

Only God Heals Broken Hearts

By Debi Pryde

Jesus began His public ministry by declaring the promise recorded by Isaiah the prophet. “The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me; because the Lord hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound.... to comfort all that mourn; to appoint unto them that mourn in Zion, to give unto them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness; that they might be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that he might be glorified.” (Isaiah 61: 1-3)

Jesus extends an open invitation to everyone who is heavy hearted, and spiritually thirsty to come to Him, the source of abiding comfort and peace, for He refuses no one. He warmly calls to all of us, “Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. . .Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price ” (Matthew 11:28; Isaiah 55:1) Salvation is free to all who will believe the Gospel message and put their trust in Christ, and the peace of God is freely poured out upon those who come to the well of living water—Jesus Christ Himself. Because believers enjoy the benefits of the indwelling Christ who, (as well as the Holy Spirit and God the Father) comforts them, they have a wonderful resource available that enables them to find peace, even in the midst of life’s deepest sorrows and disappointments.

“Now our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God, even our Father, which hath loved us, and hath given [us] everlasting consolation and good hope through grace, Comfort your hearts, and stablish you in every good word and work.” (2 Thess. 2:16-17) This truth makes a great difference in the way a trusting child of God responds to grief and the way an unbeliever might naturally respond to grief. The believer who is aware of his resources in Christ and his intimate relationship to God has such a different outlook on life and such a different perspective, that his responses and solutions to trials vastly differ from that of unbelievers.

Grief is a natural human response to loss, regardless whether we are Christian believers or not. It is a complex reaction that sometimes envelopes ones mind and emotions to such an extent that it brings us into the darkest valley of human experience. There is no way to escape grief, for it comes to all of us—the only way through it is through it. Our great consolation is that Jesus promised to go through it with us. We have God’s promise that weeping may endure for a short time, but “joy comes in the morning.” (Psa. 30:5) *It is not unspiritual to grieve or feel the painful emotions that accompany deep sorrow.* Jesus suffered grief and, in fact, was called a “man of sorrows.” (Isa. 53:11; Mat. 26:37-44; Mark 14:34-42; Luke 22:42-44) Job suffered grief and was never rebuked by God for his sorrow. The widow of Nain grieved for the loss of her son, and Jesus in compassion raised him from the dead. God noticed and expressed compassion for Hagar’s sorrow. (Gen 21:17-20) He expressed compassion for Israel’s sorrow (Ex. 3:7-10), for Hannah’s sorrow (1 Sam 1:15), for David’s sorrow in the death of Absalom (2Sam. 18:33), for Martha and Mary’s sorrow (John 11:19-40) and for Jeremiah’s sorrow (Lam. 1:12). God

instructs believers to compassionately “weep with those who weep” as He Himself does, not rebuke them. (Rom. 12:15)

There are definitely ways of managing grief that are biblical and blessed as well as ways that follow a human pattern and are therefore ineffective or even sinful. Small children tend to watch those who care for them and then respond accordingly to the emotions and manner they see modeled in those who are older. Young believers react in very much the same way, watching the more mature believers and taking cues from those who are spiritually stable and who come along side them to lift them up. Comforting those who grieve requires one to enter into a relationship with the suffering one, and to take upon themselves a portion of the burden. This is what is meant when the Scriptures say, “Bear ye one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.” (Gal. 6:2) We are able to comfort others who grieve when we genuinely empathize (weep) together with them, responding as we have learned to do when we ourselves have suffered affliction. “Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all Comfort; who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God..” (2 Cor. 1:3-4) Those who grieve will be encouraged by seeking out others who not only know the experience of sorrow, but more importantly, who know the way to find God’s comfort.

