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### Dealing With Grief

There is a lot of grief and pain and suffering in the world. Just think of the seemingly endless obituary columns in your local newspaper. Consider the photos of grief-stricken relatives of those whose lives are suddenly lost in airplane crashes or disasters at sea. Not to mention the pain experienced by those who must hear the prognosis of a doctor, “ We’ve tried everything but can do no more”.

There are those who would cover up the pain of death or the sorrow of grievous disappointments. Some would try it with well-meaning platitudes , though these can often sound hollow to those grieving: “ *In time the pain will go away*” or, “ *Tomorrow is another day and the sun is sure to come up*”.

There are others who have a fatalistic attitude towards life and death. The Greek philosopher Pythagoras, perhaps better known for his mathematical genius ( think of the Pythagorean theorem) than his philosophy wrote:

*Whatever sorrow the fate of the gods may here send us,  
Bear, whatever may strike you, with patience unmurmuring ;  
To relieve it, so far as you can is permitted,  
But reflect that not much misfortune has Fate given to the good.*

A fatalistic attitude towards events,including tragedy is seen by others as “ *the only stand to take in face of the inevitable.*”<sup>1</sup>

Yet I don’t think there are many who would go along with the thought of Epictetus, another ancient Greek who said,

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<sup>1</sup> William Edward Dubois, historian, philosopher and co-founder of the NAACP

If we merely train ourselves in wishing things to happen as they do, instead of expecting them to happen as we wish, then our lives will go smoothly”<sup>2</sup>

He was of the opinion that vigorous training in philosophy would enable people *to wish things to happen as they do*. We’d be inclined to say, “That’s mere *wishful* thinking!”

For “Grief”, wrote the Christian counselor Jay Adams ,

*May be called a life-shaking sorrow over loss. It tears life to shreds; it shakes one from top to bottom. It pulls a person loose so that he comes apart at the seams. It can indeed be a life-shattering loss.* <sup>3</sup>

Those who are said to grieve over death are called “ bereaved.” The word “reave” means to commit ravages; to forcibly deprive or take by force.” <sup>4</sup>

There are those who see one’s thoughts, reactions, feelings in bereavement as an illness. It is so, grief can be severely painful and affect a person’s ability to carry on one’s normal every-day activities. Doctors may prescribe some sedative or mood-uplifting medication to get a person “back on track” so to speak.

Doctors and grief counsellors will tell you that grief caused by death is more than a crisis; it is a process and some see as many as ten stages involved in that process. In fact the acute stage may last for three months!

The bible is clear that death, and consequently, grief and pain, came into the world because of sin. Mankind’s sin, back there in what was known as “The Garden of Eden” or “Paradise”. There our first parents, Adam and Eve

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<sup>2</sup> The Enchiridion, 8

<sup>3</sup> Jay Adams, quoted in Donal Howard Christians Grieve Too, p. 9

<sup>4</sup> Adams, p. 9

rebelled against God's express command not to eat from "The tree of the knowledge of good and evil" "For " said the Lord God, " When you eat of it you will surely die."

There will be many today who hold to this view, "If this happened, long, long ago it has nothing to do with me" Yet God says differently. His Word makes it clear that we were all "in Adam" for he was the head of the human race. In Paul's letter to the church at Rome he wrote, -

*Therefore just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way, death came to all people, because all sinned.....*

Death and grief and pain has many 'cousins'. Often guilt is associated also for Christians. Anger lies close at hand, as does bewilderment.

The bible relates the honest feelings of grief experienced by people like Jacob and King David. In Psalm 6:7 the latter says, " *My eyes grow weak with sorrow; they fail because of my foes.*" And in Psalm 31:10 David writes, " *My life is consumed by anguish and my years by groaning; my strength fails because of my affliction.* "

We do well to remember that affliction, and sorrow is controlled by God who in His providence doesn't only send sunshine, and rain in times of drought, fruitful years to farmers and child-bearing mothers. He can send pain, and consequently, sorrow. Yes, sometimes as punishment as when He sent disaster and death on Israel because of their stubborn sin against Him. Or, to cause people to cast their burdens on Him and to look to Him for comfort in all of life's happenings.

It is not that God Almighty is careless, and unmindful of the pain, and suffering of people. Once, long ago, His nation Israel was in slavery in Egypt. But then the LORD came to Moses, revealing something of his power and holiness to him from out of what appeared to be a burning bush.

He told Moses that he had *seen the misery and heard the crying of His people in Egypt* “ because of their slave drivers.” God said, “ *And I am concerned about their suffering*” ( Exodus 3: 7b).

God is in fact a God of compassion who can and will surely comfort those who grieve. The sad thing is that those who do not know Him, and so are not united to Him by a true faith, have no real hope or comfort. It’s a tragedy that is worse than death. The disaster of sin, and not knowing, not trusting in this God who does not only dry tears and give relief to those who grieve and suffer. But who *gives life, even eternal life* in the prospect of heaven and the resurrection of the dead.

The bible is clear that eternal life and joy begins not only some day, some year, “beyond the pale” and when Christ returns. For that is the culmination, or ‘graduation’ if you like for those who put their trust and hope in God today. Today, even in the midst of sorrow, pain, misery, hatred of others Christians are often found singing! Even when king David wrote about that anguish and his years of groaning he ends his psalm with, “ *The Lord has shown his wonderful love to me*” and “ *Be strong and take heart, all you who hope in the Lord.*” ( Ps. 31: 21, 24).

We may do so, you and I and all who believe in the knowledge that Jesus Christ suffered the most intense agony and pain one can ever imagine. It is not for nothing that He Son of God *and* Son of Man is called “ *A man of sorrows familiar with suffering,*” by the prophet Isaiah, long before Jesus was born. <sup>5</sup>

His death on Calvary’s cross “Means now my life indeed.” Why? Because He has paid the price for man’s horrible fall into sin. He satisfied God’s demand that “*the soul which sins must die.*” ( Ezekiel 18:20) He was willing to be our substitute though He, Himself, did no wrong, ever!

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<sup>5</sup> In Isaiah 53: 3

Is there mourning, suffering, pain and grief, also among Christians? Yes among Christians who today are persecuted and ( as happened recently) are thrown overboard and drowned by their enemies? Christ Himself said, “ Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted” ( Matthew 5:4).

Is there sorrow as a result of the pain you and I experience because we did wrong? Let us repent of that wrong, for the bible says, “ *Godly sorrow bearings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death.*” ( 2 Corinthians 7:10).

Are you in the midst of grief and pain? Right now, and are your eyes filled with tears? Go to God in prayer and like David and ask the Lord to put your tears in “*His bottle,*” or on “*His scroll*”. That He who is mighty to save may look to you and your sorrow and grant relief. True and ultimately, lasting relief in the knowledge that He cares, and He will comfort In Jesus Christ, who says,

*“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.”* ( Matthew 11: 28).

Amen, and may the Lord of life be with you.