

DISCOVERY SERIES

WHEN GOD SAYS NO

Broken Dreams to New Beginnings



Sheridan Voysey



introduction

When God Says No

Broken Dreams to
New Beginnings

Life doesn't always go as planned. Most of the time we can adjust and simply "roll with the punches." But how do we cope when our deepest dreams and most cherished hopes are crushed? Sometimes God says no and we don't understand the answer or get an explanation.

Sheridan Voysey and his wife, Merryn,
experienced the wilderness of broken dreams.
In their journey they learned about themselves
and about God. And that no isn't necessarily the
last word.

RBC Ministries

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one

The Wilderness of Broken Dreams

The call came to my wife's cell phone on Christmas Eve, 2010.

"Hi, Merryn," the voice said. "It's Emily, from the clinic."

That Christmas was shaping up to be a Christmas like no other. Just a few days prior we had been given some news we never thought we would receive. After ten years spent trying almost every means possible to start a family, we had been told that Merryn was pregnant.

Pregnant!

After a decade of waiting, we were finally going to have a baby. We could hardly believe it.

Merryn and I had packed our car and driven from Sydney to Brisbane to spend the festive season with our families, who had greeted us with tears of joy upon hearing our news. And now Emily from the IVF clinic was on the phone with the results from the latest routine blood test.

Yes, this was going to be a Christmas like no other.¹

Expectation, Expectation

I still remember the day Merryn and I decided to start a family. It was the year 2000. We'd been married for five years, were in a settled place in life, and the time seemed right to have a child. As any couple who makes that decision knows, every twenty-eight days from that point on you look for signs of success. Each month there is expectation. And for the first couple of months it's common for that expectation to be followed by disappointment.

Expectation, disappointment.
Expectation, disappointment.

We knew we needed to be patient. Conception can take a while. But after nine months without success, we'd decided to get some tests done. Those tests had revealed



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there was a problem on my side, and without divine intervention or technological assistance our dreamed-of baby was going to be hard to have.

Like many infertile couples, what followed for us was a pendulum swing of emotions. One month we were looking at the opportunities childlessness brings: We would have more time for ourselves and less demands on our finances; we would be less geographically tied and more free to travel. But before long the pendulum would swing the other way, and being childless no longer looked so attractive.

The desire to hold our own child would return—the desire to hold a “little us.”

We tried special diets, supplements, and all manner of other things to increase our chances of getting pregnant. Being committed Christians, we soon turned our attention to healing prayer.

One night a small group of people gathered in a lounge room to pray for us. As they laid hands on me and began to pray, something unexpected happened. Suddenly I began to cry. Merryn had never seen me cry before; I’m not one for tears. But she saw me cry this night—deep sobs from within. Afterwards it felt like I had met with God in a



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special way. It felt like something had been released in me, perhaps even healed. And so for the next 28 days there was expectation . . . followed by disappointment.

"Maybe we should try IVF?" Merryn said.

In 2006 we tried our first round of in vitro fertilization. The procedure was traumatic for Merryn and invasive for us both. But friends and family around the country were praying, and so in the days after we were filled with expectation.

Again, however, that expectation was met with disappointment.

"Do you think we should try and adopt?" Merryn said one day in 2007.

Eight months later our assessment to become adoptive parents was complete. "You're a very attractive couple," the social worker told us at our final appointment. "I don't think it will take long for you to be placed with a child. Just wait for the phone call."

So we waited for the phone call.

One week, two weeks, three weeks passed, then two months, six months, nine months without a phone call. After twenty months of the phone sitting silent, Merryn was a mess. "I can't do this anymore," she said, "always waiting, our lives on hold, riding this emotional rollercoaster of expectation and disappointment. Do you think we could try IVF again?"

And so in 2010 we made one last attempt at starting a family through IVF. By now I was wondering if my spirituality was the problem. Perhaps I hadn't prayed with enough faith? Perhaps the prosperity preachers were

right and I needed to truly *believe* in order to receive our child? So as our first embryo was transferred into Merryn's womb, I prayed, "God, I don't just ask you to give us a child, I believe you *will* give us a child!" Others prayed too, and so there was expectation, expectation, expectation!

