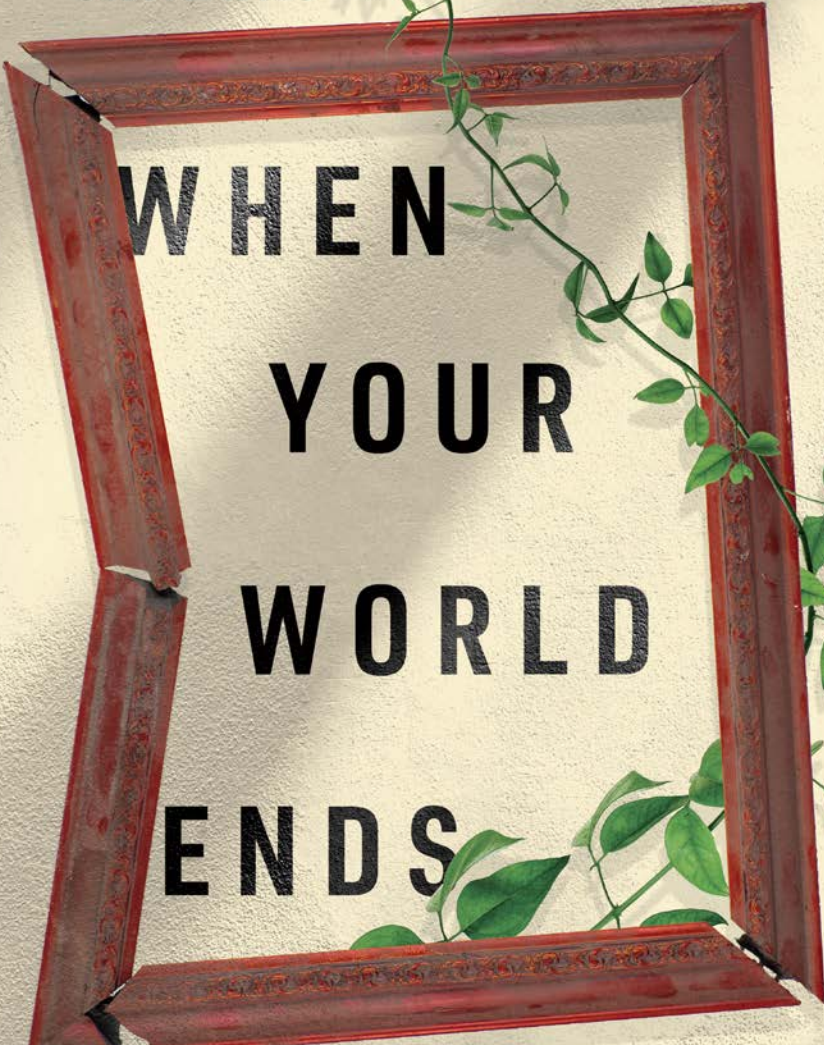


DAWN MANN
SANDERS

Foreword by
CAROL KENT



**WHEN
YOUR
WORLD
ENDS**

*God's Creative Process
for Rebuilding a Life*



InterVarsity Press
ivpress.com

Taken from *When Your World Ends* by Dawn Mann Sanders

Copyright © 2024 by Dawn Nicole Sanders

Published by InterVarsity Press, Downers Grove, IL.

www.ivpress.com.

IT'S ABOUT THE INVITATION

WHAT WAS THE LAST INVITATION you received? If you can't remember off the top of your head, consider these: an advertisement is an invitation to buy something; a phone call is an invitation to talk, listen, or both; hunger is an invitation to eat, possibly to savor; and breathing? Well, breathing is an invitation to *live*.

Basically, our lives are sequences of invitations and our responses to them.

But not all invitations are desired or pleasurable. A sink full of dirty dishes is an invitation to clean. A long line is an invitation to wait. A yard covered in dead leaves is an invitation to rake. Those are mild examples of less desirable biddings. Invitations can get much worse.

LIVING THROUGH THE END OF THE WORLD AS I KNEW IT

On June 10, 2011, God woke me up the morning after my husband Reggie's death. To say his death wasn't a desired or pleasurable invitation is the understatement of my life. The loss of my husband equated to the end of the world as I knew it. The last thing I wanted to do that morning was to live in a world without him in it. In the words of Michelle Obama, "It hurts to live after someone has died."¹

When God woke me up that morning, he invited me into what felt like an impossible situation. As far as I was concerned, it simply couldn't be done. I couldn't do it. I didn't want to do it.

My husband had just died and I was powerless to change it.

Yet in moments of despair, invitations hold immense power. They have the ability to transform lives and shape destinies. How we respond to these invitations determines the course of our journey. They can create the possible and the impossible. That morning, amid my grief, God invited me into the impossible.

For the next several nights, I'd drift to sleep begging God to allow me to wake up the next morning and realize my husband's death was a terrible dream. I even implored God to take me too. Don't get me wrong. I wasn't suicidal. I didn't want to die, nor did I do anything other than pray to end my time here on earth.

You see, as a Christian, I believe and fully embrace that I have everlasting life; therefore, I'll see my husband again in heaven. Why stay here when my partner in this life—the person I valued most and who gave me a reason to get up in the morning—wasn't here? I was simply letting God know I was ready to join my husband whenever he was ready to let me. In other words, I didn't want to wait for our reunion if I didn't have to. I prayed because the events unfolding in my life were beyond my control. If they'd been within my power, my husband wouldn't have died in the first place.

