Good Grief: Surviving the Suffering (Job 2:11-13)

1. Grief is a natural response to any perceived loss.

At its core, that is what grief is. It is how we respond, not to actual loss, but perceived loss. We can grieve the loss of loved ones, jobs, blessings, relationships, possessions, and more. And we can grieve what we see as loss, even if it wasn’t necessarily good for us- or even really lost.

I say that this morning to encourage you. It doesn’t have to be a spouse that passed for you to be grieving. It doesn’t have to involve death at all. Grief comes at all seasons.

It can be the ending of a season of parenthood. It can be the loss of something familiar. It can be a struggling relationship. It can be the recognition of impending changes around you.

I’m convinced that many people are grieving and they don’t realize what they are feeling what they do.

Until we recognize those realities, we will struggle to be and do what God would have us in them.

1. Loss impacts all, regardless of your goodness.

Job’s story is unique because the circumstances tell us that Job experienced his difficulties not because of his sinfulness, but because of his righteousness. It is easy for us to begin to search within and to cast blame for what has happened. And certainly, there are times and situations when dangerous decisions impact an outcome, but overwhelmingly, loss is simply something that is not a respecter of persons.

That often leads to a difficult place. Where does all of this come from then?

To understand the root of what is happening around us, we have to return all the way to Genesis 2. Death, curses, difficulty, they all entered into the picture as a result of sin. It is not God, but a rejection of God that was at the root. But that consequence has continued to permeate every area of natural life as we wait for final redemption.

You cannot be good enough to escape those natural realities.

As mentioned earlier, we often think of grief solely as a response to the loss of a loved one in death. But it is any perceived loss. It can be abilities, jobs, freedoms, possessions, you name it. And this statement still holds true. You can be incredibly good and righteous. But that does not mean that loss and difficulty will not find you.

You can be a faithful and hard-working employee and still lose a job. At our first pastorate, I was working for a hospice company that downsized. When I received the call that I was being laid off, my boss told me, “If you were here one more month to have your annual eval, you would be the chaplain we keep. But because of that, I have to let you go until our enrollment numbers improve.” You can be a frugal and savvy investor and lose everything you have. You can be a fantastic parent and experience unforeseen problems in relationships with your kids. You can take excellent care of your home and lose it in a day to something that you have zero control over.

Loss hits us all. It is not necessarily a statement about God’s pleasure or displeasure with you. And to think that living right will make you immune just makes you susceptible to more hurt.

1. Grief is actually a testimony to the value and goodness of God’s blessings.

We tend to treat grief as a bad thing. We often treat it as if it means that we are less spiritual or that we don’t trust God. And that is simply not the case. Grief, and our expressions of grief, can actually be a testimony to our recognition of the good things that God has given us.

Follow me for a moment. It is a simple thought. If what we had did not matter, if it was not a blessing and benefit, if it did not have value, it would not hurt.

Grief is not the absence of appreciation. It is actually a form of expression of appreciation.

1. Grief has physical, emotional, relational, and spiritual impacts.

We want to segment our lives. We want to pretend that impacts only happen in certain areas of our lives. However, the reality is that the totality of who we are is heavily connected. What I mean by that is this: physical illness can produce emotional impacts. Emotional conditions can lead to relational problems. Relational problems can have spiritual impacts. Spiritual problems can have physical manifestations. They are all interrelated.

And when it comes to grief, it impacts us at every level.

Pay attention to some of the details in this account with Job. The emotional weight took such a toll on him that his friends didn’t physically recognize him as they were approaching. Modern science affirms that we are likely to experience changes in appetite, sleep patterns, digestive issues, headaches, fatigue, difficulty concentrating, chest tightness, weakened immune systems and even a higher risk for chronic diseases. It impacts physically.

The emotional toll also took a toll on his relationships. Whether it was long-term or just immediate disagreements, we see that Job and his wife were impacted relationally by the loss. We’ll see the same things later with the friends.

It carried a spiritual impact. Job was encouraged to just curse God and die. There are times when you may go through seasons of distrust, disappointment, or even anger at God because of that loss.

We must recognize that grief is not simply, “I’m sad for a little while and then okay”. It is a full-life involving crisis that is resolved when we see our hope and help from the right place.

1. Often the ministry of presence is the best thing we can offer.

I love what we see in Job’s friends as they come in response to the news of Job’s loss. We find through the book that they were not always good influences. They didn’t always offer the greatest insight or encouragement. In fact, there were times that they likely hindered instead of helping.

And this brings up a simple truth that we need to grasp. There are no magic words is grief. We want to say something that is earth-shattering and makes everything okay again. But those words do not exist. In fact, our words can help and heal or even well-intended words can hurt.

Hopefully, our relationships are solid enough that even when trying to hear and interpret through pain that we know the hearts of those around us. But that rawness, that pain often leads to misunderstandings and confusion.

Look at the actions of his friends upon their immediate arrival. They too joined in his grief. They didn’t tell him that he should get over it. They didn’t lecture him. They didn’t even offer deep spiritual truths. They simply covered their heads in ashes, took on the posture of grief, cried out to God on his behalf, and sat with him- in silence for a week.

When you don’t know what to say, you don’t have to say anything. Presence in the middle of pain communicates more than words ever will.

1. Our response in grief can be an incredible testimony to the power of Jesus.

When looking at Job’s story, you find the reality of incredible pain. There is no doubt he is hurting beyond what words can express. He lost his riches, his livelihood, his servants, and his children in a day. Now, he is covered from the top of his head to the soles of his feet with painful boils. He is hurting. If he was not, that wouldn’t make him super spiritual, that would qualify him as a sociopath.

