

*POSTCARDS
FROM THE
VALLEY*

Rich Dixon

Messages from a fellow traveler in the valley,

Rich



To:

*Those who wander
through the
Valley
of the
Shadow*

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POSTCARDS FROM THE VALLEY
messages from a fellow traveler

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Rich



POSTCARDS FROM THE VALLEY

The Valley of the Shadow is a dark, foreboding place.

Travelers in the valley feel forsaken, frantic, and frightened. They wander in despair, believing they're all alone, that shadows and darkness have conquered light, that there's no hope.

Perhaps you're in the valley right now, or perhaps you know someone who's there. I've spent a lot of time in the valley, and I'm still a frequent visitor.

I'd like to share some thoughts about this difficult journey. I hope these postcards help as you travel your own path. I encourage you to use a journal and write some of your own thoughts as you find your way.

I claim no magic solutions to complex issues, because I don't believe such solutions exist. I can only retrace some of my own steps and hope that you'll discover the guidance of the Good Shepherd.

One thing I know for certain: You're not alone.

From the valley,

Rich



To:

*Those who wander
through the
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The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.

*He maketh me to lie down in green pastures:
he leadeth me beside the still waters.*

*He restoreth my soul:
he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.*

*Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,
I will fear no evil:*

for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.

*Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies:
thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over.*

*Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life:
and I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever.*

Psalm 23 (KJV)

How incredible that God chose to enter the valley of the shadow with me.

Sometimes I get so busy with the activities of faith that I forget its power. I'm never alone. No matter how dark the shadows become, no matter how deep or formidable the valley appears, I'm always in the company of one who knows the way because He's already been there.

Read through Psalm 23 again. What word stands out in your mind? Why do you think that word is so significant for you?

From the valley,

Rich

#1

Psalm 23



The journey through the valley often feels agonizingly solitary.

When you're hurting, lonely, and depressed it's awfully easy to imagine that you're the only person who's ever experienced your particular brand of misery. No matter how others attempt to console or reassure you, the valley of the shadow is a lonely place.

In some ways, the valley might even be a more difficult place for Christians. Somehow we get the idea that we're supposed to be different, that our faith should make the valley an easier experience for us. The church often magnifies this sense, implying that "good Christians" should be strong enough in their faith to avoid the pain and depression that plague non-believers.

Jesus knew better. He knew that grief and pain would impact even His closest followers.

"I tell you the truth, you will weep and mourn while the world rejoices. You will grieve, but your grief will turn to joy.

(John 16:20)

Jesus Himself suffered unimaginably and begged for a different path. We shouldn't add to our pain by feeling guilty for struggling and wishing for an end to a difficult road.

Faith in Jesus doesn't insulate us from the world's troubles or provide a pain-free pass through the valley. But when it seems that no one can possibly understand, we rest in the assurance that we're guided by a shepherd who knows the way.

Everyone travels through the valley at some point. Sometimes we need a companion, someone to be "Jesus with skin on." Who's somebody with whom you can share your struggle?

From the valley,

Rick

#2

Nobody Understands

What good is faith if it fails to protect me from evil? So, what if Jesus is always with me if pain and grief are still going to drag me into the valley of the shadow?

When you're in the valley, you don't want flippant platitudes. You want relief, and you want it now. I've been there, and I understand the desire to scream in anger, "God, if you really love me so much, why don't you fix this?"

Why doesn't a loving parent protect a child from harm? Why allow bicycles and football and friends with their potential threats? Why not just keep the child indoors, insulated, and safe? But we all know that a parent who tried to isolate a child from any potential injury wouldn't be a good parent.

Read Matthew 7:9-12

The intense joy of love carries the risk of painful loss. Thrilling physical activity involves potentially horrible accidents. The thrill of victory means risking the agony of defeat. Like an earthly parent, God allows His kids to live and experience the abundant life for which He created us.

A parent loves enough to prepare a child for life's experiences and share in the triumphs and sorrows. I think that's how God operates—He offers preparation and guidance, and promises to always be with us in celebration and in tragedy.

We don't expect a mom or dad to keep a child from all of life's painful realities. Love allows a full, rich life, knowing in advance that the path will involve both exhilarating peaks and desperate, lonely valleys. Love promises only that we'll never walk the path alone.

Have you ever wanted to scream at God? I have, and I think it's okay. He understands. Read Matthew 7:9-12 again. Does the comparison of God to a human parent help you answer the question, "So, what?"

