

COMPILED BY MELANIE STILES & DANNY WOODALL



THANK YOU FOR YOUR HERO

A Devotional Collection for Families of Fallen Soldiers



Help Us To Help Others! The authors of this devotional collection represents a collaborated effort to express sympathy, empathy, comfort and support to military families. These writers joined forces for a cause near and dear to all American hearts. All of the authors' proceeds from this book will be donated to FallenWarriors.org Foundation. The Foundation is committed to providing homes to the families of fallen heroes. Co-compiled by Melanie Stiles and Danny Woodall.

Thank You For Your Hero

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Thank You for Your Hero

A Devotional Collection

for

Fallen Warrior Families

Compiled by Melanie Stiles & Danny Woodall

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A Few Words.....

On September 28, 2011, PFC David Drake, my wife's nephew, was killed in Afghanistan. Our family will never forget the two weeks that followed. The waiting was nerve wrenching, but the military protocol impressive. We saw faith in action through numerous fellow Christians and began to receive the peace that passes all understanding over a period of time. The idea for this book was born from my experience during those two weeks. Knowing that David was one of the countless young men and women who paid the ultimate sacrifice for our nation, I wanted to help other families who would, by necessity, face loss and share our family's journey.

The authors of the devotional collection represent a collaborated effort from several writing groups in Texas: Agape Chapter of Inspirational Writers Alive! located in Beaumont, Texas; Taylor Chapter of the Inspirational Writers Alive! located in Taylor, Texas; and Writers Life Group, housed at Lakewood Church in Houston, Texas. These authors welcomed the opportunity to join forces for a cause near and dear to all American hearts. Their assignment was to express their own sympathy, empathy, comfort and support to family members and friends who have lost a loved one in the line of duty. Each writer delved into his or her own heart and medium using both poetry and prose. Each added a Call to Action for the reader to prayerfully speak to the individual journey of grief.

You also need to know that neither our magnificent cover designer, Robert Allen (Endeavor2Design.com.) nor any of our contributors will make money from your purchase of this book. All proceeds will be donated to FallenWarriors.org Foundation. The Foundation is a 501(c) organization committed to providing homes to the families of soldiers

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who have given their lives for our country. Information on the Foundation is located at: www.fallenwarriors.org.

A special thanks goes to Melanie Stiles, who, once again, showed the heart of a scribe. Thanks also to our publisher, Angela Hoy, at www.BookLocker.com, who has agreed to send all of the royalties from the book directly to the FallenWarriors.org Foundation.

My prayers for blessings and comfort go to all who end up with this book in their hands.

Danny Woodall

Author and Compiler

The Five Stages of Grief

The grief cycle is not rigid or sequential or even uniformly timed. Grief is as unique from one individual to another as fingerprints, however, just as we all have fingers, we all take on and live through some measure of the stages listed below:

STAGE ONE

Denial – a conscious or unconscious refusal to accept facts, information or reality in a situation.

STAGE TWO

Anger – directed at others or at self.

STAGE THREE

Bargaining – attempting to make a deal with God for the return of things as they were or even trading places.

STAGE FOUR

Depression – known as preparatory grieving and may mean different things to different people. Overall, depression includes emotional detachment from certain or all surroundings.

STAGE FIVE

Acceptance – an indication that some objectivity is returning.

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Thank You for Producing a Hero

by Lee Hardy, Jr.

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God. 2 Corinthians 1:3-4 (NIV)

It's because of your hero, I'm able to live life to the fullest and pursue my dreams.

I can't thank you enough for what you allowed your champion to do for me.

Words can't express how much your brave child means to this country.

What a person of valor my defender must have been to protect me even when he doesn't know me.

If I could, I would've loved to meet my fighter and tell him thanks as I shook his hand.

I have much respect for the troops of all military branches. When I say the pledge I make sure I stand.

I believe the values you taught your son, in some way, he shared with someone else.

So selfless, I'm sure my hero was something special to put our nation ahead of himself.

Thank You for Your Hero

How heroic, how courageous, how valiant your brave person must've
been.

