



HEARTBROKEN

HEALING FROM THE
LOSS OF A SPOUSE

PRAISE FOR *HEARTBROKEN*

In *Heartbroken*, Roe touches on every kind of marriage, including those where the relationship wasn't good. He nicely describes the various emotions surviving spouses feel from shock, to tears that refuse to stop, to anger, to numbness. Most of us who have lost a spouse felt many of those emotions. Or the pain may have been so deep we temporarily felt nothing.

– Cecil Murphey, widower and *New York Times* Bestselling author of more than 130 books including *90 Minutes in Heaven* and *Gifted Hands: The Ben Carson Story*.

Heartbroken is excellent. Sensitive, comforting, and practical, it will help widows and widowers walk through the valley of grief and begin to heal. I highly recommend it.

– Paul Casale, Licensed Marriage-Family Therapist and Mental Health Counselor

Gary Roe's *Heartbroken* is a look at the reality of grief that is long overdue. Not only is it a healing tool for those experiencing the loss of a spouse, but it should be required reading for every pastor. I highly recommend *Heartbroken* to anyone experiencing grief or involved with those who are.

– Dr. Tony Taylor, Senior Pastor,
Hilltop Lakes Chapel

Heartbroken will be recommended reading to be used with my clients. As a Licensed Professional Therapist, loss is frequently the presenting problem and often times it has been unresolved from years past. Gary's stories and insight are relatable and relevant to the grieving soul.

– Carrie Andree, Licensed
Professional Counselor

Anyone grieving the death of a spouse will find this book a welcome addition to the challenge of facing life without someone so special. More than a book of platitudes or theories, *Heartbroken* is filled with practical ways to handle this painful and difficult situation. In a simple yet powerful format, Roe brings meaning and inspiration, and facilitates the presence of hope and comfort, all crucial for those who grieve.

– Dr. Craig Borchardt, President
and CEO, Hospice Brazos Valley

Through real life experiences and sound advice, Roe helps grieving spouses navigate the turbulent waters of loss. His caring heart for people shines through his words and allows him to speak honestly in helpful ways. *Heartbroken* will be an invaluable resource to anyone who is grieving or knows someone who is.

– Troy Allen, Senior Pastor, First
Baptist Church, College Station

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Heartbroken not only helps in navigating through the emotions of loss but it allows grievors to feel as if we are not alone. Roe has been a hospice chaplain for years and not only understands the process but has the empathy and compassion to feel with his grievors. This book is a must read for anyone who has lost a loved one.

– Kimberly Dafferner, author and
Hospice Licensed Medical Social Worker

Heartbroken is exactly what one is after you have lost a spouse. There is no other way to sum up how you feel. I just wish I had this book when I lost my husband to cancer. The quotes in this book from others who have gone through this grief process would have been such a help to me. Every person should have this book to guide them as they begin their journey of grief.

– Norma Millsap, widow

Heartbroken is a very concise, well-organized, and easy-to-read book that describes, affirms, and validates the uniqueness of the grief experienced by one who has lost a spouse. The insights and interviews given by the grieving spouses offer far more impact than if the author had just described the feelings.

– Eleanor Ford, widow

Heartbroken was just what I needed 15 months after my husband's death. I was fatigued and this book reminded me that is to be expected - that emotions cycle through occasionally, without warning, for years after a loss. It was what I needed to hear, delivered in a kind and upbeat tone. I will keep this wonderful resource handy for years to come.

– Kelli Levey, widow

I have been widowed for 5 1/2 years. *Heartbroken* touched on every emotion I have experienced in that time. Gary has a way of taking a very hard subject and bringing it to a level I can identify with.

– Leslie Gillespie, widow and Regional
Director, Curo Health Services

Do you find yourself telling others, “My husband (or wife) died recently...” just to hear it again and try to believe it? Does grief still take your breath away at times? Do you wonder how ANYONE really survives such a loss? Many questions that you may have are answered in *Heartbroken* on single, easy to read pages.

