

Dealing With Grief

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Introduction

Since I lost both my parents several years ago within five months of each other, I feel I have learned better how to sympathize than I could before with others who have suffered the loss of immediate family members. It may be that one of the reasons we are allowed to suffer is so that we can feel with others when they suffer (Rom. 12:12, 15). We are sometimes tempted to ask, “Why is God doing this to me?” or even “Why is God allowing this to happen? Doesn’t He love me?” or “What have I done to deserve such pain and sorrow? Am I being punished? Why did God take my child or my husband?”

Some Causes of Suffering

Satan, not God, brought sorrow and suffering into the world. God created a pure and perfect universe in which there was no sin, pain, sorrow, or death. But God gave mankind freedom of choice to obey Him or to do what he wanted to. Tragically for us all, Adam and Eve chose to listen to the devil, yielding to pride and lust, thereby sinning (Gen. 2:16–17; 3:2–6).

Because of their sin all must eventually die physically (unless Jesus returns first): “Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned” (Rom. 5:12; cf. Heb. 9:27). Their disobedience also brought pain and suffering upon all humanity for as long as time lasts. As then, so now, we are made to suffer physically and/or emotionally because of the sins of others, in addition to the sufferings and guilt our own sins bring upon us. Drunk drivers often cause injury or death to innocent people. An adulterous spouse may bring devastating emotional pain to a mate.

We also suffer because we are physical beings who live in a world that is bound by physical laws. All of us, good and evil alike, are subject to natural laws such as the law of gravity, which if ignored or “violated,” can cause broken bones or even death.

God Gives Us Hope for Eternity

God cursed the Serpent (Satan) after he caused Adam and Eve to sin, thereby giving hope to all mankind: “I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel” (Gen. 3:15). This is a prophecy concerning the Savior Whom the Father would send to rescue mankind from the sin into which he had fallen.

This rescue is the essence of John 3:16: “For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life.” *Should not perish* does not mean that we will not die physically (as already noted), but that we may escape **spiritual** death—separation from God in eternity.

Our great hope is not bound up in earthly life, but in the life to come. Our physical lives with their griefs and sufferings are very brief, even at their longest, as Job recognized:

Man that is born of woman is of few days, and full of trouble. He cometh forth like a flower, and is cut down: he fleeth also as a shadow, and continueth not” (Job 14:1-2).

Moses’ ancient observation is no less true now: “The days of our years are threescore years and ten; and if by reason of strength they be fourscore years, yet is their strength labour and sorrow; for it is soon cut off, and we fly away” (Psa. 90:10). James wrote: “We know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapor, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away” (Jam. 4:14). Hence, even a long life on earth is only an instant when compared with eternity. Whatever sorrows and pains God’s people suffer are therefore momentary and temporary; we look toward eternity with God where all suffering will cease.

The Example of Job

Job can teach us so much about dealing with suffering. He lost all of his children and all of his wealth in one day, but instead of cursing God, he said: “Naked came I out of my mother’s womb, and naked shall I return thither: The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord. In all this Job sinned not, nor charged God foolishly” (Job 1:21-22).

When Satan’s first attack did not sway Job, God allowed him to strike Job with painful boils from his head to his feet. Job did not understand why these calamities were happening to him. He had no way of knowing that Satan had challenged God to let him test Job and see if he (Satan) could make him sin. Now God did not cause any of Job’s sufferings (Jam. 1:13), but He allowed Satan to test him to prove his faith. Job said, “Though he slay me, yet will I trust him” (Job 13:15), and he did. God also allows us to be tempted and tried because “the proving of your faith worketh patience” (Jam. 1:3).

Our Father and Savior Understand Grief and Suffering

Our Heavenly Father understands our grief. He gave up Him Who came to this earth and took on flesh, being born as His only begotten Son. Because the sinless Christ bore on the cross all of the sins of all people of all time, even the Father was forced to turn away from Him (Mat. 27:46). How much grief must the Father have suffered in watching His Son die!

