

The Unimaginable: God, Grief, and the Questions That Won't Go Away

Laura Busse on Traumatic Loss, Honest Faith, Identity, and Learning to Live Again

Laura Busse

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Program Summary

In this Thursday edition of Mark & Friends, host Donna Leland talks with Laura Busse about the death of Laura's son Evan by suicide and the grief journey that led to her Moody Publishers book, *The Unimaginable: God, Grief, and the Questions That Won't Go Away*. Laura describes traumatic grief as an earthquake that can shake the heart, mind, body, faith, health, and relationships. She speaks candidly about anger toward God, guilt and shame, the temptation to compare grief journeys, and the identity changes that follow profound loss. Rather than hiding difficult emotions, Laura encourages grieving people to bring their whole selves to God, rediscover who Scripture says they are, and allow Jesus to walk with them through the darkest valley. A dramatic encounter with a charging moose became a turning point when Laura realized, 'I want to live,' and began asking what a meaningful life after loss could look like.

Key Takeaways

- Traumatic loss can disrupt every dimension of life—heart, mind, body, faith, health, relationships, and identity.
- Laura wrote the book she wished she had been able to find after Evan's death: a companion for people walking through unimaginable loss.
- Anger toward God does not have to destroy faith; honest lament can become part of a deeper relationship with Him.
- Guilt and shame are different: guilt focuses on what happened, while shame attacks identity with accusations such as 'I am the reason.'
- Grieving people often try to think their way out of pain, but healing also requires permission to feel what is actually present.
- There are no simple timetables for grief. Love continues, so grief changes rather than simply disappearing.
- Comparing my grief journey with someone else's can pull my attention away from the unique way Jesus is walking with me.

- Loss can create an identity crisis, but Scripture gives a deeper identity: adopted, beloved, chosen, and a child of God.
- Laura's encounter with a charging moose became a turning point when she realized she wanted to live and rebuild a life of meaning.
- Faith-based grief support can hold together honest emotional pain, practical understanding of grief, and hope rooted in Jesus.

Scripture References

- Psalm 23:1-6
- Psalm 13:1-6
- Psalm 22:1-5
- Matthew 27:46
- Romans 8:1
- Romans 8:38-39
- Isaiah 43:1-2
- 2 Corinthians 1:3-4
- Ephesians 1:3-6
- 1 Peter 5:7

Quote of the Day

"Jesus wants to walk with you through your darkest valley day by day, hour by hour, sometimes second by second."

Broadcast Notes

Donna Leland introduces Laura Busse and her Moody Publishers book, *The Unimaginable: God, Grief, and the Questions That Won't Go Away*. Laura explains that after Evan's sudden death by suicide she felt as though an earthquake had shaken every part of her life. She had not known other bereaved parents or survivors of suicide, so she eventually wrote the resource she could not find. The conversation explores anger toward God and Laura's discovery that biblical people expressed anguish honestly. She says releasing anger did not drive her from God; it opened her to experience His presence in the valley. Laura distinguishes shame from guilt and encourages self-compassion rather than endless mental replay. She describes grief as lasting as long as love lasts, though its intensity changes over time. She also discusses the identity disruption that follows loss and how

writing an alphabetical list of who God says she is helped re-anchor her identity. Finally, Laura tells the story of being charged by a moose while hiking in Colorado. In that frightening moment she realized, 'I want to live,' which became a turning point toward rebuilding a meaningful life.

♥■ Practical Applications

- Give myself permission to tell God honestly what I am feeling rather than editing my grief into words I think sound more spiritual.
- When shame says, 'I am the reason,' answer it with the truth of who God says I am and with what is actually mine to carry.
- Write my own list of biblical identity statements beginning with 'I am'—beloved, chosen, adopted, forgiven, held, and other truths from Scripture.
- Stop measuring my grief against another person's timeline; ask instead what faithfulness looks like for me today.
- When a grief wave comes, slow down long enough to name the emotion rather than immediately trying to solve or suppress it.
- Speak to myself with the same compassion I would offer someone I love who was walking through the same loss.
- Invite a trusted friend, pastor, counselor, grief group, or coach into the journey rather than trying to carry traumatic grief alone.
- Remember that moving forward does not mean leaving my loved one behind or ending my love for that person.
- Ask Jesus each morning for enough grace for the next day, hour, or even the next few seconds rather than demanding that I understand the entire road ahead.
- Consider what a life of meaning can look like now and identify one small step toward re-engaging with life, purpose, relationship, or service.

