

FRONT COVER

Forgive Like a Rwandan

A MEMOIR OF LOVE, LOSS, AND LETTING GO

Chris Alan Foreman

PDF VERSION

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Third Printing

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Forgive Like a Rwandan

is dedicated to Dr. Kim Hyun Deok Foreman,
born in Asia, flourished in America, died in Africa;
once a citizen of this world, now a citizen of the next.

And to Jean Elizabeth Foreman,
love of my life, healer of my heart;
partner and fellow sojourner on this, my earthly pilgrimage.

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I wish to thank the few dozen people who stood by me in grief and in sorrow—true friends in Africa and America—who gave me permission to write their names into the text. You made this book real.

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If *Forgive Like a Rwandan* blesses readers, each of you shares a portion of that blessing.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Chris Alan Foreman". The script is cursive and fluid, with the first letters of each name being capitalized and prominent.

Dr. Chris Alan Foreman,

Humbled by His Grace

Introduction

A Time for Every Purpose

I was reared in the church, but I was raised on rock 'n' roll. These two aspects of youth intersected in 1965 when a rock group called The Byrds released a number-one single called [“Turn! Turn! Turn!”](#)¹

I bought the 45 rpm record, took it to church, and played it for my pastor. He listened, but the old reverend could not understand a word of the “gibberish.”

“But this is Solomon,” I protested. “It’s Ecclesiastes, chapter three—word for word.”

Opening my King James Bible, I read him verses one and two: “To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven: a time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up that which is planted.”

My pastor would have none of it and continued to insist that all rock music was “of the devil.” Devil or not, since the age of fifteen, “Turn! Turn! Turn!” has haunted my soul.

I continue to view life through the prism of Ecclesiastes. As I look back on my years, I recognize my own seasons of Solomon. There was a time of closeness to God; there was a time of distance. There was a time of bitterness; there was a time of forgiveness. There was a time to marry the bride of my youth; there was a time of letting her go. *Turn! Turn! Turn!*

Solomon despaired at the emptiness of human striving. “Vanity of vanities, all is vanity.” With this I concur. Yet Solomon offered no remedy for vanity and its accompanying malady, called “vexation of spirit.” How can my spirit contend with life and death, joy and sorrow—the vagaries and vicissitudes of life? I found an answer in a descendent of Solomon, a person who referred to himself as “greater than Solomon.”² I discovered that the remedy for vexation of spirit is strength through Christ.

“I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am. I know both how to have a little, and I know how to have a lot. In any and all circumstances I have learned the secret of being content—whether well fed or hungry, whether in abundance or in need. I am able to do all things through Him who strengthens me” (Philippians 4:11–13 HCSB).

It is not that Christ removes my burden; He shares it. He does not stem my flow of tears; He stands alongside and weeps.

In the sixtieth year of my life, I learned the value of a weeping Christ. I was a missionary in Africa, traveling down a country road, when calamity struck. My partner in ministry—my beloved wife of thirty-six years—died after a car crash.

Forgive Like a Rwandan tells my story in five tumultuous seasons of life: a season of joy, which tumbled into a season of grief, which settled into a season of sorrow, which brightened into a season of restoration, which burst into a season of celebration. *Turn! Turn! Turn!*

My book of seasons is a first-person chronicle spanning 888 days, during which time I transitioned from one life to another—and from one wife to another. It contains narration, introspection, poetry, and theology. It is a tribute to the sovereign one whose judgments are just, whose love is from everlasting to everlasting, and whose grace is sufficient. All events are as accurate as my memory can recount.

I undertook to write this memoir for four reasons: therapy, legacy, theodicy, and vanity. Gathering my thoughts and putting them on paper required that I revive the most traumatic moments of my life. Tears and tissues were my desk-side companions. My relived grief at losing Kim was cathartic, providing an extra measure of healing. I hope my words provide a touch of healing to readers as well.

I am not the only person who loved Kim. My children and grandchildren, my brothers and sisters, her family, friends, and colleagues—so many people—appreciated this woman of God. Because time erases memory like the tide cleanses the shore, I wished to honor Kim by creating a legacy for generations to come. I also want our family to know that letting go of the past and embracing the future marks the path to wholeness. There is hope and a future after the death of a loved one.

Theodicy is a vindication of God's justice in the face of human suffering. My story is a theodicy of sorts because it testifies that a person can remain faithful to God in the midst of trial, and that pain can serve as a refiner's fire, purging the dross and revealing the gold. I do not claim to be a super-Christian or boast a double portion of holiness. I strive to be obedient to the truth I know. God is the hero of my story and my words are an anthem to His sustaining grace.

My story is vanity nonetheless. Following the death of his wife, C. S. Lewis observed, “We want to prove ourselves that we are lovers on the grand scale, tragic heroes, not just ordinary privates in the army of bereavement.”³ That is the vain motive behind this memoir. I desired to prove to myself—and to the world—that I am not ordinary. Rather, I am a field marshal in the bereavement army and a champion among lovers. I confess to this human frailty but reply, “To every thing there is a season and a time to every purpose under the heaven: ... a time to write.”

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PART ONE
SEASON OF JOY



“To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven:
... a time to laugh.”
(Ecclesiastes 3:1–2)

Chapter 1

The Pinnacle of Paradise

When I was a child, I laughed as my Sunday school teacher read from Genesis 2:25, “And they were both naked, the man and his wife, and they were not ashamed.” I remember the felt-board depiction of Adam and Eve standing behind a bush, their secret parts hidden. I wondered, *If they weren’t ashamed of their naked bodies, why are we?*

Five decades later, as a Bible teacher myself, I taught this verse in Africa. I described Genesis 2:25 as the summarizing verse of chapters one and two, the pinnacle of paradise before the fall from grace.

When [Kim and I](#) stood atop the summit of happiness, was down the only direction to tumble?

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Thursday evening, July 29, 2010

Two days before

I wobbled on one foot in front of four hundred laughing students at the National University of Rwanda. I felt so blessed to address this multitude of Christian young people.

Under stadium lights I spoke into my handheld microphone. “You see me standing here. I am created in the image of God, but I am only half the image.”

My interpreter, Franc Murenzi, also balancing on one foot, clutched his microphone. He shouted in Kinyarwanda, “*Ndemye mwishusho y’Imana, ariko ndi icyakabiri ki shusho.*”

During Franc’s interlude of interpretation, I gazed at the sea of faces. *Lord, let me do my best. I am leaving this continent in a few days and returning to my world in California. You must increase and I must decrease.*

I read to the students from Genesis 1:25. “God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them.” Franc read from his Kinyarwanda Bible.

In the front bleacher sat my lovely wife. “KIM, step down here and join me.” [She bounded down the stairwell](#) and held my hand. “Now, this is the image of God: one man and one woman forever side by side.”

Franc gestured toward us and spoke his interpretation. The stadium burst into applause. Kim waved and smiled in response. What a pleasure to address such a large audience and funnel applause toward Kim. She had always supported my preaching but chose to sit in the shadows. She deserved the limelight.

I continued to present Kim and myself as stand-ins for Eve and Adam. “I hope you can appreciate the rich symbolism. God fashioned Eve from Adam’s own body. They were one flesh. God did not use a head bone.” I grabbed my head. “Adam was not to be her leader. He did not use a foot bone.” I pointed to my toes. “Eve was not to be his slave. God fashioned Eve from Adam’s side. God’s intent from the beginning was that a husband and wife should be exactly equal, standing side by side, walking hand in hand, as I am walking with Kim right now.”

We held hands and marched forward and backward. Franc walked with exaggerated steps as he interpreted.

Franc was more than my interpreter. He was my imitator—a mini me. I would shout, he

would shout. I would pump my fist, he would pump his fist. I would raise my Bible and Franc would raise his. He would mimic my every tone and gesture.

“Your goal in dating is found in the summarizing statement of paradise. Look at chapter two, verse twenty-five. ‘They were both naked, the man and his wife, and they were not ashamed.’” I paused to look at the students’ puzzled faces.

“No, I don’t want you couples to get naked—at least not until you’re married. But consider this verse and its amplified meaning. As your dating relationship matures and you ease toward marriage, make yourself transparent to your beloved. Reveal every detail of your history and your finances to your future spouse. Expose every nook and cranny to the eye of the other. Then, after full disclosure, practice full acceptance. This is the paradise of Eden: to be mutually transparent and without a particle of shame. This is your goal line.”

I could not say Kim and I were the perfect couple, but after thirty-six years of marriage we managed our differences well.

I gestured to a young man sitting next to his sweetheart in the front row. “My brother in Christ, if you are serious about this woman, then reveal yourself to her—bit by bit, day by day. On your wedding day you should be ninety-nine percent exposed. The final one percent is physical nakedness. Save that last sexual secret for the wedding night and God will honor your marriage. I guarantee it.” The woman blushed; her boyfriend grinned.

As I ended my final message on dating, I asked my good friend Pastor Paul Gasigi to close with a prayer. As Paul shouted in Kinyarwanda, I looked at Kim, my mind wandering. *Is it hubris to portray the two of us as the original couple in paradise? Am I Icarus flying too close to the sun with waxen wings? O God, I don’t want to be prideful, but thank You so much for the life You’ve handed Kim and me.*

As was his custom, Paul asked if anyone needed prayer. The four of us made quite a team. Franc, Paul, Kim, and I prayed with a few dozen students. It was nearly eleven when we laid hands on the last student.

After all this preaching and praying, Kim and I experienced a Holy Spirit high. We were doing what God had called us to do: proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ. As the four of us strolled to our parked cars, I draped my arm around my wife. “Do any of you know how to say Kim’s name in Korean?”

Paul shrugged.

“It’s ‘*Je il yepun yojah sesong esso*’. That means ‘Number one beautiful woman in the whole world.’” Kim rolled her eyes.

Paul repeated the Korean phrase, and Kim said, “That’s pretty good. You have an ear for language.” He spoke it a few more times, to Kim’s delight.

I gave Franc a final embrace and he drove his Honda CRV into the night. Kim and I sat in the back of Paul’s car. He drove a Toyota Hilux with the “full rhino package.” It was outfitted for the African bush with oversized tires, upgraded suspension, and mesh-covered headlights.

Soon we arrived at the Christian student house, our home away from home in Butare, Rwanda. It was too late for Paul to linger, so he left us at the front door. Kim and I washed and crashed into bed.

I chalked up another day of joyful exhaustion in service to the Lord. I lay beside Kim flushed with gratitude. God had allowed us to return year after year to the same university community, digging a well ten years deep, now gushing with African friends. I hoped my life could stay this way forever ... or least for a very long time.



Friday, July 30, 2010

One day before

[Butare, Rwanda](#), was located two degrees south of the equator, which provided the town with plenty of warm sunshine. But at six thousand feet above sea level, the temperature and humidity grew moderate. On most mornings, fog crept over the forest floor and breezes cooled the hilltops.

At this early hour, a dozen local women dropped by the house for singing, encouragement, and prayer. Wrapped in colorful fabric, these “morning mamas,” as we called them, labored in the fields digging sweet potatoes and other crops. For a few dollars a day they worked their hoes—planting, weeding, and harvesting. A few little ones tagged along. Some continued on to school; others accompanied their moms to help in the fields. The tiniest were wrapped to backs while their mothers earned a living.

Our house was their morning oasis. Sometimes we served tea or sweets. We established a modest compassion fund to help the neediest with medicine or school uniforms. Jane Kawahunga lived in the house and oversaw this daily activity. Whenever a *muzungu*—a foreigner—visited the house, we relieved Jane of her teaching responsibility and served extra treats.

On this Friday morning, [Kim presented the message](#). After hand-clapping praise, Kim spoke while Jane interpreted. “Turn in your Bibles to Luke, chapter nineteen, the story of Zacchaeus.” Kim looked into the faces of the children. “Zacchaeus was a very short man, maybe as short as some of you kids. He wanted to see a famous man called Jesus. Have any of you heard of Jesus?”

A dozen small arms darted up.

“I understand a famous man is coming to Butare today. Do you know who that is?”

Several of the children shouted, “Paul Kagame!”

“That’s right. Your president is visiting town today. But you guys are so small. What could you do if you really wanted to see him? Do you think you would climb a tree?”

The kids giggled as Kim made climbing gestures. “Guess what? That’s just what Zacchaeus did. He climbed into a tree. When Jesus saw him, He stopped, looked him in the eye, and said, ‘Zacchaeus, come down here. I’m going to your house today.’”

By the time Kim ended her Bible story, all the children were laughing. One girl asked her mom if she could climb a banana tree to see President Kagame.

As the morning mamas rushed into the fields, Jane spoke to me. “You know, Franc really is going to see the president today. He’s a leader in the local army and has to watch his boys as they stand guard on street corners. It’s amazing how he can accomplish so much. He never gets tired.”

After an hour of rest, Kim and I sat at the breakfast table. Tabitha, who had been ministering to children all week, emerged from her room and joined us.

“We didn’t see you with the morning mamas,” Kim remarked.

“Sorry. I stayed up late getting my stuff together for the kids’ Bible school. There’s so much to do.” Tabi, as we called her, had a big heart and big hair, and she came from the big state of Texas. She had just turned twenty and was on her second mission with us.

Kim provided encouragement while passing her the carafe of coffee. “Just have fun. You’ll get lots of help.”

This particular Friday was a local holiday and mothers were happy to send their children into our front yard. At about ten o'clock kids began pouring through the front gate. We counted twenty-eight of them ranging in age from six to twelve.

Tabitha established three groups, each with an adult helper. One group sat at tables under a tin roof. The Rwandan helper distributed American coloring books with biblical themes. For many kids this was their first experience to color with crayons.

A second group sat under the avocado tree on straw mats. These kids built things with colorful wooden blocks. The third group engaged in running and jumping sports.

After thirty minutes, Tabitha blew a whistle and the groups rotated. After two rotations the children stood in line for cakes and punch. Although she couldn't understand a word of the local language, grateful parents thanked Tabitha for the love she demonstrated to the Rwandan children.

I strolled a few hundred steps to the location of the Light House—our future base of ministry. God had put it on the hearts of Kim and me to take this step of faith, to begin construction of a permanent facility in order to serve university students, local pastors, and the entire community. I prayed in the center of the dirt lot, wondering if this vision would ever become reality.

After lunch, Franc showed up at the house. Three university students followed him through the front door, carrying armloads of graduation gear: blue robes and yellow stoles.

"We have a small problem, Mzee." Franc arched his eyebrows. "The tailor who sewed these robes promised to have the caps ready for today, but when I arrived this morning, he hadn't started sewing them yet. He said he forgot." Franc held up a bag of ten mortarboard hats with tassels. "This is all we have for now." He set aside five robes and caps. "These are for you. We'll have to wait for the rest."

In a few minutes, Pastor Paul and Pastor David arrived. Paul was president of the local nonprofit called [Come and See Rwanda](#), or CASR, and David was vice president. Franc, Paul, and David huddled in a corner. Soon Paul approached. "Pastor Chris, it looks like we'll have to graduate some students without hats."

"That's okay," I said. "Let's try to keep the program on schedule."

The five of us donned our newly-tailored regalia. Pastor Paul drove Kim and me to the university auditorium. David and his wife drove with Franc.

The ceremony was supposed to begin at three o'clock, but singing groups continued to entertain. Finally, at three thirty, a student rushed down the aisle with a bag full of hats. The ceremony could commence.

Kim and I placed diplomas into the hands of fifty-five students who had completed eighteen classes in biblical studies. The diplomas bore the gold seal of our nonprofit organization called [Come and See Africa International](#), or CASA for short.

The two of us posed for pictures with dozens of students who were decked out in academic robes and flashing diplomas. The sound system blasted our theme song, [Come and See Africa](#). After the celebration we walked to a nearby restaurant for a reception of speeches and goat on a stick.

As we returned to the solitude of the house, I reminded Kim, "We still have to hold that business meeting tonight. We're heading back to Kigali in the morning."

Kim was tired, but resigned. "Let's do it. But give me some time to gather my thoughts."

At seven thirty, as the meeting began, Jane handed out notes to the four board officers who were present. I knew Franc would arrive late. His troops were watching the streets after the president's speech. But where was Kim? I opened the front door and found her sitting alone in the dark. She said she was "just thinking."

The CASR board reviewed the activities of the two previous weeks: preaching in churches, speaking at the university, teaching students in the front yard, witnessing at the stadium, ministering to morning mamas, and showing hospitality to all who walked on the grounds.

After this review, we discussed the status of our construction project. Progress was slow. The recession had struck America just a few months after we broke ground in 2008. Spigots of money turned off.

I suggested we name the building under construction The Light House Bible School. As a college professor, Kim thought the word *school* demeaned university students. "Let's call it The Light House Bible Institute." I made the motion and we all voted to adopt this name. Kim joked, "If only raising funds was as easy as raising hands."

The meeting dragged on until nine o'clock. Franc showed up after we adjourned. He apologized for his tardiness. "I can't believe the way they protect that guy." He shook his head, then caught his breath. "I brought my passport with me. I want to see if I can get my visa

application completed tonight.”

“Franc,” I told him, “if you get all your papers together, we’ll visit the US embassy with you on Monday before we head to the airport. We’d love to have you visit California and speak in churches about CASA.”

Franc headed into our small office and sat behind a computer. Kim and I snacked in the sitting room, discussing the next day’s activities. After several minutes, we heard Franc groan in frustration, “I can’t figure how to print this Internet form.”

Always the professor, Kim responded, “Let me see what I can do.” She walked into the office, drew up a chair, and sat looking over his shoulder.

Too exhausted to keep my eyes open, I went to bed, falling asleep the second I hit the mattress. Around two or three in the morning, Kim lifted the mosquito netting and flopped into bed beside me. I whispered, “Get your rest, sweetheart. Tomorrow is a big day for both of us.”

PART TWO
SEASON OF GRIEF



“To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven:

... a time to weep.”

(Ecclesiastes 3:1–2)

Chapter 2

Evil Sufficient for One Day

It is a great mercy of God that His human creatures cannot see beyond the moment. We have memories of the past, we live in the present, but the future remains opaque to our eyes. I understand this to be a showering of grace. Would any of us wish to know of upcoming broken bones, of lovers who abandon us, or of the manner and moment of our death? I, for one, am thankful that I live in the bliss and ignorance of the now.

“Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof” (Matthew 6:24).

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Saturday, July 31, 2010

Day zero

I lay in bed as the mamas' quiet voices erupted into exuberance. Still groggy, Kim moaned, "What time is it?"

I looked at the little travel clock. "It's five thirty." That was our usual wake-up time, but after a short sleep daylight came early.

We crawled out from under the netting, washed up, and within ten minutes were clapping hands to the drumbeat of a praise song. I managed to down a cup of strong coffee during the singing.

It was my honor to present the final message. I spoke from the gospel of John, chapter 3, about Nicodemus and being born again. Jane provided the interpretation. Kim asked that we close with her favorite song. So we all joined voices for *Imana Ni'nziza*, that is, "God Is So Good."

On this last day in town, we presented special gifts to our morning visitors: fifteen metal hoes to the mamas and a handful of peanuts to each of the children. Jason McCoy, a member of our mission team, held up the peanut bowl to supervise twenty sets of eager hands.

After the last mama left for the fields, Jacques the watchman swept out the sitting room and repositioned the furniture. Kim sat on the front stoop, watching the sun rise over the valley forest. She seemed lost in thought. I sat with her for a while and then we both stretched out in bed for an extra hour of sleep.

About eight a.m. we enjoyed a Rwandan breakfast of omelets and pancakes. Kim augmented this with mixed fruit from the tiny fridge. She smacked her lips. "The red seeds of the passion fruit make this mix so delicious."

Jason joined us at the breakfast table. He spoke about his pursuit of a doctoral degree in his specialty of ethnomusicology. Jason had traveled with us on mission trips before, but on this one he had a specific agenda. Jason was writing his dissertation about a man named Simon Bikindi.

As Jason explained it, "Bikindi was a Rwandan musician during the genocide era. He wrote popular songs that became the soundtrack of the killing. Bikindi holds the distinction of being the only musician ever found guilty by the United Nations for crimes against humanity.

Franc and I are planning to fly to Tanzania next week to visit him in his UN prison cell. I just hope I get the chance to interview him.”

I was pleased that Jason and Franc had become fast friends and suggested an introductory quote to his dissertation. “How about, ‘Give me the maker of a nation’s songs, and I care not who makes its laws?’”⁴

Jason liked the words and said he would consider that quote for one of the chapter headings. As he continued to talk, Jason’s conversation turned to his wife, Kristin, and how he had met her. “It was love at first sight,” he rhapsodized.

I then shared how I had met Kim. “I was teaching English in Korea, and she sneaked into my classroom late, trying to remain inconspicuous. But I took full notice of this beautiful young lady. She was an English teacher fresh out of university and I was a twenty-three-year-old Peace Corps volunteer. After class, we agreed to meet at a local tea parlor. I offered to help Kim with her English speaking and she agreed to help me with my Korean. At least that was the fiction. Six months after this first encounter, we married in Seoul.”

As I talked, Kim blushed, nodded, and added an occasional comment.

Tabitha, who sat with us, soaked up the romantic stories of boy meeting girl. Our original travel plans called for Tabi to accompany us to Kigali on that Saturday morning, but she asked, “Is it okay if I spend my last two days here with Jane? I can join you two at the airport on Monday.” We were fine with that change in plan, so Tabi talked with Jane to schedule their day’s activities.

The door swung open and I recognized Franc’s familiar laugh. He hugged Kim waving papers in the air. “Mama Kim, thank you so much for helping me print out this visa application.” He turned to me. “You know, Mzee, we stayed up half the night trying to print this from the laptop. We kept losing the Internet connection.” Franc sat with us for a cup of coffee.

Next, two students from the National University walked through the door. Their smiles were contagious. Each had completed three years of Bible study and was now teaching the Bible to fellow students.

Kim stood between them, wrapping her arms around their shoulders. “This is why we operate this school. These young men are the future leaders of Rwanda.” I snapped a photo of the three.

About noon we gathered for [a final meal](#) before our car ride to Kigali. A dozen or so

people filtered into the house to bid us farewell. Jacques had killed a chicken just after breakfast. The bloodletting seemed to trouble Tabitha's conscience, but not her appetite. We all enjoyed the lunch and the laughs. Whenever Tabitha bit into the chicken, Kim and I made clucking sounds. The last loud cluck imitated the moment at which the chicken lost its head. Tabitha clucked along with the rest of us. Joy marked the conclusion of this successful mission.

When Kim had finished her plate, she returned to the fridge to get more mixed fruit. She sighed. "I'm going to be so fat when I get back home."

An hour behind schedule, Jacques loaded the last of our luggage into Franc's car.

On the way out of town we picked up my tailor-made suit. Kim had selected the color and style—a solid gray suit coat buttoned all the way up the front with a collar that suggested clergy. I tried on the jacket and pants, and Kim's eyes lit up. "That looks so good on you."

On the outskirts of Butare we paused for last-minute purchases. We bought a dozen key chains to pass on to our charitable donors. Franc bought a can of Red Bull, calling it "Rwandan coffee."

I opened her car door and Kim slipped into the backseat. I buckled into the front passenger seat, and we began our three-hour road trip to Kigali. I talked with Franc for a while, but our conversation soon petered out. Each of us battled fatigue.

I closed my eyes, mentally planning ahead. The end of our arduous trip was in sight. On Sunday morning I would preach at the big Assembly of God in Kigali. On Monday morning I would accompany Franc to the US embassy to help him with his visa application. In the afternoon Kim and I would catch our return flight to the States. Hallelujah! Back home again.

Occasionally I opened an eye to gauge our progress. I had traveled this highway a dozen times and knew many of the twists and turns.

Rwanda didn't mark seasons as summer, autumn, winter, and spring. Wet seasons and dry seasons occurred throughout the annual cycle. Our summer mission coincided with the heart of their big dry season. Staring out the side window, I saw the red dust of July covering the landscape, powdering bare-bellied children who sat along the roadway.

About two o'clock, Franc turned on the radio. I heard a soccer game broadcast in the local language. Franc shook his head and switched off the radio.

"Franc, are you okay?"

"Pastor Chris, would you like to drive for a little bit?"

“No. That’s okay. You can drive.”

After a few miles of silence, Kim asked, “Do you have any water up there? I’m thirsty.”

“No, honey. But there are some bottles in the space behind your seat.”

I heard Kim unfasten her safety belt and turn around to search for the water. I then heard rustling followed by a loud sigh of resignation. I guessed that the exhausted Kim had flattened out on the backseat without finding her drink.

“Hold on for a little while,” I shouted back to her. “We’ll rest in Gitarama. That’s about thirty minutes away.”

I stared blankly out my side window as eucalyptus trees and banana groves zipped by. When I rolled my head to look out the front windshield, I noticed our car drifting across the center median into the left lane. Far ahead I saw an on-rushing minibus. I heard its honking horn. Time slowed as if in a dream.

I screamed, “Franc!” and heard his high-pitched shriek.

Franc yanked the steering wheel hard to the right to avoid the oncoming vehicle. Then he swerved left to recover. I felt the right tires leave the roadway. The car careened to the right, tires screeching. Finally, with a desperate left, the front left axle dug into the asphalt road.

I felt the jarring and inertial force as the car tumbled forward. After what seemed like a rough ride on a roller coaster, the car rested on its rooftop. I was suspended upside down in my seatbelt. My shoes had flung off and my glasses had disappeared, but I felt no injury. In fact, I felt exhilaration. Hadn’t I just survived an awful crash?

I shouted, “*Yobo, Yobo!*”—the Korean term for “sweetheart.” There was no reply.

I saw Franc outside the car. He stood with a stoop, two hands holding his bleeding scalp. I felt a rush of hope. Might I also discover Kim standing outside?

Instead I saw several Rwandans peering into the inverted vehicle through broken glass. I tried to unbuckle my harness, but tension held it fixed. “Scissors,” I yelled out, but there was no response. I mimicked cutting blades with my fingers, and within a few seconds an old man cut my harness with a kitchen knife. Two others pulled me through the shattered window opening. A boy retrieved my shoes and I walked a few steps.

I peered into the backseat, but Kim wasn’t there. A local man grabbed my elbow and pointed me back several steps to the roadside. There, half on the roadway and half on the side gravel, lay Kim’s crumpled body. Her knees were tucked under her stomach in a fetal position.

Her torso was angled toward the centerline and her head was turned to my approach. I saw no obvious signs of trauma: no puddles of blood, no broken neck, no projecting bones. I hoped for the best.

On hands and knees, I placed my face close to hers and studied her for a moment. Kim appeared to grimace as if in profound thought. Her breathing was labored, and red-speckled spittle colored the corners of her mouth. With tenderness I stroked the back of her head. I felt warm, sticky blood on my hand. My composure collapsed.

“O God, O God, O God,” I wailed, convulsing in grief. “My love, my life, please don’t leave me.”

A pickup truck appeared at the scene. Franc clambered into the front seat next to the driver. Several men jumped into the truck bed. I crawled into the rear cab, then pushed to the far left. A few men lifted Kim from the pavement and placed her head on my lap. I grasped her fingers with my left hand and caressed her face with my right. My speech was incoherent. Some words were addressed to Kim and some to God. I prayed, I pleaded, I lifted my voice to heaven and sobbed.

The crash had occurred not far from Kabgayi Catholic Cathedral. A medical clinic was located on the church grounds and soon the truck pulled up to the building. I felt it was by God’s grace that we were so close to professional care.

Kim was placed on a gurney, pushed into the clinic, and lifted onto a hospital bed. People rushed about in a frenzy, many talking into their mobile phones.

The young orderly in charge seemed overwhelmed. After two attempts, he failed to force suction down her throat. A doctor appeared, grabbed the apparatus, and cleared her throat of obstructions. Kim heaved and breathed easier.

It seemed to me that every ten minutes or so a more medically competent superior showed up with just the right skills to keep Kim alive. At some point her breathing stopped, but a doctor immediately placed a ventilator over her face.

I saw Franc off in a corner, getting his head wound bandaged. My heart went out to him. “God, have mercy on Franc. This must be the worst day of his life.” I also noticed Rwandan police officials interviewing witnesses and taking notes.

In an hour or so, friends from Butare arrived. Tabitha, Jane, and Pastor Paul looked on with shock and tears. I gave Tabi my phone and asked her to find the listing for my sons in

America. She agreed to contact Zachary and Simon Peter and break the news to them.

Paul stood next to a police official who was interviewing an eye witness of the accident. Paul then approached me, gesturing toward the man. “This bystander saw the whole thing. Franc’s car tumbled one and a half times before crashing on its roof. It catapulted high into the air and Kim ejected head-first through a side window.”

I pushed my fingertips into my eye sockets to staunch the tears.

Fifteen minutes after my friends arrived, an ambulance appeared from Kigali. Kim was rushed into the medical compartment. One nurse monitored her vital signs while a second nurse compressed a ventilation balloon. I hopped into the front seat beside the driver, with my head cranked toward Kim.

Sirens screamed all the way to King Faisal Hospital. From time to time I tapped on the separating glass and mouthed, “Is her heart still beating?” A nurse would smile and nod. I clung to the notion that if Kim survived long enough to reach a hospital, she might recover from this devastation.

Upon arrival, Kim was transported through the emergency entrance for a full-body MRI. I was ushered into a side entrance to sign papers and make a down payment. When my Christian friends caught up, they comforted me and prayed with me. Surely with prayer Kim would fully recover. What a testimony that would be!

Hours passed, and day darkened to night. More friends arrived at King Faisal Hospital. Tabitha told me she had contacted my sons and my church in California. Hundreds of people in America were now praying for Kim. I also met a stranger who introduced herself as Julie, Chief Consular Officer at the US embassy in Kigali. She stood vigil with my friends.

Then Dr. Carlos appeared. He was the hospital neurologist on assignment from Cuba. He showed me an MRI of Kim’s brain. “Her head trauma is extensive. Her brain is swelling in all directions. The pressure of her swelling brain against her rigid skull will gradually shut down her life functions. I’m sorry, but there’s not much I can do.”

The doctor gave little hope Kim would survive more than a few days. But *little hope is some hope* and I held fast to the remaining shreds of possible recovery.

Kim was transferred to the intensive care unit. King Faisal Hospital was not a state-of-the-art facility, but the people there were kind and caring. After hand washing, two visitors at a time were permitted to enter the ICU. I rotated in and out as a dozen people took turns standing

at Kim's bed side.

Dr. Carlos dropped by after a few hours. "I am putting Mrs. Foreman into an induced coma to manage her brain swelling as best I can." He dropped a small amount of liquid into her IV bag. "I will check on her in the morning."

Later in the evening Pastor David and Jason appeared. They wept as they returned from Kim's bedside. Jason offered to help in any way he could.

I thanked him. "My two sons are en route to Kigali. Please stick with me until they arrive."

Jason agreed and I gave him e-mail addresses for Zachary and Simon. "Please keep my sons in the loop about everything that goes on. That's important and I won't be able to do it."

As the hours advanced, friends returned to their homes. Sometime after midnight Pastor Paul coaxed me into relocating to the guest house—the place that Kim and I had reserved for what would have been our last two nights in Rwanda. I stepped out of the hospital not knowing if Kim would be alive when I returned the next day.

Chapter 3

Between Numbness and Pain

Have you ever smashed your thumb with a hammer, really hard? I did that once. I was aiming for an iron nail, but instead hit my thumbnail. Nothing broke, but *wow* was there pain! Then there was numbness, then pain again. For a minute or so, my thumb throbbed between numbness and pain.

I believe the soul is sometimes smashed like that—suffering pain one moment and numbness the next. “And now my soul is poured out upon me; the days of affliction have taken hold upon me” (Job 30:16).

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Early Sunday morning, August 1, 2010

Day one

It was approaching one a.m. when I checked in to the Bon Jeur Guest House in Kigali. I knew that sleep would be impossible, but perhaps rest would come. With my mind reeling and my body aching, I sank into my guestroom bed. In the darkness I extended my arm to the side. The only object in reach was an overstuffed pillow. My face contorted in grief when I realized that—if not for a moment of highway inattention—my hand would be caressing my lovely wife.

“O God, how can I survive without her?”

I found no rest on my first night without Kim. Like drops of water falling onto a hot skillet, my fevered thoughts sputtered, skittered, and evaporated into the shadows.

O God, can You make this day start over again? My mind recalled the plot of an old [Superman movie](#). When Lois Lane fell into an earthquake crevice and died, Superman shook the world with his scream. Then he took to the air, zipping around the earth counter to its rotation. Time began to reverse! The earthquake moved backward and Lois was alive again. Hallelujah! If Superman could do this, surely my super God could do it—if He wanted to.

Lord, please make time move backward. Just do me this one small favor. Reset the universe and let Saturday start again.

I shut my eyes and re-imagined the day’s events. I remembered the cool morning as the mamas exited through the front gate with their shiny hoes. Kim was in a pensive mood, hugging her knees, sitting on the front stairs. “Is anything wrong?” I asked.

“No,” she answered, “I’m just talking with God.”

Did she know? Did she have the slightest inkling her hours on this earth were numbered; that soon she might “go the way of all the earth?”

I remembered the pleasant conversation around the breakfast table. It was by God’s grace that before this car crash, we laughed about our first meeting and our romance. *Thank You for that, God.*

I remembered Tabitha asking permission to stay behind to spend an extra two nights with Jane. It was by God’s grace that she did not travel with us in Franc’s ill-fated car. If she had, she might be in the ICU as well. *Thank You, God.*

I remembered Kim returning to the fridge for a second helping of mixed fruit. *Yobo, I'm glad you enjoyed that tang of passion fruit. There's no need to worry about getting fat now.*

I remembered later in the afternoon, picking up my new suit from the tailor shop. Could Kim have imagined she was choosing the very suit I set aside as funeral attire?

In the darkness of my stifling room, I visualized riding to the outskirts of Butare. I pictured Franc as he dropped off Kim and me at the tourist gift shop. In my mind I reviewed the details of the shop and the key chains. I remembered the *clunk* of the back car door as I looked upon Kim's smiling face for the last time.

Then, with focused imagination, I re-started the journey north to Kigali, looking out the side window at the mud-brick huts and iron-sheet roofs, red powder swirling past our car.

Squeezing my eyes extra tight, I prayed with all my might that Kim had arrived safely in Kigali and that right now my wife lay beside me, inhaling and exhaling the night air. "It was a bad dream," I told myself.

With all the faith I could muster—greater than a mustard seed?—I re-opened my eyes and reached my arm into the darkness to caress Kim's side. The pillow mocked me, reminding me that wishing did not make it so. Reality chose not to conform itself to my magical thinking. Rather, reality reinforced that "all flesh is like grass, and all its glory like the flower of the grass;



Instead of counting sheep, I added numbers in my head. One mission trip each in 2001, 2002, 2003, 2004, and 2005; two trips in 2006, 2007, and 2008; one in 2009, and now again in 2010. This July mission to Rwanda marked number thirteen. Wasn't that an unlucky number?

Our Rwanda story began in 1998 when Kim traveled to Rwanda with a group of Korean missionaries. Her trip was too spontaneous for me, so I stayed home, using her time away to fix up the outside of the house.

When she returned, I whispered into her ear, "Yobo, if you ever return to Africa, I'll go with you." I figured Africa was her once-in-a-lifetime adventure, so I felt safe making that commitment.

A few uneventful years passed, but in 2001, Kim announced, "I feel God is calling me to Africa again." I was on the hook, but I accepted this turn of events as a doorway to destiny. God

had been working in my life, and I suspected big changes were in the offing. I had cut way back on my computer consulting business and had just started classes at the Baptist seminary in Mill Valley, California. Was God leading me into full-time ministry?

Lying on my back in the darkness, I reflected upon my first mission to Rwanda and how God led us both into this obscure spot in Africa. Since Kim was a professor at San Francisco State University and I had a background in academia, the team leader assigned us to Butare, where the National University was located. He also assigned us local helpers.

Pastor Paul Gasigi was our host at the Assembly of God church. We met there with women's groups, pastors, and students. Pastor David Nahayo, an Anglican priest, led a local group of religious leaders. Franc Murenzi, a student at the National University, served as my personal interpreter. Everywhere I went, Franc was my shadow. By the end of that two-week mission, we were like father and son.

Part of my responsibility on this first mission was to preach three times to an outdoor audience. A month ahead of time, I outlined three parables I wanted to present, the last of which was the parable of the sheep and the goats.⁶

On the final day of the mission, a thousand people gathered in the open air behind the Assembly of God church. Musical groups from various churches mounted a rickety wooden platform. As one group gave way to the next, I sat stage left, deep in prayer. I knew I could teach—I had the credentials. But could I preach the gospel? I was unsure. I asked God to give me a sign.

After I mounted the platform and began my message, a small boy led a mixed flock of sheep and goats to the margin of the field. They remained in sight only long enough for me to remark, “As I begin this message, I look to my right and I see the objects of my sermon: sheep and goats. This could not happen in an American church. You people of Rwanda are truly blessed.”

Perhaps *miracle* is too strong of a word, but *coincidence* is too weak. In my moment of need, God gave me a [providential sign](#) of sheep and goats. I knew He had called me to this mission field.

In 2005 Kim and I decided to strike out on our own. Our intent was to sponsor short-term mission trips to Butare and to the National University of Rwanda. I spent two months in Rwanda, launching our ministry called Come and See Africa International. Why this name? In the gospel

of John, the woman at the well shouts to her village: “Come, see a man, which told me all things that ever I did: is not this the Christ” (John 4:29)?

Kim and I echoed her challenge. “Come to Africa and see for yourself. The challenge is beyond description and the experience beyond words.”

I was the head of our nonprofit, but Kim was the heart. And what a heart she had. She cuddled babies, labored alongside the poor, and put her arms around the wretched. The joy of God shone from her face whenever she ministered to the downcast.

I knew without a doubt Kim and I were called to be co-ministers in Rwanda. When we were passengers in Franc’s car, I was convinced we were smack dab in the middle of God’s will. Therefore, I knew it was according to the mystery of His sovereign will that Kim’s body lay crumpled by the side of that road. Was it God’s intent to pluck Kim off the mountaintop at the pinnacle of her earthly success? “And [Kim] walked with God and she was not, for God took her” (Genesis 5:24 with apologies to Enoch).

I switched on the light and picked up my journal. “July 31, 2010,” I wrote. That was D-day, the day of disaster, the day of demarcation. I divided my life into the epoch before the car crash and the epoch after.

After filling a few pages, I laid down the journal and switched off the light. But in the darkness, my mind burned bright with memories of Kim.

The sequence of African sounds signaled the coming daylight: first the distant Muslim call to prayer, next the crowing of roosters, followed by a cacophony of barking dogs, a mixed chorus of morning birds, and finally the rattle of breakfast dishes outside my door.

Sunday morning was at hand. I knew Pastor Paul and the others would soon be going to church. I knew I could not. I had to get up, wash my face, and return to Kim’s bed side at the hospital. Would she be alive?

O God. Keep her strong until this brain swelling passes. I put my trust in You, Lord.

Chapter 4

Sparrow on a Housetop

I never felt as abandoned as when Kim crashed into a coma. So many of my thoughts, words, and actions were directed toward my beloved. To be violently severed from Kim was to be ripped in two. Half of my substance had vanished.

In the midst of many caring people I felt adrift. I sat at Kim's bedside for hours at a time in tears and disbelief.

I uttered the words of the psalmist, "I am like a pelican of the wilderness: I am like an owl of the desert. I watch, and am as a sparrow alone upon the housetop" (Psalm 102:6–7).

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Sunday, August 1, 2010

Day one

Pastor Paul and Pastor David sat at an open-air table in their Sunday best drinking African tea. They signaled me to join them. Immediately I asked about Kim. Paul responded, “I just called the hospital and there’s no change. She’s still in a deep coma.” He paused and then continued, “By the way, Franc is doing better. Claudine is with him now.”

At the mention of Franc’s name, I looked at the ground.

Paul asked if I wanted to go to church with him. I declined. “There’s no way I can focus on any words spoken today.”

He nodded, and I asked for a ride to the hospital.

“I’ll drop you off on the way to church,” Paul said. “And join you after lunch.”

I sought out Jason and asked him to accompany me. Soon the three of us were traveling through Kigali to the hospital.

At the entrance to intensive care, I washed my hands and then walked to the far corner to sit with my wife. Jason remained in the waiting room, typing into his laptop.

Kim lay in a single bed with her thumb attached to a heart monitor. A respirator covered her face, and bandages wrapped her head like a turban. Tubes were adding and removing liquid to and from her body. She was tucked under a white sheet, with her toes poking out from the bottom.

I leaned over to kiss her warm forehead, careful not to disturb the bandages, wires, and tubes. Then I settled into a chair at the base of the bed, stroking her exposed left foot and praying for a miracle.

A nurse walked next to Kim’s bed, read her vital signs, and posted them to a chart.

I was concerned about the level of medical care in this obscure African city. “Can I please speak with Dr. Carlos?” I asked.

She nodded and left the room.

Several minutes later the doctor walked in. After a cursory exam of Kim, I spoke up. “I see there’s no machine here to measure brain waves.”

“Do you mean an electroencephalogram?”

“I guess so. How can you tell what her brain is doing without that?”

“Mr. Foreman,” he answered in an offended tone. “I am a neurosurgeon and there are many ways to see how the brain is functioning.” He removed a small flashlight from his breast pocket. “Look, I’ll show you.”

With his thumb and forefinger he opened Kim’s right eye and flashed the light into it. He did the same with the left eye. “See? Fixed and dilated. That sign is every bit as good as an EEG. The brain has stopped responding.”

He pulled a pin from his pocket. “Also, I have pricked her with this pin in the finger and the toe. There’s no response.”

The doctor paused, then continued in a kinder tone. “I’m sorry. I too am frustrated, but there is nothing I can do. If the trauma were localized to one area, I could possibly drill a hole through the skull to relieve some of the pressure. But the entire brain is swelling. Believe me. No hospital in the world could do better. All we can do is wait and watch.”

Under my breath I added, “And pray.”

After he had left the room, I felt remorse for my flash of anger. Dr. Carlos seemed to be a competent and caring physician.

As I stroked Kim’s foot, I realized it was the foot without the bunion. Poor Kim. The previous January she had undergone painful surgery and spent six weeks on crutches. She planned to have surgery on the right foot next January.

Why, God? Did she go through all that agonizing foot pain just to die in Africa? It didn’t make any sense.

Then I remembered the day Kim was able to walk again after her surgery. My mood lightened.

We had traveled to Korea in May. How happy she was! For the first time in thirty-six years of marriage, the two of us returned to her homeland as tourists. She was delighted to see the sights and proud to see the economic progress. We visited her alma mater, Kyung Hee University, and Kim invited a choral group to come to our church in San Lorenzo. We even made a side trip to the small village on the southern coast where she was born.

Thank You, God, for allowing this joy to happen.

After an hour or so, I returned to the waiting room. Jason was tapping into his laptop. I asked if he had received any messages from my family. He read an e-mail from my sister Eileen.

Chris and Kim were in a head-on car accident in Africa and need immediate prayer from all of you. Kim is in critical condition in a hospital in the capital of Rwanda. Please pray for God's touch on her and for Chris and for the director of Come and See Africa Franc (not our brother, Frank). We need God's intervention on Kim's behalf. Please pray now for all of them and especially Kim.

Jason then read me the e-mail from my son Simon.

Family, I've spoken to my dad a few times and it's devastating to hear the sorrow in his voice. Please continue praying for him. My dad only had a few scrapes, but my mom's condition is not good. She has severe swelling in the brain and doctors cannot operate because the swelling is around the entire brain. The doctors are not optimistic, but there is hope. Zach and I are flying out there as soon as we clear some hurdles.

My mom is now in an induced coma, so we are praying the cerebral hematoma subsides quickly. Franc also sustained a head injury, but he seems to be doing okay. I will continue to keep you updated the best I can. Please continue praying for us all!

I spotted Julie in the waiting area and walked up to her. She asked if the embassy could do anything for me.

"Is there an outside doctor who could review Kim's condition and give me a second opinion?"

She said she'd look into it, adding in an upbeat voice, "Don't worry. Kim will pull through. She'll make it." I wanted so much to believe her.

In the endless hours at King Faisal Hospital, I spoke with some of the Rwandan medical staff. One suggested I medevac Kim to a more modern hospital, perhaps in Nairobi or Johannesburg. I asked Jason if he would look into medical evacuation.

About noon Pastors Paul and David came by with church friends. The visitors took turns, two by two, communing with Kim. I made it clear I did not want to see Franc.

"Don't worry about that," David responded. "Franc's at home recovering from his head wound."

I felt bitterness at the mention of Franc's name. "Good. Let him stay there."

Julie returned with a French doctor who was on contract with the Peace Corps in

Rwanda.

“I have looked at the MRI and spoken with Dr. Carlos,” he said. “It does not look good for Mrs. Foreman. If she were a younger person, maybe there would be some optimism. Even if she did survive this, she would not be the same. She would be like a vegetable. You wouldn’t want that, would you?”

I held back my anger as best I could. “Doctor, I would want Kim alive any way she would come back to me.” *Stupid French doctor. I don’t care if I have to look after her for the rest of my life. O God, just bring her back.*

Sensing my distress, Julie repeated her mantra. “Don’t worry. Kim will pull through. She’ll make it.” I wanted to believe Julie, but the doleful look on the French physician’s face convinced me his prognosis was more likely correct.

Jason reported back to me. “I did some investigating into Kim’s insurance coverage. It looks like she can be medically evacuated, but you’ll need to talk to a representative on Monday.”

That was good news and provided a breath of optimism. Maybe doctors in New York could do something for her.

I shared dinner in the hospital cafeteria with my companions. I told Jason it was okay to return to the guest house with Paul and David.

“After I drop off Jason,” Pastor Paul said, “I’m returning to Butare. I need to pick up Tabitha and return to the airport for her morning flight.”

“I’m going back with Paul,” David said. “I need to be with my family for a few days.”

Friends from Kigali were dropping by, along with people from the Kigali Assembly of God. I had been scheduled to preach to that congregation, and many came to show their support. Apostle Thomas—the founder of the church—showed me great kindness and became my chauffeur as I shuttled between the guest house, the hospital, and the airport.

Immaculee was Kim’s closest friend in Africa. She came by, along with her brother, who was a physician. I asked for his medical opinion. I held the absurd notion that since this man was my friend, maybe he could pull some strings and give me a positive prognosis.

Holding back tears he said, “I’m so sorry, but I don’t think she has much longer to live.” This was the third doctor’s opinion, and none had offered hope.

Please, God, You are the great physician and You have the only medical opinion that

really counts. Lord, heal my wife. Make her whole. I will do anything for You if she survives.



I often broke the monotony of the bedside by going on long walks down hospital corridors. I fortified my soul by whispering hymns to myself:

[Holy, holy, holy!](#) Lord God Almighty!

Early in the morning our song shall rise to Thee;

Holy, holy, holy, merciful and mighty!

God in three Persons, blessed Trinity!

I had begun whispering hymns at Ball State University when I was nineteen years old. My academic major had devolved from education to drugs, sex, and rock 'n' roll. In the midst of my hippie lifestyle, I turned my back on God. I abandoned church and Christian friends, but the songs never abandoned me. They bubbled from my heart and gushed from my mouth:

Holy, holy, holy! All the saints adore Thee,

Casting down their golden crowns around the glassy sea;

Cherubim and seraphim falling down before Thee,

Who wert, and art, and evermore shall be.

I could not keep my arms to my side while speaking the words *holy, holy, holy*. They had to lift in praise. Through the toughest parts of life, down the darkest alleys of rebellion, the Holy Spirit brought these hymns to my remembrance:

Holy, holy, holy! Lord God Almighty!

All Thy works shall praise Thy name, in earth, and sky, and sea;

Holy, holy, holy; merciful and mighty!

God in three Persons, blessed Trinity!⁷

On one of my walks I discovered a screened window in the hospital corridor that provided a view into intensive care. I was able to look through it and see the upper half of Kim's comatose body—her jet-black hair sprouting from a bandaged head. As I walked laps in the hallways, I paused to look through the screen upon my beloved wife. I felt like a helpless sparrow, perched on a housetop watching alone, flying in frantic circles, then returning to watch again.

Long after dark, Apostle Thomas came by to drive me back to the guesthouse. I was exhausted, but couldn't sleep. Memories of Kim bounced in my head throughout the night. I spoke to her in the darkness.

"O Kim, my beloved! Our thirty-six years together seem like a moment; my life with you as a flash of lightning, blinding the universe with its brilliance but fading too quickly into a rumble that will forever reverberate in my soul.

"I remember like it was yesterday, walking together down the icy sidewalks of Seoul. You were too modest to hold my hand, but every few steps you lost your footing and grabbed on to my elbow. Then you smiled slyly. It was bliss. We walked farther, through a park, stepping in ankle-deep snow. You lifted your eyes to look into mine and a snowflake lighted on your eyelash. It was love.

"I remember proposing to you on my golden birthday. I turned twenty-four years old on the twenty-fourth day of December 1973. You said yes and we set [the wedding day](#) for March. What romance! What passion! What rapture!

"I remember our flight to America—you and I chaperoning a dozen orphans to Manhattan, you meeting my oversized family, then the two of us settling in Longview, Washington, into my parents' upstairs bedroom.

"When Zachary was born, my parents' bedroom became too small for the three of us, so we rented our own apartment.

"My beloved, you were magnificent through all this turmoil. I never realized until decades later how tough life in American was for you. I had returned to my homeland, where all was familiar and comfortable. But you left your Korean family and friends. You left behind your native land and language. You clung to me, sweetheart, and I was so inadequate. I endured low-wage jobs, then joined the army as an employer of last resort.

“You followed your officer-husband to Missouri, where Simon was born... to Oregon where I earned my PhD... to Wisconsin where you matched me with your own PhD... and then to California, where you thrived as a professor at San Francisco State University.

“You were Type A; I was Type B. You were the accelerator; I was the brake. You walked with long strides down the road to success; I stopped along the way to smell the roses. The two of us complemented each other so well. Yobo, my sweetheart, we were the best of lovers and the best of friends.

“Now twenty-two years in California have passed. Our two sons are grown and gone. ‘In sickness and in health, for richer and for poorer, for better and for worse—till death do us part’? So fast, so fast, all gone so fast.

“Just before we packed our bags for Africa, we sat together in the morning light; drinking coffee and taking turns reading through our once-a-day Bible. After we finished, I said to you, ‘Pinch me. This moment of paradise must be a dream.’ Am I now awakening from that dream?

“You grew weary of traveling to Rwanda. You wanted to explore other vistas. But I urged you to make this one last trip with me. We had talked about retirement, visiting other parts of the globe. You were supposed to out-live me. All the actuary tables said so. This is so wrong.”

