

***God's Way
for Us to
Cope with
Loss, Sorrow
and Grief***

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Preface

Several years ago, it was my good fortune to bump into sister Marilyn LaStrape from afar, though not in person. Back in 2003, she started writing for *Gospel Gazette Online*, of which I'm the Editor and the Publisher. A couple of years ago, sister Marilyn also began writing for *The Voice of Truth International* magazine, of which I'm one of the editors.

Aside from the 15 years of gracing us with her articles for these two publications, Marilyn has become a personal friend as well as being a sister in Christ. My late wife Bonnie and I invited sister LaStrape into our home a few years ago following the death of her beloved husband Joseph. It was an honor and a pleasure to host her as our honored guest. As it turned out, she stayed beyond her intention because icy, wintery weather stretching from Dallas, Texas to Memphis, Tennessee shut down the airlines for several days. We were delighted to keep her as long as we could. She traveled with us to speaking appointments in Mississippi and was well received.

The particular reason for having sister Marilyn come our way was to get her out of town and comfort her somewhat over the loss of her husband. Since the death of my darling wife Bonnie, Marilyn has more than repaid any kindness that we extend-



ed to her. She helped me survive. We developed a close friendship, and even while Bonnie was yet alive, I musingly referred to her as my “girlfriend.”

Marilyn LaStrape has been an elder’s wife for many years, both when she and her husband lived in California and after they moved to Texas. Her children, too, pursue their earnest religious convictions. One son is a deacon, and one son was a youth minister. Sister LaStrape has also written for other magazines besides those mentioned already.

Marilyn LaStrape invests herself in Christian service with other Christians from her local congregation. Surely, Christianity is a way of life for Marilyn, her family and those over whom she may have some influence. Recently, she even traveled to New Zealand by invitation to be the keynote speaker for the 21st Annual Ladies’ Challenge. She’ll go anywhere and wherever she can to be of service to our Lord. Her writings take her further and in more diverse directions than to which she could possibly travel.

Upon losing Bonnie, I resisted all of the self-help literature and other well-meaning attention meant to assuage my grief. Marilyn, however, began a series of articles on “Grief,” which I was obliged to proof, edit and layout for publication. Hence, reluctantly and unplanned on my part, she provided some of what I needed to hear about my grief. Sister LaStrape had been teaching a ladies’ Bible class series on loss, sorrow and grief; these classes addressed eight personal significant losses. With a little encouragement, her class material turned into a series of articles. Now, the series of articles has become this brief treatise, this little book. We are happy to make this available for whatever good it may provide to those experiencing grief.

Louis Rushmore
January 20, 2018

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Chapter 1:

The God of All Comfort

The God of All Comfort

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our tribulation [affliction], so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any tribulation, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God” (2 Corinthians 1:3-4). God has provided for us to be comforted in our grief.

- God has provided us with family and friends, who are willing and anxious to console us, support us, reassure us and love us. “Bear one another’s burdens and so fulfill the law of Christ” (Galatians 6:2).
- God has in His infinite wisdom and mercy provided us with time. We can be healed somewhat from the deep wound we felt initially. In the days, weeks, months and years that follow this most significant loss, time helps us to recover from the shock and pain. “A time to weep... a time to mourn” (Ecclesiastes 3:4).
- God is our supreme source of comfort. He calls upon us to find our strength, hope and refuge in Him during our tragic time of need. “He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their sorrows” (Psalm 147:3).

Physical death became a part of the human condition in the Garden of Eden. The Bible is the only source that we have that tells us what death is and why it comes to all of us. Death is the great equalizer; it happens every day all over the world. However, most of

the time, death does not get our attention until it knocks at our door!

Prayer Is Our Lifeline

Prayer is the beginning of our recovery from loss, sorrow and grief. We must be in constant, fervent and submissive prayer to God every day and every night! “In my distress I called upon the LORD, and cried out to my God; He heard my voice from His temple, and my cry came before Him, to His ears” (Psalm 18:6).

Grief Defined

Grief is intense suffering caused by severe and deeply felt loss. It is acute sorrow, deep distress and profound sadness, and grief is a process that takes a long time! It is a process that must be dealt with in a mentally healthy way, if we are to have any hope of recovery and healing.

To be deprived of a loved one by reason of death is bereavement. This brings the feelings of loss, sorrow and grief. The Bible has much to say about death and dying as well as the subsequent bereavement. In Genesis 23:1-4, it says, “Sarah lived one hundred and twenty-seven years; these were the years of the life of Sarah. So Sarah died in Hebron in the land of Canaan, and Abraham came to mourn for Sarah and to weep for her. Then Abraham stood up from his dead, and spoke to the sons of Heth, saying, ‘I am a foreigner and a visitor among you. Give me property for a burial place among you, that I may bury my dead out of my sight.’”

Significant Faces of Loss

- Death of a spouse
- Death of a parent
- Death of a sibling
- Death of a child
- Death of a grandparent
- Death of a grandchild
- Death of a best friend

Everybody's grief is different from ours. Some factors that impact our response to the loss are:

- a sudden death
- a violent death
- an unexpected death
- an anticipated death
- our age
- our gender
- our personality
- our faith/belief system
- who it was who died
- the number of times we have already experienced someone's death

Grief is not dictated by rules or absolutes. Each person is unique, so our grief is uniquely our own. ***Grief cannot be rushed by you, and most definitely not by anyone else! Grief cannot be circumvented—the only way out is through!*** When you are overwhelmed and overcome with the pain of your loss—lean into it and allow your pain to take its course. This is so needed in a healthy grieving process. “God is the source of all comfort. The comfort that comes from Him is not a narcotic nor is it a pain killer. God's comfort strengthens, aids, encourages, refreshes, and consoles. God's comfort gives us courage to bear our crosses of sorrow and sustains us in times of pain and grief” (Pack, 1).

“For whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through the **patience and comfort** of the Scriptures might have hope. Now may the God of **patience and comfort** grant you to be likeminded toward one another, according to Christ Jesus, that you may with one mind and one mouth glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Romans 15:4-6). We cannot and we will not find comfort in God and His Word **unless** and **until** we understand and believe what He can do! We must gratefully accept the comfort of God and permit Him to bring comfort into our sadness.

“Show me a sign for good, that those who hate me may see it and be ashamed, because You, O LORD, have **helped me and comforted me**” (Psalm 86:17). “In the multitude of my anxieties within me, Your **comforts** delight my soul” (Psalm 94:19). “Sometimes God changes the course of our lives so that we may better serve Him. Sometimes we sustain life-altering losses that are so profound and so tragic that it seems we could never recover” (Criswell, 287).

Observed loss, sorrow and grief DOES NOT EQUAL **experienced** loss, sorrow and grief! “Resist him [the devil], **steadfast** in the faith, **knowing** that the same sufferings are **experienced** by your brotherhood in the world. But, may the God of all grace who called us to His eternal glory by Christ Jesus, **after you have suffered a while**, perfect, establish, strengthen and settle you” (1 Peter 5:9-10).

God’s way for us to cope with loss, sorrow and grief is ultimately the only way that leads to true recovery and healing. To cope means to struggle with some degree of success. It means to face and deal with responsibilities and problems calmly and adequately. Perhaps this single word – “**COPE**” – best describes the healthy mental state that the new reality demands. This new reality must be comprised of daily, fervent and expectant prayer. Prayer must be coupled with a continuous reading, meditating and obeying of God’s Word. These are His answers that assure us achievement to face and accept a new and a different life following a significant personal death.

Thought & Discussion Questions

1. Why must humanity face physical death?
2. Discuss why prayer is one’s lifeline.
3. Define grief in your own words.
4. Coping with loss and grief by God’s design are vital to healthy recovery and healing. Why?
5. How is God described as the God of all comfort?

Chapter 2: What to Say or Not Say, What to Do or Not Do with a Grieving Person

What to Say to a Grieving Person

“A man has joy by the answer of his mouth, and a word spoken in its time, how good it is!” (Proverbs 15:23). “A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in settings of silver” (Proverbs 25:11).

Do’s

- I’m praying for you; you are in my thoughts and prayers.
- I’m here for you in whatever way you need me.
- It’s good to see you, and you are looking good.
- I’m so sorry; I can’t imagine the pain of your loss.
- How do you feel? What can I do to help you right now?
- Can I pick up some groceries for you?
- I’m available to help you with cleaning, errands, laundry, cooking, etc.
- Please call me if and when you are ready to talk.
- This is all about you and your consolation.

Dont's

- I know exactly how you feel.
- How are you doing? Are you OK?
- They are out of their suffering; they are in a better place.
- It was God's will.
- Something good will come out of this.
- It's time for you to move on with your life; it's been 3 months.
- You've got to be strong.
- They are looking down on you and smiling.
- Time heals all wounds.
- God needed another angel.
- You have two other children. Why don't you focus on them?
- Hope you don't wait too long to get married again.
- Perhaps we will never understand.
- We all need to be reminded of how fragile human life is.

What to Say to Someone Who Has Lost a Loved One

- Acknowledge the situation.
- Express your concern.
- Be genuine in your communication and don't hide your feelings.
- Offer your support.
- Ask how he or she feels and don't assume you know how the bereaved person feels on any given day (American Cancer Society, qtd. in *Peer to Peer*, 44-45).

What to Do for a Grieving Person

“Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another” (Romans 12:10).

Do's

- ALWAYS call before any visit.
- Give lots of hugs and smiles.
- Send cards and notes of sympathy and encouragement.
- Treat them to breakfast, brunch, lunch, dinner.
- Be a caring, a listening and a helpful presence.
- Cry with them, reminisce with them and laugh with them.
- Go to a movie, play a game, go for a walk, go shopping.
- Be super sensitive to their feelings; follow their lead.
- Be consistent with your help. Be available, ready and willing to assist if you said you would.
- “Silent listening,” a touch, a hug, hold their hand, rub their back (only if they are ok with any of these physical gestures of love and comfort).
- Stay with them for the long haul—from raw agony to sweet sadness.

Dont's

- Don't spend your money on things without asking, unless you are **sure** the items will be used.
- Don't give them anything you only **think** they will need or want.
- Don't start giving them updates on your family during your sympathy call/visit.
- Don't try to be a “director” or a “fixer” in what you say.
- Don't force yourself on them; keep visits and phone calls short.

- Don't try to smooth over their emotions.

