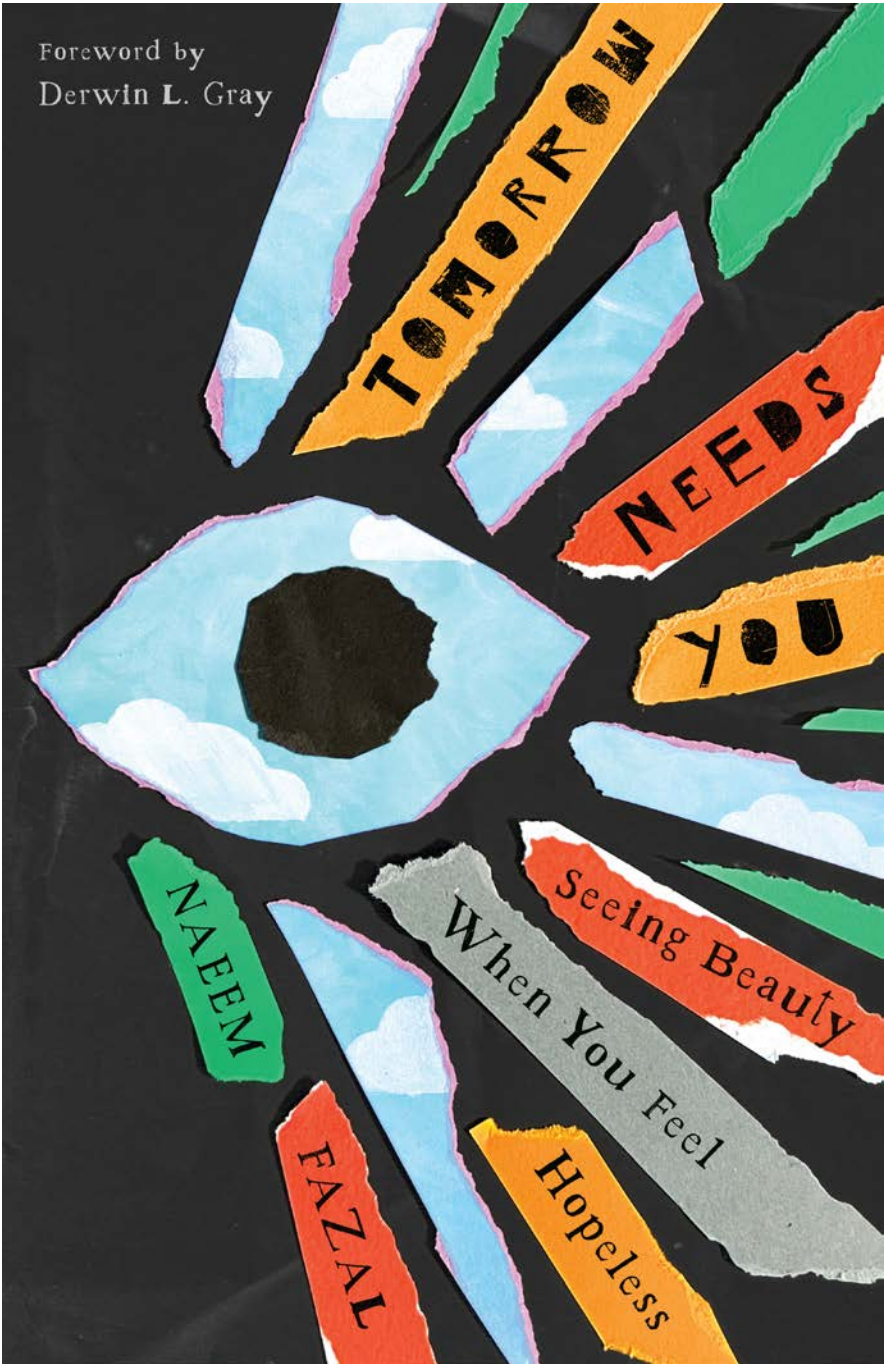


Foreword by  
Derwin L. Gray



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## Moving On

“It’s about Dad,” she said.

