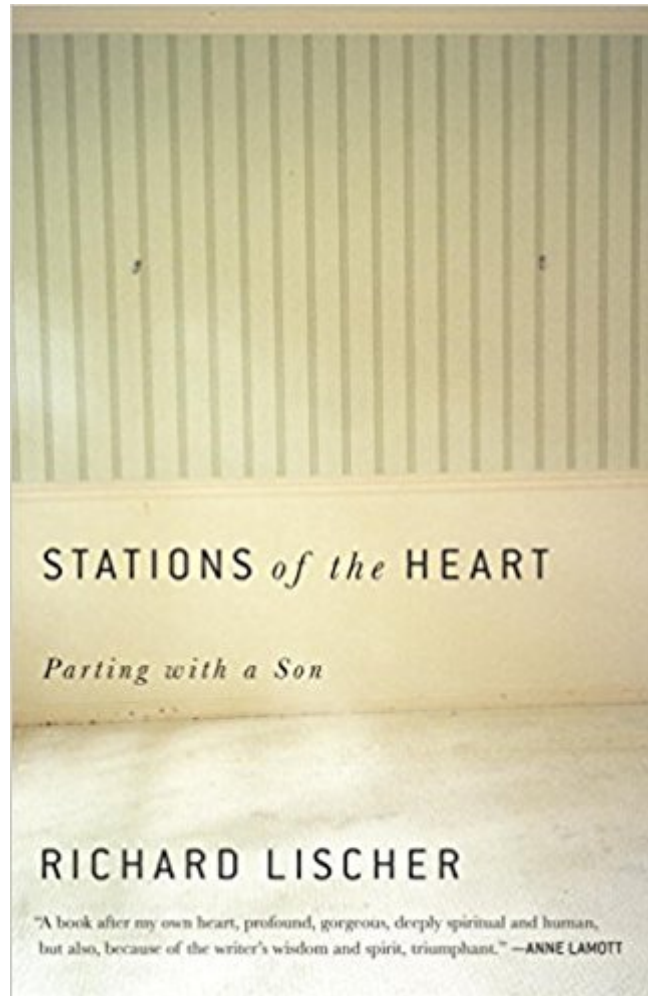




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# Stations Of The Heart: Parting With A Son



## Synopsis

Stations of the Heart is a father's heartbreaking and hopeful story about his beloved son, in which a young man teaches his family a new way to die • with wit, candor, and grace. As the book opens, Richard Lischer's son, Adam, calls to tell his father, a professor of divinity at Duke University, that his cancer has returned. Adam is a charismatic young man with a promising law career, and that his wife is pregnant with their first child makes the disease's return all the more devastating. Despite the cruel course of the illness, Adam's growing weakness evokes in him a remarkable spiritual strength. This is the story of one last summer, lived as honestly and faithfully as possible. Deeply moving and utterly lacking in sentimentality or self-pity, Stations of the Heart is an unforgettable book about life and death and the terrible blessing of saying good-bye.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Lischer's only son, Adam, died of rapidly metastasizing melanoma in 2005. He was 33. Ten days later, Adam's only child, a daughter, was born. While hardly suppressing his own feelings, Lischer resolutely focuses on Adam in this memoir provoked by the not-the-way-it's-supposed-to-be thing that happened to him. He retreats to Adam's precarious neonatal days and childhood coping with a mysterious neurological disorder that largely abated in his midteens. Thereafter, Adam blossomed, initially onstage, then following his mother into law practice. Marrying in his twenties, he'd just won a high-profile murder case for the defendant when a melanoma was discovered and surgically excised. Sixteen months later, the

cancer was back; 94 days later, he was dead. He said heâ€™d had a charmed life, and part of what is impressive about his questioning fatherâ€™s chastely worded, clear-eyed account is that we come to appreciate that. An immensely positive and congenial person, Adam used his time well, completing conversion to Catholicism and using daily prayer rituals with his wife to bless his child in the womb. Quite extraordinary. --Ray Olson --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

Praise for Richard Lischerâ€™s *Stations of the Heart* is a book after my own heart, profound, gorgeous, deeply spiritual and human, beautifully written, heartbreaking, but also, because of the writer's wisdom and spirit, triumphant." â€”Anne Lamott

Emotionally honest, raw and beautiful. I read the book over a single day and often with my heart pounding. The book is remarkable for its intimate narration of a father and son story but also for that simple yet impossible thingâ€”one human clearly seeing another.

â€”Darcey Steinke, author of *Easter Everywhere* and *Sister Golden Hair*

Quite extraordinary. . . Lischerâ€™s only son, Adam, died of rapidly metastasizing melanoma in 2005. He was 33. . . He said heâ€™d had a charmed life, and part of what is impressive about his questioning fatherâ€™s chastely worded, clear-eyed account is that we come to appreciate that.

