

Dealing with Loss and Grief

Every Christian deals with loss and grief at some time during their life. It might come in the form of the death of a loved one, the loss of a financial position, the loss of good health or the shattering of dreams.

Every one of us has, is or will experience loss and grief throughout our lives. For those of you who don't know, I lost my dad to lung cancer earlier this year. Barely 3 weeks went by from, let's see the doctor because I'm feeling bad to actual death... so right now I'm among the ones dealing with loss of a loved one and grief.

When these things happen, we can naturally ask, "Why?" or we can start thinking about life or revising our priorities or meeting people from our past or wanting to see someone in particular, etc. or all at the same time. We can even feel tempted to lose our faith in God's goodness.

We enter a period of grief. I became particularly interested in learning more about it and now happy to share this message with you

I've seen people who have experienced grief that left their lives permanently "derailed." They were moving down the track of life when SUDDENLY something unexpected happened, and it knocked them out of the race forever. Everything they did – from that moment on – was defined by that tragedy. Every decision was based on that trauma. Every happy occasion was overshadowed by that pain. They were unable to move beyond the event, unable to get themselves back on track. Their spirit was left crippled by their tragedy.

I've ALSO seen people who've experienced equally tragic events, who, after a period of mourning, get on with their lives. They are somehow able to get "back on track," It may be a different set of tracks as they are changed, indeed, but able to function, make decisions, and enjoy productive lives in the Lord.

Why the difference? What's my case going to be? After studying the scriptures, I believe it's because in modern day society there's a great misconception about "mourning" and what it means. It is presumed that "mourning" and "grief" are the same thing, but they are not.

The first group of people described (those who become permanently derailed) remain in a perpetual state of grief, which is an emotion, while the second group engage in the activity of mourning. The biblical definitions of the words for "grief" and "mourning" mean very different things AND have very different results.

There is a number of Hebrew and Greek words that have all been translated "mourn or mourning." While they have slightly varied meanings, they all basically mean "to wail, weep, make oneself bald, wear sackcloth, wallow thyself in ashes, and fast." Mourning is actually the "time" one spends engaged in these acts.

On the other hand, grief has to do with the “feelings” associated with death, rather than an activity or set of actions. Grief means “provocation, wrath, sorrow, anger, indignation, sore spite, vexation, frustration, annoyance, and pain.” Anyone who’s ever experienced a serious loss knows that the feelings associated with grief are valid emotions and are a necessary part of mourning. But the emotions that accompany grief are also very powerful feelings that, if left inside indefinitely, can cause serious breakdowns in body, mind, and spirit. In **Psalm 31:9** David said, “Mine eye is consumed with grief, yea, my soul and my belly.” We are not meant to grieve forever. Grief is meant to be part of the process of mourning. If we grieve without end, we become weak and lose our strength.

In **Ecclesiastes 3:4**, The Bible says that there is “A time to weep, And a time to laugh; A time to mourn, And a time to dance”. It is a definite set time, a season, an occasion, with a specific beginning and a specific ending. One phrase repeated over and over in the Word concerning mourning is “when the time of mourning had come to an end....” It is a very deliberate action intended to result in a specific purpose. Mourning is meant to help people adjust to their loss and restore them back to life.

In **II Samuel, chapter 12, verses 15 through 24**, we find a Biblical pattern for the grief process in a story from the life of David. We won’t go to the how David ended up with **Bathsheba** or how she became Uriah’s widow or why the kid died... we just want to lift out the part about David’s grief and use it as a pattern, Here is what the scriptures say:

Then the Lord struck the child that Uriah’s widow bore to David so that he was very sick. David therefore inquired of God for the child; and David fasted and went and lay all night on the ground. And the elders of his household stood beside him, in order to hold him up from the ground, for he was unwilling and would not eat food with them. Then it happened that on the seventh day that the child died ...But when David saw that his servants were whispering together, David perceived that the child was dead; so David said to his servants, "Is the child dead?" And they said, "He is dead." So David arose from the ground, washed, anointed himself, and changed his clothes; and he came into the house of the Lord and worshiped. Then he came to his own house, and when he requested, they set food before him and he ate. Then his servant said to him, "What is this thing you have done? While the child was alive, you fasted and wept; but when the child died, you arose and ate food." And he said, "While the child was still alive, I fasted and wept; for I said, 'Who knows, the Lord may be gracious to me, that the child may live. But now he has died; why should I fast? Can I bring him back again? I shall go to him, but he will not return to me.'" Then David comforted his wife Bathsheba, and went in to her and lay with her; and she gave birth to a son, and he named him Solomon. (NASB)

Another example in **Genesis 50:1,3** is when Jacob died, the Bible says that Joseph flung himself upon his father’s face, wept over him, and kissed him...Joseph and the Egyptians mourned Jacob for 70 days, as was their custom. But when the mourning period was over, Joseph returned to Egypt and on with his life.

The examples above show us Joseph and David engaged in biblical mourning. They understood that there is a time and purpose for mourning, a set period – with a beginning and an end. During the time of mourning, it is perfectly acceptable (even desirable and healthy) to withdraw, wail, cry, fast from food and from other comforts or pleasures. But when the period of mourning is over, we are meant to get up, worship God, and continue on with our lives.

So why do those who mourn according to the biblical pattern get such different results from those who grieve? Again, I think the Bible holds the key. In **Matthew 5:4** it tells us Blessed are those who mourn, For they shall be comforted. Within the very act of mourning are activities that bring comfort. If we remain in “grief,” instead of moving through the activities or stages of “mourning,” we’ll never be truly comforted. Jesus promises that the Holy Spirit will be our Comforter.

Occasionally, we can get trapped in an emotional abyss of unending “grief.” If that happens we must ask the Lord to help us out of it. Why? Although it is normal to grieve for our losses, it is just as important that we don’t grieve too long! During Old Testament times, God gave the Jews specific directions regarding grief and mourning. According to the Law, the Jews were allowed to express their grief in some of the same ways as the heathen nations around them - by crying, wailing and wearing sack cloth and ashes. However, they were forbidden of cutting themselves which was another common practice in the Middle east. Why was this? Because the Jews were not supposed to mourn like the heathen, who had no real hope. A cut will leave a scar - God doesn’t want us scarred by our losses. He doesn’t want us to make a memorial to them. He wants us to mourn and then go on to the future He has planned for us.

When it became evident that God had not answered David’s prayer in the way he had hoped, the scripture says that he "arose". That is what we need to do as well. At some point, we must "rise above" our grief and sorrow, pick up the pieces and go on.

After Jacob died Joseph’s brothers were afraid he would take revenge of them selling him as a slave. Joseph’s words to them in **Genesis 50:20** ...you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good in order to bring about this present result...

Likewise Satan may mean our affliction as evil against us but God means it for good in order to bring about some purpose of His own in your life or in the lives of others. Decide that you are going to trust Him in this and live your life within the constraints that He has placed upon you, just as Joseph did. This is the first step in bearing fruit.

Make a decision that, with God’s help, you’ll bring your mourning to an end as soon as possible. Only then we’ll be able to experience the comfort of God and feel God’s joy again. Grief is opposite to Joy, so “the longer the grief, the shorter the joy”

As usual, I close my message with an invented or adapted quote:

“Joy is not what makes the world go around; joy is what makes the ride worth while”