

Widowspeak

study guide

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a Renew Collaborative project

St Louis MO Eau Claire WI

courage

As a woman afflicted with the pain of widowhood one biblical story holds me captive—the woman who reaches out and touches the robe of Jesus. He turns toward her and responds so beautifully, “Daughter, take courage; your faith has made you well.”

Female or male, we all taste pain and fear in this life. Perhaps you are in a season of struggle or complacency. Perhaps your relationship with your husband or wife is flourishing. Perhaps you are feeling neglected; perhaps neglectful.

Wherever you are on the journey, free yourself from the burdens of this world, reach out and touch Jesus’ robe, then courageously engage the person dearest to you with love and joy and laughter.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Paul Whitty". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large initial "P".

“Daughter, take courage; your faith has made you well.”

– Matthew 9:22 NASB

engagement

Engaging death is difficult. Please consider sharing this journey with your beloved or with two or three trustworthy friends.

You might begin by setting aside 40 days, committing to read two chapters weekly from *Widowspeak*, then prayerfully exploring the reflections, answering the questions that touch you, setting aside those that do not, and resting on the Sabbath.

If you are leading a group through *Widowspeak*, before you begin please consider and discuss:

Presence. Gather and begin on time. Mute electronic devices. Stay present in the pauses and the silence. Breathe. Focus. Pray.

Balance. Give opportunity for each person to share, whether introverted or extroverted. Honor and respect that in diversity and unity, each person is created in the image of God.

Compassion. As each person shares her or his insight or experience, we are to respond in ways that encourage but do not fix, rescue, or interrupt. Use head nods, eye contact, body language and other non-verbal responses to convey support and encouragement.

Trust. Privacy and confidentiality are essential. The best person to share an insight or experience is the one who first articulated it. Nothing revealed within the time spent together will be shared outside the group.

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1

Departure

The events and emotions the author experiences in the hours after her husband's death are out-of-sequence, jumbled. The difficult-to-follow story illustrates the complex intersection of grief and trauma.

Remember a time when you were comforted by giving over the role of caregiver and quietly accepting care. (*Widowspeak* page 4)

Remember a time when God protected your heart. (p. 5)

How do you receive love? How do you show love? (p. 6)

Remember a time you experienced guilt or shame. Explore the validity of these sensations. (p. 7)

Remember a time when you encountered hopelessness. How were you challenged? How were you changed? (p. 9)

Remember a time when you kneeled to pray. How did God answer your prayer? (p. 11)

Remember a time when your personal appearance didn't matter, when whatever you were wearing was good enough. Did this experience change you? How so? (p. 11)

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Scripture:

2 Samuel 12:20-23

John 10:10

Zephaniah 3:17

John 11:1-44

2

Widowspeak

When her husband died, grief hit hard. The author finds it difficult to breathe. The emotional trauma displaces about 20% of her vocabulary. Her confidence is reduced to rubble. She feels vulnerable and exposed, describing herself as desperately in need of unconditional love, grace, compassion and encouragement.

Remember times in your life when you received unconditional love, grace, compassion, or encouragement. (*Widowspeak* page 16)

You just discovered you have 15 minutes to live.¹ Set a timer for 15 minutes. Write the words that need to be written. (p. 19)

Who do you turn to for comfort? Who are you best suited to comfort? (p. 19)

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Scripture:
John 14:2-4

¹ Source: Gwen Bell, Trust Yourself (#Trust30) Writing Challenge an online initiative of Seth Godin and The Domino Project, including quotes from Ralph Waldo Emerson.

3

Words

The author shares that writing helps her express grief and establishes fertile spaces for healing.

What activity helps you express yourself? Where do you find healing? (*Widowspeak* page 21)

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Scripture:

Psalm 139:16

Psalm 147:3

1 Kings 16-19, 21-22

2 Kings 1-2

4

Password

As the sun sets on the day she became a widow, the author sits at her husband's desk and prepares to call his siblings with news of his death.