We tend to respond to a loss or disappointment proportionate to the place of importance the object of our affection has in our life, or to the extent the loss is a part of our daily life. Grief is a natural response to losing a loved one to death. However, it is also a natural response when we experience the loss of *anything* we deeply love or desire or look forward to. Women who learn they cannot bear children will often grieve for the loss of something that is anticipated and greatly longed for. Men who lose a job or a promotion might grieve for the loss of something they perceive as very vital and important in their life, as well the loss of confidence, security, or esteem that might accompany losing a job. Loss of friendship, possessions, health, status, financial gain, honor, accomplishment, physical beauty, or a comfortable and familiar way of life all has the potential to produce sorrow and grief. When others experience great trials and loss, we may experience grief *for* them, out of sadness that someone we care about is suffering.

God was said to be “grieved in His heart” upon seeing the corruption man had brought upon His creation. (Gen. 6:6) Abraham was grieved for the anticipated separation from his son when his wife insisted Ishmael and Hagar be sent away. (Gen. 21:11) Naomi not only grieved for the loss of her husband and sons, but expressed much grief for the sake of her daughter-in-laws, as a result of God’s dealings with her. (Ruth 1:13) Hannah grieved that she did not have a child. (1 Sam. 1:8) David confessed he was consumed in grief because of the persecution of his enemies. (Psa. 6-7) Parents are said to grieve as a result of a child’s foolishness [rebellion]. (Pro. 17:5) Isaiah describes the deep grief of a wife who is forsaken by her husband. (Isa. 54:6) These are all experiences that are common to man and produce tremendous grief in the human heart.

When we experience a significant loss in our lives, we are forced to change our course and adjust our hearts to accommodate a new direction. We might struggle with this because what we are forced to face on one hand conflicts with what we deeply long for on the other. Still, it is a necessary adjustment requiring time and patience. The path to acceptance and reorientation to our changed life is never instantaneous. It is a journey. However, it is a journey the Christian does not travel alone and one that is not without purpose or promise. When grief is coupled with hope in God's love and promises and dependence on His provision and care, we can look forward to the day when we are led out of the dark shadows of deep sorrow into the warm sunlight of renewed hopes and dreams. "I had fainted," David said, "unless I had believed to see the goodness of the LORD in the land of the living." (Psalm 27:13)

When grief is not coupled with hope in God's mercy and care, or with faith that God will one day turn such sadness into joy, it will cause despair that the Bible describes as, "sorrow without hope" and the world describes as depression. Those who do not know the Lord Jesus as their Savior have no hope or faith, and as a result, they experience an intensity of sorrow that believers do not need to experience. (1 Thes. 4:13) Yes, the believer grieves, but not in the same way the unbeliever feels grief. Isaiah laments the hopeless despair of those who are lost. He said, "They that go down into the pit cannot hope for thy truth." (Isa. 38:18) Throughout the Psalms David reveals the anguish of his soul when being persecuted unjustly, when he sinned and brought loss upon himself, when he lost the loyalty of dear friends, when loved ones died, and when he experienced trials of many kinds. Yet David turned his attention from his loss and his disappointment and looked instead to God for help and mercy. As a result, he learned to trust and praise God in all these situations and discovered the help and healing properties of hope in Christ. He was able to confidently declare, "The Lord also will be a refuge for the oppressed, a refuge in times of trouble. (Psa. 9:9) The Lord is my strength and my shield, my heart trusted in Him, and I am helped; therefore my heart greatly rejoiceth; and with my song will I praise him. (Psa. 28:7)

On what basis does the believer have a right to hope in God and look to Him for mercy and goodness both in this life and the life to come? If one looks within himself to find merit for such grace, he will never find peace, for it cannot be found in our own self. Peace is found in Christ alone as a result of HIS merit and HIS love and HIS mercy for us. Isaiah reminds us, "Surely He hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows..." (Isa. 53:4) Furthermore, he says, "Therefore the redeemed of the Lord shall return, and come with singing unto Zion; and everlasting joy shall be upon their head: they shall obtain gladness and joy; and sorrow and mourning shall flee away." (Isa. 51:11) Because of the love of Christ, because of His sacrifice of love and work on the cross on our behalf, we can have hope and look forward to that day when "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) When we cling to these kinds of promises with the grip of faith, we are strengthened and encouraged even in the midst of our lowest valleys.

