

Overcoming Grief

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A grieving woman recognized F. B. Meyer on the train and attempted to share her burden with him. For years she had cared for a crippled daughter who brought great joy to her life. She made tea for her each morning, then left for work, knowing that in the evening the daughter would be there when she arrived home. But the daughter had died, and the grieving mother was alone and miserable. Home was not "home" anymore.

Meyer gave her wise counsel. "When you get home and put the key in the door," he said, 'say aloud, Jesus, I know You are here!' and be ready to greet Him directly when you open the door. And as you light the fire tell Him what has happened during the day; if anybody has been kind, tell Him; if anybody has been unkind, tell Him, just as you would have told your daughter. At night stretch out your hand in the darkness and say, 'Jesus, I know You are here!'"

Some months later, Meyer was back in that neighborhood and met the woman again, but he did not recognize her. Her face radiated joy instead of announcing grief and misery. "I did as you told me," she said, "and it has made all the difference in my life, and now I feel I know Him."

We have all experienced grief and sorrow in life. This is because "man is born unto trouble as the sparks fly upward" (Job 5:7). Grief is the painful emotion of sorrow caused by the loss or impending loss of anyone or anything that has deep meaning to us. Life is filled with times of sorrow but we must learn to deal with sorrow or mourning from a Biblical and spiritual perspective so it does not overtake our spiritual, emotional, and even our physical life. If we do not learn how to overcome grief, then grief will eventually overcome us. We must take charge of our grief.

Working through your grief will involve both the transformation and renewal of your mind (Rom. 12:2) and also your emotions. Once you accept the loss, whatever it might be, you can then emotionally accept how your life will be different because of the loss. Dealing with grief may consume all your energy, but your efforts will succeed when you have the correct or Biblical focus on grief. Here is some practical

advice. "Rather than trying to feel what others want you to feel, focus on the Lord God. Pray, 'Whatever You want me to feel and whatever You want me to do is my desire. My commitment is to be the person You want me to be through this season of sorrow.'"

Normal and Chronic Grief

Granger Westberg, in his little book, *Good Grief*, says that "when you have something worth grieving about, then go ahead and grieve, but grieve in a healthy way." Grief begins in your heart as a natural response to a significant, unwanted loss. Grief is a God-given emotion but it can become spiritually chronic and control our life, or debilitate us, if we allow it to fester for long periods of time. Chronic grief is an unresolved, emotional sorrow experienced over a long period of time as the result of not accepting a significant loss or not experiencing closure of that loss. It results in failing to move past the grieving process. Ecclesiastes 3:4 says there is "A time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance."

This indicates that grieving has limitations attached to it and should not become a chronic spiritual problem in our life, when we fail to turn our sorrows over to the Lord and experience His healing touch. There is a difference between grieving and surrendering to grief, allowing it to negatively impact our spiritual living and trust in the Lord. Instead of surrendering to grief, you must surrender to the Lord if grief has overtaken your life and extinguished your consecration to the Lord and His work (Rom. 12:1).

June Hunt said:

"If we are going to be 'authentically human,' we need to be able to share the truth about the heaviness in our hearts. If we have chronic grief, we are emotionally stuck, and we need to be set free. That is why Jesus' words about truth are so freeing... even when applied to grieving. "You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free" (John 8:32).

Psalm 25:17 talks about this emotional freedom:

"The troubles of my heart are enlarged: *O* bring thou me out of my distresses."

What is causing your grief? Does it extend from your childhood, youth, or adulthood? What events have occurred to cause your grief? Maybe it's the death of loved ones, lost friendships, abuse, a broken engagement, marriage, relocation,

a miscarriage, infertility, "empty nest syndrome," a loss of job or new job, illness, injury, financial loss, unjust criticism, broken or troubled marriage, false accusations, or rejection.

Psalm 31:9 says:

"Have mercy upon me, O LORD, for I am in trouble: mine eye is consumed with grief, *yea*, my soul and my belly" (my innermost being).

Grief is real, the feelings are real, the pain is real, the burden feels very heavy. Grief affects all different kinds of people - people who have enough and people who don't, people with great jobs and people who are unemployed, people who are famous and people who feel like nothing, and the list goes on.

Sorrow or grief is a natural response to losing someone or something that's important to you (1 Thess. 4:13; John 11:35; Isa. 53:3). You may feel a variety of emotions, like sadness or loneliness. In fact, you might experience it for a number of different reasons. Maybe a loved one died, a relationship ended, or you lost your job. Perhaps you moved away from friends, or a parent or spouse has died. Perhaps you have experienced a sudden and different type of loss - a pet died accidentally, or you were fired without warning. You may be experiencing despair, sadness, anger, or something else that is related to grief. Other life changes, like chronic illness, insecurity, aging, taking care of an elderly person who is terminally ill, or a move to a new home, can also lead to grief. Everyone grieves differently. But if you understand your emotions, take care of yourself, and seek God for healing and spiritual recovery, you can heal and lead a very productive and fulfilling life. God wants you to reach a place of emotional healing.

The Definition of Grief

Grief is a feeling of deep mental anguish caused by loss. As already mentioned, grief can result from the loss of a loved one, loss of possessions, loss of a career, loss of health, or some other life-changing loss. Grief can also be sorrow for something that someone has done to you or failed to do. Grief is actually a person's spiritual, emotional, intellectual and physical reaction to loss. The experience you are passing through may have shocked you both spiritually and physically, disrupting your thought and day-to-day living. Typically, a grieving person either does almost nothing for some time, or merely "goes through the motions" on what we might term as emotional autopilot. However, the continual tension and grief, when it does

not lesson, creates an emotional rollercoaster that is the result from resisting the Lord's care, healing, and His providence over our life, which in the end leaves us unsatisfied and weary. Thankfully, the Lord has made a divine provision for our life, so our loss does not have to diminish who we are, our personality, our continued fellowship with God, and living a life of victory over the effects of despair and overpowering and debilitating grief.

In 1858 Scottish missionary John G. Paton and his wife sailed for the New Hebrides (now called Vanuatu) Three months after arriving on the island of Tanna, his wife died. One week later his infant son also died. Paton was plunged into sorrow. Feeling terribly alone, and surrounded by savage people who showed him no sympathy, he wrote, "Let those who have ever passed through any similar darkness as of midnight feel for me. As for all other, it would be more than vain to try to paint my sorrows....But for Jesus, and His fellowship, I would have gone mad and died."

The Stages of Grief

The start and stages of grief may vary in people because of the level of one's own spiritual life (1 Cor. 2:15) and because of the varying circumstances that trigger the grief. For instance, if a loved one suffered with a long illness, death is often considered a blessing. For the families of Alzheimer's patients, mourning begins with the onset of the disease, long before death occurs. Because of the time spent in anticipating death, this kind of bereavement differs from the intense grief over someone who suddenly dies following a brief illness, surgery or accident. Over time, the intensity of your grief will likely subside, but do not try to rush the grieving process. And do not expect your feelings and emotions to be like anyone else's. God made you unique, and your grieving process will be a personal journey. But keep in mind that the weight of grief is lighter when shared with others ("Bear ye one another's burdens" - Galatians 6:2).

The stages of grief are somewhat predictable but not uniform in everyone. The stages are not set in stone. Some will not go through every stage. Others will go through them in a different order. First, there can be *denial*. When you first learn of a loss, it's normal to think, "This isn't happening to me." You may feel shocked or numb. This is a temporary way to deal with the rush of overwhelming emotion. It's a defense mechanism. However, eventually we must face the reality of what has occurred and deal with it from a spiritual perspective (1 Cor. 2:15).

Second, sometimes there can be *anger*. As reality sets in, you're faced with the pain of your loss. You may feel frustrated and helpless. These feelings later turn into anger. You might direct it toward other people, God, or life in general. The Bible says that we should not become angry at God or anyone ("Cease from anger" – Ps. 37:8) but possess a spirit of forgiveness (Eph. 4:32). When it comes to God, we must remember that He has given us everything that we have and enjoy in life, both physical and spiritual blessings, and life itself (Acts 17:25; 1 Cor. 2:12). Anger is not an option!