JONAH DID IT HIS WAY

I believe Jonah made a similar decision in response to God's invitation to go to Nineveh (Jonah 1). Let me set the stage. In an attempt to flee from God and his will, Jonah boarded a ship from Joppa (in today's Israel) bound for Tarshish (in today's Spain). After the ship set sail, God sent a mighty wind and storm that threatened to tear the vessel apart. Despite the mariners' fervent prayers, the storm persisted. In an effort to identify the cause of God's wrath, they cast lots.

At that point, Jonah confessed he was the culprit and directed the mariners to hurl him into the sea. Initially, the sailors attempted to row back to shore, but when their efforts proved futile, they followed Jonah's instructions and threw him overboard.

The ship was in the middle of the Mediterranean at this point. It had been at sea one day, so the crew was probably closer to Israel and Nineveh than they were to Tarshish, making the closest shore more in line with God's will for Jonah, especially since God was using the storm to encourage him to go to Nineveh. Furthermore, they were so far out I think Jonah fully expected to drown.

But I don't think Jonah was suicidal. If he truly desired to end his life, Jonah didn't need to get on a ship bound for Tarshish to kill himself. Besides, he could've simply jumped overboard. He didn't need to involve the mariners, whom he seemed inclined to protect. No, Jonah wasn't suicidal. Nor did God invite Jonah to kill himself. Jonah just didn't want to go to Nineveh.

God had extended an invitation to Jonah, and Jonah stubbornly refused to accept it. That doesn't make sense, does it? Logically, responding to God's invitation with a "No" seems nonsensical. Yet at times our emotions override logic.

Jonah was obviously a God-fearing man. Otherwise why would he flee from God's presence? And why didn't he pray for safety? He didn't pray even when urged to do so by the ship's captain. While the sailors fervently prayed to their pagan gods, Jonah didn't pray until after they threw him into the sea, according to Scripture.

This leads me to believe that not only did Jonah expect to die, but given the choice of going to Nineveh or dying, Jonah would've chosen death. However, Jonah didn't have that option. Instead a great fish appointed by God swallowed him. It took three more days inside that fish's belly before Jonah realized death wouldn't be his means of escape. Not until Jonah chapter 2 did Jonah finally surrender to God's will for his life. He prayed for salvation and, in response, God had the fish vomit Jonah out onto the dry land, a shore closer to Nineveh.

Some scholars speculate that after three days in that fish's belly, its stomach acid would've irreparably damaged Jonah's skin, assuming he still had any skin on his body when he exited the fish. I mention this because you may think Jonah could've attempted

more directly to hurt or kill himself. You may be in the midst of a trying time, dreaming up ways to harm or kill yourself. I sincerely hope and pray you won't. I'll add, though, that if you try to kill yourself and survive, you could cause yourself serious damage and potentially wind up in worse condition than before you began. It's better both spiritually and practically not to try to end your life. My situation was bad enough—my ache too intense. I wasn't trying to make it worse.

JESUS IN THE GARDEN

Praying when presented with an undesirable invitation is exactly what Jesus did in the Garden of Gethsemane. In Matthew 26 we read of Jesus' final day on earth before he headed to the cross. Despite knowing that Judas Iscariot had agreed to betray him to the chief priests, Jesus shared a meal with his apostles, including Judas. Leading up to the Passover meal, Jesus had already forewarned his disciples of his impending suffering and crucifixion. During the meal Jesus reminded them again and instituted the Lord's Supper to remember this moment always.

After spending this last, precious evening with his disciples, Jesus withdrew to the Garden of Gethsemane to pray as he awaited Judas's betrayal and his subsequent arrest. In this moment Jesus was acutely aware of his impending suffering and confided in Peter, James, and John that he was "sorrowful and deeply distressed" (Matthew 26:37).

Like any of us when facing a circumstance we know will be difficult and distressing, Jesus expressed emotions leaning toward his preference to escape this part of his future. Given the choice, Jesus preferred not to suffer. That is why he beseeched God to spare him the agony of his impending arrest, torture, and crucifixion. Jesus prayed three times, clearly communicating this preference to God.

Jesus had the power to alter his circumstances, yet the Prince of Peace chose to pray. This is evidenced by the fact that what happened next was his arrest and betrayal. When Jesus' will differed

from God's, he willingly surrendered and aligned himself with his Father's plan.

In light of this, when presented with my own set of painful circumstances, I followed Jesus' example. I made the request—I implored God to take me. When he didn't, I eventually accepted his will for my life. In waking each morning, I came to understand that God was telling me he wanted me to live through this circumstance I'd labeled as the end of the world as I knew it.

Though *my* world had ended, *the* world hadn't. My life hadn't. I decided that if I had to be here, eventually I was going to find a way to enjoy my time here. I couldn't go on hurting the way I was.

That meant I had to create a new life—one without my husband, Reggie. This was an invitation. God was inviting me to join him in his next creation—of me, my life, my community, my environment, and my world. Just as with Adam and Eve, God is inviting us to join him in the process of crafting our lives, our communities, our environments, and our worlds.

Whether it's rebuilding a community ravaged by a devastating hurricane, finding purpose after the loss of a job, or healing from the trauma of a personal tragedy, we needn't remain stuck in our pain. We aren't helpless. There's something we can do. We can join God in creating something else—something new and, as you'll see, something good.

BUY THE BOOK!

ivpress.com/when-your-world-ends