

Permission To Grieve

"Give sorrow words; the grief that does not speak knits up the o'er wrought heart and bids it break."

- Shakespeare, Macbeth

Grieving over our losses in life is as natural as gasping for air when we emerge from an underwater swim. It is a reflexive, spontaneous action when we are faced with the brokenness of life and the bitterness of death. It is the way we are created to respond to trauma so that we can recover and heal. Our physical hurts actually show the pattern of emotional healing for us: the 'ouch' moment of accidentally cutting ourselves, followed by a moment of numbness or non-feeling, then a throbbing pain for a time eventually reducing, a scabbing over of the wound, a falling away of the scab revealing new tender skin, an eventual toughening of the area to blend again with the rest, the trace of a scar to remind us of the injury, and sometimes an irritation or itch around the scar that lingers. It is this naturalness of grief that makes it so common to all mankind, yet strangely, individually and collectively we can be found resisting grief and searching for another way to remedy the hurt of our losses.

For the hurting Christian it seems the acceptance of grief is even more complex. Our awareness of our sinfulness

and the transforming work of our Saviour in our lives may lead us to despair over our grief feelings. Are we allowed to feel this way? Is this the faithful response of God's child? Our internal uncertainties are often reinforced by our well-meaning Christian family and friends who, in the face of our grief, urge us to 'trust in God', to 'get busy and don't dwell on it', to transcend our reality with heavenly thoughts. The case against grieving begins to mount in our everyday experience and we begin to battle with our grief as the enemy itself. We fight the very process created to help us heal.

It seems at the outset we need permission to grieve. A common route for popular Christianity has been to explore 'What Would Jesus Do' (WWJD). However, we don't need to speculate about that for the gospels reveal what Jesus did. The incarnate Son of God was like us in every way, except without sin. And He was a griever. In fact He was introduced as "the man of sorrows, acquainted with grief". This immediately gives us some assurance that in our grief we are on the right track, for the Man who lived out God's will in His life did it through His

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An Update from the Board

Once again, greetings from the Board of CCC. We have been praying and searching for someone to fill the position of Executive Director for some time now. It is with thanksgiving to the Lord that the Board is pleased to announce that we have been given the gift of Mr. Lammert Jagt to serve in this position.

Mr. Jagt is a retired businessman and a member of the Canadian Reformed Church in Burlington/Waterdown where he has served as deacon and elder. He has served on the board of John Calvin and Guido de Bres schools and presently serves on the Board of Governors for the Canadian Reformed Theological College in Hamilton. Lammert and his wife Marianne have been blessed with six children and 14 grandchildren and reside in Waterdown. One of Mr Jagt's responsibilities will be to expand the vision and mission of CCC through building relationships with the supporting community.

Again we ask that you uphold CCC in your prayers. We ask that the Lord will continue to bring associate counsellors willing to be a part of CCC and we ask that He will sustain and give wisdom and insight to our present counsellors, Henk, Heather, Delta, Kevin and Stephen. We ask our readers to share in the vision of CCC and to help achieve it through your prayers and financial support.

God bless you all.

Arlene Veenstra - Vice Chair

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"You turned my wailing into dancing; you removed my sackcloth and clothed me with joy, that my heart may sing to you and not be silent. O LORD my God, I will give you thanks forever." - Psalm 30:11,12

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grief. He had no choice, for He came to suffer losses to the point of death and rejection by His Father. As a despised and rejected Man, He was destined to grieve. Read through the gospels and mark out the recorded journey of our Saviour and note how He is hurt and how He grieves.



At times He openly shares His grief with those around Him. Other times, He recedes in privacy to deal with His overwhelming grief and lay it before His Father prayer. As He resolutely moves

anything back...He poured out His grief. And what did His Father do? Did He turn His back and spurn Him for His grieving? No! He sent an angel from heaven to Him to strengthen Him! (Luke 22:43) What a validation of His suffering and hurt. What a compassionate response from a Father who was punishing His Son in our place. What about Jesus' friends? They turned out to be of little help...in fact they added to His suffering. They did not watch and pray. They did not support Him in His grief. They slept. They passed by the greatest opportunity to help the Saviour in His hour of need. Jesus soon realized that He could not rely on them and urged them to pray for themselves so that they would not fall into temptation.