Life Beyond Loss

- Each loss is as unique as the individual relationship we had with the person who died.
- When we lose a parent, we lose our past. When we lose a spouse, we lose our present. When we lose a child, we lose a future.
- Each of us has his own unique personality and his own individual ways of coping. Some people are better able to cope than others. We all cope in different ways with a crisis (Doka).

Perhaps one of the biggest reasons that we as a society struggle so much with death is because not many of us want to *think* about it, not to mention *talk* about it. However, everybody needs to talk about it because it is as natural as breathing. It happens every day every few seconds around the world. **In our attempts to know what to say and what to do, less is more. Particularly if the “right words” are not easily expressed, to be wisely silent is always best.** A strong, calming presence or a genuine look of love speaks volumes! To be a **welcomed source of comfort and caring**, it is best to remember the words of our Lord when He said, “And just as you want men to do to you, you also do to them likewise” (Luke 6:31).

Thought & Discussion Questions

1. Discuss how words are helpful only when genuinely expressed.
2. If one doesn't know what to say or how to say it—say nothing. Why?
3. Why is it most important to be very specific in one's offers to render any kind of help? Should a person wait for a response? Should you indicate you will be in touch within a few days?
4. Why must a person be ready if or when his or her assistance is requested? What if you cannot be there?
5. Why is Matthew 7:12 the “Golden Rule” of Scripture and very important in interactions with someone who is grieving?

Chapter 3:

The Loss of a Parent

It has been noted that when we lose a parent, we lose our past. Most of us expect to outlive our parents. How did we feel when that expectation became a reality? That was the first question that this writer's husband asked when my mother died. "How do you feel?" My reply was, "I don't know." We remained in total silence for quite a while.

Perhaps your parents lived long and fulfilling lives, but that did not necessarily make it any easier to say goodbye! Even the fact that you may have been anticipating their death does little to prepare you for living without them; life will never be the same.

The account of the death of Sarah, Isaac's mother, is tender indeed. Isaac was only 37-years-old when Sarah died (Genesis 17:17). His father Abraham took steps to ensure Isaac's comforting as recorded in Genesis 24.

- Sarah died at the age of 127 (Genesis 23:1-2).
- Abraham sent his oldest servant back to the country of his family to take a wife for Isaac (Genesis 24:1-62).
- Isaac had gone out to meditate in the field in the evening. Rebekah saw him and asked the servant who the man was. The servant told her that was his master. So Rebekah took a veil and covered herself (Genesis 24:63-65).
- "And the servant told Isaac all the things that he had done. Then Isaac brought her into his mother Sarah's tent; and he took Rebekah and she became his wife, and he loved her. So Isaac was **comforted** after his mother's death" (Genesis 24:66-67).

Most individuals expect their parents to die before them, but few are really prepared for the loss. The intensity of your grief may

surprise you, especially if you were anticipating the death of an ill or elderly parent. The recognition that your father or mother lived a long, full life or was released from pain and suffering does not make your loss easier to bear. A parent's death is particularly difficult because:

- You are losing someone who has known you longer than anyone else.
- The parent-child bond is irreplaceable.
- It reminds us of age-related health issues in our lives and of our own mortality.
- It may surface unresolved family issues and conflict among survivors.
- You may now feel responsible for supporting and caring for your surviving parent.
- If you depended on your parent for regular advice, information or encouragement, it may be difficult to move on without that support. (*When A Loved One Dies* 8-9).

How Certain Biblical Siblings Dealt with the Death of their Father

There are times when the death of parents can bring about a healing of relationships. Such was the case in the lives of these biblical families.

- Isaac and Ishmael buried their father Abraham. At Sarah's urging, Abraham had to send Ishmael and his mother Hagar away when Ishmael was just a teenager (Genesis 25:1-10)!
- Jacob and Esau buried their father Isaac. When they both were young, Esau had determined that he would kill his brother Jacob once their father was dead (Genesis 35:27-29)!
- Joseph and his brothers buried their father Jacob. During their earlier lives, Joseph's brothers had sold him into Egyptian slavery (Genesis 49:28-50:1-14)!

After their death, it is crucial that your parents or any loved

one is remembered exactly as they were. Recovery and healing that affects healthy grieving includes:

- No enhancing of their good traits.
- No downplaying of their faults.
- Talking about the things they did/said that made you glad and you still laugh.
- Talking about the things they did/said that made you mad and you still laugh.

In his book, *Growing through Grief*, Bill Flatt references in his book, “Mental Health and the Bible” features of the shock stage. “One may withdraw from people, become aggressive, cry profusely, clam up, bottle up grief, do strange things, deny the death, **distort the truth by claiming perfection for the one who has died**” (18 emphasis added).

Randy Becton’s article, “Grief Work,” makes these observations in “Accepting Bereavement, The Healing Process of Grief.” “A symptom of acute grief is the complaint that things seem to be unreal. There is a feeling of increased emotional distance from people. There is also a sense of preoccupation with the image or memory of the deceased. **Many people will idealize the deceased person, sometimes beyond recognition**” (15, emphasis added).

For this writer, Psalms is the “go to” inspired book for facing and accepting loss and choosing to follow God’s lead as He directs a changed pathway of life. “Our help is in the name of the LORD, who made heaven and earth” (Psalm 124:8).

Thought & Discussion Questions

1. Why is the loss of one’s parents such a significant loss?
2. How can the death of parents bring about healing in sibling relationships?
3. Why does shattering drama among siblings sometimes occur?
4. With the loss of parents or any other significant losses, why is it important to remember them **exactly** as they were?
5. Discuss the interactions of the biblical siblings following the death of their father.

Chapter 4:

Becoming Stuck or Frozen in Grief

Becoming stuck or frozen in grief causes emotional peril to recovery and healing. Two questions were asked from *Grief Share: Your Journey from Mourning to Joy* that must be answered in order to avoid becoming stuck in grief.

- Would God take someone away from you that was essential to your life?
- Would God lock you in that situation and keep you there?

Two profound statements were made for objective consideration. If God answered all of your questions and you understood fully why your loved ones died, they would still be dead! If you could have them back (i.e., they hadn't died), you would get them back just the way they were when they died—dying!

In light of this inescapable truth, consider normal grieving vs. unhealthy grieving.

What Is Normal Grieving?

- Having bad days
- Being blindsided by:
 - A smell
 - A word/a phrase
 - A picture or something in a picture

- A song or words in a song
- A passage of Scripture
- An occurrence
- Crying whenever and wherever the emotion overtakes you
- Wanting to be alone for a certain amount of time every day/ every week
- Talking to the person
- Loneliness
- Moderate depression
- Loss of appetite
- Insomnia
- Wanting them back
- A haunting despair
- An overwhelming hopelessness

What Is Unhealthy Grieving?

- Refusing to accept help from those who are genuinely trying to be there for you
- Attempting to hold God accountable for your loss
- Accusing medical professionals (doctors, nurses, hospice staff, lab technicians, etc.)
- Filing unfounded suits for incompetence/negligence
- Being consumed with self-pity
- Allowing grief to become your identity
- A constant desire to live in the past
- Blaming the dead person for leaving you behind
- Turning against immediate family, other relatives, friends, members of the church
- Unrelenting anger, guilt, remorse, bitterness

- Prolonged isolation and separation from others
- Becoming trapped in a continual cycle of grief
- If only I had...

Confronting and Coping Equals Recovery and Healing

Confront – To tackle, face up to, meet head-on, deal with it

Cope – To manage, handle, survive, get by, muddle through

Keys to Avoiding Becoming Stuck or Frozen in Grief

- Live in God’s Word! (Read Psalms 19 and 119.) The Bible is the perfect guide—always!
- Pray all the time! “Evening and morning and at noon, I will pray, and cry aloud, and He shall hear my voice” (Psalm 55:17).
- Give God thanks in everything! “In everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you” (1 Thessalonians 5:18).
- Remember your loved ones exactly the way they were—the good, the bad and the ugly! If our loved ones were saints, they were not perfect saints! “For there is no distinction: for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:22-23).
- Develop new relationships with those who have suffered similar losses. “...weep with those who weep. Be of the same mind toward one another...” (Romans 12:15-16).
- Turn your thoughts to helping others (Matthew 25:31-46). “Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to Me” (vs. 40).
 - Make visits to hospitals, nursing homes, assisted living facilities and rehab centers.

- Send cards and make care packages.
- Remember the good times; replace your “if only” with Scripture. “...but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 3:13-14).
- True healing can only occur when you let grief run its course. Choose the right people with whom to share your loss. “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me. Nevertheless you have done well that you shared in my distress” (Philippians 4:13-14).
- Realize that getting better is moving away from the disabling aspects of grief. It is not a betrayal of that person for you to get better. “And my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:19).

Biblical Examples of Reactions and Responses to Traumatic Personal Losses

- Abraham mourned and wept over the death of his wife Sarah (Genesis 23:1-4).
- Jacob mourned over the death of his beloved Rachael (Genesis 35:16-20; 48:7).
- David and Bathsheba mourned the death of their infant son (2 Samuel 12).
- David mourned the death of his adult son, Absalom (2 Samuel 18-19).

In his editorial “Coping with Grief,” Dennis Loyd, Associate Editor of *Gospel Advocate*, wrote “Whatever the cause of our grief, we have ways to confront it and cope with it. God’s Word becomes our light. Prayer becomes our appeal. Christian fellowship becomes our comfort. Jesus becomes our hope” (3).

Helen M. Young wrote in, *When You Lose One You Love*, these

most provoking thoughts about “Accepting Bereavement: The Healing Process of Grief.” She used the metaphor of ocean tides. “Grief is like the ocean tides. It comes in waves. Just when you feel you are doing better, a wave of grief will sweep over you that is overwhelming. You weep as you did in the initial days of grief... The tides of grief go in and out” (8-11). How well this writer can identify with that!

In his book, *Everyday Comfort*, Randy Becton stated four paths that delay grief (84-85).

- Denying does not ease the pain of your grief, whether you deny feelings or act like nothing has happened.
- Minimizing your need to grieve does not ease the pain.
- Idealizing the one you lost does not help. Telling the truth about the good and bad in that person’s life is all that frees you to move toward recovery.
- Retreating to another time in memory only delays grief. The way to the goal is straight ahead.

God is always as near as we allow Him to be, giving us constant comfort and hope. “The LORD is near to all who call upon Him, to all who call upon Him in truth” (Psalm 145:18).