Jesus also understands our pain, weaknesses, and grief. Although He was peculiarly the Son of God, He most frequently referred to Himself as the “Son of man.” As a flesh and blood human being, He experienced our temptations: “For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities, but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin” (Heb. 4:15). As the Lord did His saving work, He suffered insults, rejection, and humiliation from the very people He came to save.

During His trials He was scourged (a lashing that left the victim’s back lacerated and bleeding, sometimes exposing bones and frequently causing death). Spikes were then hammered through His hands and feet into the rough wooden cross. He had to endure hanging on the cross for six hours in the heat of the day and finally died in indescribable agony. He did all of this so that we, who are sinners, might have eternal life and joy in Heaven. Truly, He knows the meaning of grief and suffering:

Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, that ye should follow his steps: who did no sin, ...when he suffered threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously: who his own self bare our sins in his body upon the tree, that we, having died unto sins, might live unto righteousness; by whose stripes ye were healed” (1 Pet. 2:21-24).

In Gethsemane Jesus prayed that the cup of suffering might pass from Him, but He also prayed that His Father’s will, and not His own, should be done (Mat. 26:36-44). The Father heard His prayer and sent an angel to strengthen Him (Luke 22:43). But His plea that He might avoid the cross was denied. We do not always receive the answer to our prayers that we would prefer, either. We must learn to say meekly, “Thy will be done.”

Consolation, Hope, and Encouragement

All things work together for good for the Christian (Rom. 8:28). Although God does not cause bad things to happen, He can take them and use them for our good, if we will trust in Him and allow Him to. “Tribulation [i.e., trials, testing] worketh steadfastness” (5:3; cf. Jam. 1:2-4). To the church at Thessalonica Paul wrote: “But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope” (1 The. 4:13).

First Corinthians 15 should lift our spirits and instill hope. Paul reminded the Corinthians that a planted seed does not sprout with new life without first dying (v. 36), and so it is with our physical bodies. They die (as they must) so that they may be raised as spiritual bodies (v. 44): “For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle be dissolved, we have a building in heaven, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens” (2 Cor. 5:1).

Only in that changed, immortal state can we live forever in God's spiritual Heaven (1 Cor. 15:50). Our tired, worn-out, diseased, and broken bodies cannot enter Heaven. Would we really want to live forever in the bodies that we now inhabit? Would we want those we love to do so? Death is simply a passage to the next life. For the Christian, it is a passage to Heaven and to superior life – if we have served God faithfully.

Psalms 23 provides a comforting description of God's care for us, even as we walk through "the valley of the shadow of death." Peter advised us to cast "...all your care upon him; for he careth for you" (1 Pet. 5:7). Paul encouraged the Galatians: "And let us not be weary in well doing; for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not" (Gal. 6:9).

John's description of Heaven has for centuries consoled the faithful: "And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain; for the former things are passed away" (Rev. 21:4).

The Lord has promised: "Be thou faithful unto death [i.e., to the point of dying for Him], and I will give thee a crown of life" (Rev. 2:10b). Revelation 21 and 22 contain beautiful descriptions of Heaven, which should encourage us to live so that we can enter into that place of peace and pleasure.

The late Tillit S. Teddlie wrote the song, "Heaven Holds All to Me." He once said he did not fully comprehend the meaning of his own words until his wife died. After that, Heaven held all for him in a far more vivid way. When David's infant son died, he said, "Can I bring him back again? I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me" (2 Sam. 12:23).

Conclusion

Because of their faithfulness I am confident that my parents are in Paradise, the place of comfort where Jesus went between His death and His resurrection (Luke 23:43; cf. 16:19–25). I therefore have hope that I will see them again someday. After the Lord's return and The Judgment I hope to be able to enjoy Heaven with them. If I live according to the Word of God, having been washed of my sins by the blood of Christ, I know that I shall reach Heaven at last. All who belong to Christ have this glorious hope. Whatever we must endure in this life, "Heaven will surely be worth it all" – and that is the Lord's promise.

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