Why did You take her, Lord? How could You rip my heart from my chest and expect blood to still course through my veins?

I thrashed about in the darkness, sometimes in agony and sometimes in disbelief, but always with an oppressive sense of wrongness.

With sleep impossible, I turned on a light and opened my journal. A strong desire compelled me to compose a letter to Kim while she was still among the living—before she slipped from the present into the past tense. In the quiet of night I completed my elegy.



[Goodbye, My Love, Goodbye](#)

An Elegy for My Wife, Kim Hyun Deok Foreman:

Composed on August 2, 2010, in expectation of her imminent death

O God, I understand that everything under Your sun must have a beginning, a middle, and an end. But I do not understand how someone I love so dearly can be snatched so suddenly.

Fifty-nine years of life, thirty-six years a wife, a woman full of grace and compassion, a beautiful woman on the inside and out, a remarkable woman of academic achievement, a faithful and playful companion to one husband, a caring mother to two sons, and an adoring grandmother to one small boy.

Your name is **Kim Hyun Deok Foreman**, and your name says it all. **Kim** is the most widespread family name in all Korea. *Kim* means *gold* and so you are—precious and incorruptible; a wife of gold to me.

Hyun is a name given by your mother to each of her six children. *Hyun* means *wise*, and so you are. Although at times distracted or confused, upon reflection, you always return to wisdom. You are a wonderful counselor to me.

Deok is your unique given name. *Deok* means *virtuous* and so you are—a Proverbs-31 woman par excellence. In grade school your teachers supposed Hyun Deok to be a boy, for what girl could carry a name like *wise and virtuous*? But you, my love, have carried it well for fifty-nine years. Your moral compass has kept us both pointed in a heavenly direction.

Foreman is the name that you adopted with joy. Foreman is my family name, and from our wedding day you understood that by becoming one flesh with me, it was right for you to share one name with me. I marvel at how you acquired my family name, yet maintained your own identity.

You are unique, my love. There can be only one Kim Hyun Deok Foreman in the annals of history. Perhaps your one-of-a-kind name will help me locate you in the kingdom of God and in the reign of Christ. I will be looking for the remarkable woman of gold, wisdom, and virtue, who for thirty-six years was my earthly companion and of one flesh with me.

I am grateful to God you did not suffer pain in your last moments. I miss you so much already. My heart is breaking. I love you and I am confident I will see you again.

Your husband, Chris

At some point, my journal fell to my chest and I collapsed into a deep sleep.

Chapter 5

The Land of Uz

“**T**here was a man in the land of Uz, whose name was Job,” and he said, “Have pity upon me, have pity upon me, O ye my friends; for the hand of God hath touched me. I will not refrain my mouth; I will speak in the anguish of my spirit; I will complain in the bitterness of my soul. My bone cleaveth to my skin and to my flesh, and I am escaped with the skin of my teeth.

“I cry unto thee, and thou dost not hear me: I stand up, and thou regardest me not. Thou art become cruel to me: with thy strong hand thou opposest thyself against me. O that my words were now written! O that they were printed in a book! That they were graven with an iron pen and set in the rock for ever!”⁸

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Monday, August 2, 2010

Day two

I awoke Monday morning confused, not knowing where I was. It took a full ten seconds to place myself in Kigali and a few more to once again feel the crushing weight of Kim's impending death. I had returned to the land of Uz.

I stepped out onto the patio. Jason was already awake and tapping on his laptop. I asked him about e-mails and he read the note he had received from Simon.

Thank you all for your prayers. Please continue praying for my mom. While things look grim, miracles do happen! Right now please pray for my dad like crazy. Zach and I are devastated, but I can't imagine what my dad is going through right now. My mom and dad have always been an inseparable team. Zach is flying out tonight and I am flying out tomorrow, so please pray for traveling mercy too.

I looked around the patio for Paul. Then I remembered he had gone home to Butare. At that moment he was probably on his way to Kigali with Tabitha. I thought *That lucky young woman is returning to the States*. The realization stabbed me with pain. Kim and I should be sitting next to her on that flight. Those useless airline tickets were tucked in my suitcase as tokens of looming death.

God, this is so unfair!

Pastor David was also absent from breakfast. He had accompanied Paul to Butare, planning to stay there a few days to be with his wife. Another stab! I should be with my wife too. Was there a cosmic conspiracy against me? It seemed that everyone and everything brought painful reminders that my once tidy universe lay in tatters.

I sat alone for a while, nibbling on a pastry. When I noticed the two proprietors glancing in my direction, I invited them to join me. They introduced themselves as Fred and Betsy Williams from Scotland.

"We've been overhearing your conversations," Fred said. "We are so sorry that your wife is dying. You know, Betsy and I have been missionaries in Africa for many years, first in Kenya and now here in Rwanda. The Rwandan owner of this guest house asked if we could manage it for him while he's away. These last few years have been very difficult for us."

Betsy grew misty eyed.

“You see, we lost our son two years ago. We knew he was having psychological problems, but what could we do? He was thirty years old and we were a continent away. One day we got word he had killed himself. We were in the bush at the time. It took three days for the news to reach us and four more days more before we could get back to Scotland.” He paused to hold back tears. “If there is anything we can do for you, let us know.”

I stood and thanked them for their kindness. Losing a child to suicide—what could be worse than that?

They stepped back when they saw Jason approaching. He joined me at the table and we talked. At first he was upbeat, but then I made a disparaging remark about Franc Murenzi.

His face hardened. “Chris, I really think you should meet with Franc. He needs you.”

“Franc is responsible for my wife’s condition. He’s no longer my friend. And I have no interest in seeing him ever again.”

“You know it was an accident. And Kim was like a mother to him.”

“Jason, imagine your own wife, Kristin, smashed and bleeding, about to die. Now tell me, how forgiving are you?”

He pushed his hands over his ears. “I don’t even want to go there.”

“When you *can* go there,” I sneered, “then you can talk to me about forgiveness.”

At that moment, Jason’s laptop chimed to announce an incoming e-mail. He read the message out loud. “Dad, I am at Dulles Airport. I’m about to leave aboard Ethiopian Air. I hope to be in Kigali about eight tonight your time. Zachary.”

When Jason looked up from the screen, I said, “That’s good. I hope he can make it to town before his mom passes away. Give Apostle Thomas a call and let’s head out to the hospital.”

We arrived at the hospital about ten a.m. and I sat at Kim’s bedside. I talked to the nurse who spoke the best English. She explained to me that Kim’s brain was continuing to swell and her systems were shutting down.

A second nurse added, “We are now shooting dopamine directly into her heart.” The concern in her voice conveyed to me that Kim’s end was near.

When I returned to the waiting area, Jason told me he had spoken with the insurance representative who could authorize Kim’s transport to a more modern hospital. He called her and

after a few minutes handed the phone over to me.

“Medevac,” she explained, “is an expensive procedure. Insurance will only cover it if the senior physician in charge of her care signs a form stating that her chances for survival will improve markedly if she is transported. We will not transport just to get her closer to home in case of death.”

I winced at that last remark, because that was becoming my motive. I spoke with Dr. Carlos who listened carefully, then said, “Mr. Foreman, I cannot sign that paper. Your wife is dying. There is nothing anybody can do about that. In fact, putting her into an airplane could hasten her death.”

“But Doctor, surely in Nairobi or New York they could do something.”

“Mr. Foreman, there are two factors in making my decision. One is the quality of the care and you are right. Those hospitals have better equipment. But there is a second factor. That is the condition of the patient. Your wife is in a deep coma and her systems are shutting down. Even a hospital in New York cannot resurrect the dead.”

My final sliver of hope melted away. In freefall I plunged into the abyss of grief.

I returned to my wife’s bedside and looked at her battered body. I gripped her left toe, not wanting to let her go—ever! I couldn’t stop weeping.

My thoughts twisted from Kim to Franc. *This is all Franc’s fault*, I screamed inside my head. I rushed away from Kim’s bedside with a new mission. I asked Jason to call Julie at the embassy. When she got on the phone, I asked, “Can I drop by tomorrow morning to make a sworn statement about Franc’s involvement in the car crash?”

“Sure. Would ten o’clock work for you?”

With that appointment set, I began writing notes on what to say in my affidavit.

About noon Pastor Paul dropped by the hospital with Tabitha. Her big hair was wilted and her eye shadow was smeared with tears. She spent a few moments by Kim’s side and then we all went to the guesthouse.

I handed Tabi a little leather backpack. “I overheard you say to Kim how much you admired this. Well, here it is. Remember her love for Africa.”

Tabitha’s face shone with sorrow and gratitude. Then she was off to the airport for her long flight to Lubbock, Texas.

I was exhausted, but before going to bed, I spoke to Jason. “Please phone the hospital and

ask them to contact me if Kim is about to die. Otherwise, wake me up at six p.m. so we can meet Zachary at the airport.” I didn’t know what news would greet me when I next opened my eyes.

Pastor Paul entered my room before six. “Zachary will be arriving at Kayibanda Airport soon. Do you want to eat before you go?” I knew I should eat something but had no appetite. I mechanically put bits of bread into my mouth, washing them down with tea.

I rubbed my face and through my fingers asked Paul how Kim was doing. He answered with a troubled voice. “Dr. Carlos says she has a day, maybe less.”

“It looks like Zachary will be able to sit by her bed side. I hope Simon can too.”

I asked Jason if he had heard from Simon.

“Yeah, I talked with him on the phone a bit ago. He’s having some problems. His passport expired and he had to get a new one. He said the government people in New York have been amazing. Two State Department men actually met him on Sunday—when the office is closed—and issued him a temporary passport to travel to Rwanda. He also said the Korean side of the family paid for his travel. He’s not sure, but he thinks he can get here by tomorrow night.”

Apostle Thomas came by and drove us to the airport. Zachary was already on the ground waiting for his bags. His flight had landed at seven, not eight.

When I caught sight of my first-born, my face contorted and tears gushed. My stoic son responded in kind. I held him close to my chest for a long time. Then, to break the spell of grief, I whispered, “We need to get to the hospital right away. Your mother doesn’t have much time.”

Thomas drove us to the hospital and we checked into the intensive care unit. As had become my custom, I kissed Kim on the forehead and then sat at the base of the bed, holding her exposed foot. Zachary sat to her right, on the window side, away from the noisy machines. I uncovered her small, bandaged hand and placed it into Zachary’s big one.

After a few moments of tears, Zachary opened his Catholic prayer book and read *A Prayer for Those About to Die*.

O most merciful Jesus, Lover of souls, I pray Thee, by the agony of Thy most Sacred Heart, and by the sorrows of Thy Immaculate Mother, cleanse in Thine Own Blood the sinners of the whole world who are now in their agony and to die this day. Amen.⁹

I studied my son as he read. A wide body and a deep voice. A lover of books and of truth. A man skilled at many things yet unable to find his niche. He had almost become a priest and was now a philosopher.

I recalled the last time I'd seen my wife and my son together in a hospital setting. It was thirty-five years earlier in Longview, Washington, when [a new mother](#) held her newborn babe in her arms.

After an hour we left Kim's side and spoke with a nurse. She told me her kidneys had stopped functioning, she was beginning to swell, and she could not survive much longer.

I asked for a special favor. "Please keep Kim on the respirator—even if her heart stops beating—until I'm able to return to switch it off." She agreed to do that and we left the hospital.

It was refreshing to be in my son's presence, despite the circumstances. We shared memories of his mom and even managed a few smiles.

Back at the guest house, Jason and Zachary re-introduced each other. They hadn't been together since high school.

In an almost military manner, I said, "Thank you so much, Jason, for your extraordinary service. You served as an adopted son to me until my own son could arrive. I appreciate that. You are relieved of your duties. Zach can take over now."

Jason looked at Zach with amusement. "He's all yours. If it's okay with you guys, I'm going to Butare tomorrow with Pastor Paul."

I nodded my approval.

It was past midnight when we unwound enough to retire to our own rooms. I couldn't sleep. Residents of Uz find rest nearly impossible. "My days are swifter than a weaver's shuttle, and are spent without hope. O remember that my life is wind: mine eye shall no more see good" (Job 7:6–8).

Chapter 6

The One Shall Be Taken

Kim lingered for seventy-two hours after the accident. I am grateful to God I had three days to prepare my heart for the unbearable loss of my beloved. But when did this world actually lose Kim? When did she loose her bonds to earth? In my mind July 31 loomed larger than August 3. Yes, a physical body remained. But where was the remarkable woman I knew and loved?

I believe I lost Kim when she crashed headlong through the glass and landed on the pavement. Like some warped variation of Alice, Kim passed through a looking glass and transported herself in an instant from this world into the next.

Then shall two be in the field; the one shall be taken, and the other left. Two women shall be grinding at the mill; the one shall be taken, and the other left” (Matthew 24:40–41). A husband and a wife shall be passengers in a vehicle; the one shall be taken, and the other left. “Watch therefore: for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come (Matthew 24:42).

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Tuesday, August 3, 2010

Day three

I awoke early and roused Zachary for breakfast. He was jet lagged and bleary eyed. Over eggs and toast, Jason passed along to him relevant e-mails and phone numbers. Zachary also received tentative flight information and funeral arrangements.

“Zach,” I said, “you’re my spokesman now and I want everyone to get the same message. So, when you send e-mails, always include these four people: your Uncle Frank for my family, Deacon Al for my church family, your cousin Stephen for the Korean side of the family—he’s bilingual and the best with technology—and Pastor Paul, so our African friends can stay in the loop.”

We said goodbye to Jason and Paul, who were headed south to Butare. A short time later, Apostle Thomas came by with his car. Soon Zachary and I were waiting at the entrance to the US embassy.

I reminded Zachary of his diplomatic ambitions. “You know, you could have been stationed here with the State Department. You passed the written test and even the oral test. You got the acceptance letter.”

Zachary shrugged. “Yeah, I know. Sometimes I wonder where I would be if I had followed that path.”

“But then you decided to become a priest instead.”

“Yes, and I wouldn’t change my Dominican experience for anything. I was called to the priory, and although it sounds strange, I was called out of it.”

“And now you’re called to study medieval philosophy at Catholic University?”

Zachary smiled and pointed. “I think that marine is ready to let us in.”

The two of us signed the register and followed the officer into the main building. Julie reached out her hand to greet me and I introduced Zachary. She gave us guest badges.

We followed her past a large portrait of President Obama and into the consul’s room. She sat at her desk behind a computer and we sat opposite her in comfortable chairs. After some conversation about Zachary’s travel and Kim’s worsening condition, Julie said, “So, Pastor Foreman, are you ready to make your statement?”

“Do you have a tape recorder handy?”

“No, I can input your words as you speak. Just speak slowly and clearly.”

And so I did.

“Franc Murenzi has been like a Rwandan son to me. I have supported him in many ways. Two years ago I sent funds to Rwanda for Franc to buy a car. About sixteen months ago he purchased a 1996 Honda CRV—the car involved in the accident.

“My wife and I arrived in Rwanda on July twenty-first. We spent most of the next two weeks with Franc, who was our driver. Franc does not have a valid Rwandan driver’s license. He told me he had a permit that allowed him to drive only in Butare.

“Last Saturday, he was driving us from our missionary headquarters in Butare to Kigali. I noticed him driving recklessly, with one hand on the steering wheel and the other on his cell phone. A few cars honked at him.

“Franc is the head of the local militia in Butare. He calls them his ‘boys.’ I believe that’s why he was comfortable driving his car in Butare and talking on the cell phone.”

At that point in the affidavit, I described the car crash and the emergency treatment my wife received at the scene, adding that the details of the accident were documented in public records.

I concluded, “Franc Murenzi is no longer my friend. As a Christian, a pastor, and a missionary, I forgive him. But I believe the car accident was one hundred percent preventable and Franc is one hundred percent responsible.

“I am not after revenge, but I would like to see justice. I want Franc to face the full consequences of his actions according to Rwandan law. My concern is that because of Franc’s connections in Butare, he will escape justice.

“My son Zachary is here with me now. I expect to see my second son, Simon, about two a.m. tomorrow. When he arrives we will discuss my wife’s fate. Kim is beyond recovery. We have been married for thirty-six years and I love her dearly. Right now she is being kept alive by a respirator and by dopamine pumped into the heart.

“My prayer is that Simon will arrive before she passes. But after he sees her, I expect we will discontinue the heart stimulant and my wife will die.

“I cannot return to America without letting my family know I did everything within my power to seek justice for Kim, and that my government is doing everything it can on her behalf.”

With nothing more to say, I sat depressed and exhausted, but relieved this task was

behind me. I convinced myself I was making this statement as a favor to Kim.

Julie spent several minutes reviewing and correcting the document. She then printed out two copies, and I signed both where it indicated *Name of Affiant*. I left the embassy with my copy in hand.

Thomas drove us back to the guest house about noon. He called the hospital and reported, “They say that she is very weak and could pass at any moment. I will stay here for a few hours while you get some rest.”

I thanked him, agreeing that both Zachary and I needed a bit of sleep. Dog-tired, I closed my eyes.

It was past four p.m. when I opened them again. I found Thomas on the patio taking tea with his wife. “Have you heard anything about Kim?”

“Yes. The nurse called a few hours ago and said her heart stopped beating—Kim died.”

“Died? Why didn’t you wake me up?” I sputtered in disbelief.

“I opened the door and you were asleep. There was nothing you could do. I was going to wake you soon anyway. My wife just got here, so now we can all go to the hospital together.”

Tears filled my eyes. It seemed so wrong that I wasn’t at Kim’s side when she died, but I couldn’t be angry with Thomas. He did what he thought was best.

I had believed so much that Kim possessed the internal capacity to hang on until Simon arrived at her side. I had convinced myself her life narrative could end in no other way. How foolish. Only God can determine such things.

I shook Zachary from his slumber and told him the news. He sat up and lowered his face into his hands. I left him alone for a while. When I returned he was alert and ready to return to the hospital. I grabbed my Bible and he his prayer book. Thomas, accompanied by his wife, drove us to the hospital.

The duty nurse met us as we washed our hands. She then escorted us into intensive care. I kissed Kim on the forehead. She was cool to my lips. I heard the mechanical pump and saw her chest rise and fall, providing a fiction of life. I asked the nurse to stand by while Zachary and I spoke our final words and then she could switch off the futile respirator.

I asked Zachary to pray first. From his prayer book, he read *De Profundis* and *Eternal Rest*.

Out of the depths I cry to You, O Lord; Lord, hear my voice.
Let Your ears be attentive to my voice in supplication.
If You, O Lord, mark iniquities, Lord, who can stand?
But with You is forgiveness, that You may be revered.
I trust in the Lord; my soul trusts in His word.
My soul waits for the Lord more than sentinels wait for the dawn.
More than sentinels wait for the dawn, let Israel wait for the Lord,
For with the Lord is kindness and with Him is plenteous redemption;
And He will redeem Israel from all their iniquities.^{[10](#)}

Eternal rest grant unto them, O Lord, and let perpetual light shine upon them.
May the souls of the faithful departed, through the mercy of God, rest in peace.
Amen.^{[11](#)}

I didn't want to turn off the respirator. I didn't want to let go of my beloved Kim. I wanted our marriage to last forever. *What's wrong with the world?* It wasn't supposed to end this way.

I decided to read 1 Corinthians, chapter 15, from beginning to end. These hope-filled words were still fresh in mind since I had preached this chapter as a sermon series for the recent Lent season.

With slow deliberation I read all fifty-eight verses in the King James Version, wanting to savor each moment and postpone her death for as long as possible. I finished with these words:

Behold, I show you a mystery; we shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be

to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.^{[12](#)}

After a pause and a deep breath, I nodded to Zachary. He lowered his head in response. I gestured to the nurse to remove the respirator. There was a sudden silence, followed by quiet sobs. It was real. My lovely Kim was dead.

I asked the nurse for two favors. “Please remove her wedding band for me and keep it safe. Also, please cut a lock of her hair so I can pass it on to those who ask for it.”

After agreeing to my wishes, the nurse drew the sheet up over Kim’s face. I pulled it back and gave her one final kiss on the forehead. Then Zachary and I walked out of intensive care to find Apostle Thomas.

Back at the guest house, Thomas phoned Paul to give him word of Kim’s death, and he passed it on to friends in Africa. Zachary sent e-mails to Frank, Al, and Stephen.

After enduring three days of acute uncertainty, Kim’s death brought resolution. Sheer exhaustion led me to sleep. Depression led me to prolong my sleep.

I rose from my bed after midnight, when it came time to return to the airport to meet Simon Peter.

Chapter 7

A Habitation of Dragons

Whenever I saw people who loved Kim for the first time after her passing, fresh anguish pierced my soul. Each pained expression, each set of downcast eyes, each not-knowing-what-to-say, returned me to the shadow of Kim's death. Beginning with Simon and continuing for months, I was reduced to tears by those who were reduced to tears.

“All this is come upon us; thou hast sore broken us in the place of dragons, and covered us with the shadow of death” (Psalm 44:17–19).

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Wednesday, August 4, 2010

Day four

As Tuesday transitioned into Wednesday, I steeled my heart to meet my second son. It would be sweet sorrow to greet Simon as he emerged through Rwandan customs. He would not know his mother had died. With dread of telling him the news, but with anticipation of his comforting presence, I traveled to the airport with Apostle Thomas. Zachary sat by my side.

Simon was in many ways Zachary's counterpart. I have [a favorite picture of my two boys](#) in which Zachary is dressed in a white Dominican habit juxtaposed to Simon, who is wearing a black leather jacket and pants. Zachary was always the philosopher-artist, while Simon was the artist-philosopher. Zachary painted religious icons as close to the original as possible; Simon painted free-style original art. As Zachary was close to my head, so Simon was close to my heart. And just as my heart was bursting with grief, so was Simon's. He loved his mother beyond tears.

When I saw Simon approaching, I readjusted my picture of him. I had last seen him in cold New York City. Now he was wearing short pants and a short-sleeved shirt, with cropped hair and beard stubble.

I reached out to Simon and he embraced me in a bear hug. Before he could say a word, I whispered into his ear, "Your mother died about ten hours ago." Simon fought back tears, rubbing his eyes with his fists. "But we should still go to the hospital so you can say goodbye."

"Sorry, Dad," Simon choked. "I tried to make it earlier. My passport expired two months ago and I never renewed it. I wanted to be here with Mom before she died. But it's a miracle I'm here at all." He broke down into sobs.

"It's okay, Son. You're here now and that's what important. I'm so happy to have both of my boys with me."

"But I feel so bad. The last time I spoke to Mom on the phone we said some ugly things to each other."

"Don't be concerned about that. You two were so alike. Of course you would bug each other. But I know how much you loved your mother and how much she loved you."

As we walked to the car, Zachary asked his brother about the flight.

"It was long, but I couldn't sleep, thinking about Mom. Have you made arrangements for a funeral?"

“Yeah. We think it will be on Saturday morning, which is a good thing because Dad and I have our return flight scheduled for Saturday night.”

Simon responded that his flight was leaving on Sunday.



The scene at the hospital was eerie. At three a.m. the grounds were deserted. Thomas spoke to the front watchman, who allowed us to pass onto the hospital parking lot. The orderly on duty pointed us to the night doctor.

Flanked by my two sons, I spoke to her. “My son here arrived from America about an hour ago. He just learned his mother died today but he arrived too late to be by her side. Please, could we see her?”

The woman fumbled for words. “Mr. Foreman, that will be very hard. Her body is in the morgue in the basement. I don’t have permission to enter there.”

Thomas spoke to the doctor in Kinyarwanda, words I didn’t understand. He then explained to me that the doctor was making a phone call to the hospital director. She had been reluctant to awaken him from sleep.

After a brief conversation she spoke to us. “Okay. Follow me.” After a few steps she turned and pointed to Thomas. “Not you. Family only.”

The three of us followed her to a lock box on her office wall. With key in hand, she led us down two flights of stairs, unlocked one door, and then another. The smell was dank and earthy. We approached five rows of mortuary coolers, stacked two high.

“What is the name of the deceased?”

“Kim Foreman.”

She looked at the labels. “I can’t find that name.”

I asked her to read me the names, and she began one by one.

She read “Doctor Kim.”

“That’s the one.” I said.

“Please let me open first and make some, uh, adjustments before you see her.”

We stepped back.

She opened the cooler and moved some things around. We could not see what. “Okay,

that's the best I can do."

I was startled to see Kim's corpse. She looked bloated and battered. In her final hours, kidney failure had caused her to swell. Her exposed arms showed numerous bruises from needle injections. I saw head wounds that had been hidden by bandages.

"My poor, poor Kim," I wailed.

I turned to Simon. "I'd like you to say a few words to your mom. Zach and I have already spoken to her."

Simon knelt down and touched a cloth that covered her foot. He choked out several words about his love for her.

The doctor broke in. "We can't leave this door open. All the hot air is getting in. I have to close it now."

After Simon rose to his feet, we waved goodbye. Then the doctor pushed the cooler door closed. In solemnity and shock we followed her up the staircase, away from the shadow of death, away from this desolate habitation of dragons..

We met up with Thomas, thanked the doctor for her courtesy, and drove to the guest house. I showed Simon to his room and didn't see him again for several hours. Zachary said he would stay up a bit to make phone calls to America and send e-mails. I fell into bed just as the roosters greeted the first glimmers of daylight.

We started moving again when the African sun reached its zenith. It was lunchtime for me, breakfast for Simon, and supper for Zachary. Jet lag and sorrow had pulled our lives in different directions. We all agreed Wednesday would be a good day to rest and prepare for the trials that lay ahead.

Zachary read an e-mail sent by the secretary of the Baptist Association to my cohort of pastors:

Kim Foreman passed away this morning. She will be greatly missed, but she is home. Thank you so much for your concern for our church and for Pastor Chris. Please continue to pray for the family. Pray that God will remove any obstacles there may be in bringing her body home for burial. Please hold this dear pastor in prayer. Thank you. Jane

Over our noon-time meal, Zachary read from his notes. "We have settled on the Kigali

Assembly of God church for the funeral.”

As he spoke, I mused, *Instead of hosting us to preach on August first, the church is hosting Kim’s funeral on August seventh. O God, you made the world in seven days. Are you now un-making it in seven?*

Zachary shuffled his papers. “Mom’s insurance with San Francisco State came through. They are covering the cost of returning her remains to California.” That was an answer to prayer.

“But the schedule is tight. The flight leaves at four p.m. on Saturday. So her coffin must leave for the airport by noon.”

Zachary had the ability to compartmentalize his head from his heart. As long as he didn’t meditate on the fact that “the remains” were his mother’s body, he could function well.

I explained to my sons that I was planning a second funeral in California one week after the Kigali funeral. “Your mom had so many friends back home, and they need a chance to pay their respects. My church in San Lorenzo is too small. It seats only one hundred twenty people, max. So I’m e-mailing the head of the Baptist Association to see if he can find a bigger place. Don’t worry about expense. I’ll find the money to get you there.”

“I’ll contact Dilia and ask her to buy the tickets for us,” Simon said. “Lorenzo’s not two yet, so he can fly free.”

“Did you bring anything appropriate to wear for a funeral?”

He thought a bit. “No. Maybe I can buy a suit here in Kigali.”

Zachary smiled. “You’re tall and thin, built like a Tutsi. I’m sure you can find something fashionable.” Simon and I laughed as Zachary accentuated his substantial girth.

The three of us idled away the next hour, enjoying one another’s company, sharing memories of better times. Zachary filled us in about his efforts at Catholic University and the obstacles to earning his doctorate. Simon pulled out pictures of Dilia and Lorenzo and talked about how fast his little boy was growing.

He also told us Dilia was two months’ pregnant. “The baby is expected in February. I’m hoping for a girl so I can have the experience of a son and a daughter.”

I was happy and sad at the same time. Another grandchild would be a blessing from God, but a blessing the child’s grandmother would never see.

I moved to another topic. “How did you guys learn about the car accident?”

Zachary responded first. “I was teaching a class for Power Score when my phone rang. I

recognized your number. At the break, I listened to Tabitha's message. She said she was with you and Mom in Rwanda and I should call her back as soon as possible. When I returned her call, she told me you two had been in a car accident. You were okay, but Mom was in serious condition."

Simon picked up the narrative. "Zachary phoned me in Brooklyn about ten on Saturday morning. I got on my knees right there in the apartment. Dilia and I both prayed. Over the next few hours there were more calls and e-mails."

Zachary added, "I called Stephen so he could talk to Mom's side of the family. He bought the tickets online for us to fly to Kigali. Dad, we weren't sure flying to Africa was the right decision. You were talking about medevacing Mom to Europe or New York."

"I know, but that was just brave talk. Three doctors examined your mom and each said she would not survive."

Wanting to shift the subject, I picked up my digital camera. "On the evening before the accident, we held a CASR board meeting to evaluate the mission." I showed them [the group photo](#). "One of the items on the agenda was the naming of the building that's now under construction. Your mom said we should name our facility 'The Light House Bible Institute.' I want to honor her request but also honor her memory. I'm not sure she would approve of this, but what do you think about calling the building 'The Kim Foreman Bible Institute?'"

My sons agreed. Zachary called Pastor Paul in Butare, then handed me the phone. "Paul, to honor Kim we'd like to name the building 'The Kim Foreman Bible Institute.'"

"That's a great idea."

"Can you make a sign and put it up by tomorrow?"

"I'll do my best." Paul paused. "Doctor Chris, I will be at the guest house for breakfast tomorrow. After that you need to go with me to see the police in Gitarama to sign a statement."

"Tomorrow's the right day for that. I want to take my sons to the accident site and the clinic where their mother was treated. I also want to see Franc's wrecked car and the construction in Butare."

Paul agreed to all that and said he was going to visit the sign maker right away.

After hanging up, I told Simon, "If you want to wear a suit to the funeral, we need to buy it today so it can be tailored by Friday."

We walked out of the guest house with one of the houseboys who spoke a little English.

Visiting tailor shops was a good way to pass an hour.

Simon ordered a suit jacket and pants, but the only dress shoes we found were long and pointy-toed—an African fashion. I thought they looked silly, but we had little choice.

“What the heck,” Simon joked. “They can be souvenirs.”

We ate our evening meal of chicken, chipped potatoes, beans, rice, and mixed fruit. As Zachary read aloud more e-mails of consolation, I began to fade.

I fell asleep wondering what might lie ahead for me. *O God, let me sleep soundly. And when I awake, put Kim at my side.*

Chapter 8

The Work of Thy Fingers

I know God is sovereign. What He wills is what comes to pass. Yet chaos reigned in my life. Was chaos His will for me?

I know God can bring beauty out of ashes. Could He summon beauty into my life? More important, *would* He?

When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which thou hast ordained; what is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him? For thou hast made him a little lower than the angels, and hast crowned him with glory and honor (Psalm 8:3–5).

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Thursday, August 5, 2010

Day five

I awoke to the sound of Paul rapping at my door. “Chris, come and have breakfast with me.” It was time to start my fifth day without Kim.

I washed and dressed. When I stepped onto the patio, Paul was sipping his half-milk African tea. We talked alone for a while, giving Zachary and Simon more opportunity to sleep.

“Well, Paul, now we have something in common. We’ve both had wives who were killed in Rwanda.”

He nodded.

“How long did you mourn her death?”

Paul took a moment to gather his thoughts. “I didn’t know she was dead until I returned to my house in Kigali. My neighbors said, ‘We saw the gang come to drag her away. None of them came back. They are all dead, and you know the Hutu militia man who led that group.’”

“You knew your wife’s killer?”

“Yes. He was the leader of the local militia—the *Interahamwe*—and I hated him. I wanted to chase him down and kill him. But somebody did that for me.”

“So he was never put on trial for his crimes?”

“No. When the genocide ended, a Tutsi soldier visited the village next to mine. He learned his whole family had been murdered—more than two hundred people. When he discovered that this militia man was being held in jail, he went to the jail house with his army rifle and killed this leader and twenty-five of his gang. The soldier was arrested and spent a couple of years in prison. He claimed temporary madness—which was true.

“After he was dead, I could not hate that Hutu killer anymore. But for a long time, whenever I looked at my two little sons, I saw the face of my dead wife. I was tormented by dreams about her. It was very difficult for a few years.”

“When did the grief pass?”

He smiled. “When I met Mary Jane.”

I knew this part of his story. Paul had met Mary Jane in 1996. She had returned to Rwanda after living most of her life as a refugee in Congo. They married in 1998. When I met Mary Jane in 2001, she was pregnant with their first child.

Paul's last comment sparked a thought. *Maybe the cure for my grief is remarriage.* I knew my romantic inclination and figured I would not remain single more than a few years. Yet I wondered, *How can I ever let loose of my lovely Kim?*

Simon appeared at the breakfast table and Zachary followed shortly after. We talked about our plans: a car ride to Butare and back to Kigali in one day, with lots of stops along the way. After coffee and cakes we left the guest house.

Our first visit was to the Kabgayi Catholic Cathedral. This was the oldest and largest Catholic church in Rwanda—the center of the faith. My Catholic son was delighted with the premises, especially the statuary of the Holy Family.

Like most religious structures in Rwanda, this one had a sad history. The church had at first supported the Tutsi ruling elite, but later backed the Hutu majority. During the 1994 genocide, thousands of Tutsis who had taken refuge there were killed, with some priests implicated in the slaughter. Later, some Hutus were killed, including three bishops. A stone memorial marked a mass grave beside the church.

We passed through an iron gate and visited the clinic where Kim had been treated five days earlier. I thanked all the personnel who were on hand and took [a group photo](#) of them. I told the clinic administrator how much I appreciated his staff and their efforts to keep Kim alive.

Our next stop was the point in the road where the accident had occurred. I wanted to explain events to my sons at the spot where they had happened. As is typical in the Rwandan bush, when we pulled over to the side of the road and showed our white faces, locals began to cluster around us. Pastor Paul explained to them the purpose of our stop. Some recognized me as the muzungu from the car crash.

I discovered a ten-inch gouge in the asphalt road where Franc's car dug into the pavement. I ran my fingers across the rough surface, feeling the indentation and the fine bits of collected debris. Simon picked up fragments of glass and plastic. He considered using them for a memorial to his mom.

The old man who'd cut me free from the seat belt walked up to me. With Paul interpreting, I bought the small kitchen knife he'd used for five thousand Rwandan franks—about nine dollars. The old man was delighted with the sale.

My eyes welled with tears when I saw Kim's spilt blood still staining the white roadside.

I pulled out my wallet, held up a five-thousand-frank note, and shouted in English, “I will give this to the first person who cleans up this blood.”

Pastor Paul, who was wiser than I, snatched the money from my hand and pushed it into his pocket. “You don’t want someone to do this for cash. You want someone to do it with a compassionate heart.”

He walked to the opposite side of the road, where several women stood gawking at the foreigners. “Please, will one of you be so kind as to wash away the blood from the road?”

Several walked away, but one woman ran to get a bucket and a brush. With care she scrubbed away the burgundy blood stains. When she was finished, Paul handed the surprised woman the five-thousand-frank note. The other women chased her and laughed.

We wandered around the crash scene for half an hour as I shared details with Zachary and Simon. “I was so grateful three vehicles pulled over to help us. The Rwandans are just amazing.”

Paul interrupted me. “You know, it’s a law in Rwanda that a motorist must stop if he sees an accident by the side of the road. He’s required to offer assistance. That’s why they stopped. They could be put in jail if they didn’t.”

I thanked Paul for his clarification, then continued my exposition.

Soon we were traveling down the road to the police station where Franc’s wreck had been impounded. In the silence of the drive, my mind wandered back to Rwanda’s Good Samaritan law. That sounded right to me. But then my thoughts took an odd twist.

Lord, does that law apply to You too? Father God, You saw Kim and me in distress by the side of road. You had the knowledge and power to intervene, but You just stood by and did nothing. You were not like the Good Samaritan. If You were a Rwandan citizen, you could be put in jail.

My mind pictured Imana (God) in the pink pajamas of a Rwandan prisoner.

After driving down a few back roads, we passed into an enclosure surrounded by barbed-wire fencing. We parked near Franc’s demolished Honda. A policeman met us and Paul made the introductions. I signed papers as Paul translated the words.

Then we examined the [car wreck](#). It was a wonder anyone had survived. The front roof was caved in and all the windows were blown out. I searched for my lost glasses, but to no avail.

I looked into the rear compartment and noticed a few water bottles scattered in the jumble. I pointed them out to Simon. “That’s what your mother was looking for just before the

crash.” I closed my eyes in pain. “The last words I heard your mom speak were the same words Jesus spoke from the cross: ‘I thirst.’”

I studied the backseats, which had slick leather protecting them. The rear seat belts were out of sight under the covers. I clenched my teeth, seething in rage toward Franc. Maybe Kim didn’t fasten her seatbelt because she couldn’t find it! Why did Franc install those vanity seat covers?

I leaned against the crumpled hood and wailed, “This is the worst thing that could ever happen in my life! What could possibly be worse?”

After a pause, Simon responded, “Dad, it could have been worse for us. Both Mom and you could have died in the accident.”

That thought had not occurred to me. I’d been too saturated with self-pity. To my distraught mind, it might have been better if we had died together in that car. At least then my earthly misery would have ended.

As we drove to Butare, I thanked Simon for his soft words. “You’re right. For my family’s sake, I’m glad I survived. Your pain would have doubled if I had died with your mom.”

In Butare we parked at our nonprofit headquarters. We were met by Jane and by Florida, the treasurer of the local board. They had prepared a meal for us. But it was awkward. Nobody knew what to say and no one had much of an appetite.

I was eager to show my sons the building under construction while it was still daylight. As we walked down the road, I was delighted to see a large metal sign that read “Kim Foreman Bible Institute.”

Paul grinned. “Yes, we put it up in a hurry.”

With the last rays of the sun, we three Foremans posed for snapshots in front of the freshly painted sign.

The plot of land was not much to see. A deep foundation was laid, but it was invisible beneath the soil. Twenty-four square concrete pillars stuck up from the ground, surrounded by a low stone wall, seventy feet square. I walked my sons through this meager skeleton and described the vision: just one hundred steps from the National University, a Christian outreach to the entire community, a resource and refuge to university students, all to the glory of God.

Rwandans had a curious custom to honor the passing of a loved one. When a family member died, survivors built [a large wood fire](#) in front of the house. Sometimes they sang,

sometimes they shared memories, and sometimes they sat in quietness until the fire burned down. That was the way we spent Thursday evening. Maybe one hundred people passed through the front yard, with the fire and smoke acting as a beacon. I greeted students, professors, neighbors, pastors, church goers, and local mamas. Everyone had a kind word to say about Kim.

As midnight approached I asked Paul if it would be wiser to spend the night in Butare or to return to Kigali. We decided to return. I bid farewell to the few souls who would keep vigil the entire night, then we headed north for the three-hour journey to Kigali. Paul drove and I kept him company, talking with him about funeral plans.

Near the halfway point, I asked, "Can we pause one more time at the place of the car crash?" A little after one a.m. Paul pulled to the roadside and switched off the car lights. The African sky was cloudless and moonless, making the blanket of stars stand out like glimmering points of laser light. The others walked around for a few moments, then shuffled back into the car. I asked for ten minutes alone.

The night was perfectly dark and utterly still. There was no traffic in sight and no gawking neighbors. I lay flat on my back where Kim's blood had been scrubbed away.

I had never seen so many stars in all my life, or maybe I had never noticed. The thought occurred to me that maybe I could name one pinprick of light after Kim. I knew there were astronomical agencies that would take your money and designate a star for your loved one. What might be an appropriate name for Kim's star?

My mind shifted. Just six nights earlier ... six cycles of stars coming and going ... the-six-days-of-creation ago ... Kim Hyun Deok was alive.

A stab in the heart. *God, why did You do this to me?*

Then I considered His heavens, the work of His fingers, the moon and the stars, which He set in place. And I wondered, *What am I that God is mindful of me, and what are my sons that He cares for them?*¹³

As I rose and dusted debris from my back, I knew I would be returning to Rwanda. Through Kim's death I would bring glory to the God who had created this canopy of stars.

Chapter 9

Bitterness Takes Root

Bitterness is an acid you ingest, thinking it will harm the other person, but all it does is poison your own soul.

In this world of both love and loss, grief is a fabric of life. But grief has an evil twin named *bitterness*, which seeks to pervert grief, to make it turn inward toward self rather than outward toward God.

The suffering of Christ flowed from His great love. As the prophets foretold, He was “a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief” (Isaiah 53:3). Yet in the midst of His grief, Christ never grew bitter. He forgave His tormentors, even from the cross.

Is there any good fruit that grows from a bitter root?

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Friday morning, August 6, 2010

Day six

In the days surrounding Kim's death, my world was too shattered to notice the anger boiling within me. I wanted to lash out. I wanted to hold someone responsible for the loss of my wife.

I did not blame God. I knew He was sovereign and I believed in my gut that Kim came from God and was returning to God. Rather than anger, my attitude was one of bewilderment: *Why, Lord? Why did You take the woman I love?*

I did not blame myself. My inward attitude was more of regret than guilt. *If only I had driven the car when Franc offered. If only I had grabbed the steering wheel before I shouted. If only I had insisted Kim wear her safety belt. If only ... if only ... if only.* At some level I felt derelict in my duty. I was Kim's husband—her protector, her soldier. And I had let her down.

So whom was I to blame? The single focus of my anger and bitterness became Franc Murenzi. *He* was the one driving the vehicle. *He* was the one who fell asleep at the wheel. If not for *him*, the lovely Kim would still be at my side.

I had not felt that way during the first moments after the car crash. When I saw Franc at the church clinic, my heart was filled with charity. I uttered under my breath, "Poor Franc. This must be the worst day of his life."

But over time something hardened within me. Like Cain, the firstborn of Adam, I became angry and my face darkened. Sin was crouching at my door and desired to have me.¹⁴ As Cain did, I opened the door to sin, and it leapt into my heart. Grief overpowered grace; sorrow overcame sense.

Blinded by rage, I felt one hundred percent justified in abandoning Franc as both colleague and friend. I felt a victim, entitled to revenge, and became indifferent to the damage I was causing—to Franc, to my ministry, and to the cause of Christ.



I awoke late on Friday morning to find Paul, David, and Jason sitting on the patio in animated conversation. They fell silent when they saw me approach.

“So, what were you all talking about?”

[Jason looked up at me.](#) “Chris, I just got back from Butare visiting Franc.”

My jaw tightened.

“He has such a good heart. He’s so sad and feels so guilty and repentant. He kept saying you were his friend and his father, and he doesn’t want to lose that relationship. He would do anything to change the situation and have you forgive him. He says he keeps seeing the film of the accident in his head. He knows he will probably have to leave CASA.”

I stared at Paul. “It’s up to you and David whether Franc has to leave CASA. But know this. If Franc stays, I go. I cannot work next to the man who was responsible for Kim’s death.”

“If you go, there is no more CASA,” Paul said. “And who will the real loser be? Please think about what you’re doing. You can demonstrate either compassion or judgment on Franc. Which will be a better witness for Jesus?”

“But Franc was negligent,” I railed. “He was more than careless; he was reckless. Don’t you think he should go to jail?”

Paul turned to Jason. “What would happen in the US in a case like this?”

“I’m no expert in the law, but I believe it would be up to Chris whether or not to press charges. If he did, it would involve a lawsuit, but probably not jail time. It’s not like Franc was drunk behind the wheel. It was an honest mistake. We’ve all gotten sleepy at the wheel and driven faster than we should.”

“But we haven’t all killed an innocent woman,” I raged.

David joined the conversation. “Reverend Chris, I can’t imagine what it’s like for you to lose Kim. But it’s still close to the day of her death. Sometimes it’s better to wait awhile after such an emotional event. Tears can blur your vision.”

Jason’s phone chimed. He looked at the number. “It’s Franc. Let me see what’s up.” He walked into a hallway.

“Oh, great!” I fumed. “I can’t get away from that guy.”

After a few minutes Jason returned and spoke to the three of us. “Franc said a police official just left his house. An investigation is under way. The detective gave him the statement Chris filed with the embassy. It says Franc didn’t have a driving permit, that he uses his political influence in Butare to skirt the law, and that he was driving recklessly. Franc says each of those charges is untrue. He also said he might have to go to prison.”

Jason looked directly at me. “I stayed with Franc yesterday. He told me he passed his driving exams, paid the fee, and was just waiting to get his license in the mail. He showed me his permit. He’s allowed to drive with a licensed driver. And Chris, you are licensed to drive.”

“But he drove the car that killed Kim,” I countered. “What part of *kill* don’t you understand?”

Jason turned to Paul. “Can Franc be put in jail if he wasn’t doing anything illegal?”

“Maybe. Sometimes police put people in jail just to protect them. If you kill someone by accident, the authorities can put you in prison for up to six months to make sure you’re not harmed. If you were, the government could be responsible for what happened to you.”

“But Chris won’t travel to Butare and hurt Franc. That’s crazy. He’s leaving for the States in two days.”

Paul pondered the question. “It’s a political issue now, because an American died and another American is pushing the investigation with the backing of the US embassy. The Rwandan authorities don’t want to go against the US.”

Jason rose from the table. “I’m going back to Butare to see Franc before he gets thrown in jail. And what about Franc’s wife and his two little girls? Paul, David—you talk to Chris. I’m out of here.”

They looked at me. I took a deep breath and spat out one more time. “You can keep Franc. But if he stays, then I go. Period. End of conversation.” As I stormed away, I heard the conversation switch to Kinyarwanda.

I paced the inner court of the guest house and met Simon as he emerged from the shower room.

“How are you doing this morning, Dad?”

“It’s another tough day. But I’m going for a walk outside. Do you want to join me?”

“No, I’ve got some things to do.”

I had felt the sting of rejection from Paul, David, and Jason. Now I felt it from Simon. I rushed from the guest house dejected and dazed. I walked past colorful shops and motorcycle taxis, past women balancing banana baskets on their heads and men gathered on street corners. A ragged boy approached me and spoke his stock phrase, “Give me money.” I strode past him and wondered why I had ever come to this God-forsaken country, a place that stole Kim’s life.

Sinking into the slough of despond, I whispered a prayer. Then an old hymn bubbled to

the surface. “This is my story; this is my song, praising my Savior all the day long.”

I struggled to recite the lyrics to myself. “Perfect submission, all is at rest. I in my Savior am happy and blest. Watching and waiting, looking above, filled with His goodness, lost in His love.”

Chris, I asked myself, is this your story? Is this your song?”

I sang the next lines in my head. “Angels descending bring from above echoes of mercy, whispers of love.”

O God, is this song Your “echo of mercy,” Your “whisper of love” to me?

I sang through the same lines a few more times, trying to come up with the title of the hymn. What was it?

Then it burst upon me. “[Blessed assurance, Jesus is mine](#). Oh, what a foretaste of glory divine! Heir of salvation, purchase of God, born of His Spirit, washed in His blood.”¹⁵

God, forgive me for my hard heart. Help me take baby steps in forgiving Franc.

Tears streamed down my face. Heads turned to see the spectacle of a muzungu walking, weeping, and singing to himself. I thanked Fanny J. Crosby for writing those lyrics, and I thanked God for bringing the hymn to my remembrance.

I rushed back to the guest house and scrubbed away my embarrassing tears.

Chapter 10

And Who Is My Neighbor?

Upon my first visit to East Africa, I was amazed to see the Rwandan people lavish affection on one another. They held hands, spoke with kindness, and appeared more hospitable than any of my fellow US citizens. I saw genuine love abounding within families and among friends. This puzzled me, because I understood Rwanda to be a land of terrible genocide.

Upon my second visit, I observed a group of young Americans performing a skit based on the parable of the Good Samaritan. Their leader figured Hutus and Tutsis did not know how to love and this story from the gospel of Luke might enlighten them. But then an epiphany came. This famous parable was not about love.

The lawyer who confronted Jesus did not ask, “And what is love?” He asked, “And who is my neighbor?”¹⁶ And that was the same question that confronted Rwandans in 1994. One million people died because the Hutu and the Tutsi tribes failed to practice the words of Jesus, “Go and do likewise,” in other words, “Become like the Samaritan. Show compassion to any person you find in your path.”

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Friday afternoon, August 6, 2010

Day six

Throughout my days of personal tragedy, the national tragedy of Rwanda never left my mind. In 1994 Rwanda [endured a brutal tribal genocide](#) lasting one hundred days. Nearly a million people were murdered and another million fled the country. Each of my Rwandan friends bore scars from this holocaust.

After washing my face and regaining my composure, I walked onto the courtyard. David and Paul were still locked in conversation. I asked them if they would stay awhile longer. I wanted Zachary and Simon to hear the stories of how they had survived the genocide.

The Story of Paul Gasigi

As we sat together in the quiet of mid-day, Paul began his story. “I was born in Tanzania. My parents escaped from Rwanda in 1958 when the country became independent and the Hutu majority began to persecute Tutsis. I learned English in a Baptist church. Several years later things seemed to get better in my homeland, so my family returned to Kigali.

“In 1994, I was a successful businessman working for a British petrol company. I had a private car, a wife, and two young sons. We enjoyed a comfortable life in Kigali. Although we attended church, God was a second priority to my money-making ambitions.

“I almost took my family to Uganda a few times, but that was dangerous for Tutsis to do. Besides, I saw UN troops in the streets of Kigali and jets flying overhead.

“After the president’s helicopter was shot down, roadblocks appeared in the streets. I told my wife to keep the kids in the house hoping things would get better, but they did not. Now it was too late to leave.

“Over the next few days, I saw gangs of youth with machetes break into homes and pull people into pickup trucks. When I saw Tutsi neighbors lying dead in their front yards, I knew it was time to flee.

“I found a kind neighbor with a Hutu identity card. She agreed to shelter my family while I went off alone to hide in the bush.

“I cannot tell you all of my experiences, but I will share this one. In the tall grass I found a group of runaways like myself. I walked with them for a while. They all had knives, and one

had a gun. We ran into a group of young killers drunk on banana beer. They called us *inyenzi*, cockroaches, and attacked us. We were too strong for them and chased them away.

“The leader of these runaways invited me to join them and fight the militia. I refused, saying I would not fight. He called me a coward and threatened me.

“I followed them from behind, just out of their sight. Soon the group was surrounded by the same killers, this time backed by soldiers. I heard shots and screams. I waited until all was quiet, then walked carefully down the path. I saw all twenty men massacred and mutilated. Their leader was a tall man. His legs were chopped off. That’s what they did to tall Tutsis.

“A killer in the distance shouted at me and I ran back into the bush. It was only by God’s grace that I did not fight and die with those men.