Christians grieve. That is a reality. But when Paul tells us in 1 Thessalonians 4 that we “don’t grieve like those who have no hope,” it recognizes the power of God in our lives to hold on to what the future holds because of Jesus. And because of that aspect, our grieving is different.

Job’s own wife encouraged him to just curse God and die. It is apparent that she is hurting intensely. And her response is one of incredible grief and even anger. But Job’s ability to respond came from something beyond himself and was a testimony to those around him.

Look at his responses. *“Naked I came from my mother’s womb, and naked shall I return there. The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away; Blessed be the name of the Lord.”*

When his wife responds as she did, he responds, *“…Shall we indeed accept good from God, and shall we not accept adversity?”*

His response didn’t mean that he wasn’t hurting. It meant that he was finding hope in the One that is above all things and holds it all together.

A combination of both authenticity, vulnerability, and grace can be a testament to those around you- even when you are hurting.

1. God can bring healing and redemption, but it doesn’t come over night.

As any person that has experienced great loss can attest, we long for and crave healing and help. We look for relief and redemption. And it can and will come. But it does not happen immediately.

From a natural place, there is a cycle that we go through. For years, the Kubler-Ross grief cycle was used as an authoritative explanation of the stages of grief that we go through. I know that it doesn’t enjoy the same following that it did at one point, but I do think that the core stages and cycles are still true.

It begins with shock and denial. Typically in loss, even when it is an anticipated loss, there is still an element of shock and denial that we feel. “They can’t really be gone. That didn’t happen. Did it?” At times there is a numbness or an inability to really do much. That is this part of the cycle. And I believe that it is a gift from God. It is almost a period for things to begin to sink in slowly so that the full magnitude of the pain doesn’t hit at once.

Then it proceeds to anger. After the initial shock begins to wear off, often our pain is felt and expressed through the lens of anger. And let me offer this: anger is not a sin. The Bible tells us not to sin in our anger. But often that anger is directed toward ourselves, toward doctors, toward God, and even toward our loved ones when we feel they could have acted in a way to prevent it.

Third is depression. That is a deep and enduring sense of loss.

Fourth is bargaining.

Fifth is acceptance. We eventually come to a point, not that we don’t hurt, not that we don’t miss, but that we begin to rebuild and reexperience life where everything begins to regain some normalcy.

When I taught classes on this, the question inevitably came up, “How long?” And the honest answer is “however long it takes.” We set goals and wanted to see some return to normalcy in 6 months to a year. But the reality is that the cycle isn’t nice, linear, and easy. It is messy with growth and advancement and relapses and struggles.

But in time and through those things, God offers healing and redemption. And allowing that cycle is a means of growing us in a way that we would not if he instantly took it all away.

1. Our hope is based on Jesus, nothing else.

When we are in the deepest of pain, we look for answers. We seek hope. We want so badly to find help and relief for what we are feeling. And let me say plainly, our hope is found in Jesus. God gives us help in the form of faith family. He surrounds us often with physical influences and companions to aid in that journey. And that is a part of the grace of God. But let me encourage you simply: our hope when we are hurting is bound up in the person of Jesus. When I am struggling, that is who I must run toward. I cannot lean on my deservedness or goodness. I cast myself on Him.

Whatever the situation, my hope and help are in him.

I’ve had numerous conversations over the past eighteen years about loss- and when in comes in all its forms. Sometimes, it is expected and even offers some relief that our loved one isn’t hurting. And sometimes, the situations are extremely difficult and painful. And we feel that hope eludes us because of the circumstances.

Let me tell you plainly, the grace of God and the love of Christ are bigger than those circumstances. For instance, in pain, I’ve had parents and friends ask repeatedly at every place of ministry, “What about my loved one that committed suicide? How do I find hope?”

We find it in Jesus. That hurts. I don’t want to minimize that. It leaves pain behind for loved ones to sort through. But at the feet of Jesus, there is nothing that His grace cannot cover.

The Bible says there is one unpardonable sin. And suicide isn’t it. That is an act of depression, desperation and mental illness. The only thing the Bible says is beyond His grace is our repeated refusal to heed the calling and conviction of the Spirit- to the point that we become adversarial toward God and harden ourselves against the Spirit that calls us to repentance.

Our hope and their hope is Jesus.

I’ve been asked, “What about my loved one that was cremated? How do I find hope that God can resurrect them? Did we mess that up?”

Simply, the power of Jesus to resurrect dead bones and to cause the sea to give up its dead is sufficient to put ashes back together.

My hope is in Jesus- not perfect circumstances. Whatever the situation, whatever the loss, our hope is based on Jesus. It is found in Jesus. It has always been in Jesus.

Our God doesn’t just give hope. He provides abundant reason for it.

Let me offer you a couple of quick promises:

*Psalm 46 says, “God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.”*

He is your hiding place. When the storms of life are raging, when the waves are crashing in, when all is so messed up that even the mountains aren’t where they should be, He is your place for shelter.

*Psalm 34:18 says, “The Lord is near to those who have a broken heart and saves such as are crushed in spirit.”*

God doesn’t push you away when you aren’t smiling and happy. He draws near to comfort and carry you when you are broken.

*John 16:22 says, “Therefore you now have sorrow; but I will see you again and your heart will rejoice, and your joy no one will take from you.”*

John 14 is the promise of Jesus personally preparing a place for His people.

*Romans 8:38-39 says, “For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come,**nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”*

God cares about you and your pain. He cares. He doesn’t cast off.

If you are hurting today, we hope that this is a place where you find support and comfort. But more than anything else, I hope that this is a place that points you to the hope we’ve found personally in the person of Jesus.