To have the fortitude, audaciousness, and fearlessness to fight for what
was right

all the way to the end.

Our soldier will remain a constant reminder of what keeps America
beautiful.

Our hero is in a better place now because his pride and his heart was
immovable.

You should be proud. I know you did your very best.

For your loss, I pray that God be with you and you will be forever
blessed.

Your hero is my hero.

Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, I pray for each and every member of the
armed forces who has served or those currently serving today. I pray for
their protection, their health and overall well-being. Keep them
encouraged and uplifted at all times. Amen.

From Strength to Strength

by Michelle Flippin

Blessed are those who dwell in Your house; they are ever praising You.
Blessed are those whose strength is in You, whose hearts are set on pilgrimage. As they pass through the Valley of Baka, they make it a place of springs; the autumn rains also cover it with pools. They go from strength to strength, till each appears before God in Zion.
Psalm 84:4-7 (NIV)

The news struck me with such force that I fell to my knees. I buried my face in my hands and cried out in defiance. “No! No! No!” Just as I did then, I sometimes still ask why my loved one had to die.

A longing for simple pleasures of the past—the sound of my name on their lips, the warmth of their touch—overwhelms me at times. Emotional anguish blankets me in darkness, hindering my view and any steps forward. In these moments, I struggle to see, not only my way, but also the coming light of a new day.

Staying in this place of loss and pain for long stifles me. But turning to the Lord and taking refuge in His presence frees me to move forth. The hope of a brighter tomorrow propels me on; and before long, praise pours from my mouth.

God provides sweet companionship and refreshment when we’re lonely and tired. In the embrace of His everlasting arms, we find true comfort and healing. His tears mingle with ours to water the dry, barren places in our soul and nurture a harvest of life-giving joy.

God’s love can fill the void in our hearts. When we determine to focus on Him and leave behind our disappointments and unanswered

Thank You for Your Hero

questions, we progress from one level of strength to another. His power moves us through the valley of suffering and sorrow. Looking straight ahead, our path and our destination become clear in the radiance of God's glory.

Prayer: Lord, help us go on praising You.

Call to Action: Take a walk. As you put one foot in front of the other, look ahead and praise God for His refreshment, strength, and blessings yet to come.

A Friend

by Alex Buchanan

Faithful are the wounds from a friend, but the kisses of an enemy are
deceitful.

Proverbs 27:6 (KJV)

A friend is there at all times no matter what you are going through.

A friend never criticizes when you make a mistake or go the wrong way.

A friend is strength in time of need.

A friend is silence when words won't soothe the pain.

A friend is a call when you least expect it.

A friend loves when no love can be found.

A friend gives himself but expects nothing in return.

A friend like this is truly a gem, I agree,

There is a friend who gave Himself for you and me.

When everyone has deserted you and a friend can't be found;

There is one who is true and sound ----- Jesus Christ.

Thank You for Your Hero

Prayer: Lord, in my despair, I need You to be my friend.

Call to Action: Prayer is not talking to ourselves, but to God who cares about us. Set time aside to talk to your friend.

The First Christmas Eve

by Danny Woodall

Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!

Philippians 4:4 (HCSB)

Thanksgiving was gone. That was hard enough, but now it was Christmas Eve. The Bible tells us to rejoice in the Lord. How could we rejoice knowing that our nephew, PFC David Drake, would never be with us on Christmas Eve? He died on patrol in late September in Afghanistan. The evening was bittersweet, yet we rejoiced in the Lord. Looking back over the events, we can see how God prepared us for what we would face.

First, his mother, Tommy Ann Drake, after raising three children as a single mom, remarried in March. Her husband, Stephen Rivers, previously served in the military and he was able to help her deal with all of the military protocol. Then her son, William, had been serving in Iraq and was home on leave when the news came of his brother's death. Finally, our pastor, Dr. David Mahfouz, mentioned in his Sunday night sermon about his college professors telling him of students lost in various wars. My son, Matthew, was at the service. He did not realize how real the sermon would become three days later.