Third, there is sometime *bargaining*. During this stage, you dwell on what you could have done to prevent the loss. Common thoughts are "If only..." and "What if..." You may also try to strike a deal with God promising that you will be more faithful to Him if He intervenes in the situation, whether it involves giving you more time to live or resolving some other trial in your life. Instead of bargaining with God, you should simply "commit thy way unto the LORD; trust also in him" (Ps. 37:5). Instead of looking back with regrets you should look forward to what God wants to do in your life (Phil. 3:13).

Fourth, there can be *depression*. Sadness sets in as you begin to understand the loss and its effect on your life. Signs of depression include crying, sleep issues, and a decreased appetite. You may feel overwhelmed, regretful, and lonely. If this persists for a long period of time, it's because you have not surrendered your situation and grief to the Lord's providence. You cannot surrender to grief; you must surrender to the Lord's working and way (Rom. 12:2). Psalm 115:3 declares, "But our God is in the heavens: he hath done whatsoever he hath pleased." Have you accepted His providence over your life? Also, have you been experiencing God's providential care over your life?

Psalm 91:4 promises:

"He shall cover thee with his feathers, and under his wings shalt thou trust: his truth shall be thy shield and buckler."

This means God really cares for you and will protect you from overwhelming grief and despair if you experience His care and provision for your life. Remember that when we are hurting, there are two extremes to avoid. One extreme is to block our emotions. This occurs when we determine that we will never care so much that we can be hurt in the same way again. But it is unhealthy to block our emotions to protect ourselves. God wants us to feel so we are able to taste life in its fullness.

The other extreme is becoming so consumed by our grief that nothing else matters in life. We enter into full-blown depression. The best thing to do is to get back into the normal process of life again through God's inner healing.

Fifth, there can eventually be *acceptance*. In this stage of grief, you accept the reality of your loss. It can't be changed. Although you still feel sad about it, you're able to start moving forward with your life once again. This is because, as a Christian, you have accepted the providence of God working in connection with your life and circumstance. It should be noted that getting over grief does not mean that you ever get over loving your deceased partner.

Sixth, there is spiritual *recovery*. This means that a Christian can experience recovery in the promises of God's Word and the presence of God's life. Psalm 55:22 says: "Cast thy burden upon the LORD, and he shall sustain thee: he shall never suffer the righteous to be moved." God's promise will keep you from moving into deep depression and despair, the place where grief rules your life and defeats you spiritually, robbing you of peace, joy, and contentment in life.

The Effects of Grief

There are various effects of overwhelming grief which are physical, emotional, and spiritual in nature. Maybe you feel alone and isolated. You might feel that you are living a mechanical lifestyle, only going through the motions of life without real purpose and meaning. Perhaps you are resentful toward God for allowing your loss. You might ask, "Why?" over and over again. You can feel helpless and wonder why God would allow your loss. Perhaps you are at a point where you view God as uninvolved and lacking compassion. You might have a sense of being overwhelmed and emotionally distraught, not knowing what to do or where to turn.

You might daydream about your loss, feel angry or bitter over your loss, or have difficulty forgiving those who may have caused your loss. You might view life as an empty struggle without much reward. You can experience feelings of anxiety, fear, appetite loss, sleep loss, limited concentration, confusion, uncontrollable crying, denial, feeling trapped, numbness, feelings of guilt, anguish, sadness, depression, guilt, helplessness, impaired judgment, loneliness, isolation, withdrawal, self-pity, inability to pray and read the Bible, and a victim mentality which can even lead to suicidal thoughts.

The Bible gives some examples of this type of grief.

Lamentations 3:49

“Mine eye trickleth down, and ceaseth not, without any intermission” (relief).

Psalms 6:3 adds:

“My soul is also sore vexed: but thou, O LORD, how long?”

Job 3:23-26

“*Why is light given* to a man whose way is hid, and whom God hath hedged in? For my sighing cometh before I eat, and my roarings (inward groanings and grief) are poured out like the waters. For the thing which I greatly feared is come upon me, and that which I was afraid of is come unto me. I was not in safety, neither had I rest, neither was I quiet; yet trouble came.”

In 1 Kings 19:4 we are reminded of Elijah’s grief:

“But he himself went a day’s journey into the wilderness, and came and sat down under a juniper tree: and he requested for himself that he might die; and said, It is enough; now, O LORD, take away my life; for I *am* not better than my fathers.”

Of course, grief can vary among circumstances and people. However, your anger, despair, sadness, emptiness and pain can be alleviated by God’s help and provision. God came to Elijah’s rescue (1 Kings 19:5-6) and He will do the same for you. Your particular and unique time of grief will proceed to a conclusion, when you understand God’s purpose and spiritual recovery, which He has designed just for you. And in God’s time, He will make everything beautiful (Ecclesiastes 3:11) by restoring you and replenishing your life once again. Remember that when you’re in deep, emotional pain, it can be tempting for some people to try to numb their feelings with drugs, alcohol, food, or even work. Of course, these are manmade and temporary escapes (Heb. 11:25) that won’t make you heal faster or feel better in the long run. In fact, these things can lead to addiction, depression, anxiety, or even an emotional breakdown.

An important note that needs to be added here is that grief not only comes from suffering a loss of some kind, it can also be related to some specific sin in your life. Someone has well stated that “Counselors are trying to make many people comfortable whom God is trying to make miserable!” This may be true in connection with your own personal life. Sin causes grief and mourning, when we

know we are out of fellowship with God, when God is producing conviction in our hearts (Heb. 12:7), and when we are experiencing the adverse effects of sin in our life. Yes, being overcome with anxiety, which is a sin (Phil. 4:6), can result in grief. But there are other sins, such as bitterness and anger, that we might be harboring in our hearts and lives, which can cause grief and sorrow related to God's inner conviction and sin's spiritual destruction in our lives.

David prayed in Psalm 51:1-2:

"Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy lovingkindness: according unto the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin."

It's very clear that David was experiencing inner grief and turmoil due to his own personal sin. At this point in his life, he was repenting of his sin, confessing it before God, and getting things right. You need to always remember that when you sin and are out of fellowship with God in your Christian life, that you should be miserable. Confession of sin (1 John 1:9) takes us out of the realm of grief and sorrow and restores our joy once again. David exclaimed, "Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation; and uphold me with thy free spirit" (Ps. 51:13). Joy can return to our lives after we grieve over our sin and repent.

James 4:9 describes our repentance like this:

"Be afflicted, and mourn, and weep: let your laughter be turned to mourning, and *your* joy to heaviness."

Jesus taught in Matthew 5:4:

"Blessed *are* they that mourn: for they shall be comforted."

It sounds paradoxical but when we mourn over our sin, and repent and forsake it, we will experience comfort and emotional well-being. There is a godly sorrow that is related to repentance (2 Cor. 7:10). Dealing with all known sin is important if our mourning or grief is related to sin in our life.

Someone said:

"Our sense of sin is in proportion to our nearness to God."

This is very true. The closer you get to Christ, the more you will hate sin (Titus 2:12). And the more you hate sin, the more you will grieve whenever you have embraced that which killed your Savior. Now think of this. You can look at what you ought to

be (Christlike) and be discouraged because you are so far from it (Phil. 3:13). Too much measuring yourself by the perfection of Jesus will dishearten you. Too little can breed spiritual pride. But you can also look at how far by God's grace you've come, and be hopeful. In the life of the growing Christian, there are times for both.

Growing Through Grief

Because we live in a fallen world, life inevitably includes sorrow. When sin entered the human race, it brought death—physical death and spiritual death with all the accompanying ramifications. Death or loss of anything we value causes grief. However, God has a higher purpose for His people, and He is faithful to use our most painful times to mature us, to draw us into closer dependence on Him. As mentioned already, there is a normal and healthy aspect of grieving. Even “Jesus wept” (John 11:35). Here is a primary lesson: If you are experiencing grief for any reason, allow yourself time to mourn and weep. If you try to hold in your tears and to ignore your pain, there may be serious problems later. God gave us tears to shed in our grief, an outpouring of our inner pain. Repressed grief is not healthy. Only by facing the truth of your painful loss in life and by passing through genuine grief will you have emotional healing and experience spiritual growth.

Psalm 119:71

“It is good for me that I have been afflicted; that I might learn thy statutes.”

Healthy grief will culminate in:

- accepting that the past will always be in the past
- accepting that the present offers stability and significance
- accepting that the future holds new and promising hope
- accepting that God wants you to grow in your Christian life.

Romans 5:3-5 explains it like this:

“And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience; And patience, experience; and experience, hope: And hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us.”

