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Experiencing grace

# Loosening the grip of grief

Learning to see in colour again after the darkness of a child's death



# SALVOS

MAGAZINE



**“Suffering is traumatic and awful and we get angry and we shake our fists at the heavens and we vent and rage and weep. But in the process we discover a new tomorrow, one we never would have imagined otherwise.”**

**Rob Bell**

**Author, speaker and podcaster**





## The Salvation Army is about giving hope where it's needed most.

### What is The Salvation Army?

The Salvation Army, an international movement, is an evangelical part of the universal Christian Church.

### Vision Statement

Wherever there is hardship or injustice, Salvos will live, love and fight alongside others to transform Australia one life at a time with the love of Jesus.

### Mission Statement

The Salvation Army is a Christian movement dedicated to sharing the love of Jesus by:

- Caring for people
- Creating faith pathways
- Building healthy communities
- Working for justice

# Salvos Magazine

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## The grip of grief

The vast majority of us will face some level of grief throughout our lives. This could be the death of a loved one, health issues, abuse, betrayal or any kind of dramatic change in our lives – including living through a global pandemic.

In this edition, a young mum, Hayley, bravely shares her ongoing grief journey after the death of her son, William. She talks about the dark days of devastation and pain, her struggle with God and how, slowly, she has learned to see joy in the world again.

Clinical counsellor Robyn Smartt also talks about grief, and how working through the grief process can help us face, and learn to manage, the impacts it has on our lives.

In Faith Talk, we take a different look at grief. Faye Michelson shares one example from the COVID-19 pandemic that affected her, and how focusing on a God that never changes, refocused her outlook.

Fiona's challenging but encouraging journey in My Story shows the power of love and acceptance to transform an individual and a community.

For all these stories and information on where to get help, go to [salvosmagazine.org.au](http://salvosmagazine.org.au)

Simone Worthing **Assistant Editor**



# Loosening the grip of grief

Learning to see in colour again after the darkness of a child's death

**WORDS** HAYLEY CORBEN

It was a sunny afternoon in February 2015, five weeks after moving into our new home. My boys were playing with the neighbours' kids in our front yard while my husband and I were gardening beside them. I recall thinking how lucky we were to have moved into a street with lots of children and lovely young families.

The boys ventured across to a neighbour's front yard, where their friends' father was mowing the lawn, and they eventually moved into their home to play. It was soon after that our lives changed forever. We didn't know that the pool gate in the neighbour's backyard was propped open by a lump of wood, for convenience while the father mowed the lawn. We had no idea that an innocent game of hide-and-seek would prove fatal for our youngest son, William. We will never know the full extent of what unfolded that day, and how William came to be submerged in the pool, underneath a floatation device.

## SHEER TERROR

The horror that followed will stay with me for the rest of my days; the sheer terror that unfolded as I watched life slip away from my four-year-old son. It was excruciating. Never before had I felt so completely helpless.

Multiple ambulances arrived, along with the police. A rescue helicopter hovered overhead. It was chaos. The paramedics found a very faint pulse and William was rushed to hospital for emergency care. Things began to move in slow motion for me. I expected that



Rob and Hayley with their two boys, Tom (left) and William, before the tragedy.

William would wake up, sit up in bed looking for me and that I'd be able to hug him and cry and tell him what an awful fright he had given all of us. I didn't let myself believe that this could potentially be the end. He had a full life ahead of him.

William was stabilised but still regarded as critical. He was put on life support and



Hayley and Rob with their son, Tom. William is always remembered and longed for.

transferred to a specialist children's hospital and we began our bedside vigil. A prayer chain was filtered throughout many churches, with thousands of people praying for William's recovery and healing. Despite petitions to God, we were forced to make the decision to turn off William's life support on 4 March.

“

**I would remind myself that ...  
it was okay not to be okay.**

”

Walking away from the hospital that night, without our child, was the most difficult thing I have ever done. My husband, despite being shattered in his own right, carried me to the car and held my hand as we sobbed the entire journey home. Sleep came from sheer exhaustion, but waking the next morning to face the cruel reality of having lost our child hit us like a ton of bricks.

## **DARK DAYS**

Those early days were dark. I failed to see a way forward and battled the guilt that came with failing to protect my child from harm. I raged at God. How can a supposed loving God hear thousands of prayers and still choose to say no? How would I ever be able to trust a God who I felt deserted us in our darkest hour?

The realisation that I didn't just lose William, but everything that was ahead of him, was overpowering. Grief seemed to plague my every day and the unfairness of what my family had been asked to endure seemed a mountain too high to climb.

