

GROWING FORWARD

when you can't go back

*Laurie
Pawlik*



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This book is dedicated
to you,
dear reader.



May you find peace and joy
in this season of your life.

May you grow forward
and Blossom
into who God created you to be.
With His Love,

Laurie
She Blossoms



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GROWING FORWARD

When a season of your life ends—whether by divorce, disease, or death—you know you’ll never be the same. Everything is different! Your life has been uprooted, you’ve lost a huge piece of your heart, and you’re left to pick up the pieces. You have to move forward but you just can’t find the strength. You hope God has a plan for your life, and you’re praying for a new beginning . . . but how do you actually start over?

In this book, you’ll find encouraging and effective ways to walk through an unexpected season of life. Our stories of contemporary and biblical women healing and flourishing after setbacks and devastating losses will renew your hope and faith. The five practical Blossom Tips woven through each chapter will encourage, inspire, and strengthen you. The questions at the end of the chapters include an invitation to connect with me on my *She Blossoms* blog. You don’t have to walk alone.

You’ll slowly grow strong roots and see fresh blossoms in your life. Your heart will lift and fill with the peace of God, the love of Jesus, and the power of the Holy Spirit. You’ll feel the

life-giving warmth of the sun on your face. You will feel healthy, happy, and whole again.

“See, I am doing a new thing!” says the Lord. “Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the wilderness and streams in the wasteland.”¹

A Peek into My Past

At last count, I’ve survived fifteen major losses in my life—starting from the day I was born. I grew up with a single Christian mom who struggled with nervous breakdowns and schizophrenia my whole life. My dad is Jewish, born and raised in Israel. When he landed in Canada in the late 1960s, he was planning to earn money, return to Jerusalem, and buy a business. Indeed, he moved back to Israel when I was nine months old.

My mother was hospitalized several times, unable to cope with episodes of severe paranoia and hallucinations. During her treatments, my younger half-sister and I lived in three different foster homes, plus a stint at a neighbor’s house. Even when my mom was well, living with her wasn’t easy; we often found ourselves wandering the streets in the middle of the night, and sleeping in cardboard boxes in alleys and on the front steps of churches.

You’ll learn more about me as this book unfolds. I’ll share glimpses of my journey through infertility and childlessness, a devastating family estrangement, a three-year stint of homesickness in Africa, and an attempted rape in my apartment in the middle of the night. You’ll see how I grew through the setbacks, disappointments, and deaths. The best part? You’ll discover how to weather the storms and droughts in your own life.

You will flourish and blossom in ways you never imagined.

Your Companions

In this book you'll meet a few of my *She Blossoms* blog readers. You'll see yourself in some of their thoughts and feelings. These women have survived many different types of losses; they are committed to healing, growing, and moving forward. Their honesty and companionship will fill you with comfort, encouragement, and hope.

You'll also meet ten women of the Bible as you've never met them before! Each chapter features a different woman and offers several lessons that apply to your life today. You'll witness their pain and grief, and learn how they flourished in a new season. You'll see how God changed—and still changes—situations that seem hopeless and endless, how He offers provisions and power when life feels overwhelming. Our biblical sisters loved deeply, lost tragically, grieved fully, and grew deeper in their lives and relationships. God was at work even when they couldn't see Him, and His plans turned out better than anything they could have imagined.

These ordinary women blossomed despite extraordinary heartache and loss . . . and so will you.

The Blossom Tips

Every chapter includes five Blossom Tips, to help you:

- Accept—and even embrace—a new season of life.
- Take small steps forward in practical, creative, delightful ways!
- Weave God's love and power into your heart, thoughts, and daily life.

Each Blossom Tip highlights a different part of who you are: spirit, heart, soul, body, and brain. This holistic approach will help you grow in specific areas of your self, life, and relationships. For example, if you want to increase your faith and deepen your walk with Jesus, you'll gravitate toward the Spirit Blossoms. If you need emotional healing, you'll be both challenged and comforted by the Heart Blossoms. If you want to explore the creative side of your personality, you'll love the Soul Blossoms; they're designed to help you express who God created you to be! You'll be physically strengthened by the Body Blossoms and intellectually challenged by the Brain Blossoms.