Thought & Discussion Questions

1. What causes a person to become stuck or frozen in grief?
2. What is normal grieving? Why is this grieving process necessary?
3. What is unhealthy grieving? What are the detriments of this emotional damage?
4. Discuss the keys to avoid becoming stuck or frozen in grief.
5. Discuss the four paths that delay grief from *Everyday Comfort* by Randy Becton.

Chapter 5:

The Loss of a Sibling

The USAA Educational Foundation published, *When a Loved One Dies: Coping with Grief*. Several deep personal losses are addressed in one section. This statement was made on the loss of a sibling. “When a sibling dies, there is an immediate sense of loss. An individual who was raised with you and shared your childhood is gone, leaving a void that cannot be filled. Unfortunately, siblings are sometimes known as the “forgotten mourners” because expressions of sympathy and comfort are often directed at surviving parents, spouses and children” (10).

With the loss of a sibling, sometimes there are emotional experiences that can be most troublesome.

- You may have thoughts of your own mortality. Who is next? What if I am the last sibling to die?
- You are forced to realize you have lost a person who has shared a large part of your life.
- You may begin to give more thought to your birth order. (Out of all of us, who would have ever thought that he/she would have been first/last?)

If you have lost a brother(s) or a sister(s), it may change your role in the family structure. If the sibling that died is the one that was looked upon as the leader, especially in the time of a crisis, that loss could have a devastating effect on other family members.

Seek the support of other family members who feel the loss the way you do. If you have other brothers and sisters that share your grief, they can be very comforting and consoling. They will welcome the opportunity to talk, remember, mourn and heal together.

Remember the happy times—the things that made you laugh until you cried! Also remember the things about them that made you so angry! It may surprise you as you recall those things after their death; they can make you laugh as well!

Observations from A Time to Mourn, A Time to Dance—Help for the Losses in Life

There is so much history involved in the loss of a close sibling... It is one of those relationships that, when death breaks it, we are forced to realize that we have lost a person who has shared a large portion of our life. ...Talk to many people about your feelings. Keep talking to those who will listen to you and comfort you... Then, when they listen empathetically, you will feel comforted. ...As much as possible, offer to share the responsibilities of taking care of your sibling's possessions—but don't intrude. You are not and cannot be the children's substitute parent (but you can be their special and close aunt or uncle). Recognize that each member of your sibling's family has a right to grieve in his or her own way and time frame. Recognize that they have primary responsibility for the things that your sibling left behind, not you. As time continues... you may want to give them some items that belonged to your sibling and tell them the story behind them. However, you need to recognize that once you give something to your sibling's children, it is theirs and they can do with it what they want. Be willing to accept the fact that they might not cherish it as much as you did. (33)

Personal and Family Experiences from Loss of Siblings

For this writer, experiencing the loss of a sibling occurred in 1959—at the age of 10. Now 56 years later, it is as vivid in memory as it was then. The loss of our baby sister was traumatic because she was only 20 months old. At that time, being the oldest of six children, the loss was strongly felt. When I was completely alone,

the tears flowed freely and intensely!

Just a couple of months ago, my siblings and I had to endure the shock and disbelief when the sister next to me died. In some aspects it was expected, but we did not think it was likely to happen at that time. That in itself has made the loss difficult to face and accept in a number of ways.

A family member shared with this writer her feelings after losing two of her siblings as adults. She said when they received the word that their sister did not have long to live, the drive to Florida was the longest drive she had ever encountered. She said that when they received the call that their sister had died, there was a pain in her chest that was so heavy that she could hardly breathe. She said she and this sibling may not have communicated as much as she did with their other siblings, but she could always pick up the phone, and they would pick up where they left off the last time they spoke.

When her oldest sibling died several years later, the experience was totally different. She and all her other siblings were in the hospital room when she took her last breath. She said, “That was sooooo hard!” She said they could hardly keep it together, but they knew they had to pray and thank their Lord and Savior Jesus Christ for allowing them to have her for the time that they did. She said, “Sibling relationships change from younger years. You can never know how much your siblings mean to you until they are gone. Not many people realize just how hard it is to lose a sibling.”

A member of this writer’s spiritual family shared her thoughts on the loss of her brother. It was said at his funeral service that he spent all of his living hours in the Lord’s vineyard, that he made many friends all over the world and that he did missionary work in Africa and Australia. She said, “I guess my feelings are different about death than some. When a person has lived his life for the Lord, how can you be sad? I just can’t.”

Biblical Siblings Who Dealt with the Loss of a Brother or a Sister

- Eleazar and Ithamar were two of the four sons of Aaron, the

Israelites' high priest. The deaths of their brothers Nadab and Abihu are recorded in Leviticus 10:1-7. They offered profane or irreverent fire in their censers that God had not commanded. They paid with their lives. The shocking part of this tragic incident is Moses, the brother of Aaron, commanded him, his sons Eleazar and Ithamar to do no mourning or they would die and wrath would come upon all of the people of Israel!

- Moses and Aaron experienced the death of their sister Miriam in Numbers 20:1. Miriam's death is recorded in the first verse with no details. Afterwards, God had Moses directly involved in the events prior to Aaron's death. God told him that Aaron would not cross over into the Promised Land because of his rebellion with Moses in Numbers 20:24. God commanded Moses to strip Aaron of his priestly garments on Mt. Hor in the sight of all the congregation and put them on his son Eleazar, and Aaron died there on top of the mountain (vs. 27-29).
- Mary and Martha were extremely distraught over the death of their brother Lazarus. The sisters had sent word that their brother Lazarus, whom Jesus loved, was sick (John 11: 1-5). However, Jesus stayed two more days in the place where He was (vs. 6). Their anguish was further intensified because after His arrival, they both said to Jesus, "Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died" (John 11:21, 32). Their profound grief soon turned to unspeakable joy when the Resurrection and the Life raised Lazarus from the dead (John 11:33-44)!

In her book, *The One Year WOMEN of the Bible*, Dianne Neal Matthews makes these most noteworthy observations about the grieving process.

Since loss is a normal part of life, we all go through periods of mourning. During those times, we may feel that we will never laugh again, but when we grieve in a healthy way, we eventually move through the process and embrace happiness

again. If we're in a close relationship with God, unexpected joy sometimes surprises us even in the midst of sorrow. Remembering that God can bring good out of any heartbreak helps us find comfort in his loving arms during the most painful times of our lives. It also helps to remember that a time is coming when everything that hurts us now will be replaced by everlasting joy. (96)

“You have turned for me my mourning into dancing; You have put off my sackcloth and clothed me with gladness” (Psalm 30:11).

Thought & Discussion Questions

1. Why are siblings sometimes known as the “forgotten mourners”?
2. What are some of the emotions that must be faced based on the death of a sibling?
3. Discuss the personal or family loss of a sibling.
4. One must recognize that he and other surviving siblings will probably grieve differently. Why?
5. Discuss the biblical siblings who dealt with the loss of a brother/sister.

Chapter 6: The Only Way Out is Through

In his book, *Disrupted—Finding God in Illness and Loss*, Virgil M. Fry includes a chapter entitled, “The Only Way Out Is Through.” He wrote:

We Americans live in a death-denying culture... It’s okay to hurt briefly if a gain (fitness, prestige) can be realized. It’s not okay to hurt (at least publicly) over losses from sickness, divorce or brokenness. Grief counselors know it takes months and years for family members and friends to process their grief, to reconcile themselves to permanent separation, to find hope and peace and comfort in daily living.

The true Gospel message is this: God has cared, is caring, and will always care. God loves. God comforts. God hears. God is. The implication for us: No one hurts alone. We can admit our pain without fearing rejection. We can allow ourselves time to share memories, distress and turmoil. We can cling to the assurance that there’s more to life than what we experience here. We can remember that brokenness, sickness, evil, and death all sting—but they don’t have to have the final word. Indeed, the only way out is through. (82-83)

Paul says it this way in 2 Corinthians 15:56-57, “The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.” In the magazine, *Think—Current Issues from a Distinctly Christian View*, the theme for the February 2014 issue was “Coping with Death and Loss.” In that issue is Daniel Howell’s article, “Victory Over Death.” He wrote, “Death really is the last great enemy of mankind—or at

least the only enemy to whom every person loses. Unless the Lord returns first, death in some form or fashion will visit each and every one of us, no matter what we do to try and escape its grasp (Hebrews 9:27)” (19). This passage reads, “And it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment.” **Death truly is the great equalizer!**

Daniel Howell also makes several hope-filled observations from Scripture.

The fact that Jesus **defeated death through death** is really quite amazing to think about. Our Savior did not stand aloof from death, shaking His fist at it from afar. He faced death in a “head on” fashion. He physically suffered in ways that go beyond our ability to imagine, to the point that His flesh and blood body died. He allowed death to appear to win, but only for three short days. Then He proved that He is indeed the Son of God by rising from the dead (Romans 1:4). (19)

Our Lord suffered incomprehensible agony as He faced the cross. Being in agony, He prayed more earnestly. His sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground (Luke 22:44-45). H. Leo Boles states in his *A Commentary on the Gospel According to Luke*, “The original here denotes progressive agony; he progressed from the first prayer into an intense struggle of prayer and sorrow. ‘Agony’ is only found here; ...this is another evidence peculiar to Luke, the physician. Cases of great mental anguish, causing drops of blood to ooze from the body like sweat, are known to medical authorities” (425).

Shortly before Jesus was crucified, Matthew 26:42 records Him saying in prayer, “O My Father, if this cup cannot pass away from **Me unless I drink it**, Your will be done” (emphasis added). *A Commentary on The Gospel According to Matthew* by H. Leo Boles says, “His humanity quailed beneath the suffering and He sought strength in earnest prayer... This was a degree of mental anguish of which we may speak in words, but can only form a feeble conception” (510).

Grief Must Be Faced and Then Journeyed Through!

- **Do not** try to pretend that nothing of significance has happened. Don't try to "wish" the grief away! In his book, *The Reality of Grief*, Doug Manning notes, "If you can establish significance you can move on. If you cannot do so, the loss can become more and more an obsession to you and you can become stuck in your grief" (20).
- Acknowledge that you need help from others. **You** decide who those "others" are to be.
- **Do not** apologize for the way you are feeling to anybody for any reason.
- Seek out that person(s) who will **genuinely** listen to you talk about your loss.