In the first few days after losing William, someone suggested that 'time' was the only thing that would see us survive our loss. I wanted to scream and cry out that there would never be a 'time' where things were okay. Where I would be okay with his out-of-order death and accept that he was gone.

But the person who gave me that advice was right. I had to give grief time. Grief demands ▶



William Chase Corben – always in the hearts of his family.

to be heard, felt and seen. To put it plainly, I had to sit with my pain until I could see in colour again.

## COLOUR RETURNS

Thankfully, colour did eventually reappear.

I found a wonderful therapist who gently and ever-so-patiently guided me through the darkness. He often sat and cried with me as I recollected the memories of that awful day and the many days, weeks and months that followed. He encouraged me to revisit the places that I feared, including the [Salvos] church where William's funeral took place. He encouraged me to take back the power, to claim back the good times in those places, instead of letting trauma win. Though it took me a great deal of time and perseverance, I learned to face those fears. I drove my car and sat outside the childcare centre that William had attended. I cried, screamed and beat my chest at the pain of being in a place where William had been, but would never be

again. I did the same at the church. I allowed the memories to ruin me in the moment. I allowed myself to feel, instead of trying to be brave. I claimed back some of the power that grief held over me.

“

**I believe that grief and happiness can co-exist.**

”

I read many books about grief with a highlighter in hand. For years I would read over the highlighted parts when grief threatened to envelope me. I would remind myself that what I was living through really was that bad, and that it was okay not to be okay.

I started a journey to health and wellbeing. I recognised that having a healthy body contributed hugely to my ability to have a healthy mind.

I attended a bereaved parents' retreat and connected with other families who suffered the loss of a child. I realised we were not alone in this journey.

I slowly began to listen to Christian music again. I may not always be capable of singing Christian songs with conviction, but I do often find comfort.

## PAINFUL ACCEPTANCE

Acceptance is such a complex term. I can accept that William is not coming back, but I find it incredibly difficult to accept the way that he died. I still suffer horrific flashbacks. I am regularly overcome by grief and I think

this will be the case for the rest of my life. My heart longs for my son. It is a pain for which there is no remedy this side of heaven.

I will never be okay with having lost William, but I would be lying if I didn't admit that my life is richer now. Sometimes great pain brings great insight. I am reminded that life is a gift and none of us should waste that gift. I recognise beauty in the world that once was lost on me. Sunsets, rainbows, the ocean or a beautiful view now have me stopping to be thankful. I savour the experience of good food and friends that I can laugh with.

I am eternally grateful for friends and family who still to this day aren't afraid to sit with me during my times of deep grief. I'm thankful for the grace they show me during periods where I'm messy and unfiltered. I walk through those moments now with a reassurance that the stronghold of grief will loosen its grip and I will see in colour again.

I believe that grief and happiness can co-exist, if we simply give each of these emotions the time and space they deserve.

“

**I trust that Jesus will remain beside me as I face all that lies ahead.**

”

I make a conscious decision every morning to choose happiness. The attitude of gratitude truly makes a difference.

I believe when William fell into the pool that day, Jesus was beside him. And I trust that Jesus will remain beside me as I face all that lies ahead.

## Life is a cherished gift – a brother's perspective

**WORDS** TOM CORBEN

I'll never forget the day my little brother William fell into the pool, and the days that followed. I was only seven years old, but I remember the hospital visits, and the endless questions that nobody knew the answers to, and not understanding why he couldn't just be given some medicine to help him wake up. These memories have stayed with me (Tom is now 13).

Losing William has changed my life. It's just me now with Mum and Dad. I get lonely sometimes and even jealous when I see other people with their brothers and sisters. I wish he was here to talk to and do fun things with. We lost Will at 4, but we also lose him over,

and over again, every time he is missing from the special moments in life.

Choices we make in life have consequences. Instead of enjoying our life together, I make sure I enjoy my life for him. I feel lucky that I am still here. Time has softened my pain, but William will always be missed, and will always be remembered.



Scan here for more on finding meaning.

# Good mourning

How embracing the grieving process helps us address its pain

**WORDS** ROBYN SMARTT

Life has rhythm – an ebb and flow that moves with us as we journey through experiences of connection and bonding, separation and loss. Acknowledging this normal part of living can help us move through sorrow and grief in a healthy way.

During COVID-19, we have all become aware of the toll it has taken on our overall wellbeing. Many of these impacts and responses are connected to the losses that we have felt during the pandemic. Whether we have lost our job and sense of security; lost a family member through death or find ourselves separated by border closures; feel a heightened anxiety regarding safety; are juggling working from home and homeschooling; or are feeling that our life has changed forever, it is helpful

to acknowledge and grieve these impacts so we can move forward in a healthy way.

