



GRIEVING WELL

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HAVE YOU RECENTLY SUFFERED A TRAGEDY OR GREAT LOSS IN YOUR LIFE?

Most of us can answer yes, especially after the havoc wreaked by the global pandemic from which we are emerging. Over the past two years, nearly everyone suffered tremendous loss of one kind or another. Maybe it was the loss of a loved one, the loss of a relationship, the loss of a position.

The Mayo Clinic tells us grief is a natural reaction to loss, an overwhelming emotion, a universal and yet personal experience. During times of loss, our mental health and wellness suffers when we fail to understand how to grieve well. God's Word has much to say about getting through the major losses in our lives and grieving well. When grief overwhelms, we can choose to let our losses get the best of us or we can grieve well (God's way) and deal with the circumstances in a way which allows us to grow and bounce back with resilience.

Regardless of where you are in this moment, unfortunately, you will, at some point in your life, need to know how to grieve well. First, I want to share with you five truths about grief. Second, I'd like to share four ways to help you move forward in the midst of great loss.

1 LOSS IS UNAVOIDABLE. GRIEF IS A CHOICE.

In life, loss is unavoidable but grief is a choice. You have to choose to grieve. A lot of people chose not to grieve – they suffer, they deny, they try to get through their loss without grieving. It is a mistake – a big one. In life, change comes. There is no change without loss, nor loss without pain. Yet, grief is a choice.

All living things change. You're alive, so you will experience changes in your life, around you and inside you. There is no change without loss. Why? In change, we lose the old to grab the new. In life, we are always losing things. There is no loss without pain. We don't like to lose things.

But grief is a choice. You have to let grief come in, allow yourself to feel it.

When I mention grief, most people assume it only comes with the loss of loved ones, at funerals. In truth, you have thousands of losses in your life. You can lose your health, your job, your friend, your finances. There are hundreds, even thousands of things you have that you can lose.

Grief is not simply for the times we lose someone dear to death, but for many other losses in life for which we ought to grieve. The problem is grief is unpleasant so we try to avoid it, put it aside, stuff it, proclaiming, "I'm not going to grieve. I'm going to get on with my life. I'm going to deny it."

Denying grief is the cause of many problems. Unresolved, unmourned grief, from childhood to adulthood, results in being stuck in that stage of your life.

2

GRIEF IS HEALTHY.

Grief is healthy, in fact, grief is the only healthy response to loss, any kind of loss. It could be the loss of a job or career. It might be infertility or the loss of an engagement, financial problems or still birth, the loss of a limb or health. We all have losses in life, and in those losses, grief is healthy. Grief is good for you. Why? It is unhealthy to deny a loss.

Grief is the most painful emotion in life, but is it the most helpful. How? Grief is God's tool to get you through life's transitions because if you don't grieve in your losses you get stuck. Some of us are stuck – at age 14, age 28, or age 32 – because we didn't grieve a major loss in our lives. Then, we wonder why we have anxieties, phobias, fears, and other emotional anguish. Often, the simple reason is we don't know how to grieve well.

I think we can agree that Jesus never did anything wrong. He never sinned, never did evil, never did anything unhealthy. Yet, Jesus grieved. He wept. He knew sorrows. In John 11:33-36, Jesus grieved the loss of His dear friend Lazarus. He cried, He sobbed. Sadness is not a weakness.

When I pray for those whom I love and care about, I often cry, tears streaming down my face. Sadness is not weakness; the stronger and more confident you are, the more you do not fear showing your emotions.

There are two unhealthy reactions to loss – repression and suppression. Repression is blocking painful thoughts from your mind. Suppression is when you try to do it consciously, "I'm not going to think about the loss, but put rather put my head down and move on."

To not grieve losses is a mistake. Grief is God's gift to get us through life's difficult transitions. If we don't let it out in healthy ways. We act it out in unhealthy ways. When we swallow our grief, our body suffers. Much illness comes from unresolved grief, unresolved regrets and unresolved resentment. Unhealthy behaviors and numerous illnesses can be resolved when we learn to grieve well. Grief is healthy.

3

GOD GRIEVES WITH YOU!

God grieves with us. Our whole ability to grieve comes from God. We were created in the image of God. We have emotions because God has emotions. We grieve because God grieves. God gets sad. God weeps. God feels sorrow. God has regrets when people do evil. God is an emotional God. Our ability to grieve makes us unique in all creation. When you say, "I'm not going to grieve over that loss...I'm just going to put my head down; I'm going to live in denial. I'm going to stuff it." You are denying the very thing that makes you human, that makes you like God, in His image.

The Bible tells us God not only gave us the ability to grieve, but He grieves with us. God suffers with us. He is a sympathetic God. When we are in pain, God is not aloof. In Psalm 34:18, we read, *"The Lord is close to the brokenhearted and he saves those who are crushed in spirit."* God actually enters our grief. The Psalmist tells us God is close to the brokenhearted. He is not a million miles away. He is not nowhere to be found. He is as close as He can get, we just need tune in to Him.

4

GRIEF IS HEALED IN COMMUNITY.