â€”Booklist

A fond view of a father-son relationship and a loving tribute from a minister to a son who chose a different spiritual path in his life and to his death.

â€”Kirkus Reviews

In this tender, searching, resigned memoir and tribute to [his son] Adam, Lischer relives the final three-month journey that he, his wife, and [Adamâ€™s wife] traveled with Adam, recalling with grace and humor memories of Adam in his elementary school days, his college days, and his quest to change the world around as a modern-day Atticus Finch.

â€”Publishers Weekly

*Stations of the Heart* deserves a place alongside these classics [John Guntherâ€™s inspirational *Death Be Not Proud* and Nicholas Wolterstorffâ€™s anguished *Lament for a Son*] for many reasons. It is elegant without excess, personal without self-absorption, profoundly emotional without sentimentality. . . . It looks beyond the one manâ€™s death to the death we all will face. It raises religious and philosophical questions without offering pat answers.

â€”Christian Century

An inspirational memoir . . . Lischer is a fine writerâ€”self-aware, humorous and unstinting in describing the outrage of a son dying before his father.

â€”The Toronto Star

By the storyâ€™s close, you'll have laughed, prayed, shaken your fist at the sky, and wept along with the author and his family. Lyrical, wise, and full of warmth, *Stations of the Heart* accomplishes what only the best memoirs can: it bears witness to the unimaginable and gives voice to the inarticulable.

â€”David McGlynn, author of *A Door in the Ocean*

As he grieved over the loss of his son, Richard Lischer gradually discovered that he had

been given a new role " as the interpreter of his own son's death. In this tender and loving book, Lischer does indeed become an interpreter, not only of his son's death but also of the fragile and beautiful relationships that make life both a peril and a gift for us all. Lischer is a faithful witness whose truthful and searing testimony evokes memory, provokes tears, and finally points powerfully toward hope." — Thomas G. Long, author of *What Shall We Say? Evil, Suffering, and the Crisis of Faith*

Dr. Richard Lischer is a Lutheran pastor and professor at Duke Divinity School. His book "STATIONS OF THE HEART: Parting with a Son" is one of the most emotionally draining books I've ever read, both intensely sad, but also a powerful witness to the hope of our Christian faith. I was moved, inspired and glad to have read it. It's a book well worth being read by clergy, doctors, medical teams and funeral directors, anyone who deals with end of life issues on very different levels. It certainly helps to understand the mind of those who are going through the pain in a very graphic way. It's one of the few very REAL books I've read. It drips with authenticity, love, loss, pain, sorrow, joy, redemption, death, birth, grief, and resurrection faith. Dr. Jeremy Begbie recommended this book in a lecture at a church conference I attended, as an example of "lament." Was he ever right about that! As an Episcopal priest for over 30 years, I've dealt with a lot of death in both my personal life and public ministry, so I always have an interest in reading books on this subject. Adam's story (the author's son) was so compelling...I don't even have words to describe what I want to say....except to say to Dr. Lischer, "Thank you for writing it." I recommend it to most, but not all...certainly not those who are gravely ill or currently going through intense grief. In my opinion, it's a book for either well before or well after that time. But I could see in certain circumstances, it might be helpful to those in grieving pain. That would be a pastoral call based on how well you know the person. For instance, I would certainly not recommend this book to my son who has had the same disease that killed his son, although I know he enjoys true stories of authentic and raw humanity with existential faith struggles. It's very intense from that angle, and equally powerful. You will want to pray, reflect, journal and repent, as a result of reading this book. After reading the book I feel like I know the entire family, especially Adam and his dad. Adam's courageous way that he approached his life after such a devastating diagnosis is truly admirable and reflects a very deep faith. But the same can certainly be said for his wife Jenny, his mom and dad, and his sister Sarah. ALL of them leaned into the reality of Adam's final journey, a day at a time, and processed so much over those 95 days, and of course, beyond. The insights will resonate with anyone who has ever lost a loved one and knows the pain that it creates. And the sometimes very intense sense of lostness,

