



# GOD IS BIGGER than your grief

by Karen Tripp MS

Grief is hard. The days can blur one into another. The day of the week, even the time of the day, may be hard to remember. Some days you may struggle just to recall how long it's been since your loved one died. But the hole in your chest is a steady reminder they are gone and you are left in your grief. Any loss brings unwanted thoughts, feelings and decisions. Simple coping can be a struggle. Every walk through grief is different. Below are some insights to help you cope.

## 1. People say Jesus is with me, but then why do I sometimes feel so alone?

Too many days you find yourself stumbling through your grief wanting desperately not to feel lost, not to feel alone. Others may imply that if your faith was stronger, you would not feel such grief. That's not true. Jesus does not shield you *from* grief; He carries you *through* grief. It matters not whether you see Him, feel Him or know Him, Jesus will not let you stand in this darkness alone. If you feel too weak to reach out, *fear not*; Jesus is with you. If you've wandered from His side, *fear not*; Jesus is with you. Even if you have pushed Him away with all your might, *fear not*; Jesus is with you. Jesus urgently comes to all who are lost and hurting. He knows when you cry out in anger or dissolve in sadness. He knows when you wander without purpose or become frozen with fear. He knows your pain personally, intimately, completely. How? How does Jesus know your pain so well?

You see, Jesus saw your suffering from the cross. From that height so high, He saw the fullness of your emptiness and the darkness of your nights. Jesus claimed His victory on that cross *then* so He could heal you *now*. On the cross Jesus was victorious over death, victorious over sin and, thankfully, victorious over hopelessness and despair. Know that Jesus' victory on the cross was complete. There is no grave so deep, no grief so dark and no life so hopeless where the light of Jesus cannot shine.

## 2. Will this grief ever end?

A part of this loss will *always* be with you. *Always*. Others may be waiting for you to "get over" your loss or "move past it," but healing from grief is not putting your loss behind you. The goal is to weave the love of your loved one from your past, through your present and into your future. This is Christ's specialty. He will help you overcome the pain of the past and the uncertainty of the present to build a renewed life. Faith in Jesus is not a means of avoiding grief but of enduring the heartache with a thread of hope. You may still feel sadness and anger, sorrow and shock because grief is sloppy. It does not proceed in orderly and timely stages. Just when you think you are done with your anger or your sadness, it can sneak back up again. Sporadically you may experience numbness, confusion or even indecisiveness. At one point, you may begin to see glimpses of your future only to have your relief turn into the guilt of moving on. Grief can feel as though you are traveling down a road without a map or a steering wheel in a car perpetually out of control.

But there is control; God is in control. This frustrating, painful thing called grief God will take and shape into your new beginning. It seems too big to believe, but it's true. Trust in Jesus to carry you through the suffering to arrive at a life renewed.

Lean on His promises:

*“... Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you” (Hebrews 13:5b).*

*“Peace I leave with you; My peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid” (John 14:27).*

*“And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love Him, who have been called according to His purpose” (Romans 8:28).*

It’s okay if you can’t see the renewed life Jesus has planned for you. Below is the story of a man that came to trust that Jesus would carry him through his pain, no matter what.

## **Brian Williamson’s Story** (Excerpt from *God is Bigger Than Your Grief*)

I will never forget lying in that empty bed, thinking, “What just happened to me? How could life be so perfect twelve hours ago and now everything has changed?” There I was, only twenty-five years old, remembering the police officer’s face when he said my wife Tatia had died in a car accident.

Tatia dying was like someone had drawn a jagged line through my body and suddenly knocked half of it off. Meeting Tatia in my sophomore year of college was the first time in my life I felt like I wasn’t pretending to be someone I was not. Her genuineness made me completely honest and open—like she was already a great friend. I just knew this girl was different.

After graduation I proposed, and in the fall we were married. Tatia became a development officer at a university, and I became a financial planner, selling life insurance and other financial products. Married life was great. We became so meshed and so unified in our everyday life that our thoughts and goals—careers, house, family—were completely on the same page.

On Tuesday, July 7, 1998, I came home for dinner. I had an appointment at 6:30 p.m., and Tatia had a senior high youth group meeting at our church. When I left that night, I gave her a hug and a kiss and said, “I love you and I’ll see you later.” Saying goodbye couldn’t have been more perfect.