– Lois Brokenborough, widow

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GARY ROE



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INTRODUCTION

I'm sorry.

If you're reading this book, chances are you're enduring one of the greatest losses a human being can experience.

You've lost your spouse.

A UNIQUE LOSS

This death is unlike any other. She was your partner. He was your soul mate. The two of you became one. Now you feel less than whole. It seems like part of you died too.

Perhaps your marriage was strained, and now the hope for anything different is gone. Maybe regrets piled up over the years. This is a different kind of pain.

As a hospice chaplain and pastor, I've had the honor of serving hundreds of widows and widowers as they walk through this difficult and confusing valley. I've been astounded by their honesty and inspired by their courage. It's their pain, wisdom, and healing that I share with you in this book.

IN THIS BOOK...

In the following pages, you'll find over 60 readings inspired by the words and experiences of grieving widows and widowers.

Each entry...

- addresses a specific challenge bereaved spouses face
- contains an affirmation designed to encourage healthy grieving
- concludes with a related thought and inspirational quote

The readings are divided into three parts:

Part One: Managing the Emotions- addresses the raw and difficult emotions involved in your loss.

Part Two: Navigating the Relationships - focuses on your relationships and the role other people can play in your recovery and healing.

Part Three: Leaning Forward - looks at how to re-engage in life and accept your new normal.

Here's an important thing to remember: *Each reading stands on its own, so they can be tackled in any order.*

You may decide to read them sequentially. Or you might jump around, depending on what you happen to be dealing with on any given day. It's up to you. Listen to your heart.

Some entries will be more emotional than others. Some will not be easy or fun. Don't get in a hurry. Take your time. Consider keeping a journal and writing personal responses to each reading. Processing your thoughts and feelings is crucial to healthy grieving.

Each of the three main sections begins and ends with

a chapter designed to help you move through your grief process. In addition, I've included some supplementary material with suggestions and resources to help you recover and heal.

THIS ISN'T EASY

Grieving is hard work. I'm glad you've decided to invest in doing it well. You're taking care of you, and that's the best thing you can do for yourself and those around you.

So, hang on. The ride may get bumpy. Move ahead at your own pace. Let the words of fellow griever sink in and touch your heart.

You're not crazy, and you're far from alone.

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I work as a hospice chaplain and grief specialist. I am not a Licensed Professional Counselor and none of my content is meant to diagnose or treat any disease or disorder.

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PART ONE

MANAGING THE EMOTIONS

Grieving is the natural way of working through the loss of a love.

Grieving is not weakness nor absence of faith.

Grieving is as natural as crying when you are hurt, sleeping when you are tired or sneezing when your nose itches.

It is nature's way of healing a broken heart.
– Doug Manning



THOSE CRAZY EMOTIONS

“When did they offer the roller-coaster training? Somehow I missed that.”

– Sally, a hospice patient

Grief does strange things to us. It pummels our hearts and rattles our souls. It’s confusing and unnerving. We can be shocked by its depth and power, especially when we lose a spouse.

To say that our emotions are stirred by our partner’s death is a gross understatement. Our feelings hijack us and threaten to take over our entire existence. It’s a rough and unpredictable ride. Like hospice patient Sally above, most of us are ill-equipped for the onslaught of this emotional roller-coaster.

THE NORMAL BALANCE OF REASON AND EMOTION IS GONE

Human beings are both emotional and rational beings. Some of us operate more on emotion, while others trust more in reason. Which one tends to dominate and how much depends on a variety of factors like background, experience, gifts, talents, and personality. Each of us has a natural sort of equilibrium, a balance of emotion

and reason that we settle into in the midst of routine, everyday life.

When grief strikes, this equilibrium is upended. Our usual balance of emotion-reason cracks under the strain. The heart exerts itself, and emotion floods our being.

As Sam put it, "I never knew I was capable of feeling such things. I'm suddenly an emotional basket case. I'm not myself at all."

