

The Direction of Grief: Remembering

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The direction of grief moves toward restoration. Yes, towards restoration. In Jeremiah 31, a passage about full restoration, God deliberately recognized loss first and did not overlook it. This passage is not just about hope alone, but it acknowledges the tension that life has been taken and it will be restored. Jeremiah shows us that restoration begins from a place of scattering.

The children of Israel are either on their way into exile or already in exile when they received this message about full restoration. Grief starts in such an awkward place; a disorganized, often confusing place. Grief is provoked by loss. From the death of a loved one to the loss of a dream; loss is varied in its experience. It often comes as a surprise; someone described it as a “gasp,” where your breath is knocked out of you, or, a loss known by its gnawing, relentless ache that cannot be ignored or identified. Confrontation with death creates disillusionment and disorientation, a scattering. Even if you see death coming from a distance there is still a gasp when it arrives. Life is changed and grief gives voice to that change. Healing begins from a place of scattering and grief begins with recognized loss.

By entering into your loss, you become more human, more available to God. Grief blows into flames the embers of hope for life without leaving unacknowledged the pain of where you are now. Grief does not act like you should be somewhere you are not, like you need to get over your mourning. It does not demand that you feel happy or say that you should replace/alter your sadness, rather it does the opposite; it acknowledges your loss, as a necessary part in healing. Loss reminds you this is not your home and grief helps you endure it and therein lays its value. It does not let up or answer the why's and how's which often would suffice our understanding; but rather grief helps you remain in a place of waiting for an answer only God can offer you.

The process of grieving opens you up to a more meaningful encounter with God. It is in the rawness of this place that God becomes not Someone who you just meet on Sunday, and Someone that I only use to help me feel better about my sin with, but I begin to ache over larger things with God. My eyes were focused on small things that I could control and sorrow has helped me see that I do not trust a big God who allows such difficulty to happen.

As backwards as it sounds, grief ushers us into a meaningful encounter with God. The direction is not an answer to the pain we thought we wanted. God meets us in the grief with Himself. This meaningful encounter with God centers on receiving His kindness in the midst of the tension of *hope* and *loss* together. In the Message, Jeremiah 31:1-6 states clearly that, "Israel, out looking for rest met God out looking for them!" Israel would be coming from exile through the wilderness, loss, looking for God; *met* God out looking for them, hope. The hope is not an answer or even a better life, but it is that God is out looking for you and the grief is the path into the wilderness. This is reminiscent of the prodigal coming home finding his father running to meet him with a robe and a ring of sonship.

As we begin to trust our grief, we do not like where it takes us into such deep tension. We find that sorrow is on the opposing team of death; in fact it is grief that speaks the truth most clearly that death is not suppose to be a part of this life. Death is not just a cycle of life but rather evidence that something truly is wrong. When your sorrow begins to feel the injustice of death; you are also opening up to a hope for life that can only be answered by God. It is engaging this larger difficulty with Christian grief that we listen to the cadence of home, the drumbeat of heaven. A whisper, an echo "I am the one who will make this right, I will be your God and you will be my people." Your grief matters and in the tension of hope and loss, you begin to hear cadences of home – our final home. The familiar ring is the voice of God "out looking for you." Sorrow opens you to the dual reality of real loss of life and real longing for life. It does not disguise it. Sorrow helps us remember God's name where we have forgotten Him; good and just.

It is difficult to believe that grief can journey through all of that confusion to help find rest. What I am finding is that grief helps me remember who I have forgotten and that I long for Him to meet me in the middle of the sorrow. Grief helps me to quit striving so much to figure it out and simply be sad for my loss and long for God to make it right again. Grief exposes the tension of this life, and faith in Christ creates in you the imagination for restoration.

Hear what Roger Edwards wrote as he defined Christian grief:

there is just one honest way to respond to loss. That way is to grieve. But, in order for it to take us to a good place, it must be a particular kind of grief; it must be Christian grief. It is to face the truth about death while maintaining a hope for life. This kind of grief allows the coldness of death, and the longing for life to co-mingle inside the heart. It is a painful coexistence, pulling and tearing, but ultimately healing.

Ache mingled with hope, nothing less. We grieve the loss of a loved one, we continue to grieve because we are reminded about how much we want Jesus to come and make it right. It is this tension that makes room for laughter, for healing, and for restoration. Grief creates space for restoration.

Laughter is a great biblical picture of restoration. This laughter does not forget grief or sorrow but flows from it and is strengthened by it. God's laughter at death is restoration, it is the resurrection of Christ; it is healing. As we struggle to agree with God, death that at the very beginning seemed so powerful and ominous, now seems lighter. Laughter is really seeing beyond the difficulty without denying the difficulty. This is why we may take sin seriously and not be overwhelmed by it and alone in it. We see restoration and it fills us with joy. This joy must be birthed from where you are; those eyes to see come from loss. Then we say with St. Paul: "oh, death where is your victory, where is your sting?" Paul saw beyond death, Paul saw restoration the same restoration Jeremiah was envisioning.

Laughter or restoration is ultimately the direction of grief. A New Testament picture of this is seen in Hebrews 12:2, where it says: "Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God." The joy set before him is the ultimate restoration He was aiming for; that was his joy. All the while scorning the shame of the cross or death, *hope* and *loss* – this type of laughter was not a giggle but one of severe confidence. Scorning its shame – Jesus endured the shame of death believing that the curse of death would be broken, in other words grief that leads to restoration. This is the life of Christ, a man of many sorrows that leads us all too ultimate restoration. Christ saw beyond the difficulty and did not deny the difficulty. And He sat at the right hand of God the Father.

CONCLUSION

Though seemingly an odd beginning to restoration; grief is seen as an important aspect of remembering God. The backwardness of the gospel finds itself at work in our sorrow and memory; it is through your grief healing is encountered. John Donne, the poet, restated what St. Paul said but a little differently, so let these words encourage you:

Death, be not proud, though some have called thee Mighty and dreadful,
for thou art not so;.... One short sleep past, we wake eternally, And Death
shall be no more ; Death, thou shalt die. Oh what a glorious day as we
remember the resurrection of our Lord and pray together, "Come quickly,
Lord Jesus, come quickly."

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