“After many days in the miserable rain, I returned to my house late at night and saw it had been ransacked and everything stolen. I visited my kind neighbor. She wept as she explained how the killers came to her home and discovered my wife. They abused her and took her away. The woman was able to protect my boys because she insisted they were her own, but she was so scared she demanded I take them back. I could not refuse.

“I took my two little boys and hid in a corner of our house. If we were going to die, I wanted it to be in my home.

“I can’t explain how we survived for the next month, in constant fear for our lives. I kept one chicken and we lived on a few eggs a day. I prayed hard.

“One day I heard intense fighting around my house. My boys and I hugged the concrete floor all night long. The next morning I discovered it was the Rwanda Patriotic Force sweeping through Kigali. It’s a miracle we lived through that battle.

“When I emerged from my ruined house, I saw many dead fighters from all sides. An RPF officer told me to take my kids and run north, behind the line of fighting. We were still in danger for several hours, but eventually I found hundreds of refugees streaming down the roads toward safety.

“After a week in a refugee camp, I returned to my house and began to clean up things. My car was in the garage, but it was burned and filled with bullet holes. The back tires were flat. I uncovered my hidden car key, and the engine started right up. Yes. It was so ugly none of the militia bothered to steal it. This was another miracle since I owned one of the few private cars in Kigali. With some help I managed to keep it running, and for a few months I earned money as a

taxi driver.

“One day, as I was driving my taxi, I saw an old neighbor of mine dressed in my dead wife’s Sunday clothes. I was positive the dress was hers. I stopped the car and walked toward her. She recognized me and ran into a doorway. When I looked into her eyes, she trembled. ‘In the name of Jesus, I forgive you,’ I said. Then I walked back to my car.

“I knew that if we wanted to reconcile as one Rwandan nation, I had to forgive this neighbor. At that moment, my heart began to heal”

Listening to Paul’s heart softened my own. He demonstrated the extraordinary gift of finding grace in the midst of trauma. I wished I could forgive like this Rwandan man.

The Story of David Nahayo

After hearing Paul’s story, Pastor David recited a well-known Rwandan proverb: “We say that Imana is the God of all earth. During the daytime Imana visits all nations, but every night He returns to Rwanda because my country is so beautiful.” David sighed. “Perhaps God was sleeping elsewhere for the one hundred nights of genocide.”

Then David told us his story. “I was an Anglican priest until a few years ago. Now I am just an unpaid helper. As a young leader in my church, I was able to study in England and see the wider world. In 1994, I was a parish priest at the Anglican Church here in Butare. I gained a reputation as one who helped all of my parishioners, Hutu, Tutsi, and Twa. Every person from every tribe was welcome in my church.

“For a while that was okay. The governor of Butare Province was able to keep the peace. But when he was deposed, the killing began. Gangs of youth searched out Tutsis and massacred them. Radio announcements urged ordinary citizens to kill their neighbors. Any Hutu who refused to kill was often murdered on the spot. Many people took part in the massacres for fear of being killed themselves. Because I refused to join this evil I was confined to my house. My own Hutu people cursed me and rejected me.

“When the RPF liberated Butare, I left my house. The city was filled with blood from one end to the other. Many of my parishioners, whom I knew well, were dead or had run away to Congo.

“I did everything I could to help the suffering. Perhaps I focused too much on compassion, because I got into trouble. I insisted more help was needed. But the church in Kigali

was very political and I lost my position. So I was rejected twice: once by my Hutu people and once by the church I love.”

David stared at the table. I knew he could tell more stories, but I respected his feelings and did not press.

The Story of Franc Murenzi

Following a brief silence, Zachary asked, “What did Franc do during the genocide?”

I recoiled at the mention of Franc’s name. But Pastor Paul seemed eager to share, perhaps as a way to nudge me toward reconciliation with Franc.

“Franc was born in Uganda,” Paul began. “His parents fled north at the big genocide of 1959.”

I interjected, “That was the same year President Kagame went to Uganda with his parents. There were large refugee camps of Rwandans along the Ugandan frontier, right?”

Paul nodded. “Franc grew up in such a camp. It had its own primitive schools, where Franc mastered the Rwandan language and culture. He was gifted enough to attend a Ugandan middle school, where he learned English. They had a quota, and it was tough for Rwandan kids to get in.”

I quipped, “But Franc never learned French in Uganda, and that gave him fits at the university.”

Paul ignored my interruption. “The refugee camps were fertile ground for recruiting soldiers into the RPF. Franc was too young to enlist, but he helped the army by gathering weapons and speaking out for a free Rwanda. He has always been a good speaker and preacher.”

Once more I interrupted. “Do you really think Franc was an army spy?”

“You’ll have to ask him that question,” Paul shot back.

I hijacked his story. “Franc told me once he was working in intelligence, not in uniform. He said he entered Kigali two days after the Interahamwe fled. He had to move bodies off the roadway to drive his vehicle through the city. The retreating paramilitary stripped everything of value from Kigali. He couldn’t even find an office pen. Franc said they had to rebuild the city from scratch.”

I paused to think about the tragic history of Rwanda etched in my friends. Paul had been

a refugee in Tanzania, Mary Jane in Congo, Franc in Uganda, and Immaculee in Burundi. David was the only Rwandan born in Rwanda. Each of my friends had suffered in ways beyond my comprehension, yet all of them had forgiven their persecutors.

My mind gravitated to the words of Jesus: “Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven.”¹⁷ *Am I a son of my Father in heaven?*

Simon stood. “Those are all interesting stories, but I’ve got to pick up my suit. Maybe I’ll wander around town for while.”

“I’ll join you,” Zachary said.

As Paul got up to leave, I asked, “Is everything ready for the funeral tomorrow?”

“I think so. We almost had a problem with the embalmers. There are international standards for transporting remains to the USA, and no undertakers in Rwanda have that qualification. We had to get some Ugandans to drive down from Kampala.”

I knew about the Ugandan embalmers. Zachary had filled me in on that averted crisis.

I needed to say one more thing to Paul before he left for the day. “Franc is welcome to attend the funeral. But I would appreciate it if all he did was express his sorrow that Kim died. I don’t plan to accuse Franc of anything at the funeral, and I don’t want him to defend himself either. If he admits responsibility for this accident, that could be the first step to reconciliation.”

Paul said he would contact Franc and relay that information to him.

With my two sons out on the town and my two friends gone for the night, I had some time to think. I thought about Franc. I wanted to continue my ministry in Rwanda, and build a legacy for Kim, but both were out of reach with Franc as an enemy. I recognized at some point I would have to forgive him and reconcile with him. But taking the first steps was so hard.

I thought about love. As an ambassador for Christ, there was no way I could marginalize love. It was central to the gospel. Did I love Franc? *Could* I love Franc? Then I realized I had no option. I *had* to love Franc. Not because of my identity—*who* I am—but because of my adoption: *whose* I am. I belong to Christ.

As I struggled to sleep, my mind returned to Matthew’s gospel and an illustration I had once preached from my pulpit in San Lorenzo. It went like this:

An angry man once entered the office of a pastor to seek counsel. He said, “Preacher, my wife just ran off with another man and I hate her.”

The preacher responded, “You’re a Christian, and in Ephesians the Bible says husbands should love their wives, not hate them.”

The man crossed his arms in defiance. “Yes, I’m a Christian, but she is no longer my wife. I divorced her yesterday.”

The preacher turned to the gospel of Luke. “It says here we should love our neighbor.”

“She moved to another state,” he retorted. “She’s not my neighbor; therefore, I am entitled to hate her.”

The preacher flipped forward a few pages. “Well, here in John it says Christians should love one another.”

“Can you believe she ran off with a Muslim man and gave up her faith? She’s no longer a sister in Christ.”

The preacher turned to the book of Job where it says we should care for strangers.

“She’s worse than a stranger,” the man shouted. “She hates me and I despise her. Preacher, don’t you get it?”

With a smile, the preacher said, “So she’s your sworn enemy, is she? Guess what? In Mathew 5:34 Jesus says, ‘Love your enemy’.”

That angry man had run out of excuses. And so had this one.

God, I surrender. You win. Like a little boy sputtering a forced apology, I choked out, “Franc, I forgive you fully.”

I wrapped a pillow around my head and tried to sleep, but visions of the coming funeral vexed my restless mind.

Chapter 11

Seventy Times Seven

Rooms that once held high school students, now held table upon table of moldering corpses encrusted in white lime. My lingering memory remains the pervasive odor: musky, chemical, with a whiff of decay.

Banners proclaimed “No to the deniers! No to the revisionists!” These genocide memorials dotted the Rwandan countryside.

The national motto of Rwanda is “Land of a Thousand Hills.” The advertizing slogan is “Home of the Mountain Gorilla.” But to many outsiders, this nation will ever remain the “Land of Horrific Genocide.”

“But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound” (Romans 5:20). How can a nation survive with one-tenth of its people complicit in the gruesome murder of another tenth? Only by grace. Only through reconciliation.

From my perspective, above all, Rwanda has become the “Land of Forgiveness.”

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Saturday, August 7, 2010

Day seven

Saturday came at last, the one-week anniversary of the accident, my final day in Rwanda and the day of Kim's funeral. I awoke at dawn and fussed about what to say and how to say it. The challenge was not in finding words, but in limiting them. More than anything, I wanted to honor my wife. I chafed because I knew the best way to honor the lovely Kim was to forgive the loathsome Franc.

Over breakfast, Paul handed me the funeral program. I scanned it. Paul would oversee the ceremony and I would give the final eulogy. David and Immaculee would speak on behalf of the local board. One representative from the morning mamas and one from the National University would tell of Kim's ministry in Rwanda. Simon and Zachary would pay tribute to their mom. Although he was not on the agenda, I planned to invite Franc Murenzi to say a few words of contrition if he happened to show up.

After breakfast I put on [the gray suit](#) Kim had selected for me. Simon stepped out of his room in his tailored suit and pointy shoes. Zachary joined us in a dark blue blazer. We all looked our best for this remarkable wife and mother.

We checked out of the guest house, leaving our travel bags at the front desk, and arrived at the Assembly of God church before nine. Zachary placed a collection of Kim photos near the front of the church. Jane and Florida, along with a few other women, served as greeters, wearing traditional Rwandan dress.

Julie arrived with a large, robust man. "Pastor Chris, let me introduce you to Ambassador Symington."

He pumped my hand like a politician. "Julie's filled me in on your wife's tragic death. I'm so sorry. Is it okay if I say a few words?"

I agreed, then introduced the ambassador to my sons. We added Ambassador Symington to the program.

The hearse pulled into the church parking lot just before ten. The Ugandan team of undertakers removed the casket and functioned as pall bearers during the service. Kim's casket was of Belgian design, dark brown with elaborate crosses on the sides. A panel of wood slid open to reveal a portrait-like view of Kim's face and shoulders behind a plate of Plexiglas.

O God, how I loved that woman.

At ten I led a solemn procession into the church, clutching a large African bouquet. [Zachary and Simon](#) followed with smaller bouquets. Behind us the Ugandans wheeled the casket down the center aisle. They maneuvered the casket onto the stage, to the left of the podium, behind the photo display. We placed our bouquets on the casket and took our seats in the front.

Pastor Paul opened with prayer. Then we sang praise songs, alternating lyrics in English and Kinyarwanda. The church filled to more than three hundred souls. Many sang with raised arms and tear-filled eyes.

With Paul interpreting, Pastor David read a letter he had composed:

Dear Sister Kim,

You will be greatly missed. You are leaving a big hole in our lives. Your love for the Lord, your academic abilities, and your compassionate heart for children have been a driving force for your many deeds.

You had little preparation for this voyage you are on. Yet we testify that you were always ready to meet your Creator and Redeemer.

Your love for Rwanda has impacted many lives. You will continue to be a shining light in our hearts and a Christian testimony to those who will hear us talking about you. May you rest in peace. I promise that we will come and see you.

One of the morning mamas led the church in a cheer. She directed everyone to stand. Then she bent at the waist very low. Wiggling her fingers, she simulated lifting heavy praise to the Lord. At the high point of her uplifted hands, she hopped and shouted, “Hallelujah!” She did this three times, each time with a louder praise response.

As Immaculee spoke, she held up [a large picture](#). She glanced at the photograph of Kim laughing with her family and wept uncontrollably. Her husband left his seat to stand by her side.

The songs, the words, and the sorrowful celebration attested to the esteem and affection in which her Rwandan friends held their Sister Kim.

Ambassador Symington took the stage next. “I haven’t seen such an outpouring of love since my own mother died.” He took a letter from his pocket and read a short poem dedicated to

his mother at her funeral.

Simon walked to the podium and spoke with measured resolve. “Thank you so much for being here to honor my mom in this way. As sad as this is for me, this was God’s time for my mother to go. She was right in the middle of doing what she liked to do best and what she was called to do.” He went on to thank all those in attendance, especially the ambassador.

Zachary spoke with a quiver in his voice. “Imagine that God appeared to my mother two weeks before her death and said to her, ‘My child Kim, I will be taking you home in fourteen days. Because you have led such an exemplary life I grant you to spend the next two weeks in any way you choose.’ I suspect my mom would have chosen to spend the time exactly as she had lived it, working in Africa, assisting the poor and hugging babies. She had no greater joy. That was my mother.”

Zachary introduced me as the last speaker. With my sons at my side for emotional support, I held up my Bible for all to see. “Let me read the words embossed on the front cover of this Bible. They are from Jeremiah 29:11. ‘For I know the plans I have for you declares the Lord, plans to prosper you and not harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.’¹⁸

“I bought this leather cover about three months ago at a discount store in California. I wasn’t fond of the featured verse. Jeremiah 29:11 had never been my favorite. I had always considered myself strong and not in need of encouraging verses, so I packed the cover thinking it might make a nice gift for one of my Rwandan friends.

“After a few days in Rwanda, I noticed my own Bible had become ragged. Dust was seeping in and papers were falling out. I put a large rubber band around it, but then remembered this book cover. I zipped my Bible in and it fit.

“I didn’t pay much attention to this cover until a week ago. When I recovered my possessions from Franc’s car, I fished out this Bible from the floorboard and read the first half, ‘I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord.’ I stopped reading and reminded myself that I had my plans and Kim had her plans, but God had different plans. We are not the authors of our own biographies. God designed the plan for Kim’s life and He designed the plan for my life. And our ways are not His ways.

“I am still waiting for God to fulfill the second half of this verse: ‘plans to prosper you and not harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.’”

As I spoke those words, I noticed Franc walk into the back of the church and sit down. I

pictured myself embracing Franc and forgiving him. Wouldn't that make great theater?

I described the car crash then shouted, "Is the driver of the car here? Franc, I invite you to come up front and say a few words."

With a white bandage stuck to his head, [Franc strolled forward](#) and took the microphone. He removed a paper from his pocket and read in English.

"I want to tell everyone here how sorry I am for the accident that resulted in the death of Mama Kim. But it was not my fault. I was very tired. We all were tired. I did have a driver's license at the time." Franc held up a piece of paper. "Pastor Chris said I did not have a license, but see. It was in the mail. I just got it yesterday."

Franc droned on and on defending himself. I looked down and said loud enough for my sons to hear, "No Franc. It's not supposed to go like this. You were supposed to apologize and then shut up. I want to forgive you, but you're making it really hard."

Franc prattled on. "Mama Kim was like a mother to me. As a matter of fact, I've lost two mamas. My own dear mother died in Uganda, and now Mama Kim has died too."

Simon winced. "He's trying to one-up us, making himself more of a victim than we are."

I fumed in silence.

After Franc completed his long-winded remarks, Zachary said, "Let's pray for one another." My sons put their hands on Franc's shoulders. They were better Christians than I was. I could not bear to touch that man. I stood behind my sons and placed my hands on their shoulders. Whatever charity I'd held toward Franc when the service began had vanished.

After Zachary said amen, both of my sons said loud enough for all to hear, "I forgive you, Franc."

Many in attendance gasped as these words were translated into their language. I kept my mouth shut.

After a final benediction, Paul invited guests to walk past the casket then proceed out the front door. Zachary went first. He made the sign of the cross and whispered a few words. Simon knelt, kissed the glass, and wept.

I followed. Through tears I spoke the words of the preacher, "To everything there is a season and a time for every purpose under heaven; a time to be born and a time to die." I added, "As you are now, soon I shall be."

We worked our way to the church entrance and shook hands with those who were

departing. Franc noticed the glower on my face and scooted past me without a handshake.

The Ugandans were impatient to leave. It was past noon and the casket was due to depart on Brussels Airways at four. After watching the hearse pull away, my sons and I climbed into a car and headed to a luncheon hosted by Immaculee. There I gave final hugs to my Rwandan friends.

Afterward, Paul drove Simon, Zachary and me to the guest house. I thanked Fred and Betsy for their kindness. “I hope to see you again someday.”

I opened my large suitcase to move some items into my carry-on. I pulled out a clear plastic bag containing the soiled clothes that hospital officials had removed from Kim when she entered intensive care. *What should I do with these?* I couldn’t just toss them, and I didn’t want to carry them back to America.

I handed the bag to Paul. “Please keep these in a safe place. If I ever return to Rwanda, I might want to do something special with them.”

He took the bag and put it into his luggage. “I will hold them for you until you return.”

Simon was staying in the guest house one more night, so I gave him a parting embrace. Then Pastor Paul drove Zachary and me to the airport.

I ran into Julie in the small airport cafe. She said she had just signed documents for the repatriation of Kim’s remains to the US. “I’m so glad to catch you here.” She handed me a bundle of embossed papers with “Report of the Death of an American Citizen Abroad” at the top.

“This is important,” Julie said. “You should use these documents in place of the Rwandan death certificate. You’ll need them for insurance and estate matters. There are twenty copies here. If you need more, just contact me.”

I read through the one-page report. Under “official cause of death” it stated, “Diffuse subarachnoid hemorrhage with brain edema secondary to motor vehicle accident.” Clutching the papers, I squeezed my eyes shut at this tangible token of the unimaginable.

Zachary thanked Julie for her support then chatted with her about her career in the State Department.

Paul and I sat sipping coffee and had a final conversation before my departure. We talked about [our ten-year friendship](#) and about the future of our organization.

“Pastor Chris,” he said, “you know how much I care about you and the good work you are doing in my country. But now my church is divided. Some people are on your side and some

are on Franc's side. So please listen to my words.

You know the Bible as well as I do. And you know that Jesus said we should forgive not seven times, but seventy times seven.¹⁹ If you want to return to Rwanda as a missionary and build a legacy for Kim in Rwanda, you must reconcile with Franc and accept him back on our mission team. You must learn to forgive like a Rwandan."

I slumped in my chair. I knew he was right. How could I proclaim the gospel in Rwanda and not demonstrate the gospel in my own life? His words imprinted upon my heart the need to forgive. But still, whenever Franc entered my mind, my face scowled with anger. "We'll see. Right now I don't want Franc as director. But maybe in the future ..."

Paul brightened. "Yes. We can do that. Maybe give Franc a few months off. I think he needs that anyway. We will talk more about this later." He seemed delighted that I had opened the door a crack.

Zachary and I were so caught up in our conversations we had to dash to board our plane. In Entebbe we lounged for a few hours, waiting for a connecting flight to Paris. Sitting across from my son in Uganda, I strained to fathom my new reality.

What wizard's alchemy has overtaken me? I entered Africa with a wife. Who has transformed her into a son? I lowered my head, staining my cheeks with tears.

Chapter 12

From Funeral to Funeral

As I left African airspace, I gazed upon the dark Mediterranean. Kim's absence was as enormous as the sky out my window, spreading from horizon to horizon; my sorrow was as deep as the sea below my feet.

“O that my grief were thoroughly weighed, and my calamity laid in the balances together! For now it would be heavier than the sand of the sea” (Job 6:2–3).

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Sunday, August 8, 2010

Day eight

Zachary and I landed at Charles De Gaulle Airport about six a.m. on Sunday. Our connecting flight to DC did not depart until noon. As we were landing, Zachary turned to me. “So Dad, what do you want to do for the next six hours?” A gleam of adventure shone from his face.

“I’m tired. I’m planning to just sit in the lobby and chill.”

“Come on, Dad. This is Paris! I know we’re here only a short time, but let’s get out and see something.”

I groaned. How could I refuse my enthusiastic son? “Okay. Maybe it will lift my spirits. But let’s make sure we don’t miss the flight to DC.”

After consulting maps and calculating distances, we determined to visit Notre Dame Cathedral. We hopped on the metro and headed out. I let Zachary do all the money changing, ticket buying, train catching, and street navigating. I followed him like a zombie on auto-pilot.

We spotted the spires of the cathedral just before seven. Walking through the plaza, we passed several homeless sleepers emerging from their blankets.

The huge front doors were locked. “Oh, well,” I said. “It looks like we’ll have to admire the outside architecture.” We walked around the perimeter, stopping every few steps to study the stone columns, stone saints, and stone gargoyles. The shops were still shuttered. I chuckled. “Too bad. I would’ve liked to eat breakfast at this Quasimodo Restaurant.”

After circling the cathedral, we returned to the plaza. I asked Zachary to pose for a [final picture](#) with the cathedral as a backdrop. As he did, I noticed a woman pushing open the front doors. Aha! Opening time was seven fifteen. Perfect.

We were blessed to be among a handful of visitors inside the cathedral on that Sunday morning. Without a crush of bodies, we strolled down the aisles, admiring the stained glass, ancient crypts, and vaulted ceiling. Zachary lit a candle for his mom. For a while we sat together on a wooden bench. I prayed, grieved, and thanked God that on this first Sunday after Kim’s death I was able to sit in such a magnificent church.

We returned to the airport and were soon on our way to the US. With the shift in time zones, we arrived at Dulles about two in the afternoon. My plan was to spend three nights with

Zachary in Alexandria, Virginia, then move on to California for Kim's American funeral.

Both my body and my mind existed in another time zone. I relinquished all cognitive activity to Zachary and asked him to manage our schedules. A friend of Zachary's picked us up at Dulles and I soon reclined fitfully on an air mattress in his spare room.



Monday, August 9, 2010

Day nine

The effects of jet lag, exhaustion, and grief played havoc with my biological clock. Unable to sleep, I took a shower about midnight and sat down at Zachary's computer. Since Internet connectivity had been limited in Africa, my inbox was filled with correspondence.

Al Thornell, head deacon at First Baptist Church, informed me that the Palma Ceia Church in Hayward was pleased to host Kim's funeral service on Saturday. I thanked Al for his efforts and asked him to settle the arrangements.

My brother, Frank, reported on my family in the Portland area. All three sisters would attend the funeral with their spouses and some children. He would oversee arrangements for travel and hotels. Frank agreed to serve as moderator.

Gary McCoy, Jason's father, checked out local cemeteries for me. He recommended Holy Angels Catholic Cemetery in Hayward. It was down the hill from the condo where Kim and I had lived together. I trusted Gary's judgment and went with his recommendation.

Gary told me the thirty-person Alleluia Choir—the university group Kim had invited to our church—was pleased to stay over one more day to sing at the funeral. How odd to think that Kim had personally arranged travel for the Korean choir that would sing at her own funeral.

When daylight peeked through the windows, I crawled back to bed. When I re-launched on Monday about noon, Zachary was awake, eating a meal. Was it breakfast, lunch, or supper? I joined him for a few pieces of toast.

Sitting at the kitchen table, I planned the next few days with Zachary. "There are a few things I'd like to do while I'm in town with you," I said. "Please contact your Aunt Hyun in Richmond and ask her to visit us. It's only a few hours away and I don't think she'll make it to

the funeral. We also need to visit Ethiopian Airlines to see about a refund on your mom's air fare. And give Simon a call. He should be home in a few hours. He needs to get round-trip tickets for himself, Dilia, and Lorencito."

Zachary said he would follow up on those requests then added, "I have to teach an LSAT class at five for Power Score. Do you want to come along? We're meeting at a hotel conference room not far from here."

It was something to fill the empty day, so I agreed. I finished composing [the obituary](#) that would run in the *San Francisco Chronicle* and the *Marin Independent Journal*. After Zachary reviewed it, I e-mailed it to the church secretary, who forwarded Kim's obituary for publication on Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday.

About four thirty I grabbed a water bottle, pulled open a door, and walked face-first into a dozen coat hangers. Zachary grinned. "Uh, that's the closet, Dad." I rubbed my nose and followed him through the front door without comment.

I sat in the back of the conference room, proud of my son's teaching prowess. At the first break, Zachary introduced me as his father. I said hello to the classroom of aspiring attorneys and then excused myself. "I'm going to the lobby for a cup of coffee." I turned to my left, walked several feet, opened a door, and walked into a storage closet. The class giggled as I did an about-face and nonchalantly strolled through the correct door into the lobby.

As I cradled my coffee cup and considered my two closet episodes, I caught a glimpse of myself: suspended in mid-air, like a freeze-frame photograph of a man who had slipped on a banana peel, arms flailing, mouth agape, not knowing how I got airborne, and not knowing how I would land.

After the second break, Zachary found me in the lobby. "Hey Dad, there's a Five Guys down the road. Would you mind getting us some burgers?" He tossed me the car keys. "During this last hour the students take a practice test. We can eat while I keep an eye on them."

Zachary gave me directions, which I carefully wrote down. I tried to follow them, but somehow I ended up in an express lane on the DC beltway. I drove twenty-five miles, past five exits, before I could turn around. I phoned Zachary from Five Guys to let him know about my latest misadventure.

A few minutes after nine, we ate burgers in an empty lobby. As it turned out this mealtime was not unfortunate, since our stomachs still functioned on Africa time.

We spent the transition from Monday to Tuesday watching TV. The headline news continued to dwell on the BP oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico. That didn't make sense to my heart.

What's the matter with Fox News? Don't they know? I wanted to scream, "The biggest news in the entire universe is that Kim Foreman died! What's with these knuckleheads?"

Before heading to my air mattress, I asked Zachary about the next day's plans.

"We can sleep until noon. Then we're going to Ethiopian Airlines. It's just down the road. I phoned Aunt Hyun and Uncle Michael. They plan to drive here in the evening."

Tossing and turning, I struggled to find peace through sleep.



Tuesday, August 10, 2010

Day ten

I slept on and off over the next several hours. In my waking moments I responded to e-mails from Africa and America. In my sleeping moments I processed the loss of Kim, which haunted my dreams.

I shook Zachary awake about noon. "I guess we better get started." He rolled onto his stomach and pushed himself up from bed. I paced outside in the humid August air as my son prepared for the day.

The American offices for Ethiopian Air were located about fifteen minutes away, on Washington Street in downtown Alexandria. Armed with ticket stubs, passports, and a death certificate, Zachary and I entered the building. I asked my son to speak on my behalf, because I knew I would break down if I discussed the details of Kim's death.

I stood behind Zachary as he explained the situation to a desk clerk. She asked us to wait because the manager was still out to lunch.

In the manager's private office, Zachary explained the situation once again. The man was sympathetic and returned as much money as he could to my credit card. We thanked him, and then drove back to Zachary's place.

There were more phone calls, e-mails, and conversations throughout the afternoon. I took a few long walks in Zachary's rural neighborhood. Simon phoned and confirmed that he and his

family would arrive in San Francisco on Thursday and return to New York on Sunday.

Just before dark, Hyun came with her husband, Mike. Kim had been the oldest of four girls and two boys. Hyun was now the oldest of five. We wept and talked. I gave her an African scarf that once belonged to Kim.

“How did the accident happen?” she asked. By coincidence Zachary owned a Honda CRV similar to Franc’s car. With the last rays of the summer sun, we walked to the car and I dramatized details of the car crash.

Hyun gave me a jar of her home-made kimchi, and after a final hug they drove away into the night. My wife had been the single tenuous link between my East Coast sister-in-law and me. I sensed the first dissolution of family bonds. I doubted I would ever lay eyes on these in-laws again.

My circadian rhythm was still out of whack. I was up half the night, sorting through mementos and working on the order of service for Kim’s American funeral. As I handled papers and clothing, fresh memories seared my soul. “Let my prayer come before thee: incline thine ear unto my cry; for my soul is full of troubles” (Psalm 88:2-3).



Wednesday, August 11, 2010

Day eleven

After a restful morning, Zachary’s housemate drove us to Dulles Airport. While flying across the US, weariness overcame me. I dreaded landing in Oakland. I knew I would feel the pain of Kim’s loss most acutely in the territory most familiar to us: our own town, our own church, our own home, our own bed.

Deacon Al met us at the airport. We embraced, wept, and talked. I had asked him to make my reintroduction to the church as gradual as possible. So when we arrived at my condo, I met only the five deacons of the church—no one else. I read them the affidavit I had prepared at the embassy in Kigali. I wanted to recite the horrible details just one time and let them pass the story on to the rest of the church. After the deacons laid hands on me and prayed, I was left alone with my son.

We had one more chore to do that day. In Kim's black Kia, Zachary drove me down the road to Holy Angels Catholic Cemetery. I talked with the representative and signed a dozen papers. We walked to the plot of ground that would cover the earthly remains of my lovely Kim. It was a double plot, intended to bear one long granite stone, inscribed with the names of wife and husband.

In the evening, Sorensen Brothers Mortuary contacted Zachary to tell him the African casket had arrived at the airport and was being transported to the funeral home. They verified a viewing time of midday on Friday.

For that first night back home, I asked Zachary to sleep in the king-size bed in the master bedroom. I settled down as best I could in the guest room.



Thursday, August 12, 2010

Day twelve

While I remained in the solitude of my home, Zachary drove his mom's car to the San Francisco Airport to pick up Simon, Dilia, and Lorenzo. Seeing my family together under such circumstances was a riddle of joy and sorrow: joy to celebrate the ones who were present, sorrow to mourn the one who was not.

Dilia and Lorenzo moved into the upstairs bedroom and rested. Zachary and Simon talked and planned.

I drove my Honda Insight to church and met with the leadership council. After an opening prayer, I spoke. "Thank you so much for your outpouring of love and support. I understand I am not in the mental place to make long-term decisions. I am planning to take this one step at a time. Let me talk about the next few days and nothing beyond.

"Kim's funeral will take place at Palma Ceia Church in Hayward at ten a.m. on Saturday. Sherry will be talking about that in a few minutes.

"Right after the funeral, Kim will be buried at Holy Angels Cemetery. I am embarrassed to ask this, but I need an advance on my salary. Kim had a life insurance policy, but that money will take another week to materialize. I've liquidated some investment funds, but the cash won't

be available for three days. I have given Al the contracts I signed with Holy Angels. The total cost is twenty-six thousand dollars. I don't have these funds available at this time. I need your help." I lowered my head into my arms.

Deacon Al spoke up. "I move the church write a check to Holy Angels for twenty-six thousand dollars and Pastor Chris repay whenever he is able, but before the end of the year." The trustee of the church seconded the motion and all twelve voted yes without further discussion.

[I thanked the church](#) for their kindness. Al wrote out a check and the treasurer co-signed it. "I have to go to Holy Angels right now so burial preparations can move forward. Please continue the meeting and discuss the funeral program with Sherry."

I drove to the cemetery, dropped off the check, then returned to the condo. Zachary had ordered pizza and I gobbled up a few cold slices.

I asked Simon to design the front and back cover of the funeral program. He spent the next several hours sitting at my computer, sorting through hundreds of pictures and creating art for his mom. Zachary borrowed the Kia and spent the evening visiting friends. I enjoyed a short time entertaining my little grandson.



Friday, August 13, 2010

Day thirteen

Friday was a blur of busyness. My brother, Frank, drove from Vancouver, Washington, with his wife, Lelia. My sister Jeanne arrived with her husband, Don, along with two of their six children. My sister Eileen and her husband, Terry, drove from Longview, Washington, accompanied by their two daughters and my sister Charlotte. They all stayed at local hotels.

Two of Kim's sisters and her two brothers arrived in the Bay Area and stayed with Korean friends in Mountain View. Kim's sister Nancy dropped by the condo about eleven with her son, Stephen. I thanked them for their financial support during this time of crisis. I asked Nancy to sort through Kim's Korean clothing and select one *hanbok* as her burial dress. I wanted my wife to go out of this world as a Korean.

Kim's body was available for viewing at Sorensen Brothers Mortuary from twelve to

three. Seven of us left the condo for the viewing. We spent an hour at the mortuary sitting in the front row, greeting the dozen or so people who dropped by to pay their respects. Kim was still dressed in the African attire she had acquired in Rwanda. Nancy gave the mortuary staff her Korean *hanbok* and asked them to dress her in this white silk gown.

I spent the afternoon in my church office, finalizing [the program](#) and printing out four hundred copies. Zachary and I dropped by Palma Ceia Church and Holy Angels Cemetery one more time to ensure all was in order for Saturday.

Just before going to bed, I tried on my gray suit—the one Kim chose for me. I found an old pair of Kim's black stretch pants. With scissors I sliced two inches off one cuff. This served as my black arm band. I located Kim's gold wedding band and pushed it down onto my right pinky finger. I made a vow to Kim that for the next year—as a sign of mourning—I would wear a wedding band on each hand.

I stared into the bathroom mirror, and for the first time, staring back at me, I recognized the likeness of a widowed man.

PART THREE
SEASON OF SORROW



“To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven:
... a time to mourn.”
(Ecclesiastes 3:1–2)

Chapter 13

We Give Her Back to You

We give her back to You, dear Lord, for You gave her to us. Yet as You did not lose Kim in giving her to us, so we have not lost her in her return to You. Not as the world gives, do You give, O Lover of Souls. What You give You do not take away, for what is Yours is ours always if we are Yours.

And life is eternal and love is immortal, and death is only a horizon. And a horizon is nothing save the limit of our sight. Lift us up strong Son of God, that we may see further. Cleanse our eyes that we may see more clearly. Draw us closer to You that we may know ourselves nearer to our beloved Kim, who is with You.

And while You prepare a place for us, prepare our hearts for that blessed place so that where Kim is and You are, we too may be. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.²⁰

These words were written on a [prayer card](#) and distributed at Kim's funeral.

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Saturday, August 14, 2010

Day fourteen

Zachary, Simon, Dilia, and Lorenzo were asleep in the condo when I awoke on Saturday morning. As the sun brightened my room, I sat in bed, reading my Bible and girding my soul for the difficult day ahead. In a few hours I would be looking into the sorrowful eyes of many who loved my late wife. With each initial encounter I anticipated a jab of pain in my heart.

After my family was up, fed, and dressed, we drove the two miles to Palma Ceia Baptist Church. Flanked by my two sons, I stood in the narthex and greeted people as they arrived.

I embraced my three sisters and one brother along with their spouses. I greeted my Korean in-laws, my church friends, Kim's university friends, and a host of people I had not seen in years.

At eight forty-five, a large black hearse containing the Belgian casket pulled up. Kim's two brothers, two nephews, and two sons served as pall bearers. They escorted the casket through the front doors and down the center aisle, then rested it at floor level in front of the pulpit.

Kim's face was visible through the Plexiglas panel, and mourners walked past the casket to pay final respects to this remarkable woman. Kim was arrayed in her white Korean *hanbok*, the same dress she had worn on our wedding day thirty-six years earlier.

The funeral service began at nine with choral music by the Alleluia Choir. By nine fifteen the church was filled with about four hundred people. The extended program called for six groups of Kim's family to take the platform and speak tributes.

First to appear would be Kim's academic family from San Francisco State, then her church family from First Baptist Church, followed by her American in-law family, her Korean family, her missionary family, and finally her immediate family. As moderator, Frank would introduce these groups as they walked onto the stage.

I sat in the front row next to Simon and Zachary. Lorenzo did not know what to make of the event. He squirmed on his mom's lap and occasionally toddled toward the platform. How Kim would have loved seeing him do that! On our final visit to New York City, Lorenzo could barely scoot on his tummy.

Frank opened the service by reading Kim's obituary and saying a prayer. A Korean friend

spoke a prayer in Kim's native language. Then the family groups made their way to the platform one by one.

The chair of Kim's university department spoke of her devotion to technology, to teaching, and to her students. One former student spoke of the extraordinary help Kim provided during his academic struggles. He asked how many from the audience were from SFSU and about thirty people stood.

Friends from my church then walked onto the stage. Al led in singing "[Love Lifted Me](#)," with Jean Johnson accompanying on piano. Three women from First Baptist Church paid tribute to Kim, speaking of her as a dear friend, a pastor's wife, and a mentor.

Before my sisters took the stage, Shauna—worship leader at First Baptist Church—introduced the next song,

"This hymn, '[It is Well with My Soul](#),' was written by Horatio G. Spafford. While crossing the Atlantic Ocean, all four of his daughters died in a collision with another ship. Spafford's wife survived and sent him a telegram that read, 'Saved alone.' Several weeks later, as Spafford's ship passed near the spot where his daughters died, he wrote the words to this song."

Shauna then sang:

When peace, like a river, attendeth my way,
When sorrows like sea billows roll;
Whatever my lot, Thou has taught me to say,
It is well, it is well, with my soul.^{[21](#)}

Jeanne, Charlotte, and Eileen expressed memories of their sister-in-law. Each reminisced about the time in 1974 when their brother brought home this "souvenir" from Korea. They remarked on how delighted they were to have this joyful Christian become a part of their family.

Lelia, who had accompanied us on two missionary journeys to Africa, spoke with fondness of those adventures with Kim.

My Korean in-laws then walked onto the stage. A soloist sang "Peace, Peace, Wonderful Peace" in Korean, then Kim's two sisters and two brothers each said a few words in honor of their oldest sister. Nancy could only stand and weep, so her son Stephen spoke on her behalf.

Two friends from my ordaining church in Tiburon sang a Swahili song called “*Bwana Bwa Mariki*.” Then three friends of Come and See Africa paid tribute to Kim for her missionary heart.

Pastor Rob spoke of her compassion for women. Tabitha mentioned her love for children. Amon, our friend from Rwanda who’d relocated to Portland, spoke of Kim’s big heart for students at the National University of Rwanda.

With his wife and son at his side, [Simon stepped onto the stage](#). He spoke with tenderness and passion. “There was a time when I dropped out of college and slept on the streets of Portland. My life was at a low point, and I was doing every destructive thing imaginable. My dad tried to reason with me, but he said at twenty years old it was my life to live.

“But Mom would not let me go. She knew my artistic bent and pasted together a paper collage for me. As she put it into my hands, she pled, ‘Simon, please come home. I will help you get through San Francisco State. God has a plan for your life.’

“Her love touched me where Dad’s words could not penetrate. I agreed to return to Mill Valley, attend university, and live a life of significance. I graduated from San Francisco State, went on to art school in New York City, and now have this beautiful wife and son. Without the compassion and determination of my mother, I don’t know if I would even be alive today.”

Zachary thanked all who came out to honor his mother. “My family had this practice of making New Year’s resolutions based on the way Jesus grew from child to adult. In the gospel of Luke we read that Jesus increased mentally, spiritually, physically, and socially.²² Mom and I challenged each other last January.”

Zachary pulled a crumpled paper from his pocket and read his mother’s resolutions for 2010. Holding back tears, he shared how many pounds she would lose, how many books she would read, how many friends she would make, and how she would strive to be more like Jesus. In conclusion he said, “And now she is with Jesus.”

It was past eleven when I stood at the podium. As I did at the funeral in Kigali, I held up my Bible and read the words from Jeremiah printed on the leather cover: “For I know the plans I have for you declares the Lord, plans to prosper you and not harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.” I referred to the plans I had made: retirement, travel, and a continuing life with Kim. I talked of the plans Kim had made: working for seven more years and world travel. But these were not God’s plans.

I spoke of human life as a transient moment. “On Kim’s gravestone it will read 1951 dash 2010, a birth year and a death year connected by a small horizontal stroke signifying fifty-nine years of life.

“What are you doing with your dash? What are you doing of eternal significance? Today, as we heard many people pay tribute to Kim, I was amazed at the eternal consequences of her life—of her involvement at her university, of her compassion with her family, and of her evangelism in Rwanda.

“Kim’s life was cut short; Yet in the years God gave her, she accomplished much because she loved much. I have no doubt that Kim Hyun Deok will hear those words spoken by her heavenly Father, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!’”²³

After my tribute, there were benedictions in English and in Korean. Then the family departed, as the congregation sang “Amazing Grace.”

I shook hands with dozens of people as they ambled through the exit.

A professor from the Baptist seminary remarked, “This was the [most amazing funeral](#) I have ever seen, and, believe me, I’ve seen a lot of them. Kim was really a special person.”

As sad as that day was, I felt uplifted. The burden of the funeral was behind me, Kim was honored, and the gospel had been preached.

My Korean family provided a lunchtime buffet in the church social hall and many lingered to eat and share memories of Kim.

As people started leaving the church, I called for a business meeting of Come and See Africa. It was an odd thing to do, but I felt it was necessary because I was stepping down as board president and Kim, the treasurer, had died. Craig Singleton, CASA vice president, was present, along with the Texas contingent of Cody Winkler, board secretary, his father Rob, and Tabitha. They would only be in California for one day, so I seized the moment to establish the future of CASA. My sons, brother, and sisters also attended.

In a small classroom, I called the meeting to order and prayed for God’s guidance. Then I announced, “I must step down as president of CASA. I might return, but I don’t know at this time. I cannot be impartial about events in Rwanda—especially about the future of Franc Murenzi.

“Pastor Paul and the local board of Come and See Rwanda fired Franc last week from his

position as director. I'm the one who insisted on this since Franc was responsible for Kim's death. Some of you may disagree, but I believe this is justice. I am not seeking revenge. In any case, I am stepping down and placing this situation in your hands.

"I have talked with my brother Frank, and he has agreed to serve as president of CASA." I paused. "I hereby move that Frank Foreman become president, and upon his acceptance that I resign and turn these proceedings over to him."

Craig, Cody, and I voted in favor of this motion and Frank became president of CASA. In quick order Simon was elected vice president—as the voice of his mother. Cody was elected secretary, and Tabitha was elected treasurer. I agreed to stay on as director, overseeing day-to-day activities.

I had hoped the meeting would end at that point but President Frank asked, "Are there any questions before we adjourn?"

Pastor Rob jumped to his feet. "Yes. I think we should reinstate Franc as director."

I heard a few *amens*.

Rob added, "It wasn't right for us to fire him. He didn't do anything wrong."

Frank looked my way. I felt my pulse quicken.

Through gritted teeth, I said, "My wife is dead—that's d-e-a-d. She hasn't even been put in the ground yet. Franc was recklessly driving the car that killed her."

A few others spoke up, saying I should forgive Franc and he should be immediately reinstated. I felt beaten, abused, and betrayed. Why did everyone shower sympathy on poor fired Franc but no one gave respect to poor widowed Chris?

Simon stood to defend me. He debated Rob and Cody with hot words. Most in the room kept quiet. Finally Frank intervened. "We cannot re-instate Franc, because we did not fire him. That was an action of the local board. I will e-mail Paul and talk with him about this. I believe Franc should be re-hired at some point, but we have to be sensitive to my brother."

With that, the meeting adjourned after fifteen minutes. Some continued the discussion in the classroom, but I went outside, pacing the sidewalk to settle my mind.

My head was still swimming when Zachary drove me to Holy Angels Cemetery. A police escort guided our long convoy east on Tennyson, then north on Mission Boulevard.

About fifty people stood on the cemetery lawn and another dozen sat in folding chairs under a canopy. Loose dirt and flower arrangements surrounded a neat rectangular hole. Many

bouquets were carried from the church to the graveside. Armanak, the cemetery representative, stood at the grave site along with two workmen who would complete the burial process.

The service was scheduled to begin at twelve thirty, but started about fifteen minutes late. Frank opened with a Scripture reading from 1 Corinthians chapter 15.

I spoke a few more words about Kim, then described the car accident two Saturdays earlier and the Kigali funeral the previous Saturday. Kim's youngest sister sang a Korean folk song and Simon prayed.

The six pall bearers carried the casket from the hearse onto its platform above the grave. As workers lowered the wooden box into the ground, Zachary chanted the Latin hymn "[*In Paradisum*](#)":

May angels lead you into paradise;
Upon your arrival, may the martyrs receive you
And lead you to the holy city of Jerusalem.
May the ranks of angels receive you,
And with Lazarus, once a poor man,
May you have eternal rest."^{[24](#)}

In the distance Mary Nell sounded "Taps" on the trumpet.

Armanak invited mourners to drop one of the many flowers onto the casket now dusted with accidental soil. Mourners plucked them from the arrangements and walked by the open grave. One by one they dropped flowers onto the casket.

Simon put a lily in Lorenzo's hand and, crouching behind him, held him by his belt. Lorenzo peered over the side of the pit, but held his fist tight. His mom walked to his side and opened his fingers. Lorenzo's white petals joined the others as a final gesture of love for his grandmother.

When the workers rose to complete the burial, Armanak announced the conclusion of the ceremony and thanked the people for their attendance. I walked to car with Simon, Dilia, and Lorenzo. As I drove away, I saw shovels of earth arcing into the pit. It reminded me of Genesis 3:14: "For dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return."



After the burial, my extended family gathered at my condo. About twenty relatives jammed into my living room and flooded up the stairwell. We talked, joked, and reminisced about Kim.

My nephew's daughter asked me about my antique Victrola.

I said, "Do you want to hear what I played a few days ago?" I pulled out a scratchy 78 rpm record called "[Laugh, Clown, Laugh](#),"²⁵ cranked the handle, and put the steel needle onto the hard vinyl.

She listened to the lyrics. "That's so sad ... about life being a stage."

"Well, it is, don't you think? We're just players with our exits and entrances. Kim's exit came early and unexpected."

Eileen was listening in and asked me to play something cheerful. I chose "I Don't Want Her, You Can Have Her. [She's Too Fat for Me](#)."²⁶ This song spanned the generations. The young people laughed at the outrageous lyrics and the old people sang along with Arthur Godfrey.

After a few more silly 78s, my oldest sister directed me, Zachary, and Simon to stand in the middle of the room for a time of prayer.

We moved the coffee table aside and with heads bowed, my four siblings and four in-laws [laid hands on the three of us](#).

Nieces, nephews, and others squeezed around. With arms extended everyone joined in with a loud group prayer. My sister Charlotte prayed in tongues.

I felt the presence of God and rejoiced that He had given me such a caring family.

After several minutes, the place was quiet again. Only my sons remained with Dilia and Lorenzo. I put on comfortable clothes and lay on my bed, stretching out my tired back. So many things had happened that day, yet my mind kept reverting to the ugly scene in the small classroom.

God, what do you expect of me? Am I being disloyal to Kim if I forgive Franc? Rob said Franc hadn't done anything wrong. But hold on! If that's correct, then there's nothing to forgive. In fact, wasn't Rob asking me to forget rather than to forgive?

The August afternoon turned hot, and my four houseguests put on swim suits and plunged into the condo pool. I continued to rest.

About six o'clock my Korean in-laws dropped by for a final goodbye. Nancy came with her son, Stephen. Pam and my two brothers-in-law dropped by with their families.

This was the first time any of them had visited the condo. I considered, *this convention of Koreans could not have happened while Kim was alive. It took her death to draw her diverse family into her living space.* Was this the nature of funerals? Why did people drop by only after the guest of honor had passed away?

My in-laws stayed only long enough to be polite. Language differences barred us from deeper communion. I gave the two brothers and two sisters each something of Kim's as a remembrance of their eldest sister. They apologized for their brief stay and departed.

Nancy and Stephen lingered a while longer as my sons conversed with their English-speaking cousin.

I crawled into bed about ten, leaving Zachary and Simon in front of the downstairs TV and Dilia and Lorenzo asleep in the upstairs bedroom. My mind continued to swim in the muddy waters of a turbulent day.

Chapter 14

Dark Days

As a conscientious preacher, I kept a detailed ledger of all my sermons at First Baptist Church. My ten-page spreadsheet showed that I had preached my 205th message on Sunday, July 18, 2010. The sermon was titled “A Ripe Harvest.”

Kim and I left the next morning as harvesters in Africa.

My next sermon occurred on Sunday, September 12. It was titled “The Parable of the Unmerciful Servant.” In the empty space of seven weeks, no sermon titles were listed. Instead, in bold letters, I filled in “DARK DAYS.”

“I am the man that hath seen affliction by the rod of his wrath. He hath led me, and brought me into darkness, but not into light. Surely against me is he turned; he turneth his hand against me all the day. He hath set me in dark places” (Lamentations 3:1–3, 6).

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Sunday, August 15, 2010

Day fifteen

I awoke on Sunday with Saturday still reverberating in my head. My thoughts alternated between a memorable funeral and a painful board meeting. I kept these thoughts to myself as my house guests and I prepared to attend church. No doubt I would meet friends who had not attended Kim's funeral. Once more, I prepared my heart for a piercing.

Most of my family had left town on Saturday, but Frank, Lelia, Jeanne, and Don sat with me. The director of the Baptist association filled in for me. Before he spoke, I took the pulpit to thank the church for their kindness and support. The director spoke words of affirmation and comfort to me, but they were lost on an agitated soul. Once I had taken my seat in the congregation, my thoughts wandered a million miles away.

Eight of us drove to a local restaurant for lunch. While we were eating, someone broke a side window on my Honda Insight and stole Zachary's camera. In a perverse way, this robbery was reassuring. The river of life continued to flow even after Kim's death—the good water and the bad.

After the meal, Zachary took the Kia and dropped off Simon and his family at the airport. He then headed to Stanford to meet up with friends.

After completing a police report, I duct-taped my car window and drove to the condo. I spent the afternoon in pleasant conversation with my brother and sister. We left the condo a few minutes before six o'clock to attend a church service set aside to honor Kim.

Before closing the condo door, I gathered ten of Kim's fancy silk scarves. My intent was to reward each woman who attended this testimonial with a special remembrance. The number was perfect. Sherry wept as she received her gift. "I can still detect the fragrance of Kim on this scarf."

My sister Jeanne stood and spoke of the time in 2006 when she accompanied Kim and me to Rwanda. "We went to the university stadium where Chris was teaching. The students weren't singing very loud. Kim got up from the front row and cheered them on to sing and worship with fervor. Kim was Chris's cheerleader and a wonderful pastor's wife, his true helpmate."

I bid farewell to my brother and sister and drove to my empty condo. Exhausted, I slept throughout the night, not hearing Zach's return in the wee hours.



Monday, August 16, 2010

Day sixteen

On Monday morning Zachary and I packed our bags and I drove my damaged Honda to church. While we were in Virginia over the next eight days, Deacon Al agreed to replace the broken glass and park the car in the church lot.

As Al drove us to SFO, I stared out his truck window. This was the same glass I'd peered through thirty-four days earlier when Kim was alive. Why did these shadows of sorrow continue to haunt my mind? Why was her presence so tangible fifteen days after her death?