Followed by disappointment.

Another embryo was transferred, followed by another, and another. Each time our hopes that this embryo would be "the one" were dashed.

In mid-December of 2010—ten years after our initial decision to start a family—our final embryo was placed into Merryn's womb. We had agreed this would be our final try. We couldn't keep living in this state of upheaval. By this stage Merryn and I were spiritually empty and had few prayers left. But our friends and family prayed faithfully, and their expectation was met with . . . a phone call.



"The miracle has come! After ten years' wait you're going to have a child!"

It was from Emily at the IVF clinic. "I've checked with the doctors here," she said, "and we all agree things are looking good."

"What do you mean 'good'?" Merryn asked, not wanting to misunderstand.

"Your hormone levels are right where we'd expect them to be for a pregnancy."

Merryn had put the phone down and cried with

surprise. My mother had squealed with joy upon hearing the news, and friends had texted us in tears. "God has answered your prayers!" they said. "The miracle has come! After ten years' wait you're going to have a child!"

And that's when we'd gotten into our car and driven to Brisbane to spend a Christmas like no other with our family.

A Journey through the Wilderness

"Hi, Merryn," the voice on the cell phone said on Christmas Eve. "It's Emily, from the clinic."

Oh good, Merryn thought, the results of the latest blood test.

"I'm afraid," Emily said quietly, "things have changed."

"What do you mean?" Merryn said.

"Your pregnancy hormone levels have dropped significantly."

"But you told us we were preg—"

"I am so sorry."

As an ultrasound later revealed, there had never been a baby inside Merryn. A gestational sac had been responsible for the pregnancy-like symptoms, but while it should have contained a little body, it was empty. Merryn put the phone down, walked into our bedroom and curled up on the bed in a fetal position. Our ten-year dream of having a family was over.

We no longer felt like celebrating Christmas. We repacked the car and started the long drive back to Sydney, stopping at a motel halfway. Walking into the

motel room, we dumped our bags on the floor and Merryn fell onto the bed in tears. Then I pulled out my journal and wrote these words:

God, this is cruel—leaving us in this wilderness. We've walked round in circles for years, tired, thirsty, and confused. One minute we've glimpsed the Promised Land and the next minute you've barred us from entering it.

Your Broken Dream

If you've in any way experienced a broken dream—if you've longed to be married but remain single, or perhaps, despite your best efforts, your marriage ended, or if your career has never taken off, or if a crushing diagnosis has shattered your hopes, or like us, you've never been able to have a child—you'll probably know what I mean by the phrase *the wilderness*. The wilderness is that barren place between longing and fulfillment—a place of wandering and waiting yet never reaching the "Promised Land" of the spouse, the career, the healing, or the child.

And as you wait for that spouse or that healing or for your career prospects to change, and as you perhaps glimpse the Promised Land in a handsome man or a better diagnosis that proves



The wilderness is that barren place between longing and fulfillment.

later to be a mirage, you may feel as we did along our wilderness journey—tired, jaded, sad, confused. Life may feel meaningless to you, feelings of failure may haunt you, and you may harbor jealousy towards those who have what you want and anger towards the God who has denied your request.

The wilderness can be a harsh place to dwell.

Thank God there's more to it than broken dreams and disappointment.

¹ The brief story that follows is told in full in my book *Resurrection Year: Turning Broken Dreams into New Beginnings* (Thomas Nelson, 2013).



two

Navigating the Wilderness

A Place of Revelation

T*he wilderness* I wrote on that fateful Christmas Eve. A *wilderness* experience is what our journey had been.

I had drawn the imagery, of course, from that great biblical story of the Exodus, where thousands of Israelites had set out for the Promised Land after 400 years in slavery. What started as an adventure for them had soon become an ordeal, with an eleven-day trek becoming

forty years of wandering (EXODUS 12:31–20:26; NUMBERS 10–36). Some months after our dream came to an end, I re-read this story. Through it I came to see there's more to the wilderness than suffering.