You'll find five Blossom Tips woven through each chapter, like roses climbing a trellis. At the end of the book, you'll have fifty practical ways to grow forward in your life. Every chapter begins with a peek into a difficult loss I or one of my readers have faced. Next, a biblical woman offers a unique, refreshing glimpse into her story, followed by a Blossom Tip for you to explore and weave into your own life.

This is the heartbeat of *Growing Forward When You Can't Go Back*. It may take you a chapter or two to adjust to this rhythm, just like it will take a beat or two to adapt to a new season in your life. Fear not! You are more nimble, resilient, and adaptable than you know—especially if you're following God's lead.

At the end of each chapter, you'll find five Blossom Questions for private journaling and group discussion. Take time to write through your thoughts and feelings; writing can be a powerful way to untangle painful emotions and experiences. Your "Blossom Journal" (a notebook of your choice) is the perfect place to explore your thoughts and talk to God.

Every chapter is accompanied by its own article on BlossomTips.com. I invite you to share your thoughts—big and little—with me in the "online garden" of my *She Blossoms* blog. You are welcome anytime.

Growing Forward in Your Life

Healing takes time, but time alone doesn't heal grief and loss. In fact, it's a myth that "time heals all wounds." Sure, injuries such as paper cuts and sprained ankles eventually heal, but time doesn't magically heal deep wounds. Appendicitis and cancer, for example, need therapeutic assistance and support. So do illnesses such as schizophrenia, depression, and anxiety. Those are physical, mental, and emotional wounds that require attention and care.

Grief is a similar type of wound. It's the emotional pain and suffering we experience after losing someone or something we love—including the loss of security, hopes, dreams, and expectations for the future. The feelings that accompany grief are often unexpected, confusing, and overwhelming. They can disrupt or even destroy our physical, emotional, and spiritual health.

As difficult as it is, loss must be grieved before we can move on and flourish. There are no right or wrong ways to grieve, but there are healthy ways to loosen unhealthy attachments to people or seasons of life. Accepting loss involves honoring the past and choosing to move into the future. This is growing forward when you can't go back, and it's what we'll do together as these pages unfold.

Where else to start but in the beginning? Let's dig up and air out a few family secrets, both in the Bible and in my life. . . .



Re-creating and Replanting with Eve

Families, created by God in the beginning, give us our first taste of love and joy. And, inevitably, grief! Sisters sail away, sons wander dark paths, parents wither and die. Husbands leave. Eve’s response to her losses—and the Blossom Tips woven through this chapter—show us how to flourish even when we’re no longer living in the Garden of Eden.

Sisters No More

“I haven’t returned your phone calls because I don’t want to talk to you,” said my sister. “Not now, not ever. I don’t want you in my life anymore.” She hung up the phone.

That was the day—twelve years ago now—that I learned what “keening” means. I dropped to my knees and wailed like never before. Good thing I was home alone, in a little cottage

on an island off the coast of British Columbia. If I'd been living in the city, someone would have called 9-1-1.

Now looking back on my sister's decision never to speak to me again, I see the signs I'd been ignoring for years. Our relationship was stormy from the beginning; we would often argue and not speak for months. We always seemed to be fighting about something, sometimes not even knowing what or why. She'd long ago stopped speaking to our mom. She refused to visit our dying aunt in hospice, and a few years earlier she had left her husband and two daughters. She was a leaver.

But I never dreamed she'd leave me. Not because of *me*, but because of our childhood. We grew up with a single schizophrenic mother, moved in and out of foster homes, didn't have a father. We had no other family; our grandmother and aunt both were gone. We were all we had, and I thought we'd be together forever.

But now it was just me.

The First Woman to Lose Everything

Eve is famous for being the first woman God created. She talked to the snake and chose to eat fruit of the tree that held secrets not hers to know. The Lord cast her and Adam out of the Garden of Eden, which shamed and devastated them. We may know this story well, but sometimes we overlook Eve's other experiences with death, grief, and letting go. Her experiences were heartbreaking. She was the first woman to lose her home, identity, and plans for the future. She suffered one son's death and another son's estrangement.