From the valley,

Rick



#3

So, What?

When you're trapped in the valley, it's natural to ask, "Why?"

We demand answers, as though knowing "why" or "how" will somehow dispel shadowy panic and ease the journey through terrifying terrain. I think it's a lie we tell ourselves in a desperate attempt to repel the dreadful insecurity prowling just beyond the shadow's edge.

We pretend that purpose transforms uncertainty into clarity. We want to believe that the darkness of pain and fear dissipates in the light of logic. We long for some mystical rationale to dispel the menacing meaninglessness that pervades the valley.

But reasons and explanations do little to drive back fear or even to illuminate the shadowy path. We demand sense where we perceive only senselessness, and the search for answers immobilizes us.

Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path.

Psalm 119:105

We don't easily relinquish our desire for a reason, but when you're in the valley you don't need to know why you're there. You need a way out. You need a light in the darkness.

There is a light that clarifies the path through the valley of the shadow, and that light won't be discovered within a desperate quest for "Why?"

Is the need for "why" preventing you from moving forward?

From the valley,

Rich



#4

Why?

Even when there's no apparent reason for a particular journey through the valley, we persist in seeking one. If no logic presents itself, we'll make up an explanation. It's as if ANY reason is preferable to none at all.

But if a reason suddenly appeared, would it matter?

I don't know the nature of your individual journey, but imagine for a second that God appeared before you and explained, in complete detail, the reason for your pain. Suppose it suddenly made perfect sense.

I'm convinced that it wouldn't make much difference. A person with a painful illness may understand the precise biological progression of the disease and its specific cause. Would that knowledge diminish the pain? A parent might be completely aware of the cause of a child's death; would the grief and emptiness decrease?

About the ninth hour Jesus cried out in a loud voice, "Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?"—which means, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Matthew 27:46)

Even Jesus, who KNEW the answer, still screamed for a reason. In His anguish, He begged for understanding even though He'd always known exactly why He suffered.

We need to be gentle with ourselves. It's okay to seek a reason for our journey through the valley. I think it's a part of the bargaining stage of grief—just give me a reason and then I'll be able to accept the pain.

Of course it's an illusion, one additional obstacle to overcome on the path that leads through the valley.

How has the search for a reason impacted your journey?

From the valley,

Rich



#5

Reasons Don't Matter

If “why” doesn’t remove the pain of a trip through the valley, what motivates our frantic search for answers? Partly I think it’s a way of avoiding the inevitable. We preoccupy ourselves with “why” to postpone the journey.

I wanted desperately to discover a purpose for my struggle. I secretly imagined that, if I could only be certain that my pain was advancing God’s plan, I’d be at peace with it.

I just didn’t want to face the reality of the situation. I wanted some noble, inspirational purpose to provide a shortcut through the darkness and above the floor of the valley.

I think this search for “why” is the enemy’s clever trick for trapping us in the valley. As long as we demand a reason that won’t make any difference, we prolong the pain and stay out of the light.

*Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face.
Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.
(1 Corinthians 13:12)*

Even when we imagine that we understand completely, we’re wrong. God’s work is too big and too wonderful for us to comprehend. We’re thinking in human terms with human logic, while He’s looking at a much broader picture from a perspective we can’t imagine.

Someday it will all be clear, and then I suspect it won’t really matter much anyway. Until then, we travel in the assurance that we’re guided by an experienced shepherd who knows the way. In the end, isn’t that more important? Isn’t that the key to moving out of the darkness?

What subtle tricks has the enemy used to keep you in the valley?

From the valley,

Rich



#6

Prolonging the Journey

One of the biggest enemies in the valley is our perception that we're victims.

A victim lacks control. Some exterior force pulls the strings, and the victim dances to an undesired tune. And from one perspective, that's precisely accurate. We don't choose to walk through the valley of the shadow.

We want control of our circumstances. We want to believe that our actions and choices matter, that we can alter our situation by doing the right things. We rebel against anyone or anything that threatens our personal power, but simultaneously we often surrender control voluntarily.

In the next few postcards I want to examine the issues of control and power.

First, it's simplistic and demeaning to tell those in the valley to "take control." There's much that's objectively beyond our command. Accident, illness, and unintended consequence create suffering and hardship. Others' evil choices harm intentionally. Pain and struggle aren't hypothetical platitudes in the valley. We impede progress when we deny their reality.