The Journey Through the Grieving Process

- Understand grief is **inevitable** when you lose a significant loved one. **If** you want to recover and heal, you **must** go through the grieving process.
- Understand this grieving process will be **long** and **dreadfully** painful!
- Understand initial shock and disbelief is good, **as long as it is temporary**; otherwise complete acceptance is a very slow process.
- Understand busyness will not heal your grief. Trying to forget by staying busy is short-lived at best and is ultimately ineffective. **You must allow grief to run its course in order to sustain mental wellness.**
- Understand you must be **committed to the journey of recovery** from loss, sorrow and grief.
- Understand you will be made better on the "other side" of

this most painful experience. You will **come to know how to empathize and sympathize with others** as you comfort, support and console them.

- Understand and embrace the biblical teaching that **suffering must be rightly endured!** This is true when we experience grief from the loss of any loved one, and especially if the loss was of major significance.

God works all things good and bad to accomplish His plan and purpose and perfects us through the experience. This acknowledgement helps us to remember whatever He does, whatever He allows, He is always pursuing our eternal salvation! Psalm 115:1 says, “Not unto us, O LORD, not unto us, but to Your name give glory, because of Your mercy, because of Your truth.” Psalm 119:67 reads, “Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I keep Your word.” Psalm 119:71 declares, “It was good for me that I have been afflicted, that I may learn Your statutes.”

There will be virtually countless decisions to make about an unbelievable number of things. Pray for the wisdom that is from above (James 3:17-18). Ask God for wisdom in the daily choices you must make during the grieving process. “If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him” (James 1:5). Some of the daily choices will be:

- How will you spend your days?
- With whom will you spend your days/time?
- What will you plan to do each day?
- How will you behave? (Will you be real? Will you put up a front of politeness?)
- Will you accept nurture and care from others (family, friends, members of the church)?

Death is inevitable and irrevocable. We must look to God always to sustain and strengthen us as we face the deep, shattering losses of life. The only way out of it all is through Him!

Thought & Discussion Questions

1. According to Virgil M. Fry in his book *Disrupted—Finding God in Illness and Loss*, we Americans live in a death-denying culture. Why?
2. Why is death the great equalizer?
3. Is the grieving process a journey? In what way?
4. Discuss the fact that the grieving process is long, slow and dreadfully painful!
5. The passage 2 Corinthians 15:56-57 says, “The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.” Why is this a vital passage to a comforting journey through healthy grief?

Chapter 7:

The Loss of a Child

The emotional aspects of a child's death involve all of the normal stages of grief and recovery. Because it is such a difficult loss, families may need professional help as well as support from family and friends. Parents need to talk about the child and their grief. They need to know they are not alone. After the death of a child, it is important to:

- Remember that you and your spouse may be unable to meet each other's needs because your grieving styles may differ significantly.
- Know that family and friends may attempt to protect your feelings by avoiding conversation about your child. Let them know that talking helps.
- Recognize that your pain is very real regardless of the length of your child's life. You and your spouse should not expect a quick recovery; healing will take time.
- Expect grief symptoms to recur on special days such as your child's birthday or holidays. It may help to include memories of your child in special family events.
- Talk with other bereaved parents and siblings. It will help to know that you are not alone.
- Find special ways to remember your child. Include your child's name in conversation, and tell stories about your child. Make a memory album or hold family memorial gatherings to honor your child. (*When a Loved One Dies: Coping with Grief. The Loss of a Child* 9)

On the loss of a child, the following analysis is from *Grief Share*:
“Through a Season of Grief.”

- ***Coping with the Loss of a Child*** To lose a child of any age—from an infant to an adult child—is one of the greatest shocks a parent can experience. The death of a child is tragic and feels entirely wrong. This grief can be very deep. You will likely relate to the waves of grief and sorrow expressed in Matthew 2:18: “A voice is heard in Ramah, weeping and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children and refusing to be comforted, because they are no more” (166).
- ***Troubled Thoughts*** “Ask God for a special memory of your child to replace the negative pictures in your mind. Focus your thoughts on that special memory. Share it with others. And treasure it” (170).
- ***Grief Can Lead to Divorce*** “Tragically, the majority of marriages do not survive the loss of a child. Make your marriage the exception. Choose to persevere and never to give up... Even when you are both going in opposite directions, you will surely meet if you keep your eyes on God’s plan for your life” (176).
- ***Grief Can Rob You of Intimacy*** Men and women view intimacy in different ways, and the loss of a child or a loved one will affect the intimacy in your marriage... God alone can meet your needs. When you despair because your spouse is not acting or responding in the way that you think is best, you must be proactive and not reactive... When you gain your strength from the true Source, you will be better able to build a new intimacy with your spouse (177).

An additional perspective comes from James Tolle in his book, *Living without Fear: Fear of Death*.

- The principal sufferings of life come from the fear of death... We know that death will come to us all, except to those who are alive at Christ’s coming, but few seem to face it with Christian courage, confidence and faith.

- A family lost six children in a landslide. They set up a stone memorial at the site with the words of 1 Corinthians 15:57 inscribed on it: “Thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.” They knew the real meaning of the message of glad tidings in Jesus Christ the Saviour! Do you? (82)

This most painful experience is shared by Rusty Bolton in his book, *It Depends on How You Look at It! When Things Are Tough* (29-37).

When real difficulties come, well-meaning friends want to help. Sometimes their response is of great help, but sometimes it compounds the hurt. Recently I had to stand by helplessly as my precious 22-year-old son, Danny, died. He was in the intensive care unit for almost a week, lingering between life and death. Many caring friends came by, each one sincerely wanting to help. Some helped, and some didn't. From that experience, let me share with you what did and what didn't help.

- We were blessed by *brief* visits. This showed care and helped share the pain. When the visits were prolonged, they became a burden.
- I didn't appreciate people asking for more details of Danny's condition than I offered. If I gave a general answer, it was because I *wanted* to give a general answer. I was made uncomfortable by those who pressed for more details.
- Cards, flowers, and phone calls helped.
- It was particularly helpful for visitors to offer to pray with us.
- The one thing that not only didn't help but brought much pain were the visitors who wanted to talk about their friend or relative who had been in a coma, like Danny was. That *never* helped!
- We were comforted when visitors shared their special memories of Danny. We enjoyed talking about him and remembering his bright, spicy personality. We still do.

- Basically, we needed loving support. We didn't need advice. All those who later came to his funeral and sent cards were very helpful, even though we didn't get to speak to them personally.

In the months since his death, we had readjusted to life—life without him. It has been painful and difficult. It's supposed to be. Life has its painful times. But there has been a normal, healthy grief process, and we are doing very well.

Biblical Parents Who Suffered the Loss of a Child or Children

King David had six sons born to him in Hebron (2 Samuel 3:1-5). Three of those six died violently.

- Amnon was David's firstborn. His mother was Ahioam. He was murdered by his brother, Absalom (2 Samuel 13:28-33).
- Absalom was David's third son by Maacah. He was murdered by ten young men who bore Joab's armor, the commander of David's army (2 Samuel 18:9-15).
- Adonijah was David's fourth son by Haggith. He was executed by Benaiah, an official in Solomon's court (1 Kings 2:22-25).

David fathered an illegitimate child by Bathsheba while she was married to Uriah, the Hittite. The child died as an infant; he lived one week after becoming ill (2 Samuel 12:14-18).

King Jeroboam and his wife lost their son who became sick and died because of the sin of his father (1 Kings 1:1-13).

Job and his wife lost all ten of their children—seven sons and three daughters in one day (Job 1)!

This modern day concluding experience may well serve as a description of the agony of losing a child. Glenn Martin's article, "This I Have Learned from My Son's Death," shared these heart wrenching feelings in *Accepting Bereavement—The Healing Process of Grief* (33).

I have spoken words of comfort to those who have lost loved

ones, but never before have their full meaning and strength been so completely impressed upon me.

Often my arm has encircled the shoulders of a bereaved one; yet, only now do I know the full solace that comes from the protective arm and sympathetic tear.

I have prayed on behalf of those who have experienced the loss of a loved one, but only now do I know fully the true consolation and blessings that come from such petitions.

I have known the love that children of God express to one another, but only now do I know more fully this love.

I have often talked of the power of the Word of God, but now I know that strength and comfort of the Bible in a new and personal encounter.

The love that God has toward His own and the price He paid in giving up His son have never before been so heart-moving to me as they are at this moment.

These lessons I have learned since the death of my son.

Thought & Discussion Questions

1. Parents need to talk about their child and their grief. Why?
2. Coping with the death of a child can be especially difficult. Why?
3. Why do some marriages sometimes end in divorce following the death of a child?
4. What can be done to make sure that couples stay together?
5. Discuss the biblical parents who suffered the loss of children.

Chapter 8: The Loss of Grandparents

The loss of grandparents is something we are likely to face at some point. Those of us who have lost our grandparents, depending on one's age and relationship, remember that loss with varying emotions. Some of us who have lost both parents are now grandparents. Some of us have suffered the loss of our spouse and the void that was left had to be addressed with the grandchildren. Some of us were brought up by our grandparents for any number of reasons. If the relationship was close, you were probably greatly affected when they died.

Don Williams (2015) stated:

In early America, death was a familiar experience. When several generations of a family lived in the same house, children became aware of aging, illness and death. With life somewhat like that of *The Waltons*, children watched as Grandpa and Grandma grew old and eventually died. They gathered with other family members when death occurred, and knew what funerals and "wakes" were all about. These were normally held in the home. Children of early America realized that a significant loss had occurred, and they would experience tears and sorrow. Death was something that was a regular part of their lives as animals would regularly die. Death was not a mystery to children in early America. (99)

In their book, *Grieving with Hope*, Samuel J. Hodges, IV and Kathy Leonard state:

One difference between grieving adults and children is that children grieve intermittently. Whereas adults feel they are

constantly flailing in a tidal wave of emotions, children will experience those strong emotions and then take a break. The next thing you know, they're playing with their friends, laughing, and having fun. Recognize that your children are grieving and be there to help, but also allow your children to be children. (70)

Hodges and Leonard advise:

When you talk to your children about death, it's important to use truthful, age-appropriate language. Avoid abstract euphemisms. For example, telling children "Grandpa has gone on a long journey" isn't helpful. The next time you tell your children you're going on a long trip, they may conclude you're about to die. Depending on the age of the children, you may be able to say something as simple as, "Grandpa's body stopped working, and now he is in heaven." If your children have more questions about what it means to die, H. Norman Wright advises you to speak in short, simple statements that communicate what death is and that it is permanent. He gives an example: "Death means Grandfather won't be able to do what he used to do. He won't be able to talk. He won't be able to feel. He won't be able to walk. He can't eat or drink. He doesn't breathe anymore. His body is no longer going to be here."

