

LORD, THE ONE YOU
LOVE IS SICK

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DANIEL
ROBINSON





Gwynne, 1985

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Dedication To:

Charis, Zach, and Seth.

I wonder what the Lord must have for you by
entrusting you with such heartache this early in
life. I can't wait to see.

Your Mom would be so proud of you.

Heaven knows I am.

ENDORSEMENT

My tired 91 year old eyes kept complaining the type is blurring. I did not want to read this book, but I could not put it down. I had to know how a human got through the valley of the shadow of death by cancer. David pointed the way in the 23rd Psalm. Daniel tells us in this frank biography how he made it in the 21st century after the death of his wife. If not you and me, some family and friends will need this practical help and spiritual insight. Get ready! You will thank God.

—Duke K. McCall



Between the well chosen lines of *Lord, the One You Love Is Sick*, there are eloquent groaning which cannot be uttered. Such groanings, however, breathe life into the written words.

For those who are “acquainted with grief”, reading Dan Robinson’s book is like spending quality time with a faithful and understanding friend.

Having been where he has been, reading his book both prompted tears and wiped them away at the same time.

Four words describe this written journey through the realities of sickness and death: Transparency, authenticity, integrity, and gentleness.

In his search for survival in the midst of sorrow, Dr. Robinson takes the counsel of Martin Luther, whom he quotes...”do not become your own slayer”. And what makes the latter half of Dr. Robinson’s book so significant are the early chapters of unguarded honesty and unmistakable humanity.

Lord, the One You Love Is Sick is the printed voice of a dear friend, who walks us across the level ground of the hospital hallway, the cemetery, the empty house, the rediscovery of praise and the preparedness for our own homegoing.

—Charles G. Fuller



Dr. Dan Robinson's transparency allows us to catch a glimpse of the real and raw emotions that he experienced in the death of his wife Gwynne. Through his loss, God's servant traveled from despair to hope.

Read this book and discover God, who will satisfy the deep hunger of your soul. Also, there are included practical suggestions to help you heal during your own time of loss.

—Rick Elmore
Tabernacle Baptist Church
Salem, VA



Pastor Dan proved the blessedness of Psalm 23:4, "Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death...You are with me." How faithfully he shares the anguish of a most devoted companion, and yet how vividly he shares the peace that only Jesus can give. Then in the appendices he illustrates the practical preparation we all should make. May this book give you assurance and strengthen your living hope in Christ.

—Wesley L. Duewel
President Emeritus
OMS International
Greenwood, IN



In reading *Lord, the One You Love is Sick*, I felt myself more personally engaged in the intensity of the meaning of life and death than I ever experienced in any other book I have read. But Daniel Robinson's book is more than a chronicle of one man's pain. It is an adventure that should open to all of us the process we humans must experience to reach the heights God is leading us to. Pain is universal since the fall of man, but the triumph available to us as we grow through the pain leads to a God-centeredness and a glory that is not accessible by any other route. Dan's story is high drama with the climax of high victory God wants all of us to share and learn.

—T. W. Hunt



Dan Robinson has written a phenomenal love story! He opens his heart and records on paper the love he and his precious Gwynne knew and shared together. All will benefit who choose to read this important book. Dan does not hold back! It is all here, there is love, pain, questions, anger, joy, hope, disappointment, assurance, celebration and anticipation. If you have known any of these emotions you will relate. If you have agonized over where is God when I hurt? Where is He when I need Him

most? You will be encouraged by someone who has experienced all of these emotions and more. The following free verse is my attempt to honor a life and marriage well lived.

ETYMOLOGY OF A LIFE

A place called the Cavalier
Hands on the table
Eyes of blue, skin so soft
The look, the touch, the smile
Fun, joy, laughter, connection
Oneness, they don't understand
Celebration, happiness, love
Red roses, a gift, a party, a life
Plans, hope, wants, potential
Possibilities, questions
What are we to do?
Where are we to go?
Birthdays to remember
Family, friends, dreams
A door, the eyes of blue, an embrace
The touch, the smell, it lives
Expectations, disappointments
Pain, sorrow and hurt
A face in the crowd, a faded red rose
Memories, Oh sweet memories
What could have been

What was what is
What to do? Where to go?
My life, My love, How do we live?
I want to cry! I want to laugh!
I want to know!