Grief impacts our whole being – physically, emotionally and spiritually. When confronted by our own grief response, we make choices that will determine our capacity to mourn in a healthy way.

Grief is intensely personal – no two experiences are exactly the same. The response to the loss of a spouse will be different to the loss of a child. How we deal with the death of a parent will vary, depending on the closeness of the relationship and the circumstances.

Divorce presents another kind of loss that can be complicated by shared custody of children. Empty-nest syndrome, relocating to a new city or loss of employment through layoff or retirement can also trigger grief.

It is important to know that children grieve differently to adults. They tend to mourn in spurts and in a way that is appropriate to their stage of development. Talking openly about the person who has died gives children



PHOTO BY KARIM MANJRA ON UNSPLASH



permission to grieve, remember and ask questions. It is crucial that they do not carry false responsibility or guilt for the loss.

Grief is like falling into a deep, often chaotic, valley. At first, we may feel emotionally numb; we are still in a state of shock. As our emotions begin to thaw and we begin to feel the pain of our loss, emotional mood swings can leave us feeling exhausted and muddled.

Healthy grieving takes courage. Often our emotions can feel like waves that overwhelm us. In time, the intensity of these emotions will diminish as we move to a place of acceptance or forgiveness. Eventually, we can climb out of the valley with the new learning we have gained and interact with others with renewed energy.

If we don't acknowledge our grief and do the work of mourning, our long-term health may be impacted by high blood pressure, headaches, clinical depression and somatic illnesses. Avoiding the pain of our loss can also leave us stuck and open to complicated grief that can emerge years later.

If you want to support someone who is grieving, it is important to recognise that different reactions are normal. But often it's simply being with the grieving person that is the most important thing.

### **EMBRACE GRIEF PHYSICALLY**

Get proper rest. Extra rest is needed during intense grieving. Getting to bed at a regular time each night allows the body to readjust. Naps during the early days of the journey are vital.

Maintain a healthy diet. The body requires good nutrition to stay healthy during the grieving process.

Exercise regularly. As you exercise, take the time to reflect on the outdoors, enjoy the sunshine, stop and smell a few flowers along the way. A 30-minute brisk walk releases endorphins in the body that reduce stress and help us feel better.

### **EMBRACE GRIEF EMOTIONALLY**

Facing the grief process includes facing our emotions. Find a safe place to sit with the pain and face the fears of loss. Work through the feelings of anger, guilt, frustration, regrets and disappointments.

A strong support system of family and friends enables healthy emotions to surface.

A professional counsellor can also help provide insights into emotional upheaval.

The use of symbols can also facilitate a healthy remembrance of the loved one during significant days such as holidays or anniversaries when their absence is felt deeply. But as we embrace the pain of our loss we will continue to grieve in a healthy way.

### **EMBRACE GRIEF SPIRITUALLY**

When we grieve it is helpful to focus on God's mercy and compassion, through prayer, scripture and worship. Tell God about your grief and invite him to walk with you through each aspect of the day.

*Major Robyn Smartt is Manager, Pastoral Services, The Salvation Army Australia.*



Scan here for more on finding meaning.

# A strange kind of grief

Change can bring heartache and hardship, but some things never change

WORDS FAYE MICHELSON

Last year, in the midst of the Melbourne lockdown, I encountered a strange kind of grief. It was different to the sorrow I felt for those so terribly impacted by the virus, here and overseas. This grief was wrapped up in shock, a feeling of acute loss as I – someone who had always felt safe – realised that safety was not a given. For me, that understanding didn't come after seeing confronting television images of mobile morgues outside New York hospitals or reading daily statistics about the escalating numbers of COVID infections. It came in a suburban shopping centre.



During the first lockdown, when we were allowed to travel around our suburbs (who knew that soon we would be permitted to travel only five kilometres from home?), I put

on my mask and drove to a nearby shopping centre to go to a department store that had remained open.

I'll admit to a feeling of enjoyment as I drove into the multi-level carpark for the first time in many weeks. After only shopping for essentials at the supermarket, it was a relief to experience a return to some kind of normal life. I soon discovered, though, that there wasn't much 'normal' about it.

“

**Some things, thank God, never change.**

”

This big shopping centre, usually buzzing with people, was almost empty, with the few shoppers there masked and anonymous like me. The wide walkways were lined with shut-up shops displaying A4-sized signs saying, "Closed due to COVID-19". It was eerie and echoey, and I decided I didn't really want to be there. I went into the department store and wandered half-heartedly around a few aisles before walking back to my car through the food court. And that's when this strange grief enveloped me.

