

## PREFACE TO THE SECOND EDITION

Twenty years ago I held the first copy of this book in my hands. Little did I know then that the coming years would bring a myriad of challenging and growthful goodbyes. As I look back over the last two decades, I am surprised at the amount of losses but also grateful for having survived and matured through those experiences.

During this period I left a cherished job because of irresolvable differences with an employer, moved several times, and ended a destructive relationship. I journeyed with my mother's aging and dying process, vigiled in a hospital room for three days while the person who most knew and loved my soul slowly slipped away, accompanied a dear friend while brain cancer diminished her, wept with my beloved cousin the day she received her diagnosis of inflammatory breast cancer, said goodbye to special relatives, and supported many treasured people in their last months of life. Along with these hard goodbyes, I companioned family members, colleagues, and acquaintances as they faced their struggles with job loss, children's poor choices, clinical depression, car accidents, and life-threatening illnesses.

The content and focus of *Praying Our Goodbyes* sustained me during these past twenty years. I continually reminded myself when heartache consumed me that "all is on loan" and that better days would follow. When sadness never seemed to leave, I remembered the necessity of eventually "letting go" and that the journey

does not conclude with goodbye but is followed by “hello.” The pattern of growth as one of “life, death, resurrection” provided both solace and hope. Because of the assurances that I penned in this book, I found greater meaning in my time of need and grew in my ability to love. My encounters with suffering taught me how necessary compassion is. I now feel drawn to extend this essential gift to everyone who hurts.

Through the years since this book was published, people from numerous countries have sent me letters describing their stories of loss and expressing their gratitude for *Praying Our Goodbyes*. I am humbled by how much of their pain they share with me. I continually discover more about the depths of grief and the amazing resiliency of the human spirit. I have learned, too, how helpful the prayers in this book are for those who choose to use them. For some persons, the prayers are an opening to the healing process. For others, the prayers provide the final closing of the door to a period of challenging transition.

We can know a lot about how to live through the experience of unwanted goodbyes and, yet, there is no magic remedy to move us quickly through our difficult farewells. What does make a difference is how we approach these goodbyes. If we move through the crushing anguish by tending to our hurting self and allow others to be there for us, if we rest our weariness on the heart of God and give ourselves sufficient time to heal, we will find comfort, courage, and the willingness to move forward.

In the days nearing the death of my dear cousin Theresa, I felt overwhelming sorrow. As I walked into her kitchen, I noticed an anonymous quote posted on the refrigerator door: “Just when the caterpillar thought the world was over, it became a butterfly.” That quote lifted my heart and helped me remember the deeper truth: that loss and death are not the end of the story.

When a person or a part of life that we treasure slips away from us, it is natural to feel that our world as we once knew it is over. We cannot imagine how we might go on, and sometimes we do not want to go on. We wonder if we will ever feel joy again. Like the caterpillar, our grieving thoughts and distressful emotions lead us

to believe all is ended, but what is happening in the darkness of our grief and the desolation of letting go is that our life is slowly being transformed. In the midst of our emptiness and bleakness of heart, God is nurturing and strengthening us for future growth.

As you enter this book, trust the butterfly part of yourself. Someday you will be at peace. You will discover happiness again. Your wounded self will be healed, and you will grow strong wings to carry you forward. You will find not only that you can go on, but that you want to do so.