

# Grief, One of the Strongest Emotions

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We live in a world of emotions. God has given us this gift. Emotions are feelings of joy, pleasure and peace that are often so intense they can't be described. To try to explain the emotions I have as my children run toward me after a long day away, or the peace I feel as I rest into the arms of my wife, seems impossible. Likewise, the gift of faith and the peace of conscience bring about a warmth that is deep and often indescribable.

We all have experienced painful emotions in our life. This earth gives us many reasons to yearn for heaven, many reminders to cling to the faith that will bring us to eternal joy. Around us are individuals experiencing difficult hardship and trials. Often we experience emotional pain that feels unbearable.

## **We Are Given Hope**

It can seem difficult to understand why God allows these things to happen, but He does. May it be that such trials turn us closer to God. My thoughts turn to words from the songwriter of SHZ 382: *Now I may know both joy and woe, my flesh shall have to suffer, my soul shall sing thereafter. What God ordains is ever good. My soul, oh, be thou patient: This cup, which tastes of bitterness, at heaven's feast is absent. For after grief God grants relief, my heart with laughter filling, my ev'ry sorrow stilling (v. 2,3).*

When John, the writer of Revelations, describes heaven in chapter 24, verse 4, we are given hope of the peace that awaits us there: "And 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.

There is hope of relief from our earthly pain. We trust and believe that God allows for our trials and keeping a simple, childlike faith will carry us to the shores of heaven. A sense of peace washes over me for this moment. I feel grateful for the gift of faith.

## **A Response to Loss**

Grief is one of the strongest and most complex emotions we might face here on this earth. It can be explained with many different sub-emotions. It can change from moment to moment and over time. I can only imagine the grief I would feel if the little feet of my children running to greet me, or my wife and best friend who has added so much to my life, became a memory. Simply imagining it brings strong, painful feelings.

Is there a way we can explain grief? A simple search online provides the following as a definition: Grief is the response to loss, particularly to the loss of someone or something that has died, to which a

bond or affection was formed. Although conventionally focused on the emotional response to loss, it also has physical, cognitive, behavioral, social, cultural, spiritual and philosophical dimensions (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Grief>).

A sense of loss is experienced many ways. I remember talking with a woman who was in tears as she felt the pain of a life that could have been if she wouldn't have spent 25 years supporting a loved one who battled an addiction. I have sat beside individuals as they learn that their hopes and dreams have been dashed. The tears pour out from a spot deep within. Different forms of loss come with many different responses.

### **How to Measure Its Severity**

A simple way to express how a person responds to this loss would be through an equation.

$$\text{Event} + \text{Resources} + \text{Meaning} = \text{Response}$$

It is easy to understand, for example, that the loss of a favorite shirt would differ from the loss of a best friend. Likewise, it is easy to understand how someone who can easily replace that shirt might feel the impact less than the person who has less opportunity and fewer resources. Yet if the shirt was given to you from a sister who died, all the resources in the world would not be able to replace the shirt. Such is the nature of any loss. We have a scale by which we measure the severity of the loss. Our access to emotional resources can provide some protection from the pain, and the meaning we find around the loss (they don't have to suffer here on earth vs. they were taken too soon) will determine much of our inner response. How others perceive it is another matter.

In the field of mental health services, professionals acknowledge how much value a human connection can mean in a time of grief. A clear example of this is found in Job, chapter 2, verses 11–13: “Now when Job’s three friends heard of all this evil that was come upon him, they came every one from his own place; Eliphaz the Temanite, and Bildad the Shuhite, and Zophar the Naamathite: for they had made an appointment together to come to mourn with him and to comfort him. And when they lifted up their eyes afar off, and knew him not, they lifted up their voice, and wept; and they rent every one his mantle, and sprinkled dust upon their heads toward heaven.

So they sat down with him upon the ground seven days and seven nights, and none spake a word unto him: for they saw that his grief was very great.”