Norm continues, "You need to give as much information as the children can handle according to their age level, and you've got to be honest" (72-73).

Notable Quotes from God's Little Devotional Book for Grandparents.

- A grandparent is a builder of dreams and a sculptor of souls.
- Grandma and Grandpa's house: where the great are small and the small are great.
- The riches stored in a grandparent's heart can never be stolen.
- The greatest inheritance you can give your grandchildren is your faith.

- Godly grandparents make life grand.
- The most important thing that a grandpa can do for his grandchildren is love their grandma.
- Christian grandparents never say goodbye—they say “See you later!”
- Children rarely respond to long speeches. But they are all ears if you let God make you His object lesson.

Biblical References to Grandparents

- **Genesis 48:1-9**—Joseph took his two sons Manasseh and Ephraim with him when he was told that his father Jacob was sick. This would be the first time they were actually introduced to their grandfather. Jacob blessed them before he died. What a priceless legacy to cherish!
- **Samuel 8:1-5**—Samuel had two sons, Joel and Abijah. He had made them judges over Israel. Unlike their father, his sons were corrupt! Joel and Abijah turned aside after dishonest gain, took bribes and perverted justice. Their father Samuel followed the commands of God his entire life. The very godly Elkanah and Hannah were their grandparents. One can only imagine the heartache Samuel endured! Countless parents and grandparents can definitely attest to their children and grandchildren bringing untold pain, sorrow and grief to their families.
- **Deuteronomy 4:9**—Moses commanded the Israelites before they entered the Promised Land when he said, “Only take heed to yourself, and diligently keep yourself, lest you forget the things your eyes have seen, and lest they depart from your heart all the days of your life. And teach them to your children and your grandchildren.”
- **Psalms 103:17-18**—“But the mercy of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting on those who fear Him, and His righteousness to children’s children, to such as keep His covenant, and to those who remember His commandments to do them.”

- **Psalm 92:13-14**—“Those who are planted in the house of the LORD shall flourish in the courts of our God. They shall still bear fruit in old age; they shall be fresh and flourishing.”
- **Proverbs 13:22**—“A good man leaves an inheritance to his grandchildren, but the wealth of the sinner is stored up for the righteous.”
- **Proverbs 17:6**—“Grandchildren are the crown of old men, and the glory of children is their father.”
- **2 Timothy 1:3-5**—“I thank God, whom I serve with a pure conscience... greatly desiring to see you... when I call to remembrance the genuine faith that is in you, which dwelt first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice, and I am persuaded is in you also.”

Thought & Discussion Questions

1. What are some factors involved with the loss of grandparents?
2. Discuss how early America was familiar with death according to *Walking with Those Who Weep* by Don Williams.
3. According to *Grieving with Hope*, what is one difference between grieving adults and grieving children?
4. How should children be approached when discussing death?
5. Discuss some of the biblical passages that focus on grandparents.

Chapter 9: The Loss of Grandchildren or Great-Grandchildren

This statement was quoted in a sermon from the book, *Heart-to-Heart* by Robert G. Lee. “Sin has dug every grave, built every coffin, enlarged every cemetery... that the world has ever seen” (65-66). The loss of grandchildren and great-grandchildren can strike the deepest core of our emotions, especially if the loss is an infant, a toddler or an adolescent. These losses are suffered by all people around the globe. In the final analysis, the age of the grand or great-grand is totally irrelevant. The stark reality is they are no longer with us, and we grieve on some level for the rest of our lives!

Grief becomes more complicated when a loved one’s death is:

- Sudden, unexpected or violent.
- Caused by another individual’s actions, whether deliberate or accidental.
- From natural causes with no history of illness.
- The result of an accident, suicide, natural catastrophe, casualty of war or public tragedy.
- Unconfirmed or no body is recovered.

What to Expect

Every symptom of grief may be more intense and prolonged after a traumatic death. It is normal to experience:

- Persistent memories or dreams about the event. Talking or

writing about your loved one's death can help break a cycle of obsessive thoughts.

- Fear or anxiety over simple activities, such as taking a shower, being in the dark or opening a closed door. Consult a physician if anxiety interrupts your normal routine for a prolonged period.
- Intense guilt over past actions or words – even guilt for surviving. You may relive past arguments or conflicts. When guilt persists, it may help to consult a support group, counselor or therapist.
- A sudden resurgence of symptoms when you hear of a similar traumatic event (*When a Loved One Dies* 12).

Many of us are familiar with the poem “I Walked a Mile with Pleasure” by Robert Browning Hamilton.

**I walked a mile with Pleasure;
She chatted all the way;
But left me none the wiser
For all she had to say.**

**I walked a mile with Sorrow,
And ne'er a word said she;
But, oh! The things I learned from her,
When sorrow walked with me.**

Virgil M. Fry wrote *Rekindled—Warmed by Fires of Hope*. He included a section entitled, “When Fires Rage – The Unique Journey of Grief: Reflections.” Note these selected quotes.

- No one likes to talk about death. Everyone needs to.
- Dealing with grief can bring out the worst – and the best – in families.
- Grieving is a process, one that takes time. And then some more time.
- The more significant the relationship, the deeper the wound, the longer the healing.
- Grief is common to all, but unique to you. There is no “right”

way to grieve, only your way.

- Death of a loved one offers an opportunity to consider one's own mortality.
- Getting over grief is impossible... getting through grief isn't.
- Faith in God doesn't lessen the pain of loss. It does, however, provide direction, meaning and hope. (64-65)

Our world is in a state of constant change. God is not. At times, the world seems to be trembling beneath our feet. But we can be comforted in the knowledge that our Heavenly Father is the rock that cannot be shaken. His Word promises, "I am the Lord, I do not change" (Malachi 3:6 NKJV). Every day that we live, we mortals encounter a multitude of changes – some good, some not so good, some downright disheartening. On those occasions when we must endure life-changing personal losses that leave us breathless, there is a place we can turn for comfort and assurance – we can turn to God. When we do, our loving Heavenly Father stands ready to protect us, to comfort us, to guide us, and, in time, to heal us. (*365 Daily Prayers* 34)

Biblical References of the Loss of Grandchildren or Great-Grandchildren

- Amram and Jochebed were the parents of Miriam, Aaron and Moses (Exodus 2:1-8; 6:16-20; Numbers 26:59). They were the grandparents of Nabad and Abihu, two of the four sons of Aaron. God killed Nadab and Abihu because of blatant, willful disobedience (Leviticus 10:1-2).
- God sentenced the children of Israel to wander 40 years in the wilderness for their incessant murmuring and continued disobedience until all of those 20-years-old and above had died (Numbers 14:29). This number included thousands of grandchildren and great-grandchildren!
- Korah was the great-grandson of Levi, Jacob's third son. Dathan

and Abiram were sons of Eliab and descendants of Rueben, Jacob's oldest son. On was the grandson of Reuben (Numbers 16:1). These four men brought with them 250 leaders of the congregation to challenge the authority of Moses and Aaron. God killed the three rebel leaders, also the families of the rebel leaders Dathan and Abiram, and the 250 leaders who were representatives of the congregation (Numbers 16:24-35).

- The very next day, all the congregation complained against Moses and Aaron and told them, "You have killed the people of the LORD" (Numbers 16:41). God's wrath was kindled; He sent a plague among them and 14,700 more people died "besides those who died in the Korah incident" (Numbers 16:41-50).
- The children of Israel committed harlotry with the women of Moab. God commanded Moses to take all the leaders of the people and hang the offenders. Moses commanded the judges of Israel to kill his men who were joined to Baal. When the plague was stopped, 24,000 were dead (Numbers 25).

It is God's expectation of us as parents, grandparents and great-grandparents to be the godliest examples of reverence and obedience to Him that is humanly possible. Our lives must exhibit the Holy Spirit's abiding presence in daily spiritual fruitfulness. This legacy of a lifetime of commitment to God is the most valuable inheritance our offspring could ever receive because it is undying.

Thought & Discussion Questions

1. Why can the loss of grandchildren or great-grandchildren strike the deepest core of our emotions?
2. Discuss the loss of grandchildren or great-grandchildren, especially infants, toddlers and adolescents.
3. How is the loss of an adult grandchild or great-grandchild different?
4. Discuss the most valuable spiritual legacy of grandparents or great-grandparents.
5. Discuss the biblical references of the loss of grandchildren or great-grandchildren.

Chapter 10: The Loss of a Best Friend

It has been said that during our lifetimes that we will make many acquaintances, but our best friends can be counted on one hand. A true friend is one who knows all about you, yet loves you just the same. Best friends sometimes finish each other's sentences. "Friends cross all barriers of race, creed, age, gender, and country to connect only with the heart and spirit, which have no walls. Sometimes they don't even know it when they say the right words at just the right time. Sometimes friends **feel like** family; sometimes they **are** family" (Fargo).

The USAA Educational Foundation published *When a Loved One Dies: Coping with Grief*. Several deep, personal losses are addressed in one section. This statement was made on the loss of a friend. "Accepting the death of a friend and grieving your loss can be complicated by the fact that others may not appreciate how much the friendship meant to you. That is because a friend is someone with whom you have shared experiences, confidences, laughter and tears" (11).

Friend Defined

A dictionary definition of "friend" includes the concept of a person attached to another by feelings of affection or personal regard. A person whom one knows, likes, and trusts – a favored companion.

Selected Biblical References to Friends

Job lost all of his material possessions and all ten of his children in one day! Shortly afterwards, he was stricken with boils from his head

to his feet. In his agony he said, “He [God] has removed my brothers far from me, and my acquaintances are completely estranged from me. My relatives have failed, and my close friends have forgotten me” (Job 19:13-14). Job’s three friends gave him the greatest comfort when they sat in silence with him for an entire week (Job 2:11-13).

King Solomon is credited with many of the Proverbs. These inspired passages give us God’s divine insight on friends.

- “The righteous should choose his friends carefully, for the way of the wicked leads them astray” (Proverbs 12:26).
- “A perverse man sows strife, and a whisperer separates the best of friends” (Proverbs 16:28).
- “He who covers a transgression seeks love, but he who repeats a matter separates friends” (Proverbs 17:9).
- “A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for adversity” (Proverbs 17:17).
- “A man who has friends must himself be friendly, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother” (Proverbs 18:24).
- “Wealth makes many friends, but the poor is separated from his friend” (Proverbs 19:4).

