

## Grieving

We will all deal with loss of someone we love. It's not a matter of if we will, but when we will. As a pastor, on more than one occasion, I've stood bedside with a grieving family as their loved one passes into eternity. These are difficult moments. Additionally, as a jail chaplain, I've given hundreds of death notifications over the years. This is certainly the worst part of this type of ministry, as nobody wants to deliver this type of news. Death is a tough reality, but it can also serve as a springboard for spiritual growth, and hope. This essay aims to shed light on what the Bible says about grieving, and how hope can accompany our grief. I hope this essay is an encouragement to you, especially if you find yourself reading this on the heels of a death notification.

King Solomon, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, writes a book of the Bible called Ecclesiastes. In it, he says that it's better to go to a funeral than to go to a party. Ecclesiastes 7:2-3, ***"It is better to go to a house of mourning than to go to a house of feasting, because that is the end of every man, and the living takes it to heart."*** What's he talking about here? First of all, let's agree on one point, which is, nobody wakes up the next day and says to themselves, *"I'm better off today because I partied last night."* That never happens! Many people are in jail for "partying" the night before. But why is a person "better" for having gone to a funeral, i.e. a house of mourning? King Solomon says, that those who attend the funeral will *"take to heart"* the matters of life and death. Though we grieve at a funeral, we can benefit from the experience because the funeral serves as a catalyst for our own spiritual wellness check. Giving fresh thought to life and death should compel one to seek forgiveness from God, so as to prepare for one's own passing. Therefore, the person who gets right with God, is better off having attended that funeral.

This doesn't mean that at a funeral we ought to put aside our grief. Grief is healthy, natural, and appropriate. Jesus grieved when His dear friend Lazarus died, ***"Jesus wept,"*** John 11:35. So, Ecclesiastes isn't a call to suppress grief. What King Solomon is saying is that death has purpose. It means that occasions for grieving should also serve as an occasion for growth. Solomon goes on in Ecclesiastes 7:3 and says, ***"Sorrow is better than laughter, for when a face is sad a heart may be happy."*** He's reiterating the point from verse 2; that one's life can be preoccupied with feasting/laughing/partying, and never be confronted with difficult realities. That person is missing out on the greater blessings that grief may produce.

Crisis, like the death of a loved one, is a ripe occasion for Satan to speak lies to us. When we're emotionally vulnerable, that's when Satan likes to say, *"God could have..."* or, *"God should have..."* or, *"If God loved your family then..."* When I counsel people in crisis, I mention that it's so important to be feeding yourself truth. This means to get into the Word and remind yourself of the true nature of God, which is that He's loving, caring, and understanding of what you're going through. Too often though, the death of a loved one can sadly lead people to shake their fist at God and wrongly accuse Him of not doing what we think He could and should have done for us. Don't let grief be an occasion to turn from God, but let it be an occasion to lean into God. God's Word will refresh your mind, bring comfort to your spirit and remind us about His real character.

Christians can and should grieve differently than unbelievers. In his first letter to his church in Thessalonica, the Apostle Paul, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, is writing to believers, and he encourages them about the realities of death and hope. 1 Thessalonians 4:13, ***"But we do not want you to be uninformed, brethren, about those who are asleep, so that you will not grieve as do the rest who have no hope."*** Here, the word *"asleep"* is a euphemism for death. Sometimes a deceased Christian is referred to as being *"asleep,"* in that, as sleep is not permanent, neither is death for those that know Christ. For the Christian who dies, they are instantaneously in the eternal presence of the Lord in heaven. This truth brings comfort. Though we grieve their absence, we don't grieve as do ***"the rest who have no hope."*** This refers to the unbelievers of the world, whose death is hopeless. When an unbeliever passes, there's no more hope for them; they are eternally separated from God in a very real place called hell. Apart from Jesus, there is no hope. The unbelieving community grieves differently than the believing community. We grieve, yes, because grief matters, but we don't grieve as though we're hopeless. Death has purpose, and death passes the Christian from this life into the greatest imaginable life!

Here are some additional Bible verses that one can meditate on, that can bring comfort in a time of grief.

Matthew 5:4, ***"Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted."***

Psalms 34:18, ***"The LORD is near to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit."***

Psalms 147:3, ***"He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds."***

Psalms 73:26, ***"My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever."***

Matthew 11:28-30, ***"Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and YOU WILL FIND REST FOR YOUR SOULS. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light."***

John 16:22, ***"Therefore you too have grief now; but I will see you again, and your heart will rejoice, and no one will take your joy away from you."***

1 Peter 5:6-7, ***"Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time, casting all your anxiety on Him, because He cares for you."***

Romans 8:18, ***"For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us."***

John 14:27, ***"Peace I leave with you; My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Do not let your heart be troubled, nor let it be fearful."***

Ecclesiastes 3:1-6, ***"There is an appointed time for everything. And there is a time for every event under heaven - a time to give birth and a time to die; a time to plant and a time to uproot what is planted. A time to kill and a time to heal; a time to tear down and a time to build up. A time to weep and a time to laugh; a time to mourn and a time to dance. A time to throw stones and a time to gather stones; a time to embrace and a time to shun embracing. A time to search and a time to give up as lost; a time to keep and a time to throw away."***

Revelation 21:4, ***"and He will wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there will no longer be any death; there will no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away."***