

DEALING WITH GRIEF IN OUR COMMUNITY OF FAITH

1. Be free to speak honestly and angrily about our grief & loss

Tim Keller: Sufferers in the bible always expressed their honest anger to God:

Job: The arrows of the Almighty are in me...God's terrors are marshalled against me... What strength do I have that I should still hope? What prospects that I should be patient? (Job 6) My complaint is bitter; God's hand on me is heavy in spite of my groaning. If I only knew where to find him; if only I could state my case before him and fill my mouth with arguments...(Job 23)

Naomi: "Don't call me Naomi," she told them. "Call me Mara, because the Almighty has made my life very bitter.

Jesus: My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

2. Take your honesty and anger to God

Ps 126 is helpful: Those who sow in tears shall reap with songs of joy. He who goes out weeping, carrying seed to sow, will return with songs of joy, carrying sheaves with him.

Tim Keller: Tears are seed. If you aim them right, you will soon get a harvest of joy. If you bottle them up - sit on your bad of tears - there can be no harvest of joy.

Jesus: Blessed is the one who mourns for they shall be comforted. **Matt 5v4**

Remember that we need to take our honesty and anger to God if we are to find help and we need to remind ourselves that grief is an on-going process, a regular process and one that needs repeating until heaven where the scriptures promise us

'He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death' or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away."

Rev 21 v 4

3. Hold on to Truth

Note some of the responses from people suffering in Scripture.

- **Martha first words to Jesus re Lazarus:** Jn 11v21: Where were you?
- **Disciples wake Jesus up in the storm and say:** 'don't you care if we drown'?

In moments of grief and acute pain you can find yourself questioning God and how he has allowed this to happen. Martha is blaming Jesus for her brother's death, the disciples are questioning Jesus and his character. It can be easy to look down on them as faithless but in our grief we ask questions.

Part of hanging onto God in our times of grief is to hold tight to the truth we are able to hold tight to.

4. Beware the myth that Christianity means no trouble

The suffering of Believers is a major biblical theme:

- **Peter:** Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you (1 Pet 4v12)
- **James:** Consider it pure joy when you face trials of many kinds (Jms 1v2)
- **Paul:** Everyone who lives a godly live in Christ will have persecutions (2 Tim 3v12)
- **Jesus:** I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world" (Jn 16v33)

And yet we can default to a myth which says:

If I am a good Christian, God will not let bad things happen to me. If I pay tithes, read bible, attend church, speak my faith, then I will live in perfect health, wealth and success.

It is actually pretty hard to find a biblical character that didn't have some significant season of suffering. Even of Jesus is was said 'He was a man of sorrows, acquainted with suffering.

CS Lewis: If you looking for ease and comfort look for a bottle of port, not Christianity.

5. Understand the age that we live in

Although we should prayerfully resist any attack of the enemy, equally, we must not ignore scriptures that teach us that the 'tough stuff' is a part of this present age that we live in:

Apostle Paul: When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: Death has been swallowed up in victory (1 Cor 15v52-54)

Apostle John: Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth...He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away (Rev 21v3-4)

Present suffering feeds the glory of the next age:

- Our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us (Rms 8v18)
- **Here is a beautiful quote from Brothers Karamotsov:** "All suffering will be healed and made up for, and all the humiliating absurdity of human contradictions will vanish like a pitiful mirage. At the world's finale at the moment of eternal harmony, something so precious will come to pass that it will comfort all resentments, atone for all crimes, and make it not only possible to forgive but to justify everything that happened".

6. Do not fear for God sustains us in seasons of suffering

In times of great suffering on earth there is always great support from heaven.

- We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired even of life. Indeed, in our hearts we felt the sentence of death. But this happened that we might not rely on ourselves but on God, who raises the dead. (2 Cor 1v8-9)
- A ticket of grace is only given just as you step onto the train of suffering.
- **Samuel Rutherford:** I accept being put into the cellars of suffering, because the great king keeps his wine there.

In fact, there is a kind of God encounter that actually is only available through suffering. **Spurgeon** said, 'Those who dive in the seas of affliction bring up the rarest pearls'.

Often God reveals himself to us through other people. It is why it is essential to be part of a community of faith - this is God's plan for us.

However it can be friends that offer the most comfort and help but can also cause the most hurt.

Here are a few pointers (G Brown et al)

- 1 Engage, don't ignore.
2. Do not seek to give wisdom or offer explanations to people in the raw moments. Be especially aware of biblical platitudes.
- 3 Have the courage to go to the dark and painful places with those we love. Standing with someone in their grief helps to combat the loneliness that accompanies grief.
4. Talk about the person who has died. It may seem counter intuitive to press on the raw spot, but talk of and share memories is so helpful. The greatest fear can be that the person who is loved and lost will be forgotten
- 5 Know that it is almost always the case that grief changes us; in the same way that other significant life events shape and form us, so does grief. Allow people to grow and change as they inevitably question and evaluate life

7. Don't over evaluate what God is doing in your life

Romans 8v28: All things work together for good for those who love the Lord.

There is great truth in this verse but it can lead us to want to try and 'work out' what God is doing and ask "why has this happened" Much of these things will remain a mystery but the real truth of this verse is found in bringing the broken pieces of your life and allowing God to put them together for His glory and for our good.

8. Hold onto the character of God

John Piper: How can I believe that God is in control when something bad happens? It is hard, and we don't make light of it. We don't blow it off or act chipper. We hug. We weep with those who weep. And we embrace. But when the question arises—and it will arise, sometime sooner or later—as to where was God in all of this, I think two things are essential:

1. Go to the cross of Christ and realise that God designed this horrible event for our good. The bible promises us that God is for our good even in the pain and horror we are facing. Psalm 23 promises us that even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death ... your rod and your staff they comfort me. God is with us in the midst of our pain. He walks us through it.

9. Watch out for reactive responses

The response of Understanding: 'Unless I make sense of this...'

The response of Comfort: 'The issue of personal safety is now so important to me that I will let that determine where I live and how I live, rather than God'.

10. Respond worshipfully and thankfully

This may take time!

Job: The Lord gives. The Lord takes away. Blessed by the name of the Lord.

But it took Job some time to get to that response. He was pushed to the edge, he wasn't helped by his friends or his wife, he lamented, he complained, he demanded answers - but in time he responded with worship, praise and thanksgiving.

Habakkuk 3 yet will I rejoice in the Lord.