Cornelius Called His Friends to Hear the Gospel Message

The account of Cornelius being instructed to send for Peter in the city of Joppa to hear the Gospel message is recorded in Acts 10:1-8. An angel of God instructed Peter to go with the men that Cornelius had sent to him. Acts 10:24 states, “And the following day they entered Caesarea. Now Cornelius was waiting for them, and had called together his relatives and close friends.” Cornelius demonstrated tremendous love and spiritual concern for his close friends with this one-of-a-kind invitation.

Jesus Called His Disciples “Friends”

Jesus declared in John 15:13-15, “Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one’s life for his friends. You are My friends,

if you do whatever I command you. No longer do I call you servants, for a servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I heard from My Father I have made known to you.”

The Biblical Friendship between David and Jonathan (1 Samuel 18-23)

The family of King Saul is listed in 1 Samuel 14:49-51. Jonathan was Saul's eldest son. The profound relationship that developed between David and Jonathan took place after David killed Goliath, as recorded in 1 Samuel 17.

When David returned from killing Goliath, Saul asked David whose son he was. David told Saul he was the son of Jesse. First Samuel 18:1-2 reads, “Now when he [David] had finished speaking to Saul, the soul of Jonathan was knit to the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul [the life of Jonathan was bound up with the life of David]. Saul took him that day, and would not let him go home to his father's house anymore.”

1 Samuel 18:3-4 says, “Then Jonathan and David made a covenant, because he loved him as his own soul. And Jonathan took off the robe that was on him and gave it to David, with his armor, even to his sword and his bow and his belt.”

As their friendship grew stronger, David became aware of Saul's continuous plotting to have him killed. When David told Jonathan, he did not believe him. They met and talked about how David would escape the wrath of Saul, who was more determined than ever to kill David! First Samuel 20:42 says, “Then Jonathan said to David, Go in peace, since we have both sworn in the name of the LORD, saying, May the LORD be between your descendants and my descendants, forever. So he arose and departed, and Jonathan went into the city.” This agreement lasted until Jonathan's death.

Jonathan was a man content to be second. He knew he would never succeed his father as king. With true humility he said to David, “Do not fear, for the hand of Saul my father shall not find you. You shall be king over Israel, and I shall be next to you. Even my father Saul knows that” (1 Samuel 23:17).

Jonathan and David made a second covenant. “So the two of them made a covenant before the LORD. And David stayed in the woods, and Jonathan went to his own house” (1 Samuel 23:18). They parted as close as two friends could ever be.

The Philistines killed Jonathan and his brothers on Mount Gilboa (1 Samuel 31:1-2). Saul committed suicide after being severely wounded. Saul, his sons and all his men died together that same day (1 Samuel 31:3-6).

David’s lament and eulogy is notable when he heard of the death of Saul and Jonathan. “Then David lamented with this lamentation over Saul and over Jonathan his son... The beauty of Israel is slain on your high places! How the mighty have fallen! ...From the blood of the slain from the fat of the mighty, the bow of Jonathan did not turn back, and the sword of Saul did not return empty. Saul and Jonathan were beloved and pleasant in their lives, and in their death they were not divided; they were swifter than eagles, they were stronger than lions” (2 Samuel 1:17-23).

David continued to express his grief in 2 Samuel 1:24-27 as he said, “O daughters of Israel, weep over Saul, who clothed you in scarlet, with luxury; who put ornaments of gold on your apparel. How the mighty have fallen in the midst of the battle! Jonathan was slain in your high places. I am distressed for you, my brother Jonathan; you have been very pleasant to me; your love to me was wonderful, surpassing the love of women. How the mighty have fallen, and the weapons of war perished!”

After David was crowned king, 2 Samuel 8:15 states, “So David reigned over all Israel; and David administered judgment and justice to all the people.” His judgment and justice is seen when David fulfilled his covenant to Jonathan through his son, Mephibosheth. Second Samuel 9:1 reads, “Now David said, ‘Is there still anyone who is left of the house of Saul, that I may show him kindness for Jonathan’s sake?’” There was a servant in the house of Saul who told David, “There is still a son of Jonathan who is lame in his feet” (2 Samuel 9:3b).

David asked where he was, and he sent for Mephibosheth. He fell on his face and prostrated himself before the throne of David (2

Samuel 9:6). “So David said to him, ‘Do not fear, for I will surely show you kindness for Jonathan your father’s sake and will restore to you all the land of Saul your grandfather; and you shall eat bread at my table continually” (2 Samuel 9:7). David told the servant of Saul that his grandson Mephibosheth would eat at his table like one of the king’s sons. “So Mephibosheth dwelt in Jerusalem, for he ate continually at the king’s table. And he was lame in both his feet” (2 Samuel 9:13). King David’s actions toward Jonathan’s son were most befitting the nature of true friendship.

“Truly great friends are hard to find, difficult to leave and impossible to forget.” (G. Randolph)

Thought & Discussion Questions

1. How can the loss of a best friend be complicated if some didn’t understand the relationship?
2. Explain what a best friend means to you.
3. Why are friends sometimes closer to us than our biological family?
4. Over a lifetime, why can best friends be counted on one hand?
5. Discuss some of the biblical relationships involving best friends.

Chapter 11:

The Loss of a Wife

Experts feel that the loss of a spouse or the loss of a child are the two most difficult losses to which adjustment must be made. Unlike the loss of a child, the loss of a spouse carries with it the separation of the formal union of the two who were “one flesh.” Marriage as God intended is the tie between husband and wife that is stronger than any other relationship. This bond is altogether different from any other human agreement or promise. This bond is ordained by God. When a man takes a woman to be his wife, they become one flesh.

In his book, *The Study of Genesis, A Study for Home and Bible Class*, Lesson 3, “Going Deeper: God’s Definition of Marriage,” Richard Cravy wrote the following. “**Leave...and be united:** That men (and women) are to leave their parents’ family in order to enter marriage simply shows that the parent/child relationship is not intended to be either as permanent nor as complete as the marital relationship... [T]he word (‘cleave; in the KJV) carries with it the essential idea of being glued or held fast together” (Three-7).

Husband/Wife Relationship Above and Different from All Others

H. Leo Boles defined marriage this way.

In the beginning God “made them male and female”; they were made as one pair, therefore they should be united in pairs; these pairs should remain as God ordained as the basis of the family... This act of divine creation has become the symbol of the union between Christ and His church (Ephesians 5:32-33). “For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and

shall cleave to his wife” (Genesis 2:24).

The tie of husband and wife is stronger than that of parent and child, as the tie which binds husband and wife maintains its union during life, hence “shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife. And the two shall become one flesh.” ...As the original woman was by the power of God taken out of the flesh of Adam, so is the wife reminded that she has something of the same relation to her husband; she is wedded to him, the bond between them being altogether of another kind from any human compact or covenant. The only parallels to this relation are the union of the soul and body, and Christ and the church... (1 Corinthians 6:15-20; 7:4-5; Ephesians 5:28-33). Marriage is a solemn oath of union, in which each party vows fidelity till death parts them. (386-387)

The Two Shall Become One Flesh

David Lipscomb wrote, “[T]he union of the sexes in the marriage relation was divinely ordained at the creation of the race, in order to unite husband and wife so closely that in them even personal distinction should in some respects cease” (82).

Richard Cravy penned, “**What does ‘one flesh’ mean?** First, it does not mean primarily physical, sexual union, though it is included. Jesus’ own definition is that they ‘are no longer two, but one,’ and that God has joined them together (Matthew 19:5-6). This means the man and woman become as **one person** (a permanent joining), not merely a brief joining of two bodies (sexual union)... Adam saw Eve as ‘bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh’—a part of himself! Paul in Ephesians 5:28-31 said the oneness is so complete and permanent that when a man loves his wife, he loves himself and feeds and takes care of himself” (Three-7)!

God’s Plan for Marriage and Procreation

God’s divine design for the marital union is truly in a class by itself. God never intended for procreation to be accomplished with parents, siblings or the children (Leviticus 18:6-17, 26-30)!

“Marriage is honorable among all, and the bed undefiled; but fornicators and adulterers God will judge” (Hebrews 13:5). What is the message? **Any and all sexual behavior that is not biblically authorized is an abomination before God, and it is condemned!**

When the Wife Dies

- Know that few experiences are as painful!
- You will feel extremely lonely, frightened, confused, and overwhelmed.
- There are tremendous psychological and physical impacts in this loss.
 - Gone is your friend, lover, confidant, partner, moneymaker, cook, housekeeper, bill handler, launderer, shopper and on and on and on!
- There will be reoccurring periods of memory loss, disorganization, guilt, anger, fear and fatigue.
- There will be surges of grief that you will experience at the most unexpected times and places.
- There will be people, places and things that will trigger grief moments that have the potential of sweeping over you as you are engulfed in that most painful experience of remembering!

What Will You Need to Do?

- Live in God’s Word every day! “I love the LORD, because He has heard my voice and my supplications. Because He has inclined His ear to me, therefore I will call upon Him as long as I live” (Psalm 116:1-2). **There is no expiration date on grief. On some level you will grieve for her until you die.**
- Pray every day – you **must** do this! “Give ear to my words, O LORD, consider my meditation. Give heed to the voice of my cry, my King and my God, for to you I will pray. My voice You shall hear in the morning, O LORD; in the

morning I will direct it to You, and I will look up” (Psalm 5:1-3). **Prayer calls down the power of God into any and every situation at any time or place.**

- Give yourself permission to grieve in your own way. **Do not** allow other people, no matter what the relationship or how well meaning they may be, to set the course for your grief experience. Realize that your grief experience is unique. **Nobody** had the same relationship you had with her!
- Surround yourself with people who genuinely comfort, console and have compassion for you. You will come to know who those people are. They will walk with you through your journey from mourning to joy.
- Avoid people who cause drama and situations that bring unwanted and unneeded stress! Stay away from those who want to give your grief a “quick fix.” Stay away from those who think they know exactly what you need and when. They are the worst; you will have to forgive them over and over!

Working Your Way through Your Grief

- First, recognize that the grieving process will be a very long, dreadful, slow and painful path — mentally, physically, emotionally and spiritually. The good news is you do not have to go through this alone. God is always near. “He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their sorrows” (Psalm 147:3).
- Second, realize early on that the only way out is through! The **healthy outcome** of the grieving process is recovery and healing. Getting “stuck” in your grief shuts down the grieving process. Rely on the power of God every day. “Great is our LORD, and mighty in power; His understanding is infinite” (Psalm 147:5).
- Third, grieve with others, be with others and be okay with yourself. You can help others by grieving with them. Take time to be with those, talk with those and hug those you are comfortable to be around. “A threefold cord is not quickly

broken” (Ecclesiastes 4:12b).

