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— GAYLE HAGGARD, director of women’s ministries,
New Life Church, Colorado Springs, Colorado

A Deeper Kind *of* Calm

Steadfast Faith in the Midst of Adversity

formerly The Blessing Book

LINDA DILLOW



NAV PRESS®

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To Becky, Donna, and Nanci:

*I have watched you walk through the Valley of Weeping
with grace and eyes lifted to God.*

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Chapter One

My Valley of Weeping

As I hung up the phone, all I could do was weep. This was the sixth phone call I'd received that week from a distraught woman who had shared with me her heartache, leaving my heart broken as well. Their anguish-filled words echoed in my mind:

- “My husband is having an affair with my best friend.”
- “I just found drugs in my son’s room.”
- “I lost my job—what am I going to do?”
- “My breast cancer has returned.”

So many hurting women; so many heavy, heavy burdens. I cried out to God: “Is there no end to the pain in this world? O God, give hope to the brokenhearted . . . wrap Your arms of comfort around my friends.”

But as I lifted each name to the throne of grace, I added my name to the list.

If God had given me the opportunity to script my story, I’d have written something like *It’s a Wonderful Life*. I’d be the light-hearted heroine traipsing through town, seeking opportunities to bless others.

Oh, yes, I’d have a wonderful life—and so would everyone else.

The last three years of my life have looked more like scenes from *Les Misérables* than from *It’s a Wonderful Life*. I have had struggles on every front: my relationships, my ministry, my home, and my health. While I can laugh at some of these incidents now, at the time I did not find them particularly amusing! See if you don’t agree.

SCENE I

My husband, Jody, and I took our Polish houseguests for a Wild West adventure to the Flying W Ranch, where we enjoyed a barbecue and western music. When we returned home, our friends entered the house first. When they walked into the kitchen they yelled, “Linda, come quick! Something is wrong.” As I rushed in, I discovered that *wrong* did not begin to describe the condition of my kitchen. *Disaster* was a better word.

- A mangled screen lay in the sink.
- Jagged pieces of the pantry doorframe cluttered the floor.
- A kitchen cabinet door covered with splotchy, red marks dangled from one hinge.
- Large, bloody-looking prints covered the stovetop, floor, and countertops.
- Peanut butter jars littered the counter—all of them empty.
- A chunky, brown substance that looked like vomit coated the counter and walls.

A bear had come calling. A very desperate bear. Our house had been closed and locked, except for the window over the kitchen sink, which we'd left open six inches for ventilation. Because the window had a twelve-foot drop-off, we thought our house would be secure, but a ravenous bear would not be dissuaded. Climbing on top of the grill on our deck, he lunged toward the window, heaved his large frame up on the sill, and then smashed through the screen into food heaven. According to neighbors, our ninety-pound dog, Barney, barked incessantly and then stopped abruptly. Apparently the bear had swatted him to silence, leaving a chunk of Barney fur on the floor in the process.

As we cleaned up the mess, we discovered that the blood-like prints on the counters had resulted from the bear breaking a large glass jar of salsa. (Was he a Mexican bear?) The vomitlike muck turned out to be a mixture of baking chocolate and salsa. (A Mexican bear with PMS?) When we finished cleaning up, we

went to bed, unaware that our intruder was ready for another try at the Dillow Diner. Once again, he climbed on the grill, lunging for the now-closed window. Hitting it hard, he fell helplessly onto the rocks below. We know this because our houseguests happened to be looking out the window at the time. They are now firmly convinced that the Wild West still exists!

Although our trusty dog needed a pet psychiatrist to recover from the trauma, we were not harmed. The wildlife association said our homeowner's insurance would cover the cost of repairs to our kitchen. Our insurance company said the wildlife association would cover it. They were both wrong. Months later the Dillow bank account coughed up the money.



My plan: Come home to my wonderful, clean house and relax with our guests.

My portion: Clean up a gruesome salsa mess and live for months with jagged door frames and open cabinets while hassling over “who pays” for bear break-ins.

SCENE 2

I could hardly wait. My daughter Robin and granddaughter Sofia were coming to visit us from Finland. It had been months since I'd seen either of them, and I anticipated the fun we'd have. Visions danced in my head of trips to the zoo, the park, and of

Sofia and me laughing together. I told Robin to bring something to wear besides jeans. I had made reservations for lunch and then tea at a castle. Afterward we were going shopping!