If you are yet to experience any of the above you will be inspired by someone who has endured the valley and still stands to Praise our Loving Lord! Reading this book will better equip you for the remainder of your journey. I pray these pages will touch your heart and life as they have mine.

—Steve Wingfield
Uncle to Gwynne, Friend of Dan
by choice and brother through Jesus!
Evangelist and President
Steve Wingfield Evangelistic Association



MY HEART-FELT THANKS

No one writes a book alone. You already know that. And as your might imagine the details of book-writing are myriad. Countless numbers of people have prayed for me as I've undertaken this project. It would not have reached completion without their prayers. Others have with gentle persistence asked

me often: “How’s the book coming along?” Then, of course, someone has to type the manuscript. You might be surprised to learn that in this day of high-tech computers and word processors...I have remained low-tech. I wrote the entire book with the help of only a pen and a yellow legal pad. But then our (First Baptist Church) administrative assistant, Joy Dooley (and earlier, friend and helper Cindy Oliver) faithfully typed and retyped...and then re-typed again. And obviously, you hold this book in hand because of the good and professional work of WinePress Publishers. All of these people deserve a long, resounding applause and endless thank-you’s. Ultimately, to God be all the Glory. The book bears my name. But it really is His. I pray you’ll know Him better as you read.



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PREFACE

Will this book sell? As I have worked and written my way through this manuscript that is the question I have asked. I have asked it not because of finances, but rather because of culture. More specifically the Christian culture. This book is not in step with much of the Christian mindset of today. It is neither bouncy nor cheery. It does not outline three steps to victory. It raises many questions, some of which remain unanswered.

It is an honest and transparent book. It is a book, not about strong faith, but about weak faith. It is not about how my wife and I held onto God only. It is much more about how He held onto us. You will read about my belief and my unbelief.

I hope you will allow the Lord to look over your shoulder as you read this book. I hope you will find your heart being drawn to and by Him. I hope you will come away from this book with both the conviction and the peace regarding the normalcy of suffering for the Christian. I hope you will come away with resolve that says, “no matter what, I will serve Him because His Grace is sufficient”. I hope you will come away tender and strong, gentle and courageous.

I hope you will come away with a hunger for heaven as well as a longing for living. I hope you will come away with a profound and deepening love for Jesus Christ. I hope you will come away having been weaned a little bit more from the insufficient façade of faith typifying our time. I hope you will come away stalwart and bold. I hope you will come away with your hand placed firmly in His. I hope you will come away as a New Testament Christian. I hope you will run your race with endurance and then cross the finish line to the honor, glory, and praise of Jesus Christ. Yes, I hope you will. How deeply I hope you will.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

I have written this book in the heat of battle. Fear and faith have intermingled. The will to live and the desire to die have existed side by side. Crimson stains almost every page. For that reason, some of the book is left untouched by final, smoothing out editing. This is particularly true in my journal entries. Often I reference a Scripture, hymn stanza, or simply a thought. These were things which came to my mind at the time. Sometimes these entries may come across as incomplete or even unrelated. I realize that. Yet I have decided for the most part to leave them in their original form. A battlefield where lives have fallen should always be a sacred place. Some things don't need to be polished up. It's the stark authenticity which tells the story most clearly. And this story really deserves to be clear.

CHAPTER 1

THE LAST NORMAL DAY

“I would never have known the meaning of various Psalms, come to appreciate certain difficulties, or know the inner workings of the soul; I would never have understood the practice of the Christian life and work, if God had never brought afflictions to my life.”