The domed glass ceiling over the food court flooded the expansive area with light. But where there should have been hundreds of



PHOTO BY DAWID ZAWILA ON UNSPLASH

people eating, drinking, talking and laughing, chairs were stacked in rows and tables were turned upside down on each other. Yellow tape encircled the area, as if it were a crime scene, with intermittent signs declaring the area off limits. A few traders offered take-away food and drinks to a handful of customers and somehow that made the empty, silent area more poignant. Weeks ago, just days before the lockdown, I'd met a friend there for lunch, surrounded by crowds of people doing the same thing. I was surprised to feel tears prick the back of my eyes as I looked at this, the heart of the shopping centre, that had simply stopped.

Life as we know it can change at any time. It can be because of a global pandemic, a natural disaster, war, political upheaval or economic downturn. It can be because of a loved one's death, illness, divorce or job loss.

Change can bring heartbreak and hardship. It happens now, and it will happen in the future just as surely as it happened in the past.

The person who wrote Psalm 94 in the Bible was well-acquainted with hard times. He gives us his insight into dealing with life's hard times by placing his faith in the one who is unchanging – God. "Lord, when doubts fill my mind and my heart is in turmoil quiet me and give me renewed hope," (verse 19). The psalmist's words are as encouraging today as they were when he wrote them thousands of years ago. Some things, thank God, never change.



Scan here for more  
on finding meaning.

# Experiencing grace

In a tough neighbourhood, Fiona gives to others the acceptance and friendship she has found for herself

FIONA'S STORY, AS TOLD BY BRYCE DAVIES

Major Bryce Davies is a Salvation Army officer (pastor) who has worked for many years with marginalised communities in Queensland and New South Wales. Over the next four weeks in *Salvos Magazine*, he will share some stories and struggles of people he has come across while serving in the often-troubled suburb of Villawood in Greater Western Sydney. Each story will focus on the unique challenges these brave people face, and how they are connecting with their community with the support of their friends at the Salvos. Story printed with permission.

Fiona was born into a supportive Catholic family and had a happy childhood with her brothers. She was not fantastic at school but got by. She was very shy and not overly confident, so when a boy at the movies took an interest in her one day, she was soon in a relationship that resulted in pregnancy.

“

**Fiona is a force for good  
in this community.**

”

Fiona's strict Catholic parents were horrified and she felt judged and rejected. Not long after the child was born, the baby's father became abusive and the relationship disintegrated. Fiona was left traumatised from the abuse, and a single mum without family support. Life has been tough ever since. She has lived in the government housing units in Villawood, Greater Western Sydney, for 23 years, and has had to learn to fend for herself and find ways to survive.

When the Salvos started a community program in Villawood two years ago, Fiona was defensive and often aggressive. She made it clear that she trusted nobody and was not about to be used and abused again.

Over time, we invited her to cook and help out, to give her a chance to get to know people and learn to trust the protection and boundaries the Salvos had in place to build community. This felt safe for her as she was in control.

Conflicts would often flare up though, and angry words would flow, but it has become easier and more normal to chat these things through now and trust that a fair result will eventuate. Fiona has been heavily involved with the Salvos in the Villawood hub for over a year, and she wears her Salvos shirt and cap with pride. She has helped with catering, as well as collecting for the Salvos' Red Shield Appeal. Fiona has loved the opportunity to serve, and in some ways, mother, and look after others, as her own daughter is 27 now and less dependent. Fiona has been looking for ways to offer her gifts and love to others.

Every week a bread delivery comes to Villawood and, as COVID-19 limits the capacity





Fiona now helps collect donations for the Salvos at a local shopping centre.

of the usual Salvo workers, Fiona has taken on the role of managing this service. Residents in Villawood now get regular fresh bread and a chance to connect and engage through her.

Social isolation is a challenge for Fiona, and she can sometimes feel sad and anxious, but having people around that she trusts, and having a way to get involved in community life, has been good for her. She has missed the regular meals and interactions with the Salvos over the past few months and is looking forward to things slowly getting back to normal.

Fiona has been sharing more and more of her life with the Salvos at Villawood, especially since our female worker, Maryam, arrived. As she shares, she is finding that she is no longer judged but given grace and compassion. Recently, Fiona returned to a special place where her grandmother used to live and, with Maryam, she was able to resolve some issues in her heart and experience some significant healing.

