

## “Embracing Grief and Loss” (Psalm 42:1-3)

Do you know what is the common experience for everyone? All people on this earth suffer loss, and it's a part of normal life.

Life is about loss in many normal ways that happens to all on the way. You lose your childhood when you become a teenager. And you lose being a teenager. We have to be responsible to be a young adult. And you lose singleness when you get married. As you grow older you lose your bodily physical strength. And we lose children as they grow up and get married.

And there are devastating losses that happen to all of us. Devastating losses like terminal illnesses such as a cancer. There's the death of someone close to you. There are devastating losses such as divorce which is like a death. There is being abused sexually, emotionally, physically. Some of us have tremendous loss of innocence. There are crushing disappointments that you had hoped for, that you realize will never happen.

No two losses are the same. Every loss is unique and every loss has its unique pain.

### 1. Grief is a gift from God

To feel grief, sadness and pain itself is not a bad thing. We do not grieve because we are weak. Grief is one of God's gifts.

God grieves actually.

Genesis 6, God saw how bad the sins of man had become on the earth. All of the thoughts in his heart were always directed only toward what was evil. The Lord was very sad that he had made man on the earth. His heart was filled with pain (vv.5-6). God grieved.

God saved Israelites from slavery of Egyptians. But it says in Psalm 78:40 “How often they [Israelites] rebelled against Him in the wilderness and grieved Him in the desert!” God grieves.

Jesus grieved. The Son of God is a man of sorrows, acquainted with grief (Isa 53:3-10). Jesus offered up prayer and petition with loud cries and tears (Heb 5:7). He laments over Jerusalem (Matt 23:37). He wept at the death of Lazarus (John 11:35). He agonized in the garden (Mark 14:34).

And the Holy Spirit grieves (Isa 63:10; Eph 4:30).

Being made in the image of God who grieves, grieving is a right and proper and healthy response. Grieving as part of being a human being. It's part of being alive. It's part of being made in the image of God.

And Christians, one of our gifts to the culture is that we do not deny reality that we face reality head-on. There is grief and loss everywhere. And we live, speak and move in the truth. Because we have the faith that our God is big enough to handle it.

Your life has many stories. Your life has a lot of parts to it. Part of who you are is the parts that are the wounds. Grief is not something optional. It's a part of your life. It's a part of your story. It's a part of who you are. You are a human being with limits with feelings just like everybody else.

## 2. The laments pay attention to the reality

“The laments pay attention to the reality that life can be hard, difficult, and sometimes even brutal.”<sup>1</sup> Laments are the cry of our soul that we are seeking the face of God in the situation or feeling of his absence.

But instead of facing our loss, dealing with our pain, looking deeply inside ourselves and waiting for God, we often take an instant resolution, we want to make a short cut.

Denial is a very common response to grief and loss and pain. Another is we bargain. I lose one relationship, I don't want to feel the pain, I find another. I don't want to feel the loss, I want to replace it as quickly as possible. Or we get into some addictive lifestyle to medicate the pain. One of the reasons we resisted stopping from all our busy activity is we did not want to face the sadness that was waiting for us. We watch the TV a lot or for others it's drugs and alcohol. Some got into pornography. And others of us get workaholic. We bury ourselves and work hard and make our schedule full so that we don't have to feel pain. And some of us eat too much, others of us go shopping crazy. Or unhealthy relationship attachments, even serving others at church incessantly. Or it can appear in the form of violence. Anything. Anything not to feel. Then we think we

---

<sup>1</sup> Peter Scazzero, *Emotionally Healthy Church*, Zondervan, 2003, 2010, p.168

are okay, but it's not okay actually. Not feeling pain doesn't mean you've got healed.

It is said that often depression is a result of years and years of cumulative denying reality. The reality of loss. The reality of death. The reality of failure. The reality of disappointment. And so we shove it down, shove it down, shove it down. We wonder why we're depressed. Because we're not dealing honestly with life. And it's coming up in a different form and we end up becoming dull people.

Eugene Peterson says this beautifully, he goes: the most promising preventative to addiction and depression is to learn to lament.

Another reason why we Christians do not lament is, sometimes church culture prevents us from lamenting. If you rejoice, if you are grateful, and praising, you are a spiritual person. If you are grieving, in pain and in sadness, that's because you are not spiritual. Have you ever heard something like that? You've just experienced a great loss. You are sad. You are in pain. Then you are told, "Let's be thankful to even that! Be strong in faith! Don't be sad! Now let's praise the Lord, instead of grieving!"

Is it because you are spiritually weak that you are in sadness and pain? Is it because you are spiritually immature that you are grieving? Is that really true?

We studied David before. He is a model of healthy spirituality. David grieved over the death of Saul and Jonathan. He wrote a poem and composed a song. And he ordered all the people of Judah to learn the song (2 Sam 1:17-27). David "knows how important it is for the people to stay connected to reality and not to run from pain."<sup>2</sup> It is said that more than half of the 150 psalms are classified as laments. Most were written by David, according to tradition.