Today's Challenge

Create an 'I Am' page this week. Using Scripture, write at least ten statements describing who God says I am apart from loss, regret, family role, or the labels grief has placed on me. Put the list somewhere I will see it daily. When guilt, shame, loneliness, or identity confusion rises, read the list aloud and ask Jesus to help me live from that deeper identity.

Closing Prayer

Father, meet me honestly in whatever grief I carry today. I do not want to hide my anger, confusion, guilt, sadness, fear, or questions from You. Help me bring every emotion into Your presence and trust that You can handle the truth of my heart. When shame accuses me, remind me who You say I am: beloved, chosen, adopted, held, and never beyond Your love. Keep me from comparing my grief with anyone else's journey. Walk with me through the darkest valley day by day, hour by hour, and when necessary, second by second. Give me compassion for myself and courage to receive support from others. When life feels empty, awaken in me again the desire to live with meaning and purpose. Help me honor the person I love while still receiving the life You have placed before me. Hold me close to Jesus, my Good Shepherd and my hope. In Jesus' name, Amen.

About Today's Speaker

Laura Busse

Author, Speaker, Grief Educator, and Faith Coach

Laura Busse is an engaging speaker, author, podcaster, grief educator, faith coach, and women's advocate with more than thirty years of teaching and service. She founded The 3 O'Clock Wake Up Call, a nonprofit that encourages people around the world to pause in faith each day at 3:00 p.m., remembering the hour Jesus died on the cross. Laura also co-hosts The Soul Enchilada podcast, where women's issues are approached with compassion, faith, practical support, and humor. In addition, she walks alongside bereaved women through grief and faith coaching and facilitates grief groups with grief expert David Kessler. Her Moody Publishers book, *The Unimaginable: God, Grief, and the Questions That Won't Go Away*, grows from her own journey after the death of her son Evan and her desire to help others find honest companionship, language, faith, and hope in profound loss.

Proofread Broadcast Transcript

Mark & Friends Welcome Song

*We're glad you're here, we're glad you're here,
Fellowship is sweeter, knowing you're near.
It's so good to see you, we hope that it's clear,
Everyone loves you, we're glad you're here.*

Welcome to Mark & Friends. I'm your host, Donna Leland. And today we're talking with Laura Busse.

She has walked through a journey that included the suicide of her son. She has just written a book by Moody Publishers called *The Unimaginable, God, Grief, and the Questions That Won't Go Away*. Thanks so much for joining us, Laura, on Mark & Friends.

Thank you for having me, Donna. I'm happy to be here. Such an important topic because I know people whose children have committed suicide.

I know others whose children have attempted suicide, grandchildren. So we need to talk about it. It certainly is time.

Now you had your son, Evan, tragically die by suicide. And this is really what brought about this entire book, about unimaginable loss. What compelled you, though, to share your journey so openly and vulnerably with people? I wrote the book that I couldn't find.

When my feet hit the darkest valley, I didn't know a single bereaved parent, and I didn't know any survivors of suicide. So I went searching for knowledge, for stories, for helpful tips. I felt lost, like I was in a foreign country.

I didn't understand the language or the emotions. And so I wrote this book to be a companion or a guide for a family, for an individual person who's walking through the unimaginable. Yeah, you were ministering to yourself while you were thinking about then ministering to other people.

It is true. It is true. I don't want to put this under a bushel.

I don't want to hide it. I want to talk about the real issue of mental health and how our children are struggling with depression and anxiety. And we need to share openly and honestly, even if our story doesn't end with prayers being answered.

It doesn't end the way we hoped God would plan it or bring it to life. And so I wanted to come out openly and share my raw emotions that give other people permission to share theirs. And I wanted to share our real story that maybe even put language to people's story who haven't even been able to share theirs yet.