What can we learn from this gospel message? Are you grieving a loss in your life? Maybe you have experienced the death of a loved one, a broken marriage, a loss of faith by someone close to you, a loss of trust brought on by abuse, or even a loss of your business. You are hurt and your natural response is grief in the shape of anger, fear, overwhelming sadness, depression, lethargy, lack of purpose, isolation and many other complicated feelings. Maybe you are even disappointed

Lead us to the place where we may fully rely on God, where we may truly understand that we don't control our life in any way...that we may say, echoing Jesus, "yet not my will, but Yours be done."

to the cross, His grieving over the sick and the lost, the desolation of the holy city, the lack of understanding of the disciples, His imminent death, and at last the impending separation from His Father, all these characterize his ministry on earth as one filled with grief. And when we observe the Saviour's grief in His final hours, we see its climax, and how He pours it out to His Father.

The gospels together capture the intensity of the Gethsemane experience. Jesus, heavily burdened by His awareness of the cup of God's wrath that He would have to drink, withdrew with His closest earthly confidants. He realized the limits of how much they could help him in his grief, so he simply asked them to watch with Him, to support Him with their presence and prayers. "My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me." (Matt.26:38) We know the story well, how Jesus pleaded with His Father, how He petitioned Him for help, how His sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground. He didn't hold



with God and don't understand what He is doing with your life. What does this God-given grief response offer you? Grief offers an opportunity to heal. In our grief we are confronted with our feelings...our hearts are bared and vulnerable. How is this an opportunity? God wants our hearts. In our grief, when our hearts are open we are most vulnerable to 'letting'

God in. Our grief creates the best posture for bowing to God, for emulating our Saviour. It may lead us to the place where we may fully rely on God, where we may



truly understand that we don't control our life in any way...that we may say, echoing Jesus, "yet not my will, but Yours be done." And as we travel that road of grief we may learn from our experience that we may take that burden of hurt and pain and exchange it for a lighter burden, one offered by the Man who is "gentle and

humble in heart". (Matt 11:28-30) The road of grief can help us find "rest for our souls". Will accepting our grief as a healing process make the road easy? Will it eliminate the hurt and pain? No, it will not, but it will enlarge our experience on our Christian journey to accommodate both joy and pain and still bring thanks to God. Consider King David, the earthly forefather of the Saviour. He was the man after God's own heart. The scriptural poetry of the Psalms is both a lament over suffering and loss and a discovery of God's grace in grief...it is the outpouring of David's heart which made him open to receive grace. So there is encouragement in bearing your grief as it can bring you closer to your God. Perhaps you need help to see it and experience it; even the guiding hand of a Christian counselor to aid in sorting out your thoughts and feelings. If that is the case, take the hand that is offered to you to walk alongside you in your journey through grief and you too may one day be able to sing with David.

Book Review:

**A Grace Disguised:
How the Soul Grows Through Loss**
Gerald L. Sittster (1995)
Zondervan Publishing House
ISBN 0-310-21931-0 184 pp (softcover)

The book lets us in on an intense struggle -- a drunk driver kills the author's mother, wife, and five year old daughter. Three generations are wiped out, while the author and his surviving children try to make sense of it all. Each loss is unique. Whose loss is worse? How do you compare? The author, and we with him, have no response, but are given the opportunity to share in his search for the meaning of suffering and how we can grow through suffering.

We are challenged to turn toward the pain. "The deeper we enter into the suffering, the deeper the life" (p. 37). Some may not be comfortable with the expression that suffering "enlarges the soul" but the book does not allow us to stand still and speculate about correctness, and we are quickly drawn into the challenge of recovering a sense of balance in life.

It is important to remove the impression that the book is one draining outpouring of feelings. The author suggests that feelings don't determine what is real. "We cannot ignore them nor indulge them because only God is real" (p. 88) and so the author weaves in his understanding of the ways of the Lord. In closing, the author states, "the supreme challenge to everyone facing catastrophic loss involves facing the darkness of the loss on the one hand, and learning to live with renewed vitality and gratitude on the other" (p.180).

The book is not an easy read, and may actually not be directly helpful to someone in the midst of grief. It does pull together eternal truths in relation to suffering, and provides us with the strength to walk with those in pain, and at the same time be comforted ourselves.

Henk Van Dooren