Deuteronomy 8:2

“And thou shalt remember all the way which the LORD thy God led thee these forty

years in the wilderness, to humble thee, *and* to prove thee, to know what *was* in thine heart, whether thou wouldest keep his commandments, or no.”

Job 23:10

“But he knoweth the way that I take: *when* he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold.”

“God never moves without purpose or plan
When trying His servant and molding a man.
Give thanks to the Lord though your testing seems long;
In darkness He giveth a song.
Now I can see testing comes from above
God strengthens His children and purges in love.
My Father knows best, and I trust in His care
Through purging more fruit I will bear.
O rejoice in the Lord
He makes no mistake.
He knoweth the end of each path that I take.
For when I am tried and purified,
I shall come forth as gold.”

You can grow through grief. But if you don't learn how to deal with grief, then grief will overcome your life and your spiritual growth and advancement will be halted. Remember the old saying, "All sunshine makes a desert." God knows that if you never experience the storms of life, if the rain clouds never release their water, you will never see flower gardens grow. You need to blossom and grow in your Christian life through the process of grief and sorrow. Our God is the God of the second chance. Our God is the God who can bring new life out of a life filled with despair and misery. This means that whatever is in the past can be used for God's glory. The storms of sorrow should never be wasted. Your tears are not wasted. In fact, God places them in His bottle (Ps. 56:8) to remind us of His tender-loving care and compassion over our lives. By God's design, grief will better your heart and life. Yes, grief will make you grow. Most of the things that we learn, we learn through sorrow.

For this reason, Ecclesiastes 7:3 states:

“Sorrow *is* better than laughter: for by the sadness of the countenance the heart is made better.”

“I’ve been through a fire,
That has deepened my desire
To know the living God more and more.
It hasn’t been much fun,
But the work that it has done
In my life has made it worth the hurt.
You see, sometimes we need the hard times,
To bring us to our knees,
Otherwise we do as we please
And never heed Him.
But He always knows what’s best
And it’s when we are distressed
That we really come to know God as He is.”

We grow spiritually during our times of grief and sorrow. We should grow in our faith in God (Mark 11:22) and enhance our relationship and walk with God (Phil. 3:10). We also learn firsthand how to experience God’s inner healing power in our lives.

June Hunt once again remarks:

“Grief over the death of a significant person in your life doesn't just go away in a few days, weeks, or months. Healthy grieving can last for one, two, or even five years. This is especially true with the loss of a beloved child, parent, or mate. Everyone grieves differently, but everyone must grieve in order to heal...

“Emotional complications occur when we block the natural process of grieving. Have you ever told yourself, I need to get my act together? I've got to snap out of it. I should be handling this better! These self-incriminating thoughts reveal unrealistic expectations about grieving and a failure to understand the grief process and the slow journey of restoration. While ‘stages’ of grief do exist, they are not ‘stair-step’ stages that you walk through in a specific order. In truth, people do not go through all the stages in a predictable fashion. People are unique in their individual grieving. Some stages may be experienced with varying degrees of intensity, some may be missed, and some stages may be repeated. Give yourself permission to experience the inconsistent stages of grieving... trusting God to bring new life again.”

Jesus said to His disciples in John 16:20:

“Verily, verily, I say unto you, That ye shall weep and lament, but the world shall rejoice: and ye shall be sorrowful, but your sorrow shall be turned into joy.”

Jesus spoke these words in view of His death and resurrection. The disciples were filled with sorrow or grief over Christ’s death (Matt. 17:23) but joy would come in His resurrection. There is a principle to learn from this statement. Our grief can be overcome instead of allowing it to overcome us.

Psalms 71:20

“*Thou*, which hast shewed me great and sore troubles, shalt quicken me again, and shalt bring me up again from the depths of the earth.”

Grief and the Past

As you begin to be healed emotionally from your grieving, especially from chronic sorrow, you will begin to experience greater dependence on the Lord, a new ability to leave the loss behind, develop new patterns of spiritual living, experience a new purpose in life, possess hope for the future, and have a newfound contentment in life. You will also possess greater compassion, acceptance, and have more concern toward others (Matt. 5:7).

There is a time when we must get past the past. We must say, “I will be content to leave the past in the past.”

Paul said in Philippians 3:13:

“Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but *this* one thing *I do*, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before.”

The Biblical understanding of “forgetting” does not mean we perform mental gymnastics and never think of our loss and loves ones again. It means that we have learned to deal with our loss from a Biblical perspective and we have allowed God to heal our broken heart (Luke 4:18) so that grief does not override our spiritual life.

1 Samuel 15:35

“And Samuel came no more to see Saul until the day of his death: nevertheless Samuel mourned for Saul: and the LORD repented that he had made Saul king over Israel.”

1 Samuel 16:1 goes on to say:

“And the LORD said unto Samuel, How long wilt thou mourn for Saul, seeing I have rejected him from reigning over Israel? fill thine horn with oil, and go, I will send thee to Jesse the Bethlehemite: for I have provided me a king among his sons.”

Like Samuel, many who are grieving never get over the final hurdle of letting go of the pain and saying goodbye. But this is a necessary part of the healing process. You must release the past to the past and stop trying to make it a part of your present and your future. Relegate the past to the past, letting it go and leaving it there. Allow these words from the Book of Job to reflect the disposition of your own heart.

Job 11:16

“Because thou shalt forget *thy* misery, *and* remember *it* as waters *that* pass away.”

Remember that “forgetting those things which are behind” (Phil. 3:13) does not mean we are forgetting to love. It means that we are not allowing our lives to be consumed with grief and despair. How is this possible?

Psalm 73:26

“My flesh and my heart faileth: *but* God *is* the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever.”

Philippians 4:13 adds this promise:

“I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me.”

Emotional Healing from Grief

One pastor shared this true story. “A friend of mine has a brain-damaged daughter. Sometimes the sadness she feels over her daughter's condition overwhelms her, as it did recently. She wrote me this letter and gave me permission to quote from it: ‘I can hardly bear it sometimes. My most recent wave of grief came just last year before her sixteenth birthday. As the day approached, I found myself brooding over all the things that she would never be able to do. What did I do? What I've learned to do again and again: I did what I believe is the only thing to do to conquer grief, and that is to embrace it. . . I cried and cried and cried, and faced the truth of my grief head on.’”

People who face their feelings and express them freely begin the journey toward healing and hope. The real question is this, where does a person turn for help and healing? What does the Bible say about overcoming grief? What are some important steps to consider when seeking emotional healing from our griefs and sorrows? Let's review these steps in the remainder of this study.

1. God's Presence

God's Word repeatedly claims that God Himself is our Healer, sufficient to bind up our wounds and make us whole, through trusting in His help and provision.

Psalm 147:3

"He healeth the broken in heart, and bindeth up their wounds."

Jeremiah 30:17

"For I will restore health unto thee, and I will heal thee of thy wounds, saith the LORD. "

Psalm 34:17-18

"*The righteous* cry, and the LORD heareth, and delivereth them out of all their troubles. The LORD is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart; and saveth such as be of a contrite spirit."

Psalm 23:3

"He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake."

Psalm 57:1 is a key verse to memorize in your time of sorrow:

"Be merciful unto me, O God, be merciful unto me: for my soul trusteth in thee: yea, in the shadow of thy wings will I make my refuge, until *these* calamities be overpast."

"I long again to be refreshed
With your life-giving waters, Lord
Flow down on me, refreshing streams
So I may be restored."

We must come back to the truth and reality that it is ultimately God who heals the inner wounds related to grieving and mourning. There is a supernatural antidote for emotional healing and returning to a state of emotional well-being. The cure is God Himself “Who comforteth us in all of our tribulation” (2 Cor. 1:4).

Isaiah 61:1 also reminds us of this divine solution:

“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.”

Isaiah 57:15-18 adds these precious words:

“For thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones.”

The Lord is our personal Shepherd (Psalm 23:1) and the great Shepherd of our souls (Hebrews 13:20), who comes to save and rescue us from life’s most challenging and difficult situations, which produce grief and deep sorrow in our hearts. We need to pray:

“Savior like a Shepherd lead us,
Much we need Thy tender care.
To Thy pleasant pastures feed us.
For our use, Thy folds prepare.”

