



The Space Between

Endings and Beginnings

5 Reflections



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Introduction

These reflections were written over time, in the space between an ending and a new beginning, a place many of us recognize, even if we don't always have language for it.

They aren't meant to be read quickly or in order. You might linger with one and skip another. You might return to the same page more than once.

This PDF is simply a way of holding the reflections together, for anyone who would like to sit with them more slowly or keep them in one place.

There is no right pace here. Take what's useful. Leave the rest.

Pam

When the Pain Lands in the Wrong Place

There are times when what we're feeling doesn't belong where it lands.

This can happen at any point in life, but it shows up more often when we're in the space between, when something important has ended and whatever comes next hasn't yet taken shape.

We feel unsteady.

Displaced.

Untethered.

And without quite realizing it, the emotional weight we're carrying looks for somewhere to go.

So, it spills sideways.

We snap at the wrong people.

We grow resentful in relationships that aren't actually the source of our pain.

We argue about small things that suddenly feel enormous.

We replay old hurts, blame the present, or take our frustration out on objects, memories, or people who happen to be nearby.

We kick the cat, not because the cat is the problem, but because the real source of the pain may feel too risky, too exposing, or too consequential to face directly.

Sometimes expressing the truth would mean acknowledging our part in an outcome, naming a loss of standing or identity, or tolerating emotions that feel unbearable in the moment. So, the feeling finds a safer outlet.

This isn't about being unkind or unconscious. It's about being human in moments of loss, transition, or upheaval.

When we're fired.

When a relationship ends.

When a future we counted on quietly dissolves.

When an identity no longer fits.

These experiences don't just hurt, they disorient. They loosen our sense of cause and effect and unsettle our internal compass.

The nervous system wants relief, clarity, or control. And when it can't find those things, it settles for placement.

Somewhere.

Anywhere.

What makes this especially difficult is that misdirected emotion often feels convincing.

The irritation seems justified.

The disappointment feels personal.

The anger appears to belong to the moment we're in.

And yet, if we pause long enough, there's often a quieter truth underneath:

This isn't really about this.

That recognition can be uncomfortable. It asks something of us.

Not blame but responsibility.

Responsibility for how we're carrying what happened, even when we didn't cause it.

That doesn't mean excusing harm or turning against ourselves. It means gently asking:

What am I actually grieving?

What has shifted beneath my feet?

What hasn't had a place to land yet?

In the space between, our feelings don't always arrive neatly labeled.

They come tangled.

Displaced.

Looking for somewhere to belong.

Learning to notice that, without judgment is a quiet act of maturity and care.

Sometimes the most compassionate thing we can do is pause before reacting and say:

This pain deserves the right address.

What Helps, What Hurts

When life shifts, gently or all at once, we don't always respond the way we imagine we will.

Sometimes we pull inward.

Sometimes we reach out.

Sometimes we freeze, trying to understand what just happened.

Change has a way of surprising us like that.

What often follows, though, is something more universal: the disorientation, the drifting, the slow search for something steady inside ourselves. The quiet longing to find a place where we can breathe again, a place where we can trust our own responses.

And in those unsteady seasons, the way people show up can make all the difference.

Sometimes it helps.

Sometimes it confuses us even more.

And sometimes it hurts, in ways no one intended. Most people are trying.

But the trying often takes a few familiar shapes.

The Fixers

These are the people who hear one sentence and immediately begin creating a plan. They offer solutions before we've finished breathing.

Fixers are already drafting a recovery roadmap while we're still staring at the wall.

Their care is real.

But their urgency can land like pressure instead of comfort.

The Cheerleaders

"Stay positive."

"You'll get through this."

"Everything happens for a reason."

Encouragement has its place, just not always in the first moments of disorientation.

Sometimes reassurance arrives before our feelings do.

The Storytellers

We share something vulnerable, and suddenly we're hearing about someone else's crisis, success, mishap, or spiritual awakening.

One moment we're speaking from the heart; the next, we're listening to a story that isn't ours.

Their stories are a way of relating.

But they can pull the focus away from what we're actually feeling.

The Disappearing Acts

Some people vanish, not because they don't care, but because big emotion frightens them.

They retreat, hoping the situation will feel safer later.

Sensitive topic?

Smoke bomb.

Gone.

It stings, even when it's not meant to.

One of the most painful responses is the rush, the suggestion that we should "move on," "let it go," or be finished before our heart is ready.