Remember a time when you found yourself floundering in the midst of a task and felt a deep need to be better prepared.
(*Widowspeak* page 30)

Pause to consider what your loved ones might come across in the wake of your death. Is now the time for transparency? Is there any behavior that needs to change? (p. 32)

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Scripture:

Psalm 34:18

2 Timothy 2:20-22

5

Laughter

On her first morning as a widow, while preparing to lead a bible study, the author hears her husband's laughter as she reads: Wives, in the same way submit to your own husbands.

She shares with us that her submission took a long, long time.

In Processing Through Grief Stephanie Jose writes: Your job while grieving is not to be thinking about how to make everyone else more comfortable ...²

What does submission look like for you? How does it feel?
What prompts us to withhold our trust? (*Widowspeak* page 34)

Remember a time when you experienced difficulty caring for yourself. How did you overcome? (p. 35)

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Scripture:

1 Peter 3:1-6

Acts 2:42

² *Processing Through Grief: Guided Exercises to Understand Your Emotions and Recover From Loss* by Stephanie Jose, LMHC, LCAT. Foreword by Cécile Rêve, LMHC.

6

Obituary

The author shares with us the process of writing the essential paragraph in the obituary, the one that brings the person to life.

Think about your own obituary and eulogy. What are the things likely to be included? What are the strengths you want to be remembered for? What will be your legacy? (*Widowspeak* page 39)

Do you like dark or milk chocolate? Coffee or tea? What is your favorite flower, herb or seed? Your favorite color? Season? Sport? How do you spend your time? Your money? What are your passions? Who do you love? What does your end of life celebration look like? What do you want included? How do you want to be remembered? (p. 40)

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Scripture:
Matthew 6:25-34

7

Unbalanced

The author is transparent in revealing the crushing nature of picking up her husband's remains and the strain of coming home to uninvited guests, alongside the unexpected blessing of the bouquet of fresh fragrant flowers from her employer.

Remember a time when difficulty and blessing simultaneously impacted you. (*Widowspeak* page 47)

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Scripture:

Psalm 5:1-7

Psalm 90:1-6, 13-17

John 11:1-16, 17-44

John 12:7-8

8

Day 23

In a neighborhood park, the author finds herself seated in the front row, surrounded by family and friends. Her brother-in-law, the man married to her sister, steps out in front of the crowd and takes the microphone.

When the time comes, who do you see holding the microphone or stepping up to the lectern to give your eulogy?
(*Widowspeak* page 50)

Where do you find your heart not trusting? Where do you feel unworthy of love? (p. 51)

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Scripture:
Hebrews 4:15-16

9

Lists

The author reaches a point where what she wants most is to be left alone, submerged in her pain.

In bereavement and other painful seasons words help us name what we are experiencing. The words listed on the following pages are loosely gathered around the concepts of fear, anger, anxiousness, sadness, ambivalence and joy.

Choose 3 to 5 words to describe what you are experiencing. Explore the nuances of your words. What feels familiar? What is unexpected? What is God revealing? What is God redeeming?
(*Widowspeak* page 56)

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Scripture:
John 12:1-8

<u>FEAR</u>	Insufficient	Challenged
Abandoned	Isolated	Critical
Aghast	Masked	Criticized
Alarmed	Mortified	Defiled
Apologetic	Nervous	Degraded
Apprehensive	Panicked	Demanding
Bound	Perplexed	Embittered
Careful	Petrified	Enraged
Cautious	Polite	Explosive
Closed	Powerless	Fed up
Clueless	Puzzled	Frustrated
Cutoff	Ruffled	Fuming
Defined	Scared	Furious
Deserted	Self-conscious	Harsh
Desperate	Separated	Hatred
Disconnected	Shunned	Hell bent
Dismayed	Stunned	Impatient
Disoriented	Surprised	Incensed
Dread	Surrounded	Inconsiderate
Edgy	Tense	Indignant
Exposed	Terrified	Infuriated
Fearful	Uninformed	Irate
Frantic	Withdrawn	Irked
Frightened	<u>ANGER</u>	Irritated
Haunted	Aggressive	Jealous
Horrorified	Agitated	Oppressed
Indefensible	Angry	Outraged
Inferior	Annoyed	Perturbed
Insane	Betrayed	Rage
Insanity	Bitter	Rejected
Insecure	Bristling	Restricted
Intimidated	Chagrined	Rigid

