

## Good Grief

From a journal of grieving following the death of my first wife, June in 2007. I have kept these notes just as I wrote them in hope that the raw emotions expressed will speak to others at their place of need. Thankfully, the Lord has mended my heart. May He also mend yours. The Rev. Steve Evans

**“Today was a good day, until I felt the grief hit me.”** By such subtleties we unwittingly make grief into the enemy. Yet grief is not an evil thing; it is good, a great good from which blessing is promised to flow. Even our holy God grieves: hence there can be nothing evil about it. It is, of course, because we feel pain when we grieve that grieving itself becomes “bad” in our minds. Yet grieving is actually what God gives us to do so that our hearts can mend from the real evil—the tearing away from us by death of someone we love.

Death and loss are the work of a very real enemy who comes to kill, steal and destroy whatever it is that we and God rightly love (Jn 10:10). Just consider this: if you had a stab wound that needed soaking and fresh bandages daily, you would be foolish indeed to make the doctor and his efforts to mend you into the enemy, rather than the one who thrust in the knife! Yet, the deceiver turns our righteous indignation away from what he did, to the pain it still causes us and in so doing, makes our Healer and His ways of helping us grieve seem like an enemy and an intruder. And so we lament, “If only the grief would leave me alone so I can get back to my life”—never realizing that it is only through fully embracing the grief that we can be truly mended and restored to life.

**It takes time to heal**—not from grief, but through grieving, because the tears that mend us require time to be fully released. Let us be clear though that time doesn’t heal. It may soften or deaden, but that is not healing. One may heal over time, but it is not time that heals, and this is indisputably evident because there are so many who get worse with the mere passage of time. So many actually grow in bitterness, or self-pity, or idolatry of the deceased, or fears, or self-reproach. It is God alone who can heal the rending of heart that such a devastating separation of love produces. If there is not a God who is greater than death, then the loss of our loved one is an inconsolable and endless loss, never to be lifted.

Happily, there is a God, a kind and compassionate Father who has blessed our tears as His graced means of healing us. Jesus said emphatically: blessed (how happy, how highly favored) are they who mourn, for they shall be comforted. He tells us in Psalm 30:5 that our grieving is intended by Him to be replaced by rejoicing—that sorrow may last for a night, but joy comes in the morning (and our Morning of new life lasts into an eternal Day!). He says that God draws near to the broken hearted. This is always and forever true of Him. He weeps with those who weep and commends us to do the same. Yet, tragically the broken hearted often pull away from God or allow other elements to seize their hearts which create a separation inside of them from the very One who seeks to heal them. When this happens they don’t even want to face or feel their grief, because to do so would awaken the pain and conflicted emotions of their buried “issues” with God. We must learn to deal with these contaminants!

**Contaminants to Grief.** There may be no one way to grieve and certainly no way to control what one will have to deal with in the course of grieving. But that is not to say that there are no wrong ways to grieve. It does help to keep the river of tears running smooth and clear, unblocked and filled with hope (1Th 4:13). Good grief draws the contaminants to grief out to cleanse us of them. Such things as fear, doubt, unbelief, anger with God, hopelessness, self-pity, guilt or shame are unnecessary intruders. These contaminants are drawn to the surface in such a way that we are forced eventually to recognize that they are there. The pain simply



reaches points where we cannot deny or repress our secret negative feelings. We then have a choice whether we will deal with them or let them rule over us.

Eventually, the pain of grief brings the suffering heart to God, because it is only God who can mend us of the losses that we encounter through the death of loved ones. No other remedy can do that job. Lesser griefs may be mended by lesser means, but only a great God can heal the heart of the loss of a great love. Once it becomes clear that there is nothing else on earth that can remedy the death of someone on earth, we are compelled to turn to heaven for an answer. This may come in the first few moments or it may take many years. And when the process of grieving does its task of bringing us closer to God, it may be only then that we will notice that there are contaminants in our grief that spoil, hinder or block the relationship with God that we desire to have or need to discover.

In the light of Christ, we come to see the contaminants as the fallen, sin-darkened things that they really are. Until we want God more than these contaminants we will make room for them, excuses for them, allowances for them. But once we begin to want God and His peace again, we know intuitively (by the Spirit) that we will have to let them go. Good grief is meant to bring us to the place where we are willing to accept all that the Father has allowed to take place and trust ourselves once again to His goodness and wisdom. With such acceptance, we are ready to go forward and encounter life again under His loving care.

**The cross of grief and loss.** We have to allow grieving to bring us to surrender, to accepting at a depth level the loss or injustice itself—that it happened, how it happened; the pain it brought; what it did to us and our loved ones; and the failed ways in which we have tried to respond. We come to complete acceptance of all that God allows, not because these were good things and we liked them, but because a thoroughly good and loving God saw reasons why they had to be allowed. Because He chooses to accept (however sorrowfully) what He has to allow, we need to follow in His steps. Jesus at the cross shows us the way: Father, if this cross can't be removed, then because you have accepted that, so will I. Not my will, but Thine be done. So we choose to accept: that He has done nothing wrong; that He is grieving with us; that He has been wounded by these evils more than we have been; that He is determined to bring a greater good out of even the worst evils.

Accept it as fully as you can and bear it as bravely as you can. It is NOT true that this loss is destroying you. Jesus says that the cross of loss (as with all crosses) will bring you into greater life, resurrection life, His life. His life wants to resurrect out of the ashes of death and loss—from the inside of our lives. All that is needed is our trust and surrender and our willingness to believe for resurrection. **Their resurrection is not the issue**—not if we have prayed and committed them into His Hands. **It is our resurrection from the cross of their death that is in question.** Will we trust and believe, release the loss to Him, and see what God can do to bring us fully back to life? Our loved ones in heaven surely desire us to receive new life!

**Grief is not an illness.** Pregnancy and grieving are often looked upon as if they were illnesses. The truth is both are very high states of health. They are designed by God to give birth to something of incredible value, or rather someone—a child through pregnancy, and a new and deeper life through grieving. With both there is hard labor, there are moments of great pain, there is a rising sense of expectancy, and there is a long process that lies ahead. The difference is, of course, that pregnancy begins with the physical consummation of love and grief begins with its unwanted physical dissolution. What will the child be like? What will that restored life be like? You will have to wait to see. We can trace the general outlines by



observation of another's experience, but the wonder of new life is a miracle only God can produce—and God takes His time. There is a sufficiency, a fullness of time that is required for the day of delivery to finally arrive. We would all be wise to entrust the timing of that day into God's loving Hands and rest content that He knows how to bring it about.



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