aloneness and confusion when a loved one is suffering so (this is described so well), seems to be where the rubber hits the road, so to speak....that is, the place where faith seems to have its roots, as its strength grows most in spite, or more likely because, of our personal weakness, even when it sometimes doesn't feel like it. I wrote these words for myself a few years ago, on the anniversary of my mother's death: "Grief is a gift created by God that is a necessary treatment to bring relief to intense heartache. Lean into the grief, don't ignore it or allow yourself to be distracted. Tears are the ointment given by God that bring healing to the heart's open wounds. The scars of grief will always remain, and we'll want them to, because they're reminders that we've been inflicted by love's wounds and survived them by God's grace." It seems to me that part of the celebration of life is the necessary grieving that comes with it. This book helped me get reacquainted with an my old friend grief, an essential gift that keeps on giving for those with eyes of faith to see. Grief anoints us with the healing salve of God's grace and presence that covers the mysteries that are incomprehensible on this side of that thin veil that separates us from Glory. I'm not sure it ever entirely goes away, nor am I convinced that it should. I still go to the cemetery to remember my loved ones who have died, but I go to the altar to encounter them, because as was stated many times in the book, the Communion of Saints teaches us that wherever Jesus is present, so are those who lie hidden in him. As the liturgy says, "with angels and archangels and all the company of heaven" they are there whenever and wherever Jesus is worshiped and adored. This is an amazing book in my opinion...no academic theory at all....just real life stuff as is seen and experienced every day...extremely well written. We all die. There's no getting around it. That realization is part of the beauty of this book, especially for those with eyes of faith to see. This is a book that will create much valuable reflection concerning life and death...but not for everyone, as mentioned. Personally, I wouldn't buy a bunch and give them away indiscriminately. Read it first yourself, and process it after you read. Then decide who to give it to. I gave one each to my physicians and one to the funeral director with whom I work a lot. A very hard book to put down. I give it FIVE STARS!!

*Stations of the Heart: Parting with a Son* is beautifully written, deeply honest, theologically compelling and speaks with truth the realities of a tragic, grief journey in such a way as to touch all who find themselves on the unwanted path called despair and grief. Lischer, a man of faith, but not afraid to question the very core of his beliefs as he takes us through the story of Adam, his delightful, talented and his only son's battle with cancer. I keep this book close by to reread parts as I now find myself dealing with profound grief and loss. I quote Lischer: "Grief is a series of caves--dark, multiple, and unfathomed. You do not explore them. You fall into them. Which means

you are constantly righting yourself and daily, sometimes hourly, recovering from little plunges into unrequited longing and despair." I thank the author for sharing and giving so much to us all in this classic and monumental book. You will smile, you will cry and you will grow to feel kinship with this special and always genuine family.

I just finished "Stations of the Heart" and can't imagine giving it less than 5 stars. I agree basically with every previous reviewer as to the honesty of the author, Richard Lischer, who describes his relationship with his dying son so intimately that at times I felt the need to look away. There were elements of this book that brought to mind Norman Maclean's, "A River Runs Through It." I was also reminded of the classic book by C.S. Lewis about the death of his wife, "A Grief Observed". It is important to note that Lischer has his doctorate in theology. The spiritual nature of this memoir is persuasive. Speaking from personal experience, not everyone who loses an adult child will go down this path. I found myself being envious of Dr. Lischer's abiding faith. Having lost my only daughter to cancer in 2003 when she was 32, I could not help but compare the journeys. It would be interesting for a book group to compare the sentiments expressed in "Stations of the Heart" to those of Joan Didion's "Blue Nights" for example. "Stations of the Heart" is a book so rich in meaning that it deserves to be read again which I intend to do.

Richard Lischer has written a moving memoir of his love and devotion for his 33 year old son who dies from cancer. Courageously - not voyeuristically - he invites us along during the dying process. Along the way, we see how Lischer grieves differently than his wife. We see his son Adam purchasing 18 birthday's worth of gifts for his unborn daughter - a daughter he will not live to meet. We see the cruelty of a father needing to "shop" for cemetery plots for his son. I wept in multiple places in this book not because of sentimentality, but because Lischer just puts the whole process of dying right there. Anyone who knows the turf of grief and loss will recognize the stations of Lischer's heart; cherished places where deep love, pain, separation, and souls intersect. Lischer does not offer advice but offers insights and glimpses. This book is his tribute to his son and part of his deep resolve not to let loss let him grow bitter - he loves his son that much.

I can only call this a beautiful love letter abouts beloved son, who died too young, just nine days before his first child was born. It is eloquently written, a testimony of love and grief, life, death, and the life that follows.

Excellent treatment of the tragedy of the illness and death of one's adult child, particularly the forthright addressing of issues surrounding a father and a son. Worthy of at least a second read. This book was easy to read, by no means simple, but powerfully engaging. Lischer's masterful gift of open communication and honest expression of familial tensions, emotions and memories of cherished as well as not so cherished experiences, made this book extremely difficult to put down. I am very thankful those who lead the reading group I recently joined recommended Stations of the Heart: Parting with a Son for our consideration.

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