Read *The Beatitudes (Matthew 5:1-12)*. Jesus didn't proclaim that His followers would magically avoid life's troubles. He recognized the existence of poverty, grief, injustice, and persecution. I imagine His gentle expression as He comforts His listeners in the midst of significant trials.

I think that an important step on the journey is acknowledging that the pain is horrible, you didn't choose it, and you can't just stop it. If that sounds hopeless, it's not. A doctor cannot help a patient who refuses to accept treatment, and the Good Shepherd cannot guide one who pretends he's not lost. Acknowledging the fearsome darkness is a first step toward discovering the light.

Have you ever felt guilty about being lost in the darkness of the valley?

From the valley,

Rick



#7

Victim

It seems to me that “victim” involves two distinct situations, and that understanding the distinction impacts our journey through the valley.

In one sense, victim is an objective description. Crime, accident, or illness often impact innocent victims, people who are harmed beyond their control. We acknowledge their pain knowing that they didn’t choose their circumstances.

But the truly devastating impact of a journey through the valley occurs when we surrender to the feeling of “being a victim.” The enemy subtly twists our perception until we believe that we retain no control. We’re tricked into the illusion that we’re completely helpless, totally without the ability to influence our situation or our future.

I dislike simplistic platitudes that minimize the reality or horrific situations, but when we wander in the valley we must eventually confront one simple truth: *no one can take away our power to choose how we’ll respond.*

For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 8:38-39)

I know from painful personal experience the difficulty of controlling my responses to tragedy. I did everything imaginable to avoid facing the fact that I had to decide how I would travel a path I didn’t like.

Nothing beyond my own stubborn resistance could separate me from the loving guidance of the Good Shepherd.

What feelings or thoughts arise as you ponder your responsibility for your own response to difficult circumstances?

From the valley,

Rich



#8

Attitude

The valley isn't a nice place, and the path through the valley is dark and scary and painful. I get that.

Perhaps it's collapsing finances, physical issues, relationship struggles, or even death. Every journey through the valley conceals its own shadowy corners and fearsome obstacles. We want a reason, we want someone to blame, and most of all we want a way out, some form of escape from the path before us.

All of these desires are normal aspects of the grief that accompanies every traveler in the valley. We must confront them, deny them, wrestle with them. But in these desires we'll never find the answers we seek so desperately.

Our enemy wants to prolong our focus on anger, accusation, and escape. These prevent the beginning the journey that eventually leads out of the darkness.

I'd like to recommend a powerful story that I found very helpful. In *Man's Search For Meaning*, Victor Frankl traces his journey through the horrors of Nazi concentrations camps. He recounts incomprehensible atrocities and seeks to understand why he survived while millions perished.

Frankl somehow understood that the Nazis could beat him, humiliate him, and strip from him nearly every shred of humanity, but there remained one element they couldn't remove. Only he controlled his response to the brutality. No matter what they did, they could not control his attitude toward them.

Frankl concluded that his essential meaning, his humanity, resided in his ability to determine his attitude toward a horrific journey through a very dark valley. He believes that this understanding saved his life.

What's one small step you can take toward reclaiming control of your attitude?

From the valley,

Rich



#9

A Search For Meaning

Occasionally when I'm talking about controlling my own attitude toward my injury, someone will object that it's unreasonable to expect a positive attitude toward tragedy. How can one possibly be happy about being in the valley?

There's an essential distinction between "welcoming" the journey and acknowledging that I control my attitude toward it. The valley is a place to be avoided whenever possible. We certainly don't want the despair, pain, and grief that lurk in every shadow.

Jesus prayed earnestly to be delivered from His journey through the valley.

Then he said to them, "My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me."

Going a little farther, he fell with his face to the ground and prayed, "My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will." (Matthew 26:38-39)

In the following verses He returns two additional times to ask if there's another way, even though He undoubtedly knew the eventual answer.

Don't ever feel guilty for seeking deliverance from the valley. That's part of the grief process, and everyone experiences it in some form.

Victor Frankl didn't welcome or justify Nazi brutality; he rightly labeled it as terrible evil. I don't celebrate permanent paralysis. I pray for healing regularly.

I've learned through painful experience that I don't have to like my circumstances to exert control over my attitude toward them. Like Frankl, I often find that's the only sense of control that remains.

Can praying for "another way" be a step toward acceptance?