Help us understand, how does traumatic loss different from just ordinary sadness or grief, you know, just the loss of a loved one naturally? Yeah, I didn't understand this until I was studying grief and became a grief educator that not all grief is traumatic, but trauma always has grief. So the death of our son, Evan, was traumatic. It was unexpected.

It was sudden. The way that we were told, the police officers who invaded our home, it felt like an earthquake. I felt like I was living in this space where I had life with Evan on earth, and I knew what that looked like.

And then I had life with Evan in heaven, and nothing was the same. I felt illiterate, like I didn't even know how to process or speak. I didn't know how to make decisions.

And so that earthquake just shook everything in my body. It shook my mind. It shook my faith.

It shook every single relationship. It shook my health. And I had no idea that grief impacts every aspect, our heart, our mind, our soul, our strength.

And so to me, it felt like an earthquake. As I walk alongside other grieving people, some people describe it as a tsunami. A tsunami hits their life, and wave after wave of grief just crashes upon them.

Other people describe it as a tornado. It's interesting. A lot of people use natural disasters to describe traumatic grief and loss, but it is something that comes out of nowhere, and it disrupts every part of your life.

You write so candidly about feeling anger and disappointment toward God after Evan's death. Help us understand, how is anger connected to grief? And did expressing those feelings, you know, how did that work out in your relationship with the Lord? Because he can handle it, right? We know he can handle it. Yes, it's so true.

I guess I grew up thinking that it was best to praise God and pray and share our blessings. You know, thank you God for this and thank you God for that. And when my feet hit the darkest valley, I had so many other emotions.

And the first emotion I had towards God was anger. And in the beginning, I felt guilty that I was feeling angry. But the anger had to be released.

I was angry because I had prayed prayer circles around my son's schools and workplaces and rehab centers and hospitals. I had prayed circles around his whole life. For so many years, I had been expecting God and praising God for the rescuing and the miraculous healings and things that were happening in Evan's life.

So when this tragedy happened, it didn't make sense. It didn't make sense. And my first pure emotion was anger.

And so I started lashing out. I yelled and cried out to the clouds on hikes in the mountains. I would scream and cry in my car.

And all my anger was focused on God. And then when I dove into the Bible, I realized that this is an emotion that's been going on forever. David cried out to God and asked hard questions like, Why have you forsaken me? Jesus said the same things from the cross.

And forever, as far back as we can go in the Bible, in history, people who have a heart like God, know God, have an intimate relationship with God. They express anger towards God. And some people might be thinking, well, that really must have hurt your relationship with God.

It didn't. It actually had the opposite effect. By sharing my anger with God, I realized, like you said, He can handle it.

Number two, I'm walking in the same footprints as people who've gone before me. And three, I felt closer to God because releasing my anger opened a floodgate of love. God met me.

Jesus met me in the darkest valley and he said, I'm here. I'm with you. I am your good shepherd.

You are not alone. And you can share all your emotions with me because that's how I made you. Anger is just one that we get to express with God.

Because we don't want to keep that in for sure. You know, I know as a parent, I still struggle with, you know, self-blame, guilt, feelings of regret, just working amongst my own children in their everyday choices. Where did I go wrong? What did I miss? You know, you've gone through this very deep valley.

What would you say to someone who feels stuck in one of those emotions and believes maybe they'll never be able to move forward? Well, you bring up really good points. As parents, when our child dies, and we always imagine that they would outlive our life. So when a child dies, in particular, there is guilt.

And often there's shame. And shame and guilt are not the same. You know, shame really attacks our identity.

It's I am statements, like I am the reason why Evan died. I am at fault. If I had done this, then he would still be alive.

And that's not God's voice. That is the voice of the accuser. And so when people come to me and they say, it's my fault, I say, I understand.

And that's very common that you feel that way. Because our minds would rather repeat stories and remember and try to rethink things, think our way out of grief. Because our bodies would rather think about it than feel it.

And so sometimes we get stuck in a particular emotion, and we just keep trying to think it, rethink it, come up with a different solution, a different outcome. And that can hold us in one emotion for a long time. And one thing we can do is to give ourselves self-compassion, say you did the best you could with what you knew at the time.

