

A Christian Worldview on Suffering and Loss

Ecclesiastes 3:1,4 says “To everything there is a season, a time for every purpose under heaven: a time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance.” Many Bible stories demonstrate how God comforts His people in times of sorrow and loss. Job clung desperately to God, despite catastrophic loss and unhelpful friends. David, a man after God’s own heart, openly grieved the death of his son.

Jesus is our best role model for combining faith and grief, as revealed in John 11:1-45. When He saw Mary and Martha in anguish over the death of their brother Lazarus, He wept and groaned. Although Jesus knew He was about to raise Lazarus from the dead, He still allowed Himself to feel – and express – the depths of human sorrow.

We can take comfort in knowing that Jesus has experienced all of our pain, including loss, rejection, betrayal, and dying. As our Savior and Redeemer, He took all our sins to the cross and forgives us when we ask. As our Good Shepherd, He leads us safely through “the valley of the shadow of death” (Psalm 23:4b). Remember, a shadow indicates that there is a light on the other side!

Deep faith in Christ does not prevent grief when a believer dies, but it infuses grief with hope! For Christians, death is a passageway to eternal life (see John 5:24). Paul said, “To live is Christ, and to die is gain” (Philippians 1:21b). He also said, “I want you to know what will happen to the Christians who have died so you will not be full of sorrow like people who have no hope. For since we believe that Jesus died and was raised to life again, we also believe that when Jesus comes, God will bring back with Jesus all the Christians who have died” (1 Thessalonians 4:13b-14, NLT).

Well-meaning people may say, “Jesus took your loved one away,” but that can cause people – especially children – to be angry at God. 1 Corinthians 15:26 says death is our last enemy. Therefore, we can say, “Death took our loved one away from us, but Jesus took our loved one away from death!”

If we don’t know whether our loved one believed in Jesus, we must simply trust

God. The Bible says, “The Lord ... is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.” (2 Peter 3:9). The thief on the cross turned to Christ in the last hours of life (see Luke 23:39-43). We do not know what happens in a person’s final moments between life and death, but God does – and He decides who enters His heaven.

The Holy Spirit – also called the Comforter (see John 14:26, KJV) – can give us God’s peace, even in the midst of suffering. Philippians 4:6-7 tells us, “Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.” The peace of God does not come from our circumstances, but from drawing close to Him.

Jesus promised, “Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted” (Matthew 5:4). God beckons us into His loving arms so He can heal our wounded hearts.

Managing Grief

Grief can affect our thinking, behavior, emotions, relationships, and health. People may experience sleeplessness, exhaustion, indigestion, lack of appetite, or memory lapses. Recognizing that these are common reactions to grief can help us minimize them by reaching out to friends, joining a prayer group, or asking a pastor or Christian counselor for assistance.

One of the most difficult tasks for a bereaved person is adjusting to the new environment without the loved one who has died or moved away. When is it appropriate to put away a loved one’s things, make lifestyle changes, or form new relationships? We will find the answers as time passes and recovery progresses. God will show us His timing and His direction as we seek Him.

These are some Scriptures that can bring hope, strength and peace: Psalms 16, 23, 34, 91 John 14:1-27 2 Corinthians 5:1-9 Philippians 4:6-13 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 Revelation 21:1-22:5

Helping Others Through Grief

The Bible says, “Blessed be the God ... of all comfort, who comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God” (2 Corinthians 1:3-4). A silver lining in sorrow’s dark cloud is that God can use our experiences to reach out to others with compassion and comfort.

Everyone grieves differently – depending on personality, religious beliefs, maturity, emotional stability, and cultural traditions. Here are some general counseling guidelines:

- Ask God for guidance about when to speak and what to say.
- Encourage the bereaved person to share his or her feelings, then be a good listener and don’t judge what is said. Romans 12:15b says, “Weep with those who weep.”
- Avoid platitudes. Let the person feel sorrow without implying that he or she should “cheer up” or “be joyful in the Lord,” as this could give the impression you are questioning the person’s spirituality.
- Don’t push or preach, but if the person indicates an openness, pray and share meaningful Scriptures.
- Do simple things without being asked, praying alongside someone in the chapel or offering listening ear.