### **Supporting Others Who Grieve**

We see here that no words were required from Job’s friends, just a simple presence. We see, also, the ability each one of us has to support people who grieve difficult losses.

I have often worried about what to say to someone who is experiencing grief. The Bible portion above has provided direction. Along with that has been advice to be curious. Each trial is unique, each person

has their own personality. Seek to understand how that trial is affecting them and what it means to them, and meet them in those places. Simply ask, how can I help?

Perhaps it is you who is looking for support in a time of loss. This loss may be a death or another type of loss. The hardest days of your life seem to be ahead of you. May you especially feel the gentle warmth of God's love.

### **Communicate Your Need**

If God gives the strength, reach out to those around you and clearly communicate your need for support. Freely contact the Home and Family Committee in your home congregation. In some cases, they may advise you to seek professional support. Share with that professional what you are looking for, and often they can connect you with a suitable therapist or counselor. Find someone in the helping profession that is focused in grief and loss and learn from them. Watch for the people in your life who have gone through something similar and who may be in a place that you want to get to. Ask them how they got to that place.

Most importantly, trust in God. Continue to put away doubts and sin that attach so quickly, especially when we are facing trials. In closing I return to song 382:

*What God ordains is ever good. This truth remains unshaken. Though sorrow, need, or death be mine, I shall not be forsaken. I fear no harm, for with his arm in fields of green He hides me, to heaven's home He guides me (v. 6).*

## **A Life of Service and Love**

### **Janelle Muhonen**

My mother gave her all for her children. She taught us the most important matters of life. First and foremost, she taught us matters of faith. She knew the importance of bringing her children to church to hear God's Word. Even as a single mother she made sure we went to services.

She taught us by example and through instruction. She was strict with us and tried to teach us right from wrong. She always told us: "If I don't teach you, who will?" She taught us to respect our elders and teachers, and she taught us the value of hard work.

In addition, she allowed us to learn responsibility. If we did something wrong, we had to pay the consequences. She didn't defend our bad behavior or irresponsibility. Her life example inspired us to try to live a life according to God's will.

The most significant example from her life was that Mother wanted to serve God's kingdom. Her income was so low that it was hard for her to pay her church dues. So she started fundraising by putting on dinners in our home. People would pay for the home-cooked meal, and she would give the money to the church.

She also checked every Sunday that we had change to put in the Sunday school collection. Even in her old age, she would ask her grown kids as they brought her to church, "Do you have money for collection?"

Mother served her family and community by keeping the door of her home open to everyone. She welcomed our friends and was like a second mother to many of them. She served meals, and she hosted overnight visitors passing through and local families. I see now that it was beneficial for us kids to frequently be around families with a mother and a father.

Mom made our holidays special even on a tight budget. Christmas and Thanksgiving were always festive. We would wake in the morning to the delicious smell of turkey in the oven and her wonderful cooking. Our home would be decorated, and we always got a \$5.00 tree from the Farmers Market in Minneapolis.

One year, long after all of us children had reached adulthood, I received my annual Christmas card in the mail. In the card that year was also a five-dollar bill. She always gave a gift or money, and that year it was \$5.00, probably the least of any Christmas. I sat there in the hall looking at that \$5.00 and thought to myself, money must be tight this year, but she wanted to give us something. I knew every one of my siblings received the same \$5.00. I then thought of the widow who gave her last mite. And that is how I think of my mother.

My mother's spending reflected her values. She gave her all to her children and the church. She never complained "poor me" to her children. In spite of all her hardships, she kept her faith most precious. She was obedient and God blessed her.

That \$5.00 was the most precious present I have ever received. It was a reminder to me of my dear mother, how she kept the faith, walked through life needing the gospel, endeavoring to believe and to teach her children about living faith. That was the most important to her.

