain.

I can sleep.

You remain.

I can stop noticing.

You remain.

Perhaps the faithfulness of God is simply another way of saying:

Love stays.

And isn't that what Presence has always meant?

Not always speaking.

Not always explaining.

Not always fixing.

Staying.

Presence Is Already Here

Maybe we have spent too much of our spiritual lives trying to get somewhere God already is.

Trying to invite Presence.

Trying to summon Presence.

Trying to become worthy of Presence.

But what if Presence precedes our awareness?

What if God is already in the room?

At the bedside.

In the kitchen.

In the silence.

In the grief.

In the unanswered question.

In the laughter.

In the ordinary.

In the frightening morning.

Maybe our practice is not producing Presence.

It is awakening to it.

Here.

What Is New This Morning?

So we return to the question one final time.

HELP! What's new this morning?

Perhaps the diagnosis is new.

Perhaps the breathing is different.

Perhaps someone died.

Perhaps someone was born.

Perhaps the grief feels heavier.

Perhaps the grief feels lighter and you feel guilty about that.

Perhaps you slept.

Perhaps you didn't.

Perhaps nothing changed.

Perhaps everything did.

We cannot know.

That was never the promise.

The promise was not:

Nothing painful will be new every morning.

The promise was:

Mercy will be.

That is considerably more honest.

And perhaps considerably more beautiful.

Morning by Morning

So tomorrow morning—

before you determine whether it is a good morning or a bad one,

before you measure yourself,

before you review yesterday,

before you borrow tomorrow,

before the phone,

before the news,

before the responsibilities—

perhaps simply notice:

Morning came.

Then breathe.

You are here.

And whatever this day eventually asks of you, you do not have to answer all of it now.

There will be mercy for the question when it comes.

Grace for the need when it arrives.

Help when you need help.

People through whom Presence may become tangible.

And Love beneath all of it.

Perhaps whisper:

What's new this morning?

And listen.

Not necessarily for a voice.

Maybe simply remember:

Mercy is.

The Answer Was Here All Along

Maybe that is the surprise.

We began this book with a frightened question:

HELP! What's new this morning?

We wondered what changed.

What happened overnight.

What might be worse.

What might be lost.

What the day might demand.

And those remain legitimate questions.

But somewhere along the way, another question emerged:

What will meet me there?

Lamentations answered.

Hebrews answered.

Presence answered.

Mercy.

Grace.

Help.

Love.

So perhaps the final word of this book should not be ours.

Perhaps it belongs to the ancient lamenter who somehow looked through devastation and saw something still arriving with the dawn:

“The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases;
his mercies never come to an end;
they are new every morning;
great is your faithfulness.”

Tomorrow morning will be new.

You will be new.

Your needs may be new.

Your questions may be new.

But the Love that meets you will not have changed.

And whatever is new this morning—

mercy is already awake.

Epilogue

Before Your Feet Touch the Floor

Tomorrow morning your eyes will open.

Perhaps slowly.

Perhaps suddenly.

For a few seconds you may simply be aware that you are awake.

Then life will begin returning.

Names.

Responsibilities.

Memories.

Losses.

Plans.

Questions.

Maybe fear.

Before your feet touch the floor, give yourself one moment.

You do not need to solve anything.

You do not need to become anyone.

You do not need to feel spiritual.

Just breathe.

Then perhaps ask:

HELP! What's new this morning?

If something hurts, let it hurt.

If something frightens you, name it.

If something beautiful is there, receive it.

If nothing makes sense yet, let morning remain unfinished.

Then remember:

God's Love did not begin this morning.

God's grace did not replenish overnight.

God's faithfulness did not reset at midnight.

Those remain.

But mercy—

mercy is meeting a version of you that has never lived this morning before.

So receive today's portion.

Not tomorrow's.

Today's.

Mercy for this morning.

Grace for this moment.

Help for this need.

Presence for this breath.

And if all you can pray is one word—

Help.

Let that be enough.

The throne is grace.

The invitation is still open.

And Presence is already here.

Put your feet on the floor when you are ready.

Morning has come.

And mercy got here first.

A Final Word

Be Someone's New Mercy This Morning

There is one more question.

We have spent these pages asking:

What mercy will meet me this morning?

Perhaps now we ask:

Whose morning might mercy enter through me?

Because mercy is not only something we receive.

Once received, it has a way of moving.

The person who has been comforted learns how to sit beside someone who cannot be comforted yet.

The person who has needed help becomes less embarrassed by another person's need.

The person who has lived through grief becomes less likely to offer easy answers.

The person who has discovered that Presence matters more than explanation learns how to stay.

Maybe that is how mercy multiplies.

Not because we become the source.

Because we become available.

Someone Woke Up Afraid This Morning

Somewhere this morning, someone woke before the alarm.

They are waiting for test results.

Someone is sitting beside a hospital bed.

Someone is listening to a spouse breathe.

Someone is preparing to call hospice.

Someone is driving to an appointment they never wanted to make.

Someone is waking for the first time after a death.

Someone is realizing the other side of the bed is empty.

Someone is wondering how they will pay the bills.