And Jeremiah was inspired by the Holy Spirit and wrote a book called "Lamentations" and it's one of the 66 books in the Bible.

As we looked at just before, God grieves, Jesus grieves, the Holy Spirit grieves! So we grieve. Ecclesiastes 3:4 says "a time to weep and a time to laugh, a time to mourn and a time to dance." If you need to grieve, it's your time to do it. It's biblical. You should do it.

### 3. Grief is where we can meet God

---

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p.167

“Ignoring our emotions is turning our back on reality; listening to our emotions ushers us into reality. And reality is where we can meet God.”<sup>3</sup> Grief is where we can meet God who grieves.

Jerry Sittser is a Christian and theologian. In an instant, in a tragic car accident, he lost three generations of his family: his mother, his wife, and his young daughter. And he wrote a book “A Grace Disguised: How the Soul Grows through Loss.” This book is highly recommended. He says;

“The quickest way for anyone to reach the sun and the light of day is not to run west, chasing after the setting sun, but to head east, plunging into the darkness until one comes to the sunrise.

To walk into the darkness rather than try to outrun it, to let my experience of loss take me on a journey wherever it would lead, and to allow myself to be transformed by my suffering rather than to think I could somehow avoid it.

Recovery is a misleading and empty expectation... Sorrow took up permanent residence in my soul and enlarged.

I did not get over the loss of my loved ones; rather, I absorbed the loss into my life, like soil receives decaying matter, until it became a part of who I am... Whatever that future is, it will, and must, include the pain of the past with it.”<sup>4</sup>

In grief and pain, our souls lament. “Where is God? What is he doing? Am I really loved?”

### Psalm 42:1-3

As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, O God. <sup>2</sup> My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When can I go and meet with God? <sup>3</sup> My tears have been my food day and night, while people say to me all day long, “Where is your God?”

In one day, Job lost his 10 children and all his property. Then, he also lost his health. His appearance became so miserable that it was painful to look at him. Even his wife said to him, “Curse God and die!” He lamented, “For sighing comes to me instead of food; my groans pour out like water. What I feared has come

---

<sup>3</sup> Dan Allender and Tremper Longman, *The Cry of the Soul*, Navpress, 1994, p.6

<sup>4</sup> Jerry Sittser, *A Grace Disguised*, Kindle version, 2004, Location 405-6; 409; 783; 452; 456; 786

upon me; what I dreaded has happened to me. I have no peace, no quietness. I have no rest; instead, only trouble comes” (Job 3:24-26). But he still hoped in God and sought after Him (Job 13:15; 23:3). And he encountered God in a very profound and new way he had never experienced before. So he said, “My ears had heard of you but now my eyes have seen you” (Job 42:5).

Grief is where we can meet God. That is the tangible encounter with God which we have never experienced before. There is an aspect of God which we can only experience through grief.

Not many people experience the trial like Job experienced. But for everyone from children to teenagers to young adults to middle-aged to elderly people, loss is part of life. We can't change situations around. We can't control things. But we can allow God to change us in them that the situations do change us. It never happens instantly, it requires time.

For healing of broken heart, especially forgiving the one who hurt us requires time.

Jerry Sittser says, “Even when justice does prevail, victims are not always satisfied... The desire for revenge, therefore, is a bottomless pit. It cannot be satisfied, no matter how much revenge it gets... Unforgiving people are quick to claim rights... The process of forgiveness begins when victims realize that nothing – not justice or revenge or anything else – can reverse the wrong done... Unforgiveness makes a person sick by projecting the same scene of pain into the soul day after day... Victims can choose life instead of death. They can choose to stop the cycle of destruction and, in the wake of the wrong done, do what is right.”<sup>5</sup>

Peter Scazzero says, “We will not take healing action against unfair pain until we own the pain we want to heal. We need to appropriate the pain we feel: Be conscious of it, take it on, and take it as our own... I worry about fast forgivers. They tend to forgive quickly in order to avoid their pain.”<sup>6</sup> “I do not believe it is possible to truly forgive another person from the heart, until we allow ourselves to feel the pain of what was lost.”<sup>7</sup>

Grief is where we can meet God who grieves, who sympathies with our loss and who heals our pain.

---

<sup>5</sup> Jerry Sittser, Location 1512; 1516; 1533; 1585; 1626; 1589

<sup>6</sup> Peter, p.165

<sup>7</sup> Peter, p.164

Our God is big enough that we can have the courage to go right into reality in the face and still trust and believe that God is on the throne and his promises are true that he is good, he is with us, and he will heal us, restore us.