Part of the learning and healing process is to discover that God is our emotional healer. As we experience His shepherding care over our lives, as He leads us into the “green pastures” and “beside the still waters,” preparing for us a table of provision in the wilderness of our times of grief, filling up our cup and satisfying our souls, it’s then we can personally say, “The LORD is my shepherd” (Psalm 23).

“In God's green pastures feeding,
By His cool waters lie—
Soft in the evening walk my Lord and I,
All the sheep of His pastures fare so wondrously fine
His sheep am I.

Waters cool, pastures green,
In the evening walk my Lord and I;
Dark the night, rough the way—
Step by step, my Lord and I.”

We find that God is the One who takes us through the healing process with His strengthening, enabling, and life-changing grace.

Philippians 4:13

“I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me.”

2 Peter 1:3

“According as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue.”

Jeremiah 31:25

“For I have satiated (abundantly satisfied) the weary soul, and I have replenished every sorrowful soul.”

Is this true in relation to your own life? Are you allowing God to strengthen and replenish your soul instead of following the destructive path of overpowering grief and despair?

2 Corinthians 4:16 also speaks of God’s inner refreshment:

“For which cause we faint not; but though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day.”

If you are overcome with grief, depression, anxiety, and fear, then you are not experiencing the daily renewal, revival, and refreshing that God can bring to your inner heart and human spirit. Let God do a work of grace in your heart and let it begin today! Don’t wait any longer.

“Day by day and with each passing moment,
Strength I find to meet my trials here;
Trusting in my Father's wise bestowment,
I've no cause for worry or for fear.

He whose heart is kind beyond all measure
Gives unto each day what He deems best--
Lovingly, it's part of pain and pleasure,
Mingling toil with peace and rest."

2. God's love

On our wedding day, an accomplished Christian pianist came to me and gave me a new record (yes record!) that had three big words on the front jacket. They were the words, "God Loves You!" The expression of God's love toward His children can provide them with comfort and emotional healing. Romans 5:5 says "the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us." This means that God has poured out His love for us into our hearts. This is not only Calvary love (the cross) but His caring love which He expresses to us on a daily basis. It's God's love that encourages us, heals us emotionally, calms us, and results in a deepening relationship with God.

William MacDonald said:

"This is not a vague, mystical feeling that 'Somebody up there' cares about humanity, but the deep-seated conviction that a personal God really loves you as an individual."

God's love for us is unleashed in our hearts and lives through the work of the Holy Spirit, who reveals God's loving compassion for us. We must "keep yourselves in the love of God" (Jude 21) which means we must keep experiencing the love of God in our lives on a daily and moment-by-moment basis. God's love is a healing balm that can sooth our grief and sorrow. In every situation, God loves us. This is reassuring, and His loving embrace can be experienced in our daily lives, which brings inner emotional calmness in our hearts. Below is a beautifully written poem about experiencing God's love in your time of sorrow.

"When we lose someone we love,
The loss seems too great to bear
God sends us friends to comfort us,
To show that He deeply cares.

But in the dark hours of the night
When there's nobody else around,
When we feel the saddest and loneliest,

It's there God's love can be found.

It's like a soothing, healing balm
To soothe our broken hearts
The healing oil poured over us
That flows into every part.

We can rest secure in God's love
And know He's by our side
He holds us when we feel as though
A part of us has died.

We can know that God will listen
When we just want to talk
And when we feel we need to cry,
We can share it with the Lord.

For He is always waiting there,
Ready with arms open wide
As we pour out the hurt within,
He pours His love inside.

Our Father above loves us so much
And will never leave us alone,
He will not forsake us in our need
To face this on our own.

He comforts us and strengthens us
And rubs us with His balm
And as the dawn breaks through the night,
We'll awake in His loving arms."

(By M.S. Lowndes)

3. God's Word

We also find emotional healing and well-being through the guidance and promises that He gives to us in the Word of God (2 Tim. 3:16-17; Col. 3:16). God's Word refreshes us for our journey (Jer. 15:16). It might be a new journey that is related to the loss a loved one, or some other loss that we have experienced, which has resulted in heavy sorrow and grief.

2 Peter 1:4 declares:

“Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.”

In other words, we can claim God’s promises in His Word which will in return enable us to pass through our time of fiery trial (1 Pet. 4:12) and sorrow victoriously, by not allowing overpowering grief to destroy our spiritual and abundant life that Jesus promises (John 10:10), or our commitment to living for Jesus Christ.

Psalm 119:50 reveals:

“This *is* my comfort in my affliction: for thy word hath quickened me.”

Psalm 119:28

“My soul melteth for heaviness: strengthen thou me according unto thy word.”

Psalm 119:107

“I am afflicted very much: quicken me, O LORD, according unto thy word.”

Do you have a heavy heart today? Remember that God’s Word, His promises and direction that He gives for our daily living (Ps. 119:105), can give us strength when we possess a heavy heart and a downcast soul. Don’t move away from Bible devotion and reading as you pass through your time of grief and sorrow. God’s Word will enable you to cope with your grief and not allow it to overcome your life. Cling to its promises and follow its guidance and you will discover much refreshment and relief. Find a good devotional book and read it. God will give you streams in the desert (Isaiah 35:6).

Here is a lovely prayer that you can pray today:

“Lord, I need my spirit refreshed and renewed today.
Speak to me through Your Word
That I might hear Your heart,
And help me to share my heart
with You in prayer. Amen.”

4. God’s Perspective

Another step in overcoming grief is having the right perspective on it. We must recognize that grief is a natural response to pain and loss. We have mentioned this

already. There is nothing wrong with grieving. For instance, we naturally sorrow when we lose a loved one, even when we know they are saved and in Heaven. But we should not sorrow like those who have no hope of ever seeing their loved ones again.

1 Thessalonians 4:13-14 states:

“But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him.”

Death, even for believers, brings hard realities. It always hurts, it always leaves us with a lonely spot in our hearts. The Lord does not spare us these realities just because we believe in Him. But with the pain, He gives us the hope of His wonderful promises. The greatest hope is that Christ died for us, so that the sting of death is gone forever (1 Cor. 15:56-57). We have the blessed hope of dying and living with Jesus forever in Heaven. Yes, we grieve at the death of loved ones, but we do not grieve as those who have no hope. Jesus has gone to prepare a place for us (John 14:1-3). We will be reunited with our loved ones who have fallen asleep in Jesus!

1 Thessalonians 4:16-17

“For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive *and* remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord.”

“Friends will be there I have loved long ago;
Joy like a river around me will flow;
Yet just a smile from my Savior, I know,
Will through the ages be glory for me.”

Some have concluded that since Christ defeated death (Rev. 1:18), we’re supposed to be joyful and victorious through it all. They deny the process of grieving. This idea is wrong. We should grieve over the loss of a loved one. Grief is an emotion common to the human experience, and we witness the process of grief throughout the Bible. Multiple Bible characters experienced deep loss and sadness, including Job, Naomi, Hannah, and David. As we have mentioned already, even Jesus mourned (John

11:35; Matthew 23:37-39). After Lazarus died, Jesus went to the village of Bethany, where Lazarus was buried. When Jesus saw Martha and the other mourners weeping, He also wept. He was moved by their grief and also by the fact of Lazarus's death.

Charles Spurgeon said:

"A Jesus who never wept could never wipe away my tears."

 "Often you wonder why tears come into your eyes
And burdens seem to be much more than you can stand.
 But God is standing near, He sees your falling tear
 Tears are a language God understands.

 God sees the tears of a broken hearted soul
 He sees your tears and hears them when they fall.
God weeps along with man and takes him by the hand,
 Tears are a language God understands.

 When grief has left you low, it causes tears to flow
And things have not turned out, the way that you have planned,
 But God won't forget you, His promises are true
 Tears are a language God understands.

 God sees the tears of a broken hearted soul,
 He sees your tears and hears them when they fall.
God weeps along with man and takes him by the hand
 Tears are a language God understands."

This tells us that weeping is part of God's perspective on human suffering. It's woven into the fabric of our human lives. The astounding thing is that, even though Jesus knew He was going to raise Lazarus from the dead, He chose to partake of the grief of the situation. Jesus truly is the "man of sorrows, and is acquainted with grief" (Isaiah 53:3) – your grief and mine! In fact, there is a very real sense where "he hath born our griefs, and carried our sorrows" (Isa. 53:4). He knows and understands what we are passing through and promises to come to our aid, giving us hope by strengthening us, healing us, and enabling us to go on in life. The Lord Jesus is called our sympathizing High Priest who is "touched with the feeling of our infirmities" (Heb. 4:15). It is true that no one really understands and cares for us like Jesus!