Someone's marriage is ending.

Someone's child is struggling.

Someone is exhausted from being the person everyone depends upon.

Someone is wondering whether God still hears them.

Someone is pretending to be fine.

And perhaps you know one of them.

You Do Not Have to Fix Their Morning

You do not need the perfect words.

You do not need an explanation.

You do not need to know why.

You do not need to change how they feel.

You do not need to make them smile.

You do not need to turn their pain into a spiritual lesson.

Perhaps you simply enter their morning.

“I’m here.”

“I was thinking about you.”

“How is today?”

“You don’t have to answer.”

“Can I bring you something?”

“Would you like me to stay?”

Sometimes that is enough.

Maybe more than enough.

Mercy Notices

Presence begins by noticing.

Noticing the person who became quieter.

The caregiver who looks exhausted.

The widow everyone stopped calling.

The coworker whose smile seems to require more effort than it used to.

The family member who keeps saying:

“I’m okay.”

The person sitting alone.

We do not have to diagnose them.

We simply notice.

That is something Jesus seemed to do repeatedly.

He noticed people.

Not categories.

Not interruptions.

People.

Maybe mercy begins with seeing.

Mercy Asks Better Questions

Instead of:

“Are you doing better?”

perhaps:

“How is today?”

Instead of:

“Have you moved on?”

perhaps:

“What are you missing about them lately?”

Instead of:

“Do you need anything?”

perhaps:

“Can I bring dinner tonight?”

Instead of:

“Why are you still upset?”

perhaps:

“Do you want to tell me what this morning feels like?”

Questions can create safety.

They can also create pressure.

Mercy learns the difference.

Mercy Does Not Need Credit

Perhaps some of the most beautiful mercy will never be recognized as mercy.

No one will post about it.

No one will applaud.

No one may even remember exactly what you did.

That’s okay.

Mercy is not performance.

You held the door.

You brought the meal.

You made the call.

You remembered the date.

You stayed ten minutes longer.

You listened to the story again.

You sat beside the bed.

You gave someone permission to rest.

You said their loved one's name.

You let someone cry without trying to stop them.

You were there.

That is enough.

Presence Is the Gift

There comes a point when words are no longer enough.

Maybe they never were.

We can explain.

Teach.

Counsel.

Preach.

Encourage.

But eventually every human being encounters something that language cannot repair.

That is where Presence becomes its own language.

I cannot change this.

I cannot take this from you.

I cannot promise tomorrow will be easier.

But I can be here.

Perhaps that is one of the purest forms of love.

And perhaps this is what we mean when we speak of Presence:

Presence is the quiet gift we offer when words are not enough.

Tomorrow Someone May Be Mercy for You

Do not miss this part.

Today you may be the person who helps.

Tomorrow you may be the person who needs help.

Let both be sacred.

There is no hierarchy.

The caregiver is not greater than the cared-for.

The strong person is not more valuable than the exhausted one.

The person giving mercy is also living by mercy.

We take turns.

That may be community at its best.

Today I will sit with you.

Tomorrow, perhaps you will sit with me.

No shame.

No debt.

Just Presence moving between us.

A Different Kind of Morning Prayer

Maybe our morning prayer eventually becomes two questions.

First:

What mercy do I need this morning?

And then:

How might mercy move through me today?

Not:

Who do I need to save?

Not:

Whose life am I responsible for fixing?

Simply:

Where can Love be present through me?

Perhaps nowhere dramatic.

Maybe at breakfast.

At work.

At a bedside.

In a text message.

On the telephone.

In the grocery store.

At home.

Maybe the person who needs mercy this morning is sitting across the table from you.

Maybe it is you.

The Presence Network

This is the heart behind The Presence Network.

Not having all the answers.

Not correcting everyone's theology.

Not explaining suffering.

Not rushing grief.

Not fixing what cannot be fixed.

Presence.

Compassion.

Dignity.

Listening.

Practical help.

Making room for the whole human being.

And perhaps most importantly—

staying.

We believe there are moments when the greatest gift one human being can offer another is not an answer.

It is themselves.

I see you.

I hear you.

I'm here.

Sometimes that is how mercy gets through the door.

So, What's New This Morning?

Tomorrow someone will ask that question with fear.

Someone else with curiosity.

Someone will ask it beside a hospital bed.

Someone beside an empty bed.

Someone will ask it while holding a newborn child.

Someone will ask it while waiting for a phone call.

Someone will ask it through tears.

Someone will ask it laughing.

Someone may never put the question into words at all.

But morning will come.

And with it:

Mercy.

Then perhaps mercy will knock on someone's door wearing your face.

So receive what you need.

And give what you can.

Rest when you need to rest.

Ask for help when you need help.

Stay when Love asks you to stay.

Leave room for mystery.

Tell the truth.

Notice ordinary things.

Do not borrow tomorrow.

Do not imprison yourself in yesterday.

And never underestimate what your Presence can mean in another person's morning.

Because sometimes the answer to someone's prayer—

“Help.”

—is another human being saying:

“I'm here.”

And perhaps that is how we will know what is new this morning.

Mercy is.

And mercy is still moving.