

GRIEF

Joice gave me a small plaque which says, "Happiness is being married to your best friend." It stands alone in my study now and reminds me that happiness through marriage is not eternal, but love is. Even with it, however, we grieve.

Grieving, I am told, is a process that takes "time." I have a lot of time right now, so grieving comes often, without warning. On the one hand, because I am grieving, it may not be the best time for me to write about it—it will be far too emotional. On the other hand, because I feel it so deeply, I may be more capable of expressing it now.

At one time or another, we all have grief. We have that anguish and pain that we call "heartache," and it is difficult to describe. It is impossible to quantify, although we may call it "deep" or "deep-seated" because it is so hard to locate. It is extreme and pressing, profound and even unfathomable—there are many words and expressions that we search for to get the feeling across. We find it in our heart, mind, emotions and words. Grief turns up everywhere.

And in the end, I resort to my feelings: I cry to try and relieve my grief. I can (and do) read books and Scripture about grief, but they often seem to express someone else's grief, not mine. Mine is personal and no one has had it, or ever will. People understand, to some extent, my grief because many have had it themselves. They want to help console me and they offer words of encouragement and support. For some reason, often when they do, I feel my pain more deeply.

My wife Joice would not like to see me like this: she would remind me of how faithful God has been to us, how He knew the path our lives would take from beginning to end. She would be strong when I am weak, accepting God's pain and demonstrating it in her prayers and attitude. When I think of her like that, it helps me, but it does not fill the emptiness now in my life.

It is now several weeks since she died and went to heaven. They tell me it will "get easier," as time goes on. I hope that is true. However, recently I tried to clean out her desk, but after a few moments, I was overcome. The same thing happened when Karol, our daughter, came to clean out Joice's personal items in the bathroom. I had asked her to, but when she saw my anguish, she said "Maybe you had better not watch." I couldn't—it was like I was throwing part of her away. So, it hasn't gotten "easier" in the sense of my loss, and I am told that grief is like that.

However, I do not want to grieve as one who has no hope, nor do I wish to pray for her return. She is with God, worshipping in heaven, with a new body. I am so thankful for that—it helps me overcome some aspects of my grief.

When Jesus visited Mary and Martha after their brother Lazarus died, He felt their grief, and He wept in sorrow. In one sense, He did not need to grieve about Lazarus because He was about to raise him from the dead. Nevertheless, He did grieve with the sisters. Reading this story, I know that Jesus understands my grief, as His compassion in John 11 so clearly shows. He was, in fact, "despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief." (Isaiah 53.3)

Jesus, however, went further than simply showing compassion and grief—He gave us a valuable lesson. His raising of Lazarus teaches us that death is not eternal for those who believe in Him. He is the “good Shepherd,” the one who died for His sheep and who knows His voice. When He said “Lazarus, come out,” the resurrected Lazarus obeyed His voice, and the power of His command overcame the power of death by giving Lazarus a new body.

When Jesus was resurrected from the dead and appeared to His disciples, all four of the Gospels tell us about it. He blessed the disciples with peace, and He showed them His hands and feet to show that He was “real.” Although He had been “dead” only three days (actually, about 36 hours), His wounds were now healed, and His body bore only scars. That is a clear indication that our resurrected bodies will be healed as well, even if scars remain.

Jesus even scolded His disciples because they did not believe those who had seen and reported Him alive. I pray that He will not have to scold me. He took a walk along the road from Jerusalem to Emmaus with two disciples who were puzzled about what had happened to Him and He gave them an Old Testament summary about the Messiah. Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized Jesus for who He was. Then Jesus suddenly disappeared—He had been with them long enough.

I pray that, even in grief, my eyes will be opened to the promise of God that, if we believe in Jesus, even if we die physically, we shall live eternally. That is a fantastic promise, and we should rejoice and look forward to it.

Karl Franklin