The truth is, Sam was still himself, but he was in a very different situation. Something traumatic occurred. His wife died. Powerful emotions surged forth from deep within him. Because his feelings took up a lot more space than usual, his reason naturally got squeezed into the backseat.

In other words, having roller-coaster emotions during this time is *normal*.

UP, DOWN, AND ALL AROUND

"How am I doing? Up, down, and all around. My emotions are all over the map," Sandra shared.

Grief emotions come in all shapes and sizes, ranging from mild to severe:

- Shock, numbness, feeling nothing
- Sadness, sorrow, depression
- Fear, dread, terror
- Irritability, anger, rage
- Nervousness, anxiety, panic

Some feelings are fairly constant, like a dull ache in the heart. They form a new atmosphere of sorrow that surrounds the death of a spouse. Others are like sudden, sharp daggers. They strike like lightning. As one widow put it, "It's like a thousand needles have been thrust into my soul."

How do you deal with this complicated quagmire of emotions?

It begins with recognizing a key truth about feelings.

A FOUNDATIONAL TRUTH ABOUT EMOTIONS

There is a foundational truth about emotions that everyone in grief (and not in grief, for that matter) needs to know: *Feelings are not facts. They are just emotions.*

In other words, your feelings are *real*, but they are not *reality*.

Here are some examples:

You might feel very alone. Are you? Yes, in the sense that your loss is unique. But in another sense, you are never alone. Many have endured the death of a spouse, and many are going through it now.

You could feel like you're going crazy or about to come unhinged. Are you? Probably not. But you are in a crazy situation compared to "normal" life. Everything has changed. No wonder you question your sanity.

You might have increased anxiety and even panic attacks. You could feel like you're going to die or the world is going to end. Anxiety is a natural reaction to loss. Your system is being hit by grief. All is not lost, and you will get through this.

Again, feelings are not facts. Emotions are real, but they are not reality.

So what do you do?

HANDLING THOSE CRAZY EMOTIONS

How do you handle these crazy emotions?

Feelings are meant to be felt. When the emotion comes, acknowledge it.

“I feel sad.”

“I’m really angry right now.”

“I feel so alone. I feel empty and depressed.”

Simply voicing feelings out loud has tremendous value. Some people keep a “feeling journal,” where they can write their emotions uncensored. Others share freely and honestly in a support group setting or with trusted friends.

As you acknowledge the emotion and feel it, you’re processing what’s happening in your mind and heart. You’re opening yourself up to grieve well and to begin to recover and heal.

Emotions must be felt. Let them be what they are. When you do this, you honor your spouse. By taking your emotions seriously, you’re telling your loved one (and yourself) how important they are to you and how much you love them.

BEWARE IMPULSIVE DECISION-MAKING

Feelings are sneaky. They can dupe you. They can come on so strong at times you’ll doubt your ability to deal with them. You’ll want to run.

Grief emotions can be oppressive. They can wear you down to where you might be willing to do almost anything to feel better.

That’s the danger zone.

Remember the basic truth about emotions: *Feelings are*

not facts. They are real, but they are not reality. Acknowledge and feel them, but don't go making major, life-changing decisions based on them.

The desire to feel better can push people to unhealthy decision-making like hasty relationships and poor financial choices. People can revert to old addictions, or pursue new ones. This time of grief is hard enough. You don't want or need a pile of regrets on top of it all to deal with later.

A counselor friend of mine says, "The only way out of the pain is through it." Grief is real. It is designed to be felt. Healthy grieving is one of the keys to healing your broken heart.

WE ALL NEED REASSURANCE

Most of us who are grieving need reassurance. Perhaps you do too. While grieving, you need to know that:

You're not alone.

You're not crazy.

You're going to be okay.

In the readings that follow, widows and widowers share with you their roller-coaster journeys in handling the crazy emotions of grief. Chances are, your heart will resonate with their words and you'll see yourself in their stories.