Revelation in the Wilderness

The wilderness journey is neatly summarized in a short passage of Scripture—Deuteronomy 8:1–9. We enter the story as the journey is almost over and the Jewish people are about to step into the Promised Land. Moses stands before the people and tells them what God has been up to during their wilderness trek:

Remember how the LORD your God led you all the way in the wilderness these forty years, to humble and test you in order to know what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep his commands (DEUTERONOMY 8:2).

Anyone who has experienced it knows that the wilderness is a place of trial. But the purpose of a trial is to reveal the truth. God led the Jewish people through the wilderness, Moses said, "to know what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep his commands." The wilderness is *a place of revelation*. It has a way of revealing the truth about us. It has a way of revealing what's in our hearts.

Revealing Our Heart

Merryn and I were determined to honor God as we walked through our wilderness of infertility. We made a commitment to implant every embryo resulting from the



The wilderness is a place of revelation. It has a way of revealing the truth about us.

IVF process; we wouldn't discard any after a successful pregnancy. This was easier in theory than in practice, though. On more than one occasion doctors told us we had embryos of such bad quality it wasn't worth the thousands of dollars required to implant them. On several occasions we implanted anyway. On one occasion we didn't. I hope we made the right decision.

Like us, there was probably a moment in your life when you said to Jesus, "My life is yours. I'll do whatever you want me to do and go wherever you want me to go." In the wilderness these good intentions are put to the test. Will we keep our promises when things get difficult? Will we still follow Him when the costs get high? Moral shortcuts are tempting when we want something desperately. Israel was humbled in the wilderness (DEUTERONOMY 8:2). We'll be humbled too. We may not follow Him with the unquestioned obedience we once imagined of ourselves.

The Jews grumbled repeatedly in the wilderness—about the food, the water supply, and other perils of the journey (NUMBERS 11:4–6; 14:1–4; 20:2–4). "Can God really spread a table in the wilderness?" they asked cynically, doubting God's care in a land of vultures and sand (PSALM 78:19). For us too, the wilderness reveals how much we will trust Him.

As her diary entries reveal, the wilderness brought a sharp test to Merryyn's faith:

I wish I could trust God again. I wish I could trust that there's some grand plan or reason behind Him not giving us a child.

What can you really trust God for, when you ask with all your heart and you're ignored?

Maybe God is just mean.

Like the people of Israel, Merryn never questioned God's existence in the wilderness, but she did question His goodness. Her faith wasn't one of saintly trust in the face of difficulty, but of doubt, confusion, and at times bitterness. The wilderness would reveal something different of my own heart.

A few weeks before that fateful Christmas Eve, Merryn and I had sat by Sydney Harbor one evening talking about the future.

"If we don't have a family," Merryn said, "the thought of life going on as usual is too depressing for me."

"What would be a nice consolation prize for you," I asked, "if we don't have a child?"

"I'd like to start again," she said, "overseas."

"Overseas?"

"If we don't have a baby," she said, "could we move to Europe?"

Merryn's dream of becoming a mother would soon be denied, but here was a dream that could be fulfilled. Would I make it happen? I didn't like the costs involved. To move overseas would require leaving my "successful" life and ministry in Australia—a writing career, good

speaking engagements, a national radio show that was itself a ten-year dream come true—to enter an unknown land as an unknown man. Ask any publisher—there is little opportunity for an author to be published in a country that doesn't know who he is.

To fulfill Merryn's dream, I'd have to give up my own.

I'd have to give up the *influence* I was having for God.

While the wilderness revealed in Merryn a lack of trust in God, I wonder if for me it revealed a little idol—an idol of influence (PSALM 106:19, 28; AMOS 5:25–27). I had started to get my sense of significance from my radio and writing achievements rather than from God himself.

The wilderness is a place of revelation. It reveals what's in our hearts. It reveals how much we will trust Him.