—Katherine Luther

October 16, 2001 was a typically beautiful day in the North Carolina mountains. The day before, Gwynne told me she had pain in her abdomen and was going to see her gynecologist. Dr. Dave Sandridge had delivered our two sons and had taken care of Gwynne for some fifteen years at that point. All that day, while Gwynne was at the

doctor's office, I was hiking in the Great Smoky Mountains National Park. How vividly I remember the gnawing uncertainty in my gut. I had no premonitions but I knew I was unsettled. I couldn't put my finger on it.

That evening began like so many other October evenings in the previous 19 years. But that evening would change our lives forever. Gwynne said to me, "I need to talk to you." With that we went into the bedroom and I closed the door. Sitting on the bed's edge, Gwynne's words were measured and deliberate (as usual).

She said, "Dr. Sandridge looked at the x-ray for a long time. I could tell he was concerned. He suspects a tumor and while not conclusive, cancer is suspect."

I remember holding Gwynne. My hands gripped the collar of her blouse. There was hurt, shock, and even numbness from deep within.

Two days later Gwynne was examined by an oncologist, Dr. Dave Hetzel. His conclusion was, "Better than 50% probable cancer." Two days later she had surgery.

From My Journal

10/17/01

Gwynne went to her gynecologist yesterday. He discovered a mass behind her ovaries.

He suspects cancer. We are scheduled to see the cancer surgeon this morning. Dr. Sandridge called it life threatening. There is no way to describe how I feel. The news was surreal. "Father, I need to talk to you but I don't know what to say. You have taught me from your Word that nothing touches my life without first having passed through Your Hand. But Father ...Gwynne ...of all people ...Why not me?

Father, You remind me just now with a gentle shake that I have already interpreted this event initially and cancer probably as bigger than You. I repent in Your holy Presence from that lie and from believing it. I could not possibly begin to understand Your purposes. Father in my spirit and before you I gather Gwynne, Charis, Zach, and Seth and I place us under your protection, providence and presence.

10/19/01

Since Tuesday P.M., our world as we have known it has dramatically changed. After seeing the cancer specialist on Wednesday, he advised surgery. That is scheduled for tomorrow 8 A.M. Yesterday was spent in another trip to Asheville and some pre-op

procedures. I think of several things just now:

- 1) There has been widespread brokenness for Gwynne's sake on this. People quietly weeping and caring.
- 2) I have e-mailed or called several people and asked for prayer.
- 3) Although I have known for years the propensity of people to launch either into mini-sermons or clichés in a heart-felt desire to be helpful, I have found myself both resistant to and wearied by them. One even presumptuously dared to declare that they knew just how I felt. Impossible.
- 4) My whole being has groaned at the pain and recovery procedures Gwynne will face in the next days and weeks.
- 5) Although I've preached and believed (and still do) that everything the Father permits is for our good and His glory, I have struggled this time with asking God to get glory. I have feared the possible implications of what we're facing. It seems the Lord has brought me to a point, however, of being able to pray that prayer. Not as some badge of courage or attention to self but as a heart trust in Him. I was reminded of the physical suffering of Jesus. His lacerated and torn body. I saw

again what I've understood for years, namely, that we are not exempt from suffering. I can equally say without any fear of hypocrisy how I would gladly take Gwynne's place if I could. I have hence begun to understand more of my love for Gwynne by understanding more of His love for His Bride.

- 6) Then there is every chance (a wrong word for a Christian to use) the tumor will not be malignant.
- 7) I find myself wanting Gwynne to be the next miracle advertised on the 700 Club proclaiming the healing. Yet my attention is irresistibly (if not also reluctantly) drawn to Hebrews 11:36, which insists that ...

“...Others were tortured, faced jeers and flogging, stoned, sawed in two ...and yet also commended for their faith...”