Eve was the first mother to:

- Grieve the death of a son.
- Agonize over her other son's crime of killing his brother.

- Feel the pain and shame of family estrangement.
- Rebuild a marriage wounded by grief.
- Heal and move forward without the support of a mom, sister, or aunt.

Eve's relationship with Adam—and with God—must have changed after her son Cain killed his younger brother, Abel. Her losses also changed *her*. Death and grief darken our perspective on the world, ourselves, our lives. Since Eve was the first woman God created, she didn't have female family members to lean on. She had Adam, but she didn't have the comfort and support of women who had experienced similar losses.

Worse, Eve didn't have the Holy Spirit's power, wisdom, and joy. She couldn't treasure God's words in Scripture because they weren't written yet. While Eve was on earth, she didn't know Jesus' grace, salvation, or love. And yet she found the strength she needed to keep moving forward. Perhaps her experience with God in the Garden of Eden sustained her through the pain. Maybe Eve recognized God's continuous, loving provision of food, clothing, and shelter even after she and Adam were cast out of the Garden. God did not abandon them. He promised that Someone would one day overcome the suffering and sin of this world.¹ Eve walked through the valley of grief, and I believe she emerged still believing in God's promises intact.

Our first Blossom Tip shows us how we can do the same.

SPIRIT BLOSSOM—

The Promise

Every general promise God made to believers in Scripture is for *you*—whether it was spoken to a king or prophet, queen or judge.²



A general promise is given by the Holy Spirit and applies to every believer in every age. You can trust God's promises for healing and hope, love and peace, joy and power. For example, Psalm 1:3 says we're like trees planted by rivers of water, yielding our fruit in season. When our roots are deep, we can draw on God's endless supply of strength, peace, and power.

A specific promise, in contrast, is given to a specific person in a particular situation. In Genesis 12:2 God promised to make Abraham and Sarah into a great nation. He doesn't promise that to everyone! But He does promise to bring forth good and wonderful things in our lives, even out of the hardest, driest seasons.

According to C. S. Spurgeon, "No promise is of private interpretation. Whatever God has said to any one saint, He has said to all. When He opens a well for one, it is that all may drink. . . . Whether He gave the word to Abraham or to Moses, matters not, O believer; He has given it to thee as one of the covenanted seed. There is not a high blessing too lofty for thee, nor a wide mercy too extensive for thee."³ God's general promises of healing, peace, strength, and joy are freely available to us today.

What to Do

Find a Bible verse or passage that comforts, inspires, or strengthens you. Here's one of my favorites: "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest," says Jesus in Matthew 11:28–29. "Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls."

Copy the verse into your Blossom Journal (a notebook of your choice). Then rewrite the verse in your own words. Include

your name. Here's my Matthew 11:28–29 rewrite: “Laurie, you no longer have to struggle with feelings of insecurity or worthlessness! Fix your eyes on Me and I will give you the love, identity, and freedom you need. Lean on me. We'll walk through this together. Fear not, for I am with you.”

When you rewrite your verse in your own words, don't worry about how it sounds or looks. Just share your thoughts and feelings. Open your heart to God and imagine that He is speaking directly to *you* . . . because He is.

Not Best Friends Forever

My sister and I often joked about getting old together, sitting in our rocking chairs on the front porch reliving our childhood and remembering our favorite foster parents. Gary was the “Dairy King.” When he made sundaes, we were allowed as much ice cream, chocolate syrup, whipped cream, and sprinkles as we wanted. Foster mom Beth had only one arm, yet she baked bread, planted a vegetable garden, and probably decorated a real tree at Christmas. I never found out. We didn't live with them that long.

When my sister unexpectedly cut me out of her life—without telling me why or what I had done wrong—I was blindsided. We'd been through so much together! Letting her go was horrible because I wasn't just losing a sister. I was losing part of myself, my identity, my past, and my future. I couldn't imagine a world without her. And what did it say about me, that my own sister didn't want me in her life anymore? I struggled with confusion, guilt, self-condemnation.

It took years to work through my insecurity and shame, to let go of who I thought I was and receive a new identity. It was an uphill battle because I fought alone. I refused to accept a new

self-image from God because I didn't want to let go of my sister or the past. I thought letting go of her meant I would lose *me*.