A Place of Provision

For some people, the wilderness is a place of warfare. To them, pain, suffering, and broken dreams have no place in our lives and so are to be bound, healed, and exorcised. A friend of mine recently died of cancer. To her dying day she was "binding the devil" and casting out "the spirit of death" from her body. To her, the wilderness was a place of warfare.

For others, the wilderness is a place of resignation. To them, pain, suffering, and broken dreams are part of this fallen world and so are to be expected, accepted, and endured. Some years ago another friend of mine was also dying of cancer. He rejected all prayer for healing because, in his thinking, everything that happened in life did so according to God's will and so his cancer was part of God's

plan. He therefore resigned himself to suffer it patiently.

There is a time to fight suffering, and there is a time to accept it. But Moses didn't see the wilderness primarily as a place of warfare or of resignation. He saw it firstly as a place of revelation. And he described it as something else.

Provision in the Wilderness

Moses told the Israelites to remember how God had led them through the wilderness. God hadn't abandoned them there—He'd been with them all along, doing something in their hearts throughout the journey. Then Moses went on to say this:

He humbled you, causing you to hunger and then feeding you with manna, which neither you nor your ancestors had known Your clothes did not wear out and your feet did not swell during these forty years (DEUTERONOMY 8:3–4).

Even though they grumbled and complained, God provided them with manna from heaven, quail from the skies, water from rocks, and ever-sturdy clothes (EXODUS 16:13–15; 17:3–7). The wilderness wasn't just a place of revelation for them—it was *a place of provision*.

And so it had been for Merryn and me. Not that we could always see it.

That's the thing about a broken dream—it restricts your vision. Soon your life gets confined to the four walls of your problems—to the four walls of an IVF clinic, a counselor's office, a single's site, or a hospital ward—and you miss the good things God is giving you every day



That's the thing about a broken dream—it restricts your vision. . . . You miss the good things God is giving you every day like life, breath, health, work, art, sport, and pets.

like life, breath, health, work, art, sport, and pets. In the wilderness we can miss these everyday blessings, pushing them to the periphery while our problems take precedence.

And we can forget the more specific ways God provides for us too. The same decade that was filled with dashed hopes of a baby for Merryn and me was also filled with book contracts, dream radio shows, finances, and friends when we needed them most, and a career for Merryn in medical research which brought some sense of purpose to her life.

But when our dream for a baby came to an end, Merryn needed a new start. Would God provide that?

In Ways We Least Expect

A few months after our conversation by Sydney Harbor, my phone rang at the office. It was Merryn. "I just got an e-mail from the interview panel," she said.

"Already?" I said.

"Already. Want me to read it to you?"

A lot had happened in the previous weeks. I had tendered my resignation from my radio show and told my publishers I was leaving the country. Merryn had

resigned her job too, and yet we still didn't know where we were moving. Merryn had set her heart on moving to Switzerland, but we soon discovered we couldn't get visas to enter the country. Another dream had looked set to break.

But just a few days before, an unexpected opportunity had arisen for Merryn to apply for a job at an English university, where visas wouldn't be a problem. A panel of professionals had interviewed her by telephone, pummeling her with questions on risk models, subgroup analyses, and nonparametric sample sizes—the tools of her medical research trade. Merryn had answered as best she could but hadn't left the interview hopeful. She'd been told it would take a fortnight to hear the outcome, which is why this early correspondence was a surprise.

"Read me the e-mail," I said, trying to gauge Merryn's emotions from her voice.

Merryn began to read. "It says, 'We are pleased to offer you the position of medical statistician at the Centre for Statistics in Medicine at Oxford University.' "

Oxford University! Merryn was being offered a job at one of the most prestigious educational establishments in the world. We hadn't seen that coming.

The wilderness is a place of God's provision. Often in ways we least expect.

A Place of Discovery

"[In] the wilderness," Moses reminded them, "you saw how the LORD your God carried you, as a father carries his son, all the way you went until you reached this place"

(DEUTERONOMY 1:31). And now, as he addressed the Israelites at the conclusion of their journey, he added:

Know then in your heart that as a man disciplines his son, so the LORD your God disciplines you (8:5).