“What about Dad?”

She hesitated. I was at a tire shop replacing a flat tire. It had been one of those days—those days that start out okay and turn stressful by the hour. The day was almost over when I got the call.

“Dad is in the ER . . . He stabbed—”

She erupted into uncontrollable sobs. I could barely figure out what she was saying.

“He what?!” I asked nervously, raising my voice.

“He stabbed himself . . . He took a kitchen knife . . . The kids found him. He was just lying there, Naeem. Why did he do this? I don’t understand why. Why would he do this? We just left him alone for an hour or so. Why did he do this? I can’t believe it, Naeem.”

“Okay, was he alive when you found him? Where is he now? Where was Mom? Is he stable?” I would have kept on asking questions, but I knew I needed to get there. My dad and mom were visiting my sister in Myrtle Beach, South Carolina. I was about four hours away in Charlotte, North Carolina—with a flat tire. I felt helpless.

“Okay, I’m on the way,” I said as I ended the call.

## My Dad's Story

The drive to the ER was rough. I was alone with my thoughts for four hours. I knew Dad had given up on life years ago. He began to believe he was unnecessary. It started when he moved to the United States. He was not this guy.

The dad I knew as I was growing up was ambitious and hard working. He was born in Pakistan, the youngest one of three brothers. He had half brothers because his dad, my grandfather, had two wives. (Muslims can legally have up to four wives.) But among all his brothers and sisters, Dad stood out. He never graduated from high school because at sixteen years old he jumped on a ship headed to Kuwait. He lied about how old he was and started working as soon as he got there.

Several years later he went back to Pakistan and married Mom, his first cousin. Marrying cousins is a common practice in Muslim cultures. In fact, in Dad's family, kids would be spoken for at an early age. My dad was one of three sons; his cousin (my mom) was one of three daughters. Each of the three sons married one of the three daughters. He eventually moved Mom to Kuwait, where most of my siblings and I were born and raised (my older brother was the only one of us born in Pakistan), and then later he sent us to the United States.

Dad continued to work in Kuwait to financially support us as we were trying to get settled in the States. In his thirty years in Kuwait, Dad worked his way up to management and then business partner, but eventually he left all that to come and be with us. At the time I thought it was the best thing for all of us. But, looking back, I am not sure it was.

Dad had swag. His fits were always on point. He also loved cool cars. I have a distinct memory of me, my brother, two sisters, and

Mom all cramped into a sweet maroon two-door 1978 BMW 3-series coupe. That car did not last long; neither did the Audi coupe. I remember hearing about all his travels to Europe and China for business. Seeing photos of him standing beside the Great Wall of China, in European countries in the middle of real snow, and with white, blond people was thrilling for me as a kid. (Remember, I grew up in the desert.) I was about twelve years old when he gave me some money and encouraged me to go with friends to a fine-dining restaurant just for the experience. When I was growing up, my dad was the only one I knew who had flown on a Concorde, the supersonic commercial aircraft.

Dad was the most successful and generous of all his brothers. Growing up, I would hear stories about how he put my cousin through college in the United States. Although we were not rich, he provided for us to the point of figuring out a way to send his son to the States for college, and eventually helping us all migrate there.

Then disappointment changed him. He came to America and went from being a business partner to working at a convenience store and then doing odd jobs just trying to make money to help us. He came here after 9/11. We were all concerned about immigration policies, worried that they would eventually shut down access to Pakistanis coming to the States. So he came here—or, I should say, we made him come.

And then one day he had a heart attack, which ended up requiring him to have quadruple bypass surgery. After that, he never fully recovered. Even though physically he did, depression set in. He was different from then on: he refused to drive because he feared having a heart attack while he was on the road. Eventually his body began reacting to his emotional and psychological state. He began feeling unworthy and unnecessary. He saw us growing

up and finding our own way. It did not help that now all of his kids had become Christians, leaving his Muslim faith behind. He was convinced that he had failed as a Muslim father.