And then, when I was finally ready to walk into a new season of life, I didn't know how.

How Eve Let Go

After the death of her son Abel, Eve had no choice but to let him go. Did she wail and keen? Did Adam comfort her? Perhaps he was the crier and she the comforter. Maybe they took turns, fumbling their way through their first experience with a death in the family.

Worse, Eve's eldest son, Cain, killed her younger son, thus committing the Bible's first recorded murder. She knew her boys were gifts from the Lord⁴—how could His blessings be the source of such grief? It was a devastating season for Eve as a mother.

Eve also had to accept the way God chose to punish her son. The Lord turned His back on Cain and cast him away from family and community. Cain was disgraced, destitute, estranged . . . and furious. "My punishment is too great to bear!" he said to God. "You have banished me from the land and from your presence; you have made me a homeless wanderer."⁵

Cain was Eve's firstborn child, still alive but just as lost to her as Abel. His relationship with God was destroyed, perhaps never to be healed. How did Eve cope with the pain? She didn't know about the stages of grief or psychological ways to recover from trauma. She couldn't read books about loss or bereavement. She had no counselors or doctors to call for help. And yet, she healed.

Before we discover how Eve recovered, let's do a little emotional healing of our own.

HEART BLOSSOM—

On the Mend



My first three months of counseling were delightful! My Christian psychologist, Nancy, was warm and kind. We spent hours happily chatting about me and my past. She was curious and encouraging; she hung on every word I said. But then she had this crazy idea: Let's do a little *work*. So we dug deeper and found the thick rock wall that protected my heart and prevented healthy relationships. Nancy helped me excavate the rocks and pull the thorns. I sweated, toiled, and bled my way through that wall. When I found my soft, scared little heart, it was still beating strong.

I had to trust that the seeds God buried during my season of counseling would eventually sprout and bear fruit. But first, there was work to do! I felt angry and sad about my childhood, ashamed of my flaws and failures. I wanted to quit counseling, but I knew I needed—and wanted—to recover from the past. So I kept digging up rocks, pulling weeds, planting seeds, and nurturing growth.

Behold! Glimpses of sunlight, fresh air, new sprouts. I started to heal and entered a new season of life. “See, I am doing a new thing!” God said. “Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the wilderness and streams in the wasteland.”⁶

What to Do

Recognize that no matter how smart and self-aware you are, you're also human. This means you can't see yourself objectively. You may be unaware of the obstacles holding you back, or unable to face the pain alone. A skilled counselor is a guide who can help you through difficult seasons by shining light on your path. You can learn how to grieve in healthy ways, perhaps by

exploring your childhood losses or unresolved pain. Sometimes the past hinders the current healing process.

Schedule a three-, six-, or nine-month period of regular counseling sessions (a predetermined time frame will help you stay focused and committed). Expect counseling to be uncomfortable and even painful! If your counselor is truly helpful, sometimes you'll dislike your sessions. She'll hold up a mirror to your psyche, and you won't always like what you see. Trust the process. Remember that God is helping you heal and blossom into who He created you to be.

The Bittersweetness of Letting Go

When you lose someone you love, you need time to adjust to their physical absence. Life is emptier and quieter when that person is missing. Birthdays aren't as happy, Christmas isn't as merry, anniversaries aren't as special, and life just isn't as bright.

But it's the unexpected, often shocking, emotions that can knock you sideways. For instance, after my sister left I wondered if healing would have been easier if she had died instead of choosing to reject me. Her decision had sent me spiraling downward into confusion, guilt, and shame. I couldn't figure out what I had done wrong, and she never told me. I invented a million ways I was bad, selfish, unlovable, unworthy. My imagination cycled through endless loops of self-condemnation and self-loathing.

My sister is still alive—and I'm glad!—but we have almost no contact. I accept it. Maybe one day we'll be reunited. I hope so; I occasionally send her notes, saying I'm here if she wants to talk. Maybe she'll reach out . . . or maybe I'll never see my sister again. Either way, I have stopped torturing myself and I refuse to be buried in guilt and shame.

