

DEVOTIONS *for the* UNEMPLOYED
and THOSE WHO LOVE THEM

HOW LONG, O LORD, HOW LONG?



DALE KREIENKAMP

excerpts from

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INTRODUCTION

It was the best of times, it was the worst of times... The opening line of Charles Dickens' novel *A Tale of Two Cities* is very appropriate for the journey of unemployment. If you are reading this book, you (or someone you know) has lost their job, which is the beginning of an amazing journey. When the journey is complete it's possible to look back and remember some of the most wonderful moments of joy in your life, truly the "best of times." But you will also remember heartaches along the way, which, in looking back, won't seem as significant as they did "in the moment." I can tell you from personal experience, when you are "in the moment" of heartache, it can feel overwhelming, "the worst of times." The good news is the joy in this journey can far outweigh the heartache.

If you aren't currently experiencing unemployment, but your spouse or someone you care about is, this book will help you understand what's going on in their life. It will give you a glimpse into their world, the many emotions, challenges, and heartaches they will experience. You'll be able to take a little "walk in their shoes" with them. With a better understanding, you will be a better support for them.

In today's world, being unemployed isn't uncommon and probably represents more of a "norm" for workers, as organizations often choose to shed the "expense" of employees and their salaries to meet a goal, meet the bottom line target, or

to be more efficient. While it's not uncommon, it isn't something people talk about; they just silently hope being unemployed doesn't happen to them.

The loss of a job is a major life event, and it shouldn't be underestimated. Look at any list of the most stressful life events and you will surely find "loss of a job" ranked high. Why? For most of us the connection to a job is twofold: 1) It is another "community" of people we are connected to and work with, full of close personal relationships where we often spend more hours than we do with our family. 2) For many of us, our "identity" is tied up in what we do for a living.

The good news is that your period of unemployment, no matter how long it lasts, **will end**. You will find something new or begin to do something different; the questions are *what*, *where*, and *when*. In fact, God already knows what he has in store for you. He wants us to go through this process, to rely on him, to draw us closer to him. The good news is when we get there, it will be awesome and full of joy. But while you are waiting for it to end, you may often utter the cry I did, the same cry of the psalmist David long before us: *My soul is in anguish. How long, O LORD, how long?* (Psalm 6:3).

MY STORY

Most of us don't spend much time thinking about the loss of a job. You know it can happen, but you don't expect it yourself. I've been through this process twice in my life, once after working 25 years for the same organization and once after 10 years. Both times I was fully committed to my place of work, sacrificing

my personal life and time with family and friends, all for the sake of doing my job well and advancing the mission of the organization. I was good at what I did too, but in the end, it didn't matter how good I was at my job.

My profession has been as a human resources executive. Because of my background, I already knew some things about the process of employment (finding jobs), but I received a “master's degree in life” during my first period of unemployment. It was then that I first began to draft many of these devotions, but I moved on and the drafts stayed on the shelf.

Then, 15 years later, it happened again to me, and I earned my “Ph.D.” on the subject. It was during this time that I knew God wanted me to finish this work to help others who were going through the same experience. These experiences gave me a new perspective, brought me even closer to my wife, my children and my good friends, all whom were a source of strength, love and support throughout my unemployment.

During my periods of unemployment, I never liked telling people I was “out of work,” “between jobs,” or “in transition”—all phrases that get used often. I preferred to tell people I was on *sabbatical*, which is a break from your work, a period of rest that might last from a couple of months to a year. As I look back, that's what I needed, and I believe you too might need one now. During your “sabbatical” you are in for an emotional journey of “ups” and “downs.” It's a ride that no one can really prepare you for; you will just have to experience it.

I've shared the same two thoughts with many people when talking about this experience. I wouldn't wish the experience on anyone because it is a tough time. *But* I wouldn't trade the

experience for anything, because it made me a better person, one who has learned to give more of my life over to God, to trust him. At many times during this process, you'll feel all alone. But you are not alone; *God is with you*, even though at times you may wonder if he's there.

WHAT IS THIS BOOK?