The odds of all four things happening; the marriage to a veteran; the brother at home; the sermon and David's death are extremely rare. The chance of all these incidents happening in that order is off the chart. The skeptic will sneer and say it was just fate, but we see the hand of a loving

Thank You for Your Hero

God. He knew the road we would travel and prepared the way. Losing a loved one in battle is never easy, but God knows what we are going through. All we have to do is depend on him.

Prayer: Thank you, Lord, for preparing the way for me.

Call to Action: Think about how God has helped through trial. If you cannot think of any way He has been there for you, ask a friend.

Reassigned

by Delena Richeson

Then I heard a voice from heaven say, "Write: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on." "Yes," says the Spirit, "they will rest from their labor, for their deeds will follow them."

Revelations 14:13 (NIV)

As I watched you each morning, getting dressed for work, you'd smile; for your job was like no other. Yours had purpose and calling. You were chosen, trained, and born to be a soldier. This duty cannot be fulfilled by just any. It takes devotion and passion. Few are willing to make the sacrifice and take the risk that you did. It was your responsibility to defend and protect. You did not take this call lightly; for I was one of the many you devoutly kept safe. You knew if it weren't for brave men and women like you, we would not have the life of freedom we so joyously love. You preserved our livelihood and gave us liberty. You were alert, prepared, and always ready for battle. You knew what was worth fighting for; you were courageous. Day in and day out you gladly rose to your work. You are my hero, my pride. I fight back tears because now you are gone. I know you wouldn't want me to have regrets or be dismayed. You accepted that giving your life to serve and defend those you love might be part of your journey. I know you are telling me to be strong. You wouldn't have it any other way. You want me to be proud and remember your life, instead of living in regret. How can I be angry, when I am so proud? You are my hero. You were so honored to be a soldier. Earth lost one soldier so Heaven could gain you. You were promoted from earthly defender to Heavenly protector. You were and always will be a soldier; you have gladly accepted your new mission in Heaven amidst the Invisible Army of God.

Thank You for Your Hero

Prayer: Heavenly Father, comfort my heart by reminding me my soldier is now on assignment for You until we are reunited in Glory! In Jesus' Mighty Name. Amen.

Call to Action: Today, write a favorite “war story” your loved one shared with you.

In His Shadow

by Lilly Anne Stevens

He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty. Psalm 91:1 (NIV)

On this particular day, John and Helen Collins were flying to Georgia to visit with their son. While piloting the plane, John, at age eighty, collapsed from heart failure at the controls of his twin engine Cessna. Helen knew she had to take over and fly the plane, despite the fact that she last piloted thirty years before. The situation didn't look good when Robert Vuksanovi flew alongside Helen's plane to position his plane next to her plane's wing. Robert led Helen through several practice runs before she would attempt a landing. Helen bravely took on the challenge. In spite of her insecurities, fear and a fairly hard landing, Helen successfully reached the ground.

We go through frightening situations in our lives that feel very shaky. We don't see how we are going to be able to fly our plane, much less land it. We feel frail and the task at hand seems monumental. As I picture Mr. Vuksanovi hovering next to Helen's plane, I remember Psalm 91:1. I remind myself that he who *dwells* in the shelter of the Most High will *rest* in the shadow of the Almighty. God knows we are rejuvenated and strengthened as we live in faith and trust confidently in His protection. We will find rest in His shadow.

Thank You for Your Hero

Prayer: Father God, we praise and thank You for Your divine protection. We stay steadfast in Your faithfulness to carry us through even in the scariest situations we may encounter. Thank You for covering us with Your wings and guiding us to safety. Amen

Call to Action: Despite fears and insecurities, decide to trust God.

Soldiers Walk Forever

by Thomas Ames

And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession—to the praise of his glory. Ephesians 1:13-14 (NIV)

In righteousness you stand today, united with love for the light that shines in your heart. We welcome strength and understanding into our very beings, as we hold the banner high standing together through this difficult time. The nation praises your sacrifice made with honor. We, citizens of America, give our hearts to you, as love for goodness prevails, in a time such as this.

