

SERVING CONTENTEDLY

Week 6: Walking Through the Valley

Grief is a universal reality. Whatever causes it—the death of a loved one, terminal illness, accidents, wayward children, or other traumatic events, grief inevitably comes to some degree to every person who lives. Have you ever wondered what Adam said to comfort Eve after Abel’s funeral? What did Job say to his wife as he buried his seven sons and three daughters? How did King David work through his grief over his wayward son, Absalom? How did Mary cope when her beloved Son, Jesus, was crucified? In some way, each of these individuals coped. In fact, mortals have been coping with grief through all generations.

1. Baca means “weeping” which is generally associated with sorrow. Psalm 84:6 refers to the valley of Baca. This verse may or may not have referred to a geographical location, but certainly sorrow is a part of life. A time of grief is not a pleasant experience and we would not choose to walk this way. However, we are not exempt simply because we serve Christ. We will have sorrows, but God moves in the shadows as well as the bright spots of our lives. And because He is there, we can go through the darkest valleys.

God permits sorrow for a purpose. Even as we mourn, we can have faith because we are one with a God who feels our sorrow with us. The Bible indicates that if we allow God to teach us and help us through our grief, then a spiritual purpose can and will be found (1 Peter 5:10). Why does God permit us to go through sorrow? Explain some of the things we might learn through the experience of grief.

2. In the beginning, Job was unable to see a divine purpose for his suffering. Yet God was working out a plan. Job’s tears were blinding (Job 16:20) and he seemingly felt abandoned as he searched for God (Job 23:8-10).

Still, he was able to cope. In today’s terms, Job suffered from the “normal grieving process.” Does a Christian experience this, as well as an unbeliever? Job’s response to his circumstances gives us biblical evidence that individuals with faith in God go through the grieving process too.

Those who have made a study of the natural reactions to grief tell us that the process includes the emotions of shock, bewilderment or confusion, questions, guilt, and depression. A grieving person may not feel all of the emotions at once, but they will certainly feel some of them. Using the following Scriptures, identify the emotions that Job went through. Job 1:20; 7:4; 9:17; 10:15; 13:24; 23:10; 29:2-5

3. Job did not know the reason for his afflictions since he was unaware of the conversation between God and Satan. God told Satan that His servant Job was upright and there was none like him in the earth. But even though Job was not aware of God’s commendation, his faith remained in God. He did not know what the end would be, or that he would get back what he had lost. He was shocked by his friends’ accusations that he had sinned and that this was why he was suffering. Job was a believer. There are differences between the grief of an unbeliever and a believer. The unbeliever has no hope of the hereafter, but Job had hope and was able to come through as gold (Job 23:10). How did Job cope with the sorrow and grief he felt? See Job 19:25-26; 27:5-6; 33:28.

4. We read in Ecclesiastes 3:4,7 that there is a time for mourning and a time to keep silent. When the patriarch Jacob died, his family and friends mourned for him for seventy days. When Naomi lost her husband and two sons, she spoke of feeling desolate and empty. A professor of English, writing about a tragedy in her life told how after six months of grief she was still feeling physical effects from her sorrow. Each grief is different. Each person is different. The timing of the recovery process depends on the individual spirit as well as various external factors. The healing process may seem slow, but there are actions which will help hasten the healing. What are they?

5. In much of today's society, it seems there is a degree of impatience with continuing grief. Some are inclined merely to send a sympathy card and then hope that comfort will be supplied somehow. But as Christians we should actively minister to the grief of others. The Bible tells us to weep with them that weep (Romans 12:15). It also instructs us to bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ (Galatians 6:2). To support means to hold up and sustain the one who is suffering. What are some specific actions that we can take to help bear the load and assist the one who has a terminal illness, is bereaved, or is suffering from some other cause of grief?

6. Some people believe that any display of grief or tears is a sign of weakness. As a result, they stifle the feelings and bottle up unshed tears inside. This repression is not emotionally healthy, because severe problems can arise as a result of denying one's true feelings. Jesus wept at Lazarus' death (John 11:35). His heart was touched by the sight of the grieving sisters, Martha and Mary, when their brother died. He didn't keep His feelings all inside.

Some other Scriptures that indicate Jesus' sympathy are when He wept over Jerusalem, and His suffering in the Garden concerning the sins of the world. Isaiah 63:9 tells us, "In all their affliction he was afflicted, and the angel of his presence saved them: in his love and in his pity he redeemed them; and he bare them, and carried them all the days of old." How does Christ's experience and compassion for our troubles help us in our suffering?

7. No matter what depth of sorrow we are feeling, nor how long it may linger, sorrow is temporary. The worst of the pain will pass even in this life. For the Christian, there is always the assurance of God's continued hand over his life. Jesus told His disciples, "Ye shall weep and lament, but the world shall rejoice: and ye shall be sorrowful, but your sorrow shall be turned into joy" (John 16:20). What are some of the other promises in the Scriptures which offer strength and hope to the one who is experiencing a difficult place?

Scriptures used in this session:

Job 1:20; 7:4; 9:17; 10:15; 13:24; 16:20; 19:25-26; 23:10; 27:5-6; 29:2-5; 33:28; Psalm 84:6; Ecclesiastes 3:4,7; Isaiah 63:9; John 11:35; 16:20; Romans 12:15; Galatians 6:2; 1 Peter 5:10

Supplemental Scriptures:

Joshua 1:9; Psalms 30:5; 42:5; 55:22; 91:7; 142:4; Isaiah 40:31; 41:10; 43:2; Matthew 6:34; 2 Corinthians 4:17; Hebrews 4:15; 1 Peter 5:7

Suggested verse for memorization:

And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. - 2 Corinthians 12:9