When Robin and Sofia finally arrived at our home, illness dashed my dreams. Instead of going on shopping trips together, my daughter and I took turns holding and rocking a sick Sofia. Instead of enjoying a leisurely lunch together in a lovely restaurant and tea in a castle, we were dressed in sweats, seated in the kitchen, enticing a feverish toddler with finger foods. This trip was Robin's thirtieth-birthday present. I had plans for fun—instead we had real life.

Then on Saturday Jody casually mentioned that he had passed out while lying on the bed watching TV. When I questioned him further, he said he had passed out several times that week, but he hadn't said anything because he thought "it was no big deal." (After thirty-nine years of marriage, I am no closer to understanding the male species than I was as a bride.)

After convincing this man I love that it WAS a big deal, we drove to the emergency room. The twenty-four-hour EKG they attached to Jody showed that his heart was periodically stopping and his pulse rate was below thirty. While Robin rocked Sofia at home alone, I waited for the surgeon to put a pacemaker in my husband's chest. The surgeon's comment: "This is so serious that I won't let your husband go one night without a pacemaker." Right. No big deal.



My plan: Tea in a castle and zoo-time with Sofia.

My portion: A husband with flat lines on his EKG, a sick Sofia, and an exhausted daughter.

SCENE 3

I had compiled a long list of favorite outdoor activities for the glorious Colorado summer . . . hikes up Raspberry Mountain to my waterfall, barbecues on our deck, and worship times in my “rock sanctuary.” Oh, it sounded so wonderful. But it was not to be.

That summer Colorado faced its worst drought in 230 years and the largest fire in its history (the Hayman fire). Flames gobbled up more than 110,000 acres of national forest, polluting our crisp mountain air with toxic smoke and covering our back deck in ash.

Every night I watched the news as firefighters from all over the country told about their rigorous efforts to contain the out-of-control blaze. Planes and helicopters buzzed above the smoke, dumping flame-retardant chemicals on the inferno, but it was like trying to douse a bonfire with water from a thimble.

One afternoon as the fire moved closer to our home at the foothills of the Rockies, the dreaded announcement came: “Be ready to evacuate. Unless the winds change, the fire will be here at midnight.”

I scurried through the house gathering pictures and almost forty years of treasures we’d collected from around the world as

a result of our years as missionaries: pine furniture from Austria, carpets from China, irreplaceable gifts from special friends, and mementos from our children. Valuable files and documents filled our two offices plus thousands of books, each one a treasure. As the truck with our cherished possessions left our driveway, I watched it join a caravan of cars. Many of our neighbors also were transporting their belongings to a safe place.

Throughout the night I begged God to shift the winds and spare our mountain home. God heard—and He answered. The winds shifted. Although we remained on “standby to evacuate,” our neighborhood breathed a sigh of relief. A week later we rejoiced as the official news was given: the danger was over; the Hayman fire was contained.

Have I unpacked all the boxes and put everything back in its place? No. You ask, “Linda, how could you let boxes sit around for four months?” One word: *migraines*. For months I have had a migraine headache almost every day, the latest of the wars I’ve fought with my hormones. When I have a migraine my vision clouds, my stomach lurches, and my head feels like someone hit it with a two-by-four.

Day after day, I lay in bed with a damp cloth on my forehead. Summer turned into fall. The snap of the first frost shocked Colorado into winter hibernation, turning the life-bearing green leaves to brown. I looked at the gnarled, dead-looking bush outside my window and knew exactly how it must feel.



My plan: A quiet, restful summer.

My portion: A fire-filled, migraine-filled summer.

Over the last three years my portion has also included two surgeries that were supposed to help my body. One failed miserably; the other caused my hormones to go berserk. My tears have wet the carpet as I've grieved over a conflict with someone close to me. Hardest of all, my wonderful husband and I have walked through difficult waters in our marriage. I had always assumed that as we "grew older" our intimacy would grow sweeter. It has . . . but the sweet fragrance has come as the flowers of our love have been tightly pressed.

What has been happening in your life?