Sharp	Illegitimate	Disengaged
Shocked	Imperfect	Disheartened
Steamed	Ineffective	Disrupted
Strained	Inhibited	Distracted
Ticked off	Insignificant	Distressed
Trivialized	Jumbled	Down
Unkind	Pathetic	Downhearted
Unreasonable	Repulsed	Drowning
Violated	Shamed	Empty
<u>ANXIOUSNESS</u>	Traumatized	Excluded
Ashamed	Weak	Exhausted
Awkward	Worthless	Extinguished
Baffled	<u>SADNESS</u>	Forgotten
Belittled	Abbreviated	Fluid
Burned	Absent	Forsaken
Chaotic	Abnormal	Fragile
Clumsy	Adrift	Fragmented
Confused	Alone	Gloomy
Detached	Amputated	Glum
Dirty	Bewildered	Grieved
Disgusted	Broken	Helpless
Displeased	Crazy	Hopeless
Dissatisfied	Crushed	Hungering
Dumb	Dazed	Impaired
Dumbfounded	Deep	Incomplete
Embarrassed	Defeated	Irrelevant
Fidgety	Dejected	Less than
Flustered	Depressed	Lonely
Foolish	Desolate	Lonesome
Guilty	Despairing	Lost
Humiliated	Devastated	Lousy
Ignored	Disappointed	Low

Meek	Uneasy	Uncertain
Melancholy	Unfit	Unsure
Mournful	Unfocused	Unresolved
Muddled	Unhappy	Vacillating
Neglected	Unhinged	Warring
Numb	Unimportant	Wavering
Out of place	Unlovable	Wondering
Outcast	Unqualified	<u>JOY</u>
Overlooked	Unsettled	Able
Overwhelmed	Unwanted	Accepted
Pained	Unwelcome	Adequate
Messy	Valueless	Adventurous
Practical	Vulnerable	Affirmed
Pragmatic	Weary	Anchored
Punished	Worn out	Appreciative
Reclusive	Wretched	At ease
Regretful	<u>AMBIVALENCE</u>	Available
Remorseful	Clashing	Bold
Remote	Complicated	Brave
Removed	Contradictory	Buoyed
Retreating	Debatable	Calm
Shaken	Doubtful	Capable
Sick	Equivocal	Casual
Small	Extraneous	Changed
Somber	Fickle	Changing
Sorry	Fluctuating	Cheerful
Submerged	Hesitant	Cherished
Torn	Inconclusive	Clever
Unable	Irresolute	Comfortable
Unarmed	Mixed	Comforted
Unavailable	Opposed	Compassionate
Uncomfortable	Silent	Competent

Connected	Healing	Proud
Considerate	Heard	Purposed
Contented	Honest	Qualified
Courageous	Humorous	Quiet
Cradled	Important	Reasonable
Creative	Informed	Receptive
Curious	Inspired	Refreshed
Delighted	Joyful	Relaxed
Determined	Kind	Relevant
Discerning	Learning	Rhythmic
Ecstatic	Legitimate	Robust
Elated	Lifted	Sane
Embraced	Listening	Satisfied
Encouraged	Love	Secure
Energetic	Loveable	Seen
Engaged	Loved	Settled
Equipped	Lulled	Skillful
Exhilarated	Mellow	Spirited
Expectant	Mighty	Stable
Familiar	Moored	Still
Fearless	Natural	Strong
Fit	Nesting	Supported
Flourishing	Nice	Sure
Focused	Nostalgic	Thankful
Free	Nurtured	Thrilled
Generous	Open	Trusting
Gentle	Optimistic	Truthful
Giddy	Overjoyed	Wanted
Grateful	Passionate	Warm
Grounded	Peaceful	Welcome
Happy	Powerful	Whole
Healed	Precious	Wise

10

Sex

In the days following her husband's death a piece the author had written yet never published surfaced. She read Blue Flannel LAX and wept, put it aside, rediscovered it, read it and wept.