Years later, my husband Nathan and I had the opportunity to visit Israel. I found a shop in Old Jerusalem where they sold "The widow's mite." I wanted to purchase one in memory of my mother. When I told the store owner my story, he gave it to me. He said, "Your story of your mother means more to me than what money could ever buy. I want you to have it."

I put that widow's mite in Mother's casket this last February when she passed away.

# Phillip's Writings Speak to Us

**Doug and Sharon Forstie**

It will soon be thirty years since December 26, 1990. On that day, our son Phillip was killed suddenly in a tragic accident. He was our second child. At the time, we had 11 children – our 12th was born three years later.

Phillip had just turned 18 years old on December 20. Six days later, the day after Christmas, he passed away. That Christmas, he had gotten hockey socks for a gift. He washed them right away and hung them up – but he never got to wear them.

In an English class that fall, Phillip wrote assignments that especially spoke to us and to his other loved ones and friends. These writings, given to us by his teacher after he passed away, were a great comfort.

Phillip wrote how he loved God, and also his family: *The person I love the most in this world is God. After that comes my mom and dad, my family and grandparents. I love my mom because she treats me and all of my brothers and sisters with loveÉ she has a lot of patience in everything she doesÉ my mom makes me feel good on the inside.* This spoke to me, as his mother, how he had a forgiving heart for my many failings.

He also wrote about death and loss and said that he felt thankful he had never lost a family member or cousin or someone really close to him; yet he acknowledged that loss is very hard. *Some people in our church have died that I knew, and it was sad,* he wrote. He also remembered when a friend's baby had died at one month old.

The living faith that Phillip had in his heart came through in his writings. He wrote that he didn't need to fear death: *I do not think death is something to really be scared of. When I die, if I have faith, I will go to heaven. Some people that believe in reincarnation probably are not scared of dyingÉ they believe they will come back to earth as another person. I do not think this is true. I will have another life, but it will be my soul in heaven. The people that should be scared of dying are those who worship the devil or some other false idol. If I love God when I die and have a clean conscience and soul, I will go to heavenÉ I have all faith in God. He promises us we will go to heaven if we have faith when we die.*

Hearing and believing the gospel was important to Phillip. After he died, a minister shared with us of a time when Phillip had gone to his grandmother, feeling he had offended her and wanted to have the matter cared for.

We received letters that testified of the faith Phillip shared with his believing friends. His death especially spoke to them, and some said: If I had been called that day, would I have been ready? The

love that his friends showed to us after his death meant so much. His cousin Keith Moll wrote a poem in his memory. The poem's last lines revealed the prayer of this dear friend's heart: *In this faith I endeavor to stay until God calls me to be with thee for aye*. Phillip's friends, the young believers in Arizona, sang a song in his memory at the 1991 Phoenix Winter Services.

One young girl sent us a card and wrote that she'd been given the gift of life – she hoped that she could remain in faith and serve God. We were comforted by the many messages we received and by the love of the believers.

When it would have been Phil's 20th birthday, youth in our congregation came to our home with 20 roses and sang to us. The love of the young believers touched our hearts very deeply.

It was and still is today a great comfort to know that our son was heaven-acceptable, we do not need to doubt. Phillip has achieved his heavenly victory, and we hope and pray we will see him one day in heaven.

### **Discussion Points**

1. Grief is often associated with the loss of a loved one, yet one can experience grief from a loss other than death. How have you experienced this?
2. Explain the circumstances of a grieving experience in your life. How did you react? What did you try to do to work through your grief?
3. What has been especially helpful to you during a time of grief? What has been the least helpful? Which people have been most supportive?
4. How should we approach one who is in a time of grieving and loss? How can you use your own experiences to assist that person?
5. Some suggest a grief journal, writing letters or poems, or the use of artwork or photograph collages as ways to express one's loss and grief. Share experiences you may have with these.
6. Many experience grief over a loved one who died not in faith. Share your experience. What helped you attain acceptance of this?
7. Some people advise that it isn't necessary to say anything to one who is grieving – your presence is enough. Discuss.