The sun rises on the day, as you remember the past and love shared in. The difficult moments hold you down while looking inward and letting go of the sadness brought into your life by the misfortunes of war. Sometimes you stand on the edge of understanding, but fall back in despair, until a deeper sense pulls you up and gives the fortitude needed to make it one more day.

The wave of time has swept over you, washing your hopes and dreams away. Your very bones suffer in agony for understanding, yet all the while knowing you must go on. Light shines into the future to guide your steps. During this time, there is a way to continue the path you have started. Life renewed by God. You have the strength of the Lord within you to accomplish anything you desire. After you have shed your tears; rise through the strength within you to a brighter day ahead, looking to the future. Now is your time to stand, as the strength and power of God is within you.

Thank You for Your Hero

Prayer: O Lord, live in the souls of the loved ones left behind as You bring Your peace to the earth. Amen.

Call to Action: Ask Jesus Christ into your life today. He understands all you have been through and is ready to give the free gifts of love, healing, strength, peace, joy and hope.

STAGE ONE: The Pace of Grief

by Melanie Stiles

The Lord is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed
in spirit. Psalm 34:18 (NIV)

When my husband told me to call an ambulance for my grandmother, I failed to see a valid reason for doing so. Nevertheless, a few days later, she went to be with the Lord. I never saw her death coming. The ensuing six months are still a dim, foggy memory.

I had children to raise as well as a job I dared not quit because we needed the income. People everywhere expected me to carry on with life's routines, but all I felt was a general numbness. No sorrow yet, and no joy. Every morning started with an overwhelming urge to stay in bed, yet I managed each day's activities in mechanical manner. I kept wondering how I made it through another day. I tried in vain to find my old self – the one filled with energy and a zest for life. Looking back, I realize I harbored unrealistic expectations and a huge lack of understanding about grief.

Denial is only the first stage of the journey. Feeling lost and disconnected happens to be the processes through which God designed our minds, hearts and bodies to pace our feelings of grief. These feelings are what help us to survive our loss. This important defense mechanism is His way of saying, "I care and will see you through – take as long as you need."

Thank You for Your Hero

Prayer: Lord, help me to realize You are with me throughout every day and every step of my grieving process. I can depend on You when nothing else makes sense.

Call to Action: Don't force yourself to fly through the grief process for the benefit of those around you. Realize every individual must take whatever time is needed to process loss.

Pumpkin Patch Prayers

by Danny Woodall

Trust in Him at all times, you people; pour out your hearts before Him.
God is our refuge. Selah Psalm 62:7-9 (HCSB)

In the trial of Alger Hiss, key documents were found on a farm in Maryland. These documents became known as the Pumpkin Papers. The name comes from the fact that the rolls of 35 mm film were found wrapped in waxed paper inside a hollowed-out pumpkin on Whittaker Chamber's Maryland farm. In response to a government subpoena, Chambers, on the evening of December 2, 1948 led two investigators to the patch where the film had been placed. What was hidden suddenly was unearthed.

When we first heard the news of our loss, we felt overwhelmed. Often, our first reaction is to bury our hurt. We rationalize that God isn't interested. He's too busy with feeding starving children or caring for victims of natural disasters. He is waiting for us to call on Him all of the time. Our God is a God of the bad times as well as the good ones. Grief is His specialty as He forfeited His one and only Son. We can't deal with our hurt on our own. When we put off turning to Him, we only make matters worse.

God knows how you feel. There's no need to try and hide your grief from God. Open up the hollowed out parts of your heart where you have buried your hurt. Let God help you begin the healing process.

Thank You for Your Hero

Prayer: Teach me to open up the secret places of my heart to You.

Call to Action: This week read the Book of Psalms and notice how open David was with God. Put David's method of praying into practice.

Melody of Love

by Chris Lee

Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us
from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Romans 5:5 (KJV)

Once we know about true, unconditional love, it is hard to take God's love for granted. Love is God's true embodiment. It will remain through any storm - including death. Agape love bolsters faith to trust from the heart, bursting forth in thankfulness.