I tried to watch movies on the transcontinental flight, but my thoughts remained fixed on the CASA business meeting. Perhaps Pastor Rob was right about my need to forgive Franc. Maybe I just lacked the humility to receive his blunt words. But couldn't he appreciate that forgiveness was a journey that required time?

When we arrived at Dulles, Zachary's housemate picked us up and drove us to his home. I sat at Zach's computer, writing down my thoughts, until two in the morning. My inner clock was still running on West Coast time.



Tuesday, August 17, 2010

Day seventeen

Abiding in the presence of my son was a healing balm to my grieving heart. And it made more sense for me to stay in Virginia than for him to stay in California. I knew he would be away much of the time, yet I welcomed the opportunity to put another eight days' distance between Kim's death and the ever-advancing calendar.

Time was healing my wounds, but raw sores can produce an ugly pus. On Tuesday I sent out a flurry of harsh e-mails, lashing out at Cody, Rob, and Jason, acting out my grief.

“Miserable comforters are ye all,” I scolded with the voice of Job. “Shall vain words have an end? I also could speak as ye do: if your soul were in my soul’s stead, I could heap up words against you, and shake mine head at you” (Job 16:2–4).

My brother and I were long-time readers of C. S. Lewis. I e-mailed him this quote: “Does loving your enemy mean not punishing him? No, for loving myself does not mean I ought not subject myself to punishment—even to death. If one had committed a murder, the right Christian thing to do would be to give yourself up to the police and be hanged.”²⁷

“Frank,” I concluded, “the right Christian thing for Franc Murenzi to do is to submit himself to the jailers.”



Wednesday, August 18, 2010

Day eighteen

On Wednesday I went with my son to a hotel conference room, where he taught a Power Score class. I sat in the back row for a while, then relocated to the lobby.

As I pondered my unforgiveness predicament, I divided my community into two teams. I described one team as “advocates” and the other as “adversaries.” I could only count a few advocates who supported my position against Franc. Topping the list were Simon, my lion-hearted champion, and Zachary, who was always in my corner. In celebration of my sons, I sent this e-mail to my family:

I appreciate Zachary and Simon so much because they are the kind of sons spoken about in Genesis 9:23. When Noah was in sin and drunk, his bad son Ham pointed out his nakedness and mocked him. Shem and Japheth “took a garment, and laid it upon both their shoulders, and went backward, and covered the nakedness of their father; and their faces were backward, and they saw not their father’s nakedness.” That is the love of true sons.

My brother Frank was hard to place on a team, but for a while I viewed him as an adversary. He expected me to embrace Franc, and he described my unforgiveness as a “grave moral lapse.”

Of course Rob, Cody, Tabitha, and Jason were all on the side of poor fired Franc.

My sisters puzzled me. They remained quiet when I ranted, “Franc should go to jail.” They stood by me in my grief, yet they appeared to take the side of forgiveness.

Among my African friends, Paul seemed sympathetic to my cause, but David and Immaculee wanted Franc to stay with CASA. Did Kim’s death mean nothing to them? What did they see that I was missing?



Thursday, August 19, 2010

Day nineteen

On Thursday morning Zachary and I traveled down the interstate to the Civil War site of Manassas to view a battlefield reenactment. This was a great distraction to my troubled mind.

The main speaker, sitting on horseback, described the Manassas battle repeatedly using the word *Calvary* instead of *cavalry*. I was amused at first, but soon became annoyed. I mused that if Calvary had come to the battlefield, maybe the cavalry would have been unnecessary.

In the evening I received this e-mail from my brother:

I appreciate the loyalty of you two sons. Zachary and Simon are doing as they ought. They are embracing you and not judging you.

I recognized your words from Lewis, but here’s what he says in *Reflections on the Psalms*: “We forgive, we mortify our resentment; a week later some chain of thought carries us back to the original offence and we discover the old resentment blazing away as if nothing had been done about it at all. We need to forgive our brother seventy times seven not only for 490 offences but for one offence.”²⁸

“Fighting Lewis with Lewis.” Was that fair? More than that, my brother was repeating words that Pastor Paul had spoken to me a few weeks earlier. I had already forgiven Franc seven

times—each time thinking I had banished resentment for good. Yet unforgiveness bounced back every time.

O Lord, do I really have to forgive Franc four hundred ninety times?



Friday, August 20, 2010

Day twenty

On Friday Zachary and I drove ninety minutes north to a large mall in Christiana, Delaware, where we met up with Simon and Lorenzo.

We headed to the Apple Store for some retail therapy. I wanted to compensate for our catastrophic loss in some way. I wanted to mark a new beginning for us three survivors.

Although it cost well over a thousand dollars, I purchased new Apple iPhones for both Simon and Zachary, and I bought the new iPad for myself. Then we walked next door and signed up with AT&T as our carrier.

In order to cancel Kim's cell phone contract without penalty, I needed to provide proof of her death to AT&T. Zachary did the talking. I could not bear the conversation.

After a few moments of enjoying our new toys, we couldn't believe how we had ever survived without them.



Saturday, August 21, 2010

Day twenty-one

I spent Saturday cloistered in my room, pondering my heritage. Earlier in life I had conducted genealogical research which suggested that I am one-eighth Jewish. My father's birth surname was "Formanski." There were hints that my father's father's father abandoned his traditions when he married my Catholic great grandmother.

Had I been behaving like my ancestor Jacob, whose name meant "trickster"? Was I now

in crisis and becoming more like Israel?

Jacob was left alone; and there wrestled a man with him until the breaking of the day. And he said unto him, “What is thy name?” And he said, “Jacob”. And he said, “Thy name shall be called no more Jacob, but Israel: for as a prince hast thou power with God and with men, and hast prevailed” (Genesis 32:24, 27, 28).

Like Jacob, I wrestled with God all day long.

“He killed my wife!” I thundered.

Show compassion, came the gentle answer. *Look at the car crash through Franc’s eyes.*

“But You didn’t see Kim crumpled by the roadside!”

Oh, yes. I did. I also kept My hand on you the whole time. I wept at your side.

“But why did You take Kim from me?”

She was never yours to begin with. She came from Me. She lived for Me. Now she has returned to Me.

“But it’s so hard!”

Obedience and trust are always hard.

I knew I must forgive Franc—to rid myself of all resentment. To accomplish that, I needed to look at the car crash through Franc’s eyes.

“Okay, God. I admit Franc loved Kim like a mother and he would never intentionally do anything to harm her. Franc was exhausted because he was working for Your gospel, and he showed genuine remorse about the accident. I know he would do anything to undo Kim’s death. I also admit that our times are in Your hands.”

I confessed that my willful unforgiveness had produced a bigger stain on my soul than Franc’s lapse of attention had produced on his. Certainly the consequences of his actions were more catastrophic, but God looks at the heart, and mine was stained with bitterness. “Lord,” I admitted, “mine is the only heart for which I am responsible. Give me strength to change it.”

By evening I could see myself as a self-righteous blowhard. It was time to contact my African son to seek his forgiveness. On Saturday, August 20, I sent him the following e-mail:

It has been exactly three weeks since the tragic events of July 31. It's time for us to talk one-on-one. I'm sorry it has taken so long. Please forgive me.

You have been like a Rwandan son to me. You are a man of integrity and competence. I apologize for abandoning you and for the pain I have caused you and your family. My grief made me blind.

CASA will only succeed if you and I are able to put aside our differences, reconcile in truth, and work side by side. The vision is great, but the work depends on the two of us working together.

July 31, 2010, will always be a burning memory for both of us. Part of my road to recovery is to build a Bible school to honor Kim. I would like you to partner with me on that.

It took twenty-one days for my heart to heal to the point where I could reach out to Franc. It wasn't easy. Even as I sent off that e-mail, I knew God had further surgery to do in my hardened heart.

Forgiveness is not for sissies.



Sunday, August 22, 2010

Day twenty-two

On Sunday morning, I wanted to attend a Baptist church. According to my new iPad, the nearest was Mount Pleasant Baptist, about a mile down the road. While Zachary slept in, I grabbed my Bible and left the house.

As I walked, I ruminated about the marathon wrestling match I'd had with God the day before. I had learned that forgiving meant forsaking the right to revenge, to not even take the first thought in that direction.

Okay, Lord, I got it.

I thought about the names Jacob and Israel and their meanings. Then I considered my own name. *Christopher* means "bearer of Christ." *Foreman* means "chief among them." Was that my name: Chief-among-the-bearers-of-Christ? Was this a revelation of my name?

I didn't hear much of the sermon, but I sang the old hymns with gusto. After the service, kind people asked me questions. They surely saw evidence of tears. But all I chose to say was, "I'm here visiting my son." I knew if I tried to express more, I would be smothered in sorrow. I did not wish to expose my pain to strangers I would never see again. Was this a sign of my nagging pride?

When I returned home, Zachary was still snoozing. My iPad chimed with a response from Franc.

It is always good to hear from you, Mzee. For weeks I have been praying to get a chance to talk, but even now it is hard to know which words to write after you gave me permission. I still pray we are going to have more grace and hope and less grief and pain. Physically I still feel a little bit dizzy and the areas around the head injury still seem sensitive, but this is not my worry. I am relieved that you have forgiven me.

Our conversation had begun. Would it lead to a full reconciliation?

I spent the rest of Sunday packing bags. Zachary and I went to Chicago Style Pizza for dinner. He told me one more time how much he appreciated his new iPhone.

"Thank your mom," I said.



Monday, August 23, 2010

Day twenty-three

In the early morning, Zachary drove me to the airport, where I gave him a big hug. "Thanks for putting up with me. I know it wasn't easy for you."

I arrived in San Francisco about two p.m., collected my luggage, and stepped onto a BART train. About an hour later I stepped off at Bayfair in San Leandro. I phoned Sherry, and she drove the few blocks to pick me up.

I found my Honda in the church lot. The replacement glass looked flawless. The bill attached to the steering wheel read \$342.

I chatted with Sherry for a few moments, then headed to my condo in Hayward. As I

drew closer, waves of grief washed over me. Every familiar street brought a lump to my throat.

I opened the front door, breathing in the stale air. For the first time after twenty-three days, I was alone with no family or friends to support me. My only companion was sorrow. I opened all the windows.

It was eight o'clock on the East Coast and I was exhausted. I slept a few hours and awoke after dark. Hungry, I rummaged for food. After filling myself with a cup of ramen noodles, I went back to bed.

That's when the dreams of Kim began.

Chapter 15

Awakening with Empty Arms

I did not dream of Kim while I was in Africa. Perhaps my torrent of tears extinguished the flame of my imagination. But my dreams burst forth when I slept alone in the bed we had shared for thirty-six years.

“[It will be] as when a hungry man dreams that he is eating, but he awakens, and his hunger remains; as when a thirsty man dreams that he is drinking, but he awakens faint, with his thirst unquenched” (Isaiah 29:8 NIV). It will be as when a widowed man dreams of his deceased wife but he awakens with empty arms, compounding his sorrow.

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August 24-28, 2010

Week four

Kim not only inhabited my days, she haunted my nights. My dreamscape was her playground. My nighttime dreams seemed to consist of random re-combinations of daytime events. As I meditated upon a dream, I often recognized a trigger that had passed through my mind in previous days.

For example, shortly after I returned to the States I saw an unusual dog with a red ribbon on its tail. The impression was strong but fleeting. A few days later, I dreamed about a red ribbon attached to one of Kim's toes as I kept vigil by her deathbed. I awoke struggling to remember the source of the red ribbon. I finally did.

Sometimes in my dreams, familiar locations and objects re-configured in bizarre ways. Yet inside my dream, the most outlandish visuals did not raise an eyebrow. Only upon awakened reflection did I recognize them as bizarre.

How could those small earthworms follow me into my old house, grow to human size, sprout hands, and play Scrabble with Kim and me? It didn't seem odd at the time. The most remarkable feature of a dream is that the most remarkable features do not appear remarkable at all.

I have concluded that I didn't remember actual dream events at all. I remembered remembering them. If I wished to retain my memory of dream details, I had to make a deliberate effort to re-think the dream while still in bed. Otherwise it passed into oblivion by the time I brushed my teeth.

When I first awoke after dreams of Kim, I tried to deposit four or five visuals into my memory bank. Often I recited the dream narrative throughout the day.

I was a lucid dreamer; that is, I had a conscious perception of my dream state while dreaming. Often this knowledge came at the conclusion of a dream sequence and ushered its end. Many times I would say, "But honey, didn't you die? How is it that you're here with me? Aha! This is a dream, isn't it?" Kim appeared amused and I awoke.

Since our sovereign Lord, on occasion, steps into our world to accomplish His purposes—we call that a miracle—I did not find it incredible that He sometimes stepped into my dreams. I firmly believe God has spoken to me in dreams, comforted me in dreams, and tested

me in dreams.

When I consider it afterward, a dream often provides insight. However, I do not confuse a dream with divine revelation. Whatever illumination I receive in a dream I test in the light of Scripture.

Perhaps dreams are to this world what this world is to the next. Maybe that's why I'm a lucid dreamer. While awake, I'm profoundly aware that my life on this earth is a lesser reality than the greater reality to come.

"But as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him" (1 Corinthians 2:9).

I considered my dreams as a subconscious means of processing my great grief. Even while asleep, I was unwinding and un-grasping. I was letting go of the lovely Kim.

Five dreams were especially significant to me. These are the details I remembered from each one.



Monday Dream

The River Sprite

I was walking down a stream bed in a primeval forest, pushing aside low-hanging branches and stepping through pristine water. As I moved a pine limb out of my way, I saw a feminine figure in the distance. I approached with caution, not wishing to disturb her solitude.

She was sitting on a rounded rock with water sparkling around her toes. Her legs were pulled into her chest and she rested her chin on her knees. Was this a river sprite? A stone garden ornament? Or was it Kim?

"Are you okay?" I asked.

Without looking up she said, "Yes." She then heaved a sigh. "But it's been a tough week."

Who are you? Where are you? Why are you so sad?

And then I awoke.

Tuesday Dream

The Lover

I was lying in our bed, and in my dream I sat up alert. I looked to my left and saw a large lump under the bed sheets. *Perhaps it's a pillow.* I put my hand on the lump and gently shook it. Kim's smiling face emerged.

"Is that you?" I asked.

"Of course it's me. I miss you so much."

We embraced and made rapturous love.

It wasn't through word or even thought, rather through a vague impression that our encounter was about to end.

"How are you doing?" I asked with growing dream awareness.

She remained silent.

"You're dead, you know, which means this is a dream."

She nodded with sad acknowledgement. "I know. But it's the best I can do."

I awoke, lifted the covers, and wept at my great loss.

Wednesday Dream

The Dishwasher

I was lying in our bed, and in my dream I heard clanging sounds. Who was in my house at this time of night? Could it be an intruder?

I arose and walked down the hallway.

In the kitchen I saw a woman standing with her back toward me. Even from behind, I recognized her as Kim. She did not acknowledge me, being preoccupied with her noisy task.

Finally I said, "Yobo, you're working so hard. Can I help you?"

She turned her head and wiped her brow. "Sorry," she puffed. "This is my job, and you can't help me. But keep your eyes open. There are other jobs only you can do." She winked and again turned her back to me.

I was about to ask, "What do you mean? What jobs are ahead for me?"

Instead, I sat up in bed and pondered the meaning of her words.

Thursday Dream

The Conductor

I was striding down a path when a man rushed past me, bumping my side. He was dressed in a tuxedo, like a symphony conductor and had long flowing hair. He muttered to himself, something about having just been dismissed from his orchestra.

I walked farther and heard a string quartet playing Mozart.

After a few more steps I saw the source of the music. To my amazement, Kim was wielding the baton. She pointed to each of the players and they put bow to string. Kim looked in charge and confident.

I listened, enraptured.

“Would you like to give it a try?” she asked.

“No. That’s your job and you’re doing it so well. Please continue and I’ll listen.”

She grinned and I awoke.

Friday Dream

Walk along the Beach

I was [walking down a California beach](#) alone. Waves were crashing and my heart was melancholy. Kim caught me from behind and tapped my shoulder. We walked arm in arm in the sand. I occasionally skipped a stone.

I perceived this dream to be like the scene in the movie *Contact* ²⁹, where Jodie Foster’s character speaks to a human-looking alien.

“This isn’t real,” she says. “None of this is real.”

The alien responds, “We thought this might make things easier for you.”

Did I connect this scene from *Contact* with my dream because I asked Kim, “This isn’t real, is it?”

I can’t recall. However, I do remember asking Kim many profound questions and her answering each to my satisfaction. I can’t remember the words she said, only that I was content with her responses.

After a while Kim looked to the sky. “No more questions. My time’s up.”
She looked wistful, and I awoke.



In each of these dreams I perceived Kim as hidden or unreal. Was it an intuition that my partner in life was now a familiar stranger in the afterlife?

Perhaps I partook in an experience similar to that of the disciples when they encountered the risen Christ. “Is it Him?” they asked. “Is He real?”

“Yes, it’s Him, but He’s not the same. Maybe He’s more real than we ever knew Him to be.”³⁰

I see a touch of grace in each of these dreams, of God assuring and consoling me. I once heard that the iron partition of death distresses the deceased as much as the bereaved. Could the Kim of my dreams represent Kim as she exists in the bosom of God? I don’t know. I will add that to my list of questions to ask God when I join Kim in His presence.

I continued to dream about Kim from time to time. But during my first week alone, with empty arms, in my lonely bed, I experienced this dam-burst of dreams.

Chapter 16

Picking Up the Shards

Alone and abandoned, I lived in a house twice as large as it needed to be, sleeping in a king-size bed without the queen beside me. I wallowed in grief and blubbered in self-pity.

Then it struck me: *This too is vanity*. The word *self* in *self-pity* gave it away. I had turned the Great Commandment on its head. The properly ordered passions are God first, then others, finally self. Throughout my grieving I had put myself first, a ghost of Kim second, and God last. And God chiefly as an analgesic.

When the silver cord be loosed, or the golden bowl be broken, or the pitcher be broken at the fountain, or the wheel broken at the cistern. Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was: and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it. “Vanity of vanities,” saith the preacher; “all is vanity” (Ecclesiastes 12:6–8).

Kim’s body had been shattered along a Rwandan roadway; her golden bowl was broken beyond mending. Her dust had returned to the ground, her eternal essence to her Maker.

My life was likewise shattered. Odd fragments of broken pottery were strewn along my pathway. I stooped to pick up the shards.

O Lord, help me to think of You first, and then others, and myself last. Pluck me up and plant my feet on higher ground. I cannot do it without You.

August/September 2010

Week five

After a week of dreams, depression, and hiding in my home, I prepared for a visit from Frank and Lelia.

Back in June Kim and I had made reservations to spend a pleasant weekend with them at Yosemite National Park. In September, the three who remained decided to follow through with the plans.

Why did I insist we keep this commitment? First, to surround myself with family; second, to make a statement that even death cannot break a family bond; and third, to reestablish a sense of normality, that life flows on in the wake of death.

I picked up my brother and sister-in-law at the Oakland airport on August 31. Laughter and tears, joy and sorrow, marked their entire visit. During a pause in conversation, Frank noted it was the one-month anniversary of the car crash. I'd been expecting him to bring it up. When he did, we wept together.

On Wednesday morning we packed into Kim's Kia and headed east to Yosemite. As I drove, I told Frank about the time we bought the Kia a few years earlier.

"We went to the auto mall parkway. Kim was undecided about what kind of vehicle to buy. She sat behind the wheel of this car, still unsure. To encourage her I said, 'Kia—k.i.a—that stands for *Kim is awesome*.' She brightened up and immediately decided to buy this one."

I glanced at Frank. He smiled.

I was about to say, "Of course, 'k.i.a' also stands for killed in action." But I swallowed the words and let his smile linger.

I [have a photo of me standing at Glacier Point](#), my back to the valley with my arms outstretched. But I don't remember much about that trip. I was still numb. Yosemite was an obligation fulfilled, a statement made.

While driving home, I silently commemorated the one-month anniversary of Kim's death. *Blood, death, and tears!* Was I doomed to mark these anniversary dates forever?

On Sunday Frank spoke at my church and shared his personal encounter with grief. He told how he and Lelia dealt with the birth of their daughter with multiple handicaps.

"For thirty-two years, Lucinda has reminded me that we humans live in a fallen world

plagued by suffering. Christians will never understand the mystery of evil. However, we are not called to understand, only to believe. We are to remain faithful to the God who created us.”

After the church service and lunch, I drove Frank and Lelia to the airport and thanked them for weeping at my side.



Early September 2010

Weeks six and seven

After the one-month anniversary of Kim’s death, I resolved to resume my regular pastoral duties. Every Wednesday morning my church sponsored a breakfast for Baptist clergy. All eyes were on me as I entered our fellowship hall on September 8. Seven men listened to me stammer through tears.

Before the meal, they laid hands on me and prayed for God’s peace on my heart. One of the pastors, John Phillips, agreed to meet with me after the breakfast meeting. We talked in my office.

“John, I need to return to Africa and complete the vision Kim and I began. Our Bible school is only half constructed, and it will be a legacy for her. But how can I return? I fired Franc, and half of the people in town think that was unfair. I have zero credibility with many local pastors. I’ve forgiven Franc, but how can I return to Rwanda and work beside the man who killed my wife?”

“Chris,” John said. “I believe you are being tested. What kind of love do you have in your heart? You see, forgiveness is love at the testing point. Only Christian love can forgive an enemy. Since God called you and Kim to be missionaries, I encourage you to return to Rwanda and complete the work you and Kim began together.”

John and I prayed. I asked God to infuse me with His love, a love great enough to forgive a great hurt.

After that visit with John, I sent Paul an e-mail, saying, “It’s time to re-hire Franc. Please talk with David and Immaculee. I will support it.” Still my motive was more about saving my ministry than helping its director. But I considered this another step in my journey of

forgiveness.

I returned to the pulpit on September 12. My first sermon as a widower was a repeat of a message I had presented just eight months earlier. In 2009, the parable of the unmerciful servant was just one more message in a series of ten. On this Sunday it held special significance. I wasn't preaching to my congregation this time; I was preaching to myself.

The narrative began in Matthew 18 with Simon Peter asking Jesus, "Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother who sins against me? Up to seven times?"³¹

Jesus answered him, "I tell you, not seven times, but seventy times seven." Then Jesus told a story about a great king who forgave his chief servant of a tremendous debt, a generous act of mercy. However, the forgiven servant refused to forgive a lesser servant of a paltry sum and put him in jail.

The king—who is a symbol of God—hailed his unmerciful servant before him. "You wicked slave! I forgave you all that debt because you begged me. Shouldn't you also have had mercy on your fellow slave, as I had mercy on you?"³² Then the king handed him over to the jailers to be tormented until he paid back all he owed.

Jesus concluded, "This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother from your heart."³³

I confessed to the church, "I am pointing the finger at myself this morning. I struggle to forgive Franc from my heart as Jesus commands me to do. Please pray for me. I don't want to be that wicked servant saddled with unforgiveness. You have my permission to ask me whenever you see me, 'Chris, how is that forgiveness thing going?'"

Some of my deacons took me at my word, and in the following weeks they asked me about forgiveness. "I'm on my way," I joked. "I am forgiving Franc at least once a day."

I searched online for churches that sponsored bereavement groups. I discovered that [Neighborhood Church in Castro Valley](#) held a "[GriefShare](#)" meeting every Monday evening.

I began to attend in September. The routine was to watch a video for the first thirty minutes and then allow participants to share their stories. At the first meeting I told the group that my struggle was twofold: first with grief, then with unforgiveness.

I also shared how I dealt with the awkward situation whenever a compassionate friend asked me, "How are you doing?" I knew the friend meant well, but sometimes that question turned my thoughts to a dark place.

I used to mutter responses like “Okay under the circumstances” or “I’m not doing so well today.”

Eventually I adopted a stock reply: “God is good.” That consistent response took the focus off of me and expressed my faith. “If the question is more than a courtesy,” I added, “we speak in more depth.”

I took away two things from my Monday meetings. First, I was not alone in my grief. A husband and wife sat side by side, grieving the recent suicide of their teenage son. An older woman continued to mourn her husband who had passed eight years earlier. Each story of bereavement was as unique as the teller’s DNA, yet grief was the common thread that held the stories together.

I also learned there are no answers to the questions “How long should I grieve?” and “How deeply should I grieve?” It all depends on the circumstances of the loss and the psychology of the bereaved.

I came seeking answers. I left finding perspective. With deliberate effort I began to transform my inner narrative. I determined not to be a victim, forever coveting the pity of others.

“What am I learning from grief?” I repeatedly asked myself. “How can God redeem my grief to His glory?”



Mid-September 2010

Week eight

To fill my empty evenings, I started a project. I rummaged through hundreds of photos of Kim that I had collected over thirty-six years. Some recent ones were already on my computer and some older ones I scanned in from yellowed photo albums. I created a montage of three hundred pictures of Kim and plastered the walls in my home office.

This tribute included [the first black-and-white photo](#) that I took of Kim, standing with students at her middle school in Korea. It also included the last picture of Kim and me, together in Rwanda the morning of the car crash. Often, while walking past the display, I focused on a single image, and convulsed in anguish.

After a Sunday evening service, I walked the sidewalks near my church, alone with my sorrow. A bright moon danced behind cirrus clouds. My mind traveled back to 1973, when I was courting Kim. I recalled a Korean poem I had memorized and recited to her.

I'd like to carve a moon out of my heart
And hang it ninety thousand miles high in the sky
So it would shine on the place where my love is tonight.³⁴

Full moon. Empty arms. Kim, where are you tonight?



Late September 2010

Weeks nine and ten

As I continued to process my grief, not all my steps were sure-footed.

Janet was a casual acquaintance of Kim and me. After Kim's death, Janet and I e-mailed each other almost every day. I delighted to find her thoughtful comments sitting in my inbox.

She helped me name a star for Kim. After I donated a hundred dollars to an astronomical society, we registered an obscure speck in the night sky as Sophia-Arête, Greek for "Wise-Virtuous" or, in the Korean language, "*Hyun-Deok*," which was Kim's given name. It was perfect.

Janet and I corresponded about science and eschatology. As we spoke about Kim, I lent her *The God of Hope and the End of the World* by John Polkinghorne. "There is indeed the Christian hope of a destiny beyond death, but it resides not in the presumed immortality of a spiritual soul, but in the divinely guaranteed eschatological sequence of death and resurrection. Our only ground for hope lies in the faithfulness of the Creator, in the unrelenting divine love for all creatures. Death is an end, but not the ultimate end. The only ultimate is God."³⁵

As I speculated with Janet, my mind rejoiced. And then my heart followed. I felt as if I had fallen off a horse and all I wanted was to remount and gallop into the sunset. Hoping that remarriage would stop the pain and staunch my hemorrhaging heart, I pursued Janet. I wrote her

page after page of poetry. She stopped responding to my e-mails.

Finally, a fellow pastor called me and told me that Janet did not share my romantic feelings. In my brokenness, I had mistaken her compassion for romantic affection and her agape love for erotic love.

Through this pastor, she demanded I leave her alone. I complied and felt dejected for a while.

Janet, wherever you are, I hope you will accept my apologies and forgive me my trespass. I was crazy with grief. I can offer no other explanation for my inappropriate actions.



Early October 2010

Weeks eleven and twelve

On the two-month anniversary of Kim's death, I brought flowers to her grave site. I was disappointed that the grave was still marked with an impersonal plastic name plate. Simon and I had made plans to design a special gravestone as a tribute to Kim. That was at the top of our agenda for his upcoming visit.

Simon flew to California on October 8 to spend a week with me. "My heart says this is the season to make you a priority," he said, "but my wife says seven days is my maximum."

While driving from the airport to the condo, I shared my frustration with selling the Kia. "We paid fifteen thousand dollars for it in 2008. Now I can't get a lousy seven, and that's below Blue Book. It's a good car, but I don't need it."

The next day Simon took photos of the car and posted them on Craigslist along with a jazzed-up description.

Over the next few days I received a few nibbles, but no bites. Finally I said, "You know, I wouldn't mind trading this car in for a camper. It would do me good to hit the road and spend some time in solitude."

"Let me borrow your iPad." He showed me an ad. "You mean something like this?"

My eyes lit up at the picture of a 1987 Volkswagen Westfalia with a pop-up roof, fridge, and stove. "Yeah, that's cool!"

Simon chuckled. “I see you’re still a hippie at heart. The camper’s in Sacramento. Let me call and see if they’d consider a trade-in.”

A trade-in was possible, so the next day I drove my Honda seventy miles to Sacramento. Simon followed in the Kia.

I asked Simon to do the negotiating, and he did a great job. As we were closing the deal, I told my son, “The sleek Korean Kia was a perfect match for your mom, but this rumpled camper exudes me, don’t you think?”

“Yup. It’s you all over.”

A few days after I took ownership, the old camper’s clutch smoked out while climbing the steep hill to the condo.

“It’s a hobby car,” I explained to Simon as we sat in the tow truck. “Both camping and repairing will be hobbies for me.”

Simon and I made an appointment to meet with Shirley, the woman in charge of gravestones at Holy Angels. Simon drew up designs and discussed the possibilities with her. Then he e-mailed specifications to the stone cutters.

I stayed up late one night, talking to Simon about my grief. “Let’s say we’re visiting a remote part of the world and we receive news that a great man is holed up on a mountaintop. This gnarled guru is rumored to be the wisest man who’s ever lived.”

“I picture Yoda.”

“Maybe someone like that. Anyway, we find him and ask him about suffering. He responds, ‘No. I’m a hundred years old and I have never suffered a day in my life. In fact, I’m well fed and get everything I ask for.’ Is that remotely possible? No. Godly wisdom is forged in the crucible of suffering. I wish there were another way, but there’s not.”

“You know, Dad, I’ve suffered too. I can’t believe Mom is gone. Sometimes I daydream about a moment in my past and think, *I’ll ask Mom next time we talk*. My heart breaks when I realize there won’t be a next time.”

Simon was a tonic to my soul. He doubled my joy and halved my sorrow. The clouds of grief were beginning to part. I once heard it said that the first sign of dissipating grief occurs when your unbearable loss is not the first thing that leaps into your mind as you open your eyes in the morning. For me this day of hope dawned during Simon’s visit.

As I drove my son back to the airport in my newly repaired camper, he asked me a surprising question. “Have you thought about getting a dog?”

“Simon,” I blurted, “remember what happened when we looked after the neighbor’s dog?”

He laughed. “That was a hunting dog, and Paco the parrot was out of his cage.”

“Sorry. But I don’t want some bird-chomping dog in my house.”

Simon was quiet for a moment. Then he said, “At least think about it. A dog can be good company.”

I did think about it. A lot

Chapter 17

Who Rescued Whom?

With deliberation I packed my schedule. I preached twice on Sundays, attended GriefShare on Mondays, led a Bible study on Wednesdays, and taught a seminary class on Saturdays. I tried to fill every moment in order to push Kim's death further into history. In the evenings I assembled one-thousand piece puzzles and watched old movies, but that did not relieve my loneliness. I ached for companionship.

Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their work: If one falls down, his friend can help him up. But pity the man who falls and has no one to help him up! Also, if two lie down together, they will keep warm. But how can one keep warm alone (Ecclesiastes 4:9–11)?

Simon's suggestion rattled in my thoughts. *Maybe a canine companion could keep me warm.*

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Late October 2010

Weeks thirteen and fourteen

In October I renewed my subscription to Netflix. I often unwound by lying in bed and watching old movies on my tablet. I thought about Simon's parting comment "a dog might be good company" and decided to search for a dog movie. One of the few titles I recognized was [*Old Yeller*](#).³⁶ I was seven years old when Disney released that classic in 1957. I vaguely remembered the plot: a boy had to kill his dog after it had contracted rabies.

As the movie drew to a close the father said to his son, "You'll have to forget it."

The boy replied, "How, Pa? How do you forget something like that?"

His pa answered, "*Forget* is not the right word. What I'm trying to say is life is like that sometimes. Now and then for no good reason a man can't figure out, life will just haul off and knock him flat. Slam him against the ground so hard it seems like all his insides is busted. But it's not all like that. A lot of it's mighty fine. And you can't afford to waste the good part fretting about the bad. That makes it all bad.

"I know. Saying it's one thing, feeling it's another. But I'll tell you a trick that's sometime's a big help. You start looking around for something good to take a place of the bad. As a general rule you can find it."

I replayed that father-son talk. Maybe I could look around for something good to replace the bad.



At the October church council meeting, I handed the treasurer a check for twenty-six thousand dollars and thanked the council for their trust in me. After the meeting I spoke to the head of our fellowship committee. "Diane, I'm lonesome for company. Kim and I used to have guests over all the time. Can you arrange for people to visit me on Friday evenings?"

For a dozen Fridays, church members brought over home-cooked meals and down-home conversations. I thoroughly enjoyed having visitors in my home again.

On October 16, Pastor Paul e-mailed me.

Franc will stand before a judge next week. His biggest problem is the statement you wrote at the embassy. Can you write a letter to the judge asking that Franc not go to jail? You can send it to me. I will print it and give it to the court. God bless you.

I needed to make things right with Franc. I had been his implacable foe; now I had to become his ardent champion. *Lord, change my heart.* The next day I composed this letter and sent it to Paul to pass on to the judge:

I am Pastor Chris Foreman, husband of the late Kim Foreman who was injured in an automobile accident near Gitarama on July 31, 2010, and who died on August 3, 2010. Mr. Francis Murenzi was the driver of the car.

One day before my wife died, I signed a sworn affidavit at the US embassy in Kigali, attesting to the facts concerning her death. I stand by those facts. But I do not stand by the spirit in which I wrote them.

Kim lay dying in a hospital bed; her body was swelling as her kidneys were shutting down. Anticipating her death filled me with unspeakable pain. My soul was in anguish and I burned with anger at the person who had driven the vehicle.

During the week of my wife's death, I saw the world through tears and spoke with a voice of pain. I said and did many things I now regret.

Ten weeks after Kim's death, I can say I have forgiven Franc unconditionally. On October 10, I asked our nonprofit organization to rehire Franc. And now I am asking that Mr. Murenzi not be sentenced to a prison term.

I will never seek revenge against Franc. I am appealing to the court in Gitarama to show Mr. Murenzi the same mercy I have shown him. As Scripture tells us, "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy."³⁷ May God bless you, and may God bless the nation of Rwanda.



My bitterness toward Franc was ebbing, but the loss of Kim still vexed my spirit. At the end of every workday, when I opened the condo door, I felt forlorn. There was no smile to greet me, no ear to attend my troubles. My heart was too fragile to seek female companionship; I'd learned that hard lesson with Janet. So what could I do? Simon's mention of a dog entered my

mind.

After the next church service, I mentioned my desire for a dog to Sherry and Diane. They leapt at my words. “Oh, Pastor, that would be so good for you,” Sherry said with a broad smile.

I explained that I wanted a large, masculine, pedigreed animal, something like a bulldog. They listened with patience, but then suggested that a small female rescue dog would better fit my lifestyle. I was a novice, so I deferred to their expertise.

Over the next few days, Sherry searched the Internet and gave me printouts of prospective dogs. One afternoon we visited three pet stores. Another morning we visited two animal shelters.

On October 21, Sherry, Diane, and I traveled to Lakeside Park in Oakland to greet a dog named Jody and to meet her foster parents. Jody was listed as “part Chihuahua, part terrier, fifteen pounds, prefers the company of men but not other dogs.”

Jody dazzled us with her playfulness. She showed off her spunk by chasing after Canadian geese. I liked her a lot. However, adopting a dog was a serious commitment. I whispered a quick prayer. “God, if this is the dog for me, please give me a sign.”

As negotiations continued, Jody won the hearts of the ladies. Diane mentioned, “Oh, look, there’s a little spot between her eyes that looks like an arrowhead.” From her prospective it may have looked like an arrowhead, but from where I stood, her spot appeared as a teardrop. That was the sign. I named my new dog “Jody Teardrop” because she entered my life in the midst of tears.

In no time Jody Teardrop became my faithful companion. She hung out in my church office so often the deacons appointed her the [official church mascot](#). The dog with the funny spot was an unexpected blessing from God.

A few days later, while I was stuck in traffic, my eyes scanned the surrounding cars. I spotted a bumper sticker that read, “Who rescued who?” The meaning didn’t register until I noticed a paw print following the question mark. I smiled and turned to Jody, sitting in the shotgun seat.

“What do you think, girl?” I corrected the grammar. “Who rescued whom?”

She cocked her head to one side as if undecided on the question.

“You’re right. We rescued each other.”

She wagged her tail and I stroked her black-and-white coat until traffic started to flow

again.

I told my friends, “Jody is a rescue dog. She was rescued off the streets of Oakland, from a put-down list, from an animal shelter, and from her foster home. After this series of rescues, it was Jody’s turn. She rescued me with companionship, with affection, and with joy. We are two lucky dogs.”

A week after I acquired Jody, I carried her to Kim’s graveside for an introduction. I believed that Kim would have thanked Jody, if she could, for filling a small portion of that vast chasm left by her passing.

Jody and I established two walking routines in an effort to achieve my fitness goals. One was a loop of four thousand steps behind my condo along a stream bed. The other was a five-thousand-step walk that crossed the boulevard and continued around the Cal State East Bay campus.

My habit was to listen to audio books while a pedometer measured my progress. This daily exercise kept my body fit and my mind engaged. One of my favorite audio books was Saint Augustine’s autobiography, *Confessions*. His deep, contemplative intellect struck a chord within me. *He thinks like I do, only better.*

In late October, as Jody led me across athletic fields, Augustine spoke concerning the sudden death of his best friend, Nebridius.

He entered a depression, feeling everything was evil and looked like death. He analyzed his problem, explaining how he was attached to the transient things of life.

I wondered *Kim was a transient thing. Is that why I’m miserable?*

Augustine explained that attachment to anything of this earth resulted in misery because it will always pass away. “Things are brought into being and immediately begin their progress into non-being. Attachment to things not of God will always bring the human soul despair—only attachment to God and his eternal things can make a human being happy.”³⁸

I switched off the audio and spoke out loud to my MP3 device. “Yes indeed. One way to avoid suffering is to detach.”

That was an attractive option for an introvert like me. But I wasn’t a neo-Platonist like Augustine who was suspicious of earthly attachments; nor was I a Buddhist who sought Nirvana through total dispassion. I was a Christian, and Christ commanded me to love my earthly neighbor. Didn’t Jesus weep at the tomb of Lazarus? And what about Adam? If God were

all he needed, why was Adam lonely? He walked with God, yet God provided Eve as a flesh-and-blood companion. God commanded him to cleave, not detach from her.

My friend Augustine, I hope we can discuss this further when I meet you in the City of God.

On the last day of the month, Halloween, our church held a harvest festival talent night. Some folks sang and others told jokes. In honor of my animal companion, I presented an original poem titled “A Bit of Doggerel.”

God must have humor
and have it no end,
For His name spelt backward
is now my best friend.



As the weeks passed, I gained a new perspective of my life journey. I placed myself in my third iteration. I had spent twenty-four years as a single man. In technology terms that was “Chris: Version 1.0.” My thirty-six-year marriage to Kim was “Chris: Version 2.0.” Now I was reinventing myself as a widower, becoming “Chris: Version 3.0.” I saw my re-invention most clearly on my road trips and with three innovations that came to me post-Kim.

The first was my 1987 Volkswagen Westfalia camper. Kim had always been a hotel lady, while I was more of a vagabond. Beginning in September, I tramped the highways of California, sometimes to the ocean, sometimes to the mountains. I slept by the roadside, in campsites, and in RV parks. I mounted a picture of Kim on the dashboard, and her image accompanied me along thousands of miles of pavement. The solitude of travel and the beauty of nature provided balm to my soul.

The second innovation was my traveling companion. With Jody riding shotgun there was never a lack of company. She nuzzled, licked, romped, and fetched. She was a good listener and never complained about my singing out of tune. She snuggled in the sleeping bag and walked trails with me. Unlike a human companion, Jody provided company without breaking solitude.

The third post-Kim innovation was my iPad. With this miraculous technology, I could

stay in touch with the world while traveling down the back roads. I also played games, watched movies, navigated with GPS, listened to music, and monitored the news.

I spent many hours resting in the bed of my camper, dog at my side, and tablet in my hand. What more could a hobo ask for?

God's grace sustained me, providing the solitude of a camper, [the companionship of a dog](#), and the connectivity of an iPad. A new normal was emerging in my 3.0 life—a post-Kim normal.

Chapter 18

Thanksgiving Ambush

When a patient is suffering from an unknown disease, uncertainty can cause mental distress. I sought to diagnose my condition, to define my process of grief.

I learned during my GriefShare meetings that the term *mourning* refers to outward signs of loss, like visiting grave sites or wearing black. Some cultures dictate the activities and duration of mourning.

The term *grief* refers to the personal pain of loss. Grief cannot be dictated. It can last a day or a lifetime. Like the expanding ripples of a stone cast into still water, waves of grief usually diminish over time and grow further apart.

I also learned the word *ambush*. In the counseling world, it refers to an unexpected attack of anguish that assaults the senses. A photograph, a fragrance, or a voice can trigger an ambush, returning the bereaved to the abyss of grief.

For my sighing comes before I eat, and my groanings pour out like water. For the thing I greatly feared has come upon me, and what I dreaded has happened to me.

I am not at ease, nor am I quiet; I have no rest, for trouble comes
(Job 3:24–26 HCSB).

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November 2010

Month four

At the three-month anniversary of Kim's death, I purchased [three persimmons](#), Kim's favorite fruit. I wrote on one persimmon "Chris," on the second "Zachary," and on the third "Simon." I intended to place them by her gravestone.

When I visited her grave site, I was annoyed to find the plastic marker still substituting for the granite gravestone. I phoned Shirley. She assured me that the stone cutters were busy at work and it was "on the way."

After my talk with Shirley, I pulled the persimmons from my pocket and placed them in the grass next to her marker as proxies for the three of us. As I walked back to the car, I was ambushed by the miserable thought that these three persimmons would commune with Kim only a day or two. Then the groundskeeper would pick them up and dispose of them in his trash can.

Then I looked on all the works that my hands had wrought, and on the labor that I had labored to do: and, behold, all was vanity and vexation of spirit, and there was no profit under the sun (Ecclesiastes 2:11).

My episodes of grief grew further apart. They were reducing in frequency but not in intensity. Occasional stabs of grief ambushed and bloodied my unsuspecting spirit.

Once, I was shopping in a grocery store, gazing down an aisle, when I spotted an Asian woman about the size and shape of Kim, and with her same hair style. For a split second my heart leapt. *Is Kim shopping with me today?* When reason returned, I burst into tears and rushed out the door.

Another time, I was sitting in hot bath water, putting soap on my legs, when I noticed a tiny scar on my left shin. *What's that?* Then it hit me. *That's the wound I received in the car crash.* Oh, my God! My wife had her brains battered and all I got was this trivial wound? I was the soldier. I was supposed to take the bullet, not her. *Lord, why did You take Kim and spare me?*

One day, I was staring at my computer screen, searching through my documents, when I came across an old file named *voice.wav*. I didn't recall what it was, so I double-clicked. Immediately Kim was at my side, speaking in a seductive voice. "Hi, Chris. Sorry I missed your

phone call. But just know I love you and can't wait to see you tonight." I melted in my chair and wept until my eyes hurt.



In November I resumed teaching the Psalms at our Wednesday evening Bible study.

"On June thirtieth, we studied the six verses of Psalm thirteen, a beautiful personal lament. I did what I could to explain the text. I analyzed the psalm as a mathematical equation: present predicament plus past experience equals future hope.

"A few Wednesdays after that, I was in Africa with my wife. A few Wednesdays after that I returned to California to bury her. Now several Wednesdays have passed and it's time to revisit the book of Psalms.

"Rather than continue on to Psalm fourteen, I want to linger for a while on David's lament. This time I can do more than merely explain the text. Now I can express the heart of the psalmist. Suffering has made me a better pastor."

I read the psalmist's predicament as described in verses 1 through 4.

How long wilt thou forget me, O Lord? forever? How long wilt thou hide thy face from me? How long shall I take counsel in my soul, having sorrow in my heart daily? How long shall mine enemy be exalted over me? Consider and hear me, O Lord my God: lighten mine eyes, lest I sleep the sleep of death; lest mine enemy say, I have prevailed against him; and those that trouble me rejoice when I am moved.

Then I explained my predicament.

"The Lord has taken my wife. I have grief in my heart daily. *How long, O Lord, will you forget me, forever?*"

I read about the psalmist's past experience:

"But I have trusted in thy mercy; my heart shall rejoice in thy salvation" (verse 5).

Then I described my past experience.

"Always I have trusted in God's unfailing love. My life is at the service of the gospel. He

has given me this gift of grace.”

Finally I read about the psalmist’s future hope from verse 6.

“I will sing unto the Lord, because he hath dealt bountifully with me.”

I continued. “Here is my future hope: ‘I will sing an anthem to the Lord, because His grace is sufficient for me.’

“When folks ask me, ‘How can you hang on as pastor when your wife died in service to God?’ I try to remember the Davidic equation: present predicament plus past deliverance equals future hope.”

In the five months following Kim’s death, I was surrounded by family. Either I traveled to see them or they came to see me. Zachary flew out to visit me a week before Thanksgiving. He arrived on Friday, and on Saturday we drove to Berkeley to see the “big game”—the annual football match between the Stanford Cardinal and the Cal Bears. We enjoyed the game, which Stanford won, and relished the chili dogs.

Just as we were leaving the stands, the skies grew dark. We were drenched with rain as we ran to the car. It was a day to remember.

The next Thursday was Thanksgiving. To encourage me, Zachary signed us both up for a running event called the “Turkey Trot.”

We left the house for San Francisco at six a.m. and arrived at Golden Gate Park before seven. We ran the 10K side by side. I was way out of shape and struggled to finish in sixty minutes. Although Zachary walked part of the way, he completed the distance ahead of me. He said the threat of his old man beating him provided extra motivation.

The early-morning exercise took its toll. When we returned to the condo, Zachary and I napped for a few hours. In the afternoon we celebrated the holiday by eating turkey sandwiches, baked potatoes, and pumpkin pie. I reminisced about Thanksgiving 2009.

“It’s so remote, so unreal. Simon, Dilia, and Lorenzo were here last year. We all sat right at this table.” I rapped the glass tabletop with my knuckles.

“We served tofu-turkey because Dilia didn’t eat meat. Your mom dressed Lorenzo in Korean clothes and I took [a hundred pictures of him](#)—right over there by the fireplace. Lorenzo was so cute and your mother was so happy.

“Lolo couldn’t walk yet. ‘Maybe on the next visit,’ she said. There was never a next visit.

Lorenzo was walking at her funeral, but she wasn't alive to see him." I fell silent.

Finally Zachary changed the subject. "So, Dad, would you like to come east for Christmas?"

"I was thinking about that. Why don't I visit Simon over Christmas and you over New Year's?"

"That'll be good. Maybe I can get some tickets to the Kennedy Center. I went there a few years ago. They have a dozen musical venues that stay open until midnight when the balloons drop."

We adjourned to the living room where we made plans for my up-coming visit to the East Coast. My ringing telephone interrupted our conversation. It was Eu-Gin, an East Coast cousin of Kim's. She told me she was calling to wish Kim and me a happy Thanksgiving.

Ambush! My conversation with Zachary had been happy and carefree, but in a few seconds I unraveled like a ball of yarn.

I wrote a poem called "Thanksgiving Ambush 2010," to describe the event.

A distant relative of Kim called on Thanksgiving evening.

She wanted to wish us a happy holiday.

I thought she knew.

She asked me how I was doing. I said, "Under the circumstances, I'm okay."

I added, "My son Zachary is here with me and that's good."

I thought she knew.

She asked a second time how I was doing. I told her, "My son and I will be in Virginia at the first of the year. Maybe the two of us can visit you."

I thought she knew.

I said, "Give me your phone number, so I can contact you when we arrive in Virginia."

I thought she knew.

She spoke out the numbers and I wrote them on note paper.

I thought she knew.

Then she said with a giggle, "But Kim has my e-mail. Just ask her to send me your travel plans."

I thought she knew.

I said after a painful pause, “What do you mean?”

She didn’t know!

I removed the phone from my ear and handed it to my son, sitting across from me.

I managed to sputter, “Answer her questions.”

Then I rushed to *our* bedroom, dove headlong onto *our* bed,
and wept until *our* phone call ended.

When I was certain Zachary was off the phone, I emerged from my bedroom. After a few minutes I regained my composure and we talked more about my travel plans.

Zachary borrowed my Honda and returned the next day about noon. Knowing he was about to return to Virginia, I wanted to share some thoughts with him. “Last night I was thinking about your mom’s death.”

He leaned back in his chair to listen.

“She was the fourth person to die in my close family. The grief experience for each was totally different. My dad died in 1977 when he was sixty-three. That seemed plenty old when I was in my twenties. But now? I’m almost sixty-three.

“I was at my dad’s bedside when he died of cancer. I heard the death rattle in his throat just before he was released from his agony. I grieved for a few weeks, but time passed. My biggest regret was that you and Simon didn’t get to know him. He was such a good man. Do you remember him at all?”

“Sometimes I think I do, but when I deliberate, I realize that I’m only remembering a photograph of me sitting on his lap or something like that.”

“The next death was my mother—your Grandma Jenny. She died in 1999 at eighty-four. You remember her, right?”

“Of course. She was a wonderful grandmother.”

I smiled. “She was a great mother, too, so even-tempered, so into loving her six children. Her mind left this world long before her body. But she never soured, just got sweeter and sweeter. I think when the mind goes like that, it reveals the soul beneath. With Alzheimer’s she had been departing piece by piece for a long time.”

Zachary asked about my grief when my mother died.

“It’s harsh to say, but sometimes death can be a friend. She was suffering the last few times I saw her. She was ready to meet her Maker.” I sighed, “Then there was my brother Jack.”

“I don’t remember him much,” Zachary said. “I think I only saw him a few times.”

“He was around during your first years of life, but he moved to Texas in 1980. In his last months I traveled to Houston to visit him at the cancer clinic. We were hopeful for a while, but Jack died on the last day of 2007. He was sixty-four.

“For days, I tried to accept that reality. It just didn’t make sense. We were six brothers and sisters. That number seemed as fixed as the four winds or the nine planets.”

Zach raised an eyebrow. “You know Pluto’s been demoted and now there are only eight planets, right?”

“Yeah, I do. But eight planets doesn’t seem right either.”

I stared across the room at a large framed portrait. “Losing your mom was so much worse. It was like half of my flesh was chewed away. We were so close and it happened so fast. Father, mother, brother, wife—each death was like an approaching round of artillery zeroing in on me.”

Zachary walked across the room and picked up the likeness of his mother. Staring at it, he said, “Mom’s death may be the last artillery strike in your life. But I doubt it will be the last in mine.”