And love yourself the way that God loves you. Talk to yourself in a way that sounds like if Jesus was sitting next to you, how would Jesus talk to you? How would he hold your pain? And how would he encourage you? And the only way we're going to begin our healing process is to feel. So I often tell people, there's no bad feelings.

We can't put some feelings in the good category and some in the bad category. It's where you are. And it can be confusing when even family members are grieving so differently from one another, and you have so many different emotions at the table.

But it's a great time to ask questions and get curious, and just sit with those emotions for a while and ask, what are you trying to teach me? What are you trying to tell me? And what can I learn from these emotions? And oftentimes that is a catalyst for moving forward. So good, because God is not judging us for our feelings. I know sometimes we feel like, oh, this feeling is bad.

It's sinful. It's just, it's raw. It's what it is.

And just give it to him. And he can take this. I know a lot of times in the Psalms, David would go, how long, oh Lord, how long? And I think people are in that, oh God, how long is this grief going to last? And I just, I want it over with, I want to get my little Nikes on and run through the valley of the shadow of death.

I want to get out of here and experience that table that you have spread for me in the presence of my enemies. But what have you learned about this grieving process and what can people realistically expect as they navigate it? That's one of the first questions people ask me because grief is painful. Grief is hard and we don't want to sit in that for very long.

And people will often ask me, how long is this going to last? You know, that's one of my chapters in the book. How long is this grief going to last? And I tell people, or I ask them a question, I say, how long are you going to love the person who's no longer with you on earth? And they look at me like, what? I'm going to love that person forever. I said, well, that's how long we're going to grieve.

But it's not going to always feel this intense. So over time, the intensity is going to change. The frequency of those grief bursts or those grief waves is going to change.

But right now it's okay to feel the intensity of this acute or early grief. You know, grief experts are now saying that if you have a loved one that you're very close to who passes, two years is considered early grief. Now, we used to just think like, get through the first year and then everything's going to get better.

A lot of people find out that the first year they were in shock. They were going through the motions, survival mode. And then the second year comes and our brains and our bodies, our hearts allow us to feel more and the second year can even be harder.

I'm not saying that's the case for everyone, but you can't compare your grief journey to anyone else's because you're made in the image of God uniquely. And so I always tell people if you start comparing, well, she seems to be doing great and he's gone back to work and he's moving on no problem. We take our eyes off of Jesus when we do that and we focus on our left or our right and the people around us.

Jesus wants to walk with you through your darkest valley day by day, hour by hour, sometimes second by second. And it's okay. It's going to take a while, but over time you will be able to look back and see how far you've come, how much you've learned and how God has met you in your deep grief.

Sometimes we wrap our identity up in another individual and as moms, of course, I'm my kid's mom. That's how people know me in some circles. And sometimes this grief can lead to loneliness, maybe an identity crisis.

You know, I'm no longer that person who is caring for that child. How do you find the support connection and just that renewed sense of identity and belonging? How did you do that? Identity is tied up with grief and a lot of people don't think about that until their loved one passes. That person was your spouse or your child or your best friend or your sibling.

And that changes the dynamics of who you see yourself as. You know, you think about the widow, you know, nobody wants to be called widow or widower. Nobody wants to be a bereaved parent.

I often hear, say, I didn't sign up for this club. I never wanted to be a survivor of suicide. And so we're given new labels that we didn't ask for.

We didn't pray for. And then we find ourselves with our old circles of friends, church, family, and we're like, wait, I don't fit there anymore. All their kids are going off to college or they're going to this special couples weekend and my spouse, my partner's in heaven.

And so there is a shifting of the ground underneath our feet and we have to find our sure footing. And what I found for me is going back to the Bible and asking the question, who does God say I am? And I started writing an alphabetical list. I am adopted.

I am beloved. I am chosen. I am a daughter of the King.

And I went through the whole alphabet and I wrote out my true identity in who God says I am. And I posted it in my bathroom on the mirror and I started memorizing that's who God says I am. That's who I am.

That is more important than now I am a survivor of suicide or a bereaved mother. That's not my club. I'm in God's club.

And that really was a huge shift in that identity crisis that I faced. Hmm. That's so beautiful.

Although, what did you use for X? Extra special? Yes. That's so great. Yeah.