Tatia was on her way to her meeting, on a two-lane road, when a massive thunderstorm hit. The heavy rain prevented her from seeing a car brake unexpectedly in front of her, and when Tatia hit her brakes, her car hydroplaned into the opposite lane, where she was t-boned by an SUV going 60 miles per hour. She died instantly. No one else was hurt.

It was after 10:00 p.m. by the time the police officer had taken me to the crash site and then the funeral home to see her. They had her in a back room, on a table covered with a sheet up to her neck. I remember crying as I kissed her forehead and fell on my knees praying. The reality of the whole thing started to sink in.

The person who had affected my life the most and made me a better person was gone. I knew of only one place to turn: “Jesus,” I prayed, “I need Your help. You will have to carry me because I can’t do this alone.” Jesus picked me up and threw me over His shoulders, like a sack of potatoes, and said, “Come on. Let’s go. I will carry you for as long as you need to be carried.”

After Tatia’s memorial service, I lived one day at a time. I couldn’t look ahead beyond that. I felt so alone. I felt like I was the only one going through this, especially when my friends started to resume their normal lives again. I felt as though I was in this fog and on the other side was God’s plan for me, shining like a white light. I also remember thinking, “I really want to know what God has planned, but if I know, I’m probably going to freak out and not want to do it. I’ll just have to be patient.” At the time, I was not very good at being patient.

My family and co-workers started to question me about when I was going to get back to work again, but I just couldn’t do it. After all, I was in the life insurance business, and Tatia was my first death claim. But after I took a couple of months off, I started doing some joint sales work with a couple of my friends to try and get back into the rhythm again. But that meant every night I was having a two to four hour discussion about Tatia’s accident with clients, and why they should protect

their families. It's like I was right there again. If people said, "No," I wanted to reach across and say, "Don't you get it? Don't you understand what can happen to you in a split second?"

Those were very hard days. At my company's state conference, I had the opportunity to share about the accident and reassure everyone that I was going to be okay. There wasn't a dry eye in the room, including my own. Afterwards, my company asked me to speak at other conferences. Each time, people came flooding up to share their own personal story with me: they told about losing a parent, or caring for a sick child, or knowing a friend with cancer. In telling my story, I began to see that as much as I missed Tatia I had become a completely different person because of the impact she had made on my life. Even though I was still hurting, I was able to help others find the comfort I had received from God.

I knew that Tatia had wanted to be cremated rather than have a burial, so I needed to decide what to do with her ashes. So on our wedding anniversary I went to spread her ashes on a river near where she grew up. I had crawled into a hole mentally that day, and before I took her box of ashes to the river and let her go through my finger tips, I lay in the hotel room, crying and talking out loud to God. Yes, I had grieved and, yes, I had prayed, but at that particular moment I threw myself at the feet of Jesus and said to Him, "Alright, what's going on here? What's my sorry butt still doing here on earth? How do I move forward now, when everything has been wiped away? Why couldn't I have done what You needed me to do the other way? When Tatia and I were married I felt so strong, like I could conquer the world. Why can't I live for You from a position of strength instead of a place of vulnerability?"

As I cried out to Jesus in that hotel room, I didn't understand I wasn't ready to do what God had planned for me. My faith needed to be stronger to pull that plan off. Over time, God led me to understand He was always with me, every day of my life, not just when my wife died in a car accident. Through my grief, God was laying a new foundation for me on top of the old foundation Christ had given me since childhood.

About a year after the accident, I decided to transfer to Nashville and start over. I was miserable and something had to change. I couldn't stay focused on my work; everywhere I went I saw constant reminders of "Brian and Tatia." I needed a change of scenery and to be close to friends who understood what I was going through.

My friend Jennie had moved to Nashville to pursue music. Our paths had crossed earlier—at just the right time—God's time. Tatia and I knew Jennie from college. After Tatia's death, the empathy I felt from Jennie was amazing. She had experienced several deaths in her life, and told me, "If you ever want to talk to somebody, I'll help you out anyway that I can." That's how our friendship really got started. When I moved to Nashville, it was purely as a friend, but over time, we saw in each other who we both wanted to be.