“I know. Let’s make the most of the time we have together.”

Chapter 19

Etched in Stone

Just before Kim's death, I delivered a series of eight messages from 1 Corinthians, chapter 15. For my third message, I planned to project photos of tombstones on to the overhead screen.

As I sat at home preparing this message, I shared with Kim the words I considered engraving on my own tombstone. "They're taken from the gospel of John, chapter seventeen, verse four." I told her, "Jesus prayed to His Father, "I have glorified You on the earth by finishing the work You gave me to do.""³⁹

"That sounds good," she said.

Today those words of Jesus are etched on our common gravestone at Holy Angels Cemetery.

What greater ambition could I have? And what higher tribute could I pay to Kim than "She glorified God while on earth and accomplished the tasks God had assigned to her?"

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December 2010

Month five

When I visited Holy Angels Cemetery on the five-month anniversary of Kim's death, I was upset to see the plastic marker still in place. *When will that gravestone finally arrive?* I marched into the office and growled at the receptionist. "Is Shirley around?"

After I cooled my heels a few minutes, she appeared.

I scowled at her. "You promised the gravestone would be in place by October, then November. Now it's December. Where is it?"

"The granite stone arrived yesterday. I can show it to you in the work yard."

I followed her there. When she removed the stone's covering, awe replaced anger.

The block of black granite was polished and flecked with white. The word "Kim" was engraved on the left side, with her birth date above and her death date below. "Chris" was engraved on the right, with dates absent.

In the center was an oval wedding photo cast in ceramic material. The name "Foreman" crossed the horizontal plane uniting husband and wife.

Above the wedding picture was a shining sun—the start point. At the bottom of the oval was the Christian cross—the end point.

Connecting the start point with the end point and running along the margin were forty-eight engraved symbols, providing a narrative of Kim's life. Simon and I had collaborated on the design for each glyph.

In recognition of Kim's career, we engraved her website address, www.kimforeman.com, on the stone so that any passerby could learn more about this remarkable woman by searching on the Internet. The techno side of Kim would have loved that!

The large base stone held nineteen words of Scripture: "I have glorified God on the earth. I have finished the work that He has given me to do. John 17:4."

"It looks great," I told Shirley.

"I'm sorry it took so long. You know, this is the second gravestone. The first one was two inches too narrow. It was their measuring mistake, so they replaced it at no cost to you."

I touched the ceramic oval pictures and rubbed my fingers over the engraved words. "I guess it was worth the wait to get it right."

Armanak, the funeral director, joined us in the work yard. He asked me about the significance of the glyphs. I pointed to each one and explained the meaning.

“It’s [the most creative gravestone](#) I’ve seen,” he said. “How did you come up with the idea?”

“It was a joint project of father and son. Simon was born to be an artist. I remember trying to dress him for first grade. He said, ‘Daddy, this shirt and pants don’t match.’ That was news to me. His older brother never seemed to mind how I dressed him. Simon went on to become an artist, with degrees from San Francisco State and Parsons in New York City. His specialty is making large-scale public art.

“After his mother’s funeral, I asked Simon to help me design her gravestone. I reminded him tombstones are public art and can last a long time. After all, look at the pyramids of Egypt.”

Armanak smiled. “I’m not sure our gravestones will be in place as long as the pyramids. I’m Egyptian, you know. Five thousand years is a long time.”

I left the cemetery in a much better mood than when I had arrived.

When I returned to the Holy Angels a few days later, the plastic marker had vanished and the granite stone stood in its place. I stopped off at the office and asked Shirley about the original stone, the one cut two inches too narrow.

“Oh, don’t worry about that one. We’ll toss it for you.”

“Could I take a look at it first?”

We walked to the storage yard and she pointed out the rejected stone.

I could hardly tell the difference. “Could you save it for me? I’d like to ship it to Africa.”

“Both pieces?” she asked.

“No,” I sighed. “The base stone is too heavy. Just the top stone with the names.”

A few days later Al met me at the cemetery yard and we loaded the four-hundred-pound mistake into his pickup truck. Al made a custom wooden box and we placed it in the church storage shed.



About the middle of every month I published a column in our church newsletter called “The Pastor’s Corner.” For the December newsletter, I wrote an essay, titled “Goodbye 2010.”

For the past several years Kim and I have mailed end-of-year letters to our family and friends. For the past few weeks, I've wondered whether or not I should mail out Christmas letters for 2010.

My first inclination was *No, of course not. People will understand my grief.* My second inclination was *Yes. I won't allow grief to take mastery of me. My family and friends deserve to know how I'm doing.* In the end I decided to save myself one hundred postage stamps and include my Christmas letter in our church newsletter. I hope you don't mind.

So, if you're wondering how I'm doing, I'll say this: "I am glad the year 2010 is behind me." It was my worst year ever, my dark night of the soul, my valley of the shadow of death.

I will never comprehend why Kim died in a car accident and I was spared. That is for God to know, and I have fully accepted Him as my Sovereign. My past was filled with grace; my future is filled with hope. It's my present that's bleak, but I expect my present to slowly grind into my future.

Some questions are impossible to answer, like the one hypothetically addressed to President Lincoln's wife: "Other than that, Mrs. Lincoln, how did you enjoy the play?"

If you redirect that question to me, it becomes, "Other than your wife's death, Pastor Foreman, how did you enjoy 2010?"

For me, 2010 will always mark the year that my sweet Kim died. I'm glad the year is behind me. Good riddance! And yet I expect great things for 2011 and beyond. God is not through with me yet. I am surviving my sorrow because I continue to have Christ in me, the hope of glory.



The Christmas season engulfed me with activities. There was a church Christmas party on December fourth, caroling on the eighth, and a Christmas musical on the twelfth.

I was preaching through the book of Colossians verse by verse, and on December 16, I

delivered a sermon titled “The Supreme Christ,” based on Colossians 1:15 to 17.

He [Jesus] is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For everything was created by Him, in heaven and on earth, the visible and the invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things have been created through Him and for Him. He is before all things, and by Him all things hold together.⁴⁰

Whenever I focused on this high Christology, I forgot about myself and remembered Christ. My immersion in the text helped to keep my passions rightly ordered: God first, others second, Chris last. Whenever I strayed from God’s Word, this order tended to capsize.

On December 17 I was ready to take off to the East Coast to visit my sons. I bid farewell to Sherry, dropped Jody at Diane’s house, and stopped for a moment at Kim’s grave site. From my book of Korean poems, I read to Kim:

Long and lonely December night,
I wish I could cut you in two,
And keep one half under my covers,
Warm and sweetly scented,
So I might add it to a shorter night
When my love sleeps here with me.⁴¹

I remembered reading that poem to Kim on a December night decades earlier. She told me it was famous in Korea. She then closed her eyes and recited the words back to me in Korean.

After leaving the cemetery, I parked at the church lot and Al drove me to SFO. I flew into LaGuardia airport to spend six days with Simon, Dilia, and Lorenzo.

I could sense tension in their home. My son and daughter-in-law didn’t shout at each other, but I saw pain in their faces. From my basement bed, I heard muffled unhappiness drift down the stairwell. This troubled me, especially since Dilia was seven months pregnant with

baby number two.

Simon worked long days in Manhattan and Dilia needed to get away, so they left me at home with Lorenzo. Every morning Dilia gave me written instructions on when to wake my grandson, when to walk the dogs, and when to take all three to the local park. I had anticipated spending quality time with Simon, but it turned out to be a bonding time between my grandson and me.

Zachary arrived in Queens on Christmas Eve. That was my birthday, and we all went to a local restaurant to celebrate. Lorenzo was the center of attention. Most of his antics were welcome; some were not.

On Christmas Day we exchanged gifts. With a doting father, grandfather, and uncle, little Lorenzo was showered with presents. Afterward I spoke with Simon and Dilia in private. “The best gift you two could bestow upon Lorenzo is to love each other and keep your marriage strong.”

They listened respectfully, but had little to say beyond “Yes, we know.”

With snow in the air, Zachary and I headed south to Virginia. For miles we discussed politics, religion, and the latest news. I learned his current passion was ballroom dancing.

My philosopher-son quoted from one of his texts: “There is nothing more notable in Socrates than that he found time, when he was an old man, to learn music and dancing, and thought it time well spent.”⁴²

I stayed with Zachary for the final week of 2010. On Wednesday we drove into Maryland and shared dinner with his friend Eva. I presented her with a few pieces of Kim’s jewelry.

Eva shared fond memories of 2001 when she spent the summer at our Mill Valley home. She grew tearful as she explained the positive influence Kim had on her life. She said the two of us had been role models of marriage.

“I never realized that,” I said. “Pass it on and be a role model to someone in your life.”

On Thursday we visited Eu-gin, the Korean cousin who triggered the Thanksgiving ambush. I explained the anguish caused by her phone call.

She said she was surprised that no one in the Korean community had contacted her about Kim’s death prior to her call. She explained that she was alienated from most of her relatives but Kim had made an effort to stay in touch with her.

Zachary had purchased Kennedy Center tickets as my birthday/Christmas gift and on

Friday evening we headed into DC for a New Year's Eve celebration.

We drove to a commuter lot and took the Metro into the capitol. The center was packed. Zachary and I lost and found each other a dozen times.

The end of 2010 and the start of 2011 drove me to introspection. While sipping soda and watching the throng count down the minutes, I strove to recall where I was on previous New Year days.

On January 1, 2010, I officiated at a wedding on a vineyard near Pleasanton, California. The groom gave a substantial contribution to Come and See Africa. It was a happy day for Kim and me.

On January 1, 2009, I was in Rwanda with nine missionaries, our largest group ever. Kim was among them. We ushered in the new year with noisy celebration at Pastor Paul's church. I wore a pair of goofy glasses with the digits 2009, the middle zeros being the eye holes. It was our best mission ever.

On January 1, 2008, I was in Rwanda with a team of four. Kim stayed home for that one. I was at Franc's house for a late evening meal when Zachary phoned me from the States to tell me that my brother Jack had died. The other three on my team went to Paul's church for celebration. I passed the change of calendar alone in my room, celebrating my older brother.

On January 1, 2007, I was on a British Airways flight over Europe, heading for Africa. The flight attendants wore party hats and passed out pieces of cake while the sound system piped "Auld Lang Syne."

Before my mind reached back to 2006, thousands of balloons descended throughout the Kennedy Center. It was now the year of our Lord 2011.

I heard popping sounds that I thought were firecrackers, but soon recognized as exploding balloons. I joined in the celebration and popped a few myself.

God, thank You for helping me survive 2010. If I have found grace in Your eyes, then stand by me as I begin my first year in four decades without my lovely Kim. Oh, brave new world!

Chapter 20

Where Is She Now?

Some questions are so dense they require a lifetime to unpack. “Where is she now?” is a question with only four words, yet each one merits an encyclopedia of explanation.

Is it vanity to inquire where Kim is at this very moment? Is she beyond space and time? Does she exist anywhere at all? Questions like this troubled me, but placed me in good company. The question of life after death troubled the wisest man of his day.

In gloom Solomon wrote:

For the fate of people and the fate of animals is the same. As one dies, so dies the other; they all have the same breath. People have no advantage over animals since everything is futile. All are going to the same place; all come from dust, and all return to dust. Who knows if the spirit of people rises upward and the spirit of animals goes downward to the earth (Ecclesiastes 3:19–21 HCSB)?

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January 2011

Month six

After the balloons fell and the new year arrived, Zachary and I walked a few blocks to the Metro station. Revelers in skimpy attire packed the trains. *Aren't they cold?* I thought as they caroused in happy chatter. Their merriment provoked my melancholy as I sat in contemplation. *Would Kim have enjoyed this New Year's Eve party?*

With drowsy Zachary swaying in tempo with the train, I asked, "Where is she now?"

He opened one eye. "You mean Mom, right?"

"Of course. Was she with us at the party? Is she with us right now on this train?"

Zachary, always the philosopher, answered, "The question hangs on the word *now*. What does now look like from God's perspective? I'm not sure where she is, but wherever it is, I doubt that her now is our now."

"You're right. Time is a created thing, like space. To be with God is to be outside of our time and our space. But wherever she is, do you think she retains her self-identity? Is she still Kim Foreman?"

"I think so, but I also think she is just as cut off from us as we are from her. You know the story of Lazarus and Dives? There's an unbreachable chasm between the living and the dead."

Zachary was now alert, so I decided to push the conversation. "Let's go back to the *where* question. I believe in heaven and hell, but what about purgatory? Is that where you think your mom is?"

My Catholic son pushed in return. "I don't want to hurt your Protestant sensibilities, but that's exactly where I think she is. I expect you and I will pass through purgatory as well. Look, none of us has led a perfect life. Purging is necessary before we can enter a holy heaven. It's like taking an uncomfortably hot shower before putting on those clean white robes."

I quoted Scripture. "The Bible says 'It is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment.'⁴³ I don't see purgatory sandwiched in there. And what about, 'to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord'?"⁴⁴

Zachary and I had often engaged in this Bible banter. He would explain Catholic doctrine and I would quote Scripture to refute it.

After more back and forth he said, “Well, wherever Mom is, she’s in God’s hands now, right?”

“Yes,” I responded. “Whenever now is.”

We ended our conversation as the Metro arrived at our station. When we found his car in the commuter lot, I asked, “Why don’t you let me drive?” He’d enjoyed a few drinks, but I’d stuck to soda. “Just point the way.” After scraping light frost from the windshield, I got in the driver’s seat.

On the drive home, Zachary muttered, “Dad, if Mom were looking over my shoulder right now, would she approve of my life?”

“I think she would be very proud of the way you’re looking after your father.”

We arrived home at two a.m., too wound up to sleep. Zachary suggested watching a Netflix movie, but the title didn’t interest me. I thanked him for the memorable New Year’s celebration and retired to my room.

The train-ride conversation had kindled my thoughts ablaze. *Where is she now?* As I lay in bed, I considered each word.



Where is she now?

To an atheist, there is nothing transcendent about the human body. The one hundred pounds of meat that was Kim simply lies in the ground moldering. That’s the materialist answer. She’s rotting under the soil in a graveyard on Mission Street.

If you believe in a personal God, the story must be different. Is Kim in hell? No. Her faith was firmly planted in Christ. Is she in heaven? That’s my best guess, but is *heaven* the right word? Scripture hints that our final destination—the new heaven—has yet to be created.⁴⁵ Is she in purgatory? I can’t rule it out, but since Scripture says nothing about purgatory, that seems unlikely. What more can I say than that Kim is located in God’s grip?

Where *is* she now?

The word *is* means “exist.” To a materialist the question becomes: “Where does Kim exist now?” The answer is: “She does not exist.” The living, laughing person who was Kim

ceased to be at the moment of her death. She was annihilated. Something that does not exist cannot have properties of where and now. It's nonsense to ask, "Where is she now?"

However, the living Kim was more than a moving cloud of atoms. If she ever existed as a person at all, she exists as a person still. My faith informs me that Kim subsists in that awkward interim between bodies.

I rolled over in bed, straining to remember vocabulary from my theology books. Suddenly it came to me. The human being is a "conditional unity."⁴⁶ The Lord God formed the human body from the dust of the earth and breathed into Adam's nostrils the breath of life.⁴⁷ The spirit-infused body is a unitary living soul. The unity is conditional because upon death the amalgam breaks down into its component parts. The body returns to dust while the breath returns to the one who breathed it.

In the eschaton (the final stage of history), naked human spirits will unite with new and glorified bodies. In that redeemed universe, the spirit of Kim will become an embodied unity once more—not conditional this time, but everlasting.

Where is *she* now?

The word *she* indicates a person, distinct and definable. Yes. Kim must persist as a self-identifying person, somewhere somehow. She is not a vanishing drop of water swallowed into an ocean of oblivion. She is not reincarnated as a newborn with another name at another time. She is not in some ethereal realm, ascending an otherworldly staircase, growing step by step into a goddess. For the present season, Kim-without-her-body is in the protective custody of her loving Father.

Where is she *now*?

The question of now equates to the question of time. In many ways this is the most straightforward of the four terms. Kim is with the one who fabricated time. Therefore, she exists beyond the reach of time. *Time* is another term for death, since without time death could not exist. The explanation of time is easy. The understanding is impossible.

The philosopher Immanuel Kant put it this way. Time and space aren't things at all. As limited human beings, we exist in a temporal world. Even before we experience a thought or sensation, we place it on an invisible grid. Our mind supplies the conditions of space and time in

order to experience objects.⁴⁸ Kim exists beyond our temporal grid in a mode we can't imagine.

Will there be space and time in the eschaton? I suspect there will be. But like all things at the end stage of history, space and time will be redeemed. Jürgen Moltmann called this “Aeonic time” which he understood to be cyclical in nature. “Irreversible historical time is replaced by reversible time as a reflection of God’s eternity.”⁴⁹ What might that look like? My head boggles even thinking about it.

Lord, what do all of these speculations add up to? Where is Kim now?

I remembered the words I was about to preach. So I turned on the light and rummaged for my Bible, finding Colossians 3:3 and 4. I read the verses, then repeated them out loud to Kim. “For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.”⁵⁰

Where is she now? Kim is hid with Christ in God, awaiting the eschaton. I required no more explanation than that. I fell asleep, assured that my lovely wife rested in the hands of a lovelier Savior.



I was slow to get out of bed the following morning, but Zachary was even slower. January first was a federal holiday, and most sites around the capitol were closed for the day. But we checked online and discovered that Mount Vernon was open until three p.m. When Zachary and I arrived at two, we had only one hour to walk the grounds.

As I looked at the old buildings, I told Zachary, “The last time you and I were here was 1977, when I was stationed at Fort Belvoir. You were almost two and toddling. I carried you on my shoulders most of the time.” I looked at my son. “Thank you, Zachary, for carrying me on your shoulders this week.”

We walked along the roadway circling the plantation, then I pointed to the vault that contained the remains of our first president. “Thirty-three years ago I asked your mom to stand by the front door for a picture. Just before I took the photo, I shouted out, ‘Do you know the dead body of George Washington is in there?’ She made an awful face and I snapped the picture. It seems like a moment ago. It also seems like a lifetime ago.”

“Dad, for me, thirty-three years *is* a lifetime ago.”

After our tour, we returned to his house and rested for the remainder of New Year’s Day. On January 2, I sat in on one of his Power Score classes, and on January 3, I returned to California.

After I arrived home, I continued to attend GriefShare, most of the time with Jody on a leash. My companion lifted the spirits of all the participants.

Through GriefShare, I became familiar with the work of Elisabeth Kübler-Ross.⁵¹ Her research showed that a bereaved person could expect to experience a series of five emotional stages: denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance.

As I considered my own grief journey, I recognized each of these emotions. For the first few days I was in emotional denial. I couldn’t believe Kim was actually dying. I burned with anger toward Franc. I also had several bargaining sessions with God. Next I experienced a few months of lingering melancholy that would certainly qualify as depression. I did not experience these stages in lockstep succession, but as fluid—flowing in one direction and then another. I still fell short of the acceptance stage.

I continued my road trips, even in the frigid weather. My compulsion to drive had more to do with escape and less to do with travel. In late January I drove my camper to Fresno for a Baptist convention, navigating with my iPad and accompanied by my dog. I parked overnight in the church parking lot, plugging in an electric heater.

On the return trip, I pulled into a rest stop not far from home. As I walked Jody through the trees, I came upon an educational sign that read, “Fire is the mechanism by which this forest is continually regenerated. Some species of pine even rely on fire to spread their seeds. This Monterey pine produces resin-filled cones that remain dormant until a fire occurs and melts the resin. Then the cones pop open and the seeds fall or blow out.”

Re-growth is not possible without a fiery trial.

“But who may abide the day of his coming? and who shall stand when he appeareth? for he is like a refiner’s fire” (Malachi 3:2).

A few days later I sat in my office, polishing a morning message. I was about to preach from Colossians 3:3: “For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God.” My thoughts returned to the deep philosophical question of New Year’s Day: “Where is Kim now?”

Jody sat on the couch, restless for a walk. I grabbed her leash and opened my door. I stopped at the secretary’s desk outside of my office. “Where do you think Kim is now?”

Sherry paused in thought. “Well, I can tell you this. Kim’s still on Facebook. I saw her there yesterday.”

Jody tugged me outside. As she sniffed to find just the right spot, I laughed. *It’s a burden to be a philosopher. Church secretaries are the ones who seem to have all the answers.*

Chapter 21

Seasons of Solomon

“God moves in a mysterious way His wonders to perform.” These are the first two lines of a hymn by William Cowper.^{[52](#)}

I experienced His mysterious ways in February with the confluence of three events: the birth of my granddaughter, a celebration of Kim’s birthday, and a reading from Ecclesiastes.

To everything there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven: a time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up; a time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up; a time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance (Ecclesiastes 3:1–4).

As I read this passage, God reminded me that He is sovereign over the universe. He is the one who set the stars in motion and laid the foundation of the world. He established the seasons for birth and death. This reminder of God’s oversight brought comfort to my soul as my wounded heart continued to mend.

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February 2011

Month seven

On February 20, 2011, Kim would have celebrated her sixtieth birthday. Koreans hold this day in great regard. It's called "[*Hwan-Gap*](#)" in the Korean language and is considered auspicious since the cycle of the zodiac had turned five times. Also, many years ago, it was uncommon for Koreans to live sixty years. So at this venerable age, children honored their parents with a feast and merrymaking. Hwan-Gap marked the elder's official day of retirement.

I had celebrated my Hwan-Gap on Christmas Eve 2009. After slicing birthday cake, I joked with Kim. "Yobo, your Hwan-Gap is just around the corner. How would you like to celebrate it?"

She scrunched her nose. "Sixty years old! I don't even want to think about it."

Kim never had to think about it. She died two hundred days short of this milestone birthday. However, her survivors wished to honor her with this Korean day of remembrance.

After consulting with Zachary and Simon, we decided to make her birthday a two-part affair. We would hold a Saturday celebration in San Lorenzo on February 19, travel by camper to Vancouver, and hold a Sunday celebration on February 20. I reminded my California friends that February 19 in California was actually February 20 in Korea.



Every Sunday morning, about twenty minutes before the start of the church service, I projected announcements onto an overhead screen. On most Sundays a dozen slides ran in automatic rotation. On February 6, three slides ran in sequence.

Slide one was a birth announcement. "Pastor Chris is proud to announce the arrival of his first granddaughter. [*Gia Foreman*](#) arrived on February 4 at two in the morning—six pounds and six ounces, eighteen inches top to bottom. Baby and mother are both doing great." Next to these words, a photo of one-day-old Gia brought smiles to the congregation.

The projector then rotated to slide two. "You are invited to attend a celebration and remembrance of Kim Foreman on Saturday, February 19, at five p.m. in our fellowship hall. Although Kim did not make it to her sixtieth birthday, we hope that you can. Korean food will be

provided, but bring a dessert to share.” Next to these words was a smiling picture of Kim.

The next slide reminded the congregation of the six p.m. service. “Join us this evening as we continue our study through the book of Ecclesiastes. Tonight we will consider chapter three: ‘To every thing there is a season and a time to every purpose under the heaven.’”

From our sound booth, I watched these three slides pass before my eyes. And I heard God speaking to me. “Don’t worry, Chris. Birth and death are in My hands. Be faithful and trust Me to handle the details.”

February 6 was a remarkable Sunday. In the morning I preached from Colossians, chapter 3, words that assured me about Kim’s present condition: she is hid with Christ in God, awaiting His return in glory.

In the evening I taught the seasons of Solomon from Ecclesiastes, which assured me God was in control. There is a time for everything: a time to be born and a time to die. If my life were a musical composition, I’d title it “Variations on a Theme from Solomon.”



The following week I received a large package in the mail. It was a three-foot-by-four-foot [portrait of Kim](#), custom made from my favorite photograph. She stood in Rwanda surrounded by children. Her face was beaming. She wore a red T-shirt with the words *Joy of God* emblazoned on it. I had ordered this portrait as the centerpiece of her upcoming birthday party.

Zachary arrived in the Bay Area on February 17 and Simon arrived the next day. Dilia stayed behind to look after Lorenzo and newborn Gia.

It was a pleasure to be with my sons again. We talked into the night. Simon laughed when I told him how I remembered his new daughter’s name. “G-I-A. It stands for ‘God is Awesome.’”

On Saturday we packed the VW camper, then headed out the door about three p.m. We stopped off at a party store and picked up two large Mylar balloons.

I wanted to show my sons their mom’s gravestone so we stopped at Holy Angels Cemetery. Simon was pleased with his installation art. I touched each of the glyphs that told the story of their mother’s life. We sang “Happy Birthday” with heavy hearts, leaving behind one balloon attached to the headstone.

When I smelled Korean food, I knew I was in the right church. Zachary sneaked a few pot stickers. Then we placed the portrait near the pulpit. One of Kim's friends who owned a flower shop arranged several bouquets around it. Simon got the idea to print out the forty-eight glyphs engraved on Kim's gravestone, including a brief explanation of each. We taped the paper sheets along the corridor leading into the sanctuary.

This event marked the final farewell for Kim at our church, and I was blessed to see sixty people in attendance. Most came from our congregation, many of whom were not able to honor Kim at the August funeral.

In the spirit of Hwan-Gap, Zachary and Simon [paid tribute](#) to their mother. We toasted the vibrant Kim with scant mention of her death. Laughter was the engine and sorrow the caboose.

One of my friends suggested we let the second balloon ascend into the sky. As tributes concluded, we invited congregants onto the front lawn. This large Mylar balloon proclaimed "60!" in bold letters. I put the string into a little girl's hand, telling her, "Let it go. It's going up to heaven so Kim can read it." I watched until the tiny speck disappeared into God's vast expanse.

Zachary, Simon, and I did not stick around long. We gobbled some Korean food, packed a little more, and began our all-night trek to Vancouver, Washington. The February evening was cold, so I dressed Jody in her purple sweater.

With multiple drivers and snacks to fuel our way, the six hundred miles passed quickly. I let the boys do most of the driving as I rested in the back seat, listening to their animated conversation. We pulled into a rest stop near Weed, California, where we stretched out for a few hours. Jody served as my hot-water bottle.

We arrived at Frank's home about noon on Sunday, just three hours before the northern Hwan-Gap was due to start in the social hall at Frank's church. My family in the Portland area was extensive: three sisters and one brother, with fourteen nieces and nephews, many of whom had spouses and children. Kim also had two brothers and two sisters living in Oregon. All of these relatives were invited to Kim's sixtieth birthday party, which doubled as a memorial service for those who did not attend her funeral in Hayward.

About forty people filled the social hall. They sat and snacked as Simon spoke, then Zachary, then I. The forty-eight glyphs of Kim's life were reattached to walls and concrete

pillars. The hour was informal and the conversations light hearted.

Eileen put together a memorial booklet consisting of pictures and written memories of Kim contributed by family members. Reading the tributes I gained insight into how my late wife had inspired the younger generation.

My niece Susan read her words aloud. "I remember Kim's bright smile and sweet spirit. When she came into our family, I was a teenager. She amazed me how she could squat down with feet flat on the ground and her bottom almost touching the ground! She tried to show me how to sit like that and I tried, but no way. I asked her to teach me some Korean words. She tried, and when I said them, she laughed so hard. It's a precious memory."

I had asked one of my nephews to bring ten helium balloons to the social hall. At the conclusion of the celebration, Zachary handed the balloons to ten family members. He asked each to attach a handwritten note to his mother. My note read, "Know you are missed. Know you are loved. Know you will never be forgotten." We went outside and released our messages into heaven.

By five we were dead tired. As others cleaned, we drove the camper back to Frank's house. The boys stayed up a bit, but I conked out until the next morning.

On Monday I drove Zachary and Simon across the Columbia River to the Portland airport. Their flights departed only a few hours apart. Simon returned to JFK and Zachary to Dulles. I continued the road trip south to Ashland, Oregon, where I spent the night in a motel.

On Tuesday, as I crossed the snowy Siskiyou pass, I considered the clockwork precision of the two-day event. I thanked God for my church, for my family, and for my sons.

As Mount Shasta loomed in the distance, I drank in God's handiwork. My mind returned to Kim and her untimely death. Tooling down Interstate 5, I quizzed God again. "Why did you take her, Lord? Fifty-nine is so young."

In the whirling solitude of the moving vehicle, I discerned His reply. "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts" (Isaiah 55:9).

"My child, you're asking the wrong question. It's not 'For what purpose did I take Kim?' but 'For what purpose did I spare you?' There is a time for every purpose under heaven."

For a few hundred miles I ruminated on God's reformulated question. For what purpose under heaven did God spare me?

I arrived in Hayward after dark. The condo was frigid, so I turned up the heat. I thumbed through my mail, checked phone messages, watered my plants, and fed my dog. After eating a bowl of Cheerios for dinner, I washed my face, then sank into bed. Jody hopped up next to me.

The bachelor life wasn't that bad. Was I learning that God's grace was sufficient?



March 2011

Month eight

February departed and March arrived. I was startled. On March 4 I looked at my desk calendar. I had overlooked the eight-month anniversary of the car crash. That was understandable since there was no February thirty-first. But I'd also overlooked March 3 as the eight-month marker of Kim's death.

Is this forgetfulness a bad thing or a good thing?

I felt as if two miniature figures perched on my shoulders. A little devil whispered into my left ear, "How could you? She was your beloved wife."

A little angel whispered into my right ear, "It's okay, Chris. Your oversight is a positive sign of your healing."

I nodded with satisfaction. But then I second guessed myself. *Maybe I'm reversing the roles of the devil and the angel. Then again, maybe not.*

March was a quiet month. My old Baptist church in Tiburon, California, sponsored a musical concert, with all proceeds going to CASA in memory of Kim. Afterward, the pastor sent me a check for several hundred dollars.

I received news from Rwanda, reporting tremendous progress in constructing the Light House. After paying for funeral expenses, I'd wired one-half of Kim's life insurance settlement to support the project. After receiving a fifty-thousand-dollar cash infusion, Franc e-mailed me pictures of the first floor completed and the retaining walls standing tall.

I was determined not to prosper from Kim's passing. Whatever money I gained as a result of her death in Rwanda I plowed back into Rwanda as her legacy.

March 23, 2011, would have been our thirty-seventh wedding anniversary. My custom was to present Kim with roses equal to the number of years we had been married. But not this year. During my lunch hour, I stopped at the Party Store and bought a baggie full of wedding glitter—tiny red, blue, and silver emblems of wedding bells. After work, I visited her grave site.

With Jody watching from the car, I wept bitter tears as I sprinkled glitter over granite and soil as if it were holy water. “Thank you, Yobo. Thank you for thirty-six years of devotion. I know you would be with me for number thirty-seven if you could.”

That evening I received a phone call from Simon. He asked how I was holding up. I thanked him for phoning on my loneliest day of the year.



After the vernal equinox passed and the weather warmed, I prepared for a series of serious road trips. I tuned up my old camper and bought accessories from a VW website. I decided to become a traveling advertisement for Jesus.

Since my thoughts were planted in Paul’s epistle to the Colossians, I chose a verse from that book. I asked Diane, a scrapbook enthusiast, to provide me with two-inch letters spelling out “As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in Him” (Colossians 2:6).

Since King James English was a foreign language to most contemporary drivers, I figured this verse would not offend those who had not received Christ, yet the words could exhort believers to live out their convictions.

On a sunny March morning, Sherry helped me stick the sixty vinyl letters to the back end of my camper. I was ready to hit the road in style.

Chapter 22

The Suffering of the Saints

Sometimes we Christians put God on the witness stand and barrage Him with angry questions. Like Job, we ask, “Why does evil exist? Why am I in agony? Why did my loved one die?”

When Job finally ended his longwinded tirade, God turned the tables. Out of a whirlwind the Lord asked Job sixty-four unanswerable questions. He began with “Where were you when I laid the foundations of the universe” (Job 38:4)?

In the end Job responded with humility.

I know that You can do anything and no plan of Yours can be thwarted. You asked, “Who is this who conceals My counsel with ignorance?” Surely I spoke about things I did not understand, things too wonderful for me to know. Therefore I take back my words and repent in dust and ashes (Job 42:2, 3, 6 HCSB).

Jesus Christ told His followers, “In this world ye shall have tribulation, but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world” (John 16:33).

How can Christians be of good cheer in the midst of tribulation? The prince of Jesus’ apostles, Simon Peter, wrote an entire epistle to address head on the issue of suffering.

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April 2011

Month nine

I finished my sermon series on the last Sunday in March. Once more I found myself preaching to my own edification. Paul's words were as relevant to my ears as to the ears in ancient Colossi.

When the final message concluded, I was unsure where to turn next. Easter saved me, in a sense. Four April sermons would be Lenten, leading to an Easter message on May 1. After that, who knew what would follow?

"Lord," I prayed, "You have given me the solemn responsibility to present Your Word to Your people. Speak, for Your servant is listening."

On April 3, I delivered a message on the four trials of Christ. Then on April 4, I packed my VW camper and began a four-day road trip to Death Valley. Before departing I parked the camper next to Kim's grave site so I could say goodbye to her. I knelt, wept, and read this poem to my wife's porcelain image:

What is love like?

Is it round or is it square? Long or short?

Is there more to measure than what I'm stepping on?

You may not think it lasts long

But I can't see where it ends.⁵³

Why did love have to end, Lord? Why?

With Jody riding shotgun I caught Interstate 80 heading east. I listened to old songs, remembered old times, and shed a bucket of tears. In the mix of golden oldies, the Beatles reminded me: "Ob-la-di, Ob-la-da."⁵⁴ My life would go on.

Jody and I camped overnight near Lake Tahoe. I drove down the east side of the Sierra Nevada Mountains along Highway 395. After resting at Mono Lake, we continued into Nevada. We arrived at Death Valley just before dark. Soon my campfire blazed under a canopy of twinkling stars. I sat in a folding chair, gazing into the flames.

Without a soul around, I complained out loud to God. “Lord, sometimes I feel like hanging it up. Why go on preaching? Kim was half the team—and the better half at that. I’m working with one arm, about to collapse. I’m breathing with one lung, about to suffocate. I’m cheating my church. Did you spare me in Rwanda just to make me suffer?”

The starry host held their peace.

Feeling sorry for myself, I groused, “Lord, I’m so inadequate. I don’t even know what I’m going to preach about next month.”

A thought flashed into my mind. *Preach what you know.*

“But all I know is suffering,” I muttered in dejection.

More silence.

Suddenly I got it. “Bingo,” I shouted, and Jody scooted off my lap.

With Bible software on my iPad, I conducted a word search for “suffering.” One book of the Bible stood above the rest, mentioning suffering seventeen times in five chapters. I grabbed my pocket New Testament and read through the first epistle of Peter.

Simon Peter wrote to scattered churches throughout the Roman Empire. During the reign of Nero, Christians were under fierce persecution, and many died for their faith. The suffering saints sought out Peter, prince of the apostles, seeking an explanation for their tribulation.

Since my soul was steeped in grief and I was banished to this remote desert, I too sought counsel from Saint Peter.

Peter, you who walked with Jesus, what is the purpose of suffering?

I read his words as if he were speaking to me personally. “Chris, you rejoice in this, though now for a short time you have had to struggle in various trials so that the genuineness of your faith—more valuable than gold, which perishes though refined by fire—may result in praise, glory, and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ” (1 Peter 1:6–7 HCSB).

Peter, chief of the apostles, what should be my response to suffering?

“Those who suffer according to God’s will should, while doing what is good, entrust themselves to a faithful Creator” (1 Peter 4:19 HCSB).

Do your fellow apostles—James, John, and Paul—agree with your view of suffering?

“Yes. My friend James, the brother of our Lord, said this: ‘Consider it pure joy whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance’ (James 1:2–3).

“And my best buddy John, the disciple whom Jesus loved, testified, ‘I am your brother and companion in suffering. I was on the island of Patmos because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus’ (Revelation 1:9 HCSB).

“Paul was my friend in Rome. We were martyred about the same time. Listen to what he said. ‘We also rejoice in our afflictions, because we know that affliction produces endurance, endurance produces proven character, and proven character produces hope’” (Romans 5:3–4 HCSB).

But, Peter, you denied Christ three times! Why should I care what you say?

“Don’t look to me as your role model. ‘For you were called to this, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you should follow in His steps. He did not commit sin, and no deceit was found in His mouth; when He was reviled, He did not revile in return; when He was suffering, He did not threaten but entrusted Himself to the One who judges justly’” (1 Peter 2:21–23 HCSB).

“O God,” I cried out, “help me to follow in the steps of Christ. Help me to completely forgive Franc Murenzi and banish every bit of resentment. I entrust myself to You, Lord. You will judge the matter justly.”

That night I came to understand that God does answer prayer. The Bible is our answer manual. Again I turned to the wise apostle.

Peter, am I the first man ever to experience such suffering?

Don’t be surprised when the fiery ordeal comes among you to test you as if something unusual were happening to you. Instead, rejoice as you share in the sufferings of the Messiah, so that you may also rejoice with great joy at the revelation of His glory, knowing that the same sufferings are being experienced by your fellow believers throughout the world (1 Peter 4:12, 13, 5:9 HCSB).

I rested in the camper that night knowing that the answers in my Bible now resided in my head. But I also remembered the old proverb: “The longest journey in the world may well be the one cubit—the eighteen inches—from head to heart.”

I spent the next full day on the valley floor. The temperature rose to ninety-three degrees at the Furnace Creek Visitor Center. I stopped at Dante’s View and Zabriskie Point. Jody and I

walked around abandoned borax mills.

Chugging out of Death Valley into the mountains I experienced a rain shower, a [double rainbow](#), and snow flurries all within eight hours. Jody and I passed the night in the desert wilderness along a gravel mining road.

On the return trip I found myself flipping through radio stations. I settled on a religious station and listened for while. An occupational hazard of being a preacher was that I couldn't listen to a sermon without critiquing it. After an uplifting message by Chuck Swindoll, I began listening to a local preacher. He was yammering about the book of Revelation: identifying the beast, naming combatants at the battle of Armageddon, and urging people to stock up on survival gear provided at his website.

"Charlatan!" I ranted at the radio. "That's not what our faith's about. That's not what Revelation is about. John wrote to fortify believers who were under persecution, not to sell your stupid food products." Jody looked at me to make sure I wasn't shouting at her.

I pulled over to the side of the road, opened my pocket Bible, and rebuked the voice on the radio. "Did you notice Revelation 2:10? 'Be faithful unto death and I shall give you a crown of life.' This is the kind of nourishment my soul needs, not your one-month supply of prepackaged soup."

After I snapped off the radio, I wondered why preachers like that upset me so much. Maybe because false prophets assault my sense of truth. I justified myself with the thought *At least my temper tantrum wasn't as bad as Jude's.*

I turned back a few pages in my Bible and read:

These men are blemishes—shepherds who feed only themselves. They are clouds without rain, blown along by the wind; autumn trees, without fruit and uprooted—twice dead. They are wild waves of the sea, foaming up their shame; wandering stars, for whom blackest darkness has been reserved forever (Jude 1:12–13 NIV).

I eased my camper back on to the blacktop, still raving in my mind. *Too many of these false shepherds are fleecing God's flock. People need to hear about faithfulness in the midst of pain, not one hundred and one ways to avoid it.*



When I returned to my church office, I spent a few days in careful study of 1 Peter—specifically Peter’s apologetic on suffering. I outlined a sermon series that would carry me into August. My attitude toward preaching had always been *I don’t know enough about this Scripture. The best way for me to learn it is to preach it.*

After two Easter sermons I was traveling again, this time flying east to meet a member of my family I had never seen: Gia Foreman. My new granddaughter was eighty days old when I arrived at my son’s house in Queens. This time I had every intention of functioning as a nanny.

Simon commuted into Manhattan every day and Dilia took advantage of my presence to visit her friends. I managed a feeding schedule for Gia, a playing schedule for Lorenzo, and a nap schedule for both.

The hardest part of this visit was managing the shadow of Kim. Tears welled whenever I looked into Gia’s pudgy face and considered that Kim missed this joy. If God had granted her another twenty years, nothing would have given her more pleasure than [pampering her grandchildren](#) into adulthood. *Lord, why did You take this pleasure from her?*

I stayed with my son from Monday to Friday. By the time I left for home, I’d grown to appreciate the labor of these young parents. Two kids and two dogs for five days was the maximum this grandpa could handle.

After a brief sleep in my own bed, I officiated a wedding at noon on Saturday. The Beatles were right. Life goes on.



May 2011

Month ten

Easter 2011 fell on May first, very late in the year. My resurrection sermon came from John chapter twenty, where Jesus tells doubting Thomas, “Because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed.”^{[55](#)}

I was still marking first-year events. My thoughts wandered back to Easter 2010, when Kim sat in the front pew and I preached “O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?”⁵⁶

My thoughts meandered back further, to Easter 2008. Rummaging through my files, I located a “Pastor’s Corner” column I had written for the occasion. On this particular Easter, Kim and I not only marked the resurrection of Christ, but also our thirty-fourth wedding anniversary.

I noted in the article that March 23, 2008, was a double-header. The last time Easter had occurred so early in the calendar was 1913. The closing paragraph took on a poignancy beyond my original intent.

I decided to calculate the next time my wedding anniversary and Easter would fall on the same date. It turns out to be the year of our Lord 2160. That Easter would be our 176th anniversary. Kim and I won’t be here to celebrate that day. However, my faith tells me that we will exist in another realm where we will recognize each other. Maybe we will even share memories of that Easter/anniversary that occurred 152 years earlier. It’s worth waiting to see.

O God. How could I be so flippant about life and death? Kim was not even around to celebrate Easter 2011, let alone Easter 2160. Will Kim and I really share an afterlife conversation about our adventures as husband and wife?

After Easter I was ready for another break. My associate pastor, Ken Hillard, agreed to cover the next two Sundays for me. My four-day road trip to Death Valley was just a tune-up for my [big road trip to Texas](#).

I was a vagabond from May 3 to 18, stopping by streams, building campfires, listening to music, and watching mile markers whizz by. Jody and I visited my friends in Lubbock, my sister-in-law in Dallas, and my ninety-year-old uncle in San Antonio.

Zachary flew into Dallas, and together we tramped back to California. My kindred spirit slept in the top bunk of the camper while I slept below. I relished his company, cheering when he followed my good traits and groaning when he copied my bad ones.

We visited the Alamo, the UFO museum, the Sonoran desert, the Joshua trees, and Pismo Beach. We spent a few pleasant days in Hayward, then Zachary flew back east.

Kim was never far from my mind. *How she would have enjoyed Zach's intellect and wit. And how she would have scolded him when he discussed dropping out of grad school!*

As the month ended, Frank and Lelia flew down for Memorial Day. We visited a few San Francisco tourist sites, including Coit Tower and Fisherman's Wharf. We decorated Kim's grave with flowers and I explained the forty-eight glyphs of Kim's life.

We also walked to the top of Mount Davidson, the highest point in San Francisco. In such an antireligious place, Frank was surprised to find the tallest Christian cross in all the US. Beneath the shadow of this 103-foot concrete structure, Frank, Lelia, and I sat, talked, and prayed. I told Frank, "I am returning to Rwanda to commemorate the one-year anniversary of the car crash—not so much out of desire, but out of duty. I feel derelict in her death. I must be diligent in her memory."

I explained to Frank my plans to build a roadside memorial for Kim at the point of the crash. As I spoke, I could see relief in his face.

"I'm glad you're going back to Rwanda. I thought you might, but I wasn't sure."

After a pastors' breakfast, I met with John Phillips for the last time, and shared my decision to return to Rwanda.

"Good for you," he said, then read me his favorite verse: "They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint" (Isaiah 40:31).

"Sometimes we soar like eagles," he added, "and that's a great feeling. Other times we run without getting tired. That's wonderful too. But sometimes the best we can do as Christians is to stumble along—just put one foot in front of the other and not give up. I'm glad your feet are leading you back to Africa. Maybe it's eagle time again."



June 2011

Month eleven

As I continued my practice of walking Jody while listening to audio books, I came across

a recording of a true Christian hero: Joni Eareckson Tada. In 2010 she released a book—on audio only—called “A Place of Healing.”⁵⁷ I listened to it twice.

Talk about a suffering saint! Joni’s forty years of quadriplegia and her recent bout with chronic pain pushed my own suffering into perspective. Her wise exegesis of Scripture renewed my hope in a God who cares. It also engendered in me a stronger faith in Christ, who knows what it’s like to suffer.

Joni spoke of a time when she addressed a seminary class at Biola University on the topic of God’s redemptive purpose in suffering. By the end of her lecture, she was in acute pain. A student asked her why God permitted her to suffer.

“Why? I don’t know why,” she replied. “Maybe God has allowed it so you can hear this testimony and witness honest tears.”

Maybe that’s why God has allowed me to suffer as well, so I can minister to a hurting world. Christ’s suffering was redemptive. Perhaps mine could be too. When suffering redemptive pain, I label it “excruciating” and remember that the Latin root word means “from the cross [of Christ].”

On the third Saturday in June, my church held a parking lot sale to raise funds for Africa. Knickknacks covered a dozen tables, clothes were stacked on blue tarps, and old furniture sat in rows. Jody and I hung out from nine a.m. to five p.m. At the end of that long summer day we’d hauled in \$952.50.

Clearly yard sales and pledge drives could not raise the funds needed to complete the Light House. So, using my Mill Valley property as collateral, I applied for two line-of-credit loans: one from my insurance company and another with my local bank. I figured Kim paid for half the house. Why not pour her portion into Africa to establish a Bible institute in her name?

I continued to preach from 1 Peter. Back when I had introduced this book, I proclaimed that Peter’s major theme was “endurance under suffering.” By the third message, I corrected myself. No, the real theme was “joy in the midst of suffering.”

How is it possible that Saint Peter, under threat of death, could write these words to other suffering saints? “Though not seeing Him now, you believe in Him and rejoice with inexpressible and glorious joy.”⁵⁸

O God, fill me with this joy in the midst of my sorrow.

In my quiet time I composed a reflection upon 1 Peter 1:8 called “It’s All about Joy.”

Happiness is joy experienced in the moment.

Hope is joy anticipated.

Sorrow is joy departed, now remembered.

Praise is the overflow of joy.

Peace is the in-working of joy.

Love is the out-working of joy.

Holiness is the bedrock of joy.

Faith is the attitude of joy.

Hell is the ever-absence of joy.

Heaven is the ever-presence of joy.

I rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory.

PART FOUR
SEASON OF RESTORATION



“To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven:
... a time to build up.”
(Ecclesiastes 3:1,3)

Chapter 23

Return to the Roadside

I stood under the corrugated roof of our open-air classroom, exuberant to be in Africa once again. I shared a reflection with my Rwandan students. “For the past year I have been comparing myself to Job. Satan visited Job twice. The first time, he stripped Job of his wealth and children. On his next visit, Satan ruined his health. Even Job’s friends turned against him. Who knows the only thing Satan did not remove from Job?”

A student in the back raised a hand. “His wife.”

“That’s right. I’m done identifying with Job. I’ve had it! I didn’t lose my health. I escaped the car crash without a scratch. I didn’t lose my wealth. As a matter of fact, with two insurance settlements, I’m richer than I was before. I didn’t lose my friends or my sons. We’re closer now than ever. The only thing I did lose was my wife. You can call me the ‘Un-Job.’”

A few days later a CASR student greeted me. “Hello, I really enjoyed your class. Do you remember my name?”

I paused with embarrassment.

“Well, I remember your name. You’re Doctor Un-Job.”

We shared a smile.

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July 2011

Month twelve: the one-year mark

I began July with a phone call to Master Work Plaques in Florida. “We agreed on specifications a month ago, and I sent you the check on June fifteenth. You promised it would be here by July. Guess what? It’s July and it’s not here.”

The woman at the other end of the line apologized. “Mr. Foreman, we’re sorry. We sent it to the foundry ten days ago and haven’t gotten it yet. Let me make some inquiries and I’ll get back to you.”

“You do that. I plan on carrying the plaque to Africa for my wife’s memorial. So please do what you can to get it here soon.” I hung up in frustration.

The [forged aluminum plaque](#) I’d ordered was big—three feet wide and two feet high. Master Work Plaques had said it needed to be that size to accommodate all the words. I had requested the plaque in bronze, but they said a bronze plaque would weigh eighty-five pounds, too much for me to carry on the airline. I opted instead for an aluminum plaque at thirty-five pounds. Still it cost over a thousand dollars.

The Holy Angels Cemetery had been kind enough to provide me with an extra ceramic photo of Kim. I sent the photo to Florida along with the check. The oval photo would be embedded in the center of the plaque. Across the top was “Dr. Kim Hyun Deok Foreman” and under it “February 20, 1951–August 3, 2010.” I wrote the following words to put on the right side of the memorial plaque:

At this point, on this road on July 31, 2010, Dr. Kim Hyun Deok Foreman suffered a fatal car accident. She died in Kigali on August 3, 2010. Kim was a beloved wife, a loving mother, and a faithful servant of Jesus Christ. Kim loved the people of Rwanda. She will forever live in our hearts.

Under this tribute were words of Scripture. “For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory. [Colossians 3:3–4]”

On the left side of the plaque, the same words were written in the Kinyarwanda

language.



I wanted to be with family on Independence Day, so I packed up the camper and headed north on July 3. Jody and I spent the night at the Weed rest stop and arrived in Turner, Oregon, the next afternoon. I visited Kim's sister and nephew and sat with them for a few hours at the Turner Market. I struggled to make conversation. Kim was the anchor that bound me to this family and without her I felt my Korean in-laws drifting away.

My next stop was Canby, Oregon, to visit my sister Jeanne. While driving along Interstate 5, I recalled an incident from one year earlier, when Kim and I lived in the condo. Zachary was visiting, and just before dark the three of us slipped into the association swimming pool. I splashed in the water while hearing distant pops and booms. I overheard Kim explaining to our son, "I found a wonderful way to swim laps in this pool. It keeps me motivated. I have a list of ten people to pray for, and on every lap I pray for a different person. You're the second lap, right after your dad."

I swept away tears as I pulled up to Jeanne's apartment.

I talked with my sister for a while and then we went to see fireworks over Lake Oswego. That night Jody and I slept in the camper in Jeanne's parking space.

On July 5 I visited my brother Frank in Vancouver. My two Washington State sisters dropped in for lunch. We laughed, shared, and took inventory of our children and grandchildren.

I headed home on the sixth, grateful for the family God had given me and resigned to the gradual disengagement of Kim's family.

On the drive to California I decided to visit two big mountains. The first night I parked in an RV camp close to Mount Hood, and on the second night I camped at Castle Crags State Park near Mount Shasta. The grandeur of these majestic peaks stirred my soul.