Father. Son. Carries. Disciplines. Don't miss these words. They're significant.

To this point Israel had known God as Creator, King, Warrior, Judge. But through the wilderness they have come to know Him as something else—as Father. The wilderness wasn't just a place of revelation and provision for the Israelites—it was a place of discovery. Through the wilderness they had discovered that God was their Dad, and they were His children.



Through the wilderness they have come to know Him as something else—as Father.

Who am I?

Merryn and I packed our bags, sold our car, put our Sydney flat up for rent, and gave away all the baby things we'd collected over the years—the pram, the cot, the bibs, the bottles, the books, the play rugs, the high chair. We boarded our flight, clasped our belts, and after holiday stops in Italy and Switzerland soon arrived in our new home of Oxford, United Kingdom. John Wesley once walked these streets. C. S. Lewis used to live around the corner. For centuries, world-renowned scientists, writers, and politicians have

been educated here. The history soaked into each brick of this beautiful sandstone city was astounding.

Merryn's first day at Oxford University came around. "How do I look?" she said as she walked into the kitchen wearing a new outfit bought for the occasion.

"Honey," I said, "when those medical statisticians see you today, they're going to spill their weak tea down their beige cardigans."

We laughed, but we were still anxious. We'd come a long way for this not to work out, and the thought of another broken dream for Merryn was almost too much to contemplate.

But Merryn returned home with a smile. And the smiles continued as the weeks turned into months. In fact, after the wilderness of infertility, Oxford became like a Promised Land for Merryn. Soon she was coming home each day with a spring in her step, having her papers published in important journals, and relishing this new home of ours.

Things proved a little more difficult for me. While well-connected people were recommending me, BBC Radio wasn't returning my phone calls. I started writing a new book but two publishers soon declined to publish it. Why? "Who's Sheridan Voysey?" they said. "We've never heard of him here in England."

The months wore on, and as they did some ugly emotions began to arise within me: feelings of jealousy for the authors and speakers who had what I didn't have, and a sense of insignificance that became almost crushing. *You had an audience of thousands*, a little voice whispered

within, *but now no one cares what you have to say. You're spiritually impotent, professionally irrelevant. You used to make a difference, but now you lack influence.*

Oxford became the Promised Land for Merryn. For me, it became a new wilderness. Without a meaningful role or a sense of purpose, I no longer knew who I was.

Who He Is, Who We Are

Most of us build our lives on good but ultimately secondary identities. How do you describe yourself to others?

Probably as a "wife," "husband," "mum," or "dad." Perhaps as an "artist," "engineer," "teacher," or "programmer." But who are you if you're not a wife, a husband, a mum, or a dad?

Who are you if you're no longer an artist, engineer, teacher, programmer, or whatever vocation you've either enjoyed or hoped to have? In the wilderness we're stripped of all these good but secondary identities. Merryn could not become a mum. I was no longer a broadcaster. When all that we are or have dreamed of becoming is gone, is there anything deeper, more foundational, left?

Listen again to Moses' words:

[In] the wilderness . . . you saw how the LORD your God carried you, **as a father carries his son.**

Here's what's left when those secondary identities are stripped away: You are a son or a daughter, a child of the Father. And nothing can take this primary identity away from you. Success can't shake it, and neither can failure. It is impervious to sickness, tragedy, even death. Your name is written in the book of heaven (LUKE 10:20). Nothing can

separate you from the Father's love (ROMANS 8:38–39). "See what great love the Father has lavished on us that we should be called children of God!" John tells us. "And that is what we are!" (1 JOHN 3:1). Your role, position, or status may change but this identity will remain forever.

I had known about my identity in Christ for years, of course. I had preached about it and taught it. But in the wilderness I had to fully discover it. Whether I succeeded or failed, whether applauded or forgotten, I was a child of God. And that was all that really mattered.

In the wilderness we discover who we most deeply are: children of God, our Father.