And zealous was my Z. Oh, that's perfect. I was thinking about Z too. That's awesome.

Oh, that's so funny. Yeah. Yeah.

Now you had... Extraordinary. Extraordinary. Absolutely.

Now you live in Colorado and you hang out with wild animals. And in your book, you talk about a moose. And this moose is coming at you.

And this was in a pivotal time during your grief journey as you share. Tell us about that. How did that actually influence healing? Oh my goodness.

Yes. I live in Colorado. I'm surrounded by mountains and hiking trails.

And I share this story in chapter seven, which is how do I go on living without my loved one? Yeah. And I'll be very vulnerable. I always imagined or always hoped that I would live to be 90 or a hundred, like a lot of us.

But after my son died, I kind of started bargaining with God. And I was like, you know what? If you want to take me early, it's okay. Because I think this depression, that this dark cloud that's following me everywhere is pretty awful.

And I would love to hug my son sooner than later. So I was really contemplating like, do I even want to live to be that old anymore? And it just so happens on a very foggy day, I went hiking with our older dog and we rounded a corner on a dirt road and we were all by ourselves. And there was a moose standing off about 30 yards away.

And my dog Henry went absolutely berserk and started barking and barking and barking. And that triggered the moose to charge us. I know you cannot make this up.

The moose started running. There was no place for me to hide. I'm in the middle of the trail and the moose is coming closer.

I could see the moose, the ears, the back of the mouth, the nose, the hoofs were beating on the ground. And I did not know what to do. I've lived in Colorado over 20 years, but I've never been that close to a moose.

I went into this sumo wrestler position and started yelling at the moose, Hey, no, no! Screaming at the moose, which is actually what you're not supposed to do. So please, if anyone is listening to this, do not yell at a moose. Because I learned from scientists afterwards that I did the absolute wrong thing.

But for whatever reason, God saved me in that moment. And in the last second, that moose, as the moose was coming, I was embracing for impact. It jetted off to the side and went down into an embankment.

And I was standing there on the trail. My dog had already fled. I was standing there on the trail shaking.

This one thought came to my mind, Donna, I want to live. I want to live. And that was a turning point in my grief journey, where I walked home on wobbly legs, terrified.

And I sat in my living room, and I wept and I prayed, God, I don't want to go to heaven now. I want to rebuild a life of meaning. I want my life to matter.

What does a life worth living look like? And that changed everything. People have to get to that point, don't they? Where they say, you know, I'm ready to engage life again. I want to live.

You never think about that. You never think about that. People wanting to exit along with their loved one because the grief is so hard.

Yeah, it's very common. It's very common. Yeah.

There's a wonderful ministry. I don't know if you're aware of it. But it's called GriefShare.

Yes, I've taken a couple of classes. They're amazing. But they have really helped people walk through this valley and helped them come to the other side.

Do you have any other resources that you could recommend? Well, I'm hoping to start a grief community online at my website, griefandhope.org. It's in the process of being built right now. But hopefully that will be... The back

of the book has questions, and there are several churches that are grabbing the unimaginable book and taking bereaved people through a 10-week class because it lends itself. So I'm just thinking of that.

It's interesting because besides GriefShare, I don't know of other Christian organizations. I don't either. There are a lot of secular places you can go for grief counseling and grief support.

But I know for me, I needed the faith and the science. I needed to better understand what was happening in my body and my mind and understand intellectually grief. And I also had to cling to my faith.

And that's been a tricky part for me. And that's where I feel like God is calling me to create. Create a space for believers to grieve and to mourn and hold on to their faith or rebuild their faith and understand the science of what is going on, the facts of... It's normal that your body's responding this way.

We are talking with Laura Busse, and she's an author through Moody Publishers, *The Unimaginable, God, Grief, and the Questions That Won't Go Away*. Laura, thank you so much for being a part of Mark & Friends. And can you give us your website once again if people want more information? Absolutely.

It's griefandhope.org. Thanks again for joining us on Mark & Friends. Thank you, Donna. This was delightful.

And thank you, dear listener, for being a part of Mark & Friends. Don't forget, we've got all the program notes available. Go to our website and click on the Mark & Friends tab.

Have a great day.