Counseling helped me start the healing process by digging through the rock wall around my heart. I learned about the aftereffects of a traumatic childhood and how to give myself comfort, compassion, and love. But counseling didn't heal my heart or become the bedrock of my self-identity. God took care of that.

God Let Adam and Eve Go

Imagine Eve's life after her son Abel was killed and God banished Cain! She and Adam were bewildered bystanders, witnesses to a violent eruption of pain and anger. After the dust settled, they must have felt helpless and shocked, unable to understand how their lives could have collapsed so suddenly and completely.

Their marriage would have permanently changed after they lost their children. Adam and Eve had to rebuild their relationship, perhaps fighting the temptation to blame each other for past parenting decisions. Letting go of their sons would have been heartbreaking; forgiving themselves for whatever part they played—real or imagined—must have felt impossible. Adam and Eve were stumbling forward into yet another new season of life.

God, too, felt the pain of this tragedy. "Listen!" He said to Cain. "Your brother's blood cries out to me from the ground!"⁷ God *knows* and *feels* the anguish of death and separation. He grieved Abel's death and Cain's banishment just as deeply as Adam and Eve. Even before that, the Lord knew the pain of being left by a loved one. Adam and Eve rejected Him in the Garden of Eden. God's own Son, Jesus, also experienced the pain of rejection—as well as the physical agony of torture and death on a cross.

God understands the darkness and emptiness of loss more than we'll ever know. Jesus tasted death, but He didn't stay dead, cold, or buried. He always chooses life, in all its bitter-sweet depth.

As a Jewish man, Jesus celebrated many holy days and feasts. Some involved bittersweet symbols of new beginnings, as we see in the next Blossom Tip.

SOUL BLOSSOM—

Bittersweet



“Life is bittersweet,” is what I learned in a Passover seder I shared with a Jewish family. We took turns reading the Torah aloud and eating foods that represented different aspects of the Exodus. This Jewish holiday—celebrated at home, around the table—is filled with foods that represent the Israelites’ slavery and escape from Egypt.

We tasted bitter horseradish spiced with black pepper and vinegar, a symbol of the Jewish people’s enslavement. A tiny sample with its sharp, stinging fumes brought tears to my eyes. Next was a thick, sweet honey-and-apricot jam that represented freedom from slavery. It was too sugary to eat alone.

So we combined them—the bitter horseradish and the sweet jam—on a dry matzo cracker. The flavors blended, textures meshed, aromas wove together as we tasted and saw that it was good. It was bittersweet . . . just like a deep, full, rich life.

What to Do

Find something tangible or physical that symbolizes the idea that your life is bittersweet. You might start with this poem:

The Weaver

My life is but a weaving
Between my Lord and me,
I cannot choose the colors
He worketh steadily.

Oftimes He weaveth sorrow,
And I in foolish pride
Forget He sees the upper
And I, the under side.

Not till the loom is silent
And the shuttles cease to fly
Will God unroll the canvas
And explain the reason why.

The dark threads are as needful
In the Weaver's skillful hand
As the threads of gold and silver
In the pattern He has planned.

— Author unknown⁸

Create or discover your own personal symbol of the bitter-sweetness of life. You might crochet an afghan, paint a sunset, or even cook a sweet-and-sour soup or sauce! Let it remind you that with great love can also come great pain. Dark nights are bitter, but the morning light is sweet. Both are in God's hands, and so are you.

Bringing the Past with Us

Recovering from my sister's rejection was like pushing a boulder uphill; every day it would roll down and I'd have to start over at the bottom. But the truth is I didn't really *want* to heal and move on. I just wanted my little sister back in my life. I

missed the good, fun, happy parts of our relationship. I often thought about our funny moments, secrets, and shared memories. Without her I felt alone and untethered. My sister took a huge piece of me when she left, and I wanted it back.

I resisted healing because it meant letting go of the past. Truly recovering meant moving forward into a new life without her; if I moved on, I'd lose my identity as the Laurie I once was. I'd lose the good parts of my childhood, the comforting feelings of family, love, and home. I gripped my pain because it was my only connection to my sister and my past.