Starting a new relationship was far from easy. I prayed to God, "Here's this girl I love and who loves me, and yet I have all this baggage. How do we ever make this work?" Every time Jennie drove in a thunderstorm or was late coming home, my anxiety kicked in. I was afraid. If I could lose someone I loved once, there's no reason it couldn't happen again. It took time and lots of talking, but we finally got through the baggage and were able to start dealing with the fun stuff in life.

The fog lifted on the day Jennie and I were married. Marrying Jennie gave me all the courage and strength I needed to move forward and build a stronger life and a stronger faith. I had a purpose and a responsibility beyond myself now. Four years later, we were blessed with Emma Lou, our daughter.

God used Jennie's music to radically change my life. After being invited to sing in church, Jennie was hired to record Scripture-based music for a project. She wrote a song, "Let not Your Heart be Troubled." This song spoke so powerfully to the broken hearted that I knew it could touch many lives. We had just built a new home and bought two new cars, but I quit my job and became part owner of a company to promote Jenny's CD and other Scripture-based music. The rest is history.

The music, and my newest company—AriSon Records—are both very successful. We've sold over 500,000 CDs throughout the US and to countries all over the world. Today I have a team of over 20 people working with me in making this music come alive: from songwriting to vocal recording to touring to office support. God has been there, trustworthy and true. Through God alone, our music has taken His Word to 1.5 million lives. Praise God!

There is no way to prepare for the death of a loved one, whether you have a chance to say goodbye or not. I can't live in fear over whether I'm going to have Jennie for another day or another 80 years. All I can do is live today to the fullest with her and pray that tomorrow she is going to be here with me.

Life can change at any moment. When Tatia was gone, I missed the little things so much. Now I take time to smell Jennie's hair or touch the warmth of her skin or feel the embrace of our daughter's arms around my neck. I believe God is in everything that happens to me. He always has been; He always will be.

### 3. What should I do with my feelings? Sometimes they frighten me.

Grief is hard work. Coping with the onslaught of feelings brings this horrible fatigue, which seems to never leave you. The days spent overwhelmed by emotions can be just as exhausting as the days spent pushing your feelings aside. To escape, you might try denying your feelings or using irritability and frustration as a mask. Maybe your body has begun to show symptoms of holding in your emotions. You know you need to feel the sadness and the loss in order to persevere, but the intensity of these feelings can be frightening. No one wants their feelings to overcome them, leaving them feeling hopeless. (If your grief has turned into hopelessness, call your doctor or pastor.) But you can feel exhaustion, sadness or anger without feeling hopeless. Don't be frightened of your emotions. Jesus will sit with you in your sadness and protect you from despair.

Throughout Scripture we are all given the key to grappling with sorrow without being overwhelmed by hopelessness, and that key is guard your thoughts. Focusing on "if onlys" can tear you away from those around you and leave you empty and confused. God does not want you to live under the weight of your past. Pray for God to guard your heart and your mind and devise ways to focus on Christ as you grieve. Carry uplifting Bible verses with you. Listen to Christian music. Replace regretful thoughts with thoughts of Jesus. Jesus is both your comfort in this time of need and your hope for each new day. "Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith. ..." (Hebrews 12:2a).

Jesus can help you overcome even the darkest suffering. Read this story of a woman that truly found His light in her darkest time.

### Laura Logsdon's Story (Excerpt from *God is Bigger Than Your Grief*)

It's typical for middle school students to dare one another to do dumb, harmless pranks. At my son's school someone started a dare that became deadly. Tragically, a group of kids dared one another to commit suicide. Nineteen students attempted suicide and the twentieth was completed. Our son Jayson was the twentieth. He had just turned 13. I knew he was having some friend problems, but I had no idea suicidal thoughts were even on the radar scope. The families of the 19 students that attempted suicide quietly took their kids out of the school before any other parents found out. But Jayson knew. At his funeral, a mom told us Jayson saved her daughter's life. The girl had drunk all the bleach in her house, so Jayson took her to a teacher and got her help. About three months after Jayson's death, a father called to say Jayson had saved his daughter's life when she had taken all the pills in their house. Jayson took her to the principal's office. Jayson took the lessons he learned in Sunday school and lived them. Still, I can't believe Jayson never told us about these problems. I think he knew I would have pulled him out of that school.