“No one understands like Jesus;
He's a Friend beyond compare.
Meet Him at the throne of mercy;
He is waiting for you there.
No understands like Jesus;
Every woe He sees and feels.
Tenderly He whispers comfort,
And the broken heart He heals.”

One thing is certain, there is nothing unmanly, or unbiblical, about tears in a time of grief. Paul tells us to weep with those who weep (Rom. 12:15). We should not make people who are grieving feel uncomfortable or unspiritual about their tears. One preacher shared this story. “I once preached the funeral for a man who had died in his thirties. Afterwards, I was consoling his widow when her former pastor from another town came up and tried to get her to stop crying by saying, ‘Well, praise the Lord! Scott’s in glory now!’ I wanted to punch him in the nose! Let her weep!”

There is “a time to weep” (Eccl. 3:4). The Scripture also states that “It is better to go to the house of mourning, than to go to the house of feasting: for that is the end of all men; and the living will lay it to his heart” (Eccl. 7:2). This tells us that it is better to go to a funeral parlor than gorge oneself at a banquet. This verse implies that grief can be good because it can refresh our perspective on life and help us to realize the hope we have in the time of our own death. Death is the end for this life, and when we come face to face with it, we are forced to think about our own departure and inevitable appointment. The Gospel tells of the Savior, who gives us eternal life (John 6:47), which results in the believer entering Heaven when they die. This actually gives us hope and a different perspective on the death of our loved one, and our own death.

2 Timothy 1:10

“But is now made manifest by the appearing of our Saviour Jesus Christ, who hath abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.”

Death is the doorway into Heaven! This is the Gospel promise that Christians can have in their own hearts as they face the death of loved ones and when their own time comes to pass from this life. We can confidently say: “Surely goodness and

mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever” (Psalm 23:6). We can live in the hope that only the Gospel can bring to our hearts in the time of grieving. We will see our saved loved ones in Heaven someday. Knowing we will meet our loved ones is also a healing balm to our aching hearts and lives.

“Meet me there, meet me there,
Where the tree of life is blooming,
Meet me there;
When the storms of life are o’er,
On the happy golden shore,
Where the faithful part no more,
Meet me there.”

5. God’s Timing

We must also remember that feelings of grief are to be temporary. This is important to understand. Psalm 30:5 says that “weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning.” Yes, we can possess joy during affliction and grief (1 Thess. 1:6), but there is also a sense of joy that overcomes us, as we pass through our time of grief. Joy comes in the morning! Are you in the morning? If not, your grief may be hanging over your head, making your heart heavy, and defeating your spiritual life. There should be an end to mourning. Grief has its timing and purpose, but it also has its limit. Our grief should end before it turns into a spiritual pitfall in our lives.

If you are a Christian and are overcome with life-debilitating and overpowering grief, or crippling depression, anxiety, and hopelessness, then you are living in defeat. Your grief has turned into sin. This is because nothing is to defeat our spiritual life – not even grief. If you have come to this point in your life, you have turned that which is natural (the normal process of grieving and healing) into something that is unnatural (permanent spiritual defeat).

Spiritual defeat through depression and debilitating grief is not an option for the Christian life. We must identify this as a sin for the simple reason that God has commanded that we should not be spiritually defeated by anxiety and grief.

Philippians 4:6-7

“Be careful for nothing (don’t be filled with anxiety, depression, utter despair and

grief); but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.”

Yes, we are to pray about everything, including our grief, and ask God to heal us of our griefs and sorrows.

“What a friend we have in Jesus
All our sins and griefs to bear
What a privilege it is to carry
Everything to God in prayer.”

God’s Word does not promote the idea that His people should experience life-debilitating depression, and wallow in overwhelming grief, since it takes us away from what God wants from our lives, which is trusting in His providence and care over our lives (Prov. 3:5-6), experiencing His peace (Phil. 4:7), and inner healing (Ps. 6:2), and developing fruitfulness in our life (Gal. 5:22-23). God has promised us victory over our emotional defeat and misery which may stem from the loss of a loved one, some other life-shattering trial, or even physical imbalances that may trigger depression and grief. In every situation, God has promised to be our portion.

Ephesians 6:10

“Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might.”

Isaiah 40:29

“He giveth power to the faint; and to them that have no might he increaseth strength.”

Have you been claiming the wonderful provision and promise of God’s spiritual strength as you pass through the grieving process? Perhaps you have allowed your ongoing grief to turn into a spiritual barrier that keeps you from living a life filled with meaning and purpose? God’s enabling grace allows us to go on in life. It keeps us from being spiritually wrecked by grief and depression.

Christine Wyrzten shared how a hurting wife can lose her husband, deal with her grief, and still possess the resolve to go on in life with God’s healing touch and grace.

“Yesterday he went away
How I prayed that he would stay but now he's gone.
What can I do? What can I say?
That God has His perfect way.
But I'll carry on the same
But things won't be the same anymore.
But I'll carry on the same
Just like I did before.”

Of course, things will be different when we lose a lifelong loved one, but our spiritual outlook and life can be restored for “He restoreth my soul” (Ps. 23:3) and “my cup runneth over” (Ps. 23:5). God’s sufficiency will enable you to overcome your grief and be restored emotionally and filled with God’s joy and peace. Joy comes in the morning!

6. God’s Faithfulness

Through all of our loss and grieving, we must experience God’s faithfulness. His faithfulness is experienced when He helps us deal with our deep emotional pain, so we are not overcome with the kind of grief that will keep us in depression and spiritual defeat. There are many Scriptures that remind us of God’s faithfulness in times of mourning. He is with us even in the valley of the shadow of death (Psalm 23:4).

When David sorrowed, he prayed this in Psalm 56:8: “Thou tellest my wanderings: put thou my tears into thy bottle: are they not in thy book?” The touching image of God catching our tears is full of meaning. He sees our grief and wants to relieve us. God enters into our grief and “the God of all grace” (1 Pet. 5:10) promises to help us pass through our time of grief victoriously, so we are not overcome with life-debilitating grief. God’s mercies are new every morning.

Here is the great promise of Lamentations 3:22-26:

“It is of the LORD'S mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not. They are new every morning: great is thy faithfulness. The LORD *is* my portion, saith my soul; therefore will I hope in him. The LORD *is* good unto them that wait for him, to the soul *that* seeketh him. *It is* good that *a man* should both hope and quietly wait for the salvation of the LORD.

When we are drowning in grief we must remember these things:

- God's great love and compassions never fail - vs. 22
- God faithfully comforts me daily - vs. 23
- God is all I need - vs. 24
- God wants all my hope to be placed only in Him - v. 25
- God is good to me when I seek Him - vs. 25
- God brings healing as I wait for His deliverance - vs. 26.

“In midst of dangers, fears, and tears,
Thy goodness we’ll adore.
We’ll praise thee for thy mercies past,
And humbly ask for more.”

God’s mercies are expressed to us through His tender-loving care and touch, His sympathy, and His healing in our hearts and lives. God gives a daily dose of mercies for His children so they are not “consumed” or overtaken with life-debilitating sorrow and grief. He is a faithful God! He is always there for us to comfort and console us.

“Great is Thy faithfulness, O God my Father,
There is no shadow of turning with Thee;
Thou changest not, Thy compassions, they fail not
As Thou hast been Thou forever wilt be.

Great is Thy faithfulness! Great is Thy faithfulness!
Morning by morning new mercies I see;
All I have needed Thy hand hath provided—
Great is Thy faithfulness, Lord, unto me!”

Once again, we are reminded that we have a High Priest who is “touched with the feelings of our infirmities” (Heb. 4:15). This means the Lord sympathizes with us, is deeply concerned about our broken heart, and wants to meet with us, console us, and give to us His spiritual strength, refreshment and the emotional victory we need.

“The Great Physician now is near,
The sympathizing Jesus;
He speaks the drooping heart to cheer,
Oh, hear the voice of Jesus!

Sweetest note in seraph song;
Sweetest name on mortal tongue;
Sweetest carol ever sung:
Jesus, blessed Jesus!"