From the valley,

Rich



#10

Another Way

***Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies:
thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over. (Psalm 23 KJV)***

My cup runneth over? I don't know about you, but the valley doesn't seem to be a place where my cup overflows, at least not in the manner intended by the psalmist. I'm overwhelmed with pain, despair, and darkness. There's plenty of anxiety and depression. Perhaps the most abundant commodity is anger.

And yet, in the valley of the shadow, the psalmist proclaimed, "My cup runneth over." Was the writer delusional, or living in denial? How do I capture this sense of abundant blessing on the dark path through the valley?

Since I simply cannot imagine that God expects me to be grateful for pain and suffering, the key must be found in my attitude. Light in darkness makes no sense by the world's standards, but perhaps there's a higher perspective.

You were taught...to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness. (Ephesians 4:22-24)

A new attitude of your mind—a new self—created to be like God. We're not asked to deny the pain, but to view it through a new lens. We're not asked to welcome or be thankful for the valley, but to regard it with a new attitude.

I wonder how the valley might appear if I perceived the path as holy ground? How would the journey change if I search for true righteousness and blessing among the obstacles? Is my attitude really so powerful that it can transform hopelessness into a cup that overflows?

Can I acknowledge the struggle honestly without allowing it to consume me?

From the valley,

Rich



#11

Abundance

Many Christians misunderstand how they're "supposed" to feel in the valley. This misconception makes a difficult journey profoundly more challenging.

The psalmist's cup overflowed with blessing in the darkest moments. Am I supposed to feel happy when pain and sadness crash all around and bury me in despair? Is my faith insufficient if I'm not thankful for illness, injury, and grief?

I don't think so, and we'd do well to avoid pretending that we're grateful for events about which there's absolutely nothing to celebrate.

I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do everything through him who gives me strength. (Philippians 4:11b-13)

I think it's essential to emphasize the word "content." Paul doesn't claim to be happy when he's in need, hungry, or imprisoned. Given a choice, I'm certain he'd eat and live in freedom. He simply claims that external circumstances cannot dictate his attitude of contentment.

We'd prefer to be free of pain and grief. We're excited when good things happen. Nobody, not even Jesus, *wants* to be in the valley. But life isn't always as we wish. Bad stuff happens, and faith doesn't dissipate horrific darkness.

We don't celebrate a journey through the valley. We can, however, be content in our attitude toward every circumstance through the One who gives us strength.

Have you ever felt guilty for not finding happiness in a difficult experience? How might understanding the distinction between happiness and contentment affect your attitude toward your journey?

From the valley,

Rich



#12

Contentment

Why doesn't God heal me?

At the risk of sounding trite, I think He does. But it's not the brand of healing for which we yearn when we're trapped in the valley.

As I learn about Jesus' life, one simple fact seems to emerge: He was much more focused on spiritual issues than the concerns of this world.

Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'" (Matthew 4:4)

Jesus' familiar response to temptation referred His listeners back to an ancient scripture. He reminded them that God led the Israelites through the desert for forty years, and provided them with manna as a sign. The true source of their security wasn't found in worldly things, but in God and His word.

Jesus didn't ignore worldly concerns. He emphasized care for the poor and sick. He taught His followers to submit to Earthly rulers. He encouraged and modeled authentic relationships and humble service. Jesus clearly believed that behavior mattered, and He understood and struggled with human pain and grief.

But...He placed the most desperate worldly issues in proper perspective. He understood that God's plan is spiritual and eternal, and those were His primary concerns. He didn't die to save our physical lives. Jesus went to the cross to assure eternal relationship with God.

He knows and understands the horrible pain of the valley. And He knows the indescribable joy of eternity in God's presence. He doesn't discount the valley; He walked it, and still walks with us, because He wants us to receive the reward.

How do you experience God's healing in spiritual, rather than physical, terms?

From the valley,

Rich



#13

Healing

There's no such thing as an easy route through the valley.

Those who've completed their own journey tend to recap the experience with a selective memory. They recall victory and celebrate growth. Experienced travelers tend to paint a somewhat sanitized picture of their trip.

There's some wisdom in this sort of discerning account. Those who've exited the valley don't desire to wallow in past misery. Listeners tire when old struggles are repeatedly rehashed. We don't want numerous photos and videos to recreate a horrible experience.

But an abbreviated description contains potential pitfalls for other travelers. By minimizing struggle and focusing on triumph we create a false impression of simple success. Others in the valley may be discouraged when their voyage lacks a similar simple resolution.