The first sign something was seriously wrong was less than 24 hours before I found Jayson's body. I went out to get the mail and found Jayson's progress report had an F, a C and a D. "What is going on?" was my first thought. Having been a great student, Jayson always made As and few Bs even in his gifted classes.

My husband was out of town so Jayson and I talked. He said, "Please don't make me go to school, they're going to do something mean to me in the hall." Not knowing what was really going on, I thought things would only get worse if he stayed home. I never knew what playing field we were on. I have replayed that day over and over again wishing I would have let Jayson stay home and tried to get him to talk about what was really going on.

I knew Jayson was using the computer, but I had no idea he was being bullied and harassed. Threats to beat Jayson up were only a small part of it. Someone sent an email to 150 kids saying Jayson was gay. Jayson was only 12 years old at the time. How is a twelve-year-old suppose to handle something like that? Later, I saw an e-mail of Jayson's that showed his anguish. He said, "If I fight, it looks like I have something to hide. If I don't fight, it looks like I'm saying it's true."

The day of his death, all these kids at school were daring Jayson to kill himself. It was sick, just sick. Later that afternoon on instant messenger, Jayson finally caved to the dare and told "friends" online he was going to kill himself. It turns out one was his girlfriend. (He had told me earlier a girl was being really mean to him, but I didn't know she was his girlfriend.) On the computer, as others listened, she said, "You're a whus and not man enough to do it. \_\_\_\_ off!" Since then I've learned that going through a break-up is a huge factor for teenage suicide.

By 8:30 a.m. that morning, I had called all his teachers and the school counselor. Mostly I got their voice mail but the teachers I talked to said, "Oh, he's so smart, he can bring his grades up in a week if he wants to." None of them told me of any problems. At Jayson's funeral the school counselor said she didn't answer the phone that day because she was patrolling the girl's bathroom where girls had been slitting their wrists.

What I found at home that day was a worse nightmare than you could ever see in any horror movie. I had tried calling Jayson from work but the line was busy because we had one phone line and he had been on the computer. Jayson used a shotgun and when I walked into the home office there was horror everywhere.

With Jayson's death, the world stopped. Everything—sleeping, eating, thinking—stopped. I was just so broken. I can't even explain the pain. It hurts so bad it's physical. Sometimes I'd pray, "Please God can a truck plow into me so I don't have to deal with this pain anymore? Please just help me get through the next 15 minutes."

The memories of what I saw in our home office haunted me like a movie in my mind replaying the horror over and over again. The terror wasn't just in one place, it was everywhere in the room you looked. My nightmares were so dreadful I didn't want to go to sleep. At times, the horror of that room would hit me when I was awake. There'd be a horrible pain in my chest like a knife was in my heart, and then I'd have problems breathing. At times the panic would literally knock me off my feet.

At one particular session, my counselor explained to me that God will still speak to people through dreams so I should keep a pen and a paper by my bed to record any dream.

Two nights later, I had a dream. It began as the horror movie in my mind, as though a camera lens panned the gruesome image of every wall, floor, and even the ceiling. Then suddenly, in my dream, this bright white light washed every corner of the room. At first I thought it must be Jesus or an angel. All I know for sure is that God was there in that pure, clean light, making the dark images disappear. Then God said, "He's okay, he's with me." And for the first time, somewhere deep within me I knew Jayson was okay. I asked "Jayson, are you okay?" And Jayson's like "Mom, duuh. It's heaven." I knew I was talking to Jayson because that's exactly like what Jayson would say. Then he added, "It's going to be okay. We will all be together again."

The dream was a gift. I found a feeling of peace that solidified so many things. I knew with certainty that I would see Jayson again and that I would meet Jesus. Where before I had felt hopelessness, now I had the hope that eternity is bigger than here.

God has really used this tragedy to bring my whole family to know Jesus: myself, my husband, my daughter, my parents, my brother's family, and even more family and friends. This was only the beginning of Jesus using our shattered lives for His good.

About a year after Jayson's death a boy who had been in Sunday school with Jayson told his mom that a kid at school was being picked on and harassed. His mom thought of me because she knew I had been studying and praying about bullying and teen suicides. In trying to understand what happened with Jayson, I became very knowledgeable about the risk factors of teen suicide.



