

Hey, God?  
Yes, Charles.

*CONVERSATIONS ON  
LIFE, LOSS, AND LOVE*

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## PROLOGUE

SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 11, 2007, I watched my husband drive out of sight, heading from our Nashville condo to his office and apartment in Atlanta. I never saw him conscious again.

MONDAY, NOVEMBER 12, was his 58th birthday. Since he would be out of town, our granddaughters and I had made him a cake and celebrated before he left on that Sunday.

WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 14, Charles caught me at my desk, calling just to let me know that he'd had some pretty weird pain radiating down his back. It subsided, and he was sure it was nothing, but the company nurse who just happened to be in the office that day heard what happened and insisted on calling 911 as a precaution. He assured me he was already feeling better—heck, he was in perfect health, it was probably gas!—and he'd call again once they gave him the okay at the ER. We swapped love yous. I didn't even get out of my chair.

MONDAY, NOVEMBER 26, at 2:40 a.m., despite hundreds, maybe thousands, of prayers, my precious husband died. The initial diagnosis was thoracic aortic dissection—the exact same thing that happened to John Ritter. Emergency open-heart surgery was followed by complications including acute respiratory distress syndrome, pneumonia, and various lung infections. We had been married almost 39 years.

In the following year, I learned that the connection with someone you love doesn't cease with death. Charles was always bigger than life, and his presence—his love, his humor, these conversations—was just as real after his death.

For better, for worse, I started scribbling down what I was overhearing in heaven.

I was done talking to God. Charles, as it turned out, was not.

ABOUT FIVE MONTHS  
AFTER CHARLES DIED

I'm spending the night at my dad's house, though I know I won't sleep well. I will dream about Charles.

I will lean over the terrace rail and see him walking toward me down the sidewalk. He opens the gate and we embrace.

"Where have you been?" I ask.

"You know I've been in heaven," he replies. "Where have you been?"

"Oh honey," I say, "you know I've been in hell."

..... Hey, God? Yes, Charles. ....

“Hey, God?”

“Yes, Charles.”

“Becky feels guilty about letting me die.”

“Becky let you die?” God frowned. “She spent thirteen days vetting the hospital and the doctors, getting second opinions, researching the internet nonstop, and calling in every medical connection she had. Gal in the ICU asked her if she was a nurse for Pete’s sake.”

Charles was solemn. “Yeah, but we always—*always*—had each other’s backs. That last hour by my side, watching my numbers drop, she thought she had failed me.”

“Your oxygen,” God whispered, “is what failed you.”

..... Hey, God? Yes, Charles. ....

“Hey, God?”

“Yes, Charles.”

“Sports question.”

“Shoot.”

“You know, December 1, the day of my service, Becky had the memorial first, then a celebration of life with stories, videos, food, laughter, and tears.”

“Sure, rock-n-roll, I was there.”

“Well,” Charles continued, “remember, God, the Tennessee Vols played the SEC championship that day and she even had a television in there, and we *lost*. I don’t mean to be critical, but couldn’t you have, you know, just that one time....?”

“Charles, Charles, Charles,” God admonished. “No I could not!”

..... Hey, God? Yes, Charles. ....

“Hey, God?”

“Yes, Charles.”

“If I was going to die anyway, why did we waste thirteen days and almost \$300,000?”

“Oh,” God reflected, “they weren’t wasted.”

“Mmmm,” Charles replied. “Blue Cross might disagree.”

..... Hey, God? Yes, Charles. ....

“God?”

“Yes, Charles.”

“Becky wants her husband back.”

“I know, son.”

..... Hey, God? Yes, Charles. ....

“Hey, God?”

“Yes, Charles.”

“Becky wants to put a bullet into an oxygen monitor.”

The puzzled look on God’s face was priceless. “Huh?”

“She hated watching that monitor the last day of my life.  
She wants to shoot one.”



..... Hey, God? Yes, Charles. ....

“Hey, God?”

“Yes, Charles.”

“Becky doesn’t want to wash the sheets.”

“What do you mean?” asked God.

“Remember I told you about the last weekend before my birthday when I was home with her and our granddaughters in Nashville?” reminded Charles.

“Go on,” said God.

“Well, that was the last time we slept on those sheets together, and she doesn’t want to change them.”

God was realistic. “Gotta wash the sheets.”

..... Hey, God? Yes, Charles. ....

“Oh dear, God?”

“Yes, Charles.”

“Did you hear Maddie say, ‘I think if we start crying, God will start crying and give Papa back to us.’?”

“I heard it, Charles.”

..... Hey, God? Yes, Charles. ....

“Hey, God?”

“Yes, Charles.”

“Becky thinks nobody will ever love her like I do.”

“She’s right.” God was certain.

Charles turned away to hide the little, tiny grin.

..... Hey, God? Yes, Charles. ....

“Hey, God?”

“Yes, Charles.”

“Becky just thanked me for always changing the cat litter.”

God smiled. “Sometimes it’s the little things.”

..... Hey, God? Yes, Charles. ....

“Hey, God?”

“Yes, Charles.”

“Becky wants me to come home for one night. Just one night. She won’t tell anybody.”

“Now, Charles.”

“I know.”

..... Hey, God? Yes, Charles. ....

“Hey, God?”

“Yes, Charles.”

“Really aggravates Becky that she doesn’t pray like she used to.”

“Well,” said God evenly, “that is her choice.”

“Agreed,” Charles was defensive, “but still.”

“Still,” replied God.

..... Hey, God? Yes, Charles. ....

“Hey, God?”

“Yes, Charles.”

“Aren’t grandchildren precious?”

“That they are son.”

MaKayla just started a story about me by saying, “Here’s a good memory.”

“Now we’re getting somewhere, Charles.”

..... Hey, God? Yes, Charles. ....

“Hey, God?”

“Yes, Charles.”

“You know all the issues Becky’s been having with prayer?”

“I do.”

“The prayer thing itself, the Sunday School class, the prayer lesson book.”

“She’s been fighting it,” agreed God. “And me.”

“I know. Then yesterday Maddie and MaKayla made several crosses at church. Just as Becky was waving bye to them in the parking lot, MaK called out that she wanted to give Nane one of the crosses she’d made. Becky walked over to the car, and as MaK was thumbing through them, she said, ‘I want to see which one I want to give you.’ Then she pulled it out, this precious cross she had made with the word *pray* across the middle.”

“Well, well, well.” God tried not to grin.