These phrases reduce grief to a task.

They treat an entire chapter of our life like paperwork someone wants off their desk.

They make our internal process invisible.

Often, this rush isn't about us being too slow.

It's about others wanting us to return to ourselves so *they* can stop imagining the worst.

When we're stunned, quiet, or staring at the wall, our silence can make people anxious.

And anxiety has a way of masquerading as advice.

Letting go is not a switch.

It's a human process, slow, uneven, and deeply personal.

What actually helps is often quieter than we expect.

Someone who listens without rearranging our feelings.

Someone who can sit with silence without trying to fill it.

Someone who doesn't flinch at tears or rush them away.

Someone who says, "I'm here," without adding a single instruction.

These gestures don't fix the pain.

They make room for it.

And in that room, something begins to settle — not because it was pushed, but because it was allowed.

How We Show Up for Others When They're the Ones in Transition

When someone we care about is moving through uncertainty, it's easy to forget that we are often just as human, just as tired, and just as unsure as they are.

Showing up for someone else isn't automatic.

It isn't simply a matter of saying the right thing or offering the right gesture.

It's a practice, one shaped by our own temperament, emotional bandwidth, history, and fear of getting it wrong.

Because it *is* possible to care deeply and still feel unsure what to do.

It's possible to love someone and hesitate.

It's possible to want to help and still feel clumsy.

We don't talk about that enough.

Whenever we step into someone else's difficult moment, we bring our own inner weather with us:

the fatigue we haven't admitted

the worry we're managing quietly

the overwhelm we're holding together

the old memories their situation stirs in us

the fear of saying the wrong thing

We arrive with all of it, even when we're trying to appear calm and capable. Supporting someone while carrying our own emotions is an act of courage.

Not the loud, heroic kind.

The quiet kind.

The kind that asks us to be present without being perfect.

There are a few familiar temptations we face when we're the helper.

The urge to fix their pain

We want them out of suffering, partly because we don't want them to hurt, and partly because their pain stirs our own.

Fixing is faster than feeling.

But most pain isn't asking for a solution.

It's asking for company.

The urge to find meaning too soon

We reach for explanations: "Everything happens for a reason." "This will make sense later."

But meaning usually arrives *after* the wound has closed a bit.

Offering it too early can feel like skipping past what's still raw.

The urge to promise what we can't control

"It's going to be okay."

"You'll be fine."

These words are meant to soothe, but sometimes the truest kindness sounds like: "I don't know what will happen, but I'm not going anywhere."

The urge to be stronger than we actually feel

We hide our fatigue and fear because we want to be reliable.

But presence doesn't require invincibility.

It requires honesty.

The urge to disappear when we feel inadequate

Just as others may vanish on us, we can pull away, not because we don't care, but because we're afraid of doing it wrong.

Showing up imperfectly is still showing up.

Sometimes the gestures we offer feel small, a short message, a simple "thinking of you," a line borrowed from a card.

They aren't profound.

They aren't polished.

They're the emotional equivalent of a granola bar when we wish we could cook a feast.

And yet, they still carry care.

They say: *I may not have much capacity today, but you're on my heart.*

Most people aren't looking for perfect words.

They're looking for signs they're not alone.

So, what does real support look like?

It's simpler and gentler than we think.

Showing up as we are, not as a performance.

Letting their feelings lead instead of our comfort level.

Offering small, honest presence instead of big promises.

Checking our own anxiety before speaking.

Holding space instead of holding answers.

At its core, supporting someone through change isn't about strength.

It's about presence with limits, compassion with honesty, and steadiness without a script.

It's about letting ourselves be human while offering a gentle place for someone else's humanity, too.

When Care Has Limits and Why That Doesn't Make Us Cold

There comes a point in many relationships, especially during times of strain or transition, when we realize something quietly unsettling:

our care has edges.

This isn't only about caregiving in the traditional sense, the kind shaped by aging parents, illness, or end-of-life responsibility, where obligation and guilt are often built into the role. Those experiences carry their own weight.

What I'm reflecting on here shows up more quietly, and often more confusingly, in friendships and close relationships, when the expectation shifts from mutual care to emotional dependence.

Not because we don't feel.

Not because we've hardened or withdrawn our compassion.

But because there are moments when continuing to reach, explain, rescue, or repair begins to cost us something essential.