When she asked me if I would go talk to his class, I didn't know if I could without crying. I prayed about it and that week three people gave me the Bible verse of Genesis 50:20, "You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives." After that first talk, I handed out a questionnaire asking if there was anything I said that helped them or that the students wanted to tell me. Two kids said, "This may have saved my life." Another said, "This may have helped save my friend's life." That's how Be A Positive Light ministry began. It's become my passion and God has just grown it and made it bigger and bigger. People tell me I am so strong, but it's His ministry and not mine. He gives me the strength. Many times I just want to collapse after a talk. God's using this ministry to change hearts and change lives.

I thought more kids would have told me more of what happened to Jayson. There's so much we don't know. Now I'm resolved that I'm just not going to know in this lifetime. Even though I've *what if'd* myself like crazy and have wanted to do so many things differently, I know now I was doing the best I could do with what I knew at the time. It could have driven me insane if I hadn't laid all my unanswered questions down at the cross and said, "Jesus this is way too big for me. With your help I want to intentionally be there for my husband, daughter and family. I have to give it to You."

When I get to heaven I will understand what God wants me to understand. That will be enough.

My whole perspective has to be of eternity—not this life. So the things I do today need to have eternal significance. If I do things God's way and not my way, they will. Nothing compares to the promise we have in Him.

There are two things I know with certainty. One is that ultimately we will be together again with Jayson in heaven. Living here on this earth is the hard part, but Jesus knows it's not easy. The other thing I know that's true is Jesus will be here with me the whole time, turning each moment of darkness into light.

#### 4. My family and friends are not comfortable with my grief.

In addition to the loss of your loved one, too often grief leads to distance between you and your friends and family. People bring their own baggage to your grief. They may be frightened, overprotective, distant or even surrounded by their own grief.

Too often those close to you set expectations of how much you should cry or work or laugh until one day they decide you should be done grieving. Remember, no one knows the path of your grief but you. Yet, at times like this, it's obvious not everyone is equipped to help you through your grief and perhaps the hardest part is that the ones you thought would be your greatest support may have kept the furthest distance.

While much of grieving is internal, it's better when done with others. God created us not only to be connected to Him but also to each other. When grieving, it's easier to want less, plan less, do less and talk less, so don't choose isolation when you should choose being connected. Talking with others can help you sort out the past, stay connected to the present and begin to focus on the future—even if it's just lunch tomorrow. The goal is to find comfortable ways to be connected. Identify the people God has placed in your life to fill different roles. One may hold you when you cry; another will get you out of the house. Look for the new people and new places Jesus will add to your life as He heals your suffering and leads you to a new life. Above all, know you are not alone. While our friends and family can only fill some of our needs, Jesus is there through even the darkest nights.

Sweet Jesus, I hurt. This grief is so heavy that the ache is real and overwhelming. Do not leave me alone in my pain. Come and gather me in Your strength, so I may know with certainty I am not alone for You are here. Guard my heart and mind and give me Your peace in the midst of this turmoil. Wake with me each and every morning and restore my hope in You and the life You have placed before me. Thank You for being my hope. I place all that I am before You, so You may carry me in Your loving arms all the days of my life. Amen.

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Excerpts have been included from these sources:

1. *The First Moments After Grief: Finding Peace Through the Pain*. A devotional/music CD produced by AriSon Records at [www.arisonrecords.com](http://www.arisonrecords.com).
2. *God is Bigger Than Your Grief* published by Fresh Water Press and distributed by STL Distribution. For more information, go to [www.Godisbiggerthan.com](http://www.Godisbiggerthan.com).

## Author Biography

Speaker, author and counselor Karen Tripp MS is a marriage and family therapist whose mission is to draw hurting people closer to Christ. Specializing in bereavement and cancer survivors, Tripp's books include *God is Bigger Than Your Cancer* and *God is Bigger Than Your Grief*. In addition, Tripp has teamed up with AriSon Records to create several devotional/music CDs for the grieving: *The First Christmas After*, *Another Christmas After* and *The First Moments After Grief: Finding Peace Through the Pain*. More information on speaking engagements and writing projects is available at [www.ktripp.com](http://www.ktripp.com).

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