Faith is often very fragile when our world has been turned upside down and things have not turned out the way that we had desired or planned. We tend to be caught off balance when we experience death of any kind, whether it be the death of a loved one, the death of relationships, or the death of dreams and goals. During these times, one of the most common reactions of a grieving heart is to ask “why?” We do well to remember that it is both destructive and presumptuous for *anyone* to declare they know “the” reason a particular tragedy has happened when God has not clearly revealed it to us. When we do not *know* or *understand* why God has allowed some sorrow, it is both mature and wise to accept the fact that there are many questions for which there *are no* answers this side of Heaven. Nevertheless, while we do not often know a specific reason, we *do* know there *is* a purpose for every trial. Romans 8:28 has been a beloved passage of Scripture for centuries because it assures our heart that the believer can know, without any doubt, that all things, no matter how tragic and seemingly senseless, will be made to work together for our good and God’s own glory. When Paul wrote the eighth chapter of Romans, he understood what it was to be brought low with grief. Not only does he address the fear that grief is senseless or unknown to God, but he provides other equally comforting replies to the heart’s plaintive cries for understanding in times of sorrow.

Immediately following the 28th verse in Romans, Paul assures the believer that God knows what He is doing and is using all of life’s experiences to conform His children to be like Christ. Paul then states that the believer is justified (thoroughly forgiven and cleansed of all sin) as if he anticipates the common fears tender believers often secretly harbor after a tragedy, “Is God rejecting me? Is God condemning me? Is God punishing me for some past sin?” Paul assures the troubled soul that trials are not a reflection of God’s rejection, condemnation or punishment for sin. Chapter eight began with the emphatic declaration that “There is therefore now NO condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus...” In verses thirty-one through thirty-four Paul further states that God is for us, not against us. He reminds us that Jesus, God’s own beloved son who never sinned, suffered “all things” too. Because Jesus took our punishment for us on the cross and pronounces the believer to be righteous through faith, the believer *cannot* be condemned and *no one* can charge a believer with any sin that God has paid for and forgiven! Then, as if to put the “cherry on top” Paul launches into a beautiful description of God’s all powerful and everlasting love for His suffering children. He ends these words of comfort by declaring the fact that believers are not victims of anything. They are more than conquerors through the Lord Jesus Christ who loves us and gave Himself for us.

The Scriptures indicate that comfort is found primarily in our relationship with Christ and to a lesser extent, in our relationship with other believers. As Christ never leaves or forsakes us in any trouble, we can often best serve others by simply *being* with one who is grieving. Or if we are grieving, we are helped by graciously accepting the love and presence of others. We are often most encouraged and instructed by the way others lead us into the presence of God and express their sadness at what is happening to us as well as *their* faith in God’s goodness and promises in times of trouble. Some of the most effective “grief” counseling takes place as we *demonstrate* how to be sad and how to find hope in God’s promises. Attempts to minimize the trial or compare it to a worse scenario do not comfort or reduce sorrow and pain. Those who rebuke, exhort, lecture, condemn,

or speculate reasons for a trial are most unwelcome and grievous to one who is in the grip of strong emotion and sorrow. There is a time for sensitive and loving evaluation, reflection or discussion, but it is not when grief is still fresh or the wounds of sorrow still tender. Such insensitivity will not profit one who simply needs the love, compassion, strength and presence of another believer.