Fiona's Catholic faith has never left her; she has a solid belief in God and a deep sense that God is love. She sees the heart of people rather than just their behaviour.

Villawood is a tough neighbourhood and there is often violence and all sorts of drug and alcohol use and abuse. But Fiona is a force for good in this community and has provided a welcoming table of food and friendship to heaps of people who often feel terrible about themselves. She gives them a go and tries to be gracious.

It's not always easy, but when you have experienced grace yourself, it is possible to find it in your heart for others.



Scan here for more on finding meaning.

## Gourmet rissoles Have a laugh



### Ingredients

1 tbs oil for frying vegetables, 1 onion, 1 small zucchini, 1 small carrot, 500g lean beef mince, 3 tbs dry breadcrumbs, salt and pepper to taste, 1 tbs Worcestershire sauce, 1 tbs barbecue sauce, 1 tbs tomato paste, 1 egg, 1 tbs oil for frying rissoles.

### Method

Heat oil and gently fry grated onion, zucchini and carrot. Set aside to cool.

To the vegetable mixture add mince, breadcrumbs, salt and pepper, Worcestershire sauce, barbecue sauce, tomato paste and beaten egg.

Combine well.

Divide mixture into equal portions (makes about 12). Roll each portion into a firm ball, then flatten balls slightly to make patties around 2.5cm thick.

Heat oil and cook patties around five minutes on each side, or until cooked through. Rissoles also cook well on a barbecue.



**Why were they called the Dark Ages?**  
Because there were lots of knights.



**Why don't eggs tell jokes?**  
They'd crack each other up.



**What kind of haircuts do bees get?**  
Buzzcuts.

## Bible byte

"The LORD is close to the brokenhearted; he rescues those whose spirits are crushed."

Psalm 34, verse 18  
*New Living Translation*

# Wordsearch

D D J F Q Z G H L B X J S T U  
 I E J Z K R I N V E R S I O N  
 S R Y T E L S A J Q O J H A H  
 P B H E H X O G I D N I X O  
 E T N S O G J L D P M G R O R  
 R Z E W B E I R U N I T B K I  
 S G E L G L O L O O S L J E Z  
 I R D N O P U I L P T A M U O  
 O S A F L I T E H W S Y A R N  
 N R C E O C V Y O U W D V G A  
 O D T P E G S B G W Y P U T W  
 P S E L Q I N S U N S H I N E  
 F F F D C I L L A F R E T A W  
 M E G S A R E F R A C T I O N  
 R B Y R Y E L L O W Z T H W Q

- |            |            |
|------------|------------|
| BLUE       | PHYSICS    |
| DISPERSION | RAINBOW    |
| DROPLETS   | RAYS       |
| FOG        | RED        |
| GREEN      | REFLECTION |
| HORIZON    | REFRACTION |
| INDIGO     | SHOWER     |
| INVERSION  | SUNSHINE   |
| LIGHT      | VIOLET     |
| MIST       | WATERFALL  |
| ORANGE     | YELLOW     |

# Quick quiz



1. A rainbow is a multi-coloured arc made by light striking what?
2. A rainbow is an optical illusion, the appearance of which depends on the position of the viewer and what else?
3. Which rainbow colour has the longest wavelength of visible light?
4. What forms when sunlight is reflected twice inside each water droplet?
5. According to an Irish legend, what can be found at the end of a rainbow?

# Tum-Tum



On which page of this week's *Salvos Magazine* is Tum-Tum hiding?

**Tum-Tum:** is hiding behind the rainbow on page 15.

**Answers:** 1. Water droplets. 2. The source of light. 3. Red. 4. A double rainbow. 5. A pot of gold.

# Did you know?

- Roosters have built-in earplugs.
- Continental plates drift at about the same rate as fingernails grow.
- Cats cannot taste anything sweet.

# Positive Lifestyle Program

The Salvation Army's Positive Lifestyle Program (PLP) is a fully supported eight-module course that helps you gain a deeper understanding of who you are as a person. It aims to build self-awareness, self-esteem and assertiveness, while also exploring issues such as discontentment, fear, anger and fatigue. The program covers:

- Self-awareness
- Anger
- Depression and loneliness
- Stress
- Grief and loss
- Assertiveness
- Self-esteem
- Future directions

For more information, or to register your interest, go to [salvationarmy.org.au/need-help/positive-lifestyle-program](https://salvationarmy.org.au/need-help/positive-lifestyle-program)

Please note that the Positive Lifestyle Program is not a crisis support service. If you require immediate emotional support, we recommend calling Lifeline on **13 11 14** or visit [beyondblue.org.au](https://beyondblue.org.au)