Thy mercy, O Lord, is in the heavens; and thy faithfulness reacheth unto the clouds. Thy righteousness is like the great mountains; thy judgments are a great deep: O Lord, thou preservest man and beast (Psalm 36:5–6).

I thanked God for preserving both me and my little beast called Jody.



I stopped by the office at four o'clock and talked with Sherry. I then opened my church mail, checked voice messages, and headed home.

The next day I stopped at the Hayward post office on the way to work. I thumbed through my week of accumulated mail and found nothing about the memorial plaque. I made another urgent phone call to Master Work Plaques and received another apology. "The foundry had difficulty in cementing the ceramic portrait onto the cast aluminum. But don't worry. It will be there in a few days."

Finally, on July 9, the plaque arrived at the UPS store. I unwrapped the package and smiled at Kim's ceramic face smiling back at me.

On the following Monday, I carried the plaque to GriefShare. After a two-month absence, the bereavement group was delighted to see me, but Jody more so.

About halfway through the session my turn came to speak. "This will probably be my last visit. It's been almost a year since Kim died. I came today to share the healing that has taken place in my heart and to show you this plaque."

After GriefShare adjourned, I lingered to thank those who'd helped me endure the unendurable.

The day was approaching for my July 18 departure to Africa. I met with my associate pastor, Ken Hillard, to discuss the three weeks he would fill the pulpit. I brought the memorial plaque to church on July 17 and asked the congregation to pray for me as I sought full reconciliation with Franc at the roadside dedication.

My last sermon before departing to Rwanda came from 1 Peter 3:1–11, addressing the subject of husbands and wives. If Kim had sat in the front pew, I would have joked and winked at her. She would have made exaggerated faces and rolled her eyes as I addressed Peter's words, "Wives submit yourselves to your own husbands."⁵⁹ I missed her playfulness so much.

I encased the plaque in bubble wrap and packed it into a folding wardrobe bag. Then I dropped Jody off with Diane, and her husband, Charles, drove me to the airport. I stopped en route to spend a short night with Zachary in Virginia. The next morning he drove me to Dulles

where I boarded Ethiopian Airlines. I changed planes in Addis Ababa, and after another ninety minutes in the air, I landed in Kigali.

What would I say? How would I act? I knew I could control my outward demeanor toward Franc, but what about my visceral response?

Paul and Franc met me after I claimed my luggage. Paul exhibited enthusiasm while Franc stood in silence. I noted the ugly scar on the crown of his head.

After Paul hugged me, I reached out my hand to Franc. He shook it with vigor but without a word. Finally he asked, “Mzee, how was your flight?” I believed we were both striving to strike the right tone.

Paul explained he had business in Kigali and Franc would drive me back to Butare. Was this a setup? I never asked.

Franc showed me his replacement vehicle, a beat-up clunker that was half the car of his demolished CRV. I stood frozen for a few moments, then I closed my eyes, gulped, and sat next to Franc.

He gripped the steering wheel, looked straight ahead, and intoned, “I will drive carefully, Mzee.”

After an hour we entered Gitarama. “Franc, let’s pause for a moment at the accident site.”

He acknowledged, and after several minutes, pulled over and stopped.

I didn’t recognize the roadside at first, but when I turned to face north, the accident scene rushed back.

We crossed the blacktop and strolled in silence. I stooped to the asphalt and ran my fingers along the gouge mark, undiminished after a year.

Franc bowed his head as tears flowed from my eyes. I put my hand on Franc’s shoulder. “Let’s put the past behind us and work together for the glory of God.”

He pointed toward a mound of dirt. “Over there. I talked to the property owner. He’s agreed to sell us a little piece of land. That’s where we’ll put the memorial.”

I walked to the spot, and with outstretched arms I twirled three-hundred-sixty degrees. “This will do fine.”

When we arrived at the CASR house, I set the aluminum plaque on the front stairs and told people, “That’s the exact spot where Kim meditated on her last day.”

Franc invited me to his house for a meal on Saturday evening, and I gave small gifts to

his wife, Claudine, and his two little girls. There was unspoken sadness as we joined together for chicken, potatoes, cassava, and beans.

“Your husband is a good man,” I told Claudine. “He will do great things in Rwanda.”

She smiled without speaking.

The next morning Paul invited me to preach at his church. His congregation welcomed me with respect and encouragement. I spoke about hope choosing as my text Hebrews 6:18, “We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure.”⁶⁰

I described three levels of hope. “First there is wishful thinking. This kind of hope is based on fantasy. ‘I hope I get good grades even though I didn’t study’ or ‘I hope I will go to heaven even though God is not in my life.’

“Next there is optimism. This kind of hope is based on facts. ‘I hope I will have enough money to retire because I invest ten percent of my income’ or ‘I hope I will go to heaven because I work harder than most people in this church.’

“Finally, there is Christian hope. This kind of hope is based on a conviction, an expectation that what God has promised He is also able to deliver.”⁶¹

I presented my testimony. “Christian hope has been the anchor of my soul for the past year. Picture a wooden boat anchored off the shoreline with the name Chris written on its hull. When the storm came, winds and waves battered the boat, but it stayed afloat. The anchor, fixed to the sea bottom, allowed the boat to stray only so far in any direction. Because the anchor held, my boat did not crash onto the rocky shore, nor was it swept out to sea. Hope anchored in God is the only hope that is firm and secure.”

To close out my message, Pastor Paul led the congregation in singing the Kinyarwandan version of “[The Solid Rock](#).”

My hope is built on nothing less than Jesus’ blood and righteousness;

I dare not trust the sweetest frame, but wholly lean on Jesus’ name.

On Christ, the solid Rock, I stand. All other ground is sinking sand.

All other ground is sinking sand.⁶²

On Monday and Tuesday I taught classes in our front-yard classroom. I spoke from the book of Job. Several students shared the trauma of the genocide. One read the words from Job

3:26, “I was not in safety, neither had I rest, neither was I quiet; yet trouble came.”

I concluded my teaching by saying, “I believe that Job shows us that suffering is a philosophic problem that cannot be *solved*. At best it can only be *resolved*. And we see in Job that it was resolved through a personal encounter with the whirlwind who is living God. I want to tell you from my heart that on the basis of what I know about God, I can trust Him for what I do not know.”

On Wednesday I supervised the design of Kim’s roadside memorial. I told the builders I wanted the plaque to be at eye level and suggested they use corrugated iron as the concrete mold. Late in the day, a dozen workers carried bags of concrete and rocks to the roadside.

On Thursday, the Light House construction foreman took charge of this mini-project. He asked me, “What direction do you want the plaque to face, north or south?”

I hadn’t considered that question, but on a suggestion from Franc, we positioned it in a way that would allow travelers from Kigali to see Kim’s face. We leveled the land and filled a foundation with concrete and rock.

On Friday, we set up the cylinder mold and wired it into the foundation. It was about four feet high and three feet in diameter. Pastor Paul brought me the clothing Kim had worn on the day of the car crash. I dropped each piece into the mold as laborers poured in buckets of wet cement. First I dropped in her dusty-rose blouse, then her khaki slacks, and finally her undergarments—all stained with blood.

On Saturday, we added two more feet of concrete and embedded the aluminum plaque. At Paul’s suggestion, we added two metal flower holders to the left and right of the plaque. We were now prepared for the dedication scheduled to take place at two o’clock the next day.

As we returned to Butare, Paul said, “As far as I know this is the only roadside memorial in all of Rwanda, maybe in all of Africa.”

“It may be one of a kind, but to me it was a natural response to Kim’s death.”

On Sunday, exactly one year after the terrible crash, two hundred Rwandans gathered for the dedication of Kim’s roadside memorial. The old man with the sharp knife showed up and I thanked him once more for cutting me loose from my harness. A short magistrate gave a long speech about reconciliation between the Hutu and Tutsi people. CASR handed out a dozen goats to nearby widows. Celebration was in the air.

Franc spoke of July 31 one year earlier. With sorrow in his voice, he asked for my forgiveness. I repeated several times, “Franc, I forgive you. Franc, I forgive you.”

I spoke about Kim and how she had labored for the gospel in Rwanda. I shared my memories of that fateful day, gesturing toward the nearby road.

Finally, I turned toward Franc and said, “Brother Franc, forgive me for my hard heart. I know the car crash was an accident and you had no intention of harming Kim.”

Franc’s eyes teared up. “I forgive you, Mzee.”

We embraced and I held up Franc’s arm like a prizefighter, proclaiming him to be my friend and executive director once more.

Upon hearing the translation of my words, the large crowd burst into applause. The biggest embrace I received during the entire ceremony came from Franc’s wife. Claudine’s tears of gratitude moistened my cheeks.

As others packed up chairs, I posed for pictures next to the memorial, now festooned with flowers. Pastor Paul stood next to me as Jane snapped pictures.

“Do you remember what you told me last year at the airport?” I asked Paul.

“We spoke about lots of things. What do you mean?”

“You told me, ‘If you want to keep a gospel ministry in Rwanda, you have to forgive like a Rwandan.’”

“Did I say that?” He laughed. “Pastor Chris, this awful accident has drawn us all closer together. We have each lost a wife in Rwanda and we have each forgiven the offender. But believe me, not all Rwandans are so ready to forgive. It takes time. That’s why we Rwandese continue to talk about reconciliation sixteen years after the genocide. It is a very hard thing to do. In truth, we must learn to forgive like Christians—seventy times seven.”

Franc crossed the street to the concrete memorial. The three of us joined arms [posing for photos](#) as Kim looked down from her cast-aluminum plaque.

I thanked my friends, visiting dignitaries, and local citizens one more time. Then Paul drove me back to Butare where Mary Jane served a light evening meal. I was exhausted. But before switching off the light, I pondered this first anniversary of Kim’s absence. What was it like to live 365 days without my beloved?

I recalled the only time I had ever swum the entire length of a pool underwater. As a seventeen-year-old Boy Scout responding to a dare, I plunged headlong into the deep end. I

kicked my feet and stroked my arms as hard as I could for half a minute. My lungs felt like they were about to burst, my limbs ached, and my head was spinning. I thought for sure I would drown. But I persevered and finally touched concrete at the opposite end of the pool. I spit up water and gasped for air, but I survived.

How many seconds are in a year? I opened the calculator app on my iPad and multiplied 60 times 60 times 24 times 365. What was it like to survive one year without Kim? It was like swimming under water. But rather than lasting for thirty seconds, I had endured 31,536,000 seconds.

Chapter 24

Forgiveness Is a Journey

“**F**orgiveness is the fragrance that the violet sheds on the heel that has crushed it”
(Mark Twain).^{[63](#)}

“Grace plus truth plus time equals healing” (Henry Cloud).^{[64](#)}

Time was required to heal my unforgiveness. God’s grace was abundant from the start. He enfolded me in His arms. God’s truth was manifest both in Scripture and in the bold witness of friends. However, time was part of the healing formula. For me, forgiveness was a journey lasting 365 days.

“I have seen the travail which God hath given to the sons of men to be exercised in it. He hath made every thing beautiful in his time” (Ecclesiastes 3:10–11).

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August 1 to 10, 2011

Month thirteen

On the first day of August, two big events were behind me. I had dedicated a memorial to Kim and I had reconciled with Franc in public. I could finally exhale. I looked forward to a few days of unstructured time before returning to America. On Monday morning I checked out the construction site and then went on a solitary walk into the university forest.

I reflected on August 1, 2010, searching for an apt metaphor. When had I seen ecstasy turn to agony in the blink of an eye? I remembered an incident with my son Simon. We had walked into a fancy ice cream shop. Little Simon felt so grown up picking out his own flavors. He was in ecstasy! After two steps on the sidewalk his two scoops hit the pavement. He was in agony! His lip quivered and he wailed at the top of his lungs. I was able to fix Simon's trauma with another two-dollar cone. If only grownup lip-quivering could be so easily fixed.

I walked on, wearing a pedometer and counting steps. This walk measured more than five thousand paces. My mind rambled to dog walking in California. *Would Jody like this walk? What would the locals think of a little dog on a long leash? Maybe we should relocate to Africa for full-time missionary work.* I thought about the possibilities as I stepped down the red-dirt path. *Maybe Africa is where God wants me.*

As I prayed about this, another thought invaded my mind. *Maybe I should write about my grief experience and try to publish a book. Is that what God wants me to do? Lord, lead me in Your ways.*

Back in the mission house, I searched the CASR bookshelf for something to read during my long trip home. My gaze fell on one of Kim's favorite books, *To Know as We Are Known: Education as a Spiritual Journey* by Parker J. Palmer⁶⁵. I dropped it into my carry-on bag.

On August 2, Pastor David and I visited the homes of two widows who lived just down the gravel road from CASR. As we walked, David said, "The women are so pleased you could see them before you leave. They really wanted to thank you in person for the CASA pigs you provided the funding for."

Pigs were not the traditional meat source for Rwandans. They raised goats, cows, and chickens for food. But pigs provided two added benefits. They devoured garbage and produced

large litters.

“Pastor Chris,” David continued, “we had twenty women in our group, but only enough money for six pigs and everyone wanted one.”

This was the first I’d heard of that dilemma. “How did you determine who would get the pigs?”

A smile broke on his face. “I invited all of the women to see the pigs at my house. Each was in its own cage made with sticks and twine, all material that can be found in the bush. When the widows arrived, I told them, ‘I will visit each of you next Sunday after church. Whoever has built a pen like this will get a pig.’ Five days later, when I went to their homes, only four women had made stout pig pens. I gave each of them a pig. I still have the other two at my home.”

As we approached the first home, a woman escorted us into her backyard and proudly showed me her cage. As I stared the pig in the face, I thought, *It’s charity to provide my Rwandan friends with resources, but wisdom to allow a godly man like David to distribute them.*

One chore remained undone. On the morning of the dedication, the memorial concrete had been too wet to paint. I wanted to complete this task before returning home. On Tuesday afternoon, Paul and I visited a paint store.

“What color do you want?” he asked.

“Let’s make it one part red, one part blue, and two parts white. That should make a kind of lavender, which Kim liked.”

“That’s also the color of most genocide memorials here in Rwanda, so it’s appropriate.”

We bought four buckets of lavender paint and drove to the memorial. Franc followed in his car with Jane aboard.

While we were painting, Franc talked with me. “I appreciate you coming back to Rwanda and forgiving me. But can you guess the first time I felt your forgiveness?” He paused as I looked in his direction. “It was when you sat in my car at the airport. I felt like your son again.”

“That almost didn’t happen. I came within an inch of grabbing my bags and running away.”

Frank laughed. “I half expected you to do that. I felt a lot like Jacob when he heard Esau was hunting for him.”

I knew that story from Genesis chapter 33. When Jacob heard that his brother was

coming after him, he was terrified. But instead of attacking him, Esau embraced him. The two estranged brothers reconciled.

“Franc, I was angry for a long time, but God healed my heart. I still ache for Kim every day, but I can see that what happened was an accident. This has been a test for you and me. Can we forgive each other as God has forgiven us? Can we be like Jacob and Esau?”

He gestured to the other side of the road. “I think that process began right over there a few days ago.”

Only two buckets were needed to complete the job. Paul gave the remaining paint to the old man with the knife, explaining to me, “This neighbor has accepted the role of custodian for the small parcel of land. He will tend the flowers and paint as needed. We’ll put a few coins in his pocket whenever we pass by.”

Franc turned his car around and returned to Butare with Jane. I continued to Kigali with Paul.

I had booked one night at the Bon Jeur Guest House, intending to visit Fred and Betsy. I was sad to learn they had returned to Scotland just two weeks earlier. Time moved on.

Before bed, I read Kim’s book *To Know as We Are Known* and was struck by the author’s words “practicing obedience to the truth.” I understood that as a Christian, my journey to forgiveness had to begin with my obedience to gospel truth.

On August 3, Paul drove me to King Faisal Hospital. As we approached the building on the one-year anniversary of Kim’s death, I could not hold back the tears.

We walked to the front desk and I asked, “Can you call Dr. Carlos for me? He’s in neurosurgery.”

The woman looked through her directory. “I’m sorry. Dr. Carlos is not on my roster of doctors.”

Paul talked to a doctor in the lobby, then returned to me. “He says Dr. Carlos went back to Cuba several months ago.” Paul shrugged. “What do you want to do now?”

“As long as we’re here, I’d like to see the place one last time. Let’s walk up to the intensive care unit.”

As we moved through hospital corridors, sights and smells summoned the ghost of Kim. I did not wash my hands and enter intensive care. Rather, I walked down a corridor and peered

through a familiar screened window. I saw another bandaged body in the bed once occupied by Kim.

I sighed with resignation. *This is as it should be. People move on and I must move on. I can neither recapture nor undo this event. Let the past stay in the past. Let the dead bury their dead.*

Paul dropped me off at the airport, waving goodbye as I passed through security. My mind returned to the early-morning walk of a few days earlier. *Yes, I will return to Rwanda as a missionary. And yes, I will write a book.*

During my eight-hour layover in Ethiopia, I decided to get started on my book writing. *Where to begin? Maybe with my church column.* I thought about Elisabeth Kübler-Ross and her five stages of grief.⁶⁶ I felt I had reached the final stage of acceptance. At last my head had traversed the one cubit span to my heart. I accepted that Kim's passing would forever remain a scar on my psyche. However, I felt the wound had mended and my season of sorrow was drawing to a close. Perhaps "man of sorrows" still described me, but it no longer defined me.

As I continued my journey home, I considered a parallel to the five stages of grief. If forgiveness were a journey, then it must involve steps, just like grief. What were my Christian steps to forgiveness? Still fresh in my mind were the words of Parker Palmer: "It all begins with obedience to the truth."⁶⁷ I tapped words into my iPad.

The first step in my journey was *forgiveness by the Book*. I knew full well that Jesus said, "Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors."⁶⁸ I also knew this forgiveness was not superficial but from the heart. I first had to become obedient to the truth I understood. Above all, forgiveness was a question of will.

The second step for me was *forgiveness from the mind*. Whenever my imagination grew bitter and I clenched my teeth at the thought of Franc, I mentally reminded myself, "I have forgiven him in obedience to Christ."

The third step in my journey was *forgiveness with the lips*. I had to confess to myself and say aloud to others, "Yes indeed, I have forgiven Franc." That positive confession reinforced the thoughts of my mind.

The fourth step was *forgiveness from the heart*. When waves of grief made my body tremble and tears flow, it became natural to lift Franc up to God

rather than curse him. Heart forgiveness occurred when I consistently applied the same standard of grace to Franc as I applied naturally to myself.

The two final steps reached beyond forgiveness, because forgiveness describes what takes place in the heart of one person. *Reconciliation* is a kind of mutual forgiveness. I have forgiven Franc in public for his involvement in Kim's death, and he has publically forgiven me of my hard heart. We are reconciled.

Restoration occurs when the offender is returned to a position of trust and authority. I think of the way Jesus restored Peter to his leadership role after he denied his Master three times. As an act of restoration, Peter responded to Jesus three times, "You know that I love you."⁶⁹ I restored Franc to his previous position in Rwanda. But it took me a full year to reach this stage of forgiveness, even with focused effort.

An occasional flash of unforgiveness still enters my mind. These thoughts I count as temptations, and as they occur, I take them captive and give them to God.

I believe there is one additional step in my journey to perfect forgiveness. I call it *forgiveness of the redeemed*. I'm not sure what it will look like, but perhaps I will experience it at journey's end in eternity.

Somewhere over the Atlantic Ocean, I completed this essay for my September "Pastor's Corner."



When I arrived back in the States, Zachary was at Dulles Airport, waiting to pick me up. The summer heat and humidity caused me discomfort but worked wonders for my son's vegetable garden.

The next day we drove to DC to visit the Catholic University of America. We met Julie for a luncheon appointment. She had been the Chief Consular Officer at the US embassy in Rwanda; now she worked for the state department in the capitol. We ate in the cafeteria at the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception, the largest Catholic church in the United States.

Julie told us she and her husband had visited Butare and both were impressed with the Kim Foreman Bible Institute.

In the afternoon, Zachary dropped me off at the Bolt Bus Company. For twenty-two dollars, I traveled to Penn Station. Simon skipped the last few hours of work to meet me at a Manhattan Starbucks. My heart gladdened when I saw his familiar presence emerge from the crush of urban strangers. I ordered my usual caramel macchiato, adding an espresso for Simon. We talked until the paper cups emptied. He spoke with joy about his two children, but with sadness about his wife. They were talking about separation.

I spent two nights with Simon in Queens. I held Gia in my arms, marveling at this little bundle of wonder. In the hot daytime I walked with Lorenzo to the corner park. Little Lolo squealed in the squirting water and splashed his feet in puddles. Gia squirmed in her stroller. As I sat on the park bench, thoughts of Kim shadowed me. *How she would have loved these moments! Yes, more than anything this world has to offer.*

On August 10 Simon and I left his house and walked to the subway. After a few stops, I hugged my son, stepped off his train, and continued on a different line to La Guardia Airport.

My year of mourning had passed. Any obligation I held to Kim was complete. It was time to move on with life. But what did that mean? Another job? Another home? Another romance?

I remembered my Jesus-people poster from decades past: "I don't know what the future holds, but I know who holds the future."

Chapter 25

A Drink Offering

Kim had loved her house in Mill Valley. In 2006, she made a genuine sacrifice to leave the delight of her home for the sake of her husband's career. In 2010 she made a greater sacrifice while in service to her Lord.

What could I do for God? What sacrifice could I make? As I approached my five-year mark as pastor, African drums were summoning me to the mission field. Following days of introspection, I decided to resign my pastorate and dedicate myself as a full-time missionary to Rwanda.

"I am already being poured out like a drink offering, and the time has come for my departure" (2 Timothy 4:6 NIV).

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August 11 to 31, 2011

Month thirteen

After a three-week absence, everyone was happy when I returned from Africa. My condo neighbors smiled, my church secretary gave me a big hug, my dog jumped into my arms, and my associate pastor pumped my hand. “Chris, I’m so glad you’re back. It’s hard to fill your shoes, buddy.” My heart was set on relocating to Rwanda as a missionary, but I decided to wait until our business meeting to make a public announcement.

Back in the condo, I sorted through three weeks of accumulated mail. One letter was particularly discouraging. My local bank had declined my application for a line of credit. This was doubly disheartening since my insurance company had turned me down a month earlier. My backup plan was to apply at a different loan company in 2012.

My misfortune continued. Another letter informed me that my credit card had been compromised. I telephoned the Visa rep. She explained that the fraudulent charges could be reversed, but Visa had to reissue a new credit card with a new number. That was a hassle because I had several recurring charges on auto-pay.

One of the minor auto-pay charges was for USAA Life, a holdover from my military days. As I recalled, the charge involved something Kim had signed up for ten years earlier. I remembered her saying, “I want a life insurance policy in case something happens to you. You never know.”

I figured the pay-out couldn’t be much because the charge was only \$18.80 per month. After Kim died, I had searched through her personal papers but couldn’t locate the original insurance contract. Preoccupied with grief I had let this irritant slide month after month.

I sat in my office on August 22, dealing with a backlog of chores. First, I modified airline tickets. Second, I dealt with car insurance. Third, I printed handouts for my seminary class. Fourth on my to-do list was to call USAA Life Insurance and give them a new Visa number.

I dialed the insurance rep, identified myself, and explained that my credit card had been compromised. After reading him the new number, I added, “Oh, yeah. I also need to change the beneficiary from Kim to my sons.”

“Why?” he asked.

I got teary eyed. “Because Kim died in August of 2010.”

“Oh, I’m sorry to hear that. Okay, I’ll make the changes.” He paused while tapping in new data. “By the way, how’d she die?”

“In a car accident.”

After an extended pause, he said, “Didn’t you know both you and your wife are covered on this policy?”

“No,” I confessed. “I couldn’t find the contract.”

With astonishment he added, “The policy is for accidental death only. And it’s for one hundred thousand dollars.”

I gasped.

After I recovered my composure, we talked for several minutes. He promised to send me forms; I agreed to mail him a death certificate stating “car accident” as cause of death.

I hung up the phone in disbelief and raised my hands to heaven. “Thank you, Kim.”

I walked to Sherry’s desk and waited until she glanced up from her work. “You’ll never guess what just happened.”

Her eyes widened.

I related details of the telephone conversation. “So what do you think?”

“Jehovah-Jireh.”

“What?”

“Jehovah-Jireh,” she repeated. “It means ‘the Lord provides.’”

“You’re right. And one hundred percent of that Jehovah-Jireh money is going straight to Africa. It will be used to build an institute that will be named after the woman who had the foresight to purchase an insurance policy ten years before she died. How ironic is that?”

I returned to my office and glanced at the picture of Kim hanging on my corkboard. Her smile seemed even broader than before. *The Lord does provide.*

A few days after this providential miracle, I shared with Sherry my intention to resign in one year. She looked puzzled. “Don’t use the word *resign*. That’s too harsh. You’ll be sixty-two by then. Let’s just say you’ll retire in one year.”

I liked her idea.

“I’ll miss you,” she said. “And I’ll miss Jody a lot too.”

I picked up my dog. “We’ll both come back and visit whenever we can.”

The church held its deacon meeting the following Wednesday. I showed the deacons the

retirement letter I had drafted.

After Deacon Al read it, he said, “Chris, we’re sad about this, but we understand. To be honest, I can’t believe you stayed on this long after Kim’s death. You know, I’ve never heard of a pastor giving a one year notice before leaving. Usually it’s just a week or two.”

I made fifty copies of my retirement letter and took them to our quarterly business meeting on August 28. I passed them out, then read the statement aloud.

Dear church family,

After much prayer and seeking wisdom from above, I have decided to retire as your pastor effective August 31, 2012. After this, I plan to relocate to Rwanda and lead the Kim Foreman Bible Institute.

This calling has been on my heart ever since Kim’s death, but I thought it prudent to put on hold all major life decisions for a full year while grieving the death of my lovely wife. One year has passed, and this call remains as strong as ever.

Believe me when I say that I have no issues with my church family. You have always been kind and supportive of me and Kim. Yet I believe God has set me apart for this work in Rwanda, for which I am uniquely qualified.

Consider how God has prepared me. He has granted me good health and financial resources. He has filled me with teaching gifts that coincide with the gospel need in Africa. He has built for me a deep ten-year relationship with African coworkers. Truly my cup runneth over. And the season has come for me to tip the cup, to pour out my life as a drink offering to God.

Also—and this is difficult to utter—our sovereign Lord has seen fit to prepare me with a life of singleness. Without the blessing of a wife, I can pursue His work with a single-minded focus.

The Kim Foreman Bible Institute is housed in a facility that is costing one-half million dollars. Yet this investment alone cannot yield success. Quality leadership and sustained commitment are also required, and there could be no one in the world more committed to the success of this institute than I am. I must go to Africa and build a legacy for Kim.

I am telling you of my retirement twelve months in advance because I must start the long process of relocating and I did not want to do anything behind your back. I promise to work faithfully for you until the day of my retirement, or until you hire someone to succeed me as senior pastor. Thank you for your understanding.

Chris A. Foreman,

Pastor, [First Southern Baptist Church of San Lorenzo](#)



My tenure as pastor was set at six years—four years with Kim and two years without her.

I began to plan my relocation. Wanting to ship my household goods and construction material to Africa, I looked into the costs of sending a cargo container from our church to Butare.

I also looked into relocating Jody to Africa with me. She was my rescued dog, I was her rescued human, and I wanted to act in her best interest. I knew it would be difficult to take her to Africa but equally difficult to leave her behind.

August 31 fell on a Wednesday, the day of the church fellowship meal. About twenty people gathered for the five-dollar dinner. After eating, Ken gave a short message. His teaching was excellent, but I couldn't focus on his words. I was antsy. Thirteen months had passed since Kim left my life.

God, I have kept my vow as best I could. I did not move my residence. I have my job as pastor for another year. O Lord, can I now begin to search for another woman? I don't think You designed me to live the single life. I've waited a full year, even adding an extra month for good measure. Lord, I long to love and to be loved.

When I returned to the condo, I fell into prayer. I recalled an old conversation between Kim and myself. She once said with a tease, "Chris, if I die before you, will you remarry?" She answered her own question. "Yes, I think you will. But if you die first, I won't marry again."

Why had she said this? Was it playfulness? To test my loyalty? To give me peace of mind? Just maybe she spoke those words for me to remember at that very moment.

I was still wearing two wedding bands: one on my left ring finger and one on my right pinky. I removed the rings with deliberation and placed them in a jewelry box that had belonged

to Kim. *O Lord, help me as I plunge ahead.*

I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help. My help cometh from the Lord, which made heaven and earth (Psalm 121:1–2).

I switched on my iPad and tapped the web browser. I entered “eHarmony.com” and downloaded the app for one-tap access. I was faced with myriad options. Figuring to be in the matchmaking mode for the long haul, I opted to pay \$272 for a full-year subscription. I stayed up late that night completing the compatibility questionnaire, posting pictures, and devising clever words for my profile.

Under the heading “the most important thing I’m looking for in a person,” I wrote, “I want to find a woman who loves me. That’s sensible. But I also want to find a woman who loves God more than she loves me. That’s extraordinary.” With trepidation I tapped the Send button.

My profile was posted. I had cast my bread upon August waters. I wondered what September winds would blow my way.

Chapter 26

Love at First Click

In September my identity flipped from widower to bachelor. I knew all along it would happen, but I could not predict when or how. I put my future into the hands of God who knew better than I about my hunger for intimacy and my thirst for spiritual connection. Didn't God say, "It is not good that the man should be alone" (Genesis 2:18)?

I corresponded with several women during my first week on eHarmony. As I peered into online faces, I thought, *Kim is my past. Could this woman be my future?* I wasn't looking to replace a wife. I wanted to reclaim a life.

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September 2011

Month fourteen

A few moments after I awoke on September 1, I trotted into the living room, where my iPad was charging. I was startled to find five responses to my eHarmony posting. *All this, after just seven hours?*

I responded to a few of the matches with a “smile” or short “icebreaker.” Maria from San Jose seemed to be an intriguing person. She was originally from Lebanon and worked as a nanny. After I mentioned missionary work in Africa, she returned a two-word response: “not interested.”

Jane from Pensacola seemed to like me, but she liked Florida more and was not enthused about Africa. She wrote in her parting shot, “Chris, if mission work is so important, you should be honest and say it’s a requirement in ‘the most important thing’ section of your profile.”

That night I added to my profile. “Important notice: Although I am a fulltime pastor and happy in my job, I plan to relocate to Africa for mission work. I will live in Rwanda for two years and then resume life in the Bay Area. If you embrace me, you embrace my passion as well.” A few matches stopped “smiling” at me.

I called Frank and told him about my eHarmony endeavor. “The Internet helped me find a dog. If it could find me a woman with half the devotion and disposition of Jody, I would be a lucky man indeed.”

Frank laughed.

I then asked about his sixtieth birthday celebration on September thirteenth.

He told me our three sisters were treating him to lunch.

“I’ll try to be there too,” I said.

On Friday, I checked out twelve more matches on eHarmony. I began to correspond with a woman identified as “Liz from San Mateo.” In one of her online pictures she posed with a pit bull. *This lady looks nice enough, but is my dog compatible with hers?*

I gave Liz a smile and answered a few structured comments, like “What’s your passion in life?” and “What’s the best job you’ve ever had?”

Through her postings, it was obvious that Liz set Christian faith as her number one priority. I soon settled on Liz as my best prospect. Before going to bed, I sent her this line of

Scripture from the Proverbs: “Many women are capable, but you surpass them all! Charm is deceptive and beauty is fleeting, but a woman who fears the Lord will be praised.”⁷⁰

In the morning, I read her response. “I awoke at four with thoughts of you. I’ve been wide awake since. Some of the words I wrote this morning were ‘I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.’”⁷¹

As I reviewed her profile, I noticed that Liz enjoyed creative writing. On Saturday I sent her my first non-structured message.

Liz, I feel like a young man standing on the front steps of a neighbor girl’s house, flowers in hand, wearing too much cologne, muttering to myself, and shuffling my feet. I retreat down the steps, then resolutely march up again. I am secretly wishing that no one will answer the door, but I’m also desiring to see her face. I am scared to push the doorbell. I am scared not to. I gulp. I put the bouquet behind my back and, with shaky finger, push the button. I hear the “ding dong.”

How does the story continue from here, Liz?

She replied a short time later. “Hi, Chris. How fun! The story continues . . .”

We built our story through three exchanges. Then Liz asked about my church and my missionary work. She closed by saying, “I rise early for devotions, so I’m heading to bed now. I look forward to communicating more tomorrow.”

I replied, “You said in your profile that you are open to relocation. Could that relocation include Africa? Please make this a topic of concern during your morning devotions. Let me know if you discern God’s call as a distant drum.”

On Sunday morning, we exchanged a flurry of messages. Liz asked me to phone her, but I declined. “I have to prepare for the worship service and your voice would distract me.”

She gave me her phone number and I promised to call on Monday morning. That was Labor Day and she didn’t have to go to work.

I couldn’t sleep on Sunday night. My heart was a runaway freight train. *Could I possibly be in love with this woman after two days?* I hadn’t even met her. Heck, I hadn’t even spoken with her! I’d heard of love at first sight, but “love at first click”? *God, why did You make me like this?*

At three a.m. I sent Liz a quick message. “I’m awake—tears in my ears. I cannot see

around the corner, but I suspect something wonderful is there.”

About ten minutes later, my iPad chimed. “Me too.”

I phoned Liz on Labor Day morning and heard her voice for the first time. I learned her name was Jean Elizabeth, but she went by Liz. She was eight years younger than I, divorced, and childless. She owned her home in San Mateo, worked for a local corporation, and attended Central Peninsula Church.

When I asked her about the pit bull, she laughed. “That dog doesn’t belong to me. It’s my friend Carolyn’s dog. I posed with Lucy at her poolside.”

Jody was sitting at my feet and I flashed her a thumbs up. Liz and I agreed to meet in the evening at a Starbucks not far from her home.

On Labor Day I attended a church barbecue, took Jody for a long walk, and fretted about my first date in thirty-seven years. I left the condo at six forty-five, made a few wrong turns in Foster City, and parked at seven thirty on the dot. I scanned the tables inside Starbucks and recognized the woman from the eHarmony photos: hazel eyes, auburn hair, petite frame, and a casual but well-groomed look.

Her first words to me were “I thought our date was at seven fifteen.”

Argh! Not a good way to begin a relationship.

The date improved. Liz was easy to talk to and we covered miles of conversational terrain. She told me I was her fifth date of the three-day weekend. She had left guy number four at seven o’clock. “I’m on eHarmony, Christian Cafe, and Christian Mingle. I get home from work at six during the week and then spend a few hours on those dating sites.”

Wow! “I posted my profile on Wednesday and it looks like I’ve got a keeper on Monday.”

Liz considered for a moment, then smiled.

After an hour we left Starbucks and strolled toward her Honda Civic. I stuffed my hands into my pockets as we walked side by side. Liz extracted my right hand and held it in hers. “This is okay, isn’t it?”

“Okay? This is wonderful.”

I walked Liz to her car door, gave a bashful bow, and retreated into the night.

Liz and I spoke by phone on Tuesday and agreed to meet at the same place and time on Wednesday.

“Yes,” I said. “Seven fifteen. I’m writing it on my hand as we speak.”

Wednesday confirmed that the joy of Monday was no fluke. There was definite chemistry between us.

Liz asked, “So, where do we go from here? Do you want to be exclusive?”

“Is that like going steady?”

She laughed.

“I was never the kind of guy who dated several girls at the same time. Let’s be exclusive and see where God leads us.”

I walked Liz to her car, gave her a quick kiss on the forehead, and rushed away. I glanced over my shoulder. Liz stood gazing in my direction. Did she expect more?

On Friday, I decided it was time for Liz to meet my family, so I brought Jody along. We rendezvoused in the Starbucks parking lot and Liz offered to drive the two of us to her house for dinner. As I transferred Jody from my car into Liz’s backseat, I sneaked in a potted plant.

When we arrived at her place, I presented Liz with a white orchid. Her eyes lit in surprise. “How did you know I liked orchids?”

I lowered my voice. “I read your profile very thoroughly.”

“How thoughtful of you. I’ll set it here on the coffee table.”

Liz asked me to sit on the sofa while she arranged the kitchen table. “I wanted to do something simple,” she said, “so I prepared meatloaf and baked potatoes. I hope you don’t mind.”

“Oh, no. Simple is good.”

Jody sat at my feet as I looked past the orchid at Liz, who bustled around the kitchen. When the table was set, she invited me to sit and then to pray for the food.

“Dear Lord, I thank You for the opportunity to share this meal with Liz. I ask you to bless the food and to guide us as we move forward in our relationship. May all things be done to Your glory. Amen.”

I did my best to watch my manners, taking small bites and dabbing my mouth with the napkin she provided. When the meal was complete, I helped her move the dishes to the sink and rinse them off. Then together we moseyed to her sofa.

I told Liz about my plans to return to Rwanda for a two-week mission trip in January. She asked for the exact dates, so I flicked on my iPad and e-mailed her a copy of my travel itinerary.

“Are you seriously thinking about going with me?”

“I don’t know yet. I’ll have to pray about it.” She shimmied closer to me.

Thinking about how I’d bowed to her on the first date and pecked her forehead on the second, I decided this lady deserved a real kiss. As I put my arm around her petite frame and puckered up, my dog jumped onto my lap. Jody looked at Liz and licked her face.

“I can’t believe it,” I said. “She kissed you before I did.”

“I understand. She’s been the number one girl in your life and she’s not used to sharing you.”

Jody may have given the first kiss, but it was my pleasure to deliver the next dozen. After a series of passionate embraces and quiet conversations, Liz said, “It’s getting late. But before we head back to Starbucks, I want to read you a poem.”

She dashed upstairs and returned with a yellow writing pad. “I wrote this in my journal a few months ago.”

As I listened intently, I heard the voice of a woman who was in daily conversation with God. Her poem was a plea to her heavenly Father to bring a godly man into her life. When she stopped reading, she added, “Maybe God has answered this prayer tonight.”

“Maybe He has. Let’s trust God to direct our paths.”

Liz drove me back to my Insight and I returned to Hayward about nine. After parking in the basement garage, I took Jody for a walk across the empty campus. When I put the back of my fingers to my nostrils, I inhaled the fragrance of Lizzie’s hand. I was smitten. My sister Charlotte would call it “twitterpated”.⁷² I closed my eyes and thanked God that once again a special woman was in my life.

I couldn’t sleep that night. My mind was a tornado of whirling possibilities. I sent Liz an e-mail.

She replied immediately. “What are you doing awake? I’ve been up since three thirty reflecting on our closeness last night and not wanting the evening to end. I am going to try to go back to sleep now.”

Liz was a scheduler. Several months beforehand, she had planned a getaway with her girlfriends on the Sonoma coast. I was spontaneous. At the last minute, I decided to drive north to celebrate Frank’s sixtieth birthday. It just so happened that Liz’s destination was en route to mine.

On Saturday, Liz drove to the Sea Ranch and on Sunday I headed up coastal Highway 1 in my Westfalia camper. Following her printed directions, I met Liz at her friend's beach house. Her companions were concerned about Liz and paid careful attention to the new man in her life.

I stayed only a few hours. But before continuing my road trip, Liz and I walked along the beach hand-in-hand. "You got the thumbs up," she said with a giggle.

The six hundred miles to Vancouver were consumed with thoughts of Liz, but also thoughts of Kim. Loyalty to my late wife battled passion for my new girlfriend. *O God, Your Word informs my head that my intentions are honorable. As a single man, I am permitted to pursue a single woman. Please pass the word to my heart as well.*

I stayed with Frank for a few days. Our three sisters joined us at Sherri's Restaurant for his birthday bash. I passed onto him a few of the gag gifts I had received for my sixtieth: a cone-shaped hat with "60!" in red letters and a T-shirt with the words "old geezer".

Just before heading home, I dashed off an e-mail to Liz using my iPad. A few seconds later Frank asked how things were going with her. In response I read him the last lines of my just-completed message. "My romantic heart needs adult supervision. May I hand the car keys of this relationship over to you? Could I ask you to be the designated driver? For my heart is drunk with love."

He was quiet, then looked me in the eyes. "Don't you think you're going a bit fast? You just met her."

"Yes, it's fast, but it's in character with my wild heart."

"I'll be praying for you, brother" was all Frank said.

I spent the night camped at Rogue River State Park and considered Frank's concern. Were my passions out of control? I sent Liz an e-mail with a link to a painting called "Dante and Beatrice."⁷³ I wrote, "[Beatrice was Dante](#)'s beatific vision. You are mine. Lifelong love can happen in an instant."

I understood that Liz was serious about our relationship when she sent me this e-mail on September 22.

Hi dear one,

I just purchased tickets for Africa. We are traveling together. This is really a step of faith for me since I don't sleep on long plane trips. The Lord will have to provide me

with enough rest.

I called her the next day. “I’m surprised that you’re going to Africa with me. I think it will be a time of testing for both of us.”

“I surprised myself,” she said. “Yesterday I shared the news with Carolyn. She questioned my sanity. ‘But you’ve only known this guy three weeks!’”

After a Saturday dinner, Liz offered to share details of her past. “Ask me anything. I’ll try to answer all your questions.”

She told me she was born in Denver, where her mother was a flight attendant and her father was a businessman. Her sister, Tricia, was born a few years after her. Her dad’s business moved the family to Pennsylvania, Oklahoma, and Illinois. When Liz was twelve, the four of them settled in San Mateo, California.

She told me that her father, Bill, and her mother, Becky, squabbled for as long as she could remember. She often escaped to her grandmother’s house while they were fighting. They divorced just before Liz entered UCLA in 1975.

Her mother remarried, stayed in San Mateo, and currently lived nearby as a recent widow. Liz was in contact with her mother a few times a week.

Her father stayed in the area for twenty years, but after retirement, he moved with his second wife to Asheville, North Carolina. Liz told me her father was not in good health and didn’t leave his house much. She was in phone contact with him almost every weekend.

Liz grew tearful as she discussed her own past. She had married Matt when she was thirty. He had been a church leader—an ideal husband, she thought. But in the following years, Liz struggled with her husband’s infidelity and addictions. After seven years of misery, they divorced.

After a dozen dating relationships she met Ryan. She hoped he was the right man for her, but he abruptly broke off their engagement a month before their wedding day. She felt humiliated and abandoned.

“I hope you’re my omega man,” Liz said.

I answered, “We’re a lot alike. Neither of us went on to eHarmony looking for dates. We went looking for mates. I realized from the start that our goal must be marriage. I’m okay with that, but let’s take it one step at a time. I’m hoping that you’ll be my omega woman.”

She snuggled next to me.

I looked into her eyes. "I love you, Liz. What more can I say than that?"

"I feel the same way. But the word *love* is hard for me to say. I'm divorced, my parents are divorced, my sister's divorced, and most of my friends are too. I've seen what happens when you give your heart away."

"Not all the time, sweetheart. Not all the time."



On the last day of the month, Liz was away on a business trip. After a tender phone conversation, my heart was aching for her. I wanted to e-mail her a poem.

Several years earlier I had put together a set of song lyrics with the title "Rain in My Heart." I was never satisfied with the wording and tucked it into my memory.

I spent a few hours reworking the lines with Liz as my muse. I knew she had a complicated past, with seasons of sorrow, struggle, and celebration. Before going to bed, I e-mailed her my poem, now christened "Elizabeth's Victory."

The Sorrow

Rain in my heart, Lord, rain in my heart!
Teardrops like rainfall seem not to depart,
Wounded and bleeding and broken apart.
Rain in my heart, Lord, rain in my heart.

The Struggle

Rein in my heart, Lord, rein in my heart!
Bridle my passions. Your grace please impart.
Guard me from sinning before I can start.
Rein in my heart, Lord, rein in my heart.

The Celebration

Reign in my heart, Lord, reign in my heart!
Be Thou my Sovereign, my Savior Thou art.
Fill me with Christ-joy and flood every part.
Yes! Reign in my heart, Lord, reign in my heart.

Chapter 27

Humbled by His Grace

For many years I closed my correspondence with the words “Blessings, Chris.”

When Liz came into my life, my heart burst with gratitude. She was the sunshine after the storm. The words of Jeremiah rang true to my ears. “I will turn their mourning into joy, and will comfort them, and make them rejoice from their sorrow” (Jeremiah 31:13).

God’s grace in providing Liz had humbled me. I began to close all my correspondence with the words “Chris, Humbled by His Grace.”

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October 2011

Month fifteen

Liz and I knew that before we came together in marriage, we first had to come together as friends. That was no easy task. We were both set in our ways.

I had once preached a message about friendship to my San Lorenzo congregation. I presented the definition of *friend*, listing three aspects: knowledge, trust, and affection. The affection aspect of our friendship was certainly in place. But we needed time to grow in knowledge of each other so we could fully trust.

After bickering over a minor difference of opinion, I said to Liz, “We are like the confluence of two mighty rivers. For several miles the waters stay churning and unmixed, but eventually they smooth out and join up. Love came quickly for us. Friendship will take time.”

With a wink I also suggested that we plan an equal division of labor. “If we ever marry, you can be in charge of finances and I’ll be in charge of metaphors.” I figured mine was the better deal.



Liz’s mom had been out of town for a few weeks, and she returned to San Mateo on October 2. A few days later, she invited us to her home for dinner. I drove Liz across town to her mother’s house. Jody remained in my car.

Becky was eighty-one, but appeared much younger. As we talked around her dinner table, she told me about her Pilates classes and favorite TV shows. After dessert she led me upstairs to show me a jigsaw puzzle that was almost complete.

I paused in the stairwell to study a family picture. Looking over my shoulder, Liz cringed. “I can’t believe how chubby I was in high school.”

I examined a dozen other photographs as Liz and her mom pointed out family and friends. Then we went into her living room, where we sat and chatted a while longer.

After calling it a night, Liz and I said our goodbyes. As we walked onto the front steps, I said to Becky, “Let me get my dog so you can meet her too.”

I opened the car door and lifted Jody into my arms. “Liz really likes this dog. As a matter

of fact, she can't decide if I'm the prize and Jody's the bonus, or Jody's the prize and I'm the bonus."

Liz bumped me with her shoulder. "Of course you're the prize, sweetie."

I thanked Becky for the meal and we drove away. In the car, Liz said, "So now you've met my mother. Why don't you meet my father too?"

On Saturday, she asked me to set my iPad on the coffee table and use Skype for a two-way video conversation. I sat on the sofa with Liz at my side and Jody at my feet.

We talked about ten minutes. Bill was wearing a baseball cap. His wife, Sybil, popped in and out, managing the technology. Bill talked about thunderstorms in Asheville and a loose bear in the neighborhood.

I told him about my church in San Lorenzo and my ministry in Africa. Then I moved Jody into camera range and talked about my dog.

Liz explained to her father and Sybil how we had met on a dating site and told him we enjoyed hiking together.

After the call ended, she said to me, "I didn't want to tell him that I'm going to Rwanda. He'd worry about me like I was still his little girl."

Late in the evening, back in my condo, I thought about Kim's brothers and sisters. I was sad that they were slipping out of my life. But was that void being filled by a future set of in-laws? God loves to restore relationships. "I will repay you for the years that the swarming locust ate, the young locust, the destroying locust, and the devouring locust—my great army that I sent against you" (Joel 2:25 HCSB).

Liz had visited my church office a few times, but she was reluctant to attend a Sunday service. She said she enjoyed her own church and would feel uncomfortable at mine. "I don't want to be compared to Kim," she confessed. However, October 23 was Pastor Appreciation Day and Liz promised to attend, as long as she could keep a low profile.

Since Sherry knew Liz from her office visits, I asked her to keep an eye out for Liz. As she entered the church, Sherry gave her a bulletin and sat with her in the last row of pews.

After closing the service with a benediction, I reminded the people of the reception in the fellowship hall. As the crowd started to move, Sherry escorted Liz up the center aisle to stand next to me. I shook hands with a dozen friends and introduced them to the woman at my side. "This is Liz. She's the one I've been dating for a few months." I wasn't surprised that most had

already guessed the identity of this mysterious visitor.

I walked Liz to the reception, greeting people along the way. Before cutting the cake, I spoke into the handheld mike, “I want to thank all of you for allowing me to be your pastor for the last five years.”

I turned to Liz. “[This lady is Liz](#). We’ve been seeing each other for a few months and I thought it was time for you to meet her.”

She waved shyly to the forty people in the fellowship hall.

“Be sure to make her feel welcome.”

A dozen people flocked around us to meet Liz.

Some said to me, “Pastor, congratulations for five years of service.”

Others said, “It’s good to see you smiling again.”

Turn! Turn! Turn! I thought. *There’s a time for every purpose under heaven.*



November 2011

Month sixteen

With Liz working ten-hour weekdays and me focused on Sunday preaching, we established a weekly pattern. I drove to her home for dinner on Tuesday, and on Saturday we hiked in the open spaces of San Mateo County. On occasion we broke this pattern, but our lives were full to bursting.

Cargo preparation for Rwanda consumed my work days. I boxed up most of my church library, sorting books in an empty classroom. I flipped through several well-worn volumes from the 1980s, like *The Mind’s I*,^{[74](#)} *Gödel, Escher, Bach*,^{[75](#)} and *In Search of Schrodinger’s Cat*.^{[76](#)}

These books addressed issues that still troubled my mind. *Is God really sovereign over the cosmos? Does He actually call all the shots?*

Maybe to a physicist like Werner Heisenberg the universe was uncertain, but surely God knows the position and momentum of each quantum. Maybe Erwin Schrödinger didn’t know if his cat was dead or alive, but the God who formed the cat must know.

I favored Einstein’s dictum: “God does not play dice with the universe.”^{[77](#)} Throwing dice

wouldn't be any fun for God. He'd always know the outcome before the toss.

I remembered that Kim had bought me these books for my 38th birthday. I wondered, *When Kim and I traveled to Africa in July of 2010, did we toss the dice? We were hoping for another lucky seven. But did God know all along that 2010 would come up "snake eyes"?*



On November 20, Zachary came into town, and on November 21, Home Depot delivered a truckload of construction material to the church.

Just after one p.m. on November 22, a forty-foot cargo container pulled into the church parking lot. The truck driver sat in the cab for three hours while we loaded our materials as quickly as we could. A dozen volunteers carried items from storage and packed them in the container. Construction material, classroom furnishings, book boxes, and rummage sale items entered the cargo hold. I loaded my Japanese bed and bookcases with extra care. When I relocated to Rwanda, I wanted these comforts of home undamaged.

Before locking the steel doors, Al loaded the wooden box containing Kim's four-hundred-pound tombstone. Zachary helped with the heavy lifting.