He saw his kids marry and have kids, and now he was a grandfather. Yet he couldn't see the joy and the beauty of any of those things. We had so many conversations about all the good that came from him being here with us, but he couldn't see it. Now he was saying, "I can't do anything right. I can't even kill myself right."

I don't think I will ever forget those words that my dad uttered as he was lying in the hospital bed. I remember looking into his eyes and realizing that, besides disappointment and despair, there was so much shame and guilt. He didn't want to be around for tomorrow. But tomorrow needed him.

## **Tomorrow Needs You**

This book is about growth after pain. Your trauma may be different from my trauma or my dad's trauma. Or you may not identify your past experiences as traumatic, but you still know they hurt. We all face negative experiences that can haunt us: lost relationships, disabilities, unemployment, difficult neighbors. Some of these experiences are intense and others are milder, but all of them have a cumulative effect on us. Regardless of your particular experience, this book is about being honest about our past fears and failures. It is about facing our trauma and our tragedies. It is about confronting our fears and our anxieties. It is about doing all of this not with more faith, but with beauty. In these pages, I will show you how it truly is the beautiful things in life that give us the power to overcome the most fearful things in life.

It's said that knowledge can change us, but stories have the power to transform our lives. I believe this to be true. So, in this book, you will read stories in every chapter that illustrate the power of transformation. I have also taken the opportunity to share a lot of my childhood and my culture, hoping it will allow you to see that, regardless of a fearful past, God can create a beautiful future.

My prayer is that you will stop trying to find strength within yourself and instead look to what God is offering you. It starts with realizing that tomorrow needs you. Yes, it does. Your tomorrow and someone else's tomorrow need you. Although we spend so much time rehearsing the past, the reality is that yesterday has forgotten us, and today is waiting.

## **We Need to Be Needed**

We all need to be needed. We are wired to be wanted. We need people. We begin to crack and eventually break when we feel unwanted or are convinced we are unnecessary. We all have days when we feel like nobody sees us, cares about us, understands us, or will miss us. We need God. We need counseling, therapy, walks, sleep, and so forth. We need whatever helps us to heal. Days like those are inevitable but also unreliable. We should not believe all those feelings. Those thoughts are connected to yesterday and a bad today, but tomorrow needs you. Tomorrow has so much potential, so much possibility. There are relationships and opportunities that need you. There are dreams that won't come true without you.

But life happens. We get sick. We lose jobs. We encounter tragedy, and everything changes. The life we knew becomes unfamiliar and unstable. We find ourselves struggling with disappointment and disillusionment. Most of the time our soul is trying to process what has happened to us, but our emotions have already

started affecting our bodies. We begin to do things that we would never do. We begin to think thoughts that we would never have thought before. We end up not being able to see anything good in our lives. Pain and suffering create something so massive inside of us that at times the biggest giants we have to face are not in front of us but inside of us.

Do you find yourself not wanting to get out of bed? I know we have all felt this way. Maybe you're feeling it today, and you just don't think it's worth it. You had so much invested in yesterday. You had so many accomplishments and highs yesterday. But the past is too small for us to live in.

## **Forgetting the Past**

In the Scriptures, the apostle Paul says, "I focus on this one thing: Forgetting the past and looking forward to what lies ahead, I press on to reach the end of the race and receive the heavenly prize for which God, through Christ Jesus, is calling us" (Philippians 3:13-14 NLT). Paul was talking to a certain group of people, but the content of his message rings true for us as well. We have to focus on tomorrow and not dwell on yesterday. I cannot help but wonder if he was reminded of the Old Testament passage in which God says, "Do not dwell on the past. See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the wilderness and streams in the wasteland" (Isaiah 43:18-19).

I wonder if sometimes we continue to worship the God of the past and don't recognize the God of the future. Because God exists in the future—he was in our yesterday, but he's also in tomorrow. It makes sense that God focuses on tomorrow and the future, because hope exists not in the past but only in the future. God is calling us, you and me; regardless of what happened to us, he's calling us to

the future. He knows that our dreams and aspirations and all the beautiful things exist in the future. If we are consumed with the things of yesterday, we cannot tap into the possibility of tomorrow.