Remember a time when you were angry with God. What did it take for you to let go? What did it take for you to heal?
(*Widowspeak* page 64)

What is the beauty of believing in storybook endings? What is the danger? (p. 65)

Describe a time that for you resonates with the idea that life is breaking us, that we are bleeding in our souls. (p. 66)

Remember a time when you struggled with something that felt completely overwhelming. (p. 67)

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Scripture:
Philippians 2:14-15
James 3:17

11

Love

The author shares that she can't quite wrap her heart around it, but there was something so different about this man—the man who would become her husband—even on that first night and in the morning after, when the relationship could so easily have become a one-night stand.

Why do we, as couples, spend so much time tracking the failures and the wounds when there are greater moments of love and grace and joy to celebrate? How can we reverse the trend?

(*Widowspeak* page 72)

Sneaking into his office and flipping through the Rolodex is a betrayal of trust. What prompts us to look? What is the risk? What is the remedy? (p. 72)

How are boundaries helpful? Who gets to decide? (p. 73)

Remember a time God provided comfort for your pain. How did you fully embrace it? How did you refuse to accept it? (p. 74)

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Scripture:

Genesis 2:20-25

12

23 Again

The author shares her journal: I find that tears flow freely in the privacy of the shower and in the soft darkness of a weekly yoga class; that a cocktail after work to help me sleep is too easily dangerous and that chamomile tea is soothing, safe and warm; that the gritty shard of death becomes the pearl in the oyster, the irritant smoothed by time promises to emerge as something beautiful; that a caterpillar is cocooned in total darkness before her wings are ready for flight; that the sound of sirens is a signal for prayer; and that whatever I am feeling or thinking is not just ok, it is important—my mind and body are sending messages to me.

Remember a time when you felt cocooned in darkness. Did something beautiful emerge? (*Widowspeak* page 79)

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Scripture:

Isaiah 5:9

Matthew 1:20-23

13

Performance Theater

The author's husband received an email inviting him to build sets for The Wizard of Oz. He died the next day. Opening night is joyful and tearful as the author and her daughter remember Dad, the man who never missed a performance.

How are you trusting God? How are you making way for the future?
(*Widowspeak* page 84)

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Scripture:
John 14:18-21

14

Surrender

In her widowhood, there is one regret the author carries—that in this life she did not take her pain, frustration, anger and sadness to God before burdening her husband. If she had this life to do over again, she would fully embrace life in a way that whenever she walked in the door her heart would be free to engage her husband with love and joy and laughter.

How will you engage your beloved one? What will you ask of God?
(*Widowspeak* page 86)

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Scripture:
Philippians 4:4-7

About the Author

Renee J. Wurzer

In her first book, *Widowspeak*, Renee Wurzer moved from proofreading to publishing, from editing to writing, from behind the curtain to center stage. In *Widowspeak Companion Journal* she invited us to find our courage, to risk introspection and conversation with our beloved someone, the person God designed for us.³

A recent widow, her delight here on earth is her legacy family, especially the grandchildren. She considers herself an encourager and writes daily, publishing her work online as she engages the journey from grief to joy.

Renew Collaborative

A deep appreciation for the written word, a passion for well-told stories and her affection for perfection, inspire Renee Wurzer to support and encourage writers seeking to self-publish books and other creative works. Join her in this newest venture, Renew Collaborative.

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The name *Renew Collaborative* was inspired by the Isaiah 40:31 mixed-media painting created by Destiny Jackson

*but those who hope in the Lord
will renew their strength.
They will soar on wings like eagles;
they will run and not grow weary,
they will walk and not be faint.*

³ *Widowspeak* and *Widowpeak Companion Journal* published in cooperation with Fred A. Brede, Brede Publishing.