I thanked everyone for their help and watched the truck pull out, taking the cargo to the port of Oakland for its ocean voyage to Dar es Salaam, Tanzania.

On November 23, Zachary picked up Simon and Lorenzo at the San Francisco airport. The four of us were gathering for the Thanksgiving holiday. Our plan was to spend one night in my condo and then travel to Calistoga, in the Napa Valley wine country, for a holiday dinner. Liz and her mother would meet us there.

I anticipated challenges with the get together. I wanted more than anything for my two sons and Liz to hit it off. I prayed that Zachary and Simon would accept a "significant other" in my life who was not their mother. I prayed that Liz would accept my sons and not perceive them as rivals for my affection. And I prayed for wisdom as the man in the middle of this complicated dynamic.

On Thanksgiving morning, we headed to Calistoga. Zachary drove my camper, with Simon in the shotgun seat. I was in the back entertaining Lorenzo in his car seat.

The turkey dinner for six provided an atmosphere for pleasant interaction, while Lorenzo

supplied the evening's entertainment. As the adults talked, he grabbed his fork and spoon and banged the table.

The boys stayed in my condo for a few more nights. On Saturday we shared dinner at Liz's house in San Mateo. During the return drive, I asked my sons what they thought of Liz. Zachary responded, "Dad, I don't know much about her, but I can see she's good to you. What more can we ask?"



December 2011

Month seventeen

After the flurry of Christmas events, Liz and I prepared for our first visit to Portland as a couple. Lizzie would meet my brother and sisters and I would meet her sister.

On December 28, I left Jody with Diane, picked up Liz, and drove to the airport. Once in Portland, we headed to Southwest Hills in a rental car.

I enjoyed the evening with Tricia and her husband, Jim. They prepared an over-the-top vegetarian meal in their gourmet kitchen. Sachi, their pit bull mix, had the run of the house and Tricia demonstrated his ball catching prowess. Liz spent the night in the upstairs guest room while I slept on an air mattress in the basement.

We wanted some time to ourselves, so on Thursday we booked a hotel suite. We drove to [Multnomah Falls](#) and hiked the surrounding trails. A light rainfall added to the adventure of the day.

We spent Friday with Frank and Lelia. The four of us walked through the drizzle in the afternoon and talked about Africa in the evening. Liz went to bed early and I stayed up late conversing with Frank.

"She's different from Kim," Frank said. "But that's good. You shouldn't try to duplicate what you lost. She appears to love you and to love God. And she's a lot younger than you too. What more could a guy ask?"

On Saturday afternoon my three sisters dropped by Frank's house for a New Year's Eve party. My sister Charlotte brought a cake and lit four candles in the shapes of [2-0-1-2](#). Liz and I

were the center of attention as together we blew out candles that symbolized the new year—a new beginning.

Each of my sisters, independent of the other two, took me aside and whispered, “It’s so good to see you smiling again.” I knew that Jeanne, Charlotte, and Eileen had loved Kim. Yet, they valued the happiness of their little brother. Like Frank, they understood that my agenda was not to replace my late wife, but to reclaim my shattered life.

As I drove our rental car to the airport, Liz said, “Your sisters are so joyful. Love just oozes from them.”

“Yes, they’re a hoot to be around. Each is so different, but the imprint of God makes them the same.”

Our flight left at nine p.m. on December 31 and landed in San Francisco a few hours before midnight. As we shuttled to long term parking, I shared with Lizzie events that had occurred on the previous New Year’s Day, like stomping balloons at the Kennedy Center in DC. “Who could have guessed that one year later I’d be holding hands with a wonderful woman like you? What do you think we’ll be doing one year from now?”

I was so tired when we arrived in San Mateo I spent the night at Lizzie’s house. Her living room couch opened into a twin sized bed and I settled into sleep. Just after I closed my eyes, a burst of fireworks announced the arrival of 2012.

Chapter 28

Surviving the Test

I was never a fan of Friedrich Nietzsche, but as Liz and I prepared for our mission trip to Africa, his words echoed in my ears. “That which does not kill us makes us stronger.”⁷⁸

I knew that travel to Rwanda would strain our relationship. The ordeal would either make us or break us. I didn’t know which.

I figured that if I trusted in myself, I was doomed. I suspected if Liz and I leaned on our own understanding, we were lost. We would only survive as a couple if we acknowledged God and submitted our stiff-necked wills to His.

O God, open our eyes to Proverbs 3:5 and 6. “Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths.”

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January 2012

Month eighteen

January first fell on a Sunday. I had to rise early in San Mateo to cross the seven-mile bridge into San Lorenzo. Diane brought Jody to church for a handoff. The dog jumped into my arms. “Jody,” I said, “I haven’t seen you since last year!” Everyone around us laughed.

After my forty-five-minute sermon, I was exhausted and headed straight home. I slept through the afternoon, then phoned Liz. We talked until dark.

Liz grew anxious about our trip to Africa. She spoke of long flights, bugs and snakes, food poisoning and malaria. It all made her apprehensive. She strove to keep a positive attitude, but as the departure day approached, her worry increased. I could tell that Rwanda was way outside her comfort zone.

It was also clear to me that Liz was making this sacrifice on my behalf, testing the waters to see if she could actually survive in Rwanda as a missionary’s wife.

“Lean on me,” I told her. “God has not only given me thick rhinoceros skin, I’ve got the full rhino package.”

We boarded British Airlines on January 9 and spent one night in London. The next day we boarded the flight to Addis Ababa. Liz was already grumpy with travel fatigue, and our takeoff from Heathrow did not soothe her fraying nerves.

Sitting several rows behind us was a large man in dreadlocks. On either side sat a burley cop, and behind him crouched two medics, forcing tranquilizers down his throat whenever he opened his mouth. A steward told us he was being deported to his native country. The flight was delayed for an hour because of his incessant howls. Once we were at altitude, the howler quieted down. But it proved impossible for Liz to relax.

We spent one night in Addis Ababa, where I could see Liz was struggling. While I was coming into my element, Liz was leaving hers.

Paul and Franc met us in Kigali and drove us to Butare. Liz was polite in public but cranky in private. She complained about dirty rooms, unsanitary toilets, terrible food, and the red dust that clung to just about everything.

“What did you expect?” I groused back. “This is a mission house in Rwanda, not a five-star hotel.”

On Friday we quarreled and she threatened to return to the States without me. I couldn't understand why she wasn't hardy, like me. In so many words, I told her to "suck it up!"

She couldn't understand why I didn't empathize with her misery. Why didn't I show her compassion?

At the close of a very bad Saturday, I pleaded, "Liz, we are being tested—not so much about Africa, but about each other. Can we persevere as a couple under this stress, or do we give up on each other?"

After the church service on Sunday, her disposition improved. "I'll stay here for the duration, but I could never live here for the long term. The people I've met are fine and the Christian worship was inspiring. But I'm not called to be a missionary in Rwanda." Her eyes filled with tears, "I'm sorry. I want to do it, but I just can't."

I sensed her tender spirit and asked if we could pray together. After asking God to lead us according to His will, I said, "Let's just enjoy the next eight days as if we're tourists. We can talk about our future on the way home."

"I think I can do that," she said. "But please don't judge me too harshly. Give me grace and try to understand how difficult this is for me."

The next morning, Liz and I walked on the zigzag trails of the National University. We looked for monkeys in the trees, but couldn't spot them.

That afternoon, I began teaching in the front-yard classroom. I stood with my back to a chalkboard, facing twenty students seated in white plastic chairs. Liz sat in the back, observing.

I taught from John, chapter 13, the story of Jesus washing His disciples' feet. I asked one student to join me up front. To illustrate my point, I positioned him behind me as if we were queuing in line. I then invited him to stand in front of me. As he moved, I said, "That is the love of God. It puts others ahead of you."

Again I stood in front of him. Then I maneuvered to a position behind him. "That is the humility of Christ. It takes the lowly place. Can you see how the two acts have the same effect? Humility is the twin face of love."

I bowed my head and closed my eyes. "Father God, fill us with Your love to put others before us. Lord Jesus, fill us with Your humility to put our own needs behind the needs of others."

As the students were dispersing, Liz walked up to me. "I recognize the value of the work

you're doing among university students. You're a good missionary." She hesitated before adding, "I don't want to get in your way."

On Tuesday morning, Liz and I walked the same trails across the university property. As we turned a corner, I whispered, "Look, Liz, there's a monkey." As we approached, the animal scampered away. We followed it and found ourselves in the midst of [a monkey forest](#). There must have been thirty of the little creatures. They were hanging from tree limbs, playing on the ground, and staring back at us. A large alpha male patrolled his troupe, pacing left then right, always with an eye on us. Joy shown from Liz's face as we stood in silence and drank in the scene.

When we returned to the house, Liz grabbed her guide book and opened it. "It appears the monkeys we encountered are a species called *vervet*. Adults are about the size of a raccoon, with long tails, pale green colors, and a black mask encircling the nose and mouth. It says *vervet* is French for *green*."

On Wednesday we walked again, this time carrying a few bananas, but there were no monkeys to be seen. When we returned to the house, Liz glanced down at her feet. "Look at these filthy shoes. And they're the only walking shoes I brought."

"Give them to Jacques. He'll wash them for you and put them in the sun."

Liz wore her leather shoes when we ate dinner that night at Pastor Paul's house. The meal was extravagant, with a dozen fruit and vegetable dishes. Liz loved the avocados. She complimented Mary Jane, saying, "This is best meal I've eaten since coming to Rwanda."

As I talked with Liz before bedtime, she was cheerful. "I think I'm finally adjusting to the African time zone and enjoying the local food."

On Thursday morning Liz and I walked in the woods, carrying a dozen finger bananas. Along the dusty path I noticed her shoes. She followed my gaze.

"Oh, these? My other shoes weren't dry yet, so I asked Jane if she could find a pair that would fit me."

"Those are Kim's shoes, you know."

"Yes. Jane told me."

"You seem to fill them pretty well."

She smiled. "Yes, they're a good fit."

Soon we faced our troupe of furry friends on the walking trail. We tossed a few tiny

bananas their way, which they quickly consumed. Then they lunged at the bananas Liz was carrying. She was startled at their aggression and we retreated down the trail.

At noon I addressed two hundred students at the outdoor university stadium. Liz sat in the front row with Jane. I spoke in frank terms about sexual integrity and Christian dating. One male student rose to ask me a question. "What is the line in dating? How far is too far?"

I chuckled. "All of you guys, I want you to know you have a God-given warning apparatus. Please stand and look above your head." All the men stood and looked up to the metal roof. "Now look straight down between your legs."

The men looked down and the women giggled. Liz put both hands over her mouth.

"You are looking at your built-in thermometer. When you cross the line with your girlfriend, your internal temperature gets hot and your thermometer starts to rise." I used an arm gesture to indicate an erection. "That's how you know if you've crossed the line. If your thermometer goes up, then back off. If it doesn't, you're fine." My arm dropped limp to my side.

After we concluded, I shook hands and joked with the students. Jane was still laughing as she and Liz approached me.

"This is your ministry," Liz said. "You have a gift for speaking to young people about dating and sex. I think this is something you should package and present back in the States."

Putting my arm around her, I said, "Maybe this is a ministry we can do together."

About noon on Friday, we returned to the university stadium. Again I spoke about Christian dating and marriage. "Communication is key to any relationship. How do you spell *communication*?"

A few students began speaking out the letters: "c-o-m-m—."

I interrupted, "Women spell *communication* t-a-l-k; Men spell it s-e-x."

As I continued my lecture on dating an invasion began. About one hundred vervet monkeys of all sizes closed in on us. They climbed in the rafters, rattled on the tin roof, and walked up the aisles. One monkey scampered to a loudspeaker and yanked on wires. A guitar player chased it away. Then, as quickly as they had appeared, the monkeys scampered across the soccer field and disappeared into the forest.

After the lecture Liz and I talked about the monkey incursion. She offered a practical theory. "The monkeys appeared because I fed them bananas the day before and they sought me out for more."

I counter-offered a spiritual theory. “You were hoping to see monkeys again today and God met your desire—to overflowing.” Whatever the explanation, Liz marveled to see this handiwork of God close up.

On Saturday CASR held a graduation in the university auditorium. Liz and I [posed for photographs](#) with thirty-five students who had received their diplomas. At the supper that followed, she didn’t touch the goat meat, but she did relish the avocados and pineapple.

On Sunday after church, Liz and I visited the [Rwanda National Museum](#), and on Monday Pastor Paul drove us to Kigali to begin our journey home. We flew from Rwanda to Ethiopia on Tuesday and once more spent the night in Addis Ababa. We squabbled most of the time.

During our twenty-four-hour stopover in London, our fighting grew intense. Liz criticized everything I did and said. My rhinoceros skin was wearing thin. The only thing we seemed to have in common was our faith in God, and it was only by His grace that we survived Heathrow Airport as a couple.

As we flew over the Atlantic, I shared my heart with Liz. “If I have to choose between you and God, you know I’ll choose God every time.”

Her body tensed.

“But I don’t see that as a necessary choice. I just have to decide if I’ll serve God in Rwanda without you or serve God in America alongside you.”

She reached for my hand.

“I made a commitment to live in Rwanda. And I believe I could thrive there... but not without you. God help me, Liz, but I choose you over Africa. You’re my priority. I love you. I can visit Rwanda on short-term missions. Sweetie, you don’t have to live in Africa.”

She put her head on my chest and spoke softly. “I’m sorry for my behavior. I’ve just been so anxious and scared for the last few weeks. Every day—every minute—I’ve been thinking about us. I only saw two alternatives. I could either live in Rwanda with you or live alone in California without you. Can you understand why I’ve been miserable? I don’t want to lose you. I’m so glad God spoke to your heart this way.”

When we arrived home, Liz and I fell back into our pattern of one weekday meal and one weekend hike. We had each seen the other at our worst and we had survived the test. It seemed we were over the hump. Our friendship—affection, knowledge, trust—all began to flourish.

Chapter 29

Miss Tidy Tips

“Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin: and yet I say unto you, that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these” (Matthew 6:28–29).

I relished my Saturdays with Liz. For several years, she had been volunteering as an open-space docent. [She led hikes](#) throughout San Mateo County and took pleasure in identifying springtime wild flowers. Her favorite was a delicate flower called tidy tips. It took her breath away to see an entire field of yellow-and-white petals dancing in the breeze. I once told her, “What delights you defines you,” and jokingly called her Miss Tidy Tips.

We were a study in contrasts. I identified with a less delicate, more humble plant. Call me Mister Mugwort.

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February 2012

Month nineteen

When I returned from Africa, I called my brother, telling him I had dropped my plans to move to Rwanda. “I had to choose between Africa and Liz. And I chose Liz. As I look back now, it appears so obvious. Liz could not have functioned in Rwanda. It’s not her calling. I was foolish to even ask her.”

“I understand,” Frank said.

“Kim—who visited Rwanda ten times—never wanted to live there full time. Two weeks a year was enough for her. How could I have expected Liz to leave her home and friends in San Mateo and spend two years in Rwanda? I should not have put that expectation on her shoulders.”

“Lelia could never live there. It’s rare for anyone.”

“Maybe I confused my personal desire with God’s call. You know, in the old movies, men used to join the French foreign legion to deal with a broken heart. I think Rwanda was my French foreign legion.”

Frank then voiced concern about the quick pace of my romance with Liz.

“I’ve been with her for five months now. After five months with Kim I was already married. Don’t worry. But please keep us in prayer.”

As much as I tried, I could not escape the gravity of Kim’s birthday. On February 20, I stopped by her grave site and talked to her about Liz. “My lovely Kim, I am so conflicted. I see your ageless face in porcelain and read your name etched in granite. How can I cease loving you after thirty six years of devotion? Can I turn love off like a spigot? It hurts my heart to be unfaithful to you. How can I treasure you and pursue Liz at the same time? My love, if you are truly with Christ in God, please ask Jesus what I should do.”



March 2012

Month twenty

Liz and I often spoke of marriage. For practical and personal reasons, we agreed to wait until after I retired. From a practical perspective I still worked as a full-time pastor. I loved my job and the position required that I remain local.

On a personal level, we agreed our friendship required more time to mature. I told Liz, “Things look positive now, but I don’t want to do the touchdown tango until we reach the end zone.” Marriage made more sense after September.

I spent March 23—the thirty-eighth anniversary of my wedding to Kim—in silent contemplation. I did not visit her grave site. *My past life is slipping away. I doubt Zachary or Simon is marking this day. It’s my memory alone now. Lord, what would You have me do? Help me turn the page of my life story.*

Liz and I began premarital counseling with Dr. Curry in San Mateo. He helped us work through our issues. Liz sought to tamp down her temper and I sought to improve my communication skills. When responding to Liz, I tried to practice the acronym LUVE: listen, understand, validate, empathize.



April 2012

Month twenty-one

Liz and I were taking all the steps we could to lay the foundation for a solid marriage. In April we began attending an evening class called Love and Respect.⁷⁹ The biblical basis for this course was Ephesians 5:33. “To sum up, each one of you is to love his wife as himself, and the wife is to respect her husband.”⁸⁰

This teaching resonated with me. I’d always viewed men and women as equal but intrinsically different. In this class I learned that men see the world through blue lenses. We are warriors with a code of honor. We crave respect, and being disrespected cuts us to the quick. Women wear pink lenses. They crave the devoted love of one man. Being cherished above others

is life-giving while scorn is devastating. There are real differences between pink and blue.

My favorite concept from the ten sessions was something called the crazy cycle. “If a woman does not feel loved by a man, she reacts by withholding respect. Without respect, the man reacts by withholding love.” So the couple continually spirals downward. Which partner can break the crazy cycle? The one who considers himself or herself more mature. It should be a race for grace. *Lord, I prayed, let me win this competition!*

While sitting through Love and Respect sessions in the church classroom, my mind alternated between Kim and Liz. In one lesson, as the video narrator related a story, Kim flashed into my mind. When the speaker expounded on a principle, Liz leapt into my thoughts. I closed my eyes to visualize my spouse, and a hybrid image appeared. *Should I call her “Kiz”? or maybe “Lim”?*

Lord, my mind is a jumble. Help me sort this out. I don’t want to step outside Your will. Help me step inside Your peace.



May 2012

Month twenty-two

In May I bought an airline ticket for Africa. I was determined to build a legacy for Kim, whatever the sacrifice. Closure with the past dictated it. Embrace of the future required it.

It was not something I had expected, but Mother’s Day turned out to be a day of mourning. I did not grieve for my own mother who died in 1999. But Zachary and Simon commemorated the loss of their mom. My sons might forget her birthday (February 20) or our anniversary (March 23), but how could anyone in America forget Mothers Day? It was promoted from coast to coast as a day to honor moms.

Simon called me on Sunday morning. “Dad, I just sent some flowers to Holy Angels Cemetery. Can you drop by and make sure they arrived?”

Zachary called that evening, as I was heading for church. “Hey, Dad. It’s still light in California, right? Can you pick up some flowers for Mom? I’ll pay you back.”

I was [happy to accommodate](#) both of my sons’ requests.



June 2012

Month twenty-three

The pastor selection committee began to interview candidates to replace me. They called Pastor Tim from Mississippi to speak one Sunday as my possible successor. I was content to sit in the front row and listen. As I counted down my final ten Sundays, I fought a “short timer’s attitude.” *Lord, let me finish well.*

One Friday afternoon, I put the finishing touches on a sermon from John 14:1 and 2. “Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father’s house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you.”

I began assembling the PowerPoint, which included five worship songs. The opening hymn was a longtime favorite of mine. As I read the lyrics and hummed the tune, tears came to my eyes. I recognized my story.

[Come, thou Fount of every blessing](#), tune my heart to sing thy grace;
streams of mercy, never ceasing, call for songs of loudest praise.
Jesus sought me when a stranger, wandering from the fold of God;
He, to rescue me from danger, interposed his precious blood.^{[81](#)}

“O God,” I cried out, “tune my heart to sing Your grace. And thank You for your never-ceasing streams of mercy.”

I stayed late in the church office, cutting red paper into the shape of valentine hearts and folding the cutouts in half.

On Sunday morning I asked Sherry to insert the sixty red hearts into our bulletins. Shauna led the congregation in singing the first two stanzas of the opening hymn.

When she paused, I spoke. “Before we continue with the third stanza, I’d like each of you to open your bulletin and remove the paper heart. Write your name on the inside of the heart.” I took a pencil and wrote my name on my own paper heart. “Now, fold it back up.” I did so, then

paused while others followed my lead. “For the final stanza of the hymn, let’s stand together and lift our hearts. Make it a wave offering to God.”

O to grace how great a debtor daily I’m constrained to be!
Let thy goodness, like a fetter, bind my wandering heart to thee.
Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it, prone to leave the God I love;
Here’s my heart, O take and seal it, seal it for thy courts above.

I then preached from the gospel of John. “Let not your heart be troubled.”
Yet, my heart was troubled.



As Liz and I moved toward marriage, my end goal came into focus. I wanted to become one with this woman. I felt I had achieved oneness with Kim, and I now looked forward to the day when Liz and I would enjoy the same level of spiritual intimacy.

As I considered the words *becoming one*, I recalled a book written by my old friend Dr. J. Kenneth Eakins called [*Becoming One: How One Couple Forged a Love to Last a Lifetime . . . and Beyond*](#).⁸² I located the book and opened it to the inside cover. Ken had inscribed, “To Chris and Kim. Forge a love to last a lifetime.”

My heart warmed with memories of Ken. When we lived in Mill Valley, Ken had been my mentor and advisor. Kim and I soaked in his teaching Sunday after Sunday.

As I read the book, I was struck by our parallels. Ken was a Southern Baptist, a scholar, and a romantic. His favorite author was C. S. Lewis. His wife died at age sixty after a long, happy marriage. Ken wrote a memoir to honor his wife and dedicated a building in her name. We were much alike.

After I finished reading his book, I was struck by our profound differences. I sought to process my grief by letting go of my lovely Kim; Ken said letting go of Marian was the last thing he wanted to do. I sought healing through closure with the past; Ken reported conversing with his deceased wife every morning and evening. Remarriage was at the forefront of my agenda; Ken was offended when a friend suggested he remarry.

Ken's central proposition was this: when a Christian couple attains a "oneness marriage," they remain a couple despite the intrusion of death.

No doubt this prospect of an eternal bond brought comfort to Ken, but it appeared to me as bondage. If Ken were correct in his theology, then either Kim and I had been a oneness couple and therefore I should not remarry. Or my marriage to Kim lacked the quality of oneness, allowing remarriage to be an option. I was not thrilled with either option.

Lord, help me to sort this out.

On Saturday, as Liz and I hiked [the Edgewood trail](#) near her home, I broached the topic. "I don't think I ever talked to you about Ken Eakins. He was my spiritual advisor when I was in seminary. Ken's wife died when he was about my age, and he wrote a memoir about their marriage. I reread it yesterday and was surprised by what he said."

She took another step. "What did he say?"

"Ken wrote that when a couple has a special marriage, the bond lasts forever, even after one of them dies. He suggests that in heaven they will remain a devoted couple forever."

She stopped and turned around. "Is that scriptural?"

"The Bible says there won't be marriage in heaven. But Ken says a devoted couple can maintain their exclusive bond."

We walked a few more steps side by side, and then I said, "If what he says is true, then there's something wrong with us."

Liz stopped, put her hands on her hips, and faced me. "I don't read that in the Bible. I think it's just his opinion and that's what worked for him."

"I agree with you, sweetie. Two of the most revered missionaries in Baptist history are Hudson Taylor and Adoniram Judson. I googled them last night to get my facts straight. Taylor was in China for fifty years and remarried after his first wife died. Judson lost two wives in the mission field and married three times."

"Well, there you go! Who is that guy to imply his love was superior to theirs? Or to ours?"

After we walked in silence for a while, I said, "Maybe it's like this. Ken needed to let the world know it's okay for a widower to remain single unto death, to stay devoted to his deceased wife. He wrote down his own love story and with it gave permission to those who want to hang on to a beloved spouse. I think God will honor that.

“But my love story is different from Ken’s. If I ever write a memoir, it will have a Kim part and a Liz part. I need to let the world know it’s acceptable to lament the death of a first wife, but then wonderful to embrace a new one. A second holy marriage doesn’t dishonor the first.”

As we walked on, I thought about Genesis 2:18: “The Lord God said, ‘It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper as his complement.’”⁸³ I wondered *Is God’s pronouncement valid only once in a lifetime? Or is aloneness “not good” from birth to death?*

I was about to open my mouth to share this thought with Liz when she pointed to the trail side. “Oh, look. Tidy tips! And I thought they were gone for the year.”

Her delight settled the matter. My heart was no longer troubled. It was good for me to share my life with Liz.

Chapter 30

Building a Legacy

I told my friends it was my vacation home. “I go there once a year. Some people build a cabin at Lake Tahoe, others a villa in France. I’m constructing a campus house in Rwanda.” I talked that way so my missionary work wouldn’t appear crazy.

In July of 2010, the Light House was a hole in the ground with skeletal ribs sticking above the surface. Two years later this ambitious project rose four stories above a valley floor in Rwanda.

Most of the construction money came from me—or rather, from Kim. I cashed in her retirement accounts and insurance settlements. I took out a line of credit against our Mill Valley home. The bulk of Kim’s accumulated wealth went to Africa; all of it went to the glory of God.

The prophet Nehemiah said to the Jews, the priests, the nobles, the rulers, and the people, “Come, and let us build up the wall of Jerusalem, that we be no more a reproach.” They responded, “Let us rise up and build.” So they built the wall, “for the people had a mind to work.”⁸⁴

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July 2012

Month twenty-four: the two year mark

First Baptist Church held a Vacation Bible School from July 1 to 6. How that made me miss Kim! She used to lead the children's songs with silly hand motions. She had the gift of being childlike without being childish. VBS 2010 had been Kim's American swan song. The singing stopped on a Sunday evening, and on Monday morning she accompanied me on her one-way flight to Africa.

My mind was in tumult, somersaulting between memories of Kim and enchantment with Liz. Before my 2012 departure to Rwanda, I purchased seventeen greeting cards. On the inside of each I wrote a note to Liz. I numbered the cards, sealed them, stamped them, and asked Sherry to drop one in the mailbox each day. I wanted Liz to know she was loved continually.

On July 9, Al dropped me off at the airport and in thirty-six hours I was in Rwanda. For this mission, I focused on construction of the Light House.

The cargo container I'd sent the previous October had arrived in January. American doors and windows were now installed, one of the classrooms was complete, and the peaked rooftop was nearly bolted in place. There was still much to do, but with walls and paint, I could see the contours of [something glorious](#).

Telephone calls were difficult in Butare, so I sent Liz an e-mail every day. I was in continual prayer, sorting out my responsibilities first to God, then to Liz, and finally to Kim. On my second day in Butare, I e-mailed this note to Liz:

Sweetie, in the midst of concrete pillars and exposed rebar, God spoke to my heart. He said, "Chris, do not think you are constructing a monument to the departed Kim. She is with Me now. You are My chosen vessel to bring Me glory in this corner of My kingdom. I will not share My glory with another. The concrete and iron you see will persist for generations, but eventually it will crumble. However, the thousands of souls touched by the Light House will endure throughout eternity.

I sat on the rooftop, gazing into the distant valley. *Is this building my Taj Mahal?* I couldn't recall much about that magnificent structure, except that it was homage from a grief-stricken king to his deceased queen. Basically it was an over-the-top mausoleum.

O God, clear my eyes. Help me to put love for You above all earthly loves, including my love for Kim. I don't want the Light House to become her mausoleum. Be Thou my vision.

I considered the name of the Bible school: The Kim Foreman Bible Institute. Would this name trouble Kim? Maybe so. Did this name give all the glory to God? Maybe not. Perhaps my choice had been impulsive.

I thought about the portrait of Kim with the words "Joy of God" emblazoned on her shirt. I considered changing the name to The Joy of God Bible Institute. That would honor Kim but also glorify her Maker.

On my first Sunday in Butare I met with twenty missionaries from Trinity Church in New York City. Over dinner I shared my vision of CASA and the Light House, as well as my own spiritual journey. This was the first time I'd spoken in public of Kim's death and my struggle to forgive Franc. I couldn't believe the overwhelming response. People were in tears and asked me how they could help.

After this outpouring of emotion, I determined to get started on my memoir. Could I redeem my grief to God's glory? Could I touch souls through the written word? I felt God was opening this door for me. I just needed the courage to walk through it.

I taught a few Bible classes under the iron sheet roof. My intention was to raise the level of theology, placing it somewhere between Sunday school and seminary level. Since I didn't have electricity for a projector or a copier to make handouts, I wrote four words on sheets of construction paper: *evil, choice, love, God*.

I held up the word *evil*.

"Why is there evil in the world?" I asked my students. "Because there is choice. God did not create robots. He gave us the freedom to choose Him or reject Him. The greatest gift a human being possesses, the attribute that sets us apart from animals, is moral choice. There is evil in the world because God in His goodness granted each of us freedom to follow Him or reject Him."

I then held up the word *choice*.

"Why is there choice? Because there is love. God desired creatures who would love Him, not out of compulsion but out of choice. Love cannot be forced. Can you imagine genuine love without the option of rejection? I can't. No more than I could imagine a one-ended stick. Love

must be bestowed without coercion or it is not love at all.”

Next I held up the word *love*.

“Why is there love? Because there is God. Love is the cardinal virtue, a defining characteristic of God Himself. The Bible tells us in 1 John 4:8 that God is love. Before the foundation of the universe, the Father, Son, and Spirit existed in a community of mutual love. And when God created man and woman in His own image, love was intrinsic to that image.”

I held up the word *God*.

“Why is there God? There must be God, because we have breath and are able to utter the question ‘Why is there God?’ God is a self-existent being, beyond explanation; a non-contingent being, beyond finding out. Job 34:14–15 says that if God should ‘gather unto himself his spirit and his breath; all flesh shall perish together, and man shall turn again unto dust.’”

I reversed the order of the four cards, displaying them one after the other. “God exists; therefore, love must exist. Love exists; therefore, choice must exist. Choice exists; therefore, the opportunity for evil must exist. In a roundabout way, I recognize the goodness of God because I experience the pain of evil.”

I summarized my talk by paraphrasing my favorite radio apologist, Ravi Zacharias. “We may not live in the best possible world, but this world may be the best possible means into the best possible world to come.”⁸⁵

After the students left the classroom I pondered what had come out of my mouth. I realized that God had given me those words for my own healing. The evil of Kim’s death continued to haunt me, and through this chain of reasoning, I caught a glimpse of how my suffering might be a logical outworking of God’s perfect love. God did not create me to be happy—although that may happen. God created me to be holy—and that was an entirely different matter.



As I prepared to return to the US, I talked with Pastor Paul at the construction site. “We are so blessed to build on this piece of real estate—right next to the road and near the university.”

I reminded Paul, “When Kim and I first scoped out this site in 2008, all we found were

the foundation bricks of a ruined house. I could never figure out why this was a vacant wasteland for so long.”

“Oh, I guess I never told you the story.” Paul laughed. “This land once belonged to Theodore Sindikubwabo. He was president of Rwanda during the one hundred days of genocide.”

I gasped in astonishment. “Did he live here while he led the war?”

“No. Dr. Sindikubwabo owned this house when he was on the faculty at the National University. He was a teaching doctor for many years before he became the minister of health and then got elected to parliament. In 1994, when Juvénal Habyarimana was killed, military officers made him president. He was just a puppet.”

“So what happened to him?”

“After the war, the RPF chased him into the Congo and he died there. The army demolished his house and removed all the pieces. To get title to this property, we had to obtain the signature of his daughter, who was a member of the Rwandan assembly. It took over a year.”

I marveled that on this lot of genocidal hatred Christian love flourished. On the ground where terror once spread, the gospel would multiply. “It reminds me of the Samson proverb, ‘Out of the eater came something to eat, and out of the strong came something sweet.’”⁸⁶

Paul, who also knew his Scripture, responded, “And what about Joseph? He said to his brothers, ‘You planned evil against me; God planned it for good.’”⁸⁷

After church on Sunday morning, Paul drove me to Kigali for my return flight. We stopped at the roadside memorial. The old caretaker noticed our car and walked up to me. He pointed out the bed of flowers and a circle of painted stones surrounding the lavender concrete pillar. I thanked him for his care and put five thousand Rwandan franks into his hand.

On the flight home, I had a six-hour stopover in New York City. Simon met me at JFK and we shared dinner at an airport café.

During our conversation I noticed a new tattoo on his left forearm. He followed my eyes as I crooked my head to read it.

“I got it a few weeks ago. Can you figure it out?” He lifted his elbow, [making his arm horizontal](#).

I squinted and shook my head.

“It has to with Mom.”

I read the digits out loud: “-02.14443333 +29.74838333.” I was still clueless.

“They’re coordinates.” He smiled.

A light dawned. “Ah! Minus zero-two indicates two degrees south of equator, so I bet it has to do with Africa.”

His smile broadened. “That’s right. They’re the coordinates for the accident site in Rwanda.” He held up his other arm. “Now I’m balanced. I have Lorenzo’s and Gia’s names on my right arm, and Mom’s on my left.”

I didn’t understand the younger generation’s fascination with body art, but I certainly saw the love in this one. I took a picture of Simon displaying his left arm.

While waiting to board my flight, I entered those twenty digits into Google Earth. The animated display rose from my current location in New York, rotated to east Africa, then zoomed in on a small road near Gitarama, Rwanda. Was it my imagination, or could I actually make out a small speck that was the roadside memorial?

When I arrived at the San Francisco airport, my heart leapt at the sight of Liz. We embraced and she talked with delight of the seventeen love letters that had arrived in her mailbox. Together we set a target date of January 1, 2013, to marry. Liz was excited but anxious. “There’s so much to do in only five months.”

I wanted to make everything perfect for Liz, so I wrote a letter to her father in Asheville, North Carolina. I concluded with these words: “I cannot ask Lizzie to marry me until I have your assent. Sir, do I have your blessing to ask for the hand of Jean Elizabeth in marriage? I eagerly await your response.”

A week later, I received his reply, generously granting his permission.

On the last day of the month, I visited Kim’s grave site. This Thursday marked the second anniversary of her fatal car crash. I considered the forty-eight glyphs encompassing her birth and death dates.

“To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven.” I had often viewed my own life as following the seasons of Solomon, but never Kim’s. Yet there they were, forty-eight seasons etched in stone.

I counted her seasons in Korea, America, Washington, Wisconsin, and California; at Kyung Hee University, the University of Wisconsin, and San Francisco State. I saw her seasons of technology, dance, and travel. I saw an overturned car as her concluding season.

I ached at how alien death seemed to my human spirit. Was I alone in longing for a home beyond the reach of death? I considered the words of Solomon: “He has also put eternity in their hearts, but man cannot discover the work God has done from beginning to end.”⁸⁸ I knew eternity was embedded in my heart.

I studied the husband half of the gravestone. I could visualize some of my forty-eight glyphs. There would be emblems of my little dog, of Gia, and of Liz. I would have to rely on my artistic son to complete the right side.

I [knelt in the grass](#) and talked to Kim about my struggles. I asked her about Liz. “What do you think, Yobo? You’ve been away for two years and nothing can bring you back. Is it okay if I ask Liz to marry me?”

I didn’t hear Kim say yes. But neither did I hear her say no.

Chapter 31

Hope and a Future

For two years I had inhabited the dark side of the moon, but shadows were lifting. The lunarscape was brightening. I began looking ahead and not behind.

Every Sunday morning before my weekly sermon, I plunked my Bible upon my pulpit. Week after week, I considered the Scripture verse embossed its cover: “For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future” (Jeremiah 29:11 NIV).

After preaching one hundred sermons from this Bible, were the words of the prophet at last coming to pass?

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August 2012

Month twenty-five

As my days at First Baptist Church dwindled, I delegated more responsibility to my associates. Ken Hillard covered for me while I traveled on two family outings. On August 4, Liz and I went to New York State to visit her mother's family. On August 10 we went to Washington State to visit mine. These get-togethers were important to us, because knowing our families of origin increased our understanding of each other. How far did the fruit fall from the tree?

I attended these two events back to back, flying a triangle from San Francisco to New York City to Portland and back to San Francisco. Liz was not so fortunate. Her job requirements demanded that she fly to New York, return to work for a few days, and then join me in Portland.

Our first family gathering was the "145th Annual Bull Family Reunion and Picnic" held in Campbell Hall, New York, near the Hudson River. Six hundred people sat under canopies, ate from picnic baskets, and renewed acquaintances. It was a treat to meet Liz's close relations. We posed for pictures with her mother, two aunts, two uncles, three cousins, and two second cousins.

Our second event was in Longview, Washington, at Lake Sacajawea. About forty people shared food, song, conversation, and laughter. Each of my sisters and my brother set up a folding table and decorated it with photographs and memorabilia. I distributed a sketch of our family tree squeezed onto a single sheet of paper. The schematic showed a tree trunk (my deceased father and mother), six limbs (their children), twenty-four branches (their grandchildren), thirty sticks (great-grandchildren), and ten twigs (great-great-grandchildren).

One by one the five surviving limbs stood to address the assembled branches, sticks, and twigs. I closed the gathering with prayer, asking grace upon [every piece of wood](#)—both natural and engrafted.

As I considered that event the next day, I didn't recall much conversation about Kim. Her name appeared on the Foreman family tree, but people did not feel compelled to console me or to beatify her. The topic of Kim's death was not avoided, merely absent. Rather, people wanted to talk about Liz. She was a great conversationalist, and *my* family members treated her like a member of *our* family.

When I returned to my church office, I prepared my final three sermons. I made a last-minute adjustment. I had been rereading *A Grief Observed* by C.S. Lewis. As the author

struggled with the death of this wife, he found himself lost and unsure of his next step. Then he wrote, “And now that I come to think of it, there’s no practical problem before me at all. I know the two great commandments, and I’d better get on with them.”⁸⁹

Rather than continuing in the gospel of John, my new focal verse became the two great commandments: “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbor as thyself.”⁹⁰ I considered this statement to be Christ’s prime directive: to love God, to love our neighbors, and to love ourselves.

On August 19, my message was about the third love. “Loving yourself means placing yourself at the bottom of the love pyramid. You put others and God above you. *Humility* is the word that best describes this Christian mode of love. You do not think less about yourself. You think about yourself less. That is what it means to love yourself.”

On August 26, my message was about the second love, love of others. “This is the middle of the pyramid, sandwiched between love of self and love of God. The spectrum of spouse, family, friend, stranger, and enemy all fit into this center space. It takes holy wisdom to prioritize this collection of people, but Christ teaches us that every human being deserves a share of agape love.”



Liz and I went shopping for her engagement ring in mid-August. It was my purchase, but I wanted to get the exact ring she desired. Liz was looking for a simple silver-gold band with three diamonds—a larger center stone with two smaller stones on either side. She said, “This symbolizes God in the middle with you and me on the sides.”

We ordered the ring from Macy’s on August 24. I hinted, “Labor Day will be our one-year anniversary of meeting. You may get a ring, so keep on your toes.” I planned to be sneaky with the exact time and method of my proposal.

I tracked UPS delivery on my iPad. The package was due to arrive on August 29, but it didn’t appear at the door that day. Then it was promised on August 30, but still no ring.

I phoned UPS and they guaranteed delivery on August 31. Yet, by two p.m., the ring had not arrived. Liz and I ran errands. As I returned to her street, we passed a UPS truck driving in

the opposite direction. I pulled a quick U-turn and chased it down, cutting it off before it reached the highway. Liz hopped out of the car and approached the startled driver. She explained the situation and provided her ID. We drove home with Liz holding the precious parcel.

I had planned on carrying the unopened box with me to Hayward, but Liz suggested, “Let’s check it out first.” When I flipped opened the box, a gorgeous ring appeared. But it wasn’t the ring we had ordered! All the little diamonds made it look garish. And it was too big for Liz’s finger.

We rushed to Macy’s and talked to the head of the jewelry department. He apologized profusely and took 10 percent off the price of the ring. We resigned ourselves to a post-Labor Day engagement.

As we left the jewelry counter, the manager whispered with a wink, “Buddy, you should have given her this ring. It’s worth twice as much as the one you ordered.”



September 2012

Month twenty-six

On September 2, 2012, I presented my last sermon to the congregation at First Baptist. This message was about the prime love, the love of God. “What does the love of God look like? We can’t give Him things. We can’t plant kisses on His cheek. So how can we love God? We give Him glory and we give Him priority. We place allegiance to God above all else.”

I mentioned the three Ts: time, talent, and treasure. “Where do you spend your time and with whom? Are you using your talents to bring glory to God? Where does your money go? These are not proofs of God-love. But they are indicators for assessing your heart condition. Love of God is an attitude of the soul. It is evidenced in obedience to His Son as revealed by His Spirit through His Word.”

The last slide I showed to my faithful flock revealed a photo of my VW camper. Printed on the tailgate was my parting exhortation. “As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him.”⁹¹

A short reception followed the service. Liz attended [my last hurrah](#) and helped me cut my

farewell cake. My mood was giddy. One of the teenagers asked me for my favorite Bible verse. I thought for a while, then responded, “It’s from the book of Proverbs. It goes something like this: ‘If a man speaks in the woods and there’s no woman to hear him, is he still wrong?’” I managed to keep a straight face; Liz’s eyes widened.

“That’s funny!” The young man scurried off and returned a few minutes later with a pew Bible in his hands. “Can you find it for me so I can write it down?”

“Why don’t you ask Deacon Al over there? I’m sure he can find it.”

The young man wandered over to Al and began talking to him. As I left the fellowship hall, Al looked my way with a grin.

I was not yet 100 percent gone from the church. On Wednesday, I showed up for the evening meal. Diane and Sherry hosted a farewell party for Jody Teardrop, the dog they helped rescue. Diane snapped pictures as Jody consumed two bowls of doggie ice cream.

On Friday morning, September 7, I cleared out my office space, and in the afternoon I met with Al. As I handed over my church keys, he asked about that mysterious verse in Proverbs. We shared a final laugh. After six years, this season of Solomon had come to a close. *Turn! Turn! Turn!*

On the next day, as a retired pastor, I dropped by Liz’s house and we sat at her kitchen table. A small box sat in front of me, where a dinner plate would normally appear.

“I checked it out,” she smiled. “They got the right one this time.”

Jamming the box in my pocket, I said, “Then let’s go for a walk.”

With Jody secured in the garage, we walked out her front door. Hand in hand we strolled to the end of the street. When we turned into Laurel Wood Park, I saw mothers pushing strollers, men mowing grass, and dogs scampering everywhere.

“Let’s find some privacy,” I suggested.

We pivoted up a flight of wooden stairs and ambled a few dozen steps into the woods. Under a black oak tree, I fell to one knee. With extravagant gestures I took the jewelry box out of my pocket, removed the dainty ring, and gingerly attached it to a low-hanging bough.

Liz looked down at me with amusement.

I held her left fingers in my hand. “Liz, my beloved, you would make me the happiest man in the whole world if you would be my bride. Lizzie, darling, will you marry me?”

She laughed at my romantic affectations. “Of course I will.”

I removed the ring from the branch and twisted it onto her finger. “Then it’s official.”

As we walked back to her house, she glanced down at her left hand every few steps. “I still can’t believe you want to marry me.”

“Of course I do, silly. I can’t believe I waited a full year to ask you.”

September 11, 2012, was the eleventh anniversary of the terror strike against America. It was not a happy day for my new fiancée. About nine in the morning, I read a one-line message from her. “I was laid off today. I am heading home to sort this through. I would appreciate your prayers.”

I phoned her immediately and asked if I should come over. “No,” she said. “I need some time alone to process. But please come over this evening. I need your support. And your prayers.”

When I arrived at her house, I gave her a long hug.

“It was such a shock,” she said through tears. “When I got to work this morning, my boss called me into her office. She told me she was sorry, but I was being released. The HR rep handed me a binder with my severance package details. I had thirty minutes to clear out my desk. She kept a close eye on me. Then she took my badge and walked me out the back door. It was unreal.”

“I’m so sorry, sweetie. That’s so mean.”

Liz took a deep breath. “I’ll be okay. You know how stressful this job’s been for me. I was just hoping to hold on until January.” She laughed. “It actually turned out in my favor, though. They gave me a generous separation package. Much better than if I had retired.” She sniffled. “It just hurts that they did it to me rather than me doing it to them.”

I rocked her in my arms. “It’s okay, it’s okay, it’s okay.”

I didn’t tell her at the time, but I thought her layoff was a blessing from God. I knew the coming days would add tremendous stress to her life. She didn’t need the pressure cooker of her work place as well.



It’s an unwritten rule among Baptists that when a pastor leaves his position, he doesn’t

return to the pulpit for a long time. This gives space for the succeeding pastor to establish his own style of leadership. A few weeks after I left First Baptist Church, Pastor Tim arrived in San Lorenzo. I never attended a service to hear him preach, but I did drop by the office to meet him, greet him, and offer assistance.

“What will you be doing now that you’re retired?” he asked.

“I’m not sure. My life is in major flux right now. It’s exciting but scary. With retirement, marriage, packing up, and moving, my days are more than full.” I chuckled. “A friend gave me a book last week called *Things to Do Now that You’re Retired*.⁹² I haven’t had time to crack the cover.”

“But what will do next year when things settle down? Will you try to find another pastor position?”

“I don’t think so. You know, for a long time I’ve wanted to write. I have a lot of projects started, but nothing finished. Maybe my ministry will be writing. Who knows?”

I began worshipping with Liz at [Central Peninsula Church](#) in Foster City. It was a radical step down for me. A month earlier I was a senior pastor, sitting at the desk where the buck stopped. Now my primary task on Sunday was to hold Lizzie’s hand.

On the last Thursday morning in September, I attended Men’s Fraternity at CPC. We watched a video on idolatry and discussed how John Calvin contended that the root of all sin was idol worship. In fact, Calvin taught that the human heart was a veritable idol factory.⁹³

A part of this video dramatized the life of Abraham when God commanded him to sacrifice his son Isaac on Mount Moriah.⁹⁴ This was such an inexplicable episode. Did God expect the patriarch to kill his own son? No. As the video expounded, God was testing Abraham. The question was, “Did Abraham love God more than he loved Isaac? Or had Abraham turned his son into an idol, something of greater worth than God?”

This thought rattled in my mind on the return trip to Hayward. *Is it idolatry when a man loves a spouse, a child, or a friend more than he loves God?*

Based on Abraham’s story, the answer appeared to be yes. The application of this principle hit home. In 2010, did I love Kim more than I loved God? *Maybe*. My thoughts turned dark. Was that the reason God took her from me—because I loved her too much?

“No, God, no!” I shouted in the car. “You test Your people, yes. But You don’t punish

them by killing their partners.” Redemptive pain and punitive pain may feel the same to our senses, but their purposes are different. “Your ways are above our ways.” God tested Abraham not to harm him, but to refine him like gold, in order that subsequent generations might recognize him as the father of faith.

What about Kim? I searched my heart. Was she my idol?

“But God,” I protested, “Your Word teaches that faith, hope, and love abide, and the greatest of these is love.⁹⁵ Lord, teach me the virtue of loving people without the vice of idolizing them.”

As I was pulling into the condo garage, my thoughts passed to Liz. *What about my wife-to-be?*

“God, I have such a feral heart. Help me to handle Liz. Help me to love her as Christ loved the church and gave Himself in sacrifice to her. O God, I have nowhere else to turn. Grant me peace about the past with Kim. Help me to finally let her go to You. Give me hope about the future with Liz.”

As I sat in the parked car, mulling my thoughts, a hymn sprang from my lips.

O God, our help in ages past, our hope for years to come,
our shelter from the stormy blast, and our eternal home.⁹⁶

I typed the lyrics into my iPad, searching for the author. Just as I had thought: *Isaac Watts*.

Chapter 32

All in One Box

What happens to a lifetime of accumulated goods when someone dies? We can't take it with us. "For we brought nothing into the world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out" (1 Timothy 6:7).

On August 3, 2010, Kim owned closets of clothes and shelves of books. She possessed jewelry, cosmetics, technology, and handbags galore. On the next day she owned nothing.

Where did all her possessions go? As her husband, they all passed to me. I decided what to toss, what to sell, what to give away, and what to keep. By the time of my engagement to Liz, the dispossession was nearly complete. All that remained of Kim were certificates, pictures, keepsakes, scrapbooks, and journals. I wanted to set aside some of this as her legacy. So I bought a foot locker and explained my strategy to Liz. "I promise to preserve of her only that which I can fit into this one box."

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October 2012

Month twenty-seven

Liz and I knew we would be getting married on January 1, but we didn't yet know where we would live. We considered settling into my condo, but she eliminated that option with a scrunch of her nose. Liz liked her home in San Mateo, but I preferred a neutral place, somewhere we could start fresh. Our search centered on Half Moon Bay. We both loved the beach and the proximity to San Mateo.

We looked at several rental homes on the coast but nothing seemed to click. Then we found a great home in a gated community at a reasonable price. I loved it, but as I sat with Liz back at her house, her voice trembled. "All this is too stressful for me: losing my job, getting married, us moving in together. Can we please just stay here for a while?"

I was not a happy camper. "But you said we would find a place together. You promised."

She looked at me with tears in her eyes. "I know. But this place is so nice. And I don't have the emotional bandwidth to relocate anytime soon."

After sitting in a funk for a few moments, I finally said, "Okay, sweetie. We can live here. It will be a sacrifice for me. You'll be both my landlady and my wife. Can you handle that? This will be your house, but please, it must be our home together."

Liz smiled weakly; I was left shaking my head. *How can this possibly work?*

We settled on a simple wedding ceremony. Ken Hillard agreed to officiate, and Diane and Charles consented to stand as witnesses. They would also care for the "best dog" during our wedding and honeymoon.

Liz suggested Leo Ryan Park in Foster City as the venue.

"Won't that be cold on a January morning?" I asked,

"It will be cold, but we'll only be there for a short time." Then she added with a twinkle in her eye, "And we'll warm up at the Ritz-Carlton on our wedding night."

I wasn't going to argue with that.

Since we planned a small wedding without a photographer, I suggested to Liz that we pose for formal engagement portraits. On October 4 we visited Perfect Studio and sat through a dozen photo shoots with different backdrops. Jody waited in the car. As we were about to leave, I turned to Liz. "Let's pose with my dog for just one picture." That "[family photo](#)" turned out to be

my favorite.

Although we spent most of our time at Lizzie's home in San Mateo, she came to my Hayward condo on a few occasions. One evening, after a hike and a shower, I offered her a fuzzy blue robe that had belonged to Kim. She reached into the left pocket and found a candy wrapper. I was not surprised. She reached into the right and found a yellow Post-it Note.