Nobody gets well on their own. We are better together. We need each other. God created man and put him in the Garden of Eden, a perfect environment, but God said, "it is not good for man to be alone." God hates loneliness. He made us to be in community, in relationship. He made us to love Him and love each other. We need people in our lives. We need relationships. We need community.

In Galatians 6:2, the Bible tells us, *"Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ."* When I'm in pain, you are supposed to carry my pain and vice versa. When we are in grief, we are to carry each other's grief, support each other. Grief is healed in community.

5

GRIEF TAKES TIME.

Grief takes time, it isn't overcome quickly. You cannot rush it. You don't get over grief, you get through it. You never get over the major losses in your life, but you will get through them. You will remember them the rest of your life, they are part of your life story.

In Ecclesiastes 3:1-4, the Bible tells us, *"There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under the heavens: a time to be born and a time to die, a time to plant and a time to uproot, a time to kill and a time to heal, a time to tear down and a time to build, a time to weep and a time to laugh, a time to mourn and a time to dance..."* Life is full of opposites. We have good times and bad times, up days and down days. There is a time to weep and a time to rejoice, a time to be sad, to mourn, and a time to dance and celebrate. All are part of life.

Maturity allows us to handle both. If we can only rejoice and don't know how to grieve, we are missing what helps us grow spiritually. We don't typically grow on the mountaintops but in the valleys.

Ecclesiastes also tells us there is a season to mourn. Did you see that? A season, not a day or a week, but a season. God gives us time to grieve because it is part of the healing process, it is how we get on with life.

SO HOW DO YOU GET PAST TERRIBLE LOSSES AND MOVE ON? HOW DO YOU MOVE FORWARD?

You can't get past your pain until you acknowledge it, accept it, and feel it. Once you do that then you can get through it. When you don't grieve, the pain keeps coming up in your life, manifesting in behaviors, habits, fears, problems, and even illness. It is how you get stuck. You can't get past your sorrow without going through it. You can't get through it by trying to go past it.

We have to do what the Bible calls "lament" – crying out to God with your pain, your hurt, your anger, your anguish, your complaints – telling God exactly how you feel. The problem is most of us don't know how to grieve well and instead get stuck.

Let me share the four things you need to do to get unstuck.

1 LIST THE LOSSES YOU HAVEN'T GRIEVED OVER.

List the losses you have never grieved. It may take a minute, but look at your life and losses. Maybe you went to war, you were rejected, you miss loved ones, you lost your home, you have a long-term illness, or something else. List the losses you didn't grieve. It's the place you are stuck and you can't get past them until you acknowledge them.

In Matthew 5:4, Jesus promised grief is the key to blessing when He said, *"Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted."* Jesus said those who have the courage to mourn get comforted, blessed are those who mourn. If you want God's blessing, you have to grieve well.

2

GRIEF IS HEALED IN COMMUNITY.

What did you really lose? Maybe you had an alcoholic dad or your parents divorced, maybe your family moved a lot or your parent lost a job, maybe someone you loved died. What did you lose when it happened – stability, security, identity, credibility, trust, encouragement? Go deep, look past the obvious, and identify your loss. It is what you need to grieve.

3

HAVE THE COURAGE TO LAMENT.

You need to have the courage to lament. The word isn't as familiar today as it was in Bible times, but a lament is a passionate expression of grief to God. To lament is an action we must take for our mental health. To lament may mean crying out to God, shouting to God, weeping, or yelling. What might surprise you is a lament is an act of worship which can include arguing with and complaining to God. Before you ask, yes, complaining to God can be an act of worship, BUT complaining about God is an act of rebellion. Sadly, we are usually guilty of the latter, which is sin. On the other hand, God says you can complain to Him all you want – He can handle it.

The Bible is full of laments – prayers of complaint, accusation, grief. The Bible doesn't whitewash emotion – they're all there! In fact, there's an entire book in the Bible, Lamentations, which is Jeremiah complaining to God, grieving the loss of the temple in Jerusalem. Of the 150 Psalms, 65 are laments from King David, the man after God's heart, and a lot of other godly men too. God says it's an act of worship, just like thanking God and praising Him, because when you lament you are talking to God about God.

4

ASK JESUS TO HEAL YOUR BROKEN HEART.

Ask Jesus to heal your broken heart. The Bible says He is close to the broken hearted. In Psalm 103:13-14, we read, *"The Lord is like a father to his children, tender and compassionate to those who honor him. For he understands how weak we are."* In Luke 4:18, Jesus promises, *"God has sent me to heal the brokenhearted."*

All you have to do is ask. "God, I'm hurting. God, I'm scared. God, I'm grieving. God, I just got fired and I don't know what to do. I just lost it all in the stock market. That big deal I was working on, it just fell apart. The divorce is final. The engagement is broken off. Dear God, all the things I wanted, they haven't happened. I wanted to get married; it hasn't happened. I wanted to have a baby and a family; it hasn't happened. It's a huge loss."

Whatever it is, God is tender and compassionate. Jesus came to heal the brokenhearted. While you're walking through the valley of the shadow of death, look to Jesus.

Wherever there is shadow, there is light. Turn your back on the shadow, look directly to the light, and your fear will dissipate. Jesus said, *"I am the light of the world."* Give your life to Him. He loves you and will provide all the resources you need to make it through life's losses and experience all the good He has for you.