But then I got tired of pushing that boulder uphill, day after day. It was emotionally and spiritually exhausting, and it left me without energy or motivation to start healthy new relationships. I began to realize I was basing my identity—and my future—on my sister's approval and love. If she accepted me, then I was acceptable. If she loved me, then I was lovable. Without her, I thought I was nothing.

I was basing my identity on the wrong relationship.

Growing Forward with Eve

Eve knew that God was in control of her and her family even when she couldn't see or hear Him. Further, her relationship with God changed as her life unfolded. Every birth and death she experienced must have affected how she saw, thought about, and talked to God. Eve's life changed in dramatic and shocking ways, but I believe she never doubted His absolute power and sovereignty over everything that happened in her life.

Consider, for instance, the different ways Eve referred to God. When her first son, Cain, was born she said, "With the help of the Lord I have brought forth a man."⁹ In the Old Testament, "Lord" represented Yahweh or the Hebrew name of God

(YHWH). This is a sacred name, showing respect and reverence. However, when her third son, Seth, was born, Eve said, “God has granted me another child in place of Abel, since Cain killed him.”¹⁰ This use of the name “God” is more distant and general, perhaps indicating a shift in Eve’s mindset.

The world and other people’s choices—as well as her sons’ unexpected death and banishment—changed how Eve related to God. She knew Him in the Garden of Eden, before sin pulled them apart. She knew Him in the dark, dry seasons of her life . . . but she didn’t let loss, pain, or grief stop her from trusting His goodness or accepting His gifts.

Why didn’t Eve turn away from God, even when her life was as hard as pushing a boulder uphill? Perhaps she grew into a personal relationship with Him, and that changed everything. Maybe she made small but effective changes in her life that helped her heal and grow. A tiny tweak can make a huge difference in our lives, which our next Blossom Tip reveals.

BODY BLOSSOM—

Uphill Backward



If your faith—or your life—feels like a boulder you’re pushing uphill, you’ll love this tip! Drop the boulder; grab a pair of sneakers. My favorite way to exercise is by planting God’s Word in my heart while enjoying a natural endorphin high. I listen to sermons on podcast while walking up hills. Backward.

Actually, I’ve progressed to *running* uphill backward (the trick is to lift your feet higher than usual and stay on the balls of your feet, not your heels). I started because of a hamstring injury, and discovering that walking uphill backward relieves pressure on my tendons, ligaments, and joints. It also strengthens thighs, calves,

and bum muscles in ways previously unknown to womankind.
Hello, calorie burn and weight loss!

What to Do

Schedule thirty minutes every day to walk, run, or bike with a God-centered podcast. Try to find an activity that surprises your body and metabolism, like walking uphill backward or pedaling backward on a stationary bicycle. Experiment with different routes and speeds. Add your arms! I incorporate overhead arm stretches and exercises while walking, to tone my triceps and biceps.

The more oxygen you have flowing through your muscles, heart, and brain, the happier you'll feel. Those natural endorphins are powerful, lasting long after you reach the top of the hill. While you're exercising, explore a variety of teachers, preachers, and worship music. I'm keen on Pastor Timothy Keller's sermons on podcast; his teaching is biblically sound and applicable to daily life.

Growing Forward

After ten years of pushing my boulder of guilt and shame uphill (backward), I finally dropped the burden and picked up the blossoms. As this book unfolds, you'll discover what helped me grow forward. You'll also learn how our biblical sisters and a few of my *She Blossoms* readers recovered from loss. Our experiences can help you work through your own difficulties, if you plant and nurture the seeds.

Remember that time does *not* heal all wounds! I didn't need a decade of boulder-pushing to recover from my sister's rejection.

It just took me that long to learn how to start and nurture the healing process.

How we choose to spend our time is the key to moving forward in a new season of life. I found counseling psychologically and emotionally helpful, but it didn't transform me spiritually. I needed to change how I saw myself and my past. I had to root my self-image and identity in God before I could truly flourish.

Your losses aren't exactly the same as mine. We aren't united by specific experiences of grief or pain. Rather, we're connected by something bigger and better: the hope, joy, and love only Jesus can bring! We're letting go of our expectations and plans for the future, trusting that we're in His good hands. We're allowing God to guide our lives. We're learning how to walk His way with yielded hearts.