The years we shared with our loved one are precious, forever cherished and embedded in our memory. God is too wise and faithful to make mistakes. His plans are far greater than our mind can conceive. Love is for all people, not just our limited circle. The buffet of life is too grand for dining only on one meal. Or all alone.

It is time to remove the borders. We almost feel guilty for moving forward to happier days: smiling, laughing and remembering the good times we shared with our loved one. But, we don't have to feel guilty. We have a weapon: power found in the Name of Jesus. We can choose to take authority over grief and self-pity and tell them, "Beat it! Leave me alone in Jesus' Name!" Choose to leave those heavy suitcases at the foot of the Calvary's Cross. Jesus does not mind meeting us in our present situation. He understands.

Everyone is called for God's plan and purpose, but few choose to follow His call. Choose to walk in love, not harboring bitterness, anger, defeat or malice. Have an attitude of thankfulness and gratitude. Smile. Hold your head up. Focus on Jesus. Don't lock and limit your future.

Thank You for Your Hero

Your journey is not over. Some of your best and blessed life experiences are about to spring forth in the days ahead.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, help me to keep a thankful and appreciative heart. When I miss the mark, help me to reload my arrow and shoot again, remembering I am loved beyond measure. A high price was paid for my freedom. Today, I choose to walk in that freedom. My heart will burst forth in love. Amen.

Call to Action: When you wake up in the morning, before your feet hit the floor, start with a heart of gratitude. Whisper, “Thank You” to God! By choosing to declare thanks to God, you calibrate your mind and charge the atmosphere with expectancy and courage to make it through the day. God inhabits the praises of His people. Love never fails.

God and Trial

by Irma Bozardt

Then Jesus said, “Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Matthew 11:28 (NLT)

Anguish surrounds you. You can barely take in another breath. It is so painful. You have been there before, extending your sympathies to others. This time things are different. It's your turn. Your loved one has left your heart aching. Yet, there is someone who is calling out to you. He is beckoning with His arms wide open to receive you and give you rest. Jesus is His Name. The One you can go to when you are weary and carrying heavy burdens. He is where you will find restoration and peace.

Sometimes, as we are facing insurmountable trials, we feel that no one can possibly understand how very deep the wound is that we carry. God knows what you are going through. He cares about everything that concerns you. He loves you because you are His child.

As we navigate through the ups and downs of being tossed about in grief, God gives us the strength we need to persevere. Trust in Him and believe He has a good plan for your future. There will be better days ahead. You can expect unexplained joy and peace because you trusted in Him.

Thank You for Your Hero

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank you for Your protection as I move forward. I ask for healing and strength for what lies ahead. Amen

Call to Action: Continue to celebrate the wonderful life of your soldier. Do your best to support others who have lost those who they hold dear.

Memories

by Jeff Champion

The Lord is close to the brokenhearted; he restores those whose spirits
are crushed. Psalm 34:18 (NLT)

As we search our memories of the one who was taken, there is always hurt, but we would do well to explore the unique love he or she shared with family and friends. Remember playing as brothers and sisters in the family room? Or helping Mom or Dad in the kitchen? Close your eyes and envision them. Now adjust your perspective enough to see them standing beside Jesus. He is watching over them and keeping them safe now. He will be beside Him until you meet again.

Your memories will always be with you to cherish and return you to moments of happiness. They may also bring a few tears to your eyes, but picture Jesus holding the hand of your loved one and receive the peace and joy that comes from knowing you will have an eternity together.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, I ask you to guide me through the healing process to the place where my memories are joyous and I can receive the peace that comes only from You.

Call to Action: Know that your loved one will never be forgotten for what they have done for our country, as well as the love they shared with family and friends.

Thank You for Your Hero

No Advertisement

by Danny Woodall

The intelligent person restrains his words. Proverbs 17:27 (HCSB)

My dad, Arthur Woodall, served in the army during World War II. He hardly ever spoke of his experiences during the war. This is often the case. The closer to the action, the less a veteran will speak. Maybe with fellow army buddies, he will talk about the war, but to those who were not there, he keeps silent. The horror of a firefight or bombs exploding is not the stuff of polite conversation. Neither is sleeping on frozen turf in World War II, walking through steamy jungles in Vietnam, or enduring blinding sand in the desert. The veteran indeed restrains his or her words.