A Place of Transition

The wilderness of broken dreams can be a hard and barren place, but it is also a place of revelation, provision, and discovery. Moses hadn't finished, though. There is one more thing about the wilderness he wanted the Israelites to know:

Observe the commands of the LORD your God, walking in obedience to him and revering him. For



Here's what's left when those secondary identities are stripped away: You are a son or a daughter, a child of the Father. Your role or status may change but this identity will remain forever.

the LORD your God is bringing you into a good land
(DEUTERONOMY 8:6–7).

A good land. A place of revelation, yes. A place of provision and discovery. Now Moses revealed that the wilderness is also *a place of transition*.

The wilderness is the ground between what was and what will be—the place between slavery and freedom, between immaturity and wisdom, between God's promise and its fulfillment, between who we were and who we are to be. After forty years in the wilderness, the door of the Promised Land stood before them. After forty days in the wilderness, Jesus launched His world-changing mission (MARK 1:12–15). And this can give us hope as we walk our own difficult journeys:

After the wilderness comes a new beginning.

New Beginnings

A few weeks before the Christmas Eve phone call that brought our dreams of a family to an end, I interviewed the British writer, poet, and humorist Adrian Plass on my radio show. Adrian and I later got talking off air and I ended up sharing a little of our wilderness journey with him. Adrian listened carefully, gave some encouraging words, and invited us to stay with him and his wife, Bridget, if we ever visited the UK. When Merryn and I moved to Oxford I got in touch, and we soon spent a weekend together.

We all went for a walk one afternoon. At one point Merryn and Bridget strode ahead while Adrian and I trailed behind. "How are you both doing now?" he asked me.

"On the whole, we're doing better," I said. "Coming to England has been the new beginning Merryn needed. My future is a little up in the air and Merryn still gets teary at times, but I guess we're trying to focus on the up-side of being childless—you know, like having more time and being free to travel."

"I can understand that," Adrian said. "But focusing on the 'up-side' of your situation will only get you so far."

We walked a little further before he explained what he meant.

"No matter how hard we try," Adrian said, "we cannot put a positive spin on the crucifixion. It was a dark, barbaric event—there was no 'up-side.' And Jesus didn't try to find one. Instead, He did something else entirely. Have you ever noticed how many people Jesus ministered to as He hung on the cross?"

Adrian ran down the list. While on the cross, Jesus ministered to His mother by putting her into John's care (JOHN 19:26–27), to a thief hanging next to Him (LUKE 23:39–43), to the people who crucified Him (23:33–34), to a Roman centurion who came to believe in Him (23:47; MATTHEW 27:54), and to all of us by forgiving our sins through His sacrifice.

"All of this was done in the middle of His suffering," Adrian added, "before things came good at His resurrection." I'd never seen it like that before.



"Out of your suffering will come opportunities to minister to people in ways you otherwise never could."

Adrian went on. "Yes, there may be some benefits in you being childless, but you'll also find it difficult and lonely at times. Yet out of your suffering will come opportunities to minister to people in ways you otherwise never could."

A New Mission

Later that evening Adrian and I sat in his lounge talking about the publishing world—in particular, my difficulty getting a book contract now that I was in a new country.

"Have you considered writing your story into a book?" he said. Adrian's suggestion took me by surprise, and my mind immediately filled with objections.

"Adrian, I'm not sure I'm qualified to write a book about infertility."

"Your story isn't just about infertility," he said. "It's about broken dreams, tested faith, the need for a new beginning. It's about taking a risk and starting again, and holding on to God when you don't understand Him. I think many could benefit from reading about that."

Our conversation drifted to other things, but Adrian's idea wouldn't leave me. I was certain Merryn wouldn't want such a personal story told publically either, but to my surprise, after prayer, she sensed it was the right thing to do. So a few weeks later I sat down at my desk and began to write. The book found a publisher, and within days of its release my inbox began filling with e-mails from readers:

"My son has Asperger Syndrome and my marriage is in tatters because of my husband's addiction. All my dreams are gone. But after reading your

story I now feel I can start again—and start finding God again.”

“We lost our first baby last year, and now my husband wants a divorce. Thank you for sharing your own broken dream with such honesty.”