In my time off, I found there are many books available about how to deal with death, divorce, illness, but not much out there on how Christians deal with unemployment. I decided to write this book to help others who are experiencing this same challenge in their own life, or indirectly as the loved one or friend of someone unemployed. As a Christian, I lean heavily upon God, knowing he is with me and that he will work something good in what I find challenging. It is my prayer that the same might happen for you. While I'm not a theologian, I have added Scripture verses and my thoughts about their application in this journey.

Each chapter will cover some of the emotions often felt by those who are unemployed and some biblical insights to help you in dealing with these emotions. All scripture reflects the NIV translation, unless I've noted otherwise. You'll feel many of these emotions regardless of whether you were the head of a corporation or one of the lowest-paid staff members where you worked. Your emotional makeup, or ability to deal with unemployment, isn't related in any way to how much money you make. Some devotions will be more meaningful to you than others because we are all different. Many you will go back to over and over again in dealing with the emotions and issues of

this journey. I went back to my own work many times.

If you are married or you are in a significant relationship with someone, I encourage both of you to read this. Read it together and talk about it. This is a shared experience and understanding what's happening to the one you love is important.

God allows us experiences that are often challenging and not much fun, in order to strengthen us. He then asks that we help others who are in a similar position. I hope that if you read this book and we ever meet, you'll be able to tell me about someone you helped because of your own experience.

ORGANIZATION OF THE DEVOTIONS

Organizing the book was a challenge, recognizing that we all come to different places in the journey at a different time. I chose to organize these devotions in way that is consistent with the “change curve,” which followed what I experienced. What is the “change curve”? It's a model to help you understand the stages of transition a person goes through in dealing with a personal or organizational change. If you aren't familiar, see Appendix A.

Topical Index

Recognizing that everyone who reads this book will read at their own pace and their emotions will be different, I've included a topical index in Appendix B. If you are struggling with a particular emotion or issue, the topical index will highlight relevant devotions, allowing you to get the support you need when you need it.

Books Worth Reading

Appendix C is a list of books worth reading during your journey, some related to life, some related to a job search. Many of them are referenced in these devotions.

Sample Communications

Appendix D contains communication samples I used during my search.

Interview Preparation

Appendix E has some tips on preparing for an interview.

I pray for God's richest blessings for you and your loved ones in your journey.

Dale Kreienkamp



THIS IS YOUR RACE

HAVE YOU EVER RUN in a race? I've participated in a few of them in my life. In a race, everyone who is participating has the same goal (to win) and the conditions and the course are the same. But life is a different kind of race.

In the book of Hebrews, the Apostle Paul points out that our life is our own and it is unique to us. *Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance **the race marked out for us**, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God (Hebrews 12:1-2).*

You can compare your life with that of anyone else, but it's not the same. From the day you were born, your life has been different from every other person who ever lived on this earth. There is only one "you," created by God for his purpose. You've had different parents, grandparents, siblings, and friends. I can easily go on and on regarding how unique you are, but what I really want you to know is that the race you are now running—your period of unemployment—is unique to you; it's yours alone.

While there are many people who are or have been or even

will be unemployed, they aren't "you." The danger, especially in difficult or stressful times, is in comparing our situation to that of someone else's. For example, you may know of someone who found a job in three months while you remain unemployed at four months. If you dwell on the comparison, it will only add more stress that you don't need.

The other challenge you'll face is the advice others will want to give. You'll hear things like "you should be doing __," "don't do __," "that's a bad industry to be in, avoid it," "when I was looking I did __," and so on. Everyone means well, but the advice of others may or may not help you. Hear me on this: Be a good listener, as there may be some wisdom in what they say, but ultimately, you'll need to pray about it, weigh what they have to say, then do what you believe is right for you. And then don't second-guess yourself.

In verse 2 of Hebrews 12, the Apostle Paul gives important direction on what we should be doing every day, but especially on this journey: "fixing our eyes on Jesus." As you move forward, look to Jesus for direction. You won't know what path to follow if you don't look to him.

Your life may be changing, but God isn't. He's there to love you and help you through the changes along this journey.