7. God's Providence

While we pass through grief, God reassures us of His providence over our lives and that all is not lost. Psalm 46:10 reminds us to "Be still, and know that that I am God." In the context, this means to rest in the knowledge that He is God and that He is in control of the events of the earth. Of course, this would extend to the providential events that He has allowed to come to pass in relation to our own personal lives. This would include even the death of a loved one. Our times of grief are in some way ordained by God. We must remember this as we pass through the grieving process.

Job 23:10

"But he knoweth the way that I take: *when* he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold."

The fact that God knows and tries us is an indication of His providential dealings with our lives. Job declared that God knew all about His trials in life for He is the God who ordains them and permits them with the goal to bring about greater spiritual growth and reliance on Him.

Psalm 138:8

"The LORD will perfect *that which* concerneth me (fulfill His purpose for me): thy mercy, O LORD, *endureth* for ever: forsake not the works of thine own hands."

We can know and accept that God is working everything together for our good as He brings His purpose to pass in our lives. Romans 8:28 says: "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to *his* purpose." We must eventually rest in God's providence and accept His unfailing purpose for our lives. When we do, God's purpose will result in producing spiritual growth and help us in a practical way "to be conformed to the image of his son" (Rom. 8:29) in our everyday living.

The Holy Spirit enables us to pass through God's purpose and plan for our life, whatever it might be and whenever it involves sorrow and grief. The Holy Spirit is called the "Comforter" (John 14:16). Beloved, the Comforter has come! If you are a Christian, He lives within you to put his healing balm upon your heart and life. The Holy Spirit also wants to produce Christlikeness within us, as we experience life's changes and challenges. The Bible says we are "changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord" (2 Cor. 3:18).

Your trials and season of grief ("though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations" - 1 Pet. 1:6) should bring about new spiritual changes in your life, so that you can be a better reflection of Jesus Christ in your character, attitudes, and overall living. You must remember that "all things *are* for your sakes" (2 Cor. 4:15) which means that God has an unfailing purpose for every trial that He allows to come into your life. Since this is true, you must bow the knee before a loving God who has allowed and in some sense ordained these events for your life.

Ron Hamilton wrote:

"What a privilege to come into God's presence,
Just to linger with the One who set me free.
As I lift my eyes and see His awesome glory,
I remember who He is and bow the knee.
Bow the knee, bow the knee,
He is King of all the ages, bow the knee!
God alone on His throne,
See Him high and lifted up and bow the knee!
Kneel before Him, all adore Him.
As you live to love Him more, bow the knee."

In the Christian life, there are no accidents - only appointments. This is because in God's providence He allows or permits specific circumstances to come into our own personal lives and the lives of others, which in return can cause grief in our hearts. Are you ready to accept that your situation and grieving period ultimately comes from the sovereign hand of God? Once again, the Psalmist reminds us to "be still, and know that I am God" (Psalm 46:10). Accepting God's providence over your life is an important step in the healing process. In Psalm 46, which paints the picture of God's providence over our lives, we also discover that God is called our refuge and

strength. Along with His providence there is the promise of God's power. God's *providence* is always accompanied with His *power* which enables us to deal with our grief and go on in life.

Psalm 46:1 says:

"God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble."

Psalm 91:1-2 adds these reassuring words:

"He that dwelleth in the secret place of the most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty. I will say of the LORD, He is my refuge and my fortress: my God; in him will I trust."

Have you found this secret place in your time of grief? God is with you to calm your soul and refresh and strengthen you. The secret place, where we find God's inner strength and peace, keeps us from being overcome or defeated by grief. The special place where we find God's comfort and strength keeps us from being overtaken by anxiety and entering into deep bouts of depression with feelings of hopelessness and despair. Paul prayed that his thorn in the flesh would be taken away but God in His providence and purpose chose not to heal him. Instead, God promised that "My grace is sufficient for thee" (2 Corinthians 12:9). This means that in the midst of His sovereign purpose for my life, God's strengthening grace will keep me from being overcome with the kind of grief that will cripple my spiritual life and everyday living. We must remember that the *will* of God will never lead us where the *grace* of God cannot keep us.

An important part of overcoming grief is to practice expressing your grief to God by "casting all of your care on him; for he careth for you" (1 Peter 5:7). This was written just for you! God lovingly cares for you as a Christian and wants to meet your emotional needs and heal your wounds. The God of providence is also the God of comfort (Isa, 40:1; 2 Cor. 1:3-4).

In Genesis 50:20, Joseph recognized the working of God's providence:

"But as for you, ye thought evil against me; *but* God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as *it is* this day, to save much people alive."

Think of the worst loss you have ever suffered and consider these important questions:

- Can you think of anything good that's come out of it?
- Did it draw you closer to God?
- Have you seen answers to prayer because of it?
- Have you been able to help others just because of what you've experienced yourself?
- Do you have more compassion for others?
- Have you become more like Jesus?

We are reminded again that Jesus was “a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief” (Isa. 53:3). God has feelings! And God knows how to heal us of a broken heart (Ps. 34:18). As we pass through grief and experience God’s inner touch of healing, we can in return learn to comfort others (2 Cor. 1:4). In doing this, we will be more like Jesus! Passing through grief enables us to assist others through their time of grief. We can give them personal words of encouragement and hope. How can we bypass sorrow and grief and still expect to develop emotional and spiritual maturity? If we escape grief, we cannot be like Jesus! We just can't decide to skip this course! It is part of our spiritual growth process.

God, who is in charge of all the events of our lives, also understands everything about us. This includes our feelings of grief. The implication is that in understanding and caring for us, God also intervenes for us, to heal our emotional wounds of the past and present.

Oswald Smith wrote these lovely words:

“God understands your sorrows, He sees the falling tear;
 And whispers, 'I am with thee,' Then falter not, nor fear.
 God understands your heartaches,
 He knows the bitter pain;
 O, trust Him in the darkness, You cannot trust in vain.
 God understands your weakness,
 He knows the tempter's power;
 And He will walk beside you however dark the hour.
 He understands your longing, your deepest grief He shares;
 Then let Him bear your burden, He understands and cares!”

Psalm 139:2 conveys it like this:

“Thou knowest my downsitting and mine uprising, thou understandest my thought afar off.”

Jesus taught that “your Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask him” (Matt. 6:8). Jesus knows and understands! When we commune with the God who identifies with our feelings, we are able to open our minds to the truth that He loves us, that He sympathizes with us, that He is faithful, that He is in control of the events of our lives, and that He knows how to work our loss into something that will actually be good for our Christian life. This is because “all things work together for our good to them that love God” (Rom. 8:28). Living in the reality of Romans 8:28 means that we must believe God can use our sorrows for good!

8. God’s praise

We can submit willingly to God’s gracious providence with an overwhelming sense of gratefulness. When we understand God’s providential working in every situation we face, and how He wants to enable me to grow through the trial, we can give thanks and praise to God. Praise changes things! It can relieve our grieving.

1 Thessalonians 5:18 declares:

“In every thing (every circumstance) give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you.”

Yes, part of the healing process related to grief is to give thanksgiving and praise to God. Since Romans 8:28 is true, then we should be able to praise the Lord at all times, in all circumstances, since we know God has a plan for the lives of His children who love Him. We can thank God that we can grow in our spiritual life and become more like Jesus Christ through our trial and time or sorrow (Rom. 8:29). We can thank God for all that He has taught us during our time of grief. We can thank Him for His goodness, abiding presence, and spiritual provision as we pass through the grieving process.

Of course, the Bible is not teaching that we must be thankful for every event that occurs in our lives, such as a husband of 40 years suddenly dying, or when a wife of 25 years leaves the home for another man. The Scripture is teaching that in every circumstance Christians can give thanks because of what God is doing in their heart

and life and also the lives of others. In every circumstance of life, we can thank God for His power, presence, peace, and personal faithfulness, love, and benefits (Ps. 103:2). Thanks *for* everything. No! Thanks *in* everything. Yes! No matter how bad things are, one must remain thankful to keep his inner self vibrant.