#### 4. A mark of wounded healer

Just as loss, pain, sorrow, and grief are part of you, the healing of these wounds and scars are also part of you. Wounded, healed, but still with marks from the wounds, this is the new you.

“Put your hand into my wounds” said the Risen Jesus to Thomas and “You will know who I am.” (John 20:27) The wounds of Jesus are a part of his identity. They tell us who he is. he did not lose them. Rising did not remove them. He who broke the bonds of death kept his wounds.

“The sovereign God came in Jesus Christ to suffer with us and to suffer for us.”<sup>8</sup> We can find comfort in knowing that the sovereign God, who is in control of everything, is the same God who has experienced the pain we live every day.<sup>9</sup>

When you grieve, what happens is that you are able to identify with other people's pain. But if you don't grieve your own pain, you can't empathize and relate to other people's. Loss, grief and healing is the process of making us to be a compassionate man or woman. It's a part of necessary process of being more like Jesus.

Job's friends visited him to comfort him. But for the 1<sup>st</sup> one week, they remained silent. As his pain was so great that they couldn't say anything. Then, Job started to share his feelings. He lamented about himself. Then, they started to give him theological explanation about his situation. Their theology was good. But they failed to comfort Job. Because what Job needs is not theology, but is God himself. What Job needs is friends whom he can share his pain while he waits for God, and friends who would wait for God with him sharing his pain.

“The degree to which we grieve our losses is the degree to which we are compassionate. (Henry Nouwen)”<sup>10</sup>

---

<sup>8</sup> Jerry Sittser, Location I799

<sup>9</sup> Jerry Sittser, Location I804

<sup>10</sup> Peter, p.175-6

Grieving is a critical element to growing up and being mature so that when you look at people, you're not analyzing them, you're not looking at the performance, you're not judging them based on their looks, you're able to be like God the Father, you give mercy as our Father is merciful because you understand grief and they know you understand it.

"In the 1870s Horatio Spafford was a successful Chicago lawyer. But at the Chicago fire of 1871 he lost everything. And his son had died shortly before the disaster. He and his family desperately needed a rest. In 1873 he planned a trip to Europe for his family. But just before they set sail, he got a last minute business. He decided to let his wife and four daughters go as they planned, but he alone returned to Chicago and joined them later.

But their ship hit with an English boat and sank in only 12 minutes. The accident claimed the lives of 226 people. Anna, his wife had stood on the deck with her daughters. They were desperately clinging to her. Her last memory of the disaster is that of her baby being violently torn from her arms by the force of the waters.

Just nine days later, Spafford received a telegram from his wife in Wales. It read: "Saved alone." When he made the ocean crossing to meet his grieving wife, he sailed near the place where his four daughters had sunk to the ocean's depths. There, in the midst of his sorrow, he wrote "It Is Well with My Soul." The words of Stafford's hymn have brought comfort to so many in grief."<sup>11</sup>

Though Satan should buffet, though trials should come,  
Let this blest assurance control,  
That Christ hath regarded my helpless estate,  
And hath shed His own blood for my soul.  
It is well with my soul,  
It is well, it is well with my soul.

## 5. Embracing grief and loss

All people on this earth suffer loss, and it's a part of normal life. And God will not waste our sufferings and pains. In the midst of suffering and sorrow, God matures

---

<sup>11</sup> Peter Scazzero, *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality Day by Day*, Zondervan, 2014, p.104

us, purifies us, strengthens us and builds us up. If we give up and run away, we will have just suffered, and our suffering will be wasted. There is no way we can erase suffering and pain, and no way to ignore them as if they never existed. For God to bring good from suffering and pain, we must receive them and remain in them.

We can do that because we believe God is with us, because we believe God is there with us. Sometimes we lose sight of God, sometimes we cannot feel God's presence. But we still believe that God is with us. We choose to believe that He is with us. And because we believe that, so we can embrace losses and grief. And we are surrounded by the witnesses who have been embracing grief and loss, and who experienced God's mercy and compassion, and who encountered God's griefs.

"The ability to embrace our losses and grief will equip us to love others as Jesus did. We will then be able to model our lives effectively and authentically on the incarnation."<sup>12</sup>

"Grieving is for you to stop and pay attention to your losses, large and small, both in the past and present. Give yourself permission to feel. Slow down the pace of your life. Your losses are not something "to get over" but are of great value to God and your spirituality."<sup>13</sup>

For LifeNet groups and personal reflection:

- 1) Briefly share one loss you have experienced in the last one year. How has this loss impacted you?
- 2) How do you tend to react to loss or painful incidents? Where did you learn it?
- 3) How can grief be where we can meet God? How important is it for our spiritual maturity?

---

<sup>12</sup> Peter, Church, p.179

<sup>13</sup> Peter, Church, p.174

4) “The wounds of Jesus are a part of his identity. They tell us who he is. (John 20:27)” What kind of message may our experiences of loss, pain, grief speak to others?