HOW COULD GOD LET THIS HAPPEN?

HOW COULD GOD LET this happen? Couldn't this have happened to someone else instead of me? We ask questions like this all the time when something we don't like happens. Right now, you're probably asking them because you lost your job. I know I did when I lost mine. I still don't know the answer, except to say that this is a sinful world and bad things happen. Why did my loved one die? Why did that car stop short in front of me so that I rear-ended it? Why was that test so difficult? It's unfair! When you think about it, our lives are full of "why" questions.

While in the Garden of Gethsemane, even Jesus asked if what he was facing could be taken away, not once but three times: *Going a little farther, [Jesus] fell with his face to the ground and prayed, "My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will." ... He went away a second time and prayed, "My Father, if it is not possible for this cup to be taken away unless I drink it, may your will be done." ... [He] went away once more and prayed the third time, saying the same thing* (Matthew 26:39-44). What's different here, between us and Jesus, is that he knew what was coming. We, however, can only

imagine what's coming next.

Rarely do we ask God "why" when something good happens. When was the last time you said, "Hey God, why did you send that blessing my way?" It's as if we think we should get only the good things and never the bad. Job had a great response to this in Job 2:10 when he replied, *You are talking like a foolish woman. Shall we accept good from God, and not trouble?* The verse goes on to say that *in all this, Job did not sin in what he said.* We need to take heed and accept the troubles of this world right along with the good.

In Romans 8:28, we are reminded that God can take what we consider a disaster and work something good from it: *And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.* The Apostle Paul who wrote these words had disastrous things happen to him, but he clung to God's promises that he's with us; we are his children; he'll take care of us; he'll make something good from what has happened.

It is in looking back that we often see the wonder and majesty of God and how he has taken care of us. During my journey, I spoke to many who had been previously unemployed. I heard the same thing over and over: "It wasn't fun by any stretch, but it turned out to be the best thing for me." I must agree; it was for me, too. I experienced things I would never have dreamed or imagined had my eyes not been opened to all God could provide.

If God had intervened and I'd have kept my job, the blessings of the future would never have happened. He knows what's best and he will not forsake you in this difficult time. The reason this happened doesn't matter; just trust that God knows what's best for you.



WHO AM I, NOW THAT I'M UNEMPLOYED?

“HI, I’M DALE KREIENKAMP, head of human resources for ...” Very often, that’s how I would introduce myself. My introduction, and maybe yours, identified me with where I worked and what I did for a living. But how about now, when I don’t have a job? Who am I today?

It’s a great question and one I searched for answers to. At first, I wasn’t as quick to introduce myself as I’d been in the past, maybe shying away a little. I’m not normally shy; I’m an extrovert. I just felt awkward about what to say because I could no longer say what I had said for years. When I tell people I’m in between jobs, the reactions vary. For many, it’s like telling them you have cancer. They don’t know what to say and they certainly don’t want it to happen to them. For some, it kills the conversation. Most, however, are sympathetic and want to help—they just don’t know how.

Often it was me putting others at ease, assuring them everything would be okay. It gave me a chance to share my faith, telling them I believed in God and that I trusted he had a great plan for me. During this journey, I began to realize that too

much of me had been wrapped up in *what I did and who I worked for*, neither of which are the most important things in life.

In Sheila Walsh's book, *Life is Tough, But God Is Faithful*, she talks about the time a growth on her vocal cord required that she cancel a concert tour. She faced the possibility of an operation and never singing again. It was a tough blow and she spent many hours in prayer, but what she revealed about the experience was what I needed most to hear. She writes, "I got the distinct impression that God was saying, Sheila, don't you understand that I love you because of who you are and not for what you do? Your security has been all wrapped up in thinking of yourself as Sheila Walsh the singer, the evangelist, the speaker, the person who goes out there and does it all for Me. But that's not why I love you. If you never sing another note, it will not matter to Me. I don't need you to do things for Me. I just really love you." That is so perfectly said.

