

# 1. Loss is Everywhere

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Loss comes in many forms: a car accident that takes the life of a close friend, divorce in the family, college disappointments, friendships that dissolve because of conflict or long-distance moves, tragic school shootings, broken engagements, or job losses—just to name a few. Whatever way loss delivers grief to the doorstep of our hearts; the God of all comfort stands ready to bring comfort. We are not the first to endure the unbearable pain we know of as grief. Therefore, we can find comfort in knowing how God cares for us in times of sorrow.

## **THE ORIGIN OF GRIEF**

Before sin entered the Garden of Eden, all was well and good. There was no loss, pain, grief, or death. Sadly, this heaven-on-earth didn't last long. The great deceiver, the devil, entered human experience and tempted Adam and Eve to doubt the goodness of God and the

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integrity of His Word, and they fell into his trap (Gen. 3:1-7).

The first man and woman betrayed God and, as a result, peaceful fellowship with their Creator turned to animosity. Excessive work, conflict, death, and grief entered their world and ours—all because of sin. And not one of us is exempt from its reach, as Job 5:7 testifies, 'man is born for trouble as sparks fly upward.' Adam's sin spread to all men and, therefore, just as sure as sparks rise out of a campfire, so every one of us suffers loss. Therefore, we should not be 'surprised at the fiery ordeal' when it comes (1 Pet. 4:12). Grief is part of everyday existence, but God abounds in grace and kindness toward us.

Early on, God sacrificed an animal for Adam and Eve to make a covering for their sin. Then He promised to send one man, born of a woman, to redeem sinners and deal a death blow to the devil (Gen. 3:14-15). The Bible then traces the progress and fulfillment of this promise throughout its pages. In God's perfect timing and manner, He sent this man—His one and only Son—into the world to live a sinless life and die a sinner's death in our place (Heb. 2:14-15). Jesus never sinned, but He died the death that every sinner deserves

and rose from the grave on the third day. As a result, all who now turn to Him in humble, repentant faith receive the gracious gift of righteousness (Rom. 5:17; 2 Cor. 5:21). One day in the future, Jesus, the king of Kings will return to right all wrongs and put an end to our suffering by escorting us into God's eternal presence. Until then, the Word of God assures us of His faithful comfort.

### **THERE IS COMFORT IN CHRIST**

The gospel portion of the Old Testament book of Isaiah begins with these words: "Comfort, O comfort My people," says your God' (Isa. 40:1). Over the course of church history, Isaiah earned the nickname 'the evangelical prophet' because of his emphasis on the good news of the coming Messiah—the hope and strong comfort of Israel. Regarding this verse, Warren Wiersbe explains, 'The English word "comfort" comes from two Latin words that together mean "with strength."' When Isaiah says, "Be comforted!" it is not a word of pity but of power. God's comfort does not weaken us; it strengthens us. God is not indulging us but empowering us.'<sup>1</sup>

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1 Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Comforted* (Wheaton, IL: Scripture Press, 1992), 7.

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Isaiah grounds this hope in God's relationship to Israel as His people: "'Comfort *My* people,'" says *your* God.' (Emphasis added). Even though His people's sin was worthy of a double portion of divine discipline, God would never turn His back on them. Instead, He would fulfill the covenant that He made with them. Later, through the mouth of Jeremiah, God again dispensed hope during Israel's pain: "'For I know the plans that I have for you,'" declares the Lord, "plans for welfare and not for calamity to give you a future and a hope'" (Jer. 29:11). Both prophets provided Messiah-centered comfort to their hearers by turning their focus away from their past, and from their present, toward the future hope of the promised kingdom.

Since we live *after* the cross of Calvary, we may refer to this as *Christ-centered comfort*, but the nature of the comfort God offers to us is much the same. God's comfort comes from His promise to those who believe in Christ, that the glory He will one day share with us far outweighs our present suffering (Phil. 1:6; Rom. 8:18).

The gospel offers Christ-centered hope that enables us to face the reality of death head-on. It holds forth the gift of eternal life which Jesus

purchased with His own blood. Joni Eareckson Tada and Steve Estes write in their book *When God Weeps*:

Earth's pain keeps crushing our hopes, reminding us this world can never satisfy; only heaven can. And every time we begin to nestle too comfortably on this planet, God cracks open the locks of the dam to allow an ice-cold splash of suffering to wake us from our spiritual slumber.<sup>2</sup>

Therefore, we must not waste these precious and painful occasions, which open the door to receiving God's mercy and seeing the fruit of the gospel in our hearts and the hearts of others.

## **THE GOAL OF THIS BOOK**

My aim is to point you to the only lasting comfort—the comfort that is rooted in the gospel and the relational work of the one God who exists in three persons. God the Father pays attention to you in the wake of whatever causes your pain, and He shows His love in the many ways He cares for you (Matt. 6:32). Jesus Christ is the gentle and humble Son of God (Matt. 11:29), who turns His compassionate

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2 Joni Eareckson Tada and Steve Estes, *When God Weeps* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1997), 202.

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heart toward you (Matt. 9:36). He is the suffering Savior who experienced unimaginable grief throughout His life and, ultimately, during the last days leading up to His sacrificial death on your behalf (Isa. 53:3-12). The Father and the Son commissioned and sent the Holy Spirit to be your comforter, who applies the healing words of Scripture to your aching heart (John 14:16).

A tender scene from J. R. R. Tolkien's *The Return of the King* provides a fitting conclusion to this chapter and a transition to the rest of this book. To comfort and instruct Pippin, whose mind was being overtaken by fear of losing his best friend, Aragorn the king says, "His grief he will not forget; but it will not darken his heart, it will teach him wisdom."<sup>3</sup> Some losses change us forever; we never forget them for as long as we live. Yet grief can be our teacher if we look to our hope in Christ, and humbly let it do its God-appointed work in us.

### MAIN POINT

*Grief is part of living in our broken world, but  
God's comfort is readily available to us  
through Jesus.*

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3 J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Return of the King* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1955, ren. 1983), 145.

## **QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION**

- What kinds of losses have you experienced in your life? Which has been the most difficult for you to accept?
- What does it mean to think of comfort being rooted in the gospel?
- How might seeing comfort this way help you grow in your relationship with the Lord?