This is often the hardest place to stand.

We're taught, subtly and overtly, that care means availability. Persistence.

Flexibility without end.

That if we truly care, we will keep trying, keep showing up, stretching ourselves just a little further.

And when we can't, when we begin to feel suffocated or trapped, guilt is quick to follow.

But care without limits isn't kindness.

It's depletion.

There's a difference:

between being open-hearted and being overextended

between empathy and self-erasure

between generosity and the quiet resentment that grows when we override our own signals again and again

When we are consistently over-generous, always saying yes, always responding, always making space, something else happens, too.

We deny the other person the opportunity to truly know us.

The relationship loses reciprocity.

One person serves; the other receives.

Without limits, care can slide into enmeshment, closeness sustained by over-functioning rather than mutual presence.

This is especially likely during periods of transition, the middle spaces of life, when identity feels unsettled and the ground beneath us is shifting.

In those moments, we often cling to people and relationships that feel stabilizing, even when the cost is high.

When purpose, meaning, and direction are unclear, connection can begin to carry more weight than it should.

It's a vulnerable time.

And a very human one.

Sometimes the most honest form of care is restraint.

It can look like:

stepping back from a conversation that keeps circling without movement

choosing not to correct a misunderstanding for the tenth time

letting someone sit with their disappointment rather than rushing in to soothe it away

These moments can feel cold from the inside, especially if we're wired to attune, to repair, to make things better.

But limits are not the absence of care.

They are the structure that allows care to remain real.

Without them, we don't become more loving.

We become less present.

Less grounded.

Less ourselves.

There is grief here, too.

Grief for the connection we hoped could be different.

Grief for the version of ourselves who could once give more freely.

Grief for the fantasy that love alone could smooth every rough edge.

Acknowledging limits asks us to release that fantasy, gently, but firmly. And still, this doesn't make us cold.

It makes us honest.

It means learning to listen not only to others, but to our own nervous system, our own capacity, our own sense of integrity.

Care offered beyond our limits often arrives distorted, rushed, brittle, or resentful, and helps no one in the end.

Sometimes the most respectful thing we can say, silently or aloud, is:

This is as far as I can go.

And then stay.

Not in withdrawal.

Not in punishment.

But in steadiness.

Because care with limits has weight.

It has shape.

When the Door Opens and We Learn Not to Rush Through It

The space between an ending and a new beginning doesn't end all at once.

It loosens.

One day we notice something subtle: the air feels different. A little less dense. Possibilities that once felt unimaginable begin to flicker at the edges of our attention.

An invitation.

An idea.

A person.

A sense that maybe, eventually, we could move again. It can feel like a door opening.

After a long period of uncertainty or loss, that moment can bring relief.

Hope.

Even urgency.

When the ground has been unsteady for a while, the appearance of any solid-looking path can feel like something we should take immediately.

But an open door doesn't always mean it's time to walk through.

One of the quieter challenges of leaving the space between is learning to distinguish between availability and readiness.

Between what is possible and what is wise.

Between movement that restores us and movement that simply stops the discomfort.

This is especially true in relationships.

After endings, of roles, identities, partnerships, futures, we are often hungry for connection.

Familiarity can feel like safety.

Intensity can feel like meaning.

Being chosen, needed, or desired can briefly steady a nervous system that's been searching for footing.

None of that is wrong.

But there is a difference between connection that supports our becoming and connection that asks us to skip essential steps of recovery, reflection, or self-trust.

Sometimes we rush through the door because standing in the doorway still feels vulnerable.

Because pausing means remembering why the space between existed in the first place.

Because hesitation can stir anxiety, grief, or the fear of repeating what has already been lost.

Leaving the middle space well requires a different kind of question than the ones we asked when we were lost inside it.

Not: *What will make this feeling go away?*

But: *What do I actually want now?*

What do I need in order to move forward with integrity?

What pace honors what I've just lived through?

These questions don't demand immediate answers.

They invite discernment.

The space between teaches patience by necessity.

Emerging from it asks for patience by choice, as we recognize and allow an inner realignment to continue.

We don't have to reject what appears.

We can notice it.

Sit with it.

Allow clarity to grow before commitment does.

We can let doors remain open without mistaking openness for obligation.

Leaving the middle space isn't a leap.

It's a measured step, taken with awareness, kindness toward ourselves, and respect for the terrain we're still crossing.