One of my favorite passages in the Bible is Ephesians 2:8-10, which reads, *It is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.* Our identity is not found in what we do, but in what God has done for us. It's about God's grace, not what we do—and that can be hard to accept. We are God's handiwork; in return whatever we do is done in thankful response to his love.

Take this time to let God love you for who you are, not for what you did in your old job or what you will do in your next. It's not who you are; it's whose you are.



FEAR AND WORRY

FEARS ... WE ALL have them and now you might have more than you've ever had before. I once saw an acronym for what "fear" stands for that made a lot of sense to me. I'd like to share it with you:

False
Evidence
Appearing
Real

I don't know what fears you are dealing with, but some that are relatively common for individuals in our situation might include, "I won't be able to find another good job"; "I won't make as much money as I used to make"; "We'll lose our house"; "We'll have to relocate away from family"; or _____ (you fill in the blank). We perceive these situations to be real and begin to fret and worry about them even though they haven't happened. Remember, if it hasn't happened, *it's not real*; it just appears to be real. And I'll bet most of your fears and mine haven't happened.

The words of Jesus about worry in Luke 12:22-34 are worth reading: *Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you*

*will eat; or about your body, what you will wear. For life is more than food, and the body more than clothes. Consider the ravens: They do not sow or reap, they have no storeroom or barn; yet God feeds them. And how much more valuable you are than birds! **Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to your life? Since you cannot do this very little thing, why do you worry about the rest?** Consider how the wild flowers grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you, not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today, and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, how much more will he clothe you—you of little faith! And do not set your heart on what you will eat or drink; do not worry about it. For the pagan world runs after all such things, and your Father knows that you need them. But seek his kingdom, and these things will be given to you as well. Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom.*

Focus on what Jesus is telling us: “don’t worry,” our Heavenly Father has everything taken care of—the little stuff and the big things. We can worry all we want, but it won’t add a single hour to our lives. And if we can’t add more time to our lives, then we certainly don’t control anything of significance. All of that is under God’s control.



LET IT GO

WHEN YOU HEAR THE phrase “let it go,” you just might hear the song from the movie *Frozen* playing in your head, especially if you’ve heard it often because you have a young daughter at home. On this journey, you need to continue to play that phrase over and over in your head, because it’s something you need to do, even though doing so isn’t easy. Or at least it wasn’t easy for me. Sometimes I even felt “frozen.” Even though I knew I couldn’t solve this on my own, I kept trying to do so. I couldn’t just “let it go” and give it to God; instead I held on tight. I was trying to “be God,” instead of letting God be God *for me*.

As I was beginning to write these devotions, I looked at the many verses highlighted in my Bible, looking for ones that I might use. As I looked at each one, I noticed a consistent message throughout: Give it all to God and trust him. I won’t share all the verses, but here are some worth reading time and again.

This is what the Lord says: “Cursed is the one who trusts in man, who draws strength from mere flesh and whose heart turns away from the Lord. That person will be like a bush in the wastelands; they will not see prosperity when it comes. They will dwell in the parched places of the desert, in a salt land where no one lives. But blessed is the one who trusts in the Lord, whose confidence is in him. They

will be like a tree planted by the water that sends out its roots by the stream. It does not fear when heat comes; its leaves are always green. It has no worries in a year of drought and never fails to bear fruit” (Jeremiah 17:5-8). I felt “cursed” with a heavy load weighing me down. I didn’t realize that by trusting in myself, I was bringing the “cursed” feeling upon me.

The Lord is good, a refuge in times of trouble. He cares for those who trust in him (Nahum 1:7). You feel honored when someone trusts you, and you don’t want to let them down. I know that when people put their trust in me, I go the “extra mile” to make certain it works out and that I do what I say I’ll do. God does that with us. He cares for us and loves us and won’t let us down. He wants us to keep trusting in him for everything because it draws us closer to him.

The Lord is my strength and my shield; my heart trusts in him, and he helps me (Psalm 28:7). It’s simple; when our hearts trust him, he helps us. My head so wanted to trust, but my heart just couldn’t let go. Pretty stupid actually; but it happened. That was me. Life became so much easier when my heart let it go and trusted him.