- Fourth, begin to redefine your life. Work to accept the fact that you are now a widower — a single person again. Understand that some married people will no longer be comfortable around you. For some couples, you have experienced their worst nightmare! You are a reflection of what could happen to them!
- Fifth, realize your life is changed forever and nothing will ever return to the way that it was. This is one of the aspects of acceptance that must take place for your grieving process to be positive. “Through the LORD’s mercies we are not consumed, because His compassions never fail” (Lamentations 3:22).
- Finally, let your faith in God, Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit ease your pain every day! Jude 20-21 reads, “But you beloved, building yourselves up on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit, keeping yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life.” Every blessing of mercy, loving kindness and ultimate comfort is found in Divinity. God’s loving kindness is His particular love for His chosen and covenanted people. Alan E. Highers, the Editor of *Spiritual Sword* wrote, “There is no comfort that exceeds the consolation offered by our Heavenly Father” (inside back cover).

Biblical Examples of Godly Men Who Lost Their Wives

- Abraham lost Sarah; she lived for 127 years. Genesis 23:2-3 notes, “So Sarah died in Hebron in the land of Canaan, and Abraham came to mourn for Sarah and to weep for her. Then Abraham stood up from before his dead, and spoke to the sons of Heth, saying, ‘I am a foreigner and a visitor among you. Give me property for a burial place among you, that I may bury my dead out of my sight.’”

- Jacob buried both of his wives, Rachel and Leah. Genesis 35:16-18 reads, "...And when there was but a little distance to go to Ephrath, Rachel labored in childbirth, and she had hard labor. Now it came to pass, when she was in hard labor... and so it was, as her soul was departing, for she died... his father called him Benjamin. So Rachel died and was buried on the way to Bethlehem."
 - Genesis 49:28-31 records, "Then he [Jacob] charged them [his sons]... bury me... in the cave... which Abraham bought... as a possession for a burial place. There they buried Abraham and Sarah his wife, there they buried Isaac and Rebekah his wife, and there I buried Leah."
- Ezekiel had a totally different experience with the death of his wife. God commanded this prophet with these words, "Son of man, behold, I take away from you the desire of your eyes with one stroke; yet you shall neither mourn nor weep, nor shall your tears run down. Sigh in silence, make no mourning for the dead; bind your turban on your head, and put your sandals on your feet; do not cover your lips, and do not eat man's bread of sorrow. So I spoke to the people in the morning, and at evening my wife died; and the next morning I did as I was commanded" (Ezekiel 24:16-18). Did we get all of that?

Care Notes publishes a variety of booklets on loss, sorrow and grief. One booklet is entitled, *Losing Your Wife* by Bernie Faenza. He makes this observation under the heading, **Working Your Way Through**. "I know for many men it's difficult to deal with emotions—a lot of myths and prejudices in our culture imply that men should just tough it out no matter what events occur in their lives." He further makes these points.

- Expect to ride an emotional roller coaster.
- Expect to feel the loss on many levels.
- Expect major identity changes.
- Work with the memories.

- Reach out — and up — for help.

Grief is a terrible feeling, but not everything that comes out of grief needs to be terrible. Valuable and even beautiful things can emerge from the heap of our pain. Something good coming out of a bad event never makes the bad event itself good or justifies it. Yet, seeing what is good can help us to move beyond our suffering. Some examples include: (1) Greater Empathy, (2) Having Healthier Priorities, (3) Deeper Communion with God and (4) New and Renewed Relationships. The ending of a romantic relationship may open avenues for new relationships and opportunities in life a person had not considered before (Curiel 9-10).

Thought & Discussion Questions

1. Why do experts feel that the loss of a spouse or the loss of a child are the two most difficult losses to which adjustment must be made?
2. How is the loss of a spouse completely different in scope from any other loss?
3. Discuss the tremendous psychological and physical impacts of this loss.
4. Discuss at least six ways that will help in working one's way through grief.
5. Discuss the biblical examples of godly men who lost their wives.

Chapter 12:

The Loss of a Husband

When your husband dies, if the relationship was of the quality that God intended when He instituted marriage in the Garden of Eden, your life is irrevocably changed. When I lost my husband in 2013, my world was shattered into a thousand little pieces! My days were spent with him being constantly in my thoughts, no matter who was in my presence or what I may have been doing. I woke up with him; I went to sleep with him. He was in the recesses of my mind every waking moment. My feelings were like being on a roller coaster. They ranged from a calm facing of the reality that he was really gone, to an overwhelming sadness and despair as I contemplated the fact that I would **never** see him again—not in this life!

I continue to live in God's Word and believe His promises to turn my journey of mourning to joy, in His time and in accordance with His revealed will. Oh, how I am looking forward **to the year** when losing the love of my life will be a sweet sadness! "And now, Lord, what do I wait for? My hope is in You" (Psalm 39:7). "My flesh and my heart fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my inheritance forever" (Psalm 73:26).

Decisions That Helped in My Grieving Process

- I attended a 13-week grief support class two months after my husband's death.
- I allowed those who were genuinely concerned about me to express their love and concern in the way in which I was

comfortable. They were ever so sensitive to my feelings; that was precious and priceless.

- I distanced myself from those who did not comfort and console – those who wanted to see my grief on display.
- I did only what I had to do from day to day in dealing with what seemed to be endless phone calls, appointments, mail and paperwork. Bureaucratic phone calls, appointments and paperwork were especially grim.

Things I Have Learned

- I have learned that the journey from mourning to joy is a process. I kept hearing that from those who had lost a husband or a wife.
- I have learned that I must continue to embrace the grieving process; I must not attempt to suppress my heartache and sorrow. Suppression serves no good purpose; it hinders or stops recovery and healing.
- I have learned that I cannot rush my grief. There are aspects of my grieving process that remain in a state of brokenness. However, God has the remedy for that as well. Psalm 147:3 says, “He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their sorrows.”
- I have learned to accept that I can and do still “crack like an egg” when the right or wrong emotional trigger stares me in the face. Three years has not changed that aspect very much.

I **fully** understand that God is my ultimate source of strength and comfort. I know He is there to console and care for me in this most difficult and dreadful time of my life. Psalm 68:5 says, “Father of the fatherless and protector of widows is God in His holy habitation.” From my point of view, it doesn’t get any better than that!

What Did Help Me

- Genuine phone calls
- Heartfelt sympathy cards

- Loving emails
- Timely visits
- Prepared food (There is a family who continues to bring meals 2-3 times a week!)
- Thoughtful lunch and dinner invitations
- Hugs, smiles, kisses

What Did Not Help Me

- Insensitive comments (e.g., “I know how you feel,” “Are you alright?” or “Are you still...?”)
- Unexpected visits
- Long phone calls

Appointments, Notifications and Phone Calls That Must Be Made

- Social Security
- Retirement Organizations
- Life Insurance
- Health Insurance
- Veteran’s Benefits
- Investments
- Bank Accounts
- Credit Cards
- Deeds to Real Estate
- Vehicle Titles
- Wills

The Biblical Account of a Wife Losing Her Husband and Sons

One of the major characters in the Book of Ruth is Naomi. Naomi lost her husband Elimelech in the land of Moab. After the death of her husband, Naomi's two sons married Moabite women. They lived there about 10 years, and then, both sons died (Ruth 1:4-5). Naomi urged her daughters-in-law Ruth and Orpah to return to Moab. She said to them, "Go, return each to her mother's house. The LORD deal kindly with you, as you have dealt with the dead and with me. The LORD grant that you may find rest, each in the house of her husband. So she kissed them, and they lifted up their voices and wept" (Ruth 1:8-9). Naomi wanted God to grant them days of prosperity and blessing with the families of their future husbands.

Naomi heard that the famine in her country had ended. At this point, Naomi decided to return to Bethlehem in Judah. Ruth and Orpah told Naomi they wanted to go with her, but Naomi said:

Turn back, my daughters; why will you go with me? Are there still sons in my womb, that they may be your husbands? Turn back, my daughters, go – for I am too old to have a husband. If I should say I have hope, if I should have a husband tonight and should also bear sons, would you wait for them till they were grown? Would you restrain yourselves from having husbands? No, my daughters; for it grieves me very much for your sakes, that the hand of the LORD has gone out against me! (Ruth 1:11-13)

Naomi's statements reflected an attitude of bitterness. Orpah did return to her people, but Ruth was determined to go with Naomi.

Naomi further expressed this attitude of bitterness when she returned to Bethlehem with Ruth. It happened that all the city was excited because of them, and the women were asking if it was Naomi. However, she said to them, "Do not call me Naomi [Pleasant]; call me Mara [Bitter]; for the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me. I went out full, and the LORD has brought me home again empty. Why do you call me Naomi, since the LORD has testified against me, and the Almighty has afflicted me?" (Ruth 1:20-21).

In her book, *Women of Troubled Times*, Cindy Colley wrote, speaking of Naomi:

I believe Naomi had thought ahead about this little speech... Perhaps it was not the first time she had delivered it. But the indictment of the Almighty God, who is the giver of every good and perfect gift (James 1:17), was a pity-party theme that borders on blasphemy. Thankfully, the party was brief and she soon had an outward focus once again. Broadcasting our problems in a spirit of bitterness serves to feed that spirit. It is a call for reinforcements for all that is negative in our lives. (102-103)

When our focus is on the negative, it becomes so easy to develop a bitter spirit. When we do, Satan is right there to help us feed that negative emotion to the zenith! **Challenges in life make us bitter or they make us better.** Little did Naomi know that God had plans that would change both her life and the life of Ruth forever!

Through the ever present hand of God in His divine providence, Naomi told Ruth precisely what she had to do to become the wife of Boaz who was a near kinsman. In the process of time, Boaz and Ruth were married. "So Boaz took Ruth and she became his wife; and when he went in to her, the LORD gave her conception, and she bore a son" (Ruth 4:13).