That's why, in telling my own story, I insist upon a picture that includes tragedy as well as triumph. I don't wish to dwell on negative experiences, but I never want to make it sound easy, quick or clean. It wasn't.

Jesus clearly understood the difficult nature of the human journey.

"If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will save it." (Luke 9:23b-24)

He focused on God's plans, on eternity, on spiritual healing. He knew the prize. He didn't ignore or minimize the pain; instead, He emphasized the gain.

Have you ever been discouraged when another person seems to overcome the valley so easily while you struggle?

From the valley,

Rich



#14

It Ain't Easy

The hardest aspect of the valley may be weariness. Whatever the nature of your particular journey, I think every traveler just becomes tired.

Obstacles appear unexpectedly from all directions. Just when you think one fire is contained, another erupts. The valley provides a seemingly non-stop succession of challenges and trials. There's no built-in break time, no recovery period. You confront one issue after another after another,

It's difficult to find rest in the valley.

Jesus experienced this weariness. He also knew the most effective way to deal with it. Several times during His public ministry He went away from the crowds to focus on His connection with God. He knew the source of true regeneration.

"Are you tired? Worn out? Burned out on religion? Come to me. Get away with me and you'll recover your life. I'll show you how to take a real rest. Walk with me and work with me—watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace. I won't lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you. Keep company with me and you'll learn to live freely and lightly." (Matthew 11:28-30 Msg)

When we're in the valley, we see only the obstacles and the darkness. We want relief from pain or grief, and we focus on the immediate issue. We can't see past the next complication. But Jesus saw a bigger picture.

He knew that true rest and comfort are not found within physical solutions. He understood perfectly what we only glimpse—real peace comes only through relationship with Him. No bodily healing or worldly resolution can ever provide lasting comfort. When He heals our spirit, we can find rest even in the darkness and storms of the valley.

How do you rest in the midst of chaos?

From the valley,

Rich



#15 Rest

I just want my *normal* life back.

I can't imagine how many times I've dreamed about being "normal" again. Wheelchairs are abnormal. Paralysis is abnormal. The inability to walk is abnormal. I'm not asking for anything special—I just want to be normal.

I once asked a group of kids to identify the best singer among them, and they all pointed to the same young man. I asked if they considered him abnormal. It took a bit of discussion for them to acknowledge that the singer would need to surrender his gift if he wanted to be "normal." If he suddenly lost his voice he'd fit in with the crowd, but I bet he would want his "normal" voice back.

We don't label the outstanding musician or athlete as abnormal. They're talented or gifted. Abnormal really implies that something's missing. My yearning for a normal existence really means that I'm somehow less than a real person.

Words and labels matter. As long as I label myself as "not normal," I can't consider my life in terms of meaning, fulfillment, and abundance. The best I can hope for is survival. After all, I'm abnormal.

If I wish to thrive rather than merely to survive, I need to consider how I characterize my circumstances. Stick and stones may break my bones, but words can shatter my spirit. That's God's concern. He wants my spirit to be whole.

Do I wish for some aspects of my former life? Do I want to walk and run and be free of the constant pain? Of course. That's the purpose of grief—it's a process of letting go and moving forward with what remains.

And remember—grief is a "normal" aspect of any journey through the valley.

What are the words and labels that shatter your spirit?

From the valley,

Rich



#16

Abnormal

I was talking to some students about disabilities, and I asked what they thought “normal” implied in this context..

“Normal is what most people can do.”

“Normal means the regular stuff you can do if there’s nothing wrong.”

“You’re normal if you can do what you’re supposed to do.”

I understand what they meant, but the comments prompted an interesting thought. What if “normal” means doing what you were created to do?

To my listeners, that meant walking, talking, performing standard physical and mental tasks. But I wonder how that looks from God’s perspective?

So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. (Genesis 1: 27)

We’re created in God’s own image. Since that can’t possibly imply that we share physical appearance or ability, the image we inherit from God must be spiritual. We were created to share His capacity for love and relationship.

If normal means the ability to do what we were created to do, then only one normal man has ever existed. Only Jesus lived out this destiny in perfect obedience and relationship to God. Everyone else who’s ever lived has missed the mark. By this definition, nobody’s normal.

My audience thought normal meant standard, as in average. Nothing unusual, just standard ordinary stuff.