If you’re struggling, holding on tight, trying to figure this out all on your own, listen to that song and begin to “let it go!” Then take the big step—like the one off a diving board for the first time. Let go and trust. Once you do, you’ll be much more content and at peace with what’s happening in your life.



TIME OUT

IF YOU'VE EVER PLAYED, coached, or watched a team sport that has time limits (think football, basketball, hockey, etc.), you know they all have one thing in common: the “time out.” Teams take a time out to stop playing, to regroup and adjust.

Usually the team who calls the time out is not doing so well and needs the break to regroup in some manner. It could be to just stop and catch a breath because the pace of the game is too fast, and players are tired. Sometimes it's to figure out a quick way to stop the other team from doing what they're doing well and other times, it might be to figure out what changes need to be made. Time outs may be called by a player who senses things aren't going well, but most often they are called by the coach. Most coaches, but not all, seem to save their time outs for the end of the game when every play and every decision has a major impact on the outcome of the game.

Time outs in life are important too, but the world of work doesn't offer many of them. Unlike other countries in the world, we don't take many breaks. Think about it, though. When you were younger and in school, your life was full of breaks—fall break, Christmas break, spring break, and summer. Each break was a chance to stop, rest up, and get ready for whatever was

coming next. One of the harsh realities of being part of the working world is you only get vacation time and vacations tend to be too short. So when life is a little out of sorts, it's hard to regroup.

You are in a “time out” period now, whether you want it or not. This can be a very good thing for any number of reasons. It's possible that things weren't going as well as you would have liked at work, but it wasn't feasible to take time to find a new job. You may need more time with your spouse or your family. You may just need an extended rest.

Often people think God “caused their problems” but he doesn't do that. In Lamentations 3:33 we read, *[God] does not willingly bring affliction or grief to anyone*. But he does “allow” things to happen and then uses them to accomplish his purpose for you. So it just could be that your coach, Jesus Christ, allowed this time out to be called.

Now that you're in the huddle, what is he saying to you? Are you listening or are you talking? James 1:19 reminds us of the order in which we should do things: *My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry*.

Listen first, that's the key. Please take this “time out” period and be in prayer, listening for what God wants for you in your life.



WAITING IS HARD

MOST OF US AREN'T very good at waiting. I'm certainly not. Our lives tend to be a rush—rushing here and there. We're very proud we can “multitask,” doing more than one thing at a time. We want everything instantly, and therein lies one of the biggest challenges as you search, because things won't happen instantly.

The waiting in the job search process will test you because you'll do lots and lots of waiting. The good news with this waiting though, is that God wants to use it for doing good things for us. *Yet the Lord longs to be gracious to you; therefore he will rise up to show you compassion. For the Lord is a God of justice. Blessed are all who wait for him* (Isaiah 30:18).

Think about it: Some things take time to turn out good. In cooking, that's especially true. I love fudge, which we make at Christmas each year. To make exceptional fudge, you need to bring the ingredients to a rolling boil very slowly. It usually takes me a half hour to do it right and if I don't, the sugar won't dissolve properly, which makes grainy fudge. If you like good risotto, you can't make it in ten minutes; it'll take you close to a half-hour.

How about children? I have three awesome sons and four grandchildren. None of them came quickly; they all came at

about nine months as planned. Two of my sons were even late by a couple of weeks. I have three beautiful daughters-in-law, but I had to wait for them too—waiting for their relationship with my sons to develop, to agree to be married, and to plan a wedding. Was all the waiting worth it for our family? Absolutely!

The job search process is full of waiting and the speed it moves isn't dictated by you. You'll need to *wait* for there to be a job opening that matches your gifts, *wait* for the organization to review your application and decide to interview you, *wait* for the day of the interview, *wait* for a second interview, as most organizations want to see you twice and have you meet different people in the process, *wait* for an offer. And if there is no offer, the process starts over somewhere else. A “no” simply means it wasn't part of God's plan for you, and even though you must continue to *wait* and it will take longer than you'd like, you can't control making it happen more quickly.

What do we do during this waiting process? We trust in God and have faith that he will provide the right opportunity.

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