All of this brings me to a prayer for Gwynne. “Father, You know where we are both actually and emotionally just now. How my heart, though heavy, rises in quiet praise and worship to you. I know that you are able to raise Gwynne up from her affliction. You are the Holy One with whom nothing is impossible. Impossibilities reside only on earth,

not in heaven. And I know that you define possibilities from your perfect perspective. I find myself in these last two days gaining slightly increased insight into who You are. I am both comforted and challenged by Your enormity. In truth, Gwynne has always been your gift to me—never my possession. My heart literally aches as I am aware now of the times I neglected, or treated with indifference, that gift. And of that I now repent in Your holy presence. You see the breath-interrupting sensation of grief every time the thought of losing Gwynne crosses my mind and heart. I would so deeply desire for her and request of you:

- her healing
- a “no-longer-there” tumor; or a benign one
- her restoration to life, health, and on-going fruitful ministry.

This is what I ask! But if by reason of the perfect working together of all things you deem otherwise, then I pray not my will but Thine be done. Here and now I let go of Gwynne to be your instrument. You love her infinitely more than I can even begin to experience or comprehend.

My love for her is as a pinhead compared to Yours, which is like the oceans. This wooden desk where I now sit has been the place of work, prayer, and tears for life, family and ministry for years. Today it becomes an altar whereupon I symbolically place my wife before You and give her to You. My heart is both breaking and crushed with heaviness.

Even so, I know you are a loving Father who is always working all things together for our good. Whatever you permit, I am willing to trust Gwynne into your hands. Just be glorified. Help me, I ask, to be an encourager to Gwynne. In just 24 hours, we will be in the hospital, prepped and ready to undertake the procedure, the outcome of which You know and control. I bow before You. Now to God be glory, both now and forevermore. Amen.”

I remember driving to the hospital on that pre-dawn morning. On the interstate, we passed the junction that led to the coast of North Carolina some 300 miles away. Gwynne, the children, and I had spent so many vacations there. It was a time we all anticipated and to which we always looked forward. I said to Gwynne that morning, “Let’s head to the coast.” It was the hope of life going on as it

had been for so many uninterrupted years. In many ways the coast seemed to be medicine from heaven. I always thanked God for it. But not today. We had to go to the hospital. Gwynne had to have surgery. The die was cast.

We arrived at Mission St. Joseph Hospital in Asheville. It was familiar territory. It was the hospital of my birth 48 years earlier, the place where both our sons were born, the place where my father died, and the place where I had visited innumerable people over the years as a pastor. I knew just where to go—hardly comforting on that morning.

We went through the admissions process and then to the room to wait. I remember so vividly how attractive Gwynne looked—red sweater, black slacks—and how, at 45 years of age, she still maintained a slim figure and quiet beauty. It was the last time Gwynne's body would ever be the same. That day set in motion months of surgeries, procedures, incisions and recoveries.

Typically, Gwynne was always thinking of the children and me. She placed into my hands a new book, titled *Wild at Heart*. No one else knew me like Gwynne. She had seen my heart at both its worst and best. Never one to condemn, Gwynne always sought ways to encourage others in the Lord's Grace. I was tops on her list.

The surgery began about 7:30 A.M., and like all surgeries, it lasted too long. Joe and Nancy Folsom, a deacon and his wife, were there with me. We got breakfast together, then went back to the room to wait. Dr. Hetzel came in around 11 A.M. with the results—ovarian cancer, stage three. There are only four stages.

I remember going from the room and searching, looking for any place where I might have privacy. I found it at the far end of the elevated parking garage. Looking out to the beautiful mountains surrounding Asheville, North Carolina, my eyes filled with tears. My grief and despair seemed to come from previously unknown depths. I think all I could say was “Oh, God. Oh God.”

In a short time, Gwynne was brought back to the room. As soon as she was able she asked the question which was to typify the next months of procedures and surgeries, “How did we do?” Gwynne and I had an open door policy in our relationship. No subject was off limits. Absolute understanding, truth, and frankness were expected from our one-flesh relationship. I told her the news and can still remember so vividly the disappointment in her eyes.

That day began a journey for us. The waters were uncharted. But with all of the uncertainties, we had the one unchanging certainty of our present God. We did not know what He would do. But we

did know Him. His track record of faithfulness to us was undeniable. This was by far the biggest crisis of our lives. But it was not bigger than God. And we believed it was by the permission of God.