CHAPTER 10

HOW DO I REBUILD A MEANINGFUL LIFE AFTER LOSS?

Heading home on what should have been a typical Monday morning, I was disappointed to see that the entrance to my mountain road was blocked off by several police cars. *Another oversized truck must have gotten stuck in one of the narrow bends*, I thought. *Happens all the time*. I drove up next to a police car and rolled down my window, but before I could ask about the road, I heard a woman frantically negotiating with the police. I pulled my car to the side of the road, parked, and stepped out. I took one look at her standing in the middle of the road and immediately knew she needed help.

As I walked toward her, a police officer stepped between us and asked me to return to my car. I explained how I lived up the road and this was my only way home. He nodded and said, "Lady, the road is going to be closed for a very long time. There's a suicidal young man with a gun barricaded in his car up ahead."

The distraught woman had to be his mother.

The officer told me I should leave the scene since there was nothing I could do. But I knew otherwise. I calmly told him I would not leave another mother alone to face her worst fear. He nodded, confirming she was in fact the young man's mother.

Without giving him the details of my own loss, I distracted him with random questions about his career and the weather, all the while taking baby steps in the mother's direction. When I'd made it close enough for our eyes to meet, I shouted to her, "You don't know me, but I'm here for you."

The intensely focused mother yelled back, "Thank you."

For the next forty-five minutes, I stayed at my post, some fifty feet away. In desperation, the mother continued to plead with the officers surrounding her. I silently prayed and asked the officer closest to me a series of questions. "Why won't you let her go up the mountain? What if she can convince her son to get the help he needs? Doesn't she know her son better than a SWAT Team does?"

When more police officers arrived on the scene and started turning around bystanders' cars, I persuaded the officer next to me to let me hand the mother a note. As I walked toward her and extended my hand, my heart swelled with tremendous sorrow and compassion. "Here's my name and number." I gently said, "I'll be praying for you and your son." The note read: *My son, Evan, died by suicide in January 2021. I hope you won't need to talk to me, but if you do, I'm here for you.*

I kept my promise and prayed throughout the day and into the night for her son's safety and their family's reunion. Around midnight, I learned from the County Sheriff's Office

that her beloved son, only nineteen years old, had ended his life. I wept for her and all the families whose loved ones chose death over life. All night long, I tossed and turned in bed, unable to sleep, consumed with the image of the distraught mother in the middle of the road.

Still groggy the next morning, I answered a call from an unknown number. "I don't know why you were there at the bottom of the mountain," the mother said, "but you're the only person I want to talk to now."

Even with a house full of family and friends, the bereaved mother somehow knew her pain had a safe place to go. I could speak the words her scattered soul needed to hear. During our first phone call, it became clear to me that we're best able to help the person we used to be. Comforting and calming a complete stranger confirmed in my heart that God still had meaningful plans for my life.

Years later, I learned that the bereaved mother called me her "grief angel." I believe she was mine too. Our divine encounter was a holy nudge confirming that I could rebuild a meaningful life after loss, and so can you.

ENCOURAGING

What's Next?

When you hear someone declare that they've found their purpose or calling, do you feel like you've been left out of a secret group of the "lucky ones" who've got it all figured out? I used to believe my purpose was a bull's-eye, and my goal was to hit the center of God's will for my life. If I did live out my purpose, in heaven I'd hear, "Well done, my good and faithful