

Good Grief: The Unwanted Journey

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This is taken from a journal of grieving following the death of my first wife, June Evans, 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 mended my heart as I carried it to Him (though it took a lot of time and tears) and I am walking once again in the wonder of new life.

The Way We Grieve

"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, ruled as we are by our own feelings at the center of our moral universe: if it makes me feel good, it can't be all bad; and if it makes me feel bad, then there can't be any good in it. Such is the simplicity and tenacity of our emotional logic. 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 (John 10:10). Just consider this: if you had a stab wound that needed fresh bandages, soaking and cleansing daily, you would be foolish indeed to make the doctor and what he is doing 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.

The Way God Grieves

Let us give God our tears. The grief of a great loss is way too big to move out of our hearts at once. So it happens day by day, sometimes moment by moment. It seems as if there are a certain number of tears that the grieving need to cry each day -- perhaps a differing amount on any given day -- and if we don't cry them, we slowly start becoming heavy laden and sluggish, the fog of grief sets in and we become numb. Tears release something from our hearts to His and into the resulting opening of our spirit He pours -- what? -- divine sympathy, compassion, subtle comfort, release, peace and renewed hope. In small measures or large. In ways that can be sensed and no doubt in many ways we are not aware of at all.

Grieving is His graced means for healing broken hearts and He has had to lead many people through it. He knows it well. His own heart has had to travel that path times beyond knowing (Isaiah 53:3-4). And He is in sovereign charge of the process—that is why grieving seems to



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have a life of its own and work itself out by its own inner wisdom uniquely suited to each individual. The temptation is to mistakenly think that you are caught in a cycle. That the grieving is going nowhere. That the same tears are being shed time and time again to no purpose. In reality we are being led somewhere—to the place of rebirth on the other side of the valley (Psalm 84:5-7).

It does help to imagine, know and believe the Truth—that the Man of Sorrows draws very near to us when we grieve (and all the more tenderly so if He sees we cannot sense His presence). It does help to realize that He is asking us to give Him our tears and our sorrow so that He can begin to lift them. If we were to believe otherwise, a tendency to withhold our tears from Him could develop: for why would you want to cry—if you had to weep into an empty universe? Or why would you want to shed the same tears over and over again—if it could do you no good? In fact, our universe is filled with the infinite compassion of our God who feels these sorrows far more keenly than we ever can or will. And every tear is a liquid prayer, releasing some anguished message from our hearts for which He is intently listening to hear and to answer. Great good will come of our grieving, because He has purposed to use it as His preferred means of bringing His comfort and His redemption (Matthew 5:4).



It Takes Time to Heal

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 says 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 draw away from God or allow other elements to seize their hearts that 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

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

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?

What the Crisis Reveals

Once the crisis of grief comes it is too late to prepare for it. The crisis of grief (like any other crisis) reveals the true state of our heart and of our spiritual life at that particular moment in time and we have to accept that we are just as it reveals us to be. Often, we discover that we are not as spiritually fine-tuned or mature as we had thought, certainly not as we needed to be. The temptation is to blame shift, rather than enter into the kind of honest confession of our weaknesses that would bring liberating humility before God. Mercifully, God doesn't hold anything against us that the grief reveals of our imperfect spiritual condition. Rather, He meets us, accepts us and comforts us right where we are—and He works with others to help them see our own particular needs and weaknesses so that they can take care not to bruise us as they seek to comfort us. Try to keep in mind that the great thing is not whether we are having the "right" feelings, but whether we are choosing to do the right thing with the feelings we keep having.

It may be humbling to realize that you are not as advanced as you thought you were. But that humbling enables us to learn from grief—if we are willing—and to walk in humility with our God, letting Him set the pace and show us our steps through the valley. It is ever one day at a time, one step at a time and the starting point is always right where we are, not where we wish we were, or imagine ourselves to be. Good grief eventually will make you a realist about yourself and bring you to many points of self-realization and honesty. The pain of it simply keeps pressing reality down upon us and the Spirit helps us confess up!

Grief Is Not an Illness

Do the next right thing. It is important to remember to tell people to stay anchored in doing the next right thing as they seek to go into the grief whenever it presents itself—otherwise they may get engulfed in the grief and find it hard to progress through it. There is a ditch on either side of this unwanted and difficult path—and we can fall into either side very easily if balance is not achieved with the Lord's help: either we may get too busy doing the next right thing in a misguided effort to avoid the grief; or we may let go of faithfulness altogether (abandon doing the next right thing) and just wallow in the grief. Admittedly, it is hard to walk in an upright way through the times of deep grieving, but many good things in life are hard (parenting is hard) but



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that is no excuse for not embracing the challenge to do it as well as we can. Not to live and grieve in a faithful way makes life harder on us and on our friends and family—as they see us damaging our lives (and wounding our relationships with them) by grieving badly or not at all.

What to Do for Those Who Grieve

Give the grieving your tears. What? It would seem that tears are the last thing that they need—they already have so many of their own. Would it not be like carrying water to the ocean? Or throwing matches into a fire? And yet tears (if you truly carry them for the one they have lost) are exactly what they need from you. God is in your tears. He dwells with the broken in spirit. So, in giving the grieving your tears you give them something graced by His presence. Such tears are the very Word made flesh—a word of tender compassion from the Man of Sorrows, delivered in person through His Body on earth. In fact, He says to weep with those who weep. He does already. Will you join Him and share His heart which is also touching yours with your friend? Let that touch go full circle! Remember that when Job's friends huddled mournfully and silently around him in the time of his great sorrow, they did well. It was when they tried to speak, to explain, to vindicate God (by condemning Job!) that their words only succeeded in wounding him more. Many are those who give the grieving their words—but where, oh where, are those who give them their tears? How the grieving yearn for more tears!

Handle with care: People who are grieving, or worse, carrying grief but not releasing it through grieving, are very tender to the touch. Their hearts ache for the touch that they have lost and would welcome the right touch of heart or hand by others, but they require special handling, because they are, well, so touchy. It is easy to arouse a grieving person to anger— tread lightly! Pray much, but even more intently, when you see that there is no other way to “touch” their place of need. Never doubt that God can do more from heaven by His Spirit than we can by all our efforts!

One More to Explore

Hope for Hopeless Situations

There is always a way to hold on to hope and be lifted up by it.

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