Maybe tomorrow is scary to you. Maybe because of what happened, you know for a fact that you could no longer be the person you were before. Your status has changed because now you are divorced. A loved one has died and now you are alone. You never thought you would be disabled, but even saying it now, knowing that you are, is so hard. And the thought of facing tomorrow with a permanent disability is terrifying. If tomorrow means that you have to trust again, love again, risk again, hope again, you don't want to face tomorrow.

In the book of Romans, Paul talks about pain, suffering, and God's love, and the connection between them. His writings in chapter 8 reveal that love is always questioned when pain and suffering are introduced in life. We question the love of the people in our lives when we are going through pain, grief, loss, or confusion. We question people's love when we go through relational conflict, difficulty at work, a chronic medical condition. We wonder, *Will she understand? Does he still like me? Are they still interested in me?* When we face failure and disappointment, we question people's commitment to us. We fear that if we continue to be unsuccessful and continue to struggle people will leave us. We question the love of everyone. We also question God's love when we go through tragedy and suffering. That is why Paul writes in Romans 8:38 (NLT): "I am convinced that nothing can ever separate us from God's love. Neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither our fears for today nor our worries about tomorrow—not even the powers of hell can separate us from God's love." He wants to remind us, regardless of what we might feel, the truth that God has never left us.

So if you and I find ourselves in a place in which we have convinced ourselves that no one really cares, no one really notices, and no one really understands or loves us, then we are wrong. Our feelings are real and important, but they are not necessarily true. What is right and true? God's love and commitment toward us.

Yes, tomorrow can be scary. I think that is why King David (the one who was chosen, anointed, favored, and beloved by God, that guy), one of the most powerful men in history, struggled with fear and anxiety of tomorrow. The book of Psalms contains his confessions of weakness, doubt, and uncertainty. In Psalm 27, he unveils his practice of peace and power to face tomorrows: "The LORD is my light and my salvation—whom shall I fear? The LORD is the stronghold of my life—of whom shall I be afraid?" (Psalm 27:1).

## **Fears About Our Weaknesses**

Tomorrow makes me nervous and anxious as well. Most people in my life would be surprised by that statement because I'm constantly talking about my new ideas of what the future could look like. There is no doubt that I love dreaming about the future, but that doesn't mean I don't have nightmares about it. I worry about whether people will find out that I'm not that smart, insightful, or interesting. So, yes, tomorrow might reveal to people that I'm not all that.

Tomorrow will test us. I have always hated taking tests. It started at an early age when I was in elementary school. You see, I have had a learning disability my whole life that made me a very bad test taker. Unfortunately, I did not find out I had a disability until I was in my forties. (I know, that's crazy, isn't it?) I believed for the longest time that I was simply not smart enough. To survive I started cheating on tests. I befriended the smart kids and convinced them to help me cheat. I did this from first to fifth grade. The older I got,

the harder it got. Eventually, I developed stomachaches that would show up the nights before exams. I made myself sick so that I did not have to face tomorrow. Once it got so bad that the doctors thought I might have stomach worms.

All this because tomorrow was test day. That is the reason tomorrows are so hard for me. I'm tempted to live in today or dream about yesterday because a part of me feels like I will always do badly when tested. But if tomorrow is going to test me anyway in spite of my anxiety about it, then I choose to believe that tomorrow needs me. For everybody I love will be there tomorrow, and I need to be with them.

### **God's Call into Tomorrow**

We also need words of truth as we move past our yesterday. In Jeremiah 1:5, God says to Jeremiah, "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart; I appointed you as a prophet to the nations."

It seems like God is saying, "Jeremiah, I have been dreaming about your future before you were born. I've got you, regardless of what you might think. You are special to me. I have uniquely created you for a purpose. This purpose is bigger than you think. I have known your yesterday. I'm in your today. And I'm calling you out to tomorrow."

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