Naomi was praised by the women of the city. "Then the women said to Naomi, 'Blessed be the LORD, who has not left you this day without a close relative... And may he be to you a restorer of life and a nourisher of your old age; for your daughter-in-law, who loves you, who is better to you than seven sons, has borne him'" (Ruth 4:14-15). **God gave Naomi a new reason for living.** "Then Naomi took the child and laid him on her bosom, and became a nurse to him. Also the neighbor women gave him a name, saying, 'There is a son born to Naomi.' And they called his name Obed. He is the father of Jesse, the father of David" (Ruth 4:16-17).

Becoming better through adversity is a reoccurring theme throughout the Bible. God always has a goal and a purpose for whatever He does and whatever He allows. He always does what is best for us when we leave the choice to Him. Our part is to persevere

in submissive, trusting and strong faith!

Noteworthy Observations on the Loss of a Husband

The death of a spouse is painful. Whether it's eating breakfast alone or getting into an empty bed at night, each moment of your day finds a way to remind you that you're alone and life will never be the same. (*Grief Share* 37)

Your friends and family may expect you to return to your "old self" after your spouse dies, but you will not be the same, nor should you expect to be. The transition from wife to widow or husband to widower is a painful and personal process. (*When a Loved One Dies* 8)

Cherish the relationship that you and your husband shared. Be aware of how his love, his presence, changed you, left you a richer, better person. The differences he made in your life are part of his legacy, and you carry that with you always. (Katafiasz)

Thought & Discussion Questions

1. Discuss how the loss of the husband is so very different from the loss of the wife.
2. Discuss some of the major decisions that must be made that perhaps are not a part of the equation when a wife dies.
3. Discuss what must be done to ensure her physical safety and well-being.
4. Does her financial situation change? If so, what must be done?
5. Discuss the biblical account of Naomi losing her husband and both sons in the Book of Ruth.

Chapter 13:

Lessons Learned and Observations Made

This series of articles on loss, sorrow, and grief was first taught in a ladies' Bible class from January–September 2014. They were published consecutively on this site beginning in August 2015. Four of the twelve lessons were vital in order to address the eight personal, significant losses.

- ***Chapter 1–The God of All Comfort*** This chapter defined grief and the faces of significant loss.
- ***Chapter 2–“What to Say/Do–What Not to Say/Do”*** This chapter was borne out of a question asked by one of the sisters attending the class.
- ***Chapter 4–“How to Avoid Becoming Frozen or Stuck in Grief”*** This chapter was a result of observations and comments made in the class.
- ***Chapter 6–“The Only Way Out is Through!”*** It became apparent this was very much needed because too many want to totally avoid the grieving process.

The eight remaining chapters addressed the faces of personal, significant losses.

- ***Chapter 3–“Loss of a Parent”*** A parent's death is particularly difficult because a person is losing someone who has known you longer than anyone else. The parent-child bond is irreplaceable. Most individuals expect their parents

to die before them, but few are really prepared for the loss.

- **Chapter 5—“Loss of a Sibling”** With the loss of a sibling, sometimes there are emotional experiences that can be most troublesome. If you have lost a sibling, it may change your role in the family structure. If the sibling that died is the one that was looked upon as the leader, especially in the time of a crisis, that loss could have a devastating effect on other family members. Seek the support of other family members who feel the loss the way you do.
- **Chapter 7—“Loss of a Child”** The emotional aspects of a child’s death involve all of the normal stages of grief and recovery. Because it is such a difficult loss, families may need professional help as well as support from families and friends. Parents need to talk about the child and their grief. They need to know they are not alone.
- **Chapter 8—“Loss of Grandparents”** The loss of grandparents is something we are likely to face at some point. Those who have lost their grandparents, depending on their age and relationship, remember that loss with varying emotions. Some have lost both parents and are now grandparents; the experience is so different without that older generation to rely on. Still others have suffered the loss of a spouse, and the void that was left had to be addressed with the grandchildren. That in itself is such a bittersweet experience when the relationship was so close.
- **Chapter 9—“Loss of Grandchildren/Great Grandchildren”** The loss of grandchildren and great-grandchildren can strike the deepest core of our emotions, especially if the loss was an infant, a toddler or an adolescent. In the final analysis, the age of the grand or great-grand is totally irrelevant. The stark reality is that they are no longer here, and the grief experience remains for the duration of life! It is God’s expectation of parents, grandparents and great-grandparents to be the godliest examples of reverence and obedience to Him that is humanly possible. **This legacy of lifetime commitment to**

God is the most valuable inheritance that could possibly be left to any descendants!

- **Chapter 10–“Loss of a Best Friend”** A friend is defined as a person attached to another by feelings of affection or personal regard. A person whom one knows, likes and trusts—a favored companion. Best friends sometimes finish each other’s sentences. It has been said that during one’s lifetime, one will make many acquaintances, but one’s best friends can be counted on one hand. A true friend is one who knows all about you, yet loves you just the same.
- **Chapter 11–“Loss of a Wife”** Unlike the loss of a child, the loss of a spouse carries with it the separation of the formal union of the two who were “one flesh.” **Marriage as God intended is the tie between husband and wife that is stronger than any other relationship. This bond is altogether different from any other human agreement or promise. This bond is ordained by God.** When a man takes a woman to be his wife, they become one flesh. When your wife dies, know that few experiences are as painful! You will feel extremely lonely, frightened, confused and overwhelmed. For recovery and healing to commence, you must pray and live in God’s Word every day! Give yourself permission to grieve in your own way. **Do not** allow other people, no matter what the relationship or how well meaning they may be, to set the course for your grief experience. Avoid people who cause drama and situations that bring unwanted and unneeded stress. Avoid those who want to give your grief a “quick fix.” Avoid those who think they know exactly what you need and when you need it. They are the worst; you will have to forgive them over and over. **Realize that your grief experience is unique. Nobody had the same relationship you had with her!**
- **Chapter 12–“Loss of a Husband”** When your husband dies, if the relationship was of the quality that God intended when He instituted marriage in the Garden

of Eden, your life is irrevocably changed. Continue to embrace the grieving process; do not attempt to suppress your heartache and sorrow. Suppression serves no good purpose; it hinders or stops recovery and healing. You cannot rush grief. There are aspects of the grieving process that can and may remain in a state of brokenness. However, God has the remedy for that as well; He is the ultimate source of strength and comfort.

It would not truly serve the purpose of these chapters if our own death was not addressed. In her book, *Let This Cup Pass*, Jane McWhorter states:

Every time the clock ticks one more second, someone in this world dies. Planting in our minds at this time the seeds of what a Christian's reaction should be will help us accept death with grace whenever it comes our way. Life is so fragile. A person can be in perfect health with everything in his favor and yet be dead within the next minute. God placed us here on this earth to give us an opportunity to prepare ourselves for eternity and take others with us. The question under consideration is not the **duration** of our lives but what we accomplish while we're here. How much will we be missed? When we continue living in the hearts of those left behind, have we really passed out of existence? (149)

For a Christian, the ultimate in victory is not just to accept the deaths of the masses but also his own with dignity. Acceptance is not a giddy, light-hearted gaiety. It is not happiness in the usual sense of the word but is instead a victory over the dread of death. There is a vast difference in acceptance and resignation. The latter implies defeat, a hopeless giving up. Even though one accepts his death, there normally remains a faint shred of hope. When this hope is lost, death is usually imminent. (150)

A Christian, of all people, should know what he wants out of life and also how he will face death when the time comes. As we mature in the faith, we realize that we can never be good

enough to merit our salvation. Usually it's a fairly simple matter to predict how a child of God will react to death; he faces death in the same manner as he faces life. We can't answer the call of death affirmatively unless we've also said yes to life. All that any of us can realistically hope for is today and we may not have all of that. Accept each new day for what it is—a gift from God. Use it wisely and then that night lay it back at God's feet as your offering to Him. The acceptance of death is easier for any of us if we can only learn to live one day at a time. (151)

I am one of the more fortunate ones. In 1970 I stared death in the face for a number of weeks, and, according to medical expectations, I should have died. But I didn't. I have no way of knowing how long it will be until I face the same situation again, but someday I will. I have walked far enough into that valley to know that I will never have to face **any** problem alone. I suppose we have to learn how to die before we can truly know how to live. (155)

Becoming better through adversity is a reoccurring theme throughout the Bible. **The challenges in life make us *bitter* or they make us *better*.** God always has a goal and a purpose for whatever He does and whatever He allows. He always does what is best for us when we leave the choice to Him. Our part is to persevere in submissive, trusting and strong faith!

The abiding, obedient faith of Christians gives them the strength to endure. The words of the Lord Jesus Christ keep their focus on that final unsurpassed reward—heaven. “And behold, I am coming quickly and My reward is with Me, to give to everyone according to his work. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End, the First and the Last. Blessed are those who do His commandments, that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter through the gates into the city” (Revelation 22:12-14).

Thought & Discussion Questions

1. Why are Lessons 1, 2, 4 and 6 vital to understand in order to face the eight personal, significant losses?

2. Of the eight personal, significant losses, why is the loss of a spouse the most traumatic?
3. How is the loss of a child very different from the loss of a spouse?
4. In your own words, describe your feelings at the loss of your parents. Were your feelings more pronounced for one or the other, or were your feelings very similar?
5. In the loss of a sibling, did you find it easier or harder to cope depending on his or her age and the cause of death?
6. The loss of grandparents can have life-long consequences for some. Why?
7. Why can the loss of grandchildren or great-grandchildren be so difficult to accept?
8. Why is it that best friends sometimes become those brothers and sisters that we never had biologically or emotionally?

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God's Redemptive Plan

God's Part

- Love (John 3:16)
- Grace (Ephesians 2:8)
- Mercy (Titus 3:5)
- Gospel (Romans 1:16)

Christ's Part

- The Blood of Christ (Revelation 1:5)
- Our Mediator (1 Timothy 2:5)

Holy Spirit's Part

- Revelation (2 Peter 1:20-21)

Man's Part

- Bible Faith (John 8:24)
- Repentance (Acts 17:30)
- Baptism (1 Peter 3:21)
- Obedience (Hebrews 5:8, 9)
- Purity (Revelation 22:14)
- Faithfulness (Revelation 2:10)
- Love (1 John 2:10)
- Hope (Romans 8:24)
- Works (James 2:24)
- Endurance (Matthew 10:22)
- Confessing Christ (Romans 10:9-10)
- Being Born Again (John 3:3-5)
- Laying Aside Evil (James 1:21)
- Preaching (1 Corinthians 1:18, 21)
- Calling on the Name of the Lord (Romans 10:14)
- Knowledge of the Scriptures (2 Timothy 3:15)