

**God, I Don't Understand When I Suffer Loss!**  
*Multiple Texts*

It's the subject we don't even want to talk about. Even dreaming about the possibility wakes you up in a cold sweat. Loss... The death of a parent, a spouse, a son, a daughter. Don't even go there! Yet you can't pretend it away. Most of you here, you've experienced it in some way – or should I say more correctly you are experiencing it. Even this weekend many of you attended the funeral of a mother of four in her thirties! Loss. It's gut-wrenching. And with it comes a paradox. On the one hand it often leaves us angry at God, or questioning if there even is a God, yet at the very same time it leaves us with an inescapable need for a God that can deliver us when nothing and no one else can. A preservice slide posed the question: Can loss strengthen my relationship with God? My prayer is that our meditation today answers that question with a great big "YES!"

### I. Why do people have to endure loss?

How could a loving God allow...(fill in the blank)? Is that what God intended when he created the world? Go to the Bible – what do we find? The creation was good, it was perfect. God did not create Adam and Eve with the intent that they would die. But he didn't make them robots either. He allowed them the free will to follow him or to reject him. Just one command he gave – “don't eat from this one tree in the garden.” That was Adam and Eve's opportunity to show gratitude – Martin Luther even called it their worship. Their obedience demonstrated their appreciation and respect for the God that had given them this perfect world. The command was given with this caveat, “if you eat it you will surely die.” And they did. Only then did death effect humanity and did it ever. Open your Bible to Genesis 5 and you find a genealogy – one unique in all of the Bible. It starts by saying that God made Adam in his image, but then Adam had a child, Seth, in his image, and the lineage continued and over and over again, as the next descendant is named, the phrase ends with “and he died.” God was making a point – sin resulted in death for all. Is that still true today? Do we still sin? Do we still die? We can wonder why it happened that way. We can question why God allowed it. But it really doesn't do any good because it won't change the reality. You can't wish it away. You can't stop it by rejecting God. You can't stop it by practicing another religion or no religion. Death and loss are real, unavoidable. Sin – disobeying and disrespecting God is the why. And God says so elsewhere in the Bible too.

God shares it this way through his missionary Paul explaining to the new Christians in Rome. **Romans 6:23 The Wages of sin is death.** Wages – that's what a person earns. Simply put, God says if you sin, then you die. But the loss goes even beyond death – it affects all of creation. It's not just death, but all the things that lead up to death and all the things that cause pain and suffering here. Paul explains it this way in **Romans 8:20-21** <sup>20</sup> **For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it (God), in hope** <sup>21</sup> **that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God.**

So here we see that as a result of sin, God not only brings death, but allows for the decay and corruption of all the created world. Yikes! But right away we see he does so with a purpose. Right away, we have a hint of what good God can accomplish through loss. **in hope** <sup>21</sup> **that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God.** Just what do these words mean?

When Adam and Even sinned, God kept his Word – death followed in its wake. Yet, immediately he provides a solution, cure for death. **Romans 6:23 continues, “But the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”** Jesus is the ultimate solution to loss. He is the cure for death. He came to earth as one of us – where we sinned he did not. The debt we owe God, Jesus paid. The punishment we deserved, he endured. He promised us, **“The one who believes in me will live even though he dies.”** And he himself rises to prove he will keep his promise. That is the **“freedom and glory of the children of God”** he describes here. But what does it mean the God “subjects the creation to frustration” and what is the connection to our suffering and loss? God allows for natural disaster and sickness and pandemic and famine and mosquitoes and animals that bite and cancer – many of which lead to death, some which are just annoying. But God does have a purpose – his purpose is to prevent us from clinging to this world and this life and the things of this life. I don't think I have to tell you, that is one of the hardest lessons for us to learn. I mean is there anyone here who doesn't believe they will die? Anyone here believe that your friends and family members won't die? Anyone who believes your car and your house and your property and 401k will be there for you after you die? Yet when loss happens, it shocks, it saddens, it angers. But what is God wanting to do? It's a call to attention, a startling wake from slumber. A stark reminder: “You need a cure for death.” And the follow up: “That's what I, your God, have given you! Those who die believing in me are far better off. And you will be too when you die!”

But that leads to another question that I know Christians sometimes wrestle with. Well, if God allows this to remind us of the good things he has in store, if when a Christian friend or family member dies, regardless of age – they are far better off than they were here, is it wrong for me to be sad? It is wrong for me to grieve? I'm guessing no one ever told you that grieving is was wrong, but I know that the devil uses that one to steer us off course. “Oh, you say you believe in Jesus, you say you believe in heaven. You say your loved one is in a better place, but you must not really believe it, otherwise you wouldn't be so sad!”

### II. Is it OK to grieve?

To answer that question today, we'll look at the shortest verse in the Bible. We'll look at the verses surrounding it too to give us context. But see if you can answer that question, “Is it OK to grieve?” based on what I'm about to read. Jesus' good friend Lazarus had just died, and a few days later, Jesus arrived on the scene and was talking with Lazarus' sister Mary. **John 11:32-36** <sup>32</sup> **When Mary reached the place where Jesus was and saw him, she fell at his feet and said, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.”** <sup>33</sup> **When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come along with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in spirit and troubled.** <sup>34</sup> **“Where have you laid him?” he asked. “Come and see, Lord,” they replied.** <sup>35</sup> **Jesus wept.** <sup>36</sup> **Then the Jews said, “See how he loved him!”**