I told Liz that Kim used to write reminders to herself. On the sticky note was written, "Put others first," and, "Make other people famous."

I thought a moment. "This may sound kind of spooky, but I believe those are the words that my late wife wants to pass on to my future wife."

Her eyes got misty, but then she said, "You'd better wash this robe. It's been over two years."



In preparation for moving in to Liz's house, I began the monumental task of winnowing. Along with my own stuff, I had boxes belonging to Kim, Zachary, and Simon. My goal was to get rid of most of my furniture and half of my storage containers. I wanted to compress all of Kim's keepsakes into one footlocker box.

I pulled out twenty cardboard boxes filled with papers, journals, pictures, and memorabilia. I spent many solitary evenings sorting through the flotsam and jetsam of forty years. From time to time I wept at the discovery of a lost gem.

Decades earlier, I had written a thirty-three-word poem in rhyming palindrome. I called it "Forgiveness Begets Forgiveness" and dedicated it to Kim. I was surprised to find she had preserved it in a notebook.

Me and you together forever, you and me.

I am sorry.

How could I . . . ? Should we try?

We should. I could.

How sorry am I!

Me and you forever together, you and me.

As I read the faded words in reverse order, I recalled the quarrel, the inspiration, and the reconciliation. *Yes, Kim, you and me together forever. I'm so sad that forever ended in your fifty-ninth year.*

On October 20, Liz and I traveled to Asheville, North Carolina, to visit her father, Bill, and his wife, Sybil. These were the final two pieces that completed her family puzzle. We stayed in her dad's house for three nights, talking about the Smoky Mountains, favorite restaurants, and Bill's regimen of medicine. We hiked trails at Pisgah National Forest and the Cradle of Forestry. As I munched on Bill's backyard barbecue, he welcomed me into the family.

Back in California I continued to downsize. In my last days as a Baptist pastor, I had received permission to store items in the church and then ship them to Africa. I carried a dozen camper loads of excess possessions to the church. On October 30 several of my church buddies helped me load material into [a twenty-foot cargo container](#). I was glad to see these odds and ends travel across the world for a second life.



November 2012

Month twenty-eight

Most of the time Liz and I got along well, but on one issue we remained at loggerheads. "Lizzie, Kim was my best friend for thirty-six years, and I want you to see her final resting place, just once."

"I have no interest in going to the cemetery. She was your wife and I never knew her. You can go there whenever you wish, but I don't want to go. It's creepy."

"Sweetie, I want closure with Kim. Don't you want that for me? I know it sounds weird. Maybe it is. But please, do it as a favor to me."

Liz relented and agreed to visit the cemetery with me the following week.

As I drove her through the iron gates, I described the funeral and the burial. We walked to Kim's gravestone, where I wept. I held Lizzie's hand and pointed to each of the forty-eight

glyphs, explaining its meaning.

I spoke to Kim. “Yobo, I want to introduce you to Liz. She is the love of my life. I want you to meet her, not to gain your approval but to let you know my life continues. I’m so sorry you died. Your stream of life ended, but mine continues to flow. It must.”

Liz looked on, teary-eyed.

I bent down and touched the porcelain picture of Kim. With a sigh I said to Liz, “We can go now.”

As we drove away she said, “That wasn’t so bad. And I understand why you brought me here.”

“Life is so complicated,” I said. “I loved Kim, but now I love you. I’m so glad Christ said, ‘When they shall rise from the dead, they neither marry, nor are given in marriage; but are as the angels which are in heaven’” (Mark 12:25).

“I’m glad I came.” After a pause, she added, “But I don’t ever want to come here again.”



Ecclesiastes 3:1 and 6 says, “To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven ... a time to keep, and a time to cast away.” Though I’d been putting off the sorrowful task, it was time to examine Kim’s journals. I could not keep all thirty of them. I had to discard some.

I set aside the ones written only in Korean. I gave them to her sister in Turner, Oregon. A dozen journals contained just one or two written pages. I smiled. It was so like my “absent-minded professor” to start a journal, misplace it, and start another. I clipped out the writing and tossed out the remainder.

Over several days, I looked at every page of her English writing. I wept bitter tears as Kim came to life before my eyes. I preserved several letters to pass on to Zachary and Simon.

I transcribed one handwritten entry that Kim had composed on February 12, 1997, at the Denver airport:

Let’s talk about love, love that conquered everything, love that enabled me to go on when I was lonely. God was my only refuge. When I was lost, God sent me

comfort. That was Chris, then Zach, then Simon. My children were my constant source of joy. I love You, Lord. I love you, Chris. I love you, Zach. I love you, Simon.

What can I do for You, God? I give all my heart to You. What can I do for you, Chris? You gave unwavering devotion to me. Do I deserve all your attention and adoration? I gratefully receive your love. I hope I can repay in a little way. Your smile, your image, and your scent will be with me forever. You are my friend and companion. You have given me such deep joy that I cannot explain it or even express it with words, other than to say, "I love you with all my heart, with all my soul."

Let me have you for the next twenty years. The past twenty have been tumultuous and extreme at times, but such is life. You made my life bearable and, toward the end, you made my life adventurous. I never thought my life could contain such joy with you alone. How could a human being make this possible?

You are a wise man indeed. Sometimes I have been such a fool, but you were patient. You didn't get angry. Your unwavering love sustained our marriage. Your constant care and serving heart made me realize the world I live in is not always a wicked place. It can be a wonderful place. It's up to me. I have the power to change how I view the world, then live in the world as I see it. You gave me eyes to look at this world positively. You are the one who made this possible.

What could I do other than weep at those words?



Frank and Lelia flew down to visit me over the Thanksgiving holiday. I asked Frank to help me go through the last of Kim's personal effects. She had a dozen binders of printed material preserved in transparent document covers. I couldn't bear to drop these precious objects into the Dumpster, but neither did I want to haul them around for the rest of my life. I decided to make a burial container. Frank and I packed a cardboard box with journals, magazines, newspaper clippings, and other objects I knew I wouldn't look at again.

I telephoned my renters in Mill Valley and asked if I could drop by to bury some items in their backyard. They agreed, so Frank, Lelia, and I drove to Marin County and dug a hole near the back fence.

[“Frank,”](#) I said, “this was Kim’s favorite home during our whole marriage. It’s a fitting place for buried treasure.”

On the drive back to Hayward, Frank asked what it was like marrying for a second time.

“Marrying at sixty-three is a world different from marrying at twenty-four. Kim and I had youth, vigor, and decades of future ahead of us. We had no money, few possessions, and we were building our lives together from scratch.

“I sometimes forget how difficult those first few years were. I remember once she ran out the door in a rage. She said she was returning to Korea. I had to pull her back into the house. My mind tends to gloss over those rough times. Since she died, I’ve only remembered the positive.”

“Brother, that’s the way it should be.”

“With Liz it’s different. Most of our life is behind us. We don’t have decades of shared memories, but we do have money, houses, and stuff—too much stuff. It gets in the way. We understand that our physical bodies are past their prime. I’m glad Liz insisted I join the San Mateo Athletic Club and exercise with her. She’s a good woman.”

We were silent for a while as I gathered my thoughts. “Love in the autumn is different from love in the spring. But when I hold Lizzie in my arms and close my eyes, it’s springtime once more.”



December 2012

Month twenty-nine

In December I began shedding possessions in earnest. House plants, beds, desks, lamps, chairs, my Korean wardrobe, the Thai cabinets. It all had to go. My items sold for a fraction of what I thought they were worth, but it was more critical to have stuff gone than to have cash in my pocket.

After languishing on Craigslist for two weeks, my two-thousand-dollar Shiatsu chair sold for one hundred dollars. The buyer was ecstatic. I was dejected. After he and his friend carried the beast out the front door, I took the elevator down to the basement. As I drove out of the garage, I pulled up behind my old massage chair strapped in the bed of a pickup. [I followed it](#) to the bottom of the hill, cushions flapping in the breeze. *O God, what would Kim say if she knew I sold her prize chair for just one hundred dollars?*

Christmas was approaching, but both Liz and I were distracted by the onrushing tide of events. We were about to be married; we were merging households; we were shedding furniture; we were managing myriad daily details. On top of all this, I was preparing for a January mission to Africa. Three days after our honeymoon, I would be returning to Rwanda for the seventeenth time—my fourth mission since Kim died.

Lizzie had her own year-end frenzy. “I want to complete my book of devotions before Christmas so I can present it as a gift.” Her yearlong labor of love was appearing in print. After several title changes she’d settled on *Thirty Reflective Devotions for Time-Pressed Women*,^{[97](#)} published under the pen name of Joy Fry.

We visited a jeweler so I could choose the wedding band Liz would place on my finger. “Get the exact ring you want,” she said. “I want you to be happy with it for many years to come. I’m going to inscribe some words on the inside, but you can’t see them until our wedding day. They won’t be typical wedding words. They’ll reflect my heart.”

I picked a ring, tried it on to make sure it fit, and handed it to Liz, agreeing not to see it again until January first.

We decided to keep the ceremony private, with only a bride, a groom, a pastor, and two witnesses. If we excluded all guests, we figured none of our friends or family members would be especially offended. To compensate for the private ceremony, we scheduled two receptions in the months after our wedding, one in San Mateo and one in Portland.

We shared an enjoyable Christmas meal at Becky’s house. On the drive home, Liz told me, “Mom’s miffed that she won’t be attending our wedding. I told her again that no one else will be there. She pushed me, but I was firm.”

During the last week of the year, Liz and I were overwhelmed with managing our countdown lists. I spent much of the time in my condo, preparing my heart for the adventure ahead. At last my three bedroom condo looked empty.

I saw no sense in unpacking Christmas decorations with everything else packed up. I did put on Christmas music, though, singing along with [Bach's Magnificat](#) in the house and [Handel's Messiah](#) in the car.

A few days after Christmas, I flipped on the TV and ran across the George C. Scott version of *A Christmas Carol*. Dickens's morality tale implied that the past and present are fixed, but the future is elastic. Scrooge asked the dark specter, "Are these shadows of things that will be or may be only? If we alter the present, can we change the future?"⁹⁸

That story got me thinking about alternate reality. Do our present choices dictate future events?" For two years I had grappled with Scrooge's query myself. "If I had grabbed the steering wheel, would Kim have survived?"

Intriguing thought, but speculative humbug. Past, present, future, it's all in God's hands. The mysterious interaction of God's sovereignty and man's free will is not a nut so easily cracked, even by the likes of Mr. Charles Dickens.

Chapter 33

Forsaking All Others

I was separated from Kim physically, but what about emotionally and spiritually? What did my wedding vow require of me? Could I speak the words “forsaking all others” with my lips and not mean them in my heart?

For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh. Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh (Matthew 19:5–6).

O God, do I have to become twain with Kim before becoming one with Liz?

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December 30, 2012

Day 883

Two days before my wedding I scrolled through my vows on the computer screen. On January 1, Ken Hillard would say to me, “Chris, do you take Liz to be your lawfully wedded wife? Do you commit yourself to her growth in holiness and her usefulness to God’s kingdom? Do you forsake all others in favor of Liz? Do you promise to love her, honor her, trust her, and serve her, in sickness and in health, in adversity and in prosperity, as long as you both shall live?”

My joyful response would be “I do.”

The “forsaking all others” part grabbed my attention. My mind considered the sweep of my romantic involvements, starting with my high school sweetheart and continuing to my final eHarmony pen pal. Were all these relationships truly “forsaken”?

“Yes,” I told myself with assurance.

Then, with a stab of painful insight, my mind turned to Kim Hyun Deok. I had never approximated the words *forsake* and *Kim*. “O God,” I gasped, “am I expected to forsake my lovely Kim as well?”

I searched an online dictionary and discovered that *forsake* means “to abandon, to renounce.” Strong words indeed. What would it mean to forsake the woman who loved me for thirty-six years, who was always a faithful wife, who bore my two sons, and who died in service to God? Could I really say “I do” to forsaking Kim? Did Liz expect this of me? Did God? Was I even capable of such a thing? In my distress I sought the Lord with multiple questions.

“Dear God, do the words ‘forsaking all others’ apply to the dead as well as to the living?”

Yes, God said to my heart.

I had encountered plenty of plot lines in books and cinema where attachment to a deceased spouse became a major source of marital strife. The active memory of a lost love—dead or alive—could certainly divide the heart. As a widower I was not compelled to remarry, but since I chose to do so, I had to forsake all others, including my departed wife. A man’s heart must not be divided.

“But God, is Kim’s ghost really a rival to the flesh-and-blood Liz?”

Yes, indeed.

I reflected that sometimes Liz expressed annoyance when I compared her to Kim, or when I idealized Kim in some way. My whole Africa mission, the Kim Foreman Bible Institute, even the writing of a memoir, all pointed to an active relationship that could engender jealousy. I was on the cusp of becoming “one flesh” with Liz. To accomplish this coupling I first had to decouple.

“Dear God, isn’t ‘forsaking’ the same as ‘betraying’?”

No.

I could not betray a woman to whom I was no longer married. My vow to love and honor Kim ended with her death. I could have no guilt about romantic or sexual involvement as long as my conduct aligned with Scripture.

On March 23, 1974, in front of witnesses, I had solemnly promised to be faithful to Kim “until death do us part,” and on August 3, 2010, death did us part. I had to exercise caution when I chose to remarry, but I was at liberty to do so without a hint of betrayal.

“Dear God, I fully trust that Kim is hidden with Christ, ready to be revealed at His coming. What is my relationship with Kim from Your point of view?”

I discerned His response. *That is a divine mystery beyond your ability to comprehend. But strands of truth may be grasped.*

I realized that in heaven there was no marrying, because Kim had already remarried through her death in Christ. She was now His bride, not mine.⁹⁹ I was free to remarry on earth as long as I did so within the household of faith. On the streets of heaven, I would be Kim’s brother in Christ not her husband.

“God, how can I live in peace with an earthly wife named Liz and with a late wife, now a sister in Christ, named Kim?”

I understood that this was simple in concept but challenging in execution. I had to completely abandon Kim as my wife. I would never renounce a successful marital relationship nor deny the love we once held for each other. But I had to speak of Kim in the past tense—not “I love Kim” but “I loved Kim.” I would never abandon my two sons, but their mother and their father’s wife would now be distinct people. I had to declare that my one-time union with Kim was null and void.

“Lord God, soon my spoken vows to Liz will supersede my expired vows to Kim. Teach

me to esteem Kim-as-my-sister only to the extent that it does not cause conflict with Liz-as-my-wife. Give Liz peace in the knowledge that I have truly forsaken Kim in the biblical sense of the word, and grant her courage to accept the boundaries of that forsaking.”

After much internal grappling, I accepted that for me obedience to God’s truth meant I had to forsake Kim as my wife. Only then could I pledge to love Liz for life. Other widowers might come to other conclusions, but I knew this was the right path for me.



December 31, 2012

Day 884

I wrote a list of last-minute chores to accomplish on the day before my wedding. To that list I added “Visit Kim’s grave.” I felt convicted that I must say goodbye to her before I could say hello to Liz. I scheduled this visit for ten a.m.

As the hour approached, I drove down the hill toward the Holy Angels Cemetery. From the car CD, Handel’s *Messiah*—a remnant of the Christmas season—fortified my resolve. I drove through the iron gates of the Catholic cemetery, past the likeness of Michael the archangel slaying the serpent. Just then the oratorio passed to the chorus:

“Since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive.”¹⁰⁰

Accompanied by sorrow, I parked my car on the roadside, a dozen steps from Kim’s gravestone. As if on cue, the oratorio advanced to the recitative:

“Behold, I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump.”¹⁰¹

I knew what was coming after the long pause: the exact words I had read to Kim just before removing her futile respirator. I lowered the passenger-side window and cranked up the volume. Then came that startling verse from 1 Corinthians 15:52: “[The trumpet shall sound](#), and the dead shall be raised incorruptible.”

The baroque trumpet blasted for the next nine minutes across the graveyard, as if to call forth the dead. I stood in tears before Kim’s gravestone as the stentorian voice repeated the

verse: “And we shall be changed. And we shall be changed. And we shall be changed.”

I thanked Kim-my-sister for her faithfulness and kindness to me through thirty-six years of marriage. I thanked her for giving life to our sons, Zachary and Simon Peter.

Messiah continued with verse 53: “For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality.”

Although I stood just above Kim’s mortal remains, I looked to the heavens, where her immortal soul was lying hid with Christ in God. I trusted I would see her again, not as wife, but as sister in Christ, both of us clad with bodies incorruptible and immortal, and both being the brides of Christ.

I congratulated Kim for her union with Christ and I asked her to bless my upcoming union with Liz. To the heavens I said, “Kim, I forsake our marital bond in the name of Jesus. You are the bride of a man so much greater than I.”

As Handel’s trumpet sounded its last note, I reentered the car. An alto voice recited, “Then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written: ‘Death is swallowed up in victory’”.^{[102](#)}

I returned the volume to quiet and sat awhile as *Messiah* continued in the background. I had forsaken my deceased wife. My obligation was complete. My new life could now commence.

When the chorus reached its finale, “Worthy is the Lamb that was slain,”^{[103](#)} I restarted the car. Departing from the cemetery, my soul concurred in full celebration with the words of Saint John: “Blessing, and honor, and glory, and power, be unto him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever.”^{[104](#)} Driving home, I added my voice to the Amen Chorus.

PART FIVE
SEASON OF CELEBRATION



“To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven:

... a time to dance.”

(Ecclesiastes 3:1,5)

Chapter 34

We Are Not Plan B

Your works are wonderful, and I know this very well. My bones were not hidden from You when I was made in secret, when I was formed in the depths of the earth. Your eyes saw me when I was formless; all my days were written in Your book and planned before a single one of them began (Psalm 139:14–16 HCSB).

On New Year's morning 2013, I had counted 885 days since Kim crashed into eternity. Throughout this time I resided in “the land of what if.”

What if I had grabbed the steering wheel? and What if Kim had lived? My life narrative had become “Kim was plan A. But an unspeakable evil occurred. Then God in His mercy provided Liz, who became plan B.”

O Lord, I prayed, *banish these unworthy thoughts. Purge this false narrative.* You are a God of verities, not a God of contingencies. From the foundation of the world, Liz and I were part of Your eternal plan. Liz and I were always plan A.

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January 1, 2013

Day 885

With anticipation I went to bed early on the last day of 2012. There was no need to stay up to view the celebration; my pyrotechnics with Liz would light up the skies on the following evening. I opened my eyes at midnight when pops and cheers roused me from sleep. A new year was beginning.

I rose from bed before dawn and soaked in the tub for thirty minutes in preparation for my wedding day. My charcoal suit coat was pressed and my rental car waited in the tuck-under garage. I savored the slow-moving morning before dashing out the door at nine a.m. The air was frosty and I returned to retrieve my black overcoat.

I arrived at Leo Ryan Park in thirty minutes. I didn't see Liz, Ken, or the Varadys in the parking lot, so I strolled along the boardwalk.

O God, I brooded, I'm still perplexed by the circumstances that bring me to this time and place. I love Liz and I know You provided her for me. Yet I wonder. Do I wish Kim had lived and I remained her husband, or am I glad Kim died, freeing me to marry Liz? I knew this was a sinister question. Are hypothetical questions ever fair?

I paced toward the covered pavilion, hands behind my back.

Of course Liz had a hypothetical of her own. Did she wish her divorce from Matt had never happened? She should. Doesn't God hate divorce? In the best of worlds, she and her ex-husband would have worked through their differences and stayed married. Wasn't that plan A for Liz's life? Wasn't I her plan B?

These gloomy thoughts vanished when I spotted Jody darting toward me. The high-maintenance dog leapt at my legs and I bent to lift her wriggling body. Soon I was helping Diane [arrange a ribbon choker](#) on our "best dog." Then I saw Lizzie pull up in her car.

At my approach she smiled. "I forgot how cold a January morning can be. I'm going to leave my coat on. I'd freeze in this chiffon dress." She gestured toward the recreation center. "I'm going to wait in there until we start. I'll join you when you're ready for me." Diane walked beside her to assist in whatever a bride may need.

Charles and I stood in the empty concrete amphitheater, making clouds with our breath as

we talked. I grew concerned about Ken. It wasn't like him to be late. Just as I fumbled for my phone, I saw him puffing toward me. Ken pointed down the waterline. "I've been waiting for you at that shelter over there."

Ken, Charles, and I took our places at center stage. Ken stood opposite me with his Bible open. Charles backed off several paces, with Jody on leash. Once we were set, I waved my arm for Diane and Liz to join us. The ladies strode down the center aisle. Diane joined Charles and Liz stood to my right. Her face was radiant. The frigid morning blushed her cheeks with a hint of red.

Ken began the traditional words of the wedding ceremony. Liz and I vowed our lives and love to each other. When Ken asked, "Chris, do you forsake all others in favor of Liz?" I thought about my cemetery visit on the previous day.

I replied "I do" with confidence.

Without songs, candle lighting, or speeches, the ceremony zipped by. We exchanged wedding rings and soon it was time for me to kiss Mrs. Foreman. Once again I was a married man. Hallelujah! My overwhelming emotion was gratitude, coupled with exuberance. I had received the pledged love of a righteous woman. I was humbled by God's grace. *Turn! Turn! Turn!*

Charles snapped [a few hurried pictures](#), then Liz said, "Let's go across the street to the Marriott Hotel lobby. I want pictures in my wedding dress, not this heavy coat."

We gathered in the lobby, where a Christmas tree still twinkled near the front desk. Liz removed her coat to reveal a beige chiffon dress with a floral pattern.

We [posed for pictures](#) in front of the glittering tree. Liz held a single white orchid, an offspring of the one I had given her during my first visit to her house. Ken signed the marriage certificate as officiator while Diane and Charles signed as witnesses. After an early lunch, Liz and I thanked Ken, Charles, and Diane, then headed to Half Moon Bay for our one-night honeymoon.

While driving to the coast an adage came to mind. "Lizzie, have you ever heard that life is like licking honey from a thorn?"¹⁰⁵ I've passed through a lot in the last couple of years, both sadness and joy. Today is sweet. But what do you think tomorrow will bring, honey or thorn?"

"Let's not overanalyze this," she said with gentleness. "Today is a honey day for sure. But soon enough we'll encounter thorns. That's the way life works. Let's enjoy today what God

has given us—each other.”

We arrived at the Ritz-Carlton about one p.m. and Liz walked to the front desk and asked for an early check-in. “By the way,” I chirped, “today is our honeymoon.”

“Oh, Chris,” Liz said with a blush.

“You mean your anniversary?” the desk clerk replied.

“No, honeymoon,” I insisted.

Her blush deepened.

“How would you two like an upgrade to the third-floor honeymoon suite? It faces the ocean. No extra charge.” The clerk examined her book. “It should be available by two thirty. Feel free to use the spa until then.”

As we stowed our bags behind the desk, I whispered to Liz, “Sometimes it’s good to share your exuberance.”

After the spa and dinner, we lounged in our upgraded suite. Liz and I snuggled on the window sofa [overlooking the Pacific](#). I cracked open the pane to take in the sounds and smells as well as the sights.

Waves crashed as the artful sun painted the winter sky a palette of pink pastels. Hotel guests mingled below our window, soaking in the splendor of the scene. A piping Scotsman in kilts regaled his outdoor audience with “Amazing Grace.” Shimmering Christmas lights enhanced the magic of the moment.

Liz hugged her knees, sighing with contentment. “We have the best seat in the whole hotel!”

“Oh, no,” I corrected with affection. “We have the best perch in the whole world.”

Much more could be said about the honeymoon celebration, but such things are by nature private. Liz and I were a passionate couple, yet we did not consummate our love affair until we had spoken our wedding vows. We counted the bliss of our honeymoon night as God’s wedding gift to us for honoring Him with our bodies.

I couldn’t fall asleep after such an extraordinary day. As Liz closed her eyes with fatigue, I grabbed my iPad and stepped into the lobby.

I remembered Liz had inscribed words on the inside of my wedding band. At last I had the opportunity to read them. “To my love: Psalm 33:20–22.”

I located the reference in my NIV Bible. “We wait in hope for the Lord; he is our help and our shield. In him our hearts rejoice, for we trust in his holy name. May your unfailing love be with us, Lord, even as we put our hope in you.”

“Yes, Lord,” I whispered. “We put our hope in You.”

I reflected on the day sixteen months earlier when I joined eHarmony. I listed as the most important requirement: “I want a woman who loves me, but who loves God more than she loves me.” For sure, Liz was that one woman in ten thousand.

Unable to unwind, I wrestled with thoughts of God’s purpose and alternate reality. *Could my life be a cosmic illusion? Maybe in the morning when I turn over in bed I’ll find Kim and not Liz.* I cross-examined myself. Did this speculation thrill me with hope or stab me with disappointment?

My mind wandered to an old TV show. Back in the 1970s one of my favorite comedians was Bob Newhart. He starred in two sitcoms back to back. *The Bob Newhart Show* took place in Chicago, with Newhart playing psychologist Robert Hartley. Suzanne Pleshette costarred as his wife, Emily.

A few years after this show, a second comedy followed called *Newhart*. This show took place in Vermont, with Bob Newhart starring as hotel proprietor Dick Loudon. Mary Frann played his wife, Joanna.

TV critics consider the [finale of Newhart](#) to be one of the greatest moments in television history.¹⁰⁶ In the final scene of the final episode, Dick Loudon sits up from sleep and says, “Honey, you won’t believe the dream I just had. I dreamed I was in Vermont and ran a hotel.”

Something was gyrating under the blankets as Bob Newhart continued to jabber about his vivid dream. Then Suzanne Pleshette—his wife from the earlier series—emerged from under the sheets. “Go back to sleep, Bob. It was just a dream.”

When I awake on January second, will I sit up in my African bed? Will I babble about a vivid dream, mentioning a petite woman named Liz? Will my lovely Kim emerge from under our sheets and assure me it was just a bad dream? Could it possibly happen that way?

No, I scoffed. Such things occur in fantasy, never in fact. Life is always situational and sometimes a comedy, but I can’t confuse real life with a sitcom.

By an odd twist of thought, my mind lurched to another couple: Abraham and Sarah. According to the Genesis account, this couple was married about a hundred years. Abraham

buried Sarah with great grief when she died at one hundred twenty-seven. This should have marked the end of the story, but chapter 25 begins, “Then again Abraham took a wife, and her name was Keturah, and she bare him [six children].”

I wondered. When Abraham awoke in his Canaan tent, did he reach for Sarah, only to find Keturah at his side? Did Abraham count Keturah as plan B after so many years with Sarah, his plan A? Or were both wives part of God’s eternal scheme?

As I rose to return to the honeymoon suite, my mind raced back to Africa and to Kim. I recalled the Thursday evening—887 days earlier—when Kim and I addressed students at the National University of Rwanda. I played the role of Adam while Kim played Eve.

Then the thought struck me. What if our first parents had not sinned? What if the apple had stayed on the tree? Would Jesus have been superfluous? I pictured Christ, rubbing His hands, waiting in the wings just in case Adam screwed up.

What an absurd thought! Christ was slain from the foundation of the world.¹⁰⁷ God saw everything from beginning to end before it ever happened. Jesus was always God’s plan A—and Liz was always my plan A. Forever it was His divine intent that Chris Foreman should have two wives, Kim first and Liz second. There are no might-have-beens with God, only certainties. And Liz was certainly my wife.

I entered our hotel room without switching on the light and slipped into bed.



Wednesday, January 2, 2013

Day 886

In the dimness of early morning, I rolled to my right and extended my arm. I felt a bundle under the cover and peeled back a sheet.

My heart sang an anthem to God at the dazzling sight of my lovely Liz.

Epilogue

The Conclusion of the Whole Matter

In January of 2014, Simon traveled to Butare to hang a gigantic mobile in the atrium of the Joy of God Bible Institute. From the center beam, he suspended seven large metal-framed sculptures shaped as Rwandan baskets. Each of the frames was wrapped in nylon rope and displayed the command *Forgive* inscribed in seventy languages. This installation art was named “70 x 7,” reflecting Rwanda’s amazing progress from genocide toward reconciliation and recognizing the words of Jesus regarding forgiveness: “I say not unto thee, Until seven times: but, Until seventy times seven.”¹⁰⁸

I thought the installation of these oversized baskets might provide an elegant epilog to my story. What metaphor of forgiveness could be better than “Seventy Times Seven”?

But in July of 2014, Franc Murenzi informed me that his wife, Claudine, was pregnant. He sent me this e-mail:

Hello, dear friend.

The first test shows we are expecting a boy. We have agreed to name him after our two dear friends, Christ and Chris. So his name will be Chris. Thank you for being a good friend and a role model.

I figured the birth of this boy would mark a marvelous conclusion to my memoir: a peace child with my name. What symbol of reconciliation could surpass a newborn named “Chris Murenzi”?

But surprising events continued to occur, and an endpoint to this memoir appeared beyond my reach. I wasn’t surprised. Didn’t Solomon say, “I have seen all the works that are done under the sun; and, behold, all is vanity and vexation of spirit”?¹⁰⁹

Is there no escape from futility?



I believe the words “under the sun” provide the escape. The preacher of Ecclesiastes repeats this three-word phrase twenty nine times. What does it signify? Perhaps “in the natural order of things” expresses the preacher’s Hebraism.

After twelve chapters of chasing the wind, Solomon concludes that significance and meaning cannot be found “under the sun” but only under the auspice of the Lord God, who created the sun.

Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man. For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil (Ecclesiastes 12:13–14).

In his closing imperative Solomon does not preach philosophy, but duty. This is a fitting way for me to conclude my memoir as well—the way of Ecclesiastes.

These are seven duties that I gleaned through my seasons of Solomon. This is my “conclusion of the whole matter.”

1. Remain faithful to God and obedient to the truth He has revealed to you.
2. Glorify your Creator and complete the tasks He has assigned to you.
3. Anchor your hope in God, who is able to deliver what He has promised.
4. Accept your life as scripted by God. He is the author and finisher, not you.
5. Forgive others quickly and fully. Trust God to enable you.
6. When suffering pain, ask God to redeem your grief to His glory.
7. When you don’t know what to do next, revert to God’s prime directive. Love Him and serve others.

“To every thing there is a season and a time to every purpose under the heaven”. . . a time to write and a time to conclude that which you have written.

The Story Told through Twenty-Four Photographs

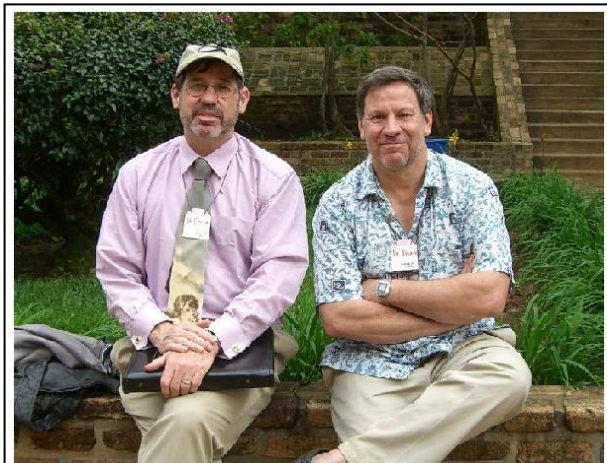
(All photos taken by author)



Chris and Kim—an engagement picture from 1974



Kim walking with Franc down a Kigali road— 2001



Chris with his brother, Frank, at a conference in Butare—2007



Last picture of Kim and Chris together—in front of the Christian Student Center



The board of Come and See Rwanda posing on the day before the car accident in front of the Christian Student Center in Butare, Rwanda. Front Row, left to right: Florida, Kim, Jane, Tabitha, Paul. Back Row, left to right: Franc, David, Ben, Chris



Jason and Franc – best of friends



Chris and Simon inspect Franc's wrecked car

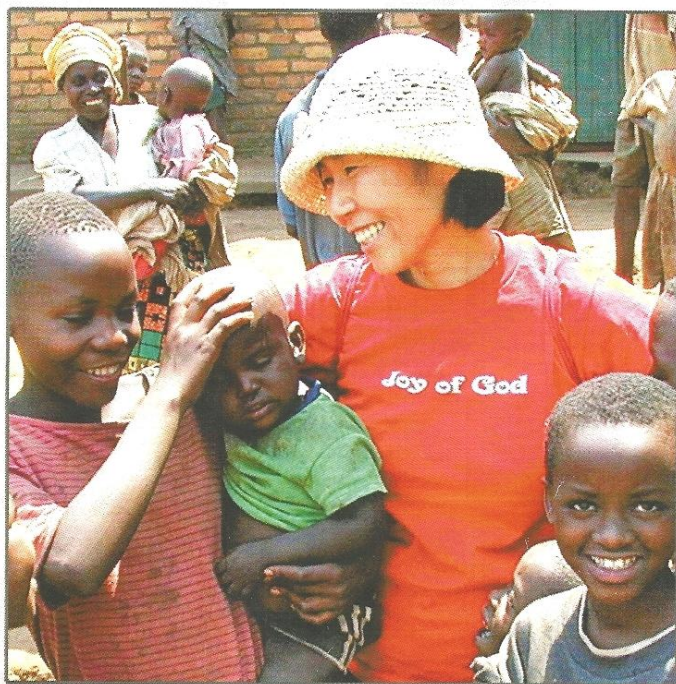


Simon, Chris, and Zachary at Kim's funeral in Kigali



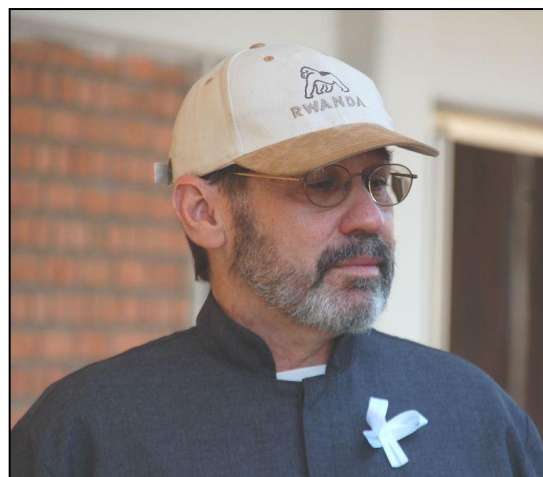
Franc speaking at Kim's funeral with Zachary and Simon looking on. Chris has his head down.

In Loving Memory of Dr. Kim Hyun Deok Foreman



Palma Ceia Baptist Church, Hayward, CA
August 14th, 2010

Bulletin of Kim's funeral in Hayward, California.
The cover photo is of Kim with children in Rwanda
(taken in 2002)



Chris at Kim's funeral in Kigali



The family praying at the condo for Chris,
Zachary, and Simon



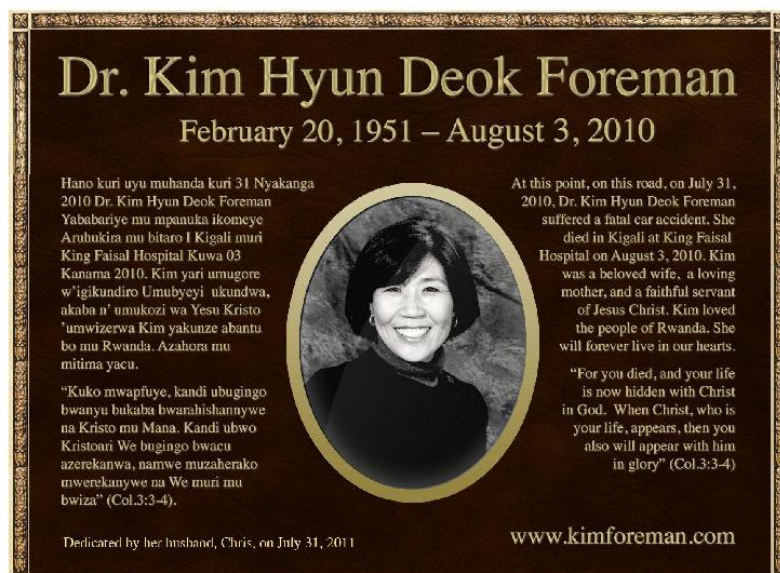
Kim's gravestone encompassed by 48 glyphs.



Zachary and Simon speaking at their mom's memorial service on February 20, 2011



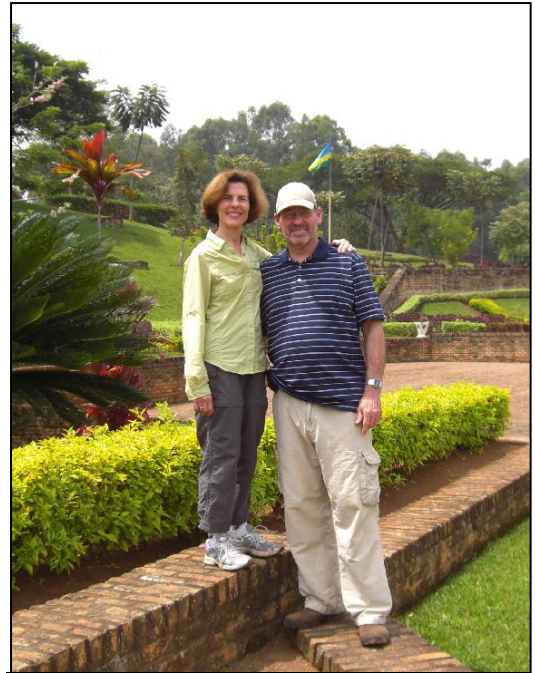
Simon with Lorenzo and holding his new daughter, Gia



This is the roadside plaque that was installed at the point of Kim's accident



Pastor Chris poses with Jody at First Southern Baptist Church of San Lorenzo



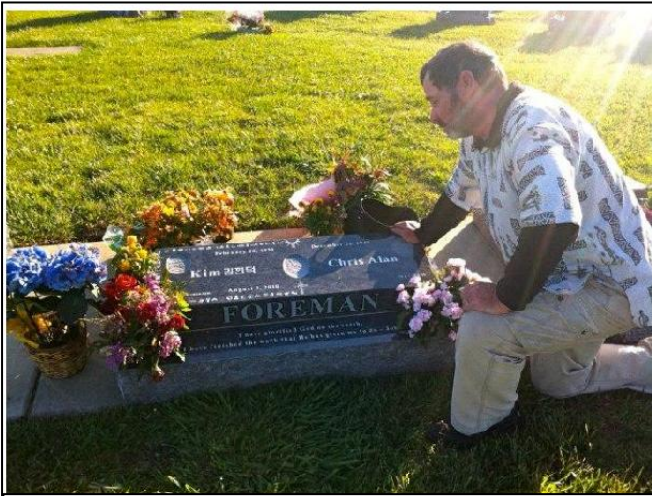
Chris and Liz at the National Museum in Butare – January 2012



Chris' brother Frank in front of the Lighthouse in Butare–2013



Chris parking his VW Camper near Death Valley. In the background is a double rainbow



Chris visiting Kim's grave at Holy Angel's Cemetery in Hayward, California.



The engagement picture of Chris and Liz— October 2012



Jody on a camping trip in Texas



Chris and Liz are married on a cold January 1, 2013

Scripture References and Notes

1. The Byrds, "[Turn! Turn! Turn!](#) (To Everything There Is a Season)," lyrics adapted by Pete Seeger from the Book of Ecclesiastes. According to the *Billboard Book of Top 40 Hits*, this was the number-one song for three weeks beginning on 11/6/65.
2. Matthew 12:42
3. C. S. Lewis, [A Grief Observed](#) (New York: Bantam Books, 1961), 63.
4. Attributed to Andrew Fletcher of Saltoun (1653–1716). Cited in <http://www.worldofquotes.com/>
5. 1 Peter 1:24 HCSB
6. Matthew 25:31–46
7. "[Holy, Holy, Holy](#)," lyrics by Reginald Heber (1783–1826), tune *Nicaea* composed by John Bacchus Dykes in 1861.
8. Job 1:1, 7:11, 19:20–21, 19:23–24
9. "A Prayer for Those About to Die" is a traditional prayer of the Roman Catholic Church, also called "Prayer for Those in Their Last Agony."
10. "*De Profundis*" refers to Psalm 130 (129 in the Vulgate), traditionally known as the "*De Profundis*" from its opening words in Latin.
11. "Eternal Rest" or "*Requiem Aeternam*" is a prayer used in the Roman Catholic Church to ask God for the release of the souls of the faithful departed from purgatory.
12. 1 Corinthians 15:51–57
13. a paraphrase of Psalm 8:3–5
14. Genesis 4:7
15. "[Blessed Assurance](#)," lyrics by Fanny J. Crosby in 1873, music by Phoebe P. Knapp in 1873.
16. Luke 10:29
17. Matthew 5:44–45
18. Jeremiah 19:11 NIV
19. Matthew 18:22
20. This prayer was patterned after one written by William Penn, 1644–1718.
21. "[It Is Well with my Soul](#)," lyrics by Horatio Spafford in 1873, music by Philip Bliss in 1876.
22. Luke 2:52
23. Matthew 25:23, NIV
24. *Missa pro defunctis: In Paradisum* is the final chant of the Requiem mass, an antiphon sung as the body is being carried out of the church to be buried. Zachary sang the Latin words: *In paradisum deducant te angeli: in tuo adventu suscipiant te martyres, et perducant te in civitatem sanctam Jerusalem. Chorus angelorum te suscipiat, et cum Lazaro quondam paupere aeternam habeas requiem.*
25. "[Laugh Clown Laugh](#)", lyrics by Sam Lewis and Joe Young, music by Ted Fio Rito, rose to #1 on the 1928 hit parade.
26. "[Too Fat Polka](#)", written by MacLean and Richardson. Sung by Arthur Godfrey on the Columbia label in 1947.
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28. C.S. Lewis, [Reflections on the Psalms](#) (San Diego: Harvest Book, 1958), 25.
29. *Contact*, directed by Robert Zemeckis (Los Angeles: Warner Brothers; 1997), DVD.
30. See Luke 24:37–41; John 20:15–18; Matthew 28:17
31. Matthew 18:21
32. Matthew 18:32–33
33. Matthew 18:35
34. Chung Chul, from [Sunset in a Spider Web: Sijo Poetry of Ancient Korea](#), adapted by Virginia Olsen Baron, illustrated by Minja Park Kim (NY: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1974).
35. John Polkinghorne, [The God of Hope and the End of the World](#), (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2002), 108.

36. *Old Yeller* (Vault Disney Collection), produced by Walt Disney, (Los Angeles: Universal Studios Entertainment, 2002), DVD.
37. Matthew 5:7
38. Saint Augustine, *The Confessions* (Hovel Audio, 2006), read by Simon Vance.
39. John 17:4 HCSB
40. Colossians 3:3–4 HCSB
41. Hwang Chini from *Sunset in a Spider Web: Sijo Poetry of Ancient Korea*, adapted by Virginia Olsen Baron, illustrated by Minja Park Kim (NY: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1974).
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44. 2 Corinthians 5:8
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51. Elisabeth Kübler-Ross, *On Grief and Grieving: Finding the Meaning of Grief through the Five Stages of Loss* (NY: Scribner, 1969).
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53. Anonymous poem from *Sunset in a Spider Web: Sijo Poetry of Ancient Korea*, adapted by Virginia Olsen Baron, illustrated by Minja Park Kim (NY: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1974).
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56. 1 Corinthians 15:55
57. Joni Eareckson Tada, *A Place of Healing* (Hovel Audio, 2010), read by Joni Eareckson Tada.
58. 1 Peter 1:8 HCSB
59. 1 Peter 3:1 HCSB
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63. Attributed to Mark Twain. See <http://quoteinvestigator.com/2013/09/30/violet-forgive/>.
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68. Matthew 6:12
69. John 21:15–17 HCSB
70. Proverbs 31:29–30 HCSB
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72. Twitterpated which means “infatuated,” is a word coined in the 1942 Disney film *Bambi*.
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81. “[Come, Thou Fount of Every Blessing](#),” lyrics by the 18th century pastor and hymnist Robert Robinson, usually set to an American folk tune known as *Nettleton*, composed by printer John Wyeth.
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100. 1 Corinthians 15:22
101. 1 Corinthians 15:51–52
102. 1 Corinthians 15:54
103. Revelation 5:12
104. Revelation 5:13
105. Louis Adamic (1898–1951), “My grandfather always said that living is like licking honey off a thorn.” Cited in <http://www.goodreads.com/>.
106. *Newhart*, “[The Last Newhart](#)” season 8, episode 24, May 21, 1990.
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108. Matthew 18:22
109. Ecclesiastes 1:14

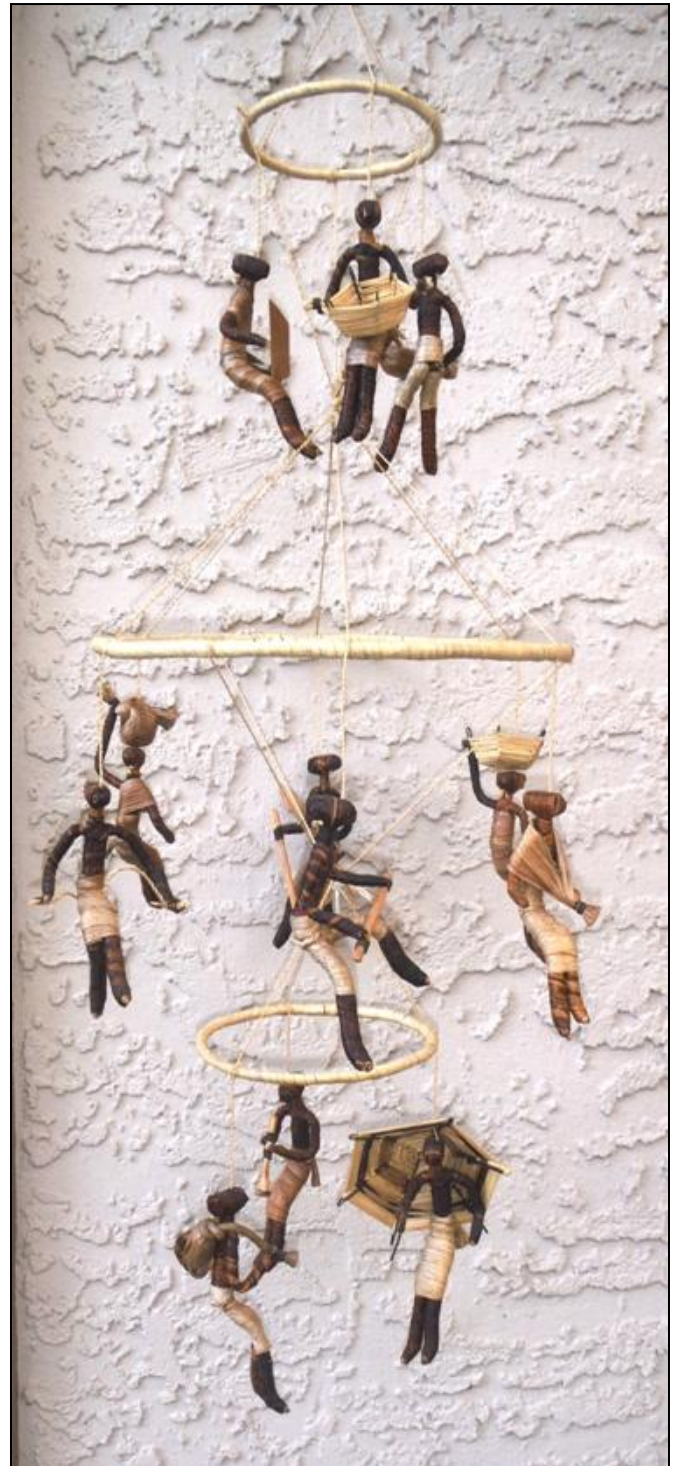
The illustrations on pages ??, ??, ??, ??, and ?? are photographs of individual figures hanging from a mobile. This art was purchased from a street vender in Kigali, Rwanda, in 2002. The artist/craftsman is unknown.

The mobile is made from wire and banana leaf. The twelve figures in the art represent twelve day-to-day activities in the life of traditional Rwandans. They illustrate “a time for every purpose under heaven.”



The illustration on the title page is taken from a greeting card purchased in Rwanda. Again, the artist/craftsman is unknown.

The card is made from banana leaf. The outline is Africa with a banana tree and traditional Rwandan home in the center.



As of 2015, Chris continues to live with his wife, Liz, and his dog, Jody, in San Mateo, California. He leads GriefShare meetings at Central Peninsula Church and occasionally goes on missions to Butare, Rwanda. He has been a featured speaker on topics of forgiveness, dating, marriage, and Christian apologetics.

To see pictures of Chris, Kim, Zachary, Simon, Franc, Paul, Jody, Liz and others mentioned in this memoir, visit “The Story Told in Twenty-four Photographs” at the Internet book page: forgivelikearwandan.com.

To contact Chris, visit his author’s page and blog at chrisalanforeman.com.

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BACK COVER

“Chris has written a beautiful and touching memoir. He opens his heart and invites the reader in, sharing his journey in a deeply personal yet universal way. Reading this inspiring book has changed my life and strengthened my resolve to live fully one day at a time.”

—Karen O'Connor. Author, *Lord, How Did I Get This Old So Soon?* (Harvest House 2014)

How does a man deal with the tragic death of his wife while the two were serving as missionaries in Africa?

How does he process the sudden loss?

How does he forgive the man responsible and come to peace with God?

How does he regain his footing and find love again?

Forgive Like a Rwandan responds to these questions in a clear and faith-filled voice. The author describes his multifaceted response to a day of catastrophe as it rips and ripples across 888 days. Chris shows his initial struggles with grief, unforgiveness, and depression. He questions God and His purposes. He later shares an internal battle between passion for his wife-to-be and loyalty to his deceased wife.

In this book you'll discover the critical step in your Christian walk is to remain faithful to God—no matter what. You'll see the value in glorifying your Creator and anchoring your hope in Him. You'll learn the importance of forgiveness and the acceptance of your life as scripted by God. You'll see, when suffering pain, it's healing to ask God to redeem your grief to His glory.

Discover wisdom in the words of King Solomon: “There's a time for every purpose under heaven: a time to be born and a time to die, a time to laugh and a time weep” (Ecclesiastes 3:1–2).



Chris Alan Foreman has lived the seasons of Solomon. He has served as a senior pastor, a foreign missionary, a college professor, an army officer, and a Peace Corps volunteer. He has taught Christian apologetics in Africa and Bible classes at San Quentin prison. Chris holds a PhD from the University of Oregon and a Master of Divinity from Golden Gate Baptist Theological Seminary. He founded a non-profit ministry called *Come & See Africa International*. He and his wife, Liz, live in the San Francisco Bay area.