When our loved one is gone, we know that we will never hold a conversation with them here on earth again, but the dead do speak. The unspoken message is a life sacrificed, lives changed and a freedom preserved. While we must deal with our grief, we should remember that they did not die for us to become a prisoner of misery. They would want us to enjoy the freedom they have provided.

The Bible speaks of a war waged on Calvary's Hill. The cross speaks of a life sacrificed, lives changed, and spiritual freedom preserved. The empty tomb declares Satan's defeat. May we never forget the blood shed for our nation's freedom and may we never forget the blood shed on the cross.

A Devotional Collection for Fallen Warrior Families

Prayer: Father thank you for giving us your Son, so that we may have spiritual freedom.

Call to Action: When you are ready, find a way to enjoy Memorial Day. Your loved one is gone, but not forgotten.

Thank You for Your Hero

Thank You for Your Sacrifice

by Irma Bozardt

But you, Lord, are a shield around me; you are my glory; the one who holds my head high. Psalm 3:3 (NLT)

You knew what to do! You've rehearsed it in your mind many times and when they left to return to their unit, you knew what to do. You prayed and asked God to protect them and their fellow soldiers from any danger or harm. Yes, you knew what to do. They were warriors like no others, courageous and fearless. God was on their side. Everyone respected them. They were born leaders who displayed valor and, oh yes, they loved being soldiers. It was ingrained into their souls and wrapped around the faith that held them together.

Those who are called to join the military are a special kind of people who serve our country with dignity, devotion and patriotism. They are our heroes who have given all to protect a nation and its people; from the sergeant to the colonel. They have all answered the call.

Though you may not have been prepared for the outcome, please know that God and a grateful nation stand with you. You knew what to do early on and I am confident that you know what to do now. Seek God. Let Him show you the way. His love endures forever. Be strong and do not be afraid. He will hold your head high.

A Devotional Collection for Fallen Warrior Families

Prayer: Father, we ask for your healing, comfort and peace to move forward into the plans you have for us. In Jesus' Name. Amen.

Call to Action: Continue your efforts as you move forward by using your time, gifts and compassion to lessen the pain of others. Treat them as you know your hero would want them treated.

Thank You for Your Hero

Sergeant Stubby

by Arlene Woodall

Teaching them to observe everything I have commanded you. And
remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.

Matthew 28:20 (HCSB)

War dogs are a vital part of our military. In World War I, Sergeant Stubby was a decorated canine. He protected the men in his unit by hearing the whine of incoming rockets and detecting nerve gas. A veteran of seventeen battles, he once helped capture a German spy holding him by the seat of his pants until soldiers could complete the capture. Sergeant Stubby remained faithful in the midst of battle. After the war he became a celebrity, marching in parades and attending every American Legion Convention until his death. The story of Sergeant Stubby can be found in the book *Paws to Protect* by Sharon Sakson.

When we are going through the grieving process, we feel like we are going through a war. We struggle to get through each day. The Bible tells us that Jesus will always be with us- no matter what. At the time Jesus spoke to His disciples, He knew they would have to face hardships, and even death. They needed to know they were not forsaken. In the midst of our grief, we need to remember no one is as faithful as Jesus. He will never leave us or forsake us. He alone knows the end.

A Devotional Collection for Fallen Warrior Families

Prayer: Jesus, help me to remember that you are with me no matter what I face. Amen.

Call to Action: When you feel like you are all alone, sit down and write a letter to Jesus. Tell Him all that you have to face. Thank Him for being with you as you travel along the road of grief.



Help Us To Help Others! The authors of this devotional collection represents a collaborated effort to express sympathy, empathy, comfort and support to military families. These writers joined forces for a cause near and dear to all American hearts. All of the authors' proceeds from this book will be donated to FallenWarriors.org Foundation. The Foundation is committed to providing homes to the families of fallen heroes. Co-compiled by Melanie Stiles and Danny Woodall.

Thank You For Your Hero

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