

THE LAST VALLEY

A story of God's grace in terminal illness

GRAHAM HEAPS



EP Books (Evangelical Press), Unit C, Tomlinson Road, Leyland PR25
2DY England

epbooks@10ofthose.com

www.epbooks.org

EP Books are distributed in the USA by:

JPL Books, 3883 Linden Ave. S.E., Wyoming, MI 49548

order@jplbooks.com

www.jplbooks.com

© Graham Heaps 2020. All rights reserved.

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data available

Print ISBN978-1-78397-296-8

Scripture quotations are from The ESV® Bible (The Holy Bible, English Standard Version®), copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Contents

Foreword	xi
Introduction	xv
1. The fulfilment of a dream	1
2. The story of a marriage	9
3. The fateful diagnosis	18
4. Under the Knife	25
5. Dark days at LGI	32
6. Life in the goldfish bowl	39
7. Progress at last	46
8. Brain frying and beyond	53
9. Rapid decline	62
10. A changed lady?	70
11. Sue's Indian summer	78
12. Falling asleep in Jesus	86
13. Dust to dust	95
14. Learning a new life	102
15. Consolations rich and real	110
Postscript	119

Introduction

It is vital, at the outset of your journey into this slim volume to give you, my reader, an idea of the story that lies in your hands. Here you will find an honest, gritty, and at times somewhat harrowing, eyewitness account of how my precious wife of more than forty years struggled with a malignant, rapidly spreading, and seemingly all-conquering brain tumour. You will learn how she came to terms with her condition, and how she coped with its increasingly debilitating effects up until the day it took her life, around a year after her alarming symptoms first appeared.

The account also shows the effect of the shock diagnosis, brutal operation, unexpectedly long hospitalisation, brief recovery and subsequent decline on her large family and many friends. What I have written is a deeply personal account of tough days. It is honestly recorded, but reflects the way I saw things; how each twist

in the road affected me. As such it is full of vivid memories of my own experience of horror and hope, panic and peace, fear and faith, consternation and comfort.

To be completely candid, here you will find a loving husband's view of his wife's struggles with a vile affliction, and doubtless that love colours every line of the record that I have written, as it did every moment of the experience itself. Indeed the account is, unashamedly, a love story: the record of how a relationship, already strong and satisfying, was not only sustained but seemed to flower yet more beautifully, in the bitter winds and sleety showers of a horrific terminal illness.

Supremely, however, this is a story of discovery. It traces how two very ordinary and, indeed, timid and flawed Christians learned at first-hand the truth of God's striking promise to presence himself with his sheep as they walk in the intimidating 'valley of the shadow of death.' Together we were surprised by grace in the furnace of approaching death and its dreaded separation. And if you patiently come with me all the way to the final pages of my little book, you will learn how a grieving widower was wonderfully upheld, generally preserved from corrosive bitterness, and even brought into new joys, by the same gracious hand of the Good Shepherd.

I have made public our story in the hope that it may be of some help to those who have to walk in similar tough tracks, or who greatly fear that this may be their lot one day. Its main purpose is to show anyone who wants to know where the best help, and only true comfort, can be

found, and to reassure those who love and follow the Saviour that he will not fail them in life's darkest moments. If the account proves to be of any help at all, I shall be more than satisfied.

Finally, it needs to be added that if the account is helpful, or even readable and coherent, much of the credit goes to my dear friend and initial editorial advisor, Gwyn Davies of Aberystwyth. Gwyn, who knew Sue all her adult life, went through the first draft of the manuscript making helpful observations about its general 'feel', as well as wise suggestions for omissions and additions. He also made copious corrections to its appalling spelling and grammar, all of which went far beyond the normal call of friendship.

Graham Heaps, March 2018