

The Grief Test!

PASSING LIFE'S TOUGHEST TESTS

Psalm 90:1-12; 1 Corinthians 15:20-26

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Someone catalogued favorite hymns of:

Dentists: "Crown Him with Many Crowns"

Meteorologists: "There Shall Be Showers of Blessings"

Golfers: "There Is a Green Hill Far Away"

Politicians: "Standing on the Promises"

IRS Auditors: "I Surrender All"

Shoppers: "The Sweet Bye and Bye"

I don't know if Moses had a favorite song, but two songs in the Bible are attributed to him. One celebrates victory at the Red Sea. The other is Psalm 90:

Lord, you have been our dwelling place throughout all generations. Before the mountains were born or you brought forth the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God... You sweep men away in the sleep of death; they are like the new grass of the morning – though in the morning it springs up new, by evening it is dry and withered. (Psalm 90:1-2, 5-6; NIV)

Psalm 90 affirms the greatness of an eternal God, and in comparison, our brief existence. But in some ways Psalm 90 is depressing.

All our days pass away under your wrath; we finish our years with a moan. The length of our days is seventy years or eighty, if we have the strength; yet their span is but trouble and sorrow, for they quickly pass, and we fly away. (Psalm 90:9-10, NIV)

For forty years Moses wandered in a wilderness as leader of people who suffered and died because of their unbelief. Although Moses tasted this consequence of sin, he finished his song appealing to God. Moses knew that God loves us. He witnessed the mighty love of God as well

as his judgment.

In Psalm 90 Moses faces the experience of trouble and death with faith; and in doing so, he shows us how to deal with grief. We all experience grief. Do we face it in faith?

It was faith in a promise from God that filled me with comfort when at age 16, I stood by my father's casket. Twelve years later, I found myself alone, crying uncontrollably. I wanted to show Dad my wife and two daughters and watch his face light up. I missed him, and it hurt.

We all have hurts. Some hurts are clean gashes. My father's death was clean. I had drawn close to him, so I carried no guilt or bitterness at his death. He died quickly, naturally, doing what he loved. I felt no anger, no sense of robbery. I just hurt from the separation. For me, his death was a clean cut, a clean separation. However, there is grief poisoned with guilt, fear and bitterness. Imagine the grief of a mother who backs over her child. Such grief is dirtied with guilt and regret. Imagine the anger of a father who loses his children because of a drunk driver. His grief is laced with resentment; maybe even anger towards God: *God, why didn't you protect my family?* There are tragic times when a person suffers like Moses from the decisions of nations. Think of those who've lost their loved ones in Afghanistan, Iraq, or Vietnam. Sometimes, their grief is inflamed with hot anger and long-term resent.

Did you know grief, clean or dirty, can act as a killer? Statistically, widows outlive their mates for many years, but widowers often suffer a major illness or even die within 18 months. Men and women handle grief differently, and for many men grief is a killer. When we are bereaved, we face one of life's greatest tests. It is a test we can pass.

The Apostle Paul wrote:

Brothers, we do not want you to be ignorant about those who fall asleep, or to

grieve like the rest of men, who have no hope. (1Thessalonians 4:13)

God doesn't want us to grieve like most of humanity. He wants our grief to be different. He wants us to know the promises of God and the God who makes those promises. God wants us to encourage each other with these promises. They bring hope and purpose and peace. Moses didn't know all the promises of God, but he knew the God who makes those promises. He knew judgment and death, but he also knew mercy and favor. That is why in Psalm 90 Moses sang his grief, faith and desire to God. There was an answer for his trouble. God who loves us!

God wants us to know there may be weeping for the night, but joy comes in the morning. God wants us to know that he binds up the broken-hearted, lightens the heavy heart, and replaces robes smeared in ashes with garments of praise. Whether it clean or toxic-laced grief, God heals the human heart. The imperfect, mixed-motive love of humans can help us, but what heals is the unadulterated love that is poured into human hearts by Christ Jesus.

A beautiful description of that love unfolds in the fictitious story of grief and healing, called *The Shack*. The author wrote it for his children to share the powerful healing of Jesus Christ in his broken life. Although controversial, it became a national bestseller and has opened up many hearts to the healing love of Jesus. It reveals some of what we learn in the Bible about overcoming grief. God's love is the antidote to grief. How can we access this love?

First, we need to express our grief. One of the best ways to express your grief is to cry. Jesus wept over the death of his friend, Lazarus. Studies show that weeping is a healthy way to release the pain of grief. Jesus modeled how to deal with grief as he wept. Crying may not be fun, but after a cry your body is relaxed. Holding grief in keeps you tense. It wears you down eventually. Did you know that your tears are holy? Through Christ's sacrifice on the cross, you

have been made holy. Your tears are then holy as well, especially as they express your heart.

Second, we need to share our grief with God. When Jesus felt pain, especially on the cross, he cried out to his Father. When Moses grieved, he spread out his hands and sang to his creator. It is important to turn to God with your grief. Share your anger, guilt and sense of loss with God? Write letters to God if that helps. Wait upon God for a response and expect it, for God will answer.

Third, allow God to minister to you. Frequently, we cry out and then restrict God's ministry. We try to handle everything alone, yet God works through people. People carry the love and call of Christ. When we withdraw from them, we withdraw from Christ. Your believing family is the physical body of Christ today. Much if not most of his healing work will come through them.

The main reason why men die earlier than women is because they hesitate to let anyone share their burdens, and they grieve alone. Women tend to let others into their emotional lives.

Christ organized the church to be the family where you let people in. The early church was organized into small house fellowships. You shared your grief and struggles with that small group, and you were never, ever alone. No burden did you bear alone.

Psychiatrist and author, Dr. M. Scott Peck, commented on the early Christian community.

If we are to use the word (community) meaningfully we must restrict it to a group of individuals who have learned how to communicate honestly with each other, whose relationships go deeper than their masks of composure, and who have developed some significant commitment to rejoice together, mourn together, and to delight in each other, make others' conditions are own.

That is exactly what we lack if we are not interacting intimately with other believers. To be truthful, I can preach and I can pray, but if you won't become part of a small, personal, faith

group, if you won't get close to some people here, if you won't talk spiritually, practically and revealingly with other believers, you'll struggle more than you need to, you'll suffer more than you need to, and you'll die earlier than you need to.

It is a sad and unnecessary thing to cry alone, to hurt alone and to walk through this life alone. If you want God to help you, stop going it alone. Let him fit you together with others and pour through them his healing love into your life.

Finally, if you struggle with grief flavored with anger or guilt, you need to **go through the hard work of forgiveness**. You cannot let go of a loved one until you let go of any anger or guilt associated with their living or dying.

Jesus died to free you and we are here to help you. It is time to live free of anger and guilt. It is time for joy to fill your heart and gratitude to lift your steps. In this world, you will be challenged with trouble. However, Jesus overcame what you face, and you will too if you will walk with him. Will you?