When Job heard the news that he had lost everything, he said, “Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return thither: the LORD gave, and the LORD hath taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD” (Job 1:21). In Job’s case, his wreckage caused him to worship! His trial and grief brought Him to the place of thanksgiving and praise. The Psalms contain numerous examples of pouring out one’s heart to God. Interestingly, the psalmist never ends where he began. He may start a psalm with expressions of grief, but, almost invariably, he will end it with praise (Psalm 13; Psalm 23:1-6; Psalm 30:11-12; Psalm 56). Grief and praise are often linked together for the simple reason that we can know that the God who ordains the events of our lives will also enable us to pass through them victoriously. This results in praise and thanksgiving to God.

2 Corinthians 4:15 reminds us:

“For all things *are* for your sakes, that the abundant grace might through the thanksgiving of many redound to the glory of God.”

“Thank you, Lord,
For the trials that come my way.
In that way I can grow each day
As I let you lead.

And thank you, Lord,
For the patience those trials bring,
In that process of growing,
I can learn to care.

I thank you, Lord,
For the victory that growing brings.
In surrender of everything
Life is so worthwhile.

And I thank you, Lord,
That when everything's put in place,
Out in front I can see your face,
And it's there you belong.”

9. God's People

Warren Wiersbe shares this:

“For many months I visited a young man in a hospital who had almost burned to death. I do not know how many operations and skin grafts he had during those months, or how many specialists visited him. But the thing that sustained him during those difficult months was not the explanations of the doctors but the promises they gave him that he would recover. That was his hope. And the thing that sustained his hope was the love of his family and many friends as they stood by him. The love of God was channeled through them to him. He did recover and today gives glory to God.”

As mentioned previously, another important step in overcoming grief is to share it with others. The body of Christ is designed to ease the burdens of its individual members. In a fallen world where loss and grief are guaranteed, God can use us as Christians to comfort others when their spiritual wounds are raw and deep.

2 Corinthians 1:4 says:

“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.”

Galatians 6:2

“Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ.”

1 Thessalonians 5:11

“Wherefore comfort yourselves together, and edify one another, even as also ye do.”

Romans 12:15

“Rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep.”

Fellow believers or Christians can mourn with those who mourn and express encouragement to them (Acts 4:36). Often, the grieving individual tends to shun others, which increase feelings of their isolation and misery. It is much healthier to seek Biblical counseling (Prov. 11:14; 15:22), and Christian group settings can be very helpful. God's people offer listening ears and helpful encouragement, camaraderie, and spiritual guidance in working through the grief. When we share our stories with God and others, your grief can be lessened, so it does not overcome your spiritual life.

A man was in prison and had come to faith in Jesus Christ. He was there for five years and was certainly fighting grief and sorrow which was related to his past. One day he was called to the warden's office. He was wearing his bathroom cleaning clothes. An evangelist was asked to visit him and provide encouragement to him. The inmate said that the evangelist took him in his arms and said, "I love you and so does God." Later on, when recounting that visit, the Christian man said, "It's was as if Jesus Himself had walked in that prison, hugged me, and said, 'I love you!'" Yes, we can have an encouraging impact on the lives of others and be part of the answer in seeing them delivered from sorrow and grief. We need to show a little bit of love and kindness to them and let them know we are praying for them and are there for them.

"Sing a song, Spread some cheer,
There are sad and lonely faces every where...
Be a friend,; Show some love,
It will lift them from the dungeons of despair.
Show a little bit of love and kindness,
Never go around with hatred's blindness
Take a little time to reach for joy and wear a happy face...
Sing a little bit when the days are dreary,
Give a little help to a friend who's weary
That's the way to make the world a happy place."

Conclusion

In summary, if we want to heal from inner grief and sorrow, we need to CHOOSE to live one day at a time as Jesus taught (Matt. 6:34), PUT Jesus Christ as the center of our lives (Phil. 1:21; 3:10), RELY totally upon God for strength and emotional healing (Ps. 46:1; 2 Cor. 1:9; 12:9; Eph. 6:10; Phil. 4:13), CONFESS all known sins (1 John 1:9), ASK God for wisdom (James 1:5), THANK God for His spiritual provision (2 Pet. 3:1) and for your trial (1 Thess. 5:18), PRAISE God for His presence and help (Heb. 13:5), GROW through our trial and time of grief (2 Pet. 3:18), KNOW that your grief and sorrow has a purpose (Ps. 119:71), ACCEPT the future plans God has for you (Jer. 29:11), place your HOPE in God (Ps. 62:5), have FAITH in God (Mark 11:22), OBTAIN comfort from others who can help you and seek to express comfort to others (2 Cor. 7:6; 1:4), DEVELOP a deeper prayer life (Ps. 5:3; Phil. 4:6), REFLECT on pure and positive things of Scripture (Phil. 4:8; 2 Tim. 3:16-17), be FUTURE oriented (2 Cor. 4:16-18; Rev. 21:4; Titus 2:13), don't live in the PAST (Phil. 3:14), and TAKE

the entire focus off ourselves (Matt. 16:24) by placing it on others (Gal. 6:2). When we reach out to others, we can experience the joy and satisfaction that comes from helping others. To state it succinctly, sometimes we need to stop being absorbed with ourselves.

Paul said in 2 Corinthians 4:8:

“We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair.”

Although Paul admitted he was knocked down emotionally, he was never knocked out! In other words, he did not allow emotional defeat to weaken or impair his spiritual life. You have a choice in life. At one point, you must “choose you this day whom ye will serve” (Josh. 24:25) – emotional defeat or emotional victory. You don’t have to be defeated by despair. You don’t have to lose all hope and live in defeat and misery the rest of your days. Take control of your life by allowing God to take control of you! Rest in His providence, promises, and power. Discover the supernatural and spiritual strength that comes from God’s presence, God’s Word, and God’s people.

Yes, grief is part of the human experience. Loss is part of life, and grief is a natural response to loss. However, we can find solace in the Holy Spirit, our Comforter (John 14:16). We can know that God is strong enough to carry all of our burdens so they do not overcome our life (Matthew 11:30). We can give all of our hurt to Him because He cares for us.

1 Peter 5:7 once again reminds us that we should be “Casting all your care (grief) upon him; for he careth for you.” The fact that He *cares* for us means that He is *there* for us! If you feel, “No one cares about my pain”—Jesus cares! If you think, “No one cares about my sorrow”—Jesus cares! If you believe, “No one cares about my grief”—Jesus cares! And He is there to provide spiritual comfort and assistance to us in our time of sorrow and need.

Hebrews 4:15-16

“For we have not an high priest (Jesus Christ) which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities (our sorrow and despair); but was in all points tempted like as *we are*, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.”

Yes, Jesus Christ can meet your emotional needs. He understands emotional pain and can bring help and healing to your broken heart. The God who understands the pain of suffering and grief not only can help you through your time of personal grief, but He can also bring healing to your broken heart. Let God touch your heart and heal you. The fact that He cares for you means that He is there for you!

“If God can dress a lily in a gown of white,
If God can guide a moonbeam thro' the dark of night,
If He can help a river find a friendly sea,
Then surely He will care for me.

If God can paint a rainbow when the rain is done,
If God can give a summer day the gift of sun,
If He can teach a nightingale a melody,
Then surely He will care for me.

If God can greet a morning with a new blue sky,
If God can show a young bird how a bird should fly,
If He can hang a blossom on a cherry tree,
Then surely He will care for me.”

He's with me when I sleep.
He's with me when I wake;
He hears my softest prayer.
Wherever I may go, whatever path I take,
I know he will be there.”

(Mary Kay Beall)

Isaiah 53:3 reminds us again that “He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief ...” Jesus truly understands grief. He identifies with it and can heal us emotionally from life-debilitating sorrow and mourning.

The old saying is still true:
“In every pang that rends the heart,
The man of sorrows had a part.
He sympathizes with our grief,
And to the sufferer sends relief.”

During times of grief, we can cast our burdens on the Lord and experience His compassion, care, and loving touch upon our lives. We also rely on the community of the church (God's people), delve into the promises of God's Word, bow the knee to His providential plan for our life, praise Him, and ultimately experience God's inner healing.

Psalms 42:5 asks this question:

"Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted (mourning, troubled, filled with anxiety) in me? hope thou in God: for I shall yet praise him for the help of his countenance."

This is a soul-searching question. Our faith in God must at one-point challenge us to stop living in a burdened and depressed state of mind and being overcome by life-debilitating grief. Why are you defeated by grief and drowned in sorrow? Friend, you can have strength for today and bright hope for tomorrow! You don't have to live defeated by grief, depression, and hopelessness. We can live with hope by experiencing God's inner strength, healing, and a fresh new start in life.

