

*Death is not
extinguishing
the light; it is*

*turning out the
Death is not
extinguishing*

*the light; it is
turning out the
the lamp because*

*the lamp because
the dawn has
the dawn has*

*now come.
now come.*

Too young to die

By Don Meyer

No matter how you look at it, anyone who is 18 years old is too young to die. There are just too many dreams left unfulfilled. There are too many things yet to do. Yet that is what happened to one of our precious students, Tracey Michelle Duncan, when she was killed in a car accident on September 24, 2005.

My heart is heavy and my hands don't want to keep writing as I gather the words trying to express all that is on my heart. Tracey joined our Valley Forge Christian College family only 36 days earlier as a freshman. She arrived on campus and moved into Shelton Hall with Julia and Priscilla. She joined Start Team Number 11. She registered for her classes. She volunteered to be a part of the new church planting team. Her life was just starting.

Her joy knew no bounds. In our residence halls we encourage quietness at 11 p.m. Tracey was often heard outside her room at 10:59 calling out at the top of her voice, "I love you guys." Just a couple of days before the accident she called her dad in West Virginia and said, "Daddy, I have never been so happy in all of my life."

She had just told her friend Meghan, "The family I baby-sit for found out I needed some work done on my car and they offered to pay for it. How awesome is God that He would do that for me. You know God has taken care of my every need. Even being here at VFCC is a miracle. Have you ever been so in love with God; so filled with joy that you



Tracey Michelle Duncan

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Tracey Duncan having some fun with classmates.

could just explode? I don't know if you know what I am talking about, but God is just so good to me and to all of us.”

That was Tracey, so full of life and savoring every moment. Then came Friday evening, September 23. She finished babysitting at 11 and decided to drive home. She called her dad and he told her not to leave because it was too late for the three-hour drive. She wanted to surprise him and decided to go home anyway. One mile from home — yes, just one mile — she fell asleep and drifted off that little country road into a fencerow for a horse farm and there entered heaven.

We all sat somewhat numb in our daily college chapel service on the Monday morning after the accident. Although I was originally scheduled to speak, we all knew it was best to change the service. After we sang a few gentle choruses, I sat on a stool and together we talked and prayed and cried.

I read the soothing, hope-filled words of Psalm 139. The profound theology and practical wisdom watered our grieving souls. The affirmations. The promises. The assurances. Sometimes you just have to read the Word of God. Slowly. Deliberately. Resolutely. Peacefully.

“How do you handle something like this?” I asked. “What do you do when there is nothing

“Where
is God
when it
hurts?”

— Philip Yancy

you can do? What do you say?” As Philip Yancey once wrote, “Where is God when it hurts?”

Out of my heart I shared with our VFCC family what my wife, Evie, and I do when these things happen. Even though there is nothing you can do to change what happened, there are some things we can do which always help us.

- **First, we must find time to spend alone with God.** In quiet privacy we soak up the Word of God. Nothing gives us perspective like reviewing our theological foundation. We pray. We meditate. We turn from our loss and pain to Him. We allow our roots to go deeper in God than ever before. And there in solitude we find He really does “restore our souls.”

- **Secondly, we do well to reflect on insights gleaned from others who over the years have also faced life's ambiguities and mysteries.** As H.B. London said, “What we are at any great moment is what we have become prior to that event.”

Or we can ponder the words of Reinhard Bonnke: “There

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are multiple layers to the will of God.”

Tracey’s life was short, and God called her home. But God’s will also includes what God wants to say to all of us at a time like this. Although this was about Tracey and not about us, in another sense it really is also about us. What can God say to us in our times of grief and sorrow?

Or as D.J. Paglia with pastoral wisdom shared at the funeral of another young person, “There are some things that God chooses not to explain to us.”

The writings of the Scriptures and wise words from spiritual giants flow over our souls in times of sorrow like ocean waves bringing comfort and peace. We realize others have experienced times like these. If God helped them through their losses, He can and will also help us through ours.

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• **Thirdly, we need to spend time with those who are close to us.** I wanted to spend time with Evie and those who are closest to me. Grief is a time to be alone but it is also a time to be with others. To process. To express our love. To think out loud. To vent our frustration. To hug and be hugged.

With this accident I found myself wanting to be near our students so we could share our grief.

I wanted to tell them how much I loved them. I wanted to comfort them, and by being with them I was also comforted by them.

• **Finally, it also helps to do something in ministry.** We took an offering from our VFCC family for Tracey’s family. Two days later 65 of us drove the three hours to the Harper’s Ferry area for the funeral. We all wore green ribbons, Tracey’s favorite color.



The site of Tracey Duncan’s accident.

The church was packed for the funeral. The service included laughter and tears and lots of godly wisdom from Tracey’s pastors. Being there helped all of us.

The images of that day will be with me for as long as I live: the sad faces; the closed casket; Tracey’s many pictures, including one with her VFCC ID card tucked in the corner; the songs; the eulogies; the committal service

in that little cemetery about a mile away; the love of our students expressed to the family; the piles and piles of home-cooked food.

Before we returned home we drove to the site of the accident. It has to be one of the most beautiful places in all of West Virginia, right in the middle of stunning horse farms. And there was the broken debris of the wooden fence strewn all over the pasture.

We all held hands and prayed.

One of our students also named Tracey said it best, “This just stinks.” It was actually hard to leave. Although Tracey was not there, somehow we felt nearer to her in that beautiful, broken place.

A few days later we planted a tree outside Tracey’s dorm room in her memory. Though our hearts grieve and our unanswered questions remain, as someone said, “Death is not extinguishing the light; it is turning out the lamp because the dawn has now come.” For Tracey Michelle Duncan, “the dawn has now come.” **tpe**

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