Job's three friends had the right idea when they came to be with Job and sat with him in silence for a solid week. It would appear that most of Job's acquaintances distanced themselves from him, as often happens when people simply do not know how to comfort or respond to one who is grieving. Job's friends came and sat quietly, but they eventually grew impatient with Job's grief. Job was an extremely godly man, yet he expressed many of the same initial responses to grief that are common to man--shock, numbness, emotional outbursts, anger, fear, soul searching, feelings of loneliness, depression, and self-pity. The loyal friends of Job weren't willing to wait patiently or listen to such unpleasant sorrow, and so they offered reasons for Job's trial that reflected self-righteousness, condemnation, and gross spiritual surmising. In agony of soul Job responded to them and said, "...miserable comforters are ye all. Shall vain words have an end? Or what emboldeneth thee that thou answerest? I also could speak as ye do; if your soul were in my soul's stead, I could heap up words against you, and shake mine head at you. But I would strengthen you with my mouth, and the moving of my lips should assuage your grief." (Job 16:1-6)

At one time or another most all of us have experienced the heartache of self-righteous friends such as Job's. We can sympathize with Job for we know only too well what it is like to hear careless words that are more like stabbing arrows than a healing balm. Yet even in the face of misunderstanding, ignorance, unjust criticism and senseless advice, Job did not hold a grudge against his sincere, but sincerely wrong friends. Had Job been unwilling to forgive and overlook the foolish transgressions of others during his painful trial, it would have added further anguish and senseless mental torment to his life. Not only did Job choose to forgive them, but he also prayed for them. This was Job's wisdom; for it was at that point that God began to turn Job's suffering around and then blessed him beyond his wildest expectations. The temptation to become angry, bitter or resentful toward those who misjudge and mishandle the grief stricken is particularly common. However, this is precisely the point at which a trusting believer must commit his case to God who judges righteously and refuse to entertain thoughts that will only lead to more sorrow.

The experience of encountering thoughtless or insensitive people during times of grief is common. At the same time, it is equally common for a Christian to know the joy of being ministered to by kind and gracious believers who do know how to put themselves in our place and assuage our grief with merciful and tender words of compassion. Many believers have experienced the heartache of being forsaken by friends and family in times of deep sorrow. David knew this experience (Psa. 31:11; 41:9; 88:8, 18). Jesus knew this experience (Matt. 26:56), and Paul knew this experience (2 Tim. 4:16). Yet David was also given a Jonathan to encourage him and Paul was given a Titus to refresh his spirit (2 Corinthians 7:6). Jesus Himself stood by Paul in prison when others had fled.

And David often confessed that he fled to the Rock, the Lord Jesus Christ, when his heart was overwhelmed and his friends were far from him. How wonderful that our Lord sends such blessings to his suffering saints! What a blessed privilege when we can be used as the human touch of God's love and mercy.

When our hearts are overwhelmed or when those we love are sinking in the slough of despond, we have only to cry out to the "Rock" that is higher than we (Psa. 61:2) and pour out our heart before Him (Psa. 62:8). He has promised to hear our cries and be our refuge. He will comfort our hearts when we come to Him for help and healing as no one and no other thing can do. Others who have fled to Jesus for comfort testify, "In the day when I cried thou answeredst me, and strengthenedst me with strength in my soul. (Psa. 138:3) He assures our hearts that He is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart (Psa. 34:18) and that He healeth the broken in heart, and bindeth up their wounds (Psa. 147:3). Our tender Shepherd and Savior urges us to call upon Him in times of trouble and promises those who do so, "I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me." (Psa. 50:15) Like David, you will someday be able to encourage others and testify, "I love the Lord, because he hath heard my voice and my supplications. Because he hath inclined his ear unto me, therefore will I call upon him as long as I live. The sorrows of death compassed me, and the pains of hell gat hold upon me: I found trouble and sorrow. Then called I upon the name of the Lord; O Lord, I beseech thee, deliver my soul. Gracious is the Lord, and righteous; yea, our God is merciful. The Lord preserveth the simple: I was brought low, and he helped me. Return unto thy rest, O my soul; for the Lord hath dealt bountifully with thee. For thou hast delivered my soul from death, mine eye from tears, and my feet from falling." (Psalm 116: 1-8)