But God’s standard is different. God’s standard is Jesus.

How does this view of “normal” impact your perception of the journey?

From the valley,

Rich



#17

What's The Standard?



I maintain that *everyone* travels through the valley of the shadow at some point.

We all experience injury, illness, and loss. Grief may be the single universal human experience. There's no such thing as a pain-free life.

So why do we consider those in the valley unusual? Why label them as disabled, abnormal, or "special?" Why is NOT being in the valley the default "normal?"

Since I believe that labels have power, I've concocted an alternative label that I believe accurately characterizes those usually labeled as "normal."

I call them *T.A.N.* (*Temporarily Arbitrarily Normal*)

If normal means you're currently outside of the valley, then certainly it's a temporary condition. *Everyone* travels through the valley at some point.

And since "normal" is such a moving target based on culture, style, age, and myriad other factors, it's clearly an arbitrary designation. What's considered perfectly normal in one situation may be outlandish in another.

Temporarily Arbitrarily Normal is really the best we can hope for. If we define normal as what's accepted by society, everyone will at some point be abnormal.

"But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own." (Matthew 6: 33-34)

God's version of normal is neither temporary nor arbitrary. We're designed to seek Him.

How have arbitrary social standards increased the difficulty of your journey?

From the valley,

Rich

#18

T.A.N.

Here's a question I hear frequently, one I wrestle with daily: I get that there's really no such thing as a normal life, but how does that help me stop wishing for what I've lost?

I really don't think that's possible. Maybe some people reach a mental place in which they truly do not feel their loss, but I think it's pretty rare. I know I've never found that ability to completely let go. I still wish I could walk.

The final stage of grief isn't forgetfulness. I don't think we ever totally heal a significant hole in our hearts. That kind of irrational expectation only serves to further damage a fragile self-concept. We need to be gentle with ourselves.

Grief winds to a conclusion when we reach a place of acceptance. We don't forget, but somehow we find a way to move forward. We learn and grow, and maybe even become stronger and better.

There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under heaven:

a time to be born and a time to die, a time to plant and a time to uproot,

a time to kill and a time to heal, a time to tear down and a time to build,

a time to weep and a time to laugh, a time to mourn and a time to dance,

a time to scatter stones and a time to gather them, a time to embrace and a time to refrain,

a time to search and a time to give up, a time to keep and a time to throw away,

a time to tear and a time to mend, a time to be silent and a time to speak,

a time to love and a time to hate, a time for war and a time for peace.

(Ecclesiastes 3: 1-8)

There's a time to be in the valley. Fortunately, there's also a time to leave it.

How do you understand the difference between forgetting and accepting?

From the valley,

Rich



#19

Acceptance

This passage from Ecclesiastes may be one of the most familiar in the Bible, but I wonder how many of us really internalize its meaning?

There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under heaven:

a time to be born and a time to die, a time to plant and a time to uproot,

a time to kill and a time to heal, a time to tear down and a time to build,

a time to weep and a time to laugh, a time to mourn and a time to dance,

a time to scatter stones and a time to gather them, a time to embrace and a time to refrain,

a time to search and a time to give up, a time to keep and a time to throw away,

a time to tear and a time to mend, a time to be silent and a time to speak,

a time to love and a time to hate, a time for war and a time for peace.

(Ecclesiastes 3: 1-8)

We like the dancing and laughing times. We recall them fondly, and wish to cling to them. We celebrate birth and love and peace.

But the scripture clearly teaches that those are not the only seasons of life on Earth. Our life will always contain times of laughter and tears, birth and death, building and tearing down. As much as I wish it weren't so, there's wisdom in acknowledging and accepting the inevitable reality.

Life cannot consist always of happiness and smiles, but neither does it always produce sorrow and pain. When you're in the valley, it's good to remember two inescapable certainties. First, the valley is part of every life; being there proves only that you're human.

Second, Jesus doesn't leave us in the valley forever.

How do you find peace in understanding that there's a season for all things?

From the valley,

Rich



#20

Acceptance

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About the Author

Rich Dixon writes and speaks about overcoming adversity, moving forward in hope and faith, and accomplishing dreams. He's published more than two dozen articles in both Christian and general-market periodicals. He blogs at www.richdixon.net/bouncingback

Rich is also the author of *RELENTLESS GRACE: God's Invitation To Give Hope Another Chance* (<http://richdixon.net/RelentlessGrace.htm>)

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