Perhaps as you read these scenes from my life, you thought, *Linda had it easy. She hasn't begun to feel the pain I've felt!* And you are right. But pain is pain, and all pain hurts. I've walked with friends whose marriages have been torn asunder by infidelity, pornography, and deceit. I know homes divided by a yellow emotional line. I've grieved with those who have lost a spouse or a child. I've cried with others who spend twenty-four hours every day in chronic pain, death crouching around the corner. I've ached with friends whose children have been diagnosed as autistic, others whose teenagers have wandered far from their Christian faith and embraced drugs, abortions, and "whatever." I've agonized with precious women who live with the horror of sexual abuse . . . evil done to them and to

their children. Long is the list of pain: cancer, financial disaster, unemployment, parents with Alzheimer's. What is a bear or a fire in comparison?

Each of us has our own "Valley of Weeping." For some, the valley is shallow. For others, the valley is so deep there seems to be no way out. My own valleys are not anything special . . . they are simply what I have experienced. What do we do when pain overtakes the path of delight we had planned?

People react differently to pain. Many women I know "stuff" their pain by denying its existence or by numbing it with pleasure (alcohol, drugs, shopping, romance novels, television, and so on). Others talk incessantly about it in an attempt to exorcise it. None of these responses brings about the true relief we desire, nor do they glorify God.

God has a different answer for pain. His answer is found in the Psalms.

Most people know the Psalms as God's hymnal of praise, but they are also His picture book of pain. In the Psalms we see anguishing pain poured forth with wrenching honesty and vulnerability, and we ask:

- Is it possible to go through the Valley of Weeping without falling apart?
- Is it possible to have joy in the midst of suffering?
- Is it possible to grow in intimacy with the Lord as we travel through the valley?

God and the psalmists say, “Yes,” and I say, “Yes.”

God has shown me that in my pain He wants to give me a blessing. With the psalmists,

I remember

I hide

I cling

I journey

AND

my Valley of Weeping becomes

a Place of Blessing.

With each page you turn, may God speak to your pain and reveal the blessing He has for you. May He take you to a deeper kind of calm.

THE SONG OF HOLY REMEMBRANCE

<i>I cried out to God for help;</i>	<i>Has God forgotten to be merciful?</i>
<i>I cried out to God to hear me.</i>	<i>Has he in anger withheld his</i>
<i>When I was in distress, I sought the</i>	<i>compassion?"</i>
<i>Lord;</i>	<i>Then I thought, "To this I will</i>
<i>at night I stretched out untiring</i>	<i>appeal:</i>
<i>hands</i>	<i>the years of the right hand of the</i>
<i>and my soul refused to be</i>	<i>Most High."</i>
<i>comforted.</i>	<i>I will remember the deeds of the</i>
<i>I remembered you, O God, and I</i>	<i>LORD;</i>
<i>groaned;</i>	<i>yes, I will remember your miracles</i>
<i>I mused, and my spirit grew faint.</i>	<i>of long ago.</i>
<i>You kept my eyes from closing;</i>	<i>I will meditate on all your works</i>
<i>I was too troubled to speak.</i>	<i>and consider all your mighty deeds.</i>
<i>I thought about the former days,</i>	<i>Your ways, O God, are holy.</i>
<i>the years of long ago;</i>	<i>What god is so great as our God?</i>
<i>I remembered my songs in the</i>	<i>You are the God who performs</i>
<i>night.</i>	<i>miracles;</i>
<i>My heart mused and my spirit</i>	<i>you display your power among the</i>
<i>inquired:</i>	<i>peoples.</i>
<i>"Will the Lord reject forever?</i>	<i>With your mighty arm you</i>
<i>Will he never show his favor again?</i>	<i>redeemed your people,</i>
<i>Has his unfailing love vanished</i>	<i>the descendants of Jacob and</i>
<i>forever?</i>	<i>Joseph.</i>
<i>Has his promise failed for all time?</i>	<i>The waters saw you, O God,</i>

22 A DEEPER KIND OF CALM

*the waters saw you and writhed;
the very depths were convulsed.
The clouds poured down water,
the skies resounded with thunder;
your arrows flashed back and forth.
Your thunder was heard in the
whirlwind,
your lightning lit up the world;
the earth trembled and quaked.
Your path led through the sea,
your way through the mighty
waters,
though your footprints were not
seen.
You led your people like a flock
by the hand of Moses and Aaron.*

PSALM 77