It's time to move on and grow forward! Let's bid yesterday a warm farewell and tuck it away in our hearts. Our memories and loved ones will always be with us, but we won't let the past hold us back from becoming who God created us to be.

Eve Chooses Life in a New Season

"God has granted me another child in place of Abel," Eve said, "since Cain killed him."¹¹ Now, that is one healthy way to look at loss! Eve acknowledged God's power and providence. She accepted His gift of another child. At the same time, in the same breath, Eve was honest and authentic about her loss. She didn't try to hide the fact that one son murdered the other. She spoke the truth.

Eve wasn't in denial, she didn't hide from the past, and she didn't suppress or conceal her pain. She lifted her head, accepted God's blessing, and chose to move into a new season of

life. Wow, Eve! No wonder her name also means “life-giving” or “mother of all who have life.”¹² Eve experienced the full range of human emotion. She was blessed with the gift of life and she experienced tragic loss. Eve grieved and rose again.

Even though her relationship with God changed, Eve still saw Him as the Source of the blessings in her life. We don't know exactly how she worked through her grief and pain (did she roam the fields and gardens near her home? Weave tapestries with black and golden threads? Become the first grief counselor?), but we know she held on to God.

Eve chose to let go of the past, even if she didn't want to. She moved forward into a new season of life. In the last Blossom Tip of this chapter, Eve shows us how to honor yesterday and embrace today.

BRAIN BLOSSOM—

Fill-in-the-Blanks



Let's do a thought experiment with Eve's last words in the Bible. In Genesis 4:25 she said, “God has granted me another child in place of Abel, since Cain killed him.” If we erase certain words, we can fill in the blanks with our own experience. Here's Eve's sentence when it's empty: “_____ has granted me _____ in place of _____, since _____.”

Now let's fill in the blanks with our own thoughts. Here's mine: “God has granted me a new self-identity based on His love and grace in place of my old self-image of unworthiness and shame, since my sister chose to leave our relationship.”

This helps me see what I learned and even gained from my loss. I'm honest about what happened, and grateful for my new identity. Here's another example from my life: “God has granted me time,

energy, and finances in place of children, since my husband and I can't have kids because of infertility."

What to Do

In your Blossom Journal, write your version of this sentence: “_____ has granted me _____ in place of _____, since _____.”

What has come out of your loss? You can fill in the blanks however you like; there are no right or wrong answers. This is your life, your losses and gains. Listen for God's still, small voice, and know He never subtracts without adding (though sometimes He requires you to wait on His timing). He delights in giving gifts; He *wants* to bless you with growth and fresh blossoms. See and accept His blessing even if it's not the person, possession, or future you expected. Don't overlook or underestimate even the smallest joys or faintest glimmers of hope. Those are the seeds and sprouts of new life.

Do this exercise five times, with different losses and blessings. Or you might choose to describe the same loss in various ways. Remember that death can bring unexpected life and fresh growth.

QUESTIONS *for* JOURNALING *and* DISCUSSION

1. **The Promise:** Which of God's promises resonate with you? How has He answered them . . . or are you still waiting?

2. **On the Mend:** How do you feel about talking to a counselor? If you sought counseling in the past, what were the benefits and drawbacks?
3. **Bittersweet:** Would you describe your life as a woven tapestry or a car wreck? What could you weave, knit, make, or bake to symbolize your life in the Weaver's hands?
4. **Uphill Backward:** How often do you surprise your body by exercising, moving, or stretching in different ways? What does your body need: rest or sweat, pampering or pushing?
5. **Fill-in-the-Blanks:** What benefits have emerged from your loss or pain? How do you feel about celebrating the blessings that arise after loss?

You don't have to walk through this season—or read this book—alone! Feel free to answer my questions and share your thoughts with me at BlossomTips.com/Eve.

Growing Forward

If your life isn't unfolding the way you planned or expected, you'll feel right at home in our next chapter! We're digging into Sarah's story. God didn't fulfill His promises the way she and Abraham expected, so she planted her own seeds. Her heart was in the right place, but her body and brain marched ahead of Him.