So is it OK to grieve? What two words answer that question? Jesus wept. That's grief, that's sadness, and by the way it's not the only time that Jesus sheds tears, not the only time when he is saddened. Why is it OK? Doesn't Jesus know Lazarus will go to heaven? Yes! Why does he grieve? Back to the beginning – this isn't what God intended! In spite of God providing the solution, the reality of loss and death is still a sad thing. It didn't have to be this way. Even Jesus acknowledges that with his tears. Loss is hard. Loss brings tears and that is OK. Even if the loss is temporary. We can see that from other life experiences too. A mom whose child goes off to college may very well still shed a tear even though she knows she'll see her son or daughter again. The Bible doesn't say don't grieve – period. Here's what it does say: **I Thessalonians 4:13-18 Brothers and sisters, we do not want you to be uninformed about those who sleep in death, so that you do not grieve like the rest of mankind, who have no hope. <sup>14</sup> For we believe that Jesus died and rose again, and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him. <sup>15</sup> According to the Lord's word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. <sup>16</sup> For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. <sup>17</sup> After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever. <sup>18</sup> Therefore encourage one another with these words.**

God doesn't say "don't grieve," just "don't grieve like those who have no hope..." Huge difference. Grief with no hope is still grief, right? Anyone here who has lost a loved one knows that. The sadness lasts, the tears catch us at times when we don't expect it. Just when we thought we took one step forward – two steps back. And while the traumatic memories may fade a bit, they never completely go away. Even grief with hope is still grief. And that's OK, in fact, it's a very Christian thing to grieve – to lament the results of sin – God does too. But that is a far cry from grief with no hope. Grief with no hope leads to utter despair. A person is left not only with loss, but distain for life – with no sense of purpose – with no moments of light and comfort – with nothing but bitterness and resentment.

So what is the difference? Christ – and the life after death that he brings. It all boils down to that. Christ means I will see my loved one who died in Christ again even though I miss them terribly now. Christ means God will be with me and see me through the times of doubt and anger. Christ means I will one day fully understand and have my "Why me?" "Why now?" questions answered. Christ means that one day I will be free from any bitterness, painful memories, tears, and anger. Christ means I will be delivered from this "bondage of decay!" That I still live with today. That is grief with hope. The confidence that the hole will one day be completely healed. But that still leaves us with a pretty big question. What about now?

### III. Will I ever be happy again while I'm here on earth?

Every Christian who knows heaven waits, who knows they will see their loved ones again, still struggle with the sadness of loss. It doesn't just go away when the funeral is done, or when one or two or ten years go by. Does God give healing before heaven? We can't say that God takes all of the feelings of loss and sadness away, but what we can say is that he does give blessings and purpose and even joy into our lives at the very same time that we are wrestling with the loss. I suppose I could go to **Romans 8:28 here – you know "in all things God works for the good..."** Yet he doesn't promise in that verse that we will be able to perceive or see it in a particular case at the time. What I'd like to do today is share one of many examples from the Bible of someone who suffered numerous and hurtful losses, yet still found blessings and purpose and joy even in the midst of the loss. It's Joseph, not Jesus' dad, but Joseph the son of Jacob, grandson of Abraham. Joseph was sold into slavery by his brothers as a child. Can you relate? Yah, neither can I. Joseph found purpose and happiness and blessing in the house of Potiphar when he became chief butler, then he was falsely accused of rape and thrown in prison. Can't say I've experienced that one either, yet God still blessed him and eventually brought him to a position of prominence in the most powerful country in the world where he saved thousands of people from multiple countries from starvation, and where eventually he was reunited with his father and his brothers. But what I really want to focus on was what happened when his father died. His brothers were worried – "Oh no! Here comes the payback!" It would have been well deserved, some of the brothers had wanted to kill him all those years ago. Listen to what he says. **Genesis 50:14-20 After burying his father, Joseph returned to Egypt, together with his brothers and all the others who had gone with him to bury his father. <sup>15</sup> When Joseph's brothers saw that their father was dead, they said, "What if Joseph holds a grudge against us and pays us back for all the wrongs we did to him?" <sup>16</sup> So they sent word to Joseph, saying, "Your father left these instructions before he died: <sup>17</sup> 'This is what you are to say to Joseph: I ask you to forgive your brothers the sins and the wrongs they committed in treating you so badly.' Now please forgive the sins of the servants of the God of your father." When their message came to him, Joseph wept. <sup>18</sup> His brothers then came and threw themselves down before him. "We are your slaves," they said. <sup>19</sup> But Joseph said to them, "Don't be afraid. Am I in the place of God? <sup>20</sup> You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives.**

God use Joseph's life experience, even including his loss, to teach Joseph patience, to strengthen his trust in God, and to be a blessing to those around him. Let me suggest that this is still how God brings joy and purpose and maturity to us today amidst loss, through our bond with him and our service to others. I can't talk about this subject without sharing the story of the Widows and Widowers group that sprung up here at our congregation and with other congregations these past few years. As those who had experienced loss reached out to others who had experienced loss, it brought them joy and purpose, as they met together, they reached out further to help and serve even more – in other words, their serving others did as much for their healing as others reaching out to help them! Yes – you can experience happiness again, even here on earth. Will the pain ever completely go away? Not until heaven, but let me assure you, God hasn't abandoned you, he still wants to bless you even before he calls you home!

God, I don't understand when I experience loss! Why do we endure it? As the result of sin, but also to remind us of the cure. Is it OK to grieve? Yes, it's Christian to grieve – but grieve with the hope, the confidence that your loss is temporary. Will I ever be happy? Yes, the pain will never completely subside here, but God will bless you as you are a blessing to others. AMEN.