Psalms 146:5

"Happy is he that hath the God of Jacob for his help, whose hope is in the LORD his God."

Psalms 94:19

"In the multitude of my thoughts within me thy comforts delight my soul."

Jesus said in John 14:1:

"Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me."

Let these reassuring words come ringing across your heart. God can take us from the place of hopelessness to hope, from hurt to healing, from discomfort to comfort, and from overwhelming grief to "joy unspeakable and full of glory" (1 Pet. 1:8).

"There's within my heart a melody
Jesus whispers sweet and low,
Fear not, I am with thee, peace, be still,
In all of life's ebb and flow.
Jesus, Jesus, Jesus,
Sweetest Name I know,

Fills my every longing,
Keeps me singing as I go.”

You don't have to be overcome with crippling grief, defeated by depression, and live a life of seclusion and sorrow. Find your healing and hope in God, let Him bind up your wounds, and be refreshed in His presence and promises.

Isaiah 40:31 gives this wonderful promise:

“But they that wait upon the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint.”

Eagles wings! This means I can soar far above my trials, like an eagle soaring in the blue sky, so I do not experience emotional defeat and despair. I can by God's gracious supply experience spiritual and emotional well-being. Beloved, you must learn to move forward in His victory and let God deliver you from the dungeons of despair, the doldrums of life, and the disappointments that overcome you emotionally and spiritually. Remember that you CHOOSE to live in defeat, despair, and debilitating grief. However, God wants to deliver you from your prison or pit of grief, if you will allow Him to work emotional healing in your heart. Instead of choosing despair and defeat, CHOOSE deliverance and healing for your soul.

David's experience is well-known in Psalm 40:2-3:

“He brought me up also out of an horrible pit, out of the miry clay, and set my feet upon a rock, and established my goings. And he hath put a new song in my mouth, even praise unto our God: many shall see it, and fear, and shall trust in the LORD.”

David went from the pits to the praises! He came out of his depressive state and once again had a new song in his heart. This can be your experience as well. Let the process of God's healing begin in your heart today! Let the Lord deliver you from the deep pit of gloom and doom. You don't have to live in a dark cavern of crushing grief and life-zapping sorrow. God can bring you out of your time of grieving and place a new song in your heart once again. It's a song of deliverance, freedom, joy, and peace. Let Him begin His work in your heart today.

Our various trials in life are explained as the turbulence of roaring waters in which we all pass through. In the midst of the waters, God grants us His presence and peace.

Psalm 46:2-3

“Therefore will not we fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea; Though the waters thereof roar and be troubled, though the mountains shake with the swelling thereof. Selah.”

Isaiah 43:2 concludes with this promise:

“When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee ...”

As we reflect on passing through the deep waters of life, which are accompanied by grief and sorrow, these lovely words remind us of God’s constant care, spiritual provision, and His deliverance from the darkness of despair to the daylight of joy.

“When I think I'm going under, part the waters, Lord
When I feel the waves around me, calm the sea,
When I cry for help, oh, hear me, Lord
And hold out Your hand,
Touch my life, still the raging storm in me.
Knowing You love me,
Through the burdens I must bear,
Hearing Your footsteps,
Lets me know I'm in Your care.
And in the night of my life,
You bring the promise of day,
Here is my hand, show me the way.”

Application Questions:

- What is the proper expression of grief for a Christian?
- When is it excessive?
- Have you surrendered to grief or God?
- Has your Christian or spiritual life been hindered by debilitating grief?
- Are you bound to depression?
- Do you possess feelings of hopelessness?
- Have you gone into seclusion and not allowed God to heal your soul?
- Has your life been defeated by despair and grief?
- Has grief turned into a sin in your life, where you are angry at God, won’t trust God, won’t pray to God for help, and where emotional stress has taken you into the depths of despair and depression?

- Do you have some specific sin in your life that is causing your grief?
- Where are you turning for your emotional healing from grief and despair?
- Have you turned your sorrow over to the Man of Sorrows?
- Are you allowing God to replenish and satisfy your soul?
- Are you resting in God's providence?
- Will you bow your knee to the God who is in charge of the events of your life?
- Are you reading the Bible and claiming God's provisional promises for your life?
- Have you been praying and fellowshiping with God, depending on Him, and experiencing His inner healing touch in your life?
- Have you reached out to fellow Christians for added help and encouragement?
- Have you been giving thanks and praise to God in your specific circumstance that you are facing in life?
- Are you willing and ready to get past the weeping stage that may endure for a night (a season), and pass into the morning stage (a new start) by experiencing a life of emotional well-being and fulfillment in God (Psalm 30:5)? Is it morning in your heart? It can be!
- Are you ready to be delivered from life-debilitating grief and experience a new song in your heart and a fresh start in life?

Prayer of Deliverance for a Believer:

“Dear heavenly Father, today I have realized that my grief has moved from what is “natural” to that which is “unnatural.” My grief and sorrow have overcome my emotional life and daily living. My grief has defeated me from a spiritual standpoint. I have not been trusting in Your providence, power, and the promises that You give to me in the Bible. I have been bound to depression and have lost all hope. I know this is not right and want to ask You for forgiveness. I surrender to You instead of my grief.

“Gracious and loving Father, right now I want to start a renewal in my Christian life. I want to begin the process of emotional healing and return to a place of spiritual stability and wellbeing. I want to experience your tender-loving care over my life, Your liberating power from depression, the refreshment that comes from claiming Your promises, and the hope that only You can give. I want to respond once again to You and those who love me, my Christian brothers and sisters. Lord, start the

process of healing me emotionally and spiritually today. Thank You, God, for loving me unconditionally and helping me to come out of the horrible pit of grief and depression. Put a new song in my heart again. I want to praise you and testify to others of Your faithfulness to me. In Jesus' name, Amen."

Let me pass on some final thoughts for a non-believer. You may have read this and are somewhat confused about the mention of the Gospel and eternal life. Let me explain. The Bible says everyone has sinned against God and deserves to die a sinner's death in the place called hell or the Lake of Fire (Romans 3:23; 6:23; Rev. 20:15). However, the Bible also teaches that Christ died on the cross, paying the judgment (penalty that God required) for all of your sins. "Christ died for our sins" (1 Cor. 15:3). But He also rose again the third day ("that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day"). In short, Jesus died on the cross and rose from the dead to save you from hell, give you the hope of eternal life in Heaven, and also provide for you a new way of life, which is an "abundant life" (John 10:10).

The only way we can receive this eternal and abundant life is by expressing *faith* in what Christ has done for us to save us from hell and provide us with a new birth and way of life as Jesus promised (John 3:3, 7).

Galatians 3:26 says:

"For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus."

Romans 10:13 expresses the same truth:

"For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved."

The words "believe", "faith," and "calling" mean the same thing. You must take the initiative to place all of your confidence or trust in Jesus Christ alone to save you, and receive not only eternal life (salvation from hell), but His new transforming life (the new birth and new way of life). Expressing faith in Christ means that you will commit your faith to Jesus Christ alone for your salvation. You will not look at yourself, anyone else, or anything else. You will only place your confidence in the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ as paying the penalty for your sin and giving you the hope of eternal life, and also a new way of life.

If you have not come to Christ and trusted in His death as the payment for your sin, the Bible says you don't possess any hope, and are "without God in the world" (Eph.

2:12). But you don't have to remain in this predicament. God promises that whoever believes in Jesus Christ "shall not perish, but have eternal life" (John 3:16). You can trust in Christ to be your Savior right now and possess the confidence that if you should die, you would enter Heaven, based upon God's promise.

Below is a prayer you can personally express to God as you commit your faith to Christ alone for salvation. Pray it with understanding, meaningfulness, but most of all, with genuine faith. Christ can deliver you from hell and give you not only everlasting life, but a new quality of life.

A Prayer for Salvation:

"Dear God, I realize that I am a sinner that is separated from You. I don't want to die and go to hell. I don't want to keep living in sin and defeat. Right now, I am expressing faith in the Lord Jesus Christ to be my Savior. I understand that He died for me and rose again to give me salvation from hell, and also give me a new birth and way of life. At this very moment, I will place all of my confidence in Jesus Christ alone to be my Savior and give me new life. In Jesus' name, Amen."