“I’m crying for the first time in a very long time—tears of healing. God is working in me through yours and Merryn’s story. I’m starting to see the dawn of new things.”

I started sharing our story and the lessons of the wilderness at conferences and churches, and people began pulling me aside and telling me secret disappointments they’d never shared before. Couples came to our home and wept over their own broken dreams. And through it all God seemed to help people find some hope and healing. It was all a surprise to Merryn and me. God began transforming our suffering into comfort for others (2 CORINTHIANS 1:3–4).

The wilderness is a place of transition. It’s where God gives us a new mission. Through the wilderness God recycles our suffering into service to others.



three

Starting Again

You don't have to move to a new country, like we did, to recover from your broken dream. As I reflect on our journey of recovery, I see it had four practical elements that can be experienced in any number of ways:

1 Get Some Rest

If you've experienced a broken dream, you may well be exhausted, having spent considerable energy trying to attain what you desperately wanted. If you're anything like us, you may need some deep, restorative rest. Try planning some weekend sleep-ins and leisurely breakfasts,

gentle walks in the countryside, or perhaps a reduced workload at the office. Whatever truly relaxes you, have a season of intentionally enjoying more of it.

2 Enjoy Some Recreation

People with broken dreams couldn't create what they wanted to and so need to create something else. Recreation literally means "re-creation." What helps you to re-create joy and energy? For me, this meant getting back into photography—a hobby I'd neglected amongst the stresses of our wilderness journey years. You could think about rediscovering a pastime like that, joining a gym, learning a musical instrument, or starting a new project like renovating a room or writing a book.



3 Find Renewal

By reading this booklet, you've already begun the third part of the recovery process, which is to find spiritual renewal. As we've explored, a broken dream can rock your sense of perspective, raise questions about the meaning of your life, and raise doubts about the goodness of God. After some rest and recreation, you may be ready to start addressing some of these questions more intentionally by finding a spiritual mentor, seeing a Christian counselor, reading some good books, or experimenting with a guided retreat. Our experience has been that those who walk with

God through the wilderness and mine their suffering for its lessons, gain a more mature faith as a result.

4 Try Some Reinvention

When a dream dies, a little part of you does too, as you can't become the person you've wanted to become. A certain degree of reinvention is needed. Your primary identity is as a child of God and this gives you freedom to explore other aspects of who you are and even experiment with a new identity. Ask yourself:

Who am I deep down? Think about your personality and key relationships, especially to family and friends. Have you neglected an aspect of your personality you'd like to renew? Is it time to reinvest energy in being a brother, sister, uncle, aunt, son, friend, or neighbor?

What other dreams could I explore? Is there a career, hobby, or dream you've never had the time or opportunity to pursue? Perhaps now is the time to do so.

How can the lessons from my suffering be recycled to help others? You don't need to become a counselor, but the new "you" God is making will almost certainly include using your God-given talents and wilderness wisdom to bring hope to others.

So perhaps you long to be married but are still single, or your chosen career has never taken off. Maybe a crushing diagnosis shattered the dreams you held for your loved one, or the whirlwind romance has ended in divorce. Whatever the path that has led to your wilderness, you

feel sadness, a sense of unfairness, even jealousy towards those who have what you want, and anger towards the God who has denied your request.

The good news is that you can start again after a broken dream. In fact, God may be doing His greatest work in you through this wilderness journey: revealing what's in your heart, and revealing His faithfulness through all the sadness and mistrust; providing for you in ways you've missed or are yet to see; helping you

discover your deepest, truest identity as His child; and transitioning you to become someone new, recycling all you've been through into meaningful service to others.

Has the new life Merryn and I begun filled the void of not having a child? Of course not. Do we still have days when we wish things were different? Of course we do. There are still occasional tears. And there probably will be for you over your own broken dream.

But we have been able to start again and experience some things we never would have dreamed of, following the One who turned His own crucifixion into a mission field.

God doesn't end every story with a miracle. But He does end a few with a surprise.

He can turn our suffering into something beautiful.



God may be helping you discover your deepest, truest identity as His child.



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