Emotions will surface. As they come, acknowledge and feel them.

Don't get in a hurry. Take your time.

Be nice to yourself.

Remember to breathe.

It's not that death came now, but that it came at all.



“THIS CAN’T BE HAPPENING”

“This can’t be happening. This isn’t real. No, no, no!” Sandra said, as she laid her head next to her husband’s.

Mark had just passed of pancreatic cancer. He had done well for a while, and then suddenly declined. Sandra and the rest of the family had been shocked by the speed of it all.

“No. You can’t be gone. You just can’t be gone,” she whispered.

You knew this was going to happen someday. You understood that most likely one of you would be left behind. But when the day of separation came, it felt wrong somehow. You were meant to be together. Forever.

And now, there is this shocking emptiness.

It’s not just that death came now, but that it came at all.

“I don’t want this to be real. I love you too much.”

Shock is our first response to loss.

It's natural, and it's designed to protect our hearts.



“I’M STUNNED”

Steve sat on a park bench, staring at the trees in the distance.

“I’m stunned,” he said with a sigh.

Steve’s wife Jennifer had just died of breast cancer. She’d been fighting the disease for years and had finally succumbed. Steve had hardly uttered a word since.

“I’m just stunned,” he repeated.

It feels like you’ve been punched in the gut or hit by a large truck. You’re in a daze. Life seems to be moving in slow motion. Someone pushed the pause button on your heart.

But it’s more than that. Perhaps this is worse than anything else that has happened to you.

Of course you’re stunned. How could you not be? Your partner is gone.

“I’m stunned. I should be.”

Grief is like an emotional concussion.

It leaves us stunned and shaken.

“When one person is missing the whole world seems empty.”

— Pat Schweibert, *Tear Soup: A Recipe for Healing After Loss*



ABOUT THE AUTHOR



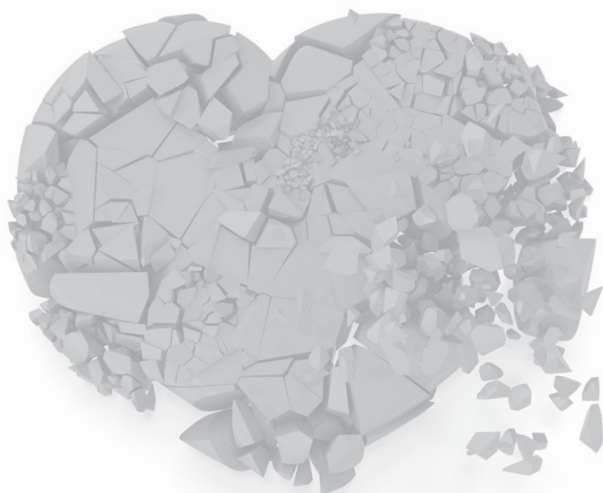
Gary's story began with a childhood of mixed messages and sexual abuse. This was followed by other losses and numerous grief experiences.

Ultimately, a painful past led Gary into a life of helping wounded people heal and grow. A former college minister, missionary in Japan, entrepreneur in Hawaii, and pastor in Texas and Washington, he now serves as a writer, speaker, and chaplain with Hospice Brazos Valley in Central Texas.

Gary is the author of *Surviving the Holidays without You* and the co-author (with New York Times Bestseller Cecil Murphey) of *Saying Goodbye* and *Not Quite Healed* (Finalist, 2013 Lime Award for Excellence in Non-Fiction, 2013 Top 50 Non-Fiction Book List). His other recovery resources include the *Good Grief Mini-Course*

and the e-books *Never Alone* and *I Miss You*, available at www.garyroe.com. He also writes columns for several newspapers and is a popular speaker at a wide range of venues.

Gary loves being a husband and father. He has seven children, including three adopted Colombian daughters. He enjoys swimming, corny jokes, and cool Hawaiian shirts. Visit him on the web at